

LEARNING FROM GERMANY'S CIVIL ENGAGEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

Given the large number of crises and conflicts worldwide, it is important to learn from past and current engagements in fragile contexts in order to make positive results replicable and avoid mistakes. The findings of the joint ministerial evaluation of the German government's civil engagement in Afghanistan¹ demonstrate what can be learned from this engagement, which was unprecedented both financially and in terms of human resources. These lessons can be applied in future operations in highly fragile contexts affected by violent conflict.

Building a peaceful and democratic Afghanistan failed, people's lives were at times improved

Between 2013 and 2021, Germany's civil engagement in Afghanistan totalled 3.5 billion euros. This made Germany the second-largest bilateral donor after the USA. The Federal Foreign Office (AA) and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) each provided around 49 per cent of the funding, while the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community (BMI) provided just under two per cent. The geographic focus of the engagement was on the north of Afghanistan and in the capital Kabul. The AA was involved primarily through the Stability Pact for Afghanistan and humanitarian assistance. The BMZ was involved chiefly in the sectors of good governance, economic development, education, energy and water, and the BMI in police rebuilding.

Germany's civil engagement at times demonstrably helped to improve the lives of the Afghan population. In the key geographic areas, the delivery of water, energy, education and health to Afghans was successfully improved. However, no significant contributions were made to the sustainable development of a constitutional democracy based on the rule of law, or market economy structures. Despite the considerable resources deployed, the ministries and international partners failed to achieve their goal of building a peaceful and democratic Afghanistan.

¹ The joint ministerial evaluation was carried out by a working group comprising DEval, the German Police University (DHPPol) and a consortium led by GFA Consulting Group GmbH. The evaluation period was limited to the period 2013 to 2021.

² The evaluation of Germany's civil engagement permits initial conclusions and recommendations for engagements in other highly fragile and conflict-ridden contexts such as Afghanistan. Some of these recommendations may also be relevant to other contexts, however.

Lessons: realistic goals, strategic capacity, dealing with negative effects, learning

Realistically assess capacity: Due to foreign and domestic policy requirements – loyalty to the NATO Alliance and the need to justify the military operation through civilian efforts – the German government set itself overambitious political goals for its civil engagement in Afghanistan. During the engagement, the ministries did not adequately adapt these goals to the political realities in Afghanistan, despite the visible lack of progress. Despite the increasingly evident dominance of clientelist power structures, a lack of ownership and the elites' unwillingness to reform, the ministries failed – in retrospect – to address these points. **For future engagements in highly fragile contexts² the evaluation therefore recommends that ministries should** (1) realistically assess their own capacity in terms of their resources and the limits of their influence in the specific context, and formulate or adapt objectives accordingly; (2) define minimum requirements for the deployment of various instruments and select these in a context-appropriate manner.

Strengthen strategic capacity across the ministries: At no point in the entire evaluation period did the AA, BMI and BMZ have a joint strategy setting out how the political goals were to be achieved, which assumptions would guide action and what a scenario for ending (parts of) the engagement might look like. Moreover, the ministries worked independently of, and sometimes in competition with, each other, especially in the area of stabilisation. Coordination platforms such as the meeting of state secretaries, which could have provided space for a critical discussion of the engagement, were largely used only for information sharing. **For future engagements, especially in highly fragile contexts, the evaluation therefore recommends** (3) developing a joint ministerial strategy agreed between the ministries, with ministry-specific

