

*Speech by the Minister for European Affairs and International Cooperation, Ben Knapen, Food  
First Conference, Floriade, 28 August 2012*

Ladies and gentlemen,

A warm welcome to today's speakers, Mr Jay Naidoo, Mrs Chaudhuri and Mr Atzo Nicolaï.

A few days ago I was in Kabul, at a college which started half a year ago and which trains high school teachers in agriculture. I talked to 12 of the teachers working there, all in their early thirties. They were enthusiastic and committed to rebuilding Afghanistan. And they had all studied in the Netherlands: some at Wageningen University, and some at Maastricht. I learned a lesson about modesty and hope: we can create something, connecting knowledge of food with people. In the coming years, around 400 students will be trained at this college.

Over the past two years we have reduced fragmentation in development cooperation and focused on four priorities, one of them being food security. My government is raising the food security budget in developing countries from 160 million euros in 2011 to 435 million euros in 2015. Let me sum up some investment highlights.

In support of more sustainable food production:

- We are underpinning the Global Agriculture and Food Security Programme with 25 million euros a year;
- Our public-private partnership in food security has 60 million euros available for a first call for ideas;
- And we're giving 20 million euros a year to FMO MASSIF+.

In regard to our second main objective — access to affordable nutritious food:

- We have founded the Amsterdam Initiative against Malnutrition;
- We support UNICEF, GAIN, SUN and other organisations with a total of five million euros annually.

Then, as regards to our third goal on efficient markets:

- 20 million euros a year for the Sustainable Trade Initiative focusing on sustainable food production;

- 10 million euros a year for IFCD2Scale;
- And more than 1 million euros a year for our public-private partnership with Heineken.

And, last but not least, in the field of creating a healthy private sector environment:

- We are investing more than five million euros a year in land governance projects;
- We support AgriProFocus, Agricord en Agriterro with 15 million euros a year;
- And we invest 25 million euros a year on vocational training.

In many cases, we also play a facilitating role, helping outstanding companies like Unilever, DSM and Friesland Campina work together with NGOs and knowledge institutions in public-private partnerships. We can make a difference in fighting malnutrition with this coalition of business, civil society, knowledge institutions and government.

In short, ladies and gentlemen: we are putting our money where our mouth is.

Efficiency and effectiveness are key to my development cooperation policy, because tax payers want to be sure their money is well spent. And food security is certainly a way of ensuring both. Earlier this year the Copenhagen Consensus Expert Panel – which included some Nobel Prize winners – said that fighting malnourishment is the most cost-effective way to respond to ten of the world's biggest challenges. It makes social and economic sense to invest in nutrition. This is hardly a surprise. Scientific research clearly shows the devastating long-term effects of malnutrition during childhood. Effects on the body as well as on the mind. Early nutrition is a key factor for a healthier and more productive life.

Obviously, food security and good nutrition cannot come from governments alone. We need to cooperate – with companies, governments and NGOs. With everyone playing their own specific part. Companies should produce, process and market food. Civil society should work on capacity building and consumer awareness. And governments should facilitate by delivering guidelines, policies and instruments – especially on public-private partnerships. The Netherlands wants to set an example in this field.

We are developing joint programmes with key global players in nutrition security such as GAIN, SUN, UNICEF and the Flour Fortification Initiative (FFI). These partnerships are currently being crafted, and discussed with our embassies and with local stakeholders. But please don't get me wrong: local problems still require local solutions. Including local communities is fundamental.

Developing countries need their own policies and guidelines – to build capacity in nutrition and health, to stimulate markets to offer a variety of foods and to provide support where appropriate and needed. In short: our goal is helping people to help themselves.

Ladies and gentlemen,

My time is almost up. But I cannot close without a few brief remarks on an urgent issue: rising food prices. The problem and its solution largely manifest themselves in developing countries. It is actually quite simple. If you spend 80 per cent of your income on food, rising prices almost immediately have a devastating impact on your daily life.

Food security and nutrition security are two sides of the same coin. While we need to raise production, it is also crucial for better food to be available to more consumers. Purchasing power, markets that work for the poor and consumer awareness are key factors for success. Our policy is to invest in both food and nutrition security and to work with those organisations that can help us achieve our goals.

Thank you.