



**APRI**  
AFRICA POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Report | June 2026

# Identifying and Addressing Colonial Continuities in German Development Cooperation

---



**Report | June 2026**

# **Identifying and Addressing Colonial Continuities in German Development Cooperation**

**By Joshua Kwesi Aikins and Amara Phillips**



## Acknowledgements and Citation

This report was produced by APRI – Africa Policy Research Institute, a Berlin-based, independent, non-partisan African think tank researching key policy issues affecting the African continent. APRI does not take institutional positions on public policy issues. The views expressed in publications are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of APRI, its staff or its board. The boundaries, colours, denominations and other information shown on any map in this work do not imply any judgment on the part of APRI concerning the legal status of any territory or the endorsement or acceptance of such boundaries. We thank Dr Olumide Abimbola (Executive Director, APRI) and Kodzo Osei, current intern for the Economy and Society programme for their invaluable leadership, feedback and administrative support to the project.

This report accompanies the APRI policy paper *Addressing Colonial Continuities in German Development Cooperation. A Policy Paper with 10 Recommendations Across the Project Cycle* (APRI, 2026).

## Rights and Permissions



This work is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International Licence (CC BY-NC 4.0) <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>. This licence allows reusers to distribute, remix, adapt and build upon the material in any medium or format for non-commercial purposes only, and only so long as attribution is given to the creator.

Attribution – Please cite the work as follows:

Africa Policy Research Institute (2026). *Identifying and Addressing Colonial Continuities in German Development Cooperation*. APRI – Africa Policy Research Institute, Berlin, Germany.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.59184/rp026.04>

# Contents

<i>Abbreviations and Acronyms</i>	8
<i>Foreword: An Invitation</i>	10
<b>Chapter 1</b>	
<b>Introduction: Development Cooperation and the Geopolitical Moment</b>	<b>12</b>
1.1 The Unfamiliar End of the Stick	12
1.2 Critique of Colonial Continuities as an Opportunity	13
1.3 At the Same Davos: Voices from the Other End	14
1.4 Value-based Realism: Not a Fact, but a Goal	15
1.5 An Intervention; An Invitation	15
1.6 Methodology: The Voices Behind the Findings	16
1.7 Situating this Research Report: Building on Engagement within the Institutions	17
<b>Chapter 2</b>	
<b>Colonial Continuities</b>	<b>19</b>
2.1 Colonial Continuities in Germany's Development Cooperation: From Past to Present	20
2.1.1 Economic Colonial Impulses	21
2.1.2 Legal Colonial Impulses	22
2.1.3 Political Colonial Impulses	23
2.1.4 Anticolonial Resistance: Recovering Agency and Internal Critique	24
2.1.5 From Colonial to Post-war Development	25
2.1.6 Colonial Continuities of aid to Rebuild Germany: the Marshall Plan's Extractive Logic	26
2.1.7 From the Marshall Plan to Eurafrica: Colonial Continuities and Access to Strategic Raw Materials	27
2.1.8 The Other Germany: Colonial Continuities in GDR Development Policy	29
2.1.9 The Brandt Commission and the Limits of Reform	30
2.1.10 Structural Adjustment Instead of Structural Reform	31
2.1.11 Financialisation, Audit and the Persistence of Asymmetry	31
2.1.12 Recent Shifts in Debates: Enslavement, Colonialism, Reparations and Development Cooperation	33

2.2	Defining and Distilling Colonial Continuities in German Development Cooperation	34
2.3	From Decolonisation to Decolonising Work	35
2.4	From Colonialities of Power, Knowledge and Being to a Coloniality of Development	36

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Addressing Colonial Continuities in Development Cooperation Elsewhere 38**

3.1	Continuities Across the Western Donor Field	38
3.2	Partnership Language Outpacing Structural Change	38
3.3	France: Reforms that Have not Undone the Older Structures	39
3.4	The Nordic Countries: A Self-image of Innocence that Obscures Continuity	40
3.5	The Netherlands: Aligning Aid with National Economic Interest	40
3.6	The 2024–26 Aid Cuts Show which Reforms were Structural	41
3.7	Canada: A Gap between International Commitments and the Domestic Record	41
3.8	Belgium: Acknowledgement without Structural Redress	42
3.9	German Strengths to Build On	42
3.10	Practices that German Cooperation can Adopt from Others	42
3.11	Remaining Risks for German Cooperation	43

### **Chapter 4**

#### **Diasporic Expertise in German Development Cooperation 44**

4.1	Why Engage the Diaspora, and on what Basis	44
4.2	The German Baseline: Four Barriers to Engagement	46
4.2.1	Whose Expertise Authors the Strategy?	46
4.2.2	Unpaid Labour and the Precarity of Engagement	46
4.2.3	Mistrust on Both Sides	46
4.2.4	The Registered Association and the German-language Gate	47
4.3	How Peer States give Diasporic Expertise a Place	47
4.3.1	Belgium: Brokering Trust through Vocational Cooperation	47
4.3.2	France: Political Representation at the Centre	48
4.3.3	The Netherlands: an Engagement Model with Stages	48
4.3.4	Italy: Engagement Written into Law	49
4.3.5	Canada: Reconciliation at Home, Extraction Abroad	50
4.4	Germany's Working Models: WIDU and MEG	50
4.5	From Narrow Recognition to Structural Standing	52

<b>Chapter 5</b>	
<b>Addressing Colonial Continuities: Recommendations across the Project Life Cycle</b>	<b>53</b>
Beyond a Deficit Reading: Aid Effectiveness and Colonial Continuities	55
Phase 1: Government Negotiations and Framework Agreements	57
Recommendation 1. From Prescription to Co-creation: Reshaping Government Negotiations	57
Phase 2: Scoping and Appraisal	64
Recommendation 2. From Briefing to Co-conception: Making Strategy Legible and Shared	64
Phase 3: Design and Preparation	69
Recommendation 3. From Selective Reference to One Consistent Standard	69
Recommendation 4. From One-sided Briefing to Preparation on Both Sides	74
Recommendation 5. From Under-used Presence to Structural Integration: Diaspora Expertise	78
Phase 4: Implementation and Steering	82
Recommendation 6. From Off-the-desk Volunteer Effort to a Recognised, Evaluable Part of the Job	82
Recommendation 7. From a Glass Ceiling to Open Progression, and a Protected Path for Reporting Racism	87
Recommendation 8. From a German-language Ceiling to a Shared Working Language	92
Recommendation 9. Peer Support and National Staff Representation	97
Phase 5: Evaluation	103
Recommendation 10. From Donor-led Justification to Shared, Learning-Oriented Evaluation	103
<i>Afterword</i>	108
<i>Interviews</i>	109
<i>Bibliography</i>	111
<i>Endnotes</i>	125

# Abbreviations and Acronyms

<b>AA</b>	Federal Foreign Office
<b>AIZ</b>	Academy for International Cooperation
<b>ANC</b>	African National Congress
<b>AU</b>	African Union
<b>BAC</b>	Brandenburg-Afrikanische Company
<b>BMZ</b>	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
<b>CD4D</b>	Connecting Diaspora for Development
<b>CPA</b>	Presidential Council for Africa
<b>CSOs</b>	Civil society organisations
<b>DAC</b>	Development Assistance Committee
<b>DEI</b>	Diversity, equity and inclusion
<b>ECA</b>	Economic Cooperation Administration
<b>ECOWAS</b>	Economic Community of West African States
<b>ERP</b>	European Recovery Program
<b>e.V.</b>	Registered association
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FORIM</b>	Forum of International Solidarity Organisations Rooted in Migration
<b>FRG</b>	Federal Republic of Germany
<b>G7</b>	Group of Seven
<b>G77</b>	Group of 77
<b>GCM</b>	Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration
<b>GDP</b>	Gross domestic product

<b>GDR</b>	Democratic Republic of Germany
<b>GIZ</b>	German Agency for International Cooperation
<b>GNI</b>	Gross national income
<b>HR</b>	Human resources
<b>ICPoC</b>	International Cooperation in Times of Postcolonial Change
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>KfW</b>	Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau
<b>LAI</b>	League Against Imperialism and Colonial Oppression
<b>NGOs</b>	Non-governmental organisations
<b>NIIEO</b>	New International Economic Order
<b>ODA</b>	Official development assistance
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>RCNP</b>	Representative Council of National Personnel
<b>SADC</b>	Southern African Development Community
<b>SAPs</b>	Structural adjustment programmes
<b>SWAPO</b>	South West Africa People's Organisation
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>US</b>	United States
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development

# Foreword: An Invitation

This report is an invitation to frank dialogue – above all, with the experts working within and in relation to Germany's development cooperation landscape, on which its findings and recommendations rest. It is not a blanket diagnosis of colonial history and its presence in development policy writ large, not a one-sided critique and not an attack. Its analysis incorporates development-critical perspectives but is not limited to them; engaging with critique, including fundamental critique, is unavoidable in a project tasked with identifying and addressing colonial continuities.

The core of the report, however, is practitioners' voices and experiences: mostly from the people who currently work, or have worked, inside German development institutions including the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW), Brot für die Welt and the political foundations. The research also prioritises the perspectives of those working in partner contexts. This is not an outside critique; it centres the inside view.

The report envisages German development cooperation not as a monolithic institution but as an interface to the Majority World, with many modes of interaction and many internal and partner experiences. This diversity is not reducible to a single truth. Yet practitioners across levels of hierarchy and contexts point to recurring patterns – colonial continuities that shape North–South relations at the structural, institutional and interpersonal level. The report surveys these experiences and offers recommendations and options for engagement at every stage of the interface. Its premise is that in a changing geopolitical context, German development cooperation needs to reflect on its origins, its internal contradictions and hierarchical dynamics, and its colonial continuities. Hearing this from those who identify, analyse and experience these functions is the precondition for reflexive action.

This is also an invitation to read with attention the facts and arguments presented – and to what they might cause you, dear reader, to think and feel.

The debate about development cooperation is highly charged. It touches on gaps between intent and outcome, between professional ethics and everyday experience, and between the ideal of an open communicative culture and structural hurdles and hierarchies. And it comes at a time of heated, at times

vitriolic and bad-faith, attacks on German development cooperation. This is a relatively new experience for many practitioners in a country where development cooperation has been a consensual, not a contested, policy field for decades. Disagreement and conflict did occur, but mostly about the how, not the if; contestation and fundamental questions have emerged and sharpened only in recent years. Fundamental academic and civil society critique is far older, but it did not dent broad societal support and wide-ranging partisan consensus. Both elements are shifting now.

Development cooperation can sometimes feel as if it were under attack: there is a progressive critique, a liberal critique and a conservative critique, while shifting politics and a slew of needling parliamentary questions (*Kleine Anfragen*) press into operational work like rarely before. This raises an obvious question: is this a good time to add another critique to the conversation? Surely colonial continuities should be discussed – but right now? Because international cooperation is key, and because maintaining a capable, diversified and reflected interface for it is in the Germans as well as in the partners' interest: an empathic yes.

The research for this report encountered practitioners deeply engaged with these questions in their day-to-day work and keen to see that engagement folded into reflexive action across organisational levels. Practitioners are also this report's primary audience – at every stage of the German development interface, from the political and management levels to senior and operational staff, through to colleagues working in and alongside the interface from partner contexts. They are best placed to see where the continuities operate, and they are the ones that the report's recommendations invite to action.

The report offers no checklist, and it makes no claim that enacting its recommendations would exhaustively address the issue; the case will not be closed when everything that practitioners suggest in these pages has been done. That is not the goal. The aim is to open a dialogue and to point to key levers which, when pulled or adjusted, will let the German development interface engage its internal and partner expertise more comprehensively. This is the prerequisite to a necessary, wider and deeper conversation about how to identify and address colonial continuities in German development cooperation. What follows are first steps in a process, not its conclusion.

# Chapter 1

## **Introduction: Development Cooperation and the Geopolitical Moment**

Development cooperation in Germany is in flux. The country now finds itself in a new position as the world's largest bilateral donor in overall monetary terms – a role it did not seek out actively but received as a consequence of the shuttering of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (OECD, 2026). At the same time, the institutions, goals and budgets of Germany's development cooperation are facing critical scrutiny and substantive cuts. Reform efforts are underway at the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). The implementing organisations are restructuring, and the budgetary climate has tightened. In addition, a sustained, increasingly mainstream political contestation of development cooperation in its current form has emerged from across the political spectrum, including from directions that until recently did not feature in German parliamentary debate.

This convergence of the accidental top spot, budget pressure and political contestation arrives in a wider geopolitical moment that is itself in flux. After cuts and institutional changes in all other Group of Seven (G7) countries, the BMZ can be described as the last development ministry standing. The architecture of international cooperation that European and other Western middle powers helped to build over the past three quarters of a century is no longer self-evident. Some of its central assumptions – about the rules of trade, the conditionality of aid, the legitimacy of multilateral institutions, the framing of responsibility for global crises – are being openly renegotiated.

This report presents an offer in that moment, in the conviction that the question of colonial continuities in German development cooperation is not a side issue. Through the BMZ, the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), political foundations and other agencies, Germany has one of the most differentiated international cooperation interfaces in the world. Whether this interface has the ability to not just meet the moment but to also be a part of emerging new constellations hinges on if and how Germany chooses to address colonial continuities in the current arrangement.

### **1.1 The Unfamiliar End of the Stick**

The international cooperation of the EU and its states must adapt to ongoing global realignments. While it is true that the old rule-based order was “part fiction” and “will not come back,” as Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney pointed out in his much-referenced 2026 Davos speech, it is also true that the coalitions that Western liberal democracies and middle-power donors like to evoke in its stead require a shift in their relations to the Global South. Development cooperation is one conduit through

which that shift must be implemented. Doing so in the reductive sense of optimisation – often code for reduction – and closer alignment with short-term Western national economic interests will not suffice.

To align development cooperation with new geopolitical dynamics, it is worth taking an unintended clue from another Davos intervention. In a segment decrying the then-undiffused United States–Greenland standoff, French President Emmanuel Macron cautioned against an approach that would “passively accept the law of the strongest,” rejecting what he described as a “sort of new colonial approach” for which those “complacent with it” would take “huge responsibility”.

When bullying tactics and the brazen use of economic leverage are decried in these terms, this resonates with those long subjected to forms of coercive conditionality and pressure tactics under the guise of development cooperation. The fact that some donors now find themselves on the receiving end of the stick does not go unnoticed in the Global South. Recent developments offer an opportunity – or even create the necessity – for critical introspection.

## **1.2 Critique of Colonial Continuities as an Opportunity**

History famously does not repeat itself, but it does rhyme. The rhyme is harder to recognise by those who newly find themselves as the recipients of threats, on the short end of the stick of economic leverage. While Europe is petrified, the rhyme here remains rather implied: selected European countries’ recent experience would still be judged quite softly in comparison by those long on the receiving end of Europe’s stick.

Recent neocolonial dynamics involving questions of sovereignty and the interests of regional economic communities illustrate this dynamic. When negotiating economic partnership agreements, European countries insisted on prying individual African states out of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), particularly Ghana and South Africa, respectively (European Parliament, 2023; Krapohl & Van Huut, 2019; McDonald et al., 2013). In both cases, the negotiations ran counter to the lofty rhetoric of respecting partner sovereignty and went against the expressed interests of the supposed partners. Some perspective-taking in light of European experiences with both United States (US) and Russian attempts to weaken cohesion in the European Union (EU) through bilateral dealings with member states (Lee, 2026; Lehne, 2026; Liik, 2022) might prove helpful here.

This example is part of one of incidents enabled by neocolonial power imbalances, in which Europe’s self-image as a normative leader clashes with its enacted policies. From this perspective, development cooperation can appear as a lubricant of unequal exchanges, as a band-aid or palliative measure that leaves persistent extractivist dynamics in place. World Bank data for 2023 (the most recent comprehensive figures available) show that African countries paid more in debt service than they received in new loans, an extractive dynamic that operates before development cooperation flows are even accounted for.

The same data show African governments spending more on debt service than on education and healthcare combined (Aikins, 2025). This is the structural environment within which contemporary development cooperation operates. Tables have not fully turned, but European governments and implementers should engage in self-critical perspective-taking. The much-vaunted European values have long been deployed coercively – a history stretching back further in time than European countries are comfortable to acknowledge.

Post- and decolonial critiques of development cooperation prove valuable here. Not to regain a supposed moral high ground but as a corrective measure to European self-perceptions and amnesias, especially towards addressing past and present unequal ‘partnerships’ with the Global South. Clearing this fog of amnesia is a necessary condition for the interest-based coalitions that Carney and others have called for to actually work.

### **1.3 At the Same Davos: Voices from the Other End**

These European recognitions arrive into a debate that has been articulated more sharply, and with more programmatic content, by leaders from the Global South. At the same Davos in January 2026, Ghanaian President John Mahama presented the Accra Reset Initiative, which he had first introduced four months earlier at the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, as a “practical answer to a question millions of young Africans are asking: what should Africa’s response be in a changing global order?” (Mahama, 2026). Framed at the UN explicitly as a response to “centuries of racism, colonialism, imperialism, and the resulting implicit bias” (Mahama, 2025), the Accra Reset is positioned not as a request for new forms of assistance but as a sovereign African contribution to the redesign of the global political and economic architecture. This is an architecture, as Mahama has repeatedly emphasised, whose contemporary asymmetries cannot be detached from the colonial period that originally produced them.

Mahama’s analysis describes the structural mechanism through which the gap between formal sovereignty and actual dependency continues to operate today:

*Too many of our countries are caught in what I call the triple dependency. We depend on others for our security choices. We depend on donors for our health and educational systems. We supply the world’s critical minerals but capture almost none of its value. This isn’t sovereignty. It’s a trap.*  
(Mahama, 2026)

This is the dynamic to which European recognition is now reluctantly catching up – what Ghanaian commentator Victoria Hamah characterises, in her analysis of the Accra Reset, as “sovereignty as a legal form coexisting with dependency as a material reality” (Hamah, 2026). It is also the dynamic this report is concerned with at the institutional level: arrangements that look procedurally neutral on the surface while reproducing asymmetries of authority, expertise and resource access that echo colonial hierarchies.

The Accra Reset’s framing of the alternative is instructive for a European audience. Mahama positions it as “a partnership of the willing, based on a shared vision and mutual respect,” in which “global south countries don’t just receive programs but co-design them with our partners in the global north” (Mahama, 2026). The key planks – co-design, mutual respect, sovereign coordination – are the ones in which the recommendations developed later in this report are formulated. The argument this report makes is that European development cooperation needs to be in a position to offer a counterpart for new modes of cooperation without slipping back into problematic pattern of the donor–recipient hierarchy whenever the conversation turns operational. Doing so requires engaging with the colonial continuities that the Accra Reset itself names. Not as an abstract historical exercise but as a precondition for the kind of partnership the geopolitical moment now requires.

## 1.4 Value-based Realism: Not a Fact, but a Goal

Carney referenced “value-based realism” as his core strategy, crediting the Finnish former foreign minister and now President Alexander Stubb as its originator. Stubb himself, however, adds a key part of the picture missing from Carney and Macron’s speeches as well as from most Davos coverage. He is convinced that the countries and interest coalitions of the Global South will be vital in determining whether the transition away from the current system will open up new opportunities for international collaboration, or instead a Hobbesian zero-sum game in which only might is right. From this vantage point, engaging self-critically with colonial continuities and evaluating how they permeate development cooperation is not virtue signalling, but value-based realism. Europe should engage with these issues not to bequeath insights onto others but to equip itself to navigate a new geopolitical landscape. If reshaped, the institutions can provide interfaces for new modes of international cooperation.

That does not mean that the much-espoused values of rule-based exchanges, respect for human rights, sovereignty, and social and ecological sustainability are obsolete. Rather, shared responsibility and reciprocity are necessary building blocks. Future interest coalitions cannot be declared unilaterally; they are relational. They need to be worked towards, and they require pragmatism and reflection on both sides. On the European side, a look in the mirror of colonial continuities can help inject the needed realism to get there.

The waning of the current international order could play out as tragedy or as farce. It is also an opportunity for European and other Western middle powers to avoid either outcome in their relationship to the African continent and the wider Global South. To avoid the tragedy of missed opportunities, it is time to end the double standard of interactions – not out of high-mindedness, but out of self-interest.

## 1.5 An Intervention; An Invitation

This report intervenes in this moment with an invitation to engage differently. It is written from the inside out. As a qualitative research report drawing on interviews and group conversations with practitioners working in or alongside German development cooperation, it surveys the colonial continuities that practitioners themselves identify, analyse and experience across the structural, institutional and interpersonal levels of their work.

The analysis responds to a commitment that German development policy has made to itself. The current reform plan, *Zukunft Zusammen Global Gestalten*, calls for a more strategic, partnership-oriented and self-reflective approach to international cooperation. It explicitly states that “any traces of coloniality in German development policy are to be identified and eliminated” (BMZ, 2026, pp. 8) as a prerequisite for credible, effective and equitable cooperation.

The first chapter, the introduction, sets out why the question is posed now in the context of the present political and geopolitical moment. Chapter 2 turns to history, not as a complete account of German colonialism but as a tracing of the continuities that bear on development cooperation, built from selected moments chosen to make the past familiar and the present unfamiliar. That defamiliarising is deliberate: tracing the continuities through time grounds a conceptual frame that introduces the colonialities, which are then referenced in the following chapters and recommendations.

Chapter 3 places German development cooperation in comparative perspective, looking at how other European donors have approached the same questions. Chapter 4 examines the place of the African and wider Global South diaspora as a development actor, with comparative learning from other European contexts. The final chapter, Chapter 5 gathers the recommendations into a single sequence that follows the life cycle of a cooperation project, each grounded in the experiences that practitioners shared in interviews and focus groups.

The recommendations are positioned for multi-level action: they identify steps that the BMZ and the implementing organisations can take from the top down, and steps that staff at every level of the institutional hierarchy can take from the bottom up. The report does not stipulate a definite, final roadmap to settle the question of how to address colonial continuities in Germany's development cooperation. Instead, it proposes to open a structured way of working on addressing these issues.

## **1.6 Methodology: The Voices Behind the Findings**

The report draws on a qualitative study of 22 in-depth interviews, three focus groups, three group workshops with approximately 60 participants (including high-level staff from the GIZ) and a GIZ Postcolonial Academy webinar with over 800 participants. These formal research engagements were informed by desk and literature research, and complemented by a number of background conversations across the period of the study.

The research was conducted with staff members who currently work, or have worked, in German development institutions including the BMZ, the AA, the GIZ, the Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW), Brot für die Welt and German political foundations. The research participants' countries span Benin, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mauritania, Rwanda, South Africa, Togo, Germany itself and a range of further partner-country contexts. Across this range, the GIZ is a key reference point – both because it is by far the largest single organisation in the interface by staff numbers, and because most respondents have worked within it, alongside it, or moved on from it to other institutions. It recurred even in the accounts of practitioners based elsewhere in the interface. Some respondents have spent decades inside the institutions of German development cooperation. Others have worked in its partner contexts, and others yet have moved between these positions across the course of their careers. Sampling from this range of experience is deliberate. The study draws on practitioners' perspectives and experiences in and with German development cooperation to give a multi-faceted inside view. It does not draw on a narrow selection of positions from which to assess the interface but on a mosaic of perspectives drawn from across the levels of hierarchy and contexts that constitute it.

Methodologically, the report is interested in the patterns that emerge throughout this multiplicity of perspectives – the things that practitioners in very different positions identify in similar terms, the experiences that recur across contexts and seniority levels, and the gaps between intent and outcome that staff experience and point out from inside their own institutional practice. Where the voices contain disagreement or tension, the report points it out rather than resolving it through aggregation. Key citations are preserved as verbatim as possible while ensuring the anonymity of respondents, which at times necessitated zooming out from the specifics. Interviewees are anonymised through general functional roles only, with no personal names or country-specific positions or details retained.

The choice to centre practitioner voices is itself a methodological commitment that follows from the report's central argument. If colonial continuities in German development cooperation reproduce in part through the daily working practices of the institution, then the people doing that work are the ones best positioned to name where the continuities operate and where the levers for change might

lie. This commitment to practitioner voice does not replace the structural, historical and theoretical work that the rest of the report develops – it works alongside it. The historical and theoretical chapters trace the patterns that colonial continuities have left in the institutional architecture; the practitioner material grounds those patterns in the working life of the people inside it.

## **1.7 Situating this Research Report: Building on Engagement within the Institutions**

The questions that this research report explores about German development cooperation have not been raised from the outside in. They have been worked on by staff groups in major German development organisations, and within the GIZ, the engagement spans several years. Staff affected by racism compiled the first record themselves: a collection of experiences of racism and microaggressions in the workplace, assembled by the staff-run Cultural Diversity Initiative, together with proposed individual and structural countermeasures (Cultural Diversity Initiative, 2021). A qualitative study across GIZ country offices in Africa then took stock of how diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) is understood and practised. The study found that the work was carried out largely by affected staff members in uncoordinated bottom-up initiatives, and proposed reporting mechanisms for discrimination, mandatory management training and institutionalised peer exchange (Cultural Diversity Initiative, GIZ.postcolonial, 2022).

A critical reflection commissioned by staff and published by the organisation examined expressions of racism in a specific programming field, migration and displacement, and connected the internal organisational level with programming itself (Nwajiaku-Dahou & Klein, 2023). Most recently, a GIZ-self-initiated measure on international cooperation in times of postcolonial change has carried the work from diagnosis towards a vision of what a postcolonially reflective, anti-racist organisation would look like, across attitude, knowledge and partnership, and from there to a narrative framework for the organisation as a whole (GIZ ICPoC,<sup>1</sup> 2026, 2024).

The timing of these publications reflects one external and one internal factor. The external factor is a broader dynamic of reckoning with colonial continuities, racism and questions of diversity, equity, access and inclusion. It had been building up for years, but was intensified by the wave of protests and demand for change after the murder of African American George Floyd by police officers in Minneapolis, US. More recently, this reckoning has met a marked backlash. Right-wing ascendancy has seen diversity, equity and inclusion commitments rolled back and decolonial and anti-racist agendas increasingly contested in the United States and across Europe. Across these contexts, the rollback expressly extends to critical engagements with colonial continuities. But this stands in combination with the internal factor – the fact that within German development institutions, practitioners had already been organising around these issues, and given the size of an organisation such as GIZ, had been able to network, engage and speak out. The report draws on their experiences and publications as well.

Taken together, this record of publications and activities shows that the diagnosis is in place. Experiences have been documented, patterns named and the connection drawn between the internal organisational and the programmatic levels, through staff initiatives, through commissioned external experts and at the level of organisational vision. Remedies have been proposed at each stage, from anti-racism training to protected reporting channels, to safe(r) spaces, to management accountability, through to revised partnership practice. The present report does not begin that conversation; it takes it on from a different angle.

What the prior engagement did not set out to do is place experiences in the historical context from which they emerge. This would entail tracing how colonial continuities persisted through and beyond formal decolonisation. It also involves following how they structured the North–South relations from which development cooperation emerged and left their mark on the institutional arrangements that practitioners work within today, and how those arrangements keep producing the difficulties that the record describes. When a pattern in procedures, work experience or partner interaction is examined as a colonial continuity rather than a local dysfunction, what addressing it requires also changes. It carries a disavowed but deep-seated logic, and addressing it means tracing the past in the present – identifying where in the project cycle the pattern reproduces itself.

Rather than examining racism or engagement with post-/decolonial or critical perspectives within a single organisation or programming area, this report asks practitioners across the institutions of Germany’s development cooperation where colonial continuities shape the everyday work and how, from their different positions in the hierarchy and across contexts, they would address them. Practitioners range from national staff to country directors and ministry level, and sit on both sides of the cooperation relationship.

The recommendations are built from their answers and read alongside the historical, comparative and practitioner analysis developed in the chapters that follow. They are organised along the sequence of the project life cycle, following the order in which practitioners actually work through cooperation projects. They address every level of the hierarchy because that is how practitioners described the problem: not as something any single level could fix but as something that runs through the entire structure and requires action across it.

# Chapter 2

## Colonial Continuities

What are colonial continuities in development cooperation? When this question was raised in interviews and focus groups with development practitioners working in or with the German development interface, responses fell into one of two camps. Many would respond rhetorically, “Well, what is *not* a colonial continuity? What is not touched by, or is completely outside the consequences of, colonial continuities?” The other camp asked the question back, “What are those colonial continuities, really?”

Part of the second group hastened to link this question to the key aspects of intent and responsibility, where they were quick to stress that certainly, development cooperation today is not structured by any colonial intentions. Some also thematised the importance of shared responsibility, both for recognising colonial atrocities and continuities and, in some cases, to delink responsibility for current political developments on the African continent. For some, this was to emphasise that not all such developments in Africa or in the Global South at large were reducible to colonial continuities. Reactions also included statements about Germany’s colonial past having been less significant than that of other colonial powers.

When encouraged to explore the question from their own vantage point – what do colonial continuities mean *to you* – respondents pointed to unequal economic relations between Germany, or the West more broadly, and their current country of work and past stations. Unequal trade relations and debt were mentioned, as were unbalanced migration regimes. Some also referred to uneven international institutional arrangements such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the UN Security Council, whose composition they linked to colonial continuities, and the disproportionate say of former colonial powers in the World Bank and the IMF.

History was a key reference point in the ensuing conversations. Respondents across the spectrum of positions taken agreed that there is too little acknowledgement, reference and readiness to thematise history and its contemporary echoes in policy and practitioner contexts.

The following sub-chapter does not aim to offer a comprehensive history of German colonialism or even an exhaustive analysis of all the strands of colonial continuities and discontinuities in contemporary development cooperation, many of which have been identified and analysed in historical (Conrad, 2012; Getachew, 2019; Beckert, 2025), anthropological (Rottenburg, 2009) and political scientific research (Ziai, 2015; Hickel et al., 2026). Instead, it traces key aspects of German colonial activities as well as anticolonial resistance to offer an alternative analytical perspective. It presents a through-line that enables the identification of colonial continuities as the links that reach across different phases of early modern, high imperial, war and post-war history in ways that affect and shape the contemporary German development cooperation interface. Key dynamics are identified and offered as analytical lenses through which these continuities in German Development Cooperation and the recommendations for addressing them can be understood.

The argument that follows spans the past four centuries and three continents, and ranges from structural via institutional to interpersonal dynamics. It traces colonial continuities from colonial extraction to civilisational claims and mass violence, and identifies through-lines that outlived the post-1945 rupture and echo in the structure and processes of contemporary development cooperation. It sets out to show that German colonial activity was structurally consequential, not marginal; it produced economic, legal and political through-lines into the post-1945 order. There are important discontinuities between the German colonial logic of *Hebung*, that is, of ‘lifting’ up the colonised and contemporary development cooperation. But there are continuities that manifest in ways that impact German development cooperation today.

Post-war reconstruction itself ran on a model (the US’s Marshall Plan) that reorganised colonial extraction in ways rarely acknowledged but consequential (Costenaro, 2026). The next phase of post-war reconstruction saw Germany put its political weight behind successful efforts to transition this extractive architecture to the structures designed to deepen economic integration in Europe (Costenaro, 2026; Hansen & Johnsson, 2015). The founding of the BMZ falls into that historical context. While the Brandt commission sought to address some structural imbalances in North–South relations such as a colonial division of labour, it studiously avoided a deeper analysis of colonial continuities and the question of redress in an attempt to placate rising neoliberal governments in the United Kingdom (UK) and the US. These did, however, set the tone for North–South relations structured by neoliberal orthodoxy and prescriptions of structural adjustment, which entrenched structural inequalities and increased extraction from the Global South.

Current notions of partner orientation do not comprehensively address colonial continuities. A theorisation of colonial continuities built from this trajectory offers a conceptual framework for the recommendations that follow.

## **2.1 Colonial Continuities in Germany’s Development Cooperation: From Past to Present**

The current global political and economic architecture is in flux but remains undergirded by colonial continuities. Historic colonial expansion created networks of extraction across continents, disrupting and reorienting indigenous economies away from local needs 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). Consequently, the crises that modern development cooperation aims to resolve cannot be decoupled from the colonial systems that produced them. German development cooperation is sometimes positioned as having a “limited colonial past” (Hövelmann & Südhoff, 2022) or even as being “perceived as ... an entity without a colonial history (in most cases).” (Vimalarajah, 2012) What follows corrects incomplete narratives of Germany’s colonial history as marginal. A complete picture is a precondition to identifying colonial continuities. Such a critical look back, a through-line across history, is a necessary first step towards addressing them.

The rise of globally integrated economies was fundamentally reliant on European expansion through “war capitalism”, a phase characterised by violent territorial expropriation and coercive labour regimes (Beckert, 2025, 2014). This expansion funneled unprecedented wealth into Europe, connecting American silver from Spanish-controlled Andean mining town Potosí via Europe to Asian markets (Pomeranz, 2000, pp. 268–272) and generating triple-digit annual profit margins from Caribbean sugar plantations (Beckert 2025; Mintz, 1985, pp. 41–43). German actors were far from marginal to this

expansion. German predecessor states, influential merchant families, producers of tradeable goods and lenders were key players from the earliest onset of these activities.

This rapid accumulation enriched European and, specifically, German merchants, banks and the emerging bourgeoisie, as well as middle-class investors. These economic gains were directly tethered to violence of genocidal proportions – including the near-total decimation of indigenous populations in the Americas and the forced deportation of more than 12 million enslaved Africans. The economic activities simultaneously lay the technological<sup>2</sup> and material foundations for European industrialisation.

Although German-speaking territories were not formally unified until the founding of the German Empire in 1871, German predecessor states and private actors were active participants in this global extractive economy from the beginning. Key investments, philosophical and proto-legal interventions and political initiatives emanating from Germany were to decisively shape European colonialism as a whole, rendering moot the popular claims about German colonialism being short and relatively inconsequential. German colonial activities also created feedback loops, which led not just to profits but also to economic, political and social changes in Germany and Europe. This transformed the German side of the colonial empire and entrenched colonial dynamics that reverberate as colonial continuities today. These colonial continuities fundamentally structure North–South relations and the role that German development cooperation plays in them.

### **2.1.1 Economic Colonial Impulses**

In terms of key early economic impulses, the Fugger and Welser business dynasties located in what is now southern Germany financed and benefitted from early Lusophone colonial expansion. They inserted a range of their products from linen wear and cutlasses for enslaved workers to metal ingots called ‘manillas’ as a key currency in the West African barter trade. Manillas were used as payment for the inhumane ‘purchase’ of enslaved Africans into the rising Atlantic enslavement enterprise, making Fugger and Welser two of the richest families in Europe at the time.

Another company, the Brandenburg-Afrikanische Company (BAC) has operated fort Groß Friedrichsburg on the West African coast since 1683 to engage directly in the transatlantic slave trade (Weber, 2009). It was financed via an economic innovation that the ruler of Brandenburg, the Great Elector Friedrich Wilhelm brought from his apprenticeship with his relatives, the rulers of the Dutch court. The BAC became the first trade share company in the German economic sphere. It raised capital for the establishment of an enslavement castle on the coast of today’s Ghana through the sale of shares.

Furthermore, German merchants, textile manufacturers and financiers extensively supported and profitted from the colonial trade networks of other European empires (Steffen & Weber, 2016; Weber, 2004). The divergence of Europe’s economies, with the attendant social and political changes wrought by the accumulation of wealth and the ability to reinvest surpluses, including into universities and the arts, was substantially enabled by such extraction. German actors were firmly embedded in the emergent system.

The extractive pattern would remain key for European advancements through later stages of colonialism: access to critical raw materials from the colonies was central to the development of all European, including German, economy through various phases of industrialisation. Critical raw materials, ranging from natural and mineral oils to rubber, key in mechanisation to copper and in the process of electrification, came from the colonies. Beyond their monetary value, these strategic and previously rare raw materials materially enabled innovation in a host of sectors and industries.

To illustrate: the majority of copper, the key raw material of Germany's rapid electrification, flowed from the exceptionally high-grade deposits of Tsumeb in German South West Africa to the smelters of Hamburg and into Germany's urban power grids. This was a sovereign-controlled supply corridor whose railway and mines were built on expropriated Herero land and, after the genocide of 1904–1908, run with the forced labour of surviving Herero and Nama prisoners of war (Hearth, 2021; Söhnge, 1967).

Not every extractive ambition delivered on German aspirations. In the attempt to optimise extraction, colonial administrators even enlisted diasporic expertise: in German Togo, the administration drew on Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute in 1901, recruiting African American agronomists – cast as bearers of "civilisation" and uplift – to transplant the racialised cotton-plantation regime of the US South for German textile mills (Zimmerman, 2012). In Zimmerman's account, the scheme worked less as civilisation than as labour discipline – a "decivilising mission" in which Tuskegee's self-help model was used to press Togolese into coerced, sharecropping-style cultivation. It met determined Togolese resistance, not least to the patriarchal household model the educators sought to impose in place of women's existing economic autonomy. As a result, the scheme fell well short of its ambitions (Zimmerman, 2012) – most of the expedition had left by 1903–04. Whether they succeeded, like the Tsumeb copper corridor, or failed, like the Togo cotton scheme, such projects shared a logic of racialised extraction – one that required legal and intellectual rationalisation.

### **2.1.2 Legal Colonial Impulses**

The exploitation of colonised and enslaved populations required intellectual rationalisation, a task to which German philosophy made foundational contributions. In his anthropological writings, Immanuel Kant formulated some of the earliest systematic, hierarchical classifications of human races, arguing for the inherent superiority of white Europeans to justify colonial tutelage (Kant, 1775/2001, pp. 10–12). Similarly, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* famously posited that Africa was "no historical part of the World," existing in a pre-rational state "beyond the day of self-conscious history" (Hegel, 1837/1956, p. 99).

International legal scholars demonstrate how this philosophical erasure directly authorised the legal fictions used to justify colonial land grabs (Anghie, 2005, p. 38). By categorising African polities and systems of land tenure as "outside of history," European international law deemed them legally non-existent under the doctrine of *terra nullius* (Gathii, 2003). This 'geographical Hegelianism' culminated in the 1884–1885 Berlin Conference, where European diplomats constructed African territory as a "conceptually empty" space open to partitioning, systematically discarding and delegitimising indigenous governance and economic arrangements (Yao, 2022).

This conference also marked the inception of the formal German colonial empire. During the era of high imperialism, the unified German state established its own formal territories in Africa and the Pacific (Conrad, 2012, pp. 2–5). This period was marked by extreme administrative violence, most notably the genocide of the Ovaherero and Nama in German South West Africa (1904–08) and the brutal suppression of the Maji Maji rebellion in German East Africa (Conrad, 2012, pp. 112–115). These events established bureaucratic, militarised and racialised models of population control that directly influenced subsequent German administrative practices and state structures. These ranged from military tactics of scorched earth policies to the erection of the first German concentration camps in what is now Namibia.

### 2.1.3 Political Colonial Impulses

The establishment of German colonial administration increasingly relied on the systemic restriction of indigenous rights and the imposition of autocratic, segregated state structures. This administrative violence became apparent in Duala (Cameroon), where the colonial government sought to radically restructure the urban landscape (Njoh & Bigon, 2015). In 1910, the state initiated an urban renewal project mandating the expropriation and demolition of the ancestral riverfront settlements of the Duala people, forcing them to relocate to the marginalised, segregated township of Neu-Bell (Schler, 2005). The execution of German-baptised and educated King Rudolf Duala Manga Bell in 1914 for mobilising legal and political resistance against this racialised dispossession demonstrated the lethal intolerance of the German colonial state towards indigenous political agency (Leanza, 2024). These events also illustrate the fact that a drift towards racialised segregation and the codification of unequal rights was not an aberration, but an integral part of the colonial logics of state-making.

In German South West Africa (now Namibia), techniques of racialised population control and increasing spatial segregation served as key conceptual forerunners and later inputs to what would become apartheid in South Africa. The German South West African colonial administration pioneered surveillance systems and mobility restrictions, such as mandatory native identity passes (*Paßmarken*), and forced family separations and strict residential zoning in Windhoek, laying the operational foundations for segregated “native locations” (Blackler, 2022). This system established a profound historical and legal loop with colonial Germany.

The colony’s 1905 ban on German–African marriages (*Mischehenverbot*) and the pseudoscientific eugenicist research of anthropologist Eugen Fischer – a later mentor of Nazi-era concentration camp doctor Joseph Mengele – in the colony provided foundational legal and eugenic frameworks that Nazi legal scholars directly referenced to construct the Nuremberg Laws of 1935 (Zimmerer, 2011; Fischer, 1913). The *Mischehenverbot* and colonially induced citizenship reforms, which culminated in the Imperial and State Citizenship Law of 1913, refined a rigid, racialised application of the *ius sanguinis* (right of blood) principle, designed to exclude colonial subjects from the national body (Genske, 2021; Nagl, 2007).

Because descentance remains the primary mechanism for acquiring German nationality today, these colonial-era exclusions continue to have direct legal repercussions to this day, leaving descendants of colonial unions structurally locked out of German citizenship (Genske, 2021; Nagl, 2007).<sup>3</sup>

This trajectory, however, did not end in Berlin. Instead, Nazi legal and political enhancements of colonial-era racist laws were to become building blocks of a political project whose links to Germany are too often underemphasised or forgotten. In a spiral of colonial political cooperation and innovation, some of these practices were invited back into Southern Africa as the budding apartheid state constructed its own institutionalised racism. South African architects of apartheid such as Hendrik Verwoerd – who studied in Weimar-era Germany – actively integrated German nationalist and psychological theories (Marx, 2013).

White nationalist academic centres in South Africa, notably the Volkekunde department at Stellenbosch University, imported German racial science, utilising physical classification tools like Fischer’s hair colour and eye colour tables to categorise the South African population into rigid racial groups (Kamies, 2018; Robins, 2016). This spiral of German colonial impulses linking Namibia, the imperial heartland in Europe, later Nazi Germany and ultimately apartheid South Africa demonstrates how colonial laboratories of racial subjugation, legal exclusion and political domination continuously reinforced and reconstructed transnational systems of white supremacy under the guise of colonial normality.

## 2.1.4 Anticolonial Resistance: Recovering Agency and Internal Critique

No telling of German colonial history or its effects on Germany and Europe can be complete without acknowledging the role that anticolonial resistance had in shaping contemporary Europe. The interplay between domination and resistance is part of the transformative dynamic of the colonial era. No colonial venture can exist without a significant dynamic of collaboration, mostly from parts of the elite and entrepreneurial classes of the colonised.

This was true for German colonisation as well, especially at the beginning, when German emissaries were able to enter some form of collaboration with some of the ruling authorities of indigenous societies. This often came with promises of protection from other colonial powers and of the exchange of technology, trade and market access. As the nature of German colonial designs became gradually clearer and more radical in their segregationist designs, many of these collaborations soured. Indigenous leaders such as the previously mentioned King Rudolf Duala Manga Bell spoke out critically, to the point that some of the earlier collaborators ended up being demoted, deposed and even executed by the same German authorities who had previously promised them protection.

From its onset, German colonisation had external and internal critics. People from all walks of life resisted its violent designs, both in the colonies and in Germany. In Imperial Germany and the early Weimar Republic, members of the African diaspora, colonial subjects residing in the metropole (the so called *Schutzgebietsangehörige*) played a key role in organising against colonial oppression and exploitation, including with several petitions to the German parliament. This culminated in the Dibobe Petition of June 1919, organised by Martin Dibobe, a Cameroonian activist and Berlin train driver (at the time, a highly respected high-tech occupation), and signed by 17 other African residents from West and East Africa (Gerbing, 2010; Kundrus, 2003).

Submitted to the Weimar National Assembly, the petition presented 32 sophisticated, structural demands that blended emancipatory and social democratic thought. Instead of merely asking for benevolent colonial rule, they demanded equal rights, the abolition of corporal punishment and forced labour, the establishment of independent courts, and direct political representation in the German parliament (Gerbing, 2010; Dibobe, 1919). In doing so, they contested and criticised colonial designs and inserted their own, rights based ideas for the improvement of economic and social conditions as well as for political participation into the debate.

Importantly, the location of this anticolonial organising created a historical feedback loop. Berlin – the city where Africa had been partitioned in 1884 – transformed during the interwar period into a principal operational hub for anticolonial solidarity across the Atlantic African diaspora including the US and the Caribbean, Africa and Asia. From 1927 to 1933, the International Secretariat of the League Against Imperialism and Colonial Oppression (LAI) was headquartered in Berlin (Petersson, 2013).

Initiated by activists such as German communist member of parliament and publishing house owner Willi Münzenberg and Indian communist and anticolonial activist Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, this Berlin office under the German name *Liga gegen koloniale Unterdrückung* served as a connective center. It became a network node where key anticolonial figures – including Jawaharlal Nehru of India, Mohammad Hatta of Indonesia, and Lamine Senghor of Senegal – forged alliances (Louro, 2018, pp. 65–70; Petersson, 2013).

This Berlin-based network directly prepared the political ground for the historic 1955 Bandung Conference and the birth of the Non-Aligned Movement. As Indonesian President Sukarno stressed in his opening address at Bandung, the interwar gathering of the LAI was a key factor that empowered

and networked anticolonial leaders towards the collective resolve to eventually secure their national independence (Twiby, 2020; Bandung Conference, 1955). The very alliances that stood up to direct colonial rule were coordinated from the capital of the former German Empire, illustrating that modern histories of international solidarity and Global South agency are deeply intertwined with Berlin as a centre of European colonial power.

This includes critical voices in Germany, who put into question the routine notion that normalised colonial aggression, genocidal violence and racism as a generally accepted product of their time. A prominent critical voice had actually participated in the violence himself, as part of the German Schutztruppe fighting the Maji Maji rebellion in German East Africa, which caused over 300 000 African casualties and pioneered military tactics such as scorched earth attacks against civilian infrastructure and livelihoods. The experience turned Hans Paasche from colonial officer to pacifist, anticolonial critic and vegan.

He landed a bestseller with *Die Forschungsreise des Afrikaners Lukanga Mukara ins innerste Deutschland* [*The Research Journey of the African Lukanga Mukara into Innermost Germany*], a satirical look at Wilhelminian society and industrialisation. First published in installments in 1913 and 1914, the work was penned from the ostensible, fictional perspective of an African visitor sending letters home. Its rise to bestseller status and the prominent role that Paasche's pacifist ideas played in the German youth movement of the time complicate norms of colonial unanimity in Germany and illustrate another aspect of the feedback loop between the colonies and the heartland of the German Empire.

Examples with broad cultural reach aside, there was prominent criticism of colonialism in the political sphere as well, with the press and members of parliament criticising colonial violence and exploitation. Social Democratic Party (SPD) leader August Bebel famously brandished a hippopotamus-hide whip in the Reichstag, laying it on the parliamentary table as material evidence of the everyday violence of colonial rule (Habermas, 2015). Similarly, Centre Party politician Matthias Erzberger used his seat on the Reichstag's budget committee to expose war profiteering and supplier kickbacks reaching ministerial level, and the physical and sexual abuse of indigenous women and minors, which the Colonial Office had sought to cover up (Habermas, 2016; Epstein, 1959).

Berlin was a crucial node for political agency for activists and diasporans from the Global South organising and networking during colonial and interwar periods through to Bandung, alongside sustained anticolonial critique within Germany itself. These strands illustrate a rich history of agency that runs alongside the history of domination traced above. A critical reflection on colonial continuities in German development cooperation can draw on both, provided it is willing to re-read its own past to address colonial continuities in the present.

### **2.1.5 From Colonial to Post-war Development**

One of the fundamental contradictions of colonial policy was the structural tension between the racialised notions of European superiority that legitimised extraction and the projection of colonial benevolence. In the German colonial administration, this benevolence was framed as the *Hebung* (so-called elevation) of colonised subjects – a paternalistic duty to 'guide' colonised peoples into European civilisation. Despite the profound political discontinuities between post-war partitioned Germany and the preceding colonial era and the National Socialist regime, this concept of 'elevation' provides a conceptual through-line into modern development cooperation.

In both contexts, the West is projected as 'developed', as the universal blueprint, the exclusive site of expertise and the sole actor with the capacity to implement change. Conversely, the economic, political and social realities of the Global South are systematically categorised as 'deficient' or projected as 'primitive' versions of the West's own historical past. By positioning former colonial

powers at the pinnacle of human development, this ideological framework naturally designates them as the sole authorities permitted to distribute it.

Following the culmination of anticolonial resistance and the rise of juridical decolonisation in the post-war era, these paternalistic notions were structurally reorganised under the concept of 'development'. This newly minted paradigm preserved the civilisational assumption of Western modernity as the ultimate blueprint for the rest of the world, while largely abandoning openly racialised terminology in favour of technical, macroeconomic language.

At the same time, West Germany experienced a rapid, Western Allied and US-led rebuilding of its economy and society. The resulting economic miracle (*Wirtschaftswunder*) of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) has been historically framed as a US-aided but mostly domestic feat of democratic resurgence, work ethic and market efficiency. It established a newfound 'West-bound' position that West Germany used to justify its entry into international development cooperation (Gieler, 2011, pp. 15–18). However, this narrative erases the structural colonial hierarchies that persisted in the post-war era, which systematically underpriced the raw materials that made the German economic recovery possible in the first place.

### **2.1.6 Colonial Continuities of aid to Rebuild Germany: the Marshall Plan's Extractive Logic**

Germany's post-war recovery was fundamentally shaped by the European Recovery Program (ERP), commonly known as the Marshall Plan. Under this programme, the US distributed approximately US\$13 billion in aid to Western Europe between 1948 and 1951 (Tarnoff, 1997), with nearly US\$1.4 billion allocated specifically to West Germany (Congressional Research Service, 2006). This was the equivalent to roughly 5% of the US's 1947 gross domestic product (GDP), which, as a measure of economic effort, would amount to over US\$1 trillion today (Tooze, 2024). Given the fact that the US actually spent even more on post-war reconstruction in Germany through the previous phase of direct military rule that overlapped with the Marshall Plan, this unprecedented spending positions Germany as a case study in successful assistance. This was at a far higher cost and with far more indiscriminate spending than practised in later iterations of development cooperation.

While popularly celebrated as a purely humanitarian initiative aiding the rebuilding of West Germany as a democracy, the Marshall Plan secured a Western sphere of influence and established West Germany as a well-resourced frontier state in a Europe divided by bloc confrontation. It also embedded colonial extraction into post-war international aid and secured US access to strategic raw and rare materials from European colonies.

As policy analyst Katie Auth (2026) observes, contemporary diplomatic controversies are mirrored in the geo-economic logic of the Marshall Plan, such as the US attempting to tie vital public health funding to critical minerals in Zambia under privileged access. US policy-makers, acutely aware that World War II had severely depleted domestic reserves of strategic minerals, designed the ERP to secure long-term American access to the natural wealth of the Global South (Auth, 2026; U.S. Congress, 1949). This resource acquisition was systematically codified through two primary mechanisms.

First, through its Article V, the Economic Cooperation Act of 1948 mandated that any European country receiving Marshall Plan aid had to sign bilateral treaties committing to facilitate the transfer of strategic materials to the US's national stockpile (U.S. Congress, 1949). Through the "colonial stipulation" of Article V, these agreements explicitly extended to the European nations' "overseas territories" and dependencies (UK Parliament, 1948). The US used this clause to bypass European mercantilist monopolies and force open colonial enclaves to American corporate exploitation,

securing Malayan rubber and tin, Southern Rhodesian chrome, and Belgian Congolese cobalt and uranium – the latter of which was vital to the US’s burgeoning nuclear weapons programme (Auth, 2026; Toussaint, 2014; Nkrumah, 1965).

Second, under the ERP’s extraction-enabling “Counterpart Funds”, European governments sold American-provided goods to their citizens in local currencies, depositing these funds into special accounts. By law, 5% of the funds were set aside exclusively for US government use, primarily to purchase strategic raw materials from the colonies without spending US dollars (U.S. Department of State, 1950). Furthermore, the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA) directly invested these counterpart funds into building deep-water wharves in British North Borneo, railways in French North Africa and mining infrastructure in Northern Rhodesia, specifically designed to accelerate resource extraction for the US market (U.S. Department of State, 1950; U.S. Congress, 1949).

A key goal of US extraction from European colonies was targeting uranium: 80% of the US’s uranium was sourced from what was then Belgian-ruled Congo. The atomic bombs that the US detonated in Hiroshima and Nagasaki were fuelled by nuclear material extracted under European colonial rule. In a secret treaty between the US, the UK and Belgium, the US had secured access to uranium from the Belgian Congo. The Marshall Plan openly continued and expanded this logic in a generalised way. In a telling prefiguration of how colonial extraction led to the colonised being indebted to their extractive metropolises, Belgium paid its debt to the US in Congolese uranium – and then saddled the newly independent Congo with its debt.

By leveraging its position as the only Western ally that did not suffer devastation on its territory, as well as the European need for reconstruction, the US successfully broke the exclusive colonial monopolies of European empires, integrating the resources of the Global South into a US-led global supply chain (as aptly analysed by Nkrumah, 1965). The Marshall Plan thus undergirded an unacknowledged precedent for post-war international development assistance: the legal and political bundling of financial aid with the guaranteed extraction of strategic resources from the Global South.

### **2.1.7 From the Marshall Plan to Eurafrica: Colonial Continuities and Access to Strategic Raw Materials**

With the end of the Marshall Plan, Europe faced economic headwinds that many European heads of state saw best addressed through greater European cooperation and gradual economic unification. But while the story of post-war European cooperation is mostly told as a *sui generis*, an intra-European narrative of cooperation in the interest of peace, this picture leaves out a key aspect of geopolitical concerns and colonial continuities that shaped it. Following the initial resource openings carved out by the Marshall Plan’s strategy, post-war European states, not least West Germany, benefitted systematically from the continued extraction from European colonies – a process institutionalised through the geopolitical project of Eurafrica (Hansen & Jonsson, 2015).

As Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson show in their eponymous analysis (2015), while the Eurafrica project came to a head in the post-war years, it had deep pre-war roots. In the 1920s and 1930s, geopolitical thinkers such as Richard von Coudenhove-Kalergi, the founder of the Pan-European movement, argued that a fragmented Europe could survive as a viable third global superpower alongside the US and the Soviet Union only if it collectively annexed and exploited the African continent as its joint, resource-rich “complementary territory” (Hansen, 2023; Hansen & Jonsson, 2015, pp. 31–33).

Hansen defines Eurafrica not as a post-war historical anomaly but as a deliberate, structural geopolitical project where European integration and African colonisation were co-constituted as two sides of the same coin (Hansen & Jonsson, 2015, pp. 5–8). Far from just a project of discourse and

geopolitical strategy, Eurafrika was marshalled and referenced by companies and conglomerates across Europe at the time as a pragmatic move to secure and expand resource and market access, as recent research shows (Costenaro, 2026).

In the context of post-war reconstructions, European integration was conceived of and planned in relation to Europe's African colonies. It effectively rerouted the de-monopolised access to Europe's African colonies that the US had secured through the stipulations of the Marshall Plan to benefit European countries, those with and without colonies. In the 1950s, the 'founding fathers' of European integration, including Robert Schuman, Konrad Adenauer, Jean Monnet and Paul-Henri Spaak, resurrected this interwar vision. They treated the integration of Europe and the collective management of Africa as a single, unified enterprise necessary to secure Europe's geopolitical and resource autonomy in the Cold War (Hansen & Jonsson, 2015, pp. 97–103).

In the German context, this process was driven by Konrad Adenauer, who was chancellor of the FRG from 1949 to 1963 and whose actions and strategic motivations reveal another set of colonial continuities. As biographer Hans-Peter Schwarz (1995, pp. 95–96) documents, Adenauer had a history of colonial advocacy. In 1927, he publicly insisted that Germany must strive to re-acquire colonial territories, and went on to serve as the vice president of the German Colonial Society (*Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft*) from 1931 to 1933.

In the post-war era, Adenauer viewed European integration as a project to secure German and European access to African resources, a view aided by his scepticism about the ability of colonised peoples to effectively rule themselves. He expressed concerns that "developing countries would soon have the majority of seats in the UN, adding that the policy was absurd and would lead to the self-destruction of the white race" (Schwarz, 1995). This view led his biographer to conclude that "his attitude towards the demand of colonial peoples for independence remained fundamentally paternalistic. Traces of the imperialist spirit of Wilhelmine Germany continued to influence his thinking" (Schwarz, 1995).

This geopolitical vision was directly coupled with Germany's post-war need for strategic resources. Following the 1956 Suez Crisis, which severely threatened European economic survival by cutting off Middle Eastern oil supplies, securing alternative, sovereign-controlled energy reserves was treated as a vital national security priority (Hansen & Jonsson, 2015, pp. 160–164). The newly discovered vast oil reserves of the Algerian Sahara and uranium deposits in Gabon, the Congo, Niger and Madagascar offered Europe a path to energy independence.

During the Treaty of Rome negotiations, Adenauer successfully persuaded a hesitant cabinet, including a sceptical Ludwig Erhard, to fund France's colonial project by pointing directly to these resources. As documented in the official Cabinet Protocols of 15 February 1957, Adenauer argued: "France possesses a latent wealth, just think of the Sahara with its oil and uranium deposits. Equatorial Africa also constitutes a significant reserve" (Hansen & Jonsson, 2015, p. 222; Kabinettsprotokolle, 1957, p. 144).

This multilateral 'colonial association' regime – which Foreign Minister Heinrich von Brentano proposed to fund via a European 'Marshall Plan' for Africa – granted West Germany's heavy industries direct, non-exclusive access to these vital resources, alongside equatorial copper, bauxite and manganese (Hansen, 2025; Hansen & Jonsson, 2015, p. 180, 222). Ghanaian President Kwame Nkrumah famously criticised this structural arrangement as the transition from direct empires to the "collective neo-colonialism of the European Common Market" (Nkrumah, 1965, p. 19). The arrangement allowed West Germany access to resources and markets to fuel its economic miracle (*Wirtschaftswunder*) without incurring the administrative, financial or military liabilities of

direct colonial rule or the management of political ties through the rising tides of decolonisation. This established an extractive pipeline that continues to influence the institutional trade and development architecture of the EU (Hansen, 2023; Hansen & Jonsson, 2015).

In the FRG, development cooperation was also an instrument of Cold War foreign policy. In the contest for recognition with the German Democratic Republic, formalised in the Hallstein doctrine, aid helped to project a benign image abroad and discourage other states from recognising East Germany (Weigel, 2022; Gray, 2003).<sup>4</sup> The logic was stated bluntly in the field: the West German ambassador to Togo advised an “egoistic development policy” (*egoistische Entwicklungspolitik*) that concentrated on projects of “low expense and high publicity value” (Weigel, 2022).

### **2.1.8 The Other Germany: Colonial Continuities in GDR Development Policy**

In the Warsaw-pact affiliated Democratic Republic of Germany (GDR), development cooperation and international assistance were officially framed through the ideological lens of ‘socialist solidarity’ and anti-imperialism (Rabenschlag, 2022). The GDR actively supported anticolonial liberation movements such as the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa, the South West Africa People’s Organisation (SWAPO) in Namibia and FRELIMO in Mozambique – positioning itself as a selfless, anti-racist alternative to West Germany’s ‘imperialist’ aid (DOMiD, 2025; Rabenschlag, 2022, pp. 85–86). However, critical historical scholarship reveals that despite this anticolonial rhetoric, East Germany’s developmental practices frequently reproduced deeply paternalistic Eurocentric and racialised hierarchies that mirrored colonial patterns (Burton et al., 2021; Schenck, 2021).

The GDR’s developmental framework was built on a rigid, Eurocentric Marxist–Leninist modernisation teleology. This “socialist civilizing mission” systematically categorised African societies as ideologically and technically ‘backwards’ or in ‘primitive’ stages of history, requiring European tutelage and discipline to transition into industrial modernity (Schenck, 2021). This ideological paternalism manifested directly in the field. East German development experts and brigade workers (*Freundschaftsbrigaden*) in the Global South frequently lived in segregated, highly privileged enclaves, relying on underpaid local domestic labour and reproducing the structural inequalities of colonial-style administrative lifestyles (Burton, 2021).

Furthermore, the GDR’s economic interactions reinforced rather than dismantled the colonial international division of labour. Suffering from chronic hard-currency crises, the GDR systematically locked its Southern ‘fraternal’ partners into their historical roles as primary commodity providers, such as Angola for its oil and Ethiopia or Mozambique for their coffee. These relations exchanged raw resources for finished industrial goods under highly unequal barter agreements (Harisch, 2020; Wentker, 2007).

Another contradiction of this socialist developmental paradigm lay in the treatment of the contract workers (*Vertragsarbeiter*) brought to East Germany from ‘fraternal nations’ (*Brüdervölker*) like Angola, Mozambique and Vietnam (DOMiD, 2025; Rabenschlag, 2022). While officially celebrated as an act of internationalist training and solidarity, the system operated as a source of cheap, highly regulated labour to offset the GDR’s domestic labour shortages (DOMiD, 2025). Under a bilateral agreement signed in 1979 between the GDR and Mozambique, more than 22 000 Mozambican workers (popularly known as the ‘Madgermanes’) were brought to East Germany (Siegert, 2021). The GDR and Mozambican governments systematically withheld up to 60% of these workers’ net wages, claiming that the funds were being safely deposited in Mozambique for their return (DOMiD, 2025; Siegert, 2021). In reality, these deducted wages were used directly by the GDR to offset Mozambique’s sovereign trade debts to East Germany, leaving the workers virtually uncompensated and sparking decades of unresolved legal and economic protests (DOMiD, 2025).

In addition, the daily reality of these ‘fraternal workers’ stood in sharp contrast to the GDR anti-racist propaganda. Contract workers were socially and spatially segregated, forced to live in tightly monitored, gender-segregated dormitories, with strict curfews and severe bans on contact with the local East German population (DOMiD, 2025; Rabenschlag, 2022, p. 88). Pregnant workers were routinely forced to choose between an immediate abortion or deportation (DOMiD, 2025). Daily and institutional racism was pervasive, occasionally escalating into violent physical assaults against Algerian, Cuban and Mozambican workers (Rabenschlag, 2022, p. 94; Siegert, 2021). To preserve the state’s anti-fascist foundational myth, these racist incidents were systematically covered up, classified and suppressed by the Ministry for State Security (Stasi) and state media (Rabenschlag, 2022, p. 95).

Analysing these parallel histories allows for underlying patterns of extractive, neocolonial logics to emerge. Across the ideological divide, these patterns constitute pan-German colonial continuities.

### **2.1.9 The Brandt Commission and the Limits of Reform**

In the late 1970s, West Germany undertook its most significant intellectual and political attempt to formally address the unequal structures of the global economy. Chaired by former West German Chancellor Willy Brandt, the Independent Commission on International Development Issues (dubbed the Brandt Commission) published its landmark report *North-South: A Programme for Survival* in 1980 (Brandt Commission, 1980). This initiative serves as a vital historical case study of Germany attempting to reckon with its relations with the Global South.

At the time, the Brandt report was groundbreaking in its explicit acknowledgment of the colonial roots of global economic inequality. The report famously stated: “People in the industrialized countries will have to realize faster and more comprehensively that the division of labor that was imposed or structured in colonial times cannot be cemented” (Brandt Commission, 1980, p. 21). It acknowledged that the existing global trade and financial architectures were designed during an era when newly independent states did not exist as sovereign entities, thereby perpetuating a structural transfer of wealth from South to North.

In alliance with demands for a New International Economic Order (NIEO), championed by the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77 (G77), the commission advocated for a radical restructuring of global relations. It proposed a largescale transfer of technical resources from North to South, commodity price stabilisation agreements to protect Southern producers from market volatility, the dismantling of Northern protectionist trade barriers, and a reform of the IMF to allow Southern nations greater voting power (Brandt Commission, 1980, pp. 267–270). Despite its progressive rhetoric, historians point out that the Brandt Commission remained fundamentally trapped in a Western-centric developmental framework (Stråth, 2024).

As a strategic, pragmatic choice, the commission de-emphasised a focus on historical recrimination in an attempt to avoid alienating Western governments and leaders such as the UK’s Margaret Thatcher and the US’s Ronald Reagan. Instead, it emphasised the theme of survival and stressed that reforms were in mutual – but also specifically in the *Western* – interest. It operated on a global neo-Keynesian model that viewed the integration of the Global South into global capitalist markets as the primary path to ‘survival’. By framing the South through a lens of ‘underdevelopment’ that needed to emulate the industrial North, the report preserved the basic premise of Western modernity as the ultimate blueprint, failing to acknowledge alternative, indigenous socioeconomic paths.

Ultimately, the structural reforms proposed by the Brandt Commission were usurped by the rise of the neoliberalism epitomised by the Thatcher and Reagan administrations (Dirlik, 2015). Instead of dismantling the colonial division of labour as Brandt urged, the subsequent Washington Consensus and

IMF structural adjustment programmes actively cemented these colonial dependencies through debt leverage, leaving the “Brandt Line” of global inequality fully intact (Progressive International, 2023).<sup>5</sup>

### **2.1.10 Structural Adjustment Instead of Structural Reform**

The later 20th century witnessed a significant shift with the onset of the neoliberal era and the consolidation of the Washington Consensus. Rather than breaking with earlier patterns of external imposition, the structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) of the 1980s and 1990s preserved and modernised the asymmetric relations of the colonial era. Under the guise of fiscal discipline, international financial institutions assumed de facto control over economic policy in the Global South. Decolonial and African critical scholars have unpacked this transition through both theoretical and empirical lenses.

Addressing the political and economic reality of these policies, Thandika Mkandawire demonstrated how the Bretton Woods institutions bypassed local democratic institutions to impose austerity, trade liberalisation and privatisation (Mkandawire & Soludo, 1989, Mkandawire, 2005). This process generated what Mkandawire termed “choiceless democracies,” in which democratic elections occurred, but elected sovereign leaders were stripped of any real agency over macroeconomic policy due to rigid external conditionalities (Mkandawire & Soludo, 1999, pp. 119–122). These “maladjusted” African economies were systematically prevented from building developmental states capable of prioritising social policies and domestic industrial growth (Mkandawire, 2005, pp. 15–18).

Empirical research has documented the material toll of structural adjustment as a continuation of imperial resource extraction. Jason Hickel, Dylan Sullivan and Huzaifa Zoomkawala (2021, pp. 1030–1035) calculate that during the structural adjustment era of the 1980s and 1990s, the scale of unequal exchange and net resource drain from the Global South to the Global North increased dramatically. This occurred as SAPs suppressed local wages and deregulated resource sectors, effectively restoring the imperial arrangement where the South serves as a source of cheap labour and raw materials for Northern consumption (Hickel et al., 2026, pp. 3–5; Hickel, 2017, pp. 142–145).

### **2.1.11 Financialisation, Audit and the Persistence of Asymmetry**

The through-line traced so far does not stop at structural adjustment. The asymmetries of the colonial and neoliberal eras were not dismantled in the 1990s. They were reorganised once more – into a present-day architecture of financial instruments and audit-driven management whose vocabulary is new while the underlying arrangement is not. A brief look at the most recent reorganisation brings the genealogy up to the present, and gives the recommendation chapters a concrete mechanism to refer back to.

A 2024 stock-taking of donor aid in Africa finds that the *concepts* that donors deploy have shifted – ‘ownership’ and ‘localisation’ among them – while the underlying aims and asymmetries have remained “relatively stable” and persist “deep into the twenty-first century” (Wiegatz & Price, 2024). The genealogy is therefore not a closed historical sequence but an open one. What changes is the register in which the asymmetry is expressed; what persists is the asymmetry itself.

Since structural adjustment, an increasing share of development has been organised through financial logics – de-risking, blended finance, results-based and debt instruments. The rationality at work is one of “rendering development investible”, making it “legible to capital ... as an investible proposition” (Taggart & Power, 2024). This places it in a direct lineage with Ferguson’s “anti-politics machine” (Ferguson 1990), development is “rendered technical” (Li, 2007) This turn, they and others stress, is neither automatic nor benign. It “delimits and overlooks crucial questions of political economy(...) marginalises radical and indigenous Development alternatives,” and reorients development towards private finance (Taggart & Power, 2024; Bernards, 2024). In the climate domain, the colonial edge is

explicit: in its current form, green and climate finance “risks becoming a new tool for colonial rule” (Zylinski, 2024).

Where conditionality was the blunt instrument of structural adjustment, the present-day instruments are softer, and ostensibly involve partners more: responsibility for delivery is handed to the partner while authorship is not. Lie’s ethnography of the World Bank–Uganda relationship shows ‘partnership’ and ‘ownership’ working more as an *indirect* mode of governance – with responsibility devolved to the partner while authorship stays at the so-called centre (Lie, 2015). Revisiting the “local turn” a decade on, he finds that “partnership and ownership appear to have become key aid conditionalities,” a “tacit and indirect form of power” in which the partner’s freedom is hedged by the donor’s “bureaucratic audit culture and coercive accountability regimes” (Lie, 2024).

A case study of country ownership over aid from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (the Global Fund) in Ghana finds the same split in operation: a “conditional ownership, whereby the recipient countries exercise limited agency” – formal partner leadership of the Country Coordinating Mechanism (CCM), but a process “mediated by the ... funding stipulations and processes” of the donor (Onokwai & Matthews, 2022). This pattern has been described as the “ownership paradox” in which the language of partner leadership coexists with continued donor control (Hasselskog et al., 2017). This is how partner-orientation can be asserted in good faith and still coexist with that control.

Richard Rottenburg’s (2009) close study of a development-bank-financed waterworks reform shows the mechanism by which a negotiable relationship is made to look like a settled technical one. The issue is not quantification as such but depoliticisation. Rottenburg introduces the term “metacode” as the shared technical language of reports, indicators, accounts and audits that lets otherwise incompatible parties cooperate at all. Through this metacode, contestable choices (an intervention’s goals, whose priorities it serves, what counts as success) are recoded into representations that are “detached from other subsystems of society in such a way that they cannot be subjected ... to social, political, or economic criteria” (Rottenburg, 2009). The donor’s framing is built into that technical layer, yet presented as a political necessity.

Rottenburg explains that “development aid thus becomes a matter of governmentality” (2009) so that the political question ceases to look like one.

These readings of depoliticisation are complementary, but address different levels: Ferguson’s (1990) “anti-politics machine” works at the level of development *discourse* – the manner in which the field renders poverty and politics into technical problems. Taggart and Power (2024) carry that discursive effect into the financialised present. Rottenburg zooms in on the machine’s inner processes, working ethnographically. Because he studies everyday cooperation practice, he can attend to the people in it, and he chooses to impute “only good intentions to all of the figures involved,” directing attention “toward ... general structural principles” rather than individual fault (2009, Prologue). This report takes a similar stance, differentiating between the problematic structure and the practitioners who work within it, who are frequently good-willed, certainly not ill-intended, yet still find themselves caught in what Rottenburg (2009) calls the “technical game”.

Concretely, the asymmetry runs through the documents. Templates, technical categories and reporting formats are authored on the German side and in German working languages, so the partner meets an exchange whose terms are already set and engages them as routine procedure rather than as open questions. Standardised ‘technical assistance’ in the drafting of proposals and agreements compounds this, because the side that supplies both the format and the expertise also shapes what can be proposed (Hasselskog et al., 2017). Financialisation, the audit-and-results turn, developmentality and the metacode are, in this sense, faces of one present-day arrangement.

This documentary and procedural layer is the mechanism that the recommendation chapters address directly: the templates, technical categories and standardised drafting through which authorship, and with it the asymmetry, is reproduced.

### **2.1.12 Recent Shifts in Debates: Enslavement, Colonialism, Reparations and Development Cooperation**

The UN has long been a site of debates about the historical meaning, contemporary effects and questions of responsibility and redress for enslavement and colonialism. The ongoing legacy of these asymmetric structures has been deliberated in specific UN formats such as the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance held in Durban, South Africa in 2001, and addressed in the Durban Declaration. The declaration defines transatlantic enslavement as a crime against humanity and called for systemic reparatory justice. It states:

*Slavery and the slave trade are a crime against humanity and should always have been so, especially the transatlantic slave trade.*

*Colonialism [and discriminatory structures caused by it] have contributed to lasting social and economic inequalities in many parts of the world today.*

(UN, 2001, pp. 12–15)

Notably, this declaration was adopted by Germany.

The debate was brought into the current geopolitical moment on 25 March 2026, when the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution A/RES/80/250 – with Germany choosing a different stance (UN, 2026). Spearheaded by Ghana and supported by the African Union (AU) and The Caribbean community (CARICOM), the resolution formally declared the trafficking of enslaved Africans and the racialised chattel enslavement of Africans as the “gravest crime against humanity” (Egbejule, 2026; UN, 2026). The presiding president of the UN General Assembly Annalena Baerbock, former foreign minister of Germany remarked on the demographic effect on the countries of origin:

*Slave trade and slavery stand among the gravest violations of human rights in human history — an affront to the very principles enshrined in the Charter of our United Nations ... It was, to put it in colder terms, mass resource extraction. (UN News, 2026)*

However, the German vote on the resolution diverged from these pronouncements and from the Durban Declaration, as the final vote tally showed a significant geopolitical cleavage. 123 member states, primarily representing the Global South and formerly colonised countries, voted in favour of the resolution and its call for reparative justice. Meanwhile, three nations voted against the motion – the US, Israel and Argentina; and 52 nations including the UK, Canada, Germany and all other 26 member states of the EU abstained (ISHR, 2026; UN, 2026). This division illustrated the differing interpretations among member states regarding institutional accountability and the translation of historical acknowledgments into structured redress.

A central point of contention in these global discussions is the conceptual distinction between development cooperation and formal, legally binding reparations. This debate became consequential in the bilateral negotiations between Germany and Namibia regarding the 1904–08 genocide of the Ovaherero and Nama peoples. The 2021 German–Namibian Joint Declaration proposed a €1.1 billion reconstruction and development package over a 30-year period. However, this framework was declined by prominent Ovaherero and Nama community organisations, chiefs (who have official recognition in the Namibian constitution) and legal experts who argue that developmental aid should

not be used as a substitute for direct legal liability and specific reparative structures (Melber, 2025; ECCHR, 2021).

For the purposes of this analysis, it is important to distinguish between two separate aspects:

### **The distinction between development assistance and reparations**

Formally, reparative justice requires an admission of legal wrongdoing, restitution and compensation based on mutual legal standing (ECCHR, 2021). Development cooperation, by contrast, is traditionally designed as a discretionary framework and is legally distinct from reparations (Völkerrechtsblog, 2023). Because development spending is typically subject to parameters and spending conditionalities that are designed by the donor, critics argue that it is categorically different from reparations as its conditionality can interfere with sovereign spending decisions, thereby maintaining a donor-recipient hierarchy.

As several UN special rapporteurs noted in their official communications regarding the German-Namibian negotiations, the “substitution of reparations by development aid ... risks perpetuating, rather than rectifying, colonial dynamics” (Salvioli et al., quoted in Völkerrechtsblog, 2023). This aligns with the perspectives of descendant communities and civil society organisations (CSOs) who maintain that “development aid is no substitute for reparations” (Israel Kaunatjike, representative of the Ovaherero people in Germany, quoted in VOA Africa, 2023). Proponents of this view argue that the acknowledgment of historical atrocities entails specific legal and reparative obligations rather than discretionary aid (GfbV, 2025).

### **The necessity of addressing colonial continuities in developmental frameworks**

Distinct from the reparations debate is the question of addressing the colonial continuities of development cooperation. This involves addressing enduring continuities in daily development practices such as Eurocentric knowledge hierarchies, structural power asymmetries, and the donor-recipient binaries that project Western models as the universal blueprint for progress (Ziai, 2015).

Ultimately, these dynamics highlight the ongoing divergence between the Global North and the Global South regarding accountability for historical extraction and unequal exchange. These historical patterns continue to influence contemporary international financial, political and knowledge structures, as well as the underlying assumptions of international development cooperation.

## **2.2 Defining and Distilling Colonial Continuities in German Development Cooperation**

While the rekindled debate on development and reparations described above signals important shifts, this report engages with the second aspect: addressing colonial continuities within Germany's development cooperation itself. Having established the economic, legal and political colonial impulses of Germany's participation in Europe's colonial expansion, and having traced some of their direct and mediated effects through Germany's North-South relations from the onset of colonialism to contemporary development cooperation, this selective survey allows us to historically and conceptually solidify what we mean by colonial continuities. We can now define them as follows.

Colonial continuities in Germany's development cooperation are not the persistence of colonial intent, which was formally renounced after 1945 and is emphatically refused by the majority of contemporary practitioners. Rather, they are the persistence of *asymmetric arrangements* of authority, expertise,

and resource distribution and access that echo colonial hierarchies – existing across structural, institutional and interpersonal levels. While the explicit colonial justifications for these asymmetries and the hierarchies they create, uphold and normalise have been disavowed, this does not mean that the arrangements and logics themselves have ended – they have repeatedly been reorganised rather than structurally broken away from.

At the **structural level**, these asymmetries reach into the global political and economic architecture that this chapter has traced. From expansionist, imperial war capitalism (through the Marshall Plan, Eurafrica and the Washington Consensus) into the current extractive trade and debt regimes, the politics of access to strategic raw materials, and the composition of the international financial and political order in the present day.

At the **institutional level**, they influence the design of German development organisations themselves. This involves staff term regimes that apply selectively and working-language requirements that route capacity through one direction of fluency. As well as time allocations that position the cost of intercultural translation on one side of the interface, and an integration of diasporic capacity that has remained largely informal (with the exception of a few dedicated projects underlining the potential).

At the **interpersonal level**, they manifest in the daily practices through which voice, recognition and authority are distributed inside the workplace and across partnership relations.

What makes these asymmetries *continuities* rather than incidental frictions in an otherwise neutral system is that they survive in patterns that look procedurally neutral on the surface:

- Who is authorised to define what works?
- Whose expertise is requested?
- Whose work to address asymmetries goes unrecognised?
- Which legal framework applies to staff terms under which circumstances?
- What counts as preparation?
- Who carries the time cost of intercultural translation?

The recommendations section identifies these patterns as continuities along the life cycle of a project.

Recognising them as continuities – instead of residual frictions – is a precondition for the German development cooperation interface to be adjusted to actually enable modes of co-creation. The recommendations that follow point to actions to be taken across the structural, institutional and interpersonal levels, and invites practitioners at all levels of the hierarchy to engage.

## 2.3 From Decolonisation to Decolonising Work

Before turning to modes for this engagement, a note on terminology. There is legitimate concern in critical scholarship about the inflationary use of the term ‘decolonisation’. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012), most prominently, warn that the term carries specific material commitments (land restitution, sovereign self-determination) that are not transferable into the metaphorical decolonisation of curricula, methods or development cooperation. Adom Getachew’s (2019) account of decolonisation as worldmaking – the constitutive ambition of mid-20th-century anticolonial movements to remake

the international order itself – likewise locates the proper sense of the term at the level of structural transformation. Decolonisation in that sense is beyond the scope and remit of this report.

However, this report does take seriously the argument developed by Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020, 2013) and Siba Grovogui (2006) that the actual project of decolonisation remains unfinished. This view argues that the formal political decolonisation of the mid-20th century preserved much of the coloniality of power that had structured the colonial period itself, as the previous chapter has traced for colonialities in development cooperation. From this vantage point, the question is not whether one can credibly speak of ‘decolonising’ German development cooperation. Instead, the question is: what forms of work can be done in its institutions that will contribute to the ongoing decolonial project rather than reproduce the continuities that the previous sections have outlined?

One characteristic of the historical decolonisation movements is particularly instructive for this question. The figures who became visible as the leaders of decolonisation – Nkrumah, Lumumba, Nyerere and others – were able to act as they did because broad movements were already organising across multiple levels. Trade unions, student organisations, women’s organisations, peasant movements, intellectuals, and diaspora networks each operated in their own contexts. Decolonisation was strategic but it was also mass action across multiple levels and levers.

The recommendations developed in this report are framed in the same way: they identify steps at structural, institutional and interpersonal levels, and they invite practitioners at every position of the institutional hierarchy to get involved. That is the form in which the unfinished work of decolonisation continues to be done – including in the institutions of German development cooperation. On that basis, the report builds its recommendations from what practitioners describe as already underway and from what they propose should follow.

## 2.4 From Colonialities of Power, Knowledge and Being to a Coloniality of Development

The previous sections traced colonial continuities, the structural inheritances that reach from war capitalism and the Marshall Plan through the Eurafrica project and structural adjustment into the present architecture of North–South relations. These inheritances continue to operate once the formal colonial order has ended, not with colonial intent, which has been disavowed, but as a patterning of authority, knowledge and recognition. The concept of coloniality used in the BMZ reform plan accounts for how this continuity is possible. The Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano conceptualised and coined the term ‘coloniality’, seeking to explain the many colonial continuities besetting Latin America long after the formal independence of its polities. Coloniality describes the “matrix of power” that outlived colonial administration and went on organising the modern world in its absence (Quijano, 2000).

Elaborated on by the Latin American modernity/coloniality collective and reworked by African scholars, among them Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020, 2013) and Sylvia Tamale (2020), coloniality describes what persists once colonialism as a formal political order is over. It asks who is presumed to know, who is presumed to lead, and whose ways of working are treated as the unmarked norm.

Three dimensions of this matrix help to cluster the colonial continuities described above, locate them in the development cooperation interface and capture what the recommendations developed in Chapter 5 are designed to address. The **coloniality of power** (Quijano, 2000) points to the persistence of hierarchies of authority that do not always track formal rank, the asymmetries through which

decision, clearance and strategy remain concentrated on one side of the interface. The **coloniality of knowledge** addresses the epistemic hierarchy that treats one body of expertise as universal and another as merely local – asking whose analysis is sought and whose is presumed to need correction.<sup>6</sup> The **coloniality of being** (Maldonado-Torres, 2007) describes hierarchies of the body and of race, the interpersonal dimension.

As the interviews conducted for this research amply show, in development cooperation, the coloniality of being is experienced as the routine (re-)production of the ‘developing’ other as deficient by default, and in the everyday register in which partner-country staff are positioned as ‘not yet ready’. These are not three separate problems but three faces of one arrangement, and they cut across the structural, institutional and interpersonal levels.

The analysis presented here invites practitioners to read these elements together. The experience of German development cooperation has been structured by the coloniality of power, of knowledge and of being in a manner that leaves a specific imprint on how cooperation is organised, exercised and experienced. Building on this lineage, that imprint can be described as a **coloniality of development**.

The current emphasis on partner orientation is a genuine attempt to address power imbalances and ownership, but addressing colonial continuities in German development cooperation more comprehensively would require a further step – towards co-creation. To do so, the specific ways in which colonialities impact German development cooperation have to be resolved. The differentiated professional structures of German development cooperation hold the potential to become an interface for such co-creation, one able to meet and help shape the present geopolitical moment. Addressing the colonial continuities traced here, at the structural, institutional and interpersonal levels, is the precondition for that shift.

# Chapter 3

## **Addressing Colonial Continuities in Development Cooperation Elsewhere**

### **3.1 Continuities Across the Western Donor Field**

Compared with other Western donors, Germany's development cooperation is typical rather than exceptional – overall, it appears neither further along than its peers in addressing colonial continuities nor is it more shaped by them. There are, however, real differences in openness and in approach to addressing this legacy in the field of development cooperation. A brief look at some of Germany's ODA peers who also share a colonial history is therefore instructive.

One pattern recurs across these donors. The language of 'partnership', 'ownership', 'localisation' and 'feminism' in foreign policy has moved faster than the structures it describes. The vocabulary has changed; the distribution of authority, knowledge and money has changed far less. The continuities visible in the German interface are not particular to Germany. They appear, in different national forms, across the Western donor field.

The aid<sup>7</sup> cuts of 2024–26<sup>8</sup> have made this easier to see. Reductions in aid, a turn towards domestic interests, the use of aid for migration control and the quiet retirement of feminist labels work, in effect, as a test of what each system treats as essential. The reforms that survive the cuts tend to be structural. Those abandoned first tend to be rhetorical, or seen as lower priority. The setting is the more multipolar moment described in Chapter 1, in which partner governments have other options, including China, Türkiye, India and the Gulf states. The setting is also the working definition provided in Chapter 2, where arrangements that look procedurally neutral can still reproduce colonial asymmetries.

### **3.2 Partnership Language Outpacing Structural Change**

Critical scholarship reads the turn to partnership, participation and ownership not as the end of hierarchy but as a more indirect form of governance. Under this model, control runs through self-management rather than direction and the partner carries responsibility for outcomes that the donor still defines (Lie, 2015). In this reading, coloniality is built into the international order instead of being a flaw in an otherwise neutral system (Rutazibwa, 2020). Whiteness can function as an unmarked sign of expertise, with the West as the absent standard against which others appear as deviations (Pailey, 2020).

This critique is most useful when it is reconstructive rather than only accusatory. After decades of post-development critique, the question is why the development project persists, and, for those who want to shed its coloniality while keeping the commitment to global solidarity, what to keep and what to discard (Rutazibwa, 2018). That work points towards recovery of local epistemologies rather than a blueprint imported from the North: reconnecting existing practices of dignity and self-determination in formerly colonised societies as resources for solidarity. Institutional rhetoric has shifted ahead of structural reality. The EU renamed its development portfolio the Commissioner for International Partnerships in 2019, and sector leaders now describe the agenda as “solidarity, not charity” (Ahmed, 2025). The task now is to let budgets, authority and decision rights follow the language; the words have been spoken, and the structures have to match them (Goris & Megadane, 2021; Kapazoglou & Goris, 2022).

‘Localisation’ shows the gap in concrete form. It promises to move power and resources to local actors, yet often leaves financial and epistemic control in the North. International non-governmental organisations (NGOs) register local offices and capture funds intended for local organisations, which sustains a value chain that begins at headquarters in donor countries. In one sector consultation, donor country offices were described as among the most visible manifestations of structural racism in the system (Peace Direct, 2021). While a localisation gap is a systemic feature of donor frameworks, certain peers have shown mechanisms to close it. The UK, for example, shows this dynamic most clearly, and offers a practical remedy, taken up in Section 3.10.

### **3.3 France: Reforms that Have not Undone the Older Structures**

France is the case where continuity is least disguised. Monetary oversight through the CFA franc currencies, an enduring military presence, and a long history of tied aid, that is, cooperation that obliged recipients to spend on French goods and then serviced the resulting debt, have held a structural asymmetry in place that the language of partnership has not removed (Pigeaud & Sylla, 2021). This is a structural point rather than an accusation: the concept of *Françafrique* can flatten a more complicated history, and works better as an analytic tool than as a charge (Gibbs, 2024).

The cost of the model is now visible in its loss of legitimacy. The rejection of the French presence across the Sahel region, in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, and the end of Operation Barkhane<sup>9</sup> show how fragile such an arrangement becomes once partners read it as serving donor strategic interest before cooperation (Chikhachev, 2025; Fasinu et al., 2025). Russia, China, Turkey and Gulf states are moving into the space this has opened, the multipolar shift described in Chapter 1.

France has also made real symbolic movement. The Sarr and Savoy report on restitution (2018) reopened the question of returning cultural property, even as the underlying dependencies continued. The country has begun, too, to install external scrutiny of its own spending. Following domestic criticism, an aid evaluation and transparency commission was created in early 2025 (Masters, 2025), a mechanism that Section 3.10 returns to as a practice worth studying. What matters for German cooperation is not France’s failings in themselves, but the fragility of arrangements that postpone structural reform, which the current cuts expose further (Section 3.6).

### **3.4 The Nordic Countries: A Self-image of Innocence that Obscures Continuity**

The Nordic region's projected image as donors without a colonial past, and therefore as disinterested helpers, is itself a form of coloniality: an account that sets aside complicity in colonial trade, scientific racism and continuing internal colonisation (Keskinen et al., 2016; Loftsdóttir & Jensen, 2012). It is the same exceptionalism, in a neighbouring form, that underwrites the German claim to a limited colonial past, which Chapter 2 examines.

Sweden shows the distance between label and structure. A pioneer of feminist foreign policy from 2014, it dropped this label in 2022. Then-Minister for Foreign Affairs Tobias Billström explained that the government would not continue with a feminist foreign policy "because the label obscures the fact that Swedish foreign policy must be based on Swedish values and Swedish interests" (Human Rights Watch, 2022). Norway presents a quieter version of the same priorities. It remains the most generous donor to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) by ratio, at 1.02% of gross national income (GNI) in 2024 (OECD, 2025). Yet much of its assistance has moved away from direct bilateral partnerships toward multilateral channels; and geographically, its funding has pivoted away from African partners towards Europe and Ukraine. (Norad, 2026.; Tjønneland, 2022).

The Sámi people across the Nordic nations and the Kola Peninsula in Russia remain subject to internal colonisation, historically through assimilationist boarding schools and today through conflicts over land and "green extractivism" (UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, 2016; Lehtola, 2015). This internal experience might be expected to foster greater reflexivity amongst Nordic states internationally, but the evidence does not support that. The documented pattern runs closer to the reverse, with paternalistic policies that have at times silenced indigenous justice claims (International Feminist Journal of Politics, 2024). The internal experience of colonised peoples could, in principle, inform a more reflexive practice abroad, but that remains a possibility rather than a record. Chapter 4 takes it up through models such as Two-Eyed Seeing (Bartlett, Marshall & Marshall, 2012) and the concept of "internal diasporas" (Brablec, 2025).

### **3.5 The Netherlands: Aligning Aid with National Economic Interest**

The Netherlands is the closest mirror for one of Germany's own risks. Dutch assistance increasingly subsidises the national private sector, and longstanding claims of 'untied aid' have been strained by a turn towards domestic priorities. Scholars trace a tied-aid and conditionality relationship with former colony Indonesia, which has been, in effect, continuous since 1901 (Christiaens, 2022).

The 2024–25 turn made these priorities explicit. Beyond the cuts detailed in Section 3.6, the remaining budget was refocused on trade, security and migration, with development cooperation folded more tightly into a 'Netherlands-first' frame (Klever, 2025; Government of the Netherlands, 2024). The OECD's most recent peer review had already flagged the tightening alignment of Dutch cooperation with national commercial and migration objectives (OECD, 2023). The Netherlands aligns aid and trade competently, where German implementation often lags, and that competence is itself the warning. Aligning aid with national economic interest efficiently is not the same as decolonising the relationship, and it draws the same criticism of economic dominance reproducing dependency that German private-sector partnerships invite (Section 3.11).

### **3.6 The 2024–26 Aid Cuts Show which Reforms were Structural**

Read across the cases, the retrenchment of the past two years works as a single test of what each system treats as essential. The figures show an unmistakable trend. France's 2025 budget cut the country's aid mission by roughly 23%, from about €5.7 billion to €4.4 billion. The development agency's Africa funding was reduced by about a third, with a further cut planned for 2026 (Focus 2030, 2025; Devex, 2025). Sweden's aid agency was cut by roughly a fifth, with assistance to Africa projected to fall by approximately 57% between 2021 and 2026, country programmes phased out, civil society agreements ended, and resources moved towards Ukraine (Government of Sweden, 2025; CONCORD Sverige, 2024). The Netherlands legislated a structural annual cut of about €2.4 billion from 2027, reducing aid from 0.62% of GNI in 2024 to 0.44% by 2029. The government also cut NGO funding by more than 70% and refocused on trade, security and migration (Klever, 2025; Government of the Netherlands, 2024).

Across the field, the items cut earliest were disproportionately rhetorical and relational, including feminist labels, civil society partnerships and gender programming, while the commercial and security architecture was largely retained. A reform that does not survive a budget cut was, in hindsight, not yet structural. Nor is this a passing episode of the political right. In the Netherlands, a coalition led by the progressive party that took office after the October 2025 election did not restore the cuts; development cooperation was not a priority in the formation and the reductions stand (NL Times, 2025). The retrenchment is structural rather than temporary, so a return to higher volumes cannot be assumed, and what can change is how cooperation is organised. The retreat is directional, not absolute: Sweden still gave 0.79% of its GNI in 2024, above the 0.7% target, and Norway 1.02% (OECD, 2025).

### **3.7 Canada: A Gap between International Commitments and the Domestic Record**

Canada presents a stark friction between a progressive international posture and an unresolved domestic historical record of settler-colonialism, coupled with external colonial continuities in its mining and exploration operations (Hall & Pryce, 2023, pp. 93-94). Although the era of classic British colonialism differs in many ways from Canada's twenty-first-century relations with African states, the structural patterns remain comparable. Butler (2015) argues that "Canadian involvement in African mining continues a long-established pattern in which resource wealth is extracted from the African continent" (p. 86). These patterns remain underdiscussed – partly due to Canada's international posture.

However, the FIAP framework itself functions as a form of colonial continuity, positioning Canada as a progressive global leader while downplaying the enduring colonial dynamics of resource extraction. This analysis is extended by arguments that the broader Canadian public is systematically socialised to endorse ongoing colonial mechanisms (Butler, 2015).

The contrast is institutionalised on both sides: Global Affairs Canada maintains its own Action Plan on Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples (2021–25), yet the domestic record it speaks to remains the measure against which the international posture is read (Global Affairs Canada, 2021). One study links feminist foreign policy directly to the silencing of indigenous justice claims in both Sweden and Canada (International Feminist Journal of Politics, 2024). Canadian charities have operated under 'direction and control' rules that effectively require approval of local partners' public statements, placing control over partners' voices on a presumption of distrust (Cooperation Canada, 2021). This transforms local movements for justice into compliant, risk-managed service providers, effectively stripping localisation of its political power.

### 3.8 Belgium: Acknowledgement without Structural Redress

Belgium has begun to confront its colonial past more openly than France. The state pursued an explicit reckoning, through a parliamentary commission that drew Congolese and Congolese-Belgian historians into the process, and the king acknowledged that colonial rule had been “unjustifiable” and marked by racism. Belgium has also tilted some of its cooperation towards countries where it had no colonial past, a deliberate attempt to separate aid from the old relationship (Christiaens, 2022).

It also took steps of symbolic restitution, including the return of murdered Congolese independence president Patrice Lumumba’s gold tooth<sup>10</sup> in 2022, with a formal apology recognising the government’s “moral responsibility” for the circumstances of his death and a reparative gesture (Al Jazeera, 2022; EJI:Talk!, 2022). The reckoning has fallen short of redress, however: there has been no financial reparation, and civil society actors have criticised the state for settling for symbolic ceremonies. Acknowledgement and restitution have run ahead of structural redress, while in the German debate, acknowledgement itself is still contested.

### 3.9 German Strengths to Build On

The comparison with other Western countries with colonial pasts allows for some of the strengths of German cooperation to become apparent. It is an established supporter of triangular and South–South arrangements, in which two Global South partners lead and Germany provides secondary support; this is a strength to deepen rather than a novelty to claim. The active inclusion of Global South voices into donor institutions is already underway, and the task is to formalise and protect it.

State-level acknowledgement of the colonial past also exists (Auswärtiges Amt, n.d.), but the process remains in progress and incomplete rather than a settled achievement. Chapter 2 shows that the Namibia joint declaration was rejected by Herero and Nama organisations, and that Germany decided to abstain on the landmark March 2026 UN resolution. The acknowledgement of historical atrocities is at once real and contested, and, for that reason, a strength to build on (Gwatiwa, 2024).

### 3.10 Practices that German Cooperation can Adopt from Others

Three practices from the other donors are worth adopting.

The first is a **shift towards core and flexible funding**, with a design caveat that the evidence requires. CSOs strongly prefer unrestricted funding, which supports innovation and long-term capacity, while project funding pushes agendas towards short-term, donor-legible results (Cassidy-Soto, 2025; Browne, 2015). A comparison of core and project funding in Swedish cooperation, however, finds that core funding can be more detrimental than project funding when it carries heavy reporting and compliance requirements, because the attached conditions erode the flexibility that is its purpose (Voluntas, 2025). The lesson for Germany is therefore sharper than ‘provide flexible funding’. It is to shift towards core funding and reduce the compliance burden, or else the mechanism delivers the reporting load of project funding without the predictability of core funding.

The second is **financial equity by design**: requiring that grantees budget local partners' institutional running costs, as the UK's development agency has done through overhead provisions. This is a direct remedy for the fund capture dynamic described in Section 3.2.

The third is **independent oversight**: an arm's-length body that audits whether stated commitments on gender and transparency move beyond rhetoric, of the kind France established with its 2025 aid commission. Whether German cooperation is beginning something comparable under its current strategy is worth confirming rather than asserting.

A single thread runs through all three practices: making the hierarchy of strategic interests legible to staff and partners instead of holding it upstream.

### **3.11 Remaining Risks for German Cooperation**

German development cooperation carries two risks of its own. One is strategic sincerity. A commitment to decolonisation can track a partner's strategic or economic importance, so that acknowledgement is used to court desired partners rather than held as principle. The other is economic dominance, the Dutch mirror. An emphasis on private-sector partnership can prioritise the German economy and create new dependencies.

One distinction belongs in the background (Section 2.1.12). Development cooperation, however reformed, is not a substitute for reparative justice, but a different instrument with different obligations (Táíwò, 2022; Hickel, 2017).

Chapter 4 turns to a group inside the development interface that is often treated as a recipient of expertise rather than a source of it: the diaspora as a development actor.

# Chapter 4

## **Diasporic Expertise in German Development Cooperation**

### **4.1 Why Engage the Diaspora, and on what Basis**

If colonial continuities in development cooperation rest in part on a notion of exclusive Western expertise – an operational assumption that the relevant knowledge sits with the donor – then engaging the African diaspora on the strength of its expertise is one of the more direct ways to unsettle that assumption. Working with the diaspora can help to address the colonialities conceptualised above.

This relationship can disrupt the coloniality of knowledge by sharing or even relinquishing epistemic authority. That is, the power to decide what is proper knowledge and who is an expert, and with that, what the scope, goals, methods, partners and evaluation of a development project should entail, and what should be excluded. Working with the diaspora can also address the coloniality of power, provided that representatives from self-mandated diaspora organisations are integrated into project boards with decision-making powers. This kind of collaboration can also tip the scales on the coloniality of being by changing who is in the room, who is part of or can represent a project, and who can influence every step of its life cycle.

However, to be able to invite such expertise in, it is important to bring on board practitioners who can speak to and address structural inequalities, racism and exclusion based on individual as well as collective experience and professional expertise. For diasporic inclusion to address the colonialities of development, it is therefore important that this inclusion happens in a framework that goes beyond instrumental participation.

Diasporas – the populations the International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines as “migrants or descendants of migrants whose identity and sense of belonging have been shaped by their migration experience and background”<sup>11</sup> – already hold a central place in the economies and societies of the Global South. The impulse that first drew diasporas to the centre of development policy and research, some fifteen years ago, was financial: remittances were found to exceed by a wide margin the bilateral and multilateral official development assistance (ODA) reaching the same countries (Aikins, 2016). This holds true today.

In 2024, the World Bank projected remittances to low- and middle-income countries at some US\$685 billion – larger than foreign direct investment and ODA combined (World Bank, 2024). What diaspora communities return, though, is not only monetary; it also takes the form of social remittances understood as the skills, practices, norms and networks that travel with people. More fundamentally, diaspora members have never been only objects of development intervention.

They are actors in their own right, pursuing their own interests, social obligations and practical solidarity in a field shaped by power imbalances; at times in the slipstream of official development policy, at times in opposition to it and at other times well beyond it (Aikins, 2016).

The case must be stated carefully because the version that comes most easily to hand reproduces the very problem it means to address: that origin itself confers insight. The capacities at issue here are not given by descent. They are acquired – a familiarity with the languages, institutions and expectations on both sides of a cooperation relationship, built through exposure and practice. The colonial record set out in earlier chapters is reason enough not to assume that shared origin guarantees alignment or good faith. At its base, this is a question of the coloniality of being: asking who is recognised as a holder of expertise that can be deployed, and who is not (Section 2.4).

Beyond the principle of diaspora capacities being acquired rather than inherited, two practical considerations point in the same direction.

The first is that these contributions run largely outside the international cooperation system. Remittances move counter-cyclically to official flows and are not taxed by any European state. They also carry high transaction costs when sent through formal channels, thus deterring use of such channels. This is a vital input to partner economies and of importance for recipient households and economies.

The second consideration is a shifting geopolitical moment in which partner governments are themselves moving to deepen ties with their diaspora communities; a donor that does not do likewise forgoes an interface that its partners are actively building. A willingness to engage the diaspora is, at the most basic level, a step away from the top-down, donor-driven posture that this report traces, and towards something closer to co-creation. It also marks a departure from the older narrative that cast diaspora members and other partner-country actors as partial, biased or corruptible, and therefore admissible only at the level of recipient or implementer.

The reframing of diaspora communities as autonomous and often experienced development actors rather than objects of management has been gathering in the field for over a decade. The IOM argued in 2013 that involving diasporas in the design and delivery of programmes could help equalise relations of power between benefactors and beneficiaries, given the understandings of language, culture and context that diaspora members carry. Objective 19 of the 2018 Global Compact for Migration commits states to “create conditions for migrants and diasporas to fully contribute to sustainable development in all countries”. Likewise, the 2022 Global Diaspora Summit took the engagement of transnational communities as a working premise rather than an open question.

Yet that same literature is alert to the risk. Caution has been raised that “essentialized understandings limit the potential of diaspora engagement as a means of innovating the development industry” (Sinatti & Horst, 2015, p. 134). This is to say that inclusion and co-creation can work only if the expertise it recognises is treated as acquired and demonstrable rather than as a property of origin.

Recognition of this kind also exposes diasporic engagement to capture. Development policy that approaches diasporic actors as a malleable medium or as a reservoir of resources to be tapped generates a standing tension between co-optation and self-determination (Aikins, 2016). The more so because the racialised history of capitalism that produced these transnational communities in the first place also shapes the development policy now courting them (Mohan & Zack-Williams, 2002). Both sides of that have to be held in view.

Institutional engagement does not, on its own, address colonial continuities; it can as easily reproduce them. Diaspora actors can be deployed as the visible face of activity whose terms they do not set – a dynamic with a long lineage, of which the Tuskegee–Togo cotton expedition, modelled on the Hampton–Tuskegee scheme, is an early instance from the context of German colonial rule in Togo (see Ch. 2.1.1.). Funding structures can pull diaspora organisations towards host-country priorities, including efforts to reroute the lucrative flow of remittances towards donor-defined ends rather than the priorities of senders or recipient communities. These are not reasons to withhold engagement. They are the conditions that determine whether engagement does what it promises, and they recur, in one form or another, across the national cases that follow.

## **4.2 The German Baseline: Four Barriers to Engagement**

The barriers to ‘richer and more meaningful’ diasporic engagement in Germany cut across labour, sustainability, trust, bureaucracy and language, as set out by diaspora organisations at a closed-door roundtable convened by the Deutsche Afrika Stiftung. They are not all of a kind: one is conceptual – a question of who is permitted to author a strategy – and the other three are the practical conditions that hold that conceptual limit in place.

### **4.2.1 Whose Expertise Authors the Strategy?**

German institutions acknowledge diasporic expertise but tend to confine it to cultural translation, soft skills or project implementation rather than strategic design (diaspora organisations, Deutsche Afrika Stiftung roundtable, 2026). In the formulation that recurs across the diaspora accounts, ‘Western expertise’ remains the architect of the development strategy, while the diaspora member is hired as a ‘local guide’. This observation is shared among diasporan professionals, even as their numbers grow across the German development interface: individual expertise may be recognised but they do not yet gain visibility as a group.<sup>12</sup> The hierarchy this describes exemplifies a coloniality-of-knowledge pattern: technical and financial authority presumed to reside with the GIZ and the BMZ.

### **4.2.2 Unpaid Labour and the Precarity of Engagement**

Many diaspora organisations in Germany operate pro bono, with few or no paid roles. Their members typically volunteer while also holding a full-time job, or work full-time for the organisation while looking for paid employment (Kandiah, 2022). The result is structural precarity: engagement depends on donated time, and the capacity to sustain or grow an operation is correspondingly thin. This is less a matter of commitment than of the absence of a financial floor under the work that institutions nonetheless rely on.

### **4.2.3 Mistrust on Both Sides**

Trust fails in both directions, and the two failures reinforce each other. On the institutional side, a presumption with colonial roots casts diaspora actors as less reliable in a formal leadership role, as seemingly more susceptible to corruption (Germany Africa Business Forum, 2026). Similarly, their organisations meet additional bureaucratic hurdles when competing with domestic NGOs for funding. On the diaspora side, the same hurdles, together with the absence of formal and compensated roles, erode the motivation to engage through official channels at all. Many redirect their efforts into informal routes, including remittances and groups outside any governmental frame. The result is what one account calls a “vicious circle” in which the institution and the diaspora each sustain the behaviour that gives the other reason to withdraw (Winterhagen, 2016).

## 4.2.4 The Registered Association and the German-language Gate

Access to funding is gated by a requirement to adopt German legal and administrative forms – principally the registered association, (the *eingetragener Verein* (e.V.)) – and to operate in the German language. This installs a particular bureaucratic norm as the universal measure of validity, and in doing so screens out the smaller, grassroots groups that often carry the most embedded knowledge in favour of professionalised organisations that are versed in German bureaucracy. The language requirement compounds this effect. German is a colonial language for African diaspora communities and, outside Namibia, it is not a working language in the formerly colonised African nations from which many of these communities come. The expectation that diaspora work be conducted in German is, as the diaspora accounts note, itself a colonial continuity – and, unlike the others, one that is comparatively easy to remedy.

## 4.3 How Peer States give Diasporic Expertise a Place

Four European peers have moved, in different ways, from informal, project-based engagement towards standing arrangements that give diaspora expertise a recognised place. They differ in how far that reach extends into the places where policy and budgets are decided.

### 4.3.1 Belgium: Brokering Trust through Vocational Cooperation

Of Belgium's population in 2024, 13.7% was non-Belgian and a further 21.6% was Belgian with a foreign background. Within the foreign-origin group, 26.2% were of African origin, around 9% from sub-Saharan Africa, with the largest share from Central Africa – the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Burundi, Belgium's former colonies. Engagement runs largely through the IOM's Migration for Development in Africa programme, with its associated Diaspora Advisory Board, and through Enabel, the country's cooperation agency, with an African focus concentrated on Central and West Africa and the Maghreb region. The IOM frames the diaspora's contribution as extending well beyond financial remittances to an "untapped potential in terms of humanitarian relief, promoting trade, investments, innovation and knowledge and technology transfers" (IOM, 2026).

Enabel's work concentrates on technical and vocational education and training, with attention to women and other marginalised groups (Enabel, 2026). It has used people with prior migration experience – alongside prolonged placements and workshops on the migration experience – to build the rapport that the uptake of such programming depends on. Its PAMMOD project mobilises the West African diaspora in Europe to support micro-entrepreneurs in agriculture, tourism and fashion in Guinea, matching diaspora experts with Guinean small and medium enterprises so that training is delivered, in effect, by the community's own people. A 2021 evaluation of Enabel's work notes a structural limit: the agency cannot directly finance self-employment, and harnessing diaspora remittances to that end falls outside its remit, even as the same evaluation recognises the potential of diaspora investment to fill the gap.

Belgium's engagement turns on the use of the diaspora to broker trust where the state itself holds little, together with a marked attention to gender efforts that cut against patriarchal assumptions in older development practice. The caution runs alongside it. Around a tenth of Belgian ODA has historically funded the domestic reception of refugees. In recent years, that funding has been redirected towards reducing migratory flows – a framing of development as containment, in which the migrant is perceived as a threat to be managed rather than a resource to be engaged. Diaspora members, meanwhile, remain at the periphery of policy-making, recognised as cultural brokers rather than high-level technical experts, without an officially constituted platform allowing them to influence policy or budget allocation.

### 4.3.2 France: Political Representation at the Centre

France hosts one of the largest African diasporas in Europe, making up close to half of its migrant population in 2023, drawn mainly from the Franco-African states and others in West Africa. Its approach mirrors the centralisation of its development system under the Agence Française de Développement (AFD): engagement is channelled through government-supported bodies, of which two are central. First, the Presidential Council for Africa (CPA), composed largely of members of the African diaspora, advises the president directly on Africa policy. Second, the Forum of International Solidarity Organisations Rooted in Migration (FORIM), federates over a thousand diaspora associations working across sub-Saharan Africa, the Maghreb, Southeast Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific under government auspices.

FORIM combines development work in countries of origin with advocacy for diaspora issues in France. It works to present a positive image of immigrants and to build a sense of belonging for those of 'double-belonging' [*la double appartenance*] as contributors to French society. It also brokers networks between its member associations, French CSOs and the authorities. Like many of its members, it operates largely through volunteers, with a small salaried team and an elected board. Alongside these representative structures, France runs a suite of entrepreneurial and remittance programmes. Among them are Pass Africa, Digital Africa and Choose Africa 2 to finance the private sector and technology entrepreneurs on the African continent, as well as the DIASDEV platform, which works to lower remittance costs and improve diaspora access to financial and investment services.

MEET Africa is the most developed of these programmes: an €8.5 million initiative co-funded by the EU and the French foreign ministry. Now in its third phase, the initiative supports the African diaspora in both France and Germany through a staged framework of digital networking, capacity-building – involving coaching on financial plans and legal structures – and start-up funding. Its earlier phase aimed to support up to 150 diaspora-led projects, building on the 80 approved in the first phase.

France answers the German authorship barrier most directly: through the CPA, diaspora expertise reaches the level where African policy is set. However, this centralised approach is also met with criticism. A heavily state-channelled model risks siloed thinking and dependence on continued state support. In addition, it carries the more pointed risk of instrumentalisation. For example, talent passports and academic recruitment schemes, such as the Bienvenue en France initiative, that welcome African elites and students in the expectation that they will remain culturally aligned with France and serve its influence upon return to their countries of origin.

### 4.3.3 The Netherlands: an Engagement Model with Stages

Of the Dutch population in 2025, roughly 28.6% was of partly or wholly non-Dutch descent, and around 7.7% of African descent excluding Moroccan, with the largest groups originating in Cabo Verde, Egypt, Ghana, Somalia and South Africa. The Dutch African diaspora is comparatively small, but Dutch engagement with it is substantial. Guided by its Africa Strategy 2023–32 and the IOM's Connecting Diaspora for Development (CD4D) programme, the Netherlands hosts the African Diaspora Policy Centre, which co-led the Europe-wide African Diaspora Platform for Development, and developed the Diaspora Engagement Model for Development (2021). This model was produced in cooperation with the BMZ and the GIZ, and structured as a sequenced roadmap for moving diaspora contributions from informal initiative to formally facilitated national policy.

The model is organised around four pillars, each pairing a requirement with the change it is meant to produce. The first is political will: a commitment at the highest level of leadership that positions the diaspora as a respected development constituency rather than an external pocket of loose change.

The second is knowing the diaspora, through data collection and mapping that lets policy-makers see from where their diaspora originates and what human, social and economic capital it holds. The third is an enabling environment – a diaspora-friendly ecosystem that reduces administrative hurdles, lowers remittance costs and enforces property and licensing rules, building the trust that sustained collaboration requires. The fourth is a formal national diaspora policy that translates broad development goals into defined interventions with timelines and verification metrics.

Similarly, the Europe-wide African Diaspora Platform for Development (EADPD), which ran from 2011 to 2013, sought to convene African diaspora organisations across Europe – partnering bodies in the UK, France, Belgium and Germany’s GIZ – into a coordinated transnational actor. The explicit aim was moving the diaspora’s involvement from informal, localised work to an organised actor able to participate meaningfully in the cooperation process.

The Dutch case also documents, more comprehensively than the others, the conditions that constrain the smaller diaspora organisations that a model like this is meant to reach. Most depend heavily on members’ personal finances, and their growth is held back by gaps in management capacity and by Dutch-language barriers. These operational and economic constraints are compounded by restrictive migration policy, by internal fragmentation across a diverse population and by forms of discrimination that keep African immigrants out of influential circles. The limited availability of monitoring and evaluation documentation further limits the ability of these organisations to engage at higher institutional levels.

The Dutch model is useful on two counts: it treats engagement as a process, with stages a government can follow, and as a multinational architecture that lends the diaspora’s role a legitimacy that no single state confers on its own. It still has its limits, however. Public monitoring and evaluation of these initiatives is thin – for the policy centre and the European platform in particular, little material is available to judge the work against its stated goals. In addition, the wider European drift towards treating aid as leverage for migration control marks the limits of the model’s reach, together with a persistent national self-image of Dutch exceptionalism that eclipses the country’s colonial history.

#### **4.3.4 Italy: Engagement Written into Law**

In 2024, about 11.2% of Italy’s population was of African descent, hailing mainly from Morocco, Egypt, Tunisia, Nigeria and Senegal. Italy gives diaspora engagement a statutory footing. A diaspora representative sits on the National Council for Development Cooperation (CNCS) and chairs its working group on migration and development, and the country counts over 2 100 registered diaspora organisations. Since 2011, Italy and the IOM have run targeted training through the Migration Associations for Co-Development (**A.MI.CO.**) initiative, supported by national diaspora summits in 2017–18 that helped establish the Italian Diaspora Forum as the government’s principal interlocutor on diaspora questions.

**A.MI.CO.** operates under Law 125/2014 and is designed to move migrant associations from informal community groups to recognised co-development actors. It does so through a graduated sequence. First, training in the practical work of drafting proposals, budgeting and networking. Then an award that pairs a financial prize for strong project concepts with continuing technical oversight. An implementation grant follows, under more rigorous selection and monitoring for past award recipients. Finally, a longer-term institutional track offering coaching and resources to scale up the associations that prove themselves.

Its successor framework, **DRAFT the Future!** Towards a Diaspora Forum in Italy aims to address the absence of a structured, coordinated and inclusive representation of diaspora actors at the national

level. It pursues this aim through three priorities: mapping diaspora forums and platforms at the European level to assess good practice; needs-based capacity-building and peer-to-peer exchange; and a grant scheme, with an accompanying study grant, that lets associations build the financial and operational track record that other public donors require for eligibility.

What gives Italy's arrangement its durability is that the role is written into law rather than left to goodwill, so it holds across changes of government. That durable recognition can be paired with the patient, capacity-building work of bringing smaller associations to the threshold of eligibility.

#### **4.3.5 Canada: Reconciliation at Home, Extraction Abroad**

Canada's indigenous peoples have been described as an "internal diaspora", a framing that throws into relief the difference between them and a transnational diaspora. This position results in indigenous peoples being, "excluded from full belonging while residing within their own ancestral lands" (Brablec, 2025). The appeal of this idea is that a state that takes its own reconciliation commitments seriously might carry that approach outwards, into how it engages a transnational diaspora – and in doing so unsettle Western-centric development frameworks from within rather than only at the border.

Canada has, on paper, some of the apparatus this would require: 10 principles, introduced in 2017, governing the relationship with indigenous peoples; recognition of rights as pre-existing rather than state-granted, protected under Section 35 of the Constitution;<sup>13</sup> and a stated commitment to move away from the paternalistic administration embodied in the Indian Act and the residential school system it enabled.

In practice, the two engagements run on a double standard. Canada's treatment of its indigenous populations has drawn sustained criticism as performative – land acknowledgements alongside contradicting policy that puts resource extraction above community interests. Furthermore, its commitments abroad have largely remained declarations, while Canadian extractive activity has at times exported the opposite of reconciliation, as in the Solaris mining conflict in Ecuador.

Canada's diaspora, for its part, is read through the mosaic image of unity in diversity, which can operate as a pressure towards assimilation to a constructed national identity. On critical reading, this identity neglects the racial hierarchies that development discourse claims to have transcended, thus maintaining a colonial narrative of Western-settler supremacy. Canada's Africa Strategy, in keeping with the European cases, seeks to move past a donor-recipient dynamic and positions its fast-growing African diaspora as a partner. But it does so largely as an economic and diplomatic broker, and alongside the same bureaucratic gatekeeping of grassroots groups seen elsewhere. Canada marks the distance between a reconciliation vocabulary and its practice, rather than offering a model to follow.

### **4.4 Germany's Working Models: WIDU and MEG**

Germany already has project-level experience with diaspora engagement in development cooperation. Two BMZ-funded programmes implemented by the GIZ already implement cooperation in different ways, and they show what a working alternative to a fully donor-driven posture looks like in practice.

WIDU.africa, a flagship initiative funded by the BMZ, the EU and The Gates Foundation, supports micro- and small enterprises in Africa by building on private diaspora remittances. It operates through a fund-matching model: a diaspora member in Europe and a local entrepreneur in Africa each contribute a quarter of a business investment plan, while WIDU provides the remaining half as a matched grant of up to €3 000, supplemented by individual coaching. On the programme's own

difference-in-difference impact evaluation, the results are reported as substantial: WIDU-supported businesses saw a significant attributable increase in employment. The initiative promoted business formalisation, with tax registrations rising from 31% to 46%, and over time, it neutralised the systemic disadvantages that are typically faced by women entrepreneurs in the region.

For Germany, WIDU exemplifies a shift in how the country engages its African diaspora in development cooperation. Rather than treating the diaspora merely as ambassadors for state-designed programmes, WIDU builds a framework that capitalises on the diaspora's existing economic and social capital. It recognises the contributions that diaspora members already make through remittances, and the deep transnational networks they hold. By establishing a platform that lets the diaspora formally invest in local entrepreneurs, Germany bridges private, informal diaspora financial flows with official development goals such as job creation, business formalisation and financial literacy.

The operational model actively challenges several colonial continuities inherent in classical ODA, which has tended to rest on a paternalistic donor-recipient basis and on the assumption that the Global North is the sole expert, dictating to the recipient Global South how aid is to be used. WIDU helps dismantle that hierarchy by transferring the power of project selection and the primary financial risk to the diaspora and to local African entrepreneurs. Because the African actors are the main authority and the initial investors in their own projects, the German state's role shifts from a top-down to a supportive one. Moreover, the design acknowledges that the localised knowledge of the diaspora is just as valuable – and arguably in this context, superior.

The one qualification, which does not undo the design, is that the German state still sets the platform rules and retains the final say over which projects qualify for the match, so a residual structural donor dynamic remains.

The Shaping Development-Oriented Migration (MEG) programme, commissioned by the BMZ, ran from June 2023 to May 2026 and was conceived as a framework response to the UN Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM). Its geographic field of action focuses on select African states – Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana and Tunisia – alongside countries in Eastern Europe, Asia and Latin America, and to support them in “leveraging the benefits of regular migration and engaging diaspora for sustainable development” (GIZ, 2024). MEG's second field of action turns explicitly to cooperation with the various diasporas, positioning people with a migration history in Germany as central development actors, and it does so through a concrete set of pathways.

The programme operated on several fronts. It funded temporary, short-term assignments for diaspora experts to deliver technical and professional expertise to ministries and CSOs in their countries of origin, and assisted diaspora members in Germany to establish businesses that contribute to sustainable economic development in their countries of origin. The programme also provided a framework for German-based diaspora organisations to partner with local organisations on grassroots development projects, and advised ministries on how to optimise diaspora engagement and implement gender-responsive development and migration policy. In addition, MEG hosted networking events to build dialogue and synergies between diaspora members and development partners. It introduced a 16-member Diaspora Advisory Board of highly qualified diaspora professionals to shape and guide the programme's support strategies directly.

MEG was interested in institutionalising consultation. The diaspora is a standing window into the priorities and strategies of partner countries, and MEG structurally acknowledged the intersectional expertise that diaspora actors hold, in the name of ‘mutual learning’ and mutual benefit. It however shares a limit with other German programmes: diaspora organisations partnering at the local level must still master complex German administrative, reporting and legal forms to secure funding.

While MEG offered advice and training to ease this, the ultimate standard of organisational validity remains rooted in German institutional norms, keeping a subtle donor-driven compliance structure intact.

Germany brings two further strengths to build on. Through the GIZ and the BMZ, the country participates in diaspora initiatives well beyond those based on German soil. Among them, MEET Africa gives German institutions a direct line of sight into how peer nations engage their diaspora communities and what those approaches yield. And the much-noted thoroughness of the German reporting and evaluation system, whatever its burdens elsewhere, means that diaspora-facing programmes in Germany are comparatively well documented and assessed. As the largest provider of ODA, Germany also moves a correspondingly large system; WIDU and MEG show that some of it has begun to shift from conditionally driven funding towards more collaborative forms. The question this raises is how much further that shift can be taken, and on what terms.

## **4.5 From Narrow Recognition to Structural Standing**

Germany's institutional barriers, the frameworks established by peer states, and existing domestic programming all suggest a similar policy direction. A transition from a narrow recognition of diaspora expertise as cultural mediation toward its structural integration based on proven, professional competence -granting diaspora actors a voice in project design, not just implementation.

The peer cases suggest the forms such integration can take, and they can be read as a sequence of increasing durability. France's CPA shows what it means for diaspora expertise to reach the level where African policy is set. The Dutch model illustrates how a government can move there in stages rather than by gesture. Italy's Law 125/2014 reveals how a legal mandate can hold the arrangement steady across electoral change. Germany's own WIDU and MEG, in turn, show that autonomy-preserving design and standing consultation are already in the country's institutional repertoire.

This institutional shift is neither novel nor untested. Where a standing diaspora body is proposed, 'empowerment' should be read as institutional standing within the German development interface – a mandate from the political decision-making level to act inside that structure, not as a partisan role. The distinction matters precisely because the term is open to misreading. (The specific, four-level recommendation is developed in Chapter 5: Recommendation 5.) The barriers name the enabling conditions in turn: paid and protected roles in place of donated time, processes made available in partners' working languages, and a remit that reaches strategy rather than stopping at implementation.

Each peer is accompanied by the caveats that centralisation can instrumentalise, consultation can stay symbolic, and recognition can become performative. These warnings are addressed later in the recommendations section and rests on a single condition: that the expertise being recognised is treated as acquired and demonstrable, anchored in what diaspora practitioners have done and can do, rather than in identity.

# Chapter 5

## **Addressing Colonial Continuities: Recommendations across the Project Life Cycle**

The recommendations that follow are organised along the sequence of a project's life cycle, from the government negotiations that set its terms, to scoping, design and implementation, through to evaluation. Each recommendation takes up a segment of that cycle, and for each one, the practitioners interviewed for this report identified how it is shaped by the colonial continuities traced in the preceding chapters.

The accounts gathered here vary across institutional position, geographic context and the weight that each practitioner places on structure against individual agency; that variation is part of the evidence. The chapters above have traced patterns that are recurring rather than universal – embedded in the logic of the arrangement without necessarily being present in every encounter. Some of the accounts cited below describe what might be called rare cases, episodes in which continuities become visible in sharp relief instead of remaining opaque. These cases are presented here not with the claim that they are frequent occurrences but instead as diagnostic instances. A structure that can generate such outcomes when conditions converge has not been set up to ensure that they do not occur, or that there are clear procedures in place to address these occurrences.

What an arrangement permits, even at its outer limits, is evidence of what it has normalised – even where the majority of those working in it would neither endorse the outcome nor, in most encounters, produce it. The patterns are recurring,<sup>14</sup> so some of the rare cases where implicit continuities are made explicit are not exceptions. Rather, they are the outer edge of a logic present in the ordinary, everyday work and communication, not departures from it.

Each recommendation carries action points across all the levels of the hierarchy; none is geared at a single level alone. Shaping action items across levels is deliberate. Colonial continuities have cross-cutting effects. They run through structures, institutions and everyday working relations at once, so a remedy confined to a single level might end up adjusting an output while leaving the arrangement that produces it intact. Taking these continuities seriously requires reaching across levels, as the following recommendations show.

The recommendations draw on relevant academic literature and on practitioner writing, but they rest above all on the interviews and focus groups conducted for this report. The remedies proposed here are grounded in the experience of the people who do the work, inside and alongside German development cooperation, rather than derived from theory alone. Where a recommendation calls

for change, it is because practitioners named the difficulty and, in many cases, pointed towards the remedy themselves.

Each recommendation is a lever that reaches across every level of the hierarchy; the numbers follow the stages of the cycle which provides the sequence of Chapter 5.

**Figure 1**  
The project life cycle and the 10 recommendations

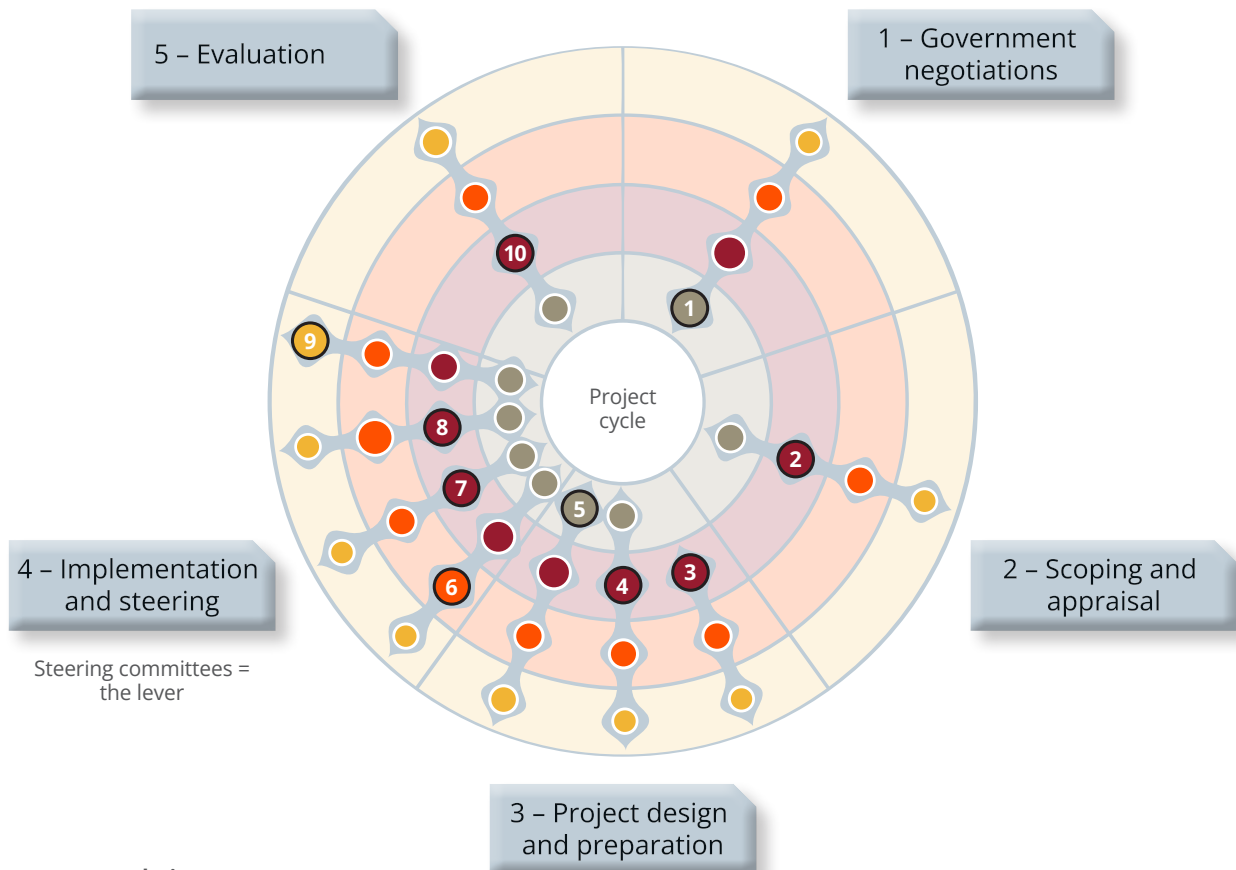
**Recommendations across the project life cycle**  
With action items across all levels of the hierarchy.

**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



**The recommendations**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #808080; border: 2px solid #000; border-radius: 50%; text-align: center; line-height: 15px; margin-right: 5px;">1</span> Reshape government negotiations</li> <li><span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #800000; border: 2px solid #000; border-radius: 50%; text-align: center; line-height: 15px; margin-right: 5px;">2</span> Strategic co-conception</li> <li><span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #800000; border: 2px solid #000; border-radius: 50%; text-align: center; line-height: 15px; margin-right: 5px;">3</span> Consistent staff terms</li> <li><span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #800000; border: 2px solid #000; border-radius: 50%; text-align: center; line-height: 15px; margin-right: 5px;">4</span> Preparation on both sides</li> <li><span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #808080; border: 2px solid #000; border-radius: 50%; text-align: center; line-height: 15px; margin-right: 5px;">5</span> Diaspora integration</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #ffa500; border: 2px solid #000; border-radius: 50%; text-align: center; line-height: 15px; margin-right: 5px;">6</span> Designated time and evaluable role</li> <li><span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #800000; border: 2px solid #000; border-radius: 50%; text-align: center; line-height: 15px; margin-right: 5px;">7</span> Progression and protected reporting</li> <li><span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #800000; border: 2px solid #000; border-radius: 50%; text-align: center; line-height: 15px; margin-right: 5px;">8</span> Bilingual communication</li> <li><span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #ffa500; border: 2px solid #000; border-radius: 50%; text-align: center; line-height: 15px; margin-right: 5px;">9</span> Peer support and representation</li> <li><span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #800000; border: 2px solid #000; border-radius: 50%; text-align: center; line-height: 15px; margin-right: 5px;">10</span> Open and learning-oriented evaluation</li> </ul> |
|---|---|

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

Source: author's analysis

## **Beyond a Deficit Reading: Aid Effectiveness and Colonial Continuities**

The difficulties that practitioners describe across the project life cycle can be read in two ways. The established reading is that of aid effectiveness: it treats these difficulties as gaps in information, capacity or the alignment of incentives, to be closed by a technocratic fix so that the system performs better. Its lineage runs through the OECD DAC's high-level forums on aid effectiveness, held in Paris (2005), Accra (2008) and Busan (2011), results-based management and the rationalist bargaining accounts that bracket the historical genealogy (Swedlund, 2017). The second reading looks past the immediate gap to the historically embedded structures that produce those same difficulties (traced in the preceding chapters). The question moves from what is missing here and now to what extent the inherited and reorganised contemporary arrangement of development cooperation keeps producing these difficulties.

The two readings are not symmetrical because the aid-effectiveness account often rests on the continuities it does not name. 'Capacity-building' shows this most plainly. It is routinely invoked with no historical account of the deprivation – colonial and recent – that produced the gap it proposes to close: the colonial restriction of education and administration. This trajectory has been traced directly from colonial administration to development studies itself (Kothari, 2005) and, in the present, the departure of capacitated individuals into better-resourced sectors.

A decolonial critique of capacity development describes the mechanism: the "transfer model" that underpins such interventions "presupposes a deficit, thus replicating colonial power hierarchies that portray the South as the location of problems and backwardness and the North as the location of solutions and progress" (Mormina & Istratii, 2021). Meanwhile being "presented in apolitical, value-neutral terms" that obscure "the normativity of colonial legacies" (Mormina & Istratii, 2021). Invoked this way, capacity-building both rests on a colonial continuity and conceals it: the gap is an inheritance. At a broader scale, the same dynamic appears as "a system continually reinvent[ing] itself by claiming that it is the only and best source for solutions to the problems it caused" (Narayanaswamy, 2024). Beneath it lies the assumption that Aram Ziai (2015, p. 58) finds rarely examined, that "development is a good thing", held so firmly that what is done in its name can escape scrutiny. Read for effectiveness, contestable political choices are recast as a technical, expert exercise. This is what Ferguson (1990) called the "anti-politics machine": development reframes political questions as technical ones and so removes them from contention. It carries into the present in Li's "rendering technical" (2007) and the financialised "rendering investible" (set out in Section 2.1.11), and shows up again at the evaluation stage (van der Puije & Satzinger, 2025).

Reading for colonial continuities widens the functional account rather than discarding it. If one isolates a recommendation's top layer, there may be surface overlap with what a purely functional reading would propose: translate the documents, consult earlier, standardise the terms. But the link to coloniality lets the same recommendation reach further, connecting across the structural, institutional and interpersonal layers, rather than fixing an output while leaving the arrangement that produced it untouched. The recommendations that follow are not a reductive checklist of technical repairs but levers identified by reading the project life cycle through the coloniality of development.

At the scoping stage (Section 5.2), the aid-effectiveness reading treats thin scoping as a coordination or capacity problem. Read as a colonial continuity, it is the withholding of the strategic picture – contestable choices recast as a technical design exercise. On progression and reporting (Section 5.7), the senior-tier ceiling reads functionally as a question of language or qualifications, and racism as interpersonal lapses. Read as a coloniality of being, both are a structural distribution of who may hold authority and whose competence is presumed rather than doubted.

At the evaluation stage (Section 5.10), the functional reflex locates the deficit in the partner, and fills it with training. Addressing the colonial continuity points the other way, where the difficulty is less that partners cannot evaluate than the fact that a supposed partner deficit turns out, on inspection, to be a donor structure that gates who may take part.

Read this way, the coloniality of development (named in Section 2.4) is less a verdict than a method: not a claim about intent, which has been disavowed since the time of decolonisation, but a reading that lets a single recommendation work across all three layers at once. This direction is not imposed on the interviews and focus groups from outside. Practitioners themselves reach towards something like co-creation: the wish to come “out of the grey zone” into honest “interest against interest” (interview 15); the search for moments of shared problem-naming, where a difficulty is framed as “a shared concern” rather than one side’s to fix (interview 12); the contrast a practitioner draws with a peer agency that “fetch[es] all of us on board” (interview 08).

One theme converges from the historical through-line, from the coloniality frame and from the practitioner voices. The differentiated professional structures of German development cooperation hold the potential to be reset as an interface for co-creation, and engaging the colonial continuities that this report traces is what would let that potential be realised.

## **Phase 1: Government Negotiations and Framework Agreements**

### **Recommendation 1. From Prescription to Co-creation: Reshaping Government Negotiations**

The framework for German development cooperation with a partner country is created and calibrated through regular encounters between high-level German representatives from the BMZ and the Federal Foreign Office (AA) on one side, and partner government delegations on the other side. The encounters take place through the biennial government negotiations (*Regierungsverhandlungen*) and the government consultations (*Regierungskonsultationen*) that occur between the two parties.

These encounters are also the ones that respondents for this study most consistently flagged as in need of an overhaul: in their experience, the reality of the room diverges from the official frame. The BMZ presents the moment of encounter as collaborative. Its public account of bilateral cooperation describes the negotiations as the occasion on which strategies for the future are “developed together with the partner country” (BMZ, 2026). The BMZ’s 2021 Guidelines for Bilateral Financial and Technical Cooperation set out a “principle of minimum intervention” under which measures “should be planned and implemented as far as possible by the partner country”. It states that “the form of support chosen should be the one that offers the most scope to Germany’s partner in terms of ownership, initiative and responsibility” (BMZ, 2021).

Ownership is not only a stated value but it also tracks with how well cooperation works. In a 2021 survey of partner-country decision-makers, the German evaluation institute DEval found that enabling ownership is positively associated with how helpful and how influential they judge a donor to be, and with the donor’s influence on agenda-setting (DEval, 2021).

The cooperation encounter itself has been studied closely. Across a seven-year study of four countries – Ghana, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda – the negotiation appears as a continual, unsettled bargain. That is described a “development dance” (Swedlund, 2017), in which “donor agencies and recipient governments remain locked in a complicated and continued state of negotiation”.

On the donor side, the negotiation is about policy influence. “Donors use the promise of aid funds to gain leverage over domestic policy issues they care about” (Swedlund, 2017), a compromise then policed after the table through conditionality tied to pre-specified targets. The donor architecture makes the imbalance visible. In many contexts, donors run their own coordinated body that governments attend “by invitation,” and from which the government representatives “depart” partway so that donors can settle common positions “without the interference of the government” (Swedlund, 2017).

The sample is not uniform. In Rwanda, one of the four countries studied, coordination bodies down to the sector working groups were “cochaired by a government representative and a donor representative” (Swedlund, 2017). This indicates that co-ownership of the table is feasible, even if it was the exception across her cases. A 2024 stock-taking concludes that while donors’ concepts have shifted (ownership and localisation among them), the underlying asymmetries persist “deep into the twenty-first century” (Wiegratz & Price, 2024).

Swedlund also records what the dialogue is meant to be – the donor side’s own standard: “policy dialogue is a two-way conversation, with people listening on both sides” (Swedlund, 2017). It is that two-way standard that the practitioner accounts below describe the German biennial government negotiations (*Regierungsverhandlungen*) as frequently failing to meet.

These findings, together with the practitioner voices cited below, indicate that these encounters are less neutral than their official description suggests – a site in the cooperation cycle where donor steering still shapes partner policy. The lever therefore sits in the encounters themselves: moving from a pre-scripted, largely single-authored format towards a co-authored one.

This is a colonial continuity of a procedurally neutral kind: a standing format applied to every partner alike, while authorship stays concentrated on one side of the interface. The asymmetry works through the paperwork. It includes, on the German side, the long planning lead time and high level of financial detail of the framework planning, which has already been completed in the German system before the negotiation convenes, leaving little room for genuine adjustment at the table. Templates, technical categories and reporting formats are authored on the German side, so the partner enters an exchange whose terms are already set and meets them as routine procedure rather than as open questions.

Standardised technical assistance in drafting compounds this. The side that supplies both the format and the expertise also shapes what can be proposed (Hasselskog et al., 2017). As a result, a format applied equally to every partner reproduces the imbalance rather than offsetting it (a mechanism that Chapter 2 expands on).

## Respondents in Their Own Words

Practitioners working in and around the German interface return repeatedly to the negotiation as the point where the gap between the aspiration of collaboration and the actual arrangement is inscribed at the very start of a cooperation cycle. Their accounts spotlight the uneven agency of the inception stage: who writes the script, in which language, on which templates, and with how much room for the partner to act on their own interests.

**Hierarchy, hospitality and mobility:** one of the more visible colonial continuities runs through the regimes of international mobility – who may travel where, through which bureaucratic procedures, and who is treated as a presumptive ‘overstayer’ required to furnish guarantees and copious paperwork to prove a legitimate purpose and the means to travel. These regimes also complicate the German development negotiations themselves.

A senior country lead describes a recent negotiation round for which representatives of an African partner government were told, with under a day’s notice, to obtain visas if they still wished to attend. Some did not attend and a minister broke off the process (interview 11). The practitioner explains that the same partners had shortly before been received elsewhere in Europe with “the golden carpet rolled out [*den goldenen Teppich ... ausgerollt*],” where “no one had to worry much about visas [*niemand muss sich groß um Visa kümmern*]” (interview 11). This episode is less an administrative slip than a breakdown internal to the German side – negotiations led by one ministry, visas by another, with the cost registered in partner capital, not at home.

**A 40-year tradition of pre-scripted meetings:** practitioners locate colonial continuities in the documents themselves. One participant explains, “We script, and we have to learn how to script it differently – there are at least forty years of tradition in there [*Wir scripten und wir müssen aber lernen, wie man es anders scripten könnte. Da liegen schon mindestens 40 Jahre Tradition drin*]”. With a framework agreement from 1967 still in use, described as colonial in appearance: “*allein das Dokument, wie das aussieht, ist schon kolonial*” (interview 12).

A senior African development professional describes the form as “top-down ... dictated from Berlin,” with “in fact no negotiation,” and traces part of the inertia to framework agreements that date to the 1960s–70s and have never been updated (interview 15).

**Openings for greater bi-directionality:** the interviews point to a constructive counter-current. The reframing of German cooperation around explicit interests is read by some not as a retreat but as a more honest starting point, provided that reflection accompanies it. A practitioner states, “Once you name it, you can also critique it more [*wenn du es benennst, kannst du es auch mehr kritisieren*]” (interview 12). Another says, “Out of the grey zone ... it is interest against interest [*raus aus dieser Grauzone ... es geht um Interesse gegen Interesse*]” (interview 15).

The concept of “interest against interest” holds the potential for greater transparency. To name German interests is to open the space for partners to name theirs – and what is named can also be criticised. Bi-directionality is not something done *to* partners. One practitioner describes the constructive move as finding language that does not speak “from on high” [*von oben herab*]” (interview 12). They also mention finding moments of shared problem-naming: “We have a big problem with that in Germany too ... it is a shared concern [*da haben wir in Deutschland auch ein großes Problem ... es ist ein gemeinsames Anliegen*]” (interview 12). Another puts the obligation on both sides: “You have to stand up for yourself, otherwise no one will stand up for you [*man muss auch für sich gerade stehen, sonst wird keiner für dich stehen*]” (interview 15).

Not every practitioner is persuaded, however. A senior lead doubts that the shift to explicit self-interest is honest, and describes the operating mode as “anticipatory obedience [*vorausschauender Gehorsam*]” (interview 11) – staff second-guessing political guidance that has not been given. The constructive reading therefore depends on a condition that the system does not reliably supply, and an ethnography of aid explains the mechanism. In the absence of clear direction, development actors are governed less by stated policy than by the need to maintain working relationships and coherent representations of their own activity (Mosse, 2005).

Rottenburg (2009) describes what this looks like when a project falters: parties who have “known for years” where the real problems lie continue to present the venture “as if” it were going to plan. In such cases, each side manages appearances to keep the cooperation – and the funding – alive. Without genuine ownership on both sides, honesty tends to default to the shared maintenance of appearances rather than to candid exchange, which, on the German side, is what the “anticipatory obedience” account describes.

A German technical adviser highlights a related pressure at project level. Project proposals must increasingly show their relevance to “the changed mood in the country [*die veränderte Stimmungslage im Land*]” (interview 04). This applies to migration narratives above all: “You have to serve such narratives these days [*du musst solche Narrative bedienen mittlerweile*]”. The problem this creates is one of appearance: naming migration reduction as an outcome of a given project makes it look as if that were the reason for it – “Once you say it, it looks as if that were the reason [*wenn man es sagt, wirkt es so, als wäre das der Grund*]” (interview 04). Adapting the narrative to a changed political context is normal; the problem is when the new frame crowds out the substantive case for the work rather than accompanying it.

## From Pattern to Recommendation

Both the interviewees and the research literature account for variance in experience – some delegations are better prepared than others, some partner governments more assertive, and some German teams engage differently. The variance is patterned rather than accidental. The argument is not that things always happen as described here, but that they recur often enough to show that the structures are not designed to prevent them. **Ownership and partnership are not enough to change the dynamic.** These key terms are invoked to show that development cooperation has learned and changed – that it is no longer the top-down, externally determined ‘development aid’ of old.

Yet in respondents’ experiences, ownership remains a paradox in implementation. Endorsed in principle since the Paris Declaration, it is routinely hollowed by the donor’s retained authorship; the underlying asymmetries have changed little even as the relationship was rebranded as ‘partnership’. Hasselskog et al. (2017) name this the “ownership paradox,” in which the language of partner leadership coexists with continued donor control. A case study of country ownership over Global Fund aid in Ghana finds a “conditional ownership, whereby the recipient countries exercise limited agency” – formal partner leadership of the body, but an operation “mediated by the ... funding stipulations and processes” (Onokwai & Matthews, 2022).

Partnership, the other key term, can itself couch a subtler form of control. Lie’s (2015) ethnography of the World Bank-Uganda partnership shows partnership and ownership functioning as a more indirect mode of governance – with responsibility devolved to the partner while authorship stays at the supposed centre. Revisiting the “local turn” a decade on, Lie (2024) finds that “partnership and ownership appear to have become key aid conditionalities”. They function as a “tacit and indirect form of power” in which recipient freedom is hedged by the donor’s “bureaucratic audit culture and coercive accountability regimes” (Lie, 2024).

The aid-effectiveness literature reads the negotiation’s failures as a generic accountability deficit. Read as a colonial continuity instead, they look different: a pre-scripted posture enabled and normalised by the coloniality of power, of knowledge, and – as the visa episode shows – of being. Its ritualised character is what makes it a **coloniality of development**. The response therefore has to be a redesign of this part of the interface, not a procedural fix: one that addresses the asymmetry that persists beneath the newer language of ‘cooperation’ and ‘partnership’, and builds towards co-authorship.

Swedlund’s (2017) evidence indicates why co-authorship is tractable. In all four of her study countries, partner governments had already built dedicated “external finance” units to engage donors more systematically, but, “not [having] much negotiating capital,” they often fall back on resistance and non-compliance. A development professional who has worked in both German and Swiss cooperation describes the partner-side cost from the other end. Without the institutional weight to insist that “this agreement ... doesn’t favour us,” governments are “quick to sign,” trading the chance to have “bargained more” for the short-term political optics of a concluded deal (interview 08). Partner-side preparation capacity, and legible agreements in partner working languages, would shift that dynamic towards front-channel co-authorship.

The asymmetry does not begin in the meeting but in the documents it runs on. Reshaping the biennial government negotiations (*Regierungsverhandlungen*) therefore depends on redrafting the templates that structure them, so they become the basis for negotiation and consultation rather than a pre-written script. Where the context allows, the framework agreements themselves can be renegotiated. With the steps set out below, this changes the preparation on both sides, not only the register in the room. On the German side, the reform is less about the quantity of preparation, which is

already substantial, than its orientation: from delivering pre-scripted talking points towards dialogue (*Dialogorientierung*).

## The Recommendation Across the Four Levels

### 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.

### 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.

**Grounded in:** the visa-coordination failure and accounts of negotiations that are “scripted,” “top-down” and “dictated from Berlin,” as participants argued (interviews 11, 15). Participants also described the agreements as carrying “at least forty years of tradition,” and in which “the document ... is already colonial” (interview 12).

Adopt dialogue orientation (*Dialogorientierung*) as the negotiating method – mutual problem-naming in place of pre-scripted positions – so that the dialogue-oriented input that the implementing organisations prepare meets a process that is able to receive it.



#### **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.

**Grounded in:** the unchanged 1967 framework and the 1960s–70s technical cooperation treaties, often unavailable in the partner’s language (interviews 12, 15).



#### **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.

**Grounded in:** accounts of constructive practice (interview 12). An adviser describes pairing an index that ranks partner countries’ corruption with one that ranks who pays the bribes, “There it is exactly reversed [*da ist es genau umgedreht*].” Plainly said, “We are all in this together somehow [*wir sitzen da alle irgendwie mit drin*]” (interview 04).

This recommendation is also informed by the view that partners must be structurally enabled to act in their own interests. As a participant expressed, “You have to stand up for yourself, otherwise no one will stand up for you” (interview 15).



### **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.

**Grounded in:** the episodes that practitioners describe (interviews 11, 12, 15).

## ***Status Quo, Cost and Benefit***

### **Status Quo**

- Pre-scripted consultations;
- Friction in partner capitals;
- Strategic aims missed;
- Peer agencies from other countries seen to offer partners a more genuine exchange; and
- The prevailing mode as an “anticipatory obedience [*vorausschauender Gehorsam*]” (interview 11) – second-guessing an instruction never actually given.

### **Cost**

- Redesigning the negotiation format;
- Building German-side preparation capacity and resourcing the partner’s own capacity – early access to the agenda and draft texts in their language, as well as support for independent partner advice;
- Tightening BMZ-AA-consular coordination; and
- Renegotiating and translating the framework (*TZ-Abkommen*) layer.

### **Benefit**

- The exchange becomes a real two-way interface where partners get a say;
- Functional bilateral partnerships in a multipolar moment;
- Reputational repair where it has been damaged; and
- On Germany’s own evaluation evidence, greater perceived helpfulness and agenda-setting influence where ownership is real (DEval, 2021).

A note on scope: renegotiation proceeds country by country and depends on each partner government’s own readiness to state its demands and decline terms – it is not a single global move.

## **Phase 2: Scoping and Appraisal**

### **Recommendation 2.**

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

A programme's strategic shape is set early – at scoping and appraisal, before implementation begins. This is the stage at which an intervention's goals, its fit with the partner's own priorities, and the logic connecting a country strategy to a single project are decided. The official expectation is that this happens with the partner. The BMZ's 2021 guidelines ask that measures "be planned and implemented as far as possible by the partner country" (BMZ, 2021). Similarly, Germany's own evaluation institute finds that real partner ownership is positively associated with how helpful and how influential partner decision-makers judge a donor to be (DEval, 2021). On this evidence, designing *with* the partner is the more effective course, not only the more respectful one.

Respondents describe a scoping stage some distance from that expectation. The strategic logic – how a BMZ or country strategy connects to a programme, a programme to a project, a project to the day's work – is held upstream and arrives already formed. National staff, who sit several steps further down from where it is written, are consulted on implementation but rarely on strategy. Chapter 2 develops this mechanism: the side that supplies the format and the expertise also shapes what can be proposed (Hasselskog et al., 2017), so a design authored by a visiting team reads (downstream) as the only available frame. Revisiting the "local turn" once again, Lie (2024) finds the same shape in the present – partner ownership granted in name while authorship stays at the so called centre, a "tacit and indirect form of power" he calls "developmentality".

This is a coloniality of knowledge in operational form. The authority to define the strategic picture – what counts as the problem, the priority, the appropriate response – stays on one side of the interface, while the in-country expertise that could shape it is drawn on late, to validate or adjust a design rather than to co-author it. The lever sits at scoping, project co-conception and the annual steering committees – the moments where strategy is formed. The strategic reasoning that links a country strategy to a programme, a project and the daily work already exists, but it is not accessible to national staff who say it reaches them late, if at all. The recommendation is to make that reasoning clear to the staff who implement it, and to bring national and partner expertise in while the design is still open, moving the process towards co-conception as part of an overall shift to co-design.

### **Respondents in Their Own Words**

Practitioners locate the asymmetry at the design stage, and they include voices from inside the German system describing how little of the strategic picture reaches even them.

#### **The scoping mission designed elsewhere: "a whole program ... without any expert input."**

A development professional who has worked in both German and Swiss cooperation describes the scoping stage at first hand. The mission is "a team of experts that will come from ... headquarters ... without any [national] expert partner," who then "go back and design a whole program." Thereafter comes the allocation of budget and hand-over to in-country managers whose task is then to "see how this program can be aligned with the priorities of our implementing partners" – that is, only after the fact (interview 08). The same account notes how a design authored at a distance can carry its authors' assumptions. In one such case, the problem was written up so as to "paint the picture of an institution as ... corruption-riddled" before the in-country team was meaningfully involved (interview 08).

**A scoping product fixed after the fact: “everything in the document was wrong.”** A national staff component manager describes a recent appraisal in the same shape. An external consultant “submitted a gender analysis” without, it seemed, having “talked to anybody ... about anything gender related,” so that “everything in the document was wrong” (interview 02). The correction fell to national staff. The analysis “had to be re-sent to some national colleagues to ... make all the input in English and then resubmit it” – a “whole nightmare” that raised, in his words, questions of “competence” and “trust” (interview 02). He draws the same conclusion: had “somebody with that expertise ... from the national context ... been part of it from the beginning,” the “quality proofing time ... would have been reduced” (interview 02).

**A strategy without the why: “what does Germany want?”** A senior African development professional puts the missing piece plainly. In the encounters that set the frame, he says, “It isn’t even discussed: what does Germany want? Why are they interested in particular themes? [*was will Deutschland? Warum sind die an bestimmten Themen interessiert?*]” (interview 15). He traces the problem in part to how the groundwork is prepared – by desk officers attending to their own thematic patch rather than “the whole picture”. As a result, “the structure is missing [*mir fehlt da die Struktur*]” (interview 15). The cost surfaces at the partner interface. On programmes he has led, African counterparts have asked him directly, “Why is Germany doing this? [*warum tut ... Deutschland das?*]” (interview 15). The honest answer to questions of that kind, he observes, often reach back to lines once drawn in Berlin.

**An incomplete picture: “completely blinded through my work.”** This is not only a national staff grievance. A German adviser new to the sector describes going “completely blinded through my work” at first, and, on the patterns she could see, having “observed without actually having a full-blown picture what that means” (interview 02). If the strategic logic is thin even for German-contract newcomers, national staff, who are positioned structurally away from where it is written, are further still from it.

**What the alternative looks like: “they fetch all of us on board.”** A West African former national GIZ staff member who explained the scoping mission describes a peer European agency he later joined, where the working relationship to strategy is inverted. “They fetch all of us on board,” staff are “asked for your input” on the country analysis, and management “rather look up to you to provide that ... context” because “you are the expert on the ground” (interview 08). The contrast shows that inclusive practice is an ordinary, operable workflow, not an aspiration – a peer agency runs it as routine.

**Knowledge that does not flow back: “very rarely mirrored back.”** A German technical adviser locates the gap in commissioning. The knowledge of national colleagues “is very rarely mirrored back [*wird sehr wenig zurückgespiegelt*]” into strategy, because that feedback “simply isn’t paid for ... it is not part of our commission [*wird halt nicht bezahlt ... es ist halt nicht Teil unseres Auftrags*]” (interview 04). What the contract does not pay for does not happen.

**Seen from the country director’s perspective: “it depends on the project manager”.** A country director describes arriving to find the pattern entrenched. “I also observed that local staff is not involved in any strategic aspects at all,” he explains. He locates the variance exactly where the corpus does: “Very often it depends on the project manager” (interview 14). He describes the counter-practice directly. Appraisal missions “should always be a mix of international and local staff,” with local consultants commissioned for the groundwork. He extends the diagnosis a step further down the cycle: “When it comes to preparing all the documents and getting the commission, in general the partner ministries are out ... we should have another process step” to keep them involved (interview 14). The same director fights the phrasing “our GIZ project X is doing the following” – “it’s always Ministry A and GIZ ... that we jointly implement”. He notes who uses the phrasing most: “It’s even more the local staff. Something must have happened in the past” (interview 14).

## From Pattern to Recommendation

Practice varies – some teams share the strategic logic, some scoping missions consult well – but the pattern that respondents describe is structural. Whether staff can see and understand the strategic framework their work sits within should not depend on individual goodwill.

**Consultation on implementation is not co-conception:** ownership endorsed at the level of delivery, while the strategic frame is set upstream, is the ownership paradox in its scoping-stage form. A case study of country ownership over Global Fund aid finds this “conditional ownership, whereby the recipient countries exercise limited agency” – formal leadership of the body, but a process “mediated by the ... funding stipulations” of the donor (Onokwai & Matthews, 2022). Bringing national and partner expertise in only to align an already-budgeted design reproduces that conditional form.

**The continuity beneath the coordination problem:** read for effectiveness, thin scoping is a problem of coordination or capacity. Seen as a colonial continuity, it is less neutral than that. Contestable political and strategic choices are recast as a technical design exercise – *rendering technical*, in Li’s term (2007) – so that the question of what we are doing and why settles, by effect if not by intent, into the apparent objectivity of a finished programme. The recommendation works the other way: the strategic reasoning made visible to the staff who carry it, and shared while the design is still open.

**Why it is tractable:** the change asked for is a workflow change at identifiable moments, not a structural impossibility. It locates national staff and partner consultation at scoping, project co-conception and the annual steering committees, and adopts as a required step the inclusive practice that a peer agency already runs as routine (interview 08). And it is more effective: programmes built on the in-country reading of partner-ministry interests are better aligned. Moreover, Germany’s own evaluation evidence ties real ownership to a donor’s perceived helpfulness and agenda-setting reach (DEval, 2021).

**Make the reasoning legible; open the scoping:** make the derivable strategic chain (country strategy ↔ programme ↔ project ↔ activity) legible to the staff who are tasked with implementing it. Open scoping and the annual operational planning to national and partner input while the design is still forming.

## The Recommendation Across the Four Levels

### *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 wider strategic 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. As a participant shared, “They fetch all of us on board” (interview 08).

## 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.

This is endorsement and expectation-setting – important support, but not the core act.



### 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.

**Grounded in:** the contrast that practitioners draw with a peer European agency, where the national professional receives the full strategic picture in advance and can shape a programme as it is designed, against the German experience of work “dictated from Berlin” and entered into “with no context” (interviews 08, 15).



### 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.

**Grounded in:** national staff who, at the ministry interface, were asked questions they could not answer because the strategic reasoning had not reached them (interview 02).



### **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.

## ***Status Quo, Cost and Benefit***

### **Status Quo**

- Strategic reasoning kept upstream;
- Questions from partner ministries left unanswered because national staff were never given the logic; and
- In-country expertise drawn on to validate a finished design, not to shape it.

### **Cost**

- Reforming how strategy documents are shared;
- Designing the consultation process at headquarters; and
- Ensuring protected time for participation at the senior and working levels.

### **Benefit**

- National staff and partners help shape the design rather than validate it;
- Better front-line relationships and in-country expertise actually used; and
- More effective, better-aligned programmes – Germany's own evaluation evidence ties real ownership to a donor's perceived helpfulness and agenda-setting reach (DEval, 2021).

## Phase 3: Design and Preparation

### Recommendation 3. From Selective Reference to One Consistent Standard

Different contractual and legal regimes will, and should, continue to coexist in German implementing organisations. Posts on the German pay tariff (internationally recruited staff, e.g. AMA in the GIZ context) are bound to that tariff in most organisations, while locally contracted staff fall under national labour law. The defensible issue that respondents raise is not that these regimes coexist – they must – but that the *choice of which framework to invoke* tends to track the direction of advantage. Local labour law is cited where it lowers an entitlement; German standards are reached for where they would raise one. Because local law sets a floor rather than a ceiling, the institution always retains discretion to do more than the minimum. The question is where it chooses to exercise that discretion, and whether it does so consistently.

Each individual citation of ‘the applicable rule’ looks correct in isolation. Meanwhile, the pattern of citations reproduces the pay-and-status asymmetry that Chapter 2 traces as a *coloniality of being* – a hierarchy of worth expressed through which legal text is reached for and when. The corrective measure is not to collapse the contract types into one, nor to claim that internationally and locally contracted posts are equivalent. It is narrower: align the standards that can be aligned, and make the benchmarking that justifies staff terms transparent.

#### Respondents in Their Own Words

**Selective reference: “very easy ... to underpay someone.”** An interviewee with direct experience of GIZ’s terms in Ghana describes the pattern: “There’s a selective reference ... when it suits them.” The local framework is cited selectively “because ... it is very easy for you to find justification to underpay someone” under national labour law (interview 03). The same account points to a revealing inconsistency in how pay is denominated, with budgets travel upwards in euros. “GIZ Ghana will never submit a budget to ... HQ in Ghana cedis ... It’s in euros,” the participant explains. Yet local salaries are fixed at a cedi conversion that is not held to the euro value actually budgeted, so “why are you not giving the person ... what you budgeted for?” (interview 03).

**Benchmark sample choice: “they go for those organisations that favour them.”** Where staff terms are justified by a market benchmark, national staff representatives who took part in such an exercise describe a selective sample assembled to produce the desired answer. In choosing the organisations to be surveyed, “It’s also selective ... not very transparent – they go for those organisations that favour them,” and “at the end ... they will say, oh, we are even better” (interview 09). The opacity is structural: the detailed figures behind the comparison are withheld as the consultant’s confidential data, so the headline reassurance cannot be checked. As one participant put it, “Everybody you speak with knows” (interview 09). Another, having seen the organisation place itself on a given pay level, asked rhetorically, “So why are you not applying the same figures?” (interview 09).

**The problem raised from the inside by a country director: “no consistent policy”.** He confirms the gap from the management side: “Till now, there is no consistent policy for local staff, national staff ... for years now, I try to convince our human resources department at headquarters that we need more consistency” (interview 14). He continues, “We need some minimal standards ... all over the world,” not identical terms but consistent ones – “contract conditions ... duration.” Likewise, “also in terms of career development ... the systems are extremely different ... even more for regional staff” (interview 14). The same account describes the institution’s side of the benchmarking: salaries

and benefits compared with some twenty other organisations every two years (interview 14). This is the exercise whose comparator sample and transparency the national staff representatives dispute (interview 09).

### **From Pattern to Recommendation**

Two legal regimes exist, and not every benefit must match across contract types. National staff understand that some differences, including in pay, are part of the system, especially for international staff moving with family (interview 21). The issue is narrower: it concerns how pay differences are assessed and justified. In practice, when national staff press the pay question, the institution commissions an external salary benchmark – but staff are not presented with the underlying data (interview 21). The exercise is experienced as selective because the benchmark “go[es] for those organisations that favour them” (interview 09), and whichever legal framework lowers the benefit is the one invoked “when it suits them” (interview 03).

**The pattern, not the single citation:** each move is locally defensible. The continuity is in the pattern. Citing whichever rule applies and commissioning a market study are decisions that look neutral when taken one at a time, yet together they maintain a status hierarchy. Read this way, “We followed the applicable framework” is no longer a sufficient answer, as local staff ask the question: which framework, and why that one?

**The operational stakes:** the asymmetry is not only a matter of fairness to staff. Research on international–local pay differences across six countries finds that such disparities corrode workplace relationships and can blunt the effectiveness of the poverty-reduction work that the organisation exists to do (Carr et al., 2010). A sustained reform programme has since worked with international organisations to treat fairer, more transparent reward as an operational question, not only an ethical one (Project FAIR; McWha-Hermann). On this evidence, closing the selective application mechanism also contributes to effectiveness.

**Why it is tractable, and whose remit it is:** local law sets minimums that the institution is free to exceed, and a country director makes the case from the inside. German labour law notwithstanding, “there’s much more room to maneuver” for a more consistent policy on national staff conditions (interview 14). That room is real across the jurisdictions in question. Most national labour codes – Côte d’Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana and South Africa’s among them – set statutory minimum standards rather than ceilings, so paid leave, maternity leave and parental protections are floors that an employer may exceed, not maximums. Nothing in them forbids the more generous terms that German contracts carry – where the organisation chooses to extend them.

The lever is therefore a human resources (HR) design decision inside each implementing organisation, not a matter for the BMZ or the political level, which cannot reach into an organisation’s staff terms. Two moves are available now. First, align the points of discretion that can be aligned (leave, maternity leave and parental protection) to one consistent standard rather than applying frameworks “in whichever direction lowers the cost”. Second, reform the benchmark protocol so the comparator sample is transparent, the methodology published and the result applied to the outcome rather than selectively cited.

**The lever:** create transparency to end the perception of selective citation of legal frameworks and the selective use of comparative national-level pay-scale data, and make the benchmarking that justifies staff terms auditable. This closes the legal procedural mechanism behind the workplace asymmetry

that Recommendation 7 addresses from the other side. Handled openly, it strengthens the external legitimacy of the organisation's policy on staff terms rather than exposing it. The demand of national staff is not the complete equalisation of pay; they expressly state that they understand the need for AMAs to receive certain benefits. Instead, beyond bare minimum, use leeway upwards, set national pay scales at minimum bond (not max-capped), and use existing pay scale flexibilities under the respective national laws.

**A standing channel for national staff voices:** the asymmetry persists partly because the people it affects lack the representation that their headquarter colleagues rely on. National staff representatives who have sat on the personnel council describe a body without real weight. "We don't have a strong staff consult here in the various countries," whereas "in [Germany] ... the consult is stronger" – a platform "where you can go and complain ... you know that you are going to have a backup, you are going to have a support" (interview 09).

At headquarters and for German-contract employees worldwide, that backing rests on law. Under Germany's Works Constitution Act (*Betriebsverfassungsgesetz*), employees can initiate a works council (*Betriebsrat*) that management is obliged to work with. Locally contracted staff have no comparable standing body, and the prevailing contract form makes even informal organisation difficult, since short-term contracts and country laws that do not always allow staff "to unionise in that sort of format" leave little basis for it (interview 09). The remedy is structural: a centrally organised representative body for locally contracted staff.

## The Recommendation Across the Four Levels

### *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 thirty 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.

## 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.

**Grounded in:** an account of a reference used to justify lower pay and another about a benchmark whose comparator sample was assembled to flatter. A participant described the first as “[a] selective reference ... when it suits them” (interview 03), and the second was expressed by national staff representatives, “They go for those organisations that favour them” (interview 09).



### **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.

### ***Status Quo, Cost and Benefit***

#### **Status Quo**

- Local labour law cited when it lowers terms, but German standards when they would raise them; and
- Benchmark exercises composed to confirm current practice – manoeuvres that look neutral one by one while reproducing the pay-band asymmetry.

#### **Cost**

- Choosing and implementing the aligned standards;
- Reforming the sector salary benchmark protocol; and
- Withholding the transparency that makes both (standards and protocol) auditable.

#### **Benefit**

- Local staff gain transparency around pay and benefits;
- The legal-and-procedural mechanism behind the workplace asymmetry is closed (pairs with Recommendation 7);
- The external legitimacy of the staff terms policy is strengthened; and
- Fairer terms support the work's effectiveness, supported by the wider evidence (Carr et al., 2010).

## **Recommendation 4. From One-sided Briefing to Preparation on Both Sides**

German staff posted abroad receive country preparation (*Landeskunde*) and the Academy for International Cooperation (AIZ) already offers modules that reach into colonial and postcolonial themes. The gap that respondents identify is not a general absence of training but an asymmetry in it, and the case for closing that gap is as much about effectiveness as it is about fairness. A programme's relational and historical groundwork holds only if both sides arrive equipped for the context they will work in.

The asymmetry has two parts. First, the preparation that does exist for outgoing German staff is optional where it matters most – the colonial continuities content sits outside the mandatory block and can be rationed away by a line manager's allocation of work time. Second, and more fundamental, incoming national staff receive nothing comparable. Their induction is technical, while the German system, language and ways of working they must operate inside are treated as the unmarked, self-evident norm – with everything else positioned as 'the other' to be explained. Making colonial history and continuities a systematic, power-critical part of mandatory pre-departure preparation, and building a real parallel induction for national staff into German organisational culture and the history of German development cooperation addresses both halves at the project's start.

### **Respondents in Their Own Words**

**A norm that does not see itself:** a development professional who has worked in both German and Swiss cooperation describes the national staff induction as only technical – “how to design and implement the cooperation program” – with no equivalent of the cultural and country preparation that German staff receive before posting. The German way of working is left to function as the standard that the national professional must absorb (interview 08). Asked whether a historical grounding would help, the same practitioner endorses it directly: “it would be good if ... that background is also given,” so that one knows “what kind of institutions you are entering into and how to approach issues” (interview 08).

**Optional and rationed:** a German adviser confirms the asymmetry from the other side. The AIZ does offer strong modules on colonial and postcolonial themes – she singles out the quality of the teaching – “but they're not mandatory whatsoever” (interview 02). She highlights that a line manager can defeat them by withholding the work time: “I was told you cannot do all” (interview 02). Her own proposed remedy points to a ready comparator: the organisation already runs recurring compulsory training on security, data security and compliance, yet on the colonial continuities side, “we have nothing that ... makes it mandatory – and then repetitively mandatory” (interview 02). The infrastructure for compulsory, recurring training exists; it has simply not been extended to the colonial continuities content yet.

**Both directions:** the same group makes the case for the parallel national staff induction. A national staff member notes that the awareness should run both ways. The national personnel, too, need to “understand the logic of the company when it comes to ... colonial and postcolonial issues,” to know “what is the position of the company” and to communicate across it (interview 02).

**The norm, named from the German side:** a German technical adviser describes the assumption that the preparation gap leaves intact. “One always assumes that the way, the structure in which one acts and works oneself ... is simply transferable, because it is the logical and the right way; but it is not

the logical and the right way. It is only one way of doing it [*man geht immer davon aus, dass die Art und Weise, die Struktur, in der man selbst agiert und arbeitet ... einfach zu übertragen ist, weil es ist ja das logische und das richtige, aber es ist nicht das logische und das richtige. Es ist nur eine Art und Weise, es zu machen*]” (interview 04).

**The partner-side case:** partners in another African working context put the question to a German adviser directly. The compliance programmes are fine, “But you cannot write a code of conduct and forget colonial history [*aber du kannst nicht einen Code of Conduct schreiben und ... Kolonialgeschichte vergessen*]” (interview 04). Racism and local culture have to be thought in.

## From Pattern to Recommendation

Some teams prepare well and some AIZ modules are excellent. The gap is not universal incompetence but a structural one – a mandate missing on one side and an induction missing on the other.

**The German context as the unmarked norm:** the asymmetry is not in the symmetrical ‘both sides lack training’ approach. It is that one context – the German one – operates as the unreflected norm against which every other context must be studied. It entails the “white gaze” of development (Pailey, 2020), in which Northern frames of reference pass as neutral and universal while others are marked as particular and in need of explanation. The blind spot is structural, not incidental. A systematic review of six development studies journals finds race largely unexamined in mainstream scholarship even as a decolonial turn is called for (Patel, 2020). This literature and the respondents of this study point the same way: treat the German system as itself a context that requires induction, and the colonial history as professional knowledge rather than optional enrichment.

**Why it is tractable:** most of the content already exists at the AIZ; the change is one of *mandate and reciprocity*, not of building from nothing. Formalise the competency: make the colonial continuities module compulsory and recurring. Deliver the module inside the existing AIZ pre-departure block so that line manager rationing cannot defeat it. In addition, specify who designs and evaluates it and raise trainer quality where it is weak, and build the parallel national staff induction that the corpus calls for. The AIZ offering should be credited for the important impulses it already conveys – and improved upon, not presumed as finished.

**Competence, not creed:** staff who understand the historical and relational context they work in cooperate more effectively, and partners notice the difference. Critical reflection of power dynamics in development cooperation, anti-racist/racism-critical competence, and substantive knowledge of the deployment country and its history are not yet treated as eligibility criteria in recruitment and job descriptions. Instead, they are seen as optional additions to a profile selected on other grounds, on a presumption that expertise is portable. This view is based on the belief that “you don’t need any specific expertise” and a job title “is enough to be deployed in all kinds of contexts” (interview 22). Practitioners put it concretely: job descriptions should be tested against whether they “reflect the realities in which we work” (interview 15), and anti-racism should be built “in[to] the requirement for any new person becoming a ... manager” (interview 20).

Framed as a core professional competence for effective cooperation – on the same footing as the compliance training no one disputes – the measure meets the current political scrutiny of the AIZ’s content on its most defensible ground. The mandate also has precedent in the field. As a participant relates, at Act Church of Sweden, an anti-racism and decoloniality training is compulsory at the start of every contract, to be completed within the first few months (interview 20).

## The Recommendation Across the Four Levels

### 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* (often with weak trainers), while incoming national staff get nothing comparable to help them read up on 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.

### Who Can Do What across the Four Levels



#### Political decision-making – a limited but distinct role.

Curriculum and induction design sit with the implementing organisations and their academies, which is where this recommendation is addressed; the political level can leave the design of training to them. Ministerial staff, especially but not only those in partner-facing units, should also attend mandatory trainings on colonial continuities.



#### Higher management (with the AIZ) – 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;
- Deliver it inside the existing AIZ pre-departure block, so that a line manager's rationing of work time cannot defeat it;
- Build the parallel induction for national staff;
- Specify who designs and evaluates the module; and
- Raise trainer quality where it is weak.

**Grounded in:** the account that the AIZ's post-colonial modules are strong "but ... not mandatory whatsoever," set against the recurring compulsory compliance and data-security training (interview 02). This recommendation is also informed by the partner-side endorsement of a historical grounding so that one knows "what kind of institutions you are entering into," as a participant proposed (interview 08).



#### **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.

All staff (national, international and German) document their own preparation gaps and submit them for an institutional response.

### ***Status Quo, Cost and Benefit***

#### **Status Quo**

- The AIZ's postcolonial modules exist but are optional and rationed against work time;
- A mandatory diversity training for managers already exists and could be strengthened and extended to other staff levels, alongside the colonial continuities preparation proposed here; and
- Preparation for incoming national staff is only technical, and going in unprepared is normalised.

#### **Cost**

- AIZ curriculum development (most of the content already exists);
- Building out the national staff induction; and
- A compulsory slot in the pre-departure block.

#### **Benefit**

- Both halves of the asymmetry resolved and a baseline competency established; and
- To lead with better relational quality in front-line partner work, and therefore better results because both sides arrive equipped for the context.

## **Recommendation 5. From Under-used Presence to Structural Integration: Diaspora Expertise**

Diaspora practitioners are already working in German development cooperation, and they bring a distinctive kind of expertise: 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. The case for recognising that expertise has to be made carefully, because the easy version of it slides into essentialism – assuming alignment by origin, which is itself a colonial continuity, a form of the colonality of being.

These capacities are not innate and not automatically inherited by origin alone. They are acquired through exposure, learned, honed and practised, and they can come with the burden of representation and the weight of collective histories. A diaspora adviser in the system captures the nuance: working in Ghana as a diasporan, “the perspective that you’re used to ... doesn’t apply here,” and one is “not ... an insider” but holds “a bit more of a realistic view on how things work” – a vantage that is read differently depending on the audience (interview 17). The expertise is real. Treating it as automatic because of someone’s name or heritage is the essentialist trap that this recommendation is built to avoid.

That trap is well documented. European governments have increasingly framed migrants and their descendants as “agents of development” (Faist, 2008). However, the way they do so tends to essentialise – to assume diaspora alignment by origin – and to keep ‘development’ defined as the planned activity of Western professionals, so that the diaspora is enlisted to deliver a model rather than to reshape it (Sinatti & Horst, 2015). The corrective measure here is not to drop the recognition but to ground it where it belongs: in acquired, demonstrable competence, integrated structurally rather than celebrated rhetorically.

The structural obstacle is an issue of definition. The *TZ-FZ-Leitlinie*, the 2021 guideline 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 senior posted roles. 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”.

Because the definition is applied as interpretation, it is handled differently in different country and programme contexts. Read structurally, this is a colonality of being working through a procedural rule: it encodes who counts as a credible, deployable ‘expert’.

### **Respondents in Their Own Words**

**The expert who “has to be blond and blue-eyed”:** practitioners describe colleagues being asked, on the way into a post, whether they would give up their partner-country citizenship in order to be hired as national rather than posted staff. “Wouldn’t you give up your citizenship [*willst du nicht deine Staatsbürgerschaft ablegen?*]?” a participant was asked. This was linked to racialised notions of what the role represents: in the logic he had reported back to him, it was seen as reserved for someone who “has to be blond and blue-eyed; you simply can’t send a Black person [*das entsandte Personal muss blond und blauäugig sein. Man kann einfach keine schwarze Person hinschicken*]” (interview 15). The point is not that anyone states such a rule officially; it is that the deployment definition makes an individual’s ties to their partner country a disqualification for the senior posted role, and reads as such on the ground.

**The double vision of the in-between:** the same vantage that the definition treats as a liability is, in practice, an asset. A diaspora practitioner describes being “really in between,” able to “see certain things that both other sides might not see, especially with racial hierarchy” (interview 17). The participant notes how the reading shifts with the audience: credible and “in-depth” to a German senior programme manager, while to a local counterpart, “I’m just another German consultant” (interview 17). That double, audience-dependent position – neither fully insider nor outsider – is the contextual fluency that the work needs and which the definition discards.

**Acquired, not innate:** the corpus also supplies the anti-essentialist guard in plain terms. Those with “extensive experience ... working in different cultural contexts” bring that awareness because “they’re used to it”. Meanwhile, colleagues who “just came from Germany ... won’t think about things like that” (interview 17). The competence tracks exposure and practice, not origin, which is why it can be recognised, developed and required, rather than presumed.

**Already inside, organised informally:** a German technical adviser describes an informal headquarters group of colleagues who began as national staff and moved into international roles, and the asymmetry they meet on the way. Staff posted abroad are supported “with the move, with all kinds of things [*mit Umzug, mit allen möglichen Sachen*],” while colleagues moving to positions in Germany are not ‘posted’, so there is “rather less support [*etwas weniger Unterstützung*],” and acquiring a visa “is at times a big problem [*ist ja auch teilweise ein großes Problem*]” (interview 04). While there has been some modest improvement recently regarding visas and relocation to Germany, this differential treatment nonetheless reveals the underlying assumption that international expert staff is presumed to be German.

## From Pattern to Recommendation

Diaspora practitioners are not interchangeable and their alignment cannot be assumed. The recommendation values their expertise without romanticising it.

**Who counts as a deployable expert:** a conventional reading treats the posted-role definition as a neutral security or administrative criterion. Read as a coloniality of being, however, it is a procedural encoding of who counts as a legitimate ‘expert’ – routing diaspora practitioners out of roles in their country of origin, in effect, regardless of competence. The corrective measure is to integrate an already-present population structurally, on the basis of acquired and demonstrated competence. Shared origin guarantees neither alignment nor trust, so the recommendation rests on demonstrated capacity rather than on identity (Sinatti & Horst, 2015).

**Why it is tractable:** the change integrates a population that the institution already employs. It is not a pipeline to be built from nothing, and peer systems already run standing diaspora bodies and schemes. Existing German diaspora programmes have lessons worth mainstreaming before they disperse at project closure. The benefit is structural integration and comparative parity, and – over time – a multiplier for durable bilateral partnerships.

**The lever:** the action required is primarily political. Revise the *TZ-FZ-Leitlinie* deployment definition so that dual nationals and diaspora practitioners are not routed out of posted roles. Create a diaspora consultative body with a mandate from the political level (on the FORIM model) and bring diaspora consultation into strategic design. At the institutional level, ease the *e.V.* (and similar) structural preconditions that gate funding for diaspora-led organisations, so that they enter as strategic partners rather than implementation contractors.

## The Recommendation Across the Four Levels

### 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 guideline 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 senior posted roles. 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.

### 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;
- 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, co-equal 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
- Give standing to the existing informal headquarters networks of staff who have moved from national to international roles (interview 04).



### **Institutional senior – proactive support.**

Senior in-country professionals below director level.

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



### **Operations/working level – more than documentary.**

Working-level staff, described by function.

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.

## ***Status Quo, Cost and Benefit***

### **Status Quo**

- Diaspora practitioners are present but under-utilised;
- Their work is siloed in time-bound projects;
- The deployment definition screens out partner-country ties at the senior level; and
- The institution lacks peers that run standing diaspora schemes.

### **Cost**

- Building the consultative body;
- Revising the *TZ-FZ-Leitlinie* and the *e.V.* funding preconditions;
- Headquarters standing for the existing informal networks; and
- Mainstreaming the lessons of MEG and WIDU.

### **Benefit**

- Diaspora practitioners' expertise is recognised and used at the senior level rather than screened out;
- A population that the institution already employs is structurally integrated, not a new pipeline built;
- Parity with peer systems; and
- Over time, a multiplier for durable bilateral partnerships.

## Phase 4: Implementation and Steering

### Recommendation 6.

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

Much of the work of addressing colonial continuities inside the institution is currently done off the side of the desk. Current and former BMZ, AA and GIZ staff members describe a commonality in their individual and group activities on the issue. The work is done “voluntarily [*ehrenamtlich*],” often without formal recognition – “I actually did it on the side; I had completely different [official] tasks [*ich habe das eigentlich so nebenbei gemacht, eigentlich habe ich ganz andere Aufgaben gehabt*]” (interview 18). This points to a structural problem: the work is being done, and it is important, but for most practitioners who engage with these topics, it is not part of their job description, their agreed goals or their time budget.

Because it rests on volunteer effort, the work is fragile. It depends on whoever chooses to take it on, and it carries a real risk of burnout and of progress stalling when one committed person moves on. What it has achieved – the staff networks that now exist, the concerns raised with leadership, the proposals corrected before they go out – has rested on work that the institution does not formally recognise or reward.

Studies of diversity and anti-discrimination work describe the same pattern: a stated commitment to inclusion can become “non-performative”. It functions as a value the institution proclaims but does not enact because the labour of realising it is left to individuals rather than built into roles (Ahmed, 2012). A country director points to the same gap from the inside: the postcolonial and anti-racism agenda still runs, she says, under the banner of “we want to be a big, inclusive, wonderful company [*wir wollen ... ein großes, inklusives, tolles Unternehmen sein*],” but it has not yet been “broken down strongly enough” into what is actually expected of managers (interview 12).

For most respondents, the problem is not that doing this work brings direct penalties; such engagement can even count in a person’s favour. What they describe is subtler. The implementing organisation runs an upwards leadership feedback instrument, in which staff rate their manager on whether the person “models diversity”. The same instrument can work against the manager who actually does the work: a director who keeps returning colonial-sounding drafts to their staff is marked down by them as someone who “exaggerates” or is “not exemplary” [*du übertreibst ... nicht vorbildlich*] (interview 12). The participant describes this as being “judged in a very outdated way by your own people [*auf so eine ganz veraltete Art von deinen Leuten beurteilt*]” (interview 12). This is a disincentive, on top of the fact that for most who take the work on, it has neither designated time nor an evaluable role.

### Respondents in Their Own Words

**Off the side of the desk:** the voluntary, unrecognised character of the work is the recurring note across respondents – work “carried voluntarily” and “on the side,” by people with “completely different tasks” (interview 18). At the working level, it shows up as a steady tax of extra effort. A bilingual colleague carries the language barrier as “an extra task” of translation no one has assigned (interview 17). In addition, the staff run self-organised groups themselves so as “not to feel alone” with the issues (interview 17). This points to the informal support infrastructure that the companion peer-support recommendation (Recommendation 9) would formalise.

**“Why are you making so much work for yourself?”** Some of this work is quality control on what the institution sends out. A country director describes a situation where she reviews the project proposals (the *Angebote*) that her project leaders draft, and returns them when the language still carries colonial continuities: “You can’t send it out like this ... in 2025, please [*so könnt ihr das nicht abschicken ... im Jahr 2025 bitte*].” The project leaders are annoyed by the repeated returns, and that annoyance feeds into the leadership feedback that scores her (the disincentive described above). Colleagues ask, “Why are you creating so much work for yourself? [*was machst du dir so viel Arbeit damit?*],” and her answer is that this is simply the job [*das ist halt unsere Aufgabe. Wozu sitze ich denn hier?*]” (interview 12).

Her remedy is structural: the expectation cannot rest on one director’s initiative but has to come as a mandate from above (an *Auftrag von oben*). It should be made concrete as a yearly objective in the organisation’s annual planning [*wir machen das mal zu einem Jahresziel in der Jahresplanung*] and worded with care “so that it is a bit more than just a lofty goal [*ein bisschen mehr ... als nur so ein hehres Ziel*]” (interview 12).

**Attitude, or requirement:** the above country director’s sharpest point concerns attitude versus requirement. The expectation of managers must be set “not only as an attitude, but as a professional matter – what to watch out for [*nicht nur im Sinne von Haltung, sondern auch was fachlicher Art, worauf muss man dann achten?*]”. This should be done concretely. She warns, “In formats like the government negotiations and the offers, take care that we do not carry certain continuities forward [*achtet ... darauf, dass wir bestimmte Kontinuitäten nicht fortschreiben*]” (interview 12).

**The mechanism already exists:** a German technical adviser points to one such mechanism: giving staff designated time to focus on an issue alongside their broader responsibilities, which in GIZ takes the form of the ‘focal person’ model. Projects designate voluntary focal persons for gender, sustainability or communication, tied to the annual objectives: “We always have yearly objectives, and you can tie extra remuneration to them.” The adviser suggests extending this model: “Let’s make someone a decolonisation focal person,” with the proviso that the recommendation takes up. That is, it must not mean “100% of your job plus another 10 on top [*100% von deinem Job und noch 10% drauf*]” (interview 04). Utilising the mechanism successfully requires screening for and building relevant competencies.

## From Pattern to Recommendation

The variance is real – some leaders carve out this work and some do not – but the difference is not personality. It is whether the work is anyone’s defined responsibility.

**A design failure, not a matter of attitude:** a conventional reading treats the unevenness as a matter of individual attitude – some managers care, some do not. Seen structurally, it is an institutional design failure of the kind Ahmed describes: a commitment proclaimed at the level of identity (“inclusive, wonderful company” (interview 12)) and left unrealised because it is nobody’s defined responsibility. Because the competence the work draws on – the ability to recognise and address colonial continuities in development cooperation – is not itself valued as a professional qualification, the work registers as discretionary extra effort by the willing rather than as part of the job. Valuing that competence at the point of selection sits with Recommendation 4. The corrective is to convert the work from discretionary attitude into a stated *professional requirement* with designated time.

**The move, and the safeguard:** make addressing colonial continuities a yearly goal in the annual planning cycle, broken down to the country level as a *fachliche Anforderung* and written so it is “more than a lofty goal” (interview 12). Build it into the relevant job descriptions and evaluation criteria, and reform the upward-feedback instrument so that pushing for change is not quietly scored against a manager. The safeguard is as important as the move. A professional requirement must not become another compliance checkbox – the aim is recognised, resourced practice, not a box to tick. The institutional vehicle exists: the focal person model already ties voluntary thematic roles to yearly objectives and remuneration (interview 04).

**The lever, and where it sits:** the work is carried at the senior in-country tier, which is why this recommendation is led there. Senior staff are the ones who carve out the engagement work, model it, push back on outdated template language and document the feedback-instrument pattern so that headquarters can fix it. Higher management issues the mandate and redesigns the job descriptions, evaluation criteria and the feedback instrument. At the working level, the priority is to recognise the voluntary inclusion work that staff already do, and to reduce its burden through the language and peer-support recommendations, rather than simply adding more designated time on top.

## The Recommendation Across the Four Levels

### *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 upwards leadership feedback instrument 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 quietly 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.

### *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.



### **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.

Substantive – but not where the work is carried.



### **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.

**Grounded in:** the “mandate from above” proposal and the feedback instrument account (interview 12), as well as the voluntary, on-the-side initiative pattern (interviews 17, 18).



### **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).

## ***Status Quo, Cost and Benefit***

### **Status Quo**

- The engagement work is fragile, sustained by whoever takes it on;
- It risks burnout and key-person dependency; and
- What it has achieved has rested on volunteer effort that the institution does not recognise.

### **Cost**

- Institutional design work on job descriptions and evaluation criteria;
- Reform of the upwards-feedback instrument; and
- A modest reallocation of time.

### **Benefit**

- The people who carry the work have it recognised and protected as part of the job rather than done on the side;
- The voluntary inclusion work is made visible; and
- The changes it produces become sustainable rather than dependent on individuals.

## **Recommendation 7.**

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

Limits to career progression for national staff leads to staff fluctuation or a form of internal resignation. Staff across German implementation agencies and political foundations have described a situation where they feel that part of their expertise is not seen or utilised. For example, respondents pointed out that the GIZ is losing senior national staff it has trained and invested in. “There’s high turnover,” a national staff technical adviser observes, “and it’s not as if these people are not good at their work – they are good.” They leave because the career simply stops: “For us, when you end here, that’s it” but for German colleagues “there are other ... bands ... you can be promoted to.” With no competitive compensation and no visible next step, “we don’t even know the next step from ... technical adviser.” As a result, “people will jump at the next opportunity and leave” (interview 13).

Keeping trained, capable staff is reason enough to act.

A pattern of unequal treatment contributes to this attrition. One example given by respondents is that authority does not follow formal rank. A national team leader describes signing authority capped below that of the German colleague reporting to him: “I could only sign up to a certain amount ... if I wanted to go higher I needed a second signature of a German ... who could be one lower than me,” even though “my German team member reports to me”. The most senior in-country posts have remained effectively closed, even as the number of national project leads has increased in recent years. Moreover, highly regarded national colleagues have been passed over for senior roles such as deputy to the country director because, as the account has it, “it always has to be ... a German” – on the unspoken worry that “when you give it to a local person there might be ... corruption” (interview 02).

The question is who reaches the senior tier, and what structural pattern underwrites selection.

That pattern is racialised, and pointing this out is difficult. The presumption that authority and probity attach to a German rather than a national colleague is a workplace expression of structural whiteness. Reflecting on her own experience in development, Robtel Neajai Pailey describes how “whiteness wields structural power and privilege in development corridors,” where “Western whiteness remains a signifier of expertise, whether real or perceived” (Pailey, 2020).

As a systematic review of the field finds, race remains structurally under-examined even where its effects are plainly felt (Patel, 2020). In German-language scholarship, the relationship is addressed directly, for instance, in chapter racism and development policy (“Rassismus und Entwicklungspolitik”) in the Handbook of Development Research (Handbuch entwicklungsforschung) (Melber, 2016). A diaspora adviser in the system describes how rarely the dynamic gets named aloud, because in the work culture people “will rarely give their proper ... opinion ... especially when it comes to ... addressing ... racial hierarchy” (interview 17).

The institution has a visible, resourced channel for reporting sexual misconduct, but it has no parallel for racism. As a result, lacking an agreed institutional definition of what crosses the line, racism can sometimes be the harder of the two to report. The difficulty compounds where both intersect.

## Respondents in Their Own Words

**Authority that does not follow rank: “I needed a second signature of a German.”** One structural marker is the signing asymmetry: a national team leader’s clearance capped below a junior German subordinate’s, so that “if I wanted to go higher I needed a second signature of a German” (interview 02). The senior tier compounds it – the head-of-project and deputy-director roles have in practice required a German, the latter justified by a generalised suspicion of “corruption ... locally” that the same speaker flatly rejects from his own experience of national managers (interview 02).

**“They jump at the next opportunity and leave.”** A national staff technical adviser ties the retention failure to a closed ceiling and uncompetitive terms. High turnover among staff who “are good at their work,” no roadmap beyond technical adviser, and an exit that looks rational – “people will jump at the next opportunity and leave” (interview 13). The institution spends to recruit and train, then loses the people it has trained.

**Hard to name.** A diaspora adviser describes the silencing: a polite, hierarchical work culture in which the “proper opinion” on racial hierarchy is rarely voiced, and where her own in-between vantage lets her “see certain things that both ... sides might not see, especially with racial hierarchy” (interview 17). This is the perception that the institution lacks a safe channel to receive.

**The everyday register: “too much Afrika.”** Sometimes the dismissal is explicit. A senior African professional reports a particularly egregious case of colleagues waving off African perspectives in meetings as “too much Afrika [*ist mir too much Afrika*],” and ties that register to the deficit framing that caps national staff. “They’re national staff, they can’t do that sort of thing – they need more capacity,” so that “certain people” are treated as “simply not good enough to do certain things” (interview 15). The dismissive register and the structural cap express the same judgement.

The presumption also sits oddly beside the everyday reality. National staff regularly repair work produced by external experts brought into a context they do not know – “parachuting experts in,” as one adviser puts it (interview 17). In a recent case, national staff had to redo a gender analysis whose author appeared not to have “talked to anybody ... in the project,” and in which “everything ... was wrong” (interview 02; see Section 5.2). The competence that the presumption discounts is the competence the work in fact relied on.

**The shape of the pyramid.** A national staff adviser maps the distribution: programme managers have “mostly been foreigners,” the approving band is roughly three-quarters foreign, and the levels fill with national staff as they descend – to entirely local at the bottom of the hierarchy in country offices. The same adviser spells out what the co-signature arrangement communicates: “You cannot be trusted to properly coordinate activities ... so you are picking someone that you trust to validate what I’m doing” (interview 01).

**What already works.** This is not a blank field. National staff progress at the senior grades has moved in recent years. “I could count the number of [senior-grade staff] when I joined in 2017; now it’s ... difficult ... [T]here was a conscious effort,” as a practitioner explains (interview 02). The institution has begun to build: an internal stock-taking of racism (initiated by voluntary staff groups), a diversity officer, the AIZ’s trainings, and a standing national-staff-representatives-to-board exchange. The recommendation builds on this, and credits it as collective, long-haul work rather than treating the field as empty.

## From Pattern to Recommendation

Progress is real and uneven. The recent movement at the senior grades is best read as the fruit of years of internal advocacy, allies across the hierarchy and the candidates' own competence – not of any single programme. The recommendation extends that work rather than claiming to start it.

**Who may hold authority, whose competence is doubted:** a conventional reading treats the ceiling as a question of language or qualifications, and racism as interpersonal lapses. A country director reads the clearance episode exactly this way – “not a structural thing, but bad management,” while conceding that “our system is very personalised ... a lot of responsibility lies on the AVs” (interview 14). This concentration of discretion is itself structural. The concession illustrates the point: where authority is distributed as personal discretion, the pattern of discretion is the structure. Read as a coloniality of being in the workplace, the ceiling and the lapses are that structure at work – a distribution of who may hold authority and whose competence is presumed rather than doubted. Who reaches the senior tier and whether racism can be safely named are two key questions that need to be addressed structurally. The race dimension is not incidental; it is the under-examined axis that the field's own scholarship flags (Pailey, 2020; Patel, 2020).

**Authority, and a protected reporting path:** first, make authority follow formal rank. Redesign clearance and the grading of local staff so that signing power tracks the post, and revise the progression and evaluation instruments through which a deficit reading quietly caps national staff. Second, establish a protected reporting path for racism. Extend the existing whistleblower and sexual misconduct infrastructure to racism, built on a shared, agreed definition of racist conduct (as already exists for sexual misconduct, where the lines are settled and the expertise resourced), with anonymity protection. Treat the racialised and gendered dimensions as intersecting rather than separate. Alongside both, strengthen and protect national staff representation – contract security for elected representatives, and genuine involvement in the decisions and information that concern them.

**Why it is tractable:** the reporting channel does not have to be invented. It exists for sexual misconduct and can be extended: the diversity officer, the stock-taking and the staff-board exchange are footholds; and the recent senior-grade movement shows that the ceiling is not fixed. Designing the channel on anonymity, a shared definition of racist conduct, and accountability rather than a bare complaints process follows the evidence that conventional grievance procedures often backfire (Dobbin & Kalev, 2022). And the institution gains directly: it keeps the senior national staff it has invested in, along with their capability and front-line credibility, and can hear and address what its staff cannot currently say (“it's not as if these people are not good at their work” (interview 13)).

This recommendation pairs with Recommendation 3 on consistent staff terms, which addresses the legal and procedural mechanism behind the same pay-and-status asymmetry.

## The Recommendation Across the Four Levels

### *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.

## Who Can Do What across the Four Levels



### Political decision-making – a supporting role.

- Back and resource the implementing organisations in establishing functioning racism reporting and case-handling; and
- Ensure that the same reporting channels – and awareness of them – exist and are resourced within the BMZ, the AA and its missions.



### 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
- Strengthen national staff representation. Contract security for elected representatives and genuine involvement in the decisions and information that concern them.

**Grounded in:** the signing authority asymmetry (interview 02) and the attrition of staff who “are good at their work” (interview 13). This recommendation is also informed by the dismissive “too much Afrika” register tied to a deficit view of national staff (interview 15) and the constrained representation forums (interviews 02, 05, 09, 17).



### 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.

### ***Status Quo, Cost and Benefit***

#### **Status Quo**

- Senior national staff leaving – a retention failure with real attrition, and the recruitment and knowledge-loss costs of replacing trained people;
- Critique that goes unvoiced; and
- A visible reporting channel for sexual misconduct with no parallel for racism.

#### **Cost**

- HR redesign of grading, clearance and evaluation;
- Building the shared definition of racist conduct and the reporting channel; and
- The equity-audit work.

#### **Benefit**

- The institution keeps the senior national staff it has invested in, along with their capability and front-line credibility; and
- A clear reporting path for racism is established and communicated.

## **Recommendation 8. From a German-language Ceiling to a Shared Working Language**

At a certain point in the workflow, the language of the institution becomes German, and from there on, the people who do not work in German lose access. A diaspora adviser describes the pattern at the country management level: “Everything is ... completely German,” with the minutes also written in German then run through machine translation by “some junior” so they can be sent out (interview 17). The cost of that default lands on the bilingual staff who close the gap by hand, and the effect on everyone else is not a question of ability but of timing. One national colleague recounted a German colleague putting it plainly: “It’s not that I’m better than you ... it’s just that I have more timely access to information because I don’t have to wait for the translation” (interview 17). Here, language functions as one of the mechanisms by which the ceiling is built.

The reversibility test makes the asymmetry visible. A senior African professional points out a country director who is responsible for a Francophone and an Anglophone country yet speaks no French. The participant asks whether that is respect, when “we wouldn’t accept it the other way round in Germany at all ... Could I go to Germany without German and find the work? No” (interview 15). The standard that the institution applies to itself at home, where you must speak the working language, is not applied to deployment in partner countries.

This standard also prioritises one kind of accountability over another. The capacity to report upwards, to Berlin and to donors, is treated as essential while the capacity to listen to and represent partners on the ground appears secondary – even though a country director’s role turns on the latter, and can be held by someone expected to represent the GIZ to partners while not speaking “a word” of their working language (interview 15). Respondents express the need for a more balanced approach.

The switch is therefore not only English ↔ German but also French ↔ German and other language combinations, and it runs on the receiving side too. Part of why double-language reporting persists is the limited English of some report-receiving staff.

This is a *coloniality of knowledge* in plain operational form: control of the working language gates access to information, and therefore to decision-making. It is also, as growing literature shows, a structural and routinely neglected axis of power in development. Research on language and power in development cooperation documents on how the language practices of development organisations decide who can be heard, and how translation failures quietly break trust and sinks initiatives (Footit, Crack & Tesseur, 2020). The corrective measure here is to stop treating translation as a favour done by bilingual staff and to make it institutional infrastructure – while specifying where German is genuinely required (legally binding texts) and lifting it everywhere it is not.

### **Respondents in Their Own Words**

**Differential access, not differential ability:** the account comes from the consultant and reporting layer. From a certain point, the documents are in German, so national staff with the expertise but without German language competence cannot contribute to work that is theirs to do. Machine translation “wouldn’t deliver the nuance that you need to actually ... work with the document,” so colleagues “took it upon themselves” to assemble a usable version. The wait for that unofficial translation ran, in one case, to “around a year”. The reason it varies, the same account notes, is that “there’s no structural procedure” – “the default ... from a certain level is ... language exclusion” (interview 17).

**The reversibility test:** a senior African professional reframes the question as one of consistency. The institution would not send someone to work in Germany without German, yet it deploys directors to Francophone countries with no French language competence – “is that respect?” The remedy he proposes is structural, not personal: be consistent with yourself, and “don’t send anyone without French” where the work requires it (interview 15).

**Why the individual fix is not enough:** the interviews show why the intention to “let people learn German” does not solve the issue. Where it happens, it is “highly individual” and runs through patronage. A German picks a “promising” local, who is then “strung along” up the hierarchy, and whose expertise can be carried off when that German person moves on (interview 17). A remedy that depends on a personal sponsor reproduces the hierarchy it is meant to loosen; the fix has to sit in the institution, not in a relationship.

**German as a barrier:** a country director states the mechanism plainly. The GIZ is a German organisation; the BMZ often “doesn’t allow English as the main language ... they want the proposals in German, the reports in German.” So “for national personnel that doesn’t speak German, [that] is sometimes a ceiling ... where they can’t go through”. The participant explains, “When you want to go up the hierarchy ladder, at a certain point you need to talk German” (interview 14). Whether English is accepted, he adds, depends on the individual desk: “It’s up to the country responsible at BMZ,” with more experienced staff readier to accept it (interview 14) – the report-receiving side that this recommendation’s political-level ask addresses.

## From Pattern to Recommendation

At project level, a good succession of managers already runs bilingual reporting and conception. However, practice varies, which shows that the default can be neutralised. But where no structural procedure exists, the language ceiling is what remains.

**Language as a gate on knowledge, not an afterthought:** where a conventional reading treats language as a practical inconvenience to be patched by whoever is bilingual, this recommendation reads it as a coloniality of knowledge. This perspective sees the working language as a gate on information and decision-making – and treats moving the translation cost onto the institution as the corrective measure. The idea that language is a structural axis of inclusion and power, not an operational afterthought, is the finding of the Listening Zones research (Footitt, Crack & Tesseur, 2020).

**The lever, and where it sits:** resource translation as an institutional workflow step rather than voluntary effort on top of an employee’s existing workload. Issue a clear directive that partner-relevant language fluency is a hiring requirement where the work needs it – including for consultants and on the report-receiving BMZ side, whose own language competence is part of the problem. Specify the narrow set of texts where German is legally required and translate the rest. Finally, renegotiate and translate the framework agreements (the *TZ-Abkommen*) into partners’ working languages. The level that can neutralise the default day to day is the senior in-country management tier, which can institute bilingual reporting and conception now – this is why this recommendation does not wait on headquarters alone.

## The Recommendation Across the Four Levels

### 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.

### 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.

**Grounded in:** the explicit “directive from above” proposal and the framework-agreements-in-German problem (interview 15).



### **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.

**Grounded in:** the project-level variance where a supportive run of managers has, in practice, run bilingual reporting (interview 01), and a diaspora adviser’s account of voluntary translation work (interview 17).



### **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 – the pattern where a German-only document with “important information in it” is shared without comment and “half of the people cannot read it,” as a participant explained (interview 17).

## ***Status Quo, Cost and Benefit***

### **Status Quo**

- At key workflow points the working language switches to German;
- Translation falls on bilingual staff, on top of their jobs – effectively fixing machine translation that can take too long to make usable. German-only documents circulate to mixed management groups where “half of the people cannot read it” (interview 17); and
- Partner governments depend on framework agreements (*TZ-Abkommen*) still drafted in German (interview 15).

### **Cost**

- Translation built into the workflow at headquarters;
- A bilingual reporting norm enforced;
- Partner-language hiring criteria; and
- Renegotiation and translation of the framework agreements.

**Benefit**

- National staff get the information their work depends on, at the same time as their colleagues, and can bring their expertise directly to the higher rungs of German development cooperation – where today it arrives only as second-hand information;
- The translation burden shifts from individuals to the institution; and
- Partners read framework agreements in their own working languages.

## **Recommendation 9. Peer Support and National Staff Representation**

German development institutions increasingly attempt to formalise national staff representation bodies. The GIZ, for example, already has formal channels for national staff voice, and it increasingly celebrates the staff initiatives that have developed alongside them. Most GIZ country offices have an elected national staff representation forum, the Representative Council of National Personnel (RCNP), and the staff-run diversity and peer-support groups that have evolved alongside it are now visible enough that the institution points to them with some pride. However, practitioners working on these topics internally also report institutional challenges. Existing expertise needs to be recognised beyond occasional appreciation and given the standing and the protection that would allow individuals and groups to continue and extend the work they are already, precariously, doing.

The gap that respondents highlight is that the work that national and minoritised staff describe as key – and which has improved the institution from the inside – is carried out informally, voluntarily and without structural protection. Where it is formal, contract precarity quietly limits it. A bilingual adviser explains the value of a staff-run peer-support space in plain terms: it lets staff “speak to other people, you can share experiences ... so you don’t feel alone”. But she also notes that visible engagement in that space has carried a cost. Those who raise such issues experience support as well as backlash (interview 17).

That cost is not distributed evenly, and the reason is contractual. The people who can carry a grievance upwards, the same adviser observes, are “some with international contracts”. Because “you can only send certain people into these battles,” those on insecure national contracts have far more to lose (interview 17). The elected representatives face the same structural issue. A long-serving senior manager explains that the representatives that staff elect “are also really controlled,” because national contracts are not permanent. “You can easily be sacked,” and a representative who “stand[s] hard” on an issue can find that management “will talk with your manager” at renewal time. The result is a job-security constraint “that is hindering,” so the representatives “cannot really be as expected” (interview 05).

This is where structural hierarchies have repercussions at the interpersonal level, affecting local staff in ways that cannot be divorced from hierarchies that are read as colonial continuities. The institution draws on the stabilising and corrective labour of these spaces – the peer support that keeps staff in post, the representation that surfaces problems and the staff advocacy that founded the diversity initiatives it now showcases. It does so while leaving the people who carry it exposed: unprotected if informal, constrained by precarity if formal. The lever, accordingly, is not exhortation to participate. It is institutional standing for the spaces, and contract protection for the people who staff and represent them.

### **Respondents in Their Own Words**

**“So you don’t feel alone.”** The account of what these spaces are for comes from a national staff adviser who relies on them, at the working level, below the management line, where the spaces are used rather than designed. A staff-run peer-support group is an outlet where you can “speak to other people, you can share experiences which ... I also think is very good so you don’t feel alone” (interview 17). The same adviser frames the horizontal solidarity that the space enables as a corrective measure in itself. It matters to keep a close relationship with national staff colleagues and “to at least let them know that we see certain things ... so that they don’t get the impression of this is just how it is” (interview 17). The point is modest and concrete – these spaces reduce isolation and transmit the sense that the status quo is not simply natural.

**Who can safely raise a concern is shaped by contract, not courage.** “You can only send certain people into these battles,” as one respondent puts it (interview 17): those with secure, permanent contracts can absorb the risk of speaking up, while colleagues on insecure national contracts have far more to lose.

**“Those we elect ... are also really controlled.”** The elected forum shows the same mechanism in its formal version. A long-serving senior manager describes the national personnel committee as the body “representing us towards the management,” then immediately qualifies it: “sometimes it’s also really controlled,” because representatives on non-permanent contracts “can easily be sacked”. If a representative presses hard on an issue, “they will talk with your manager” and the contract may not be renewed – a job-security constraint “that is hindering,” leaving the representatives unable to act independently (interview 05). He contrasts this with the German setting, where staff “can go and register” with a union that “will defend all your rights”. Locally, “we don’t have this structured” (interview 05). The same interview describes the everyday corrosion that horizontal spaces are meant to counter. Under a hierarchy where being “in good graces ... with the boss” is what advances careers, “people will start fighting among themselves” rather than standing together (interview 05).

**Built from below, recounted by a veteran manager.** Most diversity and postcolonial initiatives in German development institutions began as voluntary, staff-organised work rather than as management programmes – including the GIZ’s highly visible diversity and postcolonial initiatives. A veteran GIZ manager recounts founding one of these initiatives from within the ranks, in a context where the higher rungs of the hierarchy were still uniform. He makes reference to leadership conferences where “you see ... all white people” (interview 15). A small group of staff “founded this Cultural Diversity Initiative... the first to push the issue” (interview 15), working with sympathetic allies in the leadership tier.

As this manager frames it, the work was less about any single appointment than about contesting a long-standing assumption that the staff the institution posts abroad “must be white Germans” (interview 15). As a result, making long-serving, qualified African colleagues visible for roles from which that assumption had effectively screened them. He reads the recent appointment of the institution’s first African country directors in that register: not posts granted as a concession, but a barrier beginning to give way for people whose competence the institution, and at points the ministry itself, had already come to recognise (interview 15).

**Politically exposed, and backed.** A second pattern concerns political exposure. A practitioner describes a staff-run diversity initiative that began as a “volunteer initiative [*ehrenamtliche Initiative*]” (interview 18), ran on the institution’s own infrastructure. The initiative was advanced by “always look[ing] for where in the leadership tier there were people well-disposed toward us [*wo in der Leitungsebene ... Leute ... die ... uns wohlgesonnen sind*]” (interview 18) – securing the kind of leadership backing that, on this account, enables such an initiative to endure. That initiatives of this sort can draw external political pressure is documented independently on the public record.

After the AA promoted its staff network Diplomats of Color in 2020, the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) parliamentary group lodged a formal parliamentary question [*Kleine Anfrage*] asking, among other things, whether skin colour and migration background play a role in ministry hiring (Deutscher Bundestag, BT-Drs. 19/20093, 2020). These staff-led initiatives have done important work for and within institutions, yet their survival has so far rested on individual courage and well-placed allies rather than on any standing that the institution itself has guaranteed.

**No seat where decisions are made.** Beyond the elected forum, respondents point to the absence of national staff representation at the level where terms are set. A national staff manager observes that the management board is all German, while “70–75% of staff are National Personnel,” so “you don’t have any representation at the top”. Trusting that senior German colleagues will simply understand national staff needs leaves, on his account, “a huge disconnect” (interview 02).

### **From Pattern to Recommendation**

The forms are uneven, and some of the disparity is benign. A number of offices already treat informal local staff groupings as legitimate, the elected forum exists everywhere, and the celebrated initiatives are real. But where these spaces have worked, respondents attribute it to personal risk-taking and to allies found case by case – not to a protected institutional form. That is the gap that the recommendation addresses.

**Support the institution relies on, not welfare it provides:** a conventional reading treats peer-support spaces and staff networks as welfare or as good public relations – something the institution provides and can point to. The colonial continuities reading sees the same arrangement differently. The institution draws on the stabilising labour (keeping staff in post, transmitting that the status quo is not natural) and the corrective labour (representation, staff advocacy) of national and minoritised staff, while leaving the bearers structurally exposed – informal work unrecognised, formal representation gated by contract precarity. It is the now-familiar pattern of relying on labour without protecting those who carry it. The corrective measure here is to convert these forms from precarious, individually shouldered effort into recognised, protected practice.

**Why it is tractable:** the infrastructure already exists. The elected representation forum is institutionalised, informal staff groups are running, and the diversity initiatives are not only tolerated but also showcased. The ask builds on each of these rather than inventing anything. Give the spaces designated time and standing. Protect the people who represent and who push. Add a senior-to-new mentoring layer to the representation forum so that longer-serving national staff can pass on how to read the institution. Finally, preserve the self-selected character of the groups rather than bureaucratising the form out of existence.

**What the comparative evidence supports:** this is not only an inference from the corpus. Reviewing three decades of US firm data on what actually shifts the share of women and people of colour in management, Frank Dobbin and Alexandra Kalev (2022) find the measures that reliably work are those that “open networks up” – formal mentoring and self-organised employee resource groups. This is because they “democratize access to career resources, such as connections, visibility, and advice” and counter the isolation of being “the only representative of their group” (Dobbin & Kalev, 2022). That maps onto the corpus: the peer-support space built so that staff “don’t feel alone” (interview 17) and a senior-to-new mentoring layer are not soft extras but among the few interventions with an evidence base.

The same research also specifies the design that makes them effective: resource groups deliver when they are run as bridges – outward-facing and tied to management accountability, rather than as silos. The standing they are given should therefore connect them to management and the wider organisation, with access to decision-makers, visibility and a route for their concerns, rather than leaving them as a self-contained space. Dobbin and Kalev’s (2022) research informs how reporting channels should be designed to work rather than backfire, which Recommendation 7 takes up.

**The lever:** three moves, at the level where each bites. Recognise the peer-support spaces as legitimate organisational practice with designated time – not informal social activity – so that participation no longer competes with the day job. Protect those who represent and who raise

concerns: contract security for elected representatives, and the same protection for participants on fixed-term contracts, so that “going into these battles” (interview 17) is not a career risk borne only by those who can afford it. And give the form political cover at the top – leadership endorsement of these spaces as legitimate and productive. Unlike their precedents, this would mean the survival of these spaces does not depend on finding the right ally at the right moment, so that external political pressure meets an institutional commitment rather than an exposed individual.

## The Recommendation Across the Four Levels

### 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 time – not as mere informal social activity.

Strengthen the elected 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.

### 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.

**Grounded in:** the general pattern (interview 18) that such initiatives endure only by securing leadership backing – with the external political pressure they can draw documented on the public record (the AfD’s *Kleine Anfrage* on a federal staff network, BT-Drs. 19/20093, 2020).

A practitioner ties that backing directly to the agenda: how “to deal with colonial history ... is what we as an institution need clear backing for [wie man mit der Kolonialgeschichte ... umgehen möchte ... *da brauchen wir jetzt als Institution einfach auch ganz klar Rückendeckung für*].”

The initiatives do not claim a monopoly of insight nor to be right all the time. As a participant explains: “We don’t get everything right ... we are also here to learn.”

But the respondent locates the need for such reflexivity with partners’ interest in continued cooperation: “Our partners say they want us” (interview 04).



### **Higher management – standing, resourcing, protection.**

The headquarters and boards of the implementing organisations.

- 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 now;
- 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.

**Grounded in:** the peer-support space that lets staff “share experiences ... so you don’t feel alone” (interview 17); the grassroots founding of the staff diversity initiatives by staff members themselves (interview 15); and the bottom-up, volunteer origin of staff diversity initiatives more broadly (interview 18).

This is the bottom-up case. Management and the political level grant standing and protection, but the practice originates and lives here: the lead.

## ***Status Quo, Cost and Benefit***

### **Status Quo**

- Peer support and representation are carried at personal risk – informal peer-support work goes unrecognised, and the elected forum is “really controlled” because representatives on non-permanent contracts “can easily be sacked” (interview 05).
- Only staff with secure contracts can safely carry a concern upward – “you can only send certain people into these battles” (interview 17); and
- A hierarchy that rewards staying “in good graces ... with the boss” turns solidarity into competition (interview 05).

### **Cost**

- Institutional standing for the spaces (modest);
- Designated time and resourcing;
- The mentoring layer; and
- Contract protection for representatives and participants.

### **Benefit**

- Staff are no longer alone in dealing with the issues – horizontal solidarity replaces vertical competition;
- The informal peer-support work is made visible and recognised;
- Representation can function independently rather than under precarity; and
- The survival of peer-support spaces no longer rests on individual courage and well-placed allies.

## Phase 5: Evaluation

### Recommendation 10. From Donor-led Justification to Shared, Learning-Oriented Evaluation

Evaluation is the last stage of the project cycle. Its stated purpose is to draw from the lessons of a project so that follow-up or future projects can be done better. In practice, this stage is shaped by knowledge hierarchies, by a gap between the stated learning purpose and how evaluations are actually used, and by the unsettled question of whose perspectives and voices count. Colonial continuities run through evaluation in exactly these terms – in who conducts it, the terms it is set on, the criteria it is judged by and whom it ultimately serves. Furthermore, colonial continuities narrow the capacity of evaluation for the reflection and learning it is meant to deliver.

As it is practised, this stage often works as a ritual of justification rather than a source of learning. Reports tend to praise: “Everything always got strongly praised ... because you have to show the successes to get the funding again [*wurde immer alles sehr stark gelobt ... man muss ja die Erfolge zeigen, um ... wieder Gelder zu kriegen*]” (interview 19). An interviewee on the implementing side describes this pattern from the other end, where a report is shaped “to look good so that you can continue receiving funding ... or ... [to look] damning to continue soliciting support” (interview 08). Where an appetite for change does exist, it tends to stay confined to what one evaluator calls “decolonial islands” – individuals engaged with the question, who nonetheless retain the power to decide which methods are taken up because the underlying structures do not move (interview 19). The recommendation begins from that sober picture.

Read through the lens of *aid effectiveness*, these are problems of method and capacity, to be closed technically – sharpen the rigour, build the partners’ evaluation capacity, add a criterion. Read as colonial continuities, they are something else: a question of whose knowledge and whose competence are recognised as valid, and of who holds the authority to define what ‘success’ means. The functional reading can leave the structure intact while appearing to reform it. This is the move that Nina van der Puije and Franziska Satzinger (2025) trace in the OECD DAC’s evaluation criteria.

The five standard criteria carry Eurocentric foundations, and the very first of them, relevance, is applied without ever asking ‘relevant to whom?’ – silencing power and politics inside a technical frame, in what they call, after Ferguson (1990), an “anti-politics machine”. The turn to ‘inclusion’ – localisation, community-based, participatory – tends, on their account, to rebrand the power relations rather than change them, since the DAC retains “decision-making power over who is included, when, and on what terms” (van der Puije & Satzinger, 2025). The decolonial question they put in its place is the plain one that the technical frame leaves out: whose values count?

### Respondents in Their Own Words

**Who evaluates:** evaluators are still sent from the Global North to the Global South. One evaluator notes, “When I go with my German passport, I have so far been in the lead [*wenn ich mit meinem deutschen Pass gehe, bin ich ... im Lead gewesen*]” (interview 19). Local, partner-country evaluators are increasingly brought onto teams but the lead – and the team’s make-up – stay predominantly German, and an evaluator may be sent into a sector and a country they do not know.

**On whose terms:** the questions are set “for the justification to the taxpayer,” and “shaped by us and not at all by the people it actually concerns [*auf die Rechtfertigung für die Steuerzahler ... von uns ... gestaltet und gar nicht von den Leuten, die es ... betrifft*],” as the evaluator explains (interview 19). The five OECD DAC criteria she works with are, in her word, “eurocentric”. A recent reform that added a “coherence” criterion served, in her reading, mostly “to keep the power structures [*Machtstrukturen weiter zu behalten*]” (interview 19) – the in-practice echo of the structural critique above.

**For whose learning:** because a report must “show the successes,” critical points raised by staff or partners “did not come up at all [*ist ... nicht vorgekommen*]” in the evaluations she conducted (interview 19). The stage that is meant to produce learning is the one most disciplined into producing reassurance.

### **That it can be otherwise**

The constructive half of the picture is the more instructive. The evaluator states that, on everything to do with decolonisation, the state implementing organisation sits “right at the end of the food chain [*ganz am Ende der Nahrungskette*]” (interview 19). This observation provides a comparison across institutions and points to other organisations already doing several of the things this recommendation asks for. In her account, church-based development organisations have partners to help develop the evaluation questions. They work in tandems that include national assessors, and some delegate the evaluation budget to partners who then commission their own local evaluators – at times with no posted evaluator at all – with training provided for the purpose. The significance is practical rather than ideological: once that training exists, “you can no longer make the argument that they can’t do it [*jetzt kann man nicht mehr das Argument bringen, die können das nicht*]” (interview 19).

This is also where the question of ‘capacity’ can be turned around – and where the recommendation connects to the report’s wider argument. The aid-effectiveness reflex is to locate the deficit in the partner or the partner context – that they lack evaluation capacity. This rationalises defaulting to Western evaluators and at best attempt to close the gap with training. Addressing the colonial continuity points the other way, as the evaluator points out. The difficulty is less that partners cannot evaluate than the idea that “our German bureaucracy ... is so arcane that you have to learn it specially [*wir Deutschen und unsere Bürokratie ... ist so arkan, das muss man extra lernen*]” (interview 19). So what is taken for a missing partner competency turns out, on inspection, to be a donor structure that gates who may take part. (This is the evaluation-stage instance of the contrast that Chapter 2 develops between the aid-effectiveness reading and addressing colonial continuities.)

The alternatives, finally, are not hypothetical. Decolonial evaluation criteria that attend to power dynamics, to who is meant to benefit, and to the negotiation process are already being set out (van der Puije & Satzinger, 2025). The Made in Africa Evaluation, an African-led body of work carried out by the African Evaluation Association, has argued for over a decade for evaluation on African terms (Khumalo, 2022). In the philanthropic sector, the Equitable Evaluation Initiative makes a parallel case about who creates evaluative knowledge and how power is held within it. Reciprocal accountability is the other available shift: that partners, too, evaluate the cooperation – “they should actually evaluate us [*die sollten eigentlich uns evaluieren*]” (interview 19) – as a *wechselseitiges Rechenschaftsprinzip*. Likewise, that the complaint and feedback mechanisms that exist on paper but go unused be made known and used in the course of a project, not only at its close.

## From Pattern to Recommendation

What the moves share is a shift of authorship – over who evaluates, on whose terms, by which criteria and towards whose learning – back to the partner side, without pretending that the donor side disappears. The action sits at four levels.

**Precondition across all levels:** An evaluator stresses key requirements: “time, resources, money [*Zeit, Ressourcen, Geld*]” (interview 19). This precondition ties this recommendation to Recommendation 6 on designated time and an evaluable role, and to the same commissioning gap that keeps national staff’s knowledge from flowing back upstream (interview 04; Section 5.2).

## The Recommendation Across the Four Levels

### *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 OECD 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.

### *Who Can Do What across the Four Levels*



#### **Political decision-making – a supporting role.**

The BMZ and the wider OECD DAC avenue.

- Advance reform of the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria to enable partner-led co-evaluation;
- 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 terms of reference and the evaluation criteria;
- Adopt decolonial criteria alongside the DAC set;
- Reframe the purpose towards learning and reciprocal accountability; and
- Mainstream the complaint and feedback mechanisms so that they are known and used.

**Grounded in:** the institutional variance – church-based organisations already co-develop questions with partners, work in national evaluator tandems and even delegate evaluation budgets to partners with training provided, whereas the state organisation’s recent practice was “top-down, *deutsch*” (interview 19). This recommendation is also informed by the reframe of ‘capacity’ from “they don’t know evaluation” to “our bureaucracy is arcane and has to be learned,” as a participant expressed (interview 19).



### 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.

**Grounded in:** the seniors’ proximity to partners (interview 19).



### 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 the praise-oriented reports leave out.

**Grounded in:** the counterpart principle and the observation that critical points “do not appear [*kommen nicht vor*]” in reports that must “show the successes in order to secure funding again [*die Erfolge zeigen, um wieder Gelder zu kriegen*]” (interview 19). This account is corroborated in interview 08, where a practitioner describes reports being written to fit the funding incentive: made to “look good” even where that “may not be entirely the case on the ground,” or conversely “damning to continue soliciting support” (interview 08).

## ***Status Quo, Cost and Benefit***

### **Status Quo**

- Northern-led evaluation;
- Questions set for the taxpayer;
- Eurocentric DAC criteria;
- Reports that praise in order to keep funding flowing; and
- Complaint mechanisms that exist on paper but go unknown and unused.

### **Cost**

- Building tandem and partner-led evaluation capacity, with training;
- Developing and applying decolonial criteria;
- Redesigning the process; and
- The precondition that the corpus stresses – time, resources and money.

### **Benefit**

- Evaluation becomes a genuine site of learning that informs the next cycle rather than only justifying the last;
- Reciprocal accountability between donor and partner; and
- Criteria that reflect whom the cooperation is meant to serve.

# Afterword

This report began with an invitation, and it closes with one. The history, evidence and 10 recommendations gathered here are not an end point; they are material to extend a conversation that practitioners across the German development interface are already having. Continue it. Use the **Decolonising Development** interactive literature tool to go deeper into the academic, policy and civil society debates and concepts around addressing colonial continuities in development cooperation. Use and share the interactive overview of the **recommendations** wherever it is useful: in a team discussion, in planning sessions, in preparation for a project. The recommendations are offered as first steps, not finished prescriptions; refine them, adapt them to your context and expand on them.

But first and foremost, engage with others on the issues themselves. This report demonstrates the engagement already underway, at every level of the hierarchy. The continuities traced here will be addressed in the same way they have been analysed: across levels, together. Nothing in these pages is one level's task alone, or one person's.

We would be glad to hear whether and how the report, its findings or its tools have been useful to you. Thank you for reading, and for engaging further.

# Interviews

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 2025–26 (see Methodology, Section 1.5). The table below identifies, in anonymised form, the interviews and focus groups cited by number in the text.

To maintain anonymity, interviewees are described by general function only: no names, country-specific positions or other identifying details 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	Standpoint	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	Standpoint	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 only these numbers (e.g. interview 15). Select German-language interviews are cited in only English gloss, to preserve anonymity; other German-language passages are provided in the original with an English translation.

# Bibliography

À propos du FORIM – FORIM. (2021, February 1). <https://forim.net/le-forim/qui-sommes-nous/>

African Diaspora Policy Centre. (2015, June 23). *EADPD*. African Diaspora Policy Centre. African Diaspora Policy Centre. <https://www.diaspora-centre.org/eadpd/>

African Diaspora Policy Centre (ADPC). (2021). *Diaspora Engagement Model for Development*. African Diaspora Policy Centre (ADPC). [https://www.idiaspora.org/sites/g/files/tmzbdl2361/files/resources/document/diaspora\\_engagement\\_model\\_final\\_291121.pdf](https://www.idiaspora.org/sites/g/files/tmzbdl2361/files/resources/document/diaspora_engagement_model_final_291121.pdf)

African Union. (2019). *Diaspora Mapping and Research Study in Five European Countries*. African Union. <https://www.giz.de/de/downloads/2018%20Diaspora%20Mapping%20Study%20Europe%20ENG.pdf>

Ahmed, K. (2025, January 13). 'It's about solidarity, not charity': The Oxfam chief seeking to decolonise the aid sector. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2025/jan/13/its-about-solidarity-not-charity-the-oxfam-chief-seeking-to-decolonise-the-aid-sector>

Ahmed, S. (2012). *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. Duke University Press.

Aikins, J. K. (2016). Fallstudie: Diasporas als AkteurInnen der Entwicklungspolitik. In K. Fischer, G. Hauck, & M. Boatcă (Eds), *Handbuch Entwicklungsforschung* (pp. 225–230). Springer VS. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-04790-0\\_28](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-04790-0_28)

Aikins, J. K. (2025). Asymmetrie und Aushandlung: Ghanaisch-deutsche Entwicklungszusammenarbeit seit 1957. *Aus Politik Und Zeitgeschichte*, 75(50–51), 41–46.

Alvarado, A. C. (2022, June 23). Exporting 'reconciliation' ★ The Breach. *The Breach*. <https://breachmedia.ca/exporting-reconciliation/>

Anghie, A. (2005). *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law*. Cambridge University Press.

Arif Dirlik. (2015). *Concepts of the Global South – Voices from around the world*. Global South Studies Center, University of Cologne. Concepts of the Global South: Voices from around the World (Issue 1). [https://gssc.uni-koeln.de/sites/BiPoN/user\\_upload/9\\_GLOBAL\\_SOUTH\\_voices012015\\_concepts\\_of\\_the\\_global\\_south\\_Kopie.pdf](https://gssc.uni-koeln.de/sites/BiPoN/user_upload/9_GLOBAL_SOUTH_voices012015_concepts_of_the_global_south_Kopie.pdf)

Asian–African Conference. (1955). *Final communiqué of the Asian–African Conference of Bandung (24 April 1955)*.

Auswärtiges Amt. (2024, July 6). *Addressing Germany's colonial past*. German Federal Foreign Office. <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/about-us/2661682-2661682>

- Auth, K. (2026, May 11). Was the Marshall Plan a ploy to secure critical minerals? No. But also sort of... yes. [Substack newsletter]. *Aid Interrupted*. <https://katieauth.substack.com/p/was-the-marshall-plan-a-ploy-to-secure>
- Bechhaus-Gerst, M., Wiese, B., Malanda, A. B., Brändle, R., Zeller, J., Röschenthaier, U., Treins, K., Bischoff, E., Förster, L., Bank, M. von der, Morlang, T., Fenner, B., Brog, H., Franken, I., & Horstmann, A.-K. (Eds). (2013). *Köln und der deutsche Kolonialismus: Eine Spurensuche*. Böhlau Verlag Köln. <https://doi.org/10.7788/boehlau.9783412211646>
- Beckert, S. (2014). *Empire of cotton: A global history*. Alfred A. Knopf.
- Beckert, S. (2025). *Capitalism: A Global History*. Allen Lane.
- Bernards, N. (2024). Where is finance in the financialization of development? *Globalizations*, 21(1), 88–102. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2023.2222481>
- Blackler, A. A. (2022). *An Imperial Homeland: Forging German Identity in Southwest Africa*. Penn State University Press.
- BMZ. (n.d.). *Shaping the Future Together Globally*.
- BMZ. (2026). *The direct approach to the partner*. Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. <https://www.bmz.de/en/ministry/working-approach/bilateral-development-cooperation-56630>
- Bohnet, M. (2015). *Geschichte der deutschen Entwicklungspolitik: Strategien, Innenansichten, Zeitzeugen, Herausforderungen*. UVK Verlagsgesellschaft / UTB.
- Brablec, D. (2025). *Indigenous urbanisation and the decolonial possibilities of internal diasporas*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00380261251366885>
- Browne, E. (2015). Incentives from donor funding mechanisms for civil society organisations. *GSDRC*.
- Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung. (2021). *Leitlinien für die bilaterale Finanzielle und Technische Zusammenarbeit mit Kooperationspartnern der deutschen Entwicklungszusammenarbeit (TZ-FZ-Leitlinie)*. BMZ.
- Burton, E. (2021). *Die DDR und der Globale Süden: Zwischen 'Internationaler Solidarität', wirtschaftlicher Zusammenarbeit und Auslandsspionage [Conference Report]*. H-Soz-Kult. <https://www.hsozkult.de/conferencereport/id/fdkn-127533>
- Burton, E., Dietrich, A., Harisch, I. R., & Schenck, M. C. (2021). *Navigating Socialist Encounters: Moorings and (Dis)Entanglements between Africa and East Germany during the Cold War*. De Gruyter.
- Calmand, J., Recotillet, I., & Werquin, P. (2021). *Strategic Evaluation of the Performance of Enabel in the Field of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and Employment BXL11525B*. SOGEROM. <https://www.enabel.be/app/uploads/2023/03/0.2-Final-Report-ENG-VF.pdf>
- Carr, S. C., McWha, I., MacLachlan, M., & Furnham, A. (2010). International-local remuneration differences across six countries: Do they undermine poverty reduction work? *International Journal of Psychology*, 45(5), 321–340.

- Cassidy-Soto, I. (2025, May 1). *How we strengthen the capacity of our grantees*. Oak Foundation. Oak Foundation. <https://oakfnd.org/how-we-strengthen-the-capacity-of-our-grantees/>
- Christiaens, T. (2022, December 12). *Belgium Denounces Its Colonial Past, and the Netherlands Lags Behind*. The Low Countries. <https://www.the-low-countries.com/article/colonialpast/>
- Cleton, L., & Vanore, M. (2023). *Connecting Diaspora for Development (CD4D2) Final Report*. UN Merit. [https://iom-nederland.nl/images/CD4D/2023/CD4D2\\_Final\\_Report\\_27-10-23.pdf?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://iom-nederland.nl/images/CD4D/2023/CD4D2_Final_Report_27-10-23.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com)
- CONCORD Sverige. (2024, March 28). *Sida terminates agreements with civil society organisations*. CONCORD Sverige. <https://concord.se/sida-terminates-agreements-with-civil-society-organisations>
- Congressional Research Service. (2006). *U.S. Occupation Assistance: Iraq, Germany, and Japan Compared (Report No. RL33331)*. [https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20080129\\_RL33331\\_10e06a5a3d9491bf2251a3772e90f8194f0b425d.pdf](https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20080129_RL33331_10e06a5a3d9491bf2251a3772e90f8194f0b425d.pdf)
- Conrad, S. (2012). *German Colonialism: A Short History*. Cambridge University Press.
- Cooperation Canada. (2021, October 7). *Is the end near for Direction and Control?* <https://cooperation.ca/is-the-end-near-for-direction-and-control/>
- Costenaro, G. (2026). Materialising the Third Force: European Industrial and Financial Cooperation in Colonial Iron and Aluminium Production and the Making of Eurafrica during Decolonisation. *Contemporary European History*, 35, e59. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777326101519>
- Cultural Diversity Initiative. (2021). *Needs Assessment and Perspectives on Cultural Diversity within Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH*. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH.
- Cultural Diversity Initiative & GIZ.postcolonial. (2022). *A Qualitative Study exploring Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in GIZ Africa: Food for Thought and a Toolbox for Action*. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH.
- Declaration of the Trafficking of Enslaved Africans and Racialized Chattel Enslavement of Africans as the Gravest Crime against Humanity*. (n.d.). Retrieved 31 May 2026, from <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n26/065/33/pdf/n2606533.pdf>
- Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH. (2024). *Shaping Development-Oriented Migration*. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH. <https://www.giz.de/en/downloads/giz2023-en-Shaping-Development-Oriented-Migration.pdf>
- Deutscher Bundestag. (2020). *Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Kleine Anfrage der Fraktion der AfD: Diplomats of Color (Drucksache 19/20093)*. Deutscher Bundestag.
- Deutsches Evaluierungsinstitut der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit. (2021). *Development cooperation from a partner perspective*. DEval.
- DIASDEV. (2025, October 27). *DIASDEV – Diaspora and Development | Expertise France*. <https://www.expertisefrance.fr/en/projects/diasdev-diaspora-and-development>

Dibobe, M. (1919). *Eingabe an die deutsche Nationalversammlung [Petition to the German National Assembly]*.

Dobbin, F., & Kalev, A. (2022). *Getting to diversity: What works and what doesn't*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

DOMiD. (2025). „Vertragsarbeiter“ in der DDR. DOMiD | Dokumentationszentrum und Museum über die Migration in Deutschland. <https://domid.org/news/vertragsarbeit-in-der-ddr/>

*DRAFT the future! Towards a Diaspora Forum in Italy*. (2022). <https://italy.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd11096/files/Diaspora%20Website/df-info-sheet-en-nb2.pdf>

Egbejule, E. (2026, March 25). UN votes to describe slave trade as 'gravest crime against humanity'. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2026/mar/25/un-votes-slave-trade-gravest-crime-against-humanity-reparatory-justice>

Eine Umfrage [A Survey]. (1927). *Europäische Gespräche: Hamburger Monatshefte Für Auswärtige Politik*, 5(12), 609–676.

Enabel. (2026). *Human Mobility*. Enabel. [https://www.enabel.be/app/uploads/2024/12/Note\\_Mob\\_Hum\\_Ed2\\_EN\\_Web.pdf](https://www.enabel.be/app/uploads/2024/12/Note_Mob_Hum_Ed2_EN_Web.pdf)

European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights. (2021, June). *The 'reconciliation agreement' between Germany and Namibia: A lost opportunity*. ECCHR. <https://www.ecchr.eu/en/case/the-reconciliation-agreement-a-lost-opportunity/>

*European Economic Co-Operation—Hansard—UK Parliament*. (n.d.). Retrieved 25 May 2026, from <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1948-07-05/debates/143ab345-3dfa-453b-a084-9af76252f280/EuropeanEconomicCo-Operation>

European Parliament, D.-G. for P. R. S. (2023). *The EU–Southern African Development Community Economic Partnership Agreement: A geo-economic perspective*. European Parliament (EPRS).

Faist, T. (2008). Migrants as transnational development agents: An inquiry into the newest round of the migration-development nexus. *Population, Space and Place*, 14(1), 21–42.

Ferguson, J. (1990). *The Anti-Politics Machine: 'Development', Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*. Cambridge University Press.

Fischer, E. (1913). *Die Rehobother Bastards und das Bastardierungsproblem beim Menschen*. Gustav Fischer.

Fischer, K., Hauck, G., & Boatcă, M. (Eds). (2016). *Handbuch Entwicklungsforschung*. Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-04790-0>

Footitt, H., Crack, A. M., & Tesseur, W. (2020). *Development NGOs and Languages: Listening, Power and Inclusion*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Fürstenau, M. (2025, September 21). *Germany slashes aid, development budget*. Dw.Com. <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-slashes-aid-development-budget/a-74066633>

Gathii, J. T. (2003). Geographical Hegelianism in territorial disputes involving non-European land relations: An analysis of the case concerning Kasikili/Sedudu Island (Botswana/Namibia). *Leiden Journal of International Law*, 15(1), 201–222.

Genske, S. (2021). Gerson Liebl Makes his Case: Citizenship and (Post-)Colonial Forgetting in Germany. *Global Histories: A Student Journal*, 7(2). <https://doi.org/10.17169/GHSJ.2021.468>

Geppert, D. (2021). *60 Jahre BMZ – Was prägt(e) die deutsche Entwicklungspolitik?* Universität Potsdam, Historisches Institut (im Auftrag des BMZ).

Gerbing, S. (2010). *Afrodeutscher Aktivismus: Interventionen von Kolonialiserten am Wendepunkt der Dekolonisierung Deutschlands 1919*. Peter Lang.

Germany Africa Business Forum. (2026). *Germany's Marshall Plan for Africa | Germany Africa*. <https://germanyafrika.com/germanys-marshall-plan-for-africa/>

*Germany's Marshall Plan for Africa | Germany Africa*. (n.d.). Retrieved 27 January 2026, from <https://germanyafrika.com/germanys-marshall-plan-for-africa/>

Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker. (2025, August 18). *Germany refuses to pay reparations to Namibia*. GfbV. <https://www.gfbv.de/en/news/germany-refuses-to-pay-reparations-to-namibia/>

Getachew, A. (2019). *Worldmaking after empire: The rise and fall of self-determination*. Princeton University Press.

Gieler, W. (2011). *50 Jahre deutsche Entwicklungszusammenarbeit: Das BMZ von Walter Scheel bis Dirk Niebel*. Scientia Bonnensis.

GIZ ICPoC. (2024). *Vision für eine postkoloniale Transformation der GIZ (Visionspapier der Eigenmaßnahme 'Partnerschaftlich gestalten: Internationale Zusammenarbeit im Zeichen des postkolonialen Wandels', ICPoC)*. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH.

GIZ ICPoC. (2026). *A Postcolonial Narrative Framework*. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH.

Global South Studies Center. (2024). *Global South [glossary entry]*. Global South Studies Center, University of Cologne. Concepts of the Global South: Voices from around the World (Issue 1). <http://gssc.uni-koeln.de/node/452>

Goris, & Megadane. (2021, May 26). *Taking a historical perspective on the decolonization of aid*. Broker Online. <http://www.thebrokeronline.eu/article/taking-a-historical-perspective-on-the-decolonization-of-aid/>

Government of Canada. (2025, March 7). *Principles respecting the Government of Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples*. Government of Canada. <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/csjsj/principles-principes.html>

Gray, W. G. (2003). *Germany's Cold War: The global campaign to isolate East Germany, 1949–1969*. University of North Carolina Press.

Grovogui, S. N. (2006). *Beyond Eurocentrism and anarchy: Memories of international order and institutions*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Hamah, V. (2026). *Resetting sovereignty: Mahama's foreign policy and the Constitutional revival of Nkrumahism 60 years after the 1966 coup*. Modern Ghana. <https://www.modernghana.com/news/1474118/resetting-sovereignty-mahamas-foreign-policy.html>

Hansen, P. (2025). The return of the repressed: The colonial history of the EU's geopolitical turn. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 63(5), 1420–1437. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13757>

Hansen, P., & Jonsson, S. (2015). *Eurafrica: The untold history of European integration and colonialism* (First published in paperback). Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Inc.

Harisch, I. R. (2020). Bartering coffee, cocoa and W50 trucks: The trade relationships of the GDR, Angola and São Tomé in a global context. *Global Histories: A Student Journal*, 6(1), 89–111.

Hasselskog, M., Mugume, P., Ndushabandi, E., & Schierenbeck, I. (2017). National ownership and donor involvement: An aid paradox illustrated by the case of Rwanda. *Third World Quarterly*, 38(8), 1816–1830.

Hearth, S. (2021). The “World’s Greatest Mineral Locality:” Haillom, Ndonga, Herero, and the early colonial histories of Tsumeb, Namibia. *Earth Sciences History*, 40(2), 433–460.

Hegel, G. W. F. (1956). *The philosophy of history* (J. Sibree, Trans.; original work published 1837). Dover Publications.

Hickel, J. (2017). *The divide: A brief guide to global inequality and its solutions*. William Heinemann.

Hickel, J., Keshavjee, S., Burkett, M., & Richardson, E. T. (2026). Structural adjustment: Damages, reparations and pathways to non-recurrence. *BMJ Global Health*, 11(Suppl 1). <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2024-017221>

Hickel, J., Sullivan, D., & Zoomkawala, H. (2021). Plunder in the post-colonial era: Quantifying drain from the Global South through unequal exchange, 1960–2018. *New Political Economy*, 26(6), 1030–1047. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13563467.2021.1899153>

Horstmann, A.-K. (2013). „Das deutsche Volk braucht Kolonien“ – Konrad Adenauer und der Kolonialrevisionismus. In M. Bechhaus-Gerst & A.-K. Horstmann (Eds), *Köln und der deutsche Kolonialismus: Eine Spurensuche* (pp. 197–204). Böhlau Verlag. <https://doi.org/10.7788/boehlau.9783412211646.197>

Hövelmann, S., & Südhoff, R. (n.d.). *Germany on its long way from payer to player—International perceptions of German humanitarian action*.

Independent Commission on International Development Issues. (1980). *North-South: A programme for survival. Report of the Independent Commission on International Development Issues*. Pan Books.

International Service for Human Rights. (2026, March). *UN resolution declares transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans ‘the gravest crime against humanity’*. ISHR. <https://ishr.ch/latest-updates/the-un-general-assembly-the-transatlantic-trade-in-enslaved-africans-is-the-gravest-crime-against-humanity/>

IOM. (2026). *Diaspora engagement | IOM Belgium and Luxembourg*. Diaspora Engagement | IOM Belgium and Luxembourg. <https://belgium.iom.int/diaspora-engagement>

Jowell, D. T., & Ratha, D. (2015, March 3). *It's time to repeal the remittances "Super Tax" on Africa*. World Bank Blogs. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/peoplemove/it-s-time-repeal-remittances-super-tax-africa>

Kabinettsprotokolle der Bundesregierung. (1957). Assoziierung der überseeischen Gebiete. In *Kabinettsitzung vom 15. Februar 1957* (Vol. 10, p. 144). R. Oldenbourg Verlag.

Kandiah, A. (2022). *Agents of Change: Diasporic Development Initiatives from and Negotiations of Belonging among the Second-Generation Tamil Diaspora in Canada* [Université d'Ottawa / University of Ottawa]. <http://hdl.handle.net/10393/43853>

Kant, I. (2001). On the different races of man (J. M. Mikkelsen, Trans.; original work published 1775). In R. Bernasconi & T. Lott (Eds), *The idea of race* (pp. 8–22). Hackett Publishing.

Khumalo, S. L. (2022). The effects of coloniality and international development assistance on Made in Africa Evaluation: Implications for a decolonised evaluation agenda. *African Evaluation Journal*, 10(1), 10. <https://doi.org/10.4102/aej.v10i1.628>

Kothari, U. (2005). *A radical history of development studies: Individuals, institutions and ideologies*. Zed Books.

Krapohl, S., & Van Huut, S. (2020). A missed opportunity for regionalism: The disparate behaviour of African countries in the EPA-negotiations with the EU. *Journal of European Integration*, 42(4), 565–582. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2019.1666117>

Kundrus, B. (2003). *Moderne Imperialisten: Das Kaiserreich im Spiegel seiner Kolonien*. Böhlau.

Leanza, M. (2024). The German colonial empire, seen from its end. *Static: Thoughts and Research from Global Dis:Connect*, 3(1), 57–69. <https://doi.org/10.5282/static/65>

Lee, N. J. (2026, June 15). Sliding doors: One Trump crisis, two possible futures for Europe – European Council on Foreign Relations. *ECFR*. <https://ecfr.eu/publication/sliding-doors-one-trump-crisis-two-possible-futures-for-europe/>

Lehne, S. (2026). *What Can the EU Do About Trump 2.0?* <https://carnegieendowment.org/europe/research/2026/02/what-can-the-eu-do-about-trump-20>

Li, T. M. (2007). *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics*. Duke University Press.

Lie, J. H. S. (2024). Bottom-up development as framed freedom: Developmentality and donor power. *Canadian Journal of Development Studies / Revue Canadienne d'études Du Développement*, 45(4), 613–633. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02255189.2024.2367993>

Light, M. K., & Lewandowski, B. (n.d.). *REMITTANCES IN THE PHILIPPINES: THE IMPACT OF REMITTANCE TAXES*. Retrieved 2 June 2026, from [https://www.colorado.edu/business/sites/default/files/attached-files/western\\_union\\_tax\\_impact\\_122215.pdf](https://www.colorado.edu/business/sites/default/files/attached-files/western_union_tax_impact_122215.pdf)

- Liik, K. (2022, December 14). The old is dying and the new cannot be born: A power audit of EU-Russia relations – European Council on Foreign Relations. *ECFR*. <https://ecfr.eu/publication/the-old-is-dying-and-the-new-cannot-be-born-a-power-audit-of-eu-russia-relations/>
- Lim, J., & Kim, C. (2025). France's Policy on Attracting African Students: Balancing Recipient Needs and Donor Interests in Development Cooperation. *Journal of International Development Cooperation*, 20(1), 37–58. <https://doi.org/10.34225/jidc.2025.20.1.37>
- Lim, S., Morshed, A. K. M. M., & Turnovsky, S. J. (2021). Migrant Labor and Remittances: Macroeconomic Consequences and Policy Responses. *Journal of Human Capital*, 15(1), 128–173. <https://doi.org/10.1086/713403>
- Linne, K. (2021). *Die Bruderschaft der „Entwickler“: Personen – Institutionen – Praktiken der westdeutschen Entwicklungshilfe (1944–1961)*. Wallstein Verlag.
- Louro, M. L. (2018). *Comrades against imperialism: Nehru, India, and interwar internationalism*. Cambridge University Press.
- Louro, M., Stolte, C., Streets-Salter, H., & Tannoury-Karam, S. (2020). The League Against Imperialism: Lives and Afterlives. In C. Stolte, H. Streets-Salter, M. Louro, & S. Tannoury-Karam (Eds), *The League Against Imperialism: Lives and Afterlives* (pp. 17–52). Amsterdam University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9789400603707.002>
- Luxshi Vimalarajah. (2012). *Mapping German Development Cooperation in Peace Negotiations and Mediation: Experience, Potentials, Gaps and Areas for Strategic Support*.
- Mabanza, B. (2025). The Long Shadow of Colonialism. In *Change Course Now! Only International Justice Can Create Social Security (Analysis No. 110)* (pp. 17–24). Brot für die Welt.
- Maldonado-Torres, N. (2007). On the coloniality of being: Contributions to the development of a concept. *Cultural Studies*, 21(2–3), 240–270.
- Marx, C. (2013). Hendrik Verwoerd and the Leipzig School of Psychology in 1926. *Historia*, 58(2), 91–118.
- McDonald, S., Lande, S., & Matanda, D. (2013). *Why Economic Partnership Agreements undermine Africa's regional integration*. Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars / Manchester Trade. <https://coilink.org/20.500.12592/687f6x1>
- Melber, H. (2016). Rassismus und Entwicklungspolitik. In K. Fischer, G. Hauck, & M. Boatcă (Eds), *Handbuch Entwicklungsforschung* (pp. 303–313). Springer VS. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-04790-0\\_23](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-04790-0_23)
- Melber, H. (2025, January 7). *Germany's genocide in Namibia: Deal between the two governments falls short of delivering justice*. The Conversation. <https://theconversation.com/germanys-genocide-in-namibia-deal-between-the-two-governments-falls-short-of-delivering-justice-246719>
- Mintz, S. W. (1985). *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. Viking.
- Mkandawire, T., & Soludo, C. C. (1999). *Our Continent, Our Future: African Perspectives on Structural Adjustment*. CODESRIA / Africa World Press / IDRC.

- Mohan, G., & Zack-Williams, A. B. (2002). Globalisation from below: Conceptualising the role of the African diasporas in Africa's development. *Review of African Political Economy*, 29(92), 211–236.
- Mormina, M., & Istratii, R. (2021). 'Capacity for what? Capacity for whom?' A decolonial deconstruction of research capacity development practices in the Global South and a proposal for a value-centred approach. *Wellcome Open Research*, 6, 129. <https://doi.org/10.12688/wellcomeopenres.16850.1>
- Mosse, D. (2005). *Cultivating Development: An Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice*. Pluto Press.
- Nadia Kamies. (2018). *Nazism, Racial Science and Apartheid* | Nadia Kamies. <https://nadiakamieswriter.com/nazism-racial-science-and-apartheid/>
- Nagl, D. (2007). *Grenzfälle: Staatsangehörigkeit, Rassismus und nationale Identität unter deutscher Kolonialherrschaft*. Peter Lang.
- Narayanaswamy, L. (2024). What is 'development' and can we 'decolonise' it? Some ontological and epistemological reflections. In H. Melber, U. Kothari, L. Camfield, & K. Biekart (Eds), *Challenging global development: Towards decoloniality and justice* (pp. 225–235). Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-30308-1\\_13](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-30308-1_13)
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. (2013). *Coloniality of power in postcolonial Africa: Myths of decolonization*. CODESRIA.
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. (2018). *Epistemic freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and decolonization*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. (2020). *Decolonization, development and knowledge in Africa: Turning over a new leaf*. Routledge.
- Newkirk, P. (2012). *Tuskegee, Achimota and the Construction of Black Transcultural Identity*. Columbia University.
- Njoh, A. J., & Bigon, L. (2015). Bubonic plague, colonial ideologies, and urban planning policies: Dakar, Lagos and Kumasi. *Planning Perspectives*, 31(2), 227–248. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02665433.2015.1064779>
- Nkrumah, K. (n.d.). *Neocolonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism*.
- Norad. (2026, May 5). *Norwegian aid increases while global aid cuts hit hard* | Norad.no. Norad. Norad. <https://www.norad.no/en/news/news/2026/norwegian-aid-increases-while-global-aid-cuts-hit-hard/>
- Nwajiaku-Dahou, K., & Klein, J. K. (2023). *Expressions of racism in GIZ's work on migration and displacement: A critical reflection*. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH.
- OECD. (2021). *Empowering the immigrant diaspora for sustainable development (EN)*. OECD. [https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2021/03/development-co-operation-tips-tools-insights-practices\\_d307b396/empowering-the-immigrant-diaspora-for-sustainable-development\\_241ad8b2/d054470a-en.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2021/03/development-co-operation-tips-tools-insights-practices_d307b396/empowering-the-immigrant-diaspora-for-sustainable-development_241ad8b2/d054470a-en.pdf)

- OECD. (2026, April 9). *A historic decline in foreign aid: Preliminary 2025 ODA data*. <https://www.oecd.org/en/data/insights/data-explainers/2026/04/a-historic-decline-in-foreign-aid-preliminary-2025-oda-data.html>
- Onokwai, J. C., & Matthews, S. (2022). A Case Study of Country Ownership Over Donor Aid: The Global Fund and the Ghanaian Country Coordinating Mechanism. *Journal of Developing Societies*, 38(2), 166–183. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0169796X221085748>
- Özdil, Z. (2014). *“Racism is an American Problem”: Dutch Exceptionalism and its Politics of Denial*.
- Pálfi, L. (2023). Being World Power and Economic Utility: The Economic History of Germany’s African Colonies. *Journal of Central and Eastern European African Studies*, 3(1), 170–182. <https://doi.org/10.59569/jceeas.2023.3.1.157>
- Pasotti, M. (2025). *A.MI.CO. IMPACT TRACING THE EVOLUTION OF ITALY-BASED DIASPORA ORGANIZATIONS*. International Organization for Migration.
- Patel, K. (2020). Race and a decolonial turn in development studies. *Third World Quarterly*, 41(9), 1463–1475. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2020.1784001>
- Petersson, F. (2013). Hub of the anti-imperialist movement: The League against Imperialism and Berlin, 1927–1933. *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 16(1), 49–71. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2013.798475>
- Petersson, F. (2017). From Versailles to Bandung: The Interwar Origins of Anticolonialism. In L. Eslava, M. Fakhri, & V. Nesiha (Eds), *Bandung, Global History, and International Law: Critical Past and Pending Futures* (pp. 66–80). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316414880.006>
- Pigeaud, F., & Sylla, N. S. (2021). *Africa’s Last Colonial Currency: The CFA Franc Story*. Pluto Press.
- Pomeranz, K. (2000). *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy*. Princeton University Press.
- Progressive International. (2023, July 18). *The South-North dialogue*. <https://progressive.international/wire/2023-07-18-the-south-north-dialogue/en>
- Puije, N. van der, & Satzinger, F. (2025). Decolonising international development evaluation: Rethinking OECD DAC evaluation criteria from a decolonial perspective\*. *Development in Practice*, 0(0), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2025.2482780>
- Quijano, A. (2000). Coloniality of power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America. *Nepantla: Views from South*, 1(3), 533–580.
- Rabenschlag, A.-J. (2022). Völkerfreundschaft, Vertragsarbeiter und völkische Identität – Alltagsrassismus in staatlichen und gesellschaftlichen Diskursen der DDR. In *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung 2022*. Metropol.
- Robins, S. L. (2016). *Letters of stone: From Nazi Germany to South Africa*. Penguin Random House South Africa.

- Rottenburg, R. (2009). *Far-fetched facts: A parable of development aid*. The MIT Press.
- Rouhban, O. (2024, August 29). *In 2023, 3.5 million immigrants born in Africa lived in France—Insee Première—2010*. Insee. <https://www.insee.fr/en/statistiques/8245925>
- Rutazibwa, O. U. (2018). On babies and bathwater: Decolonizing International Development Studies. In S. de Jong, R. Icaza, & O. U. Rutazibwa (Eds), *Decolonization and Feminisms in Global Teaching and Learning* (pp. 158–180). Routledge.
- Salvioli, F., Akhavan, P., & Al-Hamad, A. (2023, April 20). *Germany has to grant reparations for colonial crimes*. Völkerrechtsblog. <https://voelkerrechtsblog.org/germany-has-to-grant-reparations-for-colonial-crimes/>
- Schenck, M. C. (2021). *Socialist educational wanderlust: East German and Angolan/Mozambican educational encounters*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-55590-0>
- Schwarz, H.-P. (1995). *Konrad Adenauer. 1: From the German Empire to the Federal Republic, 1987–1952*. Berghahn.
- Schwarz, H.-P. (1997). *Konrad Adenauer: A German politician and statesman in a period of war, revolution and reconstruction. Vol. 2: The statesman, 1952–1967*. Berghahn Books.
- Shayan, Z. (2021). *Diaspora support programmes in development cooperation: Examples from Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland and from the European level*. Vienna Institute for International Dialogue and Cooperation (VIDC). [https://www.vidc.org/fileadmin/pdfs/diaspora\\_support\\_neuweb2.pdf](https://www.vidc.org/fileadmin/pdfs/diaspora_support_neuweb2.pdf)
- Siebert, T. (2021, July 9). *Madgermanes: Die vergessenen mosambikanischen Vertragsarbeiter in der DDR*. Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (Deutschland Archiv).
- Sinatti, G., & Horst, C. (2015). Migrants as agents of development: Diaspora engagement discourse and practice in Europe. *Ethnicities*, 15(1), 134–152.
- Söhnge, G. (1967). *Tsumeb: A Historical Sketch*. S.W.A. Scientific Society.
- Statbel. (2024, June 5). *Diversity according to origin in Belgium | Statbel*. Statbel. <https://statbel.fgov.be/en/news/diversity-according-origin-belgium-2>
- Statistics Netherlands. (2026). *Origin* [Webpagina]. CBS. Statistics Netherlands. <https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/visualisations/dashboard-population/origin>
- Steffen, A., & Weber, K. (2016). Spinning and weaving for the slave trade: Proto-industry in eighteenth-century Silesia. In F. Brahm & E. Rosenhaft (Eds), *Slavery hinterland: Transatlantic slavery and continental Europe, 1680–1850* (pp. 87–107). Boydell & Brewer.
- Stråth, B. (2024, August 7). *Two planetary perspectives—Two futures: The global corporations and the Brandt Commission*. Planetary Social Thought. <https://www.planetary-social-thought.org/two-planetary-perspectives-two-futures-the-global-corporations-and-the-brandt-commission/>

Substack. (n.d.). *Was the Marshall Plan a ploy to secure critical minerals? No. But also sort of... yes.* Retrieved 25 May 2026, from <https://substack.com/home/post/p-197250547>

Sustainability (IDOS), G. I. of D. and. (n.d.). *Was hat die Paris-Erklärung zur Wirksamkeit der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit gebracht? Ergebnisse der internationalen Evaluierung und Schlussfolgerungen für die deutsche EZ.* Retrieved 24 May 2026, from <https://www.idos-research.de/analysen-und-stellungnahmen/article/was-hat-die-paris-erklaerung-zur-wirksamkeit-der-entwicklungszusammenarbeit-gebracht-ergebnisse-der-internationalen-evaluierung-und-schlussfolgerungen-fuer-die-deutsche-ez/>

Swedlund, H. J. (2017). *The development dance: How donors and recipients negotiate the delivery of foreign aid.* Cornell University Press.

Taggart, J., & Power, M. (2024). Rendering development investible: The anti-politics machine and the financialisation of development. *Progress in Human Geography*, 48(5), 552–574. <https://doi.org/10.1177/03091325241240741>

Táiwò, O. O. (2022). *Reconsidering Reparations.* Oxford University Press.

Tamale, S. (2020). *Decolonization and Afro-feminism.* Daraja Press.

Tarnoff, C. (1997). The Marshall Plan: Design, Accomplishments, and Relevance to the Present. *The Marshall Plan.*

Team, B. (2023, October 31). The colonial origins of European integration—LSE European Politics. *LSE European Politics – Bridging Research, Policy and Public Debate on Europe.* <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2023/10/31/the-colonial-origins-of-european-integration/>

*The Belgian-Congolese diaspora and Belgian development cooperation: A checkered relationship?* (2019, September 26). Justice & Peace Commission – French-Speaking Belgium. <https://www.justicepaix.be/en/la-diaspora-belgo-congolaise-et-la-cooperation-belge-au-developpement-une/>

Tooze, A. (2024, September 19). Chartbook 319 Talking about a Marshall Plan ... For 'Clean Energy' (Hegemony Notes 7) [Substack newsletter]. *Chartbook.* <https://adamtooze.substack.com/p/chartbook-319-talking-about-a-marshall>

Toussaint, É. (2014). *The Marshall Plan and the debt agreement on German debt.* Committee for the Abolition of Illegitimate Debt (CADTM). <https://www.cadtm.org/The-Marshall-Plan-and-the-Debt>

Twiby, L. (2020). *The League Against Imperialism: Interwar anti-colonial internationalism.* The Retrospect. <https://theretrospect.org.uk/the-league-against-imperialism/>

UN News. (2026, March 25). *UN resolution urges reparations for slavery's 'historical wrongs' | UN News.* <https://news.un.org/en/story/2026/03/1167199>

United Nations. (2001). *Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance.* United Nations.

United States Congress, S. C. on F. R. (1949). *Extension of European Recovery Program: Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate (81st Cong., 1st Sess.).* U.S. Government Printing Office.

United States Department of State. (1950). *Foreign relations of the United States, 1950, Volume IV: Central and Eastern Europe; the Soviet Union*. U.S. Government Printing Office.

VOA Africa. (2023, April 29). *Germany's Namibia past portrayed on-screen*. Voice of America. <https://www.voaafrica.com/a/germany-s-namibia-past-portrayed-on-screen/7070707.html>

Weber, K. (2004). *Deutsche Kaufleute im Atlantikhandel 1680–1830: Unternehmen und Familien in Hamburg, Cádiz und Bordeaux*. C.H. Beck.

Weber, K. (2009). Deutschland, der atlantische Sklavenhandel und die Plantagenwirtschaft der Neuen Welt (15. Bis 19. Jahrhundert). *Journal of Modern European History*, 7(1), 37–67. <https://doi.org/10.17104/1611-8944-2009-1-37>

Weigel, J. W. (2022). Image Under Fire: West German development aid and the Ghana press war, 1960–1966. *Contemporary European History*, 31(2), 259–270. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777321000102>

Wentker, H. (2007). *Außenpolitik in engen Grenzen: Die DDR im internationalen System 1949–1989*. Oldenbourg.

WIDU.africa. (2024). *Harnessing Diaspora Remittance to Unleash African SME's Potential*. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH. <https://www.giz.de/de/downloads/giz2024-en-impact-report-WIDU-rigorous-impact-evaluation.pdf>

Wiegatz, J., & Price, S. (2024). Donors and international aid in neoliberal Africa: Taking stock of the 2010s. *Canadian Journal of Development Studies / Revue Canadienne d'études Du Développement*, 45(4), 569–595. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02255189.2024.2436150>

Williams, J., & Duminy, J. (n.d.). *Financing Global Development*.

Winterhagen, J. (2016). *Cameroonian diaspora organisations in Germany and their development activities*. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH. [https://diaspora2030.de/fileadmin/files/Service/Publikationen/Studien\\_zu\\_Diaspora-Aktivitaeten\\_in\\_Deutschland/giz-2016-en-diasporastudy-cameroon.pdf](https://diaspora2030.de/fileadmin/files/Service/Publikationen/Studien_zu_Diaspora-Aktivitaeten_in_Deutschland/giz-2016-en-diasporastudy-cameroon.pdf)

World Bank. (2024). *Migration and development brief 40*. World Bank / KNOMAD.

World Bank. (2026). *International migrant stock (% of population)—Italy*. World Bank Open Data. <https://data.worldbank.org>

Yao, J. (2022). *The power of geographical imaginaries in the European international order: Colonialism, the 1884–85 Berlin Conference, and model international organizations*. Cambridge University Press.

Zane, D. (2022, June 20). *Patrice Lumumba: Why Belgium is returning a Congolese hero's golden tooth*. BBC. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-61838781>

Ziai, A. (2015). *Development Discourse and Global History: From colonialism to the sustainable development goals* (1st edn). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315753782>

Ziai, A. (2025). Theorizing postdevelopment. *European Journal of Development Research*, 37(1), 47–63. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41287-024-00682-1>

Zimmerer, J. (2011). *Von Windhuk nach Auschwitz? Beiträge zum Verhältnis von Kolonialismus und Holocaust*. LIT Verlag.

Zimmerman, A. (2012). *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German empire, and the globalization of the new South* (Second printing, and first paperback printing). Princeton University Press.

*Zukunft zusammen global gestalten*. (n.d.).

Zylinski, S. (2024). Coloniality dressed in green: In its current form, climate finance risks becoming a new tool for colonial rule. *Global Political Economy*, 3(2), 315–322. <https://doi.org/10.1332/26352257Y2024D000000010>

# Endnotes

1 A key factor in the genesis of the International Cooperation in Times of Postcolonial Change (ICPoC) project proves instructive: starting in 2021, GIZ.postcolonial, a GIZ self-organised group, began organising peer-learning events and writing an internal topical newsletter addressing both historical and highly practical aspects of the issue. For many in the organisation, the 33 editions of the newsletter served as an entry point into engaging with postcolonial change. The ICPoC project understands itself as a direct outgrowth of GIZ.postcolonial. Noticing the huge internal readership of the GIZ.postcolonial's newsletter, the organisation realised that an institutional response was necessary. Consequently, the initiative received funding, marking the first time that funding was explicitly allocated for a project on decolonizing international cooperation. Part of this funding was allocated to think tanks to conduct research on identifying and addressing colonial continuities in German development cooperation. Independent research conducted by Latin American Think Tank CLACSO, by Senegalese Think Tank LASPAD, by Bangladesh-based thinktank CPD and by APRI, exploring colonial continuities in development cooperation, has received funding through this grant.

2 A recent, notable example of technological appropriation is the focus of a major ongoing historiographical debate. Recent research by Dr. Jenny Bulstrode (2023) argues that the revolutionary “puddling and rolling” iron-refining process patented by Henry Cort in 1784 was actually developed by 76 enslaved Black metallurgists working at John Reeder's foundry in Morant Bay, Jamaica. The records preserve several of their West African soul names (such as Kofi and Kwasi), pointing to a lineage of advanced West African metallurgical knowledge that was subsequently utilised to manufacture the fortified steel that was foundational to modern infrastructure, machinery and imperial expansion.

However, the thesis has faced rigorous critical scrutiny from economic historians like Oliver Jelf (2025) and Anton Howes (2023), who argue that the primary archival records cited do not support Bulstrode's claims of direct technological transfer to Cort. The debate itself highlights the challenges of recovering subaltern scientific agency in imperial archives. It is one of many similar findings – and debates – that exist in a number of domains. For example, African medical knowledge including inoculations, and agricultural knowledge including rice cultivation and the manual pollination of the vanilla plant, each with huge economic implications for the contexts in which enslaved Africans shared their knowledge. If recent historiography provides any clues, more such findings are bound to emerge.

3 An illustrative example of this enduring exclusion is the case of Gerson Liebl, a Togolese citizen who migrated to Germany in 1991 and spent decades fighting to acquire German citizenship. Liebl is the grandson of Dr. Fritz Liebl, a German colonial doctor who had a child in 1910 with Kokoé Edith Ajavon, a Togolese chieftain's daughter. Because the colonial administration refused to recognise their marriage under colonial laws prohibiting intermarriage, the child was classified as ‘illegitimate’. Decades later, German courts and immigration authorities cited this lack of colonial-era legal legitimacy to deny Liebl's claim to citizenship under the *ius sanguinis* principle, resulting in his eventual deportation in 2009.

- 4 The reformed, de-nazified image that West Germany sought to project abroad contrasted with documented personnel continuities with the National Socialist state. Former National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP) members held senior positions across the early FRG's ministries and diplomatic service, a pattern since examined by independent historical commissions for the Foreign Office, the Justice Ministry and the Interior Ministry. Development cooperation was not exempt: Walter Scheel, the first Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation (1961–1966) and the BMZ's founding minister, had himself been a member of the NSDAP from 1941. He was classified a *Mitläufer* (fellow-traveller) in post-war de-nazification, a fact that became public only in 1978.
- 5 The commission format has been revived twice in recent years, evidence that North–South relations are in flux and that Germany is seeking to chart a new path. In 2026 the federal government announced a new North–South Commission, co-chaired by former Chancellor Olaf Scholz and former Costa Rican President Laura Chinchilla, to advise on relations with the Global South and positioned in the Brandt tradition. It follows the independent commission led by former Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, with former Foreign Minister and Vice-Chancellor Joschka Fischer among its members, which reported in 2025 (*Welt im Umbruch – Deutschland und der Globale Süden*).
- 6 A respondent for this study cited the philosopher Godfrey Tangwa, who reportedly said: “Europe has a very large mouth and very small ears. So much so that even when Europe tries to shut up and listen, all it can hear is the echoes of its own voice” (related in interview 20).
- 7 In English, the umbrella term ‘aid’ (*Hilfe*) covers distinctions that German policy keeps terminologically, and in part administratively, separate. Humanitarian assistance: *Humanitäre Hilfe*, administered by the Federal Foreign Office/AA; development cooperation: *Entwicklungszusammenarbeit/EZ*, administered by the BMZ; and international cooperation: *Internationale Zusammenarbeit/IZ*, the term preferred by implementing organisations such as the GIZ to avoid the connotations of aid: *Hilfe*. This report uses ‘development cooperation’ to refer primarily to the EZ/IZ field. The terminological progression – from *Hilfe* to *Zusammenarbeit* to *Partnerschaft* – tracks successive rhetorical repositioning(s). However, as practitioners’ voices in this report reveal, the policy substance has not always fully kept pace with the labelling.
- 8 The German government cut funding the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) by 8%. This was following USAID cuts under the second presidential administration of Donald Trump. Germany thus became the world’s largest funder of foreign aid (Fürstenau, 2025).
- 9 Operation Barkhane was a counter-insurgency operation conducted by the French military against Islamist groups in Africa’s Sahel region spanning from August 2014 to November 2022.
- 10 In June 2022, Belgium returned a gold-capped tooth—the sole remains of Patrice Lumumba, the Congolese independence leader—to his family. Lumumba was the DRC’s first democratically elected prime minister following independence in 1960, and was a key anti-colonial figure. He was assassinated in 1961 by separatists backed by the colonial Belgian government and the CIA; his body was dissolved in acid by a Belgian police officer who kept the tooth as a trophy, highlighting the additional humiliation and potential violation of human rights conducted as part of this colonial effort to keep the DRC under Belgian rule. The restitution 61 years later marks a symbolic reckoning with Belgium’s violent colonial legacy and led to an official admission of moral accountability taken by the Belgian government (Zane, 2022).

- 11 The IOM's formulation – belonging “shaped by ... migration experience and background” – requires amendment in a study of colonial continuities. One of the largest diasporas, the Atlantic African diaspora, was created not by migration in any ordinary sense but by the forced displacement and mass deportation tied to transatlantic enslavement (see Section 2.1). The amendment would not be only historical: as Atlantic diasporas across North America, Latin America and the Caribbean deepen their engagement with the continent, a definition that frames their origin as “migration experience” obscures the rupture from which they emerged.
- 12 Group visibility of this kind should not translate into group obligation. Diaspora status does not and should not determine which topics an individual engages with or what perspectives they are expected to bring to their work. The institutions, however, should enable staff who choose to act on their diasporic positioning – individually or collectively – to do so.
- 13 Guided by section 35 of the Constitution Act (1982), the UN Declaration, and the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)'s Calls to Action.
- 14 While they represent cases from across Germany's development interface, the GIZ is a key anchor and reference point, on account of both its size as the largest single organisation in the interface by number of employees, and the fact that respondents have worked in, with or moved on from the GIZ to other institutions.











APRI – Africa Policy Research Institute is an independent and nonpartisan African think tank. It researches key policy issues affecting African countries and the African continent. APRI provides insights into the German and European Union policy-making processes on Africa. In addition, APRI provides policy options to African policy-makers and civil society actors.

**Imprint**

Africa Policy Research Private Institute  
gUG (haftungsbeschränkt)

Prinzenstrasse 85D  
10969 Berlin  
Germany

**Executive Director**

Dr. Olumide Abimbola  
E-mail: [oabimbola@afripoli.org](mailto:oabimbola@afripoli.org)

**Contact**

Joshua Kwesi Aikins, Senior Fellow and  
Head of Economy and Society Program, APRI  
E-mail: [kaikins@afripoli.org](mailto:kaikins@afripoli.org)

License Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License  
(CC BY-NC 4.0) <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>