

International education: the Netherlands' policy

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Introduction

International Education (IE) was one of the first areas in which Dutch development cooperation manifested itself, with Dutch IE institutions playing a very active part right from the start. Traditionally focusing on higher education for mid-career professionals with English as the medium of instruction, IE was initially the almost exclusive domain of 14 specific institutions. However, since English has now been introduced on a wider scale in higher education, more institutions are now offering courses. And by becoming involved in more development projects, they are also increasing their expertise.

In order to give a clear idea of the position occupied by current IE policy, it is helpful to note that in 1998, the sector-wide approach (SWAp) was incorporated into Dutch bilateral cooperation as its organising principle. As a result, bilateral aid now focuses on specific sectors, which are selected on the basis of a partner country's needs and policies, coupled, wherever possible, to our strengths. The emphasis in these sectors is on the national policy framework and related capacity-strengthening strategies, rather than on isolated elements.

In many partner countries, education has been selected for Dutch assistance. The embassies in these partner countries, and in some others that are strongly committed to EFA principles, support the development and implementation of a national education sector plan or strategic framework. Our focus is on basic education, but from a holistic perspective we should approach the various sub-sectors of education as they are related with each other.

Sector programmes for other sectors (like health, rural development, agriculture, economic development, etc.) also include priorities for strengthening capacity in various government agencies and professional institutions. Given that specific training and institution building needs could possibly be met by Dutch institutions for higher education, at the start of the current programmes we made a conscious decision to ensure more synergy between our IE programmes and our bilateral policy on the country in question.

This paper describes how the IE programmes were updated in 1999 and 2000. It also looks at the main features of three of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs' current programmes, i.e. the two Netherlands Fellowship Programmes (NFP) and the NPT (Netherlands programme for institutional strengthening of Post-secondary education and Training capacity).¹ Finally, the paper will look at whether the Ministry's research policy might be relevant to higher education and research institutions, institutions for technological innovation, think tanks and advocacy institutions.

From 'old' to 'new' IE programmes

¹ A fourth Dutch programme, SII, does not involve the Dutch IE institutions. A cursory description is therefore given in Annex 2.

The Dutch institutions together constituted a firm basis for high-quality, specialist development cooperation. However, it gradually became apparent that, in some cases, their impact was less effective and even detrimental. By the late 1990s, the IE scene in the Netherlands had become highly complex, with many different actors from very varied backgrounds, all playing a variety of roles and holding historical 'rights' (see Annex 2). Some Dutch institutions had fixed quantity contracts with the government, which gave them little opportunity to respond rapidly to changing development cooperation policies. The Ministry's needs – enhancing the capacities of overseas partners – could only be met by certain specific institutions, with their products and prices. At the receiving end, overseas partners were largely chosen by the Dutch institutions and had little or no influence on the products to be delivered to them, or on their price or quality or the institution providing them. The Ministry was not able to assess well whether overseas institutions were content with what they got.

An Inter-ministerial Policy Review of International Education (IBO-IO) was organised with a dual aim. First, with a view to the need for changes in the funding system, it was to advise on how IE programmes could be organised more efficiently and effectively. Second, it was to find out if and how IE's role in Dutch international cooperation could be enhanced.

The IBO-IO report concluded that IE's role could grow if it were aligned to Dutch bilateral policy priorities (policy alignment). Second, it would be more effective if it paid more attention to the needs and priorities of partners in developing countries. Supply should therefore be adjusted to match demand. In doing so, the comparative advantage that the Netherlands could offer should be taken into consideration (demand orientation). Third, IE could be more efficient if it were restructured to enable the Dutch government to develop a policy of flexible application of resources (flexibility). Fourth, allocating finances to implementing institutions – both old and new – on the basis of price/quality ratios (competition; result orientation), was also expected to increase effectiveness and flexibility. Finally, the report recommended a transition period (4 years from 2000) during which the Dutch government would facilitate institutions' efforts to adapt to the new policy, with input finance gradually being replaced by output finance.

In 1999, the government endorsed the general thrust of the report and set a process in motion that would lead to a new policy framework for IE, based on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' policy priorities for sectors, countries and target groups and the priorities of recipient countries. To this end, it was considered essential to concentrate and focus programmes.

Early in 2001, the government approved the resulting International Education Policy Framework, which is still in operation today. The overall objective of the new International Education programmes was to help alleviate quantitative and qualitative shortages of skilled manpower, and to do so within the framework of sustainable capacity building aimed at reducing poverty in developing countries. Important elements of the framework included: i) the number of countries eligible for IE support was limited²; and ii) the multi-faceted IE programme (comprising seven main programmes) was restructured into a three-component programme: NPT, NFP-AP and NFP-TP. These programmes are considered in more detail in the sections below.

In mid-2002 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs contracted management of the three programmes out to a single intermediary, Nuffic. Under this contract, Nuffic operates independently from the Dutch higher education institutions and assumes certain responsibilities.³ Nuffic is responsible

² The list was longer than the priority list of Dutch partner countries, in order to acknowledge those countries with which the Netherlands had a long-established and close relationship.

³ As a matter of fact, the programmes are implemented by Dutch institutions. However, in line with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' preference, Nuffic can award combined implementation by Dutch and local/regional institutions (study in the region), when it allocates scores to proposals for NFP or NPT.

for monitoring and evaluation at project, fellowship and programme level. The Ministry is responsible for external monitoring and evaluation at programme level and checks implementation by Nuffic.

NPT: Netherlands programme for institutional strengthening of Post-secondary education and Training capacity

The aim of NPT is to strengthen developing countries' capacity to meet their needs for training and manpower development sustainably, focusing in particular on capacities relevant to the sectors targeted for Dutch bilateral aid and to cross-cutting or supra-sectoral themes. More general support for the higher education sector is also possible. The NPT programme is confined to a group of 15 countries selected from the list of 36 countries with which multi-year bilateral cooperation arrangements exist. Within this group, at least 50% of the resources available need to be devoted to Sub-Saharan Africa.⁴ NPT is a medium-term programme, with projects generally having a maximum duration of no more than four years.

Nuffic holds formal responsibility for decisions about the areas, sectors or themes to be supported by the NPT. However, since projects should be demand-driven, Dutch embassies in the NPT countries have been asked to indicate the sectors or themes to which the programme can make a meaningful contribution (higher education, the health sector, the environment and so on). In principle, the embassies' recommendations form the basis (first step) for support in the framework of NPT. (If an embassy does not have the appropriate expertise or sufficient capacity, local experts can fulfil this role; this happens frequently in practice).

The second step – identification of specific activities (projects) within the chosen sector or theme – is also a demand-driven process. Wherever possible, local stakeholders in the partner country set specific priorities for support. If sector policy plans are formulated in dialogue with local stakeholder groups, they should form the basis of this process.⁵ If deemed necessary, a meeting is convened in which local stakeholders identify priorities, in consultation with the embassy and/or Nuffic. Nuffic gives a rough indication of the budget available for supporting the priority areas identified. Support is not restricted to education institutions. Other institutions – such as ministries, national commissions and NGOs – that fulfil an important role in developing post-secondary education and training capacity can also receive support.

As a third step, an implementation plan is drawn up by actors in the recipient country. In this process, in which the embassy used to be involved, it is not unusual to have a local consultant organise the process and write the draft plan. However, it is up to the recipient organisations, as the owners of the plan, to submit it to Nuffic. By the end of 2004, implementation plans for the NPT programme had been drafted in 14 countries.

Once an implementation plan has been agreed upon, project outlines are developed. Projects involve cooperation between organisations in partner countries and Dutch organisations⁶, the latter providing technical expertise. This does not, however, imply that only Dutch institutions are involved. Studies in the home region and partnerships with Southern support organisations are encouraged. A tendering procedure ensures that supply and demand are matched

⁴ The 15 NPT countries are Vietnam, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Yemen, Eritrea, Colombia, Zambia, South Africa, Indonesia, Benin, Ghana, Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda.

⁵ This may refer to national higher education strategic plans, but also to national health or environment sector policy plans, or to cross-cutting or supra-sectoral themes such as decentralisation or public sector reform.

⁶ Dutch organisations may be drawn from a whole range of institutions, not necessarily higher education institutions.

transparently, objectively and accurately. Recipient local organisations are responsible for outlining a project for tender, detailing the priority area to be addressed. Where necessary and possible, Nuffic facilitates this process by deploying independent local or regional experts. Prospective Dutch suppliers use these outlines to submit detailed project proposals. A tender evaluation committee – comprising representatives of the recipient local organisation and Nuffic and an independent expert – selects the Dutch supplier. Tenders are awarded on the basis of an overall score encompassing both content and price. By the end of 2004 more than 70 calls for tender had been made and 61 projects were being implemented.

The total annual resources earmarked for the NPT amount to €31 million. However, this sum has only become fully available for NPT in 2005, since the old programmes had to be phased out from this budget too. As a result, the NPT was launched in only six countries in July 2002. The number of countries was increased to fifteen in 2004.

NFP: Netherlands Fellowships Programmes

NFP: NFP-AP (Academic Programme) and NFP-TP (short courses and Tailor-made Programme). NFP-AP enables persons to attend *postgraduate degree courses (Master's, PhD)* that may take several years. In contrast, NFP-TP enables persons to attend *diploma courses and tailor-made group training courses* lasting up to one year.

In order to meet the broadest possible range of demand, fellowships can be awarded for many of the courses provided by Dutch organisations.⁷ Dutch expertise does not need to be confined to formal educational institutions. Research institutions, training colleges and so on, are also free to offer short courses and can be called upon to provide tailor-made training courses. To enhance study in the region, courses provided jointly by organisations in the Netherlands and developing countries can also be included in the list of eligible courses. Short courses may be international non-degree courses (e.g. diploma courses or individual modules from Master's degree programmes), but also tailor-made training courses that have to be developed specially. To increase the impact and effects of earlier training, NFP also offers people who have previously attended courses provided by Dutch organisations the opportunity to receive refresher training.

Both NFP programmes apply to a broad range of education and training and are not confined to the sectors targeted for Dutch bilateral aid. They aim to meet needs for further training and capacity strengthening in a wide range of governmental, private and non-governmental organisations (educational institutions, planning agencies, ministries, community-based organisations, private enterprises, etc) in the NFP-eligible countries.⁸ The target group consists of experienced mid-career professionals who must be nominated by their employers to attend a course. To increase impact, fellowships, while awarded on an individual basis, are linked to the institutional development of organisations. Candidates' individual training needs must be in line with the institutional development of the organisations for which they work. Like NPT, the process of identification is largely demand-driven. Candidates from all 57 countries can apply individually, while applications for tailor-made training courses need to come from a local organisation or group of organisations and must be submitted at the to the Dutch embassy. The Dutch provider of the course, the Dutch embassy and Nuffic all play a role in the selection procedure.

⁷ By the end of 2004 there were a thousand different courses on the list. To be included on the list, all courses apart from tailor-made training and refresher courses must satisfy certain minimum standards set by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The list is reviewed annually by Nuffic, in order to respond flexibly to new developments. Whether courses on the course list get a fellowship guarantee depends on demand.

⁸ NFP programmes are open to 57 countries, including the 36 countries with which the Netherlands maintains structural bilateral development relations.

A new demand identification process has also been introduced, initially in 10 countries. In consultation with the embassy, Nuffic invites local organisations⁹ to nominate staff members to attend courses. In these pilot countries, Nuffic can also enter into multi-year agreements with selected organisations to meet their staff development needs. Organisations selected are invited to nominate members of staff to attend courses. These candidates are then given preference in the selection procedures.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has established criteria for prioritising proposals for tailor-made training courses and for the selection of candidates. In order to match demand with supply in the most transparent, objective and accurate way, a tendering procedure is applicable comparable to the procedure for the NPT.

The total annual resources available for both NFP-AP and NFP-TP amount to €25 million. Part of this budget is reserved for ongoing commitments resulting from the old fellowship programmes, ending in 2005. The aim is to allocate at least 50% of programme resources to applicants from Sub-Saharan Africa and to award at least 50% of the fellowships to women. These targets were met by and large in 2004. By the end of 2004, a total of 10 multi-year agreements had been concluded with selected organisations in four countries, while in three others preparations were being made for another six agreements. In 2004, a total of 401 Master's degree fellowships were awarded for 265 courses. Out of the total number of applicants (3,135), 27% were female. Since in many cases the IE institutions preferred to select women from the list of eligible candidates, 48% of the fellowships were awarded to women. More than half of the fellowships¹⁰ were awarded to people from Sub-Saharan Africa. Eleven tailor-made training courses were launched, including two in the Sub-Saharan Africa region.

First impressions

As the above shows, Dutch support for post-secondary education has changed considerably in the past few years. An important question yet to be answered is whether this change has contributed to greater efficiency and effectiveness. It is still too early for an informed assessment of the new programmes. The first few NPT projects were launched in 2003, to be followed by more in 2004, but many projects will not be implemented until 2005. Project reviews, country evaluations and possibly a full programme evaluation will make no sense before 2006 at the earliest. NFP's impact on both individuals and organisations will be measured through tracer studies, which are not planned until after 2007. So only a few first impressions about the results of the new programmes can be given here.

Usually, when a new programme is introduced, all actors have to adapt to their new roles. Initial experience of our Southern partners with NPT leads us to conclude that the process of demand identification is very much appreciated. This also applies to NPT's scope to support a variety of processes like reform of the education and other sectors and the strengthening of a wider range of institutions than just universities or polytechnics. In many cases, local demand and policy plans were the starting point for identification. These are signs that demand orientation within NPT has improved. At the same time, NPT's alignment with Dutch bilateral policy priorities has tended to increase, as several Dutch embassies have made higher education and/or the strengthening of professional institutions in other sectors elements of their multi-year strategic planning.

⁹ Organisations can also apply directly to the embassy for such status.

¹⁰ A total of 531 fellowships were granted for short courses at 162 academies of various types and another 31 were granted for refresher courses. There were 33 PhD fellowships.

Within NFP too, initial experience with the new demand identification process and multi-year agreements is promising. Southern partners welcome the opportunity to receive support for in-depth investment in their human capital, instead of investment in a few of their employees.

With regard to the tendering procedures which have been introduced in NPT and the development of tailor-made training within NFP, we have gained the impression that the Southern partners do not consider tendering harmful to their international relations. In fact it gets them in touch with hitherto unknown new partners. Changes in demand from Southern partners and the threat of competition through the tendering procedure seem to have enhanced cooperation between Dutch suppliers within the NPT. Many of them have formed consortia in order to bid for tenders. Cooperation with Southern suppliers is still limited but strongly encouraged by Nuffic.

Finally, initial experience with the procedures and guidelines for the management of the new programmes indicates that there is some scope for increasing efficiency through reducing red tape.

Netherlands' research policy

In the past ten years or so, changes in the world and in development policies have given rise to new research needs and new insights into the role of knowledge and research in development. As a result, research policy as part of Dutch development cooperation is currently under review.

Research policy has two aims: first, to strengthen research capacities in developing countries, and second, to produce and disseminate knowledge that is relevant to poverty reduction and sustainable development. Such knowledge is not produced as a matter of course. Conversely, not all knowledge that is acquired is used and applied in practice. All this requires special attention, cooperation and effort. While research policy contributes to the production and use of knowledge, it recognises that it is not the only answer to the need for knowledge. Seminars, training programmes, evaluations, monitoring and other forms of reporting, brainstorming sessions, Internet discussion groups, debates, work groups and creative ways of working can contribute equally well to the development of knowledge and to giving direction to development and innovation.

The policy under review focuses on increasing the relevance of research. It does so in two ways: by integrating research into existing development instruments, and by investing in the relationship between research and policy. The application of research as an instrument for development is the remit of all Ministry of Foreign Affairs departments and embassies involved in development cooperation.¹¹ So, like higher education, bilateral research policy will play a role as an integral part of the sector-wide approach (SWAp), instead of being an activity that is considered and valued on its own. Support for specific institutions of higher education and research in partner countries will therefore only be considered in the framework of a bilateral sector dialogue about their essential roles in, for instance, sector development plans.

It has been established in the Netherlands that both formal and informal contacts between policymakers and academics are much less common than they used to be. What is more, Dutch university boards are showing less interest in development cooperation, research agendas and policy discussions are developing in separate domains, and there are few brokers between policy and scholarship. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs therefore wishes to revitalise its contacts with academia. In the coming years, special attention will be paid to its contacts with the Dutch

¹¹ The Research and Communication Division (DCO/OC) is responsible for directing and coordinating this research, as well as for innovation and supra-sectoral strategic research.

academic research world. The aim is to strengthen support for development cooperation in Dutch society at this level too.

Conclusion

The new IE programmes share characteristics that make them different from the old programmes:

- a. They are more closely related to Dutch bilateral development policies: fewer countries are eligible and – specifically for the NPT – the focus is on sectors targeted for Dutch aid. Embassies are more closely involved in identifying priorities for support than before. However, the programmes are funded from budgets that are administered at central level, i.e. not delegated to the embassies.
- b. They are demand-driven and more closely in line with national development policies in the developing countries.
- c. They are flexible on the supply side: the programmes are no longer limited to higher education institutions, but are also open to other support institutions.
- d. They enhance competition between Dutch suppliers.

The role of embassies increases when support for research and professional training and higher education institutions is an intrinsic element of bilateral policy, even though the programmes are funded from budgets that are administered at central level. In order to safeguard the link with national development policies in the South and with Dutch bilateral policies, embassies are more closely involved in identifying priorities for support than before.

ANNEX 1: The old IE programmes funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs until the late 1990s

The IBO-IO calculated total ODA contributions to IE at approx. NLG 250 million¹² (€113.5 million) in 1997. The biggest contributors were the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NLG 154 million) and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (NLG 88 million). The IE programmes funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs consisted of:

1. three programmes for academic cooperation and institutional development of training institutes:
 - a. MHO, the Joint Financing Programme for Cooperation in Higher Education, which started in 1993 and was limited to 12 counterpart institutions in 12 countries, but still included projects from an older programme (SVP). It applied to 25 disciplines. Nuffic played an important role in selection and advice.
 - b. SAIL Projects Programme (SPP), encompassing programmes of the main Dutch IE institutions (ITC, IHE, HIS, ISS, MSM and WUR) which engaged in international cooperation. It started in 1997, but existing programmes were prolonged within a new framework. The IBO-IO counted 30 projects in 20 countries involving 9 disciplines in 1997. SAIL administered the programme.
 - c. HOB: programme for cooperation between Dutch institutions of higher professional education and educational institutions in developing countries for the benefit of primary education. The programme started officially in 1996, but became effective in 1998, from which time it was administered by Nuffic;

and:

2. four Fellowship/Human Resource Development programmes:
 - a. Regular Fellowships Programme (BIO), which started in 1994 and offered fellowships to developing countries' institutions for about 25 refresher courses at the 14 Dutch IE institutions involved (with about 110 regular courses). Every year some 1200 fellows were registered in 11 disciplines at one of the 5 SAIL institutions, and there were about 35 PhD students. From 1998, it was administered by FION, with the assistance of SAIL.
 - b. Special Fellowships Programme (SBP), which started in 1996 as a continuation of an older programme. It focused on tailor-made and non-regular training programmes of less than a year for organisations and groups of mid-career professionals. In 1996, 434 fellows were participating in 42 training programmes spread over 7 disciplines. It was administered by Nuffic.
 - c. University Fellowships Programme (UBP), which started in 1996 for (non-PhD) degree students in 121 DAC-listed countries, who had agreed to return home at the end of their course. In 1997 a total of 35 students on 7 courses were involved. Nuffic administered the UBP.
 - d. Jan Tinbergen Scholarships Programme (TSP), which started in 1995 on the basis of exchanges of students from the South and Dutch students. In 1996, 14 foreign students and 19 Dutch students were involved. Nuffic administered the TSP.

¹² Including core-funding subsidies to some Dutch institutes, such as ITC, IRC, IHE, MSM, ISS, KIT and RNTC. Information on these subsidies is not included here.

ANNEX 2: The Cooperation with International Institutes Programme (SII)

Yet another component of IE is the Cooperation with International Institutes Programme (SII), which supports regional tertiary education and research programmes, carried out in regions or in several countries.¹³ In late 2001, a policy change permitted support to regional education and training institutes with curricula that match priority training needs, in particular for capacity building in a more general sense. This untied programme allows for funding (for specific activities or core-funding) for international (UN) organisations and grants for institutions in developing countries.¹⁴ Apart from financial support to regional centres for the purpose of capacity building and curriculum development, essential components such as research and the provision of fellowships have also become possible. Training programmes must be of high quality and have a regional orientation.¹⁵

The SII programme has been in place since 1998 and is administered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' in the Hague. Embassies, too, play a role in that TDOs can inform the Ministry about interesting regional initiatives that could be supported from the programme. TDOs may also be asked to give advice and/or information about organisations that have submitted proposals for funding to the Ministry. SII's annual budget is about €4.5 million.

¹³ Examples of organisations receiving support are the Association of African Universities (AAU), the African Economic Research Consortium (AERC) and the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA).

¹⁴ Generally, approval scores for project proposals improve if higher numbers of Dutch partner countries are involved in the project (the list of 36 countries).

¹⁵ An example in this field is support for the training programme of the Centre for Human Rights at the University of Pretoria, which enables international students to attend the courses.