

**SPECIAL ENVOY
FOR INTERNATIONAL
WATER AFFAIRS
HENK OVINK**

‘WATER IS MORE THAN
A TOILET, TAP, DAM,
DYKE OR LEVEE,
IT’S AN ENABLER!’

Tapped by the Dutch Government in 2015 to increase awareness and action for water security across the globe, Henk Ovink is in the sixth year of his global mission. It should be no surprise that he finds water ‘critically important’. He travels the world spreading the word about the world’s water-related challenges to citizens and leaders alike, with a unique and informed approach infused with his diverse academic and professional experiences.

Photo @ Evert van de Worp

This interview was conducted early this year before the COVID-19 pandemic was exposed massively across the world. Henk Ovink advocates for a pro-active relief and recovery approach, integrating the SDGs and the Paris Agreement goals, and leaving no one behind. He also advocates for a rapid scaling up of WASH-related activities. Read also his CNN op-ed on WASH and COVID-19: <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/05/23/opinions/for-many-the-first-line-of-defense-against-covid-19-is-out-of-reach/index.html>

Post-disaster response demands that future orientation, in partnership, not responding to the past disaster and only repairing but preparing for the future and building back better.

What is your current role and what is your focus?

I am a Water Envoy. An envoy is an ambassador dedicated to a specific topic, and for me that is water. There are water-related challenges everywhere such as climate, health, security and so forth. I have been in this role now for five years. I was asked to become the Water Envoy by the prior cabinet and the Ministers Schultz van Haegen, Ploumen, and Kamp from the Ministries of Infrastructure and Environment Development Cooperation and Economic Affairs. They said 'water is so critically important across the world and is connected to a lot of the challenges and opportunities that we face. We need a 24/7 representative of the Dutch cabinet to work around the world on water awareness and action'.

First, there is a need for better understanding and awareness. This can be done through research, capacity building, education and in partnerships, leading to political and societal awareness as well as awareness and understanding in the financial sector. With understanding and awareness comes partnerships, strong coalitions and collaborations for action because the second need is about action: helping the world to move beyond response and towards preparedness.

There are so many water-related disasters across the world, 90% of all natural disasters

are water-related! I believe that we need to limit these disasters – both the strength, the amount and their impact – with strong climate action and sustainable development. Nevertheless, disasters happen, so we better be prepared by building resiliency in our communities and environments. Post-disaster response demands that future orientation, in partnership, not responding to the past disaster, and only repairing but preparing for the future and building back better. Can we move the world from a response mode to a preparedness mode? Can we have those two in place – increased awareness and understanding – plus being prepared? What are then the opportunities to help leapfrog? In the context of a changing climate and the need for sustainable action in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we need scale and replication, and at a different speed and extent than we see now. What kind of innovative practices do we need?

What led you to working within the water sector?

I think water is critically important and interestingly complex. If we invest in water, the benefits are usually outside the water world. With clean drinking water available, health costs go down, gender opportunities go up, equality goes up and education opportunities go up. With 24/7 guaranteed water with the right quality, conflict opportunities go down,

and food security goes up. If we mitigate climate risks by investing in water, risks go down and revenues go up. And so forth.

We have to make people aware that if you invest in water, there is a trickle-down effect outside of the water world, in *their* world. That demands collaboration. Water incentivises a collaborative approach, integrating needs and opportunities, and creating common values and benefits. Only through *inclusive* collaboration can we make that happen.

The goal is to go from a systems understanding all the way to sustainable investments in projects which means that parallel to investing in the project, you have to invest in the people *and* the process. I sometimes say you need a million to spend a billion wisely. You need to invest in understanding, awareness, capacity, the enabling environment and so forth, to be able to get to those solutions that are transformational, have sustainable impact, and help to build societies holistically. For that, we need better business cases including people, the environment and all values of our economies and societies.

What influences have led to who you are professionally?

My mother and father – both have passed away after long and rewarding lives – inspire

INTERVIEW

me until this day. I try to combine the best of both of them and live up to their standards. My father was an architect engineer. No problem was ever too big or too crazy to take on. He would always look for a solution like a real engineer but he was a *people-oriented* engineer. He believed that only through collaboration will the best solutions come to life. Only by collaboration can values be shared.

My mother was the activist, lead community organiser and first female school director in the east of the Netherlands post-World War II. She was an amazing educator, always bringing groups of people together, bringing us all together. She was the personification of the UN's motto 'leaving no one behind'.

I think their upbringing really determined who I am today. It was about collaboration, bringing people together with a rigorously innovative and comprehensive approach aimed at getting things done. At the end of the day, we need to see change on the ground in the lives of people that need it most.

What are your academic and professional backgrounds and how do they influence your work in your current role?

My academic background is in mathematics, arts and engineering, and a bit of public policy. I have an engineering and design background through my own practice and with a big engineering firm. I continue to do research with different universities in the Netherlands and abroad in the fields of water, governance, planning, and design.

After my first 15 years of work in the private sector, I led, for over five years, the department of Spatial Planning within the Ministry for Housing, Planning and the Environment. When we merged the two departments into the Ministry for Infrastructure and the Environment, I became acting Director General for Planning and Water.

In the Netherlands, water is about everything. It is about how we plan our cities and landscapes, how we secure better health and equal positions for all, how we work together through our 'polder model', and of course about keeping dry feet and securing safe drinking water for all. Water is as much about adaptation as it is about mitigation. This is done through innovative water-technology, inclusive



Photo @ Aad Hoogendoorn

collaborations, with old and new governance and public-private finance mechanisms. Water cuts across all challenges, needs, disciplines and opportunities. And through our planning practice, where the integration literally takes shape, we manage to bring all stakeholders, partners and interests together. With a perspective of the long-term and the future through research and scenarios, we turn our plans into realities of the near-term. Planning and water, a strong combination, helps find the collective rewards in the context of climate action and sustainable development.

At the time the Dutch government asked me to become their first Special Envoy for International Water Affairs, I was in the United States working for the Obama administration. I had the honour of serving under President Obama's Hurricane Sandy task force on the rebuilding of the New York region after the super storm's massive destruction. As special advisor to the chair of the task force, I worked on regional resiliency coordination, resilient infrastructure investments and guidelines, and on innovation for building again in a better way. I developed, set up and led the Rebuild

by Design Challenge which was aimed at building resiliency through collaboration, understanding and innovative opportunities. We brought everybody together, and from a systems' research across the region and with inspiring coalitions of local partners, we managed to develop transformative projects with the capacity to change communities. These projects were all opportunities we could replicate and scale up across the region, across the USA and possibly the world.

As it was a new position, the Special Envoy for Water, how did you go about defining your new role?

At the time when I started in my new role, the three ministries for Foreign Affairs, Infrastructure and the Environment and Economic Affairs joined forces for an international water agenda. It was also the year, 2015, where we agreed upon the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement. The world wanted to change course and for that, we needed a new compass, a new horizon. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is that inspiring

Meet Henk Ovink

Henk Ovink's complementary backgrounds in art, architecture, mathematics and urban planning, in combination with his professional experiences such as drumming up proposals to help New York City rebound from Hurricane Sandy, propel his current role as the Special Envoy for International Water Affairs for the government of the Netherlands.

As Special Envoy, Henk works for the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Infrastructure & Water Management, Economic Affairs & Climate Policy, and Agriculture, Nature & Food Quality. As a diplomat representing the Dutch Government on the international stage, he works around the world to help in identifying and tackling water-related problems. He works at home and abroad in partnership with public authorities, businesses, research institutions, multilateral organisations, embassies and consulates in the areas of research, policy, cooperation and negotiation, investment opportunities, and innovation.

He served as Sherpa to the High Level Panel on Water, is board member of Rebuild by Design – based in New York City – and researches and teaches at the University of Groningen, Harvard Graduate School of Design, and the London School of Economics.

and very necessary horizon. In this context, I had to draft my agenda, finding out what made water so special and what the added value of a Dutch-led international water approach could be.

The importance of first, progressing best understanding and awareness, second, investing in pro-active preparedness and inclusive and sustainable disaster responses, and third, developing innovative water and climate actions were the three pathways along which I would develop and implement my agenda. Not in isolation but across the world through new and existing partnerships and inspiring coalitions.

Water matters to the world but we need to understand why and how. What are the interrelations between all these challenges, across the SDGs? And what is the impact of these relations, can it help in understanding the challenges and finding the opportunities to intervene? I initiated a research, led by the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, to take the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a framework

and put all these water relations on the map of the world: water and food, pollution, health, floods, energy, biodiversity, and migration.

The first result is a publication, *'The Geography of Future Water Challenges'*, the base for next steps. And an inspiring document because it explains all these interdependencies clearly. This helps inform conversations with the worlds outside of water. With health for instance, water and health are so directly linked, but these worlds are too separated. Now we can inform that conversation and the investments and actions needed, leading to better health through water security. With this

approach, we can demonstrate that if one increases the quality and access to clean water, guaranteed 24/7, health costs go down, and opportunities for women and children go up. With safe sanitation facilities, school access and therefore opportunities for girls will go up. Water is more than a toilet, tap, dam, dyke or levee, water is an enabler. I think this is critically important: it is an enabler for a more just, sustainable and resilient society. With the researchers, we also looked at cities, across all the SDGs, across all the social, environmental, cultural and economic challenges in our cities where climate change rapidly exacerbates these challenges. Linking all these urban, water and climate challenges, we found the hotspots for climate action.

What targets did you receive from the Dutch Government and have you reached them?

In my role as special envoy, I represent the Dutch Government on water issues around the world. Along the lines of awareness and capacity, preparedness and response, and sustainable and innovative water and climate action. With the PBL research and my work with water youth around the world, I hope to help, providing the *opportunity* to increase our understanding and raising awareness among many.

Awareness is a means to an end. When people have a better understanding, it really helps us to take *better* action but also to take more *collaborative* action.

I was one of the four initiators that helped start the High Level Panel on Water (HLPW), with Prime Minister Mark Rutte as one of the leaders among the eleven heads of Government from the panel. The HLPW really sparked a political debate for water and helped to raise the bar on

**Water is as much about adaptation
as it is about mitigation.**

Why Focus on Water Affairs?

Water connects across all SDGs and due to climate change, global populations are increasingly affected by water-related problems such as heavy rainfall, hurricanes, tsunamis, soil subsidence, extreme droughts, water shortages and more. These problems often aggregate in the most vulnerable places and lead to food shortages, health problems, inequality, flooding, energy shortages and a degradation of nature. Without proactive intervention, these problems affect the lives of billions of people. Disasters like this will lead to more damage and despair, are costly to repair and the losses are avoidable.

The government of the Netherlands conceived the role of Special Envoy for International Water Affairs – the first such position of its kind – to raise water awareness worldwide and lead transformative action. After his appointment, Henk developed his agenda to create opportunities, develop partnerships, help set up projects and business cases. He mediates between stakeholders, launches new initiatives and projects to promote water security, flood protection, and sustainable development. He also developed the interactive platform World Water Atlas that enables partners to share their stories and solutions, and tackle their water-related problems together. Mapping the 'hotspots' to reveal where water-related challenges and opportunities co-exist.

www.worldwateratlas.org



water-related action. With the HLPW, we concluded on three pillars for water security: 1) better understanding of water's complexity, 2) valuing water more comprehensively and innovatively, and 3) managing water transparently and inclusively, across all interests and borders. Valuing water is the flagship program for the HLPW the Netherlands still leads. We focus on public-private partnerships, work with investors and indigenous peoples and with children across the world through water assessment and awareness programme, so they better understand the importance of taking care of *water* so water can take better care of *them*.

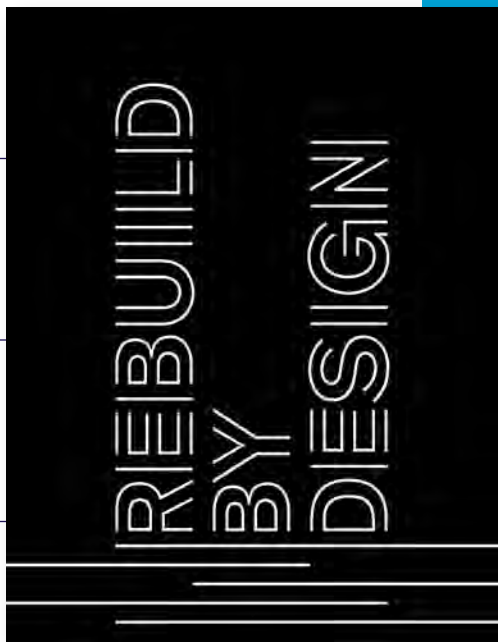
Based on your experience in this role, what is your advice on disseminating important messages about the water-related challenges?

I think it is all tailored, it is different everywhere. In my role as Sherpa for the High Level Panel on Water, I have a different type of conversation than when I am in flood-prone Khulna, Bangladesh, a town of 500,000 people that is struggling with salinity in ground water, not enough sanitation and drinking water facilities, floods and droughts, and a doubling of the city's population. Therefore, it really depends with whom you sit and where in the world you are.

I learned a lot, about how to bring forth this complex water message; this is perhaps the main thing. Water is connected to *everything* but that doesn't always help in a conversation. For many people, that is way *too* complex. What I learned is to tailor the way I message the importance of water to the context where I am. Tailoring the message helps to increase the understanding and raise the level of awareness – and ownership – among the stakeholders and partners, so whatever they do, they still contribute to the full comprehensive agenda. It is not a siloed approach but a comprehensive approach for a higher level of impact on the full comprehensive agenda. That is not always easy, but 'easy' was not why I was appointed.

What strategies have you learned about sharing these complex messages?

Water is so inspiringly complex, it has the amazing capacity to connect across all the SDGs and also across partners, stakeholders, and organisations with competing interests.



Building Resilience Through Research and Design

Following Hurricane Sandy's devastation to the Northeastern United States, the Presidential Hurricane Sandy Task Force launched a competition – Rebuild by Design – to generate solutions to climate change. Rebuild by Design was developed and led by Henk with the goal of driving innovation and inclusivity to improve response, preparedness and resilience for the Sandy-affected region. The research-based, collaborative projects, produced by the competition's coalitions became a model for governments for future challenges.

It has since become the name of an NGO based in New York City which continues to research, design and develop projects as well as collaborate with cities and communities to build resilience. The NGO holds events and publishes research. The book *Rebuild by Design* – titled after the competition – offers insights into the approach and research which was performed and the projects which resulted. Together with researcher Jelte Boeijenga, Henk Ovink wrote a book – *Rebuild by Design: A Transformative Approach to Climate Change* – about his experiences on the Presidential Task Force, developing Rebuild by Design. Read a book review of the publication on page 45.

www.rebuildbydesign.org

It can help to create a level playing field or better, a common ground. Based on a shared understanding of needs, challenges and opportunities, we can increase our impacts by collaborating and investing more holistically. This very much depends on the situation, culture, backgrounds, challenges and scale, and with that, the opportunities to intervene vary too. Leading to the need for a rooted understanding of culture and place, indigenous, individual, and institutional.

I do think it is important not to fall into the trap of simplifying the water message. The complexity is both the challenge *and* the opportunity. With all the interdependencies, we can add value by connecting the dots and increase the impact of our solutions, generating more values outside of the realm of the challenges.

What would be your ideal vision of connecting stakeholders to solve these problems?

There is no ideal world [laughs]. And I'm very happy there is none, because on the edges of the world, in the 'in between', the often called

soft spaces of our world are rough, safe and challenging but are where new opportunities emerge. It is often on the fringes of the city where you find innovative and creative development. I think there is an opportunity with that roughness. At the same time, of course, we do not want to see despair, we must continue to leave no one behind and really continue to solve all our challenges.

How do you link the diverse interests of parties?

You really need continuity, consistency and commitment to make things happen. A safe place, a platform of collaboration as well as

best understanding from real knowledge, capacity and talent. That can come from books and experts but also has to come from indigenous and local, cultural knowledge. Experience is as important as research, so we must continue to bring the diversity of talent together. The goal is to have comprehensive understanding, increased awareness across all parts of society rather than only bringing in the expert or scientist with 'a model'.

Look ahead. Take on the future. Be inspired by the SDGs and beyond. Make sure that when you enable this environment where people come together, when there is knowledge to tap

We built coalitions, identified over 40 opportunities in the end, and had ten major programs developed by local-international coalitions.



into, to unravel and connect, that there is an opportunity to ask: *'if we want a better world, where shall we go? Can we leapfrog? What would that mean for whatever we do today?'*.

In our current practices, we tend to focus only on the projects and solutions, and the business case that comes with them rather than on the process and the people. We single the solutions out so we can turn them into financial-economic business cases. And we find that there *is* always a business case for *'stupid infrastructure'*, it is the easy way forward, replicating our mistakes of the past; single focused, siloed and fragmented projects. If you build a road from A to B, there is always a financial opportunity but it does not take into account the losses that come with this financial, short-term gain; biodiversity loss, social problems and increased climate change vulnerability. We must change course, face the complexity of the challenges head on, and develop comprehensive solutions that add value across all needs. It means finding ways for holistic business cases to validate these investments. Including all stakeholders from day one and collaboratively developing a more future-proof, added-value type of investment, that can also rally people around.

To understand this complexity comes first. Value every action, need and opportunity across all the SDGs, comes next. Last, but

not least is to organise, govern and manage this in an enabling and inclusive way. With this ambition, it is really about 'how to get this done?' How to implement better, at scale? How to govern more inclusively and collaboratively? How to finance more holistically, adding values across all needs? How to maintain and operate with all upfront ambitions as continuous drivers for societal impact? That asks for a full-life-cycle approach, capturing the co-benefits while leaving no one behind.

What came from the Rebuild by Design competition and is there a connection with what you are doing now?

When I worked for the Obama administration post-Hurricane Sandy, I worked on the resilient infrastructure investment work. We asked ourselves: 'how can we use this momentum, with our leadership and the funding, to leapfrog, and identify opportunities that are transformative?' That's bring change on the ground for the communities at risk. To really build a better future instead of rebuilding the past'. On these premises, I developed a competition that was a little different. In the USA, they like to compete for best ideas, but here we needed the competition to rally support, bring people together and build an enabling environment. An environment that could shoulder the transformative projects so much needed for reform and resiliency.

We invited the talent of the world to come together with the talent of the region in ten cross-disciplinary teams, working together with communities, governments, businesses, and investors across the region. First, teams had to research the region's climate interdependencies and vulnerabilities, to get to a best understanding of the opportunities. Interventions should leverage needs and opportunities, reduce risks and build resiliency and capacity for all.

We built coalitions, identified over 40 opportunities in the end, and had ten major programmes developed by local-international coalitions. We selected the best six and awarded these with almost a billion dollars in federal disaster recovery funding. Based on this success, we were able to scale up Rebuild by Design to the National Disaster Resiliency Competition.

Most of the six winning programs will move towards the first step of implementation this year. It took a while to move from idea towards projects, from the call for projects towards an engaged process where all stakeholders really said 'OK this is what we need to do', and now towards implementation. Part of this *slow* progress comes from the inability in our current systems and culture to deal with these very innovative solutions. If we want to change the world, and seeing the current

crises and challenges ahead, we have to, then we need both a systems change and a cultural change. That will take time. Because these very comprehensive and innovative projects didn't fit current standards in policy, regulations and financing mechanisms. Stakeholders wanted to take them apart, to make them fit their – outdated – system! Instead of reinventing the future, they were trying with these innovative projects to replicate the past, in bits and pieces. We had to bring everything and everyone together again, it is like an SDG puzzle, it doesn't make sense looking at the pieces one by one, only the full set shows the transformative and enabling capacity these projects can bring.

We were able to replicate the resiliency competition in the San Francisco Bay Area as the Resilient by Design Challenge. I brought some of the work to the Water as Leverage challenge developed for the Asian cities of Chennai in India, Khulna in Bangladesh and Semarang in Indonesia. Rebuild by Design really became a global approach, a mechanism to speed up and scale up actions for the SDGs and the Paris Climate Agreement in a consistent inclusive manner.

How will you bring the knowledge acquired through this competition to educational environments?

There were over 30 schools and universities engaged in Rebuild by Design. We had to capitalise on this capacity and we brought them together, co-led by Rebuild by Design, NY-University, Columbia University and the University of Pennsylvania, in partnership with the rest. Resilience by Design University (RBD_U) is an ongoing programme aimed to engage academics from multiple disciplines around resilience, designed to bring together a diverse set of interests and structured to help students understand the complex environment around resilience in which design can – and should – play a role.

While working for the Sandy Task Force, I taught a planning studio at Harvard's Graduate School of Design. With my students, we really tried to digest what the needed governance, financial as well as institutional settings should be in a post-disaster context and which systemic changes are needed to build resilience. With Rebuild by Design, we developed a book on the projects. And together with Jelte Boeijenga, I wrote a book

on the overall process, the cultural change. As we speak, I do research with the University of Groningen on parts of the Rebuild by Design approaches. So really taking the Rebuild by Design challenge apart and bringing it back together again. It is a continuous effort to learn and with that learning, to help scale up and replicate its transformative capacity. We developed the National Disaster Resiliency

Competition based on the first evaluation by the Urban Institute. We developed the Resilient by Design Challenge in the San Francisco Bay Area based on the evaluation two years after the announcement of the New York winners, mixed with our own research and with our partners's capacity. We try to bring this culture of inclusion, transformation and integration across the world, building an

Resumé

2015–Present

Special Envoy for International Water Affairs for the Netherlands And Sherpa to the High Level Panel on Water at United Nations

2013–2015

Senior Advisor to Secretary Shaun Donovan, Chair of the Presidential Sandy Task Force / Secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development / White House Office of Management and Budget And Principal for 'Rebuild by Design' (now board member)

2012–2013

Acting Director General of the Department for Spatial Planning and Water for the Ministry for Infrastructure and the Environment

2009–2012

Co-curator of 5th International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam 'Making City'

2008–2012

Director for National Spatial Planning for Ministry for Infrastructure and the Environment

2007–2008

Director Research, Design and Strategy for the Ministry of VROM

2005–2007

Head of Spatial Planning, Development and Housing Department for the Province of South Holland

2002–2004

Practice Area Manager Spatial Planning and Design at Royal Haskoning

1999–2001

Founding Partner / Director of Bureau Kroner

1992–2000

Director of buro ovink

Education:

1998–1999

Architecture at Delft University of Technology

1990–1992

Royal Academy of Art The Hague

1987–1990

Art Academy Minerva

1986–1987

Mathematics at Groningen University

enabling environment through innovative concepts. Water as Leverage, in three cities in Asia, is the latest development. Rebuild by Design's spirit really travels the world, taking on different roles and characteristics. There is a lot of spin-off, a lot of writing, a lot of research and a lot of increased capacity.

Are the participants mostly university students or do you also target practicing professionals?

I think it is a mix, it must be. We develop this within a university context because a lot of research and learning needs to happen there. That is and should not be, the only place to work with. It must have this broader opportunity to gain impact.

What is your opinion about the progress of the dredging industry in terms of sustainability?

We can learn a lot from the dredging industry. From its past and from its future. Our dredging industry in the Netherlands is pretty impressive. Both in scale as in intelligence. What we acknowledge more and more is the experience and expertise they have built up. While the dredgers, from a sole ecological and sustainability perspective, partially come from the 'wrong side of history', making us more vulnerable and challenging the climate and our environment, they more and more change course, and become part of the right side of the future. That is why they are such an inspiring industry and community. They are the real experts from practice and research. They have the people and the capacity, and they work from a systems' perspective. They really understand our biodiversity, the geomorphology and the way our oceans, rivers, and sediment systems work. They can turn human interventions into enablers for sustainability and resiliency, for faster recovery, mitigating biodiversity losses. They have a choice, like we all have, to do the right thing.

Do you believe the dredging industry can be a force to achieve sustainability?

I think an inspiring example, also from a collaborative perspective, is EcoShape also known as the Building with Nature consortium. Our dredgers, because of their scale and capacity, were able to help fund a coalition of partners - engineers, designers, innovators and researchers - and set up a consortium to collaborate and invest in research and

projects, to build more resiliency in our coasts, rivers and ecosystems. EcoShape is a showcase partnership. It started already 13 years ago, and nowadays everybody is talking about Building with solutions to mitigate climate and adapt to an ever faster changing world, for healthy environments, and strengthening biodiversity and protection along our coasts, our rivers, and in our cities. EcoShape, I think, has laid the foundation for global transformation in how nature can actually be the driver for the change we need. Providing answers for how to invest in our natural systems, increasing our resiliency and sustainability, strengthening biodiversity and ensuring a more sustainable future for all.

I think our dredgers helped us to show the way. We are in the first year of the decade of action for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We have ten years - one decade - to bridge the gap on the SDGs. To deliver on this promise, we will need everything and everyone, coming together around this agenda. This moment is our best opportunity for sustainable impact, the ideal year to relaunch a new effort when it comes to Building with Nature and EcoShape - a renewed coalition for nature-based solutions, driving resiliency and sustainability to a next level, which is critically important for the world. We have a Global Commission on Adaptation that launched their Flagship report last year, with Nature Based Solutions, Water and Cities as three critical and connected tracks. Next year, we need to show the world that this is serious and that our commitment to change course can be inspirational and transformative too. We can and must do this together.

Van Oord launched its Sustainable Earth Actions (SEA), a sustainability initiative looking at making coasts more climate adaptive. They have a programme to accelerate climate initiatives and really look at innovative marine solutions for coastal and river deltas, so vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Another example of how one of our lead dredging companies plays a critical role in driving the sustainability agenda.

Who do you think should take the lead in this endeavor of collaboration?

'The lead' is always complex because then you single out responsibilities and create unnecessary hierarchy between peers. Also, others can escape by outsourcing the problem to this 'lead' partner. It does not mean I don't like initiatives and activist partners, not at all. Do take the lead! However, this should not move us away from focusing on strong coalitions, partnerships and collaborative action. We have to carry the load together; the responsibility lies with all of us. Only together, in solidarity and leaving no one behind can we reach our goals.

So you find collaboration taken on together to be the goal?

Inclusivity, leaving no one behind, developing partnerships and investing in people, it is this collaborative process that drives change. A change built on a strong enabling environment where we all come together with shared understanding for collective action. Action with the very much needed transformative capacity, impact for everything, everywhere and for everyone.

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