

**Letter of May 2019 from the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation and the Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality to the House of Representatives on 'Towards a World Without Hunger in 2030: the Dutch contribution'**

Global food security has been a major policy goal for the Netherlands for more than a decade, in accordance with policy letters submitted to the House in 2008, 2011 and 2014.<sup>1</sup> This letter sets out how the government is continuing its work on this issue within the framework of the revised policies on foreign trade and development cooperation (BHOS) and agriculture. It examines the current situation as regards global food security, identifies the Netherlands' strengths and sets priorities for an effective Dutch contribution towards achieving a future without hunger.

**The international context**

*Growing hunger, connected causes*

Worldwide the number of people with chronic malnutrition has grown in recent years, reaching 821 million in 2017, while the number of adults with obesity rose to 672 million.<sup>2</sup> Over 113 million people suffered acute food insecurity in 2018.<sup>3</sup> Countries in Africa are disproportionately affected by food insecurity. The world produces enough food, but a third of what is produced is lost. In Africa this usually occurs post-harvest. To reverse this trend and feed a global population of almost 10 billion in 30 years' time, we need to make a transition to a healthy, fair, climate-neutral, circular food system, with a 50% increase in net agricultural production, on average, and a more than 100% increase in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.<sup>4</sup> Food will have to be produced and distributed sustainably and efficiently. The quality of diets will have to be radically improved. This is an opportunity for food producers and other parties in the food value chain, but it is also a huge challenge, given that we are approaching the social, ecological and climatological limits of food production. Promising technologies (like big data, robotics, nanotechnology and genomics) will play a key role in these efforts over the coming decades.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> House of Representatives 31 250, no. 14; 32 605, no. 54; and 33 625, no. 147 respectively.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.fao.org/3/I9553EN/i9553en.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.fao.org/emergencies/resources/documents/resources-detail/en/c/1107313/>.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i6583e.pdf>, p. 46.

<sup>5</sup> [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_Innovation\\_with\\_a\\_Purpose\\_VF-reduced.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Innovation_with_a_Purpose_VF-reduced.pdf).

The root causes of malnutrition are still poverty and exclusion. But conflicts and climate change are having a growing impact. There are also many factors that indirectly play a role, such as the position and rights of women, the quality of ecosystems, land use rights, access to inputs (water, seed, fertilisers, knowledge and financial services), access to markets, growing urbanisation and a shortage of fuels, especially clean fuels, for cooking. In sub-Saharan Africa food insecurity is closely related to the lack of structural transformation in the agricultural sector, which means productivity remains low, post-harvest losses remain high, and the rural economy creates few jobs for a growing young population. Africa will need more than fifteen million new jobs a year over the next twenty years to employ all the new entrants to the labour market.<sup>6</sup>

#### *Consensus on goals, systemic action*

In 2015 the world agreed to tackle 17 major challenges for sustainable development. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide the basis for the Dutch government's approach which is set out in the policy document 'Investing in Global Prospects'.<sup>7</sup> SDG 2 aims to end hunger and malnutrition and raise the productivity of small-scale food producers and food systems – land-based and marine – in a way that contributes to the preservation of ecosystems, enhances resilience to climate change and improves land and soil quality. There is growing global awareness that parts of SDG 2 (nutrition, agriculture and ecological sustainability) are interdependent, and that they form a coherent whole with the other 16 SDGs.

The SDGs are also an agenda for innovation and development, and offer the private sector opportunities to explore new markets, work in new ways, and use innovative forms of finance and new digital and other technologies. The government set out its ambition to become a global leader in circular agriculture, as part of the effort to build a circular economy, in its policy document 'Agriculture, Nature and Food: Valuable and Connected'.<sup>8</sup> The goal is to close cycles of raw materials and resources at the lowest possible scale – nationally or internationally – by 2030. Around the world, the three main elements of efficient circular agriculture are sustainable intensification of production, getting maximum value from crops (through valorisation of residual flows) and reinvesting some of the profits to enhance the resilience of the agricultural ecosystem. This vision is being worked up into a plan of implementation for the Netherlands on which the House will be informed separately.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/733321493793700840/pdf/114750252017154823ACRfinal.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> House of Representatives 34 952, no. 1.

<sup>8</sup> House of Representatives 35 000 XIV, no. 5.

To achieve food security, it is important that we look at the entire food supply system: a circular system in which people know what healthy food is, whether it is safe, where it comes from, and how and by whom it has been produced. It starts with farmers, with access to land, water, fertilisers, knowledge and financial services, and continues after the harvest with storage, processing, refrigeration, transport, access to markets and a fair price. A third of the food produced globally is currently lost. In developing countries, this occurs mainly at the beginning of the value chain.

Increasing poor people's incomes is another critical factor in achieving global food security, together with efforts to ensure that higher incomes lead to more healthy diets. The agricultural sector has a double role to play in this, as a supplier of food and as an income-generating economic sector. Investments in agricultural production systems that improve innovation and sustainable growth in productivity help reduce hunger and promote economic development.<sup>9</sup>

## **The Netherlands' strengths**

### *Innovative sector*

Thanks to its extensive knowledge of agriculture, water and food value chains, its innovative industry and its excellent international reputation, the Netherlands is in a good position to help achieve sustainable food security, and thus SDG 2. The Netherlands is a leader in sustainable production and nutrition (vegetables, potatoes, fruit and dairy) in particular. Dutch agribusiness is increasingly successful in exporting innovations like sustainable animal housing systems, climate-neutral greenhouses, nature-inclusive agriculture and saline agriculture – including to developing countries. The Netherlands is also one of the world leaders in agricultural finance.

The Netherlands has a strong international position in raw material supply chains, and therefore an interest in making agricultural production more sustainable in other parts of the world too, in combination with strengthening local food security and achieving international goals in the areas of the environment, nature, health and working conditions. Voluntary sector agreements on responsible business conduct in the areas of agriculture and nutrition contribute to this effort.

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<sup>9</sup> 'Getting the policy mix right for global food security and nutrition', *Agriculture Policy Brief*, OECD, February 2019 ([https://issuu.com/oecd.publishing/docs/getting\\_the\\_policy\\_mix\\_right\\_for\\_gl](https://issuu.com/oecd.publishing/docs/getting_the_policy_mix_right_for_gl)).

### **SeedNL in Ethiopia and Nigeria**

The Dutch agriculture and foreign ministries and sector organisation Plantum have set up a public-private partnership known as SeedNL. Its ambition is to strengthen the seed sector in developing countries and emerging markets to increase the productivity of local farmers, and improve access to safe and healthy food. SeedNL will help ensure good, affordable seed is available on the local market, tailored to local demand. Initially, the focus is on Ethiopia and Nigeria.

#### *Partnerships*

The Dutch government is working to consolidate the international position of Dutch knowledge and expertise and connect with local partners, in the interests both of local food security and of Dutch earning potential. The foreign and agriculture ministries, the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO.nl) and the embassies, including the network of agricultural counsellors, are working together to achieve this goal. Working on inclusive, transparent partnerships based on local policy frameworks and institutions has become the Netherlands' hallmark. It is also often necessary to improve the enabling environment – legislation and access to financial and other services, for example – so that companies and civil society organisations can operate more effectively and thus contribute to local development.

#### *Demonstrable impact*

The Food Security Policy Review 2012-2016 published recently by the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB) found that Dutch efforts have led to substantial increases in agricultural production and income, an improvement in the business climate and better nutrition for vulnerable groups.<sup>10</sup> See also the annual reports on results per target group.<sup>11</sup> With reference to the SDG 2 targets, it can be concluded that the Netherlands is contributing significantly towards ending food insecurity and moving the agricultural sector forward in developing countries. In recent years, efforts to enhance food security have also increasingly addressed climate and biodiversity concerns. This will lead to more results in the area of ecological sustainability.

### **The agenda for the coming years**

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<sup>10</sup> House of Representatives 34 124, no. 15.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.dutchdevelopmentresults.nl/>.

Based on the above, the government has drawn the following conclusions regarding the Dutch approach to food security over the coming years.

#### *Continue with SDG 2*

Firstly, the Netherlands will continue to pursue its current food security policy goals, guided by SDG 2 (Parliamentary Paper 33625, no. 147). These goals are as follows:<sup>12</sup>

1. End hunger and malnutrition (SDGs 2.1 and 2.2), with the Netherlands aiming for a sustainable improvement in the nutritional status of 32 million young children over the period 2016-2030;
2. Promote inclusive and sustainable growth in the agricultural sector (SDG 2.3), with the Netherlands aiming for a sustainable increase in productivity and income for eight million small-scale food producers over the period 2016-2030;
3. Achieve ecologically sustainable food production systems (SDGs 2.4 and 2.5), with the Netherlands aiming for the ecologically sustainable use of eight million hectares of agricultural land over the period 2016-2030.

Efforts to secure land (use) rights, particularly for women and young people, will also continue unabated. Guaranteed land (use) rights are a vital prerequisite for sustainable agricultural development and local food security.

#### *Making food systems more sustainable*

Achieving food security means ensuring a growing global population has a healthy diet based on sustainable food systems. However, the current food system poses a threat both to humans and to the planet. Transformation of this system is an absolute condition to achieve the SDGs and implement the Paris Agreement. In particular, this will mean drastically reducing global consumption of animal protein, while at the same time recognising that in many parts of the world where malnourishment is rife, animal products are vital for a proper diet.<sup>13</sup> Any effort to boost food security must be viewed in conjunction with this challenge. The government will therefore focus on the most important connections between the SDG 2 targets and the other SDGs. Where necessary, therefore, and within the framework of the Multiannual Country Strategies, food systems analyses will be undertaken, leading to (country)context specific priorities. Where possible, action at local level will focus on combinations of nutrition, agriculture, water, nature and renewable energy. For instance,

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<sup>12</sup> These targets are a rough estimate, indicating the Netherlands' contribution to resolving the global issues in question, proportionate to our country's relative international capacity.

<sup>13</sup> [https://eatforum.org/content/uploads/2019/04/EAT-Lancet\\_Commission\\_Summary\\_Report.pdf](https://eatforum.org/content/uploads/2019/04/EAT-Lancet_Commission_Summary_Report.pdf).

using solar energy to power water-efficient irrigation, or introducing clean cooking solutions that improve nutrition and health as well as save wood. Across the board, efforts to achieve food security will at any rate encompass the following three common overarching themes:

- Nutrition

Insufficient and/or insufficiently diverse food leads to malnourishment, a deficiency of micronutrients and obesity (the 'triple burden of malnutrition'). This is particularly unacceptable for young children, as it causes them lifelong harm. Furthermore, this is a problem that can be solved, and doing so would produce great social and economic benefits. Both the quality and the safety of food are key concerns.

For this reason, the government's food security policy will centre on food-insecure consumers, and particularly malnourished young children and young mothers and prospective mothers, in accordance with the recommendation in the IOB policy review mentioned above. Specifically, this means that food security activities aimed at increasing productivity and/or ecological sustainability will have to contribute as much as possible to safe, healthy nutrition. Where relevant, feasible and efficient, activities not directly linked to food security will also address issues relating to nutrition. Specifically with a view to food safety, the Netherlands will continue to contribute to the Codex Alimentarius Commission, set up by the UN to establish global standards and guidelines for safe food.

- Gender

The stronger young women's position, the fewer malnourished children there will be.<sup>14</sup> The more access women have to land and means of production, the more food there will be.<sup>15</sup> The higher women's income, the better fed their children will be.<sup>16</sup> It is clear by now that the empowerment of women, besides being an aim in itself, is also a prerequisite for a world without hunger. Experience shows, however, that this knowledge does not automatically lead to an effective gender response in food security activities.

In concrete terms, each food security programme will be subjected to a gender analysis, with a focus on specific action and envisioned results in terms of inclusion, wellbeing and power relationships. The rule is that results must be achieved at one or more levels.

- Jobs

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/what-we-do/nutrition/adolescent-and-womens-nutrition>.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.fao.org/3/ca1506en/CA1506EN.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> Idem.

Investment in local food production (arable and horticultural production, livestock farming and fisheries) is a powerful tool for combating poverty, hunger and malnourishment and instigating economic development. Sustainable intensification of primary production and processing in value chains can create jobs, income and added value in rural areas. Digital technologies bring new opportunities, particularly in terms of making jobs in agriculture more attractive to young people. Urbanisation – especially the growth of small towns in rural areas – creates new local markets. Acknowledged land use rights, access to means of production and financial services, an open and safe business climate – particularly for women – and free trade at local and regional level are important prerequisites, as are job-oriented vocational education and training for young people. Strong farmers' associations and cooperatives play a key role.

Specifically, in accordance with a recommendation in the IOB policy review, in this respect a distinction will be made between different groups of small producers (family farms): those who have the potential to scale up commercially, those who can find work outside primary food production, and those who will for the time being continue to depend on primary food production for their subsistence. Investments to develop agriculture will focus mainly on the first of these groups (and within that, on women): family farms and parties in the value chain that can or have the potential to serve local demand and/or create local jobs. Ultimately, these investments will also benefit the other two groups in the form of new jobs and innovations for the agrifood sector as a whole.

In making the transition to more sustainable and circular food systems the government will focus on:

- Innovation

Besides agricultural products, the Netherlands is also exporting more and more knowledge and expertise. The 'Dutch Diamond approach' is a metaphor for the collaboration between companies, knowledge institutions, civil society organisations and government, which has been the basis for the successful development of the Dutch food and agricultural sector since the Second World War. This approach has become an example to be followed internationally. Adopting it in developing countries in the context of small-scale agriculture requires intensive exchange of local knowledge and experience. One good example is digitalisation in agriculture. Customised digital services can be a catalyst for higher productivity and incomes, climate resilience and reaching young people.

### **‘Garbal’ information service – the satnav for pastoralists in Mali**

The impact of climate change and lack of security are affecting the mobility of pastoralists in the Sahel. Cattle herders move between areas with enough water and vegetation, and prefer to avoid agricultural land in order not to become embroiled in conflicts with farmers. The Netherlands Development Organisation SNV and its partners have developed the Garbal information service as part of their G4AW project STAMP (Sustainable Technology Adaptation for Mali’s Pastoralists). Satellites gather information on water and vegetation in the entire country. Pastoralists can contact a call centre to obtain advice on the best route to good pasture, avoiding agricultural zones. They can also request information on market prices.

- **Climate adaptation**

Food systems are sustainable only if the ecosystems they are associated with remain intact. Those ecosystems are under great pressure locally as they are converted to human uses, or become polluted and depleted, causing species to die out at an unprecedented rate.<sup>17</sup> The planet is reaching its ecological limits, with all the attendant risks.<sup>18</sup> In addition, climate change poses irreversible threats to ecosystems and people. Higher temperatures, changes in the seasons, more extreme weather conditions, changing rainfall (more rain, less rain, less predictable pattern), sea-level rise and warmer oceans are reducing agricultural yields and soil fertility, leading to more soil erosion and salinisation and causing changes in the prevalence and types of plant and animal diseases. The effects of these developments have been noticeable for some time at a local level, and are particularly felt in small-scale agricultural food production in vulnerable regions. Failure to adapt to the changing climate will cause a decline in farmers’ productivity and incomes, and the food security situation in many of these regions will become untenable.

This means that any investment in agricultural food production will have to be based on both current and predicted climatic conditions. Uncertainty about the latter, in particular, makes it important to invest in enhancing the resilience and adaptive capacity of small-scale producers. These efforts will focus on ‘no-regret’ options, such as better weather forecasts (using IT), new technologies and innovations that reduce risks and increase opportunities (e.g. drought-, disease- or salt-tolerant crops and agricultural insurance), and adoption of climate-smart practices that have already been proven in the field (e.g. planting trees and ground cover, improved agricultural water management, use of water-

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.ipbes.net/news/ipbes-global-assessment-summary-policymakers-pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/347/6223/1259855>.



efficient techniques, improved drainage and diversification). At international level the Netherlands will continue to play a leading role in the Global Alliance for Climate-Smart Agriculture and will table this issue within the Global Center on Adaptation and the Global Commission on Adaptation.

- **Food losses**

A third of the food produced globally is lost. In developing countries this mainly occurs at the start of the value chain, due to post-harvest losses. Reducing food losses in the world's poorest countries would go a considerable way to improving food security and reducing hunger, and would also raise producers' incomes, lift unnecessary pressure on natural resources, and reduce energy wastage and greenhouse gas emissions.

The government regards this as an opportunity for Dutch industry to contribute to this vital transition in the global agricultural sector. Efforts in terms of innovation, training and knowledge dissemination for the transition to circular agriculture will also tackle food losses.

#### **Food Smart Facility**

The Netherlands, Rabobank, the World Bank, IFAD, FAO and the Rockefeller Foundation are collaborating closely on the development of a global framework to tackle food loss. This includes 'country heat maps', which show losses within the main food production chains in each country and can thus identify scope for action and investment.

#### *Specific focus areas*

Besides the above broad-ranging themes, the government will also devote specific attention to two sectors that are often overlooked, but are nevertheless vital to sustainable food systems: plant and animal breeding, and fisheries.

- **Plant and animal breeding**

The availability of good, diverse breeding and seed stock, both for cultivation and for further improvement, is vital for food production. Agrobiodiversity and sustainable use of genetic resources are absolutely crucial for global food security, particularly in the longer term, and to cope with a changing climate.

Specifically, therefore, the Netherlands is working to strengthen the seed industry in a number of countries, so that local farmers have access to good-quality seed stock. In a multilateral context, the Netherlands is contributing to the preservation and improvement

of genetic material for global food production and, in the context of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, advocates a global system that ensures sustainable and responsible access to genetic resources and sharing of the benefits of their use.

- Oceans and fisheries

Since 1961 fish consumption worldwide has increased at twice the rate of population growth. The sector is responsible for feeding and employing millions of people in developing countries. But the industry is not without its problems: 33% of global fish stocks are overfished.

The UN is working on sustainable use of the oceans and, in particular, marine biodiversity. The Netherlands also supports FAO's Blue Growth Initiative, which takes a multi-sectoral approach to aquatic resource management, in which ecologically sustainable use of oceans, inland waters and wetlands also delivers social and economic benefits.

#### *Focus on the most vulnerable regions*

In line with the policy document 'Investing in Global Prospects', and based on the understanding that food insecurity is increasingly concentrated in areas that are susceptible to conflict and ecologically fragile, Dutch development cooperation, and therefore also efforts to achieve food security, will shift to three focus regions: the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Efforts include preventive investment in making food systems more resilient, maintaining them during crises or restoring their functioning afterwards, taking regional trade relations into account. This is not a matter of quick wins. Achieving results in these vulnerable regions requires careful programming, learning and adaptation, and a long-term presence. Besides, the Netherlands will also continue efforts in other countries where it is possible to make a significant improvement to food systems and contribute to SDG 2.

#### **Coordination and resources**

Coordination of international policy and action on food security (SDG 2) is spread among different arenas, within the UN agencies (FAO, WFP, IFAD, CFS, UNICEF) as well as multi-stakeholder coalitions and platforms (Scaling Up Nutrition Movement, the World Economic Forum System Initiative on Shaping the Future of Food, the Global Alliance for Climate-Smart Agriculture, the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)

and the recent Food Systems Dialogues). This fragmentation has proven inadequate in the face of the alarming developments that threaten global food production (pollution, resource depletion, salinisation, climate change, deforestation and marine dead zones) and nutrition (hunger, lack of micronutrients and obesity). There are growing calls for a more streamlined and effective structure for achieving the SDG 2 targets, based on scientific consensus. The Netherlands shares these concerns and will seek to increase its influence in this debate, building on our internationally acknowledged position and added value in collaboration with global partners.

Coordination could be improved in the Netherlands itself, too. The Netherlands has world-class institutions for education and research and can contribute a great deal of added value, innovative capacity and knowledge, both in developing countries – through cooperation with local institutions – and through education in the Netherlands, for instance, by training international agricultural researchers in Wageningen. Joint Dutch efforts for food security could make the difference internationally. With this in mind, recently the Netherlands Global Food Partnership has been initiated, an umbrella initiative in which existing organisations and networks will be able to pool and mobilise their knowledge and expertise, thus taking Dutch efforts for global food security to the next level.

The ODA resources earmarked for food security represent the core of the funding available for achieving the policy set out in this letter, although a growing contribution is financed from other budgets (including non-ODA resources), such as for agricultural education and research. The Netherlands is seeking, in collaboration with international partners, to achieve a balanced distribution of impact over the result areas of SDG 2 (nutrition, food production and ecological sustainability), with specific attention to the connections between the goals and overarching themes mentioned in this letter.

### **Closing remarks**

The government is aware that the efforts described in this letter will place great demands on the implementation capacity of partner organisations both in the Netherlands and elsewhere. There are no fixed recipes or straight lines that lead to global food security. Every day we encounter new complications and crises, but also new solutions and opportunities. In this dynamic context, it is key to strike a good balance between the ability to produce results and the ability to adapt, between scaling up what works and responding to new challenges. Cooperating with partners who excel at this will provide the best guarantee that the Netherlands makes its maximum contribution to a world without hunger and malnutrition.