

The SW&FS Partnership on salinization in Low- and Middle-Income Countries continues to take shape

Another important step has been taken in the design of the Dutch Saline Water & Food Systems Partnership. On March 10, stakeholders from the Netherlands water and food sectors gathered in The Hague to explore how a partnership of various organizations could show a unified Dutch voice, and moreover, intensify cross-sectoral collaboration, stimulate national and international knowledge exchange, and initiate projects. The ambition of this Partnership is to improve coordination and cooperation between Dutch organizations to keep and strengthen its international position on salinization, and more importantly, to strengthen its contribution to tackling salinization in Low- and Middle-Income Countries and thus contributing to SDG2 – Zero Hunger.

The meeting was organized by the Netherlands Food Partnership (NFP) and the Netherlands Water Partnership (NWP).

Opening of the meeting

Simkje Kruidenink (Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality) opened the meeting with a look back at the path that has been taken to arrive at this partnership. Water including saline intrusion was an important subject according to the Dutch agricultural counselors. The Ministry concluded that this policy topic should be on the agenda of the different ministries. In addition, intensifying the linkages of Dutch stakeholders with national and multilateral organizations and not working in silos, would improve the Dutch contribution to the challenges of salinization. A partnership convened by NFP and NWP, complementary on water and food, and both with the role of sharing and connecting, was seen as the way forward. The Ministry will now step back and hear from the partnership what is needed and what the Ministry can contribute.

The meeting with 22 key stakeholders, ranging from knowledge institutes, private sector, government and INGOs, focused on the main chapters of the [outline for the partnership](#) based on earlier interviews. Interesting and useful discussions were held, with several improvements to the proposed focus and approach, including concrete suggestions on how the partnership could deal with this. Below is a summary of the additions to the outline.

Potential functions – specific objectives

All five proposed functions described in the outline were considered as important, but in the end the goal is to create more impact by implementing concrete projects in LMICs. A joint vision, sharing information, networking, setting the agenda and branding are necessary to get those projects going. Vice versa, projects will subsequently lead to an increase in expertise, generate new linkages, and support branding (as a cyclic approach).

Developing a shared vision and sharing knowledge and experience should focus on the excellence of the Dutch partners including cases presenting the experience of companies. A vision on salinization should also show the relation with climate change and the need for an integrated approach. A shared vision on very specific solutions is not needed as each local context requires a tailored approach. The importance of knowledge sharing, on an international scale, was acknowledged. Visions, approaches and technical knowhow need to be continuously updated between the different stakeholders. One also emphasized the need for *social innovation* next to technical solutions, testing local applications, learning from them and co-create solutions with local partners.

Linking networks, organizations and persons is needed for the organizations and companies to become a preferential partner for international donors and investors. The partnership can play a role in increasing visibility, bringing partners together and developing consortia that offer integrated solutions. Setting up a **one-stop-shop** could be an option to facilitate international stakeholders in finding information about Dutch expertise.

Informing/influencing policy and research agendas: well described salinization issues and the experience, lessons learned and best practices of the Netherlands can be shared with international and multilateral organizations (e.g. COP27, UN 2023 Water Conference). For the relevant Dutch Ministries it is also useful to be well informed on the international context and local activities of Dutch actors regarding salinization.

'Branding' the Netherlands knowledge and experience: participants at the meeting mentioned that visibility and branding on salinity indeed requires more attention to initiate new projects on the ground. Sharing experience and linking organizations contributes to the branding of Dutch expertise.

Initiating implementation projects is seen as the main function of the partnership and several proposals for organizing this emerged in the discussion. Visibility of the Netherlands expertise and access to 'who is doing what' is a pre-condition. People should know where to find information of Dutch expertise on salinity. The partnership could build an inclusive and lean & mean database - **an online hub** - with national organizations working on salinity, which also includes a pool of experts and presents an oversight of the Dutch portfolio and innovations. The database can be expanded to an international level, requiring decisions on topics, countries and expertise.

A public-private partnership or a cluster of companies or is best positioned to start implementation projects with local partners. Small companies do not have the resources to find regional or local partners and generate national government support. The SW&FS Partnership could facilitate this process. Enhancing collaboration and forming consortia always brings up the question of how to deal with competition between private sector stakeholders and potential conflicts of interests. A way to handle this is to sign on beforehand a code of conduct in which the sharing of knowledge during the execution of a project is arranged. The SW&FS partnership focuses on **the pre-competitive phase**; once a tender is published, it is up to the consortia to submit proposals. The partnership can e.g. help to find the right local partners/companies.

Funding for larger projects is often a bottleneck. The partnership could identify opportunities for projects (e.g. in collaboration with the Dutch embassies), and mobilize companies, NGOs, and research institutes for pilot-projects. These pilots are instrumental in starting larger programmes funded by banks and investors.

Several challenges to initiate effective projects were mentioned. People who benefit from salinity projects are not always able to pay for the services. Many farmers are interested in how to continue their practices for as long as possible and are not interested in saline agriculture and system-changing innovations. How to make it a sustainable business case for the local stakeholders and for the Dutch private sector; projects should be mutually beneficial.

An important topic added to the outline was the *monitoring and evaluation*. One needs measurable goals such as rural development and landscape restoration to learn about the effectiveness of interventions.

The scope of the partnership

Opinions on the substantive scope of the partnership were not very outspoken. There is consensus on the need for an integrated/systems approach, i.e. the nexus of food security, water management, soil management and crops (including crop breeding). With attention for the economic and environmental perspective, and the technical and policy side. An integrated approach comes into its own when salinization is tackled at regional level. It was also noted that salinity can be addressed in climate smart agriculture (CSA) and sustainable agriculture programmes.

Whether to focus on adaptation or mitigation depends very much on the local context. Implementation or scaling up innovations was mentioned as a possible focus area of the partnership. For initiating implementation projects it is important to 'look where the energy is' and to "check where the money flows'.

Collaboration and interaction

To enhance collaboration a long-term perspective and a clear short-term focus is needed. At the same time, one should accept the diversity in visions, approaches and stakeholders. The network of the partnership should not only focus on research but move towards practice and policy. It was recommended to involve the private sector, convene the opportunities they see and help to find investors by starting pilot projects. Because of the multiple dimensions of salinity, several ministries need to be involved.

Commitment to the SW&FS Partnership

The meeting was closed by participants expressing their views on the added value of the partnership for themselves and what they would like to contribute. The food sector can learn from the water sector and vice versa. Some organizations are experienced in developing projects on the ground, knowing the local setting and having experience setting up field trials and training. RVO can pull funding (seed money, connect with IFIs and larger banks) and as such support private initiatives with local impact. Others have an international network to offer and can contribute by putting forward insights, cases and experts.

Closure and next steps

The organizers once again thank all participants for the input of their visions and ideas. NFP and NWP will develop a partnership-work plan for 2022 based on the initial outline and the discussions and suggestions during the meeting. A next event will include sharing knowledge and match making.

For questions on the meeting or the Saline Water & Food Partnership please contact NFP or NWP.

Frans Verberne

Netherlands Food Partnership

fverberne@nlfoodpartnership.com

+31 6 21 555 022



Sabrina Kraaijenbrink-Doetjes

Netherlands Water Partnership

s.doetjes@nwp.nl

+31 70 304 3763

