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Environment and bilateral development aid: The German example. Seminar on problems of environmental protection in Pakistan, January 22-24 1989, held at the Centre for Applied Economic Studies, University of Peshawar

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Environment and Bilateral Development Aid:
The German Example

by

Udo E. Simonis

SEMINAR ON
PROBLEMS OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION IN PAKISTAN
January 22 — 24, 1989
HELD AT THE
CENTRE FOR APPLIED ECONOMIC STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF PESHAWAR.

Environment and Bilateral Development Aid:
The German Example

by

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1. Introduction

In a systematic assessment of the extent to which projects and programs of the development aid agencies of six major donor countries promoted a sustainable, environmentally sound development¹ it was stated that there is now a fairly general consensus among the aid agencies as to the meaning of "environment" in the context of development problems. This is supposed to be a major change from the more confused position of only some years ago. The most important feature of this consensus is that environment is now beginning to be seen not as an additional subject, the examination of which has only to be added on to traditional development considerations, but rather that it is seen as a whole new approach to development --a development which gives greater weight to the ecological costs of development projects and to the sustainability of their results. However, this new development perspective so far has made only little impact on the orientation and the design of the projects and the practical development policies of the aid giving agencies studied. The report concludes with the following proposals²:

- (1) There is a need to define more thoroughly environmental and natural resource objectives and concerns in the context of aid programs as a whole.
- (2) Urgent attention should be given to helping developing countries build up their own capacity to study and manage their own environmental problems. This effort should be closely related to donor efforts aimed at fostering greater environmental concern in the recipient countries.
- (3) There is a need to encourage and fund a much higher level of conservation and rehabilitation projects commensurate with the rapidly increasing need of the recipient countries.
- (4) Policy documents which are produced in each agency to govern project design and executive frequently lack adequate attention to environmental implications.
- (5) In only three of the agencies studied there was a clearly defined focal point for environmental responsibility. A

framework for systematically checking on environmental implications is essential.

- (6) Procedures to ensure that projects are systematically screened for environmental impact and subjected to environmental examination are also needed.
- (7) Greater multilateral cooperation in the utilization of donor country resources in these areas.

The aim of this paper is to take these general findings and proposals as a point of departure for looking more closely at the question of whether, and how far, environmental considerations are integrated in German development aid, and why there are still theoretical deficiencies as well as discrepancies between theory and practice of development aid policy. To do this, I would first like to give a short overview on the history, the policy declarations, the principal features and the performance of German development aid.

2. German Development Aid Policy - An Overview

With the change of government in Bonn in October 1982, all fields of politics had to varying degrees been subjected to certain readjustments of basic policy orientation.³ This is also true for the policies pursued by the new conservative-liberal German government with respect to assistance given to developing countries and with respect to general North-South issues. However, resulting from the long-term nature of many aid commitments and from a fairly well established consensus on basic aid issues among the major political parties of the country there is bound to be a considerable element of continuity in German aid policy.

The aims of the aid policy of the previous social-liberal government were most clearly and comprehensively expressed in the "Outline of Development Policy" (1980) making specifi-

cally reference to the recommendations of the Brandt Commission regarding interdependence and common interests between North and South. Besides the general emphasis laid on the promotion of rural development, one of the three major fields of program activities of German aid was labelled "Protection of Natural Resources."

Regarding the *volume target* of aid, the German federal governments, in principle, have always accepted the internationally set targets about the overall size of the aid volume that were adopted by the United Nations. They have, however, never committed themselves to any firm date by which these targets would be achieved. The absolute volume of German official development assistance (ODA) has internationally been in third position among all donor countries for several years, but relative to the target of 0.7% of the Gross National Product (GNP) it has always been far below the aim. On the other hand, total financial transfers to the developing countries have consistently been higher than 1.0% of the GNP, because private capital transfers were rather substantial.

Regarding the *principal features* of German aid, there is first, and with some importance to our subject, the relationship between bilateral and multilateral aid. Both bilateral and multilateral aid have their distinct advantages and disadvantages from the point of view of the donors as well as that of the recipients. Both types of aid are thought to be necessary and are regarded as being complementary to each other. However, firm quantitative rules have never been set for the distribution between them. While in the early 1970s there was a widespread feeling that an increasing share of the total aid volume should be channelled through multilateral institutions, this tendency has weakened in the 1980s, and bilateralism is still gaining ground.

Regarding the *geographical distribution* of German aid one can say that in general it was extremely widespread. During the 1980s there was at least some kind of German aid activity going on in about 120 developing countries. In a more specific sense, however, there is a high concentration of German aid on some countries. Pakistan, for instance, for a period of 30 years, was number 4 in the overall volume of German aid. However, there are no explicit rules for the distribution of aid between specific regions and countries. The decisions about the regional distribution of aid funds are made within the Ministry for Economic Cooperation (BMZ), and the development aid committee of the national parliament. Only in cases of an obviously more political nature do general foreign policy considerations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs enter into the allocation process by way of discussion in the cabinet.

Regarding the *sectoral allocation* of German aid intensive attempts have been made to specify rules for the composition of aid in respect to the type of programs, projects and target groups. At various historical stages the German government made policy declarations specifying "priority sectors." But despite such efforts, in reality the sectoral spectrum of German aid activities is still fairly wide, depending to a larger extent on the available expertise and planning capacities in Germany than on the priority requirements of the recipient countries. In this sense, therefore, it is fairly difficult to specify to what extent development aid is geared to the recipient countries' interests or how far its structure is determined by the preceptions and policy declarations of the donor country.

A specific feature of German aid is the request principle, i.e., that in a formal sense all aid projects are based on the principle that the recipient country submits (and has to submit) a request--although there are also indirect ways of

initiating project ideas that are favored by the donor side, so that they are eventually presented as official requests. Quite generally in development terms, and more specifically in regard to environmental considerations, there is a dilemma with this principle of acting only upon formal requests by the recipient government. How to ascertain that requests from the government of a developing country coincide with the "priority sectors" specified in the donor's policy declaration? And, specifically, how to guarantee that these are requests for projects for improving the environmental situation in the developing country? I would like to leave these questions open for the moment and come back to it later on.

Concluding my remarks on the principal features of German development aid a few more comments must be made.

There is, first, the question of the *conditions of aid*. In recent years attempts have been made to take better account of the diversity among the developing countries and to tailor the aid instruments accordingly. This is particularly exemplified with respect to LLDCs on the one hand (soft terms), and the NICs on the other hand (hard terms). Since 1978, all German aid to the LLDCs is given as grants, and debts resulting from former loans in many cases have been written off. In contrast, aid to the NICs has been gradually reduced or is given only on hard terms. In practice, so far there is no special incentive being provided for environmentally sound projects by easing the respective conditions of aid; in theory, however, "debt for nature swaps" are increasingly being discussed.

Second, there is the question of *tying aid* to programs or projects. A predominant portion of German aid is tied to individual projects. At least this is true for bilateral aid. Outright budget or balance-of-payments support is given but normally not provided out of the aid budget. This feature of

(more or less) strict project orientation in the German bilateral development aid may provide a good chance for including environmental considerations into development aid activities.

The German federal government is formally upholding the principle of not tying its aid to the procurement of German goods, except urgent commodity aid given. This principle of not tying its aid was, in the past, fairly easy to keep since a high proportion of supply contracts went back to German firms anyway. As a consequence of low economic growth and high unemployment in recent years, however, this principle faded away to a large extent. Tying aid became more frequent. Here, again, the question arises of what this means for including environmental considerations into development projects.

Third, the effectiveness of aid in general and the integration of environmental considerations into its projects is determined by the way aid administration is organized. The structure of the German aid administration is more complex than that of most other donor countries. The overall coordinator and policy maker is the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation (*Bundesministerium für Wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit - BMZ*). The project work itself, however, is carried out on behalf of the BMZ by various agencies, being administratively independent. The two most important agencies are the *Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau* (KfW), a financial aid agency (government-owned development bank) which gives loans along the lines of the World Bank, and does its field work largely through consultants; the other agency is the *Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit* (GTZ), an agency which gives technical assistance and has a substantial number of people working in developing countries. This pattern of completely separate financial and technical aid agencies was established in the days of relatively simple single-focus financial and techni-

cal cooperation projects. In addition to these major agencies, there is a whole spectrum of other public, semipublic, and private institutions that in one way or another are involved in implementing aid activities. No doubt, from the point of view of a recipient country it is quite difficult to grasp the division of labor between these various institutions.

As for the institutional conditions which govern the BMZ's performance, administrative overhead in relation to project commitment compares favorably with that of the other aid agencies investigated. However, this feature of low staffing in relation to delivered aid may not be advantageous from an environmental policy point of view. Fortunately, German aid draws, for additional staff for its bilateral aid, upon a wide variety of national scientific and technological institutions.

The BMZ and its two subsidiary agencies seem to be more closely watched by the parliament than are any of the other Western aid programs, particularly as regards environmental considerations. Indeed, the KfW is guided by a nonmandatory cabinet resolution on "Principles for Assessing the Environmental Impact of Federal Actions" (1975) and by a "Catalogue of Environmental Project Assessment Criteria of the KfW." These guidelines commit this agency to a rather comprehensive consideration of environmental effects of its development projects.

Finally, one more principal feature of German aid should be mentioned. Over the years policy instruments and incentives have been developed to supplement multilateral and bilateral official development assistance (ODA) by stimulating *private financial flows and private technology transfer* to the developing countries. It is disputable whether or not these flows should be regarded as an integral part of bilateral aid. For the

establishment of an effective environmental policy in the developing countries this flow of resources and know-how can, of course, both be an asset or a liability. Certain conditions must be fulfilled to make sure that these flows are environmentally sound could be considered as a potential contribution to implementing environmental policy in the developing countries.

I now would like to conclude this overview on the general performance and the principal features of German development aid, and concentrate in the next section on the question of how effectively environmental considerations so far have been integrated into aid activities, what the weaknesses of such integration efforts are and what deficiencies still remain.

3. Integrating Environmental Considerations into Development Aid

The impact of development aid upon the world's environment has recently become the focus of attention. This is the outcome of a debate in which worldwide concern emerged over the depletion, misuse and overuse of resources. This new focus has begun to influence the thinking and programs of aid giving national as well as international agencies.⁴ Significantly, there is consensus on the need to integrate the concept of "environment" into the thinking on and the planning of development. For most (but certainly not all) of the officials of the agencies, it seems to be clear that a broad, "holistic" interpretation of the concept is needed. This recognition is in general an important step forward. Also, there seems to be growing recognition of stressing the interrelationship of all facets of development and of rejecting the notion that the "environment" can merely be considered one more "add-on" to the economic development process.

The wide recognition of the importance of integrating environmental concerns into development planning is scarcely surprising. The rise, in the late 1960s, of the environmental issue in the wake of industrialization had led to the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment at Stockholm as early as 1972. The fact that this was a world conference further encouraged poor countries as well as rich to begin to examine the interrelationships between development and environment (or "ecodevelopment") more deeply. Countries began to focus on the question of long-term sustainability of their development efforts and of decreasing the damage caused by unplanned environmental side effects of development projects.

Since the 1970s, development agencies have begun to be more worried about the viability of their aid programs, a concern strengthened by various examples of destructive effects on the natural environment all over the world. There has also been an increase in public awareness of the environmental hazards of developing countries having to rely more upon marginal lands and specific resources, as a result of rapid population growth. These and other concerns came to be reflected in the broad commitments to *environmentally sound development* and to *resource conservation projects* that can be found in the policy declarations of all aid agencies. Theoretical commitments, however, may not match with effective action. There may be a certain (large) discrepancy between program formulation and program implementation. What then has happened with German aid regarding the environmental issue? What is the record, what are the problems?

A comprehensive evaluation of this sort would need input as well as output data; it would mean to compare the environmental situation in a developing country with and without a development aid policy incorporating the environmental issue. We are far from being able to make such a comprehensive cost-benefit-analysis of development aid policy. Also for

German aid, such a comprehensive evaluation would not be possible. Therefore, in the following I will concentrate on an input-oriented analysis only. The declarations on how to integrate environmental consideration into aid policy, the recent tendencies in project management, the judgment of projects by members of aid agencies, and the financial dimensions of environmental protection measures will be discussed.

3.1 Adjusting the Outline of Development Policy

Taking the Stockholm Conference of 1972 as a departure point, a discussion started in the Federal Republic of Germany of how to deal with environmental problems in aid policy.⁵ First, an interministerial working group studied the relationship between aid and environmental protection. In its report the group suggested to start an ecologically oriented research program on developing countries, to promote environmentally sound projects, and to secure "environmental conformity" of aid. Later on, the Minister for Economic Cooperation called to make environmental protection a central issue of development aid, since development and environment are "two sides of a coin." As early as 1972, the KfW introduced a checklist on environmental aspects of the aid projects planned by that agency. In 1975, for the first time, environmental protection was given priority as a goal of official German development aid policy, alongside the promotion of agriculture, industry, education and research.

The worldwide discussion on the necessary reorientation of development strategy towards basic needs ("basic needs strategy") which fully started after 1976, and also the United Nations conference on desertification (1977) put environmental questions higher up in the German debate on development aid, along with the problems of rural development and absolute poverty. Along with that conference strategy papers were

prepared suggesting measures for an environmentally sound and sustainable development of rural areas. A culmination point of the aid strategy discussion in Germany was reached in 1980, when the social-liberal government proceeding on the basis of the report of the North-South Commission (Brandt Report) comprehensively reformulated the framework of its development policy: In the "Outline of Development Policy"⁶ the "protection of natural resources" was given top priority--together with "rural development" and "improvement of energy supply." One could conclude that this official set of priorities is still valid and that insofar environmental considerations rank high in German development aid policy.

3.2 Tendencies in Environment and Resource Protection Projects

Outlines of development policy indicate the aims, tasks or focal points for aid activities, not more, not less. A better indicator for the importance that is given to environmental considerations may be imbedded in the very structure and kind of the aid programs and in the projects themselves.

In *Table 1* some data are presented on environmentally oriented German aid projects. These data had been collected by a research group of our institute and rely on the respective project descriptions. Projects were considered only insofar and as long as the goal of the project was to make a contribution to the improvement of the environmental situation and/or the protection of the resource basis concerned. The data therefore show the direction of aid efforts, not necessarily their effectiveness (for details see *Table 1*).

*Table 1: Expenditures for Environmental and Resource Protection in
Bilateral Development Aid (1969-1978)*

(1) Management of natural resources	260 Mio. DM	55 Projects
(2) Ecology-oriented farming	20 Mio. DM	4 Projects
(3) Rural energy supply	40 Mio. DM	28 Projects
(4) Improvement in sanitation		
(a) drinking water supply	625 Mio. DM	88 Projects
(b) sewage and waste disposal	89 Mio. DM	13 Projects
(5) Urban industrial environmental protection	26 Mio. DM	7 Projects

Source: V. Hartje, op. cit.

The table shows that a certain priority in German aid had been given to projects for "Improvement in sanitation," and especially for supplying safe drinking water. Since the demand for safe drinking water in the developing countries in general is high, this part of the German aid project increased rapidly, both in numbers and financially. Whether these drinking water supply projects were in total successful, however, remains an open question.

The category "Management of natural resources" comprises projects in the field of forestry, fishery, plant protection and ecologically oriented land use planning. The forestry projects started early in the 1970s and, astonishingly, diminished at the end of the 1970s, despite the growing awareness of the worldwide overuse of forest resources. The same is more or less to be said about fishery and plant protection projects, while the land use projects were gaining some ground in the overall pattern of German development aid.

Regarding the category of "Ecology-oriented farming," so far not much has been undertaken, this being a reflection of the low priority ecology-oriented farming is given by official agricultural policy in Germany and in the EC. Recently, how-

ever, the number of successful ecology-oriented farmers in Germany has been increasing rapidly.

A major contribution to an environmentally sound development in rural areas is to be expected by projects of renewable energy. The stock of wood and forests can be preserved if biogas and solar energy projects can successfully be operated. The projects reported in *Table 1* mainly belong to this category of alternative energy.

Regarding aid administration it should be added here that a department for appropriate technologies (GATE) was established. This is an indication that, in general, German development aid has learned the lesson on the necessity of appropriate technology transfer.

3.3 Mitigating Environmental Effects of Traditional Projects

Environmental impact assessment (EIA) may be seen as an efficient instrument for assessing developing aid projects. This method was discussed in Germany since the early 1970s, but in fact attained importance only recently. This is slightly different in German aid administration, where KfW and GTZ are working according to specific environmental guidelines and are requested to use "checklists" and "project manuals" for projects with potentially significant environmental effects. The lists include typical environmental effects of irrigation farming, dams, sugar production, pulp and paper industry, chemical industry, etc. This procedure clearly is to be regarded as an extension of technical feasibility studies and of economic appraisals. The respective project assessment in the agencies mentioned is undertaken by a team including country experts, technical, financial and also environmental experts, and may quite truly be called "environmental impact assessment."

Interviews with such evaluation teams and investigations of their reports have shown that in general there is a high sensibility for the environmental problems connected with aid projects. And it is due to this interest that in traditional aid projects improvements with respect to mitigating negative environmental effects have been made. However, the environmental effects monitored in the checking procedure, and the proposals to tackle them show that in general a fairly technical understanding of environmental protection is prevailing. The technicians are well aware of the technical measures with which environmental effects are handled in Germany, and this knowledge is easily, and sometimes too quickly transferred into the project design and project implementation for the recipient developing country. The more environmental problems can be solved only through social innovation (e.g., erosion problems) the weaker the proposals of the team members are.

In Table 2, subjective judgments of members of the KfW agency on capital aid projects are presented.⁷ The selection of the experts interviewed was made on basis of the list of projects undertaken by KfW between 1974 and 1978. The total number of projects was 383, out of which some 206 were classified as projects with significant environmental effects. Out of these some 49 were taken on basis of a random sample and an *ex post* judgment was asked for from the experts interviewed.

Regarding the countermeasures taken by KfW in the planning stage of the aid projects, it is interesting to learn that in industrial projects the main emphasis was laid on solving the problems of disposal with "end-of-pipe technologies," while radical modifications of the production process or in the location ("integrated or low emission technologies") were only seldom undertaken. The choice of the disposal technique, again, was mostly tailored according to standards prevailing in Germany.

Table 2: "Environmental Soundness" of Capital Aid Projects - Subjective Judgments

Sector	Number of projects	Number of projects with environmental problems	Number of projects with incomplete information on environmental problems	Number of projects without environmental problems
Industry and mining	18	6	3	9
Agriculture	13	2	2	9
Power plants	4	-	1	3
Transportation infrastructure	8	1	-	7
Water supply and sewage disposal	7	-	1	6
Total	50 (100%)	9 (18.4%)	7 (14.3%)	34 (69.4%)

Source: V. Hartje, op. cit.

Regarding the operation stage of the aid projects, counter-measures such as the training of additional employees were taken by the KfW experts only in cases where serious problems arose.

At this point, I cannot look into the assessment procedures used by the other German development agencies. However, it is possible to state that in general environmental impact assessment is very much dependent upon personal experience and awareness. Judging from the results of the research work quoted⁸, environmental impacts are understood and taken serious the more the given aid project is of an investive type. This means that the potential environmental effects of other projects, like institution building, etc. were recognized only as secondary or as being of low importance. These results may again illustrate that there is a certain discrepancy between theoretical perception and practical handling of development planning.

3.4 On Implementing Environmental Considerations in Project Planning

Concluding from what has been said above, one could fairly say that environmental considerations in German development aid have high priority. Especially the general political outline and principles look favorable. The practical implementation of that priority and those principles, however, is still lagging behind.

Implementation seems fairly advanced with regard to a certain type of industrial and infrastructural project, although the solutions proposed and taken are often those typical for the donor country itself. Solutions adequately adjusted to the prevailing economic and social conditions of the recipient country are still rather rare. Also projects for safe water supply should be mentioned here as being fairly well designed. Regarding environmental problems of rural areas, however, German development aid still seems to have peculiar difficulties. The question is whether this is just the "normal" lag resulting from the change of priority in aid policy or whether additional factors are involved. Adjustments of agricultural and other rural projects towards a more sustainable development are to a large extent still in the pilot phase. Here, not only institutional obstacles for change are strong. It could also well be that not enough expertise on questions of rural development is made available in highly technical donor agencies such as German KfW and GTZ, and the respective agencies in other countries. But even if the numerous experts and consultants as well as concerned institutions of German development aid administration would be considered as comparatively good⁹, a stronger commitment to do more should be expected.

A final remark: In many donor countries, including the Federal Republic of Germany, development aid agencies have

agreed that efforts to help developing countries cope with their environmental problems should be given higher priority than was the case in the past. Clearly, this is a field where donor agencies normally act only upon direct request from a government for help (which is, as was said, the general request principle in German aid policy). However, one could easily imagine that German and other development aid agencies should urgently consider how best to help build up the developing countries' environmental management capacities (i.e., institutional and organizational infrastructure), and how they themselves could more actively encourage developing countries to seek available environmental management assistance. Although there remains much to be done in all countries to protect the environment, there is also much to be learned from one another in how to do it.

Notes

- ¹ This study, organized by the International Institute for Environment and Development in London in cooperation with six affiliated project teams in Canada, Federal Republic of Germany, Netherlands, Sweden, United Kingdom and United States of America, examined the official bilateral aid agencies of the respective countries. Cf. B. Johnson, R.O. Blake (Eds.): *The Environment and Bilateral Development Aid*, Washington and London 1980.
- ² B. Johnson, R.O. Blake (Eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. IV-V.
- ³ For this section, I rely on the assessment of the main elements of the aid policy of the Federal Republic of Germany by R. Hofmeier and S. Schultz: *German Development Aid Policy in Transition*, in: *Vierteljahresberichte*, No. 91, 1983, pp. 33-49.
- ⁴ The report by the International Institute for Environment and Development gives a detailed description of how different the efforts to incorporate the environmental dimension into each of the six donor countries' aid programs have been. Cf. B. Johnson, R.O. Blake (Eds.), *op. cit.*

- ⁵ A comprehensive overview on these developments is given by V. Hartje: Umwelt- und Ressourcenschutz in der bilateralen Entwicklungshilfe. Beihilfe zum Überleben? Frankfurt and New York 1982.
- ⁶ Cf. Bundesministerium für Wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit (BMZ): Die entwicklungspolitischen Grundlinien der Bundesregierung, Bonn 1980.
- ⁷ Cf. V. Hartje, op. cit.
- ⁸ Cf. V. Hartje, op. cit.
- ⁹ Such is the judgment in the report of the International Institute for Environment and Development. Cf. B. Johnson, R.O. Blake (Eds.), op. cit.