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HOW TO TURN GOOD INTENTIONS INTO EFFECTIVE PROJECTS

Handbook for the implementation of the VENRO guidelines for development projects and programmes

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

How can good intentions be turned into effective projects? This is the question that the ↘ VENRO guidelines for development projects and programmes, adopted at the 2018 general assembly, seek to answer. These eight guidelines outline the shared quality standards of the VENRO member organisations, which have committed themselves to aligning their projects and programmes in the Global South accordingly.

These guidelines are based on the Istanbul Principles, which were adopted in 2010 by civil society organisations active in the field of international development. VENRO believes that these eight principles serve as key points of reference for successful civil society development projects. Consequently, the core components of these principles – namely the focus on human rights, gender equality, inclusive participation, empowerment, environmental sustainability, transparency, partnership, solidarity as well as knowledge management and lasting impact – are also reflected in the VENRO guidelines.

The Istanbul Principles are aimed, in equal measure, at non-governmental organisations (NGOs) from the Global South and the Global North. The VENRO guidelines were developed by VENRO member organisations and thus refer to German NGOs, but partner organisations from the Global South may also find them useful.

The purpose of this handbook is to support NGOs in their efforts to align their work with the VENRO guidelines. It addresses issues such as project design and partner dialogue as well as the culture and attitude within each organisation. The handbook thus provides an impetus for reflection at various levels and complements existing project management instruments rather than replacing them. The references and suggestions always refer to both the German organisation and its Southern partner, unless explicitly stated otherwise.

This handbook is structured around the eight guidelines mentioned above. Each chapter provides answers to the following three questions: (1) What does the guideline mean and why is it relevant for project work? (2) How can the guideline be implemented in practice? (3) How can we tell if we are on the right track? Questions aimed at self-assessment provide an opportunity for NGOs to take a critical and constructive look at their own work. These questions are not meant to be a static checklist, but rather to offer examples of the kinds of questions organisations should ask themselves when implementing the guidelines. Notes on practical examples and further guidance can be found in the annexes.

The guidelines and the handbook primarily refer to development projects and programmes in the Global South. Various quality alliances exist in the field of humanitarian aid, which also deal with

guidelines and quality standards for humanitarian aid programmes. Since 2014, many civil society organisations have committed themselves to comply with the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS). Just like the Istanbul Principles, the Core Humanitarian Standard aims above all to increase aid effectiveness. In some chapters of this handbook, we highlight CHS commitments that point the way forward for development co-operation.

In addition to this publication, we also support NGOs in implementing the guidelines through supplementary documentation, a broad range of training courses and an exchange of best practice. Take a look at what we have to offer at ↘ www.venro.org/servicebereich/uebersicht/.

GUIDELINE 1
HUMAN RIGHTS AND
SOCIAL JUSTICE

NGO development projects are effective if they develop strategies, activities and practices that promote individual and collective human rights as well as social justice and take human rights principles into account in their implementation.

What does this guideline mean?

The VENRO member organisations systematically strive to align their projects and programmes with human rights principles. The aim of this human rights-based approach is to remove obstacles to the realisation of human rights, to create equal life opportunities for all people and to promote the fair distribution of resources.

Development co-operation can have a lasting effect if it not only combats the effects of poverty but also eliminates its structural causes such as injustice, discrimination and exclusion. In order to initiate the necessary development processes and promote social justice, it is essential that NGOs respect, protect and guarantee human rights in the course of their work.

Human rights include the right to liberty, equality and participation, which at their core are universal, inalienable and indivisible:

1. "Universal" means that human rights apply equally to everyone, anytime and anywhere.

2. "Inalienable" means that human rights apply equally to all, and that they cannot be ceded, restricted or withdrawn by others.

3. "Indivisible" means that each human right is of equal value, so that social rights cannot be given priority over civil rights, for example.

All human rights are governed by overriding human rights principles. These principles are of particular relevance for human rights-based projects and programmes because they describe both the way in which human rights should be implemented and the goals that their implementation is meant to achieve.[1]

These human rights principles include the principles of **participation and empowerment,** namely that it must be possible for everyone to assert their rights and to play a part in shaping all areas of public life. Similarly, the principles of **non-discrimination and equal opportunities** also apply to human rights, meaning that everyone, regardless of origin, age, gender, social status, mental or physical health, ethnic or religious affiliation, sexual orientation or gender identity, has the right to gain access to their rights. The principles of **transparency and accountability** mean, on the one hand, that states must transparently explain what they are doing to protect human rights and, on the other, that people are entitled to compensation and redress if their rights are violated.[2]

This human rights approach is based on the conviction that rights are equally enjoyed by all people while states have a duty to uphold them. In other words, human rights are binding for states, but also for civil society and economic actors. Given their work as service providers, employers or lobbyists, both types of non-state actors influence the living situation of local groups and thus also have obligations towards them.

The benchmark for human rights-based projects and programmes are the civil, economic, social and cultural rights of all people, as enshrined in the UN Human Rights Charter and the associated declarations and conventions. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as human rights conventions at regional level are also part of the international human rights system.

How can this guideline be implemented?

The human rights approach is more than a simple instrument or a method of project- and programme work. In fact, it has a direct impact on the

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1   See Deutsches Institut für Menschenrechte (DIMR) 2014

2   See Deutsches Institut für Menschenrechte (DIMR) 2014

strategies, priorities and attitudes of NGOs and their staff: The people who take part in their projects should not be treated as recipients of charity, but as equal partners.

Human rights-based work focuses both on empowerment measures and on measures that help governments to fulfil their duty to uphold human rights.

The following aspects are crucial for human rights-based projects and programmes:

1. NGOs should ensure the participation of all individuals who have a direct or indirect interest in a project at all stages of the project work. This group of people includes, in particular, the project participants and the population groups whose living situation the project aims to improve indirectly. A prerequisite for their consistent and inclusive participation is transparent communication and accountability. (See guideline 5 "Transparency, accountability and integrity").

2. Prior to the start of the project, NGOs should conduct a comprehensive, participatory analysis of the human rights situation in the partner country and in the immediate project environment. In the event of human rights violations, it needs to be clarified 1) which human rights are being violated and in what way, 2) which groups of people are affected, and 3) who is responsible for these human rights violations. Such an analysis of the human rights situation should provide information about the people whose rights are affected in the respective setting and to what extent they are able to assert their rights themselves, or in what way they are prevented from doing so. Based on the results of this analysis, NGOs can devise appropriate measures for effective empowerment. Secondly, it also makes sense to identify the people who have a duty to uphold human rights in the

respective setting and, in the case of human rights violations, to analyse why they failed to comply with this duty.

3. According to the empowerment principle, NGOs should, in particular, empower those groups of people whose human rights are disproportionately affected or violated and enable them to assert their rights autonomously. (See guideline 3 "Empowerment and inclusive participation"). This includes people living with disabilities, girls and women, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people, illiterate people, people in precarious employment, religious and ethnic minorities and refugees, but also individuals, including human rights activists, who are suffering from political persecution or whose lives are threatened.

4. In addition, NGOs should use advocacy and lobbying to make government institutions accountable for upholding human rights. In order to take action against specific human rights violations, it may also be beneficial to work in co-operation with human rights lawyers.

5. Besides advocacy work, another important aspect is capacity building among actors whose duty it is to uphold human rights. This means informing actors such as government or municipal representatives about measures that they can take to uphold human rights.

6. In addition, it may also be useful to promote public social services, for example in the fields of health and education. Social security systems strengthen the social, economic and political participation of all population groups and improve their access to different resources.

How can we tell if we are on the right track?

Answering the following key questions may be helpful in order to reflect on the extent to which an organisation's projects and programme work is aligned with the "Human rights and social justice" guideline:

→ To what extent are our projects and programmes based on participatory analyses of the human rights situation on the ground? Have we done enough to identify any impairments to/violations of human rights and their specific causes in the project environment, as well as the government institutions responsible for human rights compliance?

→ To what extent do our project and programme objectives take the specific causes of human rights restrictions and violations into account?

→ How have we integrated the Do-No-Harm-approach into our project and programme planning? To what extent have we analysed any unintended negative effects of our project activities on the local population?

→ To what extent have we analysed the political situation on the ground and explored the scope for civil society involvement in order to minimise the risks for our partners and target groups? To what extent have we con-ducted a risk analysis and integrated risk management into our project work?

→ To what extent are we collaborating with actors whose duty it is to uphold human rights/with people whose human rights are affected?

→ To what extent are we involving our target groups in all phases of the project work?

→ To what extent do our programmes and projects take the diversity of the target groups into account? Have we identified which of the groups affected by our project are particularly disadvantaged?

→ To what extent does our project encourage target groups to stand up for their rights and interests, and to what extent do we strengthen their ability to assert their rights themselves?

→ To what extent does our project contribute to a fairer distribution of resources and an improvement in the life chances of our target groups? To what extent are we strengthening the social security systems?

→ What steps can we take to better integrate human rights and social justice aspects into our projects and programmes?

GUIDELINE 2
GENDER EQUALITY, SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY

NGO development projects are effective if they practice and promote gender equity, take into account the concerns and experiences of women, girls and people who suffer discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity (LGBTI people)[3] and support them in asserting their individual and collective rights by enabling them to take part in development processes as self-confident actors.

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3   Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people

What does this guideline mean?

When planning, implementing and evaluating projects and programmes, VENRO and its member organisations consider the different life situations of women, men, girls and boys as well as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people. Where necessary, they take measures to promote gender equality.

Equal rights for people of different genders, sexual orientations and gender identities is a human right. In recent decades, much progress has been made on gender equality, particularly under pressure from women's and LGBTI groups and organisations. Nevertheless, women, girls and LGBTI people are still disproportionately affected by (sexual) violence and human rights violations, poverty and exclusion. These forms of discrimination are based on patriarchal power relations that are expressed in laws, social norms and patterns of behaviour as well as in gender-specific role assignments and an unequal distribution of resources and (care) work.

Apart from the United Nations Human Rights Charter, the main benchmarks for gender-equitable projects and programmes are the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), the Declaration and Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995), UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the UN's Agenda 2030, in particular Sustainability Development Goal 5, to "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls".

How can this guideline be implemented?

NGOs can address the concerns of women, girls and LGBTI people through gender mainstreaming, empowerment processes, inclusive participation and effective advocacy work.

The following elements are essential for gender-sensitive projects and programmes:

1. At the beginning of each project, NGOs should carry out an analysis of gender relations in the respective work setting. Such an analysis helps to better understand the needs of different genders, to formulate common goals together with the target groups and partners and to prevent adverse, gender-related side-effects. This analysis should provide insights into social role models and the division of labour in the respective region, as well as information on access to resources, forms of gender-specific violence, and participation in decision-making both inside and outside of family structures. To enable women and men to participate equally, an analysis of daily routines may also be relevant during project planning and implementation. In addition, any characteristics of target groups that influence gender relations should also be analysed. These include, for instance, the socio-economic background, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity and age of the participants. For a holistic understanding of target groups' needs, it is of utmost importance to consider the extent to which the above-mentioned characteristics are mutually dependent and how they interact with one another. If an individual is subject to different forms of discrimination, the term intersectionality is used. In a gender-sensitive approach, groups of people suffering from multiple forms of discrimination should be given special consideration in the further planning of projects. To this end, the relevant data should be collected and broken down by gender as well as any other relevant characteristics.

2. Gender-sensitive indicators that distinguish between women and men, girls and boys and LGBTI people are useful for collecting such disaggregated data. Gender-disaggregated data should not only be collected prior to the start of a project, but also as part of the monitoring and

evaluation activities during and after the implementation. This ensures that the voices of women, girls and LGBTI people are heard and that their experiences can be incorporated into the design of follow-up programmes.

3. All partners should agree on a common understanding of gender mainstreaming in advance. Such a gender-based human rights approach relies on inclusive participation and transparency in order to change the balance of power between the sexes.

4. In order for gender mainstreaming to be successful, gender equality needs to be incorporated into all areas of work while taking into account the gender-specific impact of each project. To do so, NGOs need to review their approaches and methods from a gender equality perspective and to train their staff accordingly.

5. During the design and planning as well as in all subsequent stages of the project cycle, NGOs should ensure that all groups who are disadvantaged or excluded on the basis of their gender, sexual orientation or gender identity are able to participate – at times possibly in separate groups, depending on the context.

6. In line with the principles of empowerment, the agency and decision-making power of girls, women and LGBTI people must be strengthened at all levels of the projects and programmes. Men and boys can act as crucial allies in this regard, since they are also subject to the pressure of patriarchal role expectations. However, resistance is to be expected if any group loses power as a result of gender equity oriented projects and programmes. NGOs should therefore factor these effects into their project and programme planning.

7. Projects and programmes that specifically target and support women, girls and LGBTI people or work directly to change gender rela-

tions are just as important as consistent gender mainstreaming. Such projects can begin at a structural level and advocate for better laws that improve the situation of disadvantaged groups, or they can start at a cultural level by targeting practices that discriminate against women or LGBTI people. This type of project is known as a stand-alone measure. In many cases, self-representative organisations, for example women's organisations, are the partners of choice for such measures due to their longstanding experience in gender equality work.

8. In order to achieve gender justice, it is necessary to examine the structural power relations in place and to take measures that are directly aimed at changing them. In their discussions with decision makers, NGOs should, wherever possible, point out existing violations of rights against women, girls and LGBTI people and demand that their rights be enforced. NGOs should work out context-specific solutions together with these groups to improve their legal situation and promote their equal (political) participation. The term context-specific describes solutions that are systematically developed in such a way that they take into account the relevant thematic expertise, the respective local frameworks, and the needs, interests and ideas of local actors.

9. NGOs from the North should set a good example by embracing gender justice as a vision, mission and strategic and operational goal.

10. In the context of promoting gender justice, institutional support for self-advocacy organisations and movements should be a goal in its own right, especially given that they generally receive significantly less financial support than other project executing agencies.[4]

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4   See Medie 2016

How can we tell if we are on the right track?

Answering the following key questions may be helpful in order to reflect on the extent to which an organisation's projects and programmes are aligned with the "Gender justice, sexual orientation and gender identity" guideline:

→ To what extent is our project and programme design based on a participatory analysis of gender relations in the respective setting? What characteristics have we considered in our analysis that may reinforce disadvantages?

→ To what extent are gender equality and the empowerment of women, girls and LGBTI people explicit goals of our projects and programmes? Do these goals also include changing the structural power relations between the sexes?

→ Have we sufficiently considered any possible unintended negative consequences of our projects and programmes for women, girls and LGBTI people in our planning? Are we doing enough to minimise these risks – such as the risk of increased workloads or an increase in domestic violence? How do we react when such risks arise?

→ What strategies do we have in place for taking gender aspects into account? Are we providing enough space for women, girls and LGBTI people as well as men to articulate their views?

→ To what extent are we making sure that the voices of girls, women and LGBTI people are heard when monitoring and evaluating our projects and programmes?

→ How much training on gender-sensitive approaches and methods do our staff need? To what extent are we offering them further training as part of our projects and programmes?

→ What is the extent of the human and financial resources that we make available for gender mainstreaming in our projects and programmes?

→ Is the proportion of women and men among project staff balanced at all levels?

→ Do we have a code of conduct in place in our organisation, in our team or in our collaborations with other organisations to prevent and address abuse of power, sexual exploitation and violence?

→ To what extent do we take gender-sensitive working methods into account when selecting our partner organisations?

→ To what extent do we collaborate with women's or LGBTI rights organisations and groups (where this is useful and feasible)?

→ What steps can we take to better integrate aspects of gender justice into our projects and programmes?

GUIDELINE 3
EMPOWERMENT AND INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION

NGOs development projects are effective if they support empowerment and inclusive participation, especially of economically disadvantaged and marginalised people, in order to strengthen their democratic self-determination and their agency in political structures and development initiatives that affect their lives.

What does this guideline mean?

The work of VENRO's member organisations is based on the conviction that hunger, poverty and injustice can ultimately only be overcome if all people have the opportunity to participate in social processes and are able to organise themselves and to independently assert their rights.

Consequently, NGOs projects and programmes should pave the way for self-determination and participation on the part of the local population and their organisations. To this end, it is necessary to consider the specific context of the project and the balance of power in the regions in which it operates.

By respecting the dignity of every human being and valuing the potential inherent in every individual, NGOs pay heed to the fact that people are responsible for shaping their own lives.

Since the 1970s, development co-operation projects around the world have developed various approaches and methods designed to ensure the social and political participation of local communities. And in the 1990s, the notion of participation experienced a veritable boom. Today, inclusive participation is an essential component of development measures and an indispensable element of projects and programmes. As a result, organisations often claim to promote self-help, self-organisation, participation or empowerment among disadvantaged and underprivileged people. However, as a number of in-depth studies[5] have shown, there is often a wide gap between these claims and their impact on the ground. According to these studies, many NGOs use targeted and controlled participation in project management primarily as a technical tool for the smooth implementation of their projects and programmes, rather than as a method for strengthening political ownership.

Examining who exercises responsibility and power and thus ultimately decides on development measures is a crucial factor in empowerment processes. The challenge inherent in the principle of empowerment is thus to systematically address the factors that stand in the way of a change in the dynamics of power, and then to focus on those factors that promote participation to varying degrees and strengthen empowerment and democratic ownership. In addition to the specific social context and the respective social and political framework, the interests of the actors involved as well as their power and ability to negotiate and assert their rights are also important factors.

Self-organised action on the part of local populations is another important prerequisite for empowerment processes because it enables the people involved to develop their own critical positions. The first step is always to rely on capacities and resources that people are able to mobilise independently of external support. Raising awareness is crucial for these empowerment processes, and individuals who are able to successfully confront their disadvantages can also act as multipliers who encourage like-minded people.

The strengthening of individual and collective forms of resistance can also play an important role in empowerment processes. Ownership of any successful changes must lie with the people themselves, who need to be involved in development processes in order to shape them directly.

There are three separate levels for promoting empowerment processes. At an individual level, socially disadvantaged or marginalised people should be encouraged to develop personal skills such as self-reflection and the ability to accept criticism while strengthening their self-confidence and awareness of their living conditions and scope for action, as this helps to counteract the effects of internalised exclusion. At the relationship level, people need negotiating skills in order to play a constructive role in shaping collective decisions

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5   See World Bank 2013

as individuals. The third level, the collective dimension, is about the ability of groups to organise themselves in order to effect positive changes in their living conditions in a collaborative manner.[6]

How can this guideline be implemented?

The "Empowerment and inclusive participation" guideline focuses more closely on the people with whom and for whom development co-operation intends to bring about change. People can contribute to sustainable change if they are able to make their voices heard and act in their own interests. Strengthening their ability to speak for themselves and to exert greater influence on decisions that affect their lives should therefore be part of every project and programme.

For NGOs, the challenge is therefore to support people in recognising and releasing their own potential and that of their communities. In other words, the people themselves are often the solution. Any person can think, plan and act – in fact, that's exactly what people do.

The following characteristics are therefore essential for projects and programmes that promote empowerment and inclusive participation:

1. To promote sustainable social self-mobilisation, self-help or empowerment, NGO staff need a range of skills that go beyond technical and professional expertise. Respectful guidance is needed to support people in their efforts to improve their situation. To this end, it is important to recognise the potential, knowledge and skills of the people on the ground.

2. NGOs should enable and structure dialogue processes in an empathetic way, by creating spaces for joint analysis and learning and by moderating the decision-making processes, with the aim of unlocking inherent resources

and promoting favourable conditions for communication within the group. Psychological aspects must be considered, such as low self-esteem among disadvantaged and marginalised people or experiences of trauma and violence in conflict regions.

3. Guided by the insight that people know their own situation better than anyone, which is to say that they are experts of their own lives, NGOs should continuously review and possibly re-align their self-perception, their own actions and their supporting role.

4. In practice, the relationship between NGOs and the people they work with is often fraught with pressure to succeed, so that mistakes are made. However, such mistakes can act as important learning opportunities and should therefore not be avoided at all costs. Mutual trust can be strengthened by creating an atmosphere marked by respect, learning, feedback and constructive handling of mistakes. Facilitating this type of atmosphere is an important part of the work of NGOs.

5. NGOs must address and tackle the existing power constellations in the settings of their work. Social change can only be sustainable if power imbalances are reduced in an appropriate and targeted manner to the benefit of all those involved, especially of disadvantaged population groups.

6. Power relationships are often also reflected in language. Project-specific terminology, for example the use of terms such as "target group" and "beneficiaries" in project applications, can reinforce existing power imbalances and should therefore be re-examined. For instance, the commonly used term "target group" (which also appears in this handbook) and what its use says about one's own attitude, have become the subject of a recent debate in development policy, which we cannot resolve in this handbook.

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6   See Rowlands 1997, p. 15.

In order to strengthen inclusive participation and self-organisation, NGOs should play a supporting role to help promote favourable conditions for communication within groups and the unblocking of existing resources. As such, NGO staff have a duty to permanently reflect on their own self-perception and actions.

How can we tell if we are on the right track?

Answering the following key questions may be helpful in order to reflect on the extent to which an organisation's projects and programmes are oriented towards the "Empowerment and inclusive participation" guideline:

→ What motivates us in our work? Is it the desire to help, to guide, to direct or to learn, to argue together and to accompany people on a part of their life's journey?

→ To what extent do we, as NGO staff, trust the people we work with to be aware of and capable of finding solutions? To what extent do we accept the solutions they propose?

→ What is the self-perception and role of our staff?

→ To what extent do we act as allies, as collaborators in learning processes and as facilitators? To what extent do we provide solutions?

→ To what extent are we open to a critical review of our working methods and attitudes? How willing are we to adapt our working methods and attitudes if necessary?

→ Where do we get our impulses for change? From the outside, based on the attitude "this is how it should and needs to be"? To what extent are these impulses grounded in the multi-layered wealth of experience of the people on the ground, their knowledge and potential? To what extent do they arise from common spaces for reflection, learning and dialogue, and from interaction and networking with others?

→ How aware are we of the visions for a self-determined, just and sustainable (co)existence of the people with whom we work?

→ Against what visions (and whose) do our staff members measure their work?

→ To what extent do we support people in analysing and eliminating the structural causes of discrimination and marginalisation? To what extent do we support them in formulating and implementing their own strategic interests?

→ What steps can we take to integrate empowerment and inclusive participation in our projects and programmes?

→ How can we measure that we are personally doing a good job in implementing the guiding principles of empowerment, democratic ownership and participation?

GUIDELINE 4
ENVIRONMENTAL
SUSTAINABILITY

NGO development projects are effective if they develop and implement approaches that promote environmental sustainability for current and future generations. This includes immediate and sustainable responses to the climate crisis.

What does this guideline mean?

The conservation of natural resources and the fight against climate change occupy an important place in the projects and programmes of the VENRO member organisations.

Environment- and climate protection is indispensable for achieving the Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and preventing humanitarian crises. The SDGs include achieving access to clean water, affordable and renewable energy, an environmentally friendly infrastructure and sustainable production and consumption patterns. Environmental action and social justice are inextricably linked and can only be achieved together, which is why political reforms are needed to promote sustainable lifestyles and economic policies.

At the same time, it is necessary to strengthen the resilience of population groups and communities that are particularly affected by climate change or environmental degradation. This is essential to enable people to cope with the ecological consequences and to prevent lasting damage to their livelihoods. Adapting to climate change needs to be understood as a task of society as a whole, rather than of individual groups, not least since economically disadvantaged and vulnerable groups – including a disproportionate number of women – are particularly affected by the consequences of climate change. Finding answers to the climate crisis is thus of existential importance for the whole of humanity.

International co-operation is needed to tackle global environmental problems and ensure that natural resources are managed within the bounds of the Earth's ecological capacity. SDGs 12 ("Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns") and 13 ("Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts") as well as the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement provide the necessary multilateral frame of reference for this process. The aim of the Paris Agreement is to limit global

warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius and ideally to no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius. The other main objectives of the Paris Agreement are to increase climate resilience in order to prevent or limit the negative consequences of climate change for humankind. In addition, industrialised countries also committed themselves to supporting developing countries financially, technologically and through knowledge transfers to achieve these goals.

How can this guideline be implemented?

In order to promote environmental sustainability, NGOs need coherent project and programme strategies that place their actions in direct relation to their impact on the climate and the environment. NGOs should develop impact-based measures for environmental and climate protection at both institutional and programme level.

The following features are essential for environmentally sustainable projects and programmes:

1. In order to establish climate and environmental protection as cross-cutting topics in project and programme work, NGOs need to develop a common understanding of environmental sustainability with their partners. To this end, multilateral environmental and climate action targets can provide a guiding framework. Sufficient financial and human resources should be made available for environmental and climate protection, climate adaptation and sustainable management. Additionally, associated responsibilities should be bundled in a targeted manner.

2. Before the start of a project, it is useful for NGOs and their local partners to collect and analyse environmental and climate-relevant information for the respective project region This analysis should identify which population groups are affected by the consequences of environmental degradation and why. For this purpose, dialogue within and between communities as well as with stakeholders is useful. The

results of this analysis enable the development of appropriate climate and environmental protection measures and practical strategies for climate change adaptation. A distinction should be drawn between strategies for long-term adaptation, for coping with crises in the short term, and for reducing and preventing climate and environmental damage (preparedness and prevention).

3. Acting in consultation with their partner organisations, NGOs can use the results of such an analysis in their project applications and reports to explain how their project and programme measures affect climate protection, climate adaptation and the environmental situation on the ground. Alternatively, NGOs can initially focus on individual sectors and incorporate, for example, proposals for sustainable energy supply or energy-efficient building use in their project work.

4. At the institutional level, NGOs can also draw up an environmental statement, introduce an environmental management system, or agree on climate protection targets with their partner organisations that they will then adopt themselves. The relevant instruments include (1) standards for energy efficiency and green buildings, (2) the purchase of renewable electricity from certified sources, (3) sustainable procurement principles and (4) travel guidelines to promote environmentally friendly mobility. The latter can contribute to a reduction of flights or require for compensation of unavoidable CO_2 emissions. The aim of these instruments is to reduce the ecological footprint of NGOs and their projects and programmes. In addition, NGOs can also adopt the use of environmental labels such as the Rio markers.[7] These were developed in 1998 by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

and serve to identify projects that contribute to the implementation of international environmental agreements.

5. In addition to establishing environmental action as a horizontal objective, NGOs can also develop projects and programmes that are explicitly designed to implement national and international environmental and climate agreements. This may include projects and programmes for the protection of biological diversity, the sustainable use of ecosystems and genetic resources, combating desertification or mitigating the effects of drought. They can also include measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve the capacity to adapt to climate change and support the protection of forests and oceans. At the same time, these projects and programmes also contribute to achieving the SDGs. To achieve these goals, NGOs can deploy projects that promote environmentally sustainable lifestyles and economic activities, remedy specific types of environmental degradation or facilitate adaptation to climate change.

6. In addition, NGOs should advocate for environmentally friendly legislation and effective environmental management at the political level. This requires promoting a better understanding of climate and environmental risks in the partner countries and raising environmental awareness.

7. Marginalised and vulnerable population groups are particularly affected by climate and environmental impacts. NGO projects and programmes should therefore provide for specific measures to prevent or mitigate the adverse effects of environmentally unsustainable development on the world's most economically disadvantaged people.

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7   See OECD DAC 2016

8. Indigenous peoples and communities that practice ecologically adapted forms of land use deserve special protection and recognition with regard to environmental sustainability. Environmental degradation not only directly endangers their way of life, but their traditional wealth of expertise and knowledge is indispensable for safeguarding the diversity of cultural and socio-economic pathways of environmental sustainability. In addition to the latest environmental findings, NGOs should therefore also take traditional knowledge into account.

How can we tell if we are on the right track?

Answering the following key questions may be helpful in order to reflect on the extent to which an organisation's projects and programmes are oriented towards the "Environmental sustainability" guideline:

→ In what ways have we embedded environmental sustainability in our project work? What strategies do we have in place and how consistently and conclusively do we pursue them?

→ To what extent have we collected environmental and climate-relevant contextual information in the run-up to our project and analysed and discussed it together with our partners?

→ To what extent are women, men and LGBTI people affected by climate change, environmental degradation and resource scarcity? Which population groups in the project region are particularly disadvantaged by climate change and environmental degradation?

→ What specific steps are we taking to identify the environmental and climate risks affecting the local population and to mitigate or prevent them?

→ What do local people need in order to live in a more environmentally sustainable way?

→ To what extent do we hold governments accountable through targeted lobbying?

→ To what extent do we consider the ecological footprint of our project?

→ What is our institutional attitude towards environmental sustainability? In which areas do we consciously act in an environmentally friendly manner? In which areas do we have room for improvement?

→ What best practices does our organisation have in place for promoting environmental sustainability as a cross-sectional goal?

→ What capacities do we provide to ensure that our programmes and projects are environmentally sustainable?

→ How are we addressing environmental sustainability in partner dialogues?

→ What steps can we take to integrate environmental sustainability into our projects and programmes?

GUIDELINE 5
TRANSPARENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY AND INTEGRITY

NGO development projects are effective if they commit them-selves to transparency, are accountable to the target groups and other stakeholders, and act with integrity.

What does this guideline mean?

VENRO member organisations base their projects and programmes on the principles of transparency, accountability and integrity.

By actively practising transparency, NGOs can ensure that their partners, target groups and the public have continued trust in their work and in the efficiency of civil society organisations more generally. Transparency in their projects and programmes means that NGOs disclose all relevant information about their work and organisational structures to their stakeholders. Stakeholders include donor institutions on the one hand and the respective partners and target groups on the other.

Through accountability, especially between partners in the North and South and towards target groups, NGOs increase the quality and effectiveness of their projects and programmes. Accountability vis-à-vis target groups primarily involves making relevant information on intended and ongoing projects and their impact available to them at an early stage. This enables them to participate actively in the planning and design of programmes. NGOs should ensure that this information is also accessible to disadvantaged or marginalised groups.

In the context of civil society action, integrity means value-based action based on ethical standards. A prerequisite for trust in an organisation is the integrity of its representatives. Integrity is essential for preventing corruption and abuses of power.

At the international level, there are a number of actors working to improve accountability, such as the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation (GPEDC), the Civil Society Organisation Partnership for Development Effectiveness (CPDE) and the United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). In addition, there is also the Commitment to Ac-

countability to Affected People, adopted in 2011 by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) of the United Nations.[8] The obligations enshrined in this commitment have also been incorporated into the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS), according to which humanitarian aid should be based on communication and information and be planned and implemented in a participatory manner. The beneficiaries need to be able to provide feedback, and NGOs should be open to suggestions and criticism and learn from them in order to further improve their programmes. Furthermore, the CHS obliges NGOs to use resources in a responsible, economical and ethical manner.

How can this guideline be implemented?

NGOs should seek to ensure transparency and accountability towards their target groups and provide a framework for acting with integrity.

The following characteristics are essential for projects and programmes based on the principles of transparency, accountability and integrity:

1. In the context of NGO projects and programmes, all partners involved need to practice transparency both among themselves and towards the public. This can be achieved in a comprehensive manner by publishing an annual report, which should include information on the organisation's structure and objectives and the responsibilities of its staff. NGOs should also report on their activities, in particular on the impact of their projects and programmes, and should disclose their income, sources of funding and expenditures. Funding organisations should also clearly communicate the eligibility criteria and the conditions for the use of funds. However, the principle of transparency will need to be curtailed if the publication of such information would expose the organisation, its partners or the respective target groups to risk.

8   See Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) 2019

2. The concept of accountability to affected people demands an open attitude on the part of NGOs and their staff. All stakeholders, and the target groups in particular, must be informed in good time and in a suitable manner[9] about intended project and programme activities. The relevant information should be communicated in the language of the people involved or in visual form. This will give target groups the opportunity to actively contribute their knowledge, their concerns and their own experiences already during the needs assessment and planning phase of activities.

3. Only if information is communicated in a transparent manner is it possible for target groups to provide feedback and comments. The latter should be incorporated by means of monitoring into future project planning. This allows NGOs to make the necessary adjustments and to design their projects in a more effective way. For example, an accountability-to-beneficiaries checklist[10] can be used to determine the degree to which an organisation is accountable to its target groups and enables their participation.

4. NGOs need to create a framework for acting with integrity in their projects to actively prevent corruption and abuses of power, including sexual violence and exploitation. A code of conduct, training for employees and internal processes or behavioural controls can be appropriate measures to achieve this. Effective prevention of corruption and abuse of power also includes setting up functioning feedback and complaint mechanisms for both project staff and target groups, as this increases the likelihood of detection.

5. Donors and implementing organisations are equally responsible for ensuring transparency, accountability and integrity in NGO projects. VENRO and its member organisations have committed themselves to observing transparency and accountability standards, particularly through a code of conduct for ↘ "Transparency, organisational management and monitoring". In addition, the guidelines issued by the "Transparent Civil Society Initiative" provide useful orientation.

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9   For appropriate approaches that enable the participation of marginalised or disadvantaged groups, see the chapter on Guideline 3: Empowerment, democratic self-determination and participation.
10   See Mango 2010

How can we tell if we are on the right track?

Answering the following key questions may be helpful in order to reflect on the extent to which an organisation's projects and programmes are aligned with the "Transparency, accountability and integrity" guideline:

→ Do we as an organisation present an annual report? Does this report outline our goals and strategies?

→ To what extent do our annual report and our website provide a true and fair picture of our activities?

→ What information do partners have about our organisation? Is this information available in a language that our partners can understand?

→ To what extent are we transparent in communicating our goals and values in the run-up to a partnership?

→ Do we as an organisation have sufficient information at our disposal to determine if a new partnership will comply with the principles of transparency, accountability and integrity?

→ To what extent does the staff of our NGO feel that they know the partner in question?

→ To what extent have we informed possible target groups and stakeholders about our organisation, goals and principles?

→ To what extent do we address our target groups in a differentiated and appropriate manner? To what extent do we facilitate their barrier-free access to information, the programme design and our feedback systems?

→ What feedback systems do we have in place and how do we handle feedback? To what extent do we take feedback into account when designing our projects and services? Do we introduce changes to our projects based on feedback?

→ To what extent are we as an organisation open to feedback and complaints and are we communicating this properly?

→ To what extent are we implementing the VENRO code of conduct "Transparency, organisational management and monitoring" in our work?

→ What provisions have we taken to prevent corruption and abuse of power? To what extent do we train our staff in order to raise awareness of the associated risks?

→ To what extent have we agreed with our project partners to take preventive measures against corruption and abuse of power and to create a framework for acting with integrity?

→ What steps can we take to integrate the principles of transparency, accountability and integrity even more effectively into our projects and programmes?

GUIDELINE 6
EQUITABLE CO-OPERATION

NGO development projects are effective if they co-operate with other NGOs and development actors on an equal footing, based on common development goals and values. These include mutual respect, institutional autonomy, long-term partnerships and mutual solidarity.

What does this guideline mean?

Within the framework of their projects and programmes, the VENRO member organisations are committed to practising equitable co-operation based on respect and solidarity.

Partnerships in international co-operation are defined as relationships in which all participants have agreed to co-operate with each other in order to advance their common interests and achieve their development goals. Partnerships are a key instrument in development co-operation, in particular when it comes to NGO projects and programmes. There are three main reasons for this: 1) Projects and programmes that are implemented under conditions of local ownership, i.e. under the responsibility of local partner organisations, are more sustainable and effective than those carried out without local partners. Ownership happens when local partners and target groups are able to plan and implement measures at their own responsibility; it does not depend on how organisations structure their co-operation, for instance whether Northern NGOs maintain offices on site or not. 2) Co-operation with local civil society is of central importance for promoting and shaping democracy as well as for human rights and good governance advocacy in the respective partner countries. 3) As independent development actors, civil society organisations from Germany are the natural partners for this type of organisation in the Global South. Civil society actors thus offer a specific added value compared to government organisations.

In its "State of Civil Society Report" on the possible scope of civil society action, first published in 2013, the CIVICUS international civil society alliance states that "...the majority of the world's citizens live in environments that do not give them the opportunity to become involved in activities, organisations and movements that could im-

prove their lives."[11] Although recently, there have been major breakthroughs such as the adoption of Agenda 2030, the scope of action for NGOs and thus for organised civil society remains limited. In the coming years, the focus should therefore be on building alliances between civil society organisations from the Global South and North.[12]

There has been renewed debate on how to set up equitable partnerships based on solidarity in development co-operation, not least as a result of discussions in the field of humanitarian aid. At the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, a large number of initiatives were launched that are primarily aimed at strengthening actors in the Global South (the so-called localisation discourse).[13]

How can this guideline be implemented?

To be effective, partnerships need to be shaped and implemented by people. Partnerships between civil society actors are frequently based on personal relationships and thrive on mutual processes of exchange and dialogue. Consequently, personal attitudes and behavioural patterns have a decisive impact on the quality of each partnership. Equitable partnerships therefore rely on mutual solidarity between people and respectful treatment of each other.

The following characteristics are therefore essential for projects and programmes based on equitable co-operation, solidarity and respect:

1. Capacity development approaches are crucial for achieving equitable co-operation. Empowering partner organisations also contributes to strengthening the organisational capacity of civil society.[14] To ensure the success and effectiveness of equitable partnerships, partners

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11   See Mayrhofer 2013
12   See VENRO; Krause 2017
13   See VENRO; Krähling 2017
14   See VENRO 2017a

must also act in an inclusive and responsible manner. This requires a targeted framework for continuous learning.[15]

2. Cultural, religious, socio-economic and political differences between the partners from the Global North and the Global South should be explicitly addressed. In the framework of continuous, mutual capacity building, such partnerships should also strive for a common understanding of values, goals and project measures.

3. An essential requirement for equitable partnerships is the institutional independence of all partners. They must be able to exist independently of each other and to pursue their own goals. All too often, small partner organisations from the Global South become financially dependent on partners from the North. In such cases, it is important to consider together how institutional autonomy can be realised. To this end, the partners can jointly develop strategies for fundraising and diversification of their sources of income. In order to increase the success of such activities, Northern partners should also support the public relations work of their Southern counterparts, as this enables financially weaker partners to emerge stronger from the partnership. Strengthening the institutional independence of partner organisations is generally only possible in the case of long-term collaborations involving a limited number of partners. For this reason, partnerships are to be carefully considered and designed for a longer duration.

4. Since funding is often mobilised by Northern NGOs, they often have the last word when it comes to project planning and implementation. This asymmetry of power between partner organisations is the result of unjust access to resources. For this reason, it is important to ensure that project and programme partners negotiate their respective roles together, define them clearly and put them down in writing. They need to discuss and reflect upon their mutual expectations regarding their co-operation on a continuous basis. Already at the beginning of a project, the partner organisations should agree on such joint reflection processes and allocate sufficient time and resources for this purpose. In this regard, it is important to bear in mind that the partner organisation responsible for the use of funds is tasked with ensuring the visibility of the interests of all partners. As such, the partner organisation providing the funding acts as a moderator and plays a supporting role (see guideline 3).

5. The roles and responsibilities of the partners differ as a function of the resources available to them. As a rule, the partner organisation with the greater financial, human and professional resources also bears greater responsibility for addressing inequalities and imbalances in the relationship.[16] The partners should therefore consider how such structural power imbalances can be addressed. In addition to strengthening institutional autonomy, there are also increasing opportunities for NGOs from the Global South to apply for funding from global governments or international organisations. NGOs from the Global North should ask themselves in a self-critical manner what they can do to better support NGOs from the South in this process – for example by providing advice on application processes, arranging contacts or setting up the necessary management systems. Thereby NGOs from the North should disclose their legitimate financial needs to their Southern partner organisations – after all, they tend to be just as dependent on project funding and the associated management fees as their co-operation partners from the South.

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15   See Balk 2018

16   See Bermann-Harm; Murad 2011

How can we tell if we are on the right track?

Answering the following key questions may be helpful in order to reflect on the extent to which an organisation's projects and programmes are oriented towards the "Equitable co-operation" guideline:

→ In which way do we practice solidarity in the context of our co-operation?

→ To what extent are we addressing how to promote equitable partnerships in our project planning?

→ To what extent do we perceive our partners as independent actors with their own rights and duties?

→ How are we addressing cultural, religious, socio-economic and political differences between us and our partners?

→ To what extent are we reflecting on the asymmetry of power between the partners? What specific activities are we envisaging to overcome inequalities and reduce these power imbalances?

→ What is the envisaged duration of the partnership? Under what circumstances is a long-term partnership useful and desirable?

→ To what extent are we working to improve the institutional strength and financial independence of our partner organisations? What types of support are we providing for this purpose?

→ What are our own vested interests in the project and how are we disclosing them? To what extent are decisions on the division of management fees based on discussions with our project partners?

→ Have we concluded written partnership contracts, and if yes, to what extent were these negotiated jointly? To what extent do these contracts provide for regular and timely reviews, monitoring and adjustment of our plans and mutual obligations?

→ How are we communicating our internal decision-making processes to our partner organisations?

→ To what extent are we prepared to grant partner organisations autonomy in the use of funds?

→ To what extent are we respecting each other's intellectual property rights and copyrights as regards the partnership contributions and benefits? To what extent have we defined these rights in our co-operation agreement?

→ When it comes to administrative instructions and commitments, how are we accounting for our partners' existing processes and structures and their ability to implement these instructions?

→ To what extent are we jointly negotiating entry and exit scenarios?

→ What steps can we take to better incorporate aspects of equitable partnership in our projects and programmes?

GUIDELINE 7
EXCHANGES OF KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING

NGO development projects are effective if they promote exchanges of knowledge and learning, both from their own experiences and from the experiences of target groups and other actors.

What does this guideline mean?

Exchanges of knowledge and learning are crucial for long-term sustainable development and therefore play an important role in the projects and programmes of VENRO member organisations.

Given that a wide range of local and international stakeholders are active in development co-operation, there is a wealth of existing knowledge and experience that can be tapped. While this opens up many opportunities, it also presents NGOs with the challenge of determining how existing knowledge can be applied and disseminated. In this regard, well-funded knowledge management systems can serve as a helpful instrument in organisational and project work.

There are a number of different approaches to knowledge management. One such approach is experiential learning, which is based on the assumption that knowledge always depends on the practical experiences and personal backgrounds of those involved. Experiential learning is the process by which such individual experiences are translated into shareable knowledge. Thanks to their individual experiences, people also have knowledge of how to act in certain situations. Such situational knowledge often remains hidden, be it as a result of how the dialogue between the partners initially evolved or how new staff members are trained. Disclosing such situational knowledge, documenting it and learning from it by sharing it with different actors can lead to important improvements in practice.

A learning organisation is an organisation that is able to collect existing knowledge, to develop and share knowledge and to change behavioural patterns on the basis of new knowledge and insights. Learning organisations promote a culture of learning and constructive handling of mistakes, both at an individual and a collective level. They thereby promote innovation and critical thinking. For NGO projects and programmes, this means that

knowledge is not monopolised within one organisation but is shared among partners. In development projects, capacity development is a pivotal instrument for sharing knowledge and mutual learning at a personal, organisational and social level.

How can this guideline be implemented?

Knowledge management depends on the integration of different approaches into project work and on making the empirical knowledge of project staff and organisations explicit and structurally embedded.

The following characteristics are therefore essential for projects and programmes that promote exchanges of knowledge and learning:

1. NGOs that consider themselves to be learning organisations need to systematically integrate experiential learning into their projects. At project and programme level, joint reflection and learning from positive and negative experiences should take place at regular intervals. As a matter of priority, the learning objectives and the appropriate framework should be defined in advance.

2. In order to learn systematically from the experiences of all people involved in a project, it is important to be aware of how learning takes place in the respective other culture and to consider how formative experiences can be communicated. Colleagues on the ground are often better placed to recognise cultural differences in learning habits and to develop appropriate methods for experiential learning. Culturally adapted formats likewise help to ensure that the documentation and sharing of knowledge is tailored to the target group.

3. In addition, NGOs should facilitate joint learning in such a way that is adapted to the local cultural conditions. If no local capacities for

experiential learning are available, they should be developed in co-operation with other NGOs, stakeholders and local organisations on the ground. For example, NGOs can bring in external facilitators who are not associated with the project to conduct experience exchange workshops for the project teams and target groups. Such external consultants can help to facilitate critical reflection of the measures that have been implemented. Open-ended dialogue formats and peer learning can be used in these reflection workshops, and it is also important to promote South-South exchanges of experience.

4. Learning organisations not only create space for individual creativity and innovation, but also provide frameworks for how employees should handle information and knowledge. Clear, transparent filing systems, documentation processes and induction methods for new employees as well as targeted training opportunities play an important role in this regard.

5. Knowledge management and experiential learning are only meaningful if they lead to changes in practice. Therefore, each learning process should be followed by concrete action plans and a monitoring system for checking their implementation. Such action plans may include, for example, the establishment of a community of practice whose members exchange information on a specific topic. Such groups or communities can also be organised online.

How can we tell if we are on the right track?

Answering the following key questions may be helpful in order to reflect on the extent to which an organisation's projects and programmes are oriented towards the "Exchanges of knowledge and learning" guideline:

→ To what extent is the conscious and systematic use of knowledge and learning embedded in our organisation?

→ Does knowledge management play a role in our project processes and have we put these processes in writing? How are we generating, documenting and sharing our knowledge? To what extent does our approach to knowledge management apply equally to our activities, results and goals?

→ What filing systems does our organisation have in place? Are these systems transparent and understandable? Do we have clear responsibilities in place for the storage and maintenance of databases?

→ To what extent does our HR management system include specifications, guidelines and methods for the professional training of employees? How do we manage internal transfers of knowledge to ensure that no knowledge is lost?

→ What time and opportunities do our staff have at their disposal for knowledge management? Do we consider time spent on knowledge management as working time?

→ To what extent is experiential learning part of our projects and programmes?

→ To what extent have we incorporated experiences from similar projects or from other organisations in the planning phase and how are we using this knowledge in our own projects and programmes?

→ What kind of strategically important knowledge are we disseminating?

→ What is our budget for knowledge management and experiential learning?

→ What opportunities do we provide for project staff and partners to develop their professional skills?

→ To what extent are we involving local experts in the development and implementation of experiential learning strategies? How can we create suitable experiential learning capacities if no trained personnel is available on the ground?

→ To what extent are we generating, documenting and sharing knowledge in a language that is accessible to the partner organisations' staff and the local population alike?

→ To what extent are our projects and programmes providing a space in which necessary adjustments and practical changes can be implemented through successful learning? What resources are we providing for this purpose?

→ To what extent are we systematically sharing the generated knowledge with external stakeholders? What are we doing to ensure that knowledge will be retained in the region or partner country in the long term?

→ What steps can we take to embed knowledge management and learning even more firmly in our projects and programmes?

GUIDELINE 8
POSITIVE SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

NGO development projects are effective if they work together to realise lasting positive impact, especially for marginalised groups and people living in poverty, while keeping an eye on the conditions required to ensure the durability of these positive effects.

What does this guideline mean?

At all levels, VENRO and its member organisations take care to ensure that their projects and programmes generate a lasting positive impact. They keep a close eye on the positive and negative results as well as on the intended and unintended impact of their projects and measures.

In line with the "leave no one behind" principle of Agenda 2030, the work of development NGOs focuses on all people who experience discrimination and exclusion. The aim is to improve their living situation permanently. NGO projects therefore focus on achieving positive changes for the target groups that will endure beyond the end of the project. To this end, it is essential to combat the structural causes of inequality, poverty, violence and marginalisation and to enable people to determine their own lives.

The effects on the target group can be divided into two categories, outcomes (short- and medium-term effects) and impacts (overarching and long-term effects). Development measures may trigger these effects either directly or indirectly.

Within NGO projects, two levels of lasting effects can be distinguished:

→ At the level of the individual: What are the positive and lasting changes brought about by the project in the life of the target groups and their surroundings?

→ At the system level: What positive and lasting changes do our project activities bring about within the social, political and economic system?

In addition to the Istanbul Principles, the OECD's DAC criteria are considered an important political frame of reference for positive and lasting impact.[17]

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17   see OECD 1991

These include relevance, effectiveness, impact, efficiency, coherence and sustainability. The OECD's DAC defines sustainable effects as the continuation of the positive impact of a development measure after the funding phase has ended. Another important reference for VENRO members is the ↘ policy paper on impact orientation.

How can this guideline be implemented?

To be impact-oriented, NGO projects and programmes need to consider the intended and unintended effects right from the start of the planning phase, together with the partners and target groups. NGOs should use the findings from impact monitoring to plan and adapt their ongoing project activities and for institutional knowledge management.

The following characteristics are essential for impact-oriented projects and programmes:

1. The entire project cycle, from planning through monitoring and evaluation up to the end of the project should be impact-oriented. This means that NGOs should not only describe and measure impacts in the context of monitoring, but that they should also clarify the desired results of the individual measures in each phase of the project.

2. With the help of such a results-based approach, the intended impacts of individual project measures can be plausibly embedded within the overarching objectives of development work. Already during the planning phase, the partners should discuss this results-based approach and analyse it together with the target groups and other relevant actors in a participatory manner.

3. In addition to the target groups, other local actors should also be involved in a participatory manner in order to identify needs and to develop the project goals, approaches and measures. Ideally, the people on the ground should plan

and implement projects at their own responsibility. If there is a lack of ownership or even participation, NGOs should consider to what extent it is possible for a project to have a lasting impact and to be implemented at the time in question.

4. NGO target groups in development projects tend to be very diverse. For this reason, their various interests and needs as well as their individual opportunities for contributing to the project need to be considered during the planning and implementation of projects. Only through participation, NGO projects can bring about sustainable change. Understanding the target groups' readiness, skills and motivations for change are hereby of central importance.

5. At the same time, NGOs should integrate impact-oriented approaches into each phase of the project cycle. Using system-oriented instruments such as theories of change[18] or flexible approaches such as adaptive management,[19] NGOs can determine the steps that are necessary to bring about lasting change in complex contexts. This also includes keeping an eye on any possible unintended positive and negative effects.

6. Ideally, NGOs should also pursue a multisectoral approach. In order to achieve lasting effects, they should not work in isolation, but form alliances with other actors and embed their projects in the political and social context. NGOs should thus work together to ensure that local government actors support effective development co-operation rather than undermining it. The issue of shrinking spaces – the increasing restriction of civil society's scope for action – is becoming increasingly important, which is another reason for promoting interdisciplinary, cross-sectoral and participatory co-operation

between actors from different areas. For NGOs, this means questioning established structures and venturing into new multisectoral alliances.

7. In lobbying and advocacy work, partners should monitor to what extent their activities have contributed to changes in the legal situation, or whether they have created a new social awareness that may bring about legislative changes.

8. It takes time to effect lasting positive changes, which is why development projects should be based on long-term partnerships wherever possible. Yet the project funding cycles foreseen by government donors are ill-suited to achieving sustainable effects. In this respect, NGOs should examine prior to the start of a project to what extent long-term partnerships are possible and financially viable.

9. NGOs can only achieve lasting positive results if their work continues to have an impact on the target groups after the conclusion of the project. In terms of capacity development, NGOs should therefore ensure that the partners and project participants pass on their acquired knowledge so that it is retained in the local community in the medium term.

10. NGOs are often faced with the question of how a project can be continued after funding ends and what will happen to the infrastructure that has been put in place. If shoring up the sustainable impact of a project will likely result in follow-up costs, NGOs should already think about how to secure additional funding before the project begins. For this reason, it makes sense to develop an exit strategy to ensure the continuation of the project activities, be it by government actors, the local authorities or the target groups themselves. Such an exit strategy may include identifying suitable actors and concluding handover agreements with them at an early stage. Another possibility is to se-

18   See Valters 2015
19   See VENRO 2017b

cure financing through profits generated by the project or from private donations, for which fundraising and networking skills are essential. In order to enable local partners to successfully continue the project, NGOs should therefore plan capacity development measures[20] to strengthen their fundraising, public relations, lobbying and organisational development expertise.

20   see VENRO 2017a

How can we tell if we are on the right track?

Answering the following key questions may be helpful in order to reflect on the extent to which an organisation's projects and programmes are oriented towards the "Lasting positive impact" guideline:

→ To what extent is the design of our projects and programmes based on participatory analyses that identify factors that promote or inhibit a positive and lasting impact? To what extent are we taking account of local social and political conditions when planning our objectives and measures?

→ Which factors stand in the way of a sustainable impact in the respective project setting? Which are the social, economic or cultural conflicts that shape the project context? How are we accounting for these conflicts in our project planning and monitoring?

→ To what extent is there a common understanding among all partners involved as to what constitutes a lasting positive impact? How are we involving all relevant actors in the definition, identification and evaluation of this lasting positive impact? What processes do we have in place for their involvement?

→ How is the sustainable impact embedded in the different phases of the project cycle?

→ How do we consider the actors, approaches or aspects that might have an effect on the project's lasting impact within our strategy?

→ To what extent are we keeping an eye on possible unintended positive and negative effects?

→ To what extent is the intended impact geared towards marginalised groups?

→ How, when and for what purposes are we using the impact measurement outcomes and findings? How are we handling these impacts and insights/what do we learn from them?

→ To what extent are we collaborating with other actors to achieve our goals?

→ What is our exit strategy for the project to ensure the sustainability of the intended impact?

→ What steps can we take to integrate aspects of lasting positive impact into our projects and programmes?

FURTHER READING

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↘ https://venro.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Dateien/Daten/Publikationen/
VENRO-Dokumente/Leitlinien_v07_DIGITAL__2_.pdf

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Putting the Istanbul Principles into Practice:
**A Companion Toolkit to the Siem Reap Consensus on the International
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↘ https://wwfint.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/230111_implementation_
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GUIDELINE 1

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Child Rights Programming
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cooperation
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Save the Children, 2010
↘ http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/library/
getting-it-right-children-practitioners-guide-child-rights-programming

EU-UNICEF Child Rights Toolkit: Integrating Child Rights in Development
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↘ http://www.childrightstoolkit.com/wp-content/uploads/toolkit/English/
Child-Rights-Toolkit-Web-Links.pdf

GUIDELINE 2

Gender equality, sexual orientation and gender identity

Capturing Change in Women's Realities – A Critical Overview of Current Monitoring & Evaluation Frameworks and Approaches
Batliwala, Srilatha and Pittman, Alexandra (Association for Woman's Rights in Development), 2010
↘ https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/capturing_change_in_womens_realities.pdf

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↘ https://genderatwork.org/analytical-framework/

Invest in Women's Organisations for a change
Medie, Peace A., 2016
↘ https://www.geg.ox.ac.uk/news/invest-womens-organisations-change

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Conciliation Resources, 2015
↘ https://rc-services-assets.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/CR%20Gender%20Toolkit%20WEB.pdf

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GUIDELINE 3

Empowerment and inclusive participation

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VENRO currently has 140 members

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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 background lie in independent and church-related development education, public relations and advocacy.

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

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→ represents the interests of development policy and humanitarian 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 and humanitarian issues

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