

BMZ's new Africa Strategy
**Global structural policy 2.0 –
more self-critical, credible and
values-based?**

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Bonn, 30 January 2023. The German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) presented its new Africa Strategy on 24 January, and again at the “Joint perspectives: Cooperation with Africa in times of change” event on 25 January. Set against the dawning of a new era, the document makes a commitment to multilateral cooperation and European solutions as a means of countering the narrative of global divisions. One primary new feature of the strategy, which otherwise provides continuity in many regards, sees BMZ address its own position on development issues in greater depth and reflect upon its role as a partner in a multi-polar world. The return to a global structural policy entails stringent requirements, with Germany’s credibility as a partner to African states resting on its ability to fulfil them.



A strategy for a changing world

The strategy responds to the consequences of Russia's war of aggression and the upheaval brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic without losing sight of long-term structural transformations. While efforts to tackle the causes of displacement through (private-sector) economic development were at the heart of the Marshall Plan with Africa (2017-2022), other issues have since emerged, including a feminist development policy and pandemic prevention. The private sector plays less of a role in the strategy, with its involvement primarily limited to climate and development partnerships and infrastructure financing initiatives. There is a trend in migration policy towards the promotion of legal migration routes. Reform partnerships are set to be gradually replaced by sectoral cooperation. Civil-society actors and multi-stakeholder partnerships feature prominently. Whether this new emphasis will actually lead to an increase in the proportion of German bilateral development funding allocated to civil-society organisations, which has been comparatively small until now, remains to be seen.

Interests and values

The strategy sees Germany in competition with actors such as China, Turkey, the Gulf States and Russia for influence on the African continent. The Federal Republic intends to distinguish itself from these other players through a focus on common interests and values in its cooperation activities with African partners. Whether bilaterally or as part of EU initiatives, Germany seeks to enhance its appeal as a partner by further stepping up its commitment to democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Engaging in "in-depth reflection on the consequences of the colonial era" should prove helpful in this regard. Such reflection forms part of the new feminist approach, which aims to dismantle not only structural inequalities between the sexes, but also racist and post-colonial structures. At the same time, the strategy rejects paternalistic tendencies within development policy in response to related allegations made recently by African nations during the controversy over voting behaviour of African states at the UN General Assembly regarding the Russia-Ukraine conflict and during discussions on the use of fossil fuels. However, values-based policy could itself be understood as paternalistic. The only way for Germany to remedy this is by transparently weighing interests and values. The question arises as to whether limiting cooperation to countries with shared values and interests runs the risk of effectively

excluding a large number of partners. BMZ needs to find clear and practicable answers to the progressive autocratisation process taking place in many countries.

A return to structural policy

A global structural policy devised in cooperation with Africa and a commitment to global debt management are at the forefront of the strategy. This evokes memories of the coalition between Germany's Social Democrat and Green parties that governed the country over 20 years ago. Global structural policy means shared responsibility and can only be created through multilateral cooperation. This is expressed clearly in the announcement that existing asymmetries in trade and agricultural policy will be addressed, as well as in BMZ's desire "that the voices of African states and the AU are heard appropriately within multilateral fora". Germany needs to defend this position more vigorously if it is to boost its credibility.

The Africa Strategy offers many starting points for advancing an interministerial approach by the German Government to its relations with Africa. The strategy underscores this point by making reference to the Federal Government's Africa Policy Guidelines and expressing a commitment to working closely with other ministries and EU instruments. The few specific examples mentioned include the proven Interministerial Steering Committee on Africa, the Team Europe approach, joint programming, and the Global Gateway Africa – Europe Investment Package. As stressed in an evaluation of reform partnerships, there is a particular need for better coordination between BMZ and the Federal Foreign Office if Germany is to be viewed as a reliable partner.

The strategy covers a broad range of topics, but is often more descriptive than strategic. It reads like a manifesto for an active partnership with Africa that questions old ways of thinking and highlights common ground. There is, however, one question that remains unanswered – namely how to pursue a values-based foreign and development policy in countries whose governments do not share Germany's priorities. There are no easy answers here; rather, such a policy must be pursued pragmatically and, now more than ever, will require Germany and the EU to adopt a coherent and determined approach to their work around the world.