



CARE Deutschland

# Feminist Foreign and Development Policy

An assessment of what is - and is not - included in the recently published "Guidelines for Feminist Foreign Policy" and the "Strategy for Feminist Development Policy".

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# Feminist Foreign and Development Policy: It's all about implementation...

On March 1, 2023, the German Federal Foreign Office (Auswärtiges Amt, short GFFO) presented its "Guidelines for Feminist Foreign Policy," and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung, short BMZ) the "Strategy for Feminist Development Policy".

CARE has been working for decades to promote gender equality and end discrimination against women and girls. The organization works to ensure that all people are addressed and reached according to their individual needs, especially in humanitarian aid.

CARE therefore explicitly welcomes the commitment to a feminist foreign and development policy. The papers presented are seen as an important first step - with further steps that will need to follow soon. However, it is unfortunately largely uncertain how the concrete implementation of feminist foreign and development policy will take place and what the German contribution to gender equality and justice will look like in practice.

## Two papers, two different approaches?

It is evident that the German government has decided against developing an overarching concept for feminist foreign policy that applies to all departments involved in foreign policy. The process has not been established in the Chancellor's Office, nor has the GFFO taken the lead in developing a paper for the entire federal government. The guidelines are a Foreign Office document.

Accordingly, after separate and very different processes, GFFO and BMZ presented two separate papers. The feminist approaches in foreign and development policy are, in line with the logic of the Houses, closely related to their own sphere of action and described accordingly.

Both papers refer to the fact that they have been closely coordinated with each other and that activities in the future should be implemented coherently. Civil society has long called for this joint, closely coordinated approach between the two departments. However, concrete attempts at this have been lacking so far, and even the recently presented papers do not give any indication of how to proceed in the future. The reference to the Women, Peace and Security agenda and the interdepartmental National Action Plan 1325 is inadequate and only covers a part of the topics addressed.

Also, the questions of comparable, transparent data as well as parallel and interlocking approaches of both departments remain open. This is made clear not least by the different understandings of the meaning and content of the OECD marker for gender equality and of civil society participation at eye level.

## Let's look at the positive aspects first

It is definitely a milestone, albeit overdue, that the need for intersectionality and the responsibility, arising from Germany's (post-) colonial history, in foreign policy and development cooperation is recognized for the first time at ministerial level. The BMZ's strategy also includes an important and precise analysis of the baseline situation, which identifies global power inequalities and patriarchal, racist and colonial continuities. Both ministries commit to decisively opposing the anti-gender movement at all levels.

Both ministries also explicitly name the climate crisis and its associated gender-specific consequences. CARE welcomes the announcements to demand and promote the participation of women and vulnerable groups in international decision-making processes, especially in the climate sector, and to integrate aspects of gender justice more consistently in climate measures. In increasing resources for climate adaptation for women's rights organizations, the BMZ is setting a positive example.

**Transformative change addresses not only the symptoms but also the causes of gender inequality. The goal is to change unjust gender norms and relations in order to promote equality.**

The Strategy for Feminist Development Policy clearly commits to a transformative German development policy and thus recognizes what civil society has repeatedly emphasized: that structures of inequality must be overcome in the long term rather than exclusively fighting their symptoms in the short term. In addition, the BMZ clearly recognizes the importance of working in fragile contexts and thus takes into account the reality of crises reinforcing gender inequality. We also particularly endorse the BMZ's announcement to expand cooperation with local women's rights organizations and are

pleased that women and marginalized groups are being recognized as knowledge bearers and strengthened as decision makers. The BMZ's inclusion of civil society organizations from all around the world in its consultation process and the marking of their voices in the strategy, is a first step in this direction and recognizes that it is primarily project partners on the ground who Germany is accountable to.

The Federal Foreign Office is committed to applying gender budgeting to all of its project funds and gradually expanding it to the entire budget. This formulation of goals combined with the commitment to 85 percent gender-sensitive and 8 percent gender-transformative projects is probably the biggest surprise in the guidelines, which we emphatically welcome. Furthermore, it is to be welcomed that the Federal Foreign Office works with a diverse gender concept and recognizes diversity as a strength. This is a clear step forward compared to previous papers.



Image 2: Mother and her weaving products in Bangladesh, CARE Bangladesh

## Room for improvement

Both ministries describe in detail the fundamental problems that women and marginalized groups are facing worldwide and list a whole range of past flagship projects. However, in terms of strategic direction and measures to address the root causes of inequality, there is still much room for improvement. Both papers lack an implementation plan with indicators, timelines and specific targets. What the specific character of the German feminist foreign and development policy is remains unclear.

The GFFO remains vague on terminology; key terms in the document such as gender-sensitive, gender-targeted, or gender-transformative are used without further explanation or underlying definitions. While it is welcome that the BMZ presents a clear definition for gender-transformative work, it is also a good example of the lack of coherence between foreign policy guidelines and development policy strategy.

Humanitarian aid, the largest single budget item for the Foreign Office, is addressed in the guidelines with a single goal-oriented sentence in Guideline 2: "Our goal is to implement 100% of our humanitarian aid in a way that is at least gender-sensitive and, wherever indicated, gender-targeted." Although the GFFO's target for gender-sensitive implementation here even exceeds the 85% mentioned at the beginning, the ministry does not name a target for gender-targeted measures in the humanitarian sector and speaks rather vaguely of implementing them "wherever indicated." This is inadequate both in terms of comprehensive monitoring of its own actions and in terms of transparency and accountability

to the public: the reference to use the implementation and indicators of NAP 1325 for monitoring is insufficient. It remains unclear how progress in areas beyond the NAP is to be measured and determined.

As the guidelines strongly emphasize the 3Rs (Rights, Representation, Resources), what is clearly missing in terms of humanitarian aid is the participation of women-led or women's rights organizations and their funding as an important element for needs-based and effective humanitarian aid. This means that in the future, too, there will be no direct GFFO funding for those who know their societies best: the local civil society organizations. Also missing is a commitment to support transformative effects through humanitarian aid measures. So what the feminist, new, or even visionary element of the humanitarian aid guidelines is supposed to be remains unclear. Since humanitarian aid accounts for the lion's share of GFFO funding, and that the proportionate funding for civil society has been declining for years, this is, at the least, regrettable.

The German Foreign Office could not bring itself to commit to increasing funding in the area of financial protection against climate risks for women's rights and self-representation organizations, even though it is well known that women and vulnerable groups are disproportionately affected by the negative effects of climate change compared to men. In the BMZ, improved access to financing for local civil society and grassroots organizations is to be examined. However, a timeframe for this examination, concrete next steps, and a clear commitment to increasing funding for civil society actors are missing, as they are in the GFFO.

In general, the BMZ fails to provide concrete information on how the, often promising, objectives shall be implemented. A comprehensive monitoring system that promotes and embeds high-quality and comprehensive implementation of transformative approaches in the BMZ portfolio is not included in the paper. The strategy repeatedly refers to the performance profile "Human rights, gender equality, and inclusion," which is currently being developed, and the new Gender Action Plan, which is still to be developed. Accordingly, expectations for these documents are high.

At several points, the BMZ emphasizes the importance of the participation of women and marginalized groups in decision-making processes and the need for increased cooperation with local civil society and grassroots organizations. However, concrete approaches to increasing this participation and institutionalizing it within the structures controlled by the BMZ are missing. It will not only depend on this, but also on the recognition of Germany's colonial history and the self-reflective work on power structures, whether and how words will be followed by actions.

### **The expectations remain high**

With the papers presented, the foundation for a more gender-responsive orientation of GFFO and BMZ work has been laid. However, whether the new guidelines and the strategy presented will have a tangible impact on the lives of women, girls and marginalized groups will depend primarily on two things: concrete implementation and the will to address underlying power structures. If the latter in particular is not addressed, one is unlikely to move beyond mere "women's empowerment."

Social justice and sustainable development are only possible if all people are able to realize their rights. Whether Germany makes a significant contribution to this in its foreign and development policy remains to be seen and will ultimately determine whether the two papers presented are mere lip service or significant milestones on the road to greater gender justice.

## Our recommendations

- **The most important.** Concrete objectives and indicators for monitoring the achievement of objectives must be developed in a timely manner and existing measures must be implemented promptly and in full. Flagship projects are no substitute for strategic direction. Definitions of the terms used must be developed and be made available in a transparent manner.
- **Eliminating the causes instead of merely combating the symptoms.** The objective of not only being gender-sensitive, but also, with a certain proportion of projects, gender-transformative, must also apply to humanitarian aid in order not to reproduce negative structures.
- **Thinking about objectives in ambitious ways.** 100% of public funds for development cooperation should be allocated in a gender-sensitive manner. A significant share of the funds must also flow into gender-transformative projects. This must be based on clear definitions of gender-sensitive and transformative work.
- **Mandatory intersectional gender and power analyses for all projects.** These analyses must be financed by GFFO and BMZ and the results should be used for the project design and implementation in an obligatory and comprehensible manner.
- **Strengthen women's rights organizations.** Feminist policies must promote feminist civil society. At least 4% of humanitarian funding must go to local women's rights organizations, and at least 25% of implementing local humanitarian partner organizations should be women's rights organizations. To support sustainable transformative work, there must be sufficient long-term, flexible funding that includes core funding.
- **Funding GBV and SRHR interventions as an essential health service.** There is a need to fund and promote gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health and rights interventions in all crisis response and stabilization programs. Specific targets are needed for this. Funding a few flagship projects is not enough.
- **Taking quality control seriously.** Structures for quality control of the use of the OECD markers and codes, as well as the Gender Age Disability (GAD) marker, must be established and applied on a mandatory basis. This must be decisive for future project funding.
- **De-bureaucratize German funding.** Direct funding of local civil society must go hand in hand with an adjustment of German procurement and funding guidelines, which can also be realistically fulfilled by local partner organizations.
- **Transparency and accountability.** The results of monitoring and evaluation must be made available in a transparent manner and be publicly accessible – in different languages. Accountability must be considered in particular towards civil society from the relevant contexts, since the people there are at the center of feminist foreign and development policy and must therefore also play a central role in assessing its success.

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