



# DAAD EVALUATION

August 2021

## Evaluation and portfolio analysis of BMZ-funded partnership programs

Executive Summary

### Objective of the evaluation

1

Syspons GmbH was commissioned by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) to conduct the evaluation and portfolio analysis of BMZ-funded partnership programs. Subject of this evaluation and portfolio analysis were four university partnership programs of the DAAD within the period 2009 to 2019, which had been successively developed since 1997 according to new needs. A main concern of the evaluation and portfolio analysis was the further development of the program format as well as the funding portfolio. The evaluation examined the extent to which it would be possible to merge the programs under the umbrella of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or whether it would be more effective to continue the individual programs (formative objective). At the same time, the evaluation pursued a summative objective by reviewing the achievement of objectives and the effectiveness of the “University Partnerships” funding format to account for the provided funding by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). The evaluation results were used to develop recommendations.

### Subject of the study

In this evaluation, the following four DAAD partnership programs were examined:

- The Subject-based University Partnerships (HSP) program is a classic partnership program that aims to strengthen structures at partner universities and improve teaching offerings as well as create North-South and South-South networks. The program was introduced in 1997, is open to all disciplines and covers a wide range of development-related topics.
- In contrast, the Dialogue on Innovative Higher Education Strategies (DIES) partnerships, which were established in 2003, focus specifically on the structural improvement of management capacities at partner universities.
- In line with political objectives, the program offerings were also specialized in topics that are particularly relevant in the development context. For example, in the wake of the Ebola crisis in 2005, the Program for Partnerships for the Health Sector in Developing Countries (PAGEL Program) was created with the agenda of specifically improving the health sector in partner countries. The program thus contains a clear reference to specific SDG<sup>1</sup>.

1 In 2005, the SDGs had not yet been adopted. However, their predecessors, the MDGs, already had a strong focus on health

- Finally, at the request of the BMZ, the program portfolio was expanded in 2009 to include partnerships to promote biodiversity in developing countries (BioDiv program). This partnership program aims to structurally strengthen teaching and research at partner universities in the field of biodiversity. BioDiv supports partner countries in the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in line with the 2030 Agenda and thus has the most explicit SDG reference<sup>2</sup> among the partnership programs.

All four programs are aimed at countries on the DAC list and are oriented towards the implementation of the SDGs. With regard to the regional distribution of the projects, there is a focus on sub-Saharan Africa, followed by Asia/the Pacific in second place and Latin America in third place. The programs have the common objective of integrating German universities as active partners in development cooperation and, at the same time, strategically using and expanding their expertise in this area. At the level of the partner universities, all programs are intended to contribute to the structural strengthening of teaching. According to their Theories of Change, the DIES and BioDiv partnership programs should also promote capacity development in research. At the international level, all programs aim to strengthen development-relevant networks and cooperation structures and to internationalize the German higher education landscape.

### Employed evaluation design

The design for this evaluation was based on a contribution analysis. The contribution analysis was used to investigate the extent to which the observed (positive or negative) effects can be attributed to the four programs and the extent to which alternative explanatory patterns can be identified. The evaluation used a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis. These included two online surveys, a documentary analysis, twelve site visits in Germany and abroad, some of which took place remotely, and twelve validation interviews. Furthermore, the evaluation distinguished between three different cohorts in order to identify temporal differences

that are particularly relevant for the assessment of sustainability. In addition, thematic reviewers were included in the evaluation, who accompanied the evaluation from a thematic perspective. Furthermore, it should be emphasized that the originally planned data collection had to be adjusted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, some of the site visits took place remotely, as it was not possible for the evaluation team, including the thematic experts, to travel due to travel restrictions. However, these remote visits were conducted virtually via video and with local evaluators on site.

### Key findings

The evaluation shows that **all four programs are relevant** for the society of the respective partner countries and that the programs all address topics that contribute to the SDGs. Thus, all projects address topics that contribute to SDGs 4 and 17. Furthermore, the PAGEL program additionally contributes to SDG 3, the BioDiv program to SDG 14 and 15, and the respective subject areas in the HSP program to the respective further subject-specific SDGs.

In addition, the thematic relevance of all BMZ partnership programs on the national level of the partner countries can be confirmed through this evaluation, since, among other things, the objectives of the partnership programs are reflected in many national (development) agendas. A coherent picture also emerges among project participants in this regard: regardless of the partnership program, German and foreign partners from older, middle-aged, and younger cohorts confirm the needs orientation of the programs. Consequently, the partnership programs do justice to their basic approach. This means that from the perspective of both the foreign and the German universities, the programs facilitate useful projects that serve their needs and interests. The latter are different for the German partners since their motivation include next to a sense of responsibility to contribute to global challenges also a thematic and internationalization interest. Despite the different motivations, the German and foreign interests in the partnerships and projects complement each other very well. There is room for improvement in the right of co-determination of the

<sup>2</sup> That is due to the fact that the BioDiv program was only switched to result-based monitoring after the adoption of the Agenda2030.

foreign partners, as this is currently still very low. On the positive side, however, it should be emphasized that the foreign partners are becoming more closely involved in the project design phase over the course of time of the analysed programs.

Furthermore, the evaluation team concludes that the four programs are largely achieving their **objectives and impacts**. The programs are successful in (further) developing **teaching** at the partner universities and thus structurally strengthening them. The evaluation results identified project-related stays and events for the development of didactic methods and learning content as particularly effective for the (further) development of curricula and/or teaching modules. In the case of the PAGEL program, the (further) development of curricula and/or teaching modules also contributes to strengthening the health sector in the respective partner countries, as highly qualified specialists for this sector are trained through the developed study programs. With regard to the DIES partnerships, it was also shown that these primarily achieve effects in the improvement of institutional university management structures and therefore make an indirect contribution to the improvement of teaching and research at the respective partner universities. For the most part, these effects can be assigned to the following fields: (1) improvement of the central governance structures of the partner university, (2) establishment/improvement of language support, (3) establishment/strengthening of international offices, (4) establishment/improvement of career centres, (5) strengthening/improvement of graduate training structures, and (6) establishment/strengthening of transfer centres.

Furthermore, it is clear from the evaluation results that all programs contribute to improving **research** at the partner universities, although this is an explicit objective only in the BioDiv program. In the other programs, however, research services are also provided to a lesser extent due to the universities' own initiative, as the connection between teaching and research is seen as an integral part of the further development of teaching. In the BioDiv program, this leads to the fact that biodiversity topics are sustainably anchored as a research focus in the partner universities through this research, and the research contributes to the sustainable use and

conservation of biodiversity in the partner countries due to its predominantly participatory character.

The programs are also successful in establishing development-relevant or regional **networks**. Projects are particularly successful when they establish cooperation at eye level and are characterized by a respectful, reliable, goal-oriented and solution-oriented character as well as regular communication. In these cases, these networks also contribute to the continuation of the cooperation or to the development of further university cooperations as well as to the internationalization of the universities.

With regard to the target dimensions described above, the evaluation team comes to the conclusion that the universities do not gain **expertise** in development cooperation, but in **developing and emerging countries** and global challenges. Thus, the evaluation shows that German universities do not initiate university cooperation projects with the aim of gaining expertise in development cooperation, but rather start them out of a purely thematic interest.

The evaluation also shows that an increased relevance of the projects as well as the implementation of up-scaling processes and strategies leads to an increased achievement of the programs' objectives – especially with regard to network building – since a targeted and intended dissemination of the effects of the individual projects can be achieved in this way. This shows that **upscaling** processes must be considered from the beginning in order to be implemented successfully.

The evaluation team rates the **implementation efficiency** of program planning and control as high in principle, although there are some effort drivers. With regard to **program planning and control**, it can be concluded that this can be rated very positively in all programs and cohorts. Similarly, the communication between the DAAD and the universities is also very efficient. With regard to the DAAD's **support processes** for the universities, however, this evaluation shows that efficiency could be increased if the DAAD were to provide more support material for filling out the applications, especially for the financial part and for the initial reporting of the project officers.

With regard to **the use of funds**, the evaluation results are diverse. While the financial means are judged as sufficient by some project participants, they are judged as insufficient by others. With regard to the latter, the funds are classified as „seed capital“ by the project participants and there is consequently a need to be able to apply for a larger funding amount in order to bring about structural changes. This would be possible in the case of the proposed merging of the programs, since there with a higher number of modules also a higher financial sum could be requested (see below). With regard to an increase in the amount of funding, the evaluation also shows that there is a need to build up the research and other university infrastructure of the partner university to a greater extent.

In light of the current four-fold reporting to the funder, a potential merger of the programs has the **potential to increase efficiency**. Although reporting may become more complex with program consolidation, producing one report instead of four would save resources. Similarly, the single rather than quadruple issuance and reconciliation of tendering documents has the potential to increase efficiency, as the four programs do not have significant differences in their administrative processes. If the programs were to be merged in this way, however, care would have to be taken to ensure that the universities continue to have fixed contact persons at the DAAD. This could be ensured by dividing the responsibilities of the DAAD's administrators internally according to subject areas.

With regard to **sustainability**, this evaluation comes to the conclusion that the program effects are permanently sustainable, although the sustainability differs in its extent and depth and varies at different levels. In principle, this evaluation distinguishes between institutional and individual sustainability. Institutional sustainability is understood here as the sustainability of the effects in teaching, research and network building that have resulted from the funded projects, while individual sustainability is understood as the sustainable changes that have been brought about by the projects at the level of students and teachers.

In terms of **institutional sustainability in the area of teaching, research and network building**, it can be concluded that the sustainability of the

programs is strongest in the area of network building. This is followed by sustainability in the area of research, while sustainability in the area of teaching is proportionally the least strong. Network building is generally rated as highly sustainable. However, a distinction must be made between different types of networks with varying degrees of sustainability: loose networks with low sustainability (type 1), exchanges of a mainly thematic nature with medium sustainability (type 2), and firmly institutionalized contacts of a thematic nature, e.g., through fixed research groups, with strong sustainability (type 3). This typification is based on the results of the missions that firstly show that the sustainability of the network increases with the degree of institutionalization of the network structures. Second, sustainability increases with the degree of the thematic nature of the exchange, as common teaching and research interests make long-term professional exchange more likely. With regard to research, it is important to emphasize that sustainability in the research area is present in all four programs, although research is an explicit program objective only in the BioDiv program. This is due to the fact that there are also non-intended effects in the research area in the other programs.

With regard to **individual sustainability** at the level of the target group, this evaluation concludes that the vast majority of former grantees and teachers are employed in the higher education sector after the end of the project period. The more precise occupational environments differ by program and partly by cohort, as former PAGEL grantees work long-term in the health sector, BioDiv grantees work long-term in biodiversity research, and DIES grantees of the middle cohort work in higher education management.

In addition, this evaluation also identified some **success factors** for a high sustainability of the effects. For example, the consideration of research components in the project design can be seen as a success factor, since research allows joint publications and research groups even after the end of the project, and joint research focuses link cooperation partners for the long term. A second success factor is the consideration of the developmental relevance of the project. This is due to the fact that project activities that address development policy or societal needs can anchor their effects more appropriately

in societal structures. Since these needs exist in the long term, it is more likely that projects that are relevant to society or development policy will continue to be needed and funded after the project ends. This leads to the third identified success factor, as ensuring project connectivity to further funding opportunities has an important influence on the continuation of the project's effects. The development of a sustainability concept thereby proves to be relatively less decisive. Such an explicit concept is helpful to increase sustainability, but the three identified success factors (see above) are more decisive for ensuring sustainability than a separate concept.

In the case of a **potential merger** of the four programs, the evaluation results show that a **modular system** is best suited to the needs identified in the evaluation. Under the modular system, the four programs are integrated into one program under the umbrella of SDGs 3, 4, 14, 15 and 17 with the help of different funding lines. The focus here is on making the funding options more flexible. The basis for this new program is formed by basic modules to which all universities can apply. For specific topics such as biodiversity and health, there are also separate funding lines (modules) with special instruments and eligible activities. These funding lines can also be opened up for other topics if new needs arise.

In this regard, the evaluation results show that the modular approach has four advantages. First, the flexibility that the modular system brings is an advantage. This flexibility should be seen particularly in terms of the specific circumstances of the cooperation project, its social context and thus its relevance. Secondly, the modular system promotes interdisciplinarity because it simplifies the conceptualisation of interdisciplinary projects. The third advantage is that the modular system makes it possible to introduce a research component for all disciplines. Strengthening research is also strengthening sustainability, as stated in the previous paragraph. Fourth, the modular system has the advantage of facilitating a linkage between university

management and administration on the one hand and academics on the other within the partnership, which is relevant in that the origin of partnerships often lies in contacts in the departments and thus facilitates partnerships in university management. However, the evaluation team also sees a challenge that needs to be considered in the modular system. It should be ensured that applicants with less experience in cooperation with countries of the Global South or with fewer resources for such partnerships do not have a lower chance of success. Such applicants could potentially apply for fewer modules than other applicants and could therefore be rated lower in competition with applicants who apply for more modules.

## Recommendations

Despite the predominantly positive results of the evaluation, various fields of action were identified that could contribute to an even more successful alignment of the programs or a new program<sup>3</sup>. These fields of action were identified in both the strategic-conceptual and operational areas.

### FIELD OF ACTION 1

#### Strategic-conceptual: Introduction of the modular system

- Based on these evaluation results, it is recommended that the DAAD merges the four partnership programs under the umbrella of the SDGs into a new program in the following call for proposals (*recommendation 1*). For this purpose, **a modular system should be introduced**. Such a modular system has the advantage that projects can be flexibly adapted to the context in the partner countries, which in turn contributes to an increased goal attainment of the projects. In concrete terms, the DAAD should **divide the modular system into three strands**, which should be staggered according to the number of modules. Here, applicants should only be compared with other applicants within the same strand in order to ensure universities with less experience with partnerships in the Global South or with fewer resources for more extensive projects an equal chance of success.

3 The related recommendations can be found in Chapter 5 starting on p. 98.

- **Regarding Strand 1, the DAAD should introduce Basic Module A and Basic Module B.** Basic Module A should focus on teaching and promote capacity development in teaching. Furthermore, Basic Module A should serve to improve and expand teaching at the partner university and to promote e-learning. In contrast, Basic Module B should aim at strengthening the capacities of university management and administrators as well as digital administrative structures. For **strand 2 and 3, the DAAD should add either one or two additional modules (strand 2) or three or four additional modules (strand 3) to the respective basic module.** These additional modules can almost all be freely combined with each other. The **other freely selectable modules** consist of the following modules: Promotion of research, upscaling and **outreach, and alumni involvement.** While the upscaling and outreach component serves to promote upscaling and outreach to NGOs, policy makers and the local population, the research component serves to promote planning workshops for joint research for the development of a joint research strategy. It should be emphasized that the evaluation results show that a **general research module should be introduced** by the DAAD in the modular system in order to enable all projects to have a research component, regardless of the subject area. This results from the evaluation results, which show that not only in the biodiversity sciences, but through the interdependence with the teaching area, effects are also achieved in the research area in other disciplines. Furthermore, it became clear that a research component strengthens the sustainability of the projects and the effects of the programs, as well as making the programs more attractive for German universities.

### FIELD OF ACTION 2

#### Strategic-Conceptual: Selection Criteria and Impact Structure

- Furthermore, from the following call cycle onwards, the DAAD should adapt the **selection criteria** in that a **stronger focus is placed on their societal and developmental relevance** when selecting projects (*recommendation 2*), as this influences the effectiveness, impact and

sustainability of the project results. In addition, the DAAD should **introduce an overarching Theory of Change** for the new program in the following call cycle (*recommendation 3*), which replaces the four individual Theories of Change. With regard to this overarching Theory of Change, the DAAD should **not assume for the higher education management area** from the following call cycle onwards that a **direct contribution will be made to the structural strengthening of teaching and research** at the partner universities (*recommendation 4*). In this regard, the evaluation of the DIES program found that the link between improved university management and improved teaching, as postulated in the program theory, could not be directly demonstrated. As a last strategic-conceptual recommendation, the evaluation team advises to stop funding **Module 2 for clinical traineeships and PJ sections**, from the following call cycle onwards (*recommendation 5*). This is based on the result that the demand for this module is relatively low and the universities associate a high effort with it.

### FIELD OF ACTION 3

#### Operational adjustments

- With regard to the **operational fields of action and recommendations**, the evaluation results show that there are some effort drivers in the administration of the programs that are relevant with regard to a potential merger. In this regard, the evaluation shows that there are no significant differences between the administrative processes of the four programs. Nonetheless, the evaluation team also identifies the need to ensure that in the event of a potential merger, applicants and funded universities continue to have a permanent contact person within the DAAD to ensure a clear allocation of responsibilities. Consequently, the DAAD should arrange for **one administrator to assume responsibility per department in the modular system** from the following call cycle onwards (*recommendation 6*), so that the universities have a fixed contact person in the application process as well as in project implementation. Furthermore, the DAAD should combine the programs from next year onwards into only one call for proposals

instead of four (*recommendation 7*), which would save resources. Resources are also saved with regard to reporting, as the modular system means that four reports no longer have to be written for the four programs, even if reporting along the SDGs may become more complex. Consequently, the DAAD should **only prepare one report to the BMZ** in the new program as of the following call cycle (*recommendation 8*).

- Since applicants sometimes have difficulties filling out the application, especially the financial part, and project officers have difficulties with the first reporting, the DAAD should provide these target groups with more support material, if needed, from the following call cycle onwards (*recommendation 9*).

## IMPRINT

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