

What is not mentioned?

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Regardless of whether Danish development aid is growing, the debate about it takes up too much attention compared to other relations between the rich and the poor.

The working groups of Danida (Danish International Development Agency) have begun writing about the following thematic areas in relation to creating a new strategy for Denmark's development cooperation:

1. the promotion of rights, good governance and democracy
2. sustainable agricultural development and food safety
3. green growth, creating green jobs and sustainability
4. stability and protection in fragile and conflict-affected countries

My own personal interpretation of this particular list and the other decisions about strategies for civil societies, etc. during the last 12-13 years is this; that the attention is often focused on the fact that everyone in developing countries must learn a whole lot and must organize in a more suitable manner in order to better manage their own possibilities in a better way.

How can we create more possibilities for developing countries to manage? Let us have a look at some of the alarmingly numerous manoeuvres by the rich part of the world which keep the poor from lifting themselves out of poverty:

“The times of prosperity are now behind us” said the Danish Prime Minister in her New Year's speech. Are the times of prosperity so far behind us, that we and other welfare states have stopped sending surpluses of bad-quality goods to developing countries where these “gifts” hinder local production? For example, when parboiled rice from the rich world can be purchased in a Liberian market at a lower price than the locally produced rice. This dumping issue has not been discussed for a long time, and it does not form part of the four themes mentioned above - at least not directly. How can we ever dream of sustainable agriculture without taking precautions against dumping?

Or what about the generosity of the US government towards local cotton farmers - taking the form of subsidies to every one of the 30.000 farmers for a total of approximately one million Danish kroner (= 150.000 €), resulting the world market price of cotton to drop to far below production costs, something that countries like Mali, Burkina Faso and Benin can do absolutely nothing about. What is worse, West Africans themselves cultivate cotton of much higher quality than the Americans. Could we ask our Minister for Foreign Affairs or our Minister for Development Cooperation to look President Obama in the eye and ask him to give up these subsidies?

Thirdly, and most importantly, is developing countries' ability to collect taxes from the multinational companies. For instance, a country like Senegal, a well-functioning country by African standards, has 60,000 tax payers out of a total population of 13 million. The 60,000 tax payers belong to the middle class, since the rich, both local and multinational, know how to put their money into tax havens. In the 25 countries that receive aid from Denmark, the case is that every time Denmark pays one Danish kroner in development aid, at the same time 37 kroner disappear through illicit capital flight. Read more about the matter here: <http://politiken.dk/debat/analyse/ECE1499578/bistand-boer-gaa-til-skatteopkraevning/>

The discussion about the distribution of development aid - as reflected in the four thematic areas mentioned above - is taking up too much space in comparison with other maneuvers which actually determine who is rich and who is poor.