

Sustainable development discourse and development aid in Germany: tracking the changes from environmental protectionism towards private sector opportunities

Fabio Schojan, Amanda Machin & Magdalene Silberberger

To cite this article: Fabio Schojan, Amanda Machin & Magdalene Silberberger (26 Oct 2023): Sustainable development discourse and development aid in Germany: tracking the changes from environmental protectionism towards private sector opportunities, Critical Policy Studies, DOI: [10.1080/19460171.2023.2265988](https://doi.org/10.1080/19460171.2023.2265988)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19460171.2023.2265988>



© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 26 Oct 2023.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 208



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Sustainable development discourse and development aid in Germany: tracking the changes from environmental protectionism towards private sector opportunities

Fabio Schojan ^a, Amanda Machin ^a and Magdalene Silberberger ^b

^aDepartment of Sociology and Social Work, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Agder, Kristiansand, Norway; ^bFaculty of Management, Economics and Society, Center for Sustainable and Just Transformation [tra:ce], Witten/Herdecke University, Germany

ABSTRACT

'Sustainable Development' can be understood as a widely used discourse that has become even more prominent since the publication of the UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development in 2015. In this paper we analyze the way sustainable development discourse unfolds within the context of development aid in Germany by undertaking a discourse analysis of reports on development policy published 1973–2017 by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. Our analysis reveals that the sustainable development discourse is characterized by distinct components and storylines that change over time. We detect, in general, a shift away from a focus on environmental protection toward an emphasis on the role of the private sector in leading sustainable development. We argue, therefore, that although development is now only legitimate if it is 'sustainable', the discourse apparently facilitates the uneven allocation of development aid. The concern that arises here is that although Agenda 2030 pledges to take "bold and transformative steps" to secure the planet and to leave "no one behind" the least developed states who cannot provide 'private sector opportunities' or fulfil 'national self-responsibilities' for sustainable development are indeed being 'left behind'.

KEYWORDS

Sustainable development; Sdgs; development aid; Germany; development cooperation; discourse

1. Introduction

When over 70 years ago President Truman gave his widely cited inaugural speech to disclose a vision of a world in which the developed nations would support the 'underdeveloped', his 'fair deal' was focused on industrial and scientific progress (Escobar 1995, 3; Ziai 2017, 30). Since then, however, concerns about the environmental consequences of a 'progress' that involves the increasing domination of nature have led to concern about conventional models of development (Baker 2006, 5). In the 1980s, a 'sustainable' form of development that does not plunder ecological resources but ensures the

CONTACT Fabio Schojan  fabio.schojan@uia.no 

© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

conservation of the planet for future generations was widely promoted. ‘Sustainable Development’ (SD) was defined in the famous *Our Common Future* report (Brundtland Commission 1987) as ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’, a definition that entailed the alignment of economic growth with ongoing environmental protection. SD challenges the industrialized world to keep consumption patterns within the bounds of the ecologically possible” (Baker 2007, 302) and has become widely championed in governance structures and legal frameworks (Baker 2006, 25).

SD can be seen as an ‘overarching paradigm’ (UNESCO 2015), a ‘popular catchphrase’ (Mensah and Ricart Casadevall 2019) a ‘multidimensional concept’ (Redclift 1992), a ‘normative outlook’ (Sachs 2015, 3), a ‘consensus framework’ (Fukuda-Parr and Muchhala 2020) an ‘unending process’ (Mog 2004) or, most damningly, a ‘buzz word’ (Doyle 1998, 773). But it is perhaps most helpfully understood as a powerful *discourse* that constructs relationships of power and knowledge and positions actors and practices in particular ways (Death 2010, 2). The SD discourse has arguably become even more dominant through the announcement in 2015 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations ‘Agenda 2030’ (Moyer and Hedden 2020; UN General Assembly 2015, 14). Enshrined in Agenda 2030 is a vision of ‘the path towards sustainable development’ on which the world leaders are ‘setting out together ... devoting ourselves collectively to the pursuit of global development and of “win-win” cooperation which can bring huge gains to all countries and all parts of the world’ (UN 2015, 6). Agenda 2030 declares that in the pursuit of sustainable development ‘no one will be left behind’ (UN 2015, 1).

Numerous important accounts critically explore the SD discourse (Baker 2006; Death 2010; Escobar 1995; Harlow, Golub, and Allenby 2013; Sachs 2010, 2017; Springett 2013; Weber 2017; Ziai 2017) but we are interested more particularly on how it has impacted the practices and strategies of *development aid*. While there might be concerns about the environmental damage created by aid projects (Williams 1998, 19), since the Rio-Conference in 1992 (also known as the Earth Summit), SD apparently became the guiding principle for development aid. Billions of dollars are invested per year specifically targeted at achieving the seventeen Agenda 2030 development goals, although for example in Africa, this funding falls short and is found to fail to address local problems effectively (SDGC/A 2019).

How, then, has the SD discourse unfolded within the policy arena of development aid? How has it meaningfully reconstructed the relations between donors from high-income countries (HIC) and recipients in low-income countries (LIC)? Has it emphasized environmental concerns and social inclusion? Or could it, on the contrary, legitimize ‘leaving some behind’? In this paper, we interrogate the SD discourse in relation to policy strategy on development aid (or as it is more recently termed, ‘development cooperation’) in Germany. Germany is a particularly appropriate case, not only because it is one of the largest donors of development aid – disbursing US\$28.4 billion in 2020 (OECD 2021)¹ making it the second-largest OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) donor country (after the US) – but also because discursive changes can be closely tracked through the Reports on Development Policy published for the German Parliament and Public since 1973 by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). These reports are intended to inform the audience outside the

government (e.g. NGOs, political opposition, civil society and general public) about the progress and achievements of German development policy in the past years before publication. They are highly authoritative documents that illustrate the changing emphasis upon different ‘pillars’ (or what we call ‘*components*’) of sustainability as well as the rise and decline of the distinct (and potentially contradicting) ‘*storylines*’ of the SD discourse.

We therefore undertake a discourse analysis of the 15 BMZ reports on development policy published from 1973 to 2017. Our analysis shows, first of all, the increasing prominence of the SD discourse since the 1990s, but it also reveals the shifts in the components and storylines featuring *within* the SD discourse. While in the 1990s the environmental component was most dominant, since 2005 the economic component has dominated the discourse. Similarly, while the original storylines of sustainable development emphasized environmental protection and global cooperation and the responsibility of the HIC donor states (in this case, Germany) to ensure development in LICs is sustainable, these original storylines have receded. They have been replaced by the increasingly dominant storylines in which the private sector and individuals (in both donor and recipient states) drive SD and therefore should be incentivized to participate in the development field and in which SD is a national self-responsibility.

Thus, we argue that although development is now only legitimate if it is ‘sustainable’, the meaning and implications of SD, created within storylines of the discourse, has altered. SD now does not so much entail the alleviation of poverty and protection of the environment as it offers possibilities for the private sector to mobilize its investments.² This aligns with the claim that the SDGs both depend upon and legitimize what Emma Mawdsley calls ‘a radical shift in development finance’ away from official state-provided foreign aid toward private finance (Mawdsley 2018). SD has become detached from both environmental concern and from the needs of the poorest and is rather a matter of creating and responding to market opportunities. The SD discourse therefore facilitates and legitimizes the uneven allocation of development aid. While we cannot prove this outcome in our paper, we nevertheless observe that such uneven allocation is justified in the powerful SD discourse, an observation that we believe should be taken seriously by those interested in both development and sustainability.

We start the paper by defining our use of the terms ‘discourse’, ‘component’ and ‘storyline’. After explaining our methodology, we then present our discourse analysis of the 15 BMZ reports, which we conducted with the help of MAXQDA, a computer-assisted tool to conduct qualitative research. We conclude by pointing to the concern that if SD is indeed increasingly constructed as an economic opportunity, then contrary to the claims of Agenda 2030, the least developed states, who do not provide such opportunities for private sector incentives for SD, will be ‘left behind’.

2. The sustainable development discourse

As Redclift reminds us, the term ‘sustainable development’ is used in various, often competing, ways (Redclift 2005, 213). One of the reasons for this is the lack of consensus on what exactly is supposed to be sustained (Williams 1998, 23). While for some it is the natural resource base, for others it is the future levels of production and consumption, which raises more difficult questions about how future demands are to be determined

(Redclift 1992, 397). Redclift writes that instead of provoking political debate on what it would mean to develop sustainably, SD has commonly been used to close such debate down: ‘In place of radical new openings, which force us to reconsider what is meant by sustainable development, the term is usually attached uncritically to existing practices and policies that might benefit from “re-branding”’ (Redclift 2005, 218). Nevertheless, many accounts of SD argue that it has three ‘pillars’: economic, environmental and social sustainability (Baker 2006; Mensah and Ricart Casadevall 2019). These dimensions have been adopted by the Brundtland Commission in 1987 and the preamble of Agenda 2030 (UN 2015) and during the Johannesburg Earth Summit 2002 the development governance added a fourth dimension – political sustainability (United Nations 2014, 27). We will later refer to these four ‘pillars’ or ‘dimensions’ as ‘components’ of the SD discourse.

We approach SD here as a prominent discourse that functions to give specific meaning to ‘development’ as well as to legitimize certain actors and institutions and to exclude others. As Carl Death puts it, in this sense, the SD discourse is ‘an assemblage of practices of government which produce their own particular ways of seeing, knowing, acting and being’ (Death 2010, 2). Discourses have a powerful impact on the interpretation of problems and the responses to those problems, they legitimate particular material practices and are a key part of power relations (Feindt and Oels 2005, 161-31; Howarth, Glynos, and Griggs 2016). ‘To examine development as discourse’ explains Marc Williams ‘means to understand why so many countries started to see themselves as underdeveloped in the post-war period, how development became a fundamental problem and how whole fields of knowledge and endless strategies were devoted to this task’ (Williams 1998, 20).

We understand ‘discourse’ in line with the philosophy of Michel Foucault. For Foucault, a discourse does not translate reality into words; on the contrary, it is a set of statements, as well as a *practice* that structures our reality (Foucault 1981, 80): ‘We must conceive of discourse as a violence which we do to things; or in any case as a practice which we impose on them’ (Foucault 1981, 67). Discourses structure the way we experience the world, they demand the saying of certain things and they forbid the enunciation of others (Foucault 1978, 100). Discourses and their storylines regulate what can be said and done, and by whom it can be said and done (Howarth, Glynos, and Griggs 2016; Paul 2009; Ziai 2011, 29).

By determining what is taken-for-granted in our social reality, discourses transmit and reinforce power, but they can be used for resistance too (Foucault 1978, 101) and therefore they are also the *sites* of contestation of power: ‘discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized’ (Foucault 1981, 52). This does not mean that they can be consciously controlled. Nor are they necessarily coherent wholes (Hajer 1995, 44). Situated within a social and material context that they also help configure, discourses are radically unstable and are therefore liable to change over time (Ziai 2017, 15).

If, following Foucault, discourses are ‘practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak’ (Foucault 1972, 49), then the SD discourse forms ‘development’ in particular way so that it designates a set of activities and proposals that are seen to reconcile economic growth with environmental protection and poverty alleviation (Escobar 1995, 195). This discourse is the latest in a series of development discourses

(Williams 1998, 22). For critics such as Arturo Escobar and Aram Ziai, discourses of ‘development’ in general have made certain modes of being and thinking permissible, while disqualifying and excluding others (Escobar 1995, 5). They can be seen as closely connected to colonialism in that they portray some countries as less (or ‘under’) developed than the Western ideal that all countries (should) strive toward (Ziai 2007, 41ff.). The SD discourse in particular emerged as a dominant discourse in the 1990s, after the Brundtland-Commission Report in 1987 and the Rio ‘Earth Summit’ in 1992 (Ziai 2007, 82). What is distinct about it is the additional benefit of *environmental stability*, so that even under conditions of climate change there is no trade-off between the various goods of development; on the contrary, SD makes it possible to combine economic growth with environmental protection and social equality (Machin 2019, 201; Jakobeit et al. 2014, 16f.; Ziai 2017, 204).

We believe that an analysis of the SD discourse can provide some important insights into its implications for the specific norms, practices, strategies and relations of development aid and the way that certain conceptions of these norms, practices, strategies and relations become legitimized. Discourse analysis, as we utilize it, allows us to ‘denaturalise’ certain categories (Paul 2009, 241). For this reason, we undertake a discourse analysis that identifies the dominance of certain components of SD as well as the operation of powerful narratives or ‘storylines’ that condense complex situations into meaningful accounts of a problem (Hajer 2005; Smith and Kern 2009, 79; van Ostaijen 2017). Storylines act as a ‘glue’ to organize the different elements in a discourse to make sense of the world and our place in it (Smith Ochoa 2020, 5); when successful they not only promote particular issues as problems but also define the solutions to those problems (Hajer 1995, 44; Naylor 2011, 178).

The term ‘storyline’ is not meant to imply that the needs of human beings that are supposed to be met through development are not very real, but that notions of ‘development’ are constructed within the discourses that empower and disempower different institutions and subject positions and therefore fundamentally shape social and material reality (Feindt and Oels 2005, 164). Escobar, it is well known, is thoroughly critical of the storylines of the SD discourse that seem to blame poverty, rather than economic growth, for environmental degradation and promotes the further commercialization of nature that is integral to the Western economy (Escobar 1995, 196).³ More recent research has raised concerns that SD – as well as the more recent SDGs – are dominated by global elites rather than the citizens and local civil societies of developing countries (Akıncı et al. 2020; Cummings et al. 2018, 738; Mawdsley 2018). Critical voices also denounce SD for reinforcing technocratic approaches (Ziai 2017, 94), privileging commercial interests over basic needs (Weber 2017, 400) and the impossibility of an absolute decoupling of economic growth from inequality and environmental damage (Sachs 2017, 2578).

We are interested in the way that the SD discourse and its storylines have influenced the strategies of development aid in Germany. As we will see, the explosion of the SD discourse in the 1990s definitely, if somewhat unsurprisingly, continues to influence the German development aid policy arena. The BMZ calls for Europe to become a ‘global champion of sustainable development’ (BMZ 2018, 23) and promotes ‘holistic strategies for sustainable development across all policy fields’ (BMZ 2018, 11). However, as we will show, there have been changes within the SD discourse *itself* that can be grasped as a shift

in the dominance of competing storylines. In order to explain how we conduct our analysis of the SD discourse and its competing storylines, we briefly describe our methodology in the next section.

3. Methodology

Discourse analysis is a powerful tool for probing the taken-for-granted background for policymaking. Interrogation of a discourse can show how particular environmental issues become discursively produced as ‘problems’ and how those problems are rendered governable (Feindt and Oels 2005, 163).

As scholars from the disciplines of economics and political sociology based in Germany and Norway, who want to assess the way in which development aid has been discursively shaped, we critically approach the German BMZ reports as authoritative texts written by policy elites through which we can track the evolution of the SD discourse.

We analyzed Development Policy Reports of the BMZ, from the first report from 1973 to the fifteenth report from 2017.⁴ The reports are available to the public either via the database of the German Bundestag, the Documentation and Information System for Parliament Material - *Dokumentations- und Informationssystem für Parlamentsmaterialien* (DIP) – or at the digital archive of the BMZ.⁵ As previously mentioned, these reports are intended for a wide audience of NGOs, political parties, civil society and interested general public about the governments development policy actions and plans. They are entirely, and only, in German. Two of the team are native German speakers who attended carefully to the translation of the particular terms in the reports. Where relevant, we have included in our description below the original German terms.

Our aim was to conduct a precise and detailed analysis to show how these texts reflect particular social-political world views (Gasper and Apthorpe 1996, 5). If, as Neumann writes ‘discourse analysis makes the social world more transparent by demonstrating how its elements interact’ (Neumann 2008, 76) then we intend to make the German development policy arena more transparent by demonstrating the prevalence of different storylines of the SD discourse, in which the various ‘elements’ of the SD discourse are connected and presented in particular ways.

To do this, we employ a method of content analysis similar to one already used to analyze a series of policy documents (Machin 2019). This method adapts Maarten Hajer’s Foucauldian approach to discourse analysis (2002). For Hajer, similarly to Foucault, a discourse is ‘a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts and categorizations that are produced, reproduced and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities’ (1995, 44). Hajer suggests that storylines play a key role in discourses which give create some sort of meaningful order out of the various discursive components (Hajer 1995, 56). Therefore, as he writes, ‘[p]olitical change may therefore well take place through the emergence of new story-lines that re-order understandings’ (1995, 56). In order to find and interrogate the SD

discourse and its components and storylines in the BMZ reports our analysis comprised of four steps:

- (i) The first step involved a close comparative reading of the reports in order to provide a broad initial impression of the appearance of SD in these documents. In this way we determined an initial set of ‘components’ groups for text segments containing the phrase ‘sustainable development’: *environmental*, *economic*, *social* and *political* sustainability that each emphasize different aspects of SD. As explained above, these four ‘components’ correspond to the four different ‘pillars’ of SD that are commonly distinguished in discussions of SD.
- (ii) In a second step, we screened the reports using the software MAXQDA, by conducting an automated search for the term ‘Sustainable Development’ (in German: Nachhaltige/r/n Entwicklung). We noticed that although the word ‘sustainable’ occasionally appeared in reports one to eight, it had an entirely different meaning to the meaning it is given in the SD discourse, and usually referred to ‘constant’ or ‘stable’ development. We therefore excluded all reports released before the ninth (1993) report. We identified and highlighted the segments of text containing SD. These segments could comprise one or more sentences, or even whole paragraphs, but were included because they provided a relevant and clear meaning of SD.
- (iii) The third step involved the marking and coding of the words in these highlighted segments according to their affiliation to a ‘component’ of the SD discourse. For example, nouns such as ‘Umweltzerstörung’ and ‘Zerstörung der Umwelt’ (environmental degradation) or ‘Umweltschutz’ (environmental protection) could be grouped and coded into the ‘environmental’ component, while ‘Unternehmer’ (entrepreneur) or ‘Wirtschaft’ (economy) were grouped into the ‘economic’ component. The same was conducted for the ‘social’ and ‘political’ components. This step borrows from a similar approach of Jacobs and Tschötschel’s ‘topic modeling’, aiming to “reduce the complexity of a large corpus by representing each text as a combination of ‘topics’ [...] and ‘[finding] observed distributions of words across texts [...] to infer non-exclusive clusters typically used in common- each representing a mode of speech about a specific subject (2019, 3–4). A detailed list of identified words is provided in the Appendix A to show how the different words were coded related to what Jacobs and Tschötschel refer to as a topic, and we refer to as ‘component’.
- (iv) The fourth step consisted of determining and coding the distinct *storylines* of the SD discourse to identify the specific meaning of it in this particular context. This allowed us to go beyond a simple frequency check and to grasp and analyze the nuanced shifts within the discourse (see Malcolm 2017 for a similar approach). Storylines are important because they present – or frame – material and social reality in a particular way, and empower certain actors and strategies. Storylines can therefore have a significant political impact. We found several storylines in the various reports and tracked the decline, emergence and growth of these different storylines from 1993 to 2017. As in step iii, we marked in the highlighted segments the different discursive representations about SD that could be reduced and coded into distinct storylines.

4. Discourse analysis of BMZ reports

Our discourse analysis resulted in four striking observations, related to changes in both the frequency and meaning of SD. In this section we describe these observations and make some suggestions about the relevant background context and implications.

4.1. Emergence of the SD discourse

Our first observation was straightforward: the emergence of the term ‘Sustainable Development’ in the 1993 (ninth) BMZ report, after the publication of the Brundtland report. This indicates that the German policymaking on development aid corresponds to the more general emergence of the SD discourse in international development governance under the new theme of ‘One World’ (BMZ 1993, 32). As the 1993 BMZ report states: ‘... [with] the decision to establish the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, foundations have been laid for qualitatively new global cooperation in environment and development policy ... essential qualitative progress in global environment and development policy was achieved’ (BMZ 1993, 39).⁶

4.2. Growth of SD discourse

Second, and relatedly, we observed in general a constant growth in the frequency of the appearance of the SD discourse from 1993 until 2005 (see [Figure 1](#) for a visualization of this trend). However, the anomaly in this trend is the 2008 (thirteenth) BMZ report which shows a significant decrease the appearance of the SD, which clearly disrupts this overall pattern. We might assume that this is at least to some extent connected to the economic impacts of the financial crisis that hit Germany and elsewhere in Europe and beyond in 2008/2009. Historical events such as financial crisis can significantly affect discourses (De Rycker and Don 2013, 3), and in this case the financial crisis certainly had a direct impact on national budgets: the German ODA (Official Development Assistance) share of gross national income, decreased substantially from 0.38% to 0.35% after the crisis (BMZ 2022).

It is certainly feasible that the financial crisis led to a push to find and incentivize other means of financing of aid and placed the focus for example on the private sector instead of the donor states. The 2008 report for instance refers to resource mining in Africa to ‘mobilize domestic resources’ and committing so-called transition countries such as China and other BRICS countries to contribute to global development cooperation (Gabor 2019; Jakupec and Kelly 2015; Mawdsley 2016). Leveraging private investments through securitization (securing private investments through state-issued securities) as means for achieving the SDGs, until 2030 has also been identified as part of the general sustainability strategy of the EU since the financial crisis (Gabor 2019). Could it be that this tendency is both reflected and reaffirmed by discursive shifts that also emphasize the role of the private sector? We explore this possibility in relation to the changes in the storylines of SD in [section 4.4](#).

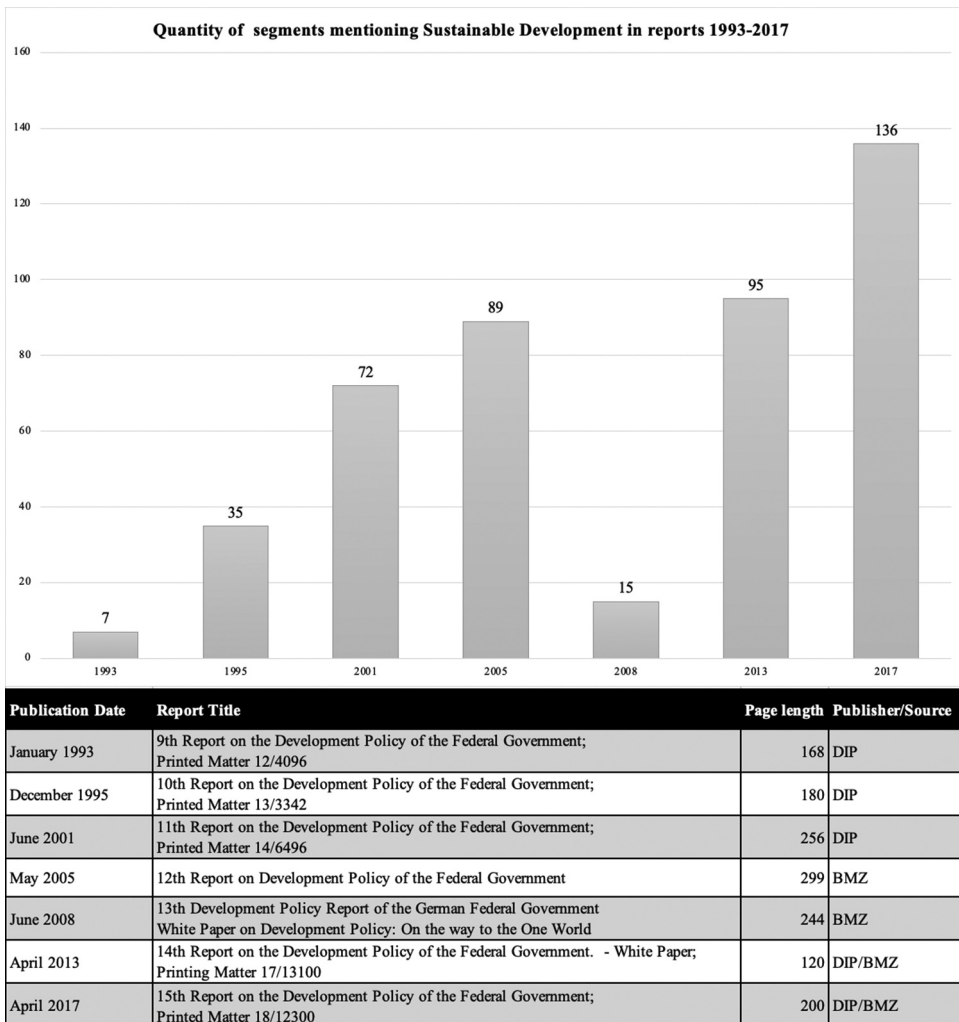


Figure 1. Frequency of SD in the BMZ reports (1993–2017). Source: Analysis of BMZ reports in MAXQDA.

4.3. Change of SD discourse

Third, we observe between 1993 and 2017 a striking change in the relative emphasis of the four different components of SD discourse. These components (as outlined in the previous methodology section) correspond to the ‘four pillars’ of SD – environmental, economic, social and political. To summarize, and as Figure 2 illustrates, there is a significant decline of the ‘environmental’ component and a significant increase in the ‘economic’ component, but there are also some interesting shifts within the components. In the paragraphs below we describe these changes in more detail.

The *environmental* component of the SD discourse dominates the reports from 1993 to 2005. This is probably not very surprising, as during this timeframe important conferences, referred to in the reports, took place with particular focus on a variety of

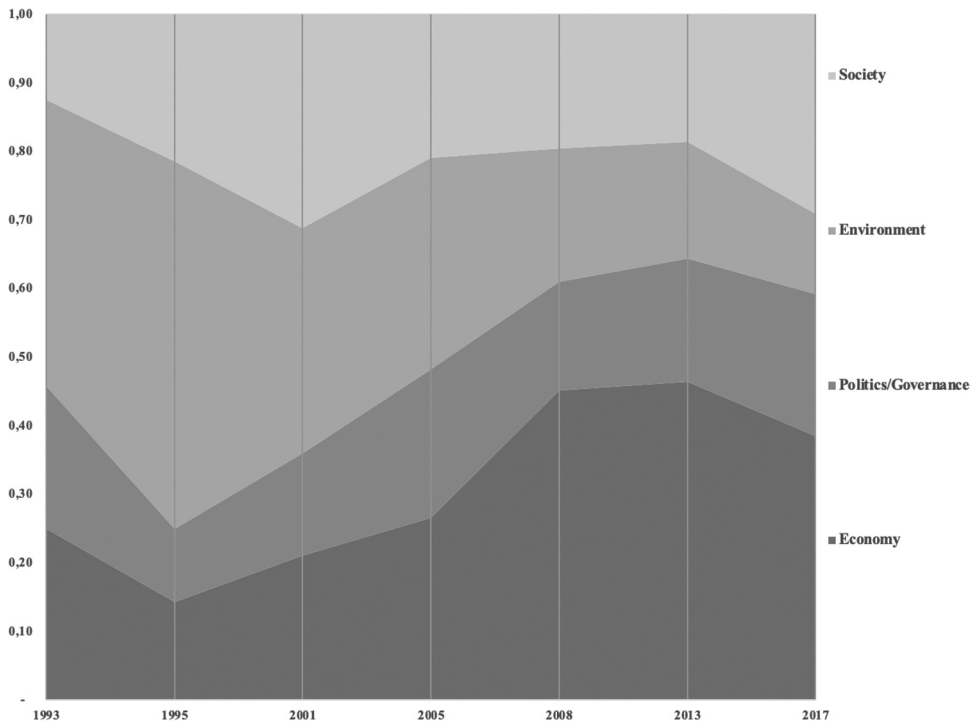


Figure 2. Component groups according to the ‘four pillars’ of SD in BMZ reports 1993–2017 in relative values.⁹ Source: Analysis of BMZ reports in MAXQDA.

environmental issues (Rio Conference 1992, Johannesburg Summit 2002, first COP from 1995 in Bonn onwards). For example, the word ‘forest’ (‘Wald’) in relation to ‘environmental protection’ appears often in SD segments because the Rio Conference issued the ‘Forest Declaration’ as one of its main objectives, as elaborated in the BMZ reports. However, although it does not disappear completely this component significantly declines after the 2005 report. This indicates that environmental sustainability, which had initially been the most important component (or ‘pillar’) of SD, is declining in importance relative to the other components (or ‘pillars’), and in the most recent report is the least dominant component. Environment protection and the safeguarding of natural resources for future generations – which might be generally assumed to be key to SD – therefore appears to be becoming less and less relevant in policy discussions and strategy in relation to SD. In short: concern for the environment is dropping out of the discourse.

In comparison, the *social* component plays initially a minor role in the SD discourse, becoming more important particularly between 2001 and 2005 (and then again in 2017). Three different background factors might be relevant here. First, there were important changes in the German government. In 1998 the conservative (CDU) government lost the federal election to be replaced by a social democratic (SPD) and green coalition. This ‘red-green coalition’ strongly emphasized the abolishment of poverty and social justice alongside environmental protection. It would therefore make sense that the social

component of SD is emphasized in development aid policy under this government. Second, until the publication of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs in 2015, the BMZ explicitly incorporated the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which focused on 'basic needs' as development goals which are aligned with the 'social component' of the SD discourse. The social-democratic ministry strongly supported the OECD-led reorientation of development cooperation toward broader, more tangible and measurable goals that manifested itself in the MDGs in response to the marginalization of development assistance during the 1990s (Lepenies et al. 2014, 204ff). Third, and perhaps most intriguingly, is the appearance and significance of the issue of migration in German politics shortly before both the 1993 and 2017 reports. In 1992 there was a huge influx of asylum seekers from former Yugoslavia and in 2015 Germany admitted thousands of refugees from Syria, which has impacted discourses in Europe (Secen 2022, 14). The putative pressures of such migration, is apparently reflected and further reproduced in the reports, which emphasize the possibility of inhibiting further migration to Europe through the implementation and support of development projects in LICs in the Global South, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa and regions bordering the EU. The issue of migration in German politics is could well be connected to the social component of SD discourse and could account for its stronger appearance at certain points.

The *political* component of the SD discourse, according to our analysis, is the least dominant of the four components. However, it is worth considering here in more detail changes *within* this component. In the early reports of 1993 and 1995 the words categorized as part of the 'political' component relate exclusively to matters of global governance. This trend that is largely continued through the 2001 report and 2005 reports which refer for example to 'good governance', 'democracy' 'peace' and 'reform-orientation' of institutions. After the 2008 report the political component group is still significantly represented in the reports, and 'good governance' continues to appear. But at the same time, there is an increase in the underlining of the importance of governance 'partnerships' between Germany and selected 'reform-orientated' LICs in the Global South (see Ziai 2017 for a discussion of 'good governance' in the SD discourse). We find here a first indication for the increasingly selective aid allocation scheme of the German development policy after 2008, which we discuss under the section on storylines below.

The *economic* component is the one that changes the most dramatically. In the 1993 and 1995 reports, this component plays only a minor role and usually amounts to general discussions about economic key indicators. This begins to change in the 2001 report, when the positive effects of globalization and free trade on development in general and particularly economic development are highlighted. This can be juxtaposed to a BMZ policy 'paradigm shift' in which private sector needs and the opening of markets become the center of attention (Brämer and Ziai 2015). This trend is also in line with three events in international development governance in the same timeframe. First, the UN Global Compact became operational in 2000. In an attempt to deal with the criticism of the (unequal) social, economic and environmental effects between industrialized and developing countries, it links the promise of economic growth through globalization with the promise of a stronger focus on social and environmental concerns. Second, the Millennium Declaration in 2000, as the MDGs quantified basic needs with measurable goals and included the mobilization of additional resources for financing these basic

needs (Ziai 2017). Third, the Monterrey Consensus in 2002 recommended participating actors in the development field (aid donors and recipients) to focus on international trade, to mobilize domestic resources and to incentivize private investment as an additional finance flow. This emphasis is confirmed in the anomaly of the 2008 report, when mobilizing financial means through exports of mineral resources and private sector investment is outlined as main strategy to fill the (previously mentioned) decline in the state financing of development aid at the time. It was also around this period that the WTO called for more liberalization of development that would allow LICs to benefit from globalization. Germany participated in the EU ‘Everything But Arms’ (EBA) initiative which granted LICs tariff-free access to the EU market. Upon further investigation, however, it becomes obvious that even the ‘Doha Development Round’ was largely influenced by economic concerns of HICs and less so by the needs of LICs (Ziai 2007, Chapter 8).

There is a huge rise in the economic component of the SD discourse in 2013 report which focuses mostly upon the ‘private sector’, ‘trade’ and ‘economic growth’ as thriving force of development in LICs in the Global South. This focus is coupled with an emphasis on education to support entrepreneurship innovation and civil society engagement, which correlates with the simultaneous increase in the ‘social’ component, which likewise underlines the importance of education and civil society. In the 2017 report the dominance of the economic component is slightly less, but the striking empowerment of the ‘private sector’ and ‘economic development’ in the SD discourse continues.

4.4. Shifts in storylines of SD discourse

Our final finding, however, is perhaps the most interesting. In step four of our methodology, as we explained above, we shifted to a more qualitative analysis which did not involve simply counting the frequency of words and phrases, but rather identified and engaged with the different narratives or ‘storylines’ that were used to make sense of material and social reality. We notice a significant shift between the dominant storylines of the SD discourse that we analyzed in which certain meanings and actors are empowered. We have visualized our findings in Figure 3, which shows in detail the trend of seven main storylines. Note that there are a variety of SD storylines, particularly after the 2008 report, which indicates that SD is indeed a ‘buzz word’ that presents very different narratives and both reflects and supports distinct – even conflicting – agendas (Doyle 1998, 774).

In the 1993 and 1995 report, as discussed above, the SD discourse in the German development aid context is dominated by the ‘environment’ component. This corresponds to the dominance of the storyline ‘*environmental protection is the fundamental goal of SD*’, shown in statements such as: ‘Nature conservation measures and their integration into sustainable development strategies are increasingly being incorporated into country policies’ (BMZ 1995, 64). Another storyline in these early reports is that ‘*SD is driven at a global level*’, which articulates the leading role of international organizations and global cooperation among states to develop frameworks and practices to promote SD, expressed, for example, in the claim that ‘sustainable development is only possible within a global framework and that the industrialized countries in particular are subject to increased demands’ (BMZ 1995, 114).

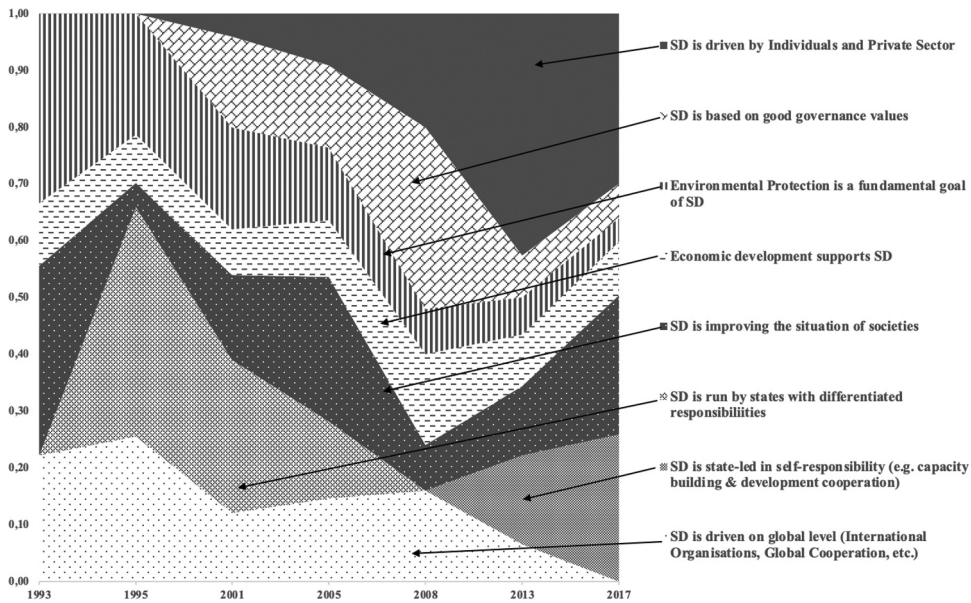


Figure 3. Storyline groups in BMZ reports 1993–2017 in relative values.¹⁰ Source: Analysis of BMZ reports in MAXQDA.

In the 1995 and 2001 reports these two storylines are joined by another: ‘*SD is run by states with differentiated responsibilities*’, that suggests that some states have greater responsibility for actions taken toward SD than others. As this statement indicates: ‘Highly industrialized countries such as Germany bear a dual responsibility for global environmental problems: on the one hand, they are disproportionately large polluters; on the other hand, their previously unsustainable economic practices and lifestyles have become a universal development model’ (BMZ 1995, 25). On the other hand, LICs (developing countries) should be supported in implementing SD. There is no necessary contradiction with the storylines that emphasizes global cooperation, for the differentiated responsibilities arise through such cooperation in accordance with the UN as an institution of global governance or the WTO as a major global economic organization. The role of official development assistance (aid) remains mostly unquestioned as ‘main actor’ in the field.

In the 2001 report, these storylines are complemented by two others: first, the storyline that ‘*SD is improving the situation of societies*’ which connects ‘alleviating poverty’ and ‘fostering social justice’ to sustainability, in line with the emphasis on the social component of SD, illustrated clearly in statements such as: ‘In development policy, poverty reduction is the overarching task to which measures from all dimensions of sustainable development contribute’ (BMZ 2001, 95). Second, the storyline ‘*SD is based on good governance values*’ that emphasizes the importance of strong institutions, capacity-building and the self-responsibility of partner countries in LICs to take matters in their own hands. Here, HICs (such as Germany) are expected to support those countries if they exhibit the will to adapt according to good governance indicators and values. This

storyline suggests that poverty and conflict are a source of instability: ‘good governance, respect for human rights, democratic structures and peaceful conflict resolution are indispensable prerequisites for poverty reduction and ecologically sustainable development . . .’ (BMZ 2001, 15).

In the 2001 and 2005 reports the storylines ‘*SD is driven by the private sector and individuals*’ and ‘*economic development supports SD*’ begin to appear, although they are not yet the dominant storylines. In 2008, as we have already shown there is a significant decline in the SD discourse in general and therefore none of the storylines are particularly prominent. However, after 2008 these two storylines completely take over.

In the 2013 and 2017 reports, the previously important storylines that allocate a mutually agreed responsibility to states to follow SD and assert the role of international cooperation and international governance at the global completely vanish. They are replaced by the storylines that states are responsible for their own actions to achieve SD and that the private sector (with a particular emphasis on ‘individuals’) as drivers of SD should be incentivized to participate in the development field: ‘Without economic development, there can be no sustainable development (. . .) Private enterprises create employment and income, also for poorer population groups, and generate tax revenues that form the basis for a public sector capable of action’ (BMZ 2013, 48). It is increasingly emphasized in these two latest reports that development governance should jump on the possibilities of ‘globalisation’ and that development governance should accommodate developing countries with policies to boost private sector-led growth in their own responsibility. The role of development cooperation is reduced to support LICs in the Global South to reach the state of self-responsibility through capacity-building and fostering ties of such reform-orientated LICs with positive prospect of private sector led growth.

It is also interesting to consider that after 2001 the storyline ‘*SD is improving the situation of societies*’ appears fairly steadily. This corresponds to our observation, described above, of the role of the ‘social’ component of SD. This storyline highlights the importance of SD for societies and local communities, making human rights the center of attention and arguing for a ‘One-World’ narrative. But this seems to fit the storyline shift that instead of strengthening the capacities of states and assigning them the leading role to achieve SD, responsibility slies at the local and individual level, and with the private sector in particular.

In short, our findings suggest that although the Agenda 2030 framework and the 17 SDGs are a result of global development governance under participation of all UN member states, the power of transformation is no longer discursively connected to international cooperation but is instead assigned to individual states to incentivize the private sector to take the lead. SD is regarded as an *opportunity* for both the private sector – in both Germany and the Global South. For instance, Sub-Saharan Africa is framed as ‘the continent of growth and opportunities’ (BMZ 2013, 14).

We can connect these results to other research that highlights the growing focus on the mobilization of domestic resources in LICs to generate financial means for SD (for example through the export of mineral resources) and on ensuring suitable business conditions for private investment in LICs through ‘Good Governance’ indicators (Jakupec and Kelly 2015; Mawdsley 2016). Daniela Gabor, for example, emphasizes the consolidation of ‘the new consensus in international development circles’ that ‘focuses on

private finance as the solution to pressing sustainability issues’ (Gabor 2019, 1). As she points out, LICs face several problems with this, as they are expected implement policies that are unlikely to help them become autonomous or ‘greener’ (Gabor 2019, 43). The implication is that SD will not work everywhere, because it depends on certain conditions that are absent in various countries. Indeed, as Li *et al.* argue, green official development aid (ODA) only seems to be correlated with reduction in carbon emissions in countries which ‘enjoy higher economic freedom as well as more freedom from corruption’ (2020); it then doesn’t make sense to invest in countries with less economic freedom and more corruption.

This raises the concern that in complete contradiction to the pledge that SD would ‘leave no one behind’, the discourse of SD actually justifies the heavily uneven allocation of development aid. It seems likely that those countries – mainly LICs in the global south who don’t meet the demands of reform-orientation and provide suitable and stable conditions of investment for the private sector – will simply be ignored and ‘left behind’.

5. Conclusion

To summarize, in our analysis of the German development aid reports, we have found that the SD discourse that emerged in 1993, after the 1992 Rio Summit, has grown in dominance until 2017. This general trend, however, is disrupted in 2008, when – presumably in response the financial crisis at the time – SD discourse sharply declined. After this ‘shock’, the initial emphasis on the environment and alleviation of poverty in the SD is increasingly replaced by a dominance of the ‘economic’ component or pillar. In line with this we have identified a shift in the storylines of the SD discourse so that SD is no longer constructed as a global responsibility to protect the environment and alleviate poverty, but more as a national self-responsibility that is led by the private sector.

Agenda 2030 is supposed to have involved a ‘transformative shift’ in which development and sustainability become entwined. Adopted by The General Assembly of the United Nations in 2015, the 2030 Agenda is a plan for ‘sustainable development’ as a ‘collective journey’ to ‘heal and secure our planet’ on which ‘no one will be left behind’ (UN 2015, 1). The question is whether that is an accurate description of the outcomes of SD, or whether SD actually hides the fact that some are indeed being ‘left behind’. Our research indicates that SD is today understood as an opportunity for private investment rather than a right or responsibility of states and global governance to focus on the well-being of all. The implication is that SD is driven by the private sector and not solely through development aid allocated by HICs such as Germany.

It is to be seen if this trend will continue. The new ‘BMZ 2030 reform strategy’ strategy plans to decrease the number of bilateral partner countries in Africa to 26 with particular focus on Morocco, South Africa, Senegal, Ethiopia, Ghana, Cote d’Ivoire and Tunisia.⁷ These countries have been identified as ‘reform-minded partners’ who are ‘eligible for increased support and reform financing’ (BMZ 2020). Similarly, the German G20 Compact with Africa, presented at the G20 summit in Hamburg in 2017 to outline the German development strategy under its G-20 presidency,⁸ aims to establish a framework for boosting private investment and increasing the provision of infrastructure. This is supposed to be achieved by incentivizing private investment by improving macroeconomic performance indicators, adjusting instruments of economic policies and financial determining factors,

while also a particular business section in the agenda aims to lay out exactly how to make Africa more attractive for private investors by reducing costs and risk (Kappel et al. 2017).

Contrary to the promise of Agenda 2030 to 'leave no-one behind', those countries that are seen as lacking the right conditions to attract for private investment might well be left both unsupported and invisible in development politics. Our research suggests that this possibility is rendered legitimate by the discourse of SD in context of development aid in Germany.

Notes

1. US\$27.5 billion in constant 2019 prices.
2. Take for instance the development agenda from the African Development Bank 'From Billions to Trillions – MDB Contributions to Financing for Development' to overcome underdevelopment (African Development Bank et al. 2015; Mawdsley 2018)
3. In his critique of development, Escobar points out that 'thousands of domestic jobs in the First World depend on development aid' and notices its role in creating business opportunities (1995: 166).
4. The 16th Report was published by the BMZ in September 2021 and was too late to be considered when this paper was written by the authors.
5. The reports are saved in different databases.
6. Please note that the quotes taken from the reports are our English translations of the original German text.
7. For comparison, the number of bilateral partners in Africa accounted in 2006 for 32 bilateral partner countries.
8. The complete agenda of the Compact with Africa can be accessed under the following URL: <https://www.compactwithafrica.org/content/dam/Compact%20with%20Africa/2017-03-30-g20-compact-with-africa-report.pdf>
9. A detailed overview of the component data in absolute numbers is provided in Appendix B.
10. A detailed overview of the storylines group data in absolute numbers is provided in the Appendix B.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributors

Fabio Schojan is PhD candidate at the University of Agder in Kristiansand, Norway and Junior Researcher at the Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy, Germany. His research interests cover international relations and development discourses in the relationship between the Global North and South focusing on critical analysis of energy partnerships and geopolitical power relationships in energy transitions.

Amanda Machin is Professor of Political Sociology at the University of Agder in Kristiansand, Norway. She is interested in the political dynamics, theories, identifications, discourses, imaginaries, protests, performances, policies and bodies of ecological and radical democratic transformation. Together with Marcel Wissenburg she is currently editing the collection Environmental Political Theory in the Anthropocene.

Magdalene Silberberger is Professor of Development Economics at the Faculty of Economics and Society at Witten/Herdecke University, Germany. Her research focuses on international economic relations between the Global North and the Global South (particularly Africa), including development assistance and climate finance. She is also interested in questions of sustainable development, agriculture and the political economy of African countries.

ORCID

Fabio Schojan  <http://orcid.org/0009-0009-7005-5991>

Amanda Machin  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3426-7630>

Magdalene Silberberger  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4574-2505>

References

- African Development Bank. 2015. "From Billions to Trillions - MDB Contributions to Financing for Development." 9 October, 2023. https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Generic-Documents/From_billions_to_trillions_-_MDB_Contributions_to_Financing_for_Development.pdf.
- Akıncı, Z. S., A. Bilgen, A. Casellas, and J. Jongerden. 2020. "Development Through Design: Knowledge, Power, and Absences in the Making of Southeastern Turkey." *Geoforum* 114:181–188. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2020.06.011>.
- Baker, S. 2006. *Sustainable Development*. London and NY: Routledge.
- Baker, S. 2007. "Sustainable Development as Symbolic Commitment: Declaratory Politics and the Seductive Appeal of Ecological Modernisation in the European Union." *Environmental Politics* 16 (2): 297–317. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644010701211874>.
- BMZ, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. 1993. *Neunter Bericht Zur Entwicklungspolitik Der Bundesregierung*.
- BMZ, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. 1995. *Zehnter Bericht Zur Entwicklungspolitik Der Bundesregierung*.
- BMZ, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. 2001. *Elfter Bericht Zur Entwicklungspolitik Der Bundesregierung*.
- BMZ, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. 2013. *Vierzehnter Bericht Zur Entwicklungspolitik Der Bundesregierung*.
- BMZ, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. 2018. "Development Policy 2030." 9 October, 2023. <https://www.bmz.de/resource/blob/23770/71cf4bb9fee375d369a42c1abf29b64d/strategiepapier452-development-policy-2030-data.pdf>.
- BMZ, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. 2020. "BMZ 2030 Reform Strategy." 9 October, 2023. <https://www.bmz.de/resource/blob/29026/materialie520-reform-strategy.pdf>.
- BMZ, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. 2022. "Deutsche ODA Leistungen." February 18, 2022. <https://www.bmz.de/de/ministerium/zahlen-fakten/oda-zahlen/deutsche-oda-leistungen-19220>.
- Brämer, J., and A. Ziai. 2015. "Die deutsche Entwicklungspolitik unter Niebel: Eine handlungslogische Analyse des FDP-geführten BMZ." *PERIPHERIE – Politik • Ökonomie • Kultur* 35 (140): 400–418. <https://doi.org/10.3224/peripherie.v35i140.22996>.
- Brundtland Commission. 1987. *Our Common Future*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cummings, S., B. Regeer, L. de Haan, M. Zweckhorst, and J. Bunders. 2018. "Critical Discourse Analysis of Perspectives on Knowledge and the Knowledge Society within the Sustainable Development Goals." *Development Policy Review* 36 (6): 727–742. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.12296>.

- Death, C. 2010. *Governing Sustainable Development: Partnerships, Protests and Power at the World Summit*. London and New York: Routledge.
- De Rycker, A., and Z. M. Don. 2013. "Discourse in Crisis, Crisis in Discourse." In *Discourse and Crisis: Critical Perspectives*, edited by A. Rycker, Don, and Mohd Don, Z., 3–65. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company. <https://doi.org/10.1075/dapsac.52.01.der>.
- Doyle, T. 1998. "Sustainable Development and Agenda 21: The Secular Bible of Global Free Markets and Pluralist Democracy." *Third World Quarterly* 19 (4): 771–786. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436599814235>.
- Escobar, A. 1995. *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Feindt, P. H., and A. Oels. 2005. "Does Discourse Matter? Discourse Analysis in Environmental Policy Making." *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning* 7 (3): 161–173. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15239080500339638>.
- Foucault, M. 1972. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, M. 1978. *The Will to Knowledge*. London: Penguin.
- Foucault, M. 1981. "The Order of Discourse." In *Untying the Text*, edited by Robert Young, 51–78. Boston, Mass. and London: Routledge.
- Fukuda-Parr, S., and B. Muchhala. 2020. "The Southern Origins of Sustainable Development Goals: Ideas, Actors, Aspirations." *World Development* 126:104706. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2019.104706>.
- Gabor, D. 2019. "Securitization for Sustainability - Does It Help to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals?" Washington DC: Heinrich Böll Stiftung North America. (February 10, 2020. <https://us.boell.org/en/2019/10/11/securitization-sustainability>.
- Gasper, D., and R. Apthorpe. 1996. "Discourse Analysis and Policy Discourse." *International Journal of Offshore and Polar Engineering* 8 (1): 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09578819608426650>.
- Hajer, M. A. 1995. *The Politics of Environmental Discourse: Ecological Modernization and the Policy Process*. Oxford, New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press.
- Hajer, M. A. 2005. "Coalitions, Practices, and Meaning in Environmental Politics: From Acid Rain to BSE." In *Discourse Theory in European politics: Identity, Policy and Governance*, edited by David Howard and Jakob Torfing, 297–315. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230523364_13.
- Harlow, J., A. Golub, and B. Allenby. 2013. "A Review of Utopian Themes in Sustainable Development Discourse." *Sustainable Development* 21 (4): 270–280. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.522>.
- Howarth, D., J. Glynos, and S. Griggs. 2016. "Discourse, Explanation and Critique." *Critical Policy Studies* 10 (1): 99–104. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19460171.2015.1131618>.
- Jacobs, T., and R. Tschötschel. 2019. "Topic Models Meet Discourse Analysis: A Quantitative Tool for a Qualitative Approach." *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 22 (5): 469–485. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2019.1576317>.
- Jakobeit, C., F. Müller, E. Sondermann, I. Wehr, and A. Ziai. 2014. "Entwicklungstheorien Weltgesellschaftliche Transformationen, entwicklungspolitische Herausforderungen, theoretische Innovationen." In *Entwicklungstheorien*, edited by Franziska Müller, Sondermann Elena, Wehr Ingrid, Jakobeit Cord, and Ziai Aram, 5–40 . Baden-Baden: Sonderheft PVS. https://doi.org/10.5771/9783845250298_10.
- Jakupec, V., and M. Kelly. 2015. "Financialisation of Official Development Assistance." *International Journal of Economics, Commerce and Management* III (2): 1–18. <http://hdl.handle.net/10536/DRO/DU:30069698>.
- Kappel, R., H. Reisen, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, and R. Afrika 2017. *The G20 'Compact with Africa': Unsuitable for African Low-Income Countries*.
- Lepenies, P. H. 2014. "Die Politik der messbaren Ziele. Die Millennium Development Goals aus gouvernementalitätstheoretischer Sicht. Lehren aus der Fixierung globaler Entwicklungsindikatoren." In *Entwicklungstheorien*, edited by Franziska Müller, Sondermann

- Elena, Wehr Ingrid, Jakobeit Cord, and Ziai Aram. 200–224. Baden-Baden: Nomos. Sonderheft PVS. https://doi.org/10.5771/9783845250298_205.
- Machin, A. 2019. “Changing the Story? The Discourse of Ecological Modernisation in the European Union.” *Environmental Politics* 25 (2): 208–227. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2019.1549780>.
- Malcolm, J. A. 2017. “Sustainability as Maritime Security: A Small Island Developing State Perspective?” *Global Policy* 8 (2): 237–245. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.12446>.
- Mawdsley, E. 2016. “Development Geography II: Financialization.” *Progress in Human Geography* 42 (2): 264–274. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132516678747>.
- Mawdsley, E. 2018. “‘From Billions to trillions’: Financing the SDGs in a World ‘Beyond aid.’” *Dialogues in Human Geography* 8 (2): 191–195. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2043820618780789>.
- Mensah, J., and S. Ricart Casadevall. 2019. “Sustainable Development: Meaning, History, Principles, Pillars, and Implications for Human Action: Literature Review.” *Cogent Social Sciences* 5 (1): 1653531. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2019.1653531>.
- Mog, J. M. 2004. “Struggling with Sustainability—A Comparative Framework for Evaluating Sustainable Development Programs.” *World Development* 32 (12): 2139–2160. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2004.07.002>.
- Moyer, J. D., and S. Hedden. 2020. “Are We on the Right Path to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals?” *World Development* 127:104749. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2019.104749>.
- Naylor, T. 2011. “Deconstructing Development: The Use of Power and Pity in the International Development Discourse.” *International Studies Quarterly* 55 (1): 177–197. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2478.2010.00640.x>.
- Neumann, I. B. 2008. “Discourse Analysis.” In *Qualitative Methods in International Relations: A Pluralist Guide*, edited by Audie Klotz and Deepa Prakash, 61–77. Hampshire and NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- OECD. 2021. “OECD Development Co-Operation Peer Reviews: Germany 2021.” OECD. May 11, 2022. https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/oecd-development-co-operation-peer-reviews-germany-2021_bb32a97d-en.
- Paul, K. T. 2009. “Discourse Analysis: An Exploration of Methodological Issues and a Call for Methodological Courage in the Field of Policy Analysis.” *Critical Policy Studies* 3 (2): 240–253. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19460170903385692>.
- Redclift, M. 1992. “The Meaning of Sustainable Development.” *Geoforum* 23 (3): 395–403. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0016-7185\(92\)90050-E](https://doi.org/10.1016/0016-7185(92)90050-E).
- Redclift, M. 2005. “Sustainable Development (1987–2005): An Oxymoron Comes of Age.” *Sustainable Development* 13 (4): 212–227. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.281>.
- Sachs, J. D. 2015. *The Age of Sustainable Development*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Sachs, W., edited by. 2010. *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power*. 2 nd ed. London: Zed Books.
- Sachs, W. 2017. “The Sustainable Development Goals and “Laudato Si”: Varieties of Post-Development?” *Third World Quarterly* 38 (12): 2573–2587. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2017.1350822>.
- SDGC/A. 2019. “Africa 2030 - Sustainable Development Goals Three Year Reality Check.” 9 October, 2023. <https://sdgcafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/AFRICA-2030-SDGS-THREE-YEAR-REALITY-CHECK-REPORT.pdf>.
- Scen, S. 2022. “Electoral Competition Dynamics and Syrian Refugee Discourses and Policies in Germany and France.” *European Politics and Society* 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2022.2142399>.
- Smith, A., and F. Kern. 2009. “The Transitions Storyline in Dutch Environmental Policy.” *Environmental Politics* 18 (1): 78–98. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644010802624835>.
- Smith Ochoa, C. 2020. “Trivializing Inequality by Narrating Facts: A Discourse Analysis of Contending Storylines in Germany.” *Critical Policy Studies* 14 (3): 319–338. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19460171.2019.1623056>.

- Springett, D. 2013. "Editorial: Critical Perspectives on Sustainable Development." *Sustainable Development* 21 (2): 73–82. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.1556>.
- UNESCO. 2015. "Sustainable Development". UNESCO Website." April 6, 2022. <https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-sustainable-development/what-is-esd/sd>.
- UN General Assembly. 2015. "Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015: 70/1." Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. April 6, 2022. https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_70_1_E.pdf.
- United Nations. 2014 July. *Prototype Global Sustainable Development Report*. New York: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division for Sustainable Development. 9 October, 2023. <https://sdgs.un.org/gsdrgsd2014>.
- van Ostaïjen, M. 2017. "Between Migration and Mobility Discourses: The Performative Potential within 'Intra-European movement'." *Critical Policy Studies* 11 (2): 166–190. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19460171.2015.1102751>.
- Weber, H. 2017. "Politics of "Leaving No One Behind": Contesting the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals Agenda." *Globalizations* 14 (3): 399–414. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2016.1275404>.
- Williams, M. 1998. "Aid, Sustainable Development and the Environmental Crisis." *International Journal of Peace Studies* 3 (2): 19–33.
- Ziai, A. 2007. *Globale Strukturpolitik? Die Nord-Süd Politik der BRD und das Dispositiv der Entwicklung*. Münster: Verlag Westfaelisches Dampfboot.
- Ziai, A. 2011. "The Millennium Development Goals: Back to the Future?" *Third World Quarterly* 32 (1): 27–43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2011.543811>.
- Ziai, A. 2017. *Development Discourse and Global History: From Colonialism to the Sustainable Development Goals*. Abington: Routledge.

Appendix A: Word List for MAXQDA

Ecology Components	Found German Term
Catastrophes	Katastrophe
Climate	Klima
Climate Change	Klimawandel
Ecology	Ökologie, ökologisch
Energy	Energie
Environment	Umwelt
Environmental Degradation	Umweltzerstörung
Environmental Goods	
Environmental Protection/Preservation	Umweltschutz, Umwelterhaltung, Umweltschonung
Forest	Wald
Global Warming	globale Erwärmung
Greenhouse Gas	Treibhausgas
Indigenous people	Ureinwohner, Indigene Völker
Islands	Inseln
Natural Resources	natürliche Ressourcen
Water	Wasser

Governance/Politics Components	Found German Terms Governance/Politics
Authoritarianism	Autoritär-, diktator-
causes of conflict	Konfliktursachen, Konfliktgründe
causes of migration	Migrationsursache, Migrationsgründe, Fluchtursachen,
Capacity Building	Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe, Capacity Building, Kapazitätsbildung, strengthening capacities, Bildung von Kapazitäten, Kapazitätsaufbau, Stärkung von Kapazitäten
Corruption	Korruption, Misswirtschaft
Democracy	Demokratie, demokratisch, demokratische, Demokratisierung, Demokratieförderung, Förderung von Demokratie
Fragility & Violence	Fragilität, Gewalt, fragile Staaten,
Global Governance	Names of International Organizations & Institutions or Conferences
Good Governance	Gute Regierungsführung, Gutes Regieren, Good Governance
Governance	Regierungsführung
Partnership	Partnerschaften
Peace	Frieden
reducing causes of conflict	Konfliktursachen, Konfliktprävention, Konfliktlösung, Gewaltprävention, Konfliktbeilegung, konfliktbearbeitung, konflikttransformativ, Krisenprävention, Krisenbewältigung,
Reducing conflict	
Reform Orientation	reformorientiert, reformen
Rule of Law	
Security	Sicherheit
Stability	Stabilität
Standards	Standards, Standardisierung
Structural Adjustment	strukturelle Anpassungen

Economy Components	Found German Terms Economy
Agricultural Development	agrikulturelle Entwicklung
creative economy	Kreativwirtschaft
Digitalisation	Digitalisierung
Exports	Exporte
Fair Trade	Fairer Handel
economic conditions	wirtschaftliche Umstände, Zustände
Economic Development	Wirtschaftliche Entwicklung
Economic Growth	wirtschaftswachstum wirtschaftliches Wachstum
Economic Independence	wirtschaftliche Unabhängigkeit
Economic Ressources	Ressourcen, wirtschaftliche Ressourcen
Economy	Wirtschaft
Finance	Finanzen, Finanzsektor
Financial & Economic Stability	Finanzstabilität, finanzielle Stabilität, wirtschaftsstabilität, wirtschaftliche Stabilität
Globalisation	Globalisierung, globalisiert, wirtschaftliche Integration
Industrialisation	Industrialisierung
Infrastructure	Infrastruktur
Innovation	Innovation
Jobs	Arbeit, Jobs, Beschäftigung, Arbeitslosigkeit
Liberalisation	Liberalisierung, liberalisierte, liberalisieren,
Markets	Märkte, Markt
mobility	Mobilität, Transport
Private Sector	Privater Sektor, Privatwirtschaft, privatwirtschaftliche
Public Goods	Öffentliche Güter
Remittances	Auslandsüberweisungen, Rücküberweisungen
Ressources	Ressourcen, wirtschaftliche Ressourcen
Starting business	Gründen, Gründer, Start-up,
supply chains	Lieferkette, Lieferketten
Taxes	Steuern, Abgaben
Technology	Technologie, technologisch
Tourism	Tourismus
Trade	Handel
welfare	Wohlstand

Society Components	Found German Terms Society
Birth-/Death Rate	Geburtsrate, Sterberate, Geburten, Müttersterblichkeit
Cities & Municipalities	Städte, Gemeinden, Kommunen, Siedlungen, Stadtentwicklung, städtisch, kommunale Entwicklung, Metropolregion, kommunal,
Civil Society	Zivilgesellschaft, zivilgesellschaftliche Vereinigungen, Bürger
Conflict prevention	Konfliktprävention, Prävention von Konflikten
Culture	kulturelle, kulturell, Kultur, Kulturprojekte, Kulturzentren
discrimination	Diskriminierung, Benachteiligung, Ausgrenzung, strukturelle Ausgrenzung/Benachteiligung
Education	Ausbildung, Fortbildung, Grundschulbildung, Bildung, Bildungsarbeit, berufliche Bildung
Family Planning	Familienplanung
Fighting Diseases	HIV/AIDS, Krankheit, Malaria, Epidemien
Food & Nutrition	Ernährung, Mangelernährung, Unterernährung, Essen, Ernährungssicherung, Hunger, Nahrungsmittel
growth of population	Bevölkerungswachstum
Health Care	Gesundheit, Gesundheitsversorgung, gesundheitliche Grundversorgung, Gesundheitssektor, Gesundheitssystem
Human Rights	Menschenrechte, Menschenrecht, Menschenrechts
Migration/Refugees	Flüchtlinge, Rückkehrer, Rückgekehrte, Migration, Migrationshilfe, Flüchtlinghilfe, Migrationsdruck, Flucht, Migranten
Population Growth	Bevölkerungswachstum, Wachstum der Bevölkerung, wachsende Bevölkerung, Bevölkerungsdruck, Wachstum der Bevölkerungsdichte,
Poverty	Armut, Armutsbekämpfung, Verminderung von Armut, Armutsverminderung, Bekämpfung von Armut, Armutsminderung, Armen, Armutsabbau, Armutsreduzierung, Armutsorientierung, einkommenschwach,
religion	Religion, Religionen, religiöse, Kirchen, Religionsgemeinschaften, Religionsfreiheit
Rural Development	ländliche Entwicklung, ländlicher Raum, Regionalentwicklung, regionale Integration
Science & Knowledge	Kompetenzen, Wissenschaft, Wissensbasis, Wissensgefälle, Wissen, Weltwissen, Forschungseinrichtung, wissenschaftlich, Wissenstransfer, Wissenszentrum, Knowledge, Erforschung, Wissensressourcen
Social Infrastructure	soziale Infrastruktur, soziale Grunddienste
Social Justice & Equality	Soziale Gerechtigkeit, Gleichstellung, Gleichberechtigung, sozialgerecht, Ungleichheit, gleichberechtigt
transformation	Transformation, Wandel, transformativ, Transformationsprozess,
Urbanisation	Urbanisierung, Stadtwachstum, Städtewachstum, Urbaner Raum, Wachstum von Städten, Wachstum von urbanen Räumen
vulnerability	Vulnerabilität, vulnerable, vulnerabel
Women & Gender	Gender, Frauen, Mädchen, Gleichberechtigung, Gleichstellung, Frauenförderung, Frauenrechte, Förderung von Frauen, Förderung von Mädchen,
Youth	Kinder, Jugendliche

Appendix B

Components of SD in BMZ reports 1993–2017 (absolute numbers)

Year/Components	Economy	Politics Governance	Environment	Society
1993	6	5	10	3
1995	20	15	75	30
2001	61	43	95	90
2005	80	65	93	63
2008	37	13	16	16
2013	237	92	87	95
2017	147	79	45	111

Components of SD in BMZ reports 1993–2017 (relative numbers)

Year/Components	Economy	Politics Governance	Environment	Society
1993	0,25	0,21	0,42	0,13
1995	0,14	0,11	0,54	0,21
2001	0,21	0,15	0,33	0,31
2005	0,27	0,22	0,31	0,21
2008	0,45	0,16	0,20	0,20
2013	0,46	0,18	0,17	0,19
2017	0,38	0,21	0,12	0,29

Storyline frequency in BMZ reports 1993–2017 (absolute numbers)

Storylines	1993	1995	2001	2005	2008	2013	2017
SD is driven on global level (International Organisations, Global Cooperation, etc.)	2	12	12	16	4	8	0
SD is state-led in self-responsibility (e.g. capacity building & development cooperation)	0	0	0	0	0	19	38
SD is run by states with differentiated responsibilities	0	19	27	15	0	0	0
SD is improving the situation of societies	3	2	15	28	2	15	36
Economic development supports SD	1	4	8	11	4	11	14
Environmental Protection is a fundamental goal of SD	3	10	18	14	2	8	6
SD is based on good governance values	0	0	16	16	8	9	9
SD is driven by Individuals and Private Sector	0	0	4	10	5	52	44
Total	9	47	100	110	25	122	147

Storyline frequency in BMZ reports 1993–2017 (relative numbers)

Storylines	1993	1995	2001	2005	2008	2013	2017
SD is driven on global level (International Organisations, Global Cooperation, etc.)	0,22	0,26	0,12	0,15	0,16	0,07	0,00
SD is state-led in self-responsibility (e.g. capacity building & development cooperation)	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,16	0,26
SD is run by states with differentiated responsibilities	0,00	0,40	0,27	0,14	0,00	0,00	0,00
SD is improving the situation of societies	0,33	0,04	0,15	0,25	0,08	0,12	0,24
Economic development supports SD	0,11	0,09	0,08	0,10	0,16	0,09	0,10
Environmental Protection is a fundamental goal of SD	0,33	0,21	0,18	0,13	0,08	0,07	0,04
SD is based on good governance values	0,00	0,00	0,16	0,15	0,32	0,07	0,06
SD is driven by Individuals and Private Sector	0,00	0,00	0,04	0,09	0,20	0,43	0,30