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## Global Lifestyles – New Pathways for Development Policy

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# The Current Column

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## Global Lifestyles – New Pathways for Development Policy

Bonn, 30 January 2012. The title of this Current Column is also the motto of the "3rd Bonn Conference on International Development Policy" on 30 and 31 January. In these two days, experts from politics, science, civil society and private companies ask among other things what direct and indirect impact lifestyles in industrialized nations have on developing countries and whether the latter should follow the same development paths or should find other, more sustainable ways – and want to. Also discussed is whether economic growth can be a panacea and represent the only yardstick of development or whether there are other gauges for successful development.

The question of sustainability of Western lifestyles is not new. As early as 1972, the *Club of Rome* pointed out the limits to growth and the finiteness of natural resources. Today, there are numerous studies which highlight the finite nature of resources and the consequences for the global society: the *Millennium Ecosystem Assessment* deals with the progressive degradation of global ecosystem services; Johan Rockström's research group calls attention to planetary boundaries which are not to be crossed by humanity if catastrophic environmental changes are to be avoided, and the German Advisory Council on Global Change (WBGU) sees the need for a social contract for implementation of a "Great Transformation". All these studies make it clear that existing natural resources are inadequate to support the industrialized countries' currently pursued paths of development and growth for the whole, constantly growing world population. In addition, patterns of consumption and lifestyles in the industrialized countries have some serious economic, social and ecological impacts on developing countries. A very current and vivid example of the increasing depletion of global resources, especially by the industrialized countries, and its negative effects is provided by the IPCC in its latest *Special Report*. It describes how climate change will lead to an increase in extreme climatic events and how above all the poor in developing countries have to suffer under this impact.

### **Patterns of consumption and lifestyles in industrialized countries have a negative impact on developing countries**

The problems which result from the interaction of finite resources, non-sustainable lifestyles and world population growth together with increasing needs appear clearly in the fields of nutrition, energy and mobility: the planting of biofuels as a substitute for fossil resources in the areas of transport and energy leads to growing competition for land and is partially behind the increases in global food prices in recent years. When farmers in developing countries switch from the production of foodstuffs to biofuels, this can have negative impacts on the local food security. On the other hand, biofuels may represent a climate-friendly and inexpensive source of energy in developing countries. Palm oil, which serves both as food (e.g. in ready-made meals, margarine, chocolate) and for energy production, is one example of a heatedly discussed product which can have positive effects in the producing countries but can also wreak ecological and social havoc. In addition, more and more human beings want to consume food of ever-higher quality (e.g. meat), so that land consumption and greenhouse gas emissions for food production continue to rise.

### **Rethinking and course change required on all levels**

In June 2012, the international community will discuss at the Rio+20 Conference the concept of a *green economy* and the required overall institutional framework. The EU recently pledged itself to an agenda for change, and aspects of sustainability on the national level play an important role in the development strategy of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. A next step will now involve following up on these concepts with deeds and implementing the idea of comprehensive sustainability in development cooperation. Regardless of different emphases, the concepts basically call for a form of economic development which deals efficiently and sustainably with existing resources and serves the interests of all population groups.

This requires action on all levels. The UN and other international organizations must orient their programmes and projects in such a way that they support countries at all stages of development over the long run in building themselves up to sustainably oriented economies. In this process, a first step must also be to establish awareness via political and scientific means and in civil society, since to some extent the worldwide, long-standing and actively pursued development paradigms of industrialized countries must radically change. Moreover, the concept of comprehensive, sustainable development requires a stronger interlinkage of different sectors particularly in the face of the challenges of a world with ever closer ties. Thus ecological aspects, for example, and a sustainable management of resources must be integrated into development strategies and other relevant political sectors (e.g. trade, transport, etc.). The need for this and the advantages and opportunities which result over the long term from such an integration are still not adequately rooted in most political arenas, which do not deal directly with these topics.

Industrialized countries must support this approach not only in the field of development cooperation but must at the same time integrate aspects of sustainability even more strongly into domestic sector policies. Actions for promoting sustainable development in the partner countries

lose much of their effectiveness when patterns of consumption and lifestyles are not simultaneously adapted correspondingly by us. Private companies and civil society must be intensively integrated into this process. For companies, for example, incentive schemes for the implementation of sustainability criteria could be an important instrument. In the final analysis, however, it is the consumers who decide on the success of a product. It is they who must be informed about the consequences of their decisions.

Finally, the developing countries themselves must be willing to implement the required transformations and thus generate experiences which can serve other countries as models. The strategies of poor countries like Mali or in particular Ethiopia which were presented at the last climate change conference in December 2011 for the development of a climate-resilient *green economy* are a step in the right direction and should be encouraged and expanded.

The Bonn Conference on International Development Policy represents an important instrument in this long-term process for bringing together the different actors who are involved in development cooperation and the sustainability discourse and for increasing their sensitivity for new aspects and interrelationships.



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