

Local is not that local anymore

VNG International, the international co-operation agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities, offers municipalities support in fulfilling their role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. “How is it done?”. That is the leading question in a series of articles that aim to inspire other local governments associations in Europe in their efforts to contribute to the SDGs. This 1# article features the set-up of VNG International’s Municipal Global Goals Campaign.

Shortly after the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals by the United Nations in September 2015, VNG International started the Municipal Global Goals Campaign to inform local governments in the Netherlands on the content of SDGs and to encourage them to take their responsibilities in realizing the Goals. Key to the Campaign is the firm link between implementation at the local level and the international dimensions of the SDGs. This is caused by the strong international relations that exist between continents and countries and the interdependency that characterizes the world nowadays. Local is not that local anymore. Therefore, local action can (help) influence international targets and international developments effect local town hall decisions (see box for examples).



The current world’s dependence becomes clear in many ways, for example in the refugee crisis. The war in Syria, suppression in Eritrea, poverty... the all cause numbers of refugee that enter Europe. At the very local level solutions has to be found to house them and to take them in the local society. Besides, seemingly simple actions like purchase of goods by local authorities have a wide international dimension since raw materials and products come from all over the world. What are the social aspects in producing the materials or goods? What is the environmental impact, also of the transport of the materials and goods?

It goes without saying that local governments play a key role in achieving the SDGs. “All of the SDGs have targets that are directly or indirectly related to the daily work of local and regional governments”, as it is stated in the UCLG publication ‘SDGs What Local Governments Need to Know’. However, apart from the notion that some of the SDGs are much closer to daily local politics than others, there is another important opinion. The attainment of the SDGs requires the involvement of all, national and local governments, international and local business, smaller and bigger non-governmental organizations; in fact the contribution of every individual human being is needed. Local governments cannot do it on their own. As a consequence, they will have to look for effective

collaboration with others at the local, national and international level. Specifically for the local level, collaboration is needed with inhabitants, small enterprises, non-governmental organizations, local social institutions, local initiatives, etcetera.

In short, local governments have a role to play in reaching the SDGs, and they have to take part in or to initiate coalitions with other local players to be effective. Taking this into account, the objective and target groups for the Municipal Global Goals Campaign was designed.

Objective

The objective of the Campaign is to encourage Dutch municipalities to address feasible contributions to the achievement of one or more of the SDGs.

Such a contribution may take shape in four ways, by:

1. Raising awareness of the SDGs among the inhabitants of the municipality;
2. Using the SDGs as a framework for all municipal policies;
3. Exchanging knowledge and experiences with municipalities in other countries, also to learn from peers in other countries and to improve existing policies and plans;
4. Supporting activities or projects abroad that contribute to the attainment of the SDGs, which can be achieved both through an international network or partnership or as a standalone endeavour or 'one off' activity.

Target groups

Target groups of the Campaign consist of mayors, alderman, councillors and officials of local governments active in the field of sustainability and development. However, the Campaign goes beyond the city hall. It aims to engage also constituents, local civil society organisations, schools, SME, and so on. The Global Goals campaign will support municipalities to create an enabling environment for a broader audience in order to engage them to the SDG's.

At the start 165 Dutch municipalities were linked to the informal SDG network already; nevertheless with the activities and communication all of the 390 municipalities that currently exist in the Netherlands are targeted.

Roles taken up by VNG International

In the Campaign VNG International fits a role which will consist of informing, exchanging, advising, and encouraging.

- *Informing* on the Global Goals, the international dimensions and what Dutch municipalities themselves can contribute to realizing the goals;
- *Facilitating exchange* by forming and expanding the network of municipalities and facilitating interaction within the network and beyond;
- *Encouraging* and stimulating activities in municipalities that contribute to the SDGs;
- *Advising* to support the translation of global agendas to the own local context and capabilities.

The findings mentioned before determine the operationalization of VNG International's Municipal Global Goals Campaign. It targets local governments and constantly pursues cooperation with other players. To give some examples. VNG International worked closely with Kaleidos Research to get insight in the state of knowledge on the SDGs within Dutch local governments. (Conclusion: the readiness to act on the SDGs is much higher within local governments compared to non-governmental organizations and business.). VNG International takes part in het Wold Best News Campaign, implemented by a large coalition of non-governmental organizations in the Netherlands which distributes positive news. For example, it emphasizes the fact that significant progress has been made with the MDGs. Moreover, VNG International takes part in the Human Cities Coalition, pioneered by multinationals AkzoNobel, Arcadis and the university-based Institute for Housing and Urban Development Studies; this coalition focusses on SDG 11 specifically. VNG International contributes in the establishment of a national information campaign and website on the SDGs in the Netherlands, in a coalition together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, amongst many other partners.