

JOINT LEARNING FORUM 2026

Evidence-Informed Development Policy: Navigating a Strategic Turning Point

Date and Place: November 5, 2026 (all day) at WZB Berlin Social Science Center, Berlin

Teaser

With its 2026 reform agenda, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development is repositioning German development cooperation as a core pillar of an integrated foreign and security policy. As a key element of this shift, evidence, data, and continuous learning will be used more systematically to support setting priorities, allocating resources, and shaping partnerships. The Joint Learning Forum 2026 brings together leading voices from policy, research, and practice to advance evidence-informed decision-making across the entire policy cycle from strategy to implementation. It focuses on practical solutions to pressing global challenges—from building partnerships based on mutual interests and strengthening development cooperation in fragile contexts to advancing solutions in areas such as health, fair labor migration, employment, and global supply chains. The goal is clear: to support a more strategic, focused, partner-oriented, and results-driven development policy – to progress on the SDGs, improve current development practice, and make achievements visible to citizens both in Germany and abroad.

Organizing Committee: Dr. Bernd Beber (GIGA), Dr. Martin Bruder (DEval), Alisa Buchstab (DEval), Angelika König (DEval), Prof. Dr. Jann Lay (GIGA), Regina Schnars (GIGA)

Sounding Board: Prof. Dr. Clara Brandi (IDOS), Dr. Cara Ebert (RWI), Martha Gutierrez (GIZ), Prof. Dr. Macartan Humphreys (WZB), Prof. Dr. Jochen Kluve (KfW)

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Evidence-informed development policy as strategic cooperation: Motivation for the Learning Forum

German development policy is at a strategic turning point. As articulated in the 2026 BMZ reform plan “Shaping the future together globally”, development cooperation is being repositioned as an instrument of German foreign, security, economic, and climate policy. In a challenging international environment, development policy is understood as a form of strategic cooperation—anchored in values, but explicitly responsive to German interests. A decisive shift toward impact orientation is one pillar of this repositioning, with stronger use of evidence, data, and learning in order to steer priorities, allocate resources, and shape partnerships.

The Joint Learning Forum 2026 convenes leading national and international actors from research, policy, and practice to collaboratively reach the next level of evidence-informed decision-making across the full policy cycle—from high-level strategy to implementation on the ground. Moving beyond abstract debate, the forum tackles real-world challenges, including how to use robust and rigorous evidence to navigate complex trade-offs, design partnerships based on mutual interests, and inform portfolio decisions in areas such as economic recovery, health, and fair labor migration. In an increasingly complex geopolitical landscape, it aims to generate actionable insights to make German development policy more strategic, focused, partner-oriented, and results-driven.

Rigorous and policy-relevant evidence helps show what works, for whom, and under what conditions. It can guide decisions about where to focus efforts—across sectors, regions, and policy tools—and help set realistic expectations for partnerships. It also strengthens the credibility of strategic decisions. For this evidence to truly influence decisions beyond individual projects, it needs to be built into institutional processes, incentives, and ways of working. This is essential for supporting strong, long-term strategic partnerships.

Strengthened dialogue: Objectives and format of the Learning Forum

Against the backdrop of the BMZ’s 2026 reform plan, the forum aims to

- strengthen the dialogue between researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to better understand how evidence can inform strategic choices and policy design;
- explore how rigorous and systematically synthesized evidence can inform complex policy trade-offs, including in partnerships shaped by mutual interests;
- reflect on institutional arrangements that enable learning-oriented use of evidence across all levels of decision-making; and
- contribute to a shared understanding of evidence-informed development policy fit for a changing geopolitical context.

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Program

08:30 – 09:00 **Registration**

09:00 – 09:15 **Opening Remarks:** Nicola Fuchs-Schündeln, WZB; Jörg Faust, DEval

Moderation of the Day: Angelika König, DEval

09:15 – 10:15 **Panel Discussion: Evidence Meets Strategy – Shaping the Future of Development Cooperation**

Panellists

- Jyotsna (Jo) Puri, Director, Policy and Programme Division, UNEP
- Diego Carillo, Lead Specialist, Outcomes Department, World Bank Group
- Sangheon Lee, Chief Economist, International Labour Organisation, ILO
- María del Pilar Garrido Gonzalo, Director for Development Cooperation, OECD (tbc)

Moderation: Jann Lay, GIGA

10:15 – 11:00 **Coffee Break with Poster Presentations**

- Alina Imping, Marburg University, Can Mobile Phone-Based Awareness Campaigns Reduce Information Barriers to Social Health Insurance? Evidence from a Randomized Controlled Trial in Pakistan.
Discussant: Simon Lange, KfW
- Christian Ambrosius, Free University Berlin, Aid Allocation and Deportation Enforcement.
Discussants: Simone Dietrich, University of Geneva (tbc); Sarah Frohnweiler, GIGA
- Giulia Malevolti, Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK), Learning to Farm Differently: Impacts of Farmer Field Schools on Agroecology Adoption in Madagascar
Discussant: Kathrin Wolf, DEval
- Jan Priebe, BNITM/IDOS, Knowledge, Incentives and Antibiotic Overdispensing: Experimental Evidence from Pharmacists in Ghana
Discussants: Merike Blofield, GIGA; Salif Jaiteh, IDInsight
- Johannes Gallé, PIK, Carbon Taxation and Firm Behavior in Emerging Economies: Evidence from South Africa
Discussants: Clara Brandi, IDOS; Tevin Tafese, GIGA
- Peter Anti Partey, University of Cape Coast, Skills Training, Employment, and the Global Political Economy of Education in sub-Saharan Africa
Discussant: Wiebke Stein, DAAD
- Tatiana Orozco Garcia, International Security and Development Center (ISDC), Can Peace Messaging Change Hearts and Minds? Experimental Evidence from Niger
Discussant: Alex Scacco, WZB

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11:00 – 11:25

Keynote: Bärbel Kofler, Parliamentary State Secretary to the Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development

11:30 – 12:25

Parallel Sessions I

Session Ia: Mutual Interest Development Cooperation and Global Supply Chains: Instruments and Evidence

How can development cooperation create tangible and sustainable benefits for both partner and donor countries? Building on the concept of Mutual Interest Development Cooperation, the session will explore how this principle can be translated into concrete policy choices, using examples from trade, investment, and global supply chains. It will examine how development policy and finance can foster economic integration, especially the degree and quality of integration into global value chains, while also contributing to more diversified, resilient, and reliable economic partnerships between donor and partner. The discussion will take stock of the available evidence on such interventions and policies and ask what we know about their effectiveness, for whom they work, and under what conditions.

- Chair and introduction: Frauke Steglich, GIGA
- Mutual Interest Development Cooperation in a Fragmenting World, Rainer Thiele, Kiel Institute
- The Local Impact of Global Assistance: Subnational Evidence Linking Aid and FDI, Laura Wedemeyer, Georg-August-University Goettingen
- How to Create Mutual Benefits in Global Supply Chains: Evidence (Needs), Stefan Pahl, UNIDO
- Reflections from Policy and Practice: Lucia de Carlo, BMZ

Session Ib: Transitional Development Assistance and Social Cohesion

Crises and conflict can erode trust within communities and between citizens and institutions, while recovery and reconstruction efforts can themselves shape social cohesion. This session examines how transitional development assistance can support peaceful and inclusive communities in fragile and conflict-affected settings. Drawing on rigorous evidence from Lebanon and other crisis contexts, it asks which interventions can strengthen trust, cooperation, and inclusive local governance, and under what conditions.

- Strengthening Social Cohesion in Lebanon, Macartan Humphreys, WZB; Nora Chirikure, WZB
- Can Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Improve Mental Health and Social Cohesion in Conflict Settings? Experimental Evidence from Nigeria, Alex Scacco, WZB
- Reflections from Policy and Practice: Chris Nassmacher, GIZ Lebanon; Clara Pellerin, GIZ Lebanon; Geraldine Aku, GIZ Nigeria; Nanribet Mwoltu, HALG Nigeria; Christian Schulze-Koch, GIZ; Nora Röhner, BMZ
- Chair: Max Schaub, University of Hamburg

12:30 – 13:30

Lunch Break

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13:30 – 14:25

Parallel Sessions II

Session IIa: Fair Labor Migration and Mutually Beneficial Skills Partnerships

Labor shortages in many high-income countries coexist with limited access to decent employment and growing working-age populations in many partner countries. Can labor migration be designed to create sustainable benefits for countries of origin, countries of destination, and migrants themselves? This session discusses evidence around global skills partnerships and other approaches that relate legal migration pathways to investments in skills and training in partner countries. It will explore the conditions under which such partnerships can address labor market needs while reducing risks such as brain drain and worker exploitation.

- Academic input: Andreas Steinmayr, University of Innsbruck
- Evidence on Global Skills Partnerships, Helen Dempster, Center for Global Development - Europe
- Reflections from Policy and Practice: Merle Kreibbaum, BMZ; Lukas Kollenz, IOM
- Chair: Cara Ebert, RWI

Session IIb: Expanding Access to Healthcare: What Works, for Whom, and under What Conditions

Universal health coverage remains a key SDG target. This session brings together evidence on approaches to expanding access to healthcare and financial protection across different settings. It explores what we know about what works, for whom, and under what conditions, how evidence can inform policy in practice, and what these insights mean for development policy actors in a changing development landscape. Evidence snapshot: What do we know about pathways to UHC?

- Making Healthcare Work for Women: The Role of Health Financing, Manuela De Allegri, Heidelberg University
- Lisa Rogge, Marburg University
- Reflections from Policy and Practice: Yvonne Schönemann, GIZ; Anna-Lena Kirch, BMZ; Christoph Strupat, IDOS
- Chair: Merike Blofield, GIGA

14:25 – 14:55

Coffee Break

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15:00 – 15:55

Parallel Sessions III

Session IIIa: Pathways to Formal Employment: What Does the Evidence Tell Us?

Youth unemployment and skills mismatches remain critical barriers to inclusive economic development. This session examines evidence on active labor market policies designed to bridge the gap between education and employability. Drawing on an impact evaluation of industry-specific training programs in Tunisia, we explore whether and how targeted interventions can support vulnerable populations in transitioning to formal private sector employment. Evidence snapshot: What works and what doesn't work in fostering formal employment?

- Private Sector-Led Training Programs in Tunisia, Amira Bouziri, Mediterranean School of Business at South Mediterranean University
- The Evidence on “Creating” Decent Jobs, Jann Lay, GIGA
- Reflections from Policy and Practice: Kirsten Schüttler, GIZ; Martin Ostermeier, ILO
- Chair: Amélie zu Eulenburg, DEval

Session IIIb: Advancing Cumulative Evidence Through Coordinated Experimentation

Rigorous impact evaluations can generate credible evidence about whether an intervention works in a particular setting. But strategic policy decisions often require broader answers about the extent to which findings travel across contexts, why effects differ, and how individual evaluations contribute to a cumulative evidence base. This session examines coordinated experimentation as one approach to answering these questions, and it will discuss what funders, researchers, and implementing organisations can do to move from individual evaluations toward more systematic, policy-relevant evidence.

- Women's Group Empowerment Can Increase Political Participation: Evidence from Five Coordinated Field Experiments, Anselm Hager, Humboldt University
- From Individual Evaluations to Policy-Relevant Evidence: The Role of Structured Funding Programmes, Alisa Buchstab (DEval)
- Reflections on Evidence and Policy: Thomas Eekhout, J-PAL (tbc); Heiner Janus, IDOS
- Chair: Macartan Humphreys, WZB

16:00-16:55

Panel Discussion: From Rigorous Impact Evaluations to Cumulative Learning: Building and Using an Evidence Base for German Development Cooperation

Panellists:

- Marie Gaarder, 3ie
- Uwe Gehlen, BMZ
- Martha Gutierrez, GIZ
- Jochen Kluve, KfW
- Raji Jayaraman, ESMT

Moderation: Martin Bruder, DEval

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17:00 – 17:10

Concluding Remarks

- Macartan Humphreys, WZB
- Bernd Beber, GIGA

17:10 – 19:00

Reception

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