

Interim evaluation of the DAAD programme Bilateral SDG Graduate Schools

June 2019

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES OF THE EVALUATION

The consultancy Syspons has been commissioned by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) to conduct the interim evaluation of the Bilateral SDG Graduate Schools programme.

The focus of the interim evaluation lay mainly at programme level. The evaluation was intended to contribute to accountability towards the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), which is funding the programme. A further objective is to contribute to learning to be able to improve the programme, and to analyse the usefulness of the programme's monitoring. To a lesser extent, the evaluation was also aimed at analysing the progress towards the specific objectives of the seven projects funded within the programme.

The evaluation focussed on the criteria relevance, effectiveness, achievement of objectives and impacts as well as on efficiency and sustainability. In addition, the analysis encompasses the aspects of coordination, complementarity and coherence. Finally, gender equality, the use of information and communications technology (ICT) and results-oriented monitoring were examined as cross-cutting issues. The findings of the interim evaluation led to the formulation of recommendations to BMZ and DAAD.

THE PROGRAMME

The Bilateral SDG Graduate Schools programme was initiated in 2016 with the aim to make a contribution to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) through higher education development cooperation. As part of the programme, the DAAD promotes the establishment of SDG Graduate Schools within the framework of bilateral partnerships between higher education institutions in Germany and developing countries. The aim is to create high-quality study offers linked to the SDG and to strengthen research at the partner universities to enhance

both individual and institutional capacities. The programme thus intends to make a twofold contribution by, on the one hand, promoting the expansion of high-quality higher education and, on the other, contributing to development by training young academics and producing research relevant to the SDG. Seven different cooperation projects in partnership with universities in Vietnam, South Africa, Peru, Ethiopia, Cameroon, Nigeria/Ghana and Colombia are currently being implemented until 2020.

EVALUATION APPROACH

The evaluation design is based on a contribution analysis based on the programme's Theory of Change to assess how and why changes have (or have not) taken place so far. In addition, an analysis of the development of institutional capacities of the partner abroad based on Peter Morgan's 5 C model was implemented. Methods of data collection included document analysis, interviews during on-site visits to all German partner universities and four partner universities abroad, as well as an

online survey of scholarship recipients. All site visits of the four projects subject to an in-depth analysis were conducted by an evaluator from Syspons, and a professor as thematic expert in the respective academic discipline of the project. In addition, each site visit abroad was accompanied by either a representative from the DAAD programme team or the DAAD evaluation unit. Evaluation results were subject to data, researcher and method triangulation.¹

MAIN FINDINGS

The SDG-GS programme is **highly relevant** for international and national development agendas. While all projects contribute to SDG 4 (quality education) and further SDG, it is not however always made explicit in external communication which project contributes to which specific SDG. This is a missed opportunity, as concise reference to contents of development agendas is instrumental in articulating the added value of the SDG Graduate Schools beyond the given academic discipline.

In addition to being relevant to development agendas, the programme also corresponds to the needs of the partner countries, partner universities and individual beneficiaries. A **strength** of the programme lies in its **flexible bottom-up approach**, in which participating universities from Germany and abroad jointly develop a tailor-made project design that addresses context-specific needs. In terms of **institutional capacity building**, the focus on strengthening research and contributing to building up the pool of faculty is not only relevant for currently funded projects, but potentially also for other partner countries of German development cooperation. This relevance

stems from a lack of qualified lecturers and a focus on education at the expense of research that is common in the higher education system of developing countries. In terms of **individual capacity building**, the combination of high-quality study offers and funding for the studies makes the programme very relevant for scholarship recipients. The evaluation has shown that the target groups for individual scholarships in the SDG-GS programme (Master, PhD and Postdocs) go beyond what is commonly understood as the target group of a Graduate School or the German *Graduiertenschule* and *Graduiertenkolleg* (all terms are used with reference to the programme, yet they describe different concepts). At the same time, the funding of all groups is highly relevant. Through the academic support and access to international networks with renowned scholars, students and researchers benefit from cross-pollination of ideas and get an edge in producing quality research output. This increases chances for publishing in international journals. As this is beneficial for the standing of the partner universities, the relevance of **individual and institutional capacity development is closely intertwined**.

¹ At the request of the DAAD, the inspections abroad were accompanied by the DAAD department in charge of the SDG-GS programme, as they wanted to contribute its content-related expertise to the evaluation. Moreover, according to the DAAD, this procedure proved itself in other evaluations. Consequently, it can not be ruled out that the answering behavior of the interview partners abroad was influenced by the presence of the DAAD department. The evaluation team, however, always had the right to conduct interviews alone if deemed necessary.

A year and a half before the end of the first funding phase, the programme already has **promising results to show for** in terms of institutional and individual capacity building. The programme **attracts qualified students** who are highly satisfied with the quality of the study programmes they get to attend. Selecting the academically strongest candidates for scholarships contributes to making the programme highly relevant to the partner universities. At the same time, due to structural inequalities with regard to access to primary and secondary education in partner countries of German development cooperation, there can be a **challenge in reconciling academic excellence and equitable access to opportunities in higher education**. In addition, the evaluation team has identified a **weakness** regarding **gender equality**. DAAD provides no orientation as to what is expected from the projects in this regard. The projects' understanding of gender equality seldom goes beyond intending to have an adequate number of female scholarship recipients. An analysis of the gender ratio among scholarship recipients shows that women are not adequately represented in at least two projects.

The **study offers developed or revised** within the programme are of **high quality and relevant to the SDG and the local context**. The contents of the curricula and the didactics have been assessed positively by the professors accompanying the evaluation team in the on-site visits. The only dimension in which the study offers do not always live up to the aspiration formulated in both the programme's Theory of Change and the project proposals is the incorporation of ICT. The use of ICT in the study offers is overall perfunctory. Incorporating ICT in study offers is however also not always a priority of partner universities, and expectations regarding the use of ICT have not been defined by either BMZ or DAAD.

Some contributions to improved teaching are **already institutionally anchored** as **new study offers** have been approved by the partner universities, a **strength** in terms of **sustainability**. The projects that were already successful in getting their study offers officially integrated into the programme of the partner universities were those that had explored corresponding requirements at the partner universities early on. Moreover, projects that made major investments in scientific research are conscientious about training lab personnel at the partner universities abroad. Concepts for financing running costs for maintenance and lab material after DAAD funding runs out still need to be fleshed out. An element that bodes well for sustainability is that the projects are active in submitting funding proposals to complement DAAD funding, and some of these proposals have been successful and will finance research activities and scholarships. At the same time, it has to be acknowledged that securing alternative third-party fund-

ing covering the scope and volume of what the SDG-DAAD programme supports constitutes a challenge, as the **programme is exceptional in its comprehensive approach linking individual and institutional capacity development**. Against this background, DAAD has not specified its expectations in terms of sustainability to the projects funded within the SDG-GS programme.

Depending on the academic discipline, the needs in terms of increasing research capacities are highly heterogeneous. Overall, scholarship recipients and representatives from the partner universities report **positive results in terms of increased individual and institutional research capacities**. Individual research capacities feed into the institutional research capacities, especially when scholarship recipients act as multipliers, e.g. when they have teaching responsibilities at their home institutions. In addition, the two projects in the natural sciences have considerably strengthened research capacities of the partner universities through the acquisition of research equipment.

While networking with stakeholders from civil society, the public sector and the private sector remains limited, **networking with stakeholders from academia** has been very strong, even though it is not an explicit objective of the programme. A contribution to **South-South networking** constitutes a **positive unintended effect**. Given the focus of the graduate schools on training scholars and strengthening research, academic networking seems at least as relevant as other types of networking in terms of employability of scholarship holders.

The programme is being **run efficiently** both between DAAD and the projects and within the projects. The support provided by programme staff in organizing network events, in conducting project visits and in responding to day-to-day queries is highly valued by the projects. Minor room for improvement at the level of DAAD can be seen with regard to the compiling of information on recurring administrative issues for the universities and in providing more access to information on administrative issues and results-oriented planning and monitoring for partner universities abroad. At project level, all projects are largely on track to fulfil their objectives and indicators. The introduction of **results-oriented planning, monitoring and reporting** at programme and project level has been a success. Both the DAAD programme staff and the projects have stated that it constitutes an added value for their work. At the same time, some universities also perceive the indicators to be rigid. The evaluation has identified the **commitment of project coordinators in Germany and abroad** as a success factor for implementation efficiency, as the partnerships involve a lot of give-and-take that cannot always be planned for in advance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation team has formulated 12 recommendations based on the findings of the evaluation. These are divided into recommendations to BMZ (1) and recommendations to DAAD (11).

Recommendation to BMZ

Recommendation 1: The BMZ should continue to fund the programme. In a second funding phase, the budget should be increased to fund additional projects.

Recommendations to BMZ and DAAD

Recommendation 2: DAAD should engage in dialogue with BMZ and the universities to plan for more realistic and context-relevant ICT measures in the projects.

Recommendations to DAAD

Recommendation 3: DAAD should be more explicit about the rationale for funding Master and Postdoc scholarships within the Graduate Schools.

Recommendation 4: The projects and the programme should convey the contribution to specific SDG.

Recommendation 5: Networking between academic stakeholders, including stakeholders from the Global South, should explicitly be integrated into the programme's Theory of Change. For a possible second funding phase of the projects, expanding the cooperation to multilateral partnerships should more explicitly be an option (maximum of three partners, out of which two should be from the Global South)

Recommendation 6: DAAD should ask projects that intend to establish new study offers to explain in the project proposals to what extent requirements for the recognition of these new study offers by the partner universities have been analysed.

Recommendation 7: DAAD should increasingly offer formats for knowledge transfer on project administration and results-oriented monitoring to the partners abroad.

Recommendation 8: DAAD should communicate more explicitly towards the universities that there is flexibility to adapt initial project planning, as long as modifications are justified and explained.

Recommendation 9: DAAD should elaborate a concept that articulates its expectations in terms of sustainability and communicate these expectations to the universities.

Recommendation 10: DAAD should position itself regarding the extent to which it would like projects to take into account socio-economic criteria in the selection of scholarship recipients in addition to academic criteria, thereby encouraging them to take into account the "Leave no one behind" principle of the 2030 Agenda.

Recommendation 11: DAAD should define its aspiration level regarding contributions to gender equality in the SDG-GS programme.

Recommendation 12: DAAD should encourage the projects to offer incentives for the career development of junior staff involved in project coordination in Germany and abroad to limit the risk of employee turnover.

Publisher

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Layout

DITHO Design GmbH, Köln

Print

W. Kohlhammer Druckerei GmbH + Co. KG, Stuttgart

Print-run

January 2020 – 100

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This publication was funded to the DAAD by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development.



Federal Ministry
for Economic Cooperation
and Development