

Sahel Trade and Investment Promotion Programme

Forging economic
partnerships between Mali,
Niger, Burkina Faso and
the Netherlands



This programme is implemented by NABC at the demand of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Mali.



Kingdom of the Netherlands

About NABC

NABC is the main Africa-focused business community in the Benelux. Our network consists of more than 300 diversified and engaged members; a wide community of African and Dutch Ambassadors, sector associations, Chambers of Commerce, Investment Promotion Agencies and over 10,000 Africa-focused business contacts.

NABC strongly believes that the private sector has a crucial role to play towards an Africa that is economically thriving and globally competitive in trade and investment. We aim to inform and connect businesses with Africa's opportunities and enable our community to make confident business decisions and succeed in Africa.

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Table of contents

	5	Preface
Facts & figures	6	
	7	Introducing the Sahel trade and investment promotion programme
Timeline	9	
	10	Spotlight on Africallia 2018: West African Business Development Forum
Spotlight on Agribusiness trade mission to the Netherlands	13	
	16	Spotlight on The Francophone Africa Business Forum
Regional partner network	18	
	19	Results & lessons learned



Preface

In September 2013, Mali organised democratic elections after almost two years of turbulence. Only two months later, the Netherlands was the first European country to mobilise a trade delegation to Bamako. At the initiative of the Dutch Embassy in Mali, NABC organised a trade mission, in which twelve Dutch companies participated. The mission turned out to be a great success, embraced by the Malian private sector and government.

Following this mission - and multiple other joint activities between 2013 and 2016 - NABC was selected by the Dutch Embassy in Bamako to implement the Sahel Trade and Investment Promotion Programme to increase trade and investments between Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and the Netherlands. Besides fostering private sector linkages, the programme also focused on capacity-building of local institutions, regional cooperation and knowledge-sharing.

As a result of our tireless efforts, we are proud to say that now, in 2019, the Netherlands has become one of the preferred economic partners in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. At the same time, the number of Dutch companies active and/or interested in the three Sahelian countries has grown immensely (p. 6).

Through this programme, NABC has succeeded in building strong relations of mutual benefit, with the Chambers of Commerce, the Investment Promotion Agencies and start-up incubators in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso (p. 18). Recently, this has resulted into the signing of an MoU where NABC and its nine partners aim to work more closely for the purpose of strong trade and investment relations between the four countries.

We are proud of these results because they show that a consistent approach contributes in building sustainable economic partnerships - at all levels - between the Netherlands and their African partner countries.

We hope you enjoy reading what has been achieved thus far.

Marina Diboma
Deputy Managing Director, NABC



Facts & Figures

6 trade missions were organised

- 1 Trade mission to Mali
- 1 Trade mission to Niger
- 1 Trade mission to Burkina Faso

18 Dutch companies participated in trade missions to Mali, Niger and/or Burkina Faso.

Activities covered 4 Dutch top sectors: agri & food, energy, logistics and water.



3 Trade missions to the Netherlands

200

Business men and women from Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso visited the Netherlands on a trade mission.

170

Dutch companies and organisations met with the delegations of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso in the Netherlands.

Network of regional partners more than doubled between 2016-2018

9
3

55 **23** **40**

500

Entrepreneurs in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso were informed about knowledge/expertise, business opportunities and financial support systems in the Netherlands.

3000

NABC contacts were informed about business opportunities in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso through its communication channels.

At least **55** Dutch companies are currently active in Mali, **40** in Burkina Faso and **23** in Niger.

Introducing the programme

Connecting challenges in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso with Dutch knowledge and expertise has been the starting point of the Sahel trade and investment promotion programme. The programme evolved from a strong, shared vision between NABC and the Embassy of the Netherlands in Mali, that targeted business promotion activities would help to introduce business opportunities in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso to the right audience, to connect possible business partners, and to establish sustainable win-win partnerships.



Impression video of incoming mission 2016: [watch the video](#)



Facilitating trade and investments

Between 2016 and 2018, multiple trade missions from Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso to the Netherlands, and vice versa, were organised by NABC at the demand of the Dutch Embassy and in cooperation with its local partners. While the missions to Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso were multisectoral, the missions to the Netherlands were more specifically focused on agribusiness (2016, 2018) and water, energy and logistics (2017). The mission to Niger consisted of a Niger-Netherlands business seminar, matchmaking and company visits around Niamey. The missions to Burkina Faso and Mali were organised surrounding the bi-annual B2B matchmaking forum 'Africallia' and the high-level 'Invest in Mali' Forum. During the missions to the Netherlands, the African participants were able to participate in business fora including matchmaking with Dutch companies, visits of various expos (Aquatech Amsterdam, VIV Europe and the Global Forum for Innovations in Agriculture) and visits to Dutch companies. The missions of 2017 and 2018 were planned in sequence with the International Water Week (Amsterdam, 2017) and the International Week for Smart Food Production (Utrecht, 2018).



Types of activities

In the context of the programme the following activities were organised:

- Trade missions from Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso to the Netherlands and vice versa, including matchmaking, expert workshops, networking receptions, company visits and visits to expos.
- Business fora (e.g. FAB Forum).
- Preparatory missions.
- Regional meetings with programme partners.
- Continued follow-up with companies and information sharing between partners.

The Sahel is made up of some of the world's least developed countries, and at the same time the world's youngest populations. Half of the population in the Sahel is under 25, and every year 11 million people enter the labour force.



It is clear that Dutch companies increasingly begin to see challenges in the Sahel as opportunities for business.

Dutch top sectors

In organising the activities, much attention was paid to the information shared with potential and confirmed participants. Information meetings were held in Bamako, Niamey, Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso to inform companies about the Dutch top sectors; private sector development (PSD) instruments offered by the Dutch government to support local small and medium enterprises (SMEs); and the practical details of taking part in the missions. These meetings were organised in close collaboration with the programme partners: the local Chambers of Commerce, the Investment Promotion Agencies and start-up incubators. In addition, more than 3000 NABC contacts were informed about the business opportunities in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso.

Involving the private sector ecosystem

Since the first mission to Mali in 2013, NABC's partner network in the Sahel has grown significantly. At the start of the programme in 2016, the Chambers of Commerce of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso were appointed as main local contacts for coordination on the ground. Soon, also the Investment Promotion Agencies (agences de promotion des investissements, APIs) were introduced to the network. Since 2017, also incubators representing the innovative start-up ecosystem in the three countries became part of the programme. Besides regular contact during the preparation phase of missions and other activities, also annual 'regional meetings' were organised to discuss progress with all partners (three partner institutions per country, NABC and the Embassy of the Netherlands in Mali), possible changes of direction or focus to the programme, and to plan for next activities. Besides evaluating, planning and synchronizing activities, the meetings also figured as important moments to share experiences between partners. This comprehensive approach, involving the main private sector players in each country, greatly supports the effectiveness and sustainability of the programme on the long-term. ♀

Doing business in the Sahel

The Sahel is an ecoclimatic area geographically spanning from Senegal all the way to Somalia. The Sahel is made up of some of the world's least developed countries, and at the same time the world's youngest populations. Half of the population in the Sahel is under 25, and every year 11 million people enter the labour force.

The NABC programme focuses on core Sahelian countries Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso; the three countries under the mandate of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Bamako. The three countries were for a long time unknown territory for many Dutch companies. Of course the language barrier played a role, as well as the historically strong position

of French companies in the area. Also the fact that many countries face significant political and security challenges was - and to a certain extent still is - a reason for Dutch companies to focus on more stable (West) African countries instead. However, over the last two years, tides seem to have changed. It is clear that Dutch companies increasingly begin to see challenges in the Sahel as opportunities for business. Many more Dutch companies are currently active - or interested - in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. An evaluation amongst Dutch companies showed that the Sahel trade and investment programme played an important role in facilitating business linkages. To find out more about the results, see p. 19.



Timeline

2018

19 June: FAB Forum 2018



16 - 22 June: Agribusiness trade mission to the Netherlands



8 - 15 May: Coordination mission to Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso

26 February - 2 March: Regional meeting in Burkina Faso

19 - 24 February: Africallia mission in Burkina Faso



2017

5 - 9 December: Trade mission to the Invest in Mali Forum



1 November: FAB Forum 2017



29 October - 4 November: Water/Energy/Logistics mission to the Netherlands



18 - 29 July: Coordination mission to Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso

15 - 20 May: Information mission in Burkina Faso

6 - 10 March: Trade mission to Niger



2016

30 August: Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso Economic Forum in the Netherlands

28 August - 1 September: Agribusiness trade mission to the Netherlands



9 - 20 July: Coordination mission to Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso



Source all pictures: NABC

Africallia 2018: West African Business Development Forum

In February 2018, 16 Dutch businessmen and women went on a trade mission to Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. The mission took place in the context of the 5th edition of Africallia. This West African B2B matchmaking forum is based on the successful model of its French mother organisation 'Futurallia', where companies engage in up to 15 face-to-face meetings. In addition, companies could showcase their company in the Holland Pavilion and take part in the various formal and informal networking moments.

The 16 participants that took part in the mission represented twelve Dutch companies active in various sectors: agriculture, energy, water, logistics, healthcare, technology, the creative industry, and business consulting. During the introductory meeting at the Sky Lounge of Hotel Bravia, the delegates had the chance to meet each other and share their expectations for the week. NABC took note of each participant's objectives for joining the mission, and made sure to check up with them during the week to see whether they were on track to meet these.

On the second day, most delegates had planned their own meetings or prepared themselves for the business forum. In the evening, an official dinner was organised for the delegation. The Honorary Consul of the Netherlands in Burkina Faso and a representative of the Investment Promotion Agency of Burkina Faso were invited to dine and network with the delegates, and to give their advice on doing business in Burkina Faso.

Formal and informal networking

The first day of the forum was opened by Mr. Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, president of the Republic of Burkina Faso. After his words of welcome, he made a tour around all stands, and shook hands with the delegation at the Holland stand. Then the B2Bs started, with the delegates spending the entire day between the 30 minute B2B sessions, workshops in the plenary room and some additional networking at the Holland stand. In the evening all Africallia participants were invited for a wonderful dinner in the garden of Silmandé Hotel, where they could dine and enjoy live music and dancing.



“The first day of the forum was opened by Mr. Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, president of the Republic of Burkina Faso



“It was my second time participating in Africallia. From the 15 B2B matchmaking sessions we had in 2018, we are still in contact with 10 interesting companies of which two have already resulted in concrete business. Ruud ten Hoorn, HSB Identification



Bas de Vaal (Portside) shaking hands with president Kaboré.

The next day was again a day full of matchmaking sessions, workshops and networking. The heads of the various country delegations headed out to Ouagadougou for some official visits. In the city, they got to meet Moro Naba, the king of the Mossi people of Burkina Faso. Afterwards, the heads of delegations were received by the Prime Minister of Burkina Faso to discuss the business relations between their respective countries and Burkina Faso. In the evening all participants once more got to enjoy a meal together during the closing party that took place at the OUAGA 2000 Salle des Banquets, and to look back on a productive week.

Well-organised and quality B2B matchmaking

The delegates were highly impressed by the effectiveness of the B2B matchmaking meetings. The schedules were packed, the logistics well-arranged and the meetings fruitful and in-depth. The formal and informal networking moments organised by Africallia (welcome ceremony, gala dinner, and farewell party) were very much appreciated. And last but not least, delegates were able to meet companies not only from Burkina Faso, but also from most other West African countries including Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, Togo and Tunisia - all in one business trip!



“The mission surpassed my expectations in terms of participants and organisation. Due to the relatively high entrance fees, only professional and capable businesses were selected to participate. Our most important contacts were suppliers of bio and fair trade products. Maren Peters, Tradin Organic



Spotlight on:
Incoming mission

Agribusiness trade mission to the Netherlands

In June 2018, 92 business delegates from Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso flew to the Netherlands to participate in the very first International Week for Smart Food Production. During this week, three agricultural expositions were taking place at the same time in the Jaarbeurs, Utrecht: the livestock/poultry expo VIV Europe, the Halal Expo and the Global Forum for Innovations in Agriculture (GFIA). In addition, the 2018 edition of the Francophone Africa Business Forum (FAB Forum) focused on the theme of 'partnerships for sustainable value chains in agriculture'.

Participating in the FAB Forum and the expos in Utrecht allowed the delegates from Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso to meet hundreds of Dutch and international companies in a single week. NABC made sure to carefully prepare the delegates for the mission. Information about the Dutch expertise in the agrofood sector was distributed in all three countries. The NABC team also paid a visit to the three countries to inform



Video incoming mission 2018:
watch the video



Video FAB Forum 2018:
watch the video



“ At the VIV Europe expo, delegates could witness demonstrations, ask questions and exchange business cards at 591 exhibitor stands



Source: NABC

registered participants about the mission, answer questions, and hold one-on-one interviews to further discuss each individual's objectives to participate in the mission. Based on these interviews, entrepreneurs were advised whether or not the mission would (or would not) be beneficial for them at this stage or how they could best prepare themselves.

Bienvenue aux Pays-Bas!

Taking into account that the mission was for some delegates their first visit to the Netherlands (or Europe), a pick-up was

arranged from the airport to the hotel in The Hague. After having checked in at the hotel, delegates had some time off to fully 'land' in the Netherlands and prepare themselves for the intensive week. On Sunday evening, the participants got to know each other better during a welcome BBQ at the Dutch beach Scheveningen. On Monday, the first mission day, a special preparatory meeting for the delegates was held at the hotel, to go through the week's programme, discuss all aspects of the FAB Forum and expos in Utrecht, and answer any remaining questions.

Innovation in agriculture

At the full-day FAB Forum in Madurodam, The Hague, the delegates were able to meet over 100 Dutch companies active in the agrofood sector during matchmaking, expert workshops and networking moments. Expert workshops included sessions on animal feed/nutrition, hybrid seeds and organic farming, realizing the SDGs through public-private partnerships, and financing sustainable value chains in agribusiness. Representatives of Wageningen University, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the European Investment Bank, Groupement du Patronat Francophone and various innovative and promising SMEs from Francophone Africa and the Netherlands were keynote speakers and panelists.

The next two days, the delegation visited the VIV Europe exposition, the world livestock/poultry expo focussing on all aspects of the value chain from 'Feed to Food'. The VIV is organised every four years and is the meeting place for global experts in the production and processing of poultry meat and eggs. At the VIV Europe expo, delegates could witness demonstrations, ask questions and exchange business cards at 591 exhibitor stands. NABC had a stand at the VIV, which served as a meeting point for matchmaking. To meet the interests of the visitors, the expo organisers arranged tailored

“ The tour at the VIV expo brought us to the heart of innovation in the agrifood sector. All companies now have ideas for their business or project that they can develop. And that is very valuable. **Aïssata Diakite, Zabbaan Holding, Mali**




“ A separate 'Invest in Africa' session was organised at the VIV, where the representatives of the Investment Promotion Agencies gave presentations about the business climate and investment opportunities in their respective countries

Source: NABC

tours around stands based on different sub-sectors, in which the delegates could participate.

Also at the Halal Expo and the Global Forum for Innovations in Agriculture (GFIA) delegates got to join tailor-made tours that brought them to stands that met their interests. During these tours, the delegates got to witness several demonstrations, in which companies explained their new technology or products. Since 94.8% of the Malian population and 99.3% of the Nigerien population identifies as Muslim, the Halal industry has high growth potential in these countries. In addition, a separate 'Invest in Africa' session was organised at the VIV, where the representatives of the Investment Promotion Agencies gave presentations about the business climate and investment opportunities in their respective countries.

Foundation for the future

During the mission evaluation on the last day, delegates mentioned to be very impressed by the innovations and smart solutions for the agrofood industry that were exposed at the Jaarbeurs. More importantly, the delegates were already thinking about innovative ways on how they could adopt these technologies and solutions to their companies at home. Some companies even had meetings with contacts they made during the FAB Forum, they were able to quickly follow-up and lay the ground for new partnerships. 



Audience at the FAB Forum in Madurodam, The Hague

“ The FAB Forum is unique in terms of the large African participation.

We found our current distributor in Mali at the agribusiness FAB Forum 2018. **Kingsley Ngwa Moyo, Enza Zaden**



Spotlight on: The FAB Forum



Source: NABC



“The FAB Forum offered us a platform to present investment opportunities in Mali to the right audience, and directly answer any questions potential investors might have.”
Binta Diakite, API Mali



Francophone Africa

The Francophone Africa Business Forum 2017 focused on “Creating partnerships in water, energy, and logistics”. Almost 300 participants - of which 100 from Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso - participated in the full day economic forum, with the aim to gain new knowledge and find business partners, to grow and expand their business in Francophone Africa.



Incoming mission
2017 including
Fab Forum:
watch the video



FAB Forum 2017 opened with keynote speeches and a panel discussion, featuring representatives of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and Akon Lighting Africa. In the afternoon participants had the chance to network and attend workshops on various topics such as ‘Increasing access to safe drinking water’, ‘Financing renewable energy projects in Africa’, and ‘Logistical solutions for landlocked countries’. Also two dynamic rounds of B2B matchmaking took place, where participants were able to speak with up to 8 pre-selected potential business partners during 15 minute matchmaking rounds.

Overcoming trade and language barriers

Doing business between African and European countries brings certain challenges. What better place to discuss possible solutions and share experiences than at a conference where all key private sector stakeholders are present? Each workshop was attended by a mix of Dutch and African SMEs, large companies and start-ups, and representatives of Dutch and African Government such as ministries, investment promotion agencies, Dutch Enterprise Agency (RVO) and the

“The FAB Forum brought us in contact with a young agent in Mali. We followed up by going on a trade mission to Mali in December. We now have established an agent partnership and we have meetings on a weekly basis.”
Addie Bom, Greenshields & Partners



Business Forum

Dutch Centre for the Promotion of Imports (CBI). Addressing topics of mutual interest with such a diverse group of stakeholders really added to the discussions. Professional translators made sure everyone could understand each other, through providing French-English and English-French simultaneous translation during the entire day.

Turning challenges into opportunities

The event was a great success. First of all, the rebranding worked. Through its sharp-looking marketing tools and communication, ‘Francophone Africa’ was positioned in the Netherlands as a dynamic region full of opportunities. And it wasn’t just good marketing: in the panel discussion, high-level speakers from the region pointed out concrete opportunities in their respective countries. The programme was unique in terms of its high representation of African speakers. In the workshops, several Dutch companies involved their African partners in their presentations, showcasing the ample possibilities on the ground. All of this contributed to the event being lifted to the next level in terms of professionalism, content and marketability. It should be no surprise that the FAB Forum 2018, themed ‘partnerships in sustainable value chains in agribusiness’ attracted even more visitors. 🌱



The FAB Forum

The Francophone Africa Business Forum (FAB Forum) is the number one business forum focused on Francophone Africa in the Benelux. The event offers the perfect opportunity to companies and investors to meet a large number of business men and women (as well as public sector representatives) from the Francophone African region, all in a single day. The event is focused on this region, that is often overlooked in the Netherlands, to highlight the myriad business opportunities these countries have to offer for European companies that are interested in discovering new and emerging markets. Not less important, the event offers African companies a perfect platform to sell their produce, buy Dutch products and/or engage in knowledge transfer.

Regional partner network

Since 2013 our regional partner network was extended from the Chambers of Commerce of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, to soon also include Investment Promotion Agencies and start-up incubators in all three countries. After two years of intensive collaboration on various activities, this is what our partners had to say:



Mohamed Keita, ImpactHub Bamako:

“Through this programme, the incubators from Mali, Niger and Burkina were able to visit and exchange with incubators in the Netherlands such as B. Amsterdam and Impact Hub Amsterdam. This contact fostered a sharing of experience in terms of project support and networking of incubated projects within the incubation structure. At the same time, we made sure to feed back all useful information, contacts and insights to our network of Malian start-ups.”



Moussa Touré, API Mali: “This programme has also helped to raise the awareness of the three countries to Dutch companies and to make them aware of the business opportunities offered here. It has improved the confidence of potential investors in the security of the countries and their investments, as well as the identification of potential technical and/or financial partners for government and private projects. Now we hope to extend programme activities to new cities in Mali in order to deconcentrate the activities outside Bamako. Kayes, Segou and Sikasso will be ideal locations to reach more Malian SMEs.”



Félix Sanon, Chamber of Commerce Burkina Faso:

“Nearly 800 business contacts between Burkinabé and Dutch companies have been made over the past two years. Even if it is not always easy to assess the impact of trade missions (companies do not like to communicate about their business), it is undeniable that their impact is real as much on the activity of companies as on the economy of the country in general.”



Eldaa Koama, BeoogoLAB Burkina Faso:

“While many projects and programmes nowadays talk about ‘youth inclusion’ this programme really gave us a seat at the table. All incubators could contribute to discussions and share their opinion on an equal basis with the other partners. It allowed us to improve our skills and extend our network. I also got the opportunity to be the official hostess of FAB Forum 2018!”



Abdoul-Kader Ali Yacouba, CCI Niger:

“The programme has helped to bring together and reinforce the collaboration between the three Chambers of Commerce (and other partners) and NABC and to lay the foundations for a programme of joint actions in the field of private sector partnership. Most importantly, it helps to bring together and create business relations between companies in the three countries and the Netherlands.”



source: API Mali

Results and lessons learned

An evaluation was carried out among 84 companies that participated in at least one of the programme activities between 2016 and 2018. This evaluation showed that currently at least* 55 companies are active in Mali, 40 in Burkina Faso and 23 in Niger. It also provided some interesting insights regarding the opportunities and potential bottlenecks to doing business in the Sahel, as perceived by Dutch companies. We complemented this with the feedback given by our local partners, by companies from the region and with our own experience. We are happy to share our findings, so these can be used to increase the chances of success for other private sector programmes in the region.



source: NABC

Sector-focussed missions and activities

Of the Dutch companies currently active in Mali, Niger and/or Burkina Faso, more than half works in the **agricultural sector**. They develop, for example, horticultural inputs such as seeds and fertilizers, provide solutions for post-harvest losses (e.g. storage, packaging or agro-logistics), work with livestock, and/or work as food traders. Another large amount of companies works in the field of **construction and logistics** or **energy** (traditional and renewable). A smaller percentage of companies works in consulting, finance, water management, waste-management, tourism and IT. On the one hand, this overview shows that clear opportunities exist especially for partnerships in the agricultural, construction/logistics and energy sectors. Focusing future trade and investment promotion activities on these three sectors, with more targeted activities will most definitely add extra value to the programme. However, local governments

at least since we did not receive a response of all 84 contacted companies.

	Mali	Burkina Faso	Niger
Dutch companies active	55	40	23
Dutch companies not active but interested	4	11	20
TOTAL Dutch companies active or interested	59	51	4

“Of the three countries, our biggest business is in Burkina Faso, where we delivered 51 trucks last year. We definitely want to expand in the region and are always looking for new contacts. For us the biggest challenge is access to finance of local companies to be able to afford our trucks. Dave Nijssen, Kleyn Trucks



Trade and investment promotion activities such as market studies, business fora and trade and learning missions assist in connecting people to opportunities and activating business.

have also identified sectors like waste management and IT as priority areas in their national development plans. Also in these sectors Dutch companies have much expertise. Carrying out a mapping of business opportunities in different sectors, will help to show where and how Dutch companies can play a role in response to local needs.

A regional approach

Organising combined trade missions enabled companies from Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso to meet and facilitate the development of business relations and knowledge transfers among them. This approach contributes to regional integration, which is at the centre of the Dutch government's development policy in West Africa. In addition, the rebranding of the annual economic forum to the Francophone Africa Business Forum (FAB Forum) has enhanced the quality of the business platform. At the FAB Forum, SMEs from the region and Dutch companies active and/or interested in business here, have the opportunity to discuss opportunities and challenges in the region, share experiences and meet potential business partners.

Working with local partners

Every successful international business (wo)man knows that having a local partner is crucial to build and grow your business abroad. Equally, in the context of this programme, having

dynamic and competent local partners is key. Local partners can provide information about issues on the ground, communicate with SMEs, assist in the logistical organisation of local activities and assist in follow-up. Over the years, the local partner network within the context of this programme has grown from 3 to 9 partners. We are proud of the warm and meaningful relations we have managed to build with each institution over the years, which was underlined with the recent signing of a partner MoU.

Support of local SMEs

The evaluation amongst Dutch companies also pointed out some remaining challenges regarding starting or growing business in the three countries. Some companies mentioned the lack of infrastructure, import regulations, high transaction costs, corruption or property rights as key bottlenecks. However, a number of companies mentioned difficulty in finding the right partner or client. Local SMEs might be too small, have insufficient access to finance, or their techniques and experience are not advanced enough. Making local SMEs more competitive - through assisting them with writing business plans,



business support trips and getting access to finance - will increase their chance of creating partnerships with Dutch companies. Focusing on a specific group of “champion” companies will also facilitate follow-up and an adequate response to individual needs of companies.

Women and youth

Missions to the Netherlands as well as business events in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso were for a large part attended by experienced business men (just as men also make up for the largest part of Dutch trade missions). However, women and young entrepreneurs did also participate and the activities and actually stood out in terms of their dynamism and determination. However, additional support and tailored mission elements could help them to grow their business or increase their position.

A long-term approach

Socio-political and security challenges in the Sahel region remain a challenge and should not be ignored. However, we believe that a healthy business environment is vital for the economic and social development of a country. We have seen a significant increase in interest for Dutch companies to do business in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. In addition, the Sahel has also become a focus region for the Dutch government. Trade and investment promotion activities such as market studies, business fora and trade and learning missions assist in connecting people to opportunities and activating business. It must however be understood that business partnerships do not evolve overnight, but take many - digital and physical - follow-ups to be established.

Over the last two years we have built a significant track-record in the region and have shown that there is a great interest from companies from Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso to do business with the Dutch, as well as vice versa. We have worked a lot on positioning and branding of the countries on both continents. Now, it is time for the next phase and accelerate business and investments. As NABC we look forward to continue our activities with our partners and companies in our network to increase business partnerships with mutual benefit. Partnerships with a long-term vision, that focus on local value creation and knowledge transfer. We are excited to carry out the NABC mission - inform, inspire, catalyse and connect - in the Sahel and report more milestones over the years to come.

“We are active in all three countries with a local distributor and sales promoters on site. In Burkina Faso we see the greatest potential in Africa, alongside Nigeria: the sector is well-organised and farmers are more advanced. Maaike Groot, East West Seeds



“We develop our business in all three countries through local partners who stock and sell our products, provide technical support and do the first line of after sale services. We also organise training and other events locally to raise brand awareness and build capacity. Yoann Le Fol, Victron Energy



“We are currently building two projects in Mali: one for a mango exporter in Sikasso and one for a poultry slaughterhouse in Bamako. We have also performed projects for fresh and dried mangoes in Burkina Faso. Dave Zoetemelk, Celtic Cooling



Business partnerships do not evolve overnight, but take many - digital and physical - follow-ups to be established.



Acknowledgements

With special thanks to the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Bamako, Mali, for initiating this programme and its strong support throughout its implementation. We also extend our greatest gratitude to our programme partners in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, without whom these long-lasting results would not have been possible.



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