

Close to the people

GIZ development workers have an important “antenna function”

Mediating resource conflicts in Peruvian villages, strengthening micro-credit schemes in Ghana, or opening up markets for farmers in Laos: Development workers of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH are always placed wherever development needs to be shaped by professionals partnering with locals. “On the spot” and “equal partners” are keywords, which describe the active commitment of GIZ development workers.

GIZ – as a state oriented sending agency – has taken over the work of the former German Development Service (DED). For more than 56 years now, development workers have been providing assistance to people in order to promote self-initiatives in the fight against poverty. They work primarily at local and regional levels and are often anchored in the structures of local civil society. Together with local organisations they develop tailored solutions for the specific needs of the partner country.

FORMER DED (DEUTSCHER ENTWICKLUNGSDIENST)

The DED was founded on 24 June 1963. It was modelled on the US Peace Corps, which was launched in 1961 on the initiative of John F. Kennedy. Accordingly, German President Heinrich Lübke, German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, and Walter Scheel as minister for economic cooperation, were delighted to be able to welcome President

Kennedy to the launch ceremony.

The legal status of the development workers was later determined by the 1969 Development Workers Act. And we can say today: the Development Service is a successful model and an important part of German development cooperation. The approximately 18,000 volunteers who have been sent out so far by DED and GIZ, and the esteem in which they have been held by their partner organisations, are evidence of this.

IMPORTANT “ANTENNA FUNCTION”

Since the merger of DED, InWEnt, and the GTZ to form the GIZ of today, development workers have been integrated into the programmes of the GIZ whenever possible. They work in developing countries and fragile states, mainly in smaller cities and provinces, which means that they have an important “antenna function”: Whereas long-term experts often advise the government ministries of partner countries, development workers

are active at the grassroots level and usually work together with civil society. Through their proximity to target groups, their professional input, and their outsider’s view of the situation, they are able to come up with ideas and suggestions. The deployment of development workers shows its worth especially where change processes require continuous professional support and can only be brought about in the medium to long term.

DEVELOPMENT SERVICE: A MODEL FOR THE FUTURE

Development Service experts are an integral part of GIZ’s capacity development strategy. Within the framework of programmes they advise state institutions as well as NGOs and civil society groups. They promote organisational development, provide technical and methodological advice, support project management, and train staff. And by doing this at the micro level, they complement other project activities at the meso and macro levels.

The basis for these programmes is provided by agreements between the German government and the government of each partner country about the development measures which are to be undertaken. This contractual framework prepares the ground for the implementation of development projects, but it also sets out the boundaries which the government of a particular partner country would like to be respected.

AGENDA 2030

When the Agenda 2030 was adopted in New York in 2015, the world committed itself to eradicating poverty worldwide without threatening the survival of life on Earth. By agreeing to the sustainable development goals, the governments of the world, and the global community of the United Nations, recognised that any attempt to overcome poverty simply through further unfettered destructive economic growth is bound to fail. Agenda 2030 recognises the work of development service experts and professionals as an effective means of implementing the sustainable development goals.

GIZ development workers are closely involved in addressing the core topics of Agenda 2030. They work at the grassroots level, together with the people concerned, on strategies for adapting to climate change and on nonviolent conflict transformation – of resource conflicts, for example – through the global Civil Conflict Transformation programme. They contribute to the protection of natural resources and food security, strengthen democratic structures, and promote the participation of population groups in social decision-making processes. They are “the enablers”, “the ones who make things possible”, when it comes to taking GIZ development programmes to the general population.



Present at the DED foundation were US President John F. Kennedy with his sister Eunice; President of the Federal Republic of Germany, Heinrich Lübke; Chairman of the Board of Directors of DED, Walther Casper; German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer; and Walter Scheel, minister for economic cooperation.

Suzanne Gentges
Civil Peace Service (CPS)
programme director

Lutz Zimmermann
Head of human re-
sources

Nicht nur auf Zeit

Ein Berufsleben in der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit

The legal definition of a development worker is someone who „renders service in developing countries without receiving a customary salary in order to contribute towards the progress of such countries by cooperating in a spirit of partnership“. “Without receiving a customary salary” means that professionals in development service receive a maintenance allowance and payments in kind to cover their living expenses. They do not receive a salary. In material terms at least, the time abroad should not be particularly attractive, and the length of service is therefore limited. That isn't how it worked out for me.

YOUNG AND FULL OF ENTHUSIASM

When I went out with the DED in 1976 to Burkina Faso, which was still called Upper Volta in those days, I had no idea that the following years working as an assistant to the management of the primary health care programme in Gaoua were going to shape my whole life.

Looking back, it seems as if the world was simpler then. The tasks of the German team sent out by GTZ – two doctors, a project manager – and DED – three craftsmen, a lab technician and me – could be completed easily. We had mopeds to get to work and to the market, lived in houses without electricity, with a water tank on the roof and a kerosene refrigerator, which was barely able to cool the beer. Letters from home came on Mondays with the mail van and the world news came to us on a transistor radio. In the evenings, under the light of the gas lamp, which was always encircled by mosquitoes, we talked about what had happened during the day or discussed the global revolution with our local colleagues.

The DED boss, who was called “country manager” in those days, came to visit several times a year. He brought cheese and other rare items in his cool box and discussed with us what needed to be done. Every couple of months we drove to the capital. The road was either dusty or muddy, depending on whether it was the dry season or the rainy season. Our purpose was to buy supplies for the project, but we used to treat ourselves to a bit of luxury as well, in the form of a visit to a restaurant or the cinema.

The idea of flying to Germany seemed completely absurd, unless there was an emergency. We only took advantage of a flight home when our contract was extended for a third year. We „needed“ holidays, though, for exploring the Sahel or the coastal countries by bush taxi. I must admit, the context and the zeitgeist were different then. There were hardly any indigenous professionals or managers in the locality.

Our contribution was welcome and fell on fertile ground. We made up for the fact that we were young and relatively inexperienced by being full of enthusiasm.



1986 in Cameroon: Inga Nagel visiting a family with whom she had become friends.

JOURNALIST AND CONSULTANT

Looking back, those were some of the best years of my life. And where work was concerned, nothing was ever the same again. In 1980, I took a job in the Africa Department of the Welthungerhilfe in Bonn and joined in returnee activities, campaigned for liberation movements, and began to write about it all. From 1985 onwards, my status as an accompanying partner made it possible for me to work as a freelance journalist – first in Niger and then in Cameroon. The GTZ noticed me, because I wrote a lot on the subject of „women“, and offered me occasional jobs as a local evaluator. Thanks to the expertise which I had developed by then – and with women in DED Cameroon lobbying for me, I was given a short-term development worker contract and entrusted with the task of carrying out a nationwide survey of the situation of women and how their lives might be improved. The study was published in the Purple Series “Frauenförderung/Frauenforderungen” (“Promoting Women – Demanding Women”) and led to the first development worker placements with women as the target group.

FREELANCE CONSULTANT

After three years in Cameroon I felt moved to go back to Burkina Faso, where I worked for five years as a freelance consultant for a variety of national and international clients – planning, advising, and evaluating projects which gave increased attention to the needs of women, and developing and running

Inga Nagel,
1976 - 1979: Burkina Faso, DED
1985 - 1988: Cameroon (accompanying partner, short-term development worker)
1990: Cameroon/Chad, DED
1991: Burkina Faso, DED
1993 - 1998: Benin, DED
2002 - 2005: Sudan, DED
2005 - 2010: Burkina Faso, DED
2013 - 2017: Haiti, GIZ

As early on as 1964 the DED sent out the first 110 development workers to Tanzania, Libya, Afghanistan, and India. The DED sent out its 10,000th professional in 1994. Now, today, approximately 18,000 development workers have served with the DED/GIZ since its inception.



2008 in Burkina Faso: Inga Nagel during a training course for women's organisations

gender training courses. The work I did for the DED during this time included: completing reports on gender issues; evaluating development worker placements; and organising the first West African regional conference on the advancement of women in 1991.

From 1993 to 1998, I took on the first regional programme assistant job to be created by the DED. Working out of the base in Benin, my task was to support the DED management, development workers, and partner organisations in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Ghana, Togo, Benin, Cameroon, and Chad in implementing the gender approach. During this time significant progress was made in raising the awareness of co-workers as regards gender inequality in both country and thematic programmes. Gender tools were integrated into the DED "toolkit", whereby the newly-appointed advisors for gender and women's development in the eight countries took on the decentralised critical monitoring and further training programmes.

A DEVELOPMENT WORKER ONCE AGAIN

In the new millennium I was a development worker once again in three different countries. For three years in Sudan and five years in Burkina Faso, I supported national

women's organisations in the campaign against female genital mutilation. Then I finally switched continents and went to Haiti in 2013. I was there for four years with the GIZ – as with the DED in the past – working together with Haitian colleagues in local NGOs to implement their strategies for defending human rights and promoting gender-sensitive environmental education. Looking back, there is also hardly any role within the DED's structures for participation, which I did not fill at some stage: member of the participation committee, spokesperson of technical groups, representative of development workers, delegate at regional conferences and general assemblies. It is not possible to count the number of articles which I have written for the DED newsletter and other development cooperation publications about my experiences in development service. They go back to the times, when there were no digital tracks left behind.

The story continues – back in Germany since 2017 – with my involvement as an educational consultant in "Education meets Development", a programme of Engagement Global, which is the new version of the good old Returnee Action.