

POLICY BRIEF | July 2020

# GERMAN PRIORITIES FOR AFRICA DURING ITS PRESIDENCY OF THE EU COUNCIL

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2020 is a pivotal year for EU-Africa relations, and they are an important focus of the German Presidency of the EU Council from July 1, 2020. However, the COVID-19 crisis has forced Germany to alter its policy priorities, and refocus on the EU's stability and recovery. It is trying to do so whilst ensuring the Union has continued leverage in international affairs, including by shifting its longer-term partnership with Africa. With an EU-Africa Summit scheduled for October 2020, Germany's presidency of the EU Council provides an opportunity to address structural challenges revealed by the current crisis, and to set the intercontinental partnership on track for a more sustainable, and equitable future.

## GERMANY AND THE EU'S STRATEGY FOR AFRICA

Deepening European relations with Africa has become an increasing priority over the last ten years as security concerns have risen, notably with the growth of terrorism, migration, and climate change. The continent's changing demography is viewed with both concern—raising questions about migration, economic development, employment and instability—and as an opportunity, notably for new technologies, sustainable green development and democratic transition.

Over the same period, China, Russia, Israel, Turkey and GCC<sup>1</sup> states have all increased their presence and influence in Africa, especially in the economic and security sectors. Often this fills the gap when western support is withdrawn, or benefits from discontent felt by African decision-makers towards western states. The ongoing

geopolitical competition over Africa's resources allows African states to be more selective in their partnerships, changing the relational dynamic from power-based to courtship<sup>2</sup>. In this context, Germany views the EU as a vehicle through which it can 'punch above its weight', making a strong EU essential to German foreign policy.

In view of these changes, the year 2020 was declared a pivotal year in EU-Africa relations by EU members. The Union developed a new EU Strategy for Africa<sup>3</sup>, and held a series of meetings designed to improve partnerships in the fields of economy, climate, new technologies, security and good governance, culminating in an EU-Africa Summit in October 2020. Germany played an important role in defining those priorities<sup>4</sup>, as they were expected to be a significant part of its EU Council presidency.

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1 Gulf Cooperation Council

2 South Africa Ambassador to Germany, Phumelele Stone Sizani, at the event *Erwartungen an die deutschen Afrika-Schwerpunkte während der EU-Ratspräsidentschaft*, March 5, 2020.

3 European Commission (2020). Towards a comprehensive strategy with Africa. [https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/priorities/eu-africa\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/priorities/eu-africa_en)

4 Presentation by Sarah Bernardy, deputy director of the planning department of the German Federal Foreign Office, during the event *Erwartungen an die deutschen Afrika-Schwerpunkte während der EU-Ratspräsidentschaft*, March 5, 2020.

## HOW COVID-19 CHANGED GERMAN PRIORITIES

The COVID-19 pandemic drastically impacted both European and German priorities, as the health and economic crises took immediate priority. For Germany, it meant doubling down on strengthening EU cooperation on economic recovery and healthcare infrastructure<sup>5</sup>, while trying to mitigate the immediate impacts of the pandemic on other European policies. German policy-makers also recognise that the pandemic's effects on other parts of the world present a real challenge to Germany and Europe's own interests. Relations with Africa have therefore remained a priority, both at bilateral and EU levels, although in different forms.

Traditionally, Germany conducts its foreign policy through multinational organisations like the EU, the UN or NATO. This means German policy, particularly in relation to Africa, constantly adapts and reacts to the position of its partners, notably France, to ensure a pragmatic multilateral approach. Whilst it increases the opportunity for cooperation, this can also hinder Germany, because it may decide to support partners' initiatives rather than implementing its own if it believes it can avoid competition and redundancy<sup>6</sup> and gain more policy leverage.

Germany's classic approach of economic development and aid still prevails, but new priorities have been added, notably regarding the green and digital transitions. The former is in line with Germany's broader prioritisation of green policies in

its domestic, EU and international agendas, while the latter is influenced by economic and demographic factors. Economically, Germany views green and digital technologies as central to modern economies, offering broader access to consumers and more economic versatility. Demographically, it is concerned with the limited economic opportunities for Africa's youthful population, and the challenges this presents to Germany's interests. This concern is also at the heart of German migration policies, which combine restriction and deterrence with investment and development in third countries. Together with green policies, it sees these priorities as a way of fostering better living conditions for local populations—as well as creating investment opportunities for the very influential German business community.

Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, this community saw Africa as an increasingly important market, demonstrated by the rise in trade volume value (in Euros) between Germany and Africa<sup>7</sup> in 2019. In some areas, exports and imports increased markedly<sup>8</sup>. Investing in Africa is still considered a priority<sup>9</sup> but recent data shows that this interest is dwindling due to the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>10</sup>, in line with reduced investments globally.

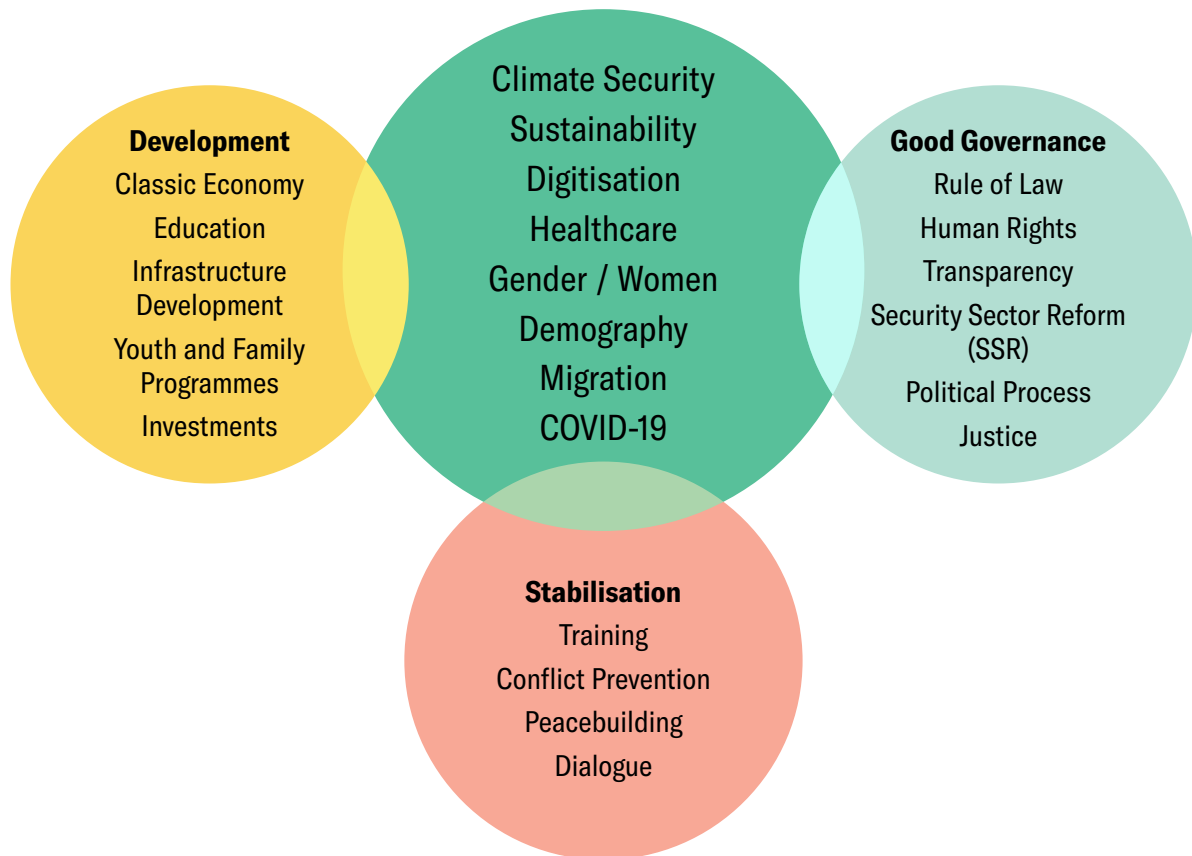
Germany's foreign policy towards Africa is also influenced by its 'values agenda'. Aid spending is partially determined by adherence to a range of good governance conditions (set by Germany), as the

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- 5 Die Bundeskanzlerin (2020). *Merkel fordert europäischen Zusammenhalt in Corona-Zeiten*. Uploaded April 25 2020. [https://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/bkin-de/mediathek/die-kanzlerin-direkt/europa-und-corona-pandemie-1747006!mediathek?query=.](https://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/bkin-de/mediathek/die-kanzlerin-direkt/europa-und-corona-pandemie-1747006!mediathek?query=)
  - 6 Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (2020). *Reformkonzept „BMZ 2030“ Umdenken – Umsteuern*. [http://www.bmz.de/de/zentrales\\_downloadarchiv/Presse/BMZ-2030\\_Reformkonzept\\_200504.pdf](http://www.bmz.de/de/zentrales_downloadarchiv/Presse/BMZ-2030_Reformkonzept_200504.pdf)
  - 7 Statistisches Bundesamt (2020). *Außenhandel Zusammenfassende Übersichten für den Außenhandel (vorläufige Ergebnisse)*. [https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Wirtschaft/Aussenhandel/Publikationen/Downloads-Aussenhandel/zusammenfassende-uebersichten-jahr-vorlaeufig-pdf-2070100.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile#%5B%7B%22num%22%3A220%2C%22gen%22%3A0%7D%2C%7B%22name%22%3A%22XYZ%22%7D%2C0%2C842%2C0%5D](https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Wirtschaft/Aussenhandel/Publikationen/Downloads-Aussenhandel/zusammenfassende-uebersichten-jahr-vorlaeufig-pdf-2070100.pdf?__blob=publicationFile#%5B%7B%22num%22%3A220%2C%22gen%22%3A0%7D%2C%7B%22name%22%3A%22XYZ%22%7D%2C0%2C842%2C0%5D) pp.33-34 Last accessed May 29, 2020.
  - 8 *ibid* p.36
  - 9 DIHK. AHK (2019). *Außenwirtschafts report 2019 Ergebnisse einer Umfrage bei den deutschen Industrie- und Handelskammern*. <https://www.dihk.de/resource/blob/12966/71f85ca6d472cf119e529bc0e2f3167e/dihk-aussenwirtschaftreport-2019-data.pdf> p.17 Last accessed May 29, 2020.
  - 10 DIHK. AHK (2020). *AHK World Business Outlook Frühjahr 2020*. <https://www.dihk.de/resource/blob/23018/e93433e0616986269d609a6df48b4c8f/ahk-world-business-outlook-fruehjahn-2020-englisch-data.pdf> p.4 Last accessed May 29 2020.

recent re-classification of partner countries shows<sup>11</sup>. Some partners have seen their relationship status with Germany change, either positively (Ivory Coast and Ghana) or negatively (Burundi). Other states like Chad have seen their status move to a 'probation'

one, whereby reforms that yield improvements in terms of good governance can lead to intensified relations. This makes it clear that Germany intends to use its economic weight and influence in the EU as both a carrot and stick in its foreign policy.

## German Policy Priorities



## PRIORITY REGIONS FOR ENGAGEMENT

<b>Investment Areas</b>	Algeria, Ethiopia, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Morocco, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa
<b>Stabilisation</b>	Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Libya, Sahel region states, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia

11 Christoph Hein. Manfred Schäfers. *Deutschland beendet Zusammenarbeit mit jedem dritten armen Land.*  
[https://www.faz.net/aktuell/wirtschaft/mehr-wirtschaft/deutschland-beendet-zusammenarbeit-mit-jedem-dritten-entwicklungsland-16745915.html?\\_ga=2.120287628.507729963.1588152021-966312082.1583488714&premium](https://www.faz.net/aktuell/wirtschaft/mehr-wirtschaft/deutschland-beendet-zusammenarbeit-mit-jedem-dritten-entwicklungsland-16745915.html?_ga=2.120287628.507729963.1588152021-966312082.1583488714&premium)

## GERMANY'S COVID-19 SUPPORT PACKAGE

The German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) launched the “Emergency COVID-19 Support Programme” for developing countries, focusing in large part on African states<sup>12</sup>. This programme recommends important structural changes in EU-Africa relations, including the establishment of an EU-African Union council for better cooperation, more structural and financial support through EU institutions, and improved investment programmes to facilitate investments from the private sector<sup>13</sup>. The BMZ has reallocated 1,2 billion euros from its budget for this programme, to finance the following initiatives:

- Improve and build healthcare infrastructures to fight the pandemic, bilaterally and as part of the “Global Health/One Health” research project
- Support food programmes to prevent famine
- Refugees and migration crisis management
- Stabilisation programmes
- Financial support for businesses
- Provision of a financial safety net for states in need of funds<sup>14</sup>

The programme underlines how important stability and security have become within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and among the priorities of Germany's presidency. These include internal security—focusing on strengthening EU cooperation and infrastructure, thereby ensuring that the EU's leverage in international affairs is at least maintained—and external security, by creating stable conditions elsewhere (especially in Africa) that would reduce external economic, health and security risks.

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12 Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (2020). Corona-Sofortprogramm – *Corona besiegen wir nur weltweit oder gar nicht*. [https://www.bmz.de/de/zentrales\\_downloadarchiv/Presse/bmz\\_corona\\_paket.pdf](https://www.bmz.de/de/zentrales_downloadarchiv/Presse/bmz_corona_paket.pdf)

13 *ibid* p.6

14 *ibid* p.7

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Under the German EU Council presidency, outlined by Chancellor Angela Merkel and the government on May 29 2020, EU priorities for Africa are framed by the combination of COVID-19 support measures and its longer-term ambitions regarding Africa.

Healthcare and economic recovery are understandably amongst the most urgent priorities. But other areas where Germany wants to make a difference, such as governance and the green and digital agendas, remain very important. As they are part of broader long-term policies, demonstrated by the various 2030 agendas set out by German ministries and civil society actors, their development reaches far beyond the German EU Council presidency. Taken jointly, they aim to respond to immediate needs prompted by the COVID-19 crisis, while creating building blocks for German policies towards Africa, bilaterally and at the EU level, for the 2020-2030 period.

### Healthcare policy

While Germany's immediate healthcare focus has been on controlling the COVID-19 pandemic through increased testing and research capacity, the crisis offers an opportunity to advance a broader—and more sustainable—social policy agenda in its partnership with Africa.

The COVID-19 crisis demonstrates that access to public goods (health, sanitation and education, in particular) is not only a shared responsibility, but forms a global existential threat if denied. Germany should support efforts to advance a multi-sectoral social policy in Africa as the only sustainable way to address COVID-19 and other crises (health or otherwise). The need for the development of long-term healthcare infrastructure remains great, and this is the area in which the international community would be most helpful in galvanising state and other actors to prioritise it as a key public responsibility.

German and EU officials should also find ways to better integrate African approaches to and experience with disease control, and coordinate their health response in line with existing continental frameworks (such as the Abuja Declaration on Health Financing). In collaboration with local communities

and civil society actors, existing home-grown measures should be jointly assessed to identify gaps for intervention and upscaling. This is also an area where inter- and intra-regional learning could be encouraged.

### Economic development

The immediate consequences of COVID-19 on African economies and households have been grave, disproportionately affecting women and the poor. Africa is expecting a sharp decline in GDP and millions of workers, formal and informal, have lost their livelihoods and incomes, without safety nets or social protection. Remittances, which have greater value than Foreign Direct Investment, are dropping—cutting off vital lifelines.

Germany has committed to provide relief to its African partners, both bilaterally and through the EU, in order to limit the immediate economic impact. It also joined a series of debt moratoria and standstill packages for distressed countries. Debt moratoria and relief can provide liquidity for the COVID-19 response. However, they do not address the problems with Africa's accrual of sovereign debt, which is linked to more structural faultlines in the global political economy. On their own, they will not solve Africa's structural challenge to sustainably generate domestic resources. Stricter governance and accountability are needed for both bilateral and multilateral borrowing (as well as corporate borrowing). Debt restructuring that protects African countries' future credit options and progressive tax systems remain the most sustainable ways for African countries to fund transformative economic and social policies.

Germany should use its presidency to shape responses that rebuild local economies and improve livelihoods in the most affected sectors. Before COVID-19, Africa was already facing a job creation deficit of close to 20 million a year, particularly for young people. Now, 250 million sub-Saharan Africans in informal urban employment are vulnerable, with a potential loss of 20 million jobs in small and medium size enterprises. Sustainable international responses would need to pay particular attention to the role of smallholder farmers in recovery and long-term food security, include informal workers in social protection

plans, and prioritise the crucial role of the care economy, actively involving women's, workers' and youth groups in recovery plans.

Finally, the COVID-19 crisis presents an opportunity to co-shape a new paradigm for green and resilient economies. Germany should support African initiatives towards green transformation plans, including through a special funding vehicle for green, continent-wide infrastructural development. It should also support the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCTA) to build long-term resilience through harmonised policies and new value and supply chains. There is a real opportunity to collaborate with African countries to build the continent's energy infrastructure, including by giving innovative business models incentives to extend energy provision to some of the poorest parts of the continent.

## **Governance**

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the crisis of leadership, democracy and governance across the continent. The EU has a strategic interest in strengthening democratic resilience in Africa, and the pandemic provides an opportunity to recentre long-term governance problems by putting citizen-led approaches first.

Germany can play a role in strengthening the EU's longer-term political partnership with Africa, by placing greater emphasis on the defence of the rule of law, democracy and electoral integrity. The EU has traditionally supported democracy promotion in Africa, but the context has become both more divergent and more challenging, requiring updated and tailor-made approaches. While attacks on civic actors continue across the continent, Germany should take proactive steps to elevate civil society stakeholders in all its Africa engagement, and champion participatory bottom-up engagement wherever it can. This requires supporting ways for civil society and the communities most directly affected to tell donors directly about their needs.

In both its COVID-19 response, and in the longer-term partnership, Germany should also seek to promote transparency and accountability. Moments of crisis are fertile ground for opacity. Enacting and enforcing transparency and accountability mechanisms for citizens and governments alike to monitor recovery efforts is all the more important in times of crisis. Looking back at lessons from the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, a lack of transparency in budget allocation and the mismanagement of funds not only undermined the healthcare system, it also worsened the crisis.



## CONCLUSIONS

Germany's traditional foreign policy priorities continue to define its relationship with Africa, both at the bilateral and multilateral levels. They retain their importance for the German EU Council presidency, but new, urgent priorities like social protection, economic justice and democracy support should inform its engagement with Africa. Some of these are reflected in the Emergency COVID-19 Support

Programme, which demonstrates the importance Germany places on stable conditions in Europe's neighbourhood and beyond, and how it intends to use the EU presidency to push reforms with the EU itself and its Africa relations. This programme has the potential to become a building block for future relations with Africa, but only if it aligns its COVID-19 support with a more durable partnership.





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