



## DUTCH EMPLOYERS COOPERATION PROGRAMME



### WORKING VISIT OF EAST AFRICAN EMPLOYERS' ORGANISATIONS TO THE NETHERLANDS

'HIGHLY INSIGHTFUL, AN EXCELLENT WAY TO LEARN FROM EACH OTHER IN ORDER TO BE MORE INNOVATIVE TO REENGINEER THE WORK OF EMPLOYERS' ORGANISATIONS DURING THESE CHANGING TIMES.' THAT IS HOW DOUGLAS OPIO, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE UGANDAN FUE SUMMARISED THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY VISIT OF EAST-AFRICAN EMPLOYERS' ORGANISATIONS TO THE NETHERLANDS. THE PROGRAMME, THAT TOOK PLACE FROM 8 TILL 10 JANUARY AND WAS ORGANISED BY DECP, INCLUDED VISITS TO VNO-NCW, LTO, THE SOCIAL-ECONOMIC COUNCIL AND OTHER POLDER INSTITUTIONS.

#### **Amsterdam - January 23, 2020**

For many years DECP has been cooperating with East African employers' organisations. Country managers and experts have paid visits to Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Burundi, Malawi and Zambia on a regular basis, conducting workshops, trainings and advisory visits. Learning with each other and from each other can be stimulated by getting to know each other's work environment better as well. DECP therefore decided to organise a study visit to the Netherlands. A high-level programme would allow the participants to get acquainted with the working methods of employers' organisations, sector organisations, the Social Economic Council and more. The DECP staff finalized the last preparations just before the Christmas holiday



in 2019 and was excited about welcoming their partners in early January. The study visit took place from 8 to 10 January.

### **REACHING OUT**

The East African delegation consisted of the executive directors and (vice) chairpersons of the employers' organisations of Zambia, Tanzania, Malawi and Uganda. The rich programme was set up by the country managers for the abovementioned countries, Arnout de Koster and Jannes van der Velde. Christine Rehbock took care of all the arrangements. Peter Bongaerts and Jos van Erp also participated in the programme. The first day of the visit allowed the guests to get acquainted with the working methods of national employers' organisation VNO-NCW, which has been supporting the DECP programme since its establishment. With a membership of around 80-90% – which is the highest in the European Union and most probably in the world – VNO-NCW is very representative. The organisation is highly professional with extensive research and lobbying departments as well as services in labour relations and human resources.

### *'Getting stronger together': Myra Ngoma, President ZFE*

VNO-NCW has established a dense network of employers' associations active at all levels of decision making, including national, regional and sectoral. The organisation is reaching out to all types and sizes of companies. VNO-NCW is pro-actively covering the full range of policy fields which are important and relevant for business. These range from social affairs to economic affairs, climate, trade and international affairs. During the visit the VNO-NCW presented its recently published Africa strategy to the delegation. This document will soon be available in English and French.

### **SPECIAL EXPERTISE**

The president of the Dutch Construction sector, Maxime Verhagen, is vice president of VNO-NCW and the former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Economic Affairs. Therefore, he has a good understanding of the construction sectors in other parts of the world, including East Africa. He gave the delegation a clear impression of the environment his sector is working in currently.





This mostly nationally operating sector faces a lot of challenges in the field of climate change and therefore changing law and legislation. Mr. Verhagen explained how he deals with the trade unions and Dutch government by using social dialogue and negotiating in order to develop the best possible business environment for his members. Three representatives of PUM, the Netherlands senior experts programme, gave examples of small-scale business support projects they offer in Tanzania, Zambia and Uganda.

*Harrington Chibanda (Executive Director ZFE, Zambia):  
'Partnership with DECP is the way to go for employers'  
organisations.'*

DECP is cooperating with PUM every now and then to send out experts to partner countries if special expertise is needed, such as for bookkeeping or setting up a social media structure. A meeting with the director and policy coordinator of the Department for Sustainable Economic Development of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DDE) completed the first day's programme. DDE is funding a large part of the DECP programme and is a valuable partner in the broader private sector development policy in which employers' organisations play an important role. Therefore, the representatives were highly interested in what issues the guests are involved with. The East African partners took the opportunity to discuss their challenges, developments and cooperation with DECP.

### **ENCOURAGE SOCIAL DIALOGUE**

The programme continued on Thursday with a presentation of Mondiaal FNV. This is the international department of one of the two main Dutch trade unions. Mondiaal FNV is part of the FNV trade union confederation and it has 1.1 million members. Mondiaal FNV supports projects in over 100 countries located in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe through resources from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, from FNV and its affiliates. Like DECP, Mondiaal FNV is supporting its partners, trade unions obviously, in developing countries. This gives both Mondiaal FNV and DECP the opportunity to cooperate occasionally to encourage social dialogue. As Jannes van der Velde puts it: 'I am convinced that social dialogue has to be the instrument to improve the business climate and thus the societies in most



African countries. The private sector – business communities and labour unions – has to take the lead.’ A meeting with Cees Oudshoorn, General Director of VNO-NCW, completed the presentation of the successful Dutch employers’ organisation.

Cees Oudshoorn elaborated on the successful transition Dutch employers’ organisations have made from a focus on employers and labour market affairs to a broad range of employers’ and business organisations. The morning’s programme was concluded with a presentation of general employers’ association AAVN, which covers more than 750 companies, 700 business units and some 65 institutions from many branches of industries.

### **MEMBERS BENEFIT**

As a consultancy, AAVN is operational in the whole field of employership, employment conditions and employment relationships. It is involved in the making of over 450 collective labour agreements (with a market share of approximately 65%) and over 300 fringe benefit arrangements. AAVN’s proven reliability ensures that it is a trusted partner for trade unions, whereby its advice is more readily accepted by employees. Consequently, the implementation of measures runs more smoothly. AAVN – strong at the micro and meso level – is a partner of VNO-NCW, the employers’ federation at a macro level. This means that whilst enjoying the whole array of services provided by AAVN, members can also benefit from the broad-based lobbying of VNO-NCW. The members of AAVN can be sure their interests are represented at all levels. Several (former) AAVN consultants are working for DECP on a regular basis as experts in the fields of negotiation, marketing and communication.

In the afternoon the guests paid a visit to LTO, the Netherlands Agricultural and Horticultural Association. The president, Marc Calon who has extensive experience as a farmer himself, made an impression on his guests with his very clear and outspoken presentation. The Netherlands is the second largest agricultural product exporter in the world. In 2019 a total turnover of 94 billion euros was achieved, of which two thirds was produced in the Netherlands itself and one third was realised by trade activities. Food availability, variety, quality and security are some main issues besides constant innovation of products and production methods.





The group then benefited from the occasion of attending the so-called Sustainable Development Goals Café at the University of Applied Science in The Hague. The SDGCafé, as it is known, is an independent and informal network of all those committed to the world's development goals, both in the Netherlands and internationally. SDGCafé connects various groups, shares current knowledge, examining research, putting issues on the agenda, and working together on partnerships. Participants at the SDGCafé include entrepreneurs, NGOs, knowledge institutions, governments and individuals. A topical theme is chosen for every meeting. A keynote, pitches, dialogue and a beer are business as usual at the SDGCafé. The topic of this day was 'Food and food security in Africa'. The guests of DECP not only took the opportunity to listen to some highly interesting speeches, they contributed actively to the discussions that followed as well. It is obvious that their presence allowed the numerous groups to talk *with* African specialists rather than to talk *about* their food environment.

#### **ADVISING THE GOVERNMENT**

On Friday a visit was paid to the Social Economic Council and the Labour Foundation. These institutions can be considered the heart of the Dutch system of social dialogue. The Social and Economic Council of the Netherlands (SER) is an advisory body in which employers, employees and independent experts (Crown-appointed members) work together to reach agreements on key social and economic issues.

*Annet Nakawunde (Vice President FUE Uganda):  
'It is all about leadership.'*

The SER advises the Dutch government and Parliament on social and economic policy. It also facilitates agreements, such as the creation of the Dutch Energy Agreement for Sustainable Growth and various agreements on international responsible business conduct.

In addition, the SER carries out administrative tasks, for example to promote employee participation. Established on 17 May 1945 (immediately after World War II), the Labour Foundation is a national consultative body organised under private law. Its



members are the three top trade union federations and three top employers' associations in the Netherlands. The foundation provides a forum in which its members discuss relevant issues in the field of labour and industrial relations. Some of these discussions result in memorandums, statements or other documents in which the foundation recommends courses of action for the employers and trade unions that negotiate collective bargaining agreements in industry or within individual companies. Upon request, the foundation also advises the government on labour-related topics.

### SHARING INTERESTS

The guests concluded that the permanent culture of cooperative approaches in the Netherlands between employers, trade unions and the state embedded well-functioning and active tri- and bipartite bodies of consultation and negotiation. This culture is further put into practice via hundreds of CLAs concluded at sector and company levels on a range of topics. It is also confirmed by a general climate of social peace and by a mutual search between social partners for evidence-based, rational win-win solutions, which preserve competitiveness combined with a high concern for fairness in social policy. One of the participants was inspired by these visits to express his biggest takeaway: 'We need to cooperate and to understand each other. Unions and employers have so many shared interests. If we change our mindset and look at the challenges we have in common, it becomes so much easier to do the right things. I've come to believe that that is the secret of the Dutch economy.'

*Jayne Nyimbo (Chairperson of ATE Tanzania):  
'I have learned to incorporate business organisations into the  
employer association by adding value to their businesses'*

Dr. Aggrey Mlimuka, executive director of ATE Tanzania added: 'Bipartite dialogue, that is, negotiations and consultations between sectoral employer organisations and respective trade unions, is the cornerstone of social dialogue in the Netherlands.'

George Khaki, Executive Director of ECAM Malawi confirmed:





'For me one of the most outstanding things is the extraordinary level of cooperation between social partners (government, business and workers) and other players that have ensured strong social dialogue in institutions and processes.'

### **A GUIDED TOUR**

With the end of the study visit rapidly approaching, the DECP guests were offered a canal cruise in Amsterdam. Despite the winter season – which often brings cloudy weather conditions – the sun was shining as if it was meant to be a special welcome. After all, a boat trip along the canals of Amsterdam is a must for those who visit the country. After having explored the historical city centre, a guided tour was conducted by Jannes van der Velde, which allowed the visitors to learn a little bit more of the history of the capital of the Netherlands.

### **WHERE PEOPLE MEET**

DECP and its East African guests were invited to the New Year's reception of the NABC (The Netherlands African Business Council) at the Heineken Experience in the centre of Amsterdam. Speeches were made and business cards exchanged while one or two good Heineken beers were enjoyed together. After all, business starts were people meet!

*Douglas Opio (Executive Director FUE Uganda):  
'An excellent way to learn from each other in order to be more innovative to reengineer the work of employers' organisations during these changing times'*

Or, as Buxton Kayuni, President of ECAM, Malawi put it after returning home: 'You learn more by traveling. Always get out of your home to learn. I have come back different!'





The DECP staff intends to organise a few more study visits for groups of partners. It has been clear that this offers added value to everybody. Myra Ngoma, President ZFE Zambia, agrees: 'For me the programme was immensely fruitful, eye-opening in some areas, educative and progressive. I enjoyed the interactions and information shared by all partners that came on board, too numerous to mention. I am confident that many good things will come from the cooperation and interactive programme.'

Later this year, partners from West Africa will probably be following in the footsteps of their East African colleagues.

DECP, January 2020

Cooperating with:



Zambia Federation of  
Employers



Federation of  
Uganda Employers

The DECP staff and East African visitors thank all organisations and persons that have contributed to make a success out of this study visit.