



Federal Ministry  
for Economic Cooperation  
and Development

# Political involvement in German develop- ment cooperation



## Political involvement in German development cooperation

The promotion of political involvement is a major aspect of state-building, democratisation and good governance. Good governance is both an aim in itself and also a key issue addressed in all sectors in which German and international development cooperation are engaged. Promoting political involvement as an aspect of good governance helps to make poverty-reduction efforts more effective. Ultimately, poverty is often both the cause and effect of the absence of democratic structures and of political involvement, and of discrimination against minorities and women.

Mid-term reviews of progress towards the **Millennium Development Goals** have shown that good governance in partner countries is a decisive factor in determining the effectiveness of development efforts. Functioning governance structures are therefore crucial to a country's development. State players can only govern and manage the state in a sustainable way if they engage in a constructive dialogue with civil society and the private sector. Shaping the space in which state, society and business interact and make decisions is therefore vital for effective development cooperation. Consequently, it is against this backdrop that promoting political involvement is a major aspect of development cooperation.

The promotion of political involvement is also a vital element in building resilient and democratic states, as well as in promoting the legitimacy of state action. Past experience has shown time and again that a resilient state can only emerge if there is a constructive and reciprocal relationship between state and society. Therefore, promoting political involvement is of vital importance when engaging with, or trying to prevent the emergence of, fragile states and also in peace-building.



**Indigenous Advocacy Group in Dialogue,  
Bolivia**

There is no blueprint for fostering political involvement. Rather, this is a question of considering the different political and social situations, the socio-cultural settings and the individual needs of the partner countries. Given the diversity of the challenges the various partner countries face – be they anchor countries<sup>1</sup>, emerging economies, fragile states, or countries in crisis or emerging from conflict – the approach must be matched to the specific context. These efforts generally only bear fruit in the medium to the long term.



## **Empowerment of Women, India**

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<sup>1</sup> «Anchor countries» is the term used by the BMZ to refer to countries that are economically and politically influential in their regions and play a major role in international relations.

Through its Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Germany strives to promote political involvement both through bilateral programmes in partner countries and through multilateral cooperation. At bilateral level, it has been agreed with a large number of our partner countries to focus development cooperation on the area of democracy, civil society and public administration. These activities involve not only state institutions but also direct cooperation with civil society organisations. In addition to projects and programmes with a specific focus on this area, the principles of promoting political involvement are also systemically applied as binding guidelines when implementing projects and programmes in other sectors and areas of German development cooperation.

## **What do we mean by promoting political involvement?**

Political involvement, as understood in German development cooperation, means all forces within society having an equal say in political decisions. Yet the aim is not for each and every citizen to be involved in each and every policy decision. Rather it is about enabling as many different interest groups and social groups as possible (particularly the disadvantaged or marginalised) to participate in political processes on an equal footing and have proper representation.

It is not least Germany's own history that leads the German government to attach great importance to promoting political involvement in development cooperation. The restoration of German unity in 1990 through the unification of the two German states, the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic, delivered compelling proof of the importance of political involvement and its potential to effect change.

Experience has shown that development processes can only be sustainable if all concerned state and non-state stakeholders are involved in both their planning and implementation. Yet a participatory approach to planning and implementing development projects is not, in itself, enough to guarantee a lasting, constructive and reciprocal relationship between state and society, resulting in stable, resilient, democratic state structures.

The approach adopted in German development cooperation therefore goes beyond strengthening civil society and taking a participative approach to designing development projects, it considers how to promote a constructive relationship between state and society as well as state-building in general.

The state and policy-makers do not derive their legitimacy solely from winning the popular vote in democratic elections. Citizens must also have the right to voice their political views between elections and in other ways than casting a formal vote. The principles of transparent, accountable and development-oriented government can only be upheld if an active civil society is informed about policy decisions, is involved and actively participates in decision-making processes and, moreover, is able to exercise its control function with regard to the state.

In German development cooperation, civil society is not seen as acting in isolation. Rather, it considers civil society and the state as being linked together in a reciprocal relationship. The state and policy-makers derive their legitimacy from the constant process of feedback and negotiation with the citizens and with an informed, articulate and organised civil society.

**Civil society is the term used to describe all forms of organised activity in which citizens engage – be it in clubs or associations or the wide range of lobby groups, social movements and non-governmental organisations. It includes all activities that are not profit-oriented and are independent of party-political interests.**

## **A multidimensional approach to promoting political involvement**

In German development cooperation, political involvement is promoted using a multidimensional strategy. The aim is to achieve sustainable results with a broad impact and to influence structures.

Efforts to promote political involvement and to promote a constructive relationship between state and society focus on three dimensions that are interdependent and mutually reinforcing:

- **Building and consolidating the legal and institutional framework**

In order to promote active political involvement and a stable democracy, it is vital that institutionalised democratic processes and the rule of law be in place. For civil society to participate in policy-making, a certain institutional framework and formal legal guarantees are required. Under the multi-level approach adopted in German development cooperation, support is provided at both national and decentralised level for the establishment of a democratic environment and the structures required for the rule of law, which are key to facilitating political involvement. A further focus is on instituting legal guarantees of the right to participation by enshrining the relevant regulations in law and establishing participation mechanisms and fora for cooperation between state and non-state actors (e.g. dialogue fora, roundtables, deliberative processes) as well as complaints and public control mechanisms (e.g. ombudsmen).

By building, institutionalising and legally guaranteeing opportunities for political involvement, the rule of law is also reinforced. This means that political involvement remains in place, regardless of who is currently in power.

- **Strengthening civil society**

Political involvement requires people having the information about their rights and opportunities for participation and being able to demand these from state authorities. One focus of German development cooperation is to support members of civil society in finding out about their rights and asserting them. Members of civil society are also helped to formulate their interests and make these interests heard in political negotiations and decision-making processes. This is what is known as empowerment.

In this context, a special focus is on empowering and enabling disadvantaged groups. These are helped to



**Kenyan Authority**

articulate their interests and improve their negotiating skills, for example by learning to organise, to pool their interests and to form networks so as to be able to assert themselves more effectively. Promoting effective lobby groups and representative groups and associations is an important aspect of strengthening civil society. As well as offering advice to civil society groups, specific measures are also implemented in German development cooperation to help these groups exercise their rights and duties within participation mechanisms and thus defend their own interests. This is done, for example, by supporting the process of decentralisation or by promoting sustainable local development.

The promotion of a free and independent media is another focus of German development cooperation. The media plays a key role in the democratic development of society and is vital in enabling an informed civil society to participate in the political process.

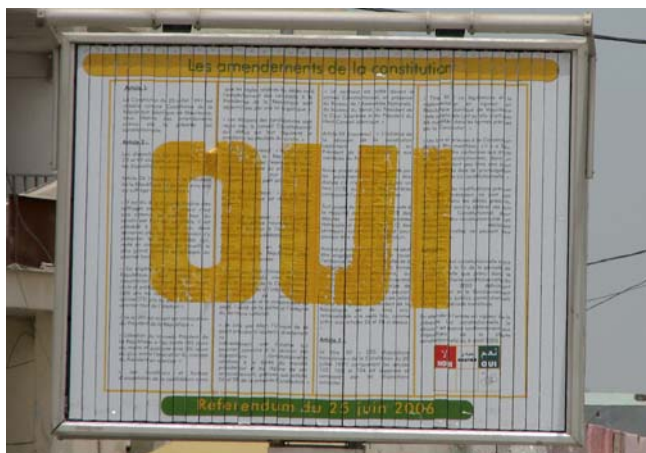
Generally, German development cooperation seeks to support civil society to fulfil its functions of drawing together society's interests and presenting them to state authorities, and of demanding and monitoring the respect, protection and fulfilment of individual and collective rights. Strengthening civil society enables it to better fulfil its role as a critical but constructive watchdog and as a lobby. It also promotes democratic consciousness among the citizens, promotes the integration of disadvantaged groups and helps to bring greater transparency to policy-making.

- **Improving the capacity of the state**

State and society can only enjoy a constructive relationship when the state is responsive to civil society's active

involvement in political decision-making processes. In order to enhance the state's responsiveness to its citizens, efforts are made through German development cooperation to enhance the democratic consciousness of actors in government, parliament and public administration and to strengthen democratic institutions.

Policy-makers and state actors learn to shape decision-making processes in such a way that civil society is able to play an active role at both national and decentralised level in terms of raising issues, being involved in political decision-making processes and in implementing these decisions. Representatives of state authorities and those working in public administration are helped to deal competently with civic participation and to institutionalise it in their structures and procedures. At the same time, they are assisted in bringing trans-



**Constitutional Referendum in Mauritania**

parency to administrative processes and to be accountable regarding the actions of government and administrative bodies.

Promoting political involvement strengthens the legitimacy of state institutions and the democratic accountability of political players, makes the actions of government and public administration more transparent, strengthens checks and balances and allows effective action to be taken against corruption, arbitrary state rule and abuse of power.



**Public Administration, Bolivia**

## What contribution is German development cooperation making in its partner countries?

A wide range of options exist for political involvement at all levels. The potential for participation in political decision-making is particularly great at local level. Citizens can discuss issues that have a direct impact on their daily lives with local authorities and decision-makers. By getting involved in the workings of (grassroots) democracy, gaining an awareness of their rights and asserting them more strongly as regards government authorities, citizens gain greater self-determination, and political involvement becomes a firmly established principle. Yet given the dimensions of the power, resources and fundamental decisions that are involved in the political process, efforts to strengthen civil society involvement in the political decision-making process must also extend to the national level.

That is why a multi-level approach is adopted in German development cooperation, with efforts being made to foster political involvement at both national and decentralised level in the following areas:

- **the identification of political priorities and the formulation of policies** – by helping the responsible authorities to establish efficient participation mechanisms and by supporting civil society in identifying and formulating needs and setting priorities;
- **the drafting of development plans and poverty reduction strategies** – by advising governments and administrative authorities on how to develop and operate participatory planning processes, the upgrading of their skills and the improvement of stakeholders' capacity for dialogue;

- **the formulation of budgets** – by involving civil society in the formulation of local budgets, helping civil society to read and understand national budgets and analyse the implications of how funding is allocated, and by strengthening parliament so as to enable it to better exercise its control function as regards budgetary matters;
- **public spending** – by enabling civil society and parliaments to hold government and public administration to account regarding the use of public funds and by helping office-holders and decision-makers to render appropriate and systematic accountability regarding public revenues and expenditure;
- **the provision of public goods and services** – by helping civil society and state actors to apply the proper procedures in a transparent way and to ensure participation in the planning, awarding of contracts for, installation and long-term provision of public services and infrastructure with the aim of assessing and increasing the benefit, accessibility and quality of public goods and services;
- **debate on a new constitution** – by providing stakeholders with advice and information, establishing a space for discussion and reflection on the issues to be dealt with by the constituent assembly and establishing a dialogue focused on transparency and consensus;
- **the enshrining of democratic participation within institutions and the law** – by sharing experience of established forms of democratic participation with legislators, which is then translated into standards and laws;

- **the strengthening of decentralised structures** – by advising and supporting local authorities in the establishment of responsive and accountable administrative structures, the efficient provision of local services and infrastructure and the fulfilment of their duties to inform and to accountability;
- **the exercising of public supervision and control** – by supporting and advising state and civil society actors on the establishment and development of public supervision and control systems (e.g. ombudsmen’s offices or independent judicial institutions);
- **the promotion of a free and independent media** – by training journalists and assisting in the establishment of low-threshold means of information and communication (e.g. local citizens’ media, such as citizen radio).



**Speech at a Legal Aid Clinic in Kabwe, Zambia**

## The institutions engaged in German development cooperation and their respective roles

The plurality of institutions engaged in German development cooperation and the diversity of instruments available means that it is possible to offer an appropriate response to a variety of different challenges. Under Germany's multi-level approach, various forms of advice and financial support can be combined at both national and decentralised level.

The **Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)** is responsible for formulating the guiding principles and strategies of German development policy. It determines the long-term strategies for cooperation with the various actors concerned and regulates implementation. It commissions a variety of German implementing organisations to realise the government's development goals within the framework of official bilateral development cooperation. The BMZ's task is then to coordinate the various actors and instruments. This is vital to the success of the pluralistic system of German



**Citizen Assembly, Mozambique**

development cooperation. The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (**GTZ**), the German Development Service (**DED**) and Capacity Building International, Germany (**InWEnt**) are the organisations engaged in official bilateral **Technical Cooperation**. **Financial Cooperation** is the task of the **KfW Entwicklungsbank**.

Germany's **political foundations** play an important role in the field of non-governmental development cooperation. **Civil society organisations**, such as **faith-based development organisations**, also insignificantly contribute to promoting sustainable development. They champion justice and peace, campaign for and demand observance of human rights, and promote political involvement in developing countries and emerging economies by supporting the development of democratic institutions and contributing to the emergence of a free media and the strengthening of civil society organisations. The BMZ provides funding to support the work of these organisations. The cooperation also involves sharing opinions and experience.

Yet this approach adopted in German development cooperation can only succeed with support from a broad section of society. That is why the German government also conducts **development education and information** measures in Germany in order to inform the public of the German government's development aims and show global interconnectedness. Non-governmental organisations are vital partners for the BMZ in this context. Many of them have valuable experience of working with civil society organisations in developing countries, and can make use of this experience in their information and education work.

## **Further information**

### **BMZ information on good governance:**

[www.bmz.de/en/issues/goodgovernance/index.html](http://www.bmz.de/en/issues/goodgovernance/index.html)

### **BMZ Special 137: Promoting democracy in German development policy, 2005**

[www.bmz.de/en/service/infothek/fach/spezial/Special137.pdf](http://www.bmz.de/en/service/infothek/fach/spezial/Special137.pdf)

### **BMZ Strategies 178: Promotion of good governance in German development policy, 2009**

[www.bmz.de/en/service/infothek/fach/konzepte/konzept178.pdf](http://www.bmz.de/en/service/infothek/fach/konzepte/konzept178.pdf)

### **Information from the GTZ:**

[www.gtz.de](http://www.gtz.de)

### **Information from KfW:**

[www.kfw-entwicklungsbank.de](http://www.kfw-entwicklungsbank.de)

### **Information from InWEnt:**

[www.inwent.org](http://www.inwent.org)

### **Information from DED:**

[www.ded.de](http://www.ded.de)



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