Having a voice and being heard enables people to shape and form the communities they are living in. But around the globe, political participation is not something to be taken for granted. In partnership with donors, the Helvetas Governance Programme strives to support marginalised people, especially women, youth, and indigenous minorities to have a say.
Photo: Helvetas / Ch. Bobst

MOVING GOVERNANCE

Strengthening Local Governance and Civil Society to improve basic services for the poor and marginalised

The inclusive and effective delivery of public services, such as water systems and sanitation, education, infrastructure and health facilities, is **key in tackling poverty reduction**. It correlates with the wider well-being of society: If poor people have access to essential services, society as such works better, and vice versa. Access to good quality public services, however, remains out of grasp for many, and especially poor and marginalised women and men.

Good governance means delivering public services competently for the benefit of all citizens, ensuring 'no one is left behind'.

Your support of the new Governance Programme will **promote good governance to improve service provision and combat poverty in nine countries**, reaching at least 1200 communities directly and many more indirectly, benefiting at least 130'000 men and women.

> **"Without a road, we could not get to the market, and in an emergency no ambulance could reach us."**
>
> Chale Tariku (50), head of administration, community Koker/ Ethiopia

FOCUS OF THE MOVING GOVERNANCE PROGRAMME

Helvetas, with the support of two private foundations, is launching a new governance programme called **Moving Governance**. The programme aims at strengthening local governance and civil society to improve service delivery that is relevant for the poor and marginalized in Helvetas partner countries, and upscale its impact.

The Moving Governance programme will bring together existing projects focusing on strengthening local governance and civil society in nine different countries across Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The programme develops a conceptual framework and set of interventions for strengthening local governance and civil society in the five main topic areas, including key metrics for the outcome and impact assessment. It provides a space for exchange and mutual learning between the projects together with the development of new guidelines, manuals and knowledge products based on the collective experiences and lessons learnt of the projects.

Moving Governance is working on:

- **Empowering citizens to effectively participate in local decision-making** so that their voices are heard and acted upon, including those of poor and marginalised men and women. This ensures that local service provision responds and adapts to the needs of the local community.

- **Enabling local Civil Society Organisations** (CSOs) so they can represent the needs of citizens and specific interest groups such as women, youth, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities as well as membership organisations representing the private sector.

- **Strengthening local authorities and other service providers** to deliver inclusive services and providing support to ensure the sustainable funding and management of these services in the long term and, most importantly, beyond the duration of project activities.

The programme aligns with **the international community's 2030 Agenda to eradicate poverty** in all its forms and dimensions. The Governance Programme will work towards Sustainable Development Goal **SDG 16** with its emphasis on inclusive local decision-making to ensure effective service delivery.

Gaining a Voice in Guatemala

Clemencia López Cabrera, 29 years old, lives in El Rincón, a community within the department of Quetzaltenango. In Guatemala, **women are often reduced to housework and care tasks** with little opportunity to build up their self-esteem and raise their voice in society and politics.

The **project *K'emenik*** seeks to **promote womens' leadership skills** to support them in living a more dignified life, as well as to confirm and multiply their knowledge and ideas through links with different private and public entities.

Clemencia has participated in courses offered by the project, such as self-esteem training and courses related to good governance and organizational strengthening. Clemencia is now a confident woman who participates and puts forward her ideas with the commitment to provide solutions and improvements in her community. She is now **president of a local women's group** and a member of the Community Council for Urban and Rural Development. Photos: Helvetas/ S. Sebastian, fairpicture
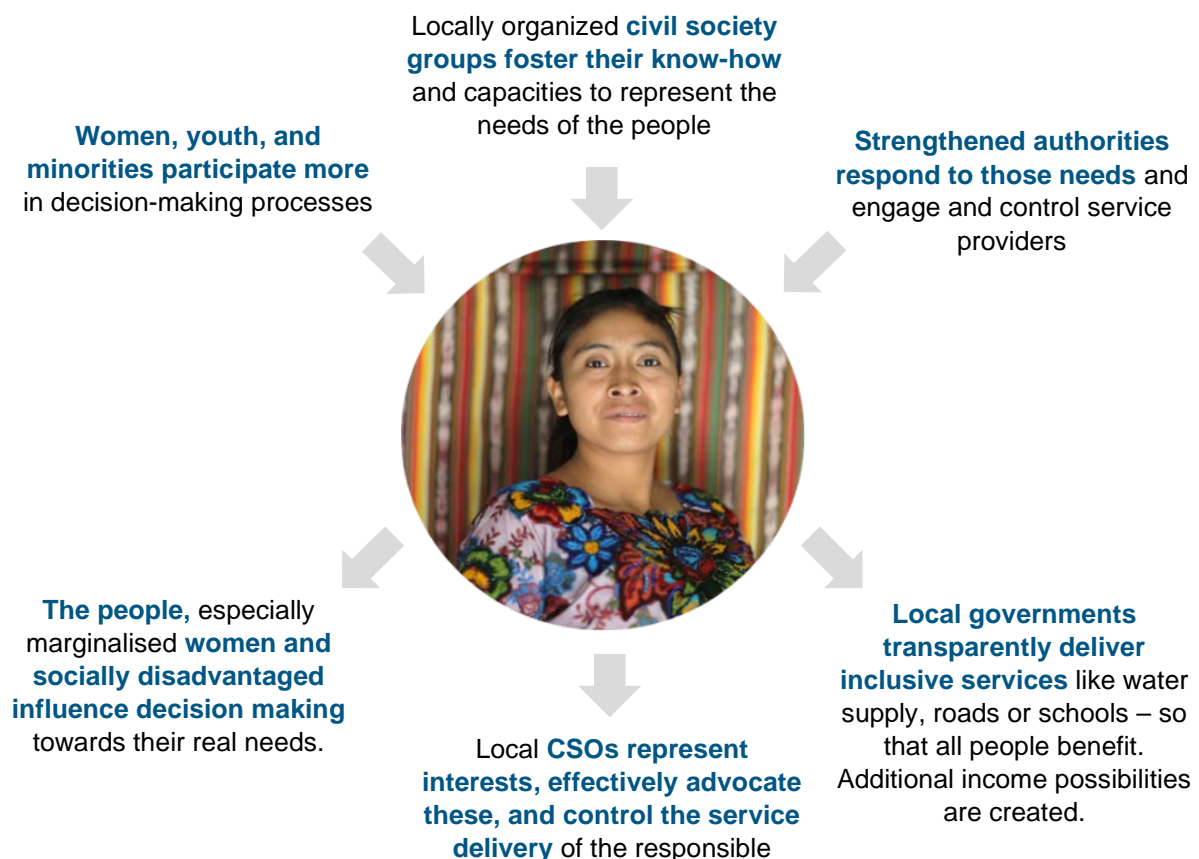
WHY THIS PROGRAMME

Helvetas has longstanding experience implementing governance projects in different countries, both own (fundraising) funded and mandated projects (e.g. SDC and EuropeAid funded, among other donors). In the past, technical support has happened mainly through Helvetas advisory services from the headoffice. However, there was **little exchange between the individual projects** in different countries, as, on the one hand, funding for such kind of activities is difficult to obtain. On the other hand, technical infrastructure and skills in the partner countries were not yet allowing easy exchange between project teams without travelling and respective time and cost requirements. This has changed drastically during the pandemic of Covid 19: Exchange between teams in different countries has become much easier.

With the new programme embracing relevant governance projects of Helvetas, more focus will be given to **foster South-South exchange, sharing of lessons learnt** and the **production of useful tools and documents beyond individual projects.**

Finally, enhancing **visibility of the topic "local governance" among Swiss foundations** and attract more funding to secure the continuation of the projects is another goal. As these depend on donations and grants on a yearly basis, a programmatic approach will lead to more planning security. For this purpose, a **Helvetas governance fund** has been established. It serves as funding mechanism for the the development of overarching activities, tools and topics but also the individual projects.

IMPACT OF LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Local governance is about improving services for poor and disadvantaged people. The theory of change is: If communities have a say over the development of their community and local governements are enabled to respond to these demands, then the relevant services for the poor and marginalized people improve:

Locally organized **civil society groups foster their know-how** and capacities to represent the needs of the people

Women, youth, and minorities participate more in decision-making processes

Strengthened authorities respond to those needs and engage and control service providers

The people, especially marginalised **women and socially disadvantaged influence decision making** towards their real needs.

Local **CSOs represent interests, effectively advocate these, and control the service delivery** of the responsible

Local governments transparently deliver inclusive services like water supply, roads or schools – so that all people benefit. Additional income possibilities are created.

AMBITIONS OF THE PROGRAMME

The Moving Governance programme has three key ambitions drawing on new approaches for analysing and implementing governance interventions, strengthening existing projects by fostering exchange and upscaling impact and knowledge management on specific governance topics.

1. Exploring new approaches for analysing and implementing governance interventions

Helvetas will explore new approaches and tools for analysing local governance contexts and developing context-specific entry-points for tackling governance-related challenges. For instance in 2021, **Helvetas developed the Political Economy and Power Analysis (PEPA) manual** to help analyse power relations and political dynamics in a specific project context. This tool will be rolled out from 2022 onwards in partner countries and projects.

The conflict sensitivity approach to assess the potential for equitable and inclusive service provision in fragile and resource-scarce context will be strengthened. Other **new approaches** will be developped to complement these existing tools, such as carrying out a situational analysis for urban settings.

Further attention will be paid on topics of **gender and social equity**. For example, it will be further examined how local government service provision could potentially **reduce the unpaid burden of care** women are bearing, i.e., by provision or support of childcare or better access to water.

Furthermore, existing approaches on gender-sensitive budgeting will be further developed.

2. Strengthening existing projects

The programme is involving existing Helvetas' projects that are working on local governance and civil society. While they all take into account the overall strategy of Helvetas, there are few opportunities for the projects to benefit from each other due to lacking exchange mechanisms.

Furthermore, the funding for these projects is depending on the yearly fundraising results of Helvetas. One part of the Programme will provide financial support to them, so that a full continuity of the activities can be provided.

A new focus is set on assessing the **potential to mainstream digital approaches and on testing e-Governance services** in existing projects.

Exploring ways to measure the impact of governance intervention will help to evaluate the implemented projects and to ensure that they are good 'value for money' and that funds are directed to the right type of activities.

3. Upscaling impact and knowledge management

The facilitation of a **webinar once a year** on a cross-cutting governance issue relevant to all the projects encourages exchange between the projects and strengthens their knowledge management components.

Depending on the topic, this webinar can also be opened to local partners and funders.

Additionally, Helvetas endeavoures to establish research collaborations, e.g., with the NADEL Center for Development and Cooperation at ETH Zurich or with other institutions such as the University of Zurich.

OVERALL GOALS/OUTCOMES 2022 – 2026

The programme is set for five years. In this period, there will be **concrete outcomes within the involved projects at the local level** such as the number of empowered people to claim their rights to basic services, the number of strengthened local authorities, civil society organizations and networks, and the supported policy changes in the respective countries. **Furthermore, tools, guidelines and capitalizations will be developed and widely shared to increase impact beyond individual projects**.

The **goals** cover the Governance Programme's ambitions on mutual learning & innovation and **three dimensions** which reflect Helvetas' theory of change.

a. **People**: The dimension covers the outreach to the direct concerned (primary stakeholders) and shows the targeted benefit for the poor and disadvantaged people. It mirrors Helvetas' orientation of concretely alleviating poverty and including marginalized population segments ("leave no one behind") in its engagements.

b. **Partnerships**: The partnership dimension shows the capacitation targets for the different national/ local partners. It relates to Helvetas' approach to strengthen and empower local actors, institutions and structures in view of reinforcing local self-reliance and sustainability.

c. **Frame conditions**: As Helvetas aims at contributing to favorable frame conditions by engaging in policy and advocacy work as well as multi-stakeholder initiatives, this dimension focusses on targeted policy and system changes.

d. **Learning & innovation**: The programme will facilitate mutual learning and exchange by facilitating webinars and other shared learning events collectively with the project teams. The programme will produce knowledge products with the project teams based on experiences on the projects.

Concretely, the following **outcomes** will be aimed for:

People	By 2026, **130'000 people** are empowered to claim their rights to basic services.
Partners	By 2026, more than **1200 local authorities, CSOs and networks** have been strengthened to provide gender-responsive and inclusive public services and to integrate tools and approaches.
Frame Conditions	By 2026, policy changes for an enabling environment for CSOs and local authorities, have been supported in **nine countries.**
Learning & innovation	By 2026, the programme has fostered mutual learning and advisory on new approaches, innovations and contemporary governance trends by conducting at least **five shared learning webinars/ events** plus advisory group meetings. By 2026, the programme has produced and externally shared **nine knowledge products (like manuals, guidelines, capitalizations)** from projects through learning events and/or Helvetas' communication outlets. The concrete products will be defined together with the projects, based on their priorities.

The detailed **programme activities will be planned from year to year**, taking into consideration the priorities and needs of the involved projects.

It is the explicit goal of the programme to facilitate the project teams to **develop their priorities together**. Therefore, a first webinar is being planned in June 2022, where the projects introduce themselves to each other and define their interests and priorities. Sub-groups for further exchanging and working jointly on certain topics are likely to evolve.

PRIORITY TOPICS AND INVOLVED PROJECTS

The nine involved countries are **Guatemala, Honduras, Bolivia, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Laos**. In all these countries, Helvetas has been developing own governance projects with different foci, depending on the local needs and priorities but also history and experience.

Some of the projects have developed over the time into locally well acknowledged projects, others have started only very recently. Common – like with all Helvetas' projects – is a constant thrive to keep learning, improving and achieving systemic changes and impact.

While the projects are always working both with the local governments and civil society with emphasis on involving the marginalized groups such as women, minorities, youth, etc. into decision-making, some projects are focusing on specific topics such as urban governance, digitalization, national and regional frameworks, gender and social equity and civil society groups and youth.

Overview of the **main topics** that will be further developed and shared:

URBAN GOVERNANCE

Traditionally, Helvetas has been focusing its work and therefore also the work on strengthening local governance and civil society in more rural areas. However, today more than half of the world's population lives in towns and cities, with this number set to rise to two-thirds by 2050. Urbanisation is happening more rapidly in developing countries and especially in smaller cities which typically draw migrants in search of work and education opportunities from surrounding rural areas.

These **smaller cities often have fewer resources to deal with the challenges of rapid urban growth.** Service delivery in growing smaller cities is especially constrained by coordination, finance, and capacity challenges. Also the involvement of civil society and local communities in decision making is more challenging than in rural settings – a gathering of the population in the village is easier than in a city. Therefore, new tools and approaches are needed to work in smaller cities to ensure that citizens have a say in how their city develops.

The governance programme will **help to explore new approaches and to develop innovative tools** for working in smaller cities, particularly on coordinating between sectors (e.g., water supply, waste management) and among a broader range of stakeholders to harness integrated approaches to urban service delivery.

A first governance project specifically working on this topic started in **Bolivia** (Sucre) a couple of years ago. Another new project is in the making in **Tanzania** (Mbeya) and **Bangladesh** (Cox's Bazar), working more specifically on sustainable food systems in cities, allowing for poor people in the cities to get access to sustainable and nutritious food. Experiences from these projects will also benefit future governance projects in other regional cities.

When confronted with rapid urban growth, smaller cities are challenged to come up with adequate service provision, i.e. to counter water pollution and manage waste. In Bolivia, Helvetas supports urban and semi-urban communities to address such challenges.
Photo: Helvetas Bolivia

DIGITALIZATION / E-GOVERNANCE

Digital technology offers new and innovative opportunities for improving good governance such as the potential for increased outreach to the people and improved transparency. However, if not addressed properly, digitalisation can also involve considerable risks, including widening the digital gap between those who have access and those who do not. A more focused approach is needed to ensure that the municipalities, as well as citizens, particularly women and disadvantaged groups, derive true benefits from available digital tools.

During the lockdowns related to COVID-19, Helvetas began to explore digitalised approaches related to governance, including **holding local council meetings virtually,** and how this strengthened the **potential for inclusion of citizens.** By supporting civil society organisations, it was also possible to curtail the spread of 'fake news' on social media related to the spread of the corona virus.

In cooperation with national training institutes and the government, the Helvetas project *Decentralization and Local Governance* in Bhutan developed informative videos that help citizens understand important issues such as climate change, poverty, and gender equality. Photo: Helvetas Bhutan

Projects with a particular focus on this topic are the ones in **Nepal**, **Bhutan** and **Bolivia**. Continuing to test and pilot digital approaches in the projects helps to draw on lessons learned, which could be applied in other countries.

NATIONAL AND REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS

Helvetas works at the national and regional level to ensure that policies, legislation and action plans foster an enabling environment in which citizens and civil society organisations can participate in decision-making and local governments can actively and effectively respond to these demands. Decentralisation policies, for example, are designed to shift powers and responsibilities away from central government to elected authorities at the local level (i.e., municipalities or village councils) given their closer proximity to citizens and knowledge of the local context.

In **Bhutan**, Helvetas is supporting the Department of Local Governance in developing its Decentralisation Policy and Action Plan. Ultimately, the Decentralisation Policy will provide the frame conditions that

empower citizens to meaningfully engage in local decision-making, especially on issues related to public services like education, health and water. Further, in **Ethiopia**, an approach tested at the local level that follows an integrated approach to community planning is soon to be rolled-out across the wider region with the support of the Regional Government. In **Bolivia**, there is a focus on translating the National Cities Policy into concrete actions in the city of Sucre, with the results of this potentially rolled-out in other cities and with feedback mechanisms established to feed back into national-level policy making.

Exchange and mutual learning between these projects may be beneficial not only between them, but also for other projects currently more focusing on rural areas.

GENDER AND SOCIAL EQUITY / WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

While all Helvetas' projects are working towards Gender and Social Equity, some of the involved projects have a stronger focus on the inclusion, leadership development and better representation of women and/or (ethnic) minorities. This often includes working with men and traditional male leaders who become role models for challenging regressive gender attitudes and norms. The lessons learnt from projects in **Guatemala**, **Ethiopia** or **Nepal** will be shared and further developed.

CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS AND YOUTH

The space for civil society as such has been shrinking in many countries over the past years. Also, young people in many developing countries have difficulties in becoming actively involved in decision-making where power is commonly deferred to traditional (elderly) authorities.

While civil society organisations, community based groups and youth groups are important stakeholders in all Helvetas governance projects, again some of them have more specific experience that can be beneficial to others. For instance, the project in **Laos** is very experienced in supporting civil society groups in a context where there are limited opportunities for public dialogue, likewise **Honduras** or **Ethiopia**.

Further development of these topics and mutual learning will foster the effectiveness of the individual projects and allowing for the development of new, overarching tools. However, it is also possible that new topics will arise during the exchange webinars that will eventually lead to new pilots, tools, guidelines etc.

PLANNING AND FUNDING

The programme is being planned for five years, from 2022 to 2026. Detailed planning will be done year by year. The Leopold Bachmann Foundation and the Somaha Foundation are the main donors of this programme and have committed to five resp. four years.

We are looking for more donors under this innovative approach and look forward to explaining you more details!

How local Governance works: An example with a water system for the village Felassie

In Felassie, a village located in the Amhara Region (Ethiopia), people needed to fetch their drinking water from self-dug open wells and surface water. Not only was the water dirty, but these sources regularly dried up during dry season. After **receiving training in participatory and inclusive planning and budgeting** as part of the Amhara Local Governance Project, the citizens' forum identified a pumping well as a top priority for the entire community. The community therefore **included the construction of a well in its development plan.**

Conscious of the scarce funds available at the local governments, the plan stated that the local community would provide financial participation and labor, as well as procure local materials such as sand and stone. Additionally, it asked the district government to supply technical expertise, cement, water pipes and a water pump. The **government approved the plan and granted the funds.**

Thanks to the **active participation** of the village community, the **well was finished after only one month** and has been **supplying the villagers with clean drinking water** ever since:

"Because the whole village was excited about finally getting a well, **everyone cooperated**. 45 families contributed 400 birr each toward the cost. Those who could carried stones, sand and cement. I am very happy to see that my neighbors can all drink clean water now." says Mulat Durso, member of the village water committee.

The people's confidence to manage and implement their own priorities, and to get the government to award resources for this purpose, grew enormously thanks to integrated planning.