

Speech Ms Reina Buijs, Director General for International Cooperation:

[Celebrating 25 years of cooperation](#)

[Welcome]

Ladies and gentlemen, it is my great pleasure to welcome you here to celebrate 25 years of cooperation between The Netherlands Commission for Environmental Assessment and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Let me first congratulate the NCEA, Tanya, Rob and your entire team, for your impressive achievements over the past 25 years.

You went from a small team of 7 employees in 1993, working in just a few countries, to an established and internationally renowned organization;

All over the world you have assisted environment and sector ministries, environmental assessment professionals and non-governmental organizations to achieve better environmental assessment practice;

You have advised us, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (our embassies as well as our departments in The Hague) when dealing with complex cross cutting issues;

You provided advisory reviews for RVO and our private sector development work.

You have helped shaping the safe guards policies for development banks, such as the World Bank;

[And I could go on, and on....]

In 2017 you received the Institutional Award by the International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA). They selected the Commission for your role in driving the development of proper impact assessment practice in The Netherlands and worldwide.

Over the years you have improved both impact assessment practice in general as well as specific Environmental impact assessments. An impressive achievement, that we can all be proud of.

[Context en huidige relevantie]

Today we are here to celebrate 25 years of cooperation. But let me go back in time a little but further, to 1987. An important year for sustainable development.

It is the year the Brundtland report was published. The report talks about the complexity of the transition to sustainable development. It mentions the difficult public policy choices that will have to be made and emphasizes the need for making informed choices. Interestingly, the report also highlights that "intergovernmental risk assessment needs to be supported by independent capacities outside of government." The NCEA is fulfilling exactly this important role. And it is unique in this completely independent set up.

The Brundtland report also reminds me of all the young people that were marching in the streets these past months to urge for better use of our planet. Brundtland's definition of sustainability - which requires protection and improvement of the environment for both the present and future generations - has been used by many students in the climate strikes that were taking place all over the world. They demand better safeguards of the environment and ask us to guarantee the right of future generations to live in a healthy world.

Their voices are heard. Climate change and the environmental impact of our choices has become chefs sache. The UN Secretary General is calling climate change the “defining issue of our time”.

We need to build on this momentum. And of course your work covers more than climate change. It spans the wider sustainability agenda, from climate and environment impacts to gender and social impacts. And it is this nexus thinking that is often lacking, but so important.

[Sustainable Development, dealing with trade-offs]

With the adoption of the sustainable development goals in 2015, we now have a clear international framework for sustainable development We have 17 shared goals that form the ultimate prevention agenda.

But how do we achieve all those 17 Sustainable Development Goals and ensure we leave no one behind? If we want to achieve all 17 goals, it is these nexus questions, it is these tradeoffs or the coherence that we need to make visible and discuss. Climate, water, food security, gender, poverty – and all the other SDGs- are interrelated.

Prime minister Rutte once said that trying to achieve them is like solving a Rubik’s cube. When we move one square to its place, all sides are affected.

I like this metaphor and would like to add to it that the NCEA is giving us the right information when we decide to twist the cube. And we can rely on your advice, because we know this information is fact-checked and coming from an independent party.

[Role of the NCEA]

It is this independent expert role that is acknowledged and appreciated by many. It enables you to contribute to sustainable development in developing countries that often rely heavily on their natural resources base. We all know that creating meaningful change can take a long time and has many challenges. It demands a high level of professionalism and long term engagement. Through your coaching trajectories (in e.g. Uganda, Ghana, Bolivia, Kenya and Mozambique) you managed to contributed to a long-lasting experience of counterpart staff, stakeholders, and local experts involved.

Last but not least, since 2013 you are also involved in our private sector development work. Your advisory reviews of the environmental and social impact assessments (of for instance Develop2Build projects) are very valuable. As is your strategic advice that foreign affairs colleagues working all over the world can make use of.

[What is next?]

So what is next? Well, we are in the midst of the current phase of cooperation which runs until 2022. With last year’s policy note “Investing in Global Prospects” the focus of our international cooperation has shifted more towards the MENA region, Horn of Africa and Sahel. I know the NCEA is working hard to explore opportunities in countries in these regions where you have not always worked before.

I look forward to our future cooperation by exploring new opportunities. So please keep sharing your extensive knowledge of environmental assessment as together we can achieve more!

Ladies and gentlemen, before we toast to 25 years of cooperation I would like to hand over the microphone to my former colleague and vice-chair of the NCEA, Tanya van Gool.
Thank you.