Working with our partners, we support the efforts of disadvantaged people and communities to determine the course of their own lives and to ensure their dignity and security. We promote a spirit of solidarity among the people we are serving and a sense of coherence that benefits people in developing countries.

Our vision is a just world where all men and women determine the course of their own lives in dignity and security, using environmental resources in a sustainable manner.

In Switzerland, we promote a spirit of solidarity among the public and we campaign for coherent policies that benefit people in developing countries.
Access to clean water and sanitary facilities is a prerequisite for a healthy life and for regional development. Infant mortality is reduced, women no longer have the burden of carrying water long distances, and productivity increases. Constructing water supply systems and latrines, hygiene training and advocating for a fair water policy are amongst Helvetas’ priorities. We also promote the construction of roads and trail bridges to make for shorter routes to schools, health centres and markets.

Over 800 million people around the world go hungry every day. Helvetas helps small farmers improve their crop yields whilst respecting the environment: through efficient irrigation, ecological farming methods and crop diversification. We support farming families to gain a footing in local and regional markets as well as access to international fair trade. Training courses and access to micro-loans open up new production opportunities for rural communities. In this way, farmers and small businesses can become drivers of rural development.

Global climate change threatens the livelihoods of farming families in vulnerable regions. Helvetas helps them to protect themselves from environmental risks and adapt their farming methods accordingly. Farmers learn how to conserve the soil, forest and watersheds. We call for those who are chiefly responsible for climate change, the industrial nations and large newly industrialized countries, to cut greenhouse gas emissions. We maintain a critical eye on Swiss climate policy, and our experts engage actively in global climate debates.

Primary school education and vocational training enable young people to take charge of their own lives. Helvetas provides teenagers and young adults in rural areas access to tailored training modules, corresponding to labour market requirements. Advice on business management helps them to set up small businesses and promotes entrepreneurial activity. We assist state agencies in training teachers and developing teaching materials. In all these efforts, we attach particular importance to the inclusion of girls and women.

Where people feel that the fruits of their labour are protected from arbitrary seizure, they can securely strive to make a better life for themselves. Helvetas works towards a society of equal opportunities for all, strengthening the ability of men and women to organize and to assert their basic rights. We assist government agencies in building their responsibilities in areas such as housing, civil registration, transparency and reliable services.

“When we are to take on new challenges then we’ll need a lot more research. And we’ll need plenty of farmers to try what we learned. For people to understand the point of new farming methods, they have to see it with their own eyes. So that’s why I show them how it’s done.”

Miguel Ortega Paty, 37, farmer and agricultural adviser in Viloco, on the Bolivian Altiplano.

“It was tough at the beginning, and we lost heart more than once. But each time I said, ‘keep going.’ We used to have nothing and I didn’t know how I would pay for my children’s education. Now I know.”

Bernardina Ray, 54, rose grower and chair of a producers’ union near Cusco, Peru.

“I didn’t know my responsibilities and duties as a councillor – but I didn’t know the possibilities either. Now I understand that the fate of the community is in our hands, and how we can improve our own lives.”

Degu Melese, a farmer and town councillor in Ahuri, South Achefer district (Amhara), Ethiopia.

“‘Our soil is turning salty. And we know that the water from the local spring pool isn’t safe anymore. Now we get clean water from our rainwater cisterns – even in the dry season.’

Protap Mazumder, 42, a tailor in the Sundarbans region in the south of Bangladesh.

“I want to be a fashion designer and open my own shop. Then I’ll be able to pass on my skills as a seamstress to other young women.”

Egzona Maliqi, 20, a seamstress in the multi-ethnic village of Berivojce in eastern Kosovo.