



# EVALUATION OF THE BMZ EMERGENCY COVID-19 SUPPORT PROGRAMME

*Lessons from the Pandemic*

*Executive Summary*  
2024



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# IMPRINT

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Background

The COVID-19 pandemic had serious health and socio-economic consequences worldwide. Whereas the countries of the Global North managed to mitigate the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic through government spending, many of the countries of the Global South lacked the necessary funds. During the pandemic, the number of people living in extreme poverty increased by around 71 million. Vulnerable groups such as women, children and refugees were affected particularly severely in terms of health and socio-economic impacts (Liu et al., 2023; Tan et al., 2023).

In response, Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) launched the Emergency COVID-19 Support Programme (Corona-Sofortprogramm, CSP) in April 2020. The programme encompassed 4.8 billion euros in funding to finance measures in 2020 and 2021 for containing the pandemic and mitigating its health and socio-economic consequences in the partner countries of German development cooperation (DC). In addition to financing measures promoting health and income, the CSP focused on reaching particularly vulnerable groups of persons for example in refugee and crisis regions. The CSP was one of various crisis programmes launched by international DC actors.

As part of the evaluation, the team cooperated with the COVID-19 Global Evaluation Coalition initiated by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The team thereby contributed to the knowledge exchange from the evaluations carried out worldwide of pandemic response programmes.

The subject of this evaluation are the DC measures financed via the CSP to support the population in the partner countries. The evaluation examines to what extent the distribution channels and instruments used within the CSP were suited to supporting the governments in the partner countries and reaching the affected population. The evaluation assesses the relevance, coherence, effectiveness and efficiency of the utilised distribution channels and instruments. On the one hand,

this focus resulted from the interest among German DC actors, and on the other hand an evidence gap was identified regarding suitable channels and instruments in the context of pandemic and crisis management in DC.

Based on this focus, three levels of analysis are derived for the evaluation: distribution channels, distribution modalities and instruments at target group level. At the analysis level of the distribution channels, the evaluation considers what type of DC organisation (bilateral governmental, multilateral or civil society organisation) the BMZ funding was distributed to. Regarding the distribution modalities, the evaluation assesses in what form the recipient organisations distributed the funding onward, for example as in-kind goods, grants or loans. The analysis at the target group level looks at instruments by which the impacted population was ultimately reached. These include health training for the local population and cash transfers to vulnerable persons who have suffered losses of income due to the pandemic. The purpose of this evaluation is twofold: it is intended on the one hand to enhance accountability for the expended funding and on the other hand to generate insights for future crisis response programmes with the aim of learning for future crises and providing even better support for impacted and vulnerable countries and persons.

The evaluation criteria examined – relevance, coherence, effectiveness, and efficiency – are considered in evaluation questions 1 to 4. The fifth evaluation question builds on these findings and aims to derive conclusions and recommendations for future crises of a similar nature. Impacts were not analysed due to the short observation period of the evaluation. Sustainability aspects were likewise not examined, as they played a subordinate role in planning and launching the CSP.

### Evaluation questions:

1. To what extent did the distribution channels, distribution modalities and instruments at target group level used within the CSP meet the partner countries' needs during the pandemic?
2. How coherent was the interaction of the actors within the CSP among one another and with other national and international actors during the pandemic?
3. How effective was the CSP, and how did the utilised distribution channels, distribution modalities and instruments at target group level impact the effectiveness of the CSP?
4. How efficient was the CSP, and how did the utilised distribution channels, distribution modalities and instruments at target group level impact the efficiency of the CSP?
5. How can the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, and efficiency of crisis response programmes be strengthened in future crises?

### The CSP's portfolio

The BMZ implemented a wide range of measures in various thematic areas such as social protection, food and health to support the partner countries in tackling the pandemic and its socio-economic consequences. Geographically, the CSP focused on projects in sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and North Africa. The sectoral focus was on supporting social infrastructure and services, health, and financial services. The CSP funding was implemented and distributed via temporary planning and coordination structures at the BMZ and governmental implementing organisations (IOs) – the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the development bank of the Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW). In total, over 750 projects received support. Some of these were projects already under way before the pandemic which were then either realigned or expanded during the crisis. In other cases, funding was allocated to new projects or used to launch projects earlier than scheduled.

The distribution of funding in the partner countries was carried out at three levels: at the distribution channel level, the CSP funding was primarily allocated to bilateral governmental organisations (66 per cent) and multilateral organisations

(31 per cent). German or international civil society organisations (CSOs) received less than two per cent of funding. Whereas the share of funding for multilateral organisations was roughly the same as prior to the crisis, that of CSOs was larger before the pandemic. At the IO level, the funding was mainly disbursed in the form of grants. Loans played only a very small role. At the target group level, mainly instruments in the fields of health (such as health training and medical supplies) as well as income and employment (cash transfers, for example) received funds.

### Methodological approach

Data were collected and assessed at various levels for the evaluation. On the one hand, data on the overall CSP were collectively analysed while, on the other hand, more in-depth surveys were conducted in selected case study countries. A mixed methods design was applied which includes the triangulation of various qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods to answer the evaluation questions. For each evaluation question, various thematic dimensions (analysis aspects) are examined for which – except for explorative dimensions – a benchmark is formulated. These benchmarks are assessed based on a six-level rating scale ranging from “missed“ to “exceeded“.

The evaluation began with a portfolio analysis of the CSP which provided an overview of the various measures implemented within the CSP and of the geographical and sectoral areas of focus. A systematic literature analysis, a document study of processes and process changes as well as various secondary data were used to assess the distribution of funding within the CSP portfolio. In addition, a country survey was conducted of representatives of bilateral organisations of the countries of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC), the partner countries and multilateral organisations.

The evaluation team conducted case studies in Jordan, Lebanon and Burkina Faso to provide more in-depth analysis of the measures. For these countries, data from four different sources were evaluated. Project documentation of all CSP projects in the case study countries was analysed in document studies, and a project survey was conducted of the project managers. To identify and gain a deeper understanding of factors

influencing the effectiveness and efficiency of the CSP, qualitative interviews with various stakeholders were conducted for four CSP projects in each country. This data collection was complemented by a target group survey of one project each in the fields of social protection (Jordan) and health (Lebanon) that supported vulnerable groups. The households were asked about all COVID-19 support they received – including measures from other actors.

Women were decision-makers and knowledge-holders in this evaluation due to the high share of female evaluators and consultants involved and the female respondents to the surveys. The target group interviews surveyed vulnerable groups such as low-income workers and refugees to include their perspectives. The results of the target group survey do not show any gender-specific differences in terms of expressed needs or the assessment of the received supports.

### Findings

Overall, the evaluation rates the CSP mainly positive. Nevertheless, the evaluation findings also reveal potential for improvement in all examined areas. The outcomes from analysing the evaluation criteria relevance, coherence, effectiveness and efficiency are presented below.

**Relevance:** To assess the relevance of the CSP, the evaluation examined how suited the utilised distribution channels, distribution modalities and instruments at target group level were to meet the needs of the partner countries during the COVID-19 pandemic. The mix of different distribution channels used within the CSP – and more specifically the predominant use of the bilateral and the multilateral distribution channels – is rated as mostly suited, and the relevance of the funding distribution, based in particular on the extensive use of grants, as fulfilled. Use of the multilateral channel, accounting for about 30 per cent, was essentially the same level as prior to the crisis. Although the civil society channel is particularly well suited to reaching vulnerable groups, little use was made of it within the CSP. The instruments were suitable for meeting the needs of the target groups, as the most broadly used instruments such as cash transfers, funds, health measures and capacity development for adapting to COVID-19 are assessed to be relevant based on the evaluated data.

Most of the countries receiving CSP funding had already exhibited high vulnerability prior to the crisis and were severely affected by the pandemic in terms of health and economic aspects. However, the funding was not distributed systematically, but rather on the basis of existing partnerships. Hence, greater consideration could have been given to the varying vulnerability between the countries over the course of the pandemic.

**Coherence:** Coherence measures the extent to which the projects of a programme have been harmonically coordinated with other interventions. Many additional DC measures were implemented around the world during the pandemic by various donors and institutions, which is why it was necessary to have particularly good coordination between the actors. The coordination within and between the German organisations (internal coherence) is rated as mostly fulfilled. At an overarching level, a crisis committee acting as the control unit coordinated the programme, especially in its early phase. In addition, various corresponding mechanisms were established within and between the German organisations. The coordination of the German organisations with other, international actors is rated to have been mostly coherent, and that with the programmes and structures of the partner countries (external coherence) as coherent. In the case study countries, a strengthened coordination between the international actors during the pandemic and a high degree of coordination and agreement in the various projects with the partners were reported.

**Effectiveness:** To assess the effectiveness of the CSP, the evaluation examines whether the measures were able to achieve their targeted objectives in the case study countries. The findings show that these objectives were mostly achieved or even exceeded, such that the level of target achievement is rated as fulfilled. In addition, the surveyed target groups experienced positive effects due to the COVID-19 support measures they received. The actors highlighted the interaction of the various channels as a success factor for effective crisis response. Moreover, it was demonstrated that the disbursement of grants and the integration of local and multilateral actors for distributing in-kind goods contributed to effective funding distribution.

**Efficiency:** The evaluation assesses the economic efficiency of the channels and instruments used as well as the timeliness of the CSP. Economic efficiency is understood as the conversion of inputs (like resources) into results in the most cost-efficient way possible. By utilising a mix of distribution channels, various efficiency benefits can be leveraged. The predominant allocation of funding to bilateral and multilateral organisations within the CSP is therefore assessed to be mostly suited for efficient crisis response. Civil society organisations were hardly involved despite, for example, offering advantages for efficiency through their local knowledge and good access to (particularly vulnerable) target groups.

Grants and in-kind goods count among the most widely used types of funding distribution within the CSP; they are rated as suitable for economically efficient crisis response. At the target group level, particularly cash transfers and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) measures were frequently used. While cash transfers are assessed to be suited for an economically efficient crisis response, due to the lack of sufficient evidence no rating could be made for WASH measures.

The timeliness of CSP funding receipt in the projects is rated as fulfilled: the allocation of funding in the case study countries began early, and the surveyed project managers assessed that allocation was done in a timely manner. Furthermore, the timeliness of the implementation is rated as fulfilled due to the early and rapid launch of delivery in the examined projects in the case study countries. In addition, the surveyed target groups (particularly low-income earners and refugees in Jordan and Lebanon) reported that they received the COVID-19 support measures at the right time.

The application of existing approaches and recourse to existing partnerships, for example, emerged as factors that had an overarching positive effect on the efficiency of the CSP and the COVID-19 response.

## Conclusions and recommendations

While the findings of the evaluation paint a positive picture of the CSP, many of the positive results cannot be attributed to any overarching systematic management of the programme. In order to make sure that similarly successful responses are achieved in future crises, active steering of the programme needs to be ensured. The findings of the evaluation should therefore be used to initiate appropriate changes.

Such efforts must also consider that the transferability of the lessons learned to any future crisis may be impacted by how similar future circumstances are to the COVID-19 pandemic. The more similar any future crisis and crisis programme are to the COVID-19 pandemic and the CSP, the more likely the recommendations from this evaluation will prove useful. It is therefore assumed that they will be highly transferable to responses to pandemics/epidemics and natural disasters that aim to provide short- to medium-term support to mitigate negative effects. The lessons drawn can be used especially to respond to global and regional crises.

## Designing crisis response programmes

The CSP was set up by the BMZ with the support of a crisis committee. Structures that were created in the IOs to manage the crisis were dissolved once the CSP had ended. Monitoring of the CSP was mainly focused on the distribution of funding. Programme planning provided for neither systematic concurrent monitoring and assessment nor any subsequent overarching examination of either the lessons learned and impacts or the sustainability of the overall programme. As a result, once the CSP had run its course there was no consistent contact person in place at the BMZ for this evaluation, and it was unclear to what extent the evaluation's findings could be systematically channelled into any future crisis response.

**Recommendation 1: For a future global crisis of a similar extent, the BMZ should appoint a specific office to be responsible for institutionally anchoring a crisis response programme, and for incorporating and making available the insights gained from internal and external learning and assessment processes.**

The appointed office should be responsible for implementing preparatory measures to be applied in the event of a future crisis. In particular, when setting up any future crisis response programme, it should be defined who is responsible for its planning, steering and subsequent evaluation.

**Recommendation 2: The BMZ, KfW and GIZ should ensure the organisation's internal learning from the CSP. GIZ and KfW should furthermore conduct analyses of the impact and sustainability of measures implemented under the CSP (at the outcome and impact level).** The BMZ should also review what lessons can be drawn for future crises from the designing and procedural implementation of the CSP. These insights can be added to and build on the findings of this evaluation. Such knowledge could enable assessment of the programme's impact and contribute to learning for future crises.

#### Distribution channels, distribution modalities and instruments at target group level

At the distribution channel level, multilateral organisations played an important role as cooperation partners. Collaborating with them strengthened the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of the CSP. This was particularly true with organisations which had previously cooperated on projects prior to the pandemic. Governmental agencies in the partner countries and international or local civil society organisations had contacts and possessed knowledge of local processes which proved decisive to implement measures in response to the crisis. Civil society organisations were less involved, despite their particularly good access to vulnerable groups.

Grants were a relevant and efficient modality of funding distribution in the crisis. In-kind goods, particularly in the field of health, were important. The CSP projects that were reviewed reported successful procurement of in-kind goods by multilateral organisations and organisations in the partner countries – something which some German actors, according to their own assessment, would have not been able to do.

The evaluation points out that there was possibly greater need at the target group level for measures promoting income and employment. The same was true for education which, however, formed just a small part of the CSP. Furthermore, the CSP funding was not systematically allocated based on the individual countries' vulnerability (for example regarding multidimensional poverty or the proportion of refugees and internally displaced persons) and affectedness. The programme was mainly based on the use of existing partnerships. Systematic needs analyses were not conducted, which contributed to a timely response at the start of the pandemic. However, in the course of the pandemic, adjustment of funding allocation based on these criteria would have enhanced the programme's relevance.

**Recommendation 3: In future crises of a similar nature, the BMZ and IOs should rely on a mix of diverse distribution channels like the CSP did, but review whether a more extensive integration of CSOs is possible.** This means that high shares of the funding should be allocated directly to multilateral organisations – as was done in the CSP. With regard to CSOs it should be examined to what extent German and international civil society organisations can be more included in crisis responses. If obstacles to cooperation with CSOs exist, crisis response mechanisms and procedures should be developed or expanded to enable larger direct allocations to international CSOs. Moreover, large shares of the funding in crises should also be passed on to civil society organisations and governmental organisations in the partner countries. In preparation for future crises, the BMZ should rely in general on partnerships with a wide range of actors in its DC activities.

**Recommendation 4: In future crises of a similar nature, the BMZ and IOs should disburse a large share of the funding in the form of grants.** Grants emerged as a relevant and efficient distribution modality in the CSP due to their advantages in terms of debt sustainability for partner countries. Hence, large shares of funding should also be dedicated to grants in future crises of a similar nature.

**Recommendation 5: In future crises of a similar nature, the BMZ and IOs should assign the procurement of in-kind goods mainly to multilateral or local organisations.** This approach was particularly successful in projects of the CSP, which is why the procurement of in-kind goods should also take place via these organisations in future crises of a similar nature.

**Recommendation 6: In future crises of a similar nature, the BMZ and IOs should factor the vulnerability, affectedness and needs of the partner countries over the course of the crisis more strongly into funding distribution than was done in the CSP.** To ensure that this recommendation is implemented, the BMZ should already now develop a process for comprehensively determining how the needs of partner countries can be identified over the course of a crisis and channelled into shaping and adjusting the crisis programme. This should be done within the existing portfolio and not lead to any distribution of funding to new partners or projects. Moreover, closer coordination with other donors is imperative to prevent excessive concentration on one or more partner countries.

#### Other factors

Building on and expanding existing partnerships and projects enhanced the efficiency and coherence of the measures implemented in the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, the coordination within German DC and between donors and international organisations is generally rated as positive. Nevertheless, there is potential for improvement. The coordination mechanisms in place prior to the crisis did play an important role.

**Recommendation 7: In future crises of a similar nature, the BMZ and IOs should embed response measures in existing projects and partnerships as was done in the CSP.** This enabled a coherent and efficient crisis response.

**Recommendation 8: In future crises of a similar nature, the BMZ and IOs should focus even more closely on the internal and external coherence of the crisis programme than they did in the CSP.** Good coordination with the partner countries and other international donors should be prioritised, while simultaneously paying attention to achieving good agreement within and between the German organisations. In preparing for future crises, the BMZ and IOs should intensify their efforts regarding a coherent internal and external response.

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