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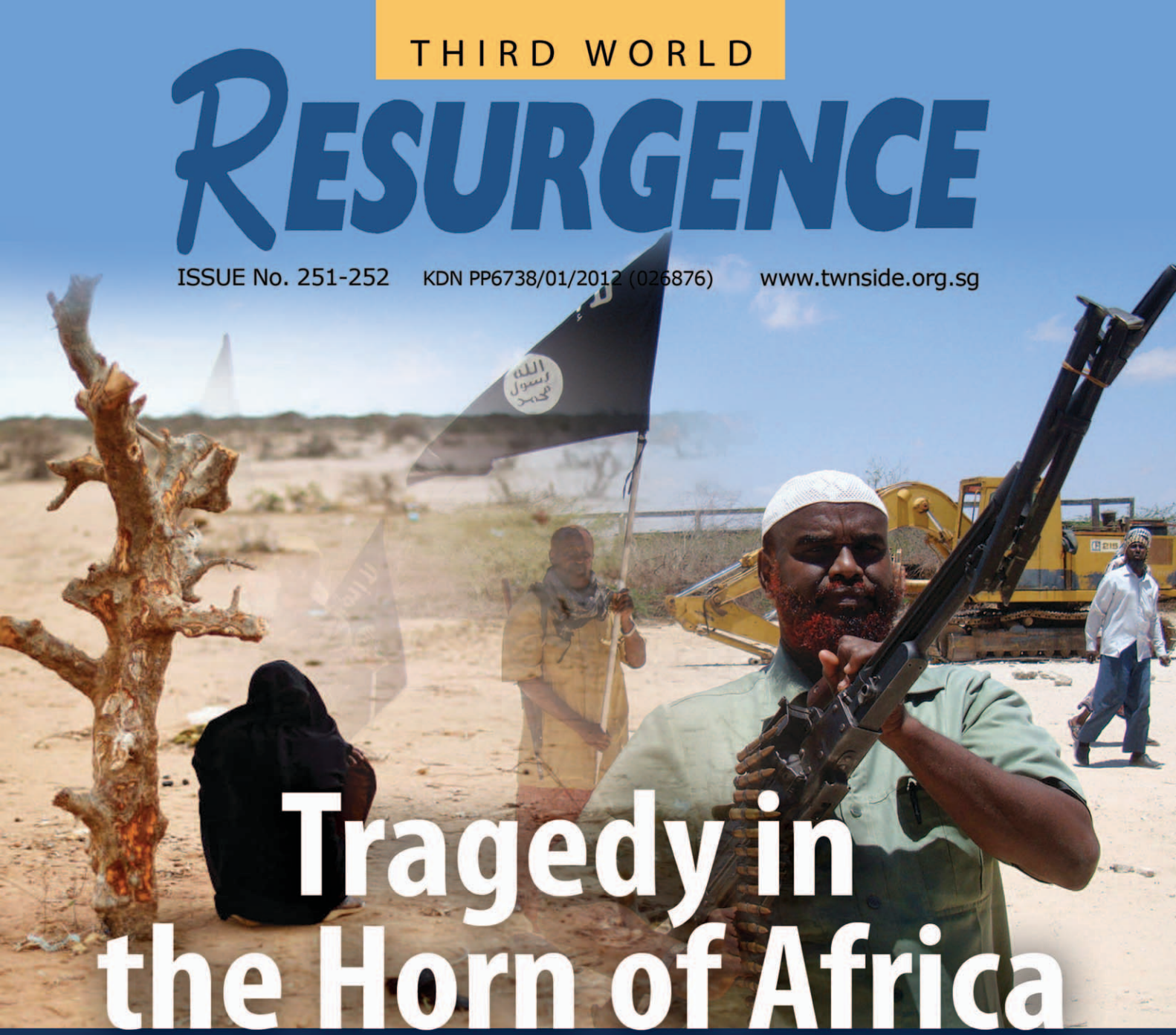

Tragedy in the Horn of Africa

Drought, famine and conflict

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Editor's Note

IT is an all-too-familiar sight on our television screens: the figures of shrunken and emaciated African children, women and men trudging to refugee camps, barely clinging to life. And when we are informed that this is the result of drought and famine in the Horn of Africa, we are disposed to conclude, on the basis of the information furnished, that once again the vagaries of Nature are at play.

There is no denying that weather patterns in this part of the world are often erratic, partly due to the operations of La Nina which reduces precipitation. But it is also becoming increasingly evident that global warming has become a major determinant in the making of such droughts. This, as we are all aware, is the product of human action. Hence it is no longer open to us to solely blame Mother Nature for this problem.

Other factors which have directly contributed to the making of drought such as ecological degradation and desertification are also the product of human activity. There can be no doubt that these processes have exacerbated such recurrent crises in the Horn of Africa.

But it is necessary to add that while drought is no stranger to this part of the world, the communities here have historically proved resilient in adapting their livelihoods and devising coping mechanisms to meet these adversities. Their failure and helplessness since the 1970s to withstand such shocks has been largely the product of political, social and economic processes which have destroyed these traditional management strategies designed to cope with or reduce the risk of drought. To put it in another way, it is these processes which have been responsible for transforming *droughts* (a condition of dry weather) into *famines* (a condition of lack of access to food).

While people from all the countries in the Horn of Africa (Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia) have been the victims of such processes, it is Somalia which exemplifies most acutely the terrifying outcome of their impact.

For one, Somalia has been without a central government in full control of its national territory since 1991. After the fall of the Siyad Barre government in that year, the country has been rent by civil war. This was largely the product of the struggle for resources among local elites who have shown a deplorable incapacity to unite for the greater good. But it would be a travesty of truth to ignore the fact that intervention by foreign countries has also been responsible for a state of affairs where there is no government worth speaking about to organise even the relief effort.

But well before the political collapse of the state, the socioeconomic foundations which supported the stability of the state had already been undermined. Livestock farming and food production had been the mainstay of Somalia's economy. In pre-colonial times, livestock farming was a communitarian endeavour, but colonial restructuring transformed it into a commercial enterprise with the rise of a class of export merchants.

Unsettling as it was, this new orientation of the economy under which cattle, from being a means of subsistence, became a commodity for export, did not upset the delicate symbiotic balance between the pastoral and the farm sectors. However, when the country came under the tutelage of the International Monetary Fund in the 1980s, the rupture was almost complete as the whole thrust of the IMF structural adjustment plans was to create an export-led economy.

All this affected not only the prices of livestock (now subject to the vagaries of the world and regional markets) but the economy as a whole. This was because livestock farming had been the dominant sector of the Somali economy since the 1960s. Production for export affected the size and composition of the livestock reared (cattle for meat in the Middle East was favoured over the camel despite the greater subsistence value, mobility and ecological and drought resilience of the latter). Naturally, large-scale production for export impacted adversely on the country's ecology and environment as this led to overgrazing and exploitation of marginal lands and traditionally conserved areas.

Likewise the IMF programmes had a debilitating impact on the farm sector. The whole emphasis on cash crops for the export market was at the expense of subsistence farming. The policy of economic deregulation resulted in the impoverishment of subsistence farmers as it opened up the domestic sector to cheaper crop imports from abroad. The liberalisation of land tenure laws gave rise to the emergence of a rentier class of bureaucrats, army officers and merchants who appropriated the best lands, marginalising genuine peasant farmers.

While the process of undoing the ecological, environmental and other damage to the Horn of Africa and the even more daunting task of re-establishing a state in Somalia must remain a long-term goal, the more immediate task now is to ensure proper and adequate relief for the famine victims. In this respect, it is surely something of an international scandal that even though warnings about the imminence of this famine were clearly and unambiguously sounded a year ago, the response of the world community has been so feeble. After so many lives have been needlessly lost or maimed and with the lives of some 12 million others in the balance, one can only hope that the international community will at last begin to move to take decisive action.

Our cover story for this issue focuses on this humanitarian disaster in the Horn of Africa. After a consideration of the climatic, ecological and environmental factors in the making of this crisis, we turn the spotlight on the case of Somalia which highlights the political and socioeconomic dimensions of the catastrophe. We conclude with some articles which probe possible remedial solutions to some aspects of the problem of drought and famine in this region.

— The Editors

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The face of famine in Somalia. Although it has been attributed to natural causes, the tragedy in the Horn of Africa region is actually largely manmade. 6

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Problems of US health care are rooted in the private sector

One attempt to discredit President Obama's health care programme has been the insidious claim that high US health care costs are the result of government involvement in the sector.

Mark Weisbrot

A RECENT report by McKinsey and Company was seized upon by opponents of health care reform to create a new myth: that President Obama's health insurance reform (the 2010 Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act – PPACA) will cause huge numbers of employers to drop health insurance coverage that they currently provide for employees.

The McKinsey study was soon shown to be worthless, and McKinsey itself acknowledged that it 'was not intended as predictive economic analysis'. But the myth seems to not be completely dead yet. For a more reasonable estimate of the impact of the health insurance reform, we can look to the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office. They estimated that the number of people (including family members) covered by employment-based insurance would be about 1.8% fewer in 2019, as a result of the PPACA legislation. Of course, this is more than counter-balanced by the fact that the percentage of the (non-elderly) population with insurance would increase from 82% to 92% – the main purpose of the reform.

Right-wingers, insurance companies, and other opponents of health care reform in the United States are always looking for ways to blame the government for the failures of our health care system. But the simple truth is that they have it backwards: our problems with health care are firmly rooted in the private sector. That is why the average high-income country – where government is vastly more involved in health care – spends half as much per person on health care as we do, and has better health outcomes.

That is why even Medicare – which has to pay for health care services and drugs at costs inflated by our dysfunctional private health care sector – has still proven to be much more efficient than private insurance. As Nobel laureate economist Paul Krugman recently pointed out, from 1969-2009, Medicare spending per person rose 400%, adjusted for inflation; private insurance premiums, also adjusted for inflation, rose 700%.

The most effective way to make the US health care system affordable would have been to expand the Medicare programme to everyone.

The most effective way to insure everyone and make our health care system affordable would have been to expand Medicare to everyone, while beginning the process of reducing costs through negotiation with, and restructuring incentives for, the private sector. The private insurance companies use up hundreds of billions annually on administrative costs, marketing, and other waste – which is what you would expect from companies who maximise profit by insuring the healthy and trying to avoid paying for the sick.

We also spend nearly $300 billion on pharmaceuticals each year, most of which is waste due to the patent monopolies of pharmaceutical companies. We could eliminate most of this waste through further public financing of pharmaceutical research, with new drugs sold as low-cost generics. Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders has introduced legislation in the Senate to realise these savings.

A distant second best reform, as compared with Medicare for all, would have been to include in Obama's health care reform a public option for employers and individuals to buy into. This would at least have provided some competition from a more efficient public sector to help control costs. But unfortunately, the insurance and pharmaceutical companies' lobbies proved to have a more powerful influence on our government than the voice of the people. This is another sad result of our dysfunctional health care system: The winners – waste for us is income for them – have a veto over health care reform.

It remains to be seen whether the PPACA will be a step toward more comprehensive, effective reform that gives us Medicare for all. In the meantime, the right will try to blame the government and the legislation itself for rising health care costs and other failures of our health care system. But in fact these result from the legislation not having gone far enough to rein in the private sector. ◆

Mark Weisbrot is co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR) in Washington, DC. He is also president of Just Foreign Policy. This article is reproduced from the CEPR website, www.cepr.net.

Filipinos to remain at the mercy of oligarchs

In June this year, the Philippines celebrated the 150th birth anniversary of its national hero, Jose Rizal, who was executed by the Spanish colonialists. Rizal believed that the only justification for national liberation was the restoration of the dignity of the people, saying '... why independence, if the slaves of today will be the tyrants of tomorrow?' In light of this, the following analysis of the country's economy makes uncomfortable reading.

Nick Legaspi

THE Philippines, which claims to be the first democratic government in Asia, is actually ruled by oligarchs.

'The oligarchs still rule the country, and Filipinos will forever be the victims of their profiteering,' says political science professor Benito Lim of the Ateneo de Manila University.

Lim says the oligarchs can be controlled but it will require strong political will. Asked if President Benigno S Aquino III, who continues to enjoy high popularity and trust ratings, can do it, Lim responds: '*Mukhang hindi siya pinakikinggan. Maliit ang boses*. [It seems nobody listens to him. Weak.]'

Members of the oligarchy in the Philippines have 'little corners' of their own and hardly get out of their own spheres of industries, apparently realising that if they resort to competition, one of them will fall.

'In general, we see no competition among the oligarchs because the role of the oligarchs is chasing after profits,' Lim notes. 'There is no crossing of swords resulting in big competition except for the PLDT-Globe dispute.'

On the other hand, everybody wants to be on top. 'Right now, Henry Sy is the richest,' Lim relates, 'but others continue to aspire for that position.'

Political analyst Alex Magno says oligarchy is a term in political science which applies to a government controlled by a group. Loosely used, oligarchy can apply to the dominance of the national economy by a few individuals or a group.

Imperfect regulatory structure

'With an imperfect regulatory structure and uneven access to opportunities the tendency is for a few to control the economy,' Magno explains.

He says oligarchs in the Philippines are not so different from those in other countries – 'they are protected and nourished by an imperfect regulatory structure.'

Asiasec Equities, in a recent report, cites the situation in the domestic cement industry.

According to the report, the cement industry has had little investment in new capacity for the past 15 years after the 'Big Three' foreign players consolidated domestic ownership and controlled practically 90% of industry capacity.

'Instead of building, the big three cement players decommissioned several kilns and reduced domestic capacity to 14mn MT against claimed installed capacity of 22mn MT,' Asiasec relates. 'The current price of cement of US$110/MT is the highest among emerging markets in Asia and the average age of the Philippine cement facilities is over 40 years.'

'There is an apparent "controlled

The Manila headquarters of San Miguel Corp (SMC). Among the conglomerates that dominate the Philippine economy, SMC retains tight control and ownership of its key business units.

supply environment", which is conducive for pricing,' the equities firm avers.

The Russian example

The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines oligarchy as 1) 'a government by the few', or 2) 'a government in which a small group exercises control especially for corrupt and selfish purposes; also: a group exercising such control'.

Wikipedia says oligarchy is 'a form of power structure in which power effectively rests with a small number of people. These people could be distinguished by royalty, wealth, family ties, corporate, or military control.'

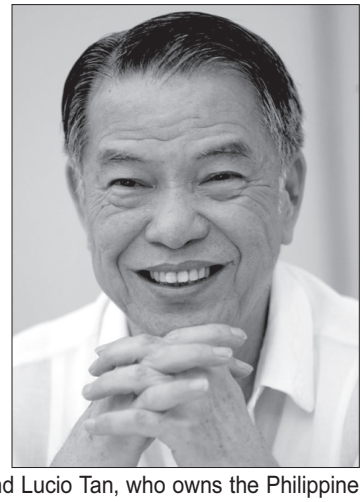
'Aristotle pioneered the use of the term as a synonym for rule by the rich, for which the exact term is plutocracy, but oligarchy is not always a rule by wealth, as oligarchs can simply be a privileged group, and do not have to be connected by bloodlines as in a monarchy,' Wikipedia relates.

As an example of a modern oligarchy, Wikipedia cites what happened after the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991, when privately owned Russia-based multinational corporations, including producers of petroleum, natural gas and metal, became oligarchs.

Wikipedia's narration is strikingly similar to what is happening in the Philippines today: 'Privatisation allowed executives to amass phenomenal wealth and power almost overnight. In May 2004, the Russian edition of *Forbes* identified 36 of these oligarchs as being worth at least $1 billion.'

In the Philippines, *Forbes* magazine listed 11 Filipino billionaires for 2011, up from five for 2010. The new billionaires are: San Miguel Chairman and CEO Eduardo Cojuangco Jr. ($1.4 billion), David Consunji ($1.98 billion) of DMCI Holdings Corp., Enrique Razon ($1.68 billion) of the International Container Terminal Services Inc., Metrobank's George S.K. Ty ($1.1 billion), former Trade and Industry Minister Roberto Ongpin ($1.3 billion) and Jollibee Chairman Tony Tan Caktiong ($1 billion).

The two wealthiest oligarchs in the Philippines are retail and banking magnate Henry Sy...



.... and Lucio Tan, who owns the Philippine National Bank and Allied Banking Corp.

Retailing and banking king Henry Sy remains the richest with a net worth estimated at $7.28 billion, followed by Lucio Tan ($2.88 billion), John Gokongwei Jr. ($2.48 billion), Andrew Tan ($2 billion) and Jaime Zobel de Ayala ($1.78 billion).

Oligarchs won't allow charter change

Senator Manny Villar says oligarchy is the reason why attempts to amend the economic provisions of the Constitution have failed – three presidents (Fidel Ramos, Joseph Estrada and Gloria Macapagal Arroyo) tried to amend the Constitution in the past 15 years, to no avail.

'We're still an oligarchy run by a few families,' Villar says. 'They're happy with the present setup now and they will not allow the Constitution to be tampered with.'

'The media, from what I've seen, is also controlled by groups that do not want to change the Constitution,' the former Senate president adds. 'And that is why any proposal [to amend the Constitution] will be killed right away.'

Villar notes the difficulties encountered by small entrepreneurs in growing their business.

'We always look at foreign investments but we don't look at the local, the small entrepreneurs, who are unable to borrow, unable to access credit because our banking system is controlled by five or six families and they are happy investing in ROPs [government debt papers] or lending to big industries,' the senator relates. 'Right now that is our banking system – it's a cartel and it's getting fewer and bigger through consolidation.'

Villar did not identify the families that control the banking system.

The biggest bank in terms of resources, Banco de Oro, is owned by Henry Sy, who also owns China Bank. George Ty owns the second largest bank, Metropolitan Bank & Trust Corp.

The Ayalas own Bank of the Philippine Islands, the third largest and the most profitable, while Lucio Tan owns the Philippine National Bank and Allied Banking Corp.

Taipan Alfonso Yuchengco owns Rizal Commercial Banking Corp. while the Cebu-based Aboitiz family owns Union Bank.

Then Socioeconomic Secretary Romulo Neri, during a forum organised by the University of the Philippines in 2004, indicated that the oligarchs were the first and foremost to oppose tax measures being proposed by government such as those for sin products, medicine, telecommunications, and power.

In its newsletter, the UP Third World Studies Center and Department of Political Science recalled that 'in 1997, with the passage of the Comprehensive Tax Reform Package, the country's tax effort declined. In one of its provisions, corporations enjoyed a cut in their tax rates along with other numerous tax incentives.'

Oligarchy breeds political dynasties

Philippine Star columnist Carmen N Pedrosa believes that oligarchy has become a culture in the Philippines. 'Our culture is so deeply imbibed with the ambition for wealth and power,' she said in her column 'From a Distance' published by the *Philippine Star* on 10 July 2010. 'So when we blame oligarchs for the sorry state of our country, we must also look into ourselves and say yeh, but we also want to be oligarchs or be friends with an oligarch because that is the system.'

According to Pedrosa, political dynasties are among the effects of oligarchic culture. 'So it should not surprise anyone that in the last two governments we have had children of past presidents, one of them from a very wealthy family,' she said.

President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo is the daughter of President Diosdado Macapagal, while President Benigno Aquino is the son of President Cory Aquino.

'The trouble is that all this is done under cover of democracy,' Pedrosa said. 'We delude ourselves that we are democratic and we have elections to prove that. There will be few who will accept that if we were to think it through, elections merely vote in or vote out leaders from the same small pool of oligarchs or would-be oligarchs.'

'We need to break out of this vicious oligarchic circle,' she stressed. 'Unfortunately, we can only do that by changing our Constitution or launching a revolution, hopefully not a violent one.'

'The oligarchic stranglehold on the Philippine political economy can be loosened by strengthening the bureaucracy, reforming the political party system and amending the Philippine Constitution,' said Romulo Neri. 'Without these reforms, the oligarchic dominance over the state will never be broken.'

The statement of Ateneo's Benito Lim is grim: 'There is harmony among the oligarchs. Filipinos will continue to be at the mercy of the oligarchs.'

7 groups dominate economy

Asiasec's report identifies seven conglomerates that dominate the Philippine economy, without labelling them as oligarchs. These are: San Miguel Corp. (SMC), Ayala Corp., First Pacific, SM Investments Corp., JG Summit, DM Consunji and Aboitiz.

Asiasec says that, among the conglomerates, SMC has a very tight grip – its control and ownership remain substantial in its key business units – compared with the other groups that have neither a super majority interest nor a consolidating stake of 51% in their key businesses.

'Elections merely vote in or vote out leaders from the same small pool of oligarchs or would-be oligarchs.'

SMC has 100% interest in its power generation business, 90% in Petron (fuel and oil), 100% in telecom, 99% in food, 78% in Ginebra, 99% in property (San Miguel Properties Inc.), 70% in Bank of Commerce, 100% in mining (coal) and 100% in airport (Caticlan).

SMC enjoys majority interest in San Miguel Brewery (51%), Metro Rail Transit 7 (51%) and toll roads (51%).

In addition, SMC has a significant minority in other businesses: 37% in the Manila Electric Co., 40% in Liberty Telecom and 35% in Manila North Harbor.

Ayala Corp. has 68% interest in Integrated Micro-electronics Inc., 54% in Ayala Land Inc., 31% in Globe Telecom, 34% in Bank of the Philippine Islands and 43% in Manila Water Co.

Asiasec notes that Ayala Corp's ownership in key businesses it controls such as telecom and banking has not even reached a majority (51%) ownership, in contrast with SMC's controlling and super majority position in most of its businesses.

'The power generation ambition of Ayala Corp., which was welcomed by the market, is in contrast a very small wind-farm (less than 50 MW) vis-a-vis San Miguel's diverse power portfolio (3,145 MW),' Asiasec says.

Hong Kong-based First Pacific, represented by PLDT Chairman Manuel V. Pangilinan, has a controlling interest (100%) in TV5, majority interest in Metro Pacific Investments Corp. (55%) and controlling but not majority interest in Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. (27%), Philex Mining Corp. (46%) and Manila Electric Co. (41%).

Henry Sy's SM Investments Corp. (SMIC) has controlling interest in its department store business (90%) and supermarket (100%), majority interest in SM Prime Holdings (51%), controlling but not majority interest in Banco de Oro (41%) and SM Development Corp. (44%), and significant minority interest in China Bank (20%), Highlands Prime (31%) and Belle Corp. (35%).

'For the SM group, it is worth highlighting that their retail assets (department store and supermarket) are all consolidated under SMIC and remain super majority,' Asiasec says. 'They have a majority controlling interest in SM Prime, albeit the ownership has been opened to the public, and controlling interest in both SMDC and BDO.'

John Gokongwei's JG Summit has controlling interest in petrochem (80%), majority interest in Universal Robina Corp. (60%), Robinsons Land Corp. (60%), Digital Telecoms (50%) and Cebu Air (65%), and a significant minority in UIC (32%).

The Aboitiz group controls Pilmico (100%) and Aboitiz Power (76%) and has controlling but not majority stake in Accuria, its transportation business, at 49.5%.

DMCI has a 100% stake in DMCI Homes, 56% in Semirara Mining Corp. and 33% in Maynilad Water Services Inc. ◆

Nick Legaspi is Managing Editor of the Philippine weekly business newsmagazine BizNews Asia*, from which this article is reproduced (July 18-25, 2011 issue).*

Drought-induced humanitarian crisis unfolds in Horn of Africa

As once again famine stalks grimly through the Horn of Africa, the causes of this catastrophe are the subject of debate. *Doreen Stabinsky* contends that the underlying cause of the drought that has metamorphosed into a famine is the slowly changing global climate that is drying out eastern Africa.

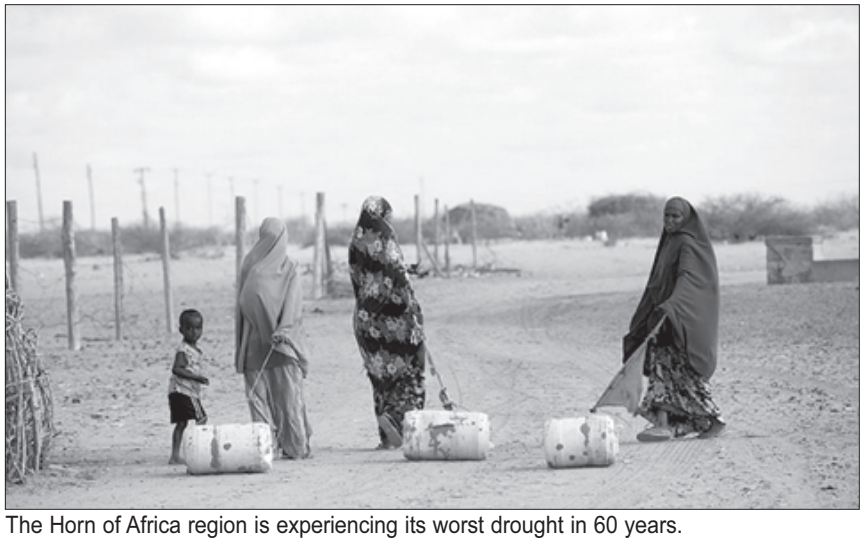
THE last two rainy seasons did not materialise over a major portion of the Horn of Africa. All of Somalia, and large swaths of Ethiopia, Kenya, Djibouti and northern Uganda are now experiencing their worst drought in 60 years.

Climate refugees are streaming from Somalia into camps in Ethiopia and Kenya by the tens of thousands, and international organisations are ringing alarm bells in the media over the impending humanitarian catastrophe.

The drought conditions have most severely affected pastoralists and their animals, with the largest impacts in regions of northern Kenya, southern Ethiopia and Somalia where over 65% of the population are pastoralists. In some areas, up to 60% of the animals have already died from lack of water and pasture, depriving herders of their only source of income and food. Agricultural experts predict half a million or more livestock deaths this year.

Pastoralists and agro-pastoralists in the region are increasingly at risk from climate change. More frequent droughts, including a recent drought in 2008-2009, have reduced overall livestock holdings, decreasing the protein and milk available to families. For the animals that remain now, milk productivity is low, contributing further to malnutrition among the affected populations.

To compound the already dire situation, grain prices are skyrocketing throughout the region. Red sorghum in Somalia is now over 240% its price from a few months ago. Yellow maize in Jiiga, Ethiopia, costs 117% above last year's price; white maize in northern Kenya 58% more.



The Horn of Africa region is experiencing its worst drought in 60 years.

For those pastoralists and agro-pastoralists who still have animals to sell, due to low prices of livestock and increases in the price of grain, their terms of trade have significantly decreased – the 90-kilogramme sack of maize they used to purchase for one or two goats now costs five. Lack of food, animals, or purchasing power is driving tens of thousands of climate refugees to migrate in search of food, water and pasture.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, in a report released on 10 June, estimates that overall food security conditions across the region will continue to deteriorate in the coming months, with no likelihood of improvement until early 2012 – if the rains return in October.

Present estimates of vulnerable populations are 3.5 million in Kenya, 3.2 million in Ethiopia, 2.5 million in Somalia and 120,000 in Djibouti.

Meteorologists are blaming the drought on a La Nina event – a periodic shift in global precipitation patterns that, among other changes, can dramatically reduce rainfall in eastern Africa (and that is also responsible for the record rains and massive flooding in Australia last year). In some areas, rains have failed for three or more consecutive rainy seasons, which normally occur between March and June and between October and December every year.

The more significant rains of March to June (known as the 'long rains' in Kenya and the 'belg' rains in Ethiopia) typically bring 40-80% of the yearly rainfall. Late, erratic and insufficient rains in these past months have tipped the region over the edge, following on the heels of one of the driest October-to-December seasons ever.

Climate change

But to blame the drought on La Nina is to miss an important underlying cause – the slowly changing glo-

bal climate that is drying out eastern Africa.

Professors Park Williams and Chris Funk from the University of California at Santa Barbara have been calling attention to the steady decrease in the region's long rains during the last 30 years (35-45% below normal), associated with the steady increase in sea surface temperatures of the Indian Ocean due to increasing global temperatures.

Higher sea surface temperatures have led to changes in precipitation patterns so that rain now falls over the Indian Ocean rather than the Horn of Africa.

Exacerbating the consequences of decreased rainfall is the fact that with higher air temperatures, water evaporates more quickly from land. For this reason, droughts under climate change are expected to be more frequent and more intense – what scientists are calling 'global-change-type droughts'.'

According to the most recent analysis of the World Meteorological Organisation, the year 2010 was the hottest year on record in Africa. And the five hottest years in Africa on record have occurred since 2003.

The countries in east Africa have seen average temperatures a full one degree Centigrade above normal every year for the last eight years. There can be no doubt that the deepening drought in the Horn of Africa is a 'global-change-type drought'.

Climate refugees are streaming from Somalia into camps in Ethiopia and Kenya.

Arid outlook

Even more alarming than the millions likely to be affected by the drought before the end of the year is the prediction that droughts like this one will become more common under climate change. As the atmosphere warms further, soil moisture levels will decline.

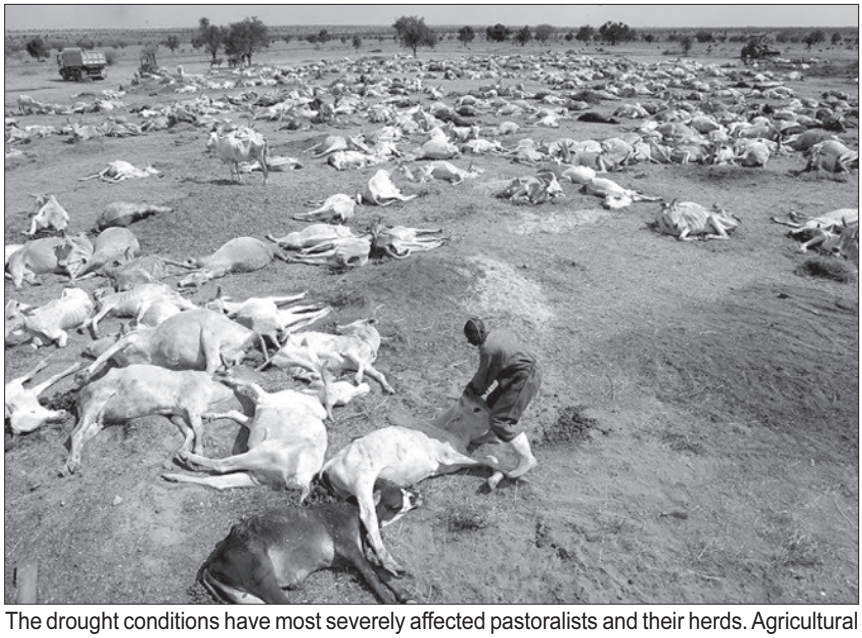
Scientists expect that the African continent will warm more, and more quickly, than the global average, with 1.5 times the global average warming expected.

Rainfall is expected to diminish over much of Africa. Moreover, rainfall events are likely to increase in severity – more water will fall in shorter periods of time. Even if a region continues to receive an average amount of rainfall over the year, if the rain comes in shorter, more intense events, more of the rain will run off and less will be absorbed by soils.

So even though the atmosphere will hold more moisture, when the rain falls, it will not necessarily translate into precipitation useful for farmers.

And in the Horn of Africa, according to the University of California research scientists, the drying trend of the last 30 years will continue.

As they concluded in a scientific paper published earlier this year specifically about the human fingerprint on droughts in eastern Africa: 'Drier, rather than wetter conditions in the century ahead appear likely. The anthropogenic Indian Ocean warming response appears to be one of the most consistent and well-understood responses to greenhouse gas emissions. This anthropogenic warming appears to have already significantly altered the earth's largest circulation feature and impacted its most food insecure inhabitants.' ◆


The drought conditions have most severely affected pastoralists and their herds. Agricultural experts predict half a million or more livestock deaths this year.

Doreen Stabinsky is Professor of Global Environmental Politics at College of the Atlantic in Maine, USA and she also closely follows the UN climate negotiations. This article is reproduced from the South-North Development Monitor (SUNS*, No. 7187, 11 July 2011), which is published by the Third World Network.*

Environmental degradation in the Greater Horn of Africa: Some impacts and future implications

Environmental degradation has been a major contributory factor in the making of droughts and famines. Writing against the backdrop of the 2009 famine that ravaged the Horn of Africa region, *Kidane Mengisteab* examines some of the important human activities which have contributed to the region's environmental degradation and their resulting impacts.

THE Horn of Africa has faced an alarming rate of environmental degradation, which has produced famines, massive economic and social dislocations, and widespread resource-based conflicts. Over the last half a century the region's temperature has shown a rising trend while rainfall has had a decreasing trend. During the same time period large parts of the region, which are arid or semi-arid, have faced rapid rates of degradation, in the form of deforestation, loss of vegetation and biodiversity, increased soil erosion, desiccation, and desertification. While the causes for the worsening degradation may not be fully understood, they relate to global climatic changes and various types of local human activities. The actual effects and potential implications of the growing rates of degradation are also hard to map out accurately. There is little doubt, however, that they pose a growing threat to human security in the region.

This article has four objectives. The first part of the article attempts to examine the most important local human activities that have contributed to the region's environmental degradation. The second part examines some of the massive socioeconomic dislocations, including social conflicts, that have resulted from the environmental degradation. The third part attempts to shed light on the future potential implications, if the countries of the region fail to contain the worsening degradation process. The concluding part briefly explores the factors that are likely to hinder the region's ability to contain the pending environmental crisis by linking the region's environmental crisis with its broader socioeconomic conditions.

A crocodile carcass lies on the dried-up bed of Lake Kamnarok in Kenya. With increasing frequency of droughts, countries in the Horn of Africa region are facing growing water shortages.

Factors behind environmental degradation

As noted above, the Horn of Africa's environmental crisis is attributable to two broad factors. One relates to global climatic changes, which have affected many regions of the world, albeit differently. The second relates to regional human activities that lead to changes in land use and land cover. While there is much debate about the factors that cause global climatic changes, there is little doubt that human activities are major culprits. Global deforestation is related to the increase in the emission of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere. Changes in land use and land cover are important drivers of water, soil, and air pollution. Vegetation removal by land clearing and harvesting of trees leaves soils vulnerable to erosion. Mining and industrial emissions are also major contributors to global warming through emission of various greenhouse gases to the atmosphere. The destruction of the ozone layer by the emission of ozone-depleting substances, including chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and nitrous oxide, is said to be a major factor in global climatic changes. Agricultural chemicals, including herbicides and pesticides, are also contaminants of water and soil and pose health risks to humans and animals. Dumping toxic waste in the high seas, which

perhaps constitutes the cruelest human activity, has also been a factor of degradation.

The Horn of Africa is one of the regions of the world which have been most seriously affected by the adverse impacts of global climatic changes, although the region is an insignificant player in the production of the industrial emissions that generate global warming. The attention of this article, however, is on the role of regional human factors. A range of human activities have contributed to the degradation of the region's environment. Among them is the rapid population growth that has occurred over the last half a century. The region's population has more than doubled since the early 1960s. As a result, notable changes have taken place in the rate, extent, and intensity of land use and land cover. More land is cleared for agriculture and more trees are cut for construction and firewood. Another regional factor that has contributed to the environmental degradation is the resilience of the peasant and pastoral modes of production. Despite rapid growth in urbanisation, the region still hosts the largest clusters of pastoralists in the world. With a growing population and increasing numbers of livestock and longer and more frequent droughts, overgrazing and shortages of quality pasture have become serious problems in many parts of the region.

Declining standards of living and declining adherence to traditional conservation measures are other factors. Many of the communities in the Horn of Africa, such as the Borona of southern Ethiopia, the Meru and the Mijikenda of central and coastal Kenya respectively, had a strong culture of environmental conservation. With downward pressure on their standard of living, however, their traditional conservation measures are increasingly undermined. Marginal and more vulnerable land is increasingly brought under cultivation and grazing, due to growing land constraint. It is also rather common for peasants and nomads to engage in cutting of trees to sell wood and charcoal in order to earn a living, even though such activities are viewed as undignified, if not socially taboo, in much of the region.

A worker at a flower farm run by a foreign company in Ethiopia. In recent years, governments in the Horn of Africa region have been awarding land to foreign investors for large-scale commercial farming.

Land takings by the state

Another factor that has exacerbated the degradation of the region's environment is appropriation of communal lands by the state. Oblivious to the land constraint and land-based communal conflicts their populations face, governments in the region have increasingly engaged in awarding land concessions to foreign investors, extinguishing the traditional land rights of their citizens. The governments of the region have been giving land concessions to corporations in extractive industries for decades. In recent years, however, they have also engaged in awarding land to foreign investors in large-scale commercial farming.

Growing food markets in the land or water deficit in Middle Eastern and Asian countries, rising global food prices, and a growing demand for biofuels are some of the factors that have stimulated investments in farmlands in the region, as in many other parts of Africa. Middle Eastern countries, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Kuwait, along with China, South Korea, and Egypt, are among the newcomers investing in farmland in the Greater Horn region. Sudan and Ethiopia, in particular, have become major targets. Data on the magnitude of land concessions awarded to commercial farmers and on the fate of those stripped of their lands are not easy to assemble, partly because the transactions lack transparency and partly because the process of land-taking is still unfolding. Anecdotal data, however, suggest that land grabs and evictions of peasants and pastoralists are taking place at a rapid rate.

The extractive industries sector is relatively small in the countries of the Horn of Africa. Yet the governments in the region have granted significant land concessions to foreign investors in the sector. Although the exact figures remain unknown, anecdotal evidence suggests that the concessions are significant enough to have an impact on the environment. The countries of the region, with the exception of Djibouti, whose mineral resources seem to be limited, have made efforts to expand their extractive industries.

Despite the absence of accurate estimates, there is little doubt that considerable land is alienated from customary holders in the region. There is also little doubt that the expansion of extractive industries and commercial farming has contributed

to environmental degradation both directly and indirectly. Both mining and commercial farming entail the clearing of land, contributing to deforestation, decline in vegetation cover, soil erosion, desiccation and desertification. They also contribute to degradation of the environment by emitting various pollutants to the air, water and soil. Oil spills in Sudan have, for example, become major sources of water and soil pollution.

Land takings have also contributed to the environmental degradation indirectly. They have exacerbated the land, pasture, and water constraints the peasants and nomads in the region face. Such constraints, of course, worsen the problems of overgrazing and over-farming. Since little compensation is given to those who are displaced, the land takings also contribute to the problems of unemployment, underemployment, and declining standards of living of communities, which, in turn, resort to unsustainable use of land and forest resources.

A mining site in Kenya. Significant land concessions have been granted to foreign investors in the extractive industries sector in the Horn region.

Some critical impacts of the environmental degradation

The environmental degradation has already produced serious socio-economic problems in the Horn of Africa region. Among the most conspicuous and serious impacts have been famines and food insecurity. With the rains becoming more erratic and droughts becoming more frequent and of longer duration, the Horn of Africa has suffered periodic famines. Ethiopia's 1974 and 1984 famines are the most devastating the region has witnessed in recent years. Beyond these large-scale famines, however, pastoralist and peasant populations in the region regularly face famines and malnutrition, along with livestock starvation. Localised famines have become rather regular occurrences in every country of the region.

The region is also witnessing a growing number of climate refugees. Persistent droughts are forcing peasants and nomads to flock to cities or refugee camps to avoid starvation. The numbers of climate refugees and displacements are difficult to estimate since there are other factors that cause displacements. Climate-induced displacements have become a growing problem. UN officials, for example, estimate that about 10% of the nearly 300,000 refugees at the Dadaab refugee camp in northern Kenya are climate refugees (Edmund Sanders, 25 October 2009).

Water and energy crisis

With increasing frequency of droughts, almost all of the countries in the region are facing growing water and power shortages that are producing serious economic disruptions not only in the peasant and pastoral sectors but also in other sectors of the economy. In July 2009, for example, newspapers in Kenya reported that Lake Kamnarok in Kenya's Rift Valley dried up. The death of the lake brought about the doom of wildlife including an estimated 10,000 crocodiles. Water points in Lake Nakuru National Park also dried up while Lake Naivasha shrank considerably. Nairobi's three reservoirs at Ndakaini, Sasumua, and Mambasa were also dangerously low, causing a water crisis in Nairobi. In addition, the critical power-generating station on the Tana River in Kenya had to be shut down due to a fall in its dam's water levels, causing power shortages. Some factories had to shut down in Nakuru, including Flamingo Bottlers, Coil Product Kenya Limited and Kapi Limited, due to the water crisis.

During the same period Ethiopia witnessed the death of Lake Haramaya in the Oromiya region. The country had also to engage in water and electricity rationing, due to low water levels of power-generating dams. Shortage of water caused the rationing of power, which is likely to have affected the country's overall economy. Even gas stations in various parts of the country were either idle or operating in shifts, due to rationing of power.

The water and energy crisis is not limited to Kenya and Ethiopia. Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan and even parts of Uganda have also faced serious drought problems. The dry river bed that cuts through Hargeisa, in Somaliland, gives no indication that the city of roughly 900,000 inhabitants once was blessed with a river flowing through it.

Soil erosion, decline of productivity and extreme poverty

Even when the rains come, they have been of shorter duration. They

have also been erratic, sporadic, and torrential, causing massive soil erosion. While topsoil is said to be Ethiopia's largest export, all the other countries in the region face serious erosion problems. A combination of droughts when the rains fail and massive soil erosion when they come has, thus, subjected the inhabitants of the region to declining agricultural productivity and quality of pastures and has made their way of life increasingly more precarious.

Communal conflicts

Another major problem associated with environmental degradation is communal conflicts. The relationship between environmental degradation and conflict is often disputed (Salehyan, 2008). The Horn of Africa, however, provides several cases of conflicts which are at least exacerbated if not entirely caused by environmental degradation.

There is little doubt, for instance, that the worsening environmental degradation has undermined the institutional mechanisms that govern access to land and water in the region. Incursions of pastoralists across customary communal and international boundaries in search of water and pasture have become common occurrences and have led to various clashes in the region. The gruesome conflict in Darfur clearly has links with dislocations brought about by environmental degradation, albeit largely indirectly. Water and land scarcity engendered by persistent droughts have undermined the traditional institutions that governed access to these vital resources by the different claimants, thereby creating conditions for conflicts.

The periodic conflicts between the Borona and Guji and Borona and Somali populations in south-eastern Ethiopia are also, at least in part, caused by shortages of water and pasture exacerbated, if not triggered, by environmental conditions. Environmental degradation is also a factor in the conflicts between the Turkana, Pokot and Karamoja and those between the Pian Karamojong and Bokora ethnic groups in Kenya and Uganda. Cattle rustling, due to depletion of stock by droughts, has also led to many inter-communal conflicts in the region, including those between the Lou-Nuer and Murle groups in the Jonglei of Southern Sudan.

The region could face mega-droughts that lead to worsening poverty rates and widespread famines. More frequent occurrences of such conditions are, in turn, likely to bring about the end of the traditional subsistence farming and nomadic modes of production.

At state level, water scarcity is beginning to build tensions among countries. Ethiopia and Kenya have, for example, faced tensions over the waters of the Gilgel Gibe III hydroelectric dam, under construction by Ethiopia over a section of the Omo River that supplies water to Lake Turkana in northern Kenya. The concern on the part of Kenya is, of course, that the construction of the dam might lead to reduction of the volume of water flowing to Lake Turkana. The water flow to the lake should not be affected significantly by the dam, provided that the dam is used for hydroelectric power generation only. The Nile countries have also, so far, failed to reach an agreement on how to share the Nile water.

Health problems

The water and energy crisis has, of course, tremendous implications for the overall economy of the region. It also has serious implications for health. Cases of cholera are, for example, said to be rising in the region, due to sanitation problems.

Wildlife-human conflicts

Shortage of agricultural land and pasture is also a major threat to the co-existence of humans and wildlife as they have to compete for the same resources. The lucrative tourist industry in the region can be damaged if the wildlife habitat is not protected.

Future potential implications of unmitigated environmental degradation

The more the environment is degraded, the more unsustainable land use patterns become, as noted earlier. There is thus little reason to expect that the degradation trend of the last half a century will not continue at an accelerated rate without sustained intervention by all stakeholders in the region, especially the states. If the trend is allowed to continue, the implications for human security in the region are likely to be grave.

One potential implication is that the region can face mega-droughts that lead to worsening poverty rates and widespread famines. More frequent occurrences of such conditions are, in turn, likely to bring about the end of the traditional subsistence farming and nomadic modes of production. These two economic systems, which currently employ over 70% of the region's population, would simply cease to be viable. The region will then face a rapid and large-scale rural-urban migration.

The states of the region under their existing economic systems are simply unlikely to be able to deal with such demographic movements. Huge rates of urban unemployment and urban congestion, along with poor health and educational services, can make the region more unstable than it already is. All these problems are also likely to be exacerbated by lower growth rates, due to increasingly punishing temperatures. The region would also likely lose some of its exports, including livestock and cash crops, which will contribute to a general economic crisis triggered by worsening water and energy shortages.

Can the degradation process be reversed?

As pointed out at the outset of the article, the Horn of Africa's environmental degradation is attributable to global climatic changes and regional human activities. Reversing the global factors, even if possible, is beyond the region's control. Controlling the regional human activities, which contribute to the degradation by changing land use and land cover patterns, is within the region's reach, however. It is also possible, at least theoretically, to reverse the degradation process since there are many policy options that can positively change land use and land cover patterns in the region. Development policy geared towards transforming the subsistence farmers and pastoralists can, for example, create non-farming jobs for those interested in moving to new occupations. This will relieve the land and pasture pressure currently faced by the populations in the most degraded areas and enable them to practise more sustainable resource-use measures. Land cover can also be gradually restored by controlling overgrazing and cutting of trees as well as through large-scale reforestation activities. Rural electrification is also likely to help reduce reliance on wood energy and the cutting of trees for fuel.

Reversing the degradation process would be neither easy nor quick; nevertheless, policies such as those identified above can slowly begin to rehabilitate the environment. The restorative process, however, requires political commitment by the states of the region to reorient their development strategy. It also requires their ability to coordinate the efforts of all stakeholders. Failure by a single country, especially one of the larger ones, such as Ethiopia, to implement the restorative policies can undermine the efforts of all the rest, since the effects of environmental degradation cannot be confined to national boundaries. Whether the region's alarming degradation process is reversed or the region continues in its present trajectory will thus depend on the political will of the states of the region to reorient their development strategies and to coordinate their restorative measures.

Reasons for pessimism

Given the prevailing political conditions in the region, however, one can hardly be optimistic that the region will rise to the challenge and take the urgently needed measures to reverse the degradation process. The environmental degradation is not the only crisis the Greater Horn has faced. As a matter of fact, the environmental crisis is only one aspect of the general socioeconomic crisis that has ravaged the region.

It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss in detail the region's general socioeconomic conditions. However, it is essential to at least identify the various challenges in order to be able to gauge the region's ability to address the environmental challenges. Among the most critical problems that afflict all the countries of the region are: (1) a crisis of nation-building manifested by various ethnic and religious conflicts; (2) a crisis of state-building manifested by regimes that see politics as a zero-sum game and are preoccupied with monopolising power rather than developing institutions of good governance; (3) opposition groups that mostly aspire to trade places with those in power; (4) a general population that has not yet been able to organise and bring the state under its control; (5) regimes that are incapable of adopting development strategies that advance the interests of their populations; (6) regimes that easily become agents of external powers and interests in an effort to secure external support in extending their stay in power; and (7) regimes that are incapable of promoting meaningful regional cooperation, manifested by the various direct and proxy wars they wage against each other.

Given these conditions, the region is unlikely to effectively address the environmental challenge. Sadly, it seems disaster-bound. ◆

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Droughts do not happen overnight

While calling for urgent relief for drought victims in the Horn of Africa, the executive secretary of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification has emphasised the need for effective long-term solutions, such as the implementation of drought management systems and measures to combat creeping desertification, to tackle the root causes of the famine.

Ramesh Jaura

Luc Gnacadja *(pic)*, Executive Secretary of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification: 'We are the desert-making species on earth.'

AS the international community struggles to provide all possible assistance to more than 11 million people in Ethiopia, Somalia, Djibouti and Kenya – adversely affected by the lack of food and long spell of drought – Executive Secretary of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), Luc Gnacadja, has drawn attention to the often ignored fact that 'droughts do not happen overnight'.

The UNCCD emerged from the Earth Summit in June 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, along with the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The UNCCD was adopted in Paris on 17 June 1994.

While calling on the international community to respond urgently to the unfolding crisis, Gnacadja stressed the need for effective long-term solutions to the root causes of famine in drought-prone regions. Such solutions lie in implementation of drought management systems and measures to put a halt to creeping desertification stemming from acute land degradation in drylands.

After all, neither desertification, nor land degradation, nor droughts are God-given. They are triggered by human activities and climate change, much of which is influenced by human beings.

A widespread but misguided belief is that drylands are wastelands or marginal lands with low productivity and low adaptive capacity where poverty is inevitable, contribute little to national prosperity and yield no good return on investments, Gnacadja told a Forum on Human Security in Switzerland on 15 July.

The fact is rather that drylands comprise one-third of the world land mass and population, 44% of the global food production system, and 50% of the world's livestock. In addition, dry forests are home to the world's largest diversity of mammals whose survival hangs on the arid zone forests.

'Feed me to feed you'

Traditional wisdom has it that dire consequences result from continuously ignoring repeated cries for help by what multiple communities across the globe call Mother Earth: 'Feed me to feed you.' If not handled with care, land suffers from utter degradation and becomes acutely vulnerable to desertification that does not allow even a blade of grass to grow.

Presently, extreme poverty, increased emissions of harmful greenhouse gases, food insecurity and hunger, instability and crisis, increased water stress, biodiversity loss, and migrations are putting a huge stress on land.

This prompted the UNCCD Executive Secretary to declare, 'We are the desert-making species on earth.' Gnacadja added: 'We are the planet's skin disease.' Millions in drylands are being forced to move to more productive land, and this is a major cause of conflict.

It is high time, therefore, to grasp some of the traditional wisdom such as the one enshrined in the Vedas, a large body of texts originating in ancient India some 3,500 years ago.

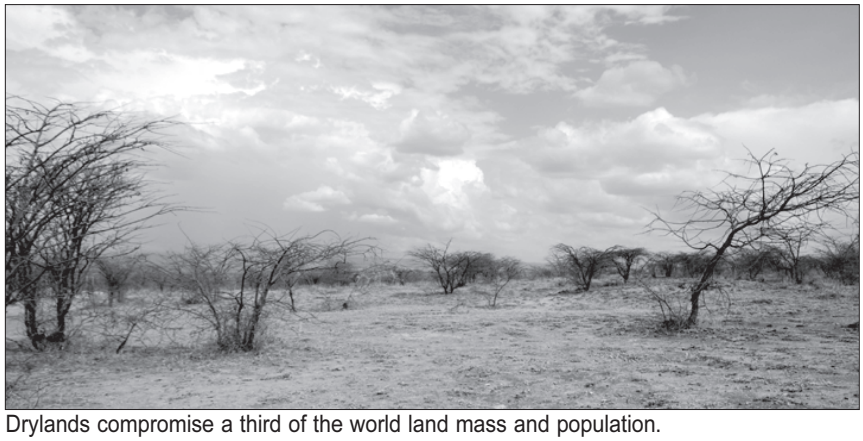
Gnacadja cited one important passage from the Vedas: 'Upon this handful of soil our survival depends. Husband it and it will grow our food, our fuel, and our shelter and surround us with beauty. Abuse it and the soil will collapse and die, taking humanity with it.'

Presently because of the agricultural system being under stress, some 925 million people are going hungry, 80% of them smallholder farmers and landless poor in rural areas. Providing food for an additional three billion people by 2050 requires a 70% increase in global food production.

World food prices are expected to continue to be higher in the next decade. According to the International

Food Policy Research Institute in Washington, land degradation over the next 25 years may reduce global food production by up to 12%, resulting in world food prices increasing by as much as 30%.

The specific challenges when it comes to major drylands are: climatic and ecological challenges that limit production; economic challenges such as low investment, poor infrastructure and limited access to market; policy and institutional challenges involving low national priority, poor land and natural resources governance, limited access to knowledge and information; socio-cultural aspects such as nomadic lifestyles; demography, and conflicts in some countries.



Drylands compromise a third of the world land mass and population.

So much depends on so little

'So much depends on so little, and we are not really tackling the root causes,' Gnacadja rightly pointed out. Humanity must double its food production to feed nine billion people, as the 'vicious cycle of poverty' worsens. Eight out of 10 conflicts in the world are in dryland areas.

'We need to take action, but the good news is that people are taking action at a grassroots level. There is land improvement in many dryland areas, because people are striving to adapt. We need to support their efforts.' He called for a governance for 'holistic management', and a greater focus on 'the forgotten billion', the poorest people in the world.

The costs of inaction are far higher than action, the UNCCD Executive Secretary warned. Desertification and land degradation is closely related to the problems of food security and political stability, a complex mix that all go into 'human security'.

There are a multitude of reasons to advance the fight against desertification, he said:

1. Drylands hold the key to future food security.

2. Addressing desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD) contributes to human security and political stability.

3. We cannot adapt to climate change or mitigate its effects without resorting to sustainable land management.

4. It will be impossible to protect the planet against the loss of terrestrial biodiversity without addressing DLDD.

5. We cannot protect our forests without addressing the top driver of deforestation: DLDD.

6. It will be impossible to reach the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) without rescuing 'the forgotten billion', the poorest among the poor living in drylands.

Realising the significance of the issue, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said on 17 June, the World Day to Combat Desertification: 'We need to reward those who make drylands productive, so they will prosper and others will seek to emulate their example.'

It is with this in view that the UN General Assembly High Level Meeting on 20 September in New York will focus on the theme 'Addressing DLDD issues in the context of poverty eradication and sustainable development'. The meeting will be attended by heads of state and government from around the world.

Government ministers will discuss ways out of desertification, land degradation and drought at the 10th Conference of the Parties (COP 10) to the UNCCD, which will be held on 10-21 October in South Korea. DLLD will also be on the agenda of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in Rio de Janeiro, 4-6 June 2012.

Rio+20 will mark the 20th anniversary of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also known as the Earth Summit, in Rio de Janeiro, and the 10th anniversary of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg. – *IDN-InDepthNews* ◆

The 20th anniversary conference of the 1992 Earth Summit *(pic)* will discuss, among other topics, the issue of desertification, land degradation and drought.

Understanding the sources of the Somali conflict

While droughts are not uncommon in the Horn of Africa, the decisive factors which have transformed the current drought into a famine are essentially political in nature. Somalia, which has been wracked by civil war since the collapse of its central government in 1991, epitomises this. In the following piece, *Afyare A Elmi* argues that it was a combination of the struggle by local groups for power and resources, colonial and foreign intervention and state repression which precipitated the conflict.

Xumaan ka guur, xumaan u guur
Xaggee bannaan, xeraan galnee

Moving from bad to worse
Where can we go, we are in prison

Farah Gamuute, Somali writer and poet

IN the early 1990s when the Soviet Union disintegrated many people expected that peace in a unipolar world would prevail. Instead, many intra-state wars broke out in different parts of the globe. Different factions, identity groups and regions challenged existing states' monopoly over violence. As a result, a number of states collapsed and many others to this day remain precipitously on the verge of failing. Somalia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, the former Yugoslavia, Congo and Cambodia are examples of states that experienced total collapse. Many African countries such as Ethiopia, Sudan and Zimbabwe are under extreme pressure from domestic and external forces. Many scholars and some important political actors often characterise these conflicts as identity-based civil wars.[1]

This article discusses the causes of the Somali conflict. As I argued elsewhere,[2] the main causes of the Somali conflict are competition for resources and/or power, the colonial legacy, and repression by the military regime. Politicised clan identity, availability of weapons, and the presence of large numbers of unemployed youth are considered as contributing causes.[3] The article further outlines the peace processes held and it discusses some of the main factors that led to the failure of these efforts.

Somalia: Brief background

Early European writers called Somalis a mixed race of Arab and African origins but more reasonable accounts suggest that Somalis are related to other ethnic groups in the Horn of Africa. In other words, Somalis, as an ethnic group, are African in race and Muslim in faith. Moreover, Somalis are largely homogeneous even though there are groups of Arabs, Bantus and Baravans. Within the Somali ethnic group, there are many clans and sub-clans that are based on patrilineal kinship.[4]

Prior to European colonial arrival, Somalis did not have a central state in the sense of a Western, Weberian bureaucratic state. However, they used home-grown conflict resolution mechanisms of Heer (traditional law) and Islam for resolving disputes among individuals and groups. Socioeconomically, Somalis have depended on livestock and farming and many are pastoral-nomads.[5]

Colonial countries partitioned Somalia into five parts. Great Britain took two parts while France, Italy and Ethiopia divided the remaining three among themselves. In response to the partition and the colonisation that followed, Somalis fought back. Sayid Mohamed Abdulle Hassan led a long struggle against Great Britain while several groups resisted France, Italy and Ethiopia in other parts of Somalia. Besides Sayid Mohamed Abdulle Hassan's protracted struggle between 1899 and 1921, the most significant organisation was the Somali Youth League (SYL), which was established in 1943.

Following Italy's defeat in the Second World War, the United Nations put Southern Somalia into trusteeship for 10 years. Northern and Southern Somalia gained independence on 26 June 1960 and 1 July 1960 respectively, and they united under one state. Somalia's first state was determined to unite all the regions under 'Greater Somalia'.

For the first nine years after its independence (1960-69), Somalia was a democratic state. Although the SYL was the dominant political party, there were as many as 60 political parties in the 1967 election.[6] But, Cold War politics and the winds of change in Africa affected Somalia. The military coup on 21 October 1969 turned Somalia into a socialist state. Although Siyad Barre's military regime built many schools and roads, it repressed the Somali people for over 20 years. As a result of the military regime's repressive tactics, several clan-based armed groups organised rebellions. Among these were the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF), the Somali National Movement (SNM), the Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM), the Somali Democratic Movement (SDM) and the United Somali Congress (USC).

In 1978 military officers from the Majeerteen clan attempted to overthrow the regime.[7] In response the Siyad Barre government used the national army and police to punish civilian members of the Majeerteen clan and the military was involved in the killing of civilians, mass abuses, and the destruction of areas inhabited by the clan. The current civil war started with these events. As more clans began to challenge the state, so the regime became more abusive. In 1981 politicians of the Isaaq clan established an opposition movement (the Somali National Movement) in London. Again the Siyad Barre regime began to punish innocent civilians, murdering many people when the SNM attacked the cities of Hargeysa and Bur'o in 1988. Human rights organisations reported that more than 50,000 people were killed in these conflicts.[8]

After Siyad Barre was overthrown in 1991, most of the country's institutions, as well as law and order, were destroyed. Anarchy spread in the country. While successful in overthrowing the regime, opposition factions failed to fill the power vacuum because no faction (including the United Somali Congress that expelled Siyad Barre from Mogadishu) had the power to dominate the other groups militarily. They also failed to reach a negotiated settlement. As a result, the factions kept fighting against each other for different motives. Most of the major factions have been fighting for domination, while smaller ones have been fighting for survival.[9]

Competition for resources and power

Outside urban centres, different clans contest over resources such as water, livestock and grazing land. In the past Somali nomads have fought over the ownership of camels because of their utility for survival in Somalia's harsh environment. In this context, clan identity is useful because to obtain and keep a large number of camels one needs to rely on the support of one's clansmen. As Abdalla Omar Mansur notes, after urbanisation, the type of assets seen as important changed.[10] State power, weapons, jobs and foreign aid became important resources for which clans and other groups competed. To access these, again one had to rely on the relationships that clan identity provided. In relying on clan identity, clan lines were strengthened.

Indeed, during the first round of the civil war, between 1988 and 1992, militias were organised along major clan lines and major cities changed hands.[11] In fact, it was at that time common to hear from the media, and Somalis, that faction X had captured a particular city or was occupying an important location within the capital. Militias from Hawiye clans expelled other Somali clans from Mogadishu and other towns in the central and southern regions. Militia groups that belonged to the Darod clan also controlled the Lower Jubba and Puntland regions while Digil and Mirifle took charge of the Bay and Bakool regions. Soon this changed, and the sub-clans of the major clans began to compete for the control of major cities. In Mogadishu, Habar-Gidir and Abgal militias fought for four months and destroyed what was left of the city. Habar-Gidir militias also fought against the militias of Murusade and Hawadle clans. Similarly, the militias of Absame and Harti clans of the Darod clan clashed a number of times for control of Lower Jubba, particularly the city of Kismayo. The Marehan and Harti sub-clans' forces have also fought over the same issue. These examples were repeated as the militias of Digil and Mirifle clans fought over control of the city of Baidoa. Even the break-away region of Somaliland was not spared from this intra-clan warfare – the militias of Isaaq clans (Garhajis and Habar Awal) fought a bitter civil war in north 'Somaliland'.

Colonial legacy and military repression

At the macro level the colonial legacy has also played a significant role in the Somali conflict. In 1884, the colonial powers divided the Somali peninsula into five different regions. Great Britain took the north-west regions and Northeast Frontier District (NFD). France colonised

Major Peace Conferences for Somali Factions

Location	Date	Sponsored	Participants	Outcome	Status
Djibouti conference, Djibouti	08/1991	Djibouti	Six factions	Accord	Failed
Addis Ababa conference, Ethiopia	03/1993	UN	15 factions	Peace accord	Failed
Cairo conference, Egypt	12/1997	Egypt	28 factions	Peace accord	Failed
Arta conference, Djibouti	05-08/2000	Djibouti	More than 3,000 civil society members	Charter	Failed
Mbagathi conference, Kenya	10/2002-10/2004	IGAD	Three main factions (SRRC, Group 8 and TNG) and many individuals	Charter	Failed

Djibouti and Italy controlled southern Somalia. During the 'scramble for Africa', Ethiopia was given the western portion of Somalia for its cooperation with the colonial powers. After colonisation, Great Britain handed over several regions of the Somali territories to Ethiopia and Kenya. Indeed, it was because of this division that Somalis started to mobilise for independence and fight against colonial forces. Moreover, after Somalia became independent in 1960 it spent most of its resources regaining the lost regions.[12] The current collapse of the Somali state is rooted in the 1977 war between Somalia and Ethiopia over the 'Ogaden' region. Due to direct military intervention from the Soviet Union and Cuba, Somalia lost the war.

With respect to repression, injustices that stemmed from the use and abuse of power during the period of the Somali state (1960-91) produced many of the grievances that Somalis have against each other. Both civilian and military governments were essentially controlled by the elites of respective clans who held the levers of state power. Somalis call the first civilian government, as democratic as it was, 'the corrupt government' (Dowladdii Musuqmaasuqa). Qasim, a famous Somali poet, eloquently characterised how Somalia's civilian government failed to meet the expectations of Somalis. He said, '*Isma doorin gaalkaan diriyo, daarta kii galaye*'[13] (There is no difference between the infidel I expelled [from the country] and the one that occupies the building [the government parliament]). Although not widespread, there were cases in which the government used the Somali police against clans who held grievances against the regime.[14]

While civilian leaders in the period between 1960 and 1969 embezzled state resources, mishandled judicial cases and scholarships, or else used nepotism when hiring and firing government employees, the military regime which took power in 1969 committed heinous crimes against civilian populations. The military leaders used brute force against opposition groups and the general public. The first incident came when military officers attempted to overthrow the government in 1978 (after the 1977 war). The coup failed, and Siyad Barre's regime killed many innocent Somalis who belonged to the Majeerteen clan in the Mudug and Bari regions. From the regime's perspective, those people were guilty by association or because they shared an identity, at times a distant one, with the officers allegedly responsible for carrying out the coup. Hadrawi, Somalia's greatest poet, protested this barbaric act and wrote his poem 'Heelliyo' (Female monkey), in which he criticised the military regime's practices.[15]

A similar event, albeit bigger in terms of magnitude and human suffering, occurred in northwest Somalia, 'Somaliland', in 1988. After a long war Siyad Barre signed a deal with Ethiopia's dictator in which they agreed to stop supporting the respective opposition groups of both regimes. This agreement forced Mengistu Haile Mariam of Ethiopia to stop supporting Somali opposition groups, including the Somali National Movement (SNM). As a result, the SNM moved into Somalia, captured Bur'o city and then attacked Hargeysa, the second capital of Somalia. The Siyad Barre regime retaliated, killing thousands of people with military airplanes and tanks. Several human rights groups condemned this act and in fact, even the United States, which earlier supported the Siyad Barre regime, stopped providing military assistance to the Somali government.[16]

Clan pride and the culture of taking revenge against any member of the perpetrator's clan (i.e., collective punishment) are not only causes of traditional clan wars but the cause of the recent civil war. For some theorists, pride or prestige is considered a type of resource, albeit not a quantifiable one.[17] There are numerous examples that show how clan pride motivated conflicts. For example, when the militias of Abgal and Habar-Gidir sub-clans of Hawiye fought in Mogadishu, it was clear that clan pride was a pertinent factor. Members of the Abgal clans considered Mogadishu as their own city and believed that the Habar-Gidir clan came all the way from the central regions of the country. Similarly, when Habar-Gidir's militia captured the Hiran, Lower Shabelle and Bay regions, clans that traditionally populated those areas internalised the defeat as an injury to clan pride.[18]

Clan pride causes conflicts between clans when a member of a clan kills another person. The clan of the victim often takes such an act as an injury to its pride and takes revenge. Besides competition for resources and/or power, there are many examples where a war began between two clans because of a perceived injury to clan pride and the collective punishment that followed it. In the 1940s clan wars among the Habar Yonis, 'Ogaden' and Dhulbahante clans began, and according to Guba poems, it was because of perceived injury to clan pride.

The Somali peace conferences: Why did they fail?

There were five major conferences that the international community supported (see table). However, at least 12 additional conferences were held, all outside of Somalia and all of which also failed. Djibouti sponsored the first peace conference in August 1991 and the Arta peace process in 2000. It also hosted two rounds of conferences in May and June 2008 for the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and the Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia. Kenya hosted a conference for the Somali groups in April 1994 and October 1996. Moreover, in 2001 Kenya hosted two more conferences, in Nairobi and Nakuru. Some Somali groups met in Cairo in November 1993. Yemen held talks for the Somali groups in April 1997. This conference was useful as it destroyed the green line in Mogadishu between the United Somali Congress (USC) groups. Moreover, Yemen mediated the two factions of the TFG in 2005. Ethiopia organised two conferences: Sodere in

1996 and Awase in 2001. Sudan hosted three rounds of conferences between the TFG and the Union of Islamic Courts.

Several factors contributed to the failure of the first two peace conferences in Djibouti and Addis Ababa. Some of the faction leaders that participated in the conferences thought they could win the war through military victory and therefore were not interested in a negotiated settlement. For instance, the six groups that met in Djibouti signed a peace accord, but General Mohamed Farah Aideed rejected the deal even though his representatives signed the agreement. He believed the agreement did not reflect the realities on the ground. Right after the accord, war broke out between the factions of General Aideed and Ali Mahdi over power-related issues.

Although thousands of people were killed during the Mogadishu fighting between the USC groups and other inter-clan wars, none of the groups emerged as a winner. The international community and the regional actors called for another conference in Ethiopia. The 15 factions that participated in this conference produced a detailed peace agreement. The creation of a Transitional National Council was agreed on which had to be elected from Somalia's 18 regions. Each of the regions would choose three members, of which one would be a woman. Again, the question over who would select these members resulted in a dispute between General Aideed and the leadership of the United Nations. General Aideed believed that since he controlled many regions his faction would nominate, while the UN wanted to respect the local people's wishes. Again, General Aideed's forces fought against the US-led United Nations forces, thus leading to another failure.

While the first two conferences were unsuccessful due to the lack of will on the part of Somali faction leaders, the Cairo and the Arta conferences failed due to foreign meddling too. When Somalis signed the Cairo Peace Accord, Ethiopia convinced Colonel Abdullahi Yusuf and General Aden Abdullahi Nur (Gabyow) to quit the conference. These leaders left Cairo and rejected the outcome. Moreover, Hussein Aideed, Ali Mahdi and others were also not interested in implementing the agreement. Hussein Aideed refused to leave Baidoa which his forces controlled. In addition, Ali Mahdi and Hussein Aideed failed to pacify Mogadishu. Many Somalis believe they had neither the will nor the capacity to do so.

The Mbagathi conference and Transitional Federal Government

Since the Mbagathi conference lasted for two years and the transitional government that resulted officially ruled the country for the longest time, in-depth analyses are warranted. The peace conference held for the Somali factions and warlords in Kenya concluded on 10 October 2004, with the formation of a transitional government. The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), a regional organisation of East African countries, sponsored the conference, which was hosted by the Kenyan government. During this period, as IGAD claims, the Somali factions enacted a transitional charter and selected a 275-member legislature. The selected parliament then elected Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed as president.

According to Stedman, badly designed and poorly implemented peace agreements can lead to a renewed civil war, not to peace. Stedman cites the examples of Rwanda and Angola where, according to him, more people died after a peace agreement was signed than during the conflict.[19] At the outset, there were serious problems with the process that produced Somalia's Transitional Federal Government. Ethiopia dominated the peace process. In particular, it rewarded the warlords that supported its policies by appointing them as members of the parliament and cabinet, and it punished those who were not on its side: civil society, nationalist intellectuals, and Islamists. Since representation problems have always been the most difficult challenge, Ethiopia and Kenya, with the help of IGAD, arbitrarily selected most of the 275 members of the parliament. They also alienated factions and countries that were important for any successful peace agreement in Somalia.

Ethiopia and Kenya had their own reasons for manipulating the peace conference. They had concerns about the notion of a greater Somalia since they both control Somali regions. So in this venture, they wanted to install a regime that was opposed to the idea of a greater Somalia. Besides, Ethiopia is a large landlocked country, and it is interested in gaining access to a sea corridor. The current Addis Ababa regime, therefore, wants to create several mini-states that are hostile to each other and have good relations with Ethiopia. It prefers to deal with different clans that populate the areas in which it has an interest rather than dealing with a strong united Somali state.[20]

Ethiopia and Kenya imposed this transitional government on the Somali people, and for the first time in history they had a charter, a parliament and a government of their design in Somalia. Without a national debate or referendum, Ethiopia and Kenya, while using their proxy warlords, also forced an undefined and obscure form of federalism on Somalia. Interestingly, the argument here was that the state was not federal but the government was federal – the Transitional Federal Government of the Somali Republic. This logic was strange because the confusion it created is still with the new Government of National Unity.

The conditions that often necessitate federation are not present in Somalia. In addition, Somalia lacks the capacity to run several layers of government: local, regional and federal. There are also practical problems, as currently there are no agreed-upon regions or states in Somalia. Depending on the popular opinion of different clans, some (federalist northerners) want two regions while others (Puntland and Rahanweyn Resistance Army) call for four or five regions. But there are also those, such as some members of the Darod clan, who want the federation to be based

on the 18 regions that Siyad Barre left. On the other hand, some members of the Hawiye clan call for the eight regions that existed before Siyad Barre came to power. None of the above criteria are based on an objective system or the economic reality of the country; each clan wants to maximise its share. Adopting such an undefined form of federalism is likely to lead to more conflicts, not solutions. More important, as has been noted previously, the Somali people did not have an opportunity to participate in the process that was used when adopting federalism.

Although the Somali peace process in Kenya took two years, unfortunately it did not have time to address justice-related issues. The question of how Somalis should deal with their past never made it to the table because the warlords did not want to face up to their crimes. Avoiding this important justice issue will not help solve it. Blanket amnesty, punishment and lustration (i.e., limiting the political rights of the warlords) are all possible ways of addressing the issue, which has to be dealt with in the first place.

Challenges

In addition to these structural issues, the transitional government faced external and domestic challenges. Externally, although Ethiopia and Kenya were on board, some countries in the region such as Eritrea and Egypt were not happy with the outcome of the conference in Kenya. As media reports suggest, Egypt received Abdullahi Yusuf coldly when he visited Cairo in November 2004 to attend the funeral of Yasir Arafat, indicating that Egypt was not interested in working with his government. Arab countries and Somalia's two neighbouring countries, Ethiopia and Kenya, have always been rivals. Arab countries share a culture and religion with the Somali people. Ethiopia and Kenya, on the other hand, share geographical boundaries with Somalia and consider it a historic enemy. Kenya and Ethiopia also have political, economic and military ties against Somalia.[21] Moreover, Ethiopia undermined Egypt's efforts to end the Somali conflict in 1997 at the Cairo conference.

Many Western countries did not clearly state how they would deal with the new regime after it was established – although this changed in 2006 when the Union of Islamic Courts emerged. The US and Great Britain cautiously welcomed the development, but their recognition and support were conditional on how the new government functioned in the country – in fact, Washington ignored the government and decided to work with the Mogadishu warlords in undermining the government. These countries' past policies toward Somalia did not change. When former president Abdikassim Salad Hassan and his prime minister, Dr Ali Khalif Galaidh, asked for assistance in 2000, the US and other Western countries told the transitional national government they would receive assistance when their government was fully functional in the country. Had the Western political and economic support come right after the conclusion of the conference, the survival chances of the Transitional Federal Government would have been much better.

Internally, the TFG faced many challenges. After its inception the government broke down into two factions in 2005. The president and the prime minister were on one side, and the speaker and several Mogadishu warlords were on the other. The president of Yemen mediated the two groups in 2005. The parliamentary speaker and the president agreed to end their hostility and hold a parliamentary meeting in Baidoa.[22] But again, the transitional government broke down into two groups. The parliamentary speaker and 40 other members fled the country after Ethiopian invasion forces crossed the Somali border. The president and the prime minister and most of the members of parliament went to Baidoa where they chose another speaker. The difference between these two groups was largely based on the presence of Ethiopian troops. Interestingly, there was another rift between the president Abdullahi Yusuf and the new prime minister, Nur Hassan Hussein, which escalated and resulted in the resignation of the president Yusuf.

Since Somalis did not own the process that produced the new charter, parliament and the government, many Somalis were cautious in dealing with the transitional government. Neither the Somali people nor their representatives have elected the members of parliament; most members obtained their parliamentary seats with the help of the countries managing the peace conference. Many Somali grassroots groups such as civil society organisations, independent media, human rights organisations and religious institutions were not happy with the outcome of the conference. Many chose not to cooperate with the regime while many more actively resisted both the Ethiopian occupation and the installation of the transitional government it controlled.

President Abdullahi Yusuf brought heavy political baggage with him. His style of leadership, his attitude toward those who differed with him and his loyalty to Ethiopia did not sit well with many important sectors of Somali society whose support was necessary for the success of his regime. These groups considered him Ethiopia's determined spoiler. In addition, the timing and the way he handled his first major policy decisions – calling for peacemaking troops that included those of Ethiopia and Kenya – was also controversial. These actions fuelled mistrust among rival clans and Islamists because some interpreted the moves as hostile. As different Somali media outlets have reported, the price of weapons in Mogadishu dramatically increased in the months that followed President Yusuf's election; a sign of war, not peace.

In addition, Abdullahi Yusuf had poor relations with most of Somalia's intellectuals and religious leaders. Yet the support of these groups was necessary for any government to function in Somalia. In the past, he alienated intellectuals and antagonised the religious community, calling them 'terrorists' in order to win sympathy

from the Ethiopian government and Bush administration. Moreover, inviting Ethiopian troops, although the US was also involved in this project, was a serious blunder on the part of the government. In fact, the transitional government did not recover from this move.

Conclusion

In short, the causes of the Somali conflict are multiple. I have argued here that the main causes are competition for power and resources, colonial legacy and state repression. Moreover, I discussed the roles of clan identity and the clan pride that comes with it. Regarding the reasons that led to failure of the efforts to end the Somali conflict, a combination of factors including lack of will and capacity on the part of Somalis and foreign meddling are behind the collapse of the five major peace conferences. ◆

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The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily represent those of the Third World Network.

Endnotes

1. See Michael E. Brown, 'The Causes of Internal Conflict: An Overview', in Michael E. Brown (ed.), *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), pp. 3-25; Chaim Kauffman, 'Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars', *International Security* 20 (1996): 136-75; Dan Smith, 'Trends and Causes of Armed Conflicts', in M.F. Norbert Ropers, Alexander Austin and Claus-Dieter Wild (eds.), *The Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation* (Berlin: Berghof Research Centre for Constructive Conflict Management, 2000), www.berghof-handbook.net/uploads/download/smith_handbook.pdf (accessed August 2008).
2. Afyare Elmi and Abdullahi Barise, 'The Somali Conflict: Root Causes, Obstacles, and Peace-building Strategies', *African Security Review* 15, no. 1 (2006): 32-54.
3. Dr. Abdullahi Barise and I have provided in-depth explanation on the contributing causes and the obstacles in an article we published in *African Security Review*, 15, no. 1 (2006): 32-54.
4. The major clans are Dir, Darod, Isaq, Hawaye, and Digil and Mirifle. See I.M. Lewis, *Saints and Somalis: Popular Islam in a Clan-based Society* (Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1998).
5. See I.M. Lewis, *Blood and Bone: The Call of Kinship in Somali Society* (Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1994).
6. A.A. Castagnio, 'Political Party System in Somalia', 1964; Lewis, *Saints and Somalis*.
7. Although this is the widely held view, the leaders and supporters of this coup argue that the officers who wanted to overthrow the government belonged to all clans, but the regime played politics with this and punished only one clan.
8. Africa Watch, *Somalia: A Government at War with Its Own People* (London: Africa Watch, 1990), p. 10.
9. See Elmi and Barise, 'The Somali Conflict'.
10. A. Mansur, 'The Nature of the Somali Clan System', in A.J. Ahmed (ed.), *The Invention of Somalia* (Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1995), pp. 117-33.
11. It would be simplistic to say that clan X fought clan Y over Z resources because militias organising along clan lines used these clan names and committed atrocities against civilian members of all clans. Although most civilian members of clans did not play a notable part in the fighting, the war nevertheless affected them. Here, I mean militias of respective clans fought, not all the members of a clan against all members of another clan. There are many examples where militias from two clans fought in one part of the country, but the same two clans coexisted peacefully in other areas.
12. Charles L. Geshekter, 'Anti-colonialism and Class Formation: The Eastern Horn of Africa before 1950', paper presented at Somali Studies Conference, Boston, 1992; Lee V. Cassanelli, *The Shaping of Somali Society: Reconstructing the History of a Pastoral People, 1600-1900* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982).
13. Ahmed Ismail Qasim is one of Somalia's most well-known poets. He composed this poem during the 1960s.
14. See Elmi and Barise, 'The Somali Conflict'.
15. In the last few lines of this poem Hadrawi graphically explains the atrocities that the military regime committed in the northeast and central regions. In Somali, he writes, '*Hadimada Garoowiyo, hanaq go'a Nugaaleed, halka aad tummaatiday, waxa kaga habboonaa, dar kaloo i hawlee, huqdaad reebtay weynaa, hibashiyo ladh kululaa. Colka Bari harraatiyey, hubka Mudug ku talax tegey, Allaylehe hubsiiniyo, hakin buu u baahnaa*'. In this poem, Hadrawi is talking about the troops that attacked the Bari and Mudug regions of Somalia and the atrocities they committed. For him, the Somali state cannot be excused for such a crime. He concludes that the implication of such a crime is huge.
16. See Africa Watch, *Somalia*.
17. See Otomar J. Bartos and Paul Wehr, *Using Conflict Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
18. Raage Ugaas, one of Somalia's classical poets, was quoted as saying, '*Qab qab dhaafay baa, laba qabiil qaran ku waayaane. Qaabiilba Haabiil markuu, qoonsaduu dilaye*' (Two clans lose nationhood or brave man because of clan pride. Qabil, the first son of Adam, killed Habil, his younger brother, when he felt anguish).
19. See Stephen John Stedman, Donald Rothchild and Elizabeth Cousens, *Ending Civil Wars: The Implementation of Peace Agreements* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2002), pp. 43-70.
20. See Elmi and Barise, 'The Somali Conflict'.
21. Economic and Security Pact between Ethiopia and Kenya.
22. See the Aden Declaration for the details of the agreement between Sharif Hassan Sheikh Adan and Abdullahi Yusuf, www.hiiraan.com/news/2006/jan/eng/Aden_ Declaration.htm (last accessed February 2006).

How foreign policy blunders helped create the famine in Somalia

The famine in Somalia is not simply a consequence of drought, but also the result of giving primacy to security interests over human needs, says *Mark Bradbury*.

FAMINE has returned to Somalia, and so has the US military. This is no natural disaster. Just as the US sent its first drones to Somalia, targeting leaders of the militant Islamist group al-Shabaab, tens of thousands of Somalis were crossing into Kenya, fleeing a catastrophic drought and conflict.

While US drones were able to find their targets in Somalia with pinpoint accuracy, humanitarian agencies have had less luck. They have experienced a catastrophic decline in access that has destroyed their ability to assist and protect civilians. The families crossing into Kenya are escaping from a severe drought but they are also fleeing a war.

This is a conflict between the internationally sponsored Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and al-Shabaab, which is listed as a terrorist organisation. The political use of aid by the warring parties has eroded the humanitarian space that agencies need to operate safely and securely.

Back in the 1990s, the international community mounted an unprecedented armed humanitarian intervention in the face of a famine that followed the collapse of the Somali state. Today it is different. For the past two years only a handful of foreign aid agencies have been able to work in the country because Somalia has become one of the most dangerous places in the world for aid workers.

International strategic interest in Somalia waned with the humbling of US forces when US Blackhawk helicopters were shot down in Mogadishu. This was compounded by the failure of the UN mission to end the conflict and restore a functioning state.

Al-Shabaab forces. The conflict between Al-Shabaab and the Transitional Federal Government has made Somalia one of the most dangerous places in the world for aid workers.

The 9/11 attacks on America revived international interest. Somalia was now viewed through a new prism, as a failed state and a potential haven for al-Qaeda. In addition, the presence of Islamic jihadist groups catapulted Somalia into the global war on terror. Suddenly the restoration of a central government was a key strategy.

But the authority of the internationally backed Transitional Federal Government was challenged in 2006 when a confederation of Islamic courts took control of Mogadishu and much of south central Somalia. Within six months, Ethiopia had intervened militarily, backed by US airstrikes. The courts were ousted from Mogadishu and the transitional government installed with an African Union peacekeeping force (AMISOM) deployed to protect it.

Humanitarian agencies have experienced a catastrophic decline in access that has destroyed their ability to assist and protect civilians.

Since then there has been an inexorable rise in the humanitarian crisis in Somalia. The policy to restore internal order to Somalia has had the opposite effect. The Ethiopian occu-

pation fuelled support for the increasingly militant al-Shabaab that emerged from the ruins of the Islamic courts. The fighting in Mogadishu has killed over 18,000 civilians, displaced up to 1 million people, and caused tens of thousands to flee the country.

The ability of international agencies to respond to the humanitarian catastrophe has declined in inverse proportion to needs. Their neutrality was compromised by international support for the TFG that included the provision of weapons and training of its security forces, the assassination of al-Shabaab leadership and overt attempts to deploy aid in support of the TFG.

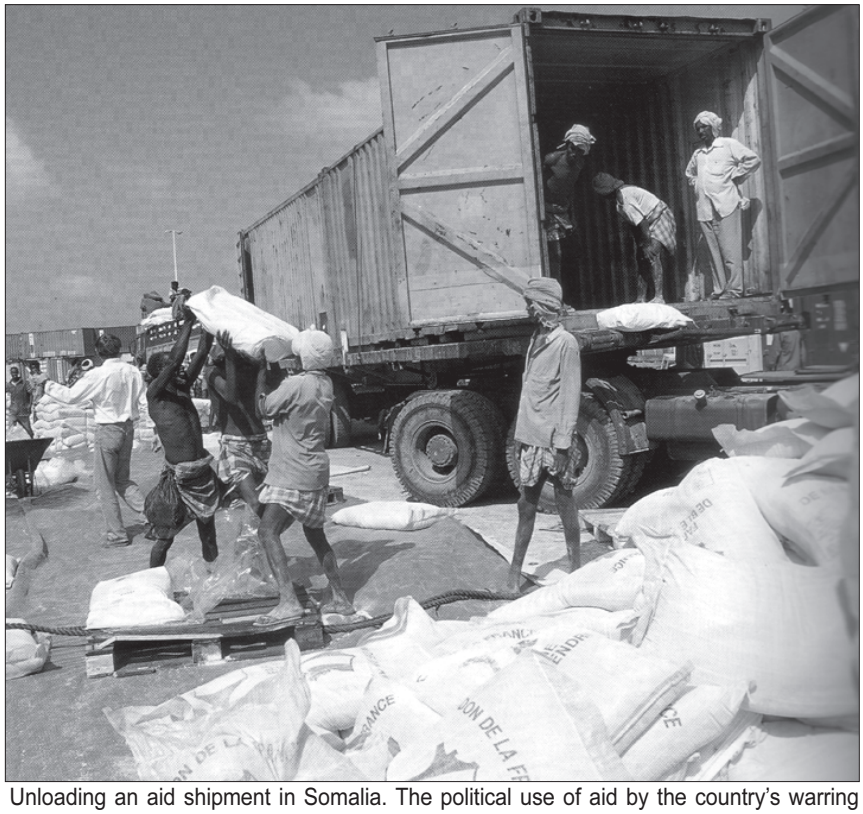
Violence against aid workers increased. Al-Shabaab accused aid agencies of being Western spies. Some were expelled while others found their work restricted through taxation and other demands. Other aid agencies have fallen foul of US domestic antiterrorism legislation that places strict conditionalities on assistance.

The World Food Programme suspended its operations in Somalia in December 2009 when the UN estimated 3.2 million people were in need of food aid. Their largest donor, the US government, had suspended funding out of concern that the aid was benefiting al-Shabaab; they faced unacceptable attacks and demands on their staff and expulsion by al-Shabaab. Good harvests in 2010 offset the immediate impact of the loss of food aid. But by early 2011, following another failure of rains, the UN monitoring systems were reporting alarming levels of malnutrition and increasing numbers of families from Somalia seeking refuge in Kenya.

The famine declared in Somalia by the UN on 20 July 2011 is not simply a consequence of drought, but the result of war, international policy and climatic conditions.

The international community became a belligerent in the war and gave primacy to security interests over human need and protection. By using aid to further their political and security agendas, foreign donors lost sight of the principles that guide humanitarian assistance. They have yet to face up to the harm they have been doing in Somalia. ◆

Somali government troops. International support for Somalia's Transitional Federal Government has been in the form of, among others, provision of weapons and training of its security forces.



Unloading an aid shipment in Somalia. The political use of aid by the country's warring parties has eroded the humanitarian space that aid agencies need to operate safely.

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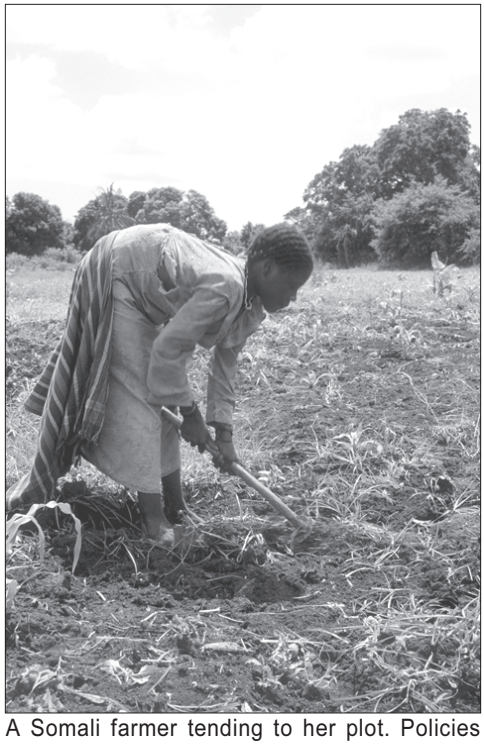
The IMF's role in the creation of famines in Somalia

How did Somalia, which in the 1970s was a grain-sufficient country, become so dependent on food imports and food aid? As *Michel Chossudovsky* explains, it was the IMF's intervention in the early 1980s that contributed to the crisis of Somali agriculture.

SOMALIA was a pastoral economy based on 'exchange' between nomadic herdsmen and small agriculturalists. Nomadic pastoralists accounted for 50% of the population. In the 1970s, resettlement programmes led to the development of a sizeable sector of commercial pastoralism. Livestock contributed to 80% of export earnings until 1983. Despite recurrent droughts, Somalia remained virtually self-sufficient in food until the 1970s.

The International Monetary Bank (IMF)-World Bank intervention in the early 1980s contributed to exacerbating the crisis of Somali agriculture. The economic reforms undermined the fragile exchange relationship between the 'nomadic economy' and the 'sedentary economy', that is, between pastoralists and small farmers, characterised by money transactions as well as traditional barter.



A Somali farmer tending to her plot. Policies imposed by the IMF and World Bank in the 1980s contributed to exacerbating the crisis of Somali agriculture.

A very tight austerity programme was imposed on the government largely to release the funds required to service Somalia's debt servicing obligations to the Paris Club. In fact, a large share of the external debt was held by the Washington-based financial institutions. According to an International Labour Organisation (ILO) mission report: 'The Fund alone among Somalia's major recipients of debt service payments, refuses to reschedule...De facto it is helping to finance an adjustment programme, one of whose major goals is to repay the IMF itself...'

The structural adjustment programme reinforced Somalia's dependence on imported grain. From the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, food aid increased 15-fold, at the rate of 31% per annum. Combined with increased commercial imports, this influx of cheap surplus wheat and rice sold in the domestic market led to the displacement of domestic producers, as well as a major shift in food consumption patterns to the detriment of traditional crops (maize and sorghum).

The devaluation of the Somali shilling imposed by the IMF in June 1981 was followed by periodic devaluations, leading to hikes in the prices of fuel, fertiliser and farm inputs. The impact on agriculturalists was immediate particularly in rain-fed agriculture but also in the areas of irrigated farming. Urban purchasing power declined dramatically, government extension programmes were curtailed, infrastructure collapsed, and the deregulation of the grain market and the influx of 'food aid' led to the impoverishment of farming communities.

Also, during this period, much of the best agricultural land was appropriated by bureaucrats, army officers and merchants with connections to the government. Rather than promoting food production for the domestic market, the donors were encouraging the development of so-called 'high value added' fruits, vegetables, oilseeds and cotton for export on the best irrigated farmland.

As of the early 1980s, prices for imported livestock drugs increased as a result of the depreciation of the currency. The World Bank encouraged the exaction of user fees for veterinarian services to the nomadic herdsmen, including the vaccination of animals. A private market for veterinary drugs was promoted.

The functions performed by the Ministry of Livestock were phased out; the veterinary laboratory services of the Ministry were to be fully financed on a cost-recovery basis. According to the World Bank, 'veterinarian services are essential for livestock development in all areas, and they can be provided mainly by the private sector (...) Since few private veterinarians will choose to practise in the remote pastoral areas, improved livestock care will also depend on "para vets" paid from drug sales.'

The privatisation of animal health was combined with the absence of emergency animal feed during periods of drought, the commercialisation

of water and the neglect of water and rangeland conservation. The results were predictable: the herds were decimated and so were the pastoralists who represented 50% of the country's population. The 'hidden objective' of this programme was to eliminate the nomadic herdsmen involved in the traditional exchange economy. According to the World Bank, 'adjustments' in the size of the herds are in any event beneficial because nomadic pastoralists in Sub-Saharan Africa are narrowly viewed as a cause of environmental degradation.

The collapse in veterinarian services also indirectly served the interests of the rich countries: in 1984, Somali cattle exports to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries plummeted as Saudi beef imports were redirected to suppliers from Australia and the European Community. The ban on Somali livestock imposed by Saudi Arabia was not, however, removed once the rinderpest disease epidemic had been eliminated.

The restructuring of government expenditure under the supervision of the Bretton Woods institutions also played a crucial role in destroying food agriculture. Agricultural infrastructure collapsed and recurrent expenditure in agriculture declined by about 85% in relation to the mid-1970s. The Somali government was prevented by the IMF from mobilising domestic resources. Tight targets for the budget deficit were set.

Moreover, the donors increasingly provided 'aid' not in the form of imports of capital and equipment but in the form of 'food aid' . The latter would in turn be sold by the government on the local market and the proceeds of these sales (the so-called 'counterpart funds') would be used to cover the domestic costs of development projects. As of the early 1980s, 'the sale of food aid' became the principal source of revenue for the state, thereby enabling donors to take control of the entire budgetary process.

The economic reforms were marked by the disintegration of health and educational programmes. By 1989, expenditure on health had declined by 78% in relation to its 1975 level. According to World Bank figures, the level of recurrent expenditure on education in 1989 was about $4 per annum per primary school student, down from about $82 in 1982. From 1981 to 1989, school enrolment declined by 41% (despite a sizeable increase in the population of school age), textbooks and school materials disappeared from the classrooms, school buildings deteriorated and nearly a quarter of the primary schools closed down. Teachers' salaries declined to abysmally low levels.

The IMF-World Bank programme has led the Somali economy into a vicious circle: the decimation of the herds pushed the nomadic pastoralists into starvation, which in turn backlashed on grain producers who sold or bartered their grain for cattle. The entire social fabric of the pastoralist economy was undone. The collapse in foreign exchange earnings from declining cattle exports and remittances (from Somali workers in the Gulf countries) backlashed on the balance of payments and the state's public finances, leading to the breakdown of the government's economic and social programmes.

Small farmers were displaced as a result of the dumping of subsidised US grain on the domestic market combined with the hike in the price of farm inputs. The impoverishment of the urban population also led to a contraction of food consumption. In turn, state support in the irrigated areas was frozen and production in the state farms declined. The latter were to be closed down or privatised under World Bank supervision.

According to World Bank estimates, real public sector wages in 1989 had declined by 90% in relation to the mid-1970s. Average wages in the public sector had fallen to $3 a month, leading to the inevitable disintegration of the civil administration.

A programme to rehabilitate civil service wages was proposed by the World Bank (in the context of a reform of the civil service), but this objective was to be achieved within the same budgetary envelope by dismissing some 40% of public sector employees and eliminating salary supplements. Under this plan, the civil service would have been reduced to a mere 25,000 employees by 1995 (in a country of six million people). Several donors indicated keen interest in funding the cost associated with the retrenchment of civil servants.

In the face of impending disaster, no attempt was made by the international donor community to rehabilitate the country's economic and social infrastructure, to restore levels of purchasing power and to rebuild the civil service: the macroeconomic adjustment measures proposed by the creditors in the year prior to the collapse of the government of General Siyad Barre in January 1991 called for a further tightening over public spending, the restructuring of the central bank, the liberalisation of credit (which virtually thwarted the private sector) and the liquidation and divestiture of most of the state enterprises.

In 1989, debt servicing obligations represented 194.6% of export earnings. The IMF's loan was cancelled because of Somalia's outstanding arrears, while the World Bank had approved a structural adjustment loan for $70 million in June 1989 which was frozen a few months later owing to Somalia's poor macroeconomic performance. Arrears with creditors had to be settled before the granting of new loans and the negotiation of debt rescheduling. Somalia was tangled in the straightjacket of debt servicing and structural adjustment; the rest is recent history.

Somalia's experience shows how a country can be devastated by macroeconomic policy: there are many Somalias in the developing world and the economic reform package implemented in Somalia is similar to that applied in more than 80 developing countries. But there is another significant dimension: Somalia is a nomadic pastoralist economy, and throughout Africa the nomadic livestock economy is being undermined by the IMF-World Bank programme in much the same way as in Somalia. ◆

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‘I carried him a whole day while he was dead, thinking he was alive’

Not for the first time, the people of Somalia have had to endure unspeakable suffering just to survive. *Abdurrahman Warsameh* reports on the heart-rending plight of Somali refugees fleeing from their famine-stricken land.

AS the first batch of food aid from the United Nations World Food Programme was airlifted into Mogadishu on 27 July, it came too late for Qadija Ali’s two-year-old son Farah.

He died in his mother’s arms as Ali and her eight other children made the 16-day epic journey from their drought-stricken village in Wanlaweyn district, Lower Shabelle, in southern Somalia to Mogadishu.

‘I carried him a whole day while he was dead, thinking he was alive and just asleep. We did not have anything to give him. No water or food for three days,’ an emotional Ali tells Inter Press Service (IPS) at Badbado Camp on the outskirts of the Somali capital.

Refugees at Camp Badbado, the largest settlement in Mogadishu for the drought-displaced people from southern Somalia.

Ali’s family had 50 head of cattle, 20 goats and five camels before the onset of the current drought in southern Somalia that has raged for two years. Her family was one of the well-off ones in the region, where ownership of numerous livestock, the mainstay of a rural economy, is a sign of wealth.

‘It started with [a] shortage of rains for the first three seasons and then no rains followed. Grass dried up, wells and rivers dried up. Our animals began dying one after another as there was no pasture or water for them,’ Ali recalls as she carries one of her remaining three young sons who is weak and malnourished.

Camp Badbado, which in Somali means ‘rescue’, is the city’s largest settlement for the drought-displaced people from southern Somalia. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) says that it is currently home to an estimated 28,000 people, approximately 5,000 families.

Ali’s entire family is not with her, however. Her husband remained behind in their village to look after the family’s remaining belongings. Ali is not aware of her husband’s fate. But she made the arduous journey along with hundreds of other families to escape the severe drought and famine in search of aid.

Malnourishment

But aid has come too late for some.

Many children arrive at the camp too weak and malnourished to be saved by doctors. Some children have gone for days without food and water. Most of the children are too small for their age, with a three-year-old having the frame and stature of a one-year-old.

‘They come here very weak from hunger and exhaustion. Two or three children and adults die every week in Mogadishu, but we have no exact statistics as camps are located in diverse places in the town,’ Muna Igeh, a nurse at Badbado, tells IPS as she weighs one of the dozens of malnourished children at the camp.

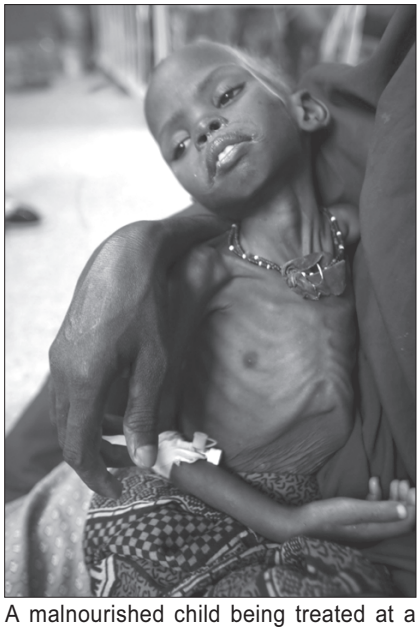
Daahir Gabow, a father of seven, had to watch as two of his children succumbed to severe malnourishment just after they arrived in Mogadishu.

He says doctors and nurses at Banadir Hospital, one of Mogadishu’s main health centres, did everything they could to save the life of his second child, a girl, but ‘fate had its way’.

He says his family had tried to ‘weather’ the drought but could not this time and had to leave their home in search of aid.

‘We tried to weather the drought as we did many other times but our livestock could not survive until the rains arrived. Many of our neighbours began leaving after losing all their livestock, so we decided it was time to go,’ says Gabow as he prepared for the burial of his daughter who died of malnutrition complications.

‘We walked for 21 days. [We] ate [and] drank what we could find and slept where the sun set on us. This is not what I have seen or [what] my father told me happened in his life-



A malnourished child being treated at a hospital in Mogadishu. The UN estimates that some 2.23 million children in Somalia, Kenya and Ethiopia are acutely malnourished.

The UN World Food Programme made its first airlift of food aid to Mogadishu on 27 July.

time. [These are] testing times so we have to be patient and strong,' Gabow says.

Elhadji As Sy, the regional director of UNICEF (the UN Children's Fund) for eastern and southern Africa, called the famine 'a child survival crisis'.

Somalia is the country worst affected by a severe drought that has ravaged the Horn of Africa, leaving an estimated 12 million people in dire need of humanitarian assistance. Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti are all also facing a crisis that is being called the worst in 60 years. The UN declared a famine in parts of southern Somalia in July.

The agency estimates that in total 2.23 million children in Somalia, Kenya and Ethiopia are acutely malnourished. The UN says it has delivered 1,300 metric tonnes of supplies to southern Somalia, including therapeutic supplies to treat over 66,000 malnourished children.

Meanwhile, people are still fleeing their homes in southern Somalia. The UN says almost 100,000 displaced people have arrived in Mogadishu, with nearly 40,000 of those in the past month.

'Over the past month, UNHCR figures show that nearly 40,000 Somalis displaced by drought and famine have converged on Mogadishu in search of food, water, shelter and other assistance,' said UNHCR spokesperson Vivian Tan in a statement on 26 July.

The UN estimates that the number is growing by the day, with daily arrivals averaging 1,000 in July.

Local non-governmental organisations are providing much-needed humanitarian aid but camp residents say the aid is limited and Somali government officials are echoing calls for more assistance.

The UN World Food Programme (WFP) on 27 July began its first airlift of food aid to Mogadishu, the first such shipment since the Islamist extremist group, Al Shabaab, banned international aid agencies from operating in regions it controls.

The WFP flew in 14 tonnes of ready-to-use food supplements for malnourished children at the camps in Mogadishu.

Spokesman for the agency, David Orr, told reporters at Mogadishu airport that more aid will be flown in over the coming days. – *IPS* ◆

Almost 100,000 people displaced by the drought and famine in southern Somalia have arrived in Mogadishu.

Somali women bear superhuman burden in famine

Somali women, who traditionally bear the primary burden to care for and sustain their families, have now been saddled with even more excruciating demands in this time of famine.

Inaki Borda

Somali refugees at the Dadaab camp in Kenya waiting to collect their water rations. Eighty percent of the refugees in Dadaab are women and children.

WHILE the exit of the Al-Qaeda-backed rebel group Al Shabaab has led to the first UN relief airlift in five years in Mogadishu, the capital of famine-wracked Somalia, the situation for women and children remains precarious, humanitarian workers warn.

'We have heard very sad stories of women having to abandon their children along the way because they were too weak to carry them,' Andreas Needham, a public information officer for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Somalia, told Inter Press Service (IPS).

The latest developments in Mogadishu are a 'step in the right direction', Augustine Mahiga, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's envoy to Somalia, said in an e-mailed statement on 6 August. 'Real security risks, including from terrorist attacks, remain and must not be underestimated.'

Three more areas in southern Somalia were added to the famine zone in early August, and the UN warns that without urgent intervention, all of southern Somalia will be engulfed in famine.

The drought that struck the area was worsened by the presence of the armed militia group, active for almost 20 years. 'Many women lost their husbands while fighting, and they're widows now that may find themselves in a worse situation than where they were before,' Needham said.

As Matthew Johnson, a press officer at the US Agency for International Development (USAID), told IPS, 'Under Somali culture, women face the extra burden of societal expectations that they bear the primary duty to care for and sustain their families, especially children and the elderly, which is a superhuman burden in times of extreme scarcity and insecurity.'

What has been declared the worst famine in the last 60 years in the area has so far cost the lives of more than 29,000 children and left another 640,000 malnourished.

But dying of starvation is just the tip of the iceberg, one of the many dangers that women and children face on a daily basis.

According to Janusz Czerniejewski, head of Intersos at the Kenya and Somalia Mission, conflict over scarce resources increases during drought, putting women and children at higher risk of experiencing sexual violence.

'As they flee Somalia to safety, women and children are passing through areas where armed groups and bandits roam, only to arrive in crowded and potentially dangerous camps. The protection aspects of this crisis are acute and life-threatening. Gender-based violence (GBV) like rape, domestic violence and female genital mutilation is a significant issue in all parts of Somalia,' he told IPS.

A report released by the International Rescue Committee in July showed that violence against women and girls is a serious danger even after they reach the camps, particularly when they must leave to collect firewood or use the forest as a latrine.

Research on sexual violence undertaken by the Protection Monitoring Network (PMN) covering 600 reported cases of rape showed that after a period of six months, 10% of the assaulted women committed suicide and 25% disappeared.

Johnson said that when many women reach refugee camps, they are forced to assume a role they are not culturally adjusted to, and often lack confidence to perform, as effective heads of the family in the absence of male relatives.

Currently, the UN children's

agency UNICEF is scaling up operations to meet the rising humanitarian needs of Somali children and families in the Dadaab refugee camps in Kenya and the surrounding communities.

Somali refugees arrive in Dadaab at an average rate of 1,300 per day. Eighty percent of them are women and children. The total population of the three camps near Dadaab is now more than 400,000, becoming the new third largest city in Kenya.

'Many Somali families who cross into Kenya at Liboi do not realise they must walk another 100 kilometres before arriving at the refugee camps in Dadaab,' said Olivia Yambi, UNICEF Kenya representative. 'The health of some malnourished children crossing at Liboi is so precarious that they simply cannot wait until they get to Dadaab for treatment,' she added.

For that reason, UNICEF has increased supplies of ready-to-use therapeutic food to hospitals and nutrition stabilisation centres in the Dadaab camps and surrounding host communities for the treatment of malnutrition in children under five.

UNICEF has dispatched medicines to existing health centres, including health kits sufficient to support about 10,000 people.

'The positioning of health and nutritional supplies close to the border will save children's lives that might otherwise have been lost on the long journey to Dadaab,' Yambi said.

Over 100,000 children have already been vaccinated thanks to UNICEF's support to integrated campaigns for measles and polio immunisation in different host camps.

'We are acting now because these diseases can spread very quickly in overcrowded conditions like we have now in the camps,' said Ibrahim Conteh, UNICEF Dadaab emergency coordinator.

In education, UNICEF is planning to construct 146 new learning centres in the outskirts of the camps to accommodate newly-arrived refugees.

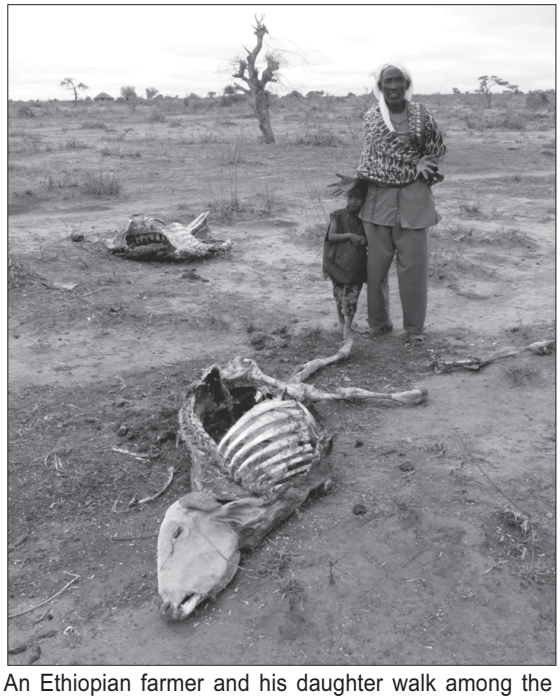
UNICEF estimates it will need almost $315 million over the next six months to scale up operations to reach children in the affected areas with emergency and preventative assistance.– *IPS* ◆

Drought decimates livestock, hits incomes

The severe drought ravaging the arid and semi-arid parts of the Horn of Africa region is threatening the livelihoods of pastoral communities, with massive livestock deaths recorded amid an increase in deadly conflict over resources.

PASTORALISTS depend on livestock for all their basic needs and any losses undermine their economic and food security. Livestock sales are often used to buy grain and lack of milk and meat contribute to high malnutrition levels.

'The value of livestock – people's main assets in many of the worst affected areas – has plummeted and livestock markets have collapsed, so people have much less purchasing power than before. People's livelihoods have already been decimated, but there is now also a real risk of large-scale loss of life,' warns Oxfam in a 1 July statement, adding that in some parts of Kenya and Ethiopia, at least 60% of the herds have perished.



An Ethiopian farmer and his daughter walk among the carcasses of a cattle herd. According to the Oxfam relief agency, at least 60% of livestock herds in parts of Kenya and Ethiopia have perished.

The perception that emergency relief often does not appreciate the importance of saving livestock assets in emergencies has prompted the development of initiatives such as the Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards (LEGS), the equivalent of SPHERE in humanitarian circles. LEGS aims at improving relief programming with communities that rely heavily on livestock for their social and economic well-being.

According to a December 2010 International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) report, interventions to support livestock, such as supplementary feeding and commercial destocking (among recommended actions in LEGS), should be implemented before livestock are so weak they die.

In the 2008-2009 Kenyan droughts, truckloads of dead and dying heads of livestock were common.

'Supplementary feeding needs to target breeding stocks with sufficient time so that they stay healthy,' states the ILRI report. 'Conflict resolution to enable pastoralists to move to key grazing areas needs to be done in advance, before large numbers of animals need pasture. Late interventions are costly and unhelpful.'

Falling prices

The weak condition of livestock has meant that the surviving cattle, for instance, have a far lower market value than normal – up to 40% less in parts of Kenya, says Oxfam, adding that 'pastoralists in Somalia have also reported that their animals are now worth less than half of their value in late 2010'.

An oversupply of cattle in parts of Somalia due to destocking and restocking of small ruminants through cattle selling in Garissa, Kenya, meant that cattle prices were still 21% less in Somalia than in 2010, stated a 20 June Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit – Somalia (FSNAU) brief.

Increased camel exports – 7% of total livestock from January to May compared with 2% over the same period in 2010 at the Bossaso port – are an additional indicator of stress selling in drought-affected pastoral areas, notes FSNAU.

Northern Kenya, Somalia and southern Ethiopia, which are predominantly pastoral regions, are among the areas most affected by the drought. In Somalia, at least 65% of the population depends on the livestock sector; because of the effects of the drought, more people are sliding into food hunger and poverty.

FSNAU estimates that at least 2.85 million people are facing food insecurity in Somalia, a 19% increase from January. In Kenya, the food-insecure population is estimated at 3.5 million.

Large livestock migration from northeastern Kenya and Somalia's arid areas of southern Gedo to Juba and Bay regions in southern Somalia may lead to early depletion of pasture and water in these regions, according to FSNAU.

Destocking

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian

Affairs (OCHA Kenya), subsidising livestock markets, commercial livestock destocking and destocking for meat sales remain priority concerns in northern Kenya.

A government-run buy-back programme has been halted in some parts due to a lack of funds.

'The amount of money allocated was small considering the large population of livestock in Isiolo, Marsabit and Moyale,' Zachary Nyanga, the Upper Eastern director of livestock, told IRIN humanitarian news service.

Nyanga said KSh37.7 million (about $419,000) allocated in April had been used to buy 13,000 goats and sheep from herders but the funds ran out in May. He said the programme would resume once additional funding, which has since been allocated, was received.

According to a local aid worker, who requested anonymity, government and aid organisations' activities in livestock emergency response had to be coordinated. 'The whole [offtake] programme was a failure from the beginning; the government was buying animals at a higher price than us,' the aid worker said.

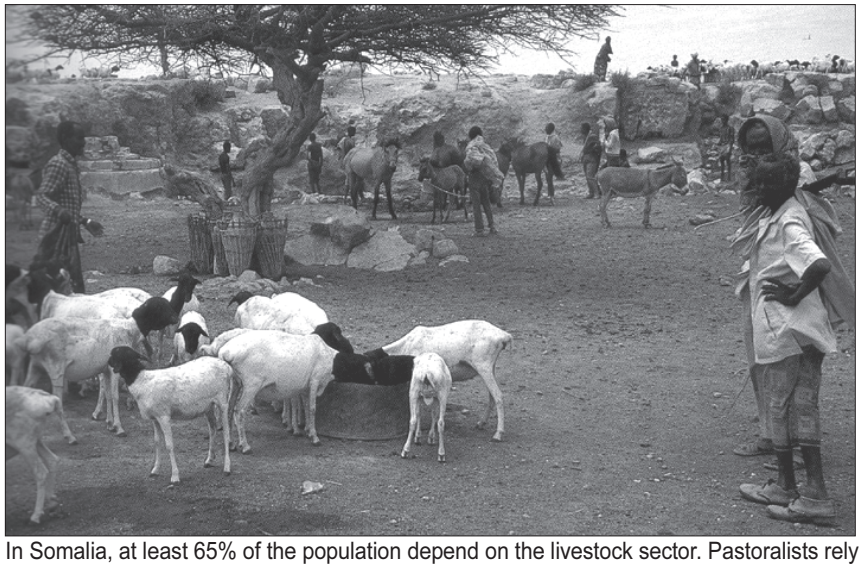
The government was offering about KSh3,000 ($34) for a goat/sheep, while NGOs were offering half that.

In addition, the programme did not target cattle, which are the worst affected by the drought.

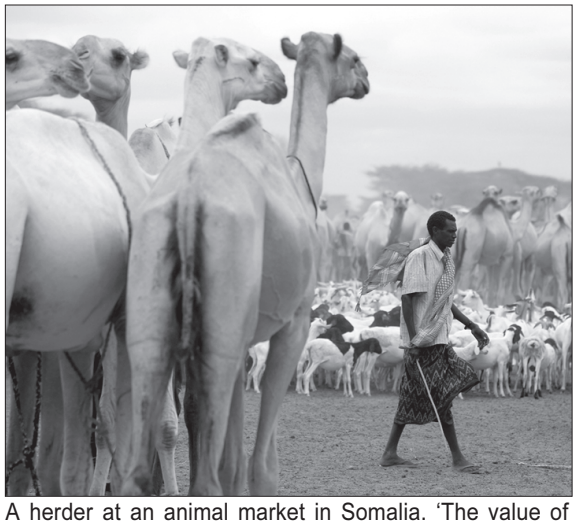
'My intention was to sell my 40 [head of] cattle, save the money in a bank and then buy livestock [with the money] after it rains,' said Peter Lepertet from the Wamba area of Samburu in the north. 'I was also only allowed to sell four goats but I have more than 150 [sheep and goats]; it is meaningless.'

Wario Jirma, a resident from Marsabit district, northern Kenya, said: 'We are losing livestock, [our] source of livelihood. The issue is very serious.'

In some areas, pasture, grazing land and migration routes that have traditionally been used in emergencies are no longer available, having been sold off, or allocated for tourism and large-scale agriculture. This has undermined pastoralists' ability to cope with recurrent drought, notes Oxfam.



In Somalia, at least 65% of the population depend on the livestock sector. Pastoralists rely on livestock for their basic needs.



A herder at an animal market in Somalia. 'The value of livestock – people's main assets in many of the worst affected areas – has plummeted.'

Clashes and displacement

In Kenya, at least 113 people were killed in clashes over resources between January and end-May, against 106 deaths in the same period in 2008, 138 in 2009, and 68 in 2010. According to OCHA Kenya, the high 2008 and 2009 killings occurred during above-normal dry conditions, similar to the present situation.

Conflict- and drought-related displacement has also affected education. At least 10 schools in Isiolo, Samburu and Turkana areas in the north have been closed.

'Hundreds of children have quit learning, many have moved with their parents to look for pasture, some have been displaced by a lack of water,' said Dade Boru, the Isiolo Teachers' Union Executive Secretary. Livestock deaths and the resultant financial losses have meant parents are unable to raise school fees.

A local leader from the Oldonyiro area of Isiolo, Nicholas Lesokoye, said insecurity had affected business activities too and there were fears of more conflict. 'We have received reports that a large number of armed herders have arrived and are still streaming in towards Isiolo,' he said.

With drought known to be an ever-present hazard in the dry lands of East and Central Africa, relief programming should focus on the whole drought cycle, including normal and recovery periods, rather than just alert and emergency, states the ILRI report. This is because 'any given area or community is... always in some phase related to current, recent or impending drought'. – *IRIN humanitarian news and analysis service* ◆

Establishing a community seed supply system: Community seed bank complexes in Africa

The current famine in Africa has served to highlight the importance of genetic diversity to ensure crop sustainability in the face of changing climate conditions. It has also brought to the fore the urgent need to establish community seed bank complexes for the maintenance of such genetic resources.

Melaku Worede

Diversity: A key factor for sustainable productivity

THE pool of genetic variability within a species allows it to adapt to environmental changes. This has a special significance for the maintenance and enhancement of productivity in agricultural crops in a region such as Sub-Saharan Africa where the agro-climatic conditions are very varied, resulting in diverse ecosystems for farmers to grow their crops. Such diversity provides security for the farmer against diseases, pests, drought and other stresses. It also allows farmers to exploit the full range of the region's highly varied micro environments differing in characteristics such as soil types, water availability, temperature, altitude, slope, and overall fertility.

Diversity among and within species is especially significant to Africa's farmers as it represents an important resource for farming communities to meet their subsistence needs. A wide variety of plant and animal species provides material for food, fibre, medicine, and other socioeconomic uses. Such diversity is crucial to sustain current production systems, improve peoples' diets and maintain life support systems essential for the livelihoods of local communities.

Maintenance of diversity both within and among species is, therefore, crucial to supporting and developing agriculture that is ecologically sustainable and helps local communities cope with the challenges of climate change. This is especially true for smallholder farmers practising agriculture under low-input conditions on difficult, often degraded lands.

The threat of genetic erosion

The broad range of genetic diversity existing in Africa, particularly in traditional and wild gene pools, is presently subject to serious genetic erosion and irreversible losses. This threat, which involves the interaction of several factors, is progressing at an alarming rate. The most crucial ones include displacement of indigenous farmers' varieties (landraces)[1] by new, genetically uniform crop cultivars, changes in agricultural development strategies and systems and/or land use, destruction of habitats and ecosystems, and reduction in rainfall leading to drought.

The drought that prevails in many parts of the African continent has directly and indirectly caused considerable genetic erosion, and at times has even resulted in massive deaths among people, their domestic animals and plants. The famine that persisted in some parts of Ethiopia in the last two decades, for example, has forced farmers to eat their own seed to survive or to sell their seed as a food commodity. This has often resulted in massive displacement of native seed stock by exotic seeds provided by relief agencies in the form of food grains.

The need for research to conserve and enhance *in situ* diversity

In situ (on-site) conservation of farmers' varieties on smallholder farms is providing a valuable option for conserving crop diversity (Melaku Worede, 1991). More importantly, it helps sustain evolutionary systems that are responsible for the generation of genetic variability. This is especially significant in the many parts of Africa subject to drought and other stresses, because it is under such environmental extremes that variations useful for stress-resistance breeding are generated. In the case of diseases or pests, this allows for continuing host-parasite co-evolution.

Also under these conditions, access to a wide diversity in local seeds probably provides the only reliable source of planting material. The ability of such materials to survive under these stresses is conditioned by their inherent broad genetic base. This is often not the case with the more uniform, new or improved cultivars which, despite their high yield potential, are less stable and not as reliable as sources of seed under the adverse growing conditions generally present in many of the drought-prone regions of Africa.

In these situations, establishment of species adapted to extreme environments in field gene banks, including semi-arid conditions, at strategic sites can provide a seed reserve for post-drought planting in places where traditional crops may have completely

failed. Germplasm materials maintained in such fields could be distributed to rural farming communities, scientific institutions and others for further investigation of their potential use in plant breeding programmes to improve food security.

Programmes for the evaluation and enhancement of farmers' varieties are certainly needed to stimulate the utilisation of germplasm resources that are already adapted to these conditions. Also, under such extreme environments, locally adapted farmers' varieties can provide suitable base materials for institutional crop improvement programmes in modern agricultural research organisations. There is, therefore, a pressing need to maintain farmers' varieties being grown under these dynamic conditions, and this is probably best achieved through farm and/or community-based conservation programmes.

There are several programmes in Africa that promote important community-level seed activities, which have a tremendous experience and pool of expertise that should be drawn upon. The Seeds of Survival/International (SOS/I) programme initially developed in Ethiopia and supported by USC (Unitarian Service Community) Canada, for example, has done a significant amount of work in building the technical capacity of African farmers and researchers in on-farm conservation, enhancement of farmers' varieties and in community-level seed production strategies. This programme still operates in countries of Eastern and Western Africa.

The Ethio-Organic Seed Action (EOSA) programme was developed from this earlier work. EOSA is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) promoting integrated conservation, use and management of agricultural biodiversity. With the guiding principle of 'conservation through use', the programme works with community groups, government researchers, other NGOs and industry to promote greater integration, and especially the integration of producers with the market. The programme operates at local, regional and national levels and aims to help develop mechanisms to support the ability of smallholder farmers to manage their own resource base through community-based seed networks, building linkages between farmers and industry through local markets and the promotion of organic agriculture. EOSA has been successful in promoting agricultural biodiversity conservation and increasing the diversity of durum wheat and other field crops in the programme areas (Anonymous, 2009).

EOSA has documented reliable experiences of effectively working on the conservation and improvement of local farmers' varieties, on community seed banking systems and seed multiplication that increase options for planting materials for farmers. It is necessary to further expand and promote such experiences through networking where a regional level of exchange of experience and expertise is possible.

Local communities and maintenance of genetic resources

Farming communities have always implemented conservation methods known to the formal sector as *ex situ* (off-field) and *in situ* (in-field) conservation strategies. They have been preserving or conserving their local crop types and varieties in gardens, backyards, fields and in their traditional storage facilities. The farm household includes small stores (clay pots, gourds, underground pits, etc.) that represent a 'de facto' *ex situ* conservation system that is probably more dynamic than the conventional one at a formal gene bank.

Traditional agro-ecosystems are sources of expertise for a sustainable, diversity-based agriculture. Many species little known to science or industrial technology are still being managed by local communities; these all together form a complex of dynamic communal gene bank systems. Endangered plant species as well as economically and ecologically useful crop types are usually included in the system as part of the community-managed environmental protection and species conservation schemes. Such species may include various wild trees, shrubs and grasses of traditional use to the communities as food, feed, medicine and sources of materials for fuel and construction.

Rural women are key members of the society in the strategy for farmer-based genetic resources conservation. They are traditionally involved in making seed selection, cleaning, storage and utilisation. They are mainly responsible for the safe storage at the household level of planting materials desired for the next season.

Seed is planted in the fields, i.e., on the same farm or in neighbouring areas where it acquired its distinctive features; it is also frequently exchanged among farmers and communities to be planted across regions differing in agro-ecological conditions. This can account for the broad range of adaptability (plasticity) inherent in such material (Melaku Worede, 1988). In places like Ethiopia, individual and communal underground seed storage is also a common practice when there is a drought leading to a famine crisis. Threatened households and communities, by tradition, bury large quantities of seed before they are forced to migrate elsewhere and then reclaim this seed for planting later when the drought crisis is over, usually within a three-year period (Melaku Worede, 1993; 1997). Maintenance of genetic diversity in this way provides a wide range of options for self-reliance in food crop production and security, thereby lowering the risks of food shortage.

Farmers in many parts of Africa also traditionally intercrop varieties and species. Thus, new variations are often created as a result of crossings within the mixtures. This has always given them the option to widen the diversity in their crops and to adopt the newly formed variations useful for sustaining productivity and other requirements through changing conditions, including climate change. The knowledge and the diversity local farmers have created have served as a basis for modern plant breeding and agricultural development (Emmanuel

et al., 1999).

Through continuous use and evaluation they maintain the genetic value of their varieties. This varietal genetic potential includes resisting environmental stresses, pests and diseases, as well as qualities such as palatability and storability that are well understood by the farming communities, particularly by women farmers. Special names that reflect the behaviour of those genes are usually given to these varieties. The high-lysine (an amino acid/protein deficient in most cereals) sorghum cultivar popularly known as '*wotet begunche*' (milk in my mouth) in Wello, Ethiopia, is but one example.

Similarly, varieties resistant to birds, pests and microbes are given names which indicate either the mechanisms of the resistance or special varietal behaviour that is responsible for that specific type of resistance. This indicates that traditional agricultural knowledge can serve as an important source of information in the improvement of agricultural productivity (Regassa Feyissa, 2000).

All modern forms of crop breeding are in fact, for the most part, dependent on the diversity promoted and maintained by local farming communities.

Securing a community-based seed supply system

The seed system used in most traditional farming systems is based on the local production of seeds by the farmers themselves. Farmers consistently retain seed as a security measure to provide a back-up in case of crop failures. They always store seeds for three main purposes:

- consumption;
- sale; and
- seed stock (for sowing in the next season).

Farmers practise seed selection, production, and saving for informal distribution of planting materials within and among the farming communities. Seed production in most cases is non-specialised; it is an integrated production of field crops, roots and tubers for consumption and marketing. This traditional seed supply system is an important back-up to overall agricultural crop production in a country. It is mainly based on the farmers' varieties with the exception of cases where the seed system depends on improved or introduced crop varieties. Usually, dependency on introduced varieties is created by the displacement of farmers' own varieties. This is the case in many parts of Africa that have been influenced by modern commercial crop production systems. The potential use of formal seed, which is characterised by a vertically organised production and distribution of tested seed and approved varieties, has limited adaptability under the prevailing conditions resulting from climate change.

Variety use and development, seed production and storage by farmers under local conditions, and seed exchange mechanisms still remain the important components of the dynamic system that forms the most important source of food crops for smallholder farmers.

Unfortunately, the economic value given to modern agricultural crop productivity has, for the most part, neglected the important contributions made by traditional crop improvement and seed supply systems. It has also largely ignored the steady depletion of traditional crop varieties, and has become a cause for a shortage or disappearance of locally adapted seeds.

The objective of the formal seed system in most cases remains at odds with the needs of smallholder farmers, who require multiple varieties of seed for all crops, and in small amounts, at the right time and at a reasonable cost (Regassa Feyissa, 2000). Similarly, most public and private seed enterprises do not produce and distribute seeds to meet the subsistence needs of rural households or for farmers living in economically marginal and environmentally challenging areas. The private seed companies see links with such farmers as economically unviable. Therefore, in order to ensure seed security in areas where the formal seed system is ineffective in particular, the capacity of the informal seed sector should be improved for a reliable supply of locally adapted varieties.

With the advent of the modernisation of agriculture and centralisation of seed supply systems, the traditional seed supply systems are likely to be disrupted even more. It is, therefore, essential to study, document and embark on enhancing such systems, building on the above-mentioned areas of community seed storage, use and exchange activities to develop sustainable sources of seed operating in networks, in a more coordinated and organised way.

What is a community seed bank?

Community seed banks are often understood as community-based stores used for the distribution of seed and grain to the local communities on a loan basis. In some cases, they are designed as income-generating operations where high-external-input seeds with chemical packages are distributed to the farming community. But, as already discussed above, a community seed bank system is and should be a part of a community-managed genetic resources conservation and utilisation practice (Regassa Feyissa, 2000). It is an integral part of an overall community-driven crop production strategy which farming communities have developed as part of their traditional farming systems. Within these systems, community-managed seed banks and on-farm farmers' variety maintenance are important components that serve as a source of sustained seed supply, as well as genetic materials for improved cultivar selection and enhancement.

The community seed bank represents a strategy for, or a collective approach to, the maintenance of genetic diversity in crop/plant species which also serves as a back-up for local self-sufficiency in planting material by stabilising the seed supply system in cases of crop failure. It is a repository of locally adapted crop diversity, including enhanced farmers' varieties that are competitive in yield and other desirable characteristics

with high-input varieties that can be poorly adapted to local conditions.

Low-cost community-level seed storage facilities can help to preserve the drought and climate change mitigating characteristics of traditional varieties, while, at the same time, serving as base material for farmers to select special lines to meet their changing needs. They also play a key role in improving market outlets through enabling communities to produce crops of known quality and in stabilising prices over changing situations. Thus, community seed bank development contributes toward promoting economic empowerment of farmers.

Networking community seed bank activities at national, regional and global levels

There is a growing worldwide concern and interest to promote ecological agriculture in the developing world as this is seen as being able to assist poor smallholder farmers achieve sustainable development beyond their current subsistence level. Central to this move is the recognition of the key role played by indigenous seeds and traditional farming practices. It is, therefore, essential to network with existing initiatives in these areas both within Africa and in other developing regions, sharing experiences on the conservation and effective utilisation of the rich inheritance of crop genetic resources still found with these smallholder farmers.

Developing a community seed bank complex at various strategically selected locations within the African region where community seed supply projects already exist offers a valuable starting point for achieving this task. This will provide an opportunity for networking and coordination of community seed bank activities in target areas, as well as the platform for case studies and learning or awareness-creating activities at local, national and regional levels.

There is one such project already being developed in South West Wello, Ethiopia within the community seed supply programme of EOSA, supported by SOS/I and USC Canada (Anonymous, 2009).

Finally, success in implementing such a network of community seed banks will depend largely on the willingness of agricultural professionals and policy-makers to learn from farmers, the living repositories of indigenous knowledge, and in no small measure on close partnerships and collaboration between scientists and farmers to achieve a synthesis between modern and indigenous knowledge, thereby creating a new knowledge base for sustainable development (Melaku Worede et al., 2000). The synergy resulting from the combined use of scientific and farmers' know-how is key to the enhanced management of natural resources that enables farmers to produce food crops beyond the subsistence level for national food security as well as to meet the challenges of climate change. ◆

Melaku Worede is senior adviser to the non-governmental organisations Seeds of Survival/ International and Unitarian Service Community of Canada. He is a plant breeder who worked for many years as the General Manager of Ethiopia's Plant Genetic Resources Centre, now the Institute of Biodiversity Conservation, establishing the first community seed bank for restoring, conserving and enhancing Ethiopian farmers' varieties with local communities.

The above is extracted from a chapter in the book Climate Change and Food Systems Resilience in Sub-Saharan Africa *(UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, Rome, 2011) edited by Lim Li Ching, Sue Edwards and Nadia El-Hage Scialabba. The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations.*

Endnote

1 Farmers' varieties, often referred to as landraces, are crop populations that have been adapted through years of selection and innovation by farmers, their local communities and the environment to meet the conditions under which they are cultivated.

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Rediscovering climate-tolerant crops

As East Africa battles its most severe drought in recent decades, there is growing awareness of the importance of crops that are resistant to drought and pests as a means to overcome famine.

Chee Yoke Heong

Because of its high productivity even in harsh conditions, cassava has come to be regarded as an important source of food in drought-prone areas across Africa.

FOOD crops such as cassava, sorghum, maize, peanut, wheat, sugar cane and banana all have 'climate' properties including stress tolerance, biomass accumulation and drought tolerance. If these crops are given due attention and systematically improved and adopted as a means to confront climatic challenges, the food situation in countries across Africa will likely improve and scenes of hunger and death which we are witnessing in East Africa now can be a thing of the past.

Among these crops, the humble cassava is perhaps the most important, as around the world, cassava is a vital staple for about 800 million people, with some reports putting the figure at one billion. Because of its high productivity, even in harsh conditions, cassava constitutes a source of food and income for poor farmers in Africa, Asia and Latin America. In Africa, about 70% of cassava production is used as food for about 300 million people.

Long seen as the food for poor people in poor countries, the drought-resistant cassava has come to be regarded as an important source of food in drought-prone areas across Africa.

Besides its ability to withstand harsh environments, cassava, which is variously known as tapioca, manioc or yucca, produces more food energy per unit of land than any other staple crop. Its leaves, commonly eaten as a vegetable in parts of Asia and Africa, provide vitamins and protein. Nutritionally, the cassava is comparable to potatoes, except that it has twice the fibre content and a higher level of potassium. Cassava leaves and roots, if properly processed, can therefore provide a balanced diet protecting millions of African children against malnutrition.

Indeed, cassava is said to contribute more to the world's calorie budget than any other food except rice and wheat, which makes it a virtually irreplaceable resource against hunger.

Talking about cassava's adaptability to the tropical African environment, a cassava breeder at the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture reportedly said: 'Cassava is to the African peasant farmers what rice is to the Asian farmers, or what wheat and potato are to the European farmers.'

One problem with cassava is the poisonous cyanides, which need to be destroyed before the cassava is consumed. The cyanide content differs with each variety of cassava and it can be destroyed through heat and various processing methods such as grating, sun drying, and fermenting.

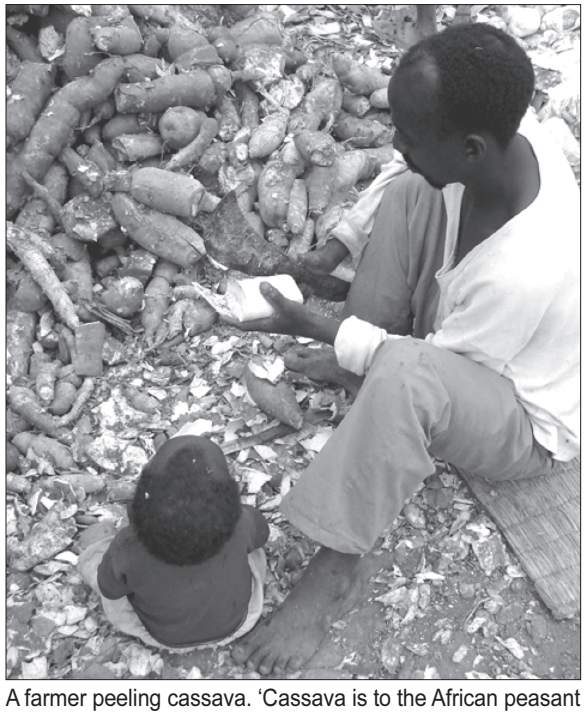
But because of the stigma attached to cassava, cultivation of the crop is limited. But its value is gaining traction among villagers and farmers looking for food security in times of prolonged drought. Some are able to grow enough to sell and generate income for the family.

Some countries which have taken the decision to aggressively adopt the growing of cassava varieties are already seeing promising results. In Nigeria, for example, both the government and farmers have adopted new technologies on cassava production and utilisation. Since 1990, FAO (UN Food and Agriculture Organisation) figures have consistently shown Nigeria as the world's largest cassava producer – moving from its fourth rank to relegate Brazil, Thailand and the Democratic Republic of Congo to the second, third and fourth positions. The achievement, according to FAO, is largely due to the availability of improved varieties developed by researchers and scientists.

A favourable factor is the creation of a conducive atmosphere by the Nigerian government for cassava expansion and spread. It adopted campaigns to popularise the improved cassava varieties, urging all relevant national institutions to embark on the multiplication and distribution of cassava planting materials in the rural areas.

Following the bitter experience suffered by Zimbabwe as a result of the 1992/93 drought that seriously affected that country's maize production, the country turned to cassava as an alternative to maize to safeguard the interest of peasant farmers and prevent any calamity in future.

Other successes were reported in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania, Mozambique, Zambia, Angola and Malawi.



A farmer peeling cassava. 'Cassava is to the African peasant farmers what rice is to the Asian farmers.'

Strains of disease-resistant cassava have also proved instrumental in saving lives and improving food security in Uganda, where a highly virulent form of the cassava mosaic virus began devastating crops in the late 1980s. The virus wiped out about 80% of the country's 500,000 hectares of land planted with cassava. In the ensuing years, the sweeping epidemic caused severe food shortages and economic hardship in parts of the country while several thousand people died of starvation. But a bold breeding programme which developed and disseminated new high-yielding varieties that were resistant to the Ugandan strain of the mosaic virus managed to bring the situation in check. The programme improved food security, restored economic balance to agricultural communities, and slowed the spread of the new mosaic strain to other cassava-producing countries in the region.

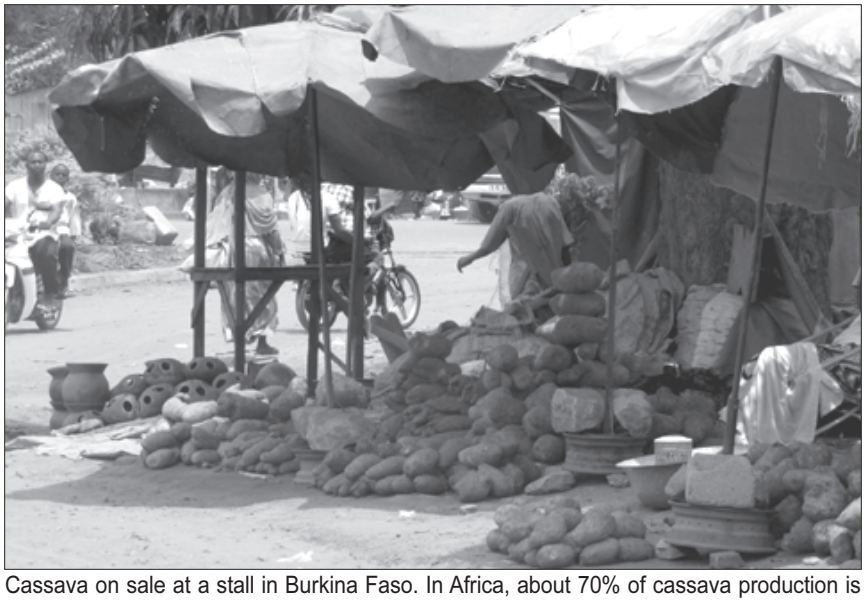
However, the risk of diseases remains a constant threat to cassava growing and production. A new study by scientists at the International Centre for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) published in the journal *Food Security* has identified hotspots around the cassava-producing world where conditions are ripe for outbreaks of some of the crop's most formidable enemies, namely, whitefly, green mite, cassava mosaic disease and cassava brown streak disease.

Combined outbreaks of all four pests and diseases are seen as a risk in Africa's Rift Valley region, South-East Asia, southern India, Mato Grosso state in Brazil, and northern South America.

The method of cultivating cassava – planting of stems cut from older plants and the transport of these stakes across large distances, at times across borders – facilitates the spread of pests and diseases.

'In an age of global travel, local risks to cassava production are now global risks – all it takes is one contaminated stake and a pest or disease could jump to an entire continent and establish itself very quickly,' one of the article's authors and also a CIAT entomologist and leading cassava expert, Dr Tony Bellotti, was quoted as saying.

In light of climatic challenges coupled with the constant threat of diseases, the ability to cultivate food crops that are climate-tolerant and pest-resistant is ever vital for the food security and livelihoods of millions of people worldwide. While cassava is one crop that seems to have received such attention, other crops which come with 'climate' properties need to be given due importance as their survival could potentially mean the survival of many more people. ◆



Cassava on sale at a stall in Burkina Faso. In Africa, about 70% of cassava production is used as food for some 300 million people.

Chee Yoke Heong is a researcher with the Third World Network.

Simple traditional technologies may be the answer

Writing in response to the 2007 famine which gripped East Africa, *Vincent Kitio* drew attention to the importance of appropriate technologies – specifically the ancient water-lifting technologies traditionally used in other parts of the Third World – in averting such disasters.

RECENT images shown on Kenyan television could not fail to move even the most stone-hearted among us to tears. It was heart-wrenching to see women hopelessly cuddling the lifeless bodies of their children, victims of a merciless famine that swept across the country. Many appeals were made by government, churches, and even the corporate world, to help mitigate against the disaster.

The time-tested technology behind the Noria waterwheel has survived to this day because of its efficiency and effectiveness.

Across the continent, in my home country of Cameroon, a similar event recurs almost every two years. Appeals are usually made by those in authority seeking food to help the victims. These are some of the issues that leave me pondering how my fellow learned Africans and I can contribute to alleviating the suffering our people have been undergoing.

The problem of recurring famine goes deeper than the often-touted reason of lack of water to help grow food or for animal use. The water levels available in Kenya are enough to sustain a hunger-free nation. In some parts of Cameroon, people suffer famine despite that country having the distinction of being home to the wettest climate on earth.

Examples abound of how others have managed to overcome famine. Despite the scarcity of water in semi-desert and arid lands of North Africa, the Arab world, the Mediterranean countries and part of South-East Asia, farmers there enjoy better food security, compared to sub-Saharan Africa. This is not because their economies are better off to enable them to easily transfer these technologies to areas suitable for their application.

Famine in Africa has reached unprecedented and disproportionate levels. Images of malnourished children, weak adults and carcasses of livestock are portrayed in the mass media every day. All the sub-Saharan African countries are affected by this drought, which many people argue could have been prevented or minimised.

Many attribute the origin of this preventable situation to poor governance, corruption, overpopulation, climate change and a dependency syndrome on foreign food aid. However, the dependency of agriculture on the weather, particularly the rain, has contributed significantly to the recurrent famine in Africa. This heavy dependence not only reduces the number of harvests per year, but also gives little freedom to the farmer for proper planning. Several years ago, rain-fed agriculture was not an issue in Africa, since entire communities could migrate from drought areas to greener pastures. This is no longer the case as no free land is available anymore.

Globalisation is also contributing to the burden of famine: cheap crop imports dominate some local markets to the detriment of local crops. This situation is worsened by the fact that agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa depends heavily on human labour as opposed to mechanisation. As a result, farmers need to provide more and more effort for little output. The application of irrigation methods in Af-

pump water for irrigation. Long before the discovery of fossil fuel, most of these countries already enjoyed food security. In fact, in order to cope with the harsh climatic conditions with little rain, inhabitants of these dry lands developed traditional knowledge of water-lifting techniques to exploit streams, rivers and underground water for irrigation to increase food production. As a result, farmers are able to harness available water to grow crops and harvest up to three times a year. In this process, all available forms of energy are put to use, such as human power, animal power, water power and wind power, to lift water for irrigation.

These ancient water-lifting technologies that have been used in Europe, the Arab world and part of Asia for centuries are still ignored in sub-Saharan Africa. Farming in Africa depends heavily on rainfall and human labour; and therefore, agriculture is vulnerable to the weather. As part of a lasting solution to the recurrent drought and famine, there is a pressing need to document, adapt and

rican agriculture remains very limited due to the water drudgery associated with it. The percentage of land irrigated in Africa is the lowest in the world.

It is therefore time to seriously explore other alternatives and affordable ways of improving traditional farming systems. Africa is endowed with permanent rivers that flow undisturbed to the sea, passing through hectares of idle lands suitable for agriculture. Using some of these rivers and streams to irrigate lands will be very beneficial to present and future food security in Africa.

The Persian wheel has been used to supply water for irrigation in Egypt, the Mediterranean countries, India and China.

The high operational cost of motor pumps to increase productivity through irrigation is simply not affordable to the majority of African farmers, and the high cost of the pump itself is prohibitive. Drilling boreholes is another solution, but again it is very expensive. It is common knowledge that people living in arid lands have developed irrigation techniques that have ensured them food security for centuries. This is the case with Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Jordan and many other Arab states, India, China and Israel, just to mention a few. Fortunately, despite the advance of modern technology, some of this traditional or indigenous knowledge is still in use today after thousands of years of operation.

Noria

In the city of Medinet El Faiyum, also known as the Garden of Eden, situated 100km south of Cairo, over 40 waterwheels, known as Noria, are used to lift water from the river Nile for irrigation. In this ancient city known as a garden in the middle of the desert, farmers are able to harvest three times a year despite the fact that the region receives only three days of rain a year. In addition, El Faiyum Governorate is considered as the main granary of Cairo. El Faiyum waterwheels were introduced several centuries ago by Ptolemic engineers. They are still working today side by side with electric water pumps to grow olives, vegetables, fruits, nuts, sugar cane, rice and wheat.

The Noria is a simple wooden waterwheel with buckets which uses the flow of the river to lift water to an irrigation aqueduct above the river: water is directed to several farms by force of gravity. The Noria works round the clock, seven days a week, all year round, provided that there is a flow of water. This time-tested technology, invented more than 2,000 years ago, most probably by the Romans, has survived up to this day because of its efficiency and effectiveness in ensuring food security. Thousands of Norias are still in operation in Spain, Portugal, Syria, Iraq, Mexico and China (in China, they are made of bamboo). The city of Hama in Syria is very famous for its different Norias built along the Orontes River, some of which are still used to irrigate urban agriculture while others attract thousands of tourists every year as a national heritage.

The Romans relied on irrigation systems to ensure food security in the empire. Roman architects and engineers developed different techniques as described by Vitruvius in 01BC in his *Ten Books on Architecture* to support their agriculture. Some of these irrigation systems have survived up until today. In 1913, Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary gave this definition: 'Noria – a large water wheel, turned by the action of a stream against its floats, and carrying at its circumference buckets, by which water is raised and discharged into a trough; used in Arabia, China, and elsewhere for irrigating land.'

The Norias found in Spain were introduced during the Islamic domination and have double sets of buckets on each side of their rims; others have two wheels on the same shaft. This allowed the system to increase the amount of water lifted. Spanish priests introduced Norias in Mexico during the colonial period. Some of them are still in operation in farms located in the northern part of the country. Their buckets are made of plastic material as opposed to clay pots or wooden buckets.

Another surviving testimony of this magnificent technology is the largest Noria (over 20 metres), known as Al-Mohammediyyah in Hama, Syria. It was the subject in one episode of the famous American television programme *Ripley's Believe It or Not!* The programme marvelled: 'A water wheel on the Orontes River in Syria is still working, although it was built in the year 1000.'

Some farmers in Hama use the Noria in urban agriculture, and occasionally when the water flow is not enough to turn the waterwheel, up to five motor pumps are needed to lift water to the aqueduct. This age-old technology is very much appropriate to the African rural lifestyle, especially now that the increase in fuel prices is already impacting negatively on economic growth.

Persian wheel

The Persian wheel, also known as Saqiya, is a water-lifting device made of two gear wheels and an endless chain of pots or buckets, capable of lifting water from both shallow and deep wells. The system is powered by one or two animals (donkey, horse, camel, bullock or buffalo). Persian

wheels have been used since time immemorial to supply water for irrigation in Egypt, the Mediterranean countries, India and China.

The animals walk around the first wheel and generate horizontal rotations, which are converted into vertical rotations through gears and bring up the chain of pots (buckets) that carry water from the well and empty into a conduct. Since the animals do not like the boring revolution walk, they are blindfolded. This technology has been in use for over 2,000 years. An American geographer who visited Egypt in 1727 estimated that there were over 200,000 Persian wheels in operation driven by oxen for agriculture purposes.

In India and Pakistan, Persian wheels, known as Rahat in Urdu, are traditional tools used for irrigation. Before their introduction in the region, irrigation was a very tedious and inefficient activity, as it is today in rural African countries, where people have to walk long distances to fetch water. The introduction of this technology improved agricultural productivity substantially in medieval India. As a result of a successful rural electrification programme across India, electric pumps are gradually replacing this time-tested device. Despite the availability of modern energy technology, Persian wheels remain popular in the Indian state of Rajasthan. It is estimated that one Persian wheel can irrigate up to one hectare of land.

Sakia

Another water-raising device that is worth mentioning here is the Sakia. The Sakia is an ancient water-lifting technology that has been used intensively in Egypt, where it originated from time immemorial. This efficient and effective device is widely used in the Nile Valley and Delta. The Sakia is made up of a large hollow wheel with scoops around its periphery, and water discharges at its centre. The Sakia can range from 2-5m in diameter, lifting water from 0.8-1.8m respectively.

Sakias, originally made of wood, are now made from galvanised sheet steel with a gear system that converts horizontal rotation into vertical rotation. They are mainly powered by animals, but some recent ones use electric or gasoline motors. According to the Egyptian Hydraulic Research and Experimental Station, more than 300,000 Sakias are in use in the Nile Valley and Delta, mostly driven by animals. A Sakia of 5m diameter will lift around $36m^3/h$ of water, while a 2m diameter model will lift $114m^3/h$.

Wind pump

Simple wind pumps as opposed to the sophisticated and costly ones that are occasionally seen in some African rural areas are another appropriate irrigation solution. In the mountain plateau of Lassithi in Crete, Greece, simple wind pumps have been used for over 400 years to irrigate land that produces mainly vegetables, fruits and wheat. These wind pumps, manufactured locally by village craftsmen, were originally made of wood and cloth. Wood was later replaced by metal in order to extend the lifespan. A decade ago, over 10,000 windmills could be found in the plateau, each farmer owning at least one of them to supply water for irrigation. Today, less than 2,000 are in operation, as a result of the European Union's agricultural subsidy policies to purchase farmers' implements. Traditional windmills are gradually being replaced with electric pumps. Model windmills are sold to tourists as souvenirs. When there is wind, each windmill pumps water from a well to a tank, and the water is later used by the farmer to irrigate his gardens by gravity. African coastal areas and hilly regions with permanent winds are ideal places for the application of this technology.

This clean and affordable technology for water lifting remains unknown to sub-Saharan African farmers. If thousands of them are introduced in the continent along its many rivers and streams to irrigate idle lands, food will soon be in abundance in the local markets, in just three months: the average time to grow and harvest vegetables badly needed to stop the spread of malnutrition.

Empowering technologies

Food aid should not be seen as a long-term solution; people should be empowered with affordable technologies that can help them to overcome present and future food shortages.

All the traditional water-lifting instruments mentioned here can be domestically manufactured with local material: no imported part is required, no fossil fuel is needed and human power is saved.

These technologies may seem very old, but their efficiency surpasses that of the imported motor pumps. It is regrettable to note that in today's high-tech world, one in six people has no access to clean water. Therefore any affordable solution that can bring water closer to people should be considered as an innovation rather than an attempt to set development back.

To make famine history in Africa, we need to introduce these affordable, tangible, proven, and traditional technologies from the arid world to African farmers. The creativity of Africa's informal sector will innovate and adapt the technologies to different local social and economic conditions, with a view to ensuring lasting food security.

While exploring modern technology to address the famine situation in Africa, it will be wise to consider the know-how that is in the public domain and not covered by any patent. Since the technologies described here are in operation as we speak, it would be highly appreciated if stakeholders in the fight against hunger in Africa visit Medinet El Faiyum in Egypt and Hama in Syria to witness how these simple traditional technologies can turn arid land into forest. This will be the beginning of the end of famine in Africa. ◆

Vincent Kitio is Chief of the Urban Energy Section in the Water, Sanitation and Infrastructure Branch of UN-HABITAT, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme. The above is an edited version of an article first published in Pambazuka News *(No. 320, 19 September 2007).*

Forecasters 'warned of Horn of Africa drought' last year

The international community was given ample notice of the drought in the Horn of Africa as the leading US-funded drought forecasting system sounded the alert a year ago.

Mico Tatalovic

FORECASTING systems were warning about a serious drought in the Horn of Africa as much as a year ago – but communication problems between scientists and decision-makers meant the alerts went largely unheeded, according to forecasters.

Warnings about the drought – which the United Nations says is the worst in 60 years – were issued last August, when the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) released a brief on food security in East Africa following the declaration of a La Niña event, a cooling of the sea surface in the Pacific Ocean known to affect weather in Africa.

'We were very confident that the October to December rains were going to be poor,' Chris Hillbruner, a food security early warning specialist with FEWS NET, told SciDev.Net. 'And there was an increased likelihood that the March to May rains were going to be poor as well.'

Once the predictions for October-December proved correct, the agency started releasing food security alerts for the region in November, February, March, May and June, and organising multi-agency meetings in Nairobi, in February, March and May.

The drought is now affecting 10 million people in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and Uganda.

Chris Funk, a climatologist with FEWS NET, said that the organisation's experts have been 'a little frustrated that we provided this information quite early' but not enough has been done to make good use of it.

'The technology has outpaced the response systems,' he said. 'We are still developing rapid response capability around that.'

And Hillbruner added: 'At the technical level, there's been agreement about the situation for the past five months.

'What we've demonstrated over time, but particularly in the last year, is that systems have got to the point where they can do pretty good early warning within a timeframe that offers opportunities for response.'

Randolph Kent, director of the Humanitarian Futures Programme at the UK's King's College London, said that the drought response raised issues about how the humanitarian community turns scientific information and uncertain predictions into decisions about a response, particularly in turbulent regions.

His comments were supported by Molly Hellmuth, a researcher at the International Research Institute for Climate and Society at Columbia University in the United States, who co-edited a report about mitigating weather disasters, published in June in *Climate and Society*.

Chris Funk, a climatologist with the Famine Early Warning Systems Network. Funk has said that the organisation's experts were 'a little frustrated' at the lack of response to its initial food security alerts for the Horn of Africa.

Hellmuth said clearer forecasts are needed that are aimed at decision-makers and come with recommended action steps stating what levels and types of action would be a sensible

response.

And some 'no regrets' actions that may not have a negative effect even if the predictions do not come true could be encouraged – such as repositioning of food supplies and capacity building, she said.

Hillbruner agreed that the uncertainties in forecasting hamper its use: 'In order to use early warning information most effectively, decision-makers have to be comfortable with that uncertainty – and it's difficult to be comfortable with it.'

But Funk added that the monitoring systems used for forecasting are now playing a powerful role in the huge humanitarian response now underway, making it a much more effective response than that to the Ethiopian famine in 1984-5.

Simon Mason, who works with Hellmuth, said that his research has shown that both forecasters and the end-users have a fear of being proved 'wrong' which causes all players to dilute their predictions and actions.

In a recent assessment of early warning systems, which did not include the FEWS NET Horn of Africa drought forecasts, Mason found that forecasters are 'playing safe; being very reluctant to issue strong warnings of severe climate events even when their models are suggesting there is a high chance of more extreme conditions'.

Hillbruner, however, denied that this had been the case with the Horn of Africa drought predictions.

In the humanitarian community, Andrew Collodel, an emergency programme coordinator with the aid agency HelpAge International, agreed that the forecasts had been made and communicated. HelpAge had listened to early warnings and worked in the region to prepare for the drought, but it had failed to garner sufficient funds in advance of the crisis.

Donors had faced 'confounding issues' such as the global financial situation, troubled local politics such as the chaotic situation in Somalia, and several other recent major crises that had raided their resources, such as the one following the Haiti earthquake and the tsunami in Japan.

'The early warning systems are not a problem, how we react to them is,' he told SciDev.Net. – *SciDev.Net*

Ground your warplanes, save the Horn of Africa

Contrasting the niggardly sum allocated by the British government for famine relief in the Horn of Africa with its huge war expenditure in Libya, *Ramzy Baroud* maintains that if only these rich countries would ground their warplanes for a few days, this single action alone could save the entire region.

'WHEN you are hungry, cold is a killer, and the people here are starving and helpless.' Not many of us can relate to such a statement, but millions of 'starving and helpless' people throughout the Horn of Africa know fully the pain of elderly Somali mother, Batula Moalim.

Moalim, quoted by the British *Telegraph*, was not posing as spokesperson to the estimated 11 million people (per United Nations figures) who are currently in dire need of food. About 440,000 of those affected by the world's 'worst humanitarian disaster' dwell in a state of complete despair in Dadaab, a complex of three camps in Kenya. Imagine the fate of those not lucky enough to reach these camps, people who remain chronically lacking in resources, and, in the case of Somalia, trapped in a civil war.

All that Batula Moalim was pleading for was 'plastic sheeting for shelter, as well as for food and medicine'.

It is disheartening, to say the least, when such disasters don't represent an opportunity for political, military or other strategic gains and, subsequently, enthusiasm to 'intervene' peters out so quickly.

UN officials from the World Food Programme (WFP) are not asking for much: $500 million to stave off the effects of what is believed to be the worst drought to hit the Horn of Africa in 60 years. This is not an impossible feat, especially when one considers the geographic extent of the drought and creeping famine. Ethiopia, Somalia, Djibouti, Kenya are all affected, and terribly so. Sudan and Eritrea are also not far from the centre of this encroaching disaster.

Sixty percent of the amount requested by WFP has already been raised. More is needed, however, especially as the reverberation of the drought is already surpassing the immediate need for food and shelter. Five million are already at risk of cholera in Ethiopia alone, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO). Hundreds have reportedly died, and many more are likely to follow.

Cholera requires an immediate remedy as the intestinal infection leads to severe diarrhoea, dehydration and death. Other figures are equally grim. 8.8 million people, also in Ethiopia, are at risk of contracting malaria, according to Tarik Jasarevic, WHO spokesman. Jasarevic has also told journalists that these ailments have already been reported in Somalia, and other Ethiopian regions. This means the disaster is not confined to refugee camps and is thus much harder to control.

For refugees, there is nothing worse than having no safe haven in sight. Still, they must escape when death becomes the only alternative to aimless journeys. While hundreds of thousands are gathering in Kenya's camps, an average of 1,700 Somali refugees venture to Ethiopia each day. The latter, a country with a population of about 85 million, is fully embroiled in the crisis. 4.5 million Ethiopians need assistance, a rise of over 50% in less than three months, according to WHO. One can only try to envisage the speed at which this disaster is unravelling.

International organisations, including WFP, WHO and UNICEF, have made numerous appeals. Some major media outlets responded by giving the humanitarian crisis a degree of coverage. While donations have bashfully trickled in, the goals are yet to be reached. According to a report by the *Telegraph*, 'no African country has offered a donation to help drought victims in the Horn of Africa outside of those affected'.

The report, published 15 July, quoted Michael O'Brien-Onyeka, Oxfam's Regional Campaigns Policy Manager for East and Central Africa, who said it was 'disappointing' that 'African states insist on "African solutions for African problems" with regard to Libya but fail to respond to droughts and famines'.

The amounts spent on US military adventurism in the Horn of Africa can feed, clothe, shelter and treat countless refugees.

On the subject of Libya, it may be helpful to consider some financial figures.

'The British Government has pledged £38 million in food aid to Ethiopia,' reported the *Telegraph*. The following day, the British *Daily Mirror* reported on the seemingly different subject of Libya. Four more British jets were recently deployed to the war zone near Libya, raising the total to 22 RAF jets, according to James Lyons in the *Mirror* (16 July). The cost thus far is £260 million, only £40 million short of the total amount needed by WFP to feed 11 million starving people.

Here is another example of the dubious nature of British involvement in the war on Libya (falsely slated as a war to prevent imminent massacres of civilians): 'Tornado GR4s cost around £35,000 for every hour they are in the air and are having to fly long distances from their base in Gioia del Colle, southern Italy, to Libya,' according to the *Mirror*.

Major African countries and Britain are not the only parties involved in acts of duplicity. The amounts spent on US military adventurism in the Horn of Africa, especially Somalia, and its renewed use of costly unmanned drones can feed, clothe, shelter and treat countless refugees. For their part, Arab and Muslim countries tend to be the least responsive parties in such situations. While it is true that the chief of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, made several appeals for help, such singular calls generate feel-good moments but no major mobilisation for action.

The disaster in the Horn of Africa is partly man-made. Countries with 'failed state' status (in other words, victims of outside interventions) cannot possibly fend off crises of this magnitude. For the last 20 years, Somalia has had no central government controlling the country's territories. Outside intervention has made it impossible for any party to unite the disjointed country. What is a Somali refugee to do?

To help the millions affected by the multilayered disaster in the Horn of Africa, we need more than appeals for blankets and foodstuff. We also need a degree of human decency and common sense. We need to re-channel some of the funds wasted on disastrous wars into actually saving lives. If warring parties would ground their Tornado GR4s and other warplanes for a few days, the single action alone could save the entire region.

For now, though, let us all do what we can to help the Horn of Africa survive this terrible ordeal. ◆

Ramzy Baroud (www.ramzybaroud.net) is an internationally-syndicated columnist and the editor of PalestineChronicle.com, from which this article is reproduced. His latest book is My Father Was a Freedom Fighter: Gaza's Untold Story *(Pluto Press, London), available on Amazon.com.*

How Venezuela's Bolivarian revolution may outlast Hugo Chávez

The health problems facing President Chávez have raised questions as to the future of his project to transform Venezuelan society. *Benjamin Dangl* explains why he believes that this revolution will live on.

A FEW years ago, when I first visited Venezuela, I met countless enthusiastic supporters of Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez. One of them was Peggy Ortiz, a blonde, self-proclaimed Chavista (Chávez supporter) who at the time was working as a radio producer in Caracas.

On a walk through the city's Plaza Bolivar she introduced me to her friends who were all, in her words, *revolucionarios*. One of them was a Che Guevara impersonator. He had the same smile, beret and goatee as El Comandante, and proudly rode a black moped around, giving high fives to street vendors selling Hugo Chávez T-shirts, key chains and alarm clocks.

'People believe in Chávez. I believe in him,' Ortiz explained as we walked past the stalls. 'He's a clean president, he doesn't hide anything. Most people who are against Chávez don't understand this political process.'

Given the unfortunate battle with cancer that has recently beset Chávez, now is a good opportunity to reflect on Chávez's rise to power and the positive changes his policies have brought to Venezuela. In addition, the upcoming 2012 presidential election in Venezuela also offers an opportunity to reflect on whether the Bolivarian revolution may outlast Chávez himself, or whether the movement is too dependent on Chávez as a central figure to move beyond their leader.

A brief history of revolution

Chávez first entered the national limelight in the wake of a popular rebellion in Venezuela against neoliberal economic policies and state repression. Economic inequality, rampant in Venezuela throughout the 20th century, came to a breaking point in 1989, when right-wing President Carlos Andres Perez arrived in office. Perez implemented harmful International Monetary Fund structural adjustments, accepted a massive loan and subsequent debt which plunged the country into an economic recession. The Caracazo, a February 1989 uprising in Caracas against the Perez government and his economic policies, was met with brutal military repression. Hugo Chávez, then a young colonel in the army, refused to participate in the Caracazo crackdown. He led an attempted coup d'état against the Perez government in 1992. When the coup failed Chávez took the blame for it and was imprisoned until 1994.

Soon after his release Chávez began a presidential campaign that took him across the country, gaining support from diverse sectors of society. He started out with little financial backing, often travelling in a broken-down pickup truck and giving speeches out of the back. His humble background – he grew up in a poor family – and fiery speeches offered a radical alternative to the wealthy, right-wing politicians in power and gave hope to a disenfranchised population, 60% of which lived below the poverty line.

Shortly after winning the 1998 presidential election, Chávez re-nationalised the country's oil reserves. Under the new constitution, the state was granted full ownership of the Petroleos de Venezuela SA (PDVSA) gas and oil company. This keeps the government, instead of corporations, in control of the industry. The constitution also established that revenue from the oil business should be used primarily to finance social and development programmes that alleviate poverty.

With the new funds, Chávez's government began literacy campaigns, undertook land reform, constructed free dentist offices, hospitals and schools in the poorest neighbourhoods, and created systems of subsidised supermarkets and business cooperatives all over the country.

This is not to say that everything has gone smoothly under Chávez. There has certainly been a centralisation of power under the leader – a centralisation that may make the Bolivarian revolution weaker when Chávez is no longer president. Though not always linked directly to Chávez himself, there have also been high violent crime rates in Caracas, as well as notably poor prison conditions and violence in prisons.

The country has also recently been beset by inflation. This is something, however, that the Chávez administration confronted in July of this year. The new law aimed at curbing inflation is called the Law for Just Prices and Costs, and enables the government to put a cap on the prices charged for services and goods throughout various levels of the national economy.

The Chávez government has faced many political challenges, particularly from the disenfranchised elite that used to run the country. In

April of 2002, a US-supported coup d'etat was staged against Chávez. Yet the rebellion was shortlived. After an outpouring of support among civilian and military Chavistas, the illegitimate government was pushed from office. Chávez was back in the presidency within two days.

During one visit to Venezuela, I stopped by a newly built community centre in a Caracas neighbourhood. In one room, women over the age of 70 were attending literacy classes decorated with murals of Chávez. The literacy campaign, known as Mission Robinson, has reached millions of people of all ages. Other occupational classes teach carpentry, auto repair and other skills to help people gain employment. Programmes in education and literacy have lowered Venezuela's poverty rates by giving citizens new skills to improve their standard of living.

Nearby the literacy classrooms were the octagonal health clinics that are located throughout the country. In the clinics, Cuban doctors offer emergency medical care, vaccinations, check-ups and medicine for common illnesses. Free healthcare improves the quality of life for many Venezuelans. The work of Cuban doctors in Venezuela's new clinics and healthcare systems has allowed for the quick expansion of services. In some cases, poor families are able to visit the doctor or a dentist for the first time in generations.

A local resident led me to a building under construction that was soon to be a Mercal. Mercals, government-subsidised supermarkets providing basic food at low prices, are now all over the country. Beans, bread, milk, vegetables and other products, largely from Venezuelan producers, are available in the markets.

Everywhere I went across the country, I ran into Chávez supporters. William Barillas, a tall, bearded volunteer at Radio Horizonte, a community radio station in Merida, believed the Chávez administration was a significant improvement from previous governments. 'This government has left the era when governments never did anything for the country. They used to just help capitalists, which were a minority of the population. This government actually cares about the education and health of poor people.'

Decentralising power

Regarding the question of how the Bolivarian revolution could outlast Chávez, one answer may lie in the hopeful decentralising of power that is taking place through the communal councils in the country. Regardless of who occupies the presidential palace, these examples of popular power could prove to influence politics from a grassroots level in profound ways for decades to come.

Communal councils offer an interesting look into some of the participatory aspects of the Bolivarian process. They were created by the government in 2006, and thousands of them exist across the country today. The councils work to solicit funding from the government, begin social projects, programmes and missions in their community, and deal with issues like the management of local health and water projects.

Long-time Venezuelan activist Alfonso Olivo believed the communal councils were 'the most revolutionary measure that this government has taken' due to their transfer of power from mayors and governors to the ordinary citizens in the councils. 'The people are capable [of social planning] by themselves, without the involvement of the state or the bureaucratic officials,' he noted in the book *Venezuela Speaks!*, a collection of interviews with Venezuelan activists.

Communal councils in Venezuela show the fascinating push-and-pull that emerges where the state creates structures and projects that build community bonds. The councils are sometimes autonomous from, or even antagonistic toward, the Bolivarian state and party. It is essential to contextualise the political landscape of this grassroots space before dissecting some of the dynamics of this dance between movements and the state.

The Chávez administration organised the councils in ways that encourage community involvement. Anyone over the age of 15 can participate, and for a decision to be officially made, at least 30% of those in the council have to vote on it. In urban areas, councils must involve a minimum of 150 families, and around 20 families in rural areas. This scale means that the councils promote direct participation and are relatively easy to self-manage. When a council comes to a decision for a project, they can receive funding directly from the national government or national institutions, dispersing power away from local mayors and officials and into the hands of residents themselves, according to sociologist Greg Wilpert's book *Changing Venezuela by Taking Power*. Communal councils have provided a check to the power of local governments, as well as a platform to demand transparency and a more efficient bureaucracy from the government.

The smaller scale and local focus of these councils is essential to their sustainability. As political scientist Josh Lerner points out in an article for *Z Magazine*, 'Since the councils usually contain only a couple hundred families within a few blocks, their members tend to be socio-economically, demographically, and politically similar. Since residents decide the boundaries of their own councils, they can self-select like-minded groups.' This means that they can pinpoint community needs and decide on projects more efficiently than a state official who doesn't live in the neighbourhood. Lerner gives the following example: 'If the members of the 23 de Enero council obviously need a new elevator, because of their common situation and interests, it may be in their best interest to pursue the elevator without spending much time and energy debating it.' Localised control is at the heart of the council's functionality, helping to eliminate unnecessary bureaucracy and circumvent corrupt or unresponsive politicians.

The councils can also provide a counterweight to a more centralised

state. In the book *Reclaiming Latin America*, political scientist Sara Motta writes that the communal councils 'are an attempt to create a new set of state institutions that bypass the traditional state, and distribute power in a democratic and participatory manner.' The elasticity of the relationship between the grassroots and the state is tested here through a public empowered by state-created institutions – institutions that citizens can then use to challenge the traditional state if necessary.

Balancing act

The balancing act between remaining autonomous from the state and engaging it is described to Motta by council participant Edenis Guilarte: 'We must obtain the tools to be able to struggle against the bureaucracy and search for a way to get rid of leaders who want to control us, look to maintain their own power, and who divide the community.' In this sense, the councils can be a tool of emancipation. 'What we are doing,' Guilarte explained, 'is training, creating consciousness, which is a process that goes beyond repairing a road, obtaining a service, enabling access to water. It's a macro process, a process of social change, a fight over ideas and practice.' The social bonds created by working on development projects through these state-created institutions can supersede the immediate goals of the actual project.

While communal councils manage budgets and develop community projects, they also serve as a basis for networking and developing community ties, which are then useful beyond the councils' work. For example, as reported in *Peacework Magazine*, Ismila, a community activist in a Caracas neighbourhood, explained that when the public water company Hidrolara didn't respond to demands from her community to deal with a sewage backup for two days, the members of her communal council decided to take matters into their own hands. Because they were used to working together, debating and organising, it was easy to coordinate a trip to the Hidrolara offices and demand to speak with the person in charge of dealing with sewage emergencies. Together, they had to pressure the officials for two hours, but ended up returning to their community with an engineer to take care of the problem. Ismila said, 'We learned today that Hidrolara is useless as an institution, it does not work for the communities. These officials think they know everything and don't listen to the community until there's a problem.' So while the bureaucracy posed a problem, the solidarity and sense of community developed through the communal councils helped to solve it.

The central question of the political struggle within this space, according to Motta, is whether the communal councils will 'become an institution that channels the demands of poor communities to a localised social democracy (with all the possibilities and limitations that this entails) or whether they enable the expansion of demands for community self-management that challenge capitalist social relations.' The councils provide the tools for local organising, which has a great potential to dismiss government clientelism and assert autonomy, helping people to live and organise beyond the state.

There are a number of cases in which social movements and groups – both created autonomously and by the government – have risen up, either in defiance of the Chávez government or with positions that radicalise the government's policies. Some have been organised around environmental, labour, and political issues and deserve attention here. As the editors of the book *Venezuela Speaks!* point out, the Bolivarian revolution depends on grassroots activism. The future of the revolution, they write, 'does not just depend on whether it can continue to overcome the destabilisation and fear campaigns of the opposition. It also depends on how well the government is able to listen to the voices demanding even deeper changes.' ◆

Benjamin Dangl is the author of Dancing with Dynamite: Social Movements and States in Latin America *(AK Press, 2010).*

Venezuela scores high in electoral fairness

Juan Reardon

IN early July, Venezuela's Social Investigation Group XXI (GIS) released new comparative data on electoral fairness in the country compiled by the Canada-based Foundation for Democratic Advancement (FDA), which found Venezuela's elections to be 'exceptionally fair, and thereby highly democratic'.

After a thorough review of Venezuela's electoral laws and regulations on political news coverage as it relates to elections, equality of campaign financing, equality of candidate and party influence, as well as equality of voter influence, the FDA gave the country a score of 85% in overall 'electoral fairness'.

In comparison, Finland scored 41%, Denmark 35%, the United States 30%, Canada 26%, Mexico 23% and Tunisia (when dictator Ben Ali was in power) 10%.

In their report, *2011 FDA Electoral Fairness Audit of Venezuela's Federal Electoral System*, the FDA evaluated Venezuela in four main areas of electoral legislation, with a total of 10 points possible in each area:

1. Political content of media (Result: 9/10);
2. Equality of political candidate and party influence (Result: 9/10);
3. Equality of electoral finance (Result: 8/10); and
4. Equality of voter say (Result: 8/10).

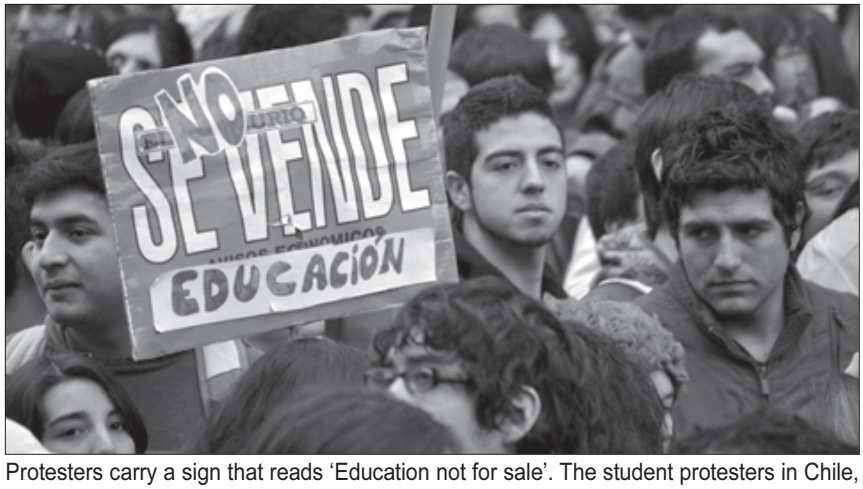
In total, Venezuela scored 34/40, or 85%.

The report's authors said the principal source of the country's electoral fairness is the Venezuelan Constitution, 'which emphasises the rights of citizens and a cooperative, pluralistic, and respectful society'. – *abridged from www.venezuelanalysis.com*

Chilean student movement leads uprising for transformation of the country

Chilean students have been staging demonstrations for weeks to protest against the country's privatised system of education. Their agitation for 'free education for all' is part of a broader movement to liberate the country from the vestiges of the political, economic and social order imposed by the Pinochet dictatorship.

Roger Burbach



Protesters carry a sign that reads 'Education not for sale'. The student protesters in Chile, joined by professors and educators, are demanding free education for all from primary school level to the university.

CHILE is becoming a part of the global movement of youth that is transforming the world bit by bit – the Arab Spring, the sit-ins and demonstrations in the Spanish plazas, and the rebellion of youth in London.

Weeks of demonstrations and strikes by Chilean students came to a head on 9 August, as an estimated 100,000 people poured into the streets of Santiago. Joined by professors and educators, they were demanding free education for all, from the primary school level to the university.

In the riotous confrontations that took place between bands of youth and the police, tear gas canisters were fired into the crowds, and 273 people were arrested. Later on, in the cool winter evening, the deafening noise of people banging on their pots and pans in support of the students could be heard throughout Santiago, the country's capital city of six million.

Under the 17-year dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, much of Chile's educational system was privatised, and even after he left power in 1990, private education continued to prevail. Today, 70% of university students attend private institutions. Private education is sustained by the constitution drawn up during the Pinochet regime, and educational entrepreneurs capitalised on it.

Camila Vallejo, the elected president of the Student Federation of the University of Chile and one of the main leaders of the national protests, proclaims: 'We need quality education for everyone. It is a right. Chilean society cannot move forward without it.'

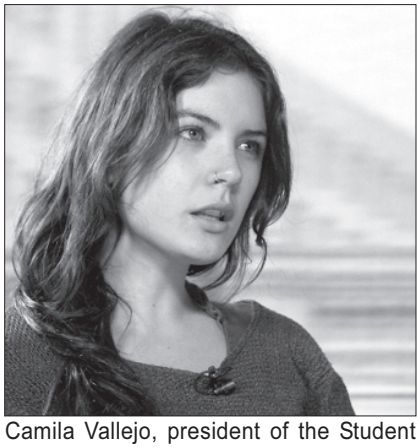
Twenty students from the secondary schools are currently on a hunger strike and are willing to forgo the academic year, even die for the cause.

Alina Gonzales, a 16-year-old participant in the secondary school strike, told New America Media: 'We will do what it takes to change this system and our lives.'

The students are part of a broader movement that is calling for the transformation of Chile. In recent months, copper mine workers have gone on strike, massive mobilisations have taken place to stop the construction of a huge complex of dam and energy projects in the Bio Bio region of southern Chile, gay rights and feminist activists have marched in the streets, and the Mapuche indigenous peoples have continued to demand the restoration of their ancestral lands.

Faced with the intransigence of the conservative government of billionaire President Sebastian Pinera, the movement is calling for a national plebiscite. Vallejo, who is also a member of the Communist youth organisation, asserts, 'If the government is not capable of responding to us, we will have to demand another non-institutional solution: the convocation of a plebiscite so that the citizens can decide on the educational future of the country.'

Forty-two social organisations grouped together under the banner 'Democracy for Chile' have rallied to back the student movement. Their manifesto proclaims: 'The economic, social and political system is in a profound crisis that has compelled the communities to mobilise … An unprecedented and historic movement of citizens is questioning the bases of the



Camila Vallejo, president of the Student Federation of the University of Chile: 'We need quality education for everyone. It is a right'.

economic and political order that were imposed in 1980' by the Pinochet constitution.

Picking up on the students' call for a referendum, the manifesto argues that it should be 'multi-thematic' and allow voters to decide whether to convene a constituent assembly that would have the power to draft a new constitution.

In recent years, there has been a growing call for an end to the neoliberal order and the attendant political system that concentrates power in the hands of a political elite. As in Ecuador, Bolivia and Venezuela, there is a movement to reshape the nation with a constitution that allows for popular participation at all levels of government. Fundamental rights would be recognised, including the right to free education, health care, culture, and the right to choose one's sexual orientation.

President Pinera refuses to endorse the call for a plebiscite. His approval rating now stands at 26%. The day after the massive demonstrations, he signed a token law calling for 'quality education'. He denounced supporters of universal free education, arguing that it would represent a transfer of wealth to the privileged since 'the poor would pay taxes that benefit the more fortunate' who attend the universities.

Chile is at a crossroads. In the two decades since the fall of the dictatorship, many Chileans have succumbed to consumerism, as shopping malls and credit cards have proliferated with the 'Chilean Economic Miracle' that has seen annual growth rates of 6%. But many Chileans want a more meaningful society. They recall the Chilean tradition of democratic socialism that was snuffed out with the overthrow of President Salvador Allende on 11 September 1973.

New mobilisations are planned, including a national strike. The call has also gone out for similar demonstrations in other Latin American countries. – *New America Media* ◆

Roger Burbach is the director of the Center for the Study of the Americas (CENSA).

Pinera yields and calls for talks

AFTER three months of mass protests that provoked a sharp drop in his popularity, Chilean President Sebastian Pinera agreed on 26 August to negotiate with students and teachers demanding more state funding for education and profound changes in government.

Pinera, who leads Chile's conservative coalition, made the call for dialogue as people recovered from a two-day (24-25 August) nationwide strike called by the country's largest union organisation.

As students, teachers and pot-banging families around the country joined in, the strike turned into a huge protest against his 18-month-old government.

Most marchers were peaceful but scattered violence marred the protests, and a 16-year-old boy was shot to death on 25 August, allegedly by a police bullet, as officers responded to looting and riots. Nearly 1,400 people were arrested nationwide, and more than 200 police and civilians were injured.

'After more than three months in which we've seen violence and conflict flourish, now is the time for peace, the time for unity, the time for dialogue, the time for agreements,' Pinera said.

He took care to invite representatives of all the sectors involved – students, teachers, parents, professors and those who run the nation's schools and universities – and say that education reform talks should take place in the presidential palace as well as Congress.

That represents an about-face for Pinera, who had avoided talking directly with protesting students or openly considering their demands before sending his 21-point package of education proposals to Congress.

The students had their own list when they began taking over high schools and universities three months ago, from more state funding to better teacher training, and a guarantee of free quality education to all Chileans. But their demands grew to include a new constitution to replace the top-down political system dictated by Gen. Augusto Pinochet's regime, and popular referendums to give Chileans a direct voice in their democracy.

Union organisers of the nationwide strike added their own list, including major changes to pensions, health care and the labour code.

Camilo Ballesteros, student president at the University of Santiago, praised Pinera's overture.

The student leader at the University of Concepcion, Guillermo Petersen, credited the movement's pressure for changing the president's mind, but said it remains to be seen how willing Pinera will be to make real concessions.

Students planned to decide over the 27-28 August weekend how to respond. The presidents of Chile's House and Senate, representing leftist and rightist parties, had offered to sponsor negotiations, but Pinera and the students were both leery of participating. (The Confederation of Students of Chile has since accepted Pinera's invitation to meet. – Editor)

Union members estimated that 600,000 people participated in the 25 August marches nationwide. Police offered no nationwide numbers, but estimated far lower crowds in Santiago. – *MercoPress* ◆

The limits of transparency

The World Bank is sticking with its Managing Director, Egypt's former minister of investment Mahmoud Mohieldin, as allegations of financial malpractice against him mount, reports *Emad Mekay*.

THE World Bank, which has often pressed borrowing nations to adopt more robust financial transparency regulations, has refused to disclose financial records of one of its senior officials despite allegations of corruption, abuse of authority and mismanagement of public funds when he served as a minister under the now toppled Hosni Mubarak.

In correspondence seen by *Al-Ahram Weekly* between the World Bank and a Washington-based NGO that advocates for greater accountability in international institutions, the lender has refused to make known records of Managing Director Mahmoud Mohieldin, who was a close aide to Mubarak and his son and heir-apparent Gamal in Egypt, citing concern over personal privacy.

The bank's legal counsel Anne-Marie Leroy told the Government Accountability Project (GAP) that the bank had to strike 'a careful balance between disclosure of financial interests and personal privacy and security concerns', and therefore decided against disclosing Mohieldin's financial statements.

The 46-year-old Mohieldin, who served as minister of investment from 2004 until his appointment as the World Bank's managing director in October 2010, became a controversial figure in Egypt following the ouster of Mubarak in February.

Along with Foreign Trade and Industry Minister Rachid Mohamed Rachid and Finance Minister Youssef Boutros Ghali, Mohieldin was a member of the economic team in charge of deeply unpopular policies that included an aggressive privatisation programme.

Both Rachid and Ghali fled abroad to escape facing charges of corruption, misuse of public funds and profiteering.

World Bank Managing Director Mahmoud Mohieldin is the subject of numerous allegations of financial misconduct stemming from his tenure as investment minister under Hosni Mubarak.

Numerous allegations of financial misconduct have been filed against Mohieldin with the prosecutor-general's office, and his alleged role in sweetheart deals involving the sale of public assets at below market rates has been raised in countless press articles.

Mohieldin travelled to Egypt several times following his World Bank appointment but has not set foot in the country since probes began into widespread corruption under Mubarak.

GAP said it began seeking Mohieldin's financial disclosure records from the World Bank after it became clear that he was the subject of controversy in Egypt. It maintains that the bank's publication of 'abbreviated forms' will 'not suffice to clarify the questions that now surround the alleged business conduct of Mr Mohieldin as Egypt's former investment minister'.

One of the accusations filed against Mohieldin is that he pressured the committee charged with valuing the Omar Effendi retail chain to lower its valuation, illegally benefiting the buyer.

In May an Egyptian court ordered that the sale of the chain to the Saudi-based company Anwal be annulled on the grounds that the valuation was too low.

According to court documents, the 82 Omar Effendi stores were sold for LE590 million when the land on which they were built was alone worth LE4 billion.

As the World Bank resisted calls for greater transparency over the financial dealings of its managing director, hundreds of workers from Omar Effendi were distributing fliers asking Egypt's interim military rulers to demand Mohieldin's extradition from Washington.

Another case before investigators alleges that Mohieldin approved the sale of the chemical manufacturer Egypt for Chemical Industries to Belgian investors at well below market prices.

'Mr Mohieldin is apparently under investigation for corruption in Egypt, yet the bank appears to be shielding his finances from public scrutiny in the United States,' said GAP international programme officer Beatrice Edwards.

A source close to the World Bank, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Mohieldin 'may be enjoying the personal protection' of World Bank Group President Robert Zoellick, who has publicly stated his admiration for Mohieldin's work under Mubarak and the economic changes it wrought in Egypt.

Zoellick had publicly praised Mohieldin as 'a tireless reformer' with an 'outstanding track-record of results in reform, modernisation, and knowledge-generation'. ◆

This article is reproduced from Al-Ahram Weekly *(No. 1061, 18-24 August 2011).*

Bahrain and human rights

Is the Obama administration really concerned about human rights in Bahrain, asks *Anthony Newkirk*.

IT is becoming painfully obvious that the United States is hostile to the 'Arab Spring'. In Egypt, US military aid programmes remain in force, and in Yemen a 'secret' US war may be in the offing. In the United Arab Emirates plans may be afoot to develop a for-profit rapid reaction force (to crack down, surely, on UAE citizens for 'publicly insulting' their leader). The US government continues to support the Israeli blockade of Gaza. But perhaps the quintessential example of US reactionary policy is in the tiny kingdom of Bahrain.

1 July marked the beginning of a 'National Dialogue' in Bahrain that King Hamad Isa bin Al Khalifa called to promote reconciliation in his strife-torn land. But it is unclear what the point of the National Dialogue is when the king is also attempting to silence Bahraini civil society. The country's ongoing domestic conflict between an unpopular Sunni elite and a Shia majority came to a boil in February when mostly Shia Bahrainis began protesting against long-standing discrimination. The ruling family offers the pretext that over half of the country's 500,000 citizens are under the thrall of Shia Iran. Meanwhile, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has been proclaiming that the United States will stand up for human rights in Bahrain and also ensure its status as a 'major non-NATO ally'.

Mostly Shia Bahrainis began protesting in February against long-standing discrimination. Picture shows the Pearl Roundabout site in Manama in smoke and flames on 16 March, after police attacked the area where protesters were camped out.

Send in the Marines

On 16 March, one month after the demonstrations began, King Hamad imposed martial law and police attacked Pearl Roundabout, where most of the protesters were camped out. Two days earlier, at least 1,000 Saudi troops and 500 UAE police attached to the Peninsula Shield Force (PSF) entered Bahrain. Although part of the occupation force may have already left Bahrain after the official end of martial law in June, the PSF presence in Bahrain may last long-term in order to 'protect its borders'.

A report recently issued by Human Rights Watch (HRW) details ongoing human rights violations, including torture, disappearances, and a systemic crackdown on the majority Shia. Such matters should be of grave concern to the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labour, which officially plays a key role in formulating US human rights policy.

But the Obama administration sees the situation quite differently, regardless of Secretary of State Clinton's statements about human rights and administration declarations about 'the rule of law'. In this case, actions are a much more dependable guide to US policy. On 1 March, Commandant of the US Marine Corps General James F Amos informed the House Armed Services Committee that a Marine Expeditionary Brigade headquarters for operations in the Middle East and Africa had already been established in Bahrain. Both former Secretary of Defence Robert Gates and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen visited Bahrain amid the protests. Bahrain, of course, hosts the US Fifth Fleet and is the naval headquarters of US Central Command.

The administration's actions suggest that it is closer to the perspective of such private sector representatives as S Rob Sobhani, president of Caspian Energy Consulting. Sobhani, a member of the right-wing Committee on the Present Danger reconstituted in 2004, has characterised King Hamad as a 'thoughtful and progressive leader' committed to 'economic growth' and 'stability'.

And kick out the diplomats

The State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labour has been quite active of late in Bahrain, but, given the bureau's name, not in the way that one might expect.

The State Department does have a track record of concern about human rights in Bahrain. George W Bush's State Department wrote in the

2007 *Trafficking in Persons Report* that 'the Government of Bahrain does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making a significant effort to do so'. The US embassy was also pursuing opportunities for American corporations in Bahrain at this time. According to WikiLeaks cables, King Hamad requested Patriot missile batteries in 2008 and asked for help attracting aircraft manufacturers to the Bahrain Air Show several months later.

Three weeks after the declaration of the state of emergency, the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labour announced the release of the *2010 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*. The section on Bahrain in the 7,000-page document clearly shows there were cases of religious and gender discrimination, police brutality, torture of detainees, and press censorship in Bahrain well before the Arab Spring and the declaration of martial law. Thus, US officials' comments of disappointment about the Bahraini government's behaviour this spring are disingenuous.

Notwithstanding this documentation, the State Department is sending out disturbing mixed signals. On 13 May, the administration 'declined' to send diplomats to a hearing held by the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission on Capitol Hill about the situation in Bahrain. Lest critics accuse the State Department of insensitivity to Congress, Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labour Michael Posner did appear before the same committee in July to testify about repression in Syria. It remains unclear why the former human rights lawyer cited HRW and Amnesty International reports on Syria but has said nothing of their work on Bahrain.

On 26 May, the State Department evacuated Ludovic Hood, its human rights officer in Bahrain, apparently in reaction to an ongoing campaign of criticism and veiled threats against him and his family by pro-government Bahraini groups. On 31 May, State Department spokesman Mark Toner stated during a press conference that Hood's departure was merely a regularly scheduled reassignment. Meanwhile, Bahrain's Ministry of Foreign Affairs categorically denied government involvement in anything that may have happened to 'a diplomat from the United States'.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton met with Bahraini Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa in Washington in June. The US State Department has been sending out disturbing mixed signals on the human rights situation in Bahrain.

In the following two weeks, Bahraini Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa and Secretary of State Clinton met in Washington, and Posner and high-ranking Bahraini officials gathered in Manama. Neither Clinton nor Posner referred to the Hood incident in their prepared statements. But Posner did observe that there were 'several positive developments' to achieve 'respect for human rights and pursuit of national security interests' in Bahrain. He cited 'the release of some prisoners' and the fact that Bahrain 'promised to investigate allegations of mistreatment'.

Mixed messages

Nevertheless, Bahrain's largest Shia political party pulled out of the National Dialogue talks due to a lack of confidence that the government was negotiating in good faith. Furthermore, many in the United States have pointed out contradictions in US-Bahraini relations. The AFL-CIO trade union federation and the International Labour Organisation have voiced concerns about Bahrain's violations of labour standards recognised in bilateral agreements and in international law – a state of affairs aggravated by the declaration of martial law in March.

The State Department is fully aware of this. The 2011 *Trafficking in Persons Report* prepared by the Office to Monitor Trafficking in Persons claimed that Bahrain 'does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking' as set out in US law. The report indicates, for instance, that the Bahraini government has admitted that 65% of foreign workers in the country did not see their employment contracts and 89% did not know what their rights were. However, 'significant efforts' are being made to correct these infractions.

Is the Obama administration concerned about human rights in small countries like Bahrain? On one hand, the security of US military assets in the Persian Gulf and US economic influence is of paramount concern to the administration (as with previous administrations). But citizens should also ask if such priorities are consistent with the principles of democracy and justice. The stakes are not a naval base or a Patriot missile battery but America's dignity as a defender of justice. ◆

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‘Matriarch’ leads struggle to recover stolen land

A 69-year-old matriarch in Colombia’s poorest province has been leading the struggle by her community since 2000 to recover land illegally expropriated by the country’s paramilitary groups in complicity with the Colombian state. *Constanza Viera* recounts the harrowing story of a marginalised community’s continuing struggle for justice.

‘GOD willing, we will make it,’ reads the sign on a rusty old all-terrain vehicle, ideal for the complicated drive to the remote Curbaradó river valley in the banana-producing region of Urabá in northwest Colombia.

This area is part of the jungle province of Chocó, one of the world’s most biodiverse places until it was drawn into the armed conflict between left-wing guerrillas and government forces – and, since the 1980s, far-right paramilitary militias – that has plagued Colombia for nearly half a century.

Inter Press Service (IPS) travelled to this isolated region with documentary-makers from Justice for Colombia, a coalition founded in 2002 by the British trade union movement in response to murders of labour activists and the overall humanitarian crisis in Colombia.

The killings in Urabá began in 1995, and the major paramilitary offensive started in 1996. ‘This has all changed so much that it looks completely different now. Everything has been destroyed: the trees, the jungle, the rivers, the streams,’ says María Chaverra, 69.

The slight, dark-skinned mother of eight and grandmother of 37 has lived here for over half a century, as a member of one of the afro-descendant communities who have practised subsistence agriculture in the sparsely populated Chocó, Colombia’s poorest province, for generations.

Although by law the rural black communities collectively own their territories, many have been driven off their land, which is rich in natural resources and biodiversity, since the 1990s.

Constanza Viera/IPS

María Chaverra, the ‘Matriarch’: ‘I never saw a war like the one that took place here. It was the peasants who suffered.’

Throughout the Curbaradó river basin and the Jiguamiandó river valley to the south, Chaverra is known as the ‘Matriarch’ in recognition of her leadership role.

African oil palm companies financed with capital of dubious origin came into the area and diverted rivers and dried up streams. After weeks of drought – inconceivable in the past in Chocó, one of the world’s rainiest regions – the water is finally pouring down now.

This is the Camelias humanitarian zone, a five-minute walk from the Curbaradó river. The zone, which is under the protection of Inter-American Court of Human Rights provisional measures, is home to some 30 internally displaced families who have braved the dangers to return to their land.

In the humanitarian zone, no armed actors are allowed within the premises, to protect the civilians from the surrounding armed conflict.

Some have dared to leave Camelias, to move back to their nearby farmland, which is not encompassed by the humanitarian zone. Meanwhile, new families arrive, seeking refuge from threats.

Camelias, a 3.5-hectare area, belongs to Chaverra. ‘My husband and I donated it to create the humanitarian zone, and to bring people together here, to struggle, defend and denounce. When everyone goes back to their nearby farms, there will be no more humanitarian zone,’ she says.

‘By denouncing what has happened here, at the national and international levels, with the support of the Colombian Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission, we were able to get help to create this humanitarian zone. So we started moving closer to our territory, but most of the people haven’t made it back to their land yet,’ she explains.

‘We live in the middle of a conflict, but we have nothing to do with any of the armed groups – neither the paramilitaries, nor the army, nor the guerrillas, none of them,’ she says.

Large signs announce that Camelias is ‘exclusive to a civilian population protected by Inter-American Court provisional measures’.

The area is marked off by barbed wire on all sides. On the nearby river bank is a military base. Across the river is Puerto Brisas, a village reportedly under the control of paramilitaries who are supposedly demobilised.

The paramilitaries moved into the area with the excuse that they were driving out the left-wing guerrillas, who took up arms in 1964. But their real aim turned out to be the land.

To force the local population out, the paramilitaries accused them of belonging to the rebel groups, burned down their houses and villages, and

killed many. By 1997 the entire population in the two river basins had fled their homes, and most had left the area.

Between 3.6 and five million Colombians have been displaced since the mid-1980s. The number depends on the source of the estimate – the government or human rights organisations.

'We were displaced by the Colombian state itself, because the incursions were carried out by the paramilitaries in complicity with the army, Brigade 17,' which was based in a nearby municipality, says Chaverra, repeating what she had denounced to the Inter-American Court.

'It wasn't guerrillas they drove out. I was a witness. I never saw a war like the one that took place here,' she says. 'It was the peasants who suffered. The ones who didn't die suffered calamities and were exposed to the elements. Many saw their children die,' and the adults died without any medical treatment or even a simple painkiller, she recalls.

'Many pregnant women gave birth along the trails. They would go into labour as they ran, and when they couldn't run anymore, they would stop and the baby would drop out right there. That's what our life was like in this war,' she says.

But Chaverra and her family stayed in the area, dodging death. 'We were a group of seven families, and we would escape together. When we heard bullets, we would flee to another place. Once we lived in the mountains for six months: rain or shine, we had no protection, even if it was pouring like today,' she adds.

They sought shelter in the cave-like enclosures formed by the enormous roots of certain trees in the jungle. They often had to steal rice to eat.

When they returned, 'there wasn't a single piece of land that didn't have African oil palms planted on it. And the chemicals (pesticides) had deteriorated the land,' she says.

The families in Camelias depend on farming. 'We tried again. Despite the fear, we planted the plantains that you see over there,' and rice and corn, and started to raise a few chickens 'to be able to eat', Chaverra says.

With the harvest from one hectare of corn they buy sugar, salt, soap and cooking oil. But when they need something from Puerto Brisas, Chaverra sends someone else. 'Many of us don't cross to the other side. Me, I don't even go to the edge of the river,' she says.

'We are all under threat, especially me because I was the legal representative of the two river basins for six years,' she adds.

The military base 'watches out for the interests of the companies, we know that because we have seen it', she says. And the paramilitaries? Chaverra holds her two index fingers next to each other, and says 'they're together'.

Land ownership

During a community assembly they all debate, gesture and draft statements. Chaverra, who speaks at the end, doesn't beat around the bush: 'What the ministers should have told us is that they are immediately going to evict the invaders from our land,' she says.

The ministers of agriculture, Juan Camilo Restrepo, and the interior, Germán Vargas, visited Camelias in March, to formally recognise the local community's collective ownership of the two river basins.

The government did so in compliance with several Constitutional Court verdicts in favour of the traditional inhabitants of the area, issued after the community began its legal battle in 2000 with the help of the Inter-Church Commission, which also receives constant death threats.

The court rulings also ordered outsiders who occupied the land of displaced persons to move out. But the ministers didn't mention that aspect, and the police have done little to nothing.

Conservative President Juan Manuel Santos promised that during his 2010-2014 term in office, his government will distribute two million hectares of land to peasant farmers, by returning land seized from them and issuing formal land titles, which many small farmers lack even when the property has been in their family for generations.

The goal for 2011 is 500,000 hectares, but the official figures indicate that of the 217,000 hectares distributed so far, only 14,000 involved the restoration of land to the original owners.

The people who have occupied the land around Camelias are not to be trusted. In June, one sexually assaulted a four-year-old girl and fled, after another did the same with a 10-year-old girl just a few weeks earlier.

In May, the Ministry of Agriculture reported to the public prosecutor's office the attempted rape of two women in the area. An unarmed group of activists from the UK-based Peace Brigades International (PBI) had driven the attackers off.

In June, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights asked the Inter-American Court to expand the provisional measures to the areas surrounding the humanitarian zone.

In December, waves of squatters, poor but intimidating, began to flood into the Curbaradó basin. They warned that if they were bothered, 'there are three possibilities: club, machete or lead', Chaverra says.

'The business owners who drove us out are behind the invasion,' she adds.

'They want us to clash with them, to be able to say "it's a fight among peasants". We have avoided that,' she says. 'We want them to be evicted legally from our territory, by peaceful means, by the authorities.'

A census is now being carried out, under the orders of the Constitutional Court, and elderly inhabitants like Chaverra can play a key role in identifying members of the traditional community, and determining which people are invaders who should be evicted.

More than 1,000 hectares in the area have been occupied and time is pressing. 'The farms of five of our families have been invaded. We don't have anywhere to plant even a clump of rice,' says Adriana Tuberquia.

'We had plantain crops and the invaders cut the plants down to plant corn. We're desperately waiting for them to be evicted,' she says. – *IPS* ◆

Murdoch's imperial overreach?

The phone-hacking scandal in Britain has brought forth an avalanche of revelations about the sleazy operations of the media empire of Rupert Murdoch. More importantly, it has once again thrown the spotlight on the incestuous relationship between politicians at the highest level and media barons. As *Jeremy Seabrook* observes in his analysis below, despite all the breast beating, it appears that it is going to be business and politics as usual.

Rupert Murdoch and his son James testifying at the Select Committee hearing into wrongdoing at the *News of the World*. They were 'called to account by a British Parliament which until the day before yesterday had obsequiously fawned and bowed to the power of their "media empire".'

ONE of the most potent images of the phone-hacking scandal in Britain was that of Rupert Murdoch's private jet flying out of London the day after the Select Committee hearing where he and his son were questioned by MPs about what they knew of 'wrongdoing' at the now-defunct *News of the World*. Here we saw the humbled emperor soaring upwards once more, shaking from his noble feet the dust of this cloudy corner of his imperial possessions, which at one point he observed represented less than 1% of his global business and was therefore presumably too insignificant to catch his notice.

He and his son had duly 'performed', called to account by a British Parliament which until the day before yesterday had obsequiously fawned and bowed to the power of their 'media empire'. Murdoch had declared the occasion to be the most humble day of his life – a rather attenuated humility, given his obvious impatience and irritation in spite of the contrition expressed. James Murdoch's answers to the questions, delivered in an English unknown to all but initiates into the mysterious idiolect of Corporate-speak, were diffuse and predictably unrevealing. The innocence which they had been no doubt well coached into showing displayed, rather, an implausible grasp of what goes on – or doesn't – in their mighty business enterprise.

Rebekah Brooks, too, freshly resigned as chief executive of News International, hair also re-coloured sober brown for the occasion, presented as a responsible Head Girl who knew nothing of the events which had caused a wave of revulsion in Britain. Although editor of the *News of the World* when the phone of murdered schoolgirl Milly Dowler was hacked and messages deleted, she was 'on holiday'; which, from her answers, clearly suggested the longest vacation from responsibility on record.

David Cameron, who cut short his trip to Africa, stormed into the House of Commons, echoing almost word for word what his friends the newspaper people had said. No 'inappropriate' conversations had taken place between him and representatives of News International, even though he had met with executives from the company 26 times in his 15 months as Prime Minister. He had been given 'assurances' by Andy Coulson, who, having resigned from the *News of the World* over the scandal, was nevertheless hired by Cameron a few months later as his chief communications adviser; although his capacity to communicate was swiftly overtaken by an attack of mutism, since he too resigned only seven months into the job, while protesting his ignorance of all that went on under his editorship of the paper.

A word should be said about 'assurances'. David Cameron promotes himself as a thoroughly modern Conservative. Reasonable, urbane and fluent, he is the perfect embodiment of the Restoration – the retrieval by the traditional ruling class of power in Britain, after its long sojourn in the hands of surrogates. Those who had, for a season, set aside the onerous

burden of ruling Britain had become tired of the downward mobility of the country under the boors and bureaucrats under which it had languished, and have reasserted the rights of the true proprietors of Britain to take back the country.

One of the characteristics of this Old Etonian/millionaire governance is that it relies upon a gentlemanly code of conduct, in which men of honour rely upon 'assurances' from their peers (in every sense), an old-world dependency upon the sacred unbreakable vow of those who would rather retire to the library and do the decent thing with a hunting-rifle than tell a lie. It is in this light that 'assurances' should be understood when they come from some of the most seedy, disreputable and unscrupulous people in charge of a press distinguished by its disregard for even a passing acquaintance with truth.

'Parliament declares war on Murdoch', had been the headline, as the British ruling classes awakened from their long somnolent acquiescence in political, media and police corruption. Suddenly, the political class had freed itself from the incubus of News International, and, repudiating its late craven fawning upon the Murdoch press, declares itself fearlessly disdainful of the ebbing might of the empire. What had begun as a textbook example of British hypocrisy ended in an orgy of penitence; and since in the mythology of Western progress, good always comes out of evil, the press, the media, the police and politicians will all have learned lessons and vowed 'Never again'.

This litany of repentance is the surest preamble to the resumption of business as usual, as soon as the memory of the current scandal can be erased. MPs, only last year objects of scorn and revulsion, have rehabilitated themselves as fearless defenders of the people against the intrusion of Murdoch and his collaborators into the sorrows not only of Prime Ministers, the royal family and celebrities, but also of the fallen in Afghanistan, parents of murdered children, victims of terror, and other 'newsworthy' personages who pass across the flickering screens of our wandering attention.

Immense power

Rupert Murdoch has been described as 'press baron', 'mogul', even 'monarch', while his son James is referred to as the 'prince' or 'heir apparent'; titles attributed of dynastic potentates. And in this modernised version of feudalism, the power they exercise is arbitrary and unaccountable, while those who serve them are treated as vassals, liegemen, expendable serfs. Their employees are impotent, as was demonstrated when the *News of the World* was closed on a whim. Indeed, Murdoch is credited with having 'rescued' the newspaper industry when, with the collusion and support of Margaret Thatcher, he destroyed the print unions in the 1980s. He also held his millions of readers in thrall; how far they obligingly followed the ideological directives issued by his newspapers, and their brutal morality and savage intolerance, is unclear.

But News International's apparent immense power convinced politicians that it was sufficient to elevate or destroy them by Murdoch's fiat. They courted him, cravenly seeking his 'blessing' in pursuit of electoral success, since their eligibility depended upon his imperial say-so. Not only was the Murdoch press a major player in the making of governments, but their survival also depended upon him. Why otherwise did Tony Blair telephone him three times in the 10 days preceding the invasion of Iraq? What did they discuss? Did Blair beseech Murdoch to support the 'mission', despite the mass demonstration of two million people, who, mere electors, could not outweigh the elect of press ownership?

All this makes few converts to the version of 'democracy' which Western leaders never tire of preaching to rogue regimes and secretive cabals that run the dark places of the earth. The clouded transparency of their own conduct is a serious handicap to the spread of the democratic gospel. As the relationships between politics, press, police and people are uncovered, 'governance' is shown to be less the high calling it claims for itself, but rather the stately quadrille of power to the music of money. All this provides rich extra-curricular instruction, as it were, to all countries on the receiving end of our lectures on cleansing corruption and ridding themselves of nepotism and cronyism.

What a festival of hypocrisy it has been, particularly after the serial cover-ups designed to ensure what is now 'in the public arena' (maintained in penumbra by the lighting electricians of the media) remained in darkness. It was only the tenacity of the *Guardian* (earlier derided for persisting in the pursuit of what the wise and knowing had demoted to mere tittle-tattle) which led to the opening to scrutiny of the real scope of illicit relationships, questionable unions and improper associations in public life – the staple fare of yesterday's *News of the World*.

In the past three years, confidence in the pillars of our democracy has crumbled, so the whole edifice has the appearance of a neglected historical monument in urgent need of restoration. First, the banks, no longer solid custodians of our addled nest-eggs, but obsessive gamblers with the people's hard-earned money; then politicians, elected to serve the interests of other franchises than that of the people; now the media, whose fearless devotion to truth has earned them lower public esteem than any other profession but the practitioners of politics. As if this were not enough to discredit a system said to be the envy of the world, the police failed to uncover the extent of criminal activity by the media conglomerate owned by Murdoch. Payments made by journalists to police officers for information, perfunctory investigations into phone-hacking and the refusal to reopen them as evidence of neglect, suppression of facts and protection of malefactors mounted, the interlocking social and professional relationships between senior police officers, executives of News International and politicians, both Labour and Conserva-

tive.... The head of the Metropolitan Police resigned, since the force had employed a former deputy editor of the *News of the World*; he petulantly demanded to know why his was a greater misdemeanour than David Cameron's engagement of Andy Coulson, who had resigned over the phone-hacking affair.

The story has been a classic British scandal. First of all, it appeared a single reporter, Clive Goodman, and a private detective, Glenn Mulcaire, had hacked into the phones of three royal aides. They were found guilty and jailed in 2007; the customary scapegoats, the lone 'bad apples' beloved of the initial stages of any inquiry into British institutional improbity. The Metropolitan Police assured the public that only a handful of further cases had been uncovered, mostly dealing with the flamboyant infidelities of celebrities, whose sexual adventures were regarded by a majority as fair game for the tabloid press. Coulson, the editor of the *News of the World,* offered an heroic resignation since, although he knew nothing about the hacking, it had occurred 'on his watch'.

Coulson was appointed in June 2007 by Cameron as his chief 'director of communications', although his greatest skill proved to be his capacity for silence on events that mattered. Although many – especially in retrospect – found it a high-risk strategy, the engagement by politicians of tabloid media employees has become a necessity, since these are regarded as psychics, endowed with a mystical insight into the popular mind not vouchsafed to the politicians who are supposed to represent them. It is their special powers that provide politicians with 'street credibility'.

When celebrities whose phones had also been hacked by the *News of the World* pursued civil cases in the courts, News International made settlements with individuals (signed off by James Murdoch, who subsequently said he was not fully aware of the reasons for the pay-offs and the expensive promises of silence). In spite of 11,000 pages of notes kept by the apparently obsessive detective Mulcaire having been passed to the Metropolitan Police in 2006, which disclosed the existence of thousands of potential victims of phone-hacking, the Metropolitan Police insisted that the numbers amounted to 'a handful'. In 2009, when the *Guardian* claimed that the *News of the World* was engaged in far more widespread illegality, the police decided not to relaunch the investigation which had fizzled out after the jailing of Goodman and Mulcaire. Only in January of 2011 did they launch Operation Weeting to look at 'significant new information'. Further arrests of *News of the World* journalists took place. Coulson resigned from his post with Cameron. On 8 July, he was arrested. In early July, News International also handed over e-mails which showed that payments were made to the police in return for information.

A customer picking up the final edition of the *News of the World*. The disclosures of phone hacking by the newspaper created a wave of revulsion in Britain.

In the avalanche of revelations that followed, it emerged that the telephone of Milly Dowler, a teenager who had gone missing and was subsequently found murdered, had been hacked in 2002. The family, finding messages deleted from her phone, had believed this indicated she might still be alive. After this, it was alleged the phones of the parents of murdered schoolgirls Jessica Chapman and Holly Wells had also been tampered with. Just when it seemed that the depths of cynical immorality had been finally reached, it appeared that the mobile phones of the victims of the London bombings in July 2007 might have been hacked, as well as those of soldiers killed in Afghanistan.

It is significant that the Murdoch press has posed as 'friends of the people' to bereaved families, the victims of murder, terror and war. The hacking of their phones says much about the depth of this love of the common people: it runs only as deep as the purse they are willing to open to pay for the view of the world peddled to them. Indeed, it is their contempt for the 'ordinary people' whose champions they claim to be, that is perhaps the most ignoble disclosure of the continuing revelations. Rebekah Brooks' proudest achievement is said to be her campaigning for Sara's Law, which enshrines the right of parents to be informed of the whereabouts of paedophiles in their neighbourhood; yet her dedication to the security of children did not prevent abuse of the dead child, Milly Dowler, by journalists during her editorship of the *News of the World*. She claimed to have been 'on holiday' at the time.

While these interesting events were unfolding, the Murdochs' News Corporation was confidently expecting that its $9 billion bid for BSkyB, to take complete control of Britain's biggest TV broadcaster, of which it already owned 39%, would be a mere

formality, given a compliant Culture Secretary and the closeness of Cameron to the Murdochs, to whose daughter he is a near neighbour, and Rebekah Brooks. They have all made their home in the Cotswolds, an idyllic thatched-cottage image of a long-vanished England that had grown rich in the late Middle Ages on the then mightiest industry in the land, wool: perhaps the medieval décor transmitted to these people a sense of seigneurial impunity.

The phone-hacking disclosures created a wave of revulsion in Britain. The response of the autocratic Murdoch was to close down the *News of the World*, a paper which has existed for 168 years. Its demise was lamented, in a torrent of media regrets about the loss of a great newspaper, even though in my lifetime it has done little but peddle salacious stories, mainly of sexual irregularities, both of celebrities and ordinary people.

The effect on politicians who, the day before yesterday, could not wait to pay homage to Murdoch, has been to turn them vehemently against him and all his works. Those who attended his family's weddings and parties, quaffed their champagne, sailed on their yachts and flaunted themselves under exotic floral arrangements in marquees on aristocratic lawns, united to reject Murdoch's bid for BSkyB, from which he withdrew shortly before an emergency parliamentary discussion on the issue was to take place. Since parliament has been offered a new sense of its own dignity in comparison to the machinations of the Murdoch empire, it has found its own redemption in the fall of the patriarch; although to be fair, certain MPs, Tom Watson and Chris Bryant, proved themselves as dogged as the *Guardian* journalist Nick Davies in pursuing what had been swept under the expensive carpets of the luxurious offices of press, politics and police.

It would, however, be premature to exaggerate the extent of politicians' new-found 'freedom from fear'. Some commentators have even spoken of 'revolution'. Events in Britain have been likened to the 'Arab spring', the removal of Ben Ali or Mubarak. This is true insofar as the tyrannical power of dictatorial individuals has been dissipated; but just as the structures of repression and intimidation remain in place in Tunisia and Egypt, so the recently vacated seats at the high table of News International await new celebrants at its perpetual banquet of human flesh.

A protester wearing a Rupert Murdoch mask walking before news photographers. The police had failed to uncover the extent of criminal activity by the media conglomerate owned by Murdoch.

Despite the breast-beating in Britain, politics remains an essentially non-representational art, and the relationship between electors and elected something of an abstraction. The arrest of 10 (at the latest count) News International employees suggests it is still the servants who will go to the scaffold while the masters retreat into more impregnable havens. The much-vaunted 'plurality' of the media requires only a significant number of owners, even if the vast majority support a single party. This is a highly abridged notion of freedom: it does not extend to the freedom seriously to question the social and economic system itself (what newspaper proprietor would permit that?), even though it may call to account those who misbehave within it.

So the rejoicing should be muted. As his loyal protégée Brooks, the waif-like pre-Raphaelite with a heart of flint, resigned and was arrested, Rupert Murdoch made a pilgrimage of penitence to South London to apologise to the Dowler family, and News International published a *mea culpa* in Britain's papers. It should not be imagined, for all this, that there are not other, hungry, pitiless individuals only too eager to promote themselves, like the Tea Party movement in America, as 'friends of the people', in order to further corporate power and limitless wealth in the name of the people, to whose wellbeing their cynicism and heartlessness testify their complete indifference. Significant are the events that have fascinated Britain in this chill summer of 2011; radical they are not. Individuals may be cast down from their place of eminence, but the thrones of power remain, awaiting their next transient occupants.

In any case, at the time of writing, it seems that the public penitence of the Murdochs was little more than ritual. James Murdoch is overwhelmingly reconfirmed as director of BSkyB, which announces a surge in profits. For the moment, the empire is intact, and the liberation movement of its British territory amounts to little more than a local disturbance among the natives. ◆

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Unusual return to the usual: An analysis of recent Turkish elections

The highly impressive electoral showing of Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) from 2002 to 2011 raises questions as to whether this marks a complete historical departure. *Ali T Akarca* argues that the recent pattern of electoral returns, while extraordinary in itself, really marks a return to the picture of electoral behaviour in the 1950s and 1960s before it was disrupted by coups and party closures.

IN each of the Turkish elections held between 2002 and 2011, an outcome not seen for half a century has been observed. Ironically, through these unusual elections a political picture quite similar to the one prevailing in the 1950s and 1960s, and disturbed by military coups and party closures, has emerged.

Let's first point out many firsts that were realised in the elections mentioned. In 2002, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power, one year after its founding, in an election which ousted all of the political parties which entered the parliament in the previous election. In 2004, the AKP became the second party to raise its votes in a local administration election relative to the previous parliamentary election. In fact, if the 1977 local election, which was held only a few months after a parliamentary one, is set aside, 2004 was the first time this has happened since 1963, when local elections began being held simultaneously. Then in 2007, by raising its vote share after ruling one legislative term, the AKP matched the record established by the Democrat Party (DP) in 1954. Although the party's vote share declined in 2009, in the 12 June 2011 election, it broke one and renewed another DP record. The AKP became the first party to be elected to a third consecutive term since 1957, and the first party ever to continue raising its vote share after remaining in power two successive terms. In addition, it became the first party to reach a 50% vote share since 1965. At the end of 2012, having ruled more than 10 consecutive years, the party will take over the title of longest-serving incumbent from the DP.

Supporters of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) celebrating the 12 June election results. The AKP became the first party to be elected to a third consecutive term since 1957.

The fact that all of the above have been experienced only once in about half a century, and were spread over several elections, indicates that they cannot be explained only by routine variables or a particular factor specific to one election. Furthermore, their concentration in about a decade of time now, and when they first occurred, suggests the existence of similar equilibriums.

In a study published in the May 2011 issue of *Iktisat Isletme ve Finans*, building on my earlier work (with Aysit Tansel) in the October 2006 issue of *Public Choice*, I had identified the main determinants of Turkish election outcomes. The historical patterns observed in Turkish voter behaviour, and the findings of studies on other countries, rather than poll data, formed the basis of that study. Inviting the reader who is interested in the technical details of econometric methods and data used in that research to refer to the articles mentioned, I intend to discuss only its findings here.

Alignment

Voters align themselves with a party that they identify as representing their interests and ideology. Consequently, holding other factors constant, they tend to choose the same party they voted for in the previous

election. Vote swings from one election to another occur as the result of the following five competing forces. The first four of these are usual and their effects are temporary. The last one however is quite unusual and has permanent effects.

Strategic voting

A portion of the electorate vote for a party other than their first choice. In other words, they vote strategically. They behave this way mainly due to two reasons: to check the power of the incumbent party and to avoid wasting their vote by voting for a party which is not likely to surpass the national threshold necessary to gain representation.

In elections such as midterm congressional elections in the US, European Parliamentary elections in European Union countries, and elections for local administrations in Turkey, supporters of the incumbent party get a chance to check the power of the central government and, if needed, send it a signal, without toppling it. Consequently, incumbent parties tend to do poorly in these types of elections.

The existence of threshold regulations in parliamentary general elections, such as the minimum 10% nationwide vote share requirement to gain representation in the Turkish Grand National Assembly, contributes to this effect as well. Some of the small party supporters who vote strategically for one of the major parties in domestic parliamentary elections in order not to waste their vote, return to their first choices in elections where no such handicaps apply, such as local administration elections in Turkey. On the other hand, in a parliamentary election, with the control of government at stake, the incumbent party experiences fewer deserters. Furthermore, the party attracts supporters from its smaller ideological cousins as well, who fear wasting their votes if they vote for their first choices.

In a local election, an incumbent party loses about 18% of the support it obtained in the previous parliamentary election, due to strategic voting.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan of the AKP addressing supporters after the 12 June election, against a backdrop that reads 'Thanks Turkey'. At the end of 2012, the AKP will take over the title of longest-serving incumbent.

Thus, contrary to common belief, incumbent parties enter a local election at a disadvantage rather than an advantage. In parliamentary elections which follow a local administration election, on the other hand, such as the one held on 12 June 2011, the said loss falls to around 6%. In such cases, besides capturing some supporters of the smaller parties, the incumbent party gets back most of its supporters who deserted it in the previous election.

Cost of ruling

For a ruling party it is almost impossible not to make some unpopular decisions, compromises and mistakes, and not to shelve some promises. These disappoint its supporters and cause loss of votes. This type of loss is estimated to be about 5-6% per year of the party's support.

Incumbency advantage

Being in power yields about 7% of the vote through things like easier access to the media, name recognition, ability to indulge in transfer activities such as providing services, subsidies and patronage, and picking locations of government investment and public work projects.

The economy

The voters reward incumbents for a good economic performance, and punish them for a bad one.

The return from a percentage rise in the per capita real GDP is roughly 0.7% of the vote. The impact of inflation however is about a sixth of that. A percentage drop in the inflation rate brings in only 0.12% of the vote. In evaluating the government's economic performance, the voters take into account only the year before the election. It should be noted that the focus of voters on the near past and growth, provides an incentive to the politicians to create political business cycles.

Another point worth noting is the fact that incumbency advantage usually does not compensate for the adverse effects of strategic voting and cost of ruling. Thus the economy plays a pivotal role in the fortunes of the incumbent party. Unless the economic performance is unusually good, it is almost impossible for the party in power to raise its vote share. That is why it has rarely occurred, and when it did (in 1954, 2007 and 2011) it was because, besides the usual fac-

tors, a political realignment was at play too. When the latter was absent, the incumbent party was able to remain in power, despite declining votes, only if its initial vote share was high enough. This was the case in the 1950s, 1960s and 1980s. If a party came to power with a relatively low vote share, as was the case in the 1970s and 1990s, the life of the government was at most one term.

The Levent business district in Istanbul. Turkey's high economic growth rate in the year before the June elections contributed to the incumbent AKP's strong showing.

Political realignment

It is not possible to fully understand recent political developments in Turkey without first understanding the political realignment which has taken place in earnest since 2002 but which in hindsight appears to have begun, on a smaller scale, even earlier. We had mentioned above that voters align themselves with parties which they believe represent their interests and worldview. Although it occurs quite rarely, when the needs and outlook of voters change but their parties fail to adapt, or when their parties change in a manner that deviates from their interests and beliefs, voters shift their allegiances to other parties.

That is what happened in Turkey during the last decade. After experiencing rampant corruption, constant infighting, and four economic crises under various coalition governments during the preceding decade, in the November 2002 election, voters ousted all of the parties which had entered the parliament in 1999. Major incompetence and rampant corruption exposed by the two major earthquakes in 1999, implicating both the government and the opposition parties, may have acted as the straw that broke the camel's back.

The parties ousted from the Turkish parliament in 2002 were the who's who of Turkish politics. Among them were the Motherland Party (ANAP), which held the premiership during 1983-1991 and 1997-1999, the True Path Party (DYP) and the Democratic Left Party (DSP), which led governments during 1991-1996 and 1999-2002, respectively, and the Nationalist Action Party (MHP), which was part of the ruling coalition between 1999 and 2002 together with the DSP and the ANAP. In 2002, none of them was able to surpass the 10% nationwide vote share threshold required to be represented in the Turkish Grand National Assembly. The Constitutional Court had already banned the Virtue Party (FP) in 2001. The predecessor of this party, the Welfare Party (RP), held the premiership during 1996-1997. The combined vote share of the parties mentioned was 81% in 1999 but only 24% in 2002. Only 11% of the legislators elected in 1999 made it to the 2002 parliament.

The AKP, which emerged from the ashes of the banned FP, captured the lion's share of the voters who deserted their former parties. The party's disavowal of its Islamist roots, embrace of political and economic reforms necessary for Turkey's accession to the European Union (EU), the non-corrupt and populist image of its mayors at the local level, its message of hope, and the likelihood of it forming a single-party government, all appealed to the electorate which deserted the right-wing ANAP, DYP and MHP. The Felicity Party (SP), the other party rooted in the FP, toed the old party line and received only a couple of percent of the votes.

The shift of votes from the ANAP and DYP (now renamed the Democrat Party but which, to avoid confusion with the DP of 1946-1960, will henceforth be labelled DP2) towards the AKP continued after 2002. In the ongoing power struggle between elected officials and the bureaucratic and military establishment, since the beginning of the republic, these two parties came from a tradition of siding with the former. When their new leaderships relinquished this position, and continued taking stands in this regard that were not popular with their remaining supporters, they continued to lose their base to the AKP. The way the AKP conducted itself in power, facilitated this vote transfer as well. The party risked its very existence by challenging the military and the judiciary to expand the power of the elected relative to the appointed. Despite the Islamist background of many of its leaders, the party ruled essentially as a moderate, centre-right, conservative democrat party would: committed to democracy, a free market economy and Turkey's EU membership.

This dispelled some of the lingering scepticism concerning the genuineness of the party leaders' transformation, and led more of the liberal-minded voters to support it. Interestingly, the party was able to do all that without alienating much of its traditional base. Over the last two decades that base, while holding on to its ba-

sic conservative values, got increasingly richer, better informed, more entrepreneurial, more modernised, more urbanised, and more integrated with other parts of Turkey and the rest of the world. These occurred largely as a result of the introduction of the Internet, ending of the state monopoly on television and radio, major improvements in the highway and telecommunication systems, and the market-oriented reforms instituted in the 1980s by Turgut Özal, the prime minister then. The leadership which formed the AKP recognised this evolution in the society better than any of the other parties, and transformed. We can say that the AKP captured the supporters of the ANAP and DYP because these parties changed, and the supporters of the FP because this party's successor, the SP, failed to change.

In short, a mass shift in votes has occurred between 1999 and 2011, which was far more than what could be attributed to the usual factors of strategic voting, cost of ruling, or voter response to economic conditions. At the end of this process, of the parties which got left out of the parliament in 2002, only the MHP was able to engineer a comeback. By 2011, the rest and the Young Party (GP), which emerged in 2002, disappeared either literally or for all practical purposes. Their combined vote share declined from 63% in 1999 to 23% in 2002 and to 2% in 2011.

2009 vs. 2011 elections

Now let's analyse the 12 June election, in light of the above findings, by contrasting it to the 2009 election. In other words, let's look at the 2011 election from a short-run perspective. What happened between 2009 and 2011 to cause a party which lost 8% of the vote two years ago to gain 11% this time?

First of all, the fact that the 2009 election was for local administrations, and the one on 12 June was for parliament, is important. The AKP vote loss due to strategic voting was 8.4 percentage points in the previous election but only 2.4 this election. The incumbency advantage was the same and the cost of ruling almost the same (4.6 percentage points in 2009 and 4.8 percentage points in 2011) between the two elections.

The main difference between the two cases was the economy. Per capita real GDP, which fell 5.7% during the year before the 2009 election, grew about 7.2% during the year before the last one. The return to the incumbent from the recent economic performance is estimated to be 5% of the vote. This may have to be revised upward if the growth rate for the second quarter of 2011 turns out to be higher than expected. If the 2009 economic conditions were prevailing now, the AKP would have been penalised by the voters about 4 percentage points rather than being rewarded 5 percentage points.

The picture which emerged at the end of the realignment process during the transition to multi-party democracy was not that different from the one we face now.

On the realignment front, the remaining votes of the ANAP and DP2, and a few points of other small party votes appear to have shifted to the AKP.

Return to the usual

To sort out what went on and where we are now, let's look at the 2011 election from a long-run perspective. A realignment similar to the one described above took place during the transition to multi-party democracy after 1946. The picture which emerged at the end of that process was not that different from the one we face now. The only difference is that now a Kurdish-nationalist party is added to the right-conservative, left-statist, and Turkish-nationalist parties.

The largest of these, the right-conservative movement, gets the support of about half of the Turkish electorate under normal conditions. However, due to interruptions from outside the political system, such as military coups and threats, and party closures by the judiciary, it got fragmented frequently. Each time it pulled itself together, but each time this required a longer time. The DP surpassed the 50% vote share in 1950 and 1954 and came very close to it in 1957. After it was toppled by the military coup on 27 May 1960 and its leader was executed, its votes split in the 1961 election.

However, in the very next parliamentary election held in 1965, the Justice Party (AP) – the party which emerged as the successor to the DP – exceeded the 50% vote share once more, and received a little less than 50% in 1969. Following the military intervention of 12 March 1971, the right-wing votes got split again and before they could be consolidated, another military coup on 12 September 1980 fragmented them even more. Because the left party was closed too in the latter episode, that wing got split as well.

Although the right-wing ANAP received 45% of the vote in 1983, after the ban on other parties and political leaders was lifted in 1987, the fragmentation which resulted was even greater than the ones experienced before. Several other interruptions by the military which fell short of takeovers, dubbed postmodern coups or e-coups by the media, contributed to the fragmentation as well. It took until 2011 for right-conservative voters to gather around a single party.

In short, looking from a shorter-term perspective, we can say that a lot of unusual outcomes were experienced during the recent elections, but looking from a longer-run perspective, we can see that through these, the Turkish political scene has returned, half a century later, to what was usual. ◆

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The corporate Supreme Court

The US Supreme Court has exhibited a shocking corporate bias in some of its recent decisions. Among these was the ruling overturning US federal laws that for decades had, in effect, prevented corporations from using their profits to buy political campaign advertisements. *Ralph Nader* responds.

FIVE Supreme Court Justices – Scalia, Thomas, Roberts, Alito and Kennedy – are entrenching, in a whirlwind of judicial dictates, judicial legislating and sheer ideological judgments, a mega-corporate supremacy over the rights and remedies of individuals.

The artificial entity called 'the corporation' has no mention in our Constitution, whose preamble starts with 'We the People', not 'We the Corporation'.

Taken together, the decisions are brazenly overriding sensible precedents, tearing apart the state common law of torts and blocking class actions, shoving aside jury verdicts, limiting people's 'standing to sue', pre-empting state jurisdictions – anything that serves to centralise power and hand it over to the corporate conquistadores.

Here are some examples. (For more see thecorporatecourt.com.) Remember the disastrous Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska's Prince William Sound 22 years ago? It destroyed marine life and the livelihoods of many landowners, fishermen and native Alaskans. Its toxic effects continue to this day.

Well, after years of litigation by Alaskan fishermen, the Supreme Court took the case to review a $5 billion award the trial court had assessed in punitive damages. A 5-to-3 decision lowered the sum to $507.5 million, which is less than what Exxon made in interest by delaying the case for 20 years. Moreover, the drunken Exxon captain's oil tanker calamity raised the price of gasoline at the pump for a while. Exxon actually made a profit despite its discharge of 50 million gallons.

The unelected, life-tenured corporate court was just getting started, and every year they tighten the noose of corporatism around the American people.

In Bush v. Gore (5-4 decision), the Court picked the more corporate president of the United States in 2000, leaving constitutional scholars thunderstruck at this breathtaking seizure of the electoral process, stopping the Florida Supreme Court's ongoing state-wide recount. The five Republican Justices behaved as political hacks conducting a judicial coup d'etat.

But then what do you expect from Justices like Thomas and Scalia who participate in a Koch brothers' political retreat or engage in extrajudicial activities that shake the public confidence in the highest court of the land?

Last year came the Citizens United v. FEC case where the Republican majority went out of its way to decide a question that the parties to the appeal never asked. In a predatory 'frolic and detour', the five Justices declared that corporations (including foreign companies) no longer have to obey the prohibitory federal law and their own court's precedents.

Corporations like Pfizer, Aetna, Chevron, GM, Citigroup and Monsanto can spend unlimited funds (without asking their shareholders) in independent expenditures to oppose or support candidates for public office, from a local city council election to federal congressional and presidential elections.

Once again our judicial dictatorship has spoken for corporate privilege and power overriding the rights of individual voters.

Eighty percent of the American people, reported a *Washington Post* poll, reject the Court's view that a business corporation is entitled to the same free speech rights as citizens.

Chances are very high that in cases between workers and companies, consumers and companies, communities and corporations, taxpayers and military contractors – big business wins.

What is behind these five corporate Justices' decisions is a commercial philosophy that big business knows best for you and your children.

Inanimate corporations created by state government charters have risen as Frankenstein monsters to control the people through one judicial activist decision after another. It was the Supreme Court in 1886 that started treating a corporation as a 'person' for purposes of the equal protection right in the Fourteenth Amendment. Actually the scribe manufactured that conclusion in the headnotes even though the Court's opinion did not go that far. But then it was off to the races. These inanimate giants, astride the globe, have privileges and immunities that 'We the People' can only dream about, yet they have equal constitutional rights with us (except for the right against self-incrimination (Fifth Amendment) and more limited privacy rights).

What is behind these five corporate Justices' decisions is a commercial philosophy that big business knows best for you and your children. These Justices intend to drive this political jurisprudence to further extremes, so long as they are in command, to twist our founders' clear writings that the Constitution was for the supremacy of human beings.

To see how extreme the five corporate Justices are, consider the strong contrary view of one of their conservative heroes, the late Chief Justice William Rehnquist, in a case where a plurality of Justices threw out a California regulation requiring an insert in utility bills inviting residential ratepayers to band together to advance their interests against Pacific Gas and Electric. The prevailing Justices said – get this – that it violated the electric company monopoly's First Amendment right to remain silent and not respond to the insert's message.

Conservative Justice Rehnquist's dissent contained these words – so totally rejected by the present-day usurpers: 'Extension of the individual freedom of conscience decisions to business corporations strains the rationale of those cases beyond the breaking point. To ascribe to such artificial entities an "intellect" or "mind" for freedom of conscience purposes is to confuse metaphor with reality.'

It was left to another conservative jurist, the late Justice Byron White, dissenting in the corporatist decision First Nat'l Bank v. Bellotti (1978), to recognise the essential principle.

Corporations, Justice White wrote, are 'in a position to control vast amounts of economic power which may, if not regulated, dominate not only the economy but also the very heart of our democracy, the electoral process'. The state, he continued, has a compelling interest in 'preventing institutions which have been permitted to amass wealth as a result of special advantages extended by the State for certain economic purposes from using that wealth to acquire an unfair advantage in the political process... *The state need not permit its own creation to consume it.*' (emphasis added)

Never have I urged impeachment of Supreme Court Justices. I do so now, for the sake of ending the Supreme Court's corporate-judicial dictatorship that is not accountable under our system of checks and balances in any other way. ◆

Ralph Nader is a US consumer advocate, lawyer and author. This article is reproduced from his website Nader.org.

Xu Demin (1953-) taught political economy in China's Fudan University after his graduation in 1983. A man of many talents, he has distinguished himself not only as a poet, but also as a short-story writer, literary critic, painter and photographer.

The Moon Rises Slowly Over the Ocean

Xu Demin

It is time
We stand like children
On the silent beach
And calmly wait for the moon
Nothing has been lost on the moon today
A banana kazoo
Sucked between the lips of night
Is no longer blowing out of tune

Crisscrossed boughs set up an easel
The moon wearing a pure white suncap
Slowly comes over like a shy boy
Holding a transparent nylon net
With which to scavenge the ocean
Of its many broken hearts
Bobbing on the sea to the horizon

Translated by Edward Morin and Dennis Ding