

FEMINIST DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Advice on implementing human rights-based and gender-transformative development cooperation

What is feminist development policy?

Besides a perspective that is fundamentally critical of power relations and gender-inclusive, there are two features which define the self-understanding of feminist development policy (BMZ, 2022b): it is human-rights-based and gender-transformative. Human rights-based development cooperation aims to realise human rights through a so-called human rights-based approach. This approach attaches paramount importance to viewing people as rights-holders. States, on the other hand, have a duty to respect, protect and fulfil human rights – which means they are duty-bearers. Working in a gender-transformative way means addressing structural discrimination and its causes. Gender-transformative development cooperation works explicitly to change social values, societal norms and the status quo, and in so doing to achieve greater gender equality.

Following Germany's change of government in 2021, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) published its first feminist development-policy goals: to eliminate structural inequalities and discrimination against women, girls and other marginalised groups in the long term. These groups will also be supported and involved as equals in development projects (BMZ, 2022a). With its initiative, the BMZ is following other countries that have already formulated a corresponding policy, such as Sweden (2014-2022), Canada (since 2017), France (since 2018) and Mexico (since 2019).

The BMZ's feminist development policy builds on existing strategies, including those for gender equality, human rights and the inclusion of persons with disabilities. Based on DEval evaluations

on these topics, this policy brief examines the extent to which German development cooperation already includes key features of a feminist development policy (see box). It also provides specific advice on how these can be better incorporated into development cooperation practice. Here, development policy operates in a challenging space of tension between alignment with partner priorities, and orientation towards basic norms and values.

WHERE IS GERMAN DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AT NOW?

The BMZ's human rights strategy, which has been in place since 2011, provides a good strategic basis for a human rights-based development policy. However, there are gaps in its practical implementation. For example, human rights are only partially considered in the BMZ's sector and country strategies, and in its development cooperation programmes and projects. Specific projects to strengthen human rights actors and the rights of disadvantaged groups are not systematically integrated into the BMZ portfolio. The budgetary resources for this are also low. In the political dialogue between Germany and partner governments, human rights are only addressed explicitly in specific cases. And although only those partner governments that guarantee human rights receive budget support, human rights violations are not systematically sanctioned by any reduction in development funding (Polak et al., 2021).

In 2014, the BMZ adopted a gender equality strategy that defines a three-pronged approach comprising political dialogue, empowerment and gender mainstreaming. This strategy provides starting points for a gender-transformative development policy. An analysis of projects in 11 post-conflict contexts shows

that many BMZ-supported interventions pursue a gender-specific approach and address the concrete needs of women and men. That said, only one in ten projects can be categorised as gender-transformative. Furthermore, more than half of the projects are either not designed in a gender-sensitive way, or are limited to removing barriers to participation for women and girls. Analytical tools used to plan projects also often have a binary understanding of gender, and intersectionality – the intersection of multiple dimensions of discrimination – is barely considered (Brüntrup-Seidemann et al., 2021).

STEPS TOWARDS GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE AND HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

A synthesis of results and recommendations from DEval evaluations reveals possible steps towards aligning German development cooperation with a feminist development policy.

DEval evaluations with links to feminist development policy



Human Rights in German Development Policy. Part 1: The Human Rights Strategy and its Implementation (Polak et al., 2021)



Supporting **Gender Equality** in Post-conflict Contexts (Brüntrup-Seidemann et al., 2021)



Evaluation of the BMZ Action Plan for the **Inclusion** of Persons with Disabilities (Schwedersky et al., 2017)

Step 1: Integrate key elements into strategies

Besides having a dedicated strategy for feminist development policy, it is also important to incorporate its essential goals and areas of activity into other strategies. In German development cooperation, there are gaps in the integration of human rights, and in the use of possible opportunities to integrate them. This is especially true in sectors whose goals are not directly linked to human rights agreements, and which are perceived by development practitioners as "bearing little relation to human rights" or "bearing little relation to inclusion", such as energy or transport. Moreover, relevant links are often not yet receiving sufficient strategic consideration.

One example of this is "gender" and "conflict". Rather than addressing this nexus, many strategies treat the two themes separately (Brüntrup-Seidemann et al., 2021).

Possible steps to strengthen central elements of a feminist development policy:



At the **strategic level**, integrate the human rights-based approach and gender-conflict nexus **into core area and quality criteria strategies**.



Incorporate the human rights-based approach and gender-conflict nexus in **country strategies**.

Step 2: Align the portfolio with strategic goals, increase financial resources

Important for realising a feminist development policy are projects that work specifically on human rights, gender equality and inclusion, and have the requisite financial and human resources. In some cases, there are targets for the share of specific projects in the portfolio. In practice, however, only a few BMZ-supported projects in post-conflict contexts, for example, pursue gender equality as their principal objective (Brüntrup-Seidemann et al., 2021), and only a small number of projects have a focus on inclusion (Schwedersky et al., 2017). And even though there are specific human rights projects, the number of these projects is not systematically recorded, as there is no human rights marker to classify them (Polak et al., 2021). Similarly, despite declarations of intent to the contrary, Germany has not yet implemented the new ODA disability inclusion marker. Consequently, it is not possible at present to make any reliable statements on how often projects specifically address human rights aspects.

Possible steps to strengthen central elements of a feminist development policy:



Review and increase the **number of specific projects** on gender equality and human rights (including inclusion).



Identify **pilot countries** to fully implement the human rights-based approach and test innovative instruments.



Review **human resources** in BMZ divisions, e.g. for implementing the human rights-based approach, and provide additional funds, e.g. to mainstream inclusion in projects.

Step 3:

Adjust procedures and processes

To mainstream human rights, gender equality and inclusion in line with a feminist development policy, effective procedures and processes are essential. The mainstreaming processes in German development cooperation vary in terms of their suitability for this. Whereas the gender mainstreaming processes generally lead to projects being designed in a gender-sensitive manner (Brüntrup-Seidemann et al., 2021), the results in terms of inclusion should be viewed more critically (Schwedersky et al., 2017). Moreover, strategic guidelines for mainstreaming the human rights-based approach in country and sector strategies, and in programmes and modules, are only partially implemented (Polak et al., 2021).

Possible steps to strengthen central elements of a feminist development policy:



Ensure that projects are designed in a gender-conflict-sensitive, human rights-based and inclusive manner through **procedural guidelines**, for example on module proposals, and through common quality standards.



Pilot (new) **analytical tools** such as human rights-based target group analyses and country-wide gender analyses, and use them holistically in the design of projects.



Review and improve **complaint mechanisms** and merge them into one system.



Establish a **monitoring system** for the quality criterion "human rights, gender equality and disability inclusion", improve the quality of project-specific indicators and increase **disaggregated monitoring** in projects.



In post-conflict contexts, select implementation partners with **gender-conflict competence**, or strengthen this competence in implementation partners.

Step 4:

Promote competence and motivation

The evaluations reveal that the knowledge of individual staff members on human rights, gender equality and inclusion plays a crucial role in dealing with partners, applying existing procedures and designing projects (Brüntrup-Seidemann et al., 2021; Polak et al., 2021; Schwedersky et al., 2017). Especially in technical sectors, staff are less aware of these issues. Awareness raising and knowledge among staff can influence the organisational culture in a way that is conducive to a feminist development policy.

Possible steps to strengthen central elements of a feminist development policy:



Strengthen **awareness-raising** and offer (mandatory) thematic **training**.



Build **knowledge that is applied and practical**, and make it accessible.



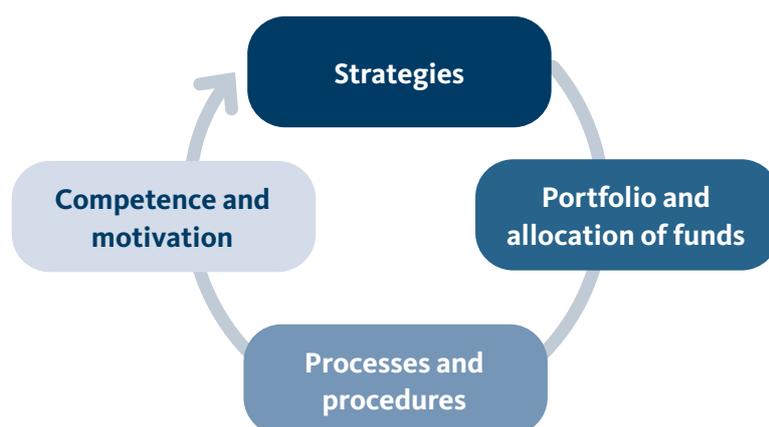
Create **incentive systems** that encourage personal initiative, make good practice visible and enable institutional learning.

The DEval evaluations have revealed a variety of ways to strengthen human rights-based and gender-transformative development cooperation. Measures in all four areas mentioned – strategies, portfolio and resource allocation, procedures and processes, competence and motivation – are relevant to this.

The steps shown are closely interrelated, and can be impactful in facilitating a feminist development policy, provided that they are conceptualised as an integrated approach and implemented accordingly in development cooperation practice.

Figure 1

Levers for human rights-based and gender-transformative development cooperation



Source: DEval, authors' own graphic

References

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The German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval) is mandated by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) to independently analyse and assess German development interventions. Evaluation reports contribute to the transparency of development results and provide policy-makers with evidence and lessons learned, based on which they can shape and improve their development policies.