



CONSULTATION ON FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY, DUTCH MFA

1. What are current best practices implemented by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs for protecting and/or promoting women's and LGBTQI+ rights and gender equality?

- ★ The MFA has been a global innovator and front-runner in gender equality, shifting power and championing Southern leadership. Successive Dutch governments have played a leading role in supporting women's and feminist movements worldwide through initiating groundbreaking funding mechanisms, from the MDG3 Fund to the Leading from the South Fund and Power of Women. Through these, the MFA has been a thought leader among donor countries.
- ★ It has played a key role in not just funding but mobilising more resources for women's and feminist movements worldwide by being a driving force behind new multi-stakeholder initiatives like the Alliance for Feminist Movements and the Equal Rights Coalition, stimulating other governments to step up their commitment. Its leadership and unequivocal support for sex workers' rights and structurally excluded women in UN spaces has had significant impact for their visibility, especially given the attack on women's rights in these multilateral spaces.
- ★ The MFA not only talked, but acted. Language on shifting power is embedded in the actual policy and funding frameworks. A good example is the effort to devolve power to Global South-led partnerships, including the Leading from the South Fund and opening up general civil society funding streams to feminist consortia and networks for and by communities that are structurally excluded.

- ★ This is supported by being in it for the long haul: the government is committed to societal transformation and structural change (as visible in the Theory of Change) with a recognised role of communities to have voice and agency. It does so by providing sustained, long-term committed funding to community-led organisations and setting up a range of funding mechanisms that ensure accessibility for both small and large women's rights organisations to quality funding.
- ★ The commitment to a gender transformative approach and the establishment of the Gender and Women's Rights Task Force.

2. **What are key weaknesses regarding protecting and/or promoting women's and LGBTIQ+ rights and gender equality within the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs' policies and implementation that would need strengthening?**

- ★ The tension between a rights-based approach and an instrumentalist approach has not been resolved - for example, theories of change centre societal transformation but the practice of monitoring and evaluating implementation remains instrumentalist. The challenge here seems to be the harmonisation of a feminist perspective that recognises the complexity of measuring change and transformation processes.
- ★ There is limited understanding of what decolonisation and an intersectional approach mean for Dutch foreign policy and their funding support to feminist movements both domestically and globally.

Policy incoherence

- ★ There is a clear inconsistency between domestic and foreign policies, e.g. sex workers' rights. The domestic Dutch policy is leaning towards criminalisation of sex work which is not in line with its firm international support of sex workers' rights. There is also insufficient follow up at national level to recommendations from intergovernmental bodies overseeing the implementation of human rights treaties, such as CEDAW, the UPR, the European Gender Equality Strategy and the Istanbul Convention. Insufficiently protecting or advancing the rights of structurally excluded communities in the Netherlands undermines the credibility of the Dutch government when advocating for the rights and protection of those same communities elsewhere.
- ★ Dutch support in different policy areas produces contradictory results. Current policies and practices continue to allow for example corporate tax regulations, arms trade and support and investment of dutch companies engaging in fossil industries and extractive projects that harm local communities, their livelihoods and human rights. The current trade policy undermines the government's efforts to contribute to gender equality, human rights, shifting the power, sustainable economic development, its climate ambitions and the energy transition. The Dutch government is still blocking the legally-binding UN instrument on transnational corporations and human rights.

National interests and corporate capture

- ★ Current Dutch foreign policies are strongly focused on national security (including a focus on short-term relative stability) and economic self-interest, as opposed to a

long-term holistic approach to sustainable development. The interests of Dutch companies and the Dutch economy seem to prevail over other priorities. In addition development funding is being redirected to financing the Dutch asylum system, which falls short of treating refugees and migrants with dignity and respect and meeting international human rights standards.

- ★ There is an increased risk in current Dutch foreign policies of corporate capture - it is imperative to pay close attention to power dynamics, especially as enthusiasm increases for multi-stakeholder spaces that include governments, activists, and private companies. If activists, (women-led) civil society organisations and feminist networks are not actively involved in the planning, guidance, supervision/monitoring and evaluation of programmes developed/work done in these spaces, double standards will continue to undermine the principles and effectiveness of Dutch FFP. Moreover, current Dutch foreign policies will then continue to support neo-liberal capitalist economies and financial systems that contribute to exploitation and inequity.

3. What should be the ambition of a Dutch Feminist Foreign Policy? What should be the short and long term priorities?

- ★ Be bold: go beyond the narrow frame of short policy windows to be able to better respond to structural and long term problems such as growing economic injustice, authoritarianism, and climate destruction. Build on what is working well now and scale up - do not present what has been done to date as FFP!

- ★ Aspire for policy and funding coherence across all relevant foreign policy areas, e.g. defence, finance, trade, asylum. Be brave and do not avoid tensions where interests of different stakeholders, e.g. the corporate sector, might clash. How can all stakeholders be engaged in working for a sustainable future of the planet that includes and cares for all, while keeping the needs of those most affected by the policies at the forefront?

- ★ Stay a front-runner on the global stage in championing the work of and funding for women's rights and feminist movements and play and active role in educating and rallying other governments and funders to do the same.

- ★ Be a bold donor by setting an ambitious target of 50% of programmes and consortia having a lead-organisation from the Global South and actively engaging communities in funding and investment decisions that affect them.

- ★ Make a commitment to decolonise foreign policy and be explicitly anti-racist: (Foreign) policies are only feminist if they acknowledge colonial legacies, the resulting power imbalances between the Global North and Global South as well as the institutions that are maintaining these imbalances e.g. international financial institutions or how the global economy is organised. FFP needs to recognise and actively counter racism, acknowledging and disrupting unequal power structures at



all levels. The government can do this by actively involving communities impacted by its policies and investments in policy making and decision making processes.

- ★ Ensure that all MFA efforts and investments build on the expressed local needs and already existing initiatives and that local civil society, in particular women's rights organisations and feminist movements, are leading decision making.

4. What should be key elements of a Dutch Feminist Foreign Policy?

Approach

- ★ Gender-transformative: Addressing and challenging systems that maintain power inequalities in societies and that structurally exclude people and communities. FFP requires examining the gendered impact of all policy areas, including defence, finance, asylum, climate, trade, and how they contribute to keeping power inequities alive. A gender-transformative approach means tackling the root causes of these structural inequities and challenging the system and institutions itself.
- ★ This includes applying an intersectional lens recognising that in addition to gender, women and girls, non-binary, gender non-conforming, trans and intersex people can face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, stigma and violence because of their race, class, caste, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, religion, (dis)ability or any other factor.
- ★ Respond to the specific needs of women in all their diversity during crisis situations and in areas of conflict, including in humanitarian assistance, migration, safety and security, peace processes and conflict prevention. This response has to be sustained in time, always looking out that the response does not deepen previous situations of violence and inequality, and rather helps to transform those into better conditions for women.

Policy Coherence

- ★ This means looking at funding and policy decisions holistically taking the diversity of oppressions and impact on different communities into account, remedying contradictions and incoherence.

Resourcing

- ★ Allocate more flexible, long-term and core funding that is fit for purpose and directly accessible to feminist and women's rights organizations and movements. Build on lessons learned from your funding instruments and evaluations, as well as the recent OECD Gender Guidance, that references the critical role women's rights organisations - and women's funds - play in delivering transformative change and lasting results.
- ★ Increase investments in gender equality as a principle and funded goal. Using the OECD DAC marker, ensure at least 80% of projects have gender equality as a significant component, and 20% programs have gender equality as a principal component.
- ★ Set an ambitious target for increasing ODA spending directly to women's rights organisations. Example targets: 5% of ODA as advised by IWDA, and allocate 10% of gender-equality principal funding directly to women's funds as Prospera advises.

- ★ Re-examine your approach to risk. The MFA can be more courageous and ensure that its approach to risk is appropriate for the size of grants as well as ensure that the ability to test new ideas and pivot due to shifts in context are not made impossible. This includes streamlining and simplifying application and reporting requirements.

Accountability and community engagement

- ★ Accountability: the Dutch government should carry responsibility for what happens in their name and with their investments. Act as an ally in solidarity with and accountable to movements and communities affected.
- ★ Due diligence across all its foreign policies and investments means ensuring that funded projects honour human rights, are free from violence and menace, are accountable to community decisions, and uphold environmental, gender and labour standards.
- ★ Community engagement and the right to say NO: FFP means that the government will ensure that in any projects that they invest in the communities whose land, livelihood and resources are impacted, are proactively and meaningfully engaged in decision making, including actively engaging women in the community, and that their decisions and consent (or lack thereof) are respected.
- ★ Include specific conditions on meaningful engagement of the local community and monitoring and reporting requirements in investment loans, as well as clauses that allow the suspension of the agreement if these are not met.
- ★ Engagement of Southern-based communities and WHRDs in policymaking and throughout the implementation cycle of different policy areas.

5. What should the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs aspire to do differently once a Feminist Foreign Policy is in place?

- ★ Ensure gender is broadly understood and recognised as going beyond a binary men versus women approach. Be inclusive of non-binary, gender non-conforming, trans and intersex people in your approach to gender and feminism and apply an intersectional lens.
- ★ Be intentional about how the work between different departments and areas of foreign policy is interlinked. Practically, this means ensuring each area of FFP (trade, development finance, security, health, etc) is able to deliver results without being undermined by funding or practices being pursued in other areas. At a minimum, uphold the principle of 'do no harm' in all efforts and investments as a basic minimum standard. Ensure that all policies comply with international human rights obligations, including the right of free, prior and informed consent of communities. Ensure that the work to advance human rights is not undermined by actions and funding in other areas, like trade and security. Provide adequate and effective mechanisms and remedies for grievances and for violations of human rights, labour and environmental standards, to address risk and ensure protection.
- ★ Show leadership and vision by supporting and investing in the development and testing of alternative economic models that lead to just economies and address the

root causes of poverty, inequalities and exclusion. These can ensure that international trade advances gender equality and women's rights by expanding decent work opportunities for women and contributing to sustainable and equitable economic development. Women's rights organisations and feminist groups in many different contexts have developed and successfully tested alternative economic models that benefit entire communities and are more sustainable for communities, bio-diversity, resources and future generations.

- ★ Identify the multiple instances of conflict of interests of the private sector in the sphere of development and where achievement of SDGs and the public good are at risk. These must be transparent, and access and influence of the private sector to decision-making and policy processes intended for public rather than private interest should be limited accordingly.
- ★ Acknowledge the limitations and potential harms of multi stakeholder approaches and of corporate capture in multilateral institutions, and address the harm done to SDG 5 and other SDGs by public-private partnerships.
- ★ Adopt a proactive role on endorsing the legally-binding UN instrument on transnational corporations and human rights, and advocate for the same shift with other EU Member States and with the EU as a bloc. Gender-responsive mechanisms for corporate accountability, prevention of corporate human rights abuses, access to justice and compensation must be made accessible for communities impacted by Dutch public and private operations.
- ★ Engage with other OECD countries, the EU, and international institutions (like the WTO, UNFCCC and international financial institutions) to catalyse change at international levels. Be intentional about using your position as a champion to influence peer donor countries to step up and do more and better in supporting feminist movements.
- ★ Be mindful not to be led by narrowly defined national interests given the global nature of the crises facing the world today.

6. What do you think is needed to successfully implement a Feminist Foreign Policy?

★ Political leadership: The government should be able to explain that feminism is about everyone and creates a better world for all. All involved ministers and ambassadors need to internalise what FFP and feminism mean and be able to promote and defend the policy internally and externally. Develop a clear, shared understanding of the terminology and approach. Ensure an inclusive view of feminism; gender does not equal women and feminism isn't just about gender.

★ Meaningful engagement and accountability: Involve local women-led organisations and communities meaningfully wherever they are impacted.



Strengthen consultation processes, building this in more intentionally throughout the process of design as well as implementation. To ensure effective accountability the MFA should set up a mechanism to be guided and advised on FFP by feminists. Consider creating an independent council to advise the MFA on FFP, particularly on moving from intent to practice and overcoming barriers to implementation. This council would be comprised of a range of feminist leaders, particularly those from the Global South and East who are directly impacted by FFP.

- ★ Human resources and capacity: Provide dedicated staff and necessary resources, don't make this work that people can opt out from in their jobs. Ensure gender focal points are well resourced rather than having to do that work on top of their other tasks. Ensure senior management is responsible for the management of and accountability of gender mainstreaming of programmes. As the IOB evaluation on gender mainstreaming advised, ensure gender expertise is available to and included in the posts of DGs of all Ministries. Provide ongoing capacity building of staff by integrating into the curriculum of the training of new diplomats and onboarding of new colleagues e.g. include in the annual human rights training.
- ★ Improved policy coherence: Focus on breaking down silos to ensure cross-departmental collaboration and policy coherence across all areas of international cooperation, foreign trade and investment, climate and sustainable economic development, and security. The Netherlands can commit to policy coherence for sustainable development by ensuring all policy areas and investments contribute to and uphold gender justice, human rights, climate justice and work to bring about structural change that gets at the roots of injustice and inequality.
- ★ FFP provides a clear accountability framework. This includes: timelines, indicators, feedback loops with clear moments built in for external stakeholders - in particular Southern-based communities affected by the different policies - to be able to evaluate together with the Dutch government and to hold the government to account.

7. What is needed to ensure collaboration between different Ministries to achieve a Feminist Foreign Policy?

- ★ Set up an Interdepartmental Working Group or Task Force: this could be an oversight board similar to the NAP 1325 oversight board, consisting of all ministries responsible for the implementation of the national action plan (MFA, Defence, Justice & Security, Education, Health) and civil society representation
- ★ 1 Minister with final responsibility to coordinate and report: the Minister of Foreign Affairs, as to avoid this being pushed to the Minister for International Trade & Development Cooperation, accidentally 'downgrading' the policy to additional support for gender equality within the existing policy framework.
- ★ Prioritise policy coherence as a non-negotiable - it means changing the way 'things have always been done' and plan for dealing with resistance and opposition. For example, it will be critical to ensure Dutch and international trade, agricultural and

investment policies are fully aligned with the Paris agreement and Dutch commitments to global gender equality.

- ★ Ensure accountability moves up and down across the Ministries and ensure delivering on gender is integrated into job performance assessments. As the IOB evaluation on gender mainstreaming advises, conduct regular participatory organisational gender audits within the MFA; consider expanding to other Ministries as well.
- ★ Annual report to parliament and the senate on the implementation of FFP, in which all responsible ministries need to report. Ensure civil society can review and provide input as well.

8. Is there any other input you would like to give in relation to Feminist Foreign Policy?

Consultations are an important element of meaningful engagement of civil society and the communities impacted. This includes timely informing stakeholders to ensure they have ample time to adequately prepare their input and consult others who have less access to these consultations and dialogues with a donor government. In addition transparency about how input will be used, a clear time frame and what feedback loops will be organised contribute to a better quality process. From FFP processes in other countries the government can draw lessons on how to improve not only consultations, but set up regular engagement with civil society for frequent evaluation, accountability and further shaping and implementing of FFP and policies related.

