

# Mienskip in Myanmar

On a cloudy Monday morning in early September, a colourful group, consisting of four foreign delegations, roams the streets of Leeuwarden. They come from Colombia, Myanmar, Benin and Ghana and are participating in the DEALS programme (see box). VNG International and the municipality of Leeuwarden offer them a tour through the Frisian capital. Interested and sometimes amazed the delegation members – young and old, male and female – explore the area. Some of them have never left their country before. Their first reactions prompt practical questions about the things they observe. 'Do the elderly in Holland ride bikes as well?' 'What's this container for?' 'Do you use another kind of asphalt for your bicycle paths than for your roads?'



## WHAT IS DEALS?

Inclusive sustainable urban development in developing countries is such a complex matter that it can only be dealt with by working in close cooperation with other partners. That's the basic idea behind DEALS. It's a multi-stakeholder programme: not only does it target local governments, but companies, CSOs, other governments and particularly citizens in the partner countries are also expected to join in. The target cities are Beira in Mozambique, Kumasi in Ghana, Patheingyi in Myanmar, Pereira in Colombia, Sèmè-Podji in Benin, Jakarta in Indonesia and Manila in the Philippines.

Each city develops a tailored programme, based on local priorities. The interests of people who earn less than 1.25 dollar a day come first. VNG-I and several Dutch municipalities support the cities. The ultimate deal will be an agreement signed by all stakeholders that aims to solve an urgent problem and achieve an 'attractive aspiration'. Moreover, the deal is innovative, sets an (inter)national example and will generate tangible results. Solutions must be sustainable, receive broad support and tackle the underlying causes of the deal's main challenge. DEALS started on 1 September 2017 and will end in August 2022. The next step in the programme consists of a visit by Dutch delegations to the partner cities in October. Apart from VNG-I and Dutch municipalities the programme is supported by the Dutch Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations. It is financed by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The budget is around 5 million euros.

**Mayor Ferd Crone** gives the delegations a warm welcome in the town hall and introduces them to another new phenomenon: [mienskip](#). It's a genuine Frisian concept meaning '[sense of community](#)'. In their bid to be European Capital of Culture, Leeuwarden and Friesland described [mienskip](#) as an action-driven, bottom-up organised form of solidarity and added the word 'iepen' (open), to emphasise the importance of participation. The mayor shows the delegations a short film in which people from all over the world pronounce the word [mienskip](#) and try to figure out its meaning. Some of the things they come up with include '[making things better together](#)', '[thinking the same way](#)', '[having the same mindset](#)' and '[genuine partnership between people](#)'. A young Frenchman says his individualistic country could use a bit of [mienskip](#).

For the delegations, [mienskip](#) is a relevant notion as the deals they are going to make will need broad support.

Mayor Crone informs them that the Frisian bid to become European Capital of Culture was successful: Leeuwarden won (together with Valetta, Malta), which makes the city the epicentre of thousands of cultural events. A delegation member from Myanmar, who has just walked through almost empty streets, asks the mayor with some concern: 'Will you get any visitors? I didn't see anybody out on the streets.' He's not aware that just two weeks earlier the giant puppets of Royal de Luxe attracted more than 400,000 spectators.

In the Blokhuispoort, a former jail, the delegations are informed in greater detail about the European Capital of Culture Leeuwarden – LF18, for short. The idea behind the European Capital of Culture is that successful cooperation in Europe will only succeed if citizens get to know each other's cultures. Each year, two European cities are given the opportunity to showcase their cultural richness. The briefing on LF18 takes place in a very small and hot room, filled with the chattering of the French, Spanish and Burmese interpreters. The recent economic crisis was in fact a community crisis, says Oeds Westerhof, director of network & legacy at LF18. That's why '[iepen mienskip](#)' was chosen as the central theme. Everybody in Friesland was invited to share what he or she felt were the most important issues in the province. This generated about 50,000 ideas. The general approach by LF18 was not to ask citizens '[what do you need from us?](#)' but rather '[what is your plan?](#)' It resulted in a total of 45,000 events. 'We made the programme with the citizens, not for them,' Westerhof says. The Frisians have signed up in numbers to help implement the programme. More than 60,000 people, 10 per cent of the population, are involved, the vast majority as volunteers.

'LF18 is a chance to reinvent ourselves', Westerhof tells the delegations. 'We take culture as a starting point, because culture drives change.' There was a strong need for change in Friesland, as the province suffers from high unemployment rates, a low average income and the negative impact of intensive dairy farming, among other things. Leeuwarden and Friesland are using LF18 to spark a process of change, aimed at a sustainable future, keeping people in the province, creating jobs, reducing poverty and stimulating biodiversity. To achieve that, art and culture are used together with social experiments and scientific support. Westerhof gives an example: the water technology institute Wetsus tested the mist fountain – a piece of art and part of LF18 – near the railway station to ensure it doesn't spread any diseases.

LF18 welcomes diversity. Some 350,000 people speak Frisian; LF18 sees this as 'a beautiful resource', not as a problem. Bilingualism among newcomers is also applauded. 'Research shows that bilingual people are more tolerant and suffer less from dementia', Westerhof explains.

The delegations are interested in how LF18 is governed and financed. Westerhof points out that it is managed by an independent CSO, with a staff of about 40 people. To avoid possible political influence, politicians and civil servants cannot join the board. LF18's independency is at the root of its success, Jurjen van der Weg of the Leeuwarden municipality adds later on. The budget of 70 million euros is provided by the EU and regional and local governments; 5 million of it comes from sponsors. The board has to report every three months, and board members are personally responsible for any deficits.

A guided tour through the former jail sparks curiosity and amusement among the foreign delegations. Some of the former cells are now home to small companies such as barbershops, while others can be booked as a hotel room. Standing in a one-person cell, a member of the Beninese delegation explains that in his country a similar space would contain between ten and fifteen prisoners.

In the afternoon, Immie Jonkman, creative producer of LF18, refines the concept of LF18. She explains that the programme consists of two sections. The main section includes about 60 bigger projects, such as the visit of the Royal de Luxe giants. The iepen mienskip programme, which is regarded as the 'heart' of LF18, encompasses some 400 smaller events such as local theatre plays. The programming is done bottom-up: 'We don't drop an artist into a neighbourhood. Rather, we ask the neighbourhood to generate an idea and then invite an artist to help them realise it. Our role is to give practical, organisational and financial support.'

The lessons learned so far according to Jonkman are:

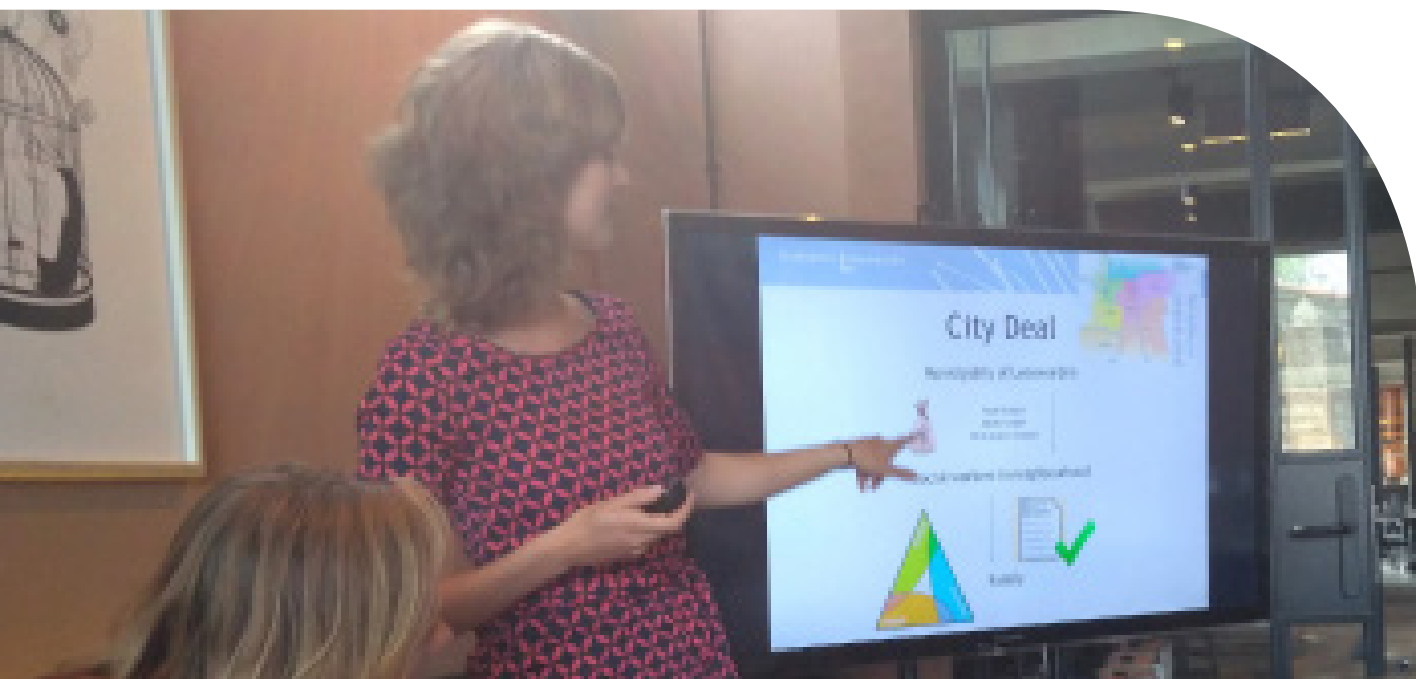
- Take all input seriously; some ideas may be artistically poor but socially valuable;
- Set a clear focal point in time
- Provide future support
- Get the government involved
- Be honest: don't pretend you know all the answers

## PRODUCTS OF IEPEN MIENSKIP

Following are some of the initiatives created and/or supported by Frisians in the context of LF18:

- Kening fan 'e Greide (Frisian for 'King of the Meadows'): concerts and civil initiatives aimed at increasing awareness of the importance of biodiversity Nederland;
- Crocheting the biggest blanket in the world (it will be donated – in parts – to homeless people and refugees);
- 'Lost in the greenhouse', a theatre play about a Frisian-Polish love affair;
- Iepen Doar(p) (Frisian for 'open door/open village'): audiovisual portraits of all 128 households in the community of Feanwâldsterwâl

LF18 has a number of ancillary goals, including luring back Frisians who left the province and reducing the number of children living beneath the poverty line. The foreign delegations are keen to know more about the results of the programme. Although the final evaluation will take place in February 2019, Jonkman is aware that some people have indeed returned to Friesland. Moreover, LF18 has changed the inhabitants' mindset, she says. 'The traditional blues heard here ran something like this: Leeuwarden was nothing, is nothing and will never become anything. I haven't heard anyone sing that song for a while.'



## A SOCIAL EXPERIMENT IN LEEUWARDEN

In pursuit of being an inclusive city, Leeuwarden has set up a social experiment in its neighbourhood Oud Oost. Since 2015, as part of a process of decentralisation, Dutch municipalities have been responsible for youth care, social work and participation. Their mandate and budget to perform this role comes from the national government. The municipality of Leeuwarden decided to ignore the traditional boundaries between these three domains and instead let the social workers handle the budget, concentrating on families as a whole. This generated creative solutions: a woman reintegrating into the labour market, who found work in a remote place, was given money to buy a car, for example. This wouldn't have been possible under the former rules. The solution saved the municipality money, as otherwise it would have needed to spend a huge amount on social benefits. In one and a half years' time this experiment showed that:

- 37 cases of youth care, social work and participation cost 200,000 euros where normally 400,000 euros would have been spent;
- the social workers were able to provide more customised care;
- clients and social workers were highly satisfied with this new way of working;

Members of the DEALS delegation showed interest in applying this approach at home. Marloes Schreurs of the municipality of Leeuwarden said this would be 'a nice experiment'.

## Water Technology

Leeuwarden's signposts carry a caption that reads 'Capital of Water Technology'. The Frisian capital is home of the WaterCampus, 'the meeting point of the Dutch water technology sector', which hosts the academic research centre Wetsus and an incubation centre for new business ideas. The campus combines fundamental research, applied science and the marketing of technologies. The WaterCampus is an example of the 'Dutch Diamond': a model in which government, the private sector and knowledge institutions, often complemented by CSOs, work closely together.

Water is also a major theme in most of the DEALS cities: Pathein, Sèmè-Podji, Kumasi, Jakarta and Manila regularly suffer from floods, and all participating cities struggle with problems related to drinking water and waste water. Therefore, a big part of the afternoon programme is dedicated to water.

Director Hein Molenkamp receives the delegations at the WaterCampus, appropriately housed in the John the Baptist Church. He talks about the 'ecosystem', in which companies, governments and knowledge institutes jointly collaborate and innovate. At the campus new concepts are born, such as robots that inspect pipelines or clean ship hulls. Other examples are smart nozzles that make it possible to clean using extremely small amounts of water and sensors that detect bacteria in a jiffy. The WaterCampus also supports experiments with domestic decentralised sanitation, using rain and greywater to save drinking water. The members of the delegations are clearly interested in these initiatives, but some of their questions reveal the considerable differences between

their countries with their specific needs and the Netherlands. 'How do you deliver and clean water in the Netherlands?' asks one of the foreign visitors. Molenkamp explains that this is a basic service in the Netherlands, provided by drinking water companies and water boards, not by the WaterCampus.

Molenkamp focuses on cooperation with the private sector, which prompts DEALS programme manager Irene Oostveen, bearing in mind the nature of the delegations, to intervene: 'Can you elaborate a bit on the role of governments?' Apart from being funders, they act as launching customers, Molenkamp replies. A Colombian delegation member wants to know whether a Dutch company could solve his town's sanitation problems for a reasonable price. Molenkamp replies it would be best to collaborate with a local company, because of the price difference. He also feels it's indispensable for users to co-finance, which requires legislation. 'But maybe a lease construction based on a modest investment and co-financing by users would do the trick.' Another difference between the Dutch reality and that of the delegation members comes to light when a delegation member asks if the WaterCampus develops autonomous drinking water and sanitation installations. 'This is not a particularly urgent issue for us, because the national system in the Netherlands functions well,' Molenkamp replies.

In the evening, the four delegations enjoy dinner together. The rather strict separation between the four delegations then starts to dissolve. Members of different delegations take selfies together and join each other at the different tables, while the mayors of Pereira and Sèmè-Podji have a long informal chat.





## OTHER TYPES OF CITY DEALS

### City Deals

The Dutch City Deals aim to strengthen innovation, well-being and growth on the basis of agreements between cities, the national government, the private sector and CSOs. They tackle issues such as climate mitigation, security and inclusiveness. The deals have generated a variety of results so far, including digitising homes, speeding up renovations in inner cities and establishing local food policies. At the moment nine Dutch cities are participating. There is not much money involved; knowledge sharing is the key.

### Urban Agenda for the EU

The Urban Agenda of the European Union aims to bring the EU closer to its citizens and to empower cities. It contributes to SDG Goal 11: 'make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable'. The Urban Agenda is an informal and voluntary programme, with a multi-level character (cities, member states and the EU). Better regulation, better funding and better knowledge are key objectives. 85 cities and 20 stakeholders, such as European organisations of tenants and cyclists, are participating in the programme.

# Public Conference

On Tuesday, the delegations pay working visits to various Dutch municipalities. On Wednesday their visit to the Netherlands ends with a public conference in the VNG building in The Hague. [Irene Oostveen](#) opens the meeting by showing a brand-new VNG clip on the governance of inclusive green growth in cities. A growing number of people are living in cities (50 per cent now, 70 per cent in 2050). The old sectoral approach doesn't solve the challenges cities are facing now. Real people's real problems should be the starting point of the solution. Public and private actors should articulate a shared ambition. The result is a city deal: a signed agreement that contains shared goals and is based on a sustainable partnership. It generates long-lasting results that combine growth, innovation and a better quality of life.

[Suzanne Potjer](#) of Urban Futures Studio at Utrecht University talks about cities experimenting. This can take on a physical form, such as allowing citizens to build circular houses, as is the case in the Buiksloterham neighbourhood of Amsterdam. It can also be a method, such as the City Deals (see box) or the act of establishing sustainable partnerships. To systemise experiments, it is necessary to combine the two forms of experimenting. Potjer, who calls herself an 'action researcher', raises the question of whether experimenting automatically means learning. The answer is no: you have to actively organise learning. It has a horizontal dimension, where ideas are exchanged with people on the same level, and a vertical dimension, in which there is interaction with people on other levels. Learning starts when people are actively using experiences generated by experiments. It is not only a cognitive matter. You also need imagination. And it helps to make things tangible, for instance by using role-plays or visiting a given location.

## Her conclusions:

- Systemise experimentation
- Actively organise learning
- Use experience and imagination as a source of learning
- **Ideas are very important, but more important is building the system, brick by brick**

After her contribution, the floor is open to representatives of the foreign delegations. [The mayor of Pereira \(Colombia\), Juan Pablo Gallo](#), tells the audience his city is relatively young, 125 years old, but is growing rapidly. Pereira is located in heart of the coffee zone. After having depended almost exclusively on coffee, the economy has now diversified. The city has gone through difficult times: since the 1990s there have been two earthquakes, coffee prices have dropped and there was an influx of migrants related to armed conflict in the country. Recent developments are positive. Pereira has an unemployment rate of only 8.3% and relatively little inequality. Concerning governance innovation, Gallo sees three potentially conflicting themes: what the people want, what the people need and what the authorities want. But it's possible to combine the three, he says. Gallo gives an example: the inhabitants of Pereira wanted more roads. What they in fact needed, he says, was better access. The municipality's solution was better public transport, with an electric cable car, among other things, which helps to reduce CO2-emissions.

The visit to the Netherlands generated various ideas, the mayor of Pereira says. 'We know where we want to go and there's still a lot to be done, but we have seen interesting examples and identified small actions that will enable us to take small steps forward.'

[U Kyaw Myint, minister of development affairs of the Ayeyarwady region](#), in which Patheis is situated, points out that his coastal city in the south of Myanmar suffers from climate change. Every year the city is hit by floods. Storms cause many casualties and destroy houses and crops. He wishes to follow the Dutch example of defending itself against water.



Charles Kwasi Adjei, planning officer of Kumasi (Ghana), calls Kumasi 'the city where Ghana happens'. It is a vibrant market town, former capital of the Ashanti Kingdom. Including its nine suburbs, the city's population exceeds 2 million. Sanitation is a big problem. Kumasi produces 500 tons of waste a day. 300 tons come from the city centre, where the central market is located. Around 10 per cent of the waste is not collected. Kumasi also suffers from flooding. Migrants from the north of Ghana settle in the expanding slums. In the past, almost all of the trees were cut down, but the municipality recently started planting new ones. Problems are now tackled together within the greater Kumasi region. Kwasi Adjei says he experienced the visit to the Netherlands as 'powerful'. LF18's bottom-up strategy caught his attention, as well as Almere's upcycling system. He believes it's essential to collaborate with the private sector.

A member of the audience wants to know how the foreign cities are dealing with the energy transition. The mayor of Pereira says mobility is the most important source of contamination in his town, since it lacks major industries. The municipality motivates people to walk or use a bike. To reduce car transport, there is a system in place that only allows people to use their cars on certain days, depending on the licence plate number. Electric cars are welcome every day. Having said that, only five of Pereira's 180,000 cars are electric. Nowadays, cycling accounts for 2 per cent of all transport. 'But it was 0.5 per cent when I started', the mayor concludes.

U Kyaw Myint explains that the number of vehicles in Myanmar is growing and that this needs government intervention. 'The problem is that the former military government did what they liked. Now our government is half military and half civilian. So we need to figure out how to tackle this issue, but one of the problems is that 40 per cent of our budget goes to the army.' He is especially inspired by the bikes and windmills in the Netherlands, he adds.

Another member of the audience asks about the main obstacles for inclusive green growth. The mayor of Pereira answers that most people expect changes to come from the government, for example regarding waste. 'But we can't provide effective solutions when the people themselves do not contribute, for example by separating their waste. Transformation is only possible when the people are involved.'

Charles Kwasi Adjei of Kumasi has noticed that Ghanaians are especially keen on having new infrastructure. 'They will not fully support you if you focus more on the soft sides.' The Myanmar representative believes the government has to initiate the action. 'But I believe that people will join then. It takes time, but people will come.'



The next question is related to disaster prevention. Do the foreign cities have strategies for tackling disasters? The mayor of Pereira points out that his city has a special disaster office, which has mapped out the city's weak points. 'We have learned from the two earthquakes and adapted our infrastructure accordingly.' In Kumasi a major problem is the outbreak of fires in the marketplace. The city's solution was to build a new marketplace. The city also suffers from flooding, caused by illegal building on waterways; better enforcement of rules and regulations is the answer to that problem.

Consultant Maita van der Mark says that political transformation requires personal transformation as well. 'Sometimes you as a person need to take the lead.'

The mayor of Pereira confirms this. 'I try to be an example. Mayors in Colombia usually transport themselves in blinded cars. I go by bike, giving the right example: I don't cross the road where it is not allowed.'

In Kumasi, the mayor gathers feedback from committee members on a monthly basis, Charles Kwasi Adjei says. 'It's helping us. It's expensive but worth it.' The Myanmar minister thinks things will only get better once the government, which he still considers weak in his country, generates better services.

The conference ends with a second VNG clip. It stresses that many issues are interconnected. When problems are treated separately, solutions might have a negative impact on other problems. That's why VNG International advocates taking an integrated government approach, in which the social and the economic are interconnected. Knowledge exchange is key. It's important to locate the root of the problem and get people involved, especially people you usually don't work with. Learn from one other, trust each other, the clip concludes. 'Get out there and make things work!'



# A seed has been planted

Looking back on three full and exciting days, programme manager Irene Oostveen appears satisfied, although she has had some sleepless nights. Not all the results of visits like this are immediately visible, she says. 'The real conversations don't take place within the official programme, and there is no need to witness them, but I know they have taken place.'

She slightly regrets that there was no official opportunity for interaction between the delegations. 'On the other hand, people from different countries did get a chance to meet and exchange ideas informally, especially during the dinner. As a result of that, the mayor of Pereira said he would have loved doing the Tuesday programme together with the Sèmè-Podji delegation.'

The most valuable aspect of the visit, in her view, was the opportunity to 'brainwash' all the participants with the concept of inclusive green growth. 'But that's a long process, one that never stops. And people will always be tempted to do a stand-alone waste project instead of an integral approach. But a seed has been planted, I'm sure of that.'

## THREE FINAL QUESTIONS TO JUAN PABLO GALLO, MAYOR OF PREREIRA (COLOMBIA)

### What major new insight are you taking away from here?

'That we have to make a pilot plan to separate waste at the source. Our visit to the Netherlands showed us that it can work.'

### What's the first thing you're going to tackle at home?

'Raise the consciousness of the population and educate them with respect to this. We would like to show people that waste separation is advantageous, because it makes it possible to lower collection tariffs.'

### Was there anything in the programme you didn't like or need?

'No, everything was okay.'

## THREE FINAL QUESTIONS TO CHARLES KWASI ADJEI, PLANNING OFFICER OF KUMASI (GHANA)

### What major new insight are you taking away from here?

'That participation pays off. Leeuwarden became the European Capital of Culture because of its bottom-up approach and because it actively involved the population. Ghana is more top-down oriented, but I think this model can be exported to my country.'

### What's the first thing you're going to tackle at home?

'Talk with our technical university and the private sector about upcycling. Almere showed how the municipality, knowledge institutes and the private sector can successfully work together in upcycling.'

### Was there anything in the programme you didn't like or need?

'I would have liked to see more examples of city deals in the Netherlands. We only learned about the one in Leeuwarden.'

## THREE FINAL QUESTIONS TO U KYAW MYINT, MINISTER OF DEVELOPMENT AFFAIRS OF THE AYEYARWADY REGION (MYANMAR)

### What major new insight are you taking away from here?

'That it's possible to collect, separate and reuse waste and keep a city clean.'

### What's the first thing you're going to tackle at home?

'Share ideas with the population about waste collection and sewage systems.'

### Was there anything in the programme you didn't like or need?

'It would have been nice to receive more detailed information about waste separation. The part on poverty reduction, including a visit to a Voedselbank, was not so relevant for us as we haven't reached that point yet.'



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