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DEVELOPING AN INTEGRATED SYSTEM FOR MONITORING, EVALUATION AND MANAGEMENT

Summary of the findings of a research and advisory project

2026

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About the research and advisory project (01/2024 - 12/2025):

The research and advisory project aimed to contribute to developing an integrated system for monitoring, evaluation and management in bilateral official development cooperation. In an integrated system, monitoring and evaluation provide information on the achievement of objectives at module, development cooperation programme and country level, enabling adjustments that can increase the effectiveness of German development cooperation. The project involved analysing scientific findings and good practice examples from both international and German development cooperation and developing possible solutions. The results were presented to the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the implementing agencies in a confidential report.

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CONTENTS

1.	Motivation for the project	1
2.	Good practices to improve the system of monitoring, evaluation and management	2
2.1	Ready for learning? Good practices to increase learning incentives	3
2.2	Visualising impact: Good practices to use theories of change for management.....	4
2.3	Producing more than just data: Good monitoring practices.....	4
2.4	Paper waste or helpful instrument? Good practices for learning from progress reports	5
2.5	Leveraging the evidence base: Good practices to strengthen the use of evidence	5
2.6	Learning needs opportunities: Good practices to incorporate learning into busy schedules	6
2.7	Impactful cooperation: Good practices to engage partners when appropriate	6
3.	Scenarios for integrated monitoring, evaluation and management systems	6
3.1	Scenario 1: Strategic development cooperation	7
3.2	Scenario 2: Sectoral development cooperation	8
3.3	Scenario 3: Steerable development cooperation	8
3.4	Scenario 4: Learning development cooperation	9
4.	Outlook	9
5.	Literature	10

1. MOTIVATION FOR THE PROJECT

As resources become scarcer, a reliable system for monitoring, evaluation and management is increasingly important in bilateral official development cooperation. Against the backdrop of global crises, growing doubts about the legitimacy of development cooperation and ongoing funding cuts, the pressure to use existing resources more effectively and efficiently is rising. To meet these demands, bilateral official development cooperation needs an integrated system for monitoring, evaluation and management. Beyond merely collecting data, such a system provides relevant information, supports learning processes and thus enables evidence-based decision-making at all management levels.

Compared to many other policy areas, German development cooperation has already taken significant steps to strengthen monitoring and evaluation. Bilateral official development cooperation uses indicator-based systems of objectives, for example, and an evaluation system characterised by a clear division of labour, established standards, transparent guidelines and a high degree of quality and independence in both project-level and strategic evaluations.¹

At the same time, evaluations, expert reports and studies indicate that there is still considerable potential to improve the interplay of monitoring, evaluation and management.² A comparison of the requirements set out in the BMZ's guidelines and procedural documents with their implementation in practice reveals a clear gap between objectives and reality. Two areas offer significant potential to enhance the effectiveness and cost efficiency of German bilateral official development cooperation:

1. strengthening **coherence** within and across systems of objectives at different management levels, and
2. enhancing **learning** from monitoring, evaluation and research.

Coherent systems of objectives are essential for achieving objectives as effectively as possible. In such systems, resources can be directed towards overarching goals.³ Redundant activities can be avoided, and synergies – such as those between modules within a development cooperation programme or with the activities of other donors – can be increased. Coherence can be strengthened by taking overarching objectives into account, systematically analysing interlinkages between objectives, regularly reviewing them and adjusting them, where necessary, based on monitoring and evaluation findings.

In bilateral official development cooperation, evidence points to weaknesses in systems of objectives both within and across the three management levels (country, development cooperation programme and module level). These weaknesses are reflected, for example, in the fact that country strategies and assumptions about how modules interact and how development cooperation programme objectives can be achieved are sometimes missing or do not take adequate account of existing evidence.⁴

¹ BMZ, 2021; BRH, 2023; Deloitte and ZEW, 2024

² For example, Amine et al, 2021; Amine and zu Eulenburg, 2022; BRH, 2023; Dörrbecker, 2023; Esser and Janus, 2023; OECD, 2021; Vorwerk and Köder, 2024

³ Ashoff, 2005; Maihold, 2010; Miola et al, 2019; Nilsson et al, 2022; Nilsson and Weitz, 2019; OECD 2016; OECD DAC, 2019

⁴ Amine et al, 2021; Amine and zu Eulenburg, 2022; OECD, 2021; Vorwerk and Köder, 2024

Learning from monitoring, evaluation and research is of particular importance for effective and economically efficient development cooperation.⁵ In development policy, learning is defined as a process that uses evidence, empirical knowledge and other information to achieve strategic objectives and improve specific interventions.⁶ If relevant data and information are collected, processed, shared and used in a targeted way, they can help to design effective interventions and portfolios, enable adjustments at an early stage and avoid repeating mistakes.⁷

For bilateral official development cooperation, there is evidence that findings from monitoring, evaluation and research are insufficiently used for strategic management by the BMZ and operational management by the implementing agencies. Relevant information is sometimes difficult to access and apply. In addition, incentives to integrate existing findings into planning and management appear limited.⁸ These gaps make it challenging to fully leverage costly data and valuable knowledge in German development cooperation.

2. GOOD PRACTICES TO IMPROVE THE SYSTEM OF MONITORING, EVALUATION AND MANAGEMENT

The project focused on identifying good practices in German and international development cooperation to enhance the coherence of systems of objectives and strengthen learning. Whereas deficits in the interplay of monitoring, evaluation and management are well documented, structured analyses of potential solutions remain limited. Against this background, the project team examined existing good practices in German and international development cooperation, as well as the relevant literature. Based on the empirical findings, potential improvements for the BMZ and implementing agencies were derived and organised into seven thematic areas. In addition, the project report highlights good practices with particularly high potential to increase the long-term effectiveness and cost efficiency of German development cooperation. At the same time, the prioritisation, further development and implementation of the good practices largely depend on the overall vision for German development cooperation and the corresponding roles of the BMZ and the implementing agencies.

⁵ Ashoff, 2010; BRH, 2021; OECD DAC, 2019

⁶ ICAI, 2014, 2019; Tsoukas and Vladimirov, 2001; Yanguas, 2021

⁷ Reinertsen et al., 2022

⁸ Dörrbecker, 2023; Esser and Janus, 2023; OECD, 2021; Vorwerk and Köder, 2024

Empirical basis

The good practices are based on analyses of academic and practice-oriented literature, an online survey of Heads of Cooperation and a total of 101 interviews with staff from German and international development cooperation, as well as scientists and other experts. These analyses include:

- **Document analysis:** This analysis describes the requirements and procedures of bilateral official development cooperation and summarises existing challenges in the interplay of monitoring, evaluation and management, based on existing evaluations, studies and expert reports.
- **Analyses of good practice in German development cooperation:** To identify existing solutions within German development cooperation, the project team conducted interviews with employees and experts from German development cooperation. It also analysed good practices for cooperating with partner governments from the perspective of Heads of Cooperation.
- **Analyses of good practice in international development cooperation:** To identify good practices in international development cooperation and derive possible solutions for German development cooperation, the project team performed case studies – including interviews and document analyses – with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad), the Agence française de développement (AFD) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). These case studies were complemented by in-depth analyses with further organisations.
- **Literature analysis:** The results from the development cooperation-specific and practice-oriented literature of the document analysis were supplemented by an analysis of the academic literature from other research areas.

2.1 Ready for learning? Good practices to increase learning incentives

The German development cooperation system does not yet provide sufficient incentives to systematically learn from monitoring, evaluation and research.⁹ However, learning incentives are necessary if learning is to be prioritised to increase the effectiveness of German development cooperation. To have a successful impact on development cooperation practice, learning incentives need to be established at all organisational and management levels. To this end, **the BMZ needs to make a clear commitment** to effective, self-critical and adaptive approaches to development cooperation, and introduce **learning agendas** that prioritise the most urgent questions to be addressed. At the level of modules, **specific objectives and indicators** can be defined to promote activities that foster learning from monitoring, evaluation and research. Such objectives create the space and secure the necessary resources to integrate these activities into tight schedules. Further incentives for learning include the **promotion of innovation**, for example through a development cooperation-wide fund that finances innovative project ideas, and a stronger requirement to **follow-up on evaluation recommendations**.

⁹ Esser and Janus, 2023; Vorwerk and Köder, 2024

2.2 Visualising impact: Good practices to use theories of change for management

In German development cooperation, intervention logics are not always used to their full potential when designing effective modules and programmes or aligning objectives across different management levels.¹⁰ When applied as theories of change, they can fulfil various functions, contributing to evidence-based planning, coherent portfolios and continuous learning. A key starting point for developing effective modules and development cooperation programs is to **clarify the overarching goals** from which impact hypotheses can be derived and scrutinised. If intervention logics are designed as **living theories of change**, they encourage development cooperation organisations to regularly review and test impact hypotheses. **Thematic theories of change** support planning by mapping evidence-based results chains within specific thematic fields or sectors. In addition, theories of change help prioritise monitoring, evaluation and research activities that are most relevant for effective implementation and management. These priorities can then be captured in **knowledge plans** to guide their systematic use.

2.3 Producing more than just data: Good monitoring practices

The reliability and usability of monitoring data in German development cooperation are often limited by heterogeneous objectives and instruments, poorly formulated indicators and differences in monitoring data across modules.¹¹ Under these conditions, monitoring data rarely allow for reliable statements on results across projects. Conceptual and technical standardisation can improve both the quality and usability of monitoring data in the existing system. This includes **catalogues of quality-assured indicators**, which provide guidance on SMART and proven indicators within specific topics and can make monitoring data easier to compare.¹² **Standardised geo-referencing of project locations** could improve the overview of German development cooperation portfolios, support needs-based planning, and enable geospatial analyses of monitoring data. Using **standardised data models** or **organisation-wide monitoring tools** would allow monitoring data to be integrated and analysed more efficiently, providing meaningful insights for strategic management.

¹⁰ Amine et al, 2021; Amine and zu Eulenburg, 2022; Krämer et al, 2021; Silvestrini, 2023

¹¹ Amine et al, 2021; BRH, 2023; Holzapfel and Römling, 2020; Raetzell and Hoppe, 2022; Vorwerk and Köder, 2024

¹² Indicators are SMART if they are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound.

2.4 Paper waste or helpful instrument? Good practices for learning from progress reports

Currently, progress reports fulfil basic accountability functions, but offer only limited support for strategic management and learning in German development cooperation.¹³ However, they can serve as an important tool for tracking progress in modules and development cooperation programmes, learning from implementation experience, and developing effective country portfolios. To realise these benefits, it is necessary to make the key findings of the reports more readily accessible. One important step is to store reports, evaluations, studies and related documents from different organisations in a **central database or cloud**. Building on this, **(AI-supported) analytical tools** could provide BMZ country officers with a quick portfolio overview and enable cross-module analyses that support the results-based management of country portfolios. In addition, **reflection discussions** between the BMZ and the implementing agencies could strengthen joint learning from progress reports and enable changes to be made in good time.

2.5 Leveraging the evidence base: Good practices to strengthen the use of evidence

Findings from scientific studies and evaluations by other development cooperation stakeholders (referred to below as “scientific evidence”) can complement existing evaluation formats in the German development cooperation system in a cost-effective way. However, the BMZ and implementing agencies have not yet fully embedded the use of scientific evidence in the development cooperation system.¹⁴ Requiring implementing agencies to document the **evidence base as part of module and development cooperation program planning** can strengthen incentives for deeper engagement with scientific evidence and improve knowledge management. Existing evidence can be used more efficiently by aligning it with strategy and planning processes, for example through **evidence-based theories of change** in frequently commissioned thematic areas. Additional ways of using evidence more efficiently include improving the **coordination with other stakeholders** and advancing the development of **living evidence products** and AI-supported tools such as **evidence chatbots**. Another step to promote cross-project learning from scientific evidence would be to strengthen **organisational structures that facilitate cooperation with researchers**.

¹³ Amine et al, 2021; BRH, 2023

¹⁴ Krämer et al, 2022; Marschall, 2022

2.6 Learning needs opportunities: Good practices to incorporate learning into busy schedules

In German development cooperation, learning from monitoring, evaluation and scientific studies often takes place at an individual level or in isolated “pockets of effectiveness”, but is not shared systematically enough to become institutional knowledge.¹⁵ Targeted learning and exchange formats help bridge this gap by promoting knowledge sharing and making existing information accessible for management decisions. Such formats include **pause, reflect and adapt cycles**, which encourage development cooperation organisations to regularly review and respond to new information. **Safe spaces** for professional exchange – free from control and performance pressure – and targeted **dialogue with external experts** to complement existing knowledge are also important. In addition, meeting the diverse information and learning needs of German development cooperation staff requires maintaining a **wide range of information channels**.

2.7 Impactful cooperation: Good practices to engage partners when appropriate

Structural and political challenges require a differentiated, context-specific approach to ensure the involvement of suitable partners and to foster coherence, ownership and joint learning.¹⁶ When the prerequisites for greater partner engagement are met, a range of established approaches and formats can be applied at different management levels. This includes involving government partners in planning country portfolios through **joint reflection processes, strategy documents or portfolio dialogues**. Joint learning can also be strengthened through regular **dialogues on monitoring and evaluation findings** at country portfolio level. At module level, suitable partners could be granted greater responsibility in designing and implementing interventions using **adaptive and participatory project management approaches**, allowing for better consideration of local contexts and increasing the effectiveness of modules.

3. SCENARIOS FOR INTEGRATED MONITORING, EVALUATION AND MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

While implementing single good practices within individual units of the BMZ or implementing agencies can lead to improvements, these measures are unlikely to substantially affect the overall effectiveness and cost efficiency of German development cooperation. Instead, systemic change is required, combining good practices with structural reforms. Such change, in turn, calls for an ambitious yet realistic vision, conceptualised as a “scenario”. Against this background, the project team outlined four scenarios that link good practices with structural measures while taking account of the complex structures and areas of tension within German development cooperation.

¹⁵ Amine et al, 2021; Esser and Janus, 2023; Yanguas, 2021

¹⁶ Faust et al, 2023; Vorwerk and Köder, 2024

Areas of tension in German development cooperation

Areas of tension in German development cooperation can restrict impact-orientated and evidence-based work and management. One area of tension repeatedly observed in the research project concerns the need for German development cooperation to reduce costs in response to constrained budgets, while at the same time facing continued pressure to further improve its results. Achieving such improvements, however, requires greater investment in analysing potential effects and impacts. A further area of tension arises between the BMZ's self-conception as a ministry pursuing transformation and long-term structural change¹⁷ and its need – especially in technical cooperation – to commission projects that are expected to achieve their objectives within three to four years. In addition, the BMZ's political and strategic role conflicts with the existing management model, which involves the commissioning and review of a large number of relatively small projects. A further area of tension exists between the legitimate self-interests of the individual development cooperation organisations and the shared objectives of German development cooperation as a whole. Finally, tension arises from the parallel use of bilateral and sectoral management models, which leads to role ambiguity and inefficiencies within German development cooperation organisations.

3.1 Scenario 1: Strategic development cooperation

Due to its thematic and geographical breadth, German development cooperation has a highly fragmented portfolio, which makes results-based management difficult and negatively affects its overall effectiveness.¹⁸ To increase the effectiveness and cost efficiency of German development cooperation, the portfolio could be narrowed. This scenario proposes that the BMZ focus on a **more limited number of thematic objectives**. Such thematic concentration offers strong potential to build up technical expertise in German development cooperation, to develop effective approaches in the selected thematic areas and to create a coherent overall portfolio (see also Scenario 2: Sectoral development cooperation). While the call for a more focussed approach to development cooperation is not new, successful implementation in the political arena remains challenging.¹⁹ Against this background, the project team outlined possible steps for a **results- and evidence-based narrowing of the portfolio**. Such an approach would involve a) formulating a more limited number of specific objectives, b) deriving effective approaches based on evidence and, building on this, c) continuing relevant modules or planning new ones. By concentrating increasingly scarce resources on a reduced number of thematic objectives, German development cooperation could identify and commission the most effective approaches in these areas, thereby achieving greater impact with the same budget. In the medium term, this focus would also reduce the need to maintain extensive structures in the BMZ and in the implementing agencies for strategic management, project planning and technical advice.

¹⁷ BMZ, 2025

¹⁸ Janus and von Schiller, 2025; Vorwerk and Köder, 2024

¹⁹ Wencker, 2022

3.2 Scenario 2: Sectoral development cooperation

German development cooperation faces global challenges such as climate change and migration that transcend national borders. The current, predominantly bilateral structure of German development cooperation is increasingly reaching its limits. While it promotes context-specific solutions and strengthens partnerships, the potential for systematic knowledge transfer and for scaling successful approaches across countries remains largely untapped. One possible response is to manage German development cooperation through **thematically focussed, sectoral portfolios with clearly defined objectives** instead of country portfolios. Sector divisions would assume responsibility for the strategic management of these thematic portfolios and commission cross-country interventions, building on the model of global projects. Implementing agencies would propose evidence-based interventions in specific countries or regions that contribute most effectively to the overarching thematic objectives. An important lever for increasing both effectiveness and cost efficiency would lie in greater flexibility in the selection of cooperation partners, as well as the ability to further develop promising interventions in a targeted manner. In addition, a more stringent management model would help overcome the structural weaknesses of the current hybrid system of bilateral and sectoral development cooperation, characterised by efficiency losses.

3.3 Scenario 3: Steerable development cooperation

In German development cooperation, the commissioning of numerous small-scale modules results in a level of management effort that the BMZ cannot adequately address and that impairs the overall effectiveness of German development cooperation. Although the introduction of the development cooperation programme level was intended to strengthen the BMZ's management capacity, this objective has so far only been achieved to a limited extent,²⁰ as commissioning, management and performance monitoring continue to take place primarily at the module level.²¹ Against this background, the core of this scenario is a **reduction from three to two management levels**, combined with a **reduction in the number of commissions**. The aim is to lower operational and administrative management efforts and thereby free up resources for the BMZ's political and strategic management role. Compared to current procedures, this would involve awarding fewer but more integrated and evidence-based commissions, comparable to current development cooperation programmes in terms of their level of objectives, scope and duration.²² To ensure clear responsibilities for coherence within programmes, these commissions would be awarded either to technical or financial cooperation. Efficiency gains resulting from reduced planning efforts would enable the BMZ to place greater emphasis on its political and strategic tasks and on enhancing the quality and impact orientation of the work carried out by the implementing agencies. In addition, the coherent planning and commissioning of multiple modules as a single, unified package, combined with integrated monitoring and knowledge management, would create more favourable conditions for achieving higher impact.

²⁰ Amine et al, 2021; KfW Development Bank and GIZ, 2023; Vorwerk and Köder, 2024

²¹ Amine et al, 2021; BRH, 2021; Hartmann et al, 2019; Silvestrini, 2023; Vorwerk and Köder, 2024

²² The administrative structure used for commissioning these programmes would partly depend on the commitment appropriations that the federal budget allows.

3.4 Scenario 4: Learning development cooperation

German development cooperation is one of the best evaluated and analysed policy areas in Germany. At the same time, the existing knowledge from monitoring, evaluation and scientific evidence is still underutilised for improving the effectiveness of development cooperation.²³ Against this backdrop, the Federal Court of Auditors called for the BMZ to develop a learning system that systematically analyses project evaluations, monitoring and reporting for overarching considerations and future projects.²⁴ In the scenario of a learning development cooperation, the BMZ and the implementing agencies would place **greater emphasis on continuous learning from monitoring, evaluation and scientific evidence**. A learning development cooperation would be characterised by a) an enabling environment with incentives and requirements for the systematic use of monitoring data, evaluation results and scientific evidence, b) clear direction on priority knowledge needs, c) the availability of usable data and information, and d) learning formats that are integrated into management and project cycles. In this scenario, findings from monitoring, evaluation and research would be systematically considered across all project phases to enhance the effectiveness and cost efficiency of current and future interventions. This would allow increasingly scarce resources to be allocated strategically to areas with the greatest potential for impact.

4. OUTLOOK

The results of this report outline steps for further developing an integrated system for monitoring, evaluation and management and using this system more effectively. The project pursued an evidence-based stocktaking approach to explore how German development cooperation could become more impact-oriented. By doing so, it closes an important gap in previous discussions of the management system and the monitoring and evaluation functions of German development cooperation. The findings show that there are numerous ways to enhance the coherence of systems of objectives and strengthen learning from monitoring, evaluation and research. At the same time, the findings do not aim to present a complete or fully coherent development cooperation system. To achieve sustainable systemic change, the BMZ needs to develop an even clearer understanding of the role and responsibilities it assigns to itself and to the implementing agencies. Based on such an improved vision – aligned in both ambition and implementation – future solutions could be prioritised and further developed more efficiently.

²³ Dörrbecker, 2023; Esser and Janus, 2023; Krämer et al, 2021; OECD, 2021; Vorwerk and Köder, 2024

²⁴ BRH, 2023

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