

**Report on Sustainability to Commit**  
**German-African Alumni Conference**  
**26.-29. April 2013 in Berlin, Germany**

Which conditions are needed so that long-term projects between people from African countries and Germany emerge out of alumni networks? This was one of the main questions the participants discussed at the conference “Sustainability to Commit“ from 26 to 29 April 2013. The meeting was organised by the “Partnership with Africa Foundation e.V.“ (SPA e.V.) and the “Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development“ (BMZ).

*To create alumni networks is one thing, keeping them alive is another*

In his opening remarks Thomas Krüger, president of the “Federal Agency for Civic Education“, pointed out that sustainable networks have an important effect on society and the future as new ideas are developed through them. The Head of Division for Public relations of BMZ, Holger Ehmke, said that education programmes like “Go Africa...Go Germany“ (GAGG) play an important role in development policies as they create occasions where participants from different countries meet and discuss at the same level. Katja Böhler of SPA e.V. explained the main problem of Alumni networks: “To create them is one thing, keeping them alive is another.“ Networks only work if people meet regularly. All three speakers hoped the participants would use the conference to create new ideas that could be implemented in the course of the programme over the next three years.

The 50 participants met Saturday morning in two working groups “Project Management“ and “The intercultural perspective in project management and development cooperation“. The results were presented Sunday evening.

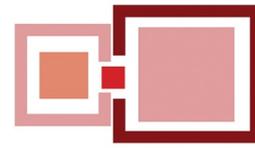
*Face-to-face meeting main instrument to keep networks alive*

Saturday evening a panel discussion took place. Speakers were Emmanuel Akoto, board member of GOAL e.V., Lars Allenstein, the Coordinator of the Young leaders network, Michel Arnd, former Board member of grenzenlos e.V., Inga Draeger, Board member of FES-Ehemalige e.V. and Christel Gbaguidi, Board member of ANSA e.V.

They first focussed on how alumni networks can constantly attract new members and stay in contact with their existing members in order to create new education projects between African countries and Germany. All panel speakers agreed that the most important way of communication is to meet face-to-face – even in times of new media technologies and Internet.

*Cooperate or even fuse to be more effective*

Another important instrument are long-and mid-term-projects, Inga Draeger pointed out. They are important to get new members involved in the network who would like to



participate but don't want to implement their own projects at the beginning.

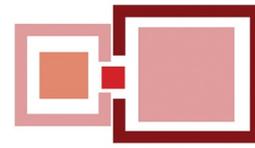
It is also important to recruit new participants for the organisation. The fluctuation of members of alumni networks can be very high – a point most of the participants agreed upon. The representatives of FES-Ehemalige and grenzenlos e.V. pointed out that this is not a problem for their organisations. They use their umbrella organisations and the participants of their programmes to attract new members. That's why they also don't have to open their alumni networks for non-alumni's. After all, the foundations of their networks are the experiences gained in certain exchange programmes. Lars Allenstein pointed out, even if they don't have the possibility to get new members as their project has already finished, they will not open their organisation to non-participants. However, he was very open to fuse with other organisations as they all have the same goals. The bigger they'll get, the more effectively they could act and they would also gain power, he said. Michel Arnd rejected this proposal. His organisation will be open for more cooperation between the alumni networks, he said, but they wouldn't fuse with a bigger organisation, as that also needs more professionalism in terms of professional staff and therefore more money.

### *Ways of financing*

The discussion turned to questions on how to finance alumni networks and their projects. All organisations have different strategies. Most charge membership fees, the FES-Alumni's also receive financial support by the FES. Grenzenlos e.V. works a lot with the support of exchange and international volunteer organisations. GOAL e.V., the Young Leaders Network and ANSA E.V. are facing financial problems and were talking about the good and bad sides of membership fees. All agreed, that these fees are important for financing projects. Inga Draeger explained why her organisation doesn't use sponsoring anymore. "Donorship is fine. But if you use sponsorship, you are acting like a cooperation, you are offering a service you'll get paid for." She also said sponsoring should just be used if the infrastructure of the organisation is professionalised.

During the discussion most representatives pointed out that their organisations are part of some kind of umbrella organisation. These umbrella organisations are important to recruit new members, to use their networks, their expertise and ideally to get some financial support. Only Michel Arnd pointed out, that you could also create an alumni-network out of participants from different programs. Grenzenlos. e.V. doesn't have a main organisation but recruits new members from three organisations and five volunteer programmes. "The important point for the network is not one common institution, but a common basis, as the volunteering service."

In question of interculturality all three intercultural organisations, GOAL e.V., the Young leaders network and ANSA e.V., agreed their interstate background is a strength as it opens up the perspective for new ideas and projects. "We shouldn't focus on the differences, but on similar goals", Emmanuel Akoto from GOAL e.V. pointed out.



### *Group criticises GOAL e.V.*

Sunday evening the results of the different working groups were presented. The speaker of the workshop on “The intercultural perspective in project management and development cooperation“, Isaac Owusu, said, that a rising awareness for the intercultural diversity should become an integral part of the “Go Africa...Go Germany” exchange programme. The group followed a holistic approach criticising the network’s name and organisation. One suggestion was to change the name because it gives a wrong perception of the continent. “We have to consider the power of words. Africa is a continent, not a country and it is culturally very diverse. But if we call the organisation ‘Go Africa...Go Germany’ the perception is that Africa is a country“, one member explained. Also, the African members of GOAL criticised that Germans were also organising the GAGG exchange programme in African countries. This leads to Germans travelling to Africa to organise the exchange, even if they have local members living in the country who could support the programme with their cultural knowledge, their expertise and their contacts. “So, why do Germans have to fly to Africa, why can’t the Africans organise the African part of the exchange programme?” Isaac explained. They recommended changing it in the future.

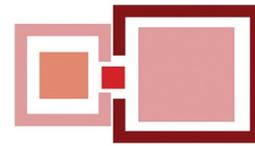
### *Project ideas*

The project management groups presented the projects they are working on at the moment. The group planning the next “Go Africa...Go Germany” exchange presented their timetable over the next months and pointed out that they will need more support from African members. They also asked the auditorium to brainstorm about topics for workshops in project countries like Zimbabwe. An idea delivered by the auditorium was “the daily lives of young people”.

New projects were also presented. The first idea was a “German-African bi-national research collaboration in social science“ through which researchers from the North and the South could find possible collaborators for their international research projects.

Another project is the mentoring programme “PAMOJA“. Their mission is to connect GOAL e.V. members with high-school-students in Ghana and in Germany. The GOAL e.V. members serve as mentors giving the students a professional career coaching. The auditorium discussed and certain questions came up, e. g. how the coaching should be organised in detail and how many members should work as mentors at the beginning.

Mentoring was also the idea of the group “students 4 students“. Here, a network of African and German students should offer information to future students about the culture and the student life at the university they might want to go to. This bottom-up-exchange could be supported by GOAL e.V. as a mediator. Still, the question was raised why the students should use GOAL to find this information and not one of the already existing networks.



### *Ideas from external networks*

A project from external participants is the “Africa Opportunities Network“(AON). The two project managers pointed out that there is a lack of information in Africa about the right structure of applications directed at western universities and organisations. They created a platform that connects Western scholars and African students. AON therefore is a network for Africans who want to work as researchers in the Western world. The auditorium liked the idea, but criticised the fact that it has no real benefit for the scholars and therefore there is no reason why the lecturers should participate in the project.

Monday morning the external project “Alumni Portal Deutschland“ was presented by Birgit Sondergeld from the Goethe Institute. The portal has 67,000 members. Its target group are foreign alumnis who studied, worked or researched in Germany or in German institutions abroad. It provides a platform for networking, events, contacts to companies, online training courses and gives background information about Germany. An important tool of the website is the possibility to create your own domain that can be used by organisations. The GAGG members discussed the possibility using this platform for their own projects and for connecting with other organisations. Birgit Sondergeld promised to ask the technicians how the data of the GAGG program could be embedded in the website as data varies in quantity and format.

The conference ended with a meeting of the different project groups – they all hoped to see each other soon in one of their new projects.