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Germany's Government-Civil Society Development Cooperation Strategy: the dangers of the middle of the road

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Keywords

dangers, germany's, strategy:, cooperation, development, society, government-civil, middle, road

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REFEREED PAPER

Germany's Government-Civil Society Development Cooperation Strategy: the dangers of the middle of the road

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Abstract

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has been busy since the late 2000s studying the way aid donors manage their relations with development civil society organisations (CSOs). More than studying these relations, they have made some very detailed suggestions about how CSOs should be organised and how donor governments should fund and otherwise relate to them. This came out of the debate about aid effectiveness, which was formally aimed at improving both donor and recipient processes. Donors have quietly dropped many of the aspects related to improving their own performance and yet a number have created new interventionist governance frameworks for CSOs. This is the case in Germany, which has a large, vibrant development CSO sector that has traditionally been quite autonomous, even where it has received state funding thanks to Germany's commitment to 'subsidiarity'. Germany is otherwise a middle of the road donor and in many ways, these 'reforms' are moving its relations with civil society more towards a somewhat more managerialist approach, one that is, in fact, the norm amongst OECD donors.

Keywords

Aid and development, Civil Society Organisations, Germany, OECD DAC, Aid effectiveness

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Introduction

There is good evidence that ‘in many countries, and in all global regions, civic space has worsened appreciably in recent years’ (CIVICUS 2016, p.7; Panel on the Independence of the Voluntary Sector 2015). The development sector has been no different with attempts to discredit CSOs and reduce their space for action through regulatory and other mechanism (Banks, Hulme & Edwards, 2015; Hayman 2016). Further, development Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) in many countries have since the 1980s been pushed in increasingly instrumentalist and managerialist directions through state policy (see inter alia Banks, Hulme & Edwards 2015; Fisher 1997; Kapoor 2005; Panel on the Independence of the Voluntary Sector 2015)¹. In Europe overall the trend is aid shifting from going to CSOs to going through them for specific projects with CSOs being seen in instrumentalist terms (Huys and De Bruyn 2015, p.10). Germany though is somewhat of an outlier, the state-development CSO relationship did not change notably over the 1980s-2000s. However, in the 2010s CSO-state relations did begin to alter at least in part due to the international aid effectiveness process led by the OECD Development Co-operation Directorate (DCD-DAC, hereafter DAC). The changes are subtle but they promote a technocratic view of development with CSOs as service delivery agents. Thus, things are not quite ‘business-as-usual’ (Huys and De Bruyn 2015, p.13).

The influence of the state varies amongst development CSOs, partly because they have differing degrees of autonomy from the state. This variation is related to the degree of reliance organisations have on government funding, which can range from zero to quite high levels. Between countries, we see different levels of funding for, and engagement with, development CSOs. In 2009, for example, only one per cent of the French government’s bilateral development support went to NGOs, whereas in Ireland it was 37% (OECD 2011c). Germany gave 12% of its aid through CSOs, putting it just below the OECD DAC average (OECD 2011c, pp. 20-21; see also Huys and De Bruyn 2015). This positioning supports Lancaster’s (2007, p. 182) argument that Germany is a (self-identified) ‘middle of the roader’ in its overall development policy, meaning they have moved with other countries in terms the objectives and operations of their program and undertaken reform incrementally. In terms of objectives, they have gradually moved from a focus on commercial and to a lesser extent diplomatic aims, to a somewhat greater focus on developmental ones.

Germany’s commitment to the principle of ‘subsidiarity’ in managing social relations has determined that the government has traditionally supported CSO autonomy. Subsidiarity is an idea developed out of the 19th century conflict between church and state in Germany, which holds that social issues should be dealt with at the most proximate level relevant to their solution. It was applied to relations between levels of government as well as in social welfare. Subsidiarity also sits well with Germany’s long history of relatively decentralised rule and, after the centralised dictatorial rule of the Third Reich, the allied powers created a

¹ I distinguish between development NGOs and CSOs here as per Banks, Hulme & Edwards (2015, p.709), with CSOs as more grassroots, member based organisations and NGOs as more staff-based, service delivery focused organisations. On the meaning and impacts of managerialism in development, see Desai and Imrie (1998).

system of decentralised government, with the underlying objective of preventing a strong central authority. In social welfare, the running of social insurance and social services is undertaken by one of six very large non-profit conglomerates (Anheier & Seibel 1993)². Thus Germany is regarded as a classic neo-corporatist state where the ‘nonprofit sector did not develop in antithesis to the state, but in interaction with it’ (Anheier & Seibel 1993, p. 3). Subsidiarity and decentralisation help explain why German state-CSO relations in development were largely unchanged during the 1980s-2000s. Yet, the DAC aid effectiveness agenda has brought change³. Germany now has its first strategy for government-civil society cooperation in development. Most other OECD donors already had these in place. In moving to a more middle of the road position in DAC terms, the traditional ‘right of initiative’ of German CSOs regarding their activities is starting to be challenged. This article demonstrates that this strategy also starts to reframe Germany’s state-CSO relations in development towards more technocratic, service delivery basis and away from a focus on transformation, human rights and social justice.

Germany’s development CSO sector is large and varied but little researched, thus the article also contributes a useful map of the sector. It has two very large church networks, a handful of big non-profit organisations (both with close relations to the state) and a plethora of smaller organisations. Overall, the country has a remarkably diverse and active civil society development sector. There are now ‘several thousand’ organisations in existence (BMZ 2015b). The term CSO is particularly pertinent in the German context because organisations include: ‘associations, action groups, federations, working groups, solidarity groups, twinning arrangements, foundations, development-policy networks, and many others’ (BMZ 2015b). The vibrant, fragmented development CSO system in Germany means the challenge to subsidiarity is predominately to the church and CSO organisations that are most closely connected to, and funded by, the state. By contrast, the large number of small CSOs have seen little impact.

As a review of the policy and program changes from the aid effectiveness agenda on German CSOs, the methodology for the article is grounded in a review of primary documents. The review used reports and documents from the German government, the OECD DAC, as it was the key driver of the aid effectiveness process, and from CSOs. For CSOs, the analysis of the international response focused on the Open Forum for CSO Effectiveness along with analysis of dissident voices. In terms of German CSOs, document analysis focused on the formal responses of the largest development CSO network called the *Verband Entwicklungspolitik Deutscher Nichtregierungsorganisationen* (VENRO)⁴ and the largest development CSOs. Finally, ten interviews with large and small CSOs, one small network and a government agency across Germany provided additional qualitative data along with

² Despite independent governance, all of the large groups have a strong dependence on public funding. The Protestant and Catholic Church bodies play a large role in these conglomerates and these and other German churches also receive strong support through a church tax (*Kirchensteuer*) collected by the state, though more and more people have been formally renouncing their membership of the church over the past decade.

³ On changes in Europe’s big donor states see Huys and De Bruyn (2015).

⁴ Attempts to interview someone from this organisation proved unsuccessful.

participant observation data from attending development forums and events in the state of Baden-Württemberg.

The first section of the paper briefly introduces the aid effectiveness agenda and the process by which it came to be applied to CSOs globally. The second section sets out Germany's development civil society sector and its history in relation to key aid effectiveness ideas. In the third section, the German government's policy on CSOs leading to the 2014 'Strategy on Government-Civil Society Cooperation in post-2015 Development Policy' is analysed. The conclusion considers to what extent these developments have challenged the subsidiarity principle. It examines too the overall impact on Germany's development CSO sector and on Germany as a donor to the period up to the end of 2014.

The Aid Effectiveness Agenda and Civil Society Organisations

The DAC aid effectiveness debate originally focused on bilateral and multilateral aid rather than on CSOs. The commitments from donors and recipients were formalised in the Paris Agenda on Aid Effectiveness (2005) and then the follow up Accra Agenda for Action (AAA) (2008). The Paris Declaration sets a practical agenda designed to improve the quality and impact of aid policy and programs. It specifies five fundamental principles for improving aid effectiveness: recipient *ownership* of the development agenda; *alignment* of donors behind recipient government strategies; *harmonisation* of aid programs to increase aid effectiveness; a focus on *results* and measurement; and *mutual accountability* of recipients and donors for outcomes (OECD 2012). The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) provided the overarching framework for aid focused on poverty reduction. Together, they set the overarching norms for development up to 2015 (Hesselmann 2011).

Combating poverty and improving aid effectiveness are individually sound goals, but divorced from issues of politics, they meld into an intentionally technocratic agenda that promotes expanded neoliberal governmentality (Banks, Hulme & Edwards, 2015; Ferguson 1994). The MDGs depoliticise poverty by reducing it to a set of 'targets' about seemingly separate development 'problems'. The Paris Declaration goals are individually quite progressive, but the overall focus is on getting the right: 'technocratic planning apparatus, based on lengthy texts, monitoring matrices and statistical information systems' (Booth 2008, p. 2; see also Gulrajani 2011; Mawdsley 2012). The progressive elements in the Paris Declaration are the reason why CSOs engaged with it and why it became a space of contestation. Given the position of the DAC as an organisation of Northern donors, it is not surprising that the outcome has been the confirmation of an only slightly modified version of the neoliberal development agenda those donors hold (Eyben 2012; Ruckert 2008). Indeed, Eyben (2012, p.89) concludes that 'the content-free nature of "aid-effectiveness" allowed the erstwhile hegemonic discourse of development as growth and basic needs to return to centre stage'. This discourse has long been discredited. Still, donors progressively reduced debate on the effectiveness agenda, and by the mid-2010s, it was just a minor point in the post-2015 framework.

Donors' declining commitment to the aid effectiveness agenda was reflected in a lack of progress in implementation. The 2011 OECD monitoring report found that recipients

‘appear[ed] to have gone further in implementing their commitments... than donors’ (OECD 2011a, p. 17). By 2016, the language used by the OECD on donors’ implementation progress had softened but their limited progress was still clear (OECD 2016, p. 25) Yet whilst donors’ overall progress on aid effectiveness waned, many pursued some elements of it, in particular the ‘harmonisation’ of CSO programs with government ones.

Development CSOs and NGOs lobbied for various aspects of the aid effectiveness agenda and urged donors to implement it (Koch 2008, p. 60). Over time, they became more deeply engaged with the aid effectiveness agenda, perhaps enticed by the early promise of a progressive agenda and the inclusion of some heterodox voices (Eyben 2012). Initially, CSOs did not seem to consider how or whether the aid effectiveness agenda would apply to them, but, by the mid-2000s OECD reports included calls for their inclusion, which formally occurred with the AAA (Koch 2008).

The 2008 Accra meeting was the first with formal civil society representation and it saw increased attention to CSOs declaring the aim of harnessing the expertise and skills of ‘all development actors - bilateral and multilateral donors, global funds, CSOs, and the private sector’ (OECD 2012, p. 18, emphasis added). With this, CSOs were for the first time officially recognised as development actors (Hayman 2016). The AAA promoted increased engagement with CSOs and asked them to consider how they could apply the Paris principles. OECD donors committed to improving: co-ordination of CSO and government programmes; CSO accountability for results; and information on CSO work (OECD 2012, pp. 19-20). The expansion of the Paris Agenda to CSOs thus provided an opportunity for expanded state monitoring and control over the sector.

By this time, however, many CSOs had realised the complication that, alongside some much needed focus on improving donor systems, was a technocratic agenda that could to diminish their independence and challenge their human rights based agendas. This occurred in the post-September 11 context of CSOs being subjected to heightened restrictions and control (Clark 2011; CIVICUS 2016; Panel on the Independence of the Voluntary Sector 2015). In addition, concerns about CSO and NGO effectiveness and accountability came to the fore in this period globally - in Germany there was a very public debate about these issues after a scandal about UNICEF Germany in 2008 (Vijfeijken & Schmitz 2011). This gave additional purchase to the debate and obliged CSOs to engage in it, on terms not of their own making.

The AAA call for CSOs to make progress on the Paris goals was supported by some Southern CSOs (Koch 2008; Menocal & Rogerson 2006; Wamugo & Pedersen 2007) and, as a result, a debate developed within the CSO community regarding the applicability of the aid effectiveness agenda to CSOs. However, given their limited resources, the capacity of Southern CSOs to engage in this debate was limited. Over time, the main CSO network, the Open Forum for CSO Effectiveness, focused the response to the aid effectiveness agenda on foregrounding human rights based development and staking out a clearer alternative. They developed the CSOs equivalent to the Paris Declaration, the Istanbul CSO Development Effectiveness Principles and the Siem Reap CSO Consensus on aid effectiveness (Open

Forum for CSO Effectiveness 2010). This declaration promotes commitment to diversity in the CSO community and calls on CSOs to maintain a focus on human rights, gender equality, sustainability and democratic ownership and participation as well as operating in a manner that promotes transparency, efficiency and learning.

This extension of the aid effectiveness agenda required CSOs to consider the extent to which the goals of increased coordination, using local systems or simplifying procedures and systems and increasing systems of mutual accountability apply to CSOs themselves. This is important as CSOs are quite large donors and there is evidence that their lack of harmonisation and coordination is costly. However, in practice, these issues have been recognised by CSOs and scholars for some time (see *inter alia* Hammad & Morton 2011; Koch 2008; Koch 2009; Riddell 2007; Wamugo & Pedersen 2007). Countering the harmonisation agenda, CSOs argue that diversity provides opportunities for innovation and creativity and that diversity allows CSOs to develop genuine partnership that adapt to, and learn from, their local partners. Moreover they argue that their importance lies fundamentally in the political and social relations they facilitate than in their role as (non-universal) service providers.

The Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness held in Busan, Korea in late 2011 saw some attempt to weave the commitments of states and civil society together. This was not surprising given the growing and diverse attendance – Busan attracted 3,000 delegates from donor and recipient governments, multilateral organisations, CSOs, private bodies and other groups. The declaration from the meeting, the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (OECD 2011b), acknowledged the slow progress in implementation and implicitly demonstrated the waning support of Northern donors to progressing the overall aid effectiveness agenda⁵. Governments committed to improving the conditions for CSO operations and only encouraged them to improve their development effectiveness. Priority was given to the CSO's meeting the Istanbul Principles rather than the Paris Principles (OECD 2011b, p. 6).

The overall trajectory, however, was a decline in donor engagement with the aid effectiveness agenda, particularly elements that questioned their own operations. The term aid effectiveness has been disappearing from donor discourse, replaced with references to 'development effectiveness' and 'the post-2015 process'. By contrast, components that increase the obligations of CSOs, like harmonising state-CSO programs have continued. DAC produced a series of very detailed reports on donor-CSO relations, which were all based on a very instrumentalist, service provider view of the role of CSOs in development. CSOs were framed as program implementers with development as a top-down, traditional process where Northern CSOs 'do development' for Southern CSOs. These reports also produced some very intrusive recommendations not just outlining to OECD governments how they should manage CSOs, but also giving detailed directions to CSOs on how they should be structuring their affairs, in other words, a managerial approach. This included: collaborating

⁵ This was exemplified in the narrow processes proposed for the promotion of aid effectiveness post-Busan (Lanzet 2012). Also the declaration emphasised the private sector, 'new' donors and South-South cooperation more than CSOs.

with donors on project objectives and outcomes; making their reports ‘fully accountable’ to donors and beneficiaries; harmonising their systems and processes; and creating an international database of CSO projects (OECD 2011a, p. 7). Why CSOs would want to comply with these directives is not discussed. There are all sorts of issues here for CSOs, first what would the consequences of donor government influence on project objectives be? Second, should donors get to determine what ‘full accountability’ is and will their own reporting meet the same standards? Third, who will CSOs have to harmonise their systems with - donors, partner NGOs, partner states - and is this possible? Fourth, what would the impacts on CSOs freedom and security of a mega-database be?

For donors, the key way they were to progress this agenda is through a civil society strategy and Germany was identified as one of just three laggards amongst DAC members, in not having one (OECD 2011a). In order to understand Germany’s lack of a civil society strategy it is necessary to first briefly map the country’s development CSO sector. The type and number of institutions and the diversity of funding sources of CSOs are key factors in the capacity of government to influence the sector, with more diversity leading to greater autonomy for the sector (Molenaers et al. 2014). As noted in the introduction, the German development CSO sector is also little researched and thus the section also provides a useful map of the sector.

Germany’s Development CSOs⁶

German CSOs can be divided into three broad groups. First, the unique phenomenon of the German political foundations – each of the parties represented in the Bundestag has a state-funded foundation and they receive funding from the Germany aid ministry, the *Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung* (BMZ), for development work. They are not discussed here as the political foundations are seen as distinct from development CSOs (Bornhorst 2012), they are not part of CSO coordination networks and the OECD DAC documents on aid effectiveness do not refer to them though there is a brief mention of them in the German government’s draft and final CSO cooperation strategy discussed later⁷.

Second, there are thousands of small and medium development CSOs including church-linked, secular and a few business-linked groups. Third, there are two big church-based development network linked to the Protestant and Catholic churches that receive substantial public funding. The Protestant network is called *Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst* (EED –

⁶ The pre-1990 situation outlined here refers only to the situation in Federal Republic of Germany not that in the former German Democratic Republic (or East Germany).

⁷ The political foundations are formally NGOs, but since they are almost fully financed from the public purse, the title NGO is problematic. Their funding is determined by the Bundestag on a three-year basis dependent on each party’s share of votes in the last election. They receive funding from five ministries, with the BMZ’s contribution expressly for development cooperation activities (OECD 2010, p. 57). Total funding for all the foundations was almost US \$2 billion between 1962 and 1998 (Rielly 2009, p. 427) and, in 2009, the political foundations received €216 million from BMZ. This is more than the funding for church-linked CSOs. German political foundations have had a role in a number of political transformations thanks to their connections to power holders (Anderson n.d.), yet they operate largely under the public radar. They have not received the critical attention focused on the US Alliance for Democracy under the Kennedy Administration or the Reagan Administration’s National Endowment for Democracy (Rielly 2009, p. 278).

Protestant Development Service) and the Catholic group is *Misereor – Hilfswerk der katholischen Kirche* (Misereor- Aid Agency of the Catholic Church). Their state support dates to the establishment of Germany's aid program and ministry in 1961 under the Federal Republic of Germany's first Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, whose political party (the Christian Democratic Union) highlighted Christian values. At the time, there was no bureaucratic structure or colonial administration to draw upon and thus there was very little German knowledge and expertise about development⁸. The government turned to the Protestant and Catholic Churches because of their 'development' experience centred on large missionary programs, especially in Africa and Latin America (Weiland 2012). The two largest church development CSOs both predate the BMZ - *Misereor* was established in 1958 and a Protestant network, *Brot für die Welt* (Bread for the World), undertook its first fundraising in 1959. This latter group merged with EED in 2012 in part to address coordination challenges but mostly in order to expand their influence on German and European politicians.

BMZ worked with CSOs as that was a core approach in (West) German post-war welfare policy built on subsidiarity (Anheier & Seibel 1993; Archambault et al. 2014). Further, Germany's post-war state privileges the Catholic, Protestant and Jewish faiths by making ecclesiastical law constitutionally equal to public administrative law and giving a special role to specified social welfare organisations, where the churches play the major role (Anheier & Seibel 1993), as well as by collecting a tax to support churches (*Kirchensteuer*). Thus, the churches have a greater presence in development policy than in the majority of DAC donor countries. BMZ still has a special department for the churches and the two organisations receive very large block grants to support their work. Indeed, the two church-linked networks receive a larger block of government funding than all other CSOs put together – in 2009 they got €192 million from the government, while all other groups received only €150 million (Ruck 2009). This latter funding was divided between 150 organisations, though with a few major beneficiaries. Thus, outside the churches, the government's contribution to CSOs is actually quite small, and this has been the subject of criticism over the years (Runge & Wardenbach 2009, p. 330)⁹. The level of government funding is said to be a key influence on CSO independence (Piewitt et al. 2010)¹⁰. *Misereor* gets around 60% of its income from the government and in 2011/12, EED received almost

⁸ In Britain, for example, a number of staff in the original Ministry of Overseas Development established in 1964 came from the Colonial Office or related departments. Whereas Germany was a late starter in developing a colonial empire and its colonies were confiscated under the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, hence the limited bureaucratic structure. Germany started development efforts in 1952 with a contribution to the UN's Expanded Assistance Program and in 1956 set up its own fund but the Ministry was not established until November 1961 (BMZ 2015a; Lancaster 2007).

⁹ There are also smaller amounts of funding available to CSOs through state governments and local government (districts, cities and municipalities).

¹⁰ The reliance of CSOs on government funding in Germany is below the European average. In 1993, around 32% of their income was from government whereas the average in Europe was 42% (Woods 2000, pp. 16-17). Estimating CSO funding is difficult as there is little data collection. The amount they receive from OECD governments is not clear as the DAC system only records direct allocations to them, not overall amounts. Multilateral funding to CSOs is not reported, nor are food and emergency aid directed through them (Woods 2000, p. 13). Nevertheless, it is clear that public and private funding for CSOs has increased substantially since the 1970s. In 1996, it was estimated that NGO funds totalled 17% of the total bilateral Official Development Assistance (ODA) of DAC members, an amount equal to twice the total ODA of the UK (Woods 2000, p. 9).

70% of its funding from government (Misereor 2012; EED 2012)¹¹. Thus, prospective changes in CSO-state relations could have more dramatic impacts on these two groups.

In terms of coordination between German CSOs, Germany was a late starter but there are now a number of networks operating at the federal, state and local levels. For a long time, the sheer number of CSOs prevented the establishment of an umbrella organisation. However, VENRO, a major country-wide platform for representing development NGOs and lobbying government, was formed in 1995¹². It has around 120 members including most of the larger CSOs, state NGO networks and the 16 One World networks¹³. Smaller organisations are indirectly represented through these networks, so that VENRO theoretically involves 2,000 development NGOs (BMZ 2015b; Ruck 2009). However, an interviewee from a sustainable development network around Freiburg, which includes members of the One World Forum, suggested that there is, in practice, little flow of information from VENRO to small CSOs (Große 2012). According to critics, VENRO has limited coverage of the sector and this restricts its effectiveness (Runge & Wardenbach 2009, p. 328).

Along with VENRO, there is a plethora of smaller networks, which reflects the size of the sector and Germany's decentralised government system. There are state-based networks, indeed sometimes there is more than one network at the state level and there can be competition between them¹⁴. Most state governments have their own development policy and programs and act as implementers for federal programs. Local government is where policy is implemented and thus they are another focus of aid and development efforts. This decentralised political system is probably a reason for the number and diversity of German CSOs. Amongst smaller CSOs, coordination issues are pronounced. Most informants in this study noted there was little coordination amongst them and Große (2012) noted that it is not uncommon to have a handful of groups in one area in Germany all working on projects in the same country that rarely meet or coordinate (see also ADRA 2012; Merk 2012).

This section on the structure of the German development CSO sector and coordination within it goes some way to explaining why it has been possible for the OECD (2011, p. 7) to make the case that: 'DAC members see the high transaction costs of dealing with many small organisations and duplication of activities between donors and CSOs as the main challenges' in working with CSOs. However, seen in a critical light, this view of CSOs is based on a view of development as a one-way technocratic project of economic growth that is done by donors to recipients and, in which, CSOs are mere service providers. The view of most

¹¹ In Germany, as in other countries, the biggest organisations get the bulk of the funding and donations, see Runge and Wardenbach (2009, p. 330) and Woods (2000, p. 18). Interestingly, Nunnenkamp and Öhler (2011) found that the funding CSOs received from BMZ was more likely to be more focused on poor countries than the funds they raised from the public for development.

¹² Prior to this, there were four German-wide CSO networks (Runge & Wardenbach 2009, p. 328). Most of the large CSOs are members of the other networks and alliances too, for example European-wide ones.

¹³ The One World network is mostly comprised of fair trade stores of which there are hundred across the country.

¹⁴ In the state of Baden-Württemberg, there are two competing groups: the Federation for Development Baden Württemberg (*Dachverbands Entwicklungspolitik Baden Württemberg*) established by local organisations in 1975; and the Foundation for Development Cooperation Baden Württemberg (*Stiftung Entwicklungs-Zusammenarbeit Baden-Württemberg*) established by the state government in 1991.

progressive CSOs is that development cooperation is an interactive, learning process for all the parties, focused around concerns with human rights and dignity. Thus such organisation regard moves to fit them into managerialist aid frameworks with suspicion.

The German Aid Program, Aid Effectiveness and CSOs

Germany is one of the few countries that has a separate ministry for development policy, however BMZ is only responsible for developing the overall program, international consultation and negotiations with developing countries regarding specific projects and programs. Responsibility for implementation and for some areas of policy development falls to a range of organisations and agencies - government, private and non-governmental – at federal, state and communal levels.¹⁵ Not surprisingly then, BMZ is not renowned for its coherence or for its coordination capacity (Nuscheler 2007, p. 678; OECD 2010, p. 17). Equally, the delivery system is very fragmented and complex, which is not uncommon amongst donor states, but the participation of so many organisations in development policy has been said to be a unique feature of German development policy (Messner 2011, p. 420).

Germany quickly committed to the MDGs and shortly thereafter to the aid effectiveness agenda. Indeed, Germany became an early ‘champion’ of the aid effectiveness agenda under the then Social Democratic Party led government (OECD 2006, p. 16). The commitment survived the subsequent grand coalition governments and the conservative coalition of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Christian Social Union in Bavaria (CSU) that came to power in 2013. However, support for the aid effectiveness agenda has waned over this time. Since 2014, development policy has been based on the ‘Charter for the Future’ (BMZ 2014a), a broad document listing eight development goals starting with ‘ensuring dignified life throughout the world’. Overall policy is framed by international agreements, in particular the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the aid effectiveness agenda (BMZ 2015a).

The effectiveness agenda prompted some changes in German aid delivery, indeed former Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development, Dirk Niebel, called these changes ‘the most far-reaching reform in the history of German development policy’ (BMZ 2013, p. 2). BMZ is now the lead agency responsible for development co-operation policy and strategy. In 2011, three of the technical cooperation agencies were merged to form the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH*¹⁶. However, there is still a distinction between technical and financial assistance and program

¹⁵For example, responsibility for emergencies remains with the Foreign Ministry, for the world economic system with the Ministries for Finance and Economy and work and for environment and agriculture with the respective ministries (Anderson n.d.; Nuscheler 2007, pp. 672-673).

¹⁶The three organisations were: *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ)*, German Development Service (DED) and Capacity Building International, Germany (InWEnt). GIZ, like its predecessors, is owned by the Federal Government and is a private company run on private lines, indeed, it understands itself as a business with a development focus (Messner 2011, p. 420). Its role is to provide technical support and cooperation for Germany’s aid program. It has around 19,000 employees, operates in over 130 countries and has revenues of almost €2 billion a year. The other main delivery body is the *Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW)*, which is responsible for financial cooperation and spends the majority of German aid. It focuses on social and economic/business infrastructure and mostly supplies cheap credit.

implementation is still carried out by a wide range of agencies (OECD 2010). The OECD DAC (2010, p. 17) review of German aid found that: 'BMZ continues to be responsible for a little more than half of Germany's Official Development Assistance (ODA) – the remainder is allocated to a range of other government departments, agencies and institutions and this makes it hard for Germany to maintain a coherent development co-operation policy'. Germany has also made slow progress in reducing the number of recipient countries (OECD 2010, p. 17). It is clear that the German government has made limited progress in improving its aid effectiveness by DAC standards.

The idea that aid effectiveness agenda should apply to German CSOs emerged in 2009 when then CSU development speaker, Christian Ruck (2009, p. 313), noted that German NGOs had not made much progress in the harmonisation agenda¹⁷. Changes to government funding for CSOs started, despite the fact that at the beginning of the Paris Agenda process there was explicit agreement between BMZ and NGOs that there would not be changes (bengo 2012). The DAC peer review of German aid arrangements pushed for change arguing that 'there are insufficient accountability linkages between' NGOs and the German aid ministries and that NGOs need to align their activities more with partner country priorities (OECD 2010, p. 18). DAC was also critical of the fact that BMZ did not have a specific strategy for working with CSOs in development, though the Foreign Ministry has one for humanitarian support (OECD 2011, p. 16-18). In response to this peer review, BMZ prepared a draft strategy in 2012, and final strategy in 2014.

One strong indicator that the German government moved to align its support for CSOs more with its own aid policy is funding changes. Historically, the relationship involved predictable support to the Catholic and Protestant CSOs, support for the political foundations and funding for a selection of other CSOs through a regular call for proposals. In 2010, a number of special purpose NGO earmarked funding programs for special topics were introduced – in 2010, a €10.0 million NGO Facility for Afghanistan was established, in 2011 it was the NGO Facility for Climate, Forest and Biodiversity conservation (funds: €5.0 million in 2012) and in 2012 a €3.0 million NGO Facility for Human Rights was established. Previous support for CSOs did not dictate geographical or sectoral priorities. BMZ's 2014 'Strategy on Government-Civil Society Cooperation in post-2015 Development Policy' (hereafter 2014 Strategy) indicates that this will continue as 'BMZ endeavours, in dialogue with civil society organisations, to focus to some extent on certain sectors or regions...' (BMZ 2014b, p. 12).

The merger of technical cooperation agencies in 2011, which created GIZ, led to changes in how the relationship between BMZ and development CSOs is managed. In 2012, Engagement Global – Service for Development Partners was created and their mandate includes linking to CSOs and promoting development education in Germany. With the restructure, the organisation is now part of the Federal Government, though its staff are not tenured bureaucrats (*Beamter*) as it is a private, non-profit, government-owned company.

¹⁷ Ruck pointed out some developments around coordination in the emergency and humanitarian relief area but noted that there was no equivalent progress in development cooperation (Ruck 2009, p. 313).

German CSOs argued that it should have involved shared state/civil society responsibility instead and that some of its structure contravenes Germany's subsidiarity principle whereby activities are devolved to the lowest practical level (Brot für die Welt – Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst et al. 2012). In particular, they pointed to development education in Germany as something CSOs have been successfully doing for decades. There is evidence that Engagement Global is now requesting changes to the content of publication it has agreed to fund where content is critical of government policies (Brot für die Welt – Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst et al. 2012; Merk 2012). This was not the case in the past and indicates a shift in state-CSO relations.

Within Engagement Global is 'bengo' - the advice centre for NGOs in development cooperation. bengo supports CSOs and private groups in accessing public funding for development. Over time, they will be given some responsibility for distributing grants (bengo 2012). Previously, bengo was an independent organisation under the umbrella of one of the central voluntary welfare associations (bengo 2012)¹⁸. As an independent organisation, it was a member of Germany's NGO umbrella group, VENRO, and participated in their working groups. However, with its incorporation into Engagement Global, bengo is no longer a member of VENRO and cannot take part in these groups. Indeed, there is now a degree of mistrust as they are seen as representatives of BMZ (bengo 2012). There is concern that the transfer of some responsibility for the selection of projects will further erode their relationship with CSOs.

BMZ outlined harmonisation goals in both the draft (BMZ 2012) and the final 2014 Strategy. Both of these refer to directing cooperation with 'partner countries' which German CSOs understand as BMZ's partners (VENRO 2012, p. 2). The emphasis on BMZ directing CSO funding for partner countries was expanded 2014 Strategy. This does indicate that BMZ is interested in directing the geographical and sectoral priorities of its CSOs funding, challenging the traditional right of initiative of German CSOs (bengo 2012)¹⁹. VENRO argued the harmonisation agenda 'must not' be applied to NGOs directly and that NGOs must not be made to follow the focus sectors and priorities of the government or other donors because they are, despite some linkages, not a transmission belt for state development policy (VENRO 2008, p. 7; VENRO 2011). Their emphasis is on local cooperation on the ground where they claim to be the strongest (Runge & Wardenbach 2009, p. 332).

VENRO highlighted two other issues in the civil society cooperation strategy. First, civil society is often positioned as a complementary actor to the state and business and not understood as an actor in its own right (VENRO 2012, p. 2). Second, BMZ placed itself in a central role on issues of coordination, transparency, results and so on but there is no detail on how it will do this and the role for existing CSO networks is vague. Koch (2008, p. 70) pointed out that there is no discussion of how BMZ and its associated agencies could

¹⁸Reportedly, two bengo staff legally challenged their move from one limited liability company to a government-owned one (bengo 2012).

¹⁹ There is historical precedent for this as BMZ had, in the past, encouraged CSOs to run projects in particular countries, for example those with which there were no strong diplomatic relations, including Cuba (bengo 2012). Such political connections are, of course, an explicit purpose of Germany's political foundations.

harmonise or improve its requirements vis-à-vis CSOs. This final point is telling regarding the evolving donor aid effectiveness discourse – it applies only where and how donors see fit. Indeed the final strategy is, under its participatory language, quite critical of CSOs and it identifies a range of areas where they need improvement including transparency, effectiveness, sustainability of their projects and harmonisation with local governments, structures and systems (BMZ 2014b, pp. 11-12). Finally, it is notable that the strategy, like the DAC reports, presents development as a one-way process whereby German CSOs build capacity in developing countries.

Conclusion

The aid effectiveness agenda started life with some progressive components, but donors have now abandoned most of those in favour of development effectiveness, which really means getting beyond aid (Eyben 2012). The CSO push for donors to progress the aid effectiveness agenda has backfired. Donor states reduced their commitment to reforming their own systems, yet some have devoted increasing attention to managing development CSOs. In line with a technocratic, depoliticised approach to aid effectiveness, this means focussing on reducing CSO transaction costs, targeting their work in countries and sectors that suit donors and applying managerial systems of outputs and outcomes. Viewing these technocratic concerns outside of the larger engagement of CSOs with partner organisations as a mutual learning experience and a political engagement concerned to progress transformative development reduces CSOs to apolitical service providers for the state. This change fits in with the trend of government's discrediting CSOs and is part of the general reduction in civic space, outlined in the introduction to the paper.

In the German case, the history of decentralisation and subsidiarity were a key reason that development CSOs were not subject to the increased instrumentalism and managerialism common across other parts of the globe from the 1980s. Yet, quite why the aid effectiveness agenda in the 2000s prompted change is not fully clear - though the relentless logic of managerialism, combined with the intervention of an international organisation the OECD DAC, goes part of the way to explaining the change. BMZ has not, according to DAC assessments, gone very far in reforming its own practices, yet it has made changes to its relations with the CSO sector.

Changes started with increasing CSOs focus on particular countries and sectors and enlarged managerial control of grant funds but are extending to government interference in CSO management. These changes are not dramatic but they do clearly bring instrumentalist and managerialist relations much more into the state-development CSO sector in Germany than had been the case previously. They challenge the principle of subsidiarity, which gives precedence to social issues being addressed at the local level and to independence in local and community governance and organisation as well as the right of initiative of German CSOs. This process has coincided with, and been reinforced by, the global trend of reduced civic space and more regulations for CSOs. This is a concerning combination.

The diversity of the German CSO sector and its range of funding sources will limit the impact of the government agenda (Molenaers et al. 2014). Its impacts are likely to be higher

on the large development CSOs, especially the church organisations, which have a very heavy reliance on government funding. It is not yet clear whether changes in funding mechanisms will affect the block grants to churches or just the competitive funding mechanisms for other CSOs. If it does not impact the block grants, it may act as a wedge between the two big church groups and other CSOs. Equally significant is that Germany's political foundations seem to be exempt from the aid effectiveness debate, which may be attributable to their 'extraordinary access to their political parties' (Lancaster 2007, p. 185).

The study has demonstrated the complexity of international, multiscalar development relations, in this case where an agenda championed by a multilateral organisation, the DAC, has influenced state-civil society relations in Germany. The influence is clearly mediated by the history and nature of the country's state-civil society relations based on subsidiarity. Still, at the end of the day, multilateral technocratic development discourse has become that bit more entrenched in Germany, where governance was historically decentralised.

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