



## WE GET INVOLVED

Advocacy in development co-operation of  
non-governmental organisations

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# PREFACE

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in international development and their partners in the Global South are committed to more sustainability, solidarity and justice around the world. They intervene in politics and society to make people's voices heard whose concerns would otherwise go unheard. Whether due to unequal educational opportunities, lack of access to health systems, human rights violations or environmental degradation, international development co-operation needs sustainable solutions for structural problems that not only combat symptoms but also address root causes.

Therefore, NGOs in the Global North and South are jointly developing strategies and approaches to effectively advocate for change and support local communities to participate in political decision-making. The topics, goals and approaches of this so-called advocacy work are just as diverse as the challenges that the organisations encounter.

Political engagement does not always come with approval; on the contrary, it can be dangerous in many parts of the world. More and more governments are restricting civic space and fundamental freedoms. In order to guarantee the safety of partner organisations and human rights activists, NGOs need to be cautious and develop effective counter-strategies.

Advocacy work requires resources, networks and specific competencies of organisations. In particular, it raises questions about unequal power relations and representation – in particular between the Global North and South. German NGOs are

called upon to critically meet these challenges in their work – to change global power structures and to engage in partnerships on an equal footing.

Last but not least, digitalisation creates new forms of civil society organisation and co-operation. Movements such as Black Lives Matter or Fridays for Future illustrate this. Development NGOs will increasingly have to deal with questions of how they can use these new opportunities for action.

With 13 examples from VENRO member organisations, this brochure gives an insight into the diverse advocacy projects of NGOs from Germany and their partner organisations in the Global South. With their stories, we would like to inspire and spark discussions about current and future challenges in advocacy work.

The report is based on interviews with NGO representatives from the Global North and South. We would like to thank the organisations that provided examples and spent time on interviews for sharing their knowledge with us in a spirit of solidarity.

I hope you enjoy reading this report!

*Heike Spielmans*  
*Managing Director*



# INTRODUCTION

# GETTING TO THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM

## Advocacy as an important tool for civil society

Together with their partner organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) offer a wide range of services to people who have been marginalised, such as women, children or rural populations, in order to improve their situation. For example, they set up health centres, organise school meals for children or work on sustainable cultivation methods with small-scale farmers.

Even though many peoples' lives benefit from these activities, human rights violations and causes of poverty cannot be tackled by aid projects alone.

„It doesn't make sense if our projects only address the symptoms of a problem. We have to tackle the structure,” is how a long-time employee describes the change of thinking in his organisation, an opinion that many other development NGOs share.

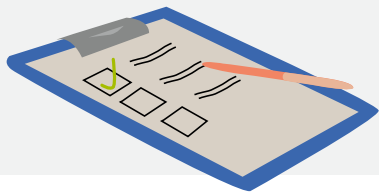
New cultivation methods, seeds or concrete measures to improve incomes can alleviate poverty. At the same time, however, small-scale farmers need

Farmers in Koussanar in Senegal hold a workshop to develop political demands on land rights.  
© ENDA Pronat



land rights so that international corporations cannot evict them from their fields. Sustainable development is only possible if we change the political, economic and social structures that make it difficult for people to access resources – as such structures violate their rights. Yet many of those affect-

*“It doesn’t make sense if our projects only address the symptoms of a problem. We have to tackle the structure.”*



ed are in a disadvantaged position – they lack a political lobby. With advocacy work, NGOs tackle structural causes of problems, for example, by calling on national governments and authorities to enforce land rights.

The example of land rights also shows that, given global interdependencies and power structures, problems cannot solely be solved locally. Often, globally active corporations are neither adequately regulated by the countries in which they are located nor by international communities. Therefore, it is in many cases necessary to change both national frameworks and international ones.

Some NGOs in the Global North and South draw the motivation for their advocacy work from concrete barriers and difficulties that they encounter in the implementation of their projects. For others, the driving force is the realisation that development co-operation is more effective and sustainable when people have a voice in the development processes that affect them and that development projects address structural causes of poverty and inequality.

Many development NGOs have years of experience in advocacy work. In particular, NGOs in the Global North pursue the approach of tackling issues together with their partners from the Global South in their own country or internationally. At the same time, they strengthen their partner organisations so that they can campaign for democratic participation and the rights of under-represented groups in their countries. Many organisations are working to strengthen civil society in the Global South as a central goal within their work.

Whether they have many years of experience or advocacy is a new field of work, many NGO representatives and funding institutions now share the conviction that projects and programs should also address structural causes of a problem. This does not mean turning away from the fulfilment of basic needs, which is still necessary in many cases. Instead, the organisations additionally develop strategies and concepts on how to strengthen advocacy work carried out by partner organisations and the local population and how to link this with work done by policy and campaign teams in the Global North.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Examples for anchoring advocacy work in strategies are provided by [Oxfam Strategy \(German\)](#) or the [DVV's international strategic fields of action \(German\)](#).

## Definition of advocacy work: A broad field in terms of both concepts and content

There are numerous definitions of advocacy work in literature and practice that do not necessarily coincide. Many NGOs have developed their own definitions and guides.<sup>2</sup> In the broadest context of the term, advocacy refers to all processes and activities aimed at influencing decision-makers and making the concerns of under-represented groups heard in politics and society, in legislation and in jurisprudence. In terms of advocacy, civil society organisations often take on the role of advocates for the people concerned. Their advocacy work is therefore based on trust, credibility and shared goals.

Social and political changes at various levels should be achieved through advocacy.<sup>3</sup> This goes beyond what is known as lobbying, which directly influences political decision-makers: Generating public pressure, for example through campaigns, is one of the tools used. Businesses

in particular are increasingly coming into focus because of their considerable influence.

Advocacy work is also closely linked to an NGO's understanding of the quality of their development projects and programmes, as stipulated in the Istanbul Principles or the VENRO Quality Guidelines<sup>4</sup>. On the one hand, it is an important means of implementing a human rights-based approach, as it supports people in claiming their rights and holding public authorities accountable. On the other hand, with their advocacy work, NGOs empower people in order to influence political decision-making processes that are important to them; they therefore promote inclusive participation as an important principle regarding their development co-operation.

2 For example, HEKS (2011), ↘ Konzept: Advocacy in der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit or CARE International (2014), ↘ The CARE International Advocacy Handbook

3 The literature often refers to a broad concept of advocacy and the various levels of impacts, see Moriarty & Brennan (2009), ↘ Effective Advocacy Evaluation: The Role of Funders or Brot für die Welt (2012), ↘ Wirkungsorientierung von Advocacy. Eine Handreichung für Planung, Monitoring und Evaluierung von Advocacy-Arbeit

4 VENRO (2019), ↘ VENRO Guidelines for Development Projects and Programmes

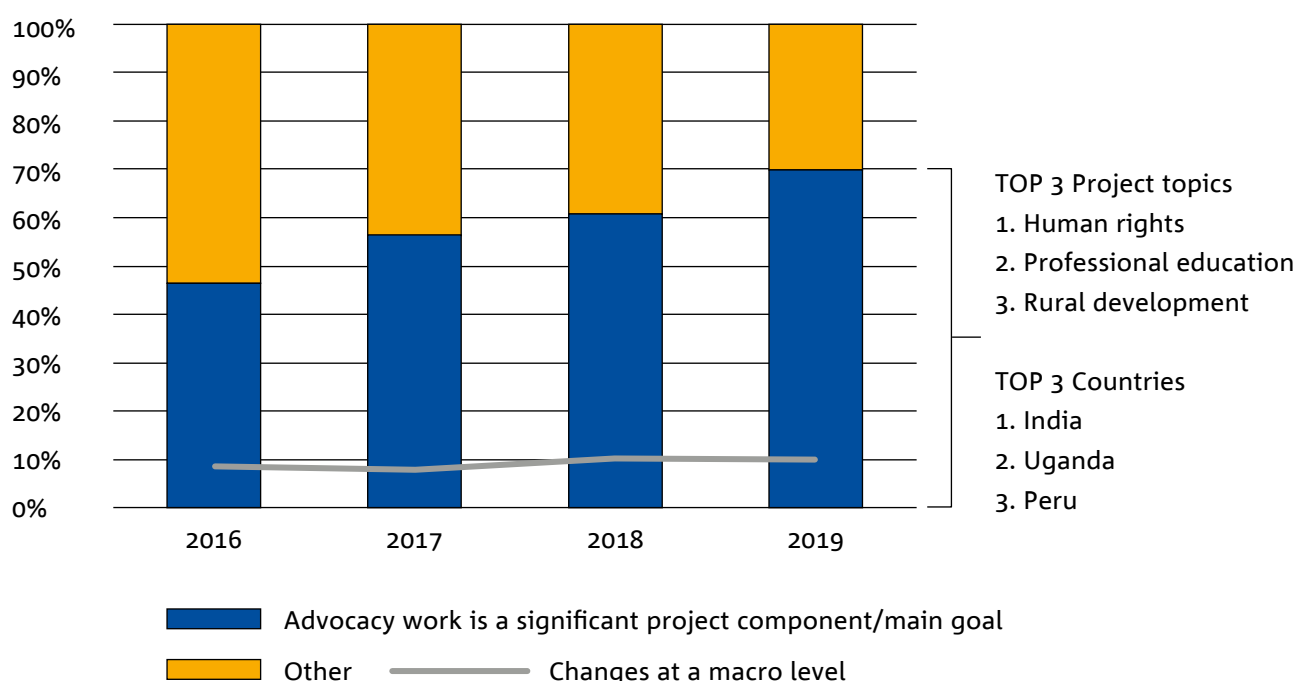


## There are many ways to achieve a goal – Advocacy in project and programme work

How development NGOs shape advocacy work in their projects and programmes varies. The examples in this brochure show a small selection from a

diverse range of ideas; each one stands for itself with its own story. They all give an insight into the approaches and challenges of NGOs in the Global North and South and show that, with topics, goals and addressees, respective activities and approaches are diverse.

Share of advocacy projects in NGO funding in German development co-operation\*



\* The share includes the projects that were issued a forwarding contract in the respective year and for which the DAC marker “Participatory Development and Good Governance” (PD/GG) was rated 1 (significant project content) or 2 (main project objective), i.e., advocacy work is promoted as significant project content. The proportion of the projects that aim to have an impact at the highest structural level (macro level) was determined by allocating flat-rate administration costs.

Figure 1: Own illustration based on data from Engagement Global



The proportion of projects that have advocacy as a main component and pursue changes at the structural level has increased in recent years, as data from Engagement Global shows (see Figure 1). At the same time, the diversity and the varying definitions of advocacy work are also reflected here: The projects strive for changes on micro, meso or macro levels and cover a large number of topics and sectors.

The interviews with NGO representatives from the Global North and South reveal some aspects that are important for joint advocacy work.

### **Stronger together: Advocacy in long-term partnerships**

Successful advocacy needs flexibility and patience. This is one of the key messages conveyed by the NGO representatives interviewed. Most of them report on joint advocacy projects that extend over many years. Studies on the effects of advocacy work have also found that sustainable changes take a lot of time – although this cannot be precisely quantified.<sup>5</sup> A feasibility study by the organisation Welthungerhilfe showed, for example, that building stable structures for a dialogue platform takes at least seven years.<sup>6</sup> Many projects consist of a number of project phases over several years and decades.

The interviews also showed that partnerships are designed differently, and the roles played by partners from the Global North and South vary. In

some cases, partner organisations only need funding for their work; in others, a close joint process arises. Many of the interviewees emphasise how important it is to work together as equals. Even if initiatives and priorities for advocacy come from partner organisations and the local population, it is important to critically reflect on existing power imbalances – for example, that work is mainly financed from the Global North.

It is characteristic of joint advocacy initiatives that necessary changes must take place both in the partner organisation's country, as well as in Germany or internationally. Many organisations in Germany combine their advocacy work in this country with the perspective, knowledge and experience of their partners. Conversely, NGOs in the South benefit from access to German or international decision-makers.

5 Barret, van Wessel & Hilhorst (2016), ↗ [Advocacy for Development - Effectiveness, Monitoring and Evaluation](#)

6 See the example of the Rights & Rice Foundation and Welthungerhilfe

## There's no magic formula: Advocacy strategies are flexibly adapted to suit different contexts

The most promising strategies and methods depend on a variety of internal factors, such as human resources or specific expertise within the NGO. In addition, there are external factors that have an impact, such as the accessibility of deci-

sion-makers or political and social contexts.<sup>7</sup> Advocacy work moves in unsteady, often unjust general conditions and power structures. Strategies and activities are therefore often flexibly and creatively adapted to the respective circumstances.

<sup>7</sup> Barret, van Wessel & Hilhorst (2016), Advocacy for Development - Effectiveness, Monitoring and Evaluation

### The six step advocacy planning cycle

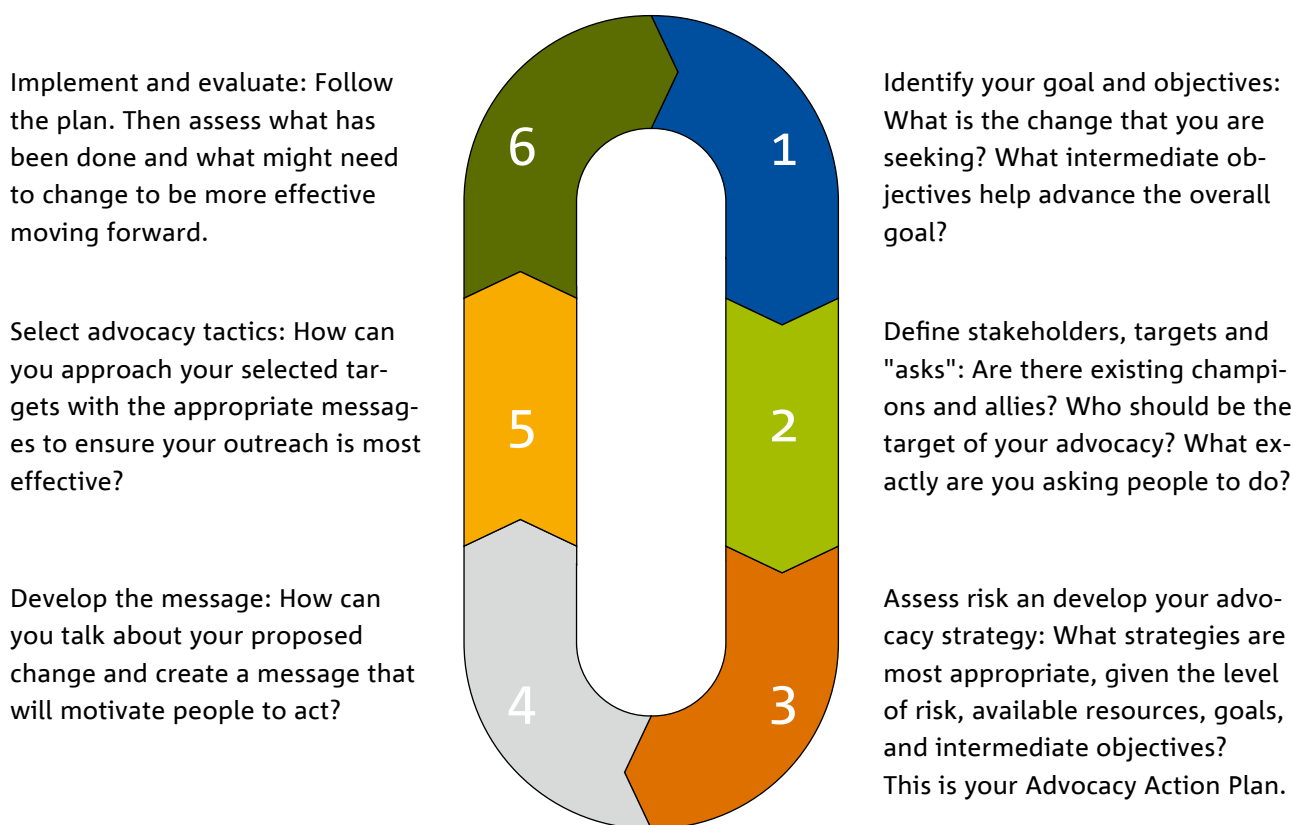


Figure 2: Example of strategic planning of advocacy work – illustration based on the Lifeline Fund for Embattled CSOs (2020), Advocacy in Restricted Spaces: A Toolkit for Civil Society Organisations

## Excursus: Strategic planning of advocacy work

Various publications provide guidance for strategic planning, the procedure and the individual steps of advocacy work – partly using the example of specific fields of action and learning modules:

- Advocacy accelerator
- Brot für die Welt (2012), Wirkungsorientierung von Advocacy
- CARE International (2014), The CARE International Advocacy Handbook
- Center for Evaluation Innovation (2015), The Advocacy Strategy Framework – A tool for articulating an advocacy theory of change
- Oxfam International (2020), Influencing for Impact Guide
- Pact (2018), Politically Smart Advocacy

“Compared to a rural development project, for which a clear results chain can be established, advocacy is similar to a game of billiards: Once it starts rolling, the cue ball can only reach its goal of sinking a certain ball by moving other balls and, if necessary, rebounding off the walls”, describes Brot für die Welt in a handbook.<sup>8</sup>

NGOs’ approaches are correspondingly diverse. They organise conferences and dialogue events, are invited as experts in committees and/or advise and train authorities. They also launch high-profile campaigns, document crimes and human rights violations, or bring about legal actions. They support activists, mobilise the population or organise demonstrations and boycotts.

<sup>8</sup> Brot für die Welt (2012), Wirkungsorientierung von Advocacy. Eine Handreichung für Planung, Monitoring und Evaluierung von Advocacy-Arbeit



Stronger together: A broad alliance of NGOs in Germany fought 2021 for a supply chain law which would hold corporations accountable to human rights due diligence. © Greenpeace

When choosing their approach, NGOs often find themselves caught between co-operation and confrontation. If they enter into close relations with the government and co-operate closely, they run the risk of being captured or of losing their credibility. At the same time, trusting relationships with political counterparts are a key to success. However, co-operation and confrontation do not have to be

mutually exclusive: In most of the examples presented here, organisations act as experts and choose co-operative ways of influencing. Confrontation becomes necessary selectively, for example, through public pressure to increase the other side's willingness to co-operate.

### **Advocacy work requires a wide range of expertise, resources and skills**

Because of its diversity and complexity, successful advocacy work places high demands on organisations and their employees.

Specific expertise is an important requirement. Through their projects and programmes, development NGOs have specialist knowledge and practical experience in areas relevant to development policy. They understand the needs and concerns of the people they work with. They can use this knowledge to create a data basis, explain problems and develop possible solutions. And they can demonstrate concrete solutions that are taken up by political decision-makers. Many organisations report that specialist knowledge and in-depth research are central to their advocacy. This allows them to substantiate their political demands with evidence and to become sought-after contacts for political decision-makers and authorities.

Some NGOs carry out their own research and network with scientific and civil society actors such as professional associations, human rights organisations, research institutions or universities.

In addition, advocacy work also requires political understanding, legal expertise, strong networks and sustainable organisational structures.

A frequently named success factor for advocacy is good relationships with decision-makers and influential supporters, as well as civil society networks and alliances with actors from scientific organisations, the private sector or political associations. An alliance often achieves more: The joint message is stronger when presented from different perspectives. At the same time, the organisations can learn from each other and share resources, knowledge and contacts.

*“An alliance often achieves more:  
The joint message is stronger when  
presented from different perspectives.”*



Many partner organisations in the Global South would like support in establishing and expanding networks, capacities and organisational structures. For example, they would like to get support for training or exchange on topics such as political analysis, strategy development, knowledge management or network building. Capacity development is therefore an important part of advocacy work.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> More on this in VENRO (2017), [Was macht Capacity Development von NRO erfolgreich?](#)





Fighting for democracy, activists in Thailand take to the streets in 2020. © Goldenhearty/shutterstock

### **Shrinking civic space: Special challenges for advocacy work**

When NGOs get involved in politics, take action against social injustice or demand human rights, they can be a thorn in the side of many governments and politicians in power. In more and more countries, governments are cracking down on civil society and trying to suppress unpopular voices. The phrase “Shrinking or Closing Space” describes this worrying trend. According to CIVICUS, a global network that monitors the global situation of civil society and civic freedoms, only around twelve percent of people worldwide can truly speak their minds unhindered, gather together and fight against grievances. In 114 of 196 states, basic civil and political rights are severely restricted.<sup>10</sup>

Many VENRO members and their partner organisations also experience this: Restrictive laws and bureaucratic requirements paralyse their work. More and more countries are restricting or prohibiting funding from abroad for independent civil society work. Partner organisations that are active in politically sensitive areas such as human rights issues or that openly express criticism are particularly targeted by the authorities. Wherever political and economic power is at stake, governments are increasingly cracking down on civil society. Violence against activists and human rights defenders, threats and criminalisation are increasing worldwide.

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<sup>10</sup> Civicus, [Monitor Tracking Civic Space](#)

### Shrinking Space: Further information

- Brot für die Welt,  
    ↳ Atlas der Zivilgesellschaft
- ↳ CIVICUS Monitor
- ↳ Freedom House
- Lifeline Fund for Embattled CSOs,  
  Advocacy in Restricted Spaces:  
    ↳ A Toolkit for Civil Society  
      Organisations
- VENRO working group  
    ↳ Strengthening civic space

Repressions and restrictive government policies towards civic engagement do not mean that advocacy work is not possible. On the contrary, it is particularly important to engage in such contexts in order to protect or expand civic space. The challenge is to apply suitable methods and strategies, to precisely analyse opportunities and risks and to react flexibly to changes in general conditions.

Consequently, there are many different answers. Many organisations follow a “low profile” or “quiet advocacy” path.<sup>11</sup> The NGOs in the Global South have fewer problems with government agencies when they act as social service organisations instead of working on human rights or justice issues. Therefore, many of them stay strategically under the radar with their political activities and choose less political or critical topics for their external communication. They use social engagement or educational projects to educate people about their rights and/or to increase general participation. It is also good practice to contact local or regional governments and authorities regarding specific project topics. These levels of government are often much more accessible and pragmatic, and structural solutions can also be achieved in dialogue.

When domestic advocacy is dangerous, “outside pressure” from international governments can be an effective tool. However, such an offensive strategy is not always appropriate, as some governments respond with greater repression. What is dangerous in one country can be useful in another – and vice versa.

Because political engagement can be dangerous in restrictive contexts, the protection of partner organisations and committed individuals has top priority. They are the ones who take the greatest risks. They know the local situation and are best able to assess their own leeway and effective strategies. International NGOs can support them, for example, by organising safe meeting places.

<sup>11</sup> VENRO (2017), ↳ Was macht Capacity Development von NRO erfolgreich?



Repression of civil society in Myanmar: People are protesting against the military coup countrywide. © R. Bociaga/shutterstock

Some NGO representatives report that, in recent years, it has become more and more important for them to deal with protection mechanisms for human rights defenders. After all, an organisation has a responsibility when it supports people in advocacy activities that may put them at risk. That is why many NGOs have set up appropriate structures. Further training and the establishment of networks are just as much a part of these structures as the support of aid funds, from which legal assistance, an escape ticket or a new smartphone can be financed quickly and non-bureaucratically. German NGOs do not always have to carry out protection and preventive measures themselves, but they can also commission specialised organisations.

## Advocacy needs flexible funding conditions

The presented requirements and their complexity pose challenges for NGOs in planning and monitoring, as well as sustainable funding of advocacy projects.

Since the results and effects of advocacy work are less plannable and measurable than those of aid projects, special methods are required that take into account the complexity of the interdependencies and the long-term nature of changes – for example, a theory of change or narrative methods<sup>12</sup>.

The funding logic used by many donors working with short terms and inflexible plans for budget distribution, goals and indicators often make the implementation of advocacy projects tedious and time-consuming. To make matters worse, these projects usually require a lot of staff. These are big hurdles, especially for smaller organisations.

VENRO has long been pointing out that successful development work requires long-term funding and the ability to flexibly adapt projects and programs.<sup>13 14</sup>

12 Van Wessel (2018), ↘ Narrative Assessment: A new approach to evaluation of advocacy for development

13 VENRO (2021), ↘ Zivilgesellschaft stärken durch verbesserte Förderbedingungen

14 VENRO (2020), ↘ Von der Wirkungsbeobachtung zur Wirkungsorientierung



However, the Federal Ministry for Economic Co-operation and Development (BMZ) has also undergone a change of thinking. For a few years now, it has been explicitly promoting political work and advocacy beyond projects aimed at directly improving the living conditions of certain population groups. For example, NGOs can apply for higher administrative costs and, often, longer terms for advocacy projects.

### Outlook

Many NGOs have long been concerned with the question of how joint advocacy work with partner organisations can achieve sustainable structural changes. The examples in this report show challenges and success stories that are intended to encourage mutual learning.

In addition to individual topics and strategies, there are also developments that NGOs will have to deal with even more in the future – to which they will have to find answers together.

→ In order to counter the restriction of civil society's space, effective counter-strategies and solidarity alliances are required. This also includes counteracting social narratives that defame and discredit civil society. The protection of human rights defenders is increasingly becoming an area of work for development NGOs.

→ Especially in advocacy work, German NGOs are confronted with challenges and questions of unequal power relations and representation between the Global North and South. They are called upon to critically encounter colonial thought patterns in their work, to change global power structures and to lead partnerships forward on an equal footing. This requires self-critical reflection on unequal power relations and the introduction of new working methods and structures.

→ New forms of civil society organisation and co-operation are emerging in the Global North and South as a result of digitalisation. Without large resources and formal structures, people come together in a decentralised manner and campaign for different interests and changes in movements such as Black Lives Matter or Fridays for Future. Hashtags like #MeToo against sexual violence or #EndSARS against police violence in Nigeria are shared millions of times on Twitter and Instagram. This can result in new opportunities for NGOs to act and to network, which many organisations would like to deal with in greater depth.



# REAL-LIFE EXAMPLES

# NO FRIENDS OR HELPERS

**Brazil** Children's rights organisations fight police violence in the Global North and South

**CEDECA Sapopemba and terre des hommes**



No other country kills as many people as Brazil. Hotspots include São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro – and police officers, of all people, belong to the main group of perpetrators. Every fifth violent death is their responsibility, and in some communities, the rate is as high as 45 percent. Children and adolescents – especially boys from poor families – are at greater risk of losing their lives in this way.<sup>15</sup>

This depressing development was fuelled by a decree passed in 2016 that removed jurisdiction from the civil courts in the event of police violence. Now, only military justice is responsible. President Jair Bolsonaro and other members of his government encourage police officers to crack down on people and assure extensive impunity.

terre des hommes Germany has been involved in Brazil for over 20 years and has been working with children's rights centre CEDECA Sapopemba in

São Paulo since 2013. Many children and young people at CEDECA have also been victims of police violence, and employees are severely threatened. In Rio de Janeiro, young local politician Marielle Franco, who denounced the police's excessive use of violence, was shot dead in the street. The main suspects are two former military police officers.

In a project funded by the BMZ, the violations of children's rights are systematically monitored, documented and made public. The methods range from creative campaigns such as carnival parades advocating for children's rights to classic public relations and lobbying work to informing the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

The NGOs organise psychological support and protective measures and give advice regarding legal steps and how to engage in advocacy. The safety of children, adolescents and project staff is paramount in all steps. An internal specialist group from terre des hommes for the protection of human rights defenders is accompanying the project.

Children and teenagers are heavily involved in all activities. The aim is to strengthen them and teach them methods to de-escalate conflicts. Being part of a street football programme run by young people, the idea is that they should gain trust in one another and learn to resolve disputes

<sup>15</sup> ↘ Polícia mata mais homens, negros e jovens no estado de São Paulo, quoted by terre des hommes

non-violently. In addition, the NGOs support girls and boys networking at local, regional, national and international levels – in order to express themselves politically. Highlights include conferences to which terre des hommes invites guests, such as the UN Special Representative for Children in Armed Conflict, with whom young participants can engage in direct discussion. Meetings with scientists and diplomats also take place occasionally.

Three quarters of the killings in Brazil take place with handguns – many of the weapons come from Germany. According to the investigation, Marielle Franco died from an army-issued bullet fired from

a Heckler & Koch machine gun. According to the International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) in Stockholm, Germany delivered significantly more weapons to Brazil than any other country between 2009 and 2018.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> From the years 2008 to 2018, the following values result for exports of armaments to Brazil were recorded: Germany 544 million US dollars, USA 478 million, France 416 million, Russia 175 million.

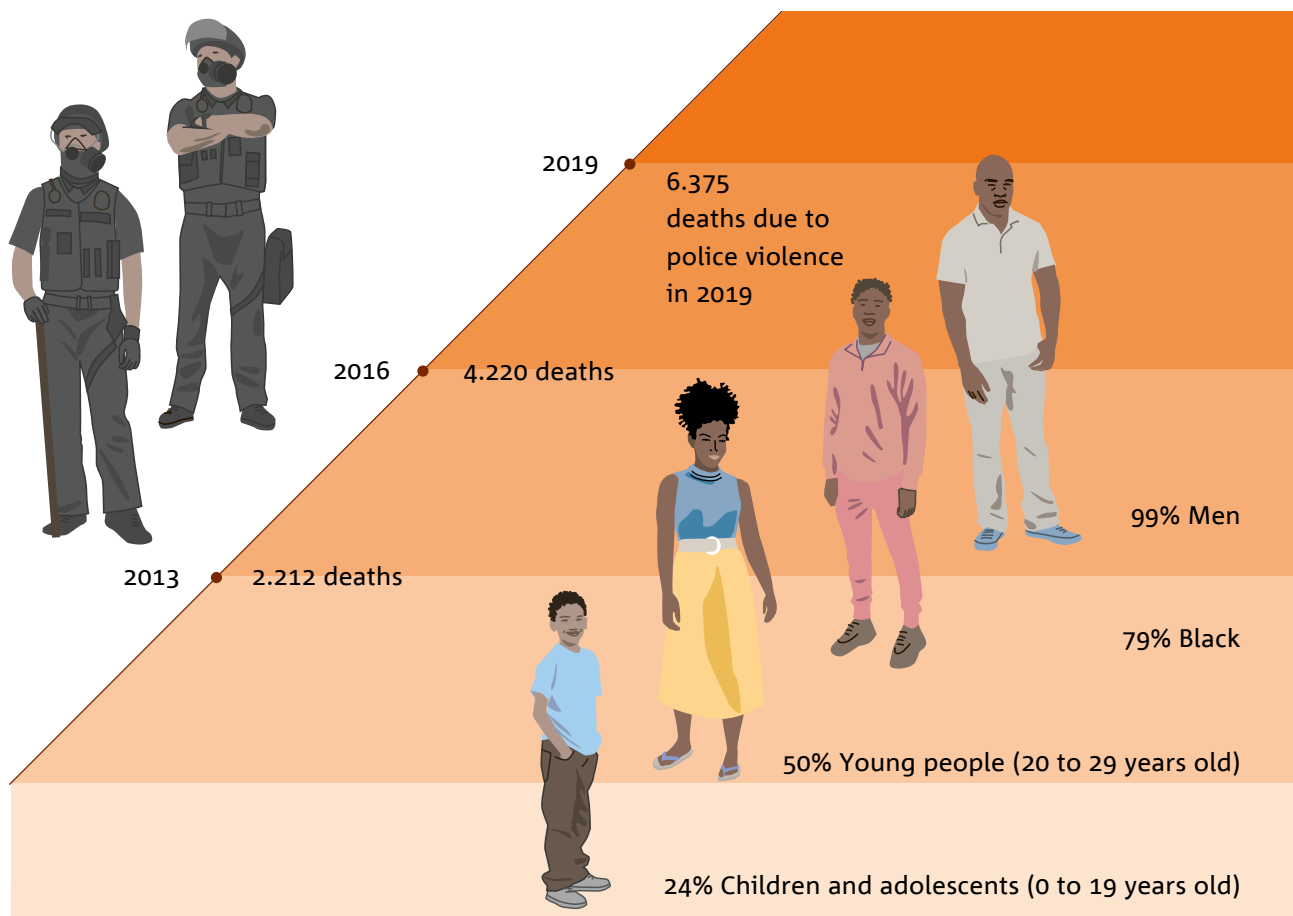


Figure 3: The dramatic extent of police violence in Brazil – a graphic from a study on police violence in Brazil, terre des hommes (2021), Hört auf zu töten – Polizeigewalt gegen Kinder und Jugendliche in Brasilien und Waffenhandel

terre des hommes works with other NGOs to stop all arms exports to Brazil. Politicians and the general public in Brazil and worldwide should learn as much as possible about the facts and cases. In 2018 and 2019, terre des hommes therefore organised lobbying and event trips for young mediators from São Paulo to Germany. They informed the BMZ and the Federal Foreign Office, the Bundestag, specialist groups and the public about the situation in Brazil and German arms deliveries. Deputies and employees from the ministries promised to work with the Brazilian Ambassador and other agencies to bring about improvements.

Meanwhile, the Brazilian guests invited employees from the German embassy and BMZ to visit CEDECA Sapopemba in São Paulo. Sometime later, De-

velopment Minister Gerd Müller even came to visit, talking to children and young people. At the end of 2019, the Federal Foreign Office assured terre des hommes that small arms exports to Brazil would no longer be approved. New export statistics confirm this – however, the export of other German armaments to Brazil continues unabated. In addition, Brazil is increasingly importing German small arms via other countries, including large quantities of Sig Sauer pistols, which the German company is now having manufactured in the USA.<sup>17</sup>

*This article was created with the support of terre des hommes.*

<sup>17</sup> Deutschlandfunk (2020), Deutsche Firmen profitieren vom Waffenboom in Brasilien

Children and young people are playing street football in São Paulo.  
© Ralf Willinger/terre des hommes





# THE TORTOISE AND THE HARE STRATEGY

**Ghana** NGOs from the Global North and South are committed to fair cocoa production

Social Enterprise Development Foundation of West Africa (SEND) and INKOTA-netzwerk



Ghana is the second largest cocoa supplier in the world after the Ivory Coast. About one fifth of chocolate raw material comes from here; four million farmers and their families are depending on cocoa. Nevertheless, cocoa cultivation was a marginal topic at best in public discussions in Ghana until a few years ago. Yet there are many problems with this type of cultivation: Farmers often earn so little that they can barely satisfy their basic needs. Moreover, intensive cultivation in single-crop farming does not only kill forests; the heavy use of pesticides also endangers people and the environment.

„I had been wondering for a long time why there was no NGO in our country that explicitly saw the need to build farmers capacity on how to champion advocacy in the cocoa sector,” reports Sandra Kwabea Sarkwah from the Social Enterprise Development Foundation of West Africa (SEND) in Ghana. Although there are many initiatives that offer training courses for cultivation, farmers lack the support to advocate for improvements at the political level. Kwabea Sarkwah’s organisation has championed advocacy engagements in other sec-

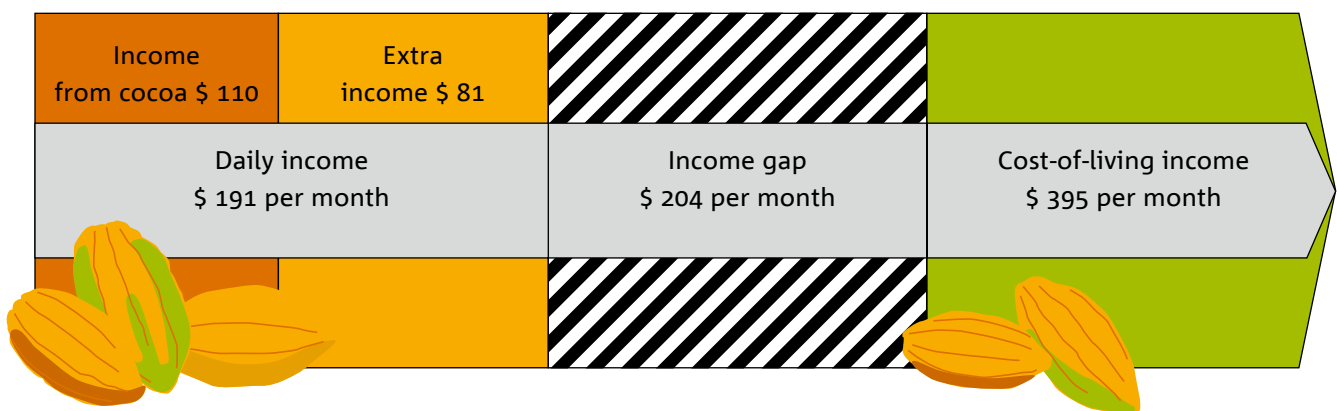


Figure 4: The average income of small-scale farmers and their families is below the subsistence level – graphic from the study on human rights violations in the cocoa sector, INKOTA (2019), [Menschenrechtsverletzungen im Kakaoanbau](#)

tors, but they saw the need to extend such expertise in the cocoa sector considering that there was no common platform for exchange or even a joint advocacy strategy by civil society actors including NGOs and farmers. The national farmers' association was initiated by the state and primarily aims to increase export quantities. Although the farmers received concrete support from the association, they did not feel that it represented them adequately.

At the beginning, INKOTA also observed that the issue of cocoa was not very well understood in Germany. While a lot has been reported about the conditions in which coffee is made, chocolate raw material has received little public attention. In

2013, the NGO therefore started the classic "Make Chocolate fair!" Campaign. Action, petitions and public relations work generated a lot of interest in Germany. During the three-year campaign, INKOTA invited some cocoa farmers from Ghana to Germany. Beyond that, however, there were no agreements with partners from the Global South. In Germany, discussions centred on whether the certification seals of Rainforest Alliance and Fair-trade, as well as corporate self-regulation, help the farmers or merely serve to reassure customers.

„Increasingly, we got an uneasy feeling about running a campaign on chocolate without a close exchange on advocacy strategies with producers and civil society in the countries concerned,” says Evelyn Bahn from INKOTA, describing the situation at the time. In 2017, she therefore travelled to Ghana to find collaboration partners among the local NGOs and farmers' associations. During her

Cocoa harvest in Ghana © INKOTA





research, she also met the managing director of SEND, whose organisation had just started to set up a nationwide networking platform around the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The organisation not only has a wide range of contacts, especially with NGOs that are committed to social issues, but also has similar ideas to INKOTA – regarding the necessary content and approach to political work. “When we talk about the future of cocoa cultivation, we have to think about social and ecological problems together and act politically on different levels in order to change structures,” says Kwabea Sarkwah, summarising her perspective. Together, the two organisations began to shed light on this blind spot and fill in the blanks that had previously existed.

„The issue of cocoa is political in Ghana. A lot of jobs are at stake,” summarises Bahn. One of the main reasons for low cocoa prices is global over-production. One way out of this issue would be cultivation systems that make farmers less dependent on a single product. But such a change costs money – and Ghana's government had announced that it wanted to increase cocoa production by a third. In doing so, it steadfastly relied on agro-industrial methods. There are no plantation operators in Ghana, instead many collaborations between small-scale farmers. However, they are all very reluctant to name problems or make demands. “They don't want to be perceived as opponents of the government because they are afraid of any disadvantages they may experience,” says Kwabea Sarkwah. After all, when it comes to marketing, all farmers are forced to work closely with the state cocoa authority. It not only regulates exports, but also provides advice and support, for example, if pests threaten to spread within single-crop fields.

Ultimately, the two NGOs decided that SEND should build a network on the topic of cocoa – docked on the SDG platform. Funding came from the BMZ. The SEND team identified the people and institutions in Ghana that needed to work to-



SEND and INKOTA fight for their joint goals.  
© INKOTA

gether in order to achieve fundamental improvements. They facilitated the process and mobilized human rights and environmental organisations. Most importantly, five cooperatives also joined. In March 2019, the Ghana Civil Society Cocoa Platform started up with 20 organisations. INKOTA and Rainforest Alliance, which also support local NGOs' work with resources, are not directly involved, but they are valued as co-operation partners.

„Our aim is to gain transparency in the sector, to improve cocoa farmers' well-being and to ensure more environmental protection,” summarises Kwabea Sarkwah. To achieve this, the stakeholders need to work together. Because NGOs do not have to worry about losing marketing licenses, they can raise issues with politicians and administration that cocoa farmers would rather not express in public.

The first networking meeting with European NGOs took place in Germany in autumn 2018. “We can clearly see that our partners from Ghana



The partners from Ghana share their expertise at joint events. © INKOTA

have been increasingly involved in strategic discussions since then,” says Bahn happily. One example is the Supply Chain Act: The information from Ghana helps with advocacy in Berlin and Brussels. Conversely, Ghanaian NGOs are very interested in background information on the EU initiative launched in 2021 for a partnership with Ghana and the Ivory Coast to improve sustainability in the cocoa sector. “It’s a mutual give and take: The European NGOs understand what’s going on with us and can use that for their work, and we learn things that enable us to present ourselves to our government in a completely different way,” says Kwabea Sarkwah. Similar to the fable of the tortoise and the hare, the two NGOs are increasingly able to compensate for their weaker advocacy position compared to the cocoa corporations through clever co-operation and a rapid exchange of information. Bit by bit, networks and influence grow – and positions are becoming more and more differentiated.

Until recently, pesticides in cocoa cultivation were not an issue in Germany because the chemical substances cannot penetrate cocoa beans’ thick shells. From the perspective of consumer protection, there is not a problem – but there is for the people who work in the fields. A case study regarding this issue is underway. INKOTA wants to use their results to advocate for a law against the use of all hazardous pesticides.

*This article was based on interviews with Evelyn Bahn from INKOTA and Sandra Kwabea Sarkwah from SEND.*

# SAVING THE PLANET AND THEIR FUTURE

## **India** Children organise against climate change and environmental degradation

### Children Movement for Justice (CMCJ) and Kindernothilfe



“It’s about our right to survive,” emphasises Maruthupandi. The 17-year-old is involved in the Indian climate initiative Children Movement for Climate Justice (CMCJ), which began in his state of Tamil Nadu in 2008. In the area around the provincial town of Virudhunagar, the Resource Centre for Participatory Development Studies (RCPDS) supported rural women at the time. Many girls and boys helped their mothers in the fields and learned that conditions for rural populations had deteriorated further and further. “When my grandfather was young, there was still a lot of water in the river; when my father was young, most of the water came from wells. For me, there is only bottled water – and what kind of water will my children be able to drink,” asks Maruthupandi, who is in the twelfth grade.

At the time, Kindernothilfe organised workshops for the children of rural women, in which they acquired basic knowledge about children’s rights and political influence. After a kind of children’s parliament had met, some of them were so enthusiastic that they founded a climate and environmental initiative themselves. “In the beginning, there were 30 children; now we are 12,000 – in five Indian states,” says Maruthupandi with audible pride. Kindernothilfe does not only support them financially and

organisationally. “From them, we learn how best to proceed and who to speak to in order to be able to achieve something. And it has many partners, net-working us with them,” reports Maruthupandi.

### Global advocacy project

In 2019, Kindernothilfe strategically started to change perspective within its own organisation with a global advocacy project. It interviewed partner organisations and around 8,000 children in different countries to find out which political issues are urgent in the eyes of children – see Kindernothilfe (2019), 30 Jahre Kinderrechtskonvention. Kinderrechte dürfen keine Träume bleiben – Die Bedeutung der Advocacy-Arbeit der Kindernothilfe und ihrer Partnerorganisationen für die Verwirklichung von Kinderrechten.



A self-description of the organisation states: “We, members of Children Movement for Climate justice – CMCJ, strongly feel that we need to and we can do something to save our only planet earth by mustering our strength and respond to the situation in an organized manner.”

CMCJ brings out simple information that children can understand and attracts attention through activities such as a 700-kilometer rally or participation in large climate protests. The organisation is also practically involved in environmental protection and has already planted 100,000 trees. A collection of signatures should move the

Indian government to sign the third additional protocol of the Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>18</sup> so that children and young people can use an individual right of appeal. CMCJ is also committed to the installation of solar panels. Many members talk about these topics in schools, in children’s clubs and in the children’s parliaments that have existed for a long time. Most CMCJ members come from poor families and are between 12 and 18 years old – but many stay with them even as young adults.

<sup>18</sup> The third additional protocol to the individual complaint procedure (Optional Protocol on a Communications Procedure) came into force in 2014. It gives children the opportunity to complain to the UN Committee on the Rights of a Child if their rights are violated. With this additional tool, the Convention on the Rights of a Child can be implemented even more effectively.

Group picture of CMCJ © CMCJ India



Padma has been involved with CMCJ since 2012. She lives in the southeast Indian state of Karnataka, helped her parents in the fields as a child and earned money in a rice mill. Today, she is studying to be a nurse. “We have so many problems: Our traditional seeds are disappearing, pesticides are poisoning the earth, there are regular droughts and rubbish is lying around everywhere. Many farming families have too little to eat and girls are often married off very young,” she says. All of these problems were interrelated.

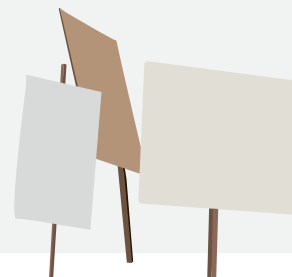
At the centre of their advocacy, there are rights that are enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child. The initiative derives a variety of demands from them. The groups are now bringing these demands to politicians and administrations at the local, regional and federal level alike.

In many places, CMCJ also reacts to specific environmental problems. Anusha, a biotechnology student from Andhra Pradesh, provides an example. In their home region, the drinking water quality had deteriorated significantly due to illegal sand mining. Children and young people complained to the regional government and tried to find fellow campaigners with a memorandum. After a bridge collapsed due to the sand mining, the administration actually took action.

Putting an end to the littering of landscapes and water bodies with plastic has always been a major concern of CMCJ and many other environmental groups in India. Tamil Nadu was one of the first states to ban single-use cutlery and plastic bags and to penalise vendors; other states followed suit. Yet bans alone do not mean that these bags will actually disappear. CMCJ therefore relies on education: “In addition to climate protection, plastic is a key issue for us. We share a lot of information on Facebook,” reports Padma.

CMCJ would have liked to have participated in the development of the “Vision 2023 Tamil Nadu”, with which the government of the state wants to achieve prosperity for all, but was not invited. That is why the organisation wrote a position paper itself. One of the central sentences: “Our future is threatened – and we demand action against this threat. Children and young people are ready to take action, and we ask our government to do the same. The time for speech-making has passed. Now, we are holding you responsible for carrying out your commitments.” The authors call for

*“In the beginning, there were 30 children; now we are 12,000 – in five Indian states.”*



bodies responsible for environmental and climate protection to be set up in administrations, for organic farming and renewable energies to be promoted and for the topic of climate and environmental protection to be anchored in the curricula. The paper closes with the words: “We will give everything we have as long as we see the chance to save our planet. We expect the same courage from all of you.”

Without a doubt, those involved with CMCJ are impatient. They would like to act and be noticed on a national and international level, says Anusha. The global climate movement Fridays for Future succeeded in doing just that in 2019. In the meantime, this movement has also arrived in India, but there it is almost exclusively supported by students and young adults in metropolises. School strikes are not a means of exerting pressure in a country where many children ardently want to be able to go to school regularly.

After all, Kindernothilfe has already managed to arrange a meeting of CMCJ activists with members of the Bundestag who wanted to find out more about activist work in India. They offered to help set up a collaboration platform, reports Arul Raj Daje, the Indian project co-ordinator for Kindernothilfe. “We haven’t heard from them since then.”

*This article was based on an interview with activists Maruthupandi, Padma and Anusha and Arul Raj Daje from Kindernothilfe.*



The committed activists at CMCJ have already planted 100,000 trees. © CMCJ



# STARTING AT THE GRASSROOTS LEVEL

## **India** Livelihood work with women brings about social changes

**Centre for World Solidarity (CWS) and  
Action Group Solidarity World (ASW)**



“We are a democracy and there are courts, but the atmosphere is very repressive. India is a country full of contradictions,” explains Rukmini Rao from the Centre for World Solidarity (CWS). Almost 30 years ago, her organisation emerged from the India representation of the German NGO Aktionsgemeinschaft Solidarische Welt (ASW). The division of labour was clearly regulated by September 2020: The CWS independently proposed projects from small organisations and the ASW obtained the money – mainly from private donors in Germany. “The people on the ground know best what is needed and, above all, how it can be implemented sustainably,” says Detlef Stüber from ASW.

Then, the so-called FCRA (Foreign Contribution Regulation Act, a law that regulates the financing of Indian NGOs by foreign donors) was abruptly tightened. This has greatly increased the demands on Indian NGOs and their foreign partner organisations. Now, NGOs are facing extensive reporting requirements; and the on-site transfer of funds is prohibited. For the organisations, this means not only a high level of bureaucratic and financial expense, but also a lot of uncertainty. “The feeling of hanging in the air and not knowing whether and how things will go on has an unsettling effect on many partners,” says Stüber, describing the situation. After all, many jobs and – not infrequently – the existence of entire organisations depend on international sources of money.

ASW and CWS have been supporting women in rural areas, in particular, for decades. In India, they are not only disproportionately affected by poverty, but also by human rights violations. The funded projects receive an average of 5,000 Euros per year and are designed for the long term: It takes time to build trust and sustainable structures within the village communities. Inevitably, the CWS uses part of its capacity to train groups involved in administrative and financial matters in order to avoid problems with government supervision as far as possible.

Advocacy and campaign work were never explicitly at the centre of co-operation projects: Above all, NGOs want to improve the income and livelihoods of women permanently. However, it has always seemed sensible to influence local politics and administrations – or to work with the police. “In many cases, the state is our partner – and it has many faces,” summarises Rao. “We work with the police and health authorities to combat violence



against women. Every now and then, there are local politicians who stand up for the perpetrators, for example, when it comes to impunity for families who have forcibly married their daughters. On the other hand, CWS co-operates with authorities to implement government programmes that grants farm workers' families the right to 100 days of employment per family."

Many groups supported by ASW and CWS participate in traditionally strong women's networks in India. Thanks in part to their efforts, the State of Andhra Pradesh has a law against domestic violence today. In the Nalgonda District in the State of Telangana, there has been a support program for

the construction and operation of women's shelters and health stations since 2017. The institutions are run by civil society organisations, including the CWS and its partners. Due to their initiative, the institutions are now receiving state funding.

Often, authorities want to oblige NGOs to refrain from press contacts if they co-operate with them. "Many new organisations feel under pressure and comply with such requirements," reports Rao. She points out that the state and NGOs have a common interest in many issues, including the support of women: "The authorities do not know how to set up such institutions and as civil society we can demonstrate it." Rao hopes that the state itself will take over the institutions after the initial phase and, at the same time, refers to another state deficit

A women's self-help group gives advice on the use of small loans. © ASW



in this context: Hundreds of women are waiting for trials against their husbands because there are far too few judges.

“As a civil society, we must continue to fight against injustice and discrimination,” said Rao. And yet, it is important not to risk a direct confrontation with state institutions. “Many live with the risk that, at some point, someone will knock on the door and arrest them,” she says, referring to friends who are in prison – lawyers, professors and other individuals engaged in human rights.

In their work, the ASW and CWS consciously focus on socio-economic rights and, under the term “Livelihood”, advocate concrete improvement in local living conditions. “If civil and political rights are to be asserted, people must have the basic right to food and a life in dignity,” says Stüber. For example, the IZAD organisation coaches Muslim girls in the state of Bihar, thereby giving them alternatives to early marriages. Education about human trafficking also takes place – a problem that can be combated thanks to good co-operation with religious and political leaders. Ultimately, the direction of work in Bihar has remained the same, says Stüber, although the conditions for this work have become more difficult.

A woman with whom the ASW and CWS worked closely had to learn that it can be dangerous to openly address human trafficking: Her house was set on fire. Even more sensitive are requests under the Freedom of Information Act, which came into force in 2005 and for which Indian civil society had campaigned intensely. Since then, all citizens officially have the right to receive information about state activities and statistics. But the experi-

ences range from sobering to even terrifying. CWS wanted to know how high the percentage of women farmers who own land independently of their husbands is. “From this, we could then perhaps derive concrete demands,” says Rao, explaining the interest in the project. To date, she has not received



Partners of CWS are participating in demonstrations. © ASW

any data – the authorities only shift responsibility to another authority. People who inquire about government machines or who want to expose corruption sometimes even risk their lives: 84 activists have already been murdered.

*This article was created based on interviews with Rukmini Rao from the Centre for World Solidarity and Detlef Stüber from Aktionsgemeinschaft Solidarische Welt.*

# WELL-FOUNDED RESEARCH AS A BASIS

**Indonesia** ELSAM fights against human rights violations and for better laws

Lembaga Studi dan Advokasi Masyarakat (ELSAM), MISEREOR, Brot für die Welt and Others



In 1993, five years before the fall of the Suharto regime, Indonesian intellectuals founded the Institute for Study and Advocacy (ELSAM – Lembaga Studi dan Advokasi Masyarakat). They were all involved in various NGOs, but lacked an organisation that did not only focus on individual cases of human rights violations, but also on the consequences of the economic growth agenda on human rights.

MISEREOR has accompanied the human rights organisation since it was founded, and Brot für die Welt is an important partner as well. This support consists primarily of providing financial resources so that the highly competent NGO employees can conduct their advocacy work independently and in a self-determined manner. In return, ELSAM informs its international supporters annually about goals and plans; about every two months, there is an update on current developments.

“Almost all funding for our work comes from Europe and the USA,” says ELSAM director Wahyu Wagiman. This creates political independence, but also means that the work often has to be described in

the form of projects: This is what the funding logic of state donors requires. In fact, however, it is almost always a question of ongoing processes that have been running for decades, using the opportunities that arise or creating new paths yourself. An external evaluation carried out a few years ago confirmed the diverse effects of ELSAM’s work in Indonesia and praised the persistence of their efforts.

“Expertise is required for political lobbying – the ability to conduct studies, conduct research and then present the results in a concise form,” says a self-description of the NGO. Solid and well-prepared research is the basis of their work. For example, ELSAM publishes studies on violence against human rights defenders who campaign against environmental degradation or for companies to exercise human rights due diligence.

ELSAM’s partners in the USA and Europe can use the studies to draw international attention to the problems and consequences of global economic policy and to put corporations under pressure. Above all, the 24 ELSAM employees use the research for their own work in Indonesia. The goals of the organisation are the promotion of a just, democratic society and the advocacy of reforms on a political and legal level. ELSAM sees its own role in monitoring the economy and the government on one hand and encouraging government agencies and companies to make changes on the other.



Although Indonesia has been a democracy since 1998 and has ratified international human rights pacts, there are still many people in offices and administrations who supported the Suharto dictatorship. Indonesia's judiciary is weak and often corrupt, and witnesses and judges are often intimidated. The military is obstructing the process of coming to terms with atrocities of the past, and economic-political interest groups are also exerting pressure. Getting those in power to come to terms with the crimes of the past is one of the traditional focal points of ELSAM's work. With the help of well-founded facts and years of lobbying, a state witness and victim protection office was set up. It provides legal support to survivors when perpetrators want to prevent crimes and human rights violations from being dealt with in law. An ELSAM employee finally became the first head of the organisation.

In the province of Aceh, for example, a state truth and reconciliation commission has been set up to investigate and come to terms with previous human rights violations. "We have high hopes for it, but unfortunately the institution receives little support from the provincial government and local authorities," says Wagiman.

ELSAM is also involved in legislative processes and supports victims of current human rights violations. Palm oil is an important issue here: The increasing global demand means that large areas of rainforest,

especially in Indonesia, have to give way to kilometre-long palm oil plantations. The deforestation of the rainforest does not only have a dramatic effect on climate and biodiversity – many people who have lived in the countryside for generations are expropriated and displaced in favour of international corporations. Working conditions on the plantations are often inhumane.

"Our greatest success so far has been the relaxation of the Plantation Act," Wagiman sums up. Companies had previously used this Act to criminalise small-scale farmers who did not want to be ousted from their fields. ELSAM went to the Supreme Court – and in 2012, it achieved the deletion of two articles. After that, several farmers were released from custody. "In current conflicts, those affected now also have something at hand to which they can refer," says Wagiman.

ELSAM works closely with a network of lawyers who support the local population in defending themselves against companies. At the same time, however, the organisation is negotiating with management and government representatives about regulations on compliance with labour and human rights. Wagiman reports that a large palm oil company recently signed a declaration to this effect. Some state institutions also co-operate with ELSAM and have asked the NGO to support them with training modules and workshops for their employees on the subject of human rights. In addition to land rights issues, this also involves violence emanating from extremist religious groups. Negotiations are currently underway for the national action plan for human rights, in which ELSAM is also involved.

*"Expertise is required for political lobbying – the ability to conduct studies, conduct research and then present the results in a concise form."*



*This article was based on an interview with Wahyu Wagiman, the previous Director of ELSAM.*

# ENFORCING RIGHTS FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES

**Kenya** Women's rights organisations are committed to combating sexualised violence on many levels

**Coalition on Violence Against Women (COVAW) and Handicap International**



A study of two Kenyan regions brought shocking results to light: 57 percent of girls and women with disabilities have experienced sexual violence; 15 percent of them have been raped. Half of the perpetrators come from the survivors' families or their neighbourhoods. The investigation was commissioned by the women's rights organisation Coalition on Violence Against Women (COVAW) and the Kenya Association for the Intellectually Handicapped (KAIH).

In general, gender-based violence is widespread in Kenya, as other studies show. Not least thanks to the work of COVAW and other NGOs, the legal situation has improved significantly with the Sexual Offences Act that came into force in 2006 and the Domestic Violence Protection Act that was passed in 2015. "What is lacking is consistent implementation," summarises COVAW's Executive Director Wairimu Munyinyi-Wahome.

COVAW has set up an access to justice department to improve the legal position of girls and women with disabilities. It is supported by 30 pro bono lawyers and just as many paralegals. "We have developed training documents on sexual and gen-



der-based violence so that both groups can train other supporters,” says Kwamboka Oseko, COVAW’s legal associate. In addition, COVAW trains police officers and public prosecutors on how to best deal with victims and witnesses with mental and intellectual disabilities.

COVAW supports victims, their families and witnesses during the entire duration of the legal process, as well as on other levels. When a woman was threatened by the perpetrator’s environment, COVAW supported the relocation of her and her family with help from the Urgent Action Fund Africa. The perpetrator was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment.

“For us, it’s not just about the perpetrators ending up in court – even though that’s very important,” says Kwamboka Oseko. COVAW also wants to cre-

ate awareness in society that human rights apply to everyone. Because girls and women with disabilities are particularly vulnerable and at risk, they need the support and attention of their surroundings to protect them from sexual violence. To this end, COVAW organises stakeholder meetings attended by partners who work on providing legal, health and social services to victims of violence.

The women’s rights organisation regularly posts on Facebook and Twitter and reports on the radio or on TV talk shows. In this way, it not only disseminates knowledge about the rights of people with disabilities, but also how to secure evidence in the event of rape. This has been success-

The team from COVAW and Handicap International © Handicap International





ful: The number of cases of which the COVAW team is informed is increasing. During the Corona lockdown, the organisation increasingly relied on digital communication, sent mass text messages and set up a hotline because it feared an increase in domestic violence, especially against girls and women with disabilities. 155 reports were received within the first three and a half months. Since the Corona measures were relaxed, the phone has been ringing less often, reports Kwamboka Oseko. After all, the Covid-19 pandemic has also brought about new insights. “We have found new, adaptive ways of communication and have managed to prevent the pandemic from slowing down our work,” she sums up.

Nevertheless, the organisation is reaching its financial limits due to the increasing number of cases. It receives financial support from international organisations such as the African Women’s Development Fund (AWDF) and from government agencies in the Netherlands. As part of the project “Making It Work Gender and Disability” by Handicap International, COVAW is working with other African organisations, which enables further technical and financial support. The international NGOs also establish contacts with worldwide networks and organisations. “We inform each other by e-mail about what’s going on. And when it comes to joint strategies, we consult with each other,” says Wairimu Munyinyi-Wahome, describing the co-operation together.

At the national level, COVAW is always involved in advocacy when it comes to laws, policies and regulations. After the African Union adopted a hu-

man rights charter for persons with disabilities<sup>19</sup> in early 2018, COVAW launched a campaign for the government to ratify the treaty. Together with the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights, they approached the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and succeeded in getting a draft for ratifying the charter to be brought to the cabinet. Kwamboka Oseko hopes that the charter will be ratified and become law so that it can be used for legal work.

Meanwhile, COVAW is involved in countering renewed outbreaks of violence in the context of the upcoming elections in 2022. “Children, women and persons with disabilities are most at risk in such situations,” says Kwamboka Oseko, speaking from experience. This is why her organisation raises awareness amongst police officers, organises dialogue forums in particularly vulnerable neighbourhoods and tries to motivate the leaders of local administrations to take action against violence. “Advocacy is a long process. We can see that the fruits of our work are gradually growing”, Kwamboka Oseko summarises.

*This article was based on an interview with  
Wairimu Munyinyi-Wahome and  
Kwamboka Oseko from COVAW.*

<sup>19</sup> The African Union Commission (2018), Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Africa



# NO FREEDOM FOR CIVIL SOCIETY IN DECADES

**Republic of the Congo** Brave people are committed against the government clan's kleptocracy

**Publish What You Pay and MISEREOR**



In the Republic of the Congo, civic space is not really shrinking – it was never really there to begin with. The country has been controlled and exploited by a family clan for decades. Under such conditions, foreign partner organisations can support courageous people from civil society when they draw international attention to the situation or mobilise politicians from their countries.

Since 2005, MISEREOR has been involved in the oil-rich Central African country, whose natural wealth has never reached its people. On the contrary, in the oil producing regions in particular, the contrast between modern system technology and the poverty of the population is particularly stark. Most of them neither have access to electricity nor clean drinking water.

Brice Mackosso works for the Catholic Commission Justitia et Pax in Pointe Noire in the far south of the country and has long been campaigning for a fair distribution of oil revenues. As the most famous activist of the “Publish What You Pay” campaign in the Republic of the Congo, he was arrested along with a member of another NGO, Christian Munseo. “That was the first point where we got involved in the Republic of the Congo,” remembers Vincent Neussl from MISEREOR. The partner organisations from the USA and France, which had been active for some time, had informed MISEREOR of the situation; and so, the German NGO

turned to the World Bank and the German government. President Denis Sassou Nguesso, in the capital of Brazzaville, also received mail.

Herta Däubler-Gmelin, previous Chairman of the Committee for Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid in the Bundestag, then called in the Congolese Ambassador. “The government in Brazzaville certainly did not expect so much attention,” Neussl suspects. The timing was also favourable because



Vincent Neussl (left) at a workshop on extractive industries, which was held in co-operation with Brice Mackosso in Pointe Noire in 2016  
© MISEREOR

the Republic of the Congo was facing bankruptcy and wanted to negotiate debt relief. The World Bank's announcement was clear: As long as the two activists were in prison, there would be no talks.

In fact, the men were released shortly afterwards. Their international fame protected them in the meantime – as well as the experience that they were able to organise pressure from foreign governments in a short time. When the management of the Italian oil company Eni in the Republic of the Congo refused to see Mackosso for a discussion about problems of the local population in the company's oil production area, it was not long before instructions came from Italy. "Anyone who can mobilise such contacts will be respected," says

Neussl. Only then was it possible for Mackosso and his few colleagues to keep asking uncomfortable questions and demands and to publish the results of their research.

For a long time, the level of oil revenues in the Republic of the Congo was an absolute taboo subject – as were the contracts with Eni and the French Total group. It was clear that, in addition to the state, the Sassou Nguesso family clan also earned money with every barrel of oil. Step by step, the activists of "Publish What You Pay" succeeded in shedding more light on financial income in the oil business. This was mainly due to international pressure on the government of the Republic of the Congo to join the international transparency initiative for extractive industries (EITI, Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative) in return for financial commitments and debt relief. This made it

Vincent Neussl (left) and Brice Mackosso (centre) at a joint workshop on Extractive Industries  
© MISEREOR



possible for Mackosso, Munseo and other activists, with the help of influential international organisations, to publicise the massive embezzlement that occurs and to introduce regulations that are intended to prevent this practice in the future.

Officially, the citizens of the Republic of the Congo have the right to ask for what and how the state spends public money. In fact, such information can only be found after a long and complicated search. At least they now know about the revenues in the oil industry and the contracts with foreign investors. Information on the real ownership of all companies and subcontractors involved in funding should follow. As soon as a crooked business practice is exposed, it is officially abolished – in the meantime, however, the politically powerful have created new loopholes for the outflow of money. “The situation for the population in the oil regions has therefore not really improved,” says Neussl.

Very few people in the Republic of the Congo dare to take a public position because opposing the presidential family is life-threatening. Local authorities appointed by the powerful ensure calm in the villages. They do so because they do not want to risk their comparatively high salary and other privileges. With a kleptocracy at the head of the state, which has so far been difficult to overcome, there can be no talk of a lively civil society.

Still, Brice Mackosso does not give up. He co-founded the African network Tournons la Page, which campaigns for democracy and against the rulers’ practices of exorbitant enrichment. Two bishops from the southern parts of the country protect him and his fellow campaigners. They have already been able to convince their counterparts from the north not to block critical publications on several occasions. For example, Mackosso, as an employee of the Justitia et Pax Commission, was

able to present a study at a press conference that shows how inadequately the health sector in the Republic of the Congo is equipped and how little of the state investment is received locally.



Brice Mackosso (right) und Vincent Neussl (left) at a project visit in 2015 © MISEREOR

Neussl had hoped for greater progress for the country after MISEREOR began to get involved in the Republic of the Congo 15 years ago; the situation affecting people in the oil regions has not improved, and the income made is still primarily benefiting a small elite. There is also no evidence of democratisation. And yet he sees no alternative but to carry on and to support and protect the few people who are engaging and speaking up.

*This article was created on the basis of an interview with Vincent Neussl, long-time regional advisor at MISEREOR. He has accompanied projects in various countries, including the Republic of the Congo. Vincent Neussl unfortunately passed away in 2021.*



# JUSTICE FOR SURVIVORS OF SEXUALISED VIOLENCE IN WAR

**Kosovo** Women's rights organisations advocate for pensions for women raped during the Kosovo war

Medica Gjakova and medica mondiale



An estimated 20,000 girls and women were raped in the Kosovo war. However, they remained silent about their experiences for a long time. Those affected fear that society will despise them for what they have experienced – and, in fact, many families do not want to know about it. In contrast to many war veterans, survivors of sexualized violence often do not want their suffering to be known.

Despite the social stigma, a group of women's rights organisations, through persistent and co-ordinated advocacy work, succeeded in getting women who were raped during the war in Kosovo recognised as civilian war victims since 2018 – they are now entitled to a war pension.

The local NGO Medica Gjakova, founded in 2011, supports those affected on a medical, psychosocial, legal and economic level. At the same time, it is committed to the rights of survivors. It works closely with the Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims (KRCT), which uses holistic approaches to empower survivors of torture, war-trauma and sexualized violence. The German NGO medica mondiale supports them in this endeavour.

The positive collaboration with President Atifete Jahjaga, who was elected in 2011, was undoubtedly decisive for the advocacy work's success. In 2014, she founded a National Council for Survivors of Sexualised Violence in War and appointed women from the two Kosovar NGOs as experts. These organisations had already addressed many state actors who, however, had previously considered the topic to be of little relevance. It was helpful



The nationwide campaign „Be my voice“ in Kosovo in 2018 was launched for the start of the pension scheme. © KRCT



that, in Croatia as well as in Bosnia and Herzegovina, there were already compensation arrangements for survivors of sexualised violence in war.

In 2014, the Kosovar parliament passed a corresponding law, but the amount of compensation was not yet determined. It is a difficult subject because the budget for war survivors is very limited and originally only aimed at the needs of war veterans. And would the women concerned even apply for the money or would they forego it for fear of stigmatisation and being traumatised again? In 2015, Jahjaga and the NGO staff discussed how the application process could be designed in such a way that the identity of the women would be protected and a return to past trauma would be avoided.

In 2017, the women's organisations organised a conference for high-ranking representatives from politics and society, at which the experiences with compensation mechanisms in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina were discussed in order to take them into account in the structuring of pensions in Kosovo. For this initiative's introduction in 2018, Medica Gjakova and KRCT started a nationwide campaign in co-operation with other Kosovar NGOs to provide information about the monthly pension payment of 230 Euros. In doing so, they also wanted to break the silence on the subject.

Broad participation at the start of the "Be my voice" campaign © KCRT



“Our goal is to bring women back to the centre of society and to give them back their dignity,” said Mirlinda Sada, Director of Medica Gjakova and Feride Rushiti, Director of KRCT, explaining the political significance of war victims’ pensions.



Many supporters were joining the launch of the campaign.  
© Barbara Horstmann/medica mondiale

1,396 women had submitted applications by February 2021, 904 of which were approved. Women living abroad are also entitled to the money.

The BMZ has been funding the advocacy work of Medica Gjakova and KRCT since 2013 in several project phases. medica mondiale accompanies the process with its specialist knowledge in STA – stress- and trauma-sensitive approach\* as well as in organisational development, management consulting and feminist leadership. The women from Germany and Kosovo regularly phone and e-mail each other and met in person during project visits. The experts from Kosovo also came to Germany for specialist meetings and conferences several times. Employees in German ministries learned more about what sexualised violence at war means for those affected and how it should be dealt with during reconciliation work. They were able to take this into account when implementing the strategy of the German federal government on dealing with the past and with reconciliation.

*This article was created with the support of medica mondiale.*

# EVERYONE AT ONE TABLE

**Liberia** Dialogue methods aim to secure land rights for local communities

Welthungerhilfe and Rights & Rice Foundation (Liberia), as well as other partners in Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone and Ethiopia



Food security is the most important goal of Welthungerhilfe – one of its central concerns is therefore to enforce land rights for marginalised people in the Global South. Traditional advocacy toolkits include setting up legal counselling centres and helping rural communities acquire formal land titles. The Welthungerhilfe and its local partners also observe, document and publish cases of so-called land grabbing in selected countries. However, the problems and interests are usually so complex they looked for an expanded approach a few years ago.

“Multi-actor partnerships were new to all of us back then,” reports Constanze von Oppeln, who co-ordinates the “Land for Life” project. In multi-actor partnerships, it is important to get supposed opponents and political decision-makers on board – without violating one’s own values. Knowing the perspective and priorities of others opens up the opportunity for new ways forward. This gave rise to the idea of introducing change through collective dialogue processes. To do this, all involved employees of Welthungerhilfe and its partner organisations first had to be trained in this method. It is based on transparency and a systematic exchange of information, as well as participatory workshops and the division of tasks in the meantime.

The “Dialogic Change Model”, which was developed by the Collective Leadership Institute in Potsdam, divides such a dialogic change process into four phases. First of all, it is a matter of gaining an understanding of the interests and perspectives of all stakeholders and of understanding the context in which they operate. For this purpose, a diverse core group of committed people who want to achieve change is formed.

## Further reading

- CorA-Netzwerk/VENRO (2020), ➤ Anforderungen an wirkungsvolle Multi-Stakeholder-Initiativen zur Stärkung unternehmerischer Sorgfaltspflichten
- Collective Leadership Institute, ➤ Introduction to the Dialogic Change Model



In phase two, this core group develops a concrete vision and gives itself a structure. “It controls the process, makes decisions and uses the potential of its members to bring about changes in phase three,” summarises von Oppeln. As they work and achieve something together, the role of those involved changes in the course of the process. Welthungerhilfe is a process companion, and the local partner organisation the engine of the multi-actor structure. In the last phase, this structure is stabilised and consolidated.

At its biennial strategy meeting, the Welthungerhilfe selected four African countries in which land rights issues are of great interest and which already had well-established partner structures: Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Ethiopia. The ini-

tiative co-financed by the BMZ is scheduled for at least seven years in order to enable fundamental changes and establish sustainable structures.

In each of the four countries, partner organisations are now trying to involve representatives from authorities, companies and scientific organisations alongside other NGOs and rural populations. “The private sector has not seen us as friends before,” says James Yarsiah, Director of the Rights & Rice Foundation (RRF) in Liberia. His organisation helped develop a new land law. There was always tension with the government because the politicians wanted quick results, but civil society was pushing for the rights of local communities to be strengthened.

Participants at a workshop in Ethiopia © Welthungerhilfe





## Land for Life Theory of Change

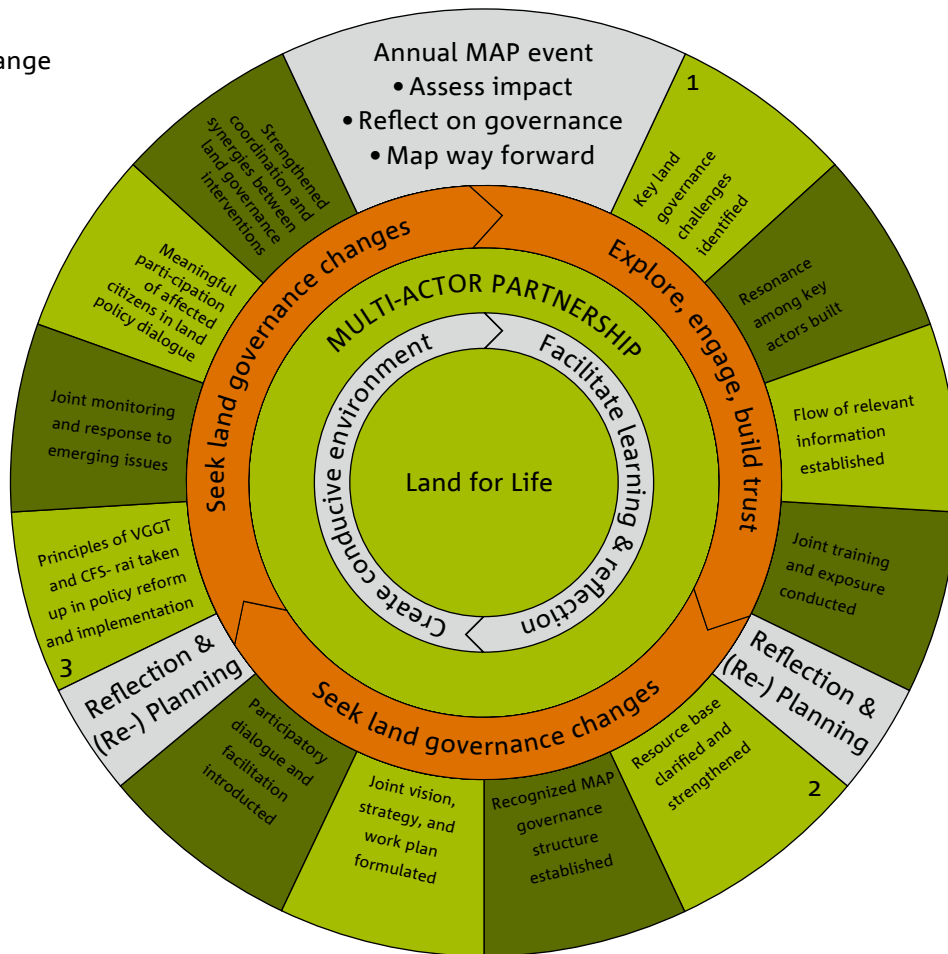


Figure 5: Changes take time – The Theory of Change of the “Land for Life” project,  
Source: Welthungerhilfe

In Liberia, the aim of the “Land for Life” initiative is to accompany and monitor the implementation of the progressive new land law. This stipulates that the resident population must agree to land purchases. “The representatives of the private sector kept accusing us of wanting to prevent any investment – and we replied that we were quite open to doing so if the investments also benefited the local population,” explains Yarsiah.

Yarsiah is convinced that the dialogical approach pursued by the “Land for Life” initiative is much more effective than the previous form of communication. It is not about accusing one another, but about respecting and listening to one another. “And we don’t want to focus on the problems; we want to look for solutions together.”

The context in the different countries of the “Land for Life” initiative is very different. “A substantial challenge is always to integrate local levels well,” reports von Oppeln. In order for the experience and information of the rural population to flow into the process, suitable instruments must be found to overcome linguistic and cultural hurdles. One cannot rule out the fact that some people cannot read and write. In Sierra Leone, for example, not



The team of the „Land for Life” project in Liberia © Welthungerhilfe

only traditional authorities are involved, but women and young people are also consulted in special workshops. The aim is always for concerns and perspectives from the grassroots to be transported as if by a lift to higher levels, where they are incorporated into political processes and decisions.

The Welthungerhilfe sees itself as the backbone of the activities. Co-ordinator von Oppeln is in close contact with partner organisations, but remains in the background during the process itself and provides support as required – for example, in networking with international organisations. By the end of the project at the latest, a small secretariat should be set up in each partner country to continue the multi-actor processes.

One challenge is that using such an approach for change takes time. Local actors must first be won over to the process. In addition, successes are difficult to measure. However, an external evaluation has shown that trust and co-operation are growing. Von Oppeln gives an example: “In the

past, when the World Bank supported governments in the Global South in land reform processes, civil society was often not as involved as it should have been in order to ensure democratic control”. In 2019, this threatened Burkina Faso as well. Those involved in the “Land for Life” initiative from ministries and administrations informed platform partners within civil society. They made the reform project public in Burkina Faso and organised a transparent exchange of information, while the Welthungerhilfe supported their efforts at the international level. Nothing has been decided yet, but a backroom deal has definitely been avoided.

*This article was based on interviews with James Yarsiah from the Rights & Rice Foundation and Constanze von Oppeln from Welthungerhilfe.*

# THAW AND ICE AGES

**Nicaragua** The LGBTI movement is fighting for equality under difficult conditions

**Lesben- und Schwulenverband (LSVD)  
and partner organisations**



“We are fighting against the dictatorship, the pandemic, depression and anxiety – and every day it gets more difficult,” says LSJI, an activist for LGBTI rights, regarding the situation of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender and intersex people in Nicaragua in the summer of 2020 – but they still do not sound desperate. It is currently impossible to make progress on a political level in the country: “President Daniel Ortega does not respect the law, and human rights are regularly and systematically violated.” However, according to LSJI’s perception, the population has decided to strive for a transformation peacefully – and Ortega’s legitimacy is dwindling more and more.

LSJI focuses on a long-term change in awareness of the population towards respect and human rights for all. After all, the LGBTI movement in Nicaragua has succeeded in establishing lively contacts with student, educational and women’s and health groups in Nicaragua and has also networked with local institutions, attracting some international attention. There were also several meetings with human rights groups: “They didn’t even have us on their radar before”. The aim is both an end to everyday discrimination and the enforcement of state-certified rights for everyone, regardless of who someone loves or what gender they belong to. LSJI knows this is going to be a long road. “A

wrong word in the wrong context can easily lead to rejection by large groups.” Nonetheless: Under no circumstances does he want to see himself and his group in a passive victim role.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex people have a hard time in patriarchal societal structures. However, homosexuality was rarely criminalised in Latin America – unlike in Nicaragua, where the Conservative President Violeta Chamorro enacted a criminal law against it in 1992. Even before the law was abolished in 2008, those affected had come together under the umbrella of a human rights and environmental network. Klaus Jetz, who was active in Nicaragua Solidarity as a young person, now works for the Lesbian and Gay Association in Germany (Lesben- und Schwulenverband/LSVD); he met one of the participants at an international event. Since then, the LSVD and the Hirschfeld Eddy Foundation (HES) have been accompanying the Nicaraguan LGBTI movement.

Thanks to extensive advocacy work Ortega abolished the criminalisation of homosexuality in Nicaragua in 2008. The LSVD informed the Bundestag human rights committee and motivated Gregor Gysi from the Left Party to contact Ortega,



whom he knows personally from former times. However, this success left a bitter taste: In return, Ortega tightened the already restrictive abortion law. For the LGBTI movement in Nicaragua, it is very evident that they are working together with the women's movement towards the impunity of abortion.

In many Latin American countries, the 2010s were a good time for the LGBTI movement. "The number of initiatives has exploded; countries like Argentina and Mexico have dozens of non-governmental organisations," summarises Jetz. Since then, 18 groups from different parts of Nicaragua have been meeting regularly. Under the name Mesa Nacional LGBTI, they discuss strategies to improve everyday acceptance and achieve fair media coverage. The network, in which LSJI is one of three full-time employees, is also involved here. With

the help of the HES and financial support from the Federal Foreign Office, three projects were able to be carried out, all of which aimed to create more awareness on the topic of human rights and sexual diversity. Well-known straight musicians went public with a song, and a video was produced to popularise the human right to live with one's own sexual identity. In a process lasting several months, the groups also created a national agenda on the topic and discussed it with representatives from government and civil society. The media response was positive.

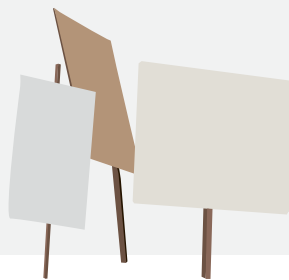
Conference of LGBTI-activists in Costa Rica © Klaus Jetz/LSVD





The atmosphere began to change, and LGBTI people increasingly dared to go out in public. Yet a major setback came in the spring of 2018. There were demonstrations across the country over planned pension cuts while social security contributions were increased. The police attacked protesters with live ammunition, and people from the LGBTI movement were arrested. Today, activists are very cautious again. They make sure that their cell phones do not reveal too much when they are checked. Many even fled abroad.

*“We have managed to gain international recognition – and that encourages support and pressure from outside.”*



The reason LSJI still sees hope lies in theory: Every transformation is preceded by a phase of chaos – and this is currently taking place in Nicaragua. However, there is no hope that Ortega will be voted out of office in 2021. None of the participating parties aggressively takes the position of “human rights for all” – probably also out of fear of alienating voters. Yet, LSJI hopes for a procession of social change as soon as the political situation relaxes. At the moment, however, it is important to hide those at risk or to bring them into exile. In addition,

the group and its fellow campaigners try to document human rights violations as well as possible in order to build up international pressure and later have something in hand to use against the perpetrators.

“We agree on the current strategies here on our own because the situation often changes so quickly,” explains LSJI. Nevertheless, Klaus Jetz and the LSVD are still important contacts. What the activists in Nicaragua want are training and further education in order to plan for the “time afterwards” and to create good conditions for later court proceedings. At the moment, people from the area around the network are scattered; many have lost or destroyed their papers while fleeing. “We are not prepared for them all to come back. They need orientation – and jobs,” says LSJI.

The activists’ work is also recognised internationally. In 2018, at the invitation of the HES, an activist was able to meet German MPs and speak at several universities. He also appeared before the Human Rights Council in Geneva. “We have managed to gain international recognition – and that encourages support and pressure from outside,” is LSJI’s interim assessment.

*This article was based on an interview with Klaus Jetz from the Lesben- und Schwulenverband Deutschland (LSVD) and LSJI, an activist from Nicaragua who wants to remain anonymous.*

# A CROSS-BORDER NETWORK

**Senegal** Rural population, science and politics develop strategies for food security

**ENDA Pronat and Weltfriedensdienst**



The Senegalese organisation ENDA Pronat has succeeded in influencing government policy in their country: After his re-election in 2019, President Macky Sall declared the agro-ecological turnaround to be one of the four central concerns of his term of office. Over decades of work, the NGO had established intense connections between local communities and academics and, at the same time, engages extensively in advocacy – from protests to processes and negotiations to intense co-operation with government agencies. A variety of networks and collaborations have emerged along the way, which, today, range from the village level to the world stage. ENDA Pronat also has a share in the fact that the World Food Organisation FAO now regards agro-ecology as a central instrument for food security.

The networks use a variety of methods and have a holistic approach. “Sociologists, lawyers, agricultural experts and farmers – they all work closely together with us,” says the Director of the organisation, Mariam Sow. The primary goal of ENDA Pronat is to make the populations of the Global South food-independent. There is no master plan for this – but agro-ecology serves as a good start. In this way, the NGO can react flexibly to the current situation and has continuously expanded its leeway.

In the 1970s, Senegal’s government backed the “Green Revolution” and encouraged peanut exports to finance urban development. The farmers were urged to use high-yield seeds; there were also subsidised fertilizers and pesticides that came in paired packages. The social consequences were fatal: Many family businesses got into debt and started a downward spiral. The ecological damage caused by monocultures and agrochemicals has also become more and more visible. The civil society initiative Pronat was founded in 1982 to educate the rural population about the consequences of the green revolution and to develop alternatives with them – and found a strong partner within the ENDA initiative founded by researchers.

ENDA Pronat has around 45 employees in Senegal. With studies, for example, on the consequences of the use of pesticides, the scientific arm of the organisation provides facts. At the same time, local researchers conduct action research together with the rural population – on sustainable cultivation

methods, as well as municipal resource protection or land law. The farmers are directly involved in the research, and they contribute their traditional knowledge and decide how the results are used. The main goal is to strengthen the ability of the rural population to experiment, to reflect together on the results and, in the process, to explore problems of governance and the causes of poverty. Therefore, the action following the research does not necessarily end in the village – it also leads to national politics.

One example is land law. By law, land in Senegal belongs to those who farm on it. The “Loi de Domaine National” from 1964 declares the land a national domain – therefore it can neither be sold nor leased. Rather, the municipalities should assign the areas to local residents for a limited period of time. In many cases, however, there are no corresponding contracts.

“This is also due to the fact that families want to claim the usage permit as a collective and do not want to transfer it to one person; for this reason, many have completely waived the application for such documents,” reports Jörg John from Weltfriedensdienst. In contrast, interested parties from abroad don’t only bring large sums of money with them, but lawyers who legally secure the usage permits as land titles, too. You can’t do anything about it later, explains John, who lived in Senegal for many years. By the end of 2012, 16 percent of the arable land in Senegal had come into foreign ownership. Often, local community representatives

A young woman in the maize field in the Region Kedougou © ENDA Pronat





were put under pressure; while elsewhere, religious leaders or local administrators acted out of self-interest, says John.



Farmers in the municipality of Yéne protest against land grabbing and resettlement.  
© ENDA Pronat

ENDA Pronat has already won three lawsuits, one of them before the Supreme Court. The contract with a Moroccan company that had obtained 11,000 hectares of fertile land with the help of a presidential decree was reversed. The legal opinion of a Senegalese professor, who was financially supported by Weltfriedensdienst, made a decisive contribution to this.

As important as such precedents are, the causes of land grabbing on a small and large scale lie in land law and its practical implementation. Together with many other actors, ENDA Pronat therefore worked out precise proposals for a land law reform. The local population is always consulted. Many suggestions were included in an amendment to the law by the Land Law Commission. The Pres-

ident and parliament have put the law on hold for the time being, but the people have been mobilised by the trials. Platforms against land grabbing have been set up in many places. As soon as someone wants to buy land, the farmers inform the networks and organise protest marches with the slogan “Hands off our earth”.

Besides the movement for a fair land law, ENDA Pronat also started an initiative for a nationwide agro-ecological transformation. A multi-stakeholder partnership organised citizen forums, and their proposals eventually condensed into a policy recommendation. The President now has a foundation for the proclaimed agro-ecological turnaround. The FAO, which has now selected Senegal as a pilot country for the development of an agro-ecological approach, is providing support. “We want the state to regard our alliance as an equal co-operation partner and ally in the long term,” says Sow, naming her goal. She is also thinking about the next steps at the international level: The World Water Forum will meet in Dakar in March 2022. The NGO wants to address water, soil and biodiversity as key resources of agriculture there and use the big platform provided for further proposals.

*This article was based on interviews with Mariam Sow from ENDA Pronat as well as Jörg John and Hans Jörg Friedrich from Weltfriedensdienst.*



# PENSIONS FOR EVERYONE

**Tanzania** Senior citizens get the freedom to get involved

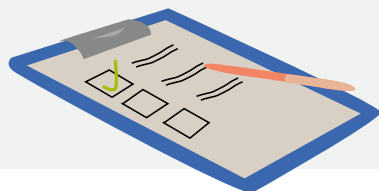
HelpAge International and Kwa Wazee



While many NGOs take care of the interests of children, the concerns of the elderly receive little attention. One exception is the international HelpAge network, which advocates for nationwide pension systems in East African countries. This was successful in 2016 in Zanzibar, a semi-autonomous state of Tanzania. HelpAge had previously paid social pensions to selected elderly people and supported the formation of self-help and savings groups. This work was financed by donations from Europe. Local organisations then developed structures at district, provincial and state levels and were ultimately able to achieve a general regulation for the payment of pensions. Other countries such as Uganda and Malawi are now interested in the experience gained.

In Tanzania, the introduction of general pensions is still pending, even though the government has announced them several times since 2010. NGOs are working hard to ensure that they finally implement this promise. After all, local projects show that even low social pensions can have an enormous effect: In two locations, HelpAge supports the NGO Kwa Wazee (Swahili: “for the elderly”), which pays senior citizens the equivalent

*»Liberation from existential worries not only enables the elderly to eat better and care for their grandchildren better. It also frees up strength within them.«*



The payment of pensions for elderly people improves their living conditions. © HelpAge



In OPAs (Older People Associations) in Tanzania, older people come together and organise joint activities. © HelpAge

of 7 euros a month. There is additional money for grandchildren, because many grandmothers are forced to raise the children of their sons and daughters who have died of HIV/AIDS. Liberation from existential worries not only enables the elderly to eat better and care for their grandchildren better. It also frees up strength within them: They organise themselves in self-help

groups for income improvement, as well as health and legal protection; they also work together for practical improvements. This includes the distribution of ID cards that give older people free access to medical services. In addition, the district government has – for the first time – reserved a larger amount of the budget explicitly for the interests of this age group. The Minister of Social Affairs also knows of the project and is full of praise for it.

*This article was created with the support of HelpAge.*

# EMPOWERMENT FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES

**Worldwide** People know their rights and enforce them

**World Vision**



Paper doesn't blush. Many laws, as well as national and international regulations, promise the protection of human rights, access to education for all, adequate social security and health care. The reality is often completely different – and in many countries and regions, people often do not know what rights they have and what they are officially entitled to. This is where World Vision's "Citizen Voice and Action" (CVA) approach comes in. The method with which local groups and communities can recognise and enforce their rights, has been used several hundred times worldwide.

"We found that there is a lot of advocacy work for vulnerable groups at the international and national level, but not at the local level. Covering this last mile, however, education, health care and much more can be improved concretely," explains Stefan Sengstmann from the World Vision programme department. That's why, in 2005, the aid organisation established local political work as a third pillar alongside emergency aid and long-term projects.

The CVA method consists of three phases: First, local capacities are built; second, participants identify the most important need for change and potential solutions; and third, these are implemented at the political level. First of all, trainers of World Vision, who speak the local language and are familiar with the respective culture, share

information and basic legal knowledge: What is everyone entitled to? What human and civil rights does each individual have – and how can they claim these rights?



CVA workshops are designed to be participatory. © World Vision

"The approach and the training courses require good planning and a great deal of sensitivity, because it is about gaining people's trust," explains



Fiona Uellendahl, Policy Advisor at World Vision Germany. Depending on needs and assessments, the meetings and training sessions take place together or in separate groups of women, men, adolescents and children. There are easily understandable pictograms for the discussions, which also enable those who cannot or only poorly read and write to participate. The aim is for everyone to feel confident enough to contribute their point of view.

Then, the groups collect what is lacking in their community and analyse the needs they see. Is there a lack of teachers or health workers? Are there not enough midwives on site? Are there no dams that protect the fields from flooding? Is the improvement of water quality and sanitary facilities at the top of the list because many children in the village

are constantly suffering from diarrhoea? Once the local community has come to an agreement on the most pressing problems, it will be determined which national programmes exist, what minimum standard they are entitled to and what the reality is. There is often a wide gap between demands and reality. Sometimes there are no state laws at all for the satisfaction of basic needs. In this case, the community discusses what these rules should ideally look like. The participants also work together to find out which networks already exist on the topic and who would have to be involved in order to make progress.

In the third phase, well-prepared community members meet with local or regional political decision-makers and representatives from institutions and government organisations to agree on an action plan with clear goals. Intermediate steps and responsibilities are also determined at these meet-

As a result of the CVA process, a village community in northern India requested the government to finance a midwife – with success: Wilfreda (left) now works in the village. © World Vision





ings. The meetings are not so much about putting political decision-makers under pressure, but rather about involving and engaging them. “Those with positions of political responsibility often see the problems themselves and can use the initiatives to better assert themselves at the district level,” said Uellendahl.

If the problems cannot be resolved locally, those involved identify system errors. They try to network with others and start political initiatives. “All of our methods are open source. Once a community has learned about them, we think it’s wonderful when they are passed on to others,” says Uellendahl. Through CVA, local communities who have been marginalised have already been directly involved in legislative processes. In Uganda, for example, good documentation methods and a strong advocacy network have led the government to fund 8,000 additional health workers.

“The whole thing is a constant learning process. In the beginning, for example, the linking of local and national structures did not work so well, but now it works wonderfully,” reports Sengstmann. “Above all, it is important that the local population feels safe in the processes, that there is an open atmosphere and that there is feedback from results achieved at higher political levels.”

World Vision has offices around the world with local staff who operate independently. As a result, the NGO enjoys a high level of credibility among the local population and, generally, its work is not perceived as an intervention from abroad, reports Sengstmann.



World Vision’s regional development programmes typically run for 12 to 13 years; by then, long-term sustainable structures should have emerged. World Vision is primarily financed by donations and public funds, including from the BMZ and the European Union. The office in Germany focuses on the areas of fundraising and quality assurance in the implementation of the projects and brings the issues of the local people into German and international politics.

*This article was created based on interviews with Fiona Uellendahl and Stefan Sengstmann from World Vision Germany.*



# ANNEX



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∟ Weltfriedensdienst

**Constanze von Oppeln**, ∟ Welthungerhilfe

**Fiona Uellendahl & Stefan Sengstmann**,  
∟ World Vision

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## VENRO

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# VENRO MEMBERS

## A

@fire Internationaler Katastrophenschutz  
Deutschland e.V.  
action medeor  
ADRA Deutschland  
AGIAMONDO  
Aktion Canchanabury  
Aktion gegen den Hunger gGmbH\*  
AMICA e.V.  
ANDHERI-HILFE e.V.  
Apotheker helfen e.V.  
Apotheker ohne Grenzen e.V.  
Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund Deutschland  
Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Eine-Welt-Landesnetzwerke  
in Deutschland (agl)  
Arbeitsgemeinschaft Entwicklungsethnologie  
arche noVa  
Ärzte der Welt  
ASW – Aktionsgemeinschaft Solidarische Welt  
AT-Verband  
AWO International

## B

Behinderung und Entwicklungszusammenarbeit (bezev)  
BONO-Direkthilfe  
BORDA e.V.  
Brot für die Welt – Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst  
Bund der Deutschen Katholischen Jugend (BDKJ)  
Bundesvereinigung Lebenshilfe

## C

CARE Deutschland e.V.  
Caritas International  
CHANGE e.V.  
ChildFund Deutschland  
Christliche Initiative Romero  
CBM Christoffel-Blindenmission  
Christian Blind Mission e.V.

## D

Dachverband Entwicklungspolitik  
Baden-Württemberg (DEAB)  
Das Hunger Projekt  
DED-Freundeskreis  
Deutsche Entwicklungshilfe für soziales Wohnungs-  
und Siedlungswesen (DESWOS)  
Deutsche Kommission Justitia et Pax  
Deutsche Lepra- und Tuberkulosehilfe (DAHW)  
Deutsche Stiftung Weltbevölkerung (DSW)  
Deutscher Paritätischer Wohlfahrtsverband  
Deutsch-Syrischer Verein e.V. (DSV)  
DGB-Bildungswerk BUND – Nord-Süd-Netz  
Difäm – Deutsches Institut für Ärztliche Mission  
Don Bosco Mondo  
DVV International – Institut für Internationale  
Zusammenarbeit des Deutschen  
Volkshochschul-Verbandes

## E

Eine Welt Netz NRW  
EIRENE – Internationaler Christlicher Friedensdienst  
EPIZ – Zentrum für Globales Lernen in Berlin  
Erlassjahr.de – Entwicklung braucht Entschuldung  
Evangelische Akademien in Deutschland (EAD)

## F

Fairtrade Deutschland e.V. (früher: Transfair)  
Fairventures Worldwide  
FIAN Deutschland  
Forum Fairer Handel  
FUTURO SÍ

## G

gemeinnützige energypedia UG  
Gemeinschaft Sant'Egidio  
German Doctors  
German Toilet Organisation  
Germanwatch  
GLS Zukunftsstiftung Entwicklung



## H

Habitat for Humanity Deutschland  
Handicap International  
Help – Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe  
HelpAge Deutschland  
Hilfe für Afrika e.V.  
Hoffnungszeichen / Sign of Hope  
humedica

## I

Indienhilfe  
INKOTA-netzwerk  
Internationaler Bund (IB)  
Internationaler Hilfsfonds  
International Justice Mission Deutschland  
Internationaler Ländlicher Entwicklungsdienst (ILD)  
Internationaler Verband Westfälischer Kinderdörfer  
Islamic Relief Deutschland

## J

JAM Deutschland  
Johanniter-Auslandshilfe

## K

KAIROS Europa  
Karl Kübel Stiftung für Kind und Familie  
KATE – Kontaktstelle für Umwelt und Entwicklung  
Kinderhilfswerk Stiftung Global-Care  
Kindernothilfe  
Kinderrechte Afrika  
KOLPING International Cooperation e.V.

## L

Lateinamerika-Zentrum  
Lesben- und Schwulenverband (LSVD)  
Lichtbrücke  
Light for the World

## M

Malteser International  
Marie-Schlei-Verein  
materra – Stiftung Frau und Gesundheit  
medica mondiale  
medico international

MISEREOR

Mission East Deutschland e.V.  
Missionsärztliches Institut Würzburg

## N

NETZ Partnerschaft für Entwicklung und  
Gerechtigkeit e.V.  
Neuapostolische Kirche-karitativ e.V.  
nph Kinderhilfe Lateinamerika e.V.

## O

OIKOS EINE WELT e. V.  
Ökumenische Initiative Eine Welt e.V.  
Opportunity International Deutschland  
Ora International Deutschland  
OroVerde – Die Tropenwaldstiftung  
Oxfam Deutschland

## P

Partnership for Transparency Fund e.V. (PTF Europe)\*  
Plan International Deutschland

## R

Rhein-Donau-Stiftung

## S

Samhathi – Hilfe für Indien  
Save the Children Deutschland  
Senegalhilfe-Verein  
Senior Experten Service (SES)  
Society for International Development Chapter  
Bonn (SID)  
SODI – Solidaritätsdienst International  
SOS-Kinderdörfer weltweit  
SOS Humanity\*  
Stiftung Childaid Network  
Stiftung der Deutschen Lions  
Stiftung Entwicklung und Frieden (SEF)  
Stiftung Kinderzukunft  
Stiftung Nord-Süd-Brücken  
Street Child Deutschland e.V.\*  
SÜDWIND – Institut für Ökonomie und Ökumene  
Susila Dharma – Soziale Dienste



## T

Tearfund Deutschland e.V.  
Terra Tech Förderprojekte  
TERRE DES FEMMES  
terre des hommes Deutschland  
Tierärzte ohne Grenzen (ToG)

## V

Verband Entwicklungspolitik Niedersachsen (VEN)  
Verbund Entwicklungspolitischer Nichtregierungs-  
organisationen Brandenburgs (VENROB)  
Verein entwicklungspolitischer Austausch-  
organisationen e.V. (ventao)

## W

W. P. Schmitz-Stiftung  
WEED – Weltwirtschaft, Ökologie & Entwicklung  
Weltfriedensdienst  
Weltgebetstag der Frauen – Deutsches Komitee  
Welthaus Bielefeld  
Welthungerhilfe  
Weltladen-Dachverband  
Weltnotwerk der KAB Deutschlands  
Werkhof Darmstadt  
Werkstatt Ökonomie  
World University Service  
World Vision Deutschland

## Z

ZOA Deutschland gGmbH

\* Guest member

VENRO currently has 144 members. (As of January 2022)



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**VENRO** is the umbrella organisation of development and humanitarian non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Germany. The association was founded in 1995 and consists of around 140 organisations. Their backgrounds lie in independent and church-related development co-operation, humanitarian aid as well as development education, public relations and advocacy.

VENRO's central goal is to construct a just globalisation, with a special emphasis on eradicating global inequality and poverty. The organisation is committed to implementing human rights and conserving natural resources.

#### **VENRO**

- represents the interests of development and humanitarian aid NGOs vis-à-vis the government
- strengthens the role of NGOs and civil society in development co-operation and humanitarian aid
- sharpens public awareness of development co-operation, humanitarian issues and sustainable development

VENRO – Association of German Development and Humanitarian Aid NGOs

[www.venro.org](http://www.venro.org)