

Summary of the Letter of 13 November 2018 from the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation to the House of Representatives on the focus regions of development cooperation policy (West Africa/the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, the Middle East and North Africa). The full text of the letter (in Dutch) can be found at: <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/ministeries/ministerie-van-buitenlandse-zaken/documenten/kamerstukken/2018/11/13/kamerbrief-focusregios-en-andere-nota-onderwerpen>

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The Netherlands' bilateral development policy for specific countries is summarised below.

Broad SDG-based relationship

In a limited number of countries, Dutch efforts will broadly address a range of priority development themes/SDGs. These countries are in general underdeveloped, as evidenced by their position on the Human Development Index and their limited progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In these countries, the Netherlands' bilateral programmes consist of a selection of activities in the areas of education, employment, women's rights, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), food, water, climate and the rule of law. Creating prospects for young people and women is a key objective. For countries in the focus regions, bilateral efforts in these areas will be stepped up and expanded if possible. Often a large delegated budget managed by the mission will be available, alongside the country-specific programmes managed centrally by the ministry in The Hague.

Within the focus regions, the existing close bilateral partnerships with **Ethiopia, Mali, the Palestinian Territories, South Sudan and Uganda** will be continued, although some adjustments will be made in line with the new policy priorities. While **Yemen** was a development cooperation partner country¹ in the previous policy and is eligible for a broad SDG-based relationship, the present armed conflict makes such a broad relationship impossible.

In the Sahel region, a new broad SDG-based relationship will gradually be developed with **Niger** and **Burkina Faso**. In these countries the Netherlands will expressly seek to align its efforts with other donors' existing programmes in order to increase their impact and prevent fragmentation of international efforts. Important factors in selecting these two countries were that they are among the world's poorest countries and are situated in an unstable region, where it is vital to invest in future prospects for the fast-growing population. Building a broader development relationship with Niger and Burkina Faso also ties in with the Netherlands' involvement in the G5 Sahel platform. Supported by countries including France and Germany, the G5 Sahel (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Niger and Mauritania) is jointly tackling transboundary security problems. It is also working with several donors in the framework of the Sahel Alliance, established in 2018, to address the underlying problems. The Netherlands participates in the Alliance.

The Netherlands will continue its broad development relationship with **Afghanistan** and **Burundi**, even though they fall outside the focus regions. The population of Burundi will continue to benefit from Dutch programmes aimed at strengthening the rule of law, food security and SRHR. In Afghanistan, the Netherlands is working to enhance stability and development through cooperation with the international community and through programmes in areas like security and the rule of law, socioeconomic development and the cross-cutting themes of gender and migration.

Specific development objectives

¹ Development policy under previous governments referred to 15 'partner countries', a term indicating that the Netherlands maintained a close bilateral development cooperation relationship with them. These countries were: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Benin, Burundi, Ethiopia, Ghana, Indonesia, Kenya, Mali, Mozambique, Palestinian Territories, Rwanda, South Sudan, Uganda and Yemen. The term 'partner country' is no longer used in the new policy.

Development cooperation efforts in this category of countries will target specific goals. A broad development cooperation relationship addressing multiple themes will not generally be pursued in countries in this category, many of which are middle-income countries. With the exception of the 'focus countries' identified in the coalition agreement (Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon), the amount of Dutch development funding made available for this category of countries will generally be more modest than for the countries listed above to which the broader development cooperation policy is being applied.

Two countries situated in a focus region and falling into this category are **Lebanon** and **Jordan**. In these two countries, Dutch development policy primarily aims to contribute to the reception and protection of the millions of refugees from the region. In that light, the Netherlands mainly supports programmes for refugees and host communities aimed at improving access to education and creating more opportunities for earning an income. The Netherlands is also closely involved in developments in these countries through its general foreign policy.

The objectives of Dutch development policy in **Iraq** are reconstruction and stability, with a special focus on the return of displaced people.

Additionally, economic diplomacy in Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq is aimed at strengthening stability and economic resilience. The government determines for each focus country separately how the knowledge and expertise of the Dutch private sector could contribute to this.

Dutch bilateral development policy for **Tunisia** is aimed primarily at combating instability. To this end activities addressing employment and security and rule of law are envisaged. With the same motive, development efforts in **Egypt** are focused on reception in the region for refugees and displaced people, and water/food security issues.

In the Horn of Africa, the Netherlands seeks primarily to enhance stability in **Somalia** through programmes on security and rule of law. In **Kenya**, a former partner country, the gradual scaling down of development activities with delegated funds will continue, in accordance with decisions made by the previous government.² This does not apply to programmes that contribute to the transition from aid to trade. Specific programmes relating to the country's regional role in the Horn of Africa (in promoting stability) and the regional reception of refugees will be maintained or expanded.

Outside the focus regions, the ongoing transition from aid to trade will be continued in **Bangladesh**. Within the objective of promoting more sustainable production, special attention will be paid to the position of women, including in the textile industry. Development funding for activities addressing themes unrelated to the productive sectors will be gradually phased out.

The once-close development relationship with **Benin** and **Mozambique**, neither of which are situated in the focus regions, will also be scaled back. In both countries, delegated funding for one single theme (respectively food security and water) will continue, while funding of activities in other areas will be gradually reduced or phased out in the years ahead.

The regional programme for the **Great Lakes Region**, aimed primarily at enhancing stability and rule of law, will be continued.

Role of development cooperation within general foreign policy

In addition to policy in the above-mentioned countries in the focus regions, bilateral development instruments may be deployed to a limited extent in other focus-region countries as part of an integrated foreign policy strategy. Poor security, instability and irregular migration are all possible reasons for using modest development cooperation resources to broaden the Netherlands' bilateral relationship with them. These bilateral Dutch efforts will be weighed against the often considerable EU funds available to the Southern Neighbourhood countries around the Mediterranean Sea under the European Neighbourhood Policy.

² Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives 2015-2016, 33625, no. 226.

Mauritania and **Chad**, like Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, are members of the G5 Sahel group. Dutch development efforts in these countries will generally consist of modest financial contributions to existing international initiatives. To support regional Sahel policy and broader foreign policy objectives, **Senegal** will also receive limited development funding for specific purposes.

Nigeria is a political and economic powerhouse in West Africa, and a significant factor for the nearby Sahel countries in particular. In light of this, the Netherlands seeks to build a broad-based bilateral relationship with Nigeria. This also encompasses trade, and some targeted bilateral development cooperation efforts.

Development efforts in **Sudan** tie in with the government-wide strategy on irregular migration and supporting refugees, displaced people and host communities. There will be no broad development relationship with Sudan and no funding will be channelled via the current government.

In view of the government-wide strategy on irregular migration in particular, some development resources will be allocated to **Algeria**, **Libya** and **Morocco**. In Libya, for instance, the government's focus will be on returning stranded migrants to their country of origin, working in cooperation with the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The EU is a major source of external finance for these countries. With regard to economic ties, Algeria and Morocco – like Egypt and Tunisia – are among the top 25 countries with which the Netherlands wants to build stronger trade relations, specifically including North Africa as a region.

Phasing out of bilateral development cooperation

During its current term of office, the government will phase out bilateral support through delegated funds in the former partner countries **Ghana**, **Indonesia** and **Rwanda** (none of which are in the focus regions). With regard to Ghana and Indonesia, this process began under the previous government, with a view to completion by 2020.³ Parallel to this process, the Netherlands is working to deepen its economic relationship with these countries. Agreement on phasing out the development relationship with Rwanda was reached with Parliament on 28 June 2018 during the debate on the government's new policy agenda, with 2022 as the envisaged completion date. Due care will be taken in phasing out programmes, and existing commitments will be honoured.

These and other developing countries can still benefit from Dutch development funding through centrally managed thematic programmes that are not country-specific in design. Examples include general programmes for private sector development, SRHR, climate finance and partnerships with civil society. The focus of these centrally managed thematic programmes will gradually shift towards specific countries in the focus regions, at least where this is realistic in view of a programme's goals and there is scope for achieving the programmes' goals in fragile settings.

³ Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives 2015-2016, 33 625, no. 226.