

A step forward towards a strategic partnership between the Netherlands and the CGIAR

On April 24, 2015, the Dutch Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and Economic Affairs (MEA) organized a meeting to inform and consult stakeholders on the draft framework for a NL-CGIAR partnership. Presentations included the initial knowledge domains and instruments which could form the backbone of the partnership and relate to the new 'Strategy and Results Framework 2016-2030' of the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR).

Forty-five participants from Dutch knowledge institutes, the private sector, civil society, government and representatives of the CGIAR Consortium discussed the added value of the proposed partnership and shared ideas as well as recommendations on the initial design. There was a high level of consensus and the conclusions of the meeting will contribute to the final framework.



Photo credit: Ineke Lemmen

'If you want to go fast in AR4D, go alone, if you want to go far in AR4D, go together'

Annette Wijering (Management team, Department of Agriculture and Nature Knowledge, MEA) opened the meeting by stressing that global partnerships are needed to address global challenges like food security and climate change. The Netherlands is already a partner in the CGIAR and is committed to build a more strategic and stronger partnership. The Netherlands has knowledge to offer across several domains and experience with regard to involving the private sector in research agenda setting and implementation.

Presentation of the partnership framework

The draft framework was presented in two parts ([Knowledge domains](#) and [Instruments](#)). It was stressed that the presentations are the proposals of a joint MEA and MFA working group and have not yet been subject to formal decision making. Mrs. Coosje Hoogendoorn (senior advisor, KIT) presented, on behalf of the working group, the priorities for Dutch policy on global food & nutrition security and the [main strategic goals of the CGIAR](#). She looked back at the actual collaboration between the Netherlands and CGIAR and the bottlenecks which prevent the full potential of partnership to flourish. A mutually supported focused agenda combined with an understanding for organizational structures, instruments and incentives can stimulate strategic collaboration. The Netherlands and CGIAR have common goals. Both want to advance agri-food science and innovation for a world free of poverty, hunger and environmental degradation.

Starting from the three main strategies of the Dutch Global Food Security Policy and the three Strategic Goals of the CGIAR Strategy and Results Framework 2016-2030, four potential priority knowledge domains have been identified, which will be well served by a number of cross-cutting themes and competences considered strong within Dutch Agricultural Research for Development (AR4D).

<i>Dutch Global Food Security Policy Priorities</i>		
Eradicating existing hunger and malnutrition	Promoting inclusive and sustainable growth in the agricultural sector	Creating ecologically sustainable food systems
<i>CGIAR Strategy and Results Framework - System Level Outcomes</i>		
Improved food and nutrition security for health	Reduced poverty	Improved natural resource systems and ecosystem services
<i>Knowledge Domains for Strategic Collaboration</i>		
Agriculture for nutrition and health	Sustainable Agri-Food Value Chains & Sectors Genetic improvement and propagation materials	Climate Smart Agriculture
<i>Dutch cross-cutting AR4D strengths</i> Systems Approach - Public Private Partnerships - Enabling & Scaling		

A three layered partnership can be envisaged: 1) An overall partnership framework, or Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed by the CGIAR Consortium and the Dutch government, i.e., the ministers of MFA and MEA; 2) Formulation of strategic thematic partnerships for a limited number of knowledge domains with alignment and synergy between Dutch and CGIAR resources; 3) Recognition for individual and more project-based collaboration that is likely to continue to evolve outside the strategic partnerships.

The proposals for policy instruments and incentives to enhance the effectiveness of the NL-CGIAR partnership were presented by *Mrs. Patricia Wagenmakers (Agriculture and Nature Knowledge Department, MEA)*. The partnership will be successful if it results in research which is demand driven rather than finance driven, demonstrates leverage through joint activities (1+1=3), focuses on the outcomes of research, and does not impose an additional administrative burden.

It is proposed to formalize the partnership by means of a MoU, the implementation of which will be governed by a Steering Committee for coordination, oversight and decision making. At organizational level the Netherlands is considering supporting the CGIAR with understanding, exploring and applying PPP methodologies for leverage, innovation, adoption and scalability. This could be done by establishing a Community of Practice for joint NL-CGIAR learning.

Various instruments and forms of collaboration can be mobilized in parallel to this, in order to enhance the strategic partnerships. The CGIAR will organize its work in a limited number of CGIAR Research Programs (CRPs), each of which will consist of 5 to 7 flagship projects. The deployment of Dutch scientists within the CGIAR system and a Young Expert Program for post-doctoral researchers will strengthen, the CGIAR, as well as scientific relations and knowledge exchange between CGIAR and the Dutch AR4D network. Joint decision making and accountability can be strengthened by, e.g., supporting Dutch senior scientists that are participating in CRP/flagship management teams.

Financial incentives from the Netherlands may consist of untied multiyear specific CRPs and, if possible, flagship funding in combination with (tied) matching funds to enable joint NL-GGIAR work within those CRPs. Other programmatic instruments may also offer options to support collaboration between the Netherlands and the CGIAR. MFA and MEA may adjust existing programs and instruments, e.g., offer capacity and co-funding for international call for research proposals; engage non-research and non-profit capacity in innovation systems; and look for geographical synergies between the work of the CGIAR and priority collaboration countries for the Netherlands.

From such a toolbox, instruments could be drawn by partners, as deemed appropriate, to design together the architecture of a strategic partnership. Last, but not least, management commitment of Dutch and CGIAR key stakeholders and organizational structures to the strategic partnerships is going to be crucial.

Plenary and panel discussion

Marcel Vernooij (Sustainable Economic Development Department, MFA) invited members of a panel of experts on the CGIAR to comment on the presentations and facilitated a plenary discussion with the audience on the 'Why, What & How' of strategic partnerships between the CGIAR and NL.



Photo credit: F&BKP Office

The members of the panel kicked-off the discussion. *Charlotte de Fraiture (UNESCO-IHE)* would like to get a clearer picture of the topics of the partnership and of the instruments; where does Dutch knowledge come in? *Frank Rijberman (CEO, CGIAR Consortium)* liked the choice for a limited number of strategic areas and the intention to have joined calls for research proposals. The CGIAR does indeed have a strong interest in the Dutch experience with PPPs since the CGIAR has limited experience engaging the private sector. *Eelco Baan (SNV Netherlands Development Organisation)* explained that his organization finds partnering with CRPs cumbersome and hence is focused on CGIAR's Research Centers (examples are ICRAF, ILRI and IFPRI). SNV brings in scaling of research to reality. He supports the plea for a more strategic collaboration. *Orlando de Ponti*, having worked on both public and private sides in the seed sector, regards agreement on dealing with Intellectual Property in PPPs as a key issue for successful collaboration and advises to be clear about 'the rules of the game' with respect to partnerships. He prefers long-term engagement with CGIAR – it needs to be remembered that the present Dutch 'Topsector' approach to stimulate partnerships between research and the private sector receives annual commitments from the government and not multi-annual financing.

Why should we have a partnership and what makes the Netherlands an interesting partner for the CGIAR?

The striking similarities between the goals of the Netherlands and CGIAR and the complimentary knowledge domains, call for a partnership as the CGIAR and NL can increase mutual impact together. Due to strategies on both sides being currently redefined, there is momentum for a partnership. In addition, a partnership offers ample opportunities for people to engage and learn. Many individual researchers in the Netherlands and CGIAR projects are already connected, but there is a lack of mechanisms to build large strategic initiatives.

The Netherlands has many assets to offer. Research and implementation programs have a strong systems approach in sectors with ample experience, like water and livestock. Other countries are interested in the Dutch experience with transdisciplinary research, the long history of working with farmer organisations and giving weight to farmers' research questions, and recently the Topsector approach. In value chains, the systems approach and the ability to organize stakeholders come together (pointing to PPPs). Stakeholder involvement in research from the outset is considered essential for putting knowledge to use.

The Netherlands is a small country and as such is perceived as not too powerful and impartial. Consequently, the Dutch are able to inspire trust in partnerships and bring people together. The Netherlands also has a number of successful farmer based cooperatives that are directly involved in or support innovation, e.g., Rabobank and Friesland Campina. The focus on sustainability is seen as typically Dutch.

Knowledge domains – What kind of topics match the cross-cutting competences of Dutch AR4D?

The proposed knowledge domains for the strategic partnerships to be developed did not raise many questions or objections. This does not imply full consensus since the knowledge domains should evolve further and filled with 'best ideas' which will bring added value and excellence. A critical mass for collaboration is a prerequisite. *Orlando De Ponti* referred to the very important but also relatively new and complex topic of food & nutrition and wondered whether this would plea for inclusion of AVRDC in the partnership with the CGIAR. *Eelco Baan* would rather focus more on resilience of agricultural systems in general than 'just' on resilience within climate smart agriculture. He also highlighted the economic dimension of food security, i.e., value chains.

Are we committed and ready for a partnership? How could it function?

At the start of the discussion, the audience had questions about the context and content of the partnership. How do we sustain demand driven research? Should we differentiate service providers from strategic partners? How do we engage in PPPs? How do we translate knowledge into practice? According to *Frank Rijsberman*, the demand side is expressed through processes such as GCARD and CAADP. To achieve the demand-based outcomes in the SRF, involvement from NGOs is also needed for adoption and scaling-up. Participants underlined that it is necessary to ensure that the formulated agenda is shared with the CGIAR and the Research Centers to achieve strategic critical mass. Inclusive programming for long term collaboration is important. For example, capacity development requires long term partnerships and a focus on young talent.

Those stakeholders that are involved and deliver added value to the priority knowledge domains, and until now are often only involved in *ad hoc* collaboration with the CGIAR, should aim to move to a more strategic collaboration which could be supported by an 'one-stop shop' rather than dealing with 15 centers. The private sector wants a win-win and a long term perspective for future business.

Frank Rijsberman mentioned several CGIAR internal developments which will be important for the implementation of a strategic partnership. Research results and scientific papers are important but CGIAR management is making sure that the organization will focus on outcomes. This will lead to organizing partnerships that deliver outcomes beyond research results. CGIAR programs will have verifiable impact pathways and be kept accountable for outcomes. Results based management will steer resources towards research that yields impact. There will need to be a level playing field to make sure the CGIAR engages with the best strategic partners.

Closure of the meeting

Wijnand van IJssel (MFA and representative of the Netherlands in Fund Council of CGIAR), was pleased that the discussion had concentrated on success factors of a joint strategy such as joint programs, and had not diverted much to a discussion about financial instruments. Breaking the barriers between different sectors and addressing the nexus of food, water and social and economic development is key. The presented position and priorities for the strategic framework are advanced, but not yet final, and he invited all participants to send additional comments and ideas to the working group.

This meeting took place at the right strategic moment according to *Frank Rijsberman*. Over summer, the call for pre-proposals for new CRPs will be launched and in August CRPs are likely to develop flagship project pre-proposals with teams of strategic partners. In early 2016, the full proposals will have to be submitted. He believes the presented priority knowledge domains are still broad and may need to be a bit more focused to meet Dutch ambitions, but advises to move quickly now. This is also because he expects that staff of CGIAR centers/CRPs will seek contact with Dutch researchers, since they are aware of the discussions about the strategic partnership.

Mr. Kees Rade (Ambassador for Sustainability Development / Director Inclusive Green Growth, MFA), closed the meeting, thanking facilitator, panel and all participants for their input. He also underlined the emphasis on the role of private sector and partnerships. Working with the 'Dutch Diamond', i.e., the private sector, knowledge institutes, civil society and government, will achieve leverage. He reminded the audience that the overall background for the discussion is the global debate around sustainable development, where the Netherlands strongly supports the alignment of international policies. From that perspective he drew the attention of the audience to important meetings in 2015, such as the Financing for Development conference in Addis Ababa (July), the Post-2015 SDG summit in New York (Sept.) and the conference on combating climate change (COP21) in Paris (Dec.), and recommended to ensure that the strategic partnership between the Netherlands and the CGIAR will strengthen the global fight against poverty, hunger and climate change.