

# Time-Questions

In the context of "Time-Zones. Development and the Factor Time" members of GTZ and Misereor, together with the weekly newspaper DIE ZEIT interviewed high-ranking personalities – managers, board members, heads of policy departments – from the leading organizations of German development cooperation.

The interviews showed: There is a comprehensive set of experiences and a deep knowledge of the role of the time factor in development policy. Despite isolated criticism as to the formulation of the topic, that some of those questioned deemed too aloof and not practically relevant, most reacted with approval: It is high time, to confront the factor time in development cooperation!

The results of the survey will be presented here in five points:

## **The Problem**

Where do the interviewees see the problem in the nexus between time and development?

## **Time and Man**

The interviewees always put the subject of time and development into the context of man. What does that mean for the practice of development cooperation?

## **Silver Bullet Participation**

Many interviewees saw participation as the silver bullet for properly dealing with the factor time.

## **Pro and Contra Speed**

There are not only good reasons for deceleration, for „more time“, but also good ones for acceleration.

## **Starting with Us**

Many interviewees stressed: the right approach to time must start with us.

gtz

MISEREOR  
DAS HILFSWERK

DIE ZEIT

# 1

## The Problem

In the view of the interviewees the problem has two sides: First, there is a lot of time pressure that actors of German development cooperation carry as part of their baggage when they arrive in a foreign country; second, on the ground they are confronted by different conceptions of time that make their work more difficult.

The time pressure in development cooperation arises, because everyone who works in one of the different organizations of development cooperation has a mission and a client, who expects results within a certain amount of time. Reporting requirements and evaluations rhythms are the expression of these expectations. The term client here has to be seen in the widest possible sense. This includes the voter, whose taxes flow into the budget and on to the institution, projects and programs of development cooperation.

Employees of international aid organizations arrive in their partner countries with this pressure and there they experience that partners have a different approach to time, for example as regards the importance of appointments and deadlines. The behavior of the partners endangers the time limits that are set at home by the sending organization.

One of those questioned, reported from his experience in Nepal: "it was difficult to convey our time pressure to our Nepalese partners. Their point of view was: what we do not achieve in this life, we will manage in the next."

How to deal with this time pressure? The instruction of the mother organization to solve the problem locally and situation dependent clearly is not enough.

Therefore Hans-Joachim Preuss, General Secretary of Deutsche Welthungerhilfe demands "We already have to take the factor time into consideration in our definition of development." Other interviewees also were of the opinion: our approach to time in development cooperation must become more of a subject. The factor time has to be part of the equation from the beginning.

# 2

## Time and Man

The interviewees generally agreed that change and thus development always has to start with man. The question as to the importance of the factor time therefore always starts with the question as to the rhythm of people. There are two positions:

First: mankind by nature has difficulties with change and transformations. He orientates himself along trusted categories and processes; he seeks where possible to avoid reforms and innovations. But man can't really be faster: natural "speed limits" become apparent through the example of learning: A certain amount of time is necessary to learn. Trust also does not develop over night.

The second position goes one step further: Martin Bröckelmann-Simon, Director of Misereor states: "Slow is always an expression of something". The apparent slowness of the partner must not simply be seen as a culturally conditioned mentality and thus as irrevocable, but is an expression of – conscious or subconscious – setting priorities. The Kassel economist Stefan Voigt also is against the "cudgel of mentalities": "It is our duty to find the rationality in the behavior of actors." The approach to time orientates itself on the circumstance, on institutions and individual life situations, the understanding of which is the basis for sustainable cooperation.

The consequence is, that the speed of change has to be co-determined by those affected. They have to be carried along in heart and mind. A crucial factor for change is the strain imposed by suffering and the consensus on the necessity for change. Only then change can be sustainable.

# 3

## Silver Bullet Participation

The interviewees saw participation as the central answer to the problem of how to properly deal with the factor time. Therein the central idea was that reliability was the basic precondition for stable partnerships. The argument can be summarized in three points:

First: There is general agreement that the timetables and cycles of the partners have to be coordinated. However that is not as easy as it may sound. A handbook of the UNDP states for example: "Participation begins, when the donor does nothing." The first rule is: "Don't rush!" Necessary preconditions to design timetables participative are transparency and sensitivity – especially as regards the time restrictions of those working in development cooperation. It has to be recognized that our own time structure, also the demand for more speed – represents a restriction that reduces the room for maneuver of both sides.

Second: Adolf Kloke-Lesch (BMZ) has found out that time has to do with power. It is about the power to set binding timetables for others. Or that one gives up part of his power, by accepting the time dimension of the other. This can go as far as complete synchronization. Prof. Josef Sayer (Misereor) recounted his time in Peru: "We were traveling without a car: deliberately, in order not to lapse back into Western acceleration: to drive into one village, talk to some people, and then drive to the next appointment. That would have been "efficient". We however were walking. That took time. But it adapted our time experience to that of the people there".

Kloke-Lesch formulates synchronization as a goal, i.e. the alignment of temporal concepts. Participation means not only taking part in a process designed by a donor country, but a real acceptance on both sides of a common process.

Third: It is crucial to take social integration into consideration. A result could be, according to Dr. Martin Bröckelmann-Simon (Misereor) a socially intelligent and integrating time planning, as shown by the example of the fable of the rabbit and the hedgehog, where the rabbit represents blindness for his environment and the ignorant chasing of speed records. The hedgehog on the other hand is an example of intelligent social networking, that resists the time pressure from outside and through an advantage in information and adaptation of the rules leads to success.

# 4

## Pro and Contra Speed

What is the right speed? Put on the pressure or let loose? As regards this question there were two groups: one of them called for deceleration, the second pointed out the danger of a slower speed for development and modernization processes.

On the one side it was argued, that planning under pressure would lead to superficial solutions. These complained Prelate Valentin Doering of the Hanns-Seidel-Stiftung would take no account of complexity and had merely an alibi function. The correction of faulty developments because of rash decisions can be more expensive later than an investment in thoroughly thought through planning. More time was also asked for implementation. Especially the most important capital of cooperation, trust, was not growing over night. Ownership needs time.

Reinhard Hermlé (VENRO, Misereor) summarized the practical experience of development cooperation: development always takes longer than one planned for.

At the same time – this was pointed out by a large number of the interviewees – deadlines are important levers for change. Only under pressure are resources made available in partner countries. This is also recognized by the partners. Hans-Peter Schipulle (BMZ) recounts a conversation he had with the South African Minister for Water, who told him that only deadlines had led to a successful dynamic: “Without this pressure we would have lacked the drive that let us reach the goals we had set ourselves.”

Open processes without time pressure often entail danger – for no action does not mean that nothing happens. To not force processes can mean that undesirable structures ossify and options for action get lost. Speed is good against sclerosis. The announced goal, to increase the aid budget of UN countries to 0.7% of GDP, had been repeated for years without any impact; only in May of this year the countries of the EU signed a declaration of intent, to reach this aim until 2015. The millennium goals also have a deadline until 2015. In the wake of exaggerated hopes as to its feasibility in the donor countries, such deadlines carry the danger of creating excessive expectations, and thus reduce the freedom of action that could become necessary should unforeseen circumstances demand it.

Barbara Unmüßig of the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung brings together the necessity for stamina and pressure: It takes long-termness and continuity in order to build up reliable networks. When suddenly a short window of opportunity opens, as for example in the Ukraine in autumn 2004, it can be utilized.

# 5

## Starting with Us

### **Back to the Beginning:**

#### **We are ourselves part of the problem**

“We are ourselves part of the problem. With our management structures, that are so fully developed, that they rob us of the flexibility that we need when dealing with the subject of time.”, complained one those questioned, who did not want to take part in the survey – and made an important argument, shared by many others, how to deal with the factor time. The view that the greatest problems were to be found in our time management and that therefore a reflection about our handling of time should have to start with ourselves was shared by most participants. This discussion was held on three levels:

First: In society as a whole there is discrepancy between time welfare and material welfare. This was already the subject of an appeal by Misereor and BUND in 1996, which exclaimed that: “Owning much begins to conflict with living well.”

Second: within the organizations of development cooperation: the key terms here are: Time as a challenge of personnel management (Prelate Doering) on the one side, the “structures of self-exploitation” of engaged employees with an idealistic motivation, favored by a general lack of budgetary funds for personnel , on the other (Barbara Unmüßig). The Western concept of time, in its current form is not only non-exportable, but does not even function at home!

Third: at the level of instruments: The interaction of the rhythms of the instruments of development cooperation with local temporal structures must be more expressly taken into consideration.

## Interview Partners

- Dr. Martin Bröckelmann-Simon, Misereor
- Prälat Dr. Valentin Doering, Hanns Seidel Foundation, Katholisches Büro Bayern
- Stefan Helming, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) GmbH
- Dr. Reinhard Hermle, VENRO/Misereor
- Christian Hoffmann, Muslim Academy Berlin
- Adolf Kloke-Lesch, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
- Hannelore Moll, Bread for the World Germany
- Dr. Hans-Joachim Preuß, Welthungerhilfe Germany
- Prof. Dr. Josef Sayer, Misereor
- Dr. Hans Peter Schipulle, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
- Dr. habil. Andreas Schlüter, Goethe Institut
- Barbara Unmüßig, Heinrich Böll Foundation

A cooperation of

