

7 Friends and foes in science policy

After reflecting on the internal structures, the room for agency and the processes of policymaking *within* the BMBF in chapter 6, this chapter tries to illuminate which actors play a role in the decision-making and agenda-setting processes next to the BMBF's heads of unit who bear the official decision-making power. Policies are not created exclusively within the boundaries of the individual BMBF working unit: In coming up with policies for research cooperation with developing countries and emerging economies, the Sustainability Subdepartment interacts with external experts, other departments of the BMBF, with project management agencies, other German ministries; and governments of partner countries. The relationships of different external actors with the Sustainability Subdepartment, their influence on decisions and their role in defining cooperation initiatives are subject of this chapter.

Two general tendencies can be observed in the interaction with different external actors: Rivalries, coined by a clear demarcation of boundaries, on the one hand, and coalition building on the other. In describing these two divergent strategies of discourse production in the BMBF case, I examine if the notion of a discourse coalition (Keller 2001; Hajer 2006) of different speakers gathering around a specific idea – while excluding other ideas and actors – is adequately describing the discourse production processes taking place within this specific policy setting.

7.1 Defending the turf: Ministries as political entities

7.1.1 Internal power struggles and their effects on international cooperation

At a first glance, it might not seem logical to subsume further BMBF departments under external actors in policy making. However, the self-perception of the ministry is indeed centred along smaller units. As other large organisations, the BMBF is not a uniform institutional actor. This becomes clear when looking at the relation between the International Department and the Sustainability Subdepartment in designing new policies for cooperation with developing countries and emerging economies. Interestingly, the internal heterogeneity also affects the cooperation

with developing countries and emerging economies – both in policy as well as in research practice.

International cooperation as such is a crosscutting issue, with concrete policies on international cooperation – in form of funding research projects – originating both in the thematic departments as well as in the International Department (ch. 5, Appendix B-2). In official overarching documents such as the *International Cooperation Action Plan* or the *Internationalisation Strategy*, which are elaborated by the International Department, the BMBF seems to be a uniform actor with overall cooperation strategies.

However, under the surface of strategic documents, internal differences loom. In the past, the actions of the different departments were not always well coordinated. An interviewee from one of the project management agencies stated that “[t]he departments don’t talk to each other. One department issues a call for international mobility; the other doesn’t pick up on it” (PT03).

While examples of successful interaction between the departments exist¹, cooperation seems to be rather difficult in general. Reasons can be found in the institutional distribution of power. The BMBF is institutionally organized into departments (ch. 5). According to its official title and mandate, the International Department is responsible for coordinating and strategizing international cooperation activities. While individual international cooperation initiatives stem from different departmental sources, in view of a strategic frame, officially the International Department is in overall charge. The strategic responsibility for international issues is thus not integrated into the thematic departments but dealt with separately in the International Department.

However, the International Department does not possess any hierarchical superiority or steering capacity in view of the international activities of other departments. It is a department on the same organisational level as the other departments. Deviations from the strategic aims are therefore possible in view of international cooperation. A large room for agency and independent decision making emerges within the thematic departments as a product of the limited power of the International Department beyond its own boundaries (ch. 6). The lack of power to prescribe actions is complemented by the lack of any incentives for coordinating international cooperation actions and policies. The International Department is not endowed with specific financial resources to enable other departments to cooperate.

Instead of acting in unison, rivalries coin the relationship between the different actors within the BMBF. The efforts to stand out against the other units and departments is strong: “The heads of working units are princes who will defend

1 Such as in case of the funding initiatives of IWRM or CLIENT, which originated in the Sustainability Subdepartment, but whose prephases were funded through the International Department.

their turfs within the larger kingdom of the ministry” (PA06).² As a crosscutting issue, internationalisation bears a large potential to be perceived as an illegitimate intrusion into the thematic departments sphere of action and decision making.

Interviewees from the International Department in contrast rather sought to legitimize the Department’s existence through seeking cooperation within the ministry and stressed that a stronger integration of international and thematic aspects would be desirable (interviews with PA01, PA09). An interviewee from the International Department asserted that “[i]t depends on good internal cooperation with the thematic departments if activities of the International Department are expedient for the entire BMBF. But cooperation has room for improvement” (PA09).

In designing the Action Plan, the International Department therefore considered close cooperation with the thematic departments as essential to create a strategy that the entire ministry identifies with. Considering the internal competition between departments, the limited budget of the International Department and the lack of power to prescribe directions, the International Department intended to enhance *ownership* of the thematic departments through close cooperation with the thematic departments. Instead of proposing novel approaches that the thematic departments were not likely to implement, the Action Plan emerged in a process of coproduction (interviews with PA01, PA08, PA09):

“The International Department was in the lead. It asked around in the thematic departments which activities they saw as beacons. We talked about that, there were meetings [...]. It is important to integrate the thematic departments, otherwise they would tell us afterwards that they had never consented to the Plan. They were involved in the process, therefore.” (PA01)

The quote illustrates the International Department’s awareness of the difficulties of cooperating with the other departments and their efforts to improve the situation. Indeed, for the International Department, institutional survival *depends* on cooperation. The existence of the International Department might be endangered if in the long run its strategies, policies and services are neither used by or in line with other departments’ actions. So far, the thematic departments have at least passively resisted basing cooperation efforts on those strategical efforts and agreements originating within the International Department. Keeping in mind the limited prescriptive power of strategic documents (ch. 6) as well as the internal quarrels between

2 The quote continued: “However, all of them unite to protect the kingdom against other kingdoms, such as the BMZ.” Perceiving external others as a common enemy creates internal unity. This is a social strategy of constructing collective identity often observed in traditional societies (Anderson 1991; Giesen 1999; Saurwein 1999).

the departments, it is questionable if any strategies aimed at international cooperation extending beyond the International Department, such as Internationalisation Strategy, country strategies or regional strategies³ will successfully provide any type of guidance to the actions of thematic departments, let alone to other ministries beyond the BMBF. Without being able to make use of any power resources, such as positive or negative reinforcement mechanisms (like the ability to sanction non-cooperation through institutionalized hierarchical power or enhance cooperation through financial resources) reaching a higher level of cooperation is unlikely. Without mobilizing these resources, the International Department is not considered as a legitimate speaker within the discourse production of the Sustainability Subdepartment; their knowledge and perspective is not considered as relevant in the process of policy making.

Different departments and working units differ regarding their responsibilities as well as objectives and interests. These different approaches to international cooperation are a root cause of parallel actions instead of coordination. The International Department funds cooperation based on the Internationalisation Strategy's objectives as guiding themes, while it geographically cooperates with countries that have signed formal Science, Technology and Innovation (ST&I) Cooperation Agreements or other types of agreements with Germany (International Bureau of the BMBF 2014). A few developing countries and a larger number of emerging economies are among the partners (Appendix B-1). The ST&I agreements come into being through bilateral science and technology negotiations with the partner countries' governments and cooperation is thus largely based on mutually defined topics of interest. It is the task of the International Department to coordinate and implement these ST&I cooperation agreements with the partner countries for the BMBF, and to fund research activities in their frame (International Bureau of the BMBF 2014). In line with its core mission to enhance international cooperation, the International Department takes the internationalisation of research as starting point and primary objective of any bilateral funding activities which it issues based on ST&I agreements with partner countries.

In contrast, the thematic departments follow a different logic and way of thinking: "One perspective is that of the International Department, that of internationalizing science policy. A different perspective, not opposing, but with different highlights, is that of a thematic department" (PA14). In the thematic departments, international cooperation is possible in some funding initiatives, but not a necessary condition. Thematic departments primarily follow nationally defined thematic ob-

3 The *Africa Strategy*, released as a first regional strategy in 2014, exemplifies the International Department's effort to provide a strategic frame to future cooperation activities with developing countries and emerging economies (BMBF 2014b).

jectives – and fund international cooperation not as an end in itself but only if deemed necessary (ch. 8, 9).

7.1.2 Ministerial rivalries

Official interfaces

In contrast to the interaction with the governments of partner countries (ch. 7.2) or other external actors (ch. 7.4), the cooperation between the BMBF and other federal German ministries is prescribed by law. Interaction is legally regulated through the Joint Rules of Procedure of the Federal Ministries, the *Gemeinsame Geschäftsordnung der Bundesministerien* (Bundesregierung 2011). These state that ministries must cooperate if their responsibilities touch, in order to ensure the coherence of actions of the Federal Government as a whole. The ministry leading a political initiative has to inform and involve any further ministries and related policy decisions can only be taken unanimously (Bundesregierung 2011: Ch. 5, section 1, § 19 [1] and [2]). In addition, the federal ministries have to ensure that they create a coherent external picture of the federal government (Bundesregierung 2011: Ch. 2, § 3 [3]).

However, while the Joint Rules of Procedure of the Federal Ministries emphasize the cooperative nature of governance, the German Constitution, the *Grundgesetz*, grants a high degree of autonomy and independence to each ministry. According to Article 65, “[t]he Federal Chancellor shall determine and be responsible for the general guidelines of policy. Within these limits each Federal Minister shall conduct the affairs of his department independently and on his own responsibility” (BMJV 2014).

This ministerial autonomy shines through in the implementation of joint ministerial strategies, as the Internationalisation Strategy. While on paper, the strategy encompasses the entire government, on the ground, it is up to the individual ministries to follow it. The BMBF as leader of the strategy is not in the position to prescribe actions – the strategy’s character is not binding, and other ministries may choose to follow their own political frames (ch. 6). Vice versa, the BMBF is not bound to any other ministries’ directives, and interviewees seemed keen on maintaining the ministry’s autonomy.

Nevertheless, some mechanisms, exchange formats and interfaces aim to enhance cooperation between the autonomous ministries. In order to enable the formal exchange between ministries, interministerial committees (*Interministerieller Ausschuss*, IMA) may be established on specific topics. These boards follow highly formalized rules of procedures and formally involve a number of actors:

“Representatives of the organisational, information and communication areas of the Federal Ministries work together on inter-departmental committees. The Federal Court of Audit, the Federal Commissioner for Data Protection and Freedom

of Information, and the Federal Commissioner for Efficiency in Public Administration sit on committees in an advisory capacity. The committees are chaired and managed by the Federal Ministry of the Interior.” (Bundesregierung 2011: §20)

At the time of research, on the level of interministerial committees, no knowledge exchange or coordination of ministerial action took place in view of cooperation with developing countries and emerging economies. However, some boards on issues of special interest included international aspects, such as the interministerial board on urbanisation (IMA Stadt).

Similarly, state secretary commissions – as a high level interministerial exchange mechanism – may be convened on topics deemed of crosscutting importance. As such, a state secretary commission is installed for sustainable development (Bundesregierung 2017a), but no state secretary commission is in place for cooperation with developing countries and emerging economies.

Another official arena of exchange between different ministries and other official policy makers, such as parliamentarians, are the permanent parliamentary committees. According to its self-description, in the field of science policy, the Committee on Education, Research and Technology Assessment meets regularly to discuss “long-term strategic choices in research and education policy” (Bundestag 2017). The government facilitates these official arenas of exchange between ministries only on specific topics. No official interface, body or exchange mechanism exists to enhance interaction in view of a cross-ministerial, general approach to cooperation with developing countries and emerging economies in research and beyond. The issue at stake is neither adequately embraced within other commissions. However, while this lack of official interministerial coordination is noteworthy, it might not be critical: Interviewees from the BMBF questioned if formalized formats of exchange were productive at all and if they would lead to any cooperation beyond the exchange of information (interviews with PA07, PA03). Along these lines, it seems worthwhile to point out that interviewees did not mention any of the existing official interministerial interfaces to play a role in the definition of any policy initiatives – and thus did not act as speakers in discourse production.

Cooperation on more informal terms played a larger role in policy discourse production. For example, the BMBF's International Department organized regular round table meetings with working level staff of other ministries, of other BMBF departments as well as science organisations cooperating with certain partner countries, in order to facilitate knowledge exchange on the working level.

Interministerial cooperation in practice

The Sustainability Subdepartment's interaction with other ministries takes place in informal contacts as well. More interesting, however, is the quality of the interaction, which is coined by a strong sense of rivalry and demarcation of boundaries.

The relation of the BMBF – especially the Sustainability Subdepartment – with the BMZ is worth a closer investigation: their policies sometimes target and affect the same cooperation countries. In view of the BMZ, interviewees from the BMBF stated that “[i]n the BMBF, we are generally free to fund water research in a country like Namibia, even if that is not a BMZ priority.” (PA03)

As argued in chapter 6, the BMBF did not follow a strategic approach in choosing cooperation countries in the past – cooperation has rather been subject to chance, tradition, and agency of the heads of unit based on their own preferences. In addition, international research cooperation policy is hardly bound to external agreements that regulate research cooperation practices, topics or partners. This is a major difference to the BMZ, whose country and topic priorities are embedded in international donor agreements such as the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, Accra Agenda for Action and their follow up documents (OECD 2008) or to meeting development targets such as the Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals which have been agreed upon internationally and which set the official frame for BMZ policy and action (BMZ 2014a).⁴

In the absence of any national or international mechanism to coordinate science policy for cooperation with developing countries beyond the Internationalisation Strategy, the BMBF and BMZ state secretaries signed a cooperation agreement in 2007 (Stather and Meyer-Krahmer 2008). In the document, both ministries argued for the need to assist developing countries and emerging economies in strengthening education and science systems, which they deemed essential for social, economic and cultural development in times of global developments of knowledge-based societies. The ministries agreed to closely coordinate their policies for cooperation with developing countries and emerging economies and to evaluate potentials of new joint funding instruments (Stather and Meyer-Krahmer 2008). Although neither of the state secretaries is in office anymore, official documents such as the 2014 Africa Strategy still mentioned the agreement as a positive example of creating a joint basis of research and development policy (BMBF 2014b). Nevertheless, interviews recollected a different story about its relevance in practice: “We have a cooperation agreement with the BMZ, which is not applied. To be honest, we cooperate with the GIZ only if suitable, on project basis, e.g. in case of

4 Framed through these international agreements and shared goals, the BMZ has limited its development cooperation priorities to seven sectors, and efforts are undertaken to coordinate these with those of other international donors (OECD 2010b). Due to donor harmonisation efforts, the BMZ’s activities are restricted to those topics and countries that are internationally agreed upon – and additionally following a top down internal strategy, based on German priorities, the development needs of the partner country, and the history of cooperation. Concrete topics of development cooperation, such as poverty reduction, ensuring peace and democracy, and environmental protection, are defined through bilateral government negotiations (BMZ 2014b; BMZ 2014a).

the Tsunami early warning system" (PA11). Other interviewees even lacked knowledge about the agreement, were not sure if the cooperation agreement was still in place or did not find it of relevance for their daily work: "There is a state secretary agreement between the BMBF and the BMZ, already a few years old... but I have never seen it. I think nobody has" (PA01).

The document thus had little impact in view of strengthening collaboration. However, other interviewees argued that while the cooperation agreement did not lead to any changes in working routines, it still had a legitimating function. Staff of both ministries, who had engaged in cooperation on an informal working level already before the official cooperation agreement could now draw on the agreement to put cooperation on an official basis (interview with PA08). The agreement thereby fulfils a function comparable to the Internationalisation Strategy – it is a reservoir of arguments and instance of legitimation for actors ready to cooperate. As such, the agreement is an illustration of enabling discourse change. Here, an official document – signed by high level staff – envisages practices that deviate from current institutional practices on the working level. Without any resources to enforce the new practice of closer interministerial cooperation, its implementation is left up to the individual interpretation and agency of staff on the working level. Nevertheless, the agreement itself turns into a resource for those willing to change their practice: With state secretaries as powerful speakers within the ministerial policy discourse, their statement supporting closer cooperation backs up any practices and further official statements in the same direction.

In instances of concrete policy making within the BMBF, such as in the process of programme or funding initiative design, cooperation is often restricted to sharing information, instead of an active coordination of actions with other ministries. In SKAD terms, the different ministries positions are dismissed in the BMBF's policy discourse. The emergence of the first versions of FONA is an example of excluding other ministries from speaker positions, granting them only a position as a recipient of the discourse, as an interviewee from the BMUB recounted:

"The BMU was not as involved in designing FONA as we would have liked to. The BMU asked for drafts repeatedly, but we were put off until the final draft for the Minister's signature was done and little possibilities for changing things existed. In earlier phases, no exchange took place." (PA15)

Similarly, neither BMUB or BMZ were routinely part of the project evaluation and selection processes in the past, which interviewees perceived as a neglect of easily accessible expertise (interviews with PA15, PA16). In view of past BMBF funding initiatives for cooperation with developing countries and emerging economies, and the lack of cooperation with other ministries in their design, an interviewee from the BMBF stated that there was no coherence between the sectoral policies (interview with PA14). The exclusion of relevant knowledge from the discourse coalition

did not only shine through in a lack of coherent policies; it also had negative consequences for the implementation of projects and their effects (ch. 10).

Causes of non-cooperation between the ministries

The general lack of policy coherence, coordination of action or of a common discursive frame as their basis raise the question about the causes that prevent cooperation instead of promoting it as foreseen in the constitution. A first cause is to be found in the organisation of work within the ministries. As elaborated in view of international cooperation (ch. 6), it largely depends on the agency of the individual working level staff if coordination with other ministries is sought. Theoretically possible in all working units, coordination of actions with other ministries is often not considered as a priority (interviews with PA14, PT07). The institutional structures and practices rather enhance non-cooperation: Due to decreasing numbers of staff and high workloads, working staff prioritize to fulfil their core tasks rather than spending time on add-on activities (interview with PA16). In order to increase cooperation, an interviewee from the BMZ therefore suggested inscribing coordination with other ministries into the work description and incentivizing it: “I it would make sense to integrate contributions to policy coherence into the ministerial target agreements – on the level of units and employees. So far, there are no guidelines for this” (PA16).

However, a second and more political explanation can be found underneath this first, practical, layer. Not including other ministries’ knowledge also can be interpreted as an act of *strategic* exclusion of potential speakers from the discourse coalition on policies in the respective field. I argue that the root causes are to be seen within the different logics and perspectives on cooperation with developing countries and emerging economies that the ministries operate within. Thus, different rationales underlie BMBF and BMZ cooperation policies. More importantly, however, the autonomy of taking own decisions, choosing the own rationale and not subordinating the own field of policy to others is sacrosanct: “If the BMZ said that water is not a focus in a certain country and therefore the BMBF shouldn’t fund water there either, we’d defend ourselves. We’d laugh out loud!” (PA03)

Ministries need to be understood as institutions with a strategic interest in maintaining their spheres of action and status quo (Weingart 2006). Different, often political factors may lead to organisational changes as well as changes of focus and direction. Ministries such as the BMBF therefore have to prove their legitimacy in order not to be contested and challenged in their work (Stucke 1993). However, their scope of responsibilities is socially constructed and may be challenged through other ministries. The BMBF’s own historical development from a nuclear ministry to a ministry of education and research – at one point losing responsibilities for economic innovation to the BMWi – illustrates this point (ch. 8).

An unambiguous rationale for cooperation with developing countries and emerging economies would be a precondition for clearly separated responsibilities. Through measures such as the African RSSCs, which fund infrastructure abroad; through funding initiatives for international cooperation with high degrees of capacity development, such as in the Megacities programme, the BMBF enters thematic territories traditionally occupied by BMZ. In return, the BMZ also steps into BMBF territories in some of its initiatives based on research, such as NoPa or the Pan African University (GIZ 2016a; 2016b). The boundaries of institutional responsibilities seem increasingly blurred, even though interviewees explain that in theory, the BMZ takes over structural, institutional and personal capacity development, which create a basis for BMBF research funding on same eyelevel (interview with PA16). If funding initiatives are similar, however, the rationale of funding turns into the only distinctive feature between BMBF and BMZ actions (ch. 9).

This explains why ministries fear overlapping responsibilities, try to define clear territorial boundaries and enter into rivalries in case of issues that are ambiguous in their scope (Weingart and Taubert 2006). Legitimizing the own actions is rather achieved through building an own distinct profile. In this context, the BMBF's strategy of maintaining the own institution's status quo seems to rely on non-cooperation and not including the BMZ or other ministries in its discourse coalition on research cooperation with developing countries and emerging economies. Routinely including the other ministries in the policy making process – as accepted speakers in the policy discourse – is avoided out of fear that the coordination of policies might lead to shifted responsibilities, to a bigger work load to coordinate actions, and above all out of fear of losing the own institution's uniqueness and visibility.

The strategy of legitimating the own existence, which ensures the BMBF institutional survival, is thus not to cooperate with others and create coherent policies, but to be distinct and create an own profile. Attempts to consolidate and extend the own policy area lead to a competition for responsibilities and topics that are likely to meet public interest – a strategy used by others as well: “There are struggles over territories that the ministries would like to represent publicly. For example, the BMZ wasn't pleased when Schavan boasted of environmental topics.” (PA15)

Cooperation, in this respect, would mean to direct less attention to the own institution, and, as the interviewee concludes: “Sharing the sun with others is never easy.” (PA15)

BMBF employees give similar explanations for the lack of policy coordination on higher level, stating that “[t]here are few consultations on a political strategic level. That is actually a huge deficiency. The lack depends on the fact that each ministry and each minister want to distinguish themselves” (PA08). An external expert, involved in the Megacities programme advisory board, concludes:

“That’s classic ministerial thinking... they could legitimize themselves through co-operation. But then you put yourself to the test, and you’d have to prove what you are better at, and where you could complement each other. I am sure that the BMBF manages a lot of things better than the BMZ – and vice versa. But it is easier to stick to the institutional divisions as on paper than to reflect about the own capacities, what one’s specific role could be. Thereby you would enter terrains you don’t feel secure on.” (EE06)

In more recent funding initiatives, a change in practices can be noticed, however – both in view of cooperating with other German ministries as well as in view of cooperation with the partner countries’ governments. For GlobE (BMBF 2011e) the BMBF and the BMZ cooperated in setting up the programme with distributed responsibilities. While GlobE still did not combine *instruments* of development cooperation and research funding, at least the financial funding was co-organized; the BMBF funds the German research partners, the BMZ funds the international CGIAR centres involved in the funding initiative (interviews with PA13, EE06). Here, an underlying reason of including the BMZ into the policy-making coalition probably was their access and available funding for the renowned CGIAR centres, which are conceived of as important research institutions in the thematic area of the call.

7.2 Cooperation countries: From objects of policy to partners in policy making

The countries that the BMBF funds research projects in and with present an interesting case. They are neither friends nor rivals: Rather, changes in the discourse on the modes of cooperation (ch. 9.4) convert them into speakers that the BMBF cannot exclude from policy production anymore. Thus, while they used to be neglected actors, they are now turning into partners within the production of policy discourse. In the past, the Sustainability Subdepartment did not necessarily coordinate their policy initiatives with the respective partner countries in bilateral agreements. This is mirrored in the BMBF’s public strategic documents, which give little room to the needs and demands of the partner countries – or how these are going to be jointly negotiated. Instead of determining partnerships jointly on the policy level, the selection of cooperation countries was left to the researchers applying for funding in IWRM and Megacities research. While in case of the call for proposals of the IWRM funding initiative, a few world regions were specified by the ministry, in case of the Megacities initiative, no partner countries were defined through the call for proposals at all (BMBF 2004a; 2004b). Based on the researchers’ choices, in the Megacities initiative, research projects in/with Ethiopia and Iran – countries without cooperation agreements – were funded next to projects from