



Postcolonialism & Post-Development

Practical Perspectives for Development Cooperation

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Editor's note

This is a translated version of the German original "Postkolonialismus & Post-Development: Praktische Perspektiven für die Entwicklungszusammenarbeit" by the same editors. Barring a few minor editorial changes for increased comprehensibility, the content corresponds to the German original. This English version was translated by German-speaking volunteers with study and work experience in anglophone contexts.

The Authors are responsible for the content of this publication. Expressed views are not necessarily shared by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

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Who we are

The editors are part of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation's Scholarly Working Group on Global Development and Postcolonial Issues, a group of students from various disciplines that addresses issues of global 'development' and international cooperation within the framework of the foundation's scholarship programme. The working group meets several times a year and works on respective issues, organises events and publishes position and discussion papers. The students work together on a voluntary basis and are not paid for their involvement in the working group. The respective umbrella organisation, referred to as "Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES)" in German, is the oldest political foundation in Germany. The non-profit institution supports the core ideas and values of social democracy – freedom, justice and solidarity in local and global contexts.

The following speakers attended our working group's meeting "Postcolonialism, Post-development, and now what? Alternatives in the network of global power structures" from March 22nd to 24th, 2019, in Kassel, Germany, and contributed to our discussion: Prof. Dr. Aram Ziai (University of Kassel); Dr. Julia Schöneberg (University of Kassel, Convivial Thinking); Dr. Raoul Bagopha (Misereor); Meike Strehl (University of Kassel; Engagement Global); Kouraich Jaouahdou (Action Associative); Lisa Maria Klaus (Welthungerhilfe). We are very grateful for their inspiring interventions.

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Executive Summary

Despite almost 70 years of German and international development cooperation, global social inequality has hardly changed. Representatives of postcolonial approaches and post-development theories have pointed out for decades that the European supremacy in defining and implementing development projects is based on colonial continuity. It thereby reproduces inequalities instead of breaking with them. So far, these ideas have found little attention within the institutions of development cooperation, possibly because they seem too abstract or because they give few practical suggestions. Against this background, the Working Group for Global Development and Postcolonial Issues of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's Academic Grants Programme met with scientists and development practitioners to discuss practical perspectives of postcolonial approaches and post-development theories. By publishing the diverse thoughts of our debates, we want to give practical suggestions for a reorientation of development cooperation. We hope that we can stimulate further productive discussions towards an emancipatory international cooperation.

Our suggestions include reforms in development policy and cooperation. They relate to the historical responsibility of the Global North, global economic relations, the self-determination of people at the receiving end of international cooperation in the Global South, as well as transparency and accountability and a reciprocal exchange of knowledge within international cooperation. We derive 17 suggestions from the approaches of postcolonialism and post-development:

1 Dealing with the legacy of German and European colonial history must be the basis for a more just development cooperation. This includes acknowledging and apologising for the atrocities of colonialism, and discussing financial reparations and debt relief. German and European colonial history should be jointly reviewed and processed with successor societies of the former colonies within the framework of a common education policy.

[Page 12](#)

2 Companies operating in international contexts should be obliged by national legislation to assume more responsibility for just production conditions. This should be implemented through binding and verifiable standards along the supply chain, e.g. through a supply chain act. In order to verify the accountability, politicians, business representatives and civil society must establish a dialogue, similarly to the "Partnership for Sustainable Textiles", a multi-stakeholder initiative in Germany.

[Page 13](#)

- 3** Trade agreements must be just, communicated transparently and accompanied by measures to promote local and rural infrastructure. This applies in particular to the European Partnership Agreements (EPAs).

[Page 15](#)
- 4** The EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) needs to be reformed extensively, also with regard to the international trade in agricultural products. Disproportionate subsidies for European producers must be reduced and, for example, African agricultural producers must be supported in exporting their goods to European markets.

[Page 16](#)
- 5** Alternative, sustainable economic models should be promoted in German and European development cooperation.

[Page 17](#)
- 6** Decision-makers in politics, economy and research should pay considerably more attention to measures of prosperity beyond the GDP and GNI.

[Page 18](#)
- 7** Decision-making and problem-solving processes should be decentralised. Partners and addressees of development cooperation must have a greater say when defining the objectives, implementation and management of the projects.

[Page 19](#)
- 8** A power-sensitive cooperation with project partners is indispensable in view of complex postcolonial political constellations. Projects that lead to conflicts of interest or hinder parts of the society from exercising their right to self-determination should be avoided.

[Page 20](#)
- 9** Self-initiated projects by marginalised groups in the Global South should be given increased support, with the awareness of potential power imbalances between different actors.

[Page 22](#)

- 10** Development cooperation must introduce superior accountability mechanisms. Thereby, individuals or groups affected by interventions can hold the implementing organisation accountable in the event of mistakes, fraud or mismanagement.
- [Page 23](#)
- 11** Radical transparency and openness of donor organisations and their partners with regard to the goals and expectations of development cooperation must be established.
- [Page 24](#)
- 12** Development cooperation staff should not be understood as ‘experts’ but ‘searchers’. They can act as an interface that brings stakeholders together, facilitates the exchange of knowledge and provides financial support in the case of concrete requests on behalf of applicants.
- [Page 25](#)
- 13** Instead of conducting deficit analyses, there should be more asset analyses focusing on the locally available capacities to solve problems in the respective societies.
- [Page 27](#)
- 14** Partners from the Global South and North should exchange their knowledge in a reciprocal and just manner. By mutually exchanging ideas, scientists and practitioners can also address problems in the Global North and thus work better on common challenges.
- [Page 28](#)
- 15** Development cooperation organisations must take a more decisive stand against racism and other forms of discrimination. They should be more sensitive in their representation of the Global South. International institutions should critically deal with Germany’s and Europe’s political involvements contributing to global injustices. As a result, they should take a more political stand.
- [Page 29](#)

16 Staff in development cooperation should participate in anti-racism training adapted to their context regularly.

[Page 30](#)

17 Decision-makers in development cooperation should institutionalise a continuous involvement with fundamental criticism, for example through regular workshops of stakeholders from the Global North and Global South.

[Page 31](#)

Development cooperation and international cooperation - Who we address and why we struggle with terminology

This discussion paper is meant for representatives of institutions that are part of 'development cooperation' in the broad sense of the term, i.e. that work closely with or finance projects of development cooperation. We address both governmental and non-governmental organisations of 'development cooperation' based on the regulations of "Official Development Assistance, ODA".¹ While our paper embarks mainly from a discussion of German organisations, this contribution might also hold insights for institutional actors in development cooperation more broadly. In some of the examples we refer to, we also include European and international institutions such as the World Bank in a broader sense. We equally aim to address structures that are rarely spoken of in the discourse on 'development', and that may have a strong impact on global inequalities (e.g. political constellations that developed from the colonial era, or global value chains).

We build our reflections on the assumption that 'development cooperation' aims to support societies in achieving economic and social improvements and in eliminating social inequalities.² We criticise that most efforts of 'development cooperation' follow a unilinear idea of 'development' that originates from a coloniality of Western thought processes. Therefore, we make the case for leaving the universal concept of 'development' behind in order to diversify the understanding of a 'good life'.³ In the long run, we call for a move from 'development cooperation' operating exclusively in the Global South towards an idea of 'international cooperation' based on a network of reciprocal knowledge exchange and solidarity. However, in order to address our suggestions precisely to existing institutional frameworks, we use the terms 'development' and 'development cooperation' where necessary. At the same time, we use the term 'international cooperation' in cases where we would like to point out that our suggestions can also be understood in a wider context of international cooperation.

¹Klingebiel, S. (2013). Entwicklungszusammenarbeit. Eine Einführung (Studies / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik, Bd. 73). Bonn: Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik.

² See Klingebiel (2013).

³ See auch Ziai, A. (2013). The discourse of "development" and why the concept should be abandoned. *Development in Practice*, 23(1), 123-136.

What criticism do postcolonial perspectives and post-development theories express towards development cooperation?

Representatives of postcolonial theories criticise that global socio-economic inequality has hardly changed in recent decades.⁴ The Global North is still the principal beneficiary of global economic structures that have grown with the expansion of liberal capitalism and European imperialism. In this, postcolonial theories underline the historical influence of colonial systems. They particularly point out that a continuity of colonial political-economic power structures causes a complex marginalisation of the Global South.⁵ While international development cooperation aims to reduce these inequalities through cooperation, it has become subject to criticism. A central critique is that colonial ways of thinking and acting are neither addressed nor reformed holistically. Hence, the hegemony of the Global North and global social and economic inequalities are not fundamentally challenged.

Post-development theories see this dominance in the development discourse as a central obstacle to a reduction of inequalities.⁶ This is the case due to the development cooperation organisations' understanding of development that envisages a social rationalisation according to Western and capitalist models for all regions of the world.⁷ From a post-development perspective, this leads to the widespread conviction that societies of the Global South are backward, which is a deeply racist underpinning.⁸ Representatives of post-development theories argue that social and ecological exploitation in the Global South continues to be the basis of material abundance in the Global North, and that governments and individuals do not recognise this.⁹ People from the Global South are underrepresented in the decision-making structures of development cooperation. In addition, a lack of acceptance of other forms of knowledge or alternative forms of social organisation

⁴ Hickel, J. (2017). Is global inequality getting better or worse? A critique of the World Bank's convergence narrative. *Third World Quarterly* 38 (10), 2208–2222.

Horner, R. & Hulme, D. (2019). From International to Global Development: New Geographies of 21st Century Development. *Development and Change* 50 (2), 347–378.

Sumner, A. (2019). Global Poverty and Inequality: Change and Continuity in Late Development. *Development and Change* 50 (2), 410–425.

⁵ Mbembe, A. (2001). *On the postcolony* (Studies on the history of society and culture, Bd. 41). Berkeley, California: University of California Press.

Mignolo, W. D. (2012). *Local histories. Coloniality, subaltern knowledges, and border thinking* (Princeton studies in culture/power/history). Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. (2013). *Coloniality of power in postcolonial Africa. Myths of decolonization*. Dakar: CODESRIA.

Sarr, F. (2016). *Afrotopia. Reinventer l'Afrique*. New York: French and European Publications Inc.

⁶ Escobar, A. (1995). *Encountering development. The making and unmaking of the third world*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

⁷ Ferguson, J. (1994). *The anti-politics machine. "Development", Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.

⁸ Rottenburg, R. (2002). *Weit hergeholte Fakten: Eine Parabel der Entwicklungshilfe* (1. Aufl.). Berlin: De Gruyter.

⁹ Brand, U. & Wissen, M. (2017). *Imperiale Lebensweise. Zur Ausbeutung von Mensch und Natur im globalen Kapitalismus*. München: Oekom Verlag.

reproduces this imbalance.¹⁰ Marginalised groups are thus not able to exercise their self-determination although they are often meant to be the beneficiaries of interventions, according to the official presentation of project specifications.¹¹

... and which practical insights do they reveal?

Against this background, representatives of development cooperation should deal in detail with the colonial past and its implications for the current development discourse. It is also important to recognise global political-economic structures as a relevant cause of social inequalities in order to make them more just and more sustainable. Self-determination of all stakeholders as well as transparency and mutual accountability are essential for all parties to work towards long-term solutions that are particularly beneficial for the Global South. Similarly, post-development theories show that knowledge production surrounding 'development' should be diversified and decentralised within global networks. Instead of a one-sided transfer of knowledge, people in the Global North can equally benefit from a mutual exchange of knowledge. Representatives of development cooperation should equally be concerned about struggling for more equitable social structures in the Global North. Furthermore, organisations of development cooperation need to create spaces where leading and executive staff can learn from criticism continuously. Based on these considerations, we derive various fields of action which are presented in detail in the following sections.

¹⁰ Ziai, A. (2016). Development discourse and global history. From colonialism to the sustainable development goals (Routledge explorations in development studies). Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

¹¹ Kapoor, I. (2004). Hyper-self-reflexive development? Spivak on representing the Third World 'Other'. *Third World Quarterly* 25 (4), 627–647.

**17 suggestions
for a more
equitable
development
cooperation
critical of power
structures**

Recognising and jointly addressing the historical responsibility of the Global North

1

Coming to terms with colonialism in society and politics

The central prerequisite for more just practices in development cooperation is coming to terms with the legacy of European and German colonialism. On the one hand, many development cooperation organisations have their origins in colonial institutions. On the other hand, the problems development cooperation aims to tackle are entangled in postcolonial structures. As the ideological legacy of colonialism, racism still strongly influences thought and action in German development cooperation, which reproduces inequalities at the interpersonal level.¹² To ensure emancipatory development cooperation, it is very important that the German Parliament and the German Federal Government recognise the injustices of colonialism and apologise to the successor societies. At the political level, reparations and debt relief should be part of the negotiations. For example, since 2015, the German Government has negotiated with the Namibian Government on addressing the crimes committed in its former colony of German South West Africa. However, not all associations of the descendants of the Nama and Herero form part of the negotiations.¹³ Rather, a comprehensive dialogue on the legacy of colonialism should be conducted together with all affected representatives of the successor societies, at government level and beyond. Moreover, a broad cultural and educational policy programme should help to critically examine Germany's (post-)colonial entanglements and make them accessible to the general public. The recognition of the horrors of the European and German colonial systems of injustice and the sovereignty of the successor societies are essential prerequisites for a more just development cooperation.

¹²Bendix, D. (2018). *Global Development and Colonial Power: German Development Policy at Home and Abroad*. Rowman & Littlefield International.

¹³Pelz, D. (2019). *Völkermord: Namibia wartet weiter auf deutsche Entschuldigung* <https://www.dw.com/de/völkermord-namibia-wartet-weiter-auf-deutsche-entschuldigung/a-50402887>. Accessed: 09 March 2020.

Towards justice in global economic relations

2

Demanding responsibility from companies operating at the international level

Managers of multinational companies must meet their international responsibilities, especially where companies benefit from lax legislation, low labour costs and tax breaks. Companies have a duty to fulfil their tax and reporting obligations. Even if they do so in Germany, they benefit to a large extent from tax concessions in special economic zones and from the inconsistent jurisdiction in the producing countries, e.g. Bangladesh, India, Myanmar or Vietnam. In addition, supply chains, especially in the manufacturing industry, are often complex, as suppliers themselves outsource standardisable production steps to subcontractors. Regular monitoring of working conditions and paid wages is difficult or is avoided deliberately. Even suppliers with better production technologies do not necessarily offer high-quality and secure jobs.¹⁴ A political practice that prevents multinational corporations from neglecting their due diligence can be promoted through dialogue between politicians, corporate representatives and civil society here in Germany. Approaches such as the “Partnership for Sustainable Textiles” initiated by the minister Gerd Müller (German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development) to improve working conditions in the long supply chains of the local textile industry are a step in the right direction. However, they are not binding. There is also a lack of commitment from the major retail and department store chains.¹⁵ The electronics, automotive, pharmaceutical and chemical industries are not part of the initiative. A binding legal framework, such as the initiated “Supply Chain Act”, is necessary and feasible for companies to stick to their due diligence.¹⁶ Regional initiatives, such as the “Core Labour Standards Plus” of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, trade unions and partners in Asia, should be given greater attention in the negotiations at EU level, in order to

¹⁴e.g. Rossi, A. (2013). Does economic upgrading lead to social upgrading in global production networks? Evidence from Morocco. *World Development* 46, 223–233.

¹⁵Kolf, F. & Weishaupt, G. (2018). Firmen scheren aus Bündnis gegen Ausbeutung von Textilarbeitern aus, *Handelsblatt Online*. <https://www.handelsblatt.com/unternehmen/handel-konsumgueter/einzelhandel-firmen-scheren-aus-buendnis-gegen-ausbeutung-von-textilarbeitern-aus/22869084.html>. Accessed: 13 September 2019.

¹⁶Transparency International. (2020). Initiative Lieferkettengesetz veröffentlicht Rechtsgutachten <https://www.transparency.de/aktuelles/detail/article/initiative-lieferkettengesetz-veroeffentlicht-rechtsgutachten/>. Accessed: 09 March 2020.

complement national initiatives. Fair trade based on the principles of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) must be a binding standard at European level, not just an exception.¹⁷ In addition, the German government should make greater use of political means to combat tax evasion and illegal financial flows, which cause countries of the Global South greater losses every year as compared to incoming investments from development cooperation.¹⁸

¹⁷Portela, C. (2018). Targeted sanctions can help the EU promote labour standards beyond its borders. <https://www.fes-asia.org/news/targeted-sanctions-can-help-the-eu-promote-labour-standards-beyond-its-borders/>. Accessed: 13 September 2019.

¹⁸See e.g. Hearson, M. (2018). The challenges for developing countries in International Tax Justice. *The Journal of Development Studies*, 54(10), 1932-1938.
Forstater, M. (2018). Illicit Financial Flows, Trade Misinvoicing, and Multinational Tax Avoidance: The Same or Different? CGD policy paper 123.

3

Transparent and just trade agreements

Trade agreements must be just, communicated openly, and accompanied by measures to promote local and rural infrastructure. The example of the European Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with West African states is a good illustration of this. Although the EPAs allow protection mechanisms for local economies for “general reasons of market protection (Art. 22)” and for food security (“Art. 47 ECOWAS EPA”), these mechanisms involve a considerable administrative burden.¹⁹ Agreements, such as the EPAs, between regions with very different economic strength only make sense if areas with weak infrastructure are promoted based on the needs of the small farmers who reside there.²⁰ Trade partnerships with major structural problems and inequalities should be able to implement temporary import bans and increased import duties in fragile economic sectors without sanctions vis-à-vis economically strong countries. The monitoring mechanism in the EPAs should be designed in such a way that the impacts can be measured and, where appropriate, sanctioned and changed for the better, particularly for the population in regions that are already disadvantaged, e.g. in the interior which is far away from West African ports.²¹ Apart from this, any trade agreements must be communicated openly on both sides. Possible impacts should be made available to the general public in order to enable political participation of various and in particular marginalised interest groups (e.g. consumers in urban and rural regions, farmers with small areas of arable land).

¹⁹ Rudloff, B. & Schmiege, E. (2016). Wieder Hühnchen mit der EU zu rupfen? Umstrittene Geflügelexporte nach Afrika: nachhaltige Handelspolitik als Aufgabe für die G20. Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik. SWP Aktuell. <https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/handle/document/49977>.

²⁰ Lowder, S. K., Scoet, J. & Raney, T. (2016). The number, size, and distribution of farms, smallholder farms, and family farms worldwide. *World Development* 87, 16–29.

²¹ See Rudloff und Schmiege (2016).

4

Reviewing the EU's Common Agricultural Policy

The EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) should be reviewed extensively, with regard to the international trade in agricultural products. Among other things, the CAP grants direct area-based payments to farmers within the EU without effective links to environmental and social services. Current reforms hold little improvement for the general public and for environmental protection. Large farms continue to benefit from subsidies that allow them to produce at extremely low costs.²² This also affects farmers in countries of the Global South. Many of them are unable to produce at such low costs, often due to a lack of subsidies, inadequate infrastructure (e.g. roads, cold storage) and a lack of funding opportunities.²³ For example, imports from EU producers are often much cheaper for the local population than products from local farmers. These local farmers do not gain access to EU markets, especially due to high trade barriers and a lack of expertise (for e.g. complex quality and safety standards). Imports from African countries even fell by 40 percent in recent years.²⁴ The CAP would allow for a wide range of options based on its budget alone: e.g. environmental costs incurred by European producers as a result of nitrate accumulation in soil could be internalised. As a result, prices of European agricultural products would better reflect real costs.²⁵ Around 370 billion euros are earmarked for agricultural payments under the CAP between 2021 and 2027. By way of comparison, only 39 billion euros have been set aside for the Federal Government's general Africa policy.²⁶

²²Ehlers, K. (2017). Die EU-Agrarpolitik – viel Geld mit wenig Wirkung, Umweltbundesamt. <https://www.umweltbundesamt.de/themen/die-eu-agrarpolitik-viel-geld-wenig-wirkung-0>. Accessed: 26 August 2019

²³See Rudloff und Schmiege (2016).

²⁴Ehrenstein, C. (2018). „Afrikas Jugend wird sich nicht auf die Flucht begeben“. <https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article180719506/Entwicklungsminister-Mueller-Afrikas-Jugend-wird-sich-nicht-auf-die-Flucht-begeben.html>. Accessed: 26 August 2019.

²⁵See Rudloff und Schmiege (2016).

²⁶See Ehrenstein, C. (2018).

Promoting a more humane and sustainable understanding of the economy

5

Promoting sustainable economic forms

Against the background of the climate crisis and social inequality in the world, a focus on unlimited material growth and capitalist accumulation of wealth is no longer sustainable. Development cooperation must also open up to and support other, more sustainable forms of economic activity. The fight against socio-economic inequalities and the search for climate-friendly economic activities are strengths of international cooperation that should be expanded. The aim is to promote economic systems that strengthen the common good and function in harmony with the environment, such as post-growth models.²⁷

²⁷ See e.g. D'Alisa, G., Demaria, F., & Kallis, G. (Eds.) (2014). *Degrowth: a vocabulary for a new era*. Routledge.

6

Diversifying the measuring of wealth

As early as in the 1960s, it has become apparent that traditional measurements of economic wealth, such as the gross national income (GNI) and the gross domestic product (GDP), are insufficient and unsustainable for measuring prosperity.²⁸ For example, the overexploitation of natural resources for the production of goods and services, or the clean-up of man-made environmental damage increase prosperity in the logic of the national income.²⁹

From a development cooperation perspective, it is also important to recognise that the increase in income of rich households is disproportionately reflected in the GDP. However, the increase in income of poor households is hardly captured. This aspect distorts the measurement of welfare, and conceals socio-economic inequalities. This is particularly problematic since social inequality plays a central role in various topics of development cooperation. Moreover, these measurements are based on an economic system that originated in the Global North. For example, informal work and community-based economies are difficult to capture in the measurement of GDP.³⁰ Hence, it is essential for decision-makers in development cooperation to not only rely on quantifiable indicators of prosperity such as the GDP, but to develop qualitative indicators or concepts in consultation with decision-makers on the ground. It is essential to put a stronger focus on diminishing social and economic inequalities.

²⁸ Kennedy, R. F. (1968). University of Kansas Address. Lawrence: University of Kansas.

²⁹ Talberth, J. (2010). Measuring What Matters: GDP, Ecosystems and the Environment, World Resources Institute. <https://www.wri.org/blog/2010/04/measuring-what-matters-gdp-ecosystems-and-environment>. Accessed: 25 June 2019.

³⁰ Lepenies, P. (2016). The power of a single number. A political history of GDP. New York: Columbia University Press.

More self-determination and say for addressees of development cooperation interventions



Striving for decentralised solutions and decision-making

“Think globally, act locally”³¹ describes a motto that should be applied more often in development cooperation. Every place, every community, every region has its own individual characteristics. Therefore, the search for solutions and decision-making should be decentralized, even in large-scale infrastructure projects.³² The people affected by the projects must have a greater say in defining the objectives, play a greater role in their implementation, or lead projects themselves. In many projects, little consideration is given to historically grown local ecological knowledge. For example, project managers convert food systems merely pursuing economic and political interests.³³ While food security is central, food sovereignty must also be guaranteed for the population. Especially in the case of large-scale infrastructure projects, the local population risks to be not or insufficiently involved in the planning process, which in various cases leads to illegal and marginalising land grabs. Such cases must cease in development cooperation. Their occurrence should be prevented by immediately and holistically involving all addressees into every project.

³¹ Matthews, S. (2010). Postdevelopment Theory. In: International Studies Association & Oxford University Press (Hrsg.), Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies. Oxford University Press, 11.

³² See Matthews (2010).

³³ Ziai, A. (2010). Postkoloniale Perspektiven auf „Entwicklung“. PERIPHERIE 30 (120), 399–426.

8

Collaborating with project partners in awareness of power relations

Many postcolonial states are strongly influenced by the former colonial political institutions and social structures.³⁴ One central criticism towards development cooperation is that funds often mainly benefit the networks of political elites.³⁵ It is therefore essential for development cooperation interventions to be mindful of the tensions between the self-determination of social groups, and the influence of predominant elites. The question whether governmental or non-governmental actors are involved as well as the partners' socio-economic and cultural backgrounds have far-reaching consequences for the project in terms of effectiveness for and reputation of its addressees.

A dilemma arises, for example, in countries with weakened state structures such as El Salvador or Honduras. Here, cooperation with public institutions can entail considerable operational risks, while cooperation with non-state partners excluding the state can entail the risk of reproducing disturbed relations of legitimacy. A balanced way could be the establishment of so-called "Independent Service Authorities".³⁶

In complex social constellations it is important for development cooperation organisations to openly reflect their own position towards the involved groups. They should question power interests shedding light on the political and ideological intentions of all involved stakeholders in view of the colonial past. When cooperating with political elites or other actors who carry out elementary functions openly or covertly, decision-makers should examine whether political or financial advantages arise for the participants. Agents in development cooperation must realise that their intervention may strengthen existing unequal political and economic

³⁴ See Niang, A. (2018). *The Postcolonial African State in Transition: Stateness and Modes of Sovereignty*. Rowman & Littlefield International.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. (2013). *Coloniality of power in postcolonial Africa*. African Books Collective.

³⁵ Shikwati, J. (2006). Fehlentwicklungshilfe. *Internationale Politik*, 61(4), 6-15.

³⁶ Bold, T., Collier, P. & Zeitlin, A. (2009). *The Provision of Social Services in Fragile States: Independent Service Authorities as a New Modality* (Centre for the Study of African Economies, University of Oxford), Oxford.

structures, and even trigger violent conflicts between social groups. Development cooperation organisations should establish a sensitive and, if possible, hybrid cooperation that contributes to a dialogue between all interest groups and reaches the previously envisaged addressees. If this is not possible, if parts of the society oppose an intervention, or if people could be oppressed due to the power constellations in a project, the project should not be carried out.



Promoting more self-initiated projects in the Global South

Another way to ensure the self-determination of marginalised groups is to support initiatives that originate from the targeted societies or communities themselves. In addition to monetary support, the full sovereignty of the organisations must be guaranteed. Some civil society organisations already try to adopt this approach. In order to expand the possibilities for state support, financing mechanisms must become more flexible and applications must be more feasible for organisations outside of Germany and Europe.

More transparency and accountability towards societies in the Global South and North

10

Introducing accountability mechanisms

Many organisations are able to carry out projects in partner countries without being held accountable in the event of mismanagement. This particularly demonstrates the unequal power structures in many development projects. The target groups often do not have the responsibility and ownership, which undermines the sovereignty of the societies in which development cooperation organisations intervene. It also counteracts sustainable and long-term project work. Superior accountability mechanisms must be introduced to make sure that development cooperation actually contributes to global justice. Thereby, affected individuals or groups can hold the implementing organisation accountable in case of mistakes. Appropriate bodies for mediation and lawsuits must be created to settle conflicts and compensate affected groups or individuals accordingly. The World Bank Inspection Panel is an example of such a structure. It is essential to promote such mechanisms proactively.

11

Promoting radical transparency and openness

Many development policy organisations have undergone major changes in recent decades and have made their work more transparent. In order to establish genuine cooperation with two or more partners and affected stakeholders, radical transparency about the means and goals of the individual organisations is indispensable. Transparency applies to monetary uses and, above all, to political objectives. Last but not least, this contributes to a stronger reciprocal responsibility within projects. Partners should be encouraged to openly communicate their criticism with respect to the cooperation. Donor organisations must take this criticism seriously and ensure that it is taken into account in future cooperation.

Promoting reciprocal knowledge exchange and diversity of knowledge

12

Abolishing expert statuses - expanding system of searchers

Development cooperation organisations recruit and send so-called 'experts' or 'consultants' for various fields, most of whom have been trained at universities in the USA, Canada, Europe and Australia. Many of these 'experts' have primarily been socialized in countries of the Global North. They may have experienced the reality of life in the countries of the Global South through indirect sources of information (e.g. literature, news) and during short- and medium-term work assignments abroad. In most cases however, they lack a detailed and intuitive understanding of the local relationships between people in positions of power and those with less influence. Even with very good language skills and with a knowledge of history, society and politics, there is a barrier to understanding the everyday realities, which are not necessarily apparent to outsiders. Due to the (self-)understanding of the existence of such 'experts' promoted in Northern education systems, the staff sent by development cooperation organisations see themselves as the bearers of solutions to problems which are basically defined in the Global North. This circumstance is favoured by the thematic guidelines of development ministries and organisations and by the allocation of funds according to the understanding of bureaucrats. It is also reflected in very unequal pay structures for local and international staff in organisations of development cooperation. The argument of maintaining local salary levels can only partially explain this gap.

As an alternative to cooperation between international and national experts, we therefore propose the role of 'seekers'. Instead of sending supposed 'experts', trained individuals from the Global North and South can establish contacts between funding agencies and organisations in both places, in case they receive concrete requests. Development

cooperation can thus serve as a platform for bringing together people and organisations with complementary needs. For this suggestion to materialise, professionals in development cooperation would need much more communication and conflict management skills. They would also need a critical engagement with social power structures and more knowledge of diverse forms of financing.

13

Replacing deficit analyses with asset analyses

In project analyses, development cooperation organisations and commissioned consulting companies put a strong focus on evaluating the deficits of the presumed target groups. This approach reflects the notion that societies in the partner countries would be deficient. It favours seeking solutions in external contexts, especially in the Global North instead of taking into account indigenous knowledge and local solutions. A convincing alternative is to locally search for assets, for circumstances that could contribute to a solution. Developing an “alternative mapping” of assets instead of deficits can “restore the visibility and credibility of what has been declared as backward, insufficient or ‘non-existent’ as a contribution to development”.³⁷ Therefore, development cooperation organisations and their consultancies should increasingly look for local aspects that contribute to finding solutions in their project planning.

³⁷ Gibson-Graham, J. K. (2006). A postcapitalist politics. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 169.

14

Promoting a reciprocal exchange of knowledge

According to the Sustainable Development Goals, all societies of the world are 'developing societies' on the way to a sustainable and peaceful coexistence. Nevertheless, development cooperation still only takes place in countries of the Global South. In view of the devastating environmental pollution and emission of climate-damaging gases that people in the Global North are causing today, it is very important to search for sustainable forms of coexistence and forms of knowledge. Many societies in the Global South have implemented valuable ideas that can offer a more sustainable alternative but are usually not taken seriously. The ideas of 'Ubuntu', of 'Buen Vivir' or concrete laws, such as the ban on plastic packaging in Rwanda, can be useful inspirations for development cooperation in countries of the Global North to protect the climate and strengthen social cohesion. Through their networks, the organisations of development cooperation would be suitable to bring knowledge from contexts of the Global South to the North and thereby enable cooperation in both directions.

Promoting an international cooperation critical of power structures and open to criticism

15

Strengthening the political commitment and critical engagement with social power structures of institutions in the Global North

As the preceding sections make clear, politics and business of the Global North can cause problems in other parts of the world. If development cooperation is supposed to bring sustainable and positive change, its organisations must become politically active in order to stop the social and ecological exploitation of the Global South, and eliminate inequalities. It is essential that development cooperation organisations take an active stand against racism and other forms of discrimination in the public and act more sensitively in representing the Global South in their societies.

16

Supporting the awareness of employees

The colonial history of Germany and other European countries is insufficiently addressed while the public discourse on institutional racism is equally limited. Thus, staff in development cooperation should be sensitised to these issues. Until today, colonial structures continue to shape our society and challenge international cooperation at eye level. Therefore, regular and holistic anti-racism training sessions and a critical analysis of German and European colonial history and its legacy are essential within institutions of international cooperation. Ultimately, continuous personal reflection and revealing one's own privileges in the global context are also indispensable for a successful cooperation.

17

Institutionalising a continuous engagement with fundamental critique

The numerous demands in this paper are an attempt to develop practical perspectives from postcolonial approaches and post-development theories. The authors want to point out that the focus of the suggestions is rooted in a certain position and time. This means that more points of equally valuable critique and practical ideas currently exist. We are also convinced that points of constructive critique - whether presented in this paper or not - will further modify in the future. The authors thus seek to enter into a continuous, open discourse about the criticism and to jointly discuss the possibilities of transformation of the respective institutions. In a constantly changing world characterised by high social inequality, it is a central task for development cooperation to continuously address the fundamental criticism it faces and to facilitate structural change. This could be achieved, for example, by a working group consisting of representatives from academia and practice, that deals with unequal power structures and fundamental criticism and passes impulses on to the operating institutions. Such a space for criticism and discussion must deal with development cooperation holistically. Hence, it should include all participating political departments and civil society organisations. In view of the postcolonial inequalities described above, voices from the Global South must be heard and represented. Actively encouraging partners from the Global South to voice their criticism will strengthen this process. Finally, it is essential to strengthen the networks of different agents and (scientific) critics from different parts of the world. Such networks support cooperation with a critical perspective in the future and ensure a continuous reflection of the structures and processes in place.

