terre des hommes: stands up for the rights of children and young people - not *for* but *with* them

Who is terre des hommes?

terre des hommes is a children's rights organisation founded in 1967 in the context of the Vietnam war. Its head office is in Osnabrück, Germany, and it currently funds over 360 projects worldwide.

What is the aim of terre des hommes in so doing?

We want to enable a future for children and young people in a just and peaceful world, those alive today and the generations to come.

The projects and programmes are about stopping violence against children and protecting them from slavery, exploitation, abuse and neglect. However, we always link the project activity with commitment to the human rights of children and young people, so that they do not remain mere paper or empty words but are put into practice in daily life.

Is terre des hommes different from other organisations in international cooperation? Is there something special about terre des hommes?

Yes, an essential element of the way terre des hommes works is participation. For us, children and young people are not a 'target group', they are themselves actors. Or, as a girl from Peru puts it, "Nothing about us without us." According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), children and young people have the right to express their opinion and have a say in all matters concerning them.

Is that also shown in the organisation structure of terre des hommes?

Yes, very clearly; for that reason we have no projects of our own but support local partner organisations. They have a kind of bridging function.

Children always live in specific contexts, they are always enmeshed in community relations. For an international organisation, however, direct access to children and the direct relationship with them is only possible to a limited extent. By contrast, our partners live as part of local civil society in the same life world as the children who are affected by violence, exploitation and injustice, and can commit themselves authentically to safeguarding children's best interests.

Do terre des hommes' partners have a say, as well?

Yes, an example of the way terre des hommes works is the Delegates Conference (DC). It takes place every five years and involves not only staff and volunteers from the association but also representatives of partner organisations and young people from the international youth network, that brings together young people from the project regions. The DC adopts the strategic goals of terre des hommes' international programmes. Participation is therefore not only the goal of the work, it is always also part of a daily practice that is not only forward-looking but is implemented in daily life. That is the only way we can remain credible and coherent in our activities.

Our principle of cooperation with local partner organisations is of central importance precisely because it is so important to terre des hommes to act not *for* but *with* children.

Why is terre des hommes working on the topic "Development and its Alternatives"? The policy mission of terre des hommes

For terre des hommes it is clear: we are all part of a global societal order that is marked by a completely unacceptable distributive injustice. Especially children and young people are victims of these exploitative structures. terre des hommes has committed itself to protecting the lives and rights of children. There is no doubt that direct assistance is necessary for this, but anyone who only gives charity runs a risk of contributing to perpetuating the causes of the ill. For that reason, we think that the necessary societal transformation can primarily arise from below, with the participation of all, and that our projects contribute to triggering local, national and international processes of change. From this perspective, the last two DCs opted primarily for tapping the potential of experience from the Global South and gathering up alternatives to the predominant myth of development. The seminar "Alternatives in Development" is part of this process.