

Smallerland and Gobabis,

The oldest Namibian - Netherlands municipal partnership is between **Gobabis** and **Smallerland**. Gobabis, situated some 200 km's east of Windhoek, is the main service centre of the semi-desert Omaheke Region. It has some 16 000 formal residents and in addition an estimated number of 10 000 informal inhabitants. Smallerland, in the northern Dutch province of Friesland, with over 54 000 residents, consists of Drachten, its largest community, and several surrounding villages.

In the late 1980's Smallerland formulated a policy plan on foreign aid in conjunction with a counterpart town in a developing country. The aim was to develop a strong personal relation with a municipality in the South. Friendship, instead of only a formal programme, should contribute to raise the community's awareness on global issues. Smallerland had actively supported the anti-apartheid struggle and it made sense to keep up assistance in southern Africa in the post-apartheid era by inviting a town from this region for this partnership. Gobabis, which has several similarities with Smallerland, came in sight as a partner through a personal recommendation.

The first phase of the co-operation was characterised by getting acquainted, to become friends, to establish reciprocity. A process with ups and downs. On a municipal level Gobabis was assisted in exchange of information on democratic processes. Some of its officials visited the Netherlands. Gradually some project priorities were formulated. It was only after five years, in 1995, that the first official visit from Smallerland to Gobabis took place and a more official relation was established, with the signing of a Friendship Treaty. Gobabis mayor, Mr. Pijoo Nganate typified this treaty as "Do not give us fish, but teach us how to fish".

Since then initiatives to co-operate with Gobabis and its people accelerated. Projects focus on municipal organisation,

and even more so on improving the situation of the most deprived and vulnerable groups, e.g. assisting the Epako Old Age Home and street kids. In the project named 'Sida Sores' ('Our House in the Sun') day care is provided to handicapped children. Smallerland is very proud of this project, in which parents are expected to be involved as well, not only in the daily tasks but also in workshops and courses to enhance their knowledge and skills in raising their children. The housing in traditional rondavels offers warmth in wintertime and coolness in summer.

Also the private initiative working groups in both Gobabis (Gobabis Working Group) and Smallerland (Werkgroep Ontwikkelingssamenwerking Smallerland (WOS) initiate activities. The extensive and solid community basis, formed by the commitment of inhabitants, schools, students, housing associations, old people's homes and other sectors, is a source of pride to everyone involved. The WOS, which has 17 board members, uses the projects to inform the public.

Annually, at least 10 volunteers/ students from Smallerland go to Gobabis for practical work and to assist in various projects. To celebrate the first decade of the signing of the agreement in October 2005 over 40 Smallerland residents travelled to Gobabis. Meanwhile a high number of Gobabis representatives have visited the Netherlands to participate in municipal training programmes on various topics such as waste management, civic participation, social housing. Exchange programmes between participating churches in Gobabis and Smallerland lead to visits to and from of pastors and church leaders.

As for the planned focus on HIV/AIDS activities in town twinning programmes, the WOS will concentrate on awareness raising by small-scale projects. Furthermore, in order to assist vulnerable people obtaining a sense of perspective, support will be given to income generating projects.