



# ***Aid - a changing necessity***

***SNV: from volunteers to advisors***

***Dolly Verhoeven***

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*'Development and progress can only be achieved by the people themselves.'*







## *Aid - a changing necessity*

*SNV has been in existence for over 35 years. During that period, national and international thinking about development cooperation has undergone major changes. Those changes are reflected in the various ways SNV and its operations have been organised. It began as a voluntary organisation of people who were carrying out visible and tangible tasks. Then, in the 1970s and 80s, SNV reoriented itself and gradually became an organisation geared towards providing professional support to disadvantaged sections of the population in the countries where it worked. And today, SNV has evolved into an advisor and provider of services. It is expected that SNV's independent status, which was granted at the beginning of 2002, will enable the organisation to further consolidate this role.*

*HRH Prince Claus of the Netherlands was SNV's chairman from 1974 and 1980 and since then its honorary chairman. He concluded at an early stage that development and progress can only be brought about by the people themselves in an environment where there exists respect for their culture, language and way of life. The Prince's forward-looking vision of development cooperation becomes clear, among others in a proposition he presented in 1988, on the occasion of the Honorary Fellowship Award Ceremony at the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague.*

*When we enter into cooperation, our principle must be that we do not interfere in matters where the recipient country is capable of taking action itself. So if a country possesses adequate manpower we should draw on it and not try to appoint our own national experts. Even if we think our experts are more expert, we should still recruit and finance more local power and expertise.*

*It is better to have a project that is technically only 80 per cent successful but completely integrated in the local environment and thus sustainable, than one that scores 100 per cent in technical terms but which one knows for certain will not be sustainable once our own experts withdraw.*

*SNV hopes that with the introduction of a new strategy and the separation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs it will be able to actually put into practice the words that have been spoken so frequently by our honorary chairman: 'aid remains necessary - but it has to be done differently'.*





*'Working in an area of one square yard  
because that square yard happens to be  
the women's domain.'*



# A pioneer spirit

## (1963-1972)

*Often you are harshly confronted with misery and when you realise the amount of work that has to be done and think about the little you are doing yourself, you sometimes lose hope. That is why it is great not to be alone because the others really lift you up. That's how we keep our spirits high. Even though we can never do enough all results – even the smallest – are welcome and push us in the right direction. [female volunteer, India, 1967]*

### the train to Paris

The date was November 19, 1963. Family and friends were at hand to wave goodbye to eleven men and ten women who were aboard a train bound for Paris. From Paris, their journey would continue to Marseille and finally Cameroon, where they would spend two years. Their job in Cameroon would be to help strengthen agricultural education. An official reception by Queen Juliana of the Netherlands, shortly before leaving, emphasized the importance of their mission. From now on, the Netherlands would play its part in the international symphony of aid to 'under developed nations'.

### acceleration

In the early 1960s, the world of international aid was in a state of flux. President Kennedy had just set up the Peace Corps for young volunteers and soon after some countries in Western Europe followed that example. Like other European nations, the Netherlands had lost its Asian colonies, which meant that for young people with a secondary or technical education the chances to work overseas were very slim. Those who went to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and applied spontaneously for an overseas posting got a negative reply. The 'experts' or 'assistant experts' that were sent abroad by the Netherlands were all paid staff with university degrees.

Volunteers were posted in modest numbers but only by private organisations, often building upon their experiences in missionary work.

In 1962, these organisations decided to pool their strengths and form one institution: the Young Volunteer Corps (JVC, Jongeren Vrijwilligers Corps). That step initiated an acceleration. Foreign Minister Joseph Luns had no intention to leave such an important matter as the posting of Dutch nationals overseas to private initiative. And so it was that the Young Volunteers Program (JVP, Jongeren Vrijwilligers Programma) was set up in great haste, a government program that could be jointly carried out with the private organisations.

The representatives of the private bodies were none too pleased with this turn of events but decided, nevertheless, to cooperate. In 1965, JVC and JVP together formed the Dutch Volunteers Foundation or Stichting Nederlandse Vrijwilligers, SNV. The government played a lead part: SNV staff were part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This limited the role of the private organisations to being members of the governing board and submitting potential projects. Years later, relations between these two partners within SNV would still be tense.

### rolling up the sleeves

Soon after the first 21 volunteers, others went overseas. In the ten years that followed, a grand total of 1417 volunteers was posted, single men and women between 20 and 35. They were practical professionals: agricultural experts, nurses or engineers. Their work was mainly practical in nature too. Roll up your sleeves, that was the main idea.

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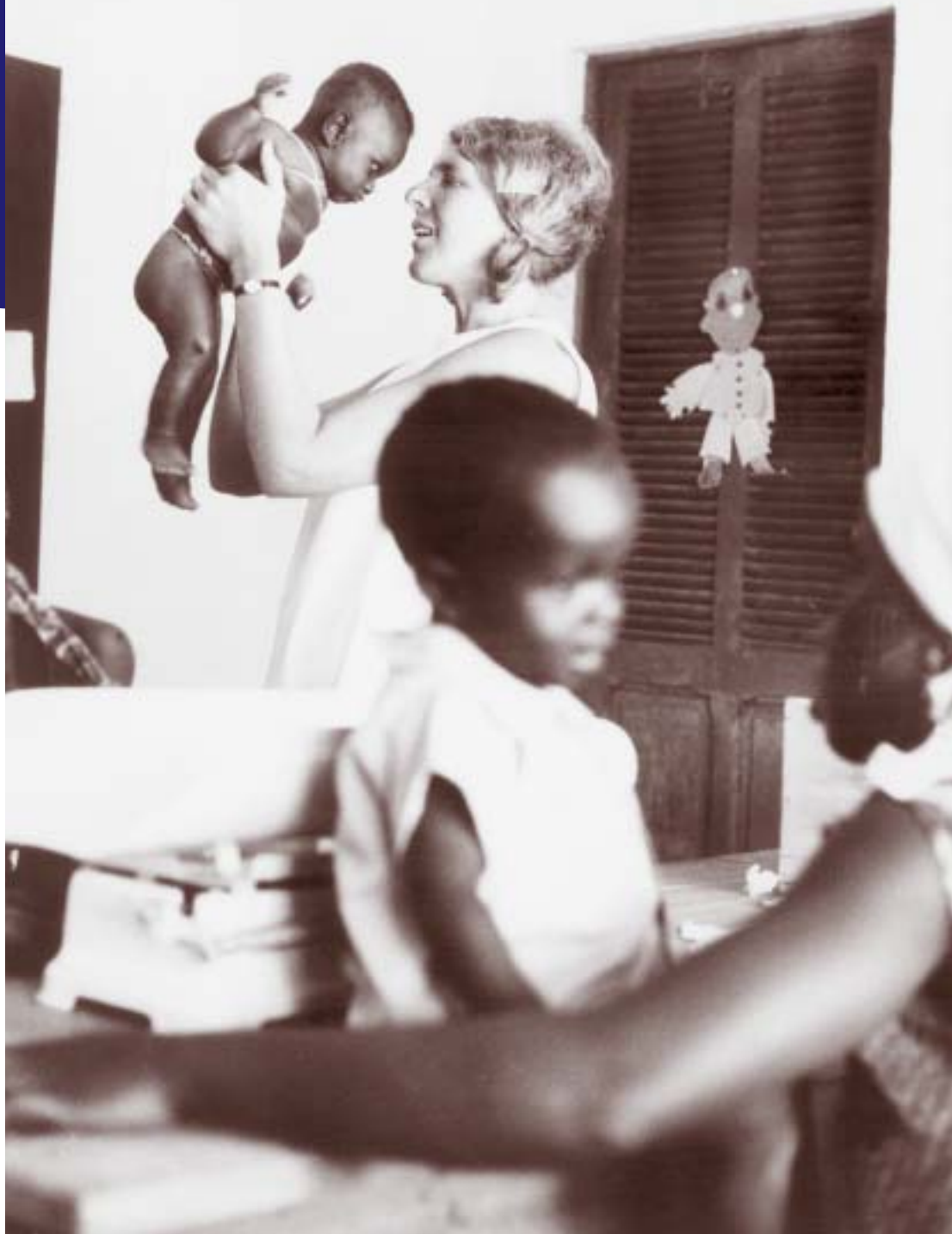
### *Cameroon: the rural women project*

Upon arrival in Cameroon in late 1963, the first volunteers were met with an unpleasant surprise. The school buildings in which they were supposed to work, were no longer available and as a result their original work order no longer applied. What next? The SNV volunteers started giving information to the local farmers and women in the villages nearby. This got them some goodwill. One year later, this work was integrated into a 'rural women project' which had been set up by Peace Corps volunteer and was supported by the government. The program was aimed at alleviating the heavy load of village women in West Cameroon, who have to combine domestic work with looking after the children and providing food. Female SNV volunteers (the high number of women working in Cameroon was remarkable) gave information about domestic labour, taught women how to read and write, maintained grain mills. They also trained Cameroon women, so they would be able to take over this extension work in the future. This work done by the first team was looked upon favourably: several volunteers received invitations from Cameroon to either prolong their stay or come back. The first group was followed by a second and third team and both continued the work with the rural women project. At an evaluation in 1969, satisfaction was expressed about the fact that in spite of the initial problems the Cameroonian project had proved 'the viability of the Dutch volunteer program.'



◀ Training at the Royal Tropical Institute, photograph SNV

▶  
Health care in Ivory Coast,  
photograph by Joke de Leeuw



Informing and educating the local population was another important part of their work. Often it was an uphill struggle just to get started. The most important precondition was to earn the local people's trust, for instance by visiting people or organising sports events. While their peers in Europe were busy scaling the barricades in the turbulent Sixties, SNV volunteers were toiling in remote areas in faraway countries for a little success. Some were driven by the desire for adventure, others wanted to dodge the military draft. But most had idealistic motives, which had, of necessity, to be combined with a healthy sense of reality, in order to cope with the inevitable disappointments. In the months prior to their departure, volunteers did courses at the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT) in Amsterdam. They were taught the local language, how to make a fire and received lessons in cooking, house repair and building mental strength. As time went on, in-country training was added. The volunteers left in teams. These were often closely-knit groups that were led by a team leader. Members gave each other lots of support.

### **stumbling into growth**

Because of its flying start, the aims and methods of the new organisation were not clearly defined. However, SNV stumbled into growth and shaped itself along the way. Criteria for a successful posting were formulated – and later adjusted. One of the key criteria was that the projects in the host country had to be supported by the government of that country. There also had to be a local counterpart, to whom the volunteer could transfer knowledge, discipline and a certain work ethic. But reality was resilient. In Latin American countries, government support was non-existent. And in many cases a local counterpart was nowhere to be found. What it basically boiled down to was this: pioneering and adapting to local circumstances.

The first ten years saw projects set up in 18 countries. In the course of time this number was reduced to 12 for a variety of reasons. SNV volunteers were busy building bridges, cultivating rice, doing agricultural extension work, nursing and taking care of new born babies. They provided education in knitting, irrigation, horticulture or the marketing of milk. They started cooperatives, initiated women's courses and led football clubs. SNV was predominantly active in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America. Ten years after the first postings overseas, more than 600 people were working in more than 80 projects. While at work, SNV had acquired its *raison d'être*.

## **SNV and the Ministry**

- 1963** Foreign Minister Joseph Luns sets up the JVP. He personally waves goodbye to the first group of volunteers.
- 1963** The first Minister of State charged with development cooperation is appointed.
- 1965** The first Minister for Development Cooperation is appointed, Mr. Th. H. Bot.
- 1965** The state-run JVP and the private JVC jointly form SNV. Both government and JVC are represented in the Board of the new organisation. The civil servants who work as members of staff and their chief are supplied by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Government determines the financing and the choice of projects and selection of volunteers.
- 1972** The Dutch Volunteers Contact Group (KNV), an association of returned volunteers, is allocated two representatives to the Board of SNV.

***This work brings out all you have inside you*** SUZAN BOLLAND

Suzan Bolland was a volunteer in heart and soul. She was part of the first group that went to Cameroon in 1963. Suzan had applied for a posting in a letter she wrote as soon as she had read about the plans for a Dutch volunteer organisation. These were the years of experimentation and learning-by-doing, of 'camping' in dilapidated shelters, boys' and girls' dormitories and everybody eating from the same mess tins.

Her previous experience in the tropics (after finishing teacher training college she had worked as a teacher in New Guinea for a few years) was very useful indeed. 'It was a difficult time but it was captivating too.

You could build something from the ground up. You made mistakes but you learnt as well.'

The first two-year contract ended in 1965 but Suzan returned to Cameroon in 1967 to work as a 'supervisor', overseeing the construction of village facilities. Simultaneously, she trained Cameroonian women so they could, over time, take over her work. This time she stayed for seven years. Her work was greatly valued.

The government of Cameroon praised her 'popular and very effective working methods' and made these words ring even louder when she left: she received a Cameroonian knighthood. The appreciation was mutual. 'I felt at home there,' Suzan recalled.

Between 1979 and 1989 she worked for the development organisation HIVOS and within the General Directorate for International Cooperation (DGIS) at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. She also trained departing SNV personnel. In 1989 Suzan took on another job for SNV, this time in Burkina Faso, where she worked in the 'Karité project.' This was a women's project that aimed to develop new techniques for processing karité nuts. The nuts play a role in the Burkinabe household (they produce fat and ointment) and in community life (as gifts and means of exchange). The idea was to give the women more income, support their organisation and increase their independence. Suzan immersed herself completely in the project. It was nothing on a large scale; the project played itself out 'in an area of one square yard because that square yard happens to be the women's domain.'

Because of her long-standing commitment, Suzan Bolland was received as a guest of honour when SNV celebrated its 35th birthday, in November 2000. In this way, all volunteers world-wide were symbolically thanked for their hard work. Four months later, Suzan died suddenly. It was a sad and terrible blow. SNV had lost its most dedicated ambassador.

*'Development organisations should emphasise the handover of projects to the local people.'*





# Revolutionary zeal

## (1973-1984)

*Since I have been working in a developing country I will be better able to work towards narrowing the gap between rich and poor once I am back in the Netherlands. I admit that those two years here don't help much – well, they do help a little but I don't see this as the solution to the problem. The solution is to change a certain mentality which is responsible for keeping the structures in place that do not benefit the Third World. [volunteer, Zambia, 1974]*

### the poorest of the poor

The protest movements of the 1960s ended in a comprehensive push towards democratisation. At the beginning of the 1970s, the unequal distribution of wealth was declared to be a fundamental problem. Related terms included awareness, social mobility and emancipation. What followed was a reorientation of development work, both internationally within the United Nations and nationally, where the social democrat Jan Pronk had become the Minister for Development Aid. Within SNV, volunteers in the field urged a more militant position. The 'poorest of the poor' emerged as a specific target group. A new term was coined: 'development cooperation', emphasising the equality of rich and poor countries. The idea was that from now on the developing countries themselves would determine what kind of aid they needed.

### discussion and reorganisation

Inside the organisation there was much talk about the democratisation process. SNV volunteers gained a modest say in policy making through field councils and national conferences of field directors. Discussions were held throughout the entire organisation about anything and everything. Returned volunteers, working together in the Dutch Volunteers Contact Group (Kontaktgroep Nederlandse Vrijwilligers, KNV) managed to get two seats on the governing board. Head office in The Hague was reorganised, following an internal discussion that lasted for years. Within the governing board, the relations between government and

private organisations remained strained. The latter were working towards getting government support for their own private volunteer projects, independent of the SNV projects. When this possibility arose, in 1978, the private organisations said goodbye to SNV as a partner, even though they kept two seats on the governing board as representatives of 'public constituencies'.

### double-edged objective

In 1975, SNV took on an additional task: the B objective, which was aimed at raising awareness of the problems of development among the public in the Netherlands. This was done by distributing circulars from projects in the field or by setting up a pool of returned volunteers, to provide information in community centres or schools. The magazine Vice Versa, set up in 1968. It was intended as a platform for volunteers and yet another attempt to contribute to a heightened public awareness. But in spite of the recruitment of a special officer for the B objective, the results in practice did not live up to expectations. The A objective, carrying out projects in developing countries, remained paramount. New standards were devised that governed the choices of countries and projects. An important criterion was whether a country was prepared and able to work towards development and a fair distribution of wealth. If a country was perceived not to meet this criterion, the projects in that country would be more strictly assessed. Among the countries there was a certain hierarchy.

## Revolutionary zeal (1973-1984)

At the top of this pyramid were the so-called 'countries of concentration' such as Cameroon, Benin, Upper Volta, Tanzania and Zambia. Here, SNV was working primarily with government. Then there were those that were not considered 'countries of concentration', a kind of in-between category. And finally, you had the countries with a 'special program' where very strict project standards were upheld and volunteers could only be posted in local organisations that were working towards raising the awareness and the level of development of groups of poor people. Especially in Latin America this last method was frequently employed. In 1984, SNV was working in 15 African countries plus three in Asia and four in Latin America. A total of 269 projects was carried out, mostly in agriculture, animal husbandry, drinking water, health care and many different types of education. SNV volunteers also helped intensively with setting up and supporting cooperatives. There was one new element: from the late 1970s onwards SNV was able to provide not only personnel but also some financial assistance, especially in countries where no Dutch embassy was present.

### more stringent criteria

Slowly but surely, the profile of the volunteer was changing. They were still mostly engaged in practical professions but the criteria in terms of education and job experience became more stringent.

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▲  
Aide for the disabled, Cameroon,  
photograph by C. Pennarts

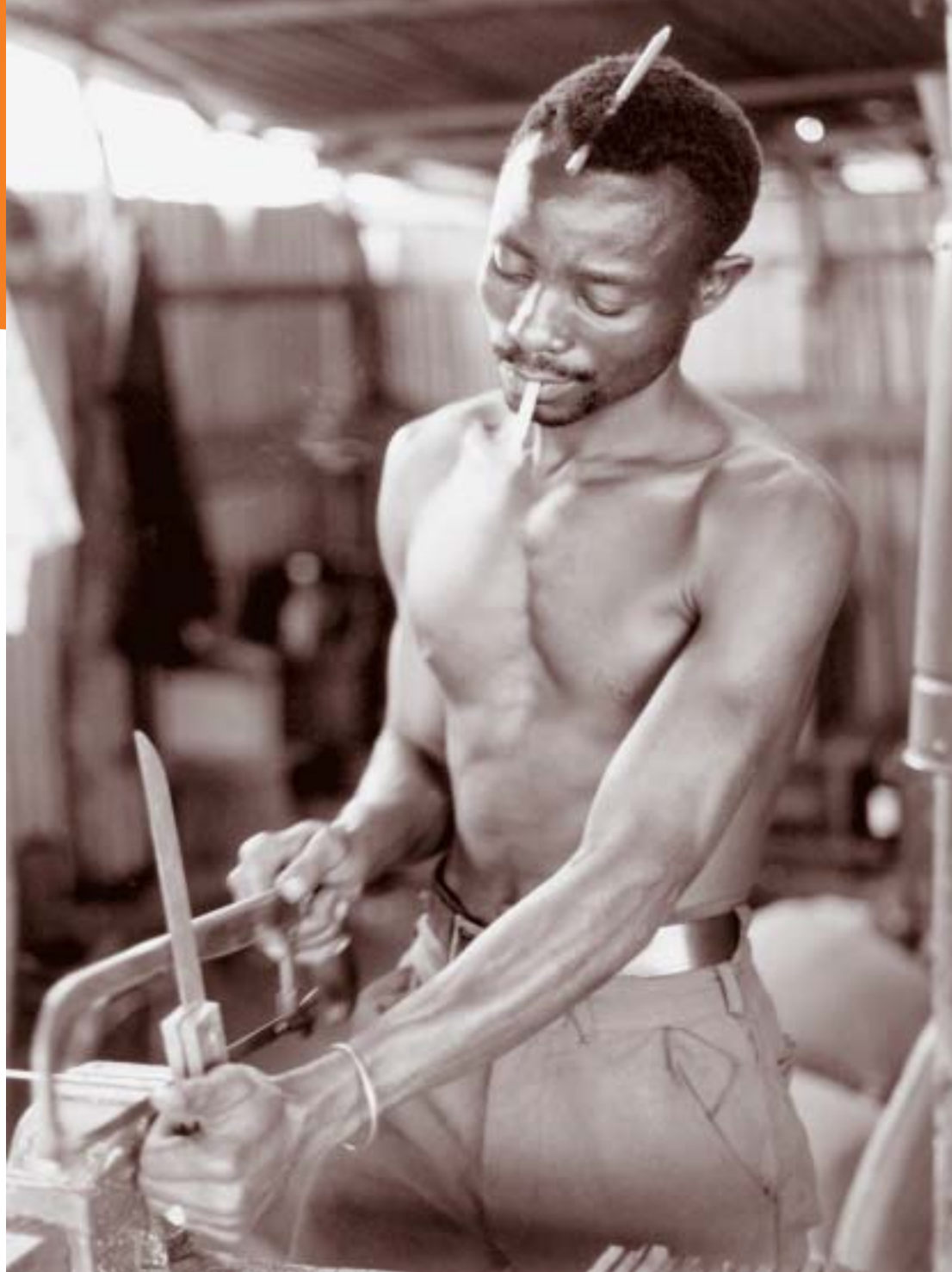
### *Technology in Bolivia*

In the late 1960s the Augustinian Fathers started a technical school for boys in Cochabamba, high in Bolivia's mountains. The school was called the Instituto Tecnológico. Soon after, SNV joined in and made the Instituto its first project in Bolivia. Dozens of volunteers taught electrical engineering, metal work, car engineering and mechanical engineering. The school came to the attention of the Bolivian bishops. In a letter written in 1970, they made their appreciation known for the 'unrivalled contribution to the preparation of the first generation of Bolivian teachers for future technical schools.' Initially, the Instituto catered primarily for boys who had already finished their secondary school. In later years, attention was also focussed upon young working people in general. The annual number of graduates increased from 40 to 80. Finding work was relatively easy for them – they had a practical technical education under their belts.

In the mid-1970s the school gradually became more 'Bolivianised'. Bolivian teachers were trained to take over the work done by SNV personnel. The last Dutch development worker (and the last of 35 members of staff posted by SNV) left the Instituto in 1980.



▶  
A knife factory in Tanzania,  
photograph SNV



The number of female volunteers decreased from about 50% to only one-fifth. There were hardly any women in executive positions. The average age of a volunteer went up to about 30. And they were more frequently married, which, by the way, did not mean that SNV felt called upon to provide facilities for partners. Vice Versa started running stories on love and sex, be it ever so cautiously. Many development workers started a love relationship with people from the local community. At times, this led to a number of problems. It also became more normal for SNV workers to choose a second and third posting after their first contract. That put pressures on the principle of 'voluntary work'. But arguments in favour of dropping the term 'volunteer' altogether because of its associations with 'unfounded idealism, lack of professionalism, adventure, self-actualisation and very young school

leavers' did not win the day – at least, not for the time being. Training also changed. The language lessons at the KIT were now accompanied by a course in 'assimilation' at the Contact of Continents (Kontakt der Kontinenten) conference and training centre. The additional in-country training became more important. Still, newcomers found it difficult to position themselves in the local communities. They alternated between being know-it-alls, too idealistic or too naive – and of course they had to deal with the simple but inevitable fact that they stood out, sometimes like a sore thumb. And then there was the return to the Netherlands after two or three years, which was not easy either. Too many were unemployed and the returnees often found out, much to their disappointment, that a stint in development work did not always constitute a recommendation.

## SNV and the Ministry

- 1973** The social democrat Jan Pronk becomes minister for development cooperation. He advocates a change in development work towards new production structures, social mobility, emancipation and awareness
- 1974** HRH Prince Claus becomes SNV Chairman
- 1975** The director general for International Cooperation, or his/her deputy becomes the minister's representative in the SNV Board
- 1977** The responsibility for the SNV programs and the government-appointed staff is placed at the SNV Board (SNV is still part of DGIS, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs General Directorate for International Cooperation, as the Department of Dutch Volunteers)
- 1978** The cooperation between the government and private sectors in SNV comes to an end when private organisations start receiving government subsidies for their own activities. The new Board consists of 6 ministerial appointees, 2 JVC representatives, 2 KNV representatives, one on behalf of the government appointed staff and 3 recently returned volunteers or members of the field staff.
- 1979** SNV starts playing a role in the funding of DGIS projects, especially in countries where there is no Dutch embassy
- 1980** HRH Prince Claus becomes SNV's honorary chairman

***I had a fantastic time there*** BERT SPEKKERS

The first reason for me to contact SNV was that I had been drafted. Development cooperation was one way in which I could avoid military service. When I contacted SNV, there were no vacancies but a year and a half later I suddenly received a telephone call. By then, I had almost forgotten about the whole affair. But in the meantime I had taken to studying development cooperation in more detail and I thought it was a good thing. I was offered a job as a teacher of electrical engineering at a technical school in Niger, which appealed to me very much. It was also a very adventurous thing to do.

I was impressed with the culture and language courses. While being trained, you were also made aware in the political sense. That was in the early 1980s. Sides were taken. For me, it was an important driving force. My work in Niger was relatively clear-cut. I was a teacher of electrical engineering at a technical college. The pupils had come through a very rigid ballot system, so they were happy to be in class. They were very polite, which is nice in the beginning but I soon found out that they did not dare to say a word, even when they did not understand their lessons.

There was hardly anything at the school. You could do your theoretical lessons, because there was a blackboard and there were pens and paper. But the practicals were very bad. Once I organised a fundraising at my old school and that money was used to buy things and send to Niger.

After four years in Niger, I could start work as a teacher of electrical engineering in Botswana, in a 'brigade'. It was perfectly organised over there. The storeroom was very neat, there were three minibuses, a Landrover, a few generators, drilling machines and all the other equipment we needed. Working conditions were good but I must say I missed West Africa a little: the markets and the informal circles.

In the brigades, students would get vocational training but at the same time they were involved in production. So students of electrical engineering had to free up three-quarters of their time to do installation work in houses or clinics. That was an excellent combination.

I worked in Botswana for about four years. I married a Botswana woman and together we made the journey back to the Netherlands, on a motor bike. We still live here, although we regularly go back to Botswana. Working in Africa has been an uplifting experience, which has changed my outlook in the world, taking in different points of view. But professionally, it has not done much for me. And with hindsight I think that I have really worked very hard to get my own job done but maybe it would have been better if I had paid more attention to handing over that job to local people. Development cooperation does not automatically produce positive results, quite the contrary. The biggest mistake is that often the handover of projects to local people has been a complete failure. I think this is a missed opportunity. Development organisations should emphasise this localising process.

*'Recently SNV has re-focused towards capacity enhancement and the transfer of expertise. In my opinion this is more rewarding.'*



# Expertise

## (1985-1989)

*Of course, in the relationships between men and women there remains much that one would like to see changed. I very carefully indicate how I would like things to be by asking, every now and then, how their wives are. Would he not like her to learn how to read and write? I am not going to shout that all veils and headscarfs must go. It makes no sense and I do not feel the need.*

*[Female volunteer, North Yemen, 1986]*

### host organisations

In the second half of the 1980s the poor and disadvantaged remained SNV's most important target group. Improving the lot of those who get paid the least, the unemployed, small-scale farmers and the disabled in what was known as the 'Third World' remained the ultimate goal. What did change was the orientation of the work. Previously, SNV had directed its efforts towards specific countries or projects; this time attempts were made to link with existing host organisations. The idea was that these organisations could better guarantee the structure and continuity of the projects. National or local governments and private organisations could all act as hosts. These five years saw a major increase in the cooperation with private organisations, for instance in Kenya, Tanzania, the Phillipines, Bolivia and Peru. Still, a small majority of projects remained linked to governments. In practical terms, rural development was still the most important. Work was done in horticulture, forestry, irrigation and potable water projects, the construction of bridges and schools, health care, education and training. Environmental concerns came in too, taking the shape of reforestation, terraced agriculture and training sessions about using wood wisely.

### women in focus

The position of women was strengthened in more ways than one. Taking account of the interests of women in projects became more and more obvious. After all, SNV's intervention should not result in a deterioration of the position of women. Activities that benefited just men were most certainly not desired. There came new research into special women's projects, such as credit or literacy programs. In some places new projects were started. The percentage of women working for SNV began to increase again, be it slowly. They were especially well-represented in the medical and the social professions. Unlike before, women were no longer over-represented in the lower echelons, even though the distribution of responsibilities was not yet on a par. Towards the end of the 1980s, about one-third of all SNV personnel were women, among field staff this was about one quarter.

### career prospects

In five years' time, the number of SNV personnel in the field grew by one hundred people to 650 even though the method of recruitment was certainly not easygoing on the applicants. Out of all those who expressed an interest in being posted overseas, only 4 per cent made it through the selection process. The chances of being selected diminished steadily for people who had only finished medium vocational training.

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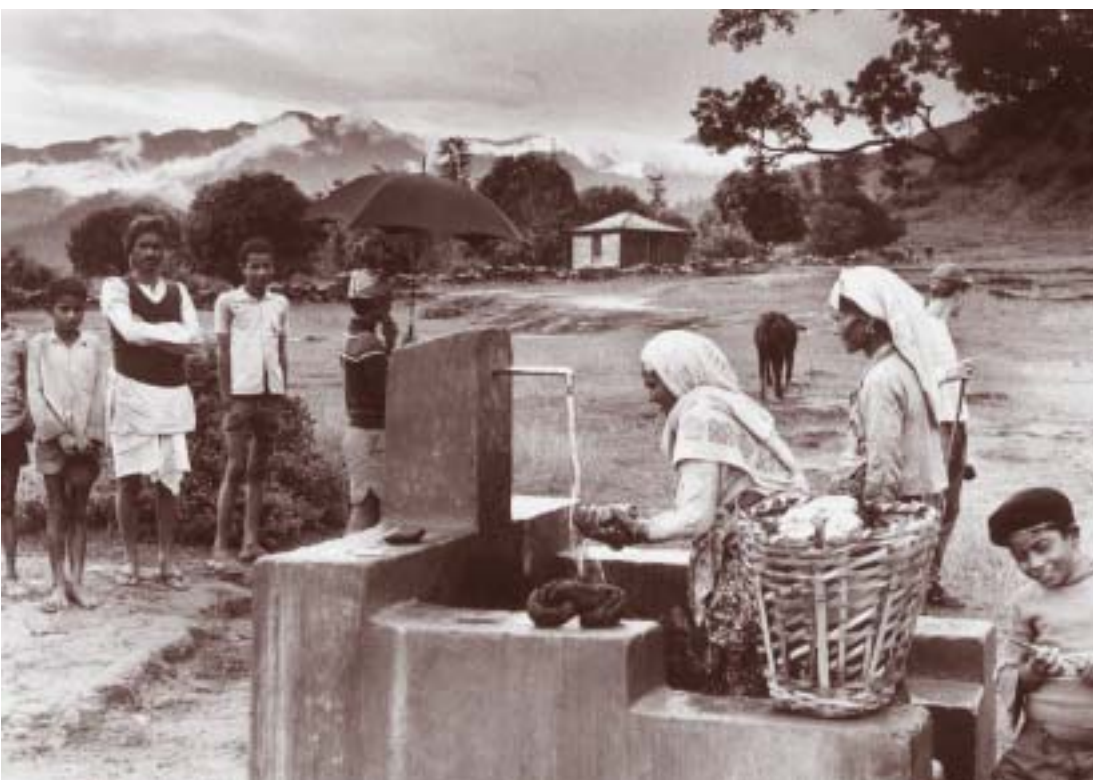
## *Water for Nepalese mountain villages*

There are remote areas in western Nepal where you sometimes have to walk two or three days to get from the village to the nearest town. This was the region where, between 1977 and 1993, thirty-two SNV workers were busy constructing a piped water system. These are projects that involve many parties. UNICEF pays for the synthetic pipes and the tools, the Nepalese government makes sure cement, steel pipes and transport are available, labour is brought in by the village people and Dutch and German development workers are helping the organisation and actual construction.

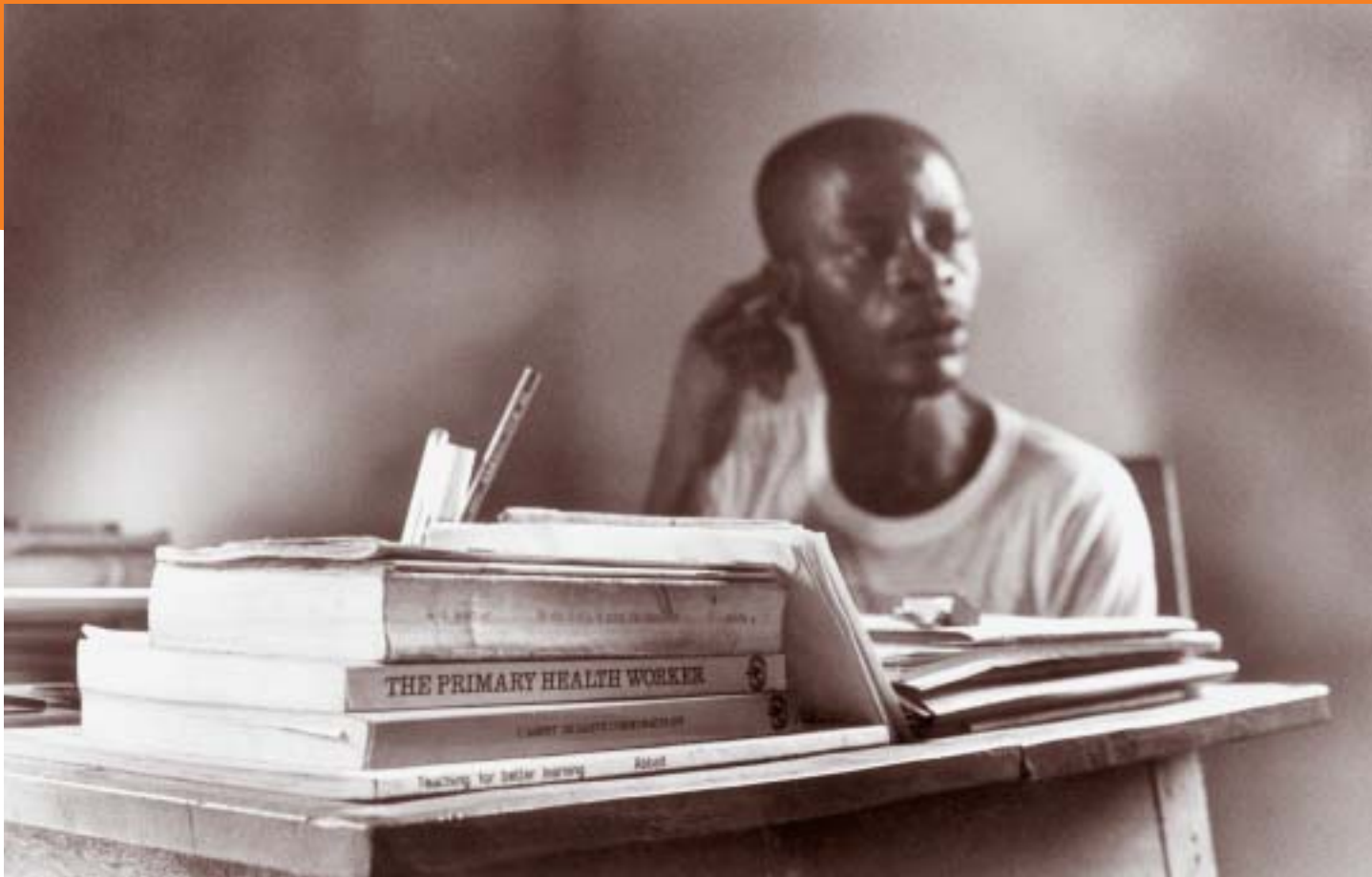
The principle is rather simple. The water is brought down by the force of gravity from the mountain slopes. It flows into the village through pipes. Public taps in the village must lessen the workload of women (whose task it is to fetch the water) and improve the health situation of the population.

The village itself must, in principle, lodge a request for a water system.

The projects were certainly not glitch-free. Villagers were often unwilling to provide free labour, powerful groups monopolised the tap, maintenance was neglected. Promoting hygiene, one of the project's secondary aims, was a cumbersome business. 'The Nepalese and Westerners have different notions of hygiene,' was how one report put it. Still, during those 16 years there were achievements. SNV and its staff have constructed a total of 135 water systems in Nepal, for the benefit of well over 200.000 people.



◀ Water provision in Nepal,  
photograph by Jan Stegeman



▲  
In Training, Cameroon,  
photograph by Jan Stegeman

The host organisations demanded a workforce that was higher educated and more experienced. The work on the ground was done more and more by local staff: physiotherapists in Zambia, analysts in Niger, mechanics in Benin. In the SNV field offices the first local staff made their appearance. The Dutch SNV contingent moved steadily away from practical work and towards policy-related activities. The average development worker became older and more experienced. They were also increasingly accompanied by a partner who, prior to departure, could follow a course weekend called 'going as a partner'. The next logical step was to offer SNV personnel career prospects and a better remuneration. Salaries were to be differentiated according to age and experience. This happened in 1988 and brought the era of the volunteer to a close.



### The dots disappear

The end to the halcyon days of the volunteer also brought a change in name for the organisation. The letters SNV were preserved but it ceased to be an acronym. The dots disappeared and SNV no longer stood for 'Dutch Volunteers Foundation' (Stichting Nederlandse Vrijwilligers). A subtitle was added: 'organisation for development cooperation and awareness'. This last lent more weight to the B objective. In practice, awareness was indeed doing rather well, especially through the highly popular linkage programs, which connected concrete projects in the field and municipalities or other organisations in the Netherlands. The system of circulars also persisted; every year tens of thousands of sheets of paper were copied at head office and distributed. Projects started to receive more financial support, which brought its own problems. As regards the receiving party, there was a major dilemma in terms of creating dependency. Giving money sometimes turned out to be 'a treacherous way of supporting development.' There were also discussions with the chief donor, DGIS (at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), about issues like competency and responsibility. Finance was

available for large purchases like building materials for bridges, water systems, transport and sometimes salaries of local project staff. SNV also supported host organisations in their quest to source funds from third parties.

### one button

Pressures of work in the Hague increased. The number of projects and staff may have grown but this did not produce a concomitant increase in the number of staff at head office, quite the contrary. Similarly, there was more work to be done at the field offices. More and more responsibilities were 'delegated' to the field. Annual plans, personnel policy plans, evaluations and other reports took up a lot of time. That was, however, compensated by an increase in field staff: in five years, their numbers almost doubled. And a new aide was moving into head and field office alike: the computer. But this new phenomenon did nothing to minimise the pressure of work – it did the exact opposite. Instead of 'simply pushing that one button' to get all the results, as advertised, the reality was a struggle with unwilling equipment, lasting until well into the small hours...

## SNV and the Ministry

- 1984** Under the new minister for development cooperation E. Schoo, Dutch development policies undergo a re-orientation. The main themes become rural development and developing industry. Most of the bilateral aid is concentrated in 28 countries.
- 1985** SNV is re-christened 'SNV organisation for development cooperation and awareness'. Government appointed staff remain part of DGIS but their collective name changes into 'SNV Staff', as of January 1, 1986.
- 1986** An evaluation of project funding via SNV leads to a more detailed agreement with DGIS; after DGIS has given its approval the projects will be carried out under SNV responsibility. The total value of the projects carried out on behalf of DGIS is already 5.5 million euro.
- 1989** In its annual report, SNV expresses unhappiness about the relationship with DGIS. There are cumbersome consultations concerning responsibilities and procedures related to the funding of DGIS projects via SNV. SNV own personnel policy is hindered by the fact that all staff in the Hague are part of DGIS.

## ***The diversity of culture has been very enriching***

SARA KIMWERI MBAGO, TANZANIA

When I applied for a job in SNV the opportunity to work for the betterment of marginalised people appealed to me tremendously. Which may have something to do with fact I was 22 years old at the time. Besides, Tanzania at the time did not have many employment opportunities in respect to the private sector, and the prospect of becoming a civil servant didn't appeal to me at all.

I studied Agricultural Economics and Information Technology and as an agricultural economist I felt I had something to offer my country where 75 per cent of the population is rural based. Currently I work with private sector organisations in Northern Tanzania providing business development services to small and micro entrepreneurs. To these organisations I offer capacity building services such as new product development, market research, or product promotion. By doing so, we hope to create employment opportunities, improve incomes and stimulate economic development

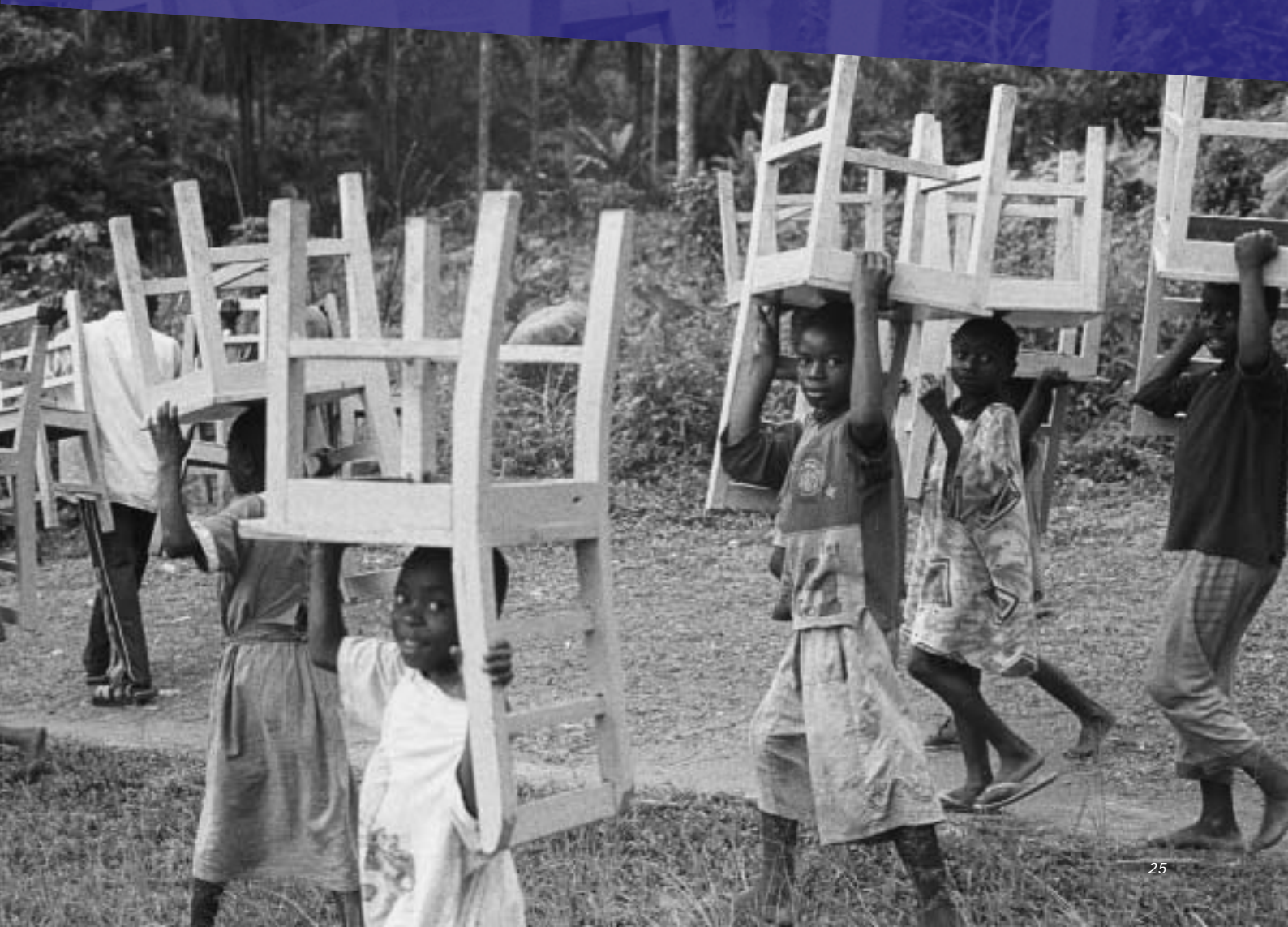
Having worked for SNV for some years now, I feel that I have been able to achieve my goal up to 75 per cent of my expectations. But also I realised over the years that real sustainable development can only be brought about by significant changes in the awareness, capacity and responsibility of local people.

In principle development aid could be used to stimulate the private sector, civil society and local government in southern countries, for example by facilitating access of these three sectors of society to relevant knowledge, finance and technology. Recently SNV has re-focussed towards capacity enhancement and expertise line (advisory). In my opinion this is indeed more rewarding than the administrative/management line (project managers, co-ordinators etc) which so far has had greater recognition.

As a Dutch-based international organisation, I think SNV could learn a little more from its 'international' members and start to have a more 'outward' focus. Also, learning from the initiatives in the field has been lacking, but fortunately it is now on the agenda.

Personally, I feel that working for SNV has given me the wonderful opportunity of meeting with a wide range of very interesting and diverse personalities. This has been enriching. It has encouraged me to 'think' and 're-think' issues much more than I otherwise would have done.

*'Everyone is entitled to their own learning curve. That is one of the most important things I have learned.'*



# Support (1990-1995)

*You are a white organisation sitting in a black or a yellow country. I think you only have the right to be there if you do things that people really need. If that link is not there, you have no right to be there. [SNV development worker, Guinea Bissau, 1991]*

## **a raft of changes**

A new strategy, changes in the Board, new responsibilities, another reorganisation, a new name...it seemed as though everything was changing at the start of the 1990s. SNV was abuzz with working groups, seminars and courses.

Responsibilities were moved out of head office in the Hague and towards the field staff. This was done on the basis of 'result-oriented management': field offices would produce annual plans beforehand and would report at year end. This led to an inevitable increase in bureaucracy. Everywhere, efforts were made to get a grip on the multitude of processes that were going on in the organisation. A special working group, called 'knowledge management' was tasked with finding ways to make the body of knowledge within the organisation more widely available. Elaborate plans were made for better personnel policies. Financial reporting was standardised.

The relationship with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also changed. SNV became more independent in terms of policy matters. This was reflected, among other things, in the composition of the Board, which no longer worked on behalf of a constituency but on the basis of administrative merit. Still, in financial terms, SNV remained closely tied to the Ministry. Financial dependence actually increased because SNV had become a sub-contractor for many DGIS projects. As a result it acted overseas as the executive arm of Dutch development aid.

This ambivalent status – between autonomy and dependence – had a name: 'quango', or quasi non-governmental organisation.

## **resilience**

There was another name change, from 'organisation for development cooperation and awareness' to 'Dutch development organisation'. This was the result of a new strategy: more focus on the target group itself. Working with host organisations had not been wholly satisfactory; there was insufficient focus on the poorest people and their working methods were considered too heavily top-down. SNV decided to shift the emphasis towards direct support for 'groups of poor, disadvantaged and oppressed people' by 'increasing their social, economic and political resilience'. This it did through its own projects and a new method: the process approach.

Point of departure for the process approach were the wishes and aspirations of the population. The target group had to be involved in the analysis of the problems, the choice of a possible approach towards solving them, and the determination of the pace. SNV support would be temporary, until such a time that the target group was strong enough to go it alone. How the program would turn out in practice depended very much on local circumstances; no blueprint could be given. Experiments with the process approach were carried out in various places, becoming especially popular in the area of rural development.

→ *page 29*





◀  
Zambian fishermen,  
photograph by Bart Eijgenhuijsen



▲  
A Zambian woman washes cassava,  
photograph by Bart Eijgenhuijsen

### *Rural Development in Benin*

When the process approach was introduced in the early 1990s, SNV-Benin was very receptive. The country became the experimental field for the new approach. The try-outs were done in two regions in the north: Kandi, in the cotton producing province of Borgou and Boukoubé, in the much poorer province of Atacora. No specific aims were set when the projects were initiated, which was in concert with the original starting point: after all, the target groups themselves had to take the initiative. In Kandi, links were established with already existing women's groups and same-age groups. Following the experimental phase, activities became geared towards improving agriculture, savings and credit, health, processing agricultural produce and the provision of water. In 1995, the project supported some one hundred local groups with a grand total of 2,500 members, or 3.5 per cent of the population in the region. It was a modest but hopeful result, even though especially the richer women in Kandi appeared to profit from the projects. In Boukoubé, the results were less encouraging. There were no local organisations to link up with. So 33 village groups were set up but their combined membership barely totalled 250, a mere 0.4 per cent of the population in the region. Three years down the road, tangible results were few and far between, benefits were limited to the village women feeling more confident and better about themselves.

## SNV and the Ministry

- 1990** Minister Pronk of development cooperation (reappointed) and SNV agree a change in status for the organisation. The composition of the Board will change and it will be responsible for all SNV activities. Staff in the Hague remain part of the Ministry. When it comes to funding projects through DGIS, SNV will now have a status that is comparable to private organisations. This means more discretion in terms of execution and financial accountability. DGIS retains the right to approve and evaluate activities.
- 1991** SNV gets its own financial means to finance small and time-bound activities. It is called KSP (Kleinschalige Projecten, Small Scale Projects) and the annual budget is 0.9 million euro.
- 1993** SNV's name is changed into SNV Dutch Development Organisation

### from B to ID

In the awareness arena, the target group took centre stage as well. The B objective was shelved and in its place came the idea of ID, 'International Dimension'. The objective here was to offer the target group access to networks of information, contacts and finance. The ID Department had its own office and eight staff. It worked in areas such as interlocal contacts (between local groups in the Netherlands and developing countries), international trade, the promotion of human rights and the environment. This last was a relatively new element in SNV policy. The environment had been taken into account before, for instance when there were projects dealing with forestation, fuel use or irrigation, but now it was declared to be part of the general core of SNV policy. Some ten years earlier, the interests of women had been declared an integral point of attention and in the 1990s women remained at the top of SNV's agenda. Only the name changed: the term 'gender' was introduced, in order to point out that biological differences between men and women were not the issue but socially determined differences in roles, tasks and responsibilities.

### DA and TA

There was no escape for SNV staff in the field: they had to wear the new badges too. They evolved from volunteers to 'Development Associates' (DA), while their work was now labelled 'Technical Assistance' (TA).

These terms reflected how much better their activities were appreciated and assessed. Specialised work required expertise and experience. At the start of the 1990s some 40 per cent of all staff had completed higher vocational training and more than half had a university degree. The shift of responsibilities towards the field resulted in a big increase in field staff. In 1995, there were just under 600 development workers, of whom one hundred were deployed in field offices. Field office staff numbers had doubled in the space of ten years. 40 per cent of staff were women. SNV was also working increasingly with local staff. Their numbers rose dramatically: in 1992 there were only 45, three years later this had risen to 122. It was, however, a bit of a headache to come up with a set of decent terms and conditions of service for this new group of employees.

In the course of the 1990s, relations between employer and employees became more business-like. More and more SNV staff considered their job just that: a normal job. Vacancies that were deemed less attractive became more difficult to fill and positions remained open for months. In order to keep the number of staff at the desired level, SNV attempted to encourage its experienced workers to consider working overseas again. This was easier said than done, because for former SNV staff the job market in the Netherlands had become more attractive. In their field work they had acquired typical management skills: flexibility, a sense of perspective, a sense of responsibility and an independent mind.



***All this poverty and all this misery - it's so unnecessary,  
you can really make a difference*** EVELIJNE BRUNING

I came across SNV when I was doing my pre-graduation research into a project in a fishing village somewhere in Viet Nam. It was a micro credit project, something I had not heard of before. I was not at all in favour of the idea; I found money basically reprehensible. But I rapidly changed my mind when I found out what the possibilities were. Just over a year after I graduated I returned to the same project, this time as a junior. So I knew what lay in store for me: a great project but also a country that I did not like very much. It is difficult to get real contact with the people. I suffered from that, as time went on. I lost my social resilience, I withdrew and became a bit of a whinger.

I also withdrew from the work, bit by bit. But that was as it was supposed to be. We have really tried to make the partner organisation stronger, encouraged it to take the lead. I must admit I find that difficult at times, allowing people to plod along when I know 'If you do it like this things will go easier and faster'. But everyone is entitled to their own learning curve. That is one of the most important things I have learned.

I then tried to direct my energies towards SNV as an organisation. Things could be done differently and better, I thought. And of course, that is when you meet resistance. There are people who have been with SNV for 30 years, who say 'In Zambia they wanted to do this thing ten years ago and it did not work. So it's pointless to try.' You must be ready to stand your ground if you want to move on.

Come to think of it, I actually came back from Viet Nam very angry. I was angry with myself and with SNV. But I spent one summer sitting on the couch and started afresh, at head office. I did that because I am enthusiastic about the new strategy. I really believe very strongly in the commitment and the expertise SNV can share, especially at the district level and in those small towns, where you can help organisations that are not yet fully operational. In Viet Nam I have seen the kind of fantastic results this can bring. But there is still far too much bureaucracy, reporting and paper nonsense. There is room for improvement there and that is what SNV is doing right now. I am working on it too. Which is very nice, don't you think?

*'Being an advisor is a business in its own right; one must be able to tell when it is time to go.'*



# Modesty

(1996-2000)

*I think that the cooperation between Albanian and Dutch SNV workers enriches both. You are trying to get the best out of two cultures and that leads to very nice results. Moreover, I think that in spite of the professional nature of the work you can still see a spark of idealism.*

*[Albanian SNV staff member, 1998]*

## North and South

First World, Second World, Third World – these were terms from the Cold War. There was no longer any place for them in the 1990s. In the world of development aid this hierarchical terminology was replaced by a geographical distinction: the North and the South would be the preferred terms from now on. The change signalled a shift towards a more balanced relationship, involving respect for the cultures in the developing countries and more emphasis on responsibility in one's own country.

This meant, in one word, 'owning' the problems and their possible solutions. Part of this idea was a more modest role for SNV. Solving problems would no longer be its main task; instead it would become more of a provider of services and an advisor, putting great emphasis on the exchange of knowledge.

SNV decided to concentrate on a number of main themes. First, 'sustainable rural development', an issue that had been on the SNV agenda for the longest time. Second, a relatively new theme, 'local governance processes'. This second theme was closely linked to recently enkindled international attention to issues of 'good governance', which also included decentralisation and democratisation. More often, 'good governance' was stated as a condition for receiving development aid.

There were two additional issues within SNV, 'mediation' and 'service', which were aimed at organisations in the South and the Netherlands respectively. Carrying out these two tasks was entrusted to the newly formed Service and Mediation Bureau (Bureau Dienstverlening en

Bemiddeling, BDB), the successor to the ID Department. Some of the activities BDB worked on were promoting responsible tourism (for the first time in its history SNV was present at the largest Dutch holiday trade fair, called 'Vakantiebeurs') and promoting international fair trade (which translated into participation in the development of a quality mark for tropical hardwood, among other things).

## measuring instruments

Again, there were many changes in SNV's internal organisation. A three-way geographical split was made and three regions were designed. Each one was led by a regional manager. A Central Staff Council was set up, a new corporate plan was outlined and a new mission stated. The general objective of 'increasing resilience' was replaced by 'contributing to sustainable development processes'. This was to be achieved by putting expertise at the disposal of clients.

Various measuring instruments were devised, to enable better monitoring and steering of activities in the field. Of course, this led to the inevitable set of new acronyms. The information system DAS (Data Activities SNV) made the digital registration of data on SNV activities possible. The Documentary Information System (DIS) was designed to bring together existing knowledge and information. Workshops in CSA (Control Self Assessment) were the means through which self-assessments were carried out in the program countries, in order to improve internal management.

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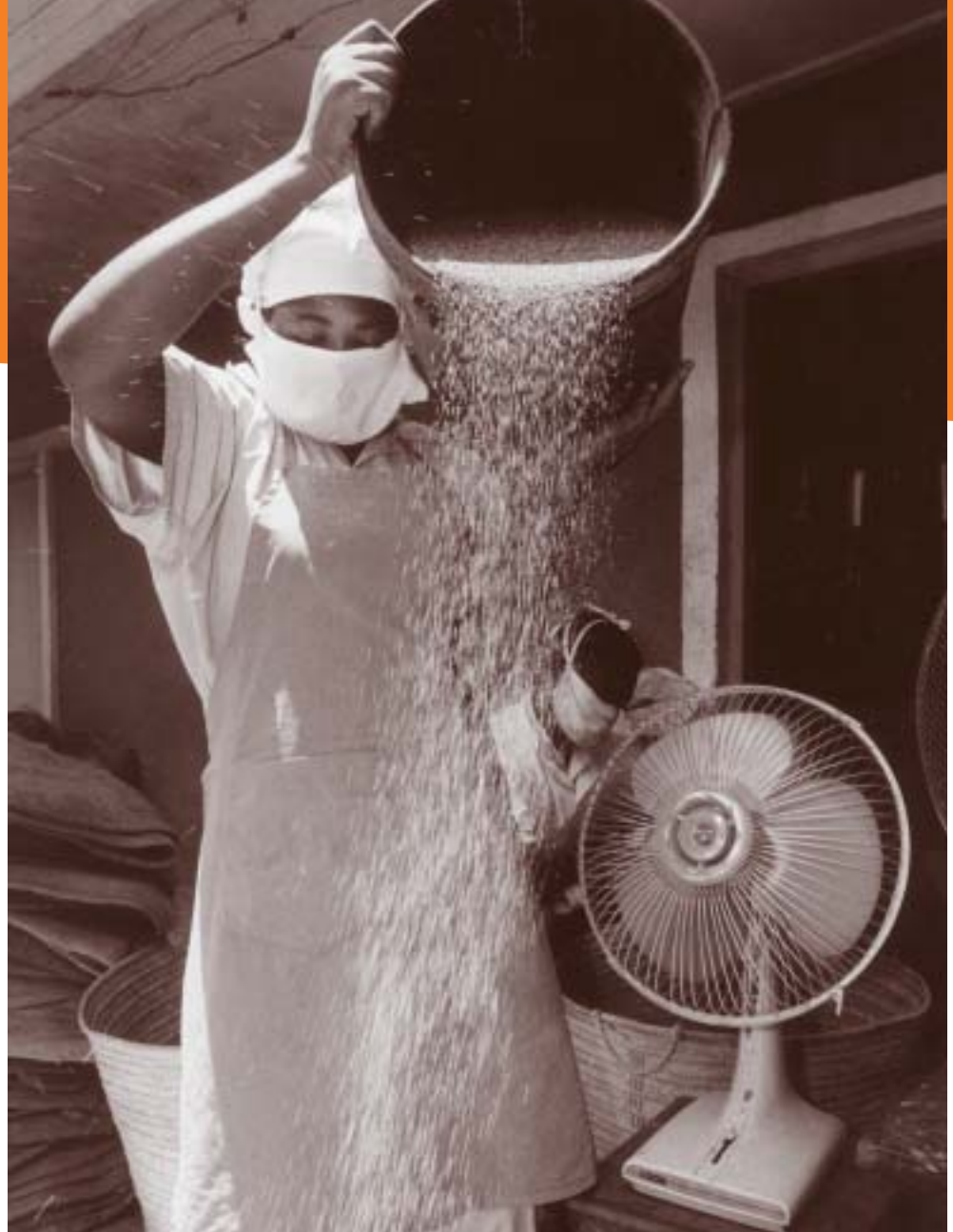
### *Tourism in Tanzania*

The initiative came from a group of Maasai, who in 1994 approached SNV Tanzania with a question about cooperation in the area of tourism. SNV liked the idea. Globally, tourism is one of the fastest growing business sectors but virtually all profits go to the large hotel chains and tour operators. So it would appear worthwhile to find out how the local rural population could benefit from the tourist industry. SNV appointed an advisor who started work with local people and the Tanzania Tourism Bureau. The aim was to come up with a five-year plan. Some time later, interested tourists could book trips under the moniker of 'cultural tourism', which involved reconciling nature conservation, the interests of the local population and the wishes of the tourists. There was a 'development surcharge' included in the price for each trip. The money was used to build schools and other facilities. Both travel agencies and tourists were enthusiastic, contributing to the project's success. Five years into the project the tourism program attracted some 3000 visitors. The local population is involved in putting together a package tour worth following. They also sell souvenirs, cook meals and act as guides. Of course, their profits pale into insignificance compared to what the large travel agencies put in their pockets, but the rural folk in Tanzania are not concerned. They simply add up the benefits that tourism has brought them and decide that it is still worth their while!

Transfer of loans in Viet Nam,  
photograph by Tessa Jol



Winnowing millet, Arusha, Tanzania,  
photograph by Bart Eijgenhujsen



Instruments of analysis were designed for the projects themselves. The Strategic Environment Analysis (SEA) was meant to increase environmental awareness. The Gender Audit analysed the extent to which country programs promoted equality between the genders.

Reactions from the field could be found in the internal personnel magazine 'Nedwerk'. There was no uniform praise: too many changes on paper only, too much bureaucracy, too much focus on policy – that was the drift of the criticism.



### juniors and seniors

Involvement, commitment and a spirit of critical analysis – those have been the characteristics of SNV workers and these have been constant factors in SNV's first 35 years. But other personnel characteristics have changed dramatically. At the end of the 1990s, the average SNV employee was well over 35 years old, in possession of a university degree in agriculture, social sciences or the economy, very experienced in the field of development and earning a corresponding salary. 40 per cent of the workforce was female. Half the entire workforce held a local contract; their numbers had increased threefold, to 350.

Having an interest in development work, a practical education and the ability to work on your own used to be sufficient to qualify for an SNV posting overseas. But those days were long gone. In order not to close the door entirely on new talents, junior positions were created at the beginning of 1998. These were experience places for young people with the requisite educational background. Senior development workers with a lot of experiences were available as 'consultants'.

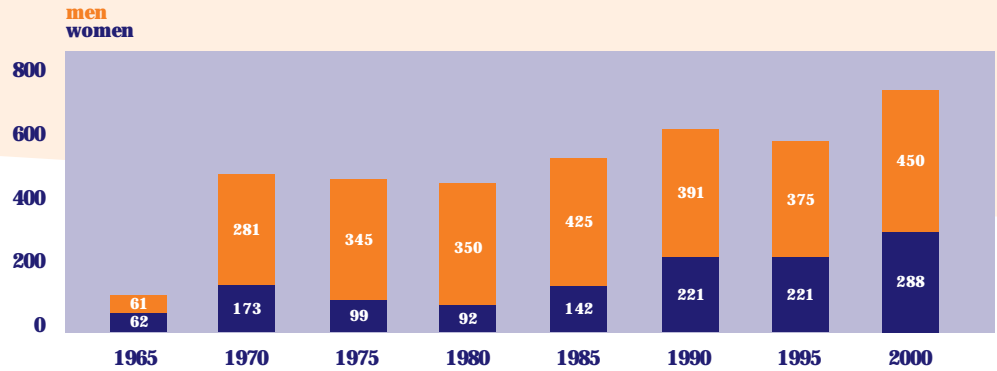
### coffee and fruit flies

In the field, there were basically two types of SNV working methods. First, 'support for capacity building', which is the posting of personnel at local governments and non-governmental organisations. These secondments were set to become time-bound and flexible. They would also be geared towards advisory work, rather than implementation on the ground. The second type consisted of carrying out projects for third parties, especially DGIS. Money involved in DGIS projects went from 19 million euro in 1996 to 23 million euro in 2000. Other parties for which SNV has carried out projects are the World Bank and the European Union, totalling 5.4 million euro in 2000. At the end of the century, more than 700 SNV workers contributed to some 350 projects of every shape and size. In Benin, candidates were trained for participation in local elections, in Niger women's mutual credit groups were supported, associations of coffee producers in Honduras received help when working on the improvement of their industrial processes, methods were developed to combat a plague of fruit flies in Bhutan and Albanian administrators were given advice when setting up employment projects.

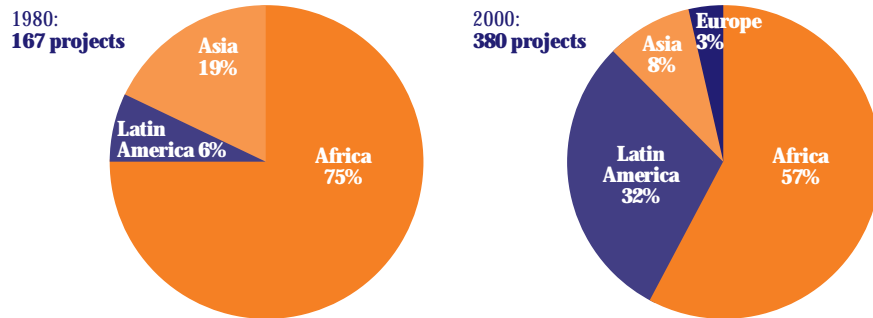
## SNV and the Ministry

- 1996** Within DGIS there is a major reorganisation called 'decompartmentalisation'. Tasks and responsibilities are moved towards the embassies. SNV as an 'independent organisation' does not experience a great deal of direct impact as a result but there are indirect consequences, most notably a more intensive cooperation with the embassies.
- 1997** The total value of DGIS projects carried out by SNV is now 26 million euro. There is also financial cooperation with the Dutch co-financing organisations, the World Bank and the European Union.
- 1998** There is a new minister for development cooperation. She is Eveline Herfkens and her maxim is: doing more in fewer countries. Seventeen (plus four) countries are selected for intensive aid. DGIS programs in other countries are brought to an end more quickly. SNV remains in these countries, working in capacity building of civil organisations and promoting good policies and good governance.
- 1999** The Inspection Department at the ministry (IOB) has evaluated the secondment of personnel in development work. Two conclusions stand out. First, projects should be financed on the basis of results. Second, the relationship between SNV and the ministry should be 'disentangled'.

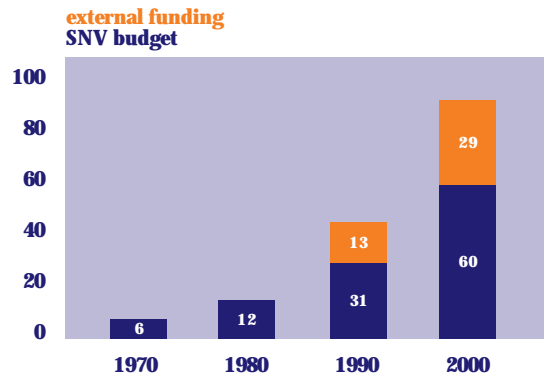
Number of SNVers

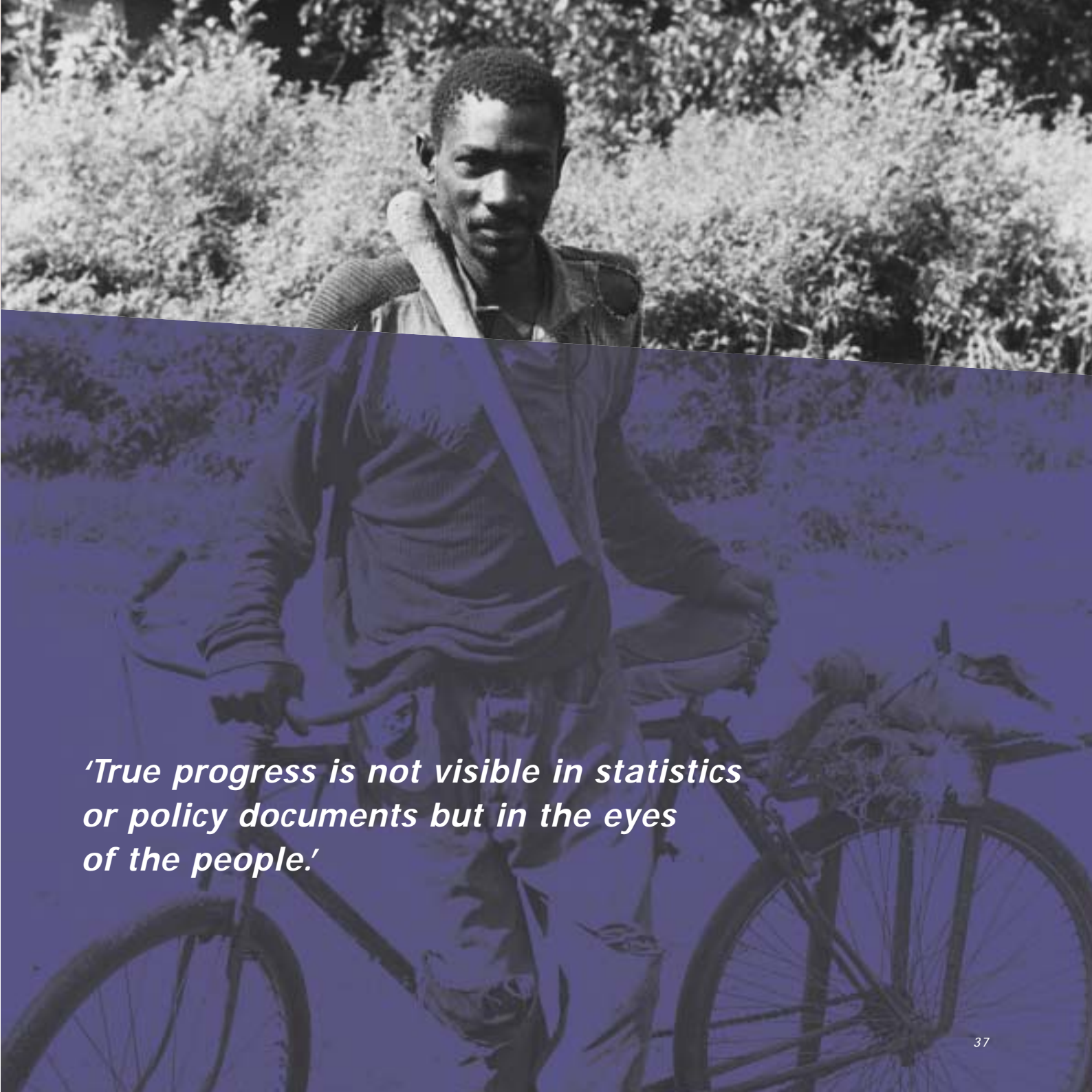


Number of projects



Budget  
(x million euros)





*'True progress is not visible in statistics or policy documents but in the eyes of the people.'*

# An advisory role

(2001- ...)

*Nowadays we are getting requests from local organisations that want their staff to work with us for a while in junior positions. That is unique. We're moving in the direction of the transfer of knowledge and are being seen less and less as a bunch of 'gringos' who are just here to spend money. [SNV employee, Bolivia, 2000]*

## **a new strategy**

At the beginning of the new millennium SNV is faced with big changes in the organisation and the way it works. A new strategy was devised in September 2000, following extensive internal and external consultations. New notions have come to the fore: 'measurable', 'demand-driven' and 'client-oriented'. SNV no longer wants to act as the implementing agency on the ground, rather it wants to present itself as an advisor for organisations that are fighting poverty. The emphasis will be at the intermediate level, that is the space between local interest groups and national governments. Here, one can find both governments and non-governmental organisations. They can request support and advice when they are developing their capacities and increasing their effectiveness. Three areas remain central to SNV's work: local governance, economic development and sustainable use of natural resources. Throughout the years, the organisation has built up a body of knowledge, expertise and networks; all these can be put to good use for the benefit of the client. SNV wants to act as a broker, helping to bring about linkages among parties at different levels.

## **on its own feet**

January 1 2002 has brought the end to a very long discussion: SNV has been detached from the Ministry of Foreign and will continue its life as an independent organisation. The Ministry will remain its

principal source of finance, although other sources of income are on the horizon.

All this means that SNV will be a less centralised and less bureaucratic organisation. The emphasis will shift to the demand side. Head office in the Hague will be reduced in size and weight, field offices in the various countries will become more important. It is there, close to the client, that policies will be primarily shaped and fleshed out.

## **multi disciplinary**

For the 2000 SNV employees the new strategy means that they will have to adopt new methods of operation. Building roads and bridges, digging wells, working in education or providing health care will become part of history; jobs we once used to do. SNV employees will no longer be integrated in existing host organisations, rather they will have to form interdisciplinary teams themselves. These could be teams consisting of highly educated specialists in forestry, economists, industrial experts, sociologists and specialists in 'gender' issues, and mainly of process councillors and organisational experts. The teams will work from a certain region, possibly taking in more than one country, from where they will support, advice and refer clients. More than was previously the case, SNV wants to recruit personnel from different nationalities, further strengthening the multicultural nature of the organisation.



◀ Working in a library, Burkina Faso,  
photograph by  
Reinout van den Bergh

Some things will stay the same. Throughout all the changes, SNV wants to maintain that which has been the driving force behind the organisation: the commitment and involvement of its employees to its main objective, combatting poverty.

### *'Chameleons' in Ecuador*

Farmers' organisations, local governments, women's groups and other special interest groups are the most important clients of SNV Ecuador. SNV employees work in three different geographical areas, each with its own office, each with a variety of partner organisations. Project implementation (for instance in irrigation, extension and health care) has made way for advice and support. In the Chimborazo province, SNV supports a provincial platform that is tasked with the administration of more than 400 large and small irrigation systems in the province. Local governments, water councils that manage the systems and other local stakeholders are all represented in the platform. In the municipality of Riobamba in the same province, one SNV worker is an advisor to the local government on matters of environmental management. In the Chanchán river basin, small farmers who want to increase agricultural productivity have set up a farmers' committee. SNV helps them set up the organisational structure. In order to do these different jobs, SNV Ecuador has a multidisciplinary team, consisting of staff from Ecuador, Colombia, the Netherlands and other European countries. Sometimes, they work for more than one organisation at the same time and, like chameleons, they must adapt to their clients and their demands. In Ecuador, flexibility is the key word.





## SNV and the Ministry

- 2001** The SNV Board adopts a new 'strategy paper' containing the following core points: the change from implementation agency to advisor, from the micro level to the intermediate level and from a vertical organisation to a horizontal one. The organisation also pronounces itself in favour of detachment from the Ministry
- 2002** SNV is independent in status, as of January 1. Towards the end of the year, the disengagement will be completed in terms of finance and personnel. The relationship between the ministry and SNV becomes that of a donor and a receiver. The first grant period will be five years. This completes the process of detachment between SNV and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

◀  
Working in the office, Burkina Faso,  
photograph by  
Reinout van den Bergh

***We must stay away from the controls*** THEA FIERENS, SNV DIRECTOR

SNV's objective has always strongly appealed to me. At the heart of it are anger and astonishment about the existence of poverty in the world. Moreover, SNV is a fascinating organisation. A motley crew of people worldwide, all motivated, all feeling strongly attached to the organisation. There is real fervour, there are uncompromising attitudes, forward-looking and conservative minds. It is a wonderful mix.

What I would like to see is a combination between that commitment to the cause and a more effective corporate management. Sometimes, our organisational arteries are getting clogged as a consequence of lack of discipline, figures that do not add up, too little awareness of expenditure. These are areas where we can learn a lot from commercial organisations. It should not be forgotten that a more effective organisation is also more effective in combatting poverty.

SNV's profile must become sharper. In spite of our multifarious methodology, we must share a similar approach: when we say 'local governance', it must be clear what we mean by that, and the same goes for terms we use like 'advice', irrespective of whether we are in Nepal or in Bolivia. That is what we are working on.

We are staking out the terrain and determining the rules. Within that framework, there must be flexibility, because Ecuador is not Mali, and so on.

We must also stop carrying out projects. We must stay away from the controls, that is something the people themselves must handle. Our role is being an advisor for organisations that are engaged in the battle against poverty. We are, in fact, a special kind of organisational advisor. We know and understand structures and issues but we also have a network. We can bring all kinds of parties together. We also want to support our clients and work from their perspective. This cannot be done in a top-down organisation, which is why we detach ourselves from the Ministry and all its regulations. We are not central to the story, the clients are.

This means that the organisation and its people will have to be educated anew. Being an advisor is a business in its own right; one must be able to tell when it is time to go. One will be required to show results.

What have been the actual results of your presence and work in a country? For this, measuring instruments are needed.

I personally find the metamorphosis which SNV is undergoing absolutely breathtaking. It is lived by a lot of people at a very deep and emotional level. The transformation is difficult and sometimes very hard work. But people are prepared to fight for it and by that I have been greatly touched.

## ***What SNV must do is engineer encounters***

JOAN BOER, INTERIM DIRECTOR GENERAL FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

For me, SNV has been the best education I could have possibly imagined. I left for Kenya and later Rwanda as a SNV volunteer 25 years ago and until the present day that experience has been useful to me. It has taught me to keep listening, assess situations and keep asking questions. When I was field director and team leader I visited many 'technical kitchens'. I used to stay at a project for a few days and be part of it for that space of time, in order to find out what was really going on. You learn a lot that way. You learn to pierce the facade, for instance when someone is trying to sell you hot air.

Inspiration and the importance of people, those are others aspects, and so are the refusal to allow yourself to be hemmed in by paper decrees and formats. I recently went back to Rwanda and visited a number of places where I had been before. The big difference between then and now is that today people get up on their feet, look you in the eye, really talk with you and ask for advice among themselves. This hardly ever happened in the past. True progress in Rwanda is not visible in statistics or policy documents but in the eyes of the people. A good government needs vocal citizens. Citizens must be able to keep asking questions and space must be available for that to occur. A government has its responsibilities but should not want to carry out all the resulting tasks on its own. This, to me, is a core task for SNV: creating a tier of administrators who are capable of working with local organisations and groups and who neither ignore forms of self-organisation nor regulate them to death but create space. That is a capacity that needs to be developed.

Between the national and the local level there is great need for an intermediary function. I think that until now SNV has lingered too much at the local level and has been too much the acting agency on the ground. You suffocate things, while your job is to create room to manoeuvre at that intermediate level. It is, therefore, important, that SNV directs itself at that intermediate level and from there acts as a catalyst for exchanging experiences.

As a development organisation, you are partly in the business of creating your own counter force. As time goes by, you become superfluous. In this fashion, SNV is now gradually being pushed out of the micro level. Which is good; it is what all this is about.





## colophon

**A publication of SNV Dutch Development Organisation, Bezuidenhoutseweg 261,  
2594 AG The Hague, contact: +31 70 344 01 39 (phone)**

<b>Concept</b>	SNV Information Office
<b>Text</b>	Dolly Verhoeven / Storia, Apeldoorn
<b>Translation</b>	Bram Posthumus
<b>Photography cover and end leafs</b>	Reinout van den Bergh (Cameroon series)
<b>Remaining photographs</b>	See text
<b>Lay-out</b>	Hollands Lof ontwerpers bv, Haarlem
<b>Printed by</b>	Albani BV, Den Haag