

Vraag 7 van 10

Ontwikkelingssamenwerking
Development cooperation

7. In your opinion, what are the Netherlands' strengths when it comes to development cooperation? In which policy themes could the Netherlands play a leading role?

Answer:

With all 13 Dutch Universities featuring in the top 250 of the Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2022, higher education is a top sector of international standing. Therefore, development cooperation in higher education should be a policy theme in its own right. However, activities should NOT be limited to the disciplines of the current four thematic focus areas. Areas in which Dutch higher education can be relevant for development cooperation are much broader. Important opportunities for international cooperation are missed if we only focus on agriculture, nutrition, water, SROL etc.

Vraag 8 van 10

Innoveren op OS

8. In what other ways and areas could Dutch development cooperation innovate more?

Answer:

I partly agree with the statement that the Dutch international cooperation is innovative, and it contributes to developing new ways of working and new types of partnership. But there is still lots of innovation to be done, especially in the area of creating more equal relations with our partners in the South. Take for example the Dutch Policy Framework for Strengthening Civil Society. The policy is internationally recognized as one of the most progressive of its kind. Nevertheless, in the Partos Community of Practice Shift-the-Power, participants discovered that despite the many innovative elements and good intentions, the policy still falls short of creating an enabling environment for balanced power relations. Because of this, the policy is less effective in strengthening civil society than it could have been.

The Dutch Policy Framework for Strengthening Civil Society emphasises local ownership and balanced power relations in CSO partnerships. This is a priority that is reflected in the selection criteria for funding. At the same time, despite the good intentions, the policy

triggers dynamics that undermine the development of balanced power relations. As the NGO-CSO partnerships evolve after the launch of a new policy cycle, patterns of decision-making unfold that contradict with the principles of local ownership, community led development and equality. As partnerships tend to evolve from North to South, the aid chain becomes like a cascade of contractor-client-relationships, in which the contractors have to account for their performance to the clients. At the end of this cycle are the communities and target group who are supposed to be the beneficiaries of the policy. The selection of Southern actors and initiatives that are supported is often undertaken in the final stages of the process. Actors who are invited to the system last, become decision takers. They have to adjust to decisions that have been taken before they joined the partnership.

How now to innovate?

One of the core questions that needs to be addressed in our search for innovative solutions is: ***What is needed to make the transition from a vertical aid chain, in which a policy at the top-end sets the rules of the game for everything that is funded downward the chain, to a system where relational 'horizontalism' prevails?***

A new system needs to encourage that the voices of the most marginalised, and ideas and solutions formulated in the South should become the main reference point for determining what will be supported with which resources. For that to happen, the time frames for harvesting priorities and ideas need to be determined by local and national dynamics, and not by project-, programme- and policy- cycles of donors in the North. Therefore, it is important that the harvesting of priorities is a continuous process and not limited to the initial stages of a Northern funding programme. ***Can we think of a policy framework that would make that possible? How to reconcile the demands of the policy cycle in the North with the need to respond flexibly to the demand in many different countries and communities, each with their own specific funding needs in terms of pace, size and terms?***