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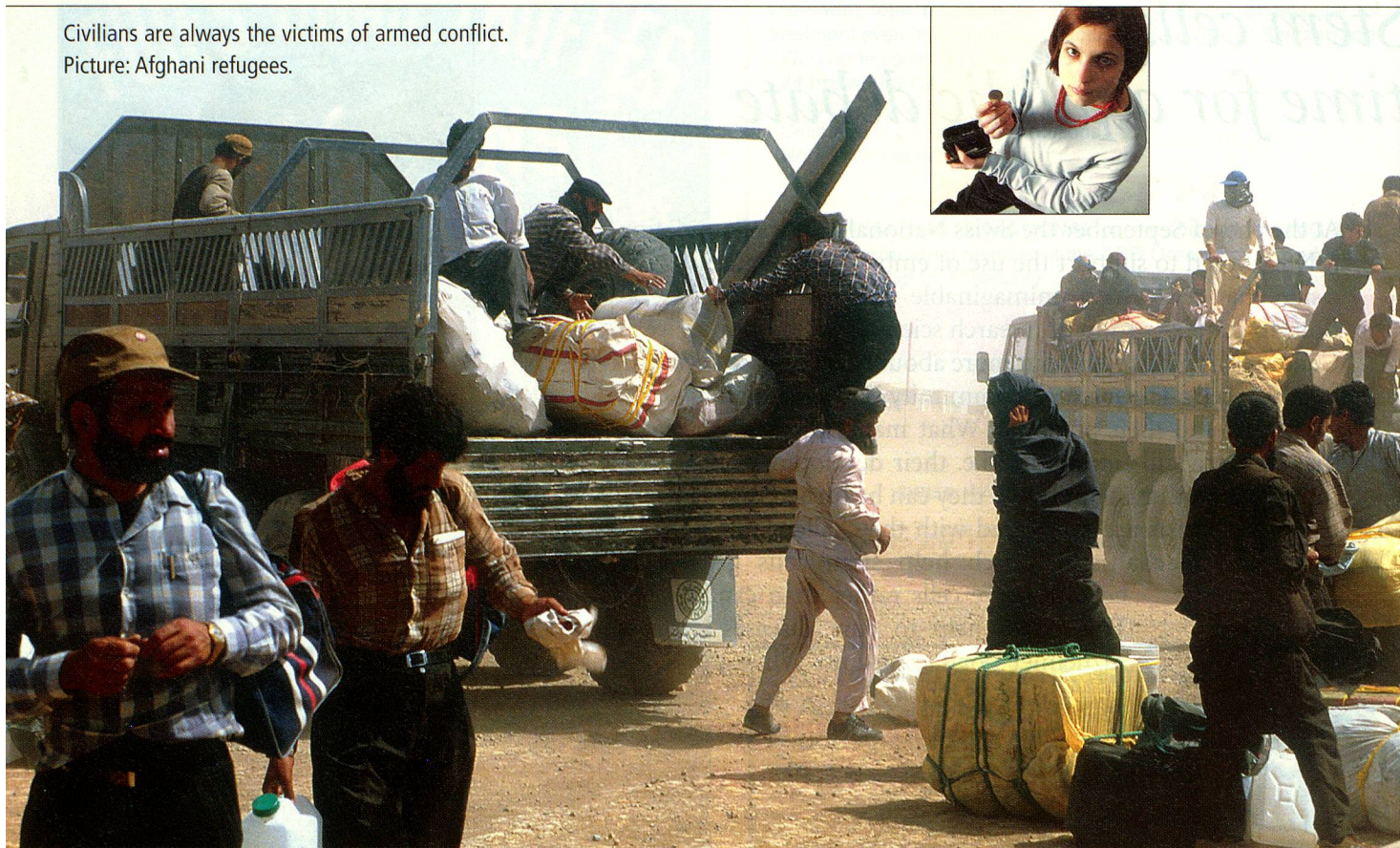
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Civilians are always the victims of armed conflict.
Picture: Afghani refugees.



Imagopress

How does Switzerland help?

BY PIERRE-ANDRÉ TSCHANZ

Like all industrialised nations, Switzerland promotes development co-operation with countries in the South. What resources are available, how and where are they used, who benefits from them and where does Switzerland stand in this co-operation work?

IN 2000 SWITZERLAND spent 0.34 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) on development co-operation, slightly overstepping the CHF 1.5 billion threshold. This clearly exceeds the average for OECD countries of

0.22 percent of GDP. Yet this figure is misleading since it is heavily influenced by several large countries, especially the USA, whose contribution relative to GDP is extremely modest (0.1 percent). The record is held by Scandinavian countries who, together with Luxembourg, are the only countries to exceed the UN-defined target of 0.7 percent of GDP. Switzerland is far off this mark, even if it acquits itself better than most of its European neighbours. For about ten years the Swiss government has been setting itself the goal of achieving a percentage of 0.4. But the poor state of federal finances coupled with the ongoing legacy of the economic crisis of the 1990s have made this goal an impossibility.

Concentration of resources

Instead of distributing the funds available for development co-operation indiscriminately, Switzerland concentrates on helping the poorest countries in the South. On the

other hand, for several years it has devoted itself increasingly to multilateral development co-operation, which now accounts for one third of the annual budget for development co-operation. In 2000 more than CHF 330 million was made available for UN programmes and the Bretton Woods institutions. Of this, CHF 170 million is earmarked for UN development programmes and humanitarian aid, making Switzerland one of the twelve most important contributors in this area.

The aim of the law on development co-operation and humanitarian aid is twofold: to improve living conditions for populations in the South, and to provide the resources required for affected countries to develop self-sufficiently. In 1994, in line with these objectives, the Federal Council drew up development policy guidelines governing four main topics: the preservation and maintenance of peace and security and strengthening of human rights, democracy

and the constitutional state; the promotion of wellbeing and the boundary conditions for sustainable development; the improvement of social justice (viz. the status of women); and protection of the natural environment.

Partnership with relief agencies

Swiss public development co-operation covers four areas: bilateral and multilateral development co-operation, humanitarian aid, co-operation with countries in Central and Eastern Europe led by the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation (SDC), a branch of the Department for Foreign Affairs, and financial assistance and trade promotion under the responsibility of the State Secretariat for the Economy (SECO). Needless to say, some of the development work is performed by the thirteen Swiss relief agencies, which play a key strategic role. In 2000 the government allocated CHF 166.4 million to these agencies to support their own projects as well as federal projects managed by them, and for humanitarian aid.

Humanitarian aid is defined as a short-term effort to rescue human lives and alleviate suffering following a natural disaster or armed conflict. Development co-operation, on the other hand, is a long-term action whose aim is to fight poverty by offer-

ing people aid for self-help. A development programme often replaces a humanitarian effort, for example to kick-start the economy after a disaster. In 2001 the Swiss Disaster Relief Corps, now renamed the Corps for Humanitarian Aid, was active in the Indian state of Gujarat following the earthquake in this region. After providing short-term humanitarian aid, Switzerland opened a fund worth CHF 1 million to help restore normal living conditions in the worst-affected area. India is one of the countries on which Swiss development co-operation focuses, with an annual budget of CHF 30 million. It also takes measures to promote the economy and trade.

Eastern Europe

Humanitarian aid serves a specific purpose and is provided by the government wherever it is most urgently needed, while Swiss development co-operation is primarily aimed at 17 so-called focal countries and regions and four countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America which are the subject of special programmes. After the fall of the Berlin Wall Switzerland set up programmes to support countries in Central and Eastern Europe on their path to democracy, constitutionality and a market economy. Nowadays such →

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Human dignity first and foremost

As a reversal of the Swiss flag, the red cross on a white background is recognised throughout the world as a symbol of a humanitarian Switzerland. The seven red cross principles drawn up in 1965 are: humanity, impartiality, neutrality, freedom of will, unity and universality. Our country can also boast these virtues. After all, our humanitarian tradition is not limited to the terms of the Geneva Convention. As a neutral state, Switzerland is in an ideal position to lend the poorest people of the world a voice, act as a mediator for justice and peace, and offer every member of the human race the protection they need.

Naturally not everything in the garden is roses. It is not in Man's nature to give without expecting something in return. Privileges are hoped for. All too often aid measures are politically motivated and it is a sad fact that some projects are selected more because of their media impact than their actual urgency. This way one might even justify building a well in the desert which no-one needs.

But it's easy to criticise. And if you carry on in this vein you become bitter and stop trying to help. Swiss humanitarian work may have a shadowy side, but it has a more important positive side. Anyone who has met people who are painstakingly removing land mines somewhere in Africa or Kosovo, attempting to identify the victims of Srebrenica, caring for those wounded in war or endeavouring to give traumatised refugees hope for a new life, knows that there are many men and women for whom human dignity means more than their own wellbeing. That is how it should be. And we must support this work with all our hearts. Gabrielle Keller

Translated from the German by N. Chisholm



Poverty has many faces. Slum near Sao Paulo.

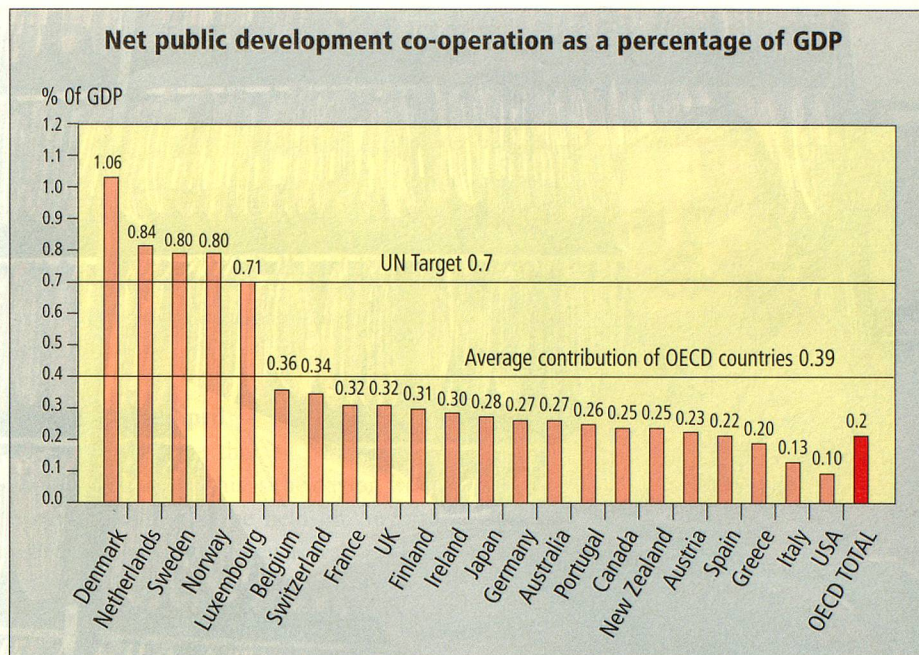
(continuation from page 5)

technical co-operation with Eastern Europe is concentrated on six Balkan states and the former Soviet Union.

Public development co-operation cannot be discussed without mention of economic and trade-related measures such as mixed credits, assistance with the balance of payments, trade promotion, the assurance of basic products, and strategies to reduce the debt of the world's highly indebted poor countries (HIPC).

Achievements

Development co-operation has experienced many changes in the the past 40 years. Gone are the days when infrastructure projects were financed and paternalistic donors provided development aid. "Nowadays donors support the partners in their development work. They fit in with their goals and methods and no longer force them to see things from their point of view," emphasises Walter Fust, SDC Director, in the recent September issue of the SDC newsletter "Eine Welt" ("One World"). What does he believe has been achieved? "No-one can say exactly



what development co-operation has achieved, because many of its elements are unquantifiable. In terms of education, health and access to drinking water, progress has been made," remarks Walter Fust, but he also points out the failures: "The group of least developed countries has grown, and

this is an unacceptable situation. We must not believe that co-operation alone will change the world and correct all inequalities."

Translated from the German by N. Chisholm

"Development has nothing to do with it"

INTERVIEW: MARTIN ZIMMERLI

Al Imfeld is a critic of Switzerland's official development co-operation work. In Switzerland the controversial development expert repeatedly sparks off heated discussion.

Switzerland is fond of boasting of its long humanitarian tradition. Can we still believe in this?

No, but we never could. Those are dangerous words - political slang.

But you must credit our country with some good offices in this area.

Yes. In fact, Switzerland played an important role in the past. But that is based on two things: firstly, the ICRC and its mediating role in conflict situations, and secondly the missionary movement; there is hardly a country in Africa where Swiss missionaries have not left their mark. Thanks to both these institutions, the ICRC and the mis-

sionary movement, Switzerland still has a very good reputation in Africa."

... But you don't think it deserves this?

Look: Even the missionaries did not provide assistance for purely selfless reasons. They tried to convince Africans that - to put it bluntly - our faith was better than theirs →



Viewed by many as an enfant terrible: Al Imfeld.

Al Imfeld (67) has studied on four continents (in Switzerland, Italy, Japan, Kenya, the USA and the Philippines). His studies ranged from Catholic and Protestant theology (ordained in 1960), journalism and development sociology, to tropical agriculture. He has taught in Zimbabwe, Malawi, Tanzania, Nairobi, Zurich, Lucerne and Berne and given lectures in Europe and Africa. He is the author of 40 books, including four volumes of poetry. He co-founded the movement "For an open church", set up the 3rd World information service (i3w) in Berne, and founded "Dialogue Africa" and the Society for the Promotion of African, Asian and Latin American Literatures.