

GERMAN DEVELOPMENT POLICY IN THE EYES OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC – OPINION MONITOR FOR DEVELOPMENT POLICY 2018

Summary

Development policy and development cooperation are becoming increasingly important in Germany. The 2030 Agenda adopted by the United Nations in 2015, with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also emphasises the role of the population of all countries for sustainable development. At the same time, there is increasing public criticism in Germany and other countries with regard to development policy. Bearing this in mind, it is very important for those involved in determining development policy to obtain as precise a picture as possible of public opinion regarding this policy field as a basis for their decision-making.

The DEval Opinion Monitor for Development Policy 2018 (Opinion Monitor 2018) establishes and analyses how the general public in Germany perceives this issue, what position is taken and how people get involved. In addition to this feedback from the general public, it also provides an overview of the factors that influence opinions.

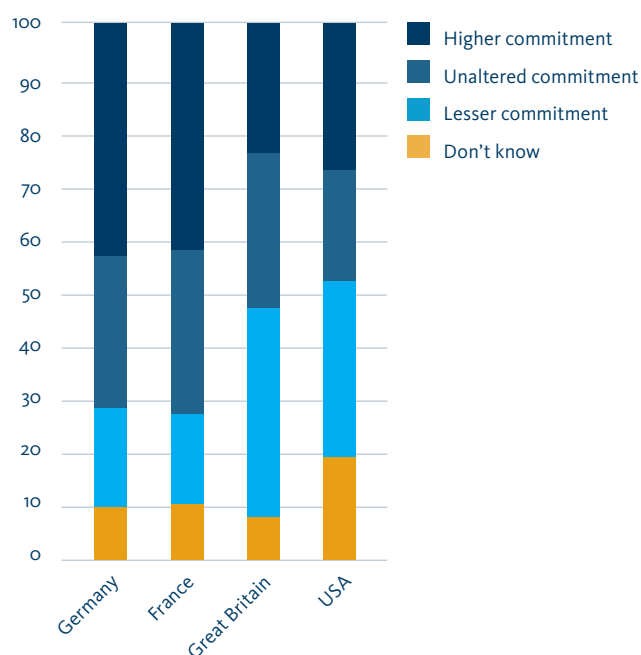
The key findings of the Opinion Monitor 2018 are as follows:

- The general public considers development policy and development cooperation to be important and supports government engagement in this area. For the most part, it perceives the policy area as a whole and hardly differentiates

between different development policy action areas and motives.

- The extent to which citizens support German development cooperation depends to a large degree on their political orientation, the moral obligation they feel towards the Global South and their perception of the effectiveness of development cooperation.
- Many people have concerns regarding the effectiveness of development cooperation and assume that corruption is widespread.
- Only 14% of the population has a completely positive view of development cooperation, whereas the majority is undecided (35%), sceptical (23%) or opposes it (28%).
- The German population has little knowledge of development policy and global development. Amongst other things, it considerably overestimates the proportion of development cooperation in the federal budget.
- The general public encounters development policy and development cooperation in discussions and through the media. Around one quarter of the population makes donations for development policy purposes and the same proportion consciously makes consumption decisions with the aim of having a positive effect on poverty and development. Only a small minority gets involved in development policy and development cooperation in an honorary capacity.

Figure: Support for government engagement towards combating global poverty



Source: Schneider and Glezer (2018, page 15).
Data source: Aid Attitudes Tracker, July 2017. N per country ≈ 6,000.

Key questions of the DEval Opinion Monitor for Development Policy 2018

The DEval Opinion Monitor 2018 primarily addressed the following questions:¹

1. Which attitudes can be identified among citizens in relation to development policy, development cooperation and global sustainable development? What do they know, and how do they get involved?
2. How have attitudes, knowledge and engagement changed in recent years?
3. Which individual and social factors explain knowledge, attitudes and engagement (e.g. sociodemographic characteristics, party preferences)?

Broad support among the general public for development cooperation

In July 2017, around 40% of the population spoke in favour of Germany increasing its engagement in combating poverty in the Global South, while approximately 20% wanted the engagement to be reduced. The degree of support is thus similar to that in France, and much higher than in Britain and the US (see figure). The population also supports the target agreed by the United Nations to spend 0.7% of the country's gross national income on Official Development Assistance (ODA), with around 40% speaking in favour of exceeding the target and 30% wishing to fulfil the ODA target of 0.7%.

The extent to which people support government engagement towards combating global poverty primarily depends on the following factors:

1. The further to the right respondents are positioned in the political spectrum, the lower their support is.
2. The greater the obligation that respondents feel towards people in the Global South, the higher their support is.
3. The older the respondents are, the lower their support is.
4. The more effective respondents perceive development cooperation to be, the higher their support is.

Motives for development cooperation, effectiveness and corruption

In public debate, German security interests, the promotion of the German economy, combating causes of forced migration and a moral obligation towards combating poverty are key motives for development cooperation. They are approximately of equal importance for citizens. Approval of three of the four motives has remained fairly constant since 2013. Only support for the motive of promoting the economy has been increasing slightly since 2013. Although the motive of combating the causes of flight has been present in the media due to increased immigration to Germany, the approval of this motive has not changed since the winter of 2015. More detailed analyses indicate that citizens are more likely to see a general added value in development cooperation than to differentiate between various motives.

When it comes to the effectiveness of government development cooperation, a significant proportion of the population is sceptical.

¹ The DEval Opinion Monitor for Development Policy 2018 is essentially based on data from the Aid Attitudes Tracker (AAT), a survey conducted in Germany, France, Britain and the US. Since 2013, the AAT has conducted a longitudinal survey every six months of around 6,000 individuals in each country with regard to attitudes, knowledge and engagement towards development policy and cooperation and related issues. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation finances the survey, while the survey research institute YouGov collects the data online.

Around 25% of citizens judge the effectiveness to be low, while only 10% believe it to be highly effective. However, the majority of citizens are undecided on this question. Citizens consider corruption to pose a major problem and suspect that around half of development cooperation funds is lost as a result of corruption. The higher the presumed corruption, the less effective citizens believe development cooperation to be.

The attitudes of the general public towards development cooperation – a typology

Aiming to make the attitudes of the general public more tangible, the Opinion Monitor 2018 combines the central attitude characteristics – a) concern about the situation in the Global South, b) sense of moral obligation, c) support for government development cooperation, d) perception of the effectiveness of development cooperation and e) own influence on the situation in the Global South – to form four groups of people with different attitudes:

1. **Supporters** (14%) display highly positive attitudes across all areas.
2. **Sceptics** (23%) care about the situation in the Global South and feel a moral obligation, but show only average levels of support for development cooperation and have concerns about its effectiveness and their own scope to exert influence.
3. **Opponents** (28%) care less about the situation in the Global South, do not feel any moral obligation, support development cooperation to a lesser extent and regard it – and personal engagement – as ineffective.
4. **Undecideds** (35%) do not have a clearly identifiable position.

The type of attitude to which respondents are assigned is associated with, among other things, their sociodemographic background and the political party with which they identify. The typology shows that, if central attitude characteristics are simultaneously taken into account, public opinion is more fragile than expected when looking solely at general support for development cooperation.

Knowledge of development policy and global development

The German population has a rather patchy knowledge of development policy and global development. In July 2017, the average estimated share of development cooperation in the federal budget was 19%. Those taking part in the survey for the first time even estimated the share to amount to 29% on average.

On top of this, some citizens seem to have a distorted perception of global developments. Above all, this concerns the extent of global poverty and child mortality as well as the scientific consensus on the human contribution to climate change. For example, almost 30% believe that child mortality has increased over the last 30 years, while only around 10% know that the figure has actually decreased. Likewise, only 20% of respondents assume that there is a consensus among scientists regarding the human contribution to climate change.

Engagement for development policy and development cooperation

Personal information intake and engagement for development policy and development cooperation play a key role in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda (Schneider et al., 2018). The DEval Opinion Monitor 2018 shows the following:

1. Citizens confront development policy and development cooperation, for instance by discussing the issue (55%) or following the news (65%).
2. Around 18% of citizens make donations for development policy purposes and 23% make consumption decisions specifically with the aim of influencing global poverty and development.
3. 5% of the population state that they are committed to development policy and development cooperation on a voluntary basis in Germany.

The factors that influence personal engagement are largely consistent across engagement types. A key predictor of donations, consumption decisions and voluntary engagement is that citizens feel a moral obligation towards the people in the Global South. Moreover, a sense of being able to make a difference and thus experience self-efficacy has a major influence on personal engagement. On top of this, people's incomes and level of education are also relevant for donations and conscious consumption decisions. Income ultimately also influences voluntary engagement, as there is a positive correlation between income and the sense of self-efficacy.

Implications for development policy and development cooperation

The central finding of the DEval Opinion Monitor 2018 is that the general public supports German government engagement in development policy in general, but at the same time is largely undecided in terms of its effectiveness or has concerns regarding

corruption. This finding presents both an opportunity and a challenge for political decision-makers. The broad support gives them the chance to conduct an open debate regarding the motives, successes and failures of development policy and development cooperation. The focus here should be on development policy strategy as well as communication and education. At a strategic level, it is necessary to examine whether the perception of the general public corresponds to reality. For example, does corruption really constitute such a huge problem? It may be necessary to take measures to counteract this perception.

A possible starting point for communication and education work is to take a differentiated approach to the groups of people with different attitudes named above. The following aspects could be addressed here:

- The moral obligation that people feel towards the Global South
- The perception of the effectiveness of development cooperation
- The sense of self-efficacy

References

Schneider, S.H. and S. H. Gleser (2018), *Meinungsmonitor Entwicklungspolitik 2018: Einstellungen zu Entwicklungszusammenarbeit und nachhaltiger Entwicklung* (Opinion Monitor for Development Policy 2018: Attitudes Towards Development Cooperation and Sustainable Development), German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval), Bonn.

Schneider, S.H., S. H. Gleser and M. Bruder (2018), *Die Agenda 2030 in der öffentlichen Meinung: Ergebnisse des DEval-Meinungsmonitor Entwicklungspolitik 2018*, (Public opinion of the 2030 Agenda: Results of the DEval Opinion Monitor for Development Policy 2018), DEval Policy Brief 6/2018, German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval), Bonn.

The sense of self-efficacy could be strengthened, for example, if political decision-makers were to show citizens ways of exerting an influence in their everyday lives, while promoting and communicating low-threshold forms of engagement. Moreover, the communication should not only focus on the need for action in the Global South, but also pinpoint positive developments and successes in development cooperation in these countries. At the same time, an open dialogue regarding the limitations and challenges of development cooperation should ideally begin at an early stage. After all, the general public is already aware of these anyway – possibly in an exaggerated form. A rational discussion can help people to question prejudices and accept areas of tension. In this context, it is advisable to strengthen people's awareness of the similarities and interdependencies between people from different regions of the world.

Aiming to make feedback from the general public and information regarding people's knowledge of development policy available to governmental and civil society actors in development policy and development cooperation in the future too, DEval intends to update its Opinion Monitor in 2020.

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The German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval) is mandated by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) to independently analyse and assess German development interventions. Evaluation reports contribute to the transparency of development results and provide policy-makers with evidence and lessons learned, based on which they can shape and improve their development policies.