

## **Development agencies in the European context – Appeal for an unambiguous terminology**

### **Draft for discussion**

### **Point of departure**

The genesis of most European organizations which have for principal purpose the temporally limited assignment of people from Europe into countries of the South - and meantime also the East - as a means and a sign of solidary acting for the One World, goes back to the time of liberation from colonisation after the Second World War and the accompanying formation of development assistance. During that time in nearly all European *linguae francae* a term was used for the mostly young men and women who went abroad, a term which had a common root: English: volunteer; French: volontaire; Spanish: voluntario; Italian: volontario; German: Freiwillige. In parallel to the non-governmental organisations also national development agencies and expert organisations of personnel development cooperation had been created in many European countries.

As the basic conditions for development cooperation have substantially changed within the past few decades, the context of the activity of "volunteers" has also changed both in the host and home countries as well as in technical respects. Among other things

- the need of personnel resources in the host countries has changed in technical regard and in the fields of activity;
- in European countries personnel cooperation has advanced. Organisations with high technical and development-policy requirements have been created, as well as organisations which are assigning mainly young people in the sense of education or training services. As European countries differ from each other, the respective approaches of the organisations are varying, which at first may be appreciated as an enrichment and not as a problem;
- in the European countries unexpressed as well as defined quality standards have emerged which form the basis for the agencies' activities. The average age of "volunteers" has considerably increased. The recognized development agencies in Germany noticed an average age of 40 years. This applies to a multiplicity of organisation, above all to those of the northern European countries.
- regarding development cooperation, multi- and supranational organisations and institutions are gaining in importance. For instance, due to PRSP the financing of development and its orientation will radically change. The decreasing importance of national, bilateral development cooperation is accompanied by a rising influence of multi- and supranational institutions on the organisations of personnel development cooperation.
- the value and the effectiveness of personnel development cooperation have increasingly been analysed.

### **Resultant questions**

On meetings of organisations of personnel development cooperation from several European countries, the difference regarding approaches, objectives and conditions of the activities of the respective organisations becomes apparent very soon.

This becomes particularly apparent in the terminology. Depending upon the organisation, the following nominations are used: *volunteer*, *technical assistant*, *development worker*, *expert* or even *consultant*. May these different terms be still acceptable within in the national context, it becomes nevertheless on international level a burden for the organisations:

- For a common lobby work on European level we need a terminology, which is clear and which is associated with unambiguous correlations in respect of content. This is the only way for the organisations to contribute effectively to development-policy work and discussion. Up to now the image of our organisations and our attributed qualities among experts and in politics are most vague.
- Within the past few decades different approaches have emerged, which appeal to different target groups and objectives. Differentiated profiles which are transparent even for outsiders are therefore necessary. The organizations being active within this field can be divided into three groups:
  - education and volunteer services, which assign mostly young people with and without completed vocational education in a sense of a "voluntary service",
  - personnel agencies which second professionally experienced young people to partners for a limited period of time,
  - experts organisations which second highly-paid specialists in the context of technical development cooperation.

For the sake of completeness, the group of commercially active consultants should be mentioned, too.

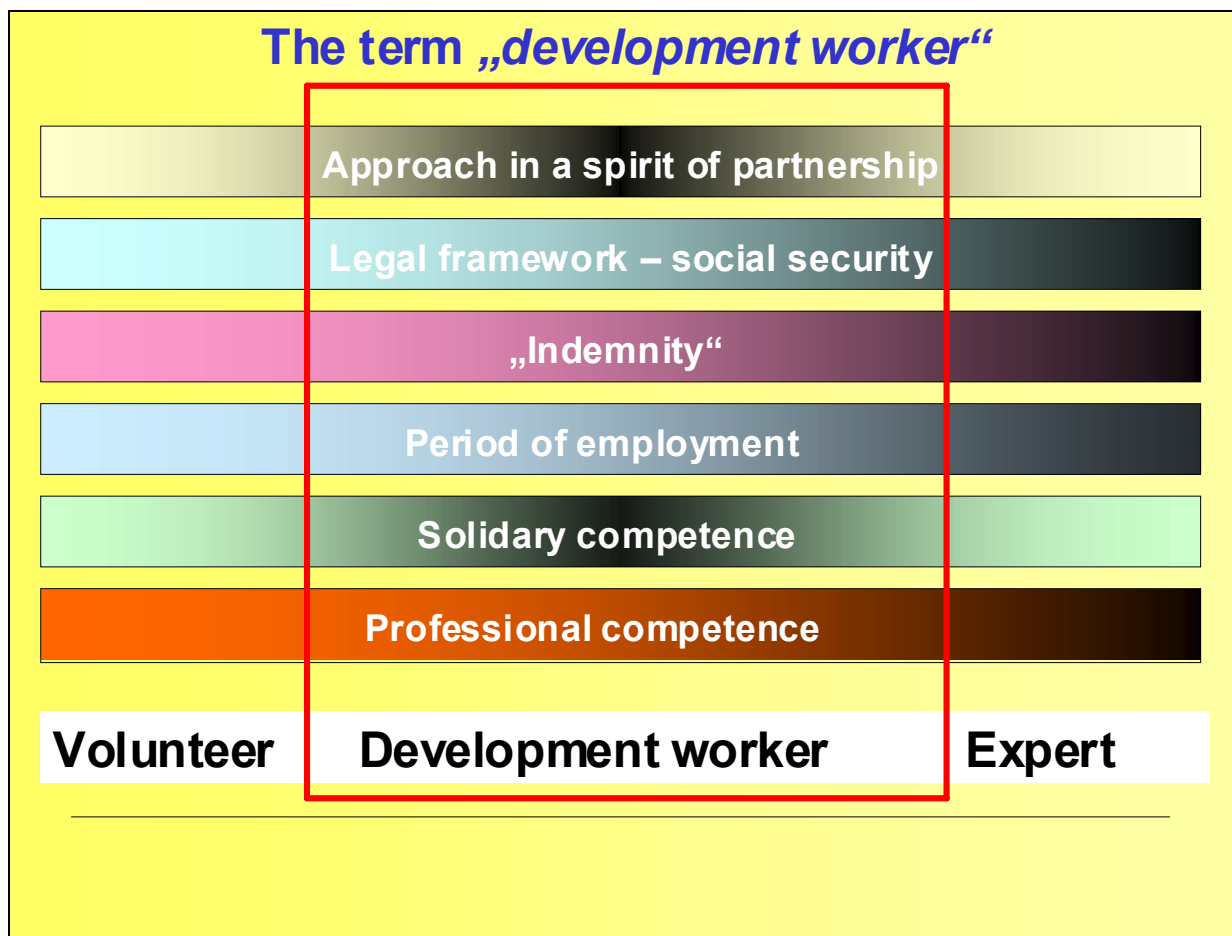
- The organisations will be confronted sooner or later, in particular if they receive or want to receive public benefits, with a discussion on quality standards. If the development organisations do not want the criteria to be forced upon from the outside, it is high time for them to lead and arrange the discussion themselves.
- Even for the organisations' cooperation among each other, particularly in common projects, a clear and unambiguous understanding is not only helpful, but virtually necessary.

### **Benchmarks for an unambiguous terminology**

An unambiguous terminology should give consideration to the following criteria:

- The terminology should be short and concise and, among experts and in politics, should be associated with unambiguous contents (attribute of recognition).
- Without levelling the organisations' different approaches, the "common denominator" should display a clear profile.
- The terminology should give consideration to the organisations' intentions and objectives, i. e. we will have probably different groups of organisations which will be labelled with their respective terminology. This would contribute to a clearer profile and a more specific lobby work.
- The categorisation of individual organisations to different groups is not a value judgement but an accentuation of the organisations' specific qualities.

These considerations suggest attaching the terminology to those attributes which display a clear profile and which at the same time cope with the characteristics of the respective organisation. That does not mean that certain attributes cannot apply also to other organisations. It rather concerns the sum of the attributes. In this spirit the following model should be comprehended. This model differentiates between *volunteer*, *development worker* and *expert*. These terms should be comprehended as "working titles" and not as ultimate definitions.



Explanatory remarks:

- Approach in a spirit of partnership. The approach in a spirit of partnership is a constitutive element for development organisations. The partners' request and interest are the initial point of the development organisations' activities and courses of action. Certainly even volunteer agencies consider the requests of partners to be important, but their main focus is to offer fields of learning and experience to (young) people.
- Legal framework and social security. In the context of the national social security systems, development agencies normally offer to their development workers social security (old age pension scheme, unemployment insurance, etc.). This is also an appreciation to the development workers' activities. A legal framework (cadre juridique) for the activities of the recognised agencies exists in numerous countries.
- Remuneration (indemnity). Compared to experts, development workers do not receive any high payments as customary in the international context, but usually a living allowance for a modest and independent lifestyle of him/her and his/her dependants in the host country. Volunteers usually receive only a pocket money.
- Period of employment. The period of the development workers' employment is terminated and does not apply in perpetuity. Although a minimum period of contract is obligatory (usually two years).
- Solidary competence. Apart from the development workers' professional competence, development organisations attach great importance to the development workers' solidary competence. This competence defines itself by the organisations' socio-political background and their development-policy orientation. The solidary competence is a conditio

sine qua non. For experts for instance such an orientation is certainly advantageous, but not of central importance for the performance of his assignment.

- Professional competence. Since development organisations are acting on behalf of and in cooperation with their partners, the development workers' professional and technical competence is of great importance apart from their solidary competence. Therefore many organisations qualify their development workers before and during their employment contracts according to their tasks assigned.

The specified characteristics represent no exclusiveness, but may and should still be supplemented. It becomes however apparent that a distinction is possible concerning work approach, target and character of the activity, from which a specific profile can be compiled.

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