

## Quality before Proof

2010



VENRO Policy Paper on Impact Monitoring

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## Why is impact monitoring an important topic for VENRO and its members?<sup>1</sup>

The central goal of VENRO is to promote fair and just globalisation, or more importantly to combat world-wide poverty. VENRO strengthens the role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society in international development so that they can make their contribution to global justice. VENRO is an association, which combines the strengths of German development NGOs. Together in solidarity, they stand up to combat poverty, promote human rights and conserve our natural resources.

The engagement of the NGOs for the poor and disadvantaged is meant to be as effective as possible. The VENRO members seek to ensure that the measures taken have the most positive outcome possible and avoid any negative effects. Therefore, impact monitoring is a key objective of all development NGOs. This has also been laid down by the Association with binding effect for its members in its Code of Conduct on Transparency, Organisational Governance and Supervision.

Impact monitoring aims to establish, describe and measure changes brought about by development activities<sup>2</sup>. One of the goals here is to identify the changes in a suitable form, while another is to clarify the specific contribution that the respective projects make to bring about those changes. Every measure taken in development work can produce various effects, which in their complexity, can often neither be recognised as a whole nor as a network of mutually influential effects. An analysis of impacts is particularly difficult when the interventions and their goals are complex, which tends to be more the rule than an exception to it, in development co-operation.

Over the last few years, impact monitoring has gained in relevance as a result of the international discussions on aid effectiveness relating to the 2005 Paris Declaration and the 2008 Accra Agenda for Action. While “aid effectiveness” focuses on the effectiveness of government

development aid, NGOs world-wide are also increasingly challenged to present the effectiveness of their development activities. Further, as critical partners of government development activities, they play an important role in pushing for more effective development co-operation beyond the narrow framework used in the Paris Declaration (“development effectiveness”). VENRO and its members seek to draw attention to structural imbalances and the need to strengthen social and political empowerment processes.

A large number of questions remain unanswered in the international discussions surrounding impact monitoring. Therefore, it is important for VENRO to lead a dialogue among its member organisations, together with other civil society organisations at the national and international level and with the government institutions and academia. This Policy Paper presents the key statements of German development NGOs and serves to promote exchanges of opinion and dialogue.

<sup>1</sup> The German term “Wirkungsbeobachtung” means “observation of effects” in literal translation. The term “impact monitoring” in this policy paper includes outcome and impact.

<sup>2</sup> Also covers humanitarian aid



## Quality assurance and learning – impact monitoring among the VENRO member organisations

Germany's development NGOs are very heterogeneous, both with respect to their fields of work and their approaches as well as their sizes and capacities. In spite of these differences, they do have much in common. Their intentions are always related to the goal of strengthening civil society and the capacity to act of those affected. Partnership and participation are therefore of great significance, both when

dealing with their partner organisations and their target groups.

Impact orientation has a high status that is to grow even more in the future. In seeking to describe and measure the impacts of their activities, the VENRO members are pursuing the following **goals**:

**GOAL Learning from experience**

The various parties involved (especially target groups, implementing organisations, funding organisations) are encouraged, through various learning processes, to reflect on their effectiveness and as such, to improve their own actions. By acknowledging changes and their causes beyond the project frameworks, learning processes can be enhanced that might otherwise be overlooked. Systematic impact monitoring as an instrument of continuous learning therefore contributes to quality assurance both through the carrying out of the procedures as well as through the results it produces at the organisational level.

**GOAL Steering**

The insights gained from impact monitoring can be used if and when needed, to adjust or reorient strategies, planning and project measures. They allow a conscious steering of projects and consequently higher effectiveness. In addition to an identification of the project impacts at certain points (through surveys and evaluations) or in connection with them, continuous impact monitoring in particular serves to steer the projects according to their impacts. This can also provide general insights into successful and less successful types of intervention in development co-operation as a whole.

**GOAL Empowerment**

Furthermore, an empowerment of the actors involved is expected to take place. The analysis of impacts makes partner organisations and target groups aware of what they have already achieved and why. Through recognising one's own

effectiveness and steering action towards further effectiveness, greater self-determination of the target groups is created. By learning how to conduct impact monitoring themselves, those concerned are increasingly able to shape their own environment.

**GOAL Accountability**

Reporting on effectiveness and accountability to donors and the public, also play a role in impact monitoring. The more beneficiaries and NGOs become aware of their own effectiveness, the more they are able to report on this to others – to those who are funding them. However, if the reporting is focused mainly on the achievement of the prescribed development goals, keeping an eye on all impacts in the bigger picture becomes more difficult. All impacts – positive and negative, unexpected and unintended – should be observed whenever and wherever possible. The willingness of all those concerned to seriously and honestly question their own actions may drop if the priority of impact monitoring is first and foremost to fulfil the reporting requirements.

Civil society organisations play a crucial role in promoting democracy and human rights at the local, regional and national levels. Processes of empowerment and change are always linked to conflicts because of the different interests that collide. In this context, NGOs require the scope to promote social processes of change. The open and transparent description of impacts reaches its limit when it reduces the effectiveness of the work or even results in an NGO losing its capability to function. This applies in particular in those countries, in which civil society is exposed to political oppression.





## Instruments and methods

In developing impact-oriented monitoring, NGOs take care in choosing their methods, which have to be appropriate to their goals, culturally adapted and efficient. The German NGOs base their co-operation with partner organisations on these locally adapted methods and, where required, develop them together with the partners as well as in co-operation with other NGOs.

In line with the goals, the instruments of impact monitoring applied by the German NGOs and their partner organisations contribute, above all, to strengthening the target groups, in order to support them in their initiatives and their autonomy. This results in preferences being given to tools promoting the empowerment of those concerned. The aim is to enable them to recognise and steer the effectiveness of their actions themselves. This is why participatory instruments of impact monitoring at grassroots level are favoured, where the target groups play a central role, and project staff or external reviewers assume a facilitating and supporting role. Through active participation, target groups

themselves learn how to observe and monitor changes in their own living conditions (capacity development).

The German NGOs are making use of the sets of methods for impact monitoring compiled by academic institutions and/or other major organisations. With their chief objective in mind – helping people to help themselves – they have to critically assess each method and each instrument in terms of its specific suitability for NGOs and for the respective project interventions. With training programmes and the appropriate leave from work (to take part in these programmes), NGOs ensure that the necessary skills for the field of impact monitoring are available, or at least have the potential to develop, within their organisation.

The partner organisations of the German NGOs are the central actors in impact monitoring. They expect specialist and financial support to develop their own capacities in the area of methodology and administration of projects. To this, German NGOs attach great importance.

## Impact monitoring in VENRO

With its publication towards the end of the nineties “Prüfen und Lernen: Praxisorientierte Handreichung zur Wirkungsbeobachtung und Evaluation”, VENRO provided its members with an essential basis, from which they could orientate themselves. The English version “Checking and Learning: Impact Monitoring and Evaluation – a practical guide” appeared a few years later. As a result, a large number of training events took place in the fields of impact monitoring and evaluation.

In order to provide partner organisations – in particular those from the grassroots level – with the necessary expertise to steer their work according to the impact monitoring, VENRO member organisations along with some southern-based NGOs have since 2004 carried out two projects under the title of “NGO Impact on Development, Empowerment and Actions” (NGO-IDEAs). Best practice examples of participatory impact monitoring from the southern NGOs were compiled in a so-called toolbox and other manuals, including one on developing impact-oriented monitoring systems, were also created. As such, NGO-IDEAs supports the people in grassroots organisations by strengthening the effectiveness of their work.

As stipulated in the Code of Conduct on Transparency, Organisational Governance and Supervision, which was adopted by the VENRO General Assembly in 2008, the association members commit themselves to an effective working practice. This has two implications. Firstly, they must describe the impacts that they aim to achieve, monitor and evaluate impacts that they do achieve and learn from the resulting experience. Secondly, they should support and motivate their local partner organisations to act according to the same principles. As such, learning processes are to be stimulated and lasting improvements made, among the VENRO members themselves, the partner organisations and the beneficiaries. Each member develops an impact monitoring approach that is adapted to its own mandate and the resources available. The requirements for impact monitoring depend on organisational and project-specific framework conditions, such as the size of the organisation, the scope provided by the staff and the amount and complexity of the projects.

### VENRO Working Group

In October 2008, the VENRO Working Group on Impact Monitoring was set up in order to support the introduction of an impact-oriented working practice among the member organisations. It also promoted information exchange between the organisations and monitoring of the political processes related to this topic. Furthermore, since early 2008, VENRO has been active in the international dialogue among civil society organisations on the issue of effectiveness. In the “Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness”, NGOs around the world co-ordinate their positions on various issues and also engage in dialogue with representatives of government-based development cooperation.

## What is expected of donors, politicians and academia and research

As presented in the above sections, impact monitoring is of considerable significance to the German development NGOs. They would hope for support from donors, politicians and academia in its implementation.





**VENRO calls on donors**

- to recognise the principles and goals of NGO impact monitoring put forward in this Paper;
- to accept that NGOs apply their own methods and instruments in impact monitoring that are appropriate to their principles, goals and capacities;
- to provide finance to apply these instruments and methods and to potentially develop them and test new approaches;
- to further strengthen impact orientation among the NGOs by financing advisory and training processes;
- to give the NGOs scope in their choice of reviewers, institutes and academic institutions, with which they collaborate to carry out impact monitoring.

**VENRO calls on politicians**

- to recognise that the role played by NGOs as critical monitors complements the governmental development co-operation and political actors. The political element of civil society represents is central to the development co-operation system as a whole. NGOs in both the North and the South represent and express the liveliness of civil society and are therefore valuable even beyond their concrete impacts;
- to accept that the desired and achieved impacts cannot be described openly in all contexts. In politically sensitive contexts in particular, a high level of confidentiality and flexibility is required that may occasionally restrict impact monitoring;
- to formulate realistic expectations of what impact monitoring can achieve. The wish to be informed on “whether aid is really helpful” should not result in the reporting and accountability mechanisms having to meet academic standards;
- to maintain and promote the plurality of actors, institutes, schools and schools of thought.

**VENRO calls on academia and research**

- to develop instruments in co-operation with the NGOs that meet the complex demands of their activities and are appropriate to their special objectives;
- to develop methods that adapt to and make the most of the abilities of the partner organisations and target groups.

## VENRO Members

- action medeor
- ADRA Deutschland
- Ärzte der Welt
- Ärzte für die Dritte Welt
- Ärzte ohne Grenzen\*
- africa action/Deutschland\*
- Akademie Klausenhof
- Aktion Canchanabury
- Andheri-Hilfe Bonn
- Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund Deutschland
- Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Eine-Welt-Landesnetzwerke in Deutschland (agl)
- Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Evangelischen Jugend in Deutschland (aej)
- Arbeitsgemeinschaft Entwicklungsethnologie
- Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Entwicklungshilfe (AGEH)
- ASW – Aktionsgemeinschaft Solidarische Welt
- AT-Verband\*
- AWO International
- Behinderung und Entwicklungszusammenarbeit (bezev)
- BONO-Direkthilfe
- Brot für die Welt
- Bündnis Eine Welt Schleswig-Holstein (BEI)
- Bund der Deutschen Katholischen Jugend (BDKJ)
- Bundesvereinigung Lebenshilfe für Menschen mit geistiger Behinderung
- CARE Deutschland-Luxemburg
- Caritas International
- Casa Alianza Kinderhilfe Guatemala
- ChildFund Deutschland
- Christliche Initiative Romero
- Christoffel-Blindenmission Deutschland
- Das Hunger Projekt
- Dachverband Entwicklungspolitik Baden-Württemberg (DEAB)
- Deutsche Entwicklungshilfe für soziales Wohnungs- und Siedlungswesen (DES-WOS)
- Deutsche Kommission Justitia et Pax
- Deutsche Lepra- und Tuberkulosehilfe (DAHW)
- Deutsche Stiftung Weltbevölkerung (DSW)
- Deutscher Paritätischer Wohlfahrtsverband
- Deutsches Blindenhilfswerk
- Deutsches Komitee für UNICEF\*
- Deutsches Komitee Katastrophenvorsorge\*
- Deutsches Rotes Kreuz\*
- DGB-Bildungswerk – Nord-Süd-Netz
- Difäm
- Eine Welt Netz NRW
- Eine Welt Netzwerk Hamburg
- EIRENE – Internationaler Christlicher Friedensdienst
- Evangelische Akademien in Deutschland (EAD)
- Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst (EED)
- FIAN-Deutschland
- Gemeinschaft Sant’Egidio
- Germanwatch
- Habitat for Humanity Deutschland
- Handicap International
- HelpAge Deutschland
- Hildesheimer Blindenmission\*
- Hilfswerk der Deutschen Lions
- humedica
- Indienhilfe
- INKOTA-netzwerk
- Internationaler Hilfsfonds
- Internationaler Ländlicher Entwicklungsdienst (ILD)
- Internationaler Verband Westfälischer Kinderdörfer
- Islamic Relief Deutschland
- Johanniter-Auslandshilfe
- Jugend Dritte Welt (JDW)
- Kairos Europa
- Karl Kübel Stiftung für Kind und Familie
- KATE – Kontaktstelle für Umwelt und Entwicklung
- Kindernothilfe
- Lateinamerika-Zentrum
- Lichtbrücke
- Malteser International
- Marie-Schlei-Verein
- materra – Stiftung Frau und Gesundheit
- medica mondiale
- medico international
- MISEREOR
- Missionszentrale der Franziskaner\*
- Nationaler Geistiger Rat der Bahá’í in Deutschland
- NETZ Bangladesch
- Ökumenische Initiative Eine Welt
- OIKOS EINE WELT
- Opportunity International Deutschland
- ORT Deutschland
- Oxfam Deutschland
- Peter-Hesse-Stiftung
- Plan International Deutschland
- Rhein-Donau-Stiftung\*
- Salem International
- Samhathi – Hilfe für Indien\*
- Save the Children Deutschland\*
- Senegalhilfe-Verein
- Senior Experten Service (SES)
- Society for International Development (SID)
- SODI – Solidaritätsdienst-international
- Sozial- und Entwicklungshilfe des Kolpingwerkes (SEK)
- Stiftung Entwicklung und Frieden (SEF)
- Stiftung Nord-Süd-Brücken
- SÜDWIND – Institut für Ökonomie und Ökumene
- Susila Dharma – Soziale Dienste
- Swisscontact Germany
- Terra Tech Förderprojekte
- terre des hommes Deutschland
- Tierärzte ohne Grenzen\*
- TransFair
- UNO-Flüchtlingshilfe
- Verband Entwicklungspolitik Niedersachsen (VEN)
- Verbund Entwicklungspolitischer Nichtregierungsorganisationen Brandenburgs (VENROB)
- Weltfriedensdienst
- Welthaus Bielefeld
- Welthungerhilfe
- Weltladen-Dachverband
- Weltnotwerk der KAB Deutschlands
- Werkhof
- Werkstatt Ökonomie
- World University Service Deutsches Komitee
- World Vision Deutschland
- W. P. Schmitz-Stiftung
- Zukunftsstiftung Entwicklungshilfe bei der GLS Treuhand

VENRO has currently 118 members

\* Guest member

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**VENRO** is the umbrella organisation of development non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Germany. The association was founded in 1995 and consists of around 120 organisations. Their backgrounds lie in independent and church-related development co-operation, humanitarian aid as well as development education, public relations and advocacy. 16 one-world networks are part of VENRO. These represent about 2000 local development initiatives and NGOs.

VENRO's central goal is to construct a just globalisation, with a special emphasis on eradicating global poverty. The organisation is committed to implementing human rights and conserving natural resources.

#### VENRO

- represents the interests of development NGOs vis-à-vis the government
- strengthens the role of NGOs and civil society in development co-operation
- engages in advocacy for the interests of developing countries and the poorer segments of society
- sharpens public awareness of development co-operation issues

**VENRO – Verband Entwicklungspolitik deutscher  
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