



POSITION PAPER: USING DEVELOPMENT TO APPLY PRESSURE

In the current debate about rejected asylum seekers and how to deport them, calls across the political spectrum have increased over recent weeks, for development assistance to be withdrawn or reduced to force countries of origin to cooperate more with the return of rejected asylum seekers. These calls have intensified especially after the terror attack in Berlin.

Keeping the aim of development cooperation in mind

Welthungerhilfe believes that proposals of this kind are actually not an appropriate way to solve the problem, and if implemented they would in fact only exacerbate the issue. The aim of development cooperation is to bring about a lasting improvement to the living conditions of people in developing countries. In the past, whenever this aim has been eclipsed by a secondary benefit - driving back Communism, fighting terrorism or keeping refugees and migrants away - the first aim was forgotten and fell by the wayside. There is also a risk that this will happen in the current situation.

The case of Tunisia provides a clear example. After the “Arab Spring”, aid to stabilise its fragile democracy was greatly increased, in order to prevent a slide back into dictatorship or into anarchy. According to the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), 290.5 million euros of state funds were earmarked for Tunisia.

A statement by the BMZ on the use of said 290.5 million euros makes it quickly apparent how inappropriate it is to apply pressure through development cooperation:

“Development assistance can contribute to a peaceful transformation by noticeably improving social conditions. Cooperation with Tunisia therefore focuses on developing disadvantaged regions in the interior of the country and creating job opportunities, particularly for young people.”

In this context it seems highly counter-productive to attempt to use funds for creating youth opportunities to pressure Tunisia into taking back young people, who came to Europe precisely because of the lack of opportunities. Ultimately this would only make more young Tunisians come to Europe.

The threat is exaggerated

The possible threat that Tunisia poses in Germany, for example, is grossly exaggerated. In the framework of the German Society for International Cooperation's (GIZ) “Better Migration Management” programme, countries including Tunisia are intended to ensure that refugees from other African countries no longer attempt the dangerous crossing from Tunisia to Europe. In exchange Tunisia then receives funds from Europe and the German national government.

It is very easy to predict what would happen if Tunisia ceased to honour agreements, like the one mentioned above, in response to the “sanctions” imposed by Germany and Europe to expedite the return of rejected asylum seekers. The countries to be pressured by current German policy would therefore be able to apply more pressure on Germany and Europe - even if people do not want to admit this amid debates on German domestic policy in the run-up to the elections. One of the few people who have dared to say this publicly is Development Minister Müller.

Welthungerhilfe indeed also recognises the need to return people who have not been proven to require protection, so that appropriate resources are available for caring and providing for recognised refugees and asylum seekers. Otherwise there would be a danger of Europe cutting itself off even more, which in turn would hurt those who really need protection. Nonetheless, methods chosen for returning rejected asylum seekers should not exacerbate the overall situation.

Development cooperation creates opportunities

Around the world, development cooperation and humanitarian assistance provide opportunities for people to stay where they are. These initiatives are the key to fighting the reasons that drive people to leave their homeland or current place of residence. Unfortunately, however, this point is all too often ignored during public discussions in favour of quick fixes, because development cooperation generally only yields fruit in the medium or long term, although its effects are long-lasting.

Although development policy and development cooperation cannot prevent conflicts such as those seen in Syria or South Sudan, preventive interventions can eliminate breeding grounds for potential conflicts in many countries. Worthwhile humanitarian assistance goes beyond basic survival, working closely in tandem with development cooperation to build up opportunities for people. Welthungerhilfe has been working successfully in the fields of humanitarian assistance and development cooperation for over 54 years.

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