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Take Africa seriously!

Germany‘s Africa policy is still stuck in old models and urgently needs a paradigm shift. Six recommendations

Read this article in German or Russian.

Just imagine the following: German Chancellor Angela Merkel travels to China and brings along a bunch of projects to strengthen the middle class, create jobs for young people and improve the regional security situation. The Chinese government would probably politely ask her not to come with suggestions for China’s development but rather to concentrate on their common cooperation as partners, for example technological collaboration and bilateral investment agreements.

And yet, in recent years, the German government’s political approach to Africa has always been accompanied by more and more new concepts. The current trip taken by the Chancellor and the Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development, Gerd Müller, is no exception. They bring along with them the Marshall Plan with Africa (MPA) and the Compact with Africa (CWA).

In fact, the German government is financing German services and selling itself as the Good Samaritan. The Chancellor’s suitcase en route to Senegal, Ghana and Nigeria contains numerous gifts supposed to promote German investment. A second piece of luggage contains measures to combat the causes of migration. It would be useful if, indeed, they would be able to formulate a European immigration policy that allowed legal immigration and thereby helped, at least in part, to reduce the flows of refugees and migrants. But presently the measures are instead aimed at shifting the European border towards Africa and setting up camps or reception centres to prevent people from reaching Europe.

A re-orientation in Germany’s Africa policy

Cooperation with Africa, as a real cooperation of equals, should look different. It needs to leave behind the focus on causes of migration and

not present itself as the good Samaritan. Germany's Africa activities urgently require a *change in mentality*. This comprises two aspects.

Firstly, German interests need to be defined more clearly. What do we want to achieve on the continent, what are our main objectives, where do we want to make progress together with our partners? Like we do in our cooperation with China or France. In other words, it is about German economic and security interests, values and norms and internationally agreed climate, labour and environmental standards, among other things. This also means that Germany has to decide which countries and players it would like to work particularly closely with. Despite numerous initiatives on the part of lobby groups, civil society, trade unions and political foundations, there has been no real, critical discussion about what has and has not been achieved in Africa so far. And is a re-orientation necessary?

We also need to bear in mind that Germany is not the centre of Africa's universe.

A second fundamental change in mentality is urgently needed. Let's finally drop our *paternalistic behaviour* towards Africa. It is continually creeping into our words and attitudes, this kind of 'We know what's best, we have the solutions'. Germany's Africa policy is still stuck in this focus on aid and charity. But help is welcome less and less. For, in spite of hundreds of billions of dollars, it has not really brought Africa's development any further forward.

That is why Germany's Africa policy needs above all a *paradigm shift*, one which accepts that development can only come from within, or to put it another way: Africans decide themselves the way they want to go forward. The faster we learn this, the better it is for future cooperation with a self-confident Africa. If we continue with our Samaritan act, we will have to learn our lessons late. Germany should make quick progress in learning how to pursue a cooperation that is in line with practices between sovereign countries and groups of countries.

Six clear recommendations

We also need to bear in mind that Germany is not the centre of Africa's universe. On the contrary: it ranks only eleventh among the leading investors and around one per cent of German trade occurs with Africa south of the Sahara. This should contribute to a humble conduct, rather than to a new German geostrategic catch-up process. Germany ought to offer something better than the neo-colonial players who exploit Africa's

resources and build up their militaries. In the future, the following aspects will be key for Germany to protect its own interests and support Africa's development:

First, Germany should continue to act as a 'civil power' and enter into a long-term strategy of fair cooperation with Africa.

Second, the overdue reform of the European Union's trade and agricultural policies requires suspending the so-called *Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA)*. The EPAs guarantee the signatory states tariff-free access to the EU market but also demand the elimination of tariffs on the African side. This opening up of markets demanded by the EU Commission means that African companies and small farmers risk being further marginalised by imports.

African nations are requesting external protection to be able to develop and build up competitive industries and agricultural sectors, in order to balance out unfavourable local conditions. To make themselves less dependent on external players such as the EU and China, the African nations want to expand intra-African trade and economic cooperation by means of a free trade area.

Third, to date there has been no discernible *coherent German Africa strategy*. This can be seen from the various strategy papers, the above-mentioned MPA and CWA. Both are thus far insufficiently coordinated and, what is more, they pursue fundamentally different and not necessarily compatible agendas. The CWA is aimed at infrastructure and investments and is characterised by conditionalities in accordance with the model of the structural adjustment programmes of the 1990s. The MPA represents traditional development cooperation. Both plans also have a different approach to trade. The ministry of finance stands for free trade, whilst the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development under Gerd Müller is favouring fair trade. You simply cannot have both.

Therefore, Germany should pursue a departure from asymmetrical trade relations, which means that the German government needs to advocate a European approach of fair trade while assisting Africa in getting their products to reach European markets as well. For example, common African-European chambers of commerce could give advice in this area to introduce African businesses to the EU's standards and norms (labour, environmental, technical and health).

Fourth, the *Europeanagricultural sector* is superior to African agriculture in every respect,

seriously and take a different position ourselves, as a civil power and a fair player towards Africa.

due to its extremely high productivity and billions of subsidies, with the result that African farmers and fishermen are a long way away from fair trade conditions. Besides that, non-tariff barriers and high trade and transport costs impede their agricultural exports. This is not least a result of the lack of support that African governments give to rural areas. The consequence of these two conditions is the longstanding high dependency on food imports. It is therefore essential that trade and agricultural issues are discussed together in the coming EU-Africa talks, so as not to further disadvantage African agriculture.

Fifth, the German contribution to reducing poverty and high youth unemployment is small at best. For example, all foreign investment over the last ten years has resulted in the creation of an average of only 100,000 new jobs per year. And the approximately 1000 German companies currently employ around 200,000 Africans. Jobs for 20 million people a year will have to be almost exclusively created by the local business communities and farmers. The task of governments is to help rather than hinder local business communities.

Last but not least, Germany should, in its own interest, pursue cooperation on the following levels: deepen economic and technological cooperation, build common research facilities, expand the excellent German Academic Exchange Service's (DAAD) programme for student exchange and cooperation with universities. It should learn from China: 70,000 African students are being educated in China, creating life-long networks. In addition, cultural relations could be deepened by supporting common activities from film and media professionals as well as from the theatre, music and art scenes. These activities could be financed by reallocating the traditional resources of development cooperation.

The current public discourse around cooperation with Africa is predominantly defined by population flight and migration. We urgently need a paradigm shift in our Africa policy. We should learn our lesson and change course. We should take Africa's agenda concerning industrialisation, modernisation and development seriously and break away from thinking in terms of 'crises, conflicts and children' and from empty phrases about the 'continent of possibilities and of the future'. Such thinking in dichotomies fogs our view of the supremely different realities of Africa's 56 countries. We should learn to anticipate where the biggest transformation in Africa is heading. We should take Africa

seriously and take a different position ourselves, as a civil power and a fair player towards Africa.



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