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THE LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF DEVELOPMENT AID:  
EMPIRICAL STUDIES IN RURAL WEST AFRICA

by

THOMAS BIERSCHENK, GEORG ELWERT and DIRK KOHNERT

1. *Definition of the Problem*

Since the seventies, international development aid has been concentrated on the countries south of the Sahara. The aim of this aid has been to stop the desperate deterioration of the economic situation and especially of the living conditions of the majority of the population of Africa. However, both international donor organizations and African governments are increasingly coming to recognize that this aid has largely failed to achieve its objectives (see World Bank, 19971; UNDP, 1991; EGA 1989).

For new approaches to development policy to offer any promise of success, they need to be based on analyses of the socio-economic conditions and consequences of policies pursued to date. Besides a universal criticism of development aid as such<sup>2</sup>, sociological research has either concentrated on individual case studies, or has attempted to analyse the *Status Quo* by means of cross-sectional evaluations of specific project types. Process-orientated analyses of the cumulative effects over time of successful as well as failed projects have been totally neglected. Many sociologists and ethnologists take the view that development aid is simply "grafted" onto the essential structural characteristics of historical and contemporaneous African societies, enabling a simple analysis of these societies to be undertaken, without due consideration to the overall effects of development aid. In those cases — mostly outside the major current of sociology and ethnology — where aspects of development aid have been subjected to sociological analysis, the studies have concentrated mainly on the reasons for the failure of individual aid measures. By contrast, this article proceeds from two fundamental considerations. Firstly, we hold that

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for at least thirty years now, development aid has been a constituent component of social relationships in many African countries; its importance for the social development process cannot be over-estimated. There is no doubt that the development conditions of African countries are to a great extent dependent on the exchange relationships within the world market and the protectionist policies of the industrialized nations. However, the recognition of this fact should not allow a sociology of developing countries to ignore internal development factors or to behave as though development aid were simply an epi-phenomenon. Precisely the state classes, the role of which has once more come to the fore in recent studies (cf. e.g. Bayart, 1989) frequently owe their political survival - at least indirectly - to development aid. It not only created the possibility of independent development of these rapidly expanding state bureaucratic classes, whose rule is legitimized in no small measure by projects financed by development aid. It is also an important element in the anchoring of a clientelist logic in social relationships within these classes, between the state apparatus and the population, as well as between donors and the representatives of the state class. Today, on all social levels of African development administration, the essential "development deficit" is regarded as being a lack of (financial) means. The solution called for is therefore transfer payments (from the donor institutions to the African governments; from the African centralized states to their populations). Depending on the various political viewpoints, this transfer of resources is then often legitimized with the settlement of old debts (e. g. for colonial exploitation or the slave trade - see Resolution of OAU Conference in Abuja, June 1991) or with a moral obligation to provide charitable aid. At the same time, projects financed by foreign aid contribute considerably to the legitimation of state rule - both in Europe and abroad.

This leads on to our second point: sociological and socio-anthropological studies of development aid and its consequences for the social structures of African (and other) societies must not be limited to the evaluation of individual development projects - mostly on the commission of the particular donor. There exists already a vast body of these studies collecting dust on the shelves of the national and international donor organizations, mostly without any recognizable consequences for project execution or any relationship to more general questions of anthropology and sociology. Sociological analyses of the consequences of development aid need rather to be pursued as fundamental research, opening up more generalized, comparative sociological questions. Nor can they be aimed at establishing an anthropology concept which has recently become fashionable amongst anthropologists, as a type of applied support discipline for a successful development policy. If the concept of "development anthropology" is to have any significance at all, then this can be

only in the sense of viewing the "development aid world" from an anthropological perspective, i. e. from a perspective which gives equally serious consideration to all the groups involved - experts and bureaucrats, farmers and shepherds, poor and rich, men and women etc. — with their own particular strategies of action and cultural attitudes (see Bierschenk 1991).

This perspective of a "sociology and social anthropology of the development aid world" formed the basis of a research project covering several countries of West Africa which was carried out by the authors between 1984 and 1990 together with a number of colleagues, initially at the University of Bielefeld and then at the Free University of Berlin. In the course of this project, it gradually became clear that our perspectives are also shared by a considerable number of researchers especially in Europe - who consciously ignore the boundaries between anthropology and development sociology.<sup>3</sup> The work on this project was, for us, a learning process. At first sight, several widespread criticisms of development aid seemed to be confirmed, but on closer analysis it proved impossible to generalize them. In the case of the Igala in Nigeria, for example, the development aid projects were concentrated along the major traffic routes, with the hinterland being neglected. In the case of the Tiv, an acephalous ethnic group in the middle belt of Nigeria, however, this tendency to concentration was not in evidence (see Mönikes, 1988). The thesis that it is key people who benefit most from the utilization of the positive effects of development aid was confirmed in the case of Benin, Niger and Sierra Leone (see Bierschenk/Forster 1987; Forster 1988; Metz 1986). Who these key people are, though, is something that this type of project is unable to generalize on or to predict. On the contrary, our interest was focussed on very specific strategies of the pursuit of self-interest. The dissolution of extended families, a frequent consequence of development aid, could also be observed (see Laabs 1987 and Peters 1987 on the marginalization of the physically handicapped and the migration of active young men in Sierra Leone). But Momkes's (1988) case study on Nigeria showed that this trend, which could be observed among the Tiv, was actually reversed in the hierarchically organized Igala; here, certain extended family groups tended to be strengthened. At the same time, in this ethnic group there was a strengthening of the economic position of women, who were able to turn their traditional separation from the husbands' budgeting to their advantage. Despite a similar role-division between men and women in one of the regions of Benin, Agossou (1987) observed a weakening in the economic position of women, a development which, in different forms, we also found in southern Niger (Kremer 1987) and in the south of Burkina Faso (Obbelode 1988). The fact that there are counter-trends to the general phenomenon of impoverishment - as described by Metz (1986) with regard to forms of women's resistance, and Scherler (1987) on the enrichment strategy of

a category of women in Sierra Leone - bodes caution against generalizing about hermeneutic models.

Thus, little remained of our original working hypotheses. Distinctive local social dynamics or transformation processes came to the fore (Zitlmann 1989). However, this meant that two working hypotheses from the original project took on even greater emphasis: the importance of the "grey (hidden) budget" of development aid - hitherto ignored by political science and sociology - and the almost systematic disregard of long-term dynamics in project-planning. In the following, we elaborate on these points in detail. An analysis of the bureaucratization effect caused by the "grey budget" of development aid, and of the failure of pre-planned aid due to the complexity of social dynamics will be followed by a description of this social structure which has been labelled "administrative development". In conclusion, we will risk formulating some suggestions for practical implementation.

## 2. The Grey Budget and the Bureaucratization of Development

In the least developed countries (LLDCs), the majority of which are African countries, development aid has now assumed major macro-economic dimensions. In the seventies and eighties, official aid (ODA) of the donor countries alone amounted, on an average, to one half of the gross investment and annual import volume of these recipient countries, not including technical and food aid. This has led to a considerable growth of money in the hands of governments. The dynamic "strategic group" (Evers/Schiel 1988), the officials and graduates, have used this opportunity to extend the state apparatus, including para-state organizations. This tends to lead to a pattern in which internal government income is scarcely adequate to cover current costs - especially for the salaries of public employees. As a result, the regimes concerned face the constant latent threat of being overthrown, as evidenced by the example of Benin 1989-90. As a result not only every new government investment, but even the servicing of earlier investments, and in some countries even the financing of current personnel costs, is dependent on foreign finance. In other words, the transfer payments from development aid form, in many recipient countries, a "grey" portion of state income, approaching or even exceeding the amount of income from taxation, customs duties, profits etc. (see table 1). Development aid has thus become a central aspect of the macro-economic reproduction structures of black African countries.

In a political-economic sense, the effects and functions of development aid in the recipient countries are comparable to those of other state revenues - e. g. from oil production (cf. Bierschenk 1984). However, a central difference to oil revenues - which are bound to indigenous resources - lies in the diversity of

Table 1 - Ratio of official government income to development aid income (ODA) in selected African countries, 1988 (in \$ m)

Country	Income from ODA absolute / % GDP	Current total of central government income % GDP		ODA as a percentage of central government income
<i>A. Countries studied in the framework of our research project</i>				
Burkina Faso	298	16.0	17.1	90 %
Benin Guinea-	162	9.0	12.0	75 %
Bissau	100	13.8	'8.2'	168 %
Nigeria	120	0.4	18.5	2 %
Sierra Leone	102	7.3	7.3	100 %
<i>B. Extreme cases</i>				
Mozambique	886	70.6	22.1'	320 %
Somalia	433	42.9	8.2'	523 %
Tanzania	978	31.2	15.2"	205 %

' provisional estimates (incl. published budget aid of donors).

Source: calculated from: World Bank, "World Development Report 1991"; OECD/DAC, 1990; EIU, Country Reports, 1990/91; IMF, "Government Finance Statistical Yearbook", 1990.

possible external sources of development aid. The second "grey" budget is largely controlled by the donors, and is generally only loosely co-ordinated on the national level. On the one hand, this leads to specific imbalances in the distribution of projects, the effects of which we will look at in more detail later. But the prime effect of this massive, uncontrolled inflow of aid is to give rise to two initially apparently paradoxical tendencies.

On the level of national development planning, there is a systematic sabotage of all efforts towards co-ordinating development planning. It is generally more advantageous for a national authority to develop direct relationships with foreign donors than to maintain them with the appropriate central planning authorities. Even within the structure of an authority, this tendency towards the independence of individual units is continued, for instance where a regional agricultural authority (or parts of it) succeeds in winning a project for itself and thus having at its disposal considerably greater resources than the ministry in the capital. This in turn arouses jealousy on the part of the central authority, which attempts to divert resources, using legal or illegal means as required. The ministry of planning - where one exists - is mostly powerless against this circumvention of legally anchored planning structures, particularly where it has no power to regulate the distribution of the "spoils" of development aid (see Beck 1991). In extreme cases, where

foreign donors partially finance the development of regional planning structures, as in Guinea Bissau, the very survival of these material and personnel structures stands and falls with the flow of development aid. This uncertainty has a negative effect on the morale and personnel structure of the class of development officials, formed over decades of painstaking work, as described by Friedrich (1991) in the case of the regional development of Guinea Bissau.

A second consequence of development aid is the nationalization and bureaucratization of development. This is only an apparent contradiction to the systematic destruction of development planning on the national level. The massive growth of employment figures in the government and semi-government sectors of most African states from the sixties onwards bear testimony to this trend. In Benin, for example, — despite repeated complaints from the donors — the number of employees in the civil service has more than doubled over the last ten years from 20,000 (1990) to almost 50,000 (1990). This has been made possible by the fact that LLDCs are required to finance only a minimum amount of government investment from internal funds, and the current costs (salaries etc.) are funded increasingly — more or less hidden — out of development aid. In addition to this, every development aid project, whether a successful one or a failure, leaves in place institutional and personnel structures which, in themselves, are an important factor in bureaucratization. On the level of political discussion, this leads to a situation in which "development" is frequently defined as "projects carried out by the (centralized) state". For African farmers, administrative buildings and the vehicles of civil servants are much greater symbols of government-induced "development" than structural economic or social changes (see Elwert/Elwert-Kretschmer 1991).

Development aid primarily involves the infusion of money into current social processes. In this context, venality is probably the most obvious undesired side-effect. Venality means that social goods and services become tradeable. In such a case, increased money does not lead to increased investment in the productive sector, but to a transformation of social relationships such as marriage, love, the law and religion into services which can be bought and sold. That is, it leads to corruption, prostitution, inflation of the costs of rituals and the ability to purchase God's grace by pilgrimages and magic. Depending on the particular power structures, the money flows into the power centres (Bierschenk 1987; Crehan/von Oppen 1988; Elwert 1989). Since development aid is not the only — and generally not even the most important — source from which money flows into society, it would be wrong to blame individual development projects for the growth of venality. However, where the establishment of development bureaucracies weakens the social control of the powerful, while the money supply continues to expand, development aid cannot be totally exonerated. This can be seen from the development of land

rights in one of the southern provinces of Benin. Between formal land ownership, entered in a land register and the informal factual land-ownership of farmers, there has developed a "usurped" right of property by government, regional or agricultural administrations. Anybody claiming rights to property and offering sufficient bribes can obtain a stamped property certificate by passing the land registration system — even if these rights are contested by the traditional authorities. The validity of this new property certificate is then enforced (in return for continuous bribery) by the police. In recent years, big businessmen and highly placed government officials have thus been able to secure for themselves a large portion of the most valuable land (see Elwert et al. 1989). Venality, though, is not merely corruption. Other social relationships, too, are increasingly organized on a money basis.

The problematic nature of these transformations is immediately apparent. The new tradeable character of social ties frees people from old obligations and is perceived as liberation. Access to resources seems to be facilitated. In the course of time, it becomes clear that these institutions, which are now subject to "market forces", also have a function in securing trust. But trust is not a vague emotional variable, it is also the basis of social interactions — even in the markets.

By contrast, the spread of venality produces long-term insecurity. This spawns the need for quick, simplistic explanations of the inexplicable. If an explanation can be found, it focusses on various fears, e.g. in charges of witchcraft (see Kohnert 1983) or, for instance, in the widespread fear of illness brought on by black magic in West Benin. Headaches, feeling ill, loss of concentration, unhappiness and other non-specific ailments are then attributed to the black magic purchased by imaginary enemies with which, for example, anonymous malefactors have invisibly split the head of the patient. The evil, the money and the irresponsibility of individuals, which already create so much insecurity in love and law, are thus convincingly linked to other social spheres. Insecurity is also a strong impetus to the creation or re-creation of (imaginary) communities. In Africa, the eighties were characterized not only by a growth of venality but also by the growing importance of various types of "in-groups", e. g. Islamic and Christian sects, the revival of traditional religions and ethno-nationalist movements. Thus, for example, discontent with the increasing corruption of government officials was an important ground for many Fulani in Benin to come together in the late eighties to form an ethnic pressure group (see Bierschenk 1989).

The intention of these communities is to (re-)establish relationships of trust; they aim to separate the monetary and social spheres. It is noticeable that many of these groups have rigid moral attitudes on the use of money. Money ought to regulate only economic systems (Elwert 1989). The same criticism has been

pronounced by Jehova's Witnesses, which have been forced underground, or radical Islamic groups in Benin, Niger and Nigeria, which - in consideration of their foreign paymasters - also work underground. The continued attractiveness of Marxism re-formulated into a para-religious belief among political youth sects (as in parts of the PCD in Benin) can be explained by the same phenomenon.

It is not surprising that religious groups and local self-help groups of this kind frequently become partners of development aid organizations. As they develop international moral-economic structures, they are more attractive and reliable partners for the development aid agencies than most of the official bodies.

As compared to government projects, European non-government organizations (NGOs) claim to be more flexible and less subject to the compulsion to co-operate with the elites. Nevertheless, even these NGOs cannot escape co-operating with the local elites if they wish to implement successfully a community development project, as the structures of decision-making within the community are stratified according to power, rank and economic importance.

Development aid by self-help groups and NGOs, then, is only to a limited extent able to break out of these structures which, as we have shown, determine overall development aid policy. Self-help groups do not live in isolation. They interact with a social environment which is characterized by the spread of venality (Amselle 1988, Neubert 1989). The more "developed" they become, the greater their integration into the "external world", the greater becomes the probability of corruption and prestige consumption being considered as "normal" characteristics of their societies. A typical example is the Kibanguist movement in Zaire, which was transformed from a national, Christian-protestant liberation movement in the colonial era into an established ideological pillar of the Mobutu regime, that now even massively exploits its own members (Asch 1983). This reveals the difficulties inherent in an attempt to transform self-help groups into the other "normality" of communal self-government based on the rule of law and democratic public information.

### 3. *The Consequences of the Static View of Development Aid*

#### 3.1 *The Traditionalism of Development Aid and the Dynamics of African Societies*

The thesis of the traditionalism of African societies, widely propounded by development planners, can be countered by its very opposite — that the world of development aid is very much more traditionalist and closed to change than

all of the societies which this development aid attempts to dynamize. There are very few development experts who recognise that current development aid projects are just the most recent in a historical series of massive external interventions since the beginning of the colonial era, which have overlapped in time and space, and which either cancel each other out or reinforce one another.

This inability to learn from history, which characterizes the world of planned development, has been frequently documented e.g. by Richards (1985) for Sierra Leone, Kohnert (1988) for Guinea Bissau and Norris (in preparation) for Togo. It has been shown how the failure of a particular technological intervention frequently leads to another project with a different technology. But after some time, this new attempt also fails, whereupon the original approach is adopted once again. The fact that this had already failed in the past has been forgotten in the meantime - not by the farmers, but by development aid institutions and their experts. Thus for example, current animal fraction projects could learn from the failure of similar "mixed farming" projects in Togo during the German colonial period, and by their evaluation reports prepared at that time (cf. Norris, in preparation). In general, the failure of a development project tends to lead to changes in inputs and in presentation rather than in the project approach. On closer scrutiny, a "community development" project of the past looks exactly like a modern day "basic needs" or "participation" project. What distinguishes them is rather their rhetoric.

This inability to learn from the past is primarily due to the fact that the development aid world has its own cognitive structures and its own communication channels. It pursues its own internal discourse, the central categories of which must be mastered. The reality which forms the frame of reference for the management and within which development projects are conceived (or implemented) is largely a derived reality, produced within this communication system itself. This goes undetected in developing countries because, unlike in Western societies, there exists no public debate in the absence of alternative channels of information or media of communication which could lead to differing perceptions of reality. Thus there is a lack of processes of deliberation which include perspectives other than those of the planning staffs. However, this lack of a response in development aid cannot be blamed on the experts alone. On the contrary, experts frequently show an amazing amount of flexibility, demonstrated, for instance, in their adaptation to physically and psychologically stressful, unaccustomed living conditions. Nor should the farmers be made responsible for the rigidity. The entrepreneurial dynamism of migrants and the rapid spread of economically viable innovations (from the distilleries, through the bicycle to improved seed corn) provide sufficient

testimony to this. However, planning processes per se display rigidity which contrasts with the flexibility of self-organized reproduction forms of farming communities.

### 3.2 *The Historical Relevance and Complexity of African Societies*

This criticism of the static view of development aid holds good not only for its implementation, but also for the perception of the social structures and dynamics of the recipient countries by the donors and experts. The latter tend rather to reinforce the existing social structures on which their terms of reference are frequently implicitly based. The failure of development projects is frequently explained by the "inert" structures of these supposedly traditional societies. "Development" or "modernization", by contrast, is presented as the "dynamization" of these inert structures by means of external intervention. In reality, this view of traditional African society as static is a myth: African societies have been changing both before, during and after the colonial era (Elwert 1983b).

This metaphor of the dormant society which could be made to move only by forceful external impulses was, for example, used to present the plantation economy of the Ivory Coast as a development model. French and World Bank experts alike recommended this as a model, as the development strategies pursued there had had a remarkable effect in increasing the income of the rural population. A group of French social anthropologists looked closely into the ethnological and historical reports on the farmers of this region. They showed that the development towards a plantation system which was competitive on the world market had begun long before the colonial era and had, in fact, been initially resisted by the French colonial masters. However, once the obstinate African farmers had prevailed against the colonial masters by a mixture of obstruction and subversion, the "plantation economy" was adopted as an official development objective, becoming the object of government and development agency plans. The success of the plantation economy in the Ivory Coast is thus by no means primarily due to external impulses, but is an example of auto-transformation (Chauveau 1985). Similar examples have also been reported from other West African countries, e. g. Nigeria (see Hogendorn 1966 and Kindler 1986).

Like all other societies, African societies, too, have their own historical dynamics. In other words, they have their own forms of transformation, i. e. systematic ways of generating internal innovations and transforming external innovations. Seen from the outside this selective reception of innovations appears to be a sign of a sceptical approach to new technologies and new forms of social organization. From the inside, however, it proves, in some cases, to be

self-confident and creative form of dealing with innovations of external origin which are rapidly and flexibly adapted to local conditions. Where casual observers see only rigid traditionalism, a closer look reveals significant transformations for the target group. And where the ignorant "expert" attributes the change only to his external impulse, frequently in reality this is only the continuation of a pre-colonial transformation pattern.

The academic study of development policy and its implementation have, to date, scarcely sought a theory of social development which would explain which social forms actually enable acceptance of innovations and self-organized control of economic development within a society. This is where our second thesis is of importance: African societies - like all other societies - are highly complex systems. Complex systems depend on control through self-organization. Each society is dependent for its reproduction on structures which operate in a similar manner to biological systems. It requires a continuous exchange with its environment. This environment includes both other societies and the natural environment. It also needs a self-reference and an awareness of its own boundaries. And finally it needs mechanisms for adaptation to ensure its continuous change in the wake of changing environmental conditions.

Each society - even a hunter and gatherer community - is thus an extremely complex whole. The wide diversity of its feedback and self-reference mechanisms make it practically impossible to predict developments on the basis of mechanical or linear development models. Thus, Mönikes (1988) has demonstrated that against the planners' expectations the hierarchically structured Igala society in Nigeria tends to accept development aid packages in their entirety, while their acephalous neighbours, the Tiv, accept only specific partial aspects of development projects and adapt other aspects to the local conditions. We will return later to this process of "unravelling" development aid packages.

Another example can be seen in the numerous irrigation projects in West Africa which were intended to promote vegetable or rice cultivation by women. For a time, these projects were very successful: yields rose, and the possibilities of marketing surpluses increased considerably. This was precisely what had been intended by the development planners. However, this led to unexpected developments: the new wealth of the farmers' wives aroused the envy of other groups, for instance their husbands and young or experienced men. This, in turn, led to revolutionary changes in the legal structure which were frequently veiled by religious changes, e. g. the transition to Islam. This in turn led to the development of a new property structure, with the men now becoming the owners of the irrigated land and taking over the lucrative production and marketing of rice themselves. Social changes of this kind,

which are frequently detectable only in the long term, as they occur with a time-lag of a decade, are another typical example of the foreseeable and unintended consequences of development policy intervention (Obbelode 1988).

The classic answer of development policy to such a diversion of project objectives is that it is simply impossible to foresee all eventualities. Then solutions are sought in technological terms. However, in our opinion, a better answer would lie in strengthening the ability of social systems for adaptation: for self-controlled trial selection of technologies, or generally the ability for self-organization.

The problem of massive external intervention can perhaps best be highlighted by a further example. In the case of famine, aid organizations tend to group the people into camps and allocate them food through ration cards. There are good logistical arguments for such an approach. Famine aid projects are therefore, regarded as a project type where experts in logistics are in demand, but certainly not social scientists or anthropologists conversant with local culture. Compared to the difficulty of transporting food to these camps, the distribution within the camps appears to pose no problems. Elaborate social structures and division of labour do not seem to be required to this end. Even the socialization of children can be reduced to the ability to take food and to beg. Frequently, the following then happens: with the onset of the next monsoon, the people are unable to return to their villages immediately. Their social structures are geared to other ends: their children educated to other strategies. They have no means of production or security. They lack security primarily because most famines in Africa are connected with wars. The people consequently remain in camps for years. This leads to the development of "spoon-fed" societies which can no longer really be considered as societies in the sense of self-organized systems. The social institutions to ensure the adaptation to new environmental conditions by internal differentiation and the creation of new rules, have been destroyed (on Niger, cf. Spittler 1989, and on Ethiopia and Somalia, cf. Zitelmann 1988).

In a more abstract form, the problem of spoon-fed societies can be formulated as follows: in the worst case, external intervention in complex dynamic systems results in the destruction of the capacity of a society for self-organization; in more favourable cases, external intervention simply has no consequences. Whatever the case, an observation of African societies as self-organized systems must lead to the statement that the result of external intervention cannot be generally predicted. The application of a specific set of intervention instruments does not automatically lead to definite socio-structural results. Rather this depends on the already existing modes of production and transformation. A typology of these modes of transformation would of

necessity be more complex than the mere bipolar distinction between pure rejection of external impulses and their positive adoption and internalization. There is at least one other type of transformation process which is characterized by an alternation between differing structures of production and social reproduction. These structures are stable in themselves, but are (temporarily) relinquished under stress in favour of other organizational forms. In the history of many rural groups in Africa, we repeatedly find periods of opening to the market followed by periods of a return to subsistence production and, following that, renewed opening to the market (Crehan/v. Oppen 1988).

### 3.3 *Administrative versus Indigenous Innovation*

Development aid projects are almost always based on an approach which can be described as "administrative innovation": experts define a problem, seek a solution, and then implement it. The solution can consist of technical or social innovations. An example of a social innovation would be the introduction of collectives - a project which, from the sixties onwards, has always been pursued with great, but usually unfulfilled expectations.

This type of administrative innovation is also to be found in European history. It characterized Russian Tsarism and Stalinism, but in German history there are certainly also positive examples, such as the Hardenberg reforms. Predominant in European history, however, was another type of innovation, which we could call "indigenous, independent innovation". This consists of a wide range of differing solutions developed simultaneously, from which a systematic selection takes place. The selection is not directly linked with the variations, e.g. if something appears ineffective it is immediately excluded from the list of possible solutions. If the appropriate communication processes are available, this simultaneous development of different solution proposals allows for an exchange of experiences and especially the modification of individual attempts at solutions. In the long term, these communication processes lead to a selection. This can be illustrated with the example of the steam engine. This was by no means invented by James Watt on his own. In the 18th century there were a dozen models competing with one another, from which James Watt's design - which also incorporated ideas from his competitors - emerged successful (Lilley 1973). In the natural sciences, this kind of interplay between variation and selection is called "evolution".

It is difficult to understand why administrative innovation plays such a dominant role in the thought of "experts" and African decision makers. Certainly the internal structure of the authoritarian African "peasant state" (Spittler 1982) is one explanatory factor. That the political orientation of the particular regime is not the determinant factor is evident from the fact that



states with quite different structures and political systems show the same dependence on state-directed innovations. The example of the "training and visit system" propagated by the World Bank with missionary zeal, a model of administratively-directed innovation, points to other determinants (see Kohnert 1990). The explanation must therefore lie, at least in part, in the structure of the development world. The insecurity of experts with regard both to a social environment which is alien to them, and to the benefit of their activities, demands the ritualization of these and the erection of barriers against potential competing (indigenous) knowledge systems — e. g. the farmers' knowledge of nee cultivation (see Kohnert, 1988, on Guinea Bissau, and Richards, 1985, on Sierra Leone). In this way an imaginary world is created, in which the success of the expert is no longer measured primarily by the actual degree to which he solves the problem of the target group, but by derivatives such as the "activist approach", the elegance and familiarity with the rituals of development management etc.

### 3.4 *Environmental Management and Self-Management*

The same problem is visible in the management of rain and drought problems. In large tracts of Africa, the problem is not so much one of too little, but of irregular rainfall. Let us take the broad belt of areas with precipitation around 500 mm per annum. This amount of rainfall is sufficient for a flourishing agriculture and wine production on the slopes of the Upper Rhine Plain. The problem is that in the Sahel sometimes half of the annual precipitation falls in one day. And it is not unlikely that while one district is suffering this cloudburst, the neighbouring area receives no rain at all. We must thus imagine the rainfall map as a very spotted leopard skin. The average rainfall figures give a mean value, but provide little in formation on the rainfall in individual areas. It can also happen that rain falls only after the end of the growing season. The only regular feature of the rainfall in virtually all parts of tropical Africa is its irregularity. The inhabitants have devised specific strategies in response to this. For the cattle rearers it is mobility - which we refer to as nomadism. For domestic political reasons of control — camouflaged by the official argument of the allocation cost of "modern" infrastructures -most African governments have a manifest interest in turning the nomads into settled residents. But this means that even in the absence of rainfall in the areas of their present settlement, nomads are unable to seek greener pastures in their old travelling grounds. Mobility is, however, by no means a strategy of security only pursued by the nomads, but can also be found among "settled" African small farmers. When one is in need, it is important to have the possibility, through relatives, clientelist relationships, or by migrant labour, to

be able to profit directly from the better distribution of rainfall in other areas. If the labour systems used in development projects now force the people to stay in one place all year, the social relationships which are the preconditions for this kind of mobility fall into decay through disuse (cf. Lachenmann 1988). A further example shall illustrate how for a long time African farmers have used strategies to optimize their security to cope with the vagaries of nature and human life. These strategies, however, run against the major trend of promoting the "green revolution" by high yielding varieties etc. There are good reasons for seed projects to be restricted to only a small number of varieties — and in some cases even to one single variety. In this way, the farmers can be instructed to observe the best sowing and harvesting times, and fertilizers and pesticides can be precisely targeted to the intended production. To the irritation of the experts, however, in many regions farmers continue to use different varieties and do not wish to give up this diversity. Paul Richards (in print) has studied this kind of agricultural production by rice farmers in Sierra Leone. He discovered that these farmers - against the advice of the development experts - pursue a type of agricultural production which can be described as a local "green revolution". Yields similar to those of the well-known "green revolution" of high-yielding varieties dependent on high fertilizer and pesticide inputs are achieved. This diversity of varieties makes sense when one realises that in some cases the rain comes on time, so that a longer growing period can be utilized, whereas in other cases the rain falls so late that quick-maturing varieties are needed. Some fields are on dry land, some are occasionally subject to flooding — whereas others are marshy. For each of these soil conditions there are specific varieties which flourish only in those locations. The farmers have even developed varieties which can float to the surface in the event of a flood. At first sight, one variety of rice appears particularly unsuitable because of its long grains. The cultivation of this variety seems irrational, since this rice is extraordinarily difficult to harvest, to thresh and to process. What is more, the gene threatens to spread to other higher yielding rice varieties. However, the farmers have a good reason to retain this rice variety in their armoury, for it is possible that a family may not have enough children to combat the worst enemy of the rice crop: birds. If there are no children to frighten off the birds, a variety of rice, e.g. long grain rice, is required which is immune to damage by birds.

### 4. *The Command State*

A command state is one in which, despite a formal framework of laws and courts, the real structure of authority is characterized by obedience to arbitrary regulations and directives of officials. There is no separation of powers

between the judiciary and the executive, and any action without explicit authorization or directive is illegal. Despite the democratization movements spreading from the capital cities, the fundamental reality in rural areas of many African countries is still the command state. The gap between the donors' expectation to handle things according to conventional administrative and legal procedures on the one hand and the reality of arbitrariness in the command states' bureaucracy on the other was filled by strategies of competition for project resources and by the emergence of social actors called "development brokers". For the donors, principles based on the rule of law, such as the binding of administrative actions to legal procedures and the provision of information to the public, are part of the natural, scarcely ever consciously formulated rules of the economic and political game. The confrontations surrounding projects, experienced by all experts, are therefore mostly classified as exceptions, personal mistakes or the "cultural heritage", without recognition being given to their systematic character. However, local development brokers, for instance, have a role to play in the social structure.

#### 4.1 *The Role of Local Development Brokers*

To date, little attention has been given in the development policy literature to one particular strategic group. We shall call them "local development brokers". In Africa and (as Lenz 1988 demonstrates) also in some areas of Latin America, development aid has created a particular sociological type: the broker, mediating between potential project beneficiaries and potential project providers. In this sense, the majority of projects can be regarded as being "mediated". The geographical distribution of development projects depends frequently not so much on the existing infrastructures such as roads and rail links, but on the presence of possible groups of mediators. These can be the "sons of the village" as described by Athawet (1988) in the case of Benin. He was asked whether he, as an academic from the capital city, would be prepared to be adopted as one such *fil du village*, as it was automatically assumed that he had better contacts to the clientelist structure of the decision-makers in the capital. In cases where there are no local mediators, they can be created by the inclusion of outsiders (e. g. civil servants) in reciprocal or clientelist relationships (cf. Lenz 1988; Crehan/v. Oppen 1988). A good example of this is the case of the agricultural extension officers in the integrated rural development projects. In Benin, the latter were in demand by the target groups, less because of their (doubtful) advisory function in technical matters than for their role as mediators between farmers and government authority in social conflicts (Liihe 1990).

These mediation efforts are usually illegal, but advantageous for the brokers

concerned, and because they mostly operate clandestinely, they are virtually never mentioned in sociological analyses of development projects. This is regrettable, as it conceals the fact that the social category of the broker is not a necessary means of development. It is just as easy to conceive of open political systems for the distribution of project resources through markets, private services, etc. according to demand. The interaction of producers, extension services, the media, and democratic political institutions in Western countries is an example of the distribution of resources in accordance with needs and purchasing power. In our Western society, too, there are mediators, but they are not in a position to impose such a personalized clientelist monopoly of access upon an entire society as the brokers in the developing countries do.

#### 4.2 *Strategic Action Versus Consensus Action*

Most development projects are still conceived as "integrated projects". This makes a great deal of sense, for many measures are really effective if combined, so they are bundled together into packages. Interestingly, however, the target groups usually unravel this package and select only individual measures which are then actually implemented. In general, therefore, projects neither fail completely, nor are they ever 100 % successful. Usually the success of a project is selective.

This unravelling of the packages is surprising in as far as all the participants are usually committed to a common rhetoric through specific procedures or methods of planning in which the "logical" interrelationship between objectives of the project is underlined.<sup>4</sup> However, under this veil of a vain attempt at consensus, there is a great deal of in-fighting between the various strategic groups participating in a project. As an example, let us look at the installation of watering points for cattle farmers, as portrayed by Bierschen (1988). The wives of the settled peasants wanted water for the household (they need a great deal of water, especially for washing). The farmers needed it for their vegetable cultivation; therefore they had an interest in ensuring that the watering points were laid as near to the village as possible, and that neither the watering points nor the vegetable fields were trampled by cattle. These interests clashed with those of the Fulani, cattle farmers, for whom the project was originally conceived. They, of course, needed watering points not in the vicinity of the villages, but near the cattle pastures. The European experts were under considerable pressure to produce results. They had to ensure a smooth flow of funds and the smooth running of operations on the ground; otherwise they were regarded as inefficient. This efficiency criterion, however, is the primary determinant of their careers. These considerations rather pointed to easily accessible watering points near major roads and traffic centres. The local politicians then had to weigh up these opposing interests, their central concern

being the gaining of legitimacy and/or material advantages for their clients. From their perspectives - and in this they are not different from politicians in the donor countries — optimum solutions for them are usually achieved if the realisation of projects can actually be made visible, for instance by situating them on the major traffic routes.

That these interests are so divergent is something which often emerges only through sociological analysis.<sup>5</sup> In the project, these hidden interests are expressed rather indirectly by promoting or blocking one alternative or another. The women lay their washing out around the watering points, either blocking the way of the cattle to the watering point or provoking a conflict which puts the cattle farmers in the wrong. The cattle farmers generally attempt to influence the decision-makers whom they consider to be relevant by giving them gifts. The male members of the peasant family are able to disrupt every decision-making body until they can force an acceptable majority. The officials, on the other hand, can prevent the construction of any watering point by administrative delays. They can, for example, stipulate that the construction requires the clearance of a higher authority. They can stop projects because of supposedly insurmountable technical difficulties, etc.

Seen from this perspective, the project appears as an arena of differing strategies for action. Structural change is not determined by a negotiated social consensus, but by the competition between various conflicting and often hidden (group) interests, local knowledge, strategies, values. In other words, it would be wrong to regard the units of analysis, whether state, village or ethnic community, as homogeneous, with everybody pulling in the same direction (Chauveau 1985, Olivier de Sardan 1988). In particular, African villages should not be regarded as realms of solidarity, but as realms of conflict (Kohnert 1982; 1988). The conflictual nature and heterogeneity of local social structures is, however, in general disregarded by development projects. Formulations which describe the target groups in the projects plans as "the population", "the poorest of the poor", "the African smallholder", etc. conceal more than they reveal. Just how different the interests of "the" target group can be comes to light at the latest when the project is implemented. The following is not untypical of the way things develop: In the first phase of an integrated rural development project, the better-off farmers take loans, utilize the inputs provided and begin to produce more. Then, in the second phase, when the resources are spread more broadly because of the project objective of "participation", a decline is observable because the necessary resources are not available for the newcomer farmers to get a foothold on the ladder of the new production process. Flourishing development projects are characterized not only by high investments of the wealthy rural classes, but also by the urban classes, particularly government employees (on Benin, cf. e.g. Meissner 1990).

It is therefore very difficult to talk of the failure of a project. In any project there are definite winners: as a rule, these are the politicians and civil servants in the national decision-making structures, and also the richer and/or more influential strata of the target population, together with other beneficiaries not considered in the original project plan, such as blacksmiths who dismantle "lost" machines into scrap iron - which they then use as a raw material - and naturally also some customs officials . . .

#### 4.3 Structures of Non-public Information

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In essence, then, we find strategies here which always make use of the same tactic, namely the blocking of the intentions of other competing. There is no public formulation of interests or negotiation of a compromise. There is no reason why this should be a cause for surprise. Precisely in the authoritarian peasant state (on this concept, cf. Spittler 1982) there is an absence of any generalized medium for formulating interests. There are no generally accessible channels for the articulation of demands of target groups, and there are no social structures for negotiating compromises. This situation by no means applies to all developing countries. However, it is characteristic of most of the least developed countries (LLDCs) of Black Africa which do not have a developed written culture.

Western societies, on the other hand, are characterized by public information as a medium for negotiation. In the West, values are questioned, debated and re-formulated. "Public" esteem is created by the evaluation of individual action on the projection screen of public debate: public information is structured through specific channels, allowing differing interests to enter into the negotiating processes. The media play a central role in the formation of public information. Thus, we can always assume that our opponents in a conflict have some partial, but not irrelevant knowledge of our objectives and strategies. There is also a consensus on the limits of these strategies.

The characteristic feature of many African development projects, however, is the inadequate dissemination of information about opposing interests and strategies, and uncertainty with regard to the limits of these strategies. The "development aid world" in countries in which a majority of the population is illiterate is generally limited to administrative communication systems with their heavily filtered and distorted information. In a situation like this, actual processes of combat of diverging interests are successfully concealed by the rhetoric of common interests. The planners are frequently totally unaware of the constraints under which African small farmers operate (Olivier de Sardan 1988).

We will now turn to three examples of peasant activities which run counter

to usual project assumptions. First, every external investment represents the placing of a bet in a game in which the various social groups are attempting to gain advantages for themselves in order to strengthen their economic position. The "common good", "community development", "national objectives", etc. are ideological legitimizations which veil these strategies. Secondly, it is the availability of labour, and not of land - even in densely populated cultivation zones of Africa, such as the south of Benin - which is frequently the major bottleneck in the agricultural economy. The farmers' strategies are aimed at overcoming this bottleneck, either by using labour-saving devices (e. g. wells or bicycles) or by ways of mobilizing labour. Thirdly, in a situation of limited trust in general legal rules and in view of the absence of a national social security network, the safety of conditions of life can only be achieved through reciprocal exchange, the exchange of dowries, or clientelist relationships. In this context we can observe the strategy of minimization of risks (Scott 1976; Bierschenk, in print).

It is, however, necessary to pay greater attention to the less overt actions of farmers and urban groups - from reformist religious movements through secret societies and anti-witchcraft associations to local political resistance movements - in order to be able to understand the reasons for the failure of development projects (Kohnert 1983; Geschiere/Klei 1986). Actions by the little man are frequently misunderstood as a mere strategy of securing material living conditions. But these forms of action are also stimulated by the concept of how the future should be and by images of personal identity which society should recognize and/or create (on this, cf. Streiffeler, in press). To interpret the cultures of African smallholder systems or to see them as being determined simply by technological backwardness and demographic pressure results in a rather flat picture of peasant life, concealing their creativity and inherent dynamism (on this, cf. e.g. Lachenmann 1988 and Lentz 1988).

### 5. *What Should be Done?*

Development aid will never be abandoned. It was being practised even before this name was invented. Driven by the economic need to expropriate colonial resources, and ideologically legitimized by attempts to missionize and "civilize the blacks", it was already being practised in the early twenties by the colonial masters. In Europe it arose from subsidies, e. g. as payments motivated by foreign policy considerations, as a more cost-effective alternative to political engagements by force.<sup>6</sup> In Germany, it was Frederick II of Prussia and Brandenburg who developed it into a systematic instrument of policy. If we conceive of development aid as subsidies - as a type of foreign policy, as

"chequebook diplomacy" - then we must certainly assume that there is hardly any government which will ever abandon it.

If our conclusions should prove to be accurate, can recommendations be derived from them for project implementation? Despite scepticism about the demand, frequently prematurely raised by donor agencies, that academic criticism is valid only when linked with direct proposals for implementation on the one hand, and running the danger of being "excommunicated" from the community of pure science because of too close a proximity to practice on the other, our analyses seem to imply three conclusions: first, concerning the relationship between development policy and foreign policy pressure, e. g. the enforcement of human rights; second, concerning the methods of our own work - sociological research; and third, concerning consultancy on development projects.

The findings of field research in Africa, to which we have referred here, show that the fate of individual development measures can best be understood from a historical perspective, with due regard to the overall social and socio-cultural context. This perspective uncovers social transformation processes which pre-date development projects, and which will probably still exist long after these have fulfilled their purpose, as the projects themselves are often transformed by these historical dynamic processes. In general, therefore, development aid seems, to an impartial observer, to be an infusion of external resources into ongoing social processes. This fuels old and new conflicts over the redistribution of resources. The old tenet of classical economics that the increase in the wealth of a nation is essentially dependent on the successful reform of the social structure - an idea neglected by neo-classical economics for almost a century<sup>7</sup> - is once again becoming fashionable in the course of the discussion about democratization and structural adjustment in Africa.

The characteristic feature of the majority of attempts of development aid is rather the blocking of self-organized innovation by the massive dominance of administratively decreed or ordered innovations. In the majority of cases in which development aid has really contributed towards visible changes, we observe the introduction of rigid social arrangements which frequently lead to a reduction of the security of survival. This gives rise to the suspicion that development aid has, to date, made more of a contribution toward involution than to social evolution.

#### 5.1 *Technical or Social Co-operation?*

In concluding a discussion on "the consequences of development aid in rural Africa"<sup>8</sup>, an African colleague stated that it is not so much an improvement in technology transfer which is required, but rather a new "project of society", as

meaning that with the existing social and political structures the viability and sustainability of technology transfer cannot be assured. Agricultural projects are, for example, frequently regarded as surrogates for a better agricultural policy. Propaganda is used to persuade farmers to produce more in a situation in which the particular interests of urban consumers are supported by an unjust price policy. We are not aware of a single report on a successful project having been undertaken under the negative conditions of a national "anti-agricultural policy" (Elwert 1983a; Bates 1983). A change in the overall political and economic policy could achieve higher food output and thus make many agricultural development projects superfluous. Where the state consciously abolishes on paper low fixed cereal prices, but each trader can be threatened in the classical command state, without any authorization, by the bureaucrats of the agricultural ministry and their allies in the local administrations and police, cereal production will remain inadequate. Only the actual abolition of this state marketing monopoly (e.g. in Mali this was brought about by external pressure) creates the necessary incentives for the farmers (see Anhut 1987). A conclusion to be drawn from this would be to concentrate development aid more heavily on policy advice and, at the same time, to promote the development of self-determining, decentralized administrative decision-making structures.

The possibility of targeting "development projects" at achieving social change should not be overestimated. Projects always involve intervention in extremely complex social processes. In the language of target-oriented project planning (ZOPP) procedures, the central issue is not so much the strategic and project objectives, but the assumptions about the underlying social conditions upon which a project, by its nature, has very little influence. Even if ZOPP theoreticians may consider this statement a platitude, it is nevertheless very quickly forgotten in the efforts, in everyday project work. Projects, by definition, are restricted in their scope and in time. Paradoxically, they are intended to be effective in the short run where a social environment of inter-relationships with long-term dynamics dominates.

It is, therefore, not easy to share the unreserved optimism of a World Bank sociologist in its plea for social engineering of participation (Carnea 1985). If development aid is not to become a delusion for altruistic voters and taxpayers, it will have to be subjected to more stringent conditions. There are other factors which could have a greater influence on social development than individual projects - even if spending on such projects were to be tripled, as is frequently demanded, namely fundamental public rights of information, such as the freedom of speech and the press, the principle of the legal state, which makes government action predictable, and institutionalized forms of democracy, which lead to the negotiation of compromises instead of blocking tactics

and sabotage. This should, however, not divert attention from the necessity to change world economic conditions in favour of developing countries.

### 5.2 *The Need for Sociological Analyses*

If projects are to have any prospect of success, an essential condition for this is a comprehensive analysis of the social and cultural systems in which far-reaching interventions are planned. Despite all the fashionable demands for more intensive consideration of "socio-cultural factors", it is extremely rare for sociological analyses, let alone a historical perspective of the development process, to form the basis for project planning. Still today, planners usually avoid basing project approaches on a fundamental knowledge of those societies and cultures in which they plan far-reaching technical intervention. Socio-anthropological studies of the indigenous knowledge systems of the farmers targeted by development aid are virtually non-existent in the German-speaking world, and are still marginal even in the UK, Scandinavia and the Netherlands. If at all, sociologists and antropologists are usually consulted on development projects only if problems occur in their implementation, or if it is necessary to produce socio-cultural background papers based on temporary, three-week local research. The "socio-cultural" expert is then usually confronted with a peculiar understanding of his role. It is more or less expected of him to come up with some trick or other, with which project management can successfully sell the project message to the "target group". In this interpretation, sociology and anthropology are actually reduced to social technology. A sad illustration of this technocratic curtailment is the conception of a rural extension service which borders on the military style of recruit-training (encadrement in French) — attitudes which unfortunately have still not completely died out amongst development experts. Instead, the function of a social scientist in a project should primarily be that of a mediator arguing for the target group, and an interpreter of opinions which would otherwise not be brought into the discussion process (cf. Rauch, in press). Moreover, sociological studies should not be restricted simply to the evolution of the project development, but should also include the socio-economic transformation processes prior to and following the running period of the project.

### 5.3 *The Major Task of Project Implementation: Mediation between Strategic Groups*

Development aid projects seem to us to make sense only if they contribute towards improving both communication between all the "strategic groups"

involved about their visions and plans for constructing a better future. This should not be confused with the progressive-sounding, but mostly completely ineffective promotion of "the" (African) small farmers as the major, if not only, legitimate actors of social development. Like every collective consciousness, the indigenous development attitudes of African small farmers are socially and historically based. Therefore they cannot, on their own, be seen as vision for the entire society. For this, a wider perspective at the nation state level (or e. g. in the case of environmental questions, at an even wider level) is necessary.

The question as to whether small farmers or planners have the appropriate view of development objectives, conditions and limitations seems to us to be the wrong question. The truth does not lie in a specific future design restricted to one social stratum or class but in the possibility of these different interest groups communicating with one another. However, we need to be wary here of succumbing to the illusion of a non-authoritarian dialogue on the idealized model of a university seminar or a planning workshop. Dialogue and the establishment of a public information system do not per se break down existing power relationships: they are however able to illuminate them. Questions of development are thus inseparable from those of accountability, legitimacy and democracy. Maybe planners, experts and development aid workers, instead of collaborating with a command state, should see themselves as ambassadors of an open society.

## NOTES

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<sup>2</sup> A current survey of the literature is given by Whiteman (1991) and Griffin (1991).

<sup>3</sup> The working groups referred to are those at the universities of Amsterdam, London and Wageningen, the CRNS in conjunction with the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (Paris and Marseille) and the ORSTOM in France. A similar approach has also been adopted by a working group in the framework of the EIDOS network (University of Amsterdam, FU Berlin, Bielefeld, SO AS (London) and Wageningen). (On this, cf. Boiral et al. 1985; Elwert & Bierschenk 1988; Long 1990; Olivier de Sardan 1985). - The German research project, the "Socio-structural Consequences of Development Aid in Rural West Africa", was supported by the Volkswagen Foundation. It was conceived by D. Kohnert and G. Elwert, and directed in conjunction with T.

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<sup>4</sup> See Kohnert/Preuss, 1990 for a critical analysis of the method of planning by objectives (ZOPP) in project implementation.

<sup>5</sup> A way in which these conflicts of interests could be revealed and played through would be by using planning games, a method which has thus far not been used in project planning (cf. Bierschenk et al. 1989).

<sup>6</sup> On antiquity, cf. Altheim 1962.

<sup>7</sup> A brilliant analysis of the linkage between economic and social-structural analysis in the works of the classical political economists, especially Adam Smith and David Ricardo, and also of the reasons for the systematic exclusion of all social aspects in neo-classical economics, is provided by Walsh/Gram 1980.

<sup>8</sup> Gervais Athawet at the Congress of the European Society for Rural Sociology, Braga, Portugal 1986.

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**Abstract:** *This article is based on field studies in rural West Africa. It concentrates on the socio-structural effects of development aid in the long run, in contrast to numerous available evaluation reports on the short-run effects of development projects. The study reveals that superficial generalisations or condemnations of development projects, like the big farmers benefit at the expense of the smaller ones, or the men benefit at the expense of the women, do not hold up to verification. Quite to the contrary one observes a wide range of specific adapted forms by which the target groups react to the demands and offers of development projects, and thereby transform their own social structure. In short, one observes a great diversity of social self-organisation. The bureaucratic structures of the development administration do, however, unfortunately - more often than not - ignore the social dynamic of their target groups which they nevertheless sustain unconsciously. Development aid has become an important political and economic factor in most African countries. Its financial impact often exceeds that of the national budget. It contributes, therefore, significantly to the development of a bureaucratic class and of its clients: the project development degenerates into a project nationalization / bureaucratization. This contrasts vividly with the strategies of the peasants. Men and women at village level do not accept any longer the paternalistic development approach. They just select what they need out of the packages of solutions that are offered to them, while they develop their own solutions, like a variety of seeds adapted to their specific resource endowments, diversified sources of income, different strategies of accumulation and risk prevention. All this allows for a gradual evolution by variation and selection. The dynamic of the rural society is to a large extent due to a competition of different (strategic) groups, opposed to one another, about the partitioning of the cake of development aid. Normally this struggle between different vested interests is covered up by the rhetoric of development planning. Planned development has up to now proven to be rigid, to be able to take account of the complex and subtle fabric of self organisation. Aid sometimes appears to be a second best substitute for a vision of a democratic society. This is due to the fact that the structures we are aiming for in the long run - which are to allow for open markets, an orientation of the producers at the resources and needs of the nation, and last not least, the growth of indigenous structures of self-help - would require a responsible and democratic government, as well as the guarantee of civil rights, accountability, an independent judiciary, freedom of the press, etc.; up to now, however, all these elements are still oppressed by the commando state itself, well nourished by the various forms of technical and financial aid.*

**Key words:** development cooperation, ODA, evaluation, West Africa, social structure

**JEL codes:** F35, A14, N17, O17, O22, O55, P52, R58, Z10