

# If the DWA didn't exist, it would have to be created.

## The origins and subsequent evolution of the Development Workers Act

"Development" is a relatively new issue in politics. Nevertheless, the 1969 Development Workers Act (DWA) had a prehistory which is worth recounting briefly. Development aid began in the 1950s in West Germany, in a historical context characterised by the division of Germany, a bipolar world, an economic boom, and the integration of the Federal Republic of Germany into the Western world. \*) Development aid had not yet been clearly defined in Western countries. At that time, the aim – in terms of development theory based on theories of economic growth (such as that of Walt W. Rostow) – was to bring developing countries up to the level of industrialised countries through a process of "catch-up development", and to integrate them into the Western economic system as far as possible.

was founded, followed by the World Peace Service (Weltfriedensdienst) in 1959. The two main churches had already built up intensive contacts in many countries of the Global South through their mission activities since the start of the colonial era. In 1959, Misereor and Bread for the World launched the first fundraising campaigns for church action to combat hunger worldwide. Already in the mid 1950s people in the Catholic church had been talking about German Catholics going to serve in the South. Then, in 1959, when funding suddenly became available through Misereor, the Association for Development Assistance (AGEH) was founded by more than 30 representatives of missionary orders and Catholic associations. The purpose was "to recruit and prepare experts, who are qualified not only professionally but also in terms of personal qualities, as aid workers to assist in building up educational and charitable organisations and to provide other professional assistance in developing countries."

There was also a move within the Protestant churches in 1959 towards people undertaking development work. This led to the founding of Service Overseas (Dienste in Übersee, DÜ) in 1961. Here, too, the need was seen especially for qualified and experienced professionals who would undertake long-term service. (Three years was thought to be a suitable minimum.) Two important "brands" of development service had therefore already been established in Germany, when the German Development Service (Deutscher Entwicklungsdienst, DED) was founded in 1963.

In both AGEH and DÜ the focus was primarily on partnership, solidarity, and cooperation with civil society and church institutions in the South. It had now become necessary to create organisational structures to facilitate this.

However, there were significant differences in relation to one particular issue: Whereas AGEH envisaged the provision of board, lodging, and pocket money plus a contribution to the costs associated with returning home, DÜ opted to pay salaries as the solution to the question of remuneration.

In 1961, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation (BMZ) was founded, and Walter Scheel was the first minister. It soon became obvious that development aid could not work through the provision of financial resources alone, and that personnel would be needed.



Peru 1967:  
German development  
workers are introduced  
to the president of Peru.

### DEVELOPMENTS IN CIVIL SOCIETY

Quite early on civil society initiatives were engaging in cooperation with organisations in developing countries. In 1957, EIRENE International Christian Service for Peace

\*) My account of the early days of development aid, development service, and the DWA is drawn largely from Bastian Hein's carefully researched dissertation: *Die Westdeutschen und die Dritte Welt. Entwicklungspolitik und Entwicklungsdienste zwischen Reform und Revolte 1959-1974* (The West Germans and the Third World. Development policy and development service between reform and revolt 1959-1974), R. Oldenbourg Verlag, Munich, 2006

50er Jahre

The beginnings of  
German development  
cooperation

1961

Development  
Workers discussion  
group founded  
BMZ founded

1963

AKLHÜ  
founded  
DED founded

1965

First draft of the  
DWA

1969

Development Service  
working group of AKLHÜ  
founded  
Start of the Reintegration  
Programme

## AKLHÜ AND THE DED

It was no later than 1959, when a group of people gathered around the managing director of the German Federal Youth Ring, Heinz Westphal, with a view to establishing a national development service in Germany. In 1961 they founded the "Development Workers" discussion group, which had already attracted 25 member organisations by 1962. This was the forerunner of the Learning and Helping Overseas Working Group (AKLHÜ), which later became the private shareholder of the DED. The discussion group was an important reference point for the federal government when it was considering setting up a development service agency in Germany. But it was only when the industrialist Walther Casper made contact with the founders of the Peace Corps who were associated with the American president, John F. Kennedy, that the whole idea became more concrete. It was then possible for the DED to be founded as a gift, so to speak, for Kennedy during his state visit in June 1963. And it was Casper who became the first chairman of the DED.

The DED differed from the Peace Corps in one significant respect: On the basis of the experience gained by AGEH and DÜ, vocational training and job experience were to become preconditions for undertaking development service with the DED. Other aspects of the AKLHÜ's 1963 "Proposed Programme for the Deployment of German Volunteers in Developing Countries" were similarly relevant to all the German development services:

- Service should be geared "exclusively towards the developmental needs of the developing country".
  - Development workers should play an active part themselves and not only act as advisors.
  - They should train counterparts who are assigned to them.
  - They should act as "catalysts of social change" and be involved in the training of "social change agents".
- The "Proposed Programme" also included a number of points which were very forward-looking at the time: It was suggested that exchanges might also be envisaged – rather than only sending people from industrial countries to developing countries. Mention was also made of the close relationship between development service and the various forms of social or charitable activity within the Federal Republic of Germany. Development service was clearly also meant to have an impact on Germany, when development workers returned home.

## THE KEY PROVISIONS OF THE DWA

All these reflections and experiences formed the basis for the passing of the DWA. Legislation had already been envisaged when the DED was founded, but no law was

passed at that time, mainly due to time constraints. The AKLHÜ subsequently put the subject back on the agenda. The Act was intended to:

- clarify the nature of development service as distinct from short-term peace service or the involvement of experts in technical cooperation;
- clarify the issue as to how aid workers were to be remunerated and, related to that, the issue of government grants; and
- regulate the relationship of development service to military service.

Without going into detail about the debate prior to the passing of the DWA, it can be stated as a matter of record that the DWA resolved these issues. The DWA was designed to regulate voluntary (rather than paid) service, even though this led to heated debate during the following years. Aid workers were to serve "without intending to seek employment".

The Act was supplemented by BMZ regulations, which stipulate how aid workers are to be paid and the arrangements which are to be made as regards social security contributions. These regulations set the level of the "living allowance" and originally limited it to no more than 50 percent of the salary paid to experts working for the Technical Cooperation Agency. By imposing a minimum term of service of two years and a minimum age of 21 years, the DWA made no provision for short-term service. It laid down that development workers:

- should have health and accident insurance;
- were to be entitled to pension payments and unemployment benefit; and
- would not be called up for compulsory military service or for alternative civilian service, if they had already completed development service.

A special regulation was made in relation to the last of these points: Young men under 22 years of age were exempted from being called up for military service, if, before receiving their call-up papers, they made a commitment to undertake development service after they had completed vocational training (paragraph 22). This



Erhard Eppler, Minister for Economic Cooperation (2nd from right), visits the DÜ office.



The DWA can be downloaded at [www.agdd.de](http://www.agdd.de) (available in English as well as in German)

18.06.1969

DWA passed

1969 - 1971

DED, DÜ, EIRENE, WFD, AGEH recognised as development service agencies

1976

First Amendment of the DWA: adjustments made to the provision of social security

1982

German Bundestag agrees the basic principle that aid workers are at the heart of development policy

1985

CFI recognised as a development service agency

was an attempt to create an opportunity for young men to undertake worthwhile service as an alternative to military service. It was an important signal in the context of social change towards the end of the 1960s. And Erhard Eppler, who was the minister at the time, was able to present the DWA as a "Reform Act" which was supposed to typify the parliamentary term.

CDU member Erika Wolf said in 1969: "I would just like to point out that it is about giving development workers, who have proved themselves to be very effective in recent years, the security they need as regards work, protection of their civil rights, and reintegration. However, I would also like to point out that these aid workers are not only helping developing countries, they are a help to our own society as well ..."

It is worth mentioning by way of an anecdote that Eppler caused a major kerfuffle in some quarters when he characterised aid workers as "peaceful revolutionaries".

### DEVELOPMENT SERVICE AGENCIES OFFICIALLY RECOGNISED

After the DWA had been passed, the BMZ recognised – as development service agencies – not only the DED, AGEH, and DÜ, but also the two smaller peace service agencies (smaller in terms of the number of skilled professionals deployed each year): EIRENE and Welfriedens-

dienst (WFD). This meant that there was closer cooperation with civil society organisations. Christian Services International (CFI) was added to the list at a later date.

Paragraph 12 of the DWA addressed the reintegration of professionals into the job market and led to the founding

of the Reintegration Programme for returning professionals, which is now part of the umbrella organisation of development service agencies (AGdD). The Reintegration Programme was and continues to be extremely important to returning professionals. Only a few professionals, when they returned from service, wanted to go back into the same job which they were in before. The Reintegration Programme organises seminars, provides counselling, and funds scholarships (since 2010 only in the form of loans) which enable professionals to obtain further

professional qualifications or to start a new career. For many professionals, undertaking development service became the start of a career in the field of international development. This did not lead – as had been hoped – to a major strengthening of development education work in Germany. But many of the people who work with refugees, either voluntarily or professionally, turn out to be former development professionals. And we will no doubt need even more people in the future with the skills and experience acquired through undertaking development service.

### DEVELOPMENT SERVICE HAS CHANGED A LOT

The DWA has been amended very little during the 50 years of its existence. One exception was the 1986 Amendment, which opened up participation in development service to people from any of the member states of the European Union, changed some details relating to social insurance, and adjusted age limits in accordance with the change in the age of majority. In 2016, the minimum duration of development service was reduced from two years to one year.

The nature of the development service facilitated by the Act has changed a great deal, however. During the initial years of development service, craftspeople and those with technical know-how were still sought after, although they were supposed to have a teaching qualification as well. Any other skills and knowledge (e.g. as regards language, culture, economic development) required for the successful performance of development service were imparted during preparation courses. In later years, training became the key task of development workers: Master craftspeople, nursing instructors, and teachers/lecturers in vocational training colleges were all being sent out. It became clear that there was an increasing demand above all for people to become qualified in the field of economic development during their term of development service, so appropriate guidelines for training were introduced.

In this, the development service agencies were also responding to requests from their partner organisations, who were looking for staff with experience in the field of economic development. Another important change came about with the launch of the Civil Peace Service (CPS) programme in 1999 and the recognition of forumZFD as a development service agency. This brought to fruition an aspect of development service which had played a role right from the outset: civilian conflict management. By now about 1,400 CPS professionals have been deployed since the programme started. In 2018



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A group of DED aid workers departs for Afghanistan in 1971

1986

Second Amendment of the DWA: The age limit is adjusted to take account of the new age of majority; All EU citizens can be deployed as professionals by German development service agencies.

1990

The GDR's FDJ brigade projects are integrated into the DED

1993

Foundation of the AGdD

1994

The 10,000th DED professional development worker is sent out

1999

Launch of the Civil Peace Service as a development service under the DWA. This is the result of many years of pressure from civil society and the churches.

2006

Recognition of forumZFD as a development service agency

they accounted for almost 30 percent of the professionals deployed under the DWA.

### PROFESSIONALS FROM ALL EU COUNTRIES

Up until now, more than 30,000 professional development workers have been deployed under the DWA. The age range has widened: There are still quite a few younger development workers: In 2018 about 10 percent were under 30. Most were between 30 and 50 years old. And nearly a third were over 50.

They are mostly academics, who serve as advisors rather than “doers”. The needs of the host countries have changed. Nowadays the importance of development service lies primarily in the fact that development workers “possess knowledge and experience of similar work contexts in other countries in the Global South, and can apply these with the critical eye of an outsider while maintaining the neutrality and impartiality which are so very welcome in many situations.

“Long-term deployments founded on professionalism, solidarity, and commitment, are effective and in demand in the Global South, especially at the local level. They represent partnership which is being lived out [...]” This is the view expressed in a study undertaken by the German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval) and published in 2015 under the title: “Development Workers – Personnel as an instrument of German development cooperation”.

It has been a long time since only Germans were deployed. Development professionals come from all the countries of the EU. Nowadays, development workers are competent and committed experts, who work on equal terms with their partners in civil society organisations, in municipalities and hospitals, and in government agencies. They perform important functions for these institutions for a limited period of time. With the creation of the GIZ, and the dissolution of the DED which that entailed, the tasks of development service were integrated into the government’s programme of bilateral development cooperation. The GIZ also took over the running of the Civil Peace Service as a programme of its own. The number of development workers in the GIZ has now been reduced to a little more than half of what it was in the DED.

### CONCLUSION AND PROSPECTS

At a time of growing international interdependence – in the global economy, in politics, and in human encounter – development service under the DWA is extraordinarily important to Germany. Just as the deployment of per-



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sonnel was seen to be of central importance to development cooperation when the DWA was passed, the promotion of development service by the BMZ is still a key task of development policy today and is undertaken by all the service agencies, whether run by the state, the churches, or private institutions. If the DWA didn’t exist, it would have to be created!

The Federal President at the time, Joachim Gauck, with returnees and their families at “The World in your Backpack” event in 2017.

But there is one task which still has to be worked out for the future. Development does not take place only in the Global South. In industrialised countries too decisions are constantly being made about the direction of economic and social development. This is where the development service agencies could become pioneers of genuine cooperation: Employees from the Global South could work in economic sectors where a new course needs to be set for the future in Germany. They could work on a basis such as that provided by the DWA, bringing their professional experience for a limited period of time.



**Eckehard Fricke,**  
certified pedagogue  
WFD development worker in Côte d’Ivoire (1970 - 72),  
WFD board member (1972 - 87),  
employee of the DED (1978 - 84),  
DÜ development worker in Mozambique (1988 - 94),  
managing director of Eirene (1995 - 2005),  
chairman of the AKLHÜ (1997 - 2004),  
and country director of DED/deputy country director of GIZ in Mozambique (2005 - 2013)

2011

DED, Inwent, and GTZ merge to form the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ).

2012

Service Overseas (DÜ) becomes a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Protestant Agency for Diakonia and Development and part of the Bread for the World “brand”.

2015

Evaluation of the effectiveness of development workers (DEval)

2016

Latest amendment of the DWA: Shorter contracts (at least one year) made legally possible.

2019

