



FROM VISION TO REALITY

Implementation and institutionalisation of a feminist foreign and development policy in Germany

Germany plays an important international role as a political actor and is the world's second-largest humanitarian donor. The feminist orientation of the German government's foreign and development policy can serve as a signal to other countries and therefore requires careful planning and implementation. On March 1, 2023, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the Federal Foreign Office (FFO) jointly presented their approaches for a feminist foreign and development policy. This was preceded by consultation processes with civil society members as well as other actors from the Global South and North.

VENRO welcomes the alignment of the German foreign and development policy with feminist principles, as feminist foreign and development policy can significantly contribute to global justice, peace, decolonisation and security. In 2022, VENRO formulated its expectations for the orientation of a feminist development policy.¹ It is encouraging that the FFO and the BMZ have committed to topics such as intersectionality, human rights-based approaches, a power-critical and postcolonial perspective and the promotion of gender-transformative approaches, albeit with different levels of ambition.

In our view, the goal of a feminist foreign and development policy should be the equal political, economic and social participation of all people, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and characteristics, ethnicity and origin,

religion, nationality, age, disability or residence status. A feminist foreign and development policy also requires a self-reflexive examination of one's own privileges as well as the historically rooted financial and political dominance of the Global North, which results from the history of colonialism and capitalism.²

The increasing shift to the right both in Germany and abroad goes hand in hand with growing anti-feminism and an intensified anti-gender movement. This trend calls into question the fundamental importance of international solidarity, development cooperation and humanitarian aid. In light of these concerning developments, we see it as a central task to anchor feminist foreign and development policy in processes, planning and structures and thus institutionalise it in both ministries. A feminist policy requires the further development of previous gender-sensitive or gender mainstreaming approaches into an intersectional feminist practice.

The example of Sweden shows how quickly a feminist foreign and development policy can be abolished. Only by structurally anchoring feminist approaches will it be possible for marginalised groups and individuals, such as LGBTIQ* and Indigenous people who have experienced discrimination on multiple levels, to participate in governing structures and be empowered on an equal footing. This can lead to a real shift in power relations towards a fairer world. In our view, however, the conditions

¹ See VENRO statement (2022): [↘ Expectations of a feminist development policy](#)

² See VENRO (2024): [↘ NRO-Report "Feminist Journeys"](#)

for ambitious implementation and institutionalisation are currently lacking. To achieve a successful implementation of feminist foreign and development policy, instruments and processes must be sustainably introduced, structurally anchored and institutionalised. This requires measures in four fields of action, driven forward through concrete commitments and target formulations

1. Practical implementation and measuring success: Concrete steps and measurable indicators

In 2023, both ministries published their respective strategic orientations for feminist policy and issued several implementation documents. For the BMZ, the Gender Action Plan (GAP) III is the central implementation document for a feminist development policy. Plans for GAP III include creating a mid-term report in 2025, an accompanying study and a civil society monitoring committee. These measures are useful and welcome as control mechanisms and consultation bodies for the implementation of GAP III. The BMZ's Human Rights Concept also supports the implementation of the feminist development strategy.

The Federal Foreign Office has not yet published a comprehensive implementation strategy for the feminist foreign policy guidelines. Although gender strategies for humanitarian aid and crisis engagement were published in spring 2024, the exact implementation is still unclear.

Although the FFO and the BMZ have committed to ensuring that 93 per cent of funding for all measures contribute to gender equality (allocation in DAC Gender Marker GG1 and GG2), there are no indicators, baseline surveys or concrete timetables for the formulated goals in the political and overarching fields of action of both ministries. To date, no cross-departmental, independent evaluation of the feminist foreign and development policy has

been planned. However, impact findings are a prerequisite for further support from parliament and the German public.

As feminist policies are critical of unequal power structures, new approaches are required for both implementation and evaluation. It is not necessary to reinvent the wheel, as many (feminist) organisations and movements have already developed instruments that are suitable for power-critical implementation and impact measurement, such as feminist Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability & Learning (MEAL). MEAL processes should be developed in cooperation with partner organisations and donors. Data protection and data security must have top priority in order to fulfil the responsibility towards LGBTIQ*, human rights and women's rights activists, and to avoid putting them at additional risk.

It is crucial that the definition and interpretation of project success is not exclusively determined by the donors, but above all, by local partners and affected groups. For an implementation-oriented approach that critically examines power structures, being accountable to the people affected is just as important as being accountable to parliament and the German public.

For gender-transformative projects that aim to change social norms and power relations while promoting gender equality, appropriate and innovative methods for measuring success are essential. Since transformative projects often have indirect impacts, it is important to use various reporting formats such as storytelling or video reports, and to collectively learn from both successes and failures.

We call on the German government to...

- pave the way to implement feminist policies, including the clear definition of implementation steps and the collection and publication of data, such as baselines where these are not yet available. The Federal Foreign Office in particular should develop a robust and sustainable implementation plan for all areas of work to anchor feminist foreign policy in the ministry.
- not only test instruments such as feminist Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability & Learning (MEAL) for measuring the impact of feminist policies but also anchor them in the processes and fund them adequately. MEAL processes should be transparent, participatory and critical of existing unequal power structures. This requires a critical analysis of current monitoring systems and instruments for measuring success.
- meaningfully and comprehensively involve partners and experts from the Global South in all evaluation efforts. This involvement should be appropriately remunerated.
- ensure that the civil society monitoring body, mentioned by the BMZ in GAP III, has a significant influence on the monitoring process of GAP III. A strong representation of feminist and intersectional civil society from the Global South, which can actively participate in agenda setting, should be guaranteed.
- initiate an independent and cross-departmental evaluation now, in the second half of the next legislative period. Experts from the Global South should be systematically involved in this process.

2. Shifting power and decolonisation: Participation of civil society

The existing humanitarian and international development system is based on historically evolved forms of dependency and unequal power relations. Decolonial and feminist approaches question the development narrative and identify problems and solutions not only among 'the others' in the Global South but also promote change among all those involved. A political will to shift power and decolonise must be an essential part of feminist politics. We welcome efforts to address colonial continuities in the feminist policies of both ministries.

An important aspect of the decolonial power shift is the substantial involvement of marginalised groups, especially from the Global South, in strategic, programmatic and project-related decision-making and implementation processes that affect them. Feminist foreign and development policy must be oriented towards the perspectives of marginalised civil society, especially from the Global South, including in international negotiations. This provides feminist and intersectional civil society with a stronger influence and greater scope for action to overcome patriarchal structures.

This also means that analyses and findings are considered together, and solutions are selected on a partnership basis in an open-ended process. It is important that feminist, marginalised, women's rights and women-led organisations in the Global South are not just seen as passive recipients of funding but are recognised as equal partners, experts and watchdogs. Strengthening existing expertise in participatory and anti-colonial methods by promoting regional feminist networks, networks of self-advocacy organisations of marginalised groups, and the promotion of South-South exchange is equally important here.

The participation of many civil society groups is hampered by structural, financial and organisational barriers. The FFO and BMZ have no clear standards for the meaningful involvement of civil society, especially from the Global South and from marginalised groups. Participation processes are often irregular and run the risk of serving either as symbolic gestures or as one-sided knowledge extraction. For example, there is often a lack of feedback and follow-up after consultations by the ministries.

At the same time, marginalised civil society groups often do not have sufficient financial and time resources to participate in these processes. Often, only organisations from urban centres are invited to take part, while rural groups and especially marginalised people are not reached. This leads to a lack of diversity and intersectional perspectives.

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- introduce minimum standards for the meaningful participation of civil society, especially from the Global South, in strategic and project-related procedures of the ministries and their implementing organisations. For these standards, guidelines should be established for the number and quality of consultations, the diversity of civil society groups involved, funding and for event-related discussions with civil society within the German FFO and the BMZ as well as at embassy level.
- design participatory processes that are power-critical and transparent. The design of the participation process should be conducted collaboratively, with clear information, selection criteria, and areas of influence for the participation of local and regional feminist, marginalised groups.

- identify and dismantle existing barriers to access to significant participation in decision-making and definition processes on a context-specific basis. This requires a self-critical analysis and reflection of power structures in the ministries, their implementing organizations and in civil society. In addition, financial resources must be made available for participation.
- ensure that when planning and sending delegations from all ministries, trips do not take place without meetings with local civil society members, especially marginalised groups.

3. Financing: Resources for civil society and the development of gender-transformative approaches

In 2019 and 2020, women-led and women's rights organisations worldwide received only 1.4 per cent of gender-related ODA funding.³ At the same time, feminist and LGBTIQ* organisations are particularly at risk of being directly affected by shrinking civic space, thus having their scope of actions restricted.

A strong feminist civil society forms the backbone for transforming structural inequality. Long-term financial support and close cooperation with marginalised civil society movements in the Global South are essential. Specific, flexible and reliable resources are required, as well as the willingness to grant these actors more decision-making freedom (German "Initiativrecht") in order to establish Germany as a permanently reliable financial partner.

A feminist policy requires a quantitative increase in support for feminist, self-advocacy, women-led and women's rights organisations. It is a positive development that a total of 93 per cent of all project-related funding of both ministries is now to contribute to the promotion of gender equality. This includes

³ See CONCORD (2023): [↘ "Funding local women's rights organizations for transformative change"](#)

85 per cent of projects aiming to pursue gender equality as a significant objective (GG1) and 8 per cent as a principal objective (GG2). However, it remains unclear how much of this will specifically benefit feminist, women-led or women's rights organisations. To institutionalise and strengthen feminist approaches, it is not sufficient to merely formulate overarching goals for the promotion of gender equality (GG1/GG2) and to evaluate implementation retrospectively based solely on the proportion of funds spent on this.

Both the Federal Foreign Office (FFO) and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) emphasise the promotion of gender-transformative approaches and projects. However, there is a lack of designated resources and framework conditions to develop, apply, and subsequently implement such innovative approaches on a broad scale.

Feminist foreign and development policy has not yet brought about any significant qualitative change in the funding conditions. These conditions continue to be characterised by strong power imbalances, a lack of flexibility and high bureaucratic hurdles. In crisis situations in particular, partner organisations are often faced with the challenge of adapting their work at short notice, which clashes with the rigid requirements of the funding logic. The local project partners know best how to organise their work in a meaningful way in the context of a crisis. Opportunities to directly support feminist movements without German partners or outside of existing project structures are still limited. It is also difficult to promote advocacy activities, which often do not follow a project logic, even though they are fundamental to strengthening independent and diverse voices from the Global South. A shift of power in the administration of funds towards southern partners is essential for decolonial and feminist foreign and development policy. In particular, support

for South-led feminist funds can make a decisive contribution here.

We call on the German government to...

- ensure sustainable financial support, in particular by setting the target that 93 per cent of the expenditure of both ministries should be used for gender equality. This should be reflected in budget notes in sections 23 and 05.
- quantitatively strengthen civil society funding in both houses. In particular,
 - in the medium term, the share of projects with the priority area GG2, namely gender equality as the principal objective, should be increased from the current 8 per cent to 20 per cent of FFO and BMZ funding.
 - more project funds should be used in the BMZ to support feminist, intersectional and women's rights organisations (funding area code 15170). The share should be increased to 15 per cent. Funding for feminist, women's rights, women-led and LGBTIQ* organisations should also be increased in the FFO's humanitarian title.
 - existing international, especially South-led, feminist funds should be supported, which are directly accessible to civil society actors from the Global South and also enable core funding for small organisations.⁴

⁴ See ↘ [VENRO Position Paper](#) (2023)

- invest in transformative approaches:
 - For the BMZ, we recommend the establishment of an innovation fund of 100 million euros annually to finance gender-transformative, intersectional and postcolonial feminist projects. At least 25 per cent of these funds should be allocated to civil society organisations.
 - The Federal Foreign Office should specifically promote the funding of innovative gender-transformative humanitarian pilot projects. This would be an important step towards serving as an international role model for gender-transformative humanitarian aid and advancing the debate.

4. Coherence: Cross-departmental conception and implementation

To date, no joint structures or processes have been identified that could ensure the implementation and institutionalisation of feminist foreign and development policy across ministries. This initially concerns the coordination between the FFO and the BMZ. The development of the FFO's feminist guidelines and the BMZ's feminist strategy were already two separate processes in which good coordination would have been useful. We welcome the fact that regular exchange rounds on human rights, gender equality, inclusion and feminist approaches in foreign and development policy are planned as part of GAP III. Closer coordination between the FFO and BMZ is particularly necessary with regard to the definitions of gender-transformative, gender-targeted and gender-sensitive approaches, as well as with regard to impact measurement and the use of international indicators (OECD definitions) for these approaches. This will not only improve comparability, but also make a joint commitment to common goals more effective.

The sustainable anchoring of feminist approaches in the government beyond the current legislative period requires, above all, the establishment of joint structures and processes between the FFO and the BMZ in the coming months. The inter-ministerial working group on the National Action Plan for the implementation of UN Resolution 1325 (Women, Peace, Security), in which representatives of civil society are also involved, or the inter-ministerial early crisis detection group can serve as role models.

In order to be successful and credible, feminist approaches in foreign and development policy must also be coherent with decisions in other departments, including those that are more domestically oriented. Examples of this are decisions to supply arms to crisis areas or authoritarian states, or the delayed and inadequately perceived reaction to the feminist revolution in Iran. The current voting behaviour in relation to European asylum and migration policy also raises fundamental questions regarding the guarantee of protection for particularly vulnerable groups. A clear commitment to feminist politics through coherent government action is required. This includes a solidarity-based peace policy stance and the participation of affected civil society in the development of foreign and development policy measures.

Moreover, Germany enhances its credibility internationally when the FFO uses international reform processes such as the UN Summit for the Future to establish itself as an actor in feminist foreign and development policy with feminist and inclusive positions.

We call on the German Government to...

- promptly establish joint structures and processes for the coherent implementation of feminist policy across ministries. One possibility would be the establishment of an interdepartmental task force under the leadership of the FFO and the BMZ. This task force should involve relevant and independent actors such as civil society and academia, particularly from the Global South, to ensure the coherence of feminist approaches.
- strongly advocate feminist positions in international and multilateral processes and promote the participation of women and marginalised groups in all multilateral forums and sectors.
- commit the Federal Foreign Office in its new humanitarian strategy to a systematic, power-critical and feminist transformation of the international humanitarian system.
- synchronise the terminology and monitoring systems of the FFO and BMZ, and adhere to the internationally applicable OECD definitions for GG1 and GG2 projects. The Federal Foreign Office's definitions of terms must be clarified and presented transparently.

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