

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

VICE VERSA

WEET WAT ER SPEELT

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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

Deeper democracy

The global trend toward more democracy seems unmistakable. But how universal is democracy, and why don't free elections always result in democratic societies? Despite all the ups and downs, many political scientists are optimistic: 'No society is free from conflicting interests. Democracy is the appropriate form to create a balance.'

by Co Welgraven

While one African country is holding free elections, another African country is undergoing a military coup. In Tunisia, the success story of the Arab Spring, people were able to vote for both a new parliament and a president in the past year. In addition, a new Constitution has been passed, one that has been praised for being transparent and progressive.

In Burkina Faso, however, the military seized power shortly after president Blaise Compaoré resigned in the face of mass demonstrations. Compaoré himself also came to office as a result of a military coup 25 years ago, but he had since been duly re-elected a few times. The question now is whether or not the army will keep its promise to organize elections and prepare the way for a civil government.

These two examples illustrate how variable the process of democratization is in Africa and on non-Western continents. According to the American research institute Freedom House, 122 of the 195 countries in the world had a democratic system at the beginning of 2014 (Tunisia is on the list, Burkina Faso isn't). That's four more countries than the year before. The newcomers are Honduras, Pakistan, Kenya and Nepal, all of them developing countries. At first glance, this seems like a decent score and a hopeful development.

But if we look further back, the current picture is less heartening; at the turn of the century, there were also about 120 'electoral democracies' as defined by Freedom House. The year 2000 mar-

ked the end of the boom in the number of democracies, which had been only 69 a decade earlier. The enormous increase was due mostly to countries in Eastern Europe that had abolished the one-party communist state after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Since the millennium, the number has stagnated; as *The Economist* editors John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge state in their book *The fourth revolution*: 'The rise of democracy has ground to a halt.' And we are speaking here only about countries that are democratic in name, where elections are held now and again.

Stagnation

If we take a deeper look, for example at political rights, respect for the Constitution, complete freedom for the opposition, a fully-fledged legal system and education open to everyone, then there are only 88 countries that can truly claim to be a liberal, free democracy; 48 countries are

'not free' according to Freedom House, and the other 59 countries are 'partially free' and can still shift in any direction. This last category includes Tunisia, a democracy, and the non-democratic Burkina Faso. In North America, Australia and Europe, continents where democratic systems are centuries old, the situation is stable, although there are also serious threats to this form of government. The changes in the annual publication of Freedom House and other institutions are related especially to Latin America, Africa, Asia and the former Soviet republics. The maps of those continents and areas have few green areas (green is the colour of true democracies); the colours yellow (half-free countries) and purple (not free or dictatorships) are much more prominent.

There are many other indicators of the spread of democracy in the world. Although one is more intricate than the other and the research methods differ from one institute to the next,

the results are roughly the same, namely that the situation has been stagnating for the past ten or fifteen years: the number of democracies is no longer increasing. The most positive results come from the so-called Mo Ibrahim index, named after the British-Sudanese telecommunications tycoon and billionaire, that charts only the countries in Africa. The last index showed that 39 of the 52 countries scored better than they had a year earlier in the four areas of good government analysed by Mo Ibrahim: safety and law, participation and human rights, sustainable economic opportunities and human development; the other thirteen countries had a lower score. Mauritius tops the list, just as it did a year ago, and Somalia once again hangs far below at the bottom.

Interesting conclusions can be drawn from all of the studies done by political scientists. Countries that were British colonies until the mid-twentieth century are doing quite well with respect to democracy; this is attributed to the fact that the British left behind reasonably functioning civil service and legal systems. In contrast, the former colonies of France and Portugal are having less success.

No reason for pessimism

Political scientists are not at all pessimistic about the current state of democracy in developing countries. It could have been much worse, said the Flemish political scientist Kristof Jacobs of Radboud University in Nijmegen, and certainly if we consider the international economic crisis that started in 2008 – an economic crisis is a natural opponent of democracy.

'There is both good and bad news,' said Jacobs. 'In general, we can say that it takes a very long time before a country can call itself a true democracy; it usually takes decades. But once a country has become a democracy, it also takes a long time for it to revert to a dictatorship. Given the global crisis of the past few years, you might expect that democracies would have floundered, but that didn't happen. In developing countries, democracy, once it has been established, is resilient. It is an established system, it's anchored, and that's interesting to note. Look at Africa. Only a couple of countries there have reverted from a democracy to a dictatorship in the last few years. There are almost no parties or politicians who resolutely state: "We have to abolish democracy, get rid of it." That's a hopeful development.'

According to Jacobs, we can speak of a positive tendency in the past several decades, starting in the mid-twentieth century. 'One of our primary findings is that there's a very strong relationship between wealth, the prosperity of a country, and the chance of establishing a democracy. The world is becoming increasingly richer, which is spectacular, and that translates into

In September 2014, protests broke out in Hong Kong after the Chinese authorities had announced restrictions on reforms to the electoral system



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'As democracy becomes more westernized, it loses support'



At the beginning of 2011, mass demonstrations at Tahrir Square in Cairo, Egypt led to president Mubarak stepping down

more democratization. It's as simple as that.' But according to Jacobs this doesn't mean that countries that are rich because of, for example, their many natural resources, are also democratic - look at Congo or the oil countries. Jacobs's view is certainly not undisputed. There are also numerous people who see a reversed relationship: democracy is necessary in order to realize economic growth. Political stability paves the way for investments in infrastructure, industry and services as well as in good education.

Political science professor Ben Crum of VU University in Amsterdam is reasonably optimistic: 'Democracy is an extremely difficult process with many ups and downs that has taken decades if not centuries here, but not always without problems. The most dramatic example of course is the Weimar Republic in Germany between the two World Wars. If you keep this in mind, then it's certainly not going so badly in the developing countries. I see a lot of encouraging signs.'

Pitfalls

But countries outside of Europe, Australia and North America are confronted by many handicaps

and pitfalls. The borders drawn so arbitrarily by the former colonizers constitute such a handicap. 'That makes the situation more difficult,' said Kristof Jacobs. 'If you place two or more opposing tribes in one country, you're asking for problems. One of the characteristics of a fully-fledged democracy is that you have what we political scientists call 'loser's consent': the opposition accepts the fact that it has lost the election, better luck next time. In an artificially drawn country, that doesn't always happen. The loser tends to protest, and it's much more difficult for a democracy to take root.' Examples of this are Sudan, Libya, which is now undergoing a civil war, Mali and, to a lesser extent, Iraq.

A presidential system doesn't improve the situation in such countries, where the 'winner takes all' principle almost always rules. Jacobs: 'That means that one group or tribe dominates the other. If the latter group comes to power in the next elections, the situation will be reversed; this has little to do with a fully-fledged democracy. Look at Zambia, where one despot was replaced by another, or at Egypt. And Indonesia is a good example of a country where the opposi-

tion tries to make life difficult for the newly elected president.'

In Africa there are definitely many strong presidents, Jacobs added. 'He is expected to be resolute - it's almost always a he. He has to help the nation to advance and to put an end to divisions and tribal disputes. He has to save the situation with decisive actions because seeking consensus is only time-consuming and we know which measures are necessary, don't we? That's the sort of pervasive feeling. But being resolute can lead to the erosion of democracy. Experience has shown that a strong president becomes an enlightened despot in no time. And an enlightened despot tends to become a despot rather than a democrat. The call for resoluteness usually boomerangs back in the democrats' faces.'

Natural disasters and disease are also major threats to the democratization process. 'A disease such as Ebola is not only killing thousands of people in western Africa, but it is also fully undermining the state and destroying the economy, with disastrous consequences,' stated Jacobs. 'The poorer the country, the poorer the hospitals and healthcare and the bigger the chance that

such an Ebola epidemic will spread. An epidemic increases the risk of a return to a dictatorship. In all aspects, Ebola is life-threatening.' President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia acts decisively, the political scientist admitted. 'But if that eventually leads to power being centralized, there's a problem with regard to democracy.'

Gap

The indexes published by Freedom House show that there is rather a wide gap between countries

don't constitute a democracy. Kristof Jacobs: 'You have to have free media, independent courts, a Constitution that can't be amended at whim, and a system of checks and balances, which means that the resoluteness I was referring to is set in a framework. That's the big problem, especially in Africa: there are too few checks and balances, if any.'

Universal?

May the West expect the rest of the world to fully



Men look at posters for the Tunisian parliamentary election of October 2014: the first elections to be held under the new Constitution

that are democratic in name ('electoral democracies') and the free, liberal democracies such as those in the wealthy West. 'It's sort of a two-staged rocket,' explained professor Ben Crum of the VU. 'In the ideal type of democracy, you have a basic Constitution that always applies: respect for human rights, protection of minorities, etc. This basic Constitution isn't enforced by a majority on the basis of elections and is thus independent of who comes to power. Rather, it rests on a sort of consensus in society. On top of this basis are the elections with winners and losers. But that electoral process has to be framed within the basic Constitution.'

The problem is that the ideal type is often absent. Crum: 'Look at what happened in Egypt two years ago. The Muslim Brotherhood won the elections with Mohamed Morsi as the leader and new president. Morsi was subsequently deposed and the Muslim Brotherhood prohibited because it was suspected of being a terrorist organization. This is a good example of elections that weren't framed within a Constitution. And unfortunately, that's more often the case in the non-Western world.'

In short, although very welcome, free electi-

adopt its democratic values and standards? Is democracy universal? Or is it tied to a certain culture and civilization that can't simply be translated to other countries? Ben Crum: 'I tend to think from the universal perspective. There's no single society in this globalized world that doesn't have a certain amount of heterogeneity and opposing interests; democracy is the appropriate form to create a sort of balance. We have to be patient. We can't expect that sending a couple of experts to Afghanistan so they can explain how to hold an election will result in a perfectly functioning democracy from one day to the next.'

Kristof Jacobs: 'It's a question of how you describe democracy. Elections, freedom of the press, independent judges, almost everyone quickly agrees on this. But if you further define the concept, problems arise: religious freedom, tolerance of minorities such as homosexuals. That's more difficult, certainly in the Middle East. As democracy becomes more westernized, it loses support.'

The former minister of Foreign Affairs Ben Bot: 'We may find it universal, but the rest of the world often has other ideas. Your enlightenment

Democratic experiment

In many places in the world, people continue to call for a greater voice. There are all sorts of interesting experiments to improve the democratic system and to enlarge people's involvement in government both in the West and in new democracies. In countries such as Belgium, Germany, Estonia, Iceland and Ireland there are (or were) so-called democratic conventions, named after the meeting held in the American city of Philadelphia, where the Constitution of the United States was adopted in 1787. These modern conventions often have a fixed core of citizens who are involved in parts of the government and who make proposals intended to improve the working of parliamentary democracy.

At the end of the last century, there was an interesting experiment in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre: participatory budgeting. Inhabitants were given direct influence on setting the budget for the district. At well-attended annual meetings, they discuss which sectors should receive some funding. The experiment is successful and popular, and the meetings are sometimes attended by more than a thousand people. The population places the emphasis on education (the number of schools in the city has increased fourfold in a quarter of a century) and healthcare, especially preventive care. Today almost every household is connected to both the water and the sewerage systems.

Tens of other municipalities in Brazil have followed the example of Porto Alegre, and the system of participatory budgeting can now be found in other Latin American countries, Asia (India) and Africa. In addition, a few cities in Europe and the United States are also conducting this experiment. After a study of Puerto Alegre, the World Bank concluded that the citizens were much more involved in government and that the poor especially benefit.

'Being resolute can lead to the deterioration of a democracy'



Tunisia, October 2014: the country's new Constitution guarantees, among other things, women's rights

philosophy, which emphasizes the individual, only leads us to poverty, division, war and tribal arguments, they claim. We first have to take care of the community and only then the individual. The western system isn't the system in which we can grow and offer young people a future. I understand this argument.'

Not optimum

Bot referred to the fact that democracy doesn't

always function as well as it should in the West. 'Look at the United States, where the Republicans and the Democrats have each other in a stranglehold that threatens to make the country impossible to steer. And take the situation in the Netherlands, where we see increasingly more splinter parties; you wonder if that really helps democracy. I can imagine that countries in Africa currently look especially towards China, Russia and Turkey and to their forms of government.'

Was the Arab Spring, which began four years ago, not a clear signal that the population wanted a democracy? Bot disputes that: 'That wasn't so much a call for democracy as a call for food and money and hope for the future. Young people were losing hope. They were looking for a good slogan, and what is better than to come together under the rallying cry of "We want democracy"? But that didn't really interest them at all; they just wanted a government that could revive the economy.'

There are scholars who can imagine that an extremely poor country doesn't give first priority to trying to establish a western-styled democracy. In a recent interview with NRC Handelsblad, James Robinson, co-author of the highly praised *Why Nations Fail*, said: 'It's important to understand that, if you want to build a prosperous society in a poor country, democracy is only part of the process and not the most important.'

VU political scientist Ben Crum agrees with this: 'Poverty is a very fundamental threat,' he stated. 'If there's nothing to eat and people are dying from hunger, I think that democracy is a luxury problem, if I may be so blunt.' So it's better to eat in a dictatorship than to be hungry in a democracy? 'Yes, I think so.'

Nevertheless, despite all the criticism, there is clearly a visible trend toward more democracy, and you can see that the international community wants to respond to this. With all of the criticism of the system, political science nevertheless also shows that democracy has many positive aspects. Political scientist Kristof Jacobs in Nijmegen: 'Democratic countries are healthier, richer. People who live in a democracy are happier. There's less terrorism, which is logical because you have loser's consent so you don't have to reach for your weapons if you disagree. All empirical research indicates that democracies perform much better on a large number of important indicators, especially if you look at the long term. They have so many advantages in so many domains for citizens and governments that it's very difficult to be opposed to a democracy as a political system.' ■

Joost Taverne:

'Large groups of the population must identify with policies'

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? Joost Taverne of the VVD (a liberal party): 'Too many parties can be tricky.'

by Arachne Molema

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

'I am committed to modernizing the Dutch system of democracy. Democracy requires maintenance. It's easy to forget that you have to devote attention to upholding democracy in a country, precisely because people here regard it as the normal state of affairs.'

'I focus on three aspects. The first is that the judiciary and the legal system are separated as far as is possible. From the jurisprudence point of view the idea is that there is a separation of power, but the Dutch Council of State still encompasses two functions: it advises the government in the field of law making and it is the highest administrative court. In 2011, I submitted a motion on the subject and the Cabinet has now come up with a legislative proposal for a better separation of these two aspects.'

'In addition, I want to make it easier for people to vote. The average turnout for House of Representatives elections is only 75 percent. There are 350 thousand people alone who have difficulties making a pencil mark on a ballot paper because they have a visual handicap. On top of that there are over 700 thousand eligible Dutch voters living and working abroad. In the last elections for the House of Representatives only 30 thousand of them actually voted. If the turnout were that low at home there'd be an outcry. I have handed in a motion to introduce electronic voting in the Netherlands

and to allow people abroad to vote online.'

'The third point concerns what the Constitution states about who has the last say on changes to the law in the Netherlands. The Constitution not only says that international law is directly applicable here, but that this takes precedence over the Constitution itself. This means we have undermined our own legal sovereignty. We need to be careful not to jeopardize the credibility of the Dutch legal system.'

What democratic trends do you discern in the Netherlands?

'In addition to the issues that concern me, there are also moves to hold referendums in the Netherlands. There is a proposal for a constitutional review of our rule of law, and the House of Representatives is continually introducing new initiatives. In addition a study was done recently on the position of the senates in the neighbouring countries. We also have regular discussions on freedom of expression.'

Is a multiparty system always the best form of government?

'Democracy implies a multiparty system; there has to be something to vote on. In the United Kingdom they have a three-party system, but in practice it's a two-party system. Yet it's the oldest democracy in the world. If you have too many parties, it can be difficult to form a government.'

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

'One answer is that the subject of development cooperation policy is not my field. But if you make it a pre-condition, you'll exclude some countries. Democracy is part of policy influencing. If you help countries to set up their own democracy or to strengthen the existing democratic system, there need to be several parties. It's important that policies are determined by more than one person and that large groups of the population can identify with them. That is why democracy is so far the best way of running a country.'

Joost Taverne (VVD, born 1971) – Member of Parliament since 2010. Spokesman for issues including the Constitution, international treaties, Electoral Law and freedom of expression. Worked previously as a diplomat in the United States. Studied law.

How do you measure democratization?

Democracy leads to healthier and more stable societies, according to political scientists. The Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy promotes democratization through projects in over 20 countries. But how do they measure the results of their work?

by **Nic van der Jagt**
Eugenia Boutylkova

The Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) is a democracy assistance provider: an organization whose work is to provide support to political processes in new and emerging democracies. The institute has programmes in over 20 countries, where the focus is on strengthening the capacities of political parties and on facilitating mutual dialogue. To ensure that the programmes for promoting democracy function as optimally as possible NIMD attempts to measure their effects and the impact they have.

Challenging task

Democratization is certainly not the easiest subject to measure. Democracies take many forms and undergo different phases, and the process of democratization is never a linear or predictable one. Processes encounter setbacks and successes, and it may take years before the effects you are trying to measure actually become visible.

Democracy is to a large extent context dependent. Because every country has its own political history and specific issues, it is important to assess for each country individually the ways in which its democratization process can be supported. This emphasis on context also makes it difficult to compare countries with each other, although this is important when measuring results. It is also crucial that the measuring process is flexible if results are to be reliable.

The influence of external factors must also be taken into account when measuring indicators of the results of democracy support, because the changes that you are trying to measure may also



NIMD organized a meeting for dialogue on electoral reform in Mozambique

be caused by natural disasters, epidemics, economic crises or political relations that countries have with, for example, the World Bank or world powers such as the US, China or Russia. The challenge is therefore to isolate the indicators you are measuring from external factors, in order to see the results achieved by the process of providing democracy assistance.

It is also the case that, even though much information is collected using indexes such as that of the American Freedom House and the Mo Ibrahim index, this does not tell us anything about how the progress that a country makes has

come about. The indexes provide a good overall description of the situation, but the level of aggregation means they are not suitable for measuring specifically the effects of democracy assistance programmes.

Mixed results

Nevertheless, the NIMD can say something about the impact of its programmes, and it does so by using 'flexible and mixed measurement of results'. This means that NIMD combines quantitative and qualitative approaches for its planning, monitoring and evaluation. Quantitative ap-

proaches include baseline surveys and annual measurement of the outputs of the various programmes. By comparing indicators it is possible to gain insight for example into whether the amount of collaboration between political parties has changed.

Qualitative measurements look more at the 'how' questions, for example the way in which the work is carried out and what the challenges and opportunities are. For example, in 2013 NIMD piloted a 'storytelling' assessment with the programme directors of partner organizations and political actors in five African countries on the changes in their countries, how these arose and how they dealt with the biggest challenges they encountered.

Furthermore, NIMD tries to monitor at different levels. For example, to measure the effectiveness of its 'democracy schools' (see below) NIMD looks at whether the alumni actually end up in a public or political job afterwards. Other indicators say something about the amount of trust between political parties and the feasibility of working together on reforms. Trust is measured by looking at how often parties hold meetings together, the subjects that are discussed and the long-term results of the talks.

Here context analysis is important again. Representatives from different political parties may well hold meetings, but if the most important issues remain unaddressed there is little point getting together, and little can be said about the amount of mutual trust.

Mozambique

To take a concrete example, we looked at the findings of a recent NIMD evaluation. In February 2014 an NIMD team travelled to Mozambique for in-depth interviews and group discussions with the representatives of political parties, local stakeholders, donors, academics and NGOs. NIMD used its 'Political Context Scan' and 'Organisational Scan' for the evaluation. The focus was on the dialogue between parties, direct assistance to parties and the 'democracy schools' where politically active members of society take courses on ways of contributing to democratization in their region (see also the article on p. 22).

Several interesting findings on the outcomes of the programme emerged from the evaluation. First is that the relevance of the inter-party dialogue is beyond doubt. Despite the complex political context, trust between political parties and the National Election Commission (CNE) in Mo-

zambique has grown. One of the recommendations was to extend inter-party dialogue beyond electoral issues by including matters such as broader democratic reforms and policy debates.

A second finding was that the NIMD democracy schools in Nampula and Chimoio have made a valuable contribution to the development of a democratic culture in the region. As many of the participants hold important positions within local government, political parties and NGOs, they have been able to contribute to laying a foundation for democracy and shown that interest in active participation is growing among the population.

Moreover, most of NIMD's evaluations are carried out by external evaluators, and as is the case with other forms of development work, it is sometimes difficult to link the recommendations from external evaluations to the daily reality encountered by those implementing the programmes. To prevent this happening, this evaluation chose to send a team of NIMD staff from other programme countries where comparable programmes are being implemented, so that the participants would learn about each other's work and reality-based recommendations would be made. This turned out to be a useful method, which is also being used increasingly by other organizations engaged in democracy assistance.

Improvements

These examples show that, despite the difficulties of measuring outcomes in this field – referred to as 'Democracy & Governance' (D&G) by the experts – learning is taking place and that innovative methods of measuring outcomes are being adopted that make it possible to improve the programmes.

Other organizations besides NIMD are also starting to find their way in these developments. The American National Democratic Institute (NDI) is experimenting with the Relection, Analysis and Decision (RAD) monitoring systems, which focus on strengthening local partners' capacities for reflection, analysis and decision-making so that they become more relevant to the local context. The International Republican Institute (IRI) has started doing peer mentoring, where colleagues in the field support each other in carrying out evaluations, thereby helping to strengthen each other's capacities. These initiatives paint a hopeful picture of measuring results in the still young field of Democracy & Governance. Yet there is still much to be learned, for NIMD too. ■

A democratization process is never linear or predictable

Uganda: how dialogue helps smooth the road to reform

Elections will be held in Uganda in just over a year's time. The opposition can't wait to defeat president Museveni, who has been in power for the last 28 years. But in Uganda's young democracy they do not yet have a fair chance. In a hostile political climate NIMD initiated a political dialogue for reforms. What role can dialogue play in the democratization of a country?

by Selma Zijlstra

Hippo Twebazes has his eyes closed. It looks like he's asleep; indeed, the subjects have been discussed countless times. But it turns out he's following the conversation, for the moment an important subject comes up his eyes open. 'When would you advise us to give up on this proposal?' the opposition asks. 'How far can the National Resistance Movement go?' Twebaze, a member of the governing party National Resistance Movement (NRM), answers patiently and then closes his eyes again. Darkness falls outside. All that remains visible is the outline of the boundary wall that protect the quiet offices in Ntinda neighbourhood from the vibrant capital of Kampala.

Today the Interparty Organization for Dialogue (IPOD) is at work and electoral reform is on the agenda. Delegates from the six political parties represented in the Ugandan parliament have

been working on these since 2012, and have now come up with over fifty proposals for improving the electoral process. But NRM still needs to decide on a number of the proposals. Maintaining the status quo remains an option for the time being.

Electoral reforms are a hot topic in Ugandan politics. With elections planned for 2016 the opposition wants a radical reform of the electoral legislation. They say the previous elections were not free and are now demanding a fair chance. But that is not a simple process in the East African country.

Uganda's democracy is still young. The first elections were held after the country gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1962. Milton Obote, the leader of the United People Congress (UPC), became the first president of Uganda. He was toppled in 1971 by the leader of the military, Idi Amin. The notorious Amin ruled

with an iron hand and had his opponents brutally murdered. A young, idealistic political science student, Yoweri Museveni, grew up during Amin's reign, drawing inspiration from Marxist literature. Together with a group of Ugandan exiles and the aid of the Tanzanian army he overthrew Idi Amin in 1980. When Milton Obote was elected president again after contested elections, Museveni withdrew in frustration to the forests. A civil war ensued in which an estimated 300 thousand people lost their lives. Museveni and his NRM conquered Kampala in 1986.

In an attempt to end the divisions, Museveni outlawed all political parties; in his view they were organized too much along ethnic and regional lines. NRM was the only movement allowed. Members of parliament were elected on a personal basis and not as members of a party. The stability that emerged under the new president and Uganda's economic success resulted in

Museveni becoming the donor darling of the West, which regarded this as an African alternative to multiparty democracy. Ultimately, however, donors put increasing pressure on Uganda to create a multiparty system and after a referendum in 2005 this became reality. Old political parties were resurrected and new ones were registered.

But Museveni was by no means ready to step down. The former guerrilla fighter, who had once promised not to rule for longer than two terms, changed the Constitution so that it no longer included clauses on presidential terms. The 2006 and 2011 elections, both of which were won outright by Museveni, were disputed and the opposition contested the results. Meanwhile Museveni has been in power for 28 years. And although the passing of the anti-homo law caused a few ripples in relations with the West, Ugandan military participation in conflict areas such as Somalia

With elections planned for 2016 the opposition wants a radical reform of the electoral legislation

and South Sudan sees to it that Western powers are not too critical.

Stability and corruption

In his office on the campus of the Makerere University in Kampala, professor of political science Sabiti Makara sums up the positive and negative points of Museveni's rule. 'One: the country has endured continuous crisis and chaos. There was much violence and the army was undisciplined. Museveni provided stability and created discipline in the military. Two: he addressed gender equality, as a result of which women form 35 percent of the representation in parliament. Three: Uganda's GNP has grown since the 1990s by an average of 7 percent. This has not led to a direct increase in income for the poor, but absolute poverty has decreased from 56 percent in 1990 to about 21 percent today. More children attend school, and number seven – are you keeping



Supporters of President Museveni celebrate on the street after his victory in the presidential elections of 2011. The opposition contested the results

NIMD facilitates debate in Uganda

NIMD's aim in Uganda is to foster better collaboration between political parties. Themes are proposed by the parties themselves and anchored in an agenda for reform. Dialogue is held between the secretary generals of the parties; they lobby within their own parties and the final decision is taken by parliament.

NIMD facilitates the dialogue. 'Our role is to keep discussions technical and focused on the subject,' explained Eugène van Kemenade, who works at the Ugandan NIMD office. 'You're a kind of referee. When parties are not willing to budge on a particular matter we try to get to the bottom of what the real issue is. Civil society representatives, academics and other relevant institutes such as the Electoral Committee and parliamentary committees are included in the dialogue.'

In addition NIMD offers assistance to the parliamentary parties to enable them to arrive at a strategic plan and create a well-founded party programme. Not unimportant, according to van Kemenade. 'Because the parties are so fixated on Museveni, they hardly get round to developing a political alternative. We help them to convey a clear message to their supporters, but also create the opportunity for substantive discussion with the governing party.'

terms of office, the confounding of executive, legislative and judicial power: all of these are a thorn in the flesh of the opposition. They want one thing more than anything: to see Museveni go. Omar Kalinge, secretary general of the JEEMA party (Justice, Education, Economic Revitalization, Morality and African Unity) established in 1996, was blunt: 'The discussion on change starts with regime change. We want to see another face on TV.'

Florence Namanyana of the Democratic Party ('the country's oldest party,' as the parliamentarian proudly put it) confirms this from within Uganda's impressive parliament building. Walking through the corridors on her way to a committee meeting on government businesses ('so much corruption,' she sighed) Namanya commented: 'He's been in power for too long. It's time for him to go.'

But Daudi Migereko, the amiable NRM minister of Land, Housing and Urban Development, and an IPOD representative, believes the accusations are far too exaggerated. On his desk four landline telephones compete with his constantly ringing mobile phone. President Museveni looks down benevolently from his picture on the wall. 'Why shouldn't someone who's doing a good job be allowed more time?' Migereko asked, in response to complaints about the presidential terms being abolished. 'A good leader who has not yet reached retirement age should be able to continue serving the country. Ugandans still want him as president,' he commented calmly.

This is not untrue. Although support for Museveni is crumbling in the capital of Kampala and many former NRM voters no longer make the effort to go to polling stations, support in rural areas remains strong. Lacking confidence in the opposition, which offers no real alternative, and fearing any change, many people still regard NRM as the best option. Their fears are not unfounded: transfer of power in Uganda has always been accompanied by bloodshed.

Dialogue begins

Because Uganda's political parties are diametrically opposed to each other, opposition and government have refused to talk to each other for years. It was within this hostile atmosphere that the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) embarked on setting up a dialogue between the parties in 2009. Both the opposition and the ruling party had approached the then Netherlands ambassador, Joke Brandt, for support. Brandt introduced them via NIMD to their colleagues in Ghana, where NIMD was also working on fostering political dialogue. There the Ugandan parties saw how dialogue can contribute to building democracy and a peaceful transfer of power.

The famous 'handshake' moment of the secretaries general of the six parliamentary parties was of great symbolic value, said Karijn de Jong, a senior programme manager at NIMD. It was the first time that they had been seen together publicly and it was a signal that the parties were prepared to work together. 'Putting Uganda first' became IPOD's motto. An informal platform, the organization has no decision-making powers, but getting the parties to the table was already quite an achievement.

Henry Kasacca, who works for IPOD, experienced the developments at close hand: 'Members of the opposition could not be seen to be associating with the ruling party. Now they are open about the fact that they talk to each other. The NRM didn't use to listen to the opposition; now the opposition has a platform.'

It took a while for trust to be established, said Kalinge, who was present from the start. 'The opposition wondered why we should work together with the ruling party. But things changed after a few years. You get to know people and build up relationships. Working from these personal relationships you can try to convince the party.'

The participants regard dialogue as an important goal in its own right. Namanyana: 'It's important to keep NRM involved. We can call them to account when they don't live up to agreements that have been made within IPOD. And we learn to work together with other opposition parties.' Moreover, IPOD provides a framework within which NRM can indicate the points on which they are not prepared to compromise. 'In this way the opposition can prepare its demands from within IPOD, and as a result they stand more chance in parliament,' Kasacca said.

Whereas the benefits that the opposition derive from IPOD are clear, the gains for NRM are a matter of guesswork. Critics and many members of the opposition believe that NRM takes part merely as a window dressing exercise and to keep donors satisfied; others believe that NRM does take the process seriously. Kasacca is one: 'The government uses IPOD to build its legitimacy,' he said.

Someone who can shed more light on NRM's motivation is of course Minister Migereko. 'We focus on discussion and dialogue with the opposition to achieve consensus. In this way political parties will be discouraged from trying to achieve their political goals in an unconstitutional and illegal way, which leads to chaos and instability. IPOD has had important successes; it has prevented chaos. As the military has also done, of course,' he added. According to Karijn de Jong of NIMD, however, Museveni is not only driven by pressure from the opposition, he also has to keep the reform-oriented factions of NRM satisfied.

Minister: 'The dialogue has prevented chaos – and the army too of course'



Above: Minister Daudi Migereko. 'Ugandans still want Museveni as president'

Below: MP Florence Namanyana. 'It's time for Museveni to go'

Reforms

While dialogue is important, there must be something that needs to be discussed. For this reason the parties decided to work on four issues within IPOD: electoral reforms, constitutional reforms, public financing of political parties and the legal system. The first steps toward electoral reform, in 2011, reached as far as London. Because the suspicion had arisen that there would be irregularities the ballot papers were printed there; and the entire opposition went along too. The papers were also counted there and taken under escort to the airport. The opposition awaited the arrival of the ballot papers in Kampala and then accompanied them to the different polling stations in the country. Kalinge regarded this as significant: 'Of course the NRM could still have faked the elections. But they weren't able to print new ballot papers; at least we were able to keep an eye on that.'

The opposition's wishes for reform are clear: they suspect large-scale fraud and are therefore demanding that a modernized voting register is set up. They also want to see a newly appointed

Electoral Committee. At present the members are appointed by Museveni and therefore not independent in the eyes of the opposition and analysts.

'You don't let Ajax's trainer appoint the referee either, do you?' said Augustine Ruzindana, secretary general of the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) by way of explanation. Uganda's second largest party was born in 2005 when Museveni's old comrades-in-arms were outraged at his decision to abolish presidential terms. Another problem associated with this, in the opposition's view, is that the members of the Electoral Committee can also be appointed for several terms. 'That leads to people trying to stay in the president's good books so that they can remain on the Committee,' said Florence Namanyana.

An equally serious concern is the alleged confusion between party and state. 'We are not opposing a party, but the state,' said Ruzindana. 'That means that we are also against the military and the police'. The opposition claims that they are in NRM's pocket, leaving the opposition little

room for manoeuvre. When the leader of the FDC, Kizza Besigye – like Ruzindana, one of Museveni's old cronies – dared to challenge the president during the 2006 elections he was arrested for 'terrorism'. In 2011 he ended up in hospital. 'Museveni regards it as a crime if you challenge him,' said professor Makara.

Moreover, according to the opposition the president uses treasury money to finance his campaign. He tours the country liberally handing out money to win votes. Florence Namanyana was visibly enraged. 'The president has already started his campaign. Money is being handed out as we speak. Where does it come from? The government. That money could be used for public services, health, education.' National media estimate that Museveni's campaign has cost 350 billion Ugandan shillings; the opposition can't even hope to spend a tenth of that amount.

The opposition's concerns are shared by EU observers, who reported irregularities and the lack of a level playing field in the last two elections. NRM does not acknowledge this picture however. Migereko: 'There are winners and losers

count? – he liberalized the media and there is free access to internet.'

He pauses for a moment. 'Now the negative side: he's been in power for 28 years already. If a person stays too long, he starts to make mistakes. Corruption is omnipresent. The roads are bad, public services have collapsed, institutions crippled. It costs twice as much to build a road here than it does in neighbouring Rwanda. The reason? Corruption.'

These could have been the words of the opposition. The system of patronage, through which Museveni grants favours to friends, family and his supporters, the abolition of presidential



A boda boda (motorcycle taxi) transports ballot boxes and papers in Mukono during the 2011 elections

in elections. If you lose, that doesn't mean you haven't had a fair chance.' He doesn't understand many of the concerns of the opposition, such as those about the Electoral Committee. 'They may be appointed by the president, but that doesn't mean that they don't operate independently. The opposition wants a selection committee. But that way you create a bureaucracy for problems that can be solved simply.'

Addressing symptoms?

Nevertheless, NRM says it is open to proposals for improvements. For example, new ways of proving identity will be used for voting. These and the other reforms being prepared jointly by the parties within IPOD will find their way to parliament, where the cabinet will vote on them. The opposition is confident that the proposed reforms will make the elections fairer. The question remains, however, whether this will be achieved before 2016. According to the opposition the biggest obstacle is the attitude of the NRM. 'NRM does not regard these issues as a problem,' said Ruzindana in response to Migereko's earlier words. 'So how can you put an issue on the agenda if the most important party doesn't even accept that it is an issue? We can work on reforms indirectly, but that is merely addressing symptoms not causes.'

Ruzindana expressed the opinion of many members of the opposition who are frustrated at the lack of progress within IPOD. An evaluation report suggested that it was unable to realize the high expectations that the opposition had. The leaders of the opposition parties even threatened to leave IPOD at one point and to opt for a more activist approach. 'The opposition wants big changes, but IPOD's mandate is limited,' said Eugène van Kemenade, head of the

NIMD Ugandan office. 'We cannot pass laws. We can make proposals. They want to see the regime go, but all we can do is to try and make the playing field more level.'

The generally more moderate secretary generals of the parties managed, however, to persuade their leaders of the importance of the IPOD process. Kalinge understands the reservations that his fellow party members have about the IPOD process: 'We talk with the NRM while our people are beaten up by the same NRM members. Nevertheless we follow both paths: that of activism and that of the strategically important dialogue.'

Yet to some extent they are fighting a losing battle, for it seems that no one yet believes that Museveni will step down from power through free and fair elections in 2016. 'The elections have already been hijacked,' professor Makara believes. 'His campaign started the day after the 2011 elections. He has an enormous lead.'

So why bother to participate in elections and fight for reforms? Kalinge sees plenty of reasons: 'Even if we don't win the elections, for us it's a way of being able to talk to the people for ninety days without being harassed by the police. And above all, we cannot walk away from our responsibilities. It is our duty to prepare ourselves for true democracy. Good electoral legislation is a reason itself. You bite off what you can chew. We're not here for short-term gains: it's about strategy.'

Ugandan Spring

No one can predict Uganda's future with certainty. Scenarios abound. Is Museveni's admiration of Mugabe, the 90-year-old president of Zimbabwe, a betrayal of his own ambitions? Or will he retire at 75 as stipulated in the constitution?

It seems that no one yet believes that Museveni will step down from power in 2016

Perhaps the internal dynamics of the NRM party will lead to cracks? The signs are already showing. In September Prime Minister Amama Mbabazi was fired for allegedly having set his sights on becoming a presidential candidate. There are speculations that Mbabazi will defect to the opposition. If the opposition were to unanimously support him and conduct a concerted campaign, Museveni may encounter serious opposition in 2016.

Another scenario about which speculation abounds is a Ugandan Spring, along the lines of the Arab Spring. Whether this will happen is questionable since there is no well-educated middle class as there was in Tunisia. Nevertheless some of the conditions for a potentially explosive situation are in place. Three-quarters of the population are younger than thirty, and 83 percent of young people aged between 18 and 24 are unemployed. They are starting to become frustrated at the lack of opportunities, while they see a small elite getting richer. Significantly, Uganda's most popular rap artist has a big hit at the moment with *Time Bomb*. 'It will be easy to capitalize on this frustration,' Kalinge suspects.

Even Museveni seems to be getting nervous. Demonstrations are increasingly being quashed and permission is required from the police for demonstrations involving more than three people. 'Extremist forces are gaining ground within the government and the opposition,' Kasacca observed. He believes that IPOD has a crucial role to play in increasing the moderate vote in a potentially explosive situation.

Kalinge too believes in the future of IPOD. 'The time will come that NRM needs us.' And leaning forward, peering over his glasses, he added while lowering his voice: 'Did you know? At the end of last year Museveni's son-in-law attended an IPOD meeting in a hotel just outside the city as an NRM representative. He said: "We've been in power for 28 years and we know that things can change. But we value our lives and want to maintain our assets. If Museveni goes, will you lock us up and steal our property? Or can we talk about safety during a transitional period and will we be treated humanely?" That was the first time that I'd heard anything like it in IPOD. See, we were talking about something important! That's exactly the role that IPOD needs to play. Then it won't just be about a couple of electoral reforms, but about the survival of the nation.' ■

Roelof van Laar PvdA (Partij van de Arbeid): 'Democracy is a never-ending process'

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? Roelof van Laar of the Partij van de Arbeid (a social democratic party): 'Development cooperation is always about dialogue.'

by Arachne Molema

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

'There's nowhere where you can make as much difference to society as in the House of Representatives. It is a great advantage that the Netherlands has a culture of openness and that you can say anything to politicians. All the input from members of the public, civil society organizations and parties makes for good debate. I'm not going to dream up what's good for my country by sitting alone in my room. In countries where there is no democracy, people only represent themselves or the interests of a small group.'

What democratic trends do you discern in the Netherlands?

'We have a developed democracy. We have a vibrant civil society and there is a place for everyone within Dutch society, but democracy is a never-ending process. In the politics and the media, form is sometimes apparently more important than content. The pace of the media today is so fast and that's not going to change. But more focus on content would mean we could run the country better.'

Is a multiparty system always the best form of government?

'It's the ultimate form of government: an inclusive multiparty system in which

institutions care about the public interest. It takes a long time to achieve this. We are still working on it in the Netherlands. In developing countries you see elements of what you'd like to see, but never a whole system. Even South Africa, a vibrant democracy, is in fact a one-party state where the ANC determines everything. Fully democratic elections have been held, fairly and freely, and yet one party dominates. In many developing countries you see dominant parties like this, or two parties that alternate. That's not democracy. Rwanda and Cambodia are examples.

'Democracy is the result of development, not something you can just introduce. A country with a multiparty democracy is not by definition better. What's important is that governing is done from the perspective of the public interest. If you live in a democracy that is corrupt and merely self-serving, you're often worse off than under a benign dictator or despot. The regime in China is not democratic but it has brought a billion people out of poverty.'

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

'Imposing something is never a good way of going about things. You can make pre-conditions as hard as you like, but development cooperation is about dialogue and working jointly on issues. We subsidize the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy, which is engaged in long-term work with local powers in countries themselves. They bring politicians together outside the political setting, and away from the eyes of the media, to help get dialogue going.

'That's the strength of the Netherlands Parliament. Everyone knows what we are up to. Sometimes party interests take priority, but in the longer term parties' main work is to run the country. The country's interest comes first. This Cabinet does not have a majority in the Senate and yet it has not collapsed. In developing countries they often fight to the bitter end because power must be held on to at all costs.'

Roelof van Laar (PvdA, born 1981) – Member of Parliament since 2013. Spokesman for development cooperation and kingdom relations. Was previously director of the relief organization Free a Girl and Councillor in the city of Leiden. Studied political science and business management.

LiquidFeedback: direct influence on policy

Democracy is under attack, but the online platform LiquidFeedback can help to revive it. The German Pirate Party is already successfully using the platform. LiquidFeedback gives citizens the feeling that they're helping to decide their future. NIMD is also interested.

by Arachne Molema

The small village of Kvareli is located in one of the oldest wine regions in the world: Kakheti in eastern Georgia. However, the group of politicians, researchers and ICT techies gathered here haven't come to taste the wine but for an exciting pilot project: LiquidFeedback. The participants from Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and Georgia are playing the LiquidFeedback simulation on their laptops.

At the top right of the webpage is a list of topics: economics, education & youth, finance, transport and urban development. Participants can indicate whether or not they want to know something more about one of the subjects, be kept abreast of latest developments, start a new initiative or either vote or give their vote to someone else. One of the Dutch participants has started a new initiative: 'The city of The Hague should replace its trams with an underground network.' Those who have indicated an interest in transport react with suggestions such as: 'The North-South line in Amsterdam has already shown that the government isn't capable enough of dealing with large projects. You should let the private sector be in charge of construction projects.' Another participant suggests building a magnetic levitation train above the city.

One of the participants is Martin Delius, leader of the German Piraten Fraktion Berlin, perhaps the most successful example of LiquidFeedback up

to now. He explained why his party uses the programme: 'We're a growing party with a lot of young people, a small programme and no structure. We didn't want a structure, we didn't want to be organized like other parties.'

The Pirate Party opposes the way in which decisions are taken within the established political order: decision-making to which citizens have nothing to contribute, have no view of the process and vote only once every four years for a party that fails to keep its promises. The German Pirate Party wants to enhance the government's transparency and it also endorses the civil right of the privacy of information. In the federal district elections in Berlin held in September 2011, the Pirates came from nowhere to win 8.9 percent of the votes, a total of fifteen seats in parliament. Then Delius began using the open source online platform LiquidFeedback.

All networks visible

LiquidFeedback begins by putting forth a position or a theme, something that every member of the Pirate Party can do. Then the discussion begins. If participants need more information about the topic, they can ask other people via LiquidFeedback. The entire discussion can be followed on the forum, and the initiator can see how many supporters his or her initiative has. After a set amount of time, a vote must be taken. Each party member can vote or can give their vote to some-

one else; the latter option has an advantage because, instead of giving your vote to a member of parliament whom you've never met, you can give it to someone you know. The underlying idea is to let everyone choose to participate in direct or indirect democracy and select the subjects they want to be involved in.

The Pirate Party started using the software as a discussion platform; they later implemented LiquidFeedback in the party itself. Everything on which a consensus is reached on the LiquidFeedback forum is adopted as a party decision, as stated in the party's statutes. So Delius adapts his policy to the results of the platform. 'If the media asked us for our opinion and we had no answer, we would ask our members via the system,' Delius explained, showing us a photo of a large room where people were holding up yellow cards. 'You don't know why these people are voting yes or no; you can only see the choices, but you don't know how the decisions were taken. LiquidFeedback is transparent. We can see who, how and when something is influenced because the entire discussion with proposals, suggestions and counter-proposals can be read on the forum. All of the networks in the party are visible, and this is a difference with a referendum, where you only vote yes or no.'

'Motivation is about communication,' said software developer Axel Kistner. 'How can you discuss matters in a larger group? We made Liq-



Demonstrators gather at Plaza de Sol during the "March for Change" planned by left-wing party Podemos that emerged out of the "Indignants" movement, in Madrid on January 31, 2015.

Modern technologies

In addition to LiquidFeedback, other modern technologies are being used to further democracy. Examples include Instavibe in Belgium, App4GOV in the US, Polly in Australia and Lomio in New Zealand.

Thousands of people can participate in Podemos, a Spanish political party established in March 2014; members discuss under their own names online, there are collective amendments and online referenda. Just like the German Pirate Party, which also aims at civic participation, the popularity of Podemos has grown enormously in only a short time. The party, which won 5 of the 54 seats available for Spain in the European Parliament, is looking for a new form of doing politics. Their primary point of attention is the fight against corruption, which Podemos believes can be combated with transparency. The website provides members with access to videos, suggestions, debate topics and news. There's also a digital parliament, a Podemos square where open discussions take place and visitors can join question-and-answer sessions with party leaders.

The Argentine Partido de la Red in Buenos Aires uses DemocraciaOS. Their ideology is that true political parties should constantly consult public opinion and learn from it. In other words, democracy is becoming more horizontal, and our democratic horizons are being extended.

uidFeedback to enable this.' Kistner developed LiquidFeedback together with Andreas Nitsche, Jan Behrens and Björn Swierczek; all four have a background in both sociology and software. The LiquidFeedback software can be used in any country if translated into the correct language.

Kistner uses a graph to illustrate how a decision is made. The interconnections go back and forth: Pete talks with his neighbour Jan, and Jan talks with his sister Maria, who then talks with Pete. There are almost half a million internet connections between a thousand people, and on the

brouck feels that we're in a period of democratic fatigue. Democracy has been reduced to elections; political parties are constantly working toward the next election and keep citizens happy with short-term solutions. The trust in political parties is low, the general feeling is one of disgruntlement and the number of parties is decreasing. In addition, the average age of party representatives and members is at a new high. All of this is extremely threatening to the political stability of a country because people don't feel represented. But how do you involve citizens in politics again?

'Do politicians want to share power? That's the direction of the future'

forum you can see who's talking to whom. A big advantage is that there are no moderators so discussions are direct.

Democratic fatigue

LiquidFeedback is increasingly considered to be one of the methods that could help to revive democracy. David van Reybrouck, the author of such well-known works as *Congo* and *Tegen verkiezingen* (Against elections), compares today's democracy with a leaking roof. You put pots and pans under a leaking roof to catch the rain until the rain becomes so heavy that the roof collapses. Van Rey-

There are all sorts of reactions to the leaking roof. There are populist parties, there are opposition groups, such as the Occupy movement, that want to redefine democracy and there is technology. Kati Piri, a member of the European Parliament and the opening speaker at one of the workshops at the conference, explained that traditional parties focus too much on the political leader. 'If the leader leaves, the party disappears as well. A leader is too much the face of a party. With LiquidFeedback, power is shared because everyone helps to decide. In addition, people become members of a party because they want to

Protestors at the Gezi Park in Turkey, May 2013.



exercise their influence, but the important decisions are taken behind closed doors, a centralized process invisible to citizens.' In the average party, position in the party hierarchy is often decisive.

LiquidFeedback addresses the reasons why citizens feel distanced from politics by letting them help decide in the policy-making process. 'Democrats can't be opposed to this because LiquidFeedback focuses on parties in the old framework of representative democracy,' added Will Derks, who works on innovation at the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD). 'It makes a party more horizontal instead of top-down. This is why the NIMD is also interested in LiquidFeedback because it offers a way to strengthen political parties and democracy. It helps parties attract young members. Politics is "sexy" again. And it also offers the possibility of actively involving members in decision-making by means of lively debates. That in turn helps political leaders discover new talent and better understand and retain members.' NIMD is talking with political parties in Georgia, Colombia and El Salvador about implementing LiquidFeedback.

User-friendly

One advantage of an internet forum is the parallel structure: everyone can decide in their own time and about their own topic. Consequently, a party can make much more lucrative use of the creativity, intelligence and ideas of its members. As the most encouraging example of what an individual member can contribute, Martin Delius cited the case of a single citizen in Berlin who caused an EU law about data protection to be adjusted.

'This man said that the existing data protection in Berlin was much better, safer and more extensive. Why depend on EU regulations if your own data protection is better? He wrote an initiative that was so good that the EU amendment was altered. He received a one-vote majority in his party, so the matter went to the parliament. This man managed to bring his own initiative to the parliament within the space of just four months.

Delius' party would like to have LiquidFeedback directly integrated into the operations of members of parliament and political parties and to have direct legal implementation done via online platforms. The Pirate Party wants these platforms in response to the speed at which Berlin is growing. 'How should we use our space, where should we build new apartments, with whom, with what money and how? We want to have this dialogue on an online platform,' Delius stated.

LiquidFeedback is already being used in this fashion in the German district of Friesland in Lower Saxony, where it's a way of building a bridge

between political representatives and citizens. The district parliament will put an item on its agenda if enough citizens call for this via the forum. All of the German-Frisian inhabitants are thus invited to think and decide virtually about matters such as new schools and cycle paths.

A participant in LiquidFeedback creates a profile, preferably with a photo. Only real people can participate in the decision-making process, which is why the Piraten Fraktion in Berlin asks its members to physically present their passport once every three hundred days in order to prevent fraud. 'It's impossible to participate anonymously. Transparency also raises the question of privacy. It's a choice between anonymity versus pen and paper, verification versus electronic ballots,' commented LiquidFeedback developer Andreas Nitsche.

Vincent Oord, head of digitalization of the Dutch Liberal Democratic party D66, is involved in the simulation test. He questions the degree of user-friendliness. 'The process leading to a proposal remains complex. A user needs explanations. It's not Facebook, where you can leave a message or upload a photo.'

A small number of people within D66 are studying the question of how they can use technology in the party. 'Of the nearly 25 thousand members, perhaps only 1500 attend a party congress. How much is your influence then as a party member?' Van Oord thinks that the individual's choice of topic and time is a big advantage of LiquidFeedback. 'But you still have to be wary of a gap in the party. You can pretend that LiquidFeedback is the platform, but is every party member capable of using that platform? The threshold has to be as low as possible.'

Van Oord understands the transparency ideology voiced by the world of hackers and developers. Power and positions of power always have to be looked at critically. 'The first question that a party should ask is: Do we really want to be organized in this way? Input is good, but what do you do with it once you have it? Do politicians want to share knowledge and power? Delius commits himself to whatever the forum decides.'

Attraction

'As a political party you must indeed clearly formulate what you do with the input from members,' said developer Nitsche, 'whether it's in the form of a think tank, guidelines, identification or a consultative body.' He thinks that the biggest advantage is unlimited communication in big groups. Civil participation is an attraction that draws new members.

In the first place, new technology like Liquid-

Feedback seems especially interesting for young parties without a strictly defined ideology or entrenched structures; parties whose political agenda must still be partly formed and who offer their members a say in the matter. Young democracies also seem suitable because they're less established. This is one of the reasons why NIMD chose to hold the kick-off of LiquidFeedback in Georgia. Some parties, such as the United National Movement and the recently created Georgian Dream party have expressed interest. In the next few

'It isn't Facebook, where you can leave a message or upload a photo'

months, the parties are going to talk with NIMD about how LiquidFeedback can be implemented.

'We first have to get a picture of our party,' said Dimitri Tskitishvili, party leader of the Georgian Dream. 'We don't know what the average age of our members is or the male-female ratio or even what regions they come from. Once we know this we'll probably start using the platform next year. Internet use and access are continuing to rise in Georgia. This is a prerequisite; in some rural areas coverage is still poor.'

'Technology such as LiquidFeedback is a bonus but not a replacement', said Will Derks of the NIMD. He believes that citizens are dissatisfied but are prepared to do something about it. 'Look at the Gezi Park demonstrations in Turkey, or those in Hong Kong and the Ukraine and the M15 movement in Spain. People want to have a voice in their future, and LiquidFeedback can play a role here because it gives citizens the feeling of having helped to make decisions.' Derks sees 'pockets' all over the world: separate locations where people are thinking about this or are already active. 'It still doesn't seem like much, but it's growing. I don't know where the process is heading; it's a search. LiquidFeedback enables power to be shared. Do politicians want to share their power? Like it or not, that's the direction of the future. You can choose to do one of two things: wait and follow or be in the vanguard and take initiatives. NIMD has chosen the latter.' ■

Democracy schools: building trust from the bottom up

‘Democracy schools’ have been established in nine countries, including Egypt, El Salvador, Burundi and Indonesia, by the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD). Under the tutelage of professionals, students from the fields of politics, NGOs and the media are learning to build a democratic culture. Vice Versa visited two of these democracy schools in Georgia.

by **Arachne Molema**

Journalist Nino Robakidze draws three circles on the board: one circle for the media, one for the government and one for society. In the classroom of the democracy school in the Georgian city of Kutaisi, about twenty pupils are listening attentively to her talk.

‘During the Soviet period, the media were controlled, which is why their current role isn’t clear,’ Robakidze says. The discussion comes to life when someone asks if it’s good that the media pay so much attention to domestic violence against women. Someone else says that people in the Soviet Union felt safer because bad news wasn’t made public. A heated discussion follows, as often happens in the democracy school in Kutaisi, one of four such schools in Georgia; the other three are in Batumi, Gori and Telavi.

The schools are trying to strengthen local democracy and develop a local political culture in communities. According to the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD), the initiator of the democracy schools, political parties are crucial to a good democracy. If the parties fulfil their role correctly, the rights and duties of citizens will be complied with and a country can develop. The NIMD works to strengthen both the political system and, by means of training programmes, the parties themselves. In addition, the NIMD tries to develop a democratic culture through, among other means, the democracy schools.

The students at the democracy schools are already working in politics or have political ambitions. The schools teach them about democratic leadership and mutual responsibilities. A new generation of politicians with democratic standards and values has to be trained from the bottom up; a group of active citizens who are capable of initiating democratic changes at the local level. Since the first school opened its doors in 2011, 354 students have completed the five-month free module. Most of them now work in local politics, the media or at an NGO.

Strong personality

Shmagi Besuashvili (20) is one of the eighty students at the democracy school in Gori. He lives with his mother, grandmother and two sisters in a small house in one of the nine camps for displaced nationals in Gori. After the Five-Day War with Russia in 2008, the family was forced to leave their home in Tsinvali in South Ossetia and they cannot return.

‘I want to become a political journalist,’ said Shmagi, who studies journalism and writes for the local newspaper, Kurta. ‘These camps have so many problems; there’s often no electricity or gas and no money. I’m writing articles about successful displaced persons, those who’ve achieved something and haven’t simply given up. Their voices have to be heard.’ Since he’s been attending the lessons, Shmagi has become much more interested in politics. ‘The education system in

Georgia isn’t good,’ he said. ‘That’s why I’m happy with the high quality of the democracy school. I can develop my personal skills and learn more about democracy and communication.’

Shmagi’s mother apologizes for not being able to serve anything sweet. She places a plate and a knife next to the bowl with soft pears, apples and grapes. Since March, displaced persons have received 45 laris (about 20 euros) a month.

Dali Giunashvili (48) lives in the same camp and is one of the first to have attended the democracy school. As head of the NGO Samachablo, she works on infrastructural projects in the camps, such as roads, footpaths and benches plus playgrounds and sports fields for the children. ‘At the democracy school I learned how to write a good project proposal, and now I’m more successful in my work.’

Three years ago, when the coordinator Zaza Chipashvili wanted to open the school, Dali helped him with the announcements. ‘We did that here in the public spaces in the camp.’ The emphasis then was on displaced nationals, who had recently arrived. The idea behind the project was that the democracy students could become good mediators between the government and the displaced persons. The facilities in the camps were poor, and most of the displaced persons weren’t well educated. This year, Shmagi is the only displaced person in the class.

Motivation is an important criterion for admittance to the school. According to Zaza Chi-

pashvili you can quickly discover how motivated someone is during the admission interview. ‘Do they express themselves well? Do they have a strong personality, their own ideas and goals, or are they quickly influenced by others?’

A man’s world

Dali Giunashvili had to flee twice. During the 1990–1991 conflict, she fled from Tsinvali. She recently saw her old house on Facebook; two families live there now. ‘Horrible, but I won’t give up. Never. If your spirit is strong, you pick yourself up and start again. This has made me want to work for my community. I’ve chosen to be single so I can go where I please; I was afraid that my independence and active spirit would be destroyed if I married. Now I think that women who combine a family with a career are really courageous.’

In orthodox Georgia, men still often think that women shouldn’t hold high positions and certainly not in politics. Women are severely underrepresented in the Georgian parliament, where only 10.8 percent are women. Moreover, women receive less pay. This is one of the spearheads of the democracy schools: more women in politics.

Women certainly show enough interest in the schools; on average, they make up about 60 per-

cent of the class. The female students are driven and ambitious; they also perform higher and better in the regular education system. In December 2014, NIMD organized a conference on gender in the centre of Tbilisi; one of the themes was violence against women, an issue that is receiving enormous attention in the media and in politics.

Alumna Dako Muradashvili (30), the mother of two children, has greatly profited from the lessons. ‘I’ve discovered myself and I’ve gained self-confidence. I dare to make my own decisions. Of course, I want to be a good mother, but I have more ambitions. I’m more diplomatic and open-minded. My husband often thinks that he’s made a decision, but I’m really the one behind it. Husbands and fathers have traditionally wielded authority here.’

Politics begins locally

The next day’s lesson in Gori is about self-government and is led by specialist Kote Kandelaki of the International Centre for Civic Culture. He wants his students to understand the role of self-government, something that isn’t easy given their Soviet heritage and accompanying centralization. It’s hard to change ways of thinking. He gives easy examples; why should the government in Tbilisi

‘A suitable candidate can also be a girl who keeps a blog’

Democracy school alumni Dako and Teona undertake action on behalf of the camps for displaced persons around Gori. ‘These benches are here thanks to our efforts’



Patience is necessary for democracy schools

In addition to Georgia, the NIMD has democracy schools in Egypt, Myanmar, Tunisia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Burundi, Mozambique and Indonesia. The institute opened two schools in Egypt after the fall of Mubarak: one in the rural area of the Nile delta and the other in the urban area around Cairo. The students come from political parties and from civil society. In Tunisia, NIMD and the local partner, Centre des Etudes Méditerranéennes et Internationales (CEMI), opened the Tunisian School of Politics in 2013 for young and talented politicians. Democracy training is a question of having patience. The first democracy school in Indonesia was opened in 2005 and now has more than two thousand alumni; about five hundred of them are active in politics. The number of candidates for parliament who had attended the democracy school rose from 83 in 2009 to 127 for the elections held in 2014. In the 2009 elections, 21 alumni gained seats in the government that ruled until 2014. At the provincial and district levels, 23 alumni were village leaders and 86 were members of an electoral commission in 2013.

'A new generation of democratic politicians has to be created from the bottom up'



Journalist Nino Robakidze gives a training session on the media at the democracy school in Kutaisi

decide what happens in the streets of Gori?

Although there's a large distance between the political parties in Georgia, supporters of all of the parties are welcome. Every election sees the creation of new parties, and it's not rare for leaders to switch from one party to the other, even when they have to advocate opposite views in their new party. The Georgian Dream Coalition, the new political party that unexpectedly won the parliamentary elections in 2012, is a collection of former liberals, conservatives, nationalists and industrialists. Those who held positions under the former governing party, the United National Movement, don't trust the present coalition, which is why NIMD is stimulating dialogue and collaboration among the various parties by offering collaborative projects at the democracy schools.

Although the Georgian national government is far from stable, there is hope. On 15 September 2014, a law was passed requiring all members of the city council to take an examination of competence. Many students hope that this will lead to an opening. That hope is actively being stimulated by the NIMD. 'Politics begins locally,' stated Irakli Kobalia, responsible within NIMD South Caucasus for the democracy schools in Georgia. 'The small decisions taken in the region determine the shape of a city. If people are forced to think about this, political trust will grow.' Kobalia believes that successful experiences will lead to people having more trust in national politics. 'It's important to build a culture of trust from the bottom up.'

'It's easier to stimulate cooperation in a small city than at the national level,' Kobalia said. His

view is illustrated by some of the alumni of the school who belong to the various parties and who have started a campaign in Gori, the birthplace of Josef Stalin, to change the name of the main street, Stalin Avenue. For generations, Soviet propaganda weakened people's ability to think critically, and many over-50s are still nostalgic about the Soviet period. Signatures were collected in support of the campaign. 'The law hasn't been passed yet, but a lot more people are now reflecting on Stalin worship,' Kobalia said.

The Stalin Museum in Gori seems to exemplify Stalin worship. The guide reminds one of Roald Dahls's Miss Trunchbull in Matilda; while pointing to paintings, photos and clothes belonging to Stalin, she monotonously recites her story to a group of South Koreans. A sort of temple on pillars has

been built over the house where Stalin was born, which is in front of the museum.

Network

If democracy is to grow in a country, politicians, NGOs, media and government bodies will have to talk to one another. This requires a strong network, and that is being formed at the schools.

'In addition to expanding my knowledge of society, politics and activism, I wanted to come into contact with other young people in my class so we could exchange ideas,' explained alumnus Eka Arreladze (28). 'Even more important is the contact with the trainers, who have given us their telephone numbers and e-mail addresses. If I want to climb higher in an NGO, I need professional contacts; I've already involved a number of trainers in my projects.' The alumni network is strong, and students also have contacts in other cities.

How do you select students for that network? The competition is large: in Kutaisi there were nearly 70 applicants this year, 22 of whom were chosen. According to Irakli Kobalia, the criteria are simple: 'Does someone show natural leadership? Does their CV show an interest in politics or public affairs? Do they care about their community? It could even be a girl who keeps a blog. And then we look at what they'd like to do with the knowledge and experience they gain at the democracy school. Do the candidates know what's going on in Georgia? But it's absolutely not for the elite; the schools are free,' emphasized Kobalia.

According to Ana Shalikiani, the coordinator in Kutaisi, in addition to creating an equal distribution among local NGOs, local parties and students, there is another important form of balance. 'We first select people who need us, who don't have enough skills and opportunities to be an active citizen. And we also look for open, developed people. The mixture of these two groups makes a class interesting. On average, one-third of the students have a political background, and the other two-thirds are either from civil society or are students.'

Results

In 2014 the NIMD invested about 60 thousand euros in the Georgian democracy schools. But how do they measure the results? How do they know if

the students have become more active and more aware? Whether they've expanded their knowledge and enlarged their professional network?

Irakli Kobalia: 'It's difficult to determine who is and who isn't successful. Not everyone who attends the democracy school goes into politics. Other groups of citizens are also strengthened to help stimulate social movements from the outside. The school is a place for debate, discussion and the exchange of ideas. The school's lessons are reflected everywhere in our society.'

In order to measure the results, NIMD hands out anonymous questionnaires during and after the training programme and it organizes focus groups. Students can indicate what they think about the quality of the material, the trainers, the surroundings, the personnel and the school. The results are positive. There's also a high degree of attendance both from city dwellers and people from the surrounding villages; and 97 percent of the students pass the course.

Kobalia: 'We also look at how the alumni further develop in their careers. Are they assertive in their workplace? Do they participate in elections? Begin their own projects? It's important that they feel more self-confident and gain more knowledge. During the last local elections, there were thirteen women candidates who had attended our school. I consider that to be a great success.' Moreover, various graduates of the very first programme were appointed to leading positions in the newly formed cabinet in 2012. And three women were appointed to, respectively, the position of deputy head, managerial head of the city council of Gori, and regional prosecutor in Gori.

If Irakli Kobalia had the money, he'd open more schools in Georgia. 'We want consistency. By building connections and expanding, we're increasing the volume of those who bring changes. They'll eventually form the majority in politics, the media and society. Democracy is still the best form. The inhabitants have better lives, their incomes are rising, human rights are better complied with and the quality of social facilities and education is higher. Some states may have oil, but Georgia doesn't. Our only way of making progress is via democratization. Who will oppose our leaders if they stray from the path of democracy?' ■



'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.'

Kralt: 'Awepa attaches great value to paying structural attention to democratic development in addition to giving humanitarian and economic assistance and helping to improve trade. Themes such as good governance, human rights and periodic elections, in short: constitutional developments, must remain on the agenda. Expanding democracy and good parliamentary institutions are essential for sustainable development. An economy led by just one person can succeed for a time, but if there's no good, long-term infrastructure for a successor, a country can fall into chaos. Participation and democratic control are important.'

Van der Steenhoven: 'The members of WO=MEN, 185 development organizations, knowledge centres, entrepreneurs, individuals and military persons, contribute to, among other things, a strong civil society. They support activists, journalists, farmers, entrepreneurs and judges, thus creating a durable society. They do this from Colombia to Sudan and with the goals of democracy and equal rights, not only from political parties but in all sorts of forms at underlying levels. Here in the Netherlands, you might wonder what the results of the Arab Spring were. But even in a country like Egypt, our members say: despite all of the human and material losses, it is good that ex-president Mubarak was de-

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)

is about 30 percent or more. In a number of countries, we specifically support women. In Somalia, for example, women play a very important role, not only in families, but increasingly often in non-traditional places. Many clans there are led by chiefs, and women play an important, corrective role. From their position in the family structure, women have a constructive function for society.'

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.'

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. Plus, in addition to a number of countries that function well as democracies, the situation in some dictatorships is relatively good. A so-called enlightened dictator doesn't have to go hand-in-hand with poor government and corruption. There is, of course, clearly a chance of this as well as a greater chance of chaos; sooner or later, a conflict may arise over the question of a successor. People sometimes ask us what the actual effect is of the work done by Awepa, which has been in existence for thirty years. The answer is: encouraging democracy by strengthening parliaments with regard to their controlling task and helping to prevent war by encouraging sustainable processes among parties.'

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-

'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.

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.' ■



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 wankle 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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