

# Global health in Dutch development policy

## A position paper on the policy note on development assistance

*December 2024*

The Netherlands faces a critical choice in its role on the global stage. In a time of increasing global health threats, investing in global health is not just a philanthropic endeavour — it is crucial to be an actively engaged partner for safeguarding our own national security, economic stability, and public health resilience. Global health investments help those most in need and also directly protect the Netherlands from future pandemics, ensure stable trade relationships, and support our strategic influence worldwide. Prioritising global health is a strategic decision that aligns with both our humanitarian values and our national interests.

### **Recalling the Dutch Global Health Strategy**

The Dutch Global Health Strategy is built around three core priorities that are essential to promoting public health, fostering resilience, and achieving sustainable development and equity worldwide.

These priorities ensure the Netherlands is prepared for global health challenges while supporting international security, economic growth, and trade stability. In light of the strategy, parliament has called for the inclusion of civil society in implementing the global health strategy and for adequate funding of SRHR and other critical areas. The global health strategy and the related motions in parliament should continue to be the leading document for the global health efforts of the Netherlands, both domestically and internationally. It is key that the full scope of priorities as set out in the Dutch Global Health Strategy are incorporated in the new policy note to ensure policy coherence. Moreover, the policy note provides an important opportunity to match the ambitions set out in the strategy with implementation efforts, both diplomatically and financially in selected areas.

## Why Global Health is good for the Netherlands and the world

Investing in global health is not only important for low- and middle-income countries, it is a matter of strategic Dutch national interest. Health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the avian flu have demonstrated how vulnerable the Dutch economy and public health are to global disruptions. The COVID-19 pandemic alone cost tens of thousands of lives in the Netherlands as well as approximately €65 billion in economic losses, underscoring the need for proactive global health investments to mitigate future risks. By addressing health challenges at their roots — strengthening international health systems and preventing pandemics — we can safeguard Dutch public health and economic stability while contributing to reaching sustainable development goals, global stability and health.

In addition to national benefits, the Netherlands should invest in global health as it demonstrates a commitment to international cooperation and the well-being of those most in need and builds agility and know-how to respond to cross border health threats at home. Global health challenges often strike hardest in regions with limited resources, deepening inequities and undermining human potential. By supporting efforts to strengthen health systems and expand access to care, the Netherlands can help bridge these divides, fostering a world where the most vulnerable are not left behind. Such investment reflects the ideals of mutual uplift, forging stronger partnerships and a more equitable, resilient global community while also benefiting the Netherlands.

One thing the Netherlands must do is ensure policy coherence. This means that the Netherlands ensures that initiatives in areas like trade, financial architecture, and climate, support (rather than undermine) health outcomes, adhering to the "do no harm" principle. For example, by actively sharing know-how and IP of medical products, countering illicit financial flows and supporting the UN framework convention on tax cooperation. By aligning policies across sectors, the Netherlands can maximize the positive impact of its efforts, avoid unintended negative consequences, and strengthen its commitment to equitable and sustainable global health solutions.

## Building on Success: Dutch Leadership in Global Health

The Netherlands has a track record of significant impact on global health, through investments in, for example, HIV/AIDS prevention, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and leadership on countering antimicrobial resistance (AMR). Many different actors in the Netherlands and abroad play an important role in ensuring impact.

Dutch civil society organizations (CSOs) have been instrumental in ensuring efforts in global health are effective, culturally adapted, and equitable. By leveraging local knowledge and connecting with local organisations and networks, CSOs help tailor interventions to fit community needs, ensuring that projects are not only well-received but also sustainable in the long term. They have served as the bridge between our national policy and the local communities in partner countries, facilitating dialogue, fostering trust, and enhancing local ownership. This helps maximize the reach, impact, and sustainability of global health spending while empowering local populations to take charge of their own health outcomes.

Dutch investments in multilateral organisations and UN institutions, such as WHO and UNFPA, have also proven effective. For example, in 2024 alone, Dutch investments in family planning and HIV reached millions, providing HIV testing and counselling to 2.6 million individuals and reproductive services to 8.5 million women and couples. The Netherlands, together with other donors, has saved 65 million lives through its investments in the Global Fund and ensured that over 130 million women could give birth with a qualified birth attendant present through contributions to the Global Financing Facility (GFF). With the Netherlands' pledge to Gavi, there were 645 thousand deaths averted and 38 million children vaccinated. The Global Fund estimates that its investments not only support

sustainable development goals but also yield substantial economic returns; for every euro invested in health, we see an estimated return of 31 euros through economic and health gains. Investing in global health therefore is an important precondition to economic development, which in turn helps to foster trade opportunities and create stability.

Just like the private sector, CSOs, including members of the DGHA, play a critical role in global health efforts by providing expertise, operational reach, and innovative approaches to solving complex health challenges. The Dutch private sector contributes an important layer of expertise and technological innovation, particularly in healthcare technology, pharmaceuticals, and sustainable solutions. These efforts complement the strengths of NGOs, public entities, and the scientific community. Initiatives such as Product Development Partnerships (PDPs) demonstrate how public and private actors can combine their strengths to develop accessible health technologies for low-income regions. CSOs and private sector actors alike are indispensable in ensuring these technologies are not only created but also implemented effectively and sustainably, particularly in underserved areas. Additionally, the government plays a crucial role in ensuring that innovations are affordable and accessible by setting conditions on public funding and fostering business opportunities abroad with appropriate safeguards for the public interest. Together, this ecosystem—spanning CSOs, private sector innovation, scientific research, and public institutions—relies on each other to function effectively and in synergy, ensuring that complementary strengths are leveraged to advance global health priorities and foster sustainable development.

## The Added Value of Dutch Expertise

The Netherlands has expertise that positions it as a global leader in health. From pioneering work in pandemic preparedness and AMR to leveraging its capabilities in water management to enhance health outcomes, Dutch expertise and capabilities are highly regarded internationally. For example, safe water and sanitation are important for preventing infectious diseases, supporting maternal and child health, and ensuring overall public health resilience. The Netherlands, with its expertise in water management, is well-positioned to address these interconnected health challenges on a global scale. By addressing AMR, we actively reduce the threat of drug-resistant infections that compromise health systems worldwide. Dutch knowledge and expertise in AMR prevention can help strengthen health systems in vulnerable regions and directly advance global health objectives.

As a strong supporter of the World Health Organization (WHO), including through technical expertise, the Netherlands can contribute to a unified and strategic global response to pressing health challenges. The WHO plays a central role in the global health architecture, coordinating international efforts to address health emergencies, set standards, and guide health policy. The WHO's leadership is crucial for aligning the actions of different countries and organizations, ensuring that resources are used effectively and efficiently and that global health goals are pursued collectively.

Furthermore, collaboration with organizations such as the Global Fund, Gavi, and the Global Financing Facility has enabled the Netherlands to amplify impact through international partnerships. This ensures that every euro spent is maximized through scale advantages in procurement of medical products as well as influence. The Dutch commitment to issues that others walk away from such as SRHR or the intersection between human rights and HIV/AIDS have made those organizations more effective in their programming. Additionally, by committing to global health leadership, the Netherlands strengthens its international reputation and ensures a seat at the table in discussions that shape global health policy. With this influence, the Netherlands can maintain stability and foster international cooperation.

## Key recommendations for the policy note on development assistance

To ensure that the Netherlands realizes its goals on global health, we recommend the minister includes the following themes in the policy note on development assistance:

- 1. Reiterate the priorities of the Global Health Strategy in the policy note**, including by promoting a Health in All Policies approach in other policy domains that affect global health.
- 2. Allocate substantial and sustainable funding towards global health** to ensure we reach the goals as set out in the Global Health Strategy. This allocation should reflect the critical importance of global health to Dutch security, international stability and equitable development.
- 3. Emphasize the role of Dutch civil society within global health** in line with parliamentary motions, and finance them accordingly.
- 4. Continue working within European Union processes and initiatives**, aligning with the EU Global Health Strategy to maximize impact.
- 5. Continue to invest in the global health architecture**, such as the global health funds and UN institutions, and by doing so guarantee a seat at the table to defend Dutch interests and provide Dutch expertise.
- 6. As part of its approach to policy coherence**, the Netherlands should contribute to and promote international solutions for tackling high debt burdens in low- and middle-income countries. This will free up domestic fiscal space which can be invested in health, ultimately reducing reliance on international development assistance for financing their health systems.

The Netherlands is at a crucial juncture. Prioritizing global health contributes to international wellbeing and solidarity but also fortifies our own economic resilience and global standing. By including these recommendations in the policy note, we can reaffirm our commitment to a healthier, more stable, and more prosperous world for all.

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## Who we are

The DGHA is a network of organizations based in the Netherlands working on global health. With members rooted in various local context, we draw on our diverse expertise and knowledge to coordinate advocacy efforts and inform Dutch policymaking. Together, we bring interdisciplinary and practical perspectives to encourage coherent and data-driven policies that promote health for all.



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