

Guiding principles for the work of Indienhilfe e.V. Herrsching (IH)

Passed in our Annual Meeting 1992

Indienhilfe – a movement

IH regards itself as part of the international survival movement in which peace-, women's-, ecology-, human rights- and Third World-groups combat the ever-increasing threats to dignified human living, and in this context concentrates in particular on relations between India and Germany.

How we see the problems

IH sees the following main reasons for the progressive sinking into misery of large populations in the so-called and actual Third World:

* the pursuit of a mistaken and dangerous policy of progress and development by the majority of populations in capitalist and (former) socialist industrialized countries, based on the irrational and presumptuous belief (hybris) that there are no limits to economic growth and material progress and in the absolute priority of individual liberty as opposed to the integration of the individual in a stable system of relations between (wo)man and nature on the planet earth;

* the adoption of this policy, represented by affluence, even excess for the majority of the population, endless possibilities for individual self-aggrandizement, the reduction of tedious manual labour regarded as humiliating, the removal of many disagreeable physical phenomena from daily life has a seductive effect on those who do not participate in it, and an extremely corrupting effect on those who do participate. The adoption of this policy in Third World countries starts at the top and works its way down (economic, political and scientific elites, middle class);

* the ruthless exploitation of global resources (e.g. minerals, plants and animals, water, air, soil, nowadays even genetic "material") by one third of the world's population which forces through its mistaken policy by creating and/or maintaining unequal and economic power relations and/or (post-)colonial structures in politics and economy at the expense of the remaining two thirds of the population living mainly in Third World countries. There are collaborations between elites in the Third World and the industrialized world and their respective power structures.

Our goals and fields of activity

IH strives by means of its project cooperation, its publicity and trading activity to contribute to a reduction in the injustice in the relations between Third World and industrialized countries., to stop the process of progressive impoverishment, to (re-)create dignified living conditions and to achieve a new development policy directed towards sustainability, justice, non-violence and the widest possible participation of all people in responsibility and power. This new development policy, characterised by the principle "POVERTY (as opposed to misery, in the sense of simplicity, moderation) IN DIGNITY FOR ALL" can only be successfully put into practice with the active involvement of all concerned – by those who suffer from misery and injustice just as much as by those who profit from the misery of others and the structures of injustice. "Poverty in dignity" here means an access to fulfillment of all basic physical needs leaving enough free time and energy for social, cultural, intellectual, religious life, for enjoyment of life. Human dignity gets lost, if (wo)men have to fully spend their energy and time on purely sustaining their physical existence. We remind the positive meaning of the term 'poverty' in religions like Christianity und Buddhism and in political/philosophical thinking like Gandhi's and dare to proclaim "Poverty liberates!" – the ones from misery, the others from destructive affluence, all from an obsession for 'having' instead of developing a character of 'being'. (We refer to Erich Fromm, 'To Have or To Be.)

We make a conscious effort in Germany (and other European countries) to increase people's awareness of the effects of our materially presumptuous life style an economic system which are leading (wo)mankind into an apparently hopeless deadlock of self-destruction. For many people in the Third World the societies of the industrialized countries serve as model for them to emulate: we therefore have a double responsibility:

We must on the one hand as a matter of elementary justice reduce to a globally reasonable level our disproportionately high consumption of energy and natural resources; we must on the other hand as a matter of simple credibility show by a new way of life that we take seriously our warnings of an ecological collapse of the earth if everyone adopts our present standard of living. (For example, one German citizen uses as much energy as 25 Indians jointly; big India would only reach the same

energy consumption as our small Germany with a population of two billion compared with its current population of 800 million.)

We attempt to confront in a positive sense and promote other ways of life and culture, recognizing the legitimate claim of all (wo)mankind to the equal satisfaction of their basic needs. Solidarity shall be valued more than ruthless selfaggrandizement; cultural, spiritual and moral values shall count for more than material values, creativity more than consumption. Nature shall be treated in such a way that it can sustain in the long term as the basis of all human life. In India as well as in Germany we pursue concrete efforts for such future oriented solidarian action in global responsibility which encourages the desired way of life and economy, socially and ecologically balanced, sustainable and participatory. Negative German examples (e.g. waste and traffic problems) shall strengthen in India the trend away from uncritical acceptance of 'Western' values, Indian examples shall arouse our solidarity and motivate action in Germany.

IH tries to steer clear of ideologies and dogmatism and to be guided simply by reality and by its chosen values.

How we try to realize our goals

Our publicity work on global inter-dependencies, demonstrated by examples from India and from Germany, and on the consequences of our own way of life, is directed towards action, that is, it aims first and foremost to change our behaviour, not just to extend our knowledge or awareness. We place particular emphasis on our publicity work on the situation of the original Indian peoples (Adivasi).

With these aims in mind IH collects relevant 'development related' information, prepares it in usable form and makes it available to interested and committed circles. IH strives to integrate with other groups, institutions and individuals. IH attempts in Germany and other (European) countries to act as advocate for the underprivileged groups of the Indian population ('advocacy').

Within the framework of our development cooperation we cooperate with indigenous partner organisations in India which organise projects and other measures aimed at helping under-privileged groups of the population to enjoy a fair share of national wealth and a dignified life. We engage in a continuing personal dialogue with our partners about the development model to be pursued and the methods by which it can be achieved.

The selection of reliable partner organisations and the strengthening of their institutional structure play a central role in our work; we regard it as illusory to believe that a German organisation such as ours can gain direct access to an cooperate without intermediary agent/agency directly with the target groups – people living in misery (below the 'poverty line'), marginal and small farmers, Adivasi, lower castes, slum and street dwellers etc., always with particular reference to women. Our experience shows that such an attempt is doomed to failure from the outset – for lack of a common language to begin with. We therefore seek intermediary organisations and continuously attempt to convince ourselves of their credibility and effectiveness.

In selecting partner organisations we pay particular attention to democratic structures and the maximum participation of those concerned in the planning and decision processes and the implementation of projects, programmes and other activities. IH itself does not initiate any new projects but instead supports existing initiatives. Our support must not make the Indian partner organisations dependent upon us. We stipulate that advantage is being taken of all available means of financial support from the Indian government (central and regional), particularly in the areas of infrastructure, welfare, small loans, and that at least nominal financial contributions for services are made and that donations, membership contributions and voluntary work are raised locally. While IH's cooperation with Indian partner organisations is not tied to any fixed period of time, as long as and as far as we can agree on common goals and a relation of mutual trust exists, individual projects must be limited to a reasonable and appropriate period of time. Individual projects should as far as possible be exemplary and should encourage continuing activities.

Priorities with regard to our project activities

IH prefers to finance rural projects with an integrated, holistic approach. Measures in the areas of education, further education and vocational training, health, agriculture, handicraft, small and village industry, appropriate technology, housing, accumulation of capital (saving schemes), cooperatives, protection of the environment and natural resources, building awareness and organising people should mutually support each other and gain in effectiveness. Great importance is always attached to

possible effects on the environment when selecting particular measures. Particular priority is given to encouraging ecological agriculture, suitable to (wo)man as well as to nature, in India. Individual programmes are supported if they are not an end in themselves but rather part of a more comprehensive process of development.

Special promotion of women as socially and economically particularly deprived group by IH goes without saying. It doesn't necessarily mean separate women's projects, but that each project assisted by IH is examined regarding its effects on women. It is ascertained that project activities always also aim at strengthening the position of women: by organising themselves, by economic encouragement, by vocational training and awareness-building, by specific health programmes etc.

IH can also cooperate with partner organisations that are active in urban surroundings and can also help in case of catastrophe which threatens life.

IH cooperates not only exclusively with organisations which renounce violence as a means of change but also sets high priority on the active encouragement of awareness-building aiming at tolerance, better understanding and a balancing of interests between those belonging to different religious or ethnic groups and castes. As part of building awareness, efforts are made to create or strengthen the organisation of the target-groups, for example, women's groups, so-called youth clubs, village committees, associations and cooperatives, savings and loan associations, trade unions and other self-help groups. Important elements of building awareness are holding meetings and seminars, promoting and training local leadership (particularly also women!), non-formal education, conducting surveys, organising cultural events such as rural fairs, exhibitions, commemorations. Individual action can also be taken such as protests, demonstrations, actions of non-violent social resistance and civil disobedience.

Important pre-conditions for cooperation

There are no ready made solutions to improve the present situation – projects in general have experimental character and their actual effects have to be continuously assessed. An essential part of our dialogue with partner organisations is therefore regular discussion on the development of their work, in written form (project reports, correspondence, evaluation by experts) and in oral form (discussions during our project visits or visits of project partners in Germany). We, too, inform about our work by correspondence, translation of important minutes and papers, by conversation. We ask for regular accounts and copies of balance-sheets in the same way that we publish our financial reports. In dealing with public money (donations, grants) we regard as indispensable a maximum transparency; this applies as much to ourselves as to partner organisations who receive and administer the money with the sole purpose of ensuring that it reaches the target-groups as effectively as possible. They are just as accountable to the public for the money as we are.

Of particular importance to us are the visits we make to partner organisations and projects in India (these visits are always financed by ourselves privately) and the visits we receive from the partner organisations (these are also financed privately or from donations specifically given for this purpose). In direct personal encounter partnership becomes reality, mutual trust and respect become possible and despite different cultural backgrounds we achieve a better mutual understanding across those frontiers.

Further criteria for IH projects are:

- * geographical focus are West Bengal and neighbouring states;
- * no preference of particular religions, castes or races;
- * project work shall have no predictable negative effects outside its own area (e.g. support of one group at the expense of another).

We regard these principles as representing the latest state of our discussion. They shall be developed further in dialogue with our partners, friends and members.
