

DEBATTE & DIALOG

Southern Voices in the *weltwärts* Programme:

Five Proposals for More Participation in Volunteering for Development

Rowena Stewart

Co-Chair of the Southern African *weltwärts* Network | rowena.stewart@afs.org

The Southern African *weltwärts* Network (SAwN) is a grouping constituted to be the collective decision-making voice of all southern African host/partner volunteer organisations. Its members are based in Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, and Swaziland. The aim of the network is to optimise the volunteer environment in southern Africa (initially focussing on the *weltwärts* programme funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development). The network was established in November 2014 in East London, South Africa, at a meeting that brought together southern African partners and stakeholders from Germany, in order to look at how best to both improve the quality of the programme and to grow its footprint. It was decided that, in order for the programme to deliver sustainable development, the southern African partners had to have a voice.

SAwN's mission is to support South-North and North-South volunteering programmes, and to foster the giving of oneself for humanity (the spirit of Ubuntu); to increase the opportunity for southern African young people to experience cross-cultural learning, by sending more southern African young people to Germany and, in future, other countries; to provide strong support structures for the southern African partner/host organisations and returnees/alumni; and to strengthen partnership and relationships between organisations. The mission is moving forward in the North-South programme but, with the South/North component, there have been constraints on how this has been rolled out (the need for fundraising in southern Africa to cover 25 % of the cost, and an apparent lack of NGOs in Germany to host southern African participants).

While the *weltwärts* Steering Committee in Germany has been extremely supportive towards the programme in southern Africa (through funding meetings, providing links to other stakeholders etc.), the partner/host organisations felt that the “voice of the south” was mainly heard around specific operational issues, with strategic direction mainly coming from the north. Therefore, a key objective of the

network is to be the conduit through which direct communication can be facilitated between the host/partner organisations and the *weltwärts* Steering Committee in Germany; and to play a fundamental role in influencing decision-making and policy development that affects the placement of *weltwärts* volunteers at partner/host organisations in the southern African region and in Germany.

With SAwN still in its infancy, a number of issues have presented which need to be addressed, the five most pressing are:

- 1. Regular and Clear Communication:** Due to data protection laws in Germany, SAwN has had to devise a way to reach out itself to partner/host organisations (with no contact details). This has led to delays in including all relevant partners, and a consequent lack of voice to those currently not included. There needs to be regular and clear communication, perhaps direct from the Ministry, encouraging all partners to register with SAwN and become involved in the debate.
- 2. Inclusive Decision-making:** There has been a debate within southern Africa around whether SAwN (and future networks for other regions) should be observers on the Steering Committee, or be members. This is obviously a large topic, and would ultimately be a decision of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development; however, with the history of southern Africa's struggle against colonialism and discrimination shaping attitudes, there is a strong desire for inclusiveness and shared decision-making. Southern Africans have taken to heart the phrase popularised in the 1990s by the South African disability activists Michael Masutha and William Rowland "Nothing About Us Without Us" that stresses that effective development can only happen when all stakeholders are involved. The issue of membership of the Steering Committee needs to be discussed – including the input of all stakeholders.
- 3. Making Fundraising for Southern Participants More Flexible:** With the South-North programme, the fundraising requirement for participants is a severe block to participation. There is not a very strong history in southern Africa of fundraising for such programmes (compared with Germany) and so, otherwise deserving candidates are lost. While southern African individuals and organisations may have the desire to fundraise, the economic environment is a major block. SAwN would like to see the funding requirement removed, perhaps with collaboration to access a different funding stream for the programme, that would remove the requirement for individuals to fundraise.
- 4. Developing a Common Vision:** Within southern Africa, there is a strong desire to continually improve the *weltwärts* programme, to develop and share standards, and to grow the programme and its footprint. We feel that, in order to do that effectively – and in a manner appropriate to the needs of the region – there needs to be a shared vision of the way forward. This would include looking at

what are the desired outcomes, developing shared goals beyond the number of participants, developing impact measures, and, crucially, deciding how partner organisations can be represented on the steering committee in order to feed the southern perspective into programme structures.

5. Exchanging Experiences Globally: While this article has been written from a southern African perspective, we would be interested to hear the experiences of other regions of the *weltwärts* programme, and others who have experience of similar multinational development programmes. We all want to improve things – and sharing experiences and ideas from as broad a constituency as possible would be a good first step.

As SAwN, we would like to see more direct input into multinational development programmes, and feel that, by including partners in the Global South, more effective development programmes will result. SAwN is ready to take up the challenge, and is looking forward to greater collaboration with its partners around the world.