MARCH 2023

N°01

THE PERSPECTIVE

SINCE 1963

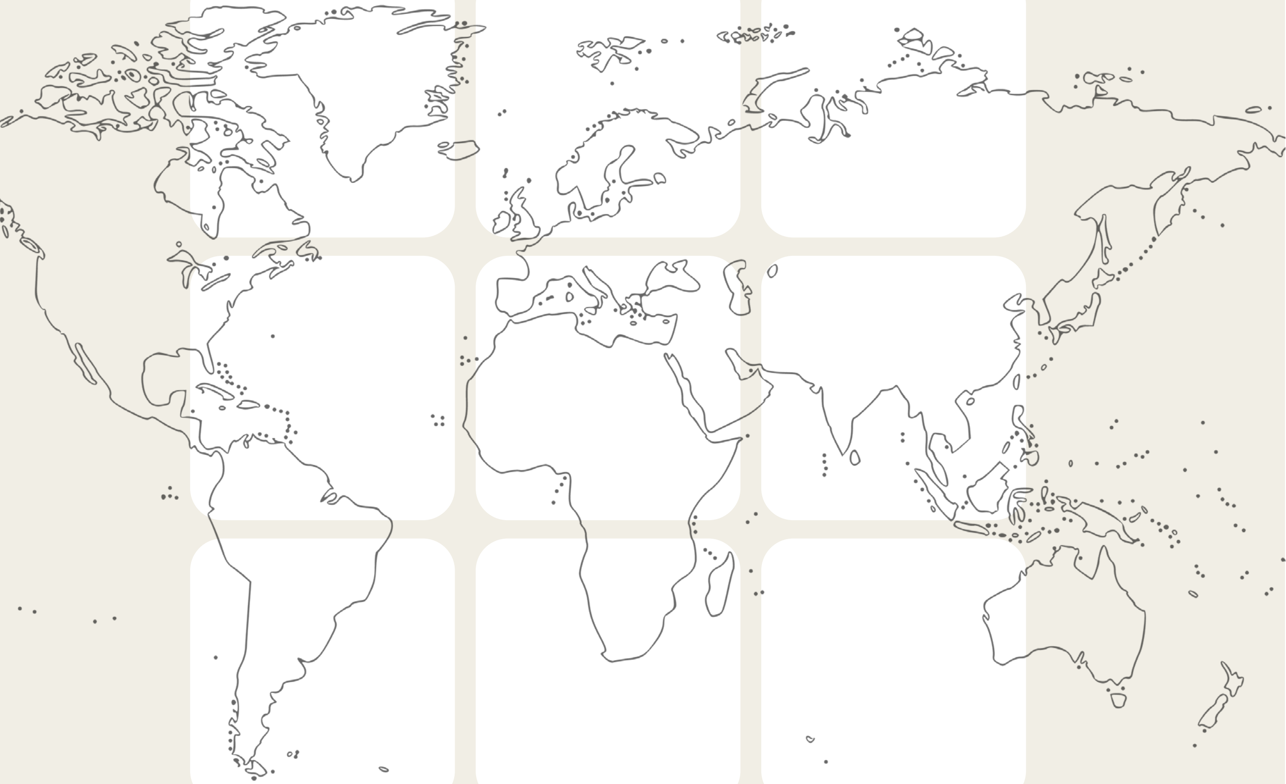
DYSTOPIA OF DIFFERENCE

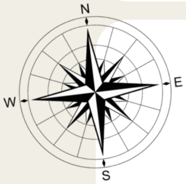
REDUCING INEQUALITY ON A LOCAL AND GLOBAL LEVEL

ASSOCIATION OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
LUND EST. 1935

UPF PASSPORT

Upon the event that a member has filled their passport with official visas from UPF, available at our events, the President of UPF will entitle the member to a certificate and reward at one of our Foreign Affairs Cafés (every Thursday at the UPF Office, 15:00).





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The President of UPF Lund hereby requests all whom it may concern to permit the member of UPF Lund named herein to pass without delay or hindrance and in case of need to give lawful aid and protection.

EDITORS' NOTE

Dear reader,

We hope you are reading this magazine somewhere outside, enjoying the sun - just as we are writing this editors' note. With the first few days of sunshine and warmer temperatures of the year, it seems as if Lund has come back to life: coffee shared on the steps of the library and extended lunchbreaks out front at Eden, lifted spirits among both professors and students, and a general gratitude for being a student in such a sweet town such as Lund. (*Speaking of fika and fun, you are always welcome to take a seat on the UPF couch, especially during our new Foreign Affairs Café which we host every Thursday at the office!)*

While we have tried to absorb as much Vitamin D as possible, many hours have still been spent behind our laptops and in the UPF office these past weeks, working on The Perspective with our wonderful magazine committee. Fuelled by cookies, caffeïne, and slightly burnt popcorn, we have prepared over 60 pages of content for you. Since our first edition, the committee has grown quite a bit and we are therefore even more excited to share this second edition with you, including more articles and more insights into the timely and important topic of inequality.

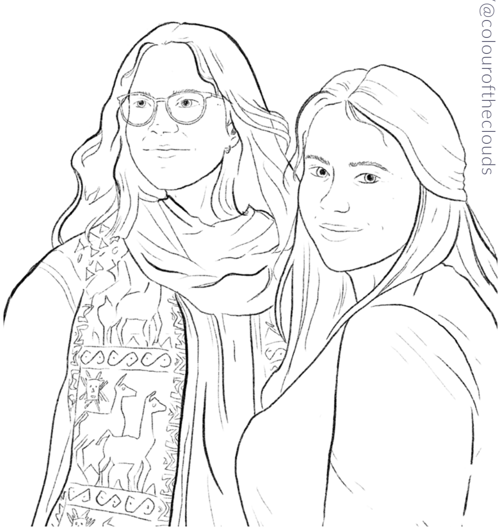
When discussing the theme of this edition, we decided that we wanted to focus on one of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals and so landed on SDG 10: Reduced inequality within and among countries. From the first brainstorming session onwards, it was clear that inequality entails much more than one might think at first – the variety of topics covered in this magazine is a good illustration of this diversity.

"Dystopia of Difference" includes articles on gender (in)equality, economic and socio-economic inequality, global inequality, and inequalities within countries. The stories covered range from Sri Lanka and Brazil to Sweden and Germany, and touch upon the intersectionality of inequality and proposals on how to address this issue. With this broad range of topics covered, we hope to shed a light on issues of inequality you might have not thought of before. We also hope to provoke some personal reflections on inequality – which position do we hold in global power structures and when are we responsible for creating inequalities? Can we change our own actions to make this world more equal for all?

Producing this magazine is above all a team effort and we are incredibly proud of our amazing reporters and the great articles they have produced. For this edition, we would also like to specifically thank our incredible layout and design team, now brightening our pages with original illustrations. We hope the joy that making this magazine brings to us is reflected in our second edition of The Perspective and we wish you a great read!

Onto many more writings,

Dianne Kok & Ronja Oechsle
Editors-in-Chief



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THE PERSPECTIVE MAGAZINE

EDITORIAL TEAM
EDITORS-IN-CHIEF
Dianne Kok
Ronja Oechsle

REPORTERS
Mark Belkin
Job van den Bijgaart
Albin Emanuel Brattberg
Nicolas Fiessinger
Linnéa Förnegård
Oskar Hedman
Jonna Hugsén
Dianne Kok
Ronja Oechsle
Mathilde Perrin
Karen Reuter
Marco Rizzi
Katharina Summ
Kris van Velzen
Emily Wudie Jonsson

LEGAL PUBLISHER
Ronja Oechsle

LAYOUT
Albin Emanuel Brattberg
Dianne Kok
Ronja Oechsle

ILLUSTRATIONS
Saar Boter
Ola Grabowski

LOGO
Elisabet Åberg

PRINT
Trydells Tryckeri AB

EDITION
500

CONTACT
Utrikespolitiska
Föreningen
Sandgatan 2
223 50 Lund

ASSOCIATION OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
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The Perspective is the magazine of the Association of Foreign Affairs in Lund (UPF). UPF Lund provides a space for students and others interested in exploring the world of politics and foreign affairs. Founded in 1935 with the purpose of disseminating information and encouraging debate on international economic and political issues, the association has become one of the largest student organizations in Sweden focusing on foreign affairs.

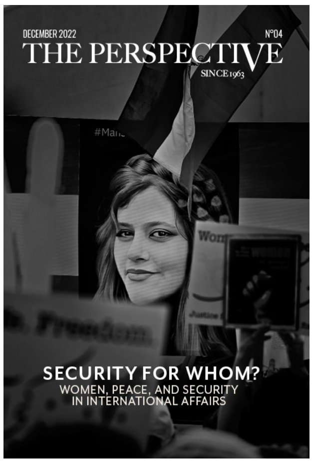
The magazine has no affiliations with any political parties. Opinions presented are the writers' own and responsibility for the articles' contents rest fully on the writer.

The Perspective

The Perspective Magazine is part of The Perspective Collective, the Media branch of UPF Lund. We also publish articles on our website, *theperspective.se,* and produce a podcast - so you can find your favourite stories about foreign affairs from UPF in print, online, and wherever you get your podcasts!

Interested in contributing to the magazine? Reach us at *magazine@upflund.se*

You are still welcome to pick up a copy of our first edition "Security for Whom?" at the UPF Office!



Cover image: Street in Qatar
© Matthew Yamamoto/Unsplash

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PRESIDENTS' ADDRESS

Dear members,

As we experience a record breaking two days in a row with blinding sunlight in 2023, we can slowly feel Lund coming back to life once again. There are few things better than entering spring in Sweden, when you suddenly get reminded how many people actually live in this town, and how much we have all missed actually enjoying being outside. With this reminder, we can really appreciate how UPF can be a beacon of light through the winter months. With the UPF Office providing fun and company everyday in the candlelight with Kate's Jazz Café playing on the TV, we can even say that we enjoyed the cold months.

Since the last address from us we have passed the half-mark of the UPF operational year. Time flies, and we just have to say how great it has been. We want to propose a 'hurray' for the Board and their work to provide the fun, insightful, steady daily operations in the association that we now have. Even managing a sittning through a storm with great success. The Heads and the committees have made sure that UPF brings value to Lund's students for another year, which is no small feat.

To all our members, we want to thank you for taking part in what we do and making everything more fun and more valuable. Your participation, contribution, your questions, insight, ideas, and company is what makes UPF. Amidst the challenges of today that we are taught about in our courses everyday, you all still want to show up and make a difference. It means the world. We sincerely hope that you will find the rest of the year *at least* as inspiring as the first part has been.

As February ends, the rest of the UPF year will consist of spring, daily operations, a ball, a trip around Europe, loads more great events - and elections. We are getting closer to the posting of the positions for the next operational year, and we just want to say that the members of this year have created something great to build upon during next year.

We cannot wait to see you all in the office, at the ball, at a lecture, or in the sun in the coming months!

Cheers!

Annie Anderek & Kathryn Dolan
President & Vice President

BOARD 2022-2023

LECTURE
Ana Caselles Calle
Love Kirkegaard
Sara Friman
lecture@upflund.se

MAGAZINE
Dianne Kok
Ronja Oechsle
magazine@upflund.se

WEBZINE
Annalena Herrmann
Julia Hampel
webzine@upflund.se

POD&RADIO
Freeman Elliott Gunnell
Natalie de Souza
radio@upflund.se

PRESIDENT
Annie Anderek
president@upflund.se

VICE PRESIDENT
Kathryn Dolan
vice-president@upflund.se

TREASURER
Lucile Corcoran *(- February)*
Francisco Cobos Cabral
treasurer@upflund.se

SECRETARY
Santeri Rönty
secretary@upflund.se

UFS REPRESENTATIVE
Anaïs Le Pluart
lund@ufsverige.org

DEBATE
Francisco Cobos Cabral
Minahil Malik
debatecoordinator@upflund.se

CAREER
Anna Holm
Victor Åstrand
career@upflund.se

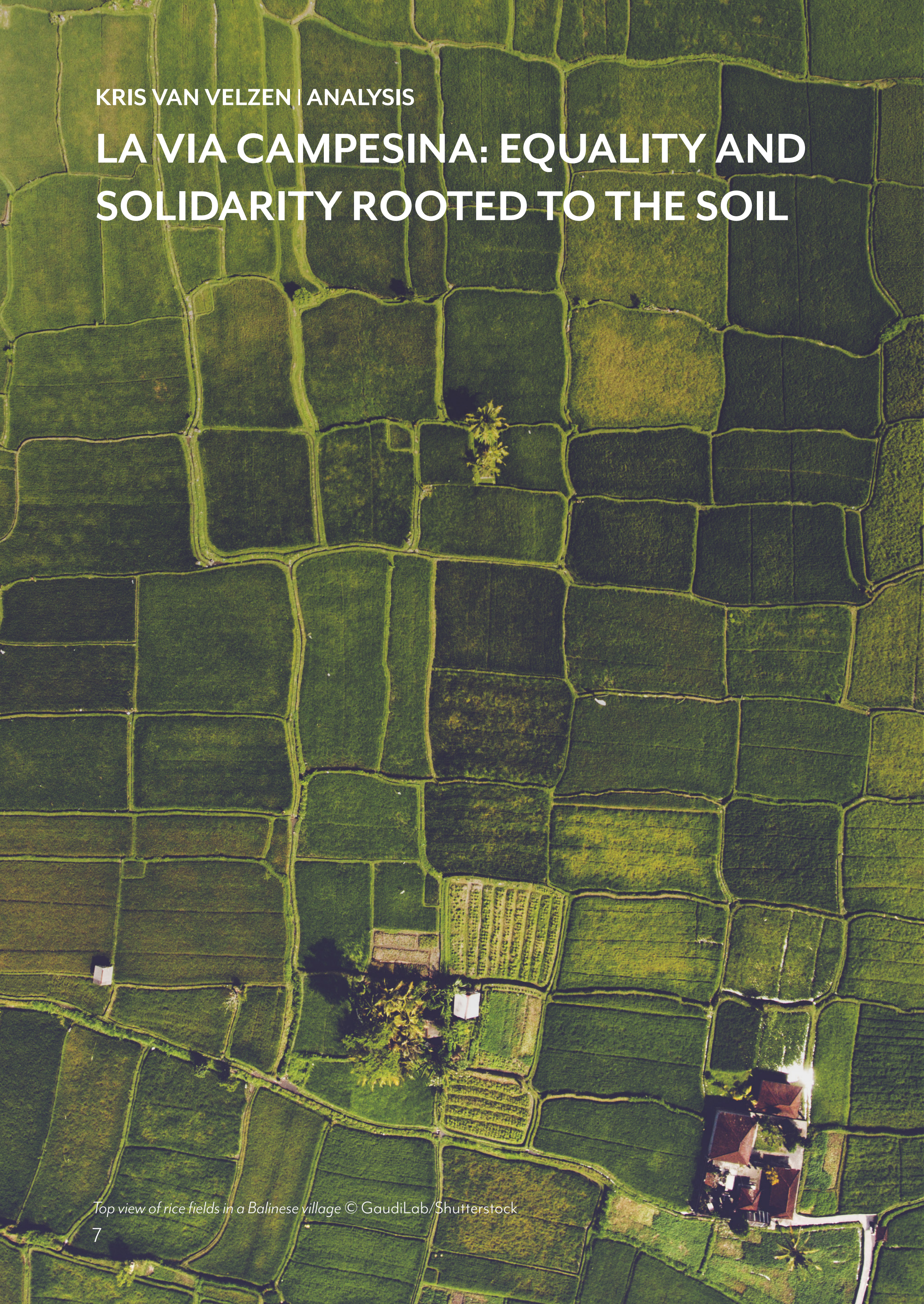
ACTIVITY
Ella Fasting
Isabella Silva Ortiz
activity@upflund.se

TRAVEL
Donja Tavakolinia
Hannah Höfle
travel@upflund.se

PR COMMITTEE
Claudia Muñoz-Rojas Domínguez
Zahra Aghazada
pr@upflund.se

KRIS VAN VELZEN | ANALYSIS

LA VIA CAMPESINA: EQUALITY AND SOLIDARITY ROOTED TO THE SOIL



Top view of rice fields in a Balinese village © GaudiLab/Shutterstock

To preach for universal human rights means to practice it. That must have been one of the main motivations for the world's largest peasant movement La Via Campesina (LVC) when they arose in the 1990's out of dissatisfaction with the way peasants were affected by free trade agreements. It stands for the right of people to produce, consume and distribute culturally appropriate food through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and peoples right to define their own food and agriculture systems.

A dignified life according to LVC, therefore, starts with food sovereignty. 'Food sovereignty' was coined by LVC to counter the term 'food security' used by global agribusiness and advocated for by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Trade Organization (WTO).

This term is generally defined as people's physical and economic access to sufficient and nutritious food. The crucial difference between food security and sovereignty lies in the ownership of the means of production and the self-determination of people to choose their own food.

In their campaign for food sovereignty, LVC addresses the gap between 'preach' and 'practice' in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that was formulated by the UN in 1948. In the years that followed, the principles of the declaration were developed further and generated a strong belief among the international community in global cooperation and prosperity for all. Now, more than 75 years later, a large part of the world's population has indeed lived a lifetime of prosperity and dignity, along the aspirations of the declaration.

"Yet, LVC recognizes that the struggles of rural people from different international and national contexts all begin and end at the same point: in their connection to the land."

However, an even larger part has found itself on the losing side of globalization and is struggling, some more than ever. The aspiration to guarantee human rights for all has turned into the challenge of making sure no one is left behind in the process. Certain core areas in Europe, North America and parts of Asia are benefitting from unbridled capitalism, while the periphery of the world suffers.

In particular rural areas and people with livelihoods depending on nature have been affected disproportionately by the process of unequal accumulation and exploitation. This results from the global expansion of free trade that drives prices for natural resources and agricultural products to the bottom.

In 2018 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP). This declaration added the notion that human dignity must be reshaped to the contexts of people living in rural areas, for whom nature is the core source of dignity. UNDROP is seen by many as the successful outcome of LVC's campaign for food sovereignty.

"There is a constant and dynamic exchange between grassroot demands and political participation at different levels of governance."

In addition to the fight for food sovereignty, the movement aims to propose a way to rethink "how we interact, exchange and organize with one another." LVC adheres to the principles of radical democracy to practice what they preach when they propose to rethink human organization. Their implementation of radical democratic values relates to considering those who have not yet been heard and considering that which has never been part of the political body: nature.

At the first ever International Food Sovereignty Forum that took place in Sélingué, Mali, in February 2007, LVC's declaration showed that they encompass the broadest possible variety of representatives of alternative agricultural-political demands. Their members gather under the umbrella of the term 'peasants,' so when LVC's representatives speak of "we, the peasants," this is what they mean:

"We, more than 500 representatives from more than 80 countries, of organizations of peasants/family farmers, artisanal fisherfolk, indigenous peoples, landless peoples, rural workers, migrants, pastoralists, forest communities, women, youth, consumers and environmental and urban movements."

At first glance this seems like an impossible variety of interests to unite and act upon. Indeed, a migrant worker in a Dutch greenhouse has very little in common with a smallholder in the Chilean Andes, or a family owned vineyard in France. Yet, LVC recognizes that the struggles of rural people from different international and national contexts all begin and end at the same point: in their connection to the land. This translates into a political identity that connects across borders and stands for an unparalleled form of international solidarity.

It is this way of organizing with one another that can serve as an inspiration for policymakers who are concerned with the representative capacity of our democratic institutions. As the international community comes to recognise the problems that come with inequality, it is confronted with the fact that, since the 1948 declaration, its political arena has become unable to address it. The rise of powerful MNCs that lobby in international and national political institutions, causes unequal representation of interests. Marginalized groups have difficulty placing their demands on the political agenda, let alone acted upon. As a result, the gap between people and politics grows, further accelerating the downwards spiral of declining representation and political participation.

La Via Campesina offers a hopeful alternative. Where most political movements around identity speak of 'us' and 'them' to demarcate

Representates de la Via Campesina © Flickr

of other protests and fights for food sovereignty happening all over the world helps bridge the distance to politics felt by people in rural areas. The solidarity statements made by LVC range from a statement against the repression of the Moroccan trade union for farmers to the denunciation of the persecution of peasant and indigenous leaders in Peru - examples of resistance are plentiful.

the area of interests they are fighting for, LVC emphasizes the 'we'. As mentioned before, at the core of their political organization lies the principle of radical democracy. This is first and foremost implemented in the strategy of bridging local instances of resistance.

The movement's strength further lays in its recognition of the overarching structure of problems in the global agricultural system. One example of a local protest for biodiversity protection which does not explicitly challenge the global food system, can still be connected to the international context of agricultural-political demands. To do so, LVC is present at every important international gathering on food and agriculture, whether at the FAO, WTO, EU or UN forums. The movement has gained access to multiple negotiation tables and uses this seat to bring demands from the streets to the formal decision-making settings and institutions.

At the same time, LVC never stops making resistance felt on the streets and continues to draw public attention. It is this constant and dynamic exchange between grassroot demands and political participation at different levels of governance that makes the movement so effective. The tireless informing

"LVC makes resistance felt on the streets."

Another inspiring aspect of La Via Campesina's approach to radical democracy is their "more than human" understanding of the social. As illustrated by the quote mentioned earlier, LVC puts critical and feminist perspectives at the forefront of their demands in many different ways, highlighting the perspectives of women and indigenous peoples. In their resistance to capitalist and patriarchal structures, they further reject the anthropocentric worldview that lies at the basis of overexploitation of natural resources. Instead, they support indigenous and feminist ontologies that recognize nature as an active voice of its own.

Admirers of the movement see in these practices a radical way of political participation. People witness that they are part of a global, political struggle that resists being co-opted by mainstream politics. LVC shows that local acts matter and that they are heard and felt deeply way beyond the streets on which they take place.

MATHILDE PERRIN | ANALYSIS

LEGAL ACTION TO PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF FEMALE MIGRANTS: COE'S ATTEMPT TO TACKLE INEQUALITIES IN MIGRATION

The Centre Primo Levi, a French Association primarily dedicated to the care and support of victims of torture and political violence exiled in France, noted in November 2022: "The passage through Libya, Morocco or Greece are places where sexual violence is systematically practised. Smugglers, members of the security forces or the police are the main perpetrators." This quote illustrates how migrant women and girls can face difficulties, particularly linked to their gender, during the process of migration and seeking asylum. In an attempt to tackle this issue, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (CoE) adopted a new recommendation concerning the protection of the rights of migrant, refugee, and asylum-seeking women and girls in May 2022. This follows a former document issued by the CoE in 2019, providing key recommendations in this area. The recommendations consisted of the need to ratify and implement the necessary European and international instruments, to adopt a child-rights-based

Refugees from Ukraine at the border crossing in Medyka 2022 © PhotopankPL/ Shutterstock

approach when girls are concerned, and to ensure safe accommodation, reception facilities, and access to healthcare services. They also mentioned the necessity of effective staff, particularly women, to support and accompany migrant women and girls throughout the entire process.

The new recommendation comes into effect under the Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023 of the Council of Europe, which includes five other strategic areas, among them the prevention and combat of gender stereotypes, sexism, and violence against women. In its preamble, the Committee of Ministers recalls the relevant texts concerning the rights of migrant women and girls. Among them are the Council of Europe Conventions, the most famous being the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR) (1950). Concerning more specific rights, one can cite the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (2011), the Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (2007), and the Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (2005). These three Conventions have been signed and ratified by almost every country of the Council of Europe and constitute legally-binding instruments that hold states responsible for the breaches of their obligations. Finally, reference is made to the Council of Europe Action Plan on Protecting Vulnerable Persons in the Context of Migration and Asylum in Europe (2021-2025). This Action Plan addressed to Member States aims at advancing targeted measures to facilitate asylum and migration procedures for vulnerable persons.

The Committee of Ministers also refers to the work of the United Nations (UN). Indeed, the recommendation relates to three Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) put forward in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of the United Nations: SDG 5: achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls; SDG 10: reduce inequality within and among countries; and SDG 16, which aims at promoting peaceful and inclusive societies. Notably, within SDG 10, target 10.7 in particular aims at facilitating orderly safe, regular and responsible migrant and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies. This diversity of SDGs illustrates the fact that the question of the rights of migrant women and girls raises a large variety of challenges and touches upon a broad scope of issues.

"The question of the rights of migrant women and girls raises a large variety of challenges."

According to The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022, globally, around one in five people have experienced discrimination based on at least one of the grounds prohibited under international human rights law, such as age, sex, ethnicity, or disability. Furthermore, the number of people forced to flee their home countries had grown to a record 24.5 million by mid-2021. The increase in migration overall made 2021 the deadliest year on record for migrants since 2017: 5,895 people died fleeing their countries. By reference to these facts, the CoE Recommendation underlines the different issues that arise in the context of women's and girls' migration. It then continues by enumerating the measures that Member States should take to reduce the discrimination and inequalities inflicted on those vulnerable people.

"It is crucial that migrant women and girls are aware of their rights."

In the fight to tackle inequalities that female migrants endure, the Recommendation highlights several concepts that need to be considered. One of them is the concept of intersectionality. According to the Center for Intersectional Justice, the concept of intersectionality "describes the ways in which systems of inequality based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, class and other forms of discrimination "intersect" to create unique dynamics and effects." Applied to the domain of migrant women and girls, this concept underlines the current issues at stake and the need to address them all together. Indeed, women are more inclined to face discrimination based on more than one ground, depending for example on their age, race, or on their status as migrants. Emphasis is put on stereotypes and the need to dismantle them to achieve equality. Particularly gender-based inequalities are denounced: violence against women, trafficking of human beings, and sexual exploitation of migrants.

Furthermore, a point is made concerning access to information and justice: it is crucial that migrant women and girls are aware of their rights. To do so, the Recommendation highlights the importance of interpreters, from the beginning of the process - to seek protection and make initial complaints - to the justice process and seeking of reparation.

A woman inside an abandoned construction site, Saida-Lebanon, 2015 © Richard Juilliart/ Shutterstock

Interpreters are necessary to ensure that the rights of the migrants are respected and effectively implemented. The value of female staff is also emphasised at every stage of the migration and asylum-seeking process. Indeed, as underlined by UN Women, "migration is a gendered process and impacts women and men differently." Female migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers particularly require the presence of staff trained in human rights, gender equality, and violence against women.

"Migration is a gendered process."

Finally, the Recommendation emphasises the economic, social, and cultural rights of migrant women and girls: the rights to health, shelter, food security, water, and economic empowerment. These rights are discussed in the context of the arrival of migrants in a new country, in particular concerning their transit and reception facilities. Concerning asylum, the Recommendation advocates for age- and gender-sensitive standards, practices, and procedures. Other areas that cannot be discussed within the scope of this article also deserve further consideration: notably healthcare, education, integration and participation, detention, and family reunion.

To conclude, the new Recommendation of the Council of Europe takes a step further in the fight for the protection of female migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers. It sets out the rights these women possess and provides means and ways Member States should ensure them. Different migration crises are currently taking place in the world – the most prominent being the one linked to the war in Ukraine. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' Annual Global Trends report, 89 million people were forcibly displaced in the world in 2022. In this context, one can wonder whether this Recommendation will impact how migrant women and girls will be treated in the future, but the need for action is highlighted.

LINNÉA FÖRNEGÅRD | ANALYSIS

PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION: INEQUALITIES IN THE BRAZILIAN SCHOOL SYSTEM

When thinking about inequality, one of the first things to pop into your mind might be poverty and economic inequality. Poverty is a serious issue in many parts of the world and often the economic inequalities have an effect on social inequalities, such as access to health care and education. In Brazil, South America's largest country, both economic and educational inequalities are a serious problem. Many children live in poverty and are not able to attend school. Despite being one of the world's biggest economies, socio-economic inequalities are severe in Brazil. Between the country's circa 214 million inhabitants, the differences in income are extremely large.

According to a United Nations report released in 2019, roughly 1% of the wealthiest part of the population in Brazil holds around 28% of Brazil's income. Comparing these income inequalities on an international level puts Brazil in the top 2 highest income concentrations of the world, with only Qatar outreaching Brazil. Despite these inequalities, the national institutions in Brazil remain to protect the most affluent part of Brazil's population. The considerable economic differences have a significant impact on the population's social equality, one of them the access to good education. Access to a good education will also influence people's future careers. This leads to an unequal educational system in Brazil as opportunities differ for those with high and lower incomes.

In Brazil, a person's socioeconomic background can highly affect their likelihood to succeed in school or the opportunity to access education altogether. Surveys of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) found that a student's socio-economic background played a crucial role in the prediction of their results. For example, students with an economic advantage outscored those without this advantage by 97 points in reading. On an average international level, the

Rio de Janeiro © Gabriel Rissi/Unsplash difference between advantaged and disadvantaged students was 89 points. The economic status often affects both the results and the aspiration of students to achieve a higher level of education, which could lead to an improved economic situation.

"A lot of Brazilians barely receive any education at all, as 6.8% of the Brazilian population, all above the age of 15, were still illiterate in 2019."

Many students with a disadvantaged socio-economic background have lower ambitions regarding their education. This might be a result of having to choose work instead of education early on to support their family. Therefore, the social surrounding of kids growing up is often critical for their later life and stepping out of one's social circle remains hardly possible.

A lot of Brazilians barely receive any education at all, as 6.8% of the Brazilian population, all above the age of 15, were still illiterate in 2019. Furthermore, 40% of the population over the age of 25 has not received any primary education. The correlation between not attending school and poverty appears to be strong. In 2019 only about 9% of children out of school, between the ages 4-17, came from families earning more than a minimum wage.

Access to education is not only dependent on the socio-economic background but also varies among geographical regions. About half of the illiterate people in Brazil live in the northeast, one of the country's poorest regions. In the southeast, a wealthier region, the literacy levels are higher. This shows that one's origin and the family's income have an impact on educational opportunities.

During 2020, access to education in Brazil was heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. When the pandemic spread across Brazil in March 2020, schools were forced to close in order to slow down the expansion of the virus. During this period, poverty worsened because of the lockdowns which meant many businesses had to close and unemployment increased.

The increased poverty and lack of internet access made it more difficult for children to participate in school activities outside of school, such as online classes. The majority of public schools did not have internet access and could therefore not hold any online classes, while a majority of the private schools had internet access and were able to provide online classes for their students. In addition to this, many children live in poverty which means they do not have an environment suited for studying and online classes at home.

In November of 2020, as many as 5 million children, aged 6-17, did not have access to education, a number that increased sharply from 2019 by almost 4 million. Children between the ages 4-5 and teens aged 15-17 were the most affected age groups. These groups' admission to school was made obligatory in 2009, meaning that keeping children out of school is against the law. Once more, there were major geographical differences showing that the poorest parts of the country, the northeast and northern regions, had the highest rates of children out of school at the time of the pandemic.

Education could be a way out of poverty for many Brazilians. Unfortunately, when opportunities vary as highly as they do in Brazil, the task to break generational poverty becomes more difficult.

It has been well established in Brazil that private schools tend to be better than public schools, however, the difference in opportunities for those attending those schools became quite clear during the pandemic. It is also clear that some regions, such as the northeast, lack sufficient funding for the school system. The amount of children who could not attend school during the pandemic is alarming and change for a more equal education is needed in Brazil.

Socio-economic differences are not the only perspective that needs to be considered when looking at Brazil's school system; other factors such as race and gender also play a significant role in a child's likelihood to succeed in school.

In Brazil, only about 18% of black adolescents are in college, compared to almost 36% of white adolescents. In total, people of colour as well as indigenous children make up about 70% of the children and adolescents not attending school. The 2018 PISA survey has also shown that girls are less likely to see themselves working as an engineer or science professor than boys.

While these perspectives are important to consider, it is apparent that the economic status of a child affects their educational opportunities predominantly, which leads to an unequal school system in Brazil.

"Unfortunately, when opportunities vary as highly as they do in Brazil, the task to break generational poverty becomes more difficult."

Nevertheless, it is not all negative. Before the pandemic, the number of children attending school increased. While the pandemic was a step back, the general trend still shows that there is a possibility for improvement. During the pandemic, some authorities tried to find alternative ways to reach out to children not attending school or school activities.

In Maranhão, in northeastern Brazil, lessons were broadcasted on the radio and public television. In São Paulo, a free app was created for students attending public schools, where they were able to attend online lessons and access school activities. Hopefully, these initiatives will continue to have a positive impact alongside new initiatives that can make education more accessible for all Brazilians.

MARK BELKIN | ANALYSIS

BREAKING THE CHAINS OF EXPLOITATION? A REVIEW OF THE GERMAN SUPPLY CHAIN ACT

Worker production line of Emmett Eletric's, Jianxi, China, 2022 © Humphery/Shutterstock

"People are, without question, the most essential part of our company" – proudly states the website of fashion giant Inditex, which owns large brands such as Zara and Bershka. To underline how much it cares about the environment and people, the company further features cheerful images showing happy workers next to their sewing machines and in blooming cotton fields. Strong emotive wording like "Transparency," "Sustainability," and "Positive Impact" accompany the images. Without the background knowledge of Inditex being a global corporation known for its fast fashion products and the poor working conditions of its suppliers' workers in the Global South, one could get the impression of Inditex being a green NGO leading the fight for more sustainable clothing. Alongside its cheery Corporate Social Responsibility coverage, the company fails to provide independent evaluations regarding their business practices in the Global South. Instead, Inditex publishes its own reports on its corporate responsibility – which are marginally more reliable than a "trust me bro" assurance. According to Human Rights Watch, Inditex is highly untransparent about concrete suppliers and their factory locations. Next to several other news outlets and NGOs, The New York Times further accuses Inditex of human right violations in the Chinese Xinjiang region.

Targeting hundreds of companies like Inditex, a new German legislation could drastically change the business practices of hundreds of firms operating in Germany with supply chains abroad. Instead of voluntary commitments to social and environmental standards, the law now imposes due diligence on companies. The Supply Chain Due Diligence Act, in truly German fashion complicatedly labelled "Lieferkettensorgfaltspflichtengesetz," is the flagship initiative of the Development Ministry and came into force on the first of January 2023. It requires companies with headquarters in Germany employing at least 3,000 employees there (around 700 companies) to adhere to and publish regular reports on human rights and labour conditions of their foreign suppliers based on UN guiding principles. Should a company fail to take appropriate action, it could face a penalty of up to 2% of its average annual turnover – which for a company making 400 million euros could mean a hefty fine of 8 million euros.

"Over a 100 companies are involved in the fabrication of a simple shirt."

Cheap labour costs, paired with low labour standards as well as little governmental oversight, create a perfect environment for cost-efficient and profitable production. This unsustainable and inhumane production is fuelled by the growing demand for increasingly cheap and short-lived products coming from industrialised nations. Low incomes in manufacturing – often below the national minimum wages – force labourers into extremely long working hours to make a living. Little room is left for recreation or investments in education, allowing them to escape the poor working conditions, resulting in a vicious cycle of poverty. For companies already adhering to human rights and carefully monitoring their suppliers, the German law presents an opportunity to level the playing field and prevent competitors from having unfair advantages.

The novelty of the law, compared to previous German labour law, is its scope. International supply chains are at the very core of our globalised, interconnected economy. According to the NGO Terre des Hommes, far above 100 companies are involved in the fabrication of a simple shirt. Still, should you happen to walk through the industrial areas of China or Bangladesh, you would be rather unlikely to run into production halls showing "Nike" or "Apple" logos on the factory building. Instead, you would come across little-known, but significant suppliers such as "Pou Chen," producing the majority of shoes for Nike or "Foxconn" producing almost all iPhone parts. The inclusion of differently branded parts makes it easy for multinational companies, profiting from long supply chains, to deflect all responsibility and argue that only the supplier is at fault for child labour or inhumane working conditions. The new law therefore imposes responsibility for foreign suppliers of companies operating in Germany, going beyond the decent national labour laws already in place within Germany.

Other countries have already experimented with the legal concept of placing due diligence on companies for their supply chain. A law similar to the German one already exists in the UK, the Modern Slavery Act from 2015. Compared to the German law, it only covers a narrow form of labour abuse. Repercussions of the UK law have been limited. 40% of UK-based companies refusing to file regular reports faced no penalties, according to the NGO BHRRC. Further, the Modern Slavery Act only issues a recommendation to take action once infringement has been established. The German law, however, creates an obligation to further investigate and improve the labour conditions with the supplier. While not being able to penetrate the entire supply chain, the German law can penalise companies in a wide variety of areas like slavery, minimum wage, working safety, and environmental hazards like pollution and excessive water consumption.

"National legislation is naturally limited in its scope."

Although generally viewed as an achievement, the law also widely criticised by environmental and human rights focussed NGOs. Not far enough, not consequential enough, declare its critics. According to the German Federal Statistical Office, 61% of all companies operating in Germany are involved in global supply chains. Because of Germany's strong immersion in global production and the significance of its industrial force, wider due diligence covering secondary or tertiary suppliers would be crucial. According to the NGO Germanwatch, most human rights abuses happen at the very bottom of supply chains, while labour connected to raw materials like crop harvesting or mineral extraction is not yet covered by the law.

Further criticism is issued for the exclusion of direct civil liability for the German companies. Consequently, those who work in extremely poor conditions in the Global South have no chance of suing a company for human rights abuses in a German court. Lastly, Greenpeace points out, the environmental scope of the law is too narrow. While direct harm caused to humans through pollution or toxic materials is covered, significant environmental harm through the emission of greenhouse gases as well as the loss of biodiversity is neglected.

On the other side of the critical spectrum are those who argue that the law is too far-reaching. The main critique from this camp, mostly represented by medium-sized companies and their powerful interest groups, revolves around the surplus of bureaucracy the law creates. While large corporations have the necessary staff to ensure detailed compliance with the law, small and medium-sized companies would lack the necessary personal and financial resources to do so. The law would therefore only lead to a mass exit of businesses operating in Germany from Global South countries, as that would be simpler and cheaper than screening their primary supply chains, as argued by the German Employers Association. Most economies in the Global South are highly dependent on low-value production and would greatly suffer if Germany-based companies started to look for suppliers elsewhere.

Quo Vadis, Lieferkettensorgfaltspflicht engesetz? Will the unpronounceable law be a toothless tiger with few consequences for German companies, similar to the UK Modern Slavery Act? Or will its consequences be so harsh that it will cause an exodus of German-based companies from the Global South? It is too early to evaluate the law in practice, as much depends on how actively German authorities will detect and pursue human rights breaches with suppliers. The high penalties as well as the obligation to act in case of a breach hint that the German law will have more consequences than the UK one. Still, discontinuation of business relationships between Germany-based companies and those in Global South countries is unlikely. Like most companies in industrialised countries, German companies heavily rely on cheap products to stay competitive and will likely adhere to the law rather than falling back to more expensive imports. The acute skill shortage in Germany, particularly in the manufacturing sector, further exacerbates the need to look for suppliers outside the country.

"Will the law be a toothless tiger with few consequences or will it cause an exodus of German-based companies from the Global South?"

National legislation is naturally limited in its scope. We need assertive policy action at higher levels to ensure globally improved working conditions and transparent supply chains on a broad scale. A possible solution is currently being worked out in Brussels, through an EU Supply Chain Act which would enforce rules similar to the German law across all EU states. It would also cover companies with a high turnover in the EU, affecting up to 17,000 companies. In comparison with the German law, the European legislation would also concern companies with less than 3,000 employees and make companies liable under civil law, allowing for lawsuits from individuals. Whether the drafted EU law will pass all necessary legislative steps is yet to be seen. What is needed in the countries whose industries are situated lower in the global value chain are improved social protection, effective monitoring systems and enforced labour as well as environmental regulation. Achieving those will be a key task for the international community and national governments to ensure just and sustainable development. The products we buy on a daily basis do not originate from a void – we, as a consumer oriented society, must never forget the people behind neatly packaged and cheerfully marketed goods.

Tiger and dragon light festival
© Mathew Schwartz/Unsplash

EMILY WUDIE JONSSON | TRAVEL REPORT

NEW LANDSCAPES, OLD PROBLEMS: MIGRANT LABOUR IN JORDAN

It is late October when twelve participants from the Association of Foreign Affairs embark on a twelve-day study trip to Jordan. The focus of the trip is on equality issues and democratic development through the theme of "Women, Peace and Security." Emily Wudie Jonsson takes us on one of the visits during the trip, the Dana nature reserve, about 20 miles south of the capital Amman and known for its increasingly developed ecotourism. After the visit, her thoughts focus more on the conditions of vulnerable guest workers, as she reflects on her broader experiences in Jordan.

Driving through rocky mountains in Jordan, down the winding roads to one of our last stops before heading home, I am left to ponder over our time in Jordan. Observing the landscape and people we drive by, I'm reflecting on all the things I have learned about Jordan that I didn't know before, and on how lucky I am to have been able to go on a journey like this. Still, what we do not see while driving through the beautiful Jordan scenery, is the sadness and inequality that is rooted within the society here, making me wonder what the purpose of my being here was. As the bus slows, we pull into one of our last destinations, the Jordanian nature reserve Dana.

The twelve of us shuffle off of the bus, collect our bags and slowly attempt to find the way to our rooms with the assistance of the hotel staff, primarily a frustrated hotel manager. After we settle in, we all gather in the common area of the hotel, which overlooks the beautiful valley of Dana. We are served delightful chai by a friendly woman working at the hotel. A woman, I notice, seems to have a similar background to myself, with Ethiopian features. The delight she expresses when I speak to her in my broken Amharic - what we speak in Ethiopia - is immense. We exchange a few words and acknowledge how nice it is to have a fellow Ethiopian around, both of us recognising how unusual it is to run

© Mathilde Perrin / UPF Travel Committee into another Ethiopian in such a small town as Dana.

"A rooted sadness and inequality."

Walking around in the small town there are a few hotels which do not seem to be open, a visitors' centre and two kiosks; the remainder of the buildings are mostly rubble - as if this small town has preserved its few buildings only for tourist purposes. The highlight in Dana is its hiking tours but as we don't have a tour guide - mandatory for most hikes - and as the clouds are creeping in, we are struggling to decide on whether to leave our small hotel or not. As this is one of our last days in Jordan, after a jam-packed schedule of study visits and sightseeing, it is finally easy to conclude that we will stay at the hotel, lounge around, snack on some food, and play some card games in the communal space.

As the day progresses, I run into my new Ethiopian friend from time to time and exchange some happy words. At one point, I ask her if I could brew some tea to which she responds yes, guiding me to a kitchen where I meet her coworker, another Ethiopian woman. However, the second woman does not seem to be very happy or inclined to greet me. I also had not seen her around much in the hotel besides just walking in and out of the kitchen and when I greeted her, she did not want to engage in any type of conversation as if out of fear or discomfort, so I let it be.

We spend the rest of the day lounging around, observing life here. Being in the hotel all day, something that catches my attention is the relationship between the staff and the manager. In our initial introduction, the manager was not very friendly, something I had chalked up to stress given we were a big group to check-in.

Still, his behaviour seemed consistent and unwarranted. When addressing other guests, he always showed a hint of frustration and when addressing his own employees, there were even tones of aggression. At times it would escalate to the point where the manager would yell, grab, and be physically aggressive with these women, even in front of guests. Sometimes he would hoard them off to a private space suggesting that other types of physical violence occurred, possibly even sexual violence. This explained the distressed behaviour the other woman showed towards me. It became clear to me that the relationship between the management and staff was abusive and unfair, something I did not know how to deal with. Had we been in Sweden, I would have called the police or taken any other action to report this situation. However, in this remote village with no contacts in the country, I was at a loss for what to do.

"The delight she expresses when I speak to her in my broken Amharic is immense."

I shared the shocking experience with my mother, but to my surprise, she did not express the same astonishment I had felt. My mother, of Ethiopian heritage and having spent most of her professional life working with migration issues, was aware of the commonality of this. She shared with me that it is quite common for women to leave countries like Ethiopia, hoping to find better opportunities in other regions like the Middle East, unaware of similarly exploitative conditions abroad. Yet I continued to feel helpless and upset, along with my eleven co-travellers as we were learning more about the practices at the hotel.

"Migrant workers are unaware of the similarly exploitative conditions abroad."

Following the trip, I was inspired to learn more about the reality of workers travelling to the Middle East for work. This migration is not at all a novel thing and rather seems to happen all the time, as acknowledged recently in Qatar and dating back for at least over a decade.

According to the Global Commission on International Migration, the Middle East is one of the regions in the world that receives the most migrant workers. Qatar as a leading example received upwards of 409,000 workers in the year 2000, which constitutes 70.4% of their total population. Jordan takes the 4th place, receiving the most migrants in proportion to population, (1,945,000 constituting 38.6% of the total population). These are significant numbers and especially so considering the detrimental effects on such a large group of people that suffer poor working conditions, psychological and physical abuse, and human trafficking. A significant number of people uproot their lives with the intention and hope of being able to build better futures for themselves and their families but are instead lured into inhumane conditions.

Digging deeper into this, I am amazed and saddened by how little information is available and known to us. Of course, a lot happens worldwide and not all stories can be followed, but how come we hear so little about migrants' rights? Are their rights not equally valued human rights? Would we have heard anything about these issues at all if not for big events like the world cup shining a light on them? The frustration I felt brought me back to one of the thoughts I had before entering the hotel in Dana, feeling lucky to

© Rachel Paige Allen / UPF Travel Committee

have this experience but unsure of the point of my being there.

I believe one of the reasons we are given the opportunity to go on trips like these is to learn and bring back new perspectives. While I feel this trip has given me the opportunity to learn a lot, at the same time I feel a larger sense of hopelessness. Studying development, I wonder about the tools needed for migrants and host countries to decrease and prevent exploitative and violent working situations like these. And what can I do? Perhaps finish my degree and work in a field that addresses these issues. Or perhaps this article can raise some awareness and ignite the same feeling in someone else.

After collecting our belongings and checking out of the hotel, the last thing I did was find my Ethiopian friend and ask her for her name. Migration issues have tremendous scopes, yet are also made up of individual exploitation which deserves to be mentioned. For now, I will remember my encounter in Dana and my new friend's name, and at the end of the day I just hope that she will be okay and that with this article, I can make sure that her story and those of many other women are heard.

"Travelling allows us to bring back new perspectives."

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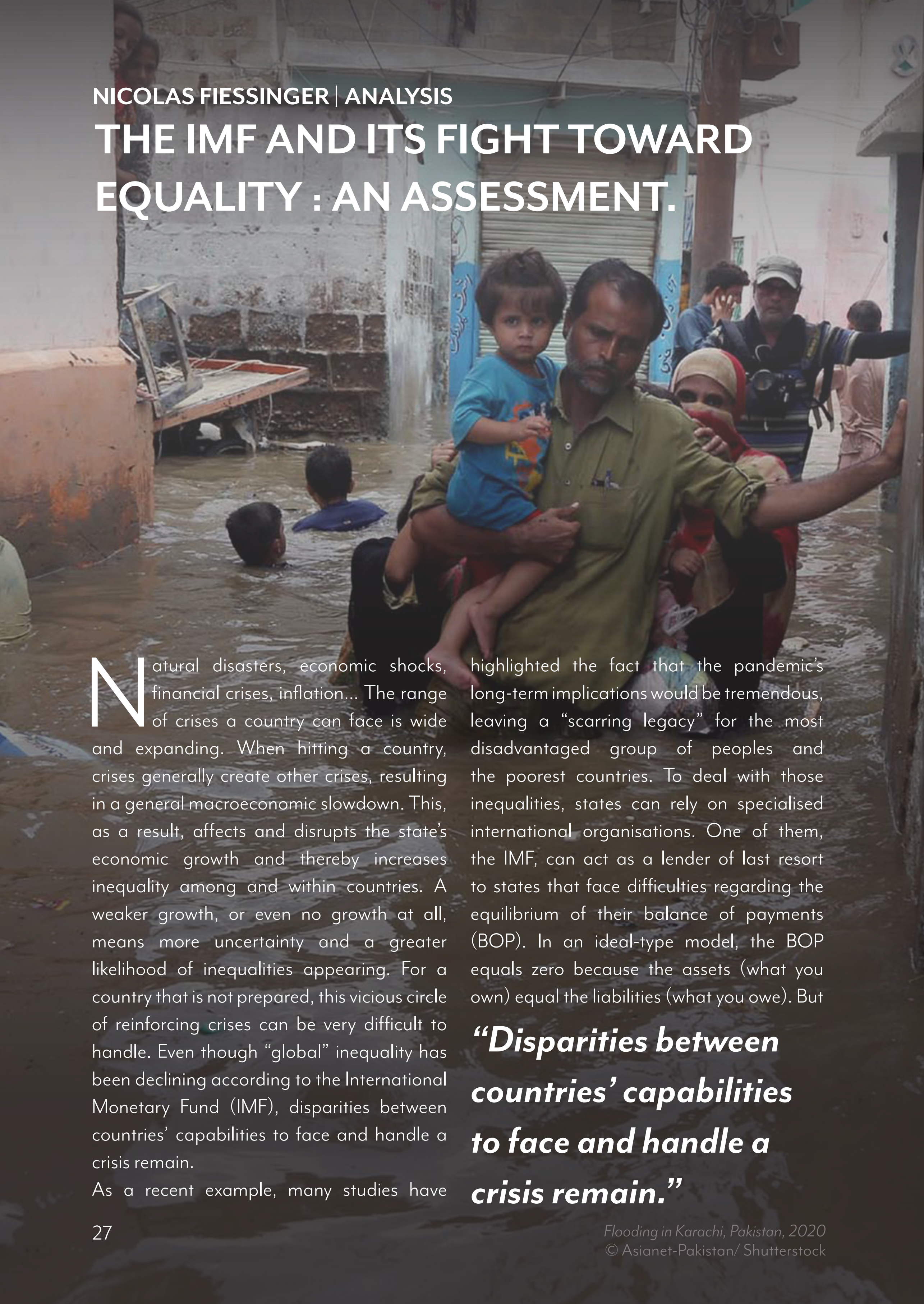
NICOLAS FIESSINGER | ANALYSIS

THE IMF AND ITS FIGHT TOWARD EQUALITY : AN ASSESSMENT.



Natural disasters, economic shocks, financial crises, inflation... The range of crises a country can face is wide and expanding. When hitting a country, crises generally create other crises, resulting in a general macroeconomic slowdown. This, as a result, affects and disrupts the state's economic growth and thereby increases inequality among and within countries. A weaker growth, or even no growth at all, means more uncertainty and a greater likelihood of inequalities appearing. For a country that is not prepared, this vicious circle of reinforcing crises can be very difficult to handle. Even though "global" inequality has been declining according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), disparities between countries' capabilities to face and handle a crisis remain.

As a recent example, many studies have highlighted the fact that the pandemic's long-term implications would be tremendous, leaving a "scarring legacy" for the most disadvantaged group of peoples and the poorest countries. To deal with those inequalities, states can rely on specialised international organisations. One of them, the IMF, can act as a lender of last resort to states that face difficulties regarding the equilibrium of their balance of payments (BOP). In an ideal-type model, the BOP equals zero because the assets (what you own) equal the liabilities (what you owe). But

"Disparities between countries' capabilities to face and handle a crisis remain."

Flooding in Karachi, Pakistan, 2020
© Asianet-Pakistan/ Shutterstock

this is rarely the case, as countries often owe way more than they own, and so may find themselves in situations of insolvency.

Acting as a specialised agency of the United Nations, the IMF defines its mission as promoting "international cooperation," working to "achieve sustainable growth and prosperity." One of the ways it aims to reach this goal is by launching initiatives and pushing states to work towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to which the IMF is committed. "Inequality" is then considered by the IMF to be a "specific issue" that threatens both, according to the institution, macroeconomic stability and sustainable growth.

To deal with the "specific issue" of inequality, the IMF has various options, all of them having an important impact on states' policies. This impact can be understood as some sort of an influence, the IMF generally taking actions that affect the way governments are ruling their country. The first option is the so-called "financial assistance," mainly consisting of money lending programs to countries in exchange for reforms. For instance, during the Eurozone crisis, the IMF lent money to Greece through different economic adjustment plans (EAP), in exchange for the implementation of austerity measures in the country.

The second option is policy advice, also known as surveillance, through which the IMF monitors how states are managing their own economical and financial capabilities. The idea here is to stabilise a state's economy by assessing its resilience and capabilities to deal with crises. The third option is "capacity development," presented as a technical assistance the IMF can provide to countries in order to bolster their public finances. This option is particularly designed for low-income developing countries (corresponding to 50% of the IMF's spending on capacity development) and conflict-affected states (25% of the IMF's spending on capacity development). All these options can be discussed between states and the IMF with respect to Article IV of the IMF's Articles of Agreement, which specifies the institution's rights to practise a regular surveillance over its member states.

"There is a significant gap between the IMF's rhetoric and actions."

With this in mind, this article seeks to raise a discussion on the effectiveness of the IMF's actions in reducing inequalities. This discussion is relevant considering the fact that the IMF's actions have been largely criticised for their outcome, which in many cases led to an increase in inequality. The most common criticism often holds that the IMF involuntarily creates the inequality it claims to tackle, by forcing in-need countries to "scrap welfare policies and pursue privatisations," such as Greece in the late 2000s. Another study conducted by OXFAM in 2017 came to a similar conclusion. After conducting in-depth analyses on 15 countries to assess if the IMF was acting in line with its claims, the research came to the conclusion that a "significant gap exists between the IMF's rhetoric and research findings on inequality and its actions."

Those statements are denied by the IMF, even though the institution recognised its failure in the Greek case - former IMF managing director, Christine Lagarde, referred to 2011 as a "lost year" due to the institution's mistakes. Nevertheless, the IMF has recently created new tools to better deal with inequality among and within low-income countries. One of them is a "floor for social spending" that prioritises health care and education. The idea behind this tool is to tackle the criticisms that were raised on the link between austerity measures and damages in social spending.

In 2018, Argentina was the first country to receive a loan condition to "maintain a minimum floor of spending on certain social assistance programmes." Adding this, the IMF underlined the importance of the "distributive aspect" of its policies, claiming that both the assessments and measures that are taken aim to mitigate the costs on the poorest. The IMF constantly tries to better frame its plans and actions to increase its efficiency, and create new tools and learn from past mistakes.

In the end, the criticisms raised against the IMF are mostly related to the difference between, on the one hand, the words and engagements of the institution, and on the other hand, the day-to-day reality of its policies regarding international and regional inequalities. Moreover, these inequalities, being numerous and most of the time overlapping each other, cannot be tackled by the IMF's actions alone and do not only rely on monetary solutions.

The IMF can help to highlight issues a country is facing, but cannot find a solution alone. For the IMF to be effective, the organisation's actions need to be fully supported by governments, as Kristalina Georgieva, current managing director of the IMF, underlined when saying "We can only stop fraud and corruption if we work together, and civil society has a critical role to play in holding to account both governments and institutions like the IMF." Both the state and the institution must work hand in hand instead of just relying on each other to take action.

Kristalina Georgieva and Ursula von der Leyen
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KAREN REUTER | ANALYSIS

MENSTRUAL EQUITY: SHIFTING PRIORITIES ON THE PATH TO GENDER EQUALITY

Periods are political – this slogan has grown in importance over the last years as more and more people have spoken up against period poverty. This is an important development, since around 1.8 billion people in the world bleed every month.

It has also increasingly become recognised among the international community and development practitioners (importantly the United Nations) that period poverty and menstrual hygiene management are crucial concerns for girls, women, and everyone else that menstruates all over the world and specifically in the Global South. An increasing number of development programs have focused on the issue of period poverty – ranging from projects producing reusable pads to those offering menstrual hygiene education.

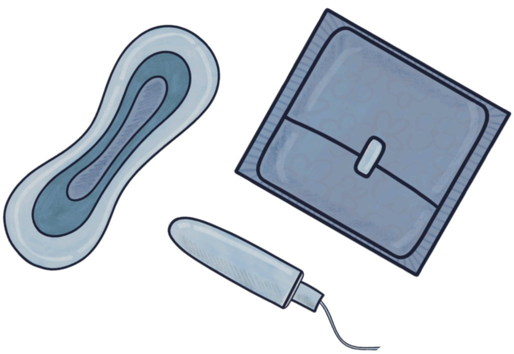
"Menstruation and period poverty are still not explicitly mentioned in the Sustainable Development Goals."

While local level initiatives are important, internationally, menstruation and period poverty are still not explicitly mentioned in the Sustainable Development Goals and clear targets forming the guideline for development work and projects remain lacking. This needs to change to spotlight the topic on the international agenda.

Periods already relate to the achievement of several of the Sustainable Development Goals and their targets: #3 Good Health and Well-being, #4 Quality Education, #5 Gender Equality, #8 Decent Work, and #10 Reduced Inequalities. Period poverty deserves to be highlighted as a priority on the path to true gender equality and therefore periods need to be addressed specifically in the next formulation of the SDGs.

While the importance of education for the future of children everywhere is well known, further attention should be paid to the potential interference of periods with school attendance. Attending school paves the way not only for having a job later, but also for learning about the opportunities and rights that are needed to live independently. However, many girls miss school each month because they stay home when they are menstruating.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, 1 out of 10 girls miss school every month, depriving them of 20% of the school year. This is due to pain, lack of period products, stigma, and resulting fears of being teased at school, especially by boys, when clothes get stained. When girls are at school while they are on their periods, they face numerous problems. Often, toilets are not clean, private, or well equipped with the

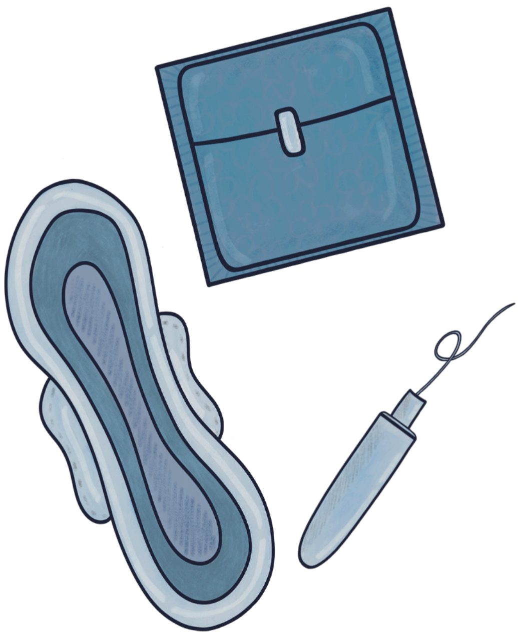


Illustrations © Ola Grabowski / @thesecretlifeofski / thesecretlifeofski@gmail.com

necessary supplies like trash cans. Stigma and fear of the period becoming apparent due to the lack of suitable period products lead to girls not being able to concentrate during classes or to play during breaks.

On top of this, periods can lead to sexual exploitation. In Kisumu, the fourth-largest city of Kenya, girls explain that some are regularly forced to turn to transaction sex to be able to afford period products. Since the danger of sexual exploitation of girls is well known, parents tend to take girls out of school when they start their period, as they fear sexual assault that could lead to unwanted pregnancies, resulting from the danger of long journeys to school that can be found especially in rural areas.

Periods threatening safety is also exemplified by the practice of period huts in rural Nepal, where women and girls stay in small huts outside of the home while bleeding, as they are considered impure during this time. While these huts often do not offer enough space to even stand up, they also leave girls vulnerable to sexual violence, as outsiders are aware of the huts which can lead to assaults.



"In Sub-Saharan Africa, 1 out of 10 girls miss school every month, depriving them of 20% of the school year."

These specific cases are examples of the result of stigma towards periods that can be found in almost every country. As with so many issues, the most vulnerable and marginalised in society are also the most vulnerable to the consequences of not being able to deal with their periods in safety, dignity, and in the way they choose.

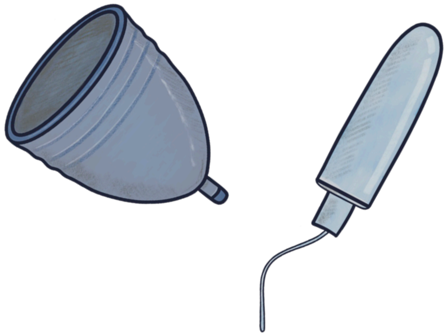
For example, women in refugee camps that are already living on the verge of society and are often facing hunger and diseases, face the additional burden of periods. Refugee camps do not offer clean or private toilets, again leading to risks for health and safety, as fungi and infections can result, and as the need to use shared toilets leads to the danger of experiencing sexual violence.

But what can be done? Stigmas run deep in society and cannot be changed from one day to another. To challenge stigma, everyone should have the opportunity to learn about their body and puberty, to be able to understand periods and misconceptions, and to be able to make informed choices about their sexuality. Hence, information about periods and puberty should increasingly form part of the sexual and reproductive health and rights agenda of the development community. They are closely connected – understanding one's body and what periods mean can prevent unwanted pregnancies and diseases like HIV.

Societal perceptions and ideas towards periods need to be considered when measures like the provision of free or reusable period products are employed. A girl might receive a reusable and sustainable pad, but she might not have the opportunity to wash and dry it privately and hygienically. Hence, practical measures should be combined with tackling stigma.

"The most vulnerable and marginalised in society are also the most vulnerable to the consequences of not being able to deal with their periods in safety, dignity, and in the way they choose."

Several countries, among them Kenya, Colombia, India, Canada, South Africa, Rwanda, and Australia, have abolished



the "tampon tax" that taxes period products. Other countries, like Scotland, are increasingly providing free products in public places. These are important starting points to reduce the burdens for those having periods and to achieve menstrual equity, which includes education, accessibility, and advocacy for one's body.

Addressing the influence of periods on people's lives and opportunities all over the world is significant for getting closer to gender equality. Education, safety, and control over one's body and health need to be viable for everyone in the same way to achieve equality.

This will only be possible if the focus on menstruation and the fight against period poverty is increased. The issue needs to be spotlighted and one important place for this are the SDGs. It is time to talk more about an issue uncomfortable for many – to make the lives of those suffering the most more comfortable.

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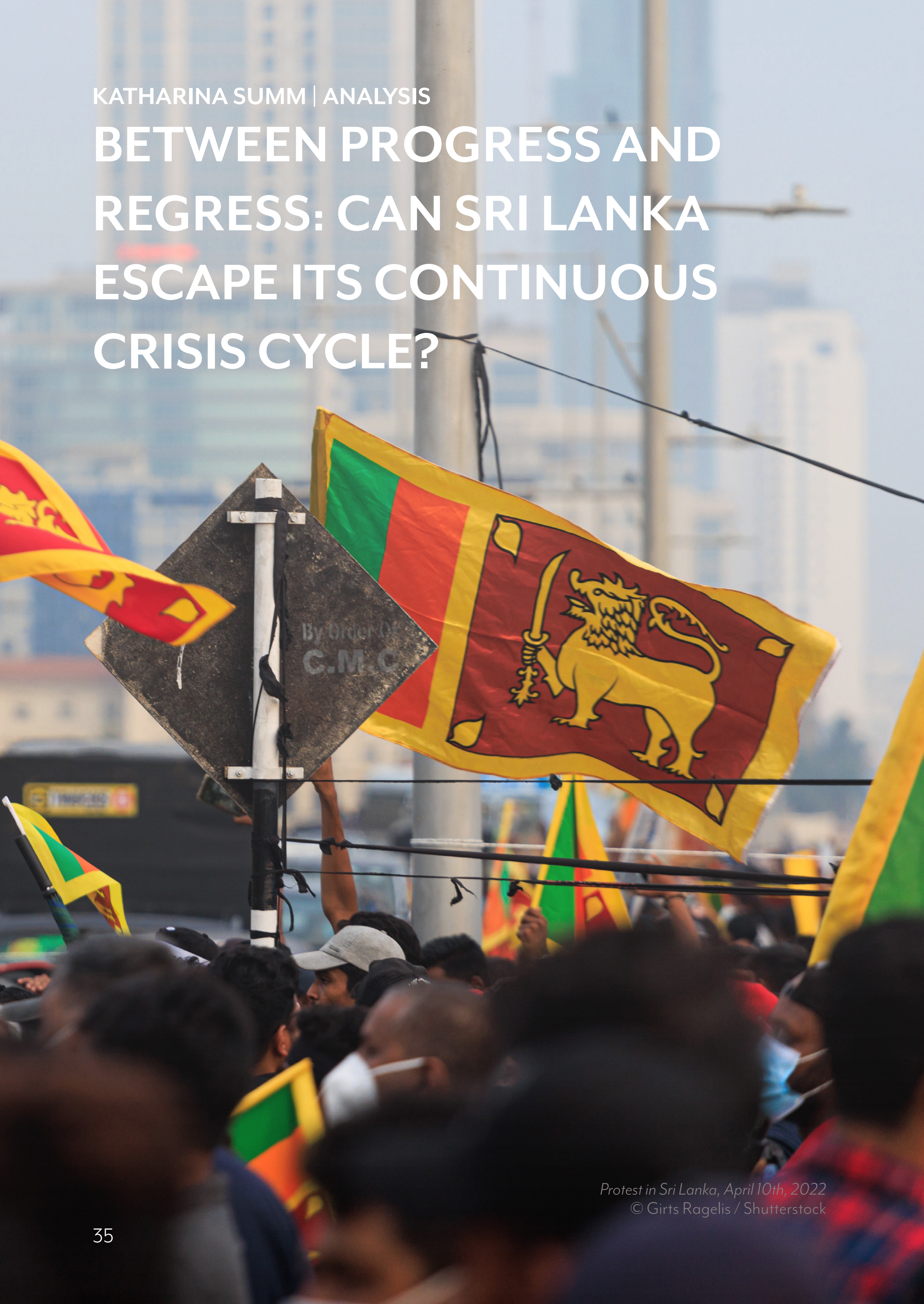
KATHARINA SUMM | ANALYSIS

BETWEEN PROGRESS AND REGRESS: CAN SRI LANKA ESCAPE ITS CONTINUOUS CRISIS CYCLE?



Protest in Sri Lanka, April 10th, 2022
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#GoHomeGota has been trending as a message directed towards Sri Lanka's former President, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, in the country and beyond its borders throughout the past year. The intention behind this hashtag was clear: Sri Lankan citizens wanted a change in government after a chain of events which led the country into an overall political, social and economic crisis. Yet, even after this desired change of the head of state, the island state entered the new year with an uncertain perspective. I interviewed a Sri Lankan living in Kandy, who expressed his feelings about the current situation by stating that he "hates to live in Sri Lanka" and "getting out of this country is the only solution."

But which circumstances have led this country, prominent for tourism and often associated with beautiful landscapes and warm weather, into the unstable situation it appears to be stuck in? Although news about Sri Lanka and its current state made its way into Western media by the middle of 2022, international attention quickly died down again. How can we understand current events without the proper coverage of them?

The events that have led to the present political situation in Sri Lanka are rooted in the country's history, making it necessary to look back several years. After a long colonial period, Sri Lanka gained its independence in 1948. However, the country remained in an unsettled situation for years after and suffered a civil war fought between the two largest population groups, the Sinhalese and the Tamil, that lasted from 1983 to 2009. Up until now, the Sinhalese dominate the southern and western parts of the country and portray the majority, while the minority Tamil live in the northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka.

"Getting out is the only solution."

The underlying motive for the war was the conflict between the majority Sinhalese population and the desire of an independent state for the Tamil minority population in Sri Lanka, pursued by the organisation Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). However, it is important to consider the influence of the colonial period in regard to the civil war and both parties wanting to restore their power rather than only looking at both sides as opponents solely. By 2009 the civil war ended eventually with the killing of the LTTE's leader. In 2004, Sri Lanka suffered another major setback alongside the civil war, being heavily affected by the tsunami destroying large parts of Asia. Nevertheless, the end of the civil war marked an important milestone in Sri Lankan history and a period of economic revival slowly began to emerge.

Thereafter, Sri Lanka became a popular tourist destination and the country started to invest heavily in infrastructure projects such as a new airport and harbour. These projects were to a large extent enabled by external creditors, among which major funding was provided by China. These investments were justified by the rising role of tourism and the opportunities and financial perspectives which would result from the tourism industry eventually. However, the outbreak of COVID-19, the war between Russia and Ukraine, as well as the country's own financial mismanagement, pushed the island state into the next big crisis, which it still has not recovered from to this day.

The country's failure to adequately manage its finances is related to the influence of one of the most politically active and wealthy families within Sri Lanka, the Rajapaksa family. One of its members, Mahinda Rajapaksa, Gotabaya's brother, became president in 2005. This resulted in various majorly influential political positions throughout the following years inherited by the Rajapaksa family.

At the beginning of 2019, the country faced another relapse after explosions, which were later claimed by ISIS, took place in the island state. Offering to lead the country into a state of stability, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, to whom the hashtag #GoHomeGota was addressed, became president after the explosions in 2019. He was supported by his family members in government, including former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, who were placed in powerful political positions such as the Prime Minister's office. The assurances of the Rajapaksa family to stabilise the country quickly turned out to be empty promises. On top of that, the COVID-19 crisis led to a halt in tourism and the year 2022 marked a historic year in which Sri Lanka's devastating situation became prominent worldwide.

Due to the pandemic, the country suffered heavily from medicine and food shortages. Additionally, the war between Russia and Ukraine led to partly implemented power cuts and fuel shortages, which had an extreme influence on the political situation within the country. Sri Lankans lined up in front of gas stations, in some cases for days. As the country was, and still is, lacking financial liquidity it is difficult to tackle these issues and pay for sources of delivery sufficiently. Therefore, at the beginning of 2022, Sri Lankans began protesting against the government peacefully, which eventually turned into more active protests.

"Assurances were empty promises."

This wave of dissatisfaction ultimately led to a storming of the president's palace and a change in government in the midst of 2022, reawakening the political situation in Sri Lanka as a topic in Western media. Since then, the news coverage has however declined repeatedly, while President Ranil Wickremesinghe, in office since July 2022 following Gotabaya Rajapaksa, once more appears as an extension of the previous political leadership. Despite changes in political leadership, problems for Sri Lanka are far from over.

A citizen of Kandy, quoted in the beginning, explains that the prices are still ascending and are too high compared to the daily wages of the majority of inhabitants. However, other Sri Lankans I spoke to rather state that the political and economic situation is recovering. Another Sri Lankan interviewed, who is travelling between tourist areas in the East and the South of the country, explains that gas and medicine supplies are still too scarce. Nevertheless, he states that the situation is less bad than portrayed by the media while the main problem of too little and too expensive gas poses further challenges for Sri

Lanka. Furthermore, he claims that tourists and the wealthier parts of society, compared to the majority of Sri Lankans, can afford to live a decent life in Sri Lanka. Both these interviewees who work in the tourist industry state that tourism is crucial for the country while now, however, the tourism industry is still far from recovering.

At the dawn of the new year 2023, claims of debt cancellation for Sri Lanka have made their way into public media. A statement including 182 experts has been published in January 2023, in which they openly call for debt justice. Moreover, Sri Lanka is depicted as a leading example which could showcase how to respond to global questions of debt relief and sustainable practices. Yet, opposing voices fear that debt relief could even result in further structural challenges.

While China is commonly presented as Sri Lanka's main creditor, the organisation Debt Justice states that a significant part of the problem lies in the commonly ignored loans which private lenders have granted Sri Lanka. Debt Justice further claims that it is these creditors who have knowingly started granting loans to a corrupt system in the first place. Whereas it is the country and its inhabitants who are suffering from this political and economic crisis it is important to question ruling power relations and parties which are upholding the demands towards the country to pay back their debts in the first place.

While I finish this article, the Sri Lankan living in Kandy who I am in contact with texts me again to endorse the situation by stating "we suffer a lot due to the crisis." Reviewing the history and Sri Lanka's current situation, I hope this article can be an impulse to keep informed about Sri Lanka's situation, with the hope that 2023 will raise new perspectives for the island state.

Protest in April 2022 © Shutterstock

OSKAR HEDMAN | ANALYSIS

NEVER MIND TRADITION: THE SUDDEN RECAST OF SWEDEN'S FOREIGN AID POLICY

“The 1 percent goal is abolished”.

With these words, the newly elected prime minister of Sweden, Ulf Kristersson, annulled an almost sixty-year-old principle in Swedish politics. The “1 percent goal,” in Sweden commonly known as “enproncentsmålet,” states that any government, no matter its political persuasion, should strive to earmark one percent of the country's Gross National Income (GNI) to foreign aid.

In practical terms this abolition means that Sida, the government agency responsible for managing and distributing Sweden's aid budget, will not, as before, have a preordained budget amounting to one percent of Sweden's GNI; instead, the size of the foreign aid budget is to be revised every three years and will not automatically increase as the country's economy grows. Despite the rather modest downsizing of the budget from 2022 to 2023 – a 1.4 billion reduction to an approximately 56 billion budget – the decision to abandon 1 percept principle is nothing short of historic.

When the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution in 1961 that encouraged developed countries to assign 1 % of their GNI to foreign aid, Sweden was one of the first countries to heed this call and officially became an aid donor in 1962. Six years later, in 1968, Sweden established the 1-percent goal which was first met in 1975.

Even when the UN later changed its policy in 1970, recommending developed countries to allocate 0.7% of their GNI to foreign aid, the one percent principle persisted and has for decades been an agreed-upon mantra for the

Tents in a Refugee Camp in Idlib, Syria © Ahmed Akacha/Pexels

Swedish public and Swedish politicians alike – the bedrock on which the notion of Sweden as a "humanitarian great power" has been built. But, with the new Swedish Government, it seems all things must eventually come to an end.

The decision to abolish the 1 percent goal was made public on October 14 last year by Prime Minister Kristersson together with his coalition partners – the Sweden Democrats (SD), the Christian Democrats (KD), and the Liberals (L) - just one month after narrowly winning the Swedish parliamentary election by an 0,7 % margin and ending the Social Democrats (S) 8-year consecutive rule.

"The agreement arguably presents the biggest revision of Sweden's foreign aid policy since the country became an aid donor in 1962."

At the press conference, the coalition partners announced the Tidö Agreement, a policy platform for their upcoming 4-year tenure set to solve "Sweden's elemental problems connected to criminality, migration, integration, economy, school, healthcare, energy and climate." The agreement arguably presents the biggest revision of Sweden's foreign aid policy since the country became an aid donor in 1962, and the scrapping of the "1 percent goal" – oddly relegated to a footnote in the document – is just one of many changes.

The new turn further entails that Sweden's foreign aid is explicitly connected with the objectives of the government's migration policy. Foreign aid will, according to the agreement, be utilised as a "tool to counteract irregular migration, increase return migration, and contribute to an effective work for return migration."

Perhaps the most controversial aspect is that the government envisages that this will be implemented by withdrawing some of the aid

given to recipients - such as Iraq and Somalia – if they fail to facilitate the deportation of their citizens who illegally reside in Sweden. Although experiences from other countries who have adopted a similar stance – using foreign aid as leverage to combat migration and increase return migration – have given modest results, the government has remained resolute.

According to Johan Forssell, Sweden's Aid Minister, "if aid recipients have no interest in fulfilling their obligations under international law – to take responsibility for their own citizens – it is perfectly reasonable to make certain demands."

"Foreign aid will, according to the agreement, be utilised as a tool to counteract irregular migration, increase return migration, and contribute to an effective work for return migration."

Aid Minister Forssell has also made it clear that Sweden's disbursement will change hands. For the first time a European country, Ukraine, is expected to become the biggest grantee on account of the still ongoing war. The foreign aid given to Afghanistan, for years Sweden's largest aid recipient, is conversely forecasted to decrease due to the policies enacted by the Taliban regime which regained power in 2021. Most recently the regime decided to ban women from working outside the state apparatus, a decision that seriously jeopardizes the ability of women aid workers to work in the country. The aid granted to long-standing recipients such as Myanmar, Guatemala, and Palestine, is also expected to decrease between 40 and 60 percent.

Whether the abandonment of the 1 percent goal and the decision to use foreign aid as leverage to combat migration will be permanent or not remains to be seen; the only parties openly endorsing this new course are the two largest ones within the liberal-conservative coalition, namely the Sweden Democrats and the Moderates.

In the deliberations that led to the Tidö Agreement, the two smaller coalition partners, the Liberals and the Christian Democrats, were reportedly opposed to the aid rearrangement and, were it not for the persistent opposition of the Christian Democrats to extensive aid cutbacks, the aid budget could have been slashed to just 0.5 % of Sweden's GNI. All of the five opposition parties also remain – at least on paper – committed to the 1 percent principle, and have, together with dozens of non-governmental organisations and the Swedish Church, criticised the cabinet's far-reaching reforms.

Despite the aid reductions initiated by the newly elected government, Sweden's aid budget will still equate to roughly 1 percent of the country's GNI, dwarfing other OECD members like the United States, United Kingdom and France who allocate 0,2%, 0.5%, and 0.51% respectively to foreign aid. Thus, Sweden will likely continue to be one of the biggest aid donors per capita in the Global North. But for how long?

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What We Owe Each Other
Social Contract

JOB VAN DEN BIJGAART | BOOK REVIEW

A SOCIAL CONTRACT FOR EQUALITY: WHAT DO WE OWE EACH OTHER?

"What We Owe Each Other: a New Social Contract For a Better Society" by Minouche Shafik, is a book where all stages of life are discussed in the light of a social contract. Minouche Shafik is currently the director of the London School of Economics and Political Science, better known as LSE. She previously held high positions at the World Bank and International Monetary Fund and will become the first female president of Columbia University later in 2023, as announced this January. According to Shafik, the social contract is broken and its rupture is accordingly reflected in the growing inequalities worldwide.

What is a social contract? To answer this question, the book "What We Owe Each Other" by Minouche Shafik highlights many different societies worldwide and the inequalities that exist between them. It concludes that where you are born determines the 'architecture of opportunities' to a large extent, as your place of birth determines not only your material conditions but also the relationships you have, life prospects, and general well-being.

There are thus inequalities in life already from birth; depending on where and in what society you are born, you will have are different opportunities and circumstances. How this society works can differentiate: some things in society are facilitated by the government collectively, and other things should be taken care of by people individually.

"There are inequalities in life already from birth."

For example, in some countries, healthcare is arranged by the government. In contrast, in other countries, this is a privatised matter; back in history, families took care of the sick and elderly. These ways of organising society, accompanied by the norms and rules governing this collective arrangement, is what Shafik calls the social contract. In today's society, an increasing number of people are dissatisfied with how things are arranged: is the social contract broken?

In the book, causes for the broken social contract such as changing gender roles, technology, new models of work, ageing, and climate change are highlighted. However, it is not only the causes but also the potential (policy) solutions that this book tries to deliver to its reader.

Illustrations © Ola Grabowski / @thesecretlifeofski / thesecretlifeofski@gmail.com

This article will discuss how a new version of the social contract could help reduce inequality, as supported by examples from the book.

According to the book "What We Owe Each Other," the social contract is broken. Research conducted through surveys found that most people feel dissatisfied with how the 'system' works for them. In this case, the system is defined as the collective top-down arrangements from the government and the individual bottom-up responsibilities of the people. In other words, this could be seen as a version of the social contract explained earlier.

"The social contract has been broken under the weight of technological and demographic changes."

In addition, it can be observed that different groups within society are dissatisfied for various reasons. Native inhabitants feel that immigrants endanger their society and culture. Groups of young people feel dissatisfied with the world because older people consume healthcare and pensions, while they worry about such securities for their own future when a world full of problems such as pollution, global warming, and increased financial debt is left behind for them.

Women face inequalities in their working life, such as unequal pay, yet the instruments to combat these inequalities, such as hiring quotas, can equally disadvantage others in their careers. There are thus inequalities we face in our societies, and various groups within these societies are dissatisfied with how the social contract works for them. Shafik argues that the social contract has been broken under the weight of technological and demographic changes; however, what can be done to combat this?

Fundamentally, to combat a broken social contract, people should be aware of their interdependencies, as in the end, we all depend on each other in this world. Shafik writes that the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted this since almost everybody in the world was impacted, although perhaps not equally. There were inequalities as the pandemic was more dangerous for the elderly and people with weaker immune systems. Yet, millions of people depended on each other to behave according to the rules and norms prevalent to be able to cope with this pandemic.

We should thus understand that everybody has a role in society that comes along with responsibilities: we owe each other something. Shafik's book includes many examples of ways to combat a broken social contract. She argues, for instance, that everyone should receive the guaranteed basics for a decent life that are equal for all, depending on what a country can afford. This includes a minimum income, educational entitlement, and basic health care. A vast body of research supports these guaranteed basics in life and would help to facilitate equality for all.

To ensure governments have enough financial resources to pay their parts of the social contract, Shafik proposes to increase corporate taxes. Corporate taxes have decreased over the past decades, whereas labour is taxed at higher rates. Currently, many people in society are dissatisfied, and according to research, this can be linked back towards the growth in unequal wages and distribution of wealth. This policy would not only help to pay for social initiatives, but it would thus also combat wealth inequality.

"Everybody has a role and responsibilities in society."

Finally, it all comes down to the sense that we owe each other something. As mentioned in the book, a 50-year-old worker is more willing to work longer if they know their children will receive life-long education. Likewise, young people are content to pay more taxes when they feel they benefit from a good education.

There are many more examples, yet this article should give you an understanding of what this book describes as a social contract, why it is broken and what could be done to repair this social contract. A well-working social contract could help combat inequalities and dissatisfaction worldwide, and we can all contribute to this ourselves as long as we are aware that we owe each other something and that this mutual interest and action benefits us all.

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JONNA HUGSÉN | ANALYSIS

A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD? PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY THROUGH FOOTBALL

Hopefully one day, we will no longer be surprised by the advancement of women's football. The great success of the European Championship 2022, with record-breaking attendance and high media coverage, seemed to be something out of the ordinary, and the enthusiastic support shocked me when I attended two games myself. The Euros revealed the emerging power of women's football and marked a turning point in football history. However, the absence of Central and Eastern European teams was noticeable and, to date, no team from this region has ever won an international women's championship. It is clear that the advancements in women's football are not universal. The sport can instead be viewed as a microcosm of global political development, where the global differences in gender equality become apparent.

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"Football is a microcosm of global political development."

Historically, women's football has been closely associated with societal gender roles that hindered further development. For instance, The English Football Association (FA) banned women from playing at FA-affiliated grounds in 1921 claiming their participation "unsuitable." The ban lasted for fifty years and subsequently minimised the visibility and investment opportunities in English women's football. Although England, along with other western countries, has reached a turning point in overcoming the legacy of historical gender discrimination, uneven global development remains - what happened in England 100 years ago is happening in Afghanistan today.

When the Taliban took over, women were banned from playing sports, causing the majority of the Afghan women's football team to flee to Australia, hoping to get recognition there. FIFA, however, keeps quiet about this and does not use its diplomatic and highly influential power to send a message against the Taliban's gender discrimination. If FIFA were to actually follow their own code of ethics, it would have recognised the Afghan female athletes. Until this recognition takes place, it will not be possible for them to assert themselves as active promoters of gender equality, one of the examples of corruption inside FIFA. The reason why women's football is so far behind men's football does not have to do with a lower quality of play, as some might argue, but rather a historical lack of policies encouraging female play.

The success of the Euros is such a big deal because it works as a direct inspiration for aspiring young footballers who now have female players to look up to, showing that it is possible for women to succeed. England's coach, Sarina Wiegman, who lead the 'lionesses' to victory, said: "I think this tournament has done so much for the game but also for society and women in society in England, Europe, and across the world and I hope that will make a [bigger] change too."

According to the UEFA impact report of the Euros, the tournament contributed to over 400,000 new opportunities for young girls to participate in football activities in England. This is important because it shows that the idea of football being "unsuitable" for girls is not the general discourse anymore. The success also shows the importance of tournaments and how they can contribute to change through increased visibility. The women's Euros were the most watched ever, with 365 million viewers across 195 territories, showing that the desire to watch women play football is a global trend.

UEFA 2022 Semi-Finals
© Victor Joly/Shutterstock

Indeed, times are changing and women's football is experiencing ground-breaking investments and new policies. For instance, the European Commission is now pushing member states to invest in female footballers on a national level. Additionally, both UEFA and FIFA have launched plans for the development of women's football over the next decade; charting the course for how they will promote gender equality within the sport. Some of the objectives are grassroots initiatives, increased visibility and commercial value, the development of the game, and enhanced governance structures.

"Football should be used as a high-impact, low-cost soft power tool in humanitarian and development efforts."

However, FIFA´s and UEFA´s policies do not reach their full potential in isolation. General gender inequality in society plagues women's sports in most parts of the world and in order to combat the uneven development in football, targeted measures in countries that lag behind are crucial. This is something that UN Women for example does through their programme "One Win Leads to Another", which aims to empower young women from vulnerable communities in Brazil through sports. New research concludes that football is beneficial to girls in many ways, for example, girls who play football have more confidence than girls who play another sport, or who do not participate in any sport at all. The programme has been successful and has provided the courage for girls in Brazil to break social norms and follow their dreams, thereby an excellent example of how football can be used as a tool to empower young girls.

Football is a weapon of soft power, which means that it has the ability to influence and persuade others by attraction rather than coercion. Most people are probably familiar with the term "sportswashing," particularly voiced when Qatar hosted the men's World Cup last year. The exploitation of people's love for the sport in an attempt to improve Qatar's international image makes a good example of how the soft power of football can easily be misused. However, it can also be used in a positive way to steer countries towards specific development pathways that promote gender equality. UNESCO puts emphasis on the positive influences of sports and argues that football is a low-cost soft power tool with a high impact, and should be implemented as a tool in humanitarian and development efforts.

We have reached a turning point in football history where female footballers are finally beginning to receive recognition. Like UEFA's chief of women's football, Nadine Kessler, says: "We must now capitalise on these successes to continue advancing our game for girls and women, to secure further commitments to women's football." The current momentum can help bring about change in gender politics, but we should still be cautious not to leave vulnerable women in countries like Afghanistan or Brazil behind. Moreover, football can be used as a soft power tool to promote women in general society. Once gender inequalities are reduced worldwide, we will no longer be surprised by the advancement of women's football.

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ALBIN EMANUEL BRATTBERG | OPINION

THE STEALTH CRISIS OF BUSINESS AS USUAL AND THE ECONOMICS OF RADICAL REFORMATION

Rescue operation Savar factory collapse in 2013 © Mamunur Rashid/Shutterstock

Even as financial crises, staggering inequality, and climate disaster are threatening decades of beliefs in perfect markets, trickle-down economics, and American dreams, the reliance on "sustainable development" and "resilience" as a mainstream crisis response may prove to be the single biggest emergency of the era. Not only have terms like "sustainability" been capitalised and greenwashed beyond recognition, their ubiquitous application to everything from the triple bottom line of 'people, profit, planet' to the 'sustainable resettlement' of migrants has turned them into wholly empty signifiers. They have little normative content beyond maintaining the present conditions for development. Or put in more sinister terms, sustainability is being employed to sustain the growth model of development that has been hegemonic since the post-war great acceleration in social change, with its accompanied social and ecological devastation.

Growth is a material process, which drives the increased metabolism of everything from planned obsolescence such as the longevity of your smartphone to commodity fetishism such as the insatiable desire for luxury goods. While growth economics has been central to the extension of citizenship rights and a fossil energy regime underpinning modern welfare systems, these were also inconspicuously made dependent on processes of accumulation, intensification, and acceleration. Such growth dependence is actively exacerbating a crisis of inertia and lock-in to dynamics of expansion which reproduce and intensify resource-intensive consumer lifestyles, unjust global material flows, inequality, indirect and direct greenhouse emissions, turnover of product life cycles and ecological commodification.

This crisis of lock-in is also concealed behind recent employments of crisis jargon which frame emerging 'sustainability issues' in crisis terms, reasoning that a 'crisis' frame demanding seriousness should offer 'opportunity', and cause for 'decision'. The idea of technocratic crisis response perpetuates a sort of mythical conception of history. It normalises crises as natural cycles between progress and decay and conceals the possibility that the true catastrophe is business as usual. A status quo in which the economic system is in a state of continuous crisis recovery, which is an ongoing catastrophe for the world's working people, for inequality, for human rights, and for the encroachment of ecologies.

A business as usual of cyclical crises is integral to the free-market project, which only advances in the background of disasters. Economic growth is a dynamic stabilising mechanism for capitalist societies in dealing with its business cycles and historical crises by prompting fresh growth strategies and business opportunities to make the world cheap and safe for capital accumulation. Unfolding crises are depoliticised of their root origins in the status quo paradigm and are simply given shock therapies in the form of technocratic fixes and technocentric solutions. In its current ideological expression, the neoliberal solution is always to bestow more power in markets, produce more markets, realise more complete and more perfect markets, more financialisation, new technologies, and to find even further ways to monetize. Sustainable solutions are made into a viable 'business case' while being emptied of meaning beyond a green-growth horizon.

Beyond business as usual

In this sense, a true state of emergency is only created in the resistance to normalisation, as it signals a loss of consensus and legitimacy for the business-as-usual incumbent system. In deliberate provocation of the entrenchment of growth, degrowth is at once a critique and a concretised amalgamation of strategies away from the discourse, ideology, and infrastructures of growth. Degrowth is proposed as a democratic process of transition which necessarily requires a reduction in the economic output of societies that have grown beyond their social needs, in the ultimate goal of reaching a new paradigm premised on global ecological and social justice. Consistent with the defamiliarising aim of degrowth, this article will seek to concretise alternatives to the most ubiquitous and stable structure of the growth paradigm: the business.

Mainstream orthodox economics has tended to understand the 'economy' as comprising two sectors: the household, which exchanges labour and other capitals for the obtainment of goods and services from for-profit enterprises. In this view, businesses are entities that sell goods or services and whose commercial operations are financially self-interested, privately owned, and managed with the main aim of profit. However, the economy also encompasses a foundational core economy which includes redistribution by sharing, household/self-provisioning, non-monetised reciprocity/volunteering, not-for-profit associations, traditional commons, and nature's sphere, among other unaccounted and discounted provisioning activities.

Not-for-profits

Among actors in the non-monetized core economy, some operate in what has been called the social economy, where entities to some extent also participate in the market. Some degrowth thinkers such as post-doc researcher Jennifer Hinton argue that a post-growth economy will be made up of businesses existing in this liminal zone with a fundamentally transformed mandate. First, they must be not-for-profit businesses (NFPs), which generate more than half their revenue through sales activities. Secondly, a for-profit sector of businesses allows the pursuit and distribution of profit for private owners, which is crucially different from the non-profit sector where any surplus must go into achieving a social benefit. Third, investment in NFPs cannot be equity-based (e.g., shares) with a distribution of dividends, but only debt-based (e.g., loans and bonds) limited to the interest on the debt, and donation-based, with no returns at all.

Finally, in contrast to private business ownership frameworks which give owners 'financial rights' to take assets out of the business, NFPs have collective ownerships which only give managerial control rights.

Businesses operating in this post-growth economy include entities such as commercial foundations, consumer co-operatives, commercial associations, many social enterprises, and state-owned companies. For Hinton, an economy based around NFPs would not contain the same expansionist pressure toward consumerism, but would instead encourage relatively high equality. Furthermore, the social benefit nature of businesses and the responsiveness of investments to social and ecological issues would change the market to act more as a social safety net, with more balancing feedback rather than growth-compulsive market dynamics. Still, explaining degrowth business operations as a mere matter of relationship-to-profit may be questionable as it leaves blind spots on the matter of market competition by successful cooperatives and omits crucial aspects such as consumption and environmental impact, the international division of labour, and unjust global material flows. It also risks rendering degrowth a 'thinkable' business case in media narratives.

The local economy

One way in which consumption and international injustice concerns can be addressed is through the promotion of a more local economy. The localisation of sourcing, production, and exchange addresses many different concerns related to long-distance transport, embedded energy and materialities, and unequal global exchange of labour and biophysical resources, among others caused by globalised geographies of trade. The local economy may rely on local currencies, or special-purpose currencies, which only have purchasing power on locally produced goods and services, and, by circulating within the local circuits of exchange, these currencies could encourage the development of an informal sector. This in turn stimulates production from backyard and hobby businesses and promotes engagement in craft and hand-tool production, and a generally more active civic life oriented toward welfare networks and self-provisioning.

A local economy could be based on small privately owned and family-owned firms, or worker cooperatives which draw on resources from local regions and in turn supply mostly to them. Furthermore, local mediums of exchange can exist alongside national currencies and enable some inter-regional trade to compensate for the geographically diverse conditions for different forms of production and subsistence. The frugality of local necessity sets naturally imposed limits to consumption as production is oriented toward fulfilling local and regional needs, but does not have to exclude some mass-production factories for the provision of products with high barriers to production, such as steelworks or railway equipment. Even then, localisation also presents some weaknesses related to diffusion and capacity for systemic change. The small-scale local initiatives suggested take place at the periphery of the current market economy, and it is questionable if network arrangements can be big enough and democratic enough to pose a challenge to dominant market actors.

Provisioning outside the market?

Other degrowth thinkers emphasise the role of non-market capitals and social systems such as 'commons' which need to maintain their independence from expropriations by the market and state. Non-market capitals are one way in which institutions such as social enterprises can take out capitals such as land and natural resources, knowledge and skills, and manufactured and financial capital, placing them under democratic control to serve a common good. This is a process of decommodification and the production of a new value system (such as time spent producing) in which such capitals are mobilised for non-market economic activities such as subsistence, gift and exchange in the community household economy. Much like the role of prices in a market, the non-monetary economy would need trellises such as alternative exchange systems to develop and function according to the needs of the economy's members. Examples of non-market actors are eco-communities, municipalities, community land trusts or mutual aid organisations, which use trellises such as common values, goals, and a collective identity based on democratic organisational structures.

In relation to non-market capitals, commons are similarly established around a natural resource base (such as productive land in traditional commons) or the mobilisation of a resource pool (such as assembling various items for a library of things in emerging commons). However, commons have comparably more porous membranes, are not fully closed-off communities, and organise through a rules-based system and a culture of sharing. The active practice of reproducing this culture is called commoning, and bottom-up initiatives, joint management and active involvement are crucial features of commoning to develop new social relations of indirect reciprocity and provisioning (production and distribution) based on sharing, cooperation, and solidarity. These enable sustainable relationships to resource-use and cultures of self-restraint based on frugality and needs-satisfaction.

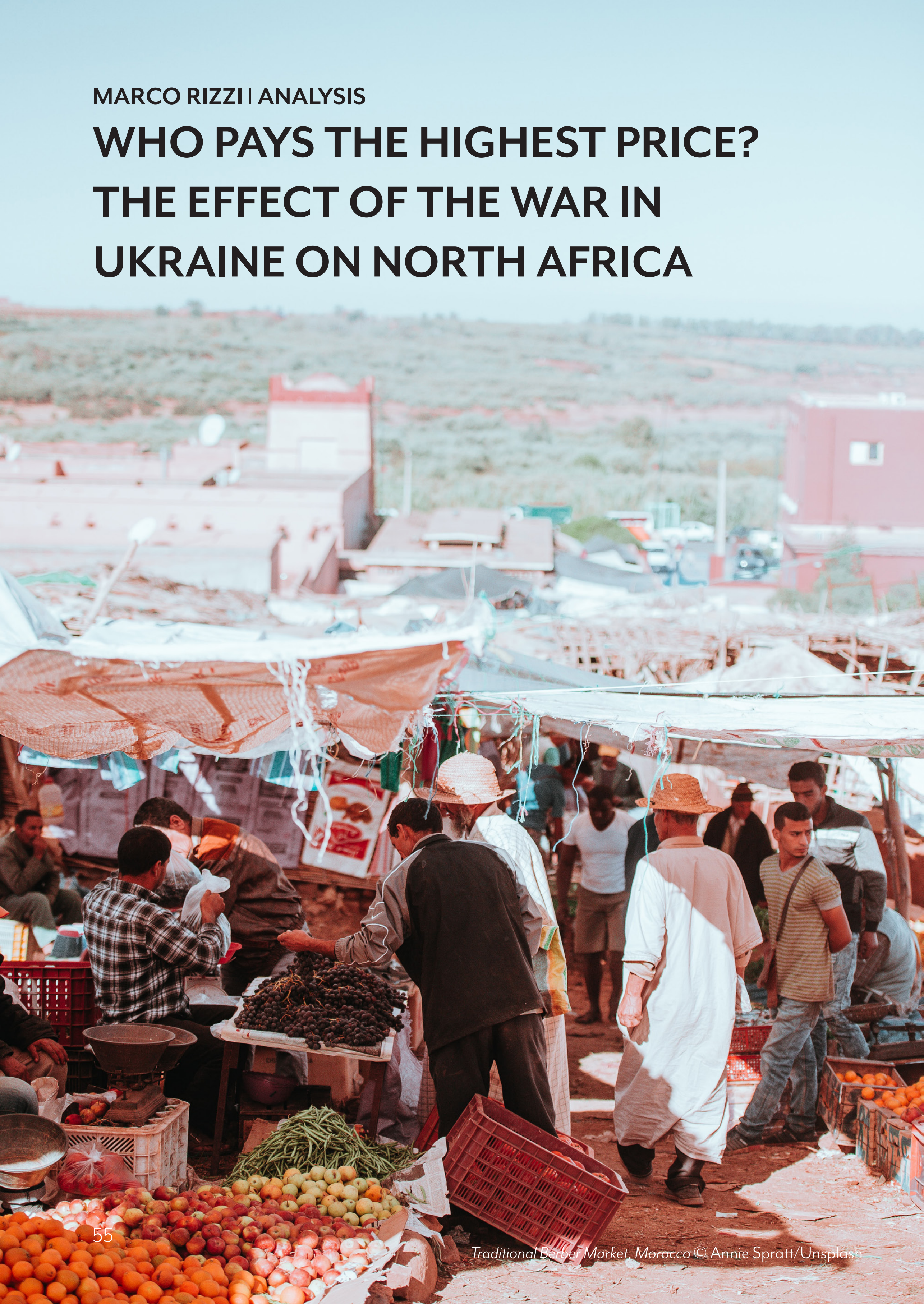
In commons of scale, the network is central for the provision of welfare services and goods, including information and communications technologies for networking and sharing of open data resources, as well as arenas for decision-making. Paid work is replaced by unpaid work in various forms of economic organisations such as housing co-ops and social centres, community gardens, libraries of things, and public-common partnerships (e.g., health commons or co-owned energy companies), and free software and knowledge (such as Wikipedia).

Resisting crisis economics

Politicising the framing of crisis reveals disasters as a structural component of the growth paradigm. Creating political opportunity requires exposing the crisis of business-as-usual consisting of an economy governed by global shock and recognizing that a true crisis requires a threat to the established order of interests, far from the ideal of 'leave no one behind' espoused by depoliticised sustainable solutions. A future beyond growth is on the horizon containing a polycentricity of businesses with emergent power to break the usual state of crisis.

MARCO RIZZI | ANALYSIS

WHO PAYS THE HIGHEST PRICE? THE EFFECT OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE ON NORTH AFRICA



Traditional Berber Market, Morocco © Annie Spratt/Unsplash

Armed conflicts weaken the ability of nations, households, and individuals to secure their nutritional needs. These conflicts can hinder the activities of growing and harvesting, processing, transporting, supplying, and marketing food.

The upheaval caused by Russia's war in Ukraine, with all the human security implications it entails, adds to pre-existing challenges that have already put pressure on prices and supply chains of foodstuffs: the COVID-19 pandemic, the energy crisis, transportation constraints, and recent climate change-induced extreme weather events.

Both Russia and Ukraine are among the world's most important producers of agricultural commodities. They are net exporters of agricultural products and leaders in global food and fertilizer markets, in which exportable supplies are often already concentrated in a handful of countries. This feature makes these markets extremely vulnerable to shocks and fluctuation.

In fact, in 2021, Russia and Ukraine were among the world's top three exporters of wheat, corn, rapeseed, seeds, and sunflower oil. In addition, Russia also ranked as the world's leading exporter of nitrogen fertilizer, the second leading supplier of potassium fertilizer, and the third leading exporter of phosphorus fertilizer, key to ensuring crop success even in less fertile areas.

As many as fifty developing countries, among them vulnerable regions of the Maghreb and Sahel areas in Africa, received at least a third of their grain from Russia and Ukraine before the conflict. Closely related to its commercial consequences, the Russian war in Ukraine also has serious humanitarian effects beyond its borders, which will be felt especially in the Northern African region. Inevitably, the war had a major impact on global food security: the outbreak of the conflict immediately affected grain exports from Ukraine and Russia. Grain shipments from Odesa and other Western ports in Ukraine have been blocked since late February 2022.

"Import dependence is the major issue that the Russian intervention in Ukraine created in an already problematic context when it comes to food security."

By late spring, most exports of wheat, barley, and sunflower oil should have been carried out, but due to blocked ports, an estimated 20 million tons of corn and wheat from the 2021 harvest have not left the territory. Some grain has reportedly been transported east by rail and truck to Black Sea ports in Romania and Polish ports in the Baltic Sea, but at high cost and in limited quantities.

According to the latest data made available by the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), more than one-fifth of the Northern African population does not have enough food, an increase of 46 million compared to 2019. Moreover, rising food and fuel prices due to the conflict in Ukraine, combined with the continent's numerous existing conflicts, droughts and climate change, are causing a quarter (346 million) of the region's population to suffer from hunger and malnutrition.

As mentioned above, the African continent is the most affected in terms of food security, as it has lost its self-sufficiency in grains mainly due to the austerity policy imposed in the 1980s by the International Monetary Fund. By making the payment of foreign debt a priority, this policy forced African countries to prioritize agricultural production for export rather than for domestic needs.

In any case, import dependence should not be confused with the food crisis, which is a situation where people risk starvation due to food shortages, that is due to a lack of food from both local and imported sources. Import dependence is the major issue that the Russian intervention in Ukraine created in an already problematic context when it comes to food security.

Due to the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, food-related trade between Africa and Europe has also slowed down and in some cases, has even come to a halt completely, blocking the arrival of foodstuffs from other markets. Libya, Egypt, Tunisia, and Algeria being the main importers of Russo-Ukrainian grain are the countries witnessing the most tangible effect of the increase in international prices due to said shortages. These shortages inevitably lead to an increase in the price of final consumer goods.

The sanctions imposed by several countries against Russia, which, in their gradual intensification, have contributed to the creation of various economic and financial imbalances, have also affected the international scenario. Moreover, additional concerns about drought, already underway in some regions of the continent which negatively impacted local trade, add to the disruption of commodity shipments that have driven up food prices in retail, penalizing large sectors of the African population. It seems the poorest are paying the inevitable cost of the crisis.

"Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, grain importers in Egypt have faced record-high prices, payment complications due to sanctions against Moscow, and disruptions in grain shipments from the Black Sea, particularly on the Ukrainian coast."

Especially in the Maghreb region, the inability to eat enough has generated setbacks of various kinds. Shortages first of all affect personal well-being but also impact social stability and economic resilience. When food prices go up to such an extent that other household expenses have to be cut or even prevent people from buying enough food, anger over other injustices comes to the surface. Therefore, the hunger felt by food crises of a certain magnitude may turn into social uprisings. We are reminded of this by the riots in Arab countries in 2011 after bread prices soared - the sociopolitical effect of the current crisis is still left to be seen.

One of the countries experiencing hard economic times right now is Tunisia; the inflation rate has risen to its highest level in almost a decade, far exceeding the target set by the Central Bank to keep the rate between 6 and 10 percent. As such, the Tunisian government implemented a package of spending cuts aiming at the reduction of their budget deficit and in support of the local currency.

But paying the highest price among North African countries is Egypt, Africa's second-largest economy and among the world's very first importers of wheat and grains in 2021. With a diet based mainly on high grain consumption and a population exceeding 100 million, the country is used to importing about 80 percent of its wheat from Russia and Ukraine and 73 percent of its sunflower oil. This shows how pressing is the issue of food insecurity in North African countries right now.

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Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, grain importers in Egypt have consequently faced record-high prices, payment complications due to sanctions against Moscow, and disruptions in grain shipments from the Black Sea, particularly on the Ukrainian coast. Although sanctions against Russia exclude food products, banks were reluctant to finance wheat imports from Russia, so Egyptian authorities and private importers have been working to diversify imports and purchase wheat from France, Brazil, Lithuania, and Bulgaria.

Food prices in Africa had been rising for many months in drought-stricken areas, even before the conflict in Ukraine, and millions of people are estimated to be in urgent need of food and water due to rainfall shortages. This, in turn, has led to the failure of millions of crops and an almost unprecedented die-off of livestock.

The Russian intervention in Ukraine only worsened this scenario, disrupting supply chains and leading to even higher prices The conflict, therefore, has had and will have far-reaching and long-lasting consequences for people not just in Ukraine, but also on the African continent, many of whom were already suffering from severe food insecurity.

DIANNE KOK & RONJA OECHSLE | EDITORIAL

DYSTOPIA OF DIFFERENCE: DEFINING INEQUALITY

For some a privilege to learn about, for others an early-life reality: we all come to realise at some point that life is not fair. In practice, differences in access, financial means, or physical capability mean that some cannot afford what for others is considered a right. There are countless limitations to our actions every day, some of which we may not even pay any attention to, yet which may still indicate patterns of discrimination based on difference.

Our personal experience when it comes to inequality depends on a number of different factors, such as nationality, gender, and economic status, but also family structure, community, and social networks. Difference is natural and unavoidable - we all start young before we grow old - making inequality a social phenomenon. It is our organisation of society, including norms and political structures which grant upon some the privileges it withholds from others.

Looking at the world today, most of us realise that it is not an equal one – but things have been getting better, right? According to the 2022 World Inequality Report, the answer to this question is nuanced: global inequalities between countries have declined but at the same time, inequality has increased within most countries. Following the straightforward definition of inequality provided by the metric of economic advance, it might seem like we should wrap up our article here already.

Inequality, however, is so much more than that. Given the complexity of our modern societies, the facets of inequality both within countries and on a global scale seem to have spiralled into infinity. While the international community seems to aim for equality through its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it is unclear whether this path of development addresses the core causes of inequality.

The economic measure maintained by the World Inequality Report does make sense, but only to a certain extent. Monetary metrics can give us an implication of economic growth and how it is distributed across the population to explain who gains and who loses from economic policies. However, economic inequality is only one aspect of a complex issue. Other parts of inequality are often harder to measure but just as important.

Womans March on Washington
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When trying to address inequality it is important to consider political, lifetime, and wealth inequalities, along with inequality of opportunity. All of these concepts are connected and offer different yet complementary insights into the causes and consequences of inequality. Government policies aimed at addressing inequalities that include as many interpretations of inequality as possible may connect different social goals into one.

The examples analysed in this edition and the personal experiences of inequality we have encountered ourselves show that inequality can be found in every aspect of life. While a country like Sweden is considered to be relatively equal when it comes to national average income levels, stories of people facing inequalities within the country differ to a great extent depending on for example gender, race, ethnicity, disability, or class.

The intersectional nature of this inequality becomes visible when trying to tackle a specific issue, such as the gender pay gap. All forms of inequality are mutually reinforcing and therefore need to be analysed and addressed simultaneously to prevent one form of inequality from reinforcing another. Solving the issue of the gender pay gap and overlooking other dimensions like race, immigration status, and socio-economic status will likely reinforce inequalities among women and thereby not lead to the goal of reducing inequalities for all women.

Another important factor to consider in the creation of policy is the difference between equity and equality. Policy in the name of equality might seem like the most sensible solution to inequality but often overlooks that the same answer is not always right or enough for everyone. An equitable approach recognizes that people have different circumstances and therefore allocates resources and opportunities in such a way as to reach an equal outcome, rather than applying a one-size-fits-all solution.

Returning to the SDGs, the critique here is that these continue to support a particular paradigm of development. Although differences like age, gender, and geographical location are not related to a specific economic system, some inequalities are still worsened by capitalism.

Simply put, development does not occur in an isolated context where the whims of the market are the only relevant factors. Like any other process dealing with the social and political, development has to account for crises and conflicts. Nowadays, crises are increasingly transboundary, both concerning borders and issue areas. The COVID-19 pandemic is a key example of the paralysis of a system already running beyond capacity, widening global divergences rather than improving on them.

In our current system, the benefit of an almost unimaginably marginal minority outweighs the interest of the majority. The pandemic, for instance, enabled the further enrichment of the world's wealthiest while impoverishing 120 million others. Crises and inequalities blend and interact, complicating the problems they cause. Given the complex interrelatedness of our modern world system - linking countries, markets, and people - a spill-over of crises can occur at any time and level.

Existing crises and inequalities will be further aggravated by climate change, not only by disproportionately affecting already disadvantaged groups and further increasing their vulnerability but also by limiting their means to respond. The World Bank estimates that between 68 to 135 million additional people could fall into poverty by 2030 as a result of climate change.

The IMF also warns that climate change will also lead to an economic setback of several decades, both between and within countries. If this is the case, an economic paradigm of development is far from useful. What good are economic gains when "progress" is constantly at risk of being turned back, whether crumbled by earthquakes or swallowed by rising tides?

The United Nations Research Institute for Sustainable Development further states that the inequalities we face today are not a "flaw in the system, but a feature of it." In line with the arguments made in this magazine, perhaps it is time for a new kind of societal agreement, which takes into account both the local and the global, the individual and the larger system.

Applying a holistic view of inequality and development, we should make an effort to incorporate justice and equality by design. Travel and education broaden our horizons, yet our direct environments are just as important, as this is where our power as individuals starts.

Within the current capitalist system, we already face countless choices every day through our agency as consumers. Without bestowing responsibility for global crises on the individual, we can start to approach our daily reality from a different perspective. We have to realise that we cannot have everything while others have nothing, and even more so, we have to realise that we should not want everything, especially at its current cost.

"The inequalities we face today are not a flaw in the system, but a feature of it."

Furthermore, the way we communicate with each other, the things we talk about, and the way we act can all contribute to making the world a little more equal. This edition includes a variety of inequalities that are often forgotten; reading and talking about these can be the first step to action. Social contracts are not a given, but a creation, and by confronting existing hegemonies of knowledge and power we can reform them to societal structures that suit us in both the present and future.

Difference is not a dystopia, but a reality, making the consequence of inequality something we can actively address and prevent. We often forget the power seemingly small things have, but the public perception of and attitudes towards inequalities have important real-world implications. The evidence of people's concerns about inequality spilling over into the political sphere is endless: from social movements to elections, change starts with awareness and discussion, a single voice opening up space for many to be heard.

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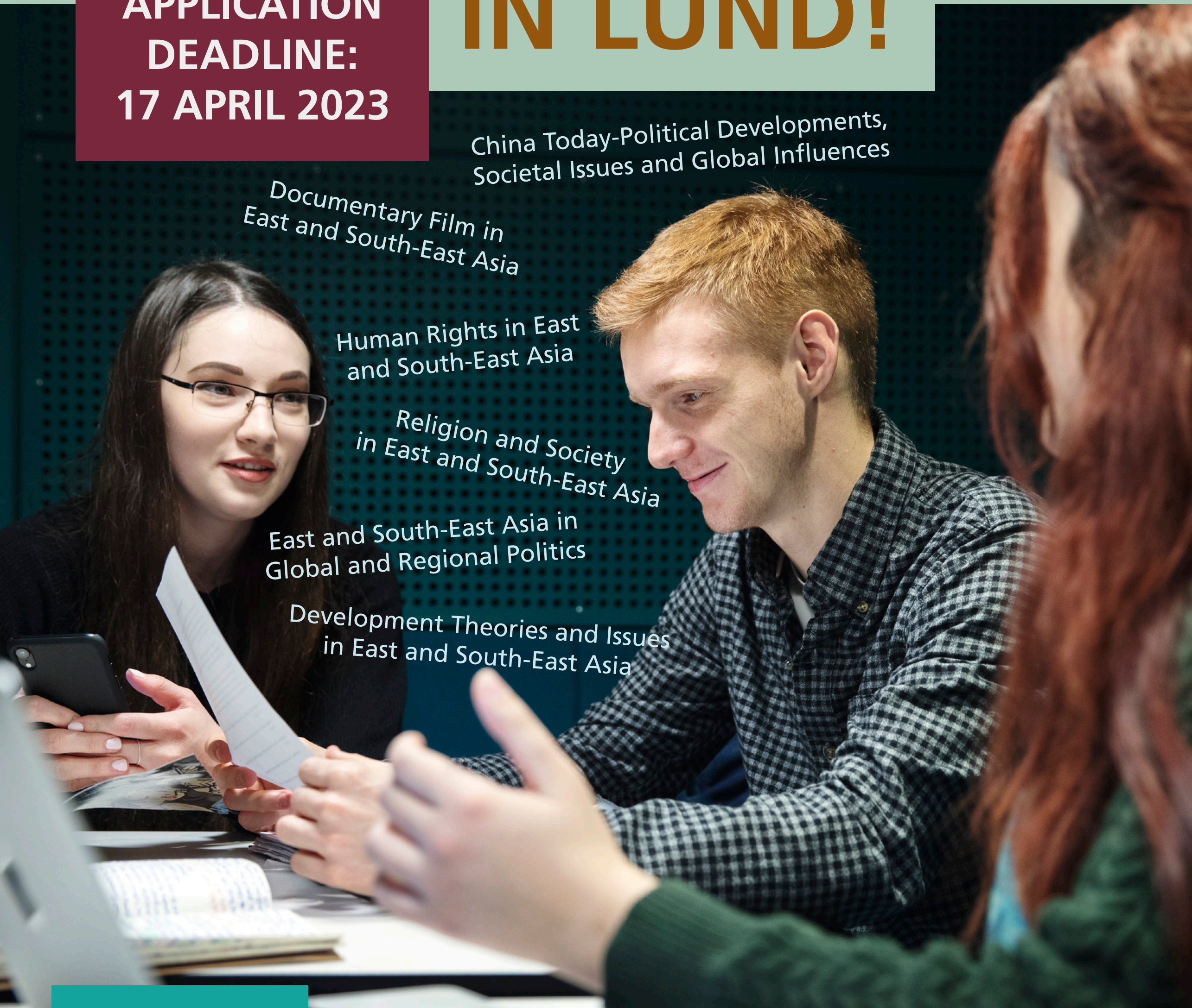

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