REPORT | 2026

VENRO
ASSOCIATION OF GERMAN DEVELOPMENT AND HUMANITARIAN AID NGOS

COURAGE FOR DEMOCRACY

How civil society organisations are strengthening freedom and participation around the world



Cover image: Rally to mark the anniversary of the expulsion of indigenous families from the Chicoyogüito community

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FOREWORD

Democracy is neither a nice-to-have nor something that can be taken for granted. It emerges where people speak up, challenge the status quo, and shape their societies – often under extremely difficult conditions and at considerable personal risk. The Report "Courage for Democracy" offers insights into this work: the global commitment of VENRO member organisations and their partner organisations to preserving, strengthening and advancing democratic structures.

The examples in this publication tell the stories of organisations working under increasingly challenging conditions. In many countries, the space for civil society is shrinking, authoritarian tendencies are on the rise, and fundamental rights are coming under increasing pressure. Yet it is precisely in these contexts that new ideas, strategies, and alliances are emerging. The projects show how civil society actors are finding ways to defend democratic spaces – and to open up new ones.

The examples submitted by our member organisations show that democracy is about more than elections and institutions. It rests on many pillars, all of which are essential to its survival: gender equality approached from an intersectional perspective – taking into account overlapping forms of discrimination such as racism, ableism (discrimination against people with disabilities), sexism, and classism – as well as the active inclusion of marginalised groups and a free and pluralistic media landscape. Equally important are efforts to address colonial legacies, provide development-policy and civic education, foster young voices and ensure a reliable legal system. Finally, the examples demonstrate how crucial international cooperation and a fairer distribution of resources are for stable democratic development.

The role of civil society is a common thread running through all the contributions. Civil society is not merely an observer but a driving force – rooted in local communities and connected across borders. At a time when civil society engagement is portrayed as a threat in some quarters, this report sends a clear message: without a vibrant civil society, there can be no vibrant democracy.

We wish you an enjoyable read!

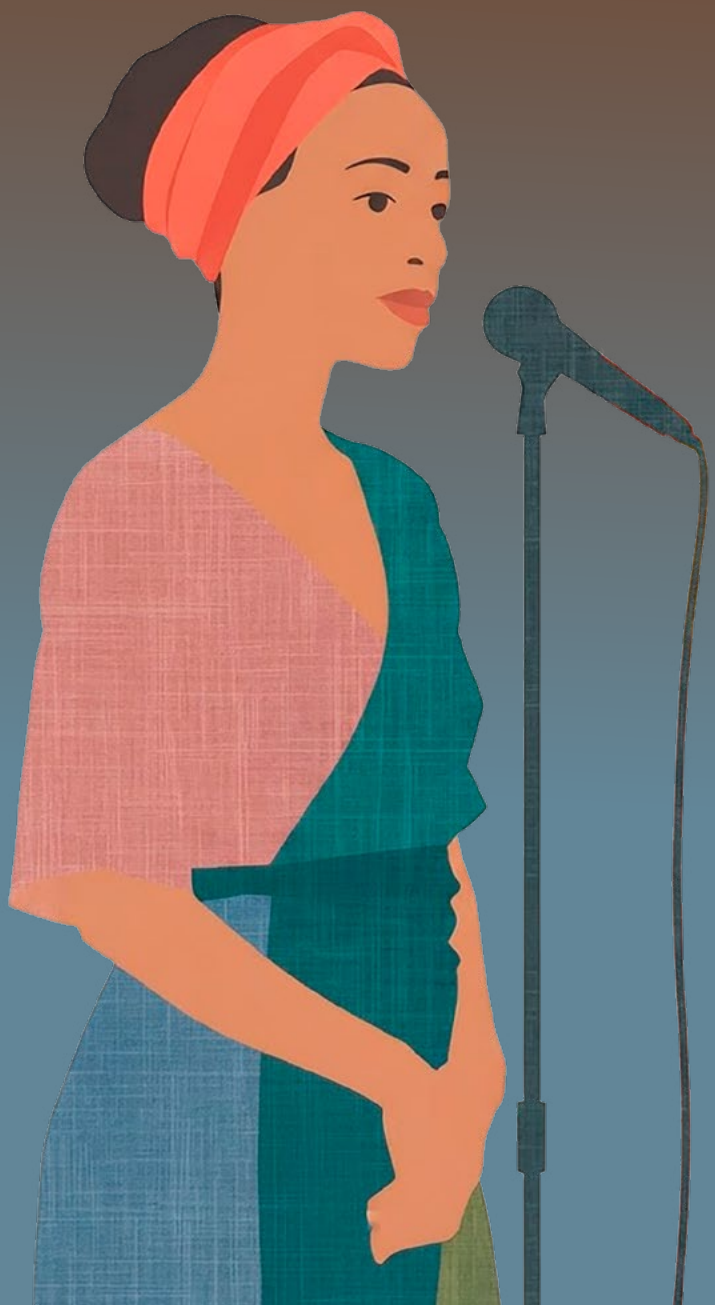


Anica Heinlein
VENRO Chair of the Board



Carsten Montag
VENRO Chair of the Board

INTRODUCTION



HOW THE WORK OF NGOS CAN STRENGTHEN DEMOCRACY

"Communities with rich networks of civic engagement are more likely to foster effective democratic governance."

The US political scientist Robert Putnam made this point as early as 1993 in his book "Making Democracy Work". Social networks, trust and civic engagement are key factors in the stability of democracy.

Only 3.4 per cent of people worldwide live in countries where full freedom of expression and assembly is guaranteed. This is shown in the 'Atlas of Civil Society' published by Brot für die Welt in 2026. By contrast, around 73 per cent of the world's population live in countries where civil liberties are significantly restricted and critics are harassed, arrested or killed. Authoritarian governments and ideologies are on the rise, whilst institutions of the rule of law, independent media and civil society actors are coming under pressure. Declines in democratic freedoms are not only evident in states where the scope for civil society action has long been regarded as 'closed' – such as Russia, Iran, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, China and Cuba – but also in countries including Georgia, Kenya, Ethiopia, Burkina Faso and Peru.

However, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have long worked to counter these trends. As a key pillar of civil society, they mobilise the public, build cross-regional networks and run international campaigns. Above all, they strengthen democracy 'from the bottom up'; in other words, they support local civil society actors who represent the interests of vulnerable sections of the population.

Strengthening democracy is a key response to today's global crises: when authoritarian forces around the world restrict the scope for civil society to act, strengthening democracy means actively defending and reopening those spaces.

By forming international networks, local initiatives pool their resources, expand their knowledge and increase their visibility. They facilitate exchange, protection and political initiatives across borders. This helps them remain able to act even under difficult conditions.

Democracy in practice requires the inclusion of all groups in decision-making processes. Children, young people and other marginalised groups, in particular, benefit from empowerment, education and changes in social norms. These are key prerequisites for enabling people to exercise their rights.

NGOs are key players in strengthening democracy. They create spaces for participation, amplify marginalised voices, promote political education and demand accountability.

Many also bring democracy to life – for example, when young people in Uganda use the Young Citizens' Score Card to learn how to put forward legitimate demands, such as the reintegration of young mothers into school:

"I am a citizen and I have rights to which I am entitled!"

YCSC Participant

Examples from the work of partners of VENRO's member organisations in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Europe show how, despite everything, scope for civil society action and democratic discourse can still be fought for and maintained.

The articles in this report examine various factors that are crucial to strengthening democracy: these include free and critical media, international cooperation, educational initiatives, the rights of minorities, the empowerment of children and young people, and gender equality.

CONTEXT



DEVELOPMENTS THREATENING DEMOCRACY

"Shrinking Space can be understood as a political struggle over the role of civil society. It describes a gradual tightening of the behavioural standards used to determine who or what is regarded as legitimate civil society."

This is the conclusion reached at a 2024 conference in Ljubljana on 'Shrinking Spaces for Civil Societies'. The shrinking space available to civil society is one of many factors that threaten democracies. The boundaries of what is considered legitimate civil society work are often redrawn – for example, on the grounds of social cohesion, the public interest or national security. This narrows the scope for action.

The Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index 2026 (BTI) presents an alarming picture: the BTI was first compiled 20 years ago, at which time democracies were still in the majority. Today, 56 per cent of the 137 countries examined in the BTI are governed autocratically.

Delegitimisation of Civil Society and the Media

In authoritarian states, democratic structures are undermined by the control of the media and smear campaigns against those who hold dissenting views. This divides society and hinders democratic negotiation processes. In these countries, journalists risk being physically attacked, deprived of their freedom or even killed. The resulting information vacuum is often filled with propaganda, as in Cameroon.

"The war in Cameroon has not only claimed thousands of lives, but has also spawned a flood of fake news and hate campaigns," says Godlove Dzebam of Draufsicht Bamenda. His organisation trains young people in Cameroon to become local reporters – although their work is hampered by the parties involved in the civil war. "We were often not able to carry our cameras around freely because we would then be stopped either by the military or by combatants."

However, autocratic tendencies are also gaining ground in numerous democracies – particularly where elected governments are undermining core democratic institutions with the aim of clinging to power. According to the BTI 2026, the erosion of democracy is particularly evident in two areas: the massive restriction of political participation and the undermining of the rule of law.

The setbacks are most evident in the areas of press freedom, freedom of expression and freedom of assembly. The scope for open debate is more restricted than at any time since the BTI survey began in 2006.

"Democracy dies not with a bang but with a whimper: it is eroded incrementally by elected leaders who subvert institutional constraints."

Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt (2018), "How Democracies Die"

According to the 2026 Atlas of Civil Society, in 82 out of 197 countries, governments are significantly curtailing civil liberties and harassing critics. These governments use not only smear campaigns and violence but also more subtle methods, such as exerting influence over the granting of licences to publishers, television and radio broadcasters; providing financial support to pro-government media; digital surveillance; and internet shutdowns. Such measures are intended to suppress criticism and hinder the organisation of opposition – and thus constitute a massive restriction on press freedom.

Economic Factors and Resource Scarcity

Alongside political pressures, most NGOs are facing an increasingly difficult economic environment.

Many NGOs working in development co-operation have faced a marked deterioration in their financial situation in recent years. According to the OECD, Official Development Assistance (ODA) from donor countries fell by six per cent in 2024; further cuts of between nine and 17 per cent were forecast for 2025. In fact, international development funding fell by as much as 23.1 per cent in 2025 compared with the previous year, to 174.3 billion US dollars – the sharpest decline since OECD statistics began. The poorest countries and those in sub-Saharan Africa are particularly affected, with declines of 13 to 25 per cent and 16 to 28 per cent expected respectively. Meanwhile, drastic cuts to US foreign aid and the suspension of around 83 per cent of the programmes run by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) are creating significant funding shortfalls for numerous international and local partner organisations. Many NGOs are therefore being forced to make staff redundancies, discontinue projects or scale back key services in the areas of education, health and the promotion of democracy and human rights.

Authoritarian governments may also obstruct funding for civil society organisations through administrative or political means. Irmgard Soentgen of Misereor, for example, reports that working conditions for her partner organisations in Ecuador have become more difficult. "Under a new NGO law, all organisations must register, disclose their finances and prove that their activities are in the public interest. Here, mere suspicion is enough to bring an NGO to a standstill."

STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY IS AN INTERNATIONAL ISSUE

"We see the strengthening of democracy as an international project, not just a German one."

Klaas Friemel Janowsky from the "Shaping Democracy Worldwide" project run by the One World Network NRW aims to foster broad public understanding of the importance of global interconnectedness. The project uses street theatre, drumming performances and flash mobs to invite the public in North Rhine-Westphalia to reflect on local participatory processes. It also aims to broaden perspectives to include global issues such as climate protection, displacement and sustainability. "We in Germany are not the epitome of democracy in practice. That is why we ask: what can we learn from others?"

Cooperation between NGOs – particularly across national borders – strengthens democratic resilience. This is why organisations are increasingly building such networks. "Misereor's local partner organisations have taken several strategically important cases to court and achieved success," says Irmgard Soentgen of Misereor. The exchange of successful human rights strategies with organisations in Colombia, Mexico and El Salvador is an important part of this work. Furthermore, Misereor's local partner organisations turn to regional bodies and the United Nations (UN) human rights mechanisms to hold their governments to account.

Civil society must prioritise international cooperation in order to promote exchange, shared learning and mutual support. This increases the prospects of collective change and helps civil society organisations retain their capacity to act, even in an increasingly authoritarian context.

COLONIAL CONTINUITIES AS A SOURCE OF CONFLICT

In countries with a colonial history, colonial structures and the resulting discrimination continue to have an impact. Strengthening democracy therefore also means recognising historical inequalities and taking local perspectives into account in order to enable sustainable participation. "The conflict between the Anglophone and Francophone parts of Cameroon is a legacy of colonialism," explains Godlove Dzebam of Draufsicht Bamenda, a partner organisation of Solidaritätsdienst International (SODI). Cameroon became a German colony in 1884 and was divided between France and Great Britain after the First World War. The differing colonial

administrative, educational and legal systems continue to shape the country to this day and fuel the ongoing conflict.

The marginalisation of the English language in everyday life in this officially bilingual country has fuelled independence movements in the Anglophone part of the country. The state responded with violence and repression. Democracy-building work must take this history into account: "Otherwise, the wounds of colonialism will resurface and create new ones," says Godlove Dzebam.

Through his organisation, he aims to recognise and empower people within their local communities – people whose stories are often not heard. In doing so, Draufsicht Bamenda uses journalistic methods to combat disinformation surrounding the conflict in Cameroon.



The project in Cameroon clearly demonstrates how democracy is strengthened through participation 'from the bottom up': fact-based reporting and trauma-sensitive journalism create reliable information structures and foster empowerment: 'Anyone who has a story to tell can make a contribution' is one of the project's key messages. This helps build trust within the population.

INCLUSION OF WOMEN AND THE PROMOTION OF QUEER RIGHTS

"From VENRO's perspective, the aim of feminist development cooperation is the equal political, economic and social participation of all people, regardless of, for example, gender, gender identity and sexual orientation, ethnic background and origin, religion, nationality, age, disability or immigration status," states the VENRO position paper on feminist development policy, 'From Idea to Reality'.

This is achieved through the equitable allocation of resources, the defence of the rights of marginalised groups, and the social and political participation of all. From an intersectional perspective, the aim is to expose power inequalities and tackle them at a structural level. Transformative feminist approaches are therefore essential for a functioning democracy.

Fairtrade Germany has established a successful model with the Women's School of Leadership in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana: the programme trains not only women cocoa farmers but also men who wish to act as 'gender champions' in support of women's rights. This combines individual empowerment with political participation.

"It is not enough for women simply to know their rights," explains Bettina von Reden of Fairtrade Germany. "We encourage them to speak out publicly and address others."

This project therefore addresses the very essence of democracy: the ability and opportunity to recognise and articulate one's own needs and rights, and to make one's voice heard. The aim is to increase women's participation in local political bodies and thereby bring about structural change. The approach is already having an impact. For example, Rosine Bekoin, a graduate of the Women's School of Leadership, later spoke in the British Parliament about the need to end the invisibility and exploitation of women cocoa farmers. She called on British and European policymakers, as well as traders and manufacturers, to establish fair trading conditions so that women cocoa farmers can earn a living wage.



In Tunisia, the organisation Mawjoudin campaigns for the rights of queer people. Through artistic projects such as the play 'Flagranti', they increase visibility and promote awareness of the rights of sexual minorities. Their work demonstrates how strengthening the rights of queer people contributes to democratic resilience. Democracy can only take root in the long term in a society where the diversity of the population is visible and included.

In addition, Mawjoudin provides direct social and legal support to vulnerable people. Until 2023, the organisation also received support from the LSVD⁺ Human Rights Foundation. This support had to be discontinued, partly because the Federal Foreign Office has ended funding for LSVD⁺ projects.

Through regional networking, Mawjoudin aims to preserve knowledge for future generations. This work aims to protect minority rights and democratic participation in the face of growing state repression. Mawjoudin co-founder Hedy (name changed) also sees this as a fight for democracy:

"Queer rights are linked to the right to sexual self-determination. Both are key to genuine freedom and genuine democracy."

THE ROLE OF NGOS IN PROMOTING DEMOCRACY

NGOs play a central role in strengthening democratic structures: they open up new avenues for participation, give marginalised groups a voice and bring democracy to life. The One World Network Thuringia, for example, uses accessible formats such as storytelling cafés and podcasts to highlight the link between local democracy and a global perspective, and to raise awareness of global issues amongst people in Thuringia. "We want to highlight the links between development work and democracy and ask: how can we be self-reliant?" says Laura Huschenbett, the network coordinator. She emphasises the importance of raising the profile of civil society actors and demonstrating that they are actively countering authoritarian tendencies.

In Uganda and Kenya, Plan International is using the Young Citizens' Score Card to promote participation led directly by young people. Young people identify local problems – such as young women dropping out of school, unsafe roads or a lack of hygiene facilities – and independently develop solutions, which they then discuss with schools, public authorities and civil society partners. Betty Habene, a participant in the programme, learnt to articulate the needs of young people who are otherwise rarely heard. She also learnt to use these concerns to challenge the authorities: "With the Young Citizens' Score Card, young people learn how to hold their institutions to account."

Draufsicht Bamenda is pursuing the same aim with a programme to strengthen democracy in schools in Cameroon. Through media and peace clubs, pupils learn what democracy means and how they can get involved in decision-making processes themselves.

The protection of marginalised groups is a prerequisite for democratic participation. In India, Don Bosco Mondo is committed to ensuring that children and young people are also recognised as rights-holders. This requires a change in deeply entrenched norms. "In our traditional culture, children are not part of the political decision-making process," says Moumita Roy (programme coordinator). That is why it is not enough simply to teach children communication skills. "To ensure they are able to raise their concerns with the village elders, we also work with parents, schools and communities."

Through these projects, NGOs act as bridges between marginalised groups and decision-makers, facilitate dialogue and build sustainable civil society structures. In this way, they promote not only participation, but also accountability, political education and social transformation.

SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE AND EFFECTIVE COUNTERSTRATEGIES



"The curtailment of civil society spaces is one of the most visible signs of democratic erosion worldwide," states the Bertelsmann Stiftung's 2026 Transformation Index. Indeed, non-governmental organisations, journalists and human rights defenders are coming under increasing pressure in many countries. In these countries, the promotion of democracy and civic engagement are no longer seen by sections of the political establishment and society as essential components of a pluralistic society, but rather as a threat to political stability. Repression often begins insidiously: with defamation, bureaucratic restrictions or accusations of foreign interference. The following accounts from various countries illustrate how the scope for action by civil society actors is narrowing – and what strategies they are developing to remain able to act despite these constraints.



CIVIL SOCIETY BEING PORTRAYED AS THE ENEMY

At the presentation of the 2025 Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution Report, the German Minister of the Interior, Alexander Dobrindt, stated: "The greatest threat to our democracy comes from right-wing extremists." This assessment is echoed by the Amadeu Antonio Foundation in its security report on attacks on democracy projects. Such projects are increasingly targeted by far-right attacks: "In 2025, an attack on democratic civil society was documented on average every third day."

According to the foundation, the consequences of this pressure are far-reaching: projects are under attack, funding is being called into question and activists are being intimidated. "At the same time, far-right actors – including right-wing populist and far-right parties, as well as right-wing alternative media – are spreading anti-democratic narratives aimed at delegitimising civic engagement." In this narrative, civil society itself becomes the enemy.

In many countries, it is the state itself that is increasingly tightening the conditions for democratic activism. This is illustrated by the following example from Togo. "Those in power are using the judiciary as a tool of repression to prevent our activities," says David Dosseh (coordinator of the Front Citoyen Togo Debout, Togo). For him, the conclusion is clear: the judiciary has long since ceased to be a neutral instrument and is now part of a system designed to suppress pro-democracy activism. He tells of colleagues who have been imprisoned – such as the human rights activist Aziz Gouma, who was detained for years. The message is clear: anyone who gets involved risks their freedom – or worse.



Professor David Dosseh signs the founding document of the Cadre de Réflexion et d'Action Citoyenne (CRAC), a new platform that brings together civil society and political forces in support of democracy. © FCTD

THE FIGHT FOR DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS IN TOGO

Interview with David Dosseh (FCTD – Front Citoyen Togo Debout)

Togo is one of the countries where an authoritarian regime is placing civil society activists under severe pressure and posing a serious threat to them. Anyone who gets involved risks imprisonment or abduction. Nevertheless, David Dosseh is fighting for democratic change alongside the Front Citoyen Togo Debout (FCTD).

Could you briefly introduce yourself and your organisation?

David Dosseh: *I am the coordinator of FCTD, an organisation that has been working to promote democracy in Togo since 2017. Together with other civil society organisations in Togo, and in partnership with opposition parties and an international network of organisations across West Africa, we aim to foster a culture of democracy in Togo.*

How would you describe the political situation in Togo?

Dosseh: *Since 1967, the same family – the Gnassingbé family – has been at the helm of our country. Following the death of Étienne Gnassingbé Eyadéma in 2005, his son succeeded him in a dynastic succession – in breach of our constitution. The current president is doing everything in his power to retain his*

position. In this tense situation, the FCTD remains steadfast and is committed to fostering a culture of democracy, a democratic transfer of power, free and fair elections, respect for human rights and a fair justice system.

What strategy does your organisation follow?

Dosseh: *We are taking a peaceful approach. For this approach to succeed, we need to raise public awareness by explaining the situation, setting out our strategy and calling on people to organise themselves and demand their rights and their individual and collective freedoms.*

What obstacles do you find yourself facing in this regard?

Dosseh: *The government places numerous obstacles in our way. One of the biggest difficulties is that we are prevented from reaching the population. Whenever we try to organise events, security forces are sent to break them up, or they are banned on the grounds of laws against public gatherings. Even when we comply with all deadlines and inform the authorities, a pretext is always found – usually alleged security concerns – to prohibit our activities.*

There are also arbitrary detentions, politically motivated forced exile and the enforced disappearance of opposition figures fighting for democracy.

What role does the judiciary play in this context?

Dosseh: *Some of our staff and partners have been imprisoned, for example Aziz Gouma, a human rights activist with Togolese-Irish citizenship. He spent eight years in prison and was only released in December 2025. He recently spoke at the United Nations, denouncing the human rights situation in Togo, the torture he endured, the lack of justice and the conditions of detention. All of this shows that the judiciary is being used as an instrument of repression.*

Do you fear further deterioration in the legal situation?

Dosseh: *The government is currently planning a new law: organisations will be required to disclose in detail what financial resources they receive and how they use them. These additional requirements will make the work of civil society considerably more difficult.*

How do you manage to remain operational despite these restrictions?

Dosseh: *When I founded FCTD, we were never issued with an official administrative document that would have allowed us to carry out our work. That is why we collaborate with other organisations that do have such documents. These organisations then register events, whilst we work behind the scenes.*

We also use social media to publicise our statements and share information without having to seek permission. Furthermore, we work with a network of lawyers who support us in the event of arrests and provide legal assistance.

With FCTD, you place great emphasis on international cooperation …

Dosseh: *The international network is very important to us. If we cannot speak out in our own country, our partner organisations in West Africa and Europe can speak on our behalf and raise awareness of our situation.*

What can global public attention achieve given the situation in Togo?

Dosseh: *The release of Aziz Gouma, for example, was the result of a European Union investigation into the human rights situation in Togo and the violence by security forces that led to the deaths of several demonstrators.*

International pressure is crucial, and we call for it to be stepped up – particularly in relation to the new 2024 constitution, which no longer provides for the direct election of the president.

CRIMINALISING NGOS

Repression does not take the form solely of persecution and imprisonment. It often begins with words.

In Ecuador, Irmgard Soentgen (project manager at Misereor) has observed how the government's rhetoric has changed. Organisations that campaign, for example, to protect communities from the consequences of mining are suddenly portrayed as enemies: they are accused of being unpatriotic, and their actions labelled as terrorist. The accusation is having an effect. "This is a clear strategy of criminalisation," says Irmgard Soentgen, summarising her assessment. Whilst armed groups on the ground pose a real threat, pressure from the state is growing at the same time – a two-pronged threat that leaves little room for manoeuvre.



Paula Litvachky, a director at the Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS) in Argentina, describes a similar pattern. "We are facing a serious crisis," she says. A government that prioritises economic interests over human rights is increasingly cracking down on critical voices. Social and indigenous movements in particular are being branded as criminal organisations or even as a threat to the state. The accusation of terrorism thus becomes a political tool – and protest itself a criminal offence.

In Tunisia, too, it is evident just how tight the restrictions can be – arising not only from the state but also from social pressure. Hedy, from the organisation Mawjoudin, encounters this daily: "In the past, the laws against same-sex relationships were not often enforced. But now government policy is becoming increasingly restrictive." As the visibility of queer issues grows, so does the risk. "As a gay couple, you can no longer show yourself in public." Events are being cancelled, and initiatives are scaling back their activities. "We haven't organised a film festival since 2022 because the heightened security situation doesn't allow it." What remains are safe spaces – and the question of how long even these will remain safe.

HUMANITARIAN AID DESPITE A RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT

ADRA GERMANY and ADRA YEMEN

ADRA Yemen

ADRA Yemen is part of the international ADRA network, a network of more than 100 independent offices worldwide. These partnerships are characterised by respect, mutual understanding and cooperation on an equal footing. ADRA Yemen works in an environment marked by war, displacement and humanitarian crises to support particularly vulnerable groups. The organisation combines emergency aid with long-term development cooperation and promotes access to education, healthcare, clean water and income-generating opportunities. There is a particular focus on supporting women, children and internally displaced people. At the same time, ADRA strengthens local communities through training, psychosocial support and the development of resilient local structures. The aim is to offer people prospects, security and social participation despite ongoing conflicts.

In Yemen, the restrictive political environment and mistrust of international NGOs among sections of the de facto government in the north of the country are limiting cooperation with the local population and hampering both humanitarian and peace work.

"ADRA Germany and ADRA Yemen, like many other NGOs and local organisations, are subject to interference in their planning and implementation processes," says Verena Lauer. At ADRA Germany, she works with ADRA Yemen to improve medical care for the rural population in Yemen.

Specifically, the project focuses on delivering medical equipment to Yemen – where such equipment cannot be sourced locally – and on providing training for hospital staff. In its day-to-day work, the project relies on cooperation with local community-based organisations, using a partnership-based approach that builds trust.

The mistrust harboured by parts of the government towards international organisations is creating new challenges for maintaining civic space. In particular, new laws, controls and repressive measures are hampering humanitarian work.

Nevertheless, ADRA Yemen has found ways to maintain an approach grounded in its values and principles: "Our aim is to reach people effectively and to secure long-term access to project areas. In doing so, we do not interfere in politics. That is why we ensure that terms such as gender, feminism or protection are communicated in language that resonates locally and does not give rise to unnecessary political misunderstandings – for example, by talking about social inclusion," reports Verena Lauer.

"An understanding of local circumstances and the Arabic language – which traditionally has no equivalent for the term 'gender' – is of central importance to our work."



ADRA is delivering medical equipment to Yemen that cannot be sourced locally. © ADRA Yemen

This adaptation concerns language and mutual understanding, but not the content or objectives of ADRA Yemen's work. Verena Lauer reports on successes that sustain this commitment: "I met a mother of two who, during her third pregnancy, was able to see an ultrasound scan for the first time because she was receiving treatment at a hospital supported by ADRA Yemen. Providing life-saving and dignified care is at the heart of our work and the reason why we remain active even in the face of restrictions."

Foreign Agents

Authoritarian states frequently resort to so-called 'foreign agent' laws to portray civil society organisations as tools of foreign interests. Under the pretext of transparency or national security, NGOs that receive funding from abroad are forced to register as 'foreign agents', which publicly stigmatises them and undermines public trust in them. At the same time, this is often accompanied by strict conditions, surveillance and the threat of heavy penalties, which make their work far more difficult or, in effect, impossible. Such laws exist, for example, in Russia, China, Georgia, Egypt, Nicaragua and India.



Rally to mark International Human Rights Day 2025 © INREDH

PRESERVING CIVIC SPACE THROUGH COLLECTIVE STRENGTH

FUNDACIÓN REGIONAL DE ASESORÍA EN DERECHOS HUMANOS (INREDH) and MISEREOR

Civil society organisations do not simply disappear when the pressure mounts. They change.

In Ecuador, Irmgard Soentgen from Misereor describes a situation in which human rights activists are under pressure from two sides: "On the one hand, civil society actors are threatened by armed gangs; on the other, they are put under pressure and obstructed by the state." Yet rather than falling apart, they are drawing closer together.

Several organisations have joined forces under the coordination of the Fundación Regional de Asesoría en Derechos Humanos (INREDH), a partner organisation of Misereor, to strengthen their collective capacity. They form alliances, share resources and support one another – including in very practical ways: when bank accounts are frozen, they provide one another with practical support.

"In our pilot project, we are providing this coalition of organisations working for environmental protection and human rights with tools: How can I protect myself and my team? How can we protect the communities and activists we support? What security strategies can we devise?" explains Irmgard Soentgen.

This creates a form of protection rooted in solidarity. Training, safety protocols, risk awareness – all of this becomes part of civil society work. Activism is becoming more professional, more cautious, but also more resilient.

Organisations are also seeking scope for action beyond national borders. They are building

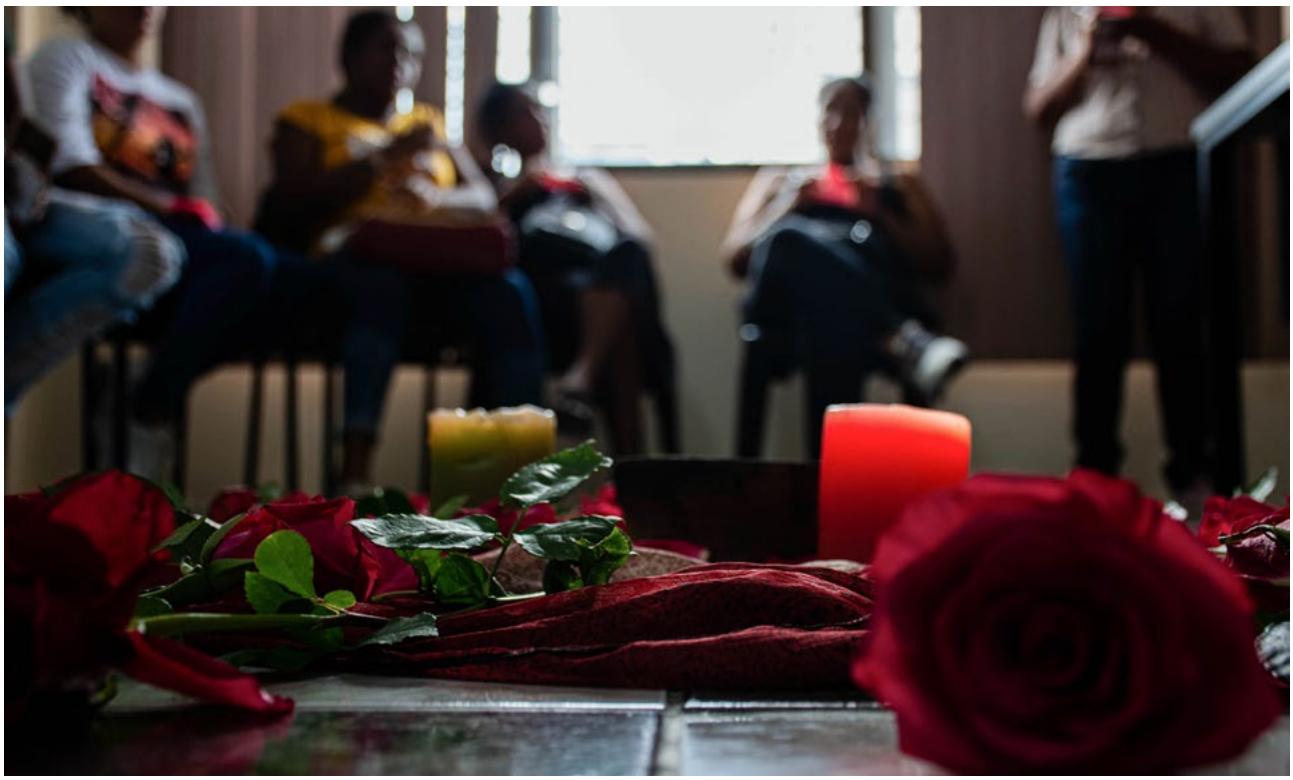
networks and sharing experiences and strategies for resistance. Ecuadorian initiatives are exchanging ideas with partners from Colombia, Mexico and El Salvador. This transnational networking creates a stronger sense of solidarity.

Legal Action as a Tool

In Ecuador, the rule of law itself is becoming a battleground. Despite all the restrictions, organisations are making strategic use of legal channels. Misereor's partner organisations have taken several cases to court and won, reports Irmgard Soentgen. "Human rights organisations have succeeded in securing convictions against members of the military following the murder of four children, in ensuring that communities defending their environmental rights were acquitted of arbitrary charges, and in having the organisations' frozen bank accounts unfrozen." These successes signal that state arbitrariness does not go unchallenged.

Fundación Regional de Asesoría en Derechos Humanos (INREDH)

INREDH works in Ecuador to protect human rights and strengthen democratic structures and the rule of law. The organisation supports indigenous communities, social movements and human rights defenders in conflicts relating to land rights, environmental destruction and social discrimination. Through educational work, legal support and public campaigns, INREDH promotes the political participation of marginalised groups. A particular focus is on protecting activists who are subjected to violence or criminalisation. The aim of this work is to defend democratic spaces and to strengthen social and environmental rights in the long term.



Welfare and support group for women from the relatives' committee of prisoners in Guayaquil © INREDH



Rally for freedom of expression, Buenos Aires Argentina© Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales

DOCUMENTING AND EXPOSING INJUSTICE

CENTRO DE ESTUDIOS LEGALES Y SOCIALES (CELS) and BROT FÜR DIE WELT

Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS)

CELS works in Argentina to promote human rights, social justice and the strengthening of democratic institutions. The organisation addresses issues such as police violence, discrimination, freedom of expression and the rights of marginalised groups. In partnership with Brot für die Welt, CELS in Argentina strives to ensure that critical voices are heard. Through legal support, research and political advocacy, CELS supports victims of human rights violations and brings social issues into political and public debate. A particular focus is on defending democratic freedoms and addressing state violence. Its aim is to promote an inclusive democracy in which all people can exercise their rights.

In Argentina, Paula Litvachky describes the strategy adopted by the human rights organisation Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS) to counter repression and violence by making abuses visible and documenting the truth. “There are state-sponsored smear campaigns that portray the press and civil society organisations as terrorist groups. Our response to this is documentation. And bringing the facts to light.”

On the ‘Mapa de la Policía’ project platform, CELS, together with other organisations, collects evidence of police violence: “We use photos, videos and witness statements to document how the police operate on the streets.” When a photographer was shot by the police, they managed to reconstruct the sequence of events and refute the official account, which claimed that the demonstrators were responsible. This

makes it clear that countering disinformation requires not only rebuttal but, above all, verifiable evidence.

"The space for civil society is shrinking. Organisations campaigning for social justice and the rights of minorities are being branded as terrorists by the government," explains Paula Litvachky. The consequences are damaging democratic life: protests are being criminalised, activists face the prospect of imprisonment, and a climate of fear and self-censorship prevails.

CELS counters the government's misrepresentations – such as the accusation of terrorism levelled at social and indigenous movements – through research, media work, campaigns and projects such as 'Mapa de la Policía'. International human rights organisations are also kept informed to increase pressure on the government.

LOCAL JOURNALISM AS A GRASSROOTS APPROACH

DRAUFSICHT BAMENDA and SOLIDARITÄTSDIENST INTERNATIONAL

Draufsicht Bamenda

Draufsicht Bamenda is a civil society media and education project in Bamenda, Cameroon, which empowers young people through journalism, media literacy and democratic participation. In an environment characterised by conflict, disinformation and social polarisation, the project creates spaces for dialogue, critical thinking and local public discourse. Young people learn to conduct fact-based research, use conflict-sensitive language and share trustworthy information within their communities. Media clubs in schools also give young people practical experience of democratic processes and social responsibility. The aim is to empower young people to contribute to social cohesion as credible advocates and local leaders.

How can authoritarian tendencies be countered? In Cameroon, the focus is on a grassroots approach. With support from SODI, the project seeks to empower people who feel powerless, says Godlove Dzebam. "Our project began with the idea of creating a place where young people could meet to exchange ideas." In a context of violence, mistrust and disinformation, listening becomes a political act.

As the conflict in Cameroon escalates, the project is evolving. 'Draufsicht Bamenda' teaches young people journalistic skills, strengthens their media literacy and seeks to counter the inflammatory rhetoric of war reporting with a voice of their own.

"As local journalists, we want to strengthen trust within the community by disseminating news

through credible channels at a time when there is widespread mistrust of all state-run media. Facts rather than rumours. Sensitive language rather than escalation."

Where state narratives lose credibility, an alternative public sphere can emerge.

The work begins in local schools: media clubs are being set up there, where discussions focus not only on democracy as an abstract concept but also on how it is practised in everyday life. "As part of our programme," says Godlove Dzebam, "we held interesting discussions about school elections and how we can elect student representatives who set a positive example."

The project is proving a success: "We have trained young people to take on leadership roles in the midst of a polarised society."

Most projects aimed at strengthening democracy and participation share a common mindset: adaptation rather than withdrawal. Whether through alliances, legal proceedings, international networks, documentation or community work – NGOs are finding ways to remain effective.

Or, as Godlove Dzebam puts it: "It's not just about rescuing people from the river – it's about preventing them from being thrown in in the first place."



Young people in Cameroon are learning journalistic skills in media clubs © Draufsicht Bamenda

EMPOWERING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



EAST AFRICAN PUPILS ARE CAMPAIGNING FOR THEIR RIGHTS

PLAN INTERNATIONAL

The empowerment of children and young people often begins quietly – with a question, a conversation or the first moment when someone realises: 'My voice matters.'

According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, participation by children and young people is not merely an option, but a right:

'States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child.' (Art. 12)

In the field of development policy, the Young Citizens' Score Card (YCSC) has proved to be an effective tool for safeguarding this right for children. Plan International, the implementing organisation, adapted this approach – previously successful with adults – for use with children and young people. The project is participatory in nature and takes a gender-transformative approach. It challenges existing gender roles and power dynamics and enables children and young people to take on leadership roles.

According to Marilena Bachmeier of Plan International, the project helps young people overcome barriers to participation. Often, she says, they are not listened to or taken seriously by older decision-makers. They find it difficult to gain the attention of decision-makers and to build lasting relationships with them.

With the help of an assessment form – known as the Young Citizens' Score Card – young people explore questions such as: What institutions, what services and what rights are available in my local community and in my country? And do they meet my needs?

Young people can use the Score Card to identify shortcomings, hold those responsible to account and work together to devise solutions.





The Young Citizens' Score Card project in Kenya and Uganda promotes young people's political participation © Plan international Uganda

Plan International also supports young people through training and capacity-building, thereby empowering them to take effective action: How do you speak to people in leadership positions? Which other civil society actors are potential allies? How can I help give my cause greater legitimacy?

In both Kenya and Uganda, one of the YCSC's key areas of focus is the right to education. Many young women there are forced to drop out of school following a pregnancy. As teenage mothers, they face stigma and lack the financial means to complete their schooling.

Many girls are unable to attend lessons whilst they are menstruating. The young people at YCSC talk to those affected to find out what support they need.

Plan International – Young Citizens' Score Card

The Young Citizens' Score Card project in Kenya and Uganda strengthens young people's political participation and promotes democratic accountability at local level. Young people learn to critically assess public services such as education, healthcare and local infrastructure, and to represent their concerns to local authorities. Using the score card, they uncover shortcomings, collect data and engage in dialogue with political decision-makers. The project combines political education with practical participation in everyday life and creates spaces where young people can experience democratic participation first-hand. The aim is to strengthen the accountability of state institutions and to recognise young people as active agents in shaping their society.

They then seek to engage with all those involved: they talk to teachers about inclusion, to the parents of young mothers about their rights, and to school authorities about possible measures to facilitate their reintegration. This not only creates a supportive environment, but also encourages schools to provide meals, hygiene products and clean toilets.

"Many young people are unaware of their rights. We share the results of the score cards with them and explain what rights they have and what support they should receive from their school. We also show them how they can hold their institutions to account."

Damaris Nyahongo, YCSC participant

It is precisely this moment that lies at the heart of the project. The processes are led not by adults but by the young people themselves. Their focus is on giving marginalised groups a voice.

For example, the young people at YCSC are campaigning to ensure that pupils with disabilities are provided with wheelchairs. They also teach young mothers craft skills such as carpet weaving or run computer courses. "It's important that they have an income for themselves and their children and can pay their school fees." Equally important is the new sense of self that the pupils gain with the help of the Score Card: "We young mothers have rights," says Betty Habene, a YCSC participant from Uganda, "and we have a voice."



Workshop for Children in Dimapur, India © CFCI, Child Friendly Dimapur, AMMA Integrated Development Association (AIDA)

CHILDREN IN INDIA KNOW AND DEFEND THEIR RIGHTS

DON BOSCO MONDO

Don Bosco Mondo works to empower children as democratic stakeholders in society. A project implemented by local Don Bosco organisations in India focused on establishing children's rights on a sustainable basis and therefore also involved the adult support networks around the children. The social participation of children and young people was promoted – in the knowledge that, regardless of their age, they are holders of rights.

The project reached 6,500 children and supported them in learning about, exercising and asserting their rights. It also supported and empowered teachers, parents, civil society actors and local authorities.

As part of the project, teams of mentors – trained and supported by local partner organisations – empowered children to exercise their rights. They set up children's rights clubs in the northern Indian cities of Dimapur and Shillong, organised creative, participatory activities, ran campaigns and held an annual children's rights congress. Supplementary training sessions were aimed at the wider community; civil society forums were also established in both cities.

These measures brought about a fundamental shift in the dynamics: "In our traditional culture, children are not part of the decision-making process, and this has been the case for generations.

But nowadays, children's voices are important too. That is why one of the biggest challenges at the outset was convincing the community leaders that we needed to give children a voice so that we could find out what problems they were facing," reports Deep Gurung, project coordinator in Shillong.

In addition, children were empowered to carry out their own surveys and develop indicators relating to children's rights. Now, in Shillong and Dimapur, children are investigating their local environment: which places are unsafe, cause fear or pose a health risk?

"The children in our training programme," says Father Joe Prabhu of Don Bosco India, "have identified places where there is a lack of street lighting or where drugs are being taken. The local authorities have listened and acted. This has led to visible improvements in the children's immediate living environment."

Another example is a playground that had become a rubbish tip. Children documented the problem, approached the local authorities and took the initiative to clear up the playground with the help of the local council, so that it could once again be used for its original purpose.

This illustrates what empowerment means: not just being heard but taking action oneself.

Through workshops and discussion forums with representatives from politics, the civil service, the media, the business sector and civil society organisations, participants learnt how to clarify responsibilities, raise awareness of children's rights and bring about concrete change.

The training sessions not only ensured that children were aware of their rights but also encouraged them to approach authorities such as the police.



Workshop in Shillong, India © CFCI, Child Friendly Shillong, Bosco Integrated Development Society (BIDS)

For many children, contact with the police is a source of anxiety. To break down this barrier, the project brought children and police officers together in a safe environment and encouraged direct interaction. "With the support of the city council, we have set up child-friendly areas in the police stations," explains Garrol Lotha, project coordinator in Dimapur. This has helped to overcome reservations and provided children with more accessible ways to seek support.

In terms of its substantive focus, the project was guided by internationally recognised child rights standards, particularly the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. A dedicated Child Rights Manual was developed to provide practical guidance on children's rights, forms of participation, and the roles of different stakeholders. Success stories featuring children and young people, together with examples of good practice, can be shared through the media and used as training materials by other organisations.

The project not only empowered children in Shillong and Dimapur. It also addressed their family and social environment. At the beginning, for example, the mentors invested considerable time and effort in convincing parents to allow their children to participate in the child rights groups. In addition, teachers from 50 schools received further training. They learnt about the relevant legal framework and their responsibilities, as well as teaching methods for helping children understand and exercise their right to democratic participation.

"Previously, children were hardly involved in local decision-making processes. Today, children stand up for their concerns – and their views are respected by adults." Garrol Lotha describes this change. As the project coordinator, she regularly visited schools to raise awareness of children's rights. Through the project, the children acquired many skills that help them make decisions independently. Local decision-makers are also cooperating more closely now. They have come to understand that children's rights are not something to fear; rather, respecting them contributes to improving the community, says Garrol Lotha. As a result, many of the proposals put forward through child-led campaigns could be implemented without difficulty.

"By creating platforms where children can express their opinions, we contribute to democracy. The children of today are the leaders of tomorrow, and the education they receive today will further strengthen the principles of democracy," explains Father Joe Prabhu.

Don Bosco Mondo

The project "Strengthening social inclusion and promoting children's rights" supports disadvantaged children and young people in the cities of Dimapur and Shillong in north-eastern India. The focus was on protecting children's rights, ensuring access to education, and providing social and psychological support to particularly vulnerable young people – such as street children, school leavers or children from disadvantaged family backgrounds. The project created safe spaces where children could receive support, advice and new prospects. At the same time, young people were encouraged to exercise their rights and play an active role in their communities. Through educational programmes, leisure activities and community work, the project promoted social inclusion, self-confidence and long-term opportunities for the future.

DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION IN GERMANY



For many people, democracy does not begin in parliaments, but in everyday life – in the schoolyard, at the weekly market, or in conversations with neighbours. This is precisely where numerous development organisations operate at grassroots level, making democratic values tangible and enabling people to participate actively.



"Democracy is not a system that can simply be taught, but a practice that has to be experienced." This is how Dutch educational theorist Gert Biesta puts it in Learning Democracy in School and Society (2011).

Development education encompasses a range of concepts and approaches, including global learning, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and engagement in development policy. These approaches help people to understand global interconnections, inequality, power relations and issues of global justice, and empower them to act responsibly. Those who have a better understanding of global inequality, human rights, climate issues or power relations are better placed to engage critically with and help shape democratic decisions. Democracy is not merely taught in theory, but is brought to life through participation, changes in perspective and the opportunity for collective action, as the following examples show. The projects described aim not only to impart knowledge about global interconnections, but also to foster the ability to engage in critical reflection and to play an active role in shaping democracy. This is precisely where their contribution to democratic resilience lies: through experiences rooted in everyday life, people learn to contextualise complex societal challenges, to tolerate differing perspectives and to translate their understanding into collective action.

"Development Education has the right tools to counteract attempts to divide society and erode solidarity in times of global crisis," says Klaas Friemel Janowsky (project manager at Eine Welt Netz NRW). These tools are urgently needed, as the effects of social and political divisions are increasingly apparent in Germany. Authoritarian tendencies – which respond to complex issues with simplistic answers and disregard nuanced contexts – are spreading rapidly and pose serious risks to democracy. A comprehensive understanding of the implications of these tendencies is needed to support a shift towards greater commitment to democracy.

At the same time, it is important to understand that democracy in Germany cannot be viewed solely as a national phenomenon, but is linked to democracy movements worldwide. International cooperation between democratic states is essential to advancing human rights and sustainability goals worldwide.



Street campaign in Steinfurt © Eine Welt Netz NRW

SHAPING DEMOCRACY WORLDWIDE

EINE WELT NETZ NRW

The “Shaping Democracy Worldwide” project run by Eine Welt Netz NRW uses art, street theatre and music. For example, at a weekly market in Steinfurt, a seemingly simple drumming activity becomes a powerful educational illustration: initially, a diverse, lively rhythm emerges, until a person with a whistle intervenes and forces everyone to play in unison. The scene suddenly seems monotonous and controlled. Only when individuals begin to break out of the rhythm and raise their own voices does diversity return. This is accompanied by statements such as: ‘We use our voices for democracy.’ Klaas Friemel Janowsky from Eine Welt Netz NRW explains that the aim is to connect with people’s everyday realities through such sensory experiences:

“Performative interventions lead directly to conversations with passers-by: Why is diversity important? What happens when voices are suppressed? The event brings to life the very essence of democratic principles – and invites people to reflect on their own role within them.”

This is complemented by artistic installations and dialogue formats, such as discussions with international partners on social values such as solidarity, cohesion and participation.

The street campaign in Steinfurt was followed by a public discussion with the town's mayor. "We talked about sustainability at a local level, about democratic coexistence and how citizens can get involved in local decision-making processes," says Klaas Friemel Janowsky.

In other discussion sessions, a colleague from Senegal explained African social concepts such as Ubuntu and Teranga – concepts based on hospitality, love for one's neighbor, and social cohesion – and highlighted what the people of Steinfurt can learn from them.

These examples illustrate a broader point:

The promotion of democracy is particularly successful where people are not only informed but also actively involved – where they can gain their own experiences, ask questions and contribute their perspectives.

This illustrates that democracy is not a static state but an ongoing process.

At a time when authoritarian tendencies and social polarisation are on the rise worldwide, grassroots development education takes on particular significance. It raises awareness of global interconnections, promotes dialogue and a shift in perspectives – and encourages people to use their own voices. Democracy thrives when people actively shape it.

Eine Welt Netz NRW

The "Shaping Democracy Worldwide" project run by Eine Welt Netz NRW combines global justice with democracy education in North Rhine-Westphalia. Through educational programmes, workshops and dialogue forums, the network addresses issues relating to human rights, social participation and opportunities for democratic action. In doing so, it incorporates global perspectives and highlights global interconnections such as inequality, the climate crisis and discrimination. The aim is to encourage people to actively campaign for an open, inclusive and democratic society. The project also strengthens civic engagement and promotes exchange between local initiatives and international partners.



LOCAL PARTICIPATION AND GLOBAL JUSTICE

EINE WELT NETZWERK THÜRINGEN

When children in Thuringia discuss climate justice, global inequality or fair trade today, it is often thanks to the Thuringian Development Education Days (thebit). For more than 30 years, this project, run by Eine Welt Netzwerk Thüringen, has provided schools and youth groups with speakers who make global issues tangible and relevant to young people's lives. Through workshops and project days, young people learn about perspectives from other parts of the world – and begin to understand how closely their own everyday lives are linked to global issues.

In the run-up to the 2024 state elections, the Eine Welt Netzwerk Thüringen (EWNT) deliberately focused on the link between global justice and local democracy as part of the campaign 'From Thuringia to Taiwan: In 2024, the world votes'. Franziska Weiland, Executive Director of the EWNT, says that the two are more closely linked than many realise: "We are showing that in Thuringia, it is not only far-right tendencies that are on the rise, but that there is also a strong democratic civil society – a civil society that stands in solidarity with partners worldwide."



© Eine Welt Netzwerk Thüringen e. V.

Rather than relying on traditional knowledge transfer, the network made a conscious decision to launch a social media campaign to highlight political developments in various countries around the world and in Thuringia, while also emphasising development policy issues in the context of the state parliamentary election. To this end, the network worked with its member organisations to draft statements and gather testimonials. The campaign combined educational and campaigning work in line with the 'Global Citizenship Education' approach – which focuses on shared global responsibility and

participation – and incorporated workshop outcomes directly into its activities. The social media campaign was accompanied by information stands at major events such as the Fête de la Musique and Thüringentag (Thuringia Day), as well as a specialist event in Leipzig. Another important component of the campaign was international exchange. As part of the 'Democracy Dialogues', stakeholders from Germany engaged in dialogue with partner organisations that are also grappling with authoritarian tendencies in their own countries. The message was clear: we can and must learn a great deal from one another in order to remain able to act.

All activities were closely tailored to the political situation in Thuringia. In the run-up to the 2024 elections, numerous civil society alliances were active there, working to strengthen democratic values and promote openness to the world.

The network, together with the #Nordhausenzusammen initiative, was one of the key driving forces behind the founding of the 'Weltoffenes Thüringen' alliance. The aim was to bring development policy perspectives into the ongoing debates – and thereby highlight an often-overlooked dimension: the link between democracy and globally sustainable development. The key questions posed by the new alliance were: What significance do elections and democracy hold globally? What options for action do we have to promote openness to the world, and how can we act effectively ourselves? What does openness to the world mean for us in Thuringia when it comes to countering far-right narratives?

Eine Welt Netzwerk Thüringen

The Eine Welt Netzwerk Thüringen (EWNT) is the state-level development policy network in Thuringia and, since 2005, has been bringing together over 40 associations, initiatives and individuals committed to global justice and sustainable development. Its work focuses in particular on global learning, democracy education, education for sustainable development and global citizenship education. Through projects such as 'thebit', 'Education Meets Development' and 'DCYDE!', the network creates educational programmes for schools, youth groups and civil society actors. At the same time, the EWNT supports organisations through advice, training and political networking. The aim is to highlight global interconnections, strengthen social participation and encourage people to actively campaign for a society based on solidarity and democracy.

The Working Group of One World Regional Networks in Germany (agl)

agl is the umbrella organisation for the 16 Eine Welt (One World) regional networks in Germany. It was founded in 1999 to support local development organisations and initiatives in their civil society work and to strengthen the structures underpinning "Eine Welt" work. Together with its 16 members – the 'Eine Welt' regional networks – agl advocates for future-oriented global development based on the principles of social justice, environmental sustainability, democracy and participation. A key focus of its work is in the field of education, with an emphasis on global learning.

DEMOCRACY NEEDS PARTICIPATION

AKTION GEGEN DEN HUNGER

When pupils in Germany explore the issue of global hunger, they soon come face to face with fundamental questions of justice: Why do some people not have enough to eat? What role do climate change, conflicts and social inequality play in this? Action Against Hunger's educational work specifically addresses these interconnections. Through its school programme, the organisation reaches more than 30,000 children and young people every year, teaching them that hunger is not an isolated problem but is closely linked to political, economic and social structures.

Aktion gegen den Hunger

Action Against Hunger is a humanitarian and development aid organisation that operates in 54 countries and regions worldwide and supports around 21.2 million people. For more than 45 years, the organisation has been combating malnutrition and providing access to clean water and healthcare. 7,122 staff members deliver emergency aid and help people build sustainable livelihoods.

The lessons focus on the following questions: What role do structural inequalities play in relation to hunger? How are climate justice and hunger linked? Does hunger manifest itself differently depending on gender? Through their own fundraising campaigns, the pupils link what they have learnt with practical action and experience how collective action can have a tangible impact.

"We bring together different perspectives and aim to foster a deeper understanding of global interconnections," says Anna Kristina Bauerreiß from Action Against Hunger. To this end, teachers can choose from a range of educational modules featuring videos and illustrative materials suitable for different age groups. All formats are in line with the principles of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and can be delivered both in person and online.

The 'Schools Against Hunger' project promotes education for democracy by fostering an interest in global and development policy issues and motivating young people to take on social responsibility. Using examples from humanitarian and development policy practice, it develops skills such as critical thinking, perspective-taking and reflection on global justice. Furthermore, the programme focuses on solutions and the resilience of communities. It demonstrates, at both global and local levels, how collective action can make a positive contribution to addressing societal challenges. Beyond the educational content itself, the team is increasingly involving pupils in the organisation of school visits, for example through the pupil council or class councils – always under the motto: 'Learn, take action, make a difference!'

GENDER AND JUSTICE



Without the active involvement and empowerment of women, democracy remains incomplete. Gender justice and equality are human rights and prerequisites for a society's democratic development and social justice.

Sexism and discrimination are mechanisms that perpetuate social power inequalities. These inequalities are often reinforced by competition for limited resources. Structural change requires transformative feminist approaches at various levels: from individual empowerment and public education to stronger representation of women in socio-political discourse.

All of this is evident in the Women's School of Leadership in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, initiated by Fairtrade Germany. Its aim is to bring about lasting change in gender inequalities.

WHEN WOMEN BREAK THEIR SILENCE

FAIRTRADE AFRICA and FAIRTRADE DEUTSCHLAND

Salimata Diakite knows what it feels like to speak in public for the first time. The cocoa farmer works hard every day in her village in Côte d'Ivoire to ensure a good harvest. Like the other women, she plants and tends the cocoa trees, harvests, ferments and dries the cocoa beans – she is involved in every stage of the production process. And yet, in the end, none of it belongs to her.

"Women do everything until the cocoa is dried. But the men take it, sell it and are not accountable to the women." This experience is not limited to Salimata Diakite; rather, it is a structural pattern: women do the bulk of the work in cocoa farming – around 68 per cent – but receive only a fraction of the income. Many of them live on less than 30 cents a day. Their work receives little social recognition.

Yet the injustice begins long before the harvest.

Land is passed down through the family, but rarely to daughters. Those who do not own land find it difficult to access loans and support schemes. This cycle systematically excludes women from resources, decision-making and opportunities. Land rights are fundamental to social and economic participation.

When Salimata Diakite takes part in the Women's School of Leadership programme for the first time, she feels uncertain. Speaking in front of others? Expressing her own ideas? Until then, she had not seen this as her role.

The workshops are not just about agriculture. They are about self-confidence, about rights, and about asking: What do I actually want? What rights do I have? And how can I assert them in front of others?

"The Women's School of Leadership," explains Bettina von Reden of Fairtrade Germany, "operates on a simple yet effective principle: knowledge is passed on. Women who have been trained take their experiences back to their communities. This



Awareness session as part of the Women's School of Leadership project in Côte d'Ivoire © Fairtrade Africa

creates a network for change – from the bottom up, driven by the people directly affected."

At the end of the year, the women receive certificates at a graduation ceremony. Representatives from the local community and the political sphere are also in attendance. This moment, says Bettina von Reden, also has a political dimension: "The graduation ceremony, held in the presence of the local community, brings to light what has long been hidden: women are not just members of the workforce. They are leaders."

Today, Salimata Diakite is no longer silent. She attended courses at the Women's School of Leadership for a year – and learnt how women can get involved in local committees, mediate conflicts and act as change agents:

"I spend a lot of time talking to young girls. I tell them: don't let men belittle you. I meet with resistance, but we talk – and I manage to convince people. I tell them: if we empower women, it helps everyone."

Her words show that political education and leadership training can empower women to speak out and actively contribute to changing social norms and local power structures.

Change does not begin with laws, but with the realisation that one's own voice counts.

Economic Independence Means Freedom

Economic independence is a key dimension of equality for women farmers.

By supporting income-generating activities – such as small businesses, livestock farming or the cultivation of additional agricultural products – women gain financial independence.

This also changes power and decision-making dynamics within families and communities: When women contribute to the household income, the situation of the whole family improves. This often leads to greater acceptance of their new role as decision-makers and as women who are no longer powerless and marginalised within their own households.

Women's School of Leadership in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana

The Women's School of Leadership in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana empowers women in Fairtrade-certified cooperatives to take on leadership roles in their villages, cooperatives and local decision-making bodies. Through workshops and training sessions, participants gain knowledge about women's rights, conflict resolution, political participation and economic self-organisation. The project supports women in speaking out confidently in public and actively engaging in community processes. At the same time, traditional gender roles are challenged and dialogue with men and local authorities is encouraged. The long-term aim is to achieve greater gender equality, social participation and democratic co-determination within the communities.

As a single mother, Ehui Edith Laure Kouamé, also a participant in the Women's School of Leadership, often did not know how she would pay for the next meal. "I used to hide away and cry because I couldn't afford what I needed."

At the Women's School of Leadership, female cocoa farmers such as Ehui Edith Laure Kouamé learn skills that enable them to generate additional income. Today, she grows vegetables, sells peanut butter and runs a small taxi business. On her own plot of land, she organises training sessions for other women – an informal farm school.

There, she demonstrates how to tap into new sources of income through vegetables, fruit trees and additional produce – not only to boost income, but also to promote more sustainable farming.

"Now I feel financially secure and am better able to cope with fluctuations in cocoa prices."

This represents more than a personal sense of achievement. It is a break with a system that keeps women economically dependent.

Change Requires Everyone's Involvement

A key aspect of the programme is the involvement and training of men. As 'gender champions', they promote gender equality by supporting women and encouraging them to speak out.

When power dynamics shift, tensions arise. However, the 'Gender Champions' training programme helps break down prejudices. Bettina

von Reden considers the 'Gender Champions' a key factor in the success of the Women's School of Leadership.

Not all men are comfortable with women's newfound power, and some tensions are inevitable. However, when men are informed about the links between women's empowerment and prosperity, they are more likely to support women's empowerment.

The change is more readily accepted when it is seen not as a loss but as a gain. When women have their own income, whole families benefit. When they have a say in decision-making, communities become more stable.

From Personal to Social Change

The changes are not limited to individual families. The Women's School of Leadership, explains Bettina von Reden, "tackles the very essence of democracy: it empowers people to see themselves as political actors."

Through a cascade system, in which trained women go on to become trainers themselves, the participants pass on their knowledge to their communities. In this way, thousands of women have already been reached – and with them, entire communities.

Some women take on leadership roles in their communities. Others are elected to local councils, speak on international stages, run cooperatives or set up their own media organisations. One graduate set up a radio station to discuss women's rights and protection against gender-based violence. The stories of Salimata Diakite and Edith Laure Kouamé show how individual empowerment can go hand in hand with social transformation.

Bettina von Reden views this as a gradual, interconnected process: the graduates of the Women's School of Leadership are changing society's perception of women. This does not happen overnight. The involvement of the entire community – including men, from gender champions to political decision-makers – is crucial to sustaining this structural transformation.

Gender equality means not only equal rights on paper, but also the opportunity and the power to exercise those rights in practice.



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THE RIGHTS OF MARGINALISED GROUPS



INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES' PARTICIPATION IN SOCIETY

CENTRO PARA LA ACCIÓN LEGAL EN DERECHOS HUMANOS (CALDH) and ROMERO INITIATIVE

"We used to think our voice didn't count," says Odelma Pastor Ajanel, a Maya woman from Guatemala. It is an experience she shares with members of indigenous communities throughout Central and South America. Human rights organisations such as CELS in Argentina and INREDH in Ecuador demonstrate that the fight for indigenous rights is inextricably linked to the struggle for a voice in society and a fair justice system.

In the highlands of Guatemala, exclusion is a constant feature of many people's lives. Janeth Revolorio is the director of the Centro para la Acción Legal en Derechos Humanos (CALDH), a local organisation working to protect indigenous rights in partnership with the Romero Initiative. She speaks of a justice system that threatens citizens rather than protecting them:

"Guatemala finds itself in a situation characterised by selective prosecution and criminalisation of human rights defenders, journalists and independent judicial figures."

For indigenous communities, this means that anyone who stands up for their rights risks repression.

Centro para la Acción Legal en Derechos Humanos (CALDH)

CALDH works in Guatemala to promote human rights, historical reconciliation and democratic participation. The organisation supports victims of human rights violations and is particularly committed to the rights of indigenous communities and survivors of the civil war. Through legal work, educational programmes and political advocacy, CALDH combats impunity and promotes access to justice. A key focus is on the culture of remembrance and coming to terms with violent crimes committed during the military dictatorship. The organisation's aim is to strengthen democracy, the rule of law and social justice in Guatemala in the long term.

The current conflicts between indigenous communities and the government in Guatemala are closely linked to the political crisis of recent years. They became particularly evident following the 2023 elections, when sections of the judiciary and the public prosecutor's office attempted to delegitimise the result. In response, indigenous authorities, such as those from Totonicapán, organised nationwide protests and road blockades to defend democratic processes.

The institutions in question have since retaliated: to this day, leading indigenous representatives are being criminalised, and some of them have been arrested or prosecuted. Many



Festival of Remembrance and Youth © CALDH

communities see this as targeted repression by entrenched power elites seeking to safeguard their privileges. The indigenous communities' adversary in this is not the government as such. The conflict is between indigenous movements and influential networks within the judiciary, politics and business. Although President Bernardo Arévalo's government is seeking dialogue and has, for the first time, involved indigenous authorities more closely, its scope for action is limited, as central institutions remain dominated by conservative forces. As a result, the situation remains contradictory: political openness on the one hand and continued repression on the other.

At the same time, traditional conflicts over land and resources persist. Indigenous communities are resisting mining, energy and infrastructure projects, which are often implemented without their consent and threaten their livelihoods.

CALDH responds to these pressures at political, legal and social levels. This includes exchanging knowledge between indigenous communities, raising awareness of their shared historical heritage and promoting their right to have a say in society.

Shrinking Spaces

Odelma Pastor Ajanel knows this reality from her own experience. She lives on the south coast of Guatemala, in a community shaped by civil war, displacement and a long struggle for

recognition. She became involved in women's groups at an early age. However, traditional power structures determine who is allowed to speak – and who is not.

"The opportunities for project work in my community are becoming increasingly restricted. We have to fight against the local councillors, who often close the premises when they don't like what we're doing."

School of Knowledge Exchange

When Odelma Pastor Ajanel attends the CALDH School of Knowledge Exchange, she meets people from other regions who have had similar experiences and endured similar struggles.

Indigenous leaders, women and young people come together to discuss oppression, human rights and democracy. "We used to be very isolated and alone. The school has enabled us to network with other organisations. Now we can interact with our compañeras from across the region."

This makes it possible to organise campaigns with greater impact and reach. Participants also share their personal experiences from three and a half decades of civil war in Guatemala – realising that they all share a common history.

The participants then take their knowledge back to their communities: they organise workshops with young people, speak on community radio stations, organise commemorative events and develop shared political positions.

Odelma Pastor Ajanel is also planning concrete steps: she would like to use the knowledge shared at the school to run workshops with young people. Her women's committee has now organised itself autonomously and can therefore act independently of the local councils.

Perhaps the most profound insight she took from the School of Knowledge Exchange is an understanding of trans-regional and international solidarity.

Strategies for Maintaining the Capacity to Act in the Face of Repression

CALDH's work in Guatemala takes place under difficult conditions. Organisations campaigning for the rights of indigenous communities are often criminalised and prosecuted. They can scarcely rely on the rule of law.

Janeth Revolorio laments the lack of political will to investigate abuses. These challenges are compounded by restrictions on international cooperation. The government is continually introducing new bureaucratic barriers. The decline in international support also jeopardises the long-term funding of the organisation's projects.

CALDH seeks to counter these threats through an integrated, three-pronged approach: educational initiatives, protective measures, and international networking.

Alongside knowledge exchange, this approach includes providing legal support to defendants. In addition, safeguards are being developed to ensure the digital and physical security of CALDH's own team and partner organisations.

The organisation is also strengthening local and international solidarity networks. These range from indigenous communities and authorities to human rights organisations and international bodies.



Rally to mark the anniversary of the expulsion of indigenous families from the Chicoyogüito community
© CALDH

Opening Political Spaces for Action Through Collective Knowledge

The shared history of indigenous communities encompasses territorial, historical and ancestral knowledge – passed down by their forebears. But how can this be used to inform political action?

This is where the educational approach of the School of Knowledge Exchange comes in. It aims to strengthen the capacity for political action and to promote the participation of indigenous communities in local decision-making processes, for example through indigenous local councils.

Odelma Pastor Ajanel used to believe that change came from above, from the president or individual leaders.

"I have since learnt that real power lies with Parliament. And we can bring about change by winning MPs over to our cause."

Due to ongoing repression, the scope for action available to indigenous communities in Guatemala remains contested. Yet these examples show that civil society engagement does not merely adapt – it develops new strategies, creates its own spaces and strengthens collective capacity for action and participation.

FIGHTING FOR QUEER SAFE SPACES

MAWJOUDIN and LSVD+ – ASSOCIATION FOR QUEER DIVERSITY

When Hedy (name changed) enters the theatre where the play 'Flagranti' is to be performed this evening, nothing can be taken for granted. The venue has been carefully chosen; it is sheltered, almost inconspicuous. Outside lies the reality of a country where queer life often has to remain invisible and where human rights organisations such as Amnesty International have noted an alarming regression in the rights of the LGBTIQA+ community. Inside, a different Tunisia begins – for a few hours.

Hedy is an activist with Mawjoudin, an organisation that emerged from small workshops in 2014. "We started by raising awareness – about the legal situation, about sexual and mental health, about identity," says Hedy. Today, it has grown into a network that not only raises awareness but also provides protection and support and increases visibility.

"Democracy is at its strongest when it protects the rights of those who are most at risk," writes Judith Butler in her book 'Undoing Gender' (2004). Queer rights are therefore a reliable indicator of democracy. Their protection shows whether a state safeguards minorities, guarantees the rule of law and enables genuine participation – and whether queer people can therefore go about their lives in public without fear.

Hedy has found that increased visibility is a double-edged sword: "After the 2010–2011 revolution, our community became more visible, partly through social media. But that is precisely what has also led to the state becoming more restrictive."

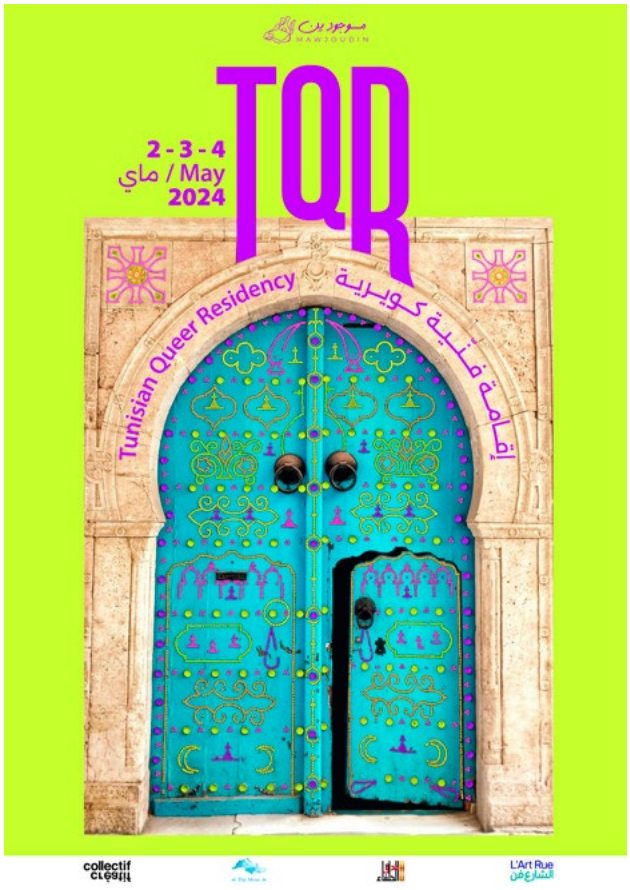
The notorious Section 230, which dates back to the colonial era and criminalises homosexuality, was rarely applied in the past, but has once again become a real risk following the detention of people based on their sexual orientation or even mere suspicion thereof.



Queer Film Festival (MQFF) – 3rd edition official poster (2022) – Founded in 2018, this festival celebrates queer cinema and a wide range of artistic expressions from Tunisia and the broader region.
© Mawjoudin We Exist

In 2024 and 2025, there were large-scale waves of arrests in Tunisia. These targeted the queer community. People were often arrested on the basis of mere suspicion; in some cases, mobile phones were searched, dating apps were scrutinised, or clothing was used as 'evidence'.

Yet Mawjoudin consciously chooses to operate in the public eye. The aim is not to relinquish hard-won democratic freedoms. In 2018, the group organised the country's first queer film festival. This was followed by the play 'Flagranti', which was staged over four years in 22 performances.



Mawjoudin Queer Residency – official poster (2024) – An artist residency program hosted in Tunis's historic Medina, bringing together six projects by artists from Tunisia, the MENA region, and its diaspora. © Mawjoudin We Exist

It explores the realities of queer life, repression – and dignity. Hedy sums it up as follows: "In the play, you see men kissing; it deals with trans people and the so-called anal test. All of these are real experiences in a very restrictive environment."

The performances take place in safe locations whose details are shared only within the community. After all, even going to the theatre can be risky. "As a queer couple, you can't show yourself in public." Yet it is precisely these artistic spaces that are crucial:

"Through the play, we were able to connect with the community, with allies, but also with people outside it. It is an important tool for raising awareness."

Alongside its artistic work, Mawjoudin provides practical support: psychological care, medical support, legal advice and, sometimes, financial assistance for people who are in immediate danger. Yet Mawjoudin's work is under pressure.

"Since the crackdown on non-governmental organisations intensified around 2024, it has become much more difficult to secure international funding. We no longer have the resources to help people with their rent or living costs," explains Hedy.

At the same time, demand is growing. Digital security has become a key issue, as personal data can create risks. People are exposed to danger simply because of the information they share on social media, Hedy explains. Anyone who comes out as queer, or openly supports queer people, can easily become the target of threats. "Progress is slow. We've never had a period of sexual liberation like the one in Europe."

Despite all these challenges, the movement continues to defend its spaces of



„عصايان كويري" – Queer Riot" (photo campaign, 2020) – A photographic series featuring queer individuals, shot in downtown Tunis on May 17, carrying powerful messages of liberation and resistance against queerphobia. © Mawjoudin We Exist

freedom – however fragile they may be. "We are trying to survive as a movement. And to create moments of joy and visibility, as far as possible."

For Hedy, the struggle for queer spaces is closely linked to the question of democracy itself: "Sexual rights are fundamental individual rights – the right to determine what happens to one's own body. That is key to true freedom."

This makes safe spaces – a theatre, a festival, a workshop – all the more important. They are places where the future can be explored, where what must otherwise remain hidden becomes visible for a moment, and where a different society becomes at least conceivable.

Mawjoudin aims to foster cross-border solidarity. In Germany, the Hirschfeld-Eddy Foundation – the LSVD⁺'s human rights foundation – supported the organisation until 2023 in implementing initiatives on the ground, such as providing support for refugees, organising queer film festivals and staging a queer play. Hedy also explains that a network has been established with similar organisations in Morocco and Algeria to share learning, exchange strategies and strengthen their work collectively. "The most important thing is that we are able to pass on our knowledge and our achievements to the next generation."

Mawjoudin

Mawjoudin campaigns in Tunisia for the rights of LGBTIQA+ people, as well as for equality and social inclusion. The organisation creates safe spaces for dialogue, counselling and the cultural visibility of queer people. Through educational work, campaigns and cultural events, Mawjoudin promotes public debate on human rights, discrimination and individual freedoms. A particular focus is on supporting young people affected by exclusion or violence. The aim of the organisation's work is to strengthen democratic freedoms and promote a more open, diverse society in Tunisia.

OUTLOOK AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE WORK OF NGOS



SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Global Crisis of Democracy

Democracy currently faces powerful opponents: authoritarian tendencies are on the rise worldwide; the civic spaces that enable engagement with and for democracy are shrinking.

The most common means of repression include the criminalisation of the work of civil society organisations, their defamation as foreign agents, restrictions on freedom of expression, freedom of the press and freedom of assembly, and the use of violence and imprisonment to intimidate civil society activists.

Authoritarian regimes often use the judiciary, the bureaucracy or regulation as tools to advance their interests. For many democracies, this risks the gradual erosion of their institutions.

Role of Civil Society and NGOs

In this situation, NGOs play a key role in promoting democracy: they defend the right to have a say, empower marginalised groups, promote political education and demand accountability.

Through their practical work with people, NGOs strengthen democracy 'from the bottom up'. They amplify the voices of those who are silenced.

In their work, strengthening democracy is closely linked to promoting gender equality, defending the rights of minorities, and addressing and dismantling colonial structures. The empowerment of marginalised and disenfranchised groups, as well as their active involvement in decision-making processes, not only strengthens democracy – as the example of the Women's School of Leadership shows, it can also support economic empowerment. Furthermore, NGOs offer marginalised groups, such as indigenous communities and queer people, a platform to fight for their rights through legal, media and cultural means.

Many NGOs do more than simply impart knowledge about people's rights. Like the One World Networks in North Rhine-Westphalia or Thuringia, they also provide spaces where democracy can be experienced through participatory and practical formats. In this way, they foster critical thinking, help people understand global interconnections and encourage citizens to participate actively in both local and global processes.

Children and young people, too, are increasingly taking responsibility for themselves and others. This is demonstrated by educational projects such as the Action Against Hunger programme in Germany, the Don Bosco Forum for the Young at Risk in India, and the school-based work carried out as part of Plan International's Young Citizens' Score Card project in Kenya and Uganda. Education goes hand in hand with political participation. The children and young people engage at local level and, in doing so, acquire practical democratic skills.

All these projects demonstrate that the intersectional inclusion and participation of marginalised groups is a prerequisite for genuine democracy.

Key Challenges for NGOs

For many NGOs, their day-to-day work is marked by political repression and obstacles in the form of surveillance, bans and arrests. Authoritarian

regimes seek to delegitimise their work in the eyes of society.

Added to this is growing financial pressure. Key donors such as USAID are sharply reducing their funding, whilst European donor countries are also increasingly cutting their funding, thereby jeopardising the survival of established civil society projects.

At the same time, NGOs' scope for action is shrinking on political, economic and social fronts.

Strategies for NGO Resilience

Nevertheless, these examples show that NGOs – and, with them, civil society – are finding ways to remain effective. They view democracy as an ongoing process of negotiation. In many places, protests and civic engagement are bringing about positive change. This ranges from the release of a political prisoner in Togo and successful legal action in Ecuador to children having a say in local politics in northern India.

By forming networks, NGOs – such as the human rights organisations in Argentina (CELS), Guatemala (CALDH) and Cameroon (Draufsicht Bamenda) – can exchange knowledge and strategies, pool their resources and better protect themselves against repression.

International allies also give NGOs greater visibility and political support.

Global networking strengthens resilience in the face of repression and is central to the capacity for local action.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT AND HUMANITARIAN ACTORS

This chapter summarises the findings from the interviews with our member organisations and their partner organisations and does not represent a coordinated VENRO position. These findings are based on the organisations' experience of project and campaign work worldwide and, as such, may not apply in every context.

Actively protect and expand civic space

The experiences of NGOs show that, in the face of repression, they increasingly have to devote resources to safeguarding their ability to operate. This includes:

- Establishing protection mechanisms for activists in the areas of digital security, legal support, and safety and risk management, as already practised by INREDH in Ecuador or Mawjoudin in Tunisia.
- Strategically using national and international legal channels. Thanks to legal action and global pressure, organisations such as the Argentine human rights organisation CELS and CALDH in Guatemala have achieved success in court.
- Documenting human rights violations to increase accountability and visibility, as illustrated by the example of CELS in Argentina.

International actors should support and promote these efforts politically and exert targeted diplomatic pressure on restrictive governments.

Systematically strengthen international networks

The examples in this report show that transnational networks are a key source of resilience. The following factors help to strengthen civil society organisations:

- The promotion of cross-regional alliances.
- The development of partnerships between local and international organisations.
- The use of international platforms, such as UN mechanisms, to amplify local voices.

International visibility can help protect actors from repression and broadens their scope for political action.

Promote local empowerment and participatory approaches

Strengthening democracy is most effective when people can act as political agents. Programmes should therefore:

- be consistently designed to be participatory and inclusive;
- specifically empower marginalised groups, such as women, young people, indigenous communities and the LGBTIQA+ community;

- focus on self-organisation and local ownership and responsibility.

Programmes such as the Women's School of Leadership and the YCSC demonstrate how participation can be implemented effectively in practice.

Expand education as a key strategy

Educational work can make democracy a tangible experience. NGOs should therefore:

- promote accessible educational formats such as dialogue-based initiatives, artistic approaches or community projects. The street campaigns organised by the One World Networks in Thuringia and North Rhine-Westphalia provide examples of good practice in this regard;
- strengthen critical thinking and media literacy. As the example 'Draufsicht Bamenda' from Cameroon shows, school workshops and training for young people to become local journalists are well suited to this purpose;
- link global issues, such as climate justice and inequality, to local experiences. The School of Knowledge Exchange in Guatemala, for instance, illustrates this approach.

Education provides the foundation: it has a long-term impact and strengthens society's resilience to authoritarian narratives.

Develop strategic communication and counter-narratives

As delegitimisation and disinformation are key tools of authoritarian politics, NGOs should:

- actively develop counter-narratives;
- engage in fact-based documentation and public relations work;
- create alternative, credible channels of information.

Whether it is community journalism in Cameroon, the school-based work of YCSC activists, Mawjoudin's theatre work in Tunisia or the training of men and women at the Women's School of Leadership, visibility and positive narratives are crucial in the political struggle for legitimacy.

Diversify and secure funding models

Declining international funding is one of the greatest challenges facing NGOs worldwide. Many projects, such as Mawjoudin in Tunisia or FCTD in Togo, are having to scale back their work. How can NGOs nevertheless remain financially viable? In the future, civil society organisations should:

- diversify their sources of funding;
- strengthen local resources and community-based support systems;
- use international networks to advocate for stronger international development funding.

APPENDIX



INTERVIEWEES

- Verena Lauer, Bianca Belger – ADRA
- Vassilios Saroglou – Aktion gegen den Hunger
- Paula Litvachky – Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS), Argentina
- David Dosseh – Front Citoyen Togo Debout (FCTD), Togo
- Father Joe Prabhu, Moumita Roy, Garrol Lotha, Deep Gurung – Don Bosco Mondo
- Laura Huschenbett, Franzisca Weiland – Eine Welt Netzwerk Thüringen
- Svenja Bloom, Klaas Friemel Janowsky – Eine Welt Netz NRW
- Bettina von Reden – Fairtrade Germany
- Hedy (name changed) – Mawjoudin, Tunisia
- Irmgard Soentgen – Misereor
- Cissy Kaamu, Betty Habene, Damaris Nyahongo, Marilena Bachmeier – Plan International Germany, Plan International Uganda
- Godlove Dzebam – Draufsicht Bamenda, Cameroon
- Holger Vollbrecht – Solidaritätsdienst International
- Odelma Pastor Ajanel, Janeth Revolorio – Centro para la Acción Legal en Derechos Humanos (CALDH), Guatemala

We would like to thank everyone who contributed to this report and made the many insightful conversations possible.

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↘ **Feminist Journeys.** How Development and Humanitarian NGOs make their work more feminist, 2024.

↘ **Shifting Power.** How development and humanitarian NGOs can address the consequences of colonialism in their work, 2022.

↘ **We get involved.** Advocacy in development co-operation of non-governmental organisations, 2021

↘ **Tech for Good.** The possibilities and limits of using digital instruments in international development projects of non-governmental organisations, 2019.

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Bundesvereinigung Lebenshilfe

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CHANGE e.V.
ChildFund Deutschland
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Difäm – Deutsches Institut für Ärztliche Mission
Don Bosco Mondo
DVV International – Institut für Internationale Zusammenarbeit des Deutschen Volkshochschul-Verbandes

E

ECPAT Deutschland e.V.
Eine Welt Netz NRW
EIRENE – Internationaler Christlicher Friedensdienst
Energypedia UG
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
ForAfrika Deutschland (früher JAM)
Forum Fairer Handel
FUTURO SÍ

G

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

I

Hilfe für Afrika e.V.
Hoffnungszeichen / Sign of Hope
humedica

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

J

Johanniter-Auslandshilfe

K

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.
LSVD+ – Verband Queere Vielfalt e. V.
Lemonaid & ChariTea e.V.
Lichtbrücke

M

Malteser International
MARIE-SCHLEI-VEREIN e. V. – Entwicklungsprojekte für Frauen
Masifunde Bildungsförderung e.V.
materra – Stiftung Frau und Gesundheit
medica mondiale
medico international
MISEREOR
medmissio (früher: Missionsärztliches Institut Würzburg)

N

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

O

Ökumenische Initiative Eine Welt e.V.
Opportunity International Deutschland
ora Kinderhilfe international e.V.
OroVerde – Die Tropenwaldstiftung
Oxfam Deutschland

P

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

R

Rhein-Donau-Stiftung e.V.

S

Samhathi – Hilfe für Indien
Save the Children Deutschland
Society for International Development Chapter Bonn (SID)
SODI – Solidaritätsdienst International
Solidaridad Deutschland e.V.
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

TERRA Projekte International e.V.
TERRE DES FEMMES
terre des hommes Deutschland
Tierärzte ohne Grenzen (ToG)

V

Verband Deutsch-Syrischer Hilfsvereine e.V.
Verband Entwicklungspolitik Niedersachsen (VEN)
Verbund Entwicklungspolitischer Nichtregierungsorganisationen Brandenburgs (VENROB)
Verein entwicklungspolitischer Austauschorganisationen e.V. (ventao)
Visions for Children e.V.

W

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

IMPRINT

Publisher:

Association of German Development and
Humanitarian Aid (VENRO)

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10963 Berlin

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Author: Jonathan Fischer

Concept and Editing: Erzsébet Lajos

Translation: Erzsébet Lajos

Proofreading: Wissenschaftslektorat Kelly GmbH

Layout & Illustrations: axeptDESIGN

Print: dieUmweltDruckerei

Edition: 350 copies

Climate-neutral printing on 100 per cent recycled paper using inks obtained from renewable raw materials.

Berlin, October 2026

This publication was supported by ENGAGEMENT GLOBAL with funding from the BMZ

Federal Ministry
for Economic Cooperation
and Development

VENRO is solely responsible for the content of this publication; positions expressed here do not reflect the views of Engagement Global or the BMZ.

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