

BMZ response to the DEval report: "A Review of Evaluative Work of German Development Cooperation in Afghanistan"

The Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) welcomes the report¹ submitted by the German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval)². The report was produced at the request of DEval's advisory board in view of the considerable volume of Germany's support for reconstruction in Afghanistan and its political significance. The BMZ strongly supported that request.

Based on document analyses and interviews with research experts and staff from the BMZ and the implementing organisations, the report analyses and assesses the type, extent and quality of the evaluative work undertaken by the GIZ, KfW and the BMZ. It also outlines the current portfolio.

We largely agree with the report's conclusions and recommendations. We are pleased by the praise accorded to the Impact Assessment of Development Cooperation in North East Afghanistan that the BMZ has been conducting since 2007 in cooperation with the Free University of Berlin, which is described as being "exemplary for the generation of strategic evidence". We also share the report's largely positive assessment of the evaluative work conducted by the implementing organisations. And we agree with the report's recommendation that the monitoring and evaluation system be focused more on effects and take a more integrative approach. This recommendation was also issued in the Strategic Portfolio Review commissioned by the BMZ and is currently being put into practice. We also share some of the recommendations on independent evaluations.

Our comments in detail: As DEval has noted, monitoring has previously been focused on outputs. External strategic evaluation only began after the Strategic Portfolio Review in 2013. As DEval itself notes, the reasons for this were the high expectations of rapidly visible results and, vitally, the context within which the German government has been operating in Afghanistan since 2002. In the years immediately following the end of the Taliban regime, the focus was on emergency and transitional aid and efforts to bring stability to the fragile conflict-ridden context. During the transition process, the rehabilitation of the country's infrastructure, the strengthening of governance and stabilisation by means of social services and economic participation were also at the forefront. These short and medium-term goals relating to stability cannot be compared with the more long-term, impact-oriented development goals that are pursued in other developing countries. It was a reflection of this context that monitoring fo-

¹ Reports drawn up by DEval are published on the institute's website www.deval.org.

² DEval has a mandate from the BMZ to carry out independent evaluations of German development cooperation. The opinions expressed in these reports do not necessarily reflect the position of the BMZ.

cused on activities and outputs that could be physically measured. The BMZ, working with all other German ministries involved in Afghanistan, developed and installed the Afghanistan Tracking System, which since 2010 has been used to quantify the collective outputs of the German government. The BMZ has been working since 2013 on enhancing this database into a German Development Tracker Afghanistan, which should become operational in the autumn of 2014. It should be noted that, given the circumstances, other major donors have also experienced deficiencies in their collection of data at the impact level, as evidenced by a report released in March 2014 by the “Independent Commission for Aid Impact” regarding DFID's portfolio. In North East Afghanistan, however, which is the focus of most of Germany's development cooperation, the findings of the impact assessment that the BMZ has been conducting since 2007 with the Free University of Berlin and that also offers a timeline of the diverse perceptions of the rural population, provide a substantial indication of the success of stabilisation efforts to date and can therefore inform the development of the portfolio.

Now that the first successes have been achieved on stabilisation, the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) has been formulated and the international community has set out its development vision for the period until 2024 as part of the Tokyo-Process launched in 2012, the foundations have been laid for a more long-term approach that focuses on achieving more over-arching impacts. The new BMZ country strategy for 2014 to 2017, which Germany and Afghanistan agreed on in early 2014, therefore places all ongoing and new measures within a strategic framework – something that had previously been done only in a few priority areas – and defines strategic goals attached to specific indicators. The decisions taken were based on an internal process of mutual learning between all concerned, the findings generated by monitoring and evaluation – including the long-term impact assessment mentioned above – and a strategic portfolio review commissioned by the BMZ. Based on project and programme documents, interviews conducted in Germany and Afghanistan and a scenario analysis, this review analyses the strategic relevance and effectiveness of the BMZ portfolio and provides a sound and sufficiently evaluative basis for the drafting of the BMZ country strategy.

We therefore agree with DEval that an evaluation of the country portfolio would currently provide no new information. As we have done in the past, however, we support the call for an evaluation of the civilian engagement of all German ministries involved in Afghanistan, which could be of major added value. Whether the additional evaluations suggested by DEval would currently be of any value is something that would need to be considered. It would also have to be considered where they would take their place within the context of existing studies – for example in the case of the sector evaluations the report recommends – or – for example in the case of the recommended evaluation of capacity development measures – to what extent the findings could be applied to other fragile state environments. Considerations would have to take account of the limited capacities of partners in Afghanistan to be involved in a large number of different studies by various donors and also the continuing security problems; the challenge posed to field studies should not be underestimated. We believe that a meta-analysis of all existing evaluative work carried out at project level would deliver little value in terms of strategic decision-making; these studies were focused on operational needs and their findings have already found their way into internal learning processes.

We unreservedly support the recommendations that both monitoring and (internal) evaluation should take an integrative approach, that in this special case they should be subject to central quality control and that they should focus more on outcomes and impacts. We are currently working on a concept for a comprehensive system of information and impact measurement for development cooperation in Afghanistan and it will become effective before the end of 2014. It will result in the implementation of many of the report's recommendations or prepare the way for their implementation. In particular, this will include moving forward the Afghanistan Tracking System and also establishing an external steering body to take on, as recommended, the centralised quality control of decentralised data collection. The task of the monitoring and evaluation unit in Kabul will remain to ensure the sharing of M&E findings between German development cooperation stakeholders in Afghanistan and Germany, between the programmes and projects on the ground, and with Afghan partners. This new concept will also retain the focus on conflict-sensitive and peacebuilding measures, which DEval describes as a strength of the German approach in Afghanistan. In order to add an external evaluative component, it is planned to adapt the current impact assessment, which has been ongoing since 2007, focusing it more on the country strategy.

The BMZ also agrees with DEval's finding that it is helpful to have sufficient space for a culture of recognising any mistakes that may have been made in the past in order to encourage institutional learning and enable corresponding adjustments in communication strategies. Moving public attention away from the short-term and more towards the long-term impact of reconstruction work in Afghanistan would, indeed, also be in the BMZ's own interest.