

Andreas J. Obrecht (Ed.)

# APPEAR II

New pathways towards participative  
knowledge production through  
transnational and transcultural  
academic cooperation

StudienVerlag

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**StudienVerlag**

Innsbruck

Wien

© 2022 by Studienverlag Ges.m.b.H., Erlenstrasse 10, A-6020 Innsbruck  
E-Mail: [order@studienverlag.at](mailto:order@studienverlag.at)  
Internet: [www.studienverlag.at](http://www.studienverlag.at)

Typesetting and Cover: Studienverlag/Maria Strobl. [www.gestro.at](http://www.gestro.at)  
Translation: Irmgard Schmoll (OeAD)  
Proof-reading and copy-editing: Jamie McDonald, Dan Brown, Rainer Einzenberger  
Selection of photos, editing of references: Anna Geiger

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ISBN 978-3-7065-6208-9

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# CONTENT

- 1 PREFACE - *Sustainable Development through Higher Education*
- 2 INTRODUCTION - *Austrian Partnership Programme in Higher Education and Research for Development. Eleven years of development policy-relevant teaching and research - and this is just the beginning!*
- 3 PALESTINE
  - 3.1 Rooting Development in the Palestinian Context
    - 3.1.1 The advanced academic partnership - ROOTDEVPAL
    - 3.1.2 Reflections
    - 3.1.3 Transcending the academic realm in conflict and war zones
    - 3.1.4 Enumeration of results
  - 3.2 Strengthening Higher Education Capacities in Palestine for Gender Equality
    - 3.2.1 The project - SHE-GE
    - 3.2.2 Why was it important to start the project in Gaza?
    - 3.2.3 Project results: planned, collateral and contingent
    - 3.2.4 Enumeration of results
  - 3.3 Promotion of Energy-Efficient Buildings towards Developing a Sustainable Built Environment in Gaza Strip
    - 3.3.1 About PEEB
    - 3.3.2 Why this project?
    - 3.3.3 Gender perspectives
    - 3.3.4 Enumeration of PEEB results
    - 3.3.5 Energy-efficient buildings as a sustainable and innovative approach of construction in Gaza - the advanced academic partnership CBEEB

- 3.3.6 Capacity building for increased energy awareness and the potential of sustainable buildings concepts in the Gaza region
- 3.3.7 Advanced activities and enumeration of CBEEB results
- 3.4 Developing Maker Movement-Inspired Training Courses on Renewable Energy Sources in Gaza Strip, Palestine
  - 3.4.1 MakingFutureEnergy4Palestine
  - 3.4.2 BOKU Vienna contribution
  - 3.4.3 ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY Gaza - gender perspectives
  - 3.4.4 Enumeration of results

## 4 NICARAGUA

- 4.1 Strengthening Local Research Capacities at the Bluefields Indian and Caribbean University, Nicaragua, to Confront the Effects of Climate Change
  - 4.1.1 Description
  - 4.1.2 The Nicaraguan perspective
  - 4.1.3 Why international cooperation in higher education matters
  - 4.1.4 Enumeration of results

## 5 ETHIOPIA

- 5.1 Strengthening Regional Capacity in Research and Training in Fisheries and Aquaculture for Improved Food Security and Livelihoods in Eastern Africa
  - 5.1.1 The project - STRECAFISH
  - 5.1.2 The project and its people that supplemented a hands-on practical-oriented graduate training programme in fisheries and aquaculture
  - 5.1.3 Why fish farming in Ethiopia?
  - 5.1.4 Enumeration of results
- 5.2 Sustainable Highland Rivers Management in Ethiopia
  - 5.2.1 The project - LARIMA
  - 5.2.2 Awareness raising and capacity building as a key role for further development

- 5.2.3 A contribution to re-establish freshwater health and biodiversity?
  - 5.2.4 Enumeration of results
- 5.3 Implementation of Academic Land Administration Education in Ethiopia for Supporting Sustainable Development
  - 5.3.1 The project - EduLAND2
  - 5.3.2 Equal partnership
  - 5.3.3 Gender aspects
  - 5.3.4 Enumeration of results
- 5.4 Advanced Academic Partnership for Legal and Human Rights Education in Ethiopia
  - 5.4.1 The project - AAPLHRE
  - 5.4.2 Human rights education during states of emergency, political reforms and a pandemic
  - 5.4.3 Working together to fulfill our objective
  - 5.4.4 Enumeration of results
- 5.5 Technology Enabled Maternal and Child Healthcare in Ethiopia
  - 5.5.1 The project - TEMACC
  - 5.5.2 Why the project was necessary
  - 5.5.3 TEMACC successfully completed - and now?
  - 5.5.4 Enumeration of results
- 5.6 Partnership for Strengthening Institutional Capacity in Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation in Ethiopia
  - 5.6.1 Description
  - 5.6.2 Ownership and belonging in international academic curriculum development
  - 5.6.3 Curricular innovation in peace and development studies beyond linear thinking
  - 5.6.4 Enumeration of results
- 5.7 Inclusion in Education for Persons with Disabilities
  - 5.7.1 The project - INEDIS
  - 5.7.2 Gender equality and empowerment across four universities in Ethiopia and Austria
  - 5.7.3 Institutional change and impact in higher education institutions in Ethiopia and Austria

#### 5.7.4 Enumeration of results

## 6 KENYA - UGANDA

### 6.1 Strengthening Capacities for Agricultural Education, Research and Adoption in Kenya

6.1.1 The project - SCARA, the Kenyan experience

6.1.2 ICT (Information and Communication Technology) and agriculture in Kenya: experiences from the APPEAR project  
SCARA

6.1.3 Enumeration of results

### 6.2 Strengthening Higher Education, Research and Community Outreach in Agroecology in the Rwenzori Region in Western Uganda

6.2.1 The project - AER

6.2.2 Participatory curriculum development of a Master of Science in Agroecology - a case study from Western Uganda

6.2.3 From teaching towards learning - lessons learnt from AER

6.2.4 Enumeration of results

### 6.3 Capacity Building on the Water-Energy-Food Security Nexus through Research and Training in Kenya and Uganda

6.3.1 The project - CapNex

6.3.2 A personal reflection

6.3.3 Gender perspectives

6.3.4 Enumeration of results

### 6.4 Professional Social Work in East Africa - Towards Sustainable Impact

6.4.1 The project - PROSOWO II

6.4.2 Social work in East Africa: reclaiming the profession's glory, unlocking the future

6.4.3 Celebrating World Social Work Day amidst difficult circumstances: impressions from East Africa

6.4.4 Enumeration of results

## 7 MOZAMBIQUE

## 7.1 Strengthening Remote Sensing Data Processing and Interpretation Capacities for Operational Use in Agricultural System Monitoring

7.1.1 The project - EO4Africa

7.1.2 Reaching the youngest - investing in educational tools

7.1.3 Remote sensing, a new and reliable data source for agricultural monitoring in low-income countries - applications and potential use cases and users in Mozambique

7.1.4 Enumeration of results

## 7.2 Innovating Sustainable Agriculture in Mozambique - Learning and Teaching Tools

7.2.1 The project - ISAM

7.2.2 Developing a collaborative Master's curriculum and innovative learning and teaching tools for sustainable agricultural development

7.2.3 Perspectives, experiences and actions within the scope of the ISAM Project

7.2.4 Enumeration of results

## 7.3 Capacity Building for Renewable Energy Technologies in Mozambique

7.3.1 The project - RETEM

7.3.2 The project and its people

7.3.3 Between high expectations and daily routine

7.3.4 Enumeration of results

# 8 SENEGAL - BURKINA FASO

## 8.1 Sustainable Energy Access for Sustainable Cities

8.1.1 Description of SEA4cities

8.1.2 Bringing together players in access and transition to energy sustainability

8.1.3 Learning by doing: when design makes sustainability accessible to all

8.1.4 Enumeration of results

## 8.2 Sustainable Management of Water and Fish Resources

8.2.1 The project - SUSFISH-plus

8.2.2 Learning innovations for sustainable fisheries in Burkina Faso: a social simulation demonstration in the frame of the Agenda 2030

8.2.3 Higher education for a sustainable water management

8.2.4 Enumeration of results

### 8.3 Local Cattle Breeds of Burkina Faso – Characterisation and Sustainable Utilisation

8.3.1 The project – LoCaBreed

8.3.2 From cattle keepers to cattle breeders. Steps of a transition –  
development countries’ realities and their implications

8.3.3 The best bulls for Burkina Faso

8.3.4 Enumeration of results

## 9 GEORGIA – ARMENIA

### 9.1 Academic Collaboration for Building Capacity in Environmental Studies

9.1.1 The project – ACCES

9.1.2 Quality assurance of e-learning – mechanisms and approaches

9.1.3 Strengthening the resilience of university education through  
innovative teaching

9.1.4 Enumeration of results

### 9.2 Building Organic Agriculture in Armenia. Improving the Knowledge and Skills of Organic Stakeholders through Participatory Curriculum Development and Outreach

9.2.1 The project – BOAA

9.2.2 The importance of how you teach – modern teaching methods in  
post-Soviet pedagogy

9.2.3 Participatory curriculum development – lessons learnt

9.2.4 Enumeration of results

### 9.3 Transdisciplinarity for Sustainable Tourism Development in the Caucasus Region

9.3.1 The project – CaucaSusT

9.3.2 At the end of it all, what have we learnt?

9.3.3 The impact of the CaucaSusT project on ASPU and TSU  
academic programs – a stakeholder perspective

9.3.4 Enumeration of results

## 10 STUDENT MOBILITY - *A Historical Perspective on the APPEAR Scholarship Programme*

10.1 Capacity Building and the North-South Dialogue Programme

10.2 Focus shift from the individual to the institution

10.3 The APPEAR Programme

## 11 AUTHORS

# 1 PREFACE

## Sustainable Development through Higher Education

A decade has passed: More than 10 years ago, APPEAR – one of the most successful programmes of the Austrian Development Cooperation – was established. With APPEAR, and in partnership with the OeAD<sup>1</sup>, the Austrian Development Agency pivoted its paradigm for cooperation in the field of higher education and science. The focus shifted from individual scholarships to institutional cooperation, building lasting North-South and South-South partnerships and higher capacities for research, teaching, and institutional management. Although scholarships still have their important role in international cooperation on higher education, they have an added value to institutional capacity development if they are embedded in the context of a broader cooperation between two or more institutions.

It appears that we have done something right. During the past 11 years, APPEAR has developed into a well-established and internationally respected programme through which 43 cooperation projects in 20 countries have been completed. In the six-year period of APPEAR II (2014–2021), a total of 17.000 students benefitted directly, and 80.000 indirectly. 84 scholarships for study in Austria were implemented, of which the majority were embedded in cooperation projects. In this perspective, APPEAR has clearly had an impressive footprint, both internationally and in Austria.

The introduction of the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was an important milestone for international harmonization of cooperation in the field of education. Whereas previously the education-related focus of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) was on universal primary education, the SDGs include targets for secondary and tertiary education as well. This is to the benefit of the overall attention given to the importance of higher education for development. However, APPEAR does not only contribute to SDG targets in the area of education, but to virtually all other SDGs as well: the knowledge and evidence generated and disseminated via APPEAR cooperation projects touches on so many of the grand challenges - from poverty reduction to clean water, zero hunger to climate, and clean energy to gender equality, to name a few.

## Impacts and outcomes

As initiators and funders of APPEAR, we need to ask: has the programme achieved the desired outcomes? The APPEAR programme theory is based on creating impact through institutional capacities in the fields of research, teaching and management. In combination with a positive culture of scientific dialogue and the individual competences of graduated scholarship holders, the programme should translate into tangible contributions to the achievement of SDGs. A glimpse at just a few of the cooperation projects gives a flavour of the types of lasting outcomes that have been achieved.

In Burkina Faso, despite its relatively limited access to water resources, sweet water fish can play an important role as a source of protein, but also as a source of income.

The government faced many challenges related to the sustainable management of fishery resources. Over a span of 10 years, the SUSFISH<sup>2</sup> project has contributed to a better understanding of fishing and aquaculture and guided decision-making for policy and planning. Another impactful project is TEMACC-Ethiopia<sup>3</sup>: participatory action research was used to search for significant improvement in maternal and child healthcare practices in rural areas using information and communication technologies. Women from different communities benefit from this research into taking better care of the health of mothers and children.

APPEAR also improves teaching capacities. In the case of the transnational CaucaSusT<sup>4</sup> project on sustainable tourism development in the Caucasus region, the results were not only changes in the academic structures. Importantly, the support of young scholars and university-practitioners in applying transdisciplinary approaches to research effectively contributed to shaping the scientific agenda and regional cooperation towards sustainable tourism. Another remarkable example is the AER<sup>5</sup> project in the Rwenzori Region in Western Uganda. To benefit higher education and research as well as the community, a Master's programme in agroecology at the Mountains of the Moon University was established, informing ecologically friendly agricultural practices.

Management practices within higher education institutions need to be improved to build sustainable partnerships. One outstanding example is the INEDIS<sup>6</sup> project on Inclusion in Education for People with Disabilities in cooperation with three public universities in Ethiopia. Among many other results, a guideline on "Inclusion of Students with Disabilities at Higher Education Institutions" and a certificate course on inclusive

community and school development were developed. Moreover, support for labour market access as well as cultural and sportive events were initiated to maximize the social participation and interactions of students with disability. Another successful cooperation with Ethiopia is PSICPCT<sup>7</sup>. The partnership between the Haramaya University and the University of Innsbruck enabled academic staff to acquire and employ strengthened capacities in handling and administering peace and development education, as well as skills in conflict analysis and peace facilitation. Both universities agreed to keep on working together in the future.

### A pioneer in the field

The examples clearly demonstrate that the cooperation projects delivered services that are highly relevant to development, and hence APPEAR achieved its outcomes. This was confirmed by a programme-level evaluation in 2019, which attests that APPEAR plays a pioneering role in the area of cooperation in the tertiary education sector; it demonstrates an efficient programme implementation, and coherent and complementary activities with other initiatives of the ADA portfolio in the area of higher education/research.

In our view, the unique features of the programme constitute the foundation of its success. The participatory approach and a concept of culturally open-minded knowledge are two important principles that guide the programme. Moreover, a practically- and empirically-oriented approach is implemented, along with gender sensitivity and bottom-up and demand-driven activities. In other words: the thematic priorities for academic

cooperation are defined by our partners in the global South, answer to the specific development challenges of the respective target country or region, and are addressed with a view to generating inclusive and tangible impact for communities.

## To a bright future

To sum up, based on the solid foundation of its previous phase, APPEAR II flourished and continued to make impact. We are grateful to the entire APPEAR community for their hard work and incredible dedication, without which we could not have reached as far. Not to forget, the onset of the global COVID-19 related crisis in 2020 required yet additional efforts in many of the cooperation projects. We would like to thank all the project teams for the consistent quality of their contributions, our programme-level partner, the OeAD, for their tireless support and leadership, the members of the Selection Board for countless hours of valuable time and competent contributions, and the members of the Advisory Board for expert insight and guidance.

The journey does, however, not end here. The next, third phase of APPEAR has already started – with a timeframe of seven years and renewed commitment: to leave no one behind, and to maximise the benefits that universities can bring to their communities.

*Heinz Habertheuer, Director Programmes and Projects International, Austrian Development Agency (ADA)*

*Matthias Themel, Advisor Education and Science (ADA)*

*Sebastian Palasser, Trainee (ADA)*

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- 1 OeAD GmbH - Austria's Agency for Education and Internationalisation
  - 2 Sustainable Management of Water and Fish Resources in Burkina Faso, see page 280-297
  - 3 Technology Enabled Maternal and Child healthcare in Ethiopia, see page 135-145
  - 4 Transdisciplinarity for Sustainable Tourism Development in the Caucasus Region, see page 333-347
  - 5 Strengthening of Higher Education, Research and Community Outreach in Agro-Ecology in the Rwenzori Region in Western Uganda, see page 182-197
  - 6 Inclusion in Education for Persons with Disabilities, see page 158-170
  - 7 HU-UIBK Partnership for Strengthening Institutional Capacity in Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation in Ethiopia, see page 146-157

## 2 INTRODUCTION

Austrian Partnership Programme in Higher Education and Research for Development. Eleven years of development policy-relevant teaching and research - and this is just the beginning!

### Eleven years of APPEAR

When a programme like APPEAR is in the midst of life, it becomes significant for thousands of people, and hundreds of institutions, it creates approaches to solutions, improves structures of knowledge generation and knowledge exchange, influences political, economic and cultural and social decision-making processes and basically operates on multidimensional levels of development policy. When we launched the first APPEAR call in 2010, we would not have dared to hope that APPEAR would enter another phase eleven years later with a longer term - until 2027 - and increased funding. APPEAR Phase III began at the end of 2020 and the 8<sup>th</sup> call of the internationally acclaimed programme was published in the spring of 2021. The generous continuation of the programme is due to the great number of high-quality projects in development research that have been carried out successfully, the provision of teaching relevant to development policy, the support for the management of higher education institutions in the partner countries, and the many years of excellent cooperation between the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) as the commissioning organisation of the

programme and the Austrian Agency for Education and Internationalisation (OeAD) as the implementing organisation. This cooperation has always endeavoured to ensure the best possible framework conditions for the selected APPEAR partnerships and the management of the APPEAR scholarship programme, which is closely linked to the projects.

This book documents phase II of APPEAR, i.e., the activities and the projects carried out between 2015 and May 2021. 26 academic partnerships were carried out during that period. For about half of the projects, the term was extended in a cost-neutral manner due to COVID-19 so that they were not finalised until the spring of 2021. This is also the reason why this book will not be published in the autumn of 2021, as originally planned, but in the spring of 2022. In addition to the 26 academic partnerships and the total of 20 preparatory funding measures, 41 students from the partner countries were able to successfully complete their studies at Austrian universities with the help of an APPEAR II scholarship. Another 33 students from the partner countries were transferred to the third programme phase and will complete their studies within APPEAR III.

This book is an ambitious undertaking – a research documentation that covers a wide variety of approaches to knowledge production relevant to development policy, and illustrates the diverse possibilities of transdisciplinary development research. As with the publication of the book on the first APPEAR phase<sup>1</sup>, the editor encouraged the 105 authors – 46 female, 59 male – to also address questions, problems and dimensions of knowledge production that are usually not addressed in research and project reports. Project planning, no matter how successful, can only partially anticipate the social reality of implementing a

project. Flexibility, creativity and improvisation are indispensable prerequisites for successful project implementation in often-difficult research conditions. The fact that reality often turns out to be different from the research designs and their underlying programmatic guidelines is also addressed in this book. Thus, this book is not only a documentation of APPEAR II but also a discursive contribution on practical approaches to transdisciplinary and transcultural knowledge production, the overarching goal of which is defined by the criteria of the UN Sustainability Agenda 2030.

APPEAR basically pursues a lively intervention and interaction strategy, the developmental goal of which is the concrete improvement of people's living conditions in the partner countries and regions. The focus is on participatory generation of knowledge as a basis for its application-oriented implementation. Knowledge production that does not follow hierarchical structures and paternalistic principles aims to achieve knowledge shared at the same level. In research, teaching, and the management of higher education institutions, APPEAR contributes to capacity development and creates spaces for transcultural and transdisciplinary thinking, and action oriented towards development policy goals. APPEAR is an ambitious programme of the Austrian Development Cooperation that is also characterised above all by flexibility and an empathetic approach to project contexts that are not always easy.

## The APPEAR II instruments and principles

The programme contains two components that are closely interlinked and coordinated in the implementation. By

funding master's and PhD scholarships (component 2:  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the direct costs) primarily within the framework of current higher education cooperations (component 1:  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the direct costs), capacities in tertiary education institutions in the partner countries are strengthened significantly. Here the programme follows international trends that aim to prevent brain drain and favour institutional strengthening over "discretionarily" awarded scholarships.

Component 1, in turn, contains three instruments. Preparatory Funding allows applications for Academic Partnerships to be prepared jointly. Academic Partnerships allow cooperation between Austrian higher education institutions and universities or scientific institutions in the addressed countries to be carried out in congruence with national development plans - the thematic orientation of the programme for a maximum period of four years makes regional networks with extended project budgets possible. And the Advanced Academic Partnerships, with a maximum duration of three years, build on successful projects of APPEAR I whereby new and qualitatively substantial research questions, goals, etc. are set and implemented based on the results.

In APPEAR II, the principles of APPEAR I were continued programmatically and consistently. The programme management and the projects and activities followed a participatory and partnership-based, knowledge-plural, application-oriented, gender-sensitive and "bottom-up" approach. These normative, research-strategic orientations and guidelines for action are based expressly on the following five APPEAR principles: Cultural open-mindedness as an expression of respect for other cultures, social orders, knowledge systems and epistemologies; practical and empirical approaches, which also change

social reality in a solution- and application-oriented way and thus contribute to poverty reduction; gender sensitivity as an expression of systematic support for young female researchers in particular and as an expression of the integration of gender-specific issues in the research design and in the analysis of the results; and bottom-up and demand-driven approaches, which basically address social, ecological, economic, cultural, etc. problems against the background of local and regional contexts and clearly define both the intent of the research and the use of the results. Moreover, social inclusion is considered as a cross-cutting theme in programme and project design and implementation.

The 26 Academic Partnerships from the programme phase APPEAR II presented in this book are, on one hand, strongly rooted in the social realities of the addressed countries and on the other hand part of a new transnational culture of knowledge that does not want science and tertiary education to be pursued for their own sake - or to exercise social distinction - but to help to concretely change the actual living conditions - especially the conditions of poverty - through practice-oriented utilisation of results. This approach also resolutely counters the "knowledge hegemony of the West", which is often perceived in post-colonial contexts, sometimes also in the scientific context of colleagues from countries of the global South. APPEAR is just as little interested in a one-sided transfer of knowledge as in a dominant role of the "funding provider" - joint research and teaching across the boundaries of cultures, languages and knowledge systems require practised participation, a clear articulation of the respective cognitive interests and an egalitarian understanding of cooperation. The practice of

“development-relevant” research in recent decades has often shown that scientific questions, project designs and, above all, methodologies tend to be oriented more towards the cognitive intent of the “donors” than towards the articulated problems and “institutional needs” of their partners in the global South. The often-used phrase “at eye level”, which on closer examination often obscures the analysis of real power relations, has far-reaching consequences in research practice. Thus, in APPEAR II, it was also of great importance that the entire project responsibility – from personnel decisions and reporting to the complete financial management and accounting of project funds – could be assumed by the partner institutions in the global South. In nine Academic Partnerships, out of a total of 26 that were carried out in APPEAR phase II, higher education institutions and scientific institutions in the partner countries used this possibility.

## Geopolitical, development policy- and knowledge-relevant changes during APPEAR II

APPEAR is embedded in global, national and regional developments, discourses, conflicts and efforts to use science and research constructively to address problem situations. APPEAR operates on multidimensional levels of development policy – from poverty reduction, coherence and consistency with various (government) programmes to strategies for implementing the SDGs. APPEAR is thus not a static programme for the achievement of a certain target but a highly flexible intervention and interaction plan, as well as a living process that defines targets according to what is possible, to principles of what makes sense in

development policy, defines mechanisms of implementation that require a high degree of quality assurance and enables participation and project implementation based on partnership. In order to meet these demands, a high degree of flexibility in the programme implementation is necessary, which has also been positively acknowledged in the programme evaluations carried out so far. This flexibility also requires empathy, i.e., responsiveness to the individual and institutional situations, to the project partners and scholarship holders, and to the national and transnational framework conditions. Accordingly, APPEAR has been constantly modified, developed and optimised over the past eleven years.

The “micro level” of the programme and project implementation is set against the “macro level” of political developments and global societal transformations that have gained particular significance in recent years. This also directly affects APPEAR - as a programme exposed to geopolitics and embedded in international communication and convention. Poor countries are also particularly vulnerable politically, which is also evident in the national problem situations of some of the countries addressed by APPEAR. Projects implemented in those countries require empathetic support and, of course, continuous vigilant monitoring on the part of the programme management. Here, too, flexibility is required, which cannot necessarily be described schematically but is of course within the normative framework of the APPEAR programme goals.

The approval of APPEAR II took place before the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the United Nations, before Brexit, before the election of Donald Trump as US President and before the emergence or aggravation of a whole series of geopolitical changes or

newly emerging problem situations that in any case play a part in development policy, including in the relationship between countries. Seven central problem or discourse areas will be briefly described in the following, all of which are globally significant, have had an influence on the programme implementation and will likely continue to do so. Since 2015, the geopolitical background and development policy context in which the programme is implemented has changed dramatically. Some project descriptions directly address aspects of the macro-political changes outlined here and especially conflicts, while in others the changed framework conditions for development-relevant research are implied. Common to all project contributions is the strong focus on the SDGs, which may seem too ambitious to some but which is also of fundamental importance for the third phase of the APPEAR programme. In the following, fundamental geopolitical changes that occurred in the second phase of APPEAR will be outlined briefly in order to contextualise the background of research and teaching relevant to development policy, especially in times of major crises and conflicts.

## Wars, refugee movements, radicalisation

In 2015, massive migration movements to Europe took place. With mass migration of people from the new war zones in the Middle East and from African countries, the discourse on development policy also turned. Due to the widespread lack of a concerted EU refugee management policy, the Austrian Development Cooperation (OEZA) was confronted on one hand with a thematic upgrading – keyword “aid on site”, etc. – and on the other hand with the problem of compensating for the lack of national and

transnational measures without a significant increase in bilateral and multilateral funds. The new war in Syria, the entry of Turkey and Iran into this war as regional powers of order, the direct confrontation between Russia and the USA in this war, the unresolved humanitarian catastrophes due to waves of refugees in the Mediterranean - all this has contributed to a profound feeling of insecurity within the "Fortress Europe". Quantitatively speaking, African countries are most affected by migration movements, and the European perception of the "refugee problem" is mostly selective. Internal migration within Africa also affects partner countries of APPEAR II - for example, large refugee camps in northern Uganda or a large number of "internally displaced people" in Ethiopia and other African countries, currently also due to the brutal civil war in the Ethiopian province of Tigray.

Moreover, there were further regional political and religious radicalisations during the term of APPEAR II, which have also affected projects: Islamic fundamentalism in East Africa, Boko Haram in West Africa, particularly affecting the north of Burkina Faso, border conflicts in Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh, then open war and radicalisation in the Israel-Palestine relationship due to a unilateral US foreign policy. Due to the project activities carried out so far, this region has a special significance for APPEAR II.

## Recapture of Afghanistan by the Taliban

The editorial deadline for this book coincides with an event with proportions of historic significance for the whole world. On 15 August 2021, the radical Islamic Taliban marched into Kabul, having conquered the whole of

Afghanistan in barely two weeks, and after a whole series of provincial towns had been handed over to them without a fight. These developments could have a significant impact on APPEAR III. This refers both to the above-mentioned Islamic fundamentalism and, in particular, to the entire Middle East and to the context of migration and refugee movements, which is so important for development policy.

The withdrawal of troops by the US administration under President Joe Biden has led to a radical system change in Afghanistan much faster than expected. The Afghan national army, which was highly armed by the West, above all the United States, was hardly able to counter the triumphant advance of the Islamic militia. In the first few days after the recapture of the entire country, chaotic scenes - especially at the airport in Kabul - occurred, thousands of people wanted to flee because they were afraid of revenge and retaliation, and the horrors of the deobandist Taliban regime (1996 to 2001) - a fundamentalist dictatorship where neither human nor women's rights were respected, where there was no TV, no music, no secondary school for girls, where women had to wear burqas and were only allowed to leave the house with male consent - are deeply rooted in the collective memory. Although the Taliban currently claim to be more moderate, saying that although they will not establish a democratic system they will respect women's rights within the limits of the Sharia, observers are extremely sceptical and assume that this is just a propagandistic strategy.

Apart from the question of how it was possible for the country to fall entirely into the hands of the Taliban in such a short time - contrary to all expectations and forecasts, especially those of the "Western world" - there is justified concern that an enormous wave of refugees from

Afghanistan will be the result of this conquest. Moreover, the rush campaign has brought the Taliban into possession of military equipment - weapons, tanks, aircraft, drones - worth around 80 billion US dollars. This makes the Taliban the best-equipped radical Islamic organisation in the world. It remains to be seen what influence this will have on other jihadist movements such as Al Qaeda or IS - Islamic State, what general boost they will experience as a result of the Taliban's victory and what possible impact this will also have on intervention areas of APPEAR III.

## US Palestine policy, trade war with China, Russia as a power of order in the Middle East

The drafting of APPEAR II took place before the election of Donald Trump as US president. After this election and the installation of the new US administration, which was particularly supported by right-wing and fundamentalist religious parties in Israel, the regulations of coexistence between Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories that are legitimate under international law have been successively disavowed with the aim of creating a two-state solution in accordance with the Oslo Accords. Examples of this include the transfer of the US embassy to Jerusalem, the "recognition" of Jewish settlements in the occupied territories and the presentation of a "US peace plan for Palestine" that attempted to legitimise positions contrary to international law and was in no way agreed with by the Palestinians. The aggravation of the situation has led to a permanent war-like situation in Gaza, which has also effectively made entry and exit impossible in the second APPEAR project phase and also escalated into open warfare in the spring of 2021. It remains to be seen and hoped that

the new US administration under President Joe Biden – which in principle is in favour of a two-state solution and is also critical of Israel’s settlement policy – can contribute to de-escalation in the region.

The trade war between the USA and China has contributed to further geopolitical and, especially, geo-economic uncertainties. Linked to this unilateral policy of the former US administration was also a systematic weakening of the UN and its component organisations – for example, through withdrawal or suspension of US membership payments. The trade war with China has been followed very closely in many African countries and has in any case strengthened China’s position in Africa in the perceptions of relevant observers and commentators. Although the new US administration has taken the first few steps towards de-escalating the relationship between the USA and China, as far as the economy is concerned the Democratic president – at least in the first half of 2021 – has continued the combat rhetoric towards the world’s most populous country and also uses old and new enemy images towards the transatlantic allies, which give little hope for a reasonably conflict-free coexistence of the two superpowers.

The massive organisational, financial and military support of President Assad’s Syrian war regime by Russia, the Iranian axis, the dangerous entry of Turkey – as a NATO member – into the Syrian war, especially against US-backed Kurdish units and infrastructure, the US sanctions against Iran, which are visibly tightening, the enormous war-induced refugee rates in Lebanon but also in Turkey and thus in Greece present us with scenarios that lead us to expect a geopolitical radicalisation of the use of violence as a political means.

## Systematic disinformation and new knowledge discourses

Due to the worldwide rise of right-wing populist parties and discourses during the APPEAR II programme phase – from Trump to Bolsonaro, Orban, Erdogan or Duterte – the systematic functionalisation of fake news has become, so to speak, acceptable. Allegations have been and are made that satisfy the emotions of their own clientele in particular without this “information” needing to have anything to do with reality. The means for this have increasingly become social media, the content of which is subject to no or only very peripheral quality and legitimacy controls. Systematic disinformation has become en vogue again as a political strategy. In this respect, too, the current situation differs from the initial situation of APPEAR II. For, in the “post-factual age”, science, evidence-based thinking, the structure of the method of research and the problem-solving proposals that can be derived from it are increasingly confronted with a legitimacy dilemma that has been exacerbated in a demagogic way. Rationally structured argumentation often seems powerless in the face of emotionally charged claims – “there has always been climate change, we humans are not to blame for it”. The method of science is rationality; where rationality is negated, rational analysis and interpretation of results can achieve nothing. A paradox – in a world that is thoroughly characterised by scientific knowledge and the resulting technology, scientific knowledge is called into doubt to make political pocket money out of it.

APPEAR is a flexible intervention and interaction programme that promotes science, research, teaching and higher education management in the partner countries in