

## A REVIEW OF (WEST) GERMANY'S RELATIONS WITH DEVELOPING COUNTRIES IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

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Over the years, there have been regular calls for Germany to have an active policy on Africa, combined with criticisms that Africa is neglected by German politicians. Hans-Ulrich Klose MP (SPD), one of the country's most experienced foreign politicians, was being self-critical when he remarked that Africa is viewed as a problem continent that only has a role in terms of development cooperation and humanitarian aid.<sup>1</sup> According to the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), over 50 per cent of bilateral development aid now goes to the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>2</sup> The German Bundestag regularly debates the situation there; the region has been visited by the German President, Chancellor and Foreign Minister; and non-governmental organisations and partnerships are involved in countless projects. Germany provides relatively high levels of aid and is involved in a wide range of activities – so why is it considered to be less committed and largely ineffectual in comparison with not just the USA, but also France and Britain? One reason lies in the global political situation at the time when the Federal Republic of Germany began to be involved in Western development cooperation.



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- 1 | Cf. Horst Köhler (ed.), *Schicksal Afrika. Denkanstöße und Erfahrungsberichte*, Hamburg, 2010, 55. Klose was First Mayor of Hamburg from 1974 to 1981. From 1983 to 2013 he was a member of the German Bundestag. In 1998 he became chairman of the foreign policy committee and was its vice-chairman from 2002 to 2013.
- 2 | Cf. Gerd Müller, "Die neue Afrika-Politik des BMZ", Bundestagsrede, 21 Mar 2014, <http://bmz.de/20140321-1> (accessed 23 Aug 2014).



Beginning of development cooperation: in 1961 the German Ministry of Development Cooperation was founded. Walter Scheel (FDP) was the first Minister of Development Cooperation, pictured here on the reception for the Foreign and Economic Minister of Gabun, Jean Hilaire Aubamé and Gustave Auguilé, on 18 May 1962 in Bonn. | Source: Fumey, Bundesarchiv, F012936-0011 ©@@@.

### **DEVELOPMENT POLICY – SHARED OR SOLE RESPONSIBILITY?**

In the summer of 1961 (so before the BMZ was set up in November of that year), the German federal government decided to get involved in international development cooperation by contributing 4.35 billion Deutsche Marks, a significant sum at the time. It also decided to join the Development Assistance Committee (DAC), which was set up within the restructured OECD to coordinate international development assistance, and the IDA, the World Bank's subsidiary for funding the world's least developed countries.<sup>3</sup> This was primarily a result of pressure from the U.S. government. At the time, Britain and the USA were struggling with a large balance of payment deficits

3 | On 14 December 1960, the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC), which had administered the U.S.-financed Marshall Plan for Europe's recovery since 1948, became the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the DAC was set up within it to coordinate development cooperation. The International Development Association (IDA) was established in September 1960 as a subsidiary of the World Bank. It is funded by the contributions of its members and grants concessionary loans with terms of 25 to 40 years, interest-free repayments for five to ten years and interest rates of 1.25 to 2.8 per cent.

because of the need to provide foreign aid and station their troops on foreign soil. Germany was enjoying a balance of payment surplus at the time, so it was asked to make a corresponding contribution. However, Chancellor Konrad Adenauer raised fundamental objections to this, as a German contribution to the cost of troop deployments was an uncomfortable reminder of the occupation costs. Instead, he offered to make a significant contribution to international development aid.

However, this burden-sharing was not without precedent. Since the 1950s, one of the aims of French policy had been to ensure Germany's involvement in "developing" the colonies. The question of how to deal with the colonies was raised during the negotiations prior to the creation of the European Economic Community (EEC). The German Foreign Office was opposed to involving the colonies in the EEC. It felt that this would implicate Germany in colonial policies and lessen the pro-German sentiment prevalent in developing countries that had already gained their independence. The German Ministry for Economic Affairs saw it as an obstacle to its favoured European free trade zone. Adenauer finally decided to give in to French demands for a development fund for the colonies because he was not prepared to let the EEC stumble over this hurdle. Germany shouldered one third of the cost of this fund, which was dominated by French interests until the signing of the Lomé Convention in 1975.

Under initial pressure from the Allies, the years that followed saw German development cooperation growing as part of German foreign policy. Its aim was for the Federal Republic to fully return to the family of nations and hence ensure non-recognition of the GDR in line with the Hallstein Doctrine. In this, it was supported by wavering but nevertheless positive public opinion. When diplomatic relations were gradually initiated with the new nations, Bonn promised to support them in their economic development, as long as they recognised the Federal Republic of Germany as the sole representative of the German people. This caused concern among the former colonial powers, which were keen to ensure that their former colonies were still largely

**Following diplomatic relations with the new nations, the Federal Republic of Germany promised economic development, as long as it was recognised as the sole representative of the German people.**

bound to them in a kind of informal empire. So Germany's development policy began to concentrate on working with Asian and Latin American countries and it initially had only limited influence in Sub-Saharan Africa.



The first group of development aid workers from the German Development Service, founded on 24 June 1963, went on its mission to Tanzania only one year later in 1964. | Source: © Deutscher Entwicklungsdienst, dpa-Bildarchiv, picture alliance.

The story of the beginnings of German development policy was reflected in its structure. It was only able to pursue its objectives within a bilateral framework. So West German contributions to multilateral aid were limited to those required as a result of its membership of international organisations. This meant that German influence continued to be weak in the region. Another consequence was that funding was handed out in a blanket fashion, because all new countries seeking it had to be given an equal share. A plethora of small projects were set up, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. Their effectiveness was limited, largely because their focus was all too often on areas where there was little chance of success but which were important to governments for political reasons. Due to solicitation from the U.S. government, Germany was also obliged to work with countries whose former colonial masters had grappled with political problems, such as the "socialist" regimes in Guinea and Ghana, or the political confusion that beset Sudan.

## **A SHIFT TO NEEDS-BASED DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION**

The first grand coalition in 1966 and the change of government in 1969 provided Germany with a new direction for its development cooperation. When Erhard Eppler (SPD) took over as minister for economic cooperation in 1968, he pitted himself against the domination of foreign policy and foreign trade interests. He wanted an autonomous development policy which focused on the needs of the developing countries and which gave them the tools to build their own political systems, societies and economies. His views were strongly influenced by the report of the Pearson Commission (set up by the World Bank), which concluded that the United Nations' First Development Decade had failed. He was also swayed by criticisms of the newly-established Third World Movement. The idea was to help developing countries to catch up by increasing official development assistance (ODA); responding to calls for a new international economic order; paying attention to the imminent depletion of natural global resources and by shifting away from the industrialised world's policies for unbridled growth. This meant a policy of cooperation between North and South and a greater role for the United Nations. Germany had been a member since 1973 and it was now time for it to become more actively involved. Development cooperation was to be distanced from major infrastructure projects and industrialisation and focus on reducing poverty by improving small-scale farming, creating a welfare structure to bridge the gap between the haves and the have-nots, establishing a policy on population and providing food aid. Eppler believed this would make a greater contribution to world peace than military interventions.

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But he faced a great many obstacles when trying to execute his plans. For the Marxist-inspired student movement of 1968, his proposals were just a distraction from the true goal – a socialist government of the people, if necessary achieved through revolution. The German Foreign Office, led by Walter Scheel (FDP) after 1969, considered his ideas

to be harmful to German interests,<sup>4</sup> and in economic circles they were accused of being anti-business. Lack of support for his plans within the German government led Eppler to step down in 1974, but his ideas continued to be influential. He succeeded in expanding the powers of the BMZ, cementing development policy as an autonomous policy area and communicating to the public at large a view of development policy as an overriding humanitarian and ethical obligation. As a result, since the 1980s, the public debate in Germany on the direction of development policy has been much more strongly imbued with humanitarian and ethical considerations than in the USA, France or Britain.



More international responsibility: The Federal Republic of Germany was accepted to the United Nations in 1973, marked by the flag ceremony in front of the UN Headquarters in New York. With Germany's UN membership, the range of development cooperation increased. | Source: Joachim Spremberg, German Federal Archive, 183-M0925-306 ©©©.

However, Eppler's failure was more a result of global politics than of internal opposition and lack of funding. Other major donors such as the USA, France, Japan and the UK had their own ideas. The oil crisis of 1973 led to a glut of petrodollars that needed to be invested – often in major projects which later proved to be unviable. There was also significant opposition from African leaders. In the early 1970s, Sub-Saharan Africa was dominated by dictators such as Mobutu, Ahidjo, Houphouet-Boigny, Sekou Touré

4 | For example, Secretary of State Peter Hermes (1975-1979) under Foreign Minister Genscher (Peter Hermes, *Meine Zeitgeschichte 1922-1987*, Paderborn, 2007, 222-223).

and Idi Amin, to name but a few. There was no way that African leaders and the new elites were going to renounce industrialisation, plantations and mining. They believed these to be the economic future of their countries and their own personal cash cows, in contrast to the unproductive agriculture practised by peasant farmers and nomads. Towards the end of the colonial era, an elite that was imbued by the experience of the developmental efforts of late colonialism believed in the omnipotence of bureaucracy and the state; in developing and supervising a “backward” population that needed educating; and in maintaining their own income and status as the privileged “ruling class”<sup>5</sup>.<sup>6</sup> The endogenous reasons that impeded Africa’s development were underestimated.

On top of this, for a variety of reasons Western donors made deals with authoritarian regimes and came up with solutions that either served their own interests or arose from patronising post-colonial attitudes. The few reform-minded governments had little scope for developing the “right” policies, and indeed there was heated debate about the content of these policies. In the 1970s it became clear how difficult it was to effect social and political change from the outside. The shift towards the basic needs strategy promoted by World Bank President Robert McNamara was an escape to a minimalist strategy designed to – at the very least – improve the lives of the rural and urban poor. But when this also miscarried, after 1980 the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) for all intents and purposes returned to its structural adjustment strategy, which linked the granting of loans to programs of economic reform and modernisation.

In practical terms, Germany’s development policies in Sub-Saharan Africa remained remarkably unaffected by this shift in aims and strategy. Official policy statements and strategic concepts only had a limited impact on the

5 | Andreas Eckert, *Herrschen und Verwalten. Afrikanische Bürokraten, staatliche Ordnung und Politik in Tanzania 1920-1970*, Munich, 2007, 265; Hartmut Elsenhans, *Abhängiger Kapitalismus oder bürokratische Entwicklungsgesellschaft. Versuch über den Staat in der Dritten Welt*, Frankfurt am Main and New York, 1981.

6 | Cf. i.a. Frederick Cooper, *Africa since 1940. The Past of the Present*, Cambridge, 2002.

project work, and often their effects were felt so late that the next paradigm shift was already on the horizon while negotiations were underway with the recipient country. The fact that development cooperation remained practical and

**While the former colonial nations had already experiences with Western politics, administration and business, technical cooperation was strongly influenced by German concepts.**

project-oriented was also due to the conditions that had prevailed since the 1960s. The key areas were still covered by the successors to the colonial administrations. So the Germans focused on projects whose technical quality made them stand out from those of other donors and which, more importantly, proved their worth to the host government. While the former colonial nations were already experienced in dealing with Western practices in the areas of politics, administration and business (even if this was mainly in the economic interest of the mother country), technical cooperation was strongly influenced by German concepts<sup>7</sup> of dual education, model villages and rural cooperatives. But there was a failure to understand how these kinds of models would only rarely succeed because of the very different social structures and mentalities involved and the competition with other donors. The only exception to this was the dual education model. Capital assistance was mainly focused on infrastructure projects. German development cooperation kept its distance from large-scale industrial projects because of the bad experiences of the past. It also kept away from the construction of major dams for power and irrigation because of the environmental and resettlement problems they entailed.<sup>8</sup>

The rivalry between West and East Germany took on a new aspect when the two states were admitted to the United Nations.<sup>9</sup> The GDR focused its efforts on states that supported the Soviet bloc, such as Ethiopia, Angola and Mozambique. It also supported the independence movements in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia. Meanwhile, West Germany assisted countries with a more Western,

7 | Exceptions to this were the Nangbeto Dam in Togo, built between 1984 and 1987, and the Manantali Dam, built in Mali between 1981 and 1987.

8 | Cf. *ibid.*, 202-204.

9 | Cf. Rolf Hofmeier, "Five Decades of German-African relations. Limited Interests, low political profile and substantial aid donor", in: Ulf Engel and Robert Kappel (eds.), *Germany's Africa Policy Revisited. Interests, images and incrementalism*, Münster, 2002, 44.

market-oriented approach. But overall, the West German government's interest in Africa continued to fade during the later years of the socialist/liberal coalition and under Chancellor Helmut Kohl. Internationally, Bonn supported the structural adjustment programs set up by the World Bank and IMF and the European Economic Community's Africa Programme, but it continued to respect the particular French and British spheres of influence.

The importance of development policy continued to wane after reunification in 1990. This was certainly a consequence of the end of the rivalry between the two German states.

**After its reunification in 1990, Germany had new responsibilities in Central and Eastern Europe, thus tying up its financial capital.**

In addition, Germany now had new responsibilities in Central and Eastern Europe which were tying up its human and financial capital. From 1987/1988 to 1998, the ratio of development aid to GDP fell from 0.53 to 0.26 per cent. This had an impact on Sub-Saharan Africa. With the end of apartheid in South Africa (Germany's main economic partner) and Namibian independence, the Federal Republic no longer had any specific foreign interests in the region. The German Foreign Office formulated its Accra Guidelines and certain regional concepts, but they were not "easy to manage or implement and of no use as guidelines for developing specific strategies".<sup>10</sup> In practical terms, the BMZ took over the lead in terms of concepts and policies. In contrast to political trends in Germany, it was confronted with the efforts of the United Nations, the European Union and other international organisations to use the end of the Cold War as a new impetus for development policy and as a chance to create a "new development architecture".

## **DEVELOPMENT POLICY AS GLOBAL STRUCTURAL POLICY**

It fell to the SPD/Greens coalition created in 1998 to tackle the debt relief initiative for heavily debt-ridden countries, the new European Union agreement with the ACP countries (Cotonou Agreement) and above all the UN's Millennium Declaration and Goals. In line with the global trend, development policy was now to be treated as a distinct policy area that should evolve into a global structural and

10 | Ulrich Golaszinski, *Subsahara-Afrika. Die Wiederentdeckung eines Kontinents*, Bonn, 2007.

peace policy. This new development architecture certainly related to global development cooperation, but its focus was on the crisis-ridden region of Sub-Saharan Africa. The 2002 G8 summit in Kananaskis agreed on an action plan for Africa. The EU also drew up a strategy for Africa. The German government supported all these initiatives, partly because it was keen for Germany to be seen in its new role as a responsible global power. But in practice, this new direction in development policy had little effect, and it was sorely lacking in funding.



Development policies of industrial nations: The G8 (now G7) introduced an Africa Action Plan in 2002. On the agenda: debt reduction, promotion of security, strengthening of economic growth. The group underlined these goals again at the G8 Summit in Lough, Northern Ireland in 2013. | Source: Tom Robinson, Crown, UK MoD, flickr ©©©©.

The OECD's Development Assistance Committee criticised the poor implementation of this reorientation in its 1999 and 2002 peer review reports. According to these reports, German development cooperation had continued to focus on large infrastructure projects, supporting the market economy, capacity building for institutions and the growth of the private sector. It was still very labour-intensive; there was no sharing of technical assistance with other donors; and there was only limited employment of local staff. Little use was made of the capacities of the recipient countries' administrations, so they were not given an opportunity to grow stronger. Technical help was still mainly provided by German experts, so it was too broad-based and too expensive. Programs were only rarely given

budget support or funded jointly with other donors. The practice of keeping key areas of programs, and particularly their financial management, in their own hands went against the principle of individual responsibility for the recipients. Local representation – which should involve liaison between donors and where decisions should be made in conjunction with the recipients – continued to be inadequate as decisions were still being made centrally in Germany. German development assistance activities were still being distributed in the same way, by region and according to country categories. There was no obvious adjustment in line with Africa's growing development needs and the strategy of combating poverty.<sup>11</sup>

The lack of focus on Sub-Saharan Africa also attracted criticism within Germany itself. The "Memorandum on a New Foundation for Germany's Africa Policy", written by German experts on Africa, called for an Africa policy based on a concept of structural stability that finally bid farewell to over-optimistic formats and clichés of disaster.<sup>12</sup> If anything was to be achieved, it was time for development cooperation to include more international (and particularly European) cooperation and coordination. It needed to be more political, promote human rights and democracy more consistently, and above all conduct political dialogue. It had to be linked to security, agriculture, foreign trade, environmental and international cultural policy in order to create coherence. These arguments were well received, but the classification of Sub-Saharan countries fuelled a great deal of controversy. Alongside countries that were potentially in transition, there were also low-income countries with few opportunities to develop and hence limited

**German experts on Africa called for a development cooperation which is linked to security, foreign trade, environmental and international cultural policy.**

11 | Cf. DAC-OECD, *Development Co-operation Review Series. Germany*. No. 29, Paris, 1998; DAC-OECD, "Development Cooperation Review Germany Development Cooperation Review. Main Findings and Recommendations", *DAC Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 4, 2001, 12 and 17.

12 | Cf. Ulf Engel, Robert Kappel, Stephan Klingebiel, Stefan Mair, Andreas Mehler and Siegmund Schmidt, "Memorandum zur Neubegründung der deutschen Afrikapolitik. Frieden und Entwicklung durch strukturelle Stabilität", Institut für Afrikanistik der Universität Leipzig, Oct 2000, [http://www.die-gdi.de/uploads/media/afrika\\_memorandum.pdf](http://www.die-gdi.de/uploads/media/afrika_memorandum.pdf) (accessed 2 Sep 2014). For the critics' view see Cord Jakobeit and Heribert Weiland (eds.), *Das 'Afrika-Memorandum' und seine Kritiker. Eine Dokumentation*, Hamburg, 2002.

prospects. According to the Memorandum, it should be assumed that around 50 per cent of countries had almost no prospects of economic growth and therefore no foundation for building structural stability. In individual cases it was possible to provide assistance for establishing institutions and capacity building, but otherwise assistance was necessarily limited to emergency aid. This statement triggered some strong protests.<sup>13</sup> However, the conclusions of the Memorandum harked back to the modernisation theory in its belief that market economy reforms alone are not enough. It claimed that lasting structural stability can only be achieved through a combination of political and economic reforms. But neither the authors nor the critics could say how this should happen under the prevailing circumstances and with the instruments that were available.

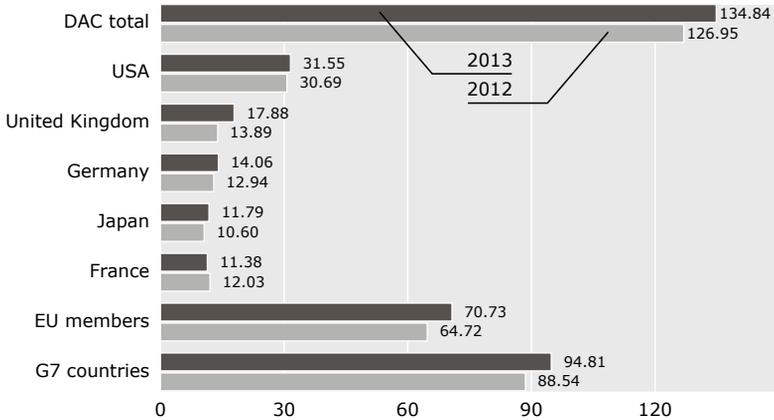
The German government reacted to the debate, with the Foreign Office and BMZ putting forward two concepts for a German policy on Africa.<sup>14</sup> These two separate programs showed that the ranks of experts, governmental departments and parties all had different criteria and opinions when it came to Africa policy. After the decades in which Germany's Africa policy was oriented towards the expectations of France and the USA, while at the same time being required to raise Germany's profile and improve its economic interests as an exporting country, it was now difficult to find a new direction in the changed circumstances.

13 | The Memorandum drew on the indices that were available at the time. The useful Bertelsmann Transformations Index was not created until a few years later. If we evaluate the Memorandum from a modern perspective, it is clear that the general prognosis was not as wrong as it was claimed at the time, and that the overall picture of Sub-Saharan Africa has improved little since the dawn of the new millennium. In certain cases there have been some serious anomalies that are linked to the fact that "no other systems are more vulnerable to crisis and conflict than Africa's numerous pseudo-democracies, which at best have adapted themselves to the calls for electoral democracy from their development aid donors". Denis Tull, "Deutsche Afrikapolitik. Ein Beitrag zu einer überfälligen Debatte", 2014, <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/10574.pdf> (accessed 28 Aug 2014).

14 | Cf. *BMZ aktuell*, *BMZ Konzeption für Afrika*, 2001. Also as an article by Federal Minister Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul in *E+Z*, issue 42, 2001, 158 et sqq. Expanded in the BMZ position paper on development cooperation with Sub-Saharan Africa, *BMZ aktuell* 091, *Neue Politische Dynamik in Afrika*, 2004.

So the restructuring of development policy only progressed around the peripheries, such as by amalgamating organisations that handled personnel and practical cooperation.<sup>15</sup> Project-based assistance was only converted into sectoral program-based assistance and budget support at a low level. Firstly, this was because it was only possible for new commitments, and secondly because the departments and ministries of the partner countries that were closely involved in the projects were inclined to be reticent. This also applied to the much-heralded New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), which was supposed to advance Sub-Saharan Africa through closer cooperation and reciprocal monitoring of whether the Millennium Development Goals were being fulfilled in Africa.<sup>16</sup>

Fig. 1  
**Selected donor countries in 2013, ODA compared to 2012, in billion U.S. dollars**



Source: Own illustration modified from BMZ, "Geber im Vergleich 2013 – Veränderungen gegenüber 2012", as at 22 Apr 2014, [http://bmz.de/de/ministerium/zahlen\\_fakten/geber/index.html](http://bmz.de/de/ministerium/zahlen_fakten/geber/index.html) (accessed 4 Nov 2014) with temporary data from OECD and DAC.

15 | In 2011 the Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit, the Deutsche Entwicklungsdienst and Internationale Weiterbildung und Entwicklung GmbH merged to create the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ).

16 | The NEPAD Secretariat was supported by GIZ.

**In 2002, 40 out of 49 Sub-Saharan countries received developmental assistance. This was to be whittled down to 26 “partner and priority countries”.** The BMZ expected German development cooperation to increase in effectiveness. It was spread thinly across a number of countries, so this was to be achieved by making it more focused. In 2002, 40 out of 49 Sub-Saharan countries received developmental assistance. This was to be whittled down to 26 “partner and priority countries”. But this proved to be only partially successful. In 2012, 38 countries were still receiving bilateral ODA subsidies for ongoing projects from the BMZ budget or that of other ministries. And German development cooperation in the individual countries still at best represented ten per cent (and generally only five per cent) of the annual payments made by DAC member countries,<sup>17</sup> so they inevitably had little impact.

Interest in the new program-based cooperation and the concentration on African countries was also limited in the state’s organisations for implementing these policies. The “baskets” funded by numerous donors and implementation via authorities and organisations in the partner countries helped to reduce staffing requirements, but this also resulted in a reduction in practical engagement and capacity, often forcing experts to take on the thankless task of being watchdogs. So there was a strong tendency to continue with technical projects such as water supply, waste disposal, transportation and education. Reports on recent years have shown that the majority of funding still goes to project-based assistance and that some 15 per cent of promised funding never actually materialises. Germany’s share of development aid to the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa was less than that of other donors.<sup>18</sup>

But change is on the horizon. The German government can no longer work on the assumption that security policy in Africa should be left to the USA, France and Britain. Germany will have to step up and be more involved in stabilis-

17 | Cf. OECD Aid Statistics, “Net Disbursements of ODA to Sub-Saharan Africa by Donor”, <http://oecd.org/dac/stats/TAB29e.xls> (accessed 11 Nov 2014).

18 | In contrast to the figures initially quoted (see n. 2), the payments made to 35 sub-Saharan countries in 2012 represented just 38 per cent of bilateral aid. Germany’s share of development aid for this region was less than the average for the DAC countries.

ing the region against the threats posed by the international drugs and arms trades and Islamic terrorism. With one eye on public opinion at home, the German government is keen to avoid direct military intervention wherever possible, but it supports the efforts of the European Commission and the security structures of the African Union.<sup>19</sup>

#### **Guiding principles of German development policy**

1. Reducing poverty
2. Securing peace and achieving democracy
3. Steering globalisation in a fair direction
4. Protecting the environment

#### **Main topics and areas of work**

- Poverty reduction
- Promoting education
- Securing peace and human rights
- Strengthening health care and social security systems, fighting AIDS, addressing population dynamics
- Fostering good governance
- Protecting the climate (adaptation and mitigation), preserving the environment and natural resources, promoting renewable energy, energy efficiency as well as the issue of raw materials and raw materials initiative (GERI)
- Discussing migration as opportunity for development
- Addressing religion and development
- Facilitating sport for development
- Promoting urban and rural development as well as food security
- Expanding economic cooperation and financing of development as well as transition assistance

Source: BMZ, "Was wir machen. Themen", [http://bmz.de/de/was\\_wir\\_machen/themen](http://bmz.de/de/was_wir_machen/themen) (accessed 29 Oct 2014).

### **INTERIM RESULT: 55 YEARS OF GERMAN DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION WITH SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA**

Germany is on the brink of greater political involvement in Africa. The political significance of Sub-Saharan Africa has soared because of population growth, a security situation that is beset by open and latent conflicts and the growing flood of migrants to Europe. German security and

19 | A military cooperation in the form of training for African countries has been in place since 1961, but it has never been of political significance. This also applies to the deployment of German troops in Somalia in 1993/1994 and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2006.

development policy will have to focus even more strongly on this region in the years to come. What can we learn from this?



Not every development project is a success. From the 1970s to the 1990s, projects to support small farms have strengthened government control systems instead. | Source: Sustainable Sanitation Alliance (SuSanA), GIZ, flickr ©.

In the early days, German development policy on Sub-Saharan Africa focused on introducing tried-and-tested German models such as dual education and the cooperative system. Large infrastructure projects were also initiated. The results of this approach have been mixed, particularly if we consider their unanticipated or unintended side effects. So, for example, the rural development projects that ran from the 1970s to the 1990s contributed to governments increasing their control over small farmers and setting so many restrictions that they were stripped of all motivation.<sup>20</sup> Another example is vocational training. The German model of vocational schools was rolled out in Africa. It has indeed created some advanced technical colleges, but it has failed to develop a broad base of skilled workers and small business-owners. And there is still no effective coordination of the bilateral activities of the various donors. The DAC was originally established with this intention, but it simply satisfied itself with introducing some very general

20 | Cf. Peter Molt, "Politik und landwirtschaftliche Entwicklung in Afrika südlich der Sahara", in: M. Domrös et al. (eds.), *Festschrift für Wendelin Klaer zum 65. Geburtstag*, Mainzer Geographische Studien Vol. 34, Mainz, 1990, 333-350.

standard procedures. These found their way into the Paris Declaration as guidelines which proved to be more political than practical. Budget support combined with a complex bureaucratic system for monitoring and approval was proposed as the preferred form of development cooperation.

This was proposed despite the fact that it would often inevitably lead to centralised bureaucracy being reinforced, and that it could only be partially justified.<sup>21</sup>

Table 1

**State visits of German Federal Presidents in Sub-Saharan Africa**

<b>Federal President</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Country</b>
Theodor Heuss (1949-1959)	—	—
Heinrich Lübke (1959-1969)	1962	Guinea
		Senegal
	1964	Ethiopia
	1966	Madagascar
		Kenya
		Cameroon
		Togo
		Mali
	1969	Côte d'Ivoire
		Niger
Gustav Heinemann (1969-1974)	—	—
Walter Scheel (1974-1979)	—	—
Karl Carstens (1979-1984)	1983	Côte d'Ivoire
		Niger
Richard von Weizsäcker (1984-1994)	1988	Mali
		Nigeria
		Zimbabwe
		Somalia
	1992	Tanzania

Federal President	Year	Country
Roman Herzog (1994-1999)	1996	Ethiopia
	1998	South Africa
		Namibia
Joahannes Rau (1999-2004)	2002	Mali
		South Africa
Horst Köhler (2004-2010)	2004	Sierra Leone
		Benin
		Djibouti
		Ethiopia
	2006	Mozambique
		Madagascar
		Botswana
	2007	Ghana
	2008	Uganda
		Nigeria
Christian Wulff (2010-2012)	—	—
Joachim Gauck (seit 2012)	2013	Ethiopia
		South Africa

Source: Own research on the impact of the Federal Presidents, [http://bundespraesident.de/EN/TheGermanFederalPresidents/thegermanfederalpresidents-node.html;jsessionid=40793D6BF07E03D9647AA98B7AB8E9E6.2\\_cid388](http://bundespraesident.de/EN/TheGermanFederalPresidents/thegermanfederalpresidents-node.html;jsessionid=40793D6BF07E03D9647AA98B7AB8E9E6.2_cid388) (accessed 11 Nov 2014).

German development cooperation has always treated Sub-Saharan Africa as of secondary importance. It has also been notably fragmented and random in the way it selected its spheres of activity.<sup>22</sup> Its political influence has been mini-

22 | In an analysis of German development policy over 15 years ("Germany's Development Policy since 1998"), in: Hanns W. Maull (ed.), *Germany's Uncertain Power. Foreign Policy of the Berlin Republic*. Basingstoke, 2006, 233-246), the author wrote: "In relation to its poverty and unresolved problems, Sub-Saharan Africa has been given inadequate attention in German development cooperation [...] It can only be •

mal, with the exception of Namibia. Here, former Foreign Minister Genscher should be given credit for the work he did to ensure the former colony's relatively smooth transition to independence and to ending apartheid in South Africa. So German policy on Africa can certainly be accused of some major shortcomings, but compared to the former colonial powers it has not made any catastrophic decisions. Africans tend to view German development cooperation as somewhat patronising but nevertheless reliable and technically proficient. Germany's reputation is generally good, in contrast to countries like France, which are viewed in a very negative light. Indeed, a quite virulent antipathy has developed among intellectuals and civil society.<sup>23</sup>



Germany enjoys a good reputation in Africa. One reason is the personal commitment of former Federal President Horst Köhler. During his presidency and until now, he has been particularly interested in the German public learning about African issues, e.g. as was the case during his visit to Tanzania in 2011. | Source: © KAS Tanzania.

concluded that the BMZ's regional focus is based on a combination of explicit normative criteria, implicit strategic considerations and individual country preferences at the working level of the ministry and organisations that implement it. The normative criteria are given particular emphasis, particularly to the outside world, and the public is becoming increasingly aware of the cases that have clearly deviated from this requirement when setting the agenda. This combination of criteria heightens the credibility problem that besets German development cooperation."

23 | Cf. Tull, n. 13.

The political dimension has been lacking in the “technical” advice that was often very limited in terms of topics and financial investment. However, this has been alleviated by the political foundations’ intensive dialogue with reform-minded elites. But Germany’s representation in Africa has to date been weaker than in other parts of the world. This is in line with the earlier quote from Klose about the lack of interest on the part of politicians, who have never found enough time to create a lasting relationship and exchange of political ideas with trustworthy African partners. This cooperative dialogue cannot be contested by representatives of the various ministries responsible, but it requires the participation of members of government, parliamentarians, academics and leading representatives of social groups. In the past, Germany has rarely established close relationships with African leaders, but now these are essential.

**African politicians have honed the fine art of responding diplomatically to external demands while continuing to pursue their own interests.**

Regrets about the lack of a clear agenda are allayed by the realisation that other Western donors have also had little success in promoting political, economic and social reform. Their forms of development cooperation have also proved to be generally unsuitable. External impulses are unlikely to succeed if a structural crisis has not led to an internal push for reform with a view to creating a legitimate political order of government that is effective and responsible yet subject to scrutiny.<sup>24</sup> African politicians have honed the fine art of responding diplomatically to external demands while continuing to pursue their own interests. The result is a facade of a Western-type state which conceals hybrid and blurred power structures.

24 | The ongoing constitutional debates are mainly dominated by questions of power politics, and particularly by presidential powers and terms of office. Meanwhile, issues such as parliamentary supervision, equal opportunities, electoral representation, civil rights, subsidiarity and decentralisation are being put on the back burner. See also Alexander Stroh and Christian von Soest, “Den Machterhalt im Blick. Verfassungsreformen in Subsahara-Afrika”, *GIGA Focus*, No. 4/2011, [http://giga-hamburg.de/de/system/files/publications/gf\\_afrika\\_1104.pdf](http://giga-hamburg.de/de/system/files/publications/gf_afrika_1104.pdf) (accessed 3 Sep 2014); Alexander Stroh und Johanna Klotz, “Präsidentialismus in Afrika”, *GIGA Focus*, Nr. 9/2011, [http://giga-hamburg.de/de/system/files/publications/gf\\_afrika\\_1109.pdf](http://giga-hamburg.de/de/system/files/publications/gf_afrika_1109.pdf) (accessed 3 Sep 2014).

It seems reasonable to ask to what extent the Western model of a constitutional state is really achievable in Africa's multi-ethnic, network-dominated societies. What applies to political systems is also relevant to the corresponding calls for better governance.<sup>25</sup> Which models are best suited to addressing the local conditions and making use of the potential there is to promote sustainably human development? For example, would it not be more beneficial for the region's economic and social development if small and medium-sized agricultural, commercial and industrial "entrepreneurs" were given greater scope for development? This would make it possible for individual initiatives and for the many Africans who are full of ideas to make the most of opportunities and create the kind of economic momentum<sup>26</sup> that is unlikely to be created by government investment or by domestic or foreign investors who are either constrained or sponsored by the state.

Today, African countries are extremely diverse, politically, socially and economically. And the arrival of new players such as China and India has diluted still further the often overestimated significance of Germany's development cooperation. This has always been minor compared to that of France, Britain, the USA and the international organisations. The reforms that are needed can only be inched forward from the outside, making it all the more important to develop the empathy and flexibility that are required. In this respect, German development cooperation will have to place more distance between itself and the forms and practices of previous years, as set out in the new concept for Germany's Africa policy.<sup>27</sup> Then perhaps the 1990 goal of

**The arrival of new players such as China and India has watered down still further the often overestimated significance of Germany's development cooperation.**

25 | Cf. Peter Molt, "Good Governance – Realistisches Konzept zur Überwindung der afrikanischen Krise?", in: Heribert Weiland, Ingrid Wehr and Mathias Seifert (eds.), *Good Governance in der Sackgasse?*, Baden-Baden, 2009, 318-337.

26 | Here we will not be addressing the widespread reports that Africa is experiencing an economic boom, which have given rise to high hopes for the continent. See also a critical view from Robert Kappel, "Afrika: weder hoffnungsloser Fall noch Aufstiegschwunder", *Giga Focus*, Hamburg, 2013, [http://giga-hamburg.de/de/system/files/publications/gf\\_afrika\\_1309.pdf](http://giga-hamburg.de/de/system/files/publications/gf_afrika_1309.pdf) (accessed 28 Aug 2014).

27 | Cf. German government, "Afrikapolitische Leitlinien der Bundesregierung", 21 May 2014, [http://bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/\\_Anlagen/2014/05/2014-05-21-afrikapolitische-leitlinien.pdf](http://bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/_Anlagen/2014/05/2014-05-21-afrikapolitische-leitlinien.pdf) (accessed 15 Sep 2014).

taking on greater global responsibility will also be achieved in Sub-Saharan Africa. But Germany and its European partners will have to continue to grapple with the issue of how to develop a realistic, forward-looking policy on Africa.