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The DFG Initiative on Joint Projects on Neglected Tropical Diseases in African-German Partnerships

Dr. Andreas Strecker, Program Director Life Sciences
German Research Foundation, Bonn, Germany



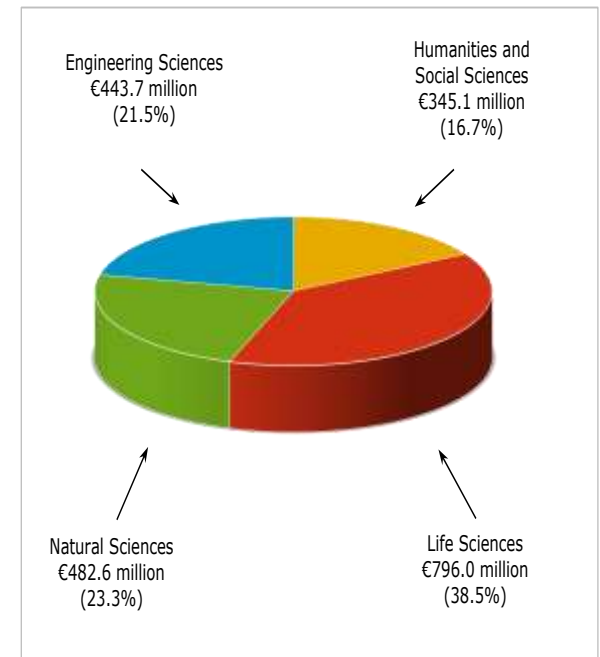
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The Philosophy of the DFG as a funding organisation

The DFG is the central public funding organisation responsible for promoting research in Germany

- a **private association**, *not* a government agency
- members are German universities and research institutions
- serves **all branches of science and the humanities**
- **decides on funding** based on the **scientific merit**, as certified by scientists on all levels
- fosters **scientific excellence** through competition
- supports **international cooperation in research**
- **advises** political and social decision-makers
- supports the **transfer of knowledge** between science and industry

Funding in 2015, by scientific discipline



The Philosophy of the DFG as a funding organisation

The DFG seeks to further the progress of (basic) science:

▶ Science-driven

- Funding of science itself is at the core, funding of scientists or scientific structures is a (desirable!) side-effect; *the advancement of science is the driving force*

▶ Bottom-up principle

- No explicit science policy, no government influence on preferred funding areas despite the full funding of the DFG budget by federal and state governments
- Scientists propose projects whenever they consider them ready (few exceptions)

▶ Self-governed

- Decisions based on peer review. Scientists decide on the best science on all levels including central grants committees; sponsors („the politics“) are involved in decisions

The Concept of the DFG NTD initiative

- ▶ New paradigm for DFG funding – substantial funding of African partners
- ▶ Experts in the field were consulted to assess specific requirements for joint African-German projects in a sustainable environment
- ▶ Long-term commitment of the DFG for the projects to allow for junior scientists to establish themselves in a field of science relevant for Africa
- ▶ Biological, clinical and humanities aspects of NTDs funded with personnel and material expenses
- ▶ Essential demands to be fulfilled:
 - Scientific excellence
 - Equality of partnership with regard to shared intellectual leadership and distribution of funding
 - Capacity building in Africa and training of junior African scientists mandatory

Outcomes

- ▶ Reviewers ensured fulfillment of all criteria including fair and equal partnerships
- ▶ Annual calls since 2007, funding commenced in 2008
- ▶ Special funds for the initial phase, now taken over by regular DFG project funding
- ▶ So far, 33 projects funded with 37 Mio. € in 20 African countries, several involving more than one African country
- ▶ Several students originally graduated within a project have become junior faculty
- ▶ High-level publications with African partners in leading positions

African countries involved (2008-16):



Listening to the African scientists


- ▶ Annual workshops were held with significant time to discuss problems encountered and ways to circumvent them
- ▶ An open discussion atmosphere was created that encouraged the African partners to address their issues
- ▶ A high degree of flexibility to re-allocate funds to alter the direction of projects when necessary or allow for addressing new developments arising was allowed
- ▶ Podium discussions with equal contributions from African experts and scientists on topics relevant for the success of the projects were held
- ▶ Inner-African networks are actively encouraged

Challenges and Future Perspectives for DFG funding in Africa

- ▶ Establishment of several projects presented unexpected, sometimes fatal obstacles, e.g. lack of talented African students
- ▶ Basic infrastructure cannot be funded by the DFG, collaboration with other funders is therefore sought to support the project funding provided
- ▶ African Scientists should play even more prominent roles
- ▶ NTD Initiative may be a role model for DFG funding in other areas of science
- ▶ Creation of academic infrastructure in Africa constitutes a foundation for funding in other funding instruments and science fields
- ▶ Help with expertise in establishing African science funding agencies

Structural requirements in Africa to become equal partners

- ▶ Train junior scientists e.g. in Graduate Schools to allow for competitive skills
- ▶ Create opportunities for scientific careers in Africa
- ▶ Establish endowed national funding agencies and academies to create an expert culture advising governments
- ▶ Develop policies for identifying research priorities
- ▶ Create a legal environment in Africa to protect intellectual property so that benefits of scientific findings stay with the African inventor

 Long-term vision: Funders and academies in the North and South should demand equality as a basic principle of partnerships to allow for Africa to become an equal partner of the global academic system

How the RFI could help to establish fair partnerships in science

- ▶ African scientists have become more aware of their limited role in the establishment of projects, this should be more systematically addressed and encouraged, e.g. by workshops
- ▶ Funders used to apply a funding policy based on the assessment of the scientific and medical situation in Africa without consulting the African side beforehand. This has changed somewhat, but funders should be actively approached to consider this.
- ▶ Help to make the existing African academic networks' voice heard in the North
- ▶ Consult African stakeholders on strategies how to address the topics relevant on-site; train e.g. in proposal writing, approaching funders and involving the national politics



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Thank you for your attention!

Further Information:

- ▶ On the DFG: <http://www.dfg.de>
- ▶ DFG-funded projects: <http://www.dfg.de/gepris>
- ▶ Research institutions in Germany: <http://research-explorer.de>