



Benkadi
2021-2025

Forward!

Five years of collaboration
in West Africa



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for Climate Justice

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Working Together for Climate Justice

Benkadi—meaning “*working together in the same direction*” in Bambara—is a five-year collaboration (2021–2025) between four West African NGO platforms and the Dutch organization Woord en Daad. The four platforms are:

- **SPONG** (Secrétariat Permanent des ONG)
- **PASCiB** (Plate-Forme des Acteurs de la Société Civile du Benin)
- **SECO-ONG** (Secrétariat de Concertation des ONG Maliennes)
- **CSCI** (Convention de la Société Civile Ivoirienne)

Supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands under the Power of Voices program, Benkadi strengthens civil society so that communities - particularly women, youth, and persons with disabilities - can influence climate policy, which is very urgent. It ensures that their concerns are heard and acted upon,

both in local councils and at national and international levels.

Over five years, Benkadi partners contributed to the following results. More than five million people were reached through media-based awareness campaigns, significantly amplifying the message across broad audiences.

“This publication gathers stories, achievements, lessons, and reflections from across the program.”

In addition, in-person awareness meetings engaged over 75,000 individuals, including 33% women, 38% youth, and 4% persons with disabilities - highlighting the inclusive nature of the initiative.

The true legacy of Benkadi lies beyond numbers. As we close this program, we are filled with a sense of accomplishment

when we observe the capacities and voices that have been transferred to communities. Capacities that will outlive the program, thanks to the leverage effect provided by the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the support of local governments involved in the program.

This publication gathers stories, achievements, lessons, and reflections from across the program. It is not only a record of what has been done, but also an invitation: to continue and to keep walking together in the same direction toward climate justice.

Abdoulaye Ouedraogo
*Chairman of the
Board of SPONG
Chair of the Benkadi
Program Steering Committee
Officer of the National
Order of Burkina Faso*



Introduction

What is Benkadi?

Benkadi is a regional alliance established under the Power of Voices framework of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. With a budget of €21.6 million for the period 2021–2025, it operates in Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Ivory Coast.



The central aim is to strengthen civil society organizations (CSOs) and local communities so that they can engage meaningfully in climate mitigation and adaptation policies. Special attention is given to the participation of **women, youth, and persons with disabilities,**



“By the end of 2025, Benkadi will have strengthened the voice and influence of hundreds of organizations.”

who are often the most affected by climate change but the least represented in decision-making.

The program focuses on some of the most urgent climate challenges in West Africa:

- **Coastal erosion**, which threatens entire villages in Benin and Côte d'Ivoire.
- **Deforestation and land degradation**, which undermine food security in Mali and Burkina Faso.
- **Pollution from artisanal gold mining**, a growing challenge in Burkina Faso.

Benkadi emphasizes **Southern leadership and shared decision-making**. The four West African platforms are in the

lead, with Woord en Daad providing facilitation, technical support, and links to international advocacy spaces. The program works adaptively, allowing strategies to respond to local contexts and evolving challenges.

By the end of 2025, Benkadi will have strengthened the voice and influence of hundreds of organizations, ensuring that local communities are not only consulted but also central actors in the fight against climate change.

Antonie Treuren

Benkadi Project Leader on behalf of Woord en Daad



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The Power of Collaboration

Climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time. No country, no community, and no organization can face it alone. Collaboration across borders, sectors, and communities is essential. This is the spirit of Benkadi: to move forward together, with unity of purpose, even when contexts differ.



Voices from the Partnership



Sylvestre Noaga Tiemtore
Regional Director

"Climate change is a global challenge. Addressing it requires strong alliances. This is why four platforms of NGOs in

West Africa—PASCiB (Benin), SPONG (Burkina Faso), CSCI (Côte d'Ivoire), and SECO-ONG (Mali)—joined forces with Woord en Daad in the Netherlands.

"Together, we have given a voice to communities long excluded from decision-making processes."

Together, we have given a voice to communities long excluded from decision-making processes and improved the lives of those most affected by climate impacts. This journey teaches us that beyond resources, it is the strength of collaboration that makes the difference. Alone, we remain vulnerable; together, we become stronger."

Joris Jurriëns
Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Benin

"The Benkadi program has shown impressive results in terms of the inclusion of marginalized and vulnerable groups and its work with local organizations in the four countries."

Jeroen Kelderhuis

Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Ivory Coast

“Civil society organizations play an indispensable role in fostering a sustainable and socially inclusive trade and investment relationship between Ivory Coast and the Netherlands. This role takes many forms. organizations involved in Benkadi provide information on the impacts of investments and the essential conditions for success, facilitate communication between companies and potentially affected individuals, inform communities about investment plans, raise concerns with the embassy, government, or businesses, support companies in developing social and environmental plans, and intervene where necessary.”

Q&A with

Nelline Roest – Boers

PMEL expert at Woord en Daad

What is the strength of the cooperation between the Netherlands and West Africa?

Benkadi began with a Southern initiative. One of the platforms approached Woord en Daad to help mobilize resources so that civil society could engage in climate policy. From the outset, ownership lay in the South, shaping everything that followed.



Why does this matter?

Because Southern leadership made all the difference. The four platforms guided partner selection, the strategy, the Theory of Change, and the monitoring approach. Woord en Daad contributed where needed - supporting technical processes and serving as a bridge to the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs - while always ensuring alignment with local context. This is what made Benkadi relevant and effective.

Can you give a concrete example?

At a joint workshop in Benin, the four platforms drafted a manifesto calling on the Global North to take responsibility for climate impacts being felt in the South. Woord en Daad colleagues then helped bring this manifesto to the attention of parliamentarians in The Hague and Brussels. It was a clear example of how Southern voices could be amplified internationally without losing their authenticity.

Benkadi lobby strategy



The implementing partners seek to influence the relevant decisionmakers (e.g. ministries and traditional leaders) through lobbying. Similarly, these same decisionmakers are influenced by the monitoring committees. Members include women, youth, and people living with disabilities to make their voices heard for more inclusive climate policies and practices.

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Project Stories

One of the strengths of the Benkadi program is that it is not only about policy advocacy at national or international level, but also about tangible change in the daily lives of communities. Across the four countries, local stories show what it means when women, youth, and persons with disabilities are empowered to take part in climate action. These are stories of courage, resilience, and innovation.



Mali Drinking Water in Basala: Women Lead, the Village Benefits

For decades, the people of **Basala**, a village in the circle of Dioïla in Mali, struggled with unsafe and insufficient water. The wells in the village dried up early in the year, often by February or March, long before the rainy season returned. This forced women and girls to walk long distances every day to fetch water, carrying heavy containers on their heads. On average, they lost three to five hours per day to this task, leaving them with little time for education, farming, or other productive work.

The consequences were severe. Children frequently missed school, especially girls who carried the burden of water collection. Waterborne diseases were common, and conflicts often arose at the wells as families competed for scarce resources. Through Benkadi, women in Basala



“With their renewed determination and the support of traditional leaders, the women’s voices were heard.”

received **training in advocacy and civic participation**. They learned how to identify their community’s most pressing problems, how to organize themselves, and how to engage with local authorities.

“The borehole did more than providing water. It provided proof that empowered women can transform an entire community.”

Encouraged by this new knowledge, the women formed a delegation and approached their village chief and the municipal council, demanding better access to drinking water.

With their renewed determination and the support of traditional leaders, the women’s voices were heard. Their advocacy attracted the attention of an NGO that agreed to finance the construction of a borehole equipped with a modern pump. For the first time, Basala had reliable access to clean water. The impact was immediate:

- Women and girls no longer lost hours each day fetching water.

- School attendance, especially among girls, increased.
 - Waterborne diseases declined sharply.
- Conflicts around water points disappeared.
- As one woman from the village explained: *“We used to walk long distances with heavy buckets, sometimes even at night. Now, thanks to our mobilization, clean water is*



within our reach. We feel stronger and respected. We know now that when we speak together, we can change things.”

The borehole did more than providing water. It provided proof that **empowered women can transform an entire community.**

Ivory Coast Azurreti’s Fight Against the Sea

The coastal village of **Azurreti**, in Grand-Bassam, Ivory Coast, is on the frontlines of climate change. Each year, the Atlantic Ocean eats away at the shoreline, with several meters disappearing into the waves. Families have seen their homes destroyed, farmland submerged, and the local fishing economy devastated.

Compounding the problem was the **delayed opening of the Comoé River mouth**. When the river mouth remained



closed, water backed up into the lagoon, flooding fields and settlements. When it was opened too late, the sea advanced further inland. The community found itself trapped between the rising sea and the overflowing lagoon. Faced with these challenges, many families abandoned Azurreti. Fishing yields collapsed, pushing households deeper into poverty. Through Benkadi, the **Sustainable**

Development Club of Azurreti was trained in advocacy and climate governance. With the support of CSCI, they engaged directly with local and national authorities.

“While not a permanent solution, it was a crucial step that gave the community breathing space.”

Their main demand was simple yet urgent: timely and regular opening of the river mouth, managed in consultation with local communities.

After months of lobbying, the authorities agreed to accelerate the process. The river mouth was opened earlier than usual, relieving pressure on the lagoon and slowing down the advance of the sea. While not a permanent solution, it was a crucial step that gave the community breathing space. *“We are still living under threat,”* says

fisherman **Mr. Akessé**, *“but we have learned that our voices matter. We will continue to demand solutions that protect our livelihoods. We need support for resilient fishing and farming practices, otherwise our village will disappear.”* Azurreti’s story illustrates how **local advocacy, when well organized and persistent, can influence national decision-making**—even on complex environmental issues.

Burkina Faso The Biodigester at the Heart of Resilience

In Dagamgui, a village in Burkina Faso, climate change has deeply disrupted daily life. With temperatures soaring to 48°C and rainfall becoming increasingly unpredictable, farming families like that of Alimata Ouédraogo face shrinking harvests and growing uncertainty. Once able to produce ten bags of millet, Alimata now gathers only four or five—threatening food security and livelihoods.



Alimata

“This small installation changed everything. I no longer spend hours looking for wood, my children breathe clean air and my field is greener than before. For us, this is real resilience.”

Before the Benkadi project, energy poverty was the norm. Like many rural women, Alimata walked several kilometers daily to collect firewood. This exhausting task exposed her family to harmful smoke and contributed to deforestation.

The introduction of a **biodigester**, through Benkadi and local NGO APIL, changed everything. Using manure from

their ten oxen, Alimata’s family now produces **biogas for cooking and organic compost for farming**.

The results are transformative:

- **1.5 hours saved daily** from wood collection
- **Cleaner air** and improved health
- **Better soil** fertility and reduced need for chemical fertilizers
- **Up to 3 tons of wood saved per household per year**

Beyond the technical benefits, the biodigester has reshaped household dynamics. Alimata now manages livestock and energy production—roles traditionally reserved for men—leading to greater gender equality and family cohesion. With over 1,600 biodigesters installed nationwide, this technology is a powerful tool in the fight against deforestation and climate vulnerability. It turns waste into

value, reduces greenhouse gas emissions, and strengthens rural resilience.

Benin From Charcoal to Cheese: Rosine Dossou’s Journey of Change

Rosine Dossou, a mother from Dassa-Zoumè in central Benin, once thrived in the charcoal trade, earning a modest income to support her family. But everything changed when she joined the Benkadi project—a local initiative aimed at empowering women and promoting sustainable practices.

Through a series of training sessions, Rosine learned about the devastating effects of deforestation and climate change. She realized that her charcoal business, though profitable, was contributing to environmental degradation and harming her community’s future. This awakening

led her to make a bold decision: to stop selling charcoal and start producing soy-based cheese.

“Beyond her entrepreneurial success, Rosine has become a symbol of change.”

Rosine invested in learning the craft, transforming four measures of soybeans each day into cheese, which she sells locally.



Rosine Dossou producing cheese

Her new business not only respects nature but also provides a stable income. She now spends around 8,000 CFA francs (12 euros) a day on production and sells her cheese at affordable prices, becoming a local advocate for sustainable living.

Beyond her entrepreneurial success, Rosine has become a symbol of change. She actively discourages wood cutting in her community and shares her story to inspire others. Her dream is to scale up her cheese production through a dedicated processing plant, creating jobs and further reducing environmental harm.

Rosine’s journey shows how awareness, education, and courage can lead to meaningful transformation. Thanks to the Benkadi project, she turned personal growth into community impact—proving that sustainable change begins with one person’s decision to do better.



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Thematic Essays

Going forward together is all about leadership and participation. In this chapter, Woord en Daad colleagues share their view on Southern leadership, climate change and participation.

Leading from the South

Southern leadership is not a slogan in Benkadi—it is the organizing principle of the entire program. From its inception, Benkadi was initiated and led by four West African civil society platforms. Woord en Daad acted as a supportive partner, but the strategic direction, priorities, and day-to-day leadership remained with the platforms themselves.

This approach was a deliberate choice. Too often in international cooperation, programs are designed in the North and implemented in the South. Benkadi reversed this logic. The Southern platforms defined the Theory of Change, identified priority themes, and decided how to implement and measure progress. This ensured that strategies were rooted in local realities.

Adaptive management was central to this leadership model. The contexts in Benin, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, and Mali differ significantly. Climate and environmental challenges from coastal erosion to desertification, from deforestation to artisanal mining. Political environments also vary, sometimes unstable and fragile. Benkadi's partners used adaptive management to adjust strategies to their contexts, while still working together as one alliance.

The success of Benkadi shows that **Southern leadership delivers concrete results**: policies were influenced, communities mobilized, and institutions strengthened. But it also highlights the systemic barriers that remain. True Southern leadership requires not only responsibility but

also resources and space to set agendas. Too often, funding structures remain controlled from the North.

Woord en Daad recognized its role as a **facilitator and amplifier**, not as a leader. Its contribution was to connect Southern voices to Dutch and European policy arenas, to bring in specific expertise when requested, and to support financing strategies that increase Southern autonomy. The aim was not to *shift the power* temporarily, but to **share power structurally**.

Antonie Treuren
*Benkadi Project Leader on
behalf of Woord en Daad*



Climate Change and Vulnerability in West Africa



West Africa is one of the most vulnerable regions in the world to climate change. Rising temperatures, increasingly unpredictable rainfall, longer dry spells, and more intense storms all affect the daily lives of millions. In these four countries, most people depend on rain-fed agriculture, livestock farming, and fishing. Sudden changes in climate therefore directly impact their food security, income, and livelihoods. According to the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA), an average of 66% of the population is directly affected by climate-related losses in food

and income. Small-scale farmers are hit the hardest. Crop yield reductions can reach up to 40%, with disastrous consequences for the net income of vulnerable farmers and their families (Wageningen University and Research).

In the **Sahel zones of Burkina Faso and Mali**, drought and deforestation have degraded fertile soils. Farmers watch their harvests decline year after year, forcing families into poverty or migration. Competition over scarce resources fuels conflict, making climate change not only an environmental but also a security challenge.

In the **coastal areas of Benin and Ivory Coast**, the sea advances relentlessly. Every year, villages lose meters of land to coastal erosion. Entire communities are displaced. Fishing yields collapse as marine ecosystems are disrupted. The delayed or

irregular opening of river mouths worsens flooding and salt intrusion, threatening both farming and human settlements. The impacts are not felt equally.

Women, youth, and persons with disabilities bear the heaviest burdens. Women often spend hours searching for water or firewood. Youth see their economic prospects shrink, leaving them vulnerable to migration pressures or recruitment into violent groups. Persons with disabilities are frequently excluded from relief and adaptation measures, deepening their marginalization.

These climate vulnerabilities cut across multiple Sustainable Development Goals (1, 2, 5, 6, 7) undermining progress towards 2030.

The time to act is now. Without structural investments in climate adaptation, sustainable agriculture, ecosystem restoration,

and inclusive decision-making, millions of people will lose their livelihoods. The Benkadi program has mobilized local forces and strengthened communities in their fight against this crisis. Climate justice begins with resilient people in the most vulnerable regions of West Africa.

Nelline Roest – Boers
*PMEL expert at
Woord en Daad*



Jonathan van Dijke
*PMEL expert at
Woord en Daad*



Participation, Lobby, and Advocacy

Heatwaves, coastal erosion, deforestation, soil degradation, and a security crisis in the Sahel. Against this backdrop, representatives of Benkadi and Woord en Daad presented a manifesto on climate change in West Africa to the Dutch House of Representatives' Committee on Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation in the summer of 2024. They did so on behalf of Pascib, SPONG, CSCI, and Seco ONG - platform organizations representing hundreds of civil society organizations in Benin, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, and Mali. Following a regional conference in Cotonou (Benin) earlier that year, the Benkadi consortium formulated a

clear message for policymakers in the Netherlands and the European Union:

1. Ensure coherent climate policy and a just energy transition;
2. Continue contributing to generous climate financing that is both accessible (including for civil society organizations) and avoids increasing government debt;
3. Promote equitable international partnerships that respect local needs and priorities.

In 2015, 195 world leaders endorsed the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities” in the Paris Agreement. Climate



responsibility is therefore a shared obligation that concerns all countries. Nations differ in their historical contributions to the problem (e.g., CO₂ emissions since the Industrial Revolution) and in their economic capacity to address it. The Advisory Council on International Affairs refers to this as a “triple inequality”: in causes, consequences, and access to solutions.

“Both locally and internationally, there is a growing call for climate justice.”

Rightfully, the Global South looks to industrialized countries like the Netherlands to drastically reduce greenhouse gas

emissions and generously contribute to funds for climate adaptation and recovery from loss and damage. Moreover, a changing world order leaves the Netherlands and Europe with no choice: we simply cannot afford to turn our backs on the world. Especially not on Africa, our neighboring continent, with which our future is economically, ecologically, and demographically inextricably linked.

Both locally and internationally, there is a growing call for climate justice. In West Africa, civil society organizations are working on concrete solutions—from ecosystem preservation to strengthening the position of youth, women, and people with disabilities. At the same time, they actively seek dialogue with policymakers in The Hague and Brussels to make their perspectives heard where political decisions are made. Only through collaboration at all levels—local, national,

regional, and international—can we arrive at structural solutions that address both the urgency and inequality of the climate crisis. Meanwhile, the international playing field has changed dramatically. It is time to create new momentum for ambitious climate policy.

Maarten van Nieuw Amerongen
Political Advisor at Woord en Daad



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Results and Impact

Benkadi was designed to achieve systemic change: strengthening civil society so that vulnerable communities can influence climate policy. After five years, the results are visible at both program level and in each of the four countries. They reflect not only numbers but also stories of empowerment and institutional transformation.



Program-Level Achievements

- 21**  **laws, regulations, or policies** were adopted or improved with explicit attention to human rights and the inclusion of vulnerable groups.
- 83**  **successful advocacy actions** placed climate vulnerability on political agendas. These ranged from municipal lobbying to influencing national climate strategies.
- 1,374**  **organizations** strengthened their advocacy capacities (118% of the target). These organizations can now design strategies, build coalitions, and engage with policymakers more effectively.
- 108**  **organizations** improved their representativeness and legitimacy, enabling them to speak credibly on behalf of communities and to monitor government policies.

Across Benin, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, and Mali, the program has achieved significant milestones:



5.23 million people were reached through awareness campaigns, workshops, and media broadcasts.

The numbers are important, but equally important is the shift in perception. Policymakers increasingly see civil society not as passive recipients but as partners in designing and implementing solutions. Communities that once felt excluded now experience that their voices matter.

Country Highlights



Benin



In Benin, efforts centered on coastal protection, sustainable agriculture, and ecosystem restoration. Achievements include:

- **113 CSOs** strengthened in lobby and advocacy capacity (141% of target).
- **45 CSOs** gained more influence in national decision-making processes (141% of target).
- **Sustainable agricultural** practices integrated into four local development plans (PDCs).
- **The national policy framework** on Ecosystem based Adaptation is sharpened and expanded to municipalities to support implementation of sustainable agricultural practices.
- **Deforestation rates** in natural forests and savannahs dropped from 14.32% to 8%, showing tangible impact on land use.

Burkina Faso



In Burkina Faso, Benkadi focused on sustainable management of natural resources and responsible artisanal gold mining. Key results include:

- A significant **reduction in the use of prohibited chemicals** such as cyanide and mercury in artisanal mining.
- **17 inspections** of mining sites carried out, with enforcement of environmental and social standards.
- **100% of companies** inspected implemented more than 80% of the actions in their environmental and social management plans.
- Progress on a **Plastics Act**, with civil society contributing to policy drafts and consultations.

Ivory Coast



In Ivory Coast, the focus was on coastal erosion, sustainable land management, and strengthening youth and women's participation. Key results include:

- **24 local action plans** developed with strong involvement of vulnerable groups.
- **353 farmers** trained in composting techniques, producing **79 tons of compost** in one year - showing widespread adoption of sustainable practices.
- Youth associations, such as AFJCI, influenced national environmental legislation by contributing to parliamentary debates.
- Local advocacy led to **accelerated opening of river mouths**, a crucial adaptation measure against coastal flooding.
- National platforms engaged with ministries to ensure that **gender and youth perspectives** were integrated into climate strategies.

Mali



In Mali, Benkadi worked on reforestation, land management, and strengthening local governance structures. Results include:

- **465 hectares reforested**, reaching **125% of the target**.
- More than 400 farmers adopted sustainable land management practices (116% of target).
- **Local bylaws** issued against illegal logging, protecting remaining forests.
- **24 citizen committees** strengthened, which integrated adaptation and mitigation measures into **18 local development plans (75% of target)**.
- Women and youth were trained to play active roles in community decision-making, breaking traditional barriers of exclusion.

Reflections on Impact

The figures are impressive, but what matters most is that capacity has been built where it is most needed. Communities now have the tools, confidence, and legitimacy to influence policies. The four platforms have grown stronger, both individually and as a regional alliance.

The impact can be summarized in three shifts:

1. From exclusion to participation: marginalized groups are now recognized as legitimate stakeholders.
2. From local concerns to national policy: grassroots voices are shaping strategies at the highest levels.
3. From vulnerability to resilience: communities are not only victims of climate change, but also drivers of solutions.

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Back to the Netherlands

Although Benkadi was designed and led in West Africa, its impact has also been felt in the Netherlands. The partnership has influenced how Dutch civil society, policymakers, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs view international cooperation and climate justice.



After five years of working with the Benkadi project, it's time to pause and reflect. What have we learned? What insights will we carry forward? In this chapter, five key lessons from the journey are shared.

1. Resilience as an inspiring example.

Communities in Ivory Coast, Mali, Benin, and Burkina Faso teach us a new definition of resilience. People are at the front lines of climate change, facing extreme heat, water scarcity, failed harvests, and coastal erosion. Yet they do not give up; coasts are reinforced, farming practices adapted, and water resources better managed.

2. Policy advocacy is essential for lasting change.

Working with government institutions often requires long-term investment in relationships. Change takes time

and patience. But when efforts lead to adjustments in laws and regulations - systemic change - the results are often more sustainable.

3. Solutions begin within local communities.

Climate adaptation cannot be imposed from above. It begins with engaging and listening to local communities; they know what is needed in their environment. They are part of the solution. To policymakers in Burkina Faso, Benin, Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, The Hague, and Brussels: don't start behind your desk - start where you want to see change.

4. Power and counterpower are both needed to protect vulnerable groups.

A democratic state governs by majority, but protects the rights of all. Often, dissenting voices represent those at

risk—whether minorities or majorities. Government rules must not silence civil society.

5. Climate change magnifies inequality between North and South.

Africa, Asia, and Latin America have contributed little to climate change compared to the global North. Yet they suffer most. And they have fewer resources to adapt. This triple inequality demands ongoing European commitment—through financial support, knowledge sharing, and reducing our global footprint. Climate justice is not a luxury - it's a necessity.

Kees Knulst
Political Advisor at
Woord en Daad





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Final Thoughts and the Road Ahead

What will we take away from five years of Benkadi, and what is truly important for the future? For me, two interrelated issues stand out:

- 1) Achieving true southern leadership requires everyone's commitment and dedication, but it brings us a great deal.**
- 2) As northern NGOs, let us define our role modestly and realistically, but then also execute it with passion, based on our values.**

will explain both. We launched Benkadi with a strong aspiration to truly put southern leadership into practice. To this end, we established a Financial Shared Service Center during the design phase, assigned strategic leadership to a steering committee consisting of the leaders of all consortium partners, assigned operational leadership to a regional team, and limited the size of the support team at Woord en Daad. Because Woord en Daad, as the applicant, did bear ultimate responsibility, this initially required some effort to find the right balance between entrusting matters to others and providing sufficient oversight to ensure contractual agreements were honored. However, this balance was convincingly found, and the result was absolutely worth all the mutual effort. And this has further confirmed our belief that we need each other. The South in the lead? Absolutely! But that doesn't mean "Shift the power," but "Share the power!"

Benkadi also taught us that as a Northern NGO, it's good to be realistic and modest about the role you play and the added value you can provide. Different cultures, Southern development challenges, and local development needs are always more complex than we can adequately under-

"But always complementing what Southern partners can do themselves."

stand from outside. At the same time, we certainly have a role to play in forging partnerships, contributing specific knowledge, and amplifying Southern voices in the Netherlands and Brussels. Yet always in complement to what Southern partners can do themselves. At Woord en Daad, we certainly take these two lessons into the future.

In fact, these lessons have inspired us to adapt the way we organize our work for the new policy period 2026-2031. We will no longer organize our work according to thematic programs, but according to four organizational roles, primarily aimed at supporting our southern partners in taking leading positions in our joint interventions. In this way, we make southern leadership as concrete as possible in all our work.



Wim Blok
*Knowledge strategist
at Woord en Daad*



“Benkadi has shown us that Southern leadership is about setting the agenda together, walking the path in equal partnership, and above all, listening to understand. This spirit is what Woord en Daad will carry into the future.”

Rina Molenaar
CEO at Woord en Daad



Credits

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Woord en Daad is a registered charity (ANBI) under Dutch law. For legacies, our address is Stichting Reformatorische Hulpactie Woord en Daad, Gorinchem. Our charity is registered under number 41118168 at the Dutch Chamber of Commerce in Utrecht and our finances are audited by a registered accountant. We bank with the Rabobank: account number NL64 RABO 0385 487088, account holder Woord en Daad, Gorinchem.

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“This small installation changed everything. I no longer spend hours looking for wood, my children breathe clean air and my field is greener than before. For us, this is real resilience.”

Alimata - Read her story on page 18