

Thorning's Top Officials

- translated from Danish by Sune Vilsted
- notes by the author

Helle Thorning-Schmidt's future employer does not give the impression of being a network that bets on geographical diversity among the decision makers. Building of democracy among the target groups and local structures does not seem to play a significant role, either.



Save the children are building latrines and much more in 120 countries, but it looks as if Save the Children are going to stick to the Anglo-Saxon world and region, when it comes to finding members for the board.

Photo: Save the Children / (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

By Jørgen Olsen

Following the discussion about democracy building I am participating in at Ibis¹ and, not to mention Emmaus International, where I am elected to encourage just that, I became curious as to how things work in the organisation that is now having the honour of being run by the former Prime Minister of Denmark. How is Save the Children organised at an international level?

¹ Danish NGO – member of Oxfam.

Who elects the board?

I went to <https://www.savethechildren.net/about-us/our-leadership>. It does not say how the board (Global Board) is elected – so one has to guess. Does it elect itself? There does not appear to occur international general assemblies every fourth year.

If you google the individual board members, then you get the impression that the vast majority is hired in the Anglo-Saxon world – in an enormous organisation that works in all parts of the world with 55 million children as the yearly target group.

At <https://www.savethechildren.net/about-us/our-vision-mission-and-values> it is specified that there has been established a member organisation in 30 of the 120 countries where Save the Children works. In the other 90 countries, there are apparently only employees, who must be assumed to get their instructions from headquarters in London. Of the aforementioned 30 countries, only nine, at most, can be characterised as developing countries.

A couple of hours of surfing leaves the impression of a top-down organisation with values from Anglo-Saxon and related cultures. I would be happy if someone would nuance this impression.

Headquarters in South Africa

For comparison, Action Aid has placed its headquarters in Johannesburg in South Africa and hired a Brazilian, Adriano Campolina, as CEO. Oxfam has headquarters in London – like Save the Children, but with the Ugandan, Winnie Byanyima, as CEO, and Juan Alberto Fuentes from Guatemala as chair.

Why is it so important to take up such questions? Because I tell myself that if international networks show their member organisations and/or local offices so much trust that they get the right to sit at the place of honour, where the decisions are being made, then there is reason to hope that trust and confidence may be spread further around the world's societies.

Jørgen Olsen



Jørgen Olsen (born 1951) is a coordinator at Genvej til Udvikling (GtU), whose mother network is Emmaus International (EI), founded by Abbé Pierre.

He has went to the school of life and comes close to the definition of a layperson. Active in EI since 1969 – elected into EI's political committee in 2011, where two Africans, two Asians, two Latin Americans, and four Europeans are seated. Re-elected into the committee for the second and last 4-year period in September 2015.

In 1978, Jørgen Olsen co-founded GtU with a background in his and the co-founders' experience with different organisations in and outside of Emmaus. GtU collaborates with around 10 grassroots movements in West Africa, especially the Cooperative in Amatal (Nigeria) and Pagla-Yiri (Burkina Faso) as the organisation in Emmaus International with the most members, namely 11,000 of which 10,000 are women. The collaboration includes buying and selling of craft products as well as renovations, cattle breeding, horticultural and bilingual education (Tuareg and French) for children and adults in Amatal.

Read [all Jørgens Olsens posts at Globalnyt](#)

It has a mental spreading effect, when Action Aid writes that Africa is Actions Aid's heart:
<http://www.actionaid.org/where-we-work>.

The stronger societies are, the easier it is for the people's representatives on all levels to get through with criticism of the authorities; in other words, create dialogue and confrontations and participate in democratic processes.

And democracy at the world level is apparently in free fall if one is to believe this article from Globalnyt²: <https://globalnyt.dk/content/freedom-house-demokrati-paa-tilbaagetog-globalt-10-aar-i-traek>³. All international networks have the option to contribute to the effort of turning around this development – and we must not be squeamish about criticising each other.

Commentary:



Erna Olsen ·

Design School Kolding Denmark

It definitely looks like there is a lot Save the Children could learn from other organisations. It is good that things are not to so bad everywhere.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 1. February 2016 10:45 PM

² Globalnyt means Global News, and it is the most important Danish site when it comes to matters such as development, North-South.relations etc.

³ Partly in Danish, but at the bottom there are English words and a link in English.