

Vers

&

Vrij

zine



The Hague



Universiteit
Leiden

Welcome

Introduction of Vers & Vrij

In The Hague, as in many other major cities, there is a growing population of vulnerable people who require low-cost or free food. At the same time, the issue of food waste poses a significant sustainability challenge. Food resources are wasted, and many individuals do not have adequate access to food. Vers & Vrij (V&V) aims to address both concerns simultaneously.

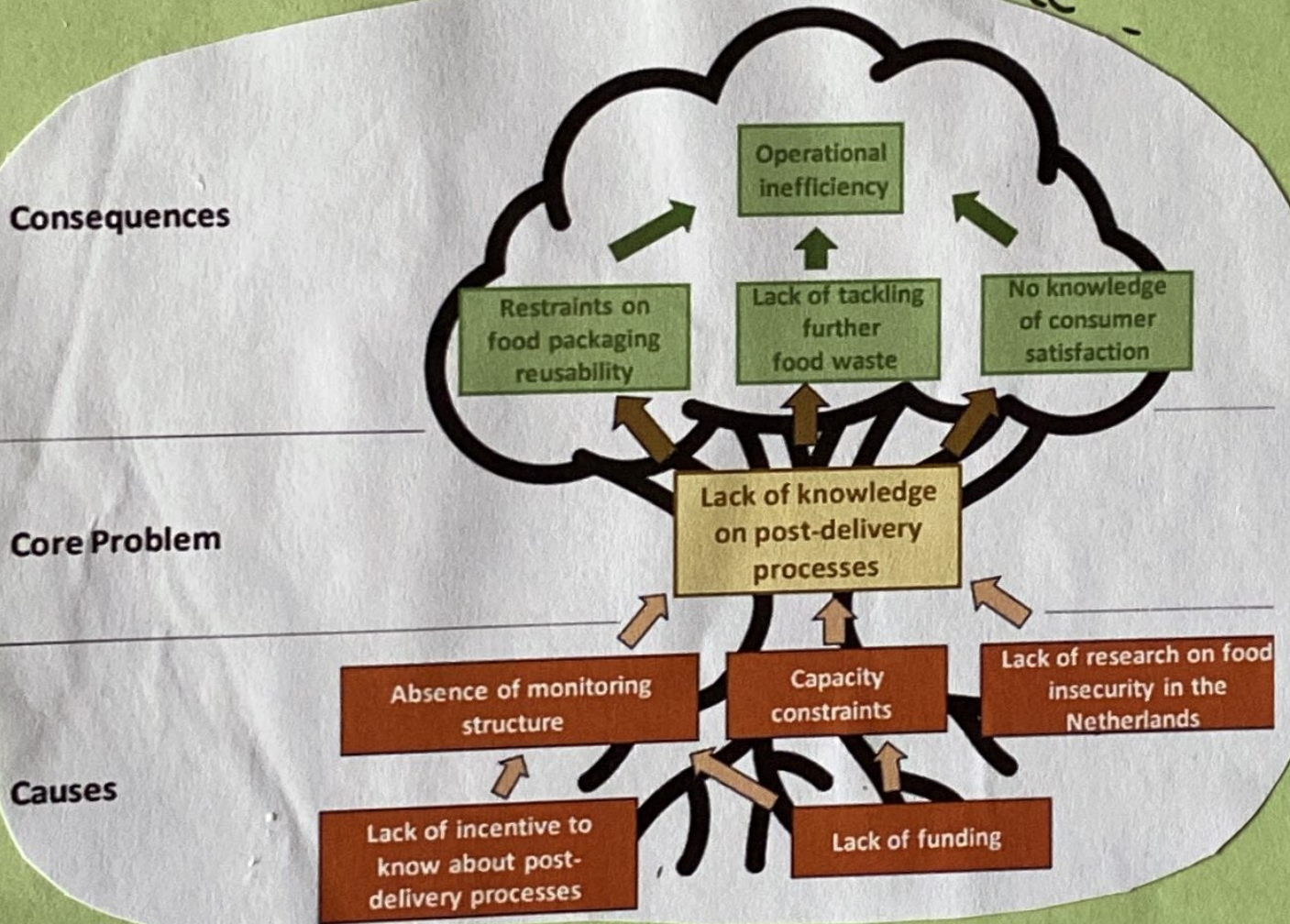
V&V is a non-profit organization that aims to alleviate food insecurity in The Hague by utilizing food waste from diverse resources. Leftovers are sourced from hospitals, restaurants, and social institutions. The food is collected and brought to the location where V&V operates, where the food is prepared and packaged into separate meals. After this process, the meals are delivered to fridge hosts and distributed throughout the city.

The initiative collaborated with 26 partner organizations within The Hague. At these locations, V&V puts up fridges where the food can be stored. Partner organizations include social organizations, doctor's offices, and Schroeder second-hand stores. Based on a schedule, meals are delivered to the partners, ensuring a daily supply. The fridges are often accessible to everyone, and there are no restrictions on use. The boxes in which the food is contained are reusable and are supposed to be brought back to the host. V&V provides a basket at the locations to drop off the used containers.

V&V is financed primarily through donations. V&V's founder, Arna van der Sloot contributes to the organization personally. The organization also sustains itself through the sale of some self-made products, such as beers and cookies. These products are also made of collected leftovers, mostly from Haagse Markt. All the partnerships are based on Arna's personal work and relations.

Research Problem

Problem tree



The focus of this research project lies on the user side of V&V. This entails the fridges, their hosts and users, and everything that happens after the delivery to the fridges and packaging. Within this process we discovered one main problem on the demand side: **Lack of knowledge of post-delivery processes**. Besides that, V&V has **unstable financial conditions**, which influences the demand and supply side.

Coming back to the core problem of the demand side, we identified multiple possible causes. First, lack of monitoring, funding, and capacity constraints. The V&V initiative is run by volunteers, who are dependent on left-over foods from restaurants, hospitals, markets, and healthcare facilities. For money, they rely on donations and government support, which is not enough to upscale current practices. Governmental support at this point is lacking, mostly because of the lack of research on food insecurity in the Netherlands, which could increase awareness and subsequently support for V&V.

Another cause would be the lack of incentives to know about post-delivery processes. V&V just wants to help people who are without/with a low income. However, they do not care who exactly picks up the food and trust people's morality. Furthermore, for many users of fridges it is important to stay anonymous because they might feel ashamed. An overview of the problem, its causes and its consequences can be found in the problem tree.

V&V Fridge
↓



↑
Prepared food

Stakeholders

The primary focus of this research project centers around *the users*: a diverse group of vulnerable communities. Within this segment, we identify *elderly people*, *homeless* individuals, those with *low incomes* and *students*. However, it is crucial to acknowledge another dimension—individuals who, while potentially benefiting from the service, are *not currently utilizing* it. This group comprises those *unaware* of how V&V operates or those who *consciously opt not to avail themselves* of its benefits. Lastly, there are *free riders* in this category—individuals who are not in dire need of food, but nonetheless derive advantages from the services offered by V&V.

Moving forward, we have singled out the category of *fridge hosts*, which comprises *community organizations*, *community centers*, and *commercial entities* actively facilitating the operation of V&V by hosting fridges. Among these hosts, you will find various establishments where fridges are strategically located throughout The Hague. These fridges serve as accessible points for people in need. These places are intentionally chosen to be of interest to the individuals directly benefiting from this initiative.

The subsequent category is constituted by *other food distributors*. We have acknowledged that various entities beyond V&V could potentially contribute to supporting vulnerable individuals. This includes other non-profit food distributors, local discounts offering more affordable prices, and initiatives such as 'Too Good To Go'.

Additionally, we have acknowledged the significance of *Research and Academia* in conducting studies on food waste and food insecurity, providing valuable insights, and suggesting potential improvements for V&V.

Lastly, we have isolated the importance of the *Municipality of The Hague*. This relationship operates reciprocally: while the municipality provides institutions for V&V's office, enabling tasks like food preparation and packaging, V&V, in turn, supports the government in assisting vulnerable individuals.

Stakeholder Map



Legend - Arrows:

Research related

Possibility to gain new stakeholders

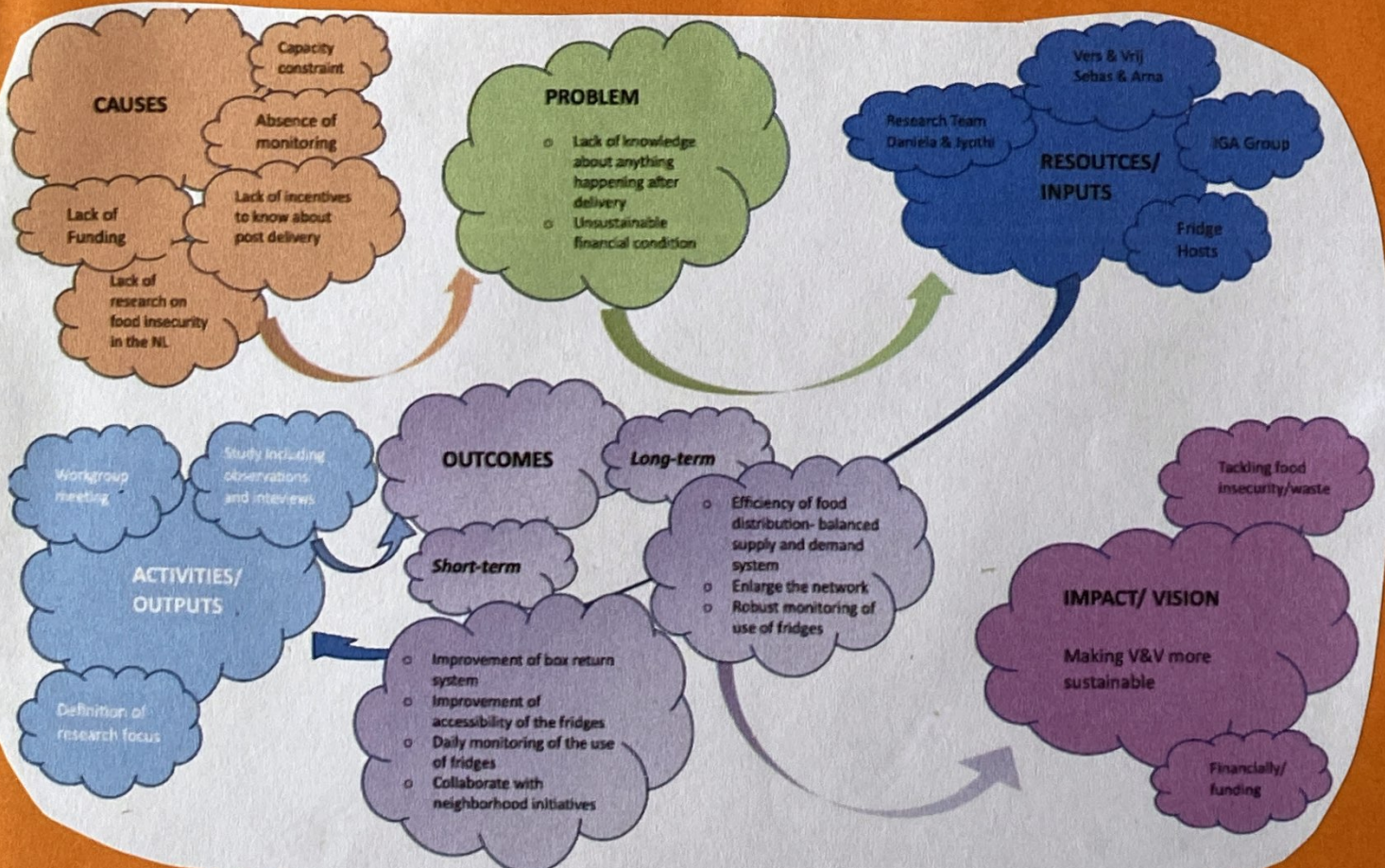
Division of the city and vulnerable groups

Relationship between government and social groups



Theory of Change

Intending to enhance V&V's sustainability, we isolated the root causes that are currently slowing this process. We identified ways to tackle the two main problems that were highlighted during our conversations and the fieldwork that we conducted. Initially, there is a gap in understanding what occurs post-delivery. Subsequently, we observed that there is a need to improve V&V's financial stability to ensure long-term sound operation. Accordingly, we suggest some ways to improve V&V's work proposing short- and long-term actions towards a more sustainable work.



Survey Findings

Our group conducted observations and surveys with 9 out of the 26 fridge hosts in The Hague to gain insights into the user side of V&V. Based on our observations and questions posed to the hosts, we received some insightful information. On this basis, we are suggesting possible improvements.



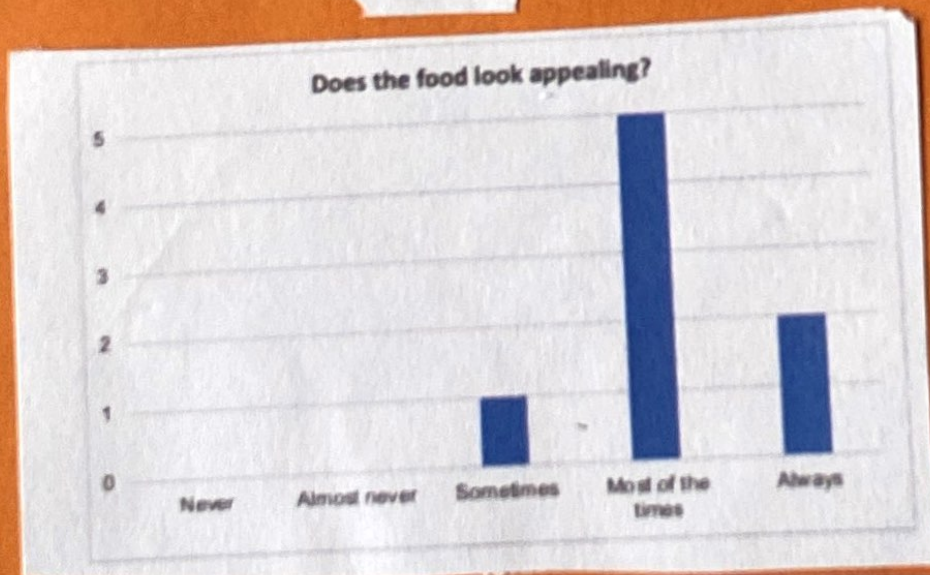
Locations

Buurtkamer de Luyk
Wijkcentrum Moerwijk
Middin Loevesteinlaan
Daklozenloket Fruitweg
Centrum De Wissel

Heeswijkplein 10
Weggeefwinkel Laak
Wijkcentrum Cromvliet
Schroeder Kringloop Loosduinsekade

We found that 66,7% of the locations were easy to find, while 55% were easily accessible.

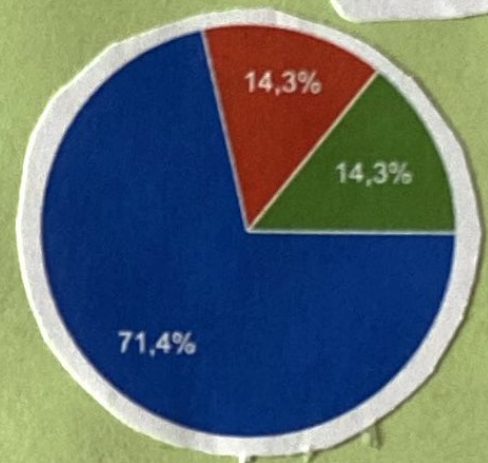
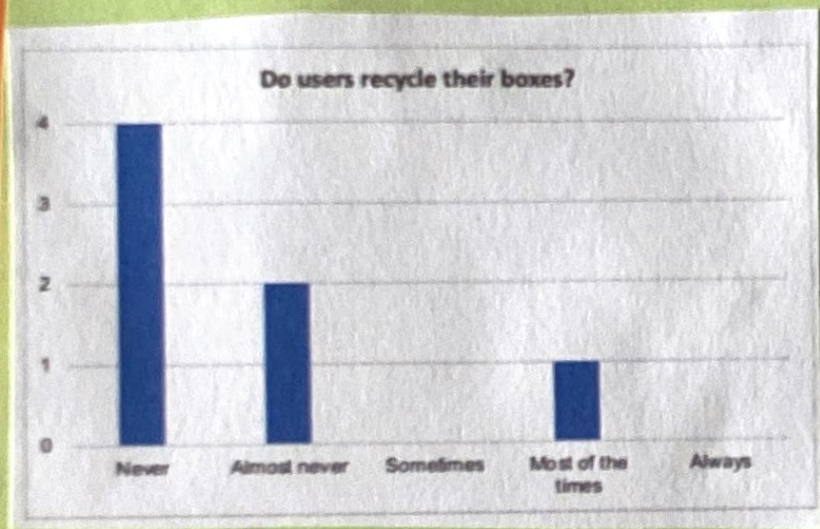
Demand



Our survey highlighted disparities in the distribution of food to the fridges. Some of the locations get more food than needed, and for example, freeze the food to distribute it later. On the contrary, some locations get less food than needed. In general, the food itself looked good and appealing.

The visibility of the recycling option raised concerns, given that 5 out of 9 hosts were deficient in this aspect.

Fridge users



- Yes
- No
- Maybe
- No idea

As the recycling option is mostly not visible, hosts found that most users are not recycling the packaging, while some users did manage to bring back the packaging.

We asked: "Do you see more people coming in because of more public knowledge about the fridges?"

Store owners mostly see the same users coming back to the store. These users are mostly single households, homeless people, and poor people.

Quotes from hosts

"We noticed that people were taking advantage of the fridge when it was outside, so we moved it inside the store. We care a lot about the fridge and cleaning and taking care of the fridge and want to contribute more if necessary."

"We want to collaborate with V&V and have great initiatives with moms making extra meals, they are even becoming HACCP certified so in the future they could provide meals for V&V."

Conclusion and Possible Improvements

After conducting this research project, we would like to acknowledge that we greatly admire how V&V operates and the applaudable goals the company pursues. V&V's commitment to tackling food insecurity and food waste in The Hague is noteworthy. As we reflect on the process and the ways in which we got to know the operations of V&V, we would like to give back by suggesting several possible improvements. We believe that implementing the following changes can strengthen V&V's impact and effectiveness in tackling food insecurity and food waste in The Hague even more.

Enhance the recyclability option by increasing the visibility

V&V currently holds an option for users to bring back the food boxes so that V&V can thoroughly clean and reuse the boxes. However, during the fieldwork, it was often found that the trash cans were missing, or it was not clear whether the trash cans were for recycling or throwing away other things. Better visibility could increase the recycling rate of the food boxes, which subsequently saves V&V money for new boxes and overall, increase their circularity.

Foster improved communication strategies with fridge hosts

From our observations and surveys, we can conclude that there is often a lack of direct communication between V&V and the hosts. This in turn influences the consumer because their needs, such as the amount of food needed or feedback on the quality of the food, cannot be properly articulated back to V&V in an easy manner.

Increased collaboration with local community initiatives

Several of the hosts that we have visited through the project have pointed out that there is a need for additional locations in the Hague. We got multiple inputs from fridge hosts who know of a different location in the Hague where a fridge could severely benefit a community. These locations were often local community initiatives, such as homeless shelters and social housing corporations, where there is a large community of people in desperate need of food. According to the interviewed hosts, having additional fridges in these initiatives will make a difference, because there are often people in such dire need that it is hard for them to leave those places and specifically find a fridge nearby. Hosts also wanted to have contact with Arna to increase their business together, as they have initiatives that could help Arna produce more food.

Improve monitoring structures for increased efficiency

Conversations with several hosts made it evident that the current monitoring structures often remain unclear to the initiatives hosting the fridges. Several crucial details, such as information about delivery times of the food boxes, the number of boxes that will be delivered per day, and the contents of these boxes often remain unclear to the hosts. Several of the hosts that we have visited have expressed that they believe that this knowledge would be very valuable to them and believe that knowing about such monitoring structures will increase consumer satisfaction. This is because if the hosts can increase such transparency to the users, they will know more about what to expect of V&V and will therefore probably make use of the services offered by V&V more often. We believe that this in turn will increase the overall efficiency of V&V.

This information was presented to you by:
David, Sacha, Sophie, Vittoria, Thomas



for more information, see versenvrij.nl