



Photo: Sarah Niemeyer

The *Peace and Co-Existence Committee* of a Sri Lankan village with Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim population decided to carry out a *common initiative* under the Helvetas “Development and Peace in Sri Lanka” project. More than 1’000 people depend on a minor water reservoir for irrigation and bathing water. But during the dry season, the pond loses a lot of water. Plants grow over the banks and make it difficult to enter and take a bath in the shallow depth. Around 800 people that had very little contact before, gathered on a Saturday and cleaned up the shores. The community members consider the activity a success and say:

“ We had serious doubts about this *common initiative*. We thought we would never be able to clean this whole reservoir with our hands. At least some machines would have been necessary, to remove all this vegetation. But with the support of so many people, almost everything is possible. We are sure that this initiative strengthens the relationship between our three communities. We have avoided each other for such a long time, but today everybody was working together and had a tea afterwards. That was really nice! ”

CONTACT

For more information please contact css@helvetas.org or consult the website www.helvetas.ch. The full version of the Helvetas Strategy 2008 – 2012 of the Working Area Civil Society and the State is available at http://www.helvetas.org/wEnglish/competencies/working_area_strategies/working_area.asp?navid=9



HELVETAS WORKING AREA

WORKING AREA CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE STATE

In 2003, Helvetas established a new working area, “Civil Society and the State”, to address the often yawning gap between the State and the citizens, and contribute to good governance and peace building. After more than six years of experience and lessons learned, the revised “Civil Society and the State” strategy (2010-2014) aims at a just and peaceful society through three intervention areas.

- Local democratic governance
- Pro-poor policies
- Conflict transformation

Downward accountability and conflict sensitivity are cross-cutting issues which will be addressed by all projects of all working areas.

CONTEXT: THE HONEYMOON OF DEMOCRACY IS OVER!

The steady increase of democracies after the cold war has stagnated and the conviction that elections lead to democratic states has been proven illusionary. Halted democracies, with weak state institutions, and lacking participation and accountability mechanisms are now confronted with widespread corruption and frequently restricted civil society.

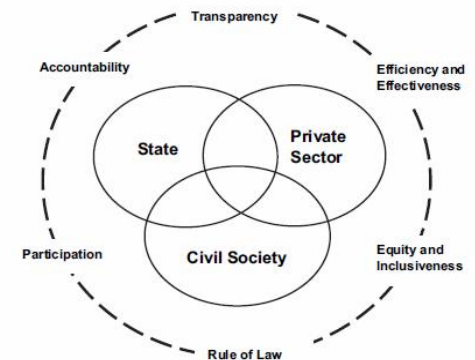
The costs of “bad governance” are enormous. The World Bank researcher Daniel Kaufmann estimates that GDP could be increased three times when good governance principles are applied. The importance of civil society has been recognised since the Accra meeting in 2008, but governments still prefer NGOs engaging in service delivery rather than advocacy.

International cooperation is often faced with violence, intrastate conflicts and fragile situations. Every year around 700'000 people die because of armed violence and many more suffer from “side events” such as internal displacement. With climate change influencing livelihoods, conflicts over natural resources will increase.

OVERALL GOAL: JUST AND PEACEFUL WORLD WITH SAFETY AND DIGNITY FOR ALL

Given the global context of halted democracies, failing states, corruption, conflict, coupled with fragile economies and ecologies, the challenges for development aid seem tremendous. Capitalising on its lessons learned Helvetas is convinced that local processes need to be better linked with policy making. International human rights treaties build the basis for citizens as right holders to claim their rights and for governments to fulfil their duties. Helvetas has the vision of a State that offers basic services and security to its citizens, who in return are able to make claims and influence policies in their interest. To pursue this vision, Helvetas will work with suitable partners from all sectors – State, civil society, private sector – through a multi-stakeholder approach and emphasising inclusion of marginalised groups.

In the coming years, the working area “Civil Society and the State” concentrates on three intervention areas, whereas the two crosscutting issues ought to be addressed in all projects of all working areas.



Collaboration of the three sectors according to Good Governance Principles (Source: Helvetas, 2007)

Governance, Water, and Sanitation Programme, Mozambique: The joint provision and management of rural water and sanitation services enables local authorities, the private sector and community-based organisations to better fulfil their respective roles. Citizens are empowered to actively participate in local decision-making through local village development committees and councils, where development issues are discussed and planned. Funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and Helvetas.

Linked to this, Helvetas will also contribute to improved public accountability, using tools such as public audits, monitoring of plans, and local government assessments. In addition, Helvetas will continue to promote access to legal aid for the poor.

Access to Justice and Judicial Reform, Central Asia: Funded by SDC, the project aims at increasing respect and protection of the rights of poor and marginalised people in Tajikistan by strengthening the rule of law, access to justice and measures for improved administration of justice.

CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

Aim: Strengthened local actors, processes and structures, which enable the prevention of violent conflicts as well as the participatory and non-violent transformation or resolution of conflicts.

The main focus of Helvetas engagement in peace building is on the prevention of violent conflict. To serve this end, social, institutional and individual capacities for peace are required. Accessible community-based mechanisms are key to address conflicts. Helvetas thus strengthens local initiatives and institutions such as peace councils. As a facilitator, Helvetas fosters dialogue and public space for deliberation. Particular importance is given to strengthening existing factors for constructive social change and non-violence within current development activities.

Conflict Prevention and Transformation, Mali: Co-financed by the Swedish International Development Agency, Helvetas facilitates the management of conflicts between farmers, herders and nomads related to access to and use of agrosylvo-pastoral areas. A network for discussions of conflict resolving strategies is facilitated by Helvetas. The cooperation among local actors is improved by the inclusion of a vast array of different stakeholders.



Intervention Areas, Civil Society and the State Working Area Strategy 2010-2014
Source: Helvetas, 2010

INTERVENTION AREAS

LOCAL DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

Aim: Inclusive decision-making on public affairs based on good governance principles and human rights, ensuring that needs, priorities and rights of poor women and men are considered, represented and accounted for by the state.

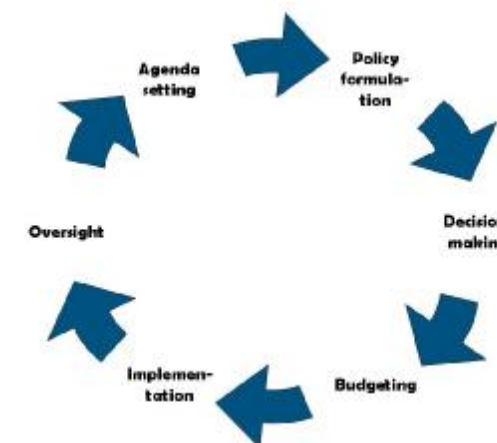
Democratic processes only become attractive if people see an impact on their lives. As local governments are closest to the people, they have the most direct effect. However, for a prosperous democracy, right holders as well as duty bearers need to fulfil their roles. In order to nurture a local culture of democracy, it is essential to work with people, engaging them in open discussions and raising awareness on citizenship and human rights. Therefore, Helvetas engages in civic education.

Since only responsive and accountable local institutions provide adequate services for the public, Helvetas works to strengthen institutions and foster decentralised planning processes. Participation of and accountability towards the citizens, especially marginalised and vulnerable groups, bring the government closer to the people.

As men and women have different needs, priorities and interests, gender aspects need to be looked at particularly. In cases where women are obviously underrepresented, special attention will be paid to closing this gap.

PRO-POOR POLICIES

Aim: Inclusive policies based on human rights, contributing to social cohesion, justice and sustainable development.



Public Policy Cycle
Source: Adapted from ASOCAM, Intercooperation, SDC, 2007

In order to ensure equality before the law and non-discrimination, policy processes need to be pro-poor, according to the “protection of the vulnerable”-principle. Access to information is a prerequisite for claiming rights and a functioning judicial sector is essential for social justice. A multi-level approach with different stakeholders is required to integrate policy making and implementation on the micro (local) as well as macro (national) level. Helvetas will strengthen the capacities of civil society and media, especially in advocacy.

A vibrant and knowledgeable civil society is essential for different perspectives to be heard and for open discussions on policies. Furthermore it ought to oversee the implementation of policies and pressurise for constructive policy-outcomes.

CROSSCUTTING ISSUES

DOWNWARD ACCOUNTABILITY

Helvetas has the duty to be accountable to its primary stakeholders. This increases the credibility of the organisation and raises awareness among the people on transparency and their right to information. See also separate guidelines.

CONFLICT SENSITIVITY

Development practitioners have to be aware that any intervention they might take – even the most well intended and humanitarian one – will introduce new factors, which might change the existing balance of power. See also separate guidelines.

CULTURE

The objectives in the working field of culture focus on the empowering and peace building effects of artistic activities. Helvetas believes that it is in these fields, artistic activities can make an important and specific contribution in a complementary way with its other programme and project activities.