

Glocal

01052016
www.vvsg.be

Localising the sustainable development goals





SPECIAL

Glocal: global goals, local focus

Localising the sustainable development goals

The 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) were adopted by the United Nations in September 2015. They form the new international agenda until 2030. In Flanders, as well as elsewhere in the world, these objectives bring about a great potential for local authorities to work on sustainable development on the municipal territory.

- 3 **opinion** Mark Suykens: Towards dignity for all
- 4 **Interview** with Kathleen Depoorter, Cil Cuypers, Tine Heyse:
Sustainable development : Everyone on board
- 6 **Interview** with Alexander De Croo, Belgian Minister of Development Cooperation:
“We will learn from the South more and more often.”
The premise is fundamentally different from that of the millennium development goals. “Back then, the global South had the problems and the global North offered the solutions. Now it is clear that governments, civil society and the private sector all have to work together to fight major world problems”, says Belgian Minister of Development Cooperation Alexander De Croo.
- 10 **A local perspective on global goals**
- 12 **The 17 sustainable development goals in the picture**
- 14 **Finally a local anchor for global policy**
- 16 **What progress local authorities have achieved?**
- 19 **From survival to a better life**

NIX





opinion

MARK SUYKENS VVSG CEO

Towards a dignified life for everyone in this world

The international agenda can be an incentive towards a coherent, local sustainable development policy.

In September 2015, 193 world leaders launched the 17 sustainable development goals at the United Nations General Assembly. These goals are inclusive and universal and approach sustainable development not only from a development cooperation angle, but also in terms of social policy, climate and the environment, economic policy, international relations and partnerships. The sustainable development goals are on the international agenda until 2030. As local authorities in Flanders, we also have a role to play. As a result of intensive lobbying by our European (CEMR) and global (UCLG) umbrella organisations, one of the 17 goals deals specifically with sustainable urbanisation. Goal 11 strives towards inclusive, resilient, safe, sustainable cities and human settlements by 2030: the perfect task for cities and municipalities. Goal 16 also states clearly that it is the global task of local governments and other levels of government to act as effective, accountable and inclusive public institutions. Each of the other sustainable development goals also affects local authorities in one way or another, with regard to poverty reduction, welfare for all ages, gender equality, the local economy, education, consumption and energy and climate policies.

The sustainable development goals are an important tool for Flemish local authorities and their partner towns in the global South to achieve sustainable development in their territories, as determined by Article 2 of the

Municipal Act. Of course, Flemish local authorities are already very active in each of these areas, but this international agenda can be an incentive to take more steps towards a coherent, local sustainable development policy. Fairtrade Towns can establish a direct link with sustainable purchasing and ethical investment policies or with the Covenant of Mayors commitments, whilst working on their international cooperation through their city-to-city partnership.

VVSG drew up a declaration of commitment on the role of local authorities in the pursuit of sustainable development. We invite the Flemish local authorities to endorse and implement this commitment. This new international agenda is very ambitious. The underlying message is equally ambitious: transforming the world by 2030 in order to achieve a dignified life for everyone, so that no one is left behind. Local authorities can integrate sustainable development into the future strategic management and policy planning cycle. However, our contribution to this international agenda for sustainable development must not stand alone. It requires proper, balanced combined action by the various levels of Belgian government. We therefore strongly urge the federal and Flemish governments to actively involve local authorities in the planning and development of actions and visions for this universal development agenda. ■



Lokaal is the monthly magazine of the Flemish local authorities
www.vvsg.be
Chief editor
Marlies van Bouwel

Have contributed to his edition
Editors Marleen Capelle, Katrien Gordts, Pieter Plas, Bart Van Moerkerke
Layout Ties Bekaert, VVSG
Printing Schaubroeck



A publication of the Association of Flemish Cities and Communes
Paviljoenstraat 9, 1030 Brussel
Responsible publisher
Mark Suykens, CEO VVSG
With the support of:







On 25 September 2015, 193 world leaders signed seventeen sustainable development goals in New York, which should radically change the world by 2030.

Kathleen Depoorter, Cil Cuypers and Tine Heyse are impressed. 'The sustainable development goals are ambitious, comprehensive and global, but they will require a lot of effort from everyone.'

Sustainable development: everyone on board

WORDS BART VAN MOERKERKE

PICTURES STEFAN DEWICKERE

In 2015, the millennium development goals received a cautiously positive assessment and the sustainable development goals were adopted under the auspices of the UN. The new agenda includes 17 strategic development goals and 169 targets. It is therefore quite a bit bulkier than the 8 millennium development goals. Besides poverty reduction, clean water, education and gender equality, they also focus on issues such as peace, sustainable production and consumption, affordable and clean energy and the fight against climate change. The agenda does not only address developing countries: it includes the South as well as the North. We asked three local aldermen responsible for international cooperation to give us an introduction: Kathleen Depoorter (N-VA, Evergem), Cil Cuypers (SP.A, Bierbeek) and Tine Heyse (Green, Ghent).

What is your assessment of the sustainable development goals?

Cil Cuypers: 'I am impressed. It is an ambitious plan, starting from a much more comprehensive, global vision than the millennium development goals.'

Kathleen Depoorter: 'They concern everyone: governments at all levels, businesses, associations, citizens. In the South, but in the North as well. They tackle the problems at root-level. Governments in the North will have to take them into account.'

Tine Heyse: 'We are past making this distinction between North and South. There is poverty in Belgium too. We have to work towards a sustainable world

here as well. Everything is connected. What we do in Belgium will affect the whole world. These goals are also a concrete implementation of sustainability in all its aspects: socially, economically and ecologically.'

The goals are very broad. Don't you think there are too many?

Tine Heyse: 'The millennium development goals were more concrete and there were only eight of them. That made them easier in terms of education. The sustainable development goals are complex, but so is sustainable development. You have to take action in so many areas, here and elsewhere, including local government. I was pleasantly surprised to see that in Ghent, we are working on many of the 169 goals already.'

Cil Cuypers: 'Our municipal council adopted a climate action plan at the end of 2015 following a participatory process. That plan includes a lot of the elements on mobility, sustainable production and consumption, better housing, reduced power consumption and fair trade.'

Are your fellow aldermen and councillors on board already? And the administration?

Cil Cuypers: 'Our staff are not very involved yet, really. That is not surprising, as the sustainable development goals received little attention outside the specialised media. I am looking for a way to explain the goals to my colleagues and municipal staff. I think I will start from what they are doing already →



Tine Heyse:
‘The sustainable-development goals are complex, but so is sustainable development. You need to work in many areas here and elsewhere, also as a local authority.’

and expand that into a more global context.’

Kathleen Depoorter: ‘In Evergem, we primarily use the town partnership as a springboard. We had a big event that involved various municipal departments this week. We worked with an artist from our partner town in Ecuador to create a giant, who carried seventeen bags to Evergem. That was a very visual way to get a conversation going about the 17 goals with my colleagues and the departments. We will also use the giant to raise awareness among the population.’

The final goal is specifically about partnerships, not just between governments, but also with businesses, civil society and the population. How do you involve them?

Cil Cuypers: ‘It is a tough challenge. Many people understand that they need to build an energy efficient home to save costs or help the environment. But they often forget that this is also important for the entire planet.’

Tine Heyse: ‘You have to present that bigger picture in several doses and in places and on forums where this is pos-

sible. We are working on a local food strategy, for example, by trying to repair the relationship with our food and by keeping the food supply chain short. We also try to include the North-South relationship. A short supply chain means that there is a limited distance between the producer and the consumer of the product, but it can also mean that there are less intermediaries and fairer prices, such as for fair trade products. It is a way to convey the bigger picture.’

Kathleen Depoorter: ‘Our town partnership can also be a stepping stone. The water shortage in Guaranda is a very specific catalyst to start a discussion about climate change in Evergem.’

Tine Heyse: ‘This is more difficult for a large city. Mangaung in South Africa is our partner town. Our cooperation is good, there is an exchange between departments, but we have failed to make the town partnership generally known to the people of Ghent. We are thinking of creating broader networks with cities in the North and the South about issues such as fair trade. In a town partnership, you are partly



‘We will learn from the South more and more often.’

‘The millennium development goals were still heavily steeped in the traditional view of development: the western world set the direction that everyone else had to follow. The sustainable development goals are the first to say that as far as some major global problems are concerned, we are all in the same boat and we have to find a solution together,’ says Belgian Minister of Development Cooperation Alexander De Croo.

WORDS BART VAN MOERKERKE
PICTURES STEFAN DEWICKERE



Kathleen Depoorter:

'Sustainable development goal 11 points out the importance of cities to central governments. It gives cities a tool they can use to go knocking on the door of their national governments.'

dependent on your partner. Cooperation in a wider context offers more opportunities.'

Cil Cuypers: 'In Bierbeek, the town partnership is one way to approach the issue, but there are other channels too. The climate action plan owes a lot to the participation sessions, for example. I did notice, however, that our employees are not yet convinced of how best to share the sustainable development goals with the population.' **Tine Heyse:** 'I had the same experience. My department felt that the sustainable development goals are very complex, too complex to be shared with the population. I think they may be a way to integrate our work even more. They show that everything is interconnected. Procurement is related to not participating in deforestation by using FSC wood. It also related to how the cobblestones on the Korenmarkt in Ghent were produced. Of course our work is for the people of Ghent, but we are not an island. We must be aware that everything we do has an impact elsewhere, and vice versa. The sustainable development goals can create a bond.'

How important is goal 11 on sustainable cities and human settlements?

Tine Heyse: 'Very important. The role of cities in the climate issue was specifically mentioned for the first time at the climate summit in Paris and is now discussed more and more. I believe very strongly in the power of local government level to offer solutions, but local authorities should also have the authority to do something about certain problems and be given control over public transport and the energy policy, for example. That is why I support the decentralisation of more competencies to the local level. Of course there will always be problems that municipalities can't handle. Emissions trading is dealt with on a European level, for example.'

Kathleen Depoorter: 'Goal 11 is very important, because cities in the South are growing particularly quickly. They often hit barriers and receive no resources or authority from central government. The eleventh goal points out the importance of cities to central governments. It gives cities a tool they can use to go knocking on the door of their national governments.'

Deputy Prime Minister Alexander De Croo attended the signing of the sustainable development goals in New York in September. 'It was an impressive event that involved all major world leaders, but it was also an important milestone, the product of years of work. The premise is fundamentally different from that of the millennium development goals. Back then, the global South had the problems and the global North offered the solutions. Now it is clear that governments, civil society and the private sector all have to work together to fight major world problems such as extreme poverty, climate change, extremism and migration flows. Some people say that 17 goals and 169 objectives are too much, but if you can distil 17 sustainable development goals for 194 very distinct countries, then that is not so bad.'

How will you and your fellow ministers implement the goals in a policy?

'We have already integrated part of them in our development policy, because we already knew the direction they were taking in 2014. There is still a lot of work to do to implement them in our domestic policy, but there are many entry points. For example, one of the 169 objectives is about significantly reducing the number of road deaths, which is directly linked to the federal and Flemish policy. Raising awareness among business people and in civil society will also require a lot of effort. Two months ago, I organised a meeting for major Belgian companies and companies with international operations. At first, many people didn't have a clue. An hour later, they had taken the ideas regarding the circular economy and sustainability on board. Sustainability

is not just a moral principle. It also makes economic sense.'

Who will include the sustainable development goals in the federal policy?

'We have divided that task. The foreign policy part is for Didier Reynders and me. The domestic policy part is for Marie Christine Marghem. As Minister for Sustainable Development, she is responsible for integrating the goals into all policy areas.'

What do the goals mean for your department?

'Development cooperation – I actually prefer the term international development – will be increasingly based on a perspective of equality between the global North and South. Until recently, globalisation meant that we set the direction the rest of the world had to



Cil Cuypers:
'People understand that they need to build energy-efficient homes to save costs or help the environment, but they often forget that it is also important for the planet.'

Cil Cuypers: 'Because capacity building is so ingrained in town partnerships, town partnerships can be very useful. They are not about development cooperation, but about mutual capacity building.'

Sustainable development permeates the entire local authority organisation, which is currently still very much compartmentalised in a political and administrative sense. How do you approach that?

Tine Heyse: 'The integrated work is already happening in the management and policy cycle. Our climate plan involves at least seven aldermen and clearly states who does what. The same applies to poverty. It is still a difficult process. Especially in times of cost cutting, departments revert to their core business.'

Cil Cuypers: 'This is slightly easier in a small organisation. We have to work comprehensively, because we are small. A good relationship with my colleagues of the political coalition helps.'

How do you see the role of the North-South official or department?

Kathleen Depoorter: 'He is going to be very busy. He and the policy coordinator will be responsible for the management and the introduction and follow-up of the sustainable development goals with the other departments. That is feasible in our small organisation.'

Tine Heyse: 'That would be impossible for us. Because the sustainable development goals are so broad, the North-South department would be coordinating the city's policy. That is what the strategy and coordination department is for.'

Cil Cuypers: 'The international cooperation officer is also the sustainability official. It would be difficult for her to be the driving force in all those other areas. Collaboration will be the key.'

The implementation of the sustainability agenda is going to cost money. Where is the money going to come from?

Tine Heyse: 'That's a matter of choice. We are running a project with Flanders on fair trade work clothing for the parks depart-

follow. That is actually changing already. If you look at the use of smartphones in payment transactions, Kenya and Bangladesh are leading the way. Remote health care, for example, is not a development that exists in the North. We can learn from developments elsewhere more and more. And of course the goals mean that the emphasis is on sustainable and inclusive economic growth. The Democratic Republic of Congo's economic growth rate was eight or nine percent last year, but that growth was not inclusive: it went to one percent of the population. We want growth that benefits the population. That will not happen through mining. It will mainly involve agriculture and an economy that gives young people the chance to help build their country by freely engaging in agriculture and doing business in their own region. That economy will be much more local than we are used to

today and will also take into account the environmental costs. A sustainable, local economy will be especially useful in very fragile countries, mostly situated in Central and West Africa, where we operate. What is required is not one huge project, but many small projects, of which one or two is allowed to fail. One example is the Inga dam on the Congo River, which would generate energy for the whole of Africa. Such a huge investment is extremely difficult to pull off in a fragile environment and even if you did, it does not always lead to inclusive growth. We see an alternative in the vicinity of Virunga National Park. The park's director, Prince Emmanuel de Merode, found that the park was being plundered by the destitute population. The only way to protect it was to provide other income for the population, so he invested in small dams and reservoirs outside the park for local electricity pro-

duction. Small industrial activity arose nearby and the economy got underway. The North can act as an accelerator that allows many of those projects to grow.'

What is the role of local authorities here and in the South?

'Local governments in the South are building their democracy from the bottom up. In Burundi, we are no longer working with the central government, but with NGOs and local political structures. We are not letting the population down. Local authorities also have an important role here, but in these times of austerity we need to coordinate our efforts better. By joining forces, we can do better with less. Belgian Development Agency BTC is building roads and drilling wells. By linking that to an agriculture NGO such as Trias and a university or college involved in irrigation, you can create



Alexander De Croo:

'If you want to lift 800 to 900 million people out of poverty by 2030, that corresponds to 150,000 people a day. That is huge.'

ment. It costs a little more, but that is the choice we make. In the past, Ghent has experienced some socially deplorable situations in its textile industry. We have a responsibility to the people of the South who are now making our clothes. A city needs to lead by example and it must ensure that its citizens have a choice from a range of ethical clothing for everyone. It is unfortunate that most people would rather help the South through development aid than pay more for their products from the South. The North still needs a change of heart in that respect.'

Kathleen Depoorter: 'We try to reconcile sustainability and financial viability. The local authority's long-term investments are in sustainable products. The short-term investments focus more on traditional products.'

Tine Heyse: 'We also need to be creative. We are asking 7 euros per square metre extra at a new business park, for example. Businesses can get part of that back if they take certain sustainability measures and they can use the rest to obtain energy advice.'

What do you expect from the Flemish and federal governments?

Kathleen Depoorter: 'International cooperation is both a Flemish and a federal responsibility, which results in lack of coordination and makes things difficult. There is a lot of room for improvement there.'

Tine Heyse: 'I expect the federal and Flemish governments to think and work in an integrated way, just like the local authorities do. All ministers must take the sustainable development goals on board.'

Cil Cuypers: 'It is up to Minister for Development Cooperation De Croo to act as the ambassador, so that his colleagues and the local authorities can then join in.' ■

Bart Van Moerkerke is the editor of Local

an extra dimension. If we then add a project strengthening local governance, the results will be even better. We need to agree on a common goal. That is the direction I want to take, and the NGOs and VVSG are contributing as well. We will also focus our efforts on a more limited number of countries. The world has changed. In the past, two billion people were well off and the rest lived in misery. Today five billion people are well off or have prospects of making better lives for themselves, and one billion lives in utter misery. We must focus our efforts on this last group of thirty or forty countries.'

Are you optimistic?

'Absolutely, but I realise that the challenges are formidable. If you want to lift 800 to 900 million people out of poverty by 2030, that corresponds to 150,000 people a day. That is huge. The

millennium development goals have taught us that this needs to happen mainly through economic growth, trade and investment in the poorest countries. There have been successes, in Ethiopia for example, which was extremely poor at the time of Band Aid. A crucial factor is strong political leadership. The young population there is as enterprising as in this country, but the government must provide an environment that fosters entrepreneurship. That also means that it must be able to deal with a critical population that can stand on its own two feet. This also applies to the local policy level.'

As Minister of Development Cooperation, do you not feel you should act more as an ambassador for the sustainable development goals, as suggested by the aldermen?

'I understand their question, but it is

not easy to make the goals accessible. Anyone with political responsibility should be an ambassador. I am also counting on the media, but they are not always enthusiastic. We will only be able to change that when we can present some concrete results.' ■

Bart Van Moerkerke is editor of Lokaal

A local perspective on global goals

What do food teams, cycle path expansion, the Covenant of Mayors for the reduction of CO₂ emissions, community composting and healthy and hospitable local authorities have to do with the United Nations? The answer lies in the UN General Assembly decision that adopted the UN sustainable development goals in New York in September 2015. It is a continuation of two global agendas: the millennium development goals for development cooperation and the various Climate Conferences.

WORDS BETTY DE WACHTER

Unlike the millennium development goals, the new sustainable development goals are universal. For the first time in this kind of an agreement, there is no sign of the classic North-South division. All countries are now expected to contribute: over the next fifteen years important social issues will be dealt with in the North and South. Poverty, hunger / nutrition, education, health, gender, the environment and sustainable development – including the economy, consumption, proper employment – are relevant all over the world, and therefore also in Belgium, Flanders and even more locally. There is one agenda, with a local and a global section: everything is connected and therefore comprehensive action is required. This universal project presents many challenges, but also offers many opportunities we can put our efforts in together.

The first fifteen goals correspond with the three pillars of sustainable development: people (social), planet (ecological) and prosperity (economic). The last two create an indispensable framework of peace (goal 16 - peace and security) and partnership (goal 17).

Not so remote, but close to home

The sustainable development goals focus on governments, businesses, universities, scientific institutions, associations, organisations and citizens around the world. They offer an interesting framework to first-line public institutions such as cities, municipalities and public social welfare centres that enables them to make the connection between what is local and what is global based on local policies and local practices. Finding so-

lutions to climate change, providing accessible services to everyone and working with citizens to focus on short food supply chains are just a few examples of how sustainable development goals can be implemented locally, in Flanders and elsewhere. In the Flemish context, the goals offer an excellent opportunity to implement the mission of each local authority, as set out in Article 2 of the Flemish municipal decree:

The local authorities aim to contribute locally to the welfare of the citizens and the sustainable development of their territories. Under Article 41 of the Constitution, they are responsible for taking the initiative to improve all matters of local authority interest.

Local governments certainly do not have all the levers at hand, but their great advantage is they can experiment more locally and test certain pilot projects. Their proximity to the citizens is a huge asset.

The way each local authority fulfils this task in the current municipal legislative period in Flanders, has been largely determined by the strategic and financial plan – the policy and management cycle – for 2014-2019. To implement the 17 goals on a local level, it is therefore essential to start from what is already there and documented. So many issues are already being addressed: poverty reduction, climate plans, healthy food dispensation at service centres, local employment, ... These are examples of local policies and practices that tie in with the

sustainable development goals. In these cases, the international framework of the sustainable development goals can serve as a source of inspiration for local policies. The local level can then make its own contribution to their implementation.

The words ‘comprehensive’, ‘integral’ and ‘multi-dimensional’ are used often. This integral aspect of policy implementation fits in well with local authorities. They are the policy level where everything comes together and where practical solutions need to be sought from different angles. How can sports contribute to welfare, health and integration? How can a focus on energy efficiency help fight poverty? How can (re)designing

public spaces contribute to climate adaptation? Local authorities can do a lot, but the transition to a different type of energy, careful management of water resources or a resilient infrastructure cannot be achieved by any one level of government or institution.

Cooperation, consultation and a clear overview as from a helicopter of the entire (local) policy are required. Local governments certainly do not have all the levers at hand, but their great advantage is they can experiment more locally and test certain pilot projects.

1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere
2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and clean energy for all
8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
10. Reduce inequality within and among countries
11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

Their proximity to the citizens is a huge asset and the policy results are usually visible immediately. Local governments have that comparative advantage all over the world. That is why they are a crucial link in the implementation of the sustainable development goals: they localise the sustainable development goals. Local authorities bring them close to home.

A lot of work needs to be done, also locally, but the so-called agenda 2030 for sustainable development allows 15 years to take steps forward, from 2015 to 2030. First, local governments must be well informed and aware to familiarise them with the international framework of the goals. They can work with local partners and associations, citizens and neighbouring local authorities to analyse the possible impact of the sustainable development goals on their policy. They can identify actions to reinforce or alter their policy choices from the per-

spective of their local contribution to the goals. They can enter into international partnerships with other local authorities in order to implement the goals. This can be done in various ways, as shown by the Climate Conference in Paris in December 2015.

Efforts have already been made to gradually make the local agenda more sustainable, but the international framework offered by the sustainable development goals are a very powerful incentive to continue. Cooperation with other cities and towns at home and abroad can result in a great deal of inspiration and good practices, so local governments all over the world can play a pioneering role in the transition towards sustainability. ■

Betty De Wachter is the Head of VVSG International

Information about the sustainable-development goals:

The United Nations	https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org
UCLG	United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) is a global umbrella organisation of local authorities, of which VVSG is a member www.uclg.org/en/issues/2030-agenda-sustainable-development
UNITAR	In 2015 CIFAL Flanders joined the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR). It is CIFAL Flanders's task to make the UN standards and declarations, in particular regarding human rights and the UN Sustainable Development Goals, suitable for local governments, businesses, knowledge centres, organisations and civil society. It offers workshops, seminars, conferences, online courses and advice under the banner of 'Leadership for sustainability'. www.cifal-flanders.org www.learnatunitar.org www.unitar.org





LAVIA AERTS



STEF DE BELDER KRIMS



BERT JANSSENS



STEFAN DEWICKERE



KIRSTEN VANHOODONCK



BERT JANSSENS



BERT JANSSENS



BERT JANSSENS



BERT JANSSENS



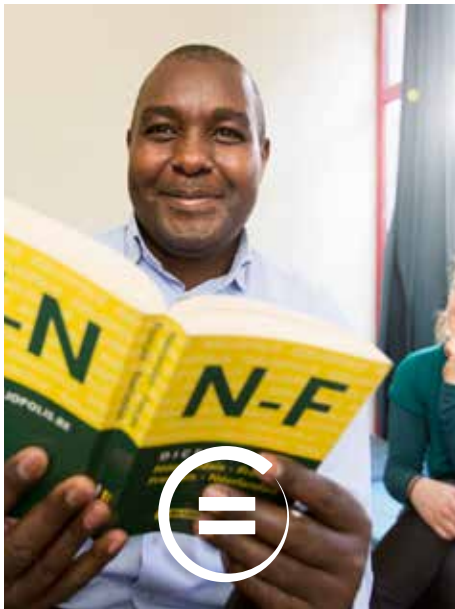
ARCHIEF ANTWERPEN



STEFAN DEWICKERE



STEF DE BELDER-KRIMS



STEFAN DEWICKERE



BERT JANSSENS



STEF DE BELDER-KRIMS



ELISABETH BIESEMANS



STEF DE BELDER-KRIMS



Finally a local anchor for global policy

A 'municipal global policy' is a vision of the local authority's policy for international cooperation and international justice. The sustainable development goals are convenient stepping stones for striving towards this municipal global policy. They are one of the ways for local government to work towards more international justice.

WORDS KARLIEN GORISSEN AND ASHLEY HENNEKAM PICTURES STEFAN DEWICKERE

In 2013 a number of North-South officials, 11.11.11 and VVSG established a think tank to reflect on the future of local authorities' development cooperation. The outcome is a vision of the 'municipal global policy'. It supports cities and towns already operating within this philosophy and it encourages reorientation where required.

The aim is international justice

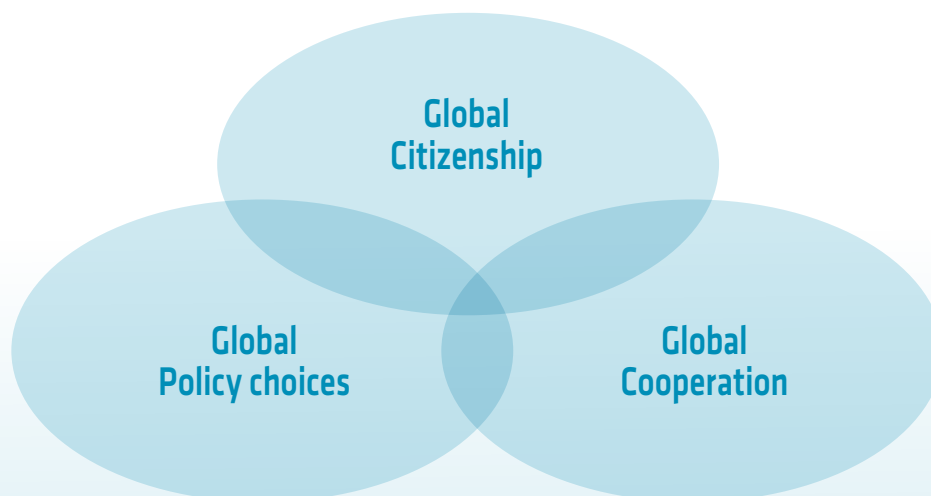
A municipal global policy arises from the knowledge that there are major disparities between countries and within countries themselves. Every day the news shows us unfair practices. By pursuing a 'global policy', we show, as a municipality, our solidarity with the people, nations and countries affected by several global trends, such as climate change, terrorism and social exploitation. By focusing on a municipal global policy, local authorities can strive towards more international justice.

The Herent advisory council for development cooperation organised a big assembly. It was decided to bring together all the Herent advisory councils around one single issue: sus-

tainability. The broader civil society gave advice for Herent's sustainable development policy. In Izegem, the aldermen and advisory councils for agriculture, environment and development cooperation set in motion a process to gain support for a big fair trade breakfast with local meat products. Both local governments put a 'municipal global policy' into practice.

Three areas for action

A municipal global policy is a coherent, comprehensive and municipal-wide policy that contributes to more international justice. This can happen in three areas of action. First, a local government can strive towards coherent policy choices that contribute to international justice. To this effect, it can adapt its internal procedures by making its procurement more sustainable or by pursuing an internal climate policy, it can integrate the sustainable development goals as the underlying framework for the different objectives of the municipal multi-annual plan, or it can include international justice in the local authority's vision and mission.



By pursuing a 'municipal global policy', we show our solidarity with the people, nations and countries affected by several global trends, such as climate change, terrorism and social exploitation.



Town partnerships (hermanamientos) are a nice example of a global alliance.

The city council of Genk decided to focus on a more sustainable city organisation from 2014. The sustainability officer was asked to work on a comprehensive interpretation of the sustainability concept. Firstly, he defined and discussed this concept with colleagues from various city departments, the management team and the board of mayor and deputy mayors. With the guidance of VITO, the transition started. A transition learning group was set up with colleagues from the departments for community development, participation, policy planning, sustainability and environment. A TRAKSIS information session was held for all project coordinators of the 60 horizontal projects in the Genk multiannual plan. Six project coordinators scanned their projects with TRAKSIS, a tool that supports cities in their transition to sustainability. Two master classes (about systems thinking and visioning) were organised for all city administration colleagues. At the end of 2015, the council took some time to reflect, learn some lessons and refine the focus of the learning process.

Secondly, the local government can encourage its citizens, organisations, employees, businesses, youth groups, schools, policy makers and retailers to become true global citizens. By informing them, raising awareness and encouraging them to act, a local council can ensure that they pursue international justice in their behaviour.

Finally, a local authority can also set up, support or encourage a global partnership project. The partners in this type of international cooperation (through town partnerships, collaboration between schools, local associations with activities in a developing region, ...) want to contribute to greater socioeconomic, ecological, cultural, political international justice.

The towns of Boechout, Edegem, Hove, Kontich and Mortsel organised an information session on sustainable development goals together. The participants were introduced to the 17 goals and immediately learned what their own local authority is doing already to achieve them. Farms supported by the local community contribute to sustainable agriculture (goal 2). Awards for the best cycling towns contribute to more sus-

tainable cities (goal 11). The integration of vulnerable groups contributes to an inclusive society (goal 16) and citizen projects, just like the town partnership between Edegem and San Jerónimo in Peru contribute to global partnership (goal 17). A panel discussion with experts including questions from the audience concluded this successful intermunicipal awareness event.

Connected by the 'global' deputy mayor, official and advisory board

A coherent municipal global policy is supported by a strong 'global' deputy mayor, official and advisory board. They ensure and guarantee that the municipality's 'global policy' is comprehensively embedded in the local authority. As a result, 'international justice' gradually becomes an integrated part of the local policy's development and the work of the local authority's departments and advisory boards. The 'global' deputy mayor, official and advisory board also act as connectors: they bring together stakeholders from different policy areas to contribute to international justice from each policy area perspective. For example, the 'global' deputy mayor, official and advisory board can connect their colleagues from the policy domains of agriculture, local economy, sustainability and health in order to develop a sustainable, local food strategy that contributes to realising objectives in all these policy domains.

A coherent municipal 'global policy' is supported by a strong 'global' deputy-mayor, official and advisory board. They bring together stakeholders from different policy areas to contribute to international justice from each policy area perspective.

In Hoogstraten the 'global' officials and sustainability official want to embed the sustainable development goals in their local government. Together they examined the current multiannual plan to look for activities that help achieve these goals. This shows that Hoogstraten is already doing a lot, but it is also investigating which further action the council can take.

Hoogstraten also wants to add something new to the town newsletter. It will systematically place the relevant sustainability development goal icon with each article and a brief explanation. This will familiarise the residents of Hoogstraten with the sustainable development goals and their icons. ■

Hoogstraten also wants to add something new to the town newsletter. It will systematically place the relevant sustainability development goal icon with each article and a brief explanation. This will familiarise the residents of Hoogstraten with the sustainable development goals and their icons. ■

Karlien Gorissen and Ashley Hennekam are part of the VVSG-International team

What progress local authorities have achieved?

Although the sustainable development goals are still new, many local authorities feel that their actions are already sustainable. The list of sustainable activities they present is indeed impressive. However, there are still people within the local authorities who are not that familiar with sustainability and how to get started with the sustainable development goals.

WORDS MARLIES VAN BOUWEL PICTURES STEFAN DEWICKERE

North-South official Bernard Dumoulin from Herent has noticed two tiers within city councils: 'One tier puts its North-South officials on an island where you can engage in some networking with the South and the other tier wants to open up the world and consistently adjust its policy accordingly.' In support of the latter, Bernard Dumoulin calls the sustainable development goals a godsend: 'Now we are no longer this section on our own as part of the Leisure department. Our area will become politically important and very policy-oriented. The sustain-

able development goals then bring this vision to the policy.' According to Dumoulin, Herent's sustainable development goals will focus mainly on the next policy period: 'We need to get started on time in order to include the vision in the next policy plan. The current political and management team did not know the subject matter, so it was barely included in the policy plan.' He sees it as his personal mission to raise enthusiasm for the sustainable development goals in other officials and politicians in order to include the goals in the policy and ensure they remain in focus.

That focus is already present in Herzele. The Herzele Constitution of 2006 had the concept of sustainability on page 1. 'It is part of four important pillars: the slogan says that Herzele must be sustainable and pleasant, vital and social.' The city manager, Daniel Adriaens already knew then that sustainability is not just an environmental issue, but also involves transport, education, social housing, quality services, zero tolerance for poverty, support to organic farming and a traffic calming plan: 'I like to see all these issued interconnected. In the same way that everything is affected by poli-



Municipalities can engage in hundreds of small activities to help reduce CO₂ emissions, such as making cycling a more attractive option.



tics, everything is affected by sustainability as well. How much we have already implemented? Well, quite a lot, I would say about three quarters. My best memories are of the initiatives that also made the municipality more beautiful. We planted standard fruit trees every few hundred meters along the municipality's border. Five hundred all together. It was

Katty Michielsen:

'For years, the same procedures were followed with the same methods and the same products, often from known suppliers. And then the specifications suddenly included a chapter on "sustainability".'

a way to create an "ecological ribbon" around Herzele, a green landmark as it were. Sooner or later someone will photograph this from the air, when all the fruit trees are in bloom and they are old enough to offer refuge to little owls. That was our time horizon: we planted trees that will be at their most magnificent in 50 years, a true multiannual plan!

The local authority of Schoten is not afraid of taking action either. Because marine animals are getting trapped or poisoned at sea, the municipality took action against the release of helium balloons. 'Our communication discussed animal protection, plastic soup as a global problem and the seabirds swallowing the balloons. The campaign received a lot of attention, also on the internet and the television news,' sustainability officer Katty Michielsen says.

More than award criteria

As the sustainability officer of Schoten, she sees hundreds of other small activities municipalities can engage in to help reduce CO2 emissions: "At the level of the local authority and its own house-keeping, but also at the level of the citizens, civil society and businesses. The local authority can develop and manage educational projects for the collective purchase of green power, photovoltaic cells and solar water heaters, for example. It can make things happen, such as providing local authority vehicles for

car sharing or it can offer funding. The creation of heating networks often involves consultation of a wide range of stakeholders, and the community is the perfect forum to push the boundaries to plan or implement action. It is also important that local authorities act very quickly in order to anticipate the effects of the CO2 that is already in the atmos-

phere. The effects of climate change will probably be experienced much faster than the implementation of a large-scale remedy.' Katty Michielsen feels this is part of her task as sustainability officer, but all departments must work towards the transition: 'This will often lead to resistance. For years, the same procedures were followed with the same methods and the same products, often from known suppliers. And then the specifications suddenly included a chapter on "sustainability". That is different from what we are used to and all change is difficult. It is important to take a multidisciplinary approach that provides a lot of information. Sometimes we need to fight existing myths and falsehoods. Beech

Tom Hofman:

'If you focus on costs, the quality will go down, but if you focus on quality, the costs will also go down.'

wood with an FSC label is identical to beech wood without the label, but its origins are different. And yet sometimes the quality is called into question.' There she sees an important role for the sustainability officer. 'It should be an automatic reflex of all those who write specifications. The aim is not to have all specifications written by sustainability officers, but in some difficult cases sustainability

officers can help reflect, write and negotiate.' Katty Michielsen feels that background information is very important in this respect. 'Buyers often deal with very dubious statements from their suppliers: "97 percent biodegradable" may sound great, but the toxins may just be in the other 3 percent.'

Social housing buyer Tom Hofman from Mechelen is aware of this: 'Award criteria are the touchstones of your bids. You always have to look for good value for money, but if you can allocate 30 points to the price and 70 points to the quality, your choice will be very different than if you were to allocate the points the other way round. You can also include other elements: you can allocate points to eco score, which is a transparent and objective measurement tool, a standard in the specifications of the vehicles. You can also use other technical requirements, such as fair trade for coffee and tea, FSC standards for wood or other labels. Sometimes they are lists of conditions companies must meet, but for certain conditions – such as clean clothes – you have to rely on the supplier's word of honour. Tom Hofman feels that causes a lot of tension: 'You constantly have to consider what is idealistic and what is realistic, what would be nice and what is feasible. As a good buyer you do not just consider the price, you also have a social role.' He quips: 'If you focus on costs, the quality will go down, but if you focus on quality, the costs will also go down.' Procurement often fails to receive the

attention it deserves, but in Belgium 15 percent of GDP comes from public procurement: "If all those buyers have the proper support, they can really make a difference,' Tom Hofman adds.

The social and ethical criteria are often forgotten. They are a difficult subject, but Tom Hofman has become very sensitive to them: "They are the core of social housing: to give people a bit of

support, to make sure you keep them on board.' In that sense, he sees opportunities to create some leverage. 'Some projects that we set aside for the social economy. We have only just done this

Bernard Dumoulin:

'You mustn't be afraid to rethink existing structures and processes. You have to be consistent in your policy.'

for wooden benches. We put them out there in the market all the same, but we set the social economy as a criterion. You can also set conditions or place different emphases for candidate companies. For example, we tell cleaning companies that they have to employ someone recruited through our departments, under Article 60 of the law on public social welfare centres. This is at least one person when up to 70,000 euros is awarded and for higher amounts there must be two.

The local administration in Mechelen is investing heavily in its bicycle fleet: 'Ordinary city bikes, electric bikes, folding bikes, cargo bikes, ... For maintenance we have set up a social economy project.'

He offers me a glass of sparkling tap water: 'The social housing department does not offer any bottled water anymore. This saved us 7,000 euros a year.' Moments later, he sighs thinking about the difference between dream and reality: 'One time, we had to order very sturdy tables for a project. We found some really nice ones at a social economy project, but they were extremely heavy. They were too heavy for the cleaners.'

Motivation

In Herent procurement is not centralised. Bernard Dumoulin selected and wrote to five people to convince them of the importance of sustainable procurement. Everyone is responsible when it comes to sustainability goals. As North-South officer, he finds out which colleagues are good partners and role models. The Culture department is such a partner: 'Herent will no longer organise festivals that are not sustainable in terms of

energy, drinks and waste. I want to support these motivated partners and motivate others. That is how I see my task in the near future. Particularly the next legislative period will be important. To

take things one step further, I want to include that framework and motivation in the next plan, but time is of the essence.' Bernard Dumoulin has great ambitions: 'You mustn't be afraid to rethink existing structures and processes. It is clear to us that we must join the two tiers. In Guatemala, the rights of our partners are being violated by the construction of a dam. We have to turn that into one story. Otherwise we will be inundated by

Daniel Adriaens:

'Sustainability now has a place as a new concept and in action programmes. However, it has not yet fully sunk in.'

those world stories. You have to be consistent in your policy.' For city manager Daniel Adriaens, the answer lies in the long-term strategic policy and management plan. 'We have made 104 action plans for 6 years, i.e. 312 weeks. We allow an average three weeks for each action plan. This time, the slogan is "For a healthy, caring, active Herzele". Being caring and being sustainable are closely related. Some of our achievements are that we have been recognised as a fair trade town, we offer homework assistance to children of disadvantaged backgrounds, we always serve beer from local breweries at receptions, we installed solar panels on the sports and cultural centre, we provide three free charging stations for electric vehicles, we monitor the energy consumption of the local authority buildings and street lights, we invest in new

cycle paths, we were voted the greatest sporting municipality in the province of East Flanders and the most energetic school, we have a North-South official and a municipal development cooperation advisory council and we are now also working on the Covenant of Mayors.' Adriaens sees things clearly: 'Sustainability now has a place as a new concept and in action programmes. However, it has not yet fully sunk in. The municipal decree only has one article that mentions the word "sustainability". This also applies to the Guidelines for Local Authority Organization Management, which merely mentions sustainability in the context of public procurement and energy. Sustainability occasionally comes knocking at the door of the boardroom to make an appearance, but we are not yet fully part of the show. Perhaps the turning point will only come when sustainability also brings economic and political advantages in the short term. Local authorities interested in produ-

cing wind power by cooperating with their citizens have understood that, for example. If sustainability is mainly characterized by an atmosphere of orders and prohibitions, it will always stumble on the fact that people are willing to think in the long term, but only truly feel things in the short term. Sustainability should be more about feelings and beauty; it should be more like a score than a set of rules and regulations.' ■

Marlies van Bouwel is the chief editor of Local

From survival to a better life

Sustainable development goal 1: end poverty



LOMMEL – CIUDAD DARÍO In 2015 local officials and politicians from Nicaragua, Guatemala and Flanders discussed the role of local government in the fight against poverty at a regional VVSG conference. At the end of the meeting, the Flemish, Guatemalan and Nicaraguan participants signed a joint poverty declaration 'From survival to a better life'. Poverty is complex. It not only concerns income, but also social exclusion in various areas of community life: education, housing, employment, health and leisure. Now, six months after the conference, Lommel and Ciudad Darío are implementing the principles in practice.

Ciudad Darío (Nicaragua)

Implement the national laws to end poverty.
 Raise awareness and offer support to sectors and associations fighting against poverty and helping poor people.
 Take own action to fight poverty in sectors with the highest socioeconomic needs.
 Draft directives to find solutions in the fight against poverty.
 Make room for the participation of various government institutions in the eradication of poverty.
 Promote gender equality and gender balance.

IN PRACTICE

Production voucher: for pets, improved seeds.
 A roof for everyone: allocation of zinc sheets to low-income families.
 Everyone has a voice: comprehensive care programme for people with disabilities.
 Homes for the people: construction of dignified housing for low-income families (as detected in the tax declaration).
 Legalisation of property: for families with an illegal residence.
 Centre for Child Development.
 Maternity Home: care for pregnant women.
 Vocational school for women: beauty, sewing, cooking.
 School kits for children from low-income families: backpack, notebooks, pencils, complete uniform.
 Meals (breakfast and lunch) at school for primary school children.
 Job creation: local government wants to develop strategies for generating employment.
 Crop diversification: provide rural families with the technical means to sow two or more crops simultaneously.
 Low interest loans with financial institutions and credit banks for producers and owners of small and medium enterprises.

Lommel

Pursue a proactive welfare policy to prevent poverty and social needs.
 Involve social workers, schools, organisations and the persons involved in the consultations.
 Housing, education and training and employment are important aspects that can improve the social situation of disadvantaged people and reduce poverty.
 The client is the central figure in social housing services.
 Continue to expand social services: budget management and guidance.
 Make sports, culture and leisure affordable and accessible to everyone.
 The vice mayor for poverty reduction screens the new urban initiatives using the poverty test.
 The political board of mayor and deputy mayors endorsed From survival to a better life on 9 February 2016.

IN PRACTICE

Raise awareness and provide information on entitlement to replacement income, adjusted rates or additional benefits, such as the heating oil premium.
 Organise consultation and coordinate action with local authority services, health care institutions, police, family doctors and community councils.
 Support institutions, organisations and initiatives.
 Launch own initiatives to integrate people with care needs: homework assistance, leisure activities for young mothers and their children, training course Let them shine for disadvantaged women and support to families.
 The international cooperation department of Lommel city presented the sustainable development goals as a foundation for the innovation and improvement of the city services. ■

Bert Janssens is a senior policy advisor of the VVSG international team

The declaration on the fight against poverty *From survival to a better life* is available on www.vvsg.be, International



ANTWERPEN 27-05-2016

GLOBAL GOALS
LOCAL FOCUS