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This document is an unofficial translation of the Dutch SDG Spotlight report and only contains a selection of the full report. The chapters with an in-depth analysis of the implementation of SDG 10 and SDG 15 in the Dutch context are not included, but a summary and recommendations can be read here.
As this is the first edition of the SDG Spotlight Netherlands Report we, the initiators and those who contributed to the creation of this report, would like to introduce ourselves. As the SDG Spotlight NL team, we share a positive motivation: we want the Netherlands to play a bigger, more decisive and consistent role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals both at home and abroad.

The initiative for an SDG Spotlight Report Netherlands emerged from Global Goals Accelerator (GGA), a partnership of Earth Charter Netherlands, Sustainability Dialogue and other networks, set up in 2016 by Veronique Swinkels and Alide Roerink. Also, Ellen van Reesch has been working as an independent consultant in the field of sustainable development since 2015. Previously she worked for the national government in the field of international cooperation, trade and foreign affairs.

At the 2017 High Level Political Forum in New York, where the Netherlands presented its first voluntary review, Alide, Veronique, and Ellen were introduced to alternative SDG reports written by civil society representatives. Meanwhile, such Spotlight reports have been released in several countries, for example in Finland, and at the global level. They put the spotlight on factors that remain underexposed in governments’ "official" SDG reports.

Thus, the idea was born to start this tradition in the Netherlands as well. Subsequently, Building Change, the partnership of Partos, Woord en Daad, and the Max van der Stoel Foundation, joined with indispensable involvement and support. On behalf of Building Change, Rosa van Driel became an active member of the team. Building Change also made a financial contribution together with NCDO, Civic Engagement Alliance and WECF. Moreover, Ellen acted as the coordinator and final editor of the report in close consultation with the editorial team.

We would also like to thank the following contributors with whom it was a pleasure to work: Wim Oolbekkink (St. SBI - Earth Charter Netherlands and the SDG House UH), Sanne van de Voort (WECF), and interns Kirsten de Mik, Annelou Snippe, Sam Blokker, and Tirza van Willigenburg. Also, we are grateful to Jannet Vaessen (WOMEN Inc., Coordinator SDG 10 Alliance) and Coenraad Krijger (IUCN, Coordinator SDG 15 Alliance) for their substantive support and involvement.

In preparing this report, we drew from our own experiences at home and abroad, input and publications from our networks and reports from the (social) media. Thankfully, we were able to use numerous valuable publications from Dutch planning agencies, advisory councils and knowledge institutions. Additionally, we were inspired by the many existing transition movements in our country, such as the Transition Engine, Trade Otherwise, Food Otherwise and the ‘Sustainable 100’ from, the Dutch daily newspaper, Trouw.

We are also grateful for the direct contributions we received during our series of online consultation meetings, through the Spotlight NL website, and through some targeted consultations. The organizations represented included the following: Avalon Foundation, (the initiative) Bewust Bodemgebruik (Conscious Ground Use), Both ENDS, CBS, Cordaid, Dorcas Aid International, Foundation Max van der Stoel, Greenpeace, Handel Anders!, IUCN, Young Climate Movement, Jongeren Milieu Actief, Lab Toekomstige Generaties, Mondiaal FNV, NJR/UN Youth Ambassador for Biodiversity & Food, Amsterdam Public Library, Oxfam Novib, Partos, PBL, Province of North Brabant, Platform Duurzame en Solidaire Economie (Platform for a Sustainable and Solidarity Economy), SDG Netherlands, SDG Netwerk Fryslân, SER, Good Governance Monitor Foundation, Stichting Landschapsbeheer Gelderland (Gelderland Landscape Foundation), VluchtelingenWerk Nederland (Dutch Refugee Council), WECF, Wildlife Justice, WWF, WOMEN Inc., Woord en Daad and Zinnige Zaken.

Signed,
Rosa van Driel (Building Change)
Ellen van Reesch (independent consultant)
Veronique Swinkels (Go for Good, Worldconnectors)
Alide Roerink (SBI Foundation - Earth Charter Netherlands)
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WHY AN SDG SPOTLIGHT REPORT FOR THE NETHERLANDS?

In September 2015, UN member states jointly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. With this, the Netherlands committed to implementing the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, the SDGs, as a coherent change agenda. At its core it is about the commitment to an economic prosperity model that is neither harmful to nature or humanity, but rather serves them, globally, both now and in the future, The core principle ‘leave no one behind’ expresses the importance of inclusiveness as a common thread through all 17 goals. It is more urgent than ever to put these principles into practice. The climate and biodiversity crisis, the depletion of ecosystems and raw materials, the growing inequality in the world, and also the COVID-19 pandemic show that the existing economic paradigm is endangering both people and the planet.

We are now more than five years into the process of implementing the SDGs. In the Netherlands, some one hundred municipalities, numerous civil society organizations, companies, knowledge institutions, and citizens have started working with the (change) agenda. Yet many goals remain far out of sight. The SDGs have not been given a convincing position in government policy. The global agenda has not been translated into a national strategy with its own measurable goals to bring the SDGs closer, both domestically and internationally. With the March 2021 elections, there has been new momentum.

Statistics Netherlands (CBS) reports on the progress of the SDGs in the Netherlands in an annual trend survey, linked to the Broad Prosperity Monitor. The national government, together with other parties, annually reports to the House of Representatives on the (policy) efforts made, under the name ‘Nederland Ontwikkelt Duurzaam’ (The Netherlands is developing sustainably). It is a good thing that in this way the Netherlands are being held accountable. The reports provide appealing examples of the initiatives undertaken by government bodies and civil society partners. But does the selection made (by Statistics
The Netherlands (CBS) lead to a fair and representative indication of what the results are? What has been reported, what not, and why? We established that the report lacks a considerable amount of essential information. Where there is stagnation or regression, we miss critical reflection on the causes, with respect to policy choices made and systemic factors. Also missing is the Dutch influence on the achievement of the SDGs at the international level. At the request of the House of Representatives, the Second Rutte cabinet launched an action plan to promote systematic policy coherence with regard to the interests of developing countries. Here too, we see a selective representation of the Dutch role in the progress report. In February 2021, the report Five years of implementation of the SDGs in the Netherlands (2016-2020): monitoring and reflection (hereafter: CBS Report 2021) was published. This report contains an inventory of government policy per SDG, but no evaluation of whether the current commitment is sufficient for the achievement of the objectives. It is for this reason that we see cause for a critically constructive report from a societal perspective.

**OUR APPROACH TO THIS REPORT**

In this first Dutch SDG Spotlight Report, we put the spotlight on SDG 10 and SDG 15. That choice is not arbitrary. SDG 10 is about reducing inequality within and among countries. Challenges that President Obama and the World Economic Forum called “the defining challenge of our time” in 2013. SDG 10 aims for a just and inclusive world where countries and people can develop as they choose. SDG 15 is about the biosphere, the natural basis for human existence, and about the conservation and restoration of ecosystems. If this natural groundwork collapses, none of the development goals will be achieved. We see these two goals as indicators for assessing whether the intended careful balance between the “three Ps” (people, planet, prosperity) is being achieved. Also, the recently published Human Development Report 2020 places a direct link between human and planetary health. We need an economic development model that is both ecologically sustainable and inclusive.

When the 17 SDGs are discussed, it is usually in general terms. The 169 underlying subgoals (targets) and the progress indicators that go with it are hardly ever considered. Overall, the discussions and reflections lack depth.

For a thorough understanding of the Netherlands’ current position, we conduct an analysis at the sub-goal level. To that end, in chapters 4 (SDG 10) and 5 (SDG 15) we first look at how the Netherlands is doing with regard to each of the subgoals (the score) and what the trend is. Next, we discuss the policy commitment in relation to concrete social issues related to these sub-goals. We do this separately for the Netherlands, and for the role of the Netherlands in other countries. Our starting point includes the consultations we have held and what is occurring in the political and social debate. This translated edition only contains a summary of chapter 4 and 5 and the resulting recommendations. ¹

Where the wording of the UN agenda is unclear, we provide an interpretation, and where relevant data is missing, this is researched or suggestions are made. In chapter 6, we look at some of the connections (trade-offs and synergies) between SDG 10 and SDG 15. Our recommendations are based on the analysis in these chapters. We also briefly reflect on the current use of indicators for progress monitoring, and make suggestions for fine tuning and improvement.

While this is a comprehensive report, we do not claim that it’s complete. We consider it to be the beginning of a process to gain a better understanding of where we stand. It is quite possible that, in the multiplicity of processed information, errors have crept in. Thus, we welcome any relevant comments and improvements.

¹ Read the full analysis of SDG 10 and SDG 15 in the Dutch context here.
Focus on the role of the national government

This Spotlight Report is a critical report. The analysis and recommendations are primarily aimed at national government and politics. The recent independent evaluation of SDG implementation in 2016-2020 finds that among citizens, organizations, businesses, and municipalities, there is great enthusiasm for the SDGs, which, however, is not met with equal interest and overarching commitment at the national government level. We acknowledge this observation. Ideas and successful experiments that fit a new model of society are still running up against old rules and patterns that stand in the way of change. Too often, the national government is the inhibiting factor that prevents the transition movement from gaining momentum. The government’s commitment to sustainable development, including the international commitment, is not coherent. This also applies to SDG 10 and SDG 15. Dutch development funds specifically aimed at combating inequality and preserving biodiversity are limited. On the other hand, there are large flows of money from and to the Netherlands that have negative effects, such as the large-scale tax avoidance that the Netherlands facilitates. Research by Building Change shows that the SDG test, which was introduced in 2019, to test the effects of new policies and legislation on developing countries and gender equality, is still hardly used.² In our report, policy coherence is the central perspective. We not only look at specific target measures related to SDG 10 and SDG 15, but also at other laws, regulations, (policy) practices, and funding that influence the goals.

We do not want our critical perspective to detract from the efforts of all, including those in government, who are working towards the SDGs. On the contrary, we hope to provide them with some support.

Delineation

We have made a number of choices for delineation. We already mentioned our focus on two of the SDGs. Of course, cross-links with other SDGs emerge, such as SDG 1 (poverty), SDG 2.4 (agriculture), SDG 8 (labour market), SDG 12 (sustainable production and consumption), and SDG 13 (climate), but we do not make this explicit in each case. In the analysis we largely ignore the direct impact of the COVID-19 crisis, as we focus more on the policy efforts of recent years. However, the consequences of past policy choices do matter for our resilience today.

In this first edition of the Dutch SDG Spotlight Report, we have limited ourselves to the European Netherlands. The differences with the Caribbean Netherlands³ are great and thus deserve attention and further elaboration. Residents of the Caribbean Netherlands have fewer rights in some areas than residents of the European Netherlands. Our point of departure is equal treatment with the Netherlands, while exceptions for the islands must be well motivated. This is not always the case. In terms of work, income and poverty reduction, children’s rights, and safety, there is a large gap with the Netherlands. In addition, the Caribbean Netherlands has its own significance in terms of nature and biodiversity. We lack the knowledge to do justice to these realities.

² See Partos for results of SDG test study.
³ The islands of Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba, collectively called the Caribbean Netherlands, have been part of the Netherlands since 2010. The intention is that the welfare and prosperity of the inhabitants of the islands rises to the level of the European Netherlands. Source: CRM: www.mensenrechten.nl/nl/caribisch-nederland.
Most reports on the Dutch implementation of the SDGs paint the picture that, overall, the Netherlands is ‘doing well’. We argue the opposite. The Netherlands scores poorly on the two central tenets of the sustainable development agenda: balance between economy, social welfare and healthy ecosystems; and the principle of leaving no one behind. The commitment to the economy continues to be at the expense of nature and biodiversity, at home and abroad. The degradation of ecosystems affects the quality of life of people here, now, elsewhere, and later. We also see no active commitment for an inclusive society. While the rich in the Netherlands are getting richer and a large middle group is still able to keep up, structurally, part of the population does not benefit from the broad prosperity: the relative differences in opportunities, income, and wealth are increasing. People with a migration background are, in most areas, at a great disadvantage. Our consumption of raw materials is as high as ever. It is precisely this footprint that is a major ‘driver’ of global inequality and ecosystem degradation.

For SDG 10 and SDG 15 there is, within the Netherlands, for almost all progress indicators, a trend of stagnation or decline. For SDG 15, the underlying values are also very unfavourable: both the proportion and quality of our natural environment places us at the bottom of the EU rankings. For SDG 10, the situation is more complicated. Based on net income inequality, the Netherlands scores quite favourably within the EU. If we also include other indicators, such as wealth inequality, the picture becomes considerably more negative. The share of the population that experiences discrimination is, with more than a quarter, substantial, and is not decreasing. The Netherlands’ contribution to SDG 10 and SDG 15 abroad is not monitored by the CBS, but the Monitor of well-being does provide valuable information. The nature of trade and investment, which is geared to short-term profit, entails considerable risks of exploitation of natural resources and cheap labour, both at home and abroad.

There is a clear causal relationship between the scores and trends for SDG 10 and SDG 15, and Dutch (economic) policy, as we have shown throughout this report. Some of the government policies lead to greater inequality, for example, the culture of wage restraint for lower-wage earners; the austerity of social services; the far-reaching marketisation of essential basic services; the facilitation of international tax avoidance; the refusal to give developing countries room to produce their own COVID-19 vaccines; and the fact that the government’s policy is not based on the principle of subsidiarity; cutting off legal routes for labour migration from developing countries. The goals of SDG 15 are also further out of reach due to policies such as the billion-dollar support for intensive livestock farming and fossil industries; the weakening of land governance and rules for nature conservation; or the designation of wood-based biomass as clean energy, resulting in harmful imports from other countries.

The government is also creating policies to make our economy more sustainable, our society more inclusive, and for corporate social responsibility. But these policies are characterized by a high degree of non-commitment. Good policy ambitions are insufficiently accompanied by measurable goals, concrete paths for transition, adequate resources, and legal frameworks. The government is not providing enough direction, and is not taking the lead as “market master”. Companies are given the space to regulate themselves and are not guided towards a more sustainable production model with rules and pricing. The sustainability of international supply chains is largely pursued through voluntary covenants. Repeatedly, we see that these approaches yield too few results. In the conclusion of this report, we will discuss in more detail these systemic causes of the lack of progress. Below, we briefly summarize the findings for SDG 10 and SDG 15 per sub-goal, followed by our recommendations.
**SDG 10** REDUCED INEQUALITY

**SDG 10.1** Encourage relatively faster income growth of the 40% lowest income earners

**STATUS/TREND:** Stagnation in net income inequality based on the 80/20 ratio and Gini coefficient. Within the EU, the Netherlands scores relatively well on this. However, the gap between the 10% highest and lowest incomes is growing. Wealth inequality is one of the highest in the world. Lower incomes hardly have any chance of improvement. Collective wages, minimum wage, and benefits structurally lag behind the average increase in disposable income.

**POLICY:** There is no policy to equalize primary wage distribution. Redistribution mitigates income disparities, but the top income and corporate tax rates have been reduced and the VAT increased. Wealth (growth) is barely taxed. The benefits system is too complex and, with its rigid application, leads to debt. The welfare state is being phased out, which will increase poverty.

**SDG 10.2** Promote the social, economic, and political inclusion of all regardless of age, gender, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, or otherwise

**STATUS/TREND:** Decline on the poverty risk indicator. The poverty gap is also increasing. The number of homeless people has doubled in ten years.

People with a (non-Western) migration background and people with a practical education benefit considerably less from the broad prosperity. Opportunities in the labour market and for good housing are very unequally distributed. See also 10.3 and 10.4.

**POLICY:** There is too little focus on inclusiveness. Decentralized implementation with large cutbacks has stripped social security. Participation Act goals have not been met, nor have the agreements on 125,000 additional jobs for people with disabilities. The social workplaces have been abolished. Market forces have increased costs for housing, care, and other basic services while access for low- and middle-income earners has been limited. Cabinet policies reinforce skewed distribution in the housing market. The number of social housing units has shrunken significantly.

**SDG 10.3** Ensure equality of opportunity and reduction of inequality through laws, policies, and practices

**STATUS/TREND:** Over a quarter of the population experiences discrimination and this remains stagnant. Especially those with a non-Western migration background, Muslims, LGBTQ+, and women experience discrimination. There is a lot of age discrimination in the labour market. In education, children of practically educated parents and people with a migration background have very unequal opportunities. Diversity in representative and administrative bodies is still low. There’s a persistent gender pay gap.

**POLICY:** Inclusion and reducing inequality are not priorities; ambition is lacking. The government is reluctant to set binding standards. Legal and institutional safeguards for equality fall short. A target for women in top positions has not worked. In 2020, more attention was paid to institutional racism and a national coordinator for discrimination and racism will be appointed. The education system is not empowering vulnerable groups, due in part to teacher shortages and lack of guidance for children in disadvantaged schools.
**SDG 10.4** Protect labour and implement policies that lead to greater equality, particularly in the areas of taxation, wages, and social protection

**STATUS/TREND:** Decline. Labour’s share of national income is historically low and declining; multinationals’ share has tripled since 1980s. High-educated workers earn more; collective bargaining wages remain behind. Higher unemployment and job insecurity among the practically educated, people with migration background, refugees, young people, and people with disabilities.

**POLICY:** Decades-long culture of wage restraint for executive work, for the sake of international competition. Profits accrue at the top. Flexibilization of the labour market and admission of fake unions has weakened employees’ position. Dominant role of stakeholders in company direction is facilitated by policy and shareholders are favoured fiscally.

**SDG 10.5** Improve the regulation and monitoring of global financial markets and institutions

**STATUS/TREND:** No CBS indicator. Dutch private investors and banks invest hundreds of billions abroad; effects remain out of sight. Unregulated money seeks the highest return. There is a great risk that this money is used to finance companies where social malpractices occur (underpaid and forced labour, intimidation, (sexual) abuse, etc.), as well as environmental degradation that also hits people hard.

**POLICY:** There is no adequate government regulation to mitigate the risks of these very large financial flows in relation to increasing inequality and human rights.

**SDG 10.6** Increased influence of developing countries in decision-making in global, economic and financial institutions

**STATUS/TREND:** No CBS Indicator. In multilateral banks, the one dollar/one vote principle applies, which is to the disadvantage of developing countries.

**POLICY:** The Netherlands is not taking any initiative to break the current structure. In the past there was a strong commitment to more multilateral financing of education and health in developing countries. Now its own trade and investment agenda has become more important. The government decided to participate in the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank with a reduced/smaller set of good rules and less supervision. The Netherlands supports protection of vulnerable groups through the development of social and environmental rules and is committed to rules to counter violence against women and LGBTQ+ individuals. But ESG rules are becoming less binding and oversight on compliance is lacking.

**SDG 10.7** Facilitate safe and responsible migration and mobility of people

**STATUS/TREND:** No current information for the indicator (Migration Policy Index).

**POLICY:** Strong restriction on labour migration from non-Western countries (excluding highly educated personnel and students). Tough stance on refugees and migrants in camps on Lesbos and in the Balkans. Only 500 highly vulnerable refugees are admitted annually through resettlement. The Netherlands uses development money to focus on ‘refuge in the region’ at the expense of structural development aid. The procedure of applying for asylum in the Netherlands is slow and status holders are on their own when it comes to integration. There’s a large deployment of migrant workers from Central and Eastern Europe in some sectors with a high risk of exploitation. Status holders and migrants are most at risk of poverty and homelessness in the Netherlands.
### SDG 10a  The principle of special and differential treatment for developing countries in accordance with WTO provisions

**STATUS/TREND:** No CBS indicator. Trade policy is an EU competence. We also look at other effects of trade on inequality. Dutch imports of raw materials from developing countries are large and increasing; this is considered negative.

**POLICY:** Despite growing public opposition, the government continued to push for new bilateral and regional EU trade treaties, while guarantees for sustainability and human rights are still weak. Efforts to make trade chains more sustainable are made through voluntary covenants with insufficient results. Social and sustainability criteria are only applied to a small proportion of public procurement and tendering.

### SDG 10b  Official development assistance, investment and financial flows to poorest countries

**STATUS/TREND:** Stagnation. The Netherlands has been below the ODA standard of 0.7% for years. Contrary to the agreements of the Paris climate accord, this includes contributions to climate funds. Tax avoidance and ISDS claims via the Netherlands cost developing countries billions.

**POLICY:** With targeted programmes the Netherlands contributes to better opportunities for vulnerable groups. In diplomacy and international forums, the Netherlands advocates for gender equality and LGBTQ+ people. Many (social) malpractices still occur in the implementation of the business instruments. The efforts to combat tax avoidance are insufficient, as are the efforts to abolish ISDS in new investment treaties and to better represent the interests of developing countries. In terms of COVID-19 support and vaccines (including enabling production in poor countries), the solidarity of the government falls far too short.

### SDG 15 LIFE ON LAND

#### SDG 15.1  Conservation, restoration and sustainable use of native ecosystems and their services

**STATUS/TREND:** 14.8% of the Netherlands is covered by forest and open nature (2015): the smallest share within the EU. The trend is (slightly) positive, but the natural area is still very fragmented. Of the ‘biodiversity hotspots’ 98% is protected. Environmental conditions have not, or barely improved over the past 10 years. Only 12% of protected habitat types are in favourable condition. For most ecosystem services the trend has been negative for 25 years.

**POLICY:** No overarching nature and biodiversity policy. The area of nature is expanding but the pace is slowing. The idea of the Netherlands as a production country and second food exporter in the world remains dominant. The conventional agricultural model with a hard separation between agriculture and nature is subsidized with billions of euros, just like the fossil industry. The new policy for more nature inclusive agriculture is positive, but not translated into strong measures. Only 4% of agriculture is organic. Application of environmental regulations is weak with little enforcement. The precautionary principle and the principle that ‘De vervuiler betaalt’ (the polluter pays) are not respected; billions in costs are passed on.

#### SDG 15.2  Sustainable management and restoration of forests, halt deforestation

**STATUS/TREND:** 46.5% of the forest area is independently certified (mid-range EU). 95% of the forest suffers from high nitrogen deposition (acidification). Together with desiccation and a rise in temperature, this makes trees vulnerable to diseases. The forest area has been decreasing in recent years (1500 ha per year).
POLICY: For a long time, there was no forest policy. In 2020 a new forest strategy was adopted. Ambition of 10% expansion by 2030 is less than half covered with funding and commitment of the government. New money for nitrogen load reduction will have local effect but will not end the overload yet. There is concern that (plains) logging in forests continues, driven by financial interest. Many healthy trees are being needlessly cut down for new construction and "safety".

**SDG 15.3** Restore degraded lands and degraded soils

**STATUS/TREND:** NL has by far the highest nitrogen surplus in the EU: 163 kilograms per hectare of cultivated land. With regard to phosphorus, NL is in the mid-range. Both are increasing after a previous decline. High pressure on (agricultural) soils are due to, among other things, slurry injection, mechanical processing, and dewatering.

**POLICY:** Environmental approach leaves much to be desired in all sectors. EU support funds the maximisation of production per hectare: monocultures based on high fertilization and chemicals. Nitrogen and fertilizer policies have caused the high emissions and rising trend. *Programma Aanpak Stikstof* (*Programme Tackling Nitrogen*) was based on legally untenable models. There is now more recognition of the importance of healthy soils and carbon sequestration. Government supports projects for better soil management, with a voluntary approach and funding from the market.

**SDG 15.5** Stop degradation of natural habitats and loss of biodiversity and protect species at risk of extinction (2020)

**STATUS/TREND:** The proportion of threatened Red List species increased to 39% in 2012-2019. Of the protected species, only 26% are in a favourable condition. Since 1990, animal populations in heathland and the agricultural landscape, on average, have been cut in half; on high sandy soils the decline is 70%. In agricultural areas the trend is still negative. The Netherlands does not comply with international obligations.

**POLICY:** Due to an increase in natural areas, restoration regulations, and reintroduction populations are restoring. But the environmental pressure is unabatedly high and rising again. Continuous increase in scale is seen as “necessary” for export. Billions of euros of agricultural nature management are not yielding the desired results; management packages present too little. Use of toxics per hectare is the highest in the EU; admission policy is too lenient. Following the nitrogen crisis there is a lot of finance available for emergency measures, but structural improvement requires opting for nature-inclusive circular agriculture.

**SDG 15.9** Integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into policy/planning

**POLICY:** With the decentralization of nature policy to provinces in 2013, nature protection beyond N2000 has been weakened. Landscape is even less protected. Leadership on environmental policy has been loosened and will be deregulated even more under the *Omgevingswet* (*Environment and Planning Act*). The importance of nature is insufficiently legally safeguarded in planning processes. Compensation for loss of nature is often inadequate; enforcement falls short. The mandatory ‘Energy Investment Deduction’ is often not carried out. Models for valuing ecosystem services are not yet used in the economy: no monetary value is placed on nature.
15a Significantly increase funding for biodiversity and ecosystems

**STATUS**: Domestic government spending on environmental protection amounted to 1.4% of GDP in 2018, only a small share for nature. Since 2010, the nature budget has been slashed by 60%.

**POLICY**: An additional €5 billion has been allocated for nature and nitrogen measures until 2030. This does not yet return spending to 2010 levels.

**SDG 15.1 to 15.5 Abroad (Dutch influence)**

**STATUS/TREND**: The amount of land needed for our consumption is 3x our own land area. Another 3x is needed to offset our greenhouse gas emissions. This has a major impact on biodiversity elsewhere, such as in the Amazon. The Netherlands is a major importer of soy, wood pellets, palm oil, and cocoa. The import of metals from the poorest countries is increasing. At least a hundred billion euros of Dutch (bank) money is invested in companies with ‘environmental controversies’.

**POLICY**: Strong focus on economic growth and trade, including transit through Dutch ports. Making production chains more sustainable is through voluntary covenants and certification. Intended new trade treaties reinforce negative trend. Continued support for fossil companies through export credit insurance, although efforts are being made for an environmentally friendly system. Too little transparency on the negative effects of investments, including those of FMO. Dutch approach to climate transition leads to pass-through effects: billions in subsidies for ‘sustainable’ biomass leads to deforestation elsewhere and more imports of metals. Commitment to circular economy has not yet reduced demand for raw materials.

**SDG 15.6 Fair and equitable sharing of genetic resource benefits**

**STATUS**: NL has translated CBD’s Nagoya Protocol into law. However, this is now expiring.

**POLICY**: Rich countries including the Netherlands want more free access to digitally available genetic information. The Netherlands is making efforts to improve access of Dutch seed breeders to local markets in developing countries. Efforts to legislate on intellectual property rights of plant varieties and starting materials as well as the UPOV91 convention threaten the food production of small farmers as well as age-old traditions of local seed breeding.

**SDG 15.7 and c End poaching and the trade in protected plants and animal species**

**STATUS**: No CBS indicator.

**POLICY**: The Netherlands has implemented the CITES regulations on wildlife trade and committed to the EU Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking 2016-2020. Various measures have been taken nationally against illegal trade. Nevertheless, the Netherlands is an important transit country for illegal wildlife trade through its seaports and Schiphol Airport, also illegal wildlife is still traded in NL.

**SDG 15b Mobilise substantial resources for conservation and sustainable forest management in developing countries**

**STATUS/TREND**: In 2018, Dutch government spending on the contribution to biodiversity in developing countries amounted to 117 million euros, according to its own statement/declaration. This is well below the level before the 2010 budget cuts.

**POLICY**: Direct funding, including through conservation projects with local people, is modest. Funding is primarily “crosscutting” other sectors. In the total funding for agricultural activities, only a small part goes to agroecological and nature-inclusive farming methods. In the context of climate policy, the Netherlands wants to do more to combat deforestation and land degradation.
A change agenda based on SDG 10 and SDG 15: recommendations

OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Place the SDGs at the heart of policy of all ministries and connect politics with implementation practices and legal principles. Develop coherent policies for the SDGs with special attention to (sub)goals where there is stagnation or regression. Delegate coordination to an overarching ministry such as the Ministry of General Affairs. Ensure independent monitoring of the policy effort.

2. After COVID-19, focus the effort on the economic and social recovery for an ambitious transition towards a sustainable economy, an inclusive society, and healthy nature, greatly reducing the global footprint. Consult with employers on a concrete interpretation of the announced new course towards broad prosperity. Tackle fundamental problems at the root; ‘tweaking’ is not enough.

3. All Dutch policies should make a fair contribution to sustainable development in developing countries. Different policy strategies should not contradict, but reinforce each other, and coherently complement a development budget of 0.7% of the GNI. Consistently assess existing and new policies and legislation in relation to the SDGs with special attention to the impact on developing countries, future generations, and vulnerable groups (Leave no one behind).

4. Conduct a strong international lobby to design the world trading system in a way that trade and investment serve the SDGs and related international agreements on human rights, climate, environment, and biodiversity.

5. Create greater separation between the public sector and the business community when it comes to setting frameworks. Ensure the active involvement of citizens, especially young people, in decision-making on social transitions, using inclusive forms such as a citizens’ council, in which there is room for joint long-term thinking.
A change agenda based on SDG 10 and SDG 15: recommendations

Prioritize, with an ambitious vision and strategy, the reduction of inequality in the Netherlands and an inclusive society in which everyone contributes optimally. Do this together with parties such as the SER, WRR, the Social and Cultural Planning Office, the Human Rights Board, the NIBUD, the Ombudsman, the National Client Council, the VNG, SDG alliances, and civil society organizations working for target groups such as refugees and migrants, women, and youth. Elaborate on what concrete measures will be taken to reduce poverty by half and ensure that the lowest income groups improve faster than the top and middle income groups. Formulate concrete goals for promoting social, economic, and political inclusion for all, and the pathway towards it. Provide a coordinating body for inclusiveness.

**SDG 10 REDUCED INEQUALITY**

Inequality at home and abroad is intertwined and calls for a systemic vision and approach. This is all the more urgent in light of the COVID-19 crisis with its catastrophic consequences for developing countries and global inequality. These recommendations follow the SDG 10 goals: first the national dimension and then our international role.

**1. Prioritize, with an ambitious vision and strategy, the reduction of inequality in the Netherlands and an inclusive society in which everyone contributes optimally.**

Set clear goals for reducing the income and wealth differences in the Netherlands; shift taxes from labour to capital, raw materials and pollution. When considering policy, don’t only consider effects on purchasing power, but also the effects on distribution of income and wealth. In line with the 2014 WRR recommendation, consider policies to reduce the wage gap. Provide greater financial appreciation for vital executive work. Encourage business models in which social value creation is the guiding principle for the course of action of the company. Reduce VAT on essential and sustainably made products. Take concrete measures to reduce wealth inequality, with fiscal policies, such as taxing wealth accumulation at the top of the pyramid, and additional policies in, for example, the real estate market.

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**3. Strengthen the position of all workers on the labour market.**

Put an end to the growing uncertainty about job retention for the growing group of bogus self-employed, temporary workers, and flex workers. Protect workers through fair collective agreements. Encourage broad social dialogue between employers and workers. Everyone, including migrant workers, should be able to do decent work under safe conditions and be paid fairly for it. Increase the employment rate of people with a migration background and people with disabilities; also support other groups with a difficult position on the labour market, such as single earners, with targeted measures such as free childcare.
Provide a social safety net based on trust and solidarity and limit the influence of market forces on basic facilities. The social safety net must once again provide security for all. A first step is a benefits system that provides clarity and is based on trust and solidarity. Ensure viable welfare and benefits and consider a basic income or basic job. Provide more social housing and affordable rental and owner-occupied housing in all neighbourhoods. Regulate the rental sector and implement policies to reduce the unfair financial gap between renting and home ownership. Commit to good public services such as education and care, services that act as powerful tools for reducing inequality. Establish free and quality childcare so that all children get an equal start. Expand public facilities such as parks, libraries and community centres and make them more accessible to all people.

Tackle institutional racism, sexism, and all forms of (unconscious) discrimination and adopt an exemplary role as a government in inclusion policies. Appoint a national coordinator for discrimination with adequate powers to deal with racism, sexism, and all other forms of exclusion. Create a plan for reducing all forms of (unconscious) inclusion and exclusion based on personal characteristics and examine the role of laws, regulations, and technology in this. Set objective standards for equity and diversity and actively enforce them. Close the gender pay gap and, as a government, steer corporate hiring and inclusivity policies with binding quotas at the top of organizations and boards of directors and supervisors. Use diversity and inclusiveness as criteria in government and public procurement; this is also a quality improvement.

Contrast the reduction of inequality among and within countries in truly development-friendly trade, tax, and investment treaties. In trade and investment agreements, put the interests of developing countries and their people before those of multinationals. Instead of foreign investors, protect the local markets of developing countries and give them room to develop industry. Do not negotiate regional and bilateral investment treaties that undermine the position of developing countries or vulnerable groups within them. Ensure that new and existing treaties also guarantee the access of governments and citizens in developing countries to an independent judiciary or complaints mechanism. Make treaty negotiations as transparent and participatory as possible.

Make IMVO obligatory and introduce binding national due diligence legislation for companies operating internationally. Dutch trade should not reinforce inequality elsewhere and should serve the SDGs and human rights and environmental treaties. Special attention should be paid to gender equality, indigenous rights and labour rights. Provide an independent social audit to ensure that human rights are not violated with-in production chains and maintain high standards for labour, safety, environment, and biodiversity. Transparency requirements are crucial in order to make this a reality. Public tenders must also meet these requirements.
Put an end to tax avoidance (through the Netherlands) and introduce regulation of the financial sector to better control international money flows. Multinationals must pay taxes where activities take place. Transparency is crucial here. Require multinationals to publicly disclose how much tax they pay in each country (public country-by-country reporting). Tighten tax rules and substance requirements for companies that establish themselves in the Netherlands. Take the lead in preventing an international (or European) tax race and avoid obstructing fair tax treaties and European and OECD measures in this area. Explore with experts in the field of sustainable finance which frameworks (policy, regulation, and monitoring) can contribute to making financial markets and the money system serviceable to the SDGs, and which steps the Netherlands itself can take.

Strengthen financial support for development countries. Expand the development budget so that it is in line with the internationally agreed ODA standard of 0.7% of the GNI. Focus these resources on the poorest countries and most vulnerable groups to help mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Fully engage in collaboration with locally rooted organizations (including for women’s rights) and ensure that they can access finance. Cancel billions of debt from developing countries or ensure a fair debt mechanism where private financiers are also presented with a bill.

Consider migration a human right, ensure safe and responsible mobility and a humane refugee policy. Include migration and refugee policy as a key theme in the policy coherence action plan. Consider legal opportunities for labour migration from developing countries so that migrants have an alternative to life-threatening routes. In doing so, also explore the possibilities of circular migration – with clear conditions. Invest development funds in a better perspective for young people, not in border control to reduce migration. Provide decent working conditions and housing for migrant workers who are allowed to work in the Netherlands and enforce this by law. Refugees have a right to international protection. This requires a well-functioning asylum system in Europe, based on solidarity and protection. Safe routes such as resettlement should be used more widely. While maintaining careful procedures, ensure the reduction of waiting times for asylum seekers. Small-scale accommodation and rapid participation opportunities promote resilience and independence. Invest in opportunities for refugees to rebuild and fully participate in society. Training and employment are crucial in this regard.
SDG 15 LIFE ON LAND

The SDG 15 Alliance website has an excellent agenda for the coming years that we endorse. Below, we make some more specific recommendations for improved engagement regarding SDG 15, at home and abroad.

1. **Make, in international and domestic policy, biodiversity as high a priority as climate.**
   - Show leadership and ambition at CoP-15 2021 on the UN Convention on Biodiversity (CBD).
   - Work with the EU on ambitious CBD biodiversity goals for 2030, such as 30% (actual) protected natural area on land and water. Support the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 and translate it into its own strategy and action plan.
   - Provide the commitment to biodiversity and related policies (such as for forests, soil restoration, water, and air) with legally defined goals, instruments, appropriate financial resources, and monitoring.
   - Establish an authority or ministry for climate and biodiversity. Ensure an integral, interdepartmental vision and approach to climate and biodiversity for the Netherlands itself, the Netherlands’ impact on global biodiversity, and the Netherlands’ international efforts. Ensure that natural values and biodiversity are more explicitly anchored in land policy and in other policies such as agriculture, the economy, and construction. Pay attention to social dimensions and inclusiveness. Also consider the possibility of giving rights to nature, starting with the Wadden Sea.

2. **Versterk de inzet voor natuurherstel in Nederland en borg bescherming van natuur en landschap stevig in het omgevingsbeleid.**
   - Expand and strengthen (the biodiversity of) the nature network in the Netherlands and ensure the quality of nature beyond this, with restorative measures at landscape level. Set ambitious and legally binding targets for the restoration and conservation of species and types of nature. Embed nature and environmental objectives more firmly into land development plans and regulations.
   - Strengthen the obligation to care for the landscape and ensure (national) spatial management of integrated environmental policy. Ensure better participation of citizens in the implementation of the Environment Act. Introduce a mandatory independent nature and environment test in larger development plans and apply environmental impact assessments consistently. Make greening a mandatory part of new construction, remodelling, and urban development; it should be possible for everyone to enjoy nature.
C3 A change agenda based on SDG 10 and SDG 15: recommendations

**Embrace a far-reaching ambition for reducing the Dutch footprint through policies aimed at sustainable consumption and production patterns and decreasing consumption.** Halve the footprint of Dutch consumption by 2030, with knock-on effects throughout the entire production chain. From the outset, include the global footprint in all policymaking and transition agendas, including for domestic production with cross-border impacts. Use awareness campaigns, pricing, and (tax) legislation to reduce the Dutch demand for water, land, minerals, and raw materials elsewhere. Limit the import of soy, palm oil, biomass, and wooden products. As part of the energy transition, push for the reuse of metals for wind turbines and solar panels. In doing so, ensure a structural reduction of the negative social and ecological impact of commodity production in countries of origin.

**Persuasively support the transition to regenerative agriculture and a sustainable food system in the Netherlands and worldwide, and direct global trade accordingly.** Steer the transition to a more sustainable diet based on short chains and more vegetable proteins, including through *true pricing* and promoting vegetable choices in production, the hospitality industry, and supermarkets. Reduce livestock numbers, with extensive support for farmers who make the switch. Do not practice agriculture where it does not fit/suit the soil-water system. Increase the share of organic agriculture from 4% today to at least 25% in 2030. Use European subsidies only for the transition to nature-inclusive cycle farming agriculture and forestry, with restoration of soil and landscape quality. Also deploy this support for start-ups and work with banks and social initiatives to provide affordable land for citizens and farmers who want to realize the goals. Continue and strengthen international cooperation projects aimed at agroecological agriculture. Revise international trade agreements so that developing countries can guarantee their food sovereignty and make sustainable agriculture possible worldwide. Do not support intellectual property rights of multinationals that undermine the position of farmers and access to genetic resources in the global south. Contribute to renewed international agreements for a fair distribution of genetic resources.

**Ensure a healthy nature and society with a strong adherence to the precautionary principle and the principle that the polluter pays, and exclude unsustainable alternatives.** Broaden the new National Environmental Policy Framework and provide an investment plan with legal ramifications. Move, with binding rules, towards a rapid reduction of the pressure from polluting substances such as PFAS, microplastics and ‘systemic’ pesticides. Measure and monitor the values of air, water, and soil as a basis for legal standards and market approval of substances. Work together with citizens, farmers, and civil society organisations, who also take measurements themselves. Adopt the nitrogen recommendations of the Remkes Commission with a binding target for 2030 and implement them energetically. Provide space for sustainable initiatives from society; make sure, with regulations and pricing of pollution, that those who lag behind are not left behind. Stop subsidising and spatially facilitating polluting activities. Restore capacity for independent monitoring and enforcement for compliance with standards.
Ensure, in the (inter)national approach to the climate and biodiversity crisis, environmental justice and avoid passing on one footprint to another. Link transition goals together by using nature-based solutions. Promote the use of carbon taxes and other ecotaxes on imports to slow the movement of (climate) emissions and encourage reuse of goods. Stop using alternative energy sources that lead to unsustainable land use and destruction of nature. Reduce the large-scale production and import of bioenergy and biomass by implementing strict sustainability criteria and regulation of demand. Allocate a substantial portion of climate funds – additional to the development budget – for natural climate solutions such as soil restoration and ecologically sound reforestation. Such solutions are already abundantly available, as, for example, Drawdown and Uurgenda have demonstrated. Make sure that the above deployment is always inclusive and goes directly to programs and projects with local (women’s) organisations. Make policies for a fair transition in which job losses are compensated, at home and abroad. With appropriate solutions, retraining, and good social policies, ensure that no one is left behind.

Make restoration of nature and biodiversity central in international cooperation, trade and, investment. Make biodiversity restoration an independent priority, supported by a multi-year ecological investment agenda. For the ambition of deforestation-free trade chains in 2030, use credible measures and an appropriate budget and link this to other tasks, for example by compensating farmers for extra efforts to conserve and restore natural vegetation. Advocate binding European sustainability criteria for biodiversity with respect to production and import. Impose the same requirements on imports and transit of agricultural and other raw materials as on Dutch and European cultivation. Use the business support instruments only for ecologically sound activities and apply environmental impact assessments. Take an active role in reducing the illegal trade in wild animals and plants.
EXPLANATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS WITH REGARD TO SDG MONITORING

Monitoring the Dutch commitment to the SDGs domestically and globally is difficult, because there has been no translation into national goals for 2030 and a strategy for the route towards them.

For **SDG 15**, the monitoring can partly tie in with the commitments that the Netherlands has made in the EU context and under the UN Convention on Biodiversity (CBD). For **SDG 10**, there is no framework with measurable goals aimed at reducing inequality.

In its exploration How Unequal is the Netherlands (2014), the WRR already called attention to mapping and monitoring inequality in the Netherlands, with some concrete suggestions.

It has proved to be quite a puzzle to get a good picture of the scores and trends for all the sub-goals. In the CBS Monitor of well-being & the SDGs 2020. (hereafter: the Monitor) not all SDG goals are discussed separately. ¹

Also, not all sub-goals have matching Dutch indicators or datasets. This is especially true for the goals related to the international dimension. The Centraal Bureau voor Statistiek has also published the 2020 SDG status report. This report briefly outlines, for most goals, the direction in which the Netherlands is heading and also how the country is progressing.

It also shows how the Netherlands scores relative to other EU countries. We see the same data in the recent report on five years of SDG implementation (CBS 2021). The Monitor offers valuable additional insights in relation to the dimensions ‘elsewhere’ and ‘later’. In our report we also use indicators and statistical information from other sources such as the Social and Cultural Planning Agency (SCP) and the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (PBL).

It is not the role of the CBS to politically interpret the identified trends, or to relate them to policy choices. That is what we do. After all, it is precisely the Dutch commitment to the goals that we are concerned with.

The problem of such an analysis is that the goals of **SDG 10** and **SDG 15** are largely formulated in general, non-quantitative terms, such as “ensure equal opportunities” or “restore degraded land”. The UN indicators attached to these goals are also sometimes vague, sometimes very specific, and often do not adequately cover the sub-goals. Therefore, where necessary, we provide our own interpretation.

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¹ In the Monitor 2020, SDG 10 and SDG 15 each highlight only two sub-goals with respect to the situation in the Netherlands. For this purpose, CBS uses its own dashboard with a series of additional indicators. What is and is not discussed in the CBS Monitor is determined by a steering committee at the national level.
**General recommendations for improving monitoring**

- Formulate relevant national goals for each of the sub-goals, and choose (additional) indicators for trend measurement that are, from the Dutch perspective, the most relevant. Do this together with the relevant SDG alliances, planning agencies, advisory bodies, civil society organisations, and independent experts.
- Agree on the independent assessment of the Dutch policy commitment at home and abroad and its effects, in addition to the trend measurement by the CBS.
- Strengthen consistency and transparency in Dutch SDG monitoring and reporting, and ensure a clear relationship with the monitoring of other, related policies.
- Strengthen the participation of planning agencies, civil society organisations, and other interested parties in the monitoring process. Make use of the suggestions made by an expert group in 2018 to better map the Dutch footprint and the impact of the money flows from and to the Netherlands (dimensions ‘elsewhere’ and ‘later’).

**SDG 10 Monitoring**

- In trend measurement, ensure disaggregation of data for different groups (men, women, theoretical/practical education, migration background, LGBTQ+, etc.) where possible, also using existing data from, for example, the SCP.
- Provide SDG 10.1 with several measures that together provide insight into how income and wealth inequality are developing in the Netherlands (see also WRR 2014). For example, include the gap between the 10% highest and lowest incomes.
- For SDG 10.2 and SDG 10.3, add indicators related to aspects of social inclusion and exclusion in the social, political, and economic spheres, such as the representation of different groups in decision-making, education, or the labour market.
- The SDG alliances have identified which sub-goals and indicators of other SDGs have a strong relationship with SDG 10, such as equal access to affordable care/medicines (SDG 3). Support the initiative for monitoring on a coherent dataset for social sustainability, possibly in a separate report.
- In consultation with relevant partners, develop appropriate indicators for monitoring policy commitment, such as trends in wages, benefits and taxes, or the number of social housing units. Do the same for SDG 10.7 (migration).
- Establish together with relevant organizations how the Dutch contribution to SDG 10.5, 10.6, 10a and 10b can be portrayed. The Monitor (dimension ‘elsewhere’) lays a foundation for this, but also indicates that there are still snags in the indicators used. Make use of the suggestions from the 2018 expert meeting for mapping money flows from and to the Netherlands and their social effects, using data from, for example, DNB, Eurodad or UNCTAD.

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1. In 2018, at the initiative of the Sustainable and Solidarity Economy Platform, a meeting with CBS took place with SOMO, Both ENDS, Vice Versa, Oxfam Novib and individual experts on measuring broad prosperity, dimensions elsewhere and later.
SDG 15 Monitoring

- For trend measurement, use not only the SDG indicators but also other indicators that have been and are being agreed upon internationally under the CBD and European Biodiversity Strategy, in order to understand and strengthen interlinkages.
- In consultation with the SDG15 Alliance and relevant organisations, complete the dataset for SDG 15.1, 15.2 and 15.5 with data on the conservation of different nature types, ecosystems, and their services; such as soil fertility. This could include links to recent policies for forests, nitrogen policies, soils, crop protection, and other relevant initiatives with goals for 2030.
- Together with relevant actors, establish criteria by which the concrete financial agreements and policy commitment of the Netherlands, at home and abroad, can be followed and independently monitored.
- Include the PBL measurements of the Dutch footprint abroad and of our safe operating space in the SDG progress report. Make use of suggestions made by the expert group in 2018 for additions to the measured footprints, for example, the water footprint, trade in waste, or trade in endangered species.
SDG 10
Reducing inequality among and within countries

No English translation available
SDG 15
Protection, restoration and sustainable use of ecosystems; stopping land degradation and biodiversity loss

No English translation available
The domains of socio-economic development, nature and the environment were, for a long time, separate worlds. For the first time, these dimensions firmly came together in the form of global goals in *Agenda 2030*. Several recent reports name the inevitable link between ecological crises, social inequality, and the prevailing economic growth model. In 2019, the IPBES made a powerful case that biodiversity can only be saved with a fundamentally different, inclusive development model. The newly released *Human Development Report 2020* also puts the relationship between people and planet at the centre for the first time: “The challenges of planetary and societal imbalance are intertwined: they interact in a vicious circle, each making the other worse.” Hurricanes, floods, drought, unbearable temperatures, and diseases resulting from climate change are reversing the positive results of decades of development efforts. This is, particularly in vulnerable, often tropical and low-lying areas – including the Caribbean – pushing tens of millions of people (back) into poverty. Ecosystem degradation and the COVID-19 pandemic share these consequences. Rich countries see that the foundations supporting their economic model are at risk and domestic inequality is growing. Future generations risk inheriting an unliveable planet if we “do not make peace with nature,” as UNEP puts it.

**SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL INJUSTICE IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH**

In many places around the world, the connection between *SDG 10* and *SDG 15* is easily seen. It is fundamentally unfair that poor countries and communities that have contributed the least to climate change and environmental degradation, are hit hardest. Millions of people are being displaced by it. In rural areas, the effects of climate change are most felt. Women are more directly affected than men because they are often responsible for the daily provision of food and drinking water. Many men move to the cities or abroad in search of work. When incomes are lost, girls and women are more likely to be married off and taken out of school, and the risk of exploitation of vulnerable groups increases. These dimensions of the climate impact are still barely taken into consideration in the Netherlands when it comes to the question of whether a rapid phase-out of fossil fuels is economically ‘feasible’ for us.

Local communities, farmers, fishermen, and indigenous peoples who depend directly on what nature provides for their livelihood, such as forest produce, food crops, and food from the sea, are the first victims of deforestation, pollution, depletion of soils, land grabbing, overfishing, and ocean acidification. Poverty and high population pressure can be a major cause of ecosystem degradation locally. But wherever there is a concentration of natural resources and raw materials, we see extensive exploitation and appropriation of land by wealthy elites and multinational corporations. Shell’s subsidiary company is wreaking ecological havoc with oil drilling in the Niger Delta in Nigeria, with disastrous consequences for the local population. This population has not benefited one bit from Shell’s profits. The recent judgment of the Hague Court of Appeal that Shell must compensate local farmers and better monitor its own pipelines is a hopeful sign.

Indigenous peoples, and especially women, are the most important guardians of the biodiverse rainforests we have left. They provide carbon sequestration on a scale that “compensates” the emissions of the
20% largest polluters. Their way of life stems from a different view of our place in nature than that of the Western worldview, in which nature serves man. Despite their enormous contribution to the well-being of the planet, indigenous peoples around the world have a marginal (legal) position, with little or no access to decision-making and land rights. Opposition to the clearing of their forests and the destruction or expropriation of their habitats results in the deaths of hundreds of environmental and human rights activists every year.

One of the dogmas within the global free trade system is that countries must export themselves out of poverty by exploiting their natural resources or with monocultures of “cash crops.” Local people are not asked for an opinion. For example, the approximately 200 million small farmers – often women – who are members of La Via Campesina worldwide. They consider food sovereignty much more important. They are not waiting to give up their land and become workers on a plantation with export crops. What is sold by governments, banks and corporations as “development” often feels to indigenous peoples and local communities like the destruction of their spiritual environment and cultural resources. They do not see “clearing” of rainforests and natural areas for soy or palm oil, or the construction of infrastructure, as progress. With the disappearance of biodiversity, cultural diversity also disappears and vice versa.

ENVIRONMENTAL INJUSTICE IN THE NETHERLANDS

Also, in the Netherlands, there are forms of environmental injustice, though these are less conspicuous. People with lower incomes, people with disabilities, and residents of deprived neighbourhoods have significantly less access to neighbourhood green space and fewer opportunities to seek out natural areas; this has become palpable, especially in times of COVID-19. Furthermore, they have less access to healthy and sustainably produced food. Households comprising of physical and low-paid workers have less time, space, and money to make their homes or lifestyles more sustainable. Government efforts to increase societal involvement in the quality of the living environment still fall short, says PBL in its ‘Planbureau voor Leefomgeving 2020’. The CBS, in its recent SDG Progress Report, warns of the negative correlation between SDG 10 and many other SDGs.

The costs and benefits of sustainability are at risk of not being fairly distributed. The risk that people on low incomes will not be able to keep up with the energy transition has long been flagged. There is also a real risk that many workers will lose their jobs due to the transition to new technologies. This is no justification for halting the sustainability of the economy; after all, the current polluting model has high social costs. However, it is very important to make active and participatory policies for a socially just transition. A rich country like the Netherlands has ample opportunities to achieve this with good social policy, the right policy choices, and plenty of support for retraining.

In the Netherlands, too, there is an uneven playing field for citizens when it comes to decisions about the living environment. Government and industry frequently make agreements on development of infrastructure and business locations that residents are left out of and/or suffer from. The gas extraction in Groningen is a glaring example.

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1 HumanDevelopmentReport2020, See also WWF
2 See study on the role of women
In North Brabant, people living near mega-pig stables suffer greatly from stench, air pollution, and ruination of the landscape. The same applies to those living near heavy industry such as Tata Steel or Chemours. Or the new biomass power plants. Those living near Schiphol and other airports suffer from noise pollution. In Utrecht, people in neighbourhoods on the edge of the city live years shorter on average because of air pollution from road traffic. In Drenthe, local residents find an accumulation of poison from lily farming in their gardens. Citizens who want to stand up for their rights have to spend a lot of time and money in legal procedures, because legislators do not protect them.

In the Netherlands, there has recently been outrage over foreign investors buying up scarce land in our country for solar parks and running off with the profits. People in the global south have been suffering from such abuses for decades. A trade-off between SDGs also occurs when rich countries shift their polluting production to poor countries. As early as the late 1980s, the Brundtland Commission urged rich countries to reduce their production and consumption in order to provide development space for poorer countries. This part of the sustainable development agenda has been ignored, also by the Netherlands.

We illustrate the role that the Netherlands plays in the connection between SDG 10 and SDG 15 below using two themes in the area of (un)sustainable consumption and production.
Where SDG 10 and SDG 15 meet: trade-offs and synergy

Solar panels require rare metals, for which dangerous and polluting mines are being reopened or opened elsewhere, not infrequently in conflict zones and in hotspots of biodiversity. Mining ensures that local biodiversity can barely recover and is often accompanied by human rights violations.\(^7\)

It is positive that the Netherlands has actively engaged in a European Union Conflict Minerals Regulation. Far more important, however, is reducing our demand for energy and raw materials.

Together with all rich countries, the Netherlands has agreed to contribute $100 billion per year for climate adaptation in developing countries starting in 2020. Our ‘fair share’ is calculated at around 1.25 billion euros per year. For now, the Netherlands is not sticking to the agreement. In 2021, public climate funding will amount to about 580 million euros. This comes, against the agreements, from the budget for cooperation with developing countries, while these funds should actually be ‘new and additional’. Moreover, part of it goes to countries in Europe. In addition, the Netherlands is mobilizing private investment. On the other hand, Dutch banks and investors, including the ABP and Zorg en Welzijn (Care and Well-Being) pension funds, are still investing heavily in fossil fuel activities, and the financial support of companies in the oil and gas industries that amounts to 1.5 billion euros annually through export credit insurance.\(^8\)

In total – depending on the calculation – the Dutch government provides (indirect) subsidies to fossil companies to the tune of 4.5 to 17 billion euros per year.\(^9\)

**Agriculture and Food Production**

The Netherlands is an agricultural ‘superpower.’ We are, transit included, the second largest food exporter in the world after the US, which is 230 times larger than the Netherlands. With a portfolio of 100 billion euros in investments worldwide, Rabobank is one of the largest loan financiers for commercial agriculture. The Dutch agricultural sector is a success story if you look at it from the point of view of the desire to produce a lot of cheap food, and from the point of view of logistical organization. But with the specialization and maximisation of production per hectare model, the basis for a sustainable yield has been lost from view: biodiversity.\(^10\)

Intensive agriculture is the biggest pressure factor for nature in the Netherlands. Not only in the area of agriculture itself, but also in the areas where nature is protected. The arable farming and grassland monocultures are run on chemicals for fertilisation, and fossil fuels for mechanisation.

Thanks to the hectare premiums from the European financial subsidies, 20% of Dutch farmers – the largest landowners – are millionaires (on paper).

However, many farmers in the Netherlands can barely keep their heads above water; about a third have incomes below the minimum wage\(^11\). The number of farmers has been cut in half in the past 20 years because many cannot keep up in the rat race. Many young farmers and citizens who would like to start producing sustainable food do not have access to land, which is far too expensive. It is therefore important that the government helps these farmers, and that agricultural land that becomes available is not automatically used for even further increases in scale.

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\(^7\) See research ActionAid
\(^8\) See BothENDS
\(^9\) See MeJudice
\(^11\) PBL, Balance of the Living Environment 2020, p. 44
There is a belief among some that the Netherlands has an important role to play in providing food for the world’s population, and that it’s better to keep the agricultural production here rather than moving it to countries where it is less sustainable (per unit of product). However, our production is far from sustainable if we look at the environmental impact per hectare. Livestock farming is also a highly inefficient form of land use for food supply. Small farmers provide a significant portion of the food supply worldwide, up to 70% according to FAO.\(^\text{12}\) From an SDG perspective this would be best. But these farmers are struggling because of imports with (disguised) subsidies from abroad, such as from the EU. At the same time, in the global south, the EU, including the Netherlands, uses millions of hectares of land to produce food for our livestock, bioenergy crops, and other luxury products.

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**THE WAY FORWARD: DIVERSE, INCLUSIVE AND NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS**

In social discussions and research that look at the challenges of our time as a related whole, the same conclusion is always drawn: the way forward is a society that works together with nature, not against it (see for example WUR on The Netherlands in 2120). During the High Level Political Forum on the SDGs in 2020, a meeting was held on building back better after corona. The pandemic is a clear warning that our own health is closely linked to that of the planet. Natural system-based solutions to the world’s multiple crises can lift a billion people out of poverty, create 17 million jobs, and add huge value to the global economy.\(^\text{13}\)

CBS identifies a possible “trade-off” between **SDG 10** and **SDG 15**. We believe that there is an enormous synergy to be gained precisely between these SDGs, if, to start with, we move away from the prevailing economic model and away from large-scale, technology-oriented solutions.

Internationally, **SDG 10** and **SDG 15**, for example, can only be achieved with the tilt towards a different food system. A more sustainable, local diet with more vegetable proteins instead of animal proteins is one of the most important keys to restoring biodiversity and reducing global warming, according to PBL. With international competition on low prices, this is not feasible.

Reform of the global trade regime is a necessary condition to protect small and sustainable farmers around the world.\(^\text{14}\) Countries in the South need to be able to re-establish their own (food) markets.

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\(^{12}\) FAO Report 2012  
\(^{13}\) Source: WWF  
\(^{14}\) See, for example, [https://pala.be/nl/artikel/de-landbouw-moet-anders-en-dat-k-n-3](https://pala.be/nl/artikel/de-landbouw-moet-anders-en-dat-k-n-3)
In the EU, farmers can once again receive fixed prices for their products, including a reward for services they provide for the landscape, nature, animal welfare, and the sequestration of organic matter in the soil. After such a transition, the Netherlands will no longer be the world’s second largest exporter of food. Is that a bad thing? Not for society. It will benefit from the flourishing of a diverse range of sustainable food producers who are close to the local markets. Also, natural solutions are needed to combat climate change and to cope with its consequences. These are readily available, as the Drawdown report, for example, with its hundred possible solutions, as well as the 54-point plan of Urgenda, show.\(^\text{15}\)

Such solutions are only inclusive if they are developed and implemented together with the population – men, women, youth, ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples – and local businesses, suitable to local conditions and landscapes. This is where we need to invest the finances for sustainable recovery after COVID-19, at home and abroad. We named the existing commitment from Dutch Cooperation with Developing Countries on participatory approaches to agroecological agriculture, renewable energy, forestry, and nature conservation. Such approaches make use of the experience, knowledge, and skills of local farmers, who best know the dynamics of their own environment. Numerous studies show that active involvement of women in ‘land governance’ and forest management leads to demonstrably better results.\(^\text{16}\)

Yet their role is still far from self-evident. Also, for land and soil regeneration, which is high on the agenda in the Global South, it is of great importance to support and finance the initiatives of local communities themselves, such as the successful Farmer-Managed Natural Regeneration project in the Sahel. This led to large-scale greening with very low relative costs, and very high benefits for local people.\(^\text{17}\)

Making such initiatives central to the way forward after COVID-19 requires a change of ‘mindset’ and a trade and investment regime that puts social values first.

\(^{15}\) See e.g. Drawdown report and link to the SDGs
\(^{17}\) www.bothends.org/en/Whats-new/Publicaties/Advancing-inclusive-land-governance
SERIOUSLY DISTURBED BALANCE DUE TO STRUCTURAL FLAWS

The Netherlands is not performing well with respect to the two central tenets of the Agenda 2030: striving for balance between the economic, social, and environmental dimensions, and striving to leave no one behind. The imbalance between the economic and other goals is not an unfortunate coincidence. It is the result of choices made every day; by government and politics, by companies, organizations, and implementing agencies. Choices based on outdated but still dominant assumptions, frameworks, policies, and laws and regulations. While it has long been clear how serious the inequality problem and biodiversity crisis are in the world, far too little active policy has been developed.

In past government periods, there was still a strong commitment to the free market as an instrument to produce progress and prosperity through profit-oriented production and trade. In the process, the government did not take on a leading role in delineating a firm framework in support of public interest. Too often we see that policy puts the securing of economic growth and corporate interests first. Businesses have a major influence at all levels – international, EU, national, local – on the rules and frameworks that should guide their actions. The argument that this is necessary to maintain growth and jobs does not hold water, especially at the bottom of the labour market. The amount of decently paid jobs for manually skilled labour has declined sharply. The share of workers on precarious contracts has exploded. The wage gap between the theoretically and practically educated is growing. At the same time, social security has been cut back and people who need support are confronted with a culture of distrust. Ethnic profiling has proven to be a systemic problem, for example with the childcare benefits scandal. The government does not have an effective policy for countering discrimination and has harsh policies on migration. In the housing market and in health care, market forces prevail at the expense of equal access to basic services, so that instead of reducing income inequality, they actually increase it.

The rules and authorities that are supposed to protect our environment, our health, our landscape, and nature have also been weakened. The precautionary principle and the principle that “the polluter pays” are trampled upon. Every year the government gives many billions in subsidies for activities that seriously pollute air, water, and soil; the environmental costs to society are estimated by PBL to be about 30 billion euro’s a year, about 4.5% of the GNP. Nitrogen emitters such as industrial agriculture, aviation and producers of toxic pesticides are given free rein, even though all the signals for nature are set to red. The government underpins the choices it makes with heavily criticized accounting models instead of actual measurements. The nitrogen file shows that the decades-long nature crisis was not seen as a reason for drastic intervention, while the permit freeze for economic activities was immediately labelled a national crisis. In land zoning policy we see that economic ambitions come at the expense of nature and landscape. When governments want to impose requirements above and beyond the statutory requirements for the environment or landscape, for example, they often come up against tough private law.

From an international cooperation point of view, the Netherlands has good programmes for sustainable development for the poorest in developing countries. On the other hand, there are very different money flows, such as the billions in tax evasion that the Netherlands continues to facilitate. The ambition to compete without hindrance on the world market is (in a global and EU context) enshrined in hard international agreements. In contrast, corporate social responsibility and the protection of the environment, human rights, and vulnerable groups are still regulated through soft and unenforceable mechanisms. In projects supported by Dutch business instruments and in the investments of multilateral banks, there are still far too few built-in guarantees against social and ecological abuses, and in favour of a positive contribution for people and nature. Whereas the
Netherlands is a great advocate of the free flow of money and goods, for (labour) migration from developing countries – an important tool for reducing inequality – it erects high barriers, causing people to resort to life-threatening alternative routes. Migrant workers from Central and Eastern Europe are welcome to perform the ‘essential labour’ in sectors that cannot run without their efforts. Temporary employment agencies and employers engage in harsh forms of exploitation of these workers with underpayment, unacceptable working conditions, and housing.

Ultimately, most of the factors that stand in the way of achieving SDG 10 and SDG 15 can be traced to the same basic weakness: the almost unlimited scope for multinationals and corporations to make money based on low labour costs and the free use of natural resources. The trade system is designed to do just that. The government continues to lend a sympathetic ear to corporate lobbies seeking to strengthen their position. Profits earned from these business activities and in the financial sector are invested in even more similar activities worldwide.

These financial flows are largely a ‘black box’ in assessing the role played by the Netherlands. The global trend is that in every country the higher educated part of the population is benefiting from globalisation and the technological revolution, while people with practical professions are falling further and further behind. Nature and the environment are also deteriorating.

_Awareness that things need to change, but slow and inconsistent approach from government_

Sustainability and climate are on the political and administrative agenda, but are too narrowed down to the sphere of energy and raw materials, and the commitment is free of obligation. The transition paths set out for sustainable agriculture, energy, and a circular economy is characterised by a focus on technological innovation, much more than on behavioural change. There is a positive ambition to develop circularity in the field of agriculture, but the measures taken focus on fitting into the old, unsustainable system. Positive initiatives from society are welcomed, but not given sufficient support.

The social domain is included far too little in Dutch sustainability thinking. The CBS identifies the risk of a trade-off effect between SDG 10 and other sustainability goals. For the significant group of Dutch people whose income is too small to make ends meet each month, the transitions that have been initiated threaten to become unaffordable, on top of worsening opportunities on the labour market. This trade-off can be avoided with good social policy by taking inclusivity into account when designing sustainability measures. The government is also ignoring the passing on of effects of our ‘sustainable’ choices to people and nature elsewhere in the world, such as the adverse effects of the import of biofuels and biomass.

_Restoring balance needed: coherent commitment to the SDGs requires a shift in our thinking_

Individual SDGs and targets can be brought closer within the existing financial-economic system. But to achieve the SDGs in interconnectedness, a new social contract is needed that ensures equal opportunities and that, also for future generations, ensures they inherit an inhabitable world. We won’t get there with a coalition agreement that focuses on the old economy with its short-term focus. Numerous transition movements, citizen’s initiatives, scientists, planning agencies, young people, climate grandparents, and also brave civil servants, advocate a radical shift to a different welfare paradigm. The integrated approach called for by the SDG agenda requires complex administration, but society is already showing the way. Well-thought-out, coherent scenarios have already been sketched for future (spatial) development in the Netherlands. There are already numerous indications of working policies in the areas of social inclusion, climate, nature, healthy, and sustainable food. As a society, we are already in transition. It is now a matter of following through.
A new policy agenda for SDG 10 and SDG 15 begins with a transparent analysis of the causes of exclusion and inequality, biodiversity loss, and inequitable trade relations. That is what we want to contribute to with this report.

‘Building back better’ then calls for an economy in which well-being and the SDGs are the active guiding principles. There is a clear call for a Government that plays an active role in society.

By strengthening community assets and establishing legal frameworks in which environmental sustainability, the precautionary principle, human rights, and inclusiveness are no longer aspirations but enforceable legal principles, for our engagement at home and abroad.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, it became clear that the government can guide the behaviour of the population if it is in the public interest. Minister Kaag (Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation) wrote to the House of Representatives in response to the recent evaluation of five years of SDG implementation: “The current pandemic shows how vulnerable our systems and societies are when “external” shocks occur. Governments have an important role to play in shaping coherent and integrated policy for building a resilient, future-proof, and sustainability-oriented society. The SDGs provide a concrete framework to further flesh this out at all levels.”

We express the hope that the new government will dare to move vigorously on this: Beyond non-commitment.
Appendix: abbreviations used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABP</td>
<td>Dutch Civil Servants Pension Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>AIV</td>
<td>International Affairs Advisory Board</td>
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<td>AOW</td>
<td>General Old Age Law</td>
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<tr>
<td>BBP</td>
<td>Gross domestic product</td>
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<tr>
<td>BNP</td>
<td>Gross national product</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBD</td>
<td>Convention on Biological Diversity</td>
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<td>CBD COP</td>
<td>Convention on Biological Diversity Conference of the Parties</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>Central Bureau of Statistics</td>
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<tr>
<td>CITES</td>
<td>Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLA</td>
<td>Collective bargaining agreement</td>
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<tr>
<td>CoP-15</td>
<td>UN Biodiversity Conference 2021</td>
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<td>CPB</td>
<td>Central Planning Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>CRM</td>
<td>College of Human Rights</td>
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<tr>
<td>DGIS</td>
<td>Directorate-General of International Cooperation</td>
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<tr>
<td>DNB</td>
<td>De Nederlandsche Bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>EIA</td>
<td>Energy Investment Allowance</td>
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<td>EIR</td>
<td>Environmental Impact Assessment</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eurodad</td>
<td>European Network on Debt and Development United Nations</td>
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<td>FAO</td>
<td>Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>FDI</td>
<td>Foreign Direct Investment</td>
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<td>FMO</td>
<td>Dutch Finance Corporation for Developing Countries</td>
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<td>FNV</td>
<td>Federation of Dutch Trade Unions</td>
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<td>FSC</td>
<td>Forest Stewardship Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>FTM</td>
<td>Follow the Money</td>
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<tr>
<td>GEF</td>
<td>Global Environment Facility</td>
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<tr>
<td>GNI</td>
<td>Gross national income</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>IND</td>
<td>Immigration and Naturalization Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>IPBES</td>
<td>Intergovernmental Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISDS</td>
<td>Investor-State Arbitration</td>
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<tr>
<td>KDW</td>
<td>Critical Deposition Value</td>
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<tr>
<td>LDC(s)</td>
<td>Least developed countries</td>
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<tr>
<td>LGBTQ+</td>
<td>Lesbian women, gay men, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning, persons</td>
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<tr>
<td>LNV</td>
<td>Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality</td>
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<td>LPI</td>
<td>Living Planet Index</td>
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<tr>
<td>MBW</td>
<td>Monitor of well-being and SDGs</td>
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<tr>
<td>N2000</td>
<td>Natura 2000</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-governmental organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>NIBUD</td>
<td>National Institute for Family Finance Information</td>
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<td>NMP</td>
<td>National Environmental Policy Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>NNN</td>
<td>Nature Network Netherlands</td>
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<tr>
<td>NOVI</td>
<td>National Environmental Vision</td>
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<tr>
<td>ODA</td>
<td>Official Development Assistance</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development</td>
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<td>PBL</td>
<td>Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>RSPO</td>
<td>Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil</td>
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<tr>
<td>RTRS</td>
<td>Roundtable on Responsible Soy</td>
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<td>SCP</td>
<td>Social-Cultural Planning Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>SDGs</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>SER</td>
<td>Social and Economic Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>TRIPS</td>
<td>Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNCTAD</td>
<td>United Nations Conference on Trade and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN DE-SA</td>
<td>United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNEP</td>
<td>United Nations Environment Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>UPOV91</td>
<td>1991 Act of the UPOV convention</td>
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<tr>
<td>VAT</td>
<td>Value Added Tax</td>
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<tr>
<td>VNG</td>
<td>Association of Netherlands Municipalities</td>
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<tr>
<td>VROM</td>
<td>Ministry of housing, spatial planning and environmental management</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wajong</td>
<td>Disability Insurance Act young handicapped</td>
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<tr>
<td>WIA</td>
<td>Work and Income to working capacity</td>
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<tr>
<td>WRR</td>
<td>Scientific Council for Government Policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>WTO</td>
<td>World Trade Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WUR</td>
<td>Wageningen University &amp; Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZZP(ers)</td>
<td>Self-employed without staff</td>
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</tbody>
</table>