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Like a fish out of water: experimenting fishery in Lake Victoria, 1964-1974

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Abstract

Based on historical research into Dutch policy-making and its effects, this contribution sets out some of the backgrounds of Dutch development aid. Over the decades aid policies have been subject to changing fashions of ideas and approaches. Looking back, one can distinguish ideas appearing, disappearing, and being rediscovered. The present focus on a combined agenda of aid, trade and investment is an example. This text offers some historical background to the role of trade in Dutch development policy. Doing so, it traces the inception of aid as an instrument to work for an improvement of human conditions since the 1940s. It will show that trade as a basic approach in combination with aid is older than generally assumed. These historical developments will add perspective to the centre piece of this present contribution. It deals with the way local culture played a role in the peculiar genesis of the Dutch fishery project in Lake Victoria between 1964 and 1974, and shows how the Dutch perspective on aid influenced this particular project. As for unintended consequences, the fishery project contributed to the dramatic changes in the lake's ecosystem that have occurred over the past decades. This historical example also serves to illustrate that temporary projects are ill-fitted to address structural issues at hand in the developing world, and that the belief in the suitability and manageability of aid instruments carries risks of unintended effects that have an impact far beyond the immediate goals of development experts..

Key words: Trade and aid – Historical policy development – Bilateral projects – Fishery – Tanzania

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In their introduction, Koch and Schulpen summarize that there are, broadly speaking, two schools that offer perspective on unintended effects of development aid: one claiming that such effects largely stem from human mistakes when planning interventions, and a second school arguing that reality is so inherently complex that unintended effects are bound to occur, no matter how well thought-through external interventions are.[1] Perhaps there is a third way to look at unintended effects: by accepting that it is extremely difficult, and often not possible, to solve structural problems through temporary intervention. Although as a historian I study the more distant past – and aid professionals may hold that things have changed since – my research into aid, and aid policy, has given me few leads to doubt that there are two fundamental issues at play that contribute to unintended effects:

1 The temporary nature of aid measures versus structural problems they seek to address;

2 Cultural differences between aid professionals and aid recipients.

By definition, aid is temporary and donor policies recognise the fundamental national sovereignty of recipient countries. But on a more practical level, representatives of donor governments and aid workers have faced the need to come to terms with the differences in perspective of the temporary outsider versus the permanent resident. In the past this has been more of an issue than in recent times. Project aid has largely passed over from government bodies to non-governmental organizations. Nonetheless, different perspectives have remained. They are not always clearly identifiable, but they do have their effects, and evidence is omnipresent. Likewise, it has taken a long time to come to grips with the differences stemming from the often widely different cultural perspectives of donors and recipients. These provide grounds for diverging views and have influenced effects.

Over the decades development cooperation policies have been subject to changing fashions of ideas and approaches, which have had their effects on aid. A certain historical cycle of ideas and approaches exists of which those involved in policy making appear unaware. Not all is as new as it is made out to be. In 2013 minister Ploumen's policy white paper stated that Dutch policy on international cooperation hinges on the mutually beneficial combination of aid and trade. The white paper acknowledged that Dutch self-interest plays a role in stimulating trade and investment and that the long term goal is to build lasting trade relations with as many countries as possible.[2] The combined agenda of aid, trade and investment has remained the guideline of policy since.[3] Such a combination is not as new as

[1] Dirk-Jan Koch, Lou Schulpen, Unintended effects of international cooperation: a preliminary literature review. Paper presented at the 'Unintended Effects of International Cooperation' conference, organized by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Radboud University, January 2017.

[2] *Wat de wereld verdient: Een nieuwe agenda voor hulp, handel en investeringen*, 5 April 2013: https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/beleidsnota-s/2013/04/05/wat-de-wereld-verdient-een-nieuwe-agenda-voor-hulp-handel-en-investeringen (accessed 2017).

[3] Memorie van Toelichting, Vaststelling van de begrotingsstaat van Buitenlandse Handel en Ontwikkelingssamenwerking (XVII) voor het jaar 2017: *Handelingen der Staten-Generaal*, Tweede Kamer, 2016-2017, Bijlage 34 550 XVII, nr. 2, p. 7.

it might seem. With the view of the historian, one can detect cyclical aspects in aid policy: the same basic ideas tend to reoccur after a lapse of time, receiving new wording to address circumstances that have changed, although the basic underlying problems have remained. It is what I have elsewhere called the trajectory of the bicycle tube valve, 'touching' the road as the wheel spins and the bicycle moves forward. The combination of aid and trade provides a striking example. Indeed, when development policy started out in the 1950s, in the years that followed Indonesian Independence, Dutch postcolonial policies already focused on a combination of trade and aid. Before turning to the case of the fisheries project, this contribution seeks to offer some historical background to the role of trade in Dutch development policy.

I am not alone when I state that aid studies are in need of investigations into how projects changed local conditions – intentionally or unintentionally – something that has been indicated as one of the most pressing tasks ahead of future researchers.[4] Only recently have historians turned their attention to the kilometres of files on development projects that were actually carried out. This contribution will look at one such story: the Dutch fishery project in Mwanza on Lake Victoria. It will provide an indication, based on the project papers of what later became known as the Tanzanian Freshwater Fisheries Institute, as to how wide-ranging unintended effects could occur.

Historical backgrounds to aid and trade

The basic ideas on the potential of foreign aid in development originated towards the end of the Second World War. In the mid-1940s an international moral commitment grew to improve living standards of 'the hundreds of millions who have through the centuries [been] under-consumers'.[5] Already in 1943 the allied nations agreed to provide 1 percent of their national income for this goal.[6] From day one the idea was that the conditions for economic growth could be created, through temporary interference in the shape of the provision of expert knowledge and capital to spur development.[7]

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[4] Richard Griffiths, Development Aid. Some Reference Points for Historical research, in: Helge Pharo, Monica Pohle Fraser (eds.), *The Aid Rush. Aid Regimes in Northern Europe During the Cold War* – Vol. I (Oslo: Unipub, 2008), pp. 17–49 [p. 38]. Marc Frey, Sönke Kunkel, Writing the History of Development: A Review of the Recent Literature, in: *Contemporary European History* 20 (2011), nr. 2, pp. 215–32 [p. 229]. Also: Corinna Unger, *Entwicklungspfade in Indien. Eine Internationale Geschichte, 1947-1980* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2015), p. 11–6.

[5] Statement of the Netherlands' representative G.C.A. Hart in the fourth commission of section III of the United Nations Conference on Food and Agriculture in Hot Springs (Virginia), 25 May 1943: *Documenten Betreffende de Buitenlandse Politiek van Nederland 1919–1945*, Period C, Vol. VI (The Hague: ING, 1996), nr. 369, p. 561.

[6] Agreement United Nations Relief And Rehabilitation Administration, 9 November 1943, in: *A Decade of American Foreign Policy: Basic Documents, 1941–49, prepared at the request of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations by the Staff of the Committee and the Department of State* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1950).

[7] Vernon W. Ruttan, *United States Development Assistance Policy. The Domestic Policies of Foreign Aid* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1996), p. 49–68. Also: Olav Stokke, *The UN and Development: From Aid to Cooperation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), p. 13–8.

In the postwar years this set-up fitted Cold War thinking and broadened its backgrounds in the Truman Doctrine on the containment of communism. It also latched on to earlier UN initiatives to provide technical assistance to member states. In 1949 president Truman enshrined these ideas in his famous Point Four program. Washington feared that emerging new nations in Asia (and later Africa) could fall victim to communism, unless special care was taken to secure them to the western alliance. Although largely dependent on American private investment, Western countries were quick to pay (at least verbal) tribute to the UN's Extended Program for Technical Assistance (EPTA) that ensued. Contributions were pledged.[8] The cooperative character of the program showed in the requirement that recipient countries would propose specific projects to be carried out under EPTA and was underlined further in the condition that recipient countries should foot 'a substantial portion of the expense' of each aid project.[9]

The Dutch did not take long to respond to Truman's initiative. The first signals of interest in joining the cooperative effort went out in the spring of 1949. In October of that year The Hague agreed to make 1.5 million (non-convertible) Dutch guilders available to the United Nations EPTA. This was not all generosity. A senior official within the government later recalled that the idea of giving aid without any direct prospect of financial returns, was far from self-evident and was debated for years.[10] Participation in EPTA was perceived in The Hague as a politically neutral way to advertise Dutch know-how. The long term goal was to develop new export markets for Dutch expertise and products. Hence most of the Dutch funds spent on EPTA remained in the country to allow dedicated engineering firms to explore emerging foreign markets in Asia and Africa.[11] The effort tied in with the formation, two years previous, of a Plan Export bureau, sponsored by the joint employers' organisations. The bureau had as its specific task to further the spread of Dutch know-how – and products – in less developed countries. Apart from a proposal to provide training for UN 'fellows' in the Netherlands, plans were hatched to send experts abroad in the EPTA context. Perceived experts were readily available because of the decolonization of the Dutch East Indies.[12] Yet closer examination of the documentation, and of the number of professionals involved, reveals that exports, rather than experts, took center stage, even in the 1950s. Of over 200,000 people

[8] For the Netherlands: Provisional government plan for Dutch-American cooperation in EPTA, May 1949, in: *Nederlandse Ontwikkelingssamenwerking* [source edition], Vol. I. (The Hague: Institute for Netherlands History, 2002), nr. 16A. For a brief international comparison, see: Frey, Writing the History of Development, pp. 226–27.
[9] President's Message to the Congress on Point Four Legislation, 24 June 1949, reproduced in: *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 268 (1950) no. 2 (March): 'Aiding Underdeveloped Areas Abroad', p. 184-187. David Owen, The United Nations Program of Technical Assistance, in: *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 270 (1950) no. 4 (July) Formulating a Point Four Program, pp. 109-117.
[10] Interview by the author with C.L. Patijn, 6 June 2000.
[11] Marc Dierikx, Policy versus practice. Behind the scenes in Dutch development aid, 1949–1989, *The International History Review* (2016), DOI: 10.1080/07075332.2016.1249384.
[12] See: Esther Arens, Multilateral Institution-Building and National Interest: Dutch Development Policy in the 1960s, in: *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 12, (2003) nr. 4, p. 457-472 (p. 458).

returning from Indonesia, only a few hundred found new employment as development experts in Asia. The majority of them were former employees of the colonial government.[13] For a future post-colonial Africa intentions were no different.[14]

The economic incentive also showed in the efforts The Hague put into joining the *Colombo Plan for Cooperative Economic Development in South- and South East Asia* that became operational in 1951. In The Hague this was perceived as a new way to secure the Dutch economic presence in southern Asia. In the end the Dutch never became members, as their involvement conflicted with membership of Indonesia, which joined the Colombo Plan in 1953.

Initially the United Nations played a big role as coordinator of the aid effort. The sums that were made available were, however, relatively modest. The initial Dutch contribution to EPTA represented a mere five percent of the annual spending on the development of Holland's remaining colonial possessions. In the 1950s, however, there was growing pressure from private interest groups to provide 'real' aid, to augment participation in UN programs. The number of institutions geared towards the study of various aspects of development was growing. There was a distinct push for a more active national involvement in aid efforts. In response, the government's 1954 annual statement of policy explicitly recognised development aid as an important task for the international community. A year later, in December 1955, parliament unanimously adopted a motion requesting a budget increase and a more active development policy. The motion called for an annual budget of 25 million guilders.[15] The increased aid was to serve as further pump priming for exports.

The growing allocation of money also opened the door for bilateral aid projects. These were much favoured by the Ministry of Economic Affairs as instruments stimulating exports. The first large project was carried out in India as the Bhal Reclamation Scheme, or Saurashtra Project, in the province of Gujarat on India's southwestern coast. The scheme, put forward in 1955, was to use Dutch know-how in water management to expand the arable land in the Vegad River delta through land reclamation. In a typical set-up for such projects, the work was commissioned to a Dutch engineering firm, Nedeco, that used knowledge gained in the Netherlands to construct a system of dykes and dams to control water levels and irrigation. Like in other projects, the money for Saurashtra was largely spent in Holland to pay for the work of the Nedeco engineers. In 1959 the Dutch were ready to start constructing a test polder, which was

[13] *Nederlandse Ontwikkelingssamenwerking* [source edition], Vol. I, no. 279.
[14] F.H. Peters, Making a Virtue of Necessity. Technical Assistance Following Decolonisation, in: Jan Nekkers, Peter Malcontent (eds), *Fifty Years of Dutch Development Cooperation, 1949–1999* (The Hague: Sdu, 2000), pp. 79–108.
[15] *Handelingen der Staten-Generaal*, 1955-1956, Verslag 2e Kamer, 530-532: www.statengeneraaldigitaal.nl.

turned over to the regional government of Gujarat in 1961.[16] This latter development was not entirely a coincidence, since it had become clear by then that those responsible for the preparations of the project had underestimated the problem of how to desalinize the reclaimed marshland, which was to be made fertile. After years of fruitlessly grappling with the issue, Nedeco decided to pull out in 1966, claiming the Indian authorities had by then acquired sufficient knowledge on how to proceed. A comment on the project stating that the assumption that reclaimed land could easily be made arable had simply been wrong was quickly filed away in The Hague.[17] Deceptions like these were not uncommon. They remained unquestioned. Time and again national engineering firms dedicated to technological work in Asia and Africa received assignments paid for by the government. In Holland such contracts were handed out seemingly irrespective of results and formed indications that there was a strong national slant in aid execution. Indeed, the engineering companies usually bought and brought the tools of their trade with them from home. Even in the late 1980s some 50 per cent of Dutch aid was still spent at home, according to an estimate from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.[18] To what extent it paid out to connect aid and trade is an issue that still awaits attention from historians.

In Africa bilateral aid and private aid initiatives both blossomed after the independence wave of 1960. The industrialized nations discovered the emerging independent countries as export markets. The aid effort was connected to the western push for development. The UN Development Decade Program and UNCTAD bolstered international pressure on the industrialized countries to 'do good'. Under the Development Decade Program the aim was that the industrialized nations should now achieve the projected share of 1 per cent of the net national income as expenditure on development aid. Bilateral aid flourished as there were advantages to be gained from tying financial aid to the provision of technical assistance. The funds that were made available would then revolve back to the donor country.[19] Dutch corporate interests clamored for bilateralism and cooperation between government and corporate interests in creating new export markets.[20]

Increasing public awareness of world poverty problems, particularly through the influence of television, stimulated the growth of the aid effort. The results were, however, mixed. In 1969 a World Bank Commission headed by the former Canadian prime minister Lester Pearson, indicated in a widely read report that the aid effort was seriously hampered by the short term character of projects and the

[16] On file, Archive Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (further: Arch. BZ), 1954-1963, DTH, 610.33, India/Saurashtra, box 241. See also: Dierikx (2016).
[17] Comment Warmenhoven in dossier Saurashtra, 9 August 1966: Arch. BZ, DTH, 610.33, India/Hides and Skins, box 240.
[18] *Nederlandse Ontwikkelingssamenwerking* [source edition], Vol. 6 (The Hague: ING, 2009), no. 193.
[19] Internal memorandum Ministry of Economic Affairs, 26 Sept. 1963: NA, 2.06.010, Arch. EZ, BEB, inv.no. 690.
[20] Brochure *Voorstellen inzake samenwerking met ontwikkelingslanden* (The Hague, 1964).

complexity of procedures. Too much of the aid – in fact some 84 per cent in 1967 – was tied to expenditure in donor countries, which seriously reduced efficiency. Insufficient use was made of the possibilities available in developing countries.[21] As the way forward, the Pearson Commission suggested an expansion of trade. While this opened the door further to the influence of economics in aid, it also facilitated an increase of the budget for direct trade promotion. In Holland, furthering the national economic interest had already been accepted as a (secondary) policy goal for several years by then. Since 1965 the annual amount for trade promotion had doubled.[22]

In more ways than one, the Third World became a playground for engineers and consultants seeking to put their particular national approaches to work in the developing world. Indeed, surprisingly many of the projects undertaken in the period under scrutiny here had the character of 'study projects' of which the consultancy firms were the primary beneficiary.

Experts formed the crucial, but also the weakest link in project aid. Without them the development effort would be null and void. It was typical of the status of engineers in Dutch society that the trust in their know-how to bring about the desired effects was very high. A government white paper on development aid that appeared in 1966 maintained that bilateral technical assistance was now a major component in the Dutch aid effort. It recommended that projects were to be clustered for maximum effect.[23] Also: projects needed to be successful, not only to justify the means invested, but also to harness political support in parliament. Hence reports on the achievements focused on whether project goals were met and paid little attention to external effects.[24]

The question, even then, was: did the aid really work, was it effective? Although the intentions were noble, those who were actually sent abroad to do the work, were only partly prepared for the conditions they found locally. A UNESCO conference late 1964 already reported that there was a general complaint from developing countries that the (predominantly young) experts who were sent out lacked knowledge of the local culture and language, particularly in West-Africa.[25] Similar situations existed

[21] Pearson Commission, *Partners in Development: Report of the Commission on International Development* (London: Pall Mall, 1969), p. 77.
[22] Memorandum K.J. Bordewijk (BEB) to minister J.E. Andriessen (Economic Affairs), 4 March 1965: NA, 2.06.010, EZ, Arch. BEB, 1945-1975, inv.no. 19. Letter W.P.H. van Oorschot to Andriessen, 26 March 1965: *Nederlandse Ontwikkelingssamenwerking* [source edition], Vol. 2, no. 74.
[23] Government White Paper *Hulpverlening aan minder-ontwikkelde landen* ('s-Gravenhage: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 1966), p. 117–18: http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/ontwikkelingssamenwerking (accessed 2017).
[24] See: L.H. Janssen, *Evaluatie van de Nederlandse ontwikkelingshulp: onderzoek verricht in opdracht van de Nederlandse regering* (Tilburg: Werkgroep Evaluatie Nederlandse Ontwikkelingshulp, 1969). For context, see: *Nederlandse Ontwikkelingssamenwerking* [source edition], Vol. 3, no. 123.
[25] Minutes Netherlands Cabinet Meeting (Rijksministerraad), 22 January 1965: NA, 2.02.05.02, Arch. MR. 22-01-1965, agenda nr. 2e.

elsewhere. In June 1965 the Netherlands ambassador in New Delhi wrote a somber comment on the aid effort to India, then one of the largest recipients of international assistance thanks to the special India Consortium of the World Bank. His conclusions were that India received more aid than its administration could muster, that political factors were paramount in the aid effort, that much of the *international* aid did not contribute to the nation's development, and that bureaucracy stifled private enterprise. The ambassador commented that such developments went largely unnoticed in The Hague.[26]

The Mwanza fisheries project on Lake Victoria

Such was the setting against which a project was developed for a modest fish factory in Mwanza, Tanzania. The project, initially intended to run for a period of two years, was a Dutch initiative, developed in cooperation with the FAO. In the summer of 1964 an agreement on the project had been drawn up in Rome between civil servants from the Netherlands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UN officials. The basic idea was that the factory would furnish processed, cooled fish for local consumption and that the fishery project would thus contribute to regional food security. The plan fitted the pattern of interventions in Africa, designed to improve fish catchments, that had been going on – although criticized by scientific experts – since British colonial times.[27] FAO fishery marketing expert John Dibbs travelled to Dar-es-Salaam in September and October 1964 to consult the Tanzanian government on the possibilities for this type of technical aid from the Netherlands.[28] After further consultations an official Tanzanian request for the fishery project was filed in The Hague on 29 March 1965. By that time it had become clear that the envisaged two year duration would be insufficient and that the project would have to be extended to four and a half years instead. Preparations, to be carried out in cooperation with as yet unidentified local counterparts, took until July 1966. By that time the Dutch had engaged the services of the Institute of Fishery Products of the Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research, TNO, to manage the project. This was in tune with the custom of the day to involve *national* institutions in aid projects. Set up as an prime example of bilateral cooperation, the Netherlands agreed to foot 75 per cent of the bill in 1966, 50 percent in 1967, 25 per cent in 1968, and end funding in 1969. The aim was to improve the food situation in the area bordering Lake Victoria by setting up a small-scale fish conservation factory in the city of Mwanza. It was to be the first such project in Tanzania. The country had been chosen because its government structure was perceived to be superior to that of its neighbours. It was planned that two Dutch

[26] Letter G. Beelaerts van Blokland to Minister of Foreign Affairs J. Luns, 12 June 1965: NA, 2.05.313, Arch. BZ, 1965-1974, inv.no. 2973.
[27] Robert M. Pringle, The Origins of the Nile Perch in Lake Victoria, in: *BioScience* (2005) 55 (9): p. 780-787: https://doi.org/10.1641/0006-3568(2005)055[0780:TOOTNP]2.0.CO;2.
[28] Letter Foreign Affairs to embassy Dar-es-Salaam, 11 Dec. 1964: NA, 2.05.253 Arch. Embassy Dar-es-Salaam, inv.nr. 172.

experts would travel and reside in Mwanza for the duration of the project.[29] Total costs for the Netherlands were estimated at 780,000 guilders, while Tanzania would pay a contribution of 25,000 British pounds.[30]

Contrary to what might be expected, two important questions remained unaddressed: (1) Would existing local fishing capacity be sufficient to provide the fish needed for the project? and (2) What were the prospects of actually marketing the processed fish that the project would generate? Instead, the responsible project officer at the Ministry in The Hague focused on the practical aspects of the project's operation when he noted that 'it was very much the intention that the project should link up with the existing level of the local population. The intention is not to introduce processing methods already in use elsewhere, but to develop methods suited to local conditions.'[31]

In the last week of July 1966 the first of two Dutch experts arrived in Mwanza. He noted with satisfaction that the project facilities in nearby Nyegezi were almost finished and would be ready for use when the Dutch project leader would arrive in September.[32] Nonetheless, getting the facility to operate proved much more difficult than had been anticipated. At the start of the project no local counterpart had been designated by the Tanzanian government. It was unclear with whom to cooperate. And what was worse: local expertise in the fields required to run the fishery project was found to be non-existent. It was not the only setback. The first technological hurdle that the experts encountered already proved a difficult one to take: the water pumped from Lake Victoria that was to supply the project was murky and unsuited to clean the fish with, or even to keep the facility clean. Purification became one of the prime concerns from the very start. Other problems touched on the human condition of the experts. Like in many other aid projects of the era altercations developed over housing conditions for the Dutch experts. There was a lack of so-called 'A-quality houses' in Mwanza, and therefore the question arose of who was going to be favoured to occupy one? The two Dutch experts did not see eye to eye on this and the issue that took a lot of time and energy to resolve. It kept the experts away from the actual purpose of what the project was all about: applying modern technologies to conserve the freshness of the catch. To get results, the experts needed cooling and processing equipment, but this took a *long* time to arrive. Machinery, exported from Holland, was held up in customs procedures for a period of up to three months – a situation that could be described as usual in development countries in those days.

[29] Letter Foreign Affairs to embassy Dar es Salaam, 14 Jan. 1966: Arch. BZ, DTH, Op land 1965-1974, inv.nr. 2070. Report on the project, 20 Dec. 1966: Arch. BZ, DTH, Op land 1965-1974, inv.nr. 2068.
[30] Report Institute for Fishery Products TNO, 20 Dec. 1966: Arch. BZ, DTH, Op land 1965-1974, inv.nr. 2068.
[31] Letter Warmenhoven to the embassy in Dar-es-Salaam, 8 March 1965: NA, 2.05.253 Arch. Embassy Dar-es-Salaam, inv.nr. 172. Translation by the author.
[32] Letter Dutch project expert to Foreign Affairs, 26 July 1966: NA, 2.05.253 Arch. Embassy Dar-es-Salaam, inv.nr. 172.

Still more difficult to resolve was the supply of fish itself: from the very start it was evident that fishing capacity on Lake Victoria was going to be too small to supply the traditional local markets *and* supply the fishery project at the same time. The Dutch were on their own here: all that the local fishermen could spare, were a mere few kilos of tilapia per week – in no way enough to make the facility run. To operate the machinery effectively, a considerable quantity of fish was needed to be cooled and stored and create a small stockpile. These concerns were discussed with Tanzanian authorities, and (after a long delay in which bilateral contract documents were lost) partly addressed. For lack of local expertise, the project manager hired two British experts who were supposed to help boost catchment on the lake. But the quibble over the fish supply hid the underlying deeper problem of the fishery project: in an aside in one of the first reports that the Dutch project leader sent back to The Hague, he remarked that he had observed that the local population was deeply suspicious of the processed, frozen fish that the project was all about, which they regarded as a way to hide bad quality and a lack of freshness. Traditionally, fish was bought right off the boat on the lakeshore. Only the European development experts working in the Mwanza area appeared willing to buy and eat the frozen fish the Dutch plant produced.[33]

Early in 1967, just seven months into the project, it began to be evident that the project was likely to fail as a consequence of insufficient supply of fish. More fish was badly needed. To obtain this in quantities, the project leader now received permission to set up a dedicated air bridge to fly in fish from Dar-es-Salaam, a distance of about 1,000 kilometres. Since this was evidently a very expensive mode of operation, he also announced that, in the long run, a modern fish trawler would be needed to boost deliveries. But if, in the short term, technology and money could solve the first problem, the second problem, of marketing the fish, remained.[34]

In The Hague the Ministry was alarmed to note that the proposed changes indicated that cooperation with local counterparts did not proceed as planned, particularly that it was neigh impossible to find local expertise in Mwanza at the level that the project needed. Project administration suffered from a similar problem: a lack of qualified staff. Communications were problematical as well. The project office lacked a telephone hook-up, which only came to be effected after a waiting period of four years. What made matters worse, was that the Tanzanian government nationalised a number of banks and other industries early in 1967, which had repercussions for the project, as it relied on foreign payments and imports of fish and materials from neighbouring countries. Nevertheless, the fish producing facility was

[33] Report Institute for Fishery Products TNO, 20 Dec. 1966: Arch. BZ, DTH, Op land 1965-1974, inv.nr. 2068.
[34] Letter Institute for Fishery Products TNO to Foreign Affairs, 16 Feb. 1967: Arch. BZ, DTH, Op land 1965-1974, inv.nr. 2070.

officially opened on 20 March 1967, operating on a supply of fish hauled by plane from great distances.[35] This left the concern over the complete lack of local customers. Accepting that this was an issue that was unlikely to be resolved, the Dutch experts decided to change the plant completely. Here a typical phenomenon showed: a lack of interaction with local counterparts that might have put the experts on track to effect better reception. An 'engineering solution' was brought forward. Instead of producing processed, cooled fish for local consumption, it was decided to go for tinned fish, intended for export. After all, considerable investments had gone into the project and the facility needed to boast success. This was, however, not a change that could easily be effected, and obtaining equipment for the new technical demands took far longer than the project's experts had anticipated. The operation involved a complete restructuring of the facilities, plus the import of a substantial supply of hygienic clean tins. Meanwhile the Dutch project experts sent the Tanzanian authorities pacifying statements to the effect that the local population 'readily accepted' frozen fish.[36]

In February 1968 an inspector from Holland arrived, who did not need long to conclude that the project would end in failure, unless the means to improve fish catchments could be improved dramatically.[37] Thus far, monthly deliveries averaged less than 2,000 kilos. While ideas on improving the fishing capacity were under discussion in The Hague, the notion of producing tinned fish for exports 'grew' on those involved in Mwanza. The original idea of improving food security in the region quietly disappeared from the agenda. Instead, a short-term technological approach on how to increase catchments became dominant. It tied in with the general trust in engineering solutions to issues at hand in aid. To allow for changes now perceived necessary, it was decided to extend the project by a period of four additional years. Finances were more than quadrupled.[38]

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[35] Quarterly report TNO on the Tanzanian fishery project, 1st quarter 1967: Arch. BZ, DTH, Op land 1965-1974, inv.nr. 2068.
[36] Annual report, Mwanza fishery project, 1968, Dec. 1968: Annual Report Mwanza Fisheries project, Dec. 1968: NA, 2.05.253 Arch. Embassy Dar-es-Salaam, inv.nr. 172.
[37] Report Institute for Fishery Products TNO, 8 Feb. 1968: Arch. BZ, DTH, Op land 1965-1974, inv.nr. 2068.
[38] Letter Foreign Affairs to TNO, 9 June 1970: NA, 2.05.253 Arch. Embassy Dar-es-Salaam, inv.nr. 173.

[The *Texel 43*, or *Gertrui*, in Holland, before conversion. Photo from the file at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs]

While the plans were being changed in the field, the Ministry in The Hague arrived at a solution to the fishing capacity problem: funds would be set aside to buy a fishing vessel. Question now was: would it be a dedicated boat made locally for use at Lake Victoria, or an adaptation of an existing type?[39] The question was resolved a fortnight later, when the Ministry discovered that a relatively new, small Dutch shrimp trawler, the *Texel-43*, named *Gertrui*, was laid up for sale by its owners on the Dutch island Texel. Acquiring a boat elsewhere never became an issue. Here the story almost takes on the qualities of a novel. Without much ado the ship was acquired for the project for the sum of fl. 141,000 (€ 64,000). The initial

[39] Letter Foreign Affairs to TNO, 9 June 1970: NA, 2.05.253 Arch. Embassy Dar-es-Salaam, inv.nr. 173.

plan was to refit the boat for fishing on Lake Victoria, and then sail the vessel from Holland to Mombasa in Kenya. From there the boat was to be transported by road to Kisumu, on the Kenyan side of Lake Victoria, a distance of 834 kilometres. On second thought, however, the plan to sail the trawler under its own power was considered just a titbit too risky, and it was decided instead to load the trawler onto a larger freighter and have it delivered to Mombasa as cargo.[40] There the trawler was to be cut up into three pieces and transported by truck to Kisumu to be reassembled. In the end it was April 1971 before the *Gertrui* arrived in Mwanza (with a malfunctioning dynamo, the spare parts for which took many weeks to arrive, as the shipment was lost by the Tanzanian postal authorities).[41]

Yet even with the new trawler, initial catchments were disappointing. The Dutch, now firmly committed to set up a processing plant for exports, found that it was difficult to track the fish in the deep waters of the lake. Evidently improving the fishing revenue would take time. Meanwhile new obstacles lurked. The year 1971 brought a distinct deterioration in Tanzania's finances. The government in Dar-es-Salaam was forced to effect a reduction in public spending and could no longer afford to sponsor the local counterparts of the project. The Hague ended up paying for all of the costs.[42] This brought additional pressure to make the project a success. Once the teething problems with the fish trawler were resolved, and partly as the result of the introduction of the Nile perch in Lake Victoria some years before, fishery itself now showed signs of development potential. For another project – a training facility – the Dutch also exported a second hand fishing cutter. In January 1972, a British-built fishing boat was launched from Entebbe on the Ugandan side of the lake, also paid for by aid funds. Modernization of the fishing fleet began to have its effects on catchments in the lake.

The project was restructured again and put on a new footing in July 1972. In this new guise the Tanzanian Freshwater Fisheries Institute was sponsored by Dutch and by Tanzanian funds for an initial period of three years. For The Hague, money was not a problem. In fact, in the years that followed the Dutch experienced difficulties identifying enough spending opportunities for the funding that Parliament had allocated.[43] Dutch aid to Tanzania rose from 11 million guilders in 1973 to a 100 million in 1977.[44] The aims of the project were also redefined: 'The purpose of the Project is to develop fishing methods and to promote the supply and consumption of fresh and processed fish by means of technological

[40] Letter TNO to Foreign Affairs, 5 Nov. 1970: NA, 2.05.253 Arch. Embassy Dar-es-Salaam, inv.nr. 173.
[41] Quarterly Report Mwanza fisheries project, April-July 1971: NA, 2.05.253 Arch. Embassy Dar-es-Salaam, inv.nr. 173.
[42] Letter Foreign Affairs to Embassy Dar-es-Salaam, 22 Apr. 1971: NA, 2.05.253 Arch. Embassy Dar-es-Salaam, inv.nr. 193.
[43] Code message Minister Jan Pronk to Embassy in Dar-es-Salaam, 26 April 1974: NA, 2.05.313, Arch. BZ, 1965-1974, inv.no. inv.nr. 2063.
[44] Reina van Ditzhuyzen (ed.), *Tweehonderd jaar ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken* (Den Haag: Sdu, 1998), p. 182–183.

development at appropriate sites in Tanzania.'[45] Thus the project's course was changed again. The development of new fishing methods became the central goal. This, in turn, tied in with the rapid spread of the Nile perch, a voracious predator experts had introduced into the lake in a different context earlier on. Launched as a short-term scientific solution to improve fish catchments, the Nile perch ate its way through the stock of the native fish species and colonized the lake, a process that was aided by modern fishing techniques that brought additional strain on the lake's population of indigenous fish. This process is well-known and referred to in the literature as 'the greatest vertebrae mass extinction in [the] modern era'.[46] But at least for the local fishermen the dramatic faunal shift represented new resource opportunities. The economic value of fishery in Lake Victoria increased by a factor of five after the mid-1970s.[47]

Conclusions

Although presented as something of a policy shift in 2013, the mutually beneficial combination of aid and trade has had a long history as an element in Dutch development cooperation. Until the early 1970s the idea that the provision of aid should, in the long term, generate positive effects for the economy of the Netherlands, was one of the basic ideas. Aid was seen as a precursor of trade in the sense of Dutch exports. Bilateral projects – then still largely carried out under supervision from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – therefore relied on cooperation with Dutch engineering companies and government funded institutions. The fisheries project in Lake Victoria fitted this pattern. It was one of the first of its kind in The Hague and therefore something of an experiment in itself. But did project aid really offer a way forward to address the long-term issue of food security? This appears dubious in this case. Like in other projects it proved difficult to keep the activities on track. Besides, local traditions in Tanzania worked against the central goals that had been set out. But culture as a factor to be incorporated had not occurred to those involved in the project's preparations. Failure not being an option, The Hague went to extraordinary lengths to provide its experts with what they felt was needed for success. It was an example of the wider culture of confidence in the ability of engineers and experts to shape conditions to meet designated goals. Increasingly these goals were defined in terms of boosting fish catchment. To achieve this within the time frame of the project, a technological solution was exported from home. In this process, the initial goal of the project was lost. Through the acquisition and delivery of a fish trawler, Foreign

[45] Contract Agreement Tanzanian Freshwater Fisheries Institute, 28 July 1972: NA, 2.05.253 Arch. Embassy Dar-es-Salaam, inv.nr. 174.
[46] Jeppe Kolding, Paul van Zwieten, Olivia Mkumbo, Greg Silsbe, Robert Hecky, Are the Lake Victoria Fisheries Threatened by Exploitation or Eutrophication? Towards an Ecosystem-based Approach to Management, in: Gabriella Bianchi, Hein Skjoldal (eds), *The Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries* (Rome: FAO, 2008), p. 309-350.
[47] Robert M. Pringle, The Origins of the Nile Perch in Lake Victoria, in: *BioScience* (2005) 55 (9): p. 780-787: https://doi.org/10.1641/0006-3568(2005)055[0780:TOOTNP]2.0.CO;2.

Affairs played an unintentional role in the upset of the lake's ecosystem – an unexpected effect that no one had foreseen of a project designed to improve food security. Question is whether such a turn of events was really typical for the time, or whether unforeseen effects are inherent to development issues as such.
