

Corporate Unit Evaluation | Cross-sectional analyses

KNOWING WHAT WORKS

# GIZ's evaluation system

## Cross-sectional analyses

## Publication details

As a worldwide service provider in the field of international cooperation for sustainable development and international education work, GIZ works with partner organisations to devise effective solutions that offer people prospects and make a lasting improvement to their living conditions. GIZ is a public-benefit federal enterprise and supports the German Government and a host of public and private sector clients in a wide variety of areas, including economic development and employment promotion, energy and the environment, and peace and security.

The Corporate Unit Evaluation reports directly to the Management Board. This organisational structure safeguards its independence vis à vis the company's operational business. The Corporate Unit Evaluation generates evidence-based findings and recommendations. It ensures that evaluation findings are transparent and encourages the company to make use of these findings.

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# Introduction

This paper presents cross-sectional analyses as part of GIZ's evaluation system. GIZ uses **cross-sectional analyses** to analyse evaluation reports. It distinguishes between meta-evaluations and evaluation syntheses. GIZ has used cross-sectional analyses in the form of evaluation syntheses since 2007. From 2010 to 2019, GIZ also had almost 500 project evaluations externally assessed in meta-evaluations with a view to determining the methodological suitability of project evaluations for evaluation syntheses as well as obtaining recommendations on ways of enhancing the quality of project evaluations.

**Meta-evaluations** are evaluations of evaluations. They look at the standard, suitability and significance of the evaluations and hence their overall quality. At GIZ, **evaluation syntheses** are understood as content-based syntheses of several reports on similar evaluation objects, ideally addressing the same questions. They translate lessons learned from empirical evidence into an accessible form.

Meta-evaluations examine the quality of GIZ's project evaluations (and those of other implementing organisations of German development cooperation). They are conducted by the German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval) for a random sample of projects. This external, regular, overarching quality assurance underpins accountability in GIZ's evaluation work and helps further develop the methods and standards used in project evaluation. The reports are published in [DEval's evaluation database](#).

In addition, GIZ can commission its own meta-evaluations for certain purposes, such as determining the strength of the evidence used in evaluations with a view to using them in evaluation syntheses. Depending on the design and coverage of DEval's meta-evaluations, GIZ reserves the right to conduct additional meta-evaluations, for instance to explore the methodological suitability of using decentralised evaluations for evaluation syntheses or to obtain findings regarding the usefulness of evaluations.

This paper looks at cross-sectional analyses in the form of evaluation syntheses conducted by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, from selecting topics to the practical application of findings. It explains the responsibilities and processes involved. It translates into practice the BMZ guidelines [Evaluierung der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit](#) (Evaluating German Development Cooperation. BMZ Evaluation Policy, in German) to make development policy effective and transparent, and supplements the paper explaining the basic aspects of GIZ's evaluation system. It addresses all those responsible for the different phases of evaluation, those involved and those affected. Target groups also include all those who have voiced their own information interests and those interested in the findings of evaluations and hoping to use them. It also addresses everyone at GIZ, commissioning parties and GIZ partner organisations, the national and international evaluation community, the science and research community, our contractors and members of the general public in Germany and partner countries who are interested in evaluation.

# 1 Functions

The primary function of evaluation syntheses is to aggregate findings at cross-project level to obtain results that are as informative as possible. GIZ pools experience-based knowledge and expertise in evaluation syntheses. These syntheses are designed to support decision-making in the context of planning and implementing projects and in further developing the range of services we offer. They can also be seen as a contribution to the (further) development of programmes, sector strategies and country strategies. In line with the BMZ guidelines *Evaluierung der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit* (Evaluating German Development Cooperation. BMZ Evaluation Policy, in German), GIZ conducts cross-sectional analyses relevant to its own information requirements at middle level, while respecting the fundamental division of labour between GIZ, BMZ and DEval.

An evaluation synthesis can focus on effectiveness, identify overarching strengths and weaknesses and/or highlight factors in the success or failure of project implementation or of realising individual interventions. It can identify scope for improvement and good practices. Evaluation syntheses produce a synthesis of the content of several reports.

They focus on one country, region, sector, approach or topic. There may be an interest in obtaining information in specific topic areas such as value for money or displacement and migration, or in cross-cutting issues such as gender and digital transformation. Evaluation syntheses may also examine other factors such as the quality of implementation. Project evaluations conducted over a one- or two-year period can also be evaluated at regular intervals in the form of a longitudinal study of quality trends in the portfolio. Within this framework, the overall assessment and the assessment of the individual evaluation criteria can be evaluated statistically.

Evaluation syntheses can be a separate product in their own right or alternatively an analytical step that is part of a more complex, modular evaluation such as a corporate strategic evaluation.

## 2 Determining the evaluation portfolio

On the basis of its experience, GIZ has decided to adopt a multi-track procedure to ensure that the best possible use is made of the data available.

On the one hand, there is already **demand** for overarching findings of evaluations from departments and corporate units and from GIZ management and steering bodies. In this context, evaluations are expected to contribute to organisational learning, corporate knowledge management and, where appropriate, risk management. This demand relates to regions, approaches and topic areas (such as the value for money offered by projects or the impacts achieved by embracing digitalisation in projects). The Corporate Unit Evaluation aims to meet this demand, and indeed encourage it, taking a transparent and structured approach. At the same time, analysing available evaluation reports broadens our view. The Corporate Unit Evaluation will thus pursue topics on its own initiative in the framework of evaluation syntheses, which will allow it to **supply** findings.

Information interests, available data, reasons for the evaluation, and methodology and participation requirements must always be weighed up and matched with the human and financial resources available to the Corporate Unit Evaluation. The topic areas selected for GIZ's evaluation syntheses are chosen on the basis both of the needs of various GIZ units and of the specific interests of the Corporate Unit Evaluation in obtaining information.

The Corporate Unit Evaluation records the ideas put forward by evaluation officers, officers with topic responsibility (including topic managers, sector networks, topic and innovation forums), colleagues from the operational departments, the Corporate Development Unit and the Client Liaison and Business Development Department.

At least once a year, generally in September or October, the Unit identifies the specific needs and knowledge interests of the operational departments, the Sectoral Department, the Client Liaison and Business Development Department and the Corporate Development Unit via the evaluation officers.

The Corporate Unit Evaluation also makes its own suggestions regarding topics for evaluation syntheses. With its overview and expertise, the Corporate Unit Evaluation is ideally positioned to identify the potential offered by regular reporting.

The Director of the Corporate Unit Evaluation selects the topic areas and informs the Managing Director responsible for evaluation. Once a year, the Corporate Unit Evaluation informs the GIZ Management Committee, BMZ and DEval about planned evaluation syntheses.

## 3 Design and implementation

### 3.1 Available data

In contrast to meta-analyses, evaluation syntheses are always based on evaluation reports. They do not make direct use of the data collected within the scope of the evaluations. Depending on the information to be obtained, (quasi) experimental and other methodologically appropriate evaluative and/or academic studies can also be drawn on, and findings can be validated by means of interviews and additional documents.

Overall, GIZ already has almost 1,300 project evaluation reports on internal (central and decentralised) evaluations. Alongside the current central project evaluations, they include<sup>1</sup> the independent portfolio evaluations conducted between 2006 and 2014, the decentralised project evaluations<sup>2</sup> conducted between 2014 and 2018 and (quasi) experimental and other evaluative studies. This means that a large and growing number of reports are available to be evaluated in syntheses. We can now produce more informative syntheses on a large number of different aspects.

Depending on the information interests, the data used for evaluation syntheses can also embrace the evaluation reports of other organisations, such as the external project evaluations of the German Federal Foreign Office, the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection, Zukunft – Umwelt – Gesellschaft (ZUG) and the EU's Directorate General for International Partnerships, as well as DEval evaluations with a link to GIZ and aggregated impact reports drawn up by respected evaluation institutions (evidence maps and systematic reviews of the [International Initiative for Impact](#)

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<sup>1</sup> Project progress reviews from 2006 to 2014 and final evaluations of the programme-integrated planning, monitoring and evaluation system (PriME) from 2009 to 2012.

<sup>2</sup> 213 of the 345 project evaluations have been addressed using appropriate methods in meta-evaluations.

Evaluation (3ie), Campbell Collaboration and other bodies). Other relevant literature can also be used in the analysis.

## 3.2 Methodology

We use a mixture of small, medium and complex formats. Although the different approaches vary in terms of informative value and robustness, each is legitimate in the right setting. When it comes to taking the final decision on the form, the Corporate Unit Evaluation must weigh up and balance the imperatives of flexibility, available data, information interests and resources. The following applies, however, to all evaluation syntheses.

Information must be appropriately and systematically analysed so as to answer the questions.

Evidence, based on analyses conducted, must be provided for conclusions so that these conclusions can be understood and assessed.

The purposes, questions addressed and procedures used, including the methodology, should be documented and described such that they can be clearly understood and assessed.

The limitations of the methodology used should be presented.

In evaluation syntheses too, GIZ ensures that appropriate methods from the field of empirical social research are used – including traditional qualitative content analysis as proposed by Mayring (possibly supplemented by regression models), comparative and cross-case analyses, category-based text analysis (possibly using grounded theory) or systematic reviews – in line with the object of the evaluation, the evaluation questions, and the time and human resources available.

Using the qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) method as a method of set-theoretical analysis, the pathways to success can be identified in addition to the success factors on the basis of qualitative content analysis. QCAs can only be used for certain questions and require a minimum number of standardised evaluation reports.

Even the comparative analysis of several evaluation reports from a topic cluster within the scope of a workshop can make a valuable contribution to obtaining cross-project findings, however.

## 3.3 Quality

**Usefulness, credibility and independence** are also pivotal to our understanding of quality in evaluation syntheses. As a federal enterprise, we implement the BMZ guidelines **Evaluierung der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit** (Evaluating German Development Cooperation. BMZ Evaluation Policy, in German) to ensure effective and transparent development policy. These guidelines build on the OECD/DAC Quality Standards for Development Evaluation and on the overarching **Standards für Evaluation** (Evaluation standards, in German) of the Gesellschaft für Evaluation e.V. (DeGEval), of which GIZ is an institutional member.

Cross-sectional analyses are consistently geared to the **benefits** to be generated for GIZ throughout all phases of the evaluation, from selecting topics to precisely defining the object of the evaluation and determining the design, to disseminating the findings and acting on recommendations.

The evaluation objectives, the object of the evaluation, the questions to be addressed and the methods to be used must be clearly defined in line with the latest scientific debate and must be communicated. Conclusions should be based specifically on the data and documents analysed so that they can be understood and assessed. To underpin the methodological quality and ensure precision, an internal peer review can be

conducted between the organisational units of the Corporate Unit Evaluation. Methodological limitations should be laid out in the report.

The Corporate Unit Evaluation reports directly to the Management Board and conducts cross-sectional analyses **independently** on the basis of previously discussed and agreed questions. It can outsource implementation to independent external contractors or the Unit itself can perform the analysis.

The evaluators bear full responsibility for the findings of the cross-sectional analysis. The final report is an **independent** report by the external or internal evaluators. The clarity and comprehensibility of the analysis and the conclusions drawn must always be guaranteed and will be verified by the Corporate Unit Evaluation. Any divergent assessments of the findings should be transparently set out in the Corporate Unit Evaluation's comments on the independent evaluation report.

## 4 Practical application of findings

Alongside the targeted dissemination of findings in a recipient-appropriate format, monitoring the implementation of recommendations set out in reports is also an integral part of the evaluation of development cooperation. To ensure that evaluation findings can be used for the process of continuous improvement, GIZ has developed formats to encourage strategic reflection on the part of all stakeholder groups and to institutionalise learning from evaluations. These include reference groups to support evaluations, reflection forums with partner organisations and commissioning parties, discussion and assessment at specialist events, and dialogue and information events.

Cross-sectional analyses may focus on success factors and good practices. Depending on knowledge interests, they can also produce recommendations. If they do contain recommendations, these are recorded in a database and evaluated along thematic lines. The Corporate Unit Evaluation determines whether a management response is to be drawn up. This is then coordinated by the Corporate Unit Evaluation. Stakeholders are given the opportunity to submit their comments in writing.

The main reports of cross-sectional analyses are published on our website at [www.giz.de/knowning-what-works](http://www.giz.de/knowning-what-works). Key findings and recommendations are available online as a four-page summary (brief report) in at least German and English. Where valid concerns preclude full publication of a report, an informative summary in German, produced independently by the evaluation team or authorised by them, will be published in a brief report. To encourage other organisations to use these resources, findings can be presented at evaluation events and specialist conferences.

Finally, monitoring of action taken on recommendations provides information on the usefulness of cross-sectional analyses. The Corporate Unit Evaluation monitors action taken on the recommendations. The units responsible for implementing recommendations thus provide updates on the implementation status. The aim is to digitalise implementation monitoring as part of the process of introducing the audit management module.



# 5 Process and responsibilities

## 5.1 Actors involved and their roles

### Corporate Unit Evaluation

Cross-sectional analyses are steered centrally by the Corporate Unit Evaluation. Evaluation management shapes the process in dialogue with intended users and involves the key stakeholder groups. Evaluation management ensures that the evaluation process follows a participatory approach. In terms of participation, however, various levels are conceivable to enable findings to be obtained within a short space of time. The Corporate Unit Evaluation is responsible for quality assurance of the entire process, the methodological procedure and reporting.

### Stakeholder groups

The Sectoral Department (e.g. planning officers and topic managers), the sector networks and the Sector and Global Programmes Department play a particularly important role in sectoral evaluation syntheses. In country-specific evaluation syntheses, this role is performed by the regional departments (e.g. country managers); if quality is to be analysed, it is assumed by the Corporate Development Unit.

### Evaluators

Corporate Unit Evaluation staff, external research institutes, consulting firms or teams of evaluators can be commissioned to perform individual cross-sectional analyses. The evaluators bear the full responsibility for the contents of the evaluation report. External evaluators must respect the specifications laid down by GIZ.

### Management Board, Management Committee

The Managing Director responsible for evaluation and the Management Committee are informed about the cross-sectional analyses planned and about the findings of these analyses.

### BMZ and the German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval)

BMZ's evaluation division – representing the Shareholder – and DEval are informed about the cross-sectional analyses planned. In line with the BMZ guidelines [Evaluierung der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit](#) (Evaluating German Development Cooperation. BMZ Evaluation Policy, in German), BMZ is always given the opportunity to notify GIZ of its knowledge interests. When reports are published, they are also sent to the BMZ evaluation division and to DEval along with a proposal to present and discuss the findings.

## 5.2 Process description

Process step	Responsible	Contributors	To be informed	Remarks	
<b>Creating the evaluation portfolio</b>					
Identify topics	Corporate Unit Evaluation	Evaluation officers and/or relevant organisational units		Ongoing, incorporated into the strategy at the end of the previous year	Annually Demand and supply
Develop topics	Corporate Unit Evaluation			October of the previous year	Annually
Review and prioritise proposals	Corporate Unit Evaluation			November of the previous year	
Plan cross-sectional analyses	Director of the Corporate Unit Evaluation	Management team of the Corporate Unit Evaluation	Responsible Managing Director, Management Committee, BMZ, DEval and evaluation officers	December of the previous year	Depending on the resources of the Corporate Unit Evaluation, approx. 5 QSAs  Information pointing out that annual planning may be supplemented if information is required at short notice
<b>Conducting cross-sectional analyses</b>					
<b>1. Prepare for implementation</b>					
Decide on outsourcing or Corporate Unit Evaluation	Corporate Unit Evaluation			Depending on human and financial resources	
Decide on involvement of stakeholder groups	Corporate Unit Evaluation		Stakeholder groups, if appropriate	Support from evaluation officers, if required	
Draw up terms of reference	Corporate Unit Evaluation		BMZ with opportunity to state its knowledge interests	Outsourcing only: assessment grid and other forms in line with P+R	
Award contract to external evaluators	Procurement and Contracting Division	Corporate Unit Evaluation		Contract awarded in line with P+R	
<b>2. Implementation</b>					
Send documents	Corporate Unit Evaluation			Documents sent via a working group	
Draft concept/methodological procedure	Contractor (or Corporate Unit Evaluation)				
Comments and feedback on concept/methodological approach	Corporate Unit Evaluation	Possibly peer reader Corporate Unit Evaluation Stakeholder groups, if appropriate			

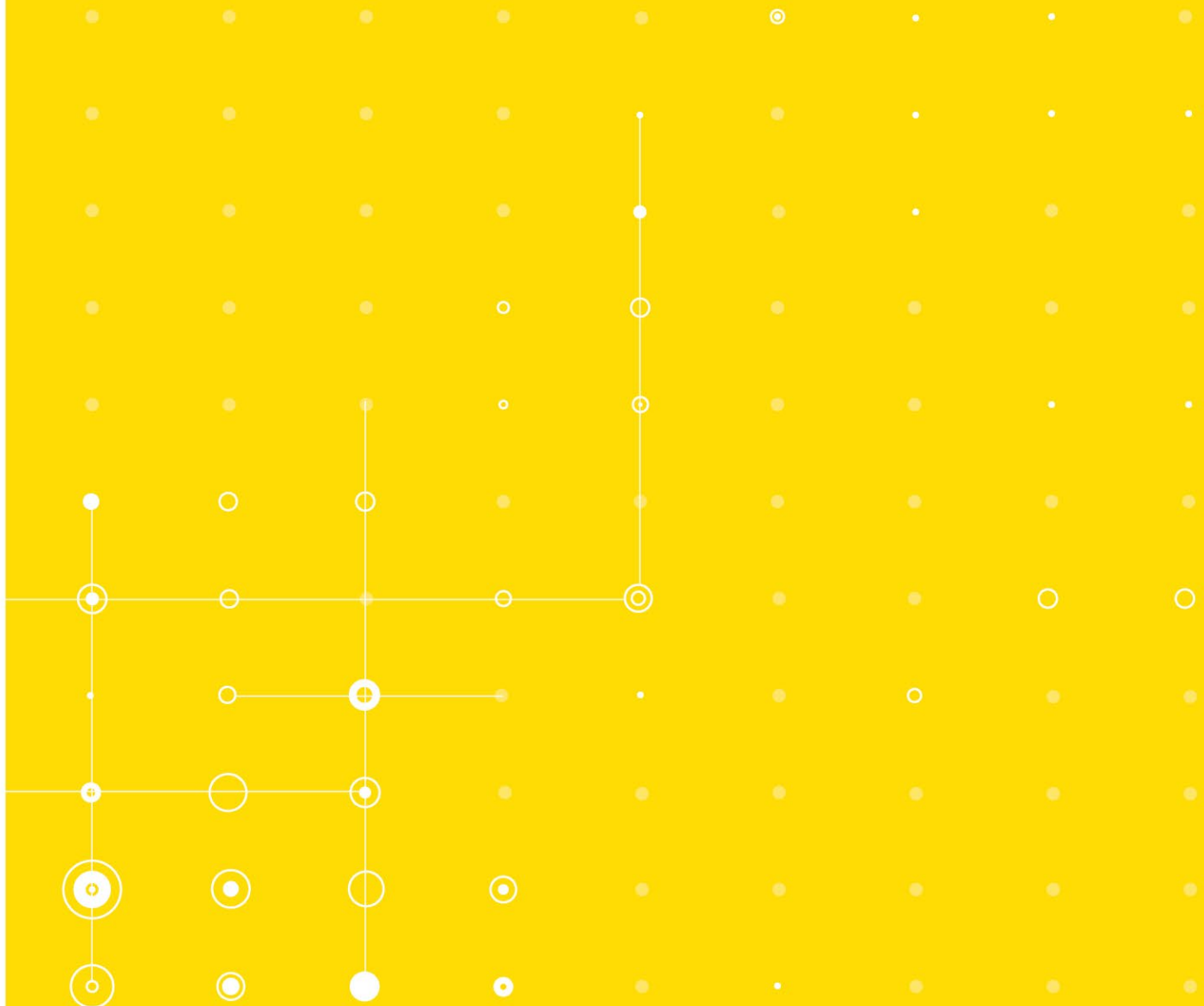
Process step	Responsible	Contributors	To be informed	Remarks
Any modifications to concept/methodological approach	Contractor; Corporate Unit Evaluation in relevant cases			
Accept concept/methodological approach	Corporate Unit Evaluation		Stakeholder groups, if appropriate	
Document analysis	Contractor (or Corporate Unit Evaluation)			Depending on design: possibly additional interviews, etc.
Draft main report	Contractor (or Corporate Unit Evaluation)			
Comments and feedback on main report	Corporate Unit Evaluation	Possibly peer reader Corporate Unit Evaluation Stakeholder groups, if appropriate		
Modify main report	Contractor (or Corporate Unit Evaluation)			Additional quality assurance loop, if necessary
Accept main report	Corporate Unit Evaluation		Stakeholder groups, if appropriate	
Produce four-page brief report	Contractor (or Corporate Unit Evaluation)			
Accept four-page brief report	Corporate Unit Evaluation		Stakeholder groups, if appropriate	
<b>3. Encourage use</b>				
Consider producing a management response, coordinate this if necessary	Corporate Unit Evaluation		Stakeholders	Stakeholders given the opportunity to submit their comments in writing
Translation	International Language Services	Corporate Unit Evaluation		Job order from Corporate Unit Evaluation  Translated into German by external consultants
Inform Management Committee	Corporate Unit Evaluation		Responsible Managing Director	Information submissions
Communicate findings (within GIZ)	Corporate Unit Evaluation			Publish on management portal  GIZ news  Evaluation brief newsletter
Send main report and four-page brief report to BMZ and DEval	Corporate Unit Evaluation			Offer to present and discuss results
Publish main report and four-pager	Corporate Communications Unit	Evaluation Unit		GIZ publications database  GIZ evaluations database  German National Library
Publication	Corporate Unit Evaluation			DAC Evaluation Resource Centre (DE-ReC)
Make a record of the recommendations	Corporate Unit Evaluation			Recommendations database

Process step	Responsible	Contributors	To be informed	Remarks
Thematic evaluation of recommendations	Corporate Unit Evaluation			
Implement recommendations and follow up on action taken	Addressees of recommendations	Evaluation Unit		Audit management module

## Sources

### URL references:

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