

Kebschull, Dietrich

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More Pragmatism — Less Talk of Strategy

The first development decade ended in frustration for donor and recipient countries. In the second decade, so it seems, disaster can hardly be still averted. The famine in the Sahel zone and conspicuous food deficiencies in South-East Asia show clearly that the ambitious economic targets are receding farther and farther into the future.

The situation is aggravated still by political discord among developing countries and in individual states: continuing fighting in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, the new war between Israel and the Arab states, the military coup in Chile and many clashes between minor ethnical groups, which are hardly even noted by the world public — all these cut the ground from under a successful development policy. Literally billions are being squandered while the people, especially the poor ones, are reduced to still greater poverty.

What good, it must be asked, are the many statements by development aid organisations in a situation like this? What point is there in representatives of developing countries time and again addressing demands to the rich nations? Is there any sense at all in taking trouble over new and more effective development measures?

McNamara's World Bank recently took fresh bearings to change course. The immense social and economic shortcomings are now to be tackled by greater concentration on developing agriculture in particular and by better facilities for aid utilisation on the part of the developing countries. This — long overdue — proposition had only to be given utterance to be greeted with rapturous applause. Now at last, or so it seemed, substantial and tangible progress was within reach.

The Federal Republic of Germany is among those who endeavour to evolve new principles of policy towards the countries of the Third World. In the sphere of technical assistance the developing countries are to have more influence on the qualifications of their foreign experts. Employment of skilled personnel from the countries themselves is to lead to better cooperation and "aid by self-aid". As a donor country the Federal Republic will exercise self-restraint according to the "principle of least interference".

A positive view may be taken of such a move because it will rid the technical assistance of the charge that it offers easy profits for a good many experienced and less experienced private consultancy firms, but there is no reason to look on it as a new *strategy*. Neither the foreshadowed shift in the activities of the World Bank nor the — so far only contemplated — new principles of German technical assistance are in the nature of a strategy capable of curing all evils. They will bring about corrections in some hitherto unduly neglected sectors. No more, no less!

The cause of the developing countries is harmed rather than helped by grandiloquent descriptions of such further moves towards a more efficacious development policy as a strategy. There is a deeply rooted but mistaken belief in the existence of a generally binding strategy applicable to all countries, which permits the development backlog to be eliminated in a very short time. So far the claptrap about strategy has only kept the industrial countries from intensifying their efforts on the ground that future successes were assured, and induced developing countries to rest content with inadequate efforts. There has probably been no greater hindrance to development policy than the theories which, mostly concerned with one single factor only, are all too easily given the epithet of strategy.

There has been and still is a surfeit of theories, ideas and slogans of this nature. They do not help. Any attempt to concentrate on one or a very few factors, sections or regions is bound to fail because it means neglecting all others. In practice it does not matter if a development policy is not stylish and stream-lined. Its execution must be pragmatic; many complementary measures have to be taken at various points. There has to be differentiation in the approach to different countries, and efforts are required from donor and recipient countries alike. Success presupposes not only cooperation between advanced and less advanced states, but a maximum of accord among the countries of the Third World. The development policy as such is in jeopardy as long as these prerequisites remain unfulfilled.

Dietrich Kobschull