

External Actors in Sub-Saharan Africa

Challenges and Lessons for Germany



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In a Nutshell

German development cooperation is under pressure both financially and in terms of justification, while Europe is also grappling with how to reset its relations with the neighbouring continent of Africa.

China, the Gulf States, and others are successfully forging new forms of cooperation with countries in sub-Saharan Africa, with a strong focus on financing and developing infrastructure. Their far-greater speed and flexibility as donors is viewed highly positively.

Not only Russia, but also China views sub-Saharan Africa as an important arena in the global systemic conflict and actively promotes illiberal ideas as well as anti-Western narratives. The pressure on pluralistic

social models across the continent is an indicator of these states' success.

Germany can in some respects learn from non-European actors and can in other respects set itself apart, for example, by emphasizing transparent cooperation, fair economic relations, and projects that are both environmentally and socially sustainable.

A "Trump-style" withdrawal from engagement in sub-Saharan Africa would send a disastrous signal in the context of the systemic conflict and would deprive Germany of important international partnerships and opportunities for economic development.

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“There is nothing of value to anybody”¹, said US President Donald Trump of the work of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) – a remark that also attracted attention in Germany in the context of debate on the usefulness and necessity of German development cooperation projects.

Right-wing populist actors are keen to call development cooperation into question in its entirety. Projects such as the infamous cycle paths in Peru make their criticism all the easier: The view is that while China is busy building roads, power stations, and railway lines, Germany is busy building cycle paths. This conveys the impression that German development cooperation is more about activist self-fulfilment than about meeting the real needs of partner countries. The legitimate question arises as to what such spending of German taxpayers' money is actually achieving. Even if this kind of criticism is often superficial, the question as to the efficiency and effectiveness of German development cooperation is justified, especially in light of the shrinking room for manoeuvring in the federal budget. What is often overlooked, however, is the strategic and geopolitical potential of this cooperation. In light of rapidly changing geopolitical realities, some recalibration seems inevitable. Calls for a more interest-driven approach to development cooperation and for better integration of export promotion into a coherent overall strategy are repeatedly voiced in the debate. At present, the German view of Africa still seems dominated by an outdated aid logic. While Germany wrestles with whether and how it should engage in the future, other actors are tapping lucrative potential and gaining influence.

Brief profiles of selected actors

China

In recent years, few countries have attracted as much attention for their international cooperation as China. The large-scale investments made at the start of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) raised high hopes of rapid, uncomplicated infrastructure development, although warnings from the West about unsustainable debt levels in recipient countries soon followed. After debt problems had emerged in some flagship projects, such as in Sri Lanka, China sought to limit the damage. The country has since shifted towards smaller, more financially sustainable projects. China's projects are notable – and sometimes criticized – for the extensive involvement of Chinese companies not only in infrastructure development, but also in the extraction of strategic resources, where China is deliberately expanding its market power.

China is particularly adept at accompanying its activities on the world stage with image campaigns and strong propaganda narratives that resonate in the so-called Global South. The recent announcement of tariff-free access for imports from Africa also has the potential to strengthen China's image as a reliable partner to Africa – in stark contrast to the actions of the Trump administration and the uncertainties surrounding its trade policy. Despite China's own complex institutional structures, the country is pursuing a relatively coherent strategy: namely by replacing the liberal international order. Year by year, it is proceeding with increasing confidence and building infrastructure worldwide that can be used for both civilian and military purposes – so-called dual-use facilities – in order

to position itself strategically for potential future military power projection.

Russia

In recent years, Russia has arguably expanded its engagement in Africa more strikingly than any other country. In terms of trade and investment, the country remains a relatively small player, but it has gained considerable relevance and influence with its distinctive toolbox. These tools are varied: Alongside traditional diplomacy and economic cooperation, they include a range of questionable military agreements, arms deliveries, the deployment of mercenaries, and targeted influence over elites.

Lacking economic strength, Russia pursues strategies that achieve significant influence with relatively little financial input. As with China, the country has little interest in democracy or the rule of law. On the contrary: Promoting autocracy is one of the central motives behind Russia's engagement. Russia thrives on instability and conflict, on corruption, and on legal grey areas in order to advance its activities.

The country's primary aims are geopolitical: fostering a multipolar world order, pushing back Western influence, and securing strategic resources. In a time of growing isolation, Moscow is actively seeking new allies. Indeed, the country has been particularly effective in using propaganda and disinformation, building on existing anti-Western sentiment and inflaming it further in order to present itself as the better alternative.

In the economic sphere, beyond arms sales – with Russia remaining Africa's leading supplier of weapons² – Russia focuses on energy and on the extractive³ sector. Rising investment in energy signals a strategic commitment to securing long-term energy partnerships with resource-rich African states.

The Gulf States

Among the external actors, the Gulf States of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates also play an increasingly important role. Alongside

traditional security and development engagement, their strategic economic investments have grown massively in recent years. Driven by the need to diversify away from fossil fuels and by competition for geopolitical influence, both Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have pursued aggressive, large-scale investment strategies. Together, the Gulf States – including Qatar – made almost 113 billion US dollars in foreign direct investment on the African continent in 2022 and 2023 alone – more than in the entire previous decade.⁴ Their investments focus on strategically important high-growth sectors, particularly energy, infrastructure, and mining. Moreover, the Gulf States have capitalized on African countries' efforts to diversify their partnerships, filling funding gaps left by other international actors. On the one hand, these states offer financing that is far more flexible, faster, and more willing to take risks than is the financing provided by Western partners; on the other hand, the lack of transparency in many of these investments has been criticized, with concerns about new extractive relationships and dependencies having also arisen.

The US is shifting its strategy away from an aid-oriented paradigm towards an investment-led approach.

Turkey

Turkey views itself as an emerging middle power, with its growing engagement in Africa framed by its ambitions for regional leadership and its drive to position itself as a global player. This engagement is marked by rapid growth in trade volume, by an expanding diplomatic presence, and by numerous infrastructure projects. Between 2003 and 2023, Turkey's trade with Africa rose from 1.35 to 12.4 billion US dollars.⁵ Turkish Airlines has significantly expanded its network⁶, and the presence of Turkish companies on the continent has also grown markedly, supported by joint business councils that Turkey has now established with 45 African countries.⁷

Turkey often combines economic relations with military cooperation, including the use of private security companies and arms sales. It supplies low-cost defence equipment and has become Africa's fourth-largest arms exporter.⁸

The country makes skilful use of its status as a “secondary actor”, operating in the shadow of the major donors and focusing on targeted investments in areas of core interest. In this context, Turkey presents itself as a “neutral” partner in Africa, unburdened by historical baggage.

The United States

Change and uncertainty currently characterize the engagement of the United States, which has historically been the most influential external actor on the African continent. The US is shifting its strategy away from an aid-oriented paradigm towards an investment-led approach that views the private sector as the main driver of growth and development. Although this shift has been evident for many years, it has gained both

momentum and uncertainty under the Trump administration. The sharp cuts to USAID programmes threaten hard-won development gains in many African countries, thereby increasing volatility, opening space for other actors, and weakening an important instrument of American soft power. Added to this are the direct and indirect effects of erratic US trade policy on African countries and the economic relations of these countries with the United States.

The future coherence of US engagement instruments is uncertain, as is the fate of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA)⁹ – a central and successful trade promotion measure that is due to expire at the end of September 2025. President Trump has shown interest in Africa only selectively, and then chiefly to pursue transactional “deals”. One example is the peace agreement between Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo brokered by the US at the end of June 2025. Trump proudly announced that the deal would secure access to substantial mineral resources in the DR Congo.¹⁰



Uncertain future: Drastic reductions in US development cooperation are hitting the African continent hard.
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Overview: Approaches and motives of selected actors

	Motives/objectives for engagement in sub-Saharan Africa	Instruments/modalities
China	<p>Economy Access to resources and markets</p> <p>Geopolitics Arena in context of systemic rivalry Promotion of illiberal societal models Influence over elites Regime security</p> <p>Security Stable investment environment Consolidation of role as global player</p>	<p>No conditionalities (“no strings attached”) Focus on expansion of trade networks Linkage with BRI strategy Loans (historically: debt-financed infrastructure; currently: shift to smaller projects) Private-sector investments Customs exemptions Arms trade Military training Participation in UN missions Influence over political parties and elites Shaping public opinion Dual-use structures for future military power projection</p>
Russia	<p>Economy Resource access Arms trade Limited volume</p> <p>Geopolitics Weakening the West Ambitions to be a global power Hybrid warfare Support for authoritarian regimes Multipolarity</p> <p>Security Regime protection Destabilization Militarization</p>	<p>No conditionalities Paramilitary forces (Africa Corps; formerly, Wagner Group) Support for authoritarian regimes Military training Resource deals (e.g. arms for gold) Trade agreements Disinformation campaigns (including targeted election interference)</p>
The Gulf States	<p>Economy Economic diversification Energy security Post-carbon strategies</p> <p>Geopolitics Strategic influence New partnerships Securing trade routes</p> <p>Security Protection of investments</p>	<p>Focus on attractive investment models Sovereign wealth fund investment, loans Blended finance and public-private partnerships Security cooperation (limited but growing)</p>
Turkey	<p>Economy Energy security Market access</p> <p>Geopolitics Establishment as a middle power Afro-Eurasian axis Aspirations to be a global power</p> <p>Security Military cooperation Arms trade Mediation</p>	<p>Strong focus on expanding trade Strategic investments Military cooperation, defence agreements Conflict diplomacy (mediation efforts) Cultural, educational, and media initiatives Religious networks Expanding diplomatic presence Turkish Airlines route network as a strategic asset Humanitarian aid (to a limited extent)</p>
The United States	<p>Economy Access to resources and markets Securing supply chains</p> <p>Geopolitics Promotion of democracy Western dominance</p> <p>Security Counter-terrorism Stability Influence through military presence</p>	<p>Gradual shift away from aid-based approach Focus on trade (AGOA, Prosper Africa, support for AfCFTA) Promotion of private-sector investment Under Trump: transactional deals, extensive security-sector engagement, continued leading diplomatic presence, development finance In reduced form: traditional development projects, humanitarian aid, democracy promotion</p>

With or without a coherent strategy, Africa is strategically important to the United States. This also applies to its military engagement, which – alongside addressing security risks and promoting stability – explicitly seeks to curb China’s military expansion.

Competing approaches: Differences and common ground

A review of the engagement of selected actors reveals clear trends and priorities. Strategic positioning and influence in the geopolitical contest are central motives shared by all, as is the interest in increasing trade and securing access to raw materials. In the race for natural resources and rare earths, there is a real risk that competition will become more and more conflictual and overwhelm existing governance structures. Engagement in the security sector shows greater differences, and in some cases, also conflicting approaches.

The most striking contrasts, however, are in the realm of values. While Germany and other Western partners often place values-based engagement with related conditions at the forefront, African countries press for rapid access to finance and infrastructure without what they view as external interference in their sovereign decisions. Approaches with few or no apparent conditions are therefore more attractive, giving an advantage to actors such as China and Turkey, which at least claim to emphasize non-interference.

Another key element is the focus on large-scale infrastructure and energy investment. China is making massive investments in transport infrastructure, hydropower, and other energy projects, for example, while the Gulf States are investing billions in renewable energy, ports, and mining, and Turkey is involved in building airports, roads, and power stations. Providing basic infrastructure and energy solutions lays the foundations for economic development in partner countries, thereby facilitating trade and securing long-term economic influence. Such projects are well received by African partners and increase the visibility of engagement. By contrast, Germany’s engagement is often fragmented, bureaucratic, and low-profile.

A focus on visible, transformative, large-scale projects is only possible by means of a comprehensive, integrated approach to investment.

More competition does not automatically translate into greater self-determination or better terms for African states.

While a competitive mindset is arguably common to all actors, Russia and China stand out for the vehemence with which they pursue this mindset. Not only is their aim to boost their own attractiveness and competitiveness, but the deliberate weakening and discrediting of Western actors is a strategic element of their engagement. However, a distinction must be drawn here: While China has an interest in stability, not least in order to protect its investments, Russia – lacking economic strength – often actively promotes instability in order to expand its influence.

For African countries, the closer engagement of a wider range of actors offers the opportunity to broaden partnerships and to choose between different offers. Competition, one might say, is good for business. However, more competition does not automatically translate into greater self-determination or better terms for African states. There are too many pitfalls and new dependencies, and there is also a tendency towards extractive deals. In some cases, such arrangements may be lucrative for ruling elites, but these arrangements do not serve the country’s sustainable development. Examples include gold mines exploited by Russia as payment for military stabilization of junta governments in West Africa as well as various costly infrastructure projects of limited benefit.

A core challenge for Germany: Strengthening engagement

The most important conclusion from observing other actors’ engagement is simple yet at the

same time is also Germany's greatest challenge: The country cannot afford to neglect its engagement in sub-Saharan Africa. Germany and Europe face extreme pressure in Africa from the growing – and in some cases, more successful – engagement of other actors. Simultaneously, they also depend on strong partnerships and strategic influence on the continent. While those other actors have recognized Africa's relevance, German – and to some extent, European – engagement is still too often viewed primarily through a humanitarian lens. This underlying approach to development cooperation does justice neither to the agency of African societies nor to our own strategic interests. German activity on the continent still tends to be defined by fragmented initiatives and projects, which almost always lack visibility, are often perceived as being irrelevant, and are shaped by a paternalistic view of Africa as a “recipient of aid”. High bureaucratic hurdles, inflexible financing instruments, and cumbersome approval procedures are met with incomprehension in many countries and hamper effective German engagement. In short, Germany lacks a contemporary guiding vision for cooperation with Africa.

The radical shift in US engagement should serve more as a warning than as inspiration. The drastic cuts in funding for development projects have had dramatic short-term effects and could set back important long-term development efforts. It would be a disaster for the continent if other Western partners were to withdraw in a similar way, not least because they would also be giving up important levers of influence.

One key lesson from comparing different approaches is that an integrated strategy linking economic, security, and development policy dimensions is essential if genuine impact and influence are to be achieved. China demonstrates a highly coordinated, long-term, cross-sector strategic vision. The Gulf States successfully combine diplomatic initiatives, financing models, and the mobilization of the private sector in a single approach. Turkey complements its economic and security engagement with strategic elements of soft power. Such integrated approaches are

also advisable for German engagement, but they require a genuinely cross-ministerial strategic effort.

In light of economic challenges, tight public finances, rising social expenditure, security risks, and a growing defence budget, it is not easy to justify spending on development cooperation. However, Germany should maintain and strengthen its engagement in Africa in qualitative terms. This effort will inevitably require adjusting structures and modalities to increase efficiency alongside a clear understanding that such spending is also an investment in Germany's own interests.

Germany has traditionally been reluctant to acknowledge its own interests.

Lessons for Germany: Five priorities

There is no shortage of recommendations for the future direction of Germany's development policy in Africa. Numerous position papers from associations, political parties, academic studies, and ministerial strategies alike all focus on important adjustments to German development cooperation. However, the actual translation into policy has thus far been disappointing. In the context of competition with other donors and in light of the sometimes-discouraging, sometimes-inspiring examples set by others, five areas stand out in which adjustment is most urgently needed.

1. *Transparent interest-based policy*

Whose interests does German engagement in sub-Saharan Africa serve? Cynics might say neither its own nor those of its partners – which is not true, but the perception is there all the same. On the one hand, Germany has traditionally been reluctant to acknowledge its own interests, instead sheltering behind the aid logic of development cooperation. On the other hand, other

actors currently seem much better at addressing the interests of the African countries.

Germany should align its engagement more closely with African priorities while openly and confidently representing its own. In practice, this could mean responding more to the demand for infrastructure investment rather than leaving the field to others. There is no contradiction in combining long-term sustainability strategies with high-profile projects that deliver fast, visible results. Ideally, cooperation should focus on areas in which there is a clear overlap of interests: A win-win scenario is most likely when active involvement of the German private sector is encouraged.

Better consideration of African priorities may also mean making stronger reference to national and regional development plans as well as to the African Union's Agenda 2063¹¹, as China and the Gulf States currently do. Close cooperation with African regional organizations, support for the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), and the strengthening of African-led security initiatives are likewise part of this consideration.

A transparent reference to Germany's own interests can also be an advantage over other actors, as can open discussion of the modalities of Germany's engagement. China's claim that its support is free of political conditions is being questioned more and more in Africa – not least in light of experience to the contrary in recent years. Non-transparent processes surrounding investment deals fuel concerns about new dependencies and exploitation. This concern offers an opportunity for Germany to position itself as a credible alternative.

2. *The mobilization of the domestic economy*

A look at other actors reveals that almost all of them are more adept at involving their domestic private sector in their engagement. For China, the Gulf States, and Turkey, this involvement has long been part of their strategy, and most recently, the United States has also made a major shift in this direction. Unlike Germany, these

actors consistently succeed in deriving economic capital from their development cooperation in Africa. In China's case, this includes the near-exclusive commissioning of its own companies in order to implement development projects. Many of Germany's Western partners also manage to involve their own economies much more closely in their development cooperation despite classifying a large proportion of their official development assistance (ODA) as "untied aid" – that is, as aid not explicitly tied to contracts for domestic companies. While other countries actively create opportunities for the economic expansion of their businesses, Germany is far too passive in this area. Worse still, a considerable share of German development cooperation funds flows to geopolitical rivals.

Companies from China and the Gulf States benefit from the absence of fixed standards and requirements that would regulate their activities. At the same time, China stresses its superficial non-interference in the internal affairs of host countries while quietly bypassing standards in ways that often result in exploitation and environmental damage for the local population. Current examples can be found in Zimbabwe, where Chinese companies produce or import plastic bags from China that circumvent Zimbabwean standards and that contribute significantly to environmental pollution.¹² Similarly, Chinese mining companies deliberately evade environmental and labour regulations in Zimbabwe.¹³ Germany will inevitably have to take a different approach. The goal should be to reduce barriers to participation without abandoning important standards and requirements. However, these standards and requirements must be designed with care – in the context of supply chain legislation, for instance – so as not to impose a major competitive disadvantage on German companies.

The reservations about US President Trump's unpredictable behaviour and the outrage over the aid cuts should not prevent us from examining the new US Africa strategy for useful ideas. Key elements include targeted links between more US companies and Africa, proactive economic

diplomacy (ambassadors are instructed to actively support US companies and promote business deals), a focus on infrastructure projects with US corporate involvement, the promotion of market-relevant reforms, and the adaptation of financing instruments.¹⁴

In terms of financing tools, it is worth looking at the Gulf States. Their sophisticated financial architectures, risk-mitigation strategies, and emphasis on public-private partnerships for large-scale investments show how private capital can be mobilized.¹⁵ Germany should implement reforms to its export credit and investment guarantees and should additionally introduce innovative financing instruments tailored to the African markets that are perceived as being high-risk. This strategy will prove essential if German companies are to compete successfully with other actors. Germany must also address its typical

bureaucracy problem. Pragmatic approaches and swift procedures must be central to successfully linking development cooperation with foreign trade promotion.

African countries are rightly calling for investments that promote local value creation, industrialization, and technology transfer.

3. *Sustainable investment*

Germany should aim for fair and partnership-based economic relations and should firmly establish the three-pronged approach of indus-



Autocracy promotion: Russia has increased its involvement in Africa in recent years and is weakening democratic processes through manipulation and disinformation. Photo: © Sergei Bobylev, ITAR-TASS, Imago.

trialization, value creation, and local job creation as a top priority of development cooperation in the sense of sustainable development.

In the field of raw material partnerships, Germany and Europe face massive competition, especially in the context of the energy transition. While Western actors still play a major role in resource extraction in Africa, China is actively working to close the gap. Rare earths and other critical resources are a particular focus, and China's already-impressive market power in this field is being further strengthened through targeted investments and agreements. The Gulf States and Turkey are also pushing forward. However, Germany can differentiate itself in qualitative terms from other actors who perpetuate extractive economic models centred on pure resource exploitation. African countries are rightly calling for investments that promote local value creation, industrialization, and technology transfer. With its strong industrial and technological base, Germany is well placed to forge partnerships that go beyond raw material trade.

German engagement can be particularly attractive and competitive when it focuses on investments in key sectors with a high level of mutual benefit and alignment with African priorities. These investments include not only critical raw materials, but also renewable energy. Where emphasis is placed on developing local processing capacity, the result can be profitable partnerships that link Germany's strategic interests with the development goals of its partner countries.

Germany can also bring its expertise to bear – and benefit from its own reputation – in areas such as modern agriculture, manufacturing, and vocational training. German quality workmanship, SME enterprises, and dual vocational training are well known to African partners and carry a highly positive reputation. Germany should confidently highlight aspects of quality, long-term commitment, reliability, and responsibility towards people and the environment. High-quality, sustainable solutions need to be positioned as a competitive advantage compared with cheaper, less sustainable alternatives.

Sustainability also means considering debt sustainability. The often-massive and opaque Chinese investments in the early years of the Belt and Road Initiative have led to substantial national debt in some African countries. While China has since become more cautious about overburdening its partners' state budgets, many projects still place a heavy strain on national finances. Although some projects generate real economic opportunities, benefits are undermined by poor terms, inadequate feasibility studies, and widespread corruption in partner countries. Large-scale investments from the Gulf States are viewed with similar concern. Germany can set itself apart by continuing to promote transparent and sustainable financing practices and by advancing innovative financing models – with the awareness that development aid alone will not suffice.

Political conditionalities are a double-edged sword.

4. *Values-based policy and democracy promotion*

Alongside economic elements, competition among external actors in Africa is also about rival values and societal models. Authoritarian powers such as China and Russia increasingly “export” their tried-and-tested autocratic tools, deliberately influence political forces and decision-makers, and undermine democratic processes through disinformation and manipulation.¹⁶

This challenge must be met not only indirectly – by relying on the attractiveness of our offer but also directly through our own measures. Political conditionalities are an important tool, but they are also a double-edged sword: While they promote transparency and compliance with minimum democratic standards, they can also make our offer more complex, slower, and less appealing to our African partners. This dilemma – that is, the need to weigh each case individually – risks inconsistency and a loss of credibility, yet a one-size-fits-all approach is not advisable.

Particular attention should be paid to the instruments of soft power, which include cultural exchange, language and education programmes, and – crucially – measures designed to promote pro-democratic forces, free media, an active civil society, and a pluralistic party landscape.

5. *Communicating Germany's engagement*

When people in different sub-Saharan African countries are asked about their impressions of various states' engagement, responses about Germany are usually vague. This situation is due largely to Germany's weak self-presentation: Unlike with other actors, there is no consistent narrative around German engagement in sub-Saharan Africa.

By contrast, China invests heavily in image-building, using large-scale media campaigns that are mostly effective at creating a positive perception of the country. China skilfully exploits its own history as a victim of European colonialism, and stresses that it is a developing country, is part of the "Global South", is committed to a multipolar world order, and is opposed to colonialism.¹⁷ This image is presented in direct contrast to the liberal order and Europe's colonial past. However, this supposed historical partnership does not reflect reality: Indeed, discrimination against African students in China at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and the activities of Chinese fishing fleets in African waters are viewed highly negatively on the continent.

Germany must take care to avoid reinforcing anti-Western narratives in development cooperation.

Russian disinformation campaigns likewise exploit the historical burden of Europe-Africa relations, but in a way that is far more hostile towards the West. Modern-day Russia benefits from the lack of awareness among many Africans of its imperialist nature and colonial history,

while its past role in supporting socialist liberation movements during the Cold War still boosts the country's image. Current atrocities committed by Russian Wagner mercenaries – as well as Russia's revisionist agenda – rarely enter public debate.

By contrast, Western states' engagement is often viewed through the lens of colonial continuity. Western actors are also frequently perceived as paternalistic, thereby making it easy for China and Russia to build a positive image by defining themselves in opposition to the West and discrediting it further. This dynamic severely limits the effectiveness of German and European efforts to promote democracy and human rights because it undermines the credibility of such values-based objectives.

Germany must counter this image by genuinely emphasizing partnership-based relations and – in so doing – aiming to give rival actors less room for attack while actively distancing itself from their negative practices. Care must also be taken to avoid either reinforcing anti-Western narratives in development cooperation or including any nuance that might be perceived as paternalistic. At the same time, Germany should promote a pragmatic yet values-based form of cooperation as part of a comprehensive image strategy that encompasses the full scope of German engagement in sub-Saharan Africa.

Conclusion

In order to avoid falling behind in the competition with other actors, old approaches must be questioned, and the efficiency and appeal of our offer improved. The stakes are high if this strategy fails, with consequences ranging from the loss of influence and the erosion of international alliances to the advance of authoritarian political and social models, the loss of key markets and investment destinations for German business, the insufficient diversification of supply chains, shortages of critical raw materials, and a reduced scope for shaping conflict prevention, counter-extremism, and peace-building. There could also be setbacks in areas such

as environmental protection, equality, and social inclusion.

Deeper future engagement in sub-Saharan Africa – one that can be justified domestically and that can be seen as attractive in partner countries – will require political will for reform and policy innovation. Above all, it will also require sustained attention to the region, even when other crises and challenges dominate the agenda. Development cooperation, foreign trade promotion, and security policy must be reconceived holistically.

Such a far-reaching ambition can quickly lead to inflated expectations and overstretch both in political practice and in public perception. To counter this situation, a sharper strategic focus for foreign policy is needed. Germany should concentrate on the areas in which it holds a comparative advantage and can deploy its strengths in a targeted way. At the same time, there must be a deliberate break with a foreign policy approach that remains too firmly rooted in the logic of traditional development aid, and this break must be in favour of a broader understanding of international responsibility. This strategy requires more coherent cooperation between ministries, which often still operate in parallel. Closer European coordination is also called for not least to overcome fragmented approaches and to strengthen joint capacity for action. Priority should be given in particular to initiatives that make a tangible difference to living conditions on the ground, such as alleviating acute hardship or creating jobs. Foreign policy engagement is also more effective when it aligns with economic interests, strengthens strategic partnerships in the geopolitical arena, supports pro-democracy forces in partner countries, and – not least – makes substantial contributions to peace and stability.

– translated from German –

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