

# From hunters to consultants

The German Africa Foundation has helped transform people's views of the continent

By Oliver Hoischen

What started as a club of big-game hunters has become a real partnership with Africa. The German Africa Foundation just celebrated 30 years of existence and members were delighted by congratulations from German President Horst Köhler.

The German president was a little bit late that evening but when Horst Köhler finally arrived, he came with much praise for the work of the German Africa Foundation. In his speech in front of 280 guests on this cold December day in Berlin, he spoke of the countless numbers of Africans and Germans from politics, business and culture that the organization has brought together. The foundation was, after all, celebrating its 30th birthday.

In his remarks, Köhler expressed just how indispensable the group has become. "We need more well-founded knowledge about Africa in Germany," he said. "In a globally networked world, we can only work cooperatively with Africa to find solutions to global challenges like security, poverty reduction, migration, security of natural resources and climate change."

Patience and continuity are important in Europe's relationship to its neighboring continent and the foundation stands for both, Köhler said. "The German Africa Foundation works very closely with political representatives," he said. "That is something I consider particularly important. Parliamentarianism is strengthening in Africa. However, it is still young, and fragile."

The foundation's history reflects how much both Africa and, especially, the German view of the continent have changed over the decades. The organization's forerunner was founded in 1956, just about a year before Ghana became the first African country south of the Sahara to achieve independence.

They were the years of the Cold War, when the Soviet Union started establishing diplomatic relations with individual countries in Africa as the West fretted



German President Horst Köhler, a friend and supporter of the German Africa Foundation.

about losing influence. While the Communists supported African independence movements ideologically, militarily and financially, the (mostly conservative) West German friends of Africa in parliament conversely sought to assist non-Communist movements in places like Mozambique, Angola, South Africa and Namibia.

The group gravitated around Parliamentary President Eugen Gerstenmaier, who was the first chairman of the organization that at the time still called itself the German Africa Association. They were soon derided as "Gerstenmaier's Big-Game Hunters Club,"

not least because the members displayed far too much sympathy for South Africa's apartheid policies. The Germans may have rejected racist discrimination but neither did they want to destabilize South Africa.

Ideology characterized debate in those days and finally led to the collapse of the Africa Association. It was refounded as the German Africa Foundation in 1978. Karl-Heinz Hornhues, who was elected chairman in 1987, managed to open up the organization so that all political parties are represented in it today – with the exception of The Left party, which has not named a representative.

Hornhues, who once chaired the Bundestag's Foreign Affairs Committee, was also at the celebration and was pleased to say, "The German Africa Foundation is the Africa mafia in parliament." Naturally, he grinned broadly while saying it. But guests such as Uschi Eid, the Green Party Africa expert sitting in the first row, understood how he meant it.

In 1989, she and Hornhues, a conservative, traveled in a small delegation to Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe. They noticed how much they had in common. Of course, by this time the outward political circumstances had changed as well, with

East-West antagonism landing on the rubbish heap of history and apartheid with it.

And today? The ambassador from Mali turns to the German Africa Foundation as a matter of course for advice for the state visit of her president in January – who else should he meet besides the German president and the chancellor? Could a breakfast with businessmen be organized? And if so, how? Should he also attend a charity event? Or perhaps a cultural program?

Foundation employees recently accompanied the Queen of Lesotho through half of Germany so that he could meet Bavaria's leader in Munich and Cardinal Meisner in Cologne. "The African embassies often have problems with the sheer size of the German Foreign Office and the Development Ministry – and vice-versa," said Dag Zimen, a longtime foundation employee. "We can help them find the common thread."

Foundation chairman Jürgen Langen and his team have consulted and influenced legislation and resolutions in the Bundestag. They are classic bridge-builders and intermediaries. They also manage to schedule unofficial meetings that often benefit the Foreign Ministry.

However, the foundation is especially concerned with ensuring that the German-African contacts keep both parties on an equal footing. Since 1993, the German Africa Prize has been awarded to people engaged in campaigning for a modern Africa. The award receives wide public recognition in Germany.

Their work fosters a more sophisticated view of Africa without ignoring issues like disease, war and corruption. They want to highlight the opportunities, economic interests and cultural hallmarks of this huge and diverse continent. Africa should not be pitied but should be supported fairly as a partner, they emphasize.

President Köhler commended the changes at the anniversary celebration. "Increasingly a new Africa is emerging," he said. "An Africa where democratic transfers of power are becoming the rule and not the exception." Hardly any other institution in Germany has accompanied these changes as resolutely as the German Africa Foundation. ■

## ■ Small-town team playing big

TSG Hoffenheim 1899 is the surprise of German football this year. The team from the tiny town (pop. 3,272) near Frankfurt is sitting proudly atop the Bundesliga standings going into the winter break, thereby earning the unofficial title of "fall champion." Of 45 "fall champions" in the Bundesliga's history, 31 have held on to win the real title in May.

Freshly promoted Hoffenheim is contesting its first season in the Bundesliga; two years ago, it was still playing in the third division. The team has flourished under head coach Ralf Rangnick and his brand of aggressive football. Lavish funding from team owner Dietmar Hopp, who also co-founded software giant SAP, also had something to do with it. Yet the team has benefited equally from some bargain acquisitions, players kept on the bench or waived by other clubs. Most notably, Bosnian forward Vedad Ibisević came out of nowhere to score 18 goals in 17 games, a feat reminiscent of the legendary Gerd Müller, the league's all-time top scorer.

In December, the perennial favorites Bayern Munich hosted Hoffenheim. The clash turned out to be one of the best of the season and, although Munich won 2:1 on a late lucky goal, it was Hoffenheim that won the respect of German football and stayed on top of the table, ahead of Bayern and Berlin.

The Bundesliga itself has been on a roll this season. A record number of 6,254,776 fans came to the stadiums in the first half of the season to see the 153 games, an average of more than 40,000 per competition. No league in Europe has drawn crowds as big this year. State-of-the-art stadiums built or renovated for the 2006 World Cup are a key reason.

Yet it was the matches themselves that kept people coming for more. The average of 3.02 goals scored per game is the highest in 20 years. The English, French, Italian and Spanish leagues all see fewer goals. Hoffenheim leads the league in that category, too, with 42 goals in 17 games. LL

A tiny football club from the mining town of Selebi-Phikwe started out as a rank outsider – last season, it was the sensation. Now the players from Nico United want to go all the way.

Gray rain clouds mass over the roofs of Selebi-Phikwe in the west of Botswana. The fans of local team Nico United are not deterred – they line up before the entry gates and get into the mood for the game with constant cries of "Nico! Nico! Nico!"

Today, the second day of the current season, "Nico" is again the underdog, facing off against the well-financed team from the diamond-city of Orapa. But this role suits the young team well and they score three times in the first half – always in 10-minute intervals. Again and again their fans in the stadium and in many cars parked outside cheer enthusiastically for their yellow-vested strikers to score more goals.

Looking from the stands across Botswana's third biggest city on the border with Zimbabwe, you see purely functional buildings and dust all over, giving an altogether rather sad impression. During the 1960s, copper and nickel was found in Selebi-Phikwe. Soon after, the city turned into a major mining center – today it is home to miners from Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

Often, the workers do not socialize after work but save their wages to send to their families. Their hope is for quick money. "Despite our very successful mines, we have an enormous unemployment rate in our city," said Patrick Gaofetoge, the club's manager, who stresses the importance of football in this city. "Unfortunately, it hits mainly young people and often they start drinking at an early age. Nico United gives hope back to the people, especially after our successes from last season."

Nico played an amazing season last year that thrilled long-time fans. After a bad start, Nico really got going, won almost every game and ended the season in fourth place in the Botswanan premier league.

Nico played best of all the teams during the second half of the season and one of their strikers scored 25 goals to become the league's top goal getter, with all the goals scored during the latter half of the season. Soon, rival teams got interested in the key players of this surprising squad. By the beginning of this season, a major competitor in the Botswana league made a serious offer to the top player, trying to lure him out of his contract with Nico.

Gaofetoge managed to prevent this move but from this day on, he was aware that teams would try even harder to lure his players away and that Nico cannot

## Yellow is the color of hope

Germany's Bundesliga has Hoffenheim, while Botswana counts on their Cinderella, Nico United | By Björn Richter



offer them much in return. That is why he increasingly counts on the motivation of his local players and attends their daily training sessions. Additionally, he only brings in two to three foreign players for the squad, mainly from Swaziland or Zimbabwe.

"We are working hard for our success," said Madinda Ndlovu, coach of Nico United. "A lot of our players work in the mines during the day and train afterward on the football field. We pay them – thanks to sponsors from the mining business – for their accommodation and give them a small allowance."

"These conditions are far from those in places like Germany and very often, our best young players leave to go to South Africa for a professional career," he added.

Ndlovu had his first football experience in Germany in the 1980s, when he played for several teams from North Rhine-Westphalia. Soon after, he earned his training license from the German Football Federation (DFB), before going back to his home country to help develop football there.

When asked to compare football in Germany and Botswana his eyes sparkle: "The best teams in our first league in Botswana can only compete with teams from the second league in Germany,"

Bavaria is everywhere: Fans with Weissbier-heads before the game.

he said. But he added that Nico players are particularly motivated and expressed his pride over the fact that two of his team members also play for the Botswana national team.

The national Botswanan team, the Zebras, didn't qualify for the World Cup 2010 in South Africa. They even lost their last game against Mozambique 1:0 in the capital Gaborone. But the fans were excited about their team and celebrated until late in the night with the opposing fans from their neighboring country. This spirit imbues Ndlovu: "Botswana is simply a football addicted country – only with less money."

The lack of money was also the main subject in the current season of the premier league. After contracting a new major sponsor for the league last summer, the sponsor disappeared – and suddenly several hundreds of thousands of dollars were lacking to run the competition. After several months of negotiations, a new sponsor was selected and finally, the season was secured.

So the games went on and everybody was talking again about Nico and its chances. The team ended up beating the favorite from Orapa 3:2. The fans cheered and shouted that they want their team to end up in at least third place – one up from last year. The manager of Nico believes that their matches will be a sensation again this year and will give hope to the miners. ■