

Poor performers in Sub-Saharan Africa – Exclusion or integration by the international community and development cooperation?

Dr. Stephan Klingebiel / Huria Ogbamichael

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Introduction

For some time now there has been an academic and political debate underway on so-called poor performers or poor-performing countries. The phenomenon of the poor performer is certainly nothing new. What is new, though, is the heightened attention which the issue has recently attracted in development policy as well as in foreign and security policy.¹ The reason for this must be sought in world-political events – above all the 9/11 terror attacks and the insecurity which some countries pose for international politics. Even though not all poor performers are countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, the ongoing discussion is particularly relevant for the African continent.

The course of the debate has been unsatisfactory in two different respects. On the one hand, we find an inflation of the terminologies used to outline similar or supposedly similar situations. Are we to see the poor-performer discussion as the same thing as the discussion on what is known as difficult partnership? How do poor performers relate to failing states, to rogue states, to crisis countries? On the other hand, we find ourselves confronted with the question of how politics can reasonably respond to the phenomenon of poor performers,

1 See e.g. Claus / Kuhn / Kurtenbach 2002.

Against this background, the present paper looks briefly into the following four questions:

1. What is the reason for the current discussion on poor performers?
2. Who are these poor performers?
3. In what way do poor performers constitute a challenge for the international community?
4. How should development cooperation (DC) deal with poor performers?

What is the reason for the current discussion on poor performers?

There are two backgrounds that are of particular importance for the ongoing debate on poor-performing countries:

~~✍~~ In development cooperation the issue has been addressed for some years now in the framework of the aid effectiveness debate. Looking at the donor community, we find that the World Bank plays a central role here. Its report "Assessing Aid. What Works, What Doesn't and Why" (World Bank 1998) has imparted a new dynamic to the debate.² The report's most important finding is that DC can only prove successful when it is flanked by "good policies" on the part of partner governments, an observation that serves once again to underline the importance of the principle of ownership as the sine qua non for the effects DC aims to achieve. But since, it is claimed, the donor community has, in allocating its funds, paid inadequate attention to the willingness to reform which this implies, many voices are calling for a reallocation of DC in favor of good-policy/high-poverty countries.

The Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) initiated by US President George W. Bush likewise sets its sights on good performance. The MCA's stated intention is to support developing countries that have been proved to be performing well on

2 On the present state of the debate, see e.g. Beynon 2001 and Goldin / Rogers / Stern 2002.

three criteria: (1) "ruling justly," (2) "investing in their people," and (3) "encouraging economic freedom."³

Even though the World Bank's approach has generally met with broad acceptance among donors, many have expressed their concern that, among other things, a too widely conceived principle of selectivity in the commitment of funds could induce donors to withdraw from the poor performers among the developing countries. Improved effectiveness of DC should, accordingly, not be achieved by shunning "difficult" partner countries.

~~✍~~ The 9/11 terror attacks have intensified and enlarged the scope of the debate on poor performers, with, above all, security aspects moving more to the foreground. The weak or nonexistent governance structures in many countries are seen as one of the factors contributing to the emergence and proliferation of international terrorism (e.g. Rotberg [ed.] 2003). It has become more clear than ever that state failure and burgeoning "markets of violence" are not only a local or regional security problem but a global one. Even if events like 9/11 offer no clear-cut proof of a causal connection between poverty and terrorism, the basic tenor of the debate can be summed up in the words: "The international community cannot afford to put up with any blind spots on the world map" (Wieczorek-Zeul 2002).

Who are these poor performers?

Although the term poor performers or poor-performing countries is frequently encountered in the general parlance of donors, it does not appear to be on the way to striking roots in official terminology. In the eyes of many institutions the term evidently has an overly derogatory or discriminatory ring. The World Bank, for instance, has already adopted a different term, "low-income countries under stress" (LICUS),⁴ and the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) uses the term "difficult partnerships."⁵

3 See the explanatory information provided on the MCA website: www.mca.gov.

4 The World Bank defines LICUS as follows: "Low-income countries under stress (LICUS) are characterized by very weak policies, institutions, and governance. Aid does not work well in these environments because

Based on the current debate, we can formulate the following definition of poor performers:

~~✍~~ The term performance refers less to a country's overall development-related performance than – explicitly – to the actions of its public institutions and political decision-makers. In other words, looking at poor performers means focusing on the state.

~~✍~~ The term poor implies that the state sector is marked by substantial institutional and political weaknesses which, viewed from the donor standpoint, run counter to successful DC. This brings us to the question of the criteria used to assess whether or not a country is a poor performer. For the World Bank the key question is whether or not the conventional instruments of DC can be used in a given country. For the DAC the key question is a given government's commitment to a poverty-oriented development policy.

It is furthermore of central importance to distinguish between two different types of poor performer:

~~✍~~ One factor constitutive for the first type is a lack of capacity to shape and articulate the political and/or the public framework. That is, the state is not longer able to reasonably meet its responsibilities (e.g. owing to the enormous pressure generated by the political problems typically encountered in a post-conflict societies, insufficient material conditions, etc.).

~~✍~~ The second type includes countries that, even though they are in possession of the means and the capacity needed to shape a governance framework, are unwilling to deploy them constructively; i.e. in these cases it is a lack of political will that is responsible for the situation.

governments lack the capacity or inclination to use finance effectively for poverty reduction." (World Bank 2002: iii)

5 For the DAC, these are countries "(...) where the government does not share the objective of poverty reduction and lacks ownership." (DCD/DAC 2002: 2)

In reality of course, mixed forms of the two phenomena occur side by side and at the same time. Poor performers are, in other words, both countries that lack a certain minimum of effective governmental authority and countries that have sufficient effective governmental authority but fail to use it for purposes of development.

Against this background we can also set other debates in relation to the discussion on poor performers. The following four debates are cases in point:

~~✍~~ Failing/failed states⁶ clearly belong to the to the category of poor performers, since in the countries or territories in question governmental authority has either ceased to exist or is in the process of disintegration.

Some of the main features of this group are:

1. loss of territorial control;
2. loss of the public security provided by state actors;
3. loss of law and order and effective governance;
4. collapse of basic public services (e.g. education and healthcare) and breakdown of central economic framework conditions.

High risks and/or an advanced state of disintegration can be observed e.g. in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Burundi, and Somalia.

~~✍~~ Whether or not conflict and crisis countries⁷ are classified as poor performers is a question that has to be decided on a case-by-case basis. The decisive question is whether the conflict or the crisis concerned is due or conducive to the collapse of state governance structures. Interestingly, Uganda, for instance, is often referred to in the development discussion as a good performer, because the government of Uganda is pursuing an active policy of poverty reduction. It must though, be borne in mind here that parts of the country are in the midst of a violent conflict.

6 For information on this debate, see e.g. Straw 2002, Sorensen 1999, and Rotberg (ed.) 2003.

7 For an overview of this discussion, see Debiel / Klein (eds.) 2002.

The conflict and crisis countries that can be assigned to the group of poor-performing countries would include e.g. Burundi, Sudan, and Cote d'Ivoire.

~~✍~~ The debate on so-called rogue states or risk states⁸ has recently assumed a new urgency and must be viewed against the background of the efforts currently being undertaken against terrorism. As a rule, the countries referred to as rogue or risk states are authoritarian regimes like those of Iraq, Libya, North Korea, and, formerly, Pakistan. There are no Subsaharan African countries among this group. Evidently, the reason for this is that the regimes in question lack the threat and pressure potentials required for inclusion.

To name two main features of so-called rogue and risk states: a) They do not comply with the rules and standards of the international community and b) their status depends in large measure on a ruling regime or a concrete leadership figure. These are, however, by no means meant to be seen as fixed criteria that determine whether or not a given country is a rogue or risk state. The debate is instead shaped to a great extent by the foreign-policy perceptions and the concrete interest situation of the US. The group of rogue states will, as a rule, consist of poor-performing countries which have governance structures sufficient to make and enforce national policy but are unwilling to use this capacity in a constructive and development-oriented fashion.

~~✍~~ Depending on the individual case, authoritarian, hybrid, and neopatrimonial systems⁹ are best assigned to the group of poor performers; though this need not necessarily be the case. On the whole, states with authoritarian or hybrid features are marked primarily by governance deficits. The case of Zimbabwe shows that fundamental governance problems block development processes in many areas; and Zimbabwe is therefore without question a poor performer. On the other hand, Uganda in turn can be cited as an example in which quite respectable development successes have been achieved, even though very little progress has been

8 On this debate, see e.g. Padtberg 2002 and Rubin 1999.

9 On this multifaceted debate, see e.g. UNDP 2002.

made there in building democratic structures. In looking at the group of authoritarian, hybrid, and neopatrimonial systems it may therefore prove informative to ask the additional but related question of whether, on the whole, the governing regime tends more to permit and foster development or to work against it.

There are already a number of different indicator models available to measure the performance of countries. These models can provide an empirical basis for assessing not all but some of the central dimensions of the phenomenon.¹⁰ The two most useful projects are "Governance Matters" and "Country Indicators for Foreign Policy."

~~✍~~ "Governance Matters" is a comprehensive World Bank project designed to evaluate data¹¹ on six core dimensions of governance.¹² This project is the most comprehensive one of its kind that actually is in possession of data and is in the process of evaluating them.

~~✍~~ The "Country Indicators for Foreign Policy" (CIFP) project is somewhat more limited in scope but likewise helpful. It is used to work out risk assessments on individual regions –which include a report on Sub-Saharan Africa.¹³ The project is located at the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs, Carleton University, Canada. Focusing on stability and/or instability, the model uses a comprehensive catalogue of indicators to assess risk potentials in nine areas.¹⁴

10 Existing models are, for instance, unable to measure the dimension "Risk" or "Rogue state," since the perceptions and the interest situation of the US constitute a crucial point in this connection.

11 Kaufmann / Kraay / Mastruzzi 2003.

12 (1) Voice and Accountability, (2) Political Stability, (3) Government Effectiveness, (4) Regulatory Quality, (5) Rule of Law, (6) Control of Corruption.

13 Delany / Varga 2002.

14 (1) History of Armed Conflict, (2) Governance and Political Instability, (3) Militarization, (4) Population Heterogeneity, (5) Demographic Stress, (6) Economic Performance, (7) Human Development, (8) Environmental Stress, (9) International Linkages.

In what way do poor performers constitute a challenge for the international community?

Basically, it is right and important for the international community to get more involved with the question of poor performers. The most important task is to gain constructive outside influence precisely in countries and territories that are at risk of instability or conflict or faced with tendencies working toward state failure. This has not only been the case since the 9/11 attacks, which suddenly brought home to the world the urgent need to address the risks posed by terrorism. Seen in this way, it can be said that there is a pronounced global interest in integrating poor performers into the world community and its structures.

The actors (neighboring countries, regional associations or alliances, the United Nations, etc.) and policies (diplomacy, security policy, trade policy, etc.) called for will differ in accordance with the causes responsible for a country's development into a poor performer and with the concrete form taken on by this problem (regional instability, internal repression, etc.). In many cases it is likely to prove extremely difficult to come up with any approaches at all that might prove effective in gaining a measure of constructive influence.

Viewed in terms of this background, DC in poor-performing countries will either often be unable to play any role at all or be restricted to a very modest one. Where certain fundamental presuppositions are lacking (territories without any governmental authority, "rogue states," etc.) it will for the most part prove impossible, or next to impossible, to find any reasonable points of departure for DC. Moreover, experience indicates that DC tends as a rule to require a medium- to long-term perspective if it is to have any realistic and reasonable prospects of working, and this means that the short-term effects frequently hoped for by political actors are simply not practicable.

On the other hand, however, it is possible to identify countries and territories from the group of poor performers that do offer points of departure for DC. Concentrating DC on the successful cases with favorable framework conditions is certainly not a satisfactory response. In its work, the World Bank assumes the existence of a total of some 30 LICUS (World Bank 2002a: 3). DC can, for instance, provide an important

contribution in countries that, say, show some first signs of state failure or in which a minimum of security has been restored.

How should development cooperation deal with poor performers?

Cooperation with poor performers is predicated in very special ways on an assessment of country-specific conditions and possibilities. This is the reason why it is impracticable to develop any one concept applicable for all poor performers. But it is possible to outline a few relevant key points.

Here we can refer back to a number of aspects that have been discussed¹⁵ in recent years in connection with the debate on "structural stability" initiated in the late 1990s by the DAC¹⁶ and the Commission of the European Union.¹⁷ Accordingly, DC should be understood as a contribution to sustainably overcoming fragile sociopolitical and state structures. One point of particular interest and importance is to develop constructive mechanisms geared to settling conflicts of interest in nonviolent ways.

What this implies for the general goal level is that DC should seek to participate in improving the following framework conditions:

~~the~~ sufficient legitimacy of the state (based, among other things, on participation of nonstate actors) and its organs (government, parliaments, etc.),

15 See Mehler 2002.

16 The DAC's definition: "*Structural stability embraces the interdependent and mutually-reinforcing objectives of social peace, respect for the rule of law and human rights, social and economic development, supported by dynamic and representative political institutions capable of managing change and resolving disputes without resorting to violent conflict.*" (OECD/DAC 1997: 10).

17 The EU Commission has proposed the following definition: "*Structural stability is to be understood as a term denoting a dynamic situation, a situation of stability able to cope with the dynamics inherent in (emerging) democratic societies. Structural stability could thus be defined as a situation involving sustainable economic development, democracy and respect for human rights, viable political structures, and healthy social and environmental conditions, with the capacity to manage change without to resort to violent conflict.*" (Commission of the EU 1996).

~~///~~ a constructive *will* of the state *to govern and formulate policy* and the *effective governmental authority* needed to do so (i.e. sufficient capacity to set and enforce standards),

~~///~~ a secure state monopoly on power, since diffusion of power constitutes a core problem here.

What do these thoughts imply for the concrete approaches of DC? The following points may be of interest in this context:¹⁸

~~///~~ In dealing with poor performers the sine qua non to gaining any constructive and effective influence is close coordination of donor action. In these cases donor coordination should therefore be particularly intensive at the level of policy dialogue and country strategies. If it is to play any meaningful role in gaining a reasonable measure of influence, however, coordination should involve other policy fields as well – i.e. foreign policy first and foremost, but also security policy in some cases.

~~///~~ DC can and should offer poor performers incentives for change. For this reason it is especially important to give thought to a strategic use of DC based on country strategies etc.

~~///~~ DC must also consider the possibility of suspension of cooperation if the countries concerned are unwilling to play a constructive role and/or if DC threatens to give rise to negative impacts. This may, for instance, be the case if DC funds are directly or indirectly misused to strengthen a country's capacities to engage in violent conflict. De facto support for a repressive regime may also be seen as an example in which it would be either reasonable or indeed necessary to suspend bilateral DC. However, suspension may also mean losing chances to gain effective influence based on cooperation ("change through rapprochement").

18 See, among others: World Bank 2002: 31ff.; DCD/DAC 2002; OECD/DAC 2001; Wieczorek-Zeul 2002; Klingebiel 1999.

- ~~///~~ As a rule, the risks involved in cooperation with poor performers will be greater than those encountered in cooperating with other partners. This may mean that investments in social or economic infrastructure are bound up with higher risks than they would be in cooperation with stable partners. The problem of the fungibility of DC is also of major relevance in this context.
- ~~///~~ Cooperation with poor performers often calls for a highly flexible approach. To cite some examples: (a) government-level DC negotiations are not possible because, say, the partner side is without a functioning government; (b) DC measures in pacified areas of a country otherwise still in the midst of an acute conflict; or (c) once combat has been brought to an end, there is a need to stabilize an affected county as swiftly as possible, a task which calls for provision of substantial funds on an ad hoc basis.
- ~~///~~ In cooperation with poor performers it is particularly important to seek to work together with the nonstate sector and, if need be, even to bypass state structures altogether. It should, though, not be forgotten here that in many countries non-state structures are either weak or as good as nonexistent.
- ~~///~~ Intensive monitoring is of major importance for DC with poor performers. Such monitoring must include various elements such as political country dialogues, systematic reporting on political issues, and a proper approach to observing emerging effects.
- ~~///~~ It is furthermore essential not to lose sight of the regional risks and potentials of poor performers. This may, for instance, involve an unstable setting (e.g. the area surrounding the Great Lakes) or constructive links to regional initiatives (e.g. the New Partnership for Africa's Development/NEPAD).
- ~~///~~ The final question centers on what concrete points of departure or what sectors must be seen as particularly important. In essence, we can name two broad fields here: 1. Wherever it is (still) possible to engage in work on political and/or sensitive issues, it would be important to pursue approaches that are regarded as

meaningful in connection with the debate on crisis prevention and crisis resolution¹⁹ as well as on good governance. These include, among others, the following issues: participation and democratization, human rights, civil society, development of functioning legal systems, and constructive involvement of the security sector in civil structures. 2. Furthermore, in many instances work in the fields of education and healthcare can prove to be a promising point of departure, particularly if the approaches used are keyed specifically to target groups. This work should at the same time contain a strong advisory element; i.e. the share of outside know-how required will necessarily be far higher (control of the use of funds etc.) than that aimed for in "regular" DC.

Conclusion

In the ongoing debate the term poor performers is used to refer to a number of different phenomena the cause of which must be sought in insufficient governance capacity and/or in a lack of willingness to pursue a constructive line of policy. Empirical data – e.g. the data collected in connection with the "Governance Matters" project²⁰ – indicate that Sub-Saharan Africa is particularly hard hit by the phenomenon of poor performance.

In many cases the possibilities available to gain any outside influence are very limited – this goes for all policy fields, and not least for DC. Still, it is also essential for DC to seek to identify meaningful points of departure for cooperation with poor performers. This applies above all for countries which are marked by individual deficits (weak state structures etc.) and offer possible points of departure for medium or longer-term cooperation. On the other hand, it is very much more difficult – indeed in many cases even impossible – to use DC as a means of gaining influence on particularly serious problem cases (in the sense of failed states etc.).

19 See e.g. DFID 2002: 26ff.

20 On this, see e.g. the comparative regional data on the project website: www.worldbank.org/wbi/governance/govdata2002/.

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