



Government of the Netherlands



Moderator: Simon O'Connell

With over 25 years' experience working for social change in a wide array of different countries and contexts, Simon O'Connell is an experienced and entrepreneurial leader. Passionate about promoting equitable access to opportunity and catalysing positive, inclusive and lasting change, Simon's main areas of expertise are in setting strategy, leading teams and fostering partnerships.

Since late 2020 Simon has been the Chief Executive Officer of SNV, Netherlands Development Organisation, leading a team of almost 1,300 people and ongoing programmes in approximately 25 countries. With overall responsibility for SNV, Simon oversees a global portfolio focused on the Agriculture, Energy and Water sectors and systems interventions that contribute to sustainable, transformational change.



Ms. Kitty van der Heijden is Director General for International Cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Her responsibilities include development cooperation policy, implementation and funding. Central themes are gender, sustainable economic development, and climate policies.

Between 2014 and 2019, Ms. Van der Heijden has served as Vice President and Director Africa and Europe at the World Resources Institute in Washington. She served as the Dutch Ambassador for Sustainable Development from 2010 until 2013 and as Ambassador for the Millennium Development Goals in 2009. Before that she held several other policy and managerial positions at both the United Nations and Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Other positions Ms. van der Heijden has served in include a position as non-executive member of the board at Unilever NL (2014-2019), and Advisory Board positions at 'Pathways to Sustainability' at Utrecht University (2018-2019), the Global Commission on Business and SDGS (2016-2017), SIM4NEXUS (2015-2019) and Global 'Planetary Security' Conference (2015-2018). She was awarded the Viet Nam Presidential Medal of Friendship in 2009 and the Dutch National 'Green Ribbon' of Honor in 2013. Ms. Van der Heijden (56) holds an MSc degree in Economics from the Erasmus University Rotterdam. She enjoys family time, nature walks and kick-boxing.



Jahan Chowdhury is the Country Engagement Director for the NDC Partnership Support Unit based in Washington, DC. In this role, Jahan works with government ministries and other stakeholders to support countries in achieving climate commitments under the Paris Agreement. He is in charge of responding to country needs from NDC Partners to ensure assistance is coordinated, and delivered with speed and impact. Throughout his career, Jahan has advised bilateral and multilateral relations for over 30 countries on issues ranging from assessing aid effectiveness to establishing the largest demand-based, government-managed climate fund.

Before joining the NDC Partnership leadership team, Jahan served as head of the Office of the Director General for the Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI), where he led the design and implementation of corporate strategy, work program and budget, resource mobilization, and communication efforts. Jahan also served as a senior advisor for climate and green funds at GGGI. Previously, Jahan served as a Chief Technical Advisor for the Rwanda Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, and as a senior-level advisor for agencies of the United Nations and Green Climate Fund.



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Dr. Evan Girvetz is a Principal Scientist and Global Program Leader, Finance and Investments for Climate Action, at the Alliance of Bioversity International and the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT). His research spans agricultural risk management, climate-smart agriculture (CSA), agricultural investment planning, and sustainable agricultural intensification. Based in Nairobi, Kenya, Dr. Girvetz works on these issues globally through innovative partnerships with private sector, NGOs and key public sector partners, including the World Bank, African Development Bank, USAID, African Union, government agencies. Dr. Girvetz earned a PhD from the University of California, Davis, and is widely published with his research being featured in top media outlets including the San Francisco Chronicle, Seattle Times, New Scientist magazine and Financial Times of London.



Patty Fong is Program Director, Climate and Health & Well-being, at the Global Alliance for the Future of Food, a strategic alliance of philanthropic foundations working together and with others to transform global food systems now and for future generations. She brings two decades of experience with strategic philanthropy in climate and sustainability.

She was formerly Program Director and founding COO at the European Climate Foundation (ECF), the first philanthropic collaborative on climate in Europe. Early on in her career, Patty helped launch and manage the Energy Foundation's China Sustainable Energy Program (now Energy Foundation China), the first major philanthropic initiative on climate and energy in China.



Denis Karema, CEO of SokoFresh. SokoFresh is a Kenyan company that provides access to cold storage for smallholder farmers with the aim of minimizing post-harvest losses. The company offers a pay-as-you-go solar cooling service to the farmers, which minimizes the financial burden as they don't have to purchase an entire cooling storage system. It also enables smallholders farmers' access to climate and farmer-friendly innovations and can simultaneously generate 20-30% more income. The results for smallholder farmers include empowering their communities and producing food in a more sustainable, energy-efficient way.

Denis is driven to be a change agent for Africa by using business as the tool for transformation. Transformation for underserved people especially rural women and youth that are in agriculture is what he has to dedicate his time to. Denis holds an MBA in International Business Management and a Bsc. Computer Science. Prior to SokoFresh He has worked across East Africa in different roles over the past 12 years.



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Dr Mithika Mwenda is a Public Policy Analyst and Advocate for Climate Justice based in Nairobi Kenya. He currently serves as the Executive Director of the Pan African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA), a 1000-strong movement African CSOs advancing a people-centred, right-based, just and inclusive approach to addressing climate and environmental challenges. Dr Mwenda is also the Chair of the Institutional Collaboration Platform for Climate Research for Development in Africa (CR4D). He has extensive experience in climate change policy advocacy and has worked to catalyze transformative change in communities, civil society and other sectors for more than 20 years.