

transfer

INFORMATION FOR RETURNING DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS

Strengthening Civil Society



Finding a Job with Heart
and Commitment at
AWO

AGdD Photo Competition:
"Decolonial Perspectives"
– The Winning Images

Åsa Månsson, VENRO,
in Interview:
The Strong Voice
of Civil Society

Page
06

Page
12

Page
15

Contents	2
Editorial	3
STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY	
For Democracy, Freedom and Solidarity Building and strengthening civil society structure	4
Finding a Job with Heart and Commitment at AWO Building bridges and bringing people together for solidarity	6
Engagement Is More Important Than Ever Responsible for Brot für die Welt's Civil Peace Service in Sierra Leone and Liberia	8
Atlas of Civil Society 2025	9
Working for Indigenous NGOs Empowering people to claim their rights themselves	10
INTERVIEW	
Andreas Frick, Misereor: Peaceful and sustainable development is based on a strong civil society	11
FROM THE EDITORS	
Decolonial Perspectives in focus The winning images of the AGdD photo competition	12
INTERVIEW	
Interview with Stefan Sckell, BMZ The BMZ's strategy for cooperation with civil society	14
Interview with Åsa Månsson, VENRO We want to be the strong voice for civil society	15
STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY	
From the Isar to the Jeetzel Working with KURVE Wustrow for a non-violent world	18
FACETS OF RETURN	
With "Generation Plus" to Mizoram Looking beyond the horizon even in retirement	19
FROM THE SERVICES	
South-North Deployment in the Civil Peace Service Pilot phase under way	20
Contributing Perspectives from the Global South as a South-North Professional	21
STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY	
Information on the thematic focus	22
FROM THE EDITORS	
Decolonising through stories A personal reading journey	23
Share Your Reading Experience! Book recommendations wanted for our reading journey	23
Upcoming AGdD events	23
AGdD: Our advisory and coaching services	23

Imprint

Published by: AGdD Förderungswerk für rückkehrende Fachkräfte der Entwicklungsdienste
Meckenheimer Allee 67-69
53115 Bonn, Germany
Phone: +49 (0)228 908 993-0
Email: redaktion@agdd.de

Editorial Team: Silke Wesemann, AGdD (Editor-in-Chief), Dieter Kroppenber, TOPIK
Articles signed by name do not necessarily reflect the views of the publisher.
Production: TOPIK, Aachen

Base layout: cap communications
Printing: Druckservice Zillekens

Reprints – including excerpts – only with permission of AGdD.

transfer is generally published three times a year.

36th year of publication – Issue 2 – November 2025

Editorial

Dear Readers,

At a time when social tensions, ecological crises and social inequalities are increasing, civil society organisations are more important than ever. They create spaces for participation, solidarity and social dialogue.

This issue focuses on professionals and returnees working in civil society organisations. Their examples, ideas and experiences illustrate what civic engagement means today, where innovation emerges and how civil society helps shape the future.

Strengthening civil society also plays an important role



for the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). With its civil society strategy, the BMZ aims to systematically strengthen cooperation with non-state actors in Germany as well as in partner countries. In an interview, Stefan Sckell, Policy Officer at the BMZ, explains the key priorities and challenges involved in implementing this strategy.

VENRO, the umbrella organisation of development and humanitarian non-governmental organisations in Germany, works to strengthen the space of action of civil society players. In an interview with *transfer*, Managing Director Åsa Månsson discusses current developments and approaches for action.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue and wish you all the best for the New Year.

Silke Westmann

For Democracy, Freedom and Solidarity

Building and Strengthening Civil Society Structures

Pia Schievink considers it important to counter the growing erosion of solidarity in our society – including in professional life. She works for the Paritätischer Wohlfahrtsverband in Cologne, where she serves as the contact person for approximately 250 self-help groups. In this role, she is able to draw effectively on both her professional expertise and the practical experience she gained during her development service.

From July 2004 to January 2006, I completed a voluntary service assignment with EIRENE as part of the Solidarity-Based Learning Service programme in Agadez, Niger. From February 2005 to January 2006, under a cooperation agreement between EIRENE and the German Development Service (DED, now GIZ), I was also a development fellow in the DED's junior staff development programme.

In Niger, I worked with the partner organisation Takayt. I was part of a local advisory team supporting two microfinance institutions whose focus was on strengthening rural self-help structures. Through this assignment, I was able to gain valuable experience in working with civil society organisations as well as in strengthening civil society structures.

Pia Schievink during her period of service in Niger, 2004

RETURNING TO SOCIAL WORK

After returning to Germany, I initially worked for several years as a policy officer for international exchange formats at various organisations. What I particularly valued was the collegial exchange with social work professionals from the countries and projects I worked with. During this period, a desire gradually grew to reorient my professional path in Germany and return to the field of social work.

As a qualified graduate social pedagogue (Diplom-Sozialpädagogin), I have professional experience in the field of self-help both in Germany and during my stay abroad in Niger. It therefore seemed a natural step to move into self-help support. I first took up a position as a network manager with a member organisation of the Paritätischer Wohlfahrtsverband working in the field of health-related self-help. From there, I eventually moved to the self-help contact centre of the Paritätischer Wohlfahrtsverband in Cologne.

STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY

In my current position, I work not only within a civil society organisation, but am also actively involved in building and strengthening civil society structures. Together with my four colleagues, I advise and support the approximately 250 self-help groups currently active in Cologne on substantive, organisational and financial matters. In addition, we support and accompany volunteers in the process of establishing new groups. Three times a week, we also provide advice by email, telephone or in person to people interested in self-help, or refer them to existing groups.

Through a range of activities – such as training courses and exchange meetings – we support networking among people who are actively engaged in self-help on a voluntary basis. We also inform the people of Cologne about self-help through public relations work, networking activities and project work. Naturally, the job also involves a variety of administrative tasks, such as database maintenance and the management of public funding.

IMPROVISATION AND CREATIVITY

In my day-to-day professional work, I benefit greatly from the experience I gained during my development service. At the contact centre, no two days are the same, and one never knows with complete certainty in the morning



how the day will unfold. Of course we plan, but things usually turn out differently. Improvisation, creativity, as well as responding flexibly to needs and processes, are therefore indispensable. These are skills my colleagues in Niger mastered exceptionally well. Civil society groups there receive far less – if any – state support. I have always admired how they compensate for this through a high degree of initiative, civic engagement and improvisational skill. The colleagues in Tanzania and Uganda with whom I worked as part of the exchange programmes I was able to coordinate demonstrated these abilities as well. I learned a great deal from them in this respect and was able to continue developing my own skills.

SOLIDARITY, JUSTICE AND DIVERSITY

Contributing, as an employee of a civil society organisation such as the Paritätischer Wohlfahrtsverband, to ensuring that solidarity, social justice and diversity remain visible and vibrant in our society is a source of great personal fulfilment for me.

In my view, such engagement is particularly important at the present time. Especially in light of the significant shift to the right that we have observed in Germany in recent years, strengthening democratic actors within civil society is indispensable. Solidary ways of thinking and acting are visibly declining in our society. Yet in an ageing society such as ours, marked by a widening gap between rich and poor and by ongoing – and at the same time necessary – migration, it is essential to decisively counter this erosion of solidarity if all people are to live together in dignity and peace.

In this sense, the system of independent welfare organisations in general, and the Paritätischer Wohlfahrtsverband in particular, are indispensable actors. The diverse services and measures provided by welfare organisations in Germany respond to civil society interests and needs precisely because they are usually in direct contact and dialogue with people. Politics and business are therefore well advised to maintain ongoing dialogue with the welfare organisations and to recognise and make use of their expertise. For example, policymakers should be familiar with and take seriously the Paritätischer Wohlfahrtsverband's poverty report, especially with regard to social policy decisions. At the international level, this is equally indispensable in my view. Here too, policymakers and business should always listen attentively and with appreciation when actors in social work in the broadest sense report, inform and articulate demands in the interest of human dignity.

CONCLUSION

Being able to work professionally for the strengthening of civil society interests in the service of democracy, freedom and social justice represents a significant part of my quality of life. Both professional expertise and practical experience are valued and needed here, whether on issues of poverty, education, migration, health or climate protection.



Photo: ©Christof Wild

For this reason, I can only encourage and motivate other returnees to bring the skills and experience they acquired during their development service into civil society organisations beyond the field of international cooperation.

Pia Schievink
Bank clerk, qualified social pedagogue
2004–2006: Niger, EIRENE

Volunteer Day in Cologne, September 2025:
Pia Schievink at the information stand of the self-help contact centre of the Paritätischer Wohlfahrtsverband

Finding a Job at AWO with Heart and Commitment

Building Bridges and Bringing People Together for Solidary Action

In El Salvador, Daniel Weiß supported a feminist organisation, among other things in the role of social media manager. After returning to Germany, he reoriented his professional path. Promoting civic engagement and communication – both offline and online – has nevertheless remained at the heart of his work at AWO in Bielefeld.

My several-year stay abroad in Central America began in 2016, when my wife took up a position as a development professional with Brot für die Welt in El Salvador. As an accompanying partner, I spent the first year caring for our then five-month-old daughter and managing the household. Our centre of life and work was Suchitoto, a small town about an hour and a half north of the capital, San Salvador.

It was difficult for us to anticipate what awaited my family and me in the smallest country in Latin America. From Germany, the news and information available to us at the time – in 2015 and 2016 – were hard to assess. The dominant topics were rampant violence and, in this con-

text, the seemingly omnipresent Mareros.

It soon became clear to us after arriving in El Salvador that these youth gangs almost exclusively harassed the poorer segments of the population. What helped us was the fact that, on our own initiative, we had already sought out and established contact with people familiar with the local context and with people on the ground before our departure. The most important of these was Morena Herrera, a co-founder of the feminist organisation Colectiva Feminista para el Desarrollo Local (CFDL – Feminist Collective for Local Development). She also took us in during our first weeks in Suchitoto. This is how my contact with CFDL came about. From 2017 to 2022, I ultimately worked with the organisation as a development service professional.

A DEDICATED PROFESSIONAL POSITION

My academic and professional background – a degree in Regional Studies (Latin America) and experience as a social media manager – matched the organisation's need for expertise in digital communication, particularly in its three rural regional offices. The strategically important Northern Regional Office was also located in Suchitoto, where we were living, and was housed in a shared women's meeting and counselling centre, the Casa de las Mujeres en Suchitoto.

After a project proposal had been reviewed and approved by Brot für die Welt, the work could begin. In my role as a development service professional, I supported CFDL as well as other local women's rights organisations based in the centre. My responsibilities included sharing knowledge through workshops for young, civically engaged people from local communities, women's groups and staff members. Topics included, for example, the use of smartphones and social media channels for policy-related work, as well as campaign work and digital communication strategies. In addition, I was responsible for setting up a media library, establishing social media channels and designing a website for the Casa de las Mujeres en Suchitoto.

I frequently accompanied activists during their actions and marches with camera and smartphone in order to make their activities and demands more visible online and to help disseminate them more widely. One of the political projects I found most interesting was the

Daniel Weiß documented, among other things, campaigns by local activists in El Salvador



campaign for the right to water for the local population and the subsequent successful local referendum on this issue in Suchitoto.

NEW PROFESSIONAL PLANS

After returning to Germany, the restart fortunately proved to be relatively smooth. For one thing, we were able to use housing that had become available within my wife's family. This removed one of the major challenges many returnees typically face. The application for, and approval of, unemployment benefits also proceeded without major difficulties.

My plan was to reposition myself professionally after my time in El Salvador. At that point, however, I did not yet know exactly in which direction this would take me. I therefore initially completed further training in online marketing. I already had experience in social media, and the training was intended to further professionalise my profile and improve my job prospects in Germany.

JOB SEARCH WITH A CLEAR PROFILE

During this phase, AGdD proved extremely helpful to me, particularly in developing a clear professional perspective. While I had generally enjoyed working in digital communication, I often had a vague sense that I was not able to fully apply my strengths – and above all my passion – in this field. In hindsight, that impression has been confirmed.

The decisive momentum certainly came from the coaching sessions with Sabine Maier at AGdD. Together, we worked on sharpening my professional profile. We also tackled what might seem like more mundane tasks, such as updating my application documents, in particular my CV. When an interview with the AWO Freiwilligenakademie OWL was scheduled, Sabine Maier provided me with one final and very helpful briefing in preparation.

The interview went well, and since mid-May 2024 I have been working as a policy officer for civic engagement at the AWO Bezirksverband Bielefeld. At the core of my work are promoting and supporting voluntary engagement in society, matching volunteers with opportunities, and building networks in this field.

At project level, I coordinate two initiatives with a colleague each: a youth democracy promotion project and the integration project "Macht zusammen Bielefeld!", which promotes joint civic engagement in the city. The latter aims to actively support newly arrived migrants and refugees in finding opportunities for voluntary engagement, thereby facilitating their arrival and integration. At the same time, the participating associations, initiatives and institutions set a visible example for diversity, tolerance and solidarity in Bielefeld.

SETTLED IN

My prior experience in the social sector and my skills in digital communication are a great asset in my current role. The courage to leave gaps, to allow space for spontaneity, authenticity and understanding, project-based



© Daniel Weiß

working, and a communicative style that is approachable and human – these are qualities I learned during my development service and from the people in El Salvador, and from which I benefit today.

I feel that I am exactly where I should be professionally at this point in my life. I am able to develop my strengths and contribute meaningful work towards strengthening civil society, this time in Germany: building bridges, bringing people together for solidary action, and creating more opportunities for genuine encounters and exchange. These are the most basic and essential building blocks that help people connect with one another. In this way, civil society forces can emerge and grow that are better equipped to confront an age marked by polycrisis and post-truth dynamics.

Daniel Weiß

Graduate in Regional Studies (Latin America),
Social Media Manager
2017–2022: El Salvador, Brot für die Welt / DÜ

Daniel Weiß at the AWO information stand during a neighbourhood day in Bielefeld-Sennestadt

Civic Engagement Is More Important Than Ever

Responsible for the Civil Peace Service of Brot für die Welt in Sierra Leone and Liberia

Based on her experience, Martina Grahl considers a broad-based and active civil society to be central to development cooperation. Promoting such civic engagement was at the heart of her service period in Argentina and remains a key objective of her current work at Brot für die Welt.

From September 2021 to December 2024, I worked as a development service professional with the Diakonische Stiftung Hora de Obrar in Argentina. There, I supported capacity development in the field of disaster risk reduction and humanitarian assistance across the countries of the Río de la Plata basin (Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay). The focus was on awareness-raising and training related to risk management and emergency preparedness. The focus was on awareness-raising and training related to risk management and emergency preparedness.

I worked primarily with municipalities, church congregations and local actors such as volunteer fire brigades, indigenous leaders, park rangers, as well as civil society initiatives and NGOs. Concrete topics included wildfires, droughts, floods, tornadoes and environmental pollution. Our central questions

were: Which preventive measures can be implemented? And how can we prepare in order to respond appropriately in the event of a disaster?

While the state is formally responsible for providing assistance in disaster situations, civil society organisations and groups play an indispensable role. They are often the first on the ground and are most familiar with the needs and challenges faced by affected communities. For this reason, the people themselves, their knowledge, and locally available capacities and resources always formed the starting point of our work. For example, we trained women's groups in rural areas to create risk maps. Using simple tools, they drew neigh-

bourhoods on paper and then identified zones that are vulnerable to flooding.

In another project, following severe wildfires, a municipality developed a joint approach involving indigenous communities and the volunteer fire brigade to ensure that fires in remote areas could be reported more quickly and contained at an early stage.

AFTER THE DEVELOPMENT SERVICE

Before my assignment, I had already worked for many years in various roles at Brot für die Welt. For the period in Argentina, I was granted leave, which meant that after my return I was able to resume work directly – albeit in a new position with new responsibilities.

I am now responsible for Brot für die Welt's Civil Peace Service (CPS) programme in Sierra Leone and Liberia. My work focuses on shaping the programme's overall strategic direction, maintaining dialogue with our civil society partner organisations, and monitoring the impact of the projects we support in both countries.

PROMOTING CIVIL SOCIETY

In my experience, a broad-based and active civil society is central to development cooperation. It makes an important contribution to promoting diversity, democracy, transparency and the rule of law. Civil society is needed in order to help shape issues of relevance to society as a whole and to give a voice to disadvantaged groups. Civil society actors involved in development cooperation often engage precisely in those contexts where state-led development cooperation does not reach, thereby making an important contribution to sustainable development.

For these reasons, Brot für die Welt works worldwide with local partner organisations and understands itself as part of an international civil society. Two projects from my current area of responsibility may serve as illustrative examples of our cooperation with NGOs in West Africa. In Liberia and Sierra Leone, we support the YMCA in its work with young people. A central focus is dealing with the legacy of the civil war, which continues to have an impact to this day. Key themes include dealing with the past, coping with experiences of violence, peacebuilding, and raising awareness of citizens' rights and responsibilities.

Another example is the civil society organisation Men's Association for Gender Equality (MAGE) in Sierra Leone. The organisation works to promote gender equality,



Women's groups created simple "risk maps" identifying areas at risk of flooding.

focusing in particular on men and boys. One of its key objectives is to encourage critical reflection on one's own role models and gender norms.

We support such project activities both through financial resources and through the deployment of Civil Peace Service (CPS) professionals, who are able to provide valuable input on the ground – ranging from methodological training and organisational development to strengthening partner organisations' networking and public outreach.

I am responsible for accompanying and administering these projects. This naturally involves a considerable amount of desk-based work, but an initial project visit to West Africa is also coming up soon. In addition, I am in close and ongoing exchange with our professionals working in the two countries. I advise and support them, for example, in their day-to-day work on the ground. Another important aspect of my role is addressing the personal challenges that come with living and working in a different cultural context.

VALUABLE EXPERIENCE FROM DEVELOPMENT SERVICE

During my time in development service, I once again learned how important it is to listen carefully and to

approach people and new situations with openness and empathy. My time in Argentina contributed to developing a deeper understanding of the challenges on the ground. The work of our partner organisations and **deployed professionals** takes place under conditions that differ significantly from those in Germany. It requires a high degree of flexibility and patience. From my perspective, a sense of humour and a willingness to work in an intercultural team are also extremely helpful. I also believe it is essential to continually reflect on how our own requirements – or those of other donors from the Global North – are perceived by local organisations on the ground. Declining financial resources for development cooperation as a whole pose an additional challenge for everyone involved.

CONCLUSION

Especially against the backdrop of the global rise in autocratic governments and extremist movements, civic engagement is more important than ever. In order to support and promote it, we as returnees can contribute many valuable skills and experiences gained during our service and, in doing so, stand up for the strengthening of open and democratic societies.



Martina Grahl
Sociologist
2021–2024:
Argentina,
Brot für die Welt / DÜ

Atlas of Civil Society 2025

72.5% of all people worldwide live in countries where civil society space is restricted or closed.

Only 284 million people live in countries with an open civil society.



Strong democracies depend on the active role of their civil societies. Just 3.5% of the world's population live in countries with unrestricted civil society freedoms, while more than 72% live in states where civil society is repressed or closed. These are the findings of the latest Atlas of Civil Society published by Brot für die Welt.

Drawing on data from the global civil rights

network CIVICUS, the Atlas combines evidence-based analysis with reports from Brot für die Welt partner organisations and a thematic focus that changes each year. This year's edition highlights how an increasing number of governments and other actors are attacking and undermining the rule of law – often with serious consequences for civil society.

To restrict fundamental freedoms, governments frequently resort to intimidation, censorship and restrictive legislation. Protests are suppressed, demonstrators are arrested, and human rights defenders are criminalised.

A particularly striking example is the Philippines. Since September 2023, 27 staff members of CERNET, a partner organisation of Brot für die Welt, have been on trial. The charges were brought following a complaint by the military, alleging that their work violates legislation aimed at combating the financing of terrorism.

"Freedom of expression and freedom of assembly are prerequisites for people to assert their rights and to work together towards just and sustainable development. Especially in times of growing autocratisation, it is all the more important to protect and strengthen civic engagement – in Germany and worldwide," says Silke Pfeiffer, Head of the Human Rights and Peace Division at Brot für die Welt.

The Atlas of Civil Society is available free of charge on the website of Brot für die Welt.

www.t1p.de/ZG-atlas-25

Working with Indigenous NGOs

Empowering People to Claim Their Rights Themselves

The ethnologist Mechthild Bock spent many years of her professional life in South America. In Peru and Bolivia, among other places, she worked as a **Civil Peace Service (CPS) professional** with Indigenous organisations. Her goal was to strengthen civil society so that people on the ground would be able to defend their own interests. Here, she presents some of the key stages of her professional journey.

Early on – during my studies in historical ethnology in Frankfurt – I was irresistibly drawn to the South American continent, and more specifically to the Asháninka, an Indigenous people living in the Peruvian Amazon region. At the time, I could not imagine completing my studies without getting to know the people I was researching in their own environment.

However, in the early 1990s, a brutal conflict was raging in the Peruvian rainforest between left-wing terrorist organisations such as Shining Path and the military. Around 6,000 Asháninka lost their lives in this conflict. Despite these dangers, I travelled to the region – and immediately knew that this was my place, contradictory as it may have seemed.

thorities and the official state justice system as enshrined in the Peruvian constitution.

PERU 2010–2013

From 2010 to 2013, I coordinated the weltwärts programme in Peru – once again as a **development professional** with the German Development Service (DED). I worked in Lima, which suited my personal circumstances well as a single parent with a daughter who was preparing for her Abitur at the German School there. There was a great deal of variety, not least due to the sometimes curious expectations of the volunteers from Germany. Some came with the aim of changing the world, others to escape the parental home after finishing school. Many, however, also absorbed the new experiences deeply and learned to open themselves up to other cultures. We had a great deal of scope to shape the programme, which allowed us to work constructively on issues such as dealing with the past, racism and discrimination.

BOLIVIA AND PERU AGAIN, 2014–2021

In 2014, I travelled to Bolivia as a **Civil Peace Service (CPS) professional** and worked with my partner organisation and the indigenous organisation of the Monkox people. Our core themes were democratic dialogue, the rights of indigenous peoples and their systems of justice. Just over two years later, I took up a position in the Peruvian Amazon region as an adviser and trainer on land conflicts involving indigenous communities. In this role, I was primarily responsible for dialogue and conflict management processes. Among other things, we developed a training programme in conflict management for indigenous leaders and government officials. To enable indigenous women in remote areas to participate more actively in decision-making processes during the Covid-19 pandemic, we also launched a small but highly effective digitalisation project. The women learned to use digital communication tools that were new to them and to speak confidently in public.

BACK IN GERMANY

Since 2024, I have been working as a temporary adviser with AGIAMONDO at Misereor. Part of my work can be carried out from my home office in Frankfurt. In addition, I travel regularly to Latin America, where I support Misereor partners in building networks together with indigenous organisations in order to strengthen the rights of indigenous peoples at national and international level. This is a complex endeavour at a time marked by illegal gold mining, drug trafficking and the climate crisis. Since early 2025, together with partners from Colombia,



Mechthild Bock (left) in conversation with a colleague from a partner organisation in the Brazilian Amazon region

PERU 2000–2006

From 2000 to 2006, I worked in Peru as a **Civil Peace Service (CPS) professional** for the DED (now GIZ). I was officially sent off by the then German Minister for Development Cooperation, Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul, to a project with Peru's state ombudsman institution. Together with a local colleague, I worked on a study examining traditional forms of conflict resolution among the Asháninka and the impacts of the violence they had experienced at the hands of both the Shining Path and the military. Building on this work, we trained Indigenous mediators to support conflict resolution processes. Our primary objective was to enable Indigenous people and their organisations to defend their own interests – in other words, to strengthen civil society. This is an approach I still consider particularly effective today. Our cooperation with judges, public prosecutors, and representatives of the police and military was also very successful. At the time, the groundwork was laid for implementing the coordination between Indigenous au-

Mechthild Bock
Ethnologist
2000–2006:
Peru, DED
2010–2013:
Peru, DED/GIZ
2014–2016:
Bolivia, GIZ
2016–2021:
Peru, GIZ

Peru, Bolivia and Brazil, I have been focusing on a thematic field with the rather unwieldy title “self-organised mechanisms of indigenous peoples for the protection and defence of their territories and livelihoods.” At its core, this work is about strengthening indigenous peoples with regard to security, justice and conflict resolution – a particularly challenging task in the context of organised crime and climate change.

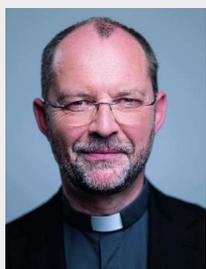
A BRIEF CONCLUSION

Unfortunately, some of the structures through which my work in and for South America was funded are currently under serious threat due to budget cuts – including AGIAMONDO's temporary “Berater*in auf Zeit” adviser programme. It remains to be seen how comparable projects aimed at strengthening civil society structures can be implemented in the future. All of my assignments were based on fixed-term contracts, including my current position as a temporary adviser with AGIAMONDO / Misereor. These contracts did not always dovetail seamlessly, which was – and remains – associated

with a degree of uncertainty. With increasing age, I would have liked to have a permanent position by now, but in truth I have never known it any other way. The flexibility I acquired during my many years in South America was certainly helpful in this regard.

Flexibility, a sense of responsibility, conflict competence and holistic thinking – in the context of our work, these are not just buzzwords, but the essence of a life lived between two worlds. And this is perhaps the most important lesson my work with indigenous peoples has given me: genuine change emerges where people are able to speak and act for themselves, and where we, as professionals, listen rather than seek to control.

Andreas Frick, Misereor: Peaceful and sustainable development is based on a strong civil society



Dr Andreas Frick, Executive Director of Misereor, is responsible for fundraising, communications, education and pastoral work, as well as policy and global future issues.

In an interview, he explains why strengthening civil society lies at the heart of Misereor's work, how international partnerships promote global justice, and the role of civic engagement in times of geopolitical tensions and the climate crisis.

Misereor supports numerous projects worldwide – around one third of them in the field of Human Rights and Civil Society. Why is this area so important, and where do you see success?

A strong civil society stands up for human rights, promotes democracy, the rule of law and participation – it is the foundation for just, peaceful and sustainable development. However, the global rise of authoritarian tendencies means that around 85 per cent of the world's population – almost seven billion people – live in countries with restricted civil society space. They cannot freely express their opinions, assemble or organise politically without fearing various forms of repression.

In cooperation with local organisations and

networks, Misereor advocates for these values not only financially, but also politically. In this way, it helps enable people to raise their voices in the fight against poverty, exclusion and violence, and to claim their rights.

You work internationally with around 1,700 partner organisations. How do you engage in dialogue, and which alliances are particularly effective in advancing global justice?

Misereor increasingly works with partners in Asia, Africa, Latin America and also Europe on shared global challenges such as food systems, climate and civil society. Dialogue with partner organisations is conducted both by staff in Aachen and by advisers on the ground. What is needed are people who can build bridges from both sides and question power relations that perpetuate injustice. This results in project funding as well as lobbying and advocacy work. In Germany, Misereor draws heavily on these relationships and forms of knowledge.

At present, seven temporary advisers are working for Misereor, supporting partner organisations in the Global South with their expertise in specific thematic areas – for example mining, ecology and human rights, water and sanitation, and the strengthening of indigenous organisations. In addition, Misereor maintains dialogue and liaison offices in ten countries across Africa, Asia and Latin America. **Development service**

professionals also work closely with partner organisations at these locations.

Geopolitical tensions, the climate crisis and pressure on development cooperation are defining the current situation – including here in Germany. How is Misereor responding to this? What can civil society do?

Not only in Europe are the goals that the member states of the United Nations set for sustainable development just ten years ago increasingly being called into question. Civil society – which in many countries is itself coming under growing pressure – must act as a corrective here and demand that national governments comply with international rules designed to strengthen peace, uphold the rule of law, and enable fair development opportunities for all people. Civil society organisations, including many of our partners, work tirelessly every day, often under extremely difficult conditions, to alleviate poverty, enable adaptation to the impacts of the climate crisis, and help people claim their rights. We must not relent in these efforts. Instead, we need to keep seeking new approaches in Germany and Europe – and perhaps also win new allies.

Thank you for the interview.

Decolonial Perspectives

The Winning Images of the

1st Prize: "Two Muslim Women Against Gender-Based Violence in Nepal's Lowlands" by Kabita Gurung, Nepal 2024

Kabita Gurung works as a project manager in a Civil Peace Service (CPS) project run by United Mission to Nepal (UMN), a partner organisation of Brot für die Welt



The photo was taken as part of the project "Ending Domestic Violence through Community Dialogue and Mediation". It shows two Muslim women from a self-help group working against domestic violence. On the right: Ruksar Begam, the group's facilitator. During a session, she helps Hairun Nesha, a survivor of domestic violence, sign a document. The photographer describes Nepal as a society that remains

deeply shaped by patriarchal structures to this day. These structures can be traced back to the arrival of the so-called "Aryans" (a term commonly used in South Asia instead of "Indo-Europeans") and the caste system they introduced. British colonial rule further entrenched these forms of discrimination. Ruksar Begam has faced numerous challenges throughout her life – including limited access to education and resistance from her husband to her social engagement. Through her active involvement in the group, she was able to take part in training in psychosocial counselling and was elected by the members as a "peace ambassador". She now brings this knowledge into the self-help group.

The jury highlighted the visible sense of connection between the two women. The photograph, they noted, opens up a shift in perspective by showing that support among indigenous women grows out of their own lived realities and does not require external assistance. The calm atmosphere also conveys that the photographer captured the moment with attentiveness and respect.



3rd Prize "Image Sovereignty" by Katja Dombrowski, Bolivia 2024

Katja Dombrowski worked as a **development service professional for Weltfriedensdienst** on the project "Conflict Transformation and Strengthening a Culture of Peace in Southern Bolivia".

The photograph shows María José, aged 15 – a student and participant in a Photovoice project run by the WFD partner organisation Fundación Acción Cultural Loyola. The aim of the project is to enable participants to portray their lived realities through texts and photographs.

The photographer writes: "In this self-portrait, image sovereignty lies entirely with María José. She stages herself and presents herself as she wishes to be seen. I captured this moment with the camera without influencing her pose or gaze."

The jury was also deeply impressed: "This photograph required us to look more closely and

see beyond the surface. At first glance, it might be dismissed as just another selfie – but there is much more behind it: themes of our modern society such as loneliness, belonging, the search for acceptance, love and trust. The girl deliberately turns the camera on herself – a courageous and powerful gesture through which she (re)claims her visibility and her place in society.

The photographer remains unobtrusively in the background, giving María José the space to present herself freely. The result is a quiet yet deeply moving image that invites reflection without imposing itself."

Decolonial Perspectives in Focus

The AGdD Photo Competition

2nd Prize "Getting to Know Other Realities Together in Order to Bring About Change" by Svenja Jandrasits, Bolivia 2024

Svenja Jandrasits works as a **development service professional** in the Civil Peace Service (CPS) programme for Centro Juana Azurduy, a partner organisation of the Weltfriedensdienst in southern Bolivia.



The project "Women and Young People as Protagonists of a Culture of Peace in Southern Bolivia through Research, Dialogue and Communication" explores women's economic dependency in Chuquisaca using the participatory research method Photovoice. Through photography, women make their experiences and perspectives visible. The resulting images document their

struggle for economic independence and were presented at dialogue events with representatives of social organisations and policymakers. This photograph was taken at one of these exhibitions. It shows members of the women's organisation Centralía Provincial de Mujeres Bartolina Sisa looking at a portrait of a woman.

The photographer describes the scene as an expression of solidarity and mutual listening: "I am here, I am listening, I am interested in the lives of other women." According to the photographer, the image conveys decolonial perspectives because the women depicted make their own realities visible and press for change – rather than external "experts" doing so on their behalf.

The jury praised the image's precise composition. Its unconventional perspective convincingly expresses the demand to "get to know other realities together in order to bring about change". The strength of the photograph lies in the way a carefully observed everyday scene prompts reflections on how we live together – far beyond the merely factual.

An Engaging Process and Three Outstanding Winning Images

In development cooperation, engaging with colonial continuities is essential – including in development service work. With the photo competition "Decolonial Perspectives" for (former) development professionals, accompanying partners and staff of partner organisations, we developed an initiative in 2025 to address this issue in a constructive way. Support for designing the competition was quickly found. Stefan Heiß, Head of Communications at EIRENE, has long been engaged with issues of racism-sensitive visual language. In several webinars, he provided important impulses for critically reflecting on and producing images. The level of interest was high.

In a further step, we assembled an international jury and engaged in in-depth discussions with these experts on the procedure and the selection criteria.

During the image selection process, it became clear that personal, intercultural,



professional and power-critical perspectives differ considerably. Engaging with these differences proved to be highly enriching, but also challenging.

According to the jury, the competition's key objective – to stimulate reflection on visual language and to foster dialogue around it – was successfully achieved. The number of submitted images, however, fell short of expectations. This was presumably due to

Our Jury (from left to right) The photographer, filmmaker and performance artist thabo thindi, who lives and works in Berlin and South Africa; the Bolivian documentary photographer Wara Vargas Lara; and the Cologne-based photographer and gallerist Wolfgang Zurborn.

the demanding nature of the call: creating images that convey decolonial perspectives is a highly ambitious task. Additional requirements, such as clarifying image rights for the people depicted, were also very time-consuming. We learned a great deal from this process.

Nevertheless, we received a number of very strong submissions, from which the jury selected three winning images.

More information on the photo competition: www.t1p.de/agdd-fotowettbewerb

Interview with Stefan Sckell, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)

The BMZ's Strategy for Cooperation with Civil Society



In 2024, the BMZ presented a new civil society strategy.

In this interview, Stefan Sckell, Policy Officer for Principles of Cooperation with Civil Society at the BMZ, explains the priorities of the strategy and the challenges involved in its implementation.

Mr Sckell, the new strategy paper states: "With the implementation of this strategy, the BMZ aims to open a new chapter in its cooperation with civil society." What does this mean in concrete terms?

Over the past few years, the BMZ has significantly intensified its dialogue with civil society – both at leadership level and at working level. In doing so, we have increasingly sought exchange with civil society actors from the Global South. For example, we involved them in the development of both the Civil Society Strategy and the Africa Strategy.

Furthermore, the BMZ advocates more strongly for the expansion of civil society space in a variety of contexts – such as during government consultations and negotiations, and at the multilateral level, including within the European Union and the United Nations. During visits to partner countries, BMZ leadership also engages in dialogue with local civil society and visits civil society projects on the ground.

In addition, the BMZ is expanding approaches aimed at supporting civil society in the Global South as directly as possible, including informal groups. For example, through the international non-governmental organisation CIVICUS, we support southern NGOs, particularly in countries where civil society space is restricted. At the same time, we pursue the approach of increasingly supporting civil society in the Global South within the framework of bilateral and regional cooperation.

Last but not least, we have simplified our funding mechanisms for civil society. With the new funding guidelines for private implementing organisations in Germany, we have made significant progress in this regard.

Where do you see the main challenges or limits?

The greatest challenge is the growing trend towards autocratisation in many countries of the Global South, accompanied by shrinking space for civil society. Even though the Federal Foreign Office and the BMZ are actively committed at various levels to creating enabling

environments for civil society, we often encounter a lack of responsiveness from governments in the Global South. Unfortunately, our influence is limited in these cases – particularly in countries with which we do not have bilateral cooperation. However, within the framework of funding for private implementing organisations, we do have certain levers to facilitate cooperation with local civil society under conditions of shrinking spaces – for example through higher funding rates.

To this day, societies continue to be shaped by patterns of thought and structures that originate in the colonial period. Many civil society organisations are now engaging with these colonial continuities and initiating processes to overcome them. This necessity is also explicitly reflected in the strategy paper for international cooperation. How does the BMZ address this issue?

A self-critical engagement with these issues is very important to BMZ. For this reason, in the summer of 2023 the BMZ launched an internal work process aimed at critically examining colonial legacies as well as patterns of thinking and action shaped by colonialism within German development cooperation. The objective is to strengthen international cooperation through more balanced and equitable partnerships, particularly in the sense of a renewed partnership between Europe and the Global South. Together with an external team of advisers and in close coordination with the implementing organisations GIZ and KfW, the BMZ is therefore analysing its work along four core areas:

- greater partner orientation and participation in the planning and implementation of development cooperation (locally led development),
- reducing global asymmetries through sectoral and multilateral engagement,
- non-discriminatory communication and language,
- and raising awareness among BMZ staff as well as diversifying the workforce.

As part of this process, a specialist conference with civil society actors on colonial continuities was held, as well as a public conference in Berlin bringing together actors from civil society, academia, politics and business from both the Global North and the Global South. A policy paper with recommendations for further action will be available shortly. In addition, a voluntary anti-racism initiative formed by BMZ staff is actively engaged and accompanies the ministry-wide process on this issue in a critical and constructive manner.

Thank you very much for the interview.

Interview with Åsa Månsson, VENRO

We Want to Be the Strong Voice for Civil Society



Åsa Månsson (left) is Executive Director of VENRO, the umbrella organisation of development and humanitarian non-governmental organisations in Germany. Dr Gabi Waibel, Executive Director of AGdD (right), spoke with her about VENRO's work and objectives and about the association's role within the civil society landscape.

Ms Månsson, VENRO is an umbrella organisation with almost 150 member organisations. What do they have in common?

We currently serve as the umbrella organisation for 147 non-governmental organisations of very different sizes. There are two formal criteria that all our members have in common: they are registered in Germany – that is, they are German NGOs – and they work internationally in the fields of development cooperation or humanitarian assistance, as well as in development education. These are the prerequisites for VENRO membership. At a substantive level, we are all engaged in development and humanitarian work.

At present, however, what connects us most strongly is a shared concern in light of social and political developments – both nationally and internationally – that are making our work increasingly difficult. Public support for our work is no longer as strong as it once was, and political understanding of global interconnections is also changing. All of this currently means that within the association we are drawing closer together, with the individual interests of member organisations taking somewhat of a back seat. We need each other more than ever – and together we are simply stronger.

How do you organise cooperation among your members, and what can you achieve better together?

Our association's work is organised primarily through working groups focusing on specific thematic areas. Representatives of the member organisations come together, exchange views and develop joint positions. There are, for example, a climate working group, a gender working group and a children's rights working group. In this way, we continuously work on around 15 thematic priorities and develop common positions, for which VENRO then acts as a mouthpiece and engages in political advocacy. A newer format is our expert groups, which we establish in response to current developments be-

yond the core thematic areas. One example was an expert group on development finance convened on the occasion of the UN conference in Seville in the summer of 2025. These expert groups operate for a limited period of time and are then dissolved. This allows us to respond flexibly to current issues and to influence ongoing processes. With this group structure, our work is highly decentralised. In addition, there are also projects that are coordinated directly by the VENRO secretariat.

As to what we can achieve better together: the core idea behind VENRO is to engage with policymakers with a unified voice and coordinated positions that is, with parliamentarians, parliamentary committees, political groups and ministries. In the context of development cooperation, we usually work with the BMZ; on humanitarian issues, with the Federal Foreign Office of Germany. We also maintain contacts with the ministries responsible for health, defence and finance in order to bring our perspectives to the table. In this way, we engage in advocacy and seek to influence political decision-making.

One of the seven overarching objectives of VENRO's Strategy 2023–2028 is to strengthen civil society. How do you put this into practice for your members?

Over the years, VENRO has built a strong reputation within the political landscape and, with 147 member organisations, also carries a certain weight. That alone – I would argue – already strengthens civil society: through our many contacts, an active network and a great deal of experience, we represent the interests of our members.

In addition, there are working groups that focus specifically on this topic, such as a working group on shrinking

space. Initially, we observed this phenomenon that is, state restrictions on civil society space primarily in the context of implementation in partner countries. In this regard, we can, for example, draw on our contacts at the Federal Foreign Office of Germany and raise the question of what conditions our partner organisations need in order to do their work effectively.

However, we are now increasingly seeing attacks on civil society actors, organisations and structures here in Germany as well, coming from different parts of the political spectrum. This is something we will be monitoring very closely in the future.

In 2024, the BMZ updated its civil society strategy (see p. 14: Interview with Stefan Sckell) and designated VENRO as a “central point of contact”. How are you filling this role? What is working well, and where do you see challenges?

We were already involved in the development of this strategy paper and were able to submit comments on the individual elements. Overall, we are satisfied with the outcome.

What will now be decisive, however, is how the important and forward-looking approaches set out in the strategy are implemented in practice – especially at a time when financial resources are becoming scarcer and perspectives on development cooperation are changing.

One example: the strategy envisages more participatory processes, meaning that civil society actors are to be involved when, for instance, strategy papers are being developed. For this to happen, however, these actors must also be able to come together. Simply opening up spaces and issuing invitations to participate is not sufficient. Preparing for and taking part in meetings or workshops requires human and financial resources that smaller civil society organisations often simply do not have. In other words, without support, this cannot be realised. Otherwise, only large, well-funded organisations will be able to make their voices heard and have their perspectives represented. One thing is clear: the very existence of the strategy is already an achievement. At the same time, we will need to wait and see what the current reform process within BMZ will bring and how it will affect implementation. Development Minister Reem Alabali Radovan is currently setting new priorities and focal areas. We have also been invited to contribute our positions to this reform process – and we will, of course, make use of that opportunity.

Could you say a bit more about your international work? Where are you well connected, and where do you see your main areas of focus?

We are part of the European NGO confederation CONCORD, which is based in Brussels. This enables exchange and cooperation with colleagues from, for example, the Netherlands, Spain, France, Portugal or Latvia. Together, we make use of contacts with Members of the European Parliament for advocacy work. After all, it is in Brussels that the key parameters of EU policy on development cooperation are set and EU budgets for civil society activities are negotiated.

Beyond the EU, we are also very well connected inter-

nationally. For example, we run the project “Countdown 2030”, in which we cooperate with three civil society platforms comparable to VENRO from Ethiopia, Brazil and India. We develop joint positions, feed them into our political work and, on specific occasions, also appear together – this year, for example, at the UN Conference on Financing for Development in Seville and at the United Nations Summit of the Future in New York.

How do you organise cooperation within this project?

Two key principles are partnership and working at eye level. We put a great deal of effort into creating comparable conditions for all those involved. We place strong emphasis on thorough exchange of perspectives, and we genuinely discuss and take important decisions together. This requires a great deal of networking. It is time-consuming, but indispensable. Our partnership-based way of working is facilitated by the fact that we have known each other for a long time – in some cases for many years – and have built relationships based on trust.

At the same time, there are factors we cannot simply change. For example, the funding for the project comes from the BMZ – that is, from Germany. As a German organisation, this is something we continually reflect on and address, even though we cannot entirely overcome it. After all, we are also accountable to the BMZ. We work hard to ensure that this does not affect project planning and implementation, which are intended to be carried out in an equal and partnership-based manner.

Equal partnership and solidarity are also central reference points of development service. This is something we want to strengthen, because personal cooperation makes it possible to understand different perspectives and contexts, to learn from one another and to jointly develop forward-looking solutions. Would you agree with that?

Yes, indeed. With Brot für die Welt, Weltfriedensdienst, EIRENE and AGIAMONDO, several development service organisations are also members of VENRO. We therefore take note of their work and contributions, and their expertise feeds into our working groups and expert groups. I myself recently attended an event organised by AGIAMONDO and learned more about their work there.

In general, I believe that we need to communicate much more clearly what is being achieved here and what is valuable about this work in order to gain broader support.

While global challenges are enormous, the role and effectiveness of development cooperation are increasingly being questioned. Isn't that a contradiction?

Yes, absolutely. Three or four years ago, the question “Why do we need to engage internationally at all?” was not being asked. There was a broad consensus in society, in parliament and among democratic parties that development cooperation is an important instrument of human rights, peace and security policy. At most, there were debates about how and how much – but the underlying principle was agreed upon.

That has changed. The question “Why development cooperation at all?” has newly emerged in the public

debate. This is happening at a time when we are facing the consequences of climate change and when inequality and conflicts have increased which is indeed contradictory. As a result, answers are now being sought, sometimes hastily. Arguments such as economic promotion or tackling the root causes of displacement then quickly come into play. Our position on this is clear: development cooperation is not the same as promoting economic development. Of course, the private sector has an important role to play in building sustainable relationships with countries and regions. But for us, arguments such as human rights and the Sustainable Development Goals are paramount. For example, it is not simply about jobs, but about jobs that are properly safeguarded and meet certain standards. This perspective must be clearly articulated, and we intend to keep bringing it into the ongoing reform process at the BMZ.

What options do you see for countering the pressure that development cooperation has come under in the public sphere over the past two to three years?

In my view, our organisations and we as an association are called upon to sharpen our messages and then consider carefully whom we can reach. I sense a great deal of uncertainty, including among our members, in light of current developments. How should we communicate? Do we now all need to be constantly posting on TikTok? I don't think so. What matters far more is being clear about our messages. Who are the people we can reach effectively? For example, donors or members. We have not had to engage quite so intensively with these questions for a long time, because many things were taken for granted. That is why, at VENRO, we are now revising our core messages and expanding our communications work, for instance our press relations.

Back in 2022, we defined seven overarching objectives for our work in our five-year strategy. But times have changed. We cannot do everything, and we need to refocus our priorities in a joint process. We need to pragmatically clarify how we can remain effective with fewer resources and ensure that we have a strong voice in reform processes and debates about the future.

One thing I would also like to emphasise: there are still many people who genuinely value our work. Issues such as health, poverty reduction or children's rights are not irrelevant to most people. There continues to be a great deal of support.

Ms Månsson, VENRO is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year – congratulations. What would you wish for on this occasion and for the years ahead?

If I may make a wish, then it would be for no cuts to the federal budget for humanitarian assistance and development cooperation. Specifically, we urgently need EUR 2.5 billion for humanitarian assistance and EUR 11.4 billion for development cooperation.

In addition, I wish for a more holistic understanding among policymakers and within society of global interconnections – of how interconnected the world is and how it functions. This is also one of the objectives we are working towards at VENRO.

Thank you very much for the interview.

Editing and editorial work:
Dieter
Kroppenberg

Information on the BMZ strategy and on VENRO



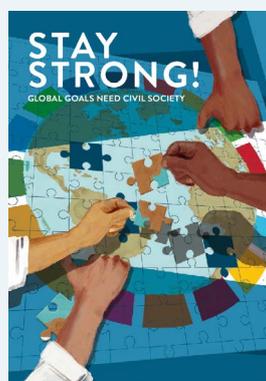
Further information on the BMZ's strategy for cooperation with civil society is available on the BMZ website.

www.t1p.de/bmz-strategie-zv



VENRO has defined seven overarching objectives as the strategic and substantive framework for its association work through to 2028.

www.t1p.de/venro-strategie



Information on the "Countdown 2030" project is available in the publication "Stay Strong" on the VENRO website.

www.t1p.de/venro-stay-strong

From the Isar to the Jeetzel

Working at KURVE Wustrow for a Nonviolent World

“Especially now, at a time of great uncertainty, work for peace is more urgent than ever,” KURVE Wustrow warned in early 2025 in a nationwide newspaper advertisement published jointly with other peace organisations shortly before the federal election. The headline read: “Chancellor for Peace Wanted.”

This appeal prompted me, after twelve years in non-profit cultural management in Bavaria, to reconnect with my earlier work as a **peace professional**. In the summer, I therefore moved from the Isar to the Jeetzel to join the executive management of KURVE Wustrow – Education and Meeting Centre for Nonviolent Action.

SPREADING NONVIOLENCE

“KURVE” is located in a former inn situated on a bend in the road in the Wendland town of Wustrow which is how the organisation got its name. It was founded in 1980 as a non-profit association in the context of civil society protests against the planned nuclear waste repository

in nearby Gorleben. Since then, the organisation has followed a guiding principle that still holds true today: “Spreading nonviolence.”

Then as now, KURVE Wustrow’s activities and project partners can be found across many areas of civil society, for example in peace work in Germany, in schools, youth groups, or within the alliance against the far right in the Wendland and Altmark regions

(„Bündnis gegen Rechts Wendland/Altmark“).

Beyond Germany, KURVE Wustrow also contributes to civil society initiatives internationally, for instance as a sending organisation within the framework of the Civil Peace Service (CPS). **CPS professionals** deployed by KURVE Wustrow “spread nonviolence” in places such as the Western Balkans, Israel and Palestine, Nepal, and Ukraine.

The goals and core principles of KURVE Wustrow are non-negotiable, although other aspects have evolved over time. For example, after more than 40 years, the organisation decided to abandon its uniform salary model, as this – in addition to its remote location near the former inner-German border – had made staff recruitment increasingly difficult.

When KURVE Wustrow was “bursting at the seams” in 2017, the association decided to invest substantial resources. With the help of a bank loan and private loans, the affiliated peace foundation purchased two adjacent half-timbered houses and carried out extensive renovations. Today, the original building – the former inn – houses only the offices for more than 30 staff members. International trainings, seminars and workshops have been held in the new conference centre since 2022. The historic ensemble, offering 31 beds, two halls and several seminar rooms, also provides a charming setting for external groups. The rooms bear names such as Gorleben, recalling places associated with nonviolent action. Responsibility for this conference centre falls within my remit, as do communications and fundraising. Programme work is overseen by my fellow managing director, Anja Petz.

FACING MAJOR CHALLENGES

My work benefits greatly from my many years of professional experience in journalism and in a cultural association – and not least from my experience with the Civil Peace Service (CPS) in South America. As a project coordinator for GIZ, I led a CPS programme in Bolivia whose objectives closely aligned with KURVE Wustrow’s vision of a world shaped by nonviolence and ecological and social balance. Even though this involved a different continent, different conflicts and a state-based context, there are striking parallels with KURVE Wustrow’s civil society projects. They are characterised by chronic funding shortages, growing pressure to justify their work, and the need to navigate constantly changing political environments. At the same time, we are facing major challenges as a result of funding cuts that have already been implemented and further reductions that are imminent in development cooperation, a new logic of militarisation, and the rise of authoritarian thinking all accompanied by increasing pressure on civil society.

At the same time, these trends make KURVE Wustrow’s guiding principle more relevant than ever: to help ensure that concern about violent and armed conflicts, environmental destruction and social injustice can be translated into considered, nonviolent action. And that is precisely what the world could make very good use of right now.

Further information: www.kurviewustrow.org

Uschi Treffer

Journalist, **Civil Peace Service (CPS) professional**, event manager

2007-2008: Peru, DED (today: GIZ)

2008: Ecuador, DED

2008–2013: Bolivien, DED and GIZ



© Lauren McKown

The author, Uschi Treffer (left), has been sharing the executive management of KURVE Wustrow with her colleague Anja Petz since the summer of 2025.

With „Generation Plus“ to Mizoram

Looking Beyond the Horizon Even in Retirement

After 40 years as an engineer in the automotive industry, I had decided to spend the final phase of my professional life working in development cooperation. In 2020, I found a project at Coworkers – Christliche Fachkräfte International that seemed tailor-made for me: they were looking for an adviser in organisational development in Myanmar. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, only remote work was possible at the time. In 2021, the military coup prevented my entry into the country, and the project had to be discontinued.

Coworkers then sought professionals for another advisory project – working with prisoners and their families in Albania. There, my wife Krista and I provided support for two years in organisational and programme development as well as in the area of nutrition. After our return, a new phase of life began for me – retirement.

MATTER CLOSE TO OUR HEARTS

The hardship faced by people in Myanmar has not left Krista and me at peace since the first project had to be abandoned. During our stay in Albania, we came into contact with a Christian organisation that runs a health centre in Mizoram, in the northeast of India, providing care for the local population and for refugees. Mizoram borders Myanmar and Bangladesh. Following ethnic conflicts in both countries, Mizoram has taken in around 100,000 refugees, even though it is itself one of India's poorest states. Due to the civil war in Myanmar, war-wounded individuals also cross the border and receive medical treatment at this health centre. In light of this situation, it was a matter close to our hearts to get to know the people on the ground and to offer our support. With the help of Coworkers, we were able to make this possible.

GENERATION PLUS: ACTIVE IN RETIREMENT

The Coworkers – Christliche Fachkräfte International Generation Plus programme offers people in retirement the opportunity to contribute their expertise and experience to development cooperation projects on a voluntary basis. Sharing professional and personal experience, encountering other cultures and working alongside people on the ground – all of this creates valuable opportunities to broaden one's horizons and learn something new.

In Mizoram, we built many relationships with local people, experienced their generosity and worked with them to make their commitment to their fellow citizens and to refugees more effective. In doing so, we were able to draw on valuable experience from our online project for Myanmar as well as from our work in Albania: cultural background knowledge, analytical methods and the joint development of strategies for change. We also contribut-

ed proven approaches to designing effective processes and structures within NGOs – always grounded in the specific cultural context.

PHOTOVOLTAICS CAN SAVE LIVES



We were very impressed to see that the health centre is able to cover its running costs largely through its own income and local donations. Larger investments, however, are only possible with external support.

One particular challenge was described to us by a surgeon there: "The public power supply here is unstable. Imagine that during surgery on a war-injured patient or during a caesarean section, the power suddenly goes out. It takes a long and critical five minutes before the diesel emergency generators are fully operational." This problem could be solved by a photovoltaic system while at the same time making a contribution to climate protection.

Together with those responsible on site, we developed a project plan. Our role was to establish contacts with partner organisations and institutions in order to obtain technical support and to mobilise funding for the project. Beyond this initiative, there are many other approaches to increasing effectiveness, and we continue to be involved in them to this day. For this reason, we will be undertaking further assignments.

There are major humanitarian challenges in many other regions of the world as well. Precisely for this reason, we would like to encourage people in retirement with professional experience to contribute their skills and knowledge to development projects. The outcome will be a great treasure for you – adventure included.

For more on Generation Plus, see page 22.

Andreas Reppich with the manager of the health centre in Mizoram



Krista and Andreas Reppich during their stay in Albania

Andreas Reppich, Engineer 2021–2023: Albanien, Coworkers

South–North Deployment in the Civil Peace Service

Pilot phase under way

In November 2017, a strategic retreat of the Civil Peace Service was held at the BMZ, during which key strategic questions concerning the further development of the CPS were discussed. One of these questions was how the deployment of professionals within a global peace service should be structured in the future. Among other points, participants discussed the need to rethink and expand the “one-way street” of North–South deployment in a future-oriented manner.

IMPLEMENTING ORGANISATIONS DEVELOP A CONCEPT

As a result, the CPS Consortium developed, among other things, a concept for South–North deployment, which was discussed regularly with the BMZ. Numerous design and implementation issues had to be addressed, including funding regulations, labour law, immigration and residence law, contract arrangements, possible deployment options in Germany and the EU, family responsibilities of South–North professionals, as well as return and reintegration after the end of the contract.

In addition, the objectives and how a South–North component would be embedded in the programme were defined. The specific added value of South–North professionals lies in strengthening partnerships, knowledge transfer, participation, credibility and legitimacy, as well as quality and impact. All of this is anchored in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Possible deployment locations and approaches for South–North professionals include German or European country networks that work together with partner organisations on the ground to promote human rights and peace, as well as diaspora communities in the Global North, which often influence conflict dynamics in their countries of origin.

Priska Palacios
Network Manager,
CSD Consortium

The CSD Consortium

The Civil Peace Service (CSD) is funded by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). Nine German peace and development organisations are responsible for implementing the CSD. Together, they form the CSD Consortium.

The Consortium continuously develops the CSD further, promotes the exchange of experience among the implementing organisations, and represents their concerns and interests vis-à-vis the BMZ and the public.

www.ziviler-friedensdienst.org/de/konsortium-zfd

PILOT PHASE LAUNCHED

In February 2021, the BMZ approved the “Concept of the CPS Consortium for Piloting a South–North Component” for implementation.

This concept sets out, among other things, the following framework conditions:

- South–North professionals must be an integral part of a provider’s CPS country programme and contribute to the impacts specified in the application in the respective CPS partner country.
- At least one CPS partner organisation in the partner country must be involved in implementation.
- After completing their assignment in the Global North, South–North professionals should ideally continue working with a partner organisation in the CPS partner country in order to support the sustainability of knowledge transfer.
- South–North professionals receive employment contracts in accordance with the labour law of the host country and the applicable collective and legal frameworks of the respective provider.
- They receive specific pre-departure preparation and, during their assignment, access to training opportunities and coaching provided by the respective organisation.
- The providers ensure that South–North professionals receive a visa permitting gainful employment in accordance with applicable residence regulations.
- Spouses and children may accompany South–North professionals.
- Providers must also apply for cooperation with the German or European partner organisation in accordance with BMZ and Federal Foreign Office requirements.

CURRENT PRACTICE

Contrary to the expectations of the CPS implementing organisations, South–North professionals are currently approved only in individual cases via special applications at BMZ senior management level. To date, three South–North professionals are deployed within the CPS: from Sudan with the Society for Threatened Peoples, from Burkina Faso with Fokus Sahel, and from Mexico with the German Human Rights Coordination Mexico. A professional from the Great Lakes region is currently still awaiting a visa in order to work with the Catholic Media Council (CAMECO).

The fact that professionals from the Global South are actively shaping the work of the CPS represents a clear enrichment. Following the pilot phase, placements are to be evaluated across organisations once sufficient experience has been gained.

Bringing Perspectives from the Global South as a South–North Professional

Paula Saucedo works in Berlin as a South–North professional with the German Human Rights Coordination Mexico (DMRKM). She was seconded by Brot für die Welt as part of its CPS programme in Mexico. In transfer, she reports on her motivations, perspectives and responsibilities.

For more than ten years, I have been working on human rights defence, the protection of journalists, advocacy work and the strengthening of civil society. I completed a master's degree in International Development and Gender Studies and then worked for various NGOs and networks in Mexico, cooperating with governmental and multilateral actors.

INTRODUCING NEW PERSPECTIVES

In 2023, I was looking for new professional opportunities. As a woman from the Global South, I wanted to bring new perspectives into European human rights spaces, where voices like mine are often missing. In my view, it is necessary to critically question eurocentric understandings of development, human rights and cooperation. Too often, these concepts rely on abstract values without clearly acknowledging Europe's historical responsibility for crises in the Global South. Without critically examining Europe's role in areas such as trade, migration, resource extraction or security policy, there is a risk that cooperation will further perpetuate existing inequalities. My goal was therefore to advocate for horizontal approaches in which Europe does not merely listen, but also reflects on its own responsibility.

During this time, I came across a job advertisement on the Brot für die Welt website for a Civil Peace Service position focusing on advocacy at the European and international level. The position was advertised as part of Brot für die Welt's Mexico programme and based at the Berlin office of the German Human Rights Coordination Mexico (DMRKM).

EU ADVOCACY OFFICER

Since November 2023, I have been working as EU Advocacy Officer at the DMRKM. This network of 19 German civil society organisations has been working closely with Mexican human rights organisations and networks since 1999. Its aim is to strengthen the protection and promotion of human rights through coordinated advocacy work in Germany and Europe. The DMRKM collects information from partners in Mexico, develops strategies, feeds them into political debates and ensures that civil society voices are heard in bilateral and multilateral cooperation. As EU Advocacy Officer, I act as a bridge-builder between Mexican organisations and EU institutions. My knowledge of the human rights situation in Mexico and my

experience in international cooperation help me to research issues for European audiences and to contextualise them in a realistic and precise manner. As a woman from the Global South, I contribute sensitivity and a perspective that makes gender discrimination, power imbalances and historical inequalities visible. In this way, I enrich the work of the DMRKM. I also promote exchange between Mexican civil society and European decision-makers. This results, for example, in briefings for EU parliamentary delegations that help place local concerns on the agenda.

The Mexican partner organisations of the DMRKM largely overlap with Brot für die Welt's CPS partners. They are part of a reference group that meets at longer intervals. Within this group, Mexican partners articulate their expectations and needs regarding my position and are thus actively involved.

CHALLENGING HIERARCHIES

The aim of my work is to challenge hierarchies in which Europe appears as the "provider" and the South as the "recipient". Partnership-based cooperation must go beyond consultation. Genuine cooperation means recognising power asymmetries and jointly developing agendas. Taking different perspectives into account is indispensable for the credibility and transformative impact of cooperation. Where this prerequisite is lacking, cooperation merely perpetuates existing structures, even if it presents itself as an act of solidarity.

CONCLUSION

International advocacy must create spaces in which those affected themselves define the terms of dialogue. In this sense, my role at the DMRKM – both professionally and personally – is to amplify the voices of Mexican civil society in Europe, to expose eurocentric blind spots and to work towards a horizontal, rights-based and self-critical model of cooperation.



Paula Saucedo
M.A. International Development and Gender Studies
Since 2013:
South–North professional with DMRKM / Brot für die Welt

Information on the Focus Theme

PROMOTING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

“DEMOKRATIE LEBEN!” PROGRAMME FOR DEMOCRATIC CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Demokratie
Leben!

Through this programme, the Federal Ministry for Education, Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMBFSFJ) supports civic engagement at all levels of government. The aim is to promote a diverse and democratic coexistence and to strengthen efforts to counter radicalisation and social polarisation.

www.demokratie-leben.de/dl/programm

ASSOCIATION OF GERMAN FOUNDATIONS

The Association of German Foundations represents the interests of foundations in Germany vis-à-vis policymakers, public administration and the wider public. It supports its members and founders through advisory services, exchange and networking. Its website offers a comprehensive online guide to the German foundation sector as well as a job portal.

www.stiftungen.org

GERMAN FOUNDATION FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND VOLUNTEERING (DSEE)

The DSEE is a central point of contact for promoting volunteering and civic engagement. It supports people in Germany who engage on a voluntary basis, provides impulses and offers practical guidance on all aspects of volunteering. Through its own micro-grant programme, the foundation also provides financial support for civic engagement.

www.deutsche-stiftung-engagement-und-ehrenamt.de

STUDIES / RESEARCH

THREATENED CIVIL SOCIETY: THE MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS OF SHRINKING SPACES

A recent study by the SÜDWIND Institute for Economics and Ecumenism provides an overview of “shrinking spaces”, using the examples of China, India, Bangladesh, Turkey, Kenya, Ghana, Mexico and Colombia, and outlines approaches for addressing these challenges.

www.t1p.de/suedwind-shrinking-spaces

SOCIAL REPORT OF THE FEDERAL AGENCY FOR CIVIC EDUCATION

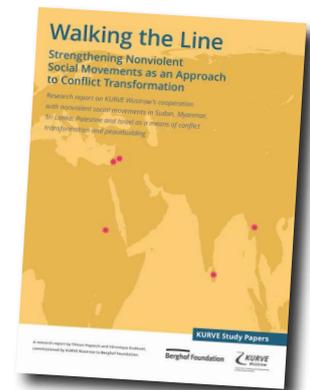
The Social Report of the Federal Agency for Civic Education offers an overview of civil society organisations and civic engagement in Germany.

www.t1p.de/bpb-sozialbericht

STUDY: WALKING THE LINE

The study “Walking the Line – Strengthening Nonviolent Social Movements as an Approach to Conflict Transformation” was commissioned by KURVE Wustrow and conducted by the Berghof Foundation in 2024. It examines KURVE Wustrow’s cooperation with social movements in various partner countries and their contributions to peace and justice.

www.kurvewustrow.org/publikation/walking-line



MAECENATA INSTITUTE FOR PHILANTHROPY AND CIVIL SOCIETY

The Maecenata Institute is an extra-university research institution. It sees itself as an independent social science think tank focusing on civil society, civic engagement, philanthropy and foundations.

Its work includes independent social science research, academic teaching, publications and exchange between academia, policymakers and practitioners.

www.maecenata.eu

LITERATURE

REIMAGINING CIVIL SOCIETY COLLABORATIONS IN DEVELOPMENT

This edited volume is aimed at researchers and practitioners concerned with innovation in development and civil society. It focuses on civil society organisations as driving forces of development in contexts of the so-called Global South. Adopting a transformative perspective, the book rethinks roles, relationships and processes from multiple viewpoints and places South-centred approaches at the forefront.

The open-access version of the book is available at www.taylorfrancis.com

PERSONAL ENGAGEMENT

GENERATION PLUS

The Generation Plus deployment model run by Coworkers – Christliche Fachkräfte International is aimed at people who are in or approaching retirement. This voluntary overseas engagement requires professional experience and, depending on the placement, appropriate health and physical prerequisites. Assignments range from three weeks to three months. Deployment costs are covered through donations or by the professional themselves.

Current vacancies:

<https://coworkers.de/offene-stellen/>

Decolonisation Through Stories

A Personal Reading Journey



I have read this book several times, given it as a gift and recommended it again and again.+ "exit RACISM" has become an indispensable classic of German-language anti-racism discourse. Particularly formative for me was the concept of the "Happy Land" – a state in which white people view racism as a problem of "others", perceived as bad, while failing to question or even recognise their own white privilege.

Sheyma Arfawi on exit RACISM by Tupoka Ogette

How do colonial structures continue to shape our present? Which stories have long gone unheard? With the reading journey "Decolonisation Through Stories" (*Dekolonisierung durch Geschichte(n)*), we explore these questions. Since April 2025, Sheyma Arfawi has been presenting a personal book recommendation every month. Across a total of twelve reviews, she explains why each book has been significant for her own learning process and why we should read it as well. Her recommendations include non-fiction and novels and cover a wide range of topics.

Sheyma Arfawi is a systemic organisational development consultant, advisor and facilitator. She works on issues of critical anti-discrimination practice and supports the AGdD in this field.

More information on the reading journey:

www.agdd.de/de/dabei/eine-dekoloniale-lesereise



Share Your Reading Experience!

Book recommendations wanted for our reading journey

In 2026, we would like to continue our reading journey. Our aim is to present one book recommendation each month that helps us look beyond our own horizons, understand other lived realities, comprehend and question existing power relations, or gain inspiration for development policy and global peace work.

You are warmly invited to contribute. Please suggest novels, (popular) academic works or specialist literature and briefly explain why you recommend the book.

Further information: www.agdd.de/aufruf-literaturempfehlungen

Please send your suggestions to: redaktion@agdd.de

Each published book recommendation will be rewarded with a book gift.

Upcoming AGdD events

- Webinar: Succeeding with Your Written Application – 26 January 2026
- Seminar: Taking Stock for Career Reorientation – 27 February – 1 March 2026, Königswinter near Bonn
- Webinar: Impulse, Exchange, Clarity: Peer Consultation for Returnees – 10 March 2026
- Seminar: Working in the Development Consulting Sector – 17-19 April 2026, Königswinter near Bonn

Our event programme is regularly updated and available at:

www.agdd.de/seminare

AGdD: Our advisory and coaching services

For development service professionals and accompanying partners, the question of what comes next after the assignment arises sooner or later. We specialise in supporting you – both during your time in the host country and after the end of your contract – in reflecting on your professional trajectory and developing new perspectives.

Whether in a personal meeting, via video call, telephone or in writing, we address your individual situation and questions.

You can request a consultation via our website:

www.agdd.de/beratung

Our Members:



Further information:
www.agdd.de

With financial support from



Bundesministerium für
wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit
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