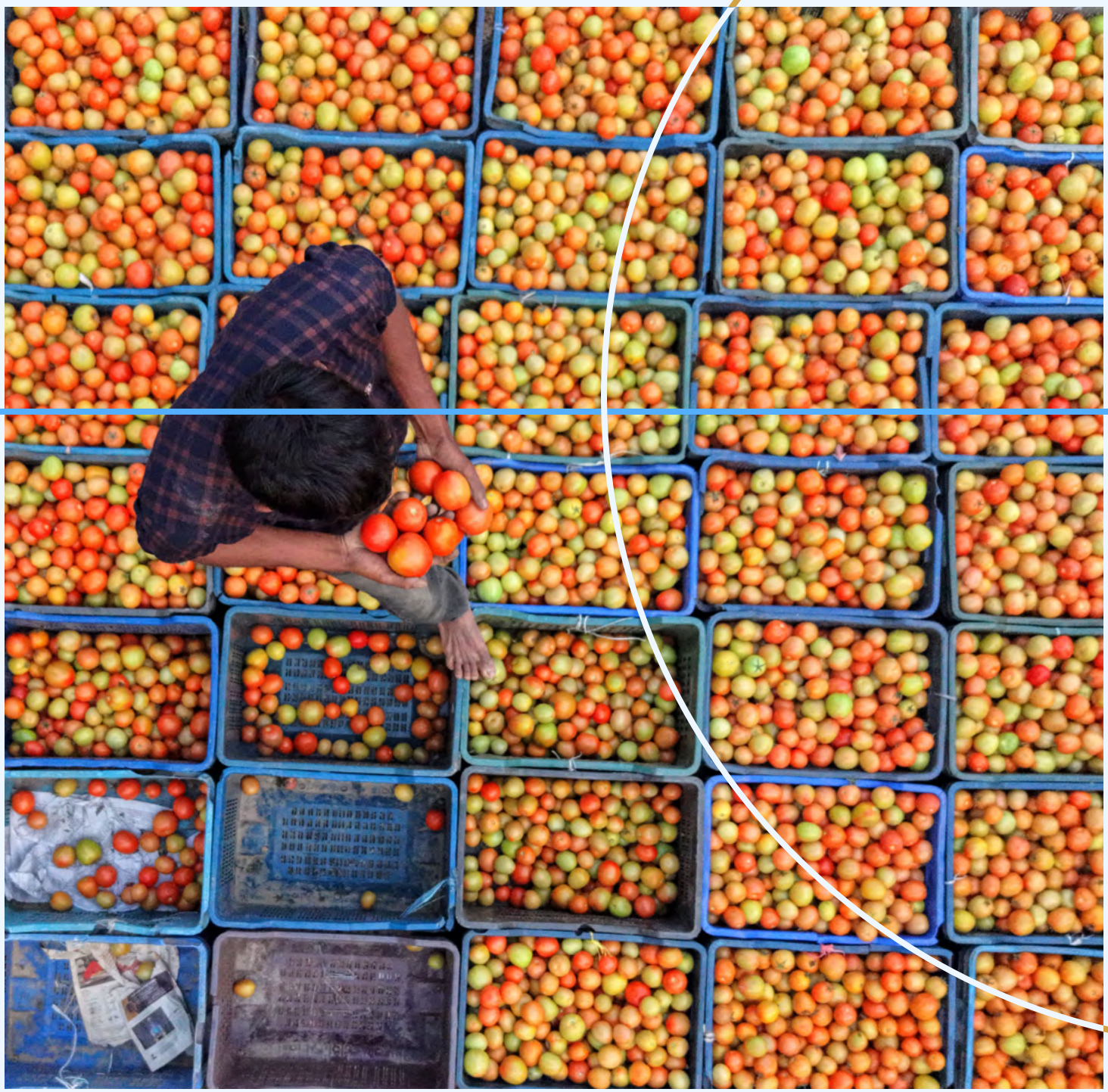
Advisory Council
on International Affairs

Food security in an unstable world: an agenda for the Netherlands

11 May 2026



Advisory Council on International Affairs

The Adviesraad Internationale Vraagstukken (Advisory Council on International Affairs, AIV) is the advisory body to the Dutch government and parliament on foreign policy. It provides advice, both on request and at its own initiative, on international issues. Its particular areas of focus are European cooperation, human rights, global development, and security policy.

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on International Affairs

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Dear Ministers,

The world continues to face a persistent and deeply troubling hunger crisis. Since the international community committed in 2015 to ending hunger by 2030, the number of people affected has in fact increased further. Today, around 700 million people experience hunger over the course of a year, nearly half of whom face acute food insecurity.[1] Almost one-third of the global population lacks access to a healthy and adequate diet.

Looking ahead, there are grounds for further concern. Rising geopolitical tensions are accompanied by an increase in armed conflict, now the primary driver of acute hunger. At the same time, cuts in funding for global humanitarian assistance are constraining the capacity to support affected populations. Conflicts in strategically important regions are also disrupting global markets and trade flows. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the Iran war in 2026 illustrate how such shocks can have immediate repercussions for food prices and food security, particularly in developing countries. Finally, accelerating climate change is placing additional pressure on food production across many regions.

The convergence of these crises has heightened the vulnerability of the global food system, which is also characterised by significant levels of food waste and persistent inequality. This underscores the need for a structural transformation, to be undertaken in a context where food security is increasingly viewed through a lens of geopolitics, economics and security. Many countries are therefore pursuing greater autonomy and resilience in their food systems. This agenda is also relevant for Europe, particularly in light of its dependence on imports of animal feed and fertilisers, often sourced from a limited number of countries.

At the same time, there is broad consensus that effective international cooperation remains indispensable for safeguarding global public goods such as climate and biodiversity. This is reflected in the coalition agreement of the new Dutch government, which commits to a future-proof food system and to continued investments in food security as part of development cooperation.

It is against this backdrop that the AIV submits this report, in response to the government's advisory request of May 2025, which posed the following central question: how can the Netherlands' efforts on global food security be better linked with Dutch interests, in particular in the areas of trade and economy, security and stability, and migration?

In this report, the AIV concludes that there are indeed multiple relevant connections between food security and these interests, but also that these linkages are layered and complex. If the direct connection with these three Dutch interests becomes too dominant, there is a risk that policy will become overly focused on the short term, while structural challenges - such as climate change or the underlying political-economic drivers of conflict - remain insufficiently addressed. Moreover, it is when shared and complementary interests are placed at the core that the conditions emerge for strategic, sustainable and mutually beneficial cooperation with partner countries.

The current geopolitical turbulence entails major risks and calls for a more proactive commitment to new models of international cooperation. With diplomatic creativity and flexibility, middle powers can play a formative and catalytic role in this regard, as argued by Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney in his Davos speech. The Netherlands, with its strong knowledge base, innovative private sector and extensive international networks, is exceptionally well positioned in the field of food security. It is precisely in this domain that the Netherlands, as a middle power, can take the lead and help shape new forms of international cooperation. In doing so, it can also adapt its strong position - built up in the relatively stable and open international context of recent decades - to a changing world order and thereby help sustain it.

1. Drivers of global food security

Food security is internationally defined as a situation in which all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs for an active and healthy life.[2] This definition, established by the United Nations (UN) in 1996, comprises four dimensions: availability, access, utilisation and stability. It thus encompasses not only the quantity of food produced, but also affordability and income (access), healthy and diverse diets (utilisation), and the resilience of food systems (stability).

In recent international debates, particularly following the UN Food Systems Summit in 2021, food security has been increasingly embedded in a broader food systems perspective, in which sustainability also plays a central role. In addition, access to adequate food is enshrined as a human right in international treaties.

In this advisory report, the AIV adopts this broad understanding of food security. This first chapter examines the most relevant drivers.

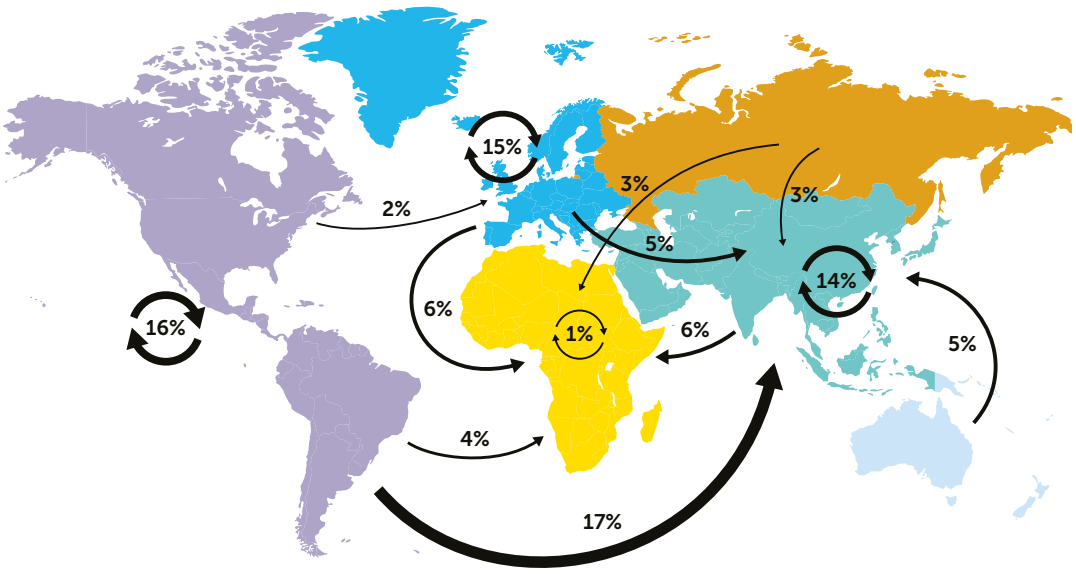
1.1 Global food markets and dependencies

Globally, a sufficient quantity of food is produced to feed the world's population. Its distribution, however, is not geared towards reducing food insecurity or promoting healthy diets. Through production and trade, global markets primarily respond to demand dynamics and therefore focus predominantly on consumers with purchasing power, although supply can also influence demand through marketing and advertising.

International trade in food is nothing new, but has expanded to unprecedented levels in recent decades. This is evident, for instance, in the global trade in cereals - including wheat, maize and rice - which occupy a central position in the global food system and form the basic caloric intake for a large share of the world's population. According to data from the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization), the volume of global cereals traded has more than doubled since 2000, while the world's population has grown by approximately 30% over the same period.[3]

This expansion of international trade has brought important benefits. It has enabled production at greater scale and fostered a more efficient geographical distribution of agricultural production, resulting in lower food prices. Regions with relatively abundant land and favourable climatic conditions have increasingly specialised in export-oriented production. Figure 1 shows that the global cereals trade is largely driven by exports from the Americas, Europe, Russia and Australia to Asia and Africa, accounting for around 45% of total trade. A comparable share (approximately 46%) takes place within continents. Notably, intra-African trade in cereals remains very limited, representing only about 1% of the global total.

Figure 1. Global trade in cereals, 2024



Source: AIV based on COMTRADE data

The picture of international agricultural trade changes when, alongside cereals, other agricultural commodities are taken into account, such as cocoa, coffee, tea, sugar, soy and palm oil. In these markets, a number of African and Asian countries are in fact major exporters. For many of these countries, particularly in Africa, such cash crops constitute a crucial source of income and employment.

Vulnerabilities of globalised trade

The strong dependence on global markets, however, also makes these economies vulnerable to price fluctuations. This risk has increased as the accelerated globalisation of agricultural markets, combined with their growing integration with financial markets and the expanding role of speculative capital, has led to greater price volatility.[4]

In economies with limited diversification, a sharp decline in the price of a key export crop can quickly trigger an economic crisis. The reverse is also evident: sudden increases in the price of imported staple foods often have major social and political consequences. For example, the sharp rise in cereal prices in 2008 and 2010 contributed to economic crises and social unrest in several countries and was one of the factors driving political mobilisation during the Arab Spring.[5]

Global food value chains also raise questions about equity, particularly with regard to the distribution of risks and returns. In many cases, profits are concentrated in the higher segments of the chain, such as trading houses and retailers, while risks, such as those associated with price declines or crop failures, are borne primarily by producers. In addition, the efficiency of the food system can be questioned, as it is estimated that up to 30% of all food produced is not consumed but lost along the supply chain or wasted.

Further integration of global markets has also contributed to a growing concentration of food production and trade among a limited number of actors. This translates into strategic dependencies and bottlenecks that, in times of financial or geopolitical crisis, can lead to disruptions with far-reaching consequences.

In the cereals trade, for example, a small number of large trading companies - often referred to as the "ABCD" firms (ADM, Bunge, Cargill and Louis Dreyfus) - dominate the market. These companies have evolved far beyond pure logistics and trading firms. They have become closely intertwined with financial markets and now generate up to 75% of their revenues from financial activities, including speculation in commodity derivatives.[6] They also increasingly provide credit within value chains, thereby assuming not only the role of trader but also that of financier. According to UNCTAD (UN Trade and Development), this financialisation has now made food markets more vulnerable to the effects of a global financial crisis than was the case during the 2008 financial crisis.

Technological developments in the food sector may give rise to new dependencies and vulnerabilities. Innovations such as genetically modified crops and the application of artificial intelligence in plant breeding, precision agriculture and market forecasting offer significant potential to improve food security. At the same time, these are sectors in which patents and economies of scale can rapidly lead to a concentration of power and data in the hands of a limited number of companies, with associated risks, in addition to concerns related to health and ethics.

Geopolitical risks

A high degree of concentration in specific markets or trade flows creates vulnerable chokepoints, amplifying the impact of geopolitical developments. This became evident in 2022, in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Together, these two countries accounted for a significant share of global exports of cereals and fertilisers, so disruptions to their trade flows led to a rapid increase in world market prices. According to the World Food Programme (WFP), this resulted in a deterioration of food security in many regions, particularly in countries in North Africa and the Middle East that were heavily dependent on imports from Russia and Ukraine.[7]

The recent closure of the Strait of Hormuz in the context of the Iran war in 2026 could have similar or even more far-reaching consequences. This route is not only crucial for the transport of oil and gas, but also for key inputs used in fertiliser production: around 35% of global urea exports and 45% of sulphur pass through this maritime bottleneck.[8] Natural gas itself is also a critical input for fertiliser production, while higher energy prices drive up transport costs in international food trade. In short, a disruption of the Strait of Hormuz could, through multiple channels, lead to a substantial increase in global food prices.

Such developments, combined with a more uncertain geopolitical environment, have heightened attention to food sovereignty and strategic autonomy in a growing number of countries, not only in the developing world. In high-income countries too, including the Netherlands, there is increasing awareness that major shocks to global markets could severely disrupt domestic food supply. Governments are therefore once again investing in national food production, strategic reserves, and measures to reduce dependence on international markets, with the aim of strengthening resilience to external shocks.[9]

This approach, however, also carries risks. Reduced international trade and a stronger emphasis on national self-sufficiency may lead to higher prices, lower efficiency, and a less optimal use of natural resources. The debate on the role of international markets in food security is therefore not about a simple choice between globalisation and self-sufficiency, but about finding a balance between efficiency, stability and resilience in an increasingly complex global food system.

1.2 National policies for agriculture and economic development

In addition to enhancing resilience to external shocks, there is another compelling argument, from a developmental perspective, for strengthening local and regional food production: the role of food systems as a driver of economic development. In many low- and middle-income countries, agriculture accounts for a large share of the economy and, especially when combined with the processing of agricultural products, provides much-needed employment. Investments in productivity, infrastructure and markets in this sector can therefore make a significant contribution to poverty reduction and broader economic transformation.

The economic history of several Asian countries illustrates this dynamic. The rapid growth of the so-called East Asian Tigers - such as South Korea and Taiwan - and later of countries such as China, Vietnam and Bangladesh, is often primarily associated with the expansion of labour-intensive industry. Less visible, but at least as important, was the role of agricultural development in the early stages of their economic transformation. In many of these countries, industrialisation was preceded by land reforms and targeted investments in rural areas, leading to a substantial increase in agricultural productivity (the Green Revolution). Higher yields among small and medium-sized farmers increased food production and generated agricultural surpluses, which in turn freed up resources for investment in other sectors.[10] In this way, agriculture functioned as a key initial engine of economic growth, rising incomes and employment.

In much of sub-Saharan Africa, a comparable agricultural transformation has yet to materialise. In many countries, productivity remains low and food imports are high. The lack of progress in agricultural development is often symptomatic of broader structural challenges rooted in a country's political economy, such as weak institutions and poor governance.

Political elites frequently prioritise low food prices for urban consumers in order to prevent social unrest. While food imports can contribute to affordable food in the short term, they may undermine the development of domestic agricultural production over time. When investments in productivity, infrastructure and market access for farmers lag behind, the agricultural sector remains trapped in a pattern of low yields and limited growth, constraining broader economic transformation.

The consequences extend beyond the agricultural sector itself. The African continent is experiencing rapid population growth, and large numbers of people are moving from rural areas to cities in search of better economic opportunities. Urbanisation has the potential to generate positive economic dynamics, but many African megacities are expanding faster than their labour markets can absorb new entrants. This is often accompanied by land speculation in peri-urban areas, displacing local communities and farmers. The result is a growing informal sector and a lack of prospects for stable livelihoods, both in rural and urban areas.

Such a lack of economic prospects contributes in various ways to both internal and international migration. Food security plays a role in this dynamic, but the relationship is complex and non-linear. Increasing food insecurity may drive some groups to seek opportunities elsewhere, while for others it limits the resources available to migrate at all. The outcome therefore depends strongly on how food insecurity is distributed within a society. When it affects not only the poorest but also middle-income groups, it is more likely to lead to international migration.[11]

African Green Shoots

Despite the significant challenges in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, it is important to recognise positive developments as well. The agricultural sector on the continent has grown substantially in recent decades, and there are increasing signs of dynamic local and regional food value chains. Regional food trade, for instance, is likely much larger than official statistics suggest, as a significant share takes place informally.[12]

While the substantial and growing volume of food imports from outside the continent is often cited to underscore the struggles of Africa's agricultural sector, an important nuance should be noted. North African countries account for roughly half of total African cereal imports and for more than 60% of the continent's agricultural trade deficit. In many other parts of Africa, by contrast, there is clear evidence of growing dynamism in local food systems.[13]

This development is driven in particular by strong production growth in fertile areas near major urban centres, supported by significant improvements in transport infrastructure. As a result, new economic opportunities are emerging in local food value chains to meet rapidly growing urban demand. Production and processing are expanding rapidly, particularly in dairy products, vegetables, poultry, and processed foods based on maize and cassava.[14]

In short, when productivity growth, infrastructure development and market integration reinforce one another, the agricultural sector can become a powerful engine of economic development in Africa.

1.3 Political instability and armed conflict

The increase in global hunger over the past decade is largely attributable to the growing number of armed conflicts.[15] Wars disrupt agricultural production, destroy infrastructure, interrupt trade flows, and force people to abandon their land. In some conflict situations, food is deliberately used as a weapon of war, despite international agreements prohibiting such tactics. In 2018, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2417, explicitly condemning the use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare. In practice, however, the use of food as a weapon of war continues to occur, and the norm against it appears to be eroding.[16]

The relationship between conflict and food security also operates in the opposite direction. Hunger and food insecurity can contribute to political instability and exacerbate conflict dynamics. At the same time, it is important to stress that food insecurity is rarely the direct cause of armed conflict. Conflicts almost always arise from a combination of factors, including political exclusion, ethnic tensions and economic inequality. Moreover, there are numerous examples of large-scale hunger that have not led to armed conflict.

In rural areas in particular, food insecurity can create conditions that enable armed groups to recruit more easily.[17] When livelihoods are under pressure and alternative sources of income are lacking, rebel groups become more attractive to young men with limited prospects. At the same time, armed groups themselves depend on access to food and resources to sustain their fighters. As a result, the availability of food and control over agricultural areas often become part of the strategic logic of conflict.

Once a conflict has erupted, it tends to develop its own dynamics and internal political logic, which strongly shape its further trajectory. In such situations, it is unlikely that improvements in food security alone will be sufficient to restore stability.[18] Humanitarian food assistance remains essential in such contexts to prevent acute hunger. Armed conflicts often have severe humanitarian consequences, including forced displacement. People typically first seek refuge in urban areas or neighbouring countries. Even if only a small proportion attempt to reach another continent, such as Europe, this can still put considerable pressure on political and public support.

In urban contexts, food also frequently plays a role in fuelling political instability. Rising food prices can trigger social unrest and protests, particularly when perceived to be the result of poor governance or corruption. Often, it is not the poorest who take to the streets, but rather the lower middle classes, whose purchasing power is declining. Rising food prices thus tend to act as a catalyst for broader political discontent, rather than as an isolated cause. Such protest movements may contribute to the downfall of ineffective or repressive regimes, but what follows is unpredictable and context-dependent, ranging from a stable transition towards new elections to prolonged instability or civil war.

In sum, armed conflict is one of the main drivers of food insecurity worldwide. Conversely, food insecurity can amplify existing tensions and contribute to instability. In this sense, lack of food security often acts as a so-called “threat multiplier” within broader political and societal conflict dynamics.

1.4 Climate change and ecological boundaries

The global food system is increasingly running up against climatic and ecological limits.

Climate change

Global warming is putting pressure on crop yields in many regions by disrupting natural growing patterns. While new opportunities for agricultural production are emerging in some northerly regions, the overall impact at the global level is negative. Average yields of key crops such as maize, wheat and soy are already showing a downward trend.[19]

In addition to gradual changes, volatility in agricultural production is also increasing. Extreme weather events linked to the water cycle - such as droughts, floods and heavy rainfall - are becoming more frequent and can rapidly destroy harvests and disrupt food markets. This is not a challenge confined to low-income countries. In Europe too, extreme weather is leading to more frequent crop failures, such as the exceptional rainfall in Spain and Portugal in early 2026, which resulted in empty fruit and vegetables shelves in Dutch supermarkets.[20]

In vulnerable regions and fragile states, climate change further intensifies the interplay between food insecurity, political instability and conflict. When crop failures or water scarcity are compounded by weak institutions and existing tensions, the risk of social unrest and violence increases. Countries with effective institutions, well-functioning markets and investments in adaptation are better equipped to absorb climate shocks, although the pace of climate change may exceed even their adaptive capacity.

The relationship between food and climate also works in reverse. The global food system itself is a major source of greenhouse gas emissions, accounting for roughly one-third of global emissions.[21] The production and consumption of animal products play a particularly significant role. For example, cattle emit methane during digestion, a greenhouse gas with a strong warming effect.

Biodiversity

In addition to climate change, biodiversity loss represents a growing challenge for the global food system. While this issue has long received relatively little attention, its importance is becoming increasingly clear. Some food crops directly depend on insects for pollination, while healthy and diverse ecosystems more broadly are essential for soil fertility, water regulation and natural control of pests and diseases. Declining biodiversity reduces the resilience of agricultural systems and increases their vulnerability to outbreaks of pests and diseases.

Here, too, the relationship operates in both directions. Agriculture itself is a major driver of biodiversity loss. Intensive production systems, such as large-scale monoculture plantations with heavy use of pesticides and fertilisers, degrade natural ecosystems and lead to soil depletion. In addition, the expansion of agricultural land increases pressure on nature, including through deforestation. In regions like Latin America and Southeast Asia, this is often linked to large-scale plantations producing export crops such as soy and palm oil. In parts of Africa, the low agricultural productivity among smallholder farmers also plays a role, as more land is required to produce the same amount of food. In both cases, pressure on ecosystems intensifies.

The growing global consumption of animal products also warrants particular attention in this context. The production of meat and dairy requires significantly more land per calorie than plant-based foods, with approximately 75% of agricultural land now used for these purposes.[22] In sum, the global food system is increasingly exceeding planetary boundaries for climate and biodiversity, thereby undermining the foundations of future food security.

Health

The global food system affects not only the health of the planet, but also human health. More than half of the world's population lacks access to a healthy diet. Unhealthy dietary patterns - characterised by high consumption of ultra-processed foods, sugar and animal fats - are increasingly contributing to chronic diseases. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately 43% of adults are now overweight and 16% are obese.[23] This issue is growing particularly rapidly in middle-income countries. At the same time, the effects are often highly unequal: unhealthy food is often cheaper and more readily available, meaning that low-income groups are disproportionately affected by poor diets.

Research by the EAT-Lancet Commission shows that it is possible to provide a growing global population with sufficient and healthy food without further exceeding planetary boundaries.[24] Achieving this, however, will require fundamental changes in both production and consumption, including more sustainable agricultural practices, a greater role for plant-based foods, and a substantial reduction in food waste.

Access to land

Access to land is under increasing pressure worldwide for several reasons. Climate change is making agricultural land less productive - or even unusable - in many areas, while population growth and urbanisation further constrain the available space. Meanwhile, demand for land is rising due to the expansion of large-scale plantations for export crops.

Climate policy also affects the availability of agricultural land. The energy transition, for instance, has increased demand for biofuels blended into diesel and petrol. Globally, an estimated 2 to 4% of agricultural land is used for biofuel crops, particularly in the United States and Brazil.[25] While this alternative market can help stabilise farmers' incomes when food prices are low, it also increases pressure on land, reducing the area available for food production or ecological restoration.

A similar tension arises in the growing market for carbon credits. Through such mechanisms, countries or companies can count investments in emissions reduction or carbon sequestration elsewhere towards their own climate targets. When carefully designed, such projects can contribute to climate mitigation, adaptation, biodiversity restoration and income diversification. However, large-scale afforestation or similar initiatives also intensify competition for land and may lead to the displacement of local communities and food production.

Particularly in countries where the protection of land rights for local communities is insufficient, this accumulation of pressures can result in vulnerable groups losing access to land. This underscores the importance of better alignment between food, climate and biodiversity policies.

In sum, food security is shaped by a complex interplay of economic, political and ecological factors. Developments in trade, economics, conflict and climate interact and often reinforce one another. Food insecurity and rising food prices can contribute to political instability, conflict and migration flows, and vice versa.

2. Position of the Netherlands

2.1 The Netherlands as a hub in global food supply chains

The Netherlands plays an exceptionally large role in the global food system, ranking as the world's second-largest agricultural exporter after the United States, with annual exports of nearly €130 billion.[26] Approximately 35% of this total consists of re-exports: products transiting through Dutch ports and trade networks to other countries, such as soy or tropical agricultural commodities. The majority, valued at over €80 billion, originates from domestic production, including dairy, meat, vegetables, flowers and seeds.

The Netherlands' influence in global food supply chains extends beyond the sheer volume of agricultural exports, however. Equally important is its leading position in knowledge, technology and supply chains. This includes the development of advanced greenhouse construction, irrigation systems, processing equipment, cold storage and transport logistics, and high-quality seeds. The Dutch financial sector also boasts relevant expertise in food-related industries, both in traditional banking and innovative investment funds. Dutch companies are globally recognised for their leading roles across these sectors.

The Dutch knowledge ecosystem forms a key pillar of this position. Wageningen University & Research has consistently ranked among the world's top agricultural universities, often securing the number one spot in international rankings.[27] Around Wageningen, a broad network of research institutes, companies and start-ups has emerged, focusing on agricultural innovation and food technology. Additionally, the Netherlands has built a strong international reputation in water management and technology, partly through institutions such as Delft University of Technology. This expertise aligns closely with growing global challenges related to water availability and climate change.

Beyond knowledge and technology, the organisation and infrastructure of the Dutch food system also play a pivotal role. The Netherlands benefits from a robust logistical position, with the ports of Rotterdam and Amsterdam serving as central gateways for international food flows into Europe and beyond. Furthermore, the country has a long-standing tradition of collaboration within food supply chains, facilitated by agricultural cooperatives and strong sector organisations.

Drawbacks

At the same time, this strong international position comes with clear drawbacks. The Netherlands' role as a hub in global food supply chains is accompanied by a substantial ecological footprint. Domestically, intensive agriculture has contributed to environmental challenges such as the nitrogen crisis and pressure on biodiversity. Furthermore, land is inherently scarce in a densely populated country like the Netherlands, yet agriculture still accounts for 66% of total land use.[28]

Yet the ecological footprint of the Dutch food system extends far beyond its borders. An estimated three-quarters of the land use related to Dutch food consumption occurs abroad, notably for the production of animal feed and tropical crops.[29] Imports of these products carry a considerable land and water footprint, contributing to deforestation and biodiversity loss. Moreover, the production of specific export crops for the European market - such as avocados and bananas - places substantial pressure on water resources, reducing availability for local food production.[30]

In previous advisory reports, the AIV has recommended setting time-bound targets to reduce the Netherlands' global footprint in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, land use, water use and biodiversity.[31] However, the 2025 National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan abandoned the earlier ambition to halve the overall ecological footprint by 2050.[32] The government at the time indicated that it did not see a major role for itself in reducing this footprint and has not developed new policy in this area.

Conversely, the export of Dutch agricultural products to developing countries raises questions about potential distortive effects on local markets. Cheap, efficiently produced goods from the Netherlands could hinder the development of local value chains. However, recent analyses present a more nuanced picture. The export of Dutch onions to Senegal, for instance, appears to be complementary to the growth of domestic production and is strongly regulated through a seasonal quota system established by the Senegalese government.[33] With regard to milk powder - often cited as an example of unfair competition - the Dutch role has diminished. Whereas the Netherlands exported more than €250 million worth of milk powder annually to West Africa in the early 2010s - accounting for over a quarter of total imports - this has declined to around €120 million in recent years, representing approximately 17% of total imports.[34] Nevertheless, it remains important to continue monitoring the potential market-distorting effects of Dutch exports.

Domestic debates on agriculture also reveal tensions surrounding the future of the sector and the Netherlands' position. Large agro-industrial firms and sector organisations have traditionally held strong influence over agricultural policy, leaving less room for smaller, innovative or more sustainable initiatives in policy discussions. Internationally, the Netherlands is not a frontrunner in the development of organic or regenerative agriculture. According to European Commission data, organic farming currently accounts for only 4% of total agricultural land in the Netherlands, far less than in countries like Austria (25%), Sweden (20%), Italy (16%) and Germany (10%).[35]

Vulnerabilities

In addition to these internal tensions, the Dutch food system faces a number of strategic dependencies. While the Netherlands as a whole is not heavily reliant on net imports of staple foods, import flows of certain products - such as cocoa and coffee - do play a significant role for processing industries and the consumer market. Greater vulnerabilities, however, lie elsewhere.

European agriculture as a whole, for instance, is highly dependent on imports of animal feed, fertilisers, and energy. Disruptions in international markets for these inputs directly affect production costs and, indirectly, the availability and affordability of food. Particularly the combination of import dependence and a high concentration of suppliers gives rise to vulnerabilities. For example, livestock farming relies on imported soybean meal, more than 70% of which comes from Brazil and Argentina.[36] Fertilisers and the raw materials required for their production are primarily sourced from Morocco, Russia, and Belarus. Despite efforts to reduce these dependencies, the EU in practice remains dependent on Russian inputs.

Separate from these critical input dependencies, a major shock to international markets - whether due to geopolitical tensions, financial crises, or climate disasters - could lead to sharp price increases or temporary shortages of products that are part of everyday consumption in the Netherlands. In such a scenario, rapid adjustments in consumption patterns would become necessary. A recent UK government report warns that British food security would be at risk in the event of a collapse of critical ecosystems elsewhere.[37] The same would apply to the Netherlands.

The rapidly changing international context raises a further question. The Netherlands' strong position in the food sector developed during a period of steady global economic integration. In a world marked by rising geopolitical tensions and increasing pressure on global supply chains due to climate change, the Netherlands will need to adapt in order to maintain this position.

At the same time, the food system offers opportunities for a more active role in new forms of international cooperation. Precisely because the Netherlands possesses strong expertise, technology, and trade networks, it is well placed to play a key and proactive role in developing solutions to global challenges in this area. By linking this expertise to the priorities of countries in the Global South, food could serve as a natural entry point for strategic partnerships and mutually beneficial economic and political relations, as emphasised in previous AIV reports on the Global South and the Africa strategy.

The following sections examine Dutch policy on food security and food systems, both nationally and within European and multilateral frameworks. The central question is to what extent current policy is adequately equipped to operate effectively in a changing international context, and where adjustments in policy and strategy may be required.

2.2 Dutch Policy

While the Netherlands holds a strong position in the global food system, it lacks an overarching, integrated vision on food and food systems that connects domestic and international dimensions. As a result, there is no clear strategy for leveraging its strong starting position to advance policy objectives in the field of global food security and its links with other domains such as trade, stability, and migration. This also means that the Netherlands' own vulnerabilities within the food system remain insufficiently addressed.

The most recent agricultural policy vision dates back to 2018 and primarily focused on the sustainability of Dutch agricultural production. The international dimension and broader issues relating to food security, nutrition, and global food systems received only limited attention. Since then, various policy letters have been issued on agriculture, trade, and development cooperation, but these have largely been sectoral and thematic in nature. A coherent long-term strategy that positions the Dutch food system within a global context is lacking, while other countries - such as the United Kingdom and Canada - have in fact developed such strategies.[38] Many countries in the Global South also have national food strategies, with Brazil often cited as a positive example due to its integration of agricultural policy, social programmes, and food security.[39]

Given the Netherlands' position in the global food system, it would be logical to develop an integrated long-term strategy to guide policy at the intersection of food security, agriculture, trade, climate and geopolitics. Such a strategy could build on existing initiatives, including the manifesto of the Agri & Food Top Sector[40] and the action plan for public-private partnerships on sustainable supply chains.[41]

The strategy would need to engage with key elements of Dutch policy in recent years, including the shift from aid to trade, the focus on the so-called Dutch Diamond approach, and the Netherlands' role in conflict-affected contexts.

a) From aid to trade

One of the most defining policy trends of recent years has been the shift from development aid toward trade and investment. This approach contains valuable elements: private investments and trade relations are essential for economic growth, employment, and innovation, and align with the aspirations of many partner countries to transform their economies, reduce aid dependency, and integrate more effectively into international markets. At the same time, this narrative has several important limitations.

First, it is unrealistic to assume that a full transition from aid to trade can be achieved in low-income countries in the short term. In many of these contexts, the institutional conditions, infrastructure, and market environments necessary to attract large-scale private investment are lacking. This is particularly true for the least developed and fragile states, where food insecurity is often most severe. In such contexts, private actors will have limited appetite to invest, meaning that a rapid reduction in public cooperation would lead to a withdrawal of Dutch engagement without new economic relationships emerging in its place.

Second, trade alone does not address broader food security challenges, such as sustainability, biodiversity loss, and access to healthy diets. Moreover, international trade can also have negative effects, for example through the ecological footprint associated with production and consumption. This calls for a broader approach in which trade is embedded within a strategy that places global public goods at its core.

Policy should therefore not focus on a linear transition from aid to trade, but rather on developing forms of strategic cooperation in which public and private instruments reinforce one another. In this context, it is crucial that development cooperation does not become fragmented into short-term projects, but is instead oriented towards long-term institutional partnerships and systems strengthening. Evaluations of Dutch policy show that such approaches - including sectoral budget support and long-term partnerships embedded in national strategies - are the most effective. The IOB (Policy and Operations Evaluation Department of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs), for example, identifies long-term strategic cooperation on delta programmes with the national government in Bangladesh and with a local authority in Mozambique (the municipality of Beira) as successful cases at the intersection of food security, water and climate.[42]

Another relevant example is the Dutch support for Ethiopia's Agricultural Transformation Institute (ATI). Operating directly under the Office of the Prime Minister's, the ATI has an explicit mandate to address structural bottlenecks in the agricultural sector.[43] Its focus is on increasing productivity through strengthening supply chain organisation, improved access to fertilisers and seeds, and enhancing market access for smallholder farmers. The effectiveness of ATI is closely linked to broader efforts by the Ethiopian government, including the development of an extensive network of agricultural extension agents - one of the largest in Africa. Together, these efforts have contributed to strong productivity growth, including a doubling of yields for maize and other staple crops, and to a 50% reduction in extreme rural poverty. This case underscores the importance of long-term, institutionally embedded cooperation, in which international partners align with national strategies.

At a time when traditional development cooperation is under increasing pressure globally, this also presents an opportunity to recalibrate Dutch engagement. A greater emphasis on local ownership, mutual interests, and long-term partnerships would enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of cooperation.

b) The 'Dutch Diamond'

A second key element of Dutch policy is its emphasis on multi-stakeholder cooperation, often referred to as the Dutch Diamond. This model, in which government, businesses, knowledge institutions, and civil society organizations each contribute from their respective roles, leverages the complementarity of different actors and can help accelerate innovation.[44]

Initiatives like SeedNL illustrate its potential. This programme, in which public and private partners collaborate on the development and distribution of improved seeds, specifically aims to strengthen local seed sectors in low- and middle-income countries. By connecting Dutch knowledge and technology with local needs and markets, SeedNL contributes to the availability of climate-resilient and high-yield crop varieties, thereby supporting both food security and economic development.

However, the number of cases in which this approach realises its full potential remains limited. In practice, the Dutch Diamond risks becoming a general guiding principle or policy mantra, without clear strategic focus or prioritisation. The absence of an overarching food strategy plays a role here. Without clear objectives and choices, it is difficult to determine where the Dutch Diamond approach can truly deliver the greatest added value. A more targeted strategic embedding is therefore required to unlock its full potential.

For the different actors involved, several specific points of attention can be identified:

- Government plays a key role in linking domestic and foreign policy frameworks and strengthening coherence between different ministries, particularly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (BZ), the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food Security and Nature (LVVN), and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate (EZK). Strengthening the diplomatic network, including embassies and agricultural attachés, is essential to be able to effectively respond to opportunities and risks, and to actively connect Dutch stakeholders with relevant partners abroad. The government has various channels at its disposal, such as Invest International, the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO), and development bank FMO, to support and scale up initiatives. It should also take a more active and targeted approach to promoting frontrunners in sustainable business practices, while encouraging lagging firms to accelerate their efforts, including through legislation on responsible business conduct.

- Private sector investment forms the backbone of food security. Companies also play an indispensable role in developing and applying sustainable and innovative technologies. Stronger leadership is needed in this regard. According to the World Benchmarking Alliance, most large agri-food companies are not yet acting at the scale or speed required to achieve healthy and sustainable food systems.[45] Companies in the sector must invest in building more robust and resilient supply chains that prevent food loss and waste. Companies also have an important role to play in deepening strategic partnerships, through equitable collaboration with business partners abroad.

- Knowledge institutions are a critical pillar underpinning the Netherlands' international role in the food system. Continued investment is needed to strengthen innovation and future earning capacity. An overarching food strategy could provide direction and focus. One area of concern is the sharing of knowledge and technology with low-income countries - a domain in which the Netherlands previously held a leading position but has recently fallen behind.[46] Strengthening academic cooperation, for example through scholarships and joint research initiatives with universities in the Global South, would contribute to more reciprocal and sustainable knowledge partnerships.

- Strong engagement with civil society organizations in partner countries is essential for the effectiveness and impact of Dutch investments abroad. Local NGOs, farmer organisations and cooperatives play an indispensable role in actively engaging small-scale producers, enabling responsible business conduct by larger companies, and embedding interventions within their social and institutional context. Dutch civil society organisations can support these actors and act as bridge-builders. They also serve an important accountability function, as critical watchdogs safeguarding public interests and those of vulnerable groups.

A recurring concern is that cooperation with partner countries is still insufficiently based on countries' own priorities and strategies. Too often, local partners are primarily involved in implementation rather than in joint agenda-setting, as noted in a recent report on the functioning of the Dutch Diamond.[47] A more effective approach requires greater emphasis on co-creation and alignment with national and regional development strategies to strengthen local and regional value chains.

c) Conflict-Affected Settings

Given the close interlinkages between conflict and food insecurity, the Netherlands' engagement in conflict-affected settings is of particular importance. The Netherlands has played an active role internationally, including in the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2417 in 2018 on the use of starvation as a method of warfare. Since then, however, this practice appears to have increased rather than declined. The Netherlands could take a more active diplomatic role in promoting compliance with the resolution, including by consistently calling on parties to adhere to it when violations occur.

The Netherlands can also play a role in other ways, using diplomatic flexibility and creativity, at the intersection of conflict and food security. Dutch support for the UNCTAD-facilitated Black Sea Grain Initiative following Russia's invasion of Ukraine provides a good example. Such initiatives demonstrate that targeted diplomatic engagement can help alleviate acute bottlenecks in global food supply chains, even in complex geopolitical circumstances.

At the same time, for an individual country like the Netherlands it is challenging to independently make a decisive impact on the ground in conflict zones and fragile states. In such contexts, it is more appropriate to focus efforts on cooperation through European and multilateral channels, where scale, legitimacy and continuity can be better safeguarded.

2.3 European Policy

European policy forms an essential framework for the Netherlands' engagement in the fields of agriculture, food security, and international cooperation. From 2019 onwards, European policy was strongly shaped by the European Green Deal and the resulting Farm to Fork Strategy, which for the first time explicitly adopted a food systems approach. In addition to agricultural production, it also addressed health, sustainability and the ecological footprint of consumption. In recent years, however, a new shift has become apparent. In recent policy documents, such as the EU Vision for Agriculture and Food, greater emphasis is placed on the competitiveness and earning capacity of European producers, partly in response to geopolitical tensions and concerns about strategic autonomy.[48]

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), accounting for around one-third of the EU budget, remains the most important financial instrument. Although the policy increasingly addresses climate and biodiversity, its primary focus is still on income support. As this support is largely linked to the number of hectares, a substantial share of funding flows to forms of agriculture

associated with livestock production, including support for grassland and feed production.[49] This sits uneasily with broader objectives related to sustainability and health, and underlines the importance of using the negotiations on the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF 2028–34) to pursue further reform of the CAP.

European trade policy also has a major influence on global food systems. Trade agreements illustrate that interests in this area are diverse and sometimes conflicting, not only between countries but also between sectors within Europe. In the debate on the Mercosur agreement, the European livestock sector mostly fears competition from South American imports, while other sectors, such as dairy and arable farming, see export opportunities. The agreement reached with India in early 2026 is based on a different approach, in which agricultural products are largely excluded from liberalisation, while opportunities are created for trade in agricultural technologies such as machinery, seeds and greenhouse systems. This may provide a useful model for future trade agreements, as the liberalisation of food markets often proves to be a politically sensitive stumbling block.

In the area of sustainability and international supply chains, the EU has taken important steps in recent years through legislation on responsible business conduct and deforestation-free supply chains, such as the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive and the EU Deforestation Regulation. These aim to reduce the global footprint of European production and consumption, but face pressure both from European businesses and from countries in the Global South, where there are concerns about increased barriers to accessing the European market. Given the close interconnections between food, climate and biodiversity, it is important that core standards are maintained when revising this legislation. This requires internal coherence within the EU, an active dialogue with partner countries, and supporting policies that enable countries to meet these standards.

European climate policy is also increasingly intersecting with food-related issues. At the end of 2025, EU leaders decided that 5% of the 2040 climate target (a 90% reduction in emissions) may be achieved through international carbon credits. Without adequate safeguards, the associated land use could come at the expense of local food production.

Within EU development policy, considerable experience has been gained in recent years in supporting sustainable agri-food systems in partner countries. Evaluations show that such efforts are most effective when they are closely aligned with national strategies and priorities.[50] In practice, however, fragmentation and overlap between different programmes and member states persist. It would make sense to increasingly organise institutional capacity-building - such as strengthening ministries or national implementing agencies - at the European level. This would enhance effectiveness and reduce the administrative burden on partner countries, which otherwise have to deal with a multitude of separate donors.

Finally, the Global Gateway initiative offers important opportunities to deploy European investments more strategically. To date, strong emphasis has been placed on energy, critical raw materials and associated infrastructure, leading some African stakeholders to view the initiative with scepticism, as a tool primarily aimed at securing access to resources for Europe. It is therefore important to ensure that this instrument is also explicitly used to support the development of regional food markets, particularly in Africa. For example, EU-African partnerships on the sustainable production of fertilisers could help ensure robust and resilient access to this crucial input for both continents.[51]

Initiatives focused on logistics, processing, storage and transport - including of refrigerated products - can play an important role in strengthening intra-African trade, which currently remains limited but is expected to grow significantly due to population growth and urbanisation. This aligns with priorities under the African Continental Free Trade Area and also offers opportunities for Dutch expertise. The Netherlands could take a more active role at the European level in ensuring that this dimension is more prominently reflected in the Global Gateway agenda.

2.4 The Netherlands as part of the multilateral system

The multilateral system for food security and agriculture is under increasing pressure worldwide. This is partly the result of geopolitical tensions, including a more cautious or selective stance by key actors such as the United States, but also reflects structural shortcomings in the functioning of multilateral institutions themselves.

The 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) remain the principal global framework for efforts aimed at food security. SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) is directly relevant, but is closely interconnected with other goals, such as SDG 13 (climate action) and SDG 15 (biodiversity on land). These interlinkages underline the importance of an integrated approach to food systems, connecting production, consumption, health and sustainability.

The UN Food Systems Summit has further reinforced this broader approach. One of its key outcomes was the development of national 'Food Systems Transformation Pathways', through which countries articulate their own priorities and transition trajectories. However, these pathways are voluntary and non-binding. Moreover, their quality and impact vary considerably. In some countries, they have led to genuine policy innovation and political engagement; in others, they remain largely externally driven documents with limited national ownership.

Within the multilateral system, a range of organisations play important but not always well-coordinated roles. The FAO plays a central role in developing international norms, standards and knowledge, for example in the areas of food safety, production statistics, and the monitoring of pests and diseases. At the same time, however, FAO also manages a substantial operational portfolio, largely funded through voluntary contributions, the effectiveness of which is less obvious. The World Food Programme (WFP) is crucial for humanitarian assistance, but faces significant funding shortfalls. In Ethiopia, for example, WFP was forced to sharply reduce food rations for nearly 800,000 refugees to levels below minimum nutritional requirements.[52] Institutions such as the World Bank, regional development banks and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) play an important role in financing investments in agricultural productivity and rural development.

Taken together, however, this landscape of initiatives and institutions does not automatically result in a coherent and effective system. There is overlap, fragmentation and insufficient coordination, while the geopolitical context further complicates the functioning of multilateral cooperation. This calls for a renewed approach, combining efforts to strengthen existing institutions with a clearer division of responsibilities. Such a 'back to basics' approach would entail the FAO focusing primarily on norms, knowledge and information provision; the WFP on humanitarian food assistance; UNICEF on addressing undernutrition; and development banks and IFAD on investments in productivity and long-term development. In this context, programming should focus in particular on fragile settings, where multilateral organisations have a comparative

advantage. In more stable low- and middle-income countries, the role of multilateral programmes could be more limited, with international partners focusing more on mobilising private finance.

In the current geopolitical context, however, meaningful reform of the multilateral system is unlikely to be achieved in the short term. Alongside strengthening existing structures, there is therefore a need for new, more flexible forms of international cooperation. Minilateral cooperation - where a limited group of like-minded countries collaborates on specific issues - can play an important role in this regard, as also explored in the AIV advisory report on relations with the Global South.[53]

Given its position in the global food system, the Netherlands could take the initiative to form a coalition of middle-sized countries from different regions with strong positions in food production, exports or fertilisers. Potential partners include Brazil, Canada, South Africa, Morocco and Thailand. A coalition of this kind could help bring issues onto the international agenda, such as sustainable food supply chains and joint efforts to address hunger in specific conflict settings. In times of crisis - like the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz - it could act swiftly by initiating responses to which other countries may subsequently align themselves.

Finally, transnational non-governmental networks continue to play an important role, particularly when multilateral institutions are under strain. In this context, networks in which businesses, knowledge institutions and civil society organisations work together across borders, help to ensure continuity, knowledge exchange, and trust in international cooperation. Examples include the Tropical Forest Alliance, the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), the World Farmers' Organisation and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development.

3. Conclusion: The importance of a broader perspective

Food security requires urgent and sustained attention in the current geopolitical and ecological context. Chapters 1 and 2 have shown how food systems worldwide are under pressure from armed conflict, rising geopolitical tensions, climate change and biodiversity loss. With its knowledge, technology and networks, the Netherlands is exceptionally well placed to contribute to strengthening the resilience of food systems, both in Europe and beyond. However, to use this position in a focused, effective and responsible manner, an overarching food strategy is needed - one that connects the domestic and international dimensions of food policy.

Two key questions should serve as the starting point. First: What is the current state of the Netherlands' own food system? A sharp analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) will help realistically determine where the Netherlands should focus its efforts and how. Second: What exactly are the Dutch interests in the context of international food security?

On the basis of these two anchor points, a coherent strategy can be developed for a targeted Dutch approach. In this concluding chapter, the AIV provides an initial framework for answering these questions.

SWOT analysis of the Dutch position

Figure 2 presents a concise SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) of the Netherlands' position in the area of food. The upper quadrants (*strengths and weaknesses*) relate to internal factors over which the Netherlands can exercise direct influence through policy. The lower quadrants (*opportunities and threats*) refer to external factors that the Netherlands cannot directly control, but to which policy must effectively respond in order to seize opportunities and better manage external risks and threats.

Figure 2. SWOT analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
• Knowledge and innovative capacity (including in the field of seeds) • Supply chain organisation • Logistics and processing industry	• High ecological footprint, both domestically and internationally • Import dependencies (animal feed, energy, fertilisers) associated with intensive forms of agriculture and livestock production
Opportunities	**Threats**
• Cooperation with new strategic partners based on complementary interests • Strengthening niche positions at the intersection of food and water technology • Responding to strong growth in regional value chains in Africa • Transition to a sustainable food system	• Geopolitical tensions and disruptions in international supply chains, affecting imports and exports • Climate change and the biodiversity crisis

Broader Interests

Although 'the' Dutch interest is difficult to define precisely, the analysis in Chapter 2 has shown that food security relates in multiple ways to broader Dutch interests in the fields of the economy, security and migration. These linkages have always played a role in foreign policy, including development policy. In the current geopolitical context, however, explicitly articulating national interests has gained greater prominence. This can, to some extent, be clarifying, as it may enhance transparency.

Yet this approach also carries risks. If the national interest is interpreted too narrowly and insufficiently connected to the interests of partner countries, it could undermine the effectiveness of policy and ultimately prove counterproductive. A strongly transactional approach, in which cooperation is primarily seen as a series of direct 'deals', may yield short-term benefits, but risks eroding trust, influence and credibility over time.

This risk also arises when food security is too directly linked to Dutch interests in trade, security and migration. These connections may appear intuitive. A commonly cited line of reasoning is that people facing hunger are more likely to take up arms or to migrate, with implications for Europe. Similarly, investments in food security are often assumed to create opportunities for Dutch businesses. While there is an element of truth in each of these arguments, Chapter 2 has shown that the underlying dynamics are complex and context-specific. An overly simplistic interpretation of these relationships results in policies that fail to reflect reality and are therefore ineffective. Several risks can be identified:

(i) Important related factors may be overlooked. Food security is closely intertwined with geopolitics, climate change and biodiversity loss. If these dimensions are not explicitly incorporated into the formulation of interests and policy, there is a risk that interventions will lack sustainability and strategic depth.

(ii) An excessive focus on the short term. Economic interests are often quickly interpreted as immediate export opportunities, potentially diverting attention from investments in sectors that underpin future earning capacity, such as knowledge-intensive applications and agricultural technologies. Investments in the seed sector illustrate this point: building a strong position in emerging markets often requires sustained investment in local relationships, partners and personnel. In the early stages, financial returns may be limited or absent; benefits may only materialise after many years. A long-term perspective is therefore essential.

(iii) A focus on relatively simple and visible interventions, while structural causes remain unaddressed. Improving food security often requires investments in institutional capacity, land rights, market access, infrastructure and good governance. At the international level, structural factors such as the functioning of global markets, geo-economic power relations and the global ecological footprint also play a crucial role. Without attention to these underlying dimensions, the impact of policy will remain limited.

(iv) An overly narrow focus on national interests can weaken attention to shared and complementary interests. Effective international cooperation depends precisely on identifying common interests and developing joint agendas. This not only enhances the effectiveness of interventions, but also strengthens the Netherlands' credibility and strategic positioning as a valuable partner.

In the current international context, it is understandable that Dutch efforts on food security are more explicitly linked to national interests than before. However, this calls for a broader and more strategic approach, in which the Dutch interest is placed in a long-term perspective and considered in conjunction with the interests of partners. This aligns with earlier AIV advisory reports on climate justice (2023) and the Global South (2025), and is also addressed in the forthcoming advisory report on migration partnerships.[54]

Food security is connected to the economy, security and migration through multiple channels, but cannot be reduced to an instrument serving these objectives. It deserves an integrated place within Dutch foreign policy, in which development cooperation, trade, investment and diplomacy are deployed as mutually reinforcing instruments. Only in this way can the Netherlands effectively leverage its strong position in the global food system and contribute to sustainable and equitable solutions to one of the most pressing global challenges.

4. Recommendations

Food security has evolved into a strategic, geopolitical and systemic challenge that cannot be effectively addressed through fragmented policies or a narrow focus on short-term interests. The current global food system is increasingly running up against ecological, social and geopolitical limits, making reforms imperative. The Netherlands holds a strong position in food security, but is not yet making full use of it. To have impact in a changing world order, an overarching long-term strategy is needed - one that approaches food security as part of broader Dutch interests. In this way, the Netherlands can deploy its strong position in a focused manner to support the transition towards sustainable and inclusive food systems. Against this background, the AIV puts forward the following recommendations:

1. **Prioritise the development of an overarching food strategy to enable the targeted use of the Netherlands' strong position in support of an urgent transition towards resilient and sustainable food systems worldwide.**

    - Embed resilience through a focus on reducing and diversifying dependencies, strengthening regional cooperation and shortening supply chains, including in response to the Netherlands' own vulnerabilities.
    - Embed the health of people and planet by promoting healthy diets and reducing the ecological footprint of the Dutch food system. This should include concrete, time-bound targets for reducing the Netherlands' global land and water footprint.
    - Embed innovation and knowledge, recognising that the Netherlands' strong position cannot be taken for granted and requires continued investment in research.

2. **Explicitly define Dutch interests within this strategy and ensure transparency in the context of international cooperation on food security.**

    - Place the link between food security and Dutch economic, security and migration interests within a broader systems perspective, in order to avoid pitfalls such as an excessive focus on the short term.
    - Explicitly recognise global public goods, such as climate and biodiversity, as part of the Netherlands' strategic interests.
    - Accept that not every individual intervention needs to be directly linked to a specific Dutch interest. In humanitarian and fragile contexts, effectiveness should be the primary consideration.
    - Acknowledge that "Dutch interests" do not form a single coherent whole, but encompass diverse and sometimes conflicting dimensions, which may also clash with the interests of other countries. This implies that explicit choices must be made, in line with the strategy.

3. **Use the Netherlands' strong position in food security as a strategic lever for reciprocal partnerships in Asia, Africa and Latin America.**

- Use Dutch embassies and agricultural attachés to actively identify complementarities and shared interests with partner countries, based on the strategy, and with particular focus on the 'combination countries' within the Netherlands' BHOS policy framework.
- Support investments by Dutch actors through the Dutch Diamond approach, including via FMO, Invest International and the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO), while ensuring that these are embedded in equitable partnerships with national actors. This requires co-creation from the agenda-setting stage. Cooperation should focus on sectors where interests converge, such as the processing of agricultural products, cold chain logistics, and productivity-enhancing technologies such as irrigation systems and seeds, thereby contributing to strengthening regional value chains.
- Situate such support within a framework of long-term, strategic and institutional cooperation, aimed at implementing country-driven strategies. This is the most effective way to strengthen local and regional food systems, which act as engines of economic development and employment, thereby also serving Dutch interests in the areas of the economy, security and migration.

4. **Firmly anchor the Netherlands' food-related efforts within the European agenda in order to enhance effectiveness.**

- Make the development of resilient regional value chains a European priority, both within Europe and in other regions, particularly in neighbouring Africa.
- Direct Global Gateway more explicitly towards strategic investments that support stronger regional food systems, including processing, logistics and fertiliser production. This aligns well with the priorities of African countries.
- Promote trade and investment agreements that leave space for strengthening sustainable regional value chains, with an emphasis on liberalising trade in agricultural technologies, in which the Netherlands has a strong position. Support farmers and businesses in low- and middle-income countries in meeting standards for the European market.
- Build coalitions with other EU member states to use the negotiations on the new MFF (2028–34) to advance further reform of the CAP, aimed at accelerating the transformation and sustainability of the European agricultural sector.
- Ensure that the use of carbon credits for European emission reductions does not increase pressure on land use at the expense of local food production elsewhere.

5. Invest in the renewal of multilateral cooperation to address global hunger.

- Initiate a food diplomacy coalition (for example with Brazil, South Africa, Canada, Morocco and Thailand) that can act as a dynamic catalyst for multilateral solutions and respond rapidly in times of crisis. Such a coalition could jointly support the implementation of the UN resolution against the use of starvation as a method of warfare and help mobilise additional resources for humanitarian assistance.
- Strengthen efforts to improve the effectiveness of UN institutions (FAO, WFP, IFAD, UNICEF), with a clearer division of labour: norm-setting, information provision and coordination for FAO; emergency assistance and protection for WFP; investments in productivity and rural development for IFAD; and the fight against undernutrition for UNICEF.
- Direct multilateral programming to areas where the need is greatest, where national government capacity is lacking, and where multilateral institutions offer clear added value compared to individual actors such as the Netherlands. This is particularly relevant in fragile settings.
- Support transnational, non-governmental networks of businesses, universities and civil society organisations, such as GAIN and CGIAR. Especially when intergovernmental cooperation is under pressure, such networks are essential for ensuring continuity, innovation and trust in international cooperation.

Sincerely,

Bert Koenders

Chair

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[54] This is a joint advisory report by the AIV and the Advisory Council on Migration on comprehensive migration partnerships, and will be published in 2026.

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