

VICE VERSA LEERT

DEMOCRACY SPECIAL

Global trends in democracy

Round table discussion

How can processes of
democratization be
supported?

Democracy schools
Building trust from
the bottom up in
Georgia

Dutch MPs
Investing in
democracy

Report Uganda
Political dialogue
opens the way for
reforms

LiquidFeedback
Promoting citizen
involvement



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Publisher: Lokaalmondiaal
Editor-in-chief: Marc Broere
Sub-editor: Jeroen Teitler
Editors: Selma Zijlstra
Editorial committee: Marc Broere, Arachne Molema and Anita Ramharakh
Concept: Arachne Molema
Contributors to this edition: Leonard Fäustle, Arachne Molema, Seada Nourhussen, Iris Visser, Co Welgraven, Selma Zijlstra, Nic van der Jagt and Eugenia Boutylkova
Production: Selma Zijlstra and Nathalie Zanen
Translation: Sara van Otterloo, Susan Parren

Art direction, design layout:
SAZZA: Saskia Stoltz and Daphne Meijer
Cover photo: Francesca Oggiano
Back-cover photo: Pasa Au Yeung
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Address *Vice Versa*:
Joseph Haydnlaan 2-A, 3533 AE Utrecht.
tel: +31 30 303 550
redactie@viceversaonline.nl
www.viceversaonline.nl

For information on subscriptions and to order individual magazine editions:
tel. +31 30 303 550
abonnementen@viceversaonline.nl

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The global trend toward more democracy seems unmistakable. But what does a closer look reveal? This special edition of *Vice Versa* was created in collaboration with the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) and is intended to contribute to a greater understanding of the complexities that democracy entails. It also shows the ways in which the Netherlands offers support to processes of democratization.

The opening article suggests that both citizens and governments are better off in democracies than in societies with other forms of government, in terms of many important indicators and certainly over the long term. But free elections alone do not constitute a democratic society. Why is that? And how do processes of democratization work on the ground?

A visit to the democracy schools in Georgia has shown that trust has to be built from the bottom up. Under the tutelage of professionals, students from the fields of politics, NGOs and the media are learning to build a democratic culture.

In the hostile political climate of Uganda, NIMD initiated a political dialogue for reforms. What is the role of dialogue in a country's process of democratization? And is the opposition genuinely open to dialogue? *Vice Versa* visited Uganda and found out that dialogue is more than just a 'chat club'.

In the final article we asked three experts for their views on several 'big issues'. Can you create a democracy or does it need to emerge organically? Should Westerners involve themselves in the process at all? The participants in the round table discussion were unanimous: democracies need to grow. And that costs time.

**Marc Broere
Arachne Molema**



'Democracies have to grow'

Can you create a democracy or should it arise organically? Should or shouldn't westerners become involved? Is donor funding harmful? Is progress being made? In a round table discussion, Vice Versa put five questions to three Dutch directors of international organizations that help to encourage democracy in developing countries. 'Despite all of the losses in the battle for democracy, everyone agrees: it was worth it.'

by Seada Nourhussen

In a stately office in the centre of The Hague, Hans Bruning, executive director of the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD), received two colleague directors to discuss democracy. That subject is also the core business of Theo Kralt of the Association of European Parliamentarians with Africa (Awepa) and Elisabeth van der Steenhoven of WO=MEN ('Women equals Men'). Awepa works with parliaments and parliamentarians, NIMD with political parties and WO=MEN with civil organizations. In an informal discussion Bruning and Kralt emphasized the importance of political parties and parliaments,

respectively, to encourage democracy. Van der Steenhoven often pointed to the contributions made by citizens and the role of social media as new control mechanisms in modern democracies.

1 Should we want to encourage democracy everywhere?

Theo Kralt: 'In its method of working, Awepa always concludes a "Memorandum of Understanding" (MoU) with a parliament in Africa. It's never a one-sided situation, but rather a balanced and respectful collaboration. We ask what they need, we impose nothing and we undertake mutual ac-

tion. That action is, of course, different in every country. Democracy in Mozambique is in a completely different phase than that in Somalia, which you could call fragmented. Awepa's task there is to bring people together and discuss how a parliament can begin to open up and organize. You have to have a good understanding of the political system. The Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, is a country that's difficult to govern and has a certain amount of dictatorship in which the parliament has to find its way. Encouraging democracy and peace initiatives in that country can call for a regional approach in which the entire Great Lakes area is involved. However, in a country like South Africa, which has a much more effective democracy, Awepa has a programme for local governments.'

Hans Bruning: 'I agree with Kralt. It's an illusion to assume that you can work on the basis of one fixed concept. The wish to be heard and to feel represented is universal, but you always have to look at a country's needs. In Burundi we bring together opposing parties, whereas in a much better functioning democracy such as Ghana we support political parties in putting themes such as the policy on raw materials and the electoral system on the agenda. NIMD is accustomed to being asked for support, sometimes directly by political parties, sometimes by Dutch embassies or the European Union. We are especially approached for assistance in encouraging a dialogue between parties, and we also train parties in matters such as strategic planning. These

'The wish to be heard and to feel represented is universal'

lost people in the battle for more democracy. People I knew have been killed. And yet they all say: it was and still is worth it. The members of WO=MEN also advocate a strong countervailing power in areas of conflict.'

2 Is it important for 'the West' to keep supporting new democracies?

Bruning: 'I'm happy that we have been living in a democracy for 69 years. Since 1945, we've lived without war thanks to the European Union; shouldn't we continue to encourage that elsewhere? Everywhere in a different way, of course. Fortunately, there are also many different initiatives for this, from people such as billionaire Mo Ibrahim, with his index for good government in African countries and his prize for the best African leader, and from large institutions like the EU.'

planning sessions encourage them to think about their vision as a party and how they want to put this into practice.'

Van der Steenhoven: 'I think the question is completely wrong. It's not about "us". Democracy isn't a western invention. In pre-colonial Africa there were traditional systems of checks and balances that were sometimes more inclusive than in western democracies. In present-day Nigeria, a king could be crowned only after having been given the support of his people and his wife. In pre-colonial Kenya, there was not just one ruler, but rather rotating representatives united in a parliament. Similar examples can also be found in Mayan cultures in Central America. Or in Porto Alegre in Brazil, where, since 1990, one and a half million people have been involved in a new form of democracy by means of cooperative management in which inhabitants together decide what public funds will be spent on.'

'Western countries or organizations should be more aware of local systems. Don't support only parliamentary democracies like ours but also traditional, tribal forms of decision-making and consultation. In Tunisia, the only country in which the Arab Spring was more or less successful because the country didn't revert to chaos and peaceful elections were held, this combined approach fits well with the desire of many people for representation. But the battle for democracy is universal and the result is overwhelming. Our members have partners in Libya, Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen who have suffered terribly, who have

posed. So great is the wish for democratic reform.'

Bruning: 'Egypt is an interesting case because it has numerous layers. Despite the large price that the people paid for the uprising, it seems that a change was set in motion in 2011 that people are not going to have taken from them. After Mubarak was deposed, some of the people considered Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood to be simply a return to where they started because his style of governing wasn't inclusive. We hear that the present military rulers are also not ideal, but at least the revolutionary movement hasn't been ended by one side. Some people say that the current president Sisi will be gone in three years. If, thinking from within a western framework, I say "that's a long time", they reply that our democratization process took much longer.'

Van der Steenhoven: 'Women's suffrage isn't even one hundred years old.'

Bruning: 'That's why in Egypt NIMD tries to bring together boys and girls of all denominations, including the Muslim Brotherhood. That all those young people from all sorts of faiths come to our democracy schools each weekend for six months to see how they can apply democracy in their cities and villages shows how much they appreciate the support.'

Kralt: 'Talking about girls and women, it's very important to continue to support their participation in politics. In some cases, this support really bears fruit, and their political participation



Theo Kralt
Chief Administrative Officer at the Association of European Parliamentarians with Africa (Awepa)



Elisabeth van der Steenhoven
Director of WO=MEN



Hans Bruning
Executive Director of Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD)

3 Does democracy also mean good government?

Kralt: 'Africa still consists mostly of imperfect democracies. Of course, western democracies are also not perfect, and you have to keep working at it. Due to economic shifts in the world order, some of the new economies seem to be less enthusiastic about only the western model of democracy.'

Van der Steenhoven: 'Nevertheless, I want to warn about token women. We do *not* think that women are better than men. In Iran female police contribute to the suppression there, and in Colombia there are female paramilitary who threaten indigenous groups. In short, women aren't better, they're just people. In Rwanda 65 percent of the parliamentarians are women, but in a parliament without any real power. Rwanda is a dictatorship with a horrible secret service.'

'We aren't interested in women who are only looking for a job. Quotas are useful for combating co-optation and preventing men from hiring only more men. Women's organizations often succeed in breaking through barriers of hate, like between the Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda and between Israelis and Palestinians. But that knowledge should also be used at the highest level, something the political parties don't realize or don't want to use because people would then have to give up their functions. But conducting peace negotiations with only 50 percent of the population is useless since you can't make any good policy.'

Bruning: 'Democracy is about the bigger picture. It's not only about fighting corruption, something that will probably continue to exist, but also about ending the obsession with that one person, the leader. NIMD's mission is to help translate the needs of citizens into government via political parties.'

Van der Steenhoven: 'There has to also be more support for civil society, which can call par-

liament to account. In the Bolivian city of Cochabamba the massive protests of 2000 and 2005 stopped the government's plans to privatize water. And now in Burkina Faso we can witness how demonstrations are blocking the extension of terms in office for a president who has been in power for 27 years. Setting parliament on fire is a bit extreme, but it gives evidence of a large civil awareness, and that's important for a democracy.'

'And don't underestimate the strength of social media, whose influence can reach as far as the United Nations. The Libyan representative to the UN found that "cultural and religious exceptions" could be made when passing sentences for violence against women. After Libyan women had gotten word of this and published it on Facebook, the representative was inundated with criticism within an hour and he changed his vote. Social media are truly a supplementary control mechanism. After the fall of Gaddafi, citizens and NGOs began to write a new Constitution via a private Facebook page. They didn't want to leave it up to the political parties alone.'

Bruning: 'In Georgia we support a German software programme called LiquidFeedback, which involves members of political parties and voters in political decision-making (see also p. 18). These decisions concern both practical and local issues as well as more principle questions. This shows that technology is indeed an attractive, supplementary form of democracy and innovation for political parties. People are required

to motivate their opinions, and this leads to new opinions within a party.'

Kralt: 'Ideally, social media should be ordered and embedded in democratic elections. Constant interruptions of the democratic process don't always lead to useful contributions. But social media are an important reality. The time of a parliament acting alone has indeed passed; all of the actions of NGOs and citizens can have a permanent collective influence.'

4 Can western involvement in democratic processes in developing countries be harmful?

Van der Steenhoven: 'Certainly. After the second Iraq war and the fall of Saddam Hussein, the female combatants were completely ignored by the NATO for honest representation in the new political system. People assumed that women had no role in an Islamic society, whereas those women themselves had negotiated with the male leaders. That was destroyed by NATO's incorrect

the first time that the government and opposition parties had ever been together in the same room. It's wrong that no such analysis is made in the development of such a country.'

Van der Steenhoven: 'In 2012 the EU concluded a large social contract with Egypt and gave the government a subsidy of 6 billion euros. But that agreement paid no attention to women's rights even though the marriageable age had just been lowered and more laws discriminating against women were in the make. Our members often work without money, but the funding from donor countries naturally influences the democracy in the recipient countries. So on certain points I agree with Dambisa Moyo (economist and author of *Dead Aid*, Ed.) that financial agreements can unintentionally thwart development.'

Bruning: 'Without foreign intervention, the Marshall Plan after the Second World War, the EU wouldn't be what it is today. It's too simple to think that interventions are always harmful. As a donor, you have to work carefully and work together with local actors. This creates local in-

Then the relationship was reactivated, also in the hope that the opposition would win the election. That didn't happen, but it was said that, with an eye to the future, the ties with Zimbabwe have to remain intact even if there's no direct prospect of improvement. Even in an apparently hopeless situation, proud parliamentarians and organizations from civil society can make a difference.'

5 When is your work finished? In other words, when is a democracy open and stable?

Bruning: 'As long as political parties in the countries we work in say that our presence is useful, we'll continue. Our mandate states that we can only operate if there's an authentic request for help from countries and political parties. And if, in countries such as Georgia and Ghana, power is transferred peacefully from the governing party to the opposition and vice versa, we consider that to be a major success for democracy because then we can continue further on various themes at a different level.'

Van der Steenhoven: 'When there is both gender equality and political equality. When everyone has the same opportunities and chances and can make choices despite their sex, origins or class. Fortunately, we are riding along on a hopeful wave of people who are courageously forcing changes. I'm aware of all sorts of negative trends, like the new restrictions on rights, but I also see new commitments between the highly and less highly educated and between businesses and citizens that had once seemed impossible.'

Kralt: 'There's still so very much to do in Africa, but many countries have achieved a decent level of democracy. South Africa has a parliament that functions well; the ANC dominates the political landscape, but it has to continue to prove itself in competition with other parties. Awepa was able to contribute to peace processes in a number of countries. In Mozambique the rival movements Frelimo and Renamo have reached a modus vivendi. We contributed to parliaments that make their voices heard at crucial moments. There are absolutely fewer coups than there used to be. So progress is being made, but the processes are time-consuming. And we can only respect, facilitate and encourage the wishes of local parliaments. You can't make or impose democracies; they have to grow.' ■

'An enlightened dictatorship doesn't have to go hand-in-hand with poor government and corruption'

assessment. That's really an example of how western prejudice can thwart ongoing developments. And the women in Tunisia who demonstrated in the uprising and fought for political participation should be given attention during western interventions or support. It's crippling if prejudices prevent points championed by local organizations from being addressed.'

Bruning: 'Large organizations like the UN development programme UNDP often simply work from one government to the next. UNDP is in essence a government organization and it often focuses on working with the current authority, which has a tendency to one-sidedness that can be damaging. If discussions are held with opposition parties, they're often the result of personal authority and the courage of ambassadors. In 2012 in Honduras we heard that it was

involvement and prevents too great a dependence on the donor.'

Kralt: 'The question of money is always a complicated and sensitive story. Awepa receives 80 percent of its available money from non-Dutch donors and about 20 percent from the Netherlands. The amount of development funding from the West marked for Africa has already become relatively less partly because of the more prominent presence of China. Sometimes you have to admit that something temporarily makes no sense. In a situation of obvious war, for example, in which members of parliament are manning the cannons so to speak. Or in a total dictatorship in which democratic developments are put on hold for the time being. Interventions have to make sense. Until a few years ago, relations between Zimbabwe and the EU were frozen.



Sjoerd Sjoerdsma (D66):

'Democracy comes from within'

Investing in good governance and democracy increases the chances of Dutch development funds being spent wisely. But in what way does their understanding of democracy colour the daily work of Dutch members of Parliament? Sjoerd Sjoerdsma of D66 (a progressive liberal party): 'A multiparty system is frustrating at times.'

by Arachne Molema

What role does democracy play in your daily work as a member of Parliament?

'I work at the heart of the Dutch democracy. I see people coming to deliver petitions and citizens' initiatives where members of the public have collected 60 thousand signatures, urging us to discuss a subject. The conclusion of a recently published book, *De wankele democratie* (The Fragile Democracy) by Jacques Thomassen and Carolien van Ham, is that democracy in the Netherlands is not fragile. There is broad structural confidence in democratic institutions.'

Is democracy under threat in the Netherlands?

'What is worrying is the number of young people who do not vote. If they don't vote when they are young, they often don't vote at an older age either. Elections are not the only part of democracy, but they are a good barometer. Low turnouts are also associated with the high level of youth unemployment. The lack of future prospects for them, and their lack of confidence in the ability of politicians to tackle this, is worrying. That's why we place so much emphasis on education and on a better balance in the relationship between young and old.'

Last summer elements from outside the country hit hard: flight MH17, the Gaza conflict that led to rifts and the growing sympathy for IS in the Netherlands. These examples of hatred towards Dutch society and Dutch democracy

touch on my work. It's up to the Cabinet to no longer act as though foreign policy is just something that happens abroad. It affects this country too.'

What democratic trends do you discern in the Netherlands?

'What surprised me in the negative sense, was the low turnout for the local council elections. Municipalities are playing an increasingly important role in matters that affect daily life. In Europe I observe that Hungary has turned its back on democracy in the form we have. That is a dangerous trend. If you are critical of others, you have to be prepared to take criticism and to act on it. This culture is absent at that level in the European Union and it's crucial that it is established. It's the only alternative if you want to work in a self-cleansing way within the EU.'

Is a multiparty system always the best form of government?

'It is the best form, but can be frustrating at times. Afghanistan had a large coalition and a centralized democracy governed from Kabul. But it is a country in which forms of governance are dependent on tribes, families and traditions, which are not easy to incorporate within a democracy. You'll take far greater steps if people become aware locally of the fact that they have a right to protection and to be themselves, and start to stand up for those rights.'

Can you impose a multiparty system as a pre-condition for development cooperation?

'I don't believe in exporting democracy. The chance of success is small if the people there are not receptive. Democracy comes from within. The path to democracy is the most bloody and painful process known to man. Once a democracy functions well, a society is more peaceful and its citizens are better protected. The way there is fickle, uncertain and violent. It's important to foster freedom of the press and public debate; these are forces that question the state and require it to remain alert.'

Sjoerd Sjoerdsma (D66, born 1981) – Member of Parliament since 2012. Spokesman for foreign affairs and development cooperation. Worked previously as a civil servant in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, at the Netherlands Embassy in Kabul and at the Netherlands Representative Office to the Palestinian Authority. Studied sociology and international relations.



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