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Addressing Colonial Continuities in German Development Cooperation

**A Policy Paper with 10 Recommendations
Across the Project Cycle**

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Addressing Colonial Continuities in German Development Cooperation

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Abbreviations and acronyms

| | |
|-------------|---|
| § | Section |
| AA | Federal Foreign Office |
| AIZ | Academy for International Cooperation |
| APRI | Africa Policy Research Institute |
| BMZ | Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development |
| Ch | Chapter |
| DAC | Development Assistance Committee |
| G7 | Group of Seven |
| GIZ | German Agency for International Cooperation |
| HR | Human resources |
| KfW | Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |

How to Read this Policy Paper

This paper summarises the key findings and recommendations of the 2026 APRI report *Identifying and Addressing Colonial Continuities in German Development Cooperation*. It is self-contained, but every claim is anchored in the empirical findings and analysis of the report it accompanies. Bracketed pointers lead there to the evidence, the interviews and focus groups, the historical record and the four-level action detail. For example, Ch. 1.6 is the methodology, Ch. 2.2 how colonial continuities are defined, and Chapter 5 the full recommendations. Quotations are verbatim from the report's interviews and focus groups, cited by interview number; interviewees are anonymised by functional role only, with no names or country-specific positions.

Key Messages

Colonial continuities in Germany's development cooperation persist as structural arrangements, not as intent. Addressing them can turn the world's largest and one of the most differentiated bilateral development interfaces into a site of genuine co-creation for international cooperation projects – in the interest of both the cooperation partner and Germany itself. As the 2026 reform plan by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) points out, "German development policy holds itself to the aim of recognising and dismantling colonial continuities" (BMZ, 2026). This policy paper presents research findings and recommendations to support this aim.

This paper distills the 2026 report *Identifying and Addressing Colonial Continuities in German Development Cooperation* by the Africa Policy Research Institute (APRI); section pointers (§) and chapter indications (Ch) refer to the full report.

- **Colonial continuities are structural and persistent.** They are neither a matter of intent, which today's practitioners may disavow and refuse, nor marginal. They exist across the structural, institutional and interpersonal levels of development cooperation, in arrangements that look procedurally neutral: who authors project concepts, whose expertise counts, whose signature a decision needs, which language the documents are presented in (§2.2).
- **They surface explicitly along the project life cycle,** from government negotiations that set the terms, to scoping, design and implementation, through to evaluation (Ch5).
- **Technical fixes alone only reinscribe the arrangement.** An 'aid-effectiveness' reading patches gaps. Instead, reading a project's life cycle through the *coloniality of development* – the specific ways in which the coloniality of power, knowledge and being (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, 2020) are experienced in development coordination – turns the 10 recommendations made in the report into levers of change, rather than a checklist (§2.4; Ch5).
- **The report's recommendations are practitioner-grounded and multi-level.** They were informed by 22 in-depth interviews, three focus groups, three workshops with some 60 participants including senior staff from the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), and a GIZ Postcolonial Academy webinar with over 800 participants. Each recommendation carries action at every level of the development hierarchy, top-down and bottom-up (§1.6).
- **The moment is strategically opportune.** Germany is now the largest bilateral donor, and the BMZ can be described as the last development ministry standing. In a multipolar moment in which partners ask for co-design, addressing colonial continuities is the path to genuine co-creation, in both parties' interest. This is an invitation to redesign the German development interface for the co-creation and co-implementation of projects with partners across the Global South. The report's recommendations offer key first steps based on practitioner experience across development institutions, not a final roadmap (Ch1).

Colonial Continuities in a Changed Geopolitical Moment

In 2026, Germany finds itself in a new position as the world's largest bilateral donor. Across the West, budgets tighten and development cooperation faces contestation from across the political spectrum, particularly in Germany's increasingly polarised political landscape. After cuts and institutional changes in every other Group of Seven (G7) country, the BMZ can be seen as the last development ministry standing. Meanwhile, the architecture of international cooperation is being openly renegotiated, and leaders of the Global South are setting terms. Ghana's Accra Reset initiative, for example, asks that partner countries "don't just receive programs but co-design them with our partners in the global north" (Mahama, 2026). Germany has one of the most differentiated cooperation interfaces in the world. Whether it can offer a counterpart for new modes of cooperation – without slipping back into the problematic pattern of a donor–recipient hierarchy once the conversation turns operational – depends on whether it addresses the colonial continuities in its current arrangements (Ch1).

According to World Bank data for 2023, African countries paid more in debt service than they received in new loans, and African governments spent more on debt service than on education and healthcare combined (§1.2). Development cooperation operates within these structural asymmetries, and partners measure its credibility against them.

The global political and economic architecture is in flux, but it remains undergirded by colonial continuities. Historic colonial expansion built networks of extraction across continents, reorienting indigenous economies away from local needs and towards the demands of the colonial powers, while marginalising precolonial political, gender and socio-ecological systems. In doing so, it established structures of inequality that persist today (Beckert, 2025; Mabanza, 2025). The crises that development cooperation now seeks to address cannot be decoupled from the colonial systems that produced them. Also, asked what colonial continuities are, practitioners answered in two registers. Some turned the question around: what is *not* touched by colonial continuities? Others asked what exactly the term covers, and were quick to stress that no colonial intent structures today's cooperation (§2). The report takes seriously both the pervasiveness of colonial continuities and the notion that open colonial intent has been delegitimised. It poses that colonial continuities are not the persistence of colonial intent, which was formally renounced after 1945 and is emphatically rejected by the majority of today's practitioners. What persists, across structural, institutional and interpersonal levels, are asymmetric arrangements of authority, expertise and access to resources that echo colonial hierarchies, which have repeatedly been reorganised rather than structurally broken (§2.2).

These reorganisations reach into the present – with colonial domination creating opportunity structures for entrenching and asserting hierarchies, even as their shape shifts over time (§2.1).

German actors were central to colonial extraction from its earliest phases. The United States' Marshall Plan, which rebuilt war-torn Germany, embedded colonial extraction into post-war aid, securing American access to the resources of European colonies. The Eurafrica project then routed African resources into European integration. Konrad Adenauer, the first chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1949–1963, argued that European integration served Germany's interest in securing access to African resources. On that basis, he persuaded a reluctant cabinet to help fund France's colonial holdings from German coffers. Structural adjustment entrenched asymmetric arrangements under the language of fiscal discipline.

Today's instruments of financialisation and auditing reorganise it once more, with the vocabulary of 'ownership' and 'localisation' signalling change that the underlying distribution of authority still lags/lacks. The register in which the asymmetry is expressed changes but the asymmetry itself persists. Recognising the current arrangements as continuities, not incidental frictions, is the precondition to adjusting them.

The through-line is not simply one of domination. Berlin, where Africa was partitioned in 1884, became an operational hub of anticolonial organising in the interwar years. African diasporans organised and wrote petitions – the Dibobe petition of 1919, among others – to put demands for equal treatment to the German parliament, and the Berlin-based League against Imperialism helped prepare the alliances that led to the Bandung conference in 1955 (§2.1.4). Critique of colonial arrangements is neither recent nor marginal; Global South agency runs through this history, and a cooperation that addresses its colonial continuities can draw on both.

From Technical Gaps to Colonial Continuities

The 2026 BMZ reform plan *Zukunft Zusammen Global Gestalten* (Shaping the Future Together Globally) calls for a more strategic, partnership-oriented and self-reflective approach to international cooperation, and states that “any traces of coloniality in German development policy are to be identified and eliminated” as a prerequisite for credible, effective and equitable cooperation (BMZ, 2026, p. 8).

Coloniality is the matrix of power that outlived colonial administration and went on to organise the modern world (Quijano, 2000; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, 2020). This matrix is built upon the coloniality of power, knowledge and being. The coloniality of power points to hierarchies of authority that do not track formal rank. The coloniality of knowledge is about the epistemic hierarchy that treats one body of expertise as universal and another as merely local. The coloniality of being signals hierarchies of body and race, experienced in development cooperation as the routine positioning of partner-country staff as 'not yet ready'. These are three faces of one arrangement. Together, they leave a specific imprint on how development cooperation, including German cooperation, is organised and experienced; the outcome is a *coloniality of development* (§2.4) that needs to be addressed.

The difficulties that practitioners experience along the project life cycle can be viewed through an established aid effectiveness lens. This framework reduces challenges to mere gaps in information, capacity or incentives, to be closed by technical fixes. That reading often relies on the continuities it does not mention. 'Capacity building' presupposes a deficit in the partner, with no account of the colonial deprivation that produced the gap; it rests on a continuity and conceals it at once. Contestable political choices become technical exercises. The arrangement that produces the difficulties stays intact while appearing reformed (Ch5).

The pattern extends to the key terms of reform. 'Ownership' and 'partnership' can operate as indirect governance: responsibility for delivery handed to the partner while authorship stays with the donor (Lie, 2015; Hasselskog & Schierenbeck, 2017). The asymmetry runs through the documents themselves: templates, technical categories and reporting formats authored on the German side, in German working languages, make contestable choices look like settled procedure (§2.1.11). Several of the recommendations address this documentary layer directly.

Reading the life cycle of a development cooperation project through colonial continuities widens the perspective on what it takes to address dysfunctions in cooperation. A recommendation's surface may overlap with what a technical reading would propose: translate the documents, consult earlier, standardise the terms. The link to these coloniality lets the same recommendation work across the structural, institutional and interpersonal layers at once, instead of fixing an output while the arrangement that produced it stands.

Thin scoping, read for effectiveness, is a coordination problem; read as a continuity, it is the withholding of the strategic picture. A language barrier is a practical inconvenience, or a gate for who may know and decide. An evaluation that only praises is a weakness of method, or a structure that forgoes learning, by giving reassurance to a status quo with unaddressed colonialities. Reading for continuities is less a verdict than a method. It turns the 10 recommendations into levers that require sustained work across the levels of the development hierarchy, rather than a reductive checklist to be ticked off, and it points beyond partner orientation towards co-creation.

Evidence From Inside the Institutions

The report is written from the inside out. It draws on 22 in-depth interviews, three focus groups, three workshops with approximately 60 participants including high-level GIZ staff, and a GIZ Postcolonial Academy webinar with over 800 participants (§1.6). Respondents work in or alongside German development institutions – the BMZ, the GIZ, the Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW), Brot für die Welt – and political foundations, across Benin, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mauritania, Rwanda, South Africa, Togo, Germany itself and other partner contexts. The analysis follows the patterns that recur across very different positions and seniority levels, and reports disagreement rather than averaging it away.

A national manager recounts that he could “only sign up to a certain amount”; to go higher, he “needed a second signature of a German” (interview 02): authority that does not follow formal rank, illustrating the coloniality of power.

An evaluator describes how the questions are “very often designed by us, and not at all by the people whom it concerns” (“*die Fragestellungen sind ... von uns sehr oft ... gestaltet und gar nicht von den Leuten, die es ... betrifft*”, interview 19): one side's analysis treated as the universal standard, showcasing the coloniality of knowledge.

And a senior African staff member recounts that in some partner settings his colleagues “are seen as the bosses and not me ... [I am taken for] the bag-carrier” (“*die Kolleginnen werden als die Chefs gesehen und ich nicht ... der ist der Kofferträger*”, interview 15): read by body and race rather than by role, reflecting the coloniality of being.

Comparative Perspectives: Other Donors Addressing Continuities

Measured against other donors, Germany's cooperation is neither uniquely virtuous nor uniquely culpable (Ch3). The same continuities recur in national variants throughout the Western donor field, where the language of partnership has moved faster than the structures it describes. The aid cuts of 2024–26 work as a test: reforms that survive tend to be structural; those abandoned first tend to be rhetorical.

France shows the cost of postponed structural reform in its loss of legitimacy across the Sahel region. The Nordic self-image of donor innocence obscures continuity. The Netherlands shows that aligning aid efficiently with national economic interest is not the same as decolonising the relationship. Three practices are worth adopting:

- Core funding with a genuinely reduced compliance burden;
- Financial equity by design, through budgeted overheads for local partners; and
- Independent oversight of stated commitments (§3.10).

Diaspora Cooperation

Diaspora expertise is the clearest case of a resource that the system already holds but does not structurally use (Ch4). Remittances to low- and middle-income countries reached some US\$685 billion in 2024, more than foreign direct investment and official development assistance combined (World Bank, 2024). Practitioners from the African and other Global Southern diasporas bring an acquired familiarity with both sides of the cooperation relationship. In Germany, their expertise is confined to cultural translation and implementation while 'Western expertise' authors the strategy. Funding is gated by German legal forms and the German language.

Peer states have moved further. France's Presidential Council for Africa places diasporic expertise where African policy is set; Italy's Law 125/2014 on reforming the country's international development cooperation writes the role into statute. Germany's own programmes, WIDU and MEG, show that the capability is in its repertoire. Diaspora cooperation has to be deepened to structural standing, not based on simply origin but also diasporic competence (§4.6; recommendation 5).

The report's recommendations follow the sequence of a project's life, from the negotiations that set its terms to its evaluation, because that is where practitioners locate the continuities concretely. None of the recommendations is geared at a single level alone: each sets out what the political, higher management, senior staff and working levels can do, so that change does not wait on any one tier (Ch5). The lead level is marked in each block; where a level carries no substantive role, the block lists only the levels that involve action.





The report speaks deliberately of addressing colonial continuities, of doing decolonising work rather than projecting a checklist for a fully decolonised development cooperation. Decolonisation, in critical scholarship, carries material commitments that may not easily be transferable into institutional reform that stops short of larger, structural transformation (§2.3). At the same time, the recommendations borrow from historical decolonisation movements in terms of the agents they address. The movements worked because unions, students, intellectuals, professionals and diasporic networks acted at multiple levels at once. These recommendations are built the same way – they address practitioners working in Germany's development cooperation across all levels of the organisational hierarchy.

Figure 1
The project life cycle and the 10 recommendations

Recommendations across the project life cycle

With action items across all levels of the hierarchy.

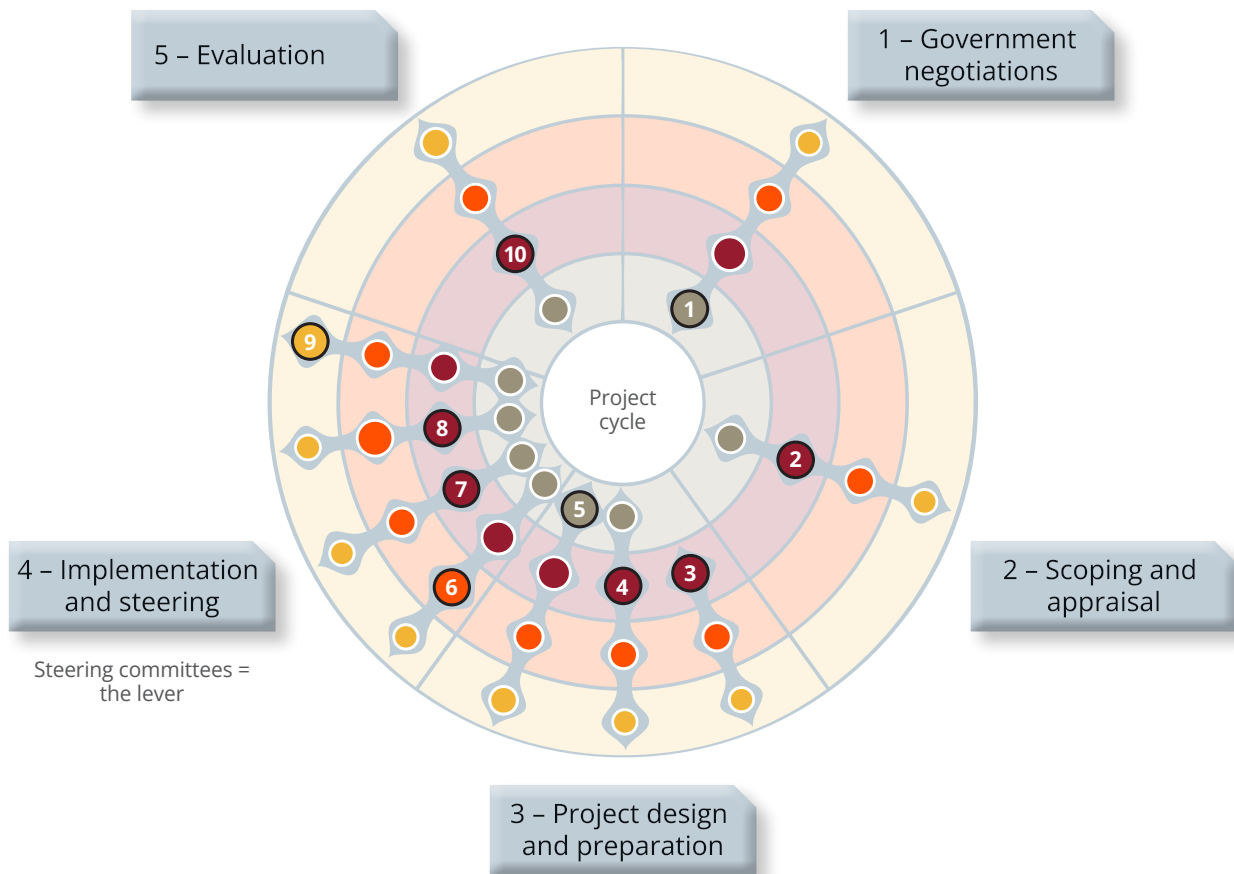
Rings - levels of action

-  Political decision-making – BMZ, AA
Within implementing organisations (GIZ, KfW, foundations and NGOs)
-  Higher management
-  Institutional senior staff
-  Operational/working level staff

Reading a recommendation






- One spindle = one recommendation across levels
- Node size = how substantive the action is there
- Dark-outlined node + number = where it is led



Steering committees = the lever

The recommendations

- | | | | |
|---|---------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
|  1 | Reshape government negotiations |  6 | Designated time and evaluable role |
|  2 | Strategic co-conception |  7 | Progression and protected reporting |
|  3 | Consistent staff terms |  8 | Bilingual communication |
|  4 | Preparation on both sides |  9 | Peer support and representation |
|  5 | Diaspora integration |  10 | Open and learning-oriented evaluation |

Numbers follow the published Chapter 5's order (the project life cycle).

Source: author's analysis

Phase 1:

Government Negotiations

Recommendation 1.

From Prescription to Co-Creation: Reshaping Government Negotiations

Specific Ask

German development policy is currently being reframed around explicit national interests. Treat that reframing as an opening rather than a retreat: an honest, interest-based starting point can become a genuinely two-way exchange, provided that partners have the same room to state and pursue their own interests.

Reshape the biennial government negotiations (the *Regierungsverhandlungen*) and the consultations between them (the *Regierungskonsultationen*) accordingly. These discussions should be less pre-scripted by German positions, more attuned to the partner's strategic priorities, better prepared on both sides, and with open reflection on the colonial continuities built in from the start rather than added at the end.

In parallel, strengthen the practical coordination between the ministries and the consular sections that the negotiations depend on. Begin renegotiating – where feasible – the framework agreements and the bilateral technical cooperation treaties (the *TZ-Abkommen*), some still dating to the 1960s, into instruments that reflect 2026 rather than 1967.

By moving away from lengthy negotiation protocols and towards compact table formats, the BMZ reform process is already making important steps in this direction. This recommendation builds on the intent to pursue bi-directional exchange, and adds further levers across the levels of hierarchy.

Grounded in: practitioners problematise the government negotiations that open each cooperation cycle. A senior country lead describes a recent round in which an African partner delegation was told, at short notice, to obtain visas if they still wished to attend; some did not attend as a result – while the same partners had shortly before been received elsewhere in Europe with “the golden carpet rolled out” (interview 11). Practitioners describe negotiation scripts they must “learn how to script ... differently,” since “there are at least forty years of tradition in there” (interview 12). A senior African development professional describes the form as “top-down ... dictated from Berlin,” with “in fact no negotiation,” connecting the inertia to framework agreements from the 1960s–70s that have never been updated (interview 15).

Who Can Do What across the Four Levels



Political decision-making – the lead.

The BMZ and the Federal Foreign Office (AA) as institutions.

- Reshape the negotiations to be two-way by design;
- Resolve the coordination breakdown that the interviews record. In a recent round, the talks were led by the BMZ while the partner delegation's visas were handled separately by the AA, and a partner minister broke off the process (interview 11);
- Develop the BMZ's negotiating posture in step with the AA's own emphasis on explicit interests so that Germany's development cooperation posture comes to the negotiating table as a clear, well-prepared counterpart. The critical lever within the BMZ is the operational level (*Referentenebene*), where talking points are assembled and shaped, and building on the interministerial coordination (*Ressortabstimmung*) that already exists;
- Resource the partner-side's preparation, including by adjusting the time frames and formats of pre-negotiation communication and documents;
- Mandate the country-by-country renegotiation of the framework and *TZ-Abkommen* layer (a political act involving the BMZ, the AA and partner governments); and
- Commission translation of the framework agreements into partners' working languages.



Higher management – a key supporting role.

The boards and headquarters of the implementing organisations (GIZ, KfW, political foundations) and their country directors.

- Ensure that the substantive programme input provided to the BMZ before each negotiation is comprehensive, dialogue-oriented and genuinely reflective of partner priorities; and
- Build on the existing practice of drafting implementation agreements with partner organisations in the partner country's official language as a model for the broader document layer pertaining to programmes and projects.



Institutional senior – proactive support.

Senior in-country professionals below director level.

- Shape the substance of consultations through well-prepared input and informal channels;
- Use language that does not talk down to the partner. “From on high [*von oben herab*],” as a participant described;
- Actively look for moments of shared problem-naming, where a difficulty is framed as common to both sides. Another participant explained, “We have a big problem with that in Germany too ... it is a shared concern” (interview 12); and
- Put partner-side capacity and partner constraints in writing so that they inform the preparation.



Operations/working level – documentary.

Working-level staff, described by function.

- Document the costs of consultation failures, such as partner ministers dropping out, untranslated agreements, the gap between the script and the room; and
- Route these failures upwards, assembling the evidence base that the redesign needs.

Phase 2:

Scoping and Appraisal

Recommendation 2.

From Briefing to Co-conception: Making Strategy Legible and Shared

Specific Ask

Make the chain of German strategic reasoning legible to national staff – how an African regional or country strategy connects to a programme, a programme to a project, and daily work to the strategy's wider political purpose. Consult national staff on strategy, not only on implementation. The strategic reasoning is more accessible to staff on German contracts than to national staff, who sit several steps further down from where it is written and often meet a second barrier in the documents themselves, which are usually in German and therefore legible only to some. Co-conception is the goal to move towards, where scoping today remains largely top-down.

Locate the change where strategy is actually formed: at scoping, at the co-conception of a project, and at the annual partner steering committees and operational planning. This does not happen at the donor reporting cycle, which is an administrative step downstream and no substitute for shared design.

Build the consultative practice that a peer European agency already runs as routine, in which national professionals are actively brought into the analysis, rather than left to consult documents if and when they are shared.

Grounded in: practitioners contrast a peer European agency, where national professionals get the full strategic picture in advance and can shape a programme as it is designed: “they fetch all of us on board” (interview 08). By contrast, German work is “dictated from Berlin” and national staff may enter it with no insight into strategy and “with no context” given to them (interviews 08, 15). When interfacing with national ministries, national staff are asked questions they cannot answer because the strategic reasoning has not reached them (interview 02), and strategic documents reach them only when it suits management rather than as a matter of course (interview 17).

Who Can Do What across the Four Levels



Political decision-making – a supporting role.

The BMZ and the AA.

- Endorse norms that make strategic documents accessible to partner-country teams;
- Set the expectation, at BMZ level, that strategy formation includes consultation with the partner country; and
- Keep this expectation in step with the AA's own emphasis on interests so that the message reaching partners is consistent.



Higher management – the lead.

The headquarters and boards of the implementing organisations, including country directors.

- Reform how strategy documents are shared so that national staff can see the reasoning;
- Build national staff consultation into concept development and into the annual steering committees and operational planning;
- Adopt the peer agency's inclusive practice as a required step in the workflow; and
- Ask country directors to share the programme-level strategic logic with their teams.



Institutional senior – proactive support.

Senior in-country professionals below director level.

- Within their own projects, bring national colleagues into the strategy-shaping conversations and pass on the reasoning they do have, so that colleagues can engage partner ministries with it rather than being caught without it; and
- Where the reasoning sits further upstream, flag the gap so that it can be closed.



Operations/working level – documentary.

Working-level staff, described by function.

- Request access to strategic documents and to the moments where strategy is discussed; and
- Document the pattern whereby such documents reach national staff only when it happens to suit management, rather than as a matter of course (interview 17), to build the case upwards.

Phase 3:

Design and Appraisal

Recommendation 3.

From Selective Reference to One Consistent Standard

Specific Ask

Different contractual and legal regimes will, and should, continue to coexist in a German implementing organisation. Internationally recruited staff on the German pay tariff are bound to that tariff, while locally contracted staff fall under national labour law. The defensible issue is not that the two regimes coexist but that the *choice of which one to invoke* tends to track the direction of advantage: local labour law cited where it lowers an entitlement, German standards where they would raise one. Because local law sets a floor and not a ceiling, the organisation always has the discretion to do more than the legal minimum.

End the selective citation; align the standards that *can* be aligned such as annual leave (nothing in local labour law forbids the same number of leave days that German contracts carry), maternity leave and parental protection; and make the market benchmarking that justifies staff terms transparent. The aim is not to claim that internationally and locally contracted posts are equivalent, but to apply the same standards wherever discretion allows them to be the same.

Alongside the standards themselves, give locally contracted staff worldwide a representative body with standing at headquarters. While this cannot replicate the works council that staff on German contracts have, which exists under German law, it can approximate its function as a channel for national staff voice without carrying the same statutory standing.

Grounded in: some respondents describe entitlements pitched below what would be possible, by invoking the precedent that justifies the lower option – “[a] selective reference ... when it suits them” (interview 03); and, on pay, a benchmark built from organisations selected to keep national pay low, which national-staff representatives put as “they go for those organisations that favour them” (interview 09).

Who Can Do What across the Four Levels



Political decision-making – implementing this recommendation rests with the organisations.

Staff terms and human resources (HR) are each the implementing organisation's own agenda to set, and that is where this recommendation is addressed. The political level shapes much else in the cooperation relationship; staff terms are distinctly an organisation's call.



Higher management – the lead.

The headquarters and boards of the implementing organisations.

- Create transparency to dispel the perception that you are citing whichever legal framework lowers the cost;
- Align the points that discretion allows (annual leave, maternity leave and parental protection);
- Reform the payment benchmarking protocol so that the comparator organisations are chosen transparently, the methodology is published and the result is applied to staff terms rather than selectively quoted; and
- Establish a representative body for locally contracted staff worldwide, with standing at headquarters.



Institutional senior – proactive support.

Senior in-country professionals below director level.

- Document specific instances of selective application and the composition of benchmark samples; and
- Ask, in writing, for a reasoned justification whenever one framework is cited in one direction but not the other.



Operations/working level – documentary. Working-level staff, described by function.

Document the pattern through the existing staff-representation forums and route it upwards.

Recommendation 4.

From One-sided Briefing to Preparation on Both Sides

Specific Ask

German staff posted abroad receive country preparation (*Landeskunde*), a pre-departure briefing on the country and its culture, and the in-house Academy for International Cooperation (AIZ) already offers modules that reach into colonial and post-colonial themes. Two things are missing. First, make colonial history and continuities a systematic, critical part of mandatory pre-departure preparation – not a standalone optional module that a line manager can ration away by withholding the work time. Second, build a genuine parallel induction for incoming national staff into German organisational culture, communication styles and the history of Germany's development cooperation.

The asymmetry to correct is not the 'both sides lack training' approach. Outgoing German staff get *Landeskunde*, while incoming national staff get nothing comparable to help them prepare for the German context they must work inside – a context that otherwise operates as the unspoken, self-evident norm against which everything else must be explained. The case is not only fairness: a programme's relational and historical groundwork holds only if both sides arrive equipped, which makes this a matter of professional competence for effective cooperation. Make these competences count in recruitment criteria and job descriptions, not only in preparation after the fact. Anchor both objectives at the project's start.

Grounded in: incoming national staff receive a technical-only induction, with no equivalent of the country preparation German staff get before posting; the awareness should run both ways, since national staff too need to understand "the logic of the company" on colonial and post-colonial issues, and a historical grounding helps one know "what kind of institutions you are entering into" (interviews 02, 08). Some AIZ modules on colonial and post-colonial themes are well-taught but "not mandatory whatsoever," unlike the recurring compulsory compliance and data-security training (interview 02).

Who Can Do What across the Four Levels



Political decision-making – a limited but distinct role.

- Make trainings on colonial continuities mandatory for ministerial staff, especially but not only those in partner-facing units; and
- Curriculum and induction design sit with the implementing organisations and their academies, which is where this recommendation is addressed.



Higher management – the lead.

The headquarters and boards of the implementing organisations and the AIZ.

- Formalise the competency: make a module on colonial continuities compulsory and recurring – at the same standard already applied to compliance and data-security training;
- Deliver it inside the existing pre-departure block, so that a line manager's rationing of work time cannot circumvent it;
- Build the parallel induction for national staff;
- Specify who designs and evaluates the module; and
- Raise trainer quality where it can be strengthened regarding colonial continuities.



Institutional senior – proactive support.

Senior in-country professionals below director level.

- Run pilot pre-deployment seminars and parallel local staff preparation at office level; and
- Document the gap – a country briefing for outgoing staff, nothing comparable for incoming national staff (interview 17) – and route the case upwards.



Operations/working level – documentary.

Working-level staff, described by function.

National and German staff document their own preparation gaps and submit them for an institutional response.

Recommendation 5.

From Under-used Presence to Structural Integration: Diasporic Expertise

Specific Ask

Recognise practitioners from the diaspora and their distinctive professional expertise – people who often bring a *consciousness* of shared histories and responsibilities, a *connection* to communities of origin, and a *context-awareness* that moves between German and Global South realities. Be clear that these capacities are acquired through exposure and practice, not given by country of origin (the recognition must not slide into essentialism).

The structural obstacle is an issue of definition. The *TZ-FZ-Leitlinie*, the 2021 guidelines for technical and financial cooperation, which governs who may be deployed, defines a “posted” expert (*entsandte Fachkraft*) in terms that route dual nationals and diaspora practitioners out of posted roles in their countries of origin. This is based on an implicit presumption of divided loyalty, while a German who has lived in a partner country for years is unproblematically “posted”.

Revise that definition. Create a diaspora consultative body with a mandate from the political level (on the model of the French FORIM) and bring diaspora consultation into strategic design. Ease the structural preconditions that gate funding for diaspora-led organisations (e.g. the registered association (e.V.)). Lastly, mainstream the lessons of existing German diaspora programmes (such as MEG and WIDU) for broader cooperation with the diaspora before they disperse at project closure.

Grounded in: the deployment definition routes diaspora and dual-national practitioners out of posted roles in their country of origin; colleagues report being asked whether they would give up a partner-country citizenship to be hired as national rather than posted staff (interview 15). The in-between position is an asset, not a liability – one practitioner describes being able to “see certain things that both other sides might not see, especially with racial hierarchy” (interview 17), a fluency acquired through exposure, not origin.

Who Can Do What across the Four Levels



Political decision-making – the lead.

The BMZ and senior leadership as institutions.

- Revise the *TZ-FZ-Leitlinie* deployment definition so that dual nationals and diaspora practitioners are not routed out of posted roles in their countries of origin;
- Create a diaspora consultative body, mandated at the political level (the FORIM model), and bring diaspora consultation into strategic foreign policy design; and
- Consolidate the lessons of existing diaspora programmes (MEG, WIDU) beyond their project lifespans.



Higher management – a substantive role.

The headquarters and boards of the implementing organisations, including country directors.

- Reform funding access by easing the registered association (*e.V.*) and Westernised-structure requirements;
- Reframe partnership so that diaspora-led organisations are strategic partners rather than implementation contractors; and
- Recognise the diaspora expertise present throughout the institution, and invite these colleagues to co-design ways they might choose to contribute to it.



Institutional senior – proactive support.

Senior in-country professionals below director level.

- Position diaspora practitioners as strategic partners; and
- Bring diaspora-led organisations into country-level programme design as commissioning partners.



Operations/working level – more than documentary.

Working-level staff.

Diaspora staff already inside the institution document the asymmetric expertise pattern, contribute to the self-organised staff groups, and record the informal mechanisms that the recommendation would formalise.

Phase 4: Implementation and Steering

Recommendation 6.

From Off-the-desk Volunteer Effort to a Recognised, Evaluable Part of the Job

Specific Ask

Much of the work of addressing colonial continuities is done as discretionary, individual, unrecognised effort – voluntarily, on the side in addition to people’s actual jobs. Turn it into recognised, evaluable practice. Make it a yearly goal in the implementing organisation’s annual planning, broken down to country level as a professional requirement (*fachliche Anforderung*) rather than a matter of personal attitude (*Haltung*). Worded appropriately, the requirement would recognise a set of competencies required to do this work.

Reform the managers feedback instrument – the upward appraisal through which staff rate their managers – so that a manager who pushes for change and requests staff engagement with issues around colonial continuities (e.g. in drafting or assessing projects) is not marked down for it. At the working level, recognise the voluntary inclusion work that staff already do, and reduce its burden through the companion language and peer-support recommendations, rather than simply adding more designated time on top.

Grounded in: the work of addressing colonial continuities is done voluntarily, on top of a full job (interview 04), and at the working level shows up as a steady tax of unassigned extra effort (interview 17). The upward leadership-feedback instrument can mark down managers who push back on colonial-sounding drafts (interview 12). Practitioners therefore propose setting the expectation “not only as an attitude, but as a professional matter,” mandated from above (interview 12).

Who Can Do What across the Four Levels



Political decision-making – a supporting role.

- Recognise and resource the voluntary staff groups working on colonial continuities, including those within the BMZ and the Federal Foreign Office: and
- Evaluation criteria and job design otherwise remain each organisation's own HR matters, where the rest of this recommendation is addressed.



Higher management – a substantive design role.

The headquarters and boards of the implementing organisations.

- Issue the mandate to make these competencies a part of the professional requirements;
- Make addressing colonial continuities a yearly goal in the annual planning cycle;
- Revise the relevant job descriptions and evaluation criteria to include it;
- Reform the managers feedback instrument; and
- Specify who designs and evaluates the work.



Institutional senior – the lead.

Senior in-country professionals below director level.

This is where the designated, evaluable practice lives. Senior staff:

- Carve out and model the engagement work;
- Push back on outdated template language;
- Keep the self-organised staff groups going; and
- Document how the upwards feedback instrument penalises managers who push for change, so that headquarters can fix this issue.



Operations/working level – recognition and documentation.

Working-level staff, described by function.

- Have the voluntary inclusion work recognised as legitimate organisational practice; and
- Document the steady tax of extra effort it carries (interview 17).

Recommendation 7.

From a Glass Ceiling to Open Progression, and a Protected Path for Reporting Racism

Specific Ask

Address three linked workplace patterns: (1) senior national staff whose clearance (signing) authority is capped below that of junior European colleagues; (2) the structural deprioritising of national staff retention and progression; and (3) a missing shared definition of racist conduct that can undergird an extension of the existing whistleblower and sexual misconduct reporting structure to cover racist misconduct as well.

Grounded in: some senior national staff hold signing authority capped below that of junior European colleagues (interview 02), and the institution loses national staff who “are good at their work” to a glass ceiling that offers no pathway up (interview 13). A dismissive attitude toward the African context surfaces in overheard remarks such as “too much Afrika” (interview 15) – conduct that currently has neither a shared definition nor a reporting channel. The elected representation forums, meanwhile, remain constrained (interviews 02, 05, 09, 17).

Who Can Do What across the Four Levels



Political decision-making – a supporting role.

- Back and resource the implementing organisations in putting functioning racism reporting and case-handling in place, and ensure the same dedicated reporting channels, and awareness of them, are in place and resourced at the BMZ and the AA and in the missions; and
- Grading, clearance, evaluation and reporting infrastructure otherwise remain each organisation's own internal matters, where the rest of this recommendation is addressed.



Higher management – the lead.

The headquarters and boards of the implementing organisations.

- Redesign clearance and the grading of local staff so that signing authority follows formal rank;
- Revise the progression and evaluation instruments;
- Create a shared, agreed definition of racist conduct (as already exists for sexual misconduct);
- Extend the existing whistleblower and sexual misconduct reporting infrastructure to include racism, with anonymity protection and build the competences required to handle reports of racism; and
- Strengthen national staff representation. Contract security for elected representatives and genuine involvement in the decisions and information that concern them.



Institutional senior – proactive support.

Senior in-country professionals below director level.

- Audit the signing and clearance flows in their own offices and publish what they find;
- Refuse the deficit register ("exaggerates," "not exemplary") in the performance feedback they write;
- Recognise the informal mentoring that already happens; and
- Senior national staff take on the informal mentoring that the companion peer-support recommendation would formalise.



Operations/working level – documentary.

Working-level staff, described by function.

Document the patterns through the existing representation forums.

Recommendation 8.

From a German-language Ceiling to a Shared Working Language

Specific Ask

At certain points in the workflow, the institution's working language becomes German and from that point on, the staff who do not work in German lose access to information they should be able to contribute to. Stop treating translation as a favour done by bilingual staff and make it an institutional workflow step.

Restructure communication and reporting so that national expertise can feed into project design, reporting and headquarters/ministry communication without requiring individual bilingual staff members to act as informal translators.

Specify precisely where German is genuinely required (legally binding texts) and lift it everywhere it is not.

Make partner-relevant language fluency a hiring requirement where the role requires it – not only English/German but French/German and other language combinations. Apply that requirement to consultants and to the report-receiving ministry staff whose own limited English language competence is part of the reason that double-language reporting persists.

Grounded in: the everyday exclusion the language ceiling produces – a German-only document with “important information in it” shared so that “half of the people cannot read it” (interview 17), and framework agreements available only in German (interview 15). Practitioners propose a “directive from above” to fix it (interview 15); and the project-level variance shows it can be fixed – a supportive run of managers has run bilingual reporting in practice (interview 01), even as the translation burden today falls on bilingual staff as voluntary work (interview 17).

Who Can Do What across the Four Levels



Political decision-making – a supporting but real role.

The BMZ and the AA.

- Make language competence that is relevant to the partner context a requirement for report-receiving staff;
- Endorse document language norms that include partners' working languages; and
- Specify the narrow set of texts where German is legally required.



Higher management – the lead.

The headquarters and boards of the implementing organisations.

- Resource translation as an institutional workflow step rather than voluntary effort on top of a staff member's workload; and
- Issue a leadership directive (from the department or executive board) that partner-language fluency is a hiring requirement where operationally necessary – applying to consultants too.



Institutional senior – co-equal, because it can neutralise the default.

Senior in-country managers below director level.

- Institute bilingual reporting and conception within their projects now – this is the tier that can neutralise the default day to day; and
- Document the personal translation burden carried by bilingual staff and route the case upwards.



Operations/working level – documentation.

Working-level staff, described by function. The level where the documents are used, not designed.

Encourage a system where:

- Bilingual staff document the translation work they currently carry out; and
- Staff who do not work in German document their exclusion from information.

Recommendation 9.

Peer Support and National Staff Representation

Specific Ask

Much of the work that keeps national and minoritised staff in post and surfaces problems from below is carried out in informal peer-support spaces, or in an elected representation forum constrained by contract precarity. Give these existing platforms standing and protection. Recognise the staff-run peer-support spaces as legitimate organisational practice with designated work time – not as mere informal social activity.

Strengthen the elected national staff representation forum (the RCNP) by adding a senior-to-new *mentoring layer*, so that longer-serving national staff can pass on their knowledge of how to read the institution.

Protect those who represent others and who raise concerns – contract security for elected representatives and for participants on fixed-term contracts – so that pushing for change is not a career risk borne only by those who can afford it. Preserve the self-selected character of the groups rather than bureaucratising the form away.

Grounded in: the general pattern that such initiatives endure only by securing leadership backing, given the external political pressure they can attract (interview 18). A practitioner ties that backing to the agenda: dealing with colonial history “is what we as an institution need clear backing for” (interview 04). The spaces themselves are staff-made and valued – a peer-support space lets staff “share experiences ... so you don’t feel alone” (interview 17), and the staff diversity initiatives were founded bottom-up, by staff members themselves (interviews 15, 18).

Who Can Do What across the Four Levels



Political decision-making – endorsement and cover.

The BMZ.

- Endorse peer-support spaces and staff networks as legitimate organisational practice with real benefits for retention and effectiveness; and
- Give them political cover so that, where staff-run diversity initiatives draw external political pressure, they meet an institutional commitment rather than an exposed individual.



Higher management – standing, resourcing, protection.

The headquarters and boards of the implementing.

- Designate time and standing for the spaces;
- Resource these spaces;
- Integrate the mentoring layer with the existing representation forum; and
- Protect participants and elected representatives on fixed-term contracts, so that representing colleagues or raising a concern does not put a contract renewal at risk.



Institutional senior – instituting and mentoring.

Senior in-country professionals below director level.

- Institute the practice within their offices;
- Recognise existing informal local staff peer groupings as legitimate;
- Take on the senior-to-new mentoring role; and
- Highlight where contract precarity is silencing representatives so that headquarters can address it.



Operations/working level – the lead.

Working-level national staff.

The spaces originate and live here: local staff organise the groups themselves, and the elected representation forum is theirs.

Phase 5: Evaluation

Recommendation 10.

From Donor-led Justification to Shared, Learning-oriented Evaluation

Specific Ask

Evaluation is the final stage of the project cycle, and the colonial continuities identified here mirror the previous project life cycle phases. It is led by evaluators from the donor country, set up mainly to justify spending to the donor's taxpayers, and judged by Eurocentric standard criteria. The aim is to make evaluation a shared and learning-oriented practice.

Four concrete changes are required to achieve this:

- Build mixed and tandem evaluation teams with national evaluators, moving over time towards partner-led evaluation supported by training;
- Set the terms of reference together with partners rather than for the donor alone;
- Broaden the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) criteria so they also weigh who is meant to benefit and the power relations at work, and engage the live reform of those criteria; and
- Orient evaluation towards learning and reciprocal accountability. This includes making the complaint and feedback mechanisms that already exist on paper genuinely known and used, in ongoing operation rather than only at the end-of-mission visit.

Grounded in: practitioners describe evaluation as donor-led, set up to "show the successes in order to secure funding again" so that critical points "do not appear" (interview 19) – an account corroborated in interview 08, where reports are written to fit the funding incentive, made to "look good" even where that "may not be entirely the case on the ground." Partner "capacity" is reframed from "they don't know evaluation" to "our bureaucracy is arcane and has to be learned" (interview 19). Church-based organisations evaluate differently: they co-develop evaluation questions with partners and work in national-evaluator tandems, in contrast to other institutional practices described as "top-down, German" (interview 19).

Who Can Do What across the Four Levels



Political decision-making – a supporting role.

The BMZ and the wider OECD DAC avenue.

- Advance the decolonial reform of the international evaluation criteria;
- Resist the way that the added 'coherence' criterion reinforces established structures; and
- Endorse norms under which partners help define what is evaluated.



Higher management – the lead.

The headquarters and boards of the implementing organisations.

- Decide *who* evaluates: mandate mixed and tandem teams with national co-evaluators and a pathway to partner-led evaluation backed by training;
- Require partner co-definition of the evaluation questions;
- Adopt decolonial criteria alongside the DAC set;
- Reframe the purpose towards learning and reciprocal accountability; and
- Mainstream the complaint and feedback mechanisms through which partners and intended beneficiaries raise concerns and, in turn, evaluate the cooperation, so that these channels are used to inform the evaluation.



Institutional senior – proactive support.

Senior in-country professionals below director level.

Closer to partners and with more authority to mediate, they can license critical questions and run mixed and tandem evaluation teams at project level.



Operations/working level – more than documentary.

Working-level staff, described by function.

- Apply the *counterpart principle*, where national staff and junior colleagues speak with their counterparts and with the target group, so that people can speak freely across steep local hierarchies; and
- Surface what gets omitted when reports are written to foreground successes.

First Steps, Not a Final Roadmap

This policy paper, and the accompanying APRI report, are an invitation, addressed primarily to practitioners at every level of the German development interface. They are the agents best placed to see where the continuities operate, and the ones who the recommendations invite to action. These are not an attack on German development cooperation, nor a verdict on the people who staff it. The report holds to one distinction throughout. It distinguishes between problematic structures and the practitioners who work within them: frequently good-willed, certainly not ill-intended, caught in arrangements they did not design. Enacting all 10 recommendations would not mean that colonial continuities are fully addressed. The report offers no exhaustive checklist, but key first steps, identified by practitioners within the institutions.

The report and its recommendations can build on prior initiatives addressing colonial continuities. Respondents point to several starting points: select AIZ trainings that address the issue (Ch. 5.7); recent movement of national staff into senior roles (Ch. 5.7); a 2021 internal stock-taking of racism initiated by the staff who experience it, and a staff-driven post-colonial transformation initiative (Ch. 1.7); and the diaspora programmes WIDU and MEG (Ch. 4). Beyond GIZ, church-based organisations co-develop evaluation questions with partners and assess in national-evaluator tandems, and in some cases make anti-racism and decoloniality training compulsory from the start of a contract (Ch. 5.6; Ch. 5.10).

These are first steps within development cooperation, which, however reformed, remains a different instrument from reparative justice, with different obligations (§2.1.12; §3.11). There is reason on both sides to take these steps: partners are asking for co-creation, and in a multipolar moment, the donors able to offer it are the ones that stay relevant. Germany's differentiated cooperation structures are well suited to this, once the continuities that constrain them are addressed – and acting on it serves Germany's own interest as much as its partners' (Ch1).

Is this the moment, amid contestation and cuts, to engage in this work? International cooperation matters; making its interface more capable, diversified and self-reflective is worth the effort.

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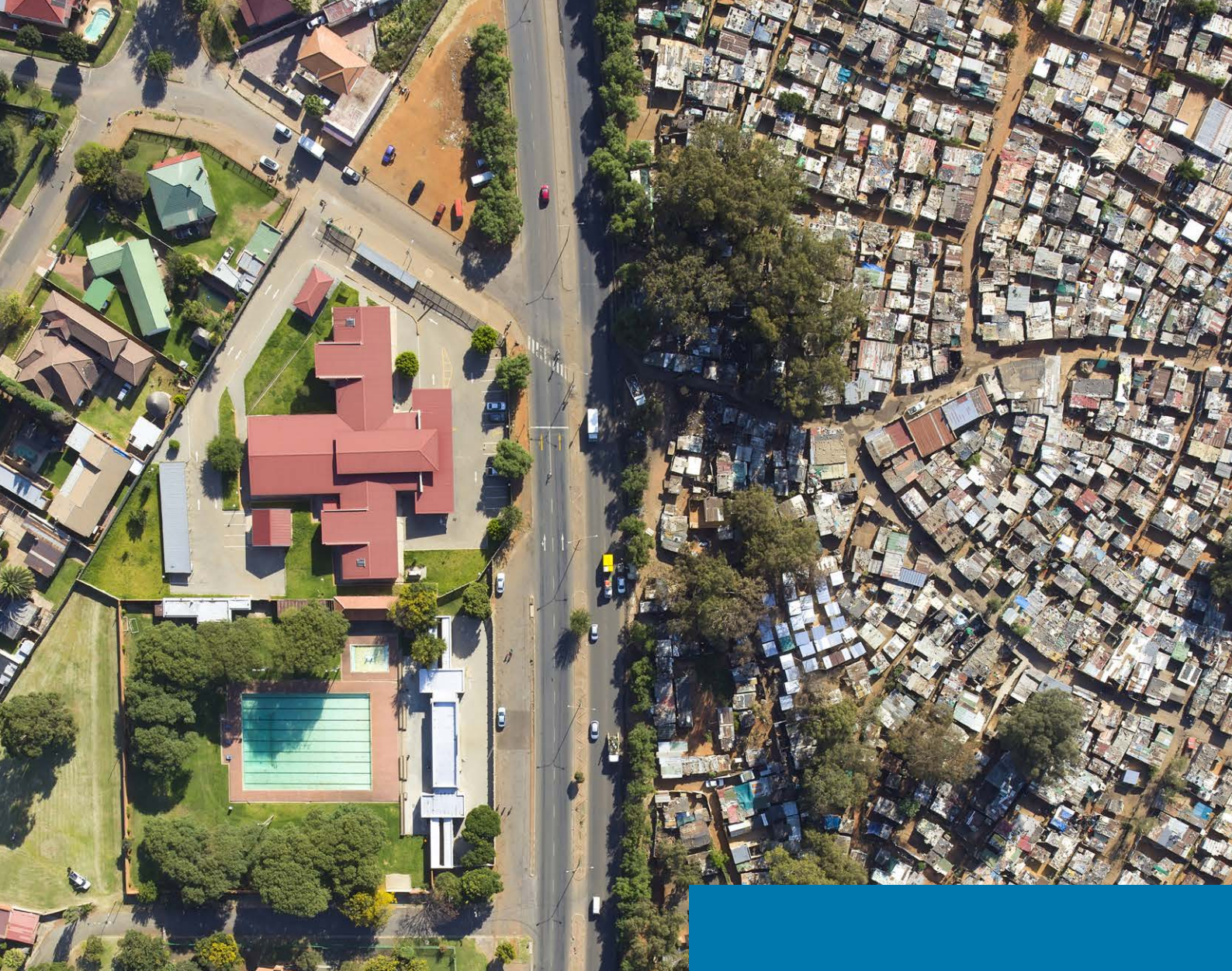
Interviews and Focus Groups Cited in this Policy Paper

The study drew on 22 in-depth interviews, three focus groups, three group workshops (approximately 60 participants, including high-level GIZ staff) and one GIZ Postcolonial Academy webinar (over 800 participants), conducted in English and German in 2025–2026 (see Methodology, Ch. 1.5). The table below identifies, in anonymised form, the interviews and focus groups cited by number in the text. In keeping with the report’s anonymisation convention, interviewees are described by general function only: no names, no country-specific positions, and no other identifying detail are given. Several interviewees are members of the African diaspora working within or alongside German development cooperation; consistent with the anonymisation convention, this is noted at the level of the sample rather than tagged to individual entries. The remaining interviews, the workshops and the webinar inform the analysis without direct attribution.

| Citation | Format | Position | Anonymised description |
|--------------|-------------|----------------------------------|---|
| Interview 01 | Individual | National staff | Technical adviser, German implementing organisation |
| Interview 02 | Focus group | National and international staff | Staff from several programmes, German implementing organisation |
| Interview 03 | Individual | External/ former staff | Academic and development consultant; former implementing-organisation staff |
| Interview 04 | Individual | International staff | Technical adviser on governance, German implementing organisation |
| Interview 05 | Individual | National staff | Component/programme manager, German implementing organisation |
| Interview 08 | Individual | Cross-agency practitioner | Development-cooperation practitioner with experience across German and other bilateral agencies |
| Interview 09 | Focus group | National staff | Project staff, German implementing organisation |
| Interview 11 | Individual | Senior management | Senior country-level manager, German development finance institution |
| Interview 12 | Individual | Senior management | Country director, German implementing organisation |

| Citation | Format | Position | Anonymised description |
|--------------|------------|---|---|
| Interview 13 | Individual | National staff | Adviser on public financial management, German implementing organisation |
| Interview 14 | Individual | Senior management | Country director, German implementing organisation |
| Interview 15 | Individual | Senior national/ regional professional | Programme/cluster coordinator, German implementing organisation |
| Interview 17 | Individual | Implementing- organisation staff | Adviser, German implementing organisation |
| Interview 18 | Individual | Former government/ ministry staff | Former staff member, German federal foreign service |
| Interview 19 | Individual | External expert | Evaluator and researcher on the decolonisation of evaluation |
| Interview 20 | Individual | Civil society | Decolonisation and anti-racism adviser, German civil-society development organisation |
| Interview 21 | Individual | National staff | Technical adviser, German implementing organisation |
| Interview 22 | Individual | Government/ministry staff | Staff member, German federal development ministry |

Interviews are referred to throughout the report by these numbers only (e.g. "interview 15"). Select German-language interviews are cited in English gloss only, to preserve anonymity; other German-language passages are given in the original with an English translation.



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