

...so that Personnel Development  
Co-operation has a lasting effect

Interviews with co-ordinators  
in the South





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Traditional agriculture  
in the Philippines.

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## Co-ordinations: meeting point between North and South

Local co-ordination is the meeting point between the partner organisations wishes, the volunteers' hopes, the objectives of the sending agencies and the local needs. It offers a common area where the interests of these stakeholders meet. The key is professional, socio-cultural and personal mediation and exchange. Technically, this co-ordination is a strong pillar, guaranteeing quality.

Our publication is intended as an acknowledgment addressed to all the co-ordinators of the Swiss Personnel Development Co-operation. Firstly, for the interesting discussions and criticisms during the interviews, but also for the demanding work they provide, which involves merging different expectations into a common vision. In this respect, the co-ordinators take on multiple roles in adapting to different contexts and local realities which vary widely. The following texts from Latin America, Africa and Asia illustrate this complexity.

**SEPP GÄHWILER**, PRESIDENT OF UNITÉ  
**MARTIN SCHREIBER**, GENERAL SECRETARY UNITÉ

Unité, Swiss association for the exchange of personnel in development co-operation, is a platform whose main objective is to establish and foster ties of solidarity and sharing with the poor in developing countries. Unité represents 22 Swiss organisations that specialise in Personnel Development Co-operation between the North and South, and who work closely with governmental, non-governmental, church or grass-roots organisations.

The services provided by Unité include the quality assurance, policy development in the Personnel Development Co-operation and a continuing education programme for the employees of its member organisations. Other key tasks are to represent the interests, as well as maintain and expand national and international networks.

Unité and its member organisations are supported in the framework of the Programme for the Personnel Development Co-operation and the North-South Exchange by the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation (SDC). Unité member organisations are represented through approximately 300 development workers in over 30 countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia. Their programmes focus specifically in the following areas: social and community work, health, education, agriculture, ecology, human rights and also in the institutional development and support of small and medium enterprises (SME).



### The local co-ordination

Many of Unité's member organisations rely on local co-ordination for the establishment and management of their programmes in the South. The tasks of the co-ordination typically include institutional representation on site, management of the development programme (quality assurance), the accompaniment of the development workers, and participation of public relations in the North.

In general, they provide the relationship between the partners in the North and the South. The challenge is great and the co-ordinators must exercise great social and professional skills:

1. Experience of international co-operation, especially with grassroots organisations and NGOs;
2. Knowledge of the Swiss development co-operation, especially in the field of Personnel Development Co-operation;
3. Knowledge of the country and the region;
4. Experience in public relations, awareness raising and representation;
5. Experience in management and accompaniment of personnel;
6. Experience in negotiation, communication and mediation (social and cultural sensibility);
7. Experience in monitoring and evaluation techniques;
8. Knowledge of administration, accountancy, office management, finances and planning.

### Personal Development Co-operation – development with a human face!

The Personal Development Co-operation is a specific practice within the international co-operation that allows mutual learning through the meeting, exchange and collaboration between people from the North and South.

By this exchange of individuals, partner organisations are strengthened in a sustainable manner and development initiatives are stimulated. The Personal Development Co-operation is complementary to inputs through the financing of projects and programmes.

On average, development worker assignments last between three and five years. They are complemented by North-South, South-South and short-term engagements. The professional, social, methodological and managing skills of the development workers contribute to the ongoing changes in the Southern countries, particularly, in terms of technology exchange and transfer (Capacity Development, Institution Building), complemented by sociopolitical activities (Empowerment and Advocacy) and contributions in the field of promoting peace and interreligious dialogue. Effective co-operation during long-term assignments is based on the ongoing relationships with partner institutions and local movements. In the North, the effect of such co-operation is manifested through information, education and training, that is disseminated through practical experience gained by development workers in the field. These new skills can be valorised and applied in a concrete way upon their return to the workplace, as well as in a social engagement, for example, in international co-operation, migration, multiculturalism, the educational system, churches, fair trade, ecology, and politics.

Personnel Development Co-operation shows the human face of the international co-operation. Development workers are solidarity ambassadors of the Swiss civil society.



## The wisdom of everyday experience in the South

Living the co-operation without forgetting that “we are guests in the South”... Help overcome the wounds from past colonial rule... Daily practice of modesty in the relationships of mutual learning... Breaking the vision of “knowledge transfer” by replacing it with the paradigm of horizontal exchange in the framework of co-operation designed as a “two-lane road and not a one-way street.”

But also to strengthen Southern partner organisations so they can be actors of their own achievable utopias... And at the same time, inform, educate and change Swiss attitudes, by enriching them with real experiences gathered in Africa, Asia or Latin America.

This bouquet of wisdom is apparent from these seven interviews, conducted by Unité over the last three years with just a few of the co-ordinators of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Switzerland dedicated to the Personnel Development Co-operation - until recently known as NGOs “sending volunteers to the South.” The daily experiences of 300 Swiss development workers who work in some 30 countries where NGOs are present, who belong to Unité, are reflected in their statements. In addition, the backbone of their practical and conceptual balance sheet forms the rich experience of the partner organisations in the South: NGOs, communities and social pastoral, local initiatives, popular movements, networks and institutions. In its majority, they represent a civil society on the path to consolidation.

The history behind these interviews is a process that began twenty years ago, in 1992, with the evaluation of the Swiss volunteer efforts in Latin America and Africa.

This perspective has enabled the emergence of a new critical awareness: since then, the NGOs involved in Unité decided to establish a more professional structure in order to realise a stronger, professional, dynamic co-

ordination, playing a bridging role and, in some cases, even an intermixing of Europeans and locals.

The co-ordinators play a complex role: first and foremost, they represent Swiss NGOs and accompany the development workers in their operations. At the same time they must assume the complex role of interlocutors; spokesperson for the needs of the South to the organisations of the North: in short, they must act as ‘facilitators’.

This brochure is not intended to be either a scientific or a result-oriented evaluation balance sheet. Instead, it shows in chronological order, a brief but detailed overview of the journalistic work of Unité, which since 2008 has enabled these ‘facilitators’ of the development co-operation to have a voice through the interviews. Thus, the purpose of this publication is based on the belief that personal evidence outweighs reports and questionnaires. They attempt to highlight that this type of co-operation is the most fruitful; that is to say human exchange, with all the strengths of everyday life, thus allowing that the reflection of partner organisations and development workers be transmitted through these irreplaceable ‘facilitators’.

The best token of appreciation for them is to put their words into perspective. In other words, to understand them in the context of reality, which is sometimes very complex, where they live and work, whilst remaining aware that these texts reflect years of accumulated experience, to address difficult cross-cultural missions and deep questions arising from the practice in the field. I am sure that the hours of recording and distance travelled, both physical and virtual, will help enhance the professional co-operation and human solidarity. Co-operation is absolutely essential, just like any bridge that brings shores, continents and civilisations closer.

**SERGIO FERRARI, UNITÉ PRESS SERVICE**

## 1

# "We must never forget that in Bolivia we are guests"

Thirty Swiss development workers are currently working in Bolivia on a variety of projects. They belong to various NGOs; members of the Swiss platform Unité. A binational co-ordination that is responsible to accompany and follow the relationships with more than twenty organisations, movements and institutional partners. Elke Kalkowski, co-head of this structure, arrived in Bolivia almost thirty years ago, during this time she has always had a special relationship with both the European co-operation as well as key social partners in the country.



**ELKE KALKOWSKI**  
UNITÉ CO-ORDINATOR IN BOLIVIA

## What is the work of the co-ordination?

It is extremely varied, and that's what makes it interesting, not to mention exciting. We carry out the follow-up of development workers, we visit them where their project is and we meet their partners. Often we have to go to several places.

When we are in Cochabamba, where our headquarters is situated, we have numerous contacts with the volunteers and their partners. But we are also in contact with all kinds of networks and organisations, Bolivian and European. We maintain close links with the services of the official Swiss co-operation and with other NGOs in the country. But the bottom line lies with the relationship of the development workers and the partners.

## Who are the partners?

Some are grassroots organisations. Many are Bolivian NGOs of various kinds, whose orientations are varied. We also work with public authorities, particularly at local level, in general highly politicised bodies in the traditional sense. This type of relationship is not always simple. The objectives and nature of the co-operation will very often depend on their vision, for example, that the Mayor has submitted an application to us. In addition,

the authorities are constantly changing, which does not help when trying to build a stable relationship.

## Does this mean that it is easier to work with grassroots partners, social movements or members of the civil society?

Without a doubt! However working with the public authorities opens possibilities, especially in the current economic situation. But as I have already mentioned this is complicated. Old habits cannot disappear overnight, and they do not facilitate the task of the volunteers who come from different cultures, including Switzerland.

## Which aspect of this exchange brings the greatest rewards?

Intercultural relations, the possibility that this kind of co-operation offers members of different societies to get to know each other better. The exchange helps to fight against certain prejudices, which are observed in Switzerland, as well as in Bolivia; for example, in the South, the idea that all gringos are rich, that they come to engage in questionable practices and so on. The presence of people coming together led to high-

lighting the interests of both societies in a globalised world. It is difficult to achieve this if we simply fund projects. The exchange of people is a vital complement, a crucial pillar of the integral co-operation. With it, international co-operation has a human face. In addition, there is a guarantee against "fabulous projects" that do not always truly benefit the people of the South.

## And the technical contribution?

This is, of course, an essential component, especially when it is provided by companies where education and training are highly developed. Certain professions do not exist in Bolivia. But beware: our partners do not want foreign experts who come to bring the "truth" or pass on their knowledge in a mechanical way. What is important for them, is knowledge that is useful to them and which is adapted to the reality of Bolivia. In addition, they want a genuine exchange where everyone gives and receives, and they want co-operation such as the joint construction of something new, a construction in which both parties make a contribution.

## After all these years of work, what are the most challenging aspects with regard to volunteers from Switzerland?

In terms of Bolivia, the repeated changes of officials and contacts, particularly when they are public authorities, complicate matters. Two attitudes are available: either we consider that these changes make it impossible to work together, or we take the matter calmly and examine the possibilities of further collaboration. In any case, it seems important to continue to support the ongoing process - and I emphasise process, not ruling party - and to offer our modest contribution to the strengthening of democratic structures, for example, the fight against corruption. Indeed, the country began a fight against this scourge, and has no intention of stopping along the way. On the side of the Northern partner, it is necessary to keep in mind that the volunteers come from a country where the reality is very different. Very often, they fail to adapt, to get away from the competition, very rooted in the mentality of the people of the North, which is expressed by the pace and way of working. Sometimes the development workers have a sense of



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Indigenous children in Cochabamba, Bolivia.

failure if they do not accomplish all the objectives of their project. Furthermore, it is true that we feel a change of “generation” on the part of volunteers who may have a less “militant” vision. But we cannot generalise naturally. There are many differences between people and between the NGOs to which they belong.

**Bolivia is experiencing a particular historical situation. How must the international co-operation place itself in this situation?**

Generally, the co-operation carries out an in-depth reflection, and had few choices from the time when President Evo Morales stressed that he did not want bosses, but rather partners and even friends. A new stage has started for the co-operation, which can no longer act as before, or exercise a power that no one dares to question. It must now align with the State project - and I stress the State, not the political party in power. This may involve some risks, due to the instability of institutions. But the potential is huge. He who sincerely wishes to help Bolivia out of poverty can only support the process. This, to me, seems completely logical.

**Should the co-operation be more humble and willing to listen?**

Any co-operation, wherever it is, should always have these characteristics. However, probably more so today in Bolivia: listening with humility. We must not lose sight of that as development workers we are visitors,

guests in this country. We welcome them because we have a common essential objective, namely the transformation of structures that support the poor. But the co-operation must review its concept, and accept that North-South relations have changed in nature. I insist that partners welcome us, in their country. International co-operation has no right to tell the Bolivians what to do in their country.

*End 2008*

**“Listening with humility. We must not lose sight of that as development workers we are visitors...”**

**ELKE KALKOWSKI**

# 2 "Strengthen civil society and promote food security"

Economist and journalist, Jürg Schiess, lives in Colombia, where he arrived as a development worker. He first worked for the Instituto Latinoamericano de Servicios Legales Alternativos (Latin American Institute of Alternative Legal Services) and, since April 2008, has been the national co-ordinator of InterTEAM. "My task is to build a network of partner organisations that InterTEAM would like to collaborate with, by offering the work of a Swiss development worker", said Jürg Schiess.

### What does the work of InterTEAM in Colombia consist of?

The 2009 - 2012 programme for Colombia prioritises the strengthening of civil society and food security. In this context, we support organisations that are active in human rights, justice, democracy, peace, fair trade or strengthening of micro enterprises. From a geographical point of view, we focus our efforts on Bogotá, Cali, Sincelejo and their surroundings.

In terms of development, our programme responds to a genuine need in Colombia. More than forty years of internal conflict and impunity, the massacres of all social organisational leaders and the stigma of social and popular organisations - that are referred to as "terrorists" - have greatly weakened civil society. This is a major obstacle to the deepening of democracy. However, without a consolidated democracy there can be no social justice or peace. Moreover, the strengthening of civil society is closely linked to food secu-



**JÜRIG SCHIESS**  
INTERTEAM CO-ORDINATOR  
IN COLOMBIA



## “The presence of a stranger opens up new possibilities and allows the partner to benefit from innovative experiences...”

JÜRIG SCHIESS

city. Without an adequate daily diet to be healthy and to live actively, it is very difficult to find the time and energy necessary to care for the community or political influence.

According to a 2007 study by the Colombian Institute of the Family, 41 per cent of the population does not receive a basic food ration. The Interteam strategy is clear: focus on these two issues and increase the impact of its missions.

### What are the main challenges for the future?

The principal challenge consists of consolidating our programme. On one side, we need to have a strategic vision in the selection of partner organisations. It is important that the various missions of Interteam are not dispersed; on the contrary, they are in synergy in order to increase their impact. In addition, it is necessary to clearly define the mission of the voluntary collaboration early. It makes little sense that they work mostly

on the operational activities within the organisation, as in this case, the impact of their efforts will finish at the end of their contract. For a mission to have a lasting effect, it must contribute to the institutional strengthening of a partner organisation. This explains why the co-operation is increasingly becoming an advisory role.

### What does the presence of development workers bring to a country like Colombia in your eyes?

Partner organisations are demanding more and more volunteers with specific skills. It is often difficult for them to find a person with the profile that they need on the Colombian labour market. Interteam can, among other benefits, provide experts with the necessary qualifications. In addition, the presence of a stranger opens up new possibilities and allows the partner to benefit from innovative experiences. It also increases its safety: evidence that armed groups

moderate their actions of intimidation against organisations that welcomes foreigners.

### Do the partners recognise the contribution that the “Personnel Development Co-operation” represents?

In general, partner organisations appreciate the work of overseas volunteers. We see, among others, the fact that they often extend their contract or ask for a new development worker once the first has completed his mission. Of course, this does not mean that there are never problems. The collaboration between the development worker and the partner organisation is almost always difficult at first, and marred by misunderstanding. But this phase passes and the results are generally satisfactory for both parties. We cannot, however, exclude the possibility that the co-operation may not match the expectations of the partner organisation, or vice versa.

### How can the Swiss civil society support the Colombian civil society?

Switzerland can help in different ways in the development of Colombia; by buying fair trade products, for example. But people should also be aware that when buying drugs they fund a bloody war, they help to increase common crime and encourage corruption. They should also know that buying bio fuels, whose production is heavily promoted in Colombia, they have their share of the responsibility for their disastrous effects on food security and the environment in the South. The Swiss can bring a more general help by supporting the efforts of Swiss NGOs working in Colombia, as well as the collaboration activities of the state. And this not only for altruistic reasons: it is also self-interest. Indeed, in this globalised world, the social and economic problems of the South have an impact on the welfare of the North. Illegal migration increases the social and political tensions in the host country. Moreover, developed nations are being increasingly forced to accept lower living standards to prevent that their companies outsource production to countries where democracy is weak, environmental standards are less demanding and the labour code is less strict.

January 2009



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Peasant children in Northern Colombia.

## 3

## "Strengthening regional social networks"

Over the last thirty years, Central America has been one of the main work areas of NGOs dedicated to the exchange of Personnel Development Co-operation. Hundreds of Swiss volunteers have worked in this region, principally in Nicaragua, but also in El Salvador and Costa Rica. A binational co-ordination has been in place since the early nineties in Nicaragua, to monitor the quality of Swiss NGO aid workers associated with Unité. Mila Incer and Angelika Süllow are the co-ordinators based in Managua. Mila Incer, a psychologist, but also a graduate in business management, is Nicaraguan and has of over twenty years experience in international co-operation. Angelika Süllow, an agricultural engineer of German nationality, has lived in Nicaragua for 17 years.



**MILA INCER  
ANGELIKA SÜLLOW**  
UNITÉ CO-ORDINATORS  
IN CENTRAL AMERICA

### What is the main task of the co-ordination of Swiss development workers in Central America?

**MILA INCER (MI):** To ensure that the partners profit as much as possible from the supportive presence of volunteers, who also take an active part in raising awareness in Switzerland. These two aspects are always the key objectives, and the challenges of our actions.

**ANGELIKA SÜLLOW (AS):** In recent years, the question of the impact of co-operation in general has been strongly debated. The "Personnel Development Co-operation" is not immune to these questions. We believe that our role is to continue to cultivate and promote this special type of co-operation, which provides a "plus" and is, in my opinion, firmly rooted in Switzerland. These roots, the exchanges South-North and North-South, as well as the innovations in the South-South exchanges, are something unique. These features are not as marked in other European development workers.

And we have an additional advantage: the power of intercultural dialogue, which takes place with great seriousness, bringing an added value to the South as well as to the North.

### When we talk about the specific character of Swiss development workers, the topics of intercultural relations and the work of raising awareness in Switzerland appear hand in hand.

**MI:** They are among the priorities of the NGOs that we represent. They are also extensively discussed in the preparation of future volunteers before their departure from Switzerland, and are part of commitments made by the development workers, often closely related to a group of people who support them in Switzerland, throughout their contract. These are key areas.

### In recent years, Central America has seen a new political reality, marked by the activity of social movements and the presence of governments with social sensitivity, particularly in Nicaragua and El Salvador. Does this framework require re-assessment or reconsideration of the co-operation?

**AS:** Indeed, the organisations of the civil society work intensely, and often even independently of the government. They are consolidated within national and regional networks on sensitive issues such as fair trade, the fight against genetically modified organ-

isms, or for the rights of women. We need to help reinforce them. I think the political changes in El Salvador and Nicaragua can strengthen their actions. Partner organisations question certain aspects of the co-operation. They do not appreciate, for example, that international aid will be subject to cut-backs for political reasons. The reduction of the aid, in effect, mainly affects the poor. The co-operation will have to encourage a dialogue between the North and the South in the future and to learn to listen. Development workers come, work and listen: they are closest to the reality. That is their advantage. They can be a bridge between the different worlds.

### In which sectors do the volunteers work?

**MI:** All Swiss NGOs carry out actions in the areas of social and human rights, in a broad sense (women's rights, children, minorities, etc.). The majority are also present in the education sector, the production and marketing of food products, in the security and food sovereignty and the protection of the environment. As for the role and duties of the Swiss volunteers, in an earlier stage, many worked directly at grassroots level with the population. Today, it is the reinforcement of the organisation and local institutions that predominates, and the actions concerning the formation of relief personnel who will spread the knowledge, the methodological support, strategic planning and programming, etc.

### Do you consider this change in profile as positive or negative?

**MI:** It responds to a need. They are the local partners who request this kind of support. Both sides of our work; the work at grassroots level or the institutional strengthening, are as equally important as each other. Most volunteers, even if their task is more institutional, want to work with people to identify their needs and provide advice to partners more efficiently. The two levels of action should not be separated.

**AS:** For example, in the area of agricultural production, technical support is not enough. The development worker must implement a methodology that really works and will lead to the birth of an organisation-



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Everyday life in Nicaragua.

al structure that suits people. If the input technique is not suitable for the way people organise themselves, and is not part of their identity, if it does not comply with their empirical knowledge, we could not expect them to become independent.

**The Swiss volunteers, therefore, prefer to work with people.**

MI: Yes, almost always. And this is understandable. The development workers aim at multiplier effects, and if they want to achieve their goal they must know the direct beneficiaries and their training needs. We find that cross-fertilisation, the fruit of almost permanent exchange of knowledge between the development worker and partner, occurs.

**Official co-operation and NGOs of "Personnel Development Co-operation" are becoming more attentive to the impact of the volunteers' work. Is it difficult to evaluate it?**

MI: It depends on the type of mission. In some cases, objectives and activities are easily measured. But it's more complicated in others. Difficulties may arise, for example, when the tasks are performed by a collective team.

AS: The way we evaluate and select criteria also come into play. Some prefer the quantitative aspect, sometimes at the expense of quality. For us, the creation or strengthening of synergies must be a key criterion of the evaluation. Moreover, with this type of co-operation, the impacts are felt long-term. It's one thing to come and teach people how to assemble pieces of a bicycle, it is another to show them how to use them and teach them to identify situations where it should be used, rather than to go on foot. In general, it is better to provide medium or long-term deadlines, which sometimes go beyond the duration of the mission. I am convinced that the work of a volunteer reaches its full effect after three or five years. That's

why I think we need more flexibility in the duration of contracts.

MI: Sustainability is also an important criterion. A development worker capacitates a team, but in our country, the local personnel changes often and some of those who have received training leave to work elsewhere. In reality, they will implement the knowledge that they have acquired in their new position, but for the benefit of another agency, not the original partner. In all cases the country benefits. It is not always easy to measure and conceptualise all.

*July 2009*

**“We find that cross-fertilisation, the fruit of almost permanent exchange of knowledge between the development worker and partner, occurs.”**

MILA INCER

## 4

## “Long-term co-operation guaranties better quality”

Interteam has been working for over twenty years in Namibia, one of the last countries in Africa to have gained its independence. Period of experience accumulation and consolidation. Swiss theologian and programme co-ordinator, Mark Burri is profoundly convinced that “there is no development without exchange” but this “requires time”. Since 2008 he and his family have lived in Windhoek, the capital.



**MARKUS BURRI**  
INTERTEAM CO-ORDINATOR  
IN NAMIBIA

### **Interteam and Swiss development workers arrived almost at the beginning of the republic...**

Indeed, we arrived shortly before independence. In the beginning, we worked with the Catholic Church who saw the presence of Swiss professionals as an opportunity: The situation was very special because the State barely existed and its structure was very fragile. We had the opportunity to work in the field of education. The first volunteers for several years, were teachers or professors of languages, mathematics, etc., who were involved mainly in the North, as people that live there are the poorest and most numerous. The Church was a very important partner in this phase; it facilitated the presence of the Swiss staff, who also worked in public schools. The programme grew slowly and we went to a second stage: the focus was now on supporting local teachers and educational support. In other words: the multiplication of training.

### **Is education still the main focus area?**

Yes, this is consistent with the institutional programme of Interteam, whose three axes are education, health and nutrition. We currently have twelve development workers

in Namibia, in two of the most marginalised areas of the country, where they are involved in education. We work with the regional education authority. Our work includes: concept formulation, promotion of inclusive education, methodology and didactics, school management and the expansion of the educational vision. A framework agreement was signed with the Ministry of Education, but the work takes place at the regional and local level, in the schools.

### **What are the essential elements, the important components of your programme that make a difference in Namibia?**

The principal difference is the logic of the programme itself. We are very careful and precise in the selection of volunteers because everyone is part of a coherent whole,

and all in our view, are much more than the sum of its individual parts alone. In addition, development workers take ownership of the programme: a volunteer who does something somewhere in the country thinks and plans for the whole group.

### **Can you elaborate on this idea of a group, of totality?**

The volunteers, in their work, are not isolated individuals, they think as part of a group. They are saturated with the programme objectives. The success of one is the success of all. The same goes for the weaknesses.

### **In the education sector, the regional partners are linked to the power structure and to the political party that is in government. Does the collaboration not become difficult if you have, as a development worker, a vision different from the political view?**

We don't talk a lot about politics in Namibia. In addition, the culture is to avoid conflict and direct confrontation, because they separate the individuals. Apart from all of this, there is a complicated history, a seventy year period of Apartheid, which does not facilitate the dialogue with people of different colour. Compared with other African and Latin American countries, people take little part in politics; civil society is not very active. A degree of apathy prevails. There is no significant mobilisation or major questioning. This is quite a special reality and not always easy to understand and accept.

### **Are there other non-governmental, national or international organisations in the country with whom you regularly collaborate or network with?**

Yes: for example, we collaborate closely locally, regionally and nationally with the VSO (Voluntary Services Overseas) from the

**“There is no real development in the South if there is no development of awareness in the North.”**

**MARKUS BURRI**

United Kingdom. We avoid any kind of competition: we plan actions together and we often meet up. Exchange between development workers is very common. We organise joint workshops and all the participants of the voluntary development service meet three times a year. Our vision and methodology are identical in respect to inclusive education.

**Everything indicates that your programme in Namibia focuses on development workers who are committed to a medium and long term? The trend today is for volunteers to only commit to a few months. What is your opinion?**

For us there is no doubt: we are convinced that long-term co-operation ensures a better quality. We consider it vital that the development worker understands the history of our presence and the logic of the programme as a whole. They come to learn, understand and discover. We must invest in building human relationships in an intercultural exchange. There is no development

without exchange: exchange is built over a period of time. Our development workers have three year contracts. The first year is devoted mainly to social and cultural adaptation. The second is the most productive. The third is also effective, but in general, as the contract draws to a close, personal life, with its priorities and concerns related to rehabilitation in Switzerland, begin to weigh. In light of our experiences, I am very critical vis-à-vis the short-term co-operation. But there are exceptions. In 2009 for example, a volunteer came for two months to provide ad hoc support to another volunteer of the project. The experience was interesting but it was a different situation.

**It is not always easy to ensure a quality "supply" from the Personnel Development Co-operation of Swiss NGOs for the "demand" of human resources from Southern partners. What is your specific experience in Namibia?**

Our partners almost always highlight the quality of the human resources who

came to work with them. They seem a little surprised not only by the quality of their work and professional level, but also their social skills and their entire culture of openness to others. To me, this is due to the selection and preparation of development workers before their departure. We rarely have a few failures.

**The work of sending information to Switzerland and raising awareness of the Civil Society of the North, are they equally a priority for you in Namibia?**

The role of development workers to transmit the voices from the inhabitants of the South to the North is very important. For Interteam, work in Switzerland is a priority. There is no real development in the South if there is no development of awareness in the North. Therefore any task intended to have a political and social impact is fundamental. Almost all the volunteers who return to Switzerland feel the importance and assume the responsibility for raising awareness, and this is not only after their final return but also at the time of their furlough, which they take in the middle of their contract, during which they undertake publicity activities, in their family network, with their friends, in their parish, etc., I would add to that the fact that all development workers must send at least three circular letters per annum.

*January 2010*



← Faces in the multiethnic Namibia.

## 5

## “Committed to peace and human rights”

Colombia is hard hit by an internal conflict that has persisted for almost fifty years. What is the role of the international co-operation in such a complex situation? What measures can it really contribute to consolidating the peace initiatives upon which the civil society sectors and social movements lie? Some questions asked to Susanne Brenner, Catholic theologian specialising in intercultural communication, and co-ordinator of the Bethlehem Mission Immensee (BMI) in Colombia since 2006.



**SUSANNE BRENNER**  
CO-ORDINATOR OF BETHLEHEM  
MISSION IMMENSEE IN COLOMBIA

### **The work for peace is a key task for the Swiss NGOs in Colombia. How are you integrated into your programme?**

The objective of the work for peace is to help communities, groups and organisations – all affected by social and armed conflict – to strengthen their social structure. It is a question of building peace through grass-roots networks: an integral peace that passes through the self determination, political participation and/or ecclesial, cultural identity and social justice. We propose to strengthen communities struggling against the segmentation and individualism. Usually, we work from the grass roots. However, in Cali, in the Pacific Region, an overseas volunteer is working to create an Observatory of Human Rights, which is a regional project.

### **What is your vision with regard to your partnerships? What kind of network resources do you have or do you work with directly?**

Our team members integrate with our partners. We do not carry out “our projects”. It, therefore, is important to choose interlocutors who share our preference for the marginalised groups in the context of a liberation theology. We work together with the

Mennonite Church of Colombia, in their efforts with four projects, their support of non-violence in such a complicated national situation, appears encouraging to us. It is clear that BMI has no intention to create its own networks in Colombia, but works to strengthen those in which our partners are active. From a strategic perspective, we look for synergies between projects and the various players to provide “added value” to each mission. As co-ordinator, I participate in the roundtable of Swiss NGOs in Colombia and the platform hosted by the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation (SDC) to improve and synchronise the Swiss co-operation in the country.

### **What more could be done or be improved by the international co-operation in general, and in particular by the Swiss Co-operation and NGOs, to help build a better future for Colombians?**

The NGOs of the “Personnel Development Co-operation” play a significant role to the conflict’s visibility in Europe. The people are indeed disseminators of information. Here, in addition to their practical work, people appreciate the solidarity put into prac-

tice and expressed by the development workers. To be close to the community, to advance and suffer with them, which from a theological perspective, could be called a “missionary presence”, represents to a population whose voice is not heard in their own homeland the opportunity to manifest it to the world.

In Switzerland, a work of solidarity with Colombia has been conducted for several years, for example, by the Working Group Switzerland-Colombia, very active; through the co-ordination of Swiss NGOs with projects in Colombia or the SUIPPCOL programme, implemented by eleven NGOs with support from the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA). The level of awareness of the Colombian situation is good, but not enough. Our NGOs and networks of solidarity help to raise awareness of another perception and to make our partners voices heard.

### **What are the main contributions of development workers during their mission?**

We are a faith-based organisation. As the Colombian conflict has some cultural aspects, we can contribute to a change in the religious culture. Indeed, it is the theology of



sacrifice that still prevails here in thought and practice. For example, mothers must sacrifice their children for the good of the country as soldiers. Our engagement aims at advancing a liberating theology which does not accept sacrifice; however on the contrary, it defends the life and dignity of each person, which adds to the challenge of a peaceful transformation.

Our presence is also a contribution in terms of technical knowledge, still inadequate in Colombia, as well as supporting the institutional strengthening process and church alternative. We can also point out how the external view of the development worker, to analyse a situation can be of assistance. For example, Chocó has experienced a wave of suicides among the young people of the Embera tribe. The authorities of Embera did not know what to do. Intercul-

tural dialogue with the volunteer from BMI has opened up the possibility of seeking their own interpretation of this phenomenon. Thus, they have found ways towards healing through workshops and rituals performed by experienced shamans.

Moreover, the presence of foreigners increases safety in the work on human rights. Moving alongside marginalised groups despised by their fellow compatriots, restores their dignity. But the type of projects in which we interact with requires that we have lots of patience and long-term projections. The "success", the impact of our presence often depends on the trust between the development worker and the beneficiary population. However, it takes time to acquire this trust in a complicated situation or in projects with ethnic minorities. In such circumstances, it is very useful for us to have

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Silent suffering (reproduction of Oswaldo Guayasamín).

amongst our volunteers, people who have more than ten years of professional experience in Colombia.

**Would you like to mention another particularly important aspect?**

Indeed, the question of gender equality seems important to me. The female body is the territory of war. That's why many international co-operation projects are aimed at women. However, in this conflict, the majority of victims and perpetrators are men. It seems essential to re-think the role of the man in Colombian society. How to be a man without being macho or violent?

*May 2010*

**“The female body is the territory of war. That’s why many international co-operation projects are aimed at women.”**

**SUSANNE BRENNER**

## 6

## “Co-operation is a two way road North-South-North”

Co-operation is a “two way road and not a one way street” underlines Djalma Costa, the current co-head of the E-Changer co-ordination in Brazil. “We need to improve the quality of our solidarity and co-operation to ensure its impact is more visible to the stakeholders and social movements of the South.” This Brazilian theologian, a specialist in community education, advises and supports many national organisations working for the rights of youths and adolescents.



**DJALMA COSTA**  
E-CHANGER CO-ORDINATOR  
IN BRAZIL

### What is your concept of a coherent programme of co-operation in Brazil?

We started with the basic principles of community education, deeply rooted in community action on the Latin American continent, in particular the idea that neither development nor the co-operation can be implemented from the top down or from the outside in. We take the existing organisation experiences in the Brazilian civil society as the starting point. However, we do not simply analyse the current situation of the country to better understand it: the partner organisations actively participate, as stakeholder representatives, at the design and management of the Brazil programme. We believe that the dialogue must be ongoing because it gives a voice to the social players who existed before us, and acquired a great capacity for action, articulation and proposal.

Our key stakeholders are Landless Workers’ Movement (MST), the Confederation of Popular Movements (CMP) and the World March of Women. The composition of our partners demonstrates our desire to ensure a balance between rural and urban areas, taking into account gender characteristics. The partners of the Brazil Programme maintain a horizontal co-operative relationship with us, and also between themselves. Their proposals and contributions strengthen the development of our work.

I think the main advantage of the Brazil Programme of E-Changer was to understand that solidarity is a two-way road and not a one way street, and that the transformation of a society is a collective work: the South without the North is weak, but the North without the South is no better. Of course we care about contents and results. These are very important aspects for co-operation in

general. But for us, they are the effects of a broader concept, that of human solidarity, solidarity among human beings.

### Effects, impact, what do these words mean in view of the Brazil Project? What are, from a conceptual point of view, the important aspects?

The first and overall effect is to help build a civil society that is consolidated, strong, able to demand rights that correspond to it, solid and able to prevent the public and natural resources from being wasted and destroyed because of the logic of the ruling system. In addition it is to co-ordinate efforts to empower people in a governance perspective.

### In the Brazil Programme, social movements and NGOs that accompany them, as partners pivotal to E-Changer, play a major role. How did you manage to establish a real trust with these movements, given the distance and the peculiar character of each?

One of the characteristics of the Brazil Programme, in line with Charter principles of E-Changer, is the mutual understanding and acceptances of the unity in its diversity. Our position is that co-operation is only possible when the societies of the North and South speak openly. We share the belief with our partners that another world is possible and that we must all help to build it. The choice of E-Changer to prioritise the partnerships with social movements brings us considerably closer to the beneficiaries of the co-operation. We do not work *for* them, we work *with* them. These organisations and movements arise from basic co-ordination, that is to say, excluded from the rural and urban worlds themselves.

I think Switzerland could draw from many lessons on organisational strategies and struggles, not only in Brazil but throughout Latin America. The indispensable condi-

**“Switzerland could draw from many lessons on organisational strategies and struggles, throughout Latin America.”**

DJALMA COSTA

tion, to ensure trust between all the stakeholders in the partnership for development, is ongoing communication: to share what is happening between each country. This allows the organisations from the North and South to be side by side in the same process, seeking consensus solutions to any common problems, benefiting from the successes of each other and seeing the multiplied effects of working and learning together every day as accomplishments. The logic of the South – seeking only for possibilities of financial support in the North – is no more valid, neither the logic of the North “helping the poor in the South”. All this is in the past, at least in Brazil, thanks to this specific strategy of people exchange. Today the responsibilities and challenges are shared. Transparency and confidence undoubtedly promotes the maturation process and sharing. Far be it from me to offer an idealised image and suggest that there are no problems. Of course, there are some, and there always will be! But we try to resolve them through dialogue, listening to each other and respecting the particularities of each stakeholder.

**How is the information and awareness work, which takes place in Switzerland, perceived in Brazil?**

This constant and intense work carried out in Switzerland is naturally one of the most important strategies in the case of the “Personnel Development Co-operation”. Without information in Switzerland and the North on the reality of the South, the potential for innovation and the proposals which social organisations can do, we would have nothing. The co-operation would be limited to a single vertical transfer of knowledge, without a true understanding of global reality. The dynamics of Brazilian civil society greatly facilitates our work as well as our vision. For example, the World Social Forum (WSF) was born from the articulation of different networks and social movements in Brazil. We quickly measured what role this possible opening could play and we sought to link our co-operative work. We therefore decided, with E-Changer to organise incoming delegations from Switzerland: this allowed, on the one hand, for Switzerland to be part of this forum, but it was also an opportunity to understand, in a manner substantially deeper, the Brazilian reality and also the South and their situation in a globalised and complex world.

The delegations organised since 2001 by E-Changer, or co-organised with Alliance Sud since 2004, allowed the participation of many people in the various editions of the World Social Forum (2001, 2002, 2003, 2005 in Porto Alegre and 2009 in Belém of Pará). They were a complete success. In all, more than 200 personalities from politics, civil society and the press from Switzerland came. This gave an opportunity for us and our partners, to show them the work that we do. Large sectors of Switzerland have been informed by their political representatives, trade unions and the press about what the co-operation does in our country by the exchange of people – a unique opportunity and essential.

*January 2010*

Social movements in Brazil: active in education and production.



## 7

# "Healing the wounds of colonisation"

Tobias Denzler is a vet and a tireless globetrotter. His trips between Switzerland and the different Southern Hemisphere countries are as many as his professional engagements in development and as a vet. Since April 2011, he has been living in Manila, the capital of the Philippines, where he is working as the co-ordinator of Bethlehem Mission Immensee (BMI). At the time, he would always ask himself the following fundamental questions: "What can I contribute to make the world a fairer place? How is a joint collaboration between different cultures with different problems but similar needs possible? Since arriving in the Philippines, it has been my motivation to work from the roots to change the world a little."



**TOBIAS DENZLER**  
CO-ORDINATOR OF BETHLEHEM  
MISSION IMMENSEE  
IN THE PHILIPPINES

### What is the current programme and presence of BMI in the Philippines?

In recent years, BMI supplemented its classical pastoral work with the integration of social work. This means that together with our partner dioceses, we are committed to environmental concerns, health promotion and the fight against corruption. With a local NGO we have tried to support the peace process between the different ethnic groups. There are currently eight development workers, from Switzerland and Germany, working in the North from Luzon. This number is expected to increase to ten, next year.

### What criteria are these key thematic concerns based on?

In its principle on the "preservation of creation", a primary concern of the Catholic Church in the Philippines is to carry out the most important social tasks. With the formation of church-based communities, attempts are made at village level to improve the situation of many disadvantaged people. Combating poverty is a complex issue and includes health care, family planning, conservation of natural resources, preservation of cultural identity, fighting corruption, creat-

ing jobs and much more. In so doing, BMI, with their development workers, support local partner organisations with their specific expertise.

### Could you give us an example of a development worker assignment?

An example could be the planned construction of an irrigation system in a village. The irrigation system should have been built to irrigate the rice terraces, thus protecting the livelihoods of the farmers. The local government received a large grant for the project but the funds provided for the irrigation scheme disappeared into the pockets of the politicians, engineers and companies. The project was never realised, and the farmers in this region were forced to move

or to cut down the last of the forest reserves to produce charcoal, or to use chemical fertilisers and pesticides for their vegetable farming. In our efforts, together with our development workers, to strengthen local voluntary groups in the fight against corruption, we also look to conserve natural resources.

Another example, this time in health care: Here the local population are taught about hygiene and waste disposal as part of an integrated nutritional programme. The families here are motivated to create their own gardens with organic vegetables and medicinal plants. Health and environmental issues are directly linked. When drinking water is polluted with sewage and pesticides, this has a direct influence on health. It is also important to strengthen church-based groups and to talk about ethical behaviour. If issues such as combating corruption and vote rigging, or the value of preserving the natural diversity are discussed with like-minded groups at village level, this adds tremendous value and helps the understanding and active supporting of projects.

In short: with the use of our volunteer professionals, non high-tech patented solutions are possible for large regions. It is, however, more important to come up with an easy customised solution together with the local beneficiary group and to implement them jointly.

### Can you help to promote self-help?

In an ideal world, with our development workers, this is possible. I would like to refer to another example: The eco-tourism project in the Mount Kalawitan region, one of the highest mountains in the Philippines. Here a number of local farmers and hunters, who previously plundered the tropical rain forest, by slashing, burning and hunting it,

**"Combating poverty is a complex issue and includes health care, family planning, conservation of natural resources, preservation of cultural identity, fighting corruption, creating jobs..."**

**TOBIAS DENZLER**

were trained as eco-tourist guides. They are now interested in preserving the tropical rain forest and with eco-tourism they now have a new source of revenue with which to secure their livelihoods.

**Does the fact that BMI mainly deals with the church, limit the interaction opportunities with other key organisations of the Philippine civil society?**

It is a fact that our partner organisations are mostly dioceses. About 80 per cent of Filipinos are Catholics, with strong family values and a deep faith. In the face of poverty, the aftermaths of ongoing natural disasters such as typhoons, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions and earthquakes, family and religion are the two key elements that give people renewed hope and vitality.

As a foreigner, we can use the church partner organisations as a link and a way of accessing the local population. Since the church maintains many social networks, our presence as so-called “lay missionaries”, who work as professionals with the local church is understood and accepted by the population. BMI development workers often co-operate with village groups that are al-

ready united in church-based communities. BMI volunteers have the opportunity to design, implement and monitor projects, in their fields of expertise, over a longer period of time. A central task is to build networks that would enable local knowledge exchange. This can be in the form of training, expertise, or in the networking of local organisations. As such, we work together with religious, private and public organisations. Basically, it is also possible to deal with private NGO partners, as was the case with the peace promoting event.

The very conservative and submissive attitude of a large part of the Philippine Church to Rome is not always a simple aspect. This pressure is especially reflected in important social issues, such as family planning and modern contraceptive methods, where the Catholic Church is strongly against the State.

**Does this mean that development workers in the Philippines must be open-minded and very understanding?**

Yes, but I think this is true not only of the Philippines, but throughout the world. The history of the Philippines is a story of

centuries of colonisation and foreign domination that have changed the cultural values and identity of the country. For us, it is easier to live with a partnership of understanding, in the sense of a dialogue on the same plain than for the Filipinos.

Often I think our principle task is to heal the wounds our ancestors left with colonisation. These wounds are still strongly noticeable and visible amongst the nation.

*September 2011*

The Philippines – between decolonisation and development.  
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