

## DEAR in the Netherlands 2020: Context and project observations

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## Development Education & Awareness Raising (DEAR) Support Team

The DEAR Support Team is a project of the European Commission:

- Supporting the Commission in the implementation of the EU DEAR Programme, including through
  - Programme Analyses and Studies, Database management, Communications about the Programme
- Supporting EU DEAR projects in the implementation and learning from their work, including through
  - Workshops and Exchanges, Communications about the projects, Learning from and between projects

As part of the work of the Team a series of ‘country studies’ have been commissioned to investigate the context in which DEAR projects operate in different EU Member States. Details of the country studies that have been published to date can be found at

<https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/dear/news/dear-programme-reports>.

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# 1. DEAR in the Dutch context

## Introduction

Based upon document review and consultations with DEAR project staff this country study examines the national context of the Netherlands in which DEAR projects operate, in particular the public, media and political opinion relating to international development issues. It also investigates what DEAR project staff consider as 'quality', 'public awareness', 'critical understanding' in Development Education & Awareness Raising and how the national context of the Netherlands facilitates or hinders Global Learning/ Campaigning-Advocacy multi-stakeholder, governmental and national CSO network policies or strategies. And, finally, this study tries to reveal how the national context influences opportunities and challenges for DEAR projects in the Netherlands.

This first chapter contains findings from the document review; the next chapter briefly outlines the methods used in this country study. Chapter 3 contains the results that will be discussed in chapter 4. The report ends with chapter 5 that contains concluding remarks with an overview of challenges and opportunities.

## Development cooperation falls below the internationally agreed target of 0.7%

Over the last ten years the Dutch public and political context in which 'Development Education and Awareness Raising' projects take place has changed significantly. In 2013, the authors of 'The Dutch and development cooperation: ahead of the crowd or trailing behind?' already mentioned that Dutch development cooperation was at a historical cross-roads: for the first time since 1975 the Dutch financial commitment to development cooperation would fall below the internationally agreed target of 0.7% of the Gross National Income (GNI). (Spitz et al., 2013) 'The decrease of the aid budget and discussions about the aid sector in the Netherlands have to be seen in a wider context of shifting geopolitical power relations, shifting patterns of poverty, pressing global issues in the field of sustainability and increased diversity of money streams,' according to the authors. Also, in 2012 a merging of the ministries of Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation took place.

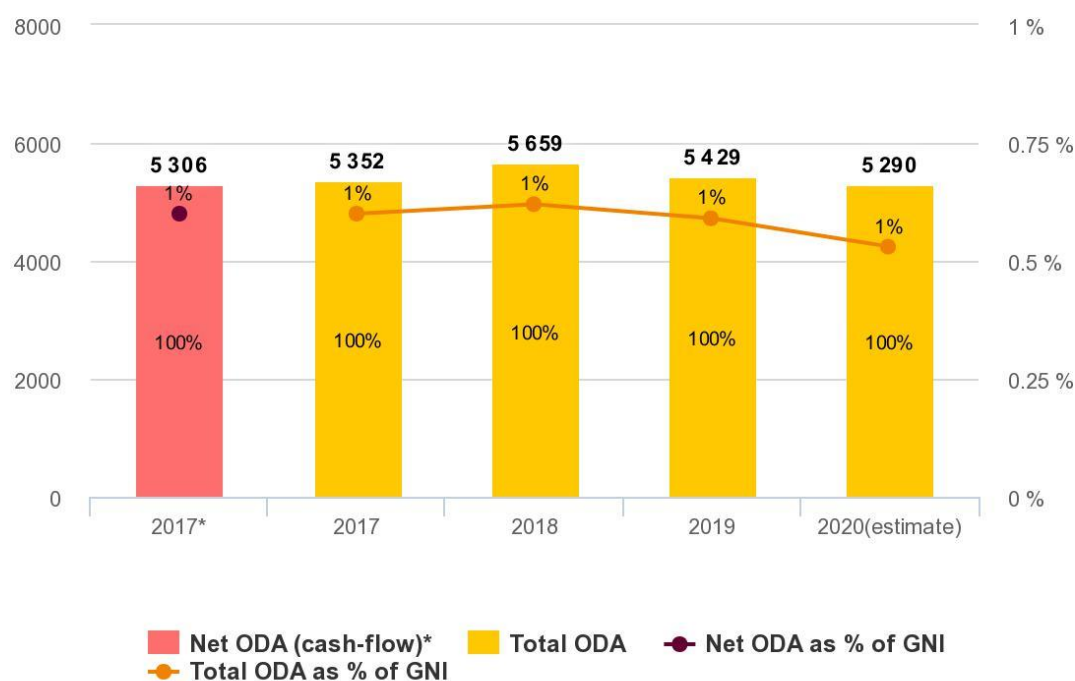
An OECD peer review of the Netherlands confirmed that the ODA/GNI ratio in 2013-2014 dropped below 0.7%. Together with sharp increases in in-donor refugee costs in 2014 and 2015, the Netherlands significantly reduced the share of bilateral ODA specifically targeted at recipient countries (country programmable aid). (OECD, 2017) About the more recent years, Donor Tracker indicates that the Netherlands spent 0.59% of its gross national income (GNI) to ODA in 2019 (that was US\$5.3 billion). And although the current government, in office since 2017, committed to compensating the development budget cuts made by its predecessor, in the 2020 budget the ODA-to-GNI ratio decreased to 0.53%, the lowest since 1973.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://donortracker.org/country/netherlands> (accessed 27 July 2020)

## THE NETHERLANDS' TOTAL ODA

US\$ millions; in 2018 prices



OECD, table DAC1. 2019 according to OECD preliminary data 2019, April 2020. 2020 estimates based on SEEK's calculations.

\*In 2017, net ODA was still officially measured according to the cash-flow methodology.

Fig. 1: Donor Tracker

### Missed opportunities to raise development awareness

In the OECD peer review (2017) specific attention is paid to opportunities to raising development awareness. In 2015, an action plan for communication 'Increasing Relevance and Transparency' was approved (MFA, 2015). This action plan looked promising according to the OECD peer review committee and focused both on increasing and improving communication with influential stakeholders and interested citizens, and on increasing openness by using open data for development co-operation. In a footnote the OECD reviewers indicate that 'the relevance of public support for development co-operation, and the role of government in strengthening it, has long been debated in the Netherlands (...). The Advisory Council on International Affairs (AIV) has consistently underscored the importance of societal awareness and support in the Netherlands and the priority that government should accord it.' The OECD referred to the advisory letter of the AIV published in November 2016 about 'the future of ODA'. (AIV, 2016) The advisory letter highlighted two contrasting viewpoints: the political viewpoint of abandoning the principle of spending at least 0.7% of GNI as ODA and at the same time charging the costs incurred in the Netherlands for the first-year reception of refugees and asylum seekers from ODA-eligible countries. And the public viewpoint that (in contrast to 2010) a majority of the Dutch electorate were in favour of increasing the Netherlands' contribution to international peace missions and were opposed to continuing to cut development cooperation expenditure.<sup>2</sup> Yet communication resources were cut in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and development education resources to civil society ceased

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ioresearch.nl/actueel/kiezers-willen-correcties-op-beleid-rutte-i-ii/> (accessed 27 July 2020)

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altogether. The OECD reviewers concluded that ‘opportunities are therefore being missed for engaging with other ministries and stakeholders to raise development awareness (e.g. through the education curriculum) at home.’ (OECD, 2017)

These resource cuts were followed one year later with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’s decision to retract all funding to the National Commission for International Cooperation and Sustainable Development (Nationale Commissie voor Internationale Samenwerking en Duurzame Ontwikkeling, NCDO). Established in 1970, the NCDO had become the organization for knowledge and advice on global citizenship and international cooperation. Its aim was to ‘create awareness and public support for development cooperation in general’ (Global Education Network Europe, 2017). In 2010 NCDO’s mandate was expanded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to ‘strengthen global citizenship/citizenship in relation to sustainable global development’. However, in the fall of 2017 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs decided that from January 1, 2018 it would no longer co-finance NCDO.

In its final years NCDO was the publisher of OneWorld, the multimedia journalistic platform for ‘global thinking and doing green’ that connects people to the world. In addition, NCDO published Samsam, an educational platform for ‘worldly-wise’ children. Kaleidos Research conducted research for these platforms and for external clients on global themes and sustainable behaviour of Dutch citizens. When the Ministry of Foreign Affairs no longer co-funded NCDO, Samsam went on with a new look, new mission and securing its future as method of global citizenship education for young children. OneWorld decided to continue its work within a new foundation: the OneWorld Foundation. Kaleidos Research finished its activities in 2017 and ceased activities on January 1, 2018. (Global Education Network Europe, 2018)

### Development education shifts from Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Ministry of Education

In 2012 the NCDO published its research about how to integrate global citizenship education into the curriculum of Pedagogical Academy for Primary Education (Pabo). (Hogeling & de Goede, 2013) Kaleidos Research (as part of NCDO) continued to contribute to researching global citizenship among children. In collaboration with partner Samsam, this research was increasingly about ‘education for global citizenship’. How do Dutch children think about children’s rights or equality, for example? What do they know about major issues regarding water and food? Kaleidos Research shared its knowledge and experience in the European network GENE (Global Education Network Europe).

Before ceasing its activities, Kaleidos Research also shared its insights and advocated for including global citizenship into the new curriculum that is currently being developed by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW). Under the name ‘Curriculum.nu’, teachers and school leaders have made proposals for improving the curriculum. They reflected on what students should know and be able to do. Proposals from the ‘development teams’ regarding citizenship include the following: ‘9.1 Globalization: Students explore how they, their classmates and other people in the Netherlands are connected to other parts of the world and learn about international cooperation; Pupils develop insight into the dependency upon and interdependence of countries and regions, migration and distribution issues; the role of the EU and UN and their own possible influence.’<sup>3</sup> However, the development teams’ proposals are not yet educational goals and are ‘work in progress’.

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<sup>3</sup> Author’s translation from the proposal in Dutch: ‘9.1 Globalisering: Leerlingen verkennen hoe zichzelf, klasgenoten en andere mensen in Nederland verbonden zijn met andere delen van wereld en leren over internationale samenwerking; Leerlingen ontwikkelen inzicht in de verwevenheid en onderlinge afhankelijkheid van landen en gebieden, migratie en verdelingsvraagstukken; de rol van de EU en VN en hun eigen mogelijk invloed.’

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There will be a scientific committee that will give the minister and the Dutch Parliament independent advice on the content and the follow-up process of the curriculum revision. This committee first examines the proposals of the development teams. In addition, she also gives advice on the assignment with which the Stichting Leerplan Ontwikkeling (Curriculum Development Foundation, SLO) is asked to further translate these proposals into concrete educational objectives.<sup>4</sup> In short, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has abandoned its support of development education, but the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science is in the 'initiating phase' of supporting development education.

### Lack of knowledge from Dutch people about global and interconnected challenges

In 2017 Kaleidos Research published its results from an investigation into 'the Dutch and the SDGs'. (Boonstoppel, 2017) Kaleidos Research found that attention to 'sustainable behaviour' is growing in media and politics; but this awareness might not be translated into sustainable behavioural change. Also the SDG-agenda has been drawn up from an inclusive view of poverty. Poverty is according to this vision more than just economic development. It is related to (global) challenges, such as climate change, inequality and peace and security. But only one in three Dutch people acknowledged that world poverty cannot be seen in isolation from climate change. The majority is thus not convinced of this link. More than a quarter (27%) of the respondents believe that climate change plays no role in the emergence and existence of global poverty. Trend research shows that campaigns can play a role in increasing knowledge about the goals, the author points out. Although the awareness of the Millennium Development Goals has never really been great, various awareness campaigns seemed successful. In 2009, 23 per cent of the Dutch indicated that they knew the targets, a doubling compared to 2007. From a European perspective, the Netherlands was even the leader. In no other European country was knowledge about the Millennium Development Goals so great. (Boonstoppel, 2017)

## 2. Methods

Against this background interviews took place with staff involved in EU grant funded DEAR projects in the Netherlands. These projects relate to the European Commission's DEAR Call for Proposals 2016. This DEAR Call's overall objective is '...to promote development education and raise public awareness on development and cooperation policies.' The specific objective is '...to provide support for and promote quality development education and awareness raising among the European public. The proposed projects must foster a growing awareness and critical understanding of the role, responsibility and lifestyles of the public in relation to an interdependent world. And it should motivate their effective involvement in local and global Actions in support of the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.' The projects should address one or more of the Sustainable Development Goals and the interdependence of EU and developing countries. One or more priority themes that the project should address are migration, climate change and gender equality.

The consultant conducted interviews with six DEAR project staff members in the Netherlands. The projects of which staff were consulted were:

- Citizen for Financial Justice;
- Make Europe Sustainable for All;

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/toekomst-onderwijs/toekomstgericht-curriculum> (accessed 27 July 2020)



- Frame, Voice, Report;
- Get up and Goals;
- MIND; and
- Snapshots from the Borders.

In addition the consultant asked in a phone call a representative of Dutch membership body for organisations working in international development (Partos) to shed light on initial findings. The consultant organised an online meeting in which four of the six staff of projects participated to reflect upon the preliminary results. The meeting was also organised for the staff from the different projects to 'meet' each other.

### 3. Results

#### National context

#### Political context

The interviewees indicated that international development issues have become more politically controversial and that less than 0.7 per cent GNP is spent on development aid. Public co-financing of development projects has decreased significantly (which one of them called 'a slowly worsening process') and they felt that the government's investment in a coordinated support base for development cooperation has disappeared. At national level funds for development education have vanished, which means that only European funds and private funds remain available. One of the respondents recalled the dismantling of knowledge platform for development education NCDO. But whereas public funds have decreased, private funds for development education have increased (although numbers are not available).

One of the respondents pointed out that the government's focus has shifted towards business and their Corporate Social Responsibility instead of raising awareness about development cooperation amongst citizens.

Another trend that interviewees indicate is the increased polarisation of the political context regarding international development issues, which makes it more difficult for NGOs to manoeuvre. The Dutch government seems more reluctant in putting progressive measures for an inclusive society in place. Regarding refugee rights, for instance, there is hardly any political space for NGOs and interested Members of Parliament. On the theme of climate change, an interviewee indicates that the organisation Urgenda<sup>5</sup> had to take the Dutch government to court in order to push it to fulfilling its obligations to halt and reverse climate change.

#### Public context

The Dutch public opinion regarding international development issues is not necessarily negative, but it has become more vocal and more polarised, like (almost) everywhere else in Europe – according to some interviewees. Another interviewee mentions that the public opinion consists of diverse groups, but overall the general public seems to be less informed about root causes of poverty and injustice. Also, issues that projects try to tackle can be hijacked by alt-right that starts publishing 'fake-news' about it.

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<sup>5</sup> The Dutch Urgenda Foundation aims for a fast transition towards a sustainable society, with a focus on the transition towards a circular economy using only renewable energy. The Urgenda Climate Case against the Dutch Government was the first in the world in which citizens established that their government has a legal duty to prevent dangerous climate change. <https://www.urgenda.nl/en/home-en/> (accessed 3 Aug 2020)

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Regarding migration, according to interviewees, it seems that the voice of right-wing sentiment and attitude to close borders has gained in volume over the last ten years.

Although interviewees feel that there is less attention to international development issues, at local level they find that people are interested in the topics addressed by DEAR. Examples they give are that people feel frustrated not being able to support refugees; a DEAR-event on this topic triggered an enthusiastic public that was eager to continue being engaged. Other interviewees recall events that sub-grantees organised at local level that linked global topics to their local reality; they expressed a commitment and continued organising activities at local level.

## Media context

Media about international development issues have become more vulnerable: an interviewee recalls the department of foreign affairs of Dutch public media, which has disappeared. Reduced budgets for independent journalism were another aspect that put it in jeopardy. This has led to fewer media focusing on development education and awareness raising; in its slipstream a privatisation of media has led to new business models and 'you have to buy space' for articles that address your DEAR project's topics, according to an interviewee.

Some interviewees experienced that local media would more easily publish about local DEAR-events. At national level DEAR-events have to compete with many other events (and news); this makes it difficult for DEAR projects to get the attention of the national media (but it is not impossible, according to an interviewee). Also interviewees expressed that media have shifted towards the right wing that might not have an interest in development issues.

Social media have gained in importance, according to the interviewees. Social media might more easily escalate development issues due to alt-right and this calls for a 'battle of interpretation' and urges DEAR projects to develop a well thought through communication plan.

## Youth

DEAR projects are especially aimed at youth; the interviewees' experience is that youth especially considers climate change as a hot topic. Last year's strikes (e.g. national climate action strikes and Fridays for Future) provoked teachers to having a bigger interest in educational material about climate change.

Not all DEAR projects target youth only, but also target the general public ('everybody that has the right to vote'). Some interviewees experienced an 'age-gap' during their events. They said that while their project addressed youth, during events their audience included both youth and the older generation. While the generation 'in between' seemed to be missing, both youth and older people felt very much engaged. Interviewees also discussed that young people often are very busy and might not have much time and space to engage – and often engage on a temporary basis only. The older generation, to the contrary, does have time. It was suggested to bring in 'mentorship' as a way of working: to connect younger and older people that aim for the same, where older people might already have a bigger network and be able to open doors for younger people that have ideas but might lack a network to bring those ideas into practice.

## Impact of the Dutch national context on DEAR projects

Funding of the Dutch government used to be provided to NGOs with quality guidelines: NGOs should provide 'a nuanced and complete picture' of international development issues, according to interviewees. Due to the cut in funding for awareness raising about the government's support to



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development aid, this 'quality impulse' has disappeared. Due to a lack of public funding, NGOs are obliged to raise funds with private funders and citizens. As a result the focus on storytelling of the root causes of poverty has changed and might have become more stereotyped because storytelling is now linked to fundraising. 'It risks lacking positive stories, because positive stories raise less funds', one of the interviewees explains.

With regard to Development Education, interviewees explain that the Netherlands doesn't have a national curriculum. This means that the government steers curriculum development, but does not provide the content. Educational publishers determine a lot regarding content, an interviewee mentions. Teachers often participate in DEAR projects about global education in addition to their usual work. The SDGNederland.nl Foundation, which facilitates a growing movement of more than 800 parties, all of whom contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), include members with a focus on education. In addition, two developments regarding creating a future-proof curriculum currently take place. These are called 'Platform Onderwijs2032', and 'Curriculum.nu'. Due to joint CSO advocacy both now include core goals of developing global citizenship and human rights education. One of the interviewees expressed that it is perhaps a good shift of development education from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to being located now with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.

Migration has become a toxic topic, one of the interviewees explains. According to the respondent who has been working on the topic of migration since 2011, the way it is being debated has changed in the aftermath of the financial and economic crisis in 2008. The debate regarding migration has become less well informed, because 'all voices must be heard'. Some political parties provide input into debates based on fear and frame immigrants and asylum-seekers as a threat (to everything from local and national security to the welfare state or to gender equality). This has transformed the NGOs' focus from collaboration with the government to making them a lobby target for putting more progressive measures in place. Respondents also indicate that CSOs have an important role to play in informing the debate and political discussions with information and stories e.g. about why people have left their homes and become refugees.

## Quality, Public Awareness, and Critical Understanding

### Quality DEAR

Interviewees consider 'quality DEAR' as 'how do you make your voice heard in the debate': not by framing people from the south as victims but as active citizens. It also includes taking steps to go from single to two-way communication. Other considerations are to incorporate informing and engaging the audience into DEAR projects and to be able to measure these processes of informing and engaging.

Another interpretation of 'quality DEAR' is to put current issues and events into a historical perspective. That provides the possibility to look at when and how decisions were taken – which shows that you can make different choices as well. 'Quality DEAR' might increase further when you share this interactively with the DEAR project's audience, according to an interviewee.

When looking at development education, one of the interviewees interprets 'quality education' to be education that provokes thoughts, such as education about the topic of climate change in relation to gender inequality that pupils found eye-opening.

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## Public Awareness

Some interviewees express that raising 'public awareness' through local projects/ events worked well, because it includes the local identity of the local NGO that implements the project. Some projects publish press releases, short films and use social media to raise public awareness. It helps for example to engage teachers and parents.

Other interviewees think that the topic shouldn't be narrowed down to international development issues but that it would be better to speak about international politics and policies and regulation. According to an interviewee people used to know what is causing injustice and what root causes of poverty are - and challenged the powers that be. Globalisation and capital disrupted these channels of information. It therefore helps to analyse developments also through a historical lens and communicate that with the audience to raise awareness.

One interviewee pointed out that, although the SDGs are of importance at home and abroad, they are a follow-up of the MDGs that were accommodated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and aimed at developing countries. So it will take a while for the SDGs to be considered internal/ national affairs, too.

Public awareness implies that one needs to work continuously to raise awareness through providing access to the right information. One interviewee mentions that the project is partly awareness raising and partly education: it was aimed at providing knowledge about what happens at the borders of the EU, providing tools how to deal with that, and providing space to act at the same time.

## Critical Understanding

'Critical understanding' is incorporated in trainings of people that are involved in the projects, according one of the interviewees. Another interviewee indicates that the project engages young students to perceive the topics from different angles – and for example to regard climate change also from the perspective of climate deniers. But one needs to include the political and business perspectives, too. Critical understanding means that the outcomes of the lessons (and especially the creative final assignment) shows that pupils generally know very well whom says what and why.

Another interviewee stressed that joint collaboration with (academic) research is something that CSOs need to do to improve the target group's critical understanding. Research could for example take the shape of interviews with migration experts that can be published to inform the public through website, Twitter and Linked-In. Because, according to the interviewee, raising public awareness must go hand in hand with informing policy debates.

## Engaging and communicating with the audience

Interviewees used public events to increase visibility of their action through publications in newspapers and social media. Some interviewees have experienced that their project has an increased outreach through involving sub-grantees. Sub-grantees that have a local focus and use local media that tend to address these projects and topics.

One of the interviewees finds that communication improves when using language that all people understand: to use easy language for a big audience that is not aware of the SDGs and to use examples, such as plastic, to make the SDGs concrete and show that everything is connected.

Another interviewee recalls an experiment with avoiding the word 'refugees' in the text and engaged mayors, journalists, NGOs and other experts for a joint session; it helped them to pull themselves out of the existing discourse.

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Communication channels to put messages across about international development have disappeared, an interviewee indicates, and that has put the support base under pressure. Collaboration with journalists within the organisation's network helped, however, to publish the events through media such as magazines and newspapers and reach a broader audience. Communication messages for campaigns from CSOs can be improved with input from and collaboration with academic institutions, according to an interviewee; this was based on learning from experience.

### Making change

'Making change' can take different forms. To jointly work with partners from Eastern and Central European countries was valuable for one interviewee to learn from each other about what works in a particular country and what doesn't. Another interviewee thought that with small initiatives the audience was triggered not only to give money, but also to change behaviour; e.g. to sustainably use energy or to become a volunteer. A third interviewee mentioned that local activities are very good at raising awareness, because the local community 'owned the action'. Another interviewee explained that the project enabled them to activate people that had lost faith in achieving a positive solution: 'we started many initiatives and some gained strong traction. I think this is just the beginning of a phase to reconnect people to talk about migration.'

One interviewee experienced that through implementing the DEAR project the academic and activist world had been linked, making it a successful combination to critique the current housing problems and provide alternative solutions for them based on evidence. Another interviewee shared that prior to the election of European Parliament the project had published national reports about the national situation of migration & development in eleven countries. The reports were based on a joint collaboration between NGOs and researchers, which contained recommendations for policy makers. One overarching European report was published, launched and discussed with candidates for European Parliament that gained a lot of attention.

Interviewees mentioned some hindering factors for change as well. COVID-19 interrupted the final stage of a DEAR project that would have consisted of a culmination of activities in March/April 2020. Another hindering factor was the decrease of Dutch funding for development education; therefore, European funding has become even more important, the interviewee mentioned.

## 4. Discussion

The results from both document reviews and interviews indicate a major change in the Dutch context regarding development cooperation and development education and awareness raising in particular.

Over the last sixty years, the Netherlands has become a respected actor in development cooperation (OECD, 2006; OECD, 2011). Spitz et al. (2013) noted that Dutch foreign relations are historically shaped around the two poles of (economic) self-interest and moral obligation. These poles are dubbed 'the merchant vs. the clergyman' (in Dutch: de koopman vs. de dominee). Also, the Netherlands has been a frontrunner of development cooperation and has had an important influence on development thinking and aid policies, such as formulating a numerical target of international development cooperation (ODA becoming 0.7% of GNI target).

The Netherlands has also been in front of the crowd regarding policy coherence and several thematic fields, including human rights, gender and sexual and reproductive rights, water, agriculture, civil society

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and local development. However, after the economic and financial crisis in 2008 and consequent recession of the Dutch economy in 2011-2012 the question became: all sectors have to cut down, so why not cut down on development aid? (Spitz et al., 2013)

According to Spitz et al. development cooperation has already been a topic in the Dutch public debate since the 1970s. The Dutch debate about development cooperation can be divided into two domains: the public and the professional debate. Overall, the tone of the public debate has become rather negative, reinforcing the image that aid does not help, which is amplified through social media. The professional debate is more nuanced, but seems to focus on technicalities of aid. Regardless of all these debates, the majority of Dutch citizens do support development cooperation and citizens are also rather actively involved in aid initiatives: as generous private donors, through fair trade consumer behaviour and through voluntary work. (Spitz et al., 2013) It is important to better inform the public so that the debate is more clearly based on factual knowledge. This is what DEAR projects contribute to at national and local levels.

Spitz et al. highlight that there are several indications that development cooperation also has value for Dutch society. (2013) Firstly, it is argued that development in the South cannot be seen in isolation from what happens in a country like the Netherlands. Several challenges, such as climate change, infectious diseases, insecurity and conflict, have international linkages. Secondly, development aid also plays a stimulating role in relation to economic development – based on the perspective as the Netherlands as merchant. (Spitz et al., 2013) Whereas DEAR projects emphasize solidarity and promote social justice, they are important to make Dutch citizens aware of the international linkages, explain the complexity of the challenges and link global challenges to local events – both through development education and awareness raising events.

The decrease in the budget for development cooperation was not a short-term move and development cooperation NGOs directed their energy towards fundraising efforts instead of promoting the support base for development cooperation. This might have impacted on the framing of their storytelling: Stravens notes in her article that organizations tend to sketch mainly doom and gloom, a one-sided image of people in developing countries. Private initiatives equally risk reinforcing the classic image of development cooperation: ‘we propose solutions to the problems there’. (Stravens, 2018) DEAR project staff expressed that they are aware of this and explained that working with sub-grantees included training them to avoid this pitfall; and for the development of campaigns and awareness raising efforts they seek to collaborate with academic researchers and use a historical lens for including a nuanced picture. In addition, the budget cuts also have shifted DEAR project staff to focus more strongly on their CSOs’ role as watchdogs and advocacy activities with Dutch government as their target group instead of collaborating partner.

## **5. Conclusion: challenges and opportunities**

Citizens in the Netherlands and all over the world have become more vocal and inquisitive about the results of development aid, demanding information on where the money goes and explanations when clear results are lacking, according to Spitz et al. (2013). At the same time, they add, the world has become more interlinked in terms of flows of money, production chains, information and people. Poverty patterns are changing. Processes of change and development are very unpredictable. According to the authors this means that stimulating sustainable development and combatting inequality is of vital

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importance in a globalizing and resource-constrained world. One of their recommendations is to better communicate positive aid results.

However, as long as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not invest in counteracting the lack of knowledge about interlinked challenges, it will continue to add to the missed opportunities of raising development awareness. DEAR projects in the Netherlands have an important role to play in filling this gap.

Joining forces creates joint energy: in the online meeting that connected DEAR project staff they decided to organise a follow-up discussion amongst themselves. The theme will be how to start a broader social agenda and movement in which the topic of migration and refugees will be linked to climate change and climate refugees and labour migration.

The results of this country report show that the staff from DEAR projects are keen to and already use the opportunity to engage and collaborate with research institutes and academics to support them with better capturing these complex processes and developments in their messages. This would (further) improve quality/ public awareness/ critical understanding of DEAR.

Also, in addition to broader campaigns, DEAR projects have used the opportunity to organise local events, which facilitates communicating directly with a smaller audience. This helps to translate major economic, environmental, social and geopolitical changes that are interlinked with international cooperation to local realities and provide the audience with these insights and opportunities to act.

However, channels to communicate about international development at national level in the Netherlands have decreased, which hinder DEAR projects to contribute to better communicating positive aid results with a broader audience. At the same time, DEAR project staff have improved their skills to strategically use (social) media, to be able to reach their audience and to bypass or counteract 'alt-right' and other groups that might want to hijack the topic for its own purpose. DEAR project staff also contribute to altering the existing, often negative, discourses regarding DEAR priority themes of migration, climate change and gender equality.

Global citizenship education in the Netherlands has encountered quite a challenge with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs first reducing funding and eventually abandoning it altogether. A renewed focus on development education and global citizenship education could become an opportunity however, with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science in charge. NGOs and CSOs that work with global citizenship education have joined forces beyond their DEAR projects and advocated for the incorporation of the topic into the design/ blue print of the new to be developed curriculum (primary and secondary education). DEAR project staff are aware that this joint advocacy might need to be continued as the development of the curriculum is in progress and schools themselves ultimately decide upon the final content of the curriculum they provide.

Due to significant budget cuts in development aid in the Netherlands, DEAR funding from the European Commission has become a crucial source for financial support to CSOs for their activities at national level, for networking at national and EU-level and jointly collaborating with colleagues from other countries.

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