



Photo: Gjal't Loots



Photo: Mathilde Miedema



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Farmers in rural Zambia to gain from the benefits from an internet link.

Flying Innovation Team helps multiply mango production.

TNO commmits to development coop

SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE ENTREPRENEURSHIP

In 2000 the United Nations drew up eight millennium development targets to which 189 countries subscribed. TNO is part of the Dutch contribution, making twenty professionals available each year for innovative development projects that vary from optimising biogas plants to clearing cluster mines. The enthusiasm is enormous.

For the sake of clarity: TNO is not an NGO but a knowledge company with social impact. 'We are now extending that impact to developing countries, making our knowledge and experience available for emergency aid, the battle against poverty and sustainable economic development,' Mathilde Miedema, programme manager explains. 'Development work tends not to be so geared to innovation. Our knowledge could help alter this current practice.' And TNO is firmly behind this. Miedema: 'Over two years TNO will be making 1.2 million euros available each year to help solve issues faced by developing countries.'

In this respect, TNO is working intensively with four development organisations: the inter-church organisation for development cooperation ICCO, the Refugee Foundation, LinkNet Zambia and the School Food project in Ghana. 'These organisations let us know what the issues are,' Miedema says. 'And they offer us a good local infrastructure for setting up and carrying out projects. TNO complements by generating innovative ideas that we elaborate together in a couple of short working visits. We coach the

project from a distance, secure the result and then leave. The local organisations then take the results further.'

Flying Innovation Team

The initiative was born during a TNO brainstorming session, and at the beginning of 2006 Miedema and her colleague, Ellen van Son, got the green light to set up a social business plan. 'We had a look beforehand at the approach, topics and partners that would best suit us. The plan was approved and in 2007 we got started on the TNO Development Cooperation programme,' she says. 'We set up around ten projects a year, led by people from TNO.'

The TNO colleagues form the heart of the plan. At least 140 TNO people offered to be project leaders. 'We looked for people that were creative, entrepreneurial and flexible as well as very capable of managing a project. We also wanted our core areas to be represented since this is a TNO-wide initiative.' The Flying Innovation Team (FIT) of 20 people has already undergone safety training, an ethics workshop and training in system innovation. They have also been on a



Cooking gas from cow dung in India – boosting efficiency and sustainability.



Photo: Mathilde Miedema

The science of TNO helps the local population to divine clean water.



Photos: Anton Kaalsjager

Solar parabola to help solve heating and electricity need in refugee camps.

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study trip to India led by Share People in order to become familiar with the practical side of living and working in a developing country.

Thirteen projects

Thirteen projects are already up and running. Miedema: 'Our study trip to India generated five projects. Optimising biogas installations in the south of India is one, and we are looking at which regions offer possibilities for clean energy. A soil improvement project has to result in better agricultural yield for the outcastes and a water and sanitation project is providing insight into the best spot to drill new wells.'

A completely different project centres on social relationships; a development organisation is trying to become more aware of the outcastes through a variety of activities. TNO is gauging the extent to which this has been achieved.

In Zambia and India TNO is involved in the rollout and utilisation of internet. In Nepal TNO is looking at how solar parabola can be used to generate electricity. Miedema: 'We are also developing a method to colour cotton naturally rather than using chemicals, which will produce

a significant environmental benefit. And for a refugee camp in Uganda we are developing a dipstick that enables the population to determine cheaply and rapidly whether drinking water is polluted or not.'

In Lebanon TNO research ways of detecting cluster munitions in trees. TNO also wants to work with the pharmaceutical industry on quickly stopping bleeding after childbirth and thus reduce the mortality rate of mothers. In Ghana TNO is providing innovation in pineapple production and handtools for farmers.

Also good for TNO

TNO is focusing on projects where existing knowledge is going into sustainable application in the context of developing countries. Miedema: 'This context is often very complex in view of the cultural, economic and political factors. Helping regions and countries get a step further, exactly in this complexity, is a script that could have been written for TNO. We have many specialists under one roof and can really contribute something.'

The initiative is also doing something for TNO: the TNO people themselves are very enthusiastic,

the projects are good for image and they have a positive effect on recruitment. 'In addition, it offers us new insights and solutions that we can also use elsewhere,' says Miedema. The first patent applications and spin-off projects are on their way.

After two years there is an evaluation. 'We are happy if our four partners are happy, the FIT team is enthusiastic and we have had a real impact on fighting poverty and on boosting sustainable economic development,' Miedema concludes. If these conditions are fulfilled, TNO is likely to extend the project.

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