

Investing in education is investing in global stability

Education as the cornerstone of Dutch development cooperation policy

Development begins with education

It starts with writing your name. You learn to count, ask questions, collaborate. Step by step, you grow into a young adult with your own dreams, plans, and ideals. Education opens worlds – it gives children and young people the tools to shape their own lives and that of their community.

But what if there is no school?

What if the teacher has never been trained?

What if school is unsafe, or if as a girl you are simply not welcome?

What if you cannot afford further education?

For those children and young people – from Malawi to Syria, from Colombia to South Sudan – the Global Campaign for Education exists. As a worldwide network of civil society organizations, teachers, policymakers, and citizens, we fight for the universal right to good, accessible, and inclusive education.

We, as Global Campaign for Education the Netherlands, know that good education makes a difference – for every individual, and for the world as a whole. It is a proven strategy for structural development, stability, and economic resilience.

A political turning point: now we choose direction

The upcoming elections offer political parties the opportunity to restate their positions and present a vision for the values and ambitions of the Netherlands in the world. The recent fall of the cabinet, which had proposed major cuts to development cooperation, underlines this urgency. Now is the time to correct course, to reinvest, and to once again make education part of development cooperation policy. Governments, civil society organizations, and Dutch businesses have committed themselves to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). GCE Nederland is the Dutch representative of SDG 4 Global. SDG 4 Global stands worldwide for ensuring equal access to quality education and promoting lifelong learning for all. This goal emphasizes that every person, regardless of background or age, must benefit from good education so that everyone has the chance to develop themselves, build a better quality of life, and contribute to society. The 17 SDGs form a global compass for addressing urgent global challenges such as access to education and healthcare, poverty, inequality, and climate change. Education plays a special role here, acting as a catalyst for achieving all other SDG goals.

Investing in education is a shared interest

Development cooperation is not only of great significance for the countries in which investments are made, but also yields tangible benefits for the Netherlands itself. It is a reciprocal relationship in which solidarity goes hand in hand with strategic interest.

1. Solidarity and international justice

Education is essential for realizing human rights, combating poverty, and achieving gender equality. It supports the most vulnerable groups worldwide – including children, people with disabilities, and refugees. By putting education at the center, the Netherlands shows that it holds fast to its core value of international solidarity.

2. Global stability and economic development

The Netherlands is intertwined with global trade and migration flows. Investing in education in low- and middle-income countries is investing in global stability and in the Netherlands as a trading nation. Good education strengthens knowledge, skills, and resilience – and thereby sustainable economic growth in the countries themselves.

3. Universal equality through education

Education is a powerful instrument for creating equal opportunities. It breaks structural inequality and offers every person, regardless of origin or gender, the opportunity to develop themselves. Let education again be the instrument for global equality – “the global equality engine.”

4. The international position of the Netherlands

The Netherlands has built up international prestige by actively investing in human rights, democracy, and development – with education as a central pillar. Continue this role. Strengthening knowledge relations, exchange, and partnerships yields both diplomatic and economic benefits.

5. Security and resilience

Education stimulates social cohesion and strengthens local institutions. In fragile states, it is one of the few anchors for long-term peace. A robust education system forms the foundation for more democracy and structural security – locally and internationally.

Education is the cornerstone for realizing Dutch ambitions in development cooperation and international trade. It is the indispensable basis for sustainable progress, economic resilience, and global stability.

The previous cabinet, through its cuts to this policy, broke with a long Dutch tradition of strategic foresight – and of solidarity with the most vulnerable. The upcoming elections give political parties the chance to correct this course.

GCE Nederland calls on political parties

GCE Nederland asks political parties to once again give education a central place in development cooperation policy. Embed in your election program a vision that does justice to both Dutch values and global challenges by explicitly addressing:

- **The necessity and urgency of consistent Dutch policy for realizing the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, namely the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).**
- **The importance of education in the Global South (SDG 4 Global) as a spearhead of development cooperation policy, including the resumption of (financial) support for education projects and funds.**

Signed on behalf of the members of [Global Campaign for Education Nederland](#)

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The Global Campaign for Education is the largest worldwide network of civil society organizations advocating for the right to inclusive and quality education for all.

Annex – The importance of investing in education in the Global South: The multiplier effect

Stronger institutions and less dependency

- Less dependency: Education enables children in the Global South to grow into independent adults. This reduces structural dependency on development aid and ensures that Dutch investments have long-term, structural impact.
- Stronger institutions: An educated population contributes to better governance, strong institutions, more democracy, and respect for the rule of law. This aligns with Dutch interests in global stability and security.
- More effectiveness: Investments in education help partner countries build self-reliant societal systems. This increases the impact and efficiency of Dutch development funds in the long term.

Water and food security

- Young people gain through education the knowledge and skills to tackle challenges around water management, such as sustainable irrigation, access to clean drinking water, and resilience against natural disasters.
- Investments in primary education form the necessary basis for later vocational training and innovation in the agricultural and food sector.
- In regions where water and food shortages lead to instability, education enables communities to develop sustainable solutions themselves, reducing future aid dependency.

Basic healthcare

- Education plays a crucial role in improving public health. Literate populations use health services more often, follow medical guidelines better, and adopt preventive measures sooner.
- Schools are essential platforms for health education – in the fields of nutrition, hygiene, and disease prevention – directly aligning with Dutch priorities for global health. Strong education systems improve the delivery of basic services in partner countries. During the COVID-19 pandemic, countries with well-functioning education systems proved better able to implement health measures. Education today means that future generations will be better equipped to handle pandemics and health threats – contributing to the health security of the Netherlands in a globalized world.

Security, stability, and migration

- Worldwide, an estimated 224 million school-age children are affected by crises; 72 million of them do not attend school at all.
- Education reduces the risk of conflicts and forced migration. Children who receive twelve years of education are less likely to resort to violence or be recruited by extremist groups.
- In fragile states and conflict areas, education programs are deployed to build communities and promote peace.
- By addressing the root causes of instability and migration, the Netherlands helps create safer environments elsewhere. This also reduces migration pressure towards Europe in the long term.

Trade and economy

- The COVID-19 pandemic caused enormous learning losses worldwide. In countries in the Global South, 7 out of 10 children at age ten can no longer read a simple text. Poor education not only means missed opportunities for children but also has major economic consequences for their countries. If we act now to provide every child in the Global South with good education, GDP per capita there could increase by nearly 70% by 2050.
- By 2030, an estimated 825 million children and young people in the Global South will not acquire the skills needed to successfully enter the labor market.
- Recent research shows that every euro the Netherlands invests in development cooperation yields over two euros in export and creates thousands of jobs in sectors such as mechanical engineering, chemistry, and food industries. Development cooperation thus not only strengthens education, well-being, and economic resilience worldwide, but also directly contributes to economic growth and employment in the Netherlands.
- Investing in girls' education has a transformative effect on societies. It leads to better economic prospects, healthier mothers, and stronger social stability. Twelve years of quality education for every girl could generate \$30 billion in lifetime income globally and reduce the risk of armed conflict by 37%.
- With demographic developments – Africa's youth population expected to grow to 830 million by 2050 – investing in education is essential. Without prospects for quality education and employment, this generation risks being left behind. Investing in education is investing in our shared future. It prevents conflict, strengthens economic stability, and contributes to peace worldwide. A stable and prosperous world is in everyone's interest. That is why investing in education is not only a moral choice, but a necessity.

- By 2050, 1 in 4 members of the global workforce will come from Africa. It is therefore crucial that this young population is equipped with the right skills to contribute to the world economy. Twelve years of good education enable young people to pursue further studies, find work, and drive economic growth – both locally and internationally. This also benefits the Netherlands, as a well-educated workforce helps solve labor shortages in various sectors.
- Promoting education in the Global South contributes to economic development and creates future trading partners and business opportunities for Dutch companies.