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ACTIVISM

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From parliament to prominent – the new wave of activism



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Photo: Climate Strike, Pixabay.

Both of us remember hearing news of a girl named Greta on strike alone in front of the Swedish Parliament, holding a sign reading “Skolstrejk för klimatet”. It was hard to imagine then that a few months later, on 20 September 2019, she would inspire more than four million people to follow her example at the biggest climate demonstration in history.

Like no other, Greta is the poster child of 21st century activism, supported by street

demonstrators and hashtags on social media. For many, she is a symbol of hope in the fight against climate change. But while she is arguably unique in how far up the chain she has taken her activism and how much she has come to represent, she is by no means unique in standing up for a cause she believes in, and making a sacrifice to do so.

Activists have shaped history countless times, through individual protest, collective action and large social movements. Be it

the four students who started the Greensboro sit-ins in 1960 that led Woolworths to abandon its policy of racial segregation; Silvia Rivera, who was a key figure in the US gay liberation movement in the 1970s; demonstrators during the 1989 Peaceful Revolution in East Germany that led to the opening of borders and reunification; five million Indian women who literally joined hands together earlier this year to form a 620 km chain of women’s rights; or

the recent uprisings in Chile to fight wealth inequality – all have, in one way or another, brought about transformative and lasting change.

This issue of the FUF magazine will explore the many faces of activism and its role in development – how it can be useful, why it might be necessary, and where it falls short.

Happy reading!



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Is a Lebanese Revolution underway?

An article by Donya Zikry

In Lebanon, thousands of people are expressing their grievances as the government announced to impose a tax on WhatsApp. Deep structural crises have culminated in one of the largest protests to occur in Lebanon in 14 years.

Hong Kong, Venezuela, Chile and Iraq: all over the globe, people are expressing discontent over unstable economic systems, dire living conditions and authoritarian governments. In Lebanon, spontaneous protests erupted on October 17th, 2019 as the government announced to impose a tax on WhatsApp phone calls. Since then, thousands of people have been protesting in a culmination of structural economic, social and political crises.

In response to the growing protests in Lebanon, the government reacted promptly by recalling the WhatsApp tax and proposing several economic reforms. A particularly significant event has been the resignation of Prime Minister Hariri (and his cabinet) on October 29th.

The WhatsApp tax has only been a stroke in the fire – but a significant one. Whats-

App is an essential tool of communication in Lebanon, considering that phone and data rates are very expensive. As the regime follows policies of regressive and indirect taxation, inter alia, the wide use of WhatsApp made it seemingly an ideal object of taxation. However, as this would have implications on the society at large and affect particularly the unemployed and working poor, the government's plan has been met with backlashes.

Furthermore, the Lebanese economic crisis is marked by negative trade balances, zero growth and a national debt at around 150 percent (85 billion USD). Living costs and unemployment rates are skyrocketing. Significantly, youth unemployment was estimated at 17 percent in 2018. In addition, poor provision of infrastructure, such as electricity and water, deteriorated people's social situation and well-being. The political elite are blamed for misallo-



Photo: Nadim Kobeissi, Wikimedia Commons.

cation of public funds, clientelism, corruption and neoliberal policies that triggered inequalities within the country. Accordingly, discontent has been simmering in Lebanon for years which has now led to the uprisings.

The protests are characterized by protestors who have been organising sit-ins and blocking main roads. Banks, universities and schools were closed for several days. Although the movement is leaderless, activists have clear demands: the resignation of the political elite (chanting “all of them means all of them”), ending political sectarianism, accountability of the government for mismanagement and cor-

ruption and a new technocratic government.

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Two events are symbolic for the movement: a 170 km long human chain expressed a sense of Lebanese unity, regardless of religion or societal class. A video sho-

wing a female activist who kicked a guard and confiscated his gun, went viral on social media and resembles the strength of the movement.

Since the protests which peaked particularly in October and November 2019, a new government has been formed in January 2020, with the former university professor Hassan Dieb replacing Saad Hariri. However, protestors took to the streets again, after the new cabinet has been

announced. It remains to be seen how the process will continue and what shape it will take.



Donya Zikry

Donya is a Master's student in International Development and Management at Lund University. She is particularly interested in issues surrounding education, digital development and the MENA Region.

Online Gender Activism in India: Working Through the Fears

A guest article by Shruti Sharada

A year has passed since #MeToo galvanised online gender activism in India. But as defamation cases rise and the accused remain powerful, activists need to look back at what made online activism so powerful in the first place.

A sharp shudder passed through my body as I read the news. A prominent Indian artist was suing an anonymous Indian Instagram account for defamation. For months, the account had posted testimonies of persons who had faced sexual harassment in the Indian art world. This afore-mentioned artist had been revealed to have been a serial predator. The damage to his image and the actual loss to his financial privilege is difficult for us to estimate, but in the case against the account, he was asking for

a distressingly large amount of money as reparation.

When #MeToo reached India in late 2018, it allowed for a rare opportunity to come out into the open and talk about the sexual harassment, rapes, and micro aggressions that so many of us had faced, especially in the workplace. This 'movement' was a privileged corner on the Internet, but it gave us hope and it initiated a sisterhood of shared experiences. We were all activists; we were all owning our stories.

In working environments where the ratio of your gender and the wage gap stand against you, women are conditioned to ignore, minimize, and remain silent about the sexual abuse they face at the workplace. In spite of that, online gender activism in India in the past decade has opened up, become bolder, and employed everything from art to comics to photography to tweets to bite back at misogyny, sexism, and abuse. When the name of the then-Chief Justice of India came up in the accused list, we gathered forces online – Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp – and got on to

the streets, making sure that the media heard. ‘Due diligence’ had failed us and we chose to rely on online sites to, hopefully, open the doors to justice.

As powerful as it was, however, what most women received in return was vicious online harassment and the sight of their harassers continuing to prosper in life. In the place of justice, we are witnessing the rise of defamation cases and blackballing.

A little over a year since #MeTooIndia, we activists are assessing why the movement

couldn’t stick strong. Fundamentally, this kind of activism, like any other, is tough when people do not believe the survivors, and give the benefit of the doubt to the accused powerful men. It is tough because even within the Indian feminist circles, online-led activism is a fractured issue. But its limitations come not from the medium, but from the same misogynistic tendencies that cause and sustain abuse. The

challenge of proving credibility remains almost always on the survivor and there is no established history of fair trials. Which is why it is important that we continue to build our online activism, in spite of all the doubts and all our fears. We may tip toe, but we must keep moving forward.

Shruti Sharada



Shruti Sharada is an independent communications strategist based in India. She is a writer, editor, and social media manager at Radio Active CR 90.4 MHz, the oldest community radio station in Bengaluru. She is also a researcher of gender-based violence, and an LGBTQIA+ community organiser at Vimochana - Forum for Women's Rights, Bengaluru.

“This ‘movement’ was a privileged corner of the Internet, but it gave us hope and it initiated a sisterhood of shared experiences.”

In Germany, an initiative of several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) is raising awareness of a draft law that can improve the lives of millions of people and the environment: the Supply Chain Act. But broad public recognition is still lacking.

Worldwide, the activities of German companies result in human rights violations and environmental degradation. Examples are inhumane working conditions on tea plantations in India, child labor on cocoa plantations in West Africa and dangerous working environments within the textile industry in Pakistan. Up to today, German companies cannot be held accountable for the negative impacts of their business activities. This could change if the proposed Supply Chain Law is passed.

If implemented, the draft law would set legal guidelines for German companies and ensure their accountability. Companies would then be responsible for fulfilling their environmental and social responsibilities through risk assessments, precautionary measures and complaint mechanisms. They would, for example, be obliged to ensure that the workers who

sew T-shirts for them work in a safe environment with fair conditions.

There have been past attempts to introduce a mandatory supply chain law some years ago. Back then, the public awareness was missing which allowed economic lobbyists, such as the employers' confederation, to put pressure on the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Energy, which finally pushed for a provisional and voluntary version of the law, thus failing to improve production conditions in countries around the world.. This shows the importance of public awareness and activism. Even though a demonstration often does not achieve its direct goal, activism and especially demonstrations, have the power to shape the discussion that takes place. It increases the political activity of its participants and therefore changes their voting behaviour or political ideologies.

Activism for supply chain laws?

An article by Kathrin Hegger

“Even though a demonstration often does not achieve its direct goal, activism has the potential to shape discussions.”

Several demonstrations and information campaigns have recently been organised in order to increase public awareness of the Supply Chain Law Initiative. Despite these efforts, the topic has not yet reached the wide public attention. This may have to do with the complex nature of the law and the challenges associated with its implementation. Recently, however, the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs and the Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development announced that they would work together put the issue at the top of

the political agenda, which indicates that the initiative is starting to bear fruit.

Nonetheless, as the implementation of the law will have several positive environmental and social impacts, even more political leaders need to join the initiative. It is important not to allow economic organizations, such as the employers' confederation in Germany, to influence the decision on whether the law is voluntary or legally binding.



Kathrin Hegger

Kathrin Hegger studies Environmental Studies and Sustainability Sciences in Lund and has a background in International Relations. She is especially interested in the environmental and social impacts of international trade activities.





Photo: Jeanne Menjoulet, Flickr.

Activists are pushing for development alternatives

A chronicle by Alexandru Mocanu

“D écroissance!, Décroissance!” This was a slogan that could be heard and seen on the streets of protesting Europe about two decades ago in reaction to the G8 Summit – an intergovernmental forum of the leaders from the most powerful countries. Known in English as Degrowth, it is now one of the major development alternative projects. What once started as a mere activist verse turned into a powerful global movement enjoying significant social, political, and academic attention today.

Degrowth is not the only case of its kind. One may think of similar movements such as Buen Vivir, or “living well”, which is a

Latin American view on co-existing with nature, Prakritik Swaraj – an approach originating in India that means natural self-rule, or Ubuntu – a Sub-Saharan concept meaning humanness (see: Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary). While they may vary ideologically and in other aspects, they all have the same pre-requisite: activism.

Indeed, activism is what has often been at their origin as shown, but also proved critical in their further development and advancement. Without the drive of activism, it is hard to imagine how such ideas could make it through. One may find it naïve to expect governments or any of their emanations to take lead on initiatives like this

THE ONLY SUSTAINABLE GROWTH IS DEGROWTH

THE SWEDISH DEVELOPMENT FORUM

Photo: Kamiel, Pixabay.

in the currently dominating neo-liberal capitalist setting. Or more so for the profit-driven private interests. It is therefore really the realm of genuine grassroots actors, thanks to which the concept of Buen Vivir, for example, has been ultimately recognized in the Constitutions of Bolivia and Ecuador.

The protests are characterized by protestors who have been organising sit-ins and blocking main roads. Banks, universities and schools were closed for several days. Although the movement is leaderless, activists have clear demands: the resignation of the political elite (chanting “all of them means all of them”), ending political

sectarianism, accountability of the government for mismanagement and corruption and a new technocratic government.

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Degrowth: What once started as a mere activist verse turned into a powerful global movement.”

Certainly, not all proposed alternatives have been enjoying a similar breakthrou-

gh. But sustained grassroots activism was able to keep them afloat long enough and build their case compellingly over time. Take for example Prakritik Swaraj or Ubuntu which are ancient indigenous ideas of a more latent character but which continue to inspire social, political and ecological movements in their respective regions and beyond.

In the end, one may want to appreciate the words of Gustavo Duch – Catalanian wri-

ter and activist – when commenting on a recently published dictionary of development alternatives: “A verse is needed to express a wish, to push for change, to eradicate injustices”. Just as all it takes to start a development alternative movement is a slogan.



Alexandru Mocanu

Alexandru Mocanu is a graduate student of International Development and Management at Lund University. With a professional background in law, he is currently exploring the interlinkages between human rights, justice, and sustainable development.

The fight for reproductive rights in Mexico

A chronicle by Carlos Ranero

In 1993, the femicide of 13-year-old Alma Chavira Farel was reported to the police of Ciudad Juarez. This report marked the beginning of an investigation that discovered “Las Muertas de Juarez” (The Dead Women of Juarez) and that brought to light the violence that women suffer in Mexico. This situation incited the women to mobilize by adopting the movement of “Ni Una Menos” (Not one woman less) in 2016.

The “Ni Una Menos” movement demands that the government take an active role in the problem of gender violence in the country. By doing this, the “Ni Una Menos” movement drew attention to the case of abortions in Mexico that, according to the General Direction of Epidemiology,

are the fifth cause of death for mothers in the country. This situation also brought the women of Mexico into adopting the pro-choice movement of “La Marea Verde” (The Green Wave) in 2018.

“La Marea Verde” had its biggest demonstration in 2018. In this mobilization, the women demanded Sexual Education to choose; Contraceptives to avoid abortion and Legal Abortion to not die to the Mexican government. However, the mobilization did not achieve its goals as in 2018, the national chamber of representatives voted down the law proposal to legalize abortion.

Regardless of this, in 2019, the movement convinced the Mexican Supreme Court to

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The “Ni Una Menos” movement demands that the government take an active role in the problem of gender violence in the country.

create a “back door” to access abortion by ordering hospitals to provide one to anyone requesting it on the grounds of having been raped. Also, Oaxaca became the second state in Mexico to legalize abortion.



Carlos Ranero

Carlos has been working on development projects in Mexico for over five years and is currently pursuing a master's in Development Studies at Lund University.

Photo: Danielle Lupin, Flickr.



The Fight to Increase Women's Political Power in India Continues

An interview by Josefine Nilsson

Even if the proportion of women in parliament increased after the 2019 election, the gender imbalance in Indian politics remains. FUF Magazine has interviewed one of the initiative-takers of the Indian movement Shakti, Tara Krishnaswamy, who is fighting for more women in politics.

Tara Krishnaswamy is a computer scientist as well as an engaged activist. She has a deep interest in civic and political issues and has been conscious of the unequal status of women in India from a young age. Krishnaswamy's experiences and previous engagements gave her the confidence to initiate the non-partisan movement Shakti.

Shakti is a unique initiative bringing together Indians from various backgrounds to promote female representation in the Parliament of India and the State Legislative Assemblies. The movement started at the end of 2018, as a strategic effort to build public engagement by running campaigns during the Indian general election in 2019. In an attempt to raise the engagement of politicians, mass calls were made to both men and women in politics urging for an increased number of women candidates in the general election.

After the general election last year, the proportion of women in parliament increased to a record high of 14 percent. Even if Krishnaswamy admits the result was better than expected, she emphasises the need to continue the fight.

– There is nothing systematic that will ensure that women's representation will continue to rise. I'm saying this because if we don't fight, it might just drop next time. So we are lucky, but we can't count on luck. We have to continue to ensure our luck, says Krishnaswamy.

Krishnaswamy highlights that the gap between the constitutional promises to women as equal citizens and the reality is huge. This is reflected in the disproportionately large portion of men in politics.

With Shakti, Krishnaswamy is advocating for increased fairness in politics. While

pointing towards the current political situation in India, she mentions the unequal gender balance among candidates.

– Remember that 90 percent of all candidates in the country are men since political parties only nominate male candidates. Only 10 percent of the candidates they nominate are women, Krishnaswamy explains.

Shakti has received consistent support from the general public, media and women in politics. Krishnaswamy shares that while powerful male politicians have the capacity to drive change, they often lack

the willingness to take action in order to improve the gender balance.

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90 percent of all candidates in the country are men since political parties only nominate male candidates.

– The main resistance towards Shakti comes from political parties, which mainly constitutes of men. It is not resistance to Shakti, it is resistance to women's repre-

sentation. Political parties in India don't have women in decision-making positions. Even parties led by women only have one woman and they don't want to have women in other key positions of power.

Shakti's campaigns include protesting, petitioning and pressuring politicians and key decision-makers. According to Krishnaswamy, a lot more has to be done to improve women's situation in India.

– We haven't really had a feminist revolution in this country. We got the right to vote without a revolution, we got the right to stand for elections without a revolution, and we got all the rights to be almost equal citizens in the country without a revolution. But clearly, we are not equal, Krishnaswamy concludes.

Josefine Nilsson



Josefine is a master's student in International Development and Management (LUMID) at Lund University. She recently returned to Sweden after spending the past years traveling, working and studying abroad. India has a special place in her heart, partly due to the delicious veggie food.





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