

Individual human beings are at the heart of development service

Dienste in Übersee and 50 years of the Development Workers Act

“Putting people at the heart of development service aligns with the nature and mission of the church.” The Ausschuss für ökumenische Diakonie (Overseas Mission Committee) already recognised during the first Bread for the World campaign that money donated to Bread for the World would have to be complemented by “human donations” in the form of people undertaking voluntary service. The Bread for the World Distribution Committee recommended the foundation of a working group on service overseas. This was then established at the end of 1960.

“Service Overseas; a Working Group of the Protestant Churches in Germany” (DÜ) already sent out the first five professionals in 1961. In 1962 there were as many as 37 – mostly health workers, craftspeople, and technicians. On 19 March 1970, DÜ was recognised by the state as a development service agency under the Development Workers Act (DWA). DÜ had already participated in discussions in the AKLHÜ (Learning and Helping Overseas Working Group) prior to the passing of the DWA and had pushed for some form of social and financial security, so that volunteers would not be expected to make a financial contribution in addition to their commitment in terms of time and energy. Nowadays development service can be part of a planned career, and partner organisations are asking for professionals to be more highly qualified. But the core concept – cooperation on a basis of solidarity and equality – has not changed at all.

and do not take on senior management roles. They see themselves as employees of the partner organisation, as colleagues for a limited period of time – and usually serve for three to six years.

The partner organisations are churches, church-related organisations, or NGOs. Professionals are sent at their request. Development service usually has to do with global issues of survival, i.e. justice, peace, and the integrity of creation. It is not always technical know-how which is most important. Increasingly it is about working together to build international networks and get particular issues onto the international agenda. Influencing political decisions is an important part of the work of partner organisations. Development service does for churches and NGOs what companies do through international human resources development or universities do through international programmes: exercise an influence on the processes of globalisation through international networking.

CPS AND EDUCATIONAL WORK

Development service comes into its own in a special way with the Civil Peace Service (CPS), a programme which has been in existence for 20 years and is concerned with civil conflict transformation and nonviolent transformation of conflicts in post-conflict situations, in current conflict zones, and – as a preventative measure – in societies where there is high potential for violent conflict. Although professionals’ contracts come to an end after a few years, the experience, contacts, and skills can last a lifetime – or even for generations in all sorts of living situations. In order to foster greater acceptance of different cultures and raise people’s awareness of being part of a globalised world, knowledge and understanding are spread within society through educational work and public information campaigns. In order to support this work, returning DÜ professionals founded the Returnees Committee (RKA) in 1977.

COLLEAGUES FOR A LIMITED TIME

At DÜ professionals and their families have always been through individual training and preparation, so that they can adjust to the way of life of the local people and fit into the structures of the partner organisation as smoothly as possible. Professionals work under the supervision of line managers in their partner organisations

Jürgen Deile,

 locksmith, tropical agriculturalist, and political scientist; coordinator of international human resources programmes at Bread for the World, member of the board of AGdD

A preparatory course for departing professionals at the Gossner Mission in Mainz-Kastel in the 1960s.



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The merger of the development work of the Protestant churches in 2012 led to DÜ gGmbH becoming a subsidiary of the Protestant Work for Diakonie and Development (EWDE) as part of the “Bread for the World” brand. On behalf of the EWDE, DÜ now supports Bread for the World by deploying professionals.

In spite of the great diversity of Bread for the World’s various programmes, they always follow the same basic principle: The individual is at the centre of development and our task is to build bridges between cultures and to establish personal and institutional networks in a world which is growing ever closer together, but where more and more people are being excluded and marginalised and the space for action is shrinking.

Things were moving

Continuing to work in church development service after returning home

It is a long time ago now, that Dienste in Übersee (Service Overseas – now part of Bread for the World) offered me and my family the opportunity to go to Nepal for three years. This step had a huge impact on my own life and that of my whole family.

For the first couple of years I worked in a community health project in the mountains of Eastern Nepal. The project was attached to a hospital which was still small in those days. I was responsible for training the health workers in the community project. Later I built up a centre for seriously malnourished children.

Eventually we moved to Kathmandu, where I was responsible for a nationwide rural development programme. The main reason for the move was that we wanted to make it possible for our son to go to school while living at home after he had spent some time in a boarding school.

If someone asks me “What was it like? Weren’t you ever ill? How did the children cope with the situation?”, the answer often gets stuck in my throat because after having stayed only a few months in Nepal, the whole family fell ill with an infectious disease and we had to return to Germany for several months. We went through a difficult and worrying time before we could go back to Nepal again.

WE STARTED SOMETHING

Recently I attended an event in Berlin on issues of development cooperation. A former colleague of mine from Nepal was one of the speakers. He now runs his own organisation with more than 100 employees working in the field of rural development. He stressed that he had learned a great deal when he was working in collaboration with professionals from Germany and other countries. Furthermore, he learnt and felt encouraged to try new things and dared to take action. It was also encouraging to hear that a women farmers association and other groups, which were founded during my time in Nepal, are still in existence and working successfully.

A lot has happened in the field of health care as well. Last year I was able to visit a hospital in a very remote district in Western Nepal. Twenty-five years ago it was very difficult, if not impossible, to convince qualified nurses and medical doctors to work in rural areas. Things are very different now.

Nevertheless, the situation in Nepal is by no means altogether rosy and the provision of health care is still very patchy. While the infant mortality rate has decreased significantly, there are still too many women dying during pregnancy and childbirth due to lacking obstetric services.



STUDYING AFTER MY RETURN

After almost ten years of living and working abroad, I went to study in England and obtained an MBA (Master of Business Administration). Then I was offered a job at Dienste in Übersee in Stuttgart. Thus, it turned out that I stayed in church development service, now at Bread for the World in Berlin, instead of working again in the German health system.

Karin Döhne worked as a nurse educator in a community health project and in other projects in Nepal.

TODAY, PEOPLE WITH DIFFERENT PROFILES ARE NEEDED

The profile of development service today is different from what it was then. Whereas filling gaps of expertise was the most prominent need for external personnel in the past, nowadays professionals are more often mediators between cultures. The focus has shifted to professional exchange and encouraging each other to tackle global justice issues. Nevertheless, some of the principles of personnel secondment of that time are still valid today, as I see it: The initiative should come from the host partner organisation. Strengthening local organisations as well as regional and international networking must play a key role.

More than ever before, in times of rapidly accelerating environmental destruction, returning German professionals are called upon to share their experiences and exert influence on policy-making here in Europe. Anyone who has lived in Africa or Asia for a longer time will have observed how the unbridled exploitation of resources has the most impact on those people who are least responsible for it and gain the smallest benefit from it.

Churches and other religious communities are especially called upon to act in this situation as it has to do with ethical conduct and globally responsible action – both at the local and at the global level, on the part of all of us, as individuals and as societies.

Karin Döhne
1986 - 1995:
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