



PEOPLE FIRST

The Netherlands' course towards humanitarian aid and diplomacy

Policy letter,

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Department for Stabilization & Humanitarian Assistance

Cluster for Humanitarian Aid & Diplomacy

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Our reference

Cc

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Netherlands' government's policy note 'Investing in Global Prospects', published in May 2018, sketched the broad outlines of the Netherlands' policy on foreign trade and development cooperation for the next several years. Within that framework, this present policy letter sets out the government's renewed course for humanitarian aid and diplomacy.

After a summary of the new approach, this letter presents the policy objectives and their foundation (3), the factors shaping the policy (4), the Netherlands' commitments and efforts in this policy area (5), the Netherlands' implementation partners (6), and, finally how the budget for this policy will be spent (7).

2. SUMMARY

The Netherlands renews its policy on humanitarian aid and diplomacy to ensure that it continues to do justice to the policy's motto: People First!

In line with the general policy note 'Investing in Global Prospects' this updated policy takes prospects, prevention and principles as guiding concepts. The government is committed to providing immediate relief and future prospects for people caught up in humanitarian emergencies. To that end we are investing in international agreements on humanitarian cooperation. Human solidarity and human values are the driving forces behind our efforts in these areas.

Our humanitarian aid and diplomacy efforts focus on:

- championing the interests of people in need;
- protecting and empowering women and girls;
- providing mental health and psychosocial support in crisis situations;
- strengthening the position and capacity of local humanitarian aid workers;
- innovation focused on delivering humanitarian aid more effectively and efficiently; and
- reforming the international humanitarian aid system.

In pursuing these objectives, we will focus on what works best and yields the best results. We will develop and support diplomatic and political initiatives in order to facilitate essential humanitarian relief as well as crisis prevention and mitigation.

All our activities are guided by the universally recognised principles of humanitarian aid (humanity, impartiality, independence and neutrality), international humanitarian law and the guidelines based on it.

Sharper focus

Humanitarian aid is provided to people affected by violent conflict and natural disasters. Its overriding objectives are to (1) preserve life, (2) alleviate suffering and (3) maintain and restore human dignity.

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When it comes to humanitarian assistance The Netherlands has a solid reputation in the international community and in the humanitarian sector. We are known for our reliability and predictability as a donor and for our engaged and critical approach.

However, the context in which we have to implement our policy on humanitarian aid and diplomacy has changed. Geopolitical instability and protracted crises combined with poverty, rapid population growth and climate change are proving to be a dangerous cocktail. As a result, humanitarian crises are now far more complex, last longer (nearly 10 years on average) and affect many more people than in the past.

In 2018, 136 million people were dependent on humanitarian relief, up from 53 million in 2010. At present, more than 68 million people have been forced to leave their homes, with the largest numbers fleeing from the crises in Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria and Yemen – all of which are the direct result of violent conflict. These five crises are also the most costly in terms of financial resources and effort.

Clearly, humanitarian crises are not isolated phenomena. They are often regional in nature and often have an international impact. This is felt in Europe too, including in the Netherlands.

Because of its status and reputation, the Netherlands is in a position to undertake political and diplomatic initiatives to foster much-needed change and exercise a positive influence on that change.

Modernisation

Our updated policy on humanitarian aid and diplomacy focuses specific attention on:

- ***Championing the interests of people in need***
In war, crisis and conflict it is becoming increasingly difficult to ensure the safety of civilians and humanitarian aid workers. As part of its humanitarian diplomacy efforts, the Netherlands will call on warring parties to comply fully with international humanitarian law, which requires them to give aid organisations access to the affected population, prohibits attacking civilians and civil infrastructure (such as hospitals, schools, water supplies and homes) and prohibits the starvation of civilians.
- ***Protecting and empowering women and girls***
War, crisis and conflict put women and girls in a particularly precarious situation. This is why our humanitarian aid and diplomacy policy emphasises protection of women and girls, their equal access to aid, and interventions targeting their specific needs.
- ***Providing mental health and psychosocial support in crisis situations***
War, crisis and conflict cause stress and trauma. Psychological suffering not only harms individuals but also erodes social bonds and damages communities, which in turn affects reconstruction efforts and society. Yet mental health and psychosocial support are not structurally incorporated into humanitarian assistance. The Netherlands seeks to help change that.
- ***Strengthening the position and capacity of local humanitarian workers***
Responding rapidly and effectively saves lives, which is why national and local institutions and organisations need to have sufficient capacity to act quickly.

They have primary responsibility and are closest to the crisis. This why the Netherlands is investing in local capacity to prepare for and respond rapidly to crises and disasters.

- ***Innovation focused on delivering humanitarian more effectively and efficiently***

ICT, data technology and new techniques can improve and speed up emergency assistance. The Netherlands is therefore investing in innovation that works. Innovation is also needed to evaluate ingrained processes and structures and to find alternative forms of financing.

- ***Reforming the international humanitarian aid system***

The international humanitarian aid system is ill equipped for the challenges posed by twenty-first-century humanitarian crises. The Netherlands is actively following up the outcomes of the World Humanitarian Summit (2016) and the agreements made by leading humanitarian organisations and donors in the 'Grand Bargain' on better leadership, coordination, professionalism and effectiveness of humanitarian aid.

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3. OBJECTIVE OF AND PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING HUMANITARIAN POLICY

The core objective of our humanitarian policy is **to preserve life, alleviate suffering and protect and restore the dignity of people affected by crisis.**

The international community has laid a foundation for this in international law and humanitarian principles:

- Humanitarian principles: humanity, impartiality, independence and neutrality;
- International law, specifically humanitarian law, human rights and refugee law ;
- Principles of Good Humanitarian Donorship¹;
- The European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid²;
- The Agenda for Humanity,³ agreed at the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul, and specifically the agreements made within the framework of the 'Grand Bargain';
- Obligations ensuing from UN resolutions relevant to humanitarian issues.

In order to fulfil these principles, the Netherlands has opted for an approach comprised of the following three elements:

- ***A holistic approach.*** Humanitarian assistance involves more than access to basic necessities such as food, water, shelter, primary healthcare and protection. Access to psychosocial support, sexual and reproductive health and rights, education and employment opportunities is also essential. Humanitarian aid aimed at providing this can also be life-saving and is essential to foster resilience and protect human dignity among populations in crisis.

¹ The Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) Principles are aimed at facilitating a principled approach to humanitarian aid by developing and stimulating donor practices that will make humanitarian action more effective and efficient and encouraging donors to adopt those practices.

² The EU member states adopted the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid in 2008 to provide a common framework for humanitarian policy jointly implemented through ECHO and for the policies of the individual member states.

³ The Agenda for Humanity was launched at the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul (2016) and includes five core commitments: political leadership to end conflict; upholding norms that safeguard humanity; leaving no one behind/addressing forced displacement; changing peoples' lives by delivering aid and ending need; and investing in humanity. These core commitments have been translated into 20 specific actions. The Grand Bargain agreements are part of the Agenda for Humanity.

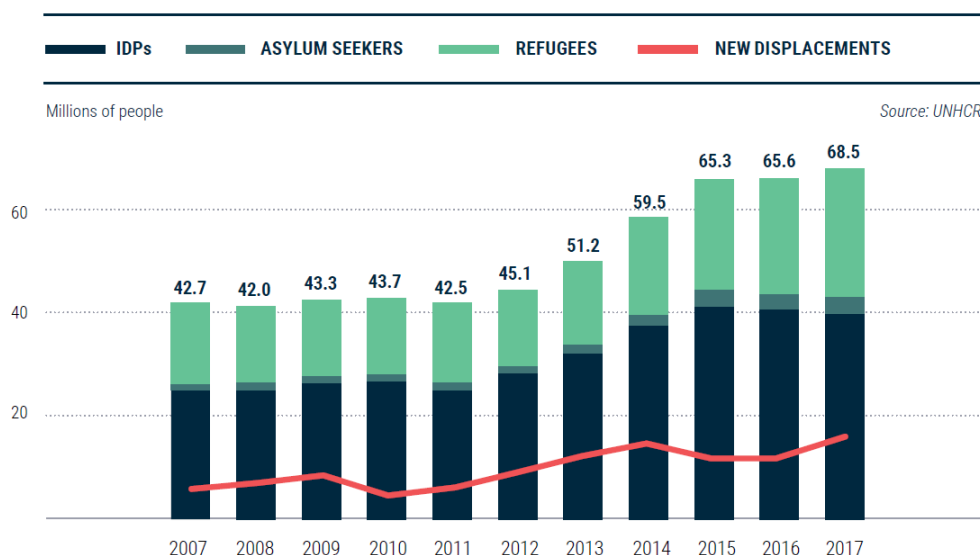
- **A budget that is not thematically limited or specified.** Humanitarian needs vary from crisis to crisis, depending on the nature of the disaster or the acute requirements of the people affected.
- **Unearmarked, multiyear contributions to trusted partners.** This is important to ensure that humanitarian aid can be deployed quickly and flexibly wherever the need is greatest. Investments of this kind have the highest yield, because they are predictable and can be made rapidly and flexibly. The partners involved are the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and the UN organisations OCHA, WFP, UNHCR, UNICEF, WHO and UNRWA, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and the Dutch Relief Alliance, a coalition of Dutch non-governmental humanitarian assistance and development organisations.

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4. CONTEXT: PROTRACTED, COMPLEX CRISES AND INCREASING HUMANITARIAN NEED

Negative trends

Humanitarian crises are more complex, last longer and affect more people than in the past. The number of people in need of international humanitarian assistance and protection rose from 53 million in 2010 to 136 million in 2018.⁴ Worldwide there are currently 68 million displaced people living in their home country or other countries. This is the highest the number has been since the founding of the UN refugee agency UNHCR in 1950.



Many crises last for years, some for decades. The average duration of crises for which the UN provides coordinated humanitarian aid is currently nine years. In 2014⁵ the average crisis lasted 5.2 years. A relatively small number of conflict-related crises claim a disproportionate number of victims and demand the most resources. In 2014-2017 the crises in Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Syria accounted for 55% of the UN's total coordinated response.⁶

More than two billion people live in countries or regions affected by conflict and instability. The combination of poverty, population growth, environmental

⁴ Global Humanitarian Overview 2018, OCHA.

⁵ Global Humanitarian Overview 2019, OCHA.

⁶ Global Humanitarian Overview 2019, OCHA.

degradation, natural disasters and violence makes people extremely vulnerable.⁷ This number is expected to grow as a result of climate change. After a long period of decline, the number of people suffering from food insecurity and malnutrition is on the rise, increasing in recent years from 795 million in 2014 to 821 million in 2017.⁸

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Natural disasters affect 350 million people a year on average. Flooding has the greatest impact. A significant number of natural disasters are caused directly or indirectly by human activity, such as deforestation, construction in vulnerable areas, failure to comply with earthquake resistant building regulations, excessive extraction of groundwater and failure to maintain early warning systems (e.g. for tsunamis).

Public authorities, donors, humanitarian aid and development organisations work tirelessly to overcome these challenges. The UN Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) linked to it provide a useful and important framework. As stated in 'Investing in Global Prospects', the SDGs aimed at reducing and preventing conflict, instability, inequality and marginalisation of the world's two billion most vulnerable people constitute the ultimate prevention agenda.

Risks

Humanitarian aid allows victims of crises to survive and can contribute to their resilience. However, the right to assistance and protection in crisis situations that civilians are entitled to under international humanitarian law and human rights conventions is frequently violated. This entails risks. In many cases the safety of humanitarian workers is not guaranteed, humanitarian work does not go according to plan and monitoring systems and instruments are imperfect.

In addition, there is a danger that humanitarian aid can have a politicising effect. Assistance to people in need must be offered in accordance with the principles of impartiality, independence and neutrality, and must be free of any political, economic or military objectives. In practice decisions about providing humanitarian aid and allowing humanitarian and aid workers access are part of a political process and aid is sometimes misused to advance a political agenda. The Netherlands works hard to prevent the politicisation of humanitarian aid.

Innovation

The humanitarian sector, which includes public authorities, the UN, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, NGOs and private sector actors, has undergone a process of professionalisation in recent years and is now able to provide assistance effectively and efficiently to more people than ever before.⁹ There are new actors in the sector too, such as the World Bank, which makes significant funding available for crisis response and reconstruction, private parties investing in 'humanitarian impact bonds' and insurance companies that cover damage caused by natural disasters. Information management has been vastly improved by applying new digital technologies and data analyses. Mobile telephony is being used more and more to assess the level of need, pass on information and complaints, and transfer money.

A large number of countries have made investments in their own capacity to respond to natural disasters or in the capacities of a regional alliance such as the

⁷ Global Humanitarian Overview 2019, OCHA.

⁸ *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2018*, FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP & WHO.

⁹ *The State of the Humanitarian System*, ALNAP (2018), pp. 24, 26.

Association of Southeast Asian Nations ASEAN. As a result of this development (and for political reasons) countries in Asia and the Pacific region request less international support when they are struck by a disaster.¹⁰

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Yet major challenges remain. A prominent example is the violation of international humanitarian law by actors (including public authorities) that make it impossible for aid organisations to reach populations affected by armed conflict. They use starvation as a weapon of war and target humanitarian workers, medical facilities and schools. Another concern is the fact that, despite the increase in worldwide funding for emergency aid, the rising demand for humanitarian assistance is increasingly outpacing resources.¹¹ Furthermore, all too often victims of crises do not receive the quality of assistance to which they are entitled.¹² This applies in general to those who are most vulnerable and specifically to those in need of mental healthcare and psychosocial support. In most cases, these groups are underserved.

In short, progress is being made, but the challenge is to keep developing, testing and above all applying innovations on a large scale.

5. THE NETHERLANDS' EFFORTS

a. Strengthening humanitarian diplomacy

The Netherlands' government is committed to stepping up its humanitarian diplomacy efforts to ensure that crisis victims' human rights are protected and to promote compliance with international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles. The Netherlands actively promotes respect for these norms and calls attention to violations and their consequences.

There is no blueprint for this. The kind of influence the Netherlands can bring to bear will vary from case to case. It may play a role behind the scenes or on centre stage. The focus may be on a specific humanitarian crisis or issue, or on initiating a discussion about existing processes and methods with the aim of enhancing effectiveness and efficiency. Whatever the case, protecting the interests of people in need will always be the overriding objective of the Netherlands' humanitarian diplomacy.

The Netherlands intends to focus its humanitarian diplomacy efforts on compliance with international humanitarian law and other bodies of law in crisis-specific situations, and on the implementation of the resolution on conflict-induced food insecurity adopted unanimously by the UN Security Council in 2018 (Resolution 2417).

Crisis-specific efforts

- The Netherlands will urge warring parties to fully comply with international humanitarian law, including the obligation to give independent, impartial, neutral humanitarian organisations access to affected populations, the prohibition on attacking civilians and civilian infrastructure (such as hospitals,

¹⁰ Global Humanitarian Overview 2019, OCHA.

¹¹ *The State of the Humanitarian System*, ALNAP (2018), p. 24.

¹² See 'Humanitarian Charter' in Sphere Handbook: 'These [rights] include the rights to protection and assistance reflected in the provisions of international humanitarian law, human rights and refugee law. For the purposes of this Charter, we summarise these rights as follows:

- the right to life with dignity;
- the right to receive humanitarian assistance; and
- the right to protection and security.

While these rights are not formulated in such terms in international law, they encapsulate a range of established legal rights and give fuller substance to the humanitarian imperative.'

schools, water supplies and homes), the prohibition on starving civilian populations and the obligation to protect and respect civilians, with special attention to women and girls and mental health and psychosocial support.

- The Netherlands will always safeguard the independence, impartiality and neutrality of humanitarian aid and avoid the politicisation of aid. This is important because these are essential conditions for securing humanitarian workers' access to the crisis victims who are most affected and need assistance the most.
- In cases of suspected violations of international humanitarian law and human rights, the Netherlands will press in the international arena for a thorough, independent inquiry, first by the warring parties themselves and, if necessary, by an international mechanism such as the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission¹³ or an ad hoc body established for that purpose, such as the Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen.

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Efforts to implement UNSC resolution on conflict and food insecurity

- In 2018 the UN Security Council adopted resolution 2417 on addressing the impact of conflict-induced food insecurity. A Dutch initiative, this resolution condemns the starvation of civilians as a weapon of war. The Netherlands is working to ensure the resolution is implemented by: 1) raising the issue of food insecurity caused by conflict; 2) investing in support for farmers in conflict areas to prevent food insecurity and 3) calling attention to situations where starvation is being used as a weapon of war.

b. Gender equality and vulnerable groups

Crises often contribute to worsening the position of women and girls. Research shows that they are affected disproportionately by violence and sexual abuse. The Netherlands is striving to raise awareness of this and ensure that humanitarian relief interventions include explicit protections for women and improve, or at least prevent the worsening of, women's position.

It is essential to this end for humanitarian response plans to empower women and take account of their specific needs and roles. A tool has been developed within the UN system for measuring this: the Gender & Age Marker. This marker is used to track to what extent programming meets specific criteria that indicate to what extent a project or programme contributes to gender- and age-specific needs and protection against violence. Against this backdrop, the government seeks to ensure that the Netherlands' partners implement programming that actively contributes to gender equality and that they address this issue in their reporting.

Whether caused by natural disasters or conflict, humanitarian crises hit women, children, people with disabilities and older people hardest. These vulnerable groups are often subjected to violence, including sexual violence, so it is important that aid organisations assess the assistance and protection needs of women, men, girls, boys, older people and people with disabilities and take account of different needs in their response plans.

Victims of crises, including the most vulnerable, have the right to take back control of and reshape their lives. They have a right to sufficient aid and protection and deserve to be allowed to play an active role in every aspect of crisis response.

¹³ The International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission (IHFFC) was established by Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions (1977).

Efforts:

- The Netherlands is working to ensure that humanitarian aid meets the specific needs and requirements of women and girls and that Humanitarian Response Plans (HRP) include specific activities to advance this objective.
- The Netherlands is working to ensure that humanitarian partners use the Gender & Age Marker systematically to assess programmes and report their findings.
- The Netherlands is working to end violence against and exploitation of the most vulnerable crisis victims.
- The Netherlands is committed to ensuring that crisis victims are involved as much as possible in the process of identifying needs and requirements and of planning and implementing the response, and that humanitarian organisations are transparent and accountable to the affected population and donors at every stage of the response.

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c. Mental health and psychosocial support

Crisis victims have an elevated risk of anxiety, depression and other disorders that interfere with a person's normal functioning. Besides directly causing psychological suffering, humanitarian emergencies damage the social networks people need in order to join forces in dealing with problems and working on reconstruction. Mental healthcare and psychosocial support should be a standard part of the package of assistance and services offered to crisis victims. Despite the great need for these services, however, they are not a priority in humanitarian response operations. There is an acute shortage of professionals with the expertise to identify mental health and psychosocial support requirements and provide assistance.

Efforts:

- In the coming years, the Netherlands will strive to raise awareness among humanitarian organisations, donors and crisis-affected countries of the need to incorporate mental healthcare and psychosocial support into humanitarian aid, and to build capacity in organisations and countries.
- In the short term, the Netherlands will finance a number of targeted activities that are needed to develop this comprehensive approach and to ensure that crisis victims have access to psychosocial support from the start of a crisis.
- On 7 and 8 October 2019, the Netherlands will be hosting a ministerial meeting in Amsterdam about mental health and psychosocial care in crisis situations aimed at political advocacy, capacity building and greater financing.

d. Preparedness

A fast and effective response saves lives, so it is important for national and local institutions and organisations to have adequate response capacity because they bear primary responsibility for protecting their people and are the first to arrive on the scene.

Preparedness is about the ability of local actors (public authorities, civilian organisations, Red Cross / Red Crescent and local companies) to respond quickly when disaster strikes or is imminent. It involves building, maintaining and embedding expertise and making sure the material and logistical requirements for a response are in place. Responding rapidly to an outbreak of disease can prevent it spreading further and claiming more victims. Taking timely measures in a drought can prevent a famine. In addition to enhancing the rapid-response capacity of local actors, preparedness also means strengthening their role in disaster management (aid localisation). Improving preparedness and increasing localisation cannot prevent disaster, but it can contribute to a better and faster response.

Capacity building in local organisations and involving them more in planning and providing emergency aid are crucial components of the localisation commitments in the 'Grand Bargain' agreed at the World Humanitarian Summit. They are contributing to a change in the humanitarian system whereby local and national responders (public authorities, civil society organisations and businesses) play a key role and international organisations have to add value in other ways in planning and providing humanitarian assistance.

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Efforts:

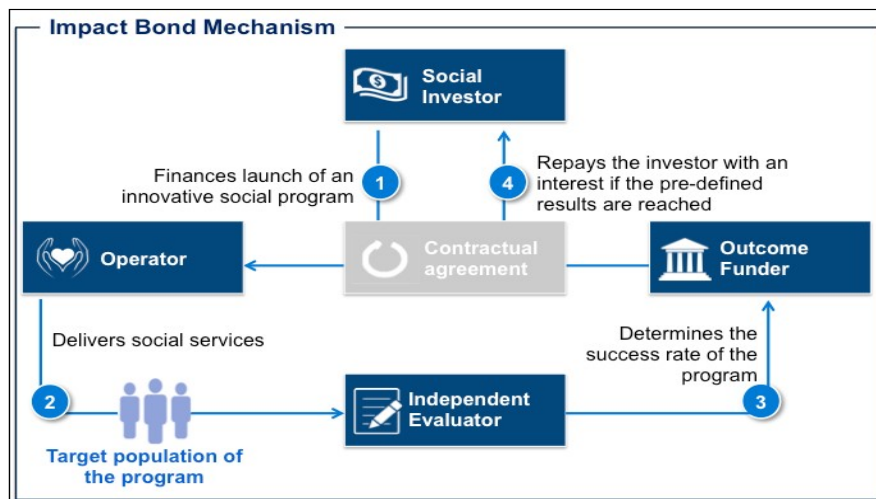
- The Netherlands is investing in building human, financial and systems capacity of national and local public authorities, civil society, businesses and communities to anticipate and respond rapidly to emergencies. This entails building, maintaining and embedding expertise and making sure the material and logistical requirements (transport, communication, IT and emergency stocks) are in place to respond quickly and properly to emergencies, in accordance with plans prepared in advance and based on sound analyses. The Netherlands does not do this directly but rather through its general contributions to humanitarian organisations, through a number of specific capacity-building programmes and by advocating capacity building, for example through the Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA).
- Working with humanitarian and development partners, the Netherlands is examining funding options based on early warning mechanisms, such as the ICRC's Forecast-based Financing and the World Bank's Famine Action Mechanism.

e. Innovation

In our rapidly changing world, it is essential for the humanitarian sector to innovate. New products need to be developed, tested and used on a large scale. Existing structures, processes and working methods need to be re-examined, and the sector needs to be willing to change and to employ technical and digital innovations.

The humanitarian sector has always looked for ways to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and quality of assistance. However, a new dynamic has emerged in recent years. Innovations are making it possible to collect, analyse and use data more effectively. As a result, humanitarian organisations have a better and more timely understanding of what is needed and can target their response better and act more quickly. In situations where markets are working properly, aid in the form of cash is often more effective and cheaper. It enables people to decide for themselves what they need, acts as a stimulus for local and regional businesses and reduces logistics costs. Through partnerships with Dutch and foreign businesses, knowledge, expertise and financial resources from the private sector can be used to achieve improvements in the humanitarian sector. There have also been developments in the area of financing, such as Humanitarian Impact Bonds (HIBs)¹⁴ and insurance against damage caused by natural disasters and epidemics. HIBs are a new funding instrument whose results and impact are as yet unproven. The same applies to other innovations.

¹⁴ HIBs attract private investors looking to invest in a specific result. If the result is achieved, donor countries pay private financiers the initial investment plus a reasonable profit. If the result is not achieved, less is repaid. This is a way of spreading the risk, which would otherwise be borne fully by the donor.



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Efforts:

- Through funds, ‘challenges’ and other platforms, the Netherlands is investing in innovation projects aimed at improving the effectiveness, efficiency and quality of assistance. The Netherlands focuses on the large-scale application of successful product innovations rather than on product development.
- The OCHA Centre for Humanitarian Data in The Hague is a mainstay of the Netherlands’ efforts. The Centre fosters innovative and enhanced cooperation between organisations in their use and sharing of humanitarian data.
- The Netherlands stimulates and encourages innovation in and by the humanitarian sector by advocating it and bringing donors, humanitarian organisations and private sector actors together. One example of this is the Dutch Coalition for Humanitarian Innovation (DCHI), a coalition of companies, knowledge institutions and NGOs.
- The Netherlands also assists in the development of new forms of financing for the humanitarian sector, such as Humanitarian Impact Bonds, and is active in the World Economic Forum’s Humanitarian Investing Initiative. This is a multi-stakeholder platform that stimulates new thinking about financing and focuses specifically on moving from short-term humanitarian aid financing to more sustainable investments in areas of chronic crises.

f. Reforming the system

Leadership, coordination and accountability are key elements of any effort to enhance the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance. The Netherlands endorses and supports the central role of the UN and the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA) in leading and coordinating international responses to emergencies, and the role of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in responding to refugee crises. The establishment of OCHA (1991), the introduction of the cluster coordination system (2005), the transformative agenda (2011), the commitments made at the World Humanitarian Summit and the ‘Grand Bargain’ launched at the Summit (2016)¹⁵ have contributed to better

¹⁵ The Agenda for Humanity was launched at the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul (2016) and includes five core commitments political leadership to end conflict; upholding norms that safeguard humanity; leaving no one behind/addressing forced displacement; changing peoples’ lives by delivering aid and ending need; and investing in humanity. These core commitments have been translated into 20 specific actions. The Grand Bargain agreements are part of the Agenda for Humanity.

leadership and coordination and increased the professionalism and effectiveness of humanitarian aid.

The Grand Bargain signatories have committed themselves to improving the humanitarian system. Aid organisations are focusing on providing humanitarian assistance that is more effective and efficient. In return, they can count on receiving more flexible, multiyear financing from donors. The implementation of the Grand Bargain commitments is yielding uneven results, however – in some areas the opposite of what the Grand Bargain envisages. For instance, earmarked donor contributions are increasing rather than decreasing, making it more difficult to respond to urgent needs or to neglected crises.

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Even with the best humanitarian system, providing assistance in crisis situations is not without operational, political, legal and reputational risks. These risks must be shared by all responders, including donors and aid organisations. At present the risks local organisations are assuming are so high that it is exceedingly difficult to continue providing assistance and protecting civilians. These risks include security risks, abuse, diversion of funds and risks associated with working in areas where counterterrorism measures apply. The balance needs to be restored.

Within the humanitarian system more is being done to encourage closer cooperation between development and humanitarian organisations. In order to tackle root causes and offer long-term prospects to crisis victims, development and humanitarian organisations must work together and coordinate their activities to achieve objectives that only joint efforts can secure.

Efforts:

- Through support for OCHA, the Netherlands will continue its efforts to enhance leadership and coordination within the humanitarian system. Our focus is on strengthening the leadership of the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), the Interagency Standing Committee (IASC)¹⁶ and the Humanitarian Coordinators (HCs) during humanitarian crises.
- The Netherlands will be working over the next two years to strengthen its role in the Grand Bargain with a view to increasing the efficiency of the humanitarian system. Our priorities concern the connection between the Grand Bargain and improving the risk-sharing balance, and transparency in the humanitarian system. The Netherlands seeks to strengthen its leading role in the Grand Bargain, prioritise transparency in the humanitarian system and initiate dialogue between donors and aid organisations about risk-sharing in humanitarian assistance in conflict areas.
- Where possible and with due regard for humanitarian principles, the Netherlands aims to strengthen leadership in order to enhance harmonisation of and connection between humanitarian action and long-term development work, taking as its starting point the context-specific challenges that crisis victims and local actors face.
- Specifically, the Netherlands will monitor the practical application of codes of conduct in order to prevent inappropriate behaviour, particularly of a sexual nature. The Netherlands and the UK will set up a pilot project to study an independent ombudsman mechanism for victims of inappropriate sexual behaviour.

¹⁶ The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) is made up of the principals of the main UN humanitarian organisations and is chaired by the head of OCHA, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator. The IASC is responsible for coordination, policy development, adopting norms and standards and decision-making with respect to responses to major crises (Level 3 crises). ICRC, IFRC and three networks of international humanitarian NGOs (ICVA, SCHR and Interaction) take part in IASC meetings and working groups.

6. PARTNERS FOR HUMANITARIAN AID: A STRATEGIC CHOICE

To provide crisis victims with essential aid and protection, a strong, flexible international humanitarian system is needed that complements and supports the local response capacity as much as possible. The effectiveness and efficiency of international humanitarian actors and the way they work with each other and with local actors has an impact on their ability to save lives, protect civilians and safeguard human dignity.

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The Netherlands supports organisations that act in accordance with humanitarian principles and that are able to provide aid and protection to affected populations in a timely and professional manner. All partner organisations should have a policy aimed at preventing and addressing all forms of abuse directed at staff and aid recipients.

Over the past 25 years the humanitarian system has developed a large number of minimum quality standards that emergency aid must fulfil, such as the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability, the Sphere Minimum Standards and Indicators for Humanitarian Response¹⁷ and others, including the humanitarian inclusion standards for older people and people with disabilities. The Netherlands expects its partners to report their results in compliance with these standards, while acknowledging that they work in difficult circumstances in conflict situations fraught with security threats and corruption and face the risk of achieving minimal results or none at all.

Our key humanitarian assistance partners are the UN organisations, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs. Through the years, these organisations have demonstrated their ability to provide increasingly effective assistance and to work together on a large scale and complement each other's programmes.¹⁸ The Netherlands supplies knowledge and expertise to a very limited extent.

United Nations

The Netherlands acknowledges and supports the central role the UN plays in coordinating and providing international humanitarian assistance. The UN's coordinating role entails consulting with the public authorities of the crisis-affected country and coordinating with and between the various UN humanitarian organisations and NGO partners. UN organisations have a mandate from the UN General Assembly to assume responsibility for centralised and decentralised coordination, in consultation with the public authorities, and to develop and implement programmes with implementing partners and the affected population. UN organisations are also responsible for the ongoing development of quality norms and standards for humanitarian assistance.¹⁹

The Netherlands will continue to make substantial, unearmarked contributions to UN organisations such as OCHA, UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF, UNRWA, WHO and the UN-administered Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and crisis-specific

¹⁷ These standards within the remit of the Humanitarian Standards Partnership are the Child Protection Minimum Standards, Livestock Emergency Guidelines, Minimum Economic Recovery Standards, Minimum Standards for Education, Minimum Standards for Marker Analysis and Humanitarian Inclusion Standards for Older People and People with Disabilities.

¹⁸ See the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB) screening of Dutch humanitarian policy 2009–2014, September 2015, and the State of the Humanitarian Systems report, December 2018.

¹⁹ The IOB screening of Dutch humanitarian policy 2009-2014 (2015) confirmed the key role of the UN humanitarian organisations in providing rapid assistance on a large scale and in coordinating humanitarian efforts. It concluded that UN organisations have made progress in building capacity for timely and effective response. The recent State of the Humanitarian Systems report confirmed these conclusions.

Country-based Pooled Funds (CBPF). As a major contributor of unearmarked funding, the Netherlands has considerable influence within the UN system. It intends to use that influence to work with other donors to reform the system, improve cooperation and make reporting on the use and impact of funding more transparent.

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Red Cross / Red Crescent

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement²⁰ has a specific role within the humanitarian system. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) pioneered the modern humanitarian movement and is the guardian of international humanitarian law. In specific situations of armed conflict, the ICRC is mandated to call warring parties to account for breaches of their obligations under international humanitarian law, to visit detainees in prison and to facilitate prisoner contacts with family. The ICRC also plays an important role in providing humanitarian assistance in conflict zones.

The 191 National Societies of the Red Cross and Red Crescent play a special supporting role in helping their governments to provide humanitarian assistance during national emergencies, working with professional staff and large numbers of volunteers. The Netherlands acknowledges the major role of the Red Cross / Red Crescent movement and will continue to support the work of the ICRC and the International Federation of Red Cross and Crescent Societies (IFRC) through a block-grant mechanism with the Netherlands Red Cross.

Non-governmental organisations

Humanitarian NGOs that operate internationally or locally play an important autonomous role in the humanitarian system. NGOs are crucial implementing partners for the UN. They have access to considerable human resources and implementing capacity on the ground. In many cases NGOs can work in places where the UN does not have the consent of the public authorities to operate, such as the part of Syria that is not controlled by the Syrian authorities. NGOs are in a position to procure some of the financial resources needed for humanitarian operations by raising voluntary contributions from donors. They also help maintain public support for humanitarian assistance.

The Netherlands acknowledges the important role that NGOs play in humanitarian operations and will continue to contribute to the activities of the Dutch Relief Alliance, a coalition of Dutch aid and humanitarian organisations funded through a partnership with government. The DRA has a partner network of international and national NGOs in a large number of the most fragile states. One of the Netherlands' conditions for working with the DRA is that the NGOs participate actively in UN coordination structures and processes. In addition, the Netherlands contributes to the UN-led Country-based Pooled Funds, which are also accessible to national NGOs.

Dutch government as implementer

The Netherlands can itself contribute expertise and other capacities to humanitarian response efforts at the request of public authorities, the EU, the UN, the Red Cross / Red Crescent or NGOs. Any such contribution is made within the international coordination structures and is expressly aimed at supplementing and strengthening local or regional capacities.

In both the public and private sector, the Netherlands has considerable knowledge of and expertise in disaster relief, particularly in the area of water-related

²⁰ The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement comprises the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the National Societies (such as the Netherlands Red Cross).

disasters. The Netherlands makes some of its public sector disaster relief expertise and capacity available to the EU Civil Protection Mechanism for use in Europe and the rest of the world. This contribution comprises the Urban Search and Rescue Team (USAR) and the USAR component Technical Assistance Support Team (TAST), the Extreme High Capacity Pumping Team (EHCPT), the Environmental Assessment Team and the Maritime Incident Response Group. In addition, the Ministry of Defence has at its disposal transport capacity (aircraft and ships) and trained personnel that can carry out rapid evacuations and provide immediate assistance in emergencies. The Netherlands also has a great many experts who are deployed through the EU Civil Protection Pool as part of EU teams or through the Dutch Surge Support water disaster response mechanism, an alliance of the Netherlands Water Partnership, the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO.nl), the Netherlands Red Cross and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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The Netherlands also supports the OCHA-managed United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) system. UNDAC was established to help governments coordinate assistance and identify needs during the first phase of an emergency. At present the Netherlands provides seven people to the UNDAC team and contributes financially to the training and deployment of UNDAC specialists from countries of the global South.

A principle of Dutch humanitarian aid policy is that goods, products and services should be procured locally or regionally wherever possible. In addition, the Netherlands aims to provide aid in the form of cash wherever possible. By exception and in response to a direct request and urgent need, the Netherlands will purchase and ship goods, as in the case of the Ebola crisis in 2014, when laboratories, medicines and other goods were dispatched.

7. EXPENDITURE – THE HUMANITARIAN AID BUDGET

The government firmly believes that humanitarian organisations, in consultation with affected populations, are best placed to determine what is needed and where the need is greatest. This is why the Netherlands strongly favours multiyear, unearmarked aid to humanitarian organisations so that they are able to offer assistance rapidly, flexibly and effectively. The Netherlands seeks to be a predictable and reliable donor so that its partners can maintain their capacities and offer crisis victims a degree of certainty that humanitarian aid will remain available to them even if a crisis continues for a long time.

For these reasons, approximately 50% of Dutch crisis response support will consist of multiyear, unearmarked financing. This is in line with the principles of Good Humanitarian Donorship and the Grand Bargain commitments made at the World Humanitarian Summit. The Netherlands calls upon other countries to follow this example and increase their unearmarked contributions in accordance with the Grand Bargain commitments. In return the Netherlands expects implementing organisations to provide transparent and clear reporting on the results they achieve with Dutch contributions.

The Netherlands recognises that there are risks involved in providing humanitarian aid in response to crises and disasters. This is why organisations are expected to report on goals that were not met, mistakes that were made and lessons learned. In the spirit of improving the risk-sharing balance, the Netherlands will not use this transparency to penalise its partners but rather to work with them to improve the system.

Around 30 to 40% of the resources available for humanitarian aid will be allocated each year for specific crises. These resources will be used for chronic, often conflict-related crises and to help respond to acute crises that arise in the course

of the year (such as natural disasters and epidemics) or to deterioration in protracted crises.

Resources for the provision of aid in specific chronic crises are allocated on the basis of a method that takes account of the following elements: 1) the vulnerability of the population, 2) the number of people in need of assistance according to the UN and the Red Cross / Red Crescent and 3) the funding shortfall for each crisis.²¹ A similar method is used by other donors like ECHO, and is in keeping with the principle that humanitarian priorities must be based on the greatest need. With respect to the resources for specific chronic crises, the Netherlands prefers to contribute to the UN-led Country-based Pooled Funds (CBPF). By giving to the CBPFs, the Netherlands is helping to meet the localisation commitments in the Grand Bargain: local organisations have access to CBPFs and are gaining an increasing share in the humanitarian aid funding provided by CBPFs.²²

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The remaining 10 to 20% of resources are allocated to specific programmes related to the priorities mentioned above, and especially mental health and psychosocial care, preparedness and innovation.

²¹ Vulnerability to emergencies is assessed using the INFORM Global Risk Index. Estimates of the number of people in need of aid are based on the figures used by the UN in the Global Humanitarian Overview, which is published annually in early December and updated in June. Figures in ICRC and IFRC appeals are used as well. The funding shortfalls identified in the previous year's UN appeal are used to determine financial needs.

²² See Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2018, p. 48. In 2016 15% of the total CBPF funds (\$104 million) went to local NGOs, rising to 20% (\$128 million) in 2017.