

# STRATEGY 2021–24



HELVETAS



**A better future for all – it's possible**



**Our vision is a just world  
in which all women  
and men determine the  
course of their lives  
in dignity and security,  
using environmental  
resources in a sustain-  
able manner.**

←  
The couple Nil Mala and Hema Kumar Chackma belong to a minority in the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh. To secure the future of their children, they have established their own tree nursery.  
Photo: Simon B. Opladen

←←  
In Tanzania, digital learning complements practical training. This gives young people like Vumilia Jumanne Tungu (left) flexible access to valuable know-how about being self-employed. Here with trainer Odetha Onesmo Petro. Photo: Stella Oguma

# WHO WE ARE

For over 60 years, Helvetas has been contributing to efforts to alleviate poverty, working to advance human rights, and fighting injustice across the globe. People are at the center of our work. We combine humanitarian response and development support, addressing specific circumstances and needs. Helvetas is a non-profit association, with a strong member base in Switzerland and sister organizations in the United States and Germany. We are a member of the Alliance2015, a strategic network of eight European non-governmental organizations, with an annual programming volume of over €640 million. Helvetas is denominationally neutral and politically independent.



Fidel Saravia, Helvetas Bolivia

## OUR VALUES



### Human Rights

We promote political, social, economic, environmental, and cultural rights.



Lwin Ko Htay, (r.) private sector partner, Myanmar



Mengist Dereje (l.), Helvetas Ethiopia, with Emwodeh Geze (r.)



### Equity and Inclusion

We are committed to social equity and strive for equal opportunities for women and men regardless of age, origin, language, religion, culture, ethnicity or political convictions.



Elsie Gaspard, Helvetas Haiti



### Solidarity and Partnership

Our engagement is based on solidarity and partnership



Leonard Shehu, partner institution, Kosovo



Rajendra Pant (l.) and Bishnu Bishwokarma, Helvetas Nepal



### Self-Determination

We uphold the principle of self-determined development.



Sharmin Begum, partner organisation, Bangladesh

# RESPONDING TO GLOBAL OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Development opportunities, challenges, and pathways in today's world are diverse. Globalization, changing population dynamics, and technological progress – including digitalization – have brought people and countries closer together. In many places, this has contributed to prosperity. But, it has also heightened existing inequalities. Globalization has created a multipolar world and opened up new markets. At the same time, it has also contributed to geopolitical shifts, which, together with the lack of strong global governance, are leading to increased global and regional tensions.

**Despite substantial progress over the past decades towards a life in dignity for all, poverty, inequality, and exclusion are still pervasive.**

In many ways, the world is changing for the better, and this progress represents important opportunities for development. Access to education, and as a consequence literacy rates, has markedly increased over the last 30 years. In many developing countries, the share of young people is significant, while fertility rates are declining, creating the potential for demographic dividends. Major technological advancements have augment-

ed the flow of information, goods, and services, opening up new economic, political and social opportunities. In the wake of the Covid-19 crisis, governments and multilateral institutions have announced massive recovery packages –

**The Covid-19 crisis is an opportunity to build back better, aiming for an economic recovery that is more inclusive, just, and climate resilient.**

an opportunity to build back better, aiming for an economic recovery that is more inclusive, just, and climate resilient. Although the global gender gap is still wide, women's empowerment allows for new development dynamics in many places, while youth around the world raise their voice for progressive change. Helvetas will build on these and other positive trends in its development and humanitarian actions, which contribute to the achievement of the Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreement on climate change.

And still, there are many challenges that remain, both new and old. Despite substantial progress over the past decades towards a life in dignity for all, poverty, inequality, and exclusion are still pervasive. Progress on combating poverty has stag-

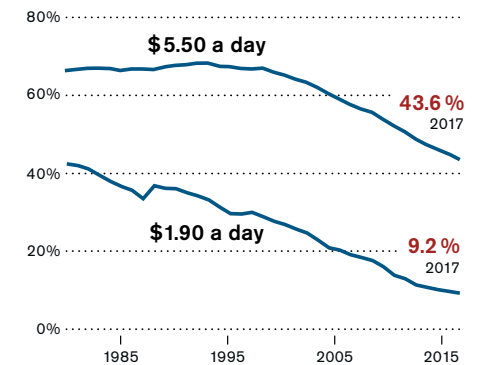
nated since 2015, and the total number of poor people in Sub-Saharan Africa has actually been increasing. Today, about 730 million people live in extreme poverty (on less than US\$1.90 per day), with many of their basic rights unfulfilled. Hunger is again on the rise. Against the poverty threshold of less than US\$5.50 per day, over 43 % of the world's population lives in poverty. This is even more appalling when one considers that the world economy has been growing since the 1980s. The Covid-19 crisis starkly exposes and exacerbates these injustices. It is estimated that the pandemic and its consequences have pushed an additional 71 million people into extreme poverty during 2020.

**Youth around the world raise their voice for progressive change.**

Weak states, authoritarianism, and social divides lead to heightened fragility, increased violent conflicts, and complex humanitarian crises. Today, about 1.8 billion people live in fragile states, and this figure could increase to 2.3 billion by 2030. In 2020, the United Nations counted almost 80 million displaced people. Large-scale labor migration is both a development challenge and opportunity. There are an estimated 164 million migrant workers worldwide. Together with

## Poverty headcount ratios

(2011 PPP) (% of population) Data: World Bank



demographic changes, migration also contributes to rapid urbanization. The number of people living in urban areas could increase by more than 2.5 billion by 2050, with most of this growth happening in developing countries. Add to this the climate crisis, ecological breakdown, and the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic, and attaining the Sustainable Development Goals becomes even more urgent to ensure that no one is left behind, including women and youth.

# OUR FOCUS AREAS FOR 2021-24

Based on the described context, we will focus on the following areas.

## We will further increase our engagement in semi-urban and urban contexts,

recognizing the growing integration of rural and urban areas through the movement of people, knowledge, and goods. We will address some of the most pressing urban development challenges, including urban poverty, access to affordable and nutritious food, and effective delivery of basic services. We will tap into the potential of cities as hubs of transformation.

## We will strengthen our work with youth significantly,

especially girls and youth networks. Two-thirds of the global poor are either children or youth. Youth unemployment, political disengagement, and violent extremism are important development challenges. At the same time, young people have great potential and can act as changemakers in many ways, making it essential for us to increase our focus on youth so we can support them to realize their potential.

## We will further enhance our humanitarian response work.

In many areas where Helvetas works, the lives and livelihoods of poor people are increasingly at risk, due to a changing climate, conflicts, and epidemics. As disruptive crises become more and more frequent, we will further strengthen our responsiveness by combining actions that address both the humanitarian and development needs of people.

## We will further leverage the digital transformation.

Digitalization is a major global trend, reshaping politics, economies, and societies everywhere. It creates tremendous opportunities, but also bears the risk of leaving already disadvantaged people even further behind. Conscious of these risks, we will use the opportunities digitalization provides to foster innovation for poverty alleviation, increase the impact of our work, and improve our ways of working.

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In the Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh, Helvetas built toilets that are connected to digester tanks that produce biogas. This enables women like Arafa Begum to cook for their families.  
Photo: Patrick Rohr



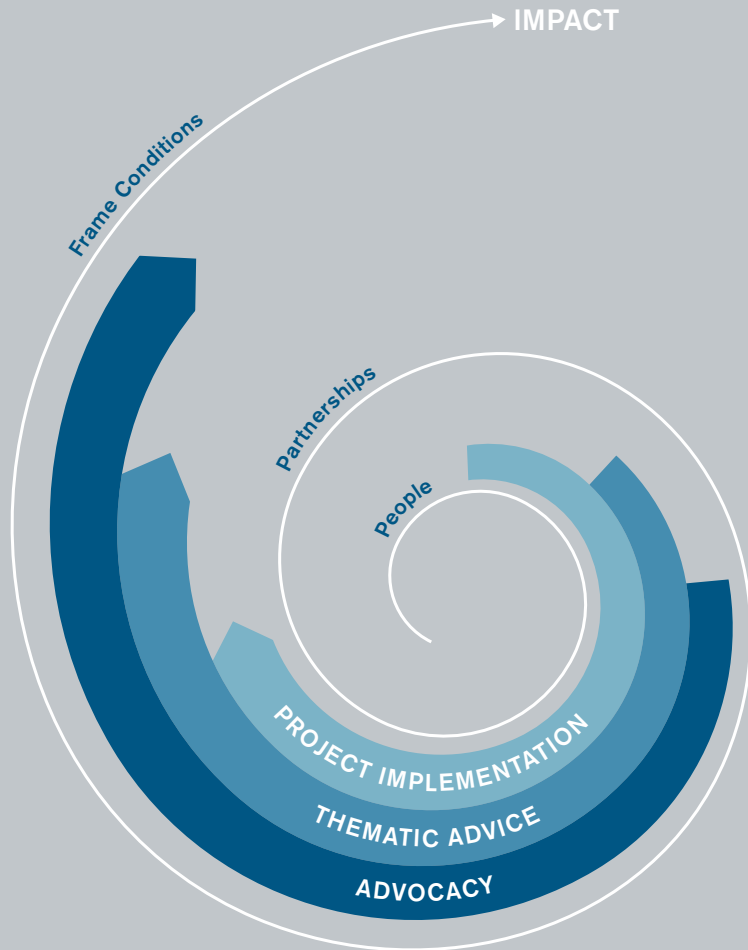


## THE PEOPLE AT THE HEART OF OUR WORK

Poor and disadvantaged women and men are at the center of our development and humanitarian response work. These include people and groups who are discriminated against or marginalized because of their gender, sex, age, origin, language, religion, culture, ethnicity, caste, or occupation. Together, we create new perspectives, leveraging existing potential, strengths, and assets.

Asmera Amtachew and her grandmother Wubite Tebeje live in Wag Hemra, a region in Ethiopia often affected by erosion and drought, where terracing and ring-basin infiltration pits allow people to retain precious water.  
Photo: Patrick Rohr

# HOW WE ACHIEVE IMPACT



Helvetas combines **three mutually reinforcing intervention mechanisms**: We implement development and humanitarian response projects; we provide technical advice and build thematic competences; and we engage in awareness-raising,

policy dialogue, and advocacy. This is how we initiate, support, and influence **systemic change** that improves the lives of people in the short and long term, strengthens our partners, and fosters conducive frame conditions.



Akram Kasymov is a member of the local water committee. Photo: Simon B. Opladen

**Example:** Farmers in Kyrgyzstan rely on well-functioning irrigation systems to make a living. With a changing governance context, however, irrigation systems started to fall into disrepair. Helvetas therefore supports farmers and municipalities to jointly manage irrigation systems, repairing canals, improving irrigation techniques, and governing water distribution. Today, farmers, municipal representatives and sector experts together advocate for a national legislation that supports sustainable local irrigation. This project is co-financed by SDC and Helvetas.



## FOR HELVETAS, EFFECTIVE CHANGE ...

**... includes the poorest and most marginalized people.** Societies and economies will only enjoy stability, security and sustainability when all people feel safe, included and valued. This is why we uphold the “leave no one behind” principle and have gender equality and social equity as core pillars of all our activities and partnerships.

**... requires strong local ownership and leadership,** supported by conducive frame conditions at the national, regional and global level. This is why we strive for strong and lasting partnerships from the local to the global level. We work with civil society organizations and media, governments and public administrations, the private sector, and academia. In particular, we support drivers of change, engage in multi-stakeholder initiatives, and participate in international networks and alliances.

**... is not about quick wins, but inclusive change at the system level.** Our interventions only reach scale and achieve lasting results if they contribute to systemic changes. This is why we use specific approaches to address the systemic nature of development challenges and advocate for a conducive institutional environment.

**... requires constant learning and innovation.** This is why we keep reflecting and learning from our own and others’ experiences and constantly challenge ourselves and the results of our work. This helps us and our partners to quickly adjust to changes and to constantly improve our ways of working.

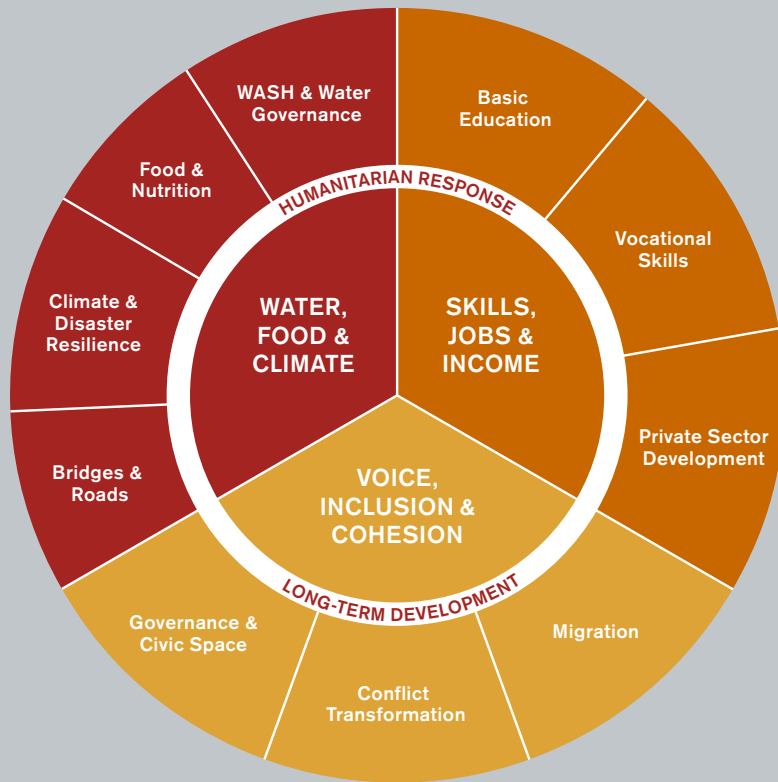
**... can only be achieved if conflicts are addressed and carefully mitigated.** This is why all our interventions are managed in a context- and conflict-sensitive manner. Doing so helps us to support efforts to reduce tension between local communities, increase social cohesion and work in an inclusive manner.

**... requires solidarity and global cooperation.** This is why we not only work in development and humanitarian contexts, but we also raise awareness for development challenges and advocate for policy coherence in Switzerland and at the global level.

←  
Mahelet Metaign from Ethiopia trained as a cook and now runs a stand selling Ethiopian specialties in the city of Bahir Dar. Photo: Simon B. Opladen



# OUR GOALS AND AREAS OF WORK



With its strategy, Helvetas pursues three main goals: **ensuring basic rights, creating new perspectives, and strengthening good governance**. We combine humanitarian response and support for longer-term development. To

achieve our goals, we work across three working areas – Water, Food & Climate; Skills, Jobs & Income; and Voice, Inclusion & Cohesion – and their ten working fields, always leveraging synergies between them.



Win Tun and Than Aye are fisherman and fisherwoman on the Gulf of Mottama. Photo: Flurina Rothenberger

**Example:** The muddy waters in Myanmar's Gulf of Mottama are not only a unique ecosystem, but also vital for the fishery communities living along its shores. Over the years, this ecosystem has been over-exploited, and its resources depleted. To help address the challenge, Helvetas brings together communities and sub-national governments to sustainably manage the coastal wetlands, diversify livelihoods, and reduce risks from disasters and climate change. This holistic approach combines all three working areas of Helvetas. The project is an SDC mandate implemented by Helvetas.

WORKING AREA

**WATER, FOOD & CLIMATE**

Teófilo García Caraballo from Bolivia, here with his son Rilberth, protects the headwaters of his community and has built an irrigation system for his fields. Photo: Simon B. Opladen

# Ensuring Basic Rights

## OUR GOAL

Helvetas enables people in development and humanitarian contexts to gain and ensure access to water, sanitation, hygiene, food, and natural resources – all human rights. In partnership with civil society, public institutions and the private sector, Helvetas promotes technical and financial support services that improve living conditions and climate resilience in rural and urban areas.

## WATER, FOOD & CLIMATE

Today, more than one in four people worldwide (2.1 billion) lack access to safely managed drinking water, while about three in five people (4.5 billion) do not have access to safely managed sanitation – both of which are fundamental human rights. Hunger is again on the rise, due to multiple causes, including conflicts and growing inequality. In 2019, about 690 million people were undernourished – nearly 60 million more than five years earlier. The Covid-19 crisis is exacerbating this. It is estimated that in 2020 alone, an additional 71 million people were pushed back into extreme poverty. The increasing number of climate-related disasters, overexploitation of natural resources, and an ongoing, devastating loss of biodiversity represent even greater threats. They don't just cause droughts, floods, and crop failure – they threaten the very foundation of our food systems. The poorest, most vulnerable, and least resilient are suffering disproportionately. Actions that support vulnerable groups to be better prepared for these crises, to adapt to climate change and mitigate its causes are therefore crucial.

OUR TARGET FOR 2021–24:

**16 million people**

**benefit from sustainable access to water, sanitation, hygiene, food or natural resources, increased sustainable agricultural productivity, or enhanced climate resilience.**



### Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) & Water Governance

Disadvantaged people have sustainable and equitable access to domestic and irrigation water, sanitation, and hygiene, including in humanitarian contexts. Helvetas' actions ensure that their voices are heard.

### Food & Nutrition

Disadvantaged women and men have sustainable and equitable access to natural resources, including land, technical and financial services, and markets. With Helvetas' support, partners advance sustainable agriculture and food systems, including in fragile contexts, and advocate for policies that increase the availability of affordable, nutritious and healthy food.

### Climate & Disaster Resilience

Disadvantaged women and men in rural and urban areas have strengthened their resilience to climate change and disaster risks. They engage in long-term planning and risk-informed decision making. Furthermore, vulnerable and exposed populations manage ecosystems sustainably and have access to climate finance.

### Bridges & Roads

Disadvantaged people have increased access to markets, schools, and health centers, thanks to newly built and well-maintained trail bridges, rural roads, and tracks. The construction of these infrastructures generates local employment opportunities and helps to strengthen local capacities.

WORKING AREA

## SKILLS, JOBS & INCOME

Sahilemariam Shebabaw and Fitfite Mulualem opened a store after training as dressmakers. Today they are employers themselves and train young people in Bahir Dar, Ethiopia. Photo: Simon B. Opladen



# Creating New Perspectives

### OUR GOAL

Helvetas promotes basic education, professional skills, and private sector development, as well as financial inclusion to help ensure that poor people have access to decent employment and income opportunities – including in humanitarian situations, where possible. To develop such opportunities, Helvetas supports its partners in enabling disadvantaged youth to acquire basic, vocational and life skills.

## SKILLS, JOBS & INCOME

Some 40% of the global population is under the age of 25, and while access to education has improved over the last decades – even in areas that are facing emergencies or ongoing crises – the quality of basic and vocational education is still poor in many countries. Women are disproportionately denied access to education. Youth unemployment has reached staggering levels and is on the rise. The Covid-19 crisis has further fueled this trend, as its consequences for the labor market have hit youth the hardest. While agriculture remains the main source of employment in developing countries, non-farm-based activities are becoming more and more important, not least due to rapid urbanization in many places. It is therefore crucial to support local private sector development and invest in digital transformation. These factors will be key to creating opportunities for global youth.

OUR TARGETS FOR 2021–24:

**> 7 million people**

– especially youth, women, and other disadvantaged groups – benefit from access to education, skills, jobs, or additional income.

**> 50,000 businesses**

of micro, small, and medium size have increased their capacities to access markets, sustainably sell products, and deliver services.



### Basic Education

Children and youth are empowered by quality formal and non-formal basic education, including soft skills training. Gender disparities in education are reduced.

### Vocational Skills

Disadvantaged youth and adults acquire relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills for employment and entrepreneurship. Access to vocational education and training for women is improved.

### Private Sector Development

Micro, small, and medium enterprises create sustainable income and job opportunities across economic sectors through improved access to quality financial services, business training, and markets.

WORKING AREA

## VOICE, INCLUSION & COHESION

VOTO  
CONSCIENTE

PROCESO ELECTORAL

TIPOS DE ELECCIONES

PRESIDENTE Y  
VICEPRESIDENTE

DIPUTADOS  
POR  
DISTRITO

DIPUTAS POR  
LISTADO NACIO-  
NAL

DIPUTADOS  
AL  
PARLACEN

CORPORACIÓN  
MUNICIPAL

In Guatemala, women teach other women in their community how politics works and how to make their voices heard. Photo: Simon B. Opladen

# Strengthening Good Governance

### OUR GOAL

Helvetas, in partnership with local actors, amplifies the voices of local communities, migrants and refugees in development and humanitarian contexts, and enhances the space for civil society and the private sector to meaningfully participate in decision making processes. At the same time, Helvetas strengthens the capacities of public institutions to deliver inclusive services and to articulate transformative policies that reduce inequalities, enhance social cohesion, and promote safe and productive migration.

## VOICE, INCLUSION & COHESION

Voice, inclusion, and social cohesion are more an aspiration than a reality for many people. The troubling trend of authoritarianism in recent years, often fueled by populist rhetoric and nationalism, has only aggravated the situation. In particular, the space for civil society continues to shrink and women’s political participation remains a challenge. The Covid-19 crisis has led to further encroachments on core civil and political rights. At the same time, the pandemic has shown how important functioning governance systems are. Fostering good and democratic governance, while protecting and promoting human rights, requires time. This is even more true in areas of the world that are marked by fragility, conflicts, and humanitarian disasters. Over the last 30 years, the number of forcibly displaced people has doubled, increasing from 40 million in 1990 to almost 80 million today.

OUR TARGETS FOR 2021–24:

**> 8 million people**  
are empowered to claim their rights to basic services or supported to transform local conflicts.

**1.8 million people**  
who decide to migrate are supported to do so safely, responsibly, and productively.



### Governance & Civic Space

Disadvantaged women and men engage in political decision-making, promote political, social, and economic human rights, and claim access to public services. Policies that improve frame conditions and civic space for poor and disadvantaged people are in place, while mutual trust between government and civil society partners has increased.

### Conflict Transformation

Conflicts are transformed through dialogue and joint engagement of communities, civil society, and government institutions. Communities enjoy increased social-cohesion, and resilience to extremist rhetoric and violence is strengthened.

### Migration

Disadvantaged women and men who decide to migrate can do so safely and productively. Furthermore, assistance is given to dialogues and partnerships between governments, the private sector, and civil society organizations that aim to set up effective migration governance systems that safeguard the rights and wellbeing of migrants.

# WHERE WE WORK

Helvetas works for people living in poverty and those challenged by inequality. These challenges exist in different contexts. Therefore, Helvetas works in least-developed and middle-income countries, in stable and fragile areas, in nine regions. Based on our experience that sustainable development takes time, our commitment to partner countries is long-term. We also work outside of our partner countries from a regional perspective, providing technical advice and responding to humanitarian crises. In Switzerland and at the global level, we raise awareness for development challenges and advocate for policy coherence.

Central America  
& the Caribbean

HAITI  
HONDURAS  
GUATEMALA

Andes  
PERU  
BOLIVIA

East & Southeast Europe  
SWITZERLAND  
SERBIA  
MOLDOVA  
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA  
KOSOVO  
NORTH MACEDONIA  
ALBANIA  
TUNISIA  
LEBANON  
PAKISTAN  
UZBEKISTAN  
KYRGYZSTAN  
TAJIKISTAN

West Africa  
Mali  
Niger  
Burkina Faso  
Benin

Middle East & North Africa  
Ethiopia

East Africa  
Tanzania  
Madagascar  
Mozambique

Central Asia  
South Asia  
South East Asia  
Nepal  
Bhutan  
Bangladesh  
Myanmar  
Sri Lanka  
Laos  
Vietnam



# MANAGING RISKS

## Fragile contexts

Helvetas often operates in difficult environments where government authorities face the challenge of providing security and basic services to large sections of the population. In such settings, development and humanitarian interventions rely on alternative local systems and are implemented in close partnerships with all local actors.

→ We adjust the way we work, including the use of Conflict Sensitive Program Management, in response to the level of instability.

## Safety, security and ethical behavior

Instability and natural hazards, including epidemics, pose various safety and security risks. Particularly in fragile contexts, there are increased safety and security risks for our collaborators, partners, and the people we work with. Furthermore, Helvetas, as every organization, faces the risk of sexual harassment, fraud, and other forms of illegal or unethical behavior.

→ We actively manage safety and security risks, invest in prevention, and have a zero-tolerance policy regarding illegal and unethical behavior.

## Shrinking civic space

The authoritarian trend in recent years has led to increased pressure on democratic principles and the space for civic engagement. Such infringements of basic human rights hamper sustainable development, for which freedom of speech and of association are essential preconditions.

→ Together with our partners, we engage in strategic actions to protect, promote and expand an enabling environment for civil society.

## Eroding global cooperation

Although the need for global responses to global challenges like climate change and inequality has never been more urgent, the past few years have seen a decrease in global cooperation in certain areas and the renewed rise of national economic and political self-interest. As a result, there is a serious risk that pressing issues that require a global response might not be addressed.

→ Faced with this trend, we engage in coordinated response strategies to promote global cooperation.



→  
Florencia Joaquim from Helvetas Mozambique, at a meeting to plan the activities for the coming months. Photo: Simon B. Opladen



## OUR COMMITMENT TO QUALITY

### Results-based management

Helvetas sees systematic and institutionalized results-based management as instrumental for learning, steering, and accountability. Therefore, we maintain a comprehensive and interlinked Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL) system at the project, country program and organizational level. We pay specific attention to outcome and impact measurement.

### Financial management and controlling

Transparency, accountability, and efficiency in the use of resources are core principles of Helvetas' commitment to quality. We have an externally audited financial management and controlling system. Internal and external audits are conducted regularly.

### Human resources development

With approximately 1,400 staff working on five continents, Helvetas represents an extraordinary wealth of professional, cultural and linguistic diversity. Our human resources development aims at systematically developing our staff as individuals and as a team, so we have the competences to understand and respond to new challenges in a constantly changing world.

### Connect the local to the global

We understand the importance of local knowledge and build our work on trust and proximity with our primary stakeholders and partners. This is why we maintain program and project offices, staffed primarily with local experts. At the same time, Helvetas engages with governments, private sector entities, and civil society networks at the national, regional, and global level. This combination of presence in partner countries and partnerships at the global level allows us to connect the local to the global and vice versa, linking stakeholders, ideas, and knowledge at different levels.

←

Paul Chugu, Helvetas project officer in Dodoma, Tanzania, evaluates how the work situation of Botro Stephano looks after his vocational training. Photo: Stella Oguma



As part of the Women Empowerment Fund, private donors are making a longer-term commitment to empowering women. Here, members of the Water Supply & Sanitation Users Group in Melamchi, Nepal. Photo: Flurina Rothenberger

## FUNDING

The work of Helvetas is funded by a variety of public and private donors. Our annual turnover is around CHF140 million. Among Helvetas' key donors are the Swiss public, the Swiss and Liechtenstein governments, the European Commission, a broad range of European and American governments, the World Bank, other UN agencies and major foundations. Our ambition is to deliver excellent services in the spirit of partnership. The synergies of these different funding streams allow Helvetas to support change processes in the mid- and long-term, through our own initiatives and mandated projects. The use of private funds multiplies the impact of public funds, and vice versa. We are grateful for the trust we receive from our donors. Together, we achieve real change.

# WHAT IS YOUR NEXT STEP TOWARDS A BETTER FUTURE?

## Imprint

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from top: Christian Bobst, Helvetas Kyrgyzstan, Patrick Rohr

→  
Zanfina Gashi attends  
the IT training course  
at the American Univer-  
sity in Kosovo. Photo:  
Christian Bobst

→→  
Elifuraha Yacobo  
is training in Tanzania  
to be a beekeeper.  
Here, he checks the  
quality of his honey  
harvest. Later, he would  
like to start his own  
business. Photo:  
Simon B. Opladen





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