

Rundu and Nieuwegein, partners since 1994.

Rundu is the bustling centre of the Kavango Region in the north of Namibia, a region four times as big as the Netherlands with some 180.000 inhabitants. Nieuwegein is a young (1971) medium sized commuter town in the centre of the Netherlands, in the province of Utrecht. Rundu and Nieuwegein are municipal partners since 1994. Common features are its number of inhabitants, some 60.000, and their location along a river, respectively the Kavango River and the Lek. In mutual consultation municipalities and citizens from Nieuwegein and Rundu have initiated and supported development co-operation activities, at municipal as well as community level.

When the twinning started it took some time to get to know each other and to understand the differences. One such striking difference was the size of the administration, which was very much smaller in Rundu, though the number of its operational staff was much higher. Another difference was that town council Nieuwegein has a more prominent role in policymaking than its counterpart in Rundu. Through the years the twinning's character evolved from donor-oriented to know-how exchange. It is currently more professionalized and institutionalised as well. In 1998, when H.E. President Nujoma paid a state visit to the Netherlands, the President of Namibia spent some time in Nieuwegein.

To assist Rundu in the process of decentralisation of governance the two municipalities have drawn up successive agreements to strengthen Rundu's municipal capacity for service delivery.

Although progress is slow at times and projects are small scale, Nieuwegein regards the long term character of the relation as benefiting Rundu's institutional and community absorption and its sustainability. In the Solid Waste

Management Project for example, Rundu involved women of the Donkerhoek, Safari en Nkarapamwe areas to address the growing waste problem. Nieuwegein's transfer of technical expertise, its donation of waste containers plus the active involvement of the women resulted in a much cleaner environment. Now, other parts of Rundu want to implement such a project as well.

The Working group Nieuwegein is mandated to stimulate, and co-ordinate Nieuwegein's civil society initiatives and efforts for the town twinning. It regards its town link to Rundu as an important "window on the world" through which the citizens of Nieuwegein can discover other cultures and ideas. It receives subsidy of the municipality, works closely with it and complements its activities, e.g. through linking local schools, hospitals, Chambers of Commerce, libraries and employers, resulting in, among other, educational exchange projects and donations to Namibian counterparts.

In the 2000-2001 project *Steun Scholen Rundu* (Support Rundu Schools), a wide variety of sectors and individuals from the Nieuwegein community participated in fundraising activities and raised over one million Namibian dollars to build classrooms in a number of schools in Rundu. Its Namibian counterpart is called Working Group Nieuwegein.

Rundu has identified HIV/AIDS as one of the major threats to its development. Both municipalities and Working groups Nieuwegein and Rundu, having witnessed the growing impact of the pandemic, are very motivated to pull their weight for the future HIV/AIDS project. In Rundu an estimated 21% of the population between 13 and 45 years old is HIV positive.