

THE BLUE DEAL: CLEAN, SUFFICIENT AND SAFE WATER FOR 20 MILLION PEOPLE

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■ If we look at the Earth from space, it is clear to see: the planet is literally covered in water. Yet, there is never enough of it – and often too much. In recent decades, water-related disasters have affected increasing numbers of people, animals and businesses. We can make a greater contribution to finding solutions to these problems if we work together better and more often in the Netherlands, too. The Dutch water authorities and the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and of Infrastructure and Water Management are therefore joining forces to launch a new international programme. The new programme, known as the Blue Deal, will run until 2030.

■ The Blue Deal has one clear goal: to help 20 million people in 40 catchment areas around the world gain access to clean, sufficient and safe water. The focus is on providing help, but also on creating opportunities for businesses and on learning from other countries so as to keep improving our own work in the Netherlands. The Blue Deal is setting the bar high. To achieve its ambitious goal, the programme will facilitate the establishment of long-term partnerships between water managers in the Netherlands and abroad. Together with their local partners, the water authorities will explore what is required to improve water management step by step, and will implement projects.

Good governance as the basis for change

A Theory of Change (ToC) has been drawn up for the Blue Deal. A ToC is a theoretical model that describes how projects and activities can help improve water management for 20 million people. The model is based on the 'Building blocks for good water governance' (2016), developed by the Water Governance Centre, and the twelve principles identified as key to good water management by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). According to both these theories, water management will improve if the Blue Deal supports and strengthens local partners on three crucial components:

- 1 Sufficient knowledge and expertise;
- 2 A well-functioning organisation with a clear mandate;
- 3 Cooperation with key stakeholders.

The model assumes that these three components will ensure that the partner becomes aware of the water-related problems in an area (step 1), draws up plans and policies to address them (step 2) and implements the plans (step 3). The Blue Deal only starts counting once a partner actually implements the plans. The programme will be a success only if 20 million people see concrete improvements in water management in their areas. The programme will contribute to achieving Sustainable Development Goals 6.3 – 6.6, the International Water Ambition and the vision of Dutch Water Authorities.

Unique chance

The Blue Deal is unique because it gives the water authorities and ministries the opportunity to support regional and national water management with more resources than are available now and for a longer period. By joining forces, they hope to achieve more together than they currently do individually. Five themes will receive extra attention: innovation, climate, sustainability, gender and poverty reduction. The first three are by their nature already part of the water authorities' approach

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and will require little extra effort. Gender and poverty reduction are, however, new. Gender is about ensuring that women are treated equally within the Blue Deal. That of course applies to the role of women in the local partners' regions, but just as much to their position in the water authorities in the Netherlands. That could also be much better than it is now.

Launch in 2019

The Blue Deal programme will be prepared over a period of a year and will start in 2019. It will be implemented in three phases: 2019-2022, 2023-2026 and 2027-2030. The Blue Deal is a programme that will grow. The first phase will largely be implemented through partnerships in which the water authorities already participate. In the years that follow, more and more new partnerships and projects will be added.

In the preparatory year, the water authorities and the two ministries will examine together with 35 local partners on a longlist whether a partnership is suitable for the Blue Deal. Some partnerships will be removed from the list and others added, resulting in a shortlist. Together with the partners on the shortlist, they will then draw up project proposals for the first phase of the Blue Deal. The first phase of the Blue Deal will be festively launched on the 2019 World Water Day.

The Blue Deal: the success factors

After almost two years of preparation, the Blue Deal was signed at the 2018 World Water Day.

We – the authors of this article – looked back and asked ourselves what we could learn from the Blue Deal process and came up with a top five factors contributing to its success.

1 TURN IT INTO A PROJECT

After a year of talking about the Blue Deal (2016), we had still not managed to conclude an actual deal. So, at the start of 2017, we came together with the ministries to decide whether to go on or to stop. Fortunately, everyone wanted to continue, but we decided to use a different approach. The Blue Deal became a project with a deadline, a project leader and a plan of action.

The 2017 World Water Day saw the launch of Waterworx, the international programme of the Dutch water companies and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. At the launch, Deputy Director-General for International Cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Reina Buijs called on the water authorities to launch the Blue Deal on the same stage exactly one year later. All of a sudden, we had a deadline and the clock was ticking.

To meet that deadline, we drew up a plan of action with milestones and divided the year up into five manageable steps. This gave us some breathing space, because we could work towards the next step without having to worry too much about what came after. We also appointed a project leader to coordinate the process on behalf of all organisations involved. She was given the time to devote herself entirely to the task, became the point of contact for all organisations and



kept sight of the big picture. And that helped: someone was now responsible for the process and could take everyone else along with her.

2 DRINKING LOTS OF COFFEE

The Blue Deal could only be successful if the water authorities and ministries could identify with it. It had to become *their* programme for it to work in practice. It took a lot of coffee to achieve that. We spent as much time as possible talking – and especially listening – to all the officials and managers involved. How could the Blue Deal generate more impact? What did they consider important? What should be included and what left out? Sometimes, they gave their input at joint work sessions or meetings, other times in one-to-one conversations. The discussions were critical at times, but that made them hugely valuable – and made the Blue Deal into a better programme.

3 LEARNING FROM OTHERS

Developing a new programme is exciting, and there is no handbook to tell you how to do it. Thankfully, other organisations had done something similar. The experiences of the Dutch water companies with Waterworx and NGOs with the SDG programme were invaluable. Both are running one year ahead of the Blue Deal and were a great source of inspiration on how to choose the right approach.

It is always enjoyable to brainstorm with people who are going through a similar process. We are keeping up this knowledge sharing and will regularly meet up with the other two programmes to help each other out. Gender, for example, is a topic in which

NGOs have broad experience but which is new to the water authorities and water companies. Water authorities, on the other hand, know how to make water management sustainable and we can help the other programmes with that. Furthermore, the three programmes sometimes work in the same countries and we can generate even more impact if we can link up in practice.

4 CELEBRATING SUCCESSES

Setting up a large international programme with so many organisations is a process of trial and error. Making sure everyone stays committed is of crucial importance. Celebrating successes is a good way of doing that. At the Amsterdam International Water Week, for example, all the organisations involved in the Blue Deal signed a declaration of intent. That may not have been necessary but it helped to keep us motivated and made us all feel: ‘We can do this!’.

5 DEVELOPING YOUR OWN STYLE

We learned a lot from similar programs, but the water authorities have their own organizational culture. So not everything that other programs do, fits us. Thanks to the ministries giving us the space to do so, we have given the programme our own style. We aren’t very keen, for example, on fancy-sounding concepts like ‘inception phase’. In the Blue Deal, we simply call it a preparatory year. Moreover, Blue Deal is an action programme, with some activities already starting in the preparatory year. Through pilot projects, we are going to develop all products, such as formats, in practice. This approach fits the mentality of the water authorities: they like to get on with the job.

WHAT DREAMS DO WE STILL HAVE?

Dutch Water Authorities is still far from having achieved all of its goals. Further professionalising our international projects through knowledge exchange remains one huge challenge.

Another challenge is to make businesses see the added value of the water authorities in international projects. Dutch Water Authorities would like to attract more requests for information from the business community. DWA is certain that, while businesses are very capable of teaching people about water governance, partnering with a government body to do this in other countries brings added value, and that water authorities can contribute unique knowledge and expertise. By entering into long-term partnerships, water authorities can achieve more with their international counterparts, and businesses eventually reap the benefits.

The dream that remains is to unite the water authorities even more closely, nationally and internationally. That will enable us to use each other's expertise and skills to create a broad-ranging water sector that can present itself even more strongly on the international stage. *Water problems? Bring in the Dutch!*

Would you like to know more about the work of Dutch Water Authorities or the Blue Deal? See www.dutchwaterauthorities.com or send an email to info@dutchwaterauthorities.com



Siging the Blue Deal on World Waterday 2018

