

Speech of Thorsten Schäfer-Gümbel,
Chair of the Management Board and Labour Relations Director of GIZ GmbH
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The spoken word is final!

We can only achieve change by working together.

Good morning, dear State Secretary Niels Annen,
good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

International cooperation strengthens the German and European model of prosperity.
International cooperation services achieve results in Germany.

They ensure security and prosperity – for us, too.
They ensure employment in a country where one in four jobs depends on exports.
They ensure urgently needed skilled labour.
And they ensure energy security and raw materials.

At the same time, the very purpose of international cooperation is being called into question in some cases. One thing is absolutely clear: international cooperation is crucial for the economic and political future of our country. A study carried out last year by the University of Göttingen and KfW shows that for every euro invested in international cooperation, German goods exports increase by an average of 36 cents. Between 2013 and 2023, the volume of exports rose by USD 8.8 billion on average, equivalent to around EUR 7.6 billion per year.

However, international cooperation is about more than just Germany's economic and social prospects: climate change continues unabated. When there are conflicts over resources such as water, or when people see no future in their home countries, this has a direct impact on Germany. The answer to the global challenges we currently face – to climate change, conflicts and wars, migration, and also to the loss of actors like USAID – must be more international cooperation.

GIZ will apply its expertise and experience effectively in pursuit of the objectives agreed on by the new German Government. We will be guided by the priorities set out in the coalition agreement. Security and stabilisation, displacement and migration, and climate action and energy are our main areas of work now already.

We have also been working with the private sector for many years and we will expand this cooperation systematically.

There is no doubt that international cooperation needs to change and continue evolving, just as it always has done. But what is also clear is that it is essential. It creates opportunities and mitigates the root causes of displacement. It ensures stability and security.

The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit has been part of the solution for decades. I would even go as far as to say that if we did not exist, someone would have to invent us – now.

Why is that so?

The political situation around the globe is changing, and so too is international cooperation. The focus is increasingly on achieving shared interests, whether that be with the European Union, the United Nations, civil society, the scientific and academic community or, to a growing extent, with the private sector: GIZ works with and on behalf of its partners to bring about lasting prosperity, peace and security worldwide – including in Germany. Pooling our strengths benefits everyone. This is a huge plus – for Germany's partners, too!

Take Ukraine, for example. On behalf of the German Federal Government, European Union and other partners, we are contributing to rebuilding Ukraine. Through the Agency for Business and Economic Development, for example, we advise German and European companies on how they can carry out projects in Ukraine and enter new markets. The Swabian company IBS, for instance, wants to support the city of Lviv in repairing the damage caused to its road network by the war. A win-win situation: German companies establish a foothold in a market of the future, and Ukraine receives urgently needed investment for reconstruction.

This is just one of more than 1,250 development partnerships that we have implemented with the private sector worldwide over the past 25 years through BMZ's develoPPP funding programme. Partnerships are key. They allow us to match the interests of the countries in which we operate with those of Germany.

The private sector is a crucial factor. Together, we drive economic development in our partner countries. Together we help to shape the future. And together we strengthen the German and European economy: we support established markets, tap into new ones and help to safeguard access to raw materials. We pave the way for more private sector engagement in our partner countries by creating the right conditions locally and using our networks to connect potential partners.

The example of Chile shows that this approach works. In Chile, we work on behalf of the Federal Environment Ministry and have contributed significantly to energy transition there over the past decade. We were involved in advising on the country's energy policy and hydrogen and coal phase-out strategies. We brought the Ministry of Energy, network operators, regulatory authorities, trade associations and private sector enterprises together at one table. Today, renewables account for more than 60 per cent of Chile's electricity, and there are more than 60 commercial hydrogen projects in place. In southern Chile, German and international companies have built the first large-scale plant for the production of carbon-neutral fuel. These are major steps towards a future in which the energy supply is climate-neutral.

And this is exactly how we work in other countries, too. In Brazil, Morocco and Namibia, we are advising on the market ramp-up of green hydrogen. This not only supports local people and the climate, it also makes an important contribution to Germany's energy security.

Allow me to stress another aspect. International cooperation stabilises crisis regions. And stability ultimately means security and peace – including for us in Europe. At GIZ, we work increasingly in volatile countries, in some cases under the radar. In Syria, for example, where we have been operating for almost 50 years – even during the civil war. Without government involvement, and with local non-governmental organisations. Our work has benefited more than 1.2 million people since 2013 alone. We support the population in producing food and gaining access to medical care. And we assist refugees in securing their housing, land and property rights. This improves the overall conditions – including for people who wish to return to Syria from abroad. We are commissioned by the German Government, with cofinancing provided by the European Union and other donors.

GIZ sees itself as an architect and builder of alliances, developing viable partnerships systematically on behalf of the German Government.

This has been proven in recent decades. This year marks the 50th anniversary of technical cooperation. Over the decades, it has constantly changed. The private sector has taken on an increasingly active role, and international alliances have been formed, for example to protect the climate. Trust-based cooperation has been in place for half a century in many countries, such as Kenya, Morocco and Indonesia. This is how we create stable connections between Germany, Europe and our partner countries.

None of this is a fixed quantity. We are evolving as well. We are modifying our internal structures and processes and driving digitalisation forward. In this way, we can respond flexibly to new requirements and changing conditions and thus increase our cost-effectiveness, speed and capability. We are positioning ourselves for the future so that we can continue to shape global solutions.

The major issues of our time are closely interlinked. This is why we look at the bigger picture and plan our work so that it spans different topics and countries even more. One example is a programme in nine African countries that combines economic development and climate action. More and more women are working in green jobs: in agriculture, fisheries, renewable energies, the waste and recycling sector and ecotourism. This has a positive impact on families' income and educational opportunities. And also protects the climate. Improved quality of life boosts the resilience and stability of regions. All of this benefits us in Germany and Europe, too. Here, GIZ works on behalf of BMZ. Cofinancing is provided by the EU and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation.

Moving on to the figures now: last year, our work continued to be successful and effective. For example, in 2024 we worked with our partners to increase the income of 2.5 million people worldwide. Access to a modern energy supply was facilitated or improved for 15.1 million people. And together we provided support to 2.2 million refugees and internally displaced persons and to five million residents of host communities.

However, it is clear that we are a federal enterprise and depend on the volume of commissions. A decline in commissions received is already proving challenging for the company. We are facing up to this task, painful as it may be.

In the future, we will need to do more with less. This is to be expected – even despite the positive business figures for the past year:

At almost EUR 4 billion (EUR 3.968 billion), GIZ's business volume was consistent with the previous year (2023: EUR 3.968 billion). With commissions worth EUR 3.2 billion (two per cent lower than in 2023), including cofinancing, our main commissioning party was once again BMZ. GIZ increased its revenue from cofinancing arrangements: in 2024, this amounted to EUR 747 million in the public-benefit business area, 18 per cent more than the 2023 figure of 634 million. Under cofinancing, multiple donors pool their funds and thus boost the results of the projects. For example, UN organisations, companies, private foundations, governments of other countries and the European Union. GIZ's revenue from cofinancing arrangements with the European Union (EU) hit a record level in 2024. At EUR 495 million, around two thirds (2024: 66 per cent; 2023: 63 per cent) of all cofinancing in the public-benefit business area came from the EU. This makes it the largest provider of third-party funds and the second largest commissioning party in this business area. Last year, we generated around half of our revenue in the public-benefit business area (53 per cent) in competition with other institutions.

The taxable International Services (InS) business area also grew in 2024. At EUR 264 million, InS increased its total operating performance by around seven per cent (2023: EUR 247 million). Through InS, international institutions such as the European Union, the United Nations, governments worldwide, businesses and private foundations can commission GIZ directly.

GIZ operated in around 120 countries in 2024. Every day, 24,530 people from 153 different countries work for a sustainable future (2023: 25,634). Two thirds are national staff (2024: 16,221; 2023: 17,098). On behalf of my colleagues on the Management Board, Ingrid-Gabriela Hoven and Anna Sophie Herken, I would like to thank our colleagues around the world for their tremendous work.

Through international cooperation, Germany has gained the trust of many key actors and partners worldwide. At GIZ, we open doors, even in challenging environments. We support people and countries in harnessing their potential. This not only has a strengthening impact locally. It is also an effective tool for implementing German viewpoints and economic interests.

In conclusion, the priority right now needs to be cooperation or 'Zusammenarbeit', as GIZ's name stands for. For the world. For Europe. And for Germany, too.

I see cooperation as vitally important for the future – and I cannot emphasise this enough. Partnerships, collaboration, coming together and achieving shared interests are key.

We can only achieve change by working together.

Thank you.