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# Aiming for a better world

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Photo: picture alliance/ASSOCIATED PRESS/Brian Inganga

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# 21 Focus — Aiming for a better world



Illustration: Naila Conita / Unsplash

**Cover: Illustration by Naila Conita (see p. 4).**

Ten years ago, the UN member states agreed to work together towards a world in which all people could live well. Since then, some countries have made considerable progress, but the 17 Sustainable Development Goals will not be achieved by 2030. The Covid-19 pandemic and cuts in development funding are setting back achievements, and forces are aligning around the world to undermine international agreements. In the face of such adversity, the international community must not give up on its goal of creating a better world.


Photo: Naila Conita

ARTIST

# Naila Conita

**Instagram: @nailaconita**

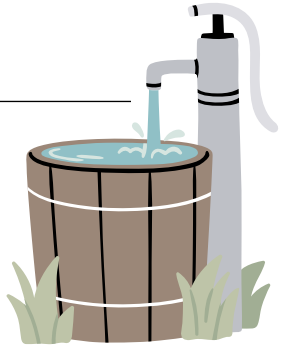
Naila Conita is an illustrator based in Indonesia. Here she introduces herself and her art:

"I am an illustrator from the city of Malang, Indonesia. I currently work both independently and as part of the creative team at Louds Studio, a design company. My illustration style combines flat forms with gentle distortion, with a strong focus on editorial illustration. My creative process involves research, sketching and completing the artwork digitally.

I am often inspired by human subjects, whether everyday emotional experiences, unique gestures or interpersonal relationships. I hope to continue creating artworks with a sense of enjoyment, exploring art and visuals that inspire me to grow as an illustrator."

Two of Naila Conita's illustrations are featured on our cover page and at the beginning of the focus section, respectively.

## The good news



According to *UNICEF*, between 2015 and 2024, around 961 million people gained access to "safely managed drinking water" – that means water that is easily accessible when needed and free from contamination. As a result, the global supply rate in this highest category rose from 68 % to 74 %.

Conversely, however, this means that 2.1 billion people still lack this secure access. 1.5 billion of them can at least reach a clean water source within 15 minutes. The remaining 600 million either have to travel long distances or use sources that are not adequately protected from contamination.

**7.3%** **of Africa's land mass**

was destroyed by wildfires in 2024, as shown by satellite data from the *Global Wildfire Information System (GWIS)*. If this figure is news to you, that is hardly surprising. Despite the fact that "only" 0.6 % of the land mass in Europe and the US was affected by forest fires in the same year, these fires received much more attention in global reporting.

There has been little response from the international community, and African countries often find themselves forced to cut their firefighting budgets. At the same time, according to researchers, the continent is one step ahead of the Global North: instead of fighting fires with more and more equipment and firefighting aircrafts, what is needed is integrated fire management, which includes, for example, fire-resistant zones around residential buildings and better forest management – *and this is already being implemented in some African countries*.

The youth-led protests in Madagascar in October forced President Andry Rajoelina to flee the country.

Credit: picture alliance/ASSOCIATED PRESS/Brian Inganga

DEMOCRACY

# What the world needs to learn from African movements

*From ousting dictators to challenging global systems, African youth movements are setting standards for democracies worldwide. Their struggle for dignity, accountability and social justice provides important insights for a world grappling with political disillusionment and anti-democratic regimes.*

BY AYA CHEBBI

On 4 November, Zohran Mamdani won the mayoral race in New York City in a historic victory. Observers in Western democracies often praise Mamdani for his powerful messaging to voters, but they rarely acknowledge the more than 100,000 campaign volunteers he mobilised or the vibrant citizen movement they embodied. Movement building plays a crucial role in strengthening and sustaining democracies. In Africa, we understand this well: how to channel outrage and despair into collective action and organised resistance.

On the African continent, we have seen two waves of youth-led movements in the 21st century. The first wave came from my generation of millennials, spanning the period from roughly 2010 to 2020. I grew up under a dictatorship, seeing only one president for 23 years, until the revolution in Tunisia began at the end of 2010. I was part of the youth movement that changed the course of history and brought an end to President Ben Ali's rule.

> "Politics cannot be sustained by scapegoats, democracy cannot be defended by fear."

In hindsight, some now claim that democratic transitions have been "worse" than the dictatorships they replaced. I'm often asked: Was it worth it? My answer is always yes. Change may be incremental, but it adds up. Democracy is not just about hope; it's about agency. Once people break through fear, they begin to reclaim their power and demand accountability. I believe you cannot stay silent just because you fear things might get worse. Without change, they almost certainly will. Since 2010, thousands of protests have erupted across Africa, and youth-led movements have ousted at least 10 dictators. These were not just protests – they were regime changes.

The second wave of youth-led movements is driven by Generation Z and emerged from 2020 onward. Their struggle is no longer framed as the old battle between dictatorship and democracy. Instead, it focuses on governance, accountability and on whether governments act in the public interest. This new movement is increasingly anti-colonial in nature. Gen Z is rising up against the entire system that sustains colonial legacies: IMF debt traps, currency controls such as the CFA franc, the unfinished business of apartheid and the entrenched inequalities of slum economies. Their resistance is not only directed against corrupt older leaders, but against a system designed to maintain dependency across African nations.

In Kenya, Gen Z protests over the past two years have challenged an IMF-backed finance bill, calling for transparency and youth-centred economic reform. In Madagascar, a recent wave of demonstrations erupted in response to chronic service failures, high unemployment and collapsing governance structures. In Morocco, decentralised networks such as "Gen Z 212" have mobilised to demand health and education services, prioritising basic rights over football stadiums and spectacle.

These youth movements offer four key lessons.

**1. PEOPLE'S POWER**

Across Western democracies, even among progressive parties, the dominant concerns are now the cost of living and migration. Political debate has shifted towards managing voter anxiety rather than mobilising collective imagination. There is an overwhelming focus on voter behaviour, polls and sentiment, but little attention is paid to organising: to building movements that can sustain democracy beyond election day.

Where institutions are weak, it is citizens and social movements that hold leaders accountable. Yet rather than learning from this, many democracies have begun to define themselves by fear. In the US and Europe, there is a growing narrative that is centred around identifying an enemy – someone to blame for economic hardship or political stagnation.

But we don't need an enemy. Politics cannot be sustained by scapegoats, democracy cannot be defended by fear. It shouldn't be about attacking opponents or casting villains, that path only leads to polarisation. We must move beyond the politics of victimhood, the constant messaging about whom to fear, whom to blame, whom to silence. This course will ruin any politics of vision. If democracy is reduced to finger-pointing and grievance, authoritarian leaders will always win. Our task is to show that democracy is stronger when it empowers citizens, not when it demonises opponents.

**2. DEMOCRACY MUST DELIVER DIGNITY**

If the cost of living is the most important issue for voters in Western democracies, voters in Africa are concerned about jobs with dignity. In Tunisia, our revolution's slogan was "Jobs, Freedom and Dignity". It was about financial freedom. Our concern is for the more than 12 million young

people who enter the workforce in Africa every year, only a fraction of whom find decent work. In 2013, my own brother Adam was recruited by Daesh (Islamic State). He was a newly graduated engineer, educated like most youths in Tunisia, where the literacy rate among the 15–24 year olds is above 95%, yet the majority unemployed. He had knowledge. But he had no opportunity.

> "It is about giving young people something to believe in so that they do not believe those whose promises require violence."

Access to knowledge without access to opportunities is access to frustration. That's what happens when imagination fails. When democracy offers no dignity, young people look elsewhere for meaning. Then we act surprised when young people rebel, leave their countries, fall into the clutches of drugs or armed groups or die in the Mediterranean in search of real opportunities. What other choice do we leave them?

That is why our fight for democracy should not be just about ballot papers and constitutions. It must be about jobs, freedom and dignity. It is about giving young people something to believe in so that they do not believe those whose promises require violence.

We need to look beyond voting behaviour, which after all is simply shaped by political discourse. It seems increasingly as if the ultimate goal of political parties is to win elections rather than to deliver for the people. Democracy has likewise been reduced to the performance of winning rather than serving the people. Western democratic parties should stop responding to far-right narratives and start organising around the everyday struggles that define people's lives, work, housing, education, care and hope.

### 3. INTERGENERATIONAL SHARED LEADERSHIP

There is a leadership crisis, but there is also a representation crisis of women and young people. In Africa, the average age of our leaders is around 63, while the average age of our population is just under 20. This means that an entire generation is locked out from power. The old guards, which remain patriarchal and isolated, are systematically extending retirement ages and presidential terms while shrinking every pathway for new leadership to emerge.

This is not just a generation gap, but a democratic blockade. The people shaping our future are those least affected by it. The result is politics that is outdated, male-dominated and detached from the pressing realities of our time like climate, jobs, technology and care.

Young people take to the streets when no one listens to them. This is why we must lead with imagination and view young people as partners, innovators and co-leaders, not as a risk to be managed. True democracy requires renewal. It must be intergenerational, feminist and fearless enough to transfer power.

For Africa and elsewhere, this means that those who wish to support democracy must invest in progressive young feminist leaders who are already building alternatives, rather than in those who are just waiting to take over broken systems.

### 4. SUPPORT DEMOCRATIC INITIATIVES WORLDWIDE

We must address extreme inequality. According to Oxfam's latest report, the wealth of the five richest men has doubled in the last five years, while the wealth of the 5 billion poorest people has declined. The problem with extreme wealth is not that it is used to buy yachts and mansions, but that it is used to buy elections, justice and public opinion. Billionaire Elon Musk alone spent more than $250 million on the 2024 US elections. It makes no difference whether it's in Africa, Europe or elsewhere: rich people shape politics to serve their interests. Extreme wealth can manipulate democracy.

> "Perhaps today it is the West that needs to learn how to defend democracy."

In the most recent US election campaign, extremely wealthy families spent $2.6 billion to get Trump back into the White House, and yet people seem surprised that the far right is winning all over the place. If the far right can mobilise billions to undermine democracy everywhere, why is it so difficult to invest in those who are fighting to defend it?

> “We are defending democratic values with deficits, debts and shortages.”

The truth is that many want to spread democracy around the world but are not willing to put money into supporting those who actually defend it. Africa is expected to take the side of Western democracies in major global conflicts, but where are the sustainable investments to build democratic trust, civil infrastructure or feminist political movements? How can you expect solidarity if you have not cultivated it?

In early July, we organised the Nalafem Summit in Freetown, Sierra Leone, as a counter-event to the “Strengthening Families” conference, a far-right event sponsored by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and with speakers from other conservative networks from the US to export their ideology to Africa. We brought together over 100 progressive female leaders. But not a single funder from the so-called progressive institutions that claim to defend democracy supported us. In fact, we still owe money to our suppliers.

We are defending democratic values with deficits, debts and austerity. If this does not change, we will lose confidence in global progressive actors who say the right things but are not prepared to put their money where their mouth is.

## THINK AND ACT TRULY GLOBALLY

With a view to strengthening our global progressive movement, I invite our allies in Europe and the US to think globally and act globally. When we talk about “global”, we still focus on European and American anxiety about controlling migration flows rather than addressing the root causes: wars, climate collapse, debt crises and governance failures in other parts of the world.

All too often, the West still comes to Africa to teach democracy. But perhaps today it is the West that needs to learn how to defend democracy when institutions are weak, inequality is high and hope itself is under threat. Africa is fighting this battle every day, and we are still standing.

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ELECTIONS

# A captured state

*After the violent chaos that followed Tanzania's October elections, a growing number of voices is calling for a new constitution – one that would curb the influence of the powerful political-business elite, distribute power more equitably among the three branches of government and grant citizens the right to remove unresponsive and incompetent leaders at all levels of elected office.*

BY LAWRENCE KILIMWIKO


Photo: picture alliance/Xinhua News Agency/Tanzania State House/Handout via Xinhua

Tanzanian President Samia Suluhu Hassan inspects the guard of honour during her inauguration ceremony at the beginning of November.

Three decades after multiparty democracy was restored in Tanzania, a system that before was briefly in place only for four years after the country's independence in 1961, the nation is now sliding increasingly into authoritarianism. This is evident in the rise of a powerful class of wealthy individuals, "business politicians" who manipulate electoral processes and exercise control behind the scenes in order to pursue their own economic interests.

A significant part of the problem lies in the country's constitution, which not only fails to distribute power equitably among the three branches of government – the executive, the legislature and the judiciary – but also lacks provisions that empower citizens to hold elected officials accountable.

Experts agree that a constitution should be evaluated in terms of power and authority – where it is located, how it is granted and how it is distributed, exercised and limited across the various organs of the state. Being the fundamental law from which both legislative and administrative acts derive their authority, an ideal constitution should clearly define the relationship between the state and society.

The doctrine of the separation of powers, with its system of checks and balances, is intended to distribute authority among those who make the law (the legislature), those who enforce it (the executive) and those who interpret it (the judiciary). This principle was designed to ensure that no one stands above the law. Yet although Tanzania's constitution formally delineates the powers of these three branches, in practice the executive often oversteps its boundaries and encroaches on the functions of the others.

This is partly because Tanzania's constitution, which has been in force since 1977, vests excessive discretionary power in the presidency. Under the constitution, the president occupies an exceptionally dominant position within the state structure. He or she serves simultaneously as head of state, head of government and commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The president also appoints ministers, senior civil servants and judges to both the High Court and the Court of Appeal. Moreover, the constitution grants the president the authority to declare a state of emergency. He or she also has the power to detain individuals without trial under the "Preventive Detention Act".

## BLURRED ROLES

The constitution further states that courts may not review decisions made by the electoral commission in the exercise of its constitutional functions. The situation is further aggravated by the growing influence of wealthy political-business networks that have effectively captured the executive. As a result, rules, regulations and even court decisions are ignored with impunity.

> "Can the country hold together on a continent plagued by coups and counter-coups?"

The presence of judges in administrative institutions is nothing new in Tanzania. They are, for example, present in the electoral commission, which remains a sensitive issue during election periods. It is also not unusual for cabinet ministers – members of the executive branch – to retain their parliamentary seats in various constituencies, rendering the oversight function meaningless.

Similarly, judges have at times served in the executive. For example, High Court Judge Julie Manning was appointed minister of justice, and Court of Appeal Judge Damian Lubuva served as minister of justice too. Both were later appointed, at different times, to positions within the electoral management body. This blurring of roles raises serious concerns about institutional independence and the integrity of governance.

## CALLING FOR A NEW CONSTITUTION

This is why legal experts and opposition leaders have been outspoken in calling for a new constitution – one that clearly upholds the doctrine of the separation of powers and establishes an effective system of checks and balances to ensure that the three branches of government hold each other accountable. Boniface Mwabukusi, president of the Tanganyika Law Society (TLS), told a local newspaper: "We want a constitution that confines parliamentarians to parliamentary duties only."

Citizens should also have the constitutional power to recall, through a vote of no confidence, both members of parliament and local government councillors who fail to represent their constituents effectively. The lack of responsiveness among parliamentarians is a key factor driving voter apathy in Tanzania. According to media reports, there are a considerable number of members of parliament who rarely ask questions or participate in debates.

An equally significant problem is the country's wealthy politico-economic elite. It has effectively merged business

> "The influence of money in politics is exacting a heavy toll on Tanzania's development."

and politics by infiltrating the ruling party and using money to finance its preferred candidates for office in the presidency, parliament and local governments. This financial influence ensures that the government turns a blind eye to corruption and willingly bends the rules to protect the interests of the powerful.

The violent eviction of thousands of Indigenous Maasai from the Ngorongoro Conservation Area – where they had lived for centuries – to make way for tourism and foreign investment is just one example of what happens when the executive, legislature and judiciary are intertwined and dominated by powerful business interests. It is unsurprising therefore that ruling party candidates who opposed the eviction, including Christopher Ole Sendeka, a veteran Maasai parliamentarian of over two decades, were removed from the party's nomination list.

## ONLY MONEY MATTERS

The commercialisation of politics by the wealthy business elite has hollowed out Tanzania's democratic process. Elections are no longer determined by candidates' merit or their responsiveness to citizens' concerns, hopes and expectations – only money matters.

This leads to a scramble for parliamentary seats in which anyone and everyone participates, driven less by a desire to serve the public than by a quest for access to state resources through connections. This reality explains why political corruption – widely recognised in Tanzania as the root cause of all other forms of corruption – remains deeply entrenched.

Unfortunately, opposition parties are also increasingly driven by greed. And those who do wish to engage in genuine opposition have very little room for manoeuvre without financial independence.

This means that the elite class rules almost without restriction, as the weakness of the constitution – and the resulting blurring of the lines between the executive, the parliament and the judiciary – has undermined accountability and good governance. The question now is where Tanzania is heading as government structures weaken and public trust is shattered. Can the country hold together on a continent plagued by coups and counter-coups?

The influence of money in politics is exacting a heavy toll on Tanzania's development, tarnishing the reputation of what was once considered one of Africa's most peaceful and stable nations. Given how deeply money-driven politics has taken root under the control of business politicians, Tanzania risks descending further into a state of political turmoil unlike anything it has experienced since gaining independence in 1961.

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RESOURCE CONFLICTS

# Can India withhold Pakistan's water?

*India's suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty is not likely to cause its neighbour Pakistan much harm in the short term, but it sets a dangerous global precedent.*

BY IMRAN MUKHTAR

Photo: picture alliance/ASSOCIATED PRESS/Channi Anand

People cross the Chenab River after the flow of water was halted from a dam, at Akhnoor, on the outskirts of Jammu, India in May.

On 23 April 2025, following a terrorist attack in the Indian-administered part of the Kashmir region that killed 26 people and wounded several others, New Delhi announced that it had unilaterally decided to suspend its decades-old water-sharing agreement with Pakistan until the latter "credibly and irrevocably abjures its support for cross-border terrorism". Pakistan vehemently denied any involvement in the incident, which brought the two nations to the brink of war.

Following the decision, Indian officials announced plans to construct new water reservoirs on the three western rivers in the Indus system that are designated primarily for Pakistan's use under the Indus Waters Treaty. Nearly 80 % of Pakistan's irrigated agriculture rely on water from these rivers. India has also stopped sharing hydrological data with Pakistan, which is crucial for flood forecasting, irrigation planning, hydropower, and drinking water management.

Pakistan responded by declaring that any attempt to stop or divert the flow of its share of water would be considered "an act of war", noting that the accord "contains no provision for unilateral suspension". At a meeting on 24 April, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and his National Security Committee emphasised that water is "a lifeline" for Pakistan's 240 million people and that "its availability will be safeguarded at all costs."

## PAKISTAN'S GEOGRAPHIC VULNERABILITY

The Indus is a major trans-boundary river that originates in Tibet and flows through the disputed Kashmir region before entering Pakistan and ultimately emptying into the Arabian Sea. Some of the river's important tributaries enter Pakistan from India.

About 95 % of Pakistan's total renewable water resources come from the Indus Basin or the Indus system. "This high dependency on a single river system makes Pakistan's water environment one of relatively high risk," states the Interactive Country Fiches, an online platform that provides environmental profiles of countries. Water is becoming increasingly scarce in Pakistan; climate change is impacting the glacial melt and monsoon rains that feed the river system, and population growth and increased economic activity are putting the country's resources under additional stress.

According to Pakistan's first Biennial Update Report to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, as of 2022, 93 % of the country's water resources were being used in agriculture. Agriculture forms the backbone of Pakistan's economy, contributing around 24 % to the GDP and employing over 37 % of the labour force according to the latest national economic survey. Any disruption in the flow of water would put the sector at risk and increase food insecurity for the fifth most populous country in the world.

> "India itself depends on rivers that originate in China, and there are hundreds of trans-boundary rivers in the world the use of which is governed by similar agreements."

## THE INDUS WATERS TREATY

When the Indian Subcontinent was partitioned following independence from Britain in 1947, the Indus Basin was divided as well. The upper riparian, or upstream river system, now belonged to India and the lower riparian to Pakistan. After over a decade of disagreement, the two countries signed the World Bank-brokered Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) in 1960. Under the treaty, India has the right to use the three

> “Practically speaking, India’s decision may not cause Pakistan much harm, at least in the short term.”

eastern rivers in the Indus system – the Ravi, Beas and Sutlej – while Pakistan has rights to the three western ones – the Indus, Jhelum and Chenab.

As the upper riparian state, India is allowed to use water from the western rivers, too, for hydropower projects and limited irrigation, but it cannot divert their flows in a way that harms Pakistan. India is also required to share hydrological data with its neighbour.

Moreover, the IWT includes no provision for unilateral suspension by either side. The treaty can only be modified by mutual agreement.

Disputes have arisen since the IWT’s inception – for instance, Pakistan has accused India of building hydropower and water infrastructure projects that violate its terms – but despite all odds, the IWT has survived all previous conflicts between the two nuclear-armed rivals. Until today.

## IMPLICATIONS OF THE IWT’S SUSPENSION

Practically speaking, India’s decision may not cause Pakistan much harm, at least in the short term. According to water management experts, New Delhi actually has very limited capacity to stop or divert water that flows from India to Pakistan.

It’s true that in May, India restricted flows from its Baglihar and Salal dams on the Chenab, one of the rivers that Pakistan has rights to; downstream residents could walk on the riverbed for the first time in recent memory. The move disrupted Pakistan’s Punjab farmers’ ability to sow vital crops like rice, sugarcane, maize and cotton. Under the IWT, India would have had to inform Pakistan before altering the flow of water so dramatically.

Still, neither of those dams can store large amounts of water long-term. Mohsin Leghari, the former minister for irrigation of Pakistan’s populous Punjab province, said that India was using less water storage capacity on the western rivers than the treaty allows. “India has not yet touched the threshold of its allowed water-storage capacity in the 65 years since the accord was signed,” he said, adding that geographic constraints and prohibitive costs are stopping India from building more dams and canals. “It is also a time-intensive process,” he stressed.

Hassan Abbas, an expert in hydrology and water resources, agrees that India has already constructed as much infrastructure and diverted as much water as its capacity and the ground realities permit. But he also believes that the IWT was never ideal for Pakistan and that India’s suspension presents an opportunity to, for example, address the issue of upstream pollution, which he claims the treaty does not adequately protect against.

Leghari feels the treaty is worth saving, however, calling it “a legal and diplomatic cornerstone, not only for South Asia but for global water governance”. He points out that India’s suspension sets a dangerous precedent: After all, India itself depends on rivers that originate in China, and there are hundreds of trans-boundary rivers in the world whose use is governed by similar agreements. Ending those agreements would threaten water security in places that, like Pakistan, are already facing water scarcity.

**LINK**

Interactive Country Fiches, Pakistan:
*dicf.unepgrid.ch/pakistan*

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MINING

# Coveted gold, poisoned water

*In Zimbabwe, rising gold prices are fuelling a boom in unregulated small-scale mining, which is coming at a heavy cost to health and the environment. The mercury used in the process is contaminating the country's water sources, but corruption and political interests continue to protect a dangerous black market.*

BY TSITSI BHOBO

Zimbabwe is awash with gold. According to the finance ministry, the country earned $ 2.5 billion from gold exports in 2024 – an increase of 37 % compared to the previous year.

Much of this trade is driven by informal networks. Syndicates dealing in chemicals such as mercury – used to extract gold from ore and sourced from China and other countries – supply thousands of unregistered small-scale and artisanal miners. These miners are commonly known as "makorokoza", a term that comes from Zimbabwe's Shona language.

Most "makorokoza" use simple tools like picks, shovels and pans to extract gold. They are responsible for around 65 % of Zimbabwe's annual gold production, which amounted to approximately 28 tonnes from January to August this year. However, a significant share of this output is not officially declared.

Much of the gold is laundered through South Africa and eventually ends up in the United Arab Emirates, where it is certified as "clean gold." In 2024, the US Department of the Treasury sanctioned a global gold smuggling network that operates in several countries, including Zimbabwe.

> "We dread the water now because it has turned brown."

Photo: picture alliance/ASSOCIATED PRESS/Tsvangirayi Mukwazhi

Small-scale miners at a riverbed on the outskirts of Harare.

## MERCURY DEALERS

But while gold prices remain at historic highs on the London Metal Exchange and the New York Mercantile Exchange, mercury used in illegal mining is contaminating previously clean water sources in Zimbabwe. "Artisanal miners of gold ore are reckless with mercury; only profit matters," says Farai Maguwu, director of the Zimbabwean Centre for Natural Resource Governance.

According to the UN Environment Programme, 96% of artisanal and small-scale gold mining sites in Zimbabwe still rely on mercury to extract gold from ore. An estimated 24 tonnes of the chemical are used each year. In 2025, the agency warned that miners, nearby communities and ecosystems face chronic exposure to toxic pollution.

"Most of the mercury chemicals we get are smuggled into Zimbabwe by dealers who import them from China, Dubai and South Africa," says Hardy Madoza, an artisanal miner in Penhalonga. "And the dealers are untouchable," he adds.

## TOXIC WATER

Penhalonga, a gold-rich area on the outskirts of Mutare – Zimbabwe's fourth-largest city – illustrates the scale of the problem. Once known for its pine-covered hills, the landscape is now scarred by countless brown pits as thousands of miners dig for river gold. Downstream, in settlements near Mutare, the activities in the Penhalonga hills are having increasingly severe consequences.

"We're losing sleep over water that we drank worry-free for decades," says Shatai Moyo, a resident of Penhalonga. "We dread the water now because it has turned brown."

In June 2022, toxicology samples from Lake Alexander, a critical water source downstream of the Penhalonga hills, revealed mercury contamination levels of 0.898 milligrammes per litre. This is well above the national safety threshold of 0.02 millligrammes per litre according to the Standards Association of Zimbabwe, which conducted the tests. Given that Lake Alexander supplies about a

quarter of Mutare's drinking water, the Environmental Management Agency warns that the contamination poses a serious health risk to local communities.

Mutare is significant because it is one of the few cities in Zimbabwe that still has relatively uncontaminated water and a reasonably reliable water-supply system, Maguwu said, pointing to the deterioration in water quality in Zimbabwe's largest cities. In the capital Harare, for example, residents often fear drinking municipal water, which is frequently contaminated and has been linked to illness among those who consume it out of desperation.

**EVEN BREAST MILK IS CONTAMINATED**

The threat facing communities around the gold-rich hills of Penhalonga mirrors the environmental disasters already unfolding in other gold-mining regions of Zimbabwe, such as Shurugwi and Kadoma in the country's centre, says Tapuwa Nhachi, an environmental expert with the Institute for Law, Development and Democracy (ILDD). "If it's not mercury getting into fresh water, then it's cyanide poisoning or artisanal miners polluting the once-clean water with rocks and soil," he explains.

On paper, the import of mercury into Zimbabwe is strictly regulated. Importers must obtain a license and demonstrate compliance with the Minamata Convention on Mercury, which Zimbabwe ratified in 2020. The convention sets out strict rules for the use and trade of mercury. In practice, however, a thriving black market has emerged. Corrupt customs officers are allowing mercury dealers to smuggle the chemical across borders.

"Mercury sells for around two dollars in Zimbabwe's artisanal gold mining communities. It is traded at scale, and the dealers often enjoy political protection because influential politicians are the gold lords," says Nhachi.

Although police frequently raid mining sites and rivers, arresting anyone caught with mercury without a license, political pressure often leads to the swift release of dealers without charges. "The mercury trade goes on," Nhachi adds. And the threat extends beyond contaminated drinking water. "An entire ecosystem is at risk – from fish to human breast milk," he warns. In 2017, tests in the gold mining districts of Kadoma and Chakari found traces of mercury in the breast milk of women. "We are going to pay a high price if we keep putting gold ahead of human health," says Nhachi.

> "Most of the mercury chemicals we get are smuggled into Zimbabwe by dealers who import them from China, Dubai and South Africa."

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HUMAN-WILDLIFE CONFLICTS

# Coexistence, not conflict

*Along the border of Malawi and Zambia, elephants and other wildlife regularly destroy crops and threaten lives. With deterrents, community action and livelihood support, a German-funded project wants to show that protecting nature can also protect people.*

BY LAMECK MASINA

One night two years ago in Chauma village in Kasungu District in central Malawi, 47-year-old widow and mother of six children, Pasipawo Manda, woke to the sound of elephants storming through her maize and groundnut fields. "I had nothing left," she recalls. "We went weeks without proper food, surviving on wild vegetables and maize bran from neighbours." That night, the elephants even broke into her house, where she and three of her children were sleeping. "We ran for our lives, leaving the elephants eating my crops. It was frightening."

Such scenes are common in Malawi and Zambia, where conflicts between humans and wildlife have become part of daily life. Expanding settlements, shrinking habitats and vandalised fences in protected areas have increased contact between people and wild animals – sometimes with deadly results.

Between 2019 and 2022, Malawi's Vwaza Marsh Wildlife Reserve recorded an average of 888 incidents each year, while Zambia's Musalangu Game Management Area reported about 489 annually. These range from elephants flattening crops to buffaloes injuring people and, in some cases, hippos overturning fishing canoes.

"When we seek compensation, no one helps," says Frank Phiri from Kasungu Warm Heart, a local organisation supporting victims of animal attacks. "To authorities, animals' lives seem more important than people's," he says, adding that Malawi's current laws lack a formal compensation scheme for such victims. That's why a group of people has brought up a legal claim against the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW). The institution had relocated elephants to Kasungu National Park in 2022, which then fatally attacked people living nearby.

## HOW HUMANS AND ANIMALS COULD COEXIST

A new initiative is now offering hope. The Human-Wildlife Co-habitation Project, launched in June 2025, targets affected areas along the Malawi-Zambia border around Vwaza Marsh in Malawi and Musalangu in Zambia. Funded by Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) through KfW Development Bank and implemented by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) with Total LandCare (TLC), the three-year project aims to not only reduce human-wildlife conflicts but also improve food security and boost household incomes. It will, for example, introduce deterrents like solar-powered fencing, chili-based repellents and community crop-guarding systems as well as climate-resilient crops that are less attractive to wildlife.

Brighton Kumchedwa, Director of Malawi's Department of National Parks and Wildlife, calls broken fences a major cause of conflict. "We're not just thinking about wildlife. We're thinking about people – their food, their safety, their income. That's how conservation should work," he says.

For Pasipawo Manda, the project brings hope. She dreams of a season when her crops will grow undisturbed – and when she will no longer wake at night to chase elephants away. "I just want to farm in peace," she says. "If this project can give us that, it will change our lives."

If successful, the project could become a model for balancing human needs and wildlife conservation across southern Africa – showing that coexistence, not conflict, is the key to protecting both people and nature.

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# Aiming for a better world

Illustration by Naila Conita (see p. 4).

Illustration: Naila Conita / Unsplash

OUR VIEW

# Not on track – not lost yet, either

*For a long time, we discussed the UN Sustainable Development Goals primarily in terms of figures: Where is progress being made? Where are we falling behind? Since this year at the latest, the goals themselves have become the target of criticism. That's one more reason to hold on to the idea.*

BY EVA-MARIA VERFÜRTH

Before publishing each new monthly issue, our editorial staff discusses what title would best fit our focus. Sometimes we decide quickly, sometimes it takes time. For this issue marking the tenth anniversary of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we had two title ideas straight away. Both were fitting, but they made opposite statements: "Aiming for a better world" and "The world is off track".

Ten years ago, the 193 UN member states agreed to work together towards a world in which all people could live well. Since then, data has been collected, progress has been tracked, and some countries have made considerable strides. We can debate how realistic the entire project was from the outset – because, for example, there still is no clear roadmap or sufficient financing. Nevertheless, it was an important, visionary step: policymakers, civil society, educational institutions and corporations worldwide set off down the path towards greater sustainability and justice.

## THE HEADWINDS ARE STRONG

Now we know that the goals will not be reached by 2030. In 2024, almost half of the indicators showed only minimal or moderate improvement, while progress on a third had stagnated or regressed. The Covid-19 pandemic erased many gains, and cuts to development funding are stalling progress further. Mortality for children under five could be rising again this year – until now, its steady drop had been a success story. And even progress does not automatically mean that things will soon be well: Efforts to meet many environment and climate goals may have curbed destruction in some places, but it is still going on.

As if that weren't sobering enough, forces are aligning worldwide to attack the UN goals. Right-wing nationalist governments and fossil-fuel industry groups are torpedoing international agreements. The USA undermined a previously negotiated agreement to decarbonise global shipping; at the last global climate conference, oil and gas-producing states blocked a binding roadmap to phase out fossil fuels. The opponents of a liveable future are loud and well-connected; their views are flooding the media landscape and making it more difficult to even imagine a positive future.

## DON'T LOSE SIGHT OF THE FUTURE

The state of the world provides few grounds for optimism. Nevertheless, even though it may sound sentimental, we chose the title "Aiming for a better world". Precisely because of the adversity it is facing, the global community must not lose sight of this goal. So far, it has largely remained committed, and coalitions of the willing are forming worldwide to act wherever global agreement is lacking.

The majority of people are behind them: According to surveys, up to 89 % of the global population wants stronger climate protection measures – and probably also progress on most of the other SDGs. If we ignore these majorities, we will ultimately be ceding the field to those forces that want to make us believe that it is already too late.

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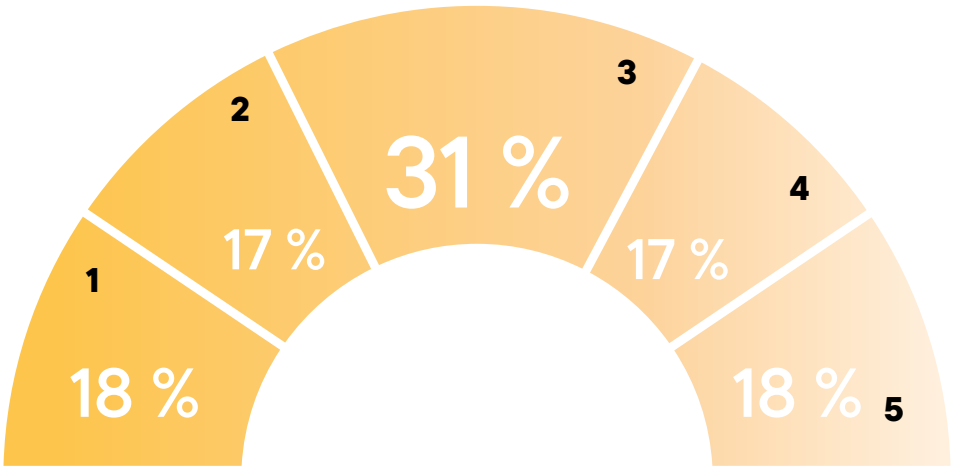
2030 AGENDA IN NUMBERS

# Global development goals: progress and setbacks

*The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are the most comprehensive yardstick for measuring how the world is developing. They came into force 10 years ago and will remain in place until 2030. Here is their current status in facts and figures.*

BY ISAH SHAFIQ




**1** On track or target met
**2** Moderate progress
**3** Marginal progress
**4** Stagnation
**5** Regression

Source: UN, The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025

**There are *17* Sustainable Development Goals comprising *169* specific targets. Of these, *139* targets were able to be assessed for the SDG Report 2025.**

**18 %** of the assessed targets have been met or are on track, **48 %** show moderate or marginal progress, **17 %** are stagnating and **18 %** show regression. (Percentages do not add up to 100 % due to rounding.)

Goals with a relatively large number of specific targets on track include SDG7 "Affordable and clean energy" and SDG11 "Sustainable cities and communities". In contrast, SDG2 "Zero hunger", SDG14 "Life below water" and SDG8 "Decent work and economic growth" have seen significant setbacks. We report on developments for a few selected indicators below.

## SDG1

"No poverty": **One in 10 people** is living in extreme poverty, measured against the international poverty line of $ 3.00 per day. In the early 1990s, it was four in 10. The goal of eradicating extreme poverty by 2030 will most likely not be achieved.

## SDG2

"Zero hunger": **8.2 %** of the world's population was undernourished in 2024, down from 8.5 % in 2023. During the Covid-19 pandemic, this figure had risen from 7.5 % to 8.8 %.

## SDG3

"Good health and well-being": The global maternal mortality ratio fell from **228** deaths per 100,000 live births in 2015 to **197** in 2023. The target of no more than 70 deaths per 100,000 births by 2030 remains a long way off.

## SDG4

"Quality education": Youth literacy increased from **91 %** in 2014 to **93 %** in 2024. The rise is mainly due to improvements in sub-Saharan Africa and Central and South Asia.

## SDG5

"Gender equality": **27.2 %** of the seats in national parliaments were held by women at the beginning of 2025 – up 4.9 percentage points from 2015. The progress is slowing down, however.

## SDG12

„Responsible consumption and production": Global domestic material consumption increased by **23.3 %** between 2015 and 2022.

## SDG15

"Life on land": An average of **10 million hectares** of forest were cleared each year between 2015 and 2020 – 2 million less than in the period from 2010 to 2015. If this trend continues, it will take another 25 years to achieve the goal of halting deforestation.

## SDG16

"Peace, justice and strong institutions": In 2024, at least one person died **every 12 minutes** due to armed conflict. Compared to the previous two-year period, the number of children killed in armed conflict rose by **337 %** in 2023/24, while the number of women killed rose by **258 %** – largely due to the war in Gaza.

### LINK

The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025: *https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2025/*

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RIGHT-WING POPULISM

# “The Sustainable Development Goals are seen as the enemy”

*Right-wing propaganda and anti-democratic policies are spreading; international cooperation is more difficult than it has been for a long time. Is the zeitgeist undermining the Sustainable Development Goals? Imme Scholz, president of the Heinrich Böll Foundation, played a leading role in drafting the most recent Global Sustainable Development Report. In this interview, she discusses political resistance and where we go from here.*

IMME SCHOLZ IN AN INTERVIEW WITH EVA-MARIA VERFÜRTH

**A little over ten years ago, 193 UN member states agreed to a vision of a more just future for all countries, regardless of their development status – the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). At the time, it was revolutionary. Now, under President Donald Trump, the USA of all countries has made it clear that it couldn’t care less about that shared goal. Is something being lost?**

The forces behind Donald Trump and right-wing extremists elsewhere have clearly made the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda part of their enemy narrative. The same trend can be observed in Europe, like when right-wing extremist forces from Latin America and Europe gathered in 2024 at the invitation of Spain’s Vox party. These groups do more than simply ignore the issues the SDGs address – they actively oppose them. They are against gender equality, human rights and climate and biodiversity protection. They are taking political action against the spirit of the SDGs and downplaying the progress that has been made.

**Can you explain where this opposition comes from?**

Right-wing extremist forces have a completely different worldview. They are working for a future in which everyone fights for themselves. Ideals like international solidarity and democratic values contradict their basic assumptions. The

same is true of the idea that humanity has shared interests and must work together to curb climate change or advance global justice. If everyone is their own neighbour, international cooperation is not important or directed at completely different goals.

> "The forces behind Donald Trump and right-wing extremists elsewhere have clearly made the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda part of their enemy narrative."

**You anticipated resistance to the implementation of the SDGs: the topic was addressed in the Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) 2023, for which you acted as co-chair of the independent group of scientists appointed by the UN. Do the recent developments match your expectations?**

We understood at the time that resistance is part of change. If we want to achieve the SDGs, we have to replace unsustainable structures and technologies with sustainable ones – which will generate resistance from those who have profited from these structures and business models in the past. But we assumed that these forces could be integrated. The political resistance that we are experiencing now is something entirely different. These aren't just reservations about a change that you know has to happen. No, the aim is to completely undermine the change. Climate change is being denied, and everything is being done to expand the fossil fuel economy. The West was never free of contradictions and has not always adhered to its own rules. But the UN Charter with its universal human rights – even though it wasn't explicitly included in the SDGs – was always a clear reference point. It's being weakened now.

Photo: picture alliance/ASSOCIATED PRESS/Andre Penner

**Argentina's President Javier Milei and US President Donald Trump drill into the world: activists in costumes during COP30.**

"The multilateral order is being undermined, ignored and supplanted by wars, conflicts and the actions of the USA and Russia in particular. The so-called West, as a political category, no longer exists."

**Some countries, like Brazil under its current government, are still promoting shared values. How much support do the SDGs still have?**

The fiercest opponents of the 2030 Agenda are obviously in the minority. At the last SDG summit in 2023, the UN confirmed its intention to further the SDGs. The basic consensus is therefore still in place – and that is extremely important. At the same time, there is a sense that the alliance is not very strong at the moment and that the SDGs are not at the top of the agenda. The enthusiasm of 2015 has waned significantly. The multilateral order is being undermined, ignored and supplanted by wars, conflicts and the actions of the USA and Russia in particular. The so-called West, as a political category, no longer exists. And we shouldn't have any illusions about China, even though it hasn't proactively opposed the SDGs.

**The West is currently withdrawing financially from development cooperation; in Europe, other issues are taking priority. Can an argument still be made for development policy?**

Since Russia's attack on Ukraine, Europe is under more pressure and must put more money into defence. In Germany, however, the National Security Strategy states that military defence is only one aspect of security. A proactive foreign policy and development cooperation with other countries are essential too. Europe is still a powerful union, though not powerful enough to defend its interests against the USA and China on its own. For that, we need cooperation – including with countries of the Global South. We need multilateral rules, institutions and precisely these goals that we have set ourselves together.

**In public debates, these considerations are rarely mentioned. Is global cooperation no longer in keeping with the spirit of the times?**

If the spirit of the times is defined by right-wing extremist groups, then that is certainly true. But there could be other reasons. When you put the economies of the Global South together, then they have been larger – in terms of purchasing power parity – than those of the old industrialised countries since 2008, even though there are still many small, very poor countries that are facing adversity. But the balance of power has shifted. That has been difficult to accept for the countries that used to clearly be on the winning and dominant side.

**In other words: Rich countries can't accept that they aren't the strongest anymore? The economic historian Adam Tooze has argued, roughly, that achieving the SDGs was never an honest goal of all of the countries of the Global North because they didn't actually want to renounce their hegemony. And in fact, the USA and many European countries now want to focus more strongly on their own interests again. What is your reaction to that?**

When countries cooperate, their own interests always play a role too, which isn't necessarily a bad thing. The 2030 Agenda and the climate and biodiversity agenda weren't agreed on as an act of charity, but rather because they were in everyone's interest. That fact is often ignored when self-interest is emphasised. At the same time, however, we have planetary boundaries: an increase in prosperity in some regions must be accompanied by a change in prosperity in the wealthiest countries. Innovations, the circular economy and non-fossil fuel technologies can do a lot, but material consumption must also be reduced – especially in the social classes that can afford high levels of consumption. That creates conflict and may have contributed to the opposition we're seeing now.

Still, I reach a different conclusion than Adam Tooze. These ethical questions were discussed for a long time during the development of the SDGs. They were taken very seriously by many civil-society actors who participated in the development and implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including in Western countries. They had no intention of withdrawing later, like the USA is planning to do now.

**What factors have most hindered progress toward the SDGs?**

Wars and conflicts not only hinder progress, they also create setbacks. People are killed, societies are destroyed, trust is eroded and, with it, the conditions to bring about improvements. That's what we determined in the Global Sustainable Development Report from 2023. Global developments since then have unfortunately confirmed our view. Another essential point is the lack of gender equality.

**Why is that so central?**

Besides the fact that women have rights that must be upheld, greater gender equality has a very positive impact on education and health and therefore also on economic productivity. It is also of central importance for democracy that half of humanity can participate to its full potential. In 2023, UN Secretary-General António Guterres warned that it would take over 300 years to achieve gender equality if we continued at our current pace. That is outrageous.

A third factor is the high level of indebtedness of developing countries. Because they lost income during the Covid-19 pandemic, many developing countries had to borrow money on the private market. Now their interest payments are so high that they can no longer invest in transformation. Rich countries, including China, urgently need to agree to debt relief, but that has not yet occurred.

> "The 2030 Agenda and the climate and biodiversity agenda weren't agreed on as an act of charity, but rather because they were in everyone's interest."

**What will or could the future of the SDGs be?**

This fall, the UN appointed the scientists who will draft the GSDR 2027. They will determine what can still be done to achieve the SDGs by 2030 and what should come after them. It is important that we stay focused on this goal, and the report will surely offer another good point of reference. At the same time, we have to think about what a post-2030 Agenda could look like. The "Pact for the Future" already identified new action areas that were not included in the 2015 agreement. The Global Digital Compact, for example, addresses the digital public sphere, disinformation and the erosion of academic freedom. All of these are important battlefields for right-wing extremist forces.

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Photo: Sibylle Fendt

Photo: picture alliance/Xinhua News Agency/Sulav Shrestha

People in traditional attire celebrate the Yomari Punhi festival in Nepal's capital Kathmandu in December.

NEPAL

# Dreams of economic prosperity and sustainable development

*Between 2015 and 2024, Nepal achieved the greatest SDG progress of any country in the East and Southeast Asia region. Poverty reduction and infrastructure development contributed to this success. Nevertheless, the country still has a long way to go and has recently been set back by natural disasters and political turmoil.*

BY RUKAMANEE MAHARJAN

Nepal committed to the UN Sustainable Development Goals early on, in 2015, and integrated them into its long-term policy. To implement the SDGs, the government is working closely with various stakeholders, such as UN organisations, the private sector and civil-society organisations. Platforms have been created where interest groups can exchange ideas, such as the Nepal SDGs Forum and the SDGs National Network Nepal.

Nepal's progress is particularly evident in SDG1 "No Poverty". The country's 2024 Voluntary National Review states that, against the 2010-11 benchmark, Nepal's poverty headcount ratio has fallen from about 25 % in 2010-11 to less than four percent in 2022-23. However, the report also notes that after revisions to the benchmark of the national poverty line in 2022-23, one fifth of the population are still considered poor. Poverty remains especially widespread in rural areas.

"Advances in infrastructure have not only contributed to better healthcare, but also to increased agricultural productivity."

The country is also making progress on other goals, such as SDG3 "Good Health and Well-Being" and SDG4 "Quality Education." Nepal has significantly reduced maternal and newborn mortality rates as well as literacy rates, for example.

## STRENGTHENING INFRASTRUCTURE

Nepal is located in the Himalayas, and its mountainous landscape makes many areas difficult to access. As a result, the government has focused on expanding infrastructure to previously isolated communities. Almost all households now have electricity, which in Nepal comes predominantly from hydropower. Most households now also have toilets and access to clean water. This has improved hygiene, reduced disease and enhanced the dignity of women and girls in particular. Stronger representation of women in decision-making bodies, from parliament to local governments, has also fostered gender equality.

Since the SDGs are interlinked, successes in one area lead to progress in others. For example, advances in infrastructure have not only contributed to better healthcare, but also to increased agricultural productivity.

## MAJOR CHALLENGES REMAIN

Nepal's 2024 Voluntary National Review highlights challenges that are hindering the implementation of the SDGs. For example, the consequences of global warming are exacerbating environmental hazards such as landslides and floods; devastating earthquakes such as the one in the district of Jajarkot in 2023 are a serious threat too. Informal settlements are putting a strain on infrastructure, and the country continues to suffer from high unemployment. Like many other countries in the Global South, Nepal is groaning under a rising debt burden. And despite all the progress made, inadequate infrastructure remains an Achilles' heel.


The fact that Nepal currently ranks only 85th out of 167 countries in the SDG ranking is also due to its weak institutional capacities and insufficient coordination between government agencies, which hinders the implementation of policy measures. Ongoing political instability presents a major challenge as well. In September, massive Gen-Z protests against a social media ban and corrupt elites devastated public infrastructure.

> “Nepal is contributing its limited resources to global efforts to achieve a more sustainable, equitable and prosperous future.”

The country also has a lot of catching up to do in terms of social inequality. People continue to face severe discrimination based on gender, caste and ethnicity. At the same time, marginalised groups such as Indigenous Peoples, Dalits and people with disabilities are not sufficiently involved in political decision-making.

In order to still achieve the SDGs, the country will need the equivalent of around $ 23 billion per year between 2024 and 2030, according to calculations by the National Planning Commission. The largest investments would have to be made in sectors such as industry and infrastructure, but considerable funds are also needed for renewable energy and poverty reduction. The total amount significantly exceeds Nepal’s budget, which is equivalent to around $14 billion for the 2025-26 fiscal year.

The bottom line is that Nepal is contributing its limited resources to global efforts to achieve a more sustainable, equitable and prosperous future. It is even having a positive impact on the ability of other countries to achieve the SDGs, as indicated by its “spillover score,” which is just under 95 out of 100. It can therefore only be beneficial for the international community and for the achievement of the SDGs as a whole to continue supporting Nepal on its path.

**LINK**

Nepal: Voluntary National Review of Sustainable Development Goals 2024. *https://hlpf.un.org/countries/nepal/voluntary-national-reviews-2024*

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PERU

# “Not all countries will follow the same development path”

*If you mention political instability, you might be talking about Peru. The country has had seven different presidents in the last 10 years, and new elections are already scheduled for next year. Frequent government turnover, weakened political institutions and high levels of informality aren't ideal conditions for development. However, Peru is the South American country that has made the most progress on the SDGs in the past decade. We talked to Javier Bronfman, UNDP Regional Adviser on SDG Integration, about the country's development path.*

JAVIER BRONFMAN IN AN INTERVIEW WITH EVA-MARIA VERFÜRTH

Photo: picture alliance/AA/Lucas Aguayo Araos


Demonstrations against the government of former Peruvian President Dina Boluarte in Lima in 2023.

**Many countries in South America have a much higher SDG score than Peru, with Chile, Uruguay and Argentina at the top of the rankings. Yet Peru is the country that has made the most progress over the last decade. What has happened here?**

Peru came from a low starting point and has made impressive progress, even though it is still behind in many areas. Much of this progress has been possible due to high economic growth, which has been remarkably pro-poor. The country relies on revenues from natural resources and mining exports, and a considerable part was invested in social policies such as education and social-protection schemes.

**In other words, would you say that Peru's progress towards achieving the SDGs was mainly possible because it was a period of economic prosperity for the country?**

In part, yes. Chile's economy grew a lot a couple of decades ago and there, too, the indicators improved during that period. However, while economic growth can create momentum for development, it doesn't always have this effect. What's notable in Peru is that growth translated into meaningful social investment, which hasn't been the case in all Latin American countries. Progress has been driven by a combination of economic development and sound policy.

**This is a surprising statement given Peru has seen high political instability in recent years. In October, former president Dina Boluarte was removed from office following huge protests and civil unrest. How could the country progress under such conditions?**

Indeed, Peru has had seven presidents in just ten years, and many of them have afterwards been sentenced to prison or house arrest. Ministerial turnover has also been high. Such instability typically weakens institutions and hinders sustainable development. It also scares off foreign investment, which is an obstacle to economic growth. But that didn't happen in Peru. Foreign investment, particularly in the extractive sector, remained strong.

Students from the Indigenous Murui community attend a native language class at a secondary school in Centro Arenal, Peru.

Photo: picture alliance/ASSOCIATED PRESS/Rodrigo Abd

"Peru focused first on access to education, then on quality. Investments were made in bilingual education and inclusion of Indigenous communities."

**Why did institutions continue to function?**
One reason is strong technical leadership within public institutions. CEPLAN, for example, the National Centre for Strategic Planning, has been doing excellent work in diagnosing challenges and setting long-term strategic goals. The education ministry has also had capable leadership. These actors ensured continuity despite political instability at the higher level. They have the capacity to implement impactful policies, and they have been driving the country in the right direction. Another reason is that Peru has already had rather well-designed social policies, such as cash-transfer programmes and a focus on education.

**Education is the only SDG that Peru has achieved so far. What did the country do?**
Peru focused first on access to education, then on quality. Investments were made in teacher training, bilingual education and inclusion of Indigenous communities. The country has introduced new national education plans and teaching methods, and it has cooperated with international organisations. Local authorities have received more control to administer resources and investments. However, although the indicators have improved considerably, education quality is still far from excellent.

**Perceived corruption is also a major issue in Peru. Transparency International ranks Peru 127 out of 180 countries. How does this not hinder development?**
Perceived corruption at a high political level is one of the reasons for the current social unrest, and it definitely hinders development. A country cannot reach its development potential when its political leadership changes frequently. However, there's another level of corruption, which is embedded in informal networks of mutual support. This goes from the bottom of the pyramid to the higher ranks. People don't always perceive these exchanges as corruption, and in some cases, it even fosters a kind of social cohesion. When everyone participates in the network of favours and no one is left behind, it can be beneficial in an otherwise unstable and informal setting.

> "Peru has already had rather well-designed social policies, such as cash-transfer programmes and a focus on education."

**Could you explain a little more?**
Informality in Peru is widespread – not just in the labour market, but in how society functions. People help and rely on each other because formal systems often don't work. This gives them adaptability and resilience. It also creates flexibility: fewer formal constraints make it easier to change jobs or start a business when circumstances change. When external shocks happen, like the pandemic, people find ways to survive. But while this may have some positive effects in the short and medium term, it's no substitute for strong, reliable institutions in the long run. In the long term, it hinders human development, and we're already seeing growing social unrest and human-rights issues. The Peruvian case shows that in development policies, we must also consider these local settings. There is no one-size-fits-all approach, and not every country will follow the same development path.

> "There is no one-size-fits-all approach, and not every country will follow the same development path."

**In which areas is Peru still falling short of the SDGs?**
Many areas need attention: poverty, hunger, health – especially malnutrition and anaemia – and inequality, not just in income but also in access to services and opportunities. Rural and urban areas face distinct challenges and have very different needs that must be addressed. Environmental indicators are poor too, even though regulations have been put in place and international treaties signed. However, the implementation remains weak, which is particularly troubling given that Peru is highly exposed to extreme weather events like mudslides, droughts, forest fires and heavy rains. The country needs resilient infrastructure.

**Why is environmental regulation difficult to enforce, while the social sector has performed rather well?**
There can be many reasons for this, such as leadership and institutional capability. However, environmental protection is also a politically sensitive area. The mining industry is key to the economy, so there's hesitation to pursue sustainable mining seriously, for instance. Many people also still believe that climate protection means limiting economic growth, not only in Peru. But that's simply not true. There are many business opportunities in the renewable-energy sector as well as in building adaptation and resilience to climate change.

"Every country has opportunities for improvement. We must identify these opportunities and tackle the challenges without getting stuck. That's the only way forward."

**How has Latin America as a whole fared in development in the last years?**

We're at a critical moment. The region is facing another lost decade with low productivity and little economic diversification. There have been setbacks in development, especially in the social sector. External shocks, especially climate-related ones, have hit the region hard due to weak coping systems. For example, poverty rates in the region had been falling since the 1980s, but the pandemic reversed much of that, and it's been hard to catch up. Even though some people have moved out of poverty, they remain vulnerable and could easily be set back by any shock. In the Regional Human Development Report 2025 we have therefore set a focus on building resilience. It is not enough to simply lift people out of poverty; we must also keep them out. This involves protecting them against climate disasters, providing insurance, growing the economy to create job opportunities and offering upskilling programmes.

**You're part of the team that is writing the "Democracy and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean" report by UNDP, which will be published next year. Why is democracy a crucial topic as well?**

The region has made democratic progress, with most countries having sustained democratic governments and elections. But today, democracy is under pressure, even from within institutions. Polarisation is increasing and the political centre is eroding. This makes effective governance difficult and creates more space for authoritarian governments. It also has a negative effect on development outcomes and challenges any thriving economy.

**Why do you think that democracies are under pressure?**

I think there's a crisis of the future. I've taught at university for 20 years and I see growing uncertainty and anxiety among young people. We need to give them hope again by working towards a world that invites participation and offers spaces where people can thrive, innovate and shape their lives. It is devastating that only around 18 % of the SDGs are on track to be met by 2030. However, every country has opportunities for improvement. We must identify these opportunities and tackle the challenges without getting stuck. That's the only way forward.

**LINK**

Briceño, V., Bronfman, J., De Los Ríos, C. and Villagarcia, F., 2024: *New Effective Paths for Approaching the 2030 Agenda with Public and Private Actors amid Political Instability.*

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CENTRAL ASIA

# How Uzbekistan has achieved rapid SDG progress

*It's a leap forward that has raised eyebrows: The Central Asian country ranks fifth worldwide for its 2015–2024 efforts to reach the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), according to the SDG Report 2025. How did Uzbekistan, long associated with stagnation and rural poverty, become such a fast reformer?*

BY SHAHIDA TULAGANOVA

Photo: picture alliance/Anadolu/Bahtiyar Abdulkerimov

Uzbekistan's face is changing: In the mountainous Zaamin area, the longest suspension pedestrian bridge in Central Asia was built.

Uzbekistan's transformation is inseparable from the political shift that followed the sudden death of President Islam Karimov in 2016. Under Karimov's authoritarian rule, the country's economy stagnated. Shavkat Mirziyoyev, who had been prime minister under Karimov, succeeded him on a campaign promise of change.

"Mirziyoyev lifted certain restrictions on business and entrepreneurship that existed during Karimov's era," says Alisher Ilkhamov, the director of the UK-based civil-society organisation Central Asia Due Diligence. He acknowledges that Mirziyoyev's economic reforms have had a real impact. "Back then, there was centralised currency exchange, whereas now the economy operates under a more liberal regime. These changes, it seems, provided an important boost to economic programmes and initiatives," he says.

The progress Uzbekistan has made in providing access to education is also the result of decentralising and reducing state control in this area. The previous regime was very reluctant to grant foreign universities admission to the country. Yet under Mirziyoyev, various foreign universities from Europe, the United States and Asia have established numerous branch campuses in Uzbekistan, according to Alisher Ilkhamov. He stresses that this development has created new opportunities for students.

"At the very least, one can say that the situation has improved, particularly in higher education," Ilkhamov says. "As for school education, consider the fact that children are no longer being sent out to pick cotton. Now schoolchildren can spend the whole year studying in the classroom rather than being distracted by these absurd cotton-picking campaigns. This alone, of course, contributes to improvement."

## CONSIDERABLE REMITTANCES FROM ABROAD

Another factor driving Uzbekistan's progress has been external rather than internal: migrant workers. According to the Central Bank of Uzbekistan, the total volume of remittances to the country from abroad in 2024 reached $ 14.8 billion, of which $ 11.5 billion came from Russia alone, where the majority of Uzbek migrant workers live. For comparison: in 2024, Uzbekistan's GDP was at $ 115 billion.

As analyst Alisher Ilkhamov points out, remittances not only provide income but also fuel domestic consumption, create demand for local goods and services and stimulate job creation at home. In this sense, Uzbekistan's SDG progress is partly built on the sacrifices of those working abroad. A female Uzbek migrant worker in Russia who spoke on condition of anonymity says: "My mother died of Covid-19 in 2021. I had to support my younger sisters myself. Despite measures having been tightened against labour migrants, I am not planning to leave Moscow, because back home I would not be able to earn between $ 1000 and $ 1100 a month as I do here. While being here, I have learned several trades and managed to study Russian to a level sufficient for communication and work."

"The progress Uzbekistan has made in providing access to education is also the result of decentralising and reducing state control in this area."

## AGRICULTURE AS KEY SECTOR

Some of the main challenges remain in the agricultural sector, which employs about 14 % of the population – a number that has fallen from 26 % in 2000. "Uzbekistan is only halfway there," says Umida Niyazova, director of the Uzbek Forum for Human Rights, a civil-society organisation that focuses on labour rights. On the one hand, she says, Uzbekistan initiated reforms in many areas and became one of the largest recipients of funding from international financial institutions to implement reforms aimed at achieving sustainable development. On the other hand, she criticises the fact that "reforms in agriculture are being carried out in a half-hearted and poorly thought-out way".

As an example, Umida Niyazova cites the state's influence on the production of cotton, one of the country's main export goods, and grain. She recalls that in 2020, the state declared that it would stop officially "ordering" cotton and grain production. "But in reality, the state continues to force farmers to grow only these crops even if it is unprofitable for them," she says, adding that some farmers have been obliged to sell their harvests to designated companies that failed to pay, leaving once-prosperous farms bankrupt. Umida Niyazova argues that such policies reflect deeper systemic weaknesses and that rural poverty will persist unless there is genuine liberalisation.

The 2025 SDG Report highlights two areas where Uzbekistan is lagging significantly behind: hunger and energy. Food insecurity remains a problem for vulnerable groups, despite falling poverty rates.

World Bank data show that while poverty has declined, inequality has increased. Between 2022 and 2023, the incomes of the poorest 10 % of the population rose by just six percent, while the wealthiest 10 % enjoyed gains exceeding 30 %. Since food prices are rising faster than salaries and pensions, many households are struggling to secure adequate nutrition, undermining progress towards SDG2 "Zero hunger."

**DEPENDENCE ON FOSSIL FUELS**

Meanwhile, the country's energy system is still plagued by chronic shortages. Uzbekistan is heavily dependent on fossil fuels. According to the International Energy Agency, 79 % of the country's energy supply came from natural gas in 2023, followed by oil and coal. Renewables are growing but make up only a small fraction of the energy mix. Meanwhile the country has issues with outdated gas and electricity infrastructure.

"The power grid in Uzbekistan still runs mainly on natural gas, which is produced domestically rather than being imported, which is a big positive," says Laurent Ruseckas, an analyst with S&P Global Commodity Insights. While expanding renewable energy production will take time and significant investment, the country seems to be on the right track, he says. "Uzbekistan has recently had considerable success in building large-scale solar generation with support from multilateral financial institutions and investment from companies such as Masdar and TotalEnergies," he says. The analyst stresses that more investments will be needed in renewables, the electricity grid and natural gas production to make up for the decline in production at older gas fields.

In early 2024, the Uzbek government raised its 2030 target for electricity generated from renewable energy from 25 % to 40 % and more than doubled its goal for solar and wind capacity from 12 to 27 gigawatts. However, systemic reform in the energy sector has yet to materialise, so SDG7 "Affordable and clean energy" is still a long way off. In energy and other sectors, corruption, inefficiency and mismanagement add to the challenges.

**REFORMS MUST CONTINUE**

All in all, despite ongoing struggles, the lives of ordinary Uzbeks have improved measurably in recent years. Small business opportunities have expanded, digital services have reduced corruption, and international partnerships have given education a new dynamism. However, rising inequality, persistent hunger, systemic energy problems and rural distress are reminders that reforms must go deeper if they are to last.

"World Bank data show that while poverty has declined, inequality has increased."

Fighting poverty will remain a major issue. In 2024, President Mirziyoyev announced a state programme whose name translates to "From Poverty to Prosperity". The programme prioritises employment, sustainable sources of income and high-quality education, these being the main drivers of long-term poverty reduction. Mirziyoyev declared that more than 70 % of government spending would be directed towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

It helps that Uzbekistan joined the International Comparison Program (ICP) in 2017, a World Bank-led initiative that allows countries to collect internationally comparable data on poverty and living standards. Under Karimov's regime, Uzbekistan didn't have reliable data on poverty, which made it impossible to compare the country's social performance with that of its neighbours or countries worldwide. Later, with the assistance of the World Bank, Uzbekistan developed a national methodology to measure poverty, which painted a clearer picture of the challenges facing Uzbekistan's society.

So far, Uzbekistan has proven that rapid progress is possible. But whether this progress can be consolidated into long-term transformation remains to be seen.

**LINK**

World Bank: International Comparison Program:
*https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/icp*

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Photo: picture alliance/Daniel Kalker/Daniel Kalker

The building of the German Parliament (Bundestag). There are fewer women in Parliament than in the previous legislative period.

GERMANY

# Driving force or hindrance? Germany and the SDGs

*Germany is among those leading the way on the global Sustainable Development Goals. Nonetheless, it is falling significantly short of the targets in key areas such as poverty, inequality, education and gender equality. Rather than the latest development budget cuts, what is needed are greater efforts to finally implement the 2030 Agenda consistently.*

BY TOBIAS HAUSCHILD

Germany regularly takes one of the top spots in the UN's annual report on progress towards the 17 Sustainable Development Goals – coming fourth out of the 167 countries assessed last year, for example. Yet this is no reason for complacency: Germany may have achieved some progress, but scoring well by international standards also disguises serious shortcomings – and many of the country's successes are now looking somewhat precarious again.

Germany shows some worrying trends in several key areas of sustainable development. Indicators for SDG1 "No Poverty", SDG4 "Quality Education", SDG5 "Gender Equality" and SDG10 "Reduced Inequalities" have regressed, for instance. And there is certainly room for improvement on SDG17 "Partnerships for the Goals".

> "Those in Germany whose parents have not completed upper secondary education are still much less likely to graduate from university themselves."

Germany is one of the world's most prosperous countries and the third-largest economy by GDP (gross domestic product) after the US and China. By no means everyone benefits from this economic wealth, however. As far as SDG1 "No Poverty" is concerned, the increase in the poverty rate after taxes and transfers – i.e. the proportion of the population that has to make do with less than half of the average income level – is particularly alarming. According to the UN, the figure in Germany is 11.6 % – the highest it has been since records began in 2008. The goal of lowering the poverty rate to 6.1 % thus appears an ever more distant prospect.

## GLARING SOCIAL INEQUALITIES

SDG10 "Reduced Inequalities" is another goal that is a long way from being achieved. Growing poverty among the elderly is especially problematic. 14.1 % of people aged 66 or above survive on less than half the median household income – likewise a new record. The long-term goal for this indicator is 3.2 %. The two leading indicators of income inequality, the Gini coefficient and the Palma ratio, also show a negative trend for Germany and are inching towards new heights.

On SDG4 "Quality Education", hardly a year goes by when the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) does not reprimand Germany for the fact that educational opportunities in the country still depend heavily on parents' income and educational levels. Admittedly, the proportion of young adults with a university degree has risen sharply and more rapidly than in many other industrialised countries in recent years, from 33 % in 2019 to 40 % in 2024. At the same time, the number of young people without upper secondary qualification (university entrance or vocational training qualification) is increasing – now at 15 %, it puts Germany in the lower third Europe-wide.

This gap between highly and poorly qualified young people is particularly concerning because it further entrenches social differences. Those in Germany whose parents have not completed upper secondary education are still much less likely to graduate from university themselves. Only around a fifth attain a tertiary qualification, compared to three fifths of young adults who have at least one tertiary-educated parent.

## PLAYING CATCH-UP ON GENDER EQUALITY

By global standards, Germany has already made reasonable headway on gender equality. However, it is still a long way from fully achieving SDG5 "Gender Equality". Although it is good to see progress in education or on women's employment, too many key areas continue to show a significant need for action. The gender pay gap is one particularly drastic example: falling far short of the European average in this respect, Germany ranks fifth last in the EU.

Parity hasn't been achieved in terms of political representation, either. Currently only 32.4 % of members of the Bundestag, Germany's parliament, are women – a lower proportion than in the previous legislative period. And policy measures are being discussed that could negatively impact female employment rates and therefore exacerbate the gender pay gap, such as limiting access to support services provided by care insurance.

Germany's role as an international donor and global player also presents a somewhat mixed picture, with significant challenges still remaining when it comes to SDG17 "Partnerships for the Goals". On the upside:

- the German government played an important part in getting the World Bank to focus more on tackling inequality;
- from 2020 to 2023, Germany fulfilled its international commitment to spend at least 0.7 % of its gross national income on official development assistance (ODA) and

- in 2024 made good on its promise to provide six billion euros a year to support developing countries and emerging economies in their efforts to implement climate change mitigation and adaptation measures.

However, the German government looks unlikely to meet these and other pledges in future. The dramatic cuts to Germany's development and humanitarian assistance spending in the federal budget already led to the 0.7 % target being missed in 2024. Given the cuts planned in the next few years, this dip can be expected to grow sharply – sending a disastrous signal at times of growing global need and instability. Germany would then no longer be a reliable partner, undermining the guiding SDG principle of "leave no one behind".

Though Germany scores well on the SDGs by international standards, it hasn't actually met a single one of them yet. Achieving the 2030 Agenda will become less and less likely if the current trend persists. The German government really needs to take resolute action now to counter it. Instead, recent budget cuts and insufficient political will are making matters worse – slowing Germany's progress toward achieving the SDGs.

Oxfam Germany and other civil-society organisations are therefore urging for policies in which the need to achieve the goals guides political action. This would include taxing the super-rich and targeting investments towards basic social services, gender equality, development cooperation and climate action. Only then could Germany credibly become a driving force for sustainable development again.

**LINK**

Sustainable Development Report:
*dashboards.sdgindex.org/map*

> "The German government really needs to take resolute action now. Instead, recent budget cuts and insufficient political will are making matters worse."

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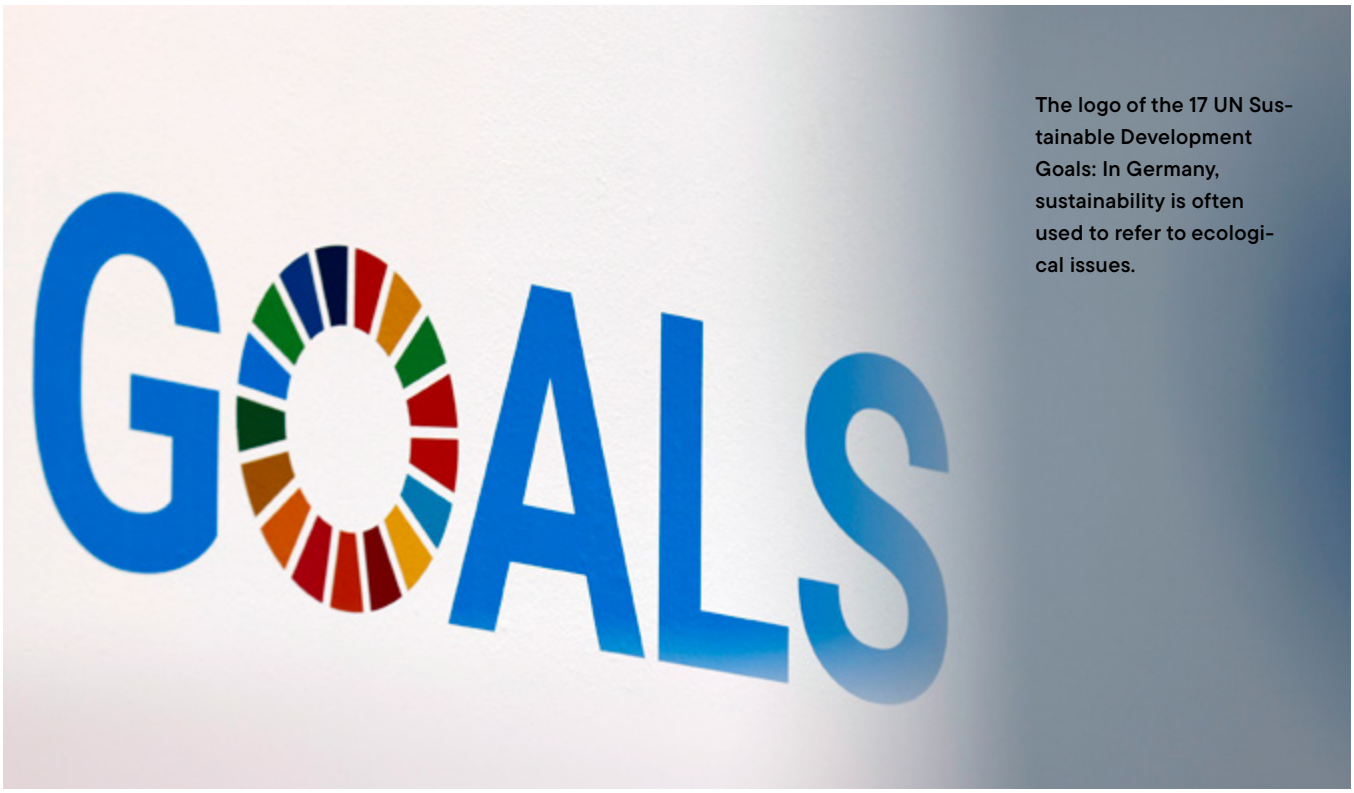
OPINION

# Refocusing on the core vision of the SDGs: an opportunity for development cooperation

*The realisation of environmental protection alongside development lies at the heart of the SDGs. Refocusing on this core vision gives an opportunity, not only in development cooperation, to rethink the issue and embrace a positive vision of the future.*

BY ESTELLE HERLYN




The logo of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals: In Germany, sustainability is often used to refer to ecological issues.

Photo: picture alliance/Panama Pictures/Christoph Hardt

Disillusionment reigns ten years after the 2030 Agenda came into force. Not only will the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) not be reached; the currently challenging situation means that some indicators may even regress compared to their original 2015/16 level. Development cooperation finds itself in serious crisis. At the same time, it is becoming increasingly clear among private sector actors that the sustainability efforts undertaken by the business world to date will not lead to the goals being achieved either.

If progress is ever to be made, development cooperation and the private sector must return to the original idea behind sustainable development, which is to combine envi-

ronmental and climate protection with development. International cooperation between actors from different sectors is vital to achieve this and offers considerable potential for development cooperation. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the area of climate action: success will only be possible if the Global North and the Global South work together. This approach is the only way to better address the unresolved issues entailed by conflicting ecological, economic and social goals – with a view to benefiting people all over the world.

> "Success will only be possible if the Global North and the Global South work together."

**THE CURRENT SITUATION**

Development cooperation is going through a difficult time. Support is crumbling, especially in the US, though also in European countries. The economic recession means the willingness to invest internationally is declining in Germany, too. As a result, less funding is available. Geopolitical tensions are additionally hindering multilateralism.

Consequently, the 'Decade of Action' proclaimed by the United Nations has failed to materialise and the 17 SDGs laid down in the 2030 Agenda will not be reached by 2030. However, the aforementioned recent developments are not the only reason for this, as there have been obstacles from the outset. These include conflicting economic and ecological goals that have yet to be resolved, such as the importance of reconciling economic growth with the need for climate action. A lack of international cooperation and, in many cases, a primarily national approach – for example to climate action – have also hindered the process. A glance at what companies are doing in this respect and at the regulatory requirements guiding their actions speaks volumes. Gigantic funding gaps and problems with the availability and transfer of sustainable technologies make matters even worse.

Moreover, the term sustainability is widely misinterpreted: in Germany it is used far too often to refer to ecological issues. Most people did not understand why Gerd Müller, Germany's former development minister, wanted to turn the Federal Ministry for economic cooperation and development into a "Federal Ministry for international cooperation and sustainability". Too many people have failed and continue to fail to recognise that the 2030 Agenda is a global system of goals that requires all the goals to be achieved simultaneously.

**BACK TO THE ROOTS: ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT**

Before attempting to answer the question of "What next?", we should look at the original definition of sustainable development and the story behind it. This leads us to the first UN Conference on the Human Environment in 1972, where the then Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi stressed that developing countries had the right to economic development. She asserted that this right must not be sacrificed for the greater good of environmental conservation and that both goals should be pursued in parallel. This concurrency was later enshrined in the Brundtland definition: sustainable development means bringing about economic development worldwide while at the same time protecting the environment and the climate. And this is precisely what Klaus Töpfer, Germany's former environment minister and executive director of the UN Environment Programme, dedicated his life to achieving. There is a lack of voices such as his nowadays.

The 2030 Agenda reflects this core vision, which is all too often forgotten: it aims to ensure that basic human needs are met worldwide (SDGs 1–6) – which does not mean offering yoga classes as part of corporate healthcare management schemes, as European companies like to boast about in their sustainability reports. It is also a question of creating an economic system that generates prosperity while reducing inequality (SDGs 7–12). Then there are the environmental and climate protection goals (SDGs 13–15). All of this requires strong institutions and global cooperation (SDGs 16–17).

Many actors in politics and business lack an in-depth understanding of the complex interconnections. Only those with a sense of the interplay between ecological, economic and social aspects can take action that does not ignore the fact that doing justice to the 2030 Agenda means addressing it as a global system of goals.

It is vital to formulate a positive vision of the future – in many places, such optimism appears to have been lost. The German public increasingly associates sustainability with proscriptive rules, with a loss of prosperity and with bureaucracy. What seems to have been forgotten is that the 2030 Agenda essentially entails an extremely positive promise: successfully protecting the environment and the climate will secure the wellbeing of all humankind.

> "The 17 SDGs laid down in the 2030 Agenda will not be reached by 2030."

## COOPERATION IS ESSENTIAL

Sustainable development is a supremely global challenge that demands cooperation. There can be no sustainable Germany nor any sustainable company in an unsustainable world. Game theory expert Axel Ockenfels stresses that climate change is the "greatest cooperation problem in human history".

Climate action can only be successful if it involves everyone, for the only relevant goal is to reach global net zero. Unilateral national approaches are not helpful and often even prove counterproductive because they weaken the trailblazer economically and, rather than eliminating emissions, simply transfer them to other countries. Leading German economic institutes pointed this out just recently. As Simon Stiell, executive secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, also stressed at COP30 in Belém: "Individual national commitments alone are not cutting emissions fast enough". This should certainly resonate with Germany.

Progress will not be possible without a cooperative approach between states, businesses, civil society and consumers that also reflects the development needs of the Global South. The necessary gigantic financial burden can only be shouldered jointly. In the area of development cooperation, these interconnections offer a great opportunity to leverage climate action to address other issues too. To this end, development cooperation actors should strive for much greater interaction with the private sector.

## THE PARIS AGREEMENT – NEGLECTED DETAILS

The two-degree target stipulated in the Paris Agreement can only be reached if the international community of states works together. It is not surprising that global carbon emissions are continuing to rise steadily. A glance at the climate targets agreed by the signatory states reveals that the targets of industrialised and developing countries differ considerably and that industrialised countries have a dual responsibility. Absolute carbon reduction targets were set for them, whereas developing countries are obliged "merely" to improve the carbon intensity of their GDP growth. This means that their carbon emissions are even allowed to increase – albeit less sharply than GDP – if they see economic growth. This is where the maxim proclaimed by Indira Gandhi more than 50 years ago comes into play: environmental and climate protection must not hinder development.

A second fundamental difference is that most climate targets for developing countries are conditional: they must and can only be reached if substantial funding is made available by industrialised countries – according to the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

The industrialised countries are thus facing a double task: they must not only achieve their own targets but also support developing countries in reaching theirs. The final declaration at COP29 in Baku in 2024 noted that $ 1.3 trillion per year needs to be raised by public and private sources by 2035 in order to help developing countries reach their targets. This is a huge joint fundraising challenge that has never been even remotely achieved in the past. While Germany made nearly € 12 billion available for international climate action in 2024, Kenya alone will require € 9 billion of international support per year between 2031 and 2035 – as it states in its latest NDC (Nationally Determined Contribution) report.

## THE ORDER OF THE DAY

The situation described above makes it imperative to use the limited financial resources efficiently. This must be the order of the day. For Germany and other industrialised countries, it's not about eliminating the last tonne of carbon at home, whatever the cost. Instead, it's about internationally deploying the funds available for climate action with maximum effectiveness, taking advantage for example of Article 6 of the Paris Agreement. It permits states to cooperate internationally to jointly reduce emissions. In this way, industrialised countries will be able to reach their own climate goals more cheaply while at the same time supporting developing countries in reaching their targets.

This will also allow private actors such as companies to contribute to international climate action in ways that benefit other SDGs too. This is precisely what the Development and Climate Alliance established by Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development in 2018 advocates. It should finally receive the public recognition and clear political support that this cause deserves. The foundation supports companies, institutions and private individuals who voluntarily pursue climate action projects in countries of the Global South.

## WAYS TO MOVE FORWARD

International climate funding is a lever for development and thus for the 2030 Agenda as a whole. It urgently needs

> “It is vital to formulate a positive vision of the future – in many places, such optimism appears to have been lost.”

to be expanded. To this end, development cooperation actors should urge Germany to live up to its dual responsibility as an industrialised country and support the achievement of the climate targets of the Global South far more comprehensively than before. In addition, cooperation with the private sector should be massively stepped up, as it must make a significant contribution to international climate funding.

Who should be campaigning most emphatically for this to happen if not the development cooperation sector? Climate change, after all, is one of the big threats that could jeopardise the development progress made so far. At the same time, it offers perhaps the greatest opportunity for much wider development cooperation: without development there can be no successful climate action – it is vital to understand and ensure broad-based acceptance of this fact in society. Anyone wishing to succeed in climate action must dedicate themselves also to development cooperation.

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## MASTHEAD | IMPRINT

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