



Photo: AGdD/Dr. Inge Baumann-May

In the mountains of Nepal, women consult with Inge Baumann-May, a professional serving with Christian Services International. The picture was awarded 1st Prize in the AGdD photography competition, "50 years of the Development Workers Act", in 2019.

Solidarity and Partnership¹

Development service – working together to build a cohesive global society

Gabi Waibel and Christian Gieseke

During the past 50 years, a lot of people have been sent abroad under the Development Workers Act. The world has changed enormously during this time. If development service is to continue to have a beneficial impact in the future, it has to be adapted to new circumstances again and again. Solidarity and partnership are key concepts in this context.

To mark the 50th anniversary of the Development Workers Act, print media, radio, and television reported in a variety of ways on the practical reality of development service in changing times. The work of professional development workers

¹ This article was first published in the special issue "Auf den Menschen kommt es an! Von der Stärke der Personellen Zusammenarbeit", edited by AKLHÜ, in: Welt-Sichten, Vol. 12-2019/1-2020, pages 10-11

<https://www.entwicklungsdienst.de/service/publikationen/dossier/>

was acknowledged. And the special features of development service were highlighted. Development service builds and fosters solidarity and thereby opens up possibilities for positive social change at various levels in host countries and here in Germany too. This is now more important than ever before. We need "people with heart and mind who set out courageously of their own accord" and "who know what is needed, what will find acceptance, and what kind of support actually promotes development," as German Chancellor Angela Merkel said at the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Development Workers Act.

For more than five decades, the development service agencies have been working together with their local partners to promote social justice, democracy, peace, better living conditions for disadvantaged people, and greater sustainability. The 'one world' has changed a lot in this time and development cooperation has become a professional undertaking. Through the deployment of more than 30,000 professionals in more than 100 countries worldwide (during the past 20 years this has included civil peace service workers), a great deal of knowledge, based on experience, has been built up.

| Solidarity is work

Solidarity remains a key concept in development service. It is tied up with the idea of a partnership of equals. And it becomes a practical reality through the active commitment of individual professional development workers. In his new book (*Solidarität*, Munich, 2019), sociologist Heinz Bude examines the term "solidarity", addresses the issue of "solidarity in a world of inequality", and sums up as follows: Everything is getting better and worse at the same time, fairer and increasingly unfair. Whereas income levels and living standards are converging globally, they are diverging at the national level. And in some countries the situation has deteriorated dramatically. The relationship between the global North and the global South is changing. Divisions and faultlines have become sharper and deeper in many places. Bude argues that solidarity is desperately needed to hold the global society of the future together. Solidarity grows when we take action for - and together with - other people. It is hard work. But solidarity does not, in itself, solve any problems. Instead, according to Bude, it raises the question: What is it that is worth living for?

| People working together

We need to work together - again and again in projects and partnerships - to find, discuss, and negotiate the answer to this question. This is why partnerships are a key part of development service. They meet the need for joint learning, for intercultural sharing of experiences, and for effective and sustainable implementation of joint projects and measures.

| Solidarity that reaches Germany

It is also important that the solidarity between local employees and target groups and professional development workers, that is born and grows out of development service, also reaches Germany. During their development service, professionals acquire a wide range of skills and competencies that they continue to use professionally. Today, their international and intercultural experience is important in a lot of sectors. And it is especially in demand, where working with refugees is concerned. AGdD's Reintegration Programme supports returning professionals in the assessment of their competencies; a special tool, the development service ProfilPASS, was created for this purpose in 2019.

Professionals who have completed their service and returned to Germany or elsewhere in Europe, also practise solidarity through part-time or voluntary work in addition to their new main employment. Ivan Tadic (who was in Cambodia with CFI, 2008-2015) set up two voluntary service projects for refugees. Katrin Heeskens (in Kenya with AGIAMONDO, 2008 to 2011), together with her husband and friends, founded an association for the support of disadvantaged children and young people in Isiolo and succeeded in getting elected to the local council. "These people return from their development service with a great sense of responsibility and a high degree of sensitivity to the needs of others. (... They) know what solidarity is," noted the recently deceased former Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation, Erhard Eppler, in an interview marking the anniversary of the Development Workers Act.

At an AGdD forum with more than 60 returnees in July 2019, it became clear once again that professional development workers are keen to remain active in the field of development policy. As experts in development policy issues and debates, they want to build a better network and contribute their ideas, values, and visions for the future. One participant reported that she had returned "full of energy" to put into "bringing about structural change". AGdD, the AKLHÜ, and its member organizations are keen to channel this know-how, so that it bears fruit in the public debate about development policy.

| Solidarity that persists

For development service to continue to have a broad and varied impact in the future, it has to be adapted to changing circumstances over and over again. Throughout this process the Development Workers Act remains as the common framework for action and a source of guidance for the development agencies. The agencies nevertheless share a desire to extend the range of possible actions. Right now, for example, non-EU citizens should be able to apply to serve as professional development workers. In addition to people being sent from the North to the South, it should be possible for people to be sent from the South to the North or from the South to somewhere else in the South. And funding should be made available for this. AGIAMONDO's "World Service" could serve as a pilot project. There needs to be a further increase in the promotion and support of civil society in partner countries and this needs to be established on a long-term basis. Development service requires a sustainable future-oriented approach and greater appreciation of the competencies and active solidarity of returnees. It will then continue to make a significant contribution to reaching the sustainable development goals and building a cohesive global society, as described by Bude – here in Germany as well.

Further reading:

AGdD, Development Service. Partnerships for the SDGs, Bonn 2019, <https://www.agdd.de/en/during/development-service>

AGdD, Entwicklungsdienst qualifiziert. Wie Fachkräfte lernen und ihre Kompetenzen entwickeln (Studie), Bonn 2017, <https://bit.ly/2Q6ZYrH>

AGdD e.V.: 50 Years of the German Development Workers Act, Bonn 2019, <https://www.agdd.de/en/during/50-years-of-the-german-development-workers-act>

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AGdD

The seven member organizations of the Association of German Development Services (AGdD) are: AGIAMONDO, Dienste in Übersee gemeinnützige GmbH, Christian Services International (CFI), EIRENE – International Christian Peace Service, forumZFD, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, and Weltfriedensdienst.

Professionals who undertake development service do so under a service contract with one of the seven state-recognized development service agencies in Germany (listed above), as laid down in the Development Workers Act. The length of contracts is limited. The minimum length of contract is one year, but contracts may be longer, usually up to two or three years. During their development service, professionals receive a maintenance allowance and social insurance which also covers dependent family members.

AGdD and its Reintegration Programme are the first port of call for returning professionals. They are given plenty of information, advice, support with skills assessment and employment issues, opportunities for getting together and networking with other returnees, and an opportunity to report on their experience.

Website and contact: www.agdd.de