



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of The Netherlands

Multi-Annual Country Strategy 2023-2026 Great Lakes Region (Condensed version)

Disclaimer: The Multi-Annual Country Strategy (MACS) has been drafted for internal planning purposes within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The Netherlands. This condensed version of the MACS can be used for purposes of coordination and exchange with development partners, host governments or other relevant actors. No rights and/or obligations can be derived from this document.

Introduction

This Multi-Annual Country Strategy (MACS) outlines the areas of international cooperation in which The Netherlands wishes to collaborate with the Great Lakes Region, and specifically within the framework of the Great Lakes Program, for the period 2023-2026. This document is a condensed version containing the policy priority areas, strategic results and strategic interventions. Where applicable, multilateral and international civil society programmes are included. The resources supporting this strategy are assigned through the annual budget and annual planning cycles. The implementation of this strategy is monitored on a regular basis and adjustments are formalised through subsequent annual plans.

I. Dutch policy goals and strategy with the Great Lakes Region

A. Overarching policy goal

The overall goal of the Great Lakes Program is to contribute to security and stability in the Great Lakes Region.

The Great Lakes Program has two 'pillars':

- Interventions in Eastern DRC that aim to improve security and stability, address drivers of conflict and mitigate the effects of conflict for the local population.
- Transboundary interventions to promote regional cooperation and regional trade.

Thematically, we will focus on topics with the most direct links to stability:

- Security and Rule of Law
- Food Security and Water
- Social Progress

The Netherlands will continue its efforts to ensure that a consistent regional approach is applied by other players such as the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN). The Netherlands will continue to commit to combating illicit financial flows in the Great Lakes region, considering the cross-cutting nature as well as recognizing this as a cross-border problem. At the same time, the Netherlands will continue to seek complementarity with existing multilateral programming (EU, IMF, WB and OECD) against illicit financial flows.

Decades of conflict have exacerbated gender inequalities and violence against women and men. In line with its feminist foreign policy, the Netherlands will continue to improve gender equality in the Great Lakes Region throughout its activities.

The Netherlands will promote the integration of mental health and psychosocial support (hereafter: 'MHPSS') into peacebuilding activities in the Great Lakes Region, as well as in the humanitarian response to the displacement crisis. We will highlight and support local knowledge and innovations in

MHPSS in relation to peacebuilding in the Great Lakes region and advocate for investments in MHPSS. Security challenges and challenges related to corruption, harassment, illegal taxes and barriers hindering economic development and access to markets and land in Eastern DRC will be addressed jointly with other actors. Appropriate solution mechanisms will be set up to address problems related to inter-community conflicts and implemented with the involvement of local authorities.

Efforts to strengthen civil society in Eastern DRC are detailed in the multi-annual country strategy of the Embassy of the Netherlands in Kinshasa.

More thematic and geographic focus within the Great Lakes Program will be achieved by:

- Phasing out funds from the Climate budget. Climate will remain an important cross-cutting theme in all Water and Food Security interventions.
- Integrating water and food security, with water focused on water management at landscape level, because self-standing water-resources management interventions in the context of eastern Congo have shown to be not very conflict relevant. Water, sanitation and hygiene (hereafter: 'WASH') activities can still be funded through centrally managed resources.
- Continuing efforts to concentrate activities in Eastern DRC in border areas, cities and their immediate rural hinterlands.

B. Strategic results per policy goal

Human Rights and legal order

By 2026 the Netherlands will have:

- Contributed to improved quality and freedom of expression online and offline
- Been a reliable partner in support and protection for human rights defenders
- Contributed to a stronger legal (human rights) order and reduced impunity

Promoting human rights and rule of law and the fight against impunity is a core component in the efforts of the Netherlands to contribute to stability in the Great Lakes Region. Since the Great Lakes Program does not have delegated funds for this policy goal, this policy priority is implemented and coordinated via the country programs. See the multi-annual country strategies of the Embassies in Kinshasa, Kampala, Bujumbura and Kigali for further details.

The Netherlands will have established a position as a credible security partner by enhancing the trustworthiness and accountability of security authorities and international actors and UN peacekeeping missions participating in creating a safer and more secure environment in the Great Lakes region. Specific programs are described in the multi-annual country strategies of the Embassies in Bujumbura, Kinshasa, Nairobi, Dar es Salaam and Kampala.

Peace, security, stability and migration

Long-term goal: contribute to peaceful, just and inclusive societies in the Great Lakes Region and especially Eastern DRC.

By 2026 the Netherlands will have:

- Contributed to an improved social contract by
 - o Peacebuilding: creating more effective local conflict resolution mechanisms (incl. security actors, women and youth groups) in Eastern DRC;
 - o Improved access to justice through local structures for communities in Eastern DRC and for border communities;
 - o Reform of the security sector: reintegration of ex-rebels in their communities, including via mental health and psycho-social support.
- Contributed to enhanced coordination of development, security and political interventions by the UN; reinforced political engagement by the UN, the EU and the World Bank in the region;
- Reinforced the convening power of regional actors (such as the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and the UN) in enhancing regional peace building and conflict prevention;
- Continued its humanitarian assistance and will have improved the cooperation between humanitarian, development, and peace building actors, in line with priorities such as localization;
- Supported the integration of MHPSS in the stabilization and peacebuilding efforts of other actors.

MAIN LINES OF THE STRATEGIC INTERVENTIONS

Eastern DRC:

- The Netherlands will contribute to addressing conflicts by reinforcing communities in dealing with conflicts, building relations between communities (ethnic groups) and local government actors (including security forces). The Netherlands will contribute to reintegration of ex-rebels in their communities, incl MHPSS, if possible in the framework of the national programme on demobilization, disarmament, community recovery and stabilization ('P-DDRCS').
- In addition, we will enhance local stability by building capacity of local government, including security and judicial actors. The development and implementation of security plans at local government level by results-based financing ('RBF') are innovative and provide a good starting point for developing activities that foster inclusive and accountable governance and political engagement. The interventions assure the active participation of women and youth, the latter being, after all, the future of the region.
- In order to enhance impact of the efforts by the Netherlands and (international) partners to improve stability, joint political engagement and coordination must be reinforced. The Great Lakes team will continue its engagement with the UN's Stability Support Unit ('SSU') and development partners to improve on these aspects.
- The Netherlands will remain a committed donor in terms of humanitarian assistance, by making use of UN channels (the Central Emergency Response Fund ('CERF'), Country-based pooled fund for the DRC), the Prospects partnership and the Dutch Relief Alliance ('DRA') as well. The Netherlands will make sure these interventions contribute to our overarching policy, i.e. working within the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, with attention for localization, and prioritize the highest humanitarian needs.

Transboundary:

- The Netherlands will continue to contribute to strengthening cross-border relations between communities by increasing awareness of regional conflict drivers and ethnic prejudice.
- We will also contribute to the improvement of access to justice across borders. These efforts will also help prevent escalation of conflicts by strengthening the cooperation between local authorities and justice organs on the borders between the countries in the region in the context of the accession of the DRC to the East African Community ('EAC').
- The Netherlands will also contribute to strengthening regional actors that support political processes, such as the ICGLR or the UN Special Envoy for the Great Lakes.
- We will support the integration of MHPSS in stabilization and peacebuilding efforts, for instance by promoting community-based socio-therapy ('CBS') as an effective integrated approach.

Sustainable development, food security, water and climate

Long-term goal: contribute to security and stability in the Great Lakes region by promoting sustainable use of natural resources and resilient farming systems, increasing agricultural productivity, market access and thus promoting on- and off- farm employment and food and nutritional security.

By 2026 the Netherlands will have:

- Increased and improved sustainable livelihoods in targeted territories;
- Invested in water and landscape level management to control erosion and flooding and secure access to water for farmers;
- Invested in strengthening the legal framework for land rights, as well as supported farming communities to improve security of tenure;
- Supported the development of cross-border value chains and regional trade to increase opportunities for smallholders for marketing their produce;
- Engaged in a dialogue with the local government and major donors in eastern DRC to promote alignment, institutionalization and the scaling up of interventions;
- Introduced and/or strengthened responsible mining practices, with a focus on security, human rights and sustainable economic development;
- Contributed to improved regional management of cross border natural resources.

MAIN LINES OF THE STRATEGIC INTERVENTIONS

Eastern DRC:

For increasing and improving livelihoods a farm system approach in combination with a food system approach will be applied. At the farm level, the first element to be dealt with is enhancing soil health, which is also important for climate change adaptation. Farming households will be encouraged, for instance by using the *Plan Intégré Paysan* ('PIP') approach, to plan their farms while involving all adult

members of the household in decision-making and, in this way, supporting women empowerment in agriculture and sustainable natural resource management. These farm plans must enable households to make necessary investments and deal with shocks in order to ensure their food and nutritional security to satisfy other basic needs, and, to accumulate assets.

Improving access to markets, directly or through value chains, will be addressed in the context of developing a broader food system, connecting it to the farm system. Interventions in the field of food and nutrition security and water will be located in areas where the security situation is not totally intractable, and which can produce for (peri-)urban markets

Agricultural extension on farming practices (digital services in synergy with local extension systems), access to quality farm inputs and access to finance are other elements to ensure increased and sustained farm production. Activities facilitating collaboration between, and the organization of, farm households and other actors will strengthen many aspects of farming and the food system.

Since land issues remain a major driver of conflict in eastern DRC as well as a barrier to inclusive economic development, efforts to promote increased access to land for small holders and improved land governance will continue.

Self-standing water interventions (such as those on WASH) in the context of Eastern Congo have shown to be not very conflict relevant, but integrated water and food security interventions are better able at addressing drivers of conflict. Therefore, water and food security will be integrated, whereby water interventions will focus on water management at landscape level to contribute to climate adaptation, reducing risks of floods, securing year-round access to fresh water and as a basis for agriculture. Climate, in particular adaptation to climate change, will remain an important cross-cutting theme.

Since the Netherlands cannot possibly cover the entire Eastern DRC with interventions on food and nutrition security and water, and to ensure that our interventions, those of the government and other development actors, are well-coordinated, an effort needs to be made to develop a rural development strategy for Eastern DRC, geared towards human security and stability.

Transboundary

The Netherlands will support the sustainable management of natural resources, by:

- Promoting transboundary collaboration between the DRC, Rwanda and Uganda on sustainable conservation of the Greater Virunga Landscape.
- Ensuring safe gas extraction from Lake Kivu by supporting collaboration between Rwanda and DRC.
- Strengthening responsible mining practices and improving security around mine sites. We will promote dialogue and cooperation across the region (also through the EAC and the ICGLR) around tax harmonization and the strengthening of anti-smuggling laws. Also, the implementation of the EU Conflict Minerals regulation will be supported. We will also lobby for rationalization of the Congolese tax system (see also the multi-annual country strategy of the Embassy in Kinshasa on responsible mining practices).

We will also explore opportunities to support the development of cross-border value chains and regional trade to increase opportunities for smallholders for marketing their produce. The accession of the DRC to the East African Community is a suitable moment to adopt a more regional focus in value chain development and trade, which is, in the long run, expected to contribute to regional stability.

Social progress

Long-term goal: Contribute to stability in the Great Lakes region and specifically Eastern DRC by reducing gender inequality.

By 2026, the Netherlands will have:

- Contributed to the prevention and reduction of Sexual and Gender Based Violence ('SGBV') in Eastern DRC;
- Supported and empowered SGBV survivors and strengthened their resilience;

- Contributed to the increased knowledge of and access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (hereafter: SRHR), targeting specifically teenage mothers, sex workers and young adolescents out of schools at the provincial level;
- Used positive masculinity and economic empowerment of women to reduce gender inequalities;
- Supported the implementation of the National Action Plan on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (see the multi-annual country strategy of the Embassy in Kinshasa).

MAIN LINES OF THE STRATEGIC INTERVENTIONS

Eastern DRC

- In North and South Kivu, care for SGBV survivors will be enhanced by expanding one-stop centers. Support to victims of SGBV to reintegrate into their communities will be strengthened, specifically in Eastern DRC. Victims will join the existing Village Savings and Loans Associations ('VSLA'), start income generating activities and become financially independent.
- Efforts to strengthen the public health system in the earlier defined geographical areas and the provision of sexual and reproductive health commodities (such as on HIV/Sexually Transmitted Infections and safe abortion services to victims of sexual abuse in public health centers) will be continued.
- We will continue to use positive masculinity as an approach for all projects to boost the reduction of gender-based violence. These efforts will be complemented by an economic empowerment component to give women a voice in the community. To ensure sustainability, different government structures will continue to be consulted and involved.
- The program will continue to inform youth out of schools (special attention for teenage mothers and teenage sex workers) about sexual and reproductive health in order to better understand and navigate relationships in a healthy way and to carry forward new models of female-male equality. This will also be accompanied by capacity building of public health centers in comprehensive sexuality education of the youth.

Transboundary

- Empowering women in cross-border trade will be achieved by strengthening their business skills, improving access to SRHR information, free legal aid providing and promoting a policy dialogue between border authorities of Rwanda and DRC to improve the business climate for cross-border trade.
- In reaction to regional developments, cross border programming on SRHR will be explored, particularly to address the impact of border movement on sexual rights violations of refugees.

II. Crosscutting priorities

- Decades of conflict have exacerbated gender inequality. This is therefore an important theme throughout the projects. For example, the PIP approach has a strong gender perspective in that it stimulates equal decision making in the household involving both men and women. Activities on land tenure pay specific attention to land rights for women. In efforts to create more effective local conflict-resolution mechanisms, specific attention is given to giving women a seat at the table. All activities must ensure that any context analysis includes a clear and comprehensive actor and gender analysis. The project results frameworks will specify gender-related indicators. During review sessions to assess progress, we will ensure results on gender are reported.
- Adaptation to climate change is integrated in food security and water interventions that focus on the prevention and/or reversal of landscape degradation, responsible land use, pest and disease control, improved cropping patterns, improved seeds, etc. This will strengthen the resilience of farming systems to climate change while at the same time addressing floods and water shortage in the dry season, which are often exacerbated by climate change but also by change in land use. It will be made explicit how and to what extent these interventions contribute to this result.

- We will continue our efforts to increase the conflict sensitivity ('CS') of our implementing partners. CS will remain an important point of attention in project design as well as monitoring by embassy staff. We will also conduct regular and in-depth political economy analyses.
- Stabilization as overall goal: all activities within the Great Lakes program have as underlying goal to contribute to security and stability in the Great Lakes Region and contribute, to a greater or lesser extent, to the policy goal on peace, security and stability.
- Integrated activities: many activities integrate several policy priorities. For example: our efforts on responsible mining practices aim at increasing security around mining sites, but at the same time improve human rights, sustainable economic development and responsible sourcing of critical raw materials needed for the climate transition. Efforts to support female cross-border traders not only aim at women empowerment and access to sexual and reproductive health services but also improve their access to justice and reducing of cross-border tensions.
- We also continue to strive for better coordination and cross-fertilization between activities. Food security and security and rule of law activities are already closely interrelated and the Embassy has made collaboration a contractual obligation for these projects. The establishment of an SRHR platform, where all Dutch-funded organizations working on this theme are represented, has proven a successful format which will be replicated for other themes. We will look into opportunities to reach out to related activities funded by other donors. Also, the planned geographical concentration of activities in selected areas in Eastern DRC will also facilitate cooperation between different projects. We will geo-locate all our activities in Eastern DRC.
- We will step up diplomatic efforts at the regional level. In Eastern DRC a regular policy dialogue with provincial authorities will be set up. At project level we will strengthen government structures where possible (without direct financing). Steering committees with local authorities and civil society have been set up to enhance political engagement at project level. The embassies in the region will step up their diplomatic and political efforts for a limited number of priorities.
- We will work more with or through likeminded partners to reach scale and because of capacity limitations at the embassies. To mitigate the risks involved in working with large consortia we will give more attention to the organizational set-up of projects and monitor internal collaboration closely. We will actively contribute to the establishment and the implementation of the renewed EU strategy for the Great Lakes region, which will be an important reference point for our future work.
- To promote localization, we will work with local organizations where possible. In consortia led by an international NGO we will ensure equal decision-making relationships within the consortium and reserve budget for tailor-made capacity building of local partner organizations. We will also promote locally developed methodologies, especially in the field of MHPSS.
- More efforts will be made to showcase the results of the Great Lakes Program on peace and security in reporting and public diplomacy activities and by adding project-specific indicators in the results registration application.
- There is great potential for regional trade, and this can be a driver for economic integration, regional stability and strengthened livelihoods. The accession of DRC to the EAC has raised expectations for growth in trade between the former EAC members and the new one. Based on the outcomes of three studies commissioned on regional trade, we will explore possibilities to strengthen regional agricultural value chains by building upon existing activities supported by the embassies in the region and the GLP and those of Trade Mark East Africa (centrally funded). Attention will also be paid to mitigating possible negative effects of trade liberalization for smallholder farmers and small and medium enterprises.

Trade within the EAC and trade between the Netherlands and the Great Lakes region can be enhanced by applying instruments for private sector development strategically. This will be done within the context of the multi-annual country strategies of the countries in the Great Lakes region.

III. [Optional] Learning Objectives

- Adaptive programming. Experience of the Great Lakes Programme has shown that the projects that were most able to adapt to changing circumstances achieved the best results. We will therefore put even more emphasis on a practical and flexible approach with sufficient room for

adjustments. Project proposals will be assessed on pre-defined pathways of change/intervention logics instead of pre-determined results and on their capability to continuously monitor and adapt. The consequence is that foreseen results may have to be adjusted from time to time.

- Given the complex volatile political context and political fragmentation, we will make more use of political economy analyses and power and stakeholder analyses and the advice of independent experts.
- Dutch development cooperation is concentrated more and more in fragile contexts and has the specific aim of contributing to legitimate stability. This has been the context and aim of the Great Lakes Program since more than a decade. We will step up our efforts to share best practices and lessons learned from this experience.
- The application of the PIP approach needs to be well monitored to control quality and to be able to draw lessons, but also to share results with the authorities and other development actors. This will foster institutionalization of the approach and scaling up the development impact.
- The effects of food and nutrition security/water interventions on household livelihoods and the management of common property resources and landscapes with more focus on outcome level results rather than activities and outputs. We will expand the learning agenda towards achieving increased resilience of livelihood and women empowerment.
- Although Results Based Financing (RBF) in the health sector is by now well-established, it is still a relatively new phenomenon in the security sector and in efforts to promote good governance. We will closely monitor experiences that two projects will obtain with this approach and share lessons learned.
- Integrating MHPSS in peacebuilding is still a relatively new topic with much to learn. Through the establishment of a regional platform on MHPSS and peacebuilding, we are supporting exchange and learning, the formulation of guidelines and best practices on this theme.

Contact addresses:

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the

Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Kigali,
Rwanda (coordination Great Lakes regional programme)

Kingdom of The Netherlands
Sub-Sahara Africa Department

Rijnstraat 8
2515 XP Den Haag
The Netherlands

Boulevard de l'Umuganda
Kacyiru, Kigali
Rwanda

DAF@minbuza.nl

KIG@minbuza.nl