

## Conference report

# Climate change interventions as a source of conflict, competing claims and new mobilities

## *Increasing the resilience of communities and cities in the Global South*

24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> November 2016

Utrecht, the Netherlands

Lucy Oates, LANDac

[l.e.oates@uu.nl](mailto:l.e.oates@uu.nl) or [landac.geo@uu.nl](mailto:landac.geo@uu.nl)

### Introduction

As countries in the South push for a greater focus on climate change adaptation (rather than mitigation), and enormous amounts of financing are made available through global finance mechanisms, understanding the impacts of climate interventions becomes increasingly important. Mitigation and adaptation are rarely the technical, apolitical processes as which they are framed; actions to address climate change create new winners and losers (or consolidate existing cleavages), generate new types of mobilities, and influence access to land and other natural resources. This dynamic process can in turn exacerbate conflicts and/or increase the risks of conflict, as well as forge new alliances with and between actors at various scales.

This conference therefore intended to better understand the impacts of climate change-related investments, exploring how to prevent and resolve conflicts, in cities as well as in urbanising and rural areas. We asked questions such as: how can current approaches to managing climate change, incorporate, internalize and process existing patterns of competing claims and interaction between various user groups of natural resources? And how can (or should) research and policy move forward so as to make heterogeneous urban dwellers and rural communities more resilient, enhancing their capacities to deal with new scarcities (and situations of abundances) arising from climate change interventions? Furthermore, to what extent can such objectives be addressed in line with the Global Frameworks of recent years, like the Paris Agreement, the Sustainable Development Goals – in particular the goal of creating safe and resilient cities – and the New Urban Agenda?

### The organisers

**LANDac** LANDac is a partnership between several Dutch organisations and their Southern partners involved in development-related research, policy and practice. The partners share a concern for increasing land inequality and new land-related conflicts, and how land governance – rules and practices on access to land – can be used to promote equitable and sustainable development in the Global South. LANDac aims to bring together researchers, policy makers and development practitioners in the field of land governance and development.

#### **The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research**

The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) ensures quality and innovation in science and facilitates its impact on society. NWO is committed to encouraging dialogue and collaboration between researchers and research users to maximise the impact of international development research on policy and practice. The jointly funded programme Conflict & Cooperation in the Management of Climate Change (CCMCC) was launched in 2012, resulting in the funding of seven research and innovation projects that address the interrelated issues of conflict and collaboration over climate change management.

#### **Utrecht University (International Development Studies)**

Utrecht University is an international research university, ranked as one of the best academic institutes in the Netherlands. It is also one of the oldest universities in the country, having been established in 1636. IDS Utrecht University encompasses a wealth of expertise in the field of Development Studies in Africa, South and Southeast Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, with both students and staff from diverse cultural, disciplinary and professional backgrounds.

The conference aimed to bring together academics, policy makers, practitioners and private sector actors interested in making climate interventions more

conflict sensitive and fit-for-purpose, taking experiences from the ground as their point of departure. This report closes with some concrete output to make mitigation and adaptation interventions more conflict sensitive, participatory, and inclusive.

### Opening words

Annelies Zoomers – professor of International Development Studies at Utrecht University and chair of LANDac– and Jacqueline Cramer – professor in Sustainable Innovation at Utrecht University and chair of the CCMCC steering committee – opened the conference, immediately highlighting the complexity of the situation. The causality between climate change and conflict can manifest itself in a host of indirect, unexpected and unpredictable ways, making it impossible to address either without taking a collaborative, empirically-grounded, interdisciplinary approach.

The professors also set some challenges for participants. How do we – as scientists, practitioners and policy-makers – increase resilience in the context of scarcity, both of capital and natural resources? How can competing claims be managed, and new mobilities accounted for? We already have ample knowledge – how do we translate this into practice that can trigger effective climate change responses? The opening ended with a reminder that though there are undeniable linkages between climate change and conflict, there are also opportunities for cooperation.

### Themes

In the opening panel, already some key themes emerged. These featured prominently throughout the event. The common themes are: the significance of good governance; ensuring meaningful and multi-stakeholder participation; the importance of acknowledging context; and recognising that conflict can also be positive. There were also some intriguing contradictions and surprises surfacing: contrasting definitions of mobility in the context of climate change; the rural-urban divide; and the role of the private sector.

### Good governance

The importance of governance was continually stressed – by key note speakers, presenters, and discussants alike. Climate change is increasingly being recognised as a security threat which could

undermine livelihoods and increase vulnerability, thus impacting institutional and governance structures; conversely, inadequate governance issues such as political instability, inadequate policy frameworks, or violent conflict can lead to the mismanagement of natural resources, further compounding environmental issues stemming from climate change.

There was mention of national governments taking back some of the power they have distilled to non-traditional actors (particularly private entities such as engineering firms and financial institutions, but also large charitable foundations and other civil society representatives), and assuming a leading role. As Janani Vivekananda said: “the blinkers of political neutrality can no longer be maintained”. At the macro-level, it was also noted that the past years have been significant for their Global Frameworks, like the Sustainable Development Goals, the New Urban Agenda, and the Paris Agreement. Most participants viewed these political frameworks as necessary guidelines, yet there was also some scepticism: whether they follow through on their promises remains to be seen.

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***“The blinkers of political neutrality can no longer be maintained.”***

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It is obvious that responding to conflict in an effective and timely manner will mean greater potential for its resolution. A strong and effective governance system will enable conflict to be identified early on and increase resilience in the face of tension, allowing climate-sensitive peacebuilding efforts and conflict-sensitive climate adaptation.

### Meaningful multi-stakeholder participation

Much emphasis was given throughout the conference to participation, collaboration and the opening up of multi-stakeholder channels. It was generally agreed that technical adaptation and mitigation measures alone cannot resolve societal issues of exclusion, segregation and competing claims that may arise alongside interventions. Collective action was mentioned as key for overcoming such disputes. As keynote speaker Joyeeta Gupta puts it, “if you want to solve the problem, everybody has to play a role”.

Participants also noted the difficulty of truly operationalising participation. There is still some way

to go in ensuring participation is always meaningful – in fact, Joyeeta also noted that we are now so far behind reaching environmental targets that to attain a 1.5°C limit to global warming we would have to “sacrifice equity completely”.

Most participants admitted that completely equal and inclusive representation is an impossible pipedream and many problematised the perhaps mythical idea of “win-win” scenarios which are so frequently touted as the outcome of truly participatory processes. In reality, of course, there cannot be such positive outcomes for all stakeholders in every instance. There should be more transparency around this, as well as adequate compensation and redressal mechanisms for the inevitable losers.

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***“The so-called “targeted group” would rather be a participant or a partner like any other actor involved.”***

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Yet aiming for collaboration, participation and representation is a respectable start. For example, we can work “with” rather than “for” the most vulnerable groups. As keynote speaker David Dodman mentioned, we frequently refer to “targeted groups” – but this very discourse in some cases excludes such populations even further. David reported that, in most instances, the so-called “targeted group” would rather be a participant or a partner like any other actor involved. We can further ensure that local priority setting takes precedent, rather than imposing top-down decisions that have been made without knowledge of the local setting.

### ***The importance of context***

Indeed, an awareness of local needs is key in successfully implementing any project in a compassionate and conflict-sensitive manner. What works in one place, for one person, may not work elsewhere, for others. Keynote speaker Janani Vivekananda opened with an evocative anecdote wherein a resilience-building intervention offered assistance in an agrarian community in Nepal that was suffering from adverse climatic conditions. The “targeted group” was from the lowest caste, meaning most people were so poor that they had never owned land, and had always worked skills-based jobs in textiles for example, meaning that in times of

agricultural hardship they were proficient in diversifying their livelihoods. The higher caste – of whom many lived entirely off the land they owned – did not have adequate coping mechanisms in times of shortfall but were excluded from the intervention based on preconceived knowledge of the implementing agency, who assumed the poorest members of society would be those least adept to coping with change.

Climate change does not adhere to social hierarchies, yet we continue to tailor interventions to those who “experts” assume need help. Instead, priorities should be set at the local level. Although this makes it difficult to scale up initiatives, it does mean that local initiatives are more likely to succeed.

### ***Positive conflict***

Climate change interventions are frequently socially, economically, and politically disruptive; conflict is unavoidable. What is problematic, however, is not the conflict itself – the very recognition and redressal of competing claims and opposing viewpoints related to interventions is necessary for these schemes and their proponents to gain legitimacy. What is important is rather the nature of the conflict. It can be a useful step in the adaptation process if it is conceptualised as a tool for transformation. We must remember that conflict can drive change if it takes the form of negotiation rather than antagonism. Our job is to maximise the former and minimise the latter.

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***“Conflict can drive change if it takes the form of negotiation rather than antagonism.”***

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### ***The duality of mobility***

The topic of mobility and migration in relation to climate change was discussed rather extensively throughout the conference – but in two very different ways. On the one hand, mobility can be undesirable – for example, people being forced out due to hazardous environmental conditions, or displacement due to resource-grabbing for the implementation of interventions. On the other hand, it can be used as a coping mechanism, increasing local resilience to shocks by seeking alternative refuge when facing climate-related risk.

Mobility is often viewed as damaging and for this reason, it is discouraged. As Sebastiaan Soeters mentioned, there is an inherent *anti-mobility* bias in policy; institutions work better if we live and work in the same country where we grow up. Transnational migration flows are also posed as a security threat in themselves, predicted to cause conflict particularly in the receiving regions. Yet not only is mobility increasingly attractive and viable for many in today's globalised world, it can also be a powerful practical adaptation strategy. There is a need to prepare for and enable movement of people. In such instances, people should be provided with the resources to make an informed choice about their own mobility, and – if necessary – the tools to relocate in a safe and secure manner.

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***“There is an inherent anti-mobility bias in policy; institutions work better if we live and work in the same country where we grow up.”***

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#### ***The rural-urban divide***

As one participant noted, 50% of the global workforce is employed in agriculture or forestry; 50% of global land and 75% of freshwater is used for the same purpose, yet agriculture and forestry generate a mere 4% of global GDP, the lion's share coming from towns and cities. Most greenhouse gas emissions also come from urban-related activities such as transportation and industry, and many who work in the urban arena suggest the city will be the space of innovation in which the climate war is won or lost.

But other participants urged us to re-centre nature in the debate. Rural scholars speak a different lingo to those who believe urbanisation is inevitable, instead focussing on “remaining” and “local development” – both of which would in many cases require adaptation to changing climatic conditions. Neither the rural nor the urban can exist without the other, but few discussions acknowledge the linkages between the two spheres, instead focussing on one or the other. There is still work to be done on bridging this divide.

#### ***The role of the private sector***

Developed countries have committed to continue to make available \$100 billion to support climate action

#### **Urban land issues**

As keynote Janani Vivekananda noted, there are specific challenges around interventions taking place in cities which are already on “the sharp edge of international risk”. Keynote speaker David Dodman identified three major issues in relation to land and climate change:

1. *Too much land* Cities are becoming less dense. The resulting (sub)urban sprawl engulfs vast swathes of land, and greenhouse gas emissions per capita increase as density decreases.
2. *Not enough land* Too little land is allocated to the most desperate groups.
3. *The wrong sort of land* Vulnerable groups instead populate perilous illicit land which is often under threat from fire, flooding or coastal exposure and is most susceptible to climate change impacts.

David also highlighted some tentative solutions, which would require innovative and pro-poor financing:

1. *Appropriate densification* involves making tightly contained, heavily populated shared spaces work for the people that live there and the natural systems the city depends on.
2. *Radical planning for adaptation* comprises a transformative, city-level approach to planning for change and addressing the root causes of climate-related risk.
3. *Working for the priorities of the poor* means restructuring the relationship between citizens and local governments to make them partners, rather than each demanding from the other that which they are unable to provide.

in developing countries each year until 2025. It is understood by some that much of this funding will come from the private sector, and many at the conference were enthusiastic about the role business could play. Many of today's frontier markets are in the most volatile environments, and fragility is bad for business; there is a key opportunity for private sector initiatives to secure connections to global markets if they can also contribute positively by working in harmony with public institutions, civil society and local populations.

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There were also those who viewed the private sector in a less favourable light, and warned others not to put so much trust and hope in the ability of profit-driven businesses to lead development in an inclusive and sustainable manner; indeed, since there is very little opportunity to make profit from adaptation strategies, Joyeeta Gupta hypothesises that the private sector see their role in climate change adaptation solely as “spending government money”.

Certainly, business alone is not the answer, but already proactive private actors are accounting for climate change in their investments. Multinational corporations are well able to at least pay this lip service, for example through “green” branding or climate-proofing their own operations; fewer small and medium enterprises are able to do this. With some intervention from the public sector, however, there may still be opportunity to mobilise private investment in low-carbon development.

### **Going forward**

Participants of the conference were consistently looking at the bigger picture: what are the implications of the research being discussed? What lessons have been learned from the implemented policies and practices? And – importantly – what should the priorities be for the coming years?

Many came with constructive individual recommendations but three recurring themes became apparent: that there is need to bridge the science-policy divide; that we require more empirically-founded research; and that more initiatives should be locally driven.

### ***Bridge the science-policy divide***

There are still tensions between science – which is based on knowledge exchange and discovery – and policy-making – which is based on decisions. Part of this problem might be related to a lack of clarity in the language used by different groups – even *within* the research community, discussion stalls if definitions cannot be agreed upon. Nowadays the ramifications of the societal challenges we face are too great to continue working apart; successful cooperation is essential.

Many scientists present at the conference recognised their responsibility in ensuring that their message can be conveyed. Likewise, decision-makers have a

responsibility to engage with researchers and science to ensure they are implementing evidence-based policy. The challenge is for us to formulate our research for each other – for science and for policy-makers – so we can ultimately implement pragmatic rather than just academic solutions. Conferences such as this one offer a great opportunity to do just this.

### ***Conduct empirically-founded research***

Though much information exists on overt climate conflicts, many studies are speculative or empirically-weak. Others are narrow in their geospatial focus and so lacking in practical applicability or providing scant guidance for development practitioners. There is also a shortage of information on less obvious manifestations of climate conflicts and on more marginal competing claims resulting from changing conditions.

We have already come a long way in understanding conflict-sensitivity, in large part thanks to the CCMCC programme, as well as to many others that were represented at this conference but there is still a lack of sufficient data to design climate change responses that are truly conflict-sensitive.

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***“For solutions, we need only look to the local level.”***

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### ***Trust in local communities***

Climate change itself is by no means a new phenomenon. Many communities have lived with fluctuating climate for years and have learned to adapt to this – for such solutions we need only look to the local level.

As “experts”, we often find it difficult to let go of control and recognise that the very people we are trying to help are frequently able and willing – with or without support – to help themselves. This is a matter of trust – of recognising the capabilities of local knowledge and institutions, rather than acting as “experts” and imposing top-down technocratic fixes.

Local visionaries are some of the most powerful leaders of social transformation. City mayors or village chiefs who campaign for progress are often those most able to persuade fellow citizens to engage and thus become the greatest agents of change.



## Conclusions

The complexity of climate change and conflict as separate entities is already immeasurable; at the nexus of these, designing truly conflict-sensitive adaptation and mitigation mechanisms will be no easy task, and will require extensive collaboration between sectors, across disciplines and beyond national borders. But the event closed with an air of optimism; as keynote speaker Janani Vivekananda said, “this is the first conference [she is] aware of that looks at the implications of climate change aid on peace and security. If this is the start of a process, that’s very reassuring”.

### List of sessions and chairpersons

#### Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> November 2016

##### University Museum

Key note speech

*Janani Vivekananda*

Opening panel: Defining the problem and taking stock

*Annelies Zoomers*

Short films: “Watermelon Men” and “Voices of Teesta”

*Jacqueline Cramer*

Round-table discussion on climate change resilient urban infrastructure

*Emiel Wegelin*

#### Friday 25<sup>th</sup> November 2016

##### Faculty Club

Key note speeches

*David Dodman and Joyeeta Gupta*

Climate-induced dispossession and displacement: Mobility and conflict

*Kei Otsuki*

Natural resources, agriculture and environmental justice

*Mirjam Ros-Tonen*

Adaptation in interventions as a source of conflict and/or cooperation in semi-arid regions in West Africa

*Sebastiaan Soeters*

Flooding and water-related vulnerability

*Fennie van Straalen*

Conceptualising cooperation and resilience

*Griet Steel*

Assessing adaptation and adapting assessment: How to better account for the specificities of climate change? (A CIRAD panel)

*Abigail Fallot*

Closing panel: The way forward, towards cooperation and climate change resilience

*Annelies Zoomers*

## Recommendations

The suggestions for “going forward” listed in this report were drawn from a series of recommendations made by different participants during the conference close.

### Research and research approaches

- Undertake solution-oriented research
- Take a landscape approach
- Develop a better understanding of the complementarity of soft and hard methods
- Develop a better understanding of positive conflict and nurture the good that comes from it
- Improve understanding and engagement across disciplines

### Implementation and solutions

- Recognise the significance of local knowledge
- Climate change is not a new phenomenon – local mitigation strategies already exist
- On-going (local) monitoring and evaluation – conflict will inevitably arise from climate change interventions; it may not be possible to prevent but if undesirable outcomes are uncovered early it may be possible to adjust accordingly
- Develop a participatory gender impact assessment that can be carried out before approving and implementing any climate intervention
- Ensure that sectoral best practices are consistent and well-coordinated
- Move from narrow technical solutions and interventions to systemic understanding of impacts
- Go beyond business-as-usual – find mechanisms that are cross-sectoral and empower local level

### Policy and decision making

- Ensure better clarity in science for policy makers
- Strengthen the link between community-level initiatives and policy by increasing collaboration of local and governmental institutions
- Ensure that decision-making is collaborative, transparent and based on a diversity of knowledge

### Private sector

- Private investments have an enormous impact so private sector actors should be challenged to lead on interventions and adaptation
- At the same time, we should not put too much trust in the private sector

### Cross-cutting

- Question the paradigm of growth and the dominant neoliberal discourse of the global economy
- Include and engage people who aren’t directly involved in climate change in their work
- Watch out for climate change fatigue – adaptation and mitigation will still be critical in many decades to come but since everything today is related to climate change, there is a danger of becoming tired of the narrative

## Key note speakers

### Janani Vivekananda, Adelphi

Janani is a senior adviser at Adelphi where she specialises in climate change and peacebuilding. She has over 12 years of experience in the peacebuilding sphere, ten of which have focused on climate change resilience and disaster risk reduction, areas around which she has published widely. Janani is one of the lead authors of the 2015 flagship report "A New Climate for Peace", dealing with climate change impacts on fragile states. She has designed a number of research projects and lead and conducted extensive field research, most notably across South Asia and in Africa on community resilience to complex risks and the peace implications of natural resource management. Janani's most recent work focuses on understanding how development interventions in fragile and climate affected urban contexts can build resilience to climate stress and contribute to peacebuilding.

### David Dodman, IIED

David is the Director of the Human Settlements Group at the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) and works in the fields of urban geography, international development, and climate change. He has held positions in universities and policy research institutions, and has worked in partnership with southern civil society organizations, local and national governments, and international organizations in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. David has contributed to major international reports including the UN Habitat Global Report on Human Settlements, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Fifth Assessment Report, and the Habitat III Policy Unit process.

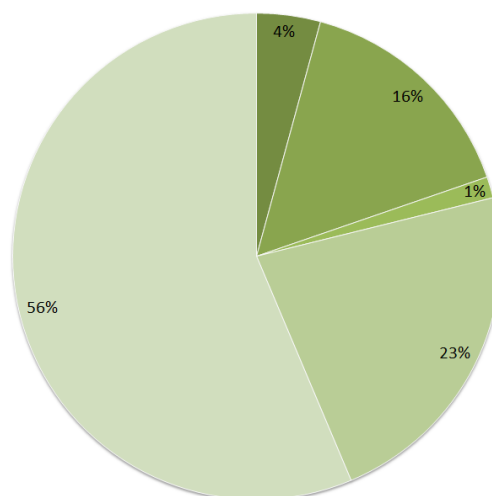
### Joyeeta Gupta, University of Amsterdam

Joyeeta Gupta is professor of environment and development in the global south at the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research of the University of Amsterdam, where she leads the programme group on Governance and Inclusive Development, and UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education in Delft. She is editor-in-chief of several major journals, and was lead author in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Report which won the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize with Al Gore as well as of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment which won the Zayed Second Prize. She is on the scientific steering committees of various international programmes and on the supervisory boards of Oxfam Novib and the Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam. She is Vice-President of the Commission on Development Cooperation and member of the Advisory Council on International Affairs, a statutory body that advises the Netherlands' Government.

## Participant information

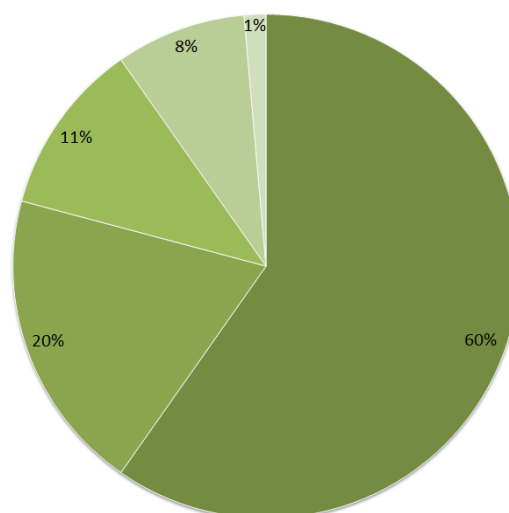
### Institutional affiliation

Government NGO Private sector Research institute University



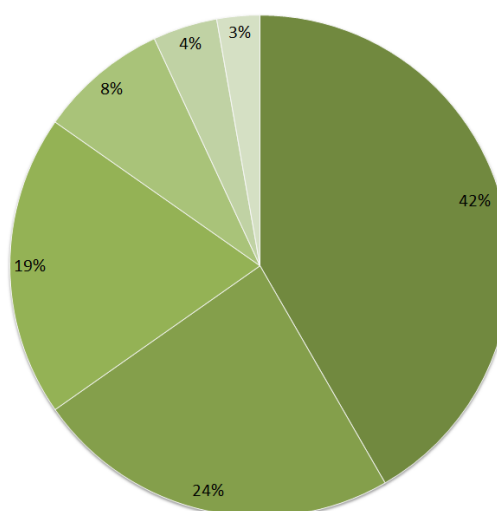
### Country of institutions' affiliation

Netherlands Rest of Europe Asia Africa North America



### Nationality of participants

Netherlands Rest of Europe Asia Africa North America South America



**Organising committee:**

Lucy Oates, LANDac  
Corinne Lamain, NWO  
Sebastiaan Soeters, Utrecht University and CCMCC  
Annelies Zoomers, Utrecht University and LANDac  
Fennie van Straalen, Utrecht University  
Kei Otsuki, Utrecht University

**With thanks to our keynote speakers:**

David Dodman, International Institute for Environment and Development  
Joyeeta Gupta, University of Amsterdam  
Janani Vivekananda, Adelphi

**And to our participants:**

Abigail Fallot, Adish Khezri, Almaz Tadesse, Angela Kronenberg, Annelieke Duker, Annelies Heijmans, Arnim Scheidel, Bert Bruins, Bettina Bluemling, Bob Smits, Chris Flower, Courtney Work, Deepa Joshi, Dhanush Dinesh, Duván H. Lopez Meneses, Emiel Wegelin, Esteve Corbera, Gamma Galudra, Gemma Betsema, Gerrit-Jan van Uffelen, Han van Dijk, Ilse Heeremans, Inez Nottet, Irene Dankelman, Jack Barber, Jacqueline Cramer, Jacqueline Kies, Jan Fransen, Janwillem Liebrand, Laura van Lieshout, Laurien de Korte, Marcela Brugnach, Margriet Hartman, Marlous Rottier, Mart Grisel, Martha Getachew Zenebe, Martine Antona, Merel Gringhuis, Michel van Winden, Muhammad Shah Alam Khan, Nadine Andrieu, Nicole Mathot, Niko King, Parvin Sultana, Patrick Worms, Paul Thompson, Poshendra Satyal, Poulomi Banerjee, Priscy Leunis, Ratha Thuon, Richard Sliuzas, Rinchu Dukpa, Risma Umar, Ronnie de Luna Lindog, Ruben Weesie, Safiétou Sanfo, Sanne Vermeulen, Sonia Duin, Sucharita Sen, Suzanne Verhoog, Titi Soentoro, Viviana Conti and Wouter Beekman.