



The Netherlands in Somalia: Partner for Peace, Justice and Development

Introduction

The Netherlands has been actively engaged in Somalia for over 20 years. Bilateral ties between the countries are good and are strengthened due to an active and vocal Dutch-Somali diaspora in the Netherlands and a lively Dutch-Somali business community in Somalia. Somalia is one of the main focus countries of the Netherlands for development cooperation, as specified in the policy note for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation '[Do what we do best](#)' (2022).

Building on recent years of engagement and taking into account Dutch development priorities, knowledge and comparative advantage, the Multi-Annual Country Strategy for Somalia (2023-2026) was developed. The thematic areas are explored further in this document.

The goal of the Dutch engagement in Somalia is to address root causes of instability and poverty, through strengthening the social contract between citizens and the state.

While in recent years, good progress has been made in state- and peacebuilding, Somalia remains fragile and the risk of descending back into conflict is high. Somalia is in the top ten most unstable countries in the world, roughly 20 percent of the population is internally displaced, uprooted by different phases and types of armed or clan conflict, drought, and natural disasters.

Somalia is subsequently dealing with the continuous threat from Al-Shabaab, the wealthiest and deadliest branch of Al-Qaeda making it a regional threat. Different local clan militias have emerged and successfully pushed out the terrorist group in some regions, however this does require a sustainable outlook on stabilization.

The security situation challenges youth entering the job market, in a country where 75 percent is under 30 years old. Marginalized groups such as women and minority groups face discrimination and exclusion from political processes.

With political uncertainty and the potential of a deteriorating security situation, working in Somalia requires a flexible approach. We are keen to leverage on Netherlands' expertise in the justice sector, knowledge institutions, civil society and private sector, with the aim to promote sustainable solutions together with the Somali authorities and stakeholders.

The following six thematic areas have been identified.

1. Increased political stability

In line with one of the main priorities as set by the current Somali government, a political settlement and reconciliation around federalization and democratization are key for long-term stability in the country. The Netherlands supports more direct elections on the federal member state level, which contributes towards a more **democratic culture** to eventually adopt a one-person-one-vote system. To this end the Netherlands contributes to the **Somalia Stability Fund**, focused on reconciliation, political dialogue and democratization. Furthermore, the Netherlands supports efforts towards an effective local government through the **UN Joint Programme for Local Governance and Decentralised Service Delivery** and the support for local government disaster risk manager via **VNG International's Dan Wadaag Programme**.

2. Safety and Security of Somali citizens is increased

Somalia is dealing with an enormous security challenge, which is impacting daily life of citizens and hampering progress of state building and the economy. The African Union Transition Mission to Somalia (ATMIS) is planned to phase out. Developments on the Somalia Transition Plan and the National Security Architecture are aimed at enabling a transfer of security responsibilities from these international troops to the Somali Security Forces.

The EU initiated several **security missions (EUTM, EUCAP, Atalanta)** to support Somalia become safer. NL as an EU member contributes with strategic secondments to support missions such as EUCAP with work on capacity building of the Somali security sector in order to create more stability offshore (coastguard) and on land (support to the broader maritime justice chain).

Facilitating cooperation between security sector actors, civil society and communities is another key engagement of the Netherlands for the purpose of preventing and countering violent extremism. Together with other countries, the Netherlands supports an **IOM defectors program** to help low-level defectors from Al-Shabaab to reintegrate back into their communities.

3. Strengthened Rule of Law

The Netherlands Rule of Law efforts are designed to help Somalia in their ambition to restore the social contract between state and citizens. Somali judicial institutions that completely collapsed during the civil war have never fully recovered and made Somalis rely on longstanding forms of community and religious justice and dispute resolution, including Al-Shabaab courts. Somalis often face discrimination when seeking justice, especially marginalized segments of society, including women (e.g. victims of sexual based violence), youth, internally displaced persons and members of minority clans.

The Netherlands encourages pathways and models for improved justice service delivery and legitimacy of security and rule of law institutions by increasing accessibility of justice. To this end, we support initiatives at the local level, where direct impact for the population is most tangible. Through supporting **IDLO's Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) centres**, the Netherlands contributes to a unique model of justice delivery, facilitating settlement of disputes through the use of informal dispute resolution, complementing concurrent strengthening of the formal judicial system.

4. Humanitarian Assistance

The humanitarian needs in Somalia remain large. The cyclical character of drought, leading to starvation and famine is worrying. Due to both humanitarian needs and conflict many Somali people got displaced. Roughly half of the population is in need of humanitarian assistance. Conflict and climate-related disasters are the two main causes of mass displacements inside Somalia as well as in neighbouring countries and further abroad.

Humanitarian crises have undermined efforts towards social cohesion, with the crisis exacerbating friction and conflicts. With Somalia being classified as the second least prepared country on the effects of climate change, there is strong need to engage in disaster risk reduction and durable solutions, therefore the Netherlands contributes to the **United Nation's Saameynta** programme, which focuses on achieving durable solutions for internally displaced persons and vulnerable host communities in Somalia.

Through support of the **Somalia Humanitarian Fund** and the **Dutch Relief Alliance**, funding is allocated for the most urgent,

life-saving interventions in the country. Additionally, the Netherlands supports humanitarian efforts through unearmarked, flexible and multi-annual funding through the United Nations and Red Cross.

5. Strengthening Civil Society

After the collapse of Somalia's central government, civil society organizations stepped in to fill the governance vacuum and provided vital services. The space for civil society has since then shrunk systematically, human rights have deteriorated and freedom of expression, association and press is at threat. Furthermore, socially retrogressive sexual offenses bills have been introduced. Somali women and girls continue to face extremely high maternal mortality, sexual and gender-based violence.

In order to improve the social contract between the citizens and the state, a strong civil society is helpful to demand accountability and progress from state actors. Their power and legitimacy lies in their ability to amplify the needs and rights of citizens, especially of those who are excluded, discriminated or stigmatized.

The Netherlands, therefore, remains an **advocate for inclusion of civil society** in decision making processes to allow them to influence legislative frameworks and practices, and support Somali reconciliation processes. Moreover, the Netherlands aims to **support human rights advocates** financially by working with national and international partners that operate in this space. The Netherlands supports the **Nagaad Network** through the Power of Women (PoW) Strategic Partnership, advocating for women to take on a leading and defining role in the political, socio-cultural and economic agenda. Additionally, the Netherlands supports the "African Activists for Climate Justice" project, implemented by the **Pan-African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA)**, which aims to organize and mobilize women, youth and indigenous communities to advance their solutions to the climate crisis.

6. Economic Development

Economic adversity remains a major challenge to sustainable development in Somalia, while particularly affecting young populations. In the uncertain context of Somalia, fostering inclusive and productive economic participation and development remains critical with high levels of poverty, poor human development indicators and instability, and new threats posed by climate change. An estimated 50 percent of youth (aged 20-34 years) are currently unemployed or economically inactive. Three-quarters of the population of Somalia are under 30 years of age.

Somalia has made strides on supporting economic reforms, including work towards debt relief and the working towards the ascension of Somalia into the East Africa Community. The Netherlands strives to support this momentum towards positive change by enhancing economic stability for micro small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and a more diverse private sector that supports young people to be more economically active as one of its key objectives. The Netherlands will instrumentalize sustainable local economic development by focusing on supporting the overall Skills and Jobs Ecosystem. Through supporting the Somali led **SHAQO consortium**, which through an industry specific sector approach to support meaningful youth participation and improving the future of work for youth by investing in green jobs, blue jobs, service jobs and digital jobs.

Financial overview (2023 – 2026)



Contact information

This factsheet has provided a short overview of the core objectives of the Netherlands in Somalia. Questions or remarks? Please send an e-mail to NAI-SOM@minbuza.nl

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