

BMZ



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BMZ EVALUATION REPORTS 057

# The “weltwärts” Development Volunteers Service

Summary



## Foreword

People’s general awareness of North-South relations, their acceptance of the need for development policy and their willingness to engage in global learning can all be further developed. At the same time, increasing numbers of young people from Germany who have just left school or completed vocational training would like to volunteer for service in a developing country. Until recently, though, the number of enquiries being received from potential volunteers was far higher than the number of opportunities that existed. Furthermore, the opportunities that did exist often involved high costs for the volunteers which made it difficult for many young people, particularly those from lower-income families, to sign up.

This is why the BMZ launched the *weltwärts* development volunteers service in 2007. This programme is designed to meet young people’s interest in getting involved in development work, while at the same time making an effective contribution to development in the countries of assignment, and to development information and education in Germany. *weltwärts* is implemented through a broad range of sending organisations, some of which have been cooperating with their partner organisations for years. The volunteers work in development projects run by the partner organisations in the countries concerned.

When the *weltwärts* programme was designed a decision was already taken that it should be evaluated at the end of its introductory phase (2010). This evaluation was conceived to review the programme’s design, implementation and results to date, as well as its procedures and organisational structures, and on that basis to then elaborate recommendations for further developing the programme.

At the end of 2010, 241 sending organisations and 6,711 places of assignment were approved by the BMZ. A total of 10,178 volunteers had either begun (i.e. had made their outward journey) or already completed their period of service in the *weltwärts*

programme. Between 2008 and 2010 the BMZ made a total of 84 million euros available for the *weltwärts* programme.

A team of evaluators from the Rambøll Management consultancy, led by Tobias Stern, conducted the evaluation, which they completed in October 2011. The evaluation encompassed six country studies plus a case study on the development information and education work performed by *weltwärts* volunteers in Germany after returning from their assignments. Further important data sources included online surveys of all sending organisations, *weltwärts* volunteers and partner organisations in the countries selected for case study. At the BMZ, Karin Roggenbuck was responsible for managing the evaluation. The views expressed in this study represent the opinion of the external consultants, and not necessarily those of the BMZ. Comments on the evaluation from the BMZ can be found at the end of this report.

This report should be cited as follows: Stern, T. et al. (2011): The *weltwärts* Development Volunteers Service. *Evaluation Reports 057*. Bonn: Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung.

This summary is available online at [http://www.bmz.de/en/publications/type\\_of\\_publication/index.html#evaluation](http://www.bmz.de/en/publications/type_of_publication/index.html#evaluation).

The full version of the main report, the country studies, the study on the development information and education work performed by *weltwärts* volunteers in Germany after returning from their assignments, plus a volume of annexes on the evaluation methods are available on request from the BMZ division for “Evaluation of Development Cooperation”.

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# Summary

## 1. BACKGROUND

After leaving school or completing vocational training, many young people in Germany are very interested in doing voluntary service in developing countries. However, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) noted that in the past there were more potential volunteers than there were opportunities provided by privately run volunteer services (so-called unregulated volunteer services). Moreover, these services often involve high costs that make it difficult for many young people, especially those from lower-income families, to sign up.

In this situation, how can we satisfy young people’s interest in getting involved in development work? How can we at the same time make an effective contribution to development in the countries of assignment, and to development information and education work in Germany? When policymakers studied these questions, they realised there was a need for a new development volunteer service. This is why the BMZ launched the *weltwärts* programme in 2007. The German name *weltwärts* translates as “worldwards”.

The basic framework for the volunteer service is laid down in the “Guideline for the development volunteers service *weltwärts*”, published on 1 August 2007, the list of objectives developed for the programme, and the BMZ strategy paper on returnee work that was prepared jointly with the sending organisations and published on 2 September 2009. (The latter is currently only available in German under the title *weltwärts – und danach?*).

When the new volunteer service was designed, together with the civil society organisations involved the BMZ already decided that the *weltwärts* programme would be evaluated at the end of the three-year introductory phase. The evaluation was designed as an independent and external review of the programme’s design, implementation and results to

date, as well as its procedures and organisational structure. On this basis, specific recommendations for further developing the programme were elaborated. Moreover, the evaluation also helps ensure accountability vis-à-vis the German government, parliament and public.

The idea behind the *weltwärts* volunteer service is “learning by serving”. The programme pursues objectives in three broad categories: global learning, partner countries and Germany. Within these three areas the *weltwärts* programme has the following specific aims:

- Create an “awareness and appreciation of the diversity of life and development” and an “understanding of the dependency of people’s lives in the global context”.
- Give the volunteers the opportunity to acquire qualifications and experience which are useful for both their personal and further career development, and will also help them to become multipliers and carry out development information and education work after their return home.
- Make a contribution through the volunteers’ work to supporting the projects of Germany’s partner organisations by helping people to help themselves, and strengthening civil society in the developing countries.
- In the spirit of “global learning”, boost development information and education work in Germany through the activities carried out by the volunteers on their return home.

A large number of actors are involved in the *weltwärts* programme. The BMZ is the central actor for political and programme management. Technical and administrative tasks are performed not only

by the BMZ, but also by the administrative office (the *weltwärts* secretariat) and the sending organisations. The latter, along with the partner organisations, the *weltwärts* volunteers and the mentors in the countries of assignment, are the key actors at the level of implementation.

When the evaluation was conducted (as at 31.12.2010) 241 sending organisations and 6,711 places of assignment were approved by the BMZ. A total of 10,178 volunteers had either already completed their service assignment in the *weltwärts* programme, or were in the process of doing so. Of these 22 per cent left Germany in 2008, 35 per cent in 2009 and 43 per cent in 2010. In the medium term the BMZ aims to send out up to 10,000 volunteers per year, for which purpose it intends to make available an annual figure of up to 70 million euros. So far, most of the placements have been to Latin America (approx. 42 per cent), Africa (approx. 37 per cent) and Asia (approx. 20 per cent). Only a small number of volunteers have been assigned to Eastern Europe and Oceania (1.3 per cent).

On average, 86 per cent of volunteers work for between 10 and 13 months in the partner-country projects in one of the following 15 fields: education, health, agriculture/food security, public administration, private enterprise/engineering/trades, culture/sports, work with children and youth, work with people with disabilities, work with adults (e.g. refugees, the homeless), work with senior citizens, work with women, miscellaneous welfare work, human rights/democracy/peace, emergency and transitional aid, and environmental protection and resource conservation. Most volunteers work with children and youth (35 per cent), in education (34 per cent) and with people with disabilities (6.3 per cent).

The sending organisations receive project-based financial support from the BMZ amounting up to 580 euros per assignment and month. Each sending organisation must cover at least 25 per cent of the

costs for the assignment of volunteers using funds of its own. Between 2008 and 2010 the BMZ made a total of 84 million euros available for the *weltwärts* programme.

The volunteers are not required to meet any of the costs of the assignment. The sending organisations provide them with pocket money and suitable board and lodging. As far as possible, the *weltwärts* volunteers are expected to support the sending organisations by helping to raise funds for the volunteer programme. However, the total to be raised is limited to a maximum of 150 euros per month spent abroad, and it is explicitly stated that this must not be made a precondition for volunteer service.

As part of the overall support package, in 2008 and 2009 the BMZ provided around 12 million euros for backstopping measures, for instance to help enable partner organisations develop places of assignment and train mentors. In 2009 the BMZ also set up a line of funding of one million euros a year for measures conducted with *weltwärts* volunteers before, during and after their return from their assignment.

Both quantitative and qualitative data survey methods were used to evaluate the *weltwärts* programme. Key elements included quantitative surveys of all sending organisations, *weltwärts* volunteers and partner organisations in the six countries selected for case study. The countries concerned were Bolivia, Costa Rica, Ghana, India, Tanzania and Viet Nam. An organisational analysis was conducted to evaluate the *weltwärts* programme's implementation procedures and processes. Six country studies were carried out, as was a case study on the development information and education work performed by *weltwärts* volunteers in Germany after returning from their assignments.

## 2. KEY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

### Relevance

The *weltwärts* programme is relevant to the target group. It meets the demand among the *weltwärts* volunteers for a volunteer service that is international and that provides an opportunity to serve in developing countries.

For the majority of partner organisations the volunteers can meet a demand for human and financial resources, and provide needed support in the form of new ideas or additional knowledge. Partner organisations also find that certain features of the programme such as its reliability, the length of the assignments, the financial support provided and the option of receiving several *weltwärts* volunteers provide them with the support they require. The programme might become more relevant if it were to focus (even) more strongly on meeting the partner organisations' specific needs, and involving the partner organisations to a greater extent in the process of selecting the *weltwärts* volunteers.

The majority of partner organisations and places of assignment are located in sectors relevant to the development of the partner countries. In some cases, however, the country studies showed that activities in specific places of assignment did not support disadvantaged sections of the population, or that the partner organisation did not pursue development-policy goals. The programme could therefore be made more relevant to development-policy objectives by further improving the selection of partner organisations and places of assignment.

With regard to (development) information and education work, the content and design of the *weltwärts* programme is on the same level as other programmes, and is characterised by its explicit pro-development orientation and the provision of financial support instruments. The sending organisations

and (other) organisations performing development information and education work need the support provided by volunteers. After returning home, former *weltwärts* volunteers form an important pool of committed multipliers whom organisations can involve in their own structures for development information and education work.

Implementation of the *weltwärts* programme only partially meets the BMZ's requirements. Whereas the seminars held before, during and after the service assignments are organised and conducted largely in compliance with the BMZ's specifications, in some cases the training and mentoring provided to the volunteers in-country do not meet these requirements. This is the case in particular with respect to the practical guidance provided to the *weltwärts* volunteers within the partner organisations, which in the majority of cases is not provided at all. Moreover, in many cases the mentors actually work for the partner organisation, even though they are not supposed to be working directly with the *weltwärts* volunteers.

Deviations from the BMZ's specifications are also found with respect to the fundraising groups. In many cases the sending organisations oblige the *weltwärts* volunteers to set up such support groups. Furthermore, for around one third of the *weltwärts* volunteers the donations raised exceed the specified ceiling of 150 euros per month. The majority of the *weltwärts* volunteers raise these funds not – as is suggested in the *weltwärts* guidelines – by setting up support groups, which in itself is supposed to be a contribution to development information and education work prior to the assignment. In fact these funds are provided mainly by the volunteers' parents.

When selecting the *weltwärts* volunteers almost all the sending organisations take into account their motivation to serve abroad, their resilience, their willingness to learn the language of the host country and their physical fitness for the task. They usually select the future volunteers through personal in-

interviews and selection boards. Some selection procedures are inadequate, because they are based exclusively on a written application followed by a telephone interview.

Between 2008 and 2010 an average of seven per cent of volunteers discontinued their assignment prematurely. In this context there were significant differences between the sending organisations and the various consortia formed by some of these organisations. No link was found between the type of selection procedure and the dropout rate.

The majority of partner organisations do not play any active role in selecting the *weltwärts* volunteers or in assigning them to their posts. Usually the partner organisations merely either accept or reject pre-selected applicants.

### Effectiveness

The programme achieves its goal of recruiting young people, and especially women, to perform voluntary service in developing countries. The volunteers do, however, belong to a homogeneous social group. Almost all of them have just left school at 18 or 19 with university entrance qualifications, and come from well-off middle-class backgrounds. However, the programme is also supposed to appeal to young adults who graduated from secondary school under the German system at the age of 15 or 16 and went on to complete vocational training. Participants are also supposed to be drawn from among lower-income families, and from families receiving welfare payments, immigrant families, and families from rural areas or the federal states in the eastern part of Germany. Young people with disabilities are also supposed to participate in the programme. So far, these target groups have hardly been reached at all.

The *weltwärts* programme achieves positive results in terms of the personal development of the volunteers. Participating in the *weltwärts* programme for

instance develops the capacities and (practical) skills of those taking part. Volunteers were also seen to be changed by the experience, gaining a more complex understanding of North-South relationships and undergoing global learning.

A large majority of volunteers see a possible future career for themselves in development cooperation. This figure drops slightly after the volunteers return. This is a thoroughly positive effect of a volunteer service, which is also designed as a learning service. The *weltwärts* participants reflect upon their expectations and question this career plan. In those cases where participants then continue to plan their future career in development cooperation, the assignment can be seen as reinforcing these plans and helping the volunteers develop them further.

For most of the partner organisations the *weltwärts* volunteers provide important support in day-to-day work. Within the partner-owned projects the volunteers provide help towards self-help, and the direct target groups of the projects profit from this contribution. In some cases the volunteers have also been able to help develop the practical capacities of the partner organisations by transferring knowledge and skills to the projects, e.g. in the field of data processing, or by calling into question existing procedures and practices, such as traditional teacher-centred teaching methods in schools, and violence against children.

However, the country studies also show that around ten per cent of the *weltwärts* volunteers do not possess the motivation and other requirements needed to perform socially committed work in a developing country. Furthermore, these volunteers are overstretched or feel overstretched even well into their assignment. This impairs their capacity to support the partner organisations.

The partner organisations themselves show positive developments with respect to global learning. Especially the staff of the partner organisations, the tar-



get groups and other actors in the project setting benefit from the intercultural exchange with the *weltwärts* volunteers.

Some partner organisations describe as very helpful and important the support measures that are designed to improve the exchange of experiences and networking between the sending organisations and partner organisations, and train mentors. However, the vast majority of partner organisations are unaware of these possible support measures.

Concerning the involvement of former volunteers in development information and education work, the *weltwärts* programme can generate positive effects. After returning, many participants get involved in development issues. Their willingness to remain engaged over a prolonged period is also high. However, this cannot be attributed exclusively to their participation in the *weltwärts* programme, as the majority of *weltwärts* volunteers were already involved in voluntary work prior to their assignment. Nevertheless, the evaluation showed that this engagement was consolidated through the assignment. However, the majority of *weltwärts* volunteers feel that they are not given sufficient training or enough information on opportunities for getting involved in development information and education work.

One goal of the programme is for the *weltwärts* volunteers to learn from their experience. Whether and to what extent they do so depends on a number of factors. As well as the selection of the volunteers and their satisfaction with the seminars held before, during and after their assignments, plus the support provided by mentors in the partner organisations, other key factors include the quality of the posts and the partner organisations.

Significant differences were found here. Around one third of partner organisations are not yet effective enough in integrating the *weltwärts* volunteers into their working procedures, and putting the volunteers' qualifications and skills to good use. Deficits

exist here particularly with respect to the selection of places of assignment and partner organisations, and the involvement of partner organisations in the process of choosing the *weltwärts* volunteers. There is also room for improvement in the communication of information on the *weltwärts* programme to partner organisations.

### Efficiency

Given that no control group was available, it was not possible to evaluate whether or to what extent the total cost of the *weltwärts* programme is proportionate to the benefits generated. The cost per assignment and the project-based support can be considered appropriate in comparison to other volunteer services run by the German government. In some countries of assignment, though, considerable visa costs have been incurred for the *weltwärts* volunteers that are not covered by the *weltwärts* programme. This was because the sending organisations had not clarified the visa regulations in advance, which meant that the volunteers were unable to stay in the country for the entire duration of the assignment without interruption and that they had to pay fees for multiple entries and exits.

The average total of donations raised, which as described above exceeds the prescribed maximum in a substantial proportion of cases, is nevertheless significantly lower than the amounts raised in comparable German government-run programmes. As far as the evaluation could determine, neither the fundraising groups nor the ceiling on donations had any significant effect on the socio-demographic makeup of the target group reached.

The financial support provided for work performed by *weltwärts* volunteers after their return is commensurate with needs. At this point in time, though, these funds cannot yet be sufficiently utilised by the *weltwärts* volunteers. One reason for this is a lack of information.

## Impact

The *weltwärts* programme stimulates development information and education work, which supports a process of global learning. This affects chiefly the sending organisations actively involved in the programme. These organisations have been able to broaden their development information and education activities. Given the fact that the *weltwärts* programme has only been running for a short period, it is not yet possible to judge whether or to what extent this has affected acceptance of the need for development cooperation or helped raise awareness of development issues in Germany.

The programme affects the partner organisations' work with target groups, and the way they systematically address social issues and tasks, because the deployment of *weltwärts* volunteers enables these organisations to broaden their activities in development-related fields and sectors. In some cases, accepting volunteers enabled organisations to modify the methods or basic principles they were applying in work with target groups (work in small groups as opposed to teacher-centred teaching, changed ways of dealing with marginalised groups such as people with disabilities, HIV-positive children, and socially disadvantaged sections of the population such as members of specific castes or indigenous groups). Beyond that, the evaluation found that the programme was not shaping the work of partner organisations in any other way, because these organisations are in most cases already going about their tasks in a systematic fashion.

A large proportion of the partner organisations possess long-standing experience with the deployment of volunteers, and thus with voluntary commitment. Partner organisations that do not possess previous experience of this kind usually lack an in-depth understanding of the concept of volunteering. This can be attributed to the fact that the *weltwärts* programme does not provide sufficient information,

also concerning the fact that *weltwärts* volunteers provide their labour free of charge.

The *weltwärts* programme has improved networking among the key actors (sending organisations, partner organisations, *weltwärts* volunteers), and between partner countries and Germany. Another positive contribution is made by (former) *weltwärts* volunteers through their own networking activities. Places of assignment that involve intermediary partner organisations are currently still profiting insufficiently from networking with the sending organisations. There is also room for improvement in networking between partner organisations, and in integrating these organisations into the networks of the sending organisations.

Only a small number of unintended negative impacts were identified. These included isolated instances of the substitution of local personnel in the education sector. In some cases the deployment of *weltwärts* volunteers conflicts with the legal regulations in the partner country (residence and labour law). One point of criticism that should be raised here is that assignments sometimes go ahead even though the visas and work permits required have not been obtained.

## Sustainability

Given that the *weltwärts* programme has only been running for a short period, it is not yet possible at this point in time to evaluate definitively the sustainability of the programme's effects. Most of the activities performed by the *weltwärts* volunteers (supporting day-to-day work in the host organisation) are not designed to be sustainable in any direct way. Intermediary partner organisations often have the potential to cooperate sustainably with the sending organisations. However, where intermediary partner organisations are involved the majority of places of assignment will have only very limited contact with



Germany, which is not likely to be sustainable. After the *weltwärts* volunteers return, their involvement in development information and education work is consistently high, and therefore has the potential to be sustainable.

### **Complementarity, coordination and coherence**

Complementarity and coordination between the actors participating in the *weltwärts* programme can still be optimised. The *weltwärts* programme is not harmonised with other German government-run international volunteer services. More specifically, there are overlaps with the newly-introduced International Youth Volunteer Service (IJFD) of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ). These overlaps concern the countries of assignment, fields of assignment, partner organisations and sending organisations.

Coordination and cooperation between the sending organisations takes place within both formal and informal networking structures. This supports the development-policy objectives of the *weltwärts* programme. A large number of sending agencies have organised to form consortia or associations. Cooperation could be intensified further in the selection of partner organisations and places of assignment, and in the assignment of *weltwärts* volunteers.

The evaluation found that in some cases cooperation was taking place in partner countries to provide joint further training for mentors. This could be further increased, as could the joint assignment of these mentors within a region, in order to strengthen the exchange of experience and knowledge. This would boost both the implementation of volunteer services and project work.

In development information and education work, a process of exchange usually takes place with the *weltwärts* volunteers through the work they perform in Germany after their return. However, only occa-

sionally does this result in regular cooperation between sending organisations and (other) organisations performing development information and education work.

In some partner countries the rules of entry and labour law provisions affecting international volunteers have a detrimental impact on implementation of the *weltwärts* programme. This includes problems with obtaining work permits and the issue of visas for *weltwärts* volunteers.

### **Organisation and procedures**

After a difficult initial phase, cooperation between the state and civil society is now taking a more pragmatic course. Nevertheless conflicts remain concerning ownership of the *weltwärts* programme. The *weltwärts* administrative office plays an important role in actual delivery. Consortia and associations are essential for facilitating administrative processes. With regard to the Advisory Council of the *weltwärts* programme, the question to be asked is whether and to what extent a single body can be both a partner for programme design, and at the same time a unit responsible for changes at the operative level.

Requests issued by the sending organisations for a basic simplification of the accreditation and approval procedures always need to be evaluated against the background of the needed quality assurance. A transfer of greater responsibility to the sending organisations would need to go hand in hand with the introduction of measures to assure the quality of the *weltwärts* programme and the work of the sending organisations. The provision of funding should always be based on the quality of the sending organisations and their partner organisations, and of the volunteer posts in-country. However, so far there is no such quality assurance system that has been discussed and agreed on with all the *weltwärts* actors.

### 3. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The profile of the *weltwärts* programme as a volunteer service for development should be brought into even sharper focus – by concentrating on the development component in all areas of the programme (selection of sending organisations, recognition of placements, selection of *weltwärts* volunteers, training and mentoring, development information and education work by returnees).
2. The federal ministries responsible for the volunteer services that they control and regulate should increase coordination and harmonisation of their activities to ensure that there are no overlaps between assignments with respect to countries of assignment, partner organisations, places or fields of assignment. For this purpose they need to define clear regional boundaries with the IJFD and thematic boundaries with the volunteer service of the Federal Foreign Office “kulturweit”.
3. Civil society actors and the BMZ should build on their common ground by jointly addressing key topical issues. This includes sharpening the development profile of the programme, assuring the quality of programme implementation, and taking measures to further simplify administrative procedures.
4. Quality in the programme should be jointly assured. To guarantee consistently high quality it is important to agree on joint quality criteria and to maintain quality awareness throughout the programme. The key instrument for quality-centred programme management is the selection of the sending organisations. Quality criteria should be included systematically when accrediting sending organisations and awarding funds, i.e. when approving assignments. One consequence of focusing on quality might be a review of the quantitative targets (number of assignments per year). Five aspects are important when judging the quality of sending organisations for the *weltwärts* programme:
  - capacities for implementing and supporting volunteer services,
  - a commitment to development and strategies for assigning volunteers,
  - access to volunteer placements that are relevant to development and that will support learning by serving,
  - a capacity to motivate and support the *weltwärts* volunteers to perform voluntary development information and education work, and
  - access to and strategies for reaching target groups that have hitherto been barely reached (such as individuals who graduated from secondary school under the German system at the age of 15 or 16, or young people from lower-income families), and a focus on target groups in their own work.
5. Civil society organisations should be given greater responsibility for implementation. In the medium term the aim should be for the BMZ and the *weltwärts* administrative office to no longer be involved in approving placements, but instead to rely on committed sending organisations whose work meets high quality standards.
6. The systematic promotion of target groups that have hitherto barely been reached should be stepped up. Among other things, this should

include the design of an overall strategy for achieving this goal. The feasibility of including access to these target groups as a criterion for the award of funding to sending organisations should also be explored.

7. Returnee work should be tailored to better suit the needs of the *weltwärts* volunteers. This in-

cludes providing *weltwärts* returnees with better information on the opportunities for them to get involved in development cooperation, and corresponding training. The feasibility of designing the returnee fund such that individual *weltwärts* volunteers could themselves apply for small amounts of funding should also be explored.

## BMZ’s comments

The planning and implementation of the evaluation were highly participatory. A team of experts appointed by the *weltwärts* Advisory Board, which included civil society representatives, supported the entire evaluation process, from the development of Terms of Reference through to the analysis of the results. The team of evaluators did a full and thorough job. The BMZ considers the results and recommendations to be largely clear and accurate.

*Weltwärts* is a relatively new development volunteer programme that first saw the light of day in 2007. It is therefore all the more pleasing that the overall results of the evaluation are highly positive. The evaluators attest to the fact that the programme is relevant, efficient and largely effective in achieving the objectives, especially at the level of the volunteers.

Together with the civil society actors involved in the programme, we intend to swiftly implement the rec-

ommendations. These revolve around raising the development profile of the programme, for instance by strengthening work with returnees or by improving training and mentoring for volunteers. We also intend to jointly design a procedure to assure the quality of programme implementation.

Civil society very much welcomed the launch of the *weltwärts* programme. Nonetheless, the pilot phase of the programme involved frequent misunderstandings. The balance between responsible state action and a civil society operating in accordance with the subsidiarity principle was put to the test time and time again. The evaluation has delivered useful findings that will enable us to improve this balance. We now intend to make use of these insights by revising mandates and responsibilities in programme implementation.

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