WO=MEN Dutch Gender Platform - Input Internet Consultation Feminist Foreign Policy

October 2022

Please find herewith a consolidated response to the survey questions from WO=MEN Dutch Gender Platform. Together with our members and partners we are looking forward to co-creating with the Dutch government its first ever Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP).

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

Rights
- The Netherlands is a critical donor to causes supporting women’s rights, the rights of LGBTQIA+ persons and gender equality in the Global South. The leadership by the Netherlands on topics such as safe access to abortion, LGBTQIA+ and sex workers’ rights is important and impactful. The Netherlands also is an important player in relation to policy making at the global level on the same, and in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and gender diplomacy (e.g., the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)).
- The Netherlands is seen as a frontrunner for gender-specific work such as Leading from the South and Power of Women (previously FLOW and MDG3 Fund) and the strategic partnerships with civil society on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), as well as on women-led climate solutions. Through its policy framework on strengthening civil society the Netherlands is an ally in holding the lines on shrinking civic space.

Representation
- Welcoming an NGO representative in the Netherlands’ CSW delegation demonstrates commitment to meaningful participation of civil society and is an example for other countries.
- The position of a Youth Ambassador for SRHR, gender equality and bodily autonomy is a promising practice for meaningful youth participation.
- The Taskforce on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality - along with the Ambassador for the same - is an important driving force to raise awareness and importance on women’s rights and gender equality within the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA).

Resources
- Dutch funding mechanisms such as Leading from the South, Power of Voices (PoV) and Power of Women (PoW) are hugely important and quite unique, multi-year resources in support of women’s and feminist movements and agendas in the Global South and worldwide. Although of course these funding mechanisms could be much improved, they do provide essential resources where there are few alternatives.
- In multilateral spaces, the Dutch MFA is an important international player in creating innovative and large-scale funding instruments to support feminist movements directly, incl. Action Coalition 6 of the Generation Equality Forum (GEF) and the co-creation of the new Alliance for Feminist Movements and the Equal Rights Coalition.
Reality Check
= The introduction of the OECD gender marker has been a good initiative to ensure that projects - whether human rights, SRHR, agricultural, finance or direct response are designed, implemented, and evaluated with a gender lens. As the IOB evaluation on gender mainstreaming in the MFA (2021) concludes, this can be improved by replacing it with a more fluid (less binary) and more intersectional approach. = We also encourage the MFA to continue the positive trend of increasing aid commitments that have gender equality marked as a principal objective and prioritise sustaining high-volume commitments in direct funding for gender equality, women’s rights (WROs) and women-led organisations (WLOs), feminist networks and youth-led organisations.

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

Lack of consistent commitment to gender equality across the breadth of Dutch foreign policy
= From access to sexual and reproductive health services to women’s participation in political decision-making, gender equality continues to be considered optional. In times of crisis there is a return to the traditional means of war and peace and decision-makers, effectively leaving women, LGBTQIA+ people and other marginalised groups side-lined. E.g., women peace activists are not always consulted during negotiations. There are no sufficient support mechanisms in place to prevent and react to diverse effects of crises for those not in a traditional humanitarian setting (e.g., shelters for survivors of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) during the COVID-19 crisis). = MFA funding flowing into multilateral agencies is not monitored in terms of gender standards. It remains unclear whether these funds are supporting harmful existing gender norms or address inequalities appropriately. Furthermore, there is a weak gender governance in relation to responsibilities delegated to implementing agencies such as FMO and RVO. Limited data is being gathered and there is limited guidance / follow through offered on gender equality priorities.

Lack of structural intersectional gender lens
= Despite good gender-specific work, a more fluid, intersectional approach is needed. An intersectional approach to gender analysis recognizes the reality of diversity among the people it serves and takes power inequalities based on multiple identities into account. This is critical to designing interventions that do no harm, and that are gender transformative.

Financial frameworks are not adapted to the realities of grassroot org. and networks
= Financial support for women’s rights, LGBTQIA+ rights and gender equality is not always backed by political support. Representatives from the Global South are not systematically consulted, and their lived experiences and insights are not structurally considered when developing, implementing, and evaluating foreign policy. = While steps have been made to devolve power and include Southern-led partnerships, this still covers only a fraction of total funding. Administrative burdens make it hard to deliver on this ambition, in particular for grassroot organisations and informal networks.
Strict measures around reporting requirements and due diligence practices for CSOs contribute to the shrinking of civic space and conflict with ambitions of Southern leadership. There is a growing discrepancy between accountability measures for CSOs compared to (public-)private partnerships.

Policy Incoherence
= Trade and investment policies are insufficient to ensure women’s rights, LGBTQIA+ rights and gender equality are protected and promoted. Current policies allow extractive companies, arms trade, and corporate tax regulations to contribute to environmental & climate damage & human rights violations.
= Prioritisation of short-term national interests over inclusion and well-being of all.
= Inconsistencies between domestic and foreign policies, e.g., sex workers’ rights and climate policies.
= The increasing focus on supporting work in even fewer countries. Given multiple crises in the world and their global nature, this is not good practice over the long-term.
= Inconsistent diplomacy by Dutch diplomats on gender justice messaging.
= Incoherence on gender and Global Health. Last year, vaccine hoarding and policies not fully promoting vaccine equity contributed to longer lockdowns in different countries in the Global South, with known effects on women, girls and LGBTQIA+ people, such as increased GBV.
= The Netherlands continues to serve as a prime jurisdiction to avoid taxation from countries in the Global South, resulting in less money for gender responsive public services in these countries. Women are impacted disproportionately, given their reliance on public services and traditional family roles resulting in them stepping in where public services are inadequate.

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

Ambition
= The Dutch FFP addresses the root causes of gender inequality and works towards structural system change. FFP focuses especially on gender transformative policies. It does not just try to prevent negative effects (as the Dutch government currently communicates); it truly addresses root causes that perpetuate unequal gender norms leading to gender injustice as part of each policy and its implementation. Thus, it should have the ability to disrupt existing power structures and focus on transforming existing power relations. Not only between women and men and non-binary people, but also considering other persisting inequalities that relate to identity, such as race, class, disability.
= The Dutch FFP explicitly promotes gender justice through all foreign policy areas and consistent diplomacy on all topics. Aim towards all policies contributing to the prevention of (direct or indirect) human rights violations and GBV, and where relevant promote Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) benefitting women, men, and non-binary people equally. This includes upholding the principle of ‘do no harm’ in all efforts and investments.

Short term priorities
= Ensure an inclusive FFP development process. An FFP cannot exist without including WROs, WLOs, gender equality and youth-led organisations, feminist networks representing diverse identities incl. those in the Global South as an integral part of its design. Their engagement should be at the level of co-creation and a reiterative shared decision-making process as to the priorities and the elaboration of specific policy areas, considering the insights of those most impacted. These organisations should also have a role in the development of indicators for the monitoring and evaluation of the policy as well as in the governance of implementation.
= Build in from the start mechanisms for accountability, quality, and governance: FFP communicates transparently and self-critically how successful it is in achieving the goals it has set for itself. To this end, it defines qualitative and quantitative indicators in exchange with civil society and, above all, with
the people whom its policy affects. Together with all stakeholders, it evaluates and communicates its success at regular intervals.

- An intersectional gender-based analysis for all new policies and policy implementation. E.g., any climate policy and intervention, economic exports, arms exports and military intervention, international energy deals, etc. To be required by law and checked for quality and being taken on board during policy making/implementation.

- Explore further what a truly feminist approach to foreign policy entails – beyond a focus on women’s rights and broader matters of gender equality.

- Secure buy-in from the public, civil servants, and other Cabinet Ministers to ensure policy coherence across all relevant areas. Also, engaging men at the leadership level of the development of FFP is crucial to anchor the Dutch FFP strongly with all foreign policy stakeholders.

- Developing and promoting an intersectional approach for all FFP elements.

- Recommit to reaching the goals of the SDGs and the ICPD25 Action Plan.

- Further prioritising peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

Long term priorities

- Policy coherence across all foreign policy areas, e.g., defence, finance, trade, economic affairs, climate, water management, asylum, security, diplomacy, European affairs, development cooperation. Plus, FFP requires coherence between domestic and foreign policies: what is demanded in foreign policy must also be implemented in domestic policy.

- Further prioritising gender transformative work. This should entail work on masculinities, femininities, power structures and violence.

- Continue to take a strong stance without compromise against the backlash against SRHR, gender equality and women’s rights – protect (W)HRDs and gender equality activists across all thematic areas.

- Make a commitment to decolonise foreign policy and be explicitly anti-racist: (Foreign) policies are only feminist if they acknowledge colonial legacies.

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

Rights

- The Dutch FFP is human rights based: it puts the voices of those who have historically been least represented, and are often most impacted, at the centre of policy making.

- The Dutch FFP must take an intersectional approach, acknowledging how gender relates to other identity markers and forms of oppression, such as race, age, disability, class. This should be demonstrated explicitly and consistently, with an articulated definition of intersectionality, as well as clear objectives, results and developing indicators.

- Ensure gender is understood throughout all its diversity and recognised as going beyond a binary of men versus women approach. Be explicitly inclusive of non-binary, gender non-conforming, trans and intersex people in your approach to gender and feminism.

- A true Intersectional FFP places climate, economic, gender, racial and social justice at its heart. It continues to strengthen work on SRHR. It embodies a conscious approach to (de)militarisation and (dis)armament – ao by a strong emphasis on and sufficient resources and gender advisory capacity to
implement Arms Trade Treaty article 7.4e. It prioritises decolonization and anti-racism. It also aims for a gender transformative humanitarian response, which addresses the root causes of gender inequality and power imbalances, which lead to unequal access to humanitarian aid and erupting crises.

**Representation**

- Collaboration with all foreign policy partners in policy making and throughout the implementation cycle of different policy areas, with explicit attention to Southern-based communities, organisations, informal networks, and activists.
- Engagement of men and boys to work towards gender justice. This includes engaging men and boys from the Global North and South, feminist men and boys as well as addressing ‘toxic’ masculinity.
- Meaningful engagement of local WROs and WLOs in peace and security decision-making processes, including those WROs and WLOs that engage in relief and recovery, and/or that provide humanitarian response and act as first crisis responders within their communities.

**Resources**

- Increased dedicated funding for WROs, WLOs, youth-led organisations and diverse feminist movements. Set an ambitious target - and timeframe to meet said target - for increasing the overall percentage of ODA spending that goes directly to these organisations. Have the twofold ambition to:
  a) ensure these movements can do their work, in greater freedom and without being undermined by Dutch or other policies and practices.
  b) to regain the reputation of being the strongest supporter of women’s rights, LGBTQIA+ rights and gender equality.
- Recognise that the ways in which funding moves (modalities and instruments) warrant review and changes to bridge the gap between intent and practice. Be intentional about driving more accessible, impactful, and efficient funding to feminist movements, including increasing control of funds by feminist civil society and funders (like Leading from the South).

**Reality Check**

- The Dutch FFP provides a clear accountability framework. This includes timelines, objectives, indicators and targets, feedback loops with clear moments built in for external stakeholders - in particular those who FFP is being developed for - to be able to evaluate together with the Dutch government and to hold the government to account.
- Policy coherence across all policy areas; the Dutch FFP must go hand in hand with working towards feminist domestic policies.

**Research & Reporting**

WO=MEN urges the MFA to adopt the so-called fifth R: Research & Reporting. Investments and policy decisions should be rooted in rigorous evidence across all streams of FFP. Key elements are monitoring and evaluation for the impact and uptake of internal policies, along with independent impact evaluations.
What should the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs aspire to do differently once a Feminist Foreign Policy is in place?

Rights
- For a credible FFP, the Dutch government must ‘walk the talk’ despite being a critical donor on women’s rights, LGBTQIA+ rights and gender equality. With the FFP in place, the government should build on what is working well and truly apply this feminist lens to all foreign policy areas. This is more than scaling up - what has been done to date is not the same as implementing FFP.
- The Netherlands should go beyond current proposals in the EU by developing gender-responsive CSR standards that are in line with OECD guidelines. The government should also actively contribute to the development of a UN Binding treaty on business and human rights.
- Implementing agencies such as RVO, Dutch companies and investors should make countering GBV a key issue in their investment policies or commercial practice abroad. Commercial partners in third countries should have policies and practices in place to counter GBV at the workplace and should demonstrate the results of their actions as part of their yearly due diligence reporting.

Representation
- Diversity is important; tougher demands should be made on Dutch companies in relation to gender equality: % in decision making places, % women participation in trade missions and businesses. Raise ambitions: no longer settle for 30% women in all their diversity in decision-making positions but follow the UN and aim for 50% everywhere.
- To ‘walk the talk’ the FFP should include a clear internal Diversity, Equity & Inclusion strategy at the MFA, for increasing diverse representation across all staff levels, incl. at embassies.

Resources
- Ensure each area of FFP can deliver results without being undermined by funding or practices being pursued in other areas. E.g., development funding is being redirected to financing the Dutch asylum system, which falls short of meeting international human rights standards.
- The Netherlands should provide more climate finance and resources in the fight against climate change, including adequate compensation of loss and damage in the Global South. International climate funding must be additional to existing ODA. In addition, the focus should be on a just energy transition, taking into account gender specific impacts of climate change, and investing in gender-just climate solutions and sustainable local alternatives. E.g., agro ecology to promote biodiversity, food security, water security, and climate resilience.

Reality Check
- Implement fair standards of accountability and risk-mitigation for civil society. CSOs from the Global South must adhere to much stricter standards of accountability than the private sector, preventing them from putting all their efforts into their work. In FFP, the Dutch MFA stands for risk-mitigating measures based on analyses of CSOs and networks themselves to reach its goals of gender equality and local leadership.
- The Dutch FFP should break with the narrow focus on state security and national economic and cultural interests, as well as the traditional emphasis on domination – by military means or other – to secure these. The MFA (and other Ministries responsible for foreign policy areas) must redefine the terminology of ‘security' and ‘trade.’
Realistically, national interests do have a home in foreign policy, but we need a more inclusive concept of security: human security, the security and safety of those in vulnerable or marginalised positions. Similarly, trade has to be redefined within the context of CSR and gender-responsive due diligence.

Priority to policy coherence incl. stronger measures to effectively deal with identified incoherencies. Within the Dutch FFP, efforts must be made to ensure that during a next global (health) emergency, the effects on women, girls and LGBTQIA+ people are properly addressed and that national policies do not hinder equity and access to health solutions in the Global South.

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

Rights
Be bold and clear what feminism means in the context of the Dutch FFP. Gender does not equal women and feminism is not just about gender. The direction the government is currently steering towards focuses on women’s rights and LGBTQIA+, which does not match the inclusive view on feminism and focus on the systemic issues that the Dutch FFP should tackle. Dutch government representatives at all levels need to be outspoken supporters, able to effectively bring about the message that feminism is about everyone and creates a better world for all, and as such inspire and foster increased support.

Representation
Continued meaningful involvement of Global South partners, diverse feminist movements and activists to monitor progress and to where needed clarify selected key feminist principles and adjust FFP priorities. Strengthen consultation processes, building this in intentionally throughout the process of design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Resources
Make sure that the results of (intersectional) gender analyses translate into activities and resources that are needed to address women’s rights, LGBTQIA+ rights and gender equality. Committed staff resources at the MFA, its embassies, and the other ministries responsible for the other foreign policy areas. Ensure gender focal points are also 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.

Build into job descriptions language on needing to apply an intersectional gender lens and ensure delivering on gender is integrated into job performance assessments. 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.

Reality Check
True gender mainstreaming goes beyond the ‘add women and stir’ approach where women are merely invited to participate in interventions, the design of which has not changed, as such an approach fails to be transformative. Similarly, an ‘add men and stir’ approach should also be avoided. Interaction & learning from other countries with an FFP, incl. countries in the Global South. Continued listening to anti-gender movements and actors and the voices of passive ‘followers’ to where address resistance and misunderstanding.

Long term political commitment, which transcends governments. This requires continued strong leadership at the highest political level (Cabinet Ministers and Prime-Minister).

A clear indicator framework, clarity on roles and responsibilities across ministries, agreement on governance and accountability for implementation. The possibility to learn and adjust the policy must be part of this.
Research & Reporting

= As a bare minimum, implementing all IOB recommendations would be a big step forward.
= Ensure that gender-disaggregated indicators are systematically introduced in all relevant policy areas and that data are collected and analysed systematically. This should go hand in hand with a more consistent distinction between outcome/impact and output indicators.
= Improve data collection based on principles of feminist data collection and evidence-based decision making. A more systemic approach on where data is coming from is essential; data collection is often started in the Global North or from a Northern perspective. Consequently, analyses do not truly reflect the realities across the globe.
= As the IOB evaluation on gender mainstreaming advises, conduct regular participatory organisational gender audits within the MFA and other Ministries. Make the results public.

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

= Consultations for the development of the Dutch FFP need to take place with the other ministries responsible for foreign policy areas (Defence, Justice & Security, Education, Economic Affairs & Climate, Finance, General Affairs). Likewise, consultations need to take place with key implementing agencies, e.g., FMO and RVO. A successful FFP needs them all on board to find common ground, though the aim and result must be something ambitious. The acceptance of an ambitious Dutch FFP will stimulate a true process of change. This in turn can lead to phases of transition for a policy that works out for all relevant Ministries.
= Ensure the final responsibility to lead, coordinate and report (accountability) lies with one dedicated Minister, while others have co-responsibility. This should be the Minister of Foreign Affairs or the level of the Prime-Minister. It must be avoided that the final responsibility for the Dutch FFP lies with the Minister for International Trade & Development Cooperation. This would increase the unintentional risk of a policy ‘downgraded’ to additional support for gender equality within the existing policy framework on development cooperation.
= Develop a clear indicator framework, clarity on roles and responsibilities across ministries, agreement on governance and accountability for implementation. A good example is the NAP-1325 oversight board, consisting of all ministries responsible for the implementation of the National Action Plan and civil society representation.
= Ensure committed staff resources at the other ministries responsible for the other relevant foreign policy areas. As the IOB evaluation on gender mainstreaming advised, gender expertise should be available and included in the posts of DGs of all Ministries. Gender focal points need to be well resourced rather than having to do the work on top of their other tasks.
= The government must ‘walk the talk’ on the principles of FFP at the domestic level with the institutionalisation of (intersectional) gender analyses as a requirement by law and placing gender and intersectionality central to all policies. Introduce gender-based budgeting across all Ministries. As the IOB evaluation on gender mainstreaming advises, conduct regular participatory organisational gender audits within the MFA and other Ministries. Make the results public.
= Ensure an annual accountability process whereby a report is presented to parliament and the senate (and publicly) on the implementation of FFP. All responsible ministries should be included. Ensure civil society can review and provide input as well.
Is there any other input you would like to give in relation to Feminist Foreign Policy?

Be an unapologetic advocate for FFP principles, both at the global level and at home
- There should be a well-funded effective communication and public diplomacy plan for bringing Dutch people along to embrace FFP. Following political commitment at the highest level, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, International Trade & Development Cooperation, and the Prime-Minister should present the policy together to show Dutch society that they mean it. Give the Dutch FFP a face people can identify with (think of the Barack Obama video: “this is what a feminist looks like”).
- Be an unapologetic FFP champion and vocal advocate by engaging with other OECD countries, the EU, and international institutions (like the WTO, UNFCCC, and international financial institutions) to catalyse change at international levels. Be bold and without compromise in countering the anti-gender and anti-rights voices in international and national spaces.
- Continue sharing lessons as part of FFP platforms and continue placing women’s rights, LGBTQIA+ rights and gender equality central in EU diplomacy.
- Regarding the EU specifically, continue to be a staunch supporter to implement GAP-III fully. Support the adoption of an ambitious gender-responsive Human Rights Due Diligence legislation for companies in the EU, providing the possibilities of civil liability and imposing financial penalties in the event of non-compliance.

For FFP to be a co-creative process, meaningful consultation is key
- Policy consultations can be an important element of meaningful engagement of civil society and the groups and communities impacted. Ensuring input and feedback is obtained from diverse civil society actors - including partners from the Global South - is essential for relevant insight to improve and strengthen the policy and build broad support for a successful implementation. Such a process should not be limited to one online survey and single round of consultation sessions, with a very limited timeframe and accessibility.
- Provide space for civil society from conflict-affected contexts to engage with the development of the FFP, not just through online written consultations but also through consultations in conflict-affected contexts run by the Dutch embassies. All of this will contribute to a better quality process.
- For subsequent steps in the consultation process for the Dutch FFP, ensure transparency about how input will be used, provide a clear time frame and explain what feedback loops will be organised in the future.
- Be willing and eager to learn and improve along the way. Welcome critical feedback, plan for regular processes to reflect on experiences and impact and ways to improve and share the learning publicly with other governments and civil society.

Concluding remarks
To conclude, the Dutch FFP must proactively work towards structural system change in ALL foreign policy areas, to really disrupt existing power structures and focus on transforming existing power relations. Not only between women and men and gender non-binary people, but also regarding other persisting inequalities. The Dutch government must ‘walk the talk’ and effectively bring about the message that feminism is about everyone and creates a better world for all. If not, we cannot speak of a true Dutch Feminist Foreign Policy.
Existing WO=MEN sources and sources by members and partners on FFP

- PAX reaction to decision to develop a NL FFP: Towards a Dutch Feminist Foreign Policy (paxforpeace.nl)
- WECF reaction on the decision to develop a NL FFP (in Dutch): https://www.wecf.org/nl/nederlands-feministisch-buitenlandbeleid-onze-ecofeministische-reactie/
- Plan International reaction on the decision to develop a NL FFP (in Dutch): https://www.planinternational.nl/actueel/kogel-door-de-kerk-kabinet-komt-met-feministisch-buitenlandbeleid

For other sources on FFP, see the WO=MEN knowledge database: https://www.wo-men.nl/en/database-content?groep%5B%5D=33&klik_groep=33