



Comments by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development on the Reports drawn up by the German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval) on: “Sustainability in German development cooperation”

The Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) welcomes the two evaluation studies conducted by the German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval). The reports are published at a time when the BMZ is reviewing its instruments and methods, assessing their suitability for tackling the challenges of the 2030 Agenda, and the reform process is in full swing. The two reports provide valuable input for further developing evaluation instruments.

The studies aim to explore how the key evaluation criterion of “sustainability” is dealt with in the ex-post assessment (evaluation) of projects and programmes of German official bilateral development cooperation. Using a representative random sample of about 500 evaluation reports produced by Deutsche Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and KfW Entwicklungsbank (KfW), the meta-evaluation (qualitative assessment of evaluations) and the evaluation synthesis (analysis of evaluation findings) provide a wealth of suggestions that enrich and confirm both the international discussion on evaluation requirements in the light of the 2030 Agenda and the agenda of ongoing reforms of evaluation systems in German development cooperation. They offer suggestions for aligning evaluations in official bilateral development cooperation even better with the 2030 Agenda and

for further enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the evaluation system in the policy field.

For decades, “sustainability” has been a key term in development policy. With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, which covers not only developing and emerging economies but all countries, sustainability has become even more important, and awareness of the various dimensions of sustainability – political-social, economic and ecological – has been renewed and increased.

The DEval evaluation reports highlight **both the progress achieved and the challenges associated with the assessment of “sustainability” in practice.** They note as positive that the BMZ plays a key role in developing OECD/DAC standards and that it uses these standards itself and in its dealings with implementing organisations. The DEval reports show that the term “sustainability” is already being covered in much more depth and much more comprehensively in GIZ and KfW evaluation reports than was envisaged by OECD/DAC. This is the outcome of the *guidelines for evaluation criteria*, which were agreed by the BMZ and the implementing organisations in 2006 and which are already based on a holistic concept of sustainability. Nine years before the 2030 Agenda was adopted, the BMZ explicitly defined the central dimensions of sustainability – conceptualised in the 2030 Agenda –

as aspects for assessment, thereby going beyond the OECD/DAC standards.

Yet, a lot remains to be done. The **recommendations** give us further momentum for the reform steps that have already been initiated.

- Notwithstanding the early inclusion of all sustainability dimensions in the *2006 guidelines*, we share the recommendation that **greater account should be taken of the 2030 Agenda in evaluations**. Further consideration needs to be given to the question of how to make this happen, and in particular whether introducing a separate, independent assessment criterion, as recommended, would be sensible and feasible. This is particularly important given that introducing an additional criterion could put too much of a burden on the capacities available in terms of time and human resources in evaluations of individual projects and programmes. We thus share the recommendation, in particular, that the BMZ should define what **requirements result from the different aspects pertaining to the 2030 Agenda for the different levels**: (individual) projects, sectoral programmes and country strategies. We welcome the recommendation that the evaluation strategy and programmes should be aligned with the 2030 Agenda in the future.
- The BMZ shares the recommendation to **sharpen the conceptual focus of the criteria that are assigned to the assessment questions in the guidelines** and to put a stronger focus on unintended effects and, overall, increase accountability. We have used this as an opportunity to carry out a comprehensive **review of the evaluation questions** on the individual criteria **contained in the guidelines**

and have initiated a consultation process with KfW and GIZ in which we are planning to include civil society organisations at a later stage. This process will be coordinated with the **ongoing discussions in the OECD Development Assistance Committee**. At the initiative of the BMZ/Germany, the **OECD/DAC countries agreed at the 2016 High Level Meeting** to commission the DAC Secretariat and the countries belonging to the evaluation network to check whether the evaluation criteria, which were defined 15 years ago, need to be revised in the light of the 2030 Agenda. Together with DEval, the BMZ is actively involved in this process in an international working group that was set up for this purpose.

- We fully support the recommendation to ensure that **evaluations carried out by implementing organisations be harmonised to a greater extent**. Our **reform discussions with GIZ and KfW** will be guided by this principle. We also believe that the monitoring systems, which need to be used more effectively, are essential for a modular reporting and evaluation system.
- Irrespective of specific requirements – yet to be created – for evaluations carried out by implementing organisations, which are covered by the ongoing procedural reform, the **BMZ** intends to **define minimum requirements**, as recommended, **for the entire policy field**, i.e. including for non-governmental and multilateral development cooperation, and the resulting roles and responsibilities, **as part of its guidelines for the evaluation of development cooperation**.
- We also want to follow up on the recommendation that **outcome and sustainability documentation** need to be

strengthened, and intend to intensify **ex-post evaluations and impact analyses** where necessary. Achieving a good balance between relevance for future project steering and valid assessments of impacts and sustainability will remain a challenge.

- In the view of the BMZ, the present DEval studies have proved to be very valuable in this regard. Regular, cross-organisational **meta-evaluations and evaluation syntheses** should therefore remain elements of the DEval evaluation programme in the future.

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