

Klaus Weidmann

Die EG-Entwicklungspolitik in Afrika: Hungerhilfe oder Elitenförderung?

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This book looks into the form and effects of the development cooperation policy of European Community (EC) in Africa, as carried out under the umbrella of the Lomé Convention.¹ The central question it addresses is whether financial and technical cooperation under the Lomé Convention are suitable instruments to effectively contribute to a higher level of food self-sufficiency in Africa. It is interesting that emphasis is placed on the performance of project aid, an area neglected in most research done so far. This neglect is probably caused by the difficulties in obtaining data on the issue, as, in the words of Weidmann: „All donors tend to make a well-protected state secret out of their development assistance“ (p. 24).

After three general theoretical chapters which introduce ‘hunger and assistance in Africa’, ‘EC development cooperation policy in Africa’ and financial and technical cooperation within the framework of the Lomé Convention, Weidmann presents an elaborate case study of EC development cooperation policy in Mali (Chapter V, pp. 127-301). It is from this point on that the book is really worthwhile. Mali was selected for such detailed analysis for a number of reasons: It belongs to the group of biggest receivers of EC assistance; it has a long-lasting relationship with the Community (i.e. since 1957); it has been a „pilot country“ since 1982 for trying out the policy dialogue on food strategies; and it is one of the poorest countries of the world, confronted with food shortages since the end of the 1960s. An additional, more pragmatic reason also played an important part in selecting Mali for this study: The delegation of the European Commission in Bamako was one of the few cooperative units within EC bureaucracy.

After describing the climatological, economical, political, social and agricultural circumstances in Mali, Weidmann convincingly concludes that the food insecurity in the country is caused not only by the constraints of being located in the Sahel region but also by the policies pursued by the urban elites since independence. Through the years the Malian state has hardly contributed to rural development, and an irresponsibly high level of foreign aid-dependency has built up. During the period 1960 to 1986 the European Community was the second largest donor.

Different from the policy followed in many other ACP countries, EC assistance in Mali has not focused on cash crops. Nevertheless little progress has been made in promoting rural development and self-sufficiency in food. Urban bias in the assistance rendered (while 80 % of the population of Mali lives in rural areas) and the fact that all major projects carried out in Mali were managed by national or local state authorities are

¹ The Lomé Convention is a trade and development cooperation treaty concluded between the EC and, at present, 70 countries in Africa, Asia and the Pacific (ACP). It is one of the main pillars of the EC development cooperation.

important causes of this failure. EC development assistance has thus only supported (bureaucratic and inefficient) state authorities and state control over the organisation of production. The latter has meanwhile proved to be inefficient and unfriendly to the peasants. Given this negative assessment it is the more shocking to read that the EC has not carried out any comprehensive nation-wide evaluation of the overall development impact of more than 25 years of assistance activities in Mali. These general observations are all illustrated in Weidmann's detailed description of „Opération Riz Ségou“, one of the biggest Malian agricultural projects which has been under way since 1972. It is the most costly EC project in the country financed by Lomé money (50 million ECU up to 1988).

Policy dialogue with international donors has led to some producer friendly reforms in price and marketing policies. Without denying the importance of this first step, Weidmann concludes that the necessary change of political conditions in Mali in the interest of small farmers has not (yet) been achieved. After qualifying EC development assistance to Mali as discouraging and disappointing, and assuming that far from being exceptional, Mali is typical of the agricultural policies of African elites, Weidmann presents two options: either stop EC development cooperation policy or demand structural political changes where needed. The EC has opted for the latter. Scepticism in this regard is justified because the weak administrative capacities of the Community itself and the lack of adequate facilities to support the desired changes are not conducive to reform.

Although many of the findings of this study were only to be expected, given the long-standing criticism of EC development cooperation expressed by a great variety of sources, Weidmann's achievement is to substantiate his criticism so convincingly, supported by detailed figures and practical examples. This book is compulsory reading for anyone with an interest in the actual practice of development cooperation activities.

On the very last page of the book Weidmann states that it is no coincidence that the EC is not too concerned about the effectiveness of its development cooperation projects. Its motives are not the elimination of hunger or other laudable aims, but much more the maintenance of good relations with ACP elites, the quick disbursement of financial means and a substantial return-flow of those means to Europe (e.g. tied aid). Larger projects are preferred. African governments know this and build their strategies and policies on it. Therefore, a call for structural changes in Africa is senseless as long as no far-reaching reforms take place in the development cooperation policies and management of the industrialised nations. If the call for structural changes in African countries is only aimed at disguising EC self-interest in development cooperation, then it is not supporting small farmers in Africa at all. In that case, future development assistance will probably still not be contributing to self-sufficiency in food, but only to the support of elites. In his book Weidmann provides sufficient arguments and facts to make this bleak picture seem very likely to come true. It leaves the reader who has a commitment to development cooperation with many difficult questions.

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