

## **#25 China's Global Health Diplomacy: Possibilities and Limitations for Cooperation**

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### **Key Takeaways**

- China is an indispensable actor in global health, and excluding China would create a serious gap in global health governance and undermine the ability to combat disease outbreaks and deliver global public goods.
- Chinese global health diplomacy operates at bilateral, regional, multilateral and global levels, including cooperation within WHO and the Health Silk Road under the Belt and Road Initiative.
- China's health diplomacy advances broader foreign policy objectives, including improving China's global image, reinforcing bilateral relations, and creating new economic and geopolitical opportunities.
- China's global health leadership is constrained by limited financial contribution, domestic institutional shortfalls, and intransparency of information at national and sub-national levels.
- The Netherlands should actively explore cooperation with China through a European coordinated step-by-step approach, starting with low-risk projects in global health.

### **Recommendations for the Netherlands**

1. Strengthening the global health architecture and national health systems
2. Improving pandemic preparedness and minimizing cross-border health threats.
3. Addressing the impact of climate change on public health, and related global public goods.

## Executive Summary

China is an indispensable actor to global health. Given the sheer size of its population, epidemiological history, and economic development, China is a vital element in sustainable strategies to contribute to health-related SDGs, prevent and mitigate future epidemics, and facilitate innovations in health technology. Without China, the global health governance system will have a serious gap. Exclusion could undermine ability to combat outbreaks and provide global public goods such as climate adaptation and mitigation. International health cooperation is essential for COVID-19 and future pandemics. The Netherlands, a supporter of global health and WHO partner, should proactively explore cooperation with China.

This report is for Dutch Ministries to understand China in global health and explore policy options for engagement. Based on academic expertise, desk literature review conducted Oct 2022–Apr 2023. Outcomes: 1. Understanding global/public health strategies in Europe, BRICS, Africa, others (Suriname) and China's domestic policies and foreign strategies; 2. Analysing opportunities and limitations for engagement; 3. Developing policy recommendations with stakeholders in China.

China has utilized global health architecture to improve agenda. In COVID-19, China contributed vaccines. Health diplomacy advances foreign policy goals including global image, power ambitions, bilateral relations, and economic opportunities.

Diplomacy operates bilateral, multilateral, regional, global. China seeks WHO cooperation under Belt and Road Initiative via Health Silk Road. During COVID-19, HSR revitalized enhancing cooperation with BRI countries.

At bilateral/regional levels, South-South cooperation, especially China-Africa; South America engagement growing, but health cooperation modest incl Suriname.

Global health largely standalone; food security, climate change, stability, migration driven by domestic agenda. One Health thinking lacking due to weak inter-agency coordination.

Despite expansion, China contribution constrained by limited finance and institutional shortfalls. WHO funding small vs Western donors. Intransparency during COVID-19 hindered role.

Policies reflect domestic politics; aim maintain CCP legitimacy. Sovereignty prioritized; engagement constrained by domestic conditions.

Netherlands should explore cooperation; non-engagement undermines role. Two-pronged European approach: invest diplomacy and cautious stepwise low-risk projects.

Netherlands can focus on three priorities: global health architecture and systems; pandemic preparedness; climate impacts on health and global public goods and related policy areas globally regionally.