

THE BMZ EMERGENCY COVID-19 SUPPORT PROGRAMME

Success factors and potential improvements for future crisis response programmes

Executive Summary

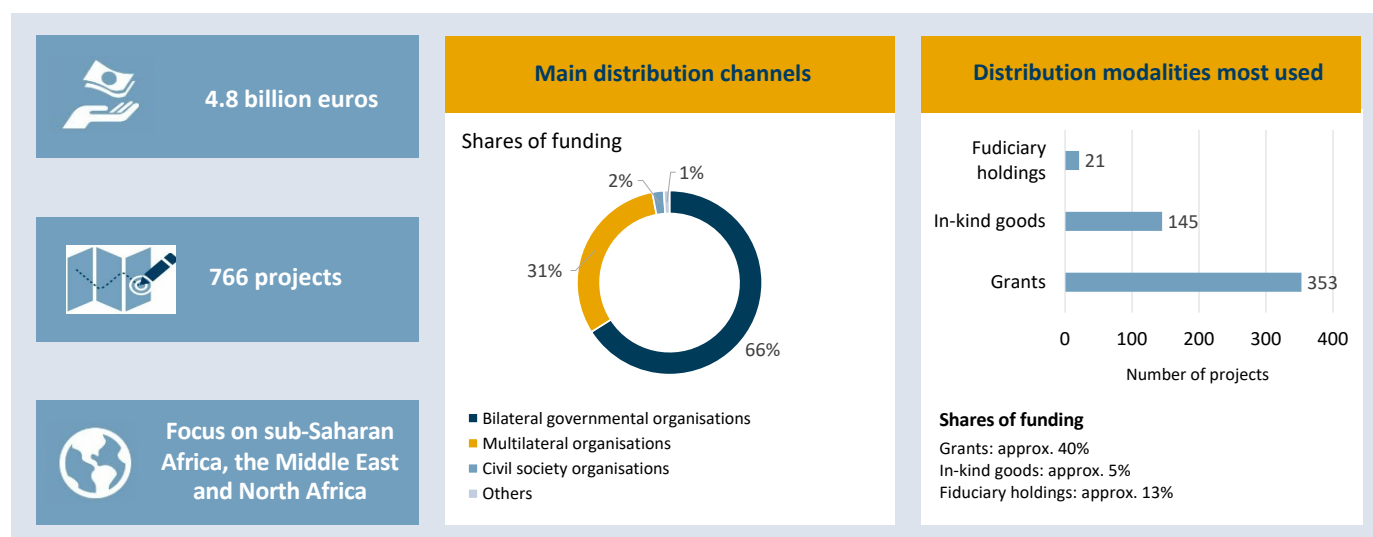
The COVID-19 pandemic posed unprecedented challenges for countries worldwide and had serious health and socio-economic consequences. In Germany, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) provided 4.8 billion euros in funding between April 2020 and December 2021 to finance the Emergency COVID-19 Support Programme (CSP). The programme was aimed at supporting efforts to contain and mitigate the pandemic and its socio-economic consequences in partner countries of German development cooperation (DC).

The German Institute for Development Evaluation (D Eval) conducted an evaluation of the CSP from December 2021 to March 2024 and assessed the programme's relevance, coherence, effectiveness and efficiency. This evaluation was closely linked with the COVID-19 Global Evaluation Coalition – an international initiative aimed at jointly learning from the evaluations carried out worldwide to assess COVID-19 response programmes in international DC. Quantitative and qualitative data were examined and in-depth case studies conducted in Burkina Faso, Jordan and Lebanon.

Overall, the report paints a positive picture of the programme as well as the distribution channels and instruments used within the CSP. The fact that many CSP measures built on and expanded existing partnerships and projects, enabling a rapid and coherent response, was rated particularly positively. The large disbursements to multilateral organisations who provide advantages in procuring in-kind goods in times of crisis and the wide use of grants within the CSP were likewise rated as highly relevant and efficient. These success factors should be considered in similar future crises.

At the same time, the evaluation's findings reveal potential improvements such as regarding the steering of similar BMZ crisis response programmes. For example, the crisis committee established by the BMZ at the onset of the pandemic was dissolved when the programme ended. Moreover, the committee focused on the disbursement of funding and initial planning, and was conceived to play only a limited role in steering the implemented interventions. A support mechanism for concurrently analysing the implementation of the CSP and adjusting it as needed had not been provided. The BMZ should give its future crisis response programmes a stronger institutional base and collaborate with the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the development bank of the Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW) to jointly ensure their organisations' internal learning from the pandemic.

Due to the lack of steering, funding was not distributed systematically based on the vulnerability and affectedness of the partner countries, while the strengths of civil society organisations (CSOs) were likewise insufficiently leveraged. D Eval therefore recommends firstly that the vulnerability and the affectedness of the partner countries be factored more strongly into funding distribution. Secondly, the reliance on a mix of diverse distribution channels should be maintained, while also reviewing how or whether a more extensive integration of CSOs is possible. Thirdly, efforts are needed to improve coordination both within the German organisations as well as with international actors to enable the use of previously established mechanisms in future crises.

Figure 1 Overview of the CSP portfolio

Source: DEval, own visualisation

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic had health and socio-economic consequences around the globe. The number of people living in extreme poverty rose for the first time in over 20 years (increasing by 71 million), undoing prior progress achieved towards reaching the Sustainable Development Goals.

Bilateral as well as multilateral donors supported partner countries through extensive programmes. The CSP launched by the BMZ disbursed 4.8 billion euros in funding in 2020 and 2021 to finance over 750 projects in the partner countries of German DC.

From a geographical perspective, the programme focused on sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa. New projects as well as existing projects received funding. The main recipients were bilateral governmental organisations (66 per cent) and multilateral organisations (31 per cent), while only a smaller portion (2 per cent) was disbursed to CSOs. The implementing organisations (IOs) disbursed the funding onward mainly in the form of grants. Fiduciary holdings and in-kind goods were also used frequently as distribution modalities (see Figure 1).

Examples of CSP activities

Promoting small and medium-sized enterprises and producing face masks in Ethiopia: an ongoing project run by GIZ was realigned within the scope of the CSP and financially expanded. This enabled the production of face masks as a cottage industry to secure jobs and contribute to controlling the pandemic.

Disbursement of cash transfers for vulnerable households in Jordan: KfW development bank, acting on behalf of the BMZ, took part for the first time in a basket fund of the Jordanian National Aid Fund (NAF). This allowed households in the informal sector which were severely impacted economically by lockdowns to receive financial support to cover their basic needs.

Methods

The evaluation assesses the relevance, coherence, effectiveness and efficiency of the CSP, focusing on the channels and instruments used within the programme. It serves on the one hand to enhance accountability, while on the other hand also generating insights aimed at learning for future crises.

The evaluation began with a portfolio analysis of the CSP coupled with a systematic literature analysis and assessment of other secondary data¹. To provide more in-depth analysis, further data were collected over the course of the evaluation by conducting a survey of representatives of bilateral organisations of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the partner countries and multilateral organisations. Furthermore, qualitative and quantitative analyses were conducted in the case study countries Burkina Faso, Jordan and Lebanon.

The evaluation team cooperated closely with the COVID-19 Global Evaluation Coalition initiated by the OECD-DAC. The coalition strives to promote learning from the pandemic on an international level by bringing together the evaluation units of various countries and institutions that are or were involved in assessing the COVID-19 response measures. The findings of the CSP evaluation are incorporated into the coalition's *Strategic Joint Evaluation of the Collective International Development and Humanitarian Assistance Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic*.

Success factors

DEval rates the CSP positively in terms of the utilised distribution channels and instruments.

Grants are one instrument of financial support and one of the distribution modalities most frequently used within the CSP. A systematic literature analysis as well as interviews with DC actors reveal grants to be relevant and efficient in a crisis. Contrary to loans, grants do not have to be paid back and do not increase the indebtedness of countries already struggling under a high debt load, hence they are better suited as an instrument for mitigating crises.

In-kind goods such as hygiene equipment were particularly important for health measures during the pandemic, and there was high demand for such goods worldwide. This demand posed challenges, in particular for countries with deficient healthcare systems. The evaluation reveals that multilateral organisations had better access for procuring goods during the pandemic than bilateral donor organisations, thanks in part to long-term procurement agreements. Local governmental actors and CSOs were able to support in-kind goods procurement through local networks and knowledge regarding processes.

The predominant distribution of CSP funding via **existing projects and partnerships** had a positive effect on the speed and coherence of the programme, as efforts were able to rely on existing structures. This finding is confirmed in a synthesis report prepared by the COVID-19 Global Evaluation Coalition (Schwensen and Scheibel Smed, 2023). The report points out that building the COVID-19 interventions on existing partnerships promoted the coherence and timeliness of crisis response.

Recommendations

In future crises of a similar nature, the BMZ and IOs should undertake the following as was done in the CSP:

- disburse a large share of the funding in the form of grants;
- assign the procurement of in-kind goods to multilateral or local organisations;
- embed response measures in existing projects and partnerships.

Potential improvements

Overall, the evaluation identified potential for improvement in the **steering of the programme**. For example, the crisis committee established at the BMZ to plan and launch the CSP was primarily designed to allocate the funding. However, it did not include any function for systematically steering the programme, for instance by means of overarching needs analyses. When the crisis committee was dissolved once the CSP had run its course, it was unclear how the insights and learning from the evaluation were to be incorporated internally within the BMZ. No plans were made to conduct further overarching observations or evaluations of the impacts achieved or their sustainability.

Recommendations

For a future global crisis of a similar extent, the BMZ should appoint a specific office to be responsible for institutionally anchoring a crisis response programme, and for incorporating and making available the insights gained from internal and external learning and assessment processes.

The BMZ, KfW and GIZ should ensure the organisation's internal learning from the CSP, and the two IOs should furthermore conduct analyses of the impact and sustainability of measures implemented under the CSP.

¹ To provide timely evidence, findings from this analysis step were published already in 2023 in a policy brief prior to completing the overall evaluation (Stein et al., 2023). As a result of subsequent follow-up data collections, the assessments in the final evaluation report deviate slightly from those presented in the 2023 policy brief.



Further findings of the evaluation are that **CSOs**, with their close proximity to the population and knowledge of local needs, increased the relevance and the efficiency of the CSP measures. Yet, as only a small portion of the funding was allocated to CSOs, their strengths were not comprehensively leveraged, and vulnerable groups were in some cases only reached to a limited extent. In contrast, the generally extensive funding disbursed to multilateral organisations was beneficial for the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of the CSP.

Furthermore, at no point in time were systematic analyses conducted of the **vulnerability and affectedness or the needs** of the partner countries and target groups. Efforts relied instead on existing partnerships. While this allowed rapid response particularly in the early phase of the programme, these aspects were not considered more strongly as measures progressed. As a result, substantial funding was allocated in part to countries less impacted by the pandemic.

While the **coherence** within German DC and between bilateral donors and international organisations is generally rated as positive, there is potential for improvement. This concerns firstly the internal structures in place within the BMZ and the IOs, and those interlinking them over the course of the CSP. Secondly, staff of international organisations saw needs for improvement in how the actors of German DC coordinated with them.

Recommendations

In future crises of a similar nature, the BMZ and IOs should undertake the following:

- rely on a mix of diverse distribution channels and review whether a more extensive integration of CSOs is possible;
- factor the vulnerability, affectedness and needs of the partner countries over the course of the crisis more strongly into funding distribution than was done in the CSP, and start now already to prepare a process for such concurrent assessment;
- focus more closely on the internal and external coherence of the crisis programme.

Literature

Römling, C., S. Disse, M. Orth-Rempel, J. Schnell and W. Stein (2024), *Evaluation of the Emergency COVID-19 Support Programme – Lessons from the Pandemic*, The German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval), Bonn.

Schwensen, C. and L. Scheibel Smed (2023), *What Can Evaluations Tell Us About the Pandemic Response? Document Review for the Strategic Joint Evaluation of the Collective International Development and Humanitarian Assistance Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic*, COVID-19 Global Evaluation Coalition, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Paris.

Stein, W., S. Disse, M. Orth-Rempel and C. Römling (2023), *Relevance and Efficiency of the Emergency COVID-19 Support Programme: BMZ prioritised rapid disbursement to partner countries*, DEval Policy Brief 5/2023, German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval), Bonn.



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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.