

MINIMISING RISK

GIZ works in many countries where there are security risks. Over the last few years, it has systematically expanded its security and risk management systems.

Text Maximilian Kurz **Illustration** Katrin Kemmerling

Mali, March 2012. Renegade soldiers advance on the capital Bamako and surround the presidential palace. The President flees and the constitution is suspended. A civil war erupts, and the Tuareg in the north of the country declare independence. In early 2013, France begins military intervention to halt the rebels' march southwards.

Mali is an example of how quickly the security situation in a country can change. Crises like this can spill over into neighbouring countries, with refugees streaming across the border and warring factions using these countries as a supply base and fallback area. 'We are increasingly seeing national crises radiating out into the wider region. Mali is a case in point: the cri-

sis here has affected the Niger and Burkina Faso and even Algeria, Chad and Nigeria. And this has a direct impact on the security of our staff in these countries,' says Cornelia Schomaker, Head of GIZ's Crisis Desk.

Working in fragile states

In recent years, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) – GIZ's main commissioning party – along with other commissioning parties such as the Federal Foreign Office have increasingly focused on fragile states or countries with a high level of violent crime. There has also been an increase in the number of humanitarian projects in regions where the security situation remains tense, such as Libya, the Sudan and South Sudan. 'In crisis settings, we now remain engaged for longer and operate in fragile regions where, at one time, we would not have had a presence or would have withdrawn our staff. We can do so because we have developed professional security management strategies and procedures that anticipate and minimise risk,' says Ms Schomaker.

These security strategies focus initially on risks that are part and parcel of daily life, such as unsafe roads, natural



disasters, crime and the increased risk of disease. But they also address situations such as violent conflict, civil war, attacks and civil unrest. With its preventive approach, GIZ is fulfilling its particular duty to ensure the safety and security of staff, for example by recommending specific types of behaviour and offering post-incident psychosocial care, assistance in acute crisis situations, and support for staff experiencing work-related problems.

However, it is equally important to look ahead and create a generally safer environment for projects in the field. In this context, the Crisis Desk provides advice to GIZ's country offices and, in some cases, to individual projects. The challenge is to align the security strategies to local needs. The advice always starts with a detailed individual risk assessment, focusing on the local situation. Which threats to security exist? What is the best preventive response? To answer these questions, the Crisis Desk has a number of tried and tested instruments and methods at its disposal. For crisis management, security guidelines are at hand as a basis for developing country-specific security strategies.

It often becomes apparent that security management cannot be dealt with as a secondary activity alongside the normal work routine. In particular in countries with a higher risk potential, external advice may be required; there may even be a need to appoint full-time risk management advisors.

In 2012, the Crisis Desk, which is open 24 hours a day, logged around 150 security-relevant incidents or country-wide crises – more than double the average for the previous years. However, this is not only due to a general deterioration in security. GIZ's staff are now more alert to potentially critical situations. Furthermore, in 2012, a new re-

porting system was introduced which allows more systematic recording of security-relevant incidents.

When assessing risk, external networks play an important role as well. GIZ attends events organised by the Global Player Initiative set up by the Federal Criminal Police Office, where it regularly shares security-relevant information with around 50 major German companies also operating abroad. There is good cooperation with the Federal Criminal Police Office during the preparation of liaison officers working in German embassies abroad. Before departure, they visit GIZ in order to find out more about GIZ's work in-country and to discuss cooperation before and during potential crises.

GIZ's security and risk management systems will continue to evolve in future – that much is certain, according to Ms Schomaker. 'There will never be 100% security, and acute crises generally escalate very quickly. But we do everything we can to minimise the risks to our staff in acute crisis situations and in daily life as far as possible, and in a worst-case scenario we are there to give them our support.' ■

