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International Development Cooperation and Civil Society Organizations - The Netherlands





EXPEDIENT

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Mara Manzoni Luz
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Introduction

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Dutch non-governmental cooperation made an important contribution in building and strengthening a large part of the Brazilian Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). For different reasons, such as geographical prioritization, thematic mismatches, or pressure from their stakeholders, most of these agencies are no longer present in Brazil. The fact that Brazil is considered a non-priority country in the list of Dutch governmental cooperation was an important factor for agencies to leave Brazil, as they require public resources to survive. For Robert Wiggers¹, when Brazil achieved middle income country status on the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) list 15 years ago, it greatly impacted the funding made available to Brazil, and the Dutch government decided to focus its cooperation with Brazil on Assistance and Trade first, and later on Trade only.

In 2020, the Process of Articulation and Dialogue (PAD) and the Brazilian Association of NGOs (Associação Brasileira de ONGS - ABONG) conducted a study called “International Development Cooperation (IDC) after 2015: agendas for the Brazilian Civil Society Organizations (A Cooperação Internacional para o Desenvolvimento (CID) pós 2015: agendas para as Organizações da Sociedade Civil brasileiras) (by Maria Elisa Huber Pessina and Elsa Sousa Kraychete). This document aims to update that study, as well as further analyze elements regarding Dutch cooperation in Brazil, and offer arguments to support advocacy actions by Brazilian CSOs on cooperation policies, and contribute to future training workshops on international cooperation, aiming to expand the participation of Brazilian organizations in the debate.

This document seeks to delve into official documents from the Dutch government, the OECD, and cooperation agencies with relevant activities in Brazil, in a non-exhaustive identification of actors. Six semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives of Dutch agencies, Brazilian CSOs, and consultants specialized in the topic.

¹ Interview with Robert Wiggers, Program Manager at the Wild Geese Foundation.

1. Programs and main focal areas

Among the countries that make up the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC), The Netherlands is the seventh largest donor, having contributed with a total amount of US\$ 5.4 billions to the official development assistance, which represents 0.59% of the country's GDP. The Netherlands is known for proactively linking development cooperation with trade, and is the leading country in aid to this economic area. According to an OECD report from 2020², the Netherlands, through its official development agency (ODA in English, from the original Officiële Ontwikkelingshulp in Dutch), has "a clear geographic and thematic focus, and is one of the leaders in supporting gender equality and women's organizations." Their government has three aspirations within the framework of development cooperation: "the eradication of extreme poverty within a single generation; the promotion of sustainability, including growth that benefits the poorest and most vulnerable populations all over the world; contributing to the success of its domestic companies abroad."

Its priority theme areas, focused on people's rights and opportunities, are:

- a) Safety;
- b) Legal Order;
- c) Water Resources Management;
- d) Food and agriculture;
- e) Health and sexual and reproductive rights
(in search of healthy and wanted births, safe deliveries and the free choice of partners)³.

Local resilience and climate action, with an increasing focus on adaptation and promotion of entrepreneurship, are emerging priorities, along with a commitment to form and support alliances and strengthen the private sector's contribution to development cooperation.

According to their Policy Document on Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, "[Investing on Global Prospects: For the World, For the Netherlands](#)" (2018), the country focuses its resources primarily on the African regions of the Sahel, Horn and North, and the Middle East, with a view to addressing the causes of poverty, irregular immigration, terrorism, and climate change.

Most of the budget is handled by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Dutch Entrepreneurial Development Bank (FMO)⁴ raises additional resources from the private sector, with about 30% going to countries in a fragile or low-income context. In 2020 the Netherlands distributed US\$289 million for responses of partner countries to COVID-19, of which US\$37 million was allocated for health-related investments.

² OECD (2020), Development Assistance Committee Members and Civil Society, The Development Dimension, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/51eb6df1-en>

³ [Development Cooperation: Your country & The Netherlands | Brazil | Brazil and the Netherlands.](#)

⁴ Along with South Africa and India, Brazil has been part of the Global Innovation Lab for Climate Finance (the Lab) since September 2020; the initiative is aimed at supporting private funding for climate action in developing countries. Further information (in English) can be found at: [news - The Lab launches eight new finance solutions to drive climate action and green recovery FMO](#). The full list of joint projects is available at: [Brazil FMO](#)

The Royal Netherlands Embassy in Brazil

As the promotion and guarantee of human rights around the world are among the priorities of the Dutch government's foreign policy, their Embassy in Brazil has launched the Human Rights (MRF) Fund, in order to offer grants to organizations that work towards promoting human rights, according to the priorities set by the Dutch government. For 2022, those priorities were: freedom of speech and of the press, freedom of religion and belief, support for human rights defenders and promotion of a wider space for civil society, equal rights for LGBTI+ people, equal rights for women and girls, promotion of the international legal order/the rule of law.

In 2022, the Fund was available for private legal entities, including Individual Microentrepreneurs and Micro and Small Enterprises with a valid CNPJ, if acting in Brazil, or for international organizations. To be eligible, projects had to address at least one of the six Human Rights Fund's priorities listed above, and had to be fully implemented in Brazil after April 1, 2022, and no later than December 20, 2022. The maximum financial contribution for a long-term project, longer than 18 months, was R\$ 395,000.00 for "projects by experienced organizations, or those based on similar existent successful initiatives." There is also a public call for proposals on "Cultural Connections Liveable Cities", which seeks to *"facilitate international cooperation between The Netherlands and Brazil in the area of culture, and involves the Embassy and the Consulates General and invites cultural institutions, artists, cultural professionals, designers, writers, poets, photographers, technologists, musicians, filmmakers, and historians to submit proposals aimed at the exchange between these two countries."*⁵

Non-governmental Cooperation

Since the 1980s, Dutch non-governmental cooperation has contributed to the strengthening of Brazilian civil society. Despite their very different natures, agencies such as Novib ([now OXFAMNOVIB](#)), Cebemo (later the Catholic Organization for Emergency Aid and Development - [Cordaid](#)), ICCO⁶, Solidaridad (now [SolidaridadNetwork](#)), all supported the efforts for democracy in Brazil at the end of the dictatorship period. *"In 1989, ICCO, as a pioneer, was already building its policies for the country with its partners in a collaborative way. Novib played an important role, as it supported social issues rather than projects, and conducted annual consultations via a counterparty platform. At the time, it had two very important Working Groups: one on gender, which helped the media and large NGOs to understand the gender perspective and change the sexist positions of the '90s; and another unprecedented one on indicators, which systematized the importance of relying on objective parameters for planning, and which was key in the debate during that period"*.

For Sérgio Haddad, "there was an important difference in the Dutch model, which also included a secular organization, Novib, in order to create an appropriate distribution of resources, in terms of church affiliation or not"⁸. In an interview with Jan van Bentum, an ICCO project officer who was in Brazil several times, he pointed out that "what was crucial in the international cooperation actions at that moment was to enable excluded people to have more space to participate in the decision making processes concerning their own lives"⁹.

⁵ Further information can be found at: [Chamada Aberta – Conexões Culturais, Cidades Habitáveis 2022 | Boletim de notícias | Holandaevoce.nl](#)

⁶ In 2021, the Interchurch Organization for Development Cooperation (ICCO) and Cordaid merged to "join forces, increasing the impact of tackling the current global challenges, unifying the Dutch development sector, and adapting to the needs of international development." At [Our history – Cordaid International](#).

⁷ Interview with Domingos Armani.

⁸ Sérgio Haddad at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/0103-730720140750> – page 7

⁹ Same as page 11.

The major Dutch agencies were traditionally very dependent on subsidies from the Dutch government. “With the decrease in official government funding available for work in Brazil, many of them have terminated their relationships with partners. The changing priorities in Dutch policy, in addition to the suggestion, somewhat stimulated by the government itself as well as by the media, that Dutch aid was too widespread, caused most agencies to stop supporting partners in Brazil altogether.”¹⁰.

There are still interesting experiments currently in place, most significantly the [Wild Geese Foundation](#) (Wilde Ganzen in Dutch), established in 1957 with the mission of reducing poverty and inequality through community-led initiatives. “We support community organizations in the Global South and their Dutch partners in seeking funds to jointly achieve a better future because we believe that communities should have control over their own development.”

In Brazil, it has supported the Ecumenical Coordination of Service (CESE) since 2006. The Foundation has an interesting initiative called “[Change the Game Academy](#)”, which is a training program for community organizations and small NGOs in 14 low- and middle-income countries, including virtual and face-to-face learning and individual coaching on effective national and international fundraising strategies.

[Hivos](#), the Humanist Institute for Development Cooperation (from the Dutch Humanistisch Instituut voor Ontwikkelingssamenwerking) is an international institution based in The Hague, the Netherlands, which supports CSOs in Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and Asia. Along with indigenous peoples and local communities, the institution runs the [All Eyes on the Amazon](#) project in Brazil, Ecuador, and Peru, which collects information about the destruction of the forest and deforestation levels using satellite images, and detects human rights violations with the aid of drones and cell phones. “We make full use of technological solutions and local knowledge to help defend the interests of indigenous peoples, and by collecting evidence, we bring about structural change through lobbying, outreach campaigns and law enforcement.”¹¹

The [Laudes Foundation](#), financially based in Switzerland, represents the field of a new philanthropy that has a significant amount of resources. It had a fleeting presence in Brazil, working with partners to ensure labor rights, accelerate sustainable cotton production, and promote the transition into a new economy, with a strong emphasis on promoting gender, equality, and inclusion. The Foundation left Brazil due to cost reductions, but it still supports some Brazilian CSOs, among them [ESPLAR](#), in its work with family farmers from Ceará in the production of [agro-ecological cotton](#) for fair trade.¹²

Since 1995, the [Porticus Foundation](#) has organized the philanthropic efforts of the Dutch [Brenninkmeijer](#) family, with the goal of “creating a sustainable future where justice and human dignity can flourish.” In Latin America, whose priority countries are Colombia, Peru and Brazil, its purpose is to confront inequality and support vulnerable groups, with a strong focus on the Amazon, counting on the presence of the Roman Catholic Church’s pastoral work, in a Panamazonian perspective. The Foundation’s headquarters are located in São Paulo, and it does not accept projects, but rather searches for the organizations it wishes to support.

The [Bernard van Leer Foundation](#) has been in Brazil for more than 30 years, and its mission is focused on early childhood (0 to 5 years old). It currently has 25 projects spread throughout the country, with partnerships at the municipal level in a trilateral perspective, involving the Foundation, with its financial and technical support, organizations or companies, and municipalities, giving priority to those towns led by black and indigenous women mayors. It funds pilot projects and has a 3-person support office in São Paulo.

¹⁰ Interview with Robert Wiggers.

¹¹ Further information (in Portuguese and English) can be found at: TOA – O Programa Todos os Olhos na Amazônia (todososojosenlaamazonia.org)

¹² Interview with Domingos Armani.

The more than 100 Dutch organizations working on international development around the world have a platform called [Partos](#), which, “through advocacy, communication, and innovation, helps its members to successfully work towards the creation of a just, fair and sustainable world for all, striving to connect, strengthen, renew and represent its members in order to contribute to effective cooperation in development.” Partos represents organizations in various forums both in The Hague, In European circles, on global platforms, and in the media. Their advocacy work fosters the efforts of organizations in promoting joint interests and influencing policy regarding the general public, the private sector, and politics. The Partos lobbying team also supports its members with Strategic Partnerships by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Brazilian NGOs and their partnership with Dutch Cooperation

“The experience of about 30 years of cooperation between FASE and Dutch co-funding and project support agencies of non-governmental organizations has reflected the profound transformations of the Brazilian and Dutch socio-political context over this period. Throughout these three decades, FASE had the support, at different times, of Dutch organizations such as Cebemo (Cordaid), ICCO, Novib, and Solidaridad, and faced the challenges of sustaining these complex partnerships in an increasingly adverse context, especially since the first decade of the current century.

*We must highlight the extremely relevant role of Dutch cooperation in the period of democratic resistance to the dictatorship and redemocratization of the country - even as part of a strategy of the Dutch government to support the opposition to the military dictatorship in Brazil through its non-governmental action arms. Organizations such as ICCO and Novib played a relevant role in supporting a range of relevant organizations, from CUT to Cebrap. Since the re-democratization, the role of Dutch cooperation in supporting an innovative agenda - supporting the incorporation by NGOs and social movements of issues such as gender, human rights, environmental sustainability, and racial equality - is unquestionable. From the first decade of this century, the Dutch cooperation went through a process of political retreat (conditioned by the hegemony of the neoliberal right-wing in the Netherlands, and the closer relationship of the agencies with the business sector in the Netherlands) - accompanied, in some cases, by its withdrawal from Brazil. Nevertheless, as Kees said (Biekart Anneke Jansen and Leilah Landim, *Marchas e contramarchas da cooperação – a parceria ICCO-FASE (1983-2010)*, p. 185), “what is good should not be forgotten”: the cooperation between Brazilian CSOs and Dutch agencies is a beautiful page in the book of international solidarity.”*

Jorge Eduardo Saavedra Durão - FASE

2. Dutch cooperation in the post-Covid-19 pandemic context: common advocacy topics and key takeaways

Although Dutch non-governmental cooperation in Brazil today is residual compared to the past, there are still possibilities for joint efforts. As official cooperation conditions assistance to trade, and seeks to generate opportunities for Dutch companies, it would be important to build on the learnings from the concrete experience of FASE Espírito Santo (ES):

- Maintaining a permanent monitoring of the Netherlands' international trade policies, which influence the cooperation policies, both governmental and non-governmental, seeking new partnerships, and updating relations for joint propositions.
- Giving visibility to the experiences of joint and consistent actions and processes, such as coalitions, platforms, and networks. In a moment of setbacks and reduced civil society spaces, as well as fewer resources, actors from different social fields gain renewed importance.
- Learning more about “Shift the power”, a global movement for the decolonization of cooperation that is very strong in the Netherlands¹³ and seeks a new paradigm of cooperation.
- Coordinating, in an innovative way, the combination between climate change and the fight against poverty and inequality, connecting the two themes to increase the resilience of rural and urban communities and refocus the issue of the development model. Depending on the outcome of the Brazilian elections, the theme will once again become part of public policies and the international debate, and civil society will once again have a role in the discussion of the development model that favors the confrontation of climate change, especially on the special role of the Amazon in the international debate and inequalities. It is important to associate this debate with the urban space, since most of the cooperation focuses on a rural view of the environmental issue, which is still a Eurocentrist and neocolonial view of the country.¹⁴
- Updating the mapping of Dutch Private Development Initiatives, which are small organizations of volunteers who raise funds in the Netherlands for a project they consider “their own”. *“In the past, these projects were started by Dutch Protestant and Catholic missionaries, Dutch tourists who were touched by the huge disparities between the rich and the poor in Brazil, who wanted to do something for the people they met, as well as Dutch citizens who worked in Brazil and came back to The Netherlands with the same feeling, that they had to do something. Those Private Development Initiatives were backed by a plethora of supporting organizations. All of them, except the Wild Geese Foundation, received government subsidies to match the funds they raised in The Netherlands. Such initiatives have become fewer in number in Brazil because missionaries have died, tourism patterns have changed, with Dutch tourists spreading to more countries in the Global South, but certainly also because many leaders have aged and have not been able to find successors. Young people still support such initiatives, but they change priorities more often and do not support the same cause for extended periods.”*¹⁵
- Raising awareness in the Dutch media about what is happening in Brazil, both in the context of climate change and in the context of human rights. *“The massive concern about climate change, especially among Dutch youth, in addition to the human rights-related crimes perpetrated by the Brazilian government, and the outcry over the war in Ukraine are making people realize again how important civil society is for the protection of democracy, people, and the planet”*¹⁶. At the same time, CSOs should take a much more active stance and find creative ways to attract media attention and subsequently the attention of individual donors and of the Dutch government.

¹³ For further information (in English), visit [Shift the Power – Partos](#).

¹⁴ Debate during the interview with Domingos Armani.

¹⁵ Interview with Robert Wiggers.

¹⁶ Interview with Robert Wiggers.

FASE Espírito Santo (ES) has had a recent experience in partnerships with Dutch civil society organizations. These relationships began when the Dutch companies BOSALIS and VanOord were being monitored for environmental crimes in the construction of the port of Suape, in Recife (PE), and got to know two NGOs: Both Ends¹⁷, which carries out important work in monitoring the Dutch credit and exports agencies that have the participation of the Dutch government; and MilieuDefensie¹⁸. Both have active participation in the Global Anti Shell Campaign in Latin America, which had an important legal victory in the Dutch Supreme Court, for the company's crimes in Nigeria. They currently support the "No More Wells!" campaign, against the installation of the central port in the municipality of Presidente Kennedy in southern Espírito Santo. Both solidarity organizations work on the issue of the oil production chain, with international cooperation mechanisms *"that involve several actions in the countries where the decisions are made, helping us to face the power of the other side and giving us an international articulation of the struggle, which is very important because the external pressure works much more effectively... we maintain a very good relationship through regular visits, getting to know the local groups, following the local Whatsapp networks"*¹⁹.

The port area is a part of the Pre-salt, which accounts for about 80% of Brazil's oil and gas production and attracts many Dutch companies. Porto Central is a megaproject that initially whose investment initially consisted of 30% from the Port of Rotterdam and 70% from a Brazilian company and the state government. After the withdrawal of the Port of Rotterdam as an investor, VanOord came in, in association with the Dutch consulates in RJ and ES, since oil company Shell operates in the Campos Basin, in RJ. The initial prospect was 300.000 barrels per day, with the proposal of several private terminals, and refineries for diesel fuel for 4.500 ships per year. Up until the interview with the person responsible at FASE ES, a meeting with the Dutch Embassy about the case had not yet been possible. This contact would be very important because, according to studies, the port will wipe out the livelihood of more than 400 fishermen and fisherwomen families in Presidente Kennedy and neighboring towns, who will lose access to the sea, with a major impact on the destruction of coral reefs and an area of more than 10.000 hectares of sandbanks and wetlands in the Atlantic Forest, affecting quilombola communities in the south of the state. It is expected that with the arrival of 3.000 men as temporary and precarious labor and without any strings attached, violence against women and girls will increase, contradicting the Dutch government's own international priority. So far there is an intense public mobilization against the port, which includes the Roman Catholic Church, since the construction will also destroy the 16th-century historical heritage, the Church of Our Lady of the Snows, a place of historical pilgrimage that is currently being processed by the Vatican to become a sanctuary. The idea is to engage the Dutch Catholic conference.

Jorge Eduardo Saavedra Durão - FASE

¹⁷ The organization seeks to empower global civil society to gain critical influence on decisions and activities that affect people's rights and the environment, including the right to water, food, and a safe living environment.

¹⁸ **Milieudefensie** (Environmental Defense in Dutch) is a Dutch environmental organization founded in 1971 by a group of scientists responsible for reporting to the Club of Rome. It carries out research and produces its own reports, sometimes commissioned by the government, and also carries out actions with other organizations such as the Green Party and Friends of the Earth.

¹⁹ Interview with FASE-ES.

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