

*Speech delivered at the conference: Shaping Tomorrow through Global Education on 28-29 November 2024 by the secretary of the European Network for Citizen Initiatives in Global Solidarity*

## **Food for thought about the role small civil society organisations play in bringing Global Citizenship Education to European Citizens.**

My name is ErnstJan Stroes and I'm a programme manager for the Wilde Ganzen Foundation from the Netherlands. As I have just 5 minutes I will instantly get to it!

We have an aging population in Europe. Senior citizens of today determine through their decisions and actions the future of our continent and even the globe. But we tend to focus Global Citizenship Education on young people and youth. But for public support to international solidarity and sustainable development senior citizens are essential. Therefore Global Citizenship Education or maybe Global Citizenship Communication aiming at adults is important.

Adults have though very different pathways in which they connect to global challenges and sustainable development. In educating and communicating with them one should not just tell stories, inform and sensitize but as well enable them to take part in creating a better world. In order to do so Citizen initiatives in Global Solidarity, Small NGOs that enable direct and practical engagement in actions of global solidarity are essential.

As Wilde Ganzen Foundation we co-fund hundreds of such small Citizen Initiatives each year and we do so for almost 70 years. Citizen Initiatives and their partners in developing countries have built thousands of schools, hospitals, health-posts, community centres, bridges and water pumps and planted millions of trees. But we are more and more aware that just investing in their practical projects in poor communities is not enough. These initiatives do more than practical development projects.

In 2017 we found that there are hundred thousands of Citizen Initiatives in Global Solidarity in Europe. It seems that creating your own small development NGO is a common thing to do for many Europeans. So ultimately; who is the person that will most probably be passionately telling you and others about global solidarity activities? Who is will be championing global challenges and talk about sustainable development? Who challenges prejudices about global solidarity in a heated debate with family members or colleagues at work?

It is not the employee of some big NGO or a young person, NO! It is rather that aunt or uncle that has an own story about a small charitable effort. A older volunteer that had a life changing experience during a holiday in Kenia. Someone that has developed a friendship with someone from Bolivia. A migrant that wants to do something for her/his country of origin. A member or supporter of a small charity that is working to create something practical like a school, health post, or a circus school.

Therefore we need to strengthen these initiatives communication and education wise. In their need to raise funds for their activities: Some of them might reinforce stereotypes and create very bleak and depressive pictures on live in low and middle income countries and about the perspectives for a sustainable future. Moreover some may use un-decolonialised perspectives in their communication disenfranchising people and communities. And some may abandon hope fully.

In 2012 already we started working on strengthening communication and education capacities, first with our Danish colleagues from CISU slowly expanding our network up to 11 partners to what is today Connect for Global Change which funds the coming years 250 Global Citizenship communication and education projects in 11 countries. Besides small grants we will provide these Citizen Initiatives in Global Solidarity with training and coaching on Global Citizenship Communication and Education to assure that their skills improve while implementing their small communication projects .

As we think global citizenship communication and education through citizen initiatives is essential we created as well the European Network for Citizen Initiatives in Global Solidarity initiatives. A network of organisations supporting small development NGOs to exchange knowledge and experience on improving the work of Citizen Initiatives in Global Solidarity here in Europe and in their partner countries.

So this is my call on you, in your Global Citizenship Education activities do think about how to involve and enhance the Global Citizenship Education and Communication capacities of Citizen Initiatives in Global Solidarity. And if interested please feel free to have a chat and maybe join our exchange network to develop your own and our work.