



# Dorcas

*for 40 years and beyond*

September 2021



Dorcas marks its 40th year of existence. 40 Years of changes in the world. **40 Years of contributing to sustainable change.** The image of the tree signifies the journey of Dorcas. The accompanying paper describes this journey along different time periods.



# Introduction

Dorcas marks its 40th year of existence. This paper describes the roots of Dorcas, the journey of Dorcas and where Dorcas is heading. The image of the tree signifies this journey. Starting out with a mission to stand up for the rights of conscience convicts and their families. Heading towards a future in which much is uncertain. Dorcas' mission to support and walk with those who are marginalised remains unwavering.

## 1980

Establishment of the Christian Foundation for Aid to Conscience Convicts (Christelijke Stichting voor Hulp aan Gewetensvervolgden)

## 1980 - 1990

1980. 40 Years after the start of World War II. The world is divided between the capitalist West and the communist East. Pink Floyd has just released its landmark album *The Wall*. The Berlin Wall demarcating East and West is standing firm. The 'Miracle on Ice' takes place during the Winter Olympic Games in Lake Placid and the Summer Olympic Games are held in Moscow, boycotted by the USA athletes. Russia has invaded Afghanistan and Ayatollah Khomeini has led the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The USA embassy in Teheran is occupied by protesters. There is tension and uncertainty in the air, further fuelled by a growing concern for the environment and social problems.

In the meantime Christians and *refusenik* Jews in communist Eastern Europe experience repression concerning three basic rights: freedom of religion, freedom of expression and freedom of gathering. Stories appear about people being sentenced to years of imprisonment and labour camps, leaving their families behind in dire straits. Children grow up in an unsafe environment and there often is experience of abject but avoidable poverty.

## 1987

Campaign for the Hungarian-Romanian reverend Ferenc Visky, who was convicted to 22 years of prison. After 6.5 years he was released, thanks to pressure from the West

*"In the early years, the work consisted mainly of support for conscience convicts in Eastern Europe. But after about five years we began to provide food and clothing for their families, particularly in Romania. The focus shifted from encouragement to material support."*  
Corry Volders, volunteer

In this context Dirk-Jan Groot and the community of Andijk started the predecessor of Dorcas, the Christian Foundation for Aid to Conscience Convicts (CFACC). The CFACC was established on 22 October 1980. In the first year action was organised for the Romanian priest Calciu, which resulted in his release 2 years later. The CFACC had a list of more than 1000 prisoners being kept in prison for their faith conviction. CFACC also obtained a list of 6000 *refusenik* Jews, who were not allowed to leave the former Soviet Union. During this period of lobby and campaigning many contacts in communist countries with affected families were established. CFACC was able to honour many individual requests for practical aid and to send personal messages letting people know they were not forgotten.

The dramatic changes, as a result of the collapse of communism and the Berlin Wall, in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union were a watershed moment for the CFACC, which had registered as Dorcas in 1986. Dorcas decided to continue as an organisation for humanitarian aid and social assistance, focussing on those experiencing extreme poverty and marginalisation. The provision of

**1989**

Humanitarian assistance  
for victims of the famine  
in Ethiopia

practical aid by Dorcas became more organised establishing linkages between groups of volunteers in the Netherlands and groups of volunteers in Eastern Europe. Dorcas started to grow rapidly and expanded its humanitarian and social assistance to Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Sudan, Somalia, Uganda and Lebanon. Through a growing network of partner organisations Dorcas was able to expand its sphere of operations, while maintaining the focus on those in need.

**1990**

Opening of country office  
in Romania

***"To me Dorcas is an  
organisation that is very  
effective and quickly present  
in places where things have  
gone terribly wrong."***

Andries Knevel,  
Dutch theologian,  
author and presenter

## 1990 - 2000

In the nineties the number and size of projects increased, together with more supporters joining the Dorcas work. Social and humanitarian assistance constituted the majority of the work and initially consisted of transportation of food, clothing and other basic needs together with humanitarian assistance and recovery projects in areas affected by conflict or natural disasters.

Successful recovery projects were implemented in Burundi, Bosnia and Kosovo, consisting of seed distribution and multiplication and house reconstruction. Support through institutional funding from the Dutch government and the European Union enabled Dorcas to implement these projects.

**1992**

Opening of country office  
in Albania

Opening of first Dorcas  
thrift shop, in Andijk

Opening Beira Clinic  
Mozambique, providing  
general consult, HIV/AIDS  
testing, family planning,  
medicines, vaccinations,  
malaria treatment, dental  
care and more

Dorcas started to focus on development projects in countries where country offices were established and cooperation with partner organisations was initiated. With a focus on self-reliance within communities and project participants, Dorcas started a sectoral approach in its projects: shelter/housing, child care and transition of homes, agriculture and food security, water and sanitation, income and employment.

Starting with people who were persecuted because of their identity and beliefs, Dorcas continued to be present for those that experienced poverty, exclusion and crisis, with special attention for families, women, children and older people. Dorcas' work is and always was all about people. People who are made in the image of God. People who can love and give care. People who also need love and care. Together with them circumstances can be changed, injustice challenged, hope created and potential realised.

**1993**

Opening of country office  
in Kenya

***"I find it important that Dorcas  
provides aid irrespective of  
peoples religion, background,  
race, etc. Everyone needs love  
and our faith inspires us to  
share. Just as God also shares,  
but never imposes."***  
Bertie Gelijk, volunteer

As a Christian faith-based organisation Dorcas supports people irrespective of their background, identity or conviction. Because of Dorcas' faith-base a logical way of developing partnerships is together with local churches and faith-based organisations. With these partners Dorcas shares a holistic view on people and their environment, looking beyond the immediate material needs and striving to provide hope. Dorcas not only partners with other faith-based organisations, but with a whole community, local government, private sectors and NGOs from other backgrounds.

The Dorcas support base in the Netherlands was and continues to be interdenominational. Dorcas started small, but has steadily grown over the years. During the nineties the first Dorcas shop started in Andijk, along with the Dorcas Food Campaign. Providing short term assistance through food, shelter, water and other essential basic needs was and still is a distinguishing operational area of Dorcas. The short term assistance is provided to families and



*It was very special to me that within our community we worked together with people from different churches, for Dorcas.*

Mr. Jol, volunteer

**1995**

Opening of country office in Tanzania

**1998**

Opening of country office in Ukraine and Ethiopia

*"What really appealed to me was how Dirk-Jan Groot linked his faith to decisive action. Over the years, this has remained a characteristic of Dorcas, despite the professionalisation: action-oriented, quick, giving hands and feet to faith."*

Floor Pieters, entrepreneur, former board member and volunteer

**2001**

Opening of country office in Mozambique

*"This is the change that we are looking for. The change in the mindset of people, that people can feel and know that they have potential. Then once you create an environment that is enabling them it's very easy for these people to flourish."*

Edwin Onyancha, country director Dorcas Kenya

older people in Eastern Europe and later to communities affected by conflict and natural disasters in other parts of the world. The Dorcas Food Campaign is directly connected to this short term assistance, which has matured over the years. During the nineties Dorcas became known for its distribution of food parcels, soup kitchens (Russia, Ethiopia) and afterschool meals for children. The Dorcas Food Campaign and other forms of collecting food and goods enabled groups of volunteers in the Netherlands to collect and initially even deliver food assistance. From the start there is a direct connection with local networks of community volunteers.

A distinguishing global development that impacted the development of Dorcas in the nineties was the devastating HIV/AIDS pandemic. In a number of countries where Dorcas was present (including the former Soviet Union) the HIV/AIDS pandemic led to a surge in the number of orphans and children without adequate parental or family care. The pandemic urged Dorcas to become involved in the health sector. Initially starting with construction and rehabilitation of health clinics (Mozambique, Albania), Dorcas later shifted to awareness raising and prevention through provision of information on the prevention of HIV/Aids and other infectious diseases. In programmes that focussed on children and young adults, Dorcas came up with the innovative concept of transition homes for children/teenagers that were 'too old' to be part of regular child protection programmes but insufficiently equipped to be safe and self-sufficient.

## 2000 - 2015

The new millennium kicked off with the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) at the United Nations Millennium Summit. Through its projects and country programmes Dorcas contributed to achieving the MDGs in this third stretch of the Dorcas journey. In the same period Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) was often linked by governments to programmes of International (Northern) Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). Further development of the humanitarian sector in the wake of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami led to an expansion and professionalisation of relief and development organisations.

Dorcas country offices took on a more coordinating and 'funding' role implementing projects via partner organisations. Dorcas started to bring to the forefront which groups of people it wanted to focus on and how Dorcas wanted to work.

In rural areas Dorcas started to focus on strengthening agricultural practices and systems with the aim to increase food security. Connected to this, Dorcas started to provide support in market and value chain development, including access to finance to aspiring farmers and other entrepreneurs. Also in other sectors Dorcas transitioned from providing to strengthening access to basic needs. In this transition communities were increasingly approached with a focus on their potential and assets. Dorcas shifted from a need-based approach towards an asset-based approach. Through adopting and adapting approaches such as Farmer Field and Farmer Business Schools, Dorcas aimed to support communities to make the shift to a market based approach while being able to

**2003**

Opening of country office  
in Moldova

**2008**

Opening of country office  
in South Sudan

**2009**

Dorcas Romania establishes  
Manna second hand shops, a  
Romanian social enterprise

*"Most likely another book will appear in the future with other pictures that tell part of the Dorcas work. Thirty years ago I was called to stand up for the poor and oppressed in the world and that is what I have done for the last thirty years. I hope to continue to do that in the years to come as well - for the benefit of this group of people."*

Dirk-Jan Groot, founder Dorcas

*"A lot has changed over the years. Goods used to be collected from us and brought to Andijk. Now the clothes are sold per kilo and the money goes to Dorcas' programmes. That's how it works these days."*

Leen Dekker, volunteer

respond to a changing environment and climate at the same time.

At the height of the HIV-Aids epidemic, Dorcas' involvement in health as a sector became even stronger as in the previous time period. This involvement largely came to an end when Dorcas changed its work from being sector based to geographically focussed. After 2015 Dorcas shifted its focus from a sectoral approach to a geographical focus. One of the sectors from which Dorcas phased out was that of health.

Children have always been a special group in Dorcas' programmes. The child sponsorship programme was established, linking individual sponsors to individual children in Dorcas projects. Towards 2015 this sponsorship programme evolved into the Future4Children approach. The Future4Children approach focussed on the broad protection, development and wellbeing of children in the context of families and communities.

In the early 2000's Dorcas started another sponsorship programme, linking individual sponsors with older people in Dorcas projects: the Adopt-a-Granny sponsorship programme. In this programme, sponsors in the Netherlands could contribute directly to structural support for older people in urban and rural areas of the countries where Dorcas was present. Like the child sponsorship programme, the Adopt-a-Granny programme also developed from providing care and practical assistance to community-based programmes. Towards 2015 the Dorcas Community Safety Net approach was born. In this approach community volunteers, local partners and churches, businesses and the local government work together in establishing local support structures or community safety nets for older people. This type of integral community based approach proved to be essential for older people, especially existing support structures were quickly deteriorating as a result of (seasonal) labour migration.

The period till 2015 was a time of growth for the number of Dorcas shops in the Netherlands and from 2009 on also in Romania. By 2015 around 25 shops had been started. The Dorcas shops fitted in a growing movement of Dorcas supporters as what would be framed Dorcas Communities. Between 2000 and 2015 this emerging movement consisted of a national Dutch network of volunteers, working groups, regional coordinators and depots for collection of clothes and other used goods. The collection and selection of clothing is an important activity of the volunteer work in the Netherlands. Clothing was initially transported to Eastern Europe, but towards the end of this time period was sold through various channels in the Netherlands. The income obtained in this way was then used to develop and implement integrated programmes in which families, children and older people participate. The interdenominational support base of Dorcas is already mentioned. As part of the growing support base in the Netherlands, churches of various backgrounds and also companies providing goods and monetary support became more and more important.



## 2015

Opening of country office  
in Iraq

Start of a Public-Private  
Partnership in Ethiopia,  
strengthening the milk  
value chain and farmers  
with milk-cows

## 2016

Opening of country office  
in Syria and Lebanon

*"The Dorcas Philosophy  
of Change speaks about  
Flourishing Communities,  
which is actually a very  
appealing prospect. A  
Flourishing Community takes  
care of its members, provides  
opportunities for them to fully  
participate, both socially and  
economically."*

MDF assessment report

*"At Dorcas we believe all  
people have value. That's why  
we make it our goal to include  
everyone in society in  
our response."*

Lilian Michael Urassa, country  
director Dorcas Tanzania

*"The community focus and the  
focus on the most vulnerable  
sets Dorcas aside from the  
Principled Relief agents  
and the hard-core business  
development interventionists."*

MDF assessment report

*"Humanitarian aid has  
historically focused on water,  
food and shelter - and that will  
continue to be vital. But in light  
of the global mental health  
crisis, we need to do more -  
particularly in countries where  
mental illness remains a taboo."*

## 2015 - 2021

2015 marks the transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Dorcas committed itself to achieving the SDGs, in particular:



The overarching theme of the SDGs – Leave No One Behind – is a core element of the identity and Philosophy of Change of Dorcas. The Philosophy of Change which was articulated in 2015 – 2016 is the foundation of Dorcas' approach in its programmes. It connects the faith-based identity of Dorcas with Dorcas' approach to change. The Philosophy of Change is dynamic but always contributes to three connected levels of change: individual, community and society.



Dorcas underscores the crucial role of working together and fully supports SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals. From the start Dorcas' work has been based on collective efforts, working together and partnerships. Emerging trends such as localisation and a movement for community led development distinctly place partnerships in a context of mutuality and reciprocity. It is not about 'us' helping 'them', but all about together answering this question:

**How can all contribute to a future in which everyone can flourish?**

Dorcas is different. This doesn't necessarily mean better. But something that distinguishes Dorcas is the fact that Dorcas is not a traditional interventionist, but has a long-term commitment with the communities it works with. This places Dorcas and communities together in the unique position to create community-led programmes, based on a well-informed understanding of the context.

*These are the people who go unseen. It is our duty to reach them."*

Najla Chahda,  
country director Dorcas Syria

## 2019

Scaling of the Blue Bucket Campaign, the local equivalent of the Dutch Dorcas Food Campaign, from Romania to multiple other countries in Eastern Europe

*"Years of underdevelopment and ethnic violence, coupled with natural disasters tear apart our social fabric. That's why Dorcas ensures that humanitarian relief and sustainable development go hand-in-hand while always looking to facilitate local peace-building efforts in complex political geographies."*

Agnes Kroese, country director  
Dorcas South Sudan

## 2020

Start of a lobby campaign for the rights of older people

## 2021

Preparing to open a country office in Yemen

*"In Ukraine, Dorcas has two localization strategies at work. Firstly, our long history of collaboration with local churches enables us to invest in diaconal work that best serves the people. We also work closely with local authorities and other multi-stakeholder partners in a bid to bring systems change and address problems of marginalization and social exclusion. As you can see, both rest on the power of partnership."*

Ferenc Katko,  
country director Dorcas Ukraine

Dorcas strives to make integrated community development the core of its approach in the coming years and beyond. A typical Dorcas project should have a strong element of community involvement and development, whilst there can be a specific focus on humanitarian assistance, community care and protection, resilient livelihoods or enterprising people and communities.

A practical implication is that Dorcas will even more intentionally view vulnerable people as people with inherent dignity and potential and not as mere 'project beneficiaries'. Dorcas strengthens its focus on empowerment and mobilisation in order to 'achieve more together.' A core element of this focus is an emphasis on local resources and partnership diversification. Since a number of years Dorcas Romania already had its own equivalent of the Dorcas Food Campaign. The Dorcas Blue Bucket Campaign was scaled to other countries from 1999 onwards.

During the 2015 – 2021 time period protracted crises and conflict in the region of Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen dominated at times the newspaper headlines. Dorcas started country offices in each of the countries (country office Yemen currently being established) intending to stay present long-term to help rebuild these countries from inside out. In general, Dorcas works predominantly in protracted crisis situations, not only in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen, but also in countries on the African continent and even in the country of Ukraine. The key characteristic of such situations underpins Dorcas' focus on 'Care and Protection'. The same holds true in countries where there is a minimum required level of safety and stability. Also in those countries Dorcas works with people that experience chronic issues that are not easily solved in the course of one project. This applies for example to the situation of older people and the breakdown of or absence of social support circles and community safety nets. It also applies to families experiencing chronic multi-dimensional poverty, particularly in areas where there is no (prospect of) economic development.

Dorcas chooses a distinctly recognisable position, but not always the easiest one. More often than not it requires a careful balancing act.

Addressing complex problems in difficult environments requires different actors working over particular timeframes, using different finance sources. Hence this requires, more than ever, strong diverse collaborative partnerships, in which Dorcas adds value with its unique community centred strengths. With Dorcas having a long-term commitment in working with communities in fragile contexts it is well positioned to reflect on how to put the triple nexus - humanitarian, development, and peace – to work. The long-term commitment of Dorcas to communities and its three-tier approach (individual, community, and society) to change puts Dorcas in a unique position to put triple-nexus to praxis.

The COVID-19 pandemic shook the world towards the end of this time period. Dorcas was able to sustain its operations and its contribution to change.



## The Future

The COVID-19 pandemic is evolving in a world that has become increasingly complex, interconnected and unpredictable. Navigating into the future in the face of uncertainty is a skill that Dorcas (and we all) continuously needs to develop in a sharp and reinvent way. Predicting what will happen beyond tomorrow is something that is notoriously impossible to do. Together with many others, Dorcas tries to discern what is ahead. How will the world change? How will Dorcas need to change so that the organisation continues to contribute to change? Looking at current and recent developments, Dorcas particularly considers the following trends.

Redistribution of power and changes in the support base and funding for development cooperation is one of them. A development related to #ShiftThePower, the localisation agenda and decolonisation. Population growth and the relationship with climate change and planetary boundaries is another one. Dorcas observes that the number of people of 65 years of age and older will be fastest growing. As countries 'develop', this will further drive population growth, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. At the same time climate change will lead to unprecedented and unpredictable disasters (man-made and natural) including droughts, floods, decreasing yields and desertification and, subsequently, conflicts because of scarcity of natural resources, combined with protectionism or nationalist policies and climate migration. Conflicts will be mostly protracted crises – concentrated in the world's poorest regions. Global poverty will decline but instable counties, mainly in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia will have the largest concentration of poverty. Rise of inequality and poverty is to be expected in developing nations, including in Europe. We can expect a geopolitical shift in the power balance, from North and West to East and South.

For Dorcas the above trends influence its policy choices, strategy and plans for the next strategic period till 2025 and beyond. In the midst of vicious cycles of poverty, inequality, conflict and climate change, Dorcas is determined to remain present for people and communities who are marginalised. These can be found in Sub-Saharan Africa, in conflict-prone and fragile areas, but also in communities in Eastern-European and low-income countries. Dorcas will maintain and strengthen its local leadership and local ownership, continue to work with local partners and work community-based everywhere, including in the Netherlands.

Dorcas will keep on working driven by the same mission for which Dorcas was born 40 years ago: "whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40).

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We fight poverty, exclusion  
and crisis. We empower  
marginalised people and  
communities to flourish.  
This is how we follow  
Jesus Christ.