The city of Antwerp’s activities in the South

Support to Antwerp associations with projects in Congo, Ghana and Morocco
In the city of **Antwerp** many ethnic and cultural minority associations are setting up projects in their countries of origin. At the start of the previous legislature, the city council decided to take its activities in the south into a different direction. At the end of 2009 this resulted in the approval of a vision statement: from then on the efforts were to focus on supporting associations that are active in Congo, Ghana and Morocco. Antwerp has large communities from all three of these countries.

For its projects in Congo the city has currently concluded cooperation agreements with three associations: Amuka, NTBS and IYAD. For Ghana the current partners in Antwerp are Kwahu Asaase Aban, Northern Territories Association, Punt, Okeyman, Impakt and Emic. The civil society associations active in Morocco are Steunproject, Iben Sina and Imane. The support focuses on two themes: education and healthcare. This is why the city has also involved the Institute of Tropical Medicine and the Antwerp Association of University and Higher Education, which whom a covenant was also concluded. The city council’s choice of policy meant that municipal international cooperation with Durban and Paramaribo was terminated in 2007.
In the administrative agreement that was concluded after the local elections of 2006 the coalition partners decided that the city were to become active in countries from which large communities are living in Antwerp and that a connection would be made with the expertise of organisations such as the Institute of Tropical Medicine, the university and colleges of Antwerp. Three countries were selected in consultation with the city advisory council for development cooperation and the ethnic and cultural minority associations in Antwerp: Congo, Ghana and Morocco. A meeting day for all associations was then organised for each country. ‘Some were already active in development cooperation at the time. They supported projects in their country of origin with or without a partner association in the South. Other associations were raising money with activities here and were sending these funds to the South without really developing any development projects. In then end the city concluded a covenant with twelve associations. The three meeting days included two recurring themes: education and healthcare. They were the logical focus points,’ according to Daan Sanders and Katrien Leemen, who work as development cooperation policy advisors for the city of Antwerp.

Was the selection of the countries difficult?
Daan Sanders: ‘Of course other communities are strongly represented in the city, but they are not all organised equally well and they are not all involved in projects in their countries of origin. The choice of the countries, associations and themes was made in a participatory process. In 2009 a vision statement about the activities in the South was presented to the bench of aldermen. Based on this statement we organised meetings with the associations and institutions that would participate. We created project groups per country and per theme to establish which projects we would support and how we would approach this. We chose a strong bottom-up approach here as well. All this took some time. The final decisions were made in the
autumn of 2010. All projects operate at different speeds. Some started fairly quickly, but others needed more time. One of the Ghanaian education projects only started last year, for example.

**Could you briefly describe the projects and role of the civil society associations?**

**Katrien Leemen:** ‘The association IYAD supports a project in Kinshasa for the rehabilitation of patients who suffered a stroke. It cooperates with a local centre that was already involved in rehabilitation through physiotherapy. The network here includes three colleges and a few rehabilitation centres in Antwerp. The project has been going fairly well for two years now. IYAD, some college lecturers and some rehabilitation specialists went on an exploratory mission to Kinshasa. Two occupational therapists taught the students at the centre. Two nurses from Kinshasa were on an internship here for three weeks. As far as education in Congo is concerned, we are working together with NTBS and Amuka. They have both set up a multimedia library with the help of a partner organisation in Kisangani and Goma respectively. Students and pupils have access to information technology and the internet and receive training there too.’

‘In Ghana ICT classrooms were established in three primary schools in different villages. The projects are supported in Antwerp by two Ghanaian associations and a connection is made with the city’s education by another society. Every summer a few teachers travel to Ghana to explain their teaching methodologies to their colleagues there. The network also includes colleges that allow their students to go on internships at the small schools there. As far as healthcare is concerned, three health stations were developed in different villages at the request of three Ghanaian associations in Antwerp. The healthcare system in Ghana is quite good, but focuses too much on the cities.’

**Daan Sanders:** ‘The aim is that they become a health post reference to be used as a template for the Ghanaian government, for other associations and for donors. Two stations are doing really well and the third one is still showing a lot of room for improvement at the moment. Some colleges are interested in sending student nurses and midwives there on internships, but the framework needs to be improved first.’

**Katrien Leemen:** ‘In Morocco the activities are somewhat different. Through three Moroccan associations in Antwerp, we support three cooperatives in the northeast of Morocco: a bee cooperative that has existed for several years and a goats and sheep cooperative that were started from scratch.’

**Daan Sanders:** ‘The Antwerp associations have chosen not to start by setting up education and healthcare projects, as they would depend and continue to depend on
our support. They first want to guarantee the partner organisation an income in their village of origin by means of cooperatives. Things are going well. The cooperatives have been the foundation for activities to promote education and health. Internship students from a few colleges go to the villages of the cooperatives once a year to teach at the primary schools. There is an exchange programme between teacher training colleges here and there. Two of the three cooperatives also have a small health station already. Student nurses and midwives are also going on internships at hospitals in the wider region.

What is the role of the city of Antwerp?
Katrien Leemen: ‘The city’s role varies from project to project. A lot depends on how strong the society is here. Some of them are a real driving force and chair project group meetings, organise local missions, etc. Others require a little more support and guidance. They are volunteering organisations after all. Generally speaking the city’s role is that of an advisor, coach and quality manager. We organise training sessions, we support the associations to create project proposals and reports, we evaluate and we make adjustments.

Daan Sanders: ‘And of course we also contribute financially with 25,000 euros per country per year. Our commitment is for the period 2010-2013 and will therefore certainly last until the end of this year. The funding is based on cooperation agreements with the associations, which are linked to indicators and results. We have also concluded covenants with the Institute of Tropical Medicine, the Association of the University and Colleges in Antwerp and 11.11.11. In exchange for financial support by the city, they offer expertise and partners.’

What are the results of the activities in those three countries?
Katrien Leemen: ‘We have not yet performed any impact measurement, but clear results are visible in the villages. The goats cooperative, for example, provides a livelihood to five women and therefore five families. The multimedia libraries in Congo are a success. The projects in Ghana are still in their infancy. It would be too soon to draw any conclusions in that respect. And of course networks are being established in Antwerp and in the villages in the South to support and develop the projects.’

What does the cooperation mean to the ethnic and cultural minority associations and to the city?
Daan Sanders: ‘The bond between the associations and the other Antwerp partners in the network and between the associations and ourselves has become much stronger. We really got to know each other well.'
There have also been many contacts that have not involved the city at all, for example between the associations and the intern students wanting to go to one of the three countries. The activities in the South strengthen the social cohesion in the city. Because a network has been established, associations are now finding it easier to connect with other actors and bodies in the city. The Institute of Tropical Medicine, the university and the colleges have also benefited from the cooperation. The associations’ social and cultural expertise about the three countries makes it easier to establish contacts and set up projects efficiently. In Antwerp it has allowed the university and the colleges to connect with young people of ethnic and cultural minorities, who are underrepresented in higher education.

**Have all the Antwerp associations involved in activities in the South also been in touch with each other?**

**Katrien Leemen:** ‘The associations working on the same theme in the same country are part of a single project group. They obviously work together. However, there is little contact between the Antwerp associations across various themes and countries. Every now and then we organise joint initiatives, but there is still room for improvement.’

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More about the city of Antwerp’s activities in the South

South-South. The development of a solid network is a crucial element in Antwerp’s activities in the South. In Antwerp there is a sound foundation, although the projects in Congo and Ghana could be developed further by a greater contribution from ICT people who can provide training, for example. Katrien Leemen: ‘In the South we also emphasise the importance of developing a network. Not all answers are provided by the North. Some questions can just as easily be asked in Congo, Ghana or Morocco. One of the conditions of the covenant is that projects focusing on the same theme work together in the South. For example, the three Ghanaian primary schools have to work together even though there is quite a lot of distance between them.’

Sounding board group. A sounding board group advises the city on its activities in the south and discusses the problems. The group includes members of the Institute of Tropical Medicine, the Antwerp University Institute for Development, VVSG and 11.11.11.

Young people. The Antwerp civil society associations of ethnic and cultural minorities are mainly driven by people in their forties and fifties. Daan Sanders: ‘The input of the second and third generations are not sufficient. Particularly the younger third generation should be involved more. They are interested in the projects in the South, but the bond must be strengthened.’

No trips to the South. Local authorities in the North and South work together as part of their municipal international cooperation. Antwerp’s activities in the South are mainly on the level of various associations in the North and South. Daan Sanders: ‘That means that there are no missions of officials and politicians in either direction. The city therefore does not have an immediate view of how the projects are progressing in the South. The evaluation is performed by third parties such as 11.11.11 or the Institute of Tropical Medicine, who create an evaluation sheet during site visits.’

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