

From mission to development cooperation

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The Swiss federal development cooperation, organised since 1961 and today conducted by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs, has taken over many of the functions that the missions performed in the nineteenth century: education, health, agriculture, vocational training and the support of local institutions. Mission 21 and other church-based organisations remain partners of the federal development cooperation and receive public funds for their projects.¹

The transition from mission to development cooperation reflects the secularisation of European society and the end of the colonial period. The purposes of development cooperation are defined by the goals of sustainable development adopted by the United Nations in 2015 and by the priorities of the partner countries. The methods emphasise partnership, local ownership and the evaluation of results. The paternalism of the missionary era has been replaced, at least in principle, by the idea of cooperation between equals.

Yet the continuity is also apparent. The Swiss development cooperation invests in education, vocational training and health, as the Basel Mission did; it supports local enterprises and markets, as the trading company did; and it seeks to combine economic development with ethical purposes. The Swiss vocational training model, which combines apprenticeship in enterprises with schooling, has been exported to developing countries through development projects, in a way that recalls the mission workshops in Akropong and Mangalore. The history of the Basel Mission thus remains present in the practice of Swiss development cooperation, with its achievements and its questions.

1 Notes

1. On Swiss development cooperation (federal service for technical cooperation from 1961; Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, SDC; State Secretariat for Economic Affairs, SECO) and the cooperation with church-based organisations such as Mission 21, see the publications of the SDC. To be verified. ↩

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