



Photo: Fatoumata Diabaté

WORKING FIELD OF CULTURE

For HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation the support to artistic activities is part of a holistic approach to poverty alleviation and aims to promote creativity, entertainment, participation and self-confidence of artists and the local population in general. Cultural activities are a means to stimulate reflections and dialogue within civil society, to empower marginalized social and ethnic groups and to contribute to peace building. It is therefore an excellent means for awareness raising and advocacy in order to stimulate social change.

HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation supports local artists in their artistic activities to facilitate dialogue and raise awareness on societal issues within their communities and to have an influence on decisions and policy makers. This support takes place in the form of financial contributions, capacity building and the promotion of artistic exchange.

INTRODUCTION

The working field is part of the working area "Governance and Peace" and deals with culture understood as artistic forms of expressions. Culture in its wider sense understood as a system of values, norms and behavioural patterns is dealt with separately under the heading of intercultural communication and competences in a transversal manner.

DEVELOPMENT RELEVANCE OF CULTURE ACTIVITIES

Generally speaking the support to artistic activities is part of a holistic approach to poverty alleviation aiming to promote creativity, entertainment, participation and self-confidence of artists and the local population in general. More specifically HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation sees the relevance of culture activities in the following three fields:

Creation of space for reflection and dialogue on relevant societal issues and concerns

The support to artists aims at promoting a space for civil society to reflect, debate and dialogue on relevant societal concerns. Artistic work often enjoys a certain freedom of expression that makes it more suitable than other forms of communication to deal with delicate and sensitive socio-political issues in an emotional, entertaining, interactive and sometimes provocative way. It is therefore an excellent means for awareness raising and advocacy in order to stimulate social change. The reflection process can be enriched and enhanced by artistic exchange between urban centres and rural areas, South-South or North-South exchange. The exchange North-South happens on equal terms from an artistic and creative point of view, each offering unique perspectives.

Empowering disadvantaged social and ethnic groups and increasing their voice in society

Artistic and creative processes offer an alternative way for marginalized and disadvantaged groups to participate, to express themselves and to give them and their concerns a voice. Furthermore the self-confidence of the involved artists and of the group as a whole is strengthened through the participation in creative activities.

Contribution to conflict resolution and peace building

Through artistic forms of expression people's emotions can be addressed with the aim to change their attitudes in conflicts, to deal with the past or to create

beauty in a context of destruction. Artistic activities have the potential to involve artists with different backgrounds to exemplify that working and living together is not only possible but also enriching.

The graph on the opposite page illustrates the development relevance of culture projects.

OBJECTIVES

Objective 1: To create spaces for artistic activities open to many people to reflect and dialogue creatively, to critically look into social questions of the community and to develop innovative solutions.

Objective 2: To promote the active involvement of disadvantaged social and ethnic groups in creative, artistic processes to enhance their self-articulation and to increase their voice in society.

Objective 3: To support artistic initiatives in conflict situations which promote peace and bring people from different conflict parties together.

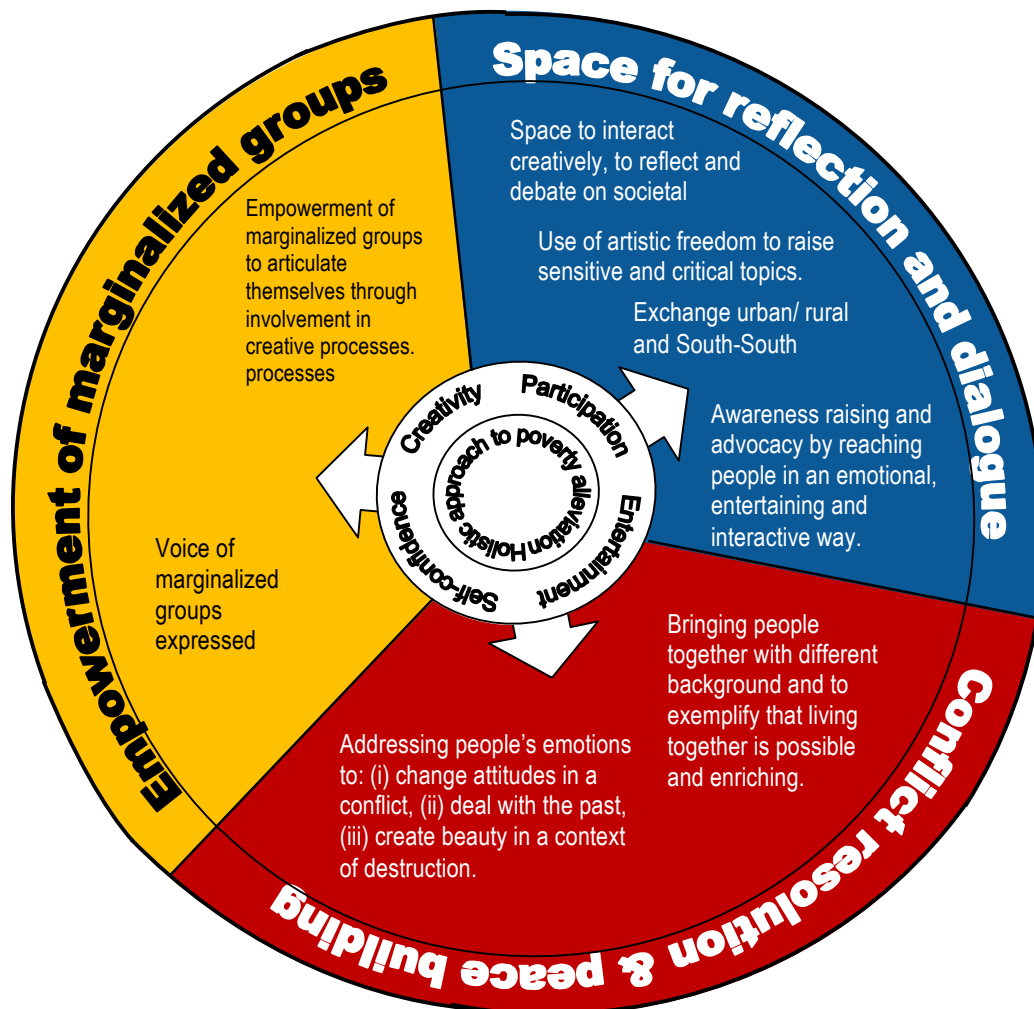
INTERVENTION AREAS

HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation supports local artists in their initiatives. These artists are typically not professional artists. They are members of their communities with a societal dedication and a motivation to express themselves through arts in their free time. They are usually organised formally or informally in a group, for example a theatre, dance or music group. However, this could be any other group of people such as a youth or student group or an indigenous group. The support happens in the following three ways:

Financial contributions to artists or group of artists for the provision of physical space for meetings, rehearsals, performances etc. and/or the purchase (or production) of costumes, instruments etc.

Capacity building of artists or groups of artists in the field of artistic expression and/or management aspects based on their specific needs.

Promotion and facilitation of exchange of artists with a focus on urban-rural exchange and exchanges within the region. The exchange can be in form of face to face workshops, exposure visits, festivals, peer reviews, co-productions and/or the participation in networks.



Development relevance of culture activities

PRINCIPLES FOR OUR SUPPORT

- Our support is open to a **wider range of societal concerns** as long as they contribute to our overall objectives and values. However a special focus will be on concerns related to the **empowerment of disadvantaged groups** and **peace building**.
- The **participation of disadvantage groups** will be promoted. It is important to encourage the most disadvantaged groups to participate, but to be careful not to privilege them too much over others as this could prove counter-productive for their integration.
- The culture projects should **add value to our overall program** in a country by exploring the respective synergies with other on going projects.
- Artists should **not be instrumentalised** for conveying pre-defined messages that merely serve the purpose of our projects. **Artistic freedom**, the artists' own concerns and creative processes shall be respected.
- Whether the concerns are raised through **contemporary** or **traditional** forms of artistic expressions is open. It is not an aim in itself to promote, revoke or strengthen traditions and it is important to be aware of the danger of folklorisation local cultures that reduces them to stereotyped and time-less images.
- In terms of artistic domains our support favours **theatre** that often goes together with dance and music. Theatre is an important form of artistic expression in most cultures and it is interactive and easily accessible by our target groups.
- The main focus of our work is on rural areas. Nevertheless it can make sense to support artists that live and work in **urban** centres. With their work they often have a bigger impact and outreach than artists in rural areas. It will be important to strengthen artistic exchange between rural and urban areas.
- In the field of art, it is often difficult to achieve **economical self-reliance** of our partners. Nevertheless, our partners should be called to account and make a contribution to the project within the frame of their possibilities.
- The suggested procedure to select artists and artistic activities is a **call for proposal**.



Photo: HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation Vietnam

HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation has at present culture projects in six different countries.

In Mali for example artistic activities play an important role in supporting the process of decentralization and in fighting poverty. They are often the only possible way to address sensitive issues which question traditional ways and power structures. The culture projects in Mali touch issues around the social, economic and political rights of the population. This happens often through the support to theatre groups who perform in villages as well as in towns with the aim to raise awareness and to promote dialogue on issues like for example female circumcision.

In the Province Cao Bang in the North of Vietnam the population in ethnic minority areas is sensitized to gender issues and domestic violence through theater plays performed by actors from the communities as illustrated in the picture on the left. The plays move from village to village and always trigger lively discussions among the spectators.

“ It is only through activities like this theatre performance to bring the necessary change in order to abandon circumcision. The issue cannot be resolved neither through repression nor through the application of a law, but through increased awareness of each and everyone. ”

Souleymane Diakit , spectator of a theatre performance on the issue of female circumcision.

CONTACT

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