

■ NETHERLANDS

Development policy without gender equality



Civil society has called for the Netherlands to show leadership in international cooperation in the implementation of the UN Millennium Declaration. It also argues that the seven priorities recommended by the Millennium Project's Task Force on Gender Equality should be incorporated into the Millennium Development Goal agenda not only to overcome historic and pervasive gender bias, but also for the MDGs to be met.

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The United Nations Development Programme estimated that there were 1.1 billion people living on less than one dollar a day in 2004.² Four years earlier, the international community agreed upon a set of global objectives, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), in order to address this injustice and to pursue sound development. The year 2005 marks the 10th anniversary of the World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen) and the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing). It is therefore a decisive year in the quest to meet the MDGs, since they encompass both social and gender aspects. The Dutch Government and the Dutch Millennium Development Goals Platform are promoting the MDGs as key international targets and as a first step towards the complete eradication of poverty. The Netherlands must play a leading role to increase the political will of international governments to achieve the goals, especially in preparation for the UN MDG Review Summit in September 2005. It must ensure, both during the preparations for the summit and at the gathering itself, that there is strong political commitment to meet the MDGs using women's rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as its basic principles.

Development policy and the MDGs

In November 2003, the Minister for Development Cooperation, Agnes van Ardenne, published *Mutual Interests, Mutual Responsibilities: Dutch Development Cooperation en Route to 2015*, which outlines the Dutch development policy:³

- Sustainable poverty reduction is the main objective of development cooperation and the MDGs are the way to achieve it. To meet the goals, the Government priorities are to increase participation in meeting the MDGs by 2015, to boost the quality and effectiveness of development cooperation, and to make Dutch efforts and results more visible.
- The number of countries that are eligible for bilateral assistance has been further reduced from 49 to 36.
- Partnership is a key concept in development policy. "Development cooperation calls for commitment from everyone involved: the Netherlands, other donors, civil society organizations, the private sector, individual citizens and multilateral organizations, as well as developing countries themselves."⁴
- Emphasis on an integrated, coherent and regional approach to foreign policy, on sustainable development, on the collaboration with the private sector and on Africa.
- Aid to focus on four priority themes: education, reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, environment and water. An increased proportion of the budget - up to 15% in 2007 - is earmarked for education.

Civil society organizations (CSOs) expressed their approval of the MDGs as a reference point for the policy, but questioned whether the proposed country selection, thematic focus, and central role of partnerships would be more effective. CSOs also noted that gender was neglected in the policy and strongly criticized the decision to discontinue the financial contribution to the UN Development Fund for Women.

Development aid in figures

The Netherlands still contributes more than the internationally agreed 0.7% of GNP to official development aid (ODA). The contribution shows a slightly negative trend: in 1990, the Government spent 0.92% of GNP on ODA, 0.82% in 2001 and 0.8% in 2003. Of the total EUR 3.5 billion (USD 4.4 billion) spent on ODA in 2003, the Government dedicated roughly 12% to education, health and population.⁵

In addition, at the 2005 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development/Development Assistance Committee meeting, the Netherlands pushed for more generous ODA criteria which would allow for certain security-related expenditures to be made using these funds. CSOs are concerned that the changes will contaminate ODA and recommend that the criteria not be broadened any further to allow for expenditures related to peace and security, since these costs should be covered in Defence budgets.

Gender

In March 2005, during the 49th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) a 10-year global review took place of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The Government reconfirmed its commitments during the CSW session. Governments, including the Dutch Government, recognized that it is impossible to achieve the MDGs without strengthening women's rights and empowering all women and girls.

CSOs call for international leadership on the part of the Netherlands in the combined implementation of the UN Millennium Declaration and the three above-mentioned agreements. This will be possible if the seven priorities recommended by the Millennium Project's Task Force on Gender Equality are incorporated into the MDG agenda to overcome historic and pervasive gender bias.⁶ These priorities are:

- To strengthen opportunities for post-primary education for girls while simultaneously meeting universal primary education commitments.
- To guarantee sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).
- To invest in infrastructure to reduce the time women and girls spend on burdensome tasks.
- To guarantee women's and girls' property and inheritance rights.
- To eliminate gender inequality in employment by decreasing women's reliance on informal employment, closing gender gaps in earnings, and reducing occupational segregation.

1 Both authors work for Novib/Oxfam Netherlands. They wrote this contribution in cooperation with the National Committee for International Cooperation and Sustainable Development (NCDO). We especially appreciate the collaboration of the Dutch Platform Millennium Goals (NMP), which is made up of 23 development organizations and organizations specialised in international development policy issues.

2 UNDP. "Human Development Report 2004. Cultural liberty in today's diverse world", 2004, <http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2004/>

3 Dutch Aid Policy: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Minister for Development Cooperation, 2003. *Mutual interests, mutual responsibilities: Dutch development cooperation en route to 2015*; www.minbuza.nl

4 *Ibid.*

5 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Development Assistance Committee (DAC) for Dutch Official Development Aid (ODA); www.oecd.org/dac

6 Task Force report on gender equality. *Taking actions, achieving gender equality and empowering women*. Executive summary, p. 3; www.unmillenniumproject.org



- To increase women's representation in national parliaments and local governing bodies.
- To combat violence against girls and women.

The seven strategic priorities should also be included in the policies and programmes of Dutch development cooperation and at the same time be part of the UN MDG Review Summit in September 2005.

Education

Education for all, especially for girls, is a Dutch Government priority. Starting in 2007, basic education will receive 15% of total development assistance. In 2004, the total expenditure on education was EUR 167 million (USD 210 million); in 2005, it is USD 295 million; in 2007, it will be USD 654 million.⁷ The education contribution co-finances organizations in the Netherlands which fund basic education programmes in different developing countries. In addition it funds bilateral assistance to 14 developing countries. The Government also contributed USD 56 million in 2005 to the Fast Track Initiative, via the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, to help speed up the implementation of solid national education plans.⁸ There are also silent partnerships with other donors which allow the Netherlands to spend education funds in non-bilateral countries.

The Global Campaign for Education⁹ report *Missing the mark, a school report on rich countries' contribution to Universal Primary Education by 2015* shows that rich countries must push harder to reach MDG 2 - achieve universal primary education - especially for girls. However it is generally known that the goal of equal access to education by 2005 has not been achieved.¹⁰ Dutch CSOs call for more funding for countries where girls have less access to education, especially in Western and Central Africa, North Africa, the Middle East and South Asia. In order to improve education, the battles against child labour, especially girl labour, and against HIV/AIDS must simultaneously be fought. Poverty cannot be an excuse for keeping children out of school. CSOs call on the Government to become a true international champion of education and provide leadership to other G7¹¹ and European countries which are performing badly in this area.

HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS is both a health and development problem which affects women and girls disproportionately. Currently the global community response is inadequate.

Therefore CSOs call for donor and collaborating countries to meet the 0.7% of GNP goal and the funding commitments made at the Social Summit in Copenhagen for basic social services. At the same

time CSOs are concerned about the creation of new and alternative funding mechanisms such as the Global Fund for AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis, which is not working properly due to a lack of genuine participation on the part of developing country governments and civil society.

In health-related development issues the Netherlands gives priority to the fight against HIV/AIDS. In 2004 it announced that it would double its substantial contribution towards this cause by 2007. Total expenditure on HIV/AIDS in 2004 was USD 197 million and in 2005, USD 268 million.¹² Its focus policy points are:¹³

- An increased commitment to the international fight against HIV/AIDS through the appointment of an AIDS Ambassador and through an emphasis on taboo subjects such as SRHR for young people (both girls and boys), sexual minorities and sex workers, and needle exchange programmes for intravenous drug-users.
- Strengthening coordination. The Government supports the UN Programme on HIV and AIDS and its policy of the "3 ones principles" (one coordinating body, one integrated programme and one implementing system per country).
- To enhance the capacity to fight HIV/AIDS in countries with a large epidemic, not only in the health sector but also in other relevant sectors such as education.
- To promote a comprehensive approach in bilateral programmes and at the multilateral level by advocating for the integration of HIV/AIDS policies into other sectors of development.

The policy demonstrates a sense of urgency; however the nature of the HIV/AIDS epidemic continues to be underestimated. At the same time, there is ideological and conservative pressure on progressive policies and efforts from a number of donor countries, recipient countries and religious communities.

The position of the Netherlands is recognized and appreciated internationally and the country has demonstrated its capacity during the European Union (EU) presidency. Hence, the Dutch Government is in a position to influence international decision-making and CSOs call for this influence in the preparation of the UN MDG Review Summit. Particular attention should be paid to the gender dimension of HIV/AIDS, including power relations between men and women. Donor coordination should be strengthened and HIV/AIDS should be included in poverty reduction strategies as well as in trade policies: the World Trade Organization agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights and Public Health should be fully implemented, especially at the national level. Even in security policies HIV/AIDS needs to be considered because of the spread of the disease in conflict areas, where systemic rape increases infection rates.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights

Women and girls, as a result of the effects of poverty, are limited in their SRHR choices. Of all development indicators SRHR shows the biggest gap between rich and poor countries and between the different income groups within countries. The Millennium Project concludes that improvements in SRHR are fundamental to reaching the MDGs.¹⁴ In the international political arena there is a strong but small opposition to SRHR. In particular there is resistance to abortion, and conservative forces are promoting the ABC Approach (Abstinence, Being faithful, Correct and consistent condom use). This approach requires a thorough review. Its gender dynamics are particularly worrying: many faithful and monogamous women are still getting infected. Therefore, this neoconservative view should be opposed. The same group also challenges the Cairo-consensus goal of providing universal access to reproductive health services before 2015. During its presidency of the EU in the second half of 2004, the Dutch government raised more than USD 80 million for SRHR and pushed for an EU annual review of SRHR progress.

Unsafe abortions as the consequence of unwanted pregnancies are one of the main causes of maternal health problems. Therefore it is of utmost importance to halt unwanted pregnancies by promoting good information and family planning, and making good abortion services and facilities available. Most new HIV infections hit young people, especially girls, between the ages of 15 and 24.¹⁵ This group needs good information and condoms to protect itself and make sound choices. Encouraging abstinence can be dangerous if young people do not learn to say no. Abstinence is not an option for girls and women, since they may often find they are not in a position to refuse sex or demand the use of a condom. Besides, abstinence programmes do not include information on safe sexual behaviour. Sometimes people are even wrongly informed and told that condoms do not protect against HIV or pregnancy. SRHR and HIV/AIDS should be strongly linked in policies and programmes since promoting and protecting sexual health will help combat the spread of the disease.

The Government is pushing for the Cairo Agenda to be addressed at the UN MDG Summit in September. This is of utmost importance since SRHR is absent in the MDGs and there is widespread consensus that it should be adopted under Goal 5 - improve maternal health - as a new target.

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7 Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Budget 2005.

8 *Ibid.*

9 Coalition of NGOs and trade unions working in more than 100 countries for the right to free, good-quality education for all. www.campaignforeducation.org

10 The World Bank Group. *World Development Indicators*, 2005; devdata.worldbank.org/wdi2005/Section1_1_1.htm

11 USA, Japan, Germany, Great Britain, Canada, Italy, France.

12 Ministry of Foreign Affairs. *op cit.*

13 Dutch Aid Policy. *op cit.*

14 Task Force report on child health and maternal health. *Who's got the power? Transforming health systems for women and children*; www.unmillenniumproject.org

15 United Nations Programme on AIDS. *AIDS: A Global Epidemic*, 1996; www.hivpositive.com/f-HIVyou/f-Statistics/UN-AIDS.html#Young





women members than the statutory 33% of all seats. Again, “the Southern states are faring better in promoting leadership compared to Northern States.”³⁵ In some states there are all-female Panchayats doing commendable work, especially in the field of primary education. However there are serious impediments to women leaders’ work due to illiteracy, patriarchal traditions and restrictions resulting from the social structure. Some of the problems emanate from the reluctance and lack of confidence of governmental officials at higher levels. Fiscal decentralization is the most commonly experienced problem faced by Panchayats.

The new Panchayati Raj institutions have brought women into local governance institutions but political empowerment is unable to flourish because of male-dominated political process, institutions, social structures and norms.

At higher institutional and decision-making levels women’s representation remains extremely limited. A recent ranking of countries according to the percentage of women in national parliament placed India 93rd on the list of 185 countries.³⁶ In the *Lok Sabha* (House of the People) there are only 45 women out of 543 parliamentarians, approximately 8.3%. Out of a total of 242 *Rajya sabha* (Council of States) members, only 28 are women, a mere 11.6%.

Conclusions

In spite of definite improvements in the status of women since independence, the picture remains bleak. This is especially true with respect to poverty, employment, health care and education. Social and political empowerment has indeed taken place but in the absence of complementary economic empowerment, women remain impoverished and excluded. Development agencies advocate the “creation of an enabling legal, social and economic environment (as of utmost importance) for achieving poverty alleviation and women’s empowerment goals”.³⁷ ■

35 *Ibid.*

36 Inter Parliamentary Union. “Women in National Parliaments”. 28 February 2005.

37 United Nations. “Poverty in a Globalizing World at Different Stages of Women’s Life Cycle”, 19 November 2001.

KAZAKHSTAN

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Gender inequality is one of the structural socio-cultural causes hampering development in Kazakhstan. This inequality stems from the legacy of past historic periods along with factors such as a traditional culture with weak democratic values,

paternalistic relations in society, peculiarities of economic activity, dependence on mining industries, weak infrastructure, regional disparities, and unsustainable use of environmental resources. These causes lead to insufficient participation of women in different sectors of society, their exposure to various risks, and a growth in discrimination and sexism.¹⁰

Kazakhstan has the potential to achieve gender equality by 2015. The issue now is how this potential will be developed and used, how deep the institutional and cultural changes in the society will go, and whether new threats to equality might arise. ■

10 *Kazakhstan: Achievement, Issues and Prospects. A Perspective by the United Nations*. 2004, p. 50.

LEBANON

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Conclusion

Lebanon is still far from completing its commitments to the CEDAW due to the large number of violations of women’s rights, both in law and in practice. Even the legal amendments made to reduce gender bias need monitoring mechanisms to ensure their proper implementation. Reducing poverty and poverty feminization are not yet a priority for the Government.

This absence of governmental will combined with an infrastructure which does not cater to women’s needs and rights, assigns non-governmental organizations (NGOs) a major role in this respect. NGOs have made significant efforts in the enforcement of international conventions in Lebanon. The national action plan focused on women’s empowerment through services and activities provided by NGOs, such as private and micro-credit, education, and training.

Although the NGO sector was responsible for much of the progress made in this field, its work remains controversial. In general, the work of NGOs is a micro-effort focused on specific communities. Many NGOs are religious institutions and provide welfare in the form of charity to the mothers, daughters or sisters of men on religious grounds and not as women in their own right. Also due to the large number of NGOs in Lebanon, their efforts are scattered and often overlap. This is compounded by the fact that the priorities of many NGOs are imposed by their funding institutions and are therefore not based on prevailing needs.

Welfare and charity are simply not enough to create sustainable change. Structural changes are required which no actor can undertake alone. The State, which is the only legislator and guarantor

of responsibilities and rights, must provide a suitable environment so that the private sector, civil society organizations, the media, and men and women, can realize their share of responsibility and create incentives that will enable women to change the reality around them and to actively claim their rights as equal human beings. ■

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Conclusion

In order to achieve the MDGs by 2015 we must learn from the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo 1994), the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women. The UN MDG Review Summit is the arena for deciding on the relevant issues which have cropped up during other world conferences. The Netherlands is a key player in the preparation phase of the MDG Review Summit and therefore CSOs call on the Government to become a true leader. The emphasis must lie on the following:

- The seven strategies on gender must be incorporated. CSOs demand that these strategies also be integrated into Dutch policies, including those on development cooperation.
- In education world leaders should focus more on countries where girls do not go to school and on situations in which girls are restrained from attending school due to child labour and HIV/AIDS, for example.
- HIV/AIDS has created an unprecedented situation, which needs a strong response. Socially sensitive subjects related to the disease must be openly discussed.
- Sexual and reproductive health and rights must be incorporated into MDG 5 as a new target.
- World leaders should counteract neoconservative forces which promote the ABC Approach and resist abortion, thus hindering the success of MDG 5.
- There are still inadequate funds available to meet the MDGs and therefore the many countries who do not yet meet the set goal of 0.7% ODA should do so as soon as possible. ■