

StanCom Discussion Paper: Strengthening Partner Dialogue and Motion 8 of the Delegates Conference 2013

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I. Introduction

We are more than ever committed to the concepts of co-decision, partner dialogue and the Delegates Conference. In a world, which is taking a giant leap backwards towards nationalism, communalism, populist leadership and authoritarian rule, spaces for participation are shrinking. terre des hommes has to offer alternatives to this trend. We should strengthen our co-decision model and not succumb to the centralization of decision-making justified by seemingly economic efficiency or ideological reasoning.

Though already reduced compared to the first conferences, the costs of the Delegates Conferences are relatively high. In our opinion, the results of the Delegates Conferences more than justify these costs:

- We establish joint Strategic Goals and pool our forces and competences to tackle global problems that concern us all (creating synergies).
- We involve those affected by problems (empowerment).
- We involve those that do the actual operational work into strategic decisions (operational knowledge).
- We live what we preach: A pluralistic, participatory and democratic cooperation trying to break with a paternalistic donor-recipient relation (democratic dialogue).

The evaluation by Prof. Overwien has shown strong support but also justified criticism on the Delegates model of terre des hommes. We have to adapt our co-decision model to a changing context and improve it further.

II. Reforms so far and Challenges remaining

In its relatively short history, the Delegates Conference has passed through different reforms of its processes and composition:

- In 1996, the first International Framework Planning Seminar of tdh took place in Bonn. In 2000, tdh institutionalized the co-decision body by including it into its statutes and re-baptizing it into Delegates Conference.

- Until 2009, the Delegates Conference took place every three years. After the first two conferences, terre des hommes realized that the three years span to achieve the set of strategic goals was not feasible and does not justify such a big and expensive conference. As areas of decision were too widespread and not clearly defined, all participants had to discuss many internal operational issues of terre des hommes.
- Based on these experiences, in 2011 the General Assembly decided on the new Delegates Order and together with the Rules of Procedures of the Delegates Conference, important changes were introduced aiming at focusing the DC's areas of responsibilities on strategic rather than operational issues, and on internationally relevant ones. Furthermore, the tdh Members Assembly specified the paragraph on the DC in the tdh Statutes, defining Strategic Goals, Focal Themes and International Campaigns and Resolutions as mandate of the DC. Following the focus on strategic issues, the time span between the Conferences was augmented from three to five years. Another important reform introduced by the Delegates Order was the reduction of the number of delegates from 62 to 42. In addition, of course, the accommodation of a new stakeholder-group, the youth.

Looking back, we can see that these reforms had a positive impact and were part of a learning curve:

- Time span of five years: Within five years, it is possible to see at least some first results of our work and evaluate if we are on the right track. At the same time, it still allows valid assumptions and predictions on the political and social developments in our project regions. Of course, it does not exclude the possibility of sudden unforeseen crises (coup d'état, natural disaster, outbreaks of violent conflicts). On the other side, five years can already be too long for the continuous work in the StanCom: Since the last conference, most of the representatives in StanCom have changed, some even more than once.
- Reduction of the number of delegates: Discussions at the Delegates Conference have become more dynamic with a smaller number of participants. However, the preparation for conferences still takes place in the respective groups; the space for joint discussions is limited to the DC itself.

We recommend maintaining these changes to evaluate its pro and cons further. The two challenges of guaranteeing continuous work of the StanCom and a lack of joint discussions before the conferences remain.

III. Adapting to Changes in the International Program of terre des hommes

In the last years, the international program of terre des hommes has changed and included new countries (e.g. Pakistan, Iraq) and withdrawn from others (Angola). Most probably, there will be others changes in the project regions of terre des hommes in the coming years (extension of the work in Middle East, Pakistan, and Africa).

So far, the Delegates Order inhibits adapting to such changes: It determines not only the overall number of 12 Delegates of Partner Organizations but also numbers per regions. The fixed regional quota are already causing problems: According to the Delegates Order, one delegate should come from West Africa, though we currently only indirectly support very few project partners of other terre des hommes Organizations. There is no partner platform and hence no partner delegates which leaves us with only 11 partner delegates. Therefore, the Delegates Order needs to be adapted,

maintaining the number of 12 partner delegates but allocated to the various regions in a more flexible way. The overall numbers of representatives of each delegates group shall remain (12 Partner Delegates, 12 Volunteer Delegates, 6 Youth Network, 3 Presidium, 3 Board, 6 Staff).

For the time being, the German annual General Assembly is entitled to decide on number and allocation of partner delegates to certain regions via the Delegates Order. In order not to have to go for their detailed decision every now and again some years before a DC, we propose to split the procedure: the annual general assembly decides the number of partner delegates in general, i.e. 12, and the specific allocation to the various regions is decided by StanCom based on a set of criteria agreed on the next DC/annual general assembly. We suggest that program coordination department proposes a quota based on these criteria right in time before the DC proceeding starts, which is then agreed on by StanCom.

The set of criteria should comprise:

- Minimum: Representation of all project regions with co-decision mechanisms (platforms, partner meetings): As far as possible, all project regions should be represented in the co-decision process. Of course, these regions can only have delegates if a co-decision process (partner platform or regular meetings) exists. In regions where this is not the case, terre des hommes should actively present possibilities for co-decision and, if desired and possible, motivate a participation in the DC process.
- Supplementary: Number of partner organizations in the region: Regions with a large number of partner organizations should also get higher number of delegates.

IV. Improving the Quality of proposals for the DC

Within tdh and partners, we have a vast expert knowledge on different topics. However, in the preparation process for the DC we do not yet use this knowledge sufficiently.

Therefore, motions for the Delegates Conference should be thoroughly formulated in small expert working groups based on the first inputs of the delegates groups (analysis of current strategic goals, first ideas for new proposals for strategic goals, focal themes, and international campaigns). The expert working groups would then take up the first proposals by the different groups and formulate a coherent proposal. The groups should be small and made up of persons, who have a real interest and professional knowledge of the discussed topic. They do not necessarily have to include all delegates groups: They could consist, for instance, only of project partners working on the topic of trauma in Latin America, only of volunteers working with refugees in Germany. However, the intention is to have mixed groups. They will only exist for the time of the elaboration of a motion for the upcoming DC.

Just as in established parliaments, Delegates of each group would then read, modify and decide upon the proposals. All decision powers would stay with the delegates.

These expert groups could also elaborate proposals before delegates are elected, taking up and conceptualizing promising new topics whenever they appear in campaigns or projects, serving as a tool for knowledge management. These proposals would then be presented to the newly elected delegates and could be a first pool of ideas for new Strategic Goals/focal themes etc.

After the Delegates Conference, the expert working groups can be invited to give advice on the operationalization of the goals.

Of course, such a process would have to be coordinated by one person, identifying interesting topics and motivating formation of the expert working group.

Proposed changes would have to be decided by the terre des hommes members' assembly as the responsible body. However, StanCom would like to ask the Delegates Conference to approve e such an initiative.