

The Sustainable Water Fund (FDW) offers a new perspective on international cooperation

The Dutch perspective on international development cooperation has changed a lot in the last decade. The Sustainable Water Fund (FDW) is an example of this. The programme strives for inclusive green growth by means of a public-private partnership (PPP) approach through water. FDW was one of the first programmes based on a double PPP approach: people-planet-profit and public-private partnerships.

Changed relationships, changed policy

Around a decade ago, the Dutch government shifted its relationships with low- and middle-income countries. Because developing countries are emerging economies, the income from private sources has been growing and companies have been increasingly active. To align development efforts with these trends, the Netherlands changed the international cooperation and trade agenda towards an equal relationship between various stakeholders within development projects.

Learning to fish

As a reaction to the changed relationship and approach, the Dutch ministry of International Cooperation and Trade developed a new types of supporting programmes, including the [Sustainable Water Fund](#) (FDW), the [Facility for Sustainable Entrepreneurship and Food Security](#) (FDOV) and the [Ghana WASH Window](#) (GWW). These programmes aim to contribute to long-term system change and have a larger role for the private sector and knowledge institutes, compared to the previous traditional aid agenda. These are programmes in which the attitude changed from “handing out fish” to “learning to fish”. Learning to fish asks for inclusive partnerships, sustainability, and inclusive growth.

Sustainable impact

FDW works on breakthroughs, on new ways of thinking and doing. It aims to transform society in sustainable access to drinking water and sanitation (WASH), efficient use of water, and improved catchment management and safe deltas. These public goods sectors are known for their complex problems. Cultural, technical, social and financial issues are common and often intertwined. These problems ask for long-term programmes for integrated development.

When a partnership runs a project under FDW, the fund asks it to work inclusively and leave no one behind. The activities should be interwoven into the system – so when a project is focused on sanitation, toilet construction alone is not enough. The project needs to create demand and address supply, while also tackling the future by producing organic fertilizer and generating income from the septic tank fecal sludge. A win-win for people and planet. All stakeholders in a project need to be involved. And the partnership needs to start up a change that can continue on its own after a project period ends. That is what makes FDW so ambitious – and why it is so important to share the acquired knowledge to increase lasting impact.