

Oxfam Novib Position Paper for Dutch MFA consultation on Feminist Foreign Policy

8 July 2021

Added Value of Intersectional Feminist Foreign Policy (IFFP)

Everybody is valuable and has the same rights – regardless of gender, ethnic origin, sexual identity, religion or belief, disability, age, social status or position. These identity axes do not exist in isolation to one another. People are comprised of multiple, interconnected identities that interact with structural inequality and discrimination, meaning that some individuals and groups face greater barriers than others. This is Oxfam Novib's definition of intersectional feminism.

We believe that an intersectional feminist approach is needed in all areas of policymaking, including foreign policy. Such an approach places climate, economic, gender, racial and social justice at its heart, prioritizes decolonization and puts the voices of those who have historically been least represented, and are often most impacted, at the centre of policymaking. *To be credible and effective, any IFFP therefore needs to be complemented by intersectional feminist domestic policy.* Too often, countries that develop FFP focus on exporting ideas that are not necessarily implemented in nationally.¹

Core Elements of Intersectional Feminist Foreign Policy (IFFP)

Nothing About Us Without Us

Adopt an intersectional feminist policy making process: co-create policy with citizens in all their diversity - in the Netherlands and abroad - who will be most impacted by it. Be citizen-centric! Intersectional feminist policy making encourages diverse perspectives, inclusivity and transparency. The Dutch government should:

- Curtail the undue influence of elite interest groups on (inter)national policy and decision-making processes.²
- Actively support the full, equal and meaningful participation³ of groups often left out in (inter)national policy and decision-making processes, always with an intersectional gender lens: i.e. diaspora, migrant and refugee communities; disabled and chronically ill persons; LGBTQI+, people with primary and secondary degrees; socially and economically marginalized groups including welfare recipients; people without ICT access; youth; and women.

Engage meaningfully youth feminist activists and movements: Youth-led feminist movements across the world are calling for intersectional feminist approaches that are rooted in the lived experiences and needs of communities. This requires investment in collective creation, connection and creativity. Youth agendas are tightly bound with feminist, anti-ableist, antiracist and environmental agendas. Ensure that more women and marginalized youth (rural, disabled, indigenous, displaced, LGBTQ+, among others) are present in spaces of power and able to contribute visibly and meaningfully. An IFFP should prioritize outreach, mutual learning and collaborative work with marginalized youth and support the safety of youth activists, especially those who are at greater risk due to their identities.

Support and protect local activists, (informal) CSOs and humanitarian organizations: Local and national activists and organizations working on rights issues and humanitarian response, in particular women/LGBTQ+-led organizations, increasingly do so under extreme duress. The COVID19 crisis has reinforced this negative trend, with emergency powers misused to curtail fundamental rights and reduce the influence of critical civil society. The Dutch government should protect online and offline civic and humanitarian space for these actors to operate; provide them with core, flexible and long term funding; ensure resources for their protection against reprisal; and publicly reinforce the legitimacy of women/LGBTQ+ rights defenders, humanitarians and peacebuilders. Many donors (prefer to) give funds to larger, institutionalized CSOs for 'efficiency' purposes and/or (inadvertently) exclude smaller,

¹ Key takeaway from Oxfam IBIS (Denmark) feminist peace event, 20 May 2021.

² For example, the role of tax advisors in influencing Dutch corporate tax rules, benefitting large corporations at the expense of the general population, including in developing countries.

³ E.g. take into account work and care obligations when scheduling consultations; hold consultations in accessible locations and provide financial compensation to enable financially constrained groups (e.g. youth, low income groups) to participate meaningfully.

less institutionalized actors due to excessive regulatory and reporting requirements which larger, institutionalized CSOs subsequently cascade down to their partners. This needs to change.

Gender mainstreaming and intersectionality

Intersectional feminism is for everyone. Any intersectional feminist policy must address gender norms and structures, and mainstream gender and intersectionality across all policy domains. IFPP must be a 'whole of government' endeavor, not a siloed area of work. It needs to include men and boys from the start and tackle white male privilege (i.e. seeing heterosexual white men as norm) and toxic masculinity, which cause and reinforce SGBV and violent conflict, and which is also harmful to boys and men.

Safety

We believe in the right to safe emotional and physical environments for all who participate in government policy and decision-making. There must be zero tolerance for (sexual) harassment, (sexual) abuse, bullying, mobbing and any other form of power abuse. Individuals should feel safe to report incidences of power abuse, knowing that their concerns will be met with utmost respect and importance, and dealt with promptly.

Focus Areas for Intersectional Feminist Foreign Policy

Build a human economy: Governments around the world must act now to build a just and sustainable Human Economy⁴ that is feminist and values what truly matters to society. The Dutch government should join the 'Wellbeing Economy Governments partnership' (WEGo) and encourage a worldwide shift of governments moving beyond a focus on GDP towards a focus on wellbeing and sustainability. The Dutch government should actively regulate and encourage companies to adopt feminist policies, act on them, and ensure they put wellbeing and sustainability above profit.

A radical and sustained reduction in inequality is the indispensable foundation of a feminist, just and sustainable economy. Governments must set concrete, time-bound targets to reduce inequality and not simply back to pre-COVID 19 crisis levels. They must go further to create a more equal world urgently. Investing in national care systems and introducing progressive and green taxation should be prioritized.

A radical overhaul of the economic system and sustained reduction in inequality are key to achieving progress in many other areas, including those mentioned specifically here below.

Adopt intersectional feminist agricultural and trade policies: Dutch ODA agricultural development policies and budgets should be crafted and allocated to serve the needs and aspirations of women smallholder farmers. They play a pivotal role in feeding communities in many low and middle income countries, empowering them is critical to eradicate poverty and inequality, and increase food security. Therefore, food security and agricultural development policies should have a bigger focus on connecting female farmers to markets, providing them with access (titles) to land, capital and other productive resources.

Dutch trade policies are largely gender-blind and not always conflict-sensitive. This policy incoherence is not only a missed opportunity but it also undoes the good intentions of climate policies, e.g. by supporting investments in fossil fuel extractive industries⁵, which drive climate change and inadvertently stimulate conflict dynamics. Climate change and competition over over-stretched natural resources hit the most marginalized people, and women and girls hardest, and drive and influence violent conflict.

Locally rooted groups, including WROs who play a key role in effective climate action and defending and restoring ecosystems, can hardly access international climate funds, amongst others, due to the high threshold criteria. The Dutch focus on private sector finance leveraging often make private interests prevail over local women's interests, and increase debts of already highly indebted countries. Dutch support for the private sector abroad must be conflict sensitive.

⁴ Defined as an economy where governments, companies and technology benefit everyone, not just the privileged few. Where governments cooperate, not just compete, and end the extreme concentration of wealth to end extreme poverty. A human economy will work equally for men and women; be powered by sustainable renewable energy; and value and measure what really matters, moving beyond GDP.

⁵ https://www.bothends.org/uploaded_files/inlineitem/2210528_Stel_een_einddatum_voor_alle_exportsteun_aan.pdf

Combat sexual & gender-based violence: The most dangerous place for females is often at home. The Dutch government has a strong focus on sexual and reproductive health rights in its foreign policy, it should maintain that leadership role. However, for true bodily integrity and for females in all their diversity to be empowered, it is critical that we continue to combat SGBV.

As stated in the 2021 CEDAW shadow report⁶, a coherent gender analysis needs to be undertaken to improve collaboration between chain partners (prevention, (in)formal support, services, aftercare, criminal law), and accessible and inclusive girl-friendly safe spaces and adolescent-friendly comprehensive services need to be created for survivors of SGBV in each Dutch province. Moreover, the Dutch government needs to strengthen partnerships with feminist and women's rights organizations (WROs), youth and men to transform the social norms that reproduce and normalize SGBV.

Prevent conflict, build peace: Addressing underlying structural causes of conflict - in particular the inequitable distribution of power and wealth - is at the core of feminist peace and security. This requires a shift in focus from protection alone to conflict prevention, listening to diverse voices and investing in movements of feminist peace activists. Security-related decision making takes place in a highly masculinized culture and in male-dominated and exclusionary spaces. This needs to change.

Feminist peace and security requires those with power to decolonize and to share it. It also requires unsettling narratives that situation violent conflict as something that happens abroad, in the Global South, without recognizing wider geopolitical drivers, including the role of Global North actors perpetuating conflict and injustice. Moreover, before the approval of arms export licenses, there need to be comprehensive and transparent assessments of the impact of arms exports on a higher risk of SGBV in the destination country.

Implement women, peace and security (WPS) commitments: The WPS agenda is universally applicable and should be implemented both in internal policies (including judicial policies) and externally (foreign, trade and migration policies), as per EU commitments on WPS⁷. The Dutch government should leverage its power, influence and relationships to ensure the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in all their diversity in ongoing and future peace, reconciliation and security processes.

Women remain in the minority in UN-led and UN-supported peace processes. The Netherlands should be bolder and use its position as an important UN donor to make clear that women must be at the peace table. Moreover, the Dutch government needs to make financial resources available to support WROs to participate meaningfully in international level conferences (e.g. ensure their inputs inform the design and agenda of the event; and provide logistical support (flights, visa application process) to ensure women can actually participate). In the Netherlands, there needs to be greater dialogue between WROs, and Dutch MPs and policy makers. Women from conflict-affected countries, including refugee and diaspora women based in the Netherlands, should be regular speakers in Parliament, meet with MPs, and have the opportunity to participate meaningfully.

Uphold rights of refugees and migrants: An IFFP is only credible when people on the move – economic migrants and refugees – are treated with dignity and have their human rights upheld. The Dutch government must consistently condemn all international rights violations against economic migrants and refugees. It must also improve its policies, practices and narrative on migration for a more respectful reception and integration of migrants and refugees in Dutch society, acknowledging their frequent role as essential worker, and oppose the externalization of migration obligations.

Specifically with regard to asylum seekers, the Dutch government should support the establishment of a Relocation Coordinator within the European Commission, who is tasked with making relocation a priority in EU asylum and migration policy; work with other EU member states to urgently relocate 5.000 asylum seekers and refugees from Greece (including by relocating 500 to The Netherlands); and establish national mechanisms to investigate pushback allegations, which are independent, well-financed, with the powers to promote accountability.

⁶ Dutch CEDAW Network, 'Women's Rights beyond Gender Neutrality: In words and in action', 6 June 2021. https://www.vn-vrouwenverdrag.nl/wp-content/uploads/Shadow_report_Dutch_CEDAW_Network_incl_references-05June2021.pdf

⁷ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/37412/st15086-en18.pdf>

Support social protection for all: The COVID19 pandemic has shown the world how women, migrants and refugees account for a large share of essential workers in the (in)formal sectors, including as care workers. They are more likely to be employed on temporary contracts, to earn lower wages, to lack job security, to work outside of legitimate employment, and to carry out tasks that are not compatible with working from home. Yet, they are less likely to be considered in or covered by coronavirus responses/relief. The Dutch government must support universal social protection for all, with a particular focus on women, migrants and refugees, to reduce poverty and inequality.

Fight systemic racism: To ensure that Black people, Afro-descendants, Indigenous Peoples and historically marginalized and oppressed communities benefit from increased spending on and access to public services, the Dutch government must support foreign governments to make deliberate efforts to address causes of exclusion, oppression and discrimination, including systemic racism and sexism in access to quality education, healthcare, social protection and labor market. Governments must ensure that legal frameworks are in place to prohibit all forms of discrimination, and take action to address historic systemic injustices.

To be credible in the fight against systemic racism, the Dutch government must urgently stop ethnic profiling by police and Tax Authorities, and stop inequality in the Dutch educational system and labor market. To do justice to the history of The Netherlands, including to all its inhabitants, Oxfam Novib supports the call made by Foundation *Nederland Wordt Beter* and others to make Keti Koti a national commemoration day of the history of slavery, and celebration of its abolition.

Shifting power to the ‘Global South’: in line with fighting systemic racism, an IFFP should commit itself to shift more power to organization in the ‘Global South’. That starts with understanding the still ongoing colonial experiences, not only between the Global South and the Global North, but also between different countries and communities within the Global South. This understanding is necessary for transforming the development and humanitarian sector, driven by the specific needs and realities of local communities. An IFFP needs to critically reflect on the power position of the Global North, not losing sight of ‘new’ colonialism by emerging economies as well as ‘home-grown’ colonialism. An IFFP needs to consciously step back in power (which is not the same as reducing support and resources!), which is related to radically changing existing funding mechanisms⁸.

Build a strong monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning framework: Last but not least, to be effective, an IFFP must consist of concrete objectives, targets, timeline, budget, and SMART monitoring, which directly engages with program participants and grantees, and includes strong feedback and accountability mechanisms. Monitoring information gathered must be able to inform policy makers on whether objectives are being met, and serve as basis for adaptive management. The Dutch government does not have a culture of rigorous policy evaluation⁹, except in the domain of development cooperation (e.g. IOB). This requires immediate improvement.

⁸ See <https://www.kuno-platform.nl/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Transformational-solidarity.pdf>

⁹ See for example Algemene Rekenkamer, *Inzicht in kwaliteit, Operatie geslaagd?* (2021) <https://www.rekenkamer.nl/publicaties/rapporten/2021/04/21/inzicht-in-kwaliteit>