

## Africa: How the IMF Worsens Ebola

by Jérôme Duval, translated by John Catalinotto

Although the International Monetary Fund (IMF) claims it is part of the solution, the IMF is really part of the problem of underdevelopment and has been for decades. The latest proof of this is that the conditions imposed on countries in need have had serious impacts on the development of these countries' public health services. In some countries this means letting epidemics destroy the lives of thousands of people. The latest example involves the Ebola epidemic. The IMF is responsible for serious restrictions in developing adequate healthcare systems.

It is not only social movements in both the global South and North that make this claim. You find it in a study published in the *Lancet Global Health* magazine by several British universities (the University of Cambridge and of Oxford and the

---

**In Liberia, there were only 0.1 doctors per 10,000 inhabitants...and 0.4 hospitals for 100,000 inhabitants.**

---

London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine). As already indicated by Vicenç Navarro in his blog or Alexander Kentikelenis, professor of the University of Cambridge and research coordinator, in *El Diario.es*: "The IMF policies have contributed to poorly funded, unprepared and understaffed health systems in countries with outbreaks of Ebola."

The organization, based in Washington, through anti-social conditions imposed together with their loans, prioritizes short-term economic objectives such as reducing debt, which in fact only serves to increase the need to pay it back forever. Bleeding resources to pay an illegitimate debt weakens the health system. For example, in Liberia, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), there were only 0.1 doctors per 10,000 inhabitants between 2006 and 2013, and 0.4 hospitals for 100,000 inhabitants in 2013.

On August 8, 2014, WHO declared the Ebola epidemic in West Africa an international public health emergency. After more than 20,000 people had been affected and more than 8,000 killed by the Ebola virus, the \$30 million granted in October 2014 by the IMF emergency assistance to Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone was not enough to confront the drama of the situation (in that time, the epidemic had killed more than 1,200 people). In addition, these funds do not represent even half of the \$300 million pledged during the G20 summit in November 2014 in Brisbane, Australia, nor do they cover the \$372 million debt these three West African countries built up within the international financial institution.

Finally, much of these funds had not even arrived in the country, given that they consist not only

of donations, but also new loans or debt relief. Thus the IMF approved new credit lines for these three countries that will send them further into debt: \$41 million for Guinea, \$49 million for Liberia and \$39 million for Sierra Leone. Meanwhile, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone had to pay \$100 million in external debt in 2014 and nearly \$130 million more in 2015. A quarter of this sum will go to the IMF. The additional \$150 million announced by the financial institution in early January 2015 arrived very late and only after several criticisms mentioned here of the poor management of the IMF. The hypocrisy of big donors is immense.

According to the UN report of December 2014, *Socio-Economic Impacts of the Ebola Virus Disease on Africa*, only 23.4% of the \$518 million pledged by the World Bank has been disbursed to date, and less than 10% of the \$459.8 million announced by the EU has reached its destination. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has disbursed only 27.3% of the \$50 million announced; not a cent of the \$25 million promised by both Mark Zuckerberg (owner of Facebook) and by the Google Foundation have been seen. So many beautiful promises are still up in the air.

Rather than counting on donations, new loans or debt relief, we should demand the immediate, total and unconditional cancellation of the external debt of West African countries affected by Ebola such as Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. That's what the

---

**We should demand cancelation of the external debt of West African countries affected by Ebola.**

---

United Nations' Economic Commission for Africa demanded on December 15: "Donors have been quite generous announcing debt relief, but will need to go further and fully cancel this debt," said Carlos Lopes, secretary general of the commission on December 15 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Obviously, this claim should be extended to all poor countries, misnamed as developing, where 85% of the world's population lives; their public debt (about \$1.8 trillion) represents only 1% of global debt. Relief will

not affect the global economic balance; the only thing needed is the political will.

It is a good thing to increase the fiscal deficit when the health and lives of people are in danger. It is not we who say this but, contradicting the usual conservative ideology of the IMF, Christine Lagarde, its director, who said it and acknowledged that the IMF doesn't say it often. But we should not have to wait for great humanitarian crises such as that caused by Ebola for people to see the clear need to increase the deficit in order to fund social services. Also, international law requires that compliance with basic human needs be a priority compared to bleeding resources to pay the debt.

The IMF, which inhumanely ignores serious human needs, must disappear; those responsible for its decisions should be brought to justice for their actions. The devastating IMF policies have damaged too many people through neoliberal debt programs to be allowed to continue with impunity. Similarly, the Spanish State should withdraw as soon as possi-

ble its Article 135 of the Constitution, which contravenes the international law that establishes the priority of human needs before any other expense—a fortiori, the debt service. This is a matter of human survival, not the accountant's books.

Some references:

Jubilee/Debt Campaign, Ebola: Drop the debt. Alexander Kentikelenis, Lawrence King, Martin McKee, David Stuckler, The International Monetary Fund and the Ebola outbreak, *The Lancet*, December 2014. Economic Commission for Africa: Socio-economic impacts of the epidemic of Ebola in Africa. UN, December 2014 (also in French). People's Health Movement, Ebola Epidemic Exposes the Pathology of the Capitalist System, August 2014.

Jérôme Duval is member of the Spanish Citizens Debt Audit Platform. Posted for the Committee for the Abolition of Third World Debt, at Links International Journal of Socialist Renewal, <http://links.org.au/node/4287>

---

## Questions for Conscientious Cannabis Consumers

# How Green Is Your Pot?

by Kollibri terre Sonnenblume

It's not news that marijuana is becoming mainstream in the US, and as legal restrictions loosen and social acceptance grows, the amount of marijuana being cultivated is rising rapidly. A big business is getting bigger. The cottage-days of the industry were left behind in the 1980s and if anything holds true in the American economic system, it's that larger scale brings lower quality and greater damage.

Conventional food agriculture is a case in point: it wrecks havoc on ecosystems, its products are unhealthy, and the farmwork itself is underpaid and dangerous. As these facts have been publicized, many people have become rightly concerned about where their food comes from. The same questions that can and should be asked about produce—Was it sprayed? Is it free of contaminants? Were the workers mistreated?—can and should be brought to bear against marijuana now.

Because marijuana is such a high value crop, reams of data have been collected about its cultivation—by government agencies, educational institutions, and growers themselves—so we have enough

most densely in Northern California, from Arcata to Ukiah, in Trinity, Humboldt and Mendocino counties, the so-called, "Emerald Triangle." Another notable center is in Southern Oregon, in the triangle made by Grant's Pass, Cave Junction and Ashland, with Williams at its heart. I have traveled repeatedly through these areas since 2010 while looking for land to farm on, and I couldn't help but run into pot farms. With a decade of farming experience under my belt, I had enough general agricultural sense to observe what I was seeing with a keen eye, and what I observed is this: More so than nearly any other crop, marijuana is resource-hungry and labor intensive.

---

## More so than nearly any other crop, marijuana is resource-hungry and labor intensive.

---

information to assess many impacts already. This article focuses on the "Green" issues: environment and labor.

Marijuana is grown outdoors and indoors, the majority of it outdoors. The debate over which method makes for better bud has dogmatic partisans on either side and will probably never be decided. From a Green perspective, both have advantages and disadvantages and both could be improved. Generally, indoor has a higher carbon footprint while outdoor is more destructive to its immediate environment.

Marijuana is grown outdoors all over the USA and Canada (including Alaska) but is concentrated

I have also noticed that, for the most part, marijuana enjoys a free ride when it comes to questions of agricultural sustainability. Many people seem to assume it's grown by happy hippies, singing songs and feelin' groovy, taking care to treat Mother Earth with love. While there are a handful of people like that out there, they are small-scale, producing mostly for themselves. When it comes to production growers, the majority are plain old capitalists, in it for the