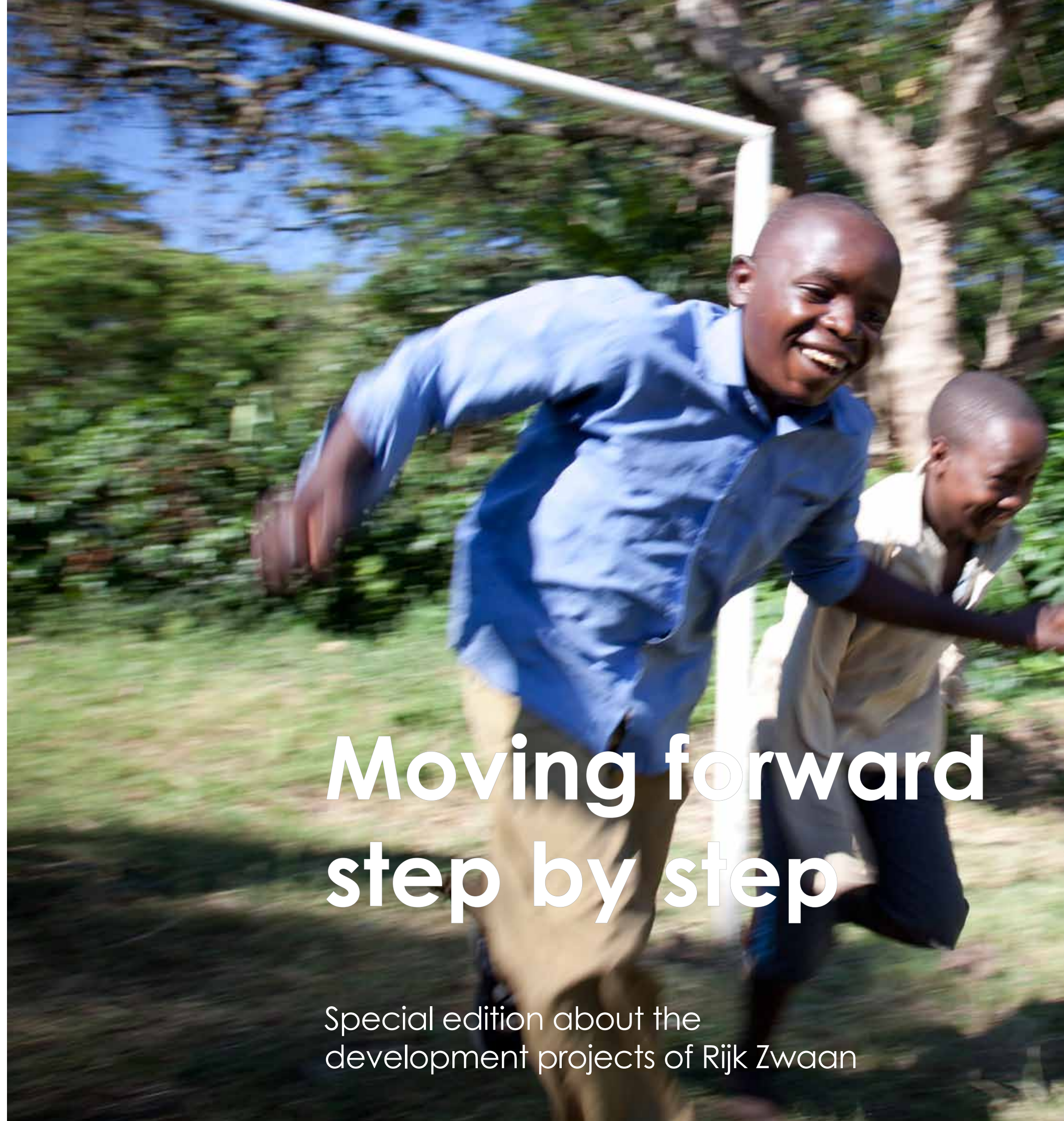




Prof.dr.ir. Rudy Rabbinge, professor emeritus of sustainable development and food security at Wageningen University, The Netherlands

"Breeding companies play a crucial role in solving the global food problem. I personally am convinced that there is enough farmland to feed the entire world. The solution lies in helping farmers to get the most out of their land. Therefore, I commend Rijk Zwaan for sharing knowledge in developing countries."



Moving forward step by step

Special edition about the
development projects of Rijk Zwaan

Content

3

Foreword:
Involvement

18

'United by a passion
for offering people a
better life'

4

Members Committee
for Development
Cooperation

22

Pooling strengths in
The Netherlands to
help farmers in Kenya

6

'The biggest challenge
is trying to change the
mentality'

26

'Western vegetables
are the best medicine'

10

Towards
independence

28

Minor effort,
major impact

14

Samrong orphanage
enables children to
enjoy vegetables

30

'Growing with Rijk
Zwaan'

Involvement

When Rijk Zwaan celebrated its 75th anniversary in 1999, we decided to mark this special occasion by making a donation to charity. That decision was a real eye-opener, and ultimately led to us setting up the 'Committee for Development Cooperation'.

After discussions with Oxfam Novib, we selected a development project in Nicaragua as our good cause. I subsequently visited this project myself in 2001, in combination with other existing projects in Chile, Bolivia and Guatemala. It was a real expedition: back then, Rijk Zwaan had very few commercial activities in South America. Upon my return to The Netherlands, I and the rest of the executive board decided to set up a foundation: we wanted to share our knowledge of vegetable growing with people in developing regions.

ment as being extremely important – not only the direct involvement of committee members in projects, so that we can see and evaluate the results with our own eyes, but also the involvement of all Rijk Zwaan's employees. It is essential that everyone supports our goals and our values, which is why we've published this one-off edition of *Moving towards independence*. We wish you happy reading!

Maarten Zwaan
December 2012

Now, 12 years later, there are various Rijk Zwaan development projects up and running on three different continents. And even more importantly: we have already successfully concluded the first of them. The fact that we've really been able to achieve something is reason enough for us to carry on in the same vein. Even though we've since become more active in those regions, and have sales representatives in countries such as Chile and Guatemala, we keep the committee's work separate from Rijk Zwaan's business activities.

We continue to regard involve-

Members of the Committee for Development Cooperation

Heleen Bos
Development Projects

Heleen spent many years working on various development projects before she arrived at Rijk Zwaan. She has a coordinating role on the committee, and she is also involved with Rijk Zwaan Afrisem. "I find development work very inspiring because I can see with my own eyes just how much progress is being made whenever I visit. The grower Claro in Guatemala, for instance, told me how much a simple greenhouse had improved his and his family's lives. I can still see his face, smiling from ear to ear!"



Gerard Hulisz
Area Manager

The committee benefits from Gerard's extensive experience within RZ Export when sharing technical know-how with growers. "I really appreciate the direct link with what Rijk Zwaan is good at. Growing healthy vegetables enables people to generate an income for themselves, either directly or indirectly. I often find myself thinking back to the official opening of the vegetable greenhouse at Samrong, Cambodia. There was a real party atmosphere with lots of dancing, and each child was given a bottle of lemonade."



Kees van Maaswaal
Implementation Phytopathology

Before joining Rijk Zwaan, Kees spent 13 years as an aid worker in West Africa. "That experience has enabled me to foresee the consequences of certain actions, and advise on future strategic direction. The project in Guatemala is a good example: growers receive first education, then are helped to set up a greenhouse, and the support continues into their subsequent activities. Hence, the project has 'a top and a tail'."



Anton Schins
External member

Anton is very familiar with the Latin American language and culture and has over 20 years of experience in development projects in the region. "In all my years, I have rarely come across an organisation which is not only prepared to make long-term financial commitments but also puts the actual needs of the aid recipients first. And all that in combination with a structural budget allocation. Aprodes in Peru is just one of the projects where this has clearly paid off."



Michiel Tamminga
External member

Michiel has more than 10 years of experience on small-scale development projects, especially in Peru. "What I find so important about the Committee for Development Cooperation is that it gives people the opportunity to let their talents flourish and to build a better future for themselves. It was a wonderful milestone when Aprodes indicated it wanted to – and was able to – pay Rijk Zwaan the regular trade price for pepper seed."



Although the project in Cuzco, Peru, is still relatively new, a clear future vision is already in place. While the current focus is on improving dietary patterns, there are also commercial opportunities. "The ultimate goal is to supply vegetables to local hotels."

The seed for the Cuzco project was sown in 2007 when Michiel Tamminga visited the region at the invitation of Peruvian organisation Aprodes. On his return to The Netherlands, he discussed his findings with the Committee for Development Cooperation: "Thanks to its high elevation, the area is ideal for growing vegetables although little of that is currently being done. The main problems are a lack of the right varieties and a lack of technical know-how. The farmers tend to stick to growing beans and potatoes because that's what their parents did." The committee agreed to help Aprodes set up a demo field in Cuzco. This represented the second development cooperation between the two organisations, since Rijk Zwaan was already cooperating with the Aprodes foundation on a project in Chanchamayo (see page 9).

Train de trainer

In Cuzco, Aprodes had to start from square one. "We helped to construct a greenhouse and created a test field and just tried things out: what will grow here?" recalls Michiel. "At an elevation of almost 4,000 metres, the climate is harsh. Because it wasn't about promoting Rijk Zwaan seeds, we also trialled seeds from other seed suppliers." The next step was to involve the local population by creating allotments. The idea was to allow people to practice the cultivation techniques on a small scale first. Because the distance made it impossible to support the project intensively, it was based on the 'train the trainer' principle right from the start. "There are some experienced seed engineers in Peru, of course, but it wasn't financially feasible to employ them on a project like that 24/7," says Anton Schins, who also visited the country several times.

Instead, the decision was made to arrange for an engineer, currently Pedro Otero, to visit once a month. Rijk Zwaan pays his travelling expenses and contributes to his salary. For the day-to-day running of the project, Hernán Flórez Valencia was recruited: he provides training in the demo field, visits growers – on the condition that they also attend the courses – and makes a note of any questions which he can't answer himself. "Hernán carries a digital camera around with him everywhere he goes so that when Pedro visits again, he can answer all the questions in one go – or sooner even, via the internet."

Gradual process

Thanks to this approach, the growers' knowledge levels have improved dramatically over the past two years. Rijk Zwaan has shared its knowledge of crop rotation and plant hygiene, for example. "But sometimes it can be a matter of small, practical issues such as a drip irrigation hose which is placed too far away from the plants," explains Michiel. The use of high-quality varieties such as those from Rijk Zwaan also boosts the quality of the harvest, although that often demands considerable patience. Anton: "With the new seeds, they're suddenly seeing germination percentages of nearly 100% – that's totally new for them! And so they're finding it difficult to understand that a handful of seeds can have a financial value. This demonstrates that the mentality has to change; it's a gradual process. Our training courses teach them to use seed sparingly, but sometimes it's good for a harvest to fail. That way they realise that you still have to work to make it a success, even with the better varieties."

Year-round quality

There are still no major horticultural companies to speak of in and around Cuzco; instead, the region features mainly small family businesses who grow vegetables for themselves and their families. Nevertheless, there is an interesting opportunity on the horizon: Cuzco is a key tourist hub with plenty of hotels catering to Western tourists who want top-quality vegetables. These are currently shipped in by road, in trucks which often have to drive for some 20 hours, but they may soon be coming from local growers. "Aprodes has already approached a couple of restaurant owners, and they were very enthusiastic about the local produce," says Anton. "However, we want to delay this development for another two years. To be a really good supplier, you need to be able to deliver year-round quality; you can't disappoint customers by saying 'No'. First stability, then profit. That's the right way forward." •

Due to Cuzco's high location it is perfect for vegetable cultivation.

'The biggest challenge is trying to change the mentality'





First Rijk Zwaan development project still a shining example

Peru was the country where the Committee for Development Cooperation launched its first ever project back in 2002. Anton and Michiel had worked on a student project in Peru a year earlier, and had come into contact with the Aprodes foundation, based in Chanchamayo, which coordinated various development projects there. Since he knew Ben Tax well, Anton established contact with Rijk Zwaan, and that turned out to be the start of what is now called the Committee for Development Cooperation. "Just like in Cuzco, we set up the Chanchamayo project based on the 'train the trainer' principle," explains Michiel. "In Chanchamayo, the focus was on growing peppers in greenhouses. After a tricky start, we decided to focus our investment in the trainer Renato Gambarino Pino. In 2008 he spent a couple of months working at RZ Iberica which enabled him to gain a lot of valuable knowledge. We regularly benefit from both the technical expertise and the Spanish language ability of our employees at RZ Iberica. They help us to provide advice on a day-to-day basis – South Americans obviously find it easier to ask questions in their own language." After Renato had completed his placement at RZ Iberica, Rijk Zwaan was gradually able to reduce its level of support. The sale of the crops harvested from the greenhouse now pays for the seeds and the training, including Renato's salary. "The greenhouse in Chanchamayo has become completely self-financing, and hence still represents a shining example for other projects. And they've recently added an extra greenhouse, without any form of subsidy from us!" says Michiel.

One of the longest running development projects is Rijk Zwaan's support of FUDI, a Guatemalan NGO in Chimaltenango. There, a professional horticultural college is slowly but surely changing the local approach to growing vegetables – from purely for survival to a stable source of income.

Traditionally, the simple family businesses in the Comalapa region have focused on crops such as maize and beans. As well as being a healthy addition, salad vegetables – because they are so scarce – present an opportunity to generate income, explains Heleen Bos. "The climate offers reasonable conditions for vegetable growing: there are occasional periods of heavy rain, but the area has a high elevation and lots of sunlight. The main problem is the lack of knowledge. Some farmers have tried growing tomatoes in the open field, but usually without much success due to diseases. Water is also an issue. There is water available, but wells have to be dug and pumps are needed to use water from the rivers."

Help with selling

"The horticultural college in Guatemala is run by Rene Moralis, a Guatemalan employed by FUDI, and comprises a school building, 4 greenhouses of 1,000 m² and a plot of land for growing open field crops. Osvin Ryuan organises the cultivation activities and a further 2 people work in administration. Our colleagues from Rijk Zwaan Guatemala regularly provide additional growing advice and technical support," says Heleen proudly. Training courses run from March to November: an entire growing season. A few years ago, hundreds of leaflets were handed out in a drive to recruit potential students; nowadays, the course – which has a maximum capacity of 50 students per year – tends to fill up quickly. "Farmers attend classes one day a week and are charged a small fee so that they feel a sense of responsibility for their results. Most of the classes take a hands-on approach. Theoretical knowledge is

reinforced by practical lessons in techniques such as pruning and trussing so that the farmers are learning while doing."

Former students can rent space in one of three greenhouses. This offers the perfect step up, since they can use their earnings from produce grown in the rental greenhouse to invest in constructing their own; eight out of ten farmers who have completed the course end up owning their own greenhouse! They also receive help with selling their products, explains Heleen. "To this end, we also utilise the network of RZ Guatemala. In addition to being sold at local markets, products are increasingly finding their way to wholesalers too. We hope to see cooperatives being formed in the future, which by packaging their produce collectively will be able to supply to supermarkets!"

Self-sufficient

Although selling to supermarkets may still be a long way off, the Committee for Development Cooperation is gradually moving into the background in Guatemala. "We still help growers to obtain microcredit, for example," comments Heleen, who travelled through the region for that very same purpose late last year. "I visited various financial institutions with the aim of facilitating contact between them and the growers. But some growers don't even need that kind of help: they're already doing it themselves." Even the horticultural school is gradually becoming self-sufficient as it increasingly generates its own revenue. It rents out three of its four greenhouses, and sells produce harvested from the fourth greenhouse for cash. Rijk Zwaan will start to reduce its financial support from

now on, and FUDI has absolutely no problem with that decision. Heleen: "The FUDI development project is moving ever closer to its ultimate goal, namely that we become surplus to requirements" •

Heleen Bos visiting one of the growers in Guatemala.



Towards independence

'Faith in the future'

Last year, Claro Perén had a new greenhouse built in Comalapa, a village situated half an hour's drive from the college. He got the idea when he saw that one of his neighbours had one. Even though he'd never seen a greenhouse before, he immediately spotted a source of income for his family of 9 children.

How did you find the training?

"I learnt a tremendous amount: growing in a greenhouse turned out to be completely different from growing open field crops! Immediately after completing the course, I arranged for a greenhouse to be built so I could grow 500 m² of tomatoes. I paid for the wood, the mulch and the labour myself and I took out a loan to pay for the plastic and the irrigation hose. I have every faith that I'll be able to pay off my loan within 2 years!"

How has the first phase gone?

"The greenhouse protects the crops well against storms and hail, and I've also had fewer problems with insects. In short, I've got a much better chance of a good harvest! I sell most of my products at the local market here in the village, but I'll sometimes travel to another village too. Thanks to my new earnings, I've been able to renovate my house and I can offer my family a better way of life."

What do you expect of the future?

"I expect that the future can only get even better, because I'm still learning new things every day. Luckily, Osvin still visits regularly. He advises me on the use of fertilisers and I can always call him if I have any problems that I can't solve on my own. Maybe I'll start growing cucumbers in the future. But for now, I'd just like to say a big thanks to everyone at Rijk Zwaan for all their support. It's changed my life!"





Samrong orphanage enables children to enjoy vegetables

Cambodia is one of the poorest countries in Southeast Asia. The Khmer Rouge regime has left many families in poverty and countless children orphaned. The Samrong 'children's learning farm' provides some of these children with a safe and educational home surrounded by animals, plants and vegetables. Rijk Zwaan has been supporting this project since 2006.

Samrong was founded in 2002 by Dutchman Sjef Philipsen who had met his future wife in Cambodia and fallen in love with both her and the country. After working on a few individual projects, in 2002 he bought a piece of land on which he constructed an orphanage, enlisting the help of paediatrician Dr Vyrak to run it soon afterwards. "Sjef contacted Rijk Zwaan about six years ago," recalls Gerard Hulisz. "He was a warm and friendly person, and full of enthusiasm for the vegetable garden that had been created at Samrong. He asked whether Rijk Zwaan would be willing to sponsor the seeds for it, and the Committee for Development Cooperation agreed to the idea. Although Rijk Zwaan had no other activities in Cambodia, I promised to stop by next time I was in the area."

Step forwards

When Gerard paid his first ever visit to Cambodia six months later, he soon realised that the country was not exactly an horticulturist's dream. "The orphanage is situated on low-lying tropical land, which means that extremely hot and dry periods are alternated with periods of heavy rain. Plants were protected by nothing more than some makeshift shadow netting, and it was pretty obvious that a greenhouse would be better." Upon his return to The Netherlands, Gerard discussed the situation with the committee which led to contact with Wim Damsteeg, Rijk Zwaan's distributor in Thailand. "We all agreed that building a greenhouse would be a huge step forwards. After all, if plants stay dry they are less susceptible to fungal diseases. We prepared a proposal and submitted it to the Dutch embassy in Bangkok.

Together, we financed a 12,000 dollar greenhouse comprising 900 m². Thanks to this, in combination with Samrong's 2,500 m² of garden, they can grow all kinds of vegetables – including peppers, chilli peppers, cabbages and various typically Asian leafy crops – much more efficiently and to a better standard of quality."

Attracting attention

From The Netherlands, Samrong is managed by the World Wide Children Farms foundation. The executive board pays its own travel expenses, and the rest of Samrong is run entirely by volunteers. The farm receives financial support from various main sponsors, one of which is Rijk Zwaan. Projects such as Samrong also attract attention from Rijk Zwaan's suppliers, customers and other partners, who regularly indicate that they would also like to contribute in some way. In that case, Rijk Zwaan works closely with them to identify the most suitable and concrete way of providing aid. The companies who were involved in realising Rijk Zwaan's De Vesting were happy to support the greenhouse project in Cambodia, for example: at the opening in 2009, they presented a cheque for 6,000 euro. Meanwhile, to mark the 15th anniversary of providing cleaning services for Rijk Zwaan's facilities in De Lier, Maasland Schoonmaakdiensten donated a cheque for 1,500 euro to Samrong which was spent on repairing the greenhouse roof, among other things.

New head gardener

The committee's involvement did not end with the completion of the new greenhouse. In fact, Rijk Zwaan has been one of the official sponsors of the orphanage since 2008 (see box) and pays the salary of the head gardener and an assistant. There is also a budget for artificial fertiliser and pesticides, and for replacing the plastic on the greenhouse every so often. "Huge progress was made in the early stages, but then the first problems started to emerge. Plant diseases and silted water caused harvests to fail, for example," explains Gerard, who now tries to visit the orphanage at least twice a year. "A drip irrigation system and raising the beds improved the situation, and East West Seeds have now become involved in the project too. They have varieties specifically developed for tropical conditions." It is important for him to have regular contact with the orphanage in between his visits, even if the language barrier does make it difficult sometimes. "Luckily there are also some English-speaking volunteers with an agricultural background at Samrong. E-mail contact with them helps me to stay up to date on the latest progress and influence the growing process if necessary."

Preparation for the future

Managing such a project remotely can be quite challenging, admits Gerard, but he sees clear results with his own eyes each time he visits. "In a country where predominantly rice is cultivated, vegetables have a tremendously positive effect on health. Furthermore, this project gives the orphanage's children something meaningful to do. In peak periods,

the whole group helps out on activities such as sowing and harvesting. And after a harvest, they are visibly proud of what they've achieved, plus they're learning something too." They will be able to put their know-how to good use in later life: many Cambodian families have their own subsistence farms. The aim is to offer children support until they leave school, and Samrong helps them to prepare for the future in other ways too. "Samrong often hosts volunteers from the Western world who teach the children English or provide computer training, for instance. Combined with their knowledge about growing vegetables, this gives them a better chance of a brighter future after leaving Samrong." •

Gerard Hulisz shares his knowledge with the head gardener of Samrong.



At first glance, Rijk Zwaan's support for the Sibusiso Foundation might appear to be a little odd. After all, this Tanzanian children's shelter has no direct link with vegetable growing. And yet the foundation is a very good fit with the values of the Committee for Development Cooperation for a number of reasons. Anton van Doornmalen explains why.

The Sibusiso Foundation was set up in May 2000 by Henk and Atty Hammer. Having spent many years working in war zones and refugee camps, they were keen to offer support to the most vulnerable members of society. This led them to start a project for mentally handicapped children in Tanzania, who have few possibilities to further develop their already limited capacities – partly because Tanzanian culture regards a handicap as a symbol of God's punishment. The foundation aims to break through the taboo around disabilities and to improve social acceptance of mentally handicapped children in Tanzania. Sibusiso assesses which capacities each child has, what they like to do and how their capacities can best be developed.

Good neighbours

The foundation's facilities in Tanzania include housing, therapy rooms, a small school and a community centre. Various Dutch companies have bases in the region, including Rijk Zwaan, which first opened production company RZ Q-Sem there in 2006 and later breeding company RZ Afrisem. "There was a clear personal 'click' with the people from Sibusiso right from the start," says Anton van Doornmalen. "Not least because of their passion for what they do: we could really identify with that. We have become very good neighbours who help each other however we can. Our technicians help them with minor repairs, for example, and we work together on safety issues." As well as Anton, other Rijk Zwaan colleagues paid regular visits to the country too and they were all suitably impressed by the Sibusiso centre. "The facilities are very professional and they enlist the services of

true specialists in various areas."

The Committee for Development Cooperation also became enthused by Sibusiso's work, so much so that it has since become one of its 'core projects'. "Part of the tragedy for these children and their families is that they have nowhere to turn," says Anton. "They can't go to a doctor or hospital because their insurance won't cover it. Sibusiso is their only option." Looking ahead to the longer term, the foundation will probably remain largely dependent on donations. Although this project differs from all other Rijk Zwaan development projects, in which self-sufficiency is the ultimate goal, the activities are still a good fit with Rijk Zwaan. "Sibusiso really takes a long-term approach. Children spend 3 to 6 months in the centre, but therapists continue to visit them at home for many years afterwards. Furthermore, all therapy is conducted in the presence of the children's parents, so that they too can learn what the exercises entail and can eventually perform the therapy themselves," continues Anton.

Improving lives

Just as with other projects, though, the committee does not simply 'throw' money at Sibusiso. Instead, the goal is to provide aid specifically and sustainably. For instance, a few years ago the company donated a large pick-up truck which is used for making home visits and taking children home to their villages at the weekend. Production specialist Frans van de Sande and Kees Reinink both attended the handover of the truck. Anton: "You'll often see that: other colleagues within Rijk Zwaan feel very involved in Sibusiso's work

too. Kees Reinink's wife once spent a day with a therapist doing home visits, for example. She was able to see for herself how Sibusiso's work really improves the lives of the families concerned."

One day, Rijk Zwaan might even be able to contribute to the project by supplying vegetable seeds: Sibusiso already has a children's kitchen, for instance. This not only encourages children to become more self-sufficient, but it also helps them to develop their fine motor skills, hand-eye coordination and intellect. In addition, all children taking part in the 'practical skills' programme have their own vegetable patch in Sibusiso's garden. "The idea is that the children learn how to help on the family's allotment so that they can contribute to the household's earnings. All vegetables purchased by Sibusiso are sourced from mothers of handicapped children so that they have a source of income for their families."

Growing demand

Anton has visited Sibusiso at least five times, often accompanied by his wife Riekje. On his most recent visit, he picked up a guitar and started playing some songs for a group of children and their mothers. "When I sang the Dutch song 'De uil zat in de olmen', everyone joined in, clapping and singing. The 'koekoek, koekoek' part of the song obviously has universal appeal. It was a wonderful experience. The language barrier can make it difficult to conduct proper conversations, but the proud looks on the mothers' faces speak volumes." Anton has gone a step further, also raising funds for the foundation outside of his work



'United by a passion for offering people a better life'



with Rijk Zwaan: he donates all proceeds from his musical performances directly to Sibusiso. "An average day's wage there is only 1 or 2 euro. What is a small amount to us can go a long way there. If you're planning to make a donation to charity and you're still looking for a worthwhile cause, you can be sure that any donations to Sibusiso will make a real difference."

Perhaps the strongest evidence of this is the growing demand for therapy. Anton: "In the early days, Sibusiso headed into the villages to offer help. When they were asked whether they had a handicapped child, locals would be too ashamed to admit it. Nowadays, more and more families are overcoming their sense of shame. They have seen what is possible and are increasingly volunteering their children for therapy." •

At Sibusiso much attention is given to the development of fine motorial skills.

Rijk Zwaan supplies seeds and horticultural expertise while Rabobank offers a network and financial acumen. Their common objective: to give underprivileged groups of people the chance of a better life. Read on to discover the ingredients for a new development project in Kenya.

"The best-kept secret of Rabobank," is how Wim Smit, regional manager of Rabobank Westland, jokingly refers to the Rabo Foundation. Wim explains that all local Rabobank branches donate a percentage of their profits to the foundation every year. "This is used to support an average of 208 projects per year, both in The Netherlands and in developing countries. Lots of good things are being done, but unfortunately we're not so good at telling people about them!" As a way of increasing the involvement from members and employees alike, Wim asked the foundation if he could adopt a specific project on behalf of the Westland region. "I'm in no doubt that Rabo Foundation funds are well spent. But it's not just about the money; just like Rijk Zwaan, we're keen to gain commitment too. And to do that, it's important to be able to monitor the effects of our investment."

Close to home

Wim already has first-hand knowledge of development work's success factors because he has been a passionate volunteer for many years – ever since he became involved in setting up a children's village in Haiti around 10 years ago. "While I saw some terrible things there, that also motivated me to do something to help those people," says Wim. "When searching for our 'own' project for Rabobank Westland, I had three criteria: a stable country, a link to horticulture, and collaboration with a local company. And with Rijk Zwaan, we ended up with a partner very close to home!"

Better yield

In fact, Rijk Zwaan was already in contact with Maina Mwangi in

Kenya, who had a long-standing dream of setting up a training centre. And his dream is soon to become reality: farmers based in the region of Thika, in the south of the country, will receive training and support in constructing greenhouses and growing vegetables. Backed up by Rijk Zwaan, Maina and his Kenyan colleagues will share their knowledge so that growers will eventually be able to generate a much better yield with their seeds.

Structural solution

Achieving big results with just a small amount – that's the idea behind microcredit. It gives small-scale entrepreneurs, who are often unable to obtain loans from traditional banks due to a lack of collateral or regular income, the chance to build their businesses. The Day for Change foundation was established in 2006 to educate people about microcredit, and the ISW secondary school in the Dutch city of 's Gravenzande took part in spring 2012. Groups of students were given microcredit and the task of setting up a small company. They generated a total of 6,000 euro, which was subsequently donated to Maina. Notably the winner, chosen by a jury comprising Rabo Westland and Rijk Zwaan, was not the group which had made the most money but rather the students with the most structural solution. They were clearly focused on the future – just like in Kenya.

Maina Mwangi's (on the right) dream will soon come true.



Pooling strengths in The Netherlands to help farmers in Kenya

Infected by Rijk Zwaan's and Maina's enthusiasm for the project, Rabobank Westland decided to lend its support too. After all, the bank can add value in a very specific way: "Uniting companies and people – that's our strength!" states Wim. "Plus, while we know exactly how to get a company off to a strong start financially, we also know that a particular mentality is needed. If something breaks in our country, for example, our first reaction is to try to repair it. Not so in Africa; there, items are simply thrown away or abandoned in a corner somewhere. We're happy to do our bit to change that mentality."

Responsibility

In addition to providing expertise and access to its network of contacts, Rabobank Westland has committed to giving a percentage of its profits to the project for three years. Wim: "Some of this is a donation, but part of it is as microcredit (see box). That way, the Kenyan growers have the responsibility to repay the borrowed money, which in turn makes them much more likely to succeed." Thanks in part to the contributions from both Rijk Zwaan and Rabobank

Westland, the regional manager is convinced that the training centre will be a success. "And the Kenyans themselves are raring to go; they will soon be better able to meet their own food requirements."

New ideas

Wim emphasises that 'Maina' is not a project that can be supported for just one year. "The only way to make a real difference is through a sustainable approach. Furthermore, the project has made us realise that we should do much more with our knowledge. We're now planning to organise a food conference in 2013, because the situation in Africa is worsening all the time. We can't solve Africa's food crisis on our own, but by working together with others we can at least do something to help." •

Wim Smit of Rabobank Westland.



RZ Afrisem serves as an example

Rijk Zwaan has been active in East Africa for some time now. The first exploratory steps were taken between 2005 and 2007 within the framework of the Tanzanian Vegetable Seed Program (TVSP). Existing vegetable varieties were tested for their suitability for African conditions, and local farmers received initial training on a small scale. The initiative later evolved into RZ Afrisem, which was set up in 2008 with the primary long-term aim of providing the African market with as many specially developed 'hybrid' varieties as possible. These varieties – which have a much higher yield than the traditional 'true' varieties – not only produce more food for the local population but also offer farmers a better chance of a good income. A key priority is improved disease resistance which in turn leads to healthier crops, less use of pesticides and hence lower costs. RZ Afrisem is a fully fledged subsidiary of Rijk Zwaan, and does not report to the Committee for Development Cooperation. However, there are of course clear areas of overlap, and RZ Afrisem can definitely serve as a good example for the Kenyan project in the future.



Since Henk van Lenteren's mother was related to the mother of Kees Verkade, one of the initiators of the Stichting De Zaaier, the bond between De Zaaier foundation and Rijk Zwaan goes way back, and remains strong to this day. "We share a common aim of helping people, and see the same opportunities to do so."

Kees Verkade first developed a passion for the African continent in the 1970s. Inspired by the work of the American organisation Double Harvest, he and fellow horticulturist Teun Boekestijn decided to start a project in Zaire. This evolved into a foundation in 1986 and has since grown to comprise 9 people. The organisation typically works intensively

and on a small scale with local people and organisations. Kees: "We invest our own money in visiting the projects a couple of times per year to monitor, support and stimulate the activities."

Central hub

Over the years, De Zaaier has regularly been shipping freight containers

to the country, which is now called Congo. The containers hold not only agricultural auxiliary items such as seeds and greenhouse equipment but also medicines. "De Zaaier also offers aid to hospitals, for example," says Kees. "The main advantage for us is that we can benefit from their existing administrations. Plus, hospitals are often a central hub for an

entire region, which can help to spread the word. It is De Zaaier's aim to share as much knowledge and expertise as possible with the local population so that they are better able to take care of themselves and their families in the future."

New vegetables

Food naturally plays a key role in

this set-up; that's how De Zaaier, via Maarten Zwaan, came into contact with Rijk Zwaan's Committee for Development Cooperation. And the two organisations have been meeting face to face at least once a year ever since. "The African diet is far from varied. The challenge is to break through the monotony of the staple foods by introducing new

vegetables. Not everything is a success; beetroot proved to be difficult to grow, for instance, but cabbage thrives there. A local doctor even said that Western vegetables were the best medicine they could have," recalls Kees. It is important that this knowledge is conveyed well, which is why De Zaaier works with several 'head offices' in Congo which are run by Congolese people in order to guarantee continuity. These offices offer advice, hold seminars and sell seeds. While the seeds are often subsidised by Rijk Zwaan, they are not handed out to growers for free. "They need to feel a sense of responsibility for their results, and that works best when you make a small charge for the seeds," explains Kees.

Positive contribution

Kees handed over the chairman's reins of De Zaaier to Piet van der Ende at the beginning of 2012. Kees is honest about the prospects for 'his' Congo: due to continuing civil war, the future doesn't look good. Nevertheless, he remains convinced that farming in particular can make a positive contribution. "It forms the basis for any economy. Even if all that people have is a couple of surplus kilos of tomatoes, they can sell them at the roadside. With each small amount of cash they earn, they can take a few more steps towards improving their lives, such as by buying clothes or a house." Rijk Zwaan Afrisem could also represent a boost to the region, Kees believes: "Not only in the long term through the development of varieties specifically for Africa, but it also opens up short-term opportunities. It would be fantastic if our Congolese engineers could spend some time working at Rijk Zwaan in Tanzania, for example!"

'Western vegetables are the best medicine'

Kees Verkade (bottom left) on a visit to Congo.

Most Committee for Development Cooperation projects demand a lot of time and energy; progress can be slow, and it can often be a case of taking two steps forward and one step back. Not so with the Zuurbekom initiative in South Africa, however. Instead, with the support of distributor Javelin Seeds, a successful commercial project was up and running in no time.

In reality, it is not entirely fair to compare this with other Committee for Development Cooperation projects, since the Zuurbekom farm initiative actually began with substantial investment from the local government. Around five years ago, some 30 tunnel greenhouses were constructed there, specifically for the black community in this region to the south of Johannesburg. What started out with good intentions soon began to flounder, explains Richard Bamberger from Javelin Seeds: "People received insufficient technical advice and support, and the project's future had not been properly thought through. There was no money available for repairs, for example, and little consideration had been given to the long-term sales plan. As a result, the tunnel greenhouses soon stood empty again." The Committee for Development Cooperation heard about the situation from Marcus Burnett from Rijk Zwaan Export, and agreed with him that the Zuurbekom project could and should be rejuvenated as quickly but inexpensively as possible.

Repairs

Javelin Seeds also saw potential in Zuurbekom, both in terms of doing something for the local community and of generating new, long-term business opportunities. The company discussed its ideas with the committee and it was agreed that the tunnel greenhouses, which by that time had been reduced to little more than their shells, would be repaired. One of the greenhouses was designated as the demo greenhouse for providing knowledge and training to local farmers, who in this case were predominantly women over the age of 60; within the black community,

that is the group that is traditionally the most involved with agriculture. "I began by arranging group sessions to explain all about growing tomatoes, from start to finish," says Richard. "The key thing was to gain their trust. We weren't sure whether they would see the benefits of investing in the higher-priced seeds from Rijk Zwaan, for example." To provide an extra incentive, Rijk Zwaan and Javelin Seeds jointly decided to offer seeds at a discounted rate, and in addition arranged for them to be grown into seedlings for free by plant nursery Multiplant. "However, we only offered the discount for a limited period. We never saw this as a charity project – that's not the way to build a sustainable future," continues Richard.

Supermarkets

Thanks not least to Richard's dedication, new life has been breathed into the Zuurbekom project. Not only that, but its continuity is now guaranteed. In addition to the tomatoes being sold at the roadside, which is the traditional sales channel in the region, they also find their way into supermarkets. "As a result of this initiative's success, the government supported the construction of a certified packing station. The products are now packed and shipped jointly, sometimes even to retail chains such as Spar," comments Richard. Nowadays, he has come to regard the women in Zuurbekom as no different from his other customers. "When we started, we wondered whether we would ever sell a single seed here. Yet as it turns out, we've been able to achieve much more: we've made a real difference to these women's lives." •



**Minor effort,
major impact**

'Growing with Rijk Zwaan''

Rijk Zwaan's projects have been successful the past few years, but it is also clear that development work remains sorely needed in the coming years. Therefore the committee remains ambitious and will stick to its current direction the coming years. This is evident from their answers to these 9 final questions.

What does the committee do?

We normally convene four times per year. We consider all new requests and discuss the progress of current projects. In both cases, it is important that they offer potential. The committee has an annual budget which we use mainly for start-up activities and various practical matters such as trainers' salaries, teaching materials and horticultural facilities. But while the financial support is important, the human factor – the visits and contact throughout the year – is even more crucial. Project visits are often combined with business trips to the same area, by the way, to keep costs to a minimum.

How are projects selected?

Many projects originate from trips made by Rijk Zwaan employees: they visit many different places and come across situations which could benefit from the committee's help. We first consider whether it is a good fit – both with our objectives and with Rijk Zwaan. We prefer to collaborate with a local partner who can monitor progress on the ground.

Is there also scope for ad-hoc projects?

Although we prefer to commit to projects for the long term, we do also consider ad-hoc situations which are in desperate need help. Rijk Zwaan made a donation after the earthquake disaster in Haiti, for example. For ad-hoc projects, the committee mainly plays an advisory role. We always emphasise our preference for

projects run by local organisations which help people to work on a better future for themselves.

Do projects ever fail?

Not everything can be a success, of course. We try to build a solid foundation with our seeds and technical expertise, but we remain dependent on other factors too. Sometimes there may be a lack of organisation locally, for instance, and we are forced to stop. As a committee, we can't build new roads, for example! Sometimes the initial exploratory stage might reveal that an area is unsuitable for growing vegetables, as happened in Nicaragua. Due to the high disease incidence, the region was more suited to growing fruit trees or keeping chickens. That might not be one of our specialties, but we'll still try to find another relevant organisation willing to take on the project.

Are growers obliged to use Rijk Zwaan seeds?

On the contrary: we want to avoid that kind of dependence! In practice, of course, we often use Rijk Zwaan varieties during training. When the farmers subsequently go it alone, they are familiar with our varieties so they will often purchase our seeds initially. But a project is only considered a complete success when the growers can – and do – decide for themselves which variety they are going to grow!

Can Rijk Zwaan employees play a part?

It is very important to the committee that all Rijk Zwaan employees are involved in our work, so we're always open to comments or suggestions!

We sometimes receive requests for seeds from colleagues who are aware of a relevant project. We always try to help out, but of course we have to ensure that we stay true to the committee's criteria, in other words preferably in combination with a transfer of knowledge.

Which role does the committee play in the 'Christmas box project'?

Once every two years, the value of the employee Christmas boxes is donated to charity. The committee advises the works council, which ultimately makes the decision. One of the nice things about this 'Christmas box project' is that the idea initially originated from our employees. We hope that this activity will continue for many years, and we'll continue to identify worthwhile causes.

Has a lot changed over the years?

The committee's structure has changed occasionally, but its philosophy and strategy haven't! The Committee for Development Cooperation has grown as Rijk Zwaan has grown, and that has brought several benefits: we have more people, more varieties and more experience, which means more help to achieve our goals. Furthermore, Rijk Zwaan is becoming better known in the world of development cooperation! We are increasingly being invited to provide advice or take part in conferences. Our involvement in a certain project can even be a reason for a development organisation to decide to contribute too; commercial support for

a development project often acts as an extra stimulus for those kinds of organisations. In Peru, for example, we spotted potential for a traditional grain type called kiwicha. Because we had little value to add to that project, we discussed it with the development organisation ICCO, with whom we had previously had some contact. Rijk Zwaan's involvement gave them a reason to take on the project. Although knowing that gives us an even stronger sense of responsibility!

How does the future look for the committee?

The growth of the Committee for Development Cooperation will continue to mirror that of Rijk Zwaan. Not necessarily in terms of the number of projects, since we remain critical in terms of what fits with our values and what doesn't, but rather in terms of our involvement. Whereas we were focused purely on cultivation techniques and related issues at first, we are now increasingly looking at sales too. And Rijk Zwaan has evolved in precisely the same way over the years: not only growing techniques but also looking ahead to the next step. With lots of collaboration and a focus on the long term – the Rijk Zwaan way! •

Colophon

Rijk Zwaan development projects in 2012:

Fudi, Guatemala
Aprodes, Peru - www.aprodes.org
Sibusiso, Tanzania - www.sibusiso.nl
WWCF, Cambodia - www.wwcf.nl
Zaaiër, Congo - www.dezaaiër.com
Maina, Kenya
Zuurbekom, South Africa

'Moving forward step by step' is a one-off publication for all Rijk Zwaan employees.

Text, design and images: Rijk Zwaan



Rijk Zwaan likes to thank the following sponsors for their help in establishing this magazine.

www.vandeventer.nl
www.translingua.nl
www.dsk-languageservices.com
www.englishproof.nl

vanDeventer

Translingua t.t.i. b.v.
www.verstalngen.nl

DSK LANGUAGE SERVICES
 Translating, Interpreting, Training

Englishproof