

Report Roundtable '*Connecting interests - linking local needs with Dutch goals*'

Introduction

On June 23 2025, the Netherlands Food Partnership (NFP), in collaboration with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food Security and Nature, organised an interactive roundtable at the Mauritskazerne in Ede. They brought together over 70 participants from diverse sectors - government, business, civil society, and research - to discuss how Dutch international food security policy can align more effectively with national priorities in eight focus countries. The session was designed to inform the development of the Dutch Multi-Annual Country Strategies (MACS) for 2026–2029.

The event revolved around two country table sessions where participants could contribute and discuss their insights and recommendations. Each table was co-hosted by an NFP facilitator and a representative from one of the ministries who is involved in the programming in that respective country. The roundtable provided a unique opportunity to connect Dutch and local perspectives on food system challenges, trade, and stability. The Dutch embassies of the 8 countries will be invited for a meeting with the NFP and ministry co-hosts to discuss the outcomes of the round tables. This report presents the outcomes of the main activities of the day and the key takeaways from the country tables.

Setting the scene

The session opened with a plenary featuring voices from policy and practice. Moderator Babette Bodlaender welcomed participants and introduced three speakers:

- Ivo Demmers (CEO of NFP) reflected on the series of interactions between policymakers and the organisations working on food and nutrition security that this event amounts to. Next to that, he explained the preliminary results of another way Netherlands Food Partnership facilitates Dutch FNS policy processes: an inventory of how the Dutch private sector can be further enabled to contribute to food and nutrition security and to better make use of this contribution.
- Maya Muller (East-West Seed) then shared a practical example of how East-West Seed successfully drives impact through aid and trade. She ascribes it to the company's vision for global food and nutrition security, set by its now late founder and World Food Prize Laureate Simon Groot. This



includes the understanding that farming does not just rely on selling good quality seeds, but for instance also on proper policies and farmer training. These are important areas addressed by their non-profit foundation East-West Seed Knowledge Transfer. Maya Muller further noted that the challenges East-West Seed faces across the world are all context-specific. They range from soil degradation to bad roads to misinformation about seeds. The common solution to all, Miss Muller stresses, is the continuity and long-term commitment to market development.

- Wilma van Esch (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) stressed the importance of the day's event in making steps towards execution of the new policy. She praised the set-up of the roundtables, and looked forward to finding the collective Dutch contribution to country-specific challenges. The best Dutch Diamond practices and proven interventions will be used to inform the development of the Dutch Multi-Annual Country Strategies for 2026–2029.

These opening insights set the stage for a rich exchange at the country tables, where participants engaged in two rounds discussing how activities in food and nutrition security link to the Dutch interests in trade and stability in specific contexts.

General outcomes of the country tables

After two rounds of country tables, several participants plenary reflected on their key findings. The following three outcomes represent the red thread among the findings of all the country tables.

Long-term vision and clarity on Dutch interests

Participants highlighted the importance of working with a long-term perspective, supported by consistent programmes. There was also a shared need for clearer articulation of what exactly constitutes the Dutch interest. Is trade a means to an end or a goal in itself? Participants stressed that it should be the first. Clarifying this would help align expectations and enhance cooperation.

Approaches must reflect local and regional realities

What works in one part of a country may not be relevant in another. That is even the case within the borders of a single country: they can often face very different challenges and will require tailored responses. Participants stressed that solutions should reflect national, regional, and even sub-regional realities.

All stakeholders are needed for real impact

Achieving meaningful outcomes requires contributions from government, business, civil society, and research communities. Participants noted that this collaboration is already taking place on the ground



and valued the roundtable as a space to better understand how their efforts intersect in practice. Many found the conversations insightful and relevant to their country-specific work.

Closing Reflections and Next Steps

To close the event, Wampie Libon, Director Inclusive Green Growth and Ambassador Sustainable Development at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, reflected on the value of these in-depth, country-level conversations. She emphasised that food and nutrition security should remain at the heart of all efforts and highlighted the strength of the Dutch Diamond model. Rather than working in isolation, NGOs and companies increasingly operate across traditional boundaries - NGOs contribute to market development, and businesses support social and economic development. Wampie also stressed the importance of investment to enable scaling up, particularly with private sector engagement.

Ivo Demmers then concluded by pointing to the rich exchange of knowledge between people and organisations that do not often interact so directly. He noted that these insights are highly relevant for the Dutch Multi-Annual Country Strategies. The session helped build shared understanding of each other's goals, priorities, and working approaches—laying a foundation for stronger collaboration going forward.

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Key country-specific takeaways

This section presents the key takeaways from the country tables.

Egypt

In Egypt, food system challenges are deeply shaped by water scarcity and land fragmentation.

- Encourage the smart use of agricultural drainage water to tackle growing scarcity and salinity, especially in the Nile Delta.
- Support smallholders by addressing fragmented land ownership and limited access to credit or financial services.
- Improve export opportunities by investing in pesticide testing and safe application technologies, aligning with European standards.



Ethiopia

The Ethiopia table emphasised that trade should be a means to support local development - not a goal in itself.

- Focus on companies that deliver local impact, with trade strengthening business continuity and viability. Building public-private partnerships are deemed a good vehicle to align Dutch and Ethiopian interests. Make sure to build on earlier investments rather than starting from scratch.
- Support Dutch sustainable input suppliers by addressing regulatory hurdles, such as product registration.
- International actors stressed: impact matters more than origin. Dutch suppliers must compete on quality and relevance across the full value chain.

Ghana

Discussions at the Ghana table centred on regional trade integration and sustainable farming, especially in the North.

- Ensure that Dutch trade policies are in line with especially Ghanaian but also regional and European policies so that they are aligned.
- Promote agroecological, climate-smart practices for soil health and biodiversity and support this providing access to insurance and finance.
- Support the investment in local value addition to reduce reliance on raw cocoa exports and promote the diversification of crops, guided by dietary guidelines. Do this by further developing the horticulture sector and seed systems.

Kenya

Kenya's food system faces both post-harvest losses and regional differences and inequalities.

- Support investments in agrologistics (e.g. on local seed availability) and cold chains to reduce food loss and improve market access for smallholders.
- Take a 'landscape approach' that combines youth employment, green energy, and food production in integrated rural development. Collaborate with local Kenyan knowledge institutions and innovations to achieve this.
- On making a strong contribution to stability in the Arid and Semi Arid Lands : involve stakeholders to really understand the local dynamics and needs. FNS interventions are too often based on the assumption of a stable situation that does not serve local communities.



Mali

The Mali table emphasised the need for long-term, inclusive approaches that go beyond fragmented projects and respond to both development and stability challenges.

- Create inclusive and practical spaces where government, civil society, businesses, and donors can come together. Such space for ongoing conversations help align national goals with external support and lead to more lasting progress.
- Bring Dutch and EU funding and initiatives together around bigger-picture efforts—such as trade and food corridors—rather than isolated short-term projects. Participants stressed the need to move from scattered activities to coordinated, longer-term initiatives that connect regions and sectors.
- Involve young people as key contributors across the entire value chain, both in urban and rural settings, from input supply, farming, aggregation, and processing, to marketing, trade logistics, policy advocacy, and public services. Not just as end beneficiaries, but as designers, implementers, and co-owners of systemic transformation.

Nigeria

At the Nigeria table, participants discussed how to strengthen the country's food system by connecting local demand, entrepreneurial potential, and Dutch expertise. They recommended having a broad perspective on Dutch interests in this country with a vast market demand.

- Develop agribusiness hubs that connect smallholder farmers to local and regional markets, with a strong focus on engaging youth and creating decent jobs. Explicitly connect these hubs to the vast market demand of the country itself.
- Focus on making quality seeds more accessible, with youth involved in designing solutions that respond to market needs. Capacity building was seen by the participants as urgent in order to increase productivity.
- Ensure that nutrition remains central by measuring the private sector's contribution to better diets and using that data to guide policy and investment decisions.

Tunisia

As Tunisia is a new focus country for Dutch food and nutrition security policy, many participants noted they were still building familiarity with the local context. Still, the discussion clearly pointed to the need for a phased, integrated approach.

- In the short term, focus on land governance, trust between citizens and institutions, and enabling factors like technology, skills, and finance (including blended finance) to lay the groundwork for inclusive, sustainable development.



- Engagement with Dutch businesses holds potential for the longer term, but requires easing political bottlenecks through diplomacy and relationship-building. This means creating mutual incentives and opportunities, on the basis of give-and-take and sustained collaboration.

Uganda

Participants emphasised the need for a long-term vision in Dutch engagement that supports smallholders, builds resilient communities, and creates opportunities for youth.

- Agriculture is often seen as unappealing by youth. Diversifying income, also off-farm, and promoting green jobs and entrepreneurship were seen as key to youth and women's inclusion. Also regarding inclusion: strengthening local communities, including IDPs, would contribute to broader stability goals.
- Uganda's low dietary quality indicators sparked discussion. More attention is needed on value chains for nutritious foods, supported by public-private partnerships in sectors like dairy and horticulture.
- Unlocking finance for smallholders and SMEs, improving access to climate-smart inputs, and reducing food loss and waste were further named as priorities. Participants also saw potential in linking sanitation with food production.