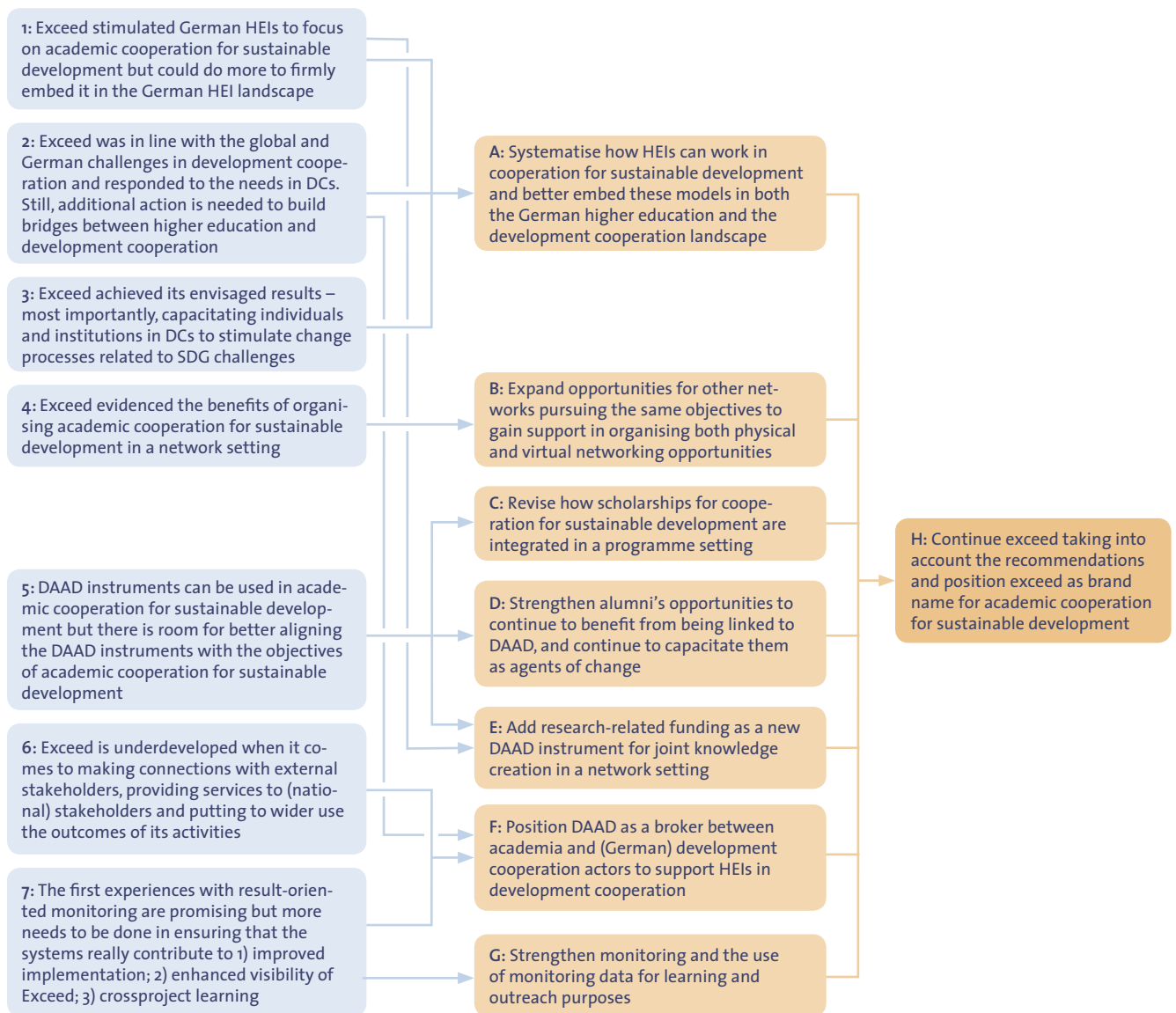


The figure below provides a schematic overview of the conclusions and recommendations made.



Publisher

DAAD
Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
German Academic Exchange Service
Kennedyallee 50, 53175 Bonn (Germany)
www.daad.de

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Layout

DITHO Design GmbH, Cologne

Print

W. Kohlhammer Druckerei GmbH + Co. KG, Stuttgart

Print-run

September 2018 – 100
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This publication was funded to the DAAD by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development.



Bundesministerium für
wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit
und Entwicklung

Evaluation of Higher Education Excellence in Development Cooperation – exceed

CHARACTERISATION OF THE EXCEED PROGRAMME

By means of the exceed programme (Excellence Centres for Exchange and Development), the DAAD (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst) aims to strengthen essential areas of higher education such as teaching, research and services both at German universities and universities in the South in order to make effective and innovative contributions to realising the United Nations (UN) Development Goals (Millennium Development Goals [MDGs – 2000–2015] and Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs – 2015–2030]).

The change process underlying the exceed programme can be described as follows. Solving global challenges requires knowledge and education to provide innovative ideas and knowhow that can be translated into concrete projects in practice. It also requires qualified personnel to do so. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Developing Countries (DCs) cannot always fulfil this potential. To partially solve this specific issue, exceed brings together German HEIs and HEIs from DCs (in a North–South and South–South cooperation model) to make scientific expertise available to society. It focuses on improving research and education capacity through the traditional ‘DAAD instruments’ in a network and demand-driven setting, rather than on the more institutional and structural challenges HEIs in DCs face.

The exceed programme has received EUR 37 million since 2008 from the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). The programme runs until December 2019.

This funding – as with all DAAD programmes – can only be used for add-on activities and support, not for establishing new structures of research groups or hiring staff at HEIs. Within the exceed programme, five projects have been supported:

- Center for International Health: CIH (German partner: Ludwig Maximilian University Munich)
- Centers for Natural Resources and Development: CNRD (German partner: University of Applied Sciences (UAS) in Cologne)
- Food Security Center: FSC (German partner: University of Hohenheim)
- International Center for Development and Decent Work: ICDD (German partner: University of Kassel)
- International Network on Sustainable Water Management in Developing Countries: SWINDON (German partner: Technical University of Braunschweig)

The nature of the exceed programme is unique. While there are many policies, programmes and initiatives that stimulate bilateral research relations between HEIs from industrialised countries and DCs, none of these promotes the setting up of global networks between HEIs from the North and the South or aims at solving global challenges. This uniqueness was useful in creating added value in the development cooperation and in the HEI landscape.

PERFORMANCE AND RESULTS

The exceed programme and the supported projects responded to global, regional, national and institutional needs in both Germany and developing countries. The programme pursued an interdisciplinary approach to solving global challenges and tested different models of academic cooperation for sustainable development.

The achievements realised by the exceed programme and the five projects over the years are remarkable. The programme managed to

- strengthen the position of German institutions in development cooperation,
- set up broad networks of different kinds,
- enable institutions in DCs by linking them to an international agenda and network,
- educate and train Master's and PhD students,

- train (future) academic staff,
- develop Master's programmes,
- conduct joint research,
- and organise international workshops and conferences in relation to SDG challenges.

What has remained rather weak in the exceed programme is the extent to which the projects have been able to support external stakeholders in (policy) development and the extent to which research results are required and used by external stakeholders (service dimension of exceed).

The networks are mostly built on existing networks and are heavily empowered through exceed. The networks, as global research communities, will continue to add value and to help realise the 2030 Agenda, as the network outputs – such as developed curricula, research, network tools (databases) – are considered to be sustainable results of the programme.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the assessment against the evaluation criteria, the following conclusions are drawn about the functioning of the exceed programme:

Conclusion 1: Exceed stimulated a selection of German HEIs to focus on academic cooperation for sustainable development. Nevertheless, the positive results of exceed, the developed models, and their potentials, have yet not been further conceptualised to firmly embed them in the German HEI landscape.

Conclusion 2: Exceed was in line with the global and German challenges in development cooperation and responded to the needs in developing countries. Still, additional action is needed to build bridges between higher education and development cooperation (such as links to other BMZ related work and use of exceed results and expertise by BMZ and implementing agencies).

Conclusion 3: Exceed achieved its envisaged results – most importantly, enabling individuals and institutions in developing countries to stimulate change processes related to SDG challenges, while the dimensions of research and services could be strengthened (no direct research funding is provided and there is limited support for exceed alumni as main 'agents of change').

Conclusion 4: Exceed evidenced the benefits of organising academic cooperation for sustainable development in a network setting. Exceed generated long term relationships and bilateral supporting ties between each German institution and the partners in DCs.

The network building activities showed lasting effects, which generally opened up more opportunities for cross-fertilisation for more institutions compared to bilateral support. Sophisticated cooperation relationships emerged between the partners, outside the influence of the German institution (south-south cooperation).

Conclusion 5: DAAD instruments can be effectively used in academic cooperation for sustainable development. Nevertheless, there is room for better aligning the DAAD instruments with the objectives of academic cooperation for sustainable development (such as operationalising long-term scholarships for PhDs in the time frame of the exceed projects, alignment with DAAD alumni policy, providing small grants for project activities).

Conclusion 6: Exceed is underdeveloped when it comes to making connections with external stakeholders, providing services to (national) stakeholders and putting to wider use the outcomes of its activities.

Conclusion 7: The first experiences with result-oriented monitoring are promising, but more needs to be done in ensuring that the systems really contribute to 1) improved implementation; 2) enhanced visibility of exceed; 3) cross-project learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In relation to the above-mentioned conclusions, recommendations are provided here which should be considered in any future-oriented planning. Independently from the choices and modalities of a future approach, the achievements realised by exceed in terms of academic cooperation for sustainable development should form the basis/starting point.

Recommendation A: Systematise how HEIs can work in cooperation for sustainable development and better embed these models in both the German HEI and the development cooperation landscape

Recommendation B: Expand opportunities for other networks pursuing the same objectives to gain support in organising both physical and virtual networking opportunities

Recommendation C: Revise how scholarships for cooperation for sustainable development are integrated in a programme setting

Recommendation D: Strengthen alumni's opportunities to continue to benefit from being linked to DAAD, and continue to capacitate them as agents of change

Recommendation E: Add research-related funding as a new DAAD instrument for joint knowledge acquisition in a network setting

Recommendation F: Position DAAD as a broker between academia and (German) development cooperation actors to support HEIs in development cooperation

Recommendation G: Strengthen monitoring and the use of monitoring data for learning and outreach purposes

Recommendation H: Continue exceed, taking into account the recommendations, and position exceed as brand name for academic cooperation for sustainable development

With regard to recommendation H, exceed is positively evaluated and therefore its continuation should be considered in a new phase, while making amendments to the programme. Potential changes that need to be considered include:

1. Opening up a new programme to new projects: A call will be launched to select new projects that are interested in academic cooperation for sustainable development in a network setting. Keeping the networks fairly small and allowing regional networks should be considered, as well as ensuring that the projects work on a smaller or a larger scale in line with the funding received.
2. Phasing out existing projects: The current projects will be supported only in some of the networking activities and joint activities (with other exceed projects) for 2–3 years to make the transition to fully independent networks. In this way, the new projects can still learn from the current projects.
3. Solving issues with the PhD scholarships: finding a way to either combine scholarships in a programmatic setting or leaving them out (but organising them separately, being earmarked for the programme).
4. Introducing research-related funding possibilities: allowing projects to allocate part of their funding to projects that can be used to conduct joint research; writing joint research proposals; mainstreaming research findings.
5. Improving projects' conceptualisation of their contribution to the SDGs: demanding that applicants better clarify how they operationalise their contribution to the SDGs and what they see as change process.
6. Installing a guidance and broker function at DAAD: DAAD providing more content-related guidance, a broker function between higher education and development cooperation and improved visibility of academic cooperation for sustainable development.

Following this recommendation, exceed is pushed forward as a brand name for academic cooperation for sustainable development, strengthening the visibility of the approach.