

The Agitator

Ag-i-tate (aj' i tāt) v. 1. to

Posted by [Roger Craver](#) in [You Deserve a Raise](#) at 05:00 | [Comment \(0\)](#) | [Send this Post to a Friend](#) | [Return to Main](#)

Sunday, November 12, 2006

Nabuur to Neighbor to Neighbour



One of the great movement entrepreneurs of the past 15 years is a Dutchman little known outside his home territory of the Netherlands and in global wildlife conservation circles.

His name is [Siegfried Woldhek](#) (he's the guy on the right in the photo to the left above) and he's pioneering a new way of volunteer involvement through an internet-based organization called [Nabuur.com](#)

More about Nabuur in a moment. First some background on Siegfried.

For years Siegfried was the CEO of the Dutch section of World Wildlife Federation. In the galaxy of WWF national organizations [WWF-Netherlands](#) is one of the wealthiest and he used that wealth to great advantage in helping pioneer key aspects of today's global environmental movement. One of the first to see the promise of the internet and the global communications revolution, Siegfried and Frits Strietman, his marketing and communications head at WWF-NL were instrumental in the critical seed money funding of [WWF International's Living Planet Campaign](#) with its unique Gifts-to-the-Earth approach to nature conservation.

This massive global effort has so far succeeded in saving eco-significant regions around the world totalling the size of France, Italy and Germany combined. It also helped change the way the global conservation movement sets its priorities. Once conservation was approached on a local, project-by-project basis. Today's strategists think in terms of eco-regions.

It was in my role as strategic consultant helping to design WWF's Living Planet Campaign that I first met Siegfried. He had an idea a minute. (WWF-Netherlands was the first large NGO to underwrite film and video news releases, first with on-the-ground cameras and story tellers for postings on the internet, and on and on.)

The trouble with Siegfried was that he saw so far over the horizon that he often spooked conventional thinkers. He could be abrasive and charming all at the same time. You know, one of your typical visionaries.

Well, as is often the case with visionaries, after about a decade he found himself in the cross hairs of a conservative, not-so-visionary board at WWF-Netherlands and moved on. But WWF's loss was the developing world's gain when Siegfried used his vision and passion to launch Nabuur.com.

"Nabuur" is, roughly translated, Dutch for "neighbor." The important difference is in the meaning of the term. In Dutch a "nabuur" is one who just doesn't shoot the breeze over the garden fence or call the cops if there's a burglar, it's a person who really comes to your aid and coordinates meaningful help. Say, you've just had a heart attack. This is the man or woman who arrives from down the street, calls the ambulance, and stays right on the scene until you get the help you need.

Translating that concept to the online world and involving thousands of skilled "nabuurs" as volunteers leading and working on projects in the developing world is the mission of Nabuur.com.

President Clinton, the guy on the left in the photo above, has praised the idea because it offers a promising approach in mobilizing global citizens to build community in an increasingly interdependent world.

Nabuur represents a model of outreach, involvement and accountability that's worth studying.

The fact is that most NGOs and surely not governments and corporations aren't designed to tap into the enormous supply of human resources that the citizens of the world represent.

Over the past few years, Nabuur has been set up -- and tested -- to do exactly that. Nabuur allows anyone to assist directly, without bureaucracy, in solving concrete problems in real villages.

Principal Characteristics of Nabuur

- The local community is in the lead; it determines what needs to be done. (Contrast this with the we-folks-from-the-'developed' world-really-know-best-approach.)
- Person to person contact; no bureaucracy between the local community and persons who assist.
- It is all about doing. Jointly working towards solutions, ***not about giving money.***
- It is transparent; the progress is visible on the website to all.
- Everyone can contribute, not just experts. What is needed is time, contacts, know-how, tools, peoplepower.
- The online volunteers (neighbors or nabuurs or neighbours depending on who's doing the spelling) stay beyond the first project and thus enlarge the local problem solving capability on a sustained basis.

Siegfried launched Nabuur.com about the same time as Dennis Whittle and Mari Kuraishi launched globalgiving.com. ([See the Agitator's earlier post on Global Giving published June 5th](#))

In fact both organizations collaborated. The result? New approaches for a world very, very much in need of new approaches.