



DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION FROM A PARTNER PERSPECTIVE

*How can Germany and other donors perform
better in the eyes of their partner countries?*

Executive Summary
2020

Imprint

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Photo credits

Cover: atakan, istockphoto

Bibliographical reference

Guffler, K., A. Harutyunyan, M. DiLorenzo, T. Sethi, M. Eppler, M. S. Heinelt (2020), *Development Cooperation from a Partner Perspective. How can Germany and other donors perform better in the eyes of their partner countries?*, German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval), Bonn.

Printing

Bonifatius, Paderborn

© German Institute for Development
Evaluation (DEval), 2020

ISBN 978-3-96126-106-2 (printed edition)
ISBN 978-3-96126-107-9 (PDF)

Published by

German Institute for Development
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53113 Bonn, Germany
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www.DEval.org

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This is an excerpt from the publication "Development Cooperation from a Partner Perspective. How can Germany and other donors perform better in the eyes of their partner countries?". Download the full report here: <https://www.deval.org/en/evaluation-reports.html>.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is about (1) how policymakers and practitioners in low- and middle-income countries assess the support for internal policy processes they receive from Germany and other donors⁴ and (2) what these donors can do to improve their support in the eyes of their partners.

Why partner perceptions matter

How partner-country policymakers and practitioners perceive donors' support for agenda setting and implementation of internal policies is relevant mainly for two reasons.

First, economic development in many low- and middle-income countries and the proliferation of donors continue to expand partner-countries' access to finance and policy ideas (Janus et al., 2015; Klingebiel et al., 2016; Parks et al., 2015). In an "age of choice" (Prizzon et al., 2016), partner countries can be increasingly selective about who they wish to cooperate with and who they invite to the table when national development priorities and policy agendas are negotiated. Over the coming years, this is likely to lead to increased competition among donors as providers of policy ideas and implementation support (Acharya et al., 2006; Frot and Santiso, 2010; Gonsior and Klingebiel, 2019; Mawdsley, 2015; Morris, 2018). As a consequence, for a donor to stay in the game and be able to contribute to the achievement of development outcomes in countries of the Global South, positive perceptions of the donor's performance among policymakers and practitioners in those countries will become increasingly important.

The second reason why donors in particular should take a keen interest in how policymakers and practitioners in their partner countries assess donor support for local policy processes is that these stakeholders can be expected to be among the best judges of the quality of this support. In view of an understanding of aid as a mere "catalyst" for internally induced development dynamics (Pronk, 2001), the approach of assessing the effectiveness of development cooperation only by directly measuring development outcomes such as economic growth poses considerable challenges. Instead, the link between donor support for local policy processes and development outcomes can also be recognised as an indirect one, and here the perceived influence and helpfulness of donors' support for partners' policies is measured to reflect donors' contributions.

Though a donor's image in the eyes of partners is important for donors to care about in and of itself, competition between donors to provide policy ideas and implementation makes perceptions even more important, as these distinguish one donor from another. However, the Listening to Leaders Survey measures more than just "perceptions": it reports experience-based assessments of donors' support by those who should know best and, as such, should be taken seriously. Accordingly, in this report we use both terms – perceptions and assessments – to describe the measured items throughout.

Guiding questions and empirical approach

Given the importance of the partner perspective, the study identifies agenda setting and policy implementation as two important entry points and examines donors' support at these two stages in the eyes of policymakers and practitioners from 126 low- and middle-income countries. In addition, it identifies factors that explain partner assessments of donor support for internal processes at three levels: first, strategic decisions by donors about aid allocation and partner-country selection (macro level); second, donor adherence to principles of aid effectiveness (see Box 1; meso level); and third, donor-partner interactions on the ground (micro level).

⁴The term "donor" has been widely banished from international development cooperation vocabulary in favour of "development partner" to express a relationship at eye level and of mutual interest (Konijn, 2013). For the same reason, the term "recipient" has been widely replaced by "partner (country)". For the sake of clarity, this report uses the term "donor" to describe providers of development assistance and "partner" or "partner country" to describe recipients.

This joint report by the German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval) and AidData investigates partner assessments globally for all bilateral and multilateral donors, as well as for Germany's official development cooperation in particular. The questions that guide the report are:

Assessments of bilateral and multilateral donors

1. How do partner-country policymakers and practitioners assess donor support at the stages of agenda setting and policy implementation?
2. What factors explain differences in partner-country policymakers' and practitioners' assessments of donor support at the stages of agenda setting and policy implementation?

Assessments of Germany's official development cooperation

3. How do partner-country policymakers and practitioners assess Germany's support at the stages of agenda setting and policy implementation?
4. What factors explain differences in partner-country policymakers' and practitioners' assessments of Germany's support at the stages of agenda setting and policy implementation?

By means of AidData's 2017 Listening to Leaders Survey, we are able to analyse data on agenda setting and policy implementation, two crucial stages of a partner-country's policy cycle in which donors can act in order to contribute to the achievement of development outcomes. In the 2017 survey, nearly 2,400 policymakers and practitioners from "government" (62.6%), "civil society" (29.8%), and the "private sector" (7.6%) provided first-hand insights into their experiences working with a variety of bilateral and multilateral donors and shared feedback on two aspects of performance: influence in agenda setting and helpfulness in implementing policy initiatives. 375 partner-country policymakers and practitioners evaluated at least one of the three main actors of Germany's official development cooperation present in partner countries (German embassies, the GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit), and the KfW Development Bank (KfW, Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau)).

We complement the survey data with insights drawn from four country case studies (Albania, Cambodia, Colombia, and Malawi). In sum, interviews with 193 policymakers and practitioners were conducted, of which 101 were partner-country policymakers and practitioners (69.3% "government and public sector", 24.8% "civil society" and 5.9% "private sector"). These country case studies provide value in two ways. First, they explore how policymakers and practitioners understand the terms "influence" in agenda setting and "helpfulness" in policy implementation. Second, they build a richer narrative around the presumed explanatory factors through which donors can become more influential and more helpful, and unearth additional factors that were not identified ahead of the case studies.

How do partner-country policymakers and practitioners assess donor support?

Key findings I: Bilateral and multilateral donors

- On average, bilateral and multilateral donors achieve scores between 2.5 and 3.5 on a scale from 1 (not at all influential/helpful) to 4 (very influential/helpful) on each item and, per our interpretation, are thus assessed as "quite influential" and "quite helpful". However, clear differences between individual donors are apparent. For instance, multilateral donors are assessed as more influential in agenda setting and more helpful in policy implementation than bilateral donors.
- The four country case studies indicate that, by and large, donors' influence in agenda setting and helpfulness in policy implementation are perceived positively.
- Survey respondents assess donors who are influential in agenda setting as also being helpful in policy implementation. While higher perceived helpfulness of donors is associated with greater perceived progress on policy initiatives, the same is not true for influence on agenda setting.

On average, bilateral and multilateral donors are assessed as "quite influential" in agenda setting and "quite helpful" in policy implementation in low- and middle-income countries. In relative terms, survey respondents assess multilateral organisations as more influential and more helpful than bilateral donors. Multilateral donors are assessed as more influential (average score: 3.00) and more helpful (average score:

3.28) than bilateral donors (influence average score: 2.85; helpfulness average score: 3.15). In our sample of 43 bilateral and multilateral donors, the top ten donors in terms of perceived influence and helpfulness are a mix of large multilateral donors. Compared to the average across all donors, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the USA, the European Union (EU), and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) are assessed as more influential and more helpful. Other donors typically have an edge on one of the two measures. The three bilateral donors ranked among the ten most influential donors are two large Development Assistance Committee (DAC) donors – the USA and the UK – and Denmark, a rather small and specialised donor. Although Denmark ranks below the USA and the UK, this result indicates that a high total amount of provided Official Development Assistance (ODA) or a large project portfolio is not necessarily related to higher influence scores. The only bilateral donor in the top ten of the most helpful donors is a large bilateral donor: the USA.

Country case studies indicate that partner-country policymakers and practitioners perceive donors' influence as an input that supports them in dealing with their development challenges. Accordingly, influence is perceived positively. Nevertheless, there are some instances when influence is perceived negatively, for example when donors disregard partners' policy preferences. Partner-country policymakers and practitioners in the country case studies describe donors' influence in agenda setting as creating or contributing to new policy agendas, modifying existing ones, or retaining priorities when new governments come to power. In the country case studies, influence in agenda setting is generally assessed as positive, i.e., as a contribution of solutions to partner-countries' development challenges. However, in a few cases partner-country policymakers and practitioners also raise criticisms with respect to influence. On the one hand, a few government interviewees mention that “influence” is not the right word to describe the nature of their partnership with donors. In their view, cooperation implies mutual respect between donors and partner-country stakeholders, and is less about donors' influence and more about supporting partners' decisions. On the other hand, influence is assessed as a negative attribute in a few cases when donors push their own interests too much and do not take partners' preferences or arguments into account.

The qualitative analysis suggests that partner-country policymakers and practitioners often associate helpfulness with donors adopting sector-wide approaches and supporting internal capacity. In the four case studies, partner-country policymakers and practitioners interpret donors' helpfulness in policy implementation mainly as various forms of support in the areas of technical and financial assistance. As we only received information that rated helpfulness positively, we conclude that scoring high on this measure is a desirable outcome. Across the country case studies, two aspects stand out that are assessed as helpful in policy implementation: using sector-wide approaches and building internal capacity.

Survey respondents assess donors who are influential in agenda setting as also being helpful in policy implementation. Survey respondents across low- and middle-income countries reveal that donors who are assessed as influential tend to be assessed as helpful, and vice versa. However, donors should not expect this positive relationship to appear automatically, as country case studies indicate that there are factors that might counteract it. First, where a donor pushes its policy ideas strongly, partners may agree to include these ideas in their policy documents, but might not prioritise their implementation in the near future. Second, if a partner-country's government changes (e.g., following elections), the new government might not prioritise its predecessor's commitments. Thus, in both cases partners might assess a donor as influential because, for example, the donor successfully brought an issue onto the agenda, but not as helpful, because projects were not implemented.

Perceived progress on policy initiatives is associated with greater donor helpfulness. We hypothesise that more favourable assessments of donors in terms of influence and helpfulness are associated with perceptions of greater progress on a policy initiative. The survey analysis reveals a positive relationship between perceived progress and assessed donor helpfulness, but not between perceived progress and perceived donor influence. However, there is also no negative relationship between perceived donor influence and perceived progress of a policy initiative. These identified correlations among influence, helpfulness, and progress indicate that donors can successfully influence partner-countries' policy agendas and subsequently assist partners to implement those policies to achieve development goals.

What explains how donors perform in the eyes of their partners?

Key findings II: Bilateral and multilateral donors

- Actionable factors that are related to how influential and helpful a donor is perceived by partner-country policymakers and practitioners have been identified at three levels: (1) strategic decisions about aid allocation and country selection (macro level), (2) donors' adherence to aid effectiveness principles (meso level), and (3) donor–partner interactions on the ground (micro level).
 - Macro level: The importance of a donor's provided aid in relation to the total provided aid to a specific partner country is positively related to that donor's perceived influence in agenda setting and perceived helpfulness in policy implementation.
 - Meso level: Donors' adherence to specific aid effectiveness principles is positively related to how partner-country policymakers and practitioners assess donors' influence and/or helpfulness.
 - Micro level: Partner-country policymakers and practitioners emphasise aspects of the donor–partner interaction that make donors more helpful in their view, such as donors' expertise, flexibility in donors' processes, cooperative partnerships, and the quality of the relationship.

Factors concerning strategic decisions about aid allocation and country selection (macro level)

Survey analysis reveals that the importance of a donor's provided aid in relation to the total provided aid to a partner country is positively related to that donor's perceived influence in agenda setting and perceived helpfulness in policy implementation. This result complements Faust et al. (2016), who also find a positive effect – of a donor's *provided aid* (measured through the indicator “country programmable aid” (CPA)) in relation to the total provided aid in a partner country – on Germany's perceived influence, but no effect on its perceived helpfulness. The result confirms that aid can be used as leverage to achieve influence on policy initiatives, which is in line with other literature (Dietrich and Wright, 2012; Molenaers et al., 2015).

Survey data show a negative relationship between aid fragmentation and donors' perceived helpfulness. In countries where *aid fragmentation* is high, policymakers and practitioners assess donors as less helpful in policy implementation. Evidence for a relationship between fragmentation and perceived influence in agenda setting is less robust, but points in the same direction.

A country's level of democracy and aid dependency were not found to be related to donors' perceived influence in agenda setting and helpfulness in policy implementation. The level of democracy or autocracy of a partner country (*regime type*) does not directly affect donors' perceived influence and helpfulness. Although for many donors the level of democracy is an important factor with regard to aid allocation, the first AidData-DEval report also did not find a direct relationship (Faust et al., 2016). Furthermore, according to the country case studies, we assumed that the greater a partner country's *aid dependency*, the more a donor would be perceived as influential and helpful. By contrast, our models show no robust relationship between aid dependency and partners' assessments of donors' support.

Factors concerning donors' adherence to aid effectiveness principles (meso level)

Survey analysis indicates that providing a larger share of aid on budget or in the form of general budget support is positively related to partners' assessments of donors' influence in agenda setting; aid on budget is also positively related to perceived helpfulness in policy implementation. Donors' use of a country's systems to provide aid was not found to be related to how partners assessed donors. In line with our initial expectation, providing *general budget support* is positively related to greater perceived influence of a donor in agenda setting. *Aid on budget* even leads donors to be assessed as more influential and more helpful in the eyes of their partners. As aid on budget facilitates budget processes and is expected to support greater accountability, it can be interpreted as a crucial step towards alignment (CABRI, 2014; OECD, 2012). The latter equally applies to general budget support, which is also seen to enhance partner-country accountability (Frantz, 2004), to improve public management systems (Lawson, 2015), and to increase budget transparency (Schmitt, 2017) as well as potentially serving to increase harmonisation among donors (Orth et al., 2017). By contrast, our analysis reveals that *use of country systems* – that is, the use of partner-country budget

execution, financial reporting, auditing, and procurement systems – is not positively related to donors' perceived performance in the internal policymaking process in the eyes of their partners. In the course of our qualitative analysis, policymakers and practitioners in the four country case studies also emphasise the general importance of donor alignment.

Donor coordination through the use of pooled funding is associated with positive assessments of donor influence and helpfulness. While there are many ways for *donors to coordinate* better, the study focuses on one approach: use of pooled funding. Our results show that, in countries where donors disburse a higher share of their aid by using pooled funding mechanisms, survey respondents assess donors as more influential and more helpful. Interestingly, whether an individual donor pools its funds with other donors in a given country does not seem to affect its own performance in the internal policymaking process, but pooling funds provides an enabling environment in which donors are perceived as more influential and more helpful. Partner-country policymakers and practitioners in three of the four country case studies (Albania, Cambodia, and Malawi) express the need for improved cooperation and communication among donors and view donor cooperation as helpful.

Survey analysis reveals a positive relationship between in-year predictability and partner-country perceptions of donors' influence and helpfulness. As one might expect, donors are assessed as more influential and more helpful when their aid is more predictable in the short term. In contrast to the survey analysis, which used in-year *predictability* as an indicator, the country case studies related predictability mostly to the sudden exit of donors from the partner country or changes in donors' commitments.

Survey analysis shows that adherence to ownership is positively related to donors' perceived influence in agenda setting and helpfulness in policy implementation. Survey participants who report that the policy initiatives they worked on received broad-based partner-country support – that is, support from a larger group of actors (e.g., the head of state/government, the legislature, the judiciary, and civil-society groups), which is related to *adherence to ownership* – assess donors to be more influential and helpful. This relationship confirms findings from the first joint AidData-DEval report, which found partner-country support to be positively correlated with Germany's perceived influence in agenda setting and helpfulness in implementation (Faust et al., 2016). Furthermore, it is in line with findings from Keijzer and Black (2020), who show that local ownership is important for effective use of development funding (pp. 1–2). While we cannot be certain about the causal relationship, partner-country support is a relevant factor to be explored in more detail in future studies, especially against the background of inclusive partnerships being a specific aspect of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 17.

Factors concerning donor–partner interactions on the ground (micro level)

Country case studies suggest that policymakers and practitioners find helpful those donors that bring expertise and are flexible in their processes. Partner-country policymakers and practitioners across the board assess donors' *expertise* as helpful, especially expertise in the area of bringing in scientific evidence and analysis, providing technological know-how, and possessing country-specific experience. Partner-country policymakers and practitioners in all four case study countries also value *flexible processes*. They regard rigid processes with respect to project planning schemes (e.g., long conception phases, cumbersome procedures, and deadlines) as rather unsupportive, because these can be out of sync with changing policy dynamics and actor constellations in specific reform processes.

Country case studies indicate that cooperative partnerships – characterised by an openness towards ideas, trust, and cultural sensitivity – make donors more helpful in policy implementation in the eyes of their partners. These *cooperative partnerships* comprise different aspects, all of them based on a partnership where both partners and donors are valued equally: working together (e.g., joint involvement in design, implementation, roll-out, and problem-solving); trust; respectful and honest communication; long-standing relationships; cultural sensitivity; proximity; and listening to and valuing partners' ideas.

Qualitative analysis indicates that personal relationships matter for donors to be perceived by partner-country actors as more influential in agenda setting and more helpful in policy implementation. Partner-country and external stakeholders (donor staff based in-country and experts) in the case studies highlight

that a donor's influence and helpfulness can be related to individual staff members (e.g., their technical and soft skills). Other aspects that appear to be relevant with respect to individual staff members include being knowledgeable in the field, responsible, and straightforward, demonstrating leadership and commitment, and maintaining good *interpersonal relations*.

How do partner-country policymakers and practitioners assess Germany's support in the BMZ's partner countries?

The study places a particular focus on analysing how the three German actors (German embassies and the implementing organisations the GIZ and the KfW) and Germany's overall official development cooperation – measured as the aggregate of the three – perform in comparison to a relevant peer group of donors in terms of influence in agenda setting and helpfulness in policy implementation across the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ's) 85 partner countries. The peer group consists of four large multilateral donors (the EU, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNICEF, and the World Bank), the four largest DAC bilateral donors aside from Germany (the UK, France, Japan, and the USA), China as an important non-DAC donor, and, lastly, relatively small and specialised donors (Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden). The latter were included as they ranked high on influence and helpfulness in the first AidData-DEval report (Faust et al., 2016). The study also shows how influential and helpful Germany's overall official development cooperation and the three German development actors are perceived across stakeholder groups ("government", "non-governmental organisations/civil society organisations" ("NGOs/CSOs"), and "private sector"), regions, and policy areas. Due to the low number of responses for German development actors, not all individual stakeholder groups, regions, and policy areas could be analysed.

Key findings I: Germany's official development cooperation

Germany's aggregate score

- Germany's aggregate score is 2.93 for influence and 3.18 for helpfulness, placing Germany's official development cooperation in the range of "quite influential" and "quite helpful", comparable to what we see for donors in the peer group of 13 bilateral and multilateral donors. Compared to the average scores of this peer group, however, Germany's aggregate score is on par for helpfulness but below par for influence.
- Across policy areas, regions, and stakeholder groups, the aggregate scores for Germany's helpfulness and influence range between 2.68 and 3.37 and are by and large on par with the peer group average. Germany's aggregate scores for influence and helpfulness are below the peer group average only for the policy area "democracy, civil society and public administration".

Individual performance of German development actors

- The three German development actors are perceived differently. More positive assessments of the German embassies in terms of their perceived influence and of the implementing organisations (the GIZ and the KfW) in terms of their perceived helpfulness might be due to the division of labour among the three development actors.
- The disaggregated analyses show that all three actors are, on average, perceived as on par with the peer group among single stakeholder groups as well as across different policy areas and regions. Only in a few areas do they perform above or below the peer group average.

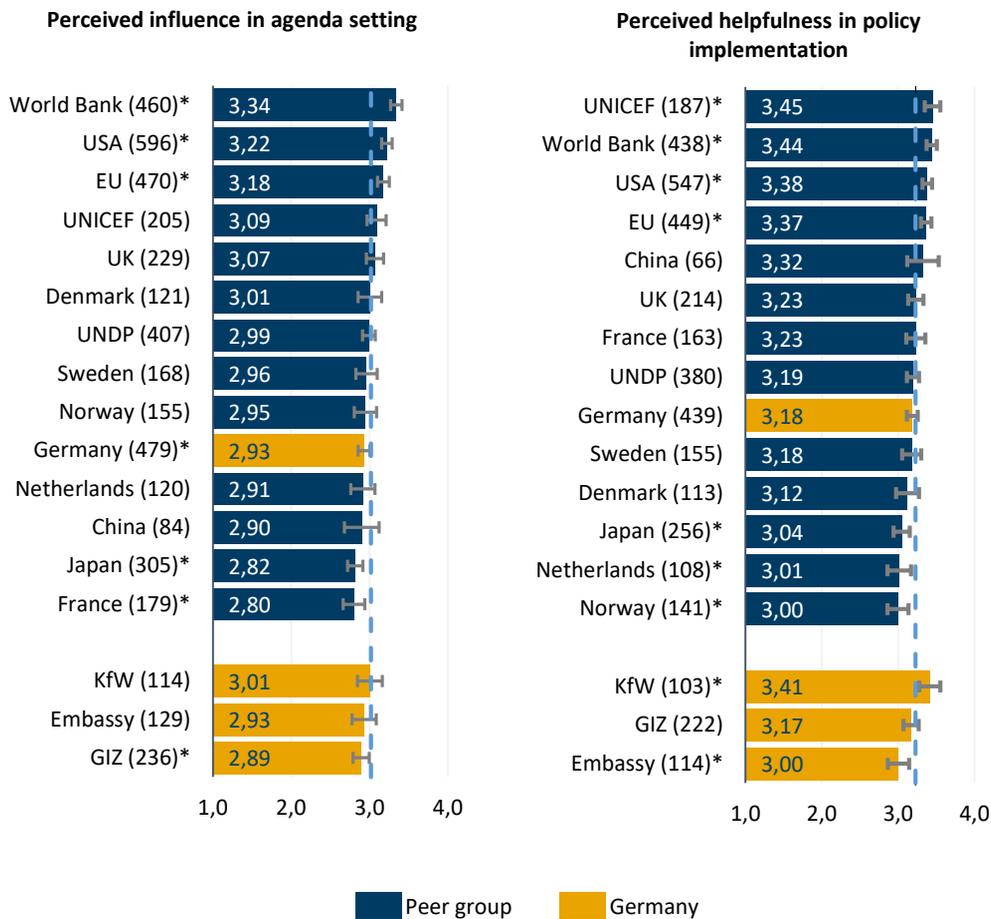
Germany's aggregate score

Germany's official development cooperation is "quite influential" in agenda setting and "quite helpful" in policy implementation. In relative terms, Germany performs on par with the average of the peer group (13 bi- and multilateral donors) for helpfulness and below par for influence. The individual scores of the three German actors range between 2.89 and 3.41 for perceived influence and perceived helpfulness on a scale of 1 to 4, which translates to an aggregate score for Germany's overall official development cooperation of 2.93 for influence in agenda setting and 3.18 for helpfulness in policy implementation. Concerning influence,

Germany’s aggregate score ranks 10th, with all four multilateral donors and some large (the USA and the UK) and small (Denmark, Sweden, and Norway) bilateral DAC donors ranking higher (see Figure below). China is ranked lower than Germany for influence in agenda setting. Regarding helpfulness, Germany’s aggregate score ranks 9th, again with all the multilateral and most large bilateral DAC donors (the USA, the UK, and France) ranking higher. China performs higher than Germany’s aggregate score in terms of helpfulness, while all small DAC donors perform lower (see Figure below).

The analyses across stakeholder groups, regions, and policy areas demonstrate that Germany’s aggregate score is by and large on par with the peer group average in terms of influence in agenda setting and helpfulness in policy implementation. Given the low number of assessments of Germany’s official development actors, not all disaggregated categories (stakeholder groups, regions, and policy areas) could be analysed. Across the conducted analyses, Germany’s aggregate scores are between 2.68 and 3.37 for perceived influence and perceived helpfulness; Germany’s official development cooperation can thus be regarded as “quite influential” and “quite helpful” in absolute terms. Only the aggregate score for Germany in the policy area “democracy, civil society and public administration” is 2.91 for influence and 3.04 for helpfulness, both lower than the peer group average (3.15 and 3.26 for respectively).

Partner assessments of donor influence and helpfulness in BMZ’s partner countries



Note: Scale: 1 = not at all influential/helpful, 2 = only slightly influential/helpful, 3 = quite influential/helpful, 4 = very influential/helpful. Blue dotted line = average (adding all donors’ average scores with N ≥ 30 and dividing the result by the total number of donors). Average influence/helpfulness = 3.02/3.23. Numbers in brackets refer to responses. Grey lines = 95% confidence intervals. An * indicates a significantly different donor score from the peer group average (p < .05).

Source: 2017 Listening to Leaders Survey.

Individual performance of the German development actors

German embassies perform on par with the peer group average in terms of perceived influence in agenda setting and below par in terms of perceived helpfulness in policy implementation. On the 1 to 4 scale, German embassies score 2.93 for perceived influence and 3.00 for perceived helpfulness and thus can be described as “quite influential” and “quite helpful”. Compared to the peer group average score for helpfulness in policy implementation (3.23), as well as in comparison to the GIZ (3.17) and the KfW (3.41), the embassies are assessed less favourably by partner-country policymakers and practitioners. The latter finding can be explained by the division of labour among the three German development actors. In contrast to the GIZ and the KfW, which are mandated to implement the largest part of Germany’s technical and financial assistance, the embassies (more specifically BMZ staff seconded to embassies and formally part of the foreign service) work on the policy sphere of development cooperation (see section 5.1) and are not directly involved in the implementation of policy initiatives.

The disaggregated analyses across stakeholder groups, regions, and policy areas show that the embassies, by and large, perform on par with the peer group average. In some areas, they receive lower assessments in terms of helpfulness in policy implementation, which – as in the aggregated analysis – might be traced back to their mandate. On a disaggregated level, the embassies receive lower assessments in terms of helpfulness in policy implementation from the stakeholder group “government officials”, in the region “Sub-Saharan Africa”, and in the policy area “democracy, civil society and public administration”. In “Europe and Central Asia”, and with respect to assessments by the stakeholder group “NGOs/CSOs”, German embassies perform on par with the peer group average for perceived influence and perceived helpfulness. In the policy area “sustainable economic development”, the embassies perform on a par with the peer group in terms of their perceived influence.

The GIZ performs on par with the peer group average in terms of perceived helpfulness in policy implementation and below par in terms of perceived influence in agenda setting. The GIZ scores 2.89 and 3.17 on the 1-to-4 scale for perceived influence and perceived helpfulness respectively, and thus is perceived as “quite influential” and “quite helpful”. In relative terms, the GIZ performs on par with the peer group average on perceived helpfulness (score: 3.02) but below par on perceived influence (score: 3.23). Corresponding to the division of labour between the German actors, the GIZ also reap a dividend in their perceived helpfulness in comparison to the embassies. The lower performance of the GIZ in terms of perceived influence can be traced back to its mandate (see section 5.1).

The disaggregated analyses demonstrate that the GIZ performs on par with the peer group average in almost all stakeholder groups, policy areas, and regions. It only performs below par in the policy area “democracy, civil society and public administration”. The disaggregated analyses show that the GIZ performs on par with the peer group average in terms of perceived influence and perceived helpfulness from the stakeholder groups “government officials” and “NGOs/CSOs”, in the regions “Europe and Central Asia” and “Sub-Saharan Africa”, and in the policy area “sustainable economic development”. By contrast, it scores below the peer group average in the policy area “democracy, civil society and public administration” across both measures.

The KfW outperforms the peer group average in terms of perceived helpfulness in policy implementation and performs on par in terms of perceived influence in agenda setting.

The KfW scores 3.01 and 3.41 on the 1-to-4 scale for perceived influence in agenda setting and helpfulness in policy implementation respectively, outperforming the peer group average of 3.23 for perceived helpfulness. Overall, the KfW ranks 6th for influence and 3rd for helpfulness, with only UNICEF and the World Bank scoring higher in helpfulness. Since the KfW operates mainly at the implementation level, its high score for perceived helpfulness in policy implementation reflects its mandate (see section 5.1; BMZ, 2008).

The disaggregated analyses reveal that the KfW is perceived as more helpful than the average of the peer group among the stakeholder group “government officials” and in the region “sub-Saharan Africa”. The KfW’s performance is particularly strong for perceived helpfulness by the stakeholder group “government officials” and in the region “Sub-Saharan Africa”, scoring 3.45 with government officials (peer group average:

3.24). Only UNICEF, the World Bank, and the USA are perceived as more helpful. In “Sub-Saharan Africa” the KfW scores 3.63 for perceived helpfulness (peer group average: 3.39), with only UNICEF ranking higher.

What explains how Germany performs in the eyes of its partners?

Key findings II: Germany’s official development cooperation

- In general, the actionable factors we identified as being relevant to the perceived helpfulness and influence of all donors are equally relevant for the case of Germany. In particular, “adherence to ownership” is found to be positively related to perceived influence in agenda setting.
- The survey analysis does not show positive or negative effects for most of the examined Germany-specific factors (e.g., duration of Germany’s official bilateral development assistance and number of staff abroad) on perceived influence in agenda setting and perceived helpfulness in policy implementation.
- As of 2011, Germany introduced comprehensive reforms of its official development cooperation. However, the study did not find any effects of this reflected in Germany’s score for influence and helpfulness in the eyes of partner-country policymakers and practitioners.

Relevance of factors identified in the cross-donor analysis for assessments of Germany’s official development cooperation

Consistent with findings presented earlier on all donors, the regime type and the aid dependency of a partner country are not found to be related to Germany’s influence and helpfulness scores. The same is true for countries where Germany coordinates with other donors. Suggestive evidence points to a negative relationship between aid fragmentation and Germany’s score for helpfulness. Consistent with the all-donor analysis and the first joint AidData-DEval report (Faust et al., 2016), the study does not indicate that the *regime type* (level of democracy or autocracy) of a partner country is related to Germany’s scores for perceived influence in agenda setting and perceived helpfulness in policy implementation. Also consistent with the all-donor analysis, the *aid dependency* of a partner country is not found to be related to Germany’s influence and helpfulness scores. The same is true for countries in which Germany *coordinates with other donors*, measured by Germany’s participation in EU joint programming initiatives. The latter finding confirms the all-donor analysis, showing that donor coordination does not seem to affect single-donor performance. Finally, suggestive evidence points to a negative relationship between *aid fragmentation* and Germany’s scores for helpfulness. This finding also points in the same direction as the first AidData-DEval report (Faust et al., 2016).

Consistent with the analysis for all donors, the internal support for policy initiatives and the relevance of projects from the GIZ and KfW in a partner country are related to Germany’s score for influence. Our results on the effects of both partner-country support and the relevance of projects indicate that donors’ *adherence to ownership* is positively related to partner assessments of donors’ influence.

Unlike the findings shown for all donors, no evidence was found with regard to the relationship between the share of Germany’s provided aid in a partner country and Germany’s scores for influence and helpfulness. There is no evidence in the data of a statistically significant positive correlation between Germany’s relative *share of provided aid* (measured through the indicator CPA) in a partner country and Germany’s scores for perceived influence and helpfulness. Although the relationship was not found for Germany’s official development cooperation (which could be related to the small number of cases in the Germany-specific analysis), there is no reason to believe that the findings from the analysis of all donors do not apply to Germany. Moreover, the results of the all-donor analysis (a greater share of provided aid is associated with greater perceived influence and helpfulness) are in line with results found in the first AidData-DEval report, which identified positive relationships between the share of Germany’s provided aid in a partner-country’s total received aid and Germany’s perceived influence score (Faust et al., 2016).

Relationship between Germany-specific factors and assessments of Germany's official development cooperation

The survey analysis shows neither positive nor negative effects for most of the examined Germany-specific factors (e.g., duration of Germany's official bilateral development assistance and number of staff abroad) on perceived influence in agenda setting and perceived helpfulness in policy implementation. Neither a positive nor a negative relationship is found between *state fragility* and partner assessments. Thus, this study indicates the performance of Germany's official bilateral development cooperation is no worse in fragile states. Moreover, no conclusive evidence is found that the *intensity of development cooperation* between Germany and its partners is positively related to Germany's performance on influence in agenda setting and helpfulness in policy implementation in the eyes of its partners. Furthermore, we find no positive relationship between the *duration of Germany's bilateral official development assistance* to BMZ partner countries and Germany's performance in terms of perceived influence and helpfulness in the survey analysis. However, the qualitative data indicate that duration is a relevant factor for partners. Thus, even though the duration of cooperation holds true only for Germany within specific contexts, it is not related to partner assessments of Germany's performance on influence and helpfulness across all BMZ partner countries.

In addition, survey data reveal no evidence that the *number of staff* from the BMZ seconded to German embassies (and formally part of the foreign service), the KfW, or the GIZ in a partner country is related to Germany's performance in influence in agenda setting and helpfulness in policy implementation. Interestingly, this holds true for all three German development actors, regardless of the notable differences in the number of their staff abroad.

There is no evidence to suggest that Germany's official development cooperation reforms of 2011 have resulted in improved scores for influence in agenda setting or helpfulness in policy implementation for Germany. We address the question of whether the reforms entail a higher score for Germany for either influence or helpfulness using four approaches (see sub-section 5.3.3). Across all four, the study does not provide evidence that Germany's official development cooperation reforms resulted in an improved score for Germany's influence in agenda setting and helpfulness in policy implementation.

Main conclusions for bilateral and multilateral donors

- The common approach of bilateral and multilateral donors – to (1) contribute policy ideas to a partner's agenda-setting process and (2) provide support for the implementation of partner policies – can foster progress on policy initiatives and is, by and large, valued as positive by partner-country policymakers and practitioners.
- Although most donors are assessed as “quite influential” in agenda setting and “quite helpful” in policy implementation, partner-country policymakers and practitioners assess some donors as significantly more (or less) influential and helpful than the donor average. For instance, a number of multilateral donors are assessed as significantly more influential and helpful than the average of all donors.
- Besides the marked differences between bilateral and (a number of) multilateral donors, variations in how policymakers and practitioners assess donor support in partner-country policy processes are related to factors at three levels: (i) strategic decisions about aid allocation and country selection (macro level); (ii) adherence to aid effectiveness principles (meso level), and (iii) donor–partner interactions in the partner country (micro level). Thus, both multilateral and bilateral donors can take action at any of these levels to improve their support in the eyes of their partners. Given the diversity of donors, they might consider different actions as appropriate depending on their resources, mandates, organisational structure, or degree of decentralisation in decision-making, as well as the specific donor–partner interaction in each country.

Main conclusions for Germany's official development cooperation

- In absolute terms, the support of the three German development actors included in the survey (German embassies, the GIZ, and the KfW) is assessed as “quite influential” in agenda setting and “quite helpful” in policy implementation.
- When aggregated into an overall score for Germany's official development cooperation, in relative terms, Germany's score is on par with the average of the peer group of bilateral and multilateral donors for helpfulness and below par for influence. These results confirm the findings of the previous AidData-DEval study on the topic (Faust et al., 2016). In the current study, Germany's performance on influence in agenda setting and helpfulness in policy implementation is found to be predominantly average when disaggregated by stakeholder group, region, and policy area.
- Germany is the second-largest bilateral donor in the world (BMZ, 2019a) – with an institutionally and instrumentally highly differentiated development cooperation system. As such, Germany's official development cooperation actors should reflect on this rather middling performance on influence and helpfulness and consider the options for action identified in this study in order to improve their perception in the eyes of their partners. In particular since the analysis does not find evidence that specific characteristics of Germany's official development cooperation, such as its high number of staff abroad, necessarily represent a unique selling point in terms of partner assessments of agenda-setting influence and helpfulness in policy implementation. It would therefore seem safe to assume that the findings and options for action identified generally for all donors should be equally relevant for Germany and that Germany's official development actors can improve their performance in the eyes of their partners by following the recommendations formulated for all donors below. In this respect, the ongoing efforts to further optimise Germany's official development cooperation system (most recently in the context of the BMZ's 2030 strategy) appear to be strongly supported by the results of this study.

Recommendations

Every donor–partner interaction is different, as both donor systems and country contexts vary widely. Accordingly, the findings and conclusions of this study cannot be applied homogeneously to each of these individual settings. There can be no one-size-fits-all blueprint as to how donors can improve their agenda-setting influence and helpfulness in policy implementation in the eyes of their partners.

We therefore formulate only one overarching recommendation that in principle applies to all donors. We then identify options for action, which each donor can carefully assess to see if they represent a viable way to improve how they are perceived by their partners. As this study has a specific focus on Germany, each option for action is reflected in light of Germany's particularities as a bilateral donor and its current strategic framework “BMZ 2030”. This study also formulates one specific recommendation for Germany's official development cooperation to review its engagement in the policy area “democracy, civil society and public administration”.

Recommendation for all donors

Donors should examine whether they can identify appropriate strategies or measures to improve how their support for domestic policy processes is assessed by their partners, taking into account options for action at the macro, meso, and micro levels.

Almost all donors in the survey sample are assessed as “quite influential” and “quite helpful” (on a scale from “not at all influential/helpful” to “very influential/helpful”). Yet variations between donors suggests that donors can improve on their performance in the eyes of their partners, and this study identifies actionable factors to do so.

However, given donors' limited resources, the diversity in individual development actors' mandates, their organisational structure, the degree of decentralisation in decision-making, and diverse partner-country contexts as well as specific donor–partner interactions, there cannot be a one-size-fits-all strategy or

measures to recommend across all donors. Instead, donors need to choose carefully among a range of options for action identified at three levels that best fit them: macro level, meso level and micro level.

Specification for Germany: When compared to the peer group of donors, Germany (the second-largest bilateral donor in the world; BMZ, 2019a) shows an overall rather middling performance in terms of influence in agenda setting and helpfulness in policy implementation in the eyes of its partners. In order to improve how they are assessed by their partners, Germany's development actors, above all the BMZ, should therefore consider the options for action identified below with a view to whether they can provide avenues in line with the BMZ's 2030 strategy to further improve how Germany's support for partners' policy processes is assessed by those very partners.

Options for action at the macro level: Strategic decisions on aid allocation and partner-country selection

Donors should gauge whether it would be possible to increase their allocations or – if they have an (over-)diversified portfolio of partner countries – concentrate their resources on a smaller number of countries. This would increase a donor's individual share in its partner-countries' aid budgets, which is associated with increased influence in agenda setting and helpfulness in policy implementation as assessed by partners.

A donor's relative share in a partner-country's total aid budget (CPA) is associated with the donor being assessed as more influential in agenda setting and more helpful in policy implementation. Given limited resources, in most cases increasing a donor's relative share of total aid in a partner country is only possible through a concentration of its aid. To avoid this recommendation becoming self-defeating, however, and to avoid the concentration of aid resources on a handful of donor-darlings and the emergence of aid orphans, any such concentration processes should be carefully coordinated among donors (see also the options for action on donor coordination at the meso level).

Specification for Germany: While the BMZ's budget has increased substantially over the past few years (BMZ, 2019a), the (over-)diversification and fragmentation of Germany's bilateral cooperation have continued to be a topic of discussion (OECD, 2010, 2015). Within the framework of the BMZ's 2030 strategy, the ministry is now in the process of further focusing its bilateral ODA (both thematically as well as geographically), by reducing the number of topics and partner countries for its bilateral cooperation (BMZ, 2020a: 25). This strategy is supported by the findings of this study. Experience also suggests, however, that such processes should be carefully coordinated with other donors and that exit processes need to be carefully managed to avoid undermining past achievements or damaging bilateral relations.⁵

Bilateral donors should assess whether they can make more effective use of multilateral channels in supporting partner-countries' policies.

As in the first joint study by AidData and DEval (Faust et al., 2016), we find that, on average, multilateral donors are assessed more favourably than bilateral donors by partner-country policymakers and practitioners with regard to their influence in agenda setting and helpfulness in policy implementation. This may be linked to the advantages of multilateral donors commonly discussed in the literature, such as being less politicised, more selective in terms of poverty criteria, more demand-driven (Gulrajani, 2016: 15), and less fragmented than bilateral cooperation.

Bilateral donors should therefore assess whether they can make more strategic use of individual multilateral donors' influence in agenda setting and helpfulness in policy implementation – for example, by increasing contributions, seeking to gain more influence on the multilaterals' policies, and improving coordination with multilateral actors. Whether these are viable options for any particular bilateral donor, however, needs to

⁵ DEval is currently undertaking a synthesis study on the lessons learned from donors' concentration and exit processes in the past.

be considered in light of realities such as the alignment of objectives and policies between the respective multilateral and bilateral donor or the possibility for a bilateral donor to have a say within a multilateral organisation and thus to be able to influence decision-making processes within that organisation. Moreover, it is important to note that the superior performance of multilateral donors does not apply to all multilaterals to the same extent (or even at all). Further, shifting allocations to multilateral channels comes at the potential cost of limited visibility of bilateral donors (Michaelowa et al., 2018) and reduced resources for bilateral cooperation.

Specification for Germany: The findings of this study – as well as the precursor study by Faust et al. (2016) – support the BMZ’s current efforts within the framework of the “BMZ 2030” strategy to strengthen and make more effective use of the multilateral system to tackle global challenges in close coordination with bilateral efforts (BMZ, 2018: 6). The “BMZ 2030” strategy envisages working more closely with the EU and other multilateral organisations, such as UNICEF and UNDP. The strategy calls for engaging more effectively within these institutions and in their strategic agenda setting (e.g., through more active engagement of seconded staff). In addition, the strategy sets out to improve coordination with these actors, e.g., through a division of labour in certain sectors (Doc. 11).⁶ In doing so, the BMZ plans to focus on those multilateral institutions that show the political will to push international reform and development agendas and in places where Germany can exercise its influence (e.g., because of substantial financial contributions or high-ranking seconded staff) (Doc. 11). This strategy would seem in line with the recommendation formulated above. Whether it would be a viable option for the BMZ to choose to channel more of its ODA resources through the multilateral system than in the past, however, needs to be weighed in terms of congruence of policy objectives, Germany’s influence in a particular multilateral organisation, the need for bilateral visibility, and so on. In the years 2015–2017, the multilateral share of Germany’s ODA stood at 21%; for the BMZ’s budget, the figure is about 30% (BMZ, 2019b; Doc. 12).

Options for action at the meso level: Adherence to aid effectiveness principles

To improve partner assessments regarding influence in agenda setting and helpfulness in policy implementation, donors should consider whether they can improve on their adherence to aid effectiveness commitments, in particular with regard to coordination, alignment, and predictability of their support.

Coordination of donor contributions: Our study shows that close coordination of financial contributions matters for partners’ assessments of donors’ support for their policy process. In general, policymakers and practitioners in low- and middle-income countries where donors coordinate their activities better (e.g., by pooling funds) are more likely to assess these donors as influential and helpful. This benefit does not accrue to donors individually, but appears to apply collectively to all donors in countries where such coordination takes place. These findings are in line with literature that emphasises efficiency gains and reduced transaction costs as positive aspects of donor coordination (Anderson, 2011; Bourguignon and Platteau, 2015; Bigsten and Tengstam, 2015; Klingebiel et al., 2017). They are also in line with literature that underlines the importance of donor coordination despite existing downsides, such as potential political costs and reduced visibility as a bilateral donor, that might come along with donor coordination (Bourguignon and Platteau, 2015; Carbone, 2017).

⁶ To preserve the confidentiality of unpublished documents provided to DEval, these are cited within the text in the form “Doc.” plus a sequential number and do not appear in the references.

Specification for Germany: Although there is no direct link between an individual donor's efforts to coordinate with other development partners and how that donor's influence and helpfulness is assessed by policymakers and practitioners in partner countries, collectively donors are assessed as more influential and more helpful in countries where they coordinate their activities well (e.g., in the form of pooled funding arrangements). Germany's current ambition to foster coordination with other development partners through co-financing and pooling mechanisms and to promote not only joint programming but also joint implementation among EU donors (Doc. 11) is thus supported by the findings of this study, and it should therefore be examined whether it could be strengthened across Germany's bilateral portfolios.

Use of country systems and alignment with partners' priorities: The study finds evidence that a greater share of aid on budget is positively associated with partner perceptions of donor influence and helpfulness and the provision of general budget support is associated with higher levels of donor influence. The study findings also suggest that donor support for policies that enjoy broad domestic ownership is associated with favourable assessments by partner-country policymakers and practitioners. Providing assistance through partner-countries' own budgetary systems (or at least reporting on budget) and thus aligning support with partner-countries' priorities (Birdsall and Kharas, 2010; OECD, 2008a: 9; OECD and UNDP, 2016: 38; Prizzon, 2016) can help donors to be assessed as more influential in agenda setting and more helpful in policy implementation. Providing support in this way has to be weighed against other relevant aspects for donors' strategic decision-making, such as donors' own priorities and strategic objectives and their confidence in partner governments and fiduciary systems.

Specification for Germany: Our results for all donors suggest that providing aid through (or at least on) budget – and thus aligning with partner-countries' systems and priorities – makes a difference to how influential and helpful this donor support is assessed by policymakers and practitioners in partner countries. The proportion of Germany's development cooperation funding that is reported in the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC) 2019 progress report as provided on budget, however, is a mere 52.7% (2016: 48.0%; GPEDC, 2020), a far call from the target of 85% formulated for 2015 by the GPEDC (OECD and UNDP, 2016: 38).

The positive relationship between use of countries' own budgetary systems and assessment by partners of donors' influence in agenda setting is particularly pronounced for the instrument of budgetary aid. The results for Germany confirm the finding that the provision of general budget support is related to a more positive assessment by partners of Germany's influence in agenda setting. While Germany has incrementally stopped its use of budget support as an aid modality during the last decade, it has recently begun offering incentive-based policy reform credits to a handful of selected countries within the framework of its "reform partnerships". These results are thus in line with the BMZ's current strategy to give more weight to the strategic use of modalities such as (policy) reform credits where conditions allow (Doc. 11). This strategy would appear to be supported by this study with regard to improving partner perceptions of Germany's official development cooperation's influence and helpfulness.

Provision of predictable development cooperation: The study shows that predictability of policy support (measured as the share of development cooperation funding to a government policy area that is disbursed in the year for which it was scheduled; GPEDC, 2020) is linked to donors being perceived as more influential and more helpful by policymakers and practitioners in partner countries. Thus, in order to improve how they perform in terms of influence and helpfulness in the eyes of their partners (among other good reasons), donors should assess whether they can increase their efforts to provide predictable support.

Specification for Germany: In the 2018 GPEDC monitoring round, annual predictability of resources provided by Germany’s development cooperation is reported at a strong 91.1%. While there is some room for improvement, Germany’s official development cooperation will probably not be able to greatly increase its influence and helpfulness as perceived by partners by further improving the predictability of its disbursements. The picture is somewhat different at the level of transparent and forward planning, for which Germany scores only 75.1% in the 2018 GPEDC monitoring round. Although this indicator of predictability was not used in the analysis of this study, it would seem that Germany’s official development cooperation could do better in this regard, potentially improving partner perceptions of its influence and helpfulness. This echoes the recommendations of the latest Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) DAC Peer Review, which recommends that Germany strengthen the predictability of its programmes and strategic planning (OECD, 2015: 19).

Options for action at the micro level: Donor–partner interactions on the ground

Donors should scrutinise to what extent they can build on staff competencies and responsive processes at the micro level of donor–partner interactions to improve their helpfulness in the eyes of their partners.

While most aspects of direct donor–partner interactions at the micro level of development cooperation are intangible and thus do not lend themselves readily to quantitative analysis, the qualitative case studies conducted for this study provided strong indications of the importance of day-to-day development cooperation activities for how partners assess donor helpfulness. At the personal level, factors that impact how partners perceive individual donors include the specific expertise and soft skills of staff and a truly cooperative partnership characterised by trust, respect, and honest communication. At the agency level, factors such as flexibility and the ability to respond quickly to partner needs particularly affect how partners perceive donors.

Specification for Germany: Germany’s official development cooperation is characterised by a comparatively large number of staff present at the country level (see Chapter 5). While the quantitative analyses conducted for this study do not provide any evidence that the number of staff in a country impacts how helpful partners assess Germany’s support to domestic policy processes, case study evidence suggests that the expertise provided by Germany’s official development cooperation on the ground is highly appreciated by partners, suggesting little potential to improve at this level. By contrast, partner perceptions are less favourable with regard to the flexibility of processes and responsiveness of Germany’s official development cooperation. It could therefore be useful for the BMZ, the GIZ and KfW, to scrutinise whether there is room to introduce more flexibility in certain processes without compromising quality and integrity. This recommendation was also made by the OECD DAC Peer Review for Germany in 2015 (OECD, 2015: 18).

Specific recommendation for Germany’s official development cooperation

The BMZ should review its strategies, concepts, and instruments in the policy area “democracy, civil society and public administration” based on solid evidence on the effectiveness of the support it provides in this area.

This study finds that, in the policy area “democracy, civil society and public administration”, the GIZ performs below the peer group average in the eyes of partners in terms of agenda-setting influence and helpfulness in policy implementation. This is supported by findings of the precursor study by AidData and DEval (Faust et al., 2016), which found a below-par performance of Germany’s agenda-setting influence in the wider policy field of good governance support. Furthermore, it is in line with the results of a recent GIZ evaluation, which assigns to the GIZ’s engagement in this sector rather “modest” results (Gomez, 2020: 58) and identifies weaknesses in particular at the level of its strategies and concepts for governance support.

Even though the average scores for Germany’s official development actors in the 2017 Listening to Leaders Survey in this policy field still fall in the categories “quite influential” and “quite helpful”, this remaining

below-average assessment by partners is of particular concern for Germany's development cooperation for two reasons. First, the promotion of good governance constitutes the second-most frequently funded policy area in Germany's bilateral portfolios (as of 2017, Doc. 7). Second, and more importantly, Germany prides itself on pursuing a "values-based" concept of development cooperation. This is particularly reflected in the BMZ's commitment to good governance criteria that have provided a reference framework for all of Germany's official development cooperation since the mid-1990s. Germany's clear commitment can be traced back to the so-called "Spranger criteria" of 1991. Understood as a reference framework for Germany's official development cooperation, these were further developed as concrete action fields for the BMZ in 1996. Against the background of the Millennium Development Goals, the BMZ revised the criteria once more in 2006 (Wagner, 2017). They are still reflected in various BMZ concepts and strategies, for instance the cross-sectoral strategy concerning human rights in development policy (BMZ, 2011). The high relevance of good governance for Germany's official development cooperation is also demonstrated by the internal BMZ process for assessing the governance situation in the partner countries (BMZ, 2009). Similarly, the promotion of good governance also plays an essential role in current key BMZ strategies, such as "BMZ 2030" (Doc. 11) and its Marshall Plan With Africa (BMZ, 2017), both important landmarks for the future orientation of Germany's official development cooperation.

Given the high relevance of this policy area within Germany's official development cooperation, the below-par performance in the eyes of its partners makes it important to review Germany's engagement in the policy field and consider revising and improving strategies, concepts, and instruments based on solid evidence on what works and what does not in this area.

This is an excerpt from the publication "Development Cooperation from a Partner Perspective. How can Germany and other donors perform better in the eyes of their partner countries?". Download the full report here: <https://www.deval.org/en/evaluation-reports.html>.