



Federal Ministry  
for Economic Cooperation  
and Development

# The Federal Development Ministry's Cooperation with Civil Society

Assuming international responsibility in a spirit of solidarity



# “ Having a say and getting involved – how civil society inspires vibrant democracy ”

*Dear readers,*

I see civil society as an expression of vibrant democracy. This is particularly clear at present, as people in towns and cities across Germany take to the streets to demonstrate against right-wing extremism and defend democracy, diversity and tolerance. We know that right-wing extremism is the single greatest threat to our democracy. A dynamic democracy with an active civil society is the strongest weapon we have to tackle hatred and incitement.

But it is not only here in Germany that civil society is important. The same is true around the world, especially in countries where democratic structures are under threat. Only when as many people as possible can have a say and get involved can they help shape issues that are crucially important for society as a whole. And that is why civil society is also so important in development cooperation.

If we are to combat hunger and poverty, make our societies more equitable, and conserve the natural resources on which we all depend, everybody will have to do their bit. At international level we will have to pull together much more strongly, within Europe, in the United Nations and within the framework of international partnerships both with the private sector, and even more importantly with civil society in all cases.

But why is civil society engagement and the work of activists so important? Firstly, because they often act as a mouthpiece for disadvantaged people, whose voices are otherwise too rarely heard. It is vital that civil society be able to play this part and act as the moral compass for politicians because activists critically scrutinise the actions of governments and prompt necessary changes.

Secondly, they might be our most important allies in achieving a goal that is very close to my own heart – gender equality. My **feminist development policy** aims to ensure that women have the same rights, resources and representation in political and economic decision-making processes that men have long enjoyed. The work of civil society organisations helps to advance the interests of women and marginalised groups worldwide. This makes societies as a whole more equitable, safer, more secure and more successful. Civil society engagement points the way forward.

Thirdly, civil society organisations implement their own development activities, many of which the Federal Development Ministry (BMZ) supports with federal funding under several lines of assistance. Civil society organisations often engage in areas that are not open to official development cooperation. I'm thinking, for instance, of Zimbabwe, where it is largely thanks to civil society that the nutritional status of children under the age of five has improved significantly. It is also thanks to their efforts that people with disabilities in Zimbabwe are now able to obtain therapeutic care and specially tailored technical and vocational education and training.

I will build on these synergies and take our cooperation to the next level in future. In Germany, I would like to further step up diversity in our cooperation, to integrate a wider spectrum of viewpoints in the policy-making process. This will mean engaging in closer dialogue with diaspora organisations and migrants' organisations. At international level I would like to work with civil society in the **Global South** to identify sustainable, long-term solutions to the problems on the ground. It is



also important to me to defend civil society's scope for action around the world, and to ensure that instead of shrinking space for civil society there is growing space. Above all, we need to strengthen ownership on the part of civil society in the **Global South** and build their resources.

That is why we at the BMZ intend to take a new line on civil society and drive forward partnership-based approaches. The voices of civil society need to be heard more, particularly voices from the **Global South**. My goal is to put in place an honest dialogue, that builds on mutual respect and trust.

We have already made a start, involving representatives of civil society in both the **Global South** and the Global North in the development of the Africa Strategy, the Strategy on **Feminist Development Policy** and this strategy. The BMZ's new Civil Society Strategy sets out

how we would like to shape cooperation with civil society in future. It explains how we can expand and consolidate this cooperation, in order to meet the challenges the coming years will bring.

I would like to thank everyone inside and outside the BMZ who has helped elaborate this strategy. Let us together assume responsibility for a climate smart, socially equitable future.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Svenja Schulze". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline.

Svenja Schulze  
Federal Minister for Economic  
Cooperation and Development



All the terms that appear in red are explained in the glossary beginning on page 26.

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# 1 A matter of principle: the Federal Development Ministry's Cooperation with Civil Society

## 1.1 Introduction

Only about three per cent of the global population live in states where civil society can act independently and operate without restrictions. By contrast, 85 per cent live in countries where civil society is suppressed or only able to act within certain constraints. In an increasing number of countries the scope for civil society activities is diminishing. We are seeing a shrinking space for civil society (**Civil Society Atlas 2023**).

A strong civil society is indispensable for Germany's development policy. The Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) recognises civil society, in all its facets, as an independent actor. We support the many different roles played by civil society both in non-governmental and official development cooperation: an advocate of universal human rights, a defender of democracy, a watchdog that monitors state institutions and policies, a global networker and implementer of development interventions, both in countries of the **Global South** and in Germany. Depending on the political context and on the objectives and frameworks in place, the primary focus may be on strengthening civil society organisations per se or on their role as effective implementation partners that have adapted to challenging situations.

The BMZ sees cooperation with civil society as part of its mandate to drive forward the **2030 Agenda** and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), all the

more so during this period of setbacks and radical transitions, while ensuring that nobody is left behind. The BMZ takes responsibility jointly with civil society for understanding global issues, discussing these and hammering out possible solutions.

The BMZ now intends to take a new stance on cooperation with civil society, encouraging and supporting partnership-based approaches even more strongly than before. Feminist principles, actively listening to voices in the states of the **Global South**, and an honest dialogue based on mutual respect, trust and solidarity are all part of this new stance. Equally, we must consider in more depth the legacies of colonialism, so as to identify possible avenues for structural changes, and to dismantle **colonial continuities** in cooperation. Many civil society organisations have already begun work here, and have gained a wealth of practical experience.

This paper will address the strategic framework for cooperation between the BMZ and institutionalised civil society, both in Germany and in the **Global South**. The principles underlying the BMZ's support for individual civic engagement are laid out in the paper entitled "*Engagement weltweit*". It explains how the BMZ and civil society can persuade even more people in Germany to get involved in development.

With the help of this strategy, the BMZ would like to open a new chapter in cooperation with civil society. The objectives and implementation steps set out below are intended to help strengthen civil society in Germany and in the **Global South**, making it more effective and increasing its independence. The BMZ will work to implement this strategy in the months and years ahead, in close consultation with civil society.



## 1.2 The political importance of civil society

Civil society organisations are forces for social change, transformation, human rights and resistance to authoritarian government actions. They perceive changes in their society at an early stage, register the first tremors of social unrest and provide impetus for progress, sustainability and innovation. Feminist civil society organisations in particular often drive transformation. They work to break down power structures and gender roles. They share the BMZ's vision of a society where everyone can get involved in political, social and economic life on an equal basis, irrespective of their gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, skin colour, disability or any other characteristics.

Civil society plays an important part in transforming society to achieve social and environmental sustainability, to protect and strengthen democracy, and to realise **feminist development policy** and social welfare activities. Not only does civil society protect and strengthen democracies. It is often indeed the starting point for democracy and the place where we find democratic engagement and development.

The vast majority of civil society sees itself as the advocate for the rule of law and as a watchdog that critically monitors state institutions. Civil society helps strengthen the accountability of the state and does its bit to bring about necessary changes in social attitudes. In some countries it operates in a difficult context, that can involve enormous risks.

Civil society organisations and their activities are not per se progressive, democratic and geared to achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) however. The anti-gender movement, nationalist, extremist and extreme religious movements are also part of civil society.

The BMZ only enters into partnerships with civil society organisations that act for the common good and development, and that renounce the use of violence. Their activities must be based on the recognition of human rights, gender equality, democracy and the rule of law. The term "civil society" used in this paper refers only to civil society organisations that share these values and principles, and uphold and realise them within the scope of their work. The BMZ expressly distances itself from all forces that use the cover of civil society initiatives to spread extremist doctrines and those that act in violation of international human rights standards and of the German Basic Law or constitution.





For years we have seen a global trend towards increasing autocracy. While the space for civil society is shrinking, protest movements are becoming increasingly prominent in many countries. Stable, pro-development societies need good, inclusive governance that guarantees to protect human rights by the rule of law, also in the digital realm. But conversely, a strong civil society is needed for democracy and transformation for greater sustainability.

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The BMZ understands the term **civil society** to embrace the full spectrum of engagement of the people of a country who get together to establish clubs, associations, and a wide spectrum of initiatives, social movements and (online) networks. This includes all activities that are neither state-run nor profit-oriented and are independent of party-political interests.

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There is a wide spectrum of civil society organisations, in terms of size, legal structure, degree of professionalism, ideological views and specific fields of action. This is true both in Germany and in the **Global South**. In Germany, many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and their associations, political and public-benefit foundations, **agencies engaged in social structural programmes** (including the *Arbeiterwohlfahrt* which promotes workers' welfare and the German Red Cross), as well as the main church agencies are engaged in development activities. They are joined by other actors including community foundations and new social movements that have evolved their own approaches to tackling social challenges. Migrants' organisations and diaspora organisations are also increasingly leaving their mark on the civil society landscape in Germany. The central, but not the only, contact for BMZ is VENRO (the umbrella organisation of development and humanitarian non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Germany).

Important frameworks of reference for the BMZ's co-operation in partnership with civil society include the International Bill of Human Rights, the **2030 Agenda** and the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change, as well as the OECD-DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance.

### 1.3 Strengthening development cooperation with civil society

Here are four of the many sound reasons for cooperating in partnership with civil society:

- **Transformation:** Realising the **2030 Agenda** in, with and through Germany is a task for the whole of society. It will require a strong civil society in countries of both the **Global South** and the Global North, especially with a view to driving forward green and socially just transformation.
- **Mobilisation:** Civil society approaches complement official development cooperation. They mobilise private-sector funding and voluntary engagement.
- **Participation:** Civil society actors in countries of the **Global South** and in Germany have direct access to dedicated individuals and organisations receiving support that are calling for political participation and government accountability.
- **Awareness building and education:** With their information and education work, civil society organisations build awareness for global interconnections and foster hands-on skills.



Civil society actors have unique skills and strengths, which enable them to address challenges that state institutions cannot master alone. Their own initiative often allows them to support and complement the actions of the state.

- **Citizen-responsive:** Many civil society actors operate at grassroots level, allowing them to reach disadvantaged sections of the population because of their direct contacts to target groups.
- **Local and technical expertise:** Civil society often has excellent access to local communities. It has a special understanding of local conditions and circumstances and can make these concerns heard.
- **Participation of the local population and understanding of their own roles as partners:** Many civil society actors base their actions on partnership, co-determination and on-site planning and design. They build on the skills of disadvantaged sections of the population and help them demand their rights.
- **Presence in fragile states:** In countries suffering fragile statehood and in nations that are affected by crises, conflicts or terrorism, civil society actors support official bilateral cooperation, which in some cases has to operate under restrictions. The BMZ uses **transitional development assistance** and special initiatives to deliver support. These forms of support strengthen resilience at local level and can also foster peaceful coexistence. Sometimes civil society organisations face huge risks, which must always be factored into cooperation.
- **Flexibility:** Civil society actors can often act more swiftly and are less risk averse than state bodies which are bound by international agreements.
- **Mobilisation:** Civil society can achieve an impressive outreach both in Germany and in the **Global South**. It can mobilise individuals to engage for social change and help actively shape both policies and projects.

## 2 Cooperating successfully: principles and current challenges

### 2.1 Principles underpinning the Federal Development Ministry's cooperation with civil society

The Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development has at its disposal a differentiated system of tools and promotion instruments. It takes into account the special characteristics of each civil society organisation. In cooperation outside ODA, it has thus stipulated specific conditions that govern its work with church-based aid organisations, political foundations, **agencies engaged in social structural programmes**, **private organisations**, agencies engaged in **transitional development assistance** and agencies delivering development education.

The BMZ has a significant interest in close cooperation with civil society in a spirit of partnership. Cooperation is governed by the **principle of subsidiarity**. In other words, the BMZ supports diverse civil society solutions wherever possible and expedient. Civil society can complement state actions. It can, for instance, address certain target groups that state institutions cannot reach directly.

Cooperation outside ODA is generally based on the right to propose solutions. It builds the expertise, strength and skills of civil society. The right to propose solutions means that civil society organisations implement their own projects with the support of the BMZ. In these cases, civil society organisations decide on the concrete content matter of the project for which they receive assistance. Where projects are to be implemented in other countries, they also decide on the country and the local partner organisation.

The BMZ's thematic and regional strategies do not automatically apply, but they can offer guidance in terms of contents. The BMZ decides whether the projects are eligible for promotion. This is the case when the proposal is in line with the development-policy principles of the BMZ.

The right to propose solutions does not apply to **transitional development assistance**, or to the special initiatives and funds (including the Blue Action Fund for marine conservation and the Legacy Landscape Fund for biodiversity). The BMZ has thematic and/or regional stipulations for these instruments for which civil society organisations and UN organisations can be implementing partners, as can state implementing organisations, including the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW).

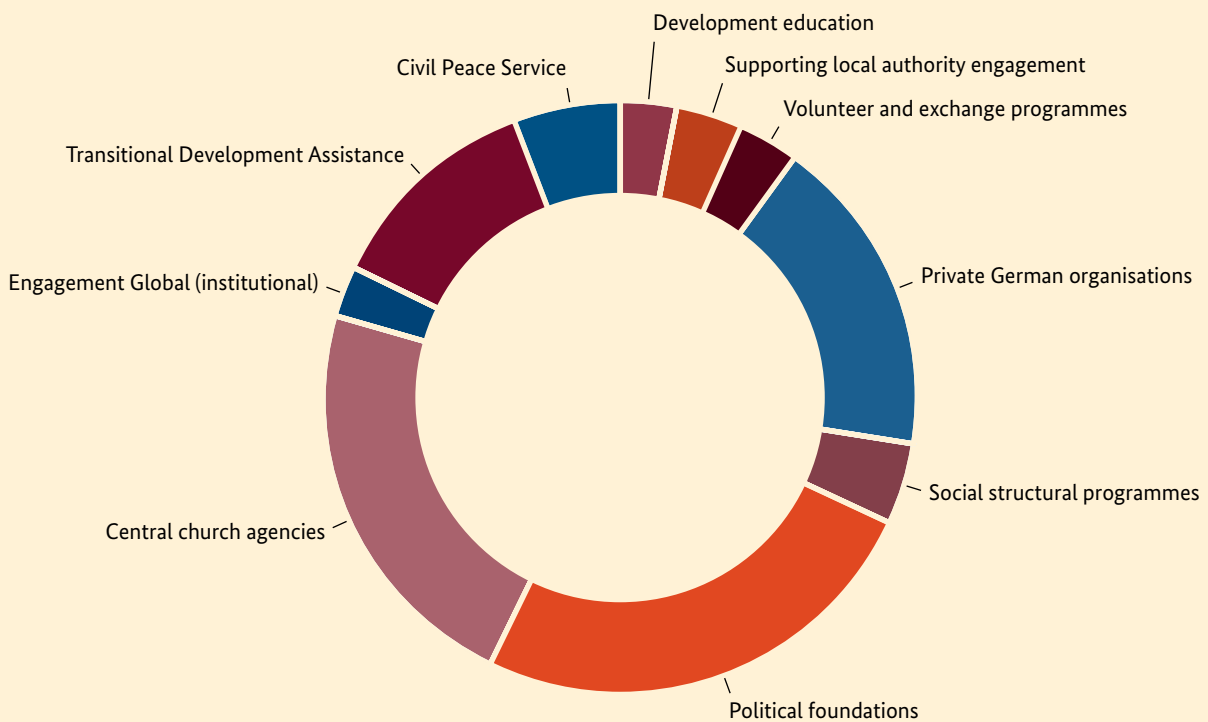
In bilateral financial and technical development cooperation, the BMZ supports civil society organisations

in partner countries through its implementing organisations. Cooperation can take a variety of forms: advisory services, capacity building, financial subsidies, tendering for certain services to be delivered by civil society organisations acting as subcontractors. Every type of cooperation also builds the capacity of the civil society actors involved.

To have an impact in the long term, civil society must have the knowledge, skills and structures to underpin its engagement. Where there is a need, capacities must be developed. At the same time, civil society in the **Global South** does have its own expertise and local knowledge. In future this is to be acknowledged to a greater extent, and harnessed through two-way knowledge sharing.

The BMZ attaches great importance to civil society demonstrating its independence and ownership, also by providing what is generally a substantial financial contribution of its own to fund projects.

Diversity of BMZ's support for civil society outside ODA  
(Total 2022: EUR 1.35 billion)



## 2.2 Strengthening civil society in countries of the Global South

Constructive relations between the state and civil society are a major precondition for social and political participation, as well as for sustainable development. For this reason, in its National Security Strategy, the German government has undertaken to expand the range of services it provides to strengthen civil society. Establishing a more enabling environment for civil society worldwide is one central thrust of Germany's development policy. The BMZ actively addresses the shrinking space for civil society actors as part of its political dialogue. German development cooperation also strives to defend human rights and basic liberties. Over and above this, it endeavours to achieve gender equality, democratic and social participation and inclusive, participatory and representative consensus building and decision-making. Protecting civil society's scope for action is crucially important in this context. This is why the BMZ is already promoting sound, participatory governance and constructive cooperation between state and civil society actors at local level, partly through official bilateral cooperation in many partner countries.

Parallel to this, it is important to develop the capacities of civil society actors in the context of digital transformation. Digital technologies offer people opportunities for social and political participation as well as opening up options for personal and economic development. But they also entail specific risks, making sound, inclusive governance and human rights crucially important, in the digital sphere as elsewhere.

Around the globe, civil society actors' scope for action is increasingly shrinking. According to the Civil Society Atlas 2023, 6.7 billion people (85% of the global population) live in countries where civil society is obstructed, repressed or closed. "Closed" in this context means that any criticism of the regime incurs heavy penalties and that there is no freedom of the press. This phenomenon is often termed the shrinking space of civil society. The CIVICUS Monitor observes worldwide trends with respect to freedom of assembly, freedom of association and freedom of expression. According to the Civil Society Atlas 2023, the number of countries in which civil society was "repressed" or "closed" rose from 62 in 2020 to 76 in 2023. Organisations working in the field of human rights, particularly those advocating for women's rights

and the rights of Indigenous Peoples, were particularly adversely affected by **shrinking spaces**. Against this backdrop, the BMZ would like to offer greater support to civil society in the **Global South**. Section 3 will look at the options available.

## 2.3 Fostering an understanding of development policy and encouraging engagement in Germany

Development policy needs strong popular support and the engagement of the German people. To harness the potential offered by civic engagement, the BMZ established Engagement Global -Service for Development Initiatives in 2012. It is the central service agency for civic engagement in the field of development, covering citizens, civil society organisations and municipalities. On behalf of the BMZ, Engagement Global brings together various networking, advisory and support options for non-ODA development engagement. It also implements its own programmes, alone or in cooperation with other organisations and actors. It is the central institution for advising and supporting civil society actors as part of BMZ's development information and education work.

Civil society organisations in Germany and in the **Global South**, with their education, PR and advocacy work, are important in communicating development-relevant content and skills. Thanks to their experience, self-reflection and knowledge, returning experts in the development service, *weltwärts* volunteers, Civil Peace Service (CPS) experts and Senior Expert Service (SES) professionals play an important part in development-policy engagement. Volunteer services assign volunteers to cooperate with local partners in a spirit of partnership and solidarity. To foster a two-way exchange, they also second volunteers from the **Global South** to Germany. The BMZ will continue to reflect on and fine-tune this engagement with the seconding services, partly with a view to overcoming **colonial continuities**.

In the field of development information and education work, German civil society complements state engagement, providing non-formal education services to deliver support that is as inclusive as possible. The BMZ uses the Funding Programme for Development Education in Germany (FEB), the Programme for Action Groups (AGP) and the PFQ programme for developmental skills training to promote the education and upskilling services offered by civil society organisations. In the Education meets Development Programme (BtE) too, civil society actors actively help ensure that global learning events can be held for people of all ages.

### 3 Making the most of opportunities: our objectives and the steps involved in implementation

The BMZ gears its cooperation in partnership strategy to the **OECD-DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance** and aligns it with the outcomes of consultations with civil society.

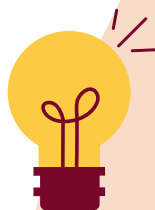
The OECD-DAC Recommendation, produced with the collaboration of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) provides guidance on how to support civil society in a spirit of partnership. It gives donors clear recommendations on how to expand space for civil society and on how to shape cooperation. The Recommendation consists of three pillars: a) respecting, protecting and promoting civic space, b) supporting and engaging with civil society, and c) incentivising CSO effectiveness, transparency and accountability.

The BMZ drew up this cooperation in partnership strategy in the course of an open, intensive dialogue with representatives of civil society in Germany and the **Global South**. In 2023, within the scope of two dialogues with German civil society, the BMZ discussed ways of involving new social actors and movements to a greater extent in development policy, as well as looking at ways to better anchor development policy in German public opinion. Within the scope of a third dialogue with civil society in the **Global South** and in Germany, we discussed ways of putting this partnership on a more equal footing.

### 3.1 Stepping up the political dialogue with civil society

An increasing number of civil society organisations are operating at political level and playing an active part in international processes. More and more organisations are not working purely in “traditional” projects, but are focusing on the shortcomings of state activities, i.e. acting as watchdogs. They see themselves as critical monitors of official development policy, multilateral organisations and the European Union. They represent the interests of society as a whole, advocate for overcoming **colonial continuities** in thoughts and actions, demand that sections of society suffering structural disadvantages be granted equal consideration and that their interests be represented, and draw up alternative draft policies.

Dialogue with civil society actors is thus indispensable if we are to achieve our common development objectives.



To reinforce political dialogue with civil society in Germany and the Global South, the BMZ will:

- Continue to develop partnerships with civil society on issues that will determine our global future. In this, the BMZ will draw on the views and expertise of civil society in the **Global South**, particularly feminist civil society, by stepping up dialogue to incorporate local knowledge and thus enhance the quality and sustainability of measures.
- Intensify dialogue with German civil society to achieve a better common understanding of key development issues and new topic areas.
- Integrate a wide spectrum of civil society views from both the Global North and the **Global South** in BMZ strategy processes.
- Work with civil society to increasingly bring common issues and concerns more effectively to the attention of the German public.



## 3.2 Protecting the space for civil society worldwide

According to the Civil Society Atlas 2023, only about three per cent of the world's population today enjoy unrestricted civil society liberties. They live in no more than 38 states, which fully respect and protect human rights. Representatives of civil society, particularly representatives of feminist NGOs or of LGBTIQ+ groups are frequently subject to physical threats and/or are threatened online.

Some governments have in the past exploited crises and the pertinent special powers and exceptional authorisations, and indeed continue to do so, to try to silence critical voices and shrink space for civil society as well as restricting civic liberties. These cases are addressed by the BMZ within the framework of inter-governmental dialogue, with a view to counteracting these trends. The main focus is on upholding legal rights and legal certainty for civil society.

### Example of a project to expand the space for civil society

The Civil Society Participation in Governance Reform and Poverty Reduction project, implemented by the GIZ, made an important contribution to expanding the space for civil society in Zambia between 2009 and 2021. By strengthening NGOs and helping them utilise digital technologies and social media the project helped empower NGOs to critically monitor the presidential election – a contribution to ensuring a peaceful change of government in Zambia.



To protect and strengthen civil society's scope for action worldwide, the BMZ will:

- Work with like-minded partners, including other donors and UN organisations, to support partner governments in drawing up and implementing pro-civil society legislation.
- Seek close dialogue with civil society, through discussion rounds and project visits in partner countries for instance. It will make use of this dialogue to find out more about the situation of civil society, to better understand the context and to harness these findings for inter-governmental dialogue and portfolio management.
- Increasingly use inter-governmental dialogues (inter-governmental consultations and negotiations for instance) to address the limited and shrinking space for civil society and trends towards autocratisation in relevant countries.
- Seek new ways to support civil society actors in countries where their space is shrinking. This could involve using funds managed by civil society actors or other development partners.
- Strengthen the capacities and networking of civil society actors in the **Global South**. This often enables them to make use of the limited space available without facing risks (**do no harm** principle).
- Secure and expand increasingly shrinking space worldwide for civil society by actively involving German and international civil society in multilateral coordination and consultation processes, including the G7 and G20.
- Underscore the special role and value of civil society at UN level and within other multilateral and supranational actors.



### 3.3 Feminist development policy: supporting equal participation

The BMZ **human rights-based approach**, with its gender transformative path to achieving gender-responsive structures and norms, is indispensable to our support for cooperation arrangements with civil society. The goal of **feminist development policy** in this is to reinforce the rights of women, girls and marginalised groups, to support equal access to resources for them, and to enhance their representation in political and economic decision-making processes. In the projects of civil society organisations, the BMZ supports the systematic adoption of **feminist development policy** and a human-rights-based approach, with a special focus on marginalised population groups including LGBTIQ+ individuals, children, Indigenous Peoples and people with disabilities.

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#### Project example: Empowering women and girls – overcoming violence

In a project to prevent gender-based discrimination and violence in India, **terre des hommes Deutschland e.V.** and local partner organisations are empowering women and girls. Crimes against women, including rape, murder and kidnapping are commonplace in the project region. The project is using general education and sex and health education to support girls in rural India, where three quarters of all women and girls are illiterate and where most of the few girls that do start school are forced into early marriage. The aim is that women and girls have a say and that their voices are heard. The women and girls are empowered in economic, social and political terms, enabling them to play an active part in building a society with gender equality. Both terre des hommes and its partner organisations agree that only a change of awareness within society can help prevent the constant sexual attacks on women and girls.

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**To protect human rights and support equal participation, the BMZ will:**

- Support partner governments in their efforts to meet human rights obligations and to undertake pertinent reforms.
- Support, and where necessary initiate local, national and international interest representation bodies and networks working for equal participation for women, girls and marginalised groups, especially people with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples and LGBTIQ+ persons.
- Work to ensure that traditional local knowledge and expertise, and the experience and approaches of feminist civil society, women's networks, women's movements, LGBTIQ+ organisations and defenders of human rights in the **Global South** are incorporated in political and economic decision-making processes. Wherever possible, the BMZ will incorporate the positions of local or regional civil society in the inter-governmental dialogue, in multi-lateral fora and in strategy development.
- Initiate a learning process leading to equal participation in political and corporate decision-making bodies, and in local and regional planning and budgeting processes for women and marginalised groups.
- Work also through civil society projects to close the digital gender gap.
- Explore how it can increasingly support the education work of feminist civil society, for instance in the form of advocacy campaigns.
- In the case of new NGO projects, strive to ensure in project planning and implementation that the concepts and measures used either a) generate an awareness within society of gender inequalities and help achieve sustainable changes to discriminatory power structures and gender stereotypes (i.e. that they have a gender transformative impact), or b) that they at least take account of the different needs of the different gender groups (i.e. that they are gender responsive).

### 3.4 Strengthening ownership on the part of actors in the Global South

Representatives of civil society in the **Global South** are increasingly calling for greater ownership in development cooperation. This involves not only more direct access to resources but also a change in cooperation culture and a new way of thinking. As a result, the BMZ will continue to hone its principles of cooperation in partnership. Equal partnerships mean redressing the imbalance in power resulting from the colonial past and the way of life and business practices based on this period. It is a shared goal of the BMZ and civil society to further dismantle existing power imbalances and move forward to a more equal partnership.

In addition to supporting civil society in the **Global South** through German civil society, the BMZ is using a number of other channels to assist civil society in the **Global South**. These include official bilateral development cooperation implemented by one of Germany's implementing organisations, **transitional development assistance** tools and thematic and regional funds such as the Blue Action Fund, the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) and the regional fund for triangular cooperation.

To overcome **colonial continuities** in cooperation, the BMZ will in future place more responsibility in the hands of civil society in the **Global South**. To this end, instruments are needed that support civil society organisations in the **Global South** more in line with their own priorities, and that reduce the inequalities and dependencies that still mark relations between the **Global South** and the Global North.

To achieve this goal, the BMZ intends to extend financing options for civil society in the **Global South**. One focus will be on promoting feminist civil society and advocacy work. The promotion of Indigenous Peoples and local communities is also particularly important in this context, for instance with regard to biodiversity and forest conservation.

There are already a whole series of funds worldwide, some managed by civil society actors themselves, that operate at international level to support local civil society initiatives in the **Global South**. The BMZ believes that this form of assistance via intermediaries is particularly appropriate. Firstly, it can reach local actors more directly and secondly, it meets the requirements of German budgetary law in terms of ensuring efficiency and accountability. The BMZ sees a more direct promotion of civil society in the **Global South** as a way of supplementing tried and tested modalities and as a valuable addition to the BMZ's toolbox.



To strengthen ownership and enhance the resources available to local actors, the BMZ will:

- Assess whether the principle of **locally led development** is being adequately implemented in ongoing non-ODA projects. The Power Awareness Tool offers one option here.
- Drive forward local ownership, for instance by reviewing applications and offering training for German and local civil society organisations.
- Expand and pilot new approaches to promoting civil society in the **Global South** in dialogue with civil society and other donors, preferably through international funds that provide access to funding. The focuses here will be on implementing **feminist development policy** and on the role of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in conserving biodiversity and forests, since both feminist civil society and Indigenous Peoples are particularly severely under-funded.

### 3.5 Simplifying ongoing support for civil society

A large percentage of the BMZ's support for civil society in the **Global South** is channelled through German civil society organisations (using what is termed a "peer to peer approach"). This has proved its worth, not only in times of **shrinking spaces**. It also provides for a two-way knowledge transfer between civil society organisations in the **Global South** and in Germany, thus laying a foundation for development education work in Germany. One crucially important element is that the planned measures should, as far as possible, be initiated, planned and implemented by the local partner organisations and/or target groups. This is designed to enhance the institutional performance of the organisations and the capacities of the local target groups in the long term. The challenge is to find a balance between ownership on the part of the local partners on one hand and compliance with German budgetary regulations governing the use of public funds on the other.

The BMZ's promotion system is intended to be easy for civil society organisations to understand and the application process is designed to be as simple as possible. The aim is to give even small civil society organisations with fewer administrative capacities the chance to lodge an application, thus enhancing diversity among the organisations involved. The regulations governing applications and accountability pose a challenge, particularly for smaller organisations. LGBTIQ+ groups, for instance, and individuals with a migrant background have not always been reached in the best possible way. The organisations that represent these groups are often small and relatively young, and they frequently lack the experience and resources needed to master bureaucratic application procedures. The existing toolbox barely reaches civil society that is not represented by actual organisations, including new informal actors with no specific legal status.

The BMZ faces the task on the one hand of cutting red tape while also ensuring the correct use of funds and accountability vis à vis the general public and the German Parliament regarding the results achieved.



To simplify the process of supporting civil society, the BMZ will:

- Continue to drive forward reforms to simplify assistance procedures, in particular by redrafting the guidelines on funding **private organisations**, in close dialogue with VENRO and civil society organisations already receiving support (including diaspora organisations, LGBTIQ+ organisations and new networks).
- Continue to review its promotion systems in dialogue with civil society to identify opportunities to optimise and further digitalise the systems. In this the BMZ is responsive and open to specific support needs of the above groups.

### 3.6 Involving the full spectrum of civil society actors

A wide spectrum of civil society actors and organisations are involved in development work. They range from small voluntary outfits to large professional organisations. They differ in terms of their ideology and their specific fields of action. Societal change is also spawning new groups that are bringing their concerns to development cooperation and helping overcome global challenges.

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#### Project example: Protecting children's rights – creating prospects of a better future – fighting terrorism

In the West African states of Cameroon, Benin and Togo, **Kinderrechte Afrika e.V.** and its partners are working to improve living conditions for young people in regions threatened by violent extremism, including attacks by Boko Haram. Children and young people suffer most from tensions in the region. The project work intends to enable young people, who account for 50% of the population, to play an active part in achieving a peaceful and non-violent society, where their rights are respected. The young people are involved in developing their own communities with a view to enhancing their social participation and their prospects of a better future. The goal is to eliminate the breeding grounds of terrorism among young people.

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Over the last two legislative periods, the BMZ has stepped up cooperation with religious actors whose activities are based on the acceptance of human rights and gender equality and on upholding democracy and the rule of law. In many partner countries, religious actors are important representatives of local concerns and drivers of development. They are in a position to initiate changes in social norms and to launch societal and political reforms.

Thus, cooperation with other civil society groups too is to be stepped up. Private foundations and philanthropists, for instance, have excellent networks and a high level of professional expertise. They are often able to contribute financial resources of their own. However, sustainable development has hitherto been a field addressed by only a small percentage of private foundations in Germany. Only about six per cent of the

country's 2,000 or so foundations state that development cooperation is their purpose in their statutes or conduct activities in this area.

Individuals with a migrant background are one group within civil society that is still under-represented in German development cooperation associations and organisations. Currently, diasporas and migrants' organisations fill this gap. Since many diaspora organisations are very young, they frequently operate in the area where social movements, voluntary engagement and civil society organisations meet. The BMZ appreciates the special needs of diasporas that are interested in development, and has at its disposal specific instruments to assist diaspora and migrants' organisations. The aim is to foster diversity and eliminate structural obstacles, in order to give diasporas non-discriminatory access to BMZ assistance instruments.



Young people constitute another group that is becoming increasingly important in cooperation with civil society. Most countries in the **Global South** have very young populations. We aim to support their engagement and motivation to work for sustainable development, good governance and democratic political participation to an even greater extent.

### Project example: Migration and Diaspora

Since 2019 the BMZ has been strengthening diasporas in Germany that are actively involved in development in their countries of origin, firstly through the **Programme Migration and Diaspora (until 2023) and then through the follow-on programme Shaping Development-oriented Migration Policy (since 2023)**. The programme offers support to businesses and start-ups launched by the diaspora in their country of origin as well as assisting short-term assignments of diaspora experts to transfer know-how to state or public benefit institutions. Magda Chabashvili, a doctor originally from Georgia, for instance, worked with medical professionals at a tuberculosis unit in Tbilisi to introduce digital patient records. Having worked for two years in a health facility in Munich and gained experience there, Chabashvili undertook a six-month assignment in Tbilisi. This was an important contribution to standardising data entry procedures and eased the burden on the full-time nursing staff in the unit.

Our current toolbox has broadly failed to reach sections of civil society that are not represented by formal organisations, including new social movements. These movements offer opportunities to reach younger people and encourage their engagement. Many people, especially young people, are getting involved today not only through formal structures, but increasingly also through informal networks. Both the BMZ and civil society operating in established formal structures need to better harness the cooperation potential offered to address development issues.



To involve the full spectrum of civil society actors, the BMZ will:

- Step up its dialogue, particularly with diaspora organisations, new social movements and philanthropists.
- Expand support for civil society organisations working for the human rights of LGBTIQ+ persons.
- Explore whether specific support options need to be put in place for informal civil society groups and new social actors, and whether existing instruments pose structural obstacles for certain civil society actors.
- Mainstream development issues more strongly among the rising number of private foundations and philanthropists.

## 3.7 Promoting multi-stakeholder partnerships

No state can achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) alone. Global partnerships are needed, with the combined efforts of all states, civil societies, the private sector and individuals. This will work all the better if all actors within society do their bit (the political level, the business community, the academic and research community and civil society). That is the essence of SDG 17 (Partnerships for the goals of the **2030 Agenda**). Multi-stakeholder partnerships are an important instrument in this. Cooperation among actors from the state sector, the business community, the academic and research community and civil society to address specific challenges can bridge conflicts of interest, strengthen shared responsibility and lay the foundations for structural and socially accepted change. The BMZ supports and advises multi-stakeholder partnerships, specifically also those spawned by civil society initiatives.



## Project example: Multi-stakeholder partnership

BMZ's PREVENT Waste Alliance is an international co-operation platform with over 450 member organisations recruited from the business community, the academic and research community, civil society and state institutions. PREVENT fosters supra-sectoral cooperation for a worldwide circular economy and has become a globally recognised international network in this sector. This is reflected in strongly rising member numbers, the broad spectrum of members' expertise, and their experience in developing and implementing projects. PREVENT working groups have produced knowledge products and recommendations for action that have gained international acclaim, including plastic credits and the implementation of the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal. Nine pilot projects and 3 innovation programmes have been implemented in over 20 countries, to devise groundbreaking solutions for the circular economy. Since the project was first launched, more than 3,262 tonnes of plastic waste have been gathered and over 350,000 people have been reached by awareness-raising measures.



To support multi-stakeholder partnerships, the BMZ will:

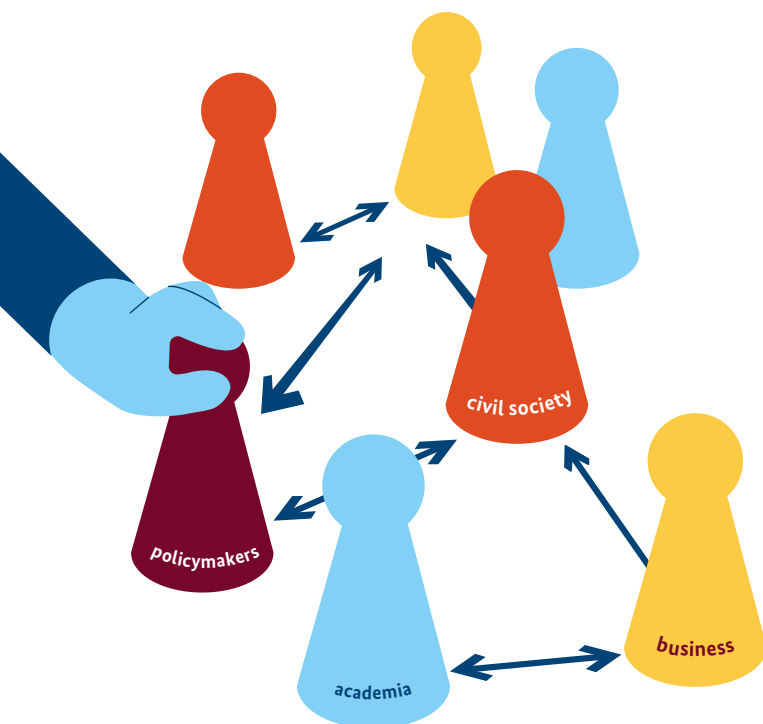
- Deliver specific support for multi-stakeholder partnerships and their civil society actors at local and international level, to enhance their political clout and the sustainability of solutions, in areas such as supply chains.

## 3.8 Ensuring sustainability, transparency and effectiveness

Civil society projects are only successful if they are sustainable and effective. Civil society actors strive to maximise the positive impacts of their activities. With respect to their projects, they feel accountable not only to their public-sector financiers and donors but also to their target groups and partner organisations.

One important precondition for the effectiveness of development engagement is the economic, social and environmental sustainability of investments and processes. The BMZ is responsible both to German tax-payers and to target groups in partner countries. That is why we both support and demand sustainable project planning, implementation and realisation in our work with civil society.

Transparency is another important principle in order to ensure effectiveness. Transparency makes for better management and coordination of development cooperation and helps prevent corruption. It also strengthens civil society in partner countries, because open access to the activity-related data of local organisations helps people analyse the actions of their governments, monitor government activities critically, and demand accountability regarding the use of funds.





**To ensure sustainability, transparency and effectiveness, the BMZ will:**

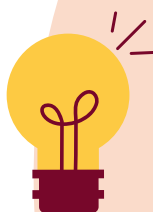
- Step up the dialogue with German civil society organisations on how to manage increasingly stringent demands in the field of monitoring and evaluation, taking account of the specific nature of civil society programmes and the BMZ guidelines on evaluating development cooperation.
- Continue to consistently align **transitional development assistance**, which operates in fragile contexts and crises, with scientific evidence. To this end, the BMZ will also continue to expand its use of impact evaluations.
- In conjunction with DEval, the independent German Institute for Development Evaluation, assess not only the impacts of state-assisted cooperation arrangements with civil society, but also collaborate on developing suitable quality standards for the evaluation of these projects and advise and support civil society organisations in the use of the standards.
- Via Engagement Global, and within the framework of the services it offers, introduce a content-related and financial contribution to enhance impact orientation in the planning and management of civil society programmes (including quality assurance).
- Work to get civil society organisations to take account of climate and environmental objectives in their project planning and implementation.
- Continue to publish data on bilateral development cooperation activities and on the promotion of civil society organisations and projects in line with the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) Standard. Account will be taken of the sensitive nature of data in the context of **shrinking spaces**, to avoid endangering civil society organisations.

### 3.9 Working together to consolidate support for development policy

Development policy can only succeed if it has the support of the population. For many years, the BMZ and German civil society have been partners in efforts to bring development policy more to the attention of the general public. Today, this is more relevant than ever before, but the challenges we face are also greater. Competition for attention for political topics has heightened in the face of multiple crises, and the political forces that question the need for international solidarity and development policy have become more prominent. Neither has it always proved possible to leverage the huge potential for development engagement. PR work for development faces the difficulty of addressing all age groups and every section of German society throughout the country, as well as making use of new communication channels.

Support for development policy among the German people can be increased with the help of PR work and through information and education. The BMZ's development information and education work aims to cultivate an awareness among the general public of the need to change environmental, social, political and economic habits, as well as advocating for global partnerships.

Civil society organisations help bring development education services to as many citizens as possible, across all age groups. This makes them an indispensable partner of the BMZ when it comes to strengthening support for development policy among the German population, and creating a sounding board for education for sustainable development. Thanks to their wide-ranging experience of cooperation with civil society partners in the **Global South** they have valuable contacts and knowledge that they can share inside Germany. In this context, both voluntary and full-time engagement within civil society organisations and initiatives is necessary and important.



In order to strengthen support for development policy within the German population, the BMZ will:

- Continue to foster cooperation between state and non-governmental actors at all levels in the implementation of development education services.
- Provide financial support through various programmes for the development education work of civil society actors.
- Review whether support options can be put in place for informal civil society actors, so that even more people can share their knowledge and experience with regard to global issues.
- Test approaches which specifically address younger target groups, partly by making more use of social media, also to address precise target groups.
- Give more space to the voices of our partners in the **Global South** within development communication.



## 4 Further reading: studies, strategies and positions relating to cooperation with civil society

Link to publication	Bibliographical references	Ideas and views relating to
➤ <b>Engagementstrategie des BMZ (in German)</b>	BMZ (Ed.) (2023) Engagement weltweit: Strategie zur Förderung bürgerschaftlichen Engagements in der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit in und aus Deutschland (German only)	Civic engagement for development.
➤ <b>BMZ Strategy. Feminist Development Policy</b>	BMZ (Ed.) (2023) Feminist Development Policy. For Just and Strong Societies Worldwide	Presentation of the status quo, the feminist approach and the future feminist direction of German development policy.
➤ <b>Konzept des BMZ zur Entwicklungspolitischen Informations- und Bildungsarbeit (in German)</b>	BMZ (Ed.) (2021) Konzept des BMZ zur Entwicklungspolitischen Informations- und Bildungsarbeit (German only)	Presentation of the BMZ's strategy on development information and education work and the programmes, actors and target group receiving BMZ-funded support.
➤ <b>DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance</b>	OECD (Ed.) (2021) <i>DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance</i>	Recommendations for cooperation with civil society in development cooperation and humanitarian assistance.
➤ <b>Civil Society Atlas 2023</b>	Brot für die Welt, Evangelisches Werk für Diakonie und Entwicklung e.V. (Ed.) (2023) Civil Society Atlas 2023: Solidarity under attack	Presentation of the spaces open to civil society worldwide. Thematic priority for 2023: Migration.
➤ <b>VENRO report "Shifting Power"</b>	VENRO (Ed.) (2022) Shifting Power: wie entwicklungspolitische und humanitäre Nichtregierungsorganisationen den Folgen von Kolonialismus in ihrer Arbeit begegnen können (German only)	Presentation of the debate on decolonisation and localisation, with examples of how to design cooperation in partnership with civil society in the Global South.
➤ <b>The Power Awareness Tool</b>	The Spindle (2020): The Power Awareness Tool	The tool renders visible power disparities between partners and allows us to analyse and reflect on power relations.
➤ <b>Strategy on Transitional Development Assistance</b>	BMZ (Ed.) (2020): Strategy on Transitional Development Assistance. Overcoming crises – Strengthening resilience – Creating new prospects	Strategic requirements for the implementation of transitional development assistance projects.
➤ <b>National Security Strategy</b>	German Federal Foreign Office (Ed.) (2023): Robust. Resilient. Sustainable. Integrated Security for Germany National Security Strategy	Germany's National Security Strategy sets out the country's role at a time when global power balances are shifting and systemic rivalry is coming to the fore. It also provides responses to external threats. It explains security policy in detail and in terms of individuals in the spirit of integrated security.

# Abbreviations

<b>BMZ</b>	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
<b>CPS</b>	Civil Peace Service
<b>DAC</b>	Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
<b>GIZ</b>	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH
<b>IATI</b>	International Aid Transparency Initiative
<b>KfW</b>	Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau
<b>LGBTIQ+</b>	lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer (the + stands for other gender identities)
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organisation
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>SES</b>	Senior Expert Service
<b>VENRO</b>	The umbrella organisation of development and humanitarian non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Germany

# Glossary

<b>2030 Agenda</b>	On 25 September 2015 the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted at a United Nations summit in New York. In it, the international community stated that complex global challenges can only be addressed by working together, and that every state must do its bit. With the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that are part of the 2030 Agenda the international community set itself goals that are to enable everyone in the world to live in dignity, while preserving our natural resource base in the long term. The 2030 Agenda calls on all states to ensure their actions are environmentally sound, socially just and economically effective.
<b>Agencies engaged in social structural programmes</b>	<p>Agencies engaged in social structural programmes are non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that have the skills and experience needed to develop and support social structures. In development cooperation, these agencies work to strengthen self-help and civil society's own initiatives, as well as fostering the participation of disadvantaged sections of the population in the social and economic development of their country.</p> <p>Around the globe the BMZ is currently supporting the work of eight agencies engaged in social structural programmes: Arbeiterwohlfahrt (AWO), the Bildungswerk des Deutschen Gewerkschaftsbundes (Training Institute of the German Trade Union Confederation), Bremen Overseas Research and Development Agency (BORDA), Caritas Germany, the German Cooperative and Raiffeisen Confederation, the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association, the Sozial- und Entwicklungshilfe des Kolpingwerkes (SEK) and the German Red Cross.</p> <p>These organisations operate in a wide spectrum of fields including adult education, support for cooperatives, trade union-related education, small-scale loans, basic sanitation, social work, community development and organisational development.</p>
<b>Colonial continuities</b>	Colonial continuities is the term used to describe the fact that even today societies are still marked by structures and ways of thinking that date back to the colonial era.
<b>Do no harm</b>	The “do no harm” principle aims to identify any potentially adverse impacts of development cooperation at an early stage, as well as preventing or mitigating any such impacts. Programmes operating within the context of a crisis must be designed to be conflict-sensitive in line with this principle. Approaches of this sort are also important with respect to gender equality. When a new project is planned, care must be taken to ensure that it does not consolidate or aggravate existing gender-specific inequalities, disadvantages or discrimination.
<b>Feminist development policy</b>	Feminist development policy aims to enable all people to participate on an equal basis in social, political and economic life – irrespective of gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, skin colour, disability or any other characteristics.
<b>Global South</b>	<p>The term Global South is used not in a geographical context, but to refer to the political, economic and cultural position of a state in the global context. Countries in the Global South have historically had a disadvantaged position within the global system in social, political and economic terms.</p> <p>For the purposes of this paper, the term Global South is used to refer to the countries on the OECD-DAC list of states that are recipients of official development assistance (ODA).</p>
<b>Human rights-based approach</b>	In politics, a human rights-based approach focuses on the entitlements of individuals vis-à-vis the state in which they live under international law and promotes human rights principles, including participation, empowerment and non-discrimination. Within the framework of development cooperation, individuals and groups are given support to enable them to demand their rights and take charge of their own lives. Target groups are not recipients of assistance or charity but are rights holders. It is the governments of their countries that must comply with their obligations. Promotion of human rights in every area of cooperation is one of the most important preconditions for sustainable development and poverty reduction.
<b>Locally led development</b>	Locally led development is an approach in which local actors (individuals, communities, organisations or governments) determine the objectives of development projects, devise solutions and provide the capacities, leadership and resources to realise these solutions.



<b>OECD-DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance</b>	The Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance addresses the question of how international donors can better support civil society. It thus contributes to achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG 17 (Global partnerships for the goals). It is the first international standard dedicated to promoting civil society. The Recommendation is what is termed “soft law”, meaning that it is not legally enforceable.
<b>Private organisations</b>	Under the budget line “Private organisations”, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) supports projects implemented in countries outside Germany by German non-profit civil society actors engaged in development work. These actors can, for instance, be organised as associations, as gGmbHs (non-profit private limited company under German law) or as foundations.
<b>Shrinking spaces</b>	Shrinking spaces is the term used to describe the diminishing scope for action for civil society around the world. Measures that cause spaces to shrink go from putting obstacles in place to imposing restrictions on freedom of opinion and association or even banning civil society organisations. In extreme cases, members of social movements and organisations have been branded criminals, threatened or even murdered.
<b>Social structural programmes</b>	<p>Social structural programmes aim to develop social structures that are firmly anchored in civil society and designed for the long term (such as associations), as well as structures involved in delivering (public) services of general interest. Social structural programmes strive to help shape macro structures, such as legislation, standards and budgets, generally at national level, as well as helping realise and implement these. Structure building of this sort can often only be achieved through long-term cooperation. It demands dovetailed measures at micro, meso and macro level from the outset.</p> <p>Agencies engaged in social structural programmes are non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and professional associations with a clear focus that have at their disposal the skills and experience to develop and support structures of this sort.</p>
<b>Subsidiarity principle</b>	Subsidiarity is a key principle in a liberal system of government and a societal order where people can live in dignity. It requires the state to accord individuals, families and society as much responsibility as possible and to enable them to take charge of their own lives as far as possible and expedient. State institutions should only intervene in a regulatory capacity where the capacities of the individual, or of a smaller group or a lower level state body are not sufficient to perform a specific task.
<b>Transitional development assistance</b>	Transitional development assistance is the BMZ’s single most important instrument in crisis transformation. It aims to make especially vulnerable individuals and local structures in fragile contexts more resilient in the medium and long term. To do so it uses multi-sector measures in the fields of food and nutrition security, peaceful coexistence, disaster risk management and the reconstruction of essential infrastructure and services. Transitional development assistance works with about 35 NGOs, which deliver specific expertise in the context of crises. They include Deutsche Welthungerhilfe, Caritas International and Handicap International, as well as the United Nations, GIZ and KfW, making this instrument flexible and providing for a rapid response. It is sometimes closely linked to humanitarian assistance, in line with the Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus. Transitional development assistance projects are based on conflict, gender and resilience analyses and foster gender equality.

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**ADDRESSES OF THE BMZ OFFICES**

→ BMZ Bonn

Dahlmannstraße 4

53113 Bonn

Tel. +49 (0) 228 99535-0

Fax +49 (0) 228 9910535-3500

→ BMZ Berlin

Stresemannstraße 94 (Europahaus)

10963 Berlin

Tel. +49 (0) 30 18535-0

Fax +49 (0) 228 9910535-3500

**CONTACT**

poststelle@bmz.bund.de