

# **Ten Recommendations for Germany's Feminist Development Policy**

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## Abstract

In early 2022, Germany's development minister Svenja Schulze announced the adoption of a feminist development policy. With this announcement, Germany joins a growing group of governments that have adopted or declared the adoption of an explicitly feminist perspective in their external policies. Drawing on these governments' policies and the observations and recommendations by civil society and researchers, this Discussion Paper outlines ten key recommendations for Germany's first feminist development policy. The first three recommendations focus on the conceptual foundation of the policy and lay out the importance of 1) an inclusive definition of gender, 2) a clarification of the feminist approach and the policy's overall goal as well as 3) the need for an intersectional approach. The second set of recommendations concerns the implementation of the policy and stresses the importance of 4) a permanent cooperation with gender-focused and feminist organisations and 5) the necessity to increase funding for gender-related objectives in general and 6) for feminist organisations in particular. Further recommendations include 7) widening the range of sectors that target gender equality through a transformative approach and context-sensitive programming and by providing mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the strategy's goals, objectives and activities. The last three recommendations emphasise institutional aspects and the importance of 8) creating an institutional environment that best supports gender equality within the development ministry and its main implementing organisations, 9) the necessity of a coherent feminist approach between the different ministries, and 10) the importance of addressing possible challenges the ministry might face in the implementation of its feminist development policy.

Keywords: feminism; feminist development policy; gender; gender equality; Germany; Canada; Sweden; Mexico; Spain; France

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## Abbreviations

AA	Federal Foreign Office (Germany) / Auswärtiges Amt
BMZ	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (Germany) / Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung
CAD	Canadian dollar
CSO	civil society organisation
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (OECD)
EU	European Union
EUR	euro
FDP	feminist development policy
FFP	feminist foreign policy
FIAP	feminist international assistance policy
GAP	Gender Action Plan (BMZ)
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für International Zusammenarbeit
HCE	High Council on Gender Equality (France)
KfW	KfW Development Bank (Germany) / Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer / Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and more
MEAE	Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (France) / Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères
NGO	non-governmental organisation
ODA	official development assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SRHR	sexual and reproductive health and rights
USD	United States dollar
WID	women in development
WRO	women's rights organisation
WVL	Women's Voice and Leadership



# 1 Introduction

In November 2021, Germany's new coalition treaty announced a feminist foreign policy (FFP), thereby joining a small but growing group of states that have adopted feminist foreign policies over the last eight years. A few months later, Svenja Schulze, the Minister of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), announced that Germany would also implement a feminist development policy (FDP). The announcement of a separate feminist development policy is largely due to the fact that, in Germany, development cooperation falls under the responsibility of a separate development ministry whereas, in other countries, development cooperation is managed by foreign ministries and is part of their overall feminist foreign policy strategies.

Attempts to integrate gender issues into development policy and practice go back to the 1970s when Western governments (Germany included) and international organisations sought to take greater account of women in development cooperation and began addressing women and girls' needs in partner countries (Beetham & Demetriades, 2007, p. 201; Boserup, 1970; World Bank, 1979). The proclamation of explicitly feminist foreign policies came much later when Sweden's Foreign Minister Margot Wallström announced the world's first feminist foreign policy in 2014. Since then, several other – mostly Western – countries, have announced a feminist foreign and/or development policy: Canada in 2017, Luxembourg in 2018, France and Mexico in 2019, Spain, Libya, and Germany in 2021 and, most recently, Chile and the Netherlands in 2022.

These governments' public confirmation of their feminist outlook stands in stark contrast to the global backlash against women's rights and against the very concept of gender and gender equality in recent years. This backlash is demonstrated in the severe restrictions and a complete abortion ban in many US states in 2022 (Gonzales & Knutson, 2022); Poland's near total abortion ban in 2021 (Deutsche Welle, 2021); Italy's new Prime Minister Meloni's statement to limit abortions (Blasi, 2022); or the Hungarian parliament's decision to ban teaching on homosexuality and transgender matters in schools (Szakacs & Ptak, 2021). These examples demonstrate that many of the hard-won victories for women and LGBTQIA+<sup>1</sup> people, particularly in the areas of sexuality and reproduction, gender-sensitive education, and gender-based violence are currently under fire.

The growing opposition to women's sexual and reproductive rights, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the effects of climate change have also led to a stagnation, and in some cases reversal, of progress towards the fifth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 5) – "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls". As the second-largest donor country of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC), Germany's commitment to put gender equality firmly at the centre of its development cooperation and to promote "equal political, economic and social participation of all people – irrespective of gender, gender identity or sexual orientation" (Schulze, February 2022, own translation) can have tangible implications for the necessary acceleration of the progress towards SDG 5. In light of the decision of Sweden's new right-wing government to drop the feminist foreign policy the country pioneered in 2014, a strong German feminist development policy also constitutes an important political signal that, even in times when other global issues move to the top of the political agenda, gender equality needs to remain a political priority. With Germany's strong commitment and a well-designed and -implemented feminist development policy, Germany could encourage and incentivise other countries to follow suit.

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1 This paper recommends a broad understanding of gender that encompasses lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual and other (LGBTQIA+) identities. In some instances, however, it also refers to LGBTI people, as this reflects the specific wording used in the respective strategies.



Although a number of policy documents on feminist foreign policies exist, they do not define what constitutes a feminist foreign policy; moreover the interpretation, design and implementation of countries' policies vary. One suggestion for a definition of feminist foreign policy, which would incorporate a feminist development policy, is provided by Thompson and colleagues:

Feminist foreign policy is the policy of a state that defines its interactions with other states, as well as movements and other non-state actors, in a manner that prioritizes peace, gender equality and environmental integrity; enshrines, promotes, and protects the human rights of all; seeks to disrupt colonial, racist, patriarchal and male-dominated power structures; and allocates significant resources, including research, to achieve that vision. Feminist foreign policy is coherent in its approach across all of its levers of influence, anchored by the exercise of those values at home and co-created with feminist activists, groups and movements, at home and abroad. (Thompson, Patel, Kripke, O'Donnell, 2020, p. 4)

A growing number of scholars have set out to analyse and evaluate the feminist foreign policies already in place. At the same time, feminist organisations, think tanks and development agencies regularly publish reports, toolboxes and guides that outline specific steps to effectively advance gender equality. There is therefore a substantial body of literature on existing feminist development policies that can inform Germany's and other countries' considerations towards their feminist development policies and strategies. This paper presents an assessment of the experience of like-minded development cooperation providers that are preparing and implementing feminist foreign policy and/or development policy strategies, insofar as they are applicable. It looks at official policy documents published on the topic and at reports and recommendations by civil society organisations and researchers that have accompanied the development and implementation of feminist policies.

The paper is divided into three parts: It first illustrates the current state of global gender inequality as well as Germany's efforts to support gender equality in its development cooperation to date. The second and main part analyses other governments' existing approaches and policies as well as reports, and outlines ten key recommendations for an inclusive, effective and transformative feminist development policy. In doing so, it addresses both the policy's strategic development as well as important internal and external concerns for the policy's implementation. While the recommendations focus on Germany, they are also relevant for other countries which have recently announced the adoption of a feminist foreign and development policy and those considering doing so in the future. The final section concludes by summarising the main points that Germany and potentially other countries need to consider on their journey towards a feminist development policy.

## **2 Background**

With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015, achieving global gender equality has become the fifth of the Agenda's 17 Sustainable Development Goals. SDG 5 sets out to "Achieve global gender equality and empower all women and girls" (UN [United Nations], 2022) and its nine targets aim to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls; to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights; and to undertake reforms to ensure women's equal rights to economic resources. In addition to being a separate objective, gender equality is also woven throughout ten other SDGs, illustrating that gender equality has a crucial impact on the achievement of most development goals.

Over the past years, the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) countries' bilateral official development assistance (ODA) for projects that target gender equality has gradually increased from USD 32.3 billion in 2015 to USD 51.2 billion in 2020 (OECD.Stat, 2022). While some improvements in advancing global gender equality have been reached over the past years, the

latest available data on SDG 5 shows that the progress is stalling, mainly due to the effects of climate change, the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the backlash against women's sexual and reproductive health and rights. As a result, women are already experiencing higher food insecurity than men and it is expected that rising food prices will further exacerbate their situation. Covid-19 has also worsened women's access to health services resulting in drastic declines in maternal health and increased maternal mortality across countries. The rate of births among adolescent girls is also on the rise again, while legal restrictions and the criminalisation of abortion prevent them from safe access to sexual and reproductive health care. Although women make up 46 per cent of the public sector workforce, they remain chronically underrepresented in leadership positions. In 2021, women constituted only 26.4 per cent of parliamentarians and 34.3 per cent of local government representatives in political institutions worldwide, leading the United Nations to conclude that it will take another 286 years to reform legal frameworks to promote, enforce and monitor gender equality in public life (UN Women, 2022a).

Germany's promotion of gender equality is guided by the cross-sectoral strategy "Gender Equality in German Development Cooperation" that was adopted in 2014 and is binding for both the BMZ and its implementing organisations (BMZ, 2014). The cross-sectoral strategy defines the "integration of a gender perspective in all development policy strategies and projects" as a fundamental pillar of German development policy. It aims to end discrimination against women and girls and to dismantle gender hierarchies through a three-pronged approach: 1) gender mainstreaming in all development strategies; 2) women's empowerment; and 3) anchoring the strengthening of women's rights and equality in bi- and multilateral political dialogue. The BMZ's Development Policy Gender Action Plans (GAPs) set out the concrete steps to implement the gender strategy. The last Gender Action Plan (GAP II) covered nine priorities<sup>2</sup> and seven cross-sectoral activities<sup>3</sup> and was effective from 2016 to 2020. Germany increased its share of funding for gender equality from 42 per cent of bilateral allocable ODA in 2015 to 44 per cent in 2020 and has become the biggest donor to gender equality in absolute terms, spending USD 8.9 billion on development activities targeting gender equality (Donor Tracker, n.d.).

The current discussions on the German feminist development policy largely reflect Sweden's model of focusing on "three Rs": the promotion of women's and girls' full enjoyment of human **rights**; women's **representation** in decision-making at all levels and in all areas; and suitable **resources** to achieve both. The German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) is currently preparing a feminist development policy strategy and the next Gender Action Plan.

Germany's orientation on Sweden is not surprising, given that Sweden was the first country to present a feminist foreign policy and had the most comprehensive feminist foreign policy, applying a gender lens to diplomacy, trade, aid and security (Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Sweden), 2019). Given some countries' more recent decisions for a feminist foreign policy, not all of them have yet published specific articulations of policy. While existing policy documents on feminist foreign policies do not follow a generally agreed upon definition of feminist foreign policy, they share many common features: Existing policies are framed around principles of

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2 The nine priority areas covered in the Gender Action Plan II were: 1) access to justice and legal services; 2) rural development, agriculture, and food security; 3) violence against women and girls; 4) armed conflicts, peacekeeping and displacement; 5) education; 6) economic empowerment; 7) health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR); 8) water and sanitation; 9) climate change, disaster risk management, sustainable development, city and community development (BMZ [Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung], 2016).

3 The seven cross-sectoral activities covered in GAP II were: 1) cooperation with female and male stakeholders; 2) tackling multiple discrimination; 3) gender equality in development financing; 4) empowering women and girls through sport; 5) gender competence/knowledge management; 6) measures to implement the gender approach; 7) strengthening women's organisations (BMZ, 2016).

human rights, women's rights and gender justice, gender mainstreaming, and intersectionality. Interpretation, design, and implementation of a countries' policies vary, however; moreover, a full cross-country comparison of the impact and effectiveness of these policies has not yet been made (Gill-Atkinson & Ridge, 2021). Table 1 presents an overview of the countries where feminist foreign policies are already in place, or where they have been announced and are presently at various stages of development.

**Table 1: Overview of (foreseen) feminist foreign policies**

2014-2022	Sweden	<b>Feminist foreign policy</b> covers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Foreign and national security policies</li> <li>Development cooperation</li> <li>Trade and promotion policy</li> </ul>	Strategy in place <i>Handbook. Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy</i> (Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Sweden), 2019)
2017	Canada	<b>Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP)</b> White Paper on a feminist foreign policy has been drafted but its publication has been delayed indefinitely	Strategy in place <i>Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy</i> (Global Affairs Canada, 2017).
2018	Luxembourg	<b>Feminist foreign policy</b> applies across <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Defence</li> <li>Diplomacy</li> <li>Development</li> </ul>	No separate policy articulation in place
2019	France	<b>Feminist diplomacy</b>	No separate policy articulation in place; currently guided by <i>France's International Strategy on Gender Equality (2018-2022)</i> (MEAE [Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères], 2018)
2019	Mexico	<b>Feminist foreign policy</b>	Separate policy articulation in place <i>La Política Exterior Feminista del Gobierno de México</i> (Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2020)
2021	Spain	<b>Feminist foreign policy</b>	Guide to feminist foreign policy in place <i>Política Exterior Feminista</i> . (Gobierno de España, 2021)
2021	Libya	<b>Feminist foreign policy</b>	No separate policy articulation in place
2021/2022	Germany	<b>Feminist foreign policy &amp; feminist development policy</b>	No separate policy articulation in place
2022	Chile	<b>Feminist foreign policy</b>	No separate policy articulation in place
2022	Netherlands	<b>Feminist foreign policy</b>	No separate policy articulation in place

Source: Authors

The fact that countries from both the Global North and the Global South have announced feminist foreign policies signals that feminist foreign policies are more than “just the latest postcolonial export” (Thompson, Ahmed & Khokar, 2021, p. 20) with which Western countries aim to present themselves as “good” states that know how to treat women while others need to learn how to do so (Thomson, 2022, p. 184). Nevertheless, it is crucial that feminist development policies from the countries in the Global North consider and address their country’s colonial history and its impact on contemporary power imbalances. To date, however, none of the FFPs in place have articulated a postcolonial approach.

At a feminist development conference in September 2022, Minister Schulze said that questioning existing power structures and discriminatory norms includes “critically questioning our own structures and recognizing where misogyny, continuing colonialism and racist ways of thinking have become entrenched” (Schulze, September 2022). She also stressed that changing existing structures means “strengthen[ing] those voices that have not received sufficient attention so far, and [...] widen[ing] our gaze by taking up those perspectives that we have not considered sufficiently.”

Indeed, Germany’s journey towards feminist development policy needs to involve groups and organisations which offer diverse voices that reflect the social, political, cultural and economic reality in their countries. Their involvement needs to be part of a broader engagement with a post-colonial approach in Germany’s development cooperation. Following a post-colonial approach means that one must reflect on the role of colonialism in changing existing social structures and imposing harmful social orders and gender roles (Nzegwu, 2006). It also implies recognising that there is no universal feminism and that the experiences of women and other marginalised groups differ, depending on their specific historical and cultural context (see hooks, 1984). As stated by the Nigerian feminist scholar Oyèrónkẹ Oyěwùmí, “one cannot assume the social organization of one culture (the dominant West included) as universal or the interpretations of the experiences of one culture as explaining another one” (Oyěwùmí, 1997, p. 10). Daibes points out that the women in the Global South are no longer willing to accept the white-centred feminism which projects a depoliticised and capitalist image of an empowered woman as someone who is “westernised, high-paid, fashionable, and independent” as the only acceptable version of an unoppressed woman and instead are reclaiming their understanding of feminism which is based in their culture and uniqueness (Daibes, 2022).

When designing and implementing its feminist development policy, the BMZ thus needs to acknowledge that there are multiple forms of feminism that address and reflect different forms of discrimination or struggles as they are lived in distinct cultural or historical contexts and to engage with feminists from its partner countries. This will also mean engaging with local strategies to foster gender equality in order to avoid imposing Western structures and images; it will also mean moving from top-down programming to a type of cooperation, which is context-sensitive and guided by local actors.

### **3 Recommendations for Germany’s feminist development policy**

Based on our analysis of existing FFP and FDP approaches and a review of the relevant literature, we suggest ten recommendations for Germany’s feminist development policy. The first three recommendations focus on the conceptual foundation of the policy and lay out the importance of 1) an **inclusive definition of gender**, 2) a **clarification of the feminist approach and the policy’s overall goal** as well as 3) the need for an **intersectional approach**. The second set of recommendations focuses on the implementation of the policy and stresses the importance of 4) a **permanent cooperation with gender-focused and feminist organisations** and 5) the necessity to **increase funding for gender-related objectives** in

general and 6) **for feminist organisations** in particular. Further recommendations include 7) **widening the range of sectors supported by gender equality programmes** through a **transformative approach and context-sensitive programming** along with providing mechanisms to **monitor and evaluate the implementation** of the strategy's goals, objectives or activities. The last three recommendations emphasise the importance of 8) **creating an institutional environment** that best supports gender equality within the development ministry and its main implementing organisations, 9) the necessity of a **coherent feminist approach between the different ministries**, and 10) the importance of **addressing possible challenges** the ministry might face in the implementation of its feminist development policy.

**Table 2: Recommendations**

Conceptual foundation	
1)	Enshrine an <b>inclusive understanding of gender</b>
2)	<b>Clarify the feminist approach</b> and <b>set a clear goal</b> for the policy
3)	Follow an <b>intersectional approach</b> to gender equality
Implementation	
4)	<b>Cooperate with gender-focused and feminist organisations</b>
5)	<b>Increase funding commitments for gender equality</b>
6)	<b>Increase funding for feminist organisations</b>
7)	Ensure <b>context-sensitive programming with a strong focus on gender equality</b>
Domestic institutional aspects	
8)	<b>Address the domestic dimension of the feminist development policy</b>
9)	Establish <b>policy coherence between feminist development and feminist foreign policy</b>
10)	<b>Address potential challenges</b> in implementing the policy

Source: Authors

### 3.1 Enshrine an inclusive understanding of gender

Conceptual clarity of a policy's core terms is a necessary foundation for a clear policy directive, implementation plan, and accountability structure. Not providing explicit definitions of core terms and concepts, or providing only vague and ambiguous terms, leaves room for interpretation of a policy, which can be counterproductive (Brown & Swiss, 2018; Tiessen, 2019; Parisi, 2020). Therefore, as a first step, the German feminist development policy needs to define the core term of the policy, namely "gender". In doing so, it should establish a broad definition that moves beyond the binary understanding of gender as comprising men and women. Whereas "men" and "women" are first and foremost biological categories, gender "refers to the roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society at a given time considers appropriate for men and women" as well as to "the relations between women and those between men" (UN Women, n.d.). A broad definition of gender acknowledges that there are more than the two fixed categories "men" and "women" and that "gender identity and sexual identity and expression may be more fluid and plural in forms" (UN Women, n.d.). Enshrining a broad definition of gender that equally encompasses LGBTQIA+ individuals is important to avoid discrimination and exclusion (UN Women, 2022b, p. 11).

The two feminist foreign policy pioneers – Sweden and Canada – have been criticised for not including explicit definitions of the terms and concepts used in their policies, as well as for their binary focus on men/women and a lack of inclusion of LGBTQIA+ people (Brown & Swiss, 2018; Tiessen, 2019; Thompson & Clement, 2019; Parisi, 2020). States which have announced their commitment to a feminist foreign or development policy more recently tend to be more inclusive. Luxembourg, for example, puts equal emphasis on the rights of women, girls and LGBTI people; while Mexico’s feminist foreign policy is also embracing a broad understanding of gender including LGBTI individuals (CFFP [Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy], 2020, p. 23).

The BMZ’s Gender Action Plan II 2016-2020 made references to gender without defining the term but mentioned almost exclusively women and girls as the target of gender equality policies, conflating “gender” with “women” (BMZ, 2016). Rather than focusing on women, a feminist policy should focus on the social constitution of gender that maintains unequal and unjust relations (Cadesky, 2020). In March 2021, the German government adopted an LGBTI Inclusion Strategy for foreign policy and development cooperation (Bundesregierung, 2021). The strategy aims to provide support to the LGBTI human rights work undertaken by civil society actors and is based on an inclusive understanding of gender. This understanding should be mirrored in the government’s feminist development policy, as only a broad definition of gender will provide a suitable foundation for the policy’s possibility to address discrimination, harassment, homophobia, and transphobia.

Another aspect to be cautious of when writing about women and girls in development policies is the tendency to focus on women and girls as biological entities and to present them solely within the framing of vulnerable people. Referring to women and girls primarily in relation to their reproductive rights and presenting women and girls solely in the framework of their vulnerability indicates a paternalistic approach and disregards the fact that women and girls have multiple factors of identity while different gender groups experience multiple forms of marginalisation depending on their ethnicity, religion, age or (dis)ability (Tiessen, 2019; Cadesky, 2020, p. 301f.). While this criticism applies to the presentation of women and girls worldwide, it is particularly relevant in the field of development policy, as (feminist) practitioners and scholars from the Global North should not generate or contribute to presenting a universal picture of the oppressed and poor “average third-world woman” (Mohanty, 1989, p. 65). A similar concern has to be voiced regarding the rights and needs of LGBTQIA+ individuals whose rights are often addressed solely within the framework of sexual and reproductive health and rights (Thompson et al., 2021, p. 3).

### **3.2 Clarify the feminist approach and set a clear goal for the feminist development policy**

While several countries have adopted a feminist foreign policy, they do not explicitly explain or define what *constitutes* a feminist foreign policy. This practice can be seen as a reflection of a variety of feminist approaches which, though sharing the aim of achieving equality of opportunity for all individuals, have different positions on their overall goal, along with the strategies through which to achieve this goal. In order to avoid ambiguities and to facilitate the policy’s translation into practice, Germany’s feminist development strategy should therefore clarify which feminist approach it pursues and define a clear overarching goal for its feminist development policy.

The two main feminist approaches are the mainstream (also referred to as instrumentalist or liberal feminism) and the transformative approach. Mainstream feminist approaches generally seek to ensure individuals’ greater integration into existing political and economic processes and see gender equality as one step towards the overall goal of poverty reduction. Mainstream approaches have been the main strategy for implementing gender equality initiatives in the development sector since the 1970s. They have ranged from the Women In Development (WID)

initiative which aimed at integrating women into development projects during the 1980s, via initiatives focusing on women's empowerment by increasing women's participation in economic processes during the 1990s, to explicitly considering and integrating a gender perspective into all stages of development programming by means of the gender mainstreaming approach (Khaled-Ibrahim & Schaefer, 2022). Mainstream approaches strive to increase women's and girls' participation through initiatives like quota or targeted programming and often focus on easily attainable measurements such as the number of women or girls involved in or impacted by policy interventions or the effect these interventions have on broader societal, political, economic, or social benefits (Tiessen, 2019, p. 7).

Critics of mainstream approaches argue that, in ignoring the underlying (political, social and cultural) structures that prevent women, girls and other marginalised groups from participation, these initiatives are too short-sighted. They accuse mainstream approaches of instrumentalising women and girls for broader economic or political goals without ensuring that they benefit from their involvement (Kabeer, 2003). Women's increased participation in the labour market, for example, means little if women have no control over the use of the additional income and therefore does not automatically improve the quality of their lives, freedoms, and security (Tiessen, 2019, p. 7). Social structures like the unequal distribution of care work, for example, have to be addressed alongside initiatives that focus on women's productive activities. Rather than focusing on improving the agency of individual women, the transformative approach focuses on the structure of existing power relations in the economic, social, legal, and political realm (see Jahan, 1995; Parpart, 2014).<sup>4</sup> The transformative approach is based on the understanding that masculinities, cultural norms and socially sanctioned power relations marginalise some groups in society – often women and girls, but also other identities – and aims to address these harmful structures and practices.

While most countries, which have adopted a feminist foreign policy and have published a strategy, have not explicitly defined their feminist approach, a closer look at their policies reveals that they in fact follow various different approaches and have differing priorities. Sweden, Spain, and Mexico for example focus on structural change, aiming to “reduce and eliminate structural differences, gender gaps and inequalities” (Centro de Investigación Internacional, 2020, p. 1) and see gender equality as an aim in itself. Canada, on the other hand, follows the mainstream approach and sees gender equality and women and girls' empowerment as the most effective means of eradicating global poverty (Morton, Muchiri & Swiss, 2020, p. 334; Thomson, 2020a). In doing so, the policy frames women's empowerment primarily in terms of their economic participation: “when women and girls are given equal opportunities to succeed, they can transform their local economies and generate growth that benefits their entire communities and countries” (Global Affairs Canada, 2017, p. 8). Thomson points out that the policy paradoxically frames women and girls as being both more precarious than other groups and as “superwomen” who alone can unlock a positive future for their communities. This framing not only puts an enormous amount of responsibility and pressure on women and girls, but also means that they, their rights, and their needs are not understood on their own terms, but within the broader impact their development will have on their society (Thomson, 2020a, p. 430).

In the months following the announcement of Germany's feminist development policy, Minister Schulze signalled her commitment to a transformative approach stating that the promotion of gender equality required the dismantling of existing patriarchal power structures and that Germany's feminist development policy meant to “increasingly work transformatively in our projects” (Rosigkeit & Schulze, 2022). A prioritisation of the transformative feminist approach to

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4 A non-exhaustive list of examples includes legal differences with regard to laws of inheritance or land ownership; the unequal distribution of (unpaid) care work; the gender pay gap; or the underrepresentation of women and other identities in political and economic positions of power and decision-making.

development cooperation would imply a shift from the BMZ's current focus on poverty reduction towards gender equality as the overall goal of its development policy. This, however, appears not to be the case as the ministry's webpage makes no reference to a (future) prioritisation of a transformative approach and lists gender equality as only one of three goals for its development cooperation: 1) tackling structural causes for hunger, poverty and inequality; 2) a just transition to deal with the global challenges presented by climate change; and 3) preventing future pandemics and strengthening health systems (Schulze, June 2022).

At the same time as publicising the transformative line of action, Schulze frequently stresses that gender equality is a key factor for overcoming hunger and poverty while women's participation in peace negotiations has a long-term positive impact on their outcome. These statements indicate an instrumentalist approach that sees women as a steppingstone to fixing poverty and conflict. The BMZ will need to maintain a fine balance between focusing on women's empowerment measures that are part of a broader feminist agenda and ensuring that they do not become the sole focus of the strategy to the detriment of a transformative approach. As stressed by Cadesky (2020), structural changes to promote and achieve gender equality may include agency-focused interventions aimed at women's empowerment; however, conflating the two within policy and practice is problematic. Focusing on women's empowerment as the sole road to gender equality and avoiding the discussion about structures that produce and reproduce discrimination and inequality risks depoliticising the issue and sidestepping the feminist, political goals of gender equality that would see policies and interventions engaged with structural inequality (Olivius, 2014).

With this in mind, Germany's strategy for a feminist development policy should prioritise a transformative approach that understands gender equality as more than a means to an end and should enshrine its commitment to move beyond earlier mainstream approaches that focused on strengthening women's position within established structures.

### **3.3 Follow an intersectional approach to gender equality**

Achieving gender equality by dismantling established structures to eventually transform the system can only be accomplished by adopting an intersectional approach that recognises how versatile forms of discrimination intersect. The idea of intersecting discriminations originated in Black feminism and is based in the critique of the alleged universality of feminism (Carastathis, 2014). The term "intersectionality" was coined by the US legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) and referred to the different forms of legal and social discrimination black women experienced in comparison to white women or black men. Intersectionality is based on the recognition that social and political categories of race, gender, sexuality, class, nationality, ability, ethnicity, age, and so on are interrelated and interact in multiple ways, influencing an individual or a group's political and social position in society.

Having announced that it will follow an intersectional approach (Kofler, 2022), the BMZ should outline its understanding of intersectionality, as an ambiguous definition invites an open interpretation as to what the approach means for aid allocations and project outcomes (Mason, 2019, p. 213). Following an intersectional approach goes beyond the mere inclusion of additional social categories in the policy but means examining and addressing the multiple ways in which race, gender, sexuality, class, nationality, ability, ethnicity, age, and so on interact and subject individuals and groups to multiple forms of discrimination (Mason, 2019; Cheung, Gürsel, Kirchner & Scheyer, 2021, UN Women & UNPRPD, n.d.). For this reason, the strategy also needs to lay out how multiple and various forms of discrimination will be addressed through Germany's development cooperation.

Mexico's feminist foreign policy explicitly adopts an intersectional approach to all foreign policy actions and the approach constitutes the fifth objective of Mexico's FFP agenda (Delgado, 2020,



p. 36). It includes “sexual and reproductive rights; recognising the diversity of women and girls; the differentiated effects of climate change on women; the rights of migrant women; and inclusion of indigenous languages and peoples” (cited in Zhukova, Rosén Sundström & Elgström, 2022, p. 211). In drawing attention to structural discrimination against women of colour, indigenous women, and migrant women, the policy underlines issues of particular concern to the Global South which are often overlooked by FFP countries from the Global North (Zhukova et al., 2022, p. 213). Similar to Mexico, the Spanish policy also refers to intersectionality and diversity as part of its feminist approach to mainstreaming gender in foreign policy and, in doing so, encompasses gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, economic status, religious belief as well as disability and place of origin (Thompson et al., 2021, p. 19).

Canada's FIAP on the other hand has been criticised for not clearly defining intersectionality and for its lack of attention to power dynamics (Mason, 2019; Tiessen, 2019). Mason (2019) argues that, when describing intersectionality, the policy provides a list of social categories which illustrate how women and girls are diverse but focuses on interpersonal or individual experiences of discrimination. This framing implies that it is the individuals' identity that is the cause of their discrimination, rather than the intersecting structures of power that facilitate discrimination. Enarsson makes a similar point stating that many gender practitioners in the development sector use intersectionality as a way of understanding the full scale of discrimination that different individuals and groups experience. She argues that simply adding one layer or form of discrimination on top of another in an accumulative way does not suffice for an intersectional perspective, as intersectionality refers to the intersecting forms of oppression that marginalise the groups (Enarsson, 2015, p. 5).

An intersectional approach grounded in a nuanced power analysis can generate a more in-depth context analysis of which groups, such as LGBTQIA+ communities or varying ethnicities, need specific assistance. Such an analysis requires data – which currently does not exist. According to UN Women, we have only 42 per cent of the gender data necessary to monitor the gender-specific dimensions of the SDGs. While not a single country out of 193 countries which have committed themselves to the 2030 Agenda has all the required data on gender-specific SDG indicators, it is especially lower and middle-income countries, which do not have sufficient data (UN Women, 2022c). The commitment to an intersectional approach therefore needs to also include a commitment to support the production, storage, and use of more – and better – gender data.

### **3.4 Cooperate with gender-focused and feminist organisations in Germany and partner countries**

In order to implement a postcolonial, transformative and intersectional approach, German feminist development policy must be based on expertise and advice from local organisations and individuals who have the knowledge, lived experience, and institutional experience of gender inequality in partner countries and understand the nature and causes of marginalisation, its local context, and cultural impediments (Tiessen, 2019). Furthermore, research on the process of setting up existing feminist foreign/development policies demonstrates that civil society organisations have more progressive, evidence-based and “best practice” definitions and ideas for feminist foreign policies than government stakeholders (Gill-Atkinson & Ridge, 2021, p. 24). Civil society organisations have also played an important role in strengthening feminist foreign policies in Sweden, France and Canada by tracking and monitoring their development and implementation progress. Their contribution was considered beneficial as these organisations have helped to increase awareness of the feminist foreign policy among policymakers (Gill-Atkinson & Ridge, 2021, p. 16f.).

The German development ministry needs to engage in inclusive consultation, planning and implementation processes with representatives of those groups as well as gender-focused

organisations and the individuals it intends to serve. In failing to include the groups which are multi-marginalised in the discourse and processes that develop and shape policies about them, the process “can perpetuate, rather than dismantle, inequalities and systems of oppression” (Thompson et al., 2021, p. 20 f.) and reiterate “a neo-colonial picture” of liberal, “good” Western states that “know how to treat women and the rest of the world needs to learn” (Thomson, 2022, p. 184).

In the lead-up to the launch of Canada’s FIAP, Global Affairs Canada initiated an extensive consultation process with 15,000 staff from various organisations, including its international partners based in 65 different countries and 9 in-person events in Canada (Rao & Tiessen, 2020, p. 351). Within this process, feminist activists, experts and academics, women’s rights organisations and a diverse constellation of stakeholders were given the opportunity to provide their inputs through both in-person consultations and written contributions. A Feminist Foreign Policy Working Group summarised the proposals raised during the consultation process and developed a set of principles for Canada’s foreign policy. Among others, these highlighted the need for an intersectional approach and demilitarisation; the importance of non-violence and peaceful conflict resolution; the importance of protecting the environment and sustainable development; and, finally, they called for accountability and policy coherence (Feminist Foreign Policy Working Group, 2021a; Thompson et al., 2021, p. 6).

In spite of the extensive nature of the consultation process, critics point out that the consultations placed little emphasis on how feminism was perceived in particular cultural, social, and political settings or how the FIAP aimed to address the structural barriers of gender equality in these distinct settings. Research on the perceptions of local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) of feminism in Malawi, Kenya and Uganda demonstrates that, although there is a common acceptance of the need to address inequalities that women face, this acknowledgement is accompanied by concerns that feminist development or gender equality and women’s empowerment programming hinders the future livelihoods of boys and men (Rao & Tiessen, 2020). The authors point out that these attitudes illustrate the gaps and misconceptions around feminism and the Canadian FIAP and that greater attention needs to be paid to perceptions of equality within particular settings in order to guide development programming that is *inclusive* of men and boys and of diverse male and female livelihoods. In addition to the omission of a concept of feminism which is defined and accepted by potential and future partners, the lack of clear guidelines on implementation and the limited consultative process after the launch of the FIAP in 2017 have also drawn criticism (Rao & Tiessen, 2020).

In line with one of the three Rs guiding its feminist development policy – better representation of women, girls, and other marginalised groups – the BMZ recognises that “all groups that have so far been insufficiently represented are to be involved in policy decision-making processes and enabled to exert influence at all levels” (BMZ, 2022a). Following this, the ministry has set up a Gender advisory group together with a consultation process with German and international civil society organisations. First, the ministry engaged in a consultation process with representatives of German civil society which consisted of two online meetings; this was followed by a consultation with international civil society organisations. The selection of international civil society representatives was based on the ministry’s contacts and suggestions by German civil society organisations whom the ministry had asked to nominate a number of representatives to be included in the process. Part of the consultation process consisted of a 30 minute online survey and took place on a voluntary basis with participants receiving no remuneration for their expertise or time. By November 2022, no preliminary results or any other information about the composition of the advisory group, its exact role, the process or content of the consultation had yet been made public. As demonstrated by the example of the Canadian FIAP, close attention to how feminism is perceived, interpreted, and lived in different regions is crucial for the implementation of a feminist policy; however the lack of information about the consultations makes it impossible to assess the depth of insights gained into the process, while questions about whose forms of feminism are represented and whether partner organisations

even embrace the language of feminism and feel any sense of ownership over the future policy remain.

### 3.5 Increase funding commitments for gender equality

Recognising that reaching feminist development policy objectives requires adequate resources (OECD, 2021a, p. 24), Minister Schulze announced that Germany would gradually increase funding for gender equality projects over the course of the next years. The minister committed to increasing the share of projects that had gender equality as a significant objective to 85 per cent by 2025, and for projects with gender equality as a principal objective from 4 per cent in 2020 to 8 per cent in 2025 (Amann, Lehman & Schulze, 2022).

Over the past few years, Germany has increased its share of funding for gender equality from 42 per cent of bilateral allocable ODA in 2015 to 44 per cent in 2020 and has become the largest donor to gender equality in absolute terms, spending USD 8.9 billion on development activities targeting gender equality. Yet, while Germany's expenditure on gender equality is high in total numbers, a closer look at the distribution of the funding for activities that target gender activities as a *principal* objective and those that target gender equality as a *significant objective* provides a more nuanced picture: Whereas in 2020 Germany's share of bilateral allocable aid for activities that had gender equality as a significant objective constituted 42 per cent and was above the DAC country average of 38 per cent, Germany spent only 2 per cent of its bilateral ODA on projects and programmes that targeted gender equality as a principal goal, which is way below the 2020 DAC average of 7 per cent (Donor Tracker, n.d.).

The announcement to further increase its funding for gender equality in the next years demonstrates that Germany is serious about its commitment to fund gender equality. This, however, should only be considered another step towards a further increase in the future, as spending on projects with gender equality as a principal purpose has to especially increase further if Germany wants to be taken seriously as an advocate of feminist development policy. Here, it should follow the example of Sweden and Canada as well as the demands by feminist civil society organisations and commit to spending 20 per cent of bilateral allocable ODA funding on projects with gender as a principal objective (Plan International, 2021; Bandera Rwampwanyiri, 2022; W7 [Women 7], 2022) and ensuring that 100 per cent of bilateral allocable ODA is spent on projects targeting gender as a significant objective, as laid out in this year's Women7 Implementation plan (W7, 2022).

The demand to increase the financial commitment to gender equality as a principal goal from the promised 8 per cent to 20 per cent in the near future may seem radical and unrealistic given that Germany currently spends 4 per cent on projects with a primary focus on gender equality – but Canada has demonstrated that it can be done. When establishing its FIAP in 2017, Canada committed 95 per cent of its foreign assistance to gender equality as a principal or significant goal (as tracked by OECD-DAC data). This commitment was a significant increase from Canada's previous spending of just 2.4 per cent (2015-2016) and 6.5 per cent (2016-2017) on gender as a principal and 68 per cent and 75 per cent on gender as a significant objective for the same years. According to the latest OECD data from 2018-2019, Canada now spends 24 per cent of its bilateral assistance on gender as a principal and 68 per cent of its bilateral assistance on gender as a significant objective (OECD, 2021b; Thompson et al., 2021, p. 5). Other top donors of gender as principal objectives in relative terms are Spain (24 per cent), Sweden (18 per cent), Iceland (17 per cent), the Netherlands (16 per cent), and Ireland (14 per cent) (Donor Tracker, n.d.). However, the majority of governments provide less than 5 per cent of their bilateral allocable ODA to gender equality as a main principle while allocations to such programmes constituted only 4.6 per cent of bilateral allocable ODA in 2020 (UN Women, 2022a).

Another aspect to include in the strategy is the provision of mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the strategy's goals, objectives, or activities. In this regard, Canada, France and Mexico are good examples to follow. Canada has developed key performance indicators for each of the FIAP's six areas and is required to publish the progress made on each indicator annually (Thompson et al., 2021, p. 6). Mexico too lays out specific, measurable, and time-bound benchmarks that are to be achieved under each of its five feminist foreign policy objectives for the period 2020-2024 (Thompson et al., 2021, p. 17). The French International Strategy on Gender Equality (2018-2022) is accompanied by an accountability framework against which to track progress (MEAE, 2018, p. 36 ff.). This framework provides specific objectives and metrics, along with calling for a public evaluation of progress against the strategy once every two years. France's High Council for Gender Equality, which is an independent body of gender experts, has the mandate to advise the French government on its implementation of (feminist) foreign and domestic policymaking (Thompson et al., 2021, p. 12f.).

### **3.6 Increase funding for feminist organisations**

Increasing funding *alone*, however, does not suffice to achieve lasting and transformative change and Germany needs to also allocate an increased share of its funding to feminist organisations in partner countries. Local feminist organisations and movements play a crucial role in working towards gender equality by, for example, supporting the fight against domestic violence against women (Weldon & Htun, 2013). Yet Germany's support to these organisations is marginal. Between 2014 and 2022, Germany committed only 0.4 per cent of its overall gender-focused aid to women's equality organisations and institutions (Papagiotti, Thompson & Ahmed, 2022).

To ensure that its feminist development policy is inclusive and transformative, Germany should prioritise core and flexible funding to feminist and women's rights organisations (WROs) and organisations that work on tackling structural inequalities in various different sectors and create funding models that are accessible to grassroots organisations (W7, 2022, p. 12; Staszewka, Dolker & Miller, 2019). Here, it can learn from the experience of those DAC-member states which have introduced funds to specifically target gender equality and local women's organisations, such as Canada's Equality Fund or the Netherland's Funding Leadership Opportunities for Women (FLOW I & II).

Canada's commitment to direct more funding to WROs and feminist movements has been applauded by feminist civil society organisations. In 2019, Canada launched the independent feminist Equality Fund – a consortium of Canadian and international organisations with strong connections to women's organisations and movements, through which the Government of Canada channelled CAD 300m of its ODA in June of 2019 (Global Affairs Canada, 2019; Equality Fund, 2021). The organisations pooled their expertise and experience and created a global platform that connected a community of philanthropists with feminist leaders, providing predictable and flexible funding as well as technical assistance to women's organisations and movements in partner countries (Global Affairs Canada, 2019). In addition, Canada committed to provide CAD 150 million to local women's organisations – a pledge that later turned into the Women's Voice and Leadership Program (WVL), which runs from 2018 to 2023 and supports 33 projects in 30 countries and regions. A recent evaluation of the programme found that the WVL managed to target diverse women's rights organisations which facilitated access to specific marginalised groups. By refraining from determining predefined themes for funding and by offering a combination of different funds, the WVL allowed WROs to "continue with their existing programming, expand the scope of their work and develop new initiatives that were responsive to the needs of their communities" (Global Affairs Canada, 2022, p. 25). Nevertheless, challenges emerged with regard to the distribution of resources: Corporate processes and systems were not sufficiently prepared to adequately adapt to the increased

flexibility and risk of supporting local WROs. As a result, more than 50 per cent of the funds were channelled to Canadian NGOs, and selection processes fell short in offering inclusivity and transparency. These obstacles notwithstanding, the initiatives helped Canada to increase the share of its aid directed at women's equality organisations and institutions, reaching 4 per cent between 2014 and 2022 (Papagiotti et al., 2022).

The Netherlands set up its first Funding Leadership Opportunities for Women (FLOW I) fund in 2012. The FLOW I (2012-2015) and FLOW II (2016-2022) programmes were part of the Netherlands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs' targeted financial support programmes for civil society organisations working on women's rights and gender equality in low- and middle-income countries (IOD PARC, 2022, p. 8). FLOW II provided a total of EUR 93 million to support Dutch or international non-governmental not-for-profit organisations that aimed at "achiev[ing] lasting reductions in social inequality [...] by working with relevant organisations and institutions with the aim of promoting equal rights and opportunities for women and girls in developing countries" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, 2017, p. 17). Eligible organisations had to focus on programmes in at least one of the following three categories: 1) women's economic participation and self-reliance; 2) combating violence against women; and 3) women's participation in politics and public administration (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, 2017, p. 18f.). A recent evaluation found that the programmes supported through the fund succeeded in advancing policy and legal change as well as structural transformations in institutions particularly due to the focus on advocacy (IOD PARC, 2022, p. vii). The evaluation also underlined the importance of ensuring the programmes' sustainability and smaller local organisations' existence once the funding period had ended and recommended developing alternative funding models that were more accessible to organisations in partner countries (IOD PARC, 2022, p. x).

These findings offer important lessons for Germany's feminist development policy by indicating how the BMZ can ensure that its funds also support smaller local organisations. Supporting existing feminist movements in partner countries will help to gradually transform the current funding landscape in which donors and activists are often disconnected, with the latter depending on the former, towards a funding landscape that supports local movements' own priorities (Arutyunova, 2018).

### **3.7 Ensure context-sensitive programming with a strong focus on gender equality**

Up to 2025, the BMZ will prioritise four thematic areas:

- tackling structural causes for hunger, poverty and inequality;
- a just transition to deal with the global challenges presented by climate change;
- preventing future pandemics and strengthening health systems; and
- a feminist development policy to remove structural inequalities and discrimination (Schulze, June 2022).

Having said that, while listing a feminist development policy as one of four priorities, the BMZ nevertheless has to ensure that a feminist perspective is adopted across all thematic areas, and gender-related objectives should be set for *all* of the BMZ's sectoral priorities.

The 2021 OECD report on DAC donors' support of gender equality and women's empowerment shows that Germany's commitment to gender equality is stronger in some sectors than in others (OECD, 2021b). Between 2018 and 2019, more than 90 per cent of Germany's aid spent on population and reproductive health and on other social infrastructure focused on gender

equality. In contrast, only about 60 per cent of funding for health, less than 40 per cent for education, approximately 20 per cent for water and sanitation, and less than 20 per cent of resources allocated to economic infrastructure had a gender-equality focus. These figures are striking considering that education, access to water and sanitation, and women's economic empowerment constituted explicit objectives of the development ministry's Gender Action Plan II. If the BMZ wants to pursue a transformative feminist development policy, it must ensure a stronger feminist perspective in *all* sectors. Acknowledging that projects dedicated to sexual and reproductive health and rights have so far lacked sufficient resources (Papagiotti et al., 2022, p. 5), the ministry's recently published strategy on strengthening sexual and reproductive health and rights signals Germany's commitment to reduce maternal and infant mortality and to foster the conditions for self-determined family-planning (BMZ, 2022b, p. 10). It is, however, essential to complement this strategy by initiatives that specifically target sectors that have so far been neglected (Plan International, 2021, p. 36). This includes, for example, the energy sector which at 15 per cent receives the lowest share of the bilateral ODA for gender equality across all DAC countries (OECD, 2021c) but has enormous potential for women's empowerment in the context of a green and just transition (Papagiotti et al., 2022, p. 5).

While Germany's gender-related development spending has so far only prioritised a few areas, other DAC donors with a feminist foreign or development policy have adopted a gender perspective across all sectors of their bilateral assistance. Between 2018 and 2019, 100 per cent of Canada's aid spent on economic infrastructure, education, water and sanitation, production, population, and reproductive health had a focus on gender equality. In other sectors, at least 80 per cent of its assistance adopted a gender equality focus. In the same period, 60 per cent of Sweden's aid for economic infrastructure and health targeted gender equality, while in all other sectors a minimum of 80 per cent was dedicated to gender equality (OECD, 2021b). This demonstrates that feminist pioneers not only spend a substantially larger share of their aid on gender equality, but that they adopt a gender perspective in a much wider range of sectors. Widening the range of sectors supported by gender equality programmes is crucial in light of gender inequality being prevalent in all spheres of society.

Setting gender-related goals in all ODA-funded sectors is essential to account for the variations in the level of gender equality in partner countries. Whereas, for example, Rwanda and Namibia are frontrunners in closing their national gender gap, figuring in the top ten of the most gender-equal countries in the world, other partner countries like Congo or Mali have the widest gender gaps in the world (World Economic Forum, 2021). In addition, partner countries vary with regard to the types of obstacles they face on the road to gender equality. Latin American countries, for example, have almost closed their gender gap in the realm of educational attainment, while lagging behind in the area of economic participation and opportunity. Sub-Saharan African countries, on the other hand, perform better in the latter but have a greater gap in the education sector. The diverse challenges faced by different countries and regions will require different approaches and thematic priorities. A feminist development strategy should therefore provide a gender perspective and a high share of gender-focused aid in all sectors to ensure that the BMZ and partner organisations can adequately respond to each partner country's specific situation. In doing so, the ministry can take an example from Sweden's approach which included a fourth "R" in its feminist foreign policy: complementing rights, resources and representation, the fourth R stands for "reality" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Sweden), 2019, p. 11). The commitment to reality involves analysing the context in which the Swedish Foreign Office is working, engaging with local actors, and supporting research that contributes to Sweden's strategic, efficient feminist foreign policy (Thompson et al., 2021, p. 2f.). Integrating an equally strong focus on reality in Germany's feminist development strategy and promoting a research-based and context-sensitive approach will enhance the policy's effectiveness.

Finally, the BMZ's feminist development strategy should not only consider the scope and context-specific priorities of its programming, but also the design of its projects. Addressing gender equality through a transformative approach requires two simultaneous activities:

focusing on the immediate needs of marginalised groups and the long-term systemic changes required to alter the power relations and structures that perpetuate inequalities. This entails a stronger focus on programmes that aim at dismantling established power hierarchies and social norms and which are directed towards all people suffering distinct forms of discrimination and marginalisation within established structures. As addressing gender equality begins with recognising harmful norms and expectations, it is crucial that programmes are directed at all genders, rather than focusing solely on women and girls. Programmes geared at engaging men and boys are vital to demonstrate that a feminist development policy does not constitute a threat to but is an opportunity for all groups in a society (Rao & Tiessen, 2020, p. 365). The GAP 2016-2020 acknowledged the relevance of engaging with male actors and set out to support male networks that work for gender equality and aimed at promoting initiatives that engage in critical reflection about harmful gender roles (BMZ, 2016, p. 32). Together with actors on the ground, the BMZ should closely monitor and evaluate such initiatives to integrate the lessons learned into its feminist development strategy and future transformative programmes.

A useful starting point to identify the status of ongoing projects is the OECD's Gender Equality Continuum (OECD, 2021c). Based on this categorisation, organisations can plan the next steps that turn a gender-sensitive or -responsive project into a transformative project. To do so, prevalent gender norms and potential opinion leaders (religious or community leaders) have to be identified; initiatives to raise awareness need to be planned; and safe spaces for engagement with the respective groups need to be created (ODI [Overseas Development Institute], 2015; UNFPA [United Nations Population Fund], 2014, p. 10). Here, it is important that project coordinators are prepared for encountering unforeseen challenges, as the communities in partner countries may well "resist gender equity mandates [...] imposed on them by Northern funders" (Barrig, 2006; True, 2011, p. 78). However, as gender-norms are context-specific, there is no uniform set of specific steps required to implement a gender-transformative approach. Moreover, in practice, the proposed classifications by the Gender Equality Continuum are often less clear-cut. Hence, as a project can entail both gender-responsive and transformative elements, its classification depends on the particular focus and underlying objective. With this in mind, the new strategy of the BMZ should underline the importance of context-analysis and -sensitivity and provide tools that facilitate the assessment of existing projects and the development of indicators to monitor and evaluate future projects.

### **3.8 Practice what you preach – address the domestic dimension of the feminist development policy**

While a feminist development policy is meant to guide the BMZ and other actors' development cooperation with partners abroad, to be effective and credible it should also address the *internal* dimension. The purpose of this is to demonstrate the consistency between domestic and foreign policies.

Unfortunately, Germany is far from being a frontrunner on gender equality. The gender wage gap of 18 per cent (2020) has changed little over the past twenty years (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2021); its gender pension gap of about 35 per cent is above the EU average of 29 per cent and substantially higher than that of member states like Hungary (10 per cent), Denmark (7-8 per cent) or Estonia (2 per cent) (Eurostat, 2021); and lifetime earnings of women and especially mothers are well below male earnings (Bönke et al., 2020). The Council of Europe found significant deficits in Germany's implementation of the Istanbul Convention and the measures taken to protect and support women victims of violence (GREVIO [Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence], 2022). In 2020, the share of women in management positions in the central government amounted to 32 per cent for senior management positions and 51 per cent for middle management positions (OECD, 2021d, p. 2). While Germany's development ministry is currently headed by a woman and the

ministry's senior positions are divided roughly equally between men and women, Germany falls just below the OECD average when it comes to the distribution of seats in the lower house of parliament. In 2021, about 30 per cent of seats were held by women (having fallen by 5.5 percentage points since 2017), compared to over 45 per cent female representation in the Mexican or Swedish parliaments (OECD, 2021d).

Seeking to advance gender equality abroad while failing to do so at home could risk credibility in feminist policy. Germany's feminist development policy should therefore entail an internal dimension and lay out how the BMZ aims to reduce gender and other inequalities within the ministry itself. Ideally, this should also apply to its implementing agencies, primarily the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW). While the GIZ adopted a comprehensive and internally binding Gender Strategy in 2019 (GIZ, 2019), entailing both an internal and an external dimension, the KfW does not indicate how it fosters gender competence within its organisation. In addressing the policy's internal dimension, Germany can learn from a number of countries which have adopted a feminist foreign policy and stress the importance of strengthening gender equality in their development cooperation and the respective ministries by enhancing gender parity among their staff, by providing staff training on gender equality issues, or by designating a specific ambassador for their feminist development policy.

France, for instance, follows a dual approach, promoting gender equality within its government as well as in its external action. The first objective of the French International Strategy on Gender Equality (2018-2022) was to increase the number of women in management and ambassador positions within its teams and those of its agencies while the second objective was to raise awareness and train employees on gender issues (MEAE, 2018). Similarly, the priorities of Luxembourg's feminist foreign policy include the promotion of gender equality within the structures of its Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (MFEA), its national action plan, recruitment policies, work-life balance, language use, training, and legal frameworks (Government of Luxembourg, 2021). Mexico, too, aims to establish a ministry of foreign affairs with parity that is free from structural differences and violence, and which bolsters the visibility of women in and their contributions to the ministry (Centro de Investigación Internacional, 2020, p. 16; Thompson et al., 2021, p. 12). Although domestic plans and policies are not outlined in detail in the Spanish feminist foreign policy, Spain's minister for Foreign Affairs, Arancha González Laya, has emphasised that "the feminist diplomacy mirrors the necessary coherence between national policy and the external action of the State" (quoted in Thompson et al., 2021, p. 17).

Creating an institutional environment that best supports gender equality requires a consideration of specific gender equality policies and practices, an organisational framework, human resource policies, and capacity development (OECD, 2022, p. 136 ff.). The OECD "Handbook on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls" stresses that gender equality efforts have to be led by management and supported by dedicated gender equality advisors as well as non-specialist staff with the knowledge and commitment to address gender inequality in their areas of responsibility in headquarters and country offices.

Sweden, for example, has demonstrated that an early integration of the ministry's different departments and missions abroad was crucial to the implementation of a feminist approach within all policy and operational areas (Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Sweden), 2019, p. 34). Sweden has also created the position of a specific ambassador and coordinator of feminist foreign policy who ensures that Sweden's FFP is coordinated and implemented throughout the entire system. The ambassador is supported by a coordination team which comprises colleagues working in various different sectors and who work together on, inter alia, policy development and operational planning and ensure the policy's continuous development (Bernes, 2021). The evaluation of France's feminist diplomacy also stresses the importance of a designated ambassador or coordinator. The French High Council on Gender Equality (HCE) found that equality advisors working at the French Foreign Office often lacked the time or



resources to sufficiently address issues relating to gender equality, only working on women's rights issues "when there [was] time left once other topics [were] covered" (HCE [French High Council on Gender Equality], 2020, p. 40, own translation). A position of a designated ambassador or coordinator is therefore deemed essential for an adequate implementation of the policy (HCE, 2020, p. 10).

The BMZ, in line with many other DAC members who have dedicated staff for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, has recently established a "Gender equality" division (Division 412) which is responsible for drafting the feminist development policy strategy and the third Gender Action Plan. The establishment of a special division is a first step in the right direction. However, the BMZ also needs to ensure that the division has sufficient resources in order to not only prepare the strategy and the new Gender Action Plan but to also promote strong leadership on gender equality among all staff in the ministry.

Another important factor in achieving institutional objectives related to gender equality is staff diversity. Representation and inclusivity among staff have an important impact on programmes and the design of policies, can build public credibility, and can enhance relationships with partner countries (OECD, 2022). For this reason, the BMZ should work on specific policies and strategies which enhance its ability to recruit a diverse pool of staff. In order to address internal intersecting inequalities, the ministry should develop a human resources strategy that takes diversity in many forms into account and that considers gender, educational and professional background, regional experience, ethnicity, and disability. This might require specific policies to target the increased recruitment of women/LGBTQIA+ people and provide sufficient retention policies considering work/life balance, equal pay, harassment/sexual harassment and pro-active mitigation measures (OECD, 2022).

Capacity development for gender equality plays an important part in maintaining the efficacy and adaptability of institutions. The OECD report stresses that institutional learning and organisational buy-in are crucial to achieving transformative change for gender equality. Providing effective and frequent training on issues related to gender equality, establishing staff incentive structures to address gender inequalities, and setting up accountability measures for gender equality within the BMZ are some of the suggested steps to encourage staff to address gender equality (OECD, 2022, p. 148). To underline the importance of such training and ensure that it actually takes place, the ministry should consider the type of training options available and indicate when they are to be implemented by. While a first round might focus on awareness-raising, the French High Council on Gender Equality recommends that these training programmes are subsequently deepened and prolonged to ensure that they become an integral part of the staff training catalogue (HCE, 2020). Moreover, it is important that awareness-raising and capacity-development is offered to staff working in different areas within the BMZ as well as to implementing partners (OECD, 2022, p. 140).

### **3.9 Establish policy coherence between feminist development and feminist foreign policy**

Germany is in the unique position of having simultaneously announced the adoption of a feminist foreign policy and a feminist development policy. This provides the BMZ, responsible for the feminist development policy, and Germany's Federal Foreign Office (AA), responsible for the feminist foreign policy, with a unique opportunity to align their strategies to ensure a coherent feminist approach. This will require regular consultation and exchanges to guarantee adherence to the same principles. Unfortunately, however, there are so far no signs that this alignment is taking place, with the BMZ and the AA underlining different principles in their approaches. In her speech at the Conference on Shaping Feminist Foreign Policy, the foreign minister Annalena Baerbock elaborated on the AA's "3R+D" approach, which stand for her ministry's focus on

rights, resources, representation, and diversity. So far, however, “diversity” has not been taken up by the BMZ. The AA, on the other hand, has refrained from explicitly mentioning a transformative approach or the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ people. In addition to the foreign office, the ministry of development also needs to promote policy coherence with other ministries such as the Federal Ministry of Finance and the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection as failing to align the feminist development policy with other ministries’ policies can substantially undermine the impact of this policy. In light of the interlinked nature of development and foreign policy, it is likely that – in the absence of concerted action – one policy will impair the effects of the other and lead to incoherence (Ashoff, 2005, p. 31f.).

Both Canada and Sweden set out to follow an integrated approach that covered development, foreign, and trade policy. This commitment notwithstanding, both countries have agreed to new arms exports to countries which knowingly violate human rights (Cecco, 2020; Thomson, 2020a). As Cadesky points out,

pursuing a ‘feminist’ foreign policy on the one hand while providing arms to a state with a disastrous track record on women’s rights domestically and in international conflicts undermines the potential to reach these goals and create lasting positive change. (Cadesky, 2020, p. 311)

In its recommendations for a Canadian FFP, the Feminist Foreign Policy Working Group therefore mentioned “coherence” as the first of eight core principles (Feminist Foreign Policy Working Group, 2021b, p. 4).

Against the backdrop of the development of a National Security Strategy, it is essential that Germany ensures policy coherence between its different ministries, its feminist approach, and its security strategy. Critics, however, have already pointed out how the “special fund” to equip Germany’s Bundeswehr contradicts feminist pledges for disarmament and their focus on human rather than military security (Von Gall, 2022). Discussions on Germany’s negotiations on a nuclear deal with Iran after the death of the Kurdish 22-year old Masha Amini further illustrate how feminist principles are put aside when security, economic or energy interests prevail (M’Barek, 2022). Striving for inclusivity and structural change on the one hand, and engaging with oppressive systems on the other hand, jeopardises both the feminist policy’s effectiveness and Germany’s credibility.

Hudson, Bowen and Nielsen (2021) have demonstrated that there is a close link between the systematic subordination of women and political instability; they have also demonstrated that the patrilineal syndrome (rules and structures that lead to close bonds between male members of society while subordinating women) is “a better predictor of violent instability than income, urbanisation or a World Bank measure of good governance” (“Societies that treat women badly”, 2021). This highlights that a low degree of gender inequality has far-reaching implications not only for development policy but also for foreign policy, trade, and defence. In a globalised world that experiences multiple interlinked crises, overarching global goals such as the Sustainable Development Goals can no longer be achieved by a single domain acting on its own (Ashoff, 2005). As gender equality constitutes one such overriding goal, it is of vital importance that the BMZ and other ministries act in a concerted and coordinated manner to not only prevent impairing their respective policy effects but to actively support each other in their joint commitment to fostering gender equality.

### **3.10 Address potential challenges in implementing the policy**

In light of the polarising nature of the term “feminist”, the global backlash against women’s rights and the concept of gender and gender equality, the implementation of the feminist development

policy is likely to face challenges. The BMZ is well advised to address the nature of these challenges and indicate how it will address them.

At the first public conference on Germany's Feminist Development Policy on 27 September 2022, the minister indicated that following a transformative approach will mean "speaking with male decision-makers and with proponents of values who are able to influence social norms" and raising "awareness of the fact that society as a whole benefits if political decisions are not just taken by men and for men, and if the structural causes of discrimination are finally tackled" (Schulze, September 2022). Confronting existing power structures which marginalise groups on grounds of their ethnicity, sexual orientation, or physical capacities will be more challenging in some countries than others. In many communities, the feminist development policy "is prone to be interpreted as a foreign narrative intended to spread a foreign agenda particularly with respect to diverse genders and sexual orientations" (Bandera Rwampwanyi, 2022) and these communities might not want to adopt gender-equity mandates imposed on them (Barrig, 2006; True, 2011, p. 78). Although some constitutional progress on LGBTQIA+ rights has been made in certain countries such as Botswana, South Africa, Angola or Mozambique, same-sex partnerships are legal in only 22 of the 54 African countries. In many other countries, same-sex sexual acts are punished by imprisonment, while in Iran, Mauritania, some states in Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Brunei they are punishable by death. There is also evidence, albeit less legal certainty, that the death penalty may be imposed in five further countries, that is, in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia (including Somaliland), Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (Mendos, et al., 2020, p. 31).

The BMZ should therefore engage with experts from the Global South and learn from their expertise in designing strategies to approach partners that oppose the feminist approach. The case of Canada's WVL shows that cooperating with local women's rights organisations has proved to be of vital importance in identifying the appropriate terminology in distinct contexts, "especially in countries where explicit references to feminism are frowned upon or rejected" (Global Affairs Canada, 2022, p. 30). An open reflection on Germany's colonial past; the status of gender equality; and the role of marginalised communities in Germany would help to avoid – or at least counterbalance – the criticism of hypocrisy. However, the ministry should also consider how to approach partner countries that are not willing to follow its feminist approach and implement projects addressing gender (in)equality. Should it continue to cooperate with countries that systematically oppress or ignore certain societal groups? Should it make cooperation conditional on a country's willingness to improve gender equality? While it might not be possible to answer these questions at this stage, it is important to consider red lines and potential strategies to deal with partner countries which are opposed to the implementation of gender-focused projects.

## 4 Conclusions

Germany's announcement that it will pursue a feminist development policy has generated new discussions in German society about feminism more broadly and the meaning of a feminist development policy for development cooperation in particular. The slow progress towards achieving SDG 5 and the disproportionate burden of climate change and Covid-19 on women illustrate that this discussion is timely and necessary in order to move the struggle towards gender equality beyond mere "more-of-the-same" initiatives.

Some scholars argue that explicit adoption of a feminist approach by certain states is not solely based on feminist norms and their attempt to foster gender equality, but is a tactical move that allows them to present themselves in a specific normative light as progressive, "good" states and to differentiate themselves from other countries that have not adopted a feminist outlook thus enhancing their international normative profile (Thomson, 2020a, p. 434; Zhukova et al.,

2022, p. 215). In light of this criticism, Germany's commitment to a feminist foreign and development policy is the right step – but only a first one. It now needs to be followed by a strong strategy that provides a sound foundation for the implementation of a transformative approach. Looking at other countries' efforts to support gender equality via a feminist foreign and development policy, this paper has provided a list of recommendations for the development ministry to concretise its approach and objective in further developing Germany's first feminist development policy strategy.

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