

ZEF Board and Management comments and responses to the External Review 2010 - 2016

The ZEF directorate and ZEF's International Advisory Board thanks the review team for an extremely thorough and detailed external review. We are very grateful to the reviewers for all the time and effort invested into this important evaluation.

In general, we agree with most of the findings, observations, recommendations and suggestions. We are particularly pleased that the reviewers are *"highly impressed by what has been achieved in ZEF's research"*.

We are also pleased to note that the reviewers judged ZEF's publication track record as good (*"The Review Panel considers ZEF's publications ... as good, particularly considering the discipline mix available in the Centre. ... it needs to be considered that applied research ... have lower probabilities of being accepted by high ranking journals and being quoted by others."*).

The review team also appreciated ZEF's efforts in attracting competitive grants (*"The Review Panel is highly impressed by the success of ZEF in its third-party fund acquisition. ... external funding doubled on average to more than 10 million € p.a. since 2012."*). Yet the review team voiced concern that the demonstrated success in competitive fund acquisition was not matched by rising core contributions from the University of Bonn (*"... the Review Panel is alarmed at the (relative) decline of core resource support of the Centre, which the Panel considers as a significant threat to the conceptual strength and sustainability of the Institute ..."*).

Based on extensive feedback from various stakeholders the review team expressed their great satisfaction with the performance of ZEF's doctoral program (BIGS-DR). In particular, it noted that *"... 90% of the respondents would join the programme again ..."*, that *"... 98% are presently employed ..."*, and that *"... 84% consider their doctoral degree as having been decisive for getting their current professional position ..."*.

Finally, the reviewers praised ZEF's reputation and its effectiveness in policy advice by, among others, quoting one respondent stating it to be *"extremely successful and extremely satisfactory"* and another respondent summarising it as *"ZEF is in the privileged position of providing advice that is listened to"*. Yet, the review team advised the Centre, that policy advice should be more equally spread across ZEF and not relying too much on one department head, i.e. Joachim von Braun.

The review team critically noted that the present research strategy of ZEF, and the chosen six core research areas are not sufficiently elaborated and lack somewhat focus. Moreover, the panel recommended some changes in web appearance and presentation of the Centre.

In the following we would like to comment on all recommendations and suggestions of the review team.

Recommendation 1: *ZEF is advised to prepare a strategy, which is commensurate with its agreed ambitious mandate in full recognition of the paradigm shifts in the on-going Global Transformation discourse, and of ZEF's expected role in guiding such shifts.*

ZEF acknowledges this advice and the associated comments. With the guidance of its International Advisory Board, ZEF will seek to revisit and clarify its current strategy, taking

into considerations the comments and suggestions of the panel. As stated in the review report, ZEF is actively participating in the national and international discourses on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

We would like to stress, however, that ZEF's present as well as previous strategy papers were on purpose not just derived from the global development blue prints like the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) MDGs and/ or the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), but a result of comprehensive bottom-up processes involving various national and international stakeholders of the Centre. We feel that this enables ZEF to profile itself and align to more specific research objectives and goals – keeping other development policy institutes' focus in mind (such as IDS, or DIE) - than mapping its research agenda into the SDGs or its precursor the MDGs would allow.

Recommendation 2: *The Review Panel advises that key criteria are identified at the corporate ZEF level which should guide the forging of partnerships and institutional associations in advancing development research, higher education, and policy advice in the context of the “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.*

Although many of ZEF's current research and capacity building programs, as well as more or less all of the Centre's six core research areas, as noted by the review team, are well aligned with the SDGs, we acknowledge that this needs to be better articulated in our present institutional strategy. ZEF actively engages at global level, in emerging economies as well as in key advisory bodies in Germany, such as the international Sustainable Development Science Network (SDSN), and the Federal German Government's “Wissenschaftsplattform Nachhaltigkeit 2030”. ZEF's International Advisory Board also actively engaged in the current SDG debate with two public sessions in Bonn during the previous two Board meetings.

As mentioned before, we believe that tying our research and partnership agenda solely to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development would insufficiently reflect ZEF's key criteria leading to its research and development philosophy and priorities that is built upon mutual respect and partnership with our stakeholders and collaborators in the developing world and beyond.

Suggestion 1: *ZEF is invited to consider the definition of vision and mission statements for communicating its strategic message; similarly, ZEF is invited to consider the definition of conceptual statements (policies/rules of engagement), e.g. on priority setting; ex-ante and ex-post impact assessment; capacity building; publications - including intellectual property rights (IP), for underpinning its strategic action.*

We acknowledge the necessity of a clear definition for a vision and mission statement of the Centre, and, thus, with the guidance from the International Advisory Board will seek to develop an appropriate vision and mission statement that will well reflect ZEF's strategic message.

Recommendation 3: *ZEF is advised to develop a corporate instrument that allows improved coordination of project acquisition and interdisciplinary cooperation between ZEF Departments, and contributes to the alignment of project selection to ZEF's key strategic goals.*

We appreciate the recommended strengthening in coordination of project acquisition and concur that this would certainly enhance the interdisciplinary collaboration within our Centre. We also, however, agree with the conclusion of the review panel that this will largely depend on the availability of additional core funding for ZEF. While we see risks of more centralization of grant acquisition, as that might stifle initiative to engage with the research grant markets by ZEF research team leaders below the level of Directors, which has been, and is a key force behind ZEF's success in acquisition of external funding, the ZEF Directorate will never the less act upon the recommendation and will identify appropriate coordination mechanisms.

Suggestion 2: *The Review Panel supports the intended establishment of a Master Programme on Development Studies at Bonn University, but suggests that ZEF does not assume operational responsibility for this programme.*

We entirely agree with the suggestions of the review team in this matter. Such a program would be of a strategic nature for Bonn, its University and the UN City. In this context, we would like to refer to ZEF's engagement in the development and soon implementation of the new International Global Health (IGH) Master Programme at the University of Bonn (UoB). Indeed, like in the IGH Programme, we see ZEF's role in the proposed Master Programme on Development Studies as an active participant in the development and also implementation of the Programme, but not as the coordinating institution.

Recommendation 4: *The Review Panel advises that ZEF's directorate develops a system of incentives to sustainably extend the BIGS-DR supervisory network beyond Bonn University, preferably not only covering national but also foreign universities.*

We concur with the review panel that it is important to keep-on broadening further the network of collaborating supervisors, not only within the UoB, but also nationally and internationally beyond the UoB. The philosophy of ZEF's doctoral programme (BIGS-DR) has always been to identify the best-qualified supervisor(s) for a given research topic. With the broadening of the thematic areas that are covered in BIGS-DR (e.g. renewable energy, One Health etc.) this shall be pursued further.

Fortunately, the institutional and regulatory provisions in the UoB faculties with which ZEF is actively collaborating in BIGS-DR are amenable to such an approach, and because of ZEF's extensive network in the German and international academia the implementation of this recommendation could start virtually immediately, meaning from the next batch (September 2017) onwards.

Recommendation 5: *In order to leverage synergies, prevent uncoordinated competition for scarce (supervisory) resources and strengthen BIGS-DR's role as ZEF's flagship programme, the Review Panel recommends that ZEF prepares a Centre-wide policy covering purpose, content and related selective criteria for ZEF's involvement in graduate school initiatives in developing and emerging countries.*

We agree with this recommendation and will pursue in due time a corresponding policy document. As the ZEF doctoral program is a key integral component of the implementation of ZEF's research strategy and agenda, we envision that the policy document shall provide guiding principles that safeguard this central characteristic of ZEF.

Suggestion 3: *Given the successful establishment of graduate schools in the WASCAL context and given the regional West Africa-wide formal agreement (at government levels) on this higher education programme, the Review Panel suggests that ZEF undertakes steps for building on this achievement and to give thoughts to a Europe – West Africa development research and higher education alliance, involving, on the European side, e.g. the European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes (EADI) with its secretariat located also in Bonn (<https://www.eadi.org/>).*

We agree with this recommendation, as the large WASCAL program and organizational investment established large opportunities to build on. As the review panel rightly observed, ZEF has already embarked on a number of new partnerships in capacity building, including with individual graduate schools of the WASCAL network in West Africa. In the future, we will certainly aim to intensify these activities, and make efforts (including raising the required long term funding) to expand these into a comprehensive alliance.

Recommendation 6: *When specifying the profiles for ZEF director successions the records of candidates in the response to comprehensive demands of inter- and transdisciplinary research, and of generating and communicating policy advice require highest attention.*

We fully agree with this recommendation of the review panel, and ZEF management, and International Advisory Board in consultation with UoB leadership will assure that these criteria are adequately reflected in the terms of reference for the succession of the Heads of Departments of the Centre.

Suggestion 4: *ZEF is encouraged to revise its "public relation" priorities in order to diversify its public profile and align it to the Centre's ambitious and broad mandate in development research and related policy advice. The Review Panel suggests that priority is given to preparing and maintaining an attractive and up-to-date website of the Centre before attention is given to social media profiles.*

We acknowledge and take note of this suggestion and ZEF will revamp and revise the web site appearance accordingly.

Recommendation 7: *The Review Panel strongly recommends raising ZEF's core funding considerably and exploring all alternatives to do so (Federal Government, State of NRW, Federal Ministries, University of Bonn, e.g. via larger ZEF overhead shares of third-party funds, and joint ZEF / Faculty (junior) professorships, etc.).*

We whole heartedly support this recommendation of the review panel and look forward to engaging in concrete discussions on this matter with the Rectorate of the UoB and possibly beyond.

Recommendation 8: *ZEF and the Rectorate of Bonn University are encouraged to explore alternative models that would allow to move to a more centralised and professional management (including management of projects and project personnel).*

We welcome this recommendation, which builds upon recommendation 3. However, we believe that such a professionalization of the Centre's management would require additional core funding, yet promises to significantly increase ZEF's ability to raise competitive third-party funds.

Recommendation 9: *The Review Panel advises that ZEF and the Rectorate of Bonn University undertake the search process for the two director successions in parallel and sufficiently early to allow smooth hand-over without extended periods of vacancies. The equality of the three director positions (W3) should be restored and they should be equally equipped with permanent scientific staff positions.*

We acknowledge this recommendation of the review panel and will discuss the matter further with the Rectorate of the UoB with support from the International Advisory Board.