

BMZ Service Centre for Evidence

A design proposal informed by international experience

— What this is about —

The BMZ reform plan **"Shaping the Future Together Globally"** (January 2026) establishes evidence and effectiveness as central steering principles of German development cooperation. The need is pressing: BMZ funding has fallen by almost a third over the past five years, while global challenges have grown dramatically — making the efficient and effective use of the remaining resources all the more decisive.

The **Service Centre for Evidence** (SCE), whose formation has been announced in the reform plan, can become the central institutional instrument for delivering on this ambition: It can provide a basis for evidence-based and impact-oriented allocation decisions, for analysing the programme portfolio accordingly, and for general reporting on effectiveness in German ODA. This paper is the executive summary of a more detailed analysis of eleven international examples and the design proposals for the Service Centre for Evidence derived from them. It sees the Service Centre as a constructive extension of, and a central building block within, the knowledge and evidence ecosystem of German development cooperation (DC).

A Three core recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1

Anchor it at leadership level

The SCE should be positioned within BMZ's "Data and Effectiveness" Department, with a direct reporting line to leadership level, so that evidence genuinely informs central steering decisions. A "Chief Analyst of Impact" (CAI) role represents BMZ's commitment to evidence and effectiveness both internally and externally.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Clear mandates, measurable results

Nine coordinated functions – from impact-oriented budget steering through a binding cost-effectiveness check and the identification of proven and less effective approaches, to strategic impact communication – all strengthening the existing structures of German development cooperation rather than duplicating them.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Adequate resources

At least seven full-time equivalents in the short term, plus programme funding for strategic impact evaluations and the development of internal information and collaboration platforms, as well as AI-assisted solutions for evidence synthesis.

KEY TAKEAWAY Evidence units only make a difference when they can shape the central steering decisions **before** a programme is designed. Where they are brought in only downstream or in a purely advisory capacity, their influence remains marginal.

B Eleven international examples

INSTITUTION	LOCATION	CORE FUNCTION & KEY FIGURE	RELEVANCE FOR BMZ
USAID Office of the Chief Economist	USA	Cost-effectiveness analysis & budget steering. ~USD 1.7 bn redirected toward more effective programmes; over 30 staff.	The leverage of a strong mandate with direct access to leadership; evidence work embedded in operations.
FCDO Analysis Directorate	UK	Coupling analytics & evidence checks. 15 years of practical experience in value-for-money analysis; in-depth check above £40 m; in-house "Best Buys" lists.	Direct translation of evidence into programme decisions; coordination of multiple evidence functions and programmes.
K4DD Knowledge for Development & Diplomacy	UK	On-demand rapid-evidence helpdesk. 200+ reviews/year ; six consortium partners.	The strongest model for a demand-driven, applied evidence service catering to needs of individual units.
SIEL Strategic Impact Evaluation & Learning	UK	Rigorous impact evaluations (incl. RCTs). 6-year programme with IPA & J-PAL; learning agendas.	Targeted generation of new evidence; learning-agenda method could be applied to focus topics of reform plan.
ICAI Independent Commission for Aid Impact	UK	Independent evaluation & parliamentary scrutiny. Three commissioners, around 13 staff; traffic-light system and "Citizen Voice" format.	A template for delineating scope DEval ↔ Service Centre; the role of "critical friend" rather than pure oversight.
SECO-WE Quality & Resources Section (WEQA)	CH	Rapid-evidence review service (pilot since 2025); "Fit for Complexity" guidelines for choosing the causal evaluation logic.	Demand-driven evidence service; structuring the portfolio by attribution/contribution logic.
DLL Development Learning Lab	NOR	Practice-oriented research in "learning arenas". Eight evidence reviews (2024); Impact Evaluation Incubator; scaling up into a Knowledge Centre.	Template for formats of evidence-driven collaboration between BMZ, GIZ and KfW and for joint capacity building.
ACRES & PACE Rapid Evidence Synthesis / Collective for Evidence	UGA ZAF	Evidence infrastructure in the Global South. 4,000+ digitally curated syntheses; largest African evidence network; meta-research on evidence use.	Southern partnerships & AI-supported methods; meta-knowledge on how evidence actually gets used.
DIME / SIEF World Bank	MULTI	Open impact data & cost analysis. SIEF: 100+ evaluations in 40+ countries; IDEAL database, Scorecard.	A model for an open effectiveness database & standardised, comparable data at strategic level.
Airbel Lab IRC	INTL	Impact measurement and cost-effectiveness analysis in the delivery of humanitarian aid, 19 % of all impact evaluations in the sector.	Field-tested cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness analyses from an implementer's perspective; public provision of many knowledge resources.

C Nine functions

Nine functions are derived from the international experience. They are ordered and conceptualized primarily to allow for a focus on increasing the effectiveness of BMZ's portfolio and to strengthen existing structures of German development cooperation.

1 Impact-oriented budget steering

Impact-oriented comparative portfolio analysis and its timely input into the budget process, systematic identification of "Smart Buys" (example: **USAID OCE**).

3 Conceptual work & annual portfolio report

Identifying additional impact potential in the BMZ portfolio, testing within- and cross-sector comparison metrics and their limits (examples: **USAID OCE**, **FCDO**, **SECO-WE**).

5 Capacity building & learning culture

Building evidence literacy across the ministry; formats such as the Impact Evaluation Incubator and an open culture around failure (examples: **Norad**, **BRAC**).

7 Networking & international exchange

Ongoing exchange with international evidence units and partners on evidence standards and initiatives; connecting to global networks, e.g. the **Smart Buys Alliance**.

9 Strategic communication of effectiveness

Together with the communications division: making the effectiveness of German DC more visible and strengthening public trust, e.g. along the lines of the **World Bank Scorecard**.

2 Mandatory cost-effectiveness check

A standard step in programme design, proportionate to project size; checks against evidence base, comparison with alternatives and benchmarks of other projects (example: **FCDO**).

4 Rapid-evidence helpdesk

Rapid evidence syntheses for divisions on a demand basis, supported by digital solutions (examples: **K4DD**, **SECO-WE**).

6 Strategic commissioning of impact evaluations

Identifying evidence gaps and targeted commissioning of impact evaluations, coordinated with BMZ's evaluation division (example: **SIEL**).

8 Building an effectiveness database for German DC

Contributing to globally coordinated evidence; setting up, over time, a public database, underpinned by a dense network of research partners (example: **IDEAL database**).

Cost-benefit estimate for the Service Centre for Evidence itself

Under the conservative assumption that the SCE enables a shift from less effective to outstandingly effective approaches across just 1–2% of BMZ's total portfolio, the return on investment of establishing it is 6:1 to 12:1.

D Institutional positioning

With these functions, a synergistic division of labour emerges within Germany's evidence architecture: **DEval** remains responsible for independent, externally mandated evaluation (accountability), functionally comparable to bodies such as ICAI. The **Service Unit**, by contrast, takes on the internal, demand-driven coordination of evidence and effectiveness analysis: evidence synthesis and strategic commissioning of evaluations, with an additional focus on cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness in steering the BMZ budget and its programme planning.

In doing so, it can build on existing domestic successes: the structural transitional aid programme (BMZ/GIZ); the rigorously evidence-based graduation approach GIZ implements in Somalia; the integrated impact management KfW has developed since 2020; and the 43 standard indicators jointly developed by BMZ, GIZ and KfW. The Service Centre's task is to consolidate such approaches, give them continuity, and expand them systematically.

E Conclusion

In sum, the international examples confirm the potential of the Service Centre for Evidence to become **one of the central building blocks for delivering on the ambitions set out in the BMZ reform plan**. However, this presupposes that it is equipped with a strong mandate, clearly defined functions, and adequate resources. International practice shows that there is no need to reinvent the wheel. What matters is the willingness to draw the best from others' experience and transfer it to Germany's development-cooperation architecture, in an open process of learning and developing.

FURTHER RESOURCES AND TECHNICAL EVIDENCE AND KNOWLEDGE SOLUTIONS

ACRES Digital Evidence Hub

Digital database providing access to over 4,000 evidence syntheses from the Global South.

deb.acres.or.ug

Area of Research Interest Database (AIR)

Public catalogue of research questions from all UK ministries, including around 180 from FCDO.

ari.org.uk

DIME Wiki (World Bank)

Open knowledge base on impact-evaluation methods.

dimewiki.worldbank.org

Dioptra (IRC)

Web-based cost-efficiency analysis for programme teams.

dioptratool.org

ImpactAI (World Bank DIME)

AI-assisted curation and synthesis of current impact evidence.

impactai.worldbank.org

Innovations for Poverty Action, Public Data

Registry of rigorous impact studies, with their data and code for re-use.

poverty-action.org

IRC Cost Analysis Data Sets and Resources

Open data sets and resources on cost analysis in implementation.

rescue.org/cost-analysis

Microdata Library (DIME)

Open microdata from impact evaluations for re-use.

microdata.worldbank.org

World Bank Group Scorecard

Aggregated impact & standard indicators presented transparently.

scorecard.worldbank.org