



## Ventao Partner Newsletter – No. 3

Welcome to the third issue of the ventao partner newsletter!

We very much appreciated the feedback we received on our newsletters so far. One partner from Benin suggested, that we included news from partner organizations in our newsletter. This is great idea! So please feel free to send us your news, experiences or anything else you would like to share with other partner organizations worldwide. As my language skills are limited I would prefer texts in English, but Spanish also works for us.

Our main topic for this newsletter will be partner engagement in the weltwaerts program. We will look at current discussions on a political level and feedback from partner organizations.

With best regards from Berlin

Jan Wenzel, Nathalie Bambalinkenga and Anette Schwitzke

### A short Introduction: ventao – Who we are and what we do

ventao is a German acronym and stands for “Association of weltwaerts Exchange Organizations in Development Cooperation”. As association of exchange organizations we have two main fields of action:

1. We are a so-called “quality association”, which means that we are an association of sending organizations, providing services and advice on all issues regarding volunteer services to our member organizations.
2. We are also a shared interest group representing the interests of our member organizations regarding the weltwaerts-program and voluntary services towards the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development and other political institutions like the German Parliament.

We currently have three staff members:

**Jan Wenzel**, the managing director with a full-time position, responsible for the overall administration of our association, for the weltwaerts-country contact persons and for the political representation.

**Anette Schwitzke**, the quality management consultant works 30 h/week. She organizes events, writes newsletters and manuals and supports the members with regard to questions of quality management.

**Nathalie Bambalinkenga** has a mini-job and supports our accounting.



You can get in touch with us at [info@ventao.org](mailto:info@ventao.org).

## 1. Partner engagement and partner dialogue in the weltwaerts program – an interview with Jan Wenzel, managing director of ventao

### Which role does partner engagement play so far in the weltwaerts program?

In the weltwaerts program partner organizations have always been considered in relation to their German partners. It is the German civil society organizations who are getting funded by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development.

For civil society the partnerships between organizations from the North and South are the key relationship. It is there where encounter and exchange are taking place. In the future, however, the aim is to discuss all relevant changes in the program not just with the German organizations but also with their partners. The perspective of partners should be considered more intensively in all program developments.

### What are the different forms or levels of partner engagement?

From my perspective it is important to distinguish between two forms of partner engagement: partner relationships on the implementation level between the German organizations and their international partners on the one hand, and partner engagement in program development on the other. The first form of partner engagement has always been strong. What is new is that we are seeking to implement mechanisms by which partners may engage more actively in program development.

### What kind of approaches to partner engagement are in place so far?

A starting point are program-wide **regional partner conferences** under participation of representatives from the funding Ministry and German civil society. Currently we are in the process of formalizing and extending partner engagement.

**Information** is key to open up possibilities to get engaged. In order to be able to inform partners about program developments it is essential to translate relevant documents, such as the funding guideline and the weltwaerts quality standards. Traditionally these documents existed only in German and most German organizations did not have the resources to translate them for their partners. Now they will be translated by the weltwaerts coordination unit and communicated to partners via their German partner organizations and be available on [www.weltwaerts.de](http://www.weltwaerts.de) .

Additionally it is planned, that partners will be updated on discussions and developments in the various **weltwaerts committees**. Most German organizations will not find the time to translate the minutes of those meetings. The working group North South has already started a pilot, e.g. informing about the upcoming evaluation of the program. In the future so called “partner representatives” shall monitor the sessions of the committees and identify subjects

relevant for partners. These subjects will then be translated and disseminated. This has already been decided upon by the program steering committee, but has not yet been widely implemented.

A step further would be not just to inform but also to **consult** with partners on certain topics. The program steering committee is currently debating what this should mean and how it might be implemented.

### **What are the challenges for partner engagement?**

There is a wide agreement, that partner engagement has its limits. It only makes sense to involve partners on issues, where there is room and willingness for change. The legal framework, on which the program rests, for example is not subject to change and therefore cannot be meaningfully discussed with partners.

For German sending organizations, there is an accepted mechanism for representation (through their associations, such as ventao). For partner organizations such a mechanism does not exist. And the partner organizations are even more numerous (> 2.000) and heterogeneous than the German organizations. Therefore at the time we do not have a formal representation of partners. Even though we try to implement mechanisms of punctual consultation, knowing that this is a low level of participation.

For German civil society the internal dialogue between them and their partners is the core issue, which they seek to strengthen. There is a need for more capacity building for partners, for more South/North – North/South and South/South dialogue and for networking. For the networking and capacity building of German organizations there is a strong quality system in place in Germany, which does not exist similarly in the partner countries. That is why partner dialogue and capacity building have to be organized and funded in other ways. Fortunately there is the instrument of the so called **accompanying measures** in the weltwaerts-program<sup>1</sup> with a funding priority for

- *Qualification and training to improve education and mentoring of the volunteers who come from Germany or are sent to Germany, for example training courses for mentors*
- *Cooperation and networking between host and sending organizations, for example at partner conferences*

But in reality many organizations in North and South are facing some challenges in the implementation of those measures. Unfortunately there are budgetary restrictions. Due to German budgetary regulations, e.g. local networks may not apply directly for financial support, only via their German partners. When their German partners apply they have to contribute 25% to the budget of those measures. That is why civil society claims for more

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<sup>1</sup> See: <http://www.weltwaerts.de/en/accompanying-measures-for-the-programme.html>

simple financing mechanisms for partner visits and local networks.

### **What should partners do, who want to engage more actively?**

The starting point would be a dialogue with your German partner. A strong partner relation is the most important channel for introducing your issues into the program. Attend partner conferences, whenever possible, and make use of the direct contact with German decision makers from the government and civil society. Each input from your side is registered and will be considered. We would like to encourage and invite you to actively come forward with your perspectives.

### **And the way ahead?**

There is no ONE way of partner engagement. In the end weltwaerts will remain a German funding program. However, according to my knowledge, there is no other German funding program which seeks so hard for ways of strengthening participation of all stakeholders. It is of real concern to the Ministry and civil society to develop the program as much as possible in dialogue with partners.

## **2. Partner engagement – the main topic of our member meeting in April 2015**

In April our member organizations met in Berlin for two days to discuss current issues, exchange experiences and network.

We spent almost a whole day further exploring the topic of partner engagement.

Everybody agreed that good partner relations are key to a good volunteer program.

### **Reports from partner conferences**

Four ventao member organizations organized partner conferences in 2014/15 and they shared the main topics as well as the feedback of partners on partner engagement and participation with us.

#### *Partner conference in Colombia*

The focus of the Colombian partner organizations was on the level of implementation, not program development. Partners asked for more regional networking – also via online platforms, more regular partner conferences (not just every two years), for being included in the development of indicators for evaluations of the program and for the possibility to send representatives from each continent to the program steering committee.

### *Partner conference in Bolivia*

Partners want to be able to engage on the program level. Existing partner networks should be used and strengthened. They would like to be able to directly apply for funding.

### *Partner conference in South Africa*

A good communication with the German partners is most important for the partner organizations. Many partners do not feel adequately informed about the program and its development. Partners are interested in participating in the development of the program. The South African weltwaerts Network (SAwN) was founded during the conference by partners. It is meant to be a platform for exchange and an interest group for partner organizations in Southern Africa (not only from the Republic of South Africa).

SAwN would also like to act as a representative towards the steering committee of weltwaerts. A kick-off event is taking place in late November 2015. We will keep you updated on the latest developments.

### *Partner conference in India*

The topic of partner engagement in program development was not met with much interest by Indian partners. For most Indian partners the strengthening of regional networks was considered more relevant. A distribution list was established and is used intensively for exchange.

*Further partner conferences will be coming up next year. So keep your eyes and ears open as they will be announced by your partners.*

## **News**

### **Ventao Homepage and Facebook**

It took a while, but now our new website is online. The main information is also provided in English. Please apologize that due to limited resources we have not been able to provide information in Spanish yet. Have a look at [www.ventao.org](http://www.ventao.org).

ventao also started a Facebook page which you will find here:

<https://www.facebook.com/ventaoQV>

As our main target group are our members, we do post in German. Please feel free to post to



the side in any language you want. Multi-lingual communication is a real challenge. We appreciate any suggestions from your side.

### **Southern African weltwärts Network (SAwN) “Kick-Off”**

The first strategic workshop of the newly founded SAwN Network will take place in Cape Town, South Africa, from 20<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> of November 2015. All weltwaerts partner organizations in Southern Africa (from South Africa, Namibia, Mozambique, Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland) are invited to participate and should get all relevant information via their German partner organizations.

The aim of the workshop is to help strengthen the network between Southern African partner organizations, sending organizations and the weltwaerts steering committee in Germany. The goal of the new structure within weltwaerts is to strengthen volunteerism & social development initiatives in Southern Africa.