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Sustainability – A North-South Dialogue

"Sustainable Development and Global Justice",
International Conference, Berlin, April 27–29, 2009



Sustainable Development –
Is it more than a sheen on the horizon?

Photo: Evan Leeson



Pastor Cornelia Füllkrug-Weitzel
is director of Brot für die Welt .



Dr. Claudia Warning
is EED director of
International Programmes.

“Sustainable Development and Global Justice” – this was the title of a joint consultation with partner organisations hosted by “Brot für die Welt” (Bread for the World) and “Evangelischen Entwicklungsdienst” (Church Development Service, EED) in spring 2009. The conference has been the starting point for a structured dialogue between the two Protestant development agencies and their partner organisations about the questions raised by the study “Zukunftsfähiges Deutschland in einer globalisierten Welt” (Sustainable Germany in a Globalised World).

The aim of the consultation was to listen to the recommendations of partner organisations. On the one hand, the question was raised what needs to be done urgently in the North, especially in Germany, to promote sustainable development and global justice. On the other hand, the two development agencies were keen to learn about the action that had been taken already by the partner organisations with regard to these two goals, since the lack of sustainability and global justice is a much more immediate problem for many people in the South than for people in Germany.

The large number of current interconnected global crises – from peak-oil to climate change, from the financial crisis to the food crisis – have lent more weight to the issues of sustainability and global justice recently. The dialogue with partner organisations has provided topics and arguments which can be used in the further debate with political and economic decision makers in Germany and Europe.

In addition to the discussion about the results and recommendations of the study “Zukunftsfähiges Deutschland” (Sustainable Germany), the meeting was an opportunity to exchange expectations, opinions, and ideas with and among the partner organisations. With this dossier, we wish to make the insights of the consultations available to a wider public. Thereby, we hope to provide an additional impulse to societal debate.

Cornelia Füllkrug-Weitzel
Claudia Warning

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Sustainability – A North-South Dialogue

“Sustainable Development and Global Justice”, International Conference, Berlin, April 27–29, 2009

Photo: Johanna Laible / EED



| A report by Uwe Hoering

Under normal circumstances meetings of development agencies and their partner organisations are focussing on project-related issues, are doing assessments of the situation, sometimes they have to deal with relationship problems. The conference in Berlin in April 2009 was quite different. It provided a framework for staff and management of the two protestant development agencies, colleagues from BUND, representatives from churches, civil society and government to meet and exchange with around 25 delegates from partner organisations from Brazil to Hong Kong, from Georgia to South Africa.

The conference was an opportunity to communicate about expectations, opinions and ideas about sustainable development, to explore forward looking strategies, reflect on the role of civil society and churches, and possibly to agree on first steps and the way forward – an opportunity for comprehensive reflection.

The study “Sustainable Germany in a Globalised World”, which was published in October 2008, served as a reference framework for the dedicated discussion. EED, “Brot für die Welt”, and BUND, the German Section of Friends of the Earth International, jointly commissioned this study in 2007 at the Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy.

Reflection and exchange: The discussion with partners provides arguments for future debate with decision makers from politics and economy.



Brot für die Welt, BUND, EED (Editors)
“Sustainable Germany in a Globalised World”
An impulse for social and public debate
 Published by Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag,
 660 pages, 14,95 Euro

Sustainability: “Many definitions, but less practice”

“Make Germany sustainable! Talk of a greener, more sustainable future is already doing the rounds. German companies publish sustainability reports. The German government has mapped out a National Sustainability Strategy. And the United Nations declared the years 2005 to 2014 the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. There has been a seachange in public attitudes too:

German consumers are spending more on fair trade and organic products, and the country’s renewable share of electricity production has risen. There is no escaping it: sustainability is an idea whose time has come.”

From: Compass Bearings for a Course Change – A summary of the study “Sustainable Germany in a Globalised World”

What is sustainability? During the last decades, there has been a global discussion and sometimes controversy on what the term actually means. In the conference, at least four definitions of sustainability were offered, taking off from different starting points, partly overlapping, partly focussing on different aspects or setting different priorities.

Tilman Santarius, co-author of the study, reminded that the modern or Western concept of sustainability is being traced back to German foresters in the 18th century, realising that they have to replant trees if the forest should not disappear. Around the UN Con-



Photo: Johanna Laible / EED

Joji Carino, Indigenous Peoples' International Centre for Policy Research and Education: "The way we understand the world, and more importantly the way we live in the world, has a big bearing on how we conduct this relationship with Earth."

ference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 this environmental aspect has been expanded to a triangle by including economic growth and social justice. It has become the dominant paradigm for most politicians, the media and the public at large.

For Iara Pietrikowski from Brazil, the concept of sustainability dates back to the 18th century with the advent of the concept of human rights. In a historical process it became more complex, including not only civil rights, but political rights, sexual rights, the rights of ethnic communities, the rights of nature and environmental rights, primarily added by indigenous peoples and others. The basic meaning of sustainability is human rights and their consequences for the policy space. "Even if one could achieve a sustainable society in ecological terms, "without the human rights perspective inequality of gender, races, ethnicities or sexual orientation would continue."

| A chair with four legs

As a third definition, Charlene Hewat from Zimbabwe compared sustainability with a chair with four legs to sit firmly on – economic, social, and environmental issues, completed by political power issues. To achieve this kind of sustainability, work has to be done with communities – listening to them, learning from them, "and loving them" – so that in the end they will say "we have done this ourselves". Involving the community and the local leaders, including the chiefs, will provide the necessary political standing and sustainability.

What about growth?

Like "sustainability", the catchword "growth" offers another formidable battlefield for endless arguments, semantic differentiations and fog production. Which kind of growth are we talking about? Is it quantitative economic growth as indexed in the GDP, which is the most common understanding and seen by many as a panacea for problems ranging from unemployment to environmental destruction, from poverty to distributional injustice? Is it "qualitative growth"? Is there something like sustainable growth? Is growth generally positive, or should it – and could it – be restricted to some "good" areas like renewable energy or happiness, or to "underdeveloped" countries? And further complicating the issue: can there be a farewell to continuous growth and something like "de-growth" – planned and wanted as demanded by the study, which as a political strategy sounds "a little bit frightening", as a participant from Macedonia said. And what about an unplanned and chaotic "de-growth" like in the present crisis, where growth rates plummet – is it a disaster, is it beneficial for promoting sustainability, because the use of resources and accordingly the prices drop as well? | |

Finally, the starting point offered by Joji Carino from the Philippines was the cultural view, which leads to variety in the understanding of sustainability. "The way we understand the world, and more importantly the way we live in the world, has a big bearing on how we conduct this relationship with the earth." While the modern or Western concept of sustainability is quite new and the result of a particular culture of industrialised societies, indigenous peoples' culture and view of the earth date back centuries of continuous living in ecosystems. They can offer contextual knowledge directly related to ecosystems, how to mitigate and to adapt to the problems of pollution, industrialisation and now climate change. But for this, self determination and the respect of the rights of indigenous peoples by governments has to be the corresponding side of sustainability, putting indigenous people back into the centre of how we see the future.

| Reflected concepts instead of thoughtless use of the term

The often seemingly thoughtless use of "sustainability" – meaning in many cases nothing more than "continuously" or "lasting" or "serious" – is fundamentally different from such concept-based definitions. Particularly politicians like these connotations which leave the term completely hollow. Obviously, the question who defines sustainability and how, is relevant for the strategies and policies to achieve whatever is understood by it. Such clarifications are important, not only as a basis for communication, but also for shaping visions, strategies and activities to achieve sustainability – What do we want to sustain? Or to be sustainable? Is there a fundamental contradiction between sustainability and development, i.e. is "sustainable development" possible at all? Is there real interest in sustainability or is it only lip service?

As Wolfgang Sachs, lead author of the study, pointed out, language is also part of the power system, defining conceptions and solutions. Thus, one very important aspect of the struggle for sustainability is to recapture power over language. Sachs understands the study as a tool to achieve this, to clarify terms and conditions of sustainability. But as important as the debate on definitions might be, in the end it becomes clear that the major problem is less an issue of definition, as was mentioned in one of the discussions: "There is a lot of definition about sustainability, but less practice". | |

Unless otherwise indicated, quotations in this and the following chapters are from the contributions and discussion at the conference.

Different worlds, closely connected

“Germany is not only a major player in the global economy, but as a ,world champion exporter‘ ultimately one of the winners of globalisation. One consequence of German foreign trade is to shift environmental impacts to other countries. In other parts of the world, a major proportion of agricultural land is taken up by crops destined for the German market. All in all, Germany’s ,ecological footprint‘ is significantly larger than our fair share – we are living off other people’s resources. Economically too, Germany’s success in the global economy puts other countries at a disadvantage. As a consequence, wealth is redistributed from other countries to Germany.”

From: Compass Bearings for a Course Change

Photo: Peter Röhl / PIXELIO



Different starting points or perspectives regarding the understanding and definition of “What do we mean by sustainability?” might be partly due to the fact that the question of sustainability relates to different worlds, represented by the participants from different countries, continents, and cultures.

On one side there is Germany, respectively the industrialised world, which of course is much wider than the “North” and includes the “North in the South“. Germany is one of the driving forces of globalisation and of the lack of sustainability, which is accompanying it. On balance, it is one of the winners from globalisation and unsustainable development elsewhere in the world, setting the standards on what is the goal of development, right to the last village in developing countries.

On the other side there are countries like Brazil, Indonesia or Kenya, largely suffering from globalisation, following the model of the “European-Atlantic world” which “colonised the imagination of the world” (Sachs). Partly they are forced on the very same development path, partly they tread it voluntarily, making up for coming late in the history of capitalist industrialisation for example with “internal colonies“. Again on balance, that is where we find the losers – which does not mean that there are no winners at all. These countries and these people pay the highest price in terms of sustainability.

To some extent at least, the experiences of the impact of globalisation on sustainability – or rather the lack of a sustainable development – are partly similar: uniformity in agriculture and culture, threats to employment, climate change, rapidly increasing inequality within and among nations, deficits in participation and democracy, probably

Sufficiency, happiness ...

In her keynote speech on “What is the intrinsic meaning of life?”, Rebecca Tanui from Kenya took up one of the lead questions, whether “the North” can learn from “the South”, in her case from Africa?

“What can I eat?” can have a different meaning – in Germany it can refer to the problem of choice from an overwhelming variety of food offered, while in Kenya it might be the question, whether there is anything to eat at all. Still, there seems to be more happiness in “poor” Africa than in countries with all that wealth and power.

Left: A mall in Germany.
Wasteful consumption does not make happy.

Right: Disused goods of the North disposed
in the South. Electronic waste in Ghana.

Photo: Vibek Raj Matuaya



... and solidarity

Ideas might be found in an African society, where continuity of traditions and family ties, community, solidarity, appreciation of nature, and an economy like organic agriculture, which survives with little resources and which is for living, not for profit, prevail, and where values are handed down from generation to generation mainly by oral education.

To improve this, there needs to be a different approach to development and growth: Stepping stones are for example investments in renewable energy, management of solid waste, a culture of re-use and recycle, and research into alternatives. ||

even further deepened by the ongoing crises. That's why "sustainable development is relevant both for the North and the South". Nevertheless, in many very essential aspects the situation is also substantially different. As expressed by Rebecca Tanui from Kenya: The simple question in the morning: "What can I eat?" means very different things in North and South, for poor and rich (see box: Sufficiency, happiness, solidarity).

This brings down to earth what is, in a broader perspective, the challenge: In Germany, it is overuse of resources, overproduction of goods, threats to climate, to other ecosystems and to sustainable development in other countries by wasteful production and consumption styles and finally a sense of lack of well-being and happiness in spite

of wealth and comfort. In "the South" it is not only the loss of resources or internal markets, but also loss of self determination or sovereignty, and loss of dignity and cultures too. At the micro level of communities, families, and people, this in many cases means also the loss of livelihoods in very concrete terms, and even of lives in the utmost consequence. It is the land issue, the issue of HIV/Aids, the colonial legacies, the debt issue, which have to be solved as a precondition to look at environment and development – but which needs more commitments by the North.

It is hardly surprising, that such different experiences, needs and challenges result in different priorities, strategies and demands. If you would draw a picture of a sustainable Germany and a sustainable Zimbabwe, as Charlene Hewat proposed, they would look quite different. The answer to the question, whether "Germany can address challenges of globalisation in a sustainable way", put forward in the keynote speech by Wolfgang Sachs, is very different from the question, how farmers in Africa for example can address those challenges. What is more important, climate change or employment, adjustment in consumption patterns and life styles or food production, low energy houses or housing at all, and so on?

While "pictures" of sustainability might be very different, and strategies to achieve them varied and complex, one fundamental challenge is obvious: It is up to Germany and other driving forces of globalisation to fundamentally change their relations with the world to open up opportunities for sustainability in other countries. In other words: Sustainability is not a matter limited to internal affairs – "we cannot speak of a sustainable Germany without speaking of a sustainable Kenya". ||

Common ground

“Under the neoliberal paradigm, economic liberalisation, free trade and privatisation are supposed to bring growth and prosperity for all; clearly, it has failed. It is high time that modern industrial societies held up their model of prosperity for critical scrutiny, and then reinvent it for the 21st century. Without ecology there can be no justice – nor security – in our time. And by the same token, our responses to ecological challenges will never have the desired effect unless they incorporate social justice.”

From: Compass Bearings for a Course Change

There is already some common ground between the actors coming from the different worlds, and some principles of their activities:

One can be found in the diagnosis of a “crisis of values”, that contributes to the different crises, and the search for values and principles to achieve sustainability, based very often on religious thoughts and convictions and teachings. At this level it is not too difficult to agree on “the intrinsic meaning of life” and “an improved lasting lifestyle”. There is some agreement to focus on sufficiency and “happiness”, as opposed to the desire for power and wealth, while it is still debatable how much is enough or whether happiness can be framed in a Gross Happiness Index. Such a “dispute of values” can be seen as a first step of transformation or of a “cultural revolution”, just as the protestant reformation in the 16th century has been one of the preconditions for the industrial revolution.

Another overarching consensus is the strive for justice at every level, from the local to

the global level. But there are different dimensions of justice, as Wolfgang Sachs pointed out: Distributive justice, based on comparison, and – different from such a “relative concept based on a hidden agenda of equality” – the concept of rights as “absolute justice” with a “hidden agenda of dignity”.

At the centre of the latter consensus is the rights-based approach, which has become more and more accepted after the Second World War, starting with the Declaration of Human Rights by the UN-System. Since then, not only states but individuals can claim universal rights which even tend to range higher than the rights of states, providing a kind of “hidden constitution for a world society” (Sachs). But this concept should not only encompass human rights, but rights of nature, of creatures, the right to participate in political decisions, etc.

Extraterritorial obligations

There is a growing consensus, that in the absence of a functioning global governing system or a global state, individual states have the obligation to safeguard rights of peoples in other countries. This should also include to take responsibility for activities of multilateral institutions, in which the states are members, or for the activities of “their” transnational corporations. This responsibility can be exercised in a restrictive manner (“do no harm”), but also in an offensive one, which could lead into an “imperial trap” of using rights issues to legitimise interferences. | |



Photo: Johanna Laible / EED



Education for sustainable development

Very importantly, there is also a general consensus far beyond the participants of the conference that radical change is needed to achieve sustainability. This need for a fundamental transformation relates to various areas which were touched in the Working Groups, such as climate change and climate justice, education, energy security, food security and sovereignty, foreign trade and labour resp. employment.

Left: Focussed attention: Jacob Kotcho, Citizen's Association for the Defence of Collective Interests (ACDIC), Cameroon.

Below: Lively discussion even during coffee breaks: Avanthi N. Rao, Centre for World Solidarity (CWS), India, in discussion with Martin Rempis, Brot für die Welt, and Ana de Ita, Center of Studies for a Change in Rural Mexico (CECCAM), Mexico.

For the fundamental change towards sustainable development, comprehensive processes of education and communication are needed. They have to encompass all educational institutions, NGOs as well as media, including the new media. In this process of building bridges between different groups in society, between state and civil society organisations, and between different situations, lifestyles and mentalities, churches can play a distinctive role as moderator, mediator and promoter of sustainability.

An intensive exchange of experiences between South and North is not only mutually enriching, but essential. And to overcome political, economic and social resistance against such a process, which is also political, credibility of its advocates by giving an example of sustainable living is one of the important conditions for success.

Summary of the Workshop on Education

Obviously, there is a wide range of approaches to change in the area of development work. They range from education, awareness-raising, capacity building, advocacy and lobby work, action oriented research, organising people and communities around different issues and proposals, to developing and implementing alternatives for livelihood and environment protection. The question is, as Wilfried Steen, Executive Director for Development Policy/Programmes within Germany put it, whether the actors who want this change are themselves "radical enough". Are their concepts, strategies and activities appropriate to bring about the desired radical change towards sustainability? And where or which are the fundamental alternatives, for the North, for the South,? ||

Rebecca Tanui, Building Eastern Africa Community Network (BEACON), Kenya, during her presentation. In the background Thorsten Göbel, Brot für die Welt.



Photo: Johanna Laible / EED



Photo: Johanna Laible / EED

Opening of the conference: Ulrich Gundert, Brot für die Welt, presents the study "Sustainable Germany". Claudia Warning, EED, in the background.



Photo: Johanna Laible / EED

Reforming capitalism?

“A radical change of course is needed. It will mean critically re-examining central pillars and doctrines of the prevailing model of development – continual economic growth, the primacy of the market, and fossil fuels. In a world where inequality, injustice and conflicts are on the increase, we need to develop and put into action a new model of prosperity.”

From: Compass Bearings of a Course Change

“Radical” means going to the root causes. And for many people the crisis underlines the conviction, that capitalism is at least one of the most important root causes for unsustainable developments in many areas, ranging from climate change to depletion of resources, from increasing poverty and food insecurity to many conflicts. The crisis has made the word “capitalism” again a well accepted connotation, flowing easily from the lips of politicians, industrialists, as well as activists and others.

Again, just as with “sustainability”, there are many different meanings of “capitalism” or different kinds of capitalisms, it seems. There is neoliberalism with deregulation and “state light” at least in the area of economic activities and social security. There is financial capitalism, represented by greedy bankers, managers and shareholders. There is the “real” capitalism of production and entrepreneurs, providing goods and employment for people. And there are various variations like Keynesianism and the German model of “social market economy”. So there are more “acceptable” versions of capitalism, restricting capitalists to “sufficient profits” and promoting social goals and more equal distribution, and others less acceptable like the “greedy” finance capitalism.

Related to this is the question running right through NGOs and civil society: how to change capitalism?



Photo: chw / PIXELIO

Gigantic view? The bank towers of Frankfurt don't seem affected by the crisis. But financial capitalism is neither robust nor sustainable and needs reforms. Opinions differ widely about which directions it should take.

Many people believe that it can be changed – even fast enough to avoid further sliding into disaster – by reforming it through participation in institutions, commissions and consultations, by lobby and advocacy work. One such intervention could be to improve its positive trends, as Professor Martin Jänicke from Freie Universität Berlin outlined in his fervent appeal to reinforce cur-

rent trends towards a green economy inherent in the economic and political system, by supporting them with subsidies and policies, and at the same time cutting back on negative (side)effects. This is related to the connotation of a state as an institution that moderates and is more or less neutral representing the common good.

| Bidding farewell to growth?

But Santarius and Wolfgang Sachs questioned that economic growth can be a goal on equal terms with the other two pillars of sustainability (environmental and social). For growth is just a means – and taking climate change seriously, even moderate continuous growth is no longer a plausible strategy altogether to achieve the goals of environmental “soundness” and social justice or “fairness”. Therefore the North needs “de-growth”, i.e. reduce its ecological foot-

print which is much too large. It should use less resources, “dematerialise” and stop taking away resources and markets from others and change course radically, learning how to live and govern without constant growth.

“De-growth” in the North means also giving up market shares in the South. This would require a reduction of production and consumption for example, allowing growth only in areas where it is not endangering sustainability, and at the same time implementing strategies for de-growth in others. This would also include some kind of “de-globalisation” especially regarding financial markets and trade, which are far away from being fair and just and not really necessary for development, which “is possible without trade”, at least in its current globalised form.

Such a “de-growth” would create many problems. One of them is that for decades continuous growth has been one of the cornerstones of social and political stability, promising that with a bigger cake each piece would become bigger without anybody to lose out. But if there is no growth anymore – who will give up voluntarily? Can this be left to appeals for sharing and self-restriction, to the convincing power of alternative models of wealth and happiness? Clearly, a strategy for a strong social net safeguarding livelihoods during a transformation towards sustainability is needed for taking people on board. “Alternative models of wealth” and a different concept of a “good life” have to be “attractive” to convince people to accept the necessary fundamental changes. The complete reorganisation of the distribution of labour between paid work, care work and community work for example would not only be necessary to answer the growing problem of unemployment, but could also open up prospects for gender justice and a more meaningful life.

“For capitalism, the prospect of sufficiency itself is difficult. Diminishing quantities of goods are hard to reconcile with the idea of constant growth in value added. But capitalism will have to pull off this manoeuvre if it is to stand a chance of future viability.”

From: Compass Bearings for a Course Change

Others are less convinced that capitalism can be reformed in such a way to promote sustainability in the broad sense. Because of intrinsic mechanisms like profit, the need to permanent growth, greed and exploitation, which cannot be changed by reforms, capitalism is seen as incompatible with sustainability. Behind this there are serious doubts for example, that exports and foreign investments can be made “sustainable” by social and environmental “standards” or certificates. Instead, change has to be a fundamental structural change.

This touches on many sensitive questions, such as the question of private property for example. For activists from the South who experience capitalist globalisation as a “new process of enclosure”, taking away resources like land, water, forests, diversity, knowledge or the atmosphere from communities, farmers, and others in the name of private property and market economy, it becomes necessary to think about how to defend the commons and to stop privatisation, and whether private property should no longer be treated as a “right” but as an obligation or even as a “privilege”. This is not only the case for the South: In the study there reminds us, that the bond enshrined in the German constitution between private property and serving the public interest can be read as entailing not just social obligations but equally a duty of responsibility towards the natural environment. | |



Photo: Brot für die Welt

“A more modest lifestyle!” is one of the conclusions from the study “Sustainable Germany in a Globalised World”. In the picture the topic is here presented in an interactive exhibition.

Crisis as an opportunity

“Of course, major course changes are bound to meet with all manner of resistance and obstructions, some stemming from indifference, some from self-interest, some from helplessness and ignorance of the alternatives. Moreover, lobbyists, modernisers and politicians unite against the charting of a new course that is now an urgent necessity. And finally, even our fondest habits, our needs and expectations, our aspirations and everyday pleasures can stand in the way of change.”

From: Compass Bearings for a Course Change

Transformation in the end boils down to the question who has the power to decide about developments, to resist necessary changes, to block alternative approaches and to defend privileges and monopolies? The “biggest threats to sustainability”, men-

tioned in the debate, are “power and economics”. This refers to national governments as well as to northern Multinationals, which are often more powerful than individual governments, and to International Financial Institutions, dominated by Northern governments. This political and economic power is often closely linked to control of knowledge and science, media and education. Furthermore it is decisive who defines “How much is enough?” and sets up the frame of a “meaningful life”. Changing course towards a more sustainable path is therefore not easy, neither in the North nor in the South.

Hence, one of the lead questions of the conference was whether the multiplicity of crises which the globe is experiencing today will help to overcome powerful obstacles and resistance and push forward a sustainable development? Obviously, there is a lot of hope that the current crises bring about the necessary rethinking about (un)sustainable development, about the urgent need to take action on climate change and depletion of resources, and that it helps to convince people and powers, that change is unavoidable. One catchword for this hope is “Green New Deal” as an answer to the financial or rather economic crisis, by moving towards ecologically sound economies, solving the climate crisis and the resource crunch at the same time, and by returning to a “sustainable” growth path, making it fascinating for politicians, environmentalists and economists alike.

Firstly, a “Green New Deal” seems to offer the chance for a breakthrough for technological solutions like the advance of renewable energy and a shift in production systems, offering at the same time new export opportunities for Germany and other countries. One example is the praise for the “success story” of the renewable energy law in

Photo: Bernd Boscolo / PIXELIO



Photo: Johanna Laible / EED



Germany as a model at least for industrialised countries for sustainability, where many players from politics, business and civil society acted together, including big players from the industry. Without overthrowing the capitalist system, it allows for environment protection and sound growth at the same time, putting the economy on a different development path of a “well regulated transformation”.

For the South the crisis could offer the technological opportunity of “leapfrogging” into the solar age, taking up modern technologies instead of coal, oil and nuclear power, a decentralised, localised energy system or promoting public transport instead of individual mobility concepts. “Do not make the same mistakes as the industrialised countries”, Tilman Santarius warned.



Tanker or Sailing-ship

A sustainable Germany in a globalised world? The questions plumb our model of civilization to its very depths. A good analogy is an oil tanker, a steel monstrosity powered by fossil fuels, which is difficult to manoeuvre and poses a constant hazard to the environment. The challenge is to turn it into a modern, high-speed sailing-boat, a light and nimble vessel powered by the wind. Though its performance and speed are less impressive, it does not pollute nor pose any threat. Both fulfil the function of transporting people and goods. But one does so in harmony with nature, whereas the other is a nature-devouring leviathan.

From: Compass Bearings for a Course Change

Secondly, for many people the concept of a Green New Deal also has the attraction to seemingly achieve sustainability and transformation without dealing with the power question: They consider the crisis as a “window of opportunity”, because politicians and industry are either by themselves shifting towards a “green economy” with green taxes, renewable energies, and circular economies, or they are desperately looking for advice from civil society and NGOs how to proceed and how to avoid that the crisis would lead into collapse and “social unrest”. Therefore, instead of “being in the radical margins”, NGOs should engage in these debates because “our topics are now on the top of the global agenda”.

In Germany, the legislation for renewable energies has opened up new opportunities to combine environmental protection and qualitative growth. However, wind turbines alone are not enough to stop climate change and to promote a “green economy”.

Others tend to see the crisis more as a threat. A forced “de-growth” pushed upon economies in a framework of inequality will result in offloading the burden on the weak, unless mitigating measures are put in place, which will be difficult in most countries in the South. It might put more pressure on resources for example. And many problems especially in the “South” would continue with such a “green economy”, as is already visible. The old monopolies and “dinosaurs” in the energy sector for example are exploiting the chances of agrofuels in the South, thereby replicating structures of monopolistic power and centralisation and using the South for the well-being of the North, for “greening” the North. Therefore some participants do not trust in a “green capitalism”: Even if it might be capable to reduce emissions, resource depletion and other environmental disasters, and would achieve economic growth and therefore employment, it still excludes recognition of women’s work, the extension of necessary social services, or the fight against injustice, discrimination, and repression. For them the Green New Deal just gives the impression that there can be a transformation of capitalism without abolishing it and that civil society can be strong and influential – without addressing the roots of the problem. | |

Reclaiming political space

“The undue weight given to capital interests in opinion-forming and decision-making must be quashed, and the state must reclaim its independence from business, i.e. the industry lobby, and put a stop to the prolonged erosion of state authority by neoliberalism.”

From: Compass Bearings for a Course Change

For many partners from the South the role of the state, which at present often is “not the institution to moderate” the transformation, is crucial. In many countries there is a huge gap between legality and legitimacy of political processes. To counter the wrong description of the causes of the crisis of sustainability and the propagation of the very same causes now sold as solutions, it would be necessary to reclaim political spaces at every level. This would be a precondition, too, to implement alternatives.

One important aspect, which is somewhat different from the North, is recreating policy space for the governments of the South, which is restricted by the debt burden, but which has also been bargained away by the WTO and other free trade agreements, and which is necessary for example for a policy on food security. In general – and for the North too – there is a need to reassert the primacy of the policy space and to develop a “new self-confidence” to enable the state as the legitimate representative of the public interest, to bring about the necessary changes and to stop wrong developments or influences.

Second, expanding the political space for citizens to participate, and to “rethink the state” is another important aspect. The classical concept is not enough any more, not only regarding participation. What is needed are new institutions, new rules, etc. for expression of social and cultural diversity for example, and the recognition of citizenship for everybody. The centrality of

democracy and democratic control “as a seed of change” is obvious. To strengthen democracy, it is not enough to demand “democratisation” in the formal way understood in the Western countries with its emphasis on multi party systems, elections, etc., which are prone to corruption and distortion, as was reported from Cameroon, but to develop own democratic forms. Working with local communities as in Zimbabwe for example could be a way to strengthen democratic structures from the grass roots.

Third, political power should be “relocalised” to the local level. This could give people the opportunities to rebuild local economies which they themselves can control, which

are not for growing profits, but for the needs of the people, and which could be more sustainable. Good practices, experiences and alternative approaches for this, such as agroecology, have been available for long but implementation is difficult because of opposing forces.

| Structural change

Fourth, also the imbalances, hierarchies, and concentration of power in social relations should be changed, since they translate into social and political power. As women movements have been arguing for a long time, “private is political”, and there is a close connection between personal values and public values – such as the issue of gender based violence. The crisis is therefore



Photo: Johanna Laible / EED

Change requires commitment and international solidarity. Before this conference Fatima Shabodien (Woman on Farms) and other foreign guests also participated in the McPlanet Congress in Berlin in 2009.

Photo: Johanna Laible / EED



Inspired by the slogan “Game over. Restart!” more than 1700 participants discussed about the worldwide crisis and equitable global alternatives at the McPlanet Congress 2009.

seen also as a result of patriarchy and values related to that, and there is an urgent need to be aware of the dialectics between individual values and the structural change that people dream for.

But reclaiming policy space is a tremendous task against many odds, with depressing backlashes too. In Brazil for example, there were so many hopes pitted to President Luiz Inácio “Lula” da Silva from the Workers’ Par-

ty, but in the meantime participants from Brazil felt that he “capitulated”. Again, these changes could become more difficult with the present crisis, because it might for example seem more urgent to tackle climate change than to develop democracy. But “to mobilise the people” for the necessary change, “this political and democratic space is necessary”.

Die interaktive Ausstellung

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Role of civil society

“Without strong commitment from civil society, the transformation to a sustainable Germany will not happen. To navigate the sea change, we are called upon now more than ever to look beyond our own limited horizons, share our ideas, link up our actions and develop new forms of cooperation.”

From: Compass Bearings for a Course Change

There is a broad consensus on the urgency of the tasks, explicitly on the need to reflect on present approaches to development, empowerment and alliance building, on refining them and taking them further, on developing new, innovative and inclusive approaches, on putting forward visions and clarifying languages, and on building new forms of solidarity and cooperation. This is necessary in order to turn the crisis into an opportunity for sustainability. Because this might not happen automatically. It has to be pushed. So another lead question, frequently referred to during the discussions, was what NGOs, civil society organisation and churches in North and South can contribute. How to build up the power of civil society, churches and others to promote change? How to “get strong”? And how to strengthen the “voices from below”, how to empower people and to turn them from affected victims to actors?

Of course, there is a whole range of instruments, activities and processes established in the NGO sector how to facilitate change, supported by experiences and some suc-



Photo: D. Knoche

cesses. Political awareness building takes centre stage, and for EED and “Brot für die Welt” the study “Sustainable Germany” is one central contribution to change towards sustainability with a whole range of educational material, workshops, trainings, and seminars contributing to raise political awareness in Germany.

| Alternatives

Another area where NGOs and civil society have their strengths is looking for and promoting alternatives, which will offer more realistic perspectives for change and sustainability for the millions of people affected so far by globalisation and left out by concepts like the Green New Deal. The “reconstruction of the concept of development” is necessary. It has to include poverty as well as environment, without pitting one against the other. This also has to include re-framing priorities – housing instead of cars, or focussing on agroecology and food sovereign-

Representatives of civil societies from all over the world met at the World Social Forum in Belém this year. Looking for alternatives that offer promising prospects for change and sustainability – these are the areas where NGOs and civil society can show their strengths.

ty instead of big and prestigious projects. Obviously, there are no “blueprints”, but there can be no doubt about a wide range of proposals that have often proven feasible. As in Africa and in indigenous communities, in many countries there is a wealth of traditions of community development and numerous starting points, vast knowledge and models of social organisations that could provide answers as well.

| Overcoming limitations

While there are many experiences and mechanisms how civil society – including NGOs – is contributing to change, the limitations of NGOs in particular and civil society in general must be discussed and reflected as well. Although everybody is painfully aware of them, there should be much more thinking and debate how to overcome them.

Limitations to the power of NGOs and civil society are numerous: the multiplicity of organisations, isolation of activities, overburdening because the withdrawal of the state from economic and social areas confers more and more tasks to NGOs. There are political and ideological divisions as well, and a limited capacity to mobilise masses as a counterweight and pressure force, especially in the North. So there is no doubt that it is necessary to concentrate more on what NGOs and Civil society can do best, to clarify what they cannot do, etc. instead of burdening civil society organisation with ever new tasks and objectives. More reflection is needed on what is necessary to build their own power and to contribute to strengthen civil society and the citizens and political movements at large. Successful movements in the past, such as feminist thinking about the role of reproductive work and patriarchal violence, which is such an important problem in many countries like South Africa, could provide also some reference points.

One way for development and environment NGOs to overcome this is to build new alliances. The crisis is also an opportunity to look for such allies, which has often been neglected in the past in favour of either splendid isolation or closer cooperation with the state, using spaces offered by governments, institutions and corporations sometimes leading to co-optation. Many social movements, trade unions, workers' and farmers' organisations for example find themselves in a very similar situation and with a similar need to react to the crisis and to act in the crisis to steer further developments into a more favourable direction. They face the

Peru in summer 2009: Many people died during fights as indigenous peoples tried to protect their habitat. The pictures show a burst pipeline in the rainforest and a press conference organised by the "Indigenous Association for the Development of the Peruvian Rainforest".

same challenges to defend against the negative impacts of the crisis and to use the opportunities for a transformation. Unfortunately, there is reluctance to intensify this debate, from both sides.

Undoubtedly this is a difficult course, because "old" social movements everywhere like workers' movement, women's movements, etc. are often in disarray or disintegrating. While in many countries of the South there are already (emerging) "new" social movements, some of them stronger, some weaker, and cooperation between them and NGOs is progressing, there is a challenge to build social movements in the North. There is also a role for organisations like EED and "Brot für die Welt" to create political awareness within churches and beyond. For this, the study can be an appropriate vehicle to formulate economic alternatives "as churches" not only in the South, but in the North as well.

This broadening of alliances and solidarity between North and South, South and South, and within countries and in different areas of engagement (environment, women, labour, lobby, action oriented research, etc.) is important to overcome the limitations of NGOs and a fragmented civil society and to challenge the powers that be more effectively. Furthermore; some of those potential alliance partners can provide some of the radical ideas and actions that are necessary for a radical change. | |



Photo: Ben Powless



Photo: Ben Powless



Photo: Ben Powless

Sustainable “South” – The Case of Brazil



Photo: D. Knochte

River dweller from Amazonia.

Sustainability should not be achieved at the expense of diversity and complexity. This applies to the ecosystems as well as to people’s way of living.

Third, the notion of democratic sustainability has to make diversity a central pillar. While the market logic has homogenised social identities, the diversity of the different forms of social organisations of farmers, fishermen, urban and rural communities, women, etc. has to be advocated. It is necessary to think about the diversity of arrangements – socially, culturally, politically – according to the diversity of social identities, trying to achieve sustainability without reducing the diversity and complexity of ecosystems and social organisations.

| Building own history and future

Fourth, it has to be recognised that these diverse social players are struggling for their citizenship, and by doing this they are building their own history, their own projects, their own future. This has to be empowered because they are the protagonists of social and environmental struggles that aim for example at democratising the access to natural resources, the protagonists for change and implementation of alternatives.

Another point is the understanding of human rights. While it has been defined by Sachs as an issue of “absolute justice”, in a country like Brazil where inequalities are so deep, “distributive justice” is crucial when thinking about human rights.

Finally, the process of change towards sustainability needs to be based on the idea of transition where the changes are worked out together with players in their historical processes. For this, political research, academic research, social struggles and

The Latin American country of Brazil is in many respects a model for other regions in the South: An emerging economy, a regional power and an important actor not only in South-South relations but also at the global level of the World Trade Organisation WTO or G20. At the same time it is still struggling with many problems of underdevelopment, injustice and power politics. Fatima Mello raised issues that should be on top of the agenda for achieving a “sustainable and democratic Brazil”, which might be valid for other countries too:

The first point is related to what Wolfgang Sachs called the dominance of the “Euro-Atlantic world”. Many countries and people

have lived with the illusion that integration into the world market would lead to development. But now with this severe environmental crisis and conflicts and social injustices and inequalities continuing and even increasing, it became clear that this promise has failed in countries like Brazil. External trade has also increased inequality within the country, between exporters and small farmers for example.

| Democratic sustainability

A second point is that the choices about the mode of production and consumption, “about what we produce, for whom we produce, the destiny of production are political choices”. The lesson is that sustainability, democracy, and the strengthening of citizenship have to go hand in hand, one depending on the other, and sustainability cannot be achieved without the political issues.

Acknowledgement

To write a report that is not only minute taking or a more or less detailed transcription of interventions and discussions is not an easy task, especially for a conference which has touched upon so many issues, concepts, ideas, proposals and sharing of experiences, with people participating who are highly knowledgeable and experienced in their respective fields of engagement. Clearly, this report is not a point to point recalling of the conference which would be impossible within some 20 pages, but a condensation of red threads, main issues raised and – a few – arguments and controversies.

Therefore I want to apologize to everybody who might not find himself or herself properly represented in this report, as well as for any misinterpretation, misunderstanding or distortions, which might have flown into it. At the same time I want to thank all and everybody for the inspiring contributions and ideas, put forward at the conference, which made my task so interesting.

Uwe Hoering



Uwe Hoering
 Journalist, numerous publications about development policy, environmental issues and social movements.
www.globe-spotting.de

Photo: D. Knoche



Photo: D. Knoche



Above and left: People in Brasilia. The inequality is huge in Brazil. The integration into the global market has not led to development, but aggravated the social divide.

movements have to be put together, trying to find solutions and to build projects in very concrete terms. "We have to talk the language of the people to bring change – less technical, more life and faces, and context".

Photos: Johanna Laible / EED



Conference Programme

Monday, April 27

- 14.00 Opening and Welcome
Ulrich Gundert, Brot für die Welt

- Presentation of the programme
Claudia Warning, EED

- Can Germany address challenges of globalisation in a sustainable way?**
Keynote Speech
Wolfgang Sachs, Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy

- 16.30 Comments
Ricardo Navarro, Friends of the Earth International
Fatima Mello, Federation of Organisations for Social and Educational Assistance (FASE)
Fatima Shabodien, Women on Farms Project (WFP)
Facilitator: Claudia Warning, EED

- 20.00 World Café – Brief presentation of own sustainable activities, ideas, flashlights
Facilitator: Richard Brand, EED

Tuesday, April 28

- 9.00 **An improved lasting lifestyle – What is the intrinsic meaning of life?**
Keynote Speech
Rebecca Tanui, Building Eastern Africa Community Network (BEACON)
Facilitator: Thorsten Göbel, Brot für die Welt

- Economic activity beyond economic growth – Are the poor paying the price?

- Panel Discussion
Chee Yoke Ling, Third World Network
Candido Grzybowski, Brazilian Institute of Social and Economic Analyses (IBASE)
Jürgen Maier, German NGO Forum on Environment and Development
Facilitator: Nicola Liebert, Journalist

- 14.00 Working Groups

- Climate Change / Climate Justice
Inputs
Chee Yoke Ling, Third World Network
Jörg Haas, European Climate Foundation
Facilitator: Stefan Cramer, Brot für die Welt

- Education for sustainable development
Inputs
Kambiz Ghawami, World University Service (WUS)
David Aprasidze, Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development
Facilitator: Klaus Seitz, Brot für die Welt

- Energy Security
Inputs
Fabby Tumiwa, Institute for Essential Services Reform (IESR)
Jürgen Maier, German NGO Forum on Environment and Development
Facilitator: Wolfgang Heinrich, EED

Food security / Food sovereignty
 Inputs
 Jobst Kraus, Evangelical Academy
 Bad Boll
 Irmi Salzer, Via Campesina Austria
 Facilitator: Bernhard Walter, Brot für
 die Welt

Trade
 Inputs
 Jacob Kotcho, Citizen's Association
 for the Defence of Collective Interests
 (ACDIC)
 Iara Pietricovsky de Oliveira, Institute
 for Socioeconomic Studies (INESC)
 Fatima Mello, Federation of Organi-
 sations for Social and Educational
 Assistance (FASE)
 Tilman Santarius, Wuppertal Insti-
 tute for Climate, Environment and
 Energy
 Facilitator: Michael Frein, EED

Labour / Employment
 Inputs
 May Wong, Globalization Monitor
 Roland Klose, Diakonisches Werk der
 EKD
 Facilitator: Richard Brand, EED

17.15 Plenary
 Presentation of working group results
 Facilitator: Thorsten Göbel, Brot für
 die Welt

19.30 Public event
**Sustainable Development worldwide
 – Expectations, opinions and ideas of
 civil society actors**
 Panel discussion
 Iara Pietricovsky de Oliveira, Institute
 for Socioeconomic Studies (INESC)
 Charlene Hewat, Environment Africa
 Joji Carino, Tebtebba Foundation
 Tilman Santarius, Wuppertal Insti-
 tute for Climate, Environment and
 Energy
 Facilitator: Nicola Liebert, Journalist

Wednesday, April 29

9.00 **Strategies to achieve sustainability –
 How could it work?**
 Keynote speech
 Martin Jänicke, Environmental Policy
 Research Centre, Free University
 Berlin

10.30 Comments
 Antje von Broock, Friends of the
 Earth Germany (BUND)
 Christoph Stückelberger, Globethics
 Joji Carino, Tebtebba Foundation
 Manfred Konukiewitz, Federal Min-
 istry for Economic Co-operation and
 Development

Plenary discussion

Observations and lessons to learn
 Uwe Hoering, Journalist
 Facilitator: Jürgen Reichel, EED

12.50 Farewell and blessing
 Wilfried Steen, EED



Participants

David Aprasidze, Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development (CIPCDD), Georgia

Wolfgang Beer, Evangelische Akademien in Deutschland, Germany

Vivi Bentin, Interpreter, Germany

Brigitte Binder, EED, Germany

Eva Bitterlich, EED, Germany

Ilonka Boltze, EED, Germany

Richard Brand, EED, Germany

Rudolf Buntzel, EED, Germany

Sara Campos Arnoldi, Interpreter, Germany

Joji Carino, Indigenous Peoples' International Centre for Policy Research and Education (Tebtebba), United Kingdom

Yoke Ling Chee, Third World Network (TWN), Malaysia

Stefan Cramer, Brot für die Welt, Germany

Satyajit Das, Church's Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA), India

Ana de Ita, Center of Studies for a Change in Rural Mexico (CECCAM), Mexico

Karin Döhne, EED, Germany

Idrissa Embalo, National Institute of Studies and Investigation (INEP), Guinea-Bissau

Udo Fickert, Kindernothilfe, Germany

Michael Frein, EED, Germany

Peter Fuchs, WEED, Germany

Naira Gelashvili, Center for Cultural Relations Caucasian House (CCRCH), Georgia

Kambiz Ghawami, World University Service (WUS), Germany

Thorsten Göbel, Brot für die Welt, Germany

Christiane Grefe, Journalist, Germany

Cândido Grzbowski, Brazilian Institute of Social and Economic Analyses (IBASE), Brasilien

Ulrich Gundert, Brot für die Welt, Germany

Jörg Haas, European Climate Foundation, Germany

Wolfgang Heinrich, EED, Germany

Charlene Hewat, Environment Africa, Simbabwe

Uwe Hoering, Journalist, Germany

Monika Huber, EED, Germany

Sabine Hupp, EED, Germany

Martin Jänicke, Free University Berlin, Germany

Sašo Klekovski, Macedonian Center for International Cooperation (MCIC), Macedonia

Roland, Klose, Diakonisches Werk der EKD, Germany

Heiner Knauss, EED, Germany

Manfred Konukiewitz, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Germany

Jacob Kotcho, Citizen's Association for the Defence of Collective Interests (ACDIC), Cameroon

Jobst Kraus, Evangelische Akademie Bad Boll, Germany

Tim Kuschnerus, EED, Germany

Johannes Küstner, Brot für die Welt, Germany

Johanna Laible, EED, Germany

Peter Lanzet, EED, Germany

Nicola Liebert, Journalist, Germany

Bernd Ludermann, welt-sichten, Germany

Jürgen Maier, German NGO Forum on Environment and Development, Germany

Francisco Mari, EED, Germany

Erika Märke, EED, Germany

Petra Meinhardt, Brot für die Welt, Germany

Fatima Mello, Federation of Social and Educational Assistance Organisations (FASE), Brazil

Klaus Milke, Germanwatch, Germany

Rama Mohan, Centre for World Solidarity (CWS), India

Avanthi N. Rao, Centre for World Solidarity (CWS), India

Ricardo Navarro, Friends of the Earth International (FOEI), El Salvador

Fon Nsoh, Community Initiative for Sustainable Development (COMINSUD), Cameroon

Iara Pietrikowski de Oliveira, Institute for Social and Economic Studies (INESC), Brazil

Henning Reetz, Brot für die Welt, Germany

Jürgen Reichel, EED, Germany

Martin Remppis, Brot für die Welt, Germany

Regine Richter, Urgewald, Germany

Sebastian Rötters, FoodFirst Information and Action Network (FIAN), Germany

Wolfgang Sachs, Wuppertal Institut for Climate, Environment and Energy, Germany

Irmi Salzer, Via Campesina (ÖBV), Austria

Tilman Santarius, Wuppertal Institut for Climate, Environment and Energy, Germany

Gerlind Schneider, EED, Germany

Wolfgang Seiss, EED, Germany

Klaus Seitz, Brot für die Welt, Germany

Fatima Shabodien, Women on Farms Project (WFP), South Africa

Wilfried Steen, EED, Germany

Christoph Stückelberger, Globethics, Switzerland

Rebecca Tanui, Building Eastern Africa Community Network (BEACON), Kenya

Rainer Tigges, EED, Germany

Fabby Tumiwa, Institute for Essential Services Reform (IESR), Indonesia

Stefan Tuschen, EED, Germany

Antje von Broock, Friends of the Earth Germany (BUND), Germany

Jean Marc von der Weid, Assessment and Services to Projects of Alternative Agriculture (AS-PTA), Brazil

Arndt von Massenbach, INKOTA-Netzwerk e.V., Germany

Bernhard Walter, Brot für die Welt, Germany

Claudia Warning, EED, Germany

May Wong, Globalisation Monitor (GM), China

Brot für die Welt

Environmental and developmental crises are inextricably interwoven. Nobody suffers more from the effects of climate change than the poor in the countries of the South. The overexploitation of our natural resources initiated by the growth model of the industrialized countries has become a symbol for the lack of international justice. Hence "Brot für die Welt" (Bread for the World) advocates a policy change towards fair and sustainable development – in our country as well as in the developing countries.

"Brot für die Welt" is an aid programme launched by the Protestant churches in Germany for development cooperation. It was founded in 1959 with the prime objective of providing a life in dignity for the disadvantaged and outsiders. "Bread for the World" cooperates with local churches and partner organisations in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe on over 1,000 projects, all of which also aspire to help people to help themselves.

Moreover, "Brot für die Welt" strives to call attention to social injustice all over the world through its public relations activities while deliberately avoiding any finger-pointing. People in Germany are encouraged to make this world a better place through activities in their communities and parishes and through political commitment, as well as by embarking upon a resource-efficient and globally compatible way of life.

More about Brot für die Welt:
www.brot-fuer-die-welt.de | |



What kind of sustainable policy is compatible with nature? A policy that allows further generations and people living in the southern hemisphere a secure existence. BUND believes that this cannot be achieved with a policy that relies stubbornly on the principle of "more and more, faster and faster": using ever more resources, covering more and more of nature with concrete, coming up faster and faster with pseudo-solutions instead of making the right connections. Transport policy, for instance, should focus on mobility and regional planning, as ever more cars on the street bring us not forward progress, but only hectic rushing and stress. More and more greenfield shopping centers also entail more automotive traffic.

For more than thirty years now BUND has championed the protection of nature and the environment. With over 470,000 members and donors it is the biggest German environmental association. In 16 state-level branches and about 2,000 groups, BUND members direct their efforts to the conservation of nature and biodiversity.

BUND is also active in the international arena, endeavouring to prevent a climate catastrophe, advocating a fair exchange between the North and the South. It is a member of Friends of the Earth, the largest federation of independent environmental organisations worldwide. The study "Sustainable Germany", published in 1996 by BUND in cooperation with Misereor, had a significant influence on the sustainability discussion in Germany.

More about the BUND: www.bund.net | |



As an organisation of the Protestant Churches in Germany, the Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst (Church Development Service, EED) grants 300 projects financial support amounting to over 100 million euros each year. It assists partners in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe in combating poverty and promoting justice. In addition, it detaches experts to assist project partners overseas and grants scholarships to students from partner countries.

In Germany the EED supports the development policy-related educational activities of 500 organisations including local churches, church groups, political action committees and NGOs with grants for tutorials and educational journeys, for campaigns and information material.

In cooperation with its partners the EED uses its advocacy work and public relations activities to bring developmental issues to the attention of churches and the German and European public. In so doing the EED strives to influence discussions and political decisions toward global justice and sustainable development.

EED partners in the North and the South include churches, Christian organisations and non-governmental organisations that pursue the same objectives and mission statements as the EED: justice, peace and the conservation of God's creation. EED is engaged in an ongoing process in which specific development perspectives for the South and the North are continuously being reformulated.

More about the EED: www.eed.de | |

Concept and editing:
Richard Brand, Michael Frein, Thorsten
Göbel, Jürgen Reichel and Klaus Seitz;
Anja Ruf (p.p. WELT-SICHTEN)

Text: Uwe Hoering

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V.i.S.d.P.: Jürgen Reichel (EED)

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Redaktion „welt-sichten“
P.O. Box 50 05 50
D-60394 Frankfurt/Main
www.welt-sichten.org

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Karlsruher Str. 11
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Tel. 0711 - 2159-777
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vertrieb@diakonie.de
www.brot-fuer-die-welt.de

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Evangelischer
Entwicklungsdienst

Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst e. V.
Öffentlichkeitsreferat
Ulrich-von-Hassell-Str. 76
53123 Bonn
Tel. 0228 - 8101- 0
Fax 0228 - 8101-160
vertrieb@eed.de
www.eed.de

