

Under Challenging Conditions: Development Cooperation in Fragile States

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Focus Report

Under challenging conditions

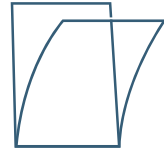
Development cooperation in fragile states



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Focus Report



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Abbreviations

AA	Federal Foreign Office <i>Auswärtiges Amt</i>
BMZ	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development <i>Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung</i>
DAC	Development Assistance Committee, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
EGM	Evidence gap map
GAAP	Joint analysis and coordinated planning (policy concept) <i>Gemeinsame Analyse und abgestimmte Planung</i>
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
HDP nexus	Humanitarian-development-peace nexus
IS	So-called Islamic State
KfW	Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau
KRI	Kurdistan Region of Iraq
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
P4P	Partnership for Prospects Initiative <i>Beschäftigungsoffensive Nahost</i>
PEPFAR	President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief
RIE	Rigorous impact evaluation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SR	Systematic review
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme

Foreword

Dear readers,

“Under challenging conditions” – we at DEval have consciously chosen this title for the present Focus Report because fragile states are probably the most demanding context for effective and lasting development cooperation.

State fragility denotes a substantial limitation on political legitimacy, serious deficits in upholding the state monopoly on the use of force, and inadequate provision of basic public services for the citizenry. State fragility is thus a severe impediment to sustainable development processes. The people it affects most tend to be those who are already disadvantaged and whose rights, resources and opportunities for representation are even further constrained by fragility and the violent conflicts it often entails. A high degree of state fragility also has ramifications internationally and hampers the creation of international public goods, which are increasingly important for sustainable development processes in a globalised world – from security policy to the social, economic and environmental domains of global governance.

It is consistent with this logic that German and international development cooperation dedicate a remarkable amount of work towards overcoming state fragility. Yet the dysfunctionality or even absence of state structures and the resultant volatility of local conditions complicate these efforts, making both strategic steering and the implementation of measures more difficult.

It is thus all the more important for independent evaluation to contribute to more effective and sustainable development cooperation in fragile states, which it does by generating practice-relevant insights, providing impulses for learning and contributing to accountability. To this end, for the last few years DEval has placed a focus on the evaluation of development policy measures in fragile contexts. This task has been highly demanding for us as well because these contexts create considerable challenges for evaluation itself, affecting such aspects as data availability, access to vulnerable groups or realising the development policy principle of “do no harm”.

Against this backdrop, this Focus Report summarises key findings from our evaluation work, with accompanying articles by renowned decision makers and experts from research, the policy sphere and implementation practice. In the hope that these insights and experiences will prove useful and contribute to improvements in our field, I would like to thank all the contributing authors and hope that the report will be highly informative for readers.

Prof. Dr Jörg Faust

Director of DEval



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Director of DEval

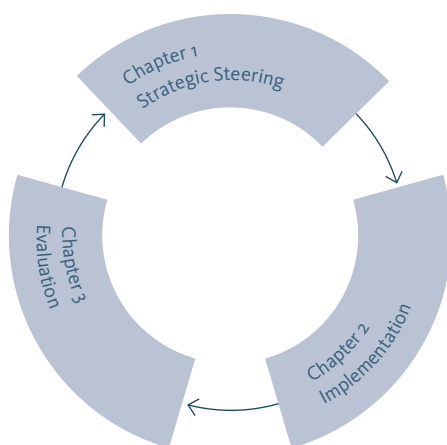
State fragility imposes high demands on development cooperation

Development cooperation in fragile states entails major challenges. To make effective use of the resources made available in the policy field, demanding strategic and operational measures are required, and special efforts on impact measurement and evidence-based policy design are equally necessary. Against this backdrop, a focus of DEval's work in recent years has been the evaluation and analysis of German development cooperation measures in fragile states.

This report presents the especially relevant findings of these evaluations – complemented with articles written by renowned non-DEval experts from academia and development practice. It is structured according to the schematic three phases of the policy cycle: strategic planning and steering, implementation and evaluation of development cooperation measures.

In taking this approach, DEval's aim is to provide decision-makers and development professionals with findings and evidence-based guidance from evaluation and impact research on the challenges and potentials of development cooperation under the conditions of fragile statehood. Policy-level decision-makers will find the insights and food for thought on strategic steering most relevant. Actors involved in practical implementation will be particularly interested in the findings on prerequisites for effective development cooperation in fragile contexts. And insights into the demands imposed on evaluation by fragile contexts, and how it can be done and developed successfully nevertheless, are significant for the evaluation community and users of evaluations alike.

The policy cycle



Source: own presentation.

1. Multidimensional understanding of fragile statehood

According to the influential understanding set out by Max Weber, a defining characteristic of states is their monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory (authority). Another defining element is their ability to create binding rules for society as a whole and to provide basic services (capacity). Finally, the foundation of stable statehood is the population's shared belief in the rightfulness of the state's rule (legitimacy). Wherever at least one of these three dimensions – authority, capacity and legitimacy – is clearly limited, the definition of fragile statehood is met.

Violent intrastate conflicts challenge the state's monopoly on the use of force. States that cannot sufficiently protect property rights or fail to provide basic services are limited in their capacity. If citizens lose confidence in the adequacy and lawfulness of the state's actions, this diminishes state legitimacy.

Such a multidimensional understanding of fragility is a good precaution against undue simplification. States can have highly divergent profiles of fragility. The same applies to development potential, which can differ from one fragile country to another depending on which of the dimensions of statehood are weak. This report resists the common temptation to broaden the concept of fragility to the point where it loses its sharpness, and hence its usefulness for analysis and policy practice. Instead, the report steers a middle course by embracing a narrow but multidimensional understanding.


It is beyond doubt that states exert a major influence on the social, economic and ecological development of societies through their monopoly on the use of force, their capacity and their authority to govern. Thus, the effects of fragility or deficits of statehood are broad and profound. For if the state's monopoly on the use of force is challenged, if its capacity to set and enforce rules on society as a whole is limited, and/or if the population does not acknowledge the state's rule, this will curtail the provision and protection of public goods for inclusive and sustainable development.

2. Fragile statehood and current development challenges

Functioning statehood is of paramount importance, both for the global transformation towards sustainable, climate-neutral and environmentally sound forms of economy, and for efforts to strengthen peace, freedom, human rights and gender equality. Four development policy challenges provide illustrations of this: the COVID-19 pandemic response, the erosion of democracy witnessed all over the world, the global food and nutrition crisis, and climate change.

Pandemic

Like a magnifying lens, the COVID-19 pandemic made the value of functioning statehood very clear. Massive interventions in public life, restrictions on freedom and substantial financial and administrative resources were necessary to combat the pandemic. But it required more than financial resources, efficient health and social security systems and a state monopoly on



Functioning statehood is of paramount importance for the global transformation towards sustainable forms of economy and for efforts to strengthen peace, freedom, human rights and gender equality.

the use of force to enforce temporary restrictions. State legitimacy – that is, the citizens' trust in the appropriateness and rightfulness of state action – proved equally essential as an enabling basis for effective state action.

Democracies under pressure

Democracies all over the world are coming under pressure. Recent data for the year 2022 from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) research institute shows a troubling global erosion of democratic quality. The figures indicate that the proportion of the world's population with democratic participation rights and fundamental liberal rights has been declining since 2011. Hence, there is much evidence of continuous tendencies towards autocratisation, which are structurally impeding progress towards the realisation of human rights, social justice and gender equality.

This development is closely linked to the phenomenon of fragile statehood.

Liberal democracies are less frequently affected by violent intrastate conflicts than autocracies, and are more often at peace with each other as well. Thus, the decline of democracies also threatens the effectiveness of the state monopoly on force to uphold public order. For a growing proportion of the world's population, this entails the risk of experiencing violence.

For the promotion of democracy, functioning statehood is equally relevant. Findings from comparative research in political science suggest that state capacity can prevent the erosion of democratic quality, foster processes of democratisation and stabilise democracies in the long term.

Food and nutrition crisis

Key causes of an acute nutrition crisis are intrastate violent conflicts, climate change, the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and rising food and energy prices – the latter due principally to food supply shortages in global markets and the disruption of supply

chains by Russia's war on Ukraine. According to the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), conflicts are the main cause of food and nutrition crises (WFP, 2023).

The food and nutrition crisis is devastating for the people affected; however, it also has an existential bearing on states. If states fail to ensure the nutrition and security of the population, it threatens the fulfilment of their very purpose as states. So state fragility and food insecurity are closely interlinked. No wonder, then, that the world's most fragile states are more severely affected by food insecurity.

Over time, failure of state functions undermines state legitimacy. On the upside, this means that humanitarian assistance during acute food crises can simultaneously provide states with existential support.

In order to address the causes of food insecurity in a sustainable way, development cooperation should act to build structures and strengthen state resilience to cope with foreseeable future challenges. This requires a minimum level of state authority and capacity, both of which ultimately have a bearing on state legitimacy.

Climate

The consequences of climate change are being felt globally. Rising levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere threaten to destroy the natural life-support base for present and, especially, future generations. If this is to be prevented, climate change must be combated by achieving climate neutrality (mitigation) and efforts must be stepped up to adapt to its consequences (adaptation).

State fragility affects mitigation and adaptation at international and national

levels. At the international level, a particular challenge is that an intact climate is a global public good. Such goods benefit everyone, regardless of who bears the costs. Within the international system, this sets an incentive to palm off the costs onto other states.

To counter this free-rider problem, it will take binding multilateral agreements backed by sanctions. Ultimately, the stability of these relies on the participation of the signatory states as consistent and committed actors in intergovernmental negotiations. In short, the establishment of a common system of rules for the transformation to climate neutrality relies on national actors with legitimacy and follow-through capacity. Where state fragility hampers binding foreign policy action, this endangers the stability of urgently needed international regimes for the creation of global public goods.

At the national level, too, functioning institutions are needed to implement mitigation and adaptation measures. Fragile states are more acutely affected by climate change due to geographical realities. At the same time, they only have limited capacity to boost the resilience of their populations. So while fragile states have greater exposure, their adaptive capacity is low. In some places, adaptation falls short of halting the destruction of the life-support base. This unleashes the threat of distributional conflicts from which people will subsequently flee. These conflicts exacerbate state fragility, while the migration flows threaten regional stability. German development cooperation addresses this aspect by directing its support for climate change adaptation principally to countries with low adaptive capacities (Noltze and Rauschenbach, 2019).

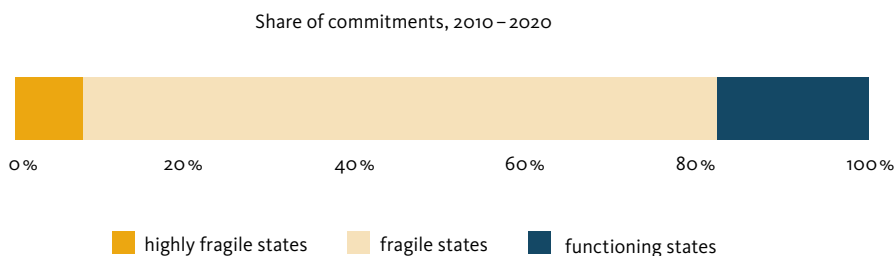
Development financing in fragile states

Fragile states benefit from a significant share of official and non-official German bilateral development cooperation (see figure).

The majority of funding goes to states that have limitations on one or two dimensions of fragility only. Nevertheless, 7 per cent was directed to highly fragile states characterised by low authority, capacity and legitimacy. This emphasis is not surprising in view of the challenges of state fragility for the achievement of development goals.

The present report is a response to the paramount importance of fragile statehood to matters of development cooperation and sustainable development. Effective development cooperation in fragile states is challenging. Fundamental to its success is an adequate understanding of fragile statehood and its causes, coupled with constant critical reflection on the amassed experience so that lessons can be learned. ■

Distribution of bilateral development cooperation to highly fragile, fragile and functioning states



The figure shows the distribution of bilateral commitments for official development assistance (ODA, grant and loan commitments) differentiated by the fragility of the recipient country. Countries with low scores on only one or two of the three fragility dimensions (authority, capacity and legitimacy) are shown as fragile. Countries with low scores on all or none of the dimensions are shown as highly fragile or as functioning.

Source: own presentation with data from the Creditor Reporting System (CRS) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) and Ziaja et al. (2022).



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STRATEGY

Strategic steering of development cooperation in fragile contexts

Fragility, which is manifested in conflicts or shifting constellations of power, makes it more challenging for development cooperation to be successful. Despite the many uncertainties involved, in fragile contexts there is a particular need for consistent strategies to steer development cooperation effectively. What are such strategies capable of and what must they deliver?

Context-robust strategies: the right basis for development cooperation in fragile contexts

1. Strategies for volatile and fragile contexts

Fragile contexts are characterised by particularly high levels of volatility and uncertainty. Often the escalation of violent intrastate conflicts or a change of government or regime means that development projects cannot achieve their intended results as planned. Yet changes of this nature can only be predicted to a limited extent, if at all.

The volatility of fragile contexts makes it more challenging for development actors to develop strategies for their work and to derive measures based on them – because even the effects of these cannot reliably be predicted. This makes formulating long-term goals for sustainable development and establishing sustainable organisational structures a key challenge in fragile contexts. But how can successful strategies be formulated for sustainable and effective development cooperation in fragile contexts, given their inherent volatility and uncertainty?

The core argument of this chapter is that in volatile conditions, strategies should be formulated such that they are more context-robust. Development actors should plan their activities in such a way that they lead to the goal under many possible contextual scenarios. Certain modes of decision-making such as broad-based scenario analyses are suited to this purpose.

Strategies

Strategies in this context refer to approaches for implementing development policy goals such as the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda. Strategies may be transnational (such as interministerial guidelines or development policy sector strategies) or country-specific (country strategies). Common to both types is that they translate overarching development policy goals into principles that guide operational action, and that they serve as the basis for selecting development policy priorities and suitable instruments and partners. Decision-makers can make use of strategies to steer the development policy portfolio throughout the policy cycle, from planning through implementation to monitoring and evaluation. Strategies are usually elaborated in official documents. However, there are also less formalised strategies that take the form of modes of action shared by many actors. (Mintzberg, 1987).

Adapting the modes of decision-making used in strategy formulation is one response to a debate taking place throughout development policy between “planners” and “seekers”. The accusation levelled against planners is that their centralised approach, relying on elements such as predefined, large-scale strategies and detailed plans, inhibits local actors from taking flexible, problem-oriented and innovative action (Easterly, 2006). What is needed instead, say the critics, are seekers who engage in market- and demand-oriented action and are better at adapting dynamically to a changing context

(Easterly, 2006; Moyo, 2009). In contrast, planners argue that lasting elimination of the structural, multidimensional and interdependent causes of poverty requires the mobilisation of extensive financial resources in line with a collective strategy (Sachs, 2005).

The tensions of this debate are manifested likewise for development cooperation in fragile contexts. This is a case where centrally planned strategies are probably not the best choice because they lack flexibility. On the other hand, a maximally flexible orientation towards local incentives or sentiment within the population can hamper structure-building and thereby thwart sustainable development cooperation. In societies dominated by conflicting interests, a development cooperation approach that is too intent on addressing everyone's interests could even exacerbate conflicts or completely overlook the interests of minorities.

Context-robust strategies represent a compromise between central planning and flexible responsiveness to incentives or sentiment. They are long-term in design but when it comes to formulating strategies and creating operational structures, they also take account of a multitude of conceivable changes, especially in the local framework conditions. Central to the approach are the processes followed by development actors to make their decisions and formulate country strategies. Inter alia, these include procedures for identifying goals and options for action. The questions at issue here concern the basis on which actors choose the data to be considered, the criteria by which they choose between options for action, and whom they involve in decisions. In a context of increasing fragility, action consists mainly of strategic adjustments at the country level – depending

on the actors involved and the nature and degree of the fragility. Country strategies themselves are of great importance for interministerial and international cooperation and for aligning development cooperation with the goals of its partners.

Context-robust strategies can therefore give development cooperation a better chance of achieving its objectives even in contexts that are volatile, fragile and rife with uncertainty. Under this approach, development policy is not just aligned to the given context at the time of strategy formulation, but is already drafted to accommodate changes in the context that are only partially predictable – for example, a coup d'état that subsequently leads to a change of political partner. In this way, even in volatile contexts, decision-makers can define medium- and long-term goals, priorities and practical approaches in a context-sensitive manner while also allowing for the possibility of strategic adjustments (Schreiber and Loudon, 2020).

Evaluations by DEval along with other findings suggest that the formulation of development policy strategies for fragile contexts should be context-robust. These findings should always be weighed against possible disadvantages of context-robust planning in the given case. For example, context-robust modes of decision-making require a higher commitment of resources in the planning phase – for broad scenario analyses, for example. Due to higher administrative, conceptual, personnel or time demands, prioritisation of the planning or strategy-building phase may carry implications in terms of financial costs, reduced flexibility and limited responsiveness under pressure to act with urgency.

— **1.1. Strategic challenges: security, partner selection and long-term effects**
Fragility is a multidimensional phenomenon in which statehood is limited on one or more dimensions:

The state's monopoly on the use of force is undermined (authority), the state's ability to provide basic services and a functioning state administration is limited (capacity), or the population does not fully accept the state's political rule (legitimacy). Each of these limitations makes it more challenging for development cooperation to engage in sustainable, structure-building and context-sensitive action.

— **Security risks**

Flare-ups of violent conflict due to weakened state authority pose a security risk for the staff and target groups of development cooperation, and can thus jeopardise the realisation of development objectives. The unpredictability of the security situation in Colombia, Iraq and other highly fragile countries resulted in a moratorium on project activities and travel by local staff in conflict-affected areas. In areas of Pakistan affected by violent conflict, development activities on gender equality are only possible subject to major constraints. Conservative sections of the local population try to intimidate project staff and prevent them from cooperating with women's groups. In the worst-case scenario, women's groups working with foreign development cooperation actors may end up exposed to greater danger due to their increasing visibility and social autonomy.

Where the state's monopoly on the use of force is stronger, as in Liberia and Sri Lanka, evidence pointing to security risks is less frequent (Brüntrup-Seidemann et al., 2021).

— **Challenges of partner selection**
Weak state legitimacy makes it more challenging for development cooperation to select suitable partners.

It must weigh its strategic principle of promoting partner-government ownership of development cooperation measures against the risks of bilateral cooperation. As a case in point, if the state is party to human rights violations as a protagonist in the conflict, it may be necessary to adapt the approach. For example, bilateral official development cooperation with Burundi has been suspended since 2015 due to the political situation in the country (AA, 2021). Instead, German development cooperation funding is channelled to the country through civil society organisations, an approach called "bypassing" (Dietrich, 2013).

Unless cooperation takes place directly with a central government, development cooperation activities can be interpreted as interference in internal affairs. For example, when the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung, BMZ) cooperated with the regional government of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) on the hosting of refugees, the Iraqi central government interpreted this as Germany taking the KRI's side in

its campaign for independence (Hartmann et al., 2022). In response, the BMZ intensified cooperation with the central government.

In Sri Lanka, cooperation with state actors is a challenge because after the country's elections, not only are new political heads appointed to every authority but extensive changes of personnel take place in the public administration (Brüntrup-Seidemann et al., 2021). In the steering of development projects, the ensuing loss of technocratic knowledge in such cases must be borne in mind when formulating strategic objectives.

— Short-term versus long-term effects

Limited state capacity makes it more challenging for development cooperation to achieve sustainable structure-building effects. If state capacity is weak, short-term measures are an appropriate way of improving the living conditions of the target groups immediately. However, this undermines the development of sustainable state structures capable of functioning independently in the long term. DEval's Iraq evaluation illustrates that under the constraints of limited state capacity, the objectives of short-term measures – such as the rehabilitation of basic public infrastructure like schools and hospitals, or measures to strengthen livelihoods like cash-for-work schemes – are easier to achieve than medium- and long-term objectives such as building the capacity of local government structures. For the most part, state implementing agencies, non-governmental or

Every limitation of statehood on the three dimensions of fragility – authority, capacity and legitimacy – makes it more challenging for development cooperation to engage in sustainable, structure-building and context-sensitive action.

multilateral organisations implement these short-term measures without the involvement of Iraqi state actors. The latter only assume responsibility for the functionality of the rehabilitated infrastructure once the measures have come to an end. Because state capacity is limited, however, the challenge is such that it jeopardises the sustainability of the measures. This illustrates that even shorter-term structure-building measures require long-term improvements in governance. Another consideration is that the temporary assumption of state tasks by development cooperation actors can diminish the state's legitimacy in the eyes of the population.

1.2. The strategic imperative of context sensitivity

The local context in which development cooperation projects take place substantially influences their success.

A synthesis of evaluations by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and KfW Development Bank shows that the effectiveness and sustainability of projects correlate closely with state capacity in the partner country – especially for projects in the health sector (Noltze et al., 2018; Wencker and Verspohl, 2019). With that in mind, it is advisable to adapt strategic objectives and approaches closely to the local context. Part of this is the choice of appropriate development policy instruments, which means the choice of development cooperation modality and of implementing and executing organisations.

An example of how the volatility of a fragile context limits the durability of project results is seen in DEval’s analysis of projects under the Partnership for Prospects in the Middle East (Beschäftigungsoffensive Nahost, P4P) initiative.

The original objective of creating long-term prospects for refugees was not achieved. Geopolitical changes in the context of the forced migration crisis were one significant reason for this. In particular, volatility within the cooperation with Turkey as a development partner impaired the long-term prospects of integration for Syrian refugees in Turkey (Roxin et al., 2021).

A development policy adapted to country contexts is in keeping with the

German public’s expectations, first and foremost with regard to the legitimacy of partner governments.

If countries are a focus of media coverage and public awareness, like some migrants’ countries of origin, demands voiced by the public have a stronger influence on the orientation of development cooperation. The DEval study “Opinion Monitor for Development Policy 2021” (Schneider et al., 2021) finds that German citizens support official cooperation for the provision of basic services principally in very poor countries with weak state capacity. On the other hand, if a state is affected by corruption, loss of its monopoly on force or declining authority in the eyes of its population, these lower the German population’s support for cooperation with a state (see pages 36 – 37).

The BMZ’s strategic guidelines which apply across all partner countries require systematic adaptation of many aspects of development cooperation to local contexts.

As DEval’s evaluation on German development cooperation in fragile contexts shows, BMZ’s strategies in this field are formulated context-sensitively. Decision-makers choose which development policy instruments to apply depending on the nature of the partner country’s fragility and its governance and development orientation. For this purpose, forecasting instruments are used to anticipate future developments. Context-sensitive planning draws on detailed context analyses and guidelines. However, project planning is largely based on one high-probability scenario or a small number of such scenarios.

Under deep uncertainty, firm statements can scarcely be made about what is expected to happen, only what might probably happen.

1.3. The dilemma of context-sensitive strategies

Development policy decision-makers face a dilemma when formulating strategies for fragile contexts. On the one hand, they want to draft strategy documents setting out goals and cooperation approaches which are long-term, structure-building and adapted to the context. On the other hand, fragile contexts are subject to sudden and drastic changes, so they must develop context-sensitive strategies for particularly volatile conditions.

At the same time, they are confronted with profound uncertainty.

On the one hand, this pertains to potential developments of the context in which development cooperation is operating. On the other hand, little is known about the extent to which development policy action will change local contextual conditions.

Strategic steering is always beset with uncertainty. In comparatively stable contexts, however, assumptions about the likelihood of particular scenarios are easier to make. Strategic decisions are then a kind of anticipatory action on the basis of these assumptions (Courtney et al., 1997; Marchau et al., 2019).

But the volatility of fragile contexts creates a more profound uncertainty of a fundamentally different quality. Often it is near-impossible to forecast future developments. Deep uncertainty means that development cooperation may end up taking place in one of a multitude of scenarios. Hence, firm statements can scarcely be made about what is expected to happen, only what

might probably happen. This is not enough of a basis for predicting either the consequences of strategic decisions or the effects of development cooperation with any accuracy (Marchau et al., 2019).

Strategies, however, are based on the assumption that consequences and effects are predictable. Unlike humanitarian assistance, development cooperation is by definition structure-building and long-term in outlook. In terms of procedures, this is reflected in long project commissioning processes, project durations and project results chains. Moreover, various allocation and synthesis studies by DEval have found that development cooperation as a whole, and the fragile states portfolio in particular, is subject to strong path dependencies. This is a constraint on flexible adaptation to local contexts (Wencker and Verspohl, 2019; Wencker, 2022). It also means that steering directives in strategies are unconnected to current challenges on the operational level.

2. Solution: context-robust strategies

Context-robust strategies are a possible answer to the challenge of implementing long-term, context-sensitive projects in particularly volatile contexts and achieving sustainable, structure-building effects.

The dilemma between deep uncertainty and the need for strategic steering is addressed by context-robust strategies which specify objectives and approaches to action that succeed under the widest possible range of different conditions. The aim is not to tailor a strategy as precisely as possible to a current or predicted geographical, socio-economic and political context. Context-robust strategies can thus prove particularly useful when a lack of case-specific evidence makes it impossible to weigh a few options and arrive at a clear prognosis.

2.1 How can context-robust strategies be developed?

Context-robust policy development has four distinguishing characteristics: the use of scenario analyses, consultations with stakeholders, adaptive planning, and the selection of policies likely to deliver comparatively good results under a variety of contextual conditions (low-regret policies). Common to these elements is the idea of taking greater account of uncertainties when deciding which policies to pursue.

Four characteristics of context-robust strategy development

- The modelling of what-if scenarios serves as the basis for strategy development. The underlying intention is not to predict contextual conditions in partner countries with complete accuracy and to describe this prognosis in as much detail as possible. Instead, the aim is to anticipate a wide range of possible eventualities. Faced with conditions of deep uncertainty, the task is not to determine what will probably happen, but what could conceivably happen. Development policy options can then be played through for different scenarios in the aim of anticipating project failure risks.
 - The use of a consultative process during strategy development is helpful for the development of plausible scenarios. The different options for action should be weighed up, working participatively as far as possible with the stakeholders relevant for successful implementation. This approach sounds out the widest possible range of views on potentially significant influencing factors and uncertainties, which can be considered during the planning process. It also reinforces the ownership of strategic decisions.
 - Adaptive planning replaces the development of an “optimal” plan. Context-robust strategies are designed from the outset to be adapted flexibly to possible developments. In this way, responses to certain scenarios – such as an unexpected change of government or the outbreak of a violent conflict – can be planned at an early stage. In addition, strategic directives should leave room to react flexibly and quickly – for example, requirements to consult and seek authorisation can be kept to a minimum.
 - To sum up, achieving good results in many plausible scenarios (in other words, pursuing low-regret policies) is the key idea. The point is not to identify a strategy for achieving development effectiveness as cost-effectively as possible under narrowly defined assumptions. The profound uncertainty of fragile contexts strips away the foundation of half-way certain forecasts that would underpin such optimising, anticipatory action. Instead, development policy approaches should be chosen that are as insensitive as possible to changes in the context.
-

Context-robust strategy development thus refers to a decision-making and implementation procedure that is based on multiple scenarios and operates flexibly on a low-regret basis.

Whether strategies should be formulated more context-robustly is dependent on the expected volatility of the context. When the framework conditions for development policy are comparatively predictable, context-robust strategies are less efficient. Choosing them may even make individual projects less beneficial. In volatile contexts, on the other hand, context-robust strategies can reduce the frequency of failure. In these cases, they mean a departure from unrealistic goals at the operational programme level.

In a context of great uncertainty, the contribution of project outcomes to strategic development policy objectives should not be overestimated. However, this does not imply that strategies should focus exclusively on quick wins and refrain from pursuing sustainable approaches. Long-term strategies with ambitious goals at the impact level make sense when the option of making adjustments is retained at the operational level (Schreiber and Loudon, 2020).

2.2 Context-robust strategies in development cooperation practice
Elements of context-robust strategies are already in use in international development cooperation. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) uses them in its cooperation on climate change adaptation (USAID, 2014). Meanwhile, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) discusses context-robust strategies for risk

Characteristics of context-robust strategies



Source: own presentation.

assessment in the course of project planning in general and describes an ideal-typical implementation of the individual process steps, referring to the example of an infrastructure project. Specifically, it gives an account of the planning and construction of a bridge and a section of highway in circumstances where climate- and traffic-related changes cannot reliably be predicted (Barandiarán et al., 2019; Lempert et al., 2021). A paper by the UK Department for International Development (DFID, now the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office) specifically discusses the added value of scenario analyses for identifying risks affecting development cooperation in fragile contexts as well as economic risks in low-income countries. It recognises scenario analysis and emergency planning as important tools and applies them in individual cases (Department for International Development, 2010; The Futures Company and Institute for Development Studies, 2011).

The picture in German development cooperation is mixed. It is acknowledged that development policy strategy development for fragile contexts is carried out within an adaptive planning framework and numerous actors are involved. Even so, the wide range of analysis instruments available for the task are not yet being utilised to their full potential (Wencker and Verspohl, 2019). Furthermore, the standard maxim for action in German development cooperation is resource-efficient utility maximisation, even in fragile contexts. In bilateral official development cooperation, the BMZ requires implementing organisations to select the most economical solution to achieve predefined objectives rather than adopting low-regret policies (BMZ, 2019).

This is problematic because utility maximisation is based on the assumption that the context will remain relatively stable, or that changes and their effect on the achievement of objectives will be predictable. In fragile contexts, however, this is not the case. The special initiatives introduced in 2014 are distinctive for allowing comparatively greater flexibility. This makes them more context-robust, at least in terms of adaptivity. One drawback of this approach is the risk that flexibility could come at the expense of time-consuming scenario-modelling processes. Another is that consultative processes play a comparatively

minor role since there are fewer directives on involving partner governments and predefining the themes of cooperation.

Consequently, the context-robustness of German development cooperation strategies in fragile contexts is limited. One reason is that the requisite analysis of a wide range of plausible scenarios is not a specified element of the strategy development process. To determine intended and unintended effects (indirectly), the BMZ makes use of both country-specific instruments (such as country strategies and internal assessments on governance and on potential for outbreaks of violent conflict) and project-specific analyses undertaken by the implementing organisations (which include environmental and social due diligence studies, target group and affected person analyses and defined safeguards). However, these very seldom reflect uncertainties explicitly, at least not in the format presented to decision-makers. Furthermore, analytical instruments for forecasting usually focus either on the most plausible development – like the classification of escalation potential – or show only a small subset of possible developments, as in political economy analyses, for example.

Using elements of adaptive planning in German development cooperation could contribute to the development of context-robust strategies in fragile states. The BMZ

endeavours to manage the interdependencies between development policy intervention and local contextual conditions proactively and adaptively. For this, it uses analytical instruments that guide its country strategies in fragile contexts. In particular, its ongoing monitoring includes conflict indicators, the purpose of which is to flag up any change in the context, and any resultant strategic adjustments that may be necessary. The BMZ seeks to support the adaptation of strategies during the steering and implementation phases by at least providing time resources and a certain degree of flexibility.

In German development cooperation there is little evidence of a tendency towards policies designed to achieve good results in many plausible scenarios (low-regret policies). In a DEval survey of BMZ country desk officers conducted in 2021, the majority of respondents stated that they would favour the module options which deliver the maximum development benefits over those which function under many different module pathways. Country desk officers for both fragile and non-fragile states gave similar responses. This is astonishing, since all desk officers for fragile countries (tended to) agree with the statement that, at the time a module is commissioned, whether a project will achieve its development objectives is something that cannot be determined with certainty.

3. Approaches for strengthening context-robustness in German development cooperation

Recent signs suggest that the importance attached to context-robust planning is growing. For instance, a BMZ discussion paper from 2018 calls for the strategy formulation process to pay greater attention to unpredictability, and raises the question of how scenario analyses can be incorporated into the formulation of development policy strategies (BMZ, 2018). DEval evaluations have provided specific guidance on this.

3.1 Proactive management of uncertainty

DEval encourages more proactive communication and proactive management of profound uncertainty in highly fragile contexts. Policy decision-makers should more clearly communicate uncertainties. Granted, they frequently discuss uncertainty and recognise it as a problem. However, the particular uncertainties in play are not adequately reflected by the analytical instruments used for steering. This is clear from the conceptual comparison of four approaches to defining fragile contexts undertaken as part of the evaluation on “German Development Cooperation in Fragile Contexts” (Wencker and Verspohl, 2019). Uncertainty could better be quantified and communicated on the basis of a combination of different analytical instruments. Here, the potential for developing context-robust strategies lies not so much in the

availability of suitable instruments, but in how the resulting data is presented and systematically combined during the process of deciding on policy.

One opportunity for this is the interministerial use of information. The joint ministerial evaluation of the engagement in Iraq shows that this is already happening within the framework of the increasingly close exchange between the Federal Foreign Office (Auswärtiges Amt, AA) and the BMZ. These two ministries regularly exchange analyses under a policy of improving joint analysis and coordinated planning (Gemeinsame Analyse und abgestimmte Planung, GAAP). It is clear all the same that this does not necessarily lead to a shared understanding of every problem. Accordingly, the evaluation recommends carrying out analyses as cooperation projects in order to identify both the core development problems and the core foreign policy problems in Iraq. Such analyses could bring together a wide array of development and foreign policy expertise from the two ministries and combine different analytical instruments so that broad scenario analyses can be used as a basis for developing strategies that can enable successful implementation under a wide range of possible future eventualities.

3.2 Insufficient resources and data
One explanation for the paucity of scenario analyses might be insufficient or non-existent time resources. The DEval evaluations on “Human Rights in German Development Policy” and “Supporting Gender

Equality in Post-conflict Contexts” come to the following conclusion: there are numerous cross-cutting themes and hence also connected processes and procedures. At the same time, project staff from the implementing organisations are confronted with heavy workloads and therefore have to set priorities (Brüntrup-Seidemann et al., 2021; Polak et al., 2021). Scenario analyses can become particularly costly when they have to take account of numerous themes. If this thematic complexity is further amplified by a large number of target groups, it is near-impossible to work up numerous scenarios economically. Either the implementing organisations would have to provide additional resources for this in the partner countries and develop more efficient tools that are dovetailed with those of other development partners, or the BMZ would have to prioritise cross-cutting themes more strategically.

Although timely recognition of changes to the context is a prerequisite of context-robust action, comparative measurement instruments are often based on old data. Most of the measurement instruments used yield few insights into short-term developments. This is shown by the DEval evaluation synthesis on “German Development Cooperation in Fragile Contexts”, which examined different methods of assessing the relevant characteristics of partner countries in terms of development policy. Country-comparative indices, in particular, are often not based on current data. Rapid adaptive action would be easier if measurement instruments

were better at tracking sudden and more unpredictable developments on the ground, perhaps by means of real-time monitoring instruments along with data from social media or satellite data.

3.3 Close exchange is necessary

Close exchange with the organisational units implementing the framework for action, and flexing of the latter, offer further potential as means of facilitating adaptive action. The DEval evaluation of the P4P initiative shows that when framework conditions are constantly changing, continuous exchange is required between the steering level within the BMZ and the operational level in the partner country, and particularly with the implementing organisations. Furthermore, the planning criteria for operational work, informed by context assessments and situation reports, should be formulated as flexibly as possible. The Sri Lankan case study findings from the evaluation “Supporting Gender Equality in Post-conflict Contexts” show that projects should be designed flexibly so that they can respond to changing conditions in the country. Ex ante scenario analysis, then, is no replacement for attentive monitoring of the political context, which must be permanently in place, while scenario analysis helps with strategy development.

3.4 Conclusion

Strategies that are more context-robust are a response to a long-running development policy debate between planners and

seekers, since they allow for continuous integration of information from the operational level and are effective even when framework conditions change. In view of the volatility and limited predictability of fragile contexts, the formulation of strategic objectives needs to be context-robust, and there must be sufficient flexibility to adjust operational work to achieve these objectives. The empowerment of development actors on the ground, especially in volatile contexts, increases the success of development measures (Honig, 2018). Competence and capacity development of local civil society actors is a further way of building more resilience and achieving sustainable development outcomes in fragile and crisis-affected contexts (de Coning, 2018; Vijayaraghavan et al., 2020). ■



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The humanitarian-development-peace nexus – a compelling way forward for fragile contexts

Fragility is a major encumbrance to achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda, and a touchstone of development policy. It jeopardises development, worsens hunger and poverty and increases the risk of violent conflicts. The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the impacts of climate change and the global repercussions of Russia's war on Ukraine are alarming manifestations of these negative amplifying effects and show the enormous need for action. But faced with so many challenges, how can development policy set priorities? The goal in crisis contexts is to implement a holistic engagement which combines short-, medium- and long-term objectives and fosters transformation and resilience. Under the changed conditions of the recent "Zeitenwende" (epochal shift), development policy is subject to particular challenges. In the context of a growing focus on military dimensions of security, a holistic understanding of the concept in terms of "human security" is of crucial importance, because in addition to physical integrity it also ensures that people are enabled to live fulfilled and self-determined lives, and individual talents and potentials are given the opportunity to develop for the benefit of society as a whole. The BMZ has adapted its engagement at national, bilateral and multilateral levels and continues to work on addressing the volatile conditions in fragile contexts to the best of its ability.

International dimension:

Germany as a pioneer of HDP approaches

State fragility is a focal theme in German development cooperation – both as a global task and in our cooperation with our partner countries. Germany numbers among the most important donors for fragile states, and has also assumed a pioneering role in the international discourse about engagement in fragile contexts. In 2018, the German Federal Government also took over as chair (jointly with the United Kingdom until 2022) of the International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF), part of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). In this capacity we helped to initiate recommendations for establishing coherent linkages between humanitarian assistance, development cooperation and peacebuilding – the humanitarian-development-peace nexus (HDP nexus) Germany has thus adopted a common frame of reference for achieving coherence between different policy fields and levels of action and for improving the effectiveness of measures in fragile contexts. Under this approach, development policy is always part of coordinated government action and interministerial cooperation in line with HDP nexus principles. A significant joint venture is the Nexus Academy founded in February 2022 – a joint initiative by DAC

members, subsidiary organisations of the United Nations (UN) and non-governmental organisations. The Academy seeks to create a common understanding of HDP nexus approaches, disseminates knowledge and develops the additional competences required to implement them in practice. Germany is providing substantial support to the Nexus Academy and thereby fostering shared learning for national and international actors. The BMZ is strengthening synergies with other donors so as to avoid duplication of efforts and make effective use of each donor's comparative advantages. Examples of this include participating in joint programming with UN organisations and cooperating in Team Europe Initiatives on the European level.

— Evaluations, analyses and monitoring as a basis for improved effectiveness

Shared learning and experiential knowledge are especially relevant in this context. It therefore remains an important element of our policy design to continuously adjust and keep improving our development policy inputs with reference to the growing body of knowledge on good practices for working in fragile states. In fragile situations with a profusion of problems, conditions on the ground can change quickly. This is why continuous analysis, conflict-sensitive design of the cooperation, and regular review and readjustment of strategies and implementation are vital prerequisites for a successful engagement.

— (Good) governance and fragile statehood

Findings from research and practice show that as state capacities in partner countries increase, development measures tend to achieve a higher success rate. A key point here is to pay special attention to local structures in particular. For us, this translates into a twofold objective: by supporting state institutions and processes we help to overcome fragility and simultaneously improve the chances of effective and sustainable development cooperation. Given the “Zeitenwende” (epochal shift) and the increasingly pronounced systemic rivalries in international cooperation, we must ask ourselves how we wish to deal with authoritarian regimes. Development policy approaches aimed specifically at promoting democratic governance and legitimate state-society relations then become all the more relevant. Hence, we systematically take account of democracy and governance aspects in the course of realising environmental and socio-economic objectives (just transition) and promote an active civil society and inclusive participation of marginalised population groups – which is entirely consistent with a feminist development policy.

At international level, development policy specifically targets relevant drivers and causes of fragility – especially in view of the escalation and amplification effects as a consequence of the Russian war on Ukraine.

Integrated approach

In practice, an integrated approach for a coherent overall engagement requires a high degree of consultation and coordination – especially under the volatile conditions of fragile statehood. To ensure the linkage of humanitarian assistance and development cooperation in fragile contexts, political steering and engagement on the ground must pursue an even more strongly interministerial approach. So far, the policy of improving joint analysis and coordinated planning (GAAP) has guided action to bring about closer cooperation between the AA and the BMZ in those countries where both ministries are actively providing support. A key aspect of this is continuous and close exchange to ensure that such support is as effective and needs-oriented as possible. Joint ministerial evaluations are an important step in this direction, in order to review our policy action and align it more closely with results and evidence. A first such evaluation examining our cooperation in Iraq has already been concluded; another evaluation on the engagement of the AA, the BMZ and the Federal Ministry of the Interior and

Community (Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat, BMI) in Afghanistan will be completed by the end of 2023.

Relevant development cooperation approaches and instruments

We know from the OECD’s “States of Fragility Report 2020” that the fragility barometer is still on the rise. How can the causes of conflict and fragile statehood be addressed sustainably against this backdrop? The linkage of different policy fields – in line with the German Federal Government’s policy guidelines on “Preventing Crises, Resolving Conflicts, Building Peace” – is of the utmost importance here. The “OECD Development Co-operation Peer Review: Germany 2021” acknowledges the BMZ’s crisis instruments – structure-building transitional development assistance (TDA) and the Special Initiative “Displaced Persons and Host Countries” – as a bridge to all three dimensions of the HDP nexus. The instruments are context-specific in deployment, adaptive to the character of the respective crisis, and quick and flexible to implement while allowing for a medium-term planning horizon. At an international level,

too, development policy specifically targets relevant drivers and causes of fragility – especially in view of escalation and amplification effects as a consequence of the Russian war on Ukraine.

An important area of action here are the global impacts on food security. In response, the German Development Minister Svenja Schulze established the Global Alliance for Food Security together with the World Bank. This joint endeavour is an example of rapid, coherent and sustainable crisis responses at the interface of humanitarian assistance and development cooperation.

— Strategic orientation of German development policy

Implementing the integrated approach in everyday practice is a perennial task. It requires continuous exchange and coherent and concerted engagement on different levels of action across actor and sector boundaries. The BMZ has established good prerequisites for this in recent years and made the peace dimension of development policy an even more central focus of its activities. In many projects and programmes, we address central dimensions of state fragility and bring together development policy approaches for crisis prevention, civil conflict transformation

and peacebuilding. Internationally, this makes the BMZ one of the largest investors for peace. We shape our partnerships along context-specific, flexible and need-appropriate lines. This enables comprehensive and targeted work to meet development and peacebuilding needs in fragile states.

— The primacy of prevention

Even the best planning and coordination are no guarantee of success. Civil conflict transformation in fragile contexts is arduous and subject to high and somewhat incalculable risks. Peace and stability do not come about overnight. They demand continuous commitment and long-term perspectives. Hence, the primacy of prevention remains the common overall goal, guiding vision and foundation for policy action in fragile contexts. Averting violent conflicts and serious disasters prevents human suffering, preserves the development outcomes achieved, and is markedly more effective than reactive crisis management. It is all too often overlooked that prevention is by far the better investment than any subsequent crisis intervention. Crises can be avoided by means of far-sighted, strategic prevention work in cross-actor and cross-sectoral solidarity. The fact is, and remains, that prevention is better than cure! ■



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For maximal impact: dare to take more risks

Adjusting who is empowered to make decisions and how performance is assessed as conditions change is common sense. Context makes a difference.

Development assistance has long failed to incorporate this truth. Employing standard decision-making structures, development partners have far too frequently taken the same basic approach in a broad range of contexts and in pursuit of widely differing goals. In fragile contexts most of all, this has been a costly omission.

— Fragile contexts make special demands

When partner countries are more unstable and unpredictable, development cooperation activities are more difficult to monitor effectively. When this is true rigorous research demonstrates that the less that development organisations rely on their headquarters' assessment and the more they are willing to let actors on the ground make important decisions, the more positive the outcomes of their development projects. The kind of top-down planning and target-setting which help drive towards results in relatively stable South Africa may well undermine success in more fragile Liberia. Projects which are inherently harder to monitor from headquarters benefit even more from empowering those on the ground; the appropriate modalities for projects which build a bridge and for supporting a justice system are not the same.

Development assistance is designed to do what it says on the tin – assist. The greatest possible impact of development assistance is in fragile states, particularly

where there is widespread recognition that the future needs to be different than the past such as in post-conflict contexts. It is all the more tragic, then, that conventional implementation arrangements are often ill-suited for fragile states, and for tasks such as governance, institution-building and post-conflict reconciliation. We must, then, either alter the tasks development assistance seeks to accomplish or alter the implementation arrangements via which that assistance is delivered.

— What kind of inputs work for fragile states?

One option is to limit assistance to providing easily observable and monitorable inputs – food, vaccines, school buildings. Supplying physical goods in a fragile state is often difficult logistically but can be monitored using the conventional technologies of development organisations. But while efficient implementation will improve welfare, these approaches are unlikely to alter the capacities and thus long-term trajectory of the community, region, or nation. One example: Delivering vaccines through contractors and international nonprofits will absolutely improve welfare. But it will not naturally improve, and in some cases may even undermine, the ability of the public health system to deliver in the absence of external support.

The greater promise in fragile states assistance lies in attempts to actually assist local changemakers in altering systems. Fragile states are settings where the previous institutional equilibrium has failed; where government has often been unable to live

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Succeeding in fragile states requires the risk of failure. A fragile states portfolio that has no failed interventions is one that very likely has been suboptimally conservative in its ambition.

up to its promises to citizens. Emergence from fragility requires not a return to the prior state of affairs but a marked improvement relative to that state, and thus the marked improvement of education, health, and governance systems. Nobody from outside will know how best to achieve these system objectives, however; we must thus trust the navigational skills of those closest to the ground. Assistance aimed at changing systems is high-risk, high-reward venture capital, not investing in a blue chip equity.

— Being willing to take risks

Succeeding in fragile states requires the risk of failure, requires accepting that assisting fragile states is inherently uncertain.

A fragile states portfolio that has no failed interventions is one that very likely has been suboptimally conservative in its ambition, leaving developing world citizens the poorer for it. We can and should learn from our failures; but we cannot learn from what we do not attempt because we lack the ambition and commitment to give assistance to fragile states the greatest possible opportunity for transformative impact.

It requires the empowered judgment of those in the field and at least medium-term commitment. It requires accountability which is “account based” rather than “accounting based”; a system where accountability is not reduced to what can be measured and quantified, but instead includes collectively deciding a course of action, reflecting during implementation on what is going well and is not, and above all learning, adapting, iterating.

Decision-makers in Germany and other countries have a real choice in how to proceed. One solution is to fit the goals aid pursues to the implementation arrangements, restricting assistance to the valuable if modest things that the current system can readily deliver. A second solution is to continue to pursue more transformative change, and to alter delivery systems to match these goals in fragile contexts. The first solution is likely to maximise the proportion of projects that can be declared successful; the second solution is likely to maximise the impact of Germany’s development assistance. ■



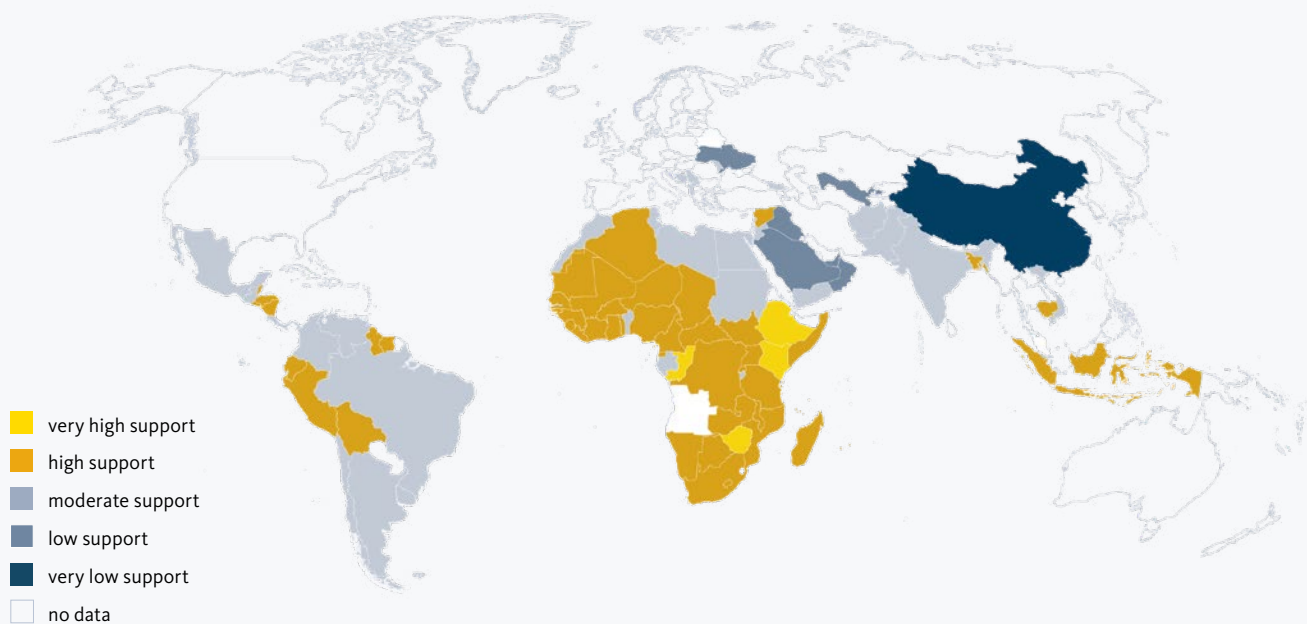
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Legitimacy of development cooperation in fragile states

Development cooperation has to tread a fine line between different guiding principles: on the one hand, it should be led by the principle of need and be of most benefit to the populations of the poorest countries. On the other hand, it needs to use the allocated funding as effectively as possible. In fragile contexts, both principles will often be in tension: poverty is widespread in highly fragile states and has often become structurally embedded due to prolonged conflicts. At the same time, the fragility of state structures hampers the effective use of development funding.

Populations in donor countries are most supportive of development cooperation when there is not just a great need for financial resources but also some assurance that they will be put to effective use (Cunningham et al., 2017; Feeny et al., 2019). Given the tension between these criteria, does the German population support development cooperation even in fragile states?

Degree of support for development cooperation exemplified by selected countries



Note: very high support = country was chosen in more than 60 per cent of selection decisions, high support = country was chosen in 50 to 60 per cent of selection decisions, moderate support = country was chosen in 40 to 50 per cent of selection decisions, low support = country was chosen in 30 to 40 per cent of selection decisions, very low support = country was chosen in fewer than 30 per cent of selection decisions

— The DEval Opinion Monitor for Development Policy

This question is addressed by the “DEval Opinion Monitor for Development Policy” (2021). Its survey results show that Germany’s population does support development cooperation with fragile states. When asked to state their preference for supporting development cooperation in one of two potential partner countries, citizens most frequently chose very fragile states such as Ethiopia, South Sudan and Somalia (53 per cent); fragile states were their second most frequent (49 per cent) and stable states their least frequent choice (44 per cent).¹

The analysis also examined whether the very fragile states were chosen because of their fragile statehood or because of their greater need for support – which may be induced by fragility. This time, respondents were asked to choose which of two hypothetical countries – based on attributes such as the level of fragility, the level of poverty or the religious majority – they considered more worthy of support. While support for development cooperation with a partner country rises when state capacity is weak, it falls in the absence of (political) legitimacy. A lack of state authority also correlates negatively with the perception that a country is worthy of support. These findings strengthen existing evidence which identifies considerable reluctance on the part of the population to cooperate with states that are particularly corrupt and undemocratic or with governments that lack legitimacy.

— Widespread support for fragile states in the German population

Whether and to what extent citizens support cooperation with fragile states depends substantially on their level of support for development cooperation in general. The higher this general level of support, the greater their support for cooperation with fragile states. On the other hand, factors such as their prior knowledge about development cooperation, their rating of its effectiveness and their interest in the subject have no direct effect. The same is true for the respondents’ political leanings and for socio-demographic factors such as age, gender, education and place of residence.

— Conclusions for development policy

Public opinion also reflects the tension between the “leave no one behind” principle of the 2030 Agenda and the effective use of financial resources. On the one hand, citizens support cooperation with fragile states. On the other hand, a lack of authority and legitimacy – which reduces or at least significantly hinders the effective use of financial resources – leads to countries being perceived as less worthy of support. This finding is particularly interesting in light of the fact that the effectiveness of development measures shows barely any variation between fragile and non-fragile contexts (Wencker and Verspohl, 2019).

Development education work must therefore consistently emphasise the interrelationship between reducing poverty and creating stable state structures. In the medium to long term, this may give rise to increased understanding of the complex circumstances in which development policy operates and stabilise the level of support for development cooperation. ■



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¹ The breakdown into the categories “very fragile”, “fragile” and “stable” states is based on the “Fragile States Index” (The Fund for Peace, 2019).

Democratisation and stabilisation in highly fragile contexts

Steering international cooperation in fragile contexts is difficult. The problems to be solved are multifaceted, and there are no blueprints for development policy action – even less so than in more stable contexts. One principle, however, can enhance the chances of long-term success even in difficult contexts: early democratisation of as many governance processes as possible in the implementation of development policy measures.

Diversity of fragile contexts

Fragile contexts take a variety of forms and manifestations. Often they are associated with wars or a history of violence. But state fragility begins much earlier; for example, when state action lacks legitimacy in the eyes of the population or the state barely provides basic services. Cases like these are not invariably linked to violence, but a sudden escalation of violence is more likely than in non-fragile contexts.

To present this diversity of fragile contexts visually, the German Institute for Development and Sustainability (IDOS) developed “Constellations of Fragility”, a typology of states according to the characteristics of fragility (Ziaja et al., 2019; Grävingholt et al., 2018). The figure below shows the distribution of different types of fragility around the world in the year 2020. Highly fragile contexts (red: dysfunctional states) are predominantly found in Africa, and the same is true of largely peaceful but illegitimate states with weak state capacity for action (orange: low capacity and legitimacy).

Democratisation appears to be especially difficult to reconcile with highly fragile contexts affected by violence. Even in Latin American states with more capacity to fulfil their functions, violence poses a constant

threat to democracy (magenta: low control). Without security, elections can be neither free nor fair. And even if the governments that come to power in those countries are democratically legitimised, their chances of success are low. Generally, states with a violent past soon fall back into cycles of conflict.

The donors' response: democracy promotion

It is important that donor countries working in such complicated situations always tie their engagement to the promotion of democratic governance. This statement may sound surprising, not least in the context of the recently wound down intervention of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Afghanistan, which has been rated as largely ineffectual on more than a few occasions. External democratisation efforts are often accused of being neo-colonialist and wishing to impose a “Western political order” on other societies, sometimes even by military means. But these propositions do not chime with the realities of international democracy promotion. Democracy promotion through military force is the exception, not the rule. The majority of democracy promotion projects implemented by development cooperation are based on cooperative exchange with local actors (Leininger, 2010). Moreover, there is a high demand for democracy among the population of many countries in the global South.

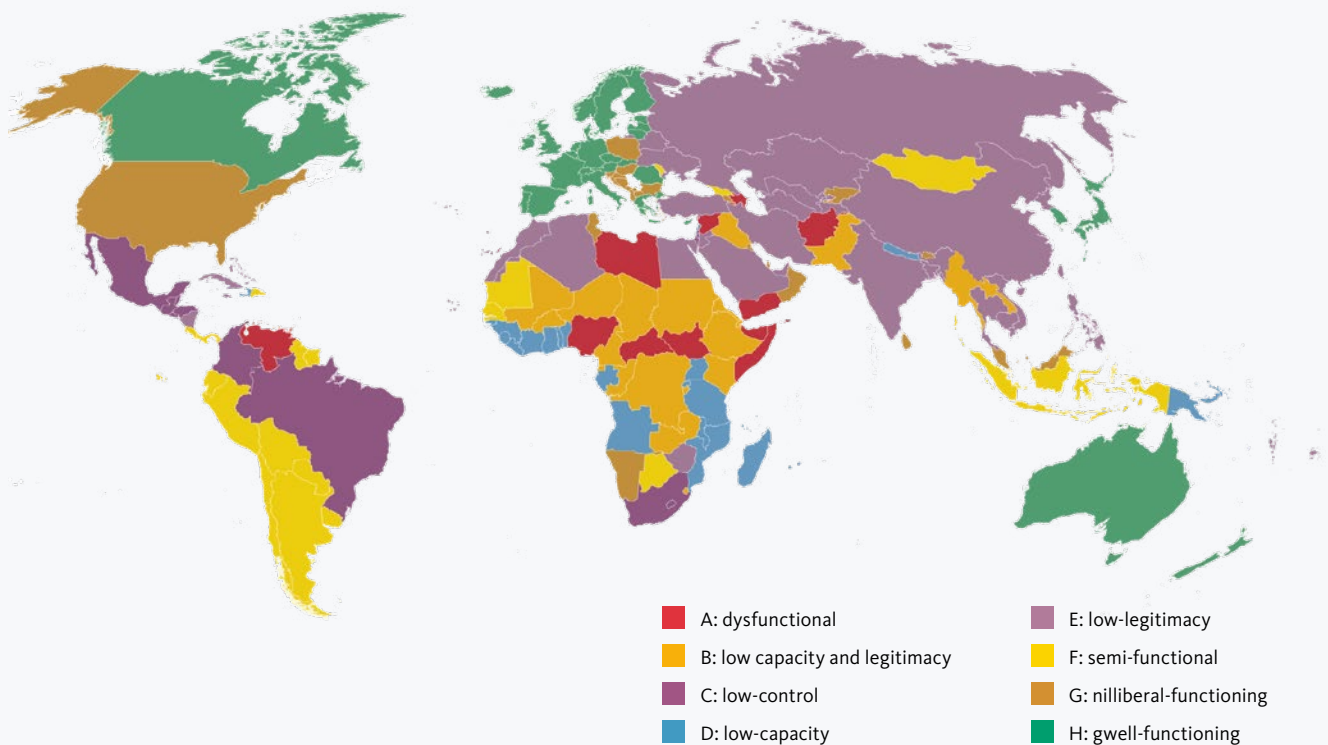
The only known long-term conflict resolution mechanism, democracy, is not without its flaws. In all its many forms, however, it represents a universally applicable principle of government. Even in fragile contexts, this must be the principle that

guides action, and not some specific model of democracy imported as a blueprint from elsewhere. If resilient institutions are to be established, local actors must determine the concrete form of democratic governance. Donors can support this process (Ziaja, 2020).

Due to weak state structures in highly fragile states, democratic principles can not be implemented entirely satisfactorily. Autocratic rulers often co-opt democratic façades as a fig leaf, which is often used as grounds for arguing that democracy

promotion or development cooperation cause more harm than they avert and should therefore be avoided in fragile, autocratic contexts (Mross, 2019). However, gradual approaches which pursue democracy promotion and stabilisation in parallel have contributed to lasting peace in post-conflict societies (Fiedler et al., 2020). And in a highly interdependent world, non-intervention is hardly a tenable option. Autocratic actors from other countries would fill the gaps left behind if democratic donors withdrew.

Constellations of state fragility in 2020



Source: updated from Ziaja et al., 2019.

“Practising democracy” works

Whether it would be more effective if the West imposed tougher conditionality, aimed at rapid and radical regime change, when working with fragile partners is highly questionable in view of these potential proponents of autocracy. While excessive pressure on, and possibly the toppling of, undesirable rulers may bring peace closer, it may also make it an even more distant prospect. The likely consequences of such radical upheaval are usually extremely difficult to anticipate.

Nevertheless, the four decades since the end of the bipolar world order have shown that even in many “sham democracies”, the prerequisites for the genuine expansion of participation mechanisms and the protection of minorities have improved. Practising democracy works. Where democratic rules have never been practised, the challenge for reformers is considerably harder, as the disappointing outcome of the Arab Spring in 2011 and 2012 shows. Countries with experience of democracy, on the other hand, more often succeed in reconnecting with such experience and institutionalising it more permanently.

Over the long term, then, the promotion of democratic governance promises to bear fruit even in the most difficult contexts. It can prepare the ground for future democratisation and thus help to break the deadly cycle of violence. ■



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IMPLEMENTATION

The tensions between short-term assistance and structural development cooperation

When states are weak and autocratically governed, external actors often step in to provide basic services. But what is needed long-term in these states are sustainable state structures, which development cooperation must work to promote. With adapted measures, the right partners, and by making often difficult trade-offs, can development cooperation achieve its goals even in regions where the state monopoly on force is limited?

IMPLEMENTATION

Angela Heucher and Alexander Kocks: Realising key implementation principles of development cooperation in fragile contexts

Development cooperation in fragile states should strengthen state structures, but not autocratic systems. In case of the latter, the alternative is to cooperate with civil society actors. But development cooperation that bypasses the state can create parallel structures.

Ingrid-Gabriela Hoven: GIZ's approaches to the implementation of development cooperation in fragile contexts
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Realising key implementation principles of development cooperation in fragile contexts

A major challenge for the implementation of development cooperation projects is that the majority of Germany's partner countries are affected by fragility (Wencker and Verspohl, 2019). German development cooperation in these countries is tasked with contributing to peaceful and inclusive development informed by a vision of "positive peace"² (BMZ, 2022a). But its task is especially difficult in such contexts because of the unfavourable framework conditions. For instance, an unstable security situation can restrict access to project regions and target groups, and a lack of capacity on the part of the partner government detracts from the planning certainty and the implementation of projects. So while development cooperation is expected to make a sustainable difference to fragility, fragility itself constrains the effectiveness of its efforts.

How can development cooperation measures be implemented in fragile contexts and nevertheless be successful? To answer this question, it is first necessary to consider four key principles of development cooperation practice in fragile contexts: "leave no one behind", "do no harm", linkage and multidimensional sustainability. How do the three dimensions of fragility – authority, capacity and legitimacy – influence the implementation of development cooperation projects, and to what extent does implementation practice nevertheless succeed in realising these four principles?

1. Principles for implementing development cooperation projects in fragile contexts

German engagement in fragile contexts is guided by four principles for action: "leave no one behind", "do no harm", linkage and multidimensional sustainability.

The German Federal Government (Bundesregierung, 2017, 2019) and the BMZ (2013, 2021) define these principles as fundamental to Germany's development cooperation and joint ministerial engagement in fragile contexts.³ Furthermore, the German government has made an international commitment to these principles, inter alia within the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and at the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in 2016.⁴ From these principles it is possible to derive a common international understanding of what marks out development cooperation in fragile contexts as context-appropriate and successful. Key elements are

- taking care to include the weakest (leave no one behind),
- avoiding unintended negative effects (do no harm),
- dovetailing various aid approaches with one another (linkage) and
- generating effects that are as sustainable as possible (multidimensional sustainability).

² Whereas negative peace merely denotes the absence of violence, positive peace is about "realising social justice and reducing the structural causes of violent conflict, such as poverty, lack of prospects, inequality, violation of human rights and restriction of political participation" (BMZ, 2022a, quotation translated from German).

³ This makes no claim to be an exhaustive list of principles, but in the overall analysis of the documents, these are the ones most frequently mentioned and, depending on the document, the ones dealt with in greatest detail.

⁴ Also relevant here are the specific principles of humanitarian assistance (UNOCHA, 2022) and the principles of the Aid Effectiveness Agenda (OECD, 2005).

1.1 Leave no one behind

“Leave no one behind” is one of the central maxims of the 2030 Agenda. It means taking extra care to address the needs of the weakest and most vulnerable members of target groups. This principle is particularly relevant to fragile contexts, which are home to around three quarters of people living in extreme poverty worldwide, and in which progress on achieving the SDGs is stagnating or declining (OECD, 2020). In conflict-affected contexts, it is often the most vulnerable groups that are exposed to dangers and discrimination – for example, women, children and adolescents, persons with disabilities, displaced persons, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons (LGBTI) and ethnic and religious minorities (BMZ, 2022b). Furthermore, they often have poorer access to the labour market or to (public and private-sector) services.

The German government anchored the “leave no one behind” principle in its guidelines on “Preventing Crises, Resolving Conflicts, Building Peace” (Bundesregierung, 2017). The BMZ’s human rights strategy (BMZ, 2011, 2013) stipulates that inclusive development based on this principle is an aspiration for German development cooperation as a whole.

1.2 Do no harm

The “do no harm” principle refers to taking precautions that the measures implemented will not have unintended negative effects, either on the population as a whole or on particular groups and individuals. In fragile contexts, this demands a conflict-sensitive approach. For there is always a risk in fragile contexts that humanitarian assistance and development cooperation measures might unintentionally foster conflict-fuelling dynamics (Anderson, 1999; BMZ, 2013). Also, in fragile states even more than elsewhere, there is often a lack of

trust between groups within the population. For example, directing support exclusively to refugees in a host country can lead to social tensions with the local population. Similarly, strengthening an authoritarian regime’s state structures can unintentionally facilitate repressive treatment of the population (Dutta, Leeson and Williamson, 2013; Kocks et al., 2018). Against this backdrop, the “do no harm” principle is also described as “by far the most important rule for development cooperation in crisis situations” (BMZ, 2013, trans. from German).

A prerequisite for realisation of the “do no harm” principle is that implementing actors should be perceived as neutral by the communities on the ground.

1.3 Linking different aid approaches

Interventions in fragile contexts are more successful when measures like humanitarian assistance, transitional development assistance and development cooperation are interlinked. This approach is also conducive to subsequent bridging from short- and medium-term outcomes to structural impacts. Contributions to the crisis response and the creation of long-term prospects in fragile contexts can only be successful if external development organisations properly coordinate their policies and measures across the complete policy cycle and coherently align them with each other.⁵ This insight is not new, but has gained notably more relevance for implementation as a result of the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul (UN Doc. A/70/709, 2016). Since then, the German government (Bundesregierung 2017, p. 110 ff.) has made linkage the central principle of action of its interministerial approach (see pages 30–33). With regard to the implementation of development cooperation projects in fragile states, this culminates in a number of approaches:

⁵ For an overview of the various concepts and debates applicable to this area (including linking relief, rehabilitation and development, whole-of-government, and connectedness), see Kocks et al. (2018).

- **interministerial linkage** between development, security and defence policy, which includes elements such as joint implementation planning and the sequencing of the various measures (Kocks et al., 2018),
- **intra-ministry linkage** between short- and medium-term interventions and structural measures within the BMZ portfolio, and
- **multi-donor linkage**, which has been postulated under the heading of donor harmonisation ever since the Paris Declaration of 2005 and includes joint planning and joint monitoring of measures.⁶

1.4 Multidimensional sustainability

In terms of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the principle of multidimensional sustainability relates to the durability of outcomes on the three dimensions of economic, environmental and social sustainability. Ideally, progress in one area should not have adverse effects on other areas. For example, measures to strengthen economic competitiveness should not be to the detriment of the environment or social justice. In the context of fragility, the durability of outcomes can be promoted by strengthening individual and collective resilience (Bahadur et al., 2015) so that individuals and societies can better deal with crises. The combined synergies of the various approaches in fragile situations should be geared towards creating durable and self-reliant structures (Bundesregierung, 2017, p. 31).

2. How fragility affects the implementation of development cooperation projects

All three dimensions of fragility – limited authority, capacity and legitimacy – impair the realisation of the four principles “leave no one behind”, “do no harm”, linkage of aid approaches and sustainability.

Loss or limitation of the state’s monopoly on the use of force (authority) inevitably poses challenges for development cooperation. The “leave no one behind” and “do no harm” principles can only be implemented once security and access to project regions are ensured. Questions of access are discussed most of all in humanitarian assistance (Menkhaus, 2012) but are also relevant for development cooperation. If non-state armed groups have territories within a country under their control, their (implicit) consent to the implementation of projects is just as necessary as that of the central government. This is relevant when vulnerable target groups, who have to be reached to fulfil the “leave no one behind” principle, are located in such regions. Another important concern is to ensure the safety of project staff and target groups. If non-state violent actors see a project as an unacceptable attempt to exert external influence, this can endanger both target groups and staff. The “do no harm” principle demands that unintended negative effects of this kind are to be avoided.

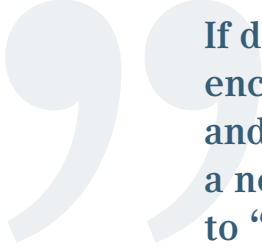
The partner country’s capacities are usually an important foundation for effective development cooperation. In fragile contexts, they are often non-existent or severely limited. This impairs the realisation of the principles of linkage and sustainability in

⁶ On the aspect of linkage with partner-country measures see the section on multidimensional sustainability on pages 54–55.

particular. Limited capacities reduce planning certainty and harbour the risk of misallocation of funding when measures are implemented via state agencies. If development cooperation uses alternative channels, such as non-governmental organisations as implementation partners or increased capacity development measures, it must weigh up certain considerations: Is there a risk of creating structures parallel to the state, which work well in the short term but may undermine the functioning of state structures in the long term (Bizhan, 2018)? Are measures likely to lead nowhere if questions of political will are neglected while focusing on capacity development (M'cleod and Ganson, 2018; Zürcher, 2012)?

Shortfalls of information and data also pose challenges to realisation of the “do no harm” and “leave no one behind” principles. Limited administrative capacities often go hand in hand with implementation problems on the partner side and are evidenced, for example, in poor data quality (Desrosiers and Muringa, 2012). The fact is, a good data basis, especially in terms of disaggregated data and comprehensive contextual, sectoral and country information, is often essential in order to implement the two principles.

Finally, lost or diminished state legitimacy gives rise to two particular challenges for sustainability and “do no harm”. First, a lack of trust makes it challenging to achieve sustainable project objectives. Secondly, adapting development cooperation to the state's diminished legitimacy can undermine it even further in the long run.⁷ Especially in conflict-affected regions, it can be



If development cooperation encounters diminished legitimacy and implements a project with a non-governmental organisation to “bypass the state”, this in turn can further weaken the legitimacy of state institutions.

difficult for development cooperation actors to find out which national or local actors the population regards as legitimate (Egreteau and Mangan, 2018). Where legitimacy is weak, projects can find it harder to reach their target groups via state structures. Likewise, if there is to be sustainable use (supported by development cooperation) of state structures and services, the population must necessarily have confidence in the government (inter alia, see Zürcher, 2012).

If development cooperation encounters diminished legitimacy (and possibly also limited capacities) and decides to “bypass the state” by implementing a project with a non-governmental organisation, this in turn can further weaken the legitimacy of state institutions (see pages 58–59). This infringes the “do no harm” principle. The question for development cooperation is, who can it cooperate with in fragile contexts to achieve sustainable project outcomes, and what long-term consequences might this have for the legitimacy of the partner government?

⁷ In keeping with the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness of 2005, development cooperation fundamentally strives for ownership (on the part of partner-country authorities) and alignment (orientation to strategies and use of the cooperation countries' institutions).

3. Evaluatory findings on the success of implementing German development cooperation projects in fragile contexts

Various DEval evaluations show that implementation practice has to some extent succeeded in realising the four principles “leave no one behind”, “do no harm”, linkage of aid approaches and sustainability in the context of fragility. What proves more problematic, however, is ensuring (multidimensional) sustainability in short- to medium-term development cooperation projects. The findings reported by a meta-analysis of evaluations on the sustainability of German development cooperation in general (Noltze et al., 2018) are explicitly shown to apply to fragile states: A lack of state capacity on the ground and (at best) diminished state legitimacy, as is often the case, are factors that make sustainable development cooperation significantly more challenging.

3.1 Leave no one behind DEval evaluations show how Germany has met the challenges of implementing the “leave no one behind” principle.

For example, access to vulnerable target groups in Iraq was made more challenging by the limited capability of the Iraqi central government to ensure security (lack of authority and capacity). Moreover, the selection of target groups in line with the “leave no one behind” principle was compromised by authoritarian governance structures rife with patronage and clientelism (diminished legitimacy). The volatile security situation was among the factors that initially made it harder to access target groups in territories liberated from the dominance of

the so-called Islamic State (IS). As a rule, the selection of measures, locations and target groups followed the interests of departments of the Iraqi government (Hartmann et al., 2021). Deficient state and administrative structures likewise impeded selection of the target groups in compliance with the rules – that is, based on criteria such as need – in countries bordering Syria (Roxin et al., 2021). There were signs that local authorities were not always selecting project participants in accordance with the vulnerability criteria anchored in the project specifications. Implementing organisations and implementing partners responded by getting more involved in the selection process to counteract any possible “cronyism”.

Projects did not normally differentiate according to degrees of vulnerability in any substantial way, however. Consequently, in fragile contexts it was often impossible to fulfil the “leave no one behind” principle in relation to the most vulnerable groups. Other reasons why the projects in Iraq did not always reach the most highly vulnerable groups included the urgency of the crisis response and the constraints on access to rural areas, resulting in part from the Iraqi central government’s limited authority. Similarly, the participants in cash-for-work projects in Jordan and Turkey included only a small proportion of persons with disabilities, old, sick and vulnerable persons, while the majority of these groups received basic services from the United Nations or the European Union (Hartmann et al., 2022; Roxin et al., 2021). One of the underlying reasons for this – resulting from capacity issues – may have been a lack of data on particularly vulnerable target groups. However, the main cause was that most cash-for-work projects were labour-intensive

employment schemes and not (yet) targeted at the said groups. Instead, their logic pursued effectiveness on the broadest possible scale: the construction of infrastructure (including roads, green spaces and dams), which is in the interests of the host countries, was carried out by physically fit refugees alongside members of the host communities, who in turn were able to feed their families wages in turn helped them to feed their families.

In order to operate in line with the “leave no one behind” principle in fragile contexts, different vulnerable groups should be addressed simultaneously in order to prevent the impression that particular groups are being treated preferentially or discriminated against.

A key success factor for the (partial) realisation of this implementation principle in the P4P initiative was the BMZ directive that the funding allocated to labour-intensive cash-for-work programmes was to be shared equally between needy refugees and needy members of the host communities (50-50 rule). This contributed substantially to the inclusion of as large a group of affected persons as possible while relieving potential social tensions between groups (Roxin et al., 2021).

German development cooperation makes use of various analytical tools, which can provide information and recommendations on ways of elaborating projects in line with the “leave no one behind” principle. Integrated peace and conflict assessments (IPCAs) and gender analyses are two such tools, but are not used to the extent that they could be. This depletes projects of important potential for success in fragile contexts. At least some of the time, the results of such analyses contribute to gender- and conflict-sensitive

realisation of projects (Brüntrup-Seidemann et al., 2021), although this criterion is not met in every case. In projects in Iraq, for example, there were no specific project activities to empower women, even though they were part of the target group (Hartmann et al., 2022). In some cases, this was because – due to extreme time pressure – conflict and gender analyses were only carried out afterwards. In general, the projects examined in Iraq, Jordan and Turkey followed BMZ directives on the gender-sensitive elaboration of measures (Roxin et al., 2021). The DEval evaluation of the P4P initiative also shows that poorer households and women benefited to a comparatively greater extent from the measures. One of the success factors proved to be speaking to and sensitising male family members, to increase their acceptance of women’s participation in the project. This approach helped projects to achieve wider-ranging outcomes in terms of the “leave no one behind” principle.

3.2 Do no harm

The “do no harm” principle requires development cooperation to involve a mix of population groups in its projects. In reality, however, this is not always feasible in view of logistical and political challenges. An analysis of the BMZ’s Iraq portfolio shows that efforts were made in this regard – for example, when implementing water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) measures in the camps for internally displaced persons. This was intended to avert the impression of any favouritism or discrimination towards particular groups and to avoid amplifying existing tensions (Hartmann et al., 2022). However, logistical and political constraints still resulted in homogeneously composed target groups.

Within the vulnerable population groups, an emphasis is often placed on women. However, DEval evaluations show that joined-up thinking about conflict and gender is still quite rare, even though conflict situations have clear gender-specific implications (Brüntrup-Seidemann et al., 2021; Hartmann et al., 2021).

Precisely in forced migration or post-conflict contexts, traumatising experiences such as gender-based violence can prevent women and men from participating equally in project activities (Brüntrup-Seidemann et al., 2021). It is therefore crucial to treat the two themes as a nexus and to bear this in mind throughout implementation.

Appropriate steering instruments are needed for the realisation of the “do no harm” principle in development cooperation projects. In the context of Iraq, the individual projects had information on unintended negative effects. There was no aggregated monitoring system to support the steering of the portfolio, however. Consequently, there were no instruments that could have been used to make steering decisions on the portfolio as a whole – for instance, if unintended negative effects had recurred in different projects (Hartmann et al., 2022).

In fragile and violence-affected contexts, it is important to have independent and objective complaint mechanisms, both to obtain information about possible unintended negative effects and in order to realise the “do no harm” principle. Although such mechanisms frequently exist, often project participants either have insufficient information about them or little confidence in them.

Complaint mechanisms – along with preventive and awareness-raising activities – are key instruments for mitigating the risks of (sexual and other) violence that are widespread in many fragile and post-conflict contexts. However, target groups are often not sufficiently well informed about complaint mechanisms. The DEval evaluations focusing on fragility also show that contact and complaints channels are often situated within state authorities. Even if project participants are aware of the complaint mechanisms, it may be that they do not use them because they have no confidence in the authorities and are afraid of possible sanctions (Roxin et al., 2021). In such situations, it is all the more important that projects either possess their own independent and objective complaint mechanisms, which should be sufficiently well known and set up for low-threshold use, or that equivalent multi-donor systems are in place. Where these do not exist, there will be considerable risks to the realisation of the “do no harm” principle.

DEval evaluations confirmed statements by development cooperation practitioners that the selection of suitable implementation partners influences the success of development interventions (inter alia, see Noltze et al., 2018). This is particularly true in fragile contexts: In view of information shortfalls, insecurity, and dynamics of (sexual) violence, it is especially important that local partners have strong context-specific knowledge and experience. Actors with proven expertise are potentially in a better position to identify any unintended negative effects at an early stage. It is therefore important to select implementing partners with a high level of

competence at the gender-conflict nexus, since sexual and gender-based violence is widespread in many conflict-affected contexts. Yet in (highly) fragile contexts more than others, there are often only a few implementing partners who possess such competence. If this is the case, German development cooperation should build and develop partners' gender-conflict nexus competence in the long term (Brüntrup-Seidemann et al., 2021).

3.3 Linking different aid approaches

Linking humanitarian assistance and development cooperation

The joint ministerial strategic evaluation of engagement by the AA and the BMZ in Iraq concludes that the two federal ministries, in concert with other international donors, succeeded in contributing to the immediate stabilisation and reconstruction of Iraq pursuant to Germany's interministerial approach (Bundesregierung, 2017). For a long time, the two ministries' portfolios were not coordinated with each other, however (Hartmann et al., 2021).

Since 2019, there have been increased coordination efforts between the AA and the BMZ in Iraq, as evidenced by the "nexus-chapeau" approach, which aims to bring together humanitarian assistance measures and transitional development assistance. It was first piloted with projects from two implementing organisations – a Welthungerhilfe project in the rural sector and an Oxfam WASH project. The implementation of both projects was beset with numerous challenges, which were partly attributable to the lack of

a joint conception phase. In the end, very few improvements to interministerial coherence were found (Hartmann et al., 2021).

Linking different aid approaches within the BMZ portfolio

The evaluation of the P4P initiative analysed the success of bridging from short-term to medium- and long-term measures within the BMZ portfolio. German development cooperation succeeded in helping in the short term but could not alleviate the persistent forced migration crisis or structurally improve the conditions in the countries receiving Syrian refugees.

The linkage challenges within development cooperation under the P4P initiative can be traced back to various implications of fragility. These principally include the protracted crisis context due to the war in Syria, which precludes the return of Syrian refugees to their home regions, as well as the fact that labour markets in the countries bordering Syria lack absorption capacity (Roxin et al., 2021). These factors could scarcely be influenced by development cooperation alone. Among the potential conditions for successful bridging to structural outcomes, the most significant (possibly flanked with economic incentives) is policy dialogue with partners, specifically to strengthen ownership with regard to the refugees' long-term prospects. When linking different aid approaches within the BMZ portfolio, other important considerations are the right sequencing, appropriate timing and joint planning, with a view to strengthening the all-round and lasting resilience of vulnerable people in fragile situations.

Can the sustainability principle be realised when limited or lacking capacities are the rule, bearing in mind that sustainability calls for high levels of capacity?

Linkage with other donors
In addressing the refugee crisis in the countries bordering Syria, linkage with other donors at the operational level is challenging. Yet better linkage would help to achieve more comprehensive outcomes.

The measures of the P4P initiative were coordinated as a matter of policy with those of international institutions and national governments (Roxin et al., 2021). Despite institutionalised coordination mechanisms under the umbrella of the UN-led Regional Refugee and Resilience Plans (3RPs), the volatile situation that prevailed in the neighbouring countries meant that donors were not sufficiently able to coordinate their interventions with flanking measures by other donors. Among other examples, this is evident with regard to Syrian child refugees. The majority of them received schooling from Syrian and Jordanian teachers funded by the BMZ, but outside the classroom they were not sufficiently supported in the community. A range of essential barriers to learning persisted, including the marriage of Syrian girls at an early age and social tensions in the host communities. Donors could have mounted a more effective response to these setbacks by making better linkages between their measures on the operational level.

4. Multidimensional sustainability

Projects in fragile contexts are faced with acute needs and often operate under considerable urgency and pressure to act. For this reason, not every development cooperation project aims to achieve durable outcomes on all three dimensions of sustainability. The focus of the P4P initiative was primarily on creating temporary employment opportunities. Its ambitions towards sustainability were thus limited to begin with (Roxin et al., 2021). Analysis of the BMZ engagement in Iraq also showed that sustainability, in the sense of connectedness with Iraqi structures, only became a more overt concern towards the end of the projects (Hartmann et al., 2022).

Measures addressing several sustainability dimensions at once tended to be the exception, in the projects examined by DEval. Some cash-for-work projects from the P4P initiative addressed all three dimensions of sustainability: their objectives were to rehabilitate and establish green infrastructure such as forestation, dams and waste disposal. The infrastructure created was expected to be economically self-sustaining after the project had ended, and to provide ongoing employment for project participants. And finally, the measures were intended to strengthen social cohesion between the population of the host communities and the refugees.

Even if the projects did not incorporate sustainability systematically and fully in every case, individual “islands” of sustainability and potentials for sustainability emerged. In the case of the P4P initiative, such potentials were identified with regard to social sustainability, specifically

via the approach of strengthening social cohesion and resilience in the host countries (Roxin et al., 2021). Development cooperation projects in Iraq were most effective on the social dimension, where training programmes and emergency schooling had successful outcomes (Hartmann et al., 2022). The sustainability dimension of the engagement encountered limitations, however, because owing to corruption and a lack of political will to oversee reforms, the prerequisites for a structural solution to the problems were not in place (Hartmann et al., 2022).

Lack of or limited administrative capacity was the main challenge to realising the principle of sustainability.

In Iraq, capacity shortfalls within the Iraqi administration and Iraqi state actors' limited capacity to take action detracted from the sustainability of projects. The actors were not in a position to continue working on tasks begun by German development cooperation or to maintain the (re)constructed infrastructure (Hartmann et al., 2022). It has been shown that development cooperation projects in fragile contexts are more successful when partner countries have a higher degree of administrative capacity (Wencker and Verspohl, 2019), a finding that is not confined to fragile contexts alone (Noltze et al., 2018).

Absence of or weak ownership poses a further challenge for the realisation of the sustainability principle. The foremost concerns here are political will and the assumption of responsibility by the partner country. In Iraq, for example, while the Iraqi central government gained in administrative capacity once the so-called Islamic State had been driven back, Iraqi actors did not automatically assume greater responsibility (Hartmann et al., 2022). That said, differences

were observed at the subnational level: unlike the Iraqi central government, the partners in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq sought to take on more coordination and steering of the projects.

Additional challenges affecting implementation of the principle of sustainability stem from the planning and implementation of projects by German development cooperation itself. Although the Iraq evaluation (Hartmann et al., 2022) shows that many individual projects adapted to changing conditions, German development cooperation barely reacted when the so-called Islamic State was pushed back and Iraqi government capacities were freed up. When the "capacity" dimension of fragility changed, German development cooperation did not adapt its approach. Ownership by the Iraqi government was not promoted and consequently, success was constrained by the fact that at an overarching level, there was no continuous, active adaptation and readjustment to changing volatile contexts.

In fragile contexts, development cooperation can face a dilemma: can the principle of sustainability be implemented at all when weakened or completely absent state capacity is the rule, given that sustainability requires high levels of capacity? As the example of Iraq shows, the levels of state capacity in fragile contexts vary and can change. Accordingly, German development cooperation must insist on and promote ownership by the actors on the ground and strengthen the capacities of its partners (Hartmann et al., 2022). Moreover, development cooperation can at least create small "islands of sustainability" and strengthen potentials for sustainability, even if it is not always possible to incorporate the principle of sustainability across the board. ■



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GIZ's approaches to the implementation of development cooperation in fragile contexts

Fragility poses special challenges for the implementation of development interventions and international cooperation measures – both at the conception stage and in operational practice. To overcome these, development organisations such as GIZ have developed approaches that are guided by certain criteria.

— Designing strategies flexibly

Implementation can only be successful if the chosen strategies are orientated towards the specific realities of highly fragile and volatile contexts and continuously adapted to them – regardless of the sector concerned. To this end, it is essential to have extremely good knowledge of the political, social and economic situation and to keep it under continuous analysis and assessment. If we work jointly with partners and local networks to monitor the context and our results, this fosters continuous learning and makes it easier to respond flexibly to changing framework conditions. In this way, we try to avoid unintended negative effects caused by the wrong choices of approaches or instruments.

— Choosing partners wisely

Implementation in highly fragile contexts calls for special attention to all the actors involved and their interests – most of all, to project partners and target groups. Wise selection of suitable partner actors is a distinguishing characteristic of an effective implementation

strategy, one which endeavours to secure the greatest possible acceptance and local embedding. To accomplish this, it is important to work in cooperation with civil society organisations as well as other, less formally organised grassroots groups such as local women's initiatives, youth groups, religious groups and authorities from the outset. The perspectives of non-state protagonists of violence such as vigilantes, neighbourhood watch groups, ex-combatant groups and rebel movements should also be borne in mind, for they can influence the success or failure of approaches.

— Thinking multisectorally

Projects in highly fragile contexts typically pursue a multisectoral approach. What this means is that the multifaceted challenges demand approaches that go beyond narrow sectoral boundaries and take a holistic view. Only this allows the possibility of a flexible and sometimes swift change of course. As an example, GIZ is implementing measures in Iraq to promote agriculture. Complementary employment promotion activities concentrate on occupational profiles along the agricultural value chain. At the same time, local administrations are being supported to anticipate potential conflicts over land and resources and to offer mechanisms for peaceful dispute resolution. This combination is intended to strengthen social cohesion at the local level in the long term.

“Continuous analysis and assessment of the risks of implementation is crucial to the success of projects in fragile contexts.”

— Creating structures

Linking short-term measures with structural elements is a key characteristic of implementation in highly fragile contexts. In Yemen, GIZ provided urgently needed fuel for water pumps to meet short-term needs for drinking water. Complementary training on pump maintenance brought together various communities who were dependent on the same water supply. With GIZ's help they organised not only the well-regulated operation of the pumps but also equitable distribution of the scarce resource of water. This built trust and established a mechanism the communities could also use to resolve other conflicting interests peacefully. Measures for responding to acute crises are based on providing humanitarian relief and thereby strengthening the population's resilience. Concrete help towards self-help is linked with long-term concepts that enable local administrations and civil society groups to become agents of development that is not only sustainable but also geared towards inclusion and crisis prevention.

— Keeping an eye on risks

If projects in fragile contexts are to succeed, it is vital to continuously analyse and assess the risks surrounding implementation. During the conception phase and in the course of implementation, every GIZ project is therefore reviewed to identify any risks affecting the achievement of objectives and

any avoidable unintended negative effects. Depending on the context, this work can be carried out in situ or – if the risks are too great – switched to remote management, which means implementing the projects from a base in another location, because protective steps must be taken swiftly whenever there is a threat to human life.

The COVID-19 pandemic and its social and economic consequences amplified fragility and its concomitant challenges in many countries by another order of magnitude. In no small part, this is why a systematic orientation of development policy approaches towards these fragile contexts will continue to be necessary in future. In the interests of the people living in the affected countries, it will remain crucial to keep up the ambitious search for solutions to overcome the structural causes of conflicts and inequality and to mobilise relevant partners in the political context. ■



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What non-state actors can do in fragile contexts – and what they cannot

One of the most difficult tasks of development cooperation is to deploy resources effectively in poorly governed and fragile countries. While on the one hand, the conditions in such contexts pose enormous challenges for successful implementation, on the other hand, broad sections of their populations are heavily reliant on external support. Under these conditions, a trend can be observed over the last few decades for donor country governments to be disproportionately reliant on non-state actors for the implementation of development policy measures.

As implementing agencies, non-state actors are still accountable to the donor agencies and governments that fund them. At the same time, they often operate more independently of precarious state structures in the partner country and have close links with local actors and vulnerable groups. This potentially helps with getting support through to where it is needed. For example, the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), has channelled antiretroviral therapy via non-state actors to over 13 million people and prevented over two million prenatal infections. The programme's local and non-state implementation structure has gained it broad acceptance at local level and thus increased its effectiveness. Not only that, but due to its clear and bounded remit, it also enjoys broad domestic policy support in the USA, which has been conducive to the ongoing financing of the programme.

Structural challenges

However, projects and programmes delivered by non-state actors can also entail structural

challenges. Vertical programmes such as PEPFAR, and the health centres financed by them, make little contribution to strengthening health system structures in the partner country and are more narrowly focused on outcomes in particular fields of activity. Other pressing health care problems that a health system ought to respond to, and that are beyond the scope of such focused programmes, are left unaddressed. Some critics go so far as to say that they create well-resourced parallel non-state structures, which are detrimental to the capacity development and legitimacy of government structures and can also provoke inequalities. The danger is that good staff will defect to better-paid jobs in the non-state sector and the population will come to perceive state facilities as inferior by comparison.

Clearly, then, in fragile contexts with weak statehood or precarious governance, the choice of the right development policy implementation instrument is typically challenging. On the one hand, measures by non-governmental organisations are often particularly effective. At the same time, their narrowly bounded effects are often associated with structural weaknesses, since measures of this kind can undermine sustainable and resilient state-building.

Neoliberal reforms versus corporatist traditions

My research also shows that the use of non-state organisations by donor governments is not influenced solely by the conditions in partner countries, but also by the donor country context. While donors such as the USA, the UK and Scandinavian countries

rely more heavily on non-state actors for implementation, this is not the case for donors such as France or Germany. The latter place more reliance on state implementation structures such as Germany's GIZ or KfW Development Bank.

In part, this sometimes striking difference goes back to neoliberal reforms in Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian countries during the 1980s and 1990s. These reforms were designed to scale back state implementation structures in domestic policy fields and transfer them to private actors. The same general trend found its way into development cooperation and humanitarian aid, where it was considered useful for countering criticism that development cooperation lacked efficiency and effectiveness. The implementation logic of these approaches targeted rather short-term measures which were limited but, for that very reason, more efficient. These were measures for which non-state implementation approaches seemed more appropriate without requiring top-level government authorities to relinquish strategic steering competence. In development cooperation, however, the disadvantage of this was that non-state implementation actors were ill-equipped, at best, to pursue more systemic – and harder-to-measure – outcomes and to promote sustainable state structures.

However, not all donor countries have undergone neoliberal reforms of the state to the same degree. Countries with stronger corporatist traditions such as Germany and France also reformed their development bureaucracies. Yet, the reform of the German development cooperation system in 2011

did not reduce the importance of state implementing organisations. As before, it still has implementation structures which pursue long-term systemic objectives and can, where appropriate, cooperate closely and on an equal footing with state actors in the partner country. In that respect, the existence of strong state implementation organisations should not be underestimated as a comparative advantage in the concert of international development cooperation.

In this context, the collapse of the Afghan regime is another indication that there is little alternative to cooperation with state actors in the long run. For while parallel non-state structures can be successful in their narrow fields of activity, they are not a viable means of strengthening state structures. Also implicit in this finding, once again, is the necessity for better coordination between donors in fragile states. Differences between development cooperation implementation structures as a result of domestic reforms must be taken into account in order to ensure a reasonably balanced and results-oriented range of provision in fragile states by both state and non-state implementation organisations. ■



Prof. Dr Simone Dietrich

Professor of Political Science and International Relations, University of Geneva, member of the Advisory Board of DEval

Natural language processing, georeferencing and fragility – where is German development cooperation being implemented in fragile contexts?

The core idea of the 2030 Agenda is to eliminate inequalities within and between countries. The “leave no one behind” principle demands that development measures should first reach those who are most affected by social exclusion, poverty and inequality. These people mainly live in countries and regions of the world which are not only less developed but often also affected by fragile statehood. Fragile contexts therefore merit particular attention.

Subnational variation calls for spatially disaggregated data

Although fragility is commonly understood as an attribute of nation states, territories within a country often exhibit different degrees of fragility. These regional disparities are usually associated with wide variations in living conditions. Moreover, local conditions exert a considerable influence on development work. But so far there have been no systematic studies of the extent to which factors that vary subnationally influence where development interventions are situated and how effective they are.

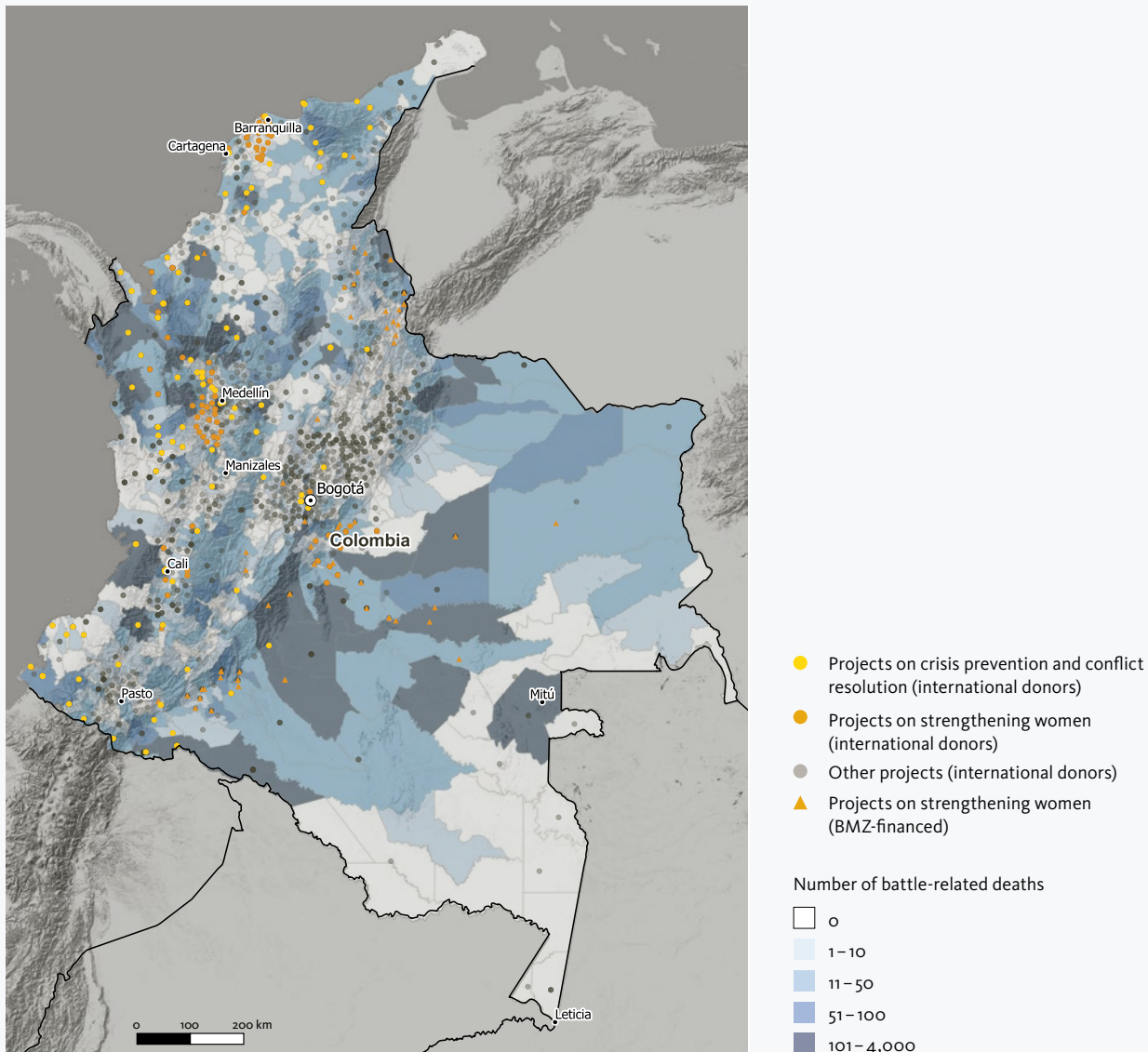
Spatially disaggregated analyses of German development cooperation usually foundered on the unavailability of subnationally disaggregated data, until recently. Progress is being made on this in the meantime with the help of natural language processing techniques. They make it possible to extract

location data from large volumes of unstructured text, such as project documentation, and assign GPS coordinates to the place identifiers. DEval evaluations are increasingly utilising these techniques in the aim of better accounting for spatial disparities and systematically analysing geographical patterns of development cooperation at levels below that of the national state.

Example: the gender-conflict nexus in Colombia

The DEval evaluation “Supporting Gender Equality in Post-conflict Contexts” (Brüntrup-Seidemann et al., 2021) examines the extent to which the processes followed by German development cooperation are appropriate for supporting gender equality and promoting peaceful and inclusive societies at the same time. Particularly relevant settings for this work at the gender-conflict nexus should be found in areas of conflict-affected countries, which often also have high levels of social inequality. Taking Colombia as an example, the evaluation therefore undertakes a subnational-level analysis of where BMZ-funded projects that jointly address these goals are located. It shows, in common with another, more extensive analysis of international development projects (Nawrotzki et al., 2022), that projects of this kind are being implemented in former conflict regions, where they are addressing

Project locations and battle-related deaths in Colombia



gender-specific needs. So these projects are indeed strategically situated in former conflict areas despite the more challenging conditions.

Innovative techniques

The multi-country DEval evaluation of “German Development Policy in Fragile Contexts” (Wencker and Verspohl, 2019) used natural language processing techniques to perform a synthesis and georeferencing of evaluation reports from GIZ and KfW Development Bank. The analysis shows that projects in states with the general capacity to ensure the provision of basic services to the population are more likely to achieve their

objectives and achieve sustained positive outcomes. Nevertheless, it finds that projects implemented in areas with a weakened state monopoly on force are no less successful than projects in less fragile areas.

In summary, geographically disaggregated analyses allow researchers to gain otherwise rare insights into the location of development projects and their results in correlation with their spatial context. Findings show that both German and international development cooperation do indeed implement projects in fragile contexts, and hence reach the groups that they can least afford to leave behind. ■



Verena Gantner
DEval Evaluator
(until 12/2022)



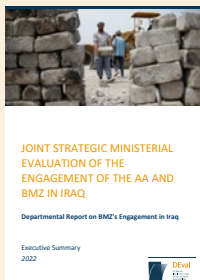
Dr. Thomas Wencker
DEval Team Leader

➤ Evaluations and studies by DEval on development cooperation in fragile contexts

Joint Strategic Ministerial Evaluation of the Engagement by the Federal Foreign Office (AA) and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) in Iraq (2022)

The aims of the German and international engagement in Iraq were, in concert with the Iraqi government, to end the reign of terror of the so-called Islamic State (IS) and to contribute to the country's stability. The work contributed by the AA and the BMZ supported the German Federal Government's overarching objectives in Iraq. The two ministries' engagement in the country was the subject of a joint ministerial evaluation, for which DEval led the study of the BMZ's engagement from 2014 to 2019. With regard to the short- and medium-term objectives, particularly given the volatile context in Iraq, the assessment of the engagement was mostly positive. It largely succeeded in making a significant contribution to the alleviation of acute hardship and the reconstruction of basic infrastructure. There was, however, a need for improvement in the implementation of the HDP nexus, and of the interministerial cooperation necessary to realise it. The medium- and long-term effectiveness and the sustainability of the engagement were also found to be limited.

– full report only available in German –



Executive
Summary



Opinion Monitor for Development Policy 2021. Media Content, Information, Appeals and Their Impact on Public Opinion (2021)

The DEval Opinion Monitor 2021 gives development policy decision makers feedback on the German general public's attitudes to development policy. In doing so, it supplies them with evidence-based guidance which allows them to shape the policy field and public communications on the basis of sound data. It pays particular attention to the public's expectations of development cooperation with due regard for state fragility in the partner countries. The study also explores how public opinion on development policy and on specific development policy measures developed during the coronavirus pandemic. The Opinion Monitor 2022 follows on from the analysis of fragile statehood and investigates public attitudes towards different ways in which development cooperation responds to autocratisation tendencies in the partner countries. The Opinion Monitor 2024 will have an emphasis on exploring public opinion on development policy in relation to the war in Ukraine.



Effectiveness of German Development Cooperation in Dealing with Conflict-Driven Migration Crises. The Partnerships for Prospects Initiative (P4P) in the Middle East (2021)

The Partnerships for Prospects Initiative in the Middle East (P4P) was launched in 2016 as a contribution to creating prospects for refugees in the countries bordering Syria. It aims to build a bridge from short-term assistance to long-term structure-building measures for the largest possible numbers of vulnerable people. The evaluation's key finding is that the effectiveness of the job-creation measures of the P4P is mainly temporary, and in the first instance, material. There was also evidence of potentially lasting social outcomes such as the alleviation of social tensions. In view of the sustained crisis context, it was recommended that the P4P should continue to target as many people in need as possible, and should combine this with the construction or upkeep of infrastructure since this is also of long-term benefit to the host countries.

– full report only available in German –



Executive Summary



Building Bridges Between International Humanitarian and Development Responses to Forced Migration (2018)

This literature review, done in collaboration with the Swedish Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA), addressed the question of how early-crisis humanitarian assistance and subsequent long-term development cooperation can be more effectively linked as responses to migration crises. The migration into Syria's neighbouring countries forced by the Syrian crisis was analysed as a case study. The study shows that divergent principles, operational structures and objectives result in a divide between humanitarian assistance and the longer-term orientation of development cooperation. With regard to the Syrian crisis, it was found that the two organisations experienced difficulties in cooperating more closely due to their different working cultures and an element of mistrust, albeit that examples of very good institutional linkages also existed. It was recommended to generate a Theory of Change for such linkages and to conduct case studies on additional countries as well as evaluations of cooperation between humanitarian assistance and development cooperation.



Supporting Gender Equality in Post-conflict Contexts (2021)

This evaluation examined the extent to which the processes of German bilateral official development cooperation are suited to the purpose of supporting gender equality in post-conflict contexts. The evaluation came to the conclusion that the procedures for gender mainstreaming are well suited to this purpose in principle, and individual projects were achieving relevant effects. In practice, however, it was found that the methods and analytical tools were rarely used in such a way that the projects systematically addressed the gender-conflict nexus. This meant that some of the potential for generating effects conducive to gender equality was forfeited. The evaluation therefore formulated concrete recommendations on how the BMZ's steering and the work of the state implementing organisations could be improved, how the structures and processes of official development cooperation could be refined, and how the necessary knowledge and the relevant skills could be consolidated and strengthened.



German Development Cooperation in Fragile Contexts (2019)

This evaluation supports decision makers in adapting development cooperation to the outset conditions in fragile countries and in basing their decision making on suitable indices as well as other factors. The evaluation identified two approaches in German development cooperation with fragile states: peacebuilding and the establishment of state institutions. One conclusion of the evaluation was that the institutional specialisation within the BMZ is appropriate, and that the allocation of funds largely follows the BMZ's strategy. In terms of the strategic orientation of German development cooperation, one of the central challenges is that of identifying suitable local partners for successful development cooperation in fragile contexts. The mobility of evaluators and the quality of monitoring and evaluation systems at the project level are highlighted as key issues to address in order to improve evaluation quality in fragile contexts even further.



A Review of Evaluative Work of German Development Cooperation in Afghanistan (2014)

The review takes stock of the types, the scope, the quality, and the usefulness of evaluations of Germany's development cooperation engagement in Afghanistan. It also issues recommendations for a possible evaluation programme to support evidence-based shaping of the BMZ country portfolio in Afghanistan. The results showed the quality of the evaluation reports to be relatively good and their findings were being used at project level by German development cooperation actors. However, these evaluations concentrated on outputs and barely supplied empirical evidence for the effects of projects at the outcome or impact levels. Thus, few conclusions could be drawn about the degree to which German development cooperation's overarching objectives in Afghanistan were achieved. It was therefore recommended to resolve the fragmentation of the current monitoring and evaluation system by incorporating an integrative evaluation approach, and to carry out external and independent evaluations for the completion of the internal system.





EVALUATION

Evaluation enables evidence-based policy design

In fragile contexts it is often difficult to plan and carry out evaluations, although they are just as indispensable for learning and accountability there as anywhere else. What evaluation approaches are the most promising for fragile contexts, and what instruments are helpful for gathering evidence under more challenging conditions?

EVALUATION

Jörg Faust and Helge Roxin: Evaluating development cooperation in fragile contexts

Fragile contexts give rise to numerous challenges for the planning, implementation and utilisation of evaluations, and these can adversely affect their usefulness, accuracy and fairness. However, the evaluation community has developed practices in order to address these challenges.

Christoph Zürcher: Impact measurement can also work in fragile contexts

The University of Ottawa professor advocates ambitious and rigorous impact evaluations in highly fragile contexts. Country-based systematic reviews are too seldom undertaken, he argues, and sees particular potential in the innovative collection and interlinkage of data.

Marion Krämer, Lea Jechel and Birte Snilstveit:

Rigorous evidence on building peaceful societies

DEval and the research institution zie have developed evidence gap maps that give ready access to relevant studies on development cooperation. The evidence gap map on “Building Peaceful Societies” is a visualisation of the available studies on resilience-building measures in contexts and states affected by fragility.

Martin Noltze and Mascha Rauschenbach: Strengthening resilience in fragile contexts – a geospatial impact evaluation in Mali

A DEval evaluation shows how rigorous geospatial impact evaluations can deliver reliable results even in conflict-affected contexts.

They are particularly appropriate for filling evidence gaps on the consequences of climate change in conflict-affected contexts.

Evaluating development cooperation in fragile contexts

The evaluation of development cooperation measures in fragile states is beset with numerous challenges, which have implications for various standards of evaluation quality. DEval's experience helps to illustrate where the most relevant problems occur and what solutions – such as adapted procedures or methods – are available.

Evaluations are an instrument for evidence-based policy design and implementation. They generate practice-relevant findings about programmes and policies, give stimulus for strategic steering and implementation based on lessons learned, and strengthen transparency and accountability. However, fulfilling these evaluation functions is especially demanding in fragile states which have substantial deficits on at least one of the three core dimensions of statehood (authority, capacity or legitimacy, see Chapter 1).

1. Challenges in all phases of the evaluation process

The special demands of evaluations in fragile contexts range across all phases of the evaluation process, from conception and planning through implementation to utilisation of the findings. During the **planning phase**, the foundations are laid for a sound and useful evaluation, and the evaluation subject, evaluation questions and evaluation design are defined. But evaluation planning is made all the more challenging by the limited time resources of the actors implementing measures in fragile contexts, the often high political sensitivity of the

questions and the uncertainty about the dynamics developing on the ground.

At least equally challenging is the **implementation phase**, when data is collected, analysed and synthesised and the evaluation report and recommendations are drafted. In conflict-affected contexts, access to vulnerable target groups is harder, data collection is subject to constraints, and the actors' perspectives are often strongly biased by ongoing or past conflicts. Particular prudence is called for to ensure that data collection will not have an amplification effect on the conflict. In addition, low state capacity on the partner side is often associated with constraints on data collection and data quality, and hampers cooperation with state actors on the ground.

Finally, the **utilisation phase**, which focuses on communicating the findings of an evaluation and implementing its recommendations, is also subject to particular challenges. The utility of concrete recommendations can quickly be superseded due to the dynamically changing context. The heavy workloads of those tasked with implementing measures mean that they often have little capacity to take up and implement recommendations, at least while crises are ongoing. Moreover, in crisis-affected contexts they must often react especially swiftly and pragmatically, and will have little time to wait for evaluation findings. Whenever evaluation findings are disseminated, there is a risk that they will be instrumentalised by a conflict party. Evaluations on fragile states often also contain sensitive findings which draw attention to trade-offs, under-resourcing,

failings of coordination and limitations of civil engagement. Constructive acceptance of such findings requires a strong culture of institutional learning among those who are being evaluated.

All these potential drawbacks can lessen the quality of evaluations in fragile states. They may do so by undermining the realisation of standards of good evaluation and by amplifying pre-existing tensions between individual standards. For instance, the accuracy of findings and hence the usefulness of evaluations will be limited if data collection on the ground is unexpectedly challenging or even impossible. If evaluations of similar interventions in different countries choose different focuses because of difficult framework conditions, this can interfere with the comparability of findings, which is detrimental to cross-project learning. The integrity of evaluations can also suffer if, for example,

- they violate the “do no harm” principle,
- their independence is called into question because those commissioning the research wish to avoid independent analysis of sensitive questions, or
- access to the field is funnelled by local actors in a way that results in systematic bias in the collection of information.

State fragility can also amplify tensions between individual evaluation standards. One such standard is transparency, which is rightly pursued throughout the stages of analysis, assessing the evidence and deriving recommendations. However, transparency can be misused if parties to the conflict instrumentalise the

information to further their own interests in the conflict. In a similar way, the standard of striving for the utmost accuracy often comes into particular tension with that of timely usability of the findings in contexts of fragility.

2. Adaptations in evaluation practice

The manifold demands imposed by high-quality evaluation work in fragile states have also generated innovations and adaptations. Evaluation is more institutionalised in development cooperation than in many other policy fields. It draws on criteria and process standards that have been tried and tested internationally, a fully formed repertoire of methods and several decades of experience of continuing to work even when conditions are especially difficult and dynamic. Back in 2019, for example, a study by DEval found that evaluations of measures by GIZ and KfW Development Bank in fragile contexts are not of lower quality overall than in non-fragile contexts (Wencker and Verspohl, 2019). At the institutional level, an expression of this fundamentally positive trend are the BMZ’s evaluation guidelines, which came into force in 2021 (BMZ, 2021). These policy guidelines on evaluation refer to the challenges of evaluations in fragile states and emphasise the importance of inter-organisational evaluations at the interfaces of humanitarian assistance and structural development cooperation. Finally, human rights-based evaluations with their focus on especially vulnerable groups and rights-holders are becoming increasingly important.

DEval standards for evaluations



Source: own presentation.

DEval tries to fulfil the high expectations and requirements of evaluations under the conditions of state fragility in accordance with the outlined quality criteria.

This is manifested inter alia in

- the employment of methods and technologies such as text mining and the increased use of geodata,
- interdisciplinary teams with high conflict sensitivity, intercultural experience and with gender and human rights competence,
- more flexible planning and implementation of evaluations in conflict-affected contexts accompanied by ongoing context analyses,
- adjusted process standards in the case of joint ministerial evaluations, and
- virtual forms of collaboration with local consultants.

The above-mentioned adaptations to evaluation work in fragile contexts were to some extent accelerated by the challenging conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.1 Planning phase

In the planning and conception phase, important parameters are defined which have a high degree of influence over the quality and validity of an evaluation.

Tasks include specifying the subject of an evaluation, formulating the evaluation questions, developing the (methodological) design, scheduling, and resource planning. Conception and planning ideally take place after consultation with important stakeholders and addressees of an evaluation, because decisions made during this phase have considerable consequences for the evaluation's relevance, accuracy and usefulness.

In fragile contexts, compliance with important evaluation standards may be jeopardised already in the planning phase.

Especially in the case of strategic evaluations involving multiple stakeholders, comparatively complex development impacts and hence multi-causal correlations, fragile contexts pose a range of planning challenges, such as

- planning for the on-time completion of an evaluation while developing an evaluation design appropriate to the complexity of the subject matter,
- realistic planning of access to and involvement of vulnerable groups and local stakeholders; and
- ensuring impartiality and independence during the conception phase.

Possible modes of access in conflict or post-conflict regions can change rapidly in fragile states – with knock-on effects on the chances of generating empirical evidence as originally planned. This is illustrated by

DEval case studies in Colombia, Pakistan, Jordan, Iraq and Turkey. As early as the planning phase, it is therefore necessary to consider that dynamic changes induced by the conflict may require adjustments to the selection of primary data sources. This may be the case if the security situation changes or if only a few remaining implementing actors, partner-government representatives or local contacts are available to be interviewed. During the evaluation of the P4P initiative, for example, the evaluation team faced the challenge that a survey planned in the countries bordering Syria could not be conducted as planned due to sudden changes in the context and the resulting burden on development cooperation personnel on the ground. Follow-up surveys of refugees also proved difficult, because most of them do not have a fixed place of residence for the longer term and are therefore more difficult to track down (Roxin et al., 2021).

For evaluations in fragile contexts, then, it is necessary to strike a balance between planning flexibility and planning reliability. One attempt to solve this problem consists of building alternative survey dates and methods into the planning and increasing process agility. By adopting an overarching planning framework, adaptable planning modules can be fitted into different data collection scenarios (Brüntrup-Seidemann et al., 2021; Hartmann et al., 2022; Roxin et al., 2021). In the case of a strategic evaluation, however, such agile scenarios are made extra demanding by the complexity of the object of evaluation and the diversity of influencing factors and stakeholders. They require

continuous monitoring of the context and coordination with the actors on the ground and relevant development organisations (e.g. Brüntrup-Seidemann et al., 2021; Hartmann et al., 2022; Roxin et al., 2021). One example was the evaluation of Germany's civil engagement in Afghanistan. Having been added to DEval's evaluation programme at the beginning of 2021, it had to be adapted to the new context after the Taliban seized power in summer 2021.

In planning which methods to use, care must be taken that methodological ambitions to produce findings of the utmost validity do not take precedence over timely utilisation of those findings.

It is therefore important to consult existing (rigorous) evidence in the form of evidence gap maps or systematic reviews on similar kinds of questions before deciding on time-consuming impact studies. That being said, there is still a great need for demanding evaluations of this kind in the context of fragile statehood (Sonnenfeld et al., 2020). The evaluation of the cash-for-work approach under the P4P (Roxin et al., 2021) is an example that illustrates the tension between the goal of presenting timely findings (usefulness) and the need for findings to be sufficiently accurate and valid to inform important decisions. In this case, discussion with the users of the evaluation about the available knowledge and the existing evidence gaps that exist – caused partly by the identified gaps in monitoring – were conducive to securing their acceptance for the implementation of time-consuming impact studies.

Access to vulnerable groups is often difficult in fragile contexts. Consequently, it may not always be possible to collect important data on human rights and gender.

Even in the planning phase of an evaluation, it is important to heed the “do no harm” principle and to ensure that information from or about vulnerable groups is treated confidentially. A human rights-sensitive evaluation must address this by reviewing both the accessibility and the potential identifiability of interviewees on the ground, taking special care to protect vulnerable risk groups. Whenever such groups are at risk of reprisals for giving interviews in the context of an evaluation, they must be excluded from the data collection process if need be. Access to vulnerable groups is often even more difficult in fragile contexts, which means that important data for human rights-oriented and gender-transformative components of an evaluation cannot always be collected. The DEval evaluation on “Supporting Gender Equality in Post-conflict Contexts” (Brüntrup-Seidemann et al., 2021) demonstrates that the incorporation of project documents such as (post-) conflict analyses and gender analyses early in the project cycle can help to prevent the exclusion of relevant groups starting from the planning phase, not least to enable their concerns and experiences

to be voiced in the evaluation. Findings also show that involving project managers in planning is key to securing reasonable access for field studies in the locality (Hartmann et al., 2022; Roxin et al., 2021).

Finally, it is necessary to ensure the independence of an evaluation from an early point in the planning phase so that it can be designed to obtain answers even to questions of a sensitive nature. Civil engagement in fragile states is sometimes a matter of public controversy. It is fraught with risks of ineffectiveness, requires high levels of inter-organisational coordination and is confronted with complex tensions and trade-offs. During the planning phase, the independence of an evaluation is therefore important during the planning phase primarily to ensure that the object of evaluation and the evaluation questions can be defined independently and appropriately to the subject matter. Accordingly, evaluators should decide on the evaluation questions and the methodological design and should also be able to influence the allocation of adequate resources to ensure that a constructively critical evaluation can be conducted.

2.2 Implementation phase

The subsequent implementation phase of an evaluation includes the collection, analysis and synthesis of data and the drafting of an evaluation report with recommendations. The task during this phase is to follow the evaluation design in order to answer the evaluation questions as accurately as possible and to derive conclusions, ratings and recommendations that are transparently clear. Here, the quality criteria of particular relevance are the accuracy, transparency and integrity of the evaluation. Integrity is manifested the independent and fair assessment of the evidence and in the ethical behaviour of the evaluation team towards all parties involved.

An obvious problem is that fragility results in poor availability of data and limits access to target groups, parties to the conflict, local government representatives and development cooperation experts. A comprehensive DEval study on “German Development Cooperation in Fragile Contexts” (Wencker and Verspohl, 2019) cites restrictions on the mobility of evaluators as a key problem affecting the implementation of evaluations. It may mean that case selection has to be guided by which regions or people can feasibly be reached rather than which ones are likely to be of greatest value for answering the evaluation questions. Consequently the inclusion of relevant data in the analysis may be limited or subject to bias, which can compromise accuracy, objectivity and fairness.

Against this background, a number of DEval evaluations recommend improving the monitoring of measures in fragile contexts, not only to support better steering of the programmes but also to facilitate data

analysis and interpretation during the course of evaluations. In particular, evaluations recommend that German development cooperation should set up an improved monitoring system for human rights, gender equality and inclusion and improve the quality of project-specific indicators (e.g. Brüntrup-Seidemann et al., 2021; Polak et al., 2021). The resources invested in monitoring are seldom adequate for the specific conditions of fragile contexts (Wencker and Verspohl, 2019).

Fragile statehood limits the scope for cooperating with state actors on data collection in the partner country.

Inadequate data infrastructure and evaluation skills are expressions of poor capacity. Not only does this inhibit state actors on the ground from supporting evaluations; it also limits collaboration with them during evaluations. If low political legitimacy and a limited monopoly on the use of force are added to this mix, the scope for cooperation at eye-level and partner orientation can be seriously limited. Whether in Turkey, Iraq, Afghanistan, Colombia or Guatemala, although not always to the same degree, various DEval evaluations were confronted with the fact that there were only limited possibilities for cooperation on an equal footing with national or local government actors due to low capacities or their lack of ownership of sustainable development.

When the mobility of evaluators is restricted due to heightened security requirements, the result is often that field surveys are facilitated by “guided” access.

Constraints on the evaluators’ freedom of movement can contribute to a bias in the data towards the interests of those who organise this access locally – state actors or implementing organisations, for example.

It is therefore necessary to keep such access corridors and the responsible gatekeepers under critical review, and perhaps also to explore options for data triangulation via secondary data and to reflect on the data-collection situation and possible biases in consultation with the local consultants (Brüntrup-Seidemann et al., 2021).

Different technical solutions can at least partially compensate for the difficulties of access in fragile contexts.

In the meantime – accelerated by the COVID 19 pandemic – virtual access to local stakeholders, implementing organisations and consultants has now become a firm component of the data collection and assessment process for evaluations in fragile contexts. In cases ranging from the joint ministerial evaluation of Germany’s civil engagement in Iraq to DEval country portfolio reviews and other evaluations, exchange with stakeholders on the ground, data collection and the management of consultants is often done virtually – in some cases to an extent that more than compensates for access restrictions. Thus, virtual access options are often employed to good effect before or after the actual field phase.

Biased assimilation of information is also a fundamental problem when actors have strongly crisis- or conflict-influenced perspectives. In situations where extreme deprivation or violent conflict exist(ed), highly subjective views regarding the causes and the actors involved are the norm. Evaluators can prevent such bias by means of particularly judicious triangulation, reviewing local consultants’ attitudes to conflict, and regular critical self-review on their own normative

positioning. However, the emphasis should be on establishing access to the experiences and perspectives of the vulnerable groups which are particularly affected by fragility.

Because of the mobility restrictions and highly subjective views of many actors, the combination or integration of different methods is especially important in evaluations in fragile contexts.

Examples of methods that can be combined are systematic surveys with control groups for rigorous impact measurements, information from group discussions and aggregated impact narratives from the viewpoints of affected persons (for example, Roxin et al., 2021). Other methods that do not entail spending time in the field include document analysis with automated language processing techniques (text mining) and the use of remote sensing data (Wencker and Verspohl, 2019). The ideal is to combine different methods with one another systematically to strengthen the robustness of the evidence generated.

As is clear from the articles on Colombia and Mali in this report (see pages 60–61 and 87–89), and indeed from the DEval evaluation synthesis on “German Development Cooperation in Fragile Contexts”, methods such as automated language processing or the use of geodata have opened up new possibilities for evaluation. Such techniques, which make use of artificial intelligence, compensate at least partially for the restricted access on the ground and make it possible to perform allocation and synthesis analyses (Wencker and Verspohl, 2019). The two types of methods complement one another: methods using automatic language processing can help

to pinpoint project locations geographically (DEval, 2021). Using remote sensing data, it is then possible to carry out analyses on the basis of geospatially precise data and gain impact-relevant insights on questions such as these: are development cooperation instruments actually being put to their intended uses in post-conflict regions (Nawrotzki et al., 2022)? What effects do climate change adaptation measures have on the intensity of conflict in fragile contexts (see pages 87–89)? Or, which dimension of fragile statehood correlates with especially high or low project ratings (Wencker and Verspohl, 2019)?

Another major challenge for the data-collection phase is that of honouring the overarching development cooperation principle of “do no harm”) appropriately.

Evaluations in fragile contexts always carry some risk of causing harm. In countries with repressive governments or in violent, conflict-affected contexts, a particularly careful assessment must be made of whether respondents might experience discrimination or even be endangered as a consequence of an evaluation. Care must also be taken not to cause further stress to traumatised individuals or groups by involving them in an evaluation in such contexts as post-conflict situations (Brüntrup-Seidemann et al., 2021) or forced migration crises (Roxin et al., 2021; Hartmann et al., 2022).

Accordingly, evaluators are taking increasing care to carry out the collection and subsequent processing of data in compliance with ethical principles. The most obvious example in this regard are the events in Afghanistan: particularly since the

Taliban seized power in 2021, evaluations should not contain any information that compromises local actors. Likewise, when presenting anecdotal evidence to illustrate causal mechanisms, it is important to ensure that it does not disclose any local sources, since this compromises the safety of vulnerable groups such as ethnic minorities, women or opposition groups from civil society and exposes them to risks. This can be prevented by adhering carefully to anonymisation or pseudonymisation and by practising good quality assurance and the multiple-eyes principle when writing evaluation reports. Principles of human rights-based evaluations, such as those applied in the DEval evaluations on “Human Rights in German Development Policy” (Polak et al., 2021) and “Supporting Gender Equality in Post-conflict Contexts” (Brüntrup-Seidemann et al., 2021), provide important guidance here.

Besides the challenges already described in relation to the collection and processing of data, the assessments to be undertaken in the implementation phase of an evaluation are also highly demanding.

Assessments and the recommendations based on them are bound by the principle of fairness. The realisation of this principle is especially challenging for evaluators in contexts that are normatively highly charged due to violent conflicts and immediate distress. As elucidated in the previous chapters, difficult contextual conditions and limited resources cause tensions between the short- and medium-term objectives of humanitarian assistance and transitional development assistance and the long-term objectives of structural development cooperation.

Evaluations in fragile states are faced with demanding assessment issues regarding difficult framework conditions on the ground and the interplay between development, foreign and security policy.

Concerning the “shared” responsibility of development cooperation and state actors on the ground, a DEval evaluation synthesis from 2016 shows that poorer sustainability ratings correlate with low ratings from state implementing organisations on the criteria of partner-country ownership and partners’ capacities (Noltze et al., 2018). The limitations of structural measures caused by a lack of ownership, low legitimacy and a local executive with a defective monopoly on force are equally evident from DEval’s strategic evaluations of the P4P approach in the Middle

East and Germany’s civil engagement in Iraq (Roxin et al., 2021; Hartmann et al., 2021). Finally, such contexts also lack the enabling foundations for the joint conception of an evaluation with the partner government, where recommendations should be formulated for both parties in keeping with the effectiveness-related principle of mutual accountability.

In this respect, evaluations must assess whether development cooperation actors’ assumptions about likely changes in the context prior to beginning or extending projects were sufficiently realistic as a basis for formulating ambitious long-term objectives.

DEval has made several recommendations on weighing these considerations, to the effect that the levels of ambition and choice of strategy in fragile contexts should be examined critically if the necessary framework conditions for structural measures are not in place or the necessary resources are not available. It is even more of a challenge to make such an assessment when work remits are divided up between development cooperation and foreign and security policy, and development cooperation is allocated responsibility for structural measures even though other two policy fields have not (been able to) put the necessary framework conditions in place. In the case of joint ministerial and cross-government evaluations, it is therefore important to take account of the different intervention logics of the respective policy fields and to consider the interactions between the measures in each policy field.

2.3 Utilisation phase

To what extent evaluations contribute to evidence-based policy design depends on what use is made of the knowledge they generate and how the addressees of the evaluations implement their recommendations. Publication of the reports extends the group of evaluation users beyond the direct addressees of the recommendations to include parliamentarians, actors in partner countries, academics, a broader audience of development professionals, and the evaluation community. All these users can draw on evaluation evidence selectively or comprehensively and use it in accordance with their own concerns. The narrower group to whom recommendations are addressed encompasses ministries, state implementing organisations and civil society actors. Recommendations should be focused on practical and relevant problems and practicable for the addressees within their scope for action. Binding implementation planning, transparent monitoring of how recommendations have actually been implemented, and improved access to practice-, gender- and human rights-based knowledge about fragile contexts are all conducive to achieving this.

A potential limitation on the utilisation of evaluations in fragile states is the tension between transparency and the “do no harm” principle. Although the publication of evaluation reports – especially those with an overarching, strategic perspective – is advisable as a general principle, it does require evaluators to review

There is tension between transparency and the “do no harm” principle when carrying out evaluations in fragile contexts. When publishing an evaluation about fragile contexts, care must be taken that the persons and organisations mentioned in the evaluation will not be harmed. The data security and anonymity of respondents must always be ensured, and the workload of doing so must be built into calculations.

the published data with particular sensitivity to ensure that persons or organisations mentioned in the evaluations do not come to harm during violent conflicts. This happened, for example, after the Taliban took power in Afghanistan in 2021. In its efforts to locate possible “collaborators”, the Taliban regime searched through project documents, and possibly also publicly accessible evaluations, for personal data.

To realise the “do no harm” principle in the course of evaluations on fragile states, more effort than usual must be invested in ensuring data security and the anonymity of respondents. An example of this is the evaluation on “Supporting Gender Equality in Post-conflict Contexts” (Brüntrup-Seidemann et al., 2021). Prior to publication, illustrative impact narratives had to go through several quality review cycles in order to exclude potential risks to participants in German development cooperation projects. As a result of these checks, some narratives

were left out of the publication. At project level, in some cases it is even necessary to refrain from publishing full reports at all. This can be the case with projects involving opposition civil society groups in authoritarian states if, due to a tightly defined object of evaluation, the evaluation report cannot guarantee the anonymity of potentially endangered persons or organisations. This is a common issue for political foundations carrying out democracy-promotion measures in autocracies, for instance.

Conflict dynamics and framework conditions in fragile states can change rapidly, which has direct ramifications for the learning needs of addressees and the accuracy of evaluation findings and recommendations. Should framework conditions change on the ground, the actors implementing development cooperation must react. There are, however, limits on how far evaluations can be adapted without collecting additional data and causing further delays. Consequently, evidence from strategic evaluations is not always available to inform the response to new and acute needs for action and learning. Other evidence-generating formats such as rapid appraisals (short studies with more flexible processes) may then be the more suitable instrument. In fragile states, however, strategic evaluations in particular are not primarily geared towards immediate usefulness on the ground, but are usually intended to generate cross-project findings that are applicable to a variety of contexts. This makes them more useful for long-term, cross-project, and in some cases also inter-organisational purposes.

If the anticipated usefulness of an evaluation changes during the evaluation process, in some circumstances the evaluation process can be adapted to better serve the addressees' interests. In the DEval evaluation on the effectiveness of German development cooperation in dealing with conflict-driven migration crises (Roxin et al., 2021), the evaluation team broadened the spectrum of methods it had originally planned. Since the BMZ had a strong need for maximally robust impact measurements of its cash-for-work approaches, the evaluation team made additional use of time-intensive, quasi-experimental methods of impact measurement. Although this meant accepting delays to the original schedule, the findings were perceived as particularly useful for the further development of such approaches to social protection in the context of forced migration crises.

A final challenge is that of feeding hard-to-communicate evidence into decision-making processes. This issue arises when dealing with authoritarian regimes in conflict-affected contexts, for example. If the implementation of recommendations depends on holding a successful dialogue on sensitive issues with an authoritarian regime, those recommendations will be difficult to implement. One recommendation aimed at effective alleviation of the plight of refugees in Syria's neighbouring states (Roxin et al., 2021) was to involve the Turkish government: to counter the issue of violent acts committed against Syrian refugee children by Turkish youths, it proposed establishing anonymous complaint mechanisms that were not

When decision makers engage with difficult evaluation findings and monitor the implementation steps of an evaluations' recommendations, it evidence-based policy-making and, ultimately, more effective development cooperation.

channelled exclusively through Turkish authorities. To this end, German development cooperation was recommended to engage in a critical dialogue.

These difficulties around the successful communication of evaluation evidence are exacerbated by the lesser reach of development cooperation in fragile states with a limited monopoly on force and/or very low legitimacy. Both civil engagement and explicitly structural development cooperation measures are often risky from the viewpoint of effectiveness. However, the risk-laden nature of such engagement is difficult to convey to the policy sphere: while long-term structural development cooperation is often called for within the (domestic) policy debate, there is little acceptance of the high risk that such engagement will not be effective.

To encourage the policy sphere to engage more intensively with evaluations that address these challenges, it should be

stressed that they are independent and that implementation planning and independent monitoring are mandatory. For if there are clear rules stating that decision makers must address the recommendations from evaluations, document the steps in implementation and have these reviewed, the response to difficult evaluation findings will improve. This is good for evidence-based policy design and hence also for effective development cooperation. ■



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Impact measurement can also work in fragile contexts

What impacts do development interventions make? Finding a reliable answer to this question is never easy, but in fragile countries it is particularly resource-intensive. Often the security situation makes field access impossible, there is no reliable demographic data, and international actors struggle hard to understand the local context. Nevertheless, in highly fragile contexts more than others it is important to identify the intended and unintended effects of development measures and to understand the underlying causal mechanisms. Often these are contexts of lawless violence, which can embolden non-state actors to use force for their own ends. There is then a far higher risk that development cooperation measures will either be completely ineffective or even make the situation worse.

Ineffective or weakly effective measures give rise to high opportunity costs. They tie up funding that could have been invested in effective projects in other locations. These costs are ultimately borne by another population elsewhere that misses out on a water supply project, for example.

— Negative effects

However, it is negative effects that are especially problematic. For instance, resources from donors might entrench or ignite distributional struggles between ethnic groups. The legitimacy of the state can be further undermined if the population gains the impression that state officials are enriching themselves from development projects, or if cooperation takes place only with partners from civil society so that parallel structures are created (see pages 58–59).

In addition, local rulers can “tax” development cooperation measures, meaning that, directly or indirectly, development organisations have to pay protection money to be able to implement their projects at all.

— Minimising risks

To minimise these risks, even in fragile states it is imperative to evaluate the effects of interventions as well as possible. The following four measures may help.

1. Despite all the impediments, in almost all cases it is possible to carry out rigorous evaluations. For example, a meta-analysis of international evaluation activities in Afghanistan shows that development organisations conducted 32 rigorous evaluations in the country between 2008 and 2018. Of course this is still far too few relative to the total funding flowing into Afghanistan. At the same time, the experience they represent demonstrates that methodologically demanding impact evaluations are indeed possible in highly fragile contexts. The bulk of this impact measurement was carried out in cooperation with research institutions, which illustrates the high – and, unfortunately, still often unutilised – potential of cooperation between development organisations and research in the field of rigorous impact evaluation (see pages 84–86).
2. Rather than undertaking complex impact measurement, it is always possible to conduct less demanding performance audits. These examine how a project was managed, whether the intended outputs were delivered, and whether it is at least

plausible that impacts could have been achieved. For example, US performance audits established that many US cooperation projects were ineffective because they did not even achieve the intended objectives at output level.

3. There are innovative approaches to data collection (see pages 60–61) such as a database of German development cooperation in Afghanistan that records all the outputs of German projects in conjunction with georeferencing data. Also operated by German development cooperation, the Risk Management Office issued local conflict analyses, which were prepared by international and local experts on the ground and regularly updated. Meanwhile, representative surveys continued to be conducted at district level. By synthesising data from these three data sources, it is possible to draw conclusions about trends and effects of development cooperation.
4. Another instrument that is very helpful but, unfortunately, still far too seldom used is the country-specific systematic review, which is a cross-donor summary of the available evaluation evidence. Systematic reviews identify all the evaluations in a fragile country that satisfy certain criteria, such as language, year of publication and methodological quality, and evaluate them in relation to certain content-based criteria. Systematic country reviews of this kind provide an objective, transparent and replicable summary of everything that is known about the effectiveness of development cooperation in a fragile country. They are an effective and

necessary corrective to anecdotal findings and dogmatic wishful thinking, and support coordination and the division of work between different donors, which is often especially demanding in fragile contexts.

Example: meta-analysis on Afghanistan

A prominent example of such a country review is the meta-analysis on Afghanistan commissioned by the BMZ in 2020, which takes 148 studies into consideration. The analysis found that interventions in the fields of health, education, water and livelihoods were somewhat effective. Measures on good governance, women's rights and stabilisation very seldom showed any effect, however. On that evidence, development cooperation organisations should only be able to implement projects in such difficult fields if they can substantiate why their projects would be better and more effective than all the other ineffective projects to date. Moreover, they should only implement them as pilots initially, flanked with a solid monitoring and evaluation system.

Because country-based systematic reviews summarise the experience of all donors in a given context, they can also strengthen multi-donor accountability and learning processes. It would therefore be desirable if the international donor community undertook to produce systematic reviews for all fragile contexts on a regular basis. Especially in the light of recent developments in Afghanistan and Mali, this pragmatic and low-cost instrument should be used considerably more often and at an earlier stage, especially in fragile states. ■



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Rigorous evidence on building peaceful societies

When designing measures for German and international development cooperation in fragile contexts, political decision makers and development practitioners must ask themselves which measures will work in a fragile context and under which conditions will they be effective? In searching for answers to these questions, it is necessary to consult the best available evidence. But this leads to a new set of questions: is there any scientifically validated evidence on the impact of measures to improve resilience in fragile contexts? If so, is there sufficient evidence, and which countries does it concentrate on? Does it include analysis of the conditions under which interventions did or did not work? Where can this evidence be found?

To answer these questions, the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) and DEval produced an evidence gap map (EGM) with the title “Building Peaceful Societies” (Sonnenfeld et al., 2020). The EGM gives a visual overview of rigorous impact evaluations (RIEs) and systematic reviews (SRs) that examine the impact of measures designed to improve resilience in fragile contexts. In this way, the EGM facilitates simple and rapid access to potentially relevant studies which may be a useful basis for decision-making at policy and project level. The EGM covers 195 completed and 47 ongoing RIEs as well as 29 completed and five ongoing SRs. The studies are subdivided into 40 intervention types and 18 outcome categories. It should be noted that the analysis only takes account of RIEs and SRs, so no conclusions can be drawn about studies that made use of other evaluation methods.

Analysis of the evidence base and gaps in evidence and synthesis

The evidence base grew considerably between 2015 and early 2019 and a large number of SRs with high quality ratings now exist. In terms of thematic coverage, however, the evidence is unevenly distributed. The studies have a preponderant focus on measures for mental health and psychosocial support.

Furthermore, the analysis highlights key evidence gaps. For twelve intervention subcategories out of 40, the research team was unable to find either RIEs or SRs. Most strikingly, no RIEs or SRs were found for the major intervention category “Supporting Peace Processes, Oversight and Post-Conflict Justice” (referenced only as Peace Processes on the EGM), which consists of five subcategories. Evidence gaps like these show where research will be necessary in future.

There were several intervention subcategories (including Peace Education, Peace Messaging and Media, Dispute Resolution and Intergroup Dialogue), one major intervention category (Building Inclusive and Accountable State Institutions) and one outcome (Social Cohesion) for which synthesis gaps were found. A synthesis gap refers to a cluster of impact evaluations that have not yet been synthesised into an SR. On the basis of this finding, the BMZ commissioned an SR on “Strengthening Intergroup Social Cohesion in Fragile Situations” (Sonnenfeld et al., 2021) within the scope of its structural instrument, transitional development assistance.

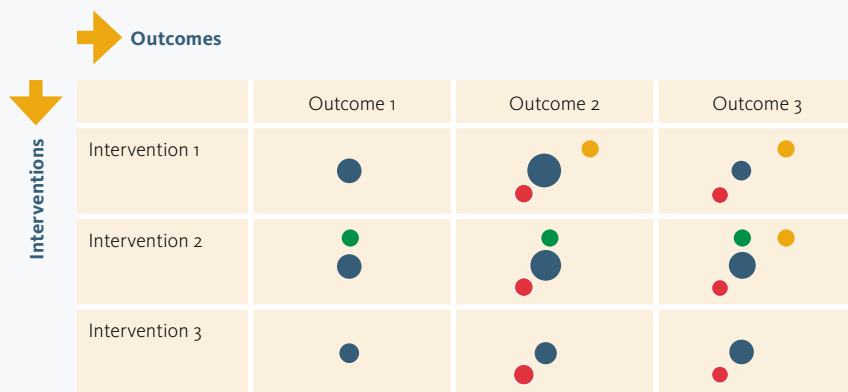
The EGM also shows that for eight of the world's ten most fragile states as defined by the Fragile States Index 2019 (The Fund for Peace, 2019), there are either very few RIEs or SRs or none at all. Geographically this represents a substantial evidence gap. Studies from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Afghanistan prove, however, that it is possible to conduct RIEs in highly fragile contexts.

The EGM also identifies methodological evidence gaps in relation to cost-effectiveness analyses and theory-based approaches as well as mixed-methods approaches. Only five studies contain references to cost-effectiveness and only about one third use a theory-based approach. The proportion employing a mixed-methods approach is similarly low.

Evidence gap maps: an overview of effectiveness studies

Evidence gap maps give a visual overview of studies (usually rigorous impact evaluations or systematic reviews) that have examined the effectiveness of measures or programmes in a particular sector or thematic area. An EGM takes the form of a matrix that shows intervention categories (for example, peacebuilding) on the vertical axis and outcomes (for example, behaviours conducive to peace) on the horizontal axis. A theoretical cause-and-effect relationship exists between the interventions and the outcomes. That is to say, theoretically the outcomes are achieved or influenced by implementing the interventions.

Circles represent (rigorous) impact evaluations and systematic reviews. The size of the circles denotes the quantity of studies. The colour of the circles indicates what type of evidence exists. In the case of systematic reviews, a quality rating is also shown. Users of the online version of the EGM only have to move the cursor over one of the circles to display a list of the studies available for that combination of intervention and outcome. The evidence can be filtered by type, region, country, study design and group studied. EGMs visualise clusters of evidence, but also evidence gaps where new research is required (for more information, see Snilstveit et al., 2017).



Source: own presentation based on Snilstveit et al., 2017.

Missing focuses and low rate of ethical approvals

The RIEs and SRs available barely take account of gender aspects, equality of opportunity and vulnerable population groups. Only a few studies deal with population groups heavily affected by fragility such as people in emergency shelters, returnees and the communities hosting these population groups.

Although peacebuilding actors largely acknowledge approaches such as the “do no harm” principle, only one third of the impact evaluations mention having received ethical approval from an Independent Review Board. Yet this is an essential prerequisite for research in which people represent the main unit of investigation – especially research dealing with sensitive issues and vulnerable populations. Since this prerequisite applies to most, if not all, of the studies covered by the EGM, the low rate of approvals gives cause for concern.

Good access to an extensive evidence base

There is clearly an extensive rigorous evidence base on the effectiveness of measures for strengthening resilience in fragile contexts. The EGM will therefore be a great help in the planning of new measures addressing this area. It provides simple, rapid and user-friendly access to potentially relevant studies that could serve as a basis for decisions. At the same time, it reveals sizeable evidence gaps which should be filled by investing strategically in research.

To accompany the online version of the EGM, there is a report that describes and analyses the evidence base and a policy brief that summarises the key findings. ■



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Strengthening resilience in fragile contexts – a geospatial impact evaluation in Mali

The poorest countries of the Global South are increasingly being affected by climate change – an additional challenge layered upon social and economic tensions that can erupt into violent conflicts. Any number of these conflicts are probably aggravated or even ignited by the negative impacts of climate change. This further underscores the importance of strengthening climate resilience in fragile states. Measures for adaptation to climate change have the potential to prevent conflicts, overcome crises and stabilise the socio-economic situation. But they can also exacerbate conflicts.

If development policy is to achieve good results in climate-vulnerable and fragile contexts, evidence-based policy design takes on particular importance. Geospatial techniques can be of great benefit in this respect. In conflict-affected regions especially, the use of geographical data offers an objective and low-cost adjunct or even an alternative to data collection in the field. As the technology has advanced and been driven forward by the restrictions on mobility and travel caused by the global COVID-19 pandemic, remote sensing data is being used considerably more frequently for the production of rigorous evidence.

Many evaluations based on geographical information confine themselves to measuring simple outcome indicators such as raised agricultural production. On the other hand, the use of geospatial information for analyses and assessments of more complex

concepts such as climate resilience still tends to be the exception.

Resilience-strengthening by German development cooperation in Mali

As part of an evaluation of measures for climate change adaptation, DEval considered measures on the irrigation infrastructure in Mali, which is a typical intervention to strengthen climate resilience in fragile contexts (Noltze et al., 2023).

Since the main form of agriculture in Mali – and in the Sahel zone generally – is rain-fed farming, climate change is having substantial consequences for food production. Rainfall is becoming less and less predictable, added to which, rising temperatures create a growing need for agricultural irrigation and increase people's vulnerability to extreme weather events such as prolonged droughts and severe rainfall events (PIK, 2020). Against this backdrop, efficient and ecologically sound irrigation of agricultural land has a high potential to increase Malian society's resilience to climate change. Irrigation improves agricultural productivity and makes it less dependent on rain. This not only has the potential to reduce poverty but ultimately also to support the social stability of Malian society.

German development cooperation in Mali has been supporting the installation and maintenance of agricultural irrigation infrastructure since the end of the 1990s.

KfW Development Bank promotes pump-based small-scale irrigation, large-scale gravity-based irrigation systems and enhanced management of floodplains via a variety of projects. The objective of the adaptation measures is to strengthen climate resilience. In a country affected by violent conflicts, the projects also include conflict-sensitive measures aimed at strengthening resilience on a broader scale (Bodian et al., 2020).

Geospatial evaluation of irrigation measures in Mali

The rigorous geospatial impact evaluation conducted by DEval focuses on how infrastructure interventions contribute to the ecological, economic and social resilience of the Malian population (BenYishay et al., 2023). It employs a quasi-experimental design (difference-in-difference analysis) and the interpretation of high-resolution aerial photographs. The data basis consists of almost 1,000 geocoded project locations, remote sensing data, geocoded survey data and incident statistics as well as interviews and focus group discussions. The analysis makes use of both panel data and repeated cross-sectional data. Geospatial impact analyses until now have usually only examined short-term effects with reference to simple indicators at outcome level.

Thanks to the availability of large amounts of geocoded data covering a long – 20-year – period of time, the evaluation not only rates the development effectiveness of the measures but also their sustainability. This it does by measuring their long-term effects on food security, child health, incomes, women’s empowerment, social cohesion (in relation to conflict risk and conflict intensity) and the environment.

Until now, impact analyses on irrigation have usually compared project locations with similar areas that were not part of the intervention (“treatment” and “control” units). This approach, however, is problematic in

regions where many different donors are active because there is no way of guaranteeing that a control area has not been “contaminated” by other activities. If artificial irrigation is also taking place in supposed control areas – unbeknown to researchers – for example, then a comparison of intervention and control units could result in mistaken assessments of the results. The DEval evaluation takes advantage of the staggered introduction of the measures by comparing the locations before the start of the project (control group) with the same locations after the start of the project (intervention group). At the same time, the difference-in-difference design controls for different temporal trends and non-temporal differences between locations.

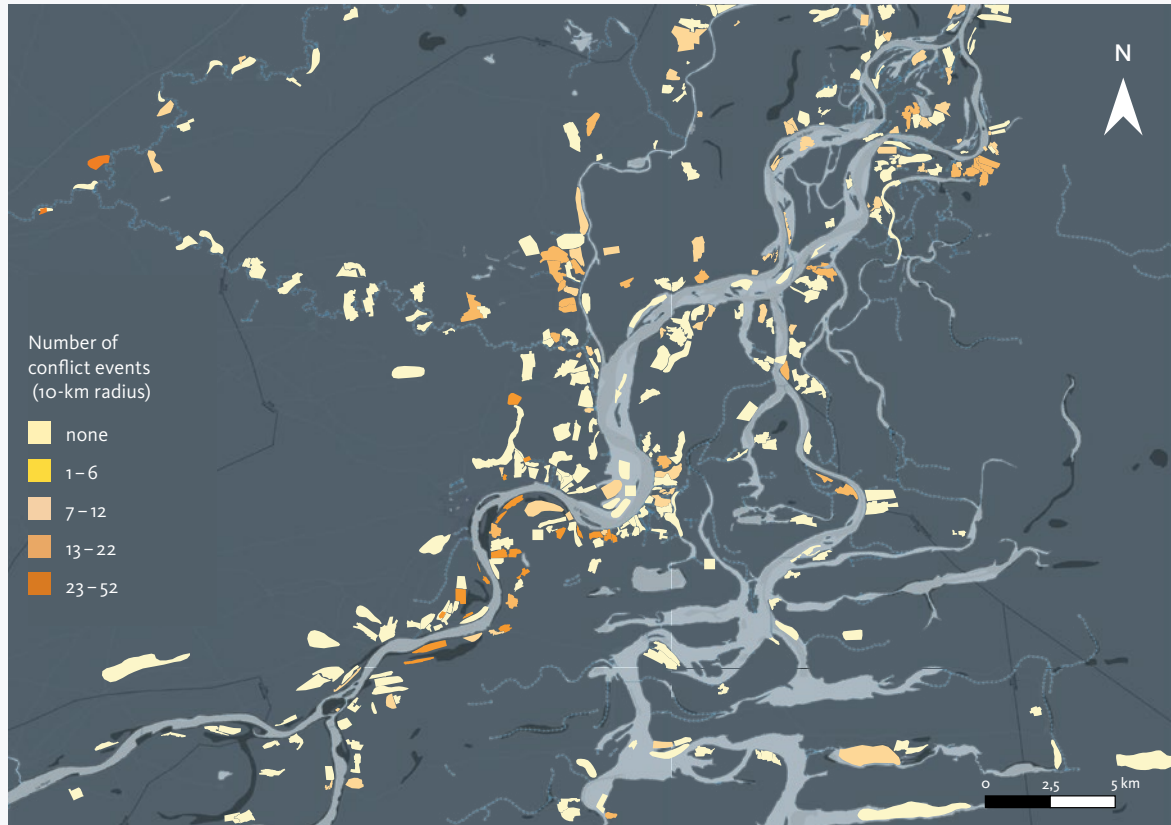
Increasing climate resilience

The evaluation finds that supporting the irrigation infrastructure contributes to a significant and long-term rise in agricultural production. By increasing crop yields, the measures have contributed to better child health and to lowering the conflict risk in the surrounding communities. The findings indicate that despite a protracted high-conflict situation, in semi-arid areas sustainable irrigation systems can be an effective instrument for improving the resilience of communities to cope with current and future negative socioeconomic impacts of climate change.

Practitioners must put the evidence-based findings to good use

The DEval approach to geospatial impact analysis of measures for irrigation infrastructure in Mali shows that even in conflict contexts where data collection on the ground is not possible due to the constraints of the security situation, development impacts (such as climate resilience-building) or even unintended effects (such as the escalation of conflicts due to the measures) can be reliably determined. However, rigorous analyses oriented to complex systems of objectives and using geo-referenced data are still rare in conflict-affected contexts.

Conflict intensity at German development cooperation project locations in Mali



Own visualisation based on geocoded project polygons (source: KfW Development Bank) and data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) on conflict events in the 10-kilometre radius of these project locations between 1997 and 2021. For each polygon, the sum of conflict events over the entire period is shown. The projects encompass pump-irrigated fields as well as floodplains under enhanced management.

At the same time, in conflict-affected contexts in particular, the repercussions of climate change put increasing pressure on development cooperation, which has to meet effectiveness criteria. The task now is to reduce this gap between rising relevance and a poor evidence base. At the national and international level, the number of rigorous evaluations using geospatial data to examine the consequences of climate

change adaptation measures in contexts of fragile statehood should therefore be increased.

DEval has presented the available evidence in a variety of formats⁸ geared towards user-friendliness because the implementing development organisations must now put the evidence to good use and incorporate it at an early stage in the planning of measures. ■



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⁸ DEval: Climate Change Adaptation, <https://www.deval.org/en/evaluations/our-evaluations/climate-change-adaptation>.



SUMMARY AND OUTLOOK

Evidence-based policy design for effective cooperation with fragile states

Development cooperation and evaluation can and should adapt their approaches to the local framework conditions in fragile contexts. Then development cooperation can operate successfully, at least in the short and medium term, and minimise risks of failure. With institutional and methodological advances, evaluation can also be of substantial value-added – including support for evidence-based, context-sensitive steering and implementation in contexts of state fragility.

Evidence-based policy design for effective cooperation with fragile states

The purpose of civil engagement in fragile contexts is to alleviate acute need, support post-conflict reconstruction, ensure social protection in times of transition and promote the establishment of sustainable and effective state and economic structures. The vast majority of the German population supports development cooperation with fragile states, as the “DEval Opinion Monitor for Development Policy” makes clear (see pages 36–37).

However, the framework conditions for effective engagement in fragile states are becoming ever more challenging. Reasons for this include the war in Ukraine, increasing competition between democracies and autocracies in the international system, environmental stress due to climate change and resource exploitation, and ensuing distributional conflicts. Moreover, the ongoing coordination and cooperation difficulties within the donor community further increase the challenges of realising the full potential of development cooperation in fragile contexts.

Development cooperation can deliver at least short- and medium-term results in situations of state fragility – in relation to social protection, education or health care, for example. But immediate relief and medium-term assistance and support fall short of meeting the aspiration of the policy field to make a structural contribution to

sustainable development as defined in the 2030 Agenda. In view of the challenging conditions in fragile contexts, fulfilling the Agenda’s ambitious goals is especially difficult:

First of all, development cooperation – particularly in highly fragile contexts – does not operate in isolation from foreign policy and security policy. In fact, it is often intersected by these two policy fields to a great extent, with geopolitical, diplomatic or security interests limiting its room for manoeuvre.

Secondly, development cooperation is never acting in a vacuum, and its success in fragile contexts in particular is very much influenced by how coherently foreign, trade and security policy engagement is pursued. Likewise, the coherent shaping of the nexus between humanitarian assistance, stabilisation, development cooperation and security policy engagement is a key determinant of success for longer-term-oriented structural development cooperation.

Thirdly, the success of long-term development cooperation depends on the development orientation of state actors in the partner countries and on their ownership of reforms geared towards sustainable development. Where state actors are not interested in sustainable and democratically embedded development, an important prerequisite for longer-term results of bilateral development cooperation is not in place.

In that case, development cooperation will have to limit itself to short- or medium-term results and coordinate with foreign policy to prevent authoritarian elites from using the bilateral support to stabilise their own political positions. At least in the medium term, development cooperation can temporarily bypass such elites by engaging with civil society rather than cooperating directly with official state agencies.

Despite these challenging framework conditions, the majority of authors of this report still endorse longer-term development-policy engagement in fragile states, without denying the particular challenges and risks of these contexts. The fact remains that the risks of failing to achieve structural development goals in highly fragile settings are comparatively high. Equally, however, at least for shorter-term objectives, there are good chances of success if the actors in the policy field manage to adapt their actions over the entire policy cycle to the demanding conditions in fragile contexts. With this in mind, the articles in this report have examined challenges and possible solutions for development cooperation in fragile states in sequence with the three stylised phases of the policy cycle: (1) planning and steering, (2) implementation of measures, and (3) evidence-based accountability and learning by means of evaluation.

1. Strategic planning and steering

The most difficult challenge for results-oriented strategic planning and steering of development cooperation in fragile states is the volatility of the context. Extremely unpredictable dynamics of local conditions make it almost impossible to develop a strategy based on plausible forecasts because political decision makers or planning teams can scarcely map highly uncertain and volatile developments in just a few scenarios.

The tensions between flexibility and coordination

Development cooperation actors should therefore adapt their decision-making procedures and their selection and deployment of instruments to this high level of uncertainty and the often rapidly changing conditions. The key here is to strike the right balance between the principles of flexibility and coordination. This can be done by formulating context-robust strategies and, circumstances permitting, delegating greater responsibility to actors on the ground.

Flexibility and the potential to change course rapidly are principles of action that political decision-makers and development organisations should try to follow in fragile states. At the same time, it is important that

In fragile states, development cooperation must weigh up the achievement of short-term versus long-term objectives: on the one hand, it is tasked with providing short-term, tangible services for especially vulnerable sections of the population. On the other hand, in the long term it is expected to develop state capacities and rule-of-law-based democracy in order to strengthen human rights, social justice and environmental sustainability.

development cooperation remains in close and continuous consultation with other ministries, as foreseen in Germany's integrated approach. Furthermore, DEval's evaluations recommend continuous exchange between the steering level of the BMZ and the operational level in the partner country – with reference to measures for transitional development assistance, for example. Often-tedious processes of coordination between development policy actors – both vertically between the steering and the operational levels and horizontally across ministries – are at odds with the desired flexibility.

Context-robust strategies are a possible way of balancing flexibility and coordination. Development cooperation should therefore pursue approaches that can be realised successfully in as many different contexts as possible. According to the article by Dan Honig (see pages 34–35), the essential uncertainty of fragile contexts may make it necessary to adopt more decentrally steered implementation modalities: as Honig points out, top-down planning reaches its limits in situations where the best way forward is unknown due to extreme uncertainty. He sees that as the cue to delegate more responsibility and trust the navigational skills of those development cooperation actors who are closest to events. This appears to be

especially relevant in highly fragile contexts, where key information for an understanding of the local context is often missing, as Christoph Zürcher emphasises in his article. Ultimately, this also favours the appropriate inclusion and empowerment of disadvantaged groups in decision-making processes and strengthens the use of local knowledge held by target groups (see pages 82–83).

Short-term or long-term objectives?

In fragile states, development cooperation must weigh up the achievement of short-term versus long-term objectives: on the one hand, it is tasked with providing short-term, tangible services for the population like those provided under transitional development assistance, which it often implements with the help of non-state actors. On the other hand, in the long term it is expected to develop state capacities and structures for democracy within the bounds of the rule of law and an administrative apparatus based on meritocracy.

Many authors of this report make the case for long-term institutional strengthening of democratic rule-of-law structures in fragile partner countries, arguing that promoting stabilisation at the same time as democratic governance holds the greatest potential for

strengthening sustainable and inclusive conflict resilience within both state and society. Findings from DEval evaluations also indicate that as state capacities increase, the conditions become more favourable for effective development cooperation (Wencker and Verspohl, 2019; Roxin et al., 2021; Hartmann et al., 2021, 2022). These findings indicate that building effective, preferably democratic, state structures should remain an important task of development policy in fragile states. From a comparative perspective, German bilateral cooperation appears to be particularly well positioned compared to other countries due to its effective implementing organisations, as **Simone Dietrich** argues (see pages 58–59).

At the same time, however, other commentators are distinctly more sceptical about the chances of realising such ambitious objectives. For example, **Christoph Zürcher** (see pages 82–83) cites the results of a meta-analysis on international development cooperation in Afghanistan, according to which measures designed to establish good governance and support long-term stabilisation in a highly fragile context have not been very successful so far – a finding he finds equally valid when comparing the cases of Afghanistan, South Sudan and Mali (Zürcher, 2020, pp. 34, 46). An evaluation by DEval on Germany’s civil engagement in Iraq also identifies the development of state capacities and rule-of-law structures as the main challenges.

Clear advocacy for structure building and democracy promotion is tempered with scepticism as to whether, and under what conditions, the corresponding objectives can be achieved. This should also be understood as a clarion call to derive lessons from the evidence of practical experience

and to incorporate these even more systematically into the design of development cooperation.

2. Implementation

The potential of development cooperation to make a difference, not only in the short and medium term by providing emergency and transitional assistance but also in the long term by building structures, depends heavily on the extent of fragility. **Verena Gantner** and **Thomas Wencker** (see pages 60–61) attest to this, in common with many other authors. In places where the state monopoly on force is only moderately threatened, where at least basic state services are still being provided, albeit in a diminished form, and where the legitimacy of state rule has not been largely eroded, there is potential for structural development cooperation as well. In these contexts, both civil society actors and German Technical and Financial Cooperation can still find partners whose local acceptance, effectiveness and readiness for ownership of sustainable development are sufficient for structural measures to be initiated or implemented.

The higher the level of fragility, the more impassable the terrain becomes for structural development cooperation. Good results then increasingly depend on how successfully development practice can counteract the different dimensions of fragility: the loss of state authority (monopoly on force), capacity (performance) and legitimacy (lawful rule). Yet the implications of fragility for the implementation of measures are extremely complex and often extend beyond development cooperation’s sphere of influence. Development cooperation cannot overcome the challenges that exist in

many (highly) fragile contexts on its own but must be coordinated with foreign policy and usually also with security policy. The HDP nexus, which **Jochen Flasbarth** highlights above as a compelling way forward, is currently the best-known example of this approach (see pages 30–33).

— Dealing with limited capacity

Development cooperation actors implementing projects in fragile states are usually confronted with weakness or absence of capacity on the part of the partner government. However, as long as low state capacity is accompanied by only moderate constraints on the monopoly on force and some banked legitimacy for state rule, these are still very good prerequisites for development cooperation to be effective in fragile states. Another crucial requirement is the successful linkage of emergency and transitional assistance in the aftermath of any disaster or violent conflict. This sets the stage for bridging from short- and medium-term effects to structural impacts with the state as the point of convergence, as envisaged by the German Federal Government's integrated approach (Kocks et al., 2018).

This presupposes a gradual shift in emphasis from short- and medium-term assistance to projects with long-term development objectives and different goal criteria (sustainability!) to some extent. To accomplish this shift in emphasis, the responsible development organisations and/or ministries must work strenuously on coordination. In the German context, the integrated approach combining foreign, development and security policy lays a good conceptual foundation for this. At the same time, DEval evaluations indicate that there

is still room for improvement with regard to the implementation of the approach.

When shifting from transitional development assistance to longer-term structural development cooperation, and especially if partners' capacities are low, there is also a need for a high degree of flexibility in the steering and implementation of projects, as **Ingrid-Gabriela Hoven** proposes in her article (see pages 56–57). Resource constraints in international development cooperation can make such transitions more challenging. For example, a DEval evaluation of cash-for-work approaches in the countries bordering Syria concludes that, considering the protracted crisis and declining donor funding, the focus on alleviating immediate precarity was more appropriate, temporarily at least, than shifting efforts towards longer-term structural measures.

— Eroding monopoly on force and low legitimacy

Structural development cooperation faces a distinctly more difficult task when the state's monopoly on force is severely eroded and the legitimacy of the political regime is low. Violent conflicts and territorial disintegration create such intense uncertainty about which actors are politically functional and legitimised that long-term cooperation in order to build up state structures is barely possible. When there is a deficit of state legitimacy, bearing in mind that in authoritarian states this usually correlates with a deficit in ownership for reform, the promotion of meritocratic state structures generally falters. If there is "only" limited ownership, it may be possible to secure improvement by actively engaging in a critical political dialogue, but if ownership is non-existent, development cooperation

should permanently switch or diversify its implementation partners. It may temporarily strengthen its cooperation with non-state actors in order to bypass state actors whose interest in development is minimal. Such an approach is particularly advisable when a lack of state legitimacy goes hand in hand with authoritarian rule, yet development cooperation wants to reach vulnerable groups nevertheless. However, **Simone Dietrich** (see pages 58–59) also points out that any longer-term recourse to cooperation with non-state actors providing services in place of the state runs the risk of weakening the legitimacy of state structures even further.

Trade-offs and constraints

Policymakers and implementing development organisations should explicitly address and reflect on these inevitable tensions and trade-offs that development cooperation encounters in fragile states. Particularly when local framework conditions deteriorate, it is necessary to initiate a political dialogue at an early stage and, if need be, to adjust conditionality and the deployment of certain instruments. For instance, the DEval evaluation of the BMZ's reform partnerships approach with Africa found that a substantial deterioration in the political framework conditions in some partner countries was not addressed early on with an adjustment of instruments, a political dialogue or stronger interministerial coordination (Roxin et al., 2022).

German development cooperation with its state and non-state development organisations is basically well positioned to achieve short- and medium-term objectives in a variety of sectors when levels of fragility are low to moderate; this would include the

infrastructure sector, the education and health sector or short- and medium-term social protection measures. The same is confirmed by the DAC's Development Co-operation Peer Review report on Germany for 2021, which acknowledges the increasing flexibility and context-specific deployment of transitional development assistance. When development cooperation meets with a fragile context with an eroded monopoly on force and poor governance, however, the conditions soon expose obvious trade-offs and constraints on the reach of development policy. Particularly regarding the realisation of any structural objectives or the principle of sustainability, the policy sphere should formulate realistic expectations until there are substantial improvements in the context. This applies to such objectives as promoting a meritocratic administrative apparatus or policy reforms aimed at sustainably combating social inequality or at promoting gender justice, civil liberties and resource-efficient management.

Another matter that decision makers should clarify in such circumstances is the question of which principles to apply in the implementation of which projects: when to opt for the principles of short-term emergency relief or medium-term transitional and reconstruction assistance (which include impartiality and independence), and when to follow the sustainability principle with its demanding requirements for ownership on the partner side. Difficult decisions need to be made on how to realise the “leave no one behind” principle. Especially given the current circumstances of multiple and protracted crises as well as stagnating donor funding, it is not always possible to address all vulnerable groups in equal measure. All the more

strenuous efforts not to lose sight of marginalised and vulnerable groups are then required.

Finally, when faced with framework conditions showing a marked degree of fragility, German and international development cooperation should practise realistic management of expectations. The implementing organisations should document this systematically during the planning of their projects and make adjustments during implementation as the need arises.

3. Evidence-based policy design by means of evaluation

At its best, evaluation fulfils three functions which not only improve the results of development cooperation in fragile states but can also indirectly strengthen the legitimacy of the policy field. Evaluation

1. obtains practice-relevant insights for evidence-based policy design,
2. contributes to providing accountability for state action and
3. makes empirically based recommendations which give impulses for learning in order to improve development policy measures.

However, evaluations are also vulnerable to constraints in fragile contexts which affect the planning, implementation and utilisation phases, sometimes severely. This can pose difficult challenges for evaluation quality, which is expressed in terms of the principles of independence, accuracy, fairness and “do no harm”. DEval evaluations on fragile states have shown that evaluators, too, must always plan flexibly because the volatile conditions will likely force them to make adjustments – field trips being the most obvious example.

When designing evaluations, they must anticipate that some stakeholders’ capacities will be limited because acute crises constrain the availability of operational units. At the same time, they need to insist on the independence of evaluations and not shy away from including evaluation questions that are difficult for (political) decision makers as well, addressing such issues as trade-offs, tensions and coordination difficulties of development cooperation in fragile states.

During the implementation phase of evaluations it is often difficult or even impossible to access the target groups, which constrains a balanced use of local knowledge. As many of those affected have their own particular perspectives on fragility and conflict, constraints on access can hinder the cross-comparison of different perspectives and sabotage the precision and neutrality of the results. One other aspect of great importance is a conflict-sensitive approach in line with the “do no harm” principle, to ensure that neither information sources nor vulnerable groups are placed in danger.

Finally, the utilisation of such evaluations has its own specific challenges. In view of the unpredictable dynamics in fragile contexts, for example, it can be especially difficult to feed evaluation results at project and programme level into decision-making and implementation processes at the “right” point in time. The utilisation of critical findings depends on a strong culture of intra- and inter-organisational learning. In the absence of such a learning culture, the acceptance of independent evaluations can suffer when they uncover the trade-offs and tensions outlined above, and when they make recommendations calling for difficult decisions

on priority setting, topping up resources or improving coordination.

Progress on multiple levels

Despite these challenges, progress has been made in the evaluation of German development cooperation in fragile states, which is evident, for instance, at the institutional and methodological levels. At the institutional level, a differentiated evaluation policy has been in place since 2021 and serves as a regulatory framework for evaluation work within German development cooperation. Among other points, the BMZ's evaluation guidelines stipulate a conflict-sensitive approach and the overarching principle of "do no harm". The rating scales and evaluation criteria used for emergency and transitional assistance also differ from those applied to long-term development cooperation, reflecting the distinction outlined above between short- and medium-term interventions as opposed to long-term measures in fragile contexts. The guidelines also define it as one of the tasks of evaluation to analyse the nexus between humanitarian assistance and structural development cooperation across ministerial remits.

Awareness of these problems is also evidenced in the coalition agreement of the current German Federal Government, the provisions of which include the expansion of interministerial evaluations. The first joint ministerial country evaluations on Germany's civil engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan have been conducted; others should follow and pay even closer attention to the coherence with which the different policy areas interact. Another institutional advance that should not be underestimated is the institutional

It is essential to fight for the independence of evaluations and not shy away from including evaluation questions that are difficult for (political) decision makers, addressing such issues as trade-offs, tensions and coordination difficulties of development cooperation in fragile states.

strengthening of implementation planning and monitoring of recommendations of DEval evaluations. With regard to fragile contexts especially – but not exclusively – this encourages systematic consideration of DEval's recommendations and sets additional incentives for the addressees of the evaluations to put them into practice interministerially.

From a methodological viewpoint, the articles in this report show that reliable, rigorous impact evaluations are feasible and useful even in fragile contexts, particularly when they are combined with qualitative components. This is demonstrated by evaluations and accompanying studies by GIZ and KfW Development Bank as well as by DEval, such as those on development cooperation in the Philippines, Mali, Jordan and Turkey. Moreover, technological possibilities opened up by digitalisation, such as virtual meetings or the processing of remote sensing or mobile phone data, mitigate the more challenging conditions of access for evaluators in fragile states. Artificial intelligence techniques can be used to automate the processing and synthesis of numerous individual project evaluations. This makes it easier for evaluators to produce

and deliver timely, aggregated and relevant knowledge for decision makers.

Finally, the evaluation process accords more importance to those affected by fragility. Higher ethical standards, appropriate participation of vulnerable groups, human rights aspects, gender equality and awareness of the cultural context are incomparably more important today than even a few years ago.

4. Challenges for the future

Evaluation is established and accepted as an integral part of the policy cycle in development cooperation. Nevertheless, the evaluation of civil engagement in fragile states still involves considerable challenges. On the supply side, further strengthening of rigorous impact evaluations will be necessary in order to generate robust evidence on the effects of interventions in fragile states. Additionally, the insights from individual studies should more frequently be summarised by topic and country in synthesis studies (such as systematic reviews), again for the purpose of generating strategically relevant evidence, as Christoph Zürcher (2022) recently did with regard to Mali, South Sudan and Afghanistan. Existing evidence from evaluations needs to be made available in a more user-friendly and practical form via evidence portals such as the Development Evidence Portal hosted by zie. Doing this would take account of the limited resources available to decision makers for

development cooperation in fragile contexts and give them access to all the existing evidence from the planning phase onwards. Finally, apart from offering solutions it is the task of evaluators to openly name the trade-offs, challenges and limitations affecting civil engagement in fragile states and to make it clear that this engagement can be worthwhile but is naturally also risk-laden for the most part.

On the evidence demand side, investment must be made in monitoring and data management in particular, in order to lay firm foundations for evidence-based steering, strategic knowledge management and efficient evaluation. In Germany, the institutional underpinnings for cross-government evaluations based on the principle of independence should be strengthened. Within the European framework, more should be invested in joint evaluations of European engagement in highly fragile countries. For the only way to achieve substantial strengthening of the culture of learning in policy and implementation practice is through better monitoring and knowledge management and the further institutionalisation of inter-organisational evaluations. Independent and impartial evaluation can then contribute – even when its findings are critical – to reducing the polarisation of views on development policy in fragile states and enhancing its effectiveness. ■



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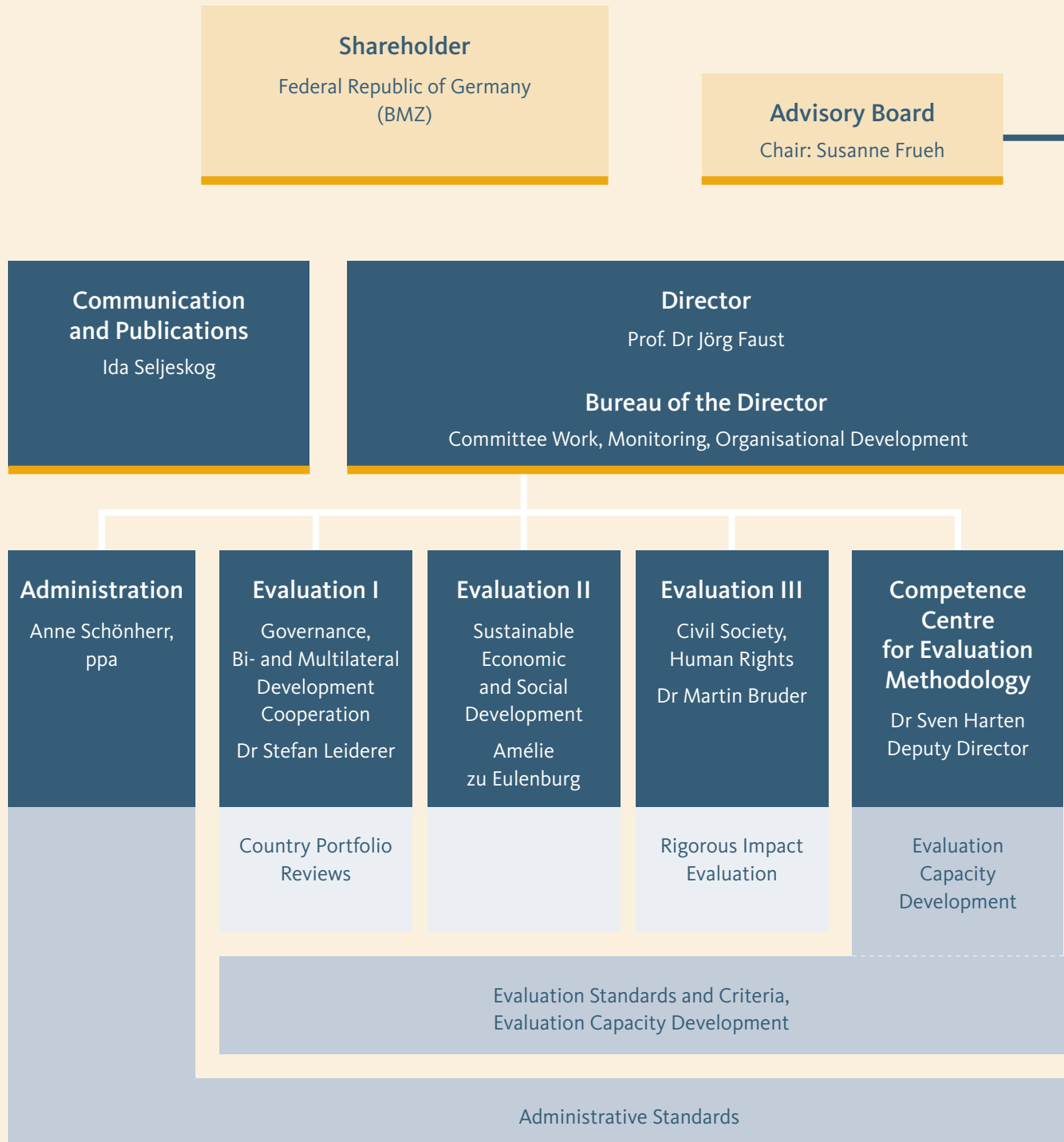
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German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval) Organisational Chart



Gender Equality Officer

Data Protection Officer

IT Security Officer

Anti-Corruption
and Integrity Officers

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Programme Director at Deutsche Stiftung
Weltbevölkerung (DSW)

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Dietrich, Simone, Prof. Dr
Professor for Political Science and International
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Frueh, Susanne, Chair
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KfW Development Bank

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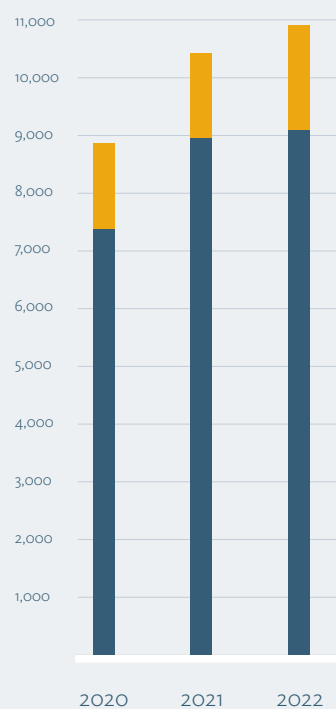
Thiele, Rainer, Prof. Dr
Kiel Institute for the World Economy (IfW),
Director of the “Kiel Institute Africa Initiative”

→ Facts and figures

Financial support (in euros, thousands)

	2020	2021	2022
Institutional support	8,327	8,949	9,076
Project support*	1,409	1,547	1,886

*Evaluation Capacity Development (2017 – 2022)
Rigorous Impact Evaluation (2018 – 2022)
Country Portfolio Reviews (2020 – 2022)



Staff members

including project staff, excluding students, assistants and interns (in full-time equivalents)

	2020	2021	2022
Management and heads of departments	6.0	6.0	6.0
Academic and research staff	51.0	50.5	53.1
Projektadministration	7.2	6.1	6.6
Stabsstellen und Verwaltung	16.4	18.3	19.9
Total	80.6	80.9	85.6

Reporting date: 31.12 of each year

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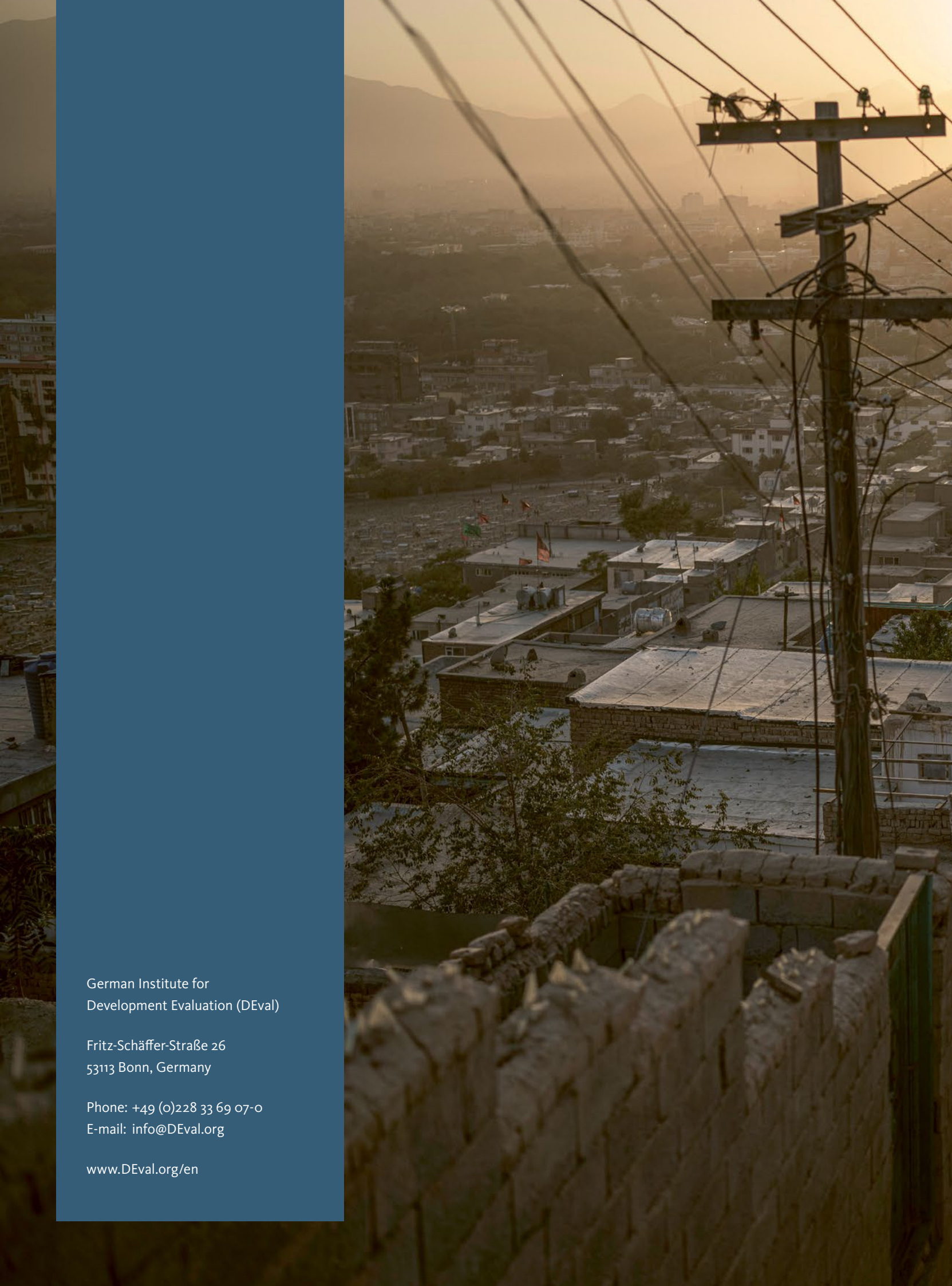
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