



Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
German Academic Exchange Service



Sustainability at the DAAD

Dimensions, fields of action and strategic goals

August 2020





SUMMARY

Climate protection has shifted to the fore of public debate as the world grapples with the effects of global warming and the irreversible impact it is already having on human life. While politicians struggle to provide viable solutions, institutions of higher education and their funding providers have recognised the importance of sustainability as a framework of orientation. The DAAD sees its task as one that should address these developments with concrete programmes and innovative approaches. As a funding organisation that promotes academic cooperation, the DAAD has a responsibility to support the efforts of the higher education and science sector to further improve sustainability and climate protection and to align its activities even closer to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. On one hand, this entails readjusting the content of its programmes and their outward impact (especially with regard to funding activities), and on the other, it requires the DAAD to improve the social, environmental and economic balance of sustainability within the organisation (sustainable procurement, mobility measures, facility management etc.). Against this backdrop, the DAAD has reformulated its policies on sustainability in more concrete terms and defined strategic goals and measures, and so doing, hopes to strengthen its contribution to the sustainability agenda.

1. Sustainable development – Strategic relevance, international frameworks of reference and central fields of activity at the DAAD

Human intervention in the natural environment has taken on global dimensions. Environmental crises such as climate change, the loss of biological diversity, soil degradation and over-fishing are threatening human lives and livelihoods like never before. And no longer is this a problem facing only developing and emerging countries; the adverse effects of climate change are being felt in every corner of the world. But the fact remains that the least developed countries often have the fewest resources to counter natural catastrophes, food crises and health risks. Not only does natural disaster hinder them from developing, it raises troubling issues of global security and social justice. The pressing environmental and developmental problems can only be surmounted by a fundamental shift toward sustainability. Education, science and international cooperation play a key role in this transformation.

Various aspects of sustainability are already anchored in the DAAD programme portfolio. They have steadily gained significance and become the increasing focus of our funding providers and member universities. Against this background, the DAAD sees sustainability

as a holistic mission and strategic opportunity for its own future development and viability. Fostering a culture of sustainability is not only an expression of social responsibility, which the DAAD assumes as a recipient of public funding; sustainability will increasingly become a success factor for procuring funding and recruiting and retaining new employees in the future. Institutional sustainability management can also contribute to accelerating innovation, improving efficiency and lowering costs.

The DAAD is keenly aware of the significance of sustainability and climate protection and is thus working closely with its member universities and funding providers to further expand its involvement in this area. The DAAD views sustainable development as “a development which satisfies the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland report, 1987).

In this respect, sustainability is a holistic, multidimensional process of transformation which takes into account social, environmental and economic aspects to an equal degree. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development serves as

the central framework of reference and orientation, comprising 17 internationally recognised Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Equitable access to high-quality education is firmly anchored in SDG 4 (quality education). Higher education, science and research play a central role in the successful implementation of all other sustainable development goals as well, such as food security (SDG 2), health (SDG 3), green economy (SDG 8) and climate change (SDG 13).

In view of its role as an intermediary for federal foreign cultural and educational policy and development cooperation, the DAAD distinguishes between four dimensions of sustainability which reflect its actions as an institution, funding provider, knowledge agency and advisory service:

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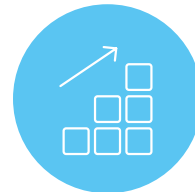


2. The DAAD's strategic goals to promote sustainability

Based on the various dimensions of sustainability, the DAAD has defined four strategic goals for its activities:

- **Increasing the visibility and scope of contributions that DAAD programmes are making to the Agenda 2030;**
- **Providing expertise for sustainable development, promoting dialogue and mutual learning, and strengthening innovative approaches;**
- **Guaranteeing sustainability of funding activities and ensuring their long-term effects;**
- **Strengthening institutional sustainability management and reducing the environmental footprint of the DAAD.**

2.1. Increasing the visibility and scope of contributions that DAAD programmes are making to the Agenda 2030



In cooperation with higher education institutions and partners in politics, business and civil society, the DAAD supports the Agenda 2030 and its national implementation within the purview of the German Sustainable Development Strategy. In addition to the field of education, the DAAD's strategy addresses far-reaching sectoral goals related to, e.g. climate protection, the sustainable use of natural resources, and health, and advances them through joint projects and scholarship funding. Its portfolio includes programmes which train highly qualified professionals and management staff, help establish development-relevant study programmes and competence centres, and finance applied research ventures in internationally networked teams.

The DAAD has already made considerable strides toward implementing key targets of the Agenda 2030. With regard to operating and funding policies, it recently published the “DAAD Standpoint” on the Agenda 2030 and reiterated its commitment to sustainability in its “Strategy 2025”. With the reorganisation of the “Sustainable Development” subdivision in the Strategy Department, the Agenda 2030 has become even more central to the activities at the DAAD. The goal is to help German universities and their international partners do even more to achieve the sustainability goals and create the conditions for a global partnership for sustainable development (SDG 17) by means of international collaboration. As a globally engaged institution, the DAAD draws on many years of experience with surmounting national boundaries and institutional constraints. In this effort, the DAAD increasingly uses and promotes digital formats of global exchange: worldwide cooperation and mobility are being developed in a future-oriented manner thanks to the application of new technologies and virtual possibilities.

The DAAD is committed to actively supporting “joint knowledge creation” to address the issues and challenges of the 17 SDGs and their 169 targets. It aims to develop new funding policies that encourage students, universities and researchers to join the effort in implementing the Agenda 2030. Sustainable development is a global challenge that requires the commitment of industrial, emerging and developing countries to an equal degree. It can only be accomplished through transformative collaboration by countries in all stages of development with the aim of achieving mutually complementary structural changes. Key challenges such as climate and resource protection, the preservation and revitalisation of ecosystems, green economy and sustainable consumption and production methods are issues which will require industrial and emerging countries to offer and implement solutions going forward. In this respect, the important thing is to strengthen cooperation-based approaches, ensure equal opportunity, establish climate- and environmentally friendly exchange formats and tap the potential of a mutual learning process with the Global South.

MEASURES

The DAAD will systematically determine, analyse and more visibly depict how and to what extent its programmes contribute to achieving the SDGs. The goal is to learn from successful examples and to steadily enhance the customised fit and effectiveness of the programmes. Wherever possible and reasonable, we will work together with our funding providers to bring existing funding programmes more in line with the global sustainability goals and help close funding gaps through new programmes and joint projects with new partners. Digitalisation and sustainability will be regarded – also strategically – as two parts of a whole.

2.2. Providing expertise for sustainable development, promoting dialogue and mutual learning, and strengthening innovative approaches



From promoting the global action programme “Education for Sustainable Development” (ESD) to enhancing profiles in the area of sustainability research to introducing “Green Campus” concepts, sustainability has become an increasingly important and strategically relevant paradigm for German higher education institutions. In November 2018, the German Rectors’ Conference issued a recommendation to establish a “culture of sustainability” at universities and assign sustainable development a special role in the target system. In addition to national higher education networks (HOCH-N, Bonn Alliance for Sustainability Research (ICB), netzwerk n etc.), student associations and international projects (International Sustainable Campus Network, Higher Education Sustainability Initiative etc.) have meanwhile established a series of their own indices and measurement tools to assess the “sustainability performance” of higher education institutions (e.g. UI GreenMetric). Normally these tools evaluate the core dimensions of

operations, teaching, research, governance and transfer. Some German universities have already achieved a pioneering role in this regard in international rankings.

As a knowledge-building and knowledge-sharing organisation, the DAAD aims to further advance international discourse on sustainable development in dialogue with partner organisations and higher education institutions. It possesses in-depth knowledge of higher education systems around the world. It is familiar with the latest academic policy developments in numerous countries and makes this expertise available to its partners and decision makers in the form of academic presentations, databases, exchange formats and advice services. At the same time, it actively participates in the discussion on the role of higher education and science for sustainable development. Its commitment to promoting cooperation with developing and emerging countries is supported by numerous political, business and civil society partners. In cooperation with implementing organisations, the DAAD is fully committed to development cooperation in order to generate synergetic effects and increase the efficacy of collaborations. Impact orientation and continual monitoring support the needs-oriented development of our portfolio and institutional learning.

MEASURES

The DAAD is intensifying its dialogue with universities, funding organisations and other non-university partners with the aim of promoting collaborative learning, exploring synergetic potentials and determining where additional funding is needed and feasible. To this end, it is focusing on university teaching and research in the context of the Agenda 2030, the “Education for Sustainable Development” programme, the Green Campus, and networking university groups and associations dedicated to sustainability issues. The DAAD is continually expanding its knowledge on the relationship between sustainable development, higher education, internationalisation and digitalisation. It works to identify potential synergies, produces relevant knowledge and advises universities,

partners and political decision makers on issues of sustainability in the higher education and research sector.

2.3. Guaranteeing sustainability of funding activities and safeguarding their long-term effects



The programmes of the DAAD effectively contribute to achieving the global sustainability goals. Physical mobility remains an essential prerequisite for fostering international collaboration and “joint knowledge creation” in the sense of “global partnership for the goals” (SDG 17) and ensuring their long-term impact. At the same time, the DAAD recognises its responsibility to further strengthen social, environmental and economic sustainability criteria through its programmes, making mobility as climate- and environmentally friendly as possible, and taking advantage of the opportunities afforded by digitally-aided formats for international exchange.

Furthermore, the DAAD is intent on safeguarding the progress and effects of its funding programmes in the long term. The aspect of sustainability of funding activities in terms of the permanence of achieved impacts plays a central role in planning, executing, managing and evaluating the DAAD’s funding programmes. To achieve long-term impact, it is important to build upon and transfer accomplishments to the scientific, business, political and social spheres. This can be done, for example by applying acquired skills, new or enhanced concepts, or structural or technical approaches which have a lasting effect at the local level irrespective of the institution which originally provided the funding. At the end of the funding period, it is important to secure the progress made (e.g. newly developed degree programmes, acquired competence, digital services) and to preserve the positive effects at the institutional level and on the respective target groups in the

long term. The success factors of sustainability-oriented funding activities include a partnership-based and needs-oriented approach to capacity building, impact-oriented planning and monitoring, the combination of individual and institutional funding, the consideration of multiplier effects, and follow-up support measures in the form of alumni work. Other financial, operative and strategic aspects are relevant in this regard as well, e.g. third-party funding acquisition, profile-building, the involvement of non-university partners and the development of commercial services.

MEASURES

The DAAD takes the increasing demands of climate and resource protection into account when developing and implementing its funding measures. It promotes the development and application of digital formats in order to facilitate cross-border collaboration while also avoiding CO₂ emissions. In its efforts to efficiently combine physical and virtual mobility and cooperation, the DAAD is taking steps to increasingly promote digital learning and exchange formats through reduction and substitution wherever possible and sensible. To achieve this end, all participants must engage in a joint learning process. Where does it make sense to replace physical mobility with virtual formats? When do the immediate benefits of “real” mobility (immersion, intercultural experience, trust-building etc.) justify or outweigh the resulting emissions in the long term? How can digitalisation be made as sustainable and resource-friendly as possible? The DAAD is constructively shaping this learning process together with its partners. Furthermore, it seeks dialogue with funding providers and universities in order to develop new approaches and adapt its funding requirements and decisions to changing demands (CO₂ compensation, sustainable procurement etc.).

The DAAD engages in dialogue with its university partners and scholarship recipients to improve its understanding of the necessary requirements and success factors in ensuring long-lasting effects. When evaluating

sustainability in the higher education sector, the DAAD orientates its policies to internationally established quality standards. It also takes the specific approaches and expectations of its scholarship programmes and cooperation programmes into account. This provides the basis for formulating corresponding requirements when planning and managing future funding programmes and projects, as well as providing more specific recommendations for safeguarding achieved effects going forward. In addition to other criteria, the potential for long-term, sustainable impact plays a key role in the DAAD’s selection process and funding decisions.

2.4. Strengthening institutional sustainability management and reducing the environmental footprint of the DAAD



Non-profit organisations are increasingly judged by how well their management and business operations take into account the goals of sustainable development, and to what extent their organisational and management structures and internal governance adhere to basic principles of sustainability. Improving one’s sustainability performance in the sense of corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become a strategically important task which presents industrial and emerging countries in particular with daunting challenges.

The DAAD has embraced this responsibility by identifying potentials for change within its own organisational and management processes. It is taking concrete action to further reduce its environmental footprint and ensure a responsible use of natural resources in the future. In this context, the DAAD acts in compliance with current legal regulations (BHO, BRKG, ArbStättV etc.), but also plans to review its policies in anticipation of future legal requirements

mandating further improvements to the organisation's environmental footprint.

MEASURES

In November 2019, the DAAD established an interdepartmental project to strengthen its institutional sustainability management. The aim of the project, which is initially designed to run for the next five years, is to build a so-called "sustainability architecture" to improve the DAAD's environmental footprint, e.g. in the areas of mobility, event management, sustainable procurement and facility management. As part of the project, numerous measures already in place will be bundled and streamlined into a sustainability programme, jointly developed in a strategic process by all departments at the DAAD. The following steps of this process are planned for the short and medium term:

- Determine the environmental footprint of the DAAD;
- Identify and prioritise possibilities for improving or reducing environmental impacts;
- Develop and coordinate a sustainability programme with quantifiable goals and activities to further improve the organisation's social and environmental sustainability balance.

For this project, the DAAD relies on the expertise and commitment of its employees and seeks to engage in dialogue with universities, funding providers and partners in the scientific sector which intensively address the issues of sustainability and climate protection.

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