



# INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION OF ENGAGEMENT GLOBAL

*Executive Summary*

2020

# IMPRINT

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MedienMélange:Kommunikation!, Hamburg  
[www.medienmelange.de](http://www.medienmelange.de)

## Translation

Exact! GmbH

## Photo credits

Cover: ©gerasimov174 , Adobe Stock

## Bibliographical reference

Schwedersky, T.; K. Hermanns, H. Steckhan, L. Kunert (2020), *Institutional Evaluation of Engagement Global*, German Institute for Development Cooperation (DEval), Bonn.

## Printing

Bonifatius, Paderborn

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ISBN 978-3-96126-117-8 (printed edition)  
ISBN 978-3-96126-118-5 (PDF)

## Published by

German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval)  
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<https://www.bmz.de/de/ministerium/evaluierung/bmz-responses-19422>

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Background, objective and overall assessment

Civic engagement takes place in various forms. It is supported by collaborative initiatives which, in the development policy context, are aimed at assuming joint responsibility for sustainable global development. From a development-policy perspective, strengthening civic involvement in development policy is particularly important because state funding can provide meaningful support for collaborative engagement and strengthen it in the interests of achieving development policy goals.

Until 2011, German development policy offered a broad and heterogeneous range of funding opportunities, some of which were provided by the state (federal, state and local governments) and some by civil society. In the course of the reform of state technical and personnel cooperation introduced in 2010, the then German government took the initiative to create a service point for civic engagement in development policy. This led to the establishment of Engagement Global as a non-profit limited liability company by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) in 2012. To this end, programmes were pooled under a common organisational umbrella and new programmes were added subsequently.

The reform had three main objectives:

1. to improve the quality and expand the type of services to be provided by the overall Engagement Global organisation;
2. to realise synergies by bringing the programmes together in one organisation; and
3. to increase the value of Engagement Global's work for old and new target groups in civil society and municipalities in terms of meeting their needs and requirements.

The reason for the present institutional evaluation was the increasing political relevance of civic, civil society and municipal development policy engagement, which has been reflected in a strong increase in funding in recent years. The budget volume of Engagement Global increased from EUR 82 million to EUR 345.2 million between 2012 and 2019. Both BMZ and VENRO (Association of German Development Policy and Humanitarian Aid Non-Governmental Organisations) provided the ideas for this evaluation.

The main objective of the evaluation is to contribute to the institutional development of Engagement Global. The findings are largely based on the recording and evaluation of what Engagement Global has achieved so far in its target areas. The subject of the evaluation was Engagement Global as an organisation with its structures, processes and portfolio of different programmes and their outcomes (e.g. consultancy services, cross-programme services, application processing and project funding) since its inception in 2012. The focus was therefore on the overall organisation and not on the level of individual programmes or work units.

The evaluation concludes that in its start-up and growth phase, Engagement Global had to integrate very diverse programmes with different identities and histories into an overall organisation, while at the same time managing a significant increase in funding and therefore staff. The demands associated with this dual task must be regarded as very high and demanding in terms of both administration and content.

Although other areas of activity, such as the realisation of synergies, were advanced less as a result, Engagement Global as a whole met the demands formulated for it and mastered the challenges. The steering by the BMZ contributed to this in important respects. Examples of this are the consolidation of the area of municipal development policy within the framework of budget legislation or the establishment of permanent project positions, thanks to which Engagement Global has become more economically sustainable. However, overcoming the central challenge, i.e. the considerable increase in funds and thus personnel, was also associated with "growth pains", the effects of which are still being felt.

At the strategic level, the start-up and growth phase was characterised by the coexistence of various strategic stipulations. Several strategy papers, objectives and strategic direction statements were relevant as strategic guidelines, but did not form a clearly structured and coherent overall strategy. In addition, the steering effect of the overall organisational strategy impulses took a back seat to programme-related steering (e.g. through use of funds statements).

A coherent overall strategy, which would also have an overarching steering effect for the individual programmes of Engagement Global, would provide the starting point for a consolidation phase that is now imminent,

- a. to use the existing experience knowledge in the organisation for more effectiveness and efficiency in the implementation of the activities,
- b. to better align structures, processes and procedures with the tasks at hand,
- c. to consolidate the portfolio,
- d. to create synergies between programmes as well as between the areas of content and thus
- e. to strengthen the overall organisational identity of Engagement Global.

This investment in institutional consolidation will pay off in the medium term in view of the continuing and new development policy challenges. Without this strategic reorientation, there is a risk that an increasing heterogeneity of the individual programmes will further complicate overall organisational management and thus ultimately the achievement of the organisation's overall objectives.

The opportunity for a strategic reorientation in the next two years is foreseeably favourable. After the startup and growth phase, Engagement Global can move on to a phase of institutional consolidation and greater use of the expertise gained in order to effectively achieve its goals. The results of the evaluation do not suggest a clear change in focus. The fields of action of Engagement Global appear to be well established and should be further developed in the future.

The evaluation also concludes that within Engagement Global, programme-related management dominates over overall organisational management. The steering impulses from the BMZ are of decisive importance here. The still inadequate internal coordination within the BMZ favours steering impulses from the specialist divisions that are programme-related but often do not take equal account of overarching aspects of the organisation's effectiveness. At the same time, the depth of control is divergent, but overall there is a clear tendency towards detailed steering.

The difficulty of coherent overall organisational management is increased by the fact that it is sometimes impossible to predict which political priorities the BMZ will set and which corresponding funds will be made available in the federal budget<sup>1</sup> with corresponding consequences for the range of tasks and services of Engagement Global. The challenges posed by changing political directions will continue to exist in principle and are legitimate in view of the primacy of politics. However, the BMZ could give Engagement Global greater room for manoeuvre and thus improve its ability to make more meaningful adjustments in the areas of tension between programme-based and overall organisational management and between the achievement of short-term and medium-term goals.

### **Methodological approach**

The evaluation took a systemic perspective on the object of evaluation, which is common in organisational analysis. "Systemic" in this context means that the various subsystems within an organisation (e.g. "management/leadership", "communication/cooperation" or "work structures and processes") are directly or indirectly related to each other under the influence of their relevant environment. In a systemic view, observed phenomena in the organisation as a whole, e.g. disruptions in vertical cooperation, are examined to see what meaning or significance they have for the organisation from the point of view of different actors and how they could be influenced.

<sup>1</sup> In view of the changed conditions caused by the corona pandemic, corresponding forecasts are subject to great uncertainty - at the moment, however, the federal government's medium-term financial planning suggests a rather moderate decline in the BMZ budget in the coming years.

At the beginning of the evaluation, in consultation with stakeholders, four key themes for the evaluation were identified:

- A. Benefits and services for the target groups addressed
- B. Institutional set-up and performance
  - 1. goals, values, strategies
  - 2. structures and processes
- C. Role of Engagement Global in the area of "civic engagement in development policy"
- D. Management structures and processes (governance)

As a rule, different survey instruments were used in a complementary manner to record the views and assessments of the various actors and to relate them to each other - also against the background of available data and documents.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the framework and environmental factors that influence the work of Engagement Global, a context analysis was carried out. In addition, Engagement Global was asked to produce a report focusing on fact-based self-assessments on selected issues from the four key evaluation themes mentioned above. In the context of the analysis of documents, existing evaluation reports on individual programmes and services, monitoring data, strategy and management documents as well as financial statements, use of funds statements and business plans were evaluated. In order to include the perspective of the employees of Engagement Global, a standardised survey was conducted throughout the organisation.

In addition, a number of interviews were conducted: with key external stakeholders at the level of the organisation as a whole and the level of branch offices, as well as in the context of the case studies; and with the top management, all managers and selected other employees of Engagement Global. Finally, focus group discussions and workshops were conducted with various internal and external stakeholder groups to capture different perspectives on Engagement Global.

Case studies were realised for five selected programmes and services. On the one hand, these determine the added value and benefits of organisational integration in Engagement Global from a programme or service specific perspective. On the other hand, they allow a deeper understanding of the operational work of the respective programmes and services. Based on a criteria-based selection, case studies were implemented for five programmes and services: (1) Mitmachzentrale, (2) bengo, (3) Förderprogramm Entwicklungspolitische Bildung (FEB), (4) Global Nachhaltige Kommune (GNK) and (5) the Zentrale Programmservice (ZPS). A legal opinion served to clarify two questions relating to funding law in the context of the analysis of potential for simplifying and standardising funding procedures at Engagement Global.

Further data were collected as part of the analysis of the six branch offices of Engagement Global in Berlin, Düsseldorf, Hamburg, Leipzig, Mainz and Stuttgart. The aim was to determine the role of the branch offices, their added value, the functionality of their work processes and the division of labour between the branch offices and headquarters.

The data collection took place between August 2018 and June 2019. More recent developments from October 2019 onwards were only considered in a few justified exceptions.

## **Main findings and conclusions**

### ***Institutional structure and performance***

Engagement Global provides services in four content areas: (1) exchange and secondment, (2) education and domestic projects, (3) municipalities in the One World and (4) projects abroad - bengo. In addition, the staff department in which the Mitmachzentrale (Participation Centre) and the staff unit for Communication & Events are located, should be mentioned.

The evaluation focused primarily on how Engagement Global's structures and processes effectively support the delivery of services. The data collections carried out lead to the conclusion that requirements formulated in this regard were met to varying degrees and, in some cases, only to a limited extent. This could be demonstrated for critical areas, such as IT support, the use of synergy potential, the establishment of the monitoring and evaluation system (M&E system) and the interaction between cross-sectional units and specialist departments:

- The introduction of a software for process and application management (PAM) did not achieve the intended objectives. In this respect, it will now depend on a newly introduced software architecture to what extent a binding, user-friendly PAM for funding and referral programmes can be ensured.
- Synergy effects play a less important role in the actual work of Engagement Global than the strategic goals of 2012 would suggest. In this context, the overarching problem of a lack of incentives for crossprogramme or cross-divisional cooperation is particularly evident.
- Ownership of the new M&E system within Engagement Global is still low. Central challenges, some of which have already been identified in the M&E framework, have not yet been adequately addressed. The BMZ and Engagement Global have now agreed to postpone the overall organisational monitoring function.
- In the interaction between specialist departments and cross-sectional units, frictional losses exceeding the expected level can be determined. They repeatedly interfere with the effective execution of specialist work.

The institutional structure of Engagement Global includes six branch offices (Berlin, Düsseldorf, Hamburg, Leipzig, Mainz and Stuttgart) with a support and networking function at decentralised level. The evaluation has shown that these are accepted as low-threshold, regional and local contact points close to the target groups. However, they operate in a field of tension between their needs-based orientation towards local and regional stakeholders and their service function for the BMZ and the headquarters of Engagement Global. In this respect, there is still a need for clarification regarding their role.

Their resources are insufficient overall; this is particularly true of branch offices, which have a comparatively large catchment area spanning several federal states. In addition, too little attention has been paid to the respective support requirements for civic engagement at local or regional level. Finally, there are deficits with regard to the support of the work of the branch offices by the Engagement Global headquarters.

### ***Steering by the BMZ***

Various divisions within the BMZ are responsible for steering the work of Engagement Global. One division is responsible for both overarching and programme-related steering tasks in the area of exchange and secondment, while three are responsible for technical steering in the other thematic areas (education and domestic projects, municipalities in One World, projects abroad - bengo). Other divisions are responsible for smaller areas of work. This constellation creates a continuous need for coordination.

The data collection efforts carried out lead to the conclusion that there are repeated frictional losses between Engagement Global and the BMZ because internal BMZ coordination is not taking place, or not to a sufficient extent, with regard to specific issues or topics. One of the main reasons for this is the position of the division tasked with steering at the institutional level, which - on one level with the programme-executing divisions - has only limited possibilities to ensure effective coordination within the ministry. This makes it more difficult to improve the overall organisational structures and processes of Engagement Global, since programme-related management has a greater weight than overall organisational management. In order to enable Engagement Global to carry out its tasks more smoothly, the various units responsible at BMZ would have to coordinate and harmonise their activities to such an extent that their steering impulses would have an appropriate, significantly higher degree of coherence and consistency.

There are considerable variations in the depth of control and the predictability of control behaviour depending on the division and sometimes also on the individual. Overall, however, detailed steering dominates. The challenge for the BMZ is to harmonise and more clearly limit the individual scope for

interpretation and action of the people working in the divisions in order to ensure consistency and reliability. At the same time, it must be considered that, in terms of the depth of control, there is a tension between the autonomous actions of Engagement Global and the political responsibility of BMZ.

The Board of Trustees of Engagement Global has so far only partially been able to make use of its role as an advisory body to the BMZ and the top management of Engagement Global. This is partly due to the fact that BMZ and the management have not responded sufficiently to the advisory impulses from the Board of Trustees. On the other hand, its members have only been able to take initiatives to a limited extent to give effect to the advice provided by the Board of Trustees. If the board were to take more initiatives of its own and pursue these more consistently, it could fulfil its role as an advisory body even more effectively. However, this would require that the BMZ and the top management make greater use of the advisory function of the Board of Trustees and use the Board of Trustees meetings even more to prepare central strategic decisions.

### ***Benefits and services for the target groups addressed***

The target groups of the programmes examined in the case studies include groups and networks that carry out development policy information and education work in Germany, private executing organisations that implement projects in countries of the Global South, and municipalities that implement the sustainability goals at local level. Despite the particular challenges posed by the increase in funding and the associated growth in the number of staff at Engagement Global in recent years, they recognise and value the programmes implemented and services offered.

The concrete implementation of programmes is sometimes met with criticism. On the whole, the funding procedures are too complex and bureaucratic, which poses particular problems for non-governmental organisations with low capacity and migrant-diasporic organisations. For example, the very high administrative demands of the application procedure are difficult to cope with for supporting organisations with exclusively voluntary staff. Difficulties also arise for applicants who receive project support from several programmes. In some of the cases examined, there is also a lack of information and clear criteria for funding decisions. For BMZ and Engagement Global, too, the procedural workload is considerable. The benefit for the target groups could be increased by more efficient procedures.

The employees of Engagement Global carry out intensive programme-related advisory work. This ranges from procedural issues and questions of financing options to advice on the content of project proposals. The quality of advice provided by Engagement Global can be described as good overall. There are, however, occasional deviations that reflect the different levels of knowledge and experience of the advisors and make it necessary to establish a common standard in the future, which Engagement Global is already aiming for. In this respect, greater standardisation in the provision of advice and an exchange of information between advisors about their development activities in the respective programme and across programmes would be beneficial to the quality of advice.

Overruns in the processing times of approvals, but also of interim reports and use of funds statement indicate that the procedural processes need to be further improved in order to be able to meet the high requirements to an appropriate extent in future. Each programme has its own particularities and requires a specific analysis in order to identify possibilities for process improvement. However, greater harmonisation or standardisation of the programme procedures would also bring benefits in this context.

### ***On the role of Engagement Global in the area of “civic engagement in development policy”***

Since its inception, Engagement Global has managed to establish itself as a relevant player in a complex field of issues, or to keep the programmes that existed before it relevant. Its role here is primarily that of a service provider, whether in terms of implementing the tasks formulated in use of funds statements, targets and instructions issued by the BMZ or in terms of supporting civil society and municipal actors as closely as possible to their needs. In addition, Engagement Global has increasingly included support services in its portfolio in which it acts on its own initiative.

As a consequence of the BMZ's decision to establish Engagement Global as a purely state-owned organisation, its work was critically accompanied by broad sections of civil society from the very beginning.

The main points of criticism were civil society's rights of participation, which were perceived as insufficient, and the fear that civil society actors could be structurally weakened; the branch offices of Engagement Global were seen as possible competitors to the One World country networks. Another point concerned a possible violation of the subsidiarity principle.

The original scepticism has since changed in such a way that the work of Engagement Global is no longer fundamentally questioned. This reflects the fact that in the course of developing Engagement Global, the BMZ and civil society have developed consultation and clarification mechanisms through which opportunities for civil society to exert influence have arisen that could not have been foreseen in 2012. The data collected in the context of this evaluation have thus not provided any indications that the principle of subsidiarity or the right of initiative have been regularly violated. However, care must continue to be taken to ensure that the principle of subsidiarity and the right of initiative are respected, particularly when setting up new programmes or taking on new service functions. This will help to ensure complementarity between the actions of Engagement Global and those of the stakeholders it addresses.

There is an obvious tension between the desired organisational self-image of many staff members who want to see Engagement Global less as a mere service provider and more as an independent actor with a mobilising, innovative and advisory function, and the expectations of the shareholder (BMZ) regarding the role of Engagement Global, who so far sees Engagement Global primarily as a service provider in an executive capacity with limited scope for action and design.

This understanding of the BMZ can be well justified by its overall political responsibility. However, the ministry also supports a stronger advisory function of Engagement Global in the long term. At the same time, the employees of Engagement Global must continue to work on the self-image of a governmental organisation, for which the federal interest formulated by BMZ sets the relevant framework.

The cooperative relationships examined in the course of the evaluation focused on the cooperation between Engagement Global and the 'Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit' (GIZ). It was found that the cooperation between the two organisations has become generally well established. In recent years, the prerequisites have also been created for addressing the structural challenges still posed by the different status of Engagement Global and GIZ (funding procedures on the one hand, contract procedures on the other) in a constructive and solution-oriented manner.

## Recommendations<sup>2</sup>

DEval has formulated recommendations for both BMZ and Engagement Global. The former address, on the one hand, essential aspects of steering and, on the other, aspects relating to the overarching design of support programmes. The latter focus on organisational structures and processes, on the concrete implementation of support programmes and on the role and mandate of the branch offices. Given the nature of Engagement Global, the recommendations addressed to it can only be implemented after approval by the shareholder.

### *Recommendations to the BMZ*

#### **Recommendation 1**

The BMZ should give Engagement Global much greater scope for action. This should enable Engagement Global to further develop its own strategic and programmatic foundations within the political guidelines of the BMZ and to promote more effective and efficient fulfilment of its corporate purpose.

<sup>2</sup> The following is a condensed version of all recommendations made by this evaluation. For the complete formulation of the individual recommendations, please refer to Chapter 6.



### **Recommendation 2**

The BMZ should call on Engagement Global to develop a coherent overall strategy within the recommended extended scope of action (see Recommendation 1).

### **Recommendation 3**

The BMZ should strengthen coherence in institutional governance by clarifying and readjusting tasks and responsibilities between the institutional division and specialist division, including the role of the director.

### **Recommendation 4**

With regard to the portfolio of Engagement Global, the BMZ should make greater use of the opportunities for programme bundling, especially in the field of education. This would make it possible to streamline the application and funding procedures between Engagement Global and BMZ.

### **Recommendation 5**

The BMZ should continue to ensure that the principle of subsidiarity and respect for civil society's right of initiative are examined when new programmes and instruments are conceptualised. This is a prerequisite for ensuring complementarity between the actions of Engagement Global and those of the stakeholders it addresses.

### **Recommendation 6**

The BMZ should lay the foundations for simplifying and standardising funding procedures through uniform procedural rules, limits on simplified application procedures, a selective reduction in self-funding requirements, a greater delegation of decision-making to Engagement Global for projects of small scale and the systematic comparison of the cost-effectiveness of procedural variants.

## ***Recommendations to Engagement Global***

### **Recommendation 7**

Engagement Global should update its mission statement in order to strengthen the common overall organisational identity of its employees and in the interest of achieving its goals. This should be accompanied by appropriate measures to strengthen the overall organisational identity.

### **Recommendation 8**

Engagement Global should introduce a new software architecture for a binding, user-friendly process and application management for funding and referral programmes, for which appropriate conditions must be created.

**Recommendation 9**

Engagement Global should resolutely press ahead with the further development of the M&E system, initially with a focus on the programme-related monitoring function. In addition, the instrument of corporate strategy evaluations should be introduced.

**Recommendation 10**

Engagement Global should clarify how cooperation between staff units and specialist departments can be made smoother and take appropriate measures.

**Recommendation 11**

Engagement Global should increase the transparency of the relevant steps in the application process, the eligibility criteria and the funding decisions for funding organisations and the public.

**Recommendation 12**

Engagement Global should take steps to ensure a more consistent quality in the provision of advice.

**Recommendation 13**

In coordination with the BMZ, Engagement Global should take appropriate measures to improve the processes in the funding procedures in such a way that the processing deadlines that it has set itself and those stipulated by procedural law are generally adhered to.

**Recommendation 14**

Engagement Global should in principle retain the branch offices, develop them further on the basis of strategic criteria and make the resources allocated to them more flexible. This is intended to achieve a moderate expansion of the branch offices, while at the same time allowing for the closure of branch offices or a shift in regional focus on the basis of criteria. The financial and personnel resources to be deployed should be justified on the basis of requirements.

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