SDG 1: NO POVERTY

The Ghanaian women's journey from farming to business

Diana Tamm and I meet on a sunny day to talk about Mondo Crafts, a social enterprise that she is involved in. This enterprise helps women in the rural communities of Ghana escape poverty, send their children to school and improve the position of women in their society.

More than five years ago, Diana went to work as a volunteer in Ghana. Her task was to develop the project of twin schools, but she also needed to look for ways for the local women to earn their own income. "I met Victoria who worked as a basket weaver and bought ten of her baskets as a sample. A year later, around Christmas time, we opened our first pop up store. The baskets were sold in our first two weeks – we had found our hit product!"

Africa is not a country

With this social enterprise, Mondo Crafts takes on two issues at once. Diana believes that every person in the world has a right to decent life. "We are giving the women in a developing country the opportunity to hone their skills, lead a business, improve their status in society and earn income for their families."

Equal parts of the work involve Estonian people. "Our aim is to present a personal experience – Monica made this basket and her picture is attached to it. The very core of her person is the same as us; the people of a small village in Congo also want their children to have a bright future, full bellies and happiness in life," says Diana.

Fighting poverty takes time

In seven years, the life in the local community has improved significantly. The association of basket weavers connects more than 35 women and up to 100 women meet up to make shea butter in the appropriate season. Diana describes the story of Victoria Nyaabila, the first basket weaver she met in 2012: "Michael, Victoria's son, told me that in earlier times, their mother had a very hard time with providing them with three meals a day, especially in spring time when the new harvest was not ready yet. After creating the association, there have been no days when there was nothing to eat in their house. Even with poor harvest, basket weaving provides enough income to buy the food they need."

The additional income is mainly used for buying products with better quality. All the women still grow their own food, but they need to buy meat and anything that they do not grow themselves. They also invest in their children's education and buy notebooks and school uniforms or save up for sending them to college.

Diana believes that in addition to providing help, we should also think about changing the underlying reasons for the issues we face: "The fact that many people cannot afford decent life in the modern world is a result of long-lasting global processes. Our economy is structured in such a way that some place has been dug up for raw materials or some place has ridiculously cheap work force, just so that people in the Western world could consume cheap products."

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1 NO POVERTY
MONDO
© Mondo, Estonia

SDG 2: ZERO HUNGER

Combatting climate change with biowaste

NutriLoop is a small, yet ambitious enterprise aiming for nothing less than circular economy which takes the nutrients in biowaste back to the soil and gives us an opportunity to transition to organic farming

Biowaste is the most important type of waste. Since it is wet, it ruins other materials, so they cannot be recycled. On the other hand, it has incredible value, which we currently can't fully utilize.

How to collect waste with less smell and time?

"At the moment, biowaste is seen as a problem. I think about it differently, though – instead of seeing biowaste as a problem, we should try to find opportunities that this waste could offer to us. We have to understand that biowaste contains the nutrients that go missing in our food system, so biowaste could be a part of the solution in the fight against climate change," explains Markko.

The NutriLoop system is simple – first, the biowaste is fermented in an anaerobic environment for two weeks, which makes it very effective and generates no smell. Then, the earthworms get to work, upcycling this material even further and producing vermicompost. The acidic environment, a by-product of the fermentation process, destroys the pathogens, chemicals, weed seeds and pesticides, but it preserves the nutrients.

Everybody wins

As should be obvious from the name of NutriLoop, it is important to create a loop – the waste of a restaurant or a community is upcycled and then taken to a field, where it adds nutrients to the soil. The organic vegetables grown on this field will be taken back to catering enterprises and people.

Markko thinks that a solution would be found in rethinking the entire agricultural system. "There is a myth that we have to use chemicals because it's cheaper and better. In reality, a great harvest comes from fertile soil."

[1] Let's Do It World, which took place on 15 September 2018 in 150 countries.

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SDG 3: GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Busting myths about mental health with Head Matters

According to the World Happiness Report, mental health issues are the most significant factor to undermine people's opportunities for having a fulfilling life in the Western world. It is estimated that at any time, there are 70 000 depressed people in Estonia. Peaasi (Head Matters) is working to prevent mental health issues. For this, they use their web portal, offer training and raise awareness, as well as counsel the people in need.

Anna-Kaisa Oidermaa is a clinical psychologist and a family therapist. Ten years ago, she worked in the Psychiatry Clinic of the North Estonia Medical Centre and noticed that there is a lack of information about mental health in Estonian. "We wanted the information to be easy to read, evidence based and avoid shaming people. Ere, a colleague of mine, and I made the first website for mental health, albeit a very simple one, and we worked on it as volunteers, parallel with having a full time job."

Other colleagues also supported their initiative and the counselling could begin. Five years ago, they landed a major project with Norwegian funding, which helped them to grow their team. Now, Anna-Kaisa is the executive director of Peaasi and the team additionally includes 25 part time employees and volunteers.

An important, yet invisible issue

Anna-Kaisa says that over a person's lifetime, mental health issues can have an impact on up to 40% of all people. "Three quarters of all mental health issues start before turning 24. In itself, this is not a big deal – it is entirely possible to live and even be happy with various disorders. In many cases, the affected person can heal and recover. In our country, however, it can pose great difficulties, since the society tends to shame people with mental health issues and propagates myths and falsehoods. When people are afraid of doing something about the problem, they keep postponing looking for solutions and the problems only get worse. In the end, it is much more difficult to get up and dig yourself out of that hole," she explains.

Anna-Kaisa remarks that although physical separation is no longer deemed acceptable, people with different behaviours still tend to be isolated, though in more subtle ways. "Generally, people who deviate from the average tend to be pushed away, for example, they could be left out from group activities. It is more difficult to find a job, keep the job or find friends, potentially only because of the biases towards the diagnosis, even though those biases are unfounded," she says.

In an ideal world, all people could use some mental health hygiene habits and would be more aware of how to maintain emotional wellbeing, focus and relationships. Illnesses rooted in mental health could be a part of an ordinary life in the society – just like physical illnesses, which simply need to be taken care of.

Anna-Kaisa has a clear vision of the situation that they are working for: "If a person is in crisis or is not feeling well, they would know which steps they could take. Friends, classmates, teachers and colleagues could also behave in an appropriate way and be there for the person in need."

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3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

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SDG 4: QUALITY EDUCATION

JAH-education brings curiosity and ethics to the table

Anneliis Terep and Pinet Anier are a part of the community founding a school in Viljandi that rests on three pillars: child-friendliness, life-centric learning and sustainable development. Such a school would be the first of its kind in Estonia. Education on sustainable development has a short and sweet abbreviation in Estonian – JAH-education ("jah" meaning "yes" in Estonian, short for "jätkusuutliku arengu haridus", i.e. "education on sustainable development").

Anneliis Terep is a methodologist, an expert on didactics and a masterful teacher who has been in all kinds of schools – small community schools, large public schools, alternative education and private schools. Piret Anier, on the other hand, is an architect who later studied education: "I went to study Waldorf education in the University of Tartu because when I studied architecture, they went over everything but the people for whom the spaces are designed."

Their work began six years ago when the idea for JAH-education was born on the basis of extracurricular education and early childhood education. They found that parents would have a need for small, child-friendly and life-centric schools. At the moment, parents are working on submitting documents for founding the school. The intention is to get approval for the curriculum for grades 1–6 during this year and in the future they intend to develop this further to include the later years of basic school.

Less classes, more curiosity

Piret explains that in their new school, learning will be based on understanding connections and children's curiosity. Every child and parent will feel at home in this small and cosy school.

The school has a different format and the classes they offer support the needs of this generation's children: "We'll get started with the basics of entrepreneurship from the first year, but instead of talking about earning money, we'll look at how to be useful for your community, the nature and the world. For example, philosophy classes offer the children an opportunity to look into morals, aesthetics and ethics. Also, it's not merely theory – the children themselves can ask practical questions and look for answers to their questions," explains Piret.

All of this is a part of the sustainable lifestyle, summed up by Anneliis in one sentence: "The relationships between society, environment and economy in space and time, so that the future generations and species would could live here."

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4 QUALITY EDUCATION
15.05.
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SDG 5: GENDER EQUALITY

A teacher inspiring thousands of women

Kristi Saare, the founder of Naisinvestorite Klubi (Female Investors' Club), comes from Rakvere. Her club, which she founded four years ago, now boasts over 10 000 members and over 1 500 women from across Estonia have participated in the club's training sessions.

Kristi shares the story of the creation of this club: "I studied in Tartu and moved to Tallinn to become a teacher in the Noored kooli (Young To School) programme. I taught economy classes and I saw that students did not have even the slightest idea about the basic principles of economy. Another influencing factor was a personal one – when I became a teacher in 2011, the gross salary was 600€. Even in that time, it was not possible to actually live on this money, so I had to figure out additional ways of earning a living."

Kristi took a closer look at the topic of investments and found two major issues: "First off, you read newspapers and see headlines about transactions in millions of euros. But what do you do if you want to invest sums in the two figure range? There was no information on that. When I went to training sessions, it turned out that I was always the only woman present. I asked other women and found that women don't dare to invest because it sounds like something reserved for middle-aged men wearing suits."

After these conversations, the social media group "Female Investors' Club" was created and they immediately agreed to meet up two weeks later.

Towards solutions with support and encouragement

The club's activities are mainly aimed at new investors. "A third of interested women have not done anything and a third of them are trying to start investing. The remaining third are already actively investing. We mostly focus on the first two groups – we encourage the first ones and support the second ones, so they could transition to the third group," explains Kristi.

Four years of work have clearly borne fruit on the individual level and the general level, too. You can see more women participating in other investment groups and events. "We know that women who are interested in this topic are exactly as capable as men. It shouldn't be seen as anything extraordinary and strange," concludes Kristi.

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© Naisinvestorite Klubi

SDG 6: CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION

Nanofilters – the solution to the question of clean water on Earth?

Estonia's trademark is often considered to be its pristine nature. However, the key question about this would be clean water – how do you clean industrial wastewater in such a way that it would not damage the nature or seep into the groundwater? Professor Erwan Rauwel and doctor Protima Rauwel, a French couple working in the Estonian University of Life Sciences, have developed an innovative filter based on nanotechnology. It is so cheap and effective that it is able to filter out heavy metals, radioactive particles and even medicine residues, while retaining the beneficial particles.

"Right now, the best solution for cleaning the water is technology based on reverse osmosis, which takes every single particle out of the water, including the good ones. The issue with this method, however, is that it takes an incredibly high toll on the environment – in a hundred years, 5% of the reverse osmosis filter will decay in the nature ," says Erwan to explain the benefits of the innovative filter. Protima provides an example of an Indian company interested in their product: "They have more than 2 000 water distributors all across India and they purify the water of the local water supply, which is already relatively clean. To produce water with reverse osmosis, they waste 4 litres of relatively clean water to produce a litre of water."

The loss of clean water

Although Estonia has plenty of water and there is no fear of losing our drinkable water, Protima has a more global example. „Of all the water on Earth, freshwater only makes up 2,5% of it. 1,5%, i.e. over a half of this, is found in glaciers, which are already melting and mixing with seawater. This leaves us with 1% freshwater, which is not much at all. For example, right now pollution is such a big issue in Mexico that the life expectancy of people is merely 40–50 years, children are not developing appropriately for their age and people get sick very often. All of these troubles come from lack of clean water." Protima believes that a nanofilter could also help with securing clean water for the inhabitants of the mining districts of North-Eastern Estonia. "The majority of Estonian water is indeed clean, but the water of rural areas contains excessive iron and manganese and even slightly radioactive particles," says Protima.

Erwan has a pessimistic forecast. "In 20–30 years, clean water will be a rare thing and wars will be waged for this. We have to do something – otherwise, people will come and take the last bits of clean water away from communities that still have it, no matter how much force or money it takes," he says.

Water pollution is caused by human activities, e.g. industry, intensive agriculture and poor waste management. "Mining pollutes roughly 100 000 tonnes of water per year, but it is cheaper to pay the pollution tax instead of just cleaning the water," adds Erwan as an example.

Recyclable filter

The filter itself uses a straightforward working principle – it consists of 99% sand and 1% nanoparticles, which will trap heavy metal, radioactive particles and even medicine residues. One gram of nanoparticles can bind up to two grams of pollution, which is significantly better than what can be achieved by the filters being used right now. When the filter is filled up, it is recycled – by applying heat, the metals and other particles are separated from the sand – and can then be used again. The clean sand will be used in a new filter, but the metals can be sold (separately, by the type of metal) on the aftermarkets. The rest of the waste can be burned and the resulting heat used in making a new nanofilter.

The only exception to this process comes from radioactive particles. In their case, the filter can be repurposed into a safe waste storage system. Erwan compares this to the current technology, where the radioactive waste is stored in concrete. "When the concrete cracks over time and the water flows through it, the waste will be taken back into the soil," he says. "In the case of our filter, the sand containing radioactive waste can be turned into glass by heating the sand. The glass can crack, but nothing can leak from it."

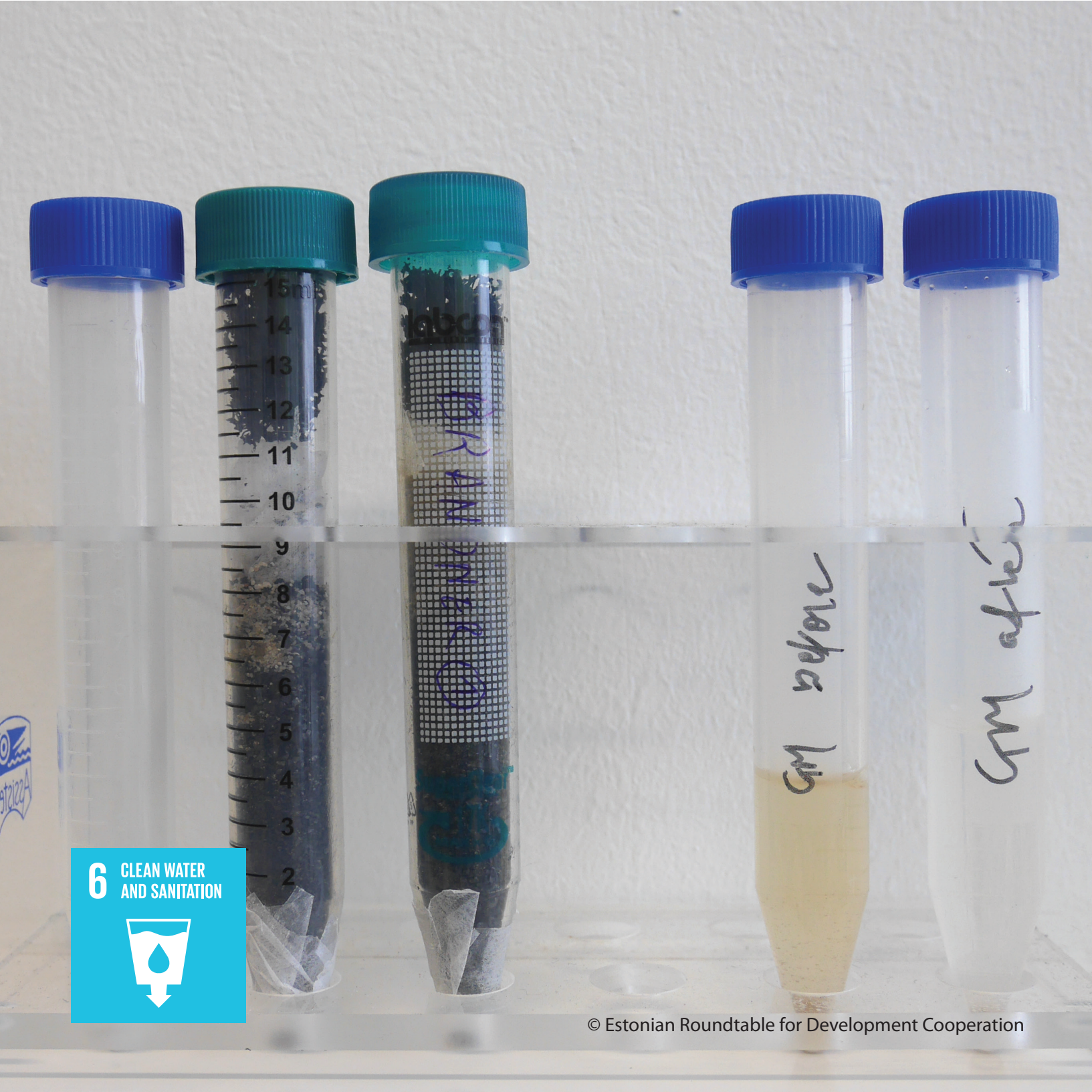
By now, the joint company of Protima and Erwan – PRO-1 NanoSolutions – has found its first Estonian client. The client's aim is to treat a ship's wastewater so thoroughly that it could be discharged into the sea without any concerns. Protima explains, "For example, when you clean the engine, you get a viscous fluid, thick with chemicals. From this fluid, as much solid waste is extracted from this as possible. The rest of it will go through our filter." Erwan demonstrates two test tubes, one of them containing the ship's wastewater, the other – treated water. I smell them. Indeed, the first, slightly yellow tube has a strong smell of acetone to it, whereas the other one looks

like entirely ordinary water.

Water is the essence of sustainable future

"Sustainability goes hand-in-hand with socio-economic effects and water has an essential role to play in this. If we exhaust our natural resources, the economic success will not do any good for us. We have to figure out how to give Earth back everything that we have stolen from it in recent times," thinks Protima. Erwan thinks about it and adds, "The Earth has had to pay a high price for our actions. If we continue to exhaust the nature to win the first prize in the race, then we should also pay for our part in this."

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SDG 7: AFFORDIBLE AND CLEAN ENERGY

Roof that produces electricity

When Andri Jagomägi started planning for his house five years ago, he wanted to convert sunlight into power without ruining the look of the house with separate solar panels. It turned out that roofing materials that would be able to produce electricity did not exist. Thus, he got an idea.

Andri, who has worked in the Department of Materials of the Tallinn University of Technology (TalTech), spent a couple of years on researching this topic and trying out materials. Roughly three years ago, Roofit Solar Energy was born. In 2017, the company installed its first roof that can produce electricity. Right now, there are five houses in Estonia that have a roof like this.

Estonia doesn't have any sun... Or does it?

When speaking of solar panels, Estonians tend to ask if there is any point in installing these in our climate. Andri smirks and says that we have as much sun as Northern France – a lot more than people usually think. "When you start measuring it, then the numbers don't lie. Our problem is actually that the sun is not particularly consistent throughout the year. There is a lot of sun in the summer and not much of it at all in wintertime, but the consumption of electricity peaks in the opposite way. You certainly couldn't live on solar power only, but fortunately we are connected to the Northern European grid and we could use renewable energy from others. If we were to give up oil shale, we could definitely get by," says Andri.

He adds, "Producing power from sunlight is roughly 10 times more environment-friendly because the entire ecological footprint of the solar panel comes from its manufacturing and it produces no pollution during its use. The panels have a very long service life because they contain no moving parts. No other way of producing energy stays serviceable for this long."

Andri concludes that everybody wins from this. "The customer gets their roof and smaller energy bills for decades to come, but the most important beneficiary is nature itself, since less fossil fuels will be used."

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© Roofit Solar

SDG 8: DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

Hea Hoog helps employers and people with special needs

The foundation Hea Hoog has offered the opportunity to work for people with special needs for eight years. This year, they offer help with working opportunities for approximately 600 people across Estonia.

Anu Hall, the development manager of the foundation, explains why people with special needs should work at all: "First and foremost, people with reduced capacity to work are willing and able to work. Our aim is to give them a chance to live an ordinary life. Additionally, Estonia is in dire need of workforce – we don't have enough people to do the work. Employers are in a difficult situation and people with special needs could assist them with many tasks."

These are people with their own quirks and special traits. "For example, we have a man with an intellectual disability and he cannot read or write. At first, he worked at a residential unit, but now he's been on the open labour market for three years and works in the meat processing industry. He goes to work by public transport and he's a very diligent worker. In fact, the problem tends to be that he doesn't rest enough," says Anu about one of their success stories.

Enjoyable and dynamic work

In total, there are 12 work centres across Estonia by now. Anu explains that their hand-crafted products are made of all kinds of materials, based on the principle of upcycling. "Newspapers get a new life, as they are used to weave baskets. The materials for rag rugs are scraps from tailoring companies or second hand stores. Egg trays and candle residues can be used to make fun little flower-shaped kits for starting a fire. Pet products are also very popular."

In addition to producing handicrafts, the foundation also offers services to private persons and companies. According to Anu, there are many simple, yet important jobs that people with special needs manage very well and with great pleasure. "For example, mowing the lawn, raking the leaves, digging up the ground, cleaning indoors and outdoors. We have been discovered by housing associations and our services are so popular that there are areas where we are unable to accept new clients," says Anu.

The most important thing, of course, is the wellbeing of the workers: "They feel that they are important and can also make their contributions with their work – work that is needed and valued. It is an important issue because it raises their self-esteem and provides a goal in life."

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SDG 9: INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

New chair to make products out of waste

The plan to create the Chair of Zero Waste Technologies[1] in the Estonian University of Life Sciences was born from the cooperation between two women – Ivi Jõudu, the chair holder of the Chair of Food Science and Technology, and Tiina Pääso, the director of the Polli Horticultural Research Centre.

Before starting joint work on writing an application for funding to create this chair, the two women had never really cooperated. Ivi and Piia laugh and say, "No matter how well or poorly this chair will do in the future, the most important result has already been achieved – we cooperate on a daily basis now!"

No more than an oink remains of the pig

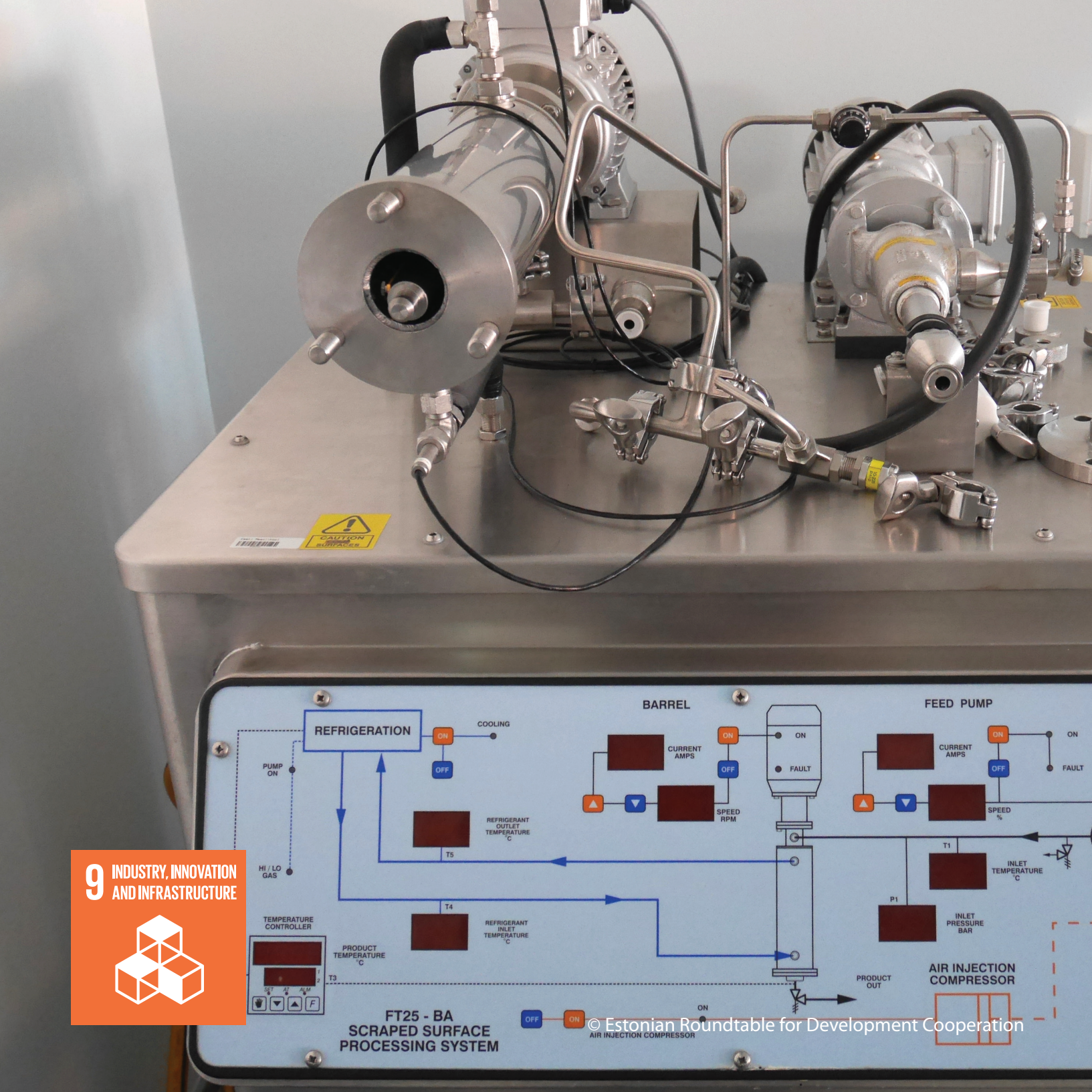
With food production come tons of by-products, currently not used for neither food nor anything else. Piia remembers that once, a raspberry producer came to Polli, pressed the raspberries into juice and then asked if there was anything that could be made of the remains. "Now they sell raspberry seed oil, which makes for a great sunscreen and is recommended for people with allergies. I think the raspberry oil might actually bring in more money than the raspberry juice itself. Same goes for berry flour, which is really what remained of the berries after pressing juice, but then dried and ground up," says Piia.

She also has an example of simple tricks to improve the results: "All of us have been making apple juice for centuries. However, you can get more juice from apples if you freeze them first and then press juice. This will also make the juice sweeter."

"Growing the raw materials is very costly in our climate and in the end, a half of it is thrown away. Nowadays, the people are more aware of this. Any kind of production will inevitably have an effect on the environment and if you produce something, then you should also use all of the raw material. Simply put, the aim of our work is to bring back the old agricultural ways, where all the leftovers you had after killing the pig was its oinking," explains Ivi.

[1] *The official name is the Chair of Technologies for Upcycling Food and By-Products.*

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9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

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SDG 10: REDUCE INEQUALITIES

A place with residents instead of wards

Years ago, most of special welfare worked almost like farms, with lots of people and not enough activities. The teachers and parents involved in the Tartu Maarja school decided that they didn't want to follow the old ways. The Maarja Village combines Estonian traditions with special education and conventional wisdom.

Ly Mikhem has been leading the Maarja Village since 2003. "I worked as a teacher in special education for 14 years, but then I took a break and got a job in the private sector. I learned much of the inner workings of business enterprises, but I also realized that working in this field is not what my heart desired. When I saw a job ad for a director for the Maarja Village in 2003, I immediately contacted them. So, here I am," laughs Ly, as we settle down in the cosy café of the Maarja Village.

In this village, people with special needs live their lives in an ordinary environment and they have to take care of themselves. The lives of the 30 people living in family homes very closely resemble those of ordinary people – you wake up, you take care of your hygiene and food and leave the house to go either to school or to work. The domestic work has also been spread out, so every day one person takes care of the house chores and outside work.

Another thing that makes the Maarja Village so special is its cooperation with the Räpina School of Horticulture, which has been going on for over 10 years now. "All the residents of our village have graduated from basic school and we believe in development. Thus, we believe that each person should learn a profession. Horticulture is a part of our everyday life. We have a field, vegetable plots and greenhouses. Since someone has to take care of all of it, it seemed only logical to contact the Räpina School of Horticulture. They accepted our first group of students with open arms and later on, the curriculum was developed," says Ly.

"I am often asked if Estonian have become more charitable. Yes, every year we get more and more people who find an area of interest and support it. From the construction of the first buildings, most of the resources have been collected through the local branches of Lions Clubs International and Rotary International. They visit us, are aware of the situation and belong to our community."

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SDG 11: SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

Smart cities have to be sustainable

Raimond Tamm, Deputy Mayor of Tartu, talks about the SmartEnCity project and its goal to make Tartu more sustainable and create practical examples that could be used by other Estonian and European cities. The project is very ambitious – it includes improving public transportation and bike traffic, street lights, renovating apartment buildings and much more.

The main goal of the project is fight climate change. I ask if Tartu is aiming for becoming a carbon neutral city. Raimond Tamm says that it is, indeed, their long term goal, but they are getting there step by step. The current goal is to reduce CO2 emissions by 20% by 2020 and 40% by 2030.

The SmartEnCity programme includes three sustainable branches, the first of which deals with low-energy residential areas. However, Raimond explains that the goal of the project cannot be merely renovating a few dozen houses: "We wish to show that even the so-called khrushchyovkas, i.e. old apartment buildings with very high energy consumption levels, could be rebuilt into nearly zero energy buildings. It would be a demonstration project for other cities, showing how to renovate, how much energy could be saved and how much energy could be produced with solar panels."

The second branch is about working on mobility, which includes, inter alia, creating a system for rental bicycles, revamping the public transportation and creating public fast recharging points for electric cars. The third branch involves public infrastructure and connecting various activities with IT to leverage their effect even further. Though the activities of each area are useful on their own, their results could be improved by the use of information technology.

City for its inhabitants

Raimond believes that we should be more aware of what effects our everyday activities have on the natural environment and the climate. "This way, we would understand how to design our future. Yes, for the city administration, the economy also has an important role, but it is essential to take a look at the living environment, particularly at clean city air, as little car traffic as possible, clean town centre with safe traffic, the quality of green spaces and so on."

Raimond hopes that the governing of cities and planning of activities will be guided more and more by a famous quote by Abraham Lincoln: "The best way to predict your future is to create it."

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SDG 12: RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

Reeds against plastic

By the day of the interview, 28 August, Mihkel Tamm and Grete Riim have lived on Saaremaa for exactly four months. Mihkel works as the director of the sports and culture department of the Saare parish. Grete has studied marketing, but she has had different jobs, such as a music manager and the owner of a shoe shop. Still, she's always looked for a field that would be just right for her.

Their enterprise, Pillirookõrs, was created in early June and it fits well with their ethical values – they produce reusable straws from reed and hope that this would help to raise awareness of the issues related to plastic in the entire world.

If you are doing things that have not been done before, you have to find your own way. As the first thing, they looked for reed with the best quality, but even companies offering thatched roofs didn't have potentially reusable reeds with the right thickness and quality. In the end, Grete and Mihkel found the reeds from the sea, right in their backyard.

In early June, Grete uploaded the first pictures of their straws to Facebook, though the enterprise did not exist at that time. „As soon as I had uploaded the picture, people started expressing great interest in buying these. A month later, in July, we sent our first invoice to a café, and as of the last week of August, we have sold over 3000 straws," says Grete.

Grete and Mihkel hope that their straws have a bigger effect than just making people not buy that one plastic straw. "Every time we go swimming, we see the plastic waste on the coasts of Saaremaa. We hope that people will start noticing unnecessary plastic, pointless packaging and articles discussing the solutions," explains Grete.

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12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION



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SDG 13: CLIMATE ACTION

Innovative leather made of gelatine to save the nature

Mari-Ann Meigo and Märt-Erik Martens are planning to produce an innovative material that resembles natural leather, but is significantly more sustainable. The majority of the world's leather is chrome tanned and producing one square metre of leather needs 5 000 litres of water. The Gelatex leather, however, only requires 65 litres. More importantly, unlike the incredibly toxic method of tanning the leather, their leather making process only involves natural materials.

Mari-Ann and Märt-Erik first studied the background of producing natural leather. Märt-Erik remembers that their findings did not make them happy at all. "We found that leather production brings tremendous amounts of pollution with it. Chemicals seep into the clean drinking water – one square metre of leather uses 2.4 kilograms of chemicals. Some of them stay in the leather, the rest of them are discharged into the seas of the world. Our leather needs no chemicals and the main raw material, gelatine, is produced by animal by-products, like bones, skin and sinew, which are currently simply incinerated in Estonia."

Sustainability must be the rule

Both founders of the company agree that Gelatex must reach the stage of mass production. Though large scale production tends to pollute the environment, Mari-Ann believes that the current system could also be made more sustainable. "Could mass production be changed in such a way that it would have no ecological footprint? Right now, you can't use sustainable materials in large scale production because we are not able to produce them in big enough quantities. However, as long as people consume meat, we will have enough material. At the moment, 25% of raw materials of animal origin go to waste – they are either burned or buried," she explains.

Märt-Erik dispels the myth that sustainable materials are more expensive. "Price-wise, the clothes manufacturer also wins because our material is cheaper. The consumer and the environment can also enjoy the benefits of this – fake leather wears out very quickly, but the degradation of fake leather takes centuries. Our material degrades relatively quickly," he adds.

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13 CLIMATE ACTION
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SDG 14: LIFE BELOW WATER

A buoy to check the health of water bodies

Andri Laidre and Karl-Kristo Vene founded FlyDog Marine 11 years ago. Today, the unique buoys developed by them assist in measuring the health of aquatic ecosystems all year round in Estonia, Finland and Sweden.

Andri and Karl were schoolmates and studied engineering. When they got the idea to create their own business, the important criteria were ethics and preserving the nature. Andri recalls, "We thought that the world is already full of stuff and our task as engineers shouldn't be producing more stuff. In creating our products, we aim for bringing benefits to mankind and the nature."

Andri says that the most exciting thing in their product selection is a buoy that allows for moving its sensors up and down, so that measurements can be taken at different depths – for example, once per hour and metre. "The usual parameters are temperature, salt content, dissolved oxygen, turbidity and phytoplankton. Our buoy has been used to measure such things at depths up to 100 metres in the Baltic sea."

Past, present and future in one device

"In a situation where environmental issues become more and more pressing, yet where no one is about to pour money into dealing with them, we have to have effective solutions for measuring the condition of the water bodies. The data could be valuable in ten years when we run into trouble. We have only recently realized the real value of the water temperature data from 200 years in the past. Perhaps in those days, they thought that the people playing in the water with a thermometer are slightly mad," ponders Karl.

At the moment, they are also working on solutions for minor islands. "In developing countries, there are many small communities that depend on river water and use it as drinking water. In the rainy season, the flood water brings dirt and other trash downstream, so in this period, the river water could be dangerous. This system could aid local water companies in determining when to stop using river water or treat it more thoroughly," explains Andri.

They are often asked if they're running a green business. Karl says, "In the classical sense, we are not green at all – the manufacturing input contains lithium and tin, after all. However, the output cannot be readily measured or judged by any scale. We believe that our devices could help the environment even more than the cars produced by Tesla. In some sense, we are helping to detect leaks on a sinking ship."

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14 LIFE BELOW WATER
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SDG 15: LIFE ON LAND

Estonian mires – one of the last ones in Europe

Marko Kohv stumbled upon the restoration of mires 15 years ago, after his brother suggested that he apply for the position of a project manager for the first project of its kind in Estonia. The job ad had been posted by ELF (Estonian Fund for Nature). Now, he is a mire restoration expert in ELF and his professional work as a geologist is done secondary to his job.

Marko sums up the development of mires with a simple example: "It is interesting how the meaning of mires has changed over time. Start from classical Estonian literature – in Tammsaare's Truth and Justice, the mire was seen as an enemy, impossible to defeat even through hard work. In Soviet times, we used to have fields with impressive signs at their edges, saying that this used to be a mire, now it is a grain field. And now, the symbol of Estonia is a mire, dotted with bog pools and admired both by the locals and the visitors."

Since mires are not suitable for living, people can only use them after they have drained the land, after which the land is used for agriculture or forestry. "The percentage of wetlands has decreased dramatically in Europe and across the world. The situation is particularly dire in Western Europe, which contains no wetlands at all. This has caused significant changes in water management and flooding has become a big problem. Water passes through wetlands quite slowly, but through canals it flows relatively quickly. Mires cleanse the water, animals and plants consume the materials littering the water and in times of drought, mires provide additional water for the rest of the landscape," explains Marko.

Excavators working for restoration

On the day of the chat between Marko and I, the excavators are sent to work for the purposes of restoring the mires. Approximately 5 000 ha of mires have already been restored, but there are enough funds for the restoration of 20 000 ha of swamps and 2 000 ha of old peat extraction sites.

Marko describes why the restoration of Estonian mires is so special: "We've got great communication between the voluntary sector, researchers and the state, which is quite unusual. As a result, we have a national nature conservation development plan, which states the goals in terms of hectares of mires to be restored. Most of the restoration works are carried out in protected mires, where the aim is to neutralize the harm done in earlier times (i.e. draining of the mires). Those mires are chosen in such a way that the works would be carried out on the most valuable areas where everything has been preserved as a whole. I am not aware of any comparable plans in any other states."

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SDG 16: PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

Violence in intimate relationships needs to be exposed

In the first ten months of this year, there have been more reports about violence in intimate relationships than in the entire last year. The police believe that these numbers are merely the tip of the iceberg and reflect only 10–20% of the real incidents.

As of October 2018, the police have received such reports on 9 910 occasions. Krista Aas, the Deputy Director of the Police and Border Guard Board, explains that the jump in the numbers of reports on violence in intimate violence does not mean that this kind of violence has become more common – instead, it shows that people are more aware of this and the authorities have been approaching those cases in a more comprehensive way. "The society has had more honest discussions about the violence hidden behind the walls of our homes. Generally, the most frequent witnesses and reporters are the neighbours, co-workers and acquaintances," she says.

Krista Aas notes that the main cause of violence in intimate relationships tends to be a co-dependent relationship. "The victims depend on the offender in one way or another, either economically, emotionally or socially."

In our family, we look after each other

Before the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, at the end of November, the officers from the Tallinn City Centre Police Station of the Northern Police Prefecture and their partners visited the families at risk for violence. These families been involved in at least two reports about domestic violence this year.

The families will be given a white card with "Meie peres hoitakse üksteist" ("In our family, we look after each other") written on it. The goal of this message is to remind the family members that it is possible to solve conflicts without violence and they should take care of each other.

The other side of this card has the contact information of the relevant authorities (the local municipality, the police, support services for victims, family and support centres) that could provide assistance when needed.

Anu Aus, the Deputy District Governor of the Tallinn City Centre Administration, explains that the goal of this action is to encourage people to seek help instead of isolating themselves and their issues. "The informational materials include all the important contacts of the authorities and agencies that can help the people in need."

"The reduction of violence in intimate relationships can only be achieved through smooth cooperation between the relevant authorities. However, this requires the input of all of us – we have to notice this, intervene and report the violence," says Krista Aas.

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SDG 17: PARTNERSHIP FOR THE GOALS

A movement that united 17 million volunteers

Let's Do It! is a civic movement that started in Estonia in 2008. In that year, more than 50 000 people united their forces to clean the entire country in five hours. Ten years later, on 15 September 2018, Let's Do It! World was organized, bringing forth millions of people to join the cleaning efforts.

Let's Do It! (Estonian *Teeme ära!*) is the biggest civic movement in history. As a part of the EV100 programme, it was presented as a gift from Estonians to the rest of the world to celebrate our 100th anniversary. In 24 hours, at least 17 million people from 158 countries helped to clean the Earth.

Cleaning is a tool, not the goal

Heidi Solba, the woman leading the world's clean-up networks, explains that this movement means much more than merely cleaning: "Our goal is to influence the habits of the people of the world, the production chains of businesses and the legislation that would contribute to creating a trash-free world and maintaining it. We are the catalysts pushing the world towards cleaning it up and practical activities are the main way to change people."

After cleaning the world, the next step would be implementing the Keep It Clean plan. This is the cream of the crop of best practices from all across the world. In this plan, the advice is divided between sectors, i.e. private persons, waste management companies and governments. Its aim is to provide advice on transitioning to circular economy and becoming waste-free.

She presents an example – the Bali island is very tourism oriented, but the sea around it is so thoroughly littered with trash that snorkelers tend to encounter diapers gently floating in the water and, consequently, in their faces. "I think that neither the surfers nor the snorkelers have any desire to go back there. However, the waste problems of each country are actually the problems of the entire world – the trash around Bali is not created in Indonesia only," explains Heidi.

Everybody wins from a cleaner world

If we could implement the Keep It Clean Plan, then everybody would win from this. The benefits would be most obvious to ordinary people whose health would improve. This would also provide some boons to the business sector with regards to the circular economy, innovative packaging industry and waste management. And finally, the states, too, would see gains, since pristine nature attracts tourists and clean environment means less money spent on healthcare costs.

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