



Veterans with a mission

Fact Sheet

Introduction

Peacekeeping missions nowadays frequently include activities in the area of reconstruction and humanitarian aid. For veterans, it does not always end there. This is because a growing number of veterans are continuing to work on such projects in areas in which they were previously deployed after their military career has ended. In 2008, a survey was conducted into veterans who organise humanitarian projects, whether or not in the area in which they were deployed as service personnel. The results of that survey were presented under the title “Veterans with a Mission”. The survey involved 33 projects in which 150 veterans were involved. Since then, a number of projects resulting from that survey have been terminated and a number of new initiatives added.

Types of projects and funding

The nature and purpose of the projects surveyed vary. Many projects are aimed at education, healthcare and community development.

Examples of projects aimed at education include:

- Building or rebuilding schools
- Providing shelter for orphans and disabled children
- Providing student grants

Examples of projects aimed at healthcare:

- Facilities and care for special groups (including leprosy patients, children with a harelip, people infected with HIV and AIDS patients)
- Financing and building a children’s ward at a hospital
- Financing and building a maternity clinic

Examples of projects aimed at community development include:

- Building and rebuilding infrastructure (bridges, water supply)
- Building and rebuilding of dwellings, community centres, village halls

The sums needed for these initiatives range from a few hundred or thousand euros to more than a hundred thousand euros, on a one-off or annual basis. For the most part, these sums are collected by the veterans themselves in the Netherlands. Money is often collected by means of door-to-door collections and donations, sponsoring by companies and special campaigns run by schools and Rotary clubs. Money is also sometimes collected through the sale of products or thrift shops set up especially for this purpose.

As well as setting up their own projects, many veterans also work for a good cause in the Netherlands or beyond. This can include, for example, fund-raising campaigns.

Areas

The geographical distribution of the projects reflects the extremely varied deployment of Dutch service personnel since the Second World War. Veterans usually choose a country or area where they were deployed; however, this is not necessarily always the case. The advantage of an area where a veteran has been deployed is that he or she is reasonably familiar with the local customs, situation and needs. They can cater for those needs by means of their own projects.

In 2008, projects were mostly run in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo; this is probably still the case now. In shared second place were Indonesia and the former Netherlands New Guinea. Many projects in Indonesia have now become defunct, owing to the age of the initiators. Many veterans are still working in New Guinea.

Motives

During their deployment, service personnel often witness poverty and suffering among the local population. For a number of veterans, involvement with the population in the former deployment areas is the key motive for continuing to work for these people after their deployment too. As former service personnel, they are familiar with working in difficult circumstances and with different cultures. They are well aware of the situation in the project countries and often have their own contacts and networks. For instance, in the 1970s and 1980s former East Indies veterans from Waalwijk made grateful use of their contacts with Catholic priests to implement projects, including health projects, in Sumatra with great success.

Some veterans start work on a development project in the country where they were deployed very soon after they return. For others, such work does not start until years later, for example, when they have reached retirement age and have time to spare. A return trip to the deployment area can motivate veterans to start a project or to start helping with an existing project. On those return trips they see the improvements that have been made in the meantime, but also see what else requires improvement.

Examples of projects

Weerzien met Libanon [Reunion with Lebanon]. This focus of this foundation is healthcare in Lebanon. In 2009, the foundation adopted the Hiram hospital in Lebanon's coastal city of Tyre. That "adoption" largely means the hospital is provided with material support. An example of this is the large quantity of hospital equipment donated in 2011, partly with the assistance of the Veterans' Institute, the Ministry of Defence and the Embassy of the Netherlands. *Weerzien met Libanon* also organised an exchange programme in 2012 where medical personnel of the Lebanese hospital were able to spend a week acquiring knowledge and experience in Dutch hospitals, including military hospitals. Finally, *Weerzien met Libanon* also organises return trips for veterans. A return trip always involves a visit to the Hiram hospital.

Veteranen Actief [Veterans in Action]. This foundation is staffed mainly by Bosnia and Kosovo veterans, but also a few Lebanon, Iraq and New Guinea veterans. The focus of the foundation is community development in Bosnia. For instance, various buildings, including a small school, were refurbished in 2013 in Bukve, Central Bosnia.

Veteranen met een hart [Veterans with a heart]. This foundation was formed in 2009 by Bosnia veterans. The focus of the foundation is education, aimed in particular at facilitating physical activity in schools. For instance, in collaboration with the Sports for Children foundation, the foundation provided schools in Travnik, Bosnia with sports and gymnastics equipment. Dutch service personnel were on active duty in this area in the past. In early 2013, the foundation received a donation through the efforts of the former Inspector General of the Armed Forces, General Lex Oostendorp.

Veterans with a mission combine forces

A number of foundations (*Veteranen Actief*; *Manusia Papua*; *Shelterbox*; *Project Falcon*; *Wings of Hope*) concluded an agreement in 2013 whose purpose is to provide each other and other veterans with a mission with support. This way they intend to help reinforce current and future development projects run by veterans. For instance, they are making joint efforts to create greater support within the Dutch community and to involve more veterans in their activities (both in the mission area and in the Netherlands). They also share with each other knowledge and experience in the area of communication, networks, legal questions, fund-raising, project supervision and accounting to donors and the local community.

Further information

This fact sheet provides general information. For further information on this topic, go to the websites of the organisations mentioned in this fact sheet, or contact us by telephone (088-334 00 50) or by email (info@veteraneninstituut.nl).

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