Civil society organisations play a key role for social progress and sustainable development. In their partner countries Welthungerhilfe co-operates with civil society groups and supports measures to strengthen civil society actors, based on the principle of help towards self-help.

The civil societies in the North and also in the South face new challenges in international co-operation due to changing framework conditions. In this context, three developments are in particular important:

- Increasing need for emergency aid, frequently in fragile states. In these countries, civil society players take on key functions, even though their capacities for responding to humanitarian disasters are often rather weak.
- In respect to the discussions on effectiveness of development aid (Paris declaration), official development assistance is increasingly characterised by budget support. At the same time, the role of civil society receives more attention due to the Accra Agenda for Action and the 4th High Level Forum in Busan.
- The debate regarding the role of civil society in the North in respect to the development process in the South has been ongoing for some time at the international and particularly at the European level.

This paper formulates Welthungerhilfe's position and policy with regard to its co-operation with civil society groups in the partner countries and describes the future challenges. The implementation of the strategy into concrete activities is explained in a separate paper that also deals with instruments and methods for promoting civil societies. Both papers are directed at Welthungerhilfe staff and its partner organisations as well as at donors and other interested parties.

Civil society

The term civil society refers to the totality of actors and groups that are involved in the social and political affairs of a country in addition to the government, the economy and individuals. To date, there is no internationally recognised definition and demarcation line for the diversity of civil society organisations. Civil society is made up of non-governmental organisations (NGO), unions, cooperatives, religious organisations, federations, associations, local self-help groups, grass-roots organisations and social movements. They may be more or less formally organised and work in a variety of different networks.

However, civil society organisations are characterised by certain elements. They are voluntary, diverse, independent and non-violent. They are committed to societal change in their countries. Civil society exists in all countries, however, with different scope regarding local, national and international actions – depending on the political, legal, economic and social conditions. The degree of individual and collective freedoms determines the civil society’s level of organisation.

With regard to social and economic development civil society organisations assume different roles in their respective contexts, depending on their specific visions and objectives, as well as on the specific political framework:

- They can function as independent development actors with own resources and supplement government policy with concrete projects (impulse provider).
- They can be the link between government agencies and certain parts of the population, i.e. taking up the advocacy role by bringing forward the concerns of disadvantaged groups.
- They can act as pressure groups to government and administration, and carry out a watchdog function. To this end, they monitor and evaluate government action, and demand good government management as well as compliance with human rights.
- They may provide basic services to substitute government obligations – also on demand of other development actors –, for example in the sector of health or education.

These roles indicate competing interests regarding their independence as a third societal force (besides government and the economy) and their dependence on financial resources, which can lead to conflicts.

Civil society organisations cover many topics and work at different levels: from the level of villages to the level of the globalised international world in peaceful and conflict contexts, in humanitarian aid, rehabilitation and sustainable development co-operation.
Welthungerhilfe's collaboration with civil society

Frequently, development actors from the North support, promote or supplement civil society organisations in the countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America in exercising their roles. Welthungerhilfe is currently working in 39 partner countries, cooperates with approximately 90 local partner organisations, and has experience in this area for many decades. However, a decline in the collaboration with local partner organisations has been observed during the last ten years. This change is also due to the fact that public donors prefer to provide funds for large and complex emergency aid and rehabilitation measures – increasingly in fragile states. In addition, smaller local partners are often unable to meet the demanding requirements for implementing measures of such a scale.

Welthungerhilfe acts independently in countries without local partner organisations or where civil societies are either temporarily or structurally unable to adequately carry out their role. This commitment is strictly limited in terms of time, includes grass-roots organisations and is designed to promote a partnership with the local civil society.

Welthungerhilfe's vision and goal

Our vision is a world in which all people have an opportunity to exercise their right to a self-determined life in dignity and justice, free of hunger and poverty. In this context, civil society contributes to human rights and poverty alleviation in terms of sustainable development. As a part of global civil society, Welthungerhilfe supports this civil society commitment in its partner countries, learns from joint experiences and contributes to solving global development problems. In this vein, Welthungerhilfe also supports the entrepreneurial spirit (small business) at the target group level.

Welthungerhilfe firmly believes that only the development actors in the partner countries themselves are able to fashion and ensure societal change and development in a sustainable manner. For this reason, Welthungerhilfe aims to assist partner organisations in reaching their goals through more professional and substantial contributions, and to promote their capacities for the long term. This involves the use of two approaches, both with own resources as well as in line with co-financing of donors:

- Capacity Development of partner organisations in joint projects in line with Welthungerhilfe’s sector portfolio.
- Empowerment of partner and grass-roots organisations to carry out their civil society roles in the partner countries.

Capacity Development

Welthungerhilfe understands this term as the strengthening and promotion of the individual, organisational and societal skills and capacities of people who work with and for the partner organisations for the fulfilment of own development objectives. The term Capacity Development has increasingly replaced the term Capacity Building in recent years, as the latter fails to adequately take into account already existing local capacities.

Empowerment

Empowerment refers to the strategies and approaches that are suited to increase the autonomy and self-determination of people in the partner countries. They are designed to enable them to independently represent and shape their interests and rights.

Challenges – yesterday, today, tomorrow

The collaboration with civil society organisations creates a number of challenges for Welthungerhilfe:

- New roles: In the countries of the South, the debate regarding the effectiveness of development co-operation and humanitarian aid has triggered a process of reflection and discussion regarding the role of Northern civil society organisations. Civil society organisations in the South are increasingly viewed as independent actors in their development. At the same time, there are indications that the commitment of civil society organisations from the North will concentrate on the Capacity Development of civil society in the partner countries.
- Mission and legitimisation: Civil society organisations should clearly define their societal objective and should have the leeway for implementing the same. This must be assessed and – in the context of fragile statehood and/or authoritarian systems – developed if required. With respect to collaboration, only sufficiently legitimised organisations are suited for partnership.
- Capacities: Local civil society organisations can differ widely depending on context and capacities. However, it is clear that civil society capacities are present everywhere. They must be identified and self-help capacity must be strengthened as part of the collaborative effort.

Principles of collaboration

- Respect for the local understanding of civil society and its role.
- Development and strengthening the relevance and leeway for civil society engagement.
- Help towards self-help for civil society organisations.
- Primacy of collaboration with civil society organisations in partner countries; self-implementation by Welthungerhilfe is the exception and restricted in terms of time; no displacement of local civil society capacities.
- Self-determination for and leadership role by local partner organisations; equal participation and involvement as well as negotiation of concrete forms of collaboration pursuant to dialogue principle.
- Context-specific and needs-appropriate collaboration.
- Support for partner organisations' lobby and advocacy work for the maintenance of their rights.
- Strengthening of outcome and impact orientation, transparency and accountability for Welthungerhilfe's work.
- Support partner organisations with the representation of civil society interests in national and international committees for the fight against hunger and poverty.

Outlook

Even though Welthungerhilfe has been working with civil society organisations for decades, these principles are not always met – particularly also due to the organisation's increased commitment in fragile states. Therefore Welthungerhilfe will be initiating a change process within the organisation:

- Own capacities will be further developed to meet the new requirements and challenges.
- Donors will be engaged in a dialogue, so that more co-financing funds are provided for the development of partner capacities (extended contract period, master agreements).
- For each country, the opportunities and risks associated with civil society commitments and the collaboration with partner organisations will be systematically analysed and suitable partners will be identified.
- Joint strategies for supporting existing civil society commitments will be developed with the partner organisations, and suitable measures for strengthening the same will be initiated.