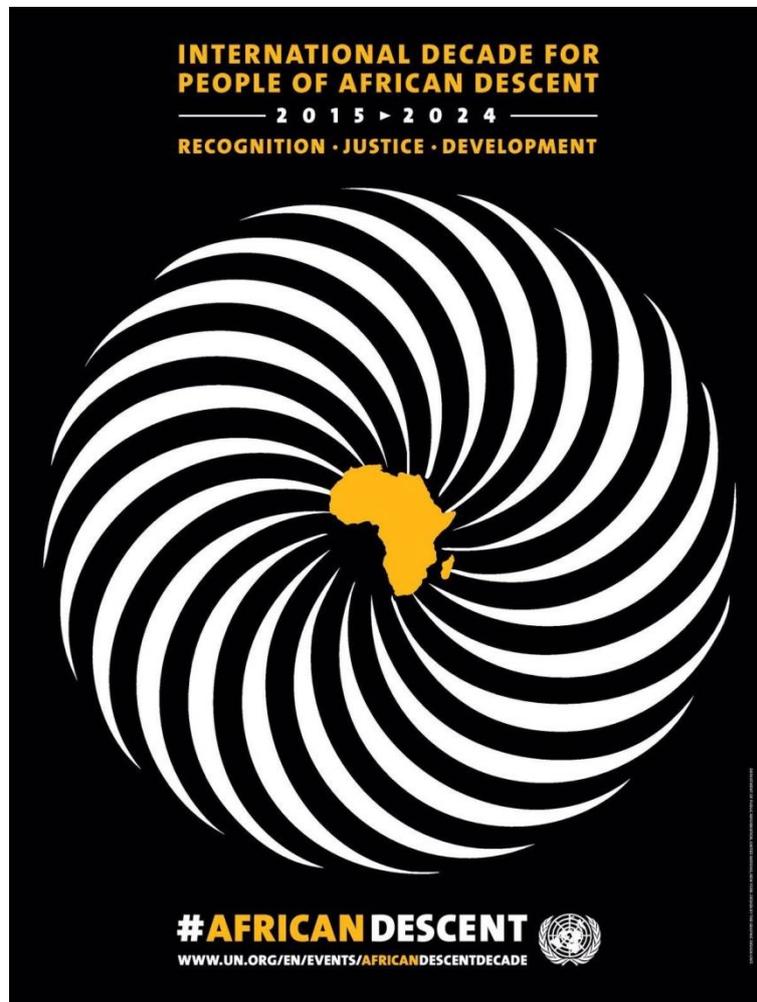


UN-Decade for People of African Descent: Recognition – Justice – Development



(Official Poster)

One more decade?

The three key words mentioned in the title are the leading words of a very welcomed, but (still) too little attended decade running from 2015 to 2024. In Germany, the UN-Decade was officially opened in June 2016 at the Federal Ministry of Family, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth. Critics might rashly say: For all more or less marginalized groups and for all issues that enjoy too little attention in the general discourse yet - as a kind of „fig leaf“ - a day, a year or even a whole decade is held. To begin enumerating, would hardly be effective. Ultimately, these days, years or decades anyway are unable to achieve the formulated objectives - so the pessimist's point of view. Those who want to be angry even say that it is more or less clear from the outset that these targets are not to be reached - whether on the part of the powerful "patrons", who are not the addressee of the measure, or on the part of the addressees of the measure itself. It is sufficient that they as ambassadors or otherwise

involved persons of a certain day, year or a decade get prominent and partially paid gigs. Whether the cause is actually advanced in itself, this case can be secondary.

Founded hope

By the way: This allegation is also repeatedly expressed when it comes to development cooperation (DC) or people working in this area – on all sides – the donor and recipient side. The allegation: The donor side has been always in the black yet. On the recipient side, the business is often understood as a personal enrichment source.

What is left behind is the thing to which it should actually go. To avoid wrong impressions: All positive progress, even a small project for a small group, at the end, of course, is better than nothing. But the fact that after over half a century of development cooperation global imbalances have increased, no one can deny. This is possible because half a century of well-intentioned but often halfheartedly powered DC is not able to undo the consequences of half a millennium courageous commitment to expand one's own plenitude of power to the disadvantage of the so-called Global South. But: Only the positive intention already causes well-founded hope.

Target group of the UN-Decade

Back to the UN-Decade for People of African Descent. Who belongs to this group? First: As in the Decade's label included not people in Africa. Therefore, the launch of the Decade took place in the Federal Ministry of Family, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth – and not in the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. The identification with the target group of the Decade is to be decided individually, so the intention. It is not to be decided like e.g. in the *one drop rule*, which is significantly relevant in the ethnic categorization in the passports of US citizens still. Shortly said: The *one drop rule* determined in the days of slavery, whether one was potentially master or slave due demonstrable African roots. According to the rule, one drop of "African blood" determined someone's fate. At least in theory it was of no relevance if one possessed one half, one quarter or one eighth of African roots. Today, the ethnic categorization is „only“ applied in the context of US-citizenship. But the categorization still depends on the type of "blood" and thus determines to which category one belongs to. All the other US-citizens are classified ethnically as well, just for completeness.

The UN-Decade leaves it to the people themselves to identify with certain groups or not. Personally, I think this approach is the right one. On the one hand it is nice, that a worldwide diaspora of African origin through different epochs of world history evolved, which often feels connected to the African continent in a special way. However - this is essential to note: Not all people with African roots define themselves as such. This is also their good and just right. Neither white US-Americans nor Australians define themselves necessarily as people of European descent. The more visible the African roots, the more probable one risks being victim of historically grown racism or structural discrimination - for example in the Western world or parts of Asia. This, however, does not mean that one identifies himself / herself as someone with African roots automatically.

Identification and Commitment

To put it a bit casually: The degree of pigmentation does not determine the degree of identification with one's African roots. E.g., this fact can lead to the circumstance that a resident of a Caribbean island does not consider herself / himself to be of African origin, although the Caribbean due to the history of the transatlantic slave trade is inhabited by a majority of people of African descent. The fact that the environment in which that person has

been socialized possibly ethnically can hardly have other influences as African, is nevertheless not of relevance in this context. On the other hand, e.g. an individual with an African-rooted part in the grand parent's generation who has no visible African roots herself / himself, can nevertheless identify himself / herself of African origin. The reasons for this decision can be numerous: Stories told or experiences made in the circle of the family on the one hand or a more theoretical approach to the said topics on the other hand – they both can be a trigger in the process of defining one's identity. In reality it's often in deed a combination of various reasons. Such a person can then engage - though not affected by racism and structural discrimination personally due to the "invisibility of African roots" - in the affairs of a group with who he / she identifies himself / herself and with who she / he has literally at first glance nothing to do.

The people of African descent – no matter if long-established populations, recently migrated or the children or grandchildren of the same – that do not identify themselves as people of African descent, have the right to do so as mentioned above. And to be called as traitors in such a case is unjustified. They are also important and can potentially change the face of the society in which they live. This includes, among other things, that they can contribute through their economic, political and social success to become a given and integral part of the society. Thus they make a contribution to the Decade's objectives - especially where people of African descent are a minority. In particular to mention are the societies on both sides of the Atlantic which are mainly white. There, among others, they contribute to reduce racism. But, this group hardly has a share in contributions that have positive effects on Africa and societies with a mainly Africa-rooted population (e.g. parts of the Caribbean).

People who identify themselves as people of African descent, however, are those who can significantly contribute to the success of the UN-Decade. How much has actually changed positively in terms of recognition, justice and development after the decade's end with regard to the global big picture depends, amongst others, significantly on whether a group uses its expertise and resources in the awareness to act for the "own people" which means for a group to which one ultimately imputes him or herself. Therefore, it is of particular importance that this group knows about the Decade and is committed in achieving the objectives fixed in it. The worst thing that can happen would be a lack of knowledge and commitment in the ranks of the addressees. This applies to the individual and for the organized level alike. Equally true: An engagement of the Decade's addressees isolated from a broader societal context is probable to reach its limits quickly.

The UN-Decade and the Sustainable Development Goals

Much more known than this Decade are the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which consist of 17 main-goals subdivided in 169 sub-goals. They are part of the 2030 agenda. By 2030, the ambitious goals are to be attained. Unlike in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) all parts of the world, including the so-called Global North, are regarded as regions with potential development needs. Noteworthy are last but not least the so-called "Big Five", which according to a study by the German Institute for Development Policy (Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE)) include climate change (SDG 13), energy (SDG 7), sustainable consumption and production (SDG 12), marine and coastal protection (SDG 14) and reducing inequalities within and between countries (SDG 10). Without going into the details here, it is obvious that the realization of the SDGs and the realization of the objectives of the UN-Decade for People of African Descent are intertwined in many ways. An example: If despite all the advances a still widely existent structural discrimination against people of African descent is not reduced to a considerable extent, no one could seriously believe that SDG 10 is going to be realized.

The UN-Decade in the broader societal context

Let's stay in Germany in this context: Societal developments clearly show that no longer all citizens are willing to accept historically evolved inequalities, just because as members of the German mainstream-society they benefit more or less from it. The One World Network NRW (Eine Welt Netz NRW) is engaged in a wide range of different projects to correct the south-north gap and internal social imbalances. In relation to the UN-Decade this means on the one hand to purposefully cooperate with representatives of the target group to operate awareness and education work here locally. On the other hand, it is necessary to set standards in the international context, e.g. in the context of development-related projects abroad or through exchange programs.

An overview of the numerous activities of Eine Welt Netz NRW can be found on our site. In this context, we hereby recommend especially the exhibition "Black is the ocean - What have boats full of refugees at Europe's coasts to do with the history of slave trade and colonialism?"

Author: Serge Palasie, specialized promoter for escape, migration and development, August 2016

For more informations about the exhibition mentioned above, see

https://www.eine-welt-netz-nrw.de/seiten/fileadmin/ewn/seiten/Ausstellungen/Schwarz_ist_der_Ozean/Flucht_Ausstellung_Schwarz-ist-der-Ozean_Ansicht.pdf

For further informations concerning the UN-Decade, see

www.un.org/en/events/africandescentdecade

Watch the official teaser of the UN-Decade in Germany at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UvNRLgbIDiA>