

<https://www.government.nl/latest/news/2022/03/22/online-consultation-bhos>

Question 1 of 10

(see english below)

Nexus (coherence) Development Cooperation & Foreign Trade

Dutch business can play an important role in some of the major global challenges of our time through trade, investment and market power. In order to give focus to the Dutch efforts towards the business community, a focus has been chosen on the “twin transitions”; the digital transition (via, among other things, artificial intelligence) and the sustainability transition. These twin transitions to digital innovation and sustainability will play a major role in achieving the Paris and Glasgow climate targets in the coming years. We must achieve these goals in the Netherlands, but also worldwide. Although there is a great need for Dutch expertise and investment, we see that more may be needed to involve Dutch companies in these transitions in (low and) middle-income countries.

1. How can the Dutch business community become more involved in the twin transition in (low and) middle-income countries?

RESPONSE:

We recommend engaging with civil society groups in low- and middle-income countries to develop sound strategies around sustainability transition. These efforts will build on existing efforts and also be realistic to the local context.

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The Netherlands has a long tradition of public-private partnerships. As global challenges grow, it is important to deepen and accelerate these public-private partnerships. The sustainable development goals were established in 2015 as an action plan for governments, companies, knowledge institutions and citizens to achieve sustainable development worldwide.

2. How can government, industry and knowledge institutions work together better to achieve the sustainable development goals?

RESPONSE: It is important for the Netherlands to support partners who can catalyze progress for the SDGs in priority countries and regions. It is important to think of community needs broadly, and not focus on business at the expense of health, rights, and gender equality. Community organizations, government services like health care, international NGOs, universities all have a role to play. It is critical to look at the full ecosystem and assess the gaps in services and barriers that perpetuate inequality and lack of access to power for women, girls, and others who have traditionally been denied power.

The Netherlands should partner with the civil society coalitions that are implementing a parallel tracking of SDG implementation and recommendations for stronger results.

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Since 2016, the Netherlands has had an action plan for policy coherence for development. Policy coherence for development aims to reduce damage to developing countries in non-aid (DS) policy and to strengthen synergies and cooperation. The Dutch action plan was revised in 2018 and provides an overview of five Dutch policy themes that influence development opportunities in developing countries. These themes are: (1) combating tax avoidance/evasion, (2) development-friendly trade agreements, (3) a development-friendly investment regime, (4) making production and trade more sustainable and (5) combating climate change.

3. How can the above-mentioned Dutch commitment to policy coherence for development be further strengthened or improved?

RESPONSE

It is critical for response to climate change to recognize the unequal burden that the crisis places on women and girls. In addition, climate change impacts, exposures and vulnerabilities are all worsening, causing considerable shifts in the underlying social and environmental determinants of health at the global level. Sexual and reproductive health services are often “invisible” when compared with food and emergency medicine in humanitarian relief efforts and crisis settings, yet services such as contraception and abortion are also critical and time-sensitive. We urge you to ensure that women from the places most vulnerable to climate change are at the table when developing solutions, and that solutions take a holistic approach that includes sexual and reproductive health and rights.

A gender lens needs should be applied to each of the five themes. Civil society groups have developed recommendations in each of these areas, to ensure that tax policies, trade agreements and investment strategies are people-centered and take into consideration the unique realities of women and girls. Doing so would strengthen synergies and set the policies up for better success.

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Foreign Trade

International trade and investment are of great importance for Dutch

prosperity and employment. A third of Dutch prosperity is earned through international trade and a third of our jobs are linked to international trade. Our international competitive position is subject to “twin transitions” (digitisation/innovation and climate/sustainability) and shifting geopolitical relationships. It is very important for the Netherlands to strengthen its earning capacity now and in the future.

Strategic and sustainable trade policy

In anticipation of geopolitical and transition developments, foreign states are also focusing more strongly on their national and international policy. For example, states are increasingly applying more assertive economic diplomacy and using economic power instruments to pursue their international goals. The Netherlands cannot lag behind in this regard. Our country's interconnectedness with the rest of the world is greater and more vulnerable than ever. As part of a coherent foreign policy, the Netherlands will focus on a strategic and sustainable trade policy.

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

RESPONSE

No response [we will leave it blank]

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Themes and sectors of the future

Now that the world is in transition to create a good future for us and the generations after us, the focus of companies, government and knowledge institutions is changing.

5. In which themes or sectors do you see opportunities for doing business internationally?

RESPONSE

There are opportunities for progress in the health sector and in increasing sexual and reproductive health and rights. The COVID crisis has pointed out weaknesses in global health and shown how women and girls are most impacted by weak health systems, resulting in social and economic losses. This is evident in lack of coordinated sexual and reproductive health choices for women and girls. Without a full range of sexual and reproductive health choices that includes abortion and easy access to effective contraception, gender equality is not possible.

There is opportunity to focus on the needs of youth. Many developing countries have a population that is 70% or more youth under 24. There are also opportunities to partner with youth-led start-ups, specifically businesses led by young women.

(EN)

Public-private cooperation and role of SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises)

A successful approach to international trade requires cooperation between the public, companies, civil society and government. It is also useful to align with market demand. What would help companies, and SMEs in particular, to increase their export performance and innovative capacity?

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?
 - b. For what countries, regions or markets should the government provide private sector support?
 - c. What type of trade promotion activities should the government stop doing?

RESPONSE

The Africa section of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) has clear strategies for strengthening and positioning African SMEs. This includes reduction of trade barriers, provision of support to women-led SMEs, who have the least access to capital. There is also a continent-wide digital initiative whose recommendations would be useful for this question.

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7. Dutch development cooperation activities

The Netherlands is actively pursuing a number of policy themes in the area of development cooperation. For example, we're investing in efforts to advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), reception in the region, access to vaccines, and climate adaptation and mitigation. The Netherlands will continue its efforts in areas where progress is being made and will focus on its strengths, such as linking diplomacy and development. For more information about Dutch development policy, go to www.nlontwikkelingssamenwerking.nl.

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?

RESPONSE

The Netherlands' clear commitment to human rights, gender equality, and strengthening civil society are its strengths. At this time when democracy is under siege in many parts of the world, it is especially important to champion these basic values of a principled development cooperation. The Netherlands has a proud history of supporting human rights, sexual and reproductive rights, gender equality, and strengthening civil society with its development cooperation. We urge you to continue to address global health through a human rights and reproductive justice lens, continue to be a courageous donor --"donor met durf," and show this strength as you take on issues like global climate change that impact women and girls most harshly.

The Netherlands can also be an advocate for increasing bilateral commitments to gender justice. Gender commitments continue to lag behind other development priorities at a time when all human resources need to be harnessed to meet global challenges.

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(EN)

Innovative development cooperation

8. Dutch international cooperation is flexible and knowledge-intensive. We are also innovative, developing new ways of working and new types of partnership that are subsequently adopted or scaled up by others, like the European Commission and the World Bank. In this respect, Dutch international cooperation is like a creative and knowledge-intensive incubator. We are a relatively small donor, but as an EU member state and through bilateral aid we can make EU aid more visible and generate additional, relevant capital flows.

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

RESPONSE

Feminist Foreign Assistance Policies like Sweden's and Canada's, very clearly link human rights and gender equity goals to foreign assistance. A feminist foreign assistance policy for Netherlands could lead to more innovation, and in reference to the

following question (# 9 of 10), encourage bolder initiatives. This quote regarding Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy is relevant: "Sweden's feminist foreign policy is based on the conviction that sustainable peace, security and development can never be achieved if half the world's population is excluded. The policy is a response to the discrimination and systematic subordination that still characterises everyday life for countless women and girls all over the world. Feminist foreign policy is an agenda for change to strengthen the rights, representation and resources of all women and girls."

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(EN)
A bold donor

Dutch international efforts can be characterised as bold, because we link financial investment to diplomatic efforts and expertise. We will continue our work on themes where we have always added value: sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), water, food security, and security and the rule of law. We will also make better use of the diplomatic weight of the EU. To ensure we achieve the SDGs by 2030, we will invest in systemic change, i.e. tackling the structures that maintain poverty and inequality.

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

RESPONSE

Please see the response to question 8 regarding a Feminist Foreign policy.

In addition, the Netherlands can also inform new trade agreements in such a way that they favor developing countries, rather than including provisions that keep countries in dependency. The Netherlands could require the use of African entities for Dutch procurement processes, rather than European ones, to further shift structural bias and exclusion.

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(EN)
General closing question

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

RESPONSE

It is critically important that SRHR continues to be an important focus for the Netherlands, with adequate resources devoted to supporting partners who can move

this agenda forward. Reproductive justice is the human right to bodily autonomy—the right to control one’s own sexuality, gender, health, and reproduction, and to do so safely and with dignity. Without access to abortion and contraception, without vital health information, and without the power to make decisions, one cannot determine their own future. Reproductive rights, including abortion rights, are human rights. Everyone has the right to make informed decisions about their body and health. To build a world where this is possible, it is necessary to integrate abortion rights into the broader movements for health-care access, gender equity and social justice. The right to an abortion is not a standalone right. It depends upon people also having other human rights: to health, to equality, to privacy, to economic options, and to live free from violence and discrimination.

There is an opportunity for the Dutch to be explicit in supporting implementation of regional human rights and women's rights instruments, such as Maputo Protocol. This adds support to the efforts of regional and local movements and honors the implementation of policies that are locally relevant.