RELIGION & STATE DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

*A German-South African dialogue on
historical and current challenges*

Editors
Renier Koegelenberg
Udo Hahn

EVANGELISCHE AKADEMIE
TUTZING

EFSA

A German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ) perspective

*Joachim Goeske*¹

Introduction

Transformation is a central element of Agenda 2030, but there is as yet no uniform definition of the term. At this moment this has the advantage of, among other things, giving me a little more freedom to approach this concept in my own personal way, and then to share with you my thoughts on the question of the role churches and church organizations can play in the implementation of Agenda 2030.

If at first we stay close to the actual definition of the term, then transformation means “to change”: something that already exists is changed into something new and thereby adopts fundamentally new characteristics. We all know how difficult it is for us to do this on a personal level. The courage we need to summon up to change is as huge as our anxiety about doing so. After all, we never really know what exactly will happen when we actually change. The journey into the unknown requires courage and a need for orientation. Membership in a community is valuable support, but the final leap toward change has to be made by each individual.

¹ Joachim Goeske, Head of Global Policies and Governance at the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ), Bonn

At what point do we change? When it is enough, when it can't go on like this, when external circumstances force us to. And when we are unable to escape our personal path dependency, we often shrug our shoulders and say: "What should I do? That's the way I am." Until the next setback. In other words, our change process is highly complex, cannot be totally planned and is by no means always crowned with success.

And it becomes even more complicated when entire societies or even the international community has to change. Here transformation includes the transformation of structures, institutions and in particular the transformation of stakeholders with their interests, convictions and values. And Agenda 2030 raises exactly this need for change.

Thus the text of the resolution speaks of a "transformation of the world for the better". However, the Agenda does not provide a sufficient answer as to how this transformation can be achieved.

I do not know about you, but personally I always wonder what concrete things can be done by us to transform the world for the better. What we need to transform is nothing less than development paradigms that are based on resource consumption, theoretically infinite consumption possibilities and growth. In fact, however, conflicts over the availability of resources are increasing, because everyone knows that not everyone can consume indefinitely. Agenda 2030 articulates the idea of the sustainability of our development model in its central messages on the three P's: planet, people and prosperity.

The benefits of Agenda 2030 for transformation

- **Agenda 2030 is a model to map the complex world and address the complexity of challenges: "The 17 SDGs connect the big challenges of our time"**

Agenda 2030 reflects the manifold interactions between the different thematic areas it specifies and calls for action in line with the three dimensions of sustainability.

- **Agenda 2030 is a roadmap for transformation**

Transformation as defined by the Agenda goes beyond technological and technocratic reforms. The requirements are much higher. If transformation is to succeed in accordance with Agenda 2030, nation states will have to defer satisfying their short-term interests in favour of setting up long-term global cooperation mechanisms in order to assume their joint responsibility and enable a trend reversal toward sustainability (cf. WBGU, 2011).

- **Agenda 2030 provides a value orientation as a basis for the necessary transformation**

Principles such as LNOB (“leave no one behind”) or the emphasis on gender equality have the potential to boost our willingness at the personal level. The commitment to universal responsibility for the transformation of the world addresses all those stakeholders who have understood that only together will we as a global community have the chance to bring about the necessary change. National egotisms and the assertion of self-interest, even by force, clearly contradict this appeal. The Agenda thus calls on us to acknowledge what kind of society and world we want to live in.

The role of the churches in the debate on the implementation of Agenda 2030

What did I observe within the framework of the debate on the implementation of Agenda 2030 with regard to religious communities? Different religious communities have dealt intensively with sustainability issues for several decades already. In Germany, for example, the churches were among the first actors to have placed sustainability onto the global agenda. In some cases the questions and movements of the church in search of sustainability still go beyond the transformation claims of Agenda 2030.

Religious communities, as actors of civil society, are important partners in implementing Agenda 2030 and the German Sustainability Strategy (DNS), and play an increasingly important role in implementing Agenda 2030 at home and abroad. In 2014 they not only actively participated in the charter for the future entitled “ONE World: Our Responsibility”, but also played a significant role in

the further development of the German Sustainability Strategy (DNS) in 2016. They emphasised that the DNS must be the reference document for all actors in all their diversity, be it parliament, government, implementation organisations, businesses, churches and civil society. In general, ecclesiastical organizations of implementation play an important role in development cooperation and especially in providing humanitarian aid.

The churches have raised two points of criticism in the discussion which I would like to touch upon here. Sufficiency strategies, i.e. reducing the consumption of resources, are not sufficiently present either in Agenda 2030 or in the DNS. There is an unclear relationship between growth and prosperity, as well as a failure to define and measure the latter. Among other things, the use of the Gross Domestic Product is insufficient to measure “good living”. Another criticism is the fact that sufficiency as a way towards greater sustainability is not mentioned in the Agenda. Church actors, on the other hand, rely heavily on sufficiency strategies and have, among other things, formulated an “ethics of sufficiency”. Sufficiency does not imply a renunciation of quality of life, but rather focuses on qualitative growth and can be a building block for a new ecological model of prosperity.

The implementation principle “Leave no one behind” of Agenda 2030 overlaps in many ways with the daily work of the churches. Religious actors play an important role in complying with this implementation principle in many partner countries and are therefore important partners for the implementation of Agenda 2030. A reference to the “Leave no one behind” principle in the DNS is considered to be insufficient. Priority should be given to combating poverty and hunger in the world over all other sustainable development goals.

What is clear is that we as a society and community can no longer afford to shrug off the issue with “that’s the way I am”. We must summon up the courage not only to think about upcoming transformations, but how to implement them – and that without knowing exactly where exactly this change will take us. We will only summon this courage if we provide each other with support and orientation.

The nearly universal presence of organizations and institutions worldwide which are based on the shared faith of their members and which are prepared to assume their social responsibility represents a resource of extreme value. As an organisation commissioned by the Federal Government of Germany – in particular

the BMZ (Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development) – to carry out international cooperation projects worldwide, the GIZ has gathered a number of concrete experiences on how religious communities can play an active role as extremely reliable cooperation partners in transformation processes. This active role manifests itself in the commitment to good forms of living together in a just society. We as the GIZ are grateful to the BMZ for the opportunity to play a supportive role here and for its willingness to broaden the scope of its activities to include the issues of values, religion and development.

Personally, I enjoy the privilege of leading a department in which we, on behalf of the BMZ, carry out projects of Agenda 2030 and cooperate with religious actors. But on the other hand, I know that in our system of international cooperation there is still a considerable way to go before we fully integrate Agenda 2030 with its principles and claims for transformation into our actions. We also have our path dependencies and need the courage to venture into something new.

We need to re-examine our key principle of capacity development, because it very clearly emphasises the need for the global South to develop its capacities and for us as an IC (International Cooperation) actor to support this process. Nowadays we are more in demand when it comes to good network management between actors from the South and the North, in line with the universalism principle of Agenda 2030. We therefore need to demonstrate more clearly than in the past the extent to which transformation issues are also highly relevant for our own society. This is precisely what our contracting authorities in the federal ministries are already demanding from us.

This also means that we must strengthen the cooperation with other organisations in Germany. The special transformation concept within Agenda 2030, which is reflected in the implementation principles of integrated approaches and multi-actor partnerships, clearly indicates that, even more so than in the past, we must bundle together our respective strengths and keep our social functions less dissociated from one another, despite all the important differences.

Time and again, as an organisation responsible for implementation, we are faced with the challenge of finding a balance between short planning phases, the demands of good networking work and the expectations of fast and measurable results. This also includes communicating in a concrete way so that the necessary

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networking and cooperation work can be carried out on the basis of explicitly expressed expectations of meeting common goals and performing the special roles of the cooperation partners. How do we ensure traction for broad-based approaches, especially for global initiatives? How do we ensure that pilot experiences are scaled in order to institutionalize the latter in a sustainable way? These include examples of how the commitment to cooperation at eye level can be consistently put into practice.