

The Kingdom of the Netherlands Summary of the Voluntary National Review

Introduction to the Kingdom of the Netherlands

The four countries of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (Aruba, Curaçao, the Netherlands and St Maarten) report jointly to the United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. While each autonomous country within the Kingdom has its own political reality and is in a different phase of SDG implementation, all of them are committed to achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Kingdom's Voluntary National Review includes the views and positions of all four countries, providing detail on progress made and lessons learned by each autonomous country as well as by the Kingdom as a whole. Aruba, Curaçao and St Maarten are all located in the Caribbean, while 'Dutch' and 'the Netherlands' refer to the Netherlands as a territory in Europe and the islands of Bonaire, Saba and St. Eustatius in the Caribbean.

Partnerships are the key...

'The Netherlands is fully committed to making the next leap forward,' Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte said at the UN Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015. The four countries of the Kingdom of the Netherlands agree that the key to success in attaining the SDGs is our willingness and resolve to form *partnerships at national and international level*. In his speech, Prime Minister Rutte gave several examples of Dutch multi-stakeholder partnerships, especially those involving Dutch companies. He affirmed the Netherlands' intention to make the SDGs its leading policy framework for the next 15 years. Working together across sectors and national boundaries is part of our DNA. We have a solid track record of resolving domestic issues by forging partnerships, for example by involving people from all walks of society in efforts to tackle water-related challenges. This approach is the key to the prominent role we play on development cooperation, combining aid, trade and investment.

Across the Kingdom, partnerships remain vital, both domestically and internationally. For the Netherlands, the European Union is a major partnership. Many current Dutch efforts to enhance sustainability reflect common European policies.

In the development of Curaçao, Aruba and St Maarten as Small Island Developing States, partnerships, as highlighted in the SAMOA Pathway, are imperative. For example, Curaçao considers forging partnerships within the region as crucial, whether through the EU's Overseas Countries and Territories Association or bilaterally with other countries in the region. Stepping up South-South cooperation will remain essential to SDG implementation.

...to accelerating progress on sustainability...

Across the Kingdom, governments (both national and local), the private sector (including the financial sector), civil society, knowledge institutions and youth organisations have hailed the SDGs as a unique opportunity to accelerate the achievement of their own sustainable development ambitions. Over the past year and a half, Dutch organisations have made considerable progress in building their knowledge of the SDGs and have formed coalitions to achieve them. The SDGs are developing into the guiding framework for these organisations' activities. This Voluntary National Review, too, is the result of joint efforts by governments, the private sector, civil society, knowledge institutions and youth representatives.

For Curaçao, the SDGs serve as a fresh opportunity to align ministries and stakeholders behind overarching goals for sustainable development. Curaçao is currently in a new phase of the process of adopting its budget and masterplan, and aims to use the SDGs as key objectives as it transforms ways of looking at sustainable development and long-term planning, adopting an inclusive and participative approach.

...while leaving no one behind.

As we make a leap forward, we have to ensure that no one is left behind. This challenge is relevant to both richer countries like the Netherlands and to developing countries, where the challenge is even greater. Specific interventions are needed to reach the poorest and most marginalised people. Inequalities, such as gender-based income gaps or men and women's unequal access to financial services, must be reduced. The Dutch agenda for aid, trade and investment contributes to attaining this objective, focusing on four priority themes: water, food security, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and security and the rule of law. Moreover, by paying extra attention to private sector development, gender equality and climate change, we help promote sustainable economic growth that benefits everyone. The Netherlands' Official Development Assistance (ODA) has yielded many encouraging results. For example, Dutch aid has helped 25 million people in developing countries gain access to clean drinking water, and provided 19 million people with access to clean energy. Thanks to Dutch investments, every year approximately 10-20 million people receive improved nutrition, 15 million women and girls obtain access to contraception, and 9 million people gain access to basic infrastructure (roads and public amenities).

An ambitious approach to SDG implementation...

The point of the SDGs is producing tangible results that improve people's lives. The Netherlands has chosen an ambitious approach to implementing the SDGs, based pragmatically on existing policies and institutions. Tasks are assigned to all the ministries concerned and coordinated by the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation. An SDG working group with representatives from each ministry has been established and meets regularly. It is chaired by a specially appointed high-level coordinator for national SDG implementation, assisted by a small secretariat.

...involves consultation with partners in society...

The Dutch government believes that the SDGs should be the subject of a lively, transparent, political debate in order to ensure and safeguard broad support for the goals. In our view, the SDGs require support at the highest level, and implementation has to involve all relevant actors to be successful. A collective process is needed, in which a wide variety of actors contribute on the basis of their respective strengths and interests. The Dutch government will produce a national SDG report periodically between now and 2030 on the progress made towards the goals. This report will be sent to Parliament on national Accountability Day (the third Wednesday in May). The first national SDG report was issued this year. It describes the activities of all stakeholders (national and local government, private companies including the financial sector, CSOs, knowledge institutions and youth organisations), illustrating the collective nature of SDG implementation in the Netherlands.

...integration into existing policy cycles...

All parts of the Kingdom are currently integrating the SDGs into their development plans, to ensure continued action to achieve them. Aruba and St Maarten are working closely together, using the UN's Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support (MAPS) approach to ensure full engagement with the 2030 Agenda. In Curaçao, a vision of combining economic growth, environmental protection and the reduction of inequalities has been embraced by all sectors, from government to the private sector and young people. Long-term political commitment and awareness-raising beyond government will remain

important for further implementation. Building active support is essential to ensure a coherent and coordinated SDG implementation strategy.

...and striving for coherence.

The Netherlands is committed to formulating policies that defend the interests of the poorest and most vulnerable groups, and urges other countries to do the same. The SDGs fit well into the ongoing discussion on the importance of policy coherence for sustainable development, which has been central to Dutch development discourse. For example, the Ready for Change initiative united over forty organisations in calling for a greater effort to promote policy coherence on the SDGs. The Netherlands' action plan on policy coherence for development makes us an international frontrunner in the field. The plan's eight themes are trade agreements, investment protection, tax evasion, remittance costs, sustainable value chains, access to medicines, climate change and food security. By committing ourselves to goals aligned with the SDGs, taking practical action, and conducting annual monitoring and reporting, we ensure that real progress will be achieved. For example, companies, CSOs, trade unions and the Dutch government are concluding sectoral agreements on responsible business conduct, working together to minimise risks such as precarious work, underpayment and environmental degradation throughout global value chains. Such agreements have already been adopted in the textile industry and the international financial sector. The Netherlands believes this is crucial to achieve the SDGs in developing countries.

The initial results show...

The Netherlands was one of the first countries to survey the starting points of national efforts to achieve the SDGs. The report 'Measuring the SDGs: An Initial Picture for the Netherlands', compiled by Statistics Netherlands, was published in November 2016. Data are currently available in the Netherlands for about one-third of the SDG indicators. Efforts are underway by Statistics Netherlands and other bodies to make more data available to measure progress on the other indicators (where relevant to the Netherlands).

...that while more data is needed...

The other countries in the Kingdom are also on track to have their statistical bureaus draw up a zero-base measurement of their SDG status. Like many small island developing states, Curaçao faces challenges in gathering usable, up-to-date data to track SDG implementation. Data collection priorities have therefore been set in its National Development Plan. Setting up a socioeconomic database will be the first step in making development data more readily available. In gathering data for this socioeconomic database, the initial focus will be on indicators related to SDGs 4, 7, 8, and 14.

...that the Netherlands is doing well...

Based on the available data, it is clear that the Netherlands is doing well on many SDG targets and indicators:

- The Netherlands scores high on economic indicators, including GDP per capita (SDG 8).
- The Dutch have confidence in their institutions. A majority of the population feels safe in their own neighbourhood, the number of reported crimes is decreasing, and corruption levels are low (SDG 16).
- Healthy life expectancy has risen in the past period. Feelings of wellbeing are high, and the Dutch are relatively satisfied with their lives (SDG 3).
- Participation in lifelong learning is high in the Netherlands, and there are proportionately many highly educated people. The Dutch also score well on skills learned through education (SDG 4). The Netherlands attaches importance to the contribution that education, science and culture in conjunction can make to achieving the goals.

- Over the past several years, Dutch ODA has remained close to or above the international 0.7% GNI target (SDG 17).

...but there is still work to be done.

There are also areas where the Netherlands scores less well:

- Social inclusion: in 2015, more Dutch people were living below the national poverty line than in 2006 (SDG 1). Although the Netherlands ranks high (4th) on the EU Gender Equality Index, it still faces persistent high levels of gender inequality in various domains (SDG 5). Moreover, several groups in the Netherlands experience perceived discrimination (SDG 10).
- Environmental pressure: The Netherlands consumes large quantities of fossil fuels and emits high amounts of greenhouse gases per capita (SDG 13). The share of renewable energy in the total energy supply is low compared to other European countries (SDG 7).
- Biodiversity and ecosystems: The Netherlands places high environmental pressure on low- and middle-income countries. The Dutch food production system is not sustainable enough (SDG 12). Water quality and fresh water extraction, coastal waters and sustainable fishery are major concerns (SDG 14). Moreover, natural habitats and biodiversity in the Netherlands are under considerable pressure (SDG 15).

And where will we be in 2030 if we continue existing policies?

All the countries in the Kingdom can build on a wide range of existing policies in implementing the SDGs. As a first step, the Dutch government has published the first national SDG report to provide an overview of existing policies that contribute to achieving the goals. Following the 2030 Agenda, the government will decide on ways of incorporating the goals into national planning processes, policies and strategies. In some cases it will be sufficient to extend current end dates towards the SDG finish line in 2030. In other cases, new policies will have to be adopted. As the Dutch government reported to Parliament, this gives the Netherlands the opportunity to gradually speed up its transition towards a more sustainable future: from fossil-based to renewable, from linear to circular, and from segmented to inclusive.

St Maarten is building on its experience with the Millennium Development Goals and constructing a database and user portal for policy development initiatives. It can draw on its experience of organising democratic dialogues with different stakeholder groups, and is currently working to engage these stakeholders in SDG implementation. Curaçao is endeavouring to strike a balance between maintaining its existing multi-sector economy, based on shipping and logistics, sustainable tourism, international financial services and oil refining, and adding sustainable solutions to the energy mix. Having installed new windmills in 2017, Curaçao already obtains more than 25% of its energy from renewable sources. Aruba has been very ambitious in planning a transition that will enable it to get 100% of its energy from renewables by 2020.

Partnerships for SDG implementation build on a strong tradition...

As early as 2014, over a year before the SDGs were adopted, more than 70 parties joined forces to support the SDGs both in the Kingdom and elsewhere by signing an SDG Charter in the Netherlands. The Charter now has 110 signatories, and is encouraging organisations to form cross-sectoral partnerships to help achieve the SDGs. There are also several new initiatives, including Community Life Centres in Africa to improve basic healthcare for people at the base of the pyramid (SDG 3), the Human Cities Coalition to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable (SDG 11), and the financial sector initiative SDG Investing to boost investments in sustainable development. The Charter powers a website where all individuals and organisations in the Netherlands can present their activities: gateway.sdgcharter.nl.

Another bottom-up initiative in support of the SDGs is Gemeenten4GlobalGoals, launched by the Association of Netherlands Municipalities to showcase local governments' contributions to SDGs such as reducing inequality and improving waste management.

Many partnerships promote sustainable development – in the Netherlands or in the global South – without referring to the SDG process. Examples include:

- The Energy Agreement for Sustainable Growth, which commits over forty organisations (private power companies, environmental organisations, knowledge institutions and government authorities) to reduce their energy use and promote a transition towards sustainable energy.
- Green Deals, which are cross-sector partnerships on themes like energy, mobility, biodiversity, water, resources, climate, food and construction. They foster economic growth while promoting energy conservation, sustainable fuel use and a clean environment. To date more than 200 Green Deals have been concluded, involving over 1,500 companies and CSOs. The EU Innovation Deals are inspired by this Dutch initiative.

In Curaçao, a long history of sectoral partnerships has paved the way for SDG implementation. In Curaçao's National Dialogue, government, businesses and trade unions discuss policy paths towards a better future for the country. This National Dialogue played a key role in launching the National Development Plan process. Building on this tradition, the government of Curaçao established a National Youth Council in 2017, which will promote youth development by giving young people a structured way to participate in policymaking and in shaping their future. With regard to implementation, Curaçao's size demands a multi-stakeholder approach: precisely the approach being taken in implementing its National Development Plan.

...and will help us meet the challenges on the road to 2030.

Broad and inclusive partnerships, both national and international, are the key to success. In the coming period the Netherlands, Curaçao, Aruba and St Maarten will build on existing partnerships, at country, Kingdom and international levels. In the Netherlands, the process of jointly drafting the first SDG report encouraged stakeholders to identify the SDGs they are contributing to. It also highlighted some gaps, for example on renewable energy, gender equality and freshwater withdrawal. Companies are increasingly aware of their responsibility to integrate sustainability in all its facets into their business models. Many actors emphasise the need for sufficient financial and other resources, and the importance of legislation and enforcement in addressing these issues. In addition, many stakeholders feel that the SDG process needs to devote more attention to the impact of current national policies on future generations and on communities in other parts of the world.

Awareness of the SDGs is growing across the Kingdom. The SDGs address complex issues, requiring the involvement of all actors. Ensuring broad involvement and collaboration between different sectors is an ongoing challenge for all the countries of the Kingdom, and SDG implementation must be further aligned with each country's existing policies. One and a half years after the UN Sustainable Development Summit, however, the first step has clearly been taken in the leap forward that Prime Minister Rutte called for. The Kingdom of the Netherlands is on the right track to meet the challenges in achieving the SDGs. In the race towards sustainable development, the SDGs have taught us to keep in step and advance together towards the same finish line. This is excellent news.