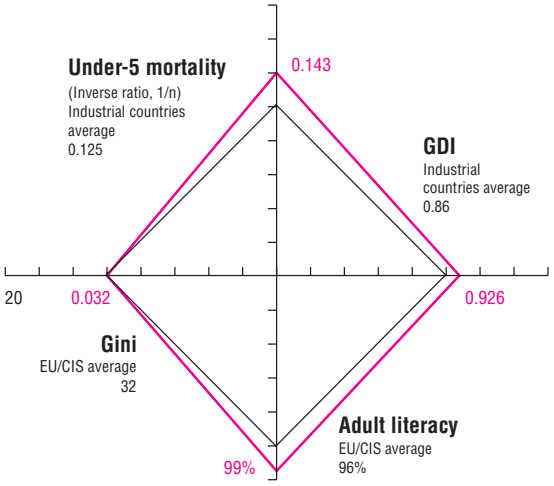

The Equity Diamond: National values in terracotta compared to regional ones in blue.

Internationally, Germany's commitment to the Copenhagen Summit principles may be undimmed. At home, Germany seems to be ignoring the poverty issue. It is as if Germany wants to persuade itself that the problem does not exist within its borders. «It seems that Bonn is (only) interested in global poverty eradication,» says Alfred Schleimer, from the office of the global development NGO Caritas. «But within its own frontiers nothing happens.»

THE STRAW IN THE NEIGHBOUR'S EYE

«The government does not deny the existence of poor people in Germany,» says Hans–Juergen Stubig, head of research into issues of social marginalisation at the German health ministry. *«But there is a difference between poverty in Germany and poverty in the Third World.»*

Thus Bonn declines to prepare an annual national poverty report –as agreed at Copenhagen– and when pressed on the issue says that its social security system covers the problem. *«Social aid is an adequate instrument with which to combat poverty in Germany,»* Stubig says.

However, current levels of social aid provision in Germany show that poverty is on the rise in Europe's economic powerhouse. New figures from the federal statistics office in Wiesbaden put 2.7 million out of 82 million Germans in need of public assistance in 1996, a 5.1% increase **over 1995.** More than half (56%) of claimants were women. Youngsters are suffering disproportionately; an estimated 38% of under 18 year olds live in households that are dependent in some way on state aid.

All this is in curious contrast to the genuinely valuable contribution that Germany made to the 1995 Copenhagen Summit, where Bonn led the charge on two major issues. These were that basic workers' rights should be protected as the free market globalisation revolution rolled around the Third World; and that more development cooperation funds were needed **for poverty reduction.**

«The German government ensured that two important points were included in the final declaration *at Copenhagen,»* says Erfried Adam, coordinator/spokesman for the Social Summit German NGO Forum, an association of 40 development, social, environmental and church NGOs: *«First, the need to strengthen International Labour Organisation (ILO) standards and ILO conventions, second, the '20:20' initiative.»*

The 20:20 initiative is intended to mobilise resources to achieve access to basic social services for all. Governments are expected to allocate about 20% of their budgets, and donors 20% percent of their aid budgets, to basic social services. Basic social services, as agreed by donor nations including Germany in Oslo in 1996, *include «basic education, primary health care including reproductive health and population programmes, nutrition programmes and safe drinking water and sanitation, as well as the institutional capacity for delivering those services.»*

Though Bonn has yet to fully meet its side of the 20:20 compact, it is already busy with what Adam calls «an intensive discussion with NGOs» on meeting the target within an agreed time frame and allocation of 20% of German development aid to poverty eradication. *«We have raised the share of our bilateral aid for basic needs oriented projects from 1.6 billion marks in 1995 to 1.8 billion marks in 1996,»* says Michael Bohnet, director general at

the German federal ministry of economic cooperation and development (BMZ), who led the German delegation to Copenhagen in 1995.

«Thus 50% of German foreign bilateral aid goes for such projects. We are placing a special emphasis on the self–help oriented fight against poverty. Funding for the purpose was increased to 500 million marks in 1995 — comprising 13% of bilateral aid allocations.»

All well and good, but Adam and Schliemer both note the incongruity of a state so obviously concerned about poverty alleviation abroad yet so resolutely determined to ignore it at home – even to the point where it breaks its own Copenhagen commitment by failing to present an annual report on domestic poverty.

In February 1996, the NGO Forum World Social Summit called for a conference with the backing of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, to develop and propose criteria for an annual national report on poverty, without response. *«Until now Bonn has failed to present annual reports on internal poverty,»* Adam says. *«The NGO Forum World Social Summit is urging Bonn to do so.»*

Germany already has extensive contacts with NGOs at the front line of poverty reduction. Many church and social NGOs are funded by the government, so the means are there to channel funds quickly to where they are needed and can be effectively used. Instead the government, squeezed by the costs of German reunification and pressures from Europe's common currency project, has had to trim spending. NGOs are feeling the squeeze in turn.

Adam says the NGO Forum wants governments to *«shape the market economy in the interest of social justice».* A combination of good policy and targeted action to build a 'social market economy' could lift the insecurity of poverty from the world's poor. *«And also in Germany,»* adds Adam.

However, Bonn's decision to emphasise 'poverty awareness' in overseas development cooperation has raised expectations in German civil society that the government doesn't want. Bonn is trying *«to talk the poverty issue to death,»* says Schleimer. *«The common idea that people who have less* than 50% the average income are poor, does not please the government. So Bonn ordered an expert's opinion about who may be called 'poor' in Germany. The survey is nothing more than *wasted money, not worth reading.»*

Schleimer sees two causes behind growing poverty in Germany. First, are the cuts in federal funds to social services directly working with the poor. Second is the increase in the number of single income families as divorce and separation increase.

Federal funding is being cut for employment programmes for long– term unemployed, pensions and other poverty–challenging work. Funding cuts have reached the point, Schleimer says, where people forced to exist on state support are not getting enough to meet even bare subsistence needs.

Meanwhile Bonn is passing the burden to the local 'kommunen' or municipal authorities. *«More than one–third of the country's circa 4.3 million jobless needs extra money from social services,»* says Schleimer, and are forced to go to the 'kommunen' for that aid. *«This is an example of how the federal government burdens municipalities with its own responsibility.»*

Stubig replies that if the municipalities are not able to cope with the growing numbers of people on social aid they should bring the issue to parliament and seek agreement on financial support from the federal government.

THE 20/20 INITIAITIVE

Internationally, Germany continues to participate actively in the implementation of the 20:20 initiative. Somewhat bluntly, Bohnet says 20:20 marks a departure from what he calls *«the stereotype demands raised by developing nations in the past, asking for a larger chunk of development assistance, without willingness on their part to come up with their own contributions.»*

Bohnet also cites German plans to 'swap' debt for spending on poverty alleviation in the manner of the debt for nature swaps of the 1980s. The relevant regulations had been changed and the budget for such swaps increased to DM 200m.

«Whoever knows how time–consuming the formation of a federal budget is – and this decision from Copenhagen has not been greeted everywhere with unanimous approval – will agree with me that this shift in Germany... has gone unusually quickly,» Bohnet says.

However Christiane Overkamp of the church aid NGO MISEREOR disputes this, saying there is no real change in the structure of the development budget to boost poverty reduction. Moreover, she says, there has been a drop in support for basic education, one of the goals agreed at Copenhagen and reconfirmed in Oslo.

Overkamp welcomes the BMZ's bilateral dialogue with some developing countries: Monika Westphal from the BMZ's department of poverty reduction says bilateral talks with between 10 and 15 countries showing interest in fulfilling their half of the 20:20 compact were underway or planned. The BMZ has also produced a new strategy paper on ways to help children in developing countries and added an extra DM 50m worth of funds to a Copenhagen backed special ILO five–year programme against child labour in 1996. But Overkamp still maintains that on the whole there has been no effective effort by Germany, as yet, to implement 20:20, and calls for *«an active and transparent information policy on the actual level of implementation.»*

The 1995 Copenhagen declaration asserted: *«We commit ourselves to the goal of eradicating* poverty in the world, through decisive national actions and international cooperation, as an ethical, *social, political and economic imperative of humankind.»* Adam, for one, reminds the German government of this clear commitment to eradicate poverty and not merely to alleviate it. And he adds that the 117 countries at Copenhagen pledged to improve the living conditions in their own countries and give high priority to full participation of the people in the decision–making processes.

Bonn, which made a positive contribution to Copenhagen in 1995, two years on has a way to go towards meeting all its pledges – especially at home.

- IPS Special report for Social Watch