

# “If we want to focus on helping human beings, it’s essential that we make sure the environment is working well”

*Nichtregierungsorganisationen leisten wichtige Entwicklungsarbeit. Um Menschen besser helfen zu können, konzentrieren sich ihre Projekte jedoch zunehmend auf den Umweltschutz. IAN MCMASTER sprach darüber mit dem Vorstand der Stiftung Menschen für Menschen.*

MEDIUM

**H**as the increased awareness of environmental matters also raised awareness of the importance of your organization’s development work in Ethiopia?

Absolutely. For example, because of our track record, we are now suddenly being bombarded with requests to plant trees because people want to offset their CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. More generally, people understand the connection between development and environmental changes. The planet doesn’t really care whether it’s got humans on it — it would survive without us — but human beings do need the environment. So, if we say we want to focus on helping human beings, it’s essential that we make sure the environment is working well. In Ethiopia, the population increased from 35 million to around 110 million in the last 40 years. And 75 per cent of them still live in farming households. To survive, they have had to cut trees to build housing, for firewood, to have more land to farm and for their animals to graze on. Both the microclimate as well as the global climate have therefore dramatically worsened over the last 50 years. To create a sustainable environment for humans, we therefore reforest the areas. We also stop the erosion caused by deforestation — for example, by closing erosion gullies with dams. We need to reduce the use of wood, for example, by providing efficient stoves, so that people use 80 per cent less wood — again, to avoid deforestation. So, to make the lives of the farmers and their

families sustainable, we need to invest massively in environmental and resource protection, which is what we have done, planting more than 250 million trees in the past almost 40 years. The key to success is to make it a joint activity with the community. The problems will only be solved if their participation is high and ownership is taken by the local community on all levels.

## What lessons can NGOs and the private sector learn from each other?

I think NGOs can learn a bit more about efficiency and how to structure things. The private sector, on the other hand, could learn more about how to focus on people, rather than on making as much money as possible. The problem with the private sector is that it focuses on customers — everyone is proud to be “customer-centric”. But a “customer” is a reduction of a human being, to an entity that is valued mainly for its ability to pay money, whereas an NGO focuses on human beings and their dignity holistically.

## What is your organization’s biggest challenge at the moment?

**commitment**  
[kə'mɪtmənt]  
• Verpflichtung

**dam** [dæm]  
• (Stau-)Damm

**deforestation**  
[diːˌfɒrɪˈsteɪʃən]  
• Abholzung, Rodung

**dignity** ['dɪgnəti] ▶ Würde

**donation** [dəʊˈneɪʃən]  
• Spende

**entity** ['entəti] ▶ Objekt

**graze** [greɪz] ▶ weiden

**gully** ['ɡʌli]  
• (Wasser-)Rinne

**holistically** [həʊˈlɪstɪkəli]  
• ganzheitlich



DR SEBASTIAN BRANDIS

has been the executive director and spokesman of the board for the Menschen für Menschen – Karlheinz Böhm’s Äthiopienhilfe – foundation since December 2016, with responsibility for communication, fundraising, finance and administration. He has worked extensively in the private sector, for example with VIAG INTERKOM and Booz Allen & Hamilton. He also held management positions in the BT Group.

To manage the transformation to new business models. Fundamentally, I believe the one-time donation model works, but it should not be our only source of money. In an increasingly volatile media environment, tomorrow, the main new focus on urgent needs globally might be on another country. And, suddenly, large parts of the donation money go elsewhere. And how do we still meet the continuing demand in Ethiopia then? We’ve got long-term commitments in our partnership with the people in Ethiopia. We commit to our integrated projects for 10 to 15 years before we leave. So, how can we make sure that the inflow of money supports that kind of long-term strategy? We

**inflow** ['ɪnfləʊ]  
• Zufluss

**offset sth.** [ˌɒfˈset]  
• etw. ausgleichen

**ownership** [ˈɒnəʃɪp]  
• Eigentum (srecht), Besitz

**reforest sth.**  
[riːˈfɒrɪst]  
• etw. wiederaufforsten

**stove** [stəʊv] ▶ Herd

**sustainable**  
[səˈsteɪnəbəl]  
• nachhaltig

**track record**  
[ˈtræk ˌrekərd]  
• Erfolgsbilanz

**volatile** [ˈvɒlətaɪl]  
• schwankungsanfällig



need different business models so that our income is steadier. And we need to do this in partnership with others. None of the players — the state, the private sector, NGOs — will solve the problems alone. Every partner has its specific strengths and weaknesses. So, I think the challenge is to create cross-sector partnerships to bring together the best competencies of each partner. We need the money from the private sector. We need the expertise of NGOs and their connection to human beings. And we need governments to create regulations that are sustainable in the long term and to implement best practices on a large scale.

**How can you get more financial support from the private sector?**

I see part of my role as bridging the languages in the private and NGO sectors. For example, in Ethiopia, we evaluate a particular region, then we develop a programme to help the area. We make an agreement with the government, specifying what we will do over a certain number of years, and then leave the region and hand over to the government and local community. In business, you would say we do a “baseline study” and “due diligence”, we “propose a contract” and do a “joint venture” with the government, and then we have an “exit strategy”. Overall, we “invest in the people”. As an NGO, we can learn to adapt our language so that other people understand our work better, particularly in the private sector, but without losing our traditional supporters and without giving up our principles. You have to select your language carefully. But using business language in the appropriate environment certainly widens our potential funds massively. For example, if you talk to the big retailers, they are starting to question the stability of their supply chains. First, consumers are saying things like, “Where did these flowers come from?” or “How much water was used for this product?” Second, their business model is in danger if their products come from regions that are massively unstable because people are starving there. So, they have an interest in a sustainable

supply chain. And we can help to de-risk their investments by partnering with them: “If you help to stimulate the region, if you support the market and the farmers, if you help us to build schools and secure water supplies, you’ll have a stable society and a good partner as your supplier.”

**What are the fundraising challenges for NGOs in the German-speaking world?**

First, the philanthropic sector is much bigger in Anglo-Saxon countries; because the government sector is much smaller, they need to do more. And there’s much more pride in showing how much you donate. Whereas here, you don’t really talk about how much money you’ve got — sometimes, it is even regarded as bad to have a lot of money. This means that addressing people with money is one problem, and the other one is attracting them to the social sector. Germany was the export world champion until two or three years ago, when China overtook it. Yet, our engagement as a country in the global south is miniscule. Out of the 500 biggest foundations in the world that are engaged in Africa, only four are German. So, we have to raise the awareness that it is in everyone’s interest, even their own, to spend money in a philanthropic way.

**baseline study**

['beɪslam ,stʌdi]  
• Grundlagenstudie

**bridge sth.** [ˌbrɪdʒ]

• hier: etw. verbinden

**due diligence**

[ˌdjuː ˈdiːlɪdʒəns]  
• gebührende Sorgfalt;  
hier: sorgfältige Prüfung

**exit strategy**

['eksɪt ,strætədʒi]  
• Ausstiegsstrategie

**expertise** [ˌeksɜːˈtiːz]

• Sachkompetenz

**foundation** [faʊnˈdeɪʃən]

• Stiftung

**funds** [fʌndz]

• Mittel, Geldmittel

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Die Stiftung **Menschen für Menschen** leistet seit fast 40 Jahren nachhaltige Entwicklungszusammenarbeit in Äthiopien. In aktuell elf Projektregionen setzen rund 640 fest angestellte und fast ausschließlich äthiopische Mitarbeiter gemeinsam mit der Bevölkerung die integrierten ländlichen Entwicklungsprojekte um. Dabei verzahnt die NGO rund 380 Maßnahmen in den Bereichen Landwirtschaft, Wasser, Bildung, Gesundheit und Einkommen miteinander und befähigt die Menschen, ihre Lebensumstände aus eigener Kraft zu verbessern.

Den Grundstein für die Stiftung legte 1981 der Schauspieler **Karlheinz Böhm** (gest. 2014) in der Sendung „Wetten, dass...?“. Menschen für Menschen trägt durchgehend seit 1993 das Spendensiegel des Deutschen Zentralinstituts für soziale Fragen (DZI).  
<https://www.menschenfuermenschen.de/en>

**fundraising** [ˈfʌndˌreɪzɪŋ]

• Mittelbeschaffung

**implement sth.**

['ɪmplɪmənt]  
• etw. umsetzen

**miniscule** [ˈmɪnɪskjuːl]

• winzig, unbedeutend

**retailer** [ˈriːtɪərlə]

• Einzelhändler(in)

**secure** [sɪˈkjʊə]

• sichern, beschaffen

**starve** [stɑːv]

• (ver)hungern

**steady** [ˈstiːdi]

• regelmäßig, konstant

**supply chain**

[səˈplaɪ tʃeɪn]  
• Lieferkette