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# A portrait of the Exposure and Dialogue Programme Association

by JÖRG HILGERS

**This article describes the methodology used in immersion programmes organised by the Exposure and Dialogue Programme Association in Germany. Working in partnership with local organisations, the Association brings influential decision makers into personal contact with poor and marginalised people, and the realities of their daily lives. Each programme has a theme focusing on specific dimensions of poverty and avenues for its reduction. Where possible, both non-national and national policy makers participate in the programmes. After describing the development and implementation of EDPs, the author discusses the learning experiences of participants and host families. He concludes by noting that a key challenge for the Association is to measure the personal and institutional impacts of EDPs in a systematic and scientific way.**

## About the EDP Association

The Exposure and Dialogue Programme (EDP) Association (formerly the Association for the Promotion of North-South Dialogue) was officially set up by the German Commission for Justice and Peace in 1992. However, EDP-type programmes have been conducted since 1985 (see Osner, this issue). The Association is membership-based and

supported by various Catholic Church-related institutions in Germany.<sup>1</sup> Since 1985, 77 Exposure and Dialogue Programmes have been conducted with almost 1,000 participants in Latin America, Asia, Africa, and South Eastern Europe. Committed to integral human development, the EDP Association stays above partisan politics. It cooperates with 'all people of good will' and does not discriminate against people on the grounds of their religious, cultural, or confessional affiliations.<sup>2</sup>

Exposure and Dialogue Programmes allow influential decision makers from various sectors to learn about poverty, the self-help capacities of the poor, and the dignity of poor and marginalised people by immersing themselves in the daily lives of poor families. The EDP Association works in cooperation with institutions that promote people's participation in different ways. For example, SEWA in India; CEPROLAI in Bolivia; and UML and the Centenary Rural Development Bank in Uganda.<sup>3</sup> Through local partners like

<sup>1</sup> 'Integral human development' is the overarching goal of Church development work. Cooperating with 'all people of good will' is a Principle of the Church's social doctrine. See Pope Paul VI (1967) *Populorum Progressio* (Progress of the People).

<sup>2</sup> For details, visit [www.exposure-dialog.de/english/ueber\\_uns/werwirsind/werwirsind.html](http://www.exposure-dialog.de/english/ueber_uns/werwirsind/werwirsind.html)

<sup>3</sup> SEWA is the Self-Employed Women's Association; CEPROLAI is the Centro de Promoción al Laicado; UML stands for Uganda Microfinance Ltd.

**German MP Hartwig Fischer preparing the day's catch for the market – learning how people make a living from scarce natural resources.**



Photo: Hartwig Fischer

these, families are identified who are willing to host visitors for 3 to 4 days. One important criterion of selection is that families strive to help themselves using their own capacities.

Those taking part in EDPs include members of parliament, administrators, business and development agency managers, Church clergy and pastoral workers, educationists, and media people. Where possible, an EDP includes both visitors from abroad and country-based policy makers. An important role of country-based participants is to accompany the visitors from abroad when they immerse into life with the host families. This provides an opportunity for both nationals and foreigners to narrow the gap between 'the big people from the centre' and those affected by their decisions. EDPs aim to show participants how 'a way out of poverty is possible' and under what kind of circumstances people can see 'light at the end of the tunnel' (participants'

testimonials). In the words of the EDP Association motto, 'development has got a face'.

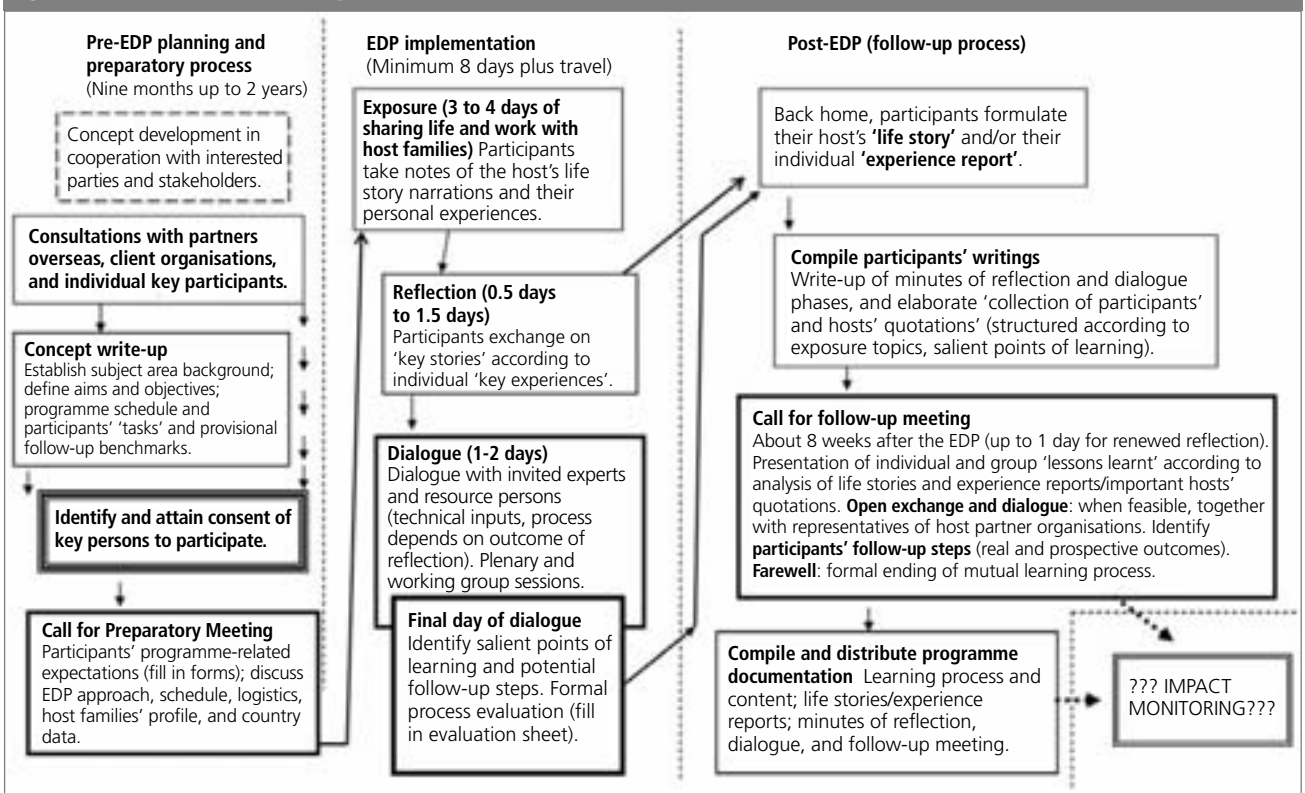
The Association currently conducts two to three regular programmes per year, each with an average duration of 8 to 10 days. However, there is growing demand, especially from Government institutions wanting to use EDPs for personnel development.

### **Themes and participants**

While personal encounters with poor and marginalised people are key to a holistic understanding of their reality, each programme has a theme focusing on specific dimensions of poverty and avenues for its reduction. The Association ensures that themes are of interest to local partners and the client organisation that is supporting the EDP.

Since 2002, the EDP Association has conducted 15

Figure 1: Flow of standard EDP procedures



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regular programmes in partnership with local organisations in Albania, Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, India, Malaysia and Singapore, Tanzania, and Uganda.<sup>4</sup>

A typical EDP has 16 to 20 participants, plus exposure group facilitators.

EDP Programmes have mainly dealt with four subject areas:

- microfinance services (instruments, regulations, operative sustainability, clients' entrepreneurial skills);
- popular participation and self-government (democratisation and decision-making processes at local level);
- water resources and supply management (procedures of self-government and user associations); and
- migration in the context of land use, land ownership, income opportunities, and access to public services.

However, other issues such as education, health, income opportunities, gender and women's development, cultural values, religion, and spirituality are often discussed too. For example, during an EDP in Uganda focusing on microfinance (2006), participants and external experts ended up

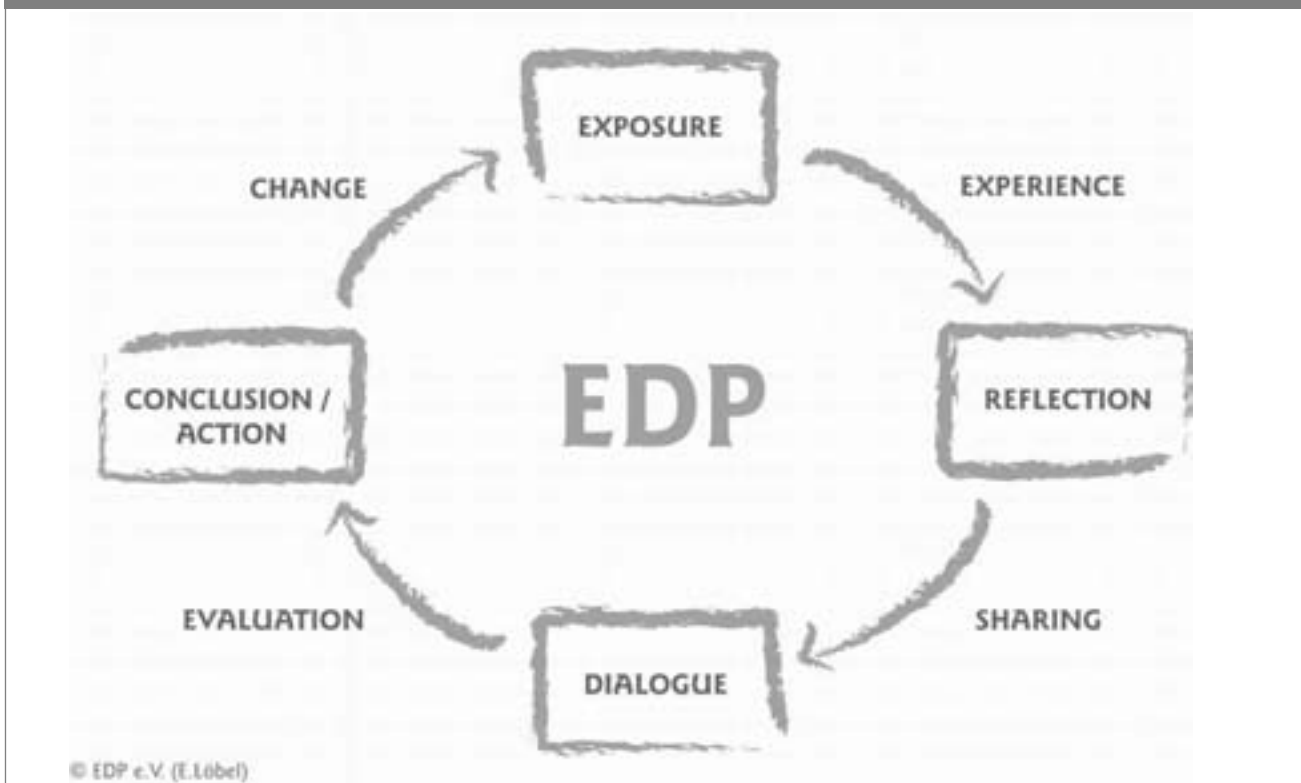
discussing the need to improve vocational training in the agricultural sector. In this way, Exposure and Dialogue Programmes help deepen understanding of **integral human development**.

### Developing an EDP

EDP planning is a complex process in which the diverse interests of local partners, potential client institutions, and individual participants must be established and taken into account. Before a programme is implemented, there are four major preparatory steps:

- **Programme development:** generate acceptance of EDPs as learning tools among relevant stakeholders in a subject area particularly important to them. This requires investigation and talks with key persons and institutions in different sectors, during which the target group (would-be participants) is identified. 'EDP must have the potential to help them [participants] solve at least some of their institutional problems.' (Karl Osner)
- **Developing local partnerships:** identify, visit (several times), and convince innovative partner organisations. The EDP

<sup>4</sup> See list at: [www.exposure-dialog.de/english/Partner/partner.html](http://www.exposure-dialog.de/english/Partner/partner.html)

**Figure 2: The EDP methodology**

Association is neither a funding agency nor operational in any partner country. Therefore, it relies heavily on its partner organisations' expertise, administrative and human capacities, and good relations with host families. We talk openly with our partners and avoid raising wrong expectations. For instance, EDPs are not fundraising opportunities for partner organisations, although they can offer benefits such as contacts with key individuals and organisations, and opportunities for developing higher-level cooperation or specific sectors of work.

Respecting the host families' dignity is also vitally important. So is agreement with the organisation's staff on how to facilitate the personal encounter between visitors and hosts. Some 6 to 8 weeks before the EDP implementation, the organisers visit and prepare the host families, and a facilitators' training session on how to apply EDP methodology is conducted.

- **Finding participants:** enlist key people. Here, having a functioning network of client institutions, EDP supporters, and former participants is indispensable. Personal testimonials about the benefits of an EDP are essential when trying to

convince potential participants. Once the client organisation agrees, identifying country-based (both national and international) participants and persuading them to participate is a difficult task. It requires in-depth country knowledge, a reputation for personal and institutional integrity, and good contacts in the host country.

- **Building sectorial and technical partnerships in the host country:** an EDP is not just an exposure programme, but also an opportunity for dialogue to bridge the gap between micro- and macro-level experiences. Programme sector experts and key host country representatives have to be identified and persuaded to be resource persons in the concluding EDP dialogue workshop. The institutional reputation of the partner organisation in the host country is vital in this process.

### The EDP methodology

Today's methodological approach is the result of an organisational learning process with partners and participants.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See [www.exposure-dialog.de/english/methode/methode.html](http://www.exposure-dialog.de/english/methode/methode.html)

**Ms Carol Namuleme, branch manager of Uganda Microfinance Ltd, presenting facilitators' reflections.**



Photo: EDP Association

A regular programme consists of three main phases – exposure, reflection, and dialogue – and lasts for 8 to 10 days.<sup>6</sup>

A participants' **preparatory meeting** (4 to 6 weeks before travelling) precedes the Exposure and Dialogue Programme. Upon arrival in the host country, participants, partners, and facilitators get to know each other in a preliminary session.

The actual **exposure** – sharing life and work with the host families with overnight stays at their homes – accounts for about 3 to 4 days, depending on the overall duration agreed. Each exposure group is composed of three people: two visitors from abroad or country-based (preferably, a man and a woman) and the local facilitator.

After exposure, a guided phase (of 1 to 1.5 days) of individual **reflection** in small groups establishes what participants have learnt during their personal encounters. Participants try to capture this in key stories. These are shared in the group.

<sup>6</sup> Some clients, like Church bodies and NGOs, may wish to invest more time in the learning process, for which customised schedules can be offered. The EDP Association also organises brief exposure visits by parliamentarians who stay with a host family for one night only in the course of an official bilateral visit.

They serve to identify important topics and issues for discussion in the concluding **dialogue** with external resource persons and experts, which takes up to 1.5 days.

On the last day of the dialogue workshop, everyone involved is asked to consider follow-up steps, based on both the exposure experiences and discussion with external resource persons. Participants are grouped according to sectors or the institutions they represent, allowing them to discuss particular issues in more detail and then to select what they share with others in the plenary. Depending on the character and the background of those involved, the closing workshop may function as a platform for political dialogue from which further actions for following-up institutional change may derive.

- A **follow-up meeting** takes place 2 to 3 months later. Prior to this, participants write a life story of their hosts and an experience report. This helps them sum up their experiences, and understand and evaluate them ('If you write it, you start to mean it.' Ela Bhatt, SEWA).<sup>7</sup> These accounts are written some weeks before the follow-up meeting so that participants' writings can be compiled, analysed, and presented as 'salient points of learning' to the group to complement the mutual learning process. The learning points are linked to the aims and objectives of the programme. For example, in an EDP about microfinance, participants' may highlight learning on the effects of improved access to financial services on the host family, business development, and local markets.

In the follow-up meeting, participants scrutinise the list of potential follow-up steps and comment on the progress of their work, noting where concerted action or revision of ongoing activities is needed.

To **monitor and evaluate** the participants' learning process, the Association uses several tools.

- Before the exposure, participants fill in forms regarding personal motivation and outcome-related expectations.
- At the end of the dialogue workshop, they fill in individual process evaluation sheets.
- After returning to their posts, they write-up their host's life story and experience report (see above).

Although there has been some delay due to ongoing programme preparation, the EDP Association has documented most of the programmes implemented since 2002 (mostly in German).

<sup>7</sup> For example: [www.exposure-dialog.de/english/lebensgeschichten/life\\_stories/Sehrbrock.pdf](http://www.exposure-dialog.de/english/lebensgeschichten/life_stories/Sehrbrock.pdf)



**When reflecting on exposure experiences, EDP participants bring along an item or symbol which reminds them of sharing life and work with their host family. These items are placed in the centre of the workshop room and help participants focus on the hosts and their lives.**



Photo: Christa Dirksen

### **Participants' expectations and learning experiences**

When participants join EDP for the first time they generally indicate the following expectations:

- learning more deeply about the overall situation and the people in a country of their interest; and
- an opportunity to 'reality check' their professional experience and technical knowledge, e.g. participants seconded from BMZ (the German Development Ministry), GTZ (the German Agency for Technical Cooperation), or KfW Development Bank (a German government-owned development bank).

Policy makers in various institutions use EDP especially to:

- develop more appropriate concepts and technical instruments for poverty reduction; and
- prepare themselves for policy dialogue.

Other organisations see EDPs as a tool for learning from the poor about specific aspects of their lives, e.g. the enterprising spirit of microcredit clients, or solidarity in situations of distress and marginalisation.

Most participants' find that their expectations have been

met when they evaluate the EDP process 2 to 3 months later. The host life stories and experience reports that participants write illustrate the depth of the learning processes EDP stimulates.<sup>8</sup>

*Whenever I have to decide on a new project, I picture the faces of my host family and ask myself: what would be the impact of this project on a family comparable to the one I stayed with?*

KfW Development Bank official

*After I worked almost 6 hours to collect firewood for the preparation of the night's meal, together with my host lady, I came to understand why she wanted to have a gas cooker as soon as there would be some cash money left. In other words, by sharing their perspectives, EDP helps politicians to learn about people's true priorities.*

Member of German Parliament

<sup>8</sup> See other quotes from participants at: [www.exposure-dialog.de/english](http://www.exposure-dialog.de/english)

*I have realised that my life in the capital does not at all relate to the life of the poor in those local communities up-country. To feel that type of truth is the best learning experience, which may lead to realistic problem solving, instead of relying on theories, only.*

Official of Tanzanian Ministry of Water

### Host family experiences

Visitors have a flight ticket in their pockets and after few days go back home with many personal insights and a range of lessons for their work. But what are the benefits for hosts and how do they feel about the encounter? Asked after some time, most of them reply in a similar way to the two women quoted below:

*First, I would have never dared to invite people from Europe to my humble home. It was amazing how much they liked to be part of my family. Actually, I am astonished that they wanted to work in my shop, fetch water, and even help the girls with the cooking. They really wanted to be with us, eat the same type of food, and sleep under this roof. I never thought that Europeans would be interested in the life of an ordinary African woman like me. They showed me pictures of their families and the offices they work in. They really wanted to share with me. It has been an honour to host them.*

Mariam Alidekki, microfinance client, Uganda

*I did not know that Germans and Albanians have so much in common. They are like us. They also work hard so that their children can go to school because things are expensive there. They like to talk and laugh. They have come to see us. They wanted to know about our life. They have not forgotten us. Now I understand what they meant by 'Albania is part of Europe'.*

Donika Rroku, women's group member, Albania

### Impact of EDPs

To facilitate personal encounters between people who lack material resources and access to basic services and those who control such resources and access services is a delicate task. Although EDPs may use certain social techniques, a true personal encounter is a gift that cannot be generated or produced in any technical manner. However, EDPs can guide people of very different socio-economic backgrounds and cultures in this encounter. EDPs challenge people to comprehend the integrity of human life and struggle for 'develop-

ment' in all its dimensions: 'Sharing in the life of another person calls for deep respect and grateful reflection' (Leo Schwarz, EDP Association Chairman, 2002 to 2007).

The Association has not yet managed to measure the personal and institutional impacts of EDPs in a systematic and scientific way. Due to resource limitations, participants' reports on their post-exposure actions are often analysed only to prove the validity of the EDP as a learning tool. It is difficult to relate this learning to specific development outcomes such as poverty reduction.<sup>9</sup> Donors often expect the participation of high-level decision makers in EDPs to have an immediate political impact, overlooking the fact that creating a stronger social backing for poverty reduction amongst decision makers is a long-term process whose benefit may become visible only after several years.

Although it is difficult to establish direct and tangible impacts on poverty, by looking at participants' testimonials it becomes clear that EDP:

- supports attitudinal change towards the human capacities and dignity of poor people;
- deepens the quality of insights into complex situations in the countries visited; and
- increases the likelihood of pro-poor decisions and alliances.

The following are examples of activities participants have become involved in post-EDP.

- A board member of the German Bundesbank has become one of the most active advocates for microfinance services in the German private sector; and recently three directors of (small) German banks have paved the way for joint ventures in funding professional micro-banks in the developing world.
- A former German government cabinet member has facilitated a formal partnership between her constituency in the Eastern part of Germany and her exposure region in India, which has been active for seven years now.
- The Federation of Catholic Chaplaincies at German Universities now uses the EDP concept as a tool for students' personality building and creating awareness of poverty and development issues, thus helping form pro-poor élites before participants become 'real' decision makers.
- German development organisations (BMZ, GTZ, and KfW Development Bank) regularly use EDP for personnel development and demand from personnel, at times, exceeds availability.

<sup>9</sup> Kuby calls this gap between the direct benefits a project might have and development outcomes the 'attribution gap' (Boru Douthwaite and Steffen Schulz, 2001; download: [www.ciat.cgiar.org/inrm/workshop2001/docs/titles/4-1APaperBDouthwaite.pdf](http://www.ciat.cgiar.org/inrm/workshop2001/docs/titles/4-1APaperBDouthwaite.pdf))

The direct costs of implementing programmes are regularly met by participants' fees. This is an important indicator of EDP's positive impact in the eyes of client organisations.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, income from participants' fees does not cover overheads. When the overhead

budget is renegotiated with Church institutions in 2010, it will become clearer whether appreciation of the EDP Association's work within Church circles matches that of client organisations in government and civil society sectors.

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**NOTE**

Perceptions and opinions expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect those of the EDP Association's management or owners.

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<sup>10</sup> Since 2002, EDP management policy has stressed the importance of cost recovery from participants' fees for each programme.