



WORLDCONNECTORS THE ROUND TABLE FOR PEOPLE AND THE PLANET

## *Coherent policy to manage the global commons*

### **Dutch International Policy requires a new approach**

Worldconnectors Vision Document in response to the Report on International Cooperation "Less Pretension, More Ambition" by the Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR), published in January 2010.

This document is based on a dialogue on the WRR Report at the Worldconnectors Round Table meetings of 16 February 2010 and 27 May 2010 and two Steering Group meetings. It has also been formed by the consultation process initiated by Worldconnectors among business actors, see Annex I for the results. Another priority for the Worldconnectors in the context of this debate is gender empowerment and diversity. With regard to this we refer to our recent statement on this theme on our website ([www.worldconnectors.nl](http://www.worldconnectors.nl)). A reaction to the WRR report regarding gender formulated by the Dutch Wo=Men network can be found in Annex II.

The debate on the WRR Report on the innovation of international cooperation has been facilitated by *The Broker*. A number of Worldconnectors contributed to this debate on this online platform. For contributions by Ruud Lubbers, Jos van Gennip, Herman Mulder, Sylvia Borren, Johan van de Gronden, Ton Dietz, Paul Hoebink and many others, please see: <http://www.thebrokeronline.eu/en/Special-Reports/Towards-a-global-development-strategy>

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#### **Last January, the Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR)**

presented a report entitled *Less Pretension, More Ambition: Development Aid that Makes a Difference*, recommending fundamental changes in the organisation of Dutch development aid. According to the WRR, more attention is needed for the management of global public goods. This refers to finding global solutions to interconnected problems, such as hunger and the food crisis, water and energy scarcity, climate change, loss of biodiversity, and global inequality.

**With this short statement, we especially want to underwrite the WRR report position on the importance of ‘the global public goods’.** Global public goods are the goods that should be available to anyone worldwide without exclusion, in a ‘non-competitive’ manner. The Worldconnectors themselves prefer to use the term ‘global commons’, referring to all that is of common interest to people and the planet. This is a value-driven dynamic concept that has both a social and a ecological dimension. In the social dimension our common interest is in peace, safety, stability, equity, welfare, etc. It is the context in which people can live their lives in dignity. In the ecological dimension our common interest is in the sustainable management of the world’s natural resources, such as forests, oceans, soil, flora and fauna. Managing the global commons means maintaining and developing both dimensions in the interest of humankind.

**Protection and advancement of the global commons is everyone’s responsibility and in everyone’s own interest.** The tragedy of the global commons agenda is that in our present competitive world when something is everyone’s responsibility it can easily become no-one’s responsibility. The ‘race to the bottom’ in this sense is very much happening today (example: the oil leakage in the Mexican Gulf). Inequality and environmental degradation lead to loss of life, insecurity, war and risks – and to a less stable world. It is therefore in our own individual and collective enlightened interest that men, women and children all over the world can participate in social-economic and political processes. This is essential now and in the coming decades of global population growth. A stable, safe and sustainable world is particularly important for the Netherlands, as our economy depends for a large part on trade with other countries. Put in a pro-active way: Wo-Mankind can and should transform its relationships with the planet and itself from a utilitarian and competitive model to a cooperative one, which can lead to great (and diverse) potential for all. This needs an ethical and practical commitment to life in all its diversity.

**This requires a true mind shift,** away from the (postcolonial) paradigm that has been dominant during the last fifty years. The traditional aid agenda was usually driven by a combination of guilt, human concern, and our own Dutch vested interests. Western countries (and the multilateral institutions they have dominated) influenced development processes in developing countries in many ways through aid and its associated conditionalities, and through their own incoherent economic and climate policies. That time is now over. We need a new model of international policies based on the fact that in this time of globalisation, everything and everyone is interdependent. This holds true

not only for individuals or countries, but also for political, economic, social, and ecological systems. This means we need to find a new balance in international power relations and new systems of checks and balances to be able to safeguard and develop the global commons, which are essential for the very survival of the planet, as well as for our own future.

**International Policies for managing and developing the global commons go beyond 'aid' or 'development cooperation'** which as concepts and practice are still based on the north-south paradigm, unequal power relationships and the exploitation of old and new scarcities. The new international approach requires an acknowledgement of our global interdependence, and requires all governments, corporates and civil partners to move beyond short term vested interests and power positions to working together to save our planet: its biodiversity as well as its peoples in all their cultural diversity. This means finding new solutions together for climate change, the food crisis, water and energy shortage etc, as well as finding ways to engage the potential of all men, women and youth in a cooperative and non- competitive manner. Some call this an evolutionary shift from competition to cooperation needed for the survival of this planet and its people.

**This new approach requires a pro-active Dutch international policy and practice.** The Dutch government needs to push for better management and development of the global commons and therefore must itself have coherent policies in the national, European and international arenas. We call upon the Dutch government to prioritise this global commons agenda. We underwrite the WRR's plea for more coordinated knowledge development on the themes of international policy and the global commons. There is a need for more cooperation and knowledge-sharing between northern and southern academics. There is a world to be won (literally) by moving towards better understanding of the global commons, which includes conservation but also development of new potential – per definition of and for our total planet and peoples.

**Besides the role of governments and academia the Worldconnectors want to highlight the roles of civil society and of the private sector.** The WRR report concentrates mostly on interstate development. But this alone has not been able to reach the poorest of the poor. One out of every seven people still go to bed hungry. Hunger is a source of conflict and disease. It is not only inhuman, but also a source of much conflict and unnecessary misery – and of course a terrible loss of human (women's) potential. The rapid growth of the world population – which by 2050 may have risen to more than 9 billion – makes the need to combat hunger and solve water- and energy scarcity even more

urgent. With new green solutions great productive human energy can be created for the global commons and sustainable economies.

Active citizens can play many different roles in all kinds of national and international initiatives: in implementation projects, as watchdogs, through research, and by influencing policies and the public mindset. The increasing force of young people in these processes should not be underestimated, and can be further stimulated.

The same goes for the private sector. As the Netherlands has a tradition of international trade, the Dutch corporate sector can make a significant difference: by being coherent and by creating opportunities for decent, green work. We therefore ask that the broad private sector (large and small) in all its diversity play a larger role in debates and policy development concerning the global commons. We ask them to 'live' the decent work agenda and the four core labor standards of the ILO, underwritten by the private sector itself as well as Trade Unions and Governments.

See Annex 1 for a statement of a working group with representatives of Dutch businesses.

**Within all this, the Worldconnectors want to highlight the key position of women.** Women can play a crucial role in local development, agriculture, micro financing, social cohesion, education and healthcare, as well as finding new local solutions for water and energy scarcities. The 'feminization of poverty' that is currently taking place can be transformed if the inequality between the sexes is addressed and if women are stimulated to use their qualities, energy and voice to achieve sustainable development. This is why the Worldconnectors ask (as an essential addition to the WRR report), that governments, companies and civilians cooperate to increase the role of women in all aspects of their organisations in order to achieve the much needed coherence in international policy and effectiveness in practice. In this sense solving the gender gap and stimulating women's leadership at local, national and global level must be a central element of the new Dutch International Policies for the management and development of the global commons.

See Annex 2 for a reaction on the WRR report by Wo=Men, as well as Annex 3: the Worldconnectors own statement on Gender and Diversity.

**The WRR report has sparked much debate, but has still seen insufficient contributions from outside 'the sector'.** So far, neither the academic community nor civil movements related to environmental protection, human rights, peace and global security, have been very actively engaged in the debates surrounding the WRR report. The Worldconnectors therefore call upon these groups to also reflect and react. Likewise, we call upon the various ministries to define a vision and actively engage in shaping a new

international policy approach, as broad coherence of policy and practice are central to this new Dutch approach towards the Global Commons.

**For the Worldconnectors the most important recommendation of the WRR is their plea for a broad and coherent international cooperation policy which we think needs to be centered around the global commons agenda, and which requires stronger global governance with a clear role for the corporate sector and civil society.**

**All other concrete recommendations of the WRR report should be carefully checked for their effect on strengthening the global commons agenda.** The WRR's recommendations (e.g., economic development beyond poverty alleviation, a country-specific approach, professionalization, stopping the discussion about the 0.7%, ten countries for bilateral support, and the creation of an NLAID) can all be analysed in terms of their positive or possibly negative effects on the role which the Netherlands can and wants to play internationally in developing global commons policies and practice.

**Summarising:** The new Dutch international policy should be driven by an uncompromising dedication to good management and to the development of global commons (partly because this is of enormous importance for the Netherlands itself). This new approach demands systematic and coherent policy development and cooperation between the Dutch government, the private sector and civil society, as well as a collective responsibility to increase the role of women, at local, national and global level.

The Worldconnectors see it as their role to support this process, and would like to invite a process of structural interaction with different stakeholders on this new concept of managing and developing the Global Commons.

The Worldconnectors