



**Reflecting on  
North-South partnerships**  
A catalogue of questions



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What makes a good partnership?  
Some answers from colleagues from the Global South...



*A partnership is first and foremost a decision. The decision to enter into a relationship between two organizations/regions/countries. A relationship that should be based on, and above all nurtured by, contacts, exchanges, sharing, adjustments and – why not – changes of course when necessary. This is the hallmark of any relationship. Partnership should be no exception.*

*Raïssa Mpundu - Partnership between Baden-Württemberg and Burundi, Burundi.*

*A partnership can work well if local knowledge is taken into account when planning the project.*

*Bill Guadamud Tobar – Fundación Cerro Verde from Guayaquil, Ecuador.*

*[...] Coming together, working and sharing ideas with similar goals. It promotes teamwork and critical thinking for success and creates more networking opportunities to enhance one's own talents and skills and learn new things together.*

*Mitchell Yakish – Lodwar Girls Primary School St. Monica, Kenya.*

*For me, partnership means more opportunities for networking, more ideas and solutions and definitely more helping hands.*

*Magaret Nontokozo Phiri – LABASIKATI Women Empowerment, South Africa.*

*It should not serve as a pretext for socio-economic and political interests between countries, because in this way there will be no justice, let alone equality.*

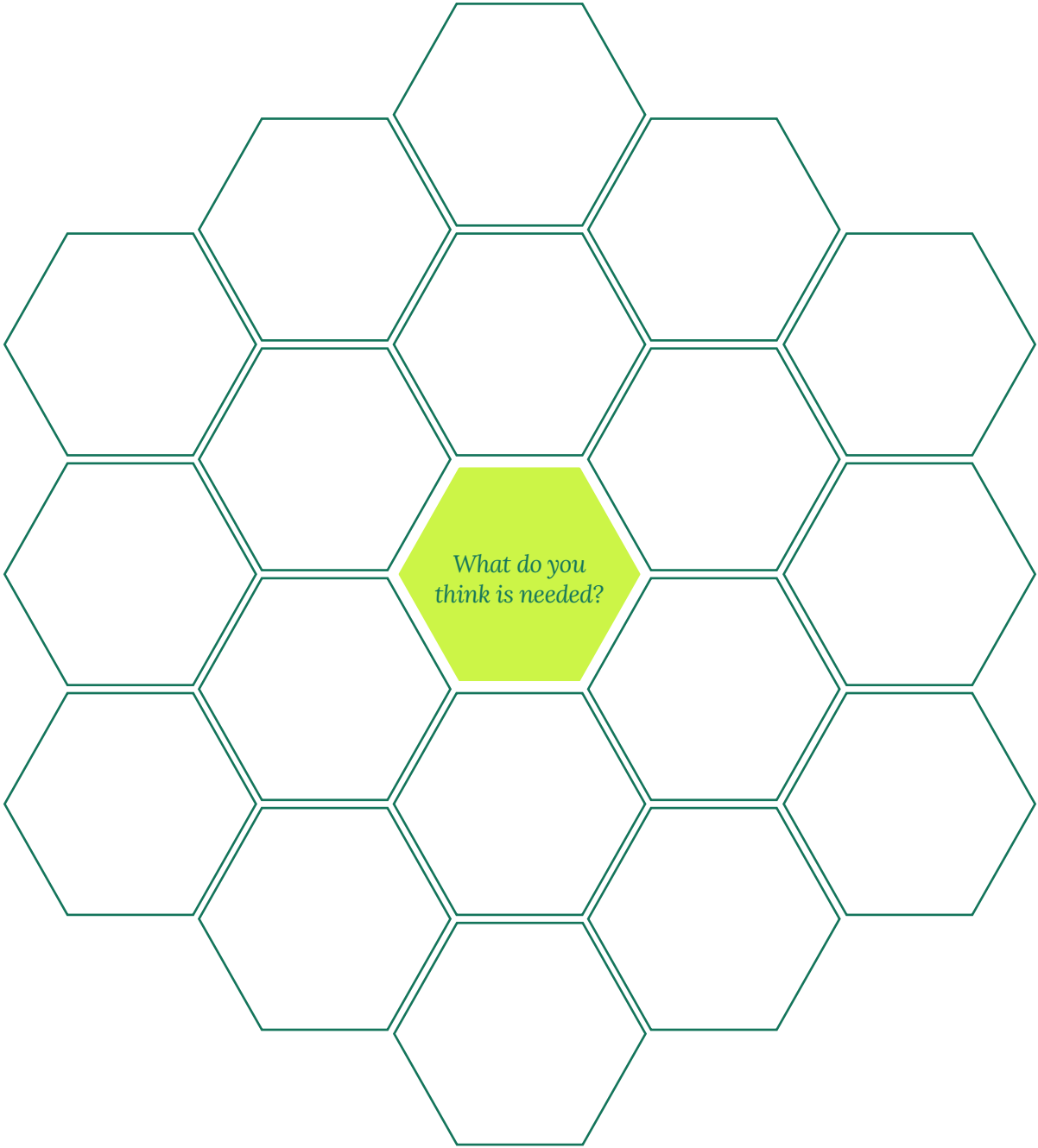
*CEDRU, San Rafael del Sur, Nicaragua.*

*A fair international partnership must contribute to eliminating global inequalities.*

*CEDRU, San Rafael del Sur, Nicaragua.*







*What do you  
think is needed?*



Due to changing perspectives and debates,  
new questions are constantly being raised.

We therefore invite you to ask yourselves  
questions and let others ask you questions!



# Introduction

## More questions than answers

In our work as specialist promoters in the field of international cooperation, we have found that new views, different perspectives and aha moments are more likely to be gained through questions than through fixed statements. This catalogue of questions is intended to support those active in partnership work in reflecting on their cooperation and to encourage them to think about challenges and new solutions. To this end, we hereby present the second edition of the catalogue of questions “Reflecting on Partnerships”.<sup>1</sup> The new edition addresses further debates, thematic aspects and potential areas of tension, some of which are new, some of which have existed for a long time but have hardly found their way into North-South partnership work so far. This includes, for example, dealing with the essential topics of “decolonization” and “power-critical perspectives” as well as aspects of global justice in partnerships. But the increasing autocratization processes globally

in recent years and the resulting restrictions on civil society actors’ room for manoeuvre (shrinking spaces) also bring new challenges for (North-South) partnership work. Therefore, questions about the political dimension as well as human rights and gender equality are an important part of this catalogue of questions. We base our work on the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).<sup>2</sup> In concrete terms, SDG 17 “Partnerships for the Goals” focuses on (North-South) partnerships as a central element on the path to greater global justice. Nevertheless, we do not see the SDGs as a panacea and encourage them to be critically questioned as well.

We see asking questions as a work in progress, and this edition will probably not be the last. As debates and perspectives change, new questions are constantly emerging, while others may become less relevant.

The catalogue of questions is intended to serve as a tool for you to think through and examine

your partnerships on different levels. In this way, we hope to encourage reflection and initiate possible change processes that will benefit your collaboration.

We have tried to adopt a power-critical perspective. Nevertheless, you may ask yourself: “Whose questions are we asking?” The questions presented here are largely formulated in the Global North. Although we hold different social positions in the team, we are aware that we are not free of prejudices and that our view of things is limited by our geographical location.

This catalogue of questions was drawn up in the Global North. For the partners in the Global South, there are certainly some questions that we have not thought of, but which are of the utmost importance in order to reflect on North-South partnerships together and to be able to shape equitable partnership work. We therefore invite you to add your questions to the catalogue and welcome all constructive criticism.

### **Questions upon questions – and now what?**

There are many different types of partnerships: school, city or municipal partnerships, project and university partnerships, partnerships that have arisen from political or cultural contexts,

and so on. Each partnership is individual with its own history, consists of different actors and is embedded in various local and global contexts. There is therefore no one right way to build, shape and maintain a partnership in the long term.

You will notice that some blocks of questions are relevant for every partnership because there is always a start and a goal. Other questions, however, are more specific. For example, not every partnership engages in public relations or campaign work. In the individual chapters, some questions address basic structures of partnerships and others relate to more concrete situations, such as conflicts.

The catalogue of questions can therefore be used in different ways. It is designed so that the subject areas can be worked through from start to finish or worked on independently. We welcome you to think about and discuss all the questions one by one. Board meetings, general meetings and (digital) meetings with partners can provide a suitable framework for this. Perhaps you would like to pick a subject area at your next meeting, discuss the questions together (e.g. in a World Café or a silent discussion) and derive concrete steps from this to further develop and professionalize your activities.

We would also like to encourage you to ask these questions repeatedly, rather than just once, as partnerships change and change processes do not happen overnight. They need time to achieve lasting effects, which can also lead to even greater mutual appreciation and recognition, for example.

We would be happy to support you in assessing your partnership, for instance with regard to unequal power relations, stable sustainable structures or transparency and participation opportunities. For this purpose – as well as for feedback and criticism – ask your partner organization in Germany to establish contact with the respective One World regional network and its responsible promoters.<sup>3</sup>

Laying the foundations!

## Start and aim of the North-South partnership

Who initiated the partnership?

What was your intention when you started the collaboration?

Are there jointly formulated goals? How were the needs and concerns of both sides taken into account when formulating the goals?

How do you address the **colonial past** and the historical and current connections between Europe and the **Global South** in your partnership work?

To what extent did you deal with Western ideas of **“development”** and **“aid”** when establishing the partnership?

### *Colonial past and continuities:*

Germany and most European countries established formal and informal colonies in Africa, the Americas, Asia and Oceania for economic reasons and against massive resistance. To justify this tyranny and exploitation, Europeans created a narrative of superiority over the rest of the world and its inhabitants. In particular, the (relatively) rich, *white*, European man was considered the measure of all things during the colonial period, to whom all other people were subordinated.

Even after its formal end in the second half of the 20th century, the colonial period continues to have an impact on an economic, political and intellectual level. iv This is expressed, for example, in ongoing prejudices and discrimination against Black and Indigenous people as well as People of Color (**BI\*PoC**), women and queer people as well as people affected by poverty. Many of these thought patterns play a role, especially in North-South cooperation, so we must actively confront them in order not to perpetuate them.<sup>4</sup>

### **Global South:**

The pair of terms Global South/Global North refer to the historical global inequality without adopting hierarchical concepts such as developing countries/developed countries. The terms are not meant in a purely geographical sense: the Global South includes countries or population groups that are disadvantaged by global colonial inequality structures, while the Global North includes those that benefit from them.

### **Development:**

The idea that the Global North is already further along the path to an ideal state than the Global South. The Global North should therefore help the Global South to develop in a similar way. This conceals a hierarchy of ways of life that has its roots in colonial times and has been influential for many centuries: the Global North is seen as exemplary and worthy of emulation, while the Global South is devalued as backward.

### **BI\*PoC:**

The abbreviation "BI\*PoC" stands for Black, Indigenous and People of Color. It makes racism against Black and Indigenous people visible and at the same time emphasizes the shared experiences of all people affected by racism. The \* in BI\*PoC stands for people affected by racism who do not identify with the three terms mentioned.

### **Ableism:**

The elevation or devaluation of people based on the abilities attributed to them, which leads to structural discrimination against chronically ill people and people with disabilities. Ableism assumes a physical and psychological ideal standard that these people cannot live up to. They are reduced to their disability and excluded from social participation.<sup>5</sup>

### **Racism:**

The structural discrimination of people based on their (supposed) ethnic origin. The characteristic of ethnic origin refers to categories such as external appearance, language, migration biography, etc.<sup>6</sup>

### **Sexism:**

The structural discrimination of people based on their (assigned) gender or gender identity.<sup>7</sup>

### **Classism:**

The structural discrimination of people based on their social and economic status as well as their education and social background.<sup>8</sup>

## Continuity of the partnership

How do you ensure that the partnership is long-term and sustainable?

What would happen on both sides if the partnership were to end? Are efforts being made to avoid long-term dependencies?

How many people are involved on each side of the partnership? What happens if people drop out?

Who has the most knowledge and resources on the topics of the partnership work (e.g. expertise, finances, contacts, processes)? How does knowledge transfer work in both directions?

Are there people on both sides who are familiar with and able to deal with these topics?

How are the skills and resources of both partners strengthened (e.g. through training measures)?

How is the partnership integrated into communities, parishes, schools or other institutions on both sides?

How do you deal with different forms of discrimination (e.g. **ableism**, **racism**, **sexism**, **classism**)?

## Power and global inequalities

What does **power** mean in your partnership?

Who participates in the partnership and for what reasons?

How and by whom are decisions made? Do you discuss this together?

How do you deal with the fact that the flow of money mainly takes place from the Global North to the Global South?

Who brings which resources (e.g. technical expertise, time, practical skills, contacts)? Who decides what is recognized as a resource?

If **volunteer work** takes place: How are power asymmetries taken into account and risks ruled out?



*Power and global inequality in partnerships:*

Partners from the Global North usually have not only greater financial resources on a personal and organizational level, but also enjoy structurally more favorable conditions, for example with regard to visa issuance. In addition, they are often attributed greater professional skills that entitle them to make decisions. Partners from the Global South often face more difficult underlying conditions: their knowledge and competence are valued less highly and structural hurdles make it difficult for them to access resources and exert influence. A comprehensive understanding of these dynamics requires historical, cultural and economic contexts to be taken into account in partnership work.

*Volunteering:*

Volunteering can become a form of exploitation if working with people (mostly children) in the Global South is treated as a consumable attraction. But even long-term volunteer services offered through state-supported programs are embedded in global power relations and can have negative effects. This applies to North-South as well as South-North volunteer services.<sup>9</sup>



Communicate and be heard!

## Inclusion and participation

Do both partners have access to each other's information and materials, e.g. mission statement, statutes, goals and plans, homepage or other information platforms (in a language they understand)?

How do you ensure equal participation of all those involved, especially marginalized groups?

What is the gender balance at the decision-making levels on both sides of the partnership?

How do you involve the respective target groups at the decision-making level? For example, is there a representative for children or youth?

What participation opportunities are there to actively shape the other side of the partnership?

### *Inclusion and participation:*

Inclusion means being part of a project or situation but with limited influence or decision-making power. Participation goes further: it involves active engagement, collaboration, and the ability to shape decisions and outcomes.

## Communication and exchange

How is mutual trust strengthened?

Does different access to communication channels (e.g. internet, telephone) and media affect your exchange? If so, how do you meet this challenge?

What **language** is primarily used for communication? How do you deal with language barriers?

How do you deal with gender-sensitive language?

How often does exchange take place - regularly or as needed? Who takes the initiative? Which people are involved?

What cultural and other differences influence communication and how do you deal with them?

How and by whom are problems or challenges addressed? Are open communication structures maintained even in conflict situations?

### *Language:*

In formerly colonized countries, the official national language (e.g. Spanish, English or French) is not always the first language of all inhabitants. Since it is learned through the formal education system (often established in colonialism), marginalized people with poor access to education often have less knowledge of this language. Many matters are much more difficult to express in a foreign language than in one's own first language.

## Press and public relations work

What forms and media of public relations do you use on both sides of the partnership and are these accessible to each other?

Are the actors on both sides named in all publications about the partnership?

Do you decide together on the photos and texts used? Are the partners aware that information about them will be published and do they have the opportunity to have a say?

Are people portrayed in texts, photos and videos **with dignity and as self-determined individuals**? Are people depicted and credited equally (e.g. full name, role, profession)?

How do you ensure that people depicted (e.g. target groups in projects) have given their consent?

If children and adolescents are depicted: is their consent in addition to that of their legal guardians obtained?

How are questions about copyright and publication rights dealt with?

### *Dignified and self-determined:*

Dignified means that all people are portrayed as individuals, rather than serving a certain idea from the Global North. It often helps to ask yourself whether you would like to be portrayed like that in the photo. Everyone should decide for themselves whether, where and how they are portrayed.<sup>10</sup>

Making formalities and  
framework conditions transparent!

## Legal foundations

In what form are the partners registered as legal entities in their respective countries?

How well do both partners know the applicable regulations and laws in the other country that are relevant to their joint work? Do both partners comply with these laws, including, for example, funding guidelines, press law, labor law, building law and visa regulations?

Are laws and regulations from one of the countries given more importance? If so, how do you deal with this?

What do you do if national laws affect your cooperation?

What protection and complaint mechanisms are there in your cooperation for situations such as discrimination, sexual assault and child endangerment? Is there, for example, a child protection policy?<sup>11</sup>

## Transparency and finances

Who has access to the finances? How does the exchange between the partners about financial matters take place?

Are all partners familiar with the funding guidelines and the application and verification processes of the funding institution?

Who is accountable to whom with regard to factual and financial reports?

What external mechanisms (e.g. certificates, donation seals, independent auditors) exist to check the **transparency** of all partners?

What differences are there in working conditions and wages (e.g. gender pay gap, local vs. foreign employees)?

Are the people on both sides of the partnership predominantly volunteers or full-time employees?

### *Transparency:*

Mutual disclosure and access to information and decision-making processes in partnership work. It is important to communicate openly and honestly with each other, especially with regard to finances, such as funds for projects and exchange trips.



## Political dimension

To what extent does a **political dimension** play a role in the partnership?

What political challenges and opportunities arise from cooperation between civil society actors from countries in the Global North and the Global South?

To what extent can actors on both sides of the partnership comment on political debates in the partner country?

How do you deal with differences of opinion in political exchanges?

To what extent do human rights play a role in the partnership? And is there a common perspective on human rights?

If civil society spaces are restricted (shrinking spaces), what strategies do you have for dealing with this?

### *Political dimension:*

Is the cooperation aimed at changing social conditions? This could be an attempt to jointly criticize and reduce inequalities between the Global North and the Global South, or a joint commitment to a goal such as combating the climate crisis and protecting human rights. Non-governmental organizations can exert political influence by drawing attention to grievances and human rights violations.

Filling the partnership with life!

## Projects

Who brings ideas for new **projects** or measures into the partnership?

How do you carry out joint projects and plans? Do actors in the Global South take an active role in the design and implementation of the projects? If not, how can obstacles be overcome?

Do you consider **gender equality** as a cross-sectional dimension in all projects?

Do you submit project applications to funding agencies together?

Do you develop joint target agreements for the projects?

How do you measure whether the goals have been achieved?

Are there childcare options available during relevant project activities?

### *Projects:*

Projects are carried out over a limited period of time and end when the specified goals have been achieved. Funding for such projects is often raised in the Global North, so the framework conditions and specifications are strongly influenced by that region.

### *Gender equality:*

Means that all genders have equal rights and opportunities in all areas of daily private and public life – only then can unequal power relations be balanced out and a fairer world made possible.

## Meetings and travel

Who decides who takes part in meetings? Who usually participates?

Is competence in a certain language a condition for participation or are translations planned if necessary?

Who determines the program content and procedures for meetings?

If project or monitoring trips take place: Why are they necessary and how is this communicated between the partners? To what extent are these trips prepared together with the partners?

Are there joint celebrations (anniversaries, achievement of goals, etc.)? Who plans and prepares them?

## Environment and Sustainability

How are the **UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** taken into account in the partnership? Are all partners aware of the SDGs?

How are projects designed and implemented with the environment in mind?

Are there common criteria for taking ecological sustainability into account? Are the same standards applied on both sides?

To what extent can modern communication technologies be used to reduce air travel?

### *UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG):*

The 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals, also known as the 2030 Agenda, were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 to promote sustainable development worldwide by 2030. These goals cover areas such as poverty reduction, education, gender equality, clean water and energy, sustainable consumption, as well as measures to protect ecosystems and combat climate change in the Global South and the Global North. However, critics complain that economic and political conditions are not sufficiently scrutinized.<sup>12</sup>

# Endnotes

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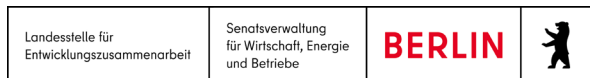
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