

Speech Carmen Hagens, deputy director IGG / MFA:

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.
- It is not often we that we can celebrate a relationship of 25 years. I would like to congratulate the NCEA for everything they have achieved over the past 25 years.
- Since 1993 you have become a renowned organization internationally with a great track-record. You have worked in 97 countries and issued more than 500 advisory reports. Impressive.
- 25 years ago we decided it would be good when the NCEA could assist developing countries in their efforts to mainstream environmental (and social) information in their decision-making processes. 25 years later we still think this is the case. Let me explain why.

[MFA and IGG]

- To answer this question, I will first say a few words about our work at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in particular in the Department for Inclusive Green Growth.
- Our work is focused on a large set of the Sustainable Development Goals. We work on poverty eradication through, activities on food security, water, sustainable energy and climate action.
- Our activities are part of minister Kaag's broader aid and trade agenda, which focuses largely on prevention and has geographically shifted to fragile states close to Europe. The Sahel, the Horn of Africa, the Middle East and North Africa have become new focus regions, due in part to the high incidence of extreme poverty in these regions.
- Some of these countries rely heavily on their natural resource base. Think of mining, forestry and oil and gas exploration. How to raise awareness of environmental issues related exploitation? How can these countries work towards more sustainable approaches?
- What role should we, as a donor play when faced with a question to contribute to projects such as the building of large dams?
- In our work we are every so often faced with pressing and complex questions. And that's when we have the option to call upon the expertise of the NCEA network.

[IGG and CieMER]

- My first acquaintance with the NCEA was through their sustainability advice. I recollect several advices that have greatly impacted our work at the Inclusive Green Growth Department.
- Over the years you have guided us in the Hague, but also our embassies, when we dealt with complex issues related to safe guard policies, land rights, fossil fuels, landscape restoration, biofuels and large dams. To name a few.
- Let me give you a concrete example.

[Example biofuels]

- The NCEA helped us when shaping our policy on biofuels. We asked the Commission's advice in the debate on how to integrate impacts in developing countries in our decisions.
- What criteria should be considered in determining the best policy options? How to achieve policy coherence? Do our choices on biofuels impact food prices and people's livelihood?
- The [NCEA report](#) was very clear on this last question. Our choices have global implications due to indirect land use change and greenhouse gas emissions, with global price implications for food and fuel, and substitution practices. In short our decisions affect people's livelihoods.
- This advice stems from 2016, but the topic is still on the agenda. Yesterday, minister Kaag was speaking about biofuels in Parliament. Highlighting the need for sustainability criteria that encompass the ecological aspects as well as socio-economic factors.

[Mining]

- Another example is on mining. Recently the MFA connected the NCEA to a global sustainable mining organization of more than 70 countries. Here we see an opportunity for the NCEA to use its expertise in assisting countries when conducting environmental and social impact assessments and the appropriate follow up.
- I also mention the follow up, as unfortunately in some countries the results of an assessment, will only be used to improve a project, but will not lead to its rejection or cancellation. We hope that through engagement of NCEA we can work towards more sustainable practices also in these countries.

[MER work]

- But let me not talk too long about the NCEA's advisory work as it is only a part of the work you do.
- As assisting developing countries with their environmental assessment systems is your core business (if I may call it that way). Through independent advice and support to government entities you have changed systems.
- In Uganda, the concept of Strategic Environmental Assessment was new, and the authorities did not have any prior experience in its application and the benefits it could bring to large-scale and complex development programs. NCEA was involved in setting-up and guiding the strategic environmental assessment. You enabled parties involved to gain a deeper understanding of methodologies and stakeholders processes with direct practical application, which they are still using in their current work activities. Strategic Environmental assessment results are being used in daily operations of national and district level environmental officers. The coaching support of NCEA is highly valued, and the "on-the-job" training experience increased the local expertise base on strategic environmental assessment principles within development planning activities.

- I will not try to describe what you have done over the past 25 years in the 97 countries where you have worked, but would like to say the following about our cooperation in these countries.

[Cooperation NCEA-MFA]

- You are an established trusted partner in many countries where you have worked. You are able to engage for a longer period of time, which enables you to build solid networks. Valuable also for other partners working on sustainable development.
- Through your secretariat model you access specialized experts, which provide highly valued independent advice.
- Your nexus approach can make development activities more sustainable (environmentally responsible, socially accepted and climate resilient).

[Conclusion]

- So to return to my earlier question, about the reason for 25 years of cooperation. I think the answer is clear.
- Your work was needed 25 years ago and is still needed and highly valued today.
- I look forward to our future cooperation and exploring new opportunities.

Thank you.