

P⁺

VNG SPECIAL

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Participation
Waste collection
Land registry
Local taxes
City planning

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION BETWEEN MUNICIPALITIES

VNG International is the organisation for international cooperation of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities VNG. It's the body within VNG for municipal international policy. It represents the interests of Netherlands municipalities in this area, supports them and executes international projects together with them.

Key programmes include:

- The Millennium Municipalities campaign, which has so far attracted 150 municipalities, and
- LOGO South, whereby Netherlands municipalities contribute to strengthening local government in developing countries.

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Local authorities exchange
Leap forward

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Municipalities throw open the shutters

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FOREWORD

By ANNEMARIE JORRITSMAL-LEBBINK



From colleague to colleague

The Dutch like to moan about the government. But what if the rubbish was just left to pile up in the streets, if there was no safe drinking water, or if your house was knee-deep in water after a bout of heavy rain?

Civil servants from around 50 Netherlands municipalities and water boards have been working together with colleagues from local authorities in 13 developing countries to tackle the problems they face. They do this under the auspices of the LOGO South programme. "These ties are unique because of their character and their long-term sustainability; the mutual trust and the

colleagues to set up a system of levies for the collection of household waste. This new source of revenue offers Ghanaian authorities a sustainable way of financing the collection of household waste. In this they are working together with central government towards the long-term objective of a national system.

Getting residents to pay for government services is not an easy option, as we know only too well. But it is the right way. Our experts have the relevant practical experience. By working from colleague to colleague together, we're able to forge the necessary trust. And I can assure you that our civil servants also get something out of it; they take a wealth of experience back home with them. This benefits the city of Almere.

Netherlands municipalities also contribute to reconstruction projects after natural disasters. After the earthquake of 1999 in the Marmara region of Turkey, the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004 and this year's earthquake in Haiti they financed programmes aimed at getting local authorities in the disaster areas to function adequately again.

And last but certainly not least: many Netherlands municipalities encourage private individuals, local institutions and companies to get involved in development cooperation. The town twinnings open up the way for setting up private aid projects. Of all the Netherlands municipalities, one third has since become a Millennium Municipality, and still more are applying. In this way they help to boost public commitment to the Millennium goals and to foster the realisation that the burning issues of our time are global issues.

By being close to their citizens, by their expertise and by their contacts, Netherlands municipalities play an irreplaceable part in development cooperation. And this they do with minimal means and maximum results, researchers have found. In this issue of P+ we showcase a number of inspiring examples. Together with our many partners we're keen to continue the good work in the years to come.

Annemarie Jorritsma-Lebbink is Chairperson of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities and Mayor of Almere

"I can assure you that our civil servants also get something out of it; they take a wealth of experience back home with them. This benefits the city of Almere."

diversity of the contacts result in major changes." These are not my words. It's one of the conclusions reached in a report published earlier this year evaluating LOGO South and written by researchers from the University of Utrecht and the University of Amsterdam. 'Unique' is not the only qualification the researchers give. They also find that this form of municipal development cooperation is 'effective', 'efficient' and 'sustainable'.

As mayor of Almere I visited our sister city of Kumasi, Ghana's second largest city, in March of this year. Just as in the other cities and villages of Ghana, rubbish lies strewn everywhere by the side of the road. This is a source of disease and bad for the image of the city (tourism!). Together with VNG International and three other Dutch local authorities that are twinned with Ghanaian municipalities we decided to say 'yes' to the four sister cities looking for our help and advice in improving household waste collection.

With the support of Logo South's Ghanaian coordinator based within the association of Ghanaian municipalities, our local authorities got started and booked good results. The impact of their efforts is even reflected in the public health statistics. Now our tax officials are working together with their Ghanaian



Building an African city

Each South African wants a home of their own. But the demand is too high, the numbers clamouring for housing too great. City planners dream of quality affordable rental housing in urban areas as a way of halting inner city decay. Netherlands municipalities and housing corporations are there to help. "Our dream is simple: an open and accessible city with a good living environment for all." **4**

Millennium Municipality and then what?

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How do you create a functional waste disposal system from scratch? Three Netherlands municipalities shared their expertise with colleagues in Uganda. "It took us 25 years to get a handle on our waste management, over there they've tackled it ten times faster." **14**

Sharing expertise with the world

Many of the municipalities in the Netherlands have a programme of international cooperation. Like Apeldoorn, which is helping to reform local government in Banda Aceh. VNG International works together with sister organisations overseas, for example in El Salvador and Haiti. **18**



Building an African city



A home of one's own, a place in the sun. That's what South Africans want too – with the emphasis on 'own'. Ownership is key, for no-one wants to rent. Certainly not since former president Nelson Mandela promised that all the poor would get their own homes. But the demand is too high, the numbers clamouring for housing too great. The situation calls for a creative solution, including programmes for subsidized living. Such programmes also present opportunities to tackle the destructive legacies of apartheid. City planners dream of quality affordable rental housing in urban areas as a way of halting inner city decay. Netherlands municipalities and housing corporations are there to help. "Our dream is simple: an open and accessible city with a good living environment for all."

• WORDS BY HANS VAN DE VEEN • PHOTOGRAPHY OUPA NKOSI



Pharoi Park could easily be a block of rented council flats in Holland.



▶ **T**he average South African regards rented accommodation as synonymous with decaying inner city apartment blocks. Or with hostels, the depressing barracks which used to house mineworkers. Housing where the willingness to pay rent is so low that the owners of the buildings do nothing about maintenance either. Pharoi Park shows that it doesn't always have to be that way. This extensive development of several dozen apartment blocks is situated in Germiston, 15 kilometres east of Johannesburg and not far from the country's largest black township of Soweto. The 400 apartments have been renovated and painted inside and out. Their parking places are crammed with cars. It could easily be a social housing estate in the Netherlands. Except, that is, for the two metre high fence around the perimeter of the entire complex and the security guard at the gate. This is South Africa, after all.

Pharoi Park is owned by the municipal housing corporation EDC, set up by the municipality of Ekurhuleni which also comprises the urban centre of Germiston. In accordance with a prior agreement, the council regularly transfers housing stock to the corporation, which now manages around a thousand residential units. The non-profit corporation needs a stock of at least three thousand rental units if it is to operate independently, says acting director Daphney Ngoasheng. "If we don't collect rents, we can't pay the salaries of our employees. We're entirely dependent on government

"In Breda it took the housing corporations a century to become self-sufficient. In Ekurhuleni we're going to do that in 15 years."

subsidy, we have no reserves and no shareholders' capital." Ngoasheng would ideally like to see EDC become an independent entity, able to build and manage housing complexes in partnership with the private sector. South Africa numbers a couple of successful housing corporations, but for the majority independence is still a dream too far. As part of the cooperation between the municipalities of Ekurhuleni and Breda, EDC exchanges knowledge and expertise with the Breda-based housing corporations Singelvest/Alleewonen and Wonen-Breburg. Ngoasheng welcomes the cooperation. "The Dutch have a great deal of experience with social housing. We want to learn from their successes – and from their mistakes. In Breda it took the corporations a hundred years to become self-sufficient. We're going to do that in 15 years." But, she warns, there are also major differences. "Breda doesn't have half our problems. They can learn from the extreme situation here. In Holland, they're only dealing with people who need a house, not people who are starving. That way the Dutch corporations can busy themselves with luxury issues like city parks and cycle paths. Of course we'd like to do that here too, but it's not our first priority." Some 40,000 people currently live in

unplanned squatter camps or informal settlements around Germiston. Alongside Germiston the extended municipality of Ekurhuleni numbers another eight urban centres, surrounded by twelve townships. Aubrey Mokgosi, Ekurhuleni's director of Human Settlements, estimates the number of inadequately housed people in his municipality at around 200,000. And demand is growing, due to the influx of rural migrants and immigrants from neighbouring countries. "The more we build, the more people come here," he says. After jobs, housing is the South African government's number one priority. When he was inaugurated as the country's first democratically elected president, Nelson Mandela promised all South Africans on low incomes their own home. Together with other government investments, the construction of these 'Reconstruction and Development Programme' (RDP) houses – known colloquially as 'Mandela homes' – have led to significant improvements. Millions of homes have been built. Around half of black households now have a toilet with running water, compared with just under a third back in 1996. Local councils foot the bill for a basic supply of drinking water and electricity to the poor.



Many tenants would like to buy their homes. But housing corporations need rental properties in order to stay afloat. Even so, they are investigating the possibilities for buy-lease.

But despite these improvements there is growing frustration. Protests about the lack of employment, houses and services provision are increasing, often taking the form of road blockades and frequently turning violent. Prime target of the civil unrest are the local authorities. And central government has since acknowledged that the lack of expertise at local management level poses a major obstacle for the implementation of policy. It's here that Netherlands municipalities can play a role. By underlining the essential link between public housing and city planning, for example. "The two largely operate independently of one another," says Breda project leader Hans Thoolen. "Thanks to the intensive exchange between our municipal services and those in

Ekurhuleni they're now working closely together. That's a big win."

That cooperation resulted in a business plan for downtown Germiston which is currently being finalised. Urban renewal should help tackle one of the most destructive legacies of apartheid. So far, the majority of the new houses have been built on cheap ground, near to the existing townships. That means they're situated a long way from the city centre (generally around 20 to 30 kilometres) and therefore far from centrally located healthcare facilities, (higher) education or public transport and – crucially – far from where the jobs are. And meanwhile the inner cities are decaying. Young people are moving away, with



the companies and the shopping malls in their wake. Only the aged and the illegal immigrants are staying behind. Mokgosi: "The people you see here around you now, arrive in the morning and leave again in the evening." The council wants to turn the tide with a new approach and inject new life into Germiston's city centre. A key element is the renovation of abandoned housing blocks and filling empty and neglected sites. All the council premises currently scattered around the municipality will be located centrally in a new local authority complex in downtown Germiston. The project kicked off with a clean-up operation, the city centre streets are now clean. Mokgosi: "Housing will be the catalyst. As a local authority we're showing we're

Picture in the paper

"Rented council housing isn't attractive politically," says Michelle Essink. "Politicians like to see pictures in the paper of themselves handing over the keys to a happy new home owner. Building Mandela homes is a vote winner. But the paper never says how far away from the city these people have to live. Many are really unhappy." On behalf of VNG International Essink coordinates municipal activities in the area of social housing in South Africa that dovetail with government policy. Social housing is one of the forms of subsidized housing for lower income groups. Thirteen municipalities now receive central government funds for programmes to promote reasonably priced rental accommodation. Essink thinks the scheme won't be extended in the near future, because there's a lack of cash. "And it's good that those councils involved first gain more experience," she says. "We're helping them with that."

Together with her colleagues, Essink put together a so-called 'Toolkit' of practical guidelines for the municipalities involved. There's a great deal of interest, she says, but implementation remains a problem. "Social housing suffers from a poor image. We've talked about it with the councils, and we've organised workshops. Now they've got to get on with it, set up a communications strategy whereby they can reassure local residents that rented accommodation doesn't mean they're getting a slum in their backyard." Municipalities not receiving government subsidies for social housing are forced to seek alternatives. Essink: "We advise them to investigate whether they can team up with successful housing corporations from elsewhere. Those are major institutions that are in a position to take over the financial risks from the municipalities."



Refurbished former mineworkers' hostels in Tsalanang. Vlissingen municipality offers support to the local housing corporation that rents these properties out.

serious by investing in a clean city, in housing construction and in public transport. That should convince private investors. Then we can really get going in public-private partnerships." In South African city planning and architectural circles there's a lot of talk about the 'African City', designed to free the country from its apartheid legacy for ever. But Mokgosi isn't that impressed by the 'African' tag. "It's a term that quickly translates into clichés about earthy colours and leopard prints. Our dream is simple: an open and accessible city with a good living environment for all."

One of the biggest challenges for the housing

corporations is the transformation of the infamous former hostels for mine workers into neat and attractive family units. Under apartheid, men who came to work on the mines were forced to leave their families behind and were housed in huge single-sex barracks. Since then many of these workers have brought their families to the city, which has placed an even more severe strain on already poor living conditions. Take Govan Mbeki municipality, for example. This rural community, named after the father of the previous South African president, is situated around two hours' drive from Johannesburg and numbers some 500,000 residents. Coal and gold mining has always

been its principal economic activity. Mining giant Sasol manages its own flats and hostels for the employees on its payroll. Others live in buildings managed by the council or the housing association. Such as in Tsalanang, a residential complex numbering several dozen blocks of flats. Some of them have been renovated and given a colourful lick of paint, others are still grey and decrepit. Between the housing blocks there are badly maintained stretches of grass, studded with pools of muddy water and holes full of rubbish. One of the buildings bears the sign "Woonwinkel" (Housing point). It could hardly get more Dutch than that. Inside we

councillors with construction and housing in their portfolios. The cooperation between central government and civil servants is also covered. During a visit to Breda last year councillors from South Africa shadowed their Dutch colleagues for several days.

Vlissingen has been twinned with Govan Mbeki Municipality since 2000. The current project, which runs to end 2010, centres on improving the living environment and city planning. Key elements are the transformation of the hostels into family dwelling units and supporting the housing corporation which provides and maintains houses. The project started with an analysis of the local housing situation that was subsequently translated into a structured plan of action. Project coordinator Willem van Baalen: "The Govan Mbeki staff no longer needs us in order to develop its city planning initiatives. But they still send their designs to us in Vlissingen. Simply because they value our input."

LOGO South in South Africa – Housing is key

No fewer than eight twinings between Dutch and South African municipalities focus on social housing. The first activities were started around 2006 under the auspices of the LOGO South Programme which runs until 2011. The overall objective is to provide support for local authorities in South Africa in formulating policy in an area that is new to them, and to help recently established housing corporations to get up and running. The agreement between Breda city council and the Metropolitan Municipality of Ekurhuleni dates back to November 2008. The aim of this two-year cooperative project is to boost the capacity for urban renewal and housing in Ekurhuleni, a council that's barely ten years old. In addition to knowledge transfer and capacity building, Breda is also cooperating in the construction of 425 new dwellings in two different locations and the urban renewal plan for Germiston. There have been working visits in both directions. These offer an opportunity not only for civil servants and representatives of the housing associations to meet one another but also



Street scene in Germiston, the urban centre destined to become the heart of Ekurhuleni municipality. The play area is maintained by Ekurhuleni Youth Development; the girls shown right are active in this youth organisation.

meet Yakhani Sondlo, the concierge for the housing complex. The idea of a housing point offering services to tenants is the fruit of the cooperation with Vlissingen, he says. The service point has a meeting hall for tenants' associations to come together as well as a children's daycare centre and a laundrette. "We want to renovate that derelict building over there," Sondlo points out, "so that we can open a shop there. At present people still have to walk a long way to get their groceries."

Outside, Paul Mlangai is washing his car. He characterizes himself as a 'contented resident' of one of the renovated homes the council rents out. He can't afford a home of his own, he says. "Don't be too sure," says Sondlo. He tells him of a new scheme whereby tenants can gradually buy the homes in which they live. But Paul thinks it too good to be true. "I can't even afford the first down payment." But Sondlo persists. "We're going to organize some meetings," he says. "People here have a right to good information." At city hall King Silahlili, acting director for housing, explains why not all of the blocks of flats have been renovated. "The people living there don't pay their rent. Often because they've lost their jobs. So we have to evict them. Central government says they should be given RDPs, Mandela homes, but there are hardly any of those being built here. That's the problem, we have no alternative to offer them." In 2005 the municipality set up its own housing corporation, that has since drawn up

plans to build several hundred new rental homes together with private sector housing for the top end of the market at another location. Silahlili: "That's what Vlissingen taught us. By combining rented accommodation with privately-owned housing, housing corporations can stay solvent." Unfortunately few houses have been sold to date, due to the economic downturn. The majority of the 25 bungalows finished so far are still standing empty. A guard keeps watch.

"We learned that in Vlissingen. A combination of buy and rent can keep housing corporations going."



Silahlili finds it frustrating that the municipality is dependent on subsidies from provincial and central authorities in order to build new homes. "But", he says, pointing to a string of maps pinned to the walls of his office, "with Vlissingen's help we've been able to get everything down on paper. The plans for renewal are complete and we've designated zones for construction. Now we need to get money together to start implementing our plans." ■

Millennium Municipality. And then what?



An increasing number of Netherlands municipalities have committed themselves to the Millennium Goals of the United Nations. “The campaign brings people together. It makes us into a better society.” It is easy to take part and once the ball is rolling, there seems to be no stopping it. The campaign is good for fostering a sense of community and it helps the disadvantaged in developing countries.

✦ WORDS BY HAN VAN DE WIEL

Everyone has ideals, but not everyone has the chance to bring them to fruition. Anja van den Dolder is an exception, presiding at the birth of Hardenberg as a Millennium Municipality. It all started in 2003 when she became a member of the Third Chamber 2015, a civil society participation project whose participants think up innovative solutions to promote improved international cooperation and present them to the public and to political decision makers. It was here that she heard of the United Nations’ eight millennium goals. “From that moment on I have tried to bring them to the attention of a broad public”, she

says. In 2006, as a councillor for the Christen Unie party, she found it a “wonderful idea to ensure that Hardenberg would debut as the Millennium Municipality in the province of Overijssel. After all, as a so-called ‘first authority’ a city council is very close to the people.” But where she had expected enthusiasm, she encountered scepticism – from members of the municipal council. “We don’t get involved in Hague politics” was the reaction. But Van den Dolder persisted and finally succeeded in gaining the backing of 30 of the 31 council members for her proposal, so that in 2007 Hardenberg became Overijssel’s first millennium council.

But that was only the start. Van den Dolder wanted the millennium municipality tag to be more than just a label emblazoned in red and white below the municipality’s name plaque. Based on the advice of the then minister for development aid Bert Koenders, Hardenberg committed itself to promoting Millennium Goal 7: giving more people access to clean drinking water. But there was also a logical link to Hardenberg, Van den Dolder says. “Water is a key factor in tourism to Hardenberg, and leading Dutch plastic pipeline manufacturer Wavin is based here.” Van den Dolder succeeded in attracting key figures from the community and their extended networks to work with the 2015 Foundation, which is charged with managing Hardenberg’s millennium initiatives. Three years on, the project has booked remarkable results. Aqua for All doubled the dividend of 100.000 euros Hardenberg received as a major shareholder of drinking water utility Vitens and the resultant sum was donated to a drinking water project run by Unicef in Niger. As a result 40,000 people gained access to clean drinking water. Last year a further 100,000 euros became available, this time resulting from the sale of energy utility Essent. This amount, too, was donated via Unicef to a water project, this time in Nepal. Van den Dolder: “So the money isn’t coming out of the budget. It’s money donated by

Local authorities are more than simply public management bodies – they’re also communities of people in which things are shared in all manner of contexts.

society.” Minister Koenders was so enthused by Hardenberg’s allocation of this social dividend that Hardenberg has been given an extra 600,000 euros to spend on similar projects up to 2015. The number of millennium municipalities like Hardenberg is on the increase. At the end of July 2010 there were 150 millennium municipalities, together home to more than 9 million people – some 55 percent of the Dutch population. “In order to realise the eight millennium goals we have to start in our own society: government, companies, institutions and people,” says Arthur Wiggers. Wiggers is deputy director of VNG International, which is implementing the Millennium Municipality campaign over a period of four years, subsidized by NCDO and the ministry of foreign affairs. NCDO regards the campaign as successful, says the organisation’s Annemiek Bosboom. “Among other things because the campaign has a low threshold: municipalities can easily come on board. A council needn’t be big or have to have a large budget or capacity to join in. This accessibility also means that the municipality can make its own decisions on how to work within the campaign, tailoring its offering to fit with the local context. Local authorities are attractive because they’re close to the people and have good access to the media and their own media channels. And there are many points of contact which require only a relatively small outlay to reach many citizens, companies, schools and other institutions. “The local authorities’ participation is informed by an awareness that they form part of a greater whole, says Wiggers. “Our actions have consequences elsewhere, and vice versa. ➤

► Municipal problems stretch beyond municipal borders. Local authorities are more than simply public management bodies – they’re also communities of people in which things are shared in all manner of contexts. In this campaign VNG is working closely together with the COS bodies specialised in international cooperation.”

“The campaign is aimed primarily at bolstering public support for the millennium goals,” says campaign leader Jaap Breugem, who also comes from VNG International. Increased social cohesion is a result of, but also a precondition for the campaign. “The campaign brings people together,” says Breugem. “It makes us a better society.”

A number of municipalities have used the Millennium campaign to breathe new life into existing twinning arrangements with municipalities in developing countries. Why are local authorities so suited to this? Wiggers

“In order to realise the eight millennium goals we have to start in our own society: government, companies, institutions and people.”

believes it’s because local authorities are particularly good in collegial cooperation. “It’s frequently been noted that we have the relevant expertise, capable people and people who are alive to cultural difference. When we share our knowledge and expertise with municipalities in developing countries it’s always welcome. It leads to a strengthening of decentralised authorities in developing countries.” The differences between the range of tasks carried out by municipalities “over here” and “over there” are surprisingly small, says Wiggers. “When people from developing countries come here to visit they’re almost always struck by the immense prosperity. But it soon transpires that the underlying issues and ways of working have a lot in common.



And that’s what it’s about: the underlying issues. Who produces the waste, who cleans it up, how is it processed, who pays for what? One can get down to talking about that very quickly. And it works better then sending a consultant over for a hefty fee, who doesn’t build up a relationship.” Breugem and Wiggers are modest about how the Millennium Municipality Campaign can help meet the ambitious millennium goals. “Of course that’s what we’re here for, but this component could be a bit more solid,” says Breugem. Wiggers is realistic. He feels that municipalities can do no more than make a contribution. “That’s why most councils opt for one or maybe two millennium goals, while others focus exclusively on giving information about them. Both approaches are fine. Councils choose what best suits them and link up with the interests within their communities and what galvanizes energy there. We can’t and don’t want to force anyone into doing anything. In some municipalities citizens have been extremely active for years, while in another case nothing is happening yet. For example, Leiden is working together with the regional training centre ROC Leiden on an hiv/aids project. Others are not interested in this subject.” But Wiggers doesn’t fear this will lead to an absence of commitment. “Councils who do no more than screw the Millennium plaque under the name of their municipality should be prepared for the fact that active citizens or the local media will start asking questions about what it all means. That actually happened in Friesland province, after regional newspaper Friesch Dagblad drew up an inventory of all the initiatives. It’s media coverage like this that links up with what we’re hoping for: concern for, and debate about, the millennium targets.”

Informing the local population is an important part of the Millennium Campaign. In Hardenberg they used the handing over of a cheque for 100,000 euros to Unicef to maximum effect, says Anja van den Dolder. “We organised an evening with the Queen’s Commissioner, a representative from VNG International and lots of local people. Around 300 to 350 people came, we were over the moon.” In mid-June Hardenberg organised a big Millennium festival, featuring among others the Hardenberg dj Edwin Evers from Radio 538, who is also a Unicef ambassador. It was at this festive occasion that the cheque for Nepal was handed over to Unicef. Former development affairs minister Koenders was very taken by Hardenberg’s approach, whereby the council looks at the issues in play within the municipal borders and enlists the expertise of an industrial sector that is traditionally strong within the community. At the VNG Millennium Municipality

“Councils who do no more than screw the Millennium plaque under the name of their municipality should be prepared for the fact that active citizens or the local media will start asking questions about what it all means.”

Symposium of October 2008 he called on municipalities to raise their ambitions “and to look further how we could do even more, and how we could do even better. I want to challenge you to raise the bar just that little bit more, no matter how high it is already. (...) How can we utilize the current level of interest within your municipalities to achieve even better results?” Koenders characterised VNG International’s initiative to actively support Millennium Municipalities that want to do more as “an essential step”. He suggested a masterclass for municipal employees, ways in which local companies could be drawn into the campaign and ways of giving concrete form to

ideas put forward by the community. “And don’t let anybody tell you that that’s not relevant!”

VNG International is looking into campaign models that go beyond informing the local population. One of the ways to do this is the soon to be started cooperative venture between municipalities and Plan Nederland. Participating councils will ask parents coming to register the birth of their child to donate a sum of money to Plan, so that babies in developing countries can also be registered. Another possibility is that the council donates seven euros to Plan for every birth registered within its municipality. Wiggers: “The registration of births is very important and is one of the municipality’s traditional tasks. You can contrast the naturalness of registration in the Netherlands with the consequences of non-registration in developing countries. Registration prevents social exclusion, gives access to medical care and education, ensures that you will later be able to vote. We’re on the look-out for these types of activities.” Over the coming years citizens and local authorities will be faced with major budget cuts in order to rein in the central government deficit. It’s uncertain whether this will have consequences for the campaign, for local authorities are relatively autonomous. Anja van den Dolder doesn’t fear any adverse effects: “The Millennium Goals form part of the new governing agreement. But of course it’s important that they continue to be supported by the community, because the council has not reserved anything in the budget. So we’ll have to think out of the box.” Van den Dolder says she’s playing with the idea of doing something with the 1.6 million overnight stays by tourists on Hardenberg’s campsites. “You could ask the owners of the campsites to give information about the Millennium Campaign and ask them to make a contribution to Foundation 2015 of one euro per overnight stay on a voluntary basis. That way you’re accessing a whole new target audience.” ■

MILLENNIUM SUCCESS STORIES

One of the attractions of the Millennium Campaign is the ease of participation: a council decision to become a Millennium Municipality is enough. But what then? In addition to the advice to opt for one - or at most two - key issues on which to focus and to link up as much as possible with what’s happening within the community, there are a number of pointers to success .

SUSTAINABLE PURCHASING

Together municipalities have enormous purchasing power. Central government and the association of Netherlands municipalities VNG have agreed that from 2010 three quarters of the goods and services purchased by municipalities must be sustainable, rising to fully sustainable purchasing by 2015. Senter Novem (now known as Agentschap NL) has formulated sustainability criteria for a large number of product and service groups. Municipalities can introduce these criteria throughout their entire organisation. www.senternovem.nl/duurzaaminkopen/

FAIR TRADE

Fair trade means that producers are paid a fair price for their products. A growing number of municipalities are buying fair trade products where possible and guaranteeing to do so by joining up to the Fair Trade Council Campaign. www.fairtradegemeente.nl

SUSTAINABLE INVESTMENT

Municipalities can invest their money in the Oikocredit Nederland Fund, a socially ethical investment fund. Oikocredit tackles poverty by making funds available to underprivileged entrepreneurs in developing countries. The fund is structured in such a way that the principal is guaranteed, so that municipalities know they will under no circumstances lose their deposit. www.oikocredit.org www.fairtradegemeente.nl

WORLD MOTHERS

In September 2010 Simavi teams up with VNG International to stage the second World Mothers’ relay. Dutch mothers will tour the length and breadth of the Netherlands in old Volkswagen vans, staging playful happenings to call attention to the importance of healthy pregnancies in developing countries. Together with the mayors of the Millennium Municipalities and prominent Dutch figures they will call attention to Millennium goal 5: fewer deaths of women through pregnancy. www.estafettevoorwereldmoeders.nl

CLIMATE NEUTRAL

More and more municipalities are looking to become climate neutral. They start with a critical evaluation of their energy consumption – such as road transport use – and switch to green electricity. But it’s difficult to eliminate one’s entire carbon footprint. In such cases the Hivos Climate Fund and ICCO’s Fair Climate Fund can offer an alternative. By investing in these funds a municipality boosts access to clean energy for people in developing countries. The carbon credits this generates can then be used by the municipality to offset its own emissions of greenhouse gases. www.hivosklimaatfonds.nl and www.fairclimatefund.nl



How do you create a functional waste disposal system from scratch? Three Netherlands municipalities shared their expertise with colleagues in Uganda. "It took us 25 years to get a handle on our waste management, over there they've tackled it ten times faster."

+ WORDS BY HAN VAN DE WIEL
+ PHOTOGRAPHY BAS JONGERIUS



A green container for green waste

Anyone visiting Uganda in the near future may well be pleasantly surprised by the country's advanced system of waste management. It might not appear so at first, but the system closely resembles that in the Netherlands, one of the world's leaders in term of waste management. What it essentially amounts to is that the waste is sorted at source and recycled in the most useful way possible: fruit and vegetable peelings are composted and used to enrich the soil, materials worth money are collected separately and the remaining waste goes into the incinerator. Uganda isn't that far yet, but the country has made a good start. In three municipalities households are experimenting with sorting their rubbish: green waste goes in one bin, residual waste in another. Containers painted in the same colours as the household bins are

placed in the street. The containers are fitted with dividers to ensure the waste stays separate, and a community worker is on hand the whole day to ensure that residents deposit their household waste in the right compartment. Once the container is full, its entire contents are shovelled by hand into the municipal lorry that stops by to collect it. The green waste ends up on the compost heap and the residual waste is processed under controlled conditions. "There's one big difference with the Netherlands," remarks Theo van Gerven, a waste disposal worker for Gemert-Bakel council in the southern Netherlands. "It took us 25 years to perfect our current waste management system, in Uganda they're doing it ten times faster." When Van Gerven first visited Uganda in 2009 he was shocked at what he saw. "There was

garbage lying around everywhere in the streets and between the houses." Together with the Netherlands municipalities of Goes and De Ronde Venen, Gemert-Bakel helped three Ugandan municipalities to set up an integrated rubbish collection and sorting system. The three participating Ugandan councils are Bushenyi, Kamuli and Kalangala.

In 2008 VNG International organised a workshop in Uganda under the auspices of LOGO South (see box page 17) where the teams of the three Dutch and Ugandan town councils jointly drew up their requirements and priorities for the project. Top priority was to create a cleaner and more sustainable living environment. Introducing municipal waste management - the sorting, collection, transportation and processing of waste - can

greatly improve the health and welfare of the local population. "Actually I'd expected we'd be doing something with regard to drinking water," says Albert Boonman of Goes municipality. "But the most important is that we made a choice together." Boonman can happily endorse the decision to tackle waste management. After all, a good system of waste management tackles several problems at once: it stops the uncontrolled release of substances into the environment, it promotes human health and composting green waste is a boon to crop growers. Knowledge transfer from colleague to colleague is the notion underpinning the cooperative venture: eventually the Ugandan councils must be able to go it alone. "There's no want of good training," says Wim Klaassen, a member of De Ronde Venen town council.

"What's lacking is sufficient management clout at the local authority level. In the Netherlands the local authority shoulders the responsibility for collecting and processing household waste. Here they don't know how to tackle such a task, how to run the show. But we can teach them that by working together as colleagues."

Goes is twinned with the town of Kamuli and environs. There's a big difference between town and country, Boonman found out. "In the country there's hardly any waste, because the people are so poor. In the little town the waste was dumped in a kind of garbage bunker - a cement floor with four walls, of which only one was still standing. Chickens, goats and cows roamed freely, so the waste scattered again just as quickly. Pools of water were a

"In the Netherlands everybody knows where the waste is supposed to go. That's really impressive"

breeding ground for malaria mosquitoes." The landfill where the waste ended up looked more like a fly-tip, Boonman says: "right next to a fishing lake and a water catchment area."

Klaassen relates a similar experience in Kalangala, a town in the district of the same name on an island group in Lake Victoria. Kalangala lies on the equator, in lush, hilly surroundings. Klaassen has since visited the area three times. "In terms of technology I have nothing to add. But what I try and do is to motivate my Ugandan colleagues. They have to



“In terms of technology I have nothing to add. But what I try and do is to motivate my Ugandan colleagues. They have to pass on the message to the local population.”

▶ pass on the message to the local population.” Little goes to waste in Kalangala, says Klaassen. “The locals recycle almost everything. Only residual waste is strewn about. There are no waste facilities, so everyone goes their own way: they dig holes and dump their rubbish in them. And once a hole is full they set the waste alight. Everywhere you can see smoking pits. At the local hospital I saw a child that had stuck used tampons in his ears: found in the rubbish. I saw monkeys running into the bush with medical waste from the hospital.” The waste from a fish processing business poses a problem that’s difficult to solve. For obvious reasons it can no longer be dumped in the waters of Lake Victoria. The University of Wageningen is looking for a remedy.

Goes, Gemert-Bakel and De Ronde Venen have all tackled the project in pretty much the same way. All started on a modest scale with the collection of household waste that had been sorted and the composting of green waste. Theo van Gerven: “We piled the composting material into a heap and drew up a schedule to turn the compost so that the heat could pass easily through the whole heap and oxygen could penetrate. In that regimented way you can book results within ten weeks.” Several months after the scheme’s introduction there was indeed a compost heap, but unfortunately it was contaminated with plastic, batteries and metals. “We took samples and had them analysed in the Netherlands. The compost was declared unfit for purpose”, says Van Gerven. “And really I knew that already, because one really must remove all the residual waste and they didn’t do that consistently.” The compost derived from the second experiment passed with flying colours. “The compost contains more fertilizers than Dutch compost. That’s good, because in Uganda compost is used instead of artificial fertilizers. There’s simply no money to buy artificial fertilizer.”



In Kamuli, which is twinned with Goes, the pilot project was less of a success, says Boonman. “At a local level, the town clerk is the one with all the power. If he’s favourably inclined, things go well. But the first town clerk did absolutely nothing. The current town clerk gives his colleagues more space. Everyone’s pulling in the same direction.” An unexpected hurdle turned out to be the colour of the bins. “We’d ordered yellow bins, but they didn’t have that colour in stock and we had to wait for months. Eventually the bins were ordered in another colour,” says Boonman. “And buying the land for the landfill took nine months longer than planned.” Boonman can laugh about it now. “The Ugandans don’t call that a problem, but a challenge.”

20 April 2010. One and a half hours behind schedule the delegation of Ugandans dawdles into the Mijdrecht council chamber (De Ronde

Venen municipality). The bus didn’t turn up. All the delegates wear blue fleece jumpers emblazoned with the VNG International logo. Lovely and warm and symbolic at the same time: discarded plastic can be used to make something useful. The Ugandan return visit will focus this morning on bridging cultural differences, for these can severely hamper effective cooperation. Albert Boonman: “After a visit to Uganda we’d frequently hear nothing. We had to learn that phone calls were far more effective than emailing, because then you’re likely to wait several weeks for an answer.” In the questions round focussed on prejudices and preconceptions, a Ugandan delegate asks why so many Dutch women smoke. Is it because it warms them up inside, he asks. What strikes many of the Ugandans is how highly structured Dutch society is. “I find that really impressive,” says mayor of Kamuli

After spending several days together, the Dutch and Ugandans share their problems with one another: “Our campaign’s success has generated its own problems for the council, because there’s only one truck to pick up the rubbish.”

Peter Muwanga. “When it comes to rubbish, for example - everyone knows exactly where the waste is supposed to go. Very impressive.” Michael Kamugisha, project leader for Bushenyi municipality, can’t get over the fact that the Dutch are even prepared to pay to get rid of their rubbish. Nevertheless the Ugandans, too, will have to start paying, says Wim Klaassen, because that’s the only way to make waste management sustainable. “It’s an irreversible process. The three municipalities function as examples for the country as a whole. There’s no going back, and they don’t want to go back. But it does cost money.”

A crucial element in the Ugandan waste management project is public information. Newspapers, television and internet don’t play a role of any significance as modes of communication in rural areas. Even so the Ugandans amazed the Dutch. “Communications are highly structured,” says Klaassen. “That’s due to the fact that the country is actually organised more democratically than the Netherlands. Alongside representatives from the seven villages, Kalangala council also



Ditch jumping is considered a traditional Dutch pastime. A couple of brave members of the Ugandan delegation give it a go during a visit to an organic cattle farm. Just one got his feet wet.



comprises representatives from specific electoral groups, such as the youth, women, the elderly and the handicapped. Furthermore the council has equal numbers of men and women. As a result there’s a structure for fast and effective communication.” Van Gerven was also impressed. “They composed a song in the local language to underline the importance of sorting and collecting waste: ‘Clean up, live longer’. That’s played on the radio, which is a major means of communication. And to mark the start of the project there was a big procession with some 500 or 600 people taking part.” Klaassen attended the official kick-off in Kalangala. “It was a huge happening, with music and performances. And above all: food for everyone. Because if there’s no food, no one comes.” Although the project has only been going for a year and a half now, the results so far have been encouraging. “I’ve heard that all the streets are clean”, says Van Gerven. Klaassen says the project has exceeded all expectations. “Participation is better than expected. That success has generated its own problems for the council, because there’s only one truck to pick up the rubbish.” ■

LOGO South

Dutch city councils can assist in bolstering local government in developing countries via the Good Local Government South (LOGO South) programme. The programme is based on bringing together practical expertise in partnerships between Dutch provinces, municipalities, water authorities and water utilities and their opposite numbers in developing countries. The programme is financed by the Dutch foreign affairs ministry and managed by VNG International.

INDONESIA

A spider to clean up the web

The devastating tsunami of 2004 not only caused a great deal of human suffering but also resulted in administrative chaos. The Netherlands municipality of Apeldoorn has given its support to the fundamental reorganisation of local government in Indonesia's Banda Aceh

“You Dutch are good in planning and organisation, we can still learn a lot from that”, says Muhammad Ridha, a local council official with the Indonesian municipality of Banda Aceh. “But”, he adds, smiling, “we’re but much better in improvising.” In the chaotic post-tsunami period, the Aceh people’s talent for improvisation was worth its weight in gold. In a remarkably short time the hard-hit province on the island of Sumatra was back on its feet. But once the majority of the foreign aid organisations withdrew Aceh was left to go it alone. In the capital of Banda, the local council sought to intensify its links with the Netherlands municipality of Apeldoorn. In December 2005 the cities’ respective mayors forged a series of agreements on technical assistance and capacity building. A key element was the establishment of an effective method of waste collection. The project quickly booked good results, but a poorly functioning local authority soon proved a bottleneck. The outmoded bureaucratic structure was not fit for purpose when it came to overseeing Aceh’s development, Ridha agrees. Too many municipal departments and an army of civil servants getting in each other’s way meant there was no clear leadership or coordination. The plans to tackle the situation drawn up under the city’s new mayor spoke metaphorically of the need for a spider able to clean up the web of conflicting powers.

After several exchange visits and extensive discussions with colleagues in Apeldoorn, Banda Aceh opted to set up a professional management agency. The unit is headed up by a city manager (comparable to a town clerk in the Netherlands) and operates independently from the rest of the organisation. The clean-up operations of this “spider at the centre of the web” include setting up a clear municipal power structure complete with clear guidelines governing the decision-making process and well-defined job descriptions for council officials.

The support given by Apeldoorn focused primarily on boosting the effectiveness of the local authority (including an improved budget procedure) and on bridging the gulf between the local authorities and the newly-elected council. In order to help boost the communication between the municipality and its citizens Apeldoorn despatched its civil service employee Herman Meijer to Banda Aceh on a two-year assignment. A local training institute, the Banda Aceh Academy was set up to tackle the problems posed by many civil servants’ lack of skills and expertise. Proudly Muhammad Ridha shows photographs of the brand-new building. The training approach, based on civil servants training their colleagues, is modelled on existing practice in Apeldoorn, says management advisor Herman Luitjes. “The academy offers possibilities for permanent schooling and training. That means we’ve really left something tangible behind. People there see it as a model project, an example for other cities in Indonesia.”



A team of policy advisors from Mayor’s Office in Banda Aceh prepares for an exchange visit to twinning partner Apeldoorn

EL SALVADOR

Municipalities must pay for services

Last year El Salvador gained its first new government in twenty years. The right-wing Arena party was forced to make way for the left-oriented FMLN party, one of the combatants in the civil war of 1979-1992.

At local level there was a small miracle: after the change of government El Salvador’s association of municipalities Comures, which had always been closely linked to Arena, managed to forge an accord with the councils affiliated to the FMLN. The result is that Comures now represents both left and right. VNG International has been supporting its Salvadorean sister organisation since 2002.

“That agreement is a unique feat,” says Irene Oostveen of VNG International. “In most countries the association of local authorities is replaced in its entirety following a political shift of power, at the expense of continuity and administrative stability.” And that could quite easily also have been the case in El Salvador. Up until 2009 the FMLN-affiliated councils were a sleeping partner within Comures, despite making up around 40 percent of the organisation. But because they did not feel represented, they withheld payment of their membership fees. Oostveen: “What’s remarkable is that the FMLN didn’t set up its own association of municipalities, as has happened in other countries. Guatemala has three such associations, for example.” That the two factions have been able to reach an agreement with FMLN taking up key positions within Comures shows that both Arena and FMLN “have

“You Dutch are good in planning and organisation, but we’re but much better in improvising.”



Petit Goave’s temporary city hall

acted in a very politically adult way”, Oostveen believes. “It’s unique that the director is still there after sixteen years and that senior staff also tend to stay on for a long time. That’s good for the continuity of the association.”

Due to its innate stability, Comures is able to focus on substantive issues. One of the most pressing questions is how its range of services is to be paid for. Municipalities pay a membership fee, but the proceeds fall far short of the funds needed to respond to all questions for support. Such queries are expensive, because it means a couple of staff are occupied with the issue while no costs are charged to the municipality concerned. This is a drain on Comures financial health. Oostveen: “VNG International raised this issue as long ago as 2002, but at the time there was no support for tackling the problem. It would be much better to use the membership levies to fund training courses for all the municipalities. And then municipalities would have to pay for individual requests. Not changing things is not an option: the municipalities expect too much of Comures and the Association is permanently stretched to the limit.”

HAÏTI

Restoring administrative power

After the tsunami, earthquakes, a hurricane and floods Jaap Breugem of VNG International thought he had seen it all. But the earthquake in Haïti really affected him.

“You see complete devastation. There’s hardly a building left standing, there’s no administrative authority, there aren’t any civil servants. The havoc wreaked by the Asian tsunami stretched no more than several hundreds of metres inwards from the coast, beyond that life carried on as usual. As a result the local population were able to offer help themselves and to start the process of rebuilding. In Haïti everything has simply been devastated.”

Now the phase of emergency aid is gradually giving way to that of reconstruction, local government literally has to be rebuilt from the ground up. Funds donated by dozens of Netherlands municipalities and the Cooperating Aid Agencies have enabled VNG International to lend a helping hand. Together with its French and Canadian sister agencies VNG International has opted to concentrate its reconstruction efforts within four municipalities in the coastal region west of the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince, a region which numbers some 400,000 inhabitants. Breugem: “The idea is to set up a kind of centralised city hall in the Léogane municipality for these four municipalities. When there’s nothing, you have to start with the creation of a central point, otherwise there’s no way of getting through it. First we have to restore and improve the administrative power of local authorities. That will take at least two years. In the three years that’s left to us - the project has been set up for a total of five years - we’ll concentrate on the restoration of essential services.”

Restoring the power of local authorities means that the council apparatus will be in a position to take up the reins once more. Breugem gives a salient example: “Council bodies on the spot complain about innumerable well-meaning NGOs launching projects all over the place without coordinating. Local councils would like to coordinate the aid. So in the near future NGOs will have to first report to the council hall in Léogane. That’s how you start becoming governable once more. The initiative has to come back to the local authorities.” VNG International will help recruit and train new civil servants and will aid in setting up a population register and land and property register. “Knowing who lives where is the basis for planning and intervention.”

One such intervention planned for later is the construction of a well thought-out waste management system. Breugem: “If you were to start on that now it would end in complete failure. There’s no-one to run it. But you can’t simply let things be and remain invisible to the residents. As a council you have to show you’re back in the saddle. So we’re going to help local authorities with things like getting a rudimentary system of waste disposal back up and running and with school buildings.” ■