

1. How can we increase the involvement of Dutch companies in the twin transitions in low- and middle-income countries?

The convergence of digitalisation and the move towards sustainability can provide countless opportunities for low- and middle-income countries. To increase the involvement of Dutch companies in this twin transition, we need to create demand among stakeholders, build capacity among local actors, and establish the benefits of these new systems for the long term.

We can create demand by developing “proof-of-concept” yet scalable pilots that promote data reuse in an inclusive, transparent and sustainable way. These pilots should be formed around the idea of an “insights ecosystem”, in which citizens, governments, and the private sector work together to establish local, sector-driven data value chains to boost development. It’s essential here that the approach is participatory, that appropriate open standards are used, and that data reuse provides benefits not only to the private sector. We can build capacities among urban utilities as well as local and national governments to manage this transition over the long term with the key values of transparency, inclusion, and sustainability at the forefront. An example of an insight ecosystem could be built around climate resilience in which insights are ground truthed with citizens and AI learnings are derived from appropriate FAIR data sets and contextualised on a platform. Climate risks can be real-time, dynamic and useful in this manner and managed dynamically.

The benefits will be accountability of local governments, business opportunities for the private sector, and improved service delivery. Transparency and participatory decision making have been pillars of the Netherlands, and Dutch companies can bring this knowledge and experience to the low and middle income countries.

2. How can government, the private sector and knowledge institutions work together better to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals?

Information plays a crucial role in bringing key actors together, and most knowledge rests in siloes. It's important to create a "one stop" knowledge platform where the government, private sector, and knowledge institutions can interact, share knowledge, and learn from each other. These online interactions can be complemented by in-person workshops to clarify queries as necessary. Local ownership and involvement is essential, since solutions must be localised and decisions must be based on data that has been locally validated. Nationally integrated data systems (<https://wdr2021.worldbank.org/>) play a key role in this and global appropriate SDG reporting mechanisms that are linked to these.

3. How can the Netherlands' efforts to achieve policy coherence for development be further strengthened or enhanced?

One of the issues impacting sustainability is that donors within specific countries are not always aligned on focus (e.g. one donor is focused on Gender and another on Climate). This can create initiatives (that seem coherent from the Netherlands) being implemented in a non aligned manner within countries. It's therefore essential to review these initiatives and share insights within countries to drive alignment. Information sharing can also be used to bring NGOs and the private sector together for joint initiatives. Monitoring (and relevant budgets for monitoring) should be seen as integral to every initiative in order to drive effective impact reporting.

4. How can the government strengthen Dutch companies' sustainable earning capacity abroad?

The Netherlands can strengthen its strategic and sustainable trade policy by bringing a coherent value proposition for Dutch companies to international development and allowing more innovation to be brought to the field. In addition, most low and middle income countries broadly have a three pronged problem- technology, capacity and systems. Some of these problems are deep-rooted and require long term solutions. Using the sustainability and digital dimensions, Dutch companies could choose to set up the technology architecture, build local capacities to own the solution and an enabling system to sustain the solution over a long run. Not only are these important foundational problems to solve to ease the countries into the transition, these are also profitable pathways to pursue. Access to local country data systems to share insights with Dutch companies can also be improve and enhanced.

5. In which themes or sectors do you see opportunities for international enterprise?

The digital transition (via, among other things, artificial intelligence) and the sustainability transition can boost and reinforce one another. There are opportunities around these twin transitions, for example in setting up digital infrastructure for large scale data storage, the circular economy, clean energy, carbon reduction citizen platforms, deforestation initiatives, and climate resilience ground truthing.

6. How can the government better support companies (and SMEs specifically) that are doing or wish to do business abroad?

a. What type of support do companies need in order to achieve international success in the areas of digital innovation (innovation partnerships) and sustainability?

By supporting seed funding, creating an ecosystem of enablers (bringing in policymakers, knowledge experts, other international donors and other Dutch companies) and building a knowledge platform for sharing lessons and catalysing wider uptake.

b. For what countries, regions or markets should the government provide private sector support?

Kenya, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Tanzania, Malawi, South Africa . We have mentioned these countries based on our understanding of their readiness to adopt the twin pillars of digital and sustainability transitions.

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?

Water, agriculture, engineering, transparency and governance, complex systems modelling, and supporting human rights issues. The Netherlands could play a role in adapting these themes locally.

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

Bring in better measurements. Instead of randomised control trials or similar expensive experimental evaluations, find more context specific and qualitative/semi quantitative measurement & real time monitoring techniques to measure the process and outcomes of development cooperation effectively.

9. In what ways or areas could the Netherlands, as a donor, be even bolder?

By strengthening privacy legislation, antitrust laws, and tech regulatory frameworks to protect individual liberties in low and middle income countries. By investing in open tech and data ecosystems for low middle income countries and data, privacy and AI ethics.

10. Are there any other points that you believe should be included in the new policy document?

Good execution is what makes a good policy. It is important to create process documentation for innovation (“proof of concept”) pilots in the middle and low income countries and share the lessons to improve the execution at scale. Allow for local innovation and data to thrive and realise that the private sector alone will not bring change. It is the collaboration of public, private sector and citizens that provide a sound foundation for change. Data and information are key levers for continuous change and improvement.