Strategy on government-civil society cooperation in post-2015 development policy
Contents

Foreword 3

1. Government and civil society in German development policy 4

2. Objectives of development cooperation with civil society actors 7
   2.1 Furthering understanding of development issues and mobilising civic engagement in Germany 7
   2.2 Strengthening civil society forces in developing countries through cooperation with German civil society 8
   2.3 Partnerships with civil society on global issues that will shape our future 9

3. Tackling development challenges in partnership with civil society 11
   3.1 Enhancing transparency and effectiveness 11
   3.2 Securing sustainability 11
   3.3 Ensuring a human rights-based approach 12
   3.4 Balancing the objectives of government and civil society 12
   3.5 Tapping the opportunities offered by innovations and new forms of communication 13
Foreword

Germany’s development policy has always drawn strength and inspiration from its close links to civil society forces. Without the enormous commitment of the churches, numerous non-governmental organisations and a veritable army of volunteers, development cooperation would be unthinkable. At the end of the 1950s, before the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) even existed, the church aid organisations Misereor and Bread for the World were founded along with other NGOs active in the field of development, including the children’s charity, Kindernothilfe. From the outset, the BMZ provided financial support for the work of these organisations, initially for the church aid organisations, and subsequently also for the work of the political foundations and private bodies engaged in development.

Since then, the environment in which development work operates has changed in many ways. Today, developing countries represent more than 40 per cent of global trade and are leaving behind them ever larger ecological footprints, with drastic consequences for the global climate, and the consumption of energy and resources. The global middle class now numbers two billion people, but about one billion people still live in absolute poverty. In their interests, but also in our own interests and in the interests of the generations to come, we must radically change the way we live and do business. We need a genuine paradigm shift. Sustainability must at last become the fundamental principle that underpins all our actions.

2015 will be a watershed year for the development of our planet. This is the year by which the United Nations Millennium Development Goals are to be achieved. And the international community is to adopt a new comprehensive agenda for sustainable development, in which civil society is to play a vitally important part.

The process I launched in April 2014, the Charter for the Future “One World – Our Responsibility” is intended to help establish and realise the post-2015 agenda as an internationally binding, universal agenda for sustainable development. A new global partnership is to provide the overarching framework for the future agenda. This partnership is to be based on the common responsibility of all states and indeed all actors, including civil society, the private sector and the academic and research community, for our global common good. With this strategy paper we intend to extend partnerships with civil society on the global issues that will shape our future, and to take these partnerships to a new level. This approach will supplement the tried and tested means of strengthening civil society forces in developing countries through cooperation arrangements with German civil society, and furthering understanding of development issues and mobilising civic engagement in Germany.

Dr. Gerd Müller, MdB
Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development
The German government pursues values-based development policy. In view of the massive threat to the natural resource base on which human life depends, we urgently need a new ethos of responsibility, with every individual contributing to sustainable global development. Non-governmental organisations, churches, political foundations and many dedicated individuals are already taking on more and more responsibility, independently of official development cooperation, and supplementing the latter.

In this paper, the BMZ lays out an overarching strategic framework for cooperation between the ministry and civil society forces in Germany. By civil society we mean the sphere within society that lies between the state, business and private sector. Civil society is a place where a country’s committed citizens come together, be it in clubs and associations, multifarious initiatives or in social movements. Their defining feature is that they are focused on values, the common good and volunteering, rather than profit.

The fundamental values we follow are the implementation and realisation of universal human rights and social justice, the peaceful coexistence of communities and the integrity of creation. Every individual is entitled to live in dignity and liberty, to have enough food to eat and adequate medical care. Every individual also has the responsibility to preserve global public goods such that they are still available to the generations to come.

A strong and vibrant civil society forms part of any properly functioning democracy. For its part, civil society needs guaranteed individual and collective freedoms in order to operate. Civil society is active throughout the world in solving problems that, in its view, are not being adequately dealt with by existing governmental or private-sector institutions. It also seeks, wherever possible, to exert political influence not only on governments and parliaments but also on business and international organisations. Civil society is increasingly operating transnationally.

Civil societies reflect the diversity of democracies. They often act as “earlywarners”, drawing attention to developments and problems at global level and within individual societies, as well as instigating new approaches. They engage, in their totality, with a very wide and varied spectrum of issues and tasks. This diversity and flexibility is one of their strengths. Civil society unites important groups of actors who are relevant for the socioeconomic and/or political development of a society, depending on their respective fields of action.

That is why a healthy and articulate civil society can play such a key role in partner countries as a vital driver of sustainable development – calling for human rights, democracy and the rule of law, often under extremely difficult conditions, providing critical yet constructive scrutiny of the transparency of states’ activities and making governments more accountable, as well as fostering a new awareness within societies. Faced with weak central, regional and/or municipal state structures, civil society, especially at the local level, can often make a major contribution to the provision of basic social services. This is particularly true in countries suffering fragile statehood.

Civil society actors have been helping to shape the development policy landscape and debate in Germany for more than fifty years and are one of the main pillars of German development cooperation. Between

---

1 The publications “Promoting Resilient States and Constructive State-Society Relations – Legitimacy, Transparency and Accountability” (BMZ Special 168, October 2009) and “Promotion of good governance in German development policy” (Strategies 178, Feb. 2009) explore in more depth the role and importance of civil society in developing countries.

2 The term “partner countries” is used to denote all countries cooperating with German official development aid or German non-governmental development cooperation.
government and civil society there is a relationship of trust reflected in two closely linked phenomena: a high degree of autonomy and the principle of subsidiarity, i.e. the principle that civil society should be charged with certain tasks rather than having the state assume direct responsibility, wherever possible and expedient. Nevertheless, although civil society can complement state activity, it can never replace the role of government. Both sides take a positive view of this cooperation, which can take the form of political participation, specialist collaboration on specific issues or financial support.

The BMZ has an interest in seeing civil society forces develop as freely as possible and wants to support innovation, so our general approach to cooperation is to value these actors’ own initiative (right of initiative). They run overseas projects that respond to the needs of their local partners (partner principle), who, for their part, actively involve the target groups in the planning and implementation of measures (participation) and ensure that project design is based on a human rights-based approach. Projects implemented by civil society organisations generally involve significant contributions by both German and local partners, underscoring civil society ownership. Sustainable civic engagement requires stable civil society structures. This is why we consider the development of knowledge, skills and structures (capacity development) from local to national level to be so important. To make the measures we support sustainable, we strive for reliability of funding arrangements. In return, we expect the funding recipients to ensure the effectiveness of their measures and to monitor results (see chapter 3.1).

An extremely heterogeneous cross-section of civil society is actively engaged in development. Its organisations vary widely in terms of size, importance, legal status, professionalism, world view and specific focuses of activity. Most of the bodies involved in development cooperation in Germany are

**Six good reasons why the state and civil society cooperate closely as partners in German development cooperation**

— Processes of change come from within society, so there is a vital need to use development education work within Germany to enhance people's understanding of global issues and how these are interconnected, and to hone their pro-active capacities, as a precondition for ensuring effective action on development and realising the post-2015 agenda in Germany.

— A diverse and vibrant civil society makes important contributions to the formulation of pro-development policies and to global ownership, while also being a valuable resource for development-related innovations.

— Civil society actors in Germany are important partners in promoting civic engagement in developing countries thanks to their direct access to people on the ground.

— Strong, active civil society organisations in developing countries in turn demand effective political participation and government accountability.

— Civil society actors with the necessary skills can execute effective projects within a development process that is owned by the partner countries themselves.

— Civil society initiatives effectively complement official development efforts by forging direct links with target groups and mobilising volunteers and private funding.
non-governmental organisations (NGOs) along with their associations and networks; political and non-profit foundations; and churches and church-based development organisations. They work together with their respective civil society partners in the partner countries. New players in this field include community foundations and social entrepreneurs who, motivated by personal civic commitment, support efforts to address social challenges with their innovative and entrepreneurial approaches.

3 The most important association representing development NGOs and presenting their interests to the German government is the Verband Entwicklungspolitik Deutscher Nichtregierungsorganisationen (VENRO; Association of German Development NGOs). Founded in 1995, it operates as a voluntary umbrella organisation for what are now around 120 German civil society organisations active in all parts of Germany.

4 Especially the Catholic and Protestant central development services (KZE and EZE), whose work is today performed by MISEREOR – the German Catholic Bishops’ Organisation for Development Cooperation and Bread for the World – Protestant Development Service as part of the Evangelisches Werk für Diakonie und Entwicklung (Protestant Agency for Diakonie and Development).

5 In the post-2015 world, the federal states, districts, towns and cities and municipalities will play an increasingly important part as development actors in their own right. They are the link between the government and civil society. They also help mobilise civil society to engage in development, partly through independent programmes. They help develop an awareness for development policy, and contribute their own specific expertise.
2. Objectives of development cooperation with civil society actors

2.1 FURTHERING UNDERSTANDING OF DEVELOPMENT ISSUES AND MOBILISING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN GERMANY

Within the scope of our values-based development policy, we work to achieve universal ethical objectives including peace, justice, human rights, and the integrity of creation. In the face of the threat posed by climate change and the over-exploitation of natural resources, the quest to identify alternatives to the growth-oriented path to development hitherto pursued at global level is becoming increasingly urgent. The post-2015 framework aims to launch a new model of prosperity, and with it a new understanding of development. One integral part of the post-2015 agenda is a new global partnership, which is to embrace not only states but also civil society, the private sector, the academic and research community and local organisations. Only by working together can we eradicate extreme poverty and hunger in the world, achieve environmentally sustainable growth, put in place decent working conditions around the world, and find better ways to prevent crises and conflicts. The precondition is to develop a shared understanding of the global common good, and the readiness to accept shared responsibility for this common good.

Development policy thus understood as a sort of global domestic policy depends on broad support within society and active participation on the part of individual citizens, civil society and business. This in turn presupposes a wide understanding within society of global issues and how these are interconnected, as well as the availability of the pertinent capabilities. But it is equally important to foster the readiness to reflect critically on one’s own conduct, and to change this conduct if necessary. This is why development-focused education and information efforts within Germany constitute a central part of any effective development policy. These activities create an audience for our concerns, encourage discussion of development objectives and motivate people to become involved in development. We understand development education as a process of life-long learning in line with the imperative to “think global – act local”.

Civil society actors play a key role in fostering such skills and in mobilising civic engagement. They bring into our society the experience and knowledge they have gained in cooperation with their partners and in confronting questions of globalisation and justice. In so doing, they inspire people in Germany to engage with development issues and help heighten public awareness of the causes and consequences of poverty and injustice. From this they draw their own conclusions for sustainable development, call for debate on these conclusions and examine their own society for ways to achieve viable worldwide development. The educational measures, information campaigns and lobbying activities carried out by civil society are important in helping to establish the complex field of development policy within society. Thanks to the high esteem and credibility that these actors enjoy, they are able to mobilise large numbers of people across Germany to volunteer. Other key players in this context are organisations of migrants living in Germany, which can act as bridge-builders between Germany and our partner countries.

This is why we work with civil society partners to bring global learning and active involvement in development to the wider public. Locally accessible, attractive options for becoming involved along with nationwide campaigns inside Germany and international learning and volunteering services create opportunities to learn and get involved suitable for individuals of every age and at every stage in life. Returning development workers, “weltwärts” development service volunteers and specialists from the Civil Peace Service (CPS) play an important part in helping people become involved in development activities. Their experience makes them particularly authentic and credible in the eyes of the public.
In Engagement Global – Service for Development Initiatives, the BMZ has created a platform for generating fresh impetus and achieving diverse synergies in the sphere of civil society engagement. This new organisation brings together under one roof an array of different services offered by the BMZ and acts as a central contact and liaison agency offering support and advice for members of the public, civil society organisations and local authorities.  

2.2 STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY FORCES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES THROUGH COOPERATION WITH GERMAN CIVIL SOCIETY

Improving the framework for civil society is an important aspect of official development cooperation. Constructive state-civil society relations are an essential precondition for sustainable development. The German government highlights the issue of poor enabling environments in its political dialogue with partner governments and assists partner governments in strengthening institutionalised democratic processes and rule-of-law structures. In addition, we mainstream civil society participation as an important consideration in all projects and sectors of our development cooperation. And finally, improving the environment for civil society actors is a core component of the German approach to promoting good governance.

Yet even when an enabling environment is in place, civil society organisations in developing countries face many other problems. Corruption, poor education and a lack of funding often prevent the development of a credible and effective civil society capable of performing the above-mentioned functions in a sustainable way. People are often unaware of their opportunities and rights to participate as citizens and have very limited abilities to articulate their interests vis-à-vis government agencies and make their voices heard in political processes of negotiation and decision-making.

We therefore want to empower civil society players and their networks by means of suitable capacity development measures. Going forward, we will be placing greater emphasis on German civil society’s role in capacity building for civil society forces in developing countries. After all, non-governmental players have major comparative advantages over state and multilateral players when it comes to this kind of capacity development:

---

6 The operational objectives and approaches of the BMZ and Engagement Global gGmbH in the field of development engagement are laid out specifically in the BMZ Strategy Paper 7/2012 “Engagement Global – Service für Entwicklungsinitiativen”.


---

8 These measures include consistently realising integrity and compliance standards within our own organisations. In 2008 VENRO adopted an exemplary code of conduct on transparency, leadership and monitoring, with a view to improving the quality of civil society development cooperation and humanitarian aid through the introduction of common guidelines, as well as making the work of VENRO members as transparent as possible.

---
sustainable way than state actors, while minimising the risk of governments interfering and taking over.

— By organising self-help, participation and empowerment among poor sections of society, they can often achieve more than state institutions, especially in countries with weak state structures. Civil society actors generally focus their project work on the strength, the capacities and the courage of poor and disadvantaged communities, and aim to strengthen the self-help capabilities and the initiative of their partners.

— In countries suffering fragile statehood or affected by conflict, the ability of state development cooperation to operate is often severely limited. Under these circumstances, civil society actors provide emergency aid and promote non-violent conflict resolution. When it comes to initiating change processes driven by stakeholder participation and building local capacities in fragile environments, German civil society organisations and their national partners are important mediators and implementers.

— Non-governmental actors can engage in political fields and work with organisations which are not open in the same way to government executing agencies. The former are free to choose their local partners and are not subject to the control that comes with cooperation with state institutions in the recipient countries.

— They are able to act faster and are, in many cases, more willing to take risks and face conflicts than the official executing agencies, which are bound by intergovernmental agreements and must take into account the conflicting objectives of other policy fields.

— Civil society organisations can mobilise broad public participation, which leads to greater identification with project measures. This is particularly beneficial in the case of measures that very much depend for their success on changes in people’s behaviour.

— Widespread voluntary commitment, a highly flexible approach and direct access to the target groups often enable civil society initiatives to work with lower administrative and staffing overheads than is the case with state institutions.

### 2.3 Partnerships with Civil Society on Global Issues that Will Shape Our Future

Global constellations are changing. In some fields, the ability of nation states to shape policy continues to decline, while new mechanisms and forms are needed at supranational level to mediate fairly between conflicting global interests. Countries that used to be aid recipients are now becoming donors. New international alignments of interests are replacing the long-running North-South debate. Parallel to this, the number of civil society organisations operating at transnational level is increasing. They operate, on the one hand, as advisors and opinion-formers and, on the other, as stakeholders speaking out on global issues that will shape our future.

These changes are leading to a shift in the fields of activity of civil society organisations in donor countries like Germany and in developing countries, and in the way they see themselves. Many of these organisations no longer focus exclusively on traditional project and programme activities but also assume the role of “watchdogs”, taking a keen interest in government and governance failures and shortcomings. They keep a critical eye not only on bilateral development policy but also on multilateral organisations and the EU.
They observe and comment on government policy and economic activities, draw attention to shortcomings, highlight the needs of socially and politically disadvantaged groups, act as advocates for the interests of society as a whole and of future generations, and formulate ideas for alternative policies. They are connected with one another in international networks, allowing them to influence political frameworks both at the national and the global level – thus meeting many of the preconditions for more effective development policy. Civil society actors have therefore become increasingly important allies in achieving our development goals in the global context.

This is why we intend to further extend our partnerships with civil society on the global issues that will shape our future. Within the scope of our Charter for the Future process, we aim to establish new constellations and new ways for the private sector, the churches, civil society, federal government, state governments and local authorities to engage in dialogue on topical development challenges and potential approaches to address these. This dialogue would aim to enable new partnerships to identify and strengthen innovative approaches to tackling global challenges.

An essential prerequisite for effective participation by civil society is transparency on both sides and a mutual willingness to engage in dialogue. It is in this spirit that we regularly call on civil society actors for advice when taking important development policy decisions. We do this through proven formats for the involvement of civil society actors, as in the case of the bodies overseeing our various funding programmes, the regular strategy meetings with key stakeholder groups, their systematic inclusion in country and sector discussions, and our preparations for important international meetings and conferences. We also advocate that civil society concerns be actively reflected at EU level and in the multilateral context.

Since we want to see civil society continue to play an active role in the new global constellations, we support civil society participation in international processes and conferences on as wide and systematic a basis as possible. This is why we keep German civil society players regularly informed in the run-up to major international events and in follow-up processes and discuss our positions with them. We help to enhance capacities and create opportunities in civil society in our partner countries to enable these actors to participate in international processes. As for German civil society, the BMZ will also be doing more to encourage participation in international political processes and, to this end, engaging in dialogue with the relevant organisations.
3. Tackling development challenges in partnership with civil society

The BMZ agenda for a new ethos of responsibility can only be realised if we all pull together. German development policy is thus committed to forward-looking alliances with creative civil society forces worldwide. We see them as important partners whom we both support and challenge. In particular, we are interested in strengthening our open dialogue with such players on the challenges facing state and civil society as outlined in the following chapters.

3.1 ENHANCING TRANSPARENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS

A responsible civil society is aware of its obligation to the public to ensure transparency and accountability in all its activities. And, alongside government, civil society plays its part in improving the effectiveness of development cooperation. It takes seriously its special responsibility not only for its own measures but also in its capacity as a watchdog.

Irrespective of formal requirements imposed within public funding frameworks, civil society actors are themselves committed to ensuring that their measures use scarce financial and (often voluntary) human resources economically in order to achieve the greatest and most positive results possible. Private donors, too, increasingly want to see evidence that their donations are actually helping and want to know how their money can be used most efficiently. Many actors, especially the larger German civil society organisations, now have well-established monitoring and evaluation systems. Others, however, have not yet introduced any arrangements for systematic impact monitoring or evaluation. We are therefore seeking active dialogue with those involved on how we can credibly meet the more exacting requirements without losing sight of the special nature of civil society programmes. Joint efforts to improve results and legitimacy should primarily aim to change the everyday lives of the poor for the better, while taking into account the long-term and complex nature of capacity development and fostering joint learning.

The newly created independent evaluation institute (DEval) will not only assess the impacts of publicly funded cooperation projects with civil society but also help design suitable standards for evaluating these programmes and advise and assist executing agencies in applying those standards. And the service portfolio of Engagement Global – Service for Development Initiatives will include technical and financial assistance designed to give civil society programmes a stronger focus on results.

3.2 SECURING SUSTAINABILITY

An important precondition for effective engagement in development is the sustainability of the investments made and the processes initiated. Experience in project implementation indicates that the sustainability aspect is not always accorded the importance it deserves in the often extremely dynamic, volunteer-based and donations-driven context of civil society cooperation projects. In some cases actors lack the know-how and experience needed to build sustainability into the planning processes from the outset. This is where we, as government actors, have a special responsibility toward our partner countries. Wherever we fund development cooperation initiatives of civil society, we insist on sustainability and support civil society efforts in this direction.

8 Cf. the position paper by VENRO on impact monitoring (“Qualität statt Beweis”, November 2010). BMZ evaluations of important funding programmes – Civil Peace Service (CPS), Social Structure Programmes, “weltwärts” – carried out in recent years generally confirm the effectiveness and sustainability of development cooperation with civil society.
Key factors in this context are long-term partnerships, the integration of local executing agencies in project planning and monitoring as “owners” of the process from the outset, and the counterpart contribution made by civil society actors that is a requirement for government co-financing of projects. To strengthen the sustainability of civil society cooperation projects, the BMZ will be optimising its funding instruments in consultation with civil society.

Another key factor is the institutional analysis and evaluation of partner structures. Especially in the context of weak state structures, there is a risk that civil society initiatives will create parallel structures and not only fail to interface with emerging state services but in fact pose a threat to those services. In nascent democracies in particular, external funding for civil society organisations can, in a worst-case scenario, actually undermine the authority of government actors and elected representatives. We want to help ensure that, while making significant contributions through voluntary activity, civil society organisations, large and small, develop an adequate understanding of the complex and systemic consequences of their engagement.

3.3 ENSURING A HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

Human rights are a guiding principle in German development policy. The human rights-based approach provides a framework for our funding of civil society cooperation projects. We support the recognition and systematic implementation of the human rights approach in all projects, including those run by civil society organisations. Furthermore, it is essential in the context of official development cooperation that the sections of civil society relevant to the promotion of human rights in the respective priority area be integrated and given specially tailored support.

The focus on human rights standards and principles, in particular insistence on non-discriminatory access to services and on their affordability and reasonable quality, helps to gear the projects to the needs of the worst-affected target groups, set the priorities accordingly, and treat the individual not as an “object” of development activities but as a bearer of rights.

3.4 BALANCING THE OBJECTIVES OF GOVERNMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Although they concur on many points, governmental and civil society objectives are not always identical. Their objectives may, for instance, diverge when it comes to government’s interest in ensuring the best possible allocation of funds and transparency and accountability with regard to their use.

Civil society has an interest in utilising its strengths and acting on its own initiative as freely as possible in response to the needs of its local partners. The contributions made by the German and local project partners are in themselves an expression of the principles of civic engagement and of the participatory planning and implementation of measures. From a government perspective, however, there is a need to weigh up this undoubtedly desirable autonomy against the imperative of deploying funds to achieve maximum impact in combination with other measures, and harnessing all available synergies. So, in its funding policy, the BMZ endeavours, in dialogue with civil society organisations, to focus to some extent on certain sectors or regions, while giving due consideration to both of these objectives.

The legally established duty of accountability in the use of taxpayers’ money is a basic principle of public finance. Civil society, on the other hand, emphasises the benefits of trust-based cooperation between partners that could potentially be called into question by
excessively zealous controls. From the BMZ’s point of view, this desirable trust-based cooperation must be appropriately combined with our duty of accountability toward the public, parliament and Germany’s Federal Court of Audit. Here, too, it is a matter of entering into a close dialogue to find the right balance and to reinforce mutual trust as an ongoing task.

3.5 TAPPING THE OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED BY INNOVATIONS AND NEW FORMS OF COMMUNICATION

We want to help business, civil society and the academic and research community to play a stronger role as drivers of innovation in development. For this, these players must engage in a more intensive exchange of ideas. It is in this context that we aim to foster dialogue between civil society, business and the academic and research community with a view to finding common, inclusive and value-oriented approaches to development that make full use of the comparative advantages offered by each of the various actors. We would like to work with civil society actors and others to play a larger part in setting the international agenda. To this end we also intend to step up exchange with globally active foundations, initiatives and faith communities.

With modern communication tools, players around the world can consult and coordinate activities in a matter of seconds, thus also revolutionising the way civil society operates. New channels and cultures of communication are also an important way of introducing people, especially the younger generation, to development issues and can be used to take global learning and engagement in development to a wider public. The opportunities offered by new technologies include dialogue-based networks for cooperation, a swifter exchange of knowledge, international learning processes, transparency of government actions, and anti-corruption efforts. We intend to work with civil society forces to seize these opportunities and make development issues more accessible to a wider community, thus enabling them to become more firmly rooted within society.