

# CONNECTING COMMUNITIES

*From deep roots  
to new shoots*

**Strategic plan 2026-2031**

**From deep roots to new shoots.**

Woord en Daad has deep roots. Based on biblical values and in close connection with our supporters in the Netherlands and our partners worldwide, we have been doing our work for more than 50 years. Over all those years, we have grown into a robust yet agile organization. New shoots continue to grow from this sturdy trunk. This allows us to continue connecting communities.

The tree says a lot about what we consider important in our work:

**Meeting.** Throughout the centuries, people around the world have used trees as a central meeting place for their community. A place where people come together and feel at home.

**Living together.** People are rooted in common ground and connected to the same trunk. At the same time, each person is unique, like spreading branches that bear leaves and fruit.

**Breathing.** Trees sustain life. They provide oxygen and are a place to catch your breath. The Bible speaks of the “Tree of Life,” whose leaves provide healing and restoration.

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# Foreword

## From deep roots to new shoots

After weeks dominated by news of war, geopolitical tensions and elections, the stillness of the African countryside during a journey can strike you deeply. It feels like a breath of fresh air, especially when, at the close of the day, the sun sets, the sky turns red, and seems to merge with the reddish landscape of the Sahel.

You rest beneath a tree, seeking shade. You listen and speak with people from the village. And in that moment, you realise you are taking part in an ancient tradition: the meeting place. Beneath the tree, people see and hear each other. The tree brings people together. We live in a time marked by polarisation and unrest: wars, the threat of violence, and global instability. And yet, the peace of meeting one another beneath the tree remains within reach.

At Woord en Daad, people also find each other under that metaphorical tree. In business groups, volunteer groups, and thrift stores, spaces emerge where faith and commitment take practical form. Well-functioning communities are part of God's design for the world, and a blessing to everyone within them. Rooted in the Christian faith, communities are also coming together across the globe. In a world shaped by history and unequal power structures, equality cannot be taken for granted. That is why mutual and attentive listening, with the intent to grow, holds such value. When it leads to honest conversations, it can sharpen and enrich all who take part.

The tree that Woord en Daad has become now offers such a space for encounter, a place that has flourished for over fifty years. In the years to come, we envision this tree extending its branches even further, with new shoots springing from deep roots.

We owe our growth to the rich soil of our Dutch support base and our global network of partners. They form the fertile ground from which we continue to grow and bear fruit. In this strategic period, we remain entrepreneurial and forward-looking. We continue to seek innovation, to question how the development sector operates, and to pursue partnerships shaped by local ownership.

We aim to steer less, and facilitate more. The voices of local communities deserve to be heard. Together with them, we seek lasting livelihoods and meaningful futures for people living in vulnerable situations. In this, we take on supportive and catalytic roles towards our partners and the wider sector, with the Southern agenda leading the discourse. Our focus is shifting: from running our own programmes to strengthening those led by our partners. As dialogue partners, we also bring our own perspective to the table.

In this way, we continue to grow - rooted in faith, nourished by encounter, with hope in our hearts, and attentive to the voices beneath the tree. Because every person matters in the world God created, and He sees the one among the millions.



*Rina Molenaar*  
Chief Executive Officer



*Jacob Jan Vreugdenhil*  
Chief Program Officer



# 1. Why now?



The world is changing rapidly. Climate change, conflict, technological acceleration and rising inequality are placing pressure on societies across the globe. In many countries, civic space is shrinking. At the same time, over 120 million people are forcibly displaced, and pressure on livelihoods continues to increase. Young generations - particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, where the population is set to double by 2050 - are searching for employment and a future. Pressure on natural resources is mounting, while migration and urbanisation are reshaping communities from within.

The Dutch landscape of international cooperation is also shifting. Public support for development cooperation is declining, political debate is hardening, polarisation is growing, and trust in institutions is eroding. At the same time, awareness of responsible business, sustainability and meaningful cooperation is rising, giving way to new forms of solidarity. Changes both far and near affect our entire network: from local communities and Southern partners to policymakers, businesses and our support base.

Now more than ever, there is a need for organisations that prioritise relationship, justice and local ownership. Shifting power dynamics between the Global North and South underscore the urgency of partnerships built on equity and shared ownership.

In this context, Woord en Daad seeks to act with hopeful engagement. With our eyes on vulnerable neighbours, we work with professionalism and entrepreneurial spirit alongside partners across the globe, striving

for structural change. We are shaped by a tradition of relational proximity, social awareness, and a commitment to connect people and networks. **Our mission is grounded in a Biblical vision of justice, compassion and responsibility.** This conviction guides our work: with our feet on the ground, our hands on the plough, and ultimately to have hope for the future.

As we look ahead to 2031, we understand what this will demand of us: to remain faithful to our calling, to walk alongside our partners and supporters, and to face the challenges of our time with courage. We aim to do justice by contributing to just systems, making a tangible difference in people's lives, and strengthening local ownership. At the same time, we recognise that not everything will succeed. Sometimes, our efforts fall short. Even then, we remain committed, sustained by a hope that sees beyond the brokenness. We continue to seek what may take root and flourish in the midst of it all.



## 2. Our strategic direction: three policy themes

In this new strategic period, our mission remains the same: in a broken world, marked by poverty and injustice, we seek signs of God's coming Kingdom. We act from a Biblical vision of compassion, justice, and responsibility. In the face of brokenness, we choose hopeful engagement.

We believe that every person is created in the image of God, inherently valuable, and called to live a life of meaning. This conviction gives us direction: to act with integrity and solidarity, and to build relationships that contribute to lasting change.

Based on this mission, we have shaped our strategic course for the period 2026–2031. It is built around three guiding policy themes, each framed by a central question. These questions help us navigate our direction and define our priorities.



### Who is being heard?

**Engaging grassroots voices** - When people have influence over decisions that affect their lives, it fosters ownership and leads to more relevant and sustainable outcomes.

This applies to decisions made by governments as well as within our partnerships. That is why we work together with local communities, leaders, and organisations to build equitable collaboration and amplify voices that are not, or not sufficiently, heard. Through our networks, we aim to elevate Southern perspectives in the North. At the same time, we draw on our presence in the Netherlands and Brussels to ensure our constituency is well-represented on issues relevant to our work. We intentionally create space for the knowledge and lived experience of the communities we work with in the South, and for the perspectives of our supporters in the Netherlands. Together, we shape shared priorities that are widely supported and locally anchored.



### How do people live with dignity?

**Enabling dignified livelihoods** - A good life is about more than a liveable income. It is about having the strength to persevere, the freedom to make your own choices, and the hope to look ahead. Together with our partners, we work with communities whose lives are under pressure, particularly due to climate change and forced migration. We contribute to solutions that promote decent work, sustainable agriculture, and fair economic systems that respect both people and the environment, now and for generations to come. In the Netherlands, we encourage citizens, companies, and government actors (including at the European level) to pursue justice for our global neighbours.



### How do we use technology for good?

**Enhancing responsible digitalisation** - Technology can connect or divide. At Woord en Daad, we see digitalisation as a tool for sustainable development, provided it is used fairly and inclusively. We collaborate with partners to develop digital solutions that are grounded in reality, from remote learning to digital access to markets. We advocate for responsible data use, support the development of digital skills, and work to ensure that technology becomes an enabler, not a barrier. In the Netherlands, we also see opportunities to use digital tools to strengthen our connection with our supporters. At the same time, we remain alert to the ethical implications and societal debates surrounding digital technology.



## 3. How we work

Connecting communities lies at the heart of how we work. Together with our global partners, we bring people together for dialogue, mutual understanding and shared decision-making that leads to lasting change. It is this relational way of working that gives Woord en Daad deep roots which are continuously nourishing and sustaining our mission.

To help bring about sustainable change, Woord en Daad takes on **four organisational roles**: **Connector**, **Catalyst**, **Knowledge broker** and **Influencer**. These roles are taking clearer shape through our regional approach and are brought to life across our areas of thematic expertise. Here, we see new shoots in our way of working.

### Our four organisational roles



**Connector** – We bring people and worlds together. By building bridges between communities and across different types of organisations, we foster cohesion and build networks that enable shared ownership.



**Catalyst** – We help new initiatives take root by linking ideas, people, and resources. In doing so, we create space for local leadership, forge new collaborations, and mobilise investments in community-led solutions.



**Knowledge broker** – We ensure people can learn from one another by making knowledge accessible and applicable. By linking existing insights to real-life experience, we support informed decision-making, increase the relevance of interventions, and ensure lessons learned are widely shared.



**Influencer** – We work to ensure that stories and insights inform policy and behaviour change. In the Global South, we support our partners to raise their voices. In the Global North, we help shape public and political discourse, leading to policy reform, greater awareness, and a growing movement toward more just systems.

### How these roles work together

Each role contributes to positive change, but it's in their interplay that sustainable transformation takes shape. **Connection** (●) is often the starting point: bringing together people, networks and perspectives. This opens space for **catalysing action** (●): developing initiatives, strengthening leadership, and building partnerships. These collaborations fuel **knowledge exchange** (●): collecting, contextualising, and making insights usable. Together, these roles support **influence** (●): amplifying relevant voices and data to shape policy, public debate and societal change.

### Concrete examples

- A regional learning workshop (●) where Southern partners exchange experiences on climate adaptation (●) leads to the development of a joint project proposal (●), Woord en Daad brings a donor on board (●) and invites policymakers to join public dialogue (●), made possible by the established network (●).
- During a visit to the Netherlands, a Southern partner shares first-hand insights about the impact of drought on food security (●). A Member of Parliament picks up the story (●), and later raises parliamentary questions. Meanwhile, a pilot project on regenerative agriculture is co-developed with the partner (●), incorporating lessons learned from other countries (●).

### What this delivers

- New partnerships and funding opportunities (●)
- Better decision-making grounded in shared knowledge and experience (●)
- Networks that grow and thrive independently of Woord en Daad (●)
- Policy impact and strengthened local voice (●)

# 3.

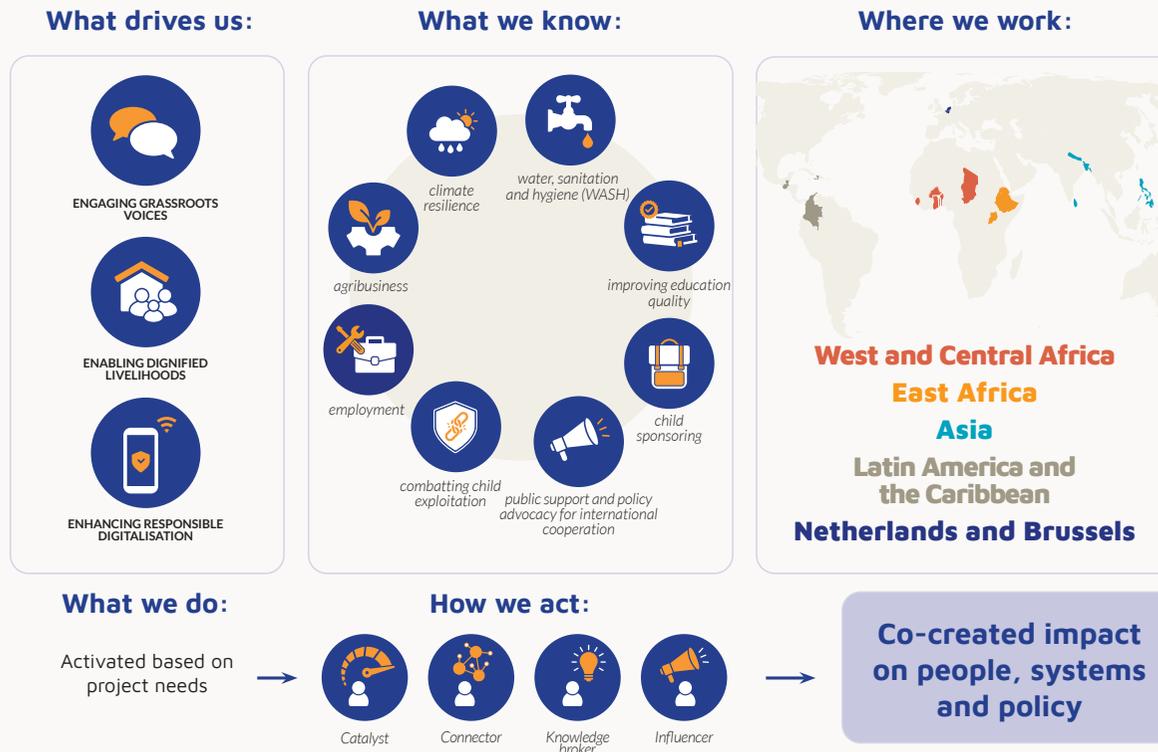
## Working by region

We organise our work across five regions: West and Central Africa, East Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Netherlands and Brussels. Each region has its own unique story, with distinct opportunities, challenges, and partnerships. Each region is supported by a duo of regional strategic advisors, one based in the South and one in the North. Together, they bring complementary perspectives, networks, and experiences. Their role is to coordinate across actors, foster mutual learning, and help keep our work aligned, grounded in local realities and connected to the bigger picture.

## Expertise groups – knowledge that works

Within each region, we respond to locally identified needs through tailored thematic plans. Practical, applicable knowledge is contributed through flexible expertise groups: child sponsoring, educational quality improvement, combatting child exploitation, agribusiness, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), climate resilience, employment, public support and policy advocacy for international cooperation. These expertise groups co-design initiatives, synthesise insights, ask the right questions, and translate knowledge into concrete action. New expertise groups may be formed during this strategic period, responding to evolving needs from our regional partners.

### HOW WOORD EN DAAD CONNECTS POLICY THEMES, THEMATIC EXPERTISE AND REGIONS FOR GREATER IMPACT



### Serving our target groups

By combining our roles and themes in a region-specific way, we build a strong foundation for serving our partners and the communities they work with - in both the Global South and the North. By investing in our Southern partner network, we reach groups who have always been central to Woord en Daad's mission: children, young people, smallholder farmers, marginalised households, and communities lacking the means to escape poverty. Our Dutch constituency, in whose name we carry out this work, remains equally vital. Through our roles as connector, catalyst, knowledge broker, and influencer, we find new ways to nurture this mutual engagement, building a bridge between action and solidarity.

### Strategic objectives 2026-2031

We have formulated seven beacons each with a strategic objective that will guide us in the coming years. Every quarter, in our navigation meeting, we will review whether we're staying on course.

#### 1. Mission and Vision:

We stay rooted in our Biblical calling to justice and compassion with distinctive values in all partnerships

#### 2. Focal Policy Themes:

We integrate our focal policy themes throughout the portfolio with documented track record showing substantial results



Engaging grassroots voices



Enabling dignified livelihoods



Enhancing responsible digitalisation

#### 3. Connector role:



We build value-based, long-term partnerships across North and South that foster mutual understanding, locally-owned change and global citizenship

#### 4. Catalyst role:



We mobilize people, ideas and resources for innovative resource models reducing dependency and amplifying sustainable, locally-owned change

#### 5. Knowledge broker role:



We facilitate the development, exchange and use of local and contextualised knowledge to inform decisions, nurture learning and promote organisational strengthening enhancing sustainable locally-owned change

#### 6. Influencer role:

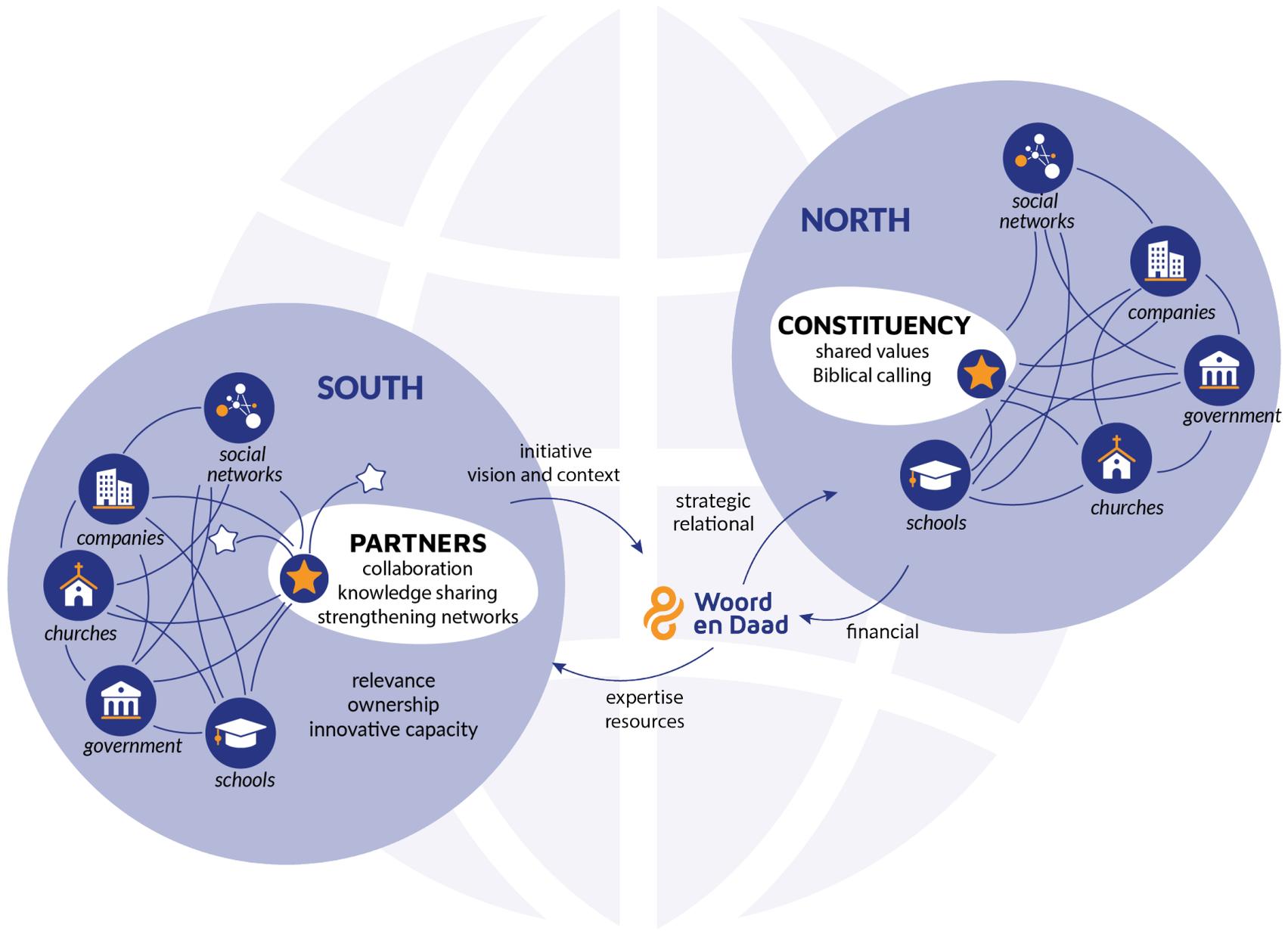


We amplify grassroots voices to shape public and political discourse in North and South, empower civil society, and foster global citizenship

#### 7. Staff development:

We foster an adaptive, people-centred and result-oriented organisation by empowering staff to lead, learn, and innovate.

4.



## 4. Partnership as community

At Woord en Daad, we cultivate partnerships grounded in mutual respect and shared ownership. Each partner contributes complementary expertise, experience, and networks. We work together as equals, guided by the strategies and visions developed by our Southern partners.

To us, collaboration means letting the Southern context take the lead. It begins with listening. We do not take someone else's seat at the table, but we create space for leadership that is locally rooted and contextually relevant.

We work with two kinds of networks. First, our **core partners**, organisations with whom we have long-standing relationships and who share our Christian identity. We also represent them in our work in the Netherlands and Brussels, including engaging and mobilising our constituency. Second, we collaborate within **broader alliances** to pursue shared goals with a wide range of actors.

### We are connected in all directions

#### North-North

In the Netherlands and Europe, we work with churches, social networks, schools, companies, and donors. These partnerships are strategic, relational, and financial in nature, anchored in shared values and our Biblical calling to compassion and justice. Donors, volunteers, and schools actively contribute to our mission.

#### North-South & South-North

We engage with initiatives led by Southern partners. Together, we co-develop programmes and processes, guided by their context and vision. We offer support, contribute technical expertise, and mobilise resources to strengthen locally defined plans. Leadership and decision-making are rooted as locally as possible, with mutual trust as the foundation.

#### South-South

We facilitate collaboration between Southern organisations and promote regional learning and exchange. Our aim is to strengthen existing networks and elevate locally driven innovation. South-South partnerships foster relevance, ownership, and transformative potential.

#### In doing so, we build bridges between:

- Donors and a wide range of organisations – through shared storytelling and transparent decision-making.
- Our Christian values and public policy – through open dialogue and collective action.
- North and South – through equitable partnerships, focused on shared growth and mutual responsibility.



# 5. People and organisation

At Woord en Daad, it's about both identity and mindset. We do what we say, and say what we do. This approach traces back to our founding in 1973 by entrepreneur Ivo 't Lam and pastor Herman Hegger - two men who believed that faith should be lived out through doing justice. Mr. 't Lam's call to "Do what you promise" still echoes in how we work today.

## Entrepreneurship and shared ownership

We work in multidisciplinary teams of colleagues from both the Global North and South, using a project-based and results-oriented approach. Everyone contributes their own expertise and plays a meaningful part in the whole. We foster a culture of entrepreneurship and decentralised responsibility: colleagues are given the space to spot opportunities, make decisions, and co-create new initiatives. Leadership is shared, and learning happens in practice.

## Growth in mindset and skills

Our four organisational roles - **Catalyst**, **Connector**, **Knowledge broker**, and **Influencer** - require a conscious and deliberate way of working. We invest in strengthening this mindset among staff, partners, and volunteers. We equip people to bring together diverse perspectives, work across cultures, communicate stories that move people, influence with integrity, and work on change and complexity.



Catalyst



Connector



Knowledge broker



Influencer

Woord en Daad is committed to maintaining a safe working environment. Identity and integrity go hand in hand. In this new strategic period, integrity will be embedded within our operational management. Our Woord en Daad Academy also supports professional integrity by offering space for moral reflection and the

discussion of ethical dilemmas in our "Moral Council," ensuring careful, values-based decision-making.

From our faith, we also feel called to take responsibility for people, society, and creation. For Woord en Daad, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is not an optional extra but a natural expression of our mission. The seven core principles of ISO 26000 closely align with our core values and form the basis of a sustainable, future-oriented CSR policy.

## Woord en Daad Academy 2.0

To support professional growth, we are renewing the **Woord en Daad Academy** into an accessible learning platform built around the practical questions staff encounter in their daily work. The Academy will offer:

- Learning paths tailored to each of the four strategic roles;
- Opportunities for cross-team, cross-country, and cross-partner learning;
- Leadership development.

There are three core competencies we aim to make visible across the organisation:

- **Ethical data use** – working carefully and transparently with data, and using high-quality information to guide decisions
- **Intercultural connection** – bridging perspectives and contexts.
- **Storytelling** – communicating clearly and accessibly, grounded in both facts and human experience.

We invest in people to strengthen craftsmanship, deepen connectedness, and develop leadership that is rooted in practice, with the resilience to stay on track in a challenging world.



## 6. Resources and funding

Woord en Daad is a constituency organisation. For over fifty years, our mission has been made possible through prayer, commitment, active engagement, and financial support from those who stand with us. Churches, schools, volunteers, individual donors, businesses, and foundations not only provide essential income, but also serve as sounding boards and strategic partners. This connected community forms a reliable foundation on which we continue to build.

To ensure the long-term sustainability of our work, we are committed to a funding mix that reflects who we are while remaining sufficiently diverse. We aim for 70% of our resources to come from private contributions, through individual donors, philanthropic funds, and our own revenue streams such as second-hand shops, services, and co-funding from partners. The remaining 30% will come from public funding sources such as the European Union and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This balance ensures agility and long-term resilience.

In the coming policy period, we will actively explore new forms of funding, including impact investing and locally sourced capital from within the Global South. These approaches will help us create space for local entrepreneurship, support innovative models, and invest together in solutions that emerge from within communities themselves.

In our roles as **Connector** and **Catalyst**, we take an entrepreneurial approach, exploring new ways to mobilise the financing of tomorrow. We welcome collaboration with people and organisations that value both meaningful results and the identity and values we stand for.



# 7. Learning and adaptation

We work with the world as it is: complex, often challenging, and constantly evolving. That's why we are committed to building a culture where reflection is second nature, decisions are well-informed, and course correction is seen as a strength.

## Learning in practise – with and from one another

Learning happens in the everyday work we do. At the level of our three policy themes, this is supported by colleagues who specialise in each area and translate their knowledge and insights into practical guidance for peers and partners. At the organisational level, we implement a strategic learning agenda focused on two key themes: identity & professionalism and equitable partnerships.

We regularly plan evaluations of specific projects and partnerships. We also make space for feedback and ensure that insights are widely shared. Our monitoring systems support this learning process.

## Data-informed action, people-centred practice

Across different levels of the organisation, we use dashboards to consolidate data and provide actionable insights. In the coming policy period, we will further strengthen our use of data to enable smarter decision-making, more targeted learning, and greater transparency. We increasingly draw on monitoring, feedback, and research to inform our choices and make impact visible. We also aim to responsibly apply artificial intelligence in selected areas of our work, where it contributes to our goals. It is important to us that data remains explicitly a means to an end, we continue to weigh ethical considerations carefully and are committed to communicating authentically with both our supporters and the communities we serve.

We see data as a tool for doing justice to people and communities. That's why, beyond donor accountability, we also aim to improve access to relevant information for our partners and target groups, whether by enabling local

governments to monitor water point maintenance or by helping farmers access market prices and weather forecasts to support their livelihoods. In doing so, we strengthen shared ownership and informed decision-making in practice.

## Staying on course – together, every quarter

Four times a year, we 'navigate': an organisation-wide reflection moment in which observations from various perspectives are brought together. We assess how our policy themes are developing, how partnerships are functioning, and how well we remain connected to our support base. We also ask ourselves: are we still aligned with our mission?

We combine data with field experience and insights from different layers of our work - ranging from policy to implementation. This creates a well-rounded perspective to help us stay on course, or adjust where necessary. Midway through the strategic period, after three years, we take extra time for a strategic review, looking at what we've learned, what trends are emerging, and how we want to adapt as an organisation.

## Anticipating risks and thinking ahead

We operate in a world where risk is a given. By preparing well, developing scenarios, and testing them internally, we increase our resilience. Risk analysis is closely linked to an adaptive way of working: we continuously respond to what the context demands, to stay relevant and deliver added value.

At the heart of our work remains the encounter under the tree. As Woord en Daad, we work with people and for people. The context in which these individuals live is constantly shifting, which can place pressure on solidarity. This is exactly what motivates us from deep roots to let new shoots come to flourish.



## COLOPHON

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At Woord en Daad, we are driven by a Christian commitment to justice and compassion, striving to restore dignity for every individual. Already more than 50 years, we have been dedicated to fostering sustainable change through innovative and entrepreneurial approaches. Our impact is made possible by the strong partnerships we forge with loyal supporters and experienced collaborators. Together, we continue to create lasting, life-changing solutions that uplift communities and transform lives.

Photos:  
Woord en Daad

