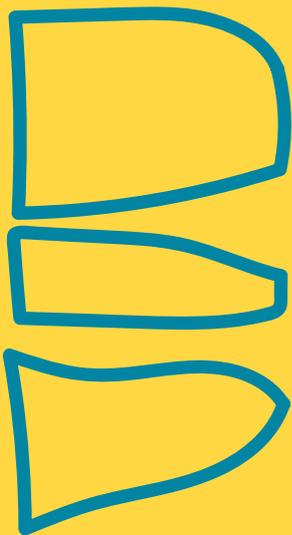


Global South Civil Society Lens: Towards Germany's Feminist International Cooperation



Position Paper



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Policy Paper: Global South Civil Society Lens: Towards Germany's Feminist International Cooperation

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Introduction

Provided by: The Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy (CFFP)

In late 2021, Germany announced its intentions to pursue a feminist foreign policy. This was followed by an announcement that the Bundesministerium für Wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit (also referred to as the BMZ, or the German Federal Ministry for Economic Development Cooperation) would develop a feminist development policy, which would fall under the broader arm of feminist foreign policy. As part of the process of building a feminist development policy, so far the BMZ has conducted:

- 1 online consultations (including 400 people, with a mix of Global South and Global North-based respondents);**
- 2 a high-level conference (including approximately 100 actors based in the Global South and North) and;**
- 3 a series of German-only civil society dialogues.**

CFFP has asked feminists globally to critically reflect on this process and on Germany's commitment to feminist development policy as well as provide a broader critical analysis of both Germany's historical and contemporary aid practices and the BMZ's Reform 2030 Strategy. The following position paper is independently authored by AWID, a leading global, feminist, membership, and movement-support organisation. It focuses on German funding and project management practices and structural neocolonial norms in development, as well as reviewing the BMZ's Reform 2030 Strategy with a feminist critical lens; and is informed by the expertise of feminists and organisations from Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Kosovo, and Ukraine.

Feminist Development: an Opportunity

Germany's pursuit of a feminist development policy opens a vibrant space for conversations about a range of critical topics, such as international power structures, the failure to acknowledge the role of race in European discourse,¹ colonial legacies and neo-colonial economies, and imperialism. It also creates space for the voice and autonomy of Global South communities - and particularly women, LGBTQI* people and other minorities - to define what development means to us. It is as important to look at the approaches of these conversations, e.g., what is development, decolonisation, justice and equality, as it is to look at how the conversations address institutional practices: who makes the decisions, who can access the financial resources, who determines impact, what are the goals and the risks, and who is accountable to whom? Do we all have an agreement on what developing and bettering society actually means? To inform this paper, feminists from Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Kosovo, and Ukraine (all countries included in the BMZ 2030 Reform Strategy) generously agreed to share their time and expertise with us. In a series of interviews, they reflected on their experiences with German development cooperation, specifically primarily on funding directed through the German Agency for International Cooperation GmbH (GIZ), but also other channels. We also invited their perspectives on movement needs in their current political and socio-economic contexts and their experience of the funding ecosystem at large.² Methodologically, we should note that, while our focus here is on BMZ approach and practice, from the civil society perspective, German funding also encompasses the so-called political foundations (associated with German political parties) funded not only by the BMZ, but also by the Foreign Affairs Ministry, the Education Ministry (for student scholarships), etc.³

Similarly, faith-based foundations (such as Brot für die Welt, the relief agency of the Protestant churches, or Misereor, the Catholic agency) receive a portion of their funding from the BMZ among other sources. The political foundations operating through national offices are better known partners to feminists, women's rights and LGBTQI* rights groups, and can even at times be among the few funders supporting gender justice initiatives in a given context.

However, by and large, in our interviews with feminists in Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Kosovo, and Ukraine, we heard loud and clear that Germany has a long way to go towards development cooperation that is aware of power inequalities and respects the rights, expertise, and agency of people to define what development means to them:

“Women really need funding, what we need is core funding that is flexible, because this will allow us to build our own movement.”

**Juwan Merza,
Aman Alliance, Iraq**

While these conversations are not new, so far German and many other international development institutions have paid little attention to the extensive and long-voiced criticism of the neocolonial, extractivist, sexist, and racist approaches dominating development.⁴

“A lot of donors want to steer a bit too much where the women’s movement should go and that’s why there isn’t a lot of core funding, because it means you let go of control. It also implies that there’s a lack of trust from donors towards civil society organisations and women’s rights organisations that they actually know best how they need to develop and what they need to do, which is very unfortunate and is a bigger part of discussion about decolonising development cooperation.”

**Stina Magnuson Buur,
Western Balkan Office - Kvinna till
Kvinna, Sweden**

The concept of development itself has rightly been criticized for imposing a Eurocentric and capitalist pathway for people and societies, obscuring, marginalizing, and de-legitimizing multiple other forms of being in the world. Developing a new and intersectional feminist strategy presents an opportunity for Germany to engage in those conversations in good faith, to really listen and to take concrete steps towards repairing human rights violations and harm, past and present, and to contribute to positive changes in our world.

The growing number of countries interested in feminist approaches to foreign policy and development sparked a number of exciting civil society initiatives and solid publications offering theoretical and practical tools, thought frameworks and policy recommendations.⁵ The question is, will governments listen and action these recommendations?

We live in times of co-option, when women's rights, gender equality, and increasingly feminism, are adopted by governments and multinational corporations for the purposes of marketing and branding. This concern has already been voiced in relation to feminist foreign policy, and it is valid all the more due to the fundamental contradictions and incoherence among policy areas, from arms and militarization to trade and investment to migration and asylum.

“One of the main problems I see is the huge clash between the funding policies of the global north and their foreign policies. Germany returns Syrian refugees ⁶ but funds humanitarian aid to Syria, the UK sells arms to Saudi that bomb Yemen but funds feminist organisations in Yemen.”

L.A., Syria

We understand a 'feminist' approach to policy as one that courageously and critically re-examines and radically transforms oppressive power structures at the foundation of our societies and economies. Feminism and intersectionality must not become buzzwords. Rather, they should signal an ongoing commitment to dismantling inter-related root causes of oppression and discrimination. This entails letting go of 'championing' certain rights while violating and undermining others (from the freedom of expression to the freedom of movement).

Can international development cooperation in such an unequal world truly be feminist? Can states inflicting violence on women and gender-diverse people every day (as becomes clear, for example, when listening to women living in Germany's refugee centers),⁷ even claim the term feminism? While one could simply say "no",

"we are confident that feminist values, principles and practices can lead us and our allies within state institutions and development agencies in the right direction of undoing harm and shifting power and resources to those who hold the solutions: feminist, women's rights, LGBTQI* rights and social justice movements in and from the Global South."

**Juwan Merza,
Aman Alliance, Iraq**

A feminist development policy could play an important role in challenging the neo-colonial, imperialist, and patriarchal thinking and practice at the core of Germany's development cooperation. This much-needed paradigm shift would also recognize Global South women and gender-diverse people not merely as 'beneficiaries' and 'recipients', but as autonomous agents and experts in their societies.

BMZ's own synthesis of the consultation process with civil society clearly identifies: "a feminist development policy requires structural changes within the institutions of German development cooperation".⁸ The interviews conducted to inform this paper reaffirm this point, and offer both a critical perspective and a constructive pathway forward.

Where are the Voices?

The 2022 consultative process conducted by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) made a step towards a dialogue with feminists globally, specifically those from the Global South. This is already an encouraging and refreshing change from Germany's development policy and practice, largely experienced by civil society as top-down in every sense: from priority-setting to application and reporting procedures.

However, the current scope of civil society consultations conducted is insufficient. For example, the survey was sent to 400 people only and dialogues were held with only 50 organisations. There is significant room for improvement and lessons to be learnt from other countries. For example, Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy was preceded by consultations "with 15,000 staff from organizations, including overseas partners based in 65 different countries and nine in-person events in Canada".⁹

We hope that this is only the beginning of an ongoing, larger-scale, and inclusive dialogue in Germany required for the ambitious and critical task of structural change across BMZ and its operation across different political, economic, and socio-cultural contexts globally. Instead of singular, one-off consultations, we emphasize the importance of an ongoing conversation with feminist movements as a tool of accountability, monitoring and evaluation of any progress Germany would hopefully make.

Where Are the Voices: "German money is difficult"

Within our interviews, we heard time and again that "German money is difficult": from the bureaucratic burdens and at times unreasonable conditionalities, to the heavy reporting requirements, and the disconnect from people's lived realities on the ground. For instance, the expectation to fill endless reporting forms and meet deadlines when you don't have electricity. This came up repeatedly in relation to GIZ but also to other channels through which BMZ budgets flow, and German funders overall.

The problem of inflexibility is even more pertinent in war zones and conflict situations, where people at risk of death must navigate requirements that are simply impossible to implement and that ignore the time-sensitivity necessary for activists to respond to their needs. Germany is not the exception, as this is a familiar struggle for civil society with most development agencies and funders living in a different reality and a sense of time:

“Sometimes we face strange questions. We get electricity for 4 hours every day and we need to have generators during certain work hours or during workshops and we need to have money for fuel for generators. Donors are sometimes not convinced of this because they cannot imagine a life with electricity only for 4 hours every day.”

**Amal Naem,
Tulip Organization, Syria**

“We had one example where we applied for a grant in April and got an answer in July but it was completely irrelevant by then because we had completely different needs. During a war, three months is an extremely long time.”

**Yuliya Sporysh,
NGO Girls, Ukraine**

The repeated notion that development funders simply don't understand the realities of the societies where they operate, underscores why genuine and expansive civil society consultations are so critical in informing and transforming development policy and practices. Basic needs like electricity, wheelchairs for women with disabilities, mental health support in crisis situations, transportation, are essential not only to do work but to survive. All of these challenges were mentioned in the interviews as difficult to impossible to manage with most funders and their requirements, including Germany. The repercussions of such strenuous funding requirements were such that some partners reported that they've decided to stop taking German money, because of the overwhelming burdens.

Where are the Voices: Following the Money

In addition to the administrative burden, Germany's funding practices are also criticized for (preferentially) funding international development organisations more than women's rights organisations. Overall, only a small portion of Germany's development budget goes to both civil society and business groups: 11.6% in 2021, and 10.7% in 2022.¹⁰ This conflation of funding to nonprofit and for-profit institutions in one figure is counterproductive, as the actual funding available to civil society is unclear. In any case, this percentage of course does not reflect the crucial role and contribution of civil society to sustainable development, human rights, social and economic justice. Moreover, much of the civil society funding goes to German organisations and their partners, many based in the Global North, and little seems to go directly to the Global South.¹¹ The BMZ funding directed through the GIZ, rarely reaches feminist, women's rights and gender justice organisations, not to mention community-based and grassroots groups, instead structurally preferring international aid organisations able to absorb large amounts of money. This has grave effects:

"15 or 16 civil society organisations in Yemen complained about the same thing; of the same big organisations getting the funding all the time and none of it reaching the smaller organisations, especially feminist organisations that have a war waged against them." (Qobool al-Absi, Qarar Foundation for Media and Sustainable Development, Yemen)

"You need to translate any piece of documentation to English or German, and you need to keep it for at least 7 years. So you can imagine how much effort it takes from my financial team. We are a big organisation, so you can imagine how much harder it is for smaller organisations." (Yuliya Sporysh, NGO Girls, Ukraine)

While these rigid frameworks and procedures aim to monitor expenditure and decrease risk, the voices of the feminists make clear that they increase another kind of risk for Germany: the failure to make strategic impact and relevant contributions that truly correspond to people's lived realities and agency in advancing and developing their societies.

This means that the bravest civil society initiatives, on the frontlines of struggle for democracy, equality and justice, are further sidelined in favor of the more established institutions, that are often coincidentally more convenient to undemocratic regimes:

"They will not see us, we are microscopic compared to them. Second of all, we are not a registered group and we are not going to register ourselves. None of the members want to be registered because there will be security implications and let's say we're not singing to the rhythm of the regime and we don't want to be affected by it." (Manal Hameed, Aman Women Alliance, Iraq)

"As for resource challenges, it's very difficult to reach foundations and donors. We are working almost for free and that's very bad. The way to get a grant is to get it through an organization that belongs to the regime like the Syria Trust for Development and this is how you can work." (Anonymous, Syria)

Certainly, collaboration with civil society organisations in all their diversity, requires structural changes in funding modalities, but it is not impossible. Direct partnerships with feminist, women's rights and gender justice organisations are essential for any development strategy to be feminist.



“The devil is in the details and we have to talk about the modalities and this is what we’re trying to raise with the German government [...] from what we heard from GIZ when we interviewed them here in the region is that their modalities, which they get from the German government, are very restrictive, so it means that it’s very hard for them to procure services or make partnerships with women’s rights organisations. If so, this is an issue that we need to raise with the German government, to change their modalities and encourage GIZ to partner with women’s rights organisations.”

**Nicole Farnsworth,
Kosovo Women’s Network, Kosovo**

Recent research by Mama Cash and AWID examined funding modalities in bilateral institutions that navigate administrative requirements while attempting to overcome the frequent and common obstacles to direct financing of feminist movements in all their diversity.¹² The modalities that enable and facilitate direct financing are what we call ‘building blocks’, with the first block being political commitment. This entails high-level leadership making public commitment to gender equality and feminist values, building relationships with feminist movements and tapping into activists’ expertise to build internal knowledge and understanding, and preparedness to change the existing modalities. The subsequent building blocks offer a practical direction for these changes, such as establishing different funding tranches to reach a continuum of organisations, big and small, and funding women’s funds that exist in all regions of the world. Feminist and women’s funds have the expertise, access and systems needed to support and accompany feminist and gender justice organisations, including grassroots, community-based and at-risk groups. Here, an important element is the commitment to prioritize feminist movements and women’s rights organisations in the Global South, over non-constituency led groups. The third block pertains to programme design and funding mechanisms, for example by building in flexibility and long-term core funding, and fund the holistic security, safety and well-being of activists and staff. Finally, the fourth block is about understanding governance and management not as merely technical neutral systems, and inviting feminist and women’s rights activists into all aspects of decision-making, from designing programs and deciding on eligibility criteria, to developing financial reporting procedures.

Where are the Voices: Shifting power

Ultimately, a feminist approach is not about only including women or addressing gender inequalities, it is about critically interrogating power structures and shifting power, with an intersectional lens. In the context of development, it means shifting geo-political and economic power among Global North and South, shifting narratives that echo colonialism, and shifting power to women and historically marginalized communities, not just as aid recipients but as the experts, solution providers and agents and drivers of change in our societies.

This relates not only to conceptual frameworks and political statements, but to practical applications and reporting requirements. For example, people living in war zones cannot be expected to provide orderly receipts in real-time, but community-based organisations can develop efficient and trust-based ways to monitor expenses and adhere to transparency:

“... for example women who live in Kherson or Melitopol, they cannot give receipts from the shops, receipts from [the] supermarket because they buy food sometimes in bazaars and markets. We trust them and we transfer them money and they send us a photo of what they bought and they don't give us receipts or papers from the trade center or whatever. Some donors approve this but it is a small number of them.”

**Olena Stryzhak,
Positive Women, Ukraine**

What would Germany's development policy and practice look like, if Global South feminists had a voice in shaping the development cooperation with their countries and regions? Certainly, it would look very different than it is now, with unilateral decision-making, limited dialogue among Germany and civil society about their own development priorities in their own context, and a great deal of financial resources going to state institutions, international aid organisations and development banks, rather than the diverse and powerful amalgam of feminist, women's rights, LGBTQI* and social justice movements, and civil society organizations.

We heard a broad range of negative and positive experiences of relationships with GIZ and other BMZ-funded agencies. Many of the negative experiences have to do with a patronizing, neo-colonial and white supremacist approach, disrespect and devaluation of expertise of the feminists in the country, and prioritizing rigid reporting demands over the safety and the wellbeing of the people involved (staff, activists, participants, and others). Several interviewees made clear that they are not against reporting and transparency. On the contrary, they are keen to comply and are deeply committed to using resources with integrity. The problem is only when requirements are unreasonably burdensome on their teams and wellbeing, unreasonable for their lived realities, and undermine the actual purpose of their work.

Positive examples emphasize the importance of a feminist approach exercised by teams, when they are attuned to the actual needs of the civil society and are able to respond to these needs in a timely, strategic and respectful manner:

“GIZ partnered with lawyers and did trainings about these new laws, data protection law and labor law in Turkey. This kind of support was very good. The people who were on the team played a huge role, both the Germans and the Syrians in those teams were feminists who made huge efforts before they came to us and really tried to make it easier for us. This happened in Turkey.”

Anonymous

This example demonstrates that, while better practice exists, it can be a patchy and disjointed experience for civil society teams working with German implementing agencies, who in turn are informed by higher-level policies dictated from the BMZ, such as the 2030 Reform Strategy.

Germany's 2030 Reform Strategy



The BMZ 2030 reform strategy is the result of the previous government (in power until the end of 2021). It is unclear how the new government intends to approach the fundamental problems of the strategy, which is an urgent task. The strategy's subtitle promises "new thinking - new direction",¹³ and yet the old hierarchies and power structures seem to be firmly in place. Let us be perfectly clear: there is nothing feminist about the reform.

One notable new direction is the private sector gaining even more significant power. This is accompanied by an abundance of neoliberal terminology promising "effectiveness", "efficiency", "flexibility", and rapid results, as the private sector does, promises and evidence apart. Let us review the strategy's core elements with feminist lens.

The reform strategy opens with a brief overview of humankind and the planet's challenges. It is important in revealing the mindset and ideological assumptions underlying the subsequent practical elements of the strategy.

The strategy overview begins by discussing demographics and the growing world population, primarily in so-called developing countries, and then identifies a number of core problems, primarily hunger and poverty, which remain the main priorities of Germany's development mission. These 'classical' causes of development institutions have a long history of failure in acknowledging and addressing the wider, structural factors that cause and sustain poverty and hunger. While the overview mentions a few causes, including: conflict and forced displacement and climate change, it then mentions globalisation and its flipside of inequality and "precarious working conditions in many supply chains [...] particularly in Africa".¹⁴

What is most interesting in this overview is what it is missing. International power structures and institutions responsible for these great problems of humankind and the planet are completely absent.

The overview seems oblivious to how colonialism has shaped, and continues shaping, today's economic and political realities, including poverty, hunger, and endless extraction and exploitation of human labor and natural resources. The focus on precarious working conditions in supply chains is a case in point. Precarious working conditions in global supply chains are recognized as a problem, mentioning Africa, but entirely omitting any mention of the Global North-headquartered multinational corporations and markets that structure these supply chains. There is also no mention of the conditionality of structural adjustment programmes by international financial institutions that force Global South countries to weaken labor and environmental standards for the sake of attracting investors with cheap labor and cheaper production and operation costs. Nor is there mention of the domestic and international lobby of the private sector against legally-binding accountability measures, that effectively make any accountability for human rights, labor rights and environmental rights violations out of reach. At the same time, the private sector dominates much of the reform strategy, as we will discuss.

Put simply, while there is a recognition of real problems, their causes are unaccounted for, and so the solutions are inadequate and end up reinforcing the power structures producing these problems. Consider

this strong statement in the text: "If everyone in the world had the same patterns of consumption and production as the industrialized countries, we would need two planets. But we only have one."¹⁵ And yet, Global North governments, multinational corporations, and international financial institutions, all bearing the lion share of responsibility for these problems, are entirely absent from the overview and the strategy itself. There is no mention of changing those patterns of unsustainable consumption and production leading to the destruction of our planet. Germany bears historical responsibility for 4% of the global total of CO₂, and is today the world's 12th largest emitter. There is no mention of Germany's accountability, past and present, to the international community and the global population. To quote CFFP, "[i]nstead of making amends, Germany depicts the financial support as a voluntary relief campaign, thus diminishing its responsibility as a former colonial power",¹⁶ to which we can add its responsibility as a current economic and political power. The same pattern of recognizing problems but neglecting to acknowledge their root causes is evident in the operational elements of the strategy. Germany recognizes that development cannot be imposed, rightly stating that "the key to development is for partners to act on their own initiative",¹⁷ and yet the conclusions from this realization are misguided.

The BMZ 2030 strategy repeats, time and again, that Germany is “calling on our partner countries more than ever before to provide measurable evidence of progress made on good governance, human rights and fighting corruption”¹⁸. While we all would like to see progress everywhere on these issues, this bilateral power structure, wherein Germany can demand evidence of progress from Global South countries, reveals the vacuum where Germany is not equally required to be accountable to produce evidence of progress on its contribution to the climate crisis, or its failure of decolonisation. The repetition of Germany’s expectations from partner countries, who “can and must deliver more themselves”,¹⁹ sounded less as respect for sovereignty and more like an adult instructing children how to behave.

Meanwhile, the “measurable evidence” sought by Germany’s development institutions is not necessarily strategic nor sensible. From our interviews, the constant pressure to produce evidence repeatedly was expressed not only as a burden on civil society but also, ironically, as an obstacle to actual impact. Rigid and inflexible evaluation mechanisms are destined to become box-ticking exercises rather than the useful tools teams can truly work with:

“They claim to have a feminist approach but they are really far from it. Their procedures are very bureaucratic and exhausting, and they are evidence based and not impact or quality based. They care about details and numbers more than values and impacts, their compliance is exhausting, their teams’ communications are exhausting, their demands are exhausting [...] I think that if GIZ wants to develop itself as a foundation that really supports feminist organizations without them adopting a feminist approach, they at least need to be flexible. The system they have now doesn’t function.”

Anonymous

Germany's 2030 Reform Strategy:

Embedded Inflexibility in Partnerships

Germany's classification of states into partnership categories is worth paying attention to. The rationale for the categories is articulated in the standard neoliberal terms (for example, effective, rapid, and flexible.) but the political logic remains unaccounted for. There are three categories:

- 1** Bilateral partners, encompassing a wide geographical diversity of 32 countries.
- 2** Global partners, encompassing Brazil, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Peru, South Africa, Vietnam, China. This category is about protecting global goods like the climate and the environment, and "mainly through loans and through leveraging additional money market funds"²⁰. This categorisation is a red flag to us and a serious concern, because protection of the climate and environment cannot be done through loans and market-based solutions. It requires, as a very first step, financing of climate justice movements, particularly those led by women and gender-diverse people from communities most affected by climate crisis and injustices.
- 3** Nexus and peace partnerships, encompassing Afghanistan, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria and Yemen. While wars and militarization are undoubtedly a major problem for humanity, this comes across as an instrument to prevent migration to Europe. We are concerned by the stated intent to "increase support for international aid organizations", ²¹ and lack of consideration for the crucial role of local civil society leadership in peacebuilding.

Germany has reached this classification in a unilateral act, rather than in cooperation and dialogue with these countries and their people. A cooperative approach for Germany would mean playing its role as a member of an international community with historical and present-day responsibilities, where we all - as the people living on this planet - can and should have a voice and the power to determine our future directions.

In terms of cooperation mode, the Reform Strategy rests on four pillars, with two out of them dominated by the private sector. The first pillar is the above mentioned expectation from partner countries to be good and try harder, which comes across as paternalistic. The second is 'reform partnerships' where the official development cooperation will give a greater role to the countries that pursue reforms, albeit there is no mention of which reforms exactly. The third pillar is private investment, "because it is mainly the private sector that generates jobs"²². This disregards the role of the private sector in causing the injustices and inequalities, and the lack of accountability measures its many forms of harm, including but not limited to: taking away people's livelihoods, extractivism driving forced displacement, climate crisis. Equating development with private investment in the Global South is in stark contradiction of feminist macroeconomic analysis and development justice approaches. Finally, creating "the right conditions for fair trade" by "campaigning for social and environmental sustainability"²³ misses out the fact that precarious labor conditions and environmental harm are not an unfortunate by-product of global supply chains, but are at the core of the global economic model.

What stands out here is the absence of civil society, albeit the intention to work more with civil society is mentioned elsewhere in the strategy. This is consistent with the absence of the voice, agency and autonomy of the people across Global South countries in the strategy itself.

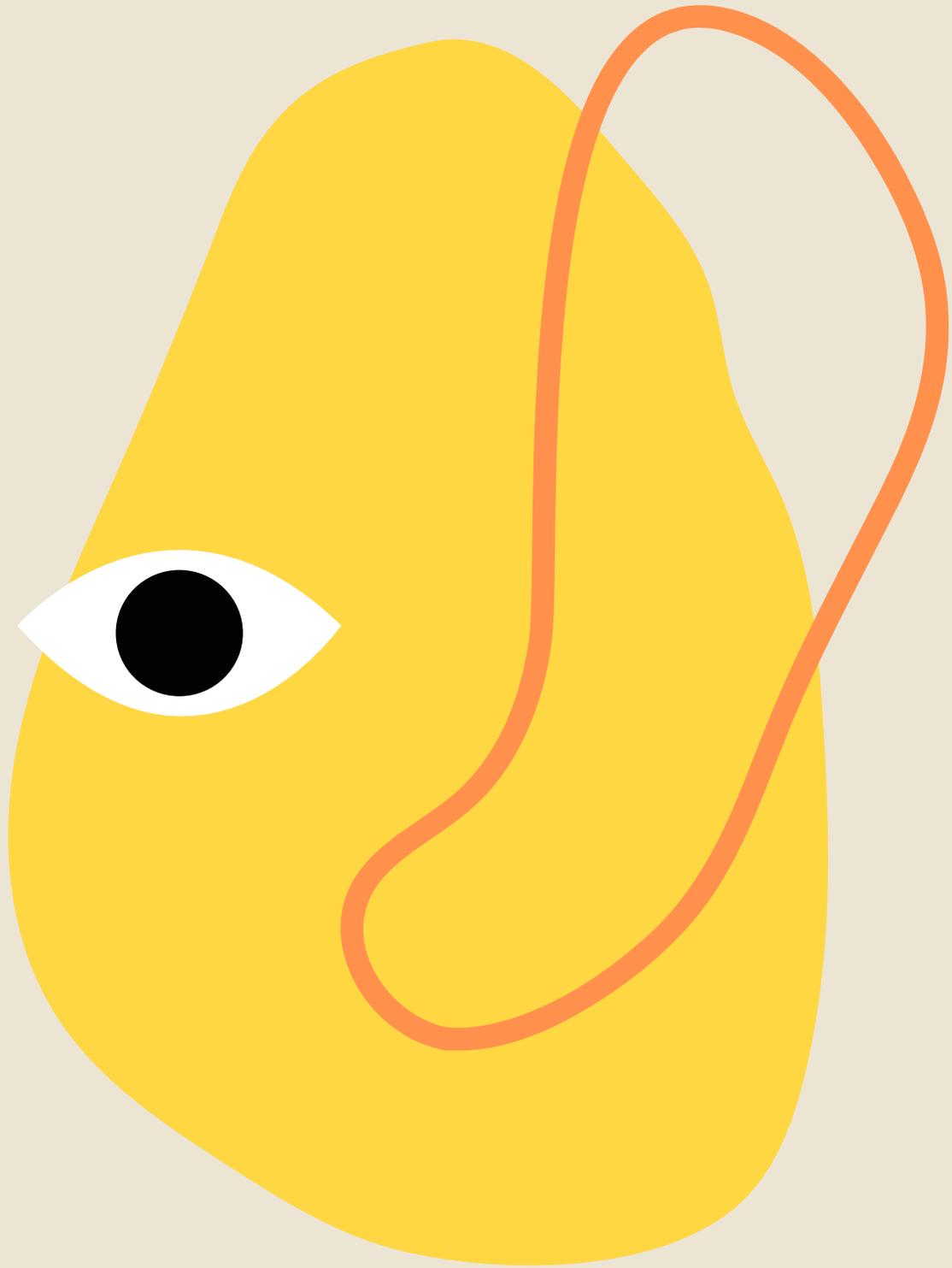
Lack of flexibility and understanding of lived realities may result in conduct that is not only insensitive and patronizing towards civil society organizations, but fails to consider questions of physical and emotional safety of women human rights defenders and communities facing trauma and violence.

Even seemingly innocuous practices such as the permanent request for participants' list in events hosted by German funders, become grossly inappropriate in politically volatile contexts where human rights defenders are persecuted. Ultimately, the strictest control of every single bus ticket cannot replace genuine trust, which is the essence of any functional relationship and cooperation, a simple truth well known to feminist funders:

“The key here really is honesty, because we also need partners to be able to share their failures with us because this is where we learn, especially if you’re working with advocacy. As long as they are open and honest with us, we can be extremely flexible with adjustments.”

**Stina Magnuson Buur,
Western Balkan Office - Kvinna till
Kvinna, Sweden**

It becomes clear that the aim of feminist development policy to drive structural change in German development institutions is as massive and ambitious as it is urgent and necessary. A transformation of mindset, policy and practice is in order. Feminist, women’s rights and gender justice movements are able and willing to offer the expertise to make this ambitious goal a reality.



Conclusion: Feminist Food for Thought

In anticipation of further civil society consultations and dialogue with the BMZ, we propose a non-exhaustive list of five specific directions for further discussion:



Acknowledging “cooperation” in development cooperation:

A cooperative approach to development requires respecting the voice and agency of people in defining what development of their own societies means to them. This applies all the more to communities and constituencies who have been historically excluded from decision-making that affects their own futures . These mustn't be one-size-fits- all models, nor top-down categorizing unilaterally decided by Germany. Current and historical power imbalances of “cooperation” in development must also be acknowledged and addressed continually. If we listen to the calls to shift away from neo-colonial power relations and operation modes, development cooperation should entail historical justice and reparations as well as multi-directional accountability amongst states and among state and civil society.

Valuing and resourcing civil society, and specifically feminist and social justice movements:

With 10.7% (1,319,741 thousand euros)²⁴ of the BMZ budget in 2022 going to “civil society and business groups and institutions”, and excluding the private sector and the funding that stays within international aid organisations, how much of this budget actually reaches grassroots, community-based, feminist, women’s rights and LGBTQI organisations? And yet, these organisations are often the key drivers of positive change in their societies, and the first responders in situations of conflict and crisis. What would it look like, truly valuing civil society and feminist movements, for their impact on society and for their expertise to inform policy and practice of international development? How different would the distribution of resources be? Here it is worth reflecting on the importance of connection, networking and cross-border solidarity for feminist organizations and civil society at large, going beyond country-based approach. **“Our issues are all common, whether we are Palestinian, Iraqi, Lebanese women. I’m wishing for a cross border alliance between Arab women all around the Arab world because our goals are similar and our realities are similar. Change is inevitable.” (Juwana Merza, Aman Alliance, Iraq)**



3

Shifting from control-based to trust-based cooperation and re-thinking risk:

Collaboration and meaningful relationship with civil society requires a shift in mindset. Civil society partners shouldn't be perceived as 'implementers' of 'projects' but as drivers of positive change in their societies and the world at large, who need and deserve more and better resourcing. Core, flexible, multi-year funding, as feminists have been advocating for years, is needed to sustain movements safeguarding rights and justice, even more so in times of backlash and unlimited resources at the disposal of anti-rights actors operating locally and globally. This needs to be accompanied by radical transformation of funding modalities, including programming and reporting and accounting procedures. Difficult, but possible and in fact necessary.²⁵ This requires funders to rethink risk and risk management, and replace cumbersome and rigid reporting and accounting demands that take disproportional toll on movements (as one of our interviewees said: "the reporting killed the spirit of the project") with a trust-based approach. Wisdom and experience of feminist funders already leads the way.²⁶

4

Getting out of the neoliberal trap of false solutions and "women's economic empowerment":

Feminist economies and feminist economic models,²⁷ practices, and agendas for wealth redistribution must be taken seriously by policy-makers, as the most promising horizons for social and economic development that centers the wellbeing of people and planet. Unfortunately, the dominance of the private sector in the BMZ reform concept and resource distribution is true to the Zeitgeist of corporate capture of governance. Expansion of debt-based economies that succumb women to indebtedness while enriching the banks are promoted as "women's economic empowerment" and "financial inclusion".²⁸ Challenging neoliberal capitalism that appears to be adopted by the reform strategy as its *raison d'être* will no doubt be one of feminist development strategy's main and most important challenges.

Policy coherence as an ongoing effort and commitment:

Feminist input on feminist foreign and development policy emphasizes the importance of policy coherence, particularly in policy areas where feminist and gender-transformative analysis is still marginalized or disregarded in entirety: trade and investment, peace and security, migration, climate and more. To this extent, we commend the proposal made in the BMZ synthesis of civil society consultations to establish a joint high-level working group of the German Federal Foreign Office (AA) and the BMZ on feminist foreign and development policy. Yet, for such a working group to realize its potential, Global South-led feminist and gender justice movements must have ample and meaningful representation, voice and influence. This would create a much-needed opportunity for the BMZ and the AA to address policy coherence on an ongoing basis, and provide a mechanism for their accountability to civil society and feminist movements.



Feminists know that another world is possible, and man-made systems - be they social, political, or financial - are never set in stone. For Germany, a feminist development policy is a precious opportunity for a much needed system change. To close with the words that resonate with us deeply:

“in the end, sustainability is about human life and if the systems that we have don't serve us, we need to invent new ones”

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End Notes

¹ Center for Intersectional Justice (CIJ) (2020) [CIJ Factsheet: Race in Germany and Europe](#). Berlin: Center for Intersectional Justice.

² See: Miller, K., and Jones, R. (2019). [Toward a feminist funding ecosystem: A framework and practical guide](#). Ontario: AWID.

³ These include: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (SPD); Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (CDU); Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung für die Freiheit (FDP); Hanns-Seidel-Stiftung (CSU); Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung (Die Linke); Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung (Grüne); and Desiderius-Erasmus-Stiftung (AfD).

⁴ Kornprobst, T., Matheis, T., Schlegel, A., Vitello, F., Fritzsche, J., Fußler, M., Starke, C., Zemeittat, T., and Klüber, D. (2020). [Postcolonialism & Post-Development: Practical Perspectives for Development Cooperation](#). FES Scholarly Working Group on Global Development and Postcolonial Issues.

⁵ See additional information, [Global Partner Network on Feminist Foreign Policy, Comparative Analysis of Feminist Foreign Policies, and Feminist Foreign Policy Web Dossier](#)

⁶ Germany had a temporary freeze on deportations to Syria, but after 2020 this freeze was partially lifted, allowing deportation of Syrians on a “case-by-case” basis, particularly to regions of Syria not controlled by the Assad regime, e.g. Kurdistan. See: Deutscher Bundestag (2021) [Abschiebungen nach Syrien Inneres und Heimat/Antwort](#). Hib 796/2021. Deutscher Bundestag; Bewarder, V.M. (2021) [Bundesregierung bereitet mögliche Abschiebungen nach Syrien vor](#). 21 April 2021. Politik.

⁷ IWS Radio (2021) [The Migrant Woman Experience](#). IWS Radio.

⁸ BMZ (2022). [Synthesis of Contributions by Civil Society Consultation Process on the Feminist Development Policy of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development](#) (BMZ). Berlin: BMZ.

⁹ Rao, S., and Tiessen, R. (2020). [Whose feminism\(s\)? Overseas partner organizations’ perceptions of Canada’s Feminist International Assistance Policy](#). Canada’s Journal of Global Policy Analysis. Vol. 75. 3; Government of Canada (2016). [What we heard: 2016 International assistance review](#). Ottawa: Government of Canada.

¹⁰ Data for 2021 available here: Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy (CFFP) (2021) [Make Foreign Policy Feminist: A Feminist Foreign Policy Manifesto for Germany](#). Berlin: Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy. Data for 2022 data here: BMZ (2022). [Facts and figures of German development cooperation](#). Berlin: BMZ.

¹¹ As far as we are aware, there is currently no accessible data on this published by the BMZ. We would welcome the collection and publication of the breakdown of civil society funding from the BMZ as an important form of accountability and transparency.

- ¹² See: AWID and Mama Cash (2020) [Moving More Money to the Drivers of Change - How funders can resource feminist movements](#). Ontario: AWID.
- ¹³ BMZ (2020). [BMZ 2030 Reform Strategy](#). Berlin: BMZ, pg. 1
- ¹⁴ Ibid., pg. 2
- ¹⁵ BMZ (2020), pg. 3.
- ¹⁶ Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy (CFFP) (2021) [Make Foreign Policy Feminist: A Feminist Foreign Policy Manifesto for Germany](#). Berlin: CFFP, pg. 32.
- ¹⁷ BMZ (2020), pg. 3.
- ¹⁸ BMZ (2020), pg. 3.
- ¹⁹ BMZ (2020), pg. 4.
- ²⁰ BMZ (2020), pg. 5.
- ²¹ BMZ (2020), pg. 5.
- ²² BMZ (2020), pg. 4.
- ²³ BMZ (2020), pg. 4.
- ²⁴ BMZ (2022). [Facts and figures of German development cooperation](#). Berlin: BMZ.
- ²⁵ For examples of bilateral funding modalities that seek to address those challenges, see AWID and Mama Cash (2020) [Moving More Money to the Drivers of Change - How funders can resource feminist movements](#). Ontario: AWID.
- ²⁶ Eddens, S., and Kroger, K. (2022) [Fundors, it's time to change how we think about risk](#). 15 November 2022. Alliance Magazine.
- ²⁷ AWID (n.d.) [Feminist Economies We Love](#). AWID.
- ²⁸ See for example: Batliwala, S. (2007) [Taking the power out of empowerment—an experiential account](#). Development in practice, Vol 17 (4-5), pp. 557-565; Michaeli, I. (2021). [Women's Economic Empowerment: Feminism, Neoliberalism, and the State](#). Berlin: Palgrave Macmillan.

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