To reach its climate targets and the sustainable development goals, the Dutch government invests domestically as well as abroad. In the global South, the Dutch government invests in large scale programmes aimed at for instance infrastructure development in urban deltas, sustainable value chains, climate-resilient food production systems. Subsidies are made available in various programmes to knowledge institutions, businesses, public organisations and entrepreneurs that want to contribute to the SDGs through interventions in lower- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

These interventions cover a wide range of topics and are focused on a wide range of countries. Policy makers, knowledge institutions, business and CSOs work together on a specific project, but often with a lack of coordination and knowledge exchange between the various projects and programmes. Impact is usually assessed on a project or programme level, but in fact we know little about the total effects of the complete set of interventions over the long term.

**Solving interconnected problems**
Creating knowledge infrastructures where Dutch public and private organisations are active can play a role in making the Dutch contribution to the SDGs more effective. If the Netherlands aspires to contribute to sustainable and inclusive global development, it needs to develop profound knowledge about local realities and about the intended and unintended effects of its interventions in different geographical and institutional contexts. The focus should not just be on individual interventions but address the complexity of multiple interventions dealing with interconnected problems. To better understand these wicked problems, area specific knowledge is crucial and interventions need to be guided by research and learning.

**Focus on local networks**
These knowledge infrastructures can be developed through the creation of research & learning hotspots in LMICs where the Netherlands are active (through development cooperation, trade, investments). In these research & learning hotspots various elements come together and provide an alternative approach to research for global development. An additional benefit of this approach – which became particularly apparent in the current corona crisis – is that the expertise needed can become more firmly embedded in local networks and becomes less dependent on foreign presence in times of crisis.

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**Objective:**
Making the Dutch contribution to the SDGs more effective by creating knowledge infrastructures in LMICs to guide policy interventions through research and learning.

**What?**
Create research & learning hotspots in which local knowledge institutions and local stakeholders work together on a long-term basis with Dutch universities and research institutes to contribute to achieving the SDGs and to increase understanding about the effectiveness of Dutch interventions abroad.

**How?**
- Holistic
- Open and process-based
- Long-term
- Location-based
- Comparative
- Integrated

**Where?**
Countries and regions with high level of Dutch engagement.
A new approach

WOTRO therefore proposes a new approach to research for global development which is complementary to the existing research programmes, including the programmes of the Dutch Research Agenda (NWA) and the mission oriented programmes in the framework of the Dutch Knowledge and Innovation Covenant (KIC). Through this alternative approach we expect to create more opportunities for scientific research in – and together with – vulnerable regions in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Through interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research – fundamental as well as strategic and applied research – local challenges should be mapped and explained and researchers, practitioners and policy makers work together on solutions by providing a knowledge base for SDG compliant development in vulnerable areas. For this we suggest a research for global development approach characterized by six core elements:

1. **A holistic approach.** By bringing together research on multiple themes, topics and sectors, we try to provide insight into the connections and interactions between topics like food systems, energy, migration, health, employability, infrastructure, climate, etc. This requires research into feedback loops, wickedness of problems, trade-offs, complexity and intended as well as unintended effects.

2. **An open and process-based approach.** Research consortia develop research proposals, including a multi-year planning for the various research activities. But circumstances change, particularly in vulnerable regions. Research consortia need to be able to adapt to these new circumstances. Research proposals need some built in flexibility so they can bring in new expertise when needed, change locations if necessary and adapt methodologies if required. Organisations assigning the research (e.g. governments, ministries) cannot intervene in the research itself but new policy needs and new political circumstances can be a reason to change certain research activities or to bring in new expertise. This will require a close interaction between policy makers and researchers in order to periodically assess the process.

3. **A long-term approach.** Long-term research offers opportunities for a longitudinal approach, so research consortia can pay attention to consequences of contemporary developments and challenges for the resilience of future generations. A longer term approach will be required to make real progress towards reaching the sustainable development goals in 2030.

4. **A location-based approach.** Dutch expertise and knowledge will be pooled with local knowledge. Generating knowledge and insight about these complex and interconnected problems (or SDGs) requires the sharing of complementary knowledge.

5. **A comparative approach.** Systematic comparisons of interventions in different locations should shed light on the advantages and disadvantages of alternative solutions. Sharing and comparing results enables researchers and policy makers to synthesize research results and creates possibilities for upscaling.

6. **An integrated approach.** Research should not be conducted in isolation. This approach makes it possible to link research with capacity building and education. Not only academic capacity building and PhD programmes can be linked to the research projects, but also training of practitioners and policymakers and the education of (post-graduate) students. Currently all these types of activities are undertaken in many LIMCs, often by different organisations, but not in a coordinated manner.

NWO-WOTRO invites the research community, the development community, government organisations and research funders to discuss these elements with WOTRO and to find ways for implementing them in future programming. A broad conversation with our partners will enable us to find common ground on what is the most effective way for Dutch science and expertise to contribute to reaching the SDGs by 2030 and to make global development more sustainable and more inclusive in the long run.