

Gender Competition 2022 Submission
Empowering Women for Leadership:
GIZ Namibia Women in Leadership Mentorship Pilot Programme 2021

Background

The GIZ Namibia Women in Leadership (WiL) development programme was launched as a pilot in April 2021, with the goal to enhance the leadership capacity of female national and international personnel to take on/ who are in leadership and management roles in line with the objectives of the Africa Department and the overall GIZ Gender Strategy “Gender reloaded: Vision needs Attitude – Attitude meets Action” (2019) which is the guiding framework for all managers, employees and other members of GIZ’s workforce.

The Africa Department’s Gender Implementation Concept 2020 – 2022 embeds the GIZ Gender Strategy into it and considers the current GIZ Gender Equality Plan. One of the objectives is the following:

The share of women in management positions (salary bands 5-7), in Germany and abroad, including national personnel, at least stays at the current level, and increases where possible, with the aim of parity. The share of women among national professionals increases up to 50%.

GIZ Namibia considers gender to be a very important topic and reports frequently to the Africa Department on their goals and measures and also has a lot of good practices and measures in place to enhance gender equality, especially within the projects and commission management. In addition to the mandatory Safeguards+ Gender process, GIZ Namibia has a focal person for gender in the management team, who advocates for all gender related topics, two country level Gender Focal Points (a good mix of national and international, male and female staff) as well as project level gender focal persons for each project.

GIZ Namibia also has a mobile work and flexible hour policy, which allows staff to be more flexible with whether they will work from home or in the office and the hours that they will work (7 am – 7 pm). This is of significance to parents who may have many child and family related responsibilities to attend to, and this flexibility allows them to manage their time and obligations accordingly.

Furthermore, the GIZ Namibia Employment Handbook has been adapted to include a clause that women who are breastfeeding are allowed even more flexibility to work from home until the child is at least 6 months old.

In addition, GIZ Namibia has developed a mechanism to report sexual harassment through a grievance committee that is made up of the Country Director, HR, Head of Finance and Administration, one representative from the management team, and the Chairperson of the national staff representative committee.

Lastly, the set-up of this mentorship programme is documented as a goal in the annual country planning 2021. This demonstrates that the mentorship programme is definitely not a fluke or a one-time event, but it is embedded in the relevance of gender to the GIZ Namibia organizational culture.

Despite the above-mentioned highlights, there is nevertheless room for improvement by looking into the structures of the GIZ Namibia staff landscape, especially staff in leadership positions:

Female employees in leadership positions are the minority with 30% of national personnel in Band 5 being female (no NMA in Band 6) and 18% of AMAs in Band 5-7 (3 out of 17).

The ratio of female NMA in Band 4 is 49% but most of the female staff in Band 4 are in administrative positions and there are less technical female staff members.

These numbers demonstrate a need to enhance the number of female staff members in leadership positions. To address these identified shortcomings, **GIZ Namibia established a mentorship programme as a pilot**, which is a step in the right direction towards the GIZ gender strategy's strategic objective of gender equality and parity within the company.

The objective and outline of the pilot programme is documented in a [concept note](#) which was approved for implementation by the Management Team of GIZ Namibia. The main aim of the pilot programme is to give female mentees further exposure to various leadership styles and empower them with the necessary skills and qualifications to be capacitated for leadership positions in future. It is envisioned that should the pilot work out well (and with adaptations based on the learnings and best practices out of the pilot) another intake of women into the mentorship programme would be feasible and desirable.

The **specific objectives** of the mentorship programme are:

- To support career development of female staff with high potential and to increase GIZ Namibia's access to highly qualified and confident female employees and therefore balancing the ratio of male/female employees in leadership/ management positions in the long run.
- To contribute to the overall number of female staff in leadership positions within GIZ, in accordance with the company- wide Gender Strategy.

In order to attain the objectives stipulated above, the target group for this mentorship programme had to be carefully defined and selected. The focus was on identifying high performing national and international female staff members who are willing to take up complex tasks or who are new in their management roles. As this was a pilot, the decision was made to limit the number of **participants to 6** in order to be able to manage the process and develop learnings that can be utilized to upscale the programme in the near future to meet the leadership needs of GIZ and the career development needs of female staff.

The first step in the set-up of the mentorship programme was the **establishment of a coordination and facilitating structure, referred to as the coordinating committee**, which consists of the following persons: The Country Director and Portfolio Manager, 1 gender focal person for GIZ Namibia; 2 representatives from the Management Team; and HR Namibia. A gender balance was a key consideration in constituting the coordinating committee. The composition of the coordinating committee is one of the success factors of the programme as it demonstrates strong management buy-in and active support, with the involvement of the Country Director and 2 members of the Management Team.

Following the set-up of the coordinating committee, the **next step was the selection of the mentees and mentors**, which was a very intense and thorough process conducted by the coordinating committee. It was highly important for the committee to **define objective criteria for use in the selection process and afterwards to be transparent in the communication with all applicants**. [Application forms](#) were developed for the mentees which requested information that allowed the committee to match them with mentors who would be the best fit for them.

In order to take part in this programme, **mentees had to fulfil the following requirements:**

- Minimum 2 years in GIZ in at least a Band 4 position/ or recently appointed in a Band 5 position, with a high level of performance, as demonstrated by their annual staff assessments (with focus on assessments of the past two years) and a willingness to take on more responsibilities and having the intention to grow within GIZ

In total, 14 applications were submitted to HR Namibia and the Coordinating Committee used the above objective criteria and a pre-defined scoring system to select 6 mentees, who are mostly national personnel (NMA) (administrative and technical staff) and one seconded staff (AMA).

In a parallel process, the Coordinating Committee requested members of the Management team to volunteer as **mentors with the following required criteria:**

- Male or female staff in at least Band 5 with a minimum of 5 years in a leadership position (at least 2 years within GIZ) with extensive knowledge of GIZ and leadership skills
- Knowledge of cooperation & leadership (KuF) is an added advantage

Unfortunately, GIZ Namibia has mainly male managers and therefore only 1 female manager was able to fulfill the above criteria and became a mentor. To increase the number of female mentors, a colleague who was recently a Band 5 AV in Namibia was selected as a mentor, even though she is now based in Germany. The Coordinating Committee wanted to have as many female mentors in this programme as possible to make sure that the mentees also had a chance to learn from female leaders. In the end, 6 mentees were matched with 4 male mentors and 2 female mentors who fulfilled the criteria stipulated above. The selection of mentors was another key success factor, because in order to ensure that the mentees got a holistic leadership experience, the coordinating committee sought to **ensure a gender mix as well as a mix of mentors based in Namibia and also in Germany**. This allows the mentees to get in-depth insight into managing projects and leading teams on ground level in the countries, but also what it takes to manage teams and units/ divisions in Headquarters.

A [mid-term review](#) has been conducted in September 2021, involving all parties. The concept note and mid-term review elaborate on the Monitoring & Evaluation System for the pilot, including the questionnaires and logbooks for the mentoring sessions.

Why are we nominating this programme for the Gender Competition 2022?

There are many mentorship programmes being run to allow more women to take on leadership roles globally, and also within GIZ specifically. What sets the GIZ Namibia mentorship programme apart from the others is the following:

- It **ties in with our organizational culture as from the recruitment stages**, women and people with disabilities are always strongly encouraged to apply for vacancies. Once the women are in the system, then such mentorship programme allows them to be capacitated to take on leadership roles and potential grow into a career in GIZ instead of only a “job”.
- Many mentorship programmes have female mentors mentoring female mentees. Our programme has a **mix of male and female mentors** because the different genders sometimes have diverse leadership styles, and our mentees benefit from interacting with both male and female leaders.
- Our mentors are leaders who are in the GIZ system and are familiar with how the company operates. In addition to this, our mentors are also a **good mix of leaders in the country and leaders in headquarters**, which allows our mentees to get a holistic, global perspective of leadership in GIZ.
- With the COVID-19 pandemic limiting the possibility to meet face to face and since some of our mentors were based in Germany or not in the capital city where the majority of GIZ Namibia offices are situation, our participants had to **“go digital” in bigger and better ways in order to continue their mentorship sessions**, participate in team meetings and project activities. This is very much in line with the GIZ objective towards digitalization (e.g. MS Teams channels for exchange, podcasts were shared for mentees, virtual women’s brunch sessions organized).
- **Co-mentoring sessions:** Some of the mentors partnered up to conduct joint mentoring sessions with their mentees. This was valuable as the mentees got to learn from two or more different leaders and also interact more with their fellow mentees.

- As mentioned above, the programme has **strong management buy-in as evidenced by the composition of the coordinating committee.**
- The programme was perceived as a **safe space for sharing all aspects of leadership** (the good, bad and ugly)
- The mentees and mentors, with the assistance of the coordinating committee, **developed a “profile of a leader”** which depicts what a good leader needs to know/ be able to do. This includes soft skills, managing people, managing finances and administration, steering implementation processes and mitigating risks. This profile of a leader then served as the basis for activity and training planning to address the gaps that the mentees identified for themselves. This means that the activities and trainings were not set up haphazardly, but rather to respond to the needs identified and in a joint planning process with the mentees.
- Another key highlight of the mentorship programme was the fact that it **combined cooperation/ collaboration with internal and external stakeholders for the benefit of the mentees.** For example, our first women’s brunch was in collaboration with the current and former Chief Executive Officers of the Motor Vehicle Accident Fund Namibia.
- Additionally, the coordinating committee is preparing a **tailormade 8 months-long training programme** with the University of Stellenbosch Business School to capacitate the mentees with skills that they identified such as negotiation skills, presentation and writing skills, dealing with gender biases in the workplace and ethical leadership, to name but a few aspects of the training programme. This training will also incorporate Enneagram tests for the mentees as well as consistent feedback loops to the coordinating committee. If such training programme is rolled out effectively and efficiently to great impact, then **it is the vision of the coordinating committee that female staff from other GIZ countries in the Southern Africa division or even the Africa department could also participate in this accredited programme** with one of the best universities in Africa.
- With regards to internal collaboration, the coordinating committee and the mentees are arranging a 2nd women’s brunch event with 2 of the female mentors as well as Mrs. Andrea von Rauch (Director, GIZ Brussels) which will be a safe space for mentees to learn from other female leaders with vast experience in GIZ.

While we highlight some of the key success factors above, a programme like this, especially since it is a first for GIZ Namibia, has not been without its challenges. Some of the key challenges that the coordinating committee has to negotiate include the limited number of female mentors available in GIZ Namibia, the availability of mentors due to workload and busy schedules and the skills shortcomings that were identified and for which training needed to be arranged. And of course, like the rest of the world, these challenges had to be dealt with in the face of an unprecedented global pandemic. What the coordinating committee, mentees and mentors found out during this process, is how important it is to be innovative, try different methods and use what could be seen as a negative (i.e: the lack of female mentors in Namibia) as a positive (an opportunity to learn from male leaders as well and get a holistic idea of leadership that is gender balanced).

Conclusion

The mentorship programme will continue into the first half of 2022. However, it is critical to note that participation in the mentorship programme itself is not enough as it does not automatically promote selected mentees into a Band 5 position, because such positions have to be available in order to be filled. This means that the programme needs to be accompanied by necessary measures from the side of the Human Resources (HR) Departments in both Namibia and Headquarters to identify potential positions locally or regionally that may be filled in the medium term by the mentees out of the pilot programme. As part of the mentorship programme, the mentees are also working on a documentation of the systematic and structural challenges that prevent women from fully taking on leadership roles in GIZ or that hinder their progression in these leadership roles. Such documentation would be shared in the GIZ structures to enable discussion and decision on some of the aspects highlighted.