

Synthesis of Contributions by Civil Society

**Consultation Process on the
Feminist Development Policy
of the Federal Ministry for Economic
Cooperation and Development (BMZ)**

Introduction & Methodological Note

After taking office in late 2021, Svenja Schulze announced that the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) will adopt a feminist development policy. To this end, BMZ set out to develop the strategy on its feminist development policy as well as a third BMZ Gender Action Plan based on an inclusive and diverse consultation process. Between February and September 2022, the process involved over 400 stakeholders mostly from civil society, but also from academia or multilateral organisations, both from Germany and the Global South.

Dialogue with German Civil Society - The consultation process kicked off with dialogues with German civil society on possible core elements (February 2022) and fields of action (May 2022) of a feminist development policy. The dialogues were held with members of the “Thematic Team Gender”, a regular exchange forum of the BMZ with German civil society and representatives of implementing organisations, in the fields of gender equality, human rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities (approx. 50 organisations).

Online Consultation - A broad online consultation (survey) was conducted in August. The aim of the survey was to obtain an assessment of civil society, especially from the Global South, of key priorities regarding the goals of a German feminist development policy. More than 400 people were invited to participate in the survey. Of those who took part, 65% were from civil society and 35% from other organisations, such as academic institutions, implementing organisations or multilateral organisations. 46% of survey participants were from the Global South and 54% from the Global North.

High-level Conference & Focus Groups - On September 27, Svenja Schulze, Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development, discussed approaches to a feminist development policy with representatives of civil society at a high-level conference. Conference participants also included members of the German Parliament Committee on Economic Cooperation and Development and the Human Rights Committee. The event was followed by focus group discussions with international experts from civil society. The focus groups discussed effective approaches and concrete actions to implement a feminist development policy in the fields of climate justice and just transition; food security; health; peace, conflict and migration; economic empowerment; and gender-based violence. In addition, three focus groups discussed approaches to transform discriminatory power structures.

All inputs collected during the consultation process were documented and analysed using qualitative and quantitative methods (incl. descriptive statistics and bivariate analysis to analyse quantitative survey results, and qualitative content analysis). They create an important basis for the development of the BMZ’s feminist development policy strategy as well as the third Gender Action Plan. The following results present the overarching synthesis of contributions, recommendations and asks made during the consultation process. The results do not necessarily reflect the position of the BMZ.

1. German feminist development policy should lead by example

‘A feminist development policy requires structural changes within the institutions of German development cooperation’ was the most prominent message made by participants in the consultation process¹. According to the participants, the BMZ therefore needs to address institutional adjustments in line with feminist principles of power transformation, anti-discrimination, inclusion and participation to lay the groundwork for a feminist development policy.

Addressing discrimination and strengthening diversity within German development cooperation institutions

One of the ideas that generated the highest agreement among civil society in the consultation concerned the need of BMZ and its implementing organisations to **address structures of discrimination and to strengthen equal representation** of women and marginalised groups at all levels of decision-making. Participants added in various focus groups discussions that especially the share of women and **people from communities and contexts targeted by German DC** should be increased in decision-making. They further proposed that this process needs to start from a **critical assessment of current power structures** and experiences of discrimination not only in terms of representation but also salary structure, e.g. valuing of “international” vs. “local” personnel and human resource processes. Next to addressing such structural questions, **capacity development** in the field of feminism, intersectional and decolonial approaches to development as well as unconscious bias and anti-racism was considered a key priority to strengthen inclusive and diverse development cooperation organisations. According to the consultation outcomes, these trainings should not only be mandatory but **expertise in these fields should also be a requirement for decision-making positions**.

Adapting policy processes & funding decisions

‘The **guiding nature of the feminist development policy** should be reflected in BMZ’s policymaking’ was a central lesson learned from previous feminist foreign policy processes shared by civil society actors. Key recommendations included that the **Gender Division of the BMZ should be placed directly under the minister** and that **personnel resources for feminist policymaking** should be increased to reflect its importance to guide decision-making and the ministries leadership. In addition, participants underlined that **guidelines for the development of BMZ policies** should be adapted to make a feminist and intersectional analysis a requirement for all policy processes and final policy documents. Similarly, the German guidelines for the **gender marker system** should be revised to improve the gender-responsiveness and gender-transformative approaches in German DC projects. Finally, participants agreed that feminist policy making is not possible without comprehensive **funding**. A substantial **increase of ODA funds** for gender equality was the second highest priority of all participants in the online consultation and has already been announced by Minister Schulze during the public event on Germany’s feminist development policy on September 27, 2022. However, as pointed out by different panelists, these funds, e.g. large-scaling funding to multilateral organisations, rarely reach feminist structures and grassroots organisations. During focus group discussions, civil society actors consequently emphasised the need of a critical assessment of current budgetary decisions and a transparent communication on

¹ In the online consultation, most (72 out of 241) suggested goals for Germany’s development policy concerned institutional changes.

money flows with the aim to **increase funds that directly reach feminist civil society organisations** (see also chapter 4.2).

Creating political coherence and legitimacy on a German feminist position

‘You need to “Walk the Talk” at home’ advised civil society representatives from the Global South. If Germany’s policies outside of the field of development cooperation (e.g. migration policy or trade policy) contradict feminist principles, this would undermine the legitimacy of German feminist development efforts abroad. The consultation process therefore brought forward ideas to strengthen **government coherence** across ministries, especially with the Federal Foreign Office. These included the idea of establishing a **joint high-level working group of the German Federal Foreign Office (AA) and the BMZ** on feminist foreign and development policy.

2. German feminist development policy should be based on feminist principles and transform power structures

In the consultation process, participants identified several principles that should be at the heart of a feminist development policy, including meaningful participation, intersectionality, an inclusive understanding of gender, accountability as well as gender-transformative and decolonial approaches. It was continuously emphasised that current standards in **programme and project cycles**, incl. analysis/conceptualisation, implementation, monitoring and partner dialogue need to be adapted in order for German DC to live up to these principles. The key overarching recommendation by participants concerned **longer project phases and project conceptualisation** (or pre-project phases). Additional time was considered a necessary pre-condition to allow for meaningful participation, intersectional and inclusive approaches and to enable transformative and power-critical processes. In addition, participants in the focus group discussions underlined that implementing the above-mentioned principles in the project cycle also requires **stronger accountability mechanisms in projects**. They required anonymous and easily accessible complaint and feedback mechanisms, both for project partners and target groups. The processes should be transparent about how this feedback affects programming and policies and how complaints are treated, while communicating honestly and openly about mistakes, flaws and things that need improvement.

Participatory

During the panel discussion with Minister Svenja Schulze, Spogmay Ahmed, Senior Global Policy Advocate at the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) as well as Alvaro Bermejo, Director-General of the International Planned Parenthood Federation, underlined that feminist development policy needs to be based on **meaningful participation and co-creation**. Civil society actors from around the world echoed the importance of listening and power-sharing as a new standard approach in project analyses, conceptualisation, and implementation as well as partner dialogue. Representatives from civil society made community-driven solutions through the involvement of youth, feminist civil society, indigenous communities, LGBTIQ+ persons and persons with disabilities as well as local and small organisations a key priority in different consultation workshops. In this process, decision-making power should be shared with the involved actors. Furthermore, civil society organisations also called for the **institutionalisation of youth participation** in policy and project decisions, including youth from the

Global South. Concrete suggestions were, for example, to provide the BMZ Youth Counsel (“Jugendbeirat”) with more decision-making power and integrate youth from the Global South in the Youth Counsel. To this end, participants in the consultation emphasised that the BMZ and implementing organisations need to **create enabling conditions for participation**. A key recommendation was that consulted experts and actors should be adequately compensated and supported with translation, security etc. It was further suggested that communication and participation formats need to be barrier-free, i.e. using simple, accessible (local) language, sign language, ensuring safety of spaces and transport as well as timing participation formats in line with participants’ schedules (e.g. youth can rarely participate when meetings are set during school hours). Finally, co-creation and meaningful participation would require a mindful handling of power dynamics in the participatory process by staff trained in this regard.

Intersectional

Beyond a truly participatory project cycle, a high priority of participants across different consultation formats constituted the **mainstreaming of intersectionality** throughout German DC projects. An **intersectional approach to gender, context and conflict analyses** as well as **monitoring and evaluation** should become a new standard in a feminist development policy and project processes. Concrete suggestions for implementation included making expertise on intersectionality and gender equality as well as do-no-harm approaches in research a requirement for staff being tasked with data collection and analysis. In addition, participants emphasised that experts from the targeted communities and regions should be represented in research/analysis teams or positions and that alternative forms of data collection such as storytelling should be considered. Through these steps the German DC should aim to contribute to **closing important data gaps** on the intersection of different forms of discrimination, e.g. based on racism, migration status, disability, gender, age, indigeneity.

Inclusive and non-binary understanding of gender

The consultation process broad forward a strong agreement among participants that a feminist development policy should be led by a **non-binary understanding of gender** and should be **inclusive of LGBTIQ+ persons**. Accordingly, inclusive and non-binary language should be used in all communication of the BMZ, and all trainings and capacity development should increase awareness and expertise on the importance of LGBTIQ+ rights in feminism (see chapter 1.1.). Additionally, **gender, conflict, and context analyses** as well as **monitoring and evaluation** should go beyond a binary understanding of gender and account for other gender identities. The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) and other LGBTIQ+ organisations provided examples for inclusive gender categories and analytical approaches. Beyond the mainstreaming of inclusion in communication and the project cycle, representatives of LGBTIQ+ organisations called for an increase in **specific projects to support LGBTIQ+ communities**. Actions should focus on strengthening networks, platforms of exchange among LGBTIQ+ organisations as well as between queer and other movements (feminist, religious etc.) and support their access to international and national agenda setting in a safe manner, with LGBTIQ+ organisations taking the lead.

Gender-transformative

During the public event on feminist development policy, Minister Schulze's commitment to transform power structures was highly welcomed by panelists and focus group participants. To this end, they recommended an **increase of gender-transformative projects**. As mentioned above, participants indicated that processes of transformation e.g. of social norms and power dynamics require **longer project phases and long-term funding commitments**. Concrete suggestions for gender-transformative activities focused in particular on implementing and supporting projects work on concepts of **masculinities that promote gender equality and LGBTIQ+ rights**.

Decolonial and anti-racist

The adaptation of a decolonial approach to German DC received by far the most support by participants in the focus group discussions. In the online consultation and throughout the focus group discussions, civil society, especially from the Global South, reiterated that **decolonial and anti-racist perspectives** must be at the core of Germany's feminist development policy. According to consultation participants this work needs to start by BMZ **confronting Germany's colonial past and identifying colonial continuities** in its current structures and systems. Concrete steps in this direction should include awareness campaigns, trainings, and power-critical assessments within the institutions of German DC (see chapter 1). Based on this understanding, participants recommended that the BMZ should **revisit and transform current colonial continuities in narratives, languages and structures** (e.g. the fact that international knowledge is still given higher importance than local knowledge). In this process the BMZ should seek guidance from experts on decolonial approaches from the affected communities. Participants further suggested that German DC should prioritise regular round tables with partners in the Global South to foster more partnerships on eye-level, refrain from conditionalities in agreements on development projects and strengthen support to **locally led development and South-South cooperation** and solutions. Civil society actors in the consultation also pleaded to critically revisit the current role of private sector actors in development cooperation with regard to extractive and exploitative practices in the Global South. Participants emphasised the importance of economic policies and structures that improve regulation and accountability (see also Chapter 3 on Access to Resources). Ideas to strengthen partnership programs with the private sector and the use of blended or innovative finance received the least support in the online consultation under the field of action "resources". Finally, participants pleaded for the BMZ to fund development programmes within Germany on feminist and gender-transformative development policy that also **educate on colonialism and decolonial approaches**.

3. German feminist development policy should focus on the 3Rs – rights, resources and representation – along its entire portfolio

The results of the consultation process confirm that the realisation of **rights**, the promotion of access to **resources** and the strengthening of **representation** - the principle of the 3Rs adopted in feminist foreign policy approaches - should also be key elements of a feminist development policy.

Realising Rights

The realisation of rights as a central approach to feminist development policy found strong support among consultation participants. According to participants, this field of action should include the protection, promotion, and realisation of rights, especially for those who have been historically and politically marginalised. All people, including women, LGBTIQ+ persons, and other marginalised groups, should have access to justice and be able to exercise their rights without restrictions or fear of discrimination.

According to the results of the online consultation, civil society considered the support of partner countries in **reforming discriminatory laws and policies** to provide women and marginalised groups with equal legal access to important resources such as land, inheritance, health, and education as the top priority in the field of action “realising rights”. The second priority calls BMZ to advocate for **anchoring the protection of the rights of women and marginalised groups** in international strategies on topics including **trade and climate policy as well as economic and employment promotion**.

Throughout the consultation process, civil society also emphasised the need to protect those who walk the talk, expose human rights violations and advocate for the realisation of human rights. German development cooperation should therefore support the development of tailor-made **protection and support measures for human rights defenders** at the national and international level.

Furthermore, civil society reiterated the importance of including **children's rights** in the feminist development policy. Focus group participants stressed that children's rights should be explicitly mentioned in the strategy, especially to fight forced marriage, female genital mutilation, and child labour. Participants in the workshop with German stakeholders proposed that the results of the BMZ review of children's rights should be incorporated into German feminist development policy.

At all stages of the consultation process, civil society emphasised the need to strengthen **sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)**, calling for the realisation of bodily autonomy and access to critical health services. The first panel at the international conference on feminist development policy on September 27 underlined that German development cooperation should **prioritise SRHR, especially for marginalised groups**, and advocate at the international level for the realisation of these rights. This is particularly urgent as these rights are the first that anti-rights movements seek to curtail. Participants of focus groups further highlighted that realising SRHR requires **recognising intersecting inequalities** of class, age, gender, sexual orientation, and other characteristics in access to health services. This includes, but is not limited to, supporting organisations that sensitise health professionals to the health needs of LGBTIQ+ persons, engage parents, men, and boys to educate them about SRHR, challenge the age at which SRHR services can be accessed, and support governments in offering SRHR services free of charge. Furthermore, focus group participants call for BMZ to **support partner countries that are willing to reform laws** to better protect SRHR. Alternatively, participants proposed that BMZ could use **bilateral dialogue with partner countries** to raise SRHR issues and **support civil society organisations** that advocate for legal reforms concerning SRHR and reduce barriers of access to legal proceedings. Specific legal provisions requested by participants of focus groups and workshops include access to maternal and gynaecological care, emergency contraception, legal abortion, and comprehensive sex education.

Another recurring theme that received much attention during the consultation process is **gender-based violence (GBV)**. Civil society organisations called for **inclusive and holistic approaches**. They emphasised that feminist development policy must **recognise the extent of GBV**, its **disproportionate impact on women and LGBTIQ+ persons**, and the **root causes** of this violence, namely discriminatory heteronormative gender norms. Comprehensive GBV prevention and response hence includes addressing discriminatory social norms, providing comprehensive support services to GBV survivors and strengthening the rights of marginalised groups. In practice, this would mean **supporting local organisations** that know the specific context, have already identified successful approaches to address the root causes of GBV, and offer services specifically tailored to the needs of survivors. Focus group participants further emphasised that German development cooperation should not try to reinvent the wheel but rely on local knowledge and fund existing initiatives that have already proven effective.

Access to Resources

Feminist development policy, based on insights from the consultation process, recognises macroeconomic challenges to the economic development of communities in the Global South and addresses them based on their contributions and interests. It also aims to reduce barriers for women and marginalised groups to access critical resources such as health, education, economic empowerment, financial services, and networks.

Civil society throughout the consultation called on BMZ to develop **new economic approaches** that enable better and more inclusive response to crises, reduce inequalities and strengthen the economies of the Global South. Among others, this should include critical reflexion on global food systems and their impacts on local communities, confronting climate justice and discussing feminist ecological resource protection. Concrete action, as suggested by focus group participants, may include increasing anticipatory action and promoting initiatives on social protection to better cushion the impact of crises. In addition, BMZ could support the development of tax systems that enable redistribution and take efforts to tackle tax evasion at a national and international level. BMZ could, for instance, support initiatives that fight against tax evasion and bring in perspectives from the Global South.

Feminist development policy, according to consultations participants, also has to provide equal access to productive resources such as to health services, education and economic resources. According to results from the online consultation, “German feminist development policy should promote **non-discriminatory, affordable, and high-quality health services**, especially for women and marginalised groups” was ranked as one of the highest priorities. Participants of focus group discussions further called for an **intersectional and life-cycle approach** to account for different health service needs and overcome access barriers. Concrete actions to pursue this aim include conducting research on barriers to accessing health services, tailoring health communications to different audiences, promoting digital solutions, and relying on community-based or peer-to-peer solutions to reach marginalised groups.

Throughout the consultation process, civil society organisations expressed the need for **inclusive education systems** that provide continuous learning for all while addressing the specific needs of girls and marginalised groups. To achieve this goal, schools could, among others, promote girls' digital literacy to narrow the gender digital divide and provide hygiene items to ensure girls do not miss lessons during

their periods. In addition, participants of the workshop with German stakeholders emphasised that schools must be accessible to and inclusive of persons with disabilities.

Feminist development policy should **address structural barriers to economic participation**, including the burden of unpaid care work and the differential valuation of male- and female-dominated sectors. In addition, German development cooperation should **strengthen networks and collectives of women and marginalised groups** to enable mutual learning and making their voices heard. According to focus group participants, this could mean building on networks of women working in informal local food markets, as well as promoting financial inclusion through self-help groups to support women and marginalised groups organise and transform existing power structures. A key example raised in this context concerned the issue of food security, where efforts should focus more on intensifying initiatives for local food systems generation. Furthermore, participants of focus groups highlighted that economic empowerment initiatives should be inclusive of persons with disabilities and raise awareness to their needs and rights.

Strengthening Representation

Civil society called on BMZ and its implementing organisations to promote meaningful participation and representation of women and marginalised groups at all levels of decision-making and public life (see also chapter 2.1). This would require increasing the representation and consultation of these groups in BMZ and its implementing organisations and to bring unheard voices to international and multilateral spaces, while also promoting greater participation of women and marginalised groups at the local and national level in partner countries.

Participants of focus group discussions emphasised that diverse sets of perspectives need to be considered in development programming. They recommended that a feminist development policy should be shaped from the **bottom up** rather than from the top down. This would require strengthening local organisations, incorporating their perspectives, and bringing their voices to conferences and initiatives at the international level. According to results of the online consultation, advocating for systematic discussion formats for greater **representation and participation of civil society organisations with feminist and intersectional approaches in international conferences, committees, and initiatives** was ranked as the top priority of a feminist development policy in the area of representation. Participants across the consultation formats also called for a regular and systematic **involvement of feminist organisations in partner dialogues and consultations** wherever possible, based on the do no harm principle.

According to the results of the online consultation, the second priority was **to support political education and awareness-raising projects at community level** to strengthen the participation of women and marginalised groups in decision-making processes in partner countries. Concrete actions may include supporting initiatives that educate people about their political rights and opportunities to get involved, strengthening local groups, networks and associations that empower marginalised voices, connecting these groups to local authorities and creating spaces to exchange perspectives. In addition, German development cooperation should support capacity-building of local policy makers through trainings on gender and marginalised perspectives and encourage them to consider the perspectives of marginalised groups including children and youth in decision-making.

4. The BMZ should strengthen international alliances and civil society to implement feminist core concerns

Strengthening multilateralism and counter anti-gender movements

To strengthen feminist policies and agendas and develop a common understanding of feminist development policy, it was considered highly important to find **strong allies and build feminist alliances** at the international level. Participants in the focus group discussions recommended BMZ to identify and partner with governments that pursue feminist policies, collaborate to bring feminist perspectives to new thematic areas and share good practices. In addition, it was emphasised by the panel of the first international conference on German feminist development policy on September 27, to engage in advocacy to win people for feminist agendas rather than leaving the space to regressive movements.

Furthermore, civil society called on BMZ to take decisive action against anti-gender movements that seek to justify exclusion and restrict the rights of women and marginalised groups. Collective action was seen as necessary to counter regressive forces and drown out their narratives. German feminist development policy should therefore join forces with like-minded organisations and countries, demonstrate demand for progressive perspectives in the multilateral space, and push for progressive EU positions in international negotiations. In addition, feminist development policy should promote a common, inclusive language, conduct research on reactionary movements and fund feminist movements to offset funding flows to anti-gender actors. Finally, BMZ should take a strong stand against government abuse and address feminist policies in bilateral dialogues with partner countries.

Financing of and collaborating with (feminist) local civil society

During the consultation process, participants emphasised the importance of funding local civil society organisations and strengthening their networks. In this regard, they prioritised **improving access to financial resources for local civil society in partner countries that advocates for the rights of women and marginalised groups**, making funding modalities more **flexible, needs-based, and long-term** and expanding **networking opportunities for feminist civil society** (movement building). Participants of the focus groups reiterated the importance of financing local civil society as they know the specific local context, drive change in their communities and are best suited to build sustainable structures. BMZ and its implementing organisations should therefore explore mechanisms to finance local civil society organisations, grassroots groups, and activists. In addition, due diligence procedures need to be adapted to allow small, informal organisations to access funding. Finally, funding conditions should be tailored to the needs of civil society organisations: long-term core funding rather than project-based funding is needed to give organisations more financial stability and flexibility in spending. Based on sufficient funding, civil society could then play a key role as collaboration partner on transforming discriminatory social norms and power hierarchies. In focus groups discussion participants agreed that in countries where there is push-back against the rights of women, LGBTIQ+ persons and other marginalised groups, strengthening local civil society should be a key priority in countering anti-right movements (see chapter 4.1).