



zef

Center for
Development Research
University of Bonn

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ZEFNEWS

Special issue



ZEF 25 YEARS



ZEF BACKGROUND AND MISSION

The Center for Development Research (ZEF) is an institute of the University of Bonn, Germany. It started its research activities in 1997. ZEF's researchers aim to find science-based solutions to promote sustainable development and planetary health. ZEF's research divisions and groups conduct inter- and transdisciplinary research in, for and with emerging economies and on global issues with its collaborating research partners around the world. ZEF educates doctoral students from all over the world in its Doctoral Studies Program. ZEF is guided by an International Advisory Board.

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WELCOME

ZEF and its international doctoral program have been an integral part of the University of Bonn since its founding in 1997/1999. The University Senate played a key role in the establishment of the Center. Moreover, the majority of ZEF's nearly 500 former doctoral students have received their doctoral degrees from one of the University's faculties. The City of Bonn has also been an important partner and supporter of ZEF from the very beginning. We are therefore honored to give the floor to the current Rector of the University of Bonn, Michael Hoch, and the current Mayor of the City of Bonn, Katja Dörner!




MICHAEL HOCH

Dear distinguished friends of ZEF,

Twenty-nine years have now passed since the Rectorate and Senate of the University of Bonn decided back in 1995 to establish an academic think-tank for international and interdisciplinary questions of development research, the Center for Development Research, or ZEF. ZEF's foundation was made possible by the Berlin-Bonn Act and the financial support of the federal government and the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, and it was able to be negotiated after the German Bundestag reached a decision on the country's future capital in 1991 in the wake of its reunification. In academic terms, ZEF was originally geared toward providing insights from development research for global benefit and serving Germany on a national scale as well as the state of North Rhine-Westphalia and the federal city of Bonn with an international agenda. No such research institute existed in Germany up to that point. Demand for research-based advice on development and science policy was growing after the fall of the Iron Curtain: within Germany, in emerging economies around the world, and among global institutions such as the UN and the World Bank. Furthermore, in 1996, Bonn became the German city of the United Nations. Thus, ZEF fitted very well into the political agenda of that time in Germany.

More than 25 years have now passed since ZEF opened its doors. There is no doubt: ZEF's development is a unique success story. It has become one of the world's most renowned and most important think-tanks on development policy and development research. Looking back, one might wonder how this was possible. Thanks to some great recruitment, excellent research by outstanding and inspiring researchers, its motivated staff, a fantastic educational program for early-career researchers, the highly dedicated members of its advisory board, an outstanding network of global partners and, of course, the continuous support of the University, the ministries and the many donor agencies that have funded research and education at ZEF over the past few decades. Between 1999 and 2022, ZEF's interdis-

ciplinary doctoral program provided excellent training and support for more than 480 doctoral students from 80 countries who now hold positions of responsibility in the most prestigious organizations and institutions in all parts of the world. Many of the alumni who have worked with ZEF as postdoctoral and senior researchers are now actively helping to solve global and local problems through their work in international organizations, governments, research institutes, businesses, NGOs and civil society initiatives.

Looking at it today, one might ask whether an institute such as ZEF is still relevant and necessary? We firmly believe that it is, more than ever! Severe environmental and climate crises, the COVID-19 pandemic that caused worldwide health and economic shocks, flaring conflicts and wars, global refugee flows, a growing population. These are all gigantic challenges that are, of course, interrelated and that the global community must cooperate in order to solve. This becomes more and more difficult in times of severe political conflicts with rival systems threatening democracies and the liberal order. What we as a University can contribute is excellent research and education to help provide solutions to these global questions of the present and future, and ZEF lies at the heart of the University's endeavors to achieve these goals. To lend ZEF further support, we have dedicated two of our High Profile Professorships funded by the University of Excellence Program to ZEF and have recruited Ina Danquah (Hertz Chair for Innovation for Planetary Health) and Martin Qaim (Schlegel Professorship for Economic and Technological Change). Together with Christian Borgemeister, they are leading ZEF as its next generation of directors. In partnership with all its researchers, staff, students, and employees, ZEF is an academic powerhouse that is at the core of the University's Sustainable Futures Transdisciplinary Research Area.

All that remains to say is this: congratulations on (more than) 25 years of ZEF. We are proud of ZEF's outstanding history and stand ready to face the future!

Michael Hoch is the 143rd Rector of the University of Bonn and currently serving his third term. He has been Rector since May 2015.



KATJA DÖRNER

Dear readers,

The Center for Development Research (ZEF) is celebrating the 25th anniversary of its international doctoral program. When this program was launched back in 1999, two years after the institute itself had become operational, it was not only a first at the University of Bonn (followed by many other international programs over time) but also spearheading the establishment of structured doctoral programs in Germany. Looking back at almost 500 Alumni and Alumnae from 80 countries, who pursued their research here in Bonn over the past 25 years, I wholeheartedly applaud the makers and drivers of this program, which has become a landmark in both the development and research landscape of Bonn.

When we think of the 1990s in Germany, we think of the end of the cold war and a new positioning of East and West, epitomised by German reunification. When we think of Bonn in the 1990s, we think of the decision to move the parliament and parts of the federal government to Berlin. And we see Bonn reinventing itself as a federal city, a UN and international meeting place and a center for science and development research in Germany, with the Berlin/Bonn Act and the compensation agreement of 1994 paving the way for the city's new profile. With the support of the Federal and State Governments (NRW), new organizations and institutions were founded together with the City of Bonn to strengthen this new profile – including the launch of the Center for Development Research (ZEF) as part of the Center for International Cooperation and as a welcome addition to the science and research region.

When I as a mayor look at our Bonn of today, I have to praise the decision makers and visionaries of the early 1990s for their ideas, passion and diligence. Without them, Bonn would not be the sustainability hub, the international meeting place, the federal city and excellent research landscape that it is today.

It has been a long and rewarding journey from the first steps in 1993 towards a North-South Centre for Development Research as a source of inspiration for science, culture, politics and business to today's ZEF. From the very beginning, interdisciplinary research on political, socio-

economic and cultural framework conditions, the potential of nature and ecology, the sustainability of technical and scientific change as well as training, research and practical policy relevance have been on ZEF's agenda.

ZEF has always played a key role in Bonn's development as an international center for science and development research. ZEF's leadership supported for example the establishment of a new branch of the United Nations University in Bonn. UNU-EHS, the Institute for Environment and Human Security, has just celebrated its 20th anniversary itself.

What makes ZEF so special to me as a mayor, is the history of excellent collaboration between Bonn and ZEF. This ranges from joint presentations at events such as United Nations Days, Science Nights, Sustainability Weeks and Open Days to what I would describe as our flagship collaboration: the establishment of The Right Livelihood Campus in 2011 as a result of a meeting of the Right Livelihood Laureates in 2010. Bonn benefits greatly from this ongoing exchange with these visionaries of sustainability, who come to the RLC Campus for annual events.

When people talk about Bonn's international profile, the unique networking culture of our city often comes to mind. ZEF is one of the masters of networking in the dense sustainability and research landscape that we are so proud of – engaged in the Bonn Alliance for Sustainability Research, the Bonn Climate Group, the Bonn Water Network, Bonn.realis, the Biodiversity Research Network BION and gender@international Bonn alike.

This year, ZEF and its PhD program celebrate their 25th anniversary. Today, ZEF offers science-based and transdisciplinary solutions to global livelihood issues related to poverty, inequality, food security, land use, governance, migration, urbanization and health – all closely linked to the thematic framework of UN Bonn and the embedding sustainability cluster. No wonder that many of the nearly 500 alumni and alumnae have continued their work at ZEF as postdocs and senior researchers and are actively contributing to solving global and local problems through their work in international organizations, governments, research institutes, companies, NGOs and civil society initiatives.

It's never the institutions, it's the people: Visionaries and decision-makers who brought ZEF to life in the 1990s, the leadership up to the current Director Martin Qaim, the scientists who are passionate about their field of research, the supporters at all levels and, of course, those who are at the heart of this research - because sustainable development is about people and leaving no one behind.

Happy anniversary and THANK YOU, ZEF! Here's hoping for many more years of excellence, networking and collaboration!

Katja Dörner has been Mayor of Bonn since November 2020

CHRONICLES

In the 1990s, Germany was in a process of profound political change and development. The reunification of East and West Germany brought many challenges and opportunities. Berlin took over Bonn's position as the country's capital. Still, the city of Bonn managed to compensate for this loss of status and influence - financially, but also politically, by granting Bonn the unique status of "Federal City". The establishment of ZEF was therefore part of a broader effort to transform Bonn into an international development and science hub, involving many local, regional and national actors. Three contemporary witnesses share their perspectives and insights.

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MICHAEL BOHNET

ZEF'S INCEPTION: A DOCUMENTATION

On **December 13/14, 1993**, the University of Bonn held an international symposium on "Science in intercultural dialogue: Development Research as a Task of the University". At this symposium, Uwe Holtz outlined an initial concept for a North-South Centre for Development Research. Such a center could become a source of inspiration for science, culture, politics and business.

At the same conference on **December 14, 1993**, I proposed a detailed concept for a North-South Centre for Development Research (ZEF) based on four pillars: Intercultural co-operation; Natural space potentials and ecology; Sustainability of technical and scientific change; Political and socio-economic issues.

On **March 16, 1994**, a project group under the leadership of the Federal Ministry of Education and Science earmarked DM 1.6 Billion for the creation of a Bonn Science Area. It was planned to finance the funds from the compensatory measures made available by the Federal Government as part of the Bonn/Berlin Act of April 26, 1994.

On **May 27, 1994**, a meeting chaired by State Secretary Ziller from the Federal Ministry of Research and Technology was held to decide on the distribution of the compensation funds from the Bonn/Berlin Compensation Agreement. In addition to a large number of federal ministries, former State Secretary Gerhard Konow and Senior Ministerial Councillor Frank Speier attended on behalf of the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, and I represented the BMZ. The BMZ was able to prevail against tough competition with its proposal to set up a center for development research and beat the alternative project "Bonn European School of Economics" proposed by the Ministry of Economics. The BMZ was supported by the state of North Rhine-Westphalia and the city of Bonn (Mayor Bärbel Dieckmann). BMZ had agreed to make a sum of

DM 10 Million available for the realization of a scholarship program.

On **June 1, 1994**, I presented a detailed concept for the North-South Centre for Development Research containing the focal themes political, socio-economic and cultural framework conditions, natural space potentials and ecology, sustainability of technical and scientific change. The University of Bonn consented to this proposal. The concept also outlined the areas of training, research and practical policy relevance. Furthermore, a financial plan for the years 1995 - 2004 totaling DM 60 Million was presented, as well as a detailed staffing plan (professors, junior scientists, doctoral students, non-scientific staff). The concept was drawn up with the assistance of Prof Eckhart Ehlers, Vice-Rector of the University of Bonn at the time.

The concept was presented to and approved by the Budget Committee of the German Bundestag on June 17, 1994.

On **November 29, 1994**, the Rector of the University of Bonn, Max Huber, appointed a founding committee for the Center for Development Research (ZEF), which he and his deputy, Eckhart Ehlers, chaired. Other founding members included: Wilhelm Barthlott, University of



Bonn; Uwe Holtz, University of Bonn; Gerhard Konow, former State Secretary (State Commissioner of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia for Bonn as a science location); Frank Speier, Senior Ministerial Councillor, Ministry of Science and Research (Düsseldorf) and myself.

In **1997** Klaus Borchard took over the chairmanship in 1997 as the new Rector of the University of Bonn.

On **July 28, 1995**, the Rector of the University of Bonn, Max Huber, established an appointment committee for ZEF, to which I was invited too. The aim was to draw up the appointment lists for the three new professorships (C4) "Political and Cultural Change", "Economic and Technical Change" and "Natural Space Potentials - Ecology - Resource Management".

As ZEF is an interdisciplinary research institute, representatives from various faculties were appointed to the appointment committee including the Faculty of Law and Political Science, the Faculty of Arts, the Faculty of

Mathematics and Natural Sciences and the Faculty of Agriculture). The appointment committee met around twenty times between **1995 and 2002**.



Photo: (left to right) Former president of The Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN) Beate Jessel, former ZEF Senior Researcher Manfred Denich and former Mayor of Bonn Bärbel Dieckmann at a COP held in Bonn in 2008

The agricultural economist Joachim von Braun, the ecologist and soil scientist Paul Vlek and the sociologist Andreas Wimmer, who began their work at the ZEF in Bonn between **1997 and 1999**, were appointed as founding directors for the three professorships.

On **March 19, 1999**, the Rector of the University of Bonn at the time, Klaus Borchard, asked me to join the International Advisory Board of the ZEF, of which I was a member until 2008.



ZEF: A building construction site 1989

Michael Bohnet is a retired Ministerial Director (BMZ) and was a member of ZEF's International Advisory Board 1999 - 2008

**IN RETROSPECT:
JOACHIM VON BRAUN AND
PAUL VLEK**

FIRST ZEF-DIRECTORS




JOACHIM VON BRAUN

ZEF-Director from
1997-2002 and
2009-2021

Why was ZEF established 25 years ago?

The determinants of ZEF's establishment can be grouped in "deep causes" and "practical determinants".

The deep causes of establishing ZEF were that a Center for Development Research (ZEF) was (and is) needed. Understanding development opportunities and failures, identifying technological, institutional and policy innovations, and addressing global sustainability and human development issues was and remains needed. And such a research institute was missing in Germany. Demand for research-based advice on development and science policy was growing in Germany, as well as in emerging-economy countries, and at the level of global institutions such as UN and World Bank.

The practical determinants of ZEF's establishment resulted from Germany's transformation in the global and European context. Without the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 the federal government would not have moved from Bonn to Berlin, Bonn would not have gone through a process of internationalization, and there would have been no ZEF. Thus, this broad set of felt needs led to ZEF's establishment. ZEF was founded as a Bonn University-based institute with the aim of providing development research insights for global benefits, and serve Germany, North Rhine Westphalia and the region of Bonn with an international agenda.

What were the main agenda items on the development research agenda at the time?

At the time ZEF was founded, the development agenda had been shaped by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also known as the 'Earth Summit', held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1992. Actually, I participated in this Summit, and it influenced my own thinking as well as ZEF's early research agenda. Klaus Töpfer, the first Chair of the ZEF Advisory Board, played a crucial role in making the Rio Conference a success. The conference recognized that integrating and

balancing economic, social and environmental dimensions required new ways of how we produce and consume.

This concept was new at the time. Major outcomes of the UNCED Conference were: The Agenda 21, calling for new strategies to invest in the future in order to achieve overall sustainable development; the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD, also known as UN Biodiversity); and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). From its beginning, ZEF-research has related to all these Conventions and Agendas. The founding document of what eventually became ZEF actually mentioned a "North-South Centre for Development Research". But the North-South terminology appeared inappropriate to us for a research institute that was meant to address complex issues of change at global, regional and local levels. Thus, we asked Bonn University's leadership to call it "Center for Development Research (ZEF)".

ZEF's initial research agenda comprised research on development, change and capacity building. The latter was implemented through the doctoral studies program, designed as an integral part of ZEF's research agenda. The ambition was to position ZEF on the international map of leading development research institutes and think tanks. Working with and achieving sound theoretical underpinnings, a relevant empirical basis, as well as implementing cutting-edge methodologies, all applied to inter- and transdisciplinary approaches, were among ZEF's strategy. Thematically, ZEF was positioned around the key issues of poverty and inequality, environmental and ecological problems, gender, behavioral change, governance and conflicts. We did not want the agenda set by the team in Bonn, but rather work it out in close cooperation with our international research partners, while taking the advice of ZEF's high-level International Advisory Board into account.

In your opinion: What have been ZEF's main achievements and what the biggest challenges as a research and doctoral educational institute?

When we came to the building allocated as ZEF's office space in September 1997, removal vans stood on the street. They were about to transport office furniture and accessories belonging to members of the German federal parliament, who had been based at Bonn up to that moment, and were heading for their new premises in Berlin. We moved in without trucks. The first two weeks we had no desks or chairs, not even a computer system. However, we had telephones to order things and a team in Bonn University's Rectorate supporting us. We quickly worked out organizational, institutional and governance arrangements for ZEF. The enthusiastic spirit of a highly motivated team of administrative, junior and senior research staff members who had moved with the first ZEF Directors - partly from their previous positions or newly recruited - also made things work. The lights in the building remained switched on until late nights. Everyone

saw it as a unique opportunity to build a new institution of tremendous relevance.

A main achievement of ZEF was the fast rise in numbers of high-quality peer-reviewed publications. The first external evaluation of ZEF, which was conducted in 2002, concluded, "The evaluation commission was deeply impressed by ZEF's achievements in a relatively short period in the areas of teaching, research and knowledge transfer". A major challenge consisted in building peer culture across disciplines among people from all over the world. The design of a strategy for the whole institute and not just for three departments took time and willingness to listen. Another challenge was financing ZEF. The institute had been endowed with funding for the first 10 years of operation only. But, we were committed to make sure there was a vibrant ZEF beyond its first 10 years. So all of us had to learn from the beginning that partnership-building and fundraising efforts were necessary for a sustainable future of the institute. This became part of ZEF's DNA and probably enhanced the institute's relevance and research quality.

ZEF and its doctoral program turn 25 this year: What are your wishes but also suggestions for their future agenda?

The first ZEF evaluation in 2002 concluded, "With the doctoral program, ZEF can live up to the claim of "uniqueness" in the German university landscape in a very special way." The jump-start of the program was only possible with an international topnotch teaching team that supported us. ZEF-lecturers came from all hemispheres and

covered a high diversity of disciplines. The landscape of doctoral programs in Bonn and elsewhere has changed a lot since then and many other excellent English-language doctoral programs have been initiated in Germany. Still, ZEF's Doctoral Program has uniqueness, as it combines and connects bottom-up perspectives from each new doctoral student with the institute's overall strategic orientation.

Transdisciplinary research and advanced methods serve sustainable transformation of economic, social and ecological systems and can pave the way toward circular and more bio-based economies. Macroeconomic themes including finance and trade, as well as institutional and technological innovations are of long-term strategic relevance. Jobs, climate, biodiversity, health & nutrition, and an eye on game

changers such as AI, robotics, and energy innovations remain areas of impactful opportunity. In the future, ZEF post-docs should also be equipped with skills to lead development research in the academic space. However, it may serve development and ZEF doctoral students if they were more equipped with capacities to become innovative start-up founders in the knowledge economy. ZEF operates in a highly competitive environment. Yet, that is best coped with in a culture of caring for each other: Among to the researchers and their families at ZEF, as well as their research partners worldwide.

"Understanding development opportunities and failures, identifying technological, institutional and policy innovations, and addressing global sustainability and human development issues was and remains needed. And such a research institute was missing in Germany."





PAUL VLEK

ZEF-Director from
1997-2008

Why was ZEF established 25 years ago?

In the early 90s the City of Bonn and its University were at a crossroads of two political developments at that time: the rapprochement of East and West Europe and the internationalization of Bonn after losing its status as Germany's capital. With the help of key local, regional and national politicians, funds were earmarked for research centers working on these areas. Subsequently, a committee of Bonn University's senate developed a concept for establishing the Center for European Integration Studies (ZEI) and the Center for Development Research (ZEF) as research institutions on the east-west and north-south axis of the world, respectively.

The role of ZEF was to create a bridge between the UN agencies (to be) established in Bonn and the academic community in and around Bonn, therewith supporting the missions of these agencies: addressing climate change, natural resource degradation and the need for building and strengthening human resources in the South.

What were the main agenda items on the development research agenda at the time?

The three inaugural directors (Joachim von Braun, Andreas Wimmer and myself) developed a strategic plan on the basis of the University's senate concept. We aimed to convert the senate's vision and mission into a set of priority research areas in which the University of Bonn and its partners could provide their expertise. The initial focus was on water, land and biological resources, as well as on the role they played in developmental processes in the Global South. But we also looked at the socio-economic constraints these resources posed on development and the strain they were under, due to development. The basic idea was to first understand and then find a solution to the problem, whether it was socio-political, economic, or technical in nature. To get to the heart of this analysis we pursued an inter-disciplinary approach, which gradually transformed

into a transdisciplinary way of analysis and search for solutions. The three departments (political and cultural change, ecology and natural resource management and economic and technological change) worked closely together in e.g. analyzing the water issues in the Volta basin, in addressing secondary forest management in the Amazon, in looking at land and water use in the lower Amudarya basin in Uzbekistan and in protecting coffee genetic resources in the Ethiopian highlands. These projects also hosted numerous PhD students. But easily as many students came to ZEF to pursue their own ideas on how to address problems they perceived relevant in their home countries. These students were coached by the ZEF doctoral program team and received academic guidance as well as their credentials from the different faculties and colleagues of the University of Bonn and surrounding institutions.

In your opinion: What have been ZEF's main achievements and what the biggest challenges as a research and doctoral educational institute?

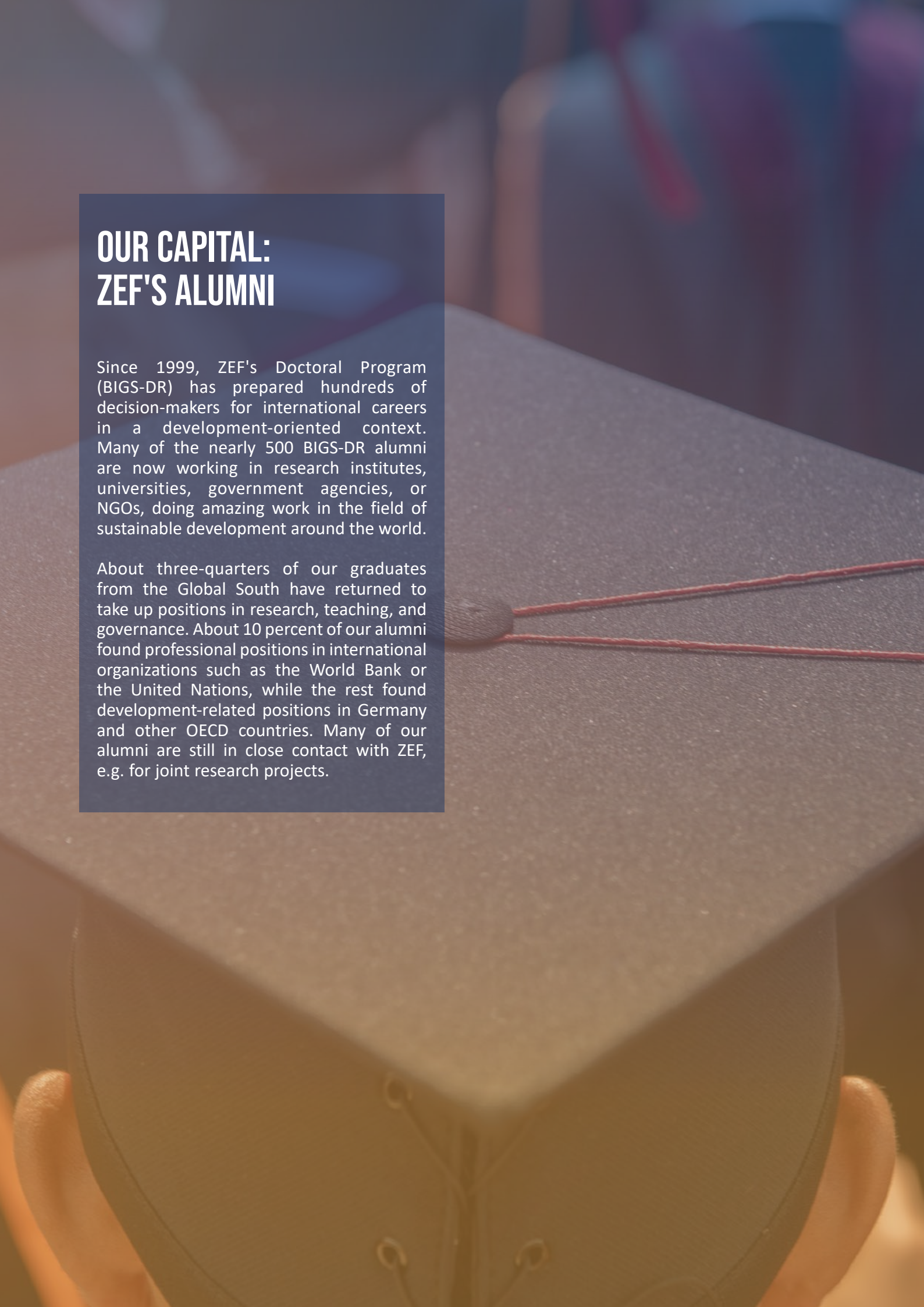
Possibly the most significant achievement is the demonstration that inter-and transdisciplinary research is sound and effective and can be taught to a new generation of scientists. The concept eventually was recognized by the University of Bonn, as it adopted the ZEF PhD program in its family of Bonn International Graduate Schools (BIGS). Numerous institutes within and outside Germany have adopted the approach, which is the highest form of recognition. Close to 500 graduates of the program and former staff at

ZEF are pursuing careers around the globe and spreading the word. Not to be under-valued is the lasting impact of some of the major projects undertaken by ZEF in the regions of interest, e.g. the designation of Ethiopia's endangered coffee forests as a natural heritage site by UNESCO. This was a direct result from ZEF's work on the topic in the region, carried out in close cooperation with its local partners.

ZEF and its doctoral program turn 25 this year: What are your wishes but also suggestions for their future agenda?

ZEF successfully dissolved disciplinary silos and I hope it will guard against silo formation in the years to come. Inter- and transdisciplinary research has transaction costs, but its effectiveness in development research more than makes up for these costs. I hope the ZEF departments will continue to jointly submit research proposals to address urgent development constraints in the Global South, and the impact of development on the natural resource base and human wellbeing. In particular, it should take on board the critical threat of climate change, which impacts most development processes and deserves to be a department in itself. - Heartfelt congratulations to ZEF!

"The role of ZEF was to create a bridge between the UN agencies (to be) established in Bonn and the academic community in and around Bonn."



OUR CAPITAL: ZEF'S ALUMNI

Since 1999, ZEF's Doctoral Program (BIGS-DR) has prepared hundreds of decision-makers for international careers in a development-oriented context. Many of the nearly 500 BIGS-DR alumni are now working in research institutes, universities, government agencies, or NGOs, doing amazing work in the field of sustainable development around the world.

About three-quarters of our graduates from the Global South have returned to take up positions in research, teaching, and governance. About 10 percent of our alumni found professional positions in international organizations such as the World Bank or the United Nations, while the rest found development-related positions in Germany and other OECD countries. Many of our alumni are still in close contact with ZEF, e.g. for joint research projects.

FIRST DOCTORAL STUDENTS AT ZEF: BATCH 1999



**ROUKAYATOU
ZIMMERMANN**

Cameroon
Batch 1999



“The emphasis on interdisciplinary collaboration fostered at ZEF has equipped me with the ability to integrate diverse perspectives and methodologies into my work, facilitating innovative problem-solving during my career”

ROUKAYATOU ZIMMERMANN

Roukayatou Zimmermann was one of the first PhD students at ZEF. She is currently working with the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)

in Germany. She was attracted to ZEF by its reputation for innovative approaches to sustainable development, its interdisciplinary framework, vibrant academic community and collaborative research environment. The exposure to global perspectives and challenges has broadened her understanding of development issues beyond her own research focus and equipped her with skills that have enabled her to contribute meaningfully to a wide range of initiatives at BMZ.

“I am proud of the contributions I have been making to research and concrete policies”

SHYAMAL CHOWDHURY

After completing his PhD on Information and Communication Technologies at ZEF in 2003, Shyamal worked at the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and the World Bank. He is now a Full Professor at the University of Sydney, Australia. At ZEF, he says, he learned a combination of skills: For example, developing ideas, getting feedback from supervisors and senior researchers, and working independently, complemented by networking with short- and long-term visitors to ZEF. In terms of achievements, he counts research with concrete impact; the results of his study on social and emotional skills have not only been published in a high-impact journal, but have also been implemented in public primary schools in Bangladesh.



**SHYAMAL
CHOWDHURY**

Australia/Bangladesh
Batch 1999



For example, developing ideas, getting feedback from supervisors and senior researchers, and working independently, complemented by networking with short- and long-term visitors to ZEF. In terms of achievements, he counts research with concrete impact; the results of his study on social and emotional skills have not only been published in a high-impact journal, but have also been implemented in public primary schools in Bangladesh.



ABAY ASFAW

Ethiopia
Batch 1999



“I was impressed by ZEF’s focus on issues that are very crucial to developing countries”

ABAY ASFAW

Abay Asfaw’s Masters and PhD research at ZEF on health issues in his home country of Ethiopia led him to his position at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the US. In this interview, he says that the interdisciplinary nature of ZEF helped him think beyond

economics and work with researchers from different disciplines. He also says that the weekly ZEF seminars (including lectures by invited guest researchers), the core methodological and applied courses, the diversity of the students, and the visits to different universities and research institutes had a profound impact on his career.

MORE ALUMNI PORTRAITS


**FAZLULLAH
AKHTAR**

 Afghanistan
Batch 2013


“I was the first Afghan doctoral graduate at ZEF”

Pioneering water resources research in Afghanistan: FAZLULLAH AKHTAR

Prior to his PhD research on water issues in Afghanistan, Fazlullah worked for international and UN agencies. After graduating from ZEF in 2017, he continued his international career, eventually returning to ZEF as a postdoctoral researcher. The main pull factors for exchanging an international working environment for

a PhD at ZEF were the mentorship model and the interdisciplinary working environment. In terms of benefits and achievements, Fazl is proud of the collaborations and partnerships he has developed throughout his career - broadening his perspectives and leading to more effective and sustainable solutions.

“Effective and implementable research needs to be interdisciplinary in nature”

**Juggling academic disciplines:
RABIA CHAUDHRY**

Rabia worked as a lawyer in Pakistan before starting her PhD at ZEF in 2014. After graduating in 2019, she returned to Pakistan where she works as an Assistant Professor at the Center for Public Policy and Governance, Forman Christian College University, Lahore. She has also advised officials of the Pakistan Administrative Service on public policy formulation and design, and regularly conducts trainings for government officials. Rabia feels that she has benefited from developing her research skills in critical thinking and analysis during her time at ZEF. Research and teaching are also a way for her to give back to society.


**RABIA
CHAUDHRY**

 Pakistan
Batch 2014


“ZEF has truly set me up for an interdisciplinary research career and expanded my networks”

On the fast lane: HART NADAV FEUER

After graduating in 2012, Hart Feuer's research took him to Japan, where he is an associate professor at Kyoto University. He has seen the field of food studies blossom globally since he began researching it at the intersection of agriculture and culinary studies. He says that his PhD studies at ZEF prepared him for an interdisciplinary

research career and enabled him to expand his networks worldwide, especially in the Global South. His personal motto is to stay true to his ethos of helping and supporting progressive ideas with scientific rationality and the legitimacy of research - and to stay rooted in the core goal of development.


**HART NADAV
FEUER**

 USA/Israel
Batch 2008


“I hope that more women, especially from the Global South, will be able to follow their passion”

Entomologist by passion: MARWA SHUMO

Marwa's PhD research on the Black Soldier Fly has made her a pioneer in insect-based food security issues. Since graduating in 2019, she has worked for several international research institutions. Her training at ZEF provided her with cross-cutting and transdisciplinary learning experiences - through ZEF's teaching program, research and outreach activities, and during laboratory and field work in Kenya. In her career, she has managed to bridge science and innovation from laboratory studies and experiments to real-time industrial applications. At ZEF, she gained experience in science communication, which complemented her skills and scope as an expert in her field.

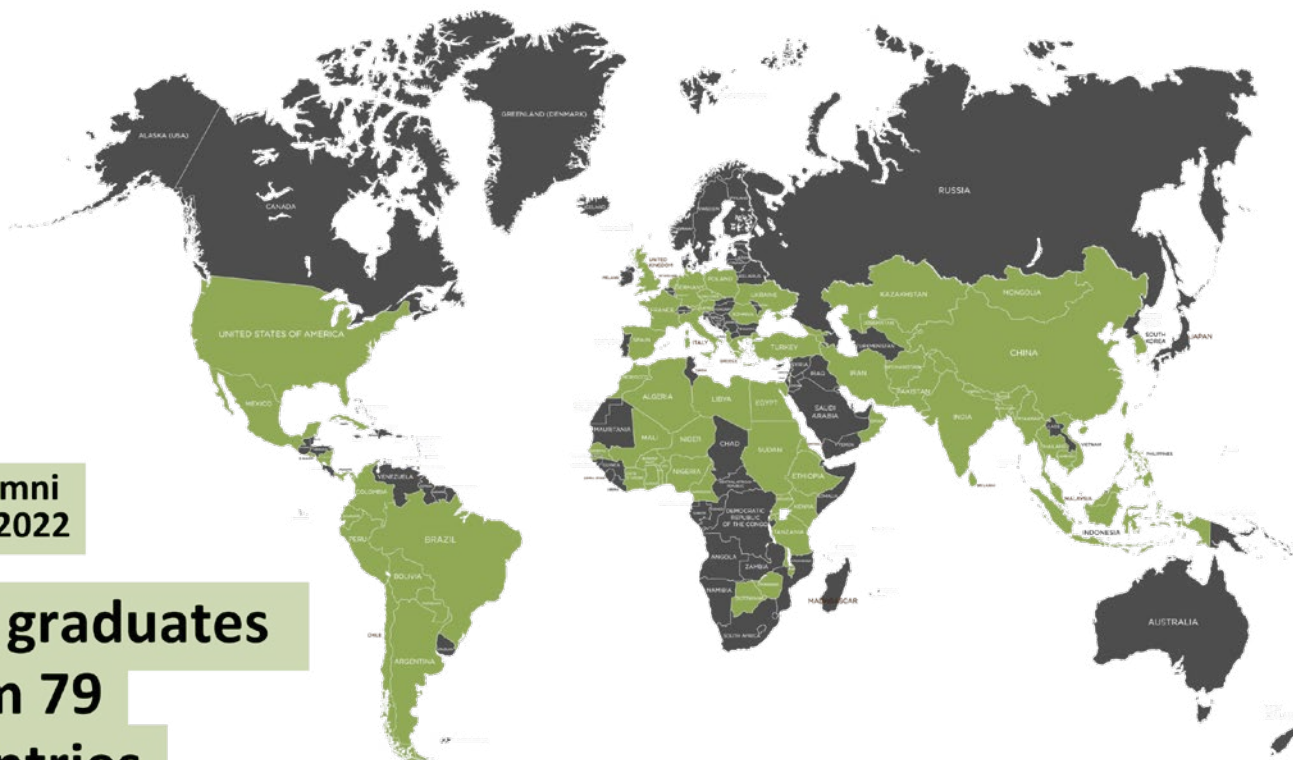


**CHECK OUT ALL
FULL ALUMNI STORIES HERE**



**ZEF alumni
1999 - 2022**

**479 graduates
from 79
countries**



**FAISAL
ABBAS**Pakistan
Batch 2005

“I learned at ZEF that doing scientific research should aim at having an impact on real life and bring something for the people of this world”

Research with real-life impact: **FAISAL ABBAS**

After completing his PhD at ZEF in 2010, Faisal pursued his career in India and Pakistan. He holds a permanent position at the National University of Science and Technology (NUST) in Islamabad, Pakistan. In his doctoral research, Faisal analyzed government allocations in

Pakistan's health sector and their impact on national development. Back in Pakistan, Faisal was able to translate his research into policy advocacy: He and his colleagues continued to pressure the government to spend more on public health services and facilities. Faisal continues to work with government advisory bodies on health policy.

“My doctoral education at ZEF provided me with an international profile and sharpened my analytical abilities in development issues”

Focusing on gender issues: **DENNIS AVILÉS IRAHOLA**

Before and after graduating from ZEF in 2005, Dennis Avilés Irahola worked as a consultant on local participation and gender inclusion for several international development organizations. Since 2019, she has been a senior researcher at ZEF. Her motivation for pursuing a PhD was to understand the complexities of marginalization in countries like Bolivia. Her training at ZEF sharpened her analytical skills in development issues and power relations. In this context, she began to explore gender mainstreaming and gender-sensitive research. As a result, Dennis was a co-founder of ZEF's Gender Group.

**DENNIS
AVILÉS**Bolivia
Batch 2001**EMMANUEL
DERBILE**Ghana
Batch 2007

“When it comes to promoting internationalization, the ZEF-led West African Center for Sustainable Rural Transformation (WAC-SRT) has been at the forefront of Ghana's universities”

Strengthening Africa's academic capacity: **EMMANUEL DERBILE**

Emmanuel K. Derbile completed his PhD at ZEF in 2010. But his research on how people in northern Ghana use different knowledge systems to sustain their lives in harsh

environmental conditions remains relevant. His interdisciplinary training at ZEF prepared him well for his career, says Emmanuel, now Vice Chancellor of the Simon Diedong Dombo University of Business and Integrated Development Studies in Ghana. But African universities face several challenges, especially in funding research, he says, so African governments need to prioritize research funding to bridge the gap between policy and research.

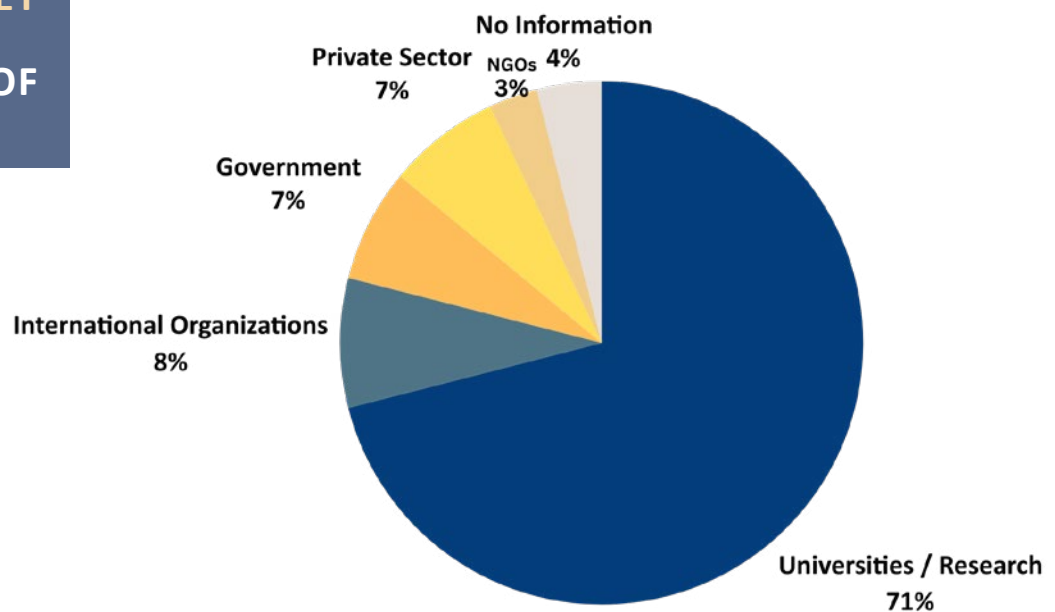


“My best memory of ZEF is the day I defended my PhD thesis and graduated in 2012. It was a very special and rewarding moment for me, as I had worked hard and overcome many challenges to complete my research and dissertation”

**Addressing environmental challenges:
ASGHAR TAHMASEBI**

Since completing his PhD on "Vulnerability to socio-political and climate change" in 2012, Asghar has worked as an assistant professor at the Department of Geography at Kharazmi University in Iran. As a climate change expert, he worked with national environmental and forestry organizations to develop local and national action plans for adaptation to drought, land degradation and climate change. ZEF's doctoral training provided him with the knowledge, critical thinking skills, intercultural exchange, and networking opportunities to conduct high-quality research, teach and mentor students, and engage in policy work.

**WHERE ARE THEY
NOW?
EMPLOYMENT OF
ZEF ALUMNI**



“I wanted to contribute to strengthening the regulatory environmental framework in my home country Nicaragua”

Lady in REDD: TANIA OSEJO CARRILLO

Tania Osejo Carrillo completed her PhD in forest economics at ZEF in 2015. After graduation, she joined the World Food Programme, where she is still working. With her PhD research, she wanted to contribute to strengthening the environmental regulatory framework in her home country, Nicaragua. Through her research, she gained a deep understanding of how carbon markets work and how this knowledge can be used to better manage land use and forests. Her research was relevant to both policy makers and practitioners in Nicaragua. It also provided a basis for further research and policy development to improve forest management.

A woman with dark skin and braided hair, wearing a bright green lab coat, is crouching in a field of tall, yellow-green grass. She is looking down at a plant in her hands, examining it closely. The background is a soft-focus field of similar grass, suggesting a rural or agricultural setting. The overall tone is warm and natural, with a focus on research and nature.

CORE COMPETENCIES: ZEF'S MAJOR RESEARCH THEMES

ZEF's research agenda and strategy have, of course, evolved over the past 25 years in response to changing trends, global developments, and national and international policies. But some of our research themes have remained at the core of our research and capacity development activities. In this chapter, professors and senior researchers from our Institute have summarized their work in these areas by identifying challenges, drawing conclusions, and making recommendations for future projects and efforts.

- **Agriculture and Nutrition. A progressing research field.** By Matin Qaim (Excerpt from ZEF policy brief no. 49)
- **About Poverty and Inequality.** By Joachim von Braun and Sundus Saleemi (Excerpt from ZEF policy brief no. 50)
- **Land Use Conflicts and Nature.** By Jan Börner and Lisa Biber-Freudenberger (Excerpt from ZEF policy brief no. 51)
- **Climate and Health.** By Ana Maria Perez Arredondo and Christian Borgemeister (Excerpt from ZEF policy brief no. 52)
- **Capacity Development and South-South Cooperation.** By Eva Youkhana, Carolina Tobón Ramírez, and Christian Petersheim (Excerpt from ZEF policy brief no. 53)

ZEF'S MAJOR RESEARCH THEMES:

AGRICULTURE AND NUTRITION

Agriculture and nutrition, nowadays often jointly referred to as “food systems”, play a major role in many dimensions of sustainable development. Close to 80% of the world’s poor and undernourished people live in rural areas, where most of them depend on agriculture, livestock husbandry, and fisheries for their livelihoods. Hence, improving agriculture has to be a major component of any broader strategy to reduce hunger and poverty.

Outlook for research and policy

There is widespread consensus that, in order to make food systems more sustainable, profound changes at many levels and in all world regions are required. However, there are still knowledge gaps of what types of changes can be most effective in different contexts and how these changes can be implemented efficiently and fairly. ZEF will continue and intensify its food systems research to address these knowledge gaps.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Agricultural development, nutrition, human health, and environmental health need to be addressed jointly, as there are many potential synergies and tradeoffs.
- The small-farm sector needs particular attention and support. Smallholder subsistence farming must not be romanticized, though: Improving market access is key.
- Technology has contributed to reducing hunger and continues to play a crucial role for improving nutrition and making food systems more sustainable.
- But technology alone will not suffice: Sustainable food systems transformation also requires social and institutional innovations and changes in people’s consumption styles and choices.

Read the full text in [ZEF Policy Brief no. 49](#) on Agriculture and Nutrition by [Matin Qaim](#), ZEF-Director, Head of ZEF’s Division Economic and Technological Change, Schlegel-Professor at Bonn University’s Faculty of Agriculture.



ZEF'S MAJOR RESEARCH THEMES:

POVERTY AND INEQUALITY

Since its inception, ZEF has selected poverty and inequality as integral research themes and committed itself to undertaking inter and transdisciplinary research in this area. ZEF's research in the area of technological and economic change explicitly included poverty reduction as a priority research area, besides globalization and trade as well as technologies (i.e. information and communication technology and biotechnology). ZEF has published more than 250 research publications on poverty and inequality since the institute's establishment.

Undertaking and disseminating comprehensive, empirical, policy-relevant research with the aim to reduce poverty in developing and emerging economies is among ZEF's raison d'être. Hence, poverty and its associates; deprivation, marginality, hunger, food insecurity, malnutrition and inequality have remained a critical focus of ZEF research.

ZEF's research projects and consortia encompass a range of critical backwards-and-forward-linkages to poverty, such as done within the large research program on agricultural innovations in Africa (PARI). Long-running collaborative research partnerships with universities and institutions in developing countries have examined poverty reduction in and vis-à-vis farming and agriculture, markets and trade, land use, urbanization and migration

– thus, ZEF has been supporting developing countries in enhancing their research capacities.

Providing robust scientific evidence of how interventions have impacted outcomes along with conveying assessments of externalities to policymakers has been a key part of ZEF's poverty-related research activities. Insights from ZEF-research on poverty have regularly been considered by political bodies, including the United Nations in the context of their summits, the German Government and the European Union. Besides, governments of countries in the Global South have drawn on ZEF-research findings related to poverty.

Read the full text in [ZEF Policy Brief no. 50](#) on Poverty and Inequality by Joachim von Braun, former ZEF-Director and currently Distinguished Professor at ZEF and Sundus Saleemi, former Senior Researcher at ZEF.



ZEF'S MAJOR RESEARCH THEMES: LAND USE CONFLICTS AND NATURE

Biodiversity contributes to human well-being by providing food and materials, water and climate regulation as well as the cultural, educational and spiritual benefits that humans derive from nature.

Land is at the heart of the biodiversity conservation challenge. It is a limited resource that humanity needs to produce food, materials and energy. Competing land uses, such as agriculture, forestry, urban development and nature conservation, can lead to conflicts that exacerbate biodiversity loss.

ZEF is engaged in several lines of research on solutions for sustainable socio-environmental transformation. Our research projects develop, assess and often critically evaluate technological and governance innovations aimed at mitigating trade-offs between competing land uses and related conflicts. This includes, for example, research on agricultural technologies, bio-economic innovations, private and public environmental policies and governance arrangements. In addition, our research explores nature-based solutions and the role of equity and diversity in societal transitions.

Land use management involves trade-offs across multiple dimensions of sustainability, as well as complex feedbacks between ecological and social subsystems.

Understanding these trade-offs and systemic relationships requires an inter- and transdisciplinary research

approach and international collaboration. Our current science and innovation systems and funding landscape do not always coherently encourage and reward such solution-oriented research approaches. At ZEF, we seek to address this challenge by building strong networks with international partners and investing in inter- and transdisciplinary training of early-career researchers.

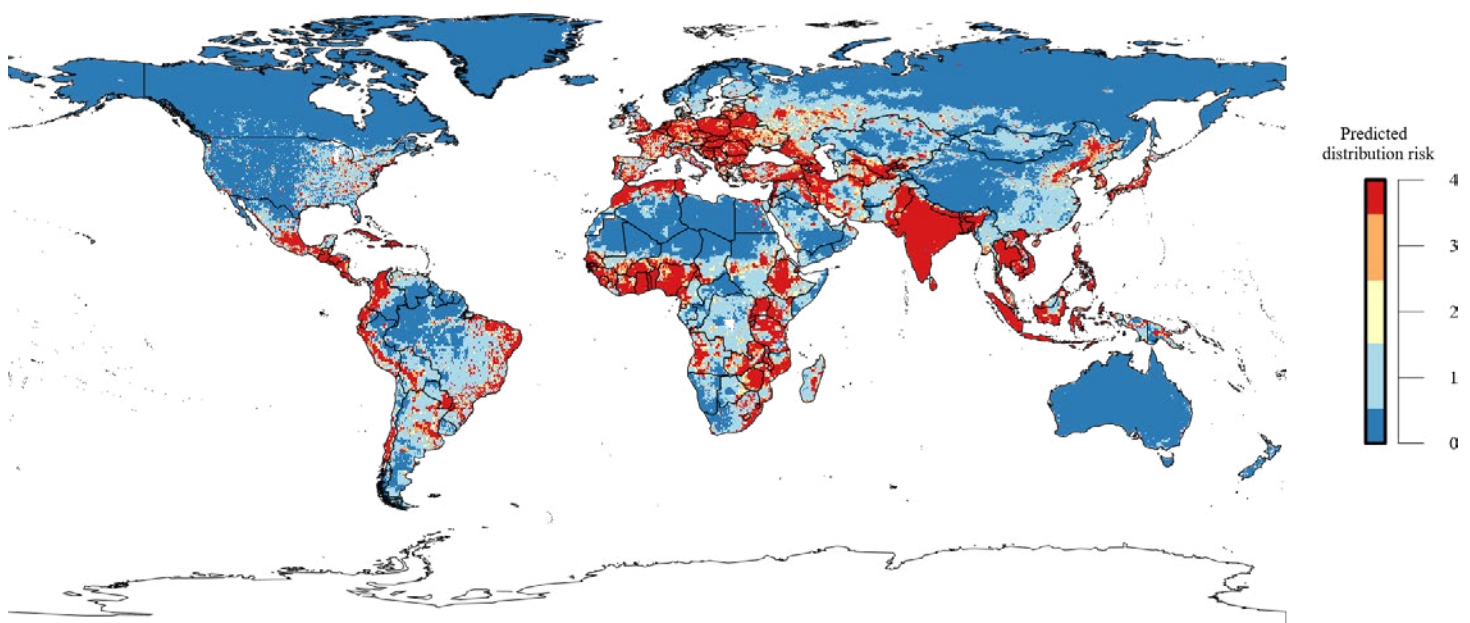
One example of research: Based on data on known locations of existing environmental conflicts from the Environmental Justice Atlas, we modelled high-risk and low-risk areas for land use conflicts using indicators of socio-economic conditions such as population density, income and corruption, and land cover characteristics such as distance to a protected or key biodiversity areas, agricultural area and tree cover.

Source Figure 1:
<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-020-2705-y>
Jendritzki (2021) Global risk of Emerging Social-Ecological Land Use Conflicts: A Modeling Approach. Master Thesis, Hochschule Rhein-Waal
<https://ejatlas.org/>

Read the full text in [ZEF Policy Brief no. 51](#) on *Land Use Conflicts and Nature* by Jan Börner, Professor at Bonn University/ZEF, and Lisa Biber-Freudenberger, Junior-Professor at Bonn University/ZEF.



Figure 1: Environmental conflict risk. Predictions based on known locations



ZEF'S MAJOR RESEARCH THEMES:

CLIMATE AND HEALTH

This research area examines the complex link between climate change and health, highlighting the need for integrated health approaches. Global changes, like climate variability, are impacting human, animal, and environmental health. ZEF addresses these issues through interdisciplinary research that blends biological, social, economic, and ecological factors.

ZEF's work spans critical areas such as zoonotic and vector-borne diseases, antimicrobial resistance, health resilience, urban green spaces, and social health determinants. Our research shows how climate change exacerbates health problems like heat stress, respiratory issues, and vector-borne diseases by altering environmental conditions. Key topics also include the effects of climate change on water quality and agricultural productivity, with a focus on developing adaptation strategies to protect vulnerable populations and enhance food security and health resilience.

ZEF has contributed significantly to understanding the health impacts of climate change, such as the severe effects of extreme weather on child nutrition, the presence of drug-resistant bacteria in urban wastewater, and the mental health benefits of urban green spaces.



Current projects focus on arboviral disease transmission, the ecology of waterborne diseases under climate change, and the role of diet in antimicrobial resistance.

ZEF's diverse research efforts in the fields of climate and health are advancing our understanding of climate-related health challenges and supporting policy change to build sustainability and community resilience.

However, challenges remain, including the complexity of interdisciplinary collaboration, difficulties in data collection, and the translation of research into sustainable policies. ZEF recommends fostering interdisciplinary research, incorporating cultural diversity in health strategies, examining gender dynamics, assessing healthcare system resilience, and reducing the environmental impact of healthcare practices.

In summary, ZEF's research provides comprehensive solutions to health challenges posed by environmental change, emphasizing the need for sustainable, inclusive, and adaptable health systems.

Read the full text in [ZEF Policy Brief no. 52](#) by Ana Maria Perez Arredondo, Senior Researcher and project coordinator of the One Health Graduate School at ZEF and Christian Borgemeister, ZEF-Director and Professor at Bonn University.



ZEF'S MAJOR RESEARCH THEMES:

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT AND SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION

To shape a sustainable future, it's essential to identify and address development issues collaboratively with political and civil society stakeholders. Traditionally, international donors, guided by the policies of the UN and the Bretton Woods institutions (IMF and World Bank) managed these tasks.

Their policies implied and prescribed structural adjustments by and in the partner countries of the Global South, often through bilateral cooperation agreements between industrialized countries and so-called developing countries, created under conditions of entangled dependencies.

Today, we are talking about the countries of the New South. These countries have intensified and possibly adapted their efforts towards more sustainability. At the same time, they are developing their own, more locally adapted strategies and alternative development models or even alternatives to the perceived Eurocentric development model (including SDGs), often based and focused on economic growth and technological solutions

ZEF has been actively contributing to these efforts since its inception. ZEF's international doctoral program (BIGSDR) is a cornerstone of its work, fostering a global network of scholars and practitioners. ZEF has established several important programs across Africa, Latin America, and Asia. ZEF also supports South-South cooperation, where countries in the Global South collaborate directly.

However, challenges persist. South-South collaboration often faces logistical and institutional barriers, such as visa restrictions and academic inequities. Western dominance in knowledge production remains an issue, hindering Southern partners' access to academic resources and publication opportunities. Moreover, the high transaction costs of sustained collaboration and language barriers add to these challenges.

To move forward, ZEF recommends including diverse Southern perspectives in research planning and implementation, ensuring equal opportunities for South-South knowledge exchange, and strengthening financial support for bilateral and multilateral collaborations. The goal is to create more equitable conditions for global academic competition and to systematically address the consequences of global inequalities.

Read the full text in [ZEF Policy Brief no. 53](#) by Eva Youkhana, Privatdozent (PD) at the University of Bonn and Senior Researcher at ZEF. She heads the ZEF Research Group on Cultural and Political Change. Carolina Tobón and Christian Petersheim are Senior Researchers at ZEF and coordinators of the DSSP.



A top-down photograph showing several hands of different skin tones placing white puzzle pieces onto a yellow surface. The puzzle pieces are interlocking and form a large, abstract shape. The hands are positioned around the edges of the puzzle, suggesting a collaborative effort.

COOPERATION: IMPRESSIONS FROM ZEF'S LONG-TERM RESEARCH PARTNERS

Over the past decades, ZEF has established research partnerships with researchers, policy and decision makers, academic institutions, research agencies and international organizations at the local, national and international levels. These partnerships have grown into a global network with hundreds of points of contact and cooperation for joint research projects, but also for teaching and training. In particular, ZEF's network in West and East Africa has made it an important pillar of the University of Bonn's internationalization strategy. In recent years, the focus has shifted to strengthening South-South cooperation, e.g. between West Africa (Ghana) and South America (Colombia).

We'd like to see more Colombian professors and lecturers teaching and researching in Germany

ZEF and the National University of Colombia (UNAL): A high-performing partnership

We have benefited from this arrangement in many ways. First of all, we have improved our capacity in many areas. Not only our logistical capacity to organize courses, but also our capacity to do research, especially interdisciplinary research, in so many areas. We work by combining different fields and offer a study program with a very comprehensive approach. With ZEF, we share the same philosophy of what the environment is. For us, the environment includes the relationship between ecosystem and culture, between nature and society. We show these relationships in our research, but also in our academic courses.

How young researchers and students in the Global South benefit from international collaboration

Students have had the opportunity to share knowledge, for example, by writing a term paper in groups of three students with different academic backgrounds. The SDG program has also improved our ability to publish our academic results in scientific journals. In addition, with the support of the SDG program, we have published three to four books in other fields, such as agrobiodiversity. Finally, we have been able to discuss the concept of sustainable development from an interdisciplinary approach. As a result, our students are able to understand life in a better way.

Impulses for further cooperation

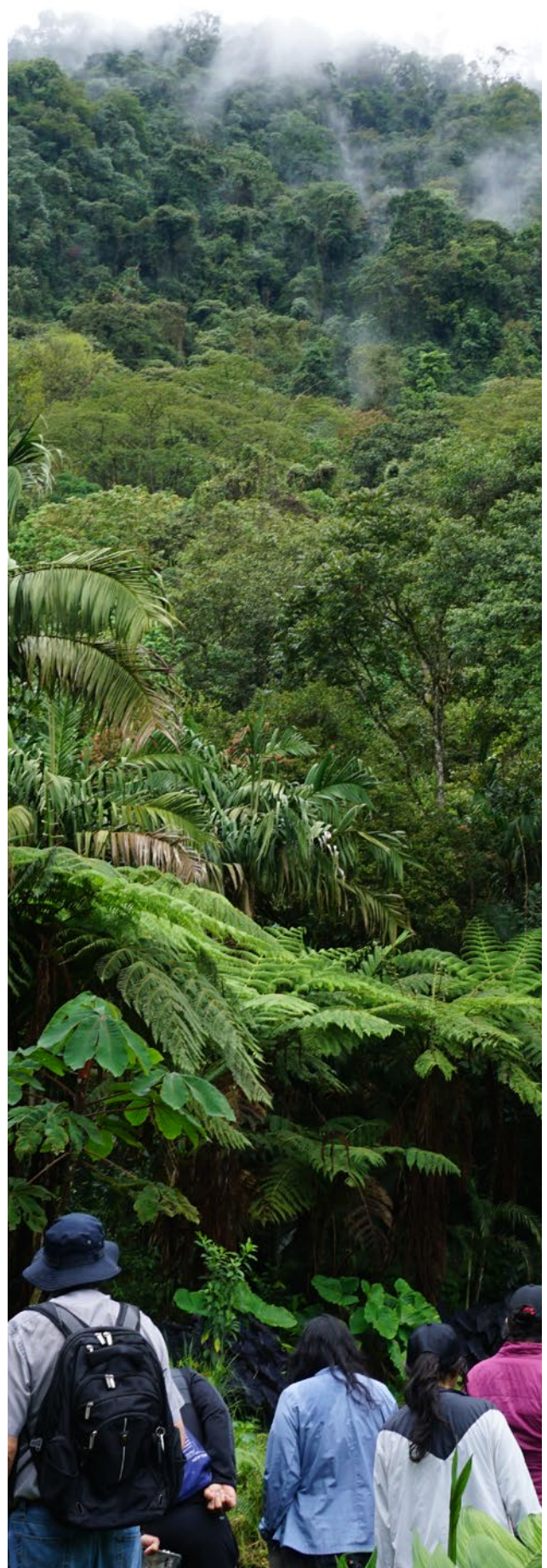
What could be improved in the future is the exchange at the professorial level, with more Colombian professors and lecturers going to Germany, and not just the German colleagues teaching in Colombia. This would allow a real exchange and discussion of experiences and enrich the perception of Latin American studies.

The ZEF-led German-Colombian Doctoral Studies Support Program (DSSP) is funded by the German Exchange Service (DAAD) in the framework of its seven SDG Graduate Schools program. More info about DSSP: <https://dssp-colombia.org/>



Tomás León Sicard

Professor at the National University of Colombia (UNAL) and project leader of DSSP for the Colombian partners





A “think global and act local” - approach is helpful in addressing development issues

Common ground: Biodiversity

The German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN), ZEF and their Ethiopian partners have worked closely together to facilitate the establishment of UNESCO biosphere reserves for the conservation and sustainable use of Ethiopia's wild coffee forests. The successive funding from three German ministries (BMBF, BMUV, BMZ) created an ideal sequence of support for German development cooperation, with research, capacity development and implementation components building on each other. In general, the exchange with ZEF staff and students inspired us to develop new project ideas in the context of biodiversity and nature conservation and provide networking opportunities with researchers and stakeholders from the Global South.

Think global, act local

A "think global, act local" approach is extremely helpful in addressing development issues. ZEF's PhD program successfully works with this concept. The BIGS-DR program invites young people from all over the world, especially from the Global South, and supports them in conducting research, often on local problems and solutions in their home countries. At the same time, students can interact with their peers around the world. Inter- and transdisciplinary research components facilitate stakeholder engagement, training and mutual learning to address local challenges.

Wishes: Stay on track!

I wish ZEF space, time and sufficient resources to continue to think and act out of the box, and to develop innovative research and educational approaches that address development issues around the world. ZEF should continue to emphasize solution- and implementation-oriented research and the training of young researchers as future influential scholars, leaders, and decision-makers. It should also seek to strengthen the science-policy interface, as the involvement of the policy level is key to implementation.



Bettina Hedden-Dunkhorst

Head Division for International Nature Conservation, German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (Bundesamt für Naturschutz, BfN) in Bonn



The ZEF platform has facilitated North-South interactions for graduates and faculty members alike

Overcoming challenges for young researchers in the Global South

ZEF's focus on the Global South and its interdisciplinary education and training approach represents a valuable and important contribution to the field. It plays a pivotal role in developing the technical skills that are essential for socio-economic development in the Global South. Additionally, ZEF offers top-notch training facilities for graduates from the Global South, who often have limited access to scholarship and funding opportunities. ZEF offers an excellent research training environment for its PhD students. The interdisciplinary skills I acquired at ZEF during my doctoral studies have been instrumental in advancing my career and in the impact of my work with local communities.

Institutional benefits of ZEF-cooperation for University of Nairobi

The collaboration with ZEF over the past few years has created valuable opportunities for international PhD students to share their expertise and experience. Furthermore, it facilitated the exploration of prospective research collaborations and the expansion of the ZEF network.

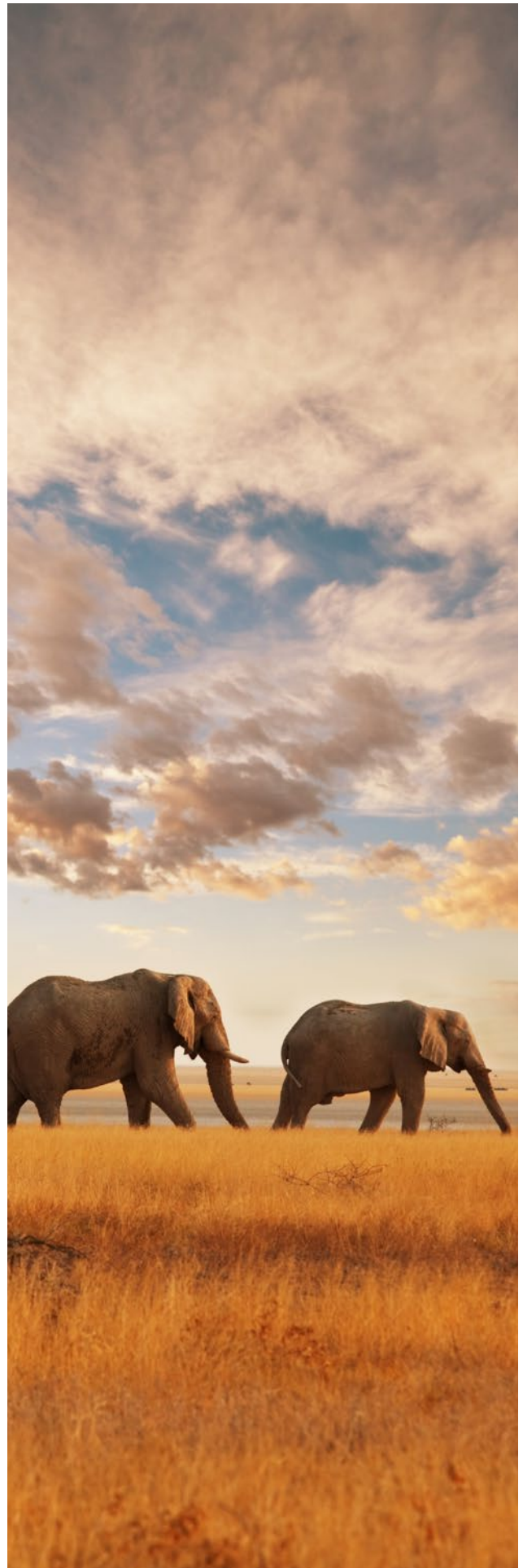
Boosting North-South interactions

ZEF has made a significant contribution to the advancement of technical capabilities in the Global South, and it is my hope that this support will continue. Furthermore, the ZEF platform has facilitated North-South interactions for graduate and faculty members alike. I would like to express my sincerest gratitude and appreciation for your contributions to the ZEF Silver Jubilee celebration, which have been instrumental in developing essential skills. I am grateful for the ongoing support and unwavering commitment over the past 25 years, which have contributed to consistent growth.



Thuita Thenya

ZEF-alumnus
Director of Wangari Maathai
Institute for Peace and
Environmental Studies,
University of Nairobi, Kenya



ZEF should help decolonize knowledge production



The importance of Global South-North cooperation

Collaborations between research institutions and higher education in the Global South and North offer invaluable opportunities for cross-cultural learning that benefit the partners involved. This is because, in the absence of such platforms, it may prove challenging for researchers to identify shared objectives and engage in the collaborative learning and idea exchange that are currently underway. Over the years, ZEF has established a fruitful partnership with the University for Development Studies, and more recently, the Simon Diedong Dombo University of Business and Integrated Development Studies (SDD-UBIDS) in Wa, Ghana. This collaboration has made a significant contribution to infrastructural development, enhanced the capacity of faculty, and provided invaluable mentorship to young faculties. The West African Center for Sustainable Rural Transformation (WAC-SRT), a DAAD-funded Center of Excellence initiated and led by ZEF, provides resources and infrastructure to support the nascent SDD-UBIDS. The center's activities are oriented towards the advancement of sustainable rural transformation in West Africa, encompassing a range of dimensions, including socio-economic, political, cultural, administrative, and technological development.

Enriching careers, creating opportunities

The collaboration with ZEF has yielded significant benefits, including the creation of opportunities for SDD-UBIDS personnel and students to pursue studies at the Center, gain international exposure and experience, and facilitate learning exchanges. In light of the scarcity of resources in our work and living environments, it is evident that without these opportunities, many faculty members and junior researchers would have encountered significant challenges in accessing world-class education. Consequently, the partnership enables senior scientists at ZEF working in northern Ghana to conduct research and gain insights by collaborating with faculty at SDD-UBIDS, which is crucial for enriching their research experience and advancing their careers. On a personal level, as a gender expert on the Interfaces project, a five-year BMBF-sponsored project, I am involved in providing technical support to the regional projects on enhancing gender responsiveness in research and implementation. This is done by facilitating the learning processes of junior and senior scientists on gender in research and implementation. This role has been highly rewarding, as it has enabled me to exert a significant influence on the research and implementation outcomes across the regional projects.



Constance Awinpoka Akurugu

Associate Professor of Sociology and Gender Studies, Department of Public Policy and Management, Faculty of Public Policy and Governance, SDD University of Business and Integrated Development Studies Wa, Ghana

Wishes: Partnerships with African research institutes should be made a top priority

Happy 25th anniversary! I commend ZEF's success in Africa, especially in West Africa and Ghana. I hope ZEF keeps working well and forms stronger links with other organizations in the region. I think ZEF should focus its partnerships with African research and education institutions on African knowledge and help decolonize knowledge production, making it more diverse. When ZEF is recruiting and forming partnerships, it should also think about the needs of women and girls in Africa.





Locally identified research needs should be included in projects in a better way

ZEF's cooperation with Abdou Moumouni University of Niamey in Niger

Partnerships with internationally and interdisciplinary oriented institutes such as ZEF are very important for the Global South. Through these joint efforts we can handle global challenges like climate change and key sustainable development goals (SDGs 1 to 7, SDG 11 and SDGs 13 to 17). Especially partnerships focusing on developing and implementing high-level research and adequate education are key. In West Africa, the collaboration that the Abdou Moumouni University of Niamey in Niger has developed with ZEF includes (i) research activities related to the management of natural resources, innovation and technological change, as well as political and cultural change and (ii) master and PhD trainings on sustainable rural transformation (WAC-SRT) in order to educate and train young African scholars in engineering and policy areas.



A cascade of collaboration projects

During the last ten years, we have developed strong and very important international collaborations worldwide. The number of our international collaborations has increased considerably, since we started cooperating with ZEF in the West-African Science Service Center in Climate Change and Adapted Land Uses (WASCAL) project in 2013. By now, we are cooperating on many capacity development and research projects, namely WASCAL, RARSUS, WASCAL-PAUWES, WAC-SRT, CIREG and RE-TO Dosso.

This opportunity has allowed us also to build a strong partnership with ZEF's partners in Germany and Africa: IIT-TH Cologne, United Nations University (UNU), Potsdam Institute for Climate Research impacts (PIK), Pan African University in Water and Energy Sciences (PAUWES) hosted by Tlemcen University in Algeria, University of Development Studies (UDS) from Tamale (Ghana) and University of Ghana from Accra (Ghana) and UNAL (Colombia). In collaboration with ZEF, we have been involved in the mobilization of regional and international grants to conduct research on issues related to energy, water, food security and climate change.

Need for identifying and integrating more African perspectives

It is recommended that the doctoral program integrate African partners more fully into the following areas: teaching, recruitment process, thesis supervision, and defense. Locally identified research needs should be included in projects in a better way, e.g. by developing joint research topics in collaboration with partners.

More information about ZEF's current projects on our website here: <https://www.zef.de/research-projects.html>.

Main funders of projects mentioned in this article: German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)



Adamou Rabani

Rector of the Université Abdou Moumouni, Niamey, Niger and Coordinator of the WASCAL Studies Programs 'Climate change and Energy' and 'Photovoltaic and System Analysis for Green Hydrogen Technologies'



High-quality research requires not just skilled experts but also well-established facilities

Importance of institutions like ZEF in the Global South

Institutions like ZEF are crucial for the Global South, focusing on both research and education. Their approach involves partnering with and training experts from these regions, aiming to enhance the capacity of local institutions and researchers. This focus is essential because research facilities and career development opportunities are often limited in the Global South. High-quality research requires not just skilled experts but also well-established facilities—labs, equipment, and technology—that are often scarce in these areas. Therefore, educating and training young professionals at the post-graduate level, while simultaneously building research infrastructure, can significantly enhance research capacities.

ZEF has a strong track record of educating PhD students from developing countries by involving them in collaborative research projects with local institutions. Over the past 25 years, ZEF has produced many qualified researchers who now hold key positions in international, regional, and national institutions, including research institutes, universities, multilateral organizations, and governments. Successful projects like the GLOWA-Volta project in West Africa, the Aral Sea project in Uzbekistan, the Coffee project in Ethiopia, and the BIOTA Africa project in East and West Africa (all funded by BMBF) have been instrumental in training these experts. Many of these professionals remain key research partners to ZEF, underscoring the importance of continuing to combine research with education and training to build research capacity in the Global South.

Benefits of cooperation with ZEF

My cooperation with ZEF over the years has been highly beneficial. ZEF's strong connections with international and regional institutions and its robust alumni network offer unique opportunities for building partnerships. For instance, my institution, the Horn of Africa Regional Environment Center and Network at Addis Ababa University, collaborates with ZEF in the CABES project, coordinating activities in East Africa. This collaboration has expanded our scope beyond the Horn of Africa, enhancing South-South cooperation across the continent. Through CABES, we've also increased our participation in international platforms like IPBES, benefiting from training provided by partners like Co-Know and UNEP-WCMC.

The SPIBES Masters' program further enriches our collaboration by facilitating the exchange of students, lecturers, and resources among partners, leading to diverse knowledge-sharing across Africa. This partnership has opened career development opportunities for many young professionals in our region. Additionally, CABES has strengthened our National Biodiversity Platform, enhancing our partnerships with various stakeholders, including government agencies, academia, and civil society. Collaborating with ZEF has also increased our capacity to secure competitive grants, further highlighting the value of this partnership.

Wishes and suggestions for ZEF's Future

As ZEF and its doctoral program celebrate 25 years, it's clear that the institution has made significant strides in building research capacity and producing highly-qualified experts through its BIGS-DR program. ZEF's model is unique in its commitment to inclusivity, embracing diversity across gender, culture, and disciplines. My experience at ZEF was transformative, not just academically but also personally, and I hope ZEF continues to serve as an Interdisciplinary Center of Excellence for Development Research.

Looking forward, I wish for ZEF to maintain its role as a global hub for development research, bridging North-South collaboration, and facilitating the exchange of knowledge, technology, and innovation. I also hope ZEF will strengthen its alumni network, enhancing collaboration and networking across various scales. Finally, I wish for ZEF to continue its commitment to producing high-quality research and serving the global scientific community.



Mekuria Argaw

ZEF-alumnus of 3rd Batch of BIGS-DR Program (2001)

Executive Director of the Horn of Africa Regional Environment Center and Network Addis Ababa University Ethiopia



These formats of cooperation
are spaces for fostering global
citizenship

ZEF and Right Livelihood: A global network

This kind of cooperation is indeed important for the convergence of plural knowledge in the Global South and the Global North, as well as for collective participation, awareness and appreciation of differences and social structures. It also opens up new and innovative avenues in higher education.

Institutional and personal value

The collaboration between ZEF, its Right Livelihood Campus and our RLC Campus in Mumbai has developed over a long period of time. It has added immense value both institutionally and personally. Institutionally, it has led to student exchanges, joint organization of workshops and lectures, and collaboration in the supervision of PhD students. These formats of collaboration are indeed spaces for fostering global citizenship and critical cosmopolitan capacities. Personally, it has helped to build friendships, knowledge, and emotionally meaningful collegiality across geographies. This is why I am so passionate about this kind of collaboration.

Wishes for ZEF's 25th

We join you in your celebration and look forward to strengthening our mutual ties. We hope that you will continue to move forward on the path of truly transformative, global, and meaningful education and development.

The Right Livelihood College Campus Bonn is supported by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). More info at <http://www.rlc-bonn.de>



Swati Banerjee

Professor at Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai and Coordinator of the Right Livelihood College (RLC) Campus Mumbai, in which capacity she is cooperating with ZEF



CONCLUSION: FACTS & FIGURES ON ZEF TODAY

From an originally tripartite management structure, ZEF's leadership and management structure has become broader and more diverse. The three ZEF professorships are now complemented by additional (junior) professors and group leaders.

As of 2023, ZEF is organized into three main divisions and four research groups (see right). The number and focus of our research groups is flexible, responding to new needs and opportunities.

About 40+ senior researchers and more than 120 junior researchers are currently working at ZEF, complemented by senior fellows, guest and associated researchers who are not employed by ZEF.

Over the past 25 years, ZEF has implemented nearly 100 projects in more than 80 countries, funded by more than 40 donor agencies. Today, our researchers run more than 40 externally funded projects in nearly 50 countries.

In addition to conducting projects, ZEF researchers publish their work in high-impact, peer-reviewed journals and books. ZEF has its own discussion paper and working paper series.



ZEF MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE (SINCE 2023)

ZEF DIVISIONS



Economic and Technological Change (ECON)
Prof. Dr. Martin Qaim



Nutrition and Planetary Health (HEALTH)
Prof. Dr. Ina Danquah



Ecology and Natural Resources Management (ECOL)
Prof. Dr. Christian Borgemeister



Cultural and Political Change (CPC)
PD Dr. Eva Youkhana



Environmental Policy (ENVPOL)
Prof. Dr. Jan Börner



Integrated System Modeling (MODEL)
Jun.-Prof. Dr. Wolfram Barfuss



Biodiversity and Sustainable Land Use (LAND)
Jun.-Prof. Dr. Lisa Biber-Freudenberger

FURTHER ZEF PROFESSORS

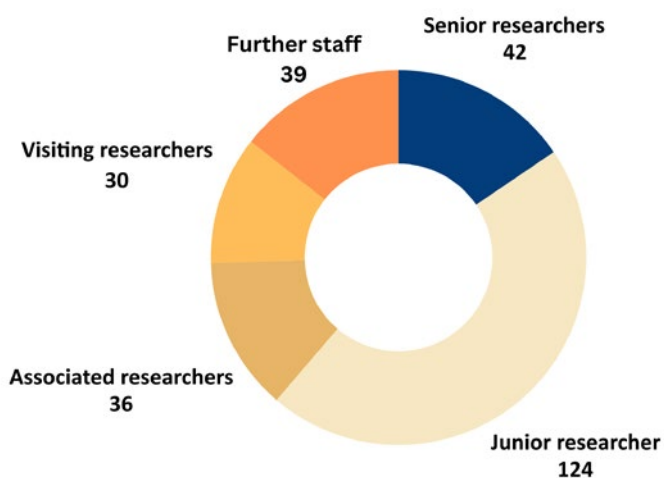


Prof. Dr. Joachim von Braun



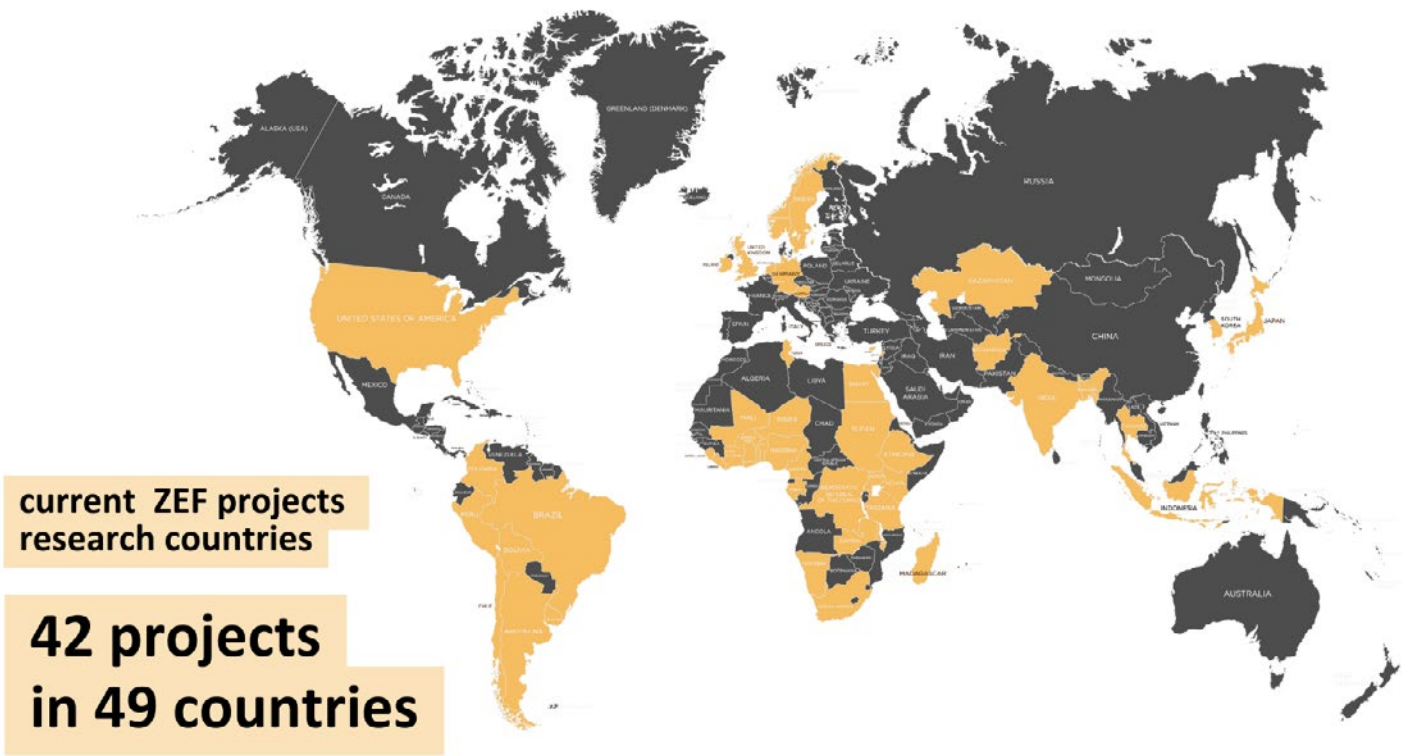
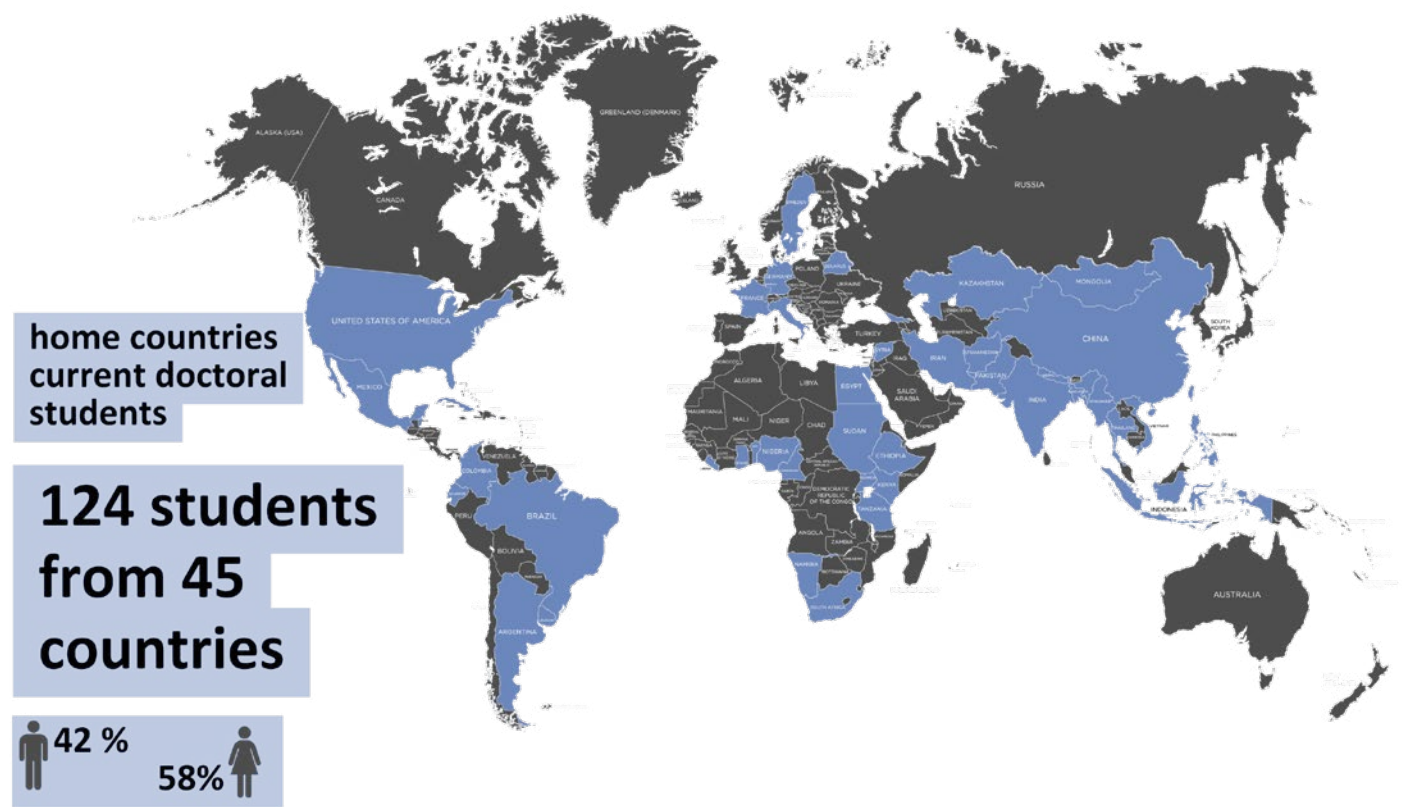
Prof. Dr. Conrad Schetter

RESEARCHERS AND FURTHER STAFF

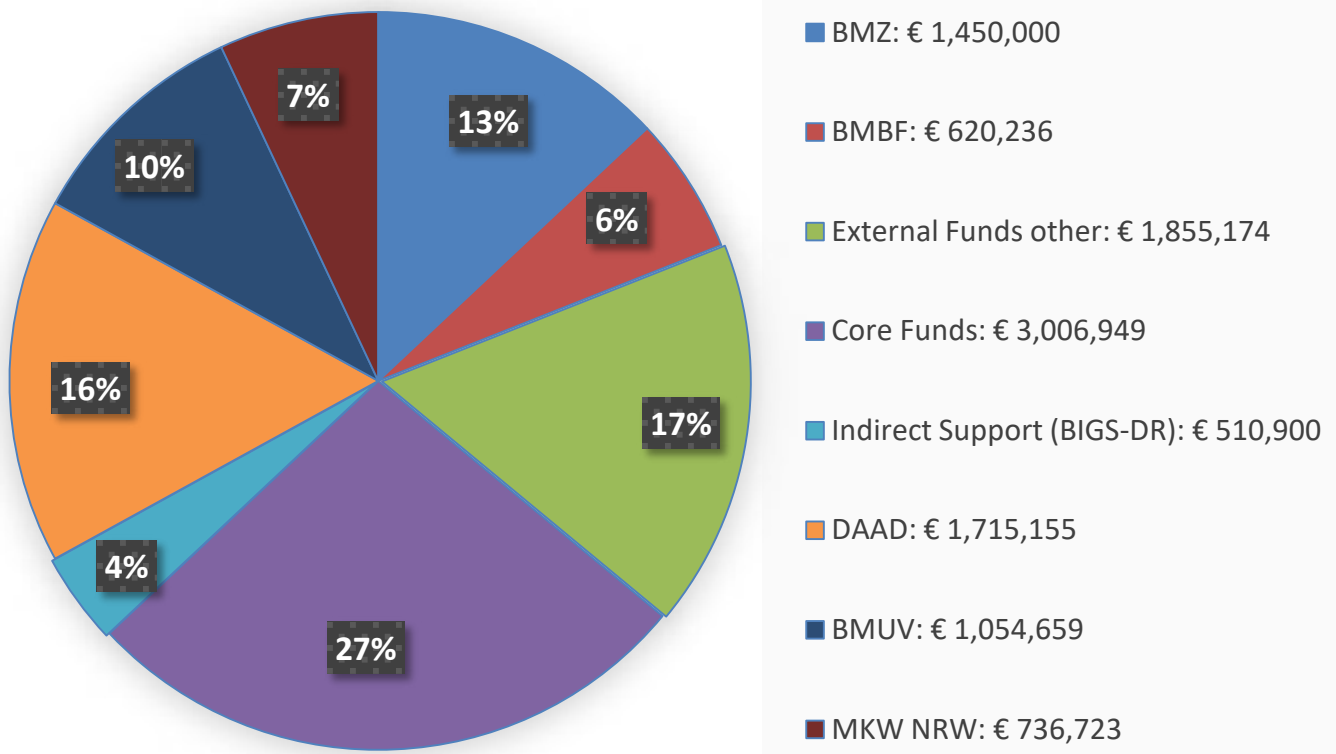


ACADEMIC STAFF FEMALE & MALE





TOTAL BUDGET 2024:
€ 10,949,796
WITH 73 % THIRD-PARTY FUNDING



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Here, we can only mention a few of our donors:

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PUBLICATIONS
REPORTING PERIOD 2023 - MID 2024

Journal articles	159
Book chapters	16
Books	7
ZEF Working Papers	14
ZEF Discussion Papers	27
ZEF & PARI Policy Briefs	7

Numbers in total since 1999
over 4,300
over 1,100
over 350
332
345
85

PR/MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS
SEPTEMBER 2024



Facebook followers: 5,695



LinkedIn followers: 5,220



X (former Twitter) followers: 4,747



YouTube subscribers: 1,560



Instagram followers: 872

Around 110 documented media counts (articles, interviews and quotes in media outlets) by ZEF researchers in 2023-mid 2024 (see <https://www.zef.de/media-center/zef-in-the-press.html>).

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