

Good practices and lessons learned from the diverse funding modalities in the field of women's rights and gender equality: the Dutch example

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Introduction

Dutch development cooperation policy has a long history of providing support for women's rights and gender equality worldwide. It has used a range of instruments for this purpose over the past several decades, at both central government and through its embassies. While funding priorities have changed over the years, some themes have been policy constants and are still part of the current focus. These include empowering women and strengthening their leadership, promoting women's economic participation (access to work) and political participation, and combating violence against women. These policies aim to bring about tangible changes and to enhance the rights and opportunities of women and girls in the Global South. Another constant is the use of a mix of instruments and programmes, both targeting specific activities and mainstreaming gender in other activities. At the same time, there have been shifts in the forms of support for strengthening women's organisations, movements and networks. This paper will briefly discuss the modalities and instruments that have been used, the choices that have been made, and the lessons that have been learned.

Funding modalities

There has always been huge demand for financial support for programmes on women's rights and gender equality, to help reach the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and more recently the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

MDG3 Fund and FLOW I Fund

The policy frameworks of the MDG3 Fund and its successor, Funding Leadership and Opportunities for Women (FLOW I), aimed to reduce poverty by promoting gender equality, equal rights, and opportunities for and empowerment of women through programmes on political participation, economic participation, property and land rights, and eliminating violence against women. The MDG3 Fund was primarily meant for organisations in developing countries, including businesses, while organisations based in DAC member countries and working in developing countries – either Dutch or international NGOs – could apply for FLOW I funding. Grant proposals had to be for at least €1 million and for no more than €6 million, for a period of four years. Furthermore, 25% of grantees' annual

income had to come from sources other than the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This meant that most of the selected organisations were larger, well-established organisations (mostly INGOs), women's funds and international networks. These organisations funded smaller groups or worked with partner organisations at local level. Feminist movements were generally positive about the MDG3 Fund and FLOW I, because the funding provided reached smaller women's organisations in the South and strengthened these organisations' institutional and organisational capacity.

Both the MDG3 Fund and FLOW I were outsourced and managed by two organisations: PricewaterhouseCoopers, which provided programme management expertise, and Femconsult, which provided specific gender expertise. Policymakers at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs had little direct contact with the grantees, which made it more difficult to build a common knowledge base. Monitoring by the managing organisations focused on ensuring proper expenditure of funds for the work that was done. This meant that reporting focused on input, output and activities. It was difficult to determine whether the programmes actually achieved the intended capacity development, institutional strengthening and societal transformation. Less attention was paid to monitoring changes in social and cultural patterns, norms and values which impede women's empowerment and participation. While there was a general sense that both programmes led to major changes, concrete evidence was difficult to obtain.

FLOW II and Leading from the South

In order to gain more insight into results, it was decided that management and monitoring of FLOW II would not be outsourced and the policy framework was adapted accordingly. As a result, more attention is given to societal transformation and structural changes in norms and values. FLOW II uses a Theory of Change that facilitates monitoring changes of a more qualitative nature. It still has the same policy priorities – enhancing the political and economic participation of women and girls and combating violence against women – but with a specific focus on the most excluded and marginalised groups (poor women, LGBTI women and others who experience multiple forms of discrimination, women with disabilities, HIV-positive women and migrants) and on inequality in power relations.

FLOW II supports organisations that use a strategic and results-based approach to promote an enabling environment for equal opportunities, rights and safety for women and girls in low- and lower-middle-income countries and in certain middle-income countries. Proposals selected for a grant were submitted by Dutch and international civil society organisations, most of which mainstream gender equality and women's rights in their activities but are not themselves women's organisations or movements. This has generated a great deal of discussion about the lack of direct support to organisations based in the Global South.

This discussion led to the establishment of the programme Leading from the South (LFS), which complements FLOW II. LFS supports feminist women's organisations, movements and networks based in the Global South through four women's funds that are also based there. These four funds support small, medium-sized and large organisations, movements and networks that work locally, nationally and/or regionally. The programme falls under the Dutch gender policy but is also related to the Dialogue and Dissent framework, because LFS is specifically meant to strengthen lobbying and advocacy capacity. The programme was not originally intended as a strategic partnership, but discussions with the women's funds made clear that a more strategic partnership would have considerable added value. This gives the funds and grantees useful opportunities to learn from one another and links LFS to other Ministry activities with strategic partners. The 'linking and learning' workshop held as part of Dialogue and Dissent in February 2018 made clear how valuable these exchanges are.

NAP 1325

The policy framework on Women, Peace and Security is part of the agenda for implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which recognises the important role women play in peace processes and in preventing and resolving conflicts. Several ministries and civil society organisations are working together to implement 'Taking a Stand for Women, Peace and Security', the Dutch National Action Plan on Resolution 1325, which relies on a worldwide network of partners. The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs uses the policy framework to shape its cooperation with Dutch organisations that signed the National Action Plan, and to support programmes of Dutch NGO consortia on women, peace and security in eight focus countries.

Other funding modalities

Besides the funding modalities exclusively designed to support women's rights and gender equality, there are programmes within other funding mechanisms that also pursue this goal. These include the strategic partnerships Count Me In! (CMI), Girls Advocacy Alliance (GAA) and the Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action (GAGGA) within the Dialogue and Dissent funding mechanism. Programmes within the Voice funding framework – which is designed to help the most marginalised groups and those that experience the most discrimination – support women who face exploitation, abuse and/or gender-based violence. The Amplify Change funding mechanism supports activities in the field of SRHR, such as those promoting the right to safe abortion, LGBTI rights, comprehensive sexuality education, and an end to child, early and forced marriages and to gender-based violence. All these funds reach out to organisations based in the Global South.

At country level, embassies use delegated funds to implement women's rights programmes. Evaluations of these programmes have generally shown that they are highly valued and have achieved significant results.

Finally, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs strongly supports international diplomacy for women's rights and gender equality by contributing to international programmes like the World Bank's Umbrella Facility for Gender Equality and UN Women, and by promoting women's rights in international negotiations.

Programme funds	MDG3	FLOW I	FLOW II	NAP 1325	Leading from the South	Dialogue & Dissent	VOICE	Amplify Change
Budget	€77 million	€85.5 million	€102 million	€16 million	€40 million	€95 million*	€12.5 million*	€10 million
Period	2008-2011	2012-2015	2016-2020	2016-2020	2016-2020	2016-2020	2016-2021	2017-2020

Table 1: Overview of Dutch funding modalities

* Funding modality that does not specifically address women's rights and gender equality; however, the amount indicated is spent on these themes.

Lessons learned

Combining funding modalities and activities

One of the lessons learned is the need for a gender policy that combines different modalities. Each modality has its own characteristics, reaches specific groups and has different but complementary goals. For this reason, current Dutch policy has three dimensions: mainstreaming gender in other programmes, specific support for women's organisations, and gender diplomacy.

Mainstream organisations have strengthened their capacity to address gender as a key issue in achieving the SDGs and inclusive, sustainable development worldwide. They address gender equality in a wide range of areas. In their contextual analyses they take account of their programmes' possible positive and negative effects on both women and men, and see existing power relations as a major factor in gender inequality. Women's organisations and movements play an especially prominent role in strengthening women's leadership, influencing policy, building the capacity of smaller organisations that deal with particularly sensitive topics, and putting women's rights on the political agenda. They are especially effective in stimulating societal transformation and questioning existing power relations. They do this work mostly at local and national level, aided by advocacy and exchange of experiences at regional and international level. FLOW and Leading from the South help women's organisations link local, regional and global advocacy and activities. Lastly, the Ministry and Dutch embassies abroad use gender diplomacy to promote gender equality as well as effective and inclusive foreign and development cooperation policies. For example, they ensure women's participation in political dialogues, facilitate women's participation in decision-making, and promote women's rights and gender equality in national and international negotiations. By funding and working with women's organisations and NGOs, the Ministry provides them with vital information and knowledge for effective gender diplomacy.

Organisations can benefit from combining service delivery with policy advocacy. Civil society has an important role to play as a watchdog and advocate for political, social and economic change that fosters inclusion and equity. Advocacy can be difficult however without service delivery, which can enhance an organisation's legitimacy.

Linking and learning

Another, equally important lesson learned is the need to include a linking and learning component in each programme. Joint learning and exchanges of experiences, views, ideas, successes and challenges between organisations and across regions not only encourages a more creative and innovative way of working, but also helps people form new networks and join forces. Organisations in both North and South as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have taken part in this process and learned from each other. This has resulted in funding for research into topics, such as sexual diversity in indigenous groups, which are not on the regular research agenda but are relevant to different actors and their situations. The results of such research can generate debates and be used to set agendas on issues that are less visible, less well known or particularly sensitive. New information and knowledge can help demystify traditional beliefs and ideas, and can give women's organisations and movements the evidence they need to change norms, values, attitudes and practices.

Flexibility

Transformative processes are generally difficult to forecast, because they are usually not linear. Logframes that are used for long-term planning and monitoring of programmes and activities do not allow much flexibility. The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs has accordingly opted for the Theory of

Change (ToC) model as a planning and monitoring instrument. This is much more flexible, as it allows the user to regularly analyse the underlying assumptions and consider whether they are still correct or require adaptations or more radical changes. The ToC model focuses more on qualitative results and outcomes than on output and activities. Elaborating a ToC is also part of the learning process, because the instrument is new for everybody. The Ministry has itself devised ToCs for its different policy frameworks and priorities, and has faced the same challenges as its partners.

North and South

The different financing modalities that the Ministry has used over the years have always included a major component on strengthening the capacity of civil society organisations. As a result the partner organisations in the Global South are now much stronger, and are capable of defining and implementing their own policies. Strangely, however, frameworks like FLOW and NAP 1325 still tend to finance programmes in which organisations based in the North take the lead. This is also the case with the Dialogue and Dissent partnerships: only one out of 25 is led by an organisation in the South.

The Ministry recognises the need to shift towards more direct funding of partners in the South. In the first place, these partners have a much greater understanding and knowledge of the local context, of people's demands and needs, and specifically of women's realities. Furthermore, having organisations in the South take the lead in creating change makes change more sustainable. The embassies can play a major role in providing direct support at local level.

This shift will require organisations in the North to change their roles. They can do a great deal to unite and amplify the voices of different women's organisations and movements, and to lobby high-level forums at international level. Smaller women's organisations in the South do not have access to these platforms, so they need intermediaries to make their voices heard. Organisations in the North can also play a role in linking and learning processes, contributing their experiences, strengthening networks and keeping their own countries internationally accountable for the SDG agenda. Strategic collaboration with the Ministry can also help in counteracting the shrinking space for civil society. This is specifically relevant to more sensitive topics within women's rights and gender equality.

The Netherlands has begun to establish strategic partnerships with civil society organisations on a more equal basis instead of just giving grants. A strategic partnership must be based on mutual trust, respect and acknowledgement of each other's identity, roles, responsibilities, expertise, experience and networks. It requires partners to seek opportunities to work together in a complementary way. It also means that opinions can differ, and that criticism and dissent are an accepted part of the relationship. As long as partners are working towards the same ultimate goals, they can take different pathways to reach them. Working in partnership is part of a changing relationship and changing roles. Yet it is still a challenge to establish more strategic partnerships directly with organisations in the South.

Concluding remarks

Theo Sowa of the African Women's Development Fund said at a linking and learning event in February 2018, 'Northern organisations have to learn when to step back, so that other voices can be heard. Stepping back and listening to others contributes to solidarity and sustainable change.' This means a significant change in the ways donors finance civil society organisations, as well as in the roles organisations play in the North and South. The experience of Leading from the South can help define new strategies, roles and financing modalities and ways of establishing different strategic partnerships. This includes more partnerships led from the South and direct funding of organisations

based in the South. As organisations in the South grow stronger and their voices louder, power relationships are changing. Partnerships need to be restructured accordingly.

Real change is only possible when governments are held accountable for their actions. Dialogue & Dissent has been catalytic and pioneering in funding lobby and advocacy initiatives that bring political pressure to bear. It offers a unique opportunity to tackle unequal power relations and strengthen ordinary people's voices, contributing to greater social cohesion, stronger and more open democracies and less inequality. This perspective is also important for women's movements and organisations worldwide.

It remains vital to work with governments, (I)NGOs and companies that integrate and mainstream gender in their policies and champion women's rights in areas like infrastructure, water and food security, climate, private sector development, security sector reform and human rights. Programmes like FLOW, too, pursue the goals of women's rights and gender equality, but not necessarily by only supporting women's organisations. At the same time, significant funding for women-led organisations and movements is crucial, as this directly supports women's leadership on women's rights. The role of women's organisations is to work for social, political and economic transformation, including gender equality. Women's right to lead and speak on behalf of their communities, societies, and countries is key to this transformation.