

## **Development cooperation**

*Hans Jochen Diesfeld, Univ.-Prof., MD\**

After three decades of development cooperation, the players in the wealthy parts of the globe have to ask themselves about the added value they were able to provide to developing countries. But the developing countries, too, have to ask themselves whether they have done enough in order to implement these efforts for the profit of their populations. In doing this, both sides have to take a critical attitude.

September 11, 2001, made this question drastically topical in brutally drawing all attention on the problematic gap between the North and the South, respectively the rich and the poor, as well as on the international globalisation debate.

The end of the “cold war“ abolished the East-West dimension in development cooperation, however, to the detriment of North-South cooperation. All hopes placed in the “peace dividend“ as a result of this “historical turning point“ were disappointed. Political proxy wars were replaced by economically motivated conflicts. Developing countries fight against each other and civil wars ruin the outcome of 30 years of development cooperation. Arms trade booms more than ever and the number of civil victims is rising.

Once again, it became strikingly evident that development cooperation can neither be considered, nor practised in an isolated manner.

As many other global problems, such as for instance climate, environment or ”terms of trade“, development cooperation, too, is subject to high-level-discussions. Development cooperation is considered a tool for combating poverty and a stabilising political factor for integrating developing countries into world economy.

Considering these high claims, the resources available for implementation are scarce. The decrease in the share of expenses in the gross national product for development cooperation of donor countries is only one indicator. This is explained by the bad world economy situation and by the worsening economic data, which is perhaps a result of unsuccessful economic policy – a vicious circle.

In addition, it is the efficiency of the concepts of development policy which are to be questioned.

The effects of “globalisation”, that is “Americanization” of economic policy on developing countries and on development cooperation, too, are never discussed seriously. It is always parted from the assumption that globalisation serves the integration of developing countries, apart from “collateral damage”. Of course, there are advantages and disadvantages for developing countries. In health care, they become clearly evident. But the disparity between the partners cannot be denied.

However, what is never perceived by the public, are the voices of the developing countries themselves. They are barely heard, or taken seriously in international bodies, in addition, they lack positive interest in development policy. One could have expected that the events of September 11 would bring about a change in mind. It is questionable whether these attacks actually followed such intention. In many comments from the part of industrialised and developing countries, however, these events were interpreted as an “outcry”. This could have

been an incentive for reconsidering again a global concept of development policy, instead of combating terrorism alone.

Such an attitude draws off the attention from actual problems, as well as from the many other hot spots and from the fact that in many developing countries, dictatorship, “unhallowed alliances” and exploiting oligarchies persist which are perfectly eligible for trade.

The promising term “good governance” as a basis for cooperation becomes meaningless. Still, politicians attach too little importance to 30 years of development cooperation, the conception and implementation of which involves commitment by a large number of persons, therefore development cooperation is still isolated at political level, comparable to a “fig leaf” against “higher interests”. The final balance, therefore, is depressing which is due rather to the frame conditions than to development cooperation in detail.

Whereas politicians, under pressure of topical events, find noble words, at the level of the European Commission, with the approval of the European Parliament, for instance, a partner programme, which has been practiced successfully since 1984 (INCO-DEV), aiming at promoting research and intellectual “capacity building” in developing countries, is being (mis)used for European interest. This implies that European research cooperation with developing countries and research capacity in developing countries, which has been developed for years, is being famished in the field of agriculture, nutrition, ecology, health (see “Does Brussels listen? European Health Systems Research in Developing Countries at the Edge of Extinction” Editorial, *Int. Journal of Tropical Medicine and International Health*, 2002, went to press).

This global balance of development cooperation and its frame conditions gives little hope and overshadows the positive experiences made in numerous projects and development cooperation programmes, for instance in the health sector. In this area, too, the critical question of sustainability arises. Can good, mid-term, successful projects based on partnership be transformed into long-term projects?

One decisive key for solving this problem is training and further education of experts, including the management level on both sides of development cooperation, “Capacity Building”, “Human Resource Development”, where these questions and experiences, both positive and critical, are collected and transformed in training contents. This is the only way to improve efficiency and effectiveness of development cooperation in the long run. This component of development cooperation has perhaps the most long terms aspect of all.

The directory “Medicine & Health 2002” presents all courses offered in health care at international level and constitutes unparalleled, indispensable guidance. Only insiders are able to have an idea of the efforts and stamina which are necessary for keeping this directory up to date for 11 years. Therefore, we hope that it will be available in a large number of countries, including the partner countries of developing cooperation. In the name of all users, I express my sincerest thanks to the editors.

*\* Diesfeld Hans Jochen, Univ.-Prof., Dr. med.*

*Emeritus Chair of Tropical Hygiene and Public Health, University of Heidelberg, Germany*