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*Frank Bliss, Karin Gaesing
and Anika Mahla*

The Perpetuation of Poverty in Developing Countries

Analysis of Causes and Counterstrategies

AVE Study 2b/2017
2nd updated edition 2021

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Lotharstr. 53 47057 Duisburg, Germany
Phone +49 (203) 379 4420 Fax +49 (203) 379 4425

E-Mail: inef-sek@uni-due.de

Homepage: <https://www.uni-due.de/inef/>

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*Frank Bliss,
Karin Gaesing,
Anika Mahla*

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Ways out of Poverty, Vulnerability and Food Insecurity

Universität Duisburg-Essen
University of Duisburg-Essen

Institut für Entwicklung und Frieden (INEF)
Institute for Development and Peace

AUTHORS:

Dr. phil. Frank Bliss, Professor of Ethnology (development ethnology) at the University of Hamburg and Senior Research Fellow as well as teaching officer at the University of Duisburg-Essen (INEF). Research projects among others in Egypt, the Maghreb, Sudan and Central Asia. Active as a consultant above all in the field of water, the implementation of social safeguards in infrastructure projects and in policy advice.

E-Mail: bliss.gaesing@t-online.de

Dr. rer. pol. Karin Gaesing, geographer and spatial planner; researcher at INEF, University of Duisburg-Essen; many years of experience in development cooperation, including for GTZ in Ethiopia and Côte d'Ivoire, and as a freelance consultant in Africa and India. Expertise in regional planning, gender, participation, and land use planning.

E-Mail: karin.gaesing@uni-due.de

Anika Mahla, M.A. in International Relations and Development Policy, B.A. in Social Science and Philosophy with a major in Political Science; research associate at INEF, University of Duisburg-Essen, research focus: rural development, gender, food security and land governance.

E-Mail: anika.mahla@gmx.net

Project homepage: https://www.uni-due.de/inef/projekt_ave.php

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List of Abbreviations

ACP	African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AfDB	African Development Bank
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
AVE	Ways out of (extreme) Poverty, Vulnerability and Food Insecurity (Wege aus (extremer) Armut, Vulnerabilität und Ernährungsunsicherheit)
BMZ	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung)
BTI	Bertelsmann Transformation Index
CEQ	Council on Environmental Quality
CGAP	Consulting Group to Assist the Poor
CPAN	Chronic Poverty Advisory Network
CPI	Corruption Perception Index
DAAD	German Academic Exchange Service (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst)
DC	Development Cooperation
DESA	Department of Economic and Social Affairs (of the UN)
DFID	Department for International Development
DIE	German Development Institute (Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik)
DITSL	German Institute for Tropical and Subtropical Agriculture (Deutsches Institut für Tropische und Subtropische Landwirtschaft)
DSW	German Foundation for World Population (Deutsche Stiftung Weltbevölkerung)
ECG	Evaluation Cooperation Group
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EPA	Economic Partnership Agreement
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FC	Financial Cooperation
FCFA	Franc Communauté Financière Africaine
FHH	Female-Headed Households
FIAN	FoodFirst Informations- und Aktions-Netzwerk
GDP	Gross domestic product
GFI	Global Financial Integrity
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GTZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für technische Zusammenarbeit
ha	Hectare

HDI	Human Development Index
HEF	Health Equity Fund
HIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Countries
HSNP	Hunger Safety Net Programme
IDM	Individual Deprivation Measure
IDS	Institute for Development Studies
IEG	Independent Evaluation Group (of the Worldbank)
IEO	Independent Evaluation Office (of the IMF)
IFSH	Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg (Institut für Friedensforschung und Sicherheitspolitik an der Universität Hamburg)
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INEF	Institute for Development and Peace
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
KAS	Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung)
KfW	Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau
KWh	Kilowatt hour
MDG(s)	Millennium Development Goal(s)
MPI	Multidimensional Poverty Index
NGO(s)	Non-Governmental Organization(s)
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OPHI	Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative
PPP	Public-Private Partnership
ppp	Purchasing Power Parity
PRSP(s)	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper(s)
PSNP	Productive Safety Net Programme
SAP(s)	Structural Adjustment Programme(s)
SDG(s)	Sustainable Development Goal(s)
SEWOH	Special Initiative “ONE WORLD – no Hunger” (EINEWELT ohne Hunger“)
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
SPRING	Spatial Planning for Regions in Growing Economies
TC	Technical Cooperation
TCA	Technical Center for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation
TTIP	Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund

UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
USD	US Dollars
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WCD	World Commission on Dams
WFP	UN World Food Programme
WTO	World Trade Organization
ZEF	Centre for Development Research (Zentrum für Entwicklungsforschung)

Summary

The exact number of poor people worldwide is stated differently by different sources. There are also different categories of poverty, such as extreme poverty, ultra-poverty, deep poverty, etc. In addition to the previously purely economic criteria for poverty, further criteria have been added in recent times which also include the consequences of material hardship, i.e. the health-related, educational, cultural, political and social disadvantages of poor people. We currently assume that there are about two billion poor people in the world. The World Bank stated at the end of 2019 that these include 736 million extremely poor people. In our opinion the latter estimate is still too low. The greatest successes in poverty reduction between 1990 and 2011 were achieved in East and Southeast Asia, with a poverty reduction rate of 84%, followed by North Africa with minus 81%, Caucasus and Central Asia with a reduction rate of 77%, and South Asia excluding India with 73%. Sub-Saharan Africa is the worst performer over the period, with a decline of only 28% in the proportion of poor people.

The causes of poverty are very complex and operate at different levels. The majority of poor people in developing countries live in rural areas and accordingly it is very important for them to be able to practise agriculture. At the local level, lack of access to land and lack of legal security in land use therefore play an essential role. The people particularly affected in this respect are those who use communal land for which there are no official land titles, and which is often regarded by authorities as “unused”. Similarly, farming families suffer from declining fertility of arable land due to soil erosion, lack of agricultural inputs and increasing population pressure. The marginality and structural weakness of many rural areas often offer farmers hardly any alternatives to their traditional way of doing business, because there is a lack of agricultural advice, markets, access roads, water (including for small-scale irrigation), electricity and employment opportunities other than agriculture.

Discrimination against certain groups of the population excludes them from economic opportunities, social networks and the right to have a say in the village, and therefore deprives them of opportunities to improve their lives. Women and girls have been shown to be more often and more severely affected by poverty and hunger than men and boys, which is why the term “feminization of poverty” is also used. Poor people find it difficult or impossible to build up reserves to withstand times of need or shocks. Violent conflicts in many regions exacerbate this problem further.

Poor governance is responsible for many of these causes of poverty. Corruption, self-enrichment and the unwillingness or inability to democratize and decentralize power, decision-making authority and resources keep developing countries in poverty. The neglect of agriculture and rural development in many countries is also a manifestation of poor governance. There is uneven investment in the development of different parts of the country, such as the favouring of coastal regions in West Africa. The latter is still a legacy of colonialism to some extent. In many developing countries there is also a lack of resources for uniform positive development in the country.

Globally, the impacts of climate change exacerbate the causes of poverty described above. International power imbalances reproduce inequalities, such as the neglect of the diseases of poverty that are responsible for the majority of deaths in developing countries. Wrongly conceived development aid, e.g. through the structural adjustment programmes of the 1980s and their “technical” accompaniment, have increased poverty and hunger in many developing countries instead of reducing them.

Lack of education plays a key role in perpetuating poverty. This is complemented by poor health, inadequate and unbalanced nutrition, and lack of access to capital, credit and labour. Another important factor in the persistence of poverty, and the fact that even people who are no longer poor fall back into poverty, is the frequent lack of social security systems for (extremely) poor people who have no possibility of earning their own living on a permanent basis or are temporarily deprived of this possibility, e.g. due to illness.

The additional people who will fall below the poverty line in 2020 and 2021 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects – numbering 100 or even 600 million according to various estimates – are to be helped by the rapid provision of funds, emergency programmes and additional measures through development cooperation (DC). The funds are mainly channelled into medical aid and the provision of basic services for vulnerable and poorer population groups, e.g. in the form of budget support for governments and unconditional cash transfers for the affected households. The opportunity which this offers to establish social security systems on a permanent basis should be seized.

Development cooperation can only make a small contribution to economic and social development and poverty reduction in partner countries. Those responsible, i.e. governments and the economic and social elites in the countries themselves, are called upon to bring about better governance, and thus to implement policies oriented towards development and poverty reduction. Where governance does not improve and a development orientation is not discernible even after intensive dialogue and repeated attempts, state cooperation should be reduced or even discontinued. Support for poor population groups – insofar as this does not support the systems, at least not directly – should, if need be, be provided directly via non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

On the donor side, achieving coherence is at the top of the reform agenda. Development efforts must no longer be thwarted by economic and foreign policy interests and the resulting obstacles to development. In this context, donor coordination in the sense of the Paris Declaration also requires considerable improvement, as long as neither the OECD countries nor the EU member states and more recent donors such as China put aside their own interests at the expense of the developing countries.

National ownership of all development measures and societal participation in all important decisions on goals and paths of national development are indispensable conditions for success in poverty reduction. At a lower level, people (women and men, old and young) must have a say in local development issues. At the national level, it is the legitimate and representative delegates of civil society who should be involved in development concepts.

The role of socio-cultural aspects of development should be given considerably more weight in the context of development cooperation instruments. The will of the population is important here, i.e., a measure must not merely be accepted. It must also be directly supported by those involved. In addition, those responsible on the donor side should pay more attention to questions of power. Key questions here are: “Who has prevented poor people from accessing resources so far?” and “Who, on the other hand, can support the empowerment of the poor?” Alongside the importance of gender equality and the consideration of social, ethnic or religious heterogeneity, these questions should play a far more important role in development cooperation than has been the case to date.

In the sectoral area, in rural poverty reduction and agricultural promotion, the development of an area by provision of roads or tracks is a foundation for further measures. It is only when people can reach markets that they can make money. Their living conditions

only improve when they can reach health centres and schools, and when drinking water and electricity come to them.

Basic social services such as health care, education or drinking water are only really available to the poor when the services are sustainably provided (i.e. when there are sufficient financial resources for their long-term provision). In addition, the poor should have a basic right to receive the services even if they themselves have no money to pay for them. This can be ensured through cross-subsidies in the system, but also through the assumption of costs within the framework of social security systems, without the basic social services themselves running the risk of having to be discontinued for lack of funding.

Food security is also, but by no means exclusively, a question of production. Rather, food security can only be established if food of good quality is available to all people in sufficient quantities, i.e. if people own the land to grow food or have the financial means to acquire it. In countries like Cambodia or Tajikistan, where nutrition figures lag well behind the successful figures in poverty reduction, education about good nutrition and overcoming bad food habits must additionally be provided. This is a considerable challenge and requires major investment in awareness-raising for society as a whole as well as for individuals.

An estimated 250 to 350 million of the extremely poor worldwide, in contrast to other extremely poor people, have no self-help capacities. These include people with disabilities, the elderly, and families without available labour. In order to bring these groups out of their unbearable situation, in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), there is no alternative to providing unconditional cash transfers. However, such transfers require coherent overall packages within the framework of development cooperation. These must have a long-term perspective until the partner countries are able to support the programmes themselves. They require a good targeting system in order to identify, with reasonable effort and without major inclusion or exclusion errors, the poor who are unable to help themselves. Finally, ways must be found to ensure that transfer payments reach the right people even when governance is poor.

1. About the INEF research project

From October 2015 to early 2020, the Institute for Development and Peace (INEF) at the University of Duisburg-Essen conducted a research project funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). The research project was intended to contribute towards reaching extremely poor, vulnerable and food-insecure population groups in the partner countries of German governmental development cooperation better than before, within the framework of primarily bilateral measures. In this way, the aim was to lead them out of poverty in the long term. With a focus on holistic agricultural aid and access to financial services for poor smallholders, the research project has been continued from October 2020 until around February 2023.

Although in recent decades, depending on the choice of indicators and the method of calculation, extreme poverty worldwide has decreased in relative terms, the absolute number of poor people has remained largely the same. This is true despite numerous adapted national poverty reduction concepts, increased internal measures by many countries (above all Brazil, China, and India, but also Mexico, the Philippines, Pakistan and other mainly middle-income countries) and, with a view to fulfilment of the SDGs, an increasing commitment by the industrialized countries to financing development. This is partly due to poor governance and international power relations, but also to population growth, especially in the world's poorest countries, where resources are often severely limited. The increasing impact of global climate change also plays a role. On the other hand, there are also a number of reasons for inadequate poverty reduction, which are to be found in the instruments of development cooperation, in the special situation of the poor themselves, and in the interplay of both factors.

People living in extreme poverty and suffering from vulnerability and food insecurity have low self-help capacities. As documented in the literature, they are often also unable to articulate their interests publicly, so that they and their ideas and wishes are not taken into account when planning development measures, or at least are not the focus of the measures (cf. Bliss / Heinz 2009 and 2010). National and international planners must also increasingly ask themselves whether, for example, old people, households without available labour, or people with disabilities can be reached at all with the means of traditional development cooperation, which focuses on helping people to help themselves and implements measures primarily with the aim of economic sustainability.

The research project was and is located at this interface: the specific conditions of poverty and food insecurity on the one hand and the – possibly inadequate – instruments of development cooperation on the other. Building on the analysis of previous problems in reaching the above-mentioned target groups through DC and successful examples of poverty reduction, promising projects (good practices) are to be identified and examined in detail. In this context, it is important to analyse the circumstances of the respective success in detail, in order to work out the conditions under which such successes can be transferred to a broader circle of DC measures in other situations and countries. They also need to be made usable for those responsible in the ministry and in implementing organizations as well as for NGOs, knowing full well that there can be no blueprints in DC.

The research work of the 2015 to 2020 project was accordingly divided into four basic steps. The starting point for the study was a review of the role of poverty reduction within international and German development cooperation to date. The causes of poverty and reasons for the perpetuation of mass poverty worldwide were compiled. It was examined why – despite occasional reports to the contrary – the states themselves and international

development cooperation have not succeeded in at least halving mass poverty by 2015, in accordance with the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs).

In a second step, the project took a close look at the previous work of international as well as German development organizations. It examined reasons for their failure to reach the poor, as well as particularly good inclusion of the poor in measures that have demonstrably led out of poverty and food insecurity. Thirdly, on the basis of an initial critical pre-selection, particularly successful projects were examined very closely, on the basis of planning, implementation and evaluation documents and together with those responsible in the DC organizations, to determine the circumstances that contributed to their success. In the fourth step, selected projects were analysed in more detail on site, based primarily on statements from the population involved.

As a consistent analytical framework for the project, we focused on the closely related area of gender relations, participation and socio-cultural factors. In order to be able to target poverty-oriented projects and measures in the almost endless number of international DC projects, three thematic focal areas for project selection were defined for the 2015-2020 processing phase. The first focus was on examining projects and programmes that deal with access to important resources such as land in particular, but also water, and aim to provide poor, food-insecure and vulnerable people with this access in a sustainable and secure manner.

Many DC organizations are currently focusing on the approach of promoting (local) value chains in connection with increasing agricultural productivity and production. Such projects, which are primarily concerned with promoting the production and processing of foodstuffs grown and consumed by the local population, form the second focus for the selection of good practices. This focus is linked in particular to the question of whether these projects really reach the poorest of the poor and/or whether the latter benefit from them.

Social protection, our third focal area, has played an increasingly prominent role in international development cooperation since around 2000 in the fight against food insecurity, (extreme) poverty and economic and social vulnerability. According to the analysis of a number of international DC organizations, there are a large number of people who cannot be reached by economic and employment promotion measures – both within and outside agriculture.¹ This is the group of people who, for various reasons (such as age and/or disability), are not able to work, or their respective households, who often remain in a state of apathy because of this drawback. They can only be freed from their degrading situation by direct livelihood support. We therefore wanted to examine the extent to which innovative approaches to social protection can contribute to food security and the eradication of extreme poverty.

Direct and participatory impact analyses were carried out in a number of countries in the fourth step of the analysis. These had the goal of ensuring that the success is also perceived as such by the (formerly) poor population and that their living conditions have actually improved in the long term. The first round of empirical on-site studies was carried out in Asia – in Cambodia – and in Africa – in the four countries Ethiopia, Benin, Burkina Faso and Kenya. In each country, between three and five projects were visited by the research team and interviews were conducted with all key stakeholders. In most of the projects a survey of

¹ This was a key finding of the international conference on “Incorporating Pro-poorest Growth in the SDGs” held in Manila in April 2016 by the Chronic Poverty Advisory Network (CPAN) in collaboration with the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

approx. 400 households was carried out in parallel. For the second round of studies, the good practices to be investigated, along with the project countries, were only being selected at the time this article went to press.

Current products of the investigation are 25 *AVE Studies* (AVE = *Armut* (poverty), *Vulnerabilität* (vulnerability), and *Ernährungsunsicherheit* (food insecurity)). On the one hand, these consist of summary concept and strategy papers as well as synthesis papers on the focal topics of the research project. On the other hand, they also document more comprehensive project investigations. In addition, 23 booklets were published in the *Good Practice series*, in which good project examples are documented on eight to twelve pages. Their specific approach as well as their instruments to fight poverty, vulnerability and food insecurity effectively and sustainably are presented and evaluated in a targeted and practical way. Some of the reports have also been published in French or English.

The research team in Germany consisted (and still consists) of Frank Bliss, Tobias Debiel and Karin Gaesing (both phases) as well as Anika Mahla, Jana Herold (first phase) and Arne Rieber (second phase) and research assistants at the INEF institute of the University of Duisburg-Essen. At times, national colleagues Tamene Hailegiorgis Gutema (Ethiopia), Mathias Pofagi (Benin), Andrew Kiplagat (Kenya) as well as Sok Sovannarith, Oliver Schell and Rosa Hennecke (Cambodia) have worked and continue to work with us.

For further information on the research project:

https://www.uni-due.de/inef/projekt_ave.php

Duisburg, August 2017 and February 2021

2. Introduction

This paper presents the results of the first phase of the research project “Ways out of Extreme Poverty, Vulnerability and Food Insecurity”, focusing first on the causes of poverty and the question of why it persists at remarkably high levels, especially in sub-Saharan Africa – despite sustained economic growth in many countries and currently around 150 billion US dollars in annual development aid. In another working paper the question of DC's contributions to global food security to date was examined in summary, and this question is therefore addressed here only marginally.²

For our stocktaking, we evaluated numerous documents, mainly from donor circles, and the results of discussions with more than 100 experts in research on development countries as well as development practice. This showed that even regarding the number of (extremely) poor people worldwide, there is a considerable contradiction between the data, e.g. provided by the World Bank or UN organizations, and the estimates of independent researchers. However, it is extremely important to know whether fewer than 700 million or more than two billion people are extremely poor. This question plays an eminently important role in the search for development policy contributions to poverty reduction and food security for those affected – one of the main tasks of this research project. Accordingly, a brief résumé of the numbers debate has been drawn up in Chapter 3.³

However, when it comes to analysing the causes of poverty, the “battle fronts” open up between independent research on developing countries and analyses by the important international and national donor organizations. There is broad agreement here that, on the one hand, historical reasons such as colonialism initially played an important role (later replaced by world market structures which in many ways disadvantaged developing countries), but that in recent decades endogenous causes have increasingly gained in importance. In this context, the extremely poor governance in many developing countries should be mentioned in particular. This recurs throughout Chapter 4 as a common theme. Much evidence of this was also found during the 2016 to 2020 investigations.

Other factors come into play: for instance, the increasing importance of climate change cannot be denied when it comes to the causes of weather-related crop failures, soil degradation or fluctuations in the water balance of water bodies and aquifers. These have consequences for the income and food situation of hundreds of millions of people. However, it is also necessary to bear in mind the increasing disparity between population density and available agricultural resources in many places, especially in locations with marginal yields. This is another increasing cause of poverty and rising (internal) migration.

There seems to be little distinction between the question of the causes of poverty and the reasons for its persistence, which are briefly discussed in Chapter 4. Similar arguments can be made in many cases: For example, lack of or limited access to land or the uncertain legal situation regarding land use is one of the most significant causes of poverty in rural areas. If the government does not act to change matters, it is also a reason for its perpetuation. However, a corrupt government with little development orientation is directly responsible for perpetuating poverty in its country if, instead of creating legal security and a land policy based

² Cf. Mahla et al. 2018: Maßnahmen zur Ernährungssicherung im entwicklungspolitischen Kontext. AVE-Studie 8/2017, Duisburg (INEF).

³ This is dealt with more fully in our paper on the conceptualizations and interrelationships of poverty, vulnerability and food insecurity (see Mahla et al. 2017).

on broad access to this important resource, it arbitrarily expropriates small farmers for the benefit of its clientele. In this way it deprives the majority of the rural population of any opportunity for development and thus removes their way out of poverty.

Armed conflicts are also an important reason for the perpetuation of poverty, when people are not made able to use economic resources despite their basic availability. Moreover, studies show that the economic potential of a country is exploited to a lesser extent than possible by repressive systems. This is another important reason why the poor population in particular does not manage to free itself from its precarious situation (Goodhand 2003, Philip / Rayan 2004).

Chapter 5 deals with the question of the role of development cooperation in efforts to reduce poverty worldwide. The focus is on the question of what concrete contributions have been made and which contributions have been particularly effective. Conversely, it is also on the question of which measures have contributed less to poverty reduction and what caused this. Here we distinguish between the various sectors or priority areas of development cooperation (e.g. education, health promotion or infrastructure development) and the instruments of development cooperation. The authors, as development policy practitioners, also wish to investigate precisely the methodological approaches and their effects. In other words, is country ownership really taken seriously in the identification and design of development cooperation measures? Whose ownership is at stake: that of governments or of the people themselves who are to be helped and whose empowerment is to be strengthened? What is also important in this context is the question of the socio-cultural conditions of development, which prominently include the power relations in a country and a society. Has DC investigated these conditions and taken them seriously, or has it failed to do so and therefore failed to seize available opportunities to exert influence?⁴

Finally, in order to supplement the mixed analysis of DC impacts to date, Chapter 6 compiles a series of recommendations for improvement, primarily with regard to development policy instruments. Here, as in the previous analysis of impacts, the authors were able to draw extensively on the results of numerous discussions with proven German and foreign DC experts, whom we would like to thank warmly at this point for their suggestions. The comments and recommendations of the interlocutors also make it clear that the role of development cooperation in country development should not be overestimated, even in the poorer countries, but that the initiative of the affected developing countries themselves must first be at the centre of considerations. The basic conditions must first have been provided through good governance – first and foremost, overall state action must be oriented towards development. Only then can development cooperation, with its limited external contributions, effectively support the measures of the state on a subsidiary basis and ensure that they are safeguarded if, despite all efforts, resources are insufficient.

⁴ See also the project's policy paper: Bliss (2020a): Soziokulturelle Aspekte von Entwicklung, Partizipation und Gender. Analysen und Empfehlungen. AVE Study 25/2020, Duisburg (INEF).

3. Poverty: Terms, numbers, and context⁵

In his new book on the ethics of migration, philosopher Julian Nida-Rümelin writes that it is a scandal that more than two billion people of the earth's population still remain in extreme poverty, suffering from hunger and malnutrition, lack of medical care, and insufficient educational and training opportunities, although according to him it is possible to remedy this misfortune with a fraction of the global annual economic output (0.5%) (2017: 9f.).

The MDGs of September 2000 and also the new SDGs of January 2016 focus on ending this extreme poverty and hunger in general. The SDGs do so once again in the context of a long-term programme that is to run until 2030, until extreme poverty worldwide can be completely eradicated⁶ – although “completely” is still likely to leave out two or three percent of the world's population. Despite these very precise conceptions of the SDGs, however, the concept of poverty remains relative and is defined differently depending on the country category and specific context. Poverty criteria and indicators are also arbitrarily adjusted retrospectively by important actors⁷, for instance in order to document their own alleged political successes or to legitimize changes in strategy in retrospect.

In industrialized countries, reference is primarily made to “relative poverty”, with the ratio between the lowest and the highest income groups serving as the assessment yardstick. In development policy, and thus also for the SDGs, the daily availability per person of less than two US dollars (USD) per day, adjusted by so-called purchasing power parity (ppp), continues to be regarded as the threshold for normal or moderate poverty. However, since the defining line for extreme poverty was adjusted (in 2015, from USD 1.25 to 1.90), this threshold also urgently needs to be raised.

In addition to the previously entirely or predominantly economic criteria for poverty (such as gross national product per capita), other criteria have been added in recent times that include not only material hardship but also its consequences for those affected, i.e. the health-related, educational, cultural and social disadvantages that result from material poverty. The Human Development Index (HDI) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which includes not only income but also life expectancy and education, is one such attempt at a broader measurement of poverty. Published annually since 1990, the criteria for poverty have been continuously adapted and expanded, starting from purely economic measures. Today, for example, gender criteria and also social inequality (measured by the GINI coefficient) play an important role here.

One relatively new measure is the Oxford “Global Multidimensional Poverty Index” (MPI), developed with German support, which uses 10 indicators to measure deprivation,

⁵ A more detailed compilation on poverty in the context of vulnerability can be found in our study “Extreme Armut, Vulnerabilität und Ernährungsunsicherheit: Begriffe, Dimensionen, Verbreitung und Zusammenhänge” (Mahla et al. 2017). Here vulnerability is understood as an intermediate stage between poverty and “no longer being in poverty” as currently frequently used by the World Bank. However, it is also used in the sense of a particular exposure to external shocks over which those affected have little or no control.

⁶ SDG vision “We envisage a world free of poverty, hunger, disease and want, where all life can thrive”. Objective 1: “End poverty in all its forms everywhere” (UN 2015a). In target 1.1, this target refers to all people everywhere (on earth) living on less than USD 1.25 per person per day (reference year 2015, i.e. before the poverty line was raised to USD 1.90). Target 1.2 then already makes a significant climbdown, in that extreme poverty according to national definitions is to be at least halved by 2030.

⁷ Cf. Thomas Pogge in *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 24.9.2015 or Jason Hickel (2015).

especially in the areas of health, education and living standards (see University of Oxford 2016)⁸. Other indicators include limited access to social services, lack of cultural participation, social exclusion, etc.

Another contribution to poverty measurement is the Individual Deprivation Measure (IDM). The emphasis here is on the individual as a reference point, and explicitly not on the household or family. The IDM is based on the correct observation that household-based indicators, as used in traditional recording systems, do not take into account gender inequalities in particular, but also age, disability or ethnic origin. Accordingly, the IDM uses the self-assessment of the persons concerned as a yardstick for the allocation to poverty categories.⁹

Proposed by Peter Edward (2006) and defended by Jason Hickel in a perceptive analysis (2015), there is also the ethical poverty line, which investigates which people reach the global average life expectancy of 73 and which do not. This would increase the number of poor people to around 3.5 billion – which, incidentally, would also happen if one were to take an average of all the world's poverty lines and not use the 15 poorest countries as a yardstick (Hickel 2015: 7).

Against this background, how many (extremely) poor people are there for the states themselves and development cooperation to deal with? The different criteria for poverty also lead to very different estimates of the number of people affected by poverty. Although individual international organizations seem to provide very accurate figures on this, there are often open complaints in the same context that there are hardly any accurate statistical data available, especially for many poor countries. This is particularly true for countries in sub-Saharan Africa¹⁰ Accordingly, it can be expected that published figures not only vary widely given the different criteria for poverty, but also fluctuate considerably when the same criterion is used. For this reason, a figure quoted by the World Bank of “exactly” 736 million extremely poor people worldwide (at the end of 2019)¹¹ should be viewed with the utmost caution (cf. World Bank 2019, Hickel 2015).¹²

In 2012, Nicole Rippin of the German Development Institute (DIE) took a critical look at the data available with respect to the success figures presented by the World Bank almost every year, and her conclusions remain valid in 2020: First, the figures on poverty reduction during the period of the MDGs until at least 2010 hide the fact that the reduction in absolute poverty in the world between 1990 and 2010 took place mainly in China. Indeed, of some 620

⁸ According to the 2019 MPI Report, 23.1% of people are multidimensionally poor in the 101 countries covered by the global MPI, with regional variations ranging from 1.1% in Europe and Central Asia to 57.5% in sub-Saharan Africa (see <https://t1p.de/j6rh> [01/2021]). For a breakdown of the 10 indicators, see: http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2019_technical_notes.pdf [01/2021].

⁹ In detail: Wisor et al. (2015).

¹⁰ For this reason, the World Bank intends to provide more support than in the past to the countries concerned in carrying out national budget surveys, which are to be repeated on a regular basis (note during talks in Washington in August 2016). This has already been done with great effort in the past in Bangladesh, where a nationwide poverty atlas was compiled at the end of each of the years 2005, 2010 and 2015, providing data broken down to the district level (see, among others, World Bank et al. 2010).

¹¹ The figure is also precisely stated that 416.4 million of these are in sub-Saharan Africa (see World Bank on 24/09/2019): <https://t1p.de/rvgab> [12/2020]).

¹² The World Bank speaks of 736 million people in December 2019 (see <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2019/12/20/year-in-review-2019-in-charts>) up from 734.5 million in September 2019 (see <https://t1p.de/rvgab> [12/2020]).

million poor people raised above the \$1.25 threshold since 1990, 510 million lived in China and only 110 million in the rest of the world, with the number of the poor in sub-Saharan Africa actually increasing by 96 million (see Box 1).

Box 1: Achievements in poverty reduction - Africa lags significantly behind

The MDG assessment (see UN 2015b: 14) shows – considering that the figures remain highly debated due to the measurement criteria – that the percentage of the extreme poor (people living on less than 1.25 USD per day [since 2015 1.90 USD/day]) decreased by 68% from 1990 (36%) to 2011 (15%) to 2017 (9.2%).

In the developing regions excluding China, however, the proportion of poor people declined by only 57%. Particularly good values in this period can be seen in East and Southeast Asia, with a decline of 84%, North Africa with a decline of 81%, the Caucasus and Central Asia with a decline of 77% and South Asia (excluding India) with a decline of 73%. However, the rate of decline is most notable in China, at around 95% (from 66.3% in 1990 to only 0.7% in 2015, a figure that is, however, disputed) (cf. World Bank 2016c). By contrast, the world's worst rates are in sub-Saharan Africa, where the proportion of poor people declined by only 28% in total (from 55.7% [1990] to 45.3% [2011] and 40.3% [2018]) (cf. World Bank 2018c).

There are no official statements on the exact number of acutely impoverished or multiply disadvantaged subgroups of the extreme poor who have no chance of extricating themselves from their situation by their own efforts, such as the people described as ultra-poor. The research team estimates these to be between 250 and 350 million people.

Secondly, the author rightly points out that changes in measurement methods can lead to very different numerical results, as the World Bank itself had to experience in 2008. At that time, the change in the national poverty lines taken into account, as well as an update of the purchasing power parity (PPP), led to an increase of 430 million poor people from one day to the next. The rather arbitrary determination of the baskets of goods as a reference value for the determination of purchasing power parities by the World Bank and, above all, the changes made to the reference years (cf. Reddy / Pogge 2005 / 2010) raise considerable doubts even today about the figures on the number of poor people worldwide. This in turn casts doubt on the success figures for poverty reduction.¹³ Above all, when determining purchasing power parities, many stakeholders do not take into account that the extremely poor have to spend 70% of their income on basic foodstuffs, the price of which is similar almost everywhere in a world comparison. For these people, the scope of expenditure is therefore reduced on services which are very cheap in many developing countries. These cheap services particularly influence purchasing power parities.

¹³ Cf. Mahla et al. 2017 and especially Reddy and Pogge 2005 / 2010.

4. The perpetuation of extreme poverty: Causes and consequences

4.1 Causes of extreme poverty

Poverty in developing countries is based on a very complex set of causes. In order to organize the complexity and make it comprehensible, a distinction is made between exogenous and endogenous factors. This equates to the difference between factors which are externally induced and those which countries themselves produce and are responsible for. However, the distinction is often not absolutely clear-cut (cf. Bliss 2009a, Rauch 2007). In attempting to systematize this complex phenomenon, the mainstream literature further distinguishes between different levels at which poverty causes take effect: the global, national, regional and local levels (cf. Ahmed et al. 2007, Haughton / Khandker 2009, Jones and Hermias 2015, Lawson et al. 2006). The latter can be further subdivided into the community level, the household level and the individual level (cf. Haughton / Khandker 2009).

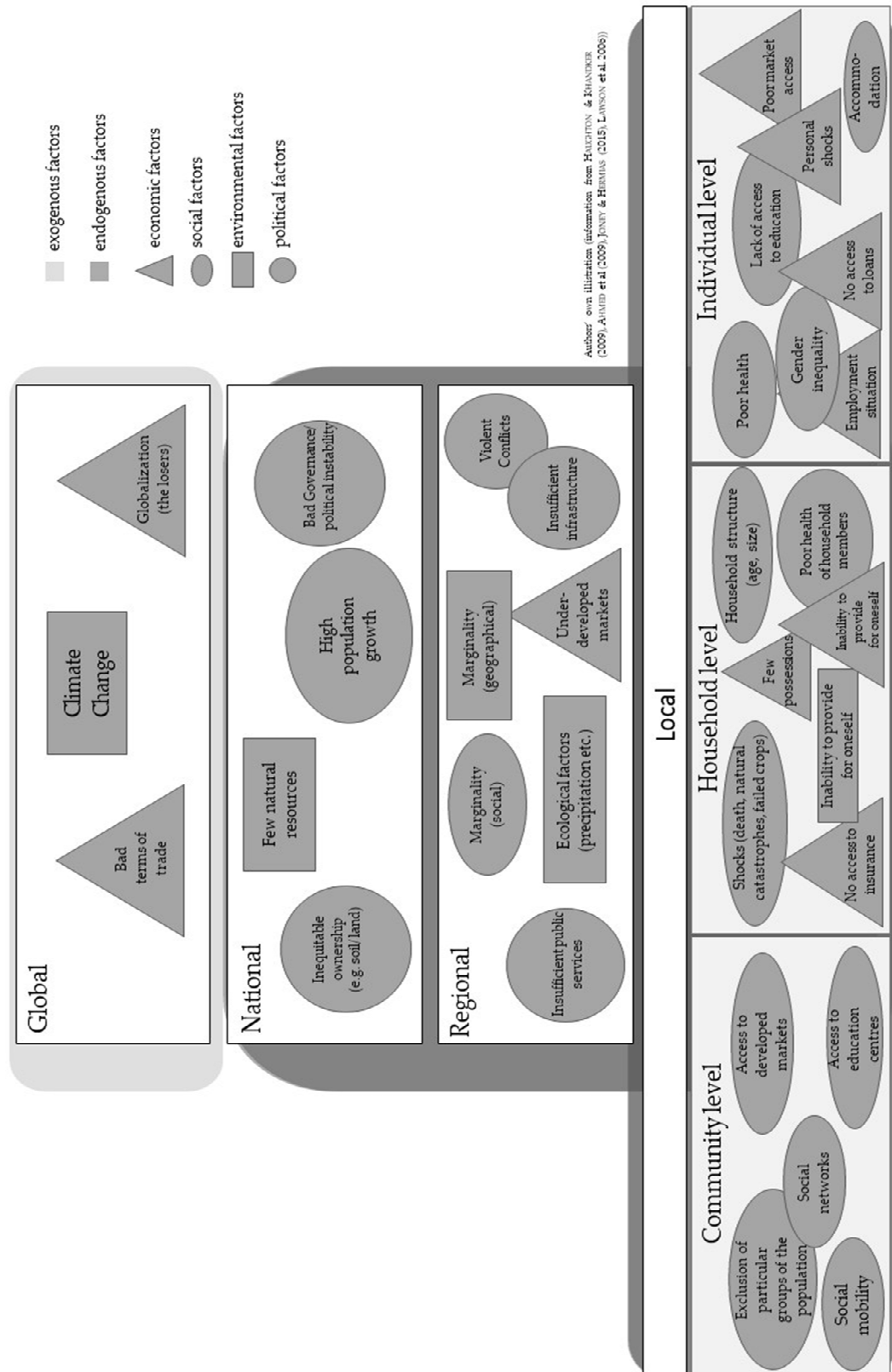
At the four levels mentioned above, i.e. local, regional, national and global, the causes of poverty are differentiated according to types of causal factors into economic, social, environmental and political-institutional causes (cf. Rauch 2007). Figure 1 presents the causes of poverty in the system described above, with overlaps and, in some cases, circular causalities in almost all areas.

4.1.1 Causes of poverty at the local level

There are a large number of studies that have intensively investigated the causes of poverty and hunger at the local level, i.e. that of the individual, the household and the rural or urban community (see e.g. Dhakal 2005, Lawson et al. 2006). Other works are based on the comparison of different empirical studies and the attempt to systematize their results (cf. Gatzweiler et al. 2011, Haughton / Khandker 2009, Rauch 2007). In reviewing the documents focusing on rural areas, a number of common features emerge. The order in which the causes of (extreme) poverty are dealt with in the following sections does not represent a hierarchy of the importance of the causes.

The *lack of access to land* as well as the *lack of legal security* with regard to the cultivated land are consistently mentioned as causes of poverty. Landlessness correlates much more strongly with poverty in Asia than in sub-Saharan Africa (cf. Ahmed et al. 2007, Bliss 2009a). In Africa, on the other hand, the lack of legal security with regard to cultivated land often plays a greater role, especially for women (cf. Moreda 2017 and World Bank 2014). Other factors are the displacement of farmers from agriculturally productive areas to marginal land during the colonial era and, more recently, population pressure. In many places, despite the expansion of cultivation into further areas (which are less and less fertile), the available land units for cultivation per household or person are becoming smaller and smaller. In addition, farmers can be evicted at any time from the land they have often farmed for several generations. This happens even in countries where land is not state property. It can be observed frequently in Ethiopia, for example, but also in Zambia with the dissolution of tribal trust land. Another example in Southeast Asia is Cambodia, where the ancient customary rights of the local population were no longer recognized when economic land concessions were granted to “investors”.

Fig. 1: Systematization of the causes of poverty



Pastoralists and indigenous populations usually hold collective or communal land titles. These are often disregarded by the governments of African, Asian and Latin American countries, forcing people off their land. Often this happens without (adequate) compensation, in most cases without any counselling or start-up support for an alternative livelihood (cf. Batterbury / Ndi 2018, Moreda 2017, Zoomers et al. 2017, Neef 2016). In the context of land grabbing, this phenomenon is rapidly increasing throughout the Global South. The increased production of food is usually an untenable pretext for land grabbing, since as a rule the newly emerging large farms produce less per unit of land than small or medium-sized farms, if they cultivate the acquired land at all. Also, the jobs often promised by the new landowners through the new large-scale farms do not adequately absorb the population that has now become landless, or often offer them poor working conditions and wages which are insufficient to make a living (cf. Cotula et al. 2009, Transnational Institute 2012, FIAN 2013, FIAN 2014).

Other factors related to land can also be causes of poverty and extreme poverty. The *decreasing fertility of arable land* due to degradation or erosion presents many farming families with the problem of not even being able to produce enough food for their own consumption, let alone for sale. The reasons for this are manifold (see Bliss 2009a, Sachs 2005, Dhakal 2005 for Nepal, Gaesing 2012 for Kenya).

Fig. 2: In addition to soil degradation, retrograde gully erosion destroys large parts of the fertile farmland in the Ethiopian highlands.



From our own work experience in Ethiopia, Kenya and various West African countries, which can certainly be transferred to other countries, we believe that the following causal relationships play an important role: (i.) overuse of land, for example when there is no fallow land; (ii.) poor land management due to ignorance or lack of capital and / or labour to implement erosion control measures, for example; (iii.) neglect of sustainable management of cultivated land because it is not at all legally certain whether the same person or family will

work the field again in the next cultivation season; (iv.) the fragmentation of family fields into insufficiently large areas due to the prevailing form of inheritance division, etc. (cf. Gaesing 2008). Most of these causes are anthropogenic, but climate change and its effects are increasingly playing an exacerbating role (cf. Dietz / Scholz 2008).

Agriculture in poor countries is largely based on manual labour. In addition, the climate (e.g. the limited rainy seasons) results in considerable work peaks when, for example, the fields have to be tilled and sown in just a few days. If a family member falls ill or dies, this can be a cause for the family to fall into poverty, especially if it is a productive member of the family who is lost as a much-needed worker (see also Dhakal 2005). Families hit by such an unforeseen event, a so-called shock such as illness, an accident or death, very often fall at least temporarily into poverty or even extreme poverty.

In such cases, the governments of the countries of the Global South generally do not offer any cushioning support for affected families (as is the case in Germany, for example, with health insurance, unemployment insurance and similar social security benefits). For this reason, a shock hits people there disproportionately harder than in the western industrialized countries.

Other unforeseen events that can drive a family or village into poverty or extreme poverty are natural disasters such as floods, large-scale landslides and droughts, or suddenly becoming the victim of crime or violent conflict. At the time of this study's review, for example, hundreds of thousands of people in Tigray, Ethiopia, are fleeing violence caused by fighting between government soldiers, Eritrean military and the Tigray People's Liberation Front. This adds to the number of internally displaced people in Africa, which is already estimated at 15 to 20 million.

Poverty at the household level can also be caused by the household structure itself. If too many people who do not contribute to the household income depend on too few productive people (*negative dependency ratio*), the household is more likely to be poor or extremely poor. *De facto*, this means that households with many young children, elderly, sick or disabled people have a higher probability of being poor. The households of grandmothers raising AIDS orphans, which are now common in sub-Saharan Africa, are just one extreme example of this.

In addition, there is a phenomenon that has so far received too little attention in development cooperation: social disparities within one and the same family. In many places this includes "closer" and "more distant" members. Thus, beyond a *nuclear family* (i.e. father, mother, children, and also grandparents – mostly the husband's parents), a household may also include other persons on a temporary or long-term basis, such as refugees or more distantly related children attending school in the city. In some circumstances, benefits such as food or medical care (including external support services, if applicable) may not be equally distributed in the household. This is especially true in cultures where women and girls are disadvantaged compared to men and boys, e.g. where they can only eat after the men have eaten and then often only get the less nutritional food.

People who are unable to care for themselves, such as the elderly, infirm or disabled, are often also among the very poor. The same applies for single women in societies that make it difficult or impossible for women to engage in income-generating activities. The specific aspect of the feminization of poverty is discussed in Section 4.3. In addition, there is the increasing number of households living in border areas between agriculture and urban life, in the outskirts and suburbs of rapidly growing large cities (cf. Sattelberger 2017). Here, however, in the same way as everywhere else, decreasing solidarity within the group (e.g. village community or clan) can be a cause for the slide into extreme poverty.

At the local level, cultural and social norms and values often *disadvantage certain groups of the population* and exclude them from general social life. Exclusion from social networks, which support people even outside of times of particular need, is highly significant here. As a result, certain economic options may be out of reach for them because, for example, they have no access to land or to community labour services, forcing them to remain in poverty if they cannot or do not want to leave the local community (cf. De Jong / Roth 2009, GTZ 1996). In Ethiopia, the INEF research team was able to find out that extremely poor households, which barely had the necessary labour to cultivate their own piece of land, were excluded from the otherwise customary neighbourly assistance because they themselves could not help their neighbours, i.e. they fell out of the system of reciprocity.

A BMZ research project on socio-cultural issues was carried out from 2008 to 2012, addressing, among other things, the role of particularly disadvantaged minorities / indigenous population groups. The partial results of this study clearly show that extreme poverty is often the result of social exclusion of members of minorities. This exclusion may encompass only the local level (e.g. in Africa in many places the ethnic groups “to whom the land does not belong”), but also takes place at the national level (cf. Bliss / Heinz 2009). The resulting failure to listen to the same disadvantaged groups in the context of development planning is then a further cause of, as well as a contribution to, the perpetuation of extreme poverty.

Marginality is one of the main causes of poverty at the local level, but it also extends to the sub-regional and regional levels (see Ahmed et al. 2007, Gaesing et al. 2012). According to Gatzweiler et al. (2011), extreme poverty is not caused by an individual factor of marginality, such as a physical disability or belonging to an excluded minority, but always by a complex network of factors of marginality. Gatzweiler et al. (2011: 3) define marginality as follows: “[...] an involuntary position or condition of an individual or group at the margins of social, political, economic, ecological and biophysical systems, preventing them from access to resources, assets, services, restraining freedom of choice, preventing the development of capabilities, and eventually causing extreme poverty.” The concept is based on Sen (1981 and 1999), but is extended to include the spatial aspect and the environmental component.

Husmann (2016) applied the concept of marginality based on seven spheres of life¹⁴ to Ethiopia using Geographic Information Systems. Her study shows that the application of the concept can have different results depending on the indicators used for the seven spheres of life, and also depending on the thresholds used for extreme poverty in each sphere. A comparison of the results with agro-ecological factors shows drylands with relatively low agricultural potential, such as the Afar region in the north-east or the Somali region in the south-east of the country, as the poorest areas of Ethiopia.

One of the determinants at the local level is the often extremely pronounced structural disadvantage of rural areas, which is expressed, for example, in the lack of or poor access of the local population to educational institutions and health care. At the most, there are primary schools within reach of the villages, but hardly any secondary schools. The accessible schools are also often inadequately equipped with rooms, furniture and teaching materials, and have fewer and less qualified teachers than schools in more central areas. Children who want to

¹⁴ The seven spheres of life include (1) the economy (including household economy), (2) demography, (3) the nature of the landscape, land use and location of the region, (4) quality of life and lifestyle, (5) ecosystem, natural resources and climate, (6) infrastructure, and (7) public sector and institutions (Gatzweiler et al. 2011: 8).

enjoy a higher education have to walk very far (which is often a criterion for exclusion in the case of girls because of the dangers of the journey to school), they have to live with relatives in distant places with secondary schools, or they have to attend a boarding school, for which there is usually no money. Children of poor parents thus have very difficult access to higher education. In many countries it is intended for attendance at primary school to be made possible by exempting state primary education institutions from charges. However, even here parents very often have to pay for school uniforms, notebooks and writing utensils, transport if necessary and, in view of the empty public coffers, often also for the salary of a teacher. Almost everywhere in Africa's schools there are also so-called parent-teacher committees, whose main task is to ensure the structural maintenance of the school. They may even have to build the school or at least individual classrooms themselves first, as has been observed in the central African country Chad (cf. Bliss 2011: 17).

Marginality is also reflected in the infrastructure of a village or a smaller administrative unit. The roads or paths often allow access to the village only on foot or with a mount. Motorized vehicles can often only reach the villages in the dry season, as the unpaved roads and paths are impassable in the rainy season. Regulated and reliable marketing of the products produced by the farmers is therefore not guaranteed. High transport costs also minimize profits. In marginal villages, it is impossible to even think of supplying electricity, and rural areas are often not connected to a central power grid for cost reasons. The connection is very expensive, which is why many farming households, which may even have previously had to make way for the construction of a reservoir for electricity generation, cannot afford the connection.¹⁵ Clean drinking water and sanitation services are also often not available or exist only at a considerable distance from the place of residence.

Another cause of poverty, which results from many of the above-mentioned causal complexes and is additionally reinforced by socio-cultural conditions, is the *inability of people to build up reserves* that can be used in times of need or for investments (cf. Sachs 2005). In her study on women's participation in rural development in Ghana, Karin Gaesing (2001) investigated which conditions and instruments enable poor people to build up savings. Savings are not to be understood here merely as saving up money, but rather saving takes place primarily through the purchase and resale of animals or storable food. Due to culturally determined behaviours and norms, even poor people in developing countries usually share with others who are even more needy. However, reciprocity plays an important role in these relationships and requires sharing and redistribution within a framework of reciprocity. Those who have absolutely nothing to offer remain excluded, so that in many societies the extremely poor cannot benefit from the principle of reciprocity already mentioned.¹⁶

Based on the remarks of Sen (2000), Rauch (2007) explores the question of the extent to which poverty is culturally determined and which socio-cultural factors can cause mass poverty. He identifies as key factors the culture-specific incentive systems with regard to initiative and personal responsibility on the one hand and solidarity on the other. He concludes that only the balance of the two offers a way out of poverty, because

¹⁵ In Tanzania or Cambodia, for example, it is not uncommon for costs to range from USD 0.50 to over USD 1.0 per KWh.

¹⁶ As also presented and discussed, for example, in the context of the workshop "Kulturen der Armut" [Cultures of Poverty] of the AVE research project and the Institute of Ethnology of the University of Frankfurt on 24/04/2017 at the University of Frankfurt, by Wilemijn De Jong (cf. De Jong / Roth 2009, De Jong 2019).

overemphasizing either initiative and responsibility or solidarity can have negative effects on a society.

In this context, there is probably no “culture of poverty” in the sense of Lewis (1951, 1959 and 1967), who assumes that certain groups of poor people develop a particular kind of behaviour and pass it on within families. On the one hand, this behaviour allows them to cope with the poverty situation, at least superficially, but, on the other hand, makes it difficult for them to free themselves from poverty independently. It is likely, however, that beyond a “culture” there are indeed social groups that form behaviours of a life in poverty which they pass on from one generation to the next (on this see Hahn 2019 and Heinz 2019).

There is therefore ample evidence that poor people often fail to lift themselves permanently out of poverty despite changes in their lifestyles and economies (e.g. intensification of agriculture). This is attributed to the far-reaching structural causes of poverty that an individual, a household or a village cannot overcome by their own efforts (cf. Dasgupta 2004, Ziegler 2011). These are discussed in the following sections.

4.1.2 Causes of poverty at the regional level

At the regional level, *spatial disadvantages* are one of the main causes of poverty. Harper and Braunholtz-Speight (2008) include remoteness, certain types of natural landscapes, but also political marginalization and low integration of a space within a country. In structurally weak regions, the proportion of poor and extremely poor people is often high (cf. BRIDGE 2014, Gaesing et al. 2012, Husmann 2016). Often, but not generally, these regions are additionally spatially marginal within a country, such as the entire northern counties in Kenya. These lie in the semi-arid to arid climatic zone. They are all among the poorest regions in the country and have high structural weakness (see Samoei et al. 2015, Merttens et al. 2013, DITSL 2013). It also occurs that central regions with fundamentally high development potential are marginalized for domestic political reasons, such as the Oromia region in Ethiopia.

Structural weakness means, on the one hand, a lack of physical infrastructure, i.e., for example, few kilometres of roads relative to area, even fewer roads with asphalt surfaces or otherwise paved, and few roads which are usable all year round. As a result, farms generally have poor access to markets, and most of the proceeds from their products are used for transport. Structural weakness also entails inadequate provision of social infrastructure such as facilities for education, health care, financial services, public authorities and the like. The inadequate transport network also makes it difficult for the rural population to reach these facilities, and transport is very expensive.

Von Braun (2008) also states that the lack of access to services is one of the main causes of extreme poverty. In structurally weak regions, moreover, there is little or no electricity, and the supply of clean drinking water within adequate reach is not always available. Often structurally weak parts of the country are not integrated into the country's economic cycles. According to Ahmed et al. (2007), the poorest and most food-insecure households are located the furthest from roads, markets, schools and health services.

An indication of a region's structural weakness is also the inability of regional authorities and institutions to promote non-agricultural incomes, or to generate and/or support formal employment opportunities, or to integrate agricultural production into value chains and thus promote it (cf. Dhakal 2005). For the African continent, Robert Kappel complains that the largely rudimentary infrastructure hinders market integration and stands in the way of the creation of business networks. He notes this both for individual regions within a country and

at the overall country level. According to him, the agricultural sector and the poor population groups in particular are marginalized by the lack of infrastructure everywhere (Kappel 2017: 10).

The increasing *degradation and scarcity of natural resources* is intensifying the pressure on the (extremely) poor in individual regions. It has been shown that poor people in rural areas often live from the (freely available) use of natural resources. They produce charcoal for sale, collect firewood, fruits, nuts, materials for house and roof construction, medicinal plants and other non-timber products for their own use or for sale, and use the forest or savannah for cattle grazing. On the one hand, poor people suffer from the scarcity of these resources, which are vital for their life (and survival); on the other hand, some of the activities listed above are illegal in many regions, e.g. the production of charcoal (cf. Bliss 1996, Bliss / Gaesing 1992, Kenea 2009, Gaesing et al. 2012, Kiplagat 2012, Neufeldt et al. 2015, Mensah 2021). The conflict between nature conservation and the needs of residents of national parks and other protected areas is only one factor which further restricts the economic options for poor people in mostly remote rural areas and pushes them to the edge of illegality. This is especially the case when protected areas are designated and managed without the participation of local residents (see Kiplagat 2012).

Fig. 3: Poorer women earn monetary income by producing and selling charcoal, among other things (here: on the way to the next weekly market in the north of Benin).



Misguided government policies in the agricultural sector that do not take into account regional characteristics and needs can both generate and exacerbate poverty. For example, Fourile (2016) describes for Laos that government reform efforts, which actually aimed to intensify agricultural production and strengthen land rights, did indeed achieve this for farmers who

were already rich with highly productive wet rice crops in the lowlands. However, the poor peasant farms in the highlands were deprived by the reforms of the fallow land which they required for soil regeneration and plunged deeper into poverty and food insecurity. The non-focused subsidy policy of many countries also reduces the possibility of supporting genuinely poor farmers (e.g. in Zambia) given the mostly low overall budgets.

Violent conflicts can be the cause of extreme poverty at regional as well as national level. Goodhand (2003) provides a very detailed analysis of the interconnected causes of conflict that can lead to chronic poverty (cf. also Philip / Rayhan 2004). Sometimes the deliberate impoverishment of people and regions is used as a war strategy by parties to a conflict. The terrorization of the population in the Sahel states and in large areas of the northern regions of some West African coastal states by Islamic fundamentalists destabilizes the country and the government, among other things.

Matthew Turner (2004) analyzed conflicts between pastoralist and agrarian societies in the Sahel of West Africa. These revolve around the ever scarcer resources (land for agriculture and pasture farming as well as water) in the face of a constantly growing and spatially condensing population. He notes that these superficial conflicts over resources often have deeper causes. Conflicts are also often used for political purposes, sometimes even staged for political reasons. DC projects can contribute to the conflicts if they have an impact on the rights of one side or the other (e.g. expansion of the Office du Niger in Mali, which restricted the migration routes of semi-nomadic or transhumant pastoralists).

Fig. 4: Every year during the dry season, conflicts with arable farmers occur in the Sahel countries when Fulbe semi-nomads move with their herds to the grazing areas in the south, where arable farming is also increasingly practiced



Violent conflicts increase the dependency ratio in households, i.e. the survival of the household rests on the shoulders of the elderly, the disabled, women and children, because the men are involved in the military conflicts. Violent conflict leads to a long-term lack of regional health care and access to education, and to the destruction of institutions and social cohesion, the destruction of markets and transport, and ultimately leads to farming families no longer being able to cultivate or harvest their fields, and thus to the collapse of regional food security.

4.1.3 Causes of poverty at the national level

Many of the causes of poverty at local or regional level discussed above originate at national level or are exacerbated by government action or inaction.

The *lack of resources* of the countries¹⁷ is often blamed for poverty and extreme poverty. Sumner (2016), on the other hand, argues that it is not the lack of resources that causes extreme poverty, but rather the *distribution of those resources*. Therefore, causes of economic policy and the governance of growth and public finances are more significant in his analysis. Collins and Lappé reached the same conclusion exactly four decades ago (1980).

The correlation between poverty and *poor governance* is very high, as is made clear by the UNDP Poverty Report 2000, among others. Poor governance as a cause of poverty, as described by Frank Bliss (2009a), has many facets. These include corruption and favouritism towards those close to the system through land grabbing, leading to displacement of people, falling crop yields and mismanagement and political instability in general. Decentralized governance, on the other hand, when implemented consistently, has positive effects on public administration. It strengthens local capacity and empowerment, as well as promoting equal distribution of resources in the country, political stability, and effective public services – all factors that have been shown to reduce poverty (see Dick et al. 2016). In sub-Saharan Africa, decentralized states with fiscal decentralization also in place made greater progress in eradicating poverty and achieving the Millennium Development Goals than states with lower levels of decentralization (see Beerfeltz 2013, cited in Dick et al. 2016).

Through its comparative analyses, the Chronic Poverty Advisory Network (2014, 2019) also confirms the importance of good governance in poverty reduction. Countries that prioritize human development, good governance and pro-poor policies create a climate in which poor people are more likely to lift themselves out of poverty than in countries which do not take heed of these policies.

Discussions between the authors and renowned German development experts on the subject of the causes of poverty revealed that poor governance can consistently be regarded as one of the main reasons for extreme poverty and its perpetuation. Bad governance also means that large sections of the population in developing countries do not trust their governments, which in turn can lead to a lack of cooperation in development projects. The Swiss sociologist and politician Jean Ziegler (2011) and renowned African economists such as Axelle Kabou (1995) also denounce the corrupt elites in developing countries who embezzle state funds and line their own pockets.

One aspect of bad governance is the *neglect of rural development and agriculture* which can be seen in many countries. Only in recent years has this aspect been “rediscovered” both

¹⁷ Cf. 2015 ILO report on how many countries could not introduce social security systems from their own resources, namely almost except for less than a dozen.

by the governments of the developing countries and by development organizations. After all, the majority of the poor in developing countries are still to be found in rural areas and not in the cities. Increased agriculturally oriented programmes such as the German SEWOH initiative of the BMZ (German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development) and efforts to reduce inequality are also a first response to mistakes of the former structural adjustment policy, which led to the abandonment or restriction of state advisory services for farmers.

It cannot be denied that *migration*, especially of young people, deprives developing countries of much potential for future development. A special case here is the so-called *brain drain*, the emigration of highly qualified specialists, who often emigrate after completing their education or stay on after studying abroad. An evaluation conducted on behalf of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), for example, shows that only 58% of people from developing countries who completed a Master's degree at a German university in 2011 returned to their home country. The majority of the remaining 42% are still in Germany or have already returned to Germany. Interestingly, however, the study also shows that the poorer the country, the higher the likelihood of returning to the country of origin (cf. Bauschke-Urban / Gaesing et al. 2017). This may be related to the fact that people from these countries feel a special obligation to their relatives who enabled them to study and now want to "pay back" the benefit they received locally. The reasons for the brain drain as well as the migration of young people are manifold and mostly have to do with bad governance and its effects such as violence, poverty and lack of prospects (cf. African Union et al. 2020).

Population growth is widely cited as a cause of poverty (see Sachs 2005, Lawson et al. 2006, DSW 2016). However, this growth is now often no longer seen as an individual problem, but rather accepted as a fact and discussed in the context of how to feed the ever-increasing and increasingly urban population.

The 2016 data report of the German Foundation for World Population (DSW) relates population growth in countries around the world to the likelihood of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The figures clearly show that the least developed countries, with a total fertility rate of 4.3 children per woman, still have a significantly higher fertility rate than the average for the rest of the developing world (excluding China), which is 2.9 children. Sub-Saharan African countries drive up the average a lot, with five births per woman. This is despite the fact that just over a third of married women aged 15-49 there use a family planning method (DSW 2016: 6).

In the context of natural resource degradation, population growth plays a significant role. In many places, the increasing pressure on natural resources prevents the regeneration of soils, which is necessary to maintain soil fertility. Fallow periods are shortened or dropped completely without being replaced by another sustainable system of agriculture – due to lack of knowledge or lack of financial resources to implement adequate culture techniques (cf. Sachs 2005). INEF's 2015-2020 research in several African countries identified pressure on natural resources as a result of poverty and population growth as at least a core regional problem in many contexts (such as Ethiopia, northern Benin, and many parts of Burkina Faso).

A comparative study of national and regional data for 37 countries in sub-Saharan Africa by Drechsel et al. in 2001 already showed clear links between population pressure, the absence or shortening of fallow periods, and declining soil fertility or soil erosion. Higher population pressure and increasing intensity of land use are leading to soil depletion, with soil erosion being the main cause of nutrient depletion in East African countries. Barrett and Bevis (2015) draw a clear link between extreme and persistent poverty and depleted, low-fertility soils.

They also argue that good soils can significantly strengthen the resilience of farming families. The studies thus confirm the topicality of earlier publications on the same subject (cf. e.g. Boserup 1965, Mortimore et al. 1993).

Of course, geographical factors beyond the regional climate cannot be ignored as causes of a situation of disadvantage and poverty affecting an entire country. Even without the colonial border design, the emergence of landlocked countries would certainly not have been prevented. These countries are disadvantaged by the lack of access to ports, which already restricts the self-determined movement of goods and people. In addition, landlocked countries generally have longer transport routes and therefore higher costs for the overall movement of people and goods. In the case of landlocked countries such as Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Chad and others, there are one to three national borders across which goods have to be imported or exported. There are distances of over 1,100 km (Ouagadougou / Burkina Faso – Dakar / Senegal) to 1,900 km (Douala / Cameroon – N'Djaména / Chad) in each case. Because of the increased costs of access to the world market, even moderately available natural resources are of little use in such a situation (except for some gold in Burkina Faso and Mali or uranium in Niger), since they have to be marketed in competition with countries that have much lower cost structures for this purpose (cf. Bliss 2021).

4.1.4 Causes of poverty at the global level

For developing countries, the causes of poverty at the global level are usually counted as exogenous factors, even if this delimitation is not always accurate.

Poverty is increasingly also a consequence of climate change. The largest contributors to climate change are to be found in the group of industrialized countries, including emerging economies such as India, Brazil and China. The *effects of climate change*, on the other hand, hit developing countries particularly hard, e.g. through a more rapid succession of droughts, which make it difficult or even impossible for vegetation to regenerate or for livestock farmers to regenerate their starving livestock. The rainfall required for rain-fed agriculture is no longer reliable, i.e. the rainy seasons no longer occur with the usual regularity. These seasons become more or less variable, with (excessively) long breaks followed by (excessively) heavy downpours, and sometimes even altogether fail to appear. This is all the more dangerous where the dependence of poor people in rural areas on agriculture and the use of natural resources is very high. According to Jones and Hermias (2015), climate change has the potential to massively undermine poverty reduction. The negative trends may reverse positive developments in a number of countries. Low-income countries also often lack the capacity, resources and technology to invest in protective infrastructure, social protection and regeneration strategies.

As early as 1975, Christopher Chase-Dunn's comparative study clearly demonstrated that economically peripheral countries find it extremely difficult to build up economic development which is uniform among regions and which benefits their own country. This statement applies all the more today with increasing globalization. Here globalization is also understood as a confirmation, consolidation and expansion of the traditional North-South power imbalance (on this cf. Kappel 2017). *These international power imbalances reproduce inequalities and poverty.*

It is precisely when corrupt elites ally themselves with multinational investors that inequalities are reinforced, rather than balanced development in the country being the aim. Ugandan politician and Oxfam Executive Director Winnie Byanyima lamented at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2016 that developing countries were losing around €100

billion a year to tax evasion and tax avoidance by corporations. She called for a “global approach”, as otherwise the gap between rich and poor would widen.¹⁸

Unfair trade agreements are also among the reasons why the economies of many countries are performing worse than they could. Added to this are the continuing export subsidies of many OECD countries, which on balance are likely to exceed the transfers from DC funds. The EPA free trade agreements between the European Union and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries, for example, could lead to an estimated €1,871 billion in lost customs revenues in Africa alone by 2035¹⁹.

Another momentous manifestation of global inequalities and the power imbalance between states is the *neglect of the so-called diseases of poverty* by pharmaceutical research and industry. Local research and production of urgently needed affordable medicines in the Global South is sometimes hindered or even prevented by patent protection regulations that were pushed through by the industrialized countries in the interests of their pharmaceutical companies during World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations (cf. Heilinger / Pogge 2015). Far fewer funds are available for effective and comprehensive combating of “diseases of the poor”, such as malaria and other tropical diseases, than for diseases of civilization and HIV/AIDS. Fighting against the latter is also important for Europe and the USA (see Pharma-Brief 02/2004).

Misconceived development policies also played their part in creating poverty (see Collins / Lappé 1980, Glennie 2008, Moyo 2010, Ziegler 2011). In her book, Moyo (2010) provides a brief outline of the various objectives and characteristics of development “aid” since its beginnings in the 1940s.²⁰ Her conclusion is that DC has made most countries dependent and has in some cases greatly increased poverty and hunger, especially through the *Structural Adjustment Programmes* (SAPs) with the “downsizing” of the civil service and the privatization of state-run institutions.

Ziegler (2011: 161) cites, among others, the example of Niger, where the forced privatization of the National Veterinary Office entailed that from then on the population living on livestock breeding had to buy the medicines necessary for their animals from international corporations at completely inflated prices. As a result, tens of thousands of families lost their livestock and fell into poverty and hunger. Another consequence of the SAP is the one-sided promotion of export crop cultivation at the expense of the cultivation of foodstuffs, in order to raise foreign currency for state budgets through exports, above all for the debt repayment of developing countries. One-sided market dependencies of farming families and state budgets are the result, not to mention declining food production (cf. Ziegler 2011). Further devastating consequences of the SAP, with its sometimes curious sweeping demands for job

¹⁸ See article by Hannes Koch in taz (*Tageszeitung* journal), 22/01/2016: Weltwirtschaftsforum in Davos, Zugang zu den Mächtigen <http://www.taz.de/!5267449/> [09/2017].

¹⁹ The EU free trade agreement EPA (Economic Partnership Agreement) with 78 ACP states was signed by the majority of the members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on 24 Jan. 2015 after 12 years of negotiations (for criticism cf. Dirk Kohnert 2015: EU-Wirtschaftsabkommen mit Westafrika. Afrikas TTIP – Kuhhandel oder Partnerschaft auf Augenhöhe? Presentation on 10.3.2015 in Stuttgart).

²⁰ Moyo (2010: 10) divides the eras of development aid (especially in Africa) as follows: 1940s beginning in Bretton Woods, 1950s Marshall Plan, 1960s industrialization, 1970s aid as a response to poverty, 1980s aid as an instrument of stabilization and structural adjustment, 1990s aid to support democracy and good governance, from 2000 onwards an obsession that development aid was the only solution to Africa's myriad problems.

cuts, even within the education systems of many developing countries, cannot be detailed here (cf. BMZ 1995).

Glennie (2008) also criticizes DC, citing numerous examples where large-scale projects have cost thousands of people their livelihoods and plunged them into poverty. He also describes the negative effects of policies imposed on African countries in return for aid. One such example is the forced opening of the market in Kenya. This has led to a flooding of the country with cheap textile products from Europe and Asia and, at the same time, to the destruction of the domestic cotton production and textile industry (2008: 39).

The financing of the construction of large dams, which until the 1990s led to the displacement of thousands of poor people in many countries (cf. World Commission on Dams 2000), will certainly have contributed to impoverishment, disease and even death in some cases (e.g. Mahaweli in Sri Lanka),²¹ even though in economic terms it may even have contributed to national poverty reduction.

A more detailed assessment of the impacts of DC is provided in Chapter 5. It shows, among other things, that even basically good poverty-oriented development concepts and strategies often cannot be implemented due to instrumental inadequacies, and can therefore only fall far short of their intentions.

Colonialism is still cited as a cause of poverty, especially in Africa. It certainly underlies some of the phenomena described above, such as the unequal development of different parts of the country. The aforementioned colonial demarcation of borders and the transport routes, which are often still oriented towards former colonial purposes (cf. Ostby et al. 2009), should be mentioned as another legacy that stands in the way of equal development of different areas. However, African intellectuals such as Axelle Kabou (1995), who worked for a number of development organizations (including UNDP), accuse both the African elites and the “white aid workers” of persisting with this “comfortable” apportionment of blame instead of looking at the problems and potentials of the present and tackling them with commitment and the will to change. Nowadays, the term “neo-colonialism” is used in connection with large-scale land grabbing. However, the “colonial masters” have changed (and now include China and Saudi Arabia) and once again poor governance is partly responsible.

4.2 Main factors perpetuating poverty

The above-mentioned causes of (extreme) poverty already display the factors that are also responsible for the perpetuation of poverty. English-language literature speaks of *persistence of poverty* or *chronic poverty* and of *poverty traps*, which lead to such perpetuation in the sense of permanent, often intergenerational poverty. Households and individuals can only free themselves sustainably from this in exceptional cases (cf. generally the writings of the Chronic Poverty Advisory Network).

²¹ The Mahaweli Project refers to the construction of several dams on the Mahaweli River in Sri Lanka, mainly in the 1970s and 1980s, which led to the resettlement of several tens of thousands of people. Many of these households were not even minimally compensated, since they owned merely traditional or informal land use rights. Many of the households which were “compensated” were resettled in malaria-infested resettlement areas with poor infrastructure. In the process village communities were torn apart and cultural traditions were not taken into consideration (cf. BMZ 1997, also McCully 1996 and WCD 2000).

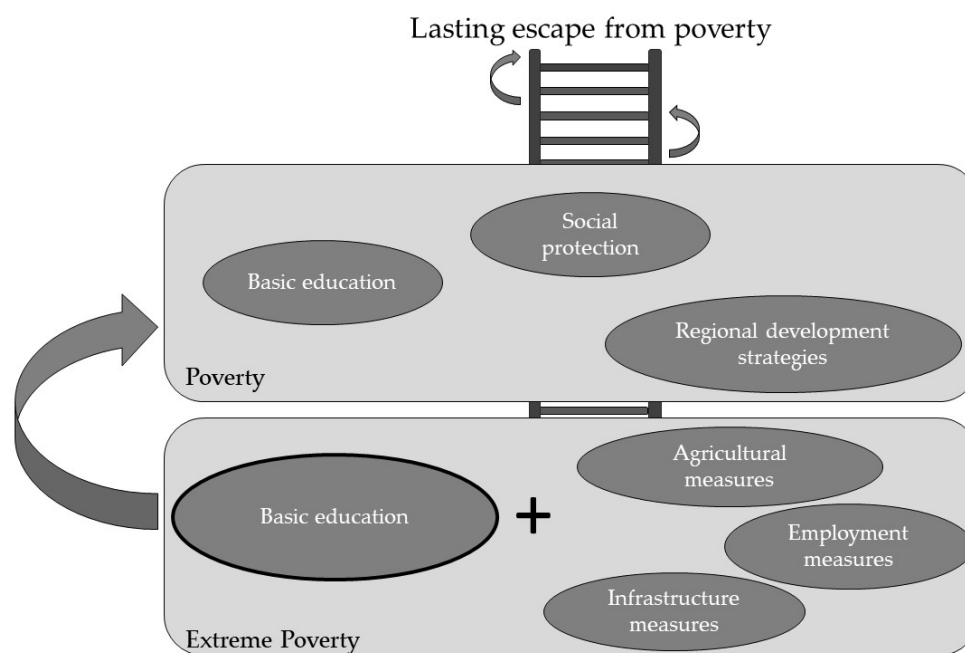
At the *individual level*, Dasgupta (2004) identifies the links between nutrition and the ability to work / susceptibility to illness, and between nutrition and learning / intelligence development of children as key factors for the perpetuation of poverty. At the *local level*, he identifies population growth coupled with degradation of natural resources as a major cause of persistent poverty.

Ahmed et al. (2007) attribute a key role in the perpetuation of poverty to the lack of education (and opportunities to obtain it). When poor households are unable to invest in their children's education, poverty perpetuates itself in the next generation. Similarly, the authors highlight the link between poor health, inadequate and unbalanced nutrition and poverty. These *poverty traps* perpetuated themselves into the next generation, in part due to a lack of productive labour in households. The hopeless situation for these people is exacerbated by the lack of access to capital, loans and thus to assets which could also be used to build up reserves. Apel et al. (2016) also blame poor access to education and capital for perpetuating poverty.

Based on studies in four African and four Asian countries, the Chronic Poverty Advisory Network (CPAN) identifies three factors that have a significant influence on the persistence of poverty or that do not prevent someone who has managed to lift himself out of extreme poverty from falling back into it. According to the authors of the 2014-2015 report (CPAN 2014a, cf. CPAN 2019), land access, education and active regional development are the key factors for lasting liberation from poverty. Conversely, the lack of educational opportunities, lack of access to or legal security in the ownership and use of land, and the absence of dynamic regional development are causes of the perpetuation of poverty (see Figure 2).

Bad governance, as discussed in Section 4.1.3, underlies a number of these factors and is thus one of the main causes of the perpetuation of poverty. This also includes land grabbing, for which national elites close to the respective governments bear considerable responsibility. Other factors cited are the lack or inadequacy of infrastructure and the negative external influences to which developing countries are exposed. In addition to Japan and China, individual EU member states, among others, are centrally involved in the plundering of fishery resources. This and the plundering of other natural resources are consequences of the power imbalance in international relations, not only in economic terms. This imbalance is very difficult to break through or circumvent. Of these factors, only the lack of infrastructure and poor fiscal management can be remedied with relative success through targeted measures within development cooperation. The other factors can be influenced only moderately or not at all within this framework. Governance, however, is one of the factors that is difficult to influence, above all because within the donor community unified action is difficult to achieve due to differing or even conflicting interests. This donor community includes China to an ever greater extent, above all through loans with few or no conditions attached.

Fig. 5: Factors that promote a sustained climb out of poverty



Source: Authors' own representation based on CPAN 2014b.

Civil wars, terrorism or violent conflicts with neighbouring countries, as well as the difficulty of dealing with the consequences even after the formal end of the conflicts, also paralyse a country or region to such an extent that its population finds it difficult to free itself from poverty. Goodhand (2003) therefore also counts conflict among the perpetuating factors of poverty.

A detailed overview of the world's current conflict regions, their causes and effects is provided by Debiel and Rinck (2015). Half of the 32 armed conflicts in 2014 were in extremely or highly fragile states in sub-Saharan Africa (e.g., Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan, Central African Republic) or in South Asia (e.g., Afghanistan, Myanmar, Pakistan)²². Projections show that by 2030, between 43 and 60 percent of the extremely poor will live in fragile, conflict-affected, and violent contexts (see World Bank 2018). As a result, the countries or regions concerned slip deeper and deeper into poverty and block their development opportunities, in some cases for decades.

4.3 Feminization of poverty

Experience from development cooperation research shows that women (and girls) are particularly affected by poverty. The origins of the debate on the "feminization of poverty" go back to US debates in the 1970s about the problem of impoverishment of single mothers and their children (cf. BRIDGE 2001). The assumption of feminized poverty is associated with gender-specific poverty risks. These are based on the gender-specific division of labour and discrimination against women in different parts of society, such as the distribution of burdens

²² See also Malley (2019) and Global Conflict Tracker (2021).

within the family (household, family and care), income distribution (gender pay gap²³), access to education and credit, and land rights (cf. Sellach 2008, Nuscheler 2012)²⁴.

Although women are the main producers and processors of staple foods in many developing countries, they are the most affected by malnutrition and undernourishment (cf. Thorn 2005). These disadvantages reflect patriarchal social structures and power relations. Various indices of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) are intended to reflect the latter. The Gender-related Development Index operationalizes gender inequalities using the indicators of life expectancy, educational attainment and income, and the Gender Empowerment Measure refers to gender inequalities in participation in the economy and politics (cf. *inter alia* UNDP 2016, 2020). Wichterich (2006: 3; authors' translation) aptly points to multidimensionality: "Women are poor in resources, education, health, employment, income, etc., because they are poor in rights, opportunities, power, social security, time, freedom from violence, etc." The feminization of poverty means that women's social, economic, and political human rights are violated disproportionately more than those of men (see Thorn 2005).

In the development context, the term "feminization of poverty" has been used as a strategic tool to draw discursive attention to women's poverty and to highlight it as being particularly negative. The term is not used consistently, and refers to different processes and assumptions: i.) women are disproportionately affected by absolute poverty (70% of the absolutely poor are women); ii.) poverty among women is more severe than among men; and iii.) there is a trend of rising female poverty, especially in female-headed households (FHH)²⁵ (see Bliss et al. 1995, BRIDGE 2001, Wichterich 2007, Munoz Boudet et al. 2018).

Initially, the discussion focused in particular on the increasing number of FHH. The focus was on their increased vulnerability²⁶ to crises such as unemployment and cuts in social spending. In response to observed negative social effects of the structural or sector adjustment programmes, the first gender-specific poverty analyses were carried out. These established the connection between macroeconomic policies and a tendency towards impoverishment among women as a result of their implementation (cf. Wichterich 2007).

²³ On average, women worldwide earn about two thirds of men's income (cf. Thorn 2005).

²⁴ The (unfortunately unpublished) gender analyses prepared by GIZ for most new projects within the framework of German technical cooperation offer an almost inexhaustible fund of evidence in this regard.

²⁵ A distinction is made here between *de jure* and *de facto* female-headed households (FHH). In *de jure* FHH, there are divorced, widowed or unmarried women. In *de facto* FHH, on the other hand, the man is absent because he is engaged in work outside his own household, but fulfils certain economic and social obligations (Dohr et al. 2015: 73).

²⁶ Vulnerability refers to certain phases of life and crises, such as pregnancy, illness, widowhood or old age. These are related to mutually reinforcing mechanisms which result in economic, social, cultural, physical and psychological weakening and thus amount to impoverishment (cf. Wichterich 2007).

Fig. 6: In many African countries, the informal sector is dominated by women, as seen here at a market in rural Mali.



Another important issue in this context is the increasing number of women working precariously in the informal sector in cities (feminization of work)²⁷. Various UN Security Council resolutions (2000, 2008, 2009) also state that women and children are often the main victims of wars (feminization of disasters) (cf. Nuscheler 2012) and must accordingly be given special consideration in conflict mitigation measures (cf. World Bank 2018a, 2018b).

Currently, there is an increasing call for a focus on gender relations in general, in order to take into account the diversity of women and to break down a widespread dualistic understanding of women either as victims of or as the main perpetrators of grievances. It also seeks to avoid simplistic assumptions that women need to be supported, e.g. through education or access to resources, but that do not take into account the increased workload of women (cf. BRIDGE 2001). In particular, the increased disposition of women to poverty also harbours the danger of essentialization and generalization, which can mean that women in rural areas or in FHH are regarded as poor across the board, although this is not empirically accurate (cf. Wichterich 2007, Rodenberg 2003).

²⁷ In Benin, for example, the proportion of informal work performed by women is 97%. In Kenya, the figure is 83% (cf. Thorn 2005).

Fig. 7: Thanks to a secure land use title, a women's group in northern Benin can invest their labour in establishing an irrigation perimeter and grow rice



Recently, considerations linking gender equity to economic development, or lack thereof, have also gained prominence. Discrimination against women in politics, society and the economy has hindered the development of national economies to a considerable extent, whereas far-reaching gender equality can contribute significantly to economic growth and thus to reducing the poverty rate, according to the widely circulated analysis, which has now even found its way into national development programmes²⁸. In the words of Balasubramanian et al: “The empirical evidence supports the view that female economic empowerment is key to end poverty and boost economic prosperity” (2019: 1). Other studies support this view²⁹, which is why DC that promotes gender equity may be the most effective strategy in the fight against mass poverty. This, however, presupposes tackling problems which are associated with the greater role of women in the world of work and the fact that they initially continue

²⁸ Here, too, reference can be made to GIZ gender analyses, according to which, especially in African countries, even national development strategies and gender action plans now explicitly emphasise that economic growth can be increased to a particular extent by a much more active role for women in national economies.

²⁹ Again, the project-related gender analyses of the GIZ represent an important source, which is why a publication would be urgently recommended, especially since current analyses are constantly being added.

to have multiple burdens in addition to gainful employment. This, in turn presupposes a gender-equitable social system with legal foundations which are also applied in practice.³⁰

4.4 COVID-19 and its consequences

As early as May 2020, the World Bank projected that, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, between 70 and 100 million additional people would fall into extreme poverty (i.e., less than US\$1.90 per capita per day of income) in the pandemic outbreak year compared to the previous year, 2019. This would result in an increase in the poverty rate of between 0.3% and 0.7%. These estimates were revised several times, and later in the year ranged from 88 to 114 million people. Projections for 2021 put the total number of people who would slip below the absolute poverty line as a result of the pandemic at around 150 million³¹.

However, compared to data from other actors, especially NGOs, the World Bank estimates are still low. Much higher figures are cited, for example, in an April 2020 study by the international NGO Oxfam. Taking into account all primary and secondary impacts, between 434 and 612 million additional people worldwide could fall below the poverty line due to the pandemic (Oxfam 2020).

Poor populations are affected by the COVID-19 pandemic to different degrees and due to different aspects. For poorer, mainly subsistence-oriented smallholder households, the situation has not changed significantly as a result of COVID-19. Those poor farmers who market part of their surpluses or even produce more for the market are currently often sinking deeper into poverty. The reason is that out of fear of infection they themselves avoid the markets with their crowds of people, and their customers also no longer go to the market as often as before. In addition, sales through middlemen come to a standstill, so that the producers also cannot profit from the rising prices for food in the cities.

The pandemic particularly affects the already poor (marginal) urban population, which does not have agricultural production for self-sufficiency and has to buy its food on the market (cf. Bliss 2021).

Equally hard hit are households that rely on remittances from family members living abroad to support themselves. The example of Tajikistan can be used to illustrate the effects: Here, the decline in foreign remittances was 15% in June 2020, and a 28% decline in remittances was already recorded in October 2020 (see World Bank 2020). The consequences are as devastating for the 800,000 to 1.2 million migrant workers (almost always men) affected by dismissals, mostly living in Russia, as they are for their families. They themselves live in a foreign country without income and usually do not even have the means to get home, while their wives and children in Tajikistan, who often received only meagre remittances before, are now left without any support and depend on alms from the man's relatives, who are almost always also poor.

In response to the rising poverty figures, numerous DC organizations reorganized their programs, mobilized funds at short notice for rapid assistance in the COVID-19 pandemic,

³⁰ For example, the fact that barely 15% of all women in Jordan are officially employed is due to the fact that, although maternity leave, childcare, flexible working hours, etc. are legally provided for in labour law, they are hardly accepted in practice and therefore receive little consideration (see USAID 2020, Phenix Center 2017).

³¹ See World Bank Press Report, October 7, 2020 ("COVID-19 to Add as Many as 150 Million Extreme Poor by 2021").

and added emergency measures to their ongoing programs. Within the framework of such emergency measures, the World Bank alone put together the largest aid package in the history of development cooperation to date, with a total of US\$ 160 billion in grants and further financial support in the form of cheap loans. The duration of the programme was initially limited to 15 months (World Bank 2020a). The German government also made about one billion euros available from mid-2020 onwards, in addition to the “normal” DC funds (BMZ 2020).

Most of the funds made available to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects are channelled into measures such as the provision of medicines and medical equipment, direct cash transfers for particularly vulnerable households, and the securing of basic supplies (including food aid) for particularly affected population groups. Budget support, which has long fallen into disrepute, is also being used again (BMZ 2020, World Bank 2020 and 2020a). It is precisely the provision for particularly vulnerable and poor population groups through unconditional cash transfers that is also propagated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as a possible solution for a transitional period.

In this context, it is important for successful long-term poverty reduction to quickly establish sustainable social security systems as a contribution to livelihood security in order to move away from emergency and transitional aid. Here it makes sense to develop a broad-based health and old-age insurance scheme that also includes the informal sector, as well as risk insurance against unemployment.

5. Poverty reduction in development practice: A mixed record

5.1 Development cooperation is moving in the right direction

As explained earlier in Section 4.2, one of the factors that leads to the perpetuation of poverty is bad governance. This is at least true to a considerable extent for Africa³² and some particularly poor countries in Asia (e.g. Tajikistan or Laos) and Latin America (Haiti, Colombia, etc.). The perpetuation of poverty is not, or not primarily, the result of a lack of resources. This is true even for most of the poorest countries in the world. Some of the most resource-rich countries are known to be among the poor states, and it is here that bad governance is particularly evident (cf. Uhlmann 2015).

International development cooperation can only exceptionally be held responsible for the perpetuation of poverty, even if there are individual examples³³. In the 1990s, for example, French DC severely impaired the supply of medicines to the population of Mali because, under pressure from France, the good supply of sufficiently available generic drugs had to be cut off and French branded products, which were unaffordable for most people, had to be supplied instead³⁴. Large irrigation perimeters, e.g. in Pakistan, which in the end left behind salinated soils, have destroyed hopes and devastated landscapes rather than bringing about new poverty, since the people resettled here often had hardly anything before. Devastation was also promoted, for example, by the development cooperation of the European Union (EU), when in the 1970s and 1980s it cleared large areas of primary bushland in Darfur, Sudan, using large-scale machinery and ploughed them into agro-industrial areas – and produced deserts in the process³⁵. Hence DC certainly has done damage.

Today, in view of the considerable change in policy (e.g. environmental impact assessment, social *ex-ante* impact analyses / social safeguards, greater transparency and partial monitoring of planning by the public / civil society), obviously harmful DC projects have become the

³² Well presented by Asfa-Wossen Assefate with respect to Africa (2016) and by Volker Seitz (2009), other important sources presented in Hechler (2003). The literature on this topic is almost inexhaustible, but most of the sources that deal more concretely with the actual extent of bad governance and cite case studies are internal studies which are generally not publicly available (except for documents posted by Wikileaks, cf. <https://wikileaks.org/>). On the concept of good governance: cf. BMZ (2002), Siegmar Schmidt (2013). One important measure here is Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI). This can also be compared with the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI), which measures transformation performance for numerous countries in relation to the goal of pluralist democracy and a social market economy. The latter index is therefore considered an important indicator of the quality of governance.

³³ Sophal Ear (2012) is very specific on this: In the volume "Aid Dependence in Cambodia", at least for the years around 2005, DC is assigned a share of responsibility for the rise in maternal mortality (!) and, less controversially, for the rise in corruption. In Deaton (2017), however, poor governance is generally associated with DC, even when the aid is not siphoned off by those in power and actually reaches the poor in the form of health infrastructure, for example. In this case, it relieves the state budget, which can then be misused for other purposes.

³⁴ Unpublished evaluation commissioned by BMZ on the impact of the 1994 devaluation of the FCFA (Franc of the West African Currency Area).

³⁵ Impacts of past and ongoing development projects identified in GIZ's 1988 potential analysis in Sudan's Darfur Province.

exception rather than the rule. The (Western) fundamental criticism of DC as expressed by Bandulet, Erler, Keweloh or Pater has therefore also subsided³⁶ or is concentrated on individual areas such as large-scale interventions in nature and the habitats of indigenous population groups. However, DC is still not as effective as planned in numerous cases. Its core problem is that it often operates far below its actual capabilities. This does not just mean their occasional role as losers in disputes with the economic or foreign affairs departments of donor countries. Nor does it refer to the fact that there are even more obvious contradictions between DC goals and the agricultural or foreign economic policy of the EU or its individual states.

Rather, development cooperation sells itself short and thus reduces both effectiveness and efficiency because – despite more than 30 years of discussion – it is still often not adapted to the socio-economic conditions in the partner countries at the project and programme level or even when policies and strategies are being formulated. Moreover, in interaction with target groups of the cooperation it still too often ignores socio-cultural conditions. These include power structures and legitimacy (who speaks for the people?), priorities (what do people understand by development and what are their wishes for DC?) or heterogeneities (how different are the social structures? How may the interests of women and men differ?)³⁷.

In addition, probably also under pressure from its own foreign and economic ministries in the donor countries, DC is conflict-averse. It does not sufficiently address the conditions in the partner countries that are hostile to development or, after formal protests (such as the sometimes annually repeated formulas on corruption in the minutes of government negotiations), which are usually politely presented, it moves on to the implementation-oriented agenda. German DC and, temporarily, the World Bank terminated their cooperation in 2011 in the case of the particularly corrupt and anti-development government of Chad. However, the World Bank soon returned without the governance in the country having improved in the slightest. Today Germany is also represented in the Sahel country through regional projects, mostly technical cooperation (TC) projects, which include Chad, almost as extensively as before during the bilateral cooperation phase.

Because too little attention is paid to (and changes made to) the framework conditions, i.e. the problems resulting from poor governance, the impact of many DC measures is low. For example, schools or health centres are built, but the state hardly assigns any staff to them and does not provide for their operation or maintenance. Roads are built, but again the state does not provide funds for their maintenance.

In the following, the achievements are to be contrasted with the obstacles to development policy instruments that are frequently observed in practice, but are actually unnecessary. In this way, in the final chapter (Chapter 6), conclusions are to be derived, as well as demands for more poverty-oriented development cooperation. The focus is on German governmental bilateral DC, but contributions and procedures of international organizations are also included.

³⁶ Cf. Bandulet (1978), Erler (1985), Keweloh (1997), Pater / Striepke (1986); on the beginnings of DC for steel mill construction in Rourkela, India, cf. Sperling (1965). Also highlighted in Seitz (2009).

³⁷ On this, for comprehensive discussion from around 1985, cf. *inter alia* BMZ 1990 and 1999, Bliss 1986, Bliss et al. 1997, Schönhuth 1987, Simson 1986 and 1993, Trost 2012: esp. 47ff. Most recently, conclusions and recommendations on the consideration of socio-cultural aspects in the practice of DC were also presented in the context of the INEF-BMZ research project on extreme poverty, vulnerability and food insecurity (cf. Bliss 2020a).

When analysing the successes and failures of development cooperation, it is essential to bear in mind that – with the exception of a few countries such as Niger, Mali or Burkina Faso – it only provides a small proportion of the budgetary resources of the respective country and can therefore only activate processes, but not implement them itself³⁸. In addition, the DC funds are vanishingly small in comparison to the capital flows released by trade and also to the armaments expenditures of the states concerned or even the guest worker remittances (Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan or Lesotho are examples). In 2019, for example, with approximately \$152.8 billion in Official Development Assistance (ODA) funding globally, \$1,917 billion – the highest figure since 1988 – was spent worldwide on the military and on defence equipment during the same period (see SIPRI 2020). In 2018, Sub-Saharan Africa accounted for \$18.4 billion (see SIPRI 2019) out of \$50.3 billion ODA (see World Bank 2021) in the same year. The EPA free trade agreements between the EU and African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries are also expected to result in an estimated €1,871 billion in lost African customs revenues by 2035, for example, which would be 44% higher than the EU's aid commitments.

5.2 Analysis of the priority areas of development cooperation³⁹

German and international development cooperation has achieved a great deal in the areas of drinking water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), in education cooperation (especially in the development of primary school systems) and certainly in some sub-sectors of the health sector. As an example of the latter, mass immunization even in the poorest countries can be cited, which, together with the provision of drinking water, has contributed to a significant reduction in child mortality worldwide and thus to the achievement of the corresponding MDGs in a number of countries (see Deaton 2017).

In the *health sector*, what has been less successful so far is the provision of comprehensive basic health care. In countries such as Chad, Niger or Mali, health centres exist in many places more on paper than actually being operational, i.e. equipped with staff, devices and medicines and providing the rural population with care of an acceptable quality. In the countries mentioned, but also, for example, in Tajikistan in Central Asia, in India or in other Asian countries, despite the theoretical freedom of basic health care, “entrance” fees are almost always charged, which the extremely poor are usually unable to afford. International development cooperation has not yet taken sufficient account of this access barrier everywhere, with the result that extremely poor people continue to be excluded in many places from systems that are at least partially financed by development cooperation.

Social security issues were centrally addressed in the INEF survey from 2015 to 2020. This showed that even poorer countries do not fare worse than some of the “emerging” states. By explicitly promoting social security systems, Rwanda, for example, currently offers comprehensive health services for all citizens. Cambodia, the governance of which is rightly criticized in many respects⁴⁰, has also introduced a useful health service at all levels for

³⁸ ODA worldwide (just DAC member states) \$131.6 billion (2015), \$142.6 billion (2016), \$152.8 billion (2019), \$161.2 billion (2020) (see OECD 2016, 2017, 2020, 2021), however these figures are likely to be grossly inflated, as many donor countries subsume under ODA substantial sums that at best indirectly benefit developing countries.

³⁹ Unless otherwise stated, the assessments in this section are based on the analysis of evaluation reports (some of which have not been published), and also on the rapporteurs' many years of project experience.

⁴⁰ In addition to internal donor studies, Human Rights Watch (2015) also publicly addressed this issue in its article on the corruptive system of Prime Minister Hun Sen. Also addressed by Karbaum (2016).

households classified as poor in the form of the Health Equity Fund (HEF). The HEF, which provides free basic health care to around three million people classified as poor in Cambodia and also finances more intensive medical services if required, is also a good exception beyond this: It was even possible to reduce donor contributions (including those from German financial cooperation (FC)), since the state showed considerable ownership of the project and increased its own contributions (cf. World Bank 2016a, 2016b, Bliss 2018). Both positive examples are supported by donor funds, as is the identification system for the poor (ID Poor) in Cambodia⁴¹. Brazil should not go unmentioned in this context, as here the first cash transfers were started on a trial basis as early as 1995 and later the nationwide programme “Bolsa Familia” became a model for the entire developing world in matters of social security (cf. Tepperman 2016).

The World Bank and, for example, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) have strongly reoriented their portfolios towards social protection in the last decade and are currently involved in programmes involving conditional cash transfers for extremely poor households. The Philippines and Pakistan, for example, have been and continue to be supported by the ADB (supplemented for some years now in part by funds from the World Bank) with packages of around USD 400 million each, which in both countries mobilize about ten times this amount in transfer payments from the state budget⁴². Other international organizations and bilateral donors, such as the British Department for International Development (DFID), are also increasingly dedicated to social protection programmes (see Heinz 2017).

German DC has so far been rather hesitant in using the instruments. It has done so for example together with other donors in the form of cash transfers to extremely poor households in Malawi (cf. University of North Carolina 2015). Financial Cooperation also participates in a number of measures in the health sector, e.g. in the form of coupons or health vouchers. Most of the contributions to social security are made in the technical cooperation portfolio, where support is provided primarily for the development of national health or pension insurance systems. However, the issue has increasingly become the subject of conceptual considerations in both TC and FC in recent years. This has not led to more comprehensive participation in transfer programmes, even though the Bundestag’s Committee on Economic Cooperation and Development has explicitly called for greater German involvement in direct transfer services (Committee resolution of 23 March 2017).

The effects of cash transfers granted within the framework of social security systems have not yet been clearly researched. A study by the German Development Institute (DIE) (Burchi et al. 2016) assumes predominantly positive effects with regard to improved food security, among other things. However, a number of points still need to be taken into account, such as the targeting of aid recipients, the type of disbursement, the level of payments or the role of

⁴¹ See the INEF research project report on ID Poor in Cambodia by Rosa Hennecke and Frank Bliss (2018b).

⁴² In the Philippines, the Social Protection Support Project (see ADB 2017a); in Pakistan, the Benhazir Income Support Programme (see ADB 2017b). Both measures are currently (in 2021) in a follow-up phase with a further increase in funding.

the state in implementing the programmes⁴³. Examples from Kenya and Ethiopia also show that flexible transfer systems can at least partially alleviate hunger crises⁴⁴.

In any case, however, transfer payments alone are not sufficient to guarantee food security. This is evident in the examples of Cambodia and Tajikistan, where poverty rates are moving downwards significantly, but nutrition-related health data are moving much more slowly in a positive direction.

In the *education sector* FC has made a massive contribution to the rehabilitation of schools and the construction of new schools, and in some countries such as Malawi or Zambia it has probably even created the conditions for the increased school enrolment rates of boys and especially girls. But as with primary health care, there are two core problems. One is the poor quality of school education, mainly in African countries, but also in countries such as Tajikistan, Laos, Cambodia or in the poor areas with indigenous populations in India. The other is the “voluntary” school fees necessary to keep the schools running. Even the poorest parents have to pay these so that the teachers, in view of their often inadequate pay, do not stay away from lessons or change their profession altogether when the opportunity arises, or so that the school buildings do not collapse due to poor maintenance.

⁴³ See also the project's policy paper on social protection systems: Bliss 2020b.

⁴⁴ In Kenya, this is the Hunger Safety Net Programme (HSNP), which the AVE project team researched itself in Turkana County in 2017 (Gaesing / Mahla 2018), and in Ethiopia on the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) (Bliss 2019).

Fig. 8: More than 100 children in one class. School buildings are of little use if teachers are barely available



Investments by German bilateral DC, but also German contributions from the international development banks and the EU in the **WASH sector**, together with other donor funds and many countries' own measures, have undoubtedly led to a strong increase in the supply of hygienically safe drinking water over the last three decades. Between 1990 and 2015, a remarkable 2.6 billion people gained access to improved drinking water sources for the first time. This has reportedly increased the number of people supplied worldwide from 76% to 91%.

Nevertheless: In 2017, an estimated 785 million people worldwide still did not have access to even halfway acceptable water supplies (see UNICEF 2019a). Further estimates suggest that the number of people whose right to water is not fulfilled could be as high as 2.2 billion (see UNICEF 2019b). This is due to the fact that in the water sector a distinction must be made between formally correct water supply (the 91% coverage rate cited) and the actual quality of the sources⁴⁵. The situation is even worse for sanitation services (a general lack of sanitation and latrine availability for some 4.2 billion people), especially in rural areas. Worldwide the situation is the worst for sustainable waste management (see UNICEF 2019b).

⁴⁵ Thus, many water sources are rated as "improved", and users are thus statistically listed as having been supplied with water, even though the water is often contaminated with coliform bacteria, among other things. This is the case especially with draw wells that are fixed but open (experience of the authors from various projects in Sahel Africa, e.g. Bliss 2011, 2021).

Fig. 9: In rural areas, people often have to travel long distances to get clean water for their households. Moreover, water pumps are not available everywhere, as here in a village in Mali.



There is a fundamental contradiction between the clearly increasing supply of drinking water and the failure to reach extremely poor people. This contradiction results from the often unsolved balancing act between the need to sustain the operation of the water supply systems (which presupposes that costs will be recovered through user charges), and the lack of funds on the part of the poor to be able to pay these charges. In many places, for example, considerable parts of the population are still excluded from using donor-financed water sources, simply because they do not have the funds to pay the fees.⁴⁶ This situation, which is also unacceptable from a human rights perspective, is particularly often due to the fact that the socio-economic conditions (willingness and ability to pay) have not always been sufficiently investigated during project planning. In addition, alternative financing systems are often not part of the supply concepts, but are expected to come from third parties, such as

⁴⁶ A UNICEF evaluation in Niger in 2000-2001 revealed that up to 50% and more of the population designated as the target group were unable to pay the user fees and thus had no access to clean drinking water - with all the negative consequences thereof for their health. A GTZ evaluation on the sanitation sector (in this case in Vietnam) revealed that the project did not co-finance the house connections (cf. GTZ 2009), which could have led to poor households foregoing participation in regulated waste water disposal.

through social assistance from the state or the municipality. These exist at best in the form of token gestures.⁴⁷

In the *transport sector*, the *energy sector* and, in particular, the *environmental sector* and *agriculture*, countless examples can be cited in which DC projects generally make good contributions but the results are contradictory. For instance, through the construction of the road, a region that has hardly been developed so far can be made accessible to transport vehicles for the first time, giving the people living there the chance to access a market. However, there is regularly the problem of road maintenance, which governments, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, rarely provide effectively. Alternatively, they pass on the responsibility for maintenance to the local communities, which in turn are massively overburdened with it. The energy sector, particularly including rural electricity supply, makes enormous contributions to the development of connected regions as well as to the improvement of living conditions in rural areas, which leads to reduced interest in migration. However, house connections for the poor are often not financed, which means that they remain excluded, as in the case of drinking water supply – and this is despite the fact that the lines or pipes are often already in front of the huts thanks to DC funds⁴⁸.

This is where the above-mentioned insufficient consideration of socio-economic and socio-cultural conditions comes into play, in addition to the governance problem that is too often suppressed in project planning. What is equally important is the almost always negligible degree of population participation in development policy decisions. This applies both at the project and programme level (i.e. the participation of representatives of the population) and at the national level. Even legitimate representatives of civil society are rarely given a say, and not even the national parliaments are involved⁴⁹.

It is true that the demand for population participation in development policy planning is hardly absent today from any strategy paper of the donor community or from any national development concept. Prior to the preparation of the first BMZ participation concept (published in 1999), it was clearly established that during the identification phase of development cooperation measures, the target group was involved in only 10% of cases⁵⁰. The cross-sectional evaluation of poverty impacts of German development cooperation by the BMZ in 2004 shows that the involvement of poor target groups in the planning process was still little practised in the early 2000s (cf. BMZ 2004).

⁴⁷ The situation is similar for power supply, which is extremely important in the continental climate of Central Asia, e.g. for heating. Here, the major donors in the sector assume that subsidies from national aid programmes for poor households are also disbursed, which is not the case in Tajikistan, for example (see footnote 40).

⁴⁸ Rarely addressed, but explicitly mentioned in the World Bank and the African Development Bank (AfDB) documentation on the Rusumo project in East Africa (see Fichtner 2013 and World Bank 2013). For Central Asia, the CAREC Power Sector Regional Master Plan 2011-2012 at least hints that subsidies for electricity bills, which are common here, do not reach the poor, who are the explicit target group of these measures, for example in Tajikistan (see Fichtner / ADB 2012).

⁴⁹ Cf. Bliss / Neumann 2008, Neumann 2012, Bliss / Heinz 2009, Eberlei 2003, Bliss 2021.

⁵⁰ Report by R. Forster in the context of an expert discussion on the status of implementation of the participation concept in German development cooperation (BMZ 1996), although at that time participation was at best understood as consultation and by no means as involvement or even co-determination (cf. BMZ 1999).

A comprehensive study by the DIE on sanitation in 2004 also concluded that the ongoing programmes at that time were far from meeting the BMZ's specified conceptual standards for poverty reduction and the participation of the population in development projects (cf. Bliss 2004, Van de Sand 2009). This has not improved since then; on the contrary, the population remains involved to a relatively small extent in planning and implementation processes (and even more so in evaluations), and the poor in particular remain almost completely "invisible" (see Bliss / Heinz 2009, also Bliss / Heinz 2010, Bliss / Neumann 2014, Van de Sand 2009)⁵¹. The conclusion of INEF research from 2015 to 2020 is also rather sobering in this respect (cf. Bliss 2020a).

Agriculture and the development of rural areas are once again playing an important role within German DC today. There was a boom in the 1970s and 1980s, when development cooperation was at times almost equated with agricultural promotion and the tropical agronomist was the development expert *par excellence*. After this, the priority area was steadily reduced in terms of both financial volume and the number of measures, and partly replaced by resource management and land use planning. By the year 2000 it was no more than a sideshow within government development cooperation.

Fig. 10: The Bou Heurtma dam, feeding an irrigation perimeter of almost 20,000 hectares (the picture shows the main water pipeline).



However, the *male bias* in the field of agricultural promotion also played a role in perpetuating or feminizing poverty, because the almost exclusively male development experts did not take into account the enormously important role – at least in sub-Saharan Africa – of women as agricultural producers. They therefore did not include and promote them accordingly, thus marginalizing them even further (cf. *inter alia* Bliss et al. 1994, Boserup 1965, Elson 1990).

⁵¹ This was also the finding of two interviews with former high-ranking BMZ staff by the INEF research team in 2016.

A number of major projects from Pakistan to Tunisia have manifestly failed because neither ecological nor social considerations were taken into account (see Box 2). While large irrigation areas in particular have had to face criticism, there have been considerable successes in the field of small-scale irrigation. The above-mentioned BMZ evaluation (2004) of the poverty impacts of German development cooperation (TC and FC) – which have not been carried out again in this form since then – awarded the highest marks to two small-scale irrigation projects in Latin America. With the approach of including all households of the participating municipalities, the principle of “leaving no one behind” was already practised in isolated cases, long before the SDGs were adopted (cf. KfW 2017b).

Box 2: The Bou Heurtma irrigation perimeter, Tunisia

From about 1975 to 1988, an area of around 18,000 hectares of former cereal rain-fed land in the Jendouba region of Tunisia was converted into an irrigation perimeter with German FC and TC funds. By means of a newly constructed dam (see Fig. 10), the water from a small river was dammed and channelled to five or ten hectare field units as part of a complex pipe system. Here, the constant availability of water made it possible to produce a number of agricultural products (e.g. potatoes) that were previously not sufficiently available in the country, without any risk of failure.

An evaluation by the BMZ in 1987 showed that the project was definitely on the right track, both in economic and operational terms. However, the project had a considerable social imbalance, as it had practically no impact on poverty. The mistake had been to trust an agreed upon *réforme agraire*, which was miss-translated into the German word “Agrarreform”, meaning redistribution of land ownership. In the Tunisian example, however, the term only meant the pooling of land to obtain technical irrigation units of five or ten hectares, but not any redistribution of land and certainly not any favouring of poor households.

The evaluation showed that the value of the land had increased by a factor of 17 compared with the previous rain fed agriculture. However, the totally flat land chosen for the irrigation perimeter belonged predominantly to large landowners, while the poorer farmers had to continue working on the hilly land in the surrounding countryside that was not included in the perimeter. Several owner units of between 500 and 800 hectares, in one case even of 1,200 hectares, were thus turned into a gold mine for their already rich owners thanks to German taxpayers' money (cf. BMZ 1987).

In 2014, rural development experts took stock of 50 years of rural regional development at a GIZ (Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit) conference, also highlighting future goals, priorities and paths (GIZ 2014). In particular, there is now more emphasis on the linkages between rural and urban areas, also with regard to multilocality and migration (cf. Schmidt-Kallert in GIZ 2014). Rural regional development has changed its face significantly in terms of its objectives, priorities and approaches and has become a cross-regional and cross-sectoral approach to promoting rural development. Thus, rural regional development needs to be integrated into a multi-level intervention approach, rather than referring to one district, one region or the national level at a time. Planning and management at the different levels and their interlinking take place in a “multi-actor scenario” (Rauch in GIZ 2014: 15-19).

Mercandalli and Losch (2017: 15) note that the boundaries between “urban” and “rural” in sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere in the world are becoming increasingly blurred as a result of integrated food systems and the increasing interconnectedness of urban and rural

settlement areas, lifestyles, and labour and migration relations. This requires an integrated approach, as Matthaei (2018) also describes for the so-called “Rurban Concept” in India. This refers to planning that has an entire region as its basis and includes both urban and rural areas in equal measure. Cooperation between different actors and planning levels is sought, but this is not easy to implement in the often hierarchically and sectorally strictly structured authorities.

Fig. 11: Smallholder farmers receive plots of land for cultivation in this large-scale irrigation project of the Office du Niger in Mali



The effects of the BMZ’s special initiative “ONE WORLD – No Hunger” can be seen today, after over six years of intensified interventions in the agricultural sector, in the form of a number of good practices, some of which the INEF research team was able to study and confirm in the field. It is thus certain that agricultural development and food security have regained an important status and that German public development cooperation has caught up with the international mainstream⁵².

In the overview of DC priority areas, a brief look can be taken at the *financial sector*, especially *microfinance projects*, which for many outsiders leads to unexpected results. To this day, microcredits are seen as being particularly successful with (extremely) poor households, and are propagated as a means of poverty reduction. Numerous evaluations over the last ten years have focused on the impact of small loans and microcredits on the poor. As

⁵² This echoed the very clear conclusion reached in a 2011 OECD report based on four countries: “[...] the analysis suggests that the greater share of poverty reduction achieved in the study countries was due to growth in agricultural GDP/worker” (OECD 2011: 48).

early as 2006, an evaluation of UNDP and World Bank programmes (*Consulting Group to Assist the Poor*, CGAP) found a disappointing result, with less than a quarter of all projects examined showing positive results (cf. CGAP 2006).

In another serial evaluation in 2010, the *Evaluation Cooperation Group* (ECG) also “surprisingly” found that despite the huge expansion of the sector, there was hardly any evidence of poverty impacts (cf. ECG 2010). Since then, numerous other series or sector evaluations have achieved similar results. Recent NGO reports have been particularly critical of the links between irresponsible lending, the inability of poor households to repay, and the resulting threat of loss of land registered as collateral to the banks⁵³.

The problem with small loans / microcredits is that often only existing loans of the poor borrowers with money lenders are redeemed by the DC-supported financial service providers, without the funds being used for investments, e.g. in agriculture or handicrafts. A second problem is the structure of many microcredit funds, which donors disburse to their partner organizations in USD but to poor borrowers in national currency. With national inflation rates often high relative to the dollar, interest rates are correspondingly high. In Tajikistan, for example, these currently amount to between 25 and over 40% p.a.. Elsewhere, such as in the south-east African country of Zambia, they are even higher, at up to 70% p.a., so that at best these loans are beneficial to those traders / micro traders who can turn over their goods quickly and repay the money they have borrowed just as quickly. To be able to deal with such high interest rates and even make a profit is only possible for modern large agricultural enterprises, which, however, also work with a completely different credit volume.

Programmes based on savings approaches are generally much more successful (cf. Bédard 1997 and interviews by the research team). Individual evaluations of German DC showed more than 20 years ago that considerable impacts can be achieved with medium-sized, still “small” loans of between 1,000 and 5,000 USD or EUR – not for the very poorest, but with explicit poverty impacts. In the Philippines and Cambodia, for example, additional jobs were almost always created by the borrowers⁵⁴. The problem is that in many countries such loans are hardly available or are subject to the same problems as small loans / microcredits: they do not permit investment in durable (even simple) agricultural equipment, for example, because the interest charges are too high⁵⁵.

⁵³ According to the Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO: 2019). See also, however, Bauchet et al. (2011), who could not confirm that microcredits were generally harmful, but who also could not find any notable effects of this type of credit; Crépon et al. (2011), who could demonstrate little to no effects on consumption, health, education, etc., in 81 villages in rural Morocco; Beck (2015), whose conclusion of a “critical literature review” is that the sources of the last 10 years show “moderate but not transformative effects of microcredit”, whereas micro-savings are considerably more promising. Banerjee et al. (2015a) did not find a significant increase in household income or consumption expenditure through microcredits in any of six project examples examined. Klas / Mader (2014) are also very critical of microcredits.

⁵⁴ Cf. BMZ evaluation 1997 “Integration of South-NGO into the Bilateral Cooperation”, including a very successful small loan programme in the Philippines, and impact review on the effects of lending by the ACLEDA Bank, KfW 2001. Neither study has been published.

⁵⁵ For example, a 2016 study of employment promotion opportunities in Benin by co-author Frank Bliss found that there were only two DC projects in the West African country that explicitly provided loans in this segment - exactly 90 loans nationwide in the months between April 2015 and April 2016. A KfW-supported loan fund in a comparable financing segment in Benin to promote agricultural development was still being set up in 2016, but is now (early 2021) expected to be well received.

Fig. 12: The processing of soy into tofu in a small business in Benin creates jobs, especially for poorer women from the neighbourhood



One area that could have significant positive poverty impacts is the promotion of *good governance*, especially *decentralization*, through DC (see BMZ 2008, 2009, Busan 2011, Olum 2014, BMZ 2014). More and more countries, also under pressure from the donor community, are shifting important services for the population to the towns and rural communities. In Mali, where in 1991 the municipalities were given almost all the tasks that had previously been the responsibility of the *départements* without having built up even minimal personnel capacity beforehand, German DC made a considerable contribution. In several provinces mayors and senior staff of the municipal administrations were trained in general financial management, land use planning (*de facto* the entire area of land use and urban land use planning) as well as the maintenance and upkeep of the infrastructure transferred to the municipalities, in some cases with great success. In Ghana, too, German development cooperation achieved great success in supporting decentralization, e.g. by training district parliaments and advising on fiscal decentralization. The role of local experts trained in Germany, especially in the field of spatial planning, should not be underestimated here⁵⁶. The problem for DC in supporting good governance, however, is that it can almost only have a positive impact where the quality of governance is already above average (as in Ghana and, at least for a time, in Mali).

Nevertheless, the direct poverty effects of these contributions must be assessed as relatively low on balance. This is due to a basic problem of decentralization in African states,

⁵⁶ An impact study currently (2021) being carried out by Susanne Frank, Karin Gaesing and Annika Guhl shows that the Ghanaian graduates of the SPRING Master's degree programme at the Faculty of Spatial Planning at TU Dortmund University have achieved major impacts in their home country in terms of decentralization and poverty reduction. Since 1984 this program has been run jointly with, among others, the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Kumasi, Ghana. On decentralization in Ghana, see also Dick et al. (2016).

the refusal of most central governments to **decentralize fiscally**: Hence numerous tasks are imposed on the municipalities, which considerably relieve the budget of the central state, but the money for them is retained in the national budget. At best, the municipalities are given the idea of generating “their own revenues” (cf. Bliss 2021). Unfortunately, this was also supported by German DC for a long time, for example by recommending to the mayors the introduction of market fees, fees for freight yards (*gares routières*) etc. in order to generate the income for the necessary local expenditure themselves⁵⁷. This in turn hit the poor particularly hard (and continues to do so), as market women, for example, had to pay fees of 100, 250 or even 500 FCFA from their marginal daily profits of often at most 1,000 FCFA (one and a half euros) in order to be allowed to enter the DC-financed market to sell their goods.

The lack of fiscal decentralization has an even greater negative effect on the population: Due to a lack of available funds, the maintenance of schools, health centres, drinking water sources or roads is carried out even worse than before under the direction of the branch offices of central governments which have not carried out any decentralization of competencies. In this context, agricultural advisory services were also discontinued particularly frequently, which may not have hit the very poorest (who were never reached by them), but did hit the mass of small producers hard, some of whom had previously been quite market-oriented⁵⁸. In some countries, the gap that has arisen has since been recognized and new advisory systems have been established, at least in a rudimentary form. One example in Benin in West Africa in 2018, which has since been providing decentralized advisory services to so-called *filières* (value chains such as for rice, for shea butter / *Butyrospermum parkii*, cashew nuts, soybeans and for poultry farming).

Fiscal decentralization is lacking or only poorly implemented in many countries. Up to today it is still not a core topic of policy analysis and, accordingly, of policy dialogue with the countries concerned. This is despite the fact that hardly any other reform is as important for sustainable poverty reduction by national governments. A 2002 DIE article, for example, Uwe Otzen lists the improvement of local revenues first among the four pillars of fiscal decentralization. However, he does not call for the municipalities to have a primary share of tax revenue. This is the case in Germany, for example, with the municipal shares of income tax and value-added tax as well as the purely municipal property and trade tax. Even in the otherwise very comprehensive literature on German DC decentralization promotion, references to this core problem are rare – for instance, it is also not included in the BMZ's 2008 conceptual contribution on decentralization. In a European Commission policy paper (European Commission 2007: 17) similarly speaks of *delegation of funds*, but not of statutory tax shares as an entitlement of municipalities.

Even the turnover tax increasingly introduced in developing countries, which hits poor households particularly hard (cf. Jellema 2016), is rarely questioned and almost always assessed positively without any differentiation. For example, in Ghana, if health insurance is subsidized with increased revenue from sales tax (CPAN 2014: 62), the fact is ignored that the poorest pay the tax in the same way as the rich – except that the latter are usually taxed only

⁵⁷ For example, it was practised under the TC programme “Kommunalförderung Mali” [Mali municipality support] (term 2002-2013), and it is also a reality in a number of former “municipal investment funds” of German FC in Mali and neighbouring countries. In the limited literature on fiscal decentralization, there is generally no mention of financing local governments using constitutional property taxes (see World Bank 2008, ADB 2010, France 2014, IMF 2015, or Martinez-Vazques et al. 2015).

⁵⁸ In response, there is a call to revitalize advisory services, especially for smallholder farmers (see CTA 2012).

on immediate consumption expenditure, while savings or investment securities, for example, remain untaxed. If the countermeasures to the effects of COVID-19 in Germany also included a reduction in VAT⁵⁹, the criticism of this (“not very effective”) must be rejected from the point of view of low-income earners, since everyday necessities such as food, household goods and energy did indeed become cheaper. However, a significant poverty impact would be achieved particularly in places where people have to spend an even larger share of their income on food than even the poor in Germany. If the extremely poor, with an estimated 70% or more of their income spent on basic foodstuffs, had to pay no or significantly lower VAT, their food availability would – not only in theory – immediately increase by a comparable percentage to the reduction in tax rates.

5.3 Evaluation of development cooperation instruments

In the following we take a look at the *significance of development policy instruments* and how they are applied in practice in order to attain poverty-reducing DC goals. Here, too, it must be conceded that there have been considerable improvements in the past few decades, at least in FC projects close to the population. This has to do with the increasing attention paid to safeguards, gender-sensitive approaches in general or the early implementation of target group analyses. Most recently, the human rights approach of German governmental development cooperation has also led to an increasing desire not to exclude from services even the poorest who cannot pay fees for them. Particularly with regard to the latter objective, however, there are still clear dissonances with a number of partners, among others, who have not yet been able to see how they are to finance the implementation of this objective in the long term. One example is in the context of a supply company for drinking water.

The failure to reach (extremely) poor sections of the population through DC support persists in numerous cases and is certainly due to reasons that also have to do with the inappropriate instruments of TC and FC. A basic problem is that in international as well as in German governmental DC, *supply-oriented approaches* continue to be more numerous than demand-oriented approaches – at least from the point of view of the target groups of the intended support. Often, the priority area of a project is already determined when the government negotiations are conducted and projects are agreed. It is rare in state development cooperation for projects to have open objectives. Similarly, it is rare for these projects to formulate desired outputs and means only on the basis of a survey of the population and the identification of the most urgent problems (in a participatory manner together with the legitimate representatives of the target group). This is by no means standard practice among NGOs either⁶⁰.

As a rule, many DC measures are designed for a *short period*, and they are far too short, in the opinion of many of those interviewed in this study. Even regional development projects are rarely carried out beyond periods of six to eight years. However, where fundamental

⁵⁹ From July to December 2020 from 19% to 16% and for the reduced rate from 7% to 5%. On the temporary tax cut debate, note a post on 10 December 2020 by Jakob Arnold at <https://t1p.de/izv8> [01/2021].

⁶⁰ On the one hand, because many NGOs are still dependent on state (co-)financing, and on the other hand, because they themselves still think and plan in sectoral categories or are mono-sectoral in their objectives (such as drinking water, children’s organizations or blind aid). What is perfectly legitimate for an NGO with many small direct partners, however, entails a considerable restriction of the participation concept for state DC.

changes in the attitudes of the population are needed, as in resource management, even 10-15 years are often not enough to bring about lasting change. It is particularly difficult to intervene in the area of changing dietary habits, where negative practices are also handed down from generation to generation.

In many cases, however, even a long-term project is not enough. In other words, a DC contribution is not sufficient if the product promoted or the institution formation supported is not seamlessly transferred to public responsibility. This applies, for example, to the maintenance of the entire social and economic infrastructure. Alternatively, the legal framework may be inadequate, so that the DC measure has to take place in a lawless niche and accordingly depends on the goodwill of important reference persons in the government. This is almost always not very sustainable. Conversely, projects such as the German forestry programme in Vietnam are so successful because they cooperate at the level of the forest farmers, the participating provinces and the state level, and operate within the framework of a *multi-level approach* (see Box 3)⁶¹.

Box 3: A multi-level success programme in Vietnam

Between 2003 and 2014, an extensive forestry programme was implemented in Vietnam with the support of the German FC and TC. The basic idea was to reforest hilly zones that had been completely denuded by US area bombing during the Vietnam War. This was not to be carried out by the state, but as a contribution to poverty reduction in rural areas by the local residents themselves. For this purpose, two hectares of land were allocated to each of the interested households in the project area, to be reforested. Since forest needs time to become economically viable, but as these underprivileged households could not wait up to five years for the returns, they received a sum of money in the form of a savings book, which they could draw on to a greater extent in the first year and in decreasing amounts in the following years while they planted and cared for the trees, and could also use them from the fourth year onwards, i.e. along with the selling of forest (such as wood) products.

In the provinces of Quang Nam, Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh and Phu Yen in Central Vietnam alone, 23,000 hectares of forest were reforested in this way. In 144 villages, almost 15,000 families and village communities received land use certificates. Nationwide, around 125,000 households were reached through the entire programme throughout Vietnam. While the Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW) financed the reforestation work and helped the forest farmers to survive financially in the first few years with the "savings book approach", the Gesellschaft für technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) supported the Vietnamese government in drafting a new forestry law that made it possible to grant land to private households as first priority.

On the one hand, the **small-scale or fragmented nature of development cooperation** ("thousands of projects and dozens of donors which are not coordinated with each other") is criticized. Development cooperation is therefore seen as being unable to have any substantial impact because the wide-ranging impact and synergy effects are far too low and place too great an institutional burden on the partner country. Conversely, however, there is also

⁶¹ See KfW 2016 "Forstrehabilitation und nachhaltige Waldbewirtschaftung" (2006-2014) and from INEF research most recently Bliss 2020 "VIETNAM: Forstprogramm Vietnam. Ressourcenschutz in enger Verbindung mit nachhaltiger Armutsbekämpfung." Good Practice Reihe 23. Duisburg (INEF).

criticism of participation in large international funds or national basket financing packages and budget support. In 2009, for example, more than 40 countries received such support from the BMZ, even though some of them lacked even minimal institutional conditions⁶². In the context of the background of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (OECD 2008), the problem here is obviously finding a middle way between the implementation of independent individual projects under strong donor influence, on the one hand, and on the other hand a blanket handover of funds and implementation responsibility to a partner which sometimes has serious governance deficiencies. In the meantime, the trend swing has taken place, i.e., budget support funding is hardly ever provided any more, although evaluations now attribute positive effects to budget support (cf. DEval 2015, 2017, 2018).

Good *donor coordination* is another condition of success for sustainable interventions in a partner country. Increasingly, donor groups (e.g. EU member states or *Like Minded Donor Groups*) are adopting joint country concepts and putting together packages of measures. Conversely, however, in other partner countries it is not even possible to get otherwise close European allies around the table. Even competition between European states and mutual displacement processes in the partner country can be observed.

Fig. 13: As part of a forestry programme supported by Germany, forest areas on state-owned land in Vietnam were restored and given to families for permanent cultivation.



At the *methodological level*, there are increasingly good specifications in both TC and FC. Just two key examples are KfW's comprehensive analytical frameworks for examining target groups and those affected as part of FC project appraisal (since 2012), and GIZ's gender analyses. Nevertheless, implementing agencies are reluctant to spend more than a fraction of the cost they budget for technical examination fees in the area of social science soft skills.

⁶² Conversation in 2016 with former members of the BMZ management.

Accordingly, baseline data collection is lacking for many projects, which makes it difficult to measure impact later in the context of evaluations. This therefore makes it less possible or impossible to record real impacts, and hence to transfer experience to comparable project types.

Evaluations, which have only been institutionally consolidated in German governmental DC for a few years, continue to be carried out with too little rigour, i.e. based on insufficient solid empirical foundations. Especially the poverty-reducing impacts of projects can hardly be recorded and documented empirically in this way. Food security impacts are practically impossible to record without measuring and weighing the persons supported.

Despite the above-mentioned improvements in safeguards, gender sensitivity and general accountability, bilateral and multilateral development cooperation is still too technically oriented. It was formerly usual to intensively prepare foreign employees of governmental development cooperation, especially in sociological aspects including behaviour in the host countries as well as language skills. However, this has been reduced to a minimum in Germany, for example, while it is not demanded at all for members of the constantly growing consulting sector.

For too long, TC in particular has relied on the elaboration of *model projects* in which, for example, the environmental management of a specific water catchment area could be improved in an exemplary and often successful manner, thus enabling very poor farmers to regain access to sufficient resources. This has worked on a large scale in India, where dozens of committed organizations have been involved, or in Tunisia or Ethiopia, where the state has taken resource protection very seriously, at least for some time, and invested considerable resources of its own in the sector. In many other countries, however, such models have not been replicated, or not to the extent expected, because their planners had paid too little attention to national conditions. For example, in many projects there was too little implementation capacity in the partner government or too little motivation (and possibly also too little ownership, see below) on the part of those responsible. Often, the cost of the measures was simply too high to be replicated nationally or at least regionally. A measure which already required several million euros in implementation costs in a relatively small water catchment area would cost astronomical sums for 1,200 such areas in need of intervention (as is the situation in Jordan, which is relatively small). A more intensive analysis of the socio-economic conditions might have led to other, more effective and more poverty-relevant solutions.

Ownership, the principle that the partner side of a DC measure must explicitly want the measure and be prepared to implement it sustainably, is now a conceptual imperative for all donors. Especially with regard to poverty reduction, no success can be expected without ownership. Within the framework of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative, which was adopted at the 1999 Cologne G7/8 Summit, numerous countries drew up country-specific poverty reduction strategies⁶³ and thus officially committed themselves to considerable additional investment in targeted poverty reduction measures. However, this sometimes significant reversal of previous policy approaches took place in a number of countries under strong donor pressure. In addition, the World Bank in particular, which imposed itself on the process as a kind of lead donor, drew up extensive formal guidelines

⁶³ These strategies became known as Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). The strategies called for prioritization and concentration of their own measures as well as external DC support for the PRSP priorities determined by the partners in a participatory manner. Later, most PRSPs were absorbed into national general development concepts, which continued to focus on poverty reduction.

that contributed a narrow macroeconomic understanding reminiscent of earlier structural adjustment concepts. In order to satisfy the donors and to have (public) debts cancelled, and on the other hand to be able to call up DC funds in an unchanged or increased amount, World Bank “friendly” PRSPs were nevertheless presented. At the same time, however, individual states began to present their own long-term national development strategies, which set entirely different priorities from the PRSPs⁶⁴.

In retrospect, the donor community’s ideas to commit the particularly poor partner countries to greater commitment in the fight against poverty were quite correct, but the process did not take sufficient account of the question of ownership, with the result that while progress was made on poverty indicators in certain countries (cf. Eberlei 2009), in other countries implementation was only half-hearted or even non-existent. If national ownership (in the sense of ownership by government *and* society) had been more central to the development of the concept from the outset, the MDGs would probably have been achieved to a greater extent. A development cooperation instrument that was correct and innovative in its approach was thus also inadequately implemented here, at least in part.

In numerous discussions of the research team with important actors with DC responsibility and DC implementation experience, reference was made to further, mostly institutional aspects that are relevant for the success or failure of poverty-oriented DC. For example, the commitment of the BMZ management was not always sufficiently geared towards poverty reduction. There was a lack of *steering capacities in the Ministry* to remind the implementing organizations more strongly of the implementation of the concepts which were actually obligatory. Similarly, German DC in the partner countries is too weakly positioned to be able to exert political influence in donor rounds and *vis-à-vis* the partners. This is a problem which has been partially but by no means completely solved by the increase in the number of advisers seconded by the BMZ to the embassies.⁶⁵ Sometimes people also shy away from naming real problems to the partner side in order to avoid jeopardizing the cooperation climate. In addition, it was pointed out that the German DC external structures hardly have any financial resources that can be used flexibly in order to be able to intervene quickly and support national processes (e.g. in the elaboration of a sector strategy).

The role of *partnership between development cooperation and the private sector* (public-private partnership) was only marginally considered in this brief analysis. With respect to this, few interviewees were able to point to positive structural effects in the fight against poverty. In the German discourse it is currently considered that there are hardly any advantages in the provision of previously public services (e.g. drinking water supply) through cooperation with the private sector⁶⁶. A study by Jomo et al. (2016: 22) shows that the same viewpoint is also taken internationally, because “[...] they have failed to yield ‘value for money’ [...] as well as broader welfare benefits for society such as the impact on poverty and sustainable development”.

⁶⁴ Intensively worked on for Tajikistan within the framework of a research project of INEF with funding from the VW Foundation by Frank Bliss (2010) and including Kyrgyzstan, which abruptly stopped the PRSP process in 2005 for ownership reasons, by Bliss / Neumann (2014).

⁶⁵ After 2012, for example, more than 50 additional positions were created for development policy coordination; in smaller developing countries, these development cooperation officers are often even representatives of the embassy management.

⁶⁶ A clearly more negative reference to the results of the public-private partnership in the UK (cf. Jubilee Debt Campaign 2017) speaks of “Lessons on private finance for the rest of the world”.

Between the implementation of cross-sectoral, sectoral and regional strategies and the application of development policy instruments and methodology, there is the repeatedly cited problem of (German) DC with the recognition and implementation of socio-cultural requirements of DC and the participation of the population in decisions about their future. Clearly too little is being done here and, above all, far too little attention is being paid to the question of power within the social structures in the partner countries. For example, there is still no follow-up paper to the participation concept published by the BMZ in 1999, which has since been forgotten. At a time when the space for civil society organizations in many countries, especially partner countries of development cooperation, is being massively restricted (“shrinking spaces” for civil society)⁶⁷, the donor side should attach considerably more importance to the role of this civil society in the partnership dialogue on development policy. However, this requires conceptual reflection on who enjoys legitimacy and representativeness to speak “for the people” and especially “for the poor”⁶⁸.

The results of the unique population survey “Voices of the Poor” (cf. Narayan et al. 1999)⁶⁹ also make something else clear: poor people do not only, and not even primarily, view their situation from the point of view of material deficiencies. Rather, poor people see poverty primarily as dependency and helplessness, not being able to protect themselves from exploitation and oppression, and as being unavoidably forced to endure humiliation, insults and refusal when they request help. Accordingly, poverty is not an abstract characteristic, but the result of unjust and unjustified exercise of power, “a condition, something households experience” (Narayan 2009: 24). As long as this problem is not given significantly more attention in the context of development cooperation, poverty-oriented projects in particular will be less successful than would be possible if more careful consideration were given to the respective power structures.

⁶⁷ Oscar Del Valle Dávila's article of 8 January 2018 for the VENRO blog is very good on this (see <https://t1p.de/jmv8> [01/2021])

⁶⁸ This should also apply to the international level, where people talk more often about than with those affected. This state of affairs, which was criticized by Inge Kaul in 2003 (2003: 164), has unfortunately not lost its relevance to this day, as could be repeatedly observed in the context of the INEF research project.

⁶⁹ As an article in the “Consultations with the Poor” for the World Development Report (World Bank 2000/2001). Tens of thousands of representatives of poor households in 47 countries were surveyed. In Vietnam alone, for example, around 1,000 households were included in about 40 villages and districts of large cities.

6. Options for action for sustainable poverty reduction and food security

Development cooperation can only make a small contribution to global poverty reduction. Both the primary responsibility and the duty to act lie essentially with the affected countries and their governments themselves. For this reason, a distinction will be made in the following between options for action that are exclusively or predominantly the responsibility of governments themselves and those for which bilateral and unilateral development cooperation could at least share responsibility, even if national governments and their institutions would have to take care of implementation themselves. This is a necessity if only to ensure the sustainability of the measures, which, virtually by definition, are always intended by DC to be only an initial spark. Both of these responsibilities for DC will be the main focus of this chapter.

Against the background of the international refugee debate, which continues to be relevant during and after COVID-19, one option for action should be mentioned first: fleeing from poor countries to industrialized countries in order to escape poverty. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates the total number of refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced persons worldwide to be 79.5 million at the end of 2019 (see UNHCR 2020). These figures, however, do not even include the many millions of people who have left their homes, e.g. for environmental reasons, and live for the most part in poverty on the outskirts of the rapidly growing cities in developing countries, or the hundreds of millions of poverty “nomads” who wander homeless with their families through countries such as India or China, e.g. as day labourers. Moreover, no account has been taken of the millions of people who, in Nigeria alone, have given up hope of realizing a life of peace and prosperity there and are practically sitting on packed suitcases. They are currently just waiting for a chance to move out (see Migali / Scipioni 2019, Gallup 2017).

The idea of supporting poverty migration in order to combat hunger and poverty, at least on a large scale, is very difficult to implement. At least from the point of view of industrialized countries, it is also not very desirable, as was shown by the “refugee crisis” in 2015, which brought the EU to the brink of a crisis⁷⁰. However, the idea is not a viable option from an ethical perspective either, as is made very clear by Julian Nida-Rümelin (2017). Local residents who are already left behind by economic success would sink down further. The consequences for social peace in the host countries would be incalculable, and even a failure of democracy would be conceivable⁷¹. For the poor countries themselves, however, the emigration of active people, most of whom have above-average qualifications, would be a catastrophe that would

⁷⁰ Poverty migrants are therefore not referred to in the literature as refugees (cf. Hippler 2016). Moreover, it is interesting to note Heinemann-Grüder's comment that migration to Europe is not only or not primarily due to poverty, but is a phenomenon of the middle classes among non-European migrants (2016: 65). It can be understood that the social environment of those who can raise USD 10,000 for the journey to Europe (albeit with the help of relatives) can also by no means be described as extremely poor. Even in the case of violent conflicts, according to Heinemann-Grüder, it is mainly people whose income is beyond subsistence who flee to Europe (loc. cit.).

⁷¹ The discussion in France about the role of migrants in the months leading up to the presidential elections in May 2017 confirm this impressively, as does the development in Hungary towards a totalitarian nationalist regime.

destroy any chance of economic and social development and thus make it absolutely impossible to achieve the SDGs⁷².

This does not mean that temporary labour migration cannot be economically viable. For the planning staff of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), for example, “guest work” has become a permanent factor that is politically desired but also specifically managed by member states (cf. IOM 2014). This form of migration is therefore fundamentally different from poverty migration. UNCTAD's 2018 Economic Development in Africa Report also even suggests that in Africa, labour migration could fundamentally transform the continent's economy and thereby make an important contribution towards achieving the SDGs (UNCTAD 2018).

For European countries, however, such migration would mean an increase in social differentiation if millions of unqualified workers were admitted without reflection, with real wages falling further, especially for people with low labour incomes (cf. Collier 2014).

6.1 The tasks of the states

Asfa-Wossen Assef (2016), Axelle Kabou (1995), James Shikwati (2002, 2006) or Dambisa Moyo (2009) as well as dozens of other African authors see DC rather as providing a secondary contribution to the development of the continent, sometimes even as being harmful. The main challenge, on the other hand, is for the governments themselves to finally establish sensible governance in their countries that is development-oriented, and geared towards the interests of the population rather than their own bank accounts. This demand is shared by countless Western authors. Stefan Seitz (2009), Robert Collier (2007) or William Easterly (2006), for example, who express particularly fierce and direct criticism of the elite (although also criticism with regard to the behaviour of the donor community), are by no means in a minority position with respect to their opinion. Similar positions to those on Africa also apply to a large number of states in Asia and Latin America or the Caribbean.

But what does improved governance entail? The majority of the authors mentioned above, as well as our numerous interlocutors from German and international DC organizations, see a shift towards *development orientation in government action* as being the most important step. Instead of self-enrichment, policies are called for which are aimed at poverty reduction through economic growth and social justice. This includes above all the reduction of corruption. An operationalization of this policy goes in two directions:

(i.) Firstly, the conditions for economic activity should be improved. This would be most clearly reflected, at least in terms of a formal outcome, in the World Bank's annual *Doing Business* reports. The establishment of businesses should be made easier, their activities significantly deregulated, access to financial services improved and the tax system reformed.

(ii.) Secondly, however, we see a drastic reform of fiscal policy in almost all developing countries, including emerging economies, not merely as being a sub-issue of economic reform, but as representing a core element of a poverty-reducing policy, which is as important and urgent as economic development itself.

⁷² In his work “Exodus” Paul Collier (2014), cited in Nida-Rümelin (2017), also argues against mass migration, which would hit the poorest countries particularly hard. Although considerable remittances could be expected in the first period - worldwide this would be 400 billion USD per year - the remittances would only just compensate for the loss of productive power in the migrants' countries of origin. The migrants would also have earned money at home and helped their families.

This reform would have to consist of three steps: (i.) Firstly, a fundamental change in tax systems. In this context, taxes should be applied more equitably and the sales tax, which is an easy tax to collect but which disproportionately burdens the poor, should be reduced or abolished. It should be replaced by, for example, an income tax or another tax that is borne substantially by wealthier citizens⁷³. (ii.) Secondly, as already called for in the HIPC process in 2000, the spending policies of the states would have to be more development-oriented and geared towards greater poverty reduction. The increasing importance of social security and its long-term financing should be taken into account (see below Section 4.2, cf. Bliss 2020b). Finally, (iii.) fiscal decentralization, which has already been cited as very important, should finally make faster progress, since a large part of the services demanded by the SDGs for the citizens of a country is increasingly being provided by the municipal levels (so far, at least in theory) or could best be provided there.

There are frequent calls for a general improvement in governance, although it is often unclear what is meant by this. Of course, the widespread endemic corruption must stop. Without this neither economic nor social development will get off the ground. However, this also means – contrary to the long-standing policy of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) – that shares of the budgets for administration must be increased and civil servants and employees must be paid salaries that enable them to feed their families and live in the (generally expensive) urban centres without major financial worries. However, this is also likely to be linked to the need to reduce unneeded staff in the medium term or to redeploy them to other areas.

Finally, a reorganization of the administrations is also necessary. Within the framework of roadmaps, for example, the tasks and competencies of the various departments and administrative levels should be redefined and specifications made for their implementation. On the one hand, external competencies are needed for this, but these can often be mobilized from among migrated national experts, if necessary by providing incentives for them to return to their home country and help to build it up. For poverty reduction (and for international DC contributions), it would be important to finally assign regulatory and decision-making authority to the national DC coordinating bodies. These bodies normally exist only in theory. Ultimately this authority must not be ignored in interventions in the country.

Further key concepts for development-oriented policy are democratization of the state political systems and their institutions, as well as strengthening or building up an independent civil society which is worthy of the name. Today in the guise of civil society there are mainly donor-financed, sometimes also donor-created development NGOs or semi-public “national NGOs”. Furthermore, it is necessary to establish additional institutions that ensure transparency, legitimacy and accountability, such as independent national audit offices and judiciaries, as well as round tables of the administration and civil society. These should include representatives of the business community, or national think tanks, plus scientific organizations and independent mass media.

⁷³ Jon Jellema (2016) has calculated that through the sales tax, to which almost all income of poor people (especially in urban areas) is subject, extremely poor households pay more to the treasury than they receive through social benefits, including DC funds. But the general unfairness of the sales tax to poor people is that they cannot save or make economic investments (both of which are largely exempt from sales tax), but must put all of their income into consumption (which is taxed). Rich households use only a small part of their income for consumption (which is taxed), whereas they can save a large part, or invest it in shares or in business assets (which is untaxed) (see also Lustig / Higgins 2016 and Lustig 2016).

Even if it has recently become somewhat unfashionable to cite population growth as a cause of hunger and poverty, the leaders of the Sahel states, among others, should themselves realize that even with the best governance and use of their own resources, a reduction in birth rates is necessary for a sustainable policy (without a revolutionary change in the ownership structure of the country). A human rights-oriented policy that grants girls equal educational and employment opportunities, that bans child marriage, and that places girls and women on an equal footing in every other legal and social respect would be an important goal here. The UN Population Fund (UNFPA) has now also adapted its earlier approaches to birth control in this direction (cf. UNFPA 2016).

6.2 Options for action for development cooperation

From the brief analyses of the various development cooperation priority areas and development policy instruments, a number of suggestions implicitly emerge for more poverty-oriented, participatory and socio-culturally sensitive development cooperation. Therefore, this section will only address six thematic areas that have emerged as being particularly important following our secondary analysis and the numerous interviews with DC professionals, as well as the outcome of the numerous field studies conducted between 2015 and 2020. These areas provide the framework for further consideration of individual issues and challenges.

I. Improving or establishing coherence

A substantial improvement in the impact of DC measures on poor people would be achieved through much more coherent interaction between foreign, external economic, environmental and development policy. In addition, the national policies of the EU member countries and the policies of the Commission and the Council of the EU would have to be harmonized. Germany should be just as clear on this issue as it has been, at least some of the time, on European monetary policy. For example, there should be a commitment to a general renunciation of destructive export subsidies or subsidies that decouple European goods from their production costs. There must be more respect for international agreements and an end to the enforcement of the law of the strongest (e.g. with regard to European predatory fishing off Africa's coasts). The grabbing of national supply and communications companies by former colonial powers must be renounced, as is still being practised by France, among others, in West Africa.

Coherence in development cooperation also includes the issue of donor coordination. This is in urgent need of improvement in view of the realities in almost all development countries. This involves the inclusion of China, as an important actor, but one that usually refuses to participate in joint deliberations. However, it also involves much better coordination between the OECD donor countries, India and Brazil, and even between the EU members represented in the respective developing countries.

II. Targeting and selection of populations to be supported

There is a need to improve the targeting of development cooperation measures, i.e. the targeted identification of the "right" people (or groups) to be supported. Geographical targeting is still described in the German state guidelines for bilateral development cooperation in the section on assessing development policy objectives relating to poverty (BMZ 2015). This geographical targeting should be replaced by a procedure that captures the situation of each person with simple procedures. The principle should be "one system for one country, and all donors follow that system".

Fig. 14: As part of "ID Poor", poor households in Cambodia are identified and provided with a card that enables them to receive free health care, among other things.



ID Poor in Cambodia can be considered as a model for this. However, the identification systems would need to be supplemented by post-identification. Hence not only would people be interviewed every few years regarding their classification as poor or non-poor, but the “forgotten poor” and people who had become poor between study periods could subsequently obtain entitlement papers for benefits. This has also been done with *ID Poor* in the meantime, in that since 2020 poor people have been able to submit applications to the local government administration at any time.

Targeting systems, once established nationwide, should of course be used by the implementing state, but also by all donors, including NGOs. This means that they would do without having their own targeting procedures. However, it presupposes that the systems would not have major inclusion or exclusion errors. In other words, there would be only a small number of households included without justification or people who are poor but not covered. In addition, the post-identification mentioned above would actually have to work.

III. Social security and benefits for the extremely poor

The present study supports the call for greater commitment on the part of German governmental and international development cooperation in the area of social security. In accordance with the initiative of the Committee on Economic Cooperation and Development of the German Bundestag, contributions to support the development of social security systems should be expanded within the framework of official development cooperation. In this context, conditional and non-conditional cash transfers should also be supported with FC funds to a much greater extent than in the past⁷⁴.

Fig. 15: The payment of unconditional cash transfers in Turkana County, Kenya, takes place in a decentralised manner in small kiosks. The recipients receive their money after showing a specially issued bank card.



The intended effects of such transfers would always have to be worked out in advance: social protection mitigates the impact of shocks, for example by preventing droughts from leading to famines. It is indispensable in improving the living conditions of those ultra-poor households within the extremely poor population who cannot help themselves, since they have no labour force, and who also fall outside traditional social protection systems. For the most part, however, cash transfers alone can do little directly to build sustainable household resilience to future shocks (see CPAN 2014, Mariotti et al. 2016). Consequently, they would have to be set up permanently for people lacking any self-help capacity.

Cash transfers to ultra-poor households should be unconditional and they should be granted at a level that leads in the medium term to the SDG goal „to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030“⁷⁵. Cash transfers to (extremely) poor households should only be linked to conditions if these are easy to fulfil, e.g. where schools or health care centres are available and accessible to the people, and where basic education or medical services can actually be offered.

However, it will be important to consider three points in particular during implementation:

- (i.) Cash transfers to poor households require a good targeting system (see above. Point II). Where this does not yet exist or does not exist nationwide, German development

⁷⁵ See on SDG targets: <https://t1p.de/cxyc> [01/2021].

cooperation should support the establishment of a transparent, participatory and flexible registration system for poor households and individuals.

- (ii.) Secondly, in view of the fact that governance is generally problematic, especially in the poorer partner countries, it must be ensured that the support funds also reach the intended households and individuals (i.e. good targeting of the services). The common practice of paying out money primarily to women has often proven successful. However, more attention needs to be paid to how funds reach marginalized groups, the elderly, orphans, etc., since social differentiation often exists within the same household and family. Electronic transfers, where technically genuinely accessible to those concerned, could provide a solution.
- (iii.) The amount of the disbursement requires careful consideration and differentiation. Households that include members who are perfectly able to work often need only supplementary income to afford better food, education for children or basic health services beyond the bare minimum of subsistence. However, ultra-poor people will have to meet most or all of their subsistence needs through social transfer payments. In terms of the SDGs, this means providing them with resources at a level that enables them to live in dignity. The funds granted within the framework of so-called graduation approaches⁷⁶ or the support granted in the overall package of graduation approaches are generally not sufficient for this group to ever be able to overcome the threshold of extreme poverty (cf. Bauer 2016).

IV. Rural regional development

As long as the disparity and gap between rural areas and (capital) cities is as great as it is at present in most partner countries, and as long as good schools and hospitals, employment opportunities outside agriculture, attractive markets and connections to the transport and electricity networks are not to be found in rural areas, life there will not be attractive for many people, especially young and educated people. Those who have the opportunity often seek employment in the ever-expanding urban centres or leave their home country in search of a supposedly better life.

Migration, multilocality and translocal living systems are currently the reality in rural areas. Whereas in the past DC tried to stop the rural exodus with its poverty-reducing rural regional development approaches, today's considerations tend to be aimed at containing it. This includes addressing and questioning the sell-off of land resources in developing countries. It also involves building solutions based on the now undeniable interconnections between urban and rural areas. The future must therefore also involve fostering and supporting the already diverse relations between towns and the countryside for their mutual benefit. Rural regional development is particularly dependent on the participation of all local and regional stakeholders. Only participation in planning processes and the co-decision of legitimate representatives of the population with respect to goals and methods guarantees socio-culturally and socio-economically adapted and appropriate solutions which are supported and implemented with a broad consensus. It is here, and not so much in technical terms, that there is the most important need for adjustment for German DC in the rural regional development sector to date.

⁷⁶ *Graduation* describes a process in which people who receive support in the form of cash transfers, food aid and the like are able to free themselves from dependence on this aid in the long term and leave the programme (cf. Devereux / Sabates-Wheeler 2015).

Fig. 16: The development of the forestry sector creates jobs in Vietnam, especially in rural areas, many of them for women



There are three main areas of focus for the future of rural regional development. (i.) One focus of rural development will have to be on regulation of access to land (i.e. above all land security) and other resources, combined with sustainable resource management and participatory land use planning (cf. Gaesing 2020). (ii.) Secondly, it is important to promote employment in rural areas beyond agricultural production, while at the same time linking up with centres in rural areas and urban areas. (iii.) Thirdly, the overarching objective is labour-intensive regional economic development, in which support for existing urban-rural relations should play an increasingly important role, as mentioned above.

In this context, the promotion of value chains must be seen as an instrument to kick-start regional economic development that can also generate income for poor people (cf. Herold 2020). Urban-rural linkages also need to be established in a mutually beneficial way. The approach in the past of following progressive farmers on the assumption that they could be a model for others and that innovations would in time spread to the mass of poor rural households has not led to significant success. The direct inclusion of the poor in such value chains is therefore one of the major challenges facing German development cooperation in rural areas today.

Fig. 17: The terraced farmland in the front produces good harvests, while the land that is not treated with sustainable resource management methods (in the background) is no longer usable for farming in Ethiopia



V. Making DC services usable for the extremely poor, but still sustainable

In the case of drinking water supplies (co-)financed by DC, the expansion of rural power supply, the provision of basic health services or local educational opportunities, the question of the sustainability of the investments always arises. Therefore, long-term financial resources must be available for the operation and maintenance of the facilities. Regular income is therefore needed, which at present has to be raised by the users themselves, because it is often not provided by the state. For water and electricity, connection costs are usually added, often between \$100 and \$200 per household. The result is that the poorest five, ten or even fifty percent of a poor society cannot afford these achievements of international development cooperation, even though they should be the primary target groups of development cooperation – and usually are in the donors' self-portrayal.

Fig. 18: Where villages in Cambodia are not connected to the central power grid, poor households in particular have to spend a lot of money for the "luxury" of a minimal power supply (here: private charging station for car batteries)



As long as no social security systems with social assistance payments can be assumed (or, as in the Balkan countries, these are still inadequate in terms of the level and coverage of affected groups) interim solutions must be considered, in order to be able to actually achieve the goals of social infrastructure development. Such solutions can be small, short-term adaptations even of programmes which are already running (following the principle of “leaving no one behind”):

- (i.) What is particularly effective is the widespread waiving of connection fees for drinking water supply and waste water disposal, as well as for the connection of a household to the public electricity grid. Since most participants can at least pay the ongoing charges if they consume sparingly, connection costs could be recovered (at least in part) in the long term through user charges. Those who can afford higher consumption charges would also bear the bulk of the costs.
- (ii.) In projects that are initially designed only as indirect poverty reduction measures, such as the establishment of a national basic power supply or the construction of important transport axes, a cost-effective expansion of the commitment makes it possible to develop rural poor areas, often with direct poverty impacts. Today main power lines with 220-500 kV voltage all too often pass through the middle of poor areas without the people living there being able to benefit from them. Additional medium-voltage and low-voltage lines could be laid in order to at least provide access to the small rural centres along the main line. In the case of national roads, at least those centres along the main route could be connected by spur routes and made accessible to the market.

- (iii.) In general, for social infrastructure projects or agricultural measures (e.g. small-scale irrigation) the so-called 'first come, first served' principle should be definitively abandoned in favour of a transparent selection procedure based on objective criteria: degree of poverty of a village or region, condition of previous supply, self-help capacities (and especially the lack of capacities), etc. Approaches that rely on cost-sharing by the population (in cash or in kind / labour) should only be implemented where even the poorest can participate and have the chance to benefit from the measures.

VI. Food security is more than increasing production

Support for food security (i.e. more than just improving access to food) through international development cooperation requires an expansion of methodological approaches. The problems encountered in promoting food security in Cambodia and Tajikistan, among others, show that, in addition to the issue of production (and thus the availability of nutritionally valuable products), it is above all traditions, habits and also incorrect information that play an important role. These can have the effect that improvement of the nutritional situation, especially of children and mothers, does not automatically accompany positive change in the general living conditions. The experiences of Welthungerhilfe in Malawi (cf. 2014) also make it clear how difficult it is and what intensive persuasion is needed to change food traditions even slightly.

Contributions to improving food security should focus much more strongly than in the past on:

- (i.) A very broad, intensive education. This would have to place the topic of food security at the centre of health-related information work throughout the country and be present above all in the decentralized health care facilities.
- (ii.) Individual counselling by national health workers, as already propagated and supported by UNICEF in particular. Counselling begins with the start of prenatal care for mothers and continues through the first 1,000 days of a child's life. Health personnel must be trained well and have sufficient motivation, possibly through performance-related bonuses. In addition, adequately prepared information material in the local languages is needed to a much greater extent than is currently available in rural health centres. This material must also be suitable for illiterate people. Subsequently, nutrition awareness issues should continue to be adequately addressed, through schools where appropriate. This is still too rare outside of special programmes.
- (iii.) Neighbourly structures and/or forms of organization created within the residential environment which take up nutritional issues help to break entrenched habits and can bring about an independent change in daily nutrition in the medium term. Dysfunctional and in some cases downright dangerous "cultural survivals" can probably only be overcome over time in such a way.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ For example, in some cultures it is almost taboo for pregnant or breastfeeding women to eat eggs, chicken or other particularly nutritious foods.

Food security, of course, cannot be achieved without food availability, which in turn means that the required quantities of food must be present and that all segments of the population must be able to acquire it.

In this context, DC can help to promote access to land for landless and land-poor people. Accordingly, support for land reforms should once again play a more prominent role in DC and become a sub-goal of poverty reduction. The same applies to the strengthening of legal certainty in the case of disputed rights of use for land. This can be observed worldwide when land titles subject to traditional law are transferred into state or private ownership. It can also be seen when land previously used by farmers is converted by state officials into “economic land concessions” (land grabbing). On the issue of land access, a number of separate papers on Ethiopia and Cambodia have already been produced as part of the INEF-BMZ research project (Examples include Hennecke et al. 2017, Hennecke et al. 2018, Gaesing / Gutema 2019, and Gaesing / Bliss 2019).

However, especially in rural areas with high population density (e.g. Southeast Asia) or in marginal lands (the Sahel region), the creation of non-agricultural jobs will be just as important for overcoming extreme poverty and ensuring food security. In addition, in places where survival is currently only possible at the expense of natural resources, consideration must be given to supporting people by means of social security contributions, including in the long term (cf. the Swiss “Alpine farmer model”).

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Institut für Entwicklung und Frieden (INEF)
Lotharstr. 53 47057 Duisburg, Germany
Telefon +49 (203) 379 4420
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