

## POOR PERFORMERS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

### *Exclusion or integration?*

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World political events since 9/11 have refocused attention in the development, foreign and security policy spheres on 'poor performing' countries, owing to the possible threat that some countries pose to the international community. These countries, referred to by the World Bank as low-income countries under stress (LICUS), are 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. There is a pronounced global interest in integrating poor performers into the world community and its structures. The stress here is on using development co-operation and to identify meaningful points of departure for co-operation with poor performers.

### Introduction

There has been much academic and political debate regarding so-called 'poor performers' or 'poor performing' countries. The phenomenon of poor performer is certainly not new. What is new, however, is the heightened attention the issue has attracted recently in development policy, as well as in foreign and security policy.<sup>1</sup> The reason for this increased attention must be sought in world political events; above all the 11 September 2001 terror attacks and the threat that some countries pose to international community. 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 a conflation 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 and to crisis countries? On the other hand, we are confronted with the question: How can politics reasonably respond to the phenomenon of poor performers?

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

- What is the reason for the current discussion on poor performers?
- Who are these poor performers?
- In what way do poor performers constitute a challenge for the international community?
- How should development co-operation (DC) deal with poor performers?

### The current discussion

Two background matters are of particular importance within the ongoing debate on poor-performing countries: the aid effectiveness debate; and the relative importance of the security aspect.

First, in development co-operation the issue of poor performance has been addressed for some years within the framework of the aid effectiveness debate. Looking at the donor community, we find that the World Bank plays a central role and defines many of the debates. The World Bank report 'Assessing aid. What works, what doesn't and why' has given a new dynamic to the debate.<sup>2</sup> 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* of the effects DC aims to achieve. Many voices are now calling for a reallocation of DC in favour of good-policy/high-poverty countries to address the tendency of the donor community in the past to pay inadequate attention to these states' willingness to reform.

The Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) initiated by US President George W Bush also sets its sights on good performance. The MCA's stated intention is to support developing countries that have proved to be performing countries based on three criteria: ruling justly; investing in their people; and encouraging economic freedom.<sup>3</sup>

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.

Second, the 9/11 terror attacks have intensified and enlarged the scope of the debate on poor performers, with, above all, security aspects moving to the foreground. The weak or non-existent governance structures in many countries are seen as one of the factors contributing to the emergence and proliferation of international terrorism in those states. It has become clearer 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 September 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 Wiczorek-Zeul's words: "The international community cannot afford to put up with any blind spots on the world map."

### Who are the poor performers?

Although the term 'poor performers' or 'poor-performing states' 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 to it. The World Bank, for instance, has already adopted a different term, 'low-income countries under stress' (LICUS),<sup>4</sup> and the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) uses the term 'difficult partnerships'.<sup>5</sup>

Based on the current debate, the following definition of poor performers can be formulated:

- 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, when viewed from the donors' standpoint, are not conducive 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 also important to distinguish between two different types of poor performer:

- The first type includes states that lack the capacity to shape and articulate the political or public framework. That is, the state is no longer able to reasonably meet its responsibilities. This is usually because of the enormous pressure generated by the political problems typically encountered in 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; that is, in these cases a lack of political will is responsible for the situation.

In reality, 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 and failed states<sup>6</sup> clearly belong 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:

- loss of territorial control;
- loss of the public security provided by state actors;
- loss of law and order and effective governance; and
- 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, for example, in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Liberia, Sierra Leone, Burundi and Somalia.

- Whether or not conflict and crisis countries<sup>7</sup> 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, however, be borne in mind that parts of the country are in the midst of a violent conflict.

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

- The debate on so-called rogue states or risk states<sup>8</sup> 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 sub-Saharan 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.

Two main features of so-called rogue and risk states are that they do not comply with the rules and standards of the international community and that 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 systems<sup>9</sup> 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 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.<sup>10</sup> 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 data<sup>11</sup> on six core dimensions of governance.<sup>12</sup> 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 includes a report on sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup>

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

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 towards 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 (neighbouring countries, regional associations or alliances, the UN, 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 will 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 favourable framework conditions is certainly not a satisfactory

response. In its work, the World Bank assumes the existence of a total of some 30 LICUS. 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 DC deal with poor performers?

Co-operation 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 discussed<sup>15</sup> in recent years in connection with the debate on 'structural stability' initiated in the late 1990s by the DAC<sup>16</sup> and the Commission of the European Union.<sup>17</sup> 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:

- sufficient legitimacy of the state (based, among other things, on participation of nonstate actors) and its organs (government, parliaments, etc.);
- 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); and
- 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:<sup>18</sup>

- In dealing with poor performers the *sine qua non* to gaining any constructive and effective influence is close co-ordination of donor action. In these cases donor co-ordination 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, co-ordination should involve other policy fields as well—that is, 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 co-operation 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 co-operation ('change through rapprochement').
- As a rule, the risks involved in co-operation with poor performers will be greater than those encountered in co-operating with other partners. This may mean that investments in social or economic infrastructure are bound up with higher risks than they would be in co-operation with stable partners. The problem of the fungibility of DC is also of major relevance in this context.
- Co-operation with poor performers often calls for a highly flexible approach. To cite some examples: government-level DC negotiations are not possible because, for example, the partner side is without a functioning government; DC measures in pacified areas of a country otherwise still in the midst of an acute conflict; or once combat has been brought to an end, there is a need to stabilise an affected county as swiftly as possible, a task which calls for the provision of substantial funds on an ad hoc basis.
- In co-operation 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, however, not be forgotten here that in many countries nonstate 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 centres on what concrete points of departure or what sectors must be seen as particularly important. In essence, we can name two broad fields here:
  - 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 resolution<sup>19</sup> as well as on good governance. These include, among others, the following issues: participation and democratisation, human rights, civil society, development of functioning legal systems, and constructive involvement of the security sector in civil structures.
  - 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—for example, the data collected in connection with the Governance Matters project<sup>20</sup>—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 co-operation 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 co-operation. On the other hand, it is 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.).

## Notes

- 1 See e.g. Claus, Kuhn, Kurtenbach 2002.
- 2 On the present state of the debate, see e.g. J Beynon, Policy implications for aid allocations or recent research on aid effectiveness and selectivity, 2001, <ercedfid.org.uk/knowledgecentre/JB-DAC2.pdf>; and I Goldin, H Rogers & N Stern, The role and effectiveness of development assistance, in *The World Bank: A case for aid, building a consensus for development assistance*, Washington DC, 2002.
- 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 characterised by very weak policies, institutions, and governance. Aid does not work well in these environments because governments lack the capacity or inclination to use finance effectively for poverty reduction." World Bank, Group work in low-income countries under stress: A Task Force report, September 2002, p iii, <www1.worldbank.org/operations/licus/documents/licus.pdf>.
- 5 For the DAC, these are countries "... where the government does not share the objective of poverty reduction and lacks ownership". DCD/DAC, Development in difficult partnerships, Note by the Secretariat, 16 May 2002, p 2.
- 6 For information on this debate, see e.g. J Straw, Failed and failing states. Speech by the Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, European Research Institute,

- Birmingham, Friday 6 September 2002, <[www.britain.it/news/02Sept/02e.htm](http://www.britain.it/news/02Sept/02e.htm)>; G Sorensen, Development in fragile/failed states, Failed States Conference Purdue University, West Lafayette, 7–11 April 1999. Unpublished paper <[www.ippu.purdue.edu/failed\\_states/1999/papers/Sorensen.html](http://www.ippu.purdue.edu/failed_states/1999/papers/Sorensen.html)>; and RI Rotberg (ed.), *State failure and state weakness in a time of terror*, Cambridge, Washington DC, 2003.
- 7 For an overview of this discussion, see T Debiel & A Klein (eds.) *Fragile peace. State failure, violence and development in crisis regions*, London, 2002.
  - 8 On this debate, see e.g. C Padtberg, Schurkenstaaten werden alt. Im Krieg gegen den Terror versagt das Feindbild, 2002, <[www.zeit.de/2002/37/Politik/print\\_politik\\_schurkenstaaten.html](http://www.zeit.de/2002/37/Politik/print_politik_schurkenstaaten.html)>; and B Rubin, 'Schurkenstaaten.' *Amerikas Selbstverständnis und seine Beziehungen zur Welt*, 1999, <[www.dgap.org/IP/ip9906/rubin.htm](http://www.dgap.org/IP/ip9906/rubin.htm)>.
  - 9 On this multifaceted debate, see e.g. UNDP, Human Development Report 2002, *Deepening democracy in a fragmented world*, Oxford, 2002.
  - 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 D Kaufmann, A Kraay & M Mastruzzi, Governance Matters III: Governance indicators for 1996–2002, World Bank, (draft), Washington DC, 2003.
  - 12 (1) Voice and accountability, (2) Political stability, (3) Government effectiveness, (4) Regulatory quality, (5) Rule of law, (6) Control of corruption.
  - 13 C Delany & S Varga, Conflict risk assessment report, sub-Saharan Africa, Carleton, 2002.
  - 14 (1) History of armed conflict, (2) Governance and political instability, (3) Militarisation, (4) Population heterogeneity, (5) Demographic stress, (6) Economic performance, (7) Human development, (8) Environmental stress, (9) International linkages.
  - 15 See A Mehler, Structural stability: Meaning, scope and use in an African context, *Africa Spectrum* (37)1, 2002, pp 5–23.
  - 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, DAC Guidelines on Conflict, Peace and Development Co-operation, Paris, 1997, p 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 European Union, The EU and the issue of conflicts in Africa: Peacebuilding, conflict prevention and beyond, 1996, <<http://europa.eu.int/comm/development/prevention/communication-1996.htm>>.
  - 18 See, among others: World Bank, The role and effectiveness of development assistance. Lessons from World Bank experience, Washington DC, 2002, p 31ff; DCD/DAC op cit; OECD/DAC, The DAC guidelines helping prevent violent conflict, Paris, 2001; H Wieczorek-Zeul, Statement made (in German) at a press conference on the occasion of the high-level meeting of the OECD development ministers (OECD-DAC High Level Meeting), held in Paris on 16 May 2002, <[www.bmz.de/presse/reden/rede\\_20020516.html](http://www.bmz.de/presse/reden/rede_20020516.html)>; S Klingebiel, Impact of development co-operation in conflict situations, Cross-section report on evaluations of German development co-operation in six countries, German Development Institute, Berlin, 1999.
  - 19 See e.g. DFID (Department for International Development), Conducting conflict assessments: Guidance notes, London, 2002, p 26ff.
  - 20 On this, see e.g. the comparative regional data on the project website <[www.worldbank.org/wbi/governance/govdata2002/](http://www.worldbank.org/wbi/governance/govdata2002/)>.

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