

# Annual Results 2023



## Forging municipal partnerships for today and tomorrow

The impact of armed conflict, climate change, migration and resource scarcity, is increasingly felt at the local level. Local governments play a crucial role in dealing with the effects of these disasters. VNG International works precisely at the intersection where global challenges and local policies meet by forging partnerships with local governments and their associations. I am therefore pleased to present our results of 2023 and to showcase how we contributed to a sustainable and peaceful future for communities.

Particularly remarkable was the involvement and solidarity of Dutch municipalities with their counterparts in Ukraine, Turkey and Morocco. They have donated €4 million to the VNG Fund for Emergency Aid, Reconstruction and Peacebuilding. Thanks to these donations and expertise made available, VNG International supported the affected areas to take the first steps for sustainable reconstruction.

Supporting and learning from each other's insights forms the foundation of our exchange programme between civil servants in the Caribbean and Dutch local governments. Both jointly learn from each other on how to deal with familiar challenges in solid waste collection, nature conservation, public

communication and crisis preparedness.

Our strategic partnership with the Netherlands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs entered its second year in 2023. Through this partnership, the ministry and VNG International are working together to strengthen local governance in 12 countries on the themes fragility, migration, local revenues and water management. The implementation of the partnership programme witnessed full implementation with tangible results accomplished by involving many municipalities, councillors, civil society organisations and private sector parties.

The mission of VNG International is more than ever relevant as both the international and our domestic context becomes more complex. Partnering with local governments abroad, their associations, related organisations as well as Dutch municipalities, we will stand together and continue to work collaboratively to deal with the challenges of today and tomorrow.

I hope our results are a source of inspiration to you!

**Pieter Jeroense**  
Director VNG International



Discover our key figures for 2023 below

OR

Jump straight to our achievements of 2023



# VNG International in key figures:

In 2023 VNG International supported local governance through **55 projects** across the world:

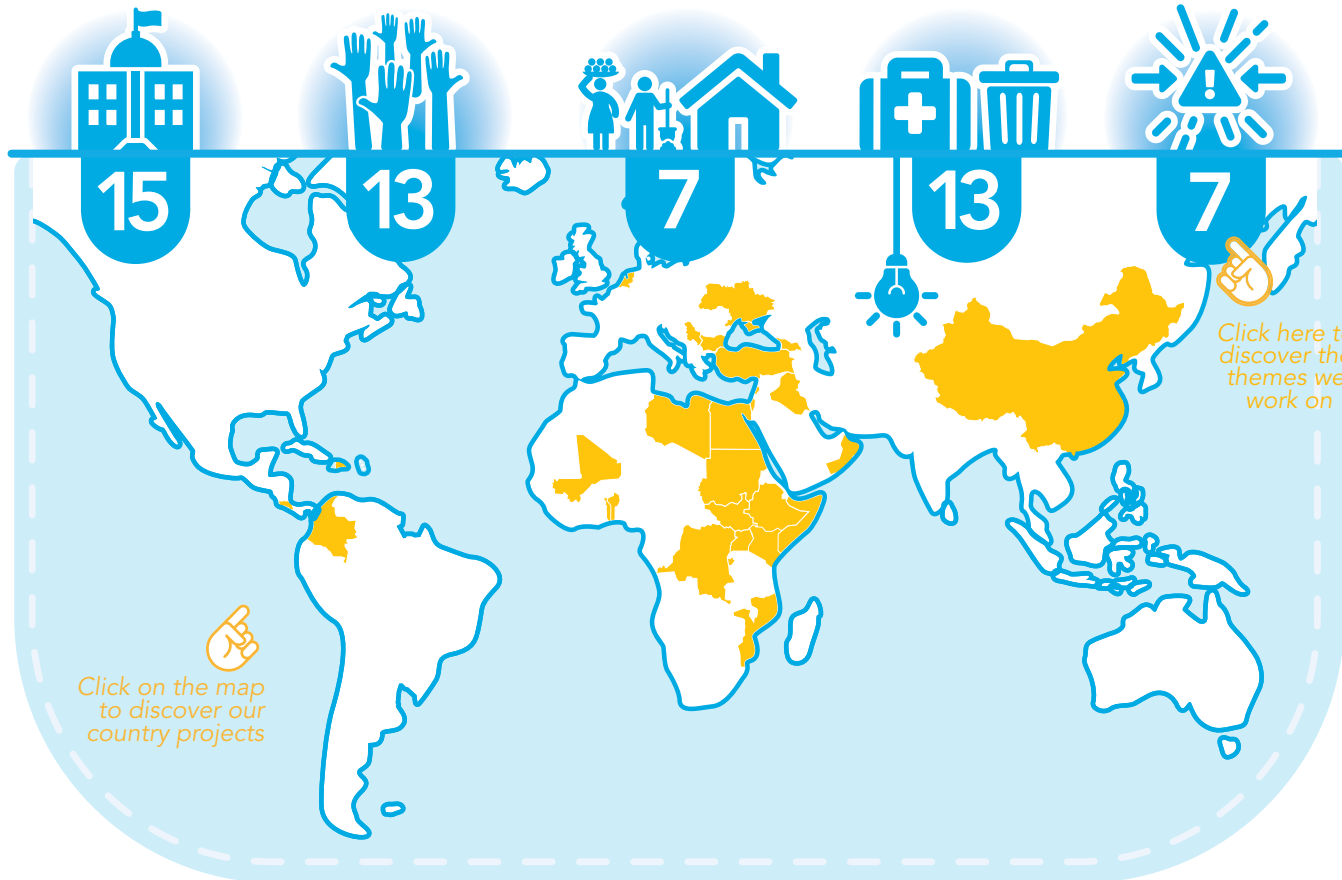
Building more effective public administrations

Involving citizens in decision making

Developing sustainable & resilient cities & communities

Improving access to basic services

Dealing with conflict, fragility & migration



We contribute to the following SDGs:



**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

Benin, Bulgaria, Burundi, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Democratic Republic of Congo, Dominican Republic, Egypt, Ethiopia, Georgia, Iraq, Kenya, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, Mozambique, Oman, Palestine, Serbia, Sint Maarten, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Togo, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine.



63

Dutch municipalities actively contribute to our international work

132

Participate in the Gemeenten4GlobalGoals network

An initiative by VNG to support Dutch municipalities to integrate SDGs in their work.



3

Innovative approaches piloted this year

Local governments operate in an ever changing world and we therefore also need to constantly adapt and reinvent our approaches. This year we piloted 3 innovative approaches, the **example on the right** showcases one of them.



19

VNG International offices in partner countries

Benin	Iraq	Palestine	Togo
Burundi	Kenya	Puntland	Tunesia
DR Congo	Libya	Somaliland	Uganda
Egypt	Mali	South Sudan	
Ethiopia	Mozambique	Sint Maarten	



250

VNG International staff members

In-country staff: 184 ♂ 109 male ♀ 75 female  
 The Hague staff: 66 ♂ 21 male ♀ 45 female

### Scaling up innovation - the use of IT for data-driven decision-making for fostering social accountability

an example from Ethiopia

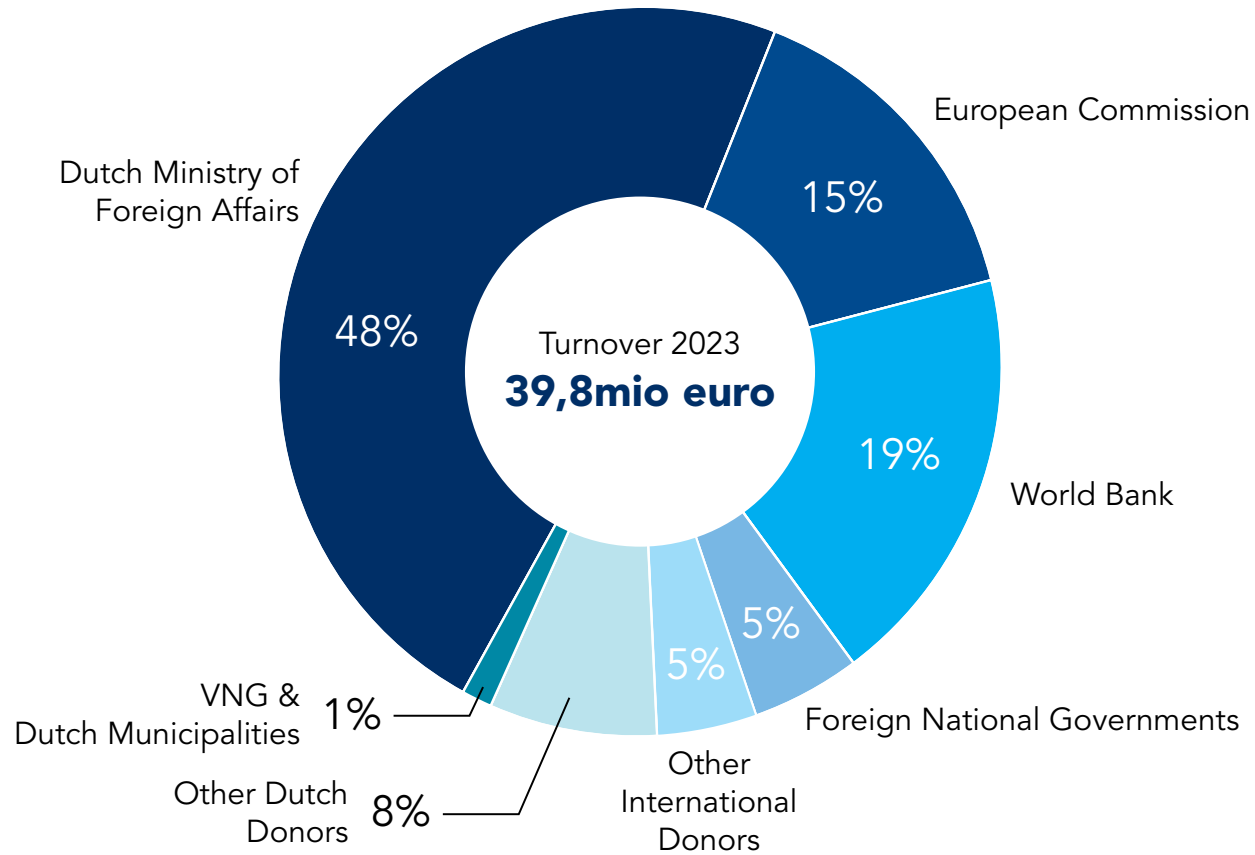
As the Ethiopia Social Accountability Programme (ESAP) expanded from a dozen pilot woredas to 416 woredas, VNG International and its local partners recognized the necessity to innovate the data collection and processing methods. The approach now involves digital data collection using smartphones and free apps, with built-in quality checks incorporated into the process.

woredas, selected using a multi-stage cluster-sampling method. The availability of reliable data has prompted local governments to focus on delivering services such as waste management, mosquito control, improving public lighting, and redeveloping road transport stations. By December 2023, 378 woredas conducted the CRC, interviewing 76,742 households.

The core of the programme lies in empowering citizens to hold their local governments accountable through the use of the Citizen Report Card (CRC) tool. This methodology involves conducting household surveys to identify citizen priorities for services, which then serve as the basis for co-creating Joint Action Plans between citizens, service providers, and local authorities. The CRC's effectiveness in pinpointing priorities is bolstered by ensuring the reliability of data through representative samples from ESAP

This innovative digital approach presents numerous benefits that VNG International intends to leverage in other projects. Future developments will focus on constructing platforms around the dashboards for fostering dialogue and facilitating learning opportunities. Additionally, the ability to exchange insights with partners and statistics agencies should be enabled in the future, enhancing collaboration and knowledge-sharing across various stakeholders.

# Our turnover by donor in 2023



Our financial report for 2023

## Building better futures with people with disabilities from our project in Burundi

In the "We are Able" programme VNG International works together with different NGO's to strengthen the position of people with disabilities in six African countries. The aim of the programme is to help them to achieve a sustainable, fully-fledged place in their community, so that they have more opportunities to enhance their livelihoods. VNG International's specific contribution in this programme is to facilitate strengthening the relationship between local governments and designated NGO's for including the specific needs of people with disabilities in local agenda's

One of these countries is Burundi where VNG International has worked with four local governments (communes) in Cibitoke and Makamba including the specific needs in community plans. In response, communal councils are

taking steps to include people with disabilities, as in the case of Mabanda for example where it decided to adopt free land registration rights for people with disabilities. Also, in all communes accessibility of their offices & buildings for people with disabilities has improved and this enabled them to participate in communal planning committees.

Anne Marie (41), a teacher, explains: "Before, when the authorities invited citizens to meetings and you came as a person living with a disability, they would ask you to go back, and the others would give you feedback on what was said in the meeting. But now the last time I was consulted, the commune wanted to know the value of braces, tricycles and crutches in enhancing our mobility. A lot has changed. Personally, before the project, I'd been commuting 10 km a day, but have been redeployed to work close to where I live, in an accessible environment. Even the classroom I work in is different from other classrooms."





## Building sustainable futures through Local Recovery and Development Plans from our work in Ukraine

In Ukraine, VNG International is supporting the territorial communities of Kherson, Beryslav, Ochakiv, and Vysokopillia in crafting local recovery plans to address the extensive destruction and damage caused to critical infrastructure, housing, and essential public services. Amid ongoing Russian aggression, Ukrainian municipalities are planning for the future while contending with security threats and service deficiencies. For this reason, the project has integrated planning for building back better with a €100,000 grant facility per community for priority projects.

In implementing the project, VNG International leverages its close partnership with the Association of Ukrainian Cities (AUC). Through training sessions on recovery plan methodology, the four communities have established a community of practice by sharing experiences. Due to proximity to the contact line, frequent travel by VNG experts was impossible. To overcome this challenge, an online webinar series titled the 'Spring Summer School' was organized, where numerous Dutch municipal and other international experts shared their knowledge with Ukrainian communities.

The four communities were among the first in Ukraine to formulate their local recovery plans, a crucial step for obtaining funding from the Ukrainian Reconstruction Agency. Simultaneously, priority projects were initiated, including the restoration of transport links between settlements to ensure access to essential services such as healthcare and education. Additionally, efforts were made to enhance waste collection services by acquiring a bulldozer. Throughout these endeavors, citizen participation remained robust and integral.

The exchanges with Dutch experts are highly valued as they emphasize the importance of building capacity in both 'soft' elements, such as good project management, and 'hard' infrastructure components. As Oleksandr Alchiiev, Chief of Beryslav Military Administration, says "the exchange with the Dutch city of Winterswijk is particularly valuable to us. We believe that the joint efforts of the city and the community can create conditions for improving the quality and diversity of reconstruction and recovery. In this way, we can begin to study and implement new successful practices".

# What we achieved in 2023:

In 2023 VNG International's projects continued to build better futures by promoting local governance worldwide. In this section we outline our achievements and some cases of the past year.

## Our impact

We partner with local governments to take up their leading role in local democratic development and with their constituencies to have them benefit from good service provision.

We do this in three ways:



### Creating enabling environments

We work with local governments and their associations - both on national and international level - to ensure a proper mandate with concomitant funding as recognition of their pivotal role in development.



### Facilitating capacity strengthening

We support local governments in developing strong technical and political leadership, setting up participatory processes for citizens to meaningfully influence decision making, improving their capability to implement decisions against high standards, and raising sufficient resources to do so.



### Encouraging citizen engagement

We encourage citizens and their leaders, and especially groups in a marginalised position, to come forward to express their needs, wishes and ambitions towards local governments and service providers.

As a result, we contributed to:

**491**

local governments take up a pro-active role in local or regional development

Service delivery by local governments reached

**73mio**  
citizens



## Securing land registration from our Benin project

A functioning property registration system by cadasters is one of the pre-conditions for supporting investment, productivity and growth. As land and buildings account for between half and three-quarters of the wealth in most economies having an up-to-date land information system is vital. For this reason, VNG International has been actively engaged in land management efforts in Benin since 2010, supporting local governments (communes) in facilitating secure access to land for all members of the population, with a particular emphasis on vulnerable groups such as women and young people. Together with Kadaster International, we have also supported since 2019 the establishment of a comprehensive national land registry, including the development of streamlined land registration procedures aimed at enhancing the inclusion of the most vulnerable individuals in land rights processes.

VNG International's work has focused on 12 communes across Benin, including the capital Cotonou, out of a total of 79 communes.

As such, we have worked on strengthening the capacity of local governments on various aspects of land rights registration, including the implementation of the national cadaster and the protection of land rights for vulnerable groups. As of 2023, our efforts have contributed to the secure registration of 234,305 land plots in these 12 communes, including 30,215 plots for women (12%).

One important learning which VNG International applied over time is to have an active engagement with civil society during the design of a land registration system. Civil Society organizations (CSOs) have played a crucial role in identifying challenges related to land rights registration for vulnerable groups, which were subsequently addressed at the national level. This dialogue led to the adaptation of land registration procedures and the revision of the decree governing land data registration in the national cadastre. The adoption of this decree by the government in December 2023 marks a significant step towards ensuring land rights for the people of Benin.

VNG International's interventions on the above described ways have led to tangible changes across the world. The figures below speak for themselves: **the year 2023 was once again an impactful year for VNG International!** This impact is not the result of a handful of bold actions, but rather the accumulation of the countless hours of hard work and dedication from VNG International's teams in The Hague and worldwide. Behind every number a unique story is to be told. Some of these stories are presented here and are illustrative for the work and accomplishments of VNG International.




By facilitating **capacity strengthening** we build local governments that are more capable, effective & participatory

**920** Local governments supported by VNG international 

**569** Local governments improved their services 

**10.211** Local government staff strengthened 

**29** Revenue collection processes improved 


**431** Plans created through citizens participation 



We create **enabling environments** wherein local governments can fulfill their pivotal role in development

**29** National reforms with a positive impact on the role of local governance 

**162** Lobby trajectories by Local Government Association for decentralisation reforms 

**39** International cases which strengthened the role of local governance in development 



By encouraging **citizen engagement** local governments can ensure services respond to local needs

## Local Governments Response, Recovery, and Reconstruction following Earthquakes

### a case from our project in Turkey

The world was stunned by the tragic earthquakes that struck Turkey in February 2023. In the Netherlands, numerous funds were raised, including contributions from Dutch municipalities, to support emergency relief, recovery, and reconstruction efforts. Part of these funds were allocated to VNG International to support the municipalities of Adana Seyhan, Kahramanmara Metropolitan, and Osmaniye in their post-disaster response and recovery capacity.

Central to our support is the Participatory Task

Force method. This approach brings together elected municipal council members, appointed officials, and representatives from civil society in a collaborative effort, fostering an inclusive process of decision-making and information sharing.

At the start emergency grants were delivered to each municipality for first needs, after which the task force dived into defining Local Recovery Plans. These plans have pinpointed priority projects set for further development. By integrating smaller grants, technical assistance,

and capacity strengthening, these efforts ensure that local government responses to post-disaster situations are well-informed and future-proof, facilitating strategic decisions that lay a solid foundation for sustainable redevelopment.

These activities underscore the pivotal role of local governments in disaster response. It also illustrates the pivotal role that VNG International plays in providing support, e.g. by Dutch municipal urban development experts and city planners, and demonstrating solidarity to fellow municipalities abroad. As we move forward, our

focus will now be on advancing at least one priority project per municipality with a robust implementation strategy.

As a member of the taskforce said: "with the workshops and trainings that have taken place, I have noticed it is not the physical contributions which will impact this community most, but it is the lessons and expertise we have gained through this cooperation, as the people and technical experts of the municipality, which we can take forward to improve the services for our citizens."



**International**

P.O. Box 30435

2500 GK The Hague

Tel +31 70 373 84 01

Fax +31 70 373 86 60

[vng-international@vng.nl](mailto:vng-international@vng.nl)

[www.vng-international.nl](http://www.vng-international.nl)