

Promoting Participatory Development in the People’s Republic of China

A Case Study of Sino-German Development Cooperation (2003–2006)

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Since 1991 the promotion of participatory development has been a cornerstone of German bilateral foreign and development policy.¹ Participation – the active involvement of citizens in processes that affect their lives² – is increasingly being seen as a key condition for a functioning democracy and for poverty alleviation. But can the ambitious goal of promoting participatory development also be met in the case of German development cooperation with the People’s Republic of China (PRC)? While participation is now a prevalent cross-cutting theme on the new policy agenda (NPA)³, an ever increasing implementation gap can be observed. Based on information gathered over four and a half years of field research and his personal observations as a development practitioner in the PRC from 2003 until 2007, the author looks at both structural and cognitive barriers to effective policy implementation. The protracted shift from a technical to a political understanding of development among key agents of Sino-German development cooperation is seen as the single most serious obstacle to effective policy implementation. But what do we mean by policy implementation? As

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¹ BMZ, *Good Governance in der deutschen Entwicklungszusammenarbeit. Ein Positionspapier des BMZ*. Bonn: BMZ 2002, p. 8.

² BMZ, *Übersektorales Konzept. Partizipative Entwicklungszusammenarbeit*. Bonn: BMZ 1999, p. 2.

³ Robinson, M., “Governance, Democracy and Conditionality: NGOs and the New Policy Agenda”, in: A. Clayton (Ed.), *Governance, Democracy and Conditionality: What Role for NGOs?* Oxford: Intrac 1994, pp. 35–52.

Giandomenico Majone and Aaron Wildawsky rightly point out, “we require the impossible when we expect our bureaucrats to be at the same time literal executors and successful implementers of policy mandates. Something has to be left to chance.”⁴ While it can be argued that administrative discretion allows policy implementers to find creative solutions to problems, the counter-argument that such leeway leads to bureaucratic inertia or even misconduct may also hold true.⁵ At the same time it is important to keep in mind Frank Fischer’s assertion that “seldom do policy controversies involve relatively easy questions of pros and cons, or positives versus negatives. Instead, they typically turn on several very different and competing understandings or definitions of the same policy, of its purposes, its substantive content, and potential consequences.”⁶ Research findings suggest that while China is caught up with international rules, responsibilities and sanctioning procedures, German external actors are also getting caught up in the institutional practices of a corporatist Chinese party-state. As contractual partners of an authoritarian regime they appear to sacrifice their organizational autonomy for a highly circumscribed engagement with China. Based on recent parliamentary debates the author concludes that German lawmakers can contribute to the promotion of participatory development in the PRC by exercising greater parliamentary oversight over German ministerial bodies and agencies in charge of cooperating with Chinese state and non-state recipient organizations.

Mainstreaming Participation in Sino-German Development Cooperation

The conduct of Sino-German bilateral development cooperation is understood as an evolutionary process in which individual Germans and Chinese as well as collective and corporatist actors cooperate and compete with each another. Multiple interactions occur in a highly regulated policy environment, where fiscal constraints on the German side⁷ meet political-ad-

⁴ Majone, G. and Wildawsky, A., “Implementation as Evolution”, in: S. Z. Theodoulou and M. A. Cahn (Eds.), *Public Policy. The Essential Readings*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall 1995, p. 149.

⁵ Rourke, F. E., *Bureaucracy, Politics, and Public Policy*. Boston and Toronto: Little Brown and Company 1976, pp. 158–159.

⁶ Fischer, Frank, *Reframing Public Policy. Discursive Politics and Deliberative Practices*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2003, p. 64.

⁷ Molt, Peter, “Ein neuer Realismus in der Entwicklungspolitik”. *Internationale Politik*, 4/2002, p. 69.

ministrative restrictions on the Chinese side.⁸ Drawing on empirical evidence collected during his time as trainee with the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ, 2002–2004), consultant to the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ, 2003–2006), and advisor to the China Association for NGO Cooperation (CANGO, 2004–2007), the author will discuss organisational interactions between German donor and implementing agencies as well as Chinese recipient organisations. Insights could be gained during participation in the Sector Project “Mainstreaming Participation” (SVMP), 2003–2006. The project was initiated by the policy and strategy division of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), Germany’s state-owned bilateral development agency for technical cooperation. It was initiated by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and entrusted with the task of firmly establishing participation as a cross-cutting theme in German development cooperation. The SVMP served as change agent, propagating reformed goals-means combinations in Sino-German development cooperation. It enjoyed a fairly far-reaching political mandate to engage with both co-workers and management staff of German development cooperation organisations. It thus enabled the author to conduct a comprehensive review of shifting organisational identities of German state and non-state development organisations operating within China. The review covered GTZ, the German personnel placement agency Center for International Migration and Development (CIM), four German political foundations as well as the German Embassy in Beijing, which acts as a policy hub for the coordination of Sino-German development cooperation initiatives. Drawing on years of participant observation and with the help of thick description⁹ the author shows how these divergent actors addressed the cross-cutting themes of public participation and civil society inclusion. It should be noted, however, that German state and non-state actors differ markedly in terms of organisational culture and that their services and products are hardly comparable. They pursue different organisational goals and apply different modes of delivery.¹⁰ Furthermore these organisations are highly path-dependent and have a tendency to incrementally adjust to changing framework conditions. Making

⁸ Zweig, David, *Internationalizing China. Domestic Interests and Global Linkages*. New York: Cornell University Press 2002, pp. 224–225.

⁹ Geertz, Clifford, *Dichte Beschreibung. Beiträge zum Verstehen kultureller Systeme*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1987, pp. 7–43.

¹⁰ Erdmann, Gero, *Demokratie- und Menschenrechtsförderung in der Dritten Welt. Grundlinien eines Rahmenkonzeptes für die kirchliche Entwicklungszusammenarbeit*. Bonn: Zentralstelle Weltkirche der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz 1999, pp. 144–145.

use of Jörg Bogumil and Josef Schmid's strategic organisational analysis¹¹ the author presents four case studies which reveal their contingent organisational capabilities, perceptions, preferences and orientations towards public participation and civil society inclusion. As a common denominator, key policy storylines are recounted. According to Marteen Hajer, a policy storyline can be understood as follows:

“A storyline (...) ‘is a generative sort of narrative that allows actors to draw upon various discursive categories to give meaning to specific or social phenomena.’ (...) The primary ‘function of story-lines is that they suggest unity in the bewildering variety of separate discursive components parts (sic!) of a problem’ that otherwise have no clear or meaningful pattern of connections.”¹²

Such policy storylines provide insights into dominant and alternative interpretations of goal-means combinations of German foreign and development policy towards China from the viewpoint of policy implementers. They are also central to alternative courses of action:

“Finding or reconstructing the appropriate storyline becomes the central form of agency for the political actor. Effective communication skills and argumentative strategies are thus important resources that play a significant role in determining the shape of events. Like an art form, such communicative skills hold out the possibility of making people see things differently, and, in the process, shifting the course of political struggle.”¹³

They help elicit to what degree German state and non-state development agencies are actually willing to meet their strategic accountabilities¹⁴ vis-à-vis their political principals. Policy storylines also reveal some fairly nuanced differences in their views and treatment of their Chinese counterparts in the party-state and civil society sector. Such a discursive approach puts the spotlight on the process of policy implementation which, because of an almost overzealous protection of administrative discretion, has so far remained a black box.

¹¹ Bogumil, J. and Schmid, J., *Politik in Organisationen. Organisationstheoretische Ansätze und praxisbezogene Anwendungsbeispiele*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich 2001, pp. 55–71.

¹² Frank Fischer, op. cit., p. 86, cites Hajer, M., *The Politics of Environmental Discourse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1995, p. 56.

¹³ Ibid., p. 88.

¹⁴ Edwards, M. and Hulme, D., “NGO Performance and Accountability: Introduction and Overview”, in: Michael Edwards and Alan Fowler (Eds.), *The Earthscan Reader on NGO Management*. London: Earthscan Publications 2003, p. 248.

Case 1. The Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ)

The first case study concentrates on the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), which became active in the PRC in 1981 and is thus the German development agency with the longest development cooperation history. The state-owned and yet formally privately organised government organisation portrays itself “as an international cooperation enterprise for sustainable development with worldwide operations.”¹⁵ As a monopolist in German technical assistance (TA), GTZ maintains close cooperation with another monopolist of foreign ODA, the Chinese Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM). MOFCOM acts as GTZ’s organisational entry point as well as gatekeeper. Over the past 25 years GTZ has almost exclusively established project cooperation agreements with high profile Chinese party-state actors such as the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), the National People’s Congress (NPC), as well as research institutes such as the China Institute for Reform and Development (CIRD). Yet despite the stable flow of fundings, GTZ eventually got caught up by challenges to its operations in China. A case in point was the cover-story of *The Economist* on ODA flows to China in 2003, whose open advocacy of ending development assistance to China sent shock-waves through the community of German development practitioners.¹⁶ It compelled a GTZ management unit in Beijing to reassure its main funding body, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) in Bonn as well as members of the German parliament in Berlin of its relevance as a key executing agency. Internally, the efficiency and effectiveness of Sino-German development initiatives were supposed to be enhanced with the introduction of a total quality management system and other private sector management systems. Other voices even advocated the outright commercialization of GTZ’s services in China. Surprisingly absent from such internal and external deliberations about reform was a more fundamental discussion as to how GTZ might reposition itself in a dramatically changed China. While the idea of discontinuing German ODA to China might have been reasonable in the face of China’s impressive economic growth, an immediate end to Sino-German development cooperation was by no means a foregone conclusion, given China’s mounting social deficits, environmental degradation, the problem of corruption as well as the lack of progress towards the rule of law and human rights protection. The SVMP therefore

¹⁵ GTZ 2008, <http://www.gtz.de/en/unternehmen/1698.htm> (download 12 January 2008).

¹⁶ *The Economist*, “Congratulations, China (So, no need for any more aid, then?)”. October 18–24, 2003.

seized the opportunity to instigate a broader discussion about reformed goals-means combinations in Sino-German development cooperation.

In a first step the existing portfolio of Sino-German development initiatives was measured against each project's ability to mobilize public participation and include of Chinese civil society actors. A review ordered by BMZ in early 2003 soon revealed that in less than 15% of Sino-German development cooperation projects were Chinese civil society organisations actually consulted or in fact participated in the process of project implementation. In 2003 less than 1% of German technical assistance – a mere 100.000 euros from an annual budget of ca. 20 million euros – made its way into the books of Chinese civil society organisations. What were the reasons for such a dismal engagement with China's growing civil society sector? Cumbersome bureaucratic planning, the fear of alienating long-term party-state collaboration partners¹⁷ and a general lack of interest in social and political development issues among GTZ's management had led to the situation whereby GTZ's Beijing office had become insulated from any sign of external change. The reluctance to respond to new signs was also evident during a GTZ workshop on the issue of China's nascent civil society on 15 July 2003, which was also open to the general public. When the author presented a number of strategic options on how to better engage with Chinese civil society organisations, a Chinese GTZ co-worker echoed the concerns of the German GTZ management in China:

“You mentioned that in the future you are going to involve more NGOs in China in development work. I am interested how you are going to do it. As I have mentioned earlier, we have encountered problems (when trying to include NGOs) in our program and I was wondering how you are going to identify, select and involve NGOs in specific projects or programs. As far as I know, at the moment all of the GTZ projects are cooperations between the two governments. That means that from the very beginning of the project or program preparation, and from the project proposal to the last implementation all of it is business between the two governments. So my question is: From which stage on are you going to try to involve NGOs? E.g if you have selected an NGO for a certain project, how are you going to deal with problems from the governmental side? From the first presentation we learned that the Chinese government is still supervising or even controlling NGOs in China. I think if the GTZ is trying to

¹⁷ For a discussion of the resurgent phenomenon of fear in highly industrialized countries see Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Times. Living in an Age of Uncertainty*. Cambridge: Polity Press 2007, pp. 55–70.

cooperate with an NGO it cannot bypass the governmental sector. So how are you going to deal with these problems?"¹⁸

The question revealed that Chinese party-state counterpart organisations were seen as the key obstacle to opening up decision-making and steering processes of Sino-German technical cooperation. Keeping in mind that policy implementation relies on "learning and invention rather than on instruction and command"¹⁹, the author replied:

"It is not about bypassing the government in any way. This becomes evident from the three-sector model which I presented earlier. In fact we should try to facilitate an ongoing dialogue between state agencies, private sector enterprises as well as NGOs. So in no way are we trying to exclude anyone. In fact we are trying to include people. So that is the first answer to your question. Still, there is no blueprint for the cooperation with civil society organisations in our work. This is something that will have to evolve over time and we will have to rely on good practices. That is to say from within our organisation or from other donor and implementing organisations or even learn from some Chinese experiences themselves."²⁰

Representing GTZ as an honest broker actually raised eyebrows among management, which could read such statements as an indirect criticism of GTZ's conduct of affairs in China. Rather than seeing the inclusion of non-state actors as a way of increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of party-state-led development initiatives, any kind of engagement with China's nascent civil society was considered to be too risky. The continuation of GTZ's long-held position of disengagement was contrary to its own declared goal of becoming a more client-oriented organisation:

"The success of development cooperation requires the joint and coordinated action of development agencies on the ground and the inclusion of all societal actors that are relevant to the attainment of goals. In our partner countries these comprise government organisations just like the private sector as well as non-governmental organisations and other civil society organisations (author's translation)."²¹

By shutting the door on an evolving civil society sector in China, GTZ revealed a somewhat conservative organisational self-understanding. The

¹⁸ Fulda, Andreas Martin (Ed.), *Understanding China's Nascent Civil Society*. (A) Workshop Documentation. 2003. www.cango.org/cnindex/lunwen/12.pdf (download 20 May 2006).

¹⁹ Majone, G. and Wildawsky, A., *op. cit.*, p. 149.

²⁰ Fulda, Andreas Martin (Ed.), *Understanding China's nascent Civil Society*. (A) Workshop Documentation. 2003. www.cango.org/cnindex/lunwen/12.pdf (download 20 May 2006).

²¹ GTZ, *GTZ-Policy für das Auftragsmanagement*. Eschborn: GTZ 2003, p. 4.

German democracy advocate Gero Erdmann describes the strategic dilemma as follows:

“According to its self-conception, GTZ is supposed to distance itself from democracy promotion approaches (...). Even more so, GTZ is supposed to avoid ‘discretionary partiality in favor of certain groups – even if it is the poor’. Instead of such ‘political values of transparency, sincerity, dialogue and partnership’, the ‘benefits of state-centered technical assistance in the political realm [...] which lie in the recognition of state partners’ are emphasized. What kind of ‘state partners’ they are no longer seems to matter, nor does the fact that this constitutes a very partial choice – which is by no means ‘discreet’ (author’s translation).”²²

Little consideration was given to the fact that a changing donor-recipient landscape in China allowed the GTZ management to innovate and go beyond the tried and tested formulas of state-centered development cooperation. Quite the contrary, GTZ’s monopoly on technical assistance had cemented its collaboration patterns with party-state organisations to such a degree that any deviation from its highly formalistic cooperation agreements drawn up annually between the German and Chinese government seemed an unlikely option. Arguing that the time was not ripe for a diversification of recipient organisations, the option of civil society inclusion in cooperation projects administered by GTZ was not considered viable. Many of the concerns of the OECD-DAC about the lack of progress towards more inclusive development aid thus also applied to GTZ’s China engagement from 2003 until 2006:

“The concepts underlying participatory development have been on the development agenda for many years but practice has often proved difficult. In an aid context, recipient governments not infrequently have reservations which severely limit the effective impact of these approaches. On the donor side, project aid procedures can constrain participation, and are often an obstacle to the flexible and less-known approaches needed to support local initiatives and grassroots organisations. Development administrators are not always convinced about the relevance and implications of encouraging participatory approaches. ‘Getting things done’ and funds disbursed often outweigh other considerations, and work against participatory development.”²³

²² Erdmann, Gero, op. cit., p. 99.

²³ OECD/DAC, *Participatory Development and Good Governance*. Development Cooperation Guideline Series. Paris: OECD 1995, p. 9.

What happened to Germany's "participation agency"?

Not willing to submit so soon to initial resistance, the SVMP intensified its activities in China in late 2003 and ushered in a series of mainstreaming activities designed to re-open a debate which seemed to have come to an end before it had actually started. To their credit GTZ management supported the Eschborn-based SVMP in conducting a number of mainstreaming activities in China, which included three months of field research in autumn 2003, workshops and conferences in 2003 and 2004, as well as photo exhibitions showcasing public participation in community development in Beijing and Kunming in 2005. This opening allowed the SVMP to construct new policy narratives which contrasted sharply with previous goals-means combinations. Given the conservative mindset among German policy implementers in Germany and China the SVMP opted for a soft approach to change management:

*"Mainstreaming utilizes soft and hard methods. Soft or horizontal methods can be seen as new images, voluntary communication groups or workshops; (...) soft methods are slow methods, they work with resistance and attempt to achieve identification and commitment step-by-step (author's translation)."*²⁴

Initially, the SVMP identified two Sino-German rural development and natural resource protection projects in the provinces of Shanxi and Hainan as useful vehicles for examining the degree of public participation and civil society inclusion. Current practices of participatory project management were contrasted with the need to take note of two additional dimensions of participation – namely democratic and systemic participation²⁵ – which were seen as being at least equally important in promoting participatory development. In contrast to GTZ's management in Beijing, German project leaders and Chinese project staff in Taiyuan and Haikou were already convinced that goals such as afforestation in Shanxi or the protection of tropical rainforest in Hainan could not be achieved without the integration of the local population in the process of project implementation. Yet in both cases a rather instrumental understanding of participation could be observed. While both projects claimed to promote citizen empowerment, it

²⁴ BMZ, Sektorvorhaben Mainstreaming Participation (SVMP), Issue Box. Mainstreaming. 2006. <http://www2.gtz.de/participation/deutsch/issue-box.htm> (download 24 June 2006).

²⁵ Democratic participation is understood as "empowering people to participate in steering and decision-making processes" whereas systemic participation refers to "developing systems and institutions in politics and society that enable and guarantee participation". See GTZ, Participation, <http://gtz.de/en/themen/uebergreifende-themen/partizipation/908.htm> (download 17 January 2008).

was often merely a means to an end rather than an end in itself. Nevertheless, these bilateral development projects provided starting points for reflecting on how bottom-up participatory approaches can contribute to good governance and the protection of human rights in the PRC. Findings were presented to Chinese partners at international conferences in Haikou and Beijing in 2003 and 2004 respectively. The SVMP managed to put the issue of inclusive aid even more firmly on the agenda by holding an international conference in Beijing on the topic of “Mainstreaming Public Participation in International Cooperation with the P.R. China” on 15 October 2004.²⁶ While the BMZ supported the event in conjunction with other German (GTZ, CIM) and Chinese (CANGO) collaborators, there was a striking unease about the political dimension of the event. Well aware that the mainstreaming of a political understanding of traditional development work could be seen as a Trojan horse strategy for promoting participatory democracy in China, BMZ staff in Bonn and Beijing called on the SVMP team to portray project findings in a way that would not antagonize traditional party-state cooperation partners. This showed that in trying to be politically correct, existing spaces for the promotion of participatory development were supposed to be left unexplored.²⁷ It was more than ironic that negotiations about extending spaces for participatory development thus had to be held with the German side, rather than with the Chinese gatekeepers of German development agencies. With hindsight, the successful conduct of the international conference was the key to the tearing down of a number of psychological barriers to a more political understanding of development work among German development practitioners.

In 2003 Sino-German development cooperation was still almost exclusively seen through the lenses of economics and trade. A case in point is the following assertion by the BMZ division responsible for the political steering of Sino-German development cooperation, which is published on the BMZ website:

²⁶ For further information about the International conference in Haikou, Hainan, see: <http://business.sohu.com/2003/11/30/17/article216271709.shtml> (download 24 June 2006) and for more information about the international conference in Beijing please consult: <http://www2.gtz.de/participation/download/fulda2004a.pdf> (download 24 June 2006).

²⁷ Daniel A. Bell made similar observations about self-censorship among Western scholars dealing with sensitive political issues in China. See Bell, Daniel A., *Teaching Political Theory in Beijing*, 2006. <http://dissentmagazine.org/article/?article=418> (download 17 January 2008).

“In China we do not pursue a traditional development policy in which ‘development aid’ is being provided; rather, it is about economic cooperation for mutual benefit (author’s translation).”²⁸

In stark contrast, the SVMP received both the support of BMZ as well as the German Foreign Ministry in 2006 for the following policy narrative, which was part of its final report on China:

“Participation has gained far more significance in recent years. Development cooperation has become more ‘political’. Issues such as human rights, the rule of law and political participation are no longer seen as framework conditions for development cooperation, but as actual areas of activity. China’s political framework offers little scope for participation, with political reform forces strictly regulated. The direct promotion of democracy and human rights by the international community is therefore a politically sensitive area. The country’s high degree of independence on external assistance and its significance in the region, which has grown in step with its economic reforms, have reduced opportunities for external influence. As a result, maintaining a political dialogue on human rights, the rule of law and democracy is very important. At the heart of Chinese-German political relations is the dialogue on the rule of law, which touches at least indirectly on human rights issues. Helpful to the partnership-based dialogue is the fact that German development cooperation respects and actively promotes economic, social and cultural human rights, which are associated with political and civic rights. In addition, German development cooperation organisations support civil society initiatives to strengthen democratic forces in China.”²⁹

The SVMP had thus not only challenged the conventional wisdom of the German development community dealing with China, but also provided a new policy narrative that could be used by policy implementers to effectively alter the course of policy implementation. The new account of a reformed German development policy called for nothing less than the transformation of a formerly allocative policy into a more regulatory and redistributive one. It also encouraged German development practitioners to overcome censorship and refrain from self-censorship. Suggestions were made as to how future Sino-German development initiatives could engage

²⁸ BMZ, China. <http://www.bmz.de/laender/partnerlaender/china/index.html> (download 28 June 2006). The phrasing was later changed from “economic cooperation for mutual benefit” to “strategic development partnerships for mutual benefit” (as of 14 January 2008).

²⁹ GTZ, China. *Authoritarian yet participatory? Governance in PR China in times of change. From the series: Promoting participatory development in German development cooperation*. Eschborn: GTZ 2006, p. 19.

with the Chinese party-state without excluding China's nascent civil society. Rather than giving preferential treatment to one stakeholder group over others, Sino-German development cooperation was supposed to lead to "mutual empowerment", understood in the terms of Joel Migdal, Atul Kohli, and Vivienne Shue.³⁰ Sino-German development cooperation was envisaged as an opportunity to foster new forms of collaboration between both Chinese party-state and civil society organisations. The SVMP called on German policy implementers to establish training programmes for participatory community development, to introduce new methods for public participation such as Future Search Conferences (FSC) as new vehicles for more inclusive local state/citizen relations, and to explore the possibilities of strengthening democratic self-government through community funds.³¹ What thus started as a mainly constructivist enterprise in early 2003 had by mid-2006 become a credible platform for an increased German engagement with China in the field of public participation and civil society inclusion.

Case 2. The Center for International Migration and Development (CIM)

The SVMP also engaged other development actors in China such as the German placement agency Center for International Migration and Development (CIM). Since 1985 CIM has provided personnel assistance (PA) to Chinese party-state organisations, private enterprises and civil society organisations through its Chinese cooperation partner, the China International Center for Economic and Technical Exchanges (CICETE). CIM is a division of GTZ but also forms a working group with the work placement agency Zentralstelle für Arbeit (ZfA) in Frankfurt. Like its corporatist brother GTZ, CIM also faced the challenge of justifying its long-term China engagement in the eyes of an increasingly critical German public. Since the beginning of its China engagement, it has placed more than 80 integrated experts in the cooperation fields of economic cooperation and trade, environmental protection, city planning, health, media and civil society building. The number of German integrated CIM experts rose to 38 in 2006, making the PRC one of CIM's biggest partners in Asia. German experts were supposed to work in policy fields where China still lacked pro-

³⁰ Migdal, J., Kohli, A. and Shue, V. (Eds.), *State Power and Social Forces: Domination and Transformation in the Third World*. New York: Cambridge University Press 1994.

³¹ GTZ, *China. Authoritarian yet participatory? Governance in P. R. China in times of change. From the series: Promoting participatory development in German development cooperation*. Eschborn: GTZ 2006, p. 29.

fessional expertise. Given GTZ's lackluster engagement with public participation and civil society inclusion, CIM managed to take the lead on both issues between 2003 and 2006. A series of personnel placements in Chinese government-organized non-governmental organisations (GONGO) as well as grassroots NGOs contributed to this trend (see Table 1).

TABLE 1: Integrated CIM experts in Chinese GONGO and grassroots NGOs

| | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 |
|-----------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| GONGO | 2 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 5 |
| Grassroots NGOs | 2 | 4 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 4 |
| Total | 4 | 7 | 9 | 9 | 8 | 9 |

Source: China International Center for Economic and Technical Exchanges (CICETE), 2006.

CIM enjoyed the explicit political mandate given by its core funder BMZ to support Chinese civil society organisations as well as to take up good governance issues. German development planners were convinced that due to the "embedded" nature of German CIM experts in Chinese organisations, the ownership of such political development work would be firmly in Chinese hands, thereby diminishing the likelihood of possible accusations of meddling in internal affairs. The presentation of CIM's activities in China on its official website is a case in point:

"In response to the request of partners with special development policy relevance, CIM has also been active in politically sensitive areas in China. It supports the difficult work of non-governmental organisations, which are subject to tight state control in China. CIM is also engaged in enhancing the rights and political maturity of the civil society, for example, by calling for greater citizen participation. Here CIM makes use of its scope to act outside development policy priority areas."³²

CIM's China program was scrutinized by the SVMP and its project manager in Frankfurt. A written survey revealed in 2004 that 12 out of 35 (34%) integrated CIM experts named public participation and civil society inclusion a major component of their work. This stood in great contrast to findings on GTZ projects in China, where only 15% of project managers had reported communication or cooperation with Chinese civil society organisations. Individual feedback in 2004 also revealed calls for a more balanced economic development in China, which takes environmental and social issues

³² CIM, <http://www.cimonline.de/en/worldwide/313.asp> (download 4 September 2006).

into account. In the following section, the author quotes from anonymized feedback provided by German development practitioners in the field.

A CIM expert working for a Chinese GONGO dealing with environmental issues noted:

“Citizen participation is strengthening SEPA’s (State Environmental Protection Agency) position which, as in other countries, is in a weak position compared with other government agencies. Citizen participation and environmental NGOs are thus being supported by SEPA. Citizen participation in the environmental area contributes to the implementation of environmental policies and enhances transparency etc (author’s translation).”

Such findings were echoed by another CIM expert working for a local Chinese Environmental Protection Bureau (EPB):

“Participation of non-state actors has been given a high priority in the (expert’s) terms of reference and is being consciously supported by the employer, taking all restrictions of a state apparatus into account. The integrated expert has the leeway to include these non-state actors, yet has to make sure that radical NGOs will not gain too much influence, since this may create problems for the employer (author’s translation).”

The feedback proved useful for both CIM and the SVMP and provided convincing evidence that the time was ripe for a more political understanding of Sino-German development cooperation. In the wake of an increasingly fierce parliamentary debate about the necessity of continuing it, CIM headquarters in Frankfurt repeated the survey in China in spring 2006. For the first time the written inquiry explicitly raised the term “democracy promotion”, thus indicating the expanded leeway for Sino-German development work. Feedback provided by German CIM experts carried home the message of many fields still remaining for possible Sino-German development cooperation. A CIM expert working for an independent Chinese research institute noted:

“Especially the establishment of a wider public sphere and publications on topics such as health reform, labour standards and the development of democracy through models of citizen participation are sensitive areas to which more attention should be paid in development cooperation (author’s translation).”

A German CIM expert working for a Chinese grassroots NGO picked up on the theme of facilitating the interaction between party-state and Chinese civil society organisations:

“I see limitations in the possibility of NGOs to initiate dialogues with state organisations and to influence politics. To this end most NGOs still require support to professionalize their work (author’s translation).”

Another CIM expert working on environmental standards in the Chinese business sector came to the following conclusion:

“I am convinced that with the Chinese versions of NGOs and public participation, goals can also be reached and that the possibilities to make good use of these instruments have not yet been exhausted (author’s translation).”

CIM experts also played an important role in matching German faith-based non-state development organisations such as Misereor and Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst (EED) as well as German political foundations with Chinese GONGO and grassroots NGO counterparts. A case in point is the CANGO Training Center for Chinese Grassroots NGOs, which was funded with the support of CIM and EED between 2002 and 2006. Furthermore they were able to raise funds from the whole spectrum of international donor and implementing agencies, bypassing the bottlenecks of German bilateral ODA flows to China. A good example is the Participatory Urban Governance Program for Migrant Integration (PUGP), which was implemented by CANGO in partnership with CIM and the American Bar Association (ABA), 2006–2007.³³

Case 3. Germany’s political foundations

The key importance of personnel agencies in policy implementation will be further explored in the discussion of Germany’s political foundations, which can be differentiated into those which engaged China prior to Tiananmen 1989 – the Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSS) since 1983 and the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation (FES) since 1984 – and those which began their China engagement in the post-Tiananmen era – the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation (KAS) in 1992 and the Heinrich-Böll-Foundation (HBS) in 2003. All four political foundations participated in the mainstreaming activities of the SVMP by providing written self-assessments on how they were dealing with the issues of public participation and civil society inclusion. Their policy narratives revealed that both HSS and FES were leaning almost exclusively towards the party-state rather than following the example of KAS and HBS as “institutions operating in between the realm of state and society (author’s

³³ CANGO, CANGO Annual Report 2006. www.cango.org/newweb/niandubaogao/annualreport2006.pdf (download 17 January 2008).

translation)“³⁴. The country representative of HSS positioned the foundation as follows:

“The HSS, which has been active in China for more than 20 years, has from the beginning put a great emphasis on long-term partnerships which are characterized by mutual trust and respect. On the basis of a framework contract with the ‘Ministry of Education’ (MoE) in Beijing a number of project partnership agreements were drawn up. Partners included the CCP party school as well as the women’s federation (WF) (author’s translation).”³⁵

He described the usefulness of participatory approaches as follows:

“The cooperation with the CCP party school shows clearly that under a one-party system the possibility of including actors in decisions and actions is directed ‘from above’ and thereby has its limitations. The partners of HSS at the central and regional levels are bound by certain rules of the game which can only be gradually influenced by participatory programs (author’s translation).”³⁶

A non-interventionistic and mainly technical understanding of the foundation’s work was also apparent in the self-conception of the social democratic Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation (FES) in China:

“According to its self-conception, the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation (FES) is a partner, not a donor and not a missionary, in its dealings with partners and potential partners. All activities are primarily designed in accordance with the demand of the requesting organisations (...) and each event or activity is budgeted in close cooperation. This is where the financial – and not only the ideational – contribution of the partner organisation is jointly defined. FES is not legally responsible to provide any organisation or person in China with a certain financial sum. The general principles of annual planning meetings with organisations requesting assistance are flexibility of the main targets and joint development of project goals based on suggestions of partners or potential partners. If the partner cannot come up with ideas, no project will come about (author’s translation).”³⁷

³⁴ Bartsch, Sebastian, “Politische Stiftungen: Grenzgänger zwischen Gesellschafts- und Staatenwelt”, in: Wolf-Dieter Eberwein and Karl Kaiser (Eds.), *Deutschlands neue Außenpolitik, Band 4, Institutionen und Ressourcen*. München: R. Oldenbourg 1998. <http://www.weltpolitik.net/print/1452.html> (download 21 July 2004).

³⁵ Fulda, Andreas, *Elitär und partizipativ zugleich? Regierungspraxis der VR China im Wandel*. Eschborn: GTZ 2004. <http://www2.gtz.de/participation/download/fulda2004.pdf> (download 24 June 2006).

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

The insistence on tailoring its cooperation program strictly according to the needs of its partner organisations had led to a situation in which FES ended up dealing exclusively with party-state organisations. This came as a certain surprise given that the FES had been authorized to run the “human rights dialogue” initiated by the German government – a dialogue which thus excluded Chinese citizen associations which had been vocal in asserting their political and civil human rights since the mid-1990s. The Christian-democratic Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation (KAS) on the other hand had made sure that it remained flexible enough to engage all kinds of Chinese partners in the context of a China program fully owned by KAS itself. Its country representative described the KAS’ approach as follows:

“Given the complexity of challenges in various areas of societal development there is a need to come up with differentiated approaches that take differences in specific countries into account. Regarding the PRC, which is just beginning to explore the development of a civil society and an autonomous public sphere, the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation made a decision years ago to opt for a program run on its own initiative (Eigenmaßnahmenprogramm). The foundation is active in fields such as the rule of law, societal change, economic and social reforms, regional development, foreign and security policy and media and thus selects co-organizers on a case-by-case basis who possess certain competencies in the aforementioned areas as well as the necessary consulting capacity to achieve political impact. In this sense they may be seen as loose coalitions rather than fixed partnerships, although there is one exception – the Chinese Academy for Social Sciences – with which we have been pursuing a comprehensive research and consultation programme on an annual basis (author’s translation).”³⁸

Under the influence of the SVMP, KAS gradually expanded its activities to include civil society organisations in both its research activities as well as international seminars. A case in point is a Sino-German NGO dialogue on the issue of “Development of Grassroots Democracy through Public Participation”, which was held in cooperation with the China Association for NGO Cooperation (CANGO) in Beijing in December 2005.³⁹ Furthermore, German members of parliament on a visit to China were repeatedly briefed by Chinese social development practitioners on the country’s progress towards more participatory forms of governance. The SVMP’s mainstream-

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ For further information see KAS, http://www.kas.de/proj/home/events/37/2/year-2005/month-12/veranstaltung_id-18632/index.html (download 14 January 2008) and CANGO, http://www.cango.org/newweb/Shownews_page.asp?ArticleID=274 (download 14 January 2008).

ing activities thus led to the foundation's direct engagement with Chinese GONGO and grassroots NGOs, which formally began in late 2007.

While all three political foundations HSS, FES and KAS opted for a country representative system, the Heinrich Böll Foundation (HBS) entered China in 2003 with the help of a project agreement with CANGO.⁴⁰ In 2004 it presented itself to the SVMP as follows:

“Partnerships are of great importance for the international work of the HBS. HBS is trying to regularly include local partners and aims at capacity building (...). According to the motto ‘Think global, act local’ we do not want to simply transfer existing models, but strive, through collaboration, to come up with individually tailored approaches and initiatives (author’s translation).”⁴¹

In order to promote public participation and civil society inclusion, the Heinrich-Böll-Foundation collaborated with one Chinese GONGO as well as four grassroots NGOs. Its support of institutions included the organisation of civil society-related study tours to Europe, financing of publications on relevant subjects, conduct of seminars with CSO participation as well as provision of support to CSO project activities at the grassroots level such as the highly successful 26 Degree Campaign.⁴² According to the foundation's statistics in 2004, it had spent some 90,000 euros on such efforts, thereby contributing more than all of the other three German political foundations HSS, FES and KAS together. So far, only KAS has been willing to follow the example of HBS.

Case 4. The German Embassy in Beijing

The discussion so far has illustrated that policy implementation should not be envisaged as a mechanical process in which targets are first laid out and then implemented according to plan. Instead, as the SVMP's mainstreaming activities illustrate, it takes deliberate efforts to build up individual commitment among prospective policy implementers to follow up on government policies. In the case of the PRC, it can be summarized that dominant self-conceptions of German development organisations weighed heavily on

⁴⁰ In summer 2006 HBS headquarters in Berlin placed its own country representative in Beijing, as indication that the HBS might be moving in the same direction as the other three German political foundations.

⁴¹ Fulda, Andreas, *Elitär und partizipativ zugleich? Regierungspraxis der VR China im Wandel.*, Eschborn: GTZ 2004. <http://www2.gtz.de/participation/download/fulda2004.pdf> (download 24 June 2006).

⁴² 26 Degree Campaign Website, <http://www.26c.ngo.cn/> (download 17 January 2008).

the choices of development practitioners. Being perfectly aware of existing structural and cognitive barriers to a political understanding of development work in China, they were often reluctant to buy into the message of reformed goals-means combinations in Sino-German development cooperation. This was also due to the broader political environment, which was not very conducive to political development aid. Between 2003 and 2006 the general discourse about China was still dominated by then-Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, who had put trade interests before human rights concerns.⁴³ This simple yet essential fact strongly discouraged members of the German development community to openly advocate change. In the course of the SVMP's mainstreaming activities it thus became apparent that besides the already targeted policy implementers, there also was a need to engage with German policy makers. The SVMP therefore began to include German members of parliament, decision-makers in BMZ and the German Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as staff of the German Embassy in Beijing in its policy deliberations. The author and other like-minded CIM experts assisted colleagues from the German Embassy's political department to organize a series of roundtable meetings for German government officials and members of parliament between 2003 and 2006. These roundtable meetings touched on issues ranging from the contributions of Chinese green NGOs to environmental protection (2003 and 2004), to Chinese migrant organisations struggling for social justice (2005) and the role of Chinese journalists and organic intellectuals in the pursuit of human rights in China (2006). High-ranking German public servants such as the German Ambassador to China, Volker Stanzel, as well as leading German politicians such as the former speaker of the German parliament, Wolfgang Thierse, as well as the new German foreign minister Franz-Walter Steinmeier thereby learned about new areas for prospective Sino-German cooperation. Such networking enabled the SVMP to match the political dialogue on China with realities on the ground, thereby making a strong case for reformed goals-means combinations. Such forums for debate also proved to be of greater value than the occasional visits to "Potemkin Sino-German project villages" by German members of parliament visiting the PRC.

Conclusion: Parliamentary oversight as a means to influence policy implementation

In conclusion, the author would like to make a call for greater scrutiny of Sino-German development cooperation by the German Bundestag. Given

⁴³ *Der Tagesspiegel*, "Schröder hat viel kaputt gemacht". 26 March 2006, p. 7.

that the PRC constitutes Germany's biggest development aid recipient, German parliamentarians should not be easily satisfied with glowing reports and the occasional Sino-German model project. If finding the right problem is a "conscious principle of action"⁴⁴ and if "the problem of administration is, purely and simply, one of controlling discretion"⁴⁵, German legislators should exercise greater parliamentary oversight over Sino-German development cooperation. Given that the German public has become increasingly doubtful about the necessity to provide official development assistance (ODA) to economically successful transition countries such as China, India or Brazil, members of the German parliament enjoy considerable leverage to keep up the pressure on the government to deliver on their foreign and development policies and ensure that German state and non-state development organisations are living up to the principles of good governance, such as openness, transparency and accountability. In this process political decisionmakers can benefit from partnering with independent academics.

When the author informed development experts of all German party caucuses about the deficits of Sino-German development cooperation in January 2008, it was the Liberal Democratic party caucus which responded first to the call for reform. The liberal democrats had lobbied for an end to ODA transfers to China for many years. They saw the impulse as an opportunity to shape their emerging development policy. On 12 March 2008 the German Liberal Democratic party caucus issued a small inquiry (*Kleine Anfrage*)⁴⁶ on the status of Sino-German development cooperation in general and government to government negotiations in particular, initially scheduled for summer 2008. A formally inner-administrative discourse thereby became part of the parliamentary debate. A significant proportion of the inquiry was directed towards the current status of collaboration between German and Chinese development agencies, such as GTZ and MOFCOM. It was questioned whether German external actors were free to select appropriate domestic organizational entry points, thereby raising doubts about the current relationship between German donorship and Chinese ownership. While the German government provided an official reply by 24 April 2008 it refused to answer key questions raised in the small inquiry, stating that questions about government to government negotiations had become obsolete in the face of development minister Wieczorek-Zeul's unilateral decision to freeze

⁴⁴ Schön, D.A., *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. New York: Basic Books 1983, p. 18.

⁴⁵ Majone, G. and Wildawsky, A., op. cit., p. 148.

⁴⁶ Deutscher Bundestag, 16. Wahlperiode, Drucksache 16/8572, Kleine Anfrage vom 12.03. 2008.

bilateral negotiations due to the Tibet conflict in mid-March 2008.⁴⁷ Dissatisfied with the German government's official response and keen to show its development policy credentials before the next parliamentary election in 2009 the Liberal Democratic party caucus stepped up its efforts and paved the way for a parliamentary debate.

On 25 June 2008 a parliamentary motion was tabled.⁴⁸ Refining their stance on Sino-German development cooperation the Liberal Democratic party caucus called for a change of priorities. More direct financial, technical and personal support was to be provided for Chinese civil society organizations. In the subsequent parliamentary debate on 26 June 2008, member of German parliament Hellmut Koenigshaus underscored the main message of the motion:

“It is of particular importance that we strengthen civil society. Current development cooperation is too restricted to collaboration with state organizations (...), yet the real partners for sustainable development are private enterprises and civil organisations. This is where we need to be heading (author's translation).”⁴⁹

Following the parliamentary debate the motion was delegated to the parliamentary committees for development cooperation (AWZ) as well as finances (*Finanzausschuss*). It did not take long for the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) to respond to the changed political climate. On 22 September 2008 development minister Wieczorek-Zeul publicly announced the end to financial cooperation with the PR China, which should be replaced by a “strategic partnership of the entire German Federal government”.⁵⁰ Without elaborating on the nature of such a strategic partnership Wieczorek-Zeul further mentioned that German support should aim at strengthening reform processes in the fields of the rule of law, society as well as climate change. It remains doubtful whether such lofty reform rhetoric falling short on specifics will be enough to convince an increasingly sceptical German public and members of the German parliament to extend the lifeline of Sino-German development cooperation. Instead, the

⁴⁷ Deutscher Bundestag, 16. Wahlperiode, Drucksache 16/8932, Antwort der Bundesregierung vom 24.04.2008.

⁴⁸ Deutscher Bundestag, 16. Wahlperiode, Drucksache 16/9745, Antrag auf Beschlussfassung des Deutschen Bundestags vom 25.06.2008.

⁴⁹ Deutscher Bundestag, Plenarprotokoll 16/172, Stenografischer Bericht, 172. Sitzung, Berlin, Donnerstag, den 26. Juni 2008. <http://www.gmbh-kompakt.de/pdf/BTDrs16172.pdf> (download 5 January 2009).

⁵⁰ BMZ Presse, Deutliche Steigerung des Entwicklungshaushalts. http://www.bmz.de/de/presse/aktuelle_Meldungen/2008/september/20080918_haushalt2009/index.html (download 5 January 2009).

effective promotion of participatory development in the PR China will require new institutions for the negotiation of German and Chinese interests and a greater willingness on both sides to experiment with new partnership models.