Challenges and Opportunities of the Young Generation in Africa and Germany

Major Findings

A Contribution to our Common Future

A Common Paper
written by the scholarship-holders of the exchange programme “Go Africa... Go Germany...”, realized by the Federal Agency for Civic Education/bpb, following an initiative of the former President of the Federal Republic of Germany, Horst Köhler

2009/10
A Common Paper on the challenges and opportunities of the young generation in Africa and Germany

We, the participants of the third German-African exchange programme “Go Africa... Go Germany 2009/10” from Germany and West African countries, are proud to hereby present the following essay as a major result of our collaborative work.

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1 The programme was conceptualised and organised by the Federal Agency for Civic Education/bpb on the initiative of the former Federal President Horst Köhler and took place from August 16th to September 3rd, 2009 in Germany, and from March 11th to March 31st, 2010 in Ghana and Nigeria. It was designed to bridge the knowledge gap between African realities and German perceptions and German realities and African perceptions and, by bringing together the younger generation of academics in a meeting of the cultures, encourage an interdisciplinary exchange and deepening of knowledge. One of the major aims of the programme was to acquire a creative human basis for future German-African academics but also to facilitate exchange between them and established experts in the fields of economics, politics and law, as well as politicians. The programme was aimed mainly at students and young graduates aged up to 28 years in the subject areas of political science, international relations, economics and law.
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1. Introduction

One of the core goals of the “Go Africa... Go Germany...” exchange programme is to promote a deeper understanding of German and African realities. This finds its expression in the Common Paper, written jointly by the participants of each generation. For this Common Paper, we have concentrated on the question, how a German-African partnership can address challenges affecting youth in Germany and Africa. As we are currently developing a network of young people motivated to contribute to the build-up of a long-lasting partnership between Africa and Germany, as envisaged by the former Federal President of Germany, Horst Köhler, we want to contribute to a better understanding of crucial issues in both parts of the world. Therefore, this paper aims to tackle the following question: How can youth policy develop within a German-African Partnership, and how should a corresponding policy be shaped in Germany and Africa? The focus is placed on Germany and West African countries, in particular on Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Cameroon and Guinea. These are all states and societies with varying political, economic and security situations, but still, their comparison reveals the inherent underlying similarities with regards to the challenges facing young people in these countries. After an analysis of the main characteristics and trends in the field of youth policies in Germany and West African countries, we propose a series of recommendations for their improvement. Through these recommendations, we also wish to contribute to the current establishment of the Association for German-African Youth Education.

"Youth" is understood as a phase of life between childhood and adulthood, starting with the beginning of puberty at the age of approximately 13 years. But youth is not only defined biologically; one’s culture and society has a role to play in this definition. "Youth" takes certain forms and has a particular meaning depending on the society or social group. Therefore, the end of this phase of life is much harder to determine than its beginning. Usually, one’s social and economic self-dependency is taken as a marker. However, many young people today are socially and culturally independent, i.e. they live in their own households, have finished basic education, lead their own social and cultural lives etc., but are still economically dependent on their parents. Consequently, we chose 30 as the cut-off age for our definition. The operational definition of the age group between 15 and 30 has been chosen because of the diverse cultural contexts that this paper deals with.

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2 Depending on the data available, we also refer to Africa as a whole or to diverging sub-regions.
On a practical level, the youth demand rights and economic prospects. Both can be difficult, and if the interests of youth and more influential social groups clash, serious problems related to political participation, economic opportunities, social and cultural influence and even to security and peace can arise. In Germany, specific problems arise from the ageing population and resultant shrinking society. This is a world in which today's youth have to shoulder a large burden in the near future and at the same time faces difficulties in finding adequate work. This latter problem is the same across most of Africa, where many young people compete in societies where the majority of people are young and influential positions are monopolized by elders and the high number of youngsters is considered as a problem in itself: The "youth bulge" seems to threaten the state's and society's stability – while youth would say that the problem lies in the lack of chances, not in the youth itself.

As this paper tries to tackle the dual task of pointing out problems and finding solutions, we have explored the diverse problems and challenges that young people in Africa and Germany face and have pointed out possible ways to improve current situations. We take into account a range of problems affecting both German and African youth. Our aim is to find out the potential that exists in a German-African partnership with a youth policy embedded within this partnership. In this respect, the possibilities of a German-African Foundation centred on youth education are explored: What could the envisaged German-African Youth Foundation contribute to solving the identified problems?

We are aware that the living-conditions of youth in Germany and Africa vary widely. However, they also vary across African countries and, most importantly, between different regions and social groups within those countries – as is the case with Germany. Therefore, the variation does not prevent a comparison, as long as necessary differentiations are made. More importantly: Comparison is especially interesting when differences exist – and only through this type of analysis can both sides learn from each other.

Several sub-questions will guide our analysis and the development of proposals. The first question we deal with is: Do German and African youth share the same attitudes and values? We start by describing and comparing basic attitudes and values of youth in Africa and Germany, their wishes for their current and future lives with respect to politics and society, religion, culture, family and everyday life. The second set of questions asks: What does the daily reality of young people look like? Do African youth have similar opportunities and future prospects as young people in Germany or vice versa? In this section, we explore the daily challenges and realities of young men and women in both West Africa and Germany.
Finally, we look into ways and the extent to which groups of young people desire to or actually actively participate in politics. What problems do they face in this respect and how is their commitment rated by their peers and society? The recommendations that are dealt with in this section are intended to contribute to the formulation of the specific role and tasks of the newly founded Association for German-African Youth Education.

In the paper, we argue that youth in both analysed regions are facing several similar yet different challenges due to changing demands in a globalised world, conflicts between hopes and wishes on the one hand and livelihoods on the other hand. We argue that these challenges sometimes manifest themselves in divergent ways, for examples the differences in the labour market in Germany and West Africa. Yet, they are not essentially different in terms of structure. So the youth in both regions wish to have a nucleus of social contacts providing for personal acceptance as well as economic support; the need to develop their own fitting value systems, as well as to find their economic and private roles in society. While every society needs to guarantee this, it has to make sure that the individual social environment of youths and the special conditions related to their upbringing do not create constraints that will ultimately be detrimental to personal and societal development. The youth need to be made aware of the existing opportunities to influence these constraints, either politically or through other participatory means.

The three chapters detail how these areas of conflict are set up in the fields of values and attitudes, daily realities and political participation for the analysed regions. We come to the conclusion that any successful attempts to design youth policies will have to acknowledge each of these fields very closely in order to allow the youth to become mature and responsible citizens in the future – a task that lies at the very heart of the development of our societies. We also come up with clear-cut suggestions of what our envisaged sustainable partnership can do to promote this aim.
2. Summary of the Study & Outlook

This Common Paper written by the participants of the “Go Africa... Go Germany...” exchange programme addresses main issues of youth livelihoods in Africa and Germany. Youth, in our opinion, need special attention for several reasons: Firstly, as highlighted in this paper, they tend to be affected worse by poverty, violence, health problems, educational impasses and other potentially damaging issues than the national average. Secondly, they are hugely underrepresented in politics all over the world, so there is little scope for them to change this situation actively in formal politics. Thirdly, the future development of any country rests on the education of young people on the basis of equality, acceptable economic conditions, social attention and justice – in short: on them becoming mature and responsible citizens. Since these aims cannot be achieved on a national level in the globalised world, one needs to identify ways in which the connection between different regions can become better structured and natural for future generations. The realisation that there are global problems and that these problems need global-orientated solutions has highlighted the fact that we are all interconnected and have a lot to learn from each other. In order to tackle these problems a broad-based involvement from all segments of the population is needed, especially from the youth. In this respect, the exchange with other regions demonstrates our commitment to strengthening relationships between Europe and Africa for overcoming this gap.

The present paper has identified three main issue areas of common concern for an African-German partnership in the field of youth policy. These areas will be important in structuring the shape and actions of the envisaged partnership. The corresponding three thematic sections in this paper dealt with values and attitudes, daily realities and political participation of youth in both Africa and Germany. In exploring these fields we not only assessed a wide range of conceptions regarding family, education, politics and lifestyles but also tried to understand how these conceptions and values were embedded into their respective realities and political cultures. We therefore sought to identify similarities, overarching topics and overall structures connecting youth across the continents that we believe to be evident in our findings.

Our analysis begins with the main values and attitudes of the youth. Concerning family and social environment, we have been able to show that young people in both regions look for a nucleus of social contacts, which provide for personal acceptance as well as economic support. For both it holds true that the family is still the preferred model. Changing economic and social environments, as well as the tendency of modern western-oriented societies to outsource former functions of the family to the state lead to more individualisation and inde-
dependence of young people. This also brings with it a number of insecurities and liabilities, especially as many young people cannot be absorbed into the formal labour market and thus need to sustain themselves.

With regard to religion, there are more clear-cut structural differences between the analysed regions. Even though spiritual orientations seem to be just as popular among youth in Germany as they are in Africa, religious institutions perform a completely different and far more important role in Africa. There, they are heavily involved in economic welfare, unifying social activities and identity construction and if they work well, this provides scope for good policy outcomes. However, if used for questionable aims, they can also create problems along religious cleavages. African-German policy cooperation should be very aware of both sides and make an informed assessment about which institutions can be cooperated with to the benefit of young people.

Individualisation is a common theme that came up in the research of motives and attitudes towards education. While the low-profile appeal (albeit high political reputation) of education in Africa for large parts of the youth and the high pressure for an ever higher and specialised education in Germany seem to pull in different directions, both can be interpreted as a prioritisation of education as a means for the individual economic benefit. In Africa, rational economic calculation tells people to stay out of the educational sector due to scarce opportunities and detachment of the educational sector from the labour market. In Germany, the economic rat-race makes people pursue an ever higher degree, preferably in areas of high economic profitability.

In the area of culture and consumption, youths adapt to trans-regionally, sometimes even globally conveyed images that are largely not of their own making. To make matters more complex, these images are often in stark contrast with the value systems in their social environment. While in Germany as well as in Africa there is evidence of a lack of media monitoring as well as a lack of opportunities to discuss and explore experiences of young people, this is notably more so in Africa. This should not be considered a minor problem, as it affects vital health issues such as HIV/AIDS as well as the general design for the young people's lives.

As a second step for our study, we decided to look at the daily realities, in which the attitudes and values of the youths are set. This point has two interesting dimensions. Firstly, it is interesting what the individual desires and with what the aspirations of young people are confronted with in terms of their actual livelihoods. Secondly, these daily realities can also be
considered to shape the youths’ mindset in some way or another. Poverty, inequality, education, work, health, demography, migration, security and ecology were analysed and in assessing these areas a higher level of affectedness of youths compared to the national average in both regions could be identified. We were not surprised to find out that daily realities of young people are drastically diverging between Germany and Africa with higher standards in Germany and considerably lower ones in Africa. The contrasting findings in nearly all of these policy-fields hint at common economic and political root causes which have led to the diverging situations in the analysed regions. For example, equal allocation of goods and services and a peaceful and clean living environment are essential for survival and prerequisites for any kind of social participation within societies. But they cannot possibly be separated from global North-South policy-making and legitimacy-patterns contributing to the problems in the above-mentioned areas.

However, when looking beyond the concrete manifestations and histories of the labour market situation, education, health care and environment, we not only found common themes but also uneasy parallel developments and tendencies: be it the accentuation of inequalities, cutback of health care and social security systems, rising youth unemployment, brain drain, a global warming challenge, as well as hopeful investments in education that ultimately do not provide sufficient security for the youth. All constitute results and impacts of two continents, already connected in their fate. As none of the above-mentioned problems will be solved on a national level in the long term, sustainable solutions are highly dependent on honest transnational dedication and cooperation of the national actors. Some level of trust and comprehension are indispensable when dealing with common policies.

As a third step, we turned to the issue of political participation in both regions, as this is the most common way the needs and desires of young people and improvements to their living environments can find their way on to the political agenda. In Germany as in Africa we found willingness and interest in political action among the youth, even though the interest was considerably lower in Germany than in Africa for the data available. Concerning the transformation of this interest into concrete political action, we found youth in both regions pursuing a tendency towards specific causes in opposition to conventional political party membership. The latter are the object of distrust and frustration of young people on both continents. This distrust and frustration is matched by the youth’s limited ability and lack of possibilities to influence formal political decision often coupled with a lack of understanding of the political processes. Nevertheless, in both regions political systems informally deny decision-making to young people. Young people as policy-makers are an absolute exception, even more so, when the social background or gender is not the “appropriate” one. Youth interests and opin-
ions are rarely respected or perceived as legitimate, thus, they are the losers in the pursuit of policies and the struggle for mandates.

Similarly, political systems in Germany and African countries tend to place youth into the service of the established political apparatus, not representatively taking into account their issues and daily realities. Youth issues are at the margins of the public sphere while young people in established political parties often have to choose in between producing political commitment of their own which is often rather symbolic and not being taken into account, on the one hand, or being instrumentalised by established politicians in pursuing policies that they are not interested in and not their own original idea. The case of several African countries is thereby an especially sad example with youth used to commit acts of political violence. Formal politics in both regions thereby takes the form of the inaccessible; a domain for the established and well-educated; generally an activity assumed to be too complex for youth. It informally denies decision making to young people, while claiming to act in the youths’ best interest.

Drawing from the findings of this paper, an adequate strategy for enabling young people to act as what they really are – young and therefore future-oriented citizens of their states, on the one hand and members of the global community on the other hand – are the three steps road-mapped in this paper. First, we have to seriously and thoroughly explore what the youth want for themselves, their social environment, their states and the global community. Secondly, we have to compare these hopes, needs and concepts with the daily realities they face and figure out the real opportunities for improvement in these areas in an open (in terms of access as well as direction) debate with the other societal actors. Lastly, we have to make sure there is provision for an open political process as well as that the youth fully understand the workings of these processes and are also aware of sensible alternatives for influencing political decisions, if necessary.

It is crucial for the development of any society that the youth are made aware of the respective policy issues, formulate their interests and make these heard through active involvement in politics. Such involvement will need to take place at various levels, ranging from local to international politics, depending on the issue at hand. In many of the areas addressed above, there are inter-linkages between the situation of youth in African countries and in Germany; therefore exchange and cooperation will be essential to arrive at sustainable policies, taking advantage of joint opportunities.
3. The Way Forward: Recommendations for Improving Youth Policy in Germany and African Countries

From the analysis described in the summary of the study, a number of points of action emerge. In order to address the various challenges young people in West Africa and Germany face in their everyday lives, policy interventions are required at international, national, sub-national as well as local level. Appropriate policies at each of these levels will need to be determined based on a thorough analysis of the specific situation of the youth to be targeted and may differ depending on the local context. Additionally, measures can be taken within the German-African Partnership, affecting other areas of national youth policy.

**Strengthening the participation of young people in political decision-making** is likely to foster a better representation of their interests. In this respect, the following policies appear pertinent:

- **Youth quotas** in administration appointments, e.g. 15% of all appointments should be reserved for people under 30 years old. Youth quotas institutionalizing the appointment of young persons in high administration offices increase the possibilities of policy changes that would take youth interests into account. Highly qualified, young adults can contribute meaningfully and prove that the promotion of youth participation is not just a lip service.

- **Provide sufficient places** for young people to meet and articulate their interests. Youth clubs and other places where young persons can assemble freely, discuss topical issues in a relaxed environment are necessary to facilitate an exchange of ideas and mobilize the youth towards action.

- **Honour voluntary societal commitment** of students in schools and universities through scheduled free-time slots in their day or other incentives. As schools and universities are the focal point of adolescents and young adults, they should actively encourage the political or societal commitment of their students. Incentives should be provided in order to increase a community-orientated conscience among the students. This can include the provision of classes in community action and civil service.

- **Democratize the administration of schools.** The immediate environment shapes the political participation of young persons. Either it encourages them to get involved
or it discourages them. Schools are the backdrop of all further development and therefore it follows that in order to encourage more political participation, the youth should participate in the school’s management. As school councils take decisions that directly impact students’ lives, students need to be involved. At these councils, they can prove their ability to take responsibility for their immediate environment. School councils should therefore have equal representation from parents, teachers and students. Students should have equal voting rights. Decisions should be made by simple majority voting.

- Provide the preconditions for young people to access information relevant to their civic education and career paths. For the youth to be active citizens, it is necessary that they can find the relevant information whenever they need it. Therefore, better access to infrastructure for research and fast internet connections would be an added asset for supporting their active involvement.

Establishing a German-African Youth Foundation

Building on joint opportunities and tackling the challenges faced by African and German youth will require sustained exchange, involving and empowering youth with various backgrounds. The following section outlines how a German-African Youth Foundation could play a crucial role in this respect, by providing opportunities to get to know each other, to exchange ideas and visions and to participate in political decision-making.

Aims of the German-African Youth Foundation

The German-African Youth Foundation should be an institution that builds networks and fosters exchange between young people from Germany and African countries, with the objective of identifying topics of common concern and facilitating innovative thinking to solve these issues.

Accordingly, as a starting point, the German-African Youth Foundation should enhance mutual understanding, aim at broadening the youths’ horizons and contribute to overcoming misconceptions about each other. Beyond this, the Foundation should create an open space for free speech and critical thinking, allowing youth in Germany and in African countries to develop and exchange ideas. An important aim will be to strengthen young people's motivation and capabilities for political participation in local, national and global contexts, through innovative forms of political participation.
Target Group

In order to maximise its reach, the Foundation should define “youth” as broad enough to remain relevant in a global context yet infuse socio-cultural and economic specificities of target group countries. These recommendations are generally targeted at young people between 14 and 30 years of age, however the target group may need to be specified further for each of the specific programmes and policies in question.

The Foundation should be inclusive and aim at reaching all youth, irrespective of their socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. University students and graduates, or respectively high school students from families with a higher education background, can be expected to be particularly inclined to participating in the activities of a German-African Youth Foundation. Therefore, in order to ensure broad participation and continued relevance, the Foundation will need to especially target socially and economically disadvantaged young people. The Foundation should offer opportunities for youth attending different types of high schools (including public as well as private schools and all three German types of secondary school: Hauptschule, Realschule and Gymnasium), university students and young professionals (university graduates as well as those with other types of training). Efforts should be made to reach out to and connect with the multitude of young people who are deprived of formal education.

Activities of the Foundation should equally target male and female youth and ensure a gender balance in its activities. It should be open for youth with disabilities and offer special support for participation if needed.

In order to reach as many young people as possible with limited capacities, the Foundation should pay special attention to multipliers such as journalists, teachers and youth who are already actively engaged in politics or society.

Guidelines

To achieve the aims of the German-African Youth Foundation and ensure that recommended policies benefit the desired target group, the following guidelines will be employed.

- **Promote and build on existing youth programmes** – The idea of a youth Foundation is not entirely new. Several institutions and organisations that have projects and programmes to address some of the challenges highlighted in this paper already exist. It is therefore a strategic imperative that the German-African Youth Foundation
builds synergies by creating networks with some of these organisations and help build on their programmes. This would help the Foundation to reach out to more people since the already existing programmes have the necessary structures in place for success.

- **Strengthen “for youth, by youth programmes” within local communities (ownership)** – To improve the effectiveness and sustainability of programmes introduced by the Foundation, it is important that individual youth in the local communities are involved in the initiation, planning and implementation of programmes. Local ownership of the programmes will augment their dedication and increase the likelihood of the programmes’ success.

- **Support individual multipliers through self-empowerment** – The activities of the German-African Youth Foundation can only reach a small group of people at a time. It is therefore necessary that individuals who benefit from the Foundation’s programmes become multipliers in their communities. Thus, they must be supported with the necessary logistics and resources needed, thereby empowering them to successfully carry out various projects.

- **Use local languages where needed** – The activities of the German-African Youth Foundation would want to reach all the youth in both urban and rural areas. In order to ensure that individual youth understand and buy into the programmes put in place by the Foundation, local language must be used where necessary to enhance participation.

- **Develop a platform for information exchange** – The German-African Youth Foundation must put in place a common document that would serve as a guide in the planning and implementation of activities on the national and international level. This is to ensure coherence in what is done across board and also that organised activities address the aims of the Foundation. Publications could however not only cover these “constitutional or basic” aspects of cooperation but also be extended to develop bi-continental magazines, journals or reviews (like the Joint MAG).

- **Consider social events when trying to organise activities** – Social events are a good way to allow good interaction and informal education in many aspects of life. Programmes and activities organized by the Foundation should be fun, interesting and educative. This would encourage youth dedication and support for success.
Avoid clichéd and overdone representation, but rather show diverse societies –
The German-African Youth Foundation in organizing programmes (social or cultural events, for example) should not only focus on one aspect of the culture of a group of people that is commonly “known” and misinterpreted. It should rather contribute to breaking down these stereotypes by showing the diversity of life.

Ensure easy access to all events – The German-African Youth Foundation should ensure that access to all its events and programmes is easy and affordable. Entrance fees should be relative to the participant’s income and the Foundation should provide for a mechanism to subsidize the costs of those who might otherwise be unable to attend. There should be simple procedures to access information and to participate in activities organized by the Foundation.

Means

In order to implement programmes and activities of the Foundation, proper mediums and structures must be put in place. The following are ways by which the Foundation intends to implement its policies to accomplish set goals and targets.

- Exchanges – These exchanges which would take place at both inter- and intra-country levels are platforms that would be created to enable the youth to interact and learn from each other. The Foundation would be put in place to:
  - Facilitate access to or provide scholarships and grants for
    - study abroad programmes
    - German-African internships, i.e. two successive internships in similar companies/ institutions on each of the two continents to grasp different working methods and cultures. This would enable the intern to develop constructive ideas to advance the companies’/institutions’ goals.
  - Facilitate the creation of networks and pen friendships among the youth in their own countries, and internationally.
  - Assist in the continuous planning and implementation of yearly “Go Africa… Go Germany” programmes. Past participants of the programme can meet periodically to deliberate on issues and continue discussions for positive change.
  - Organise annually “Go Africa… Go Germany…” conferences, each dedicated to a specific topic of common interest. Such conferences would both offer an opportunity to explore issues in depth and to strengthen networks among former participants of “Go Africa… Go Germany” exchange programmes.
o Enhance web-based information sharing. This would include the creation of a database accessible by all that would provide information on opportunities for the youth especially within their own countries and in other parts of the world.

o Create opportunities for peer teaching and training through mentoring programmes.

o Organize inter-cultural exchanges between young musicians, artists and youth in creative industries. This would be an opportunity for the youth to develop their talents and learn more about other cultures.

- **Cross-continental activities without physical interaction** – This can be done by using information and communication technology to:
  
  o Hold annual essay, arts and music competitions.
  
  o Organize a forum for educational debates and discussions on economic and social issues. Ideas on possible solutions to these issues can be generated.

- **Coordinated activities at respective national levels** – Due to resource constraints, the German-African Youth Foundation would need to focus on organizing frequent, well-coordinated activities on the national level. These activities should:
  
  o Support media formats (e.g. youth radios)
  
  o Provide an opportunity for quarterly conferences, workshops and seminars on various social topics (education, job search, health etc.) that are of concern to the youth
  
  o Create an avenue for analyzing and critically evaluating public education curricula because the mis- or under-representation of the “other” can significantly contribute to sustaining stereotypes. The goal is to lobby for “sound” covering, i.e. a differentiated depiction of different realities, of Europe and Africa respectively
  
  o Organize activities in schools and involve teachers in order to reach young high school students. Possible activities in schools might include the visit of experts, the organisation of project days, the creation of German-African youth clubs or the facilitation of role model games of international politics.

  o Encourage the organisation of cultural events and competitions.

  o Seek funds to support research activities focusing on attitudes, values and interests of young people.
Partners

In order to successfully execute these various activities, the Foundation should seek the partnership of other players in this field. There is the need to distinguish between different levels of partnership.

Generally, the Foundation should seek partners that can support it through material and immaterial resources. Different prominent people such as high-ranking politicians, popular persons within the educational system or civil society such as professors, journalists or “elder statesmen” or other ambassadors could provide valuable contacts and publicly endorse the Foundation’s purposes. The fact that the project itself goes back to the initiative of a Partnership with Africa of the former Federal President of Germany, Horst Köhler, shows, to what extent the personal commitment of influential persons is necessary at the initial stages. However, this support needs to be institutionalised because of the persistent changes in office.

For material support, the Foundation should seek partnership with companies who are willing to significantly contribute to the financing of the Foundation without claiming any influence on the Foundations operations.

On a more practical level, with every executed project, sufficient media coverage should be assured in order to fulfil the Foundation’s aims. Journalists, on a local, national and international level, should be permanently informed about and included in the Foundation’s activities and during specific projects.