

# Towards better futures for all

For gender sensitive local governance





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Imagine a town, with its houses and its town hall. It's a normal enough town: men, women and children live here, men and women work, and life runs its course. But only men work in the municipality - at least in all the decision-making positions. And in these decisions, the voice of women is not reflected. This is not the result of some ill-intent, but it has always been that way. The main problem in this scenario is obvious though: a municipality should represent its citizens, and should respond to the needs and requirements of its citizens. All of them - men and women alike.

We aim to achieve our core mission **"Building better futures"** by strengthening democratic and inclusive local governance. We take this mission seriously and intend to **take everyone on board**: "better futures" includes perspectives in which inequalities are reduced – meaning inequalities between social groups, races, ethnic and religious minorities and between genders.

## **Strong local governments are effective and democratically accountable:**

- To be effective, their service delivery has to be inclusive and accessible to all to be of quality;
- To be accountable, they must account to all their citizens for their actions, without discrimination of gender or other category.

## **Local government (representatives) can only be truly inclusive and participatory if all men and women can participate.**

And if all men and women are able to participate in public affairs, they are able **to shape their own futures**. Gender should naturally become integrated in all the fields of expertise and intervention of local governments. We believe that VNG International can make a difference by helping the actors who know their context the best to foster gender equal and sustainable futures for all individuals alike: local governments and other actors on the local level such as civil society organisations.

VNG International has the ambition to be an inclusive and committed organisation **answering global challenges with local action**: working in a gender sensitive manner leads to more efficient actions as well as to more sustainability. As a matter of fact, men and women (and those in-between) are very often affected differently by problems VNG International is aiming to tackle (conflicts, migration, economic inequality, bad governance etc.). A gender sensitive approach is therefore needed in order for the local government to give an appropriate response and provide good service for all.

For example, in times of conflict, rates of homicide and other forms of violent crime increase significantly. While men are more likely to be killed on the battlefield, women are disproportionately subjected to sexual violence, singled out for abduction, tortured and forced to leave their homes. Targeted killings, rape and other forms of violence against women are often used as weapons of war. Women are suffering differently from conflict situations. Gender norms that associate “being a man” with domination and aggression, can fuel conflict and violence. Military and political actors also deliberately use and manipulate such ideals to build support for conflict and to recruit men into armed groups. Influencing social norms in a positive way is therefore a crucial way out of the vicious circle of conflict. Moreover, the participation of women in governance and peace processes has proven to be effective and to lead to more sustainable results. Even if that wasn’t the case, one can argue, if it doesn’t work the way we have been doing things, why don’t we try something else?



Therefore, we incorporate gender as a cross-sectional theme within our 5 fields of expertise:



## Effective public administration

Trigger change to ensure equal access and opportunities for women and men to lead governing institutions. We do this by ensuring that gender does not restrict access to active participation to public life and leadership in decision-making positions.



## Inclusive decision making

Support partners in lobby and advocacy efforts to accelerate policy transformation towards gender equality, include both women and men in electoral processes and ensure gender does not block their representation in governance institutions.



## Sustainable and resilient cities and communities

Strengthen the role women and men can have as agents of change: both women and men are affected by disasters and climate change, and both can meaningfully contribute to solutions and/or adaptation.



## Access to basic services

Provide local governments with tools, advice and support in capacities building for them to reduce gender inequalities in policy design and local services supply.

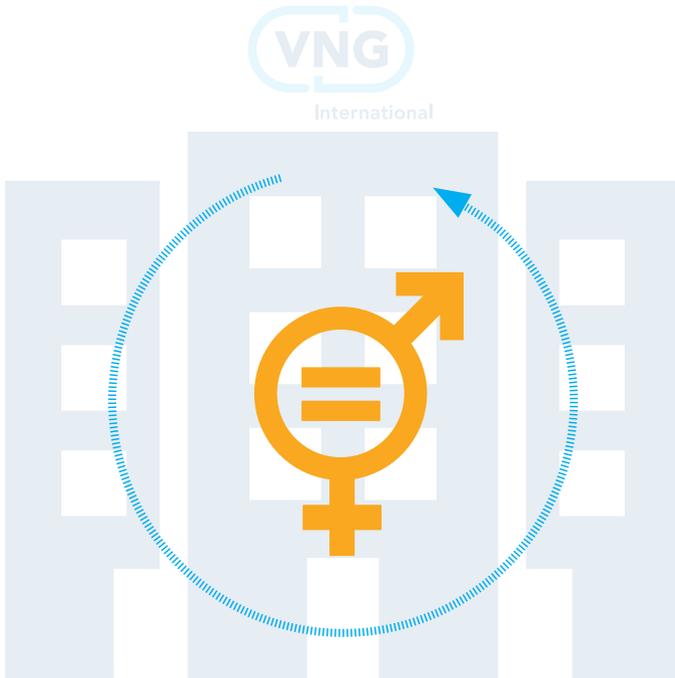


## Dealing with conflict fragility and migration

Promote contributions of women and girls alongside that of men and boys in conflict prevention, peacebuilding and conflict recovery. Women's needs, voices and representation must be re-evaluated and better used as key resources.

Understanding the context and the complexity of the **gender and power** relations in our target areas is crucial to **“do no harm”** but also critical for the efficiency of our interventions. Moreover, gender relations are crucial to understanding opportunities and obstacles. **Gender sensitive programming, implementation, monitoring and evaluation are the corner stones of a good intervention.**

In order to mainstream gender within our organisation and our projects, we integrate gender equality as a crosscutting objective within organisational processes: from human resources, to bid-plans and implementation of activities in the field. The everyday working practices and the culture within the organisation are increasingly gender-aware and sensitive to create real changes.





# Building Better Futures

by strengthening democratic local government

VNG International is an expert in strengthening democratic local government in developing and transitional countries. Local governments play a key role in the provision of basic services such as water, waste management, health care and housing. They have profound impact on areas like safety, food security, rule of law, and women's rights. Our projects contribute sustainably to better futures for people, communities and countries.

VNG International runs over sixty projects worldwide, funded by various donors including the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the European Union and the World Bank. We are embedded in the Dutch local government sector and we have an extensive international network of experts in the fields of decentralisation and local administration at our disposal.

In 1993 VNG International was founded by Vereniging Nederlandse Gemeenten (VNG), the Association of Netherlands Municipalities. Globally we are represented through our daughter company in Tunis, as well as over 15 local project offices.

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