

Jan Vanhee (Flemish government representative)

Dear colleagues,

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Conferences are in general meant to be a closing moment of processes and people went through, or they are meant to be a starting point for new perspectives, new projects, new challenges and objects. Our conferences, has both challenges. The challenge of looking backwards to what has been done, to what we have realised until now, specifically in the youth cooperation between the South African government and the Flemish Community of Belgium.

A kind of evaluation, looking at our failures, the lessons learned and, even more important looking at the successes we can further on.

Let's start with looking backwards. Being part of the history in the cooperation I will give you a short overview of the cooperation between South Africa and Flanders in the youth-field. This overview brings me back to 1995, almost 17 years ago.

1995: After the abolishment of Apartheid in South Africa, the first steps were made to activate the cooperation between Belgium and South Africa, after a long period of non-activity.

From the Flemish community of Belgium the first Minister to visit South Africa was the Minister of Culture, Mr Hugo Weckx. It is out of his visit that we started our cooperation, in this field. During his stay in South Africa, Minister Weckx got aware that the cooperation should not be focused on Culture with a big C, but in the field of cooperation between structures and people, the content of the cooperation should stress the professionalisation and capacity building. Black and coloured people should be the target group.

In 1995 a first group of 10 South Africans came to Flanders, for a six week stay in order to get acquainted with the Flemish youth-work. The methodology that was used was training, study visits and job shadowing in youth organisations. It was a complete failure, both sides. The reason was simple. The programme was set up with the best feelings but from one side.

The Flemish partner did not know the South African partners and was not aware their expectations. The South African partner did not know the Flemish partner and did not know what to expect. One should learn out of his failures. And so we did. We got aware that without knowledge about both countries, the people, the culture, the differences and the things we have in common, without commitment and involvement of both sides, it would not work. In cooperation the stands for common.

But how to know each other? To whom to address? The first contacts we had were realised through the responsible of a youth project that was run by UNISA and that was supported by the Flemish community./

1996: A delegation of responsables of this project where invited for a study visit Flanders. We exposed these people to our country, the people that live in it, the way we live and the most important of course to how we deal with people, and how youth-work is organised in Flanders. A first brainstorm session was held, concerning methodology and content of further cooperation.

1997: A Flemish delegation visits SA. This delegation was also confronted with the country, the people, culture, the way people live and how is dealt with young people. We met the first members of the National Youth Commission, youth commission that was just established. A member of the delegation summarised it in this way:

“We have seen a lot in a very intensive way, we met people of all levels, we saw how people live, the way education is organised, youth work... the street... many colours... people.”

A second brainstorm session bringing experiences together was held. There was one big conclusion: work, work, work.

1998: The real cooperation starts. Out of the different contacts and meetings the field of cooperation we stressed was on: training, professionalisation and capacity building. Training courses were organised in Flanders and in South Africa. From 1998 until now over 500 young people took part in the training courses, people coming from all over the country. The concrete content and the target group changed through the years. The first participants were a mixture of responsables in youth field from the side of the official authorities, responsables in structures for youth work and grass root workers.

Later on the training was stressed on grass root workers and in a further stage on responsables for so called structured youth work, seen as trainers for trainers. Also the content changed, the first training programmes were based on learning by exposure. Study-visits, discussions with Flemish youth workers on diverse issues. Later on the training programmes were more based on ‘indoor’ training sessions, tackling issues on voluntarism, group dynamics, organisation and so on...The elaboration of the programmes was done in cooperation, prepared in SA or Flanders with both partners. The training courses itself were led by both partners. It was a mutual ongoing learning process.

Although knowing each other, it does not mean that differences are always easily bridged. But it worked. It was felt as a success from both sides. More than 500 young people had thanks to these programmes an unforgettable experience, each of them went back with a suit-case filled with good ideas, a lot of enthusiasm and with a lot of the warm feelings. Lots of us have lost their hart in Flanders or South Africa.

Not all of them continued to work in the youth-field. Not in Flanders, especially not in South Africa. South Africa is a very dynamic society. People leave and change quickly. Those who continued still do it with a lot of enthusiasm, those who did not hold their whole experience they had, in this way this experience contributes as well to the development of society. A lot of Flemish politicians still refer in interviews to the experience they had in youth work.

2000: The preparation for the new working programme for the bilateral cooperation is set up. The idea was to continue in the field of training. But in South Africa specifically an intensive transition phase was completed. The system of local councils was restructured into a radically revised system. This system had significantly fewer local councils, but they do have clear remits and great importance is attached to communication with an official system of wards. The National Youth Commission saw great importance for introducing 'youth policy' into this new situation.

During the past programmes, the South African partner could experience, that youth work in Flanders was very well established on the local municipal level. For this reason a proposal was made to change the cooperation in this direction. The Flemish and South African partners set up a plan of cooperation on local youth development. The objectives for this action survey were formulated as follows:

"To stimulate responsibility and active citizenship of young people in their local communities starting a process of communication between the various local role players. Young people, youth workers, politicians and civil servants. This should lead to local networking that is needed to develop a coherent and planned local youth policy."

The second objective was that the result of his approach has to take the form of a practical guide, an accessible handbook to provide help in terms of content and strategy to all parties involved. The action survey was run as a monitored process and took local circumstances into account. It was held in five specific communities of the Tswane (City Centre, Mamelodi and Eersterus) and Mangaung (Thana Nchu and Botshabelo). It focused on three specific elements:

- Structures and channels of communication between youth workers, their supervisors and the local authority;
- Training the role players involved, with the intention of exchanging experiences and constructing a common frame of references;
- Specific infrastructures and accommodation for young people, including for sport, recreation and meetings.

The results of this action survey were presented and discussed at the conference in the spring for us, the autumn for you of 2002 also held here in Johannesburg.

The following recommendations came out of the survey:

- Effective youth policy programmes and initiatives must be based on an understanding of the realities of young people's lives. Youth development initiatives need to be informed by a respond to the needs and priorities of the young people they target;
- There is a need to restore the faith of young people in the system of governance. Therefore young people must have a clear understanding of the system of local governance and of their role within that system, in order to engage effectively with local government structures and processes. Effective service has to be provided to young people and ways to be found to encourage young people to engage in positive forms of community development;
- The third recommendation was: establishing a mechanism for ongoing, two way communication. Youth development has to become an iterative process of dialogue convened by local government but involving a variety of stakeholders. Local government should facilitate the dialogue, providing opportunities for the participants to better understand the challenges of youth, to identify and implement coordinated initiatives to them.

2004 – 2006

The introduction of CAR

Capacity Building Course focussed on training on the floor... We already organised two courses, one in 2004 and one in 2005. In October 2006 we organised the third one in Flanders;

Advocacy and lobbying;

Research: we will look at the results and discuss them more in details during this conference.

2006 – 2009

Focus of the cooperation on the four local community centres... (in the field of Culture, Youth, and Heritage.

Today we are happy to (re)start our cooperation with the focus on 'Promoting and Up-scaling Youth Volunteering in Civil Society Organisations.'

This will be our challenge in the following days and years. I hope the future will be as fruitful as the past. The support from the authorities from the South African

government/ NYDA, from the Flemish community on financial but merely on political and moral level, has been of a great importance. We have come to a certain end, but also to a new start. Let me end with some words of Mr. Nelson Mandela: *"We walked already long, but our long walk is not yet ended."*

Jan Vanhee