

For peace and justice

World Peace Service – worldwide, professional, committed

Everyone has the right to live in a just and peaceful society. This is what we have been working for – for 60 years with the World Peace Service (Weltfriedensdienst, WFD) – worldwide, professionally, and with great commitment. This commitment and the desire to undertake peace service as an expression of solidarity led to the deployment of volunteers in practical projects as early as 1959, long before effective aid was provided through the Development Workers Act (DWA). People helped rebuild the Greek city of Servia, which had been destroyed by German and Italian troops during the Second World War, others undertook peace service in Egypt, India, Afghanistan, and Cameroon.

framework and also by expressing the political commitment to enabling engagement in peace service: Public funding could be obtained for projects developed jointly with partner organisations, and the duties and rights of those undertaking service could be embodied in a standard contract for development workers. For the World Peace Service, the DWA has been linked to the design of joint development cooperation projects right from the start.

Over the years the nature of development cooperation has changed. Whereas the first projects entailed working jointly towards a desired set of outcomes, it is now about empowering civil society partners and fostering their independence, so that they can orient their organisations towards the needs and requirements of their target groups. Whereas it used to be a case of building schools, today it is about knowledge management, global learning, and good practice. Lead questions are: How and in which way do societies learn in today's world? What do we need to know to create sustainable dignified living conditions for everybody?

OUR WORK IS BUILT ON TRUST

Both the variety of valuable experiences and the adaptation of formal methods to local conditions require a careful approach and, above all, a cooperation based on trust. This demands from everyone involved time, effort, and a turning of one's attention towards the Other, the stranger.

This building up of trusting relationships is an essential and integral part of our work at the World Peace Service: When they are working together, both development workers and their colleagues in partner organisations contribute their own experiences. Thus they are able to develop new solutions and produce new outcomes which have been tailored to each new situation. These new solutions and outcomes are also useful to others besides the particular partner organisations and their own target groups.

For 60 years the World Peace Service has been committed to observing, supporting, and helping to shape processes of social transformation. And for 50 years, through the deployment of professional development workers, the DWA has supported and facilitated the knowledge transfer, joint work, and trusting relationships necessary for a life of dignity for all.

GEARED TOWARDS CIVIL SOCIETY

Since taking effect half a century ago, the DWA regulates the preparation, deployment, and support of development workers with the World Peace Service and makes their expertise available for work in international cooperation. The deployment of development workers to local partner organisations helps to build trusting, working relationships. These relationships inform the analysis of local needs and situations which feeds back into the process of project design. In this way, the cooperation between the World Peace Service and its partners has always been rooted in and geared towards civil society. This ensures the lasting impact of joint peace work.

CHANGING OBJECTIVES

During the early years the working conditions were very different from what they are now. The DWA brought about a significant improvement by establishing a legal

Mary Makambe in her field in Chimanimani, Zimbabwe. The partner organisations of the World Peace Service work for a lasting peace, to make it possible for people to work in their fields in peace.

Judith Ohene,
managing director of
the World Peace Service



A development cooperation worker in Zimbabwe

Learning and advising at the same time

Chimanimani District is situated in the eastern hill country of Zimbabwe alongside the border with Mozambique. I was there from 2006 to 2018 as a World Peace Service development worker. My three development worker contracts amounted to a total of 10 years and 5 months. As a development economist specialising in “rural development in Africa”, I served as an advisor to the Zimbabwean NGO Towards Sustainable Use of Resources – TSURO, for short. My main areas of work were sustainable agriculture, climate change, grassroots organisation building, and cooperation with other actors.

TSURO has its roots in small farmers' associations in about 200 villages. The key programme areas cover almost every aspect of rural development. But while TSURO's approach covers a broad range of issues, it is limited geographically to the one district. And TSURO concentrates on innovative programmes which successfully fill niches outside the scope of conventional integrated rural development. These programmes include, for example, the inclusion of people with physical and mental disabilities, “farmer-to-farmer” learning groups, collective sustainable livestock and pasture management, and climate protection groups which take care of water catchment areas.

Well-developed “bottom-up” planning, monitoring, and implementation have enabled TSURO to drive processes of development which are of significant benefit to particular target groups. These developments have brought about a considerable improvement in the living conditions of the rural population. Both external evaluation and internal documentation have confirmed this many times.

LEARNING AND ADVISING

Before taking up work in development cooperation, I had already lived in Zimbabwe for many years, first as a teacher under local terms and conditions, and then mainly as my wife's accompanying partner. When we arrived in Zimbabwe in the 1980s, we wanted to get involved – in Africa – in building a more just world, opposing apartheid, and working for peace and sustainable development. Over the years I became familiar with oppression, corruption and power politics in many different guises. As a result, I sometimes felt disillusioned, powerless, and even threatened in unpredictable situations. The years of crisis in Zimbabwe were sometimes quite turbulent, so the support of German organisations such as the World Peace Service was extremely important, not only to the local civil society, but also to us personally. I have always regarded my role as a professional development worker as one of both learning and advising at the same time. However, there were some subject areas which I tackled with great enthusiasm and where I tried to push particular processes in what I thought was the right direction. One such process



Wolf Ulrich Westermann (right) working as an advisor in Zimbabwe

was the drafting of the first Climate Change & Watershed Management Policy at district level in Zimbabwe. From this perspective, I have never believed that it is the role of a professional development worker to be neutral. The role is rather one of supporting and accompanying particular processes. In 2015, when the DEval evaluation of the global impact of the deployment of development workers in development cooperation was being carried out, I was selected as the subject of a case study in my field of work. WFD saw the results of the evaluation as an affirmation of the practice of advising local partners on a basis of equality and a justification of the policy of supporting and accompanying positive processes by providing advice on a long-term basis.

GROWING (TOGETHER) AS A TEAM

Open and dedicated working relationships have meant that I feel a deep affinity with my colleagues in Zimbabwe and in WFD and many of them have become friends. I have acquired a lot of intercultural knowledge from them and also from my neighbours of various backgrounds. This knowledge has expanded my horizons and made me more tolerant.

We have grown together as a team at TSURO and the increased capacity both of individuals and of the organisation is clearly evident. Even in acute emergency situations – such as that triggered recently by the Cyclone Idai disaster in Chimanimani – TSURO plays a key role in the distribution of relief, reconstruction, and the psycho-social care of traumatised communities. Being part of a dedicated team in WFD has helped me to maintain my stability in spite of being a long way from home and has given meaning and direction to my work for peace and justice.

Wolf Ulrich Westermann 2006 - 2018: Zimbabwe, WFD