

## *Harnessing the potential of agriculture for people and nature The role of UK aid – May 2021*

*“Food production is the most significant driver of terrestrial biodiversity loss. As the global population grows, the enormous problem of producing sufficient food in a sustainable manner will only intensify.”  
(The Economics of Biodiversity; The Dasgupta Review, 2021)*

The food system – the way we produce, process, trade and consume food - has a significant impact on the climate, nature and people. Covid-19 has shone a light on the interdependence between people and planet, showing that some of the root causes of zoonotic diseases, such as changes in land use for agriculture, are the same as those for climate change and biodiversity loss. Recent estimates show around one-third of greenhouse gas emissions are associated with land use, most of which is caused by changes in land use for agriculture. Global public finance has often contributed to the decline in nature by paying more for its unsustainable exploitation than its protection, causing damage and loss to natural ecosystems and their services estimated at \$4-6 trillion per year.

Sustainable approaches to agriculture can help overcome these challenges, tackling climate change, improving biodiversity, bringing social and economic benefits to the communities involved and protecting their rights (IPBES, 2016). However, over the past decade the potentially transformative role of agriculture has been overlooked within the UK’s international development strategy.

### **Research Findings**

RSPB and CAFOD of UK commissioned research into UK aid spend on agriculture, assessing the contribution that agricultural spend is currently making towards sustainable development.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Finding 1 - Agriculture spend within UK aid is low**

In 2019, total UK ODA through all channels reported under all Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (AFF) codes was £642.2m, which amounted to just 4.2% of total ODA. Of this, £549m (85%) was Agriculture, £74m (11%) Forestry and £19m (3%) Fisheries. The UK’s climate finance results showed a similar low priority for agriculture spend, representing only one-sixth of UK climate finance.

#### **Finding 2 - Large-scale commercial agriculture has often outweighed spend on rural development**

Where UK aid has been spent on agriculture it has often been targeted towards commercial agriculture for export as opposed to sustainable agriculture and rural development, in part due to significant funds flowing through CDC. For example, from 2010-2019 total reported bilateral UK aid to Nigeria for agriculture and rural development was £26.7m, while UK aid-funded institutions invested at least £125.5m (five times as much) in Indorama Eleme, a gas-based fertiliser production plant.

#### **Finding 3 - Agriculture programmes consider limited social and environmental criteria**

RSPB and CAFOD assessed 25 agriculture programmes with spend over £2 million, based on twelve sustainability criteria. Only eight programmes had any nature and climate indicators, such as climate adaptation or restoration of landscapes, while 17 programmes had no relevant indicators. Social indicators were more routinely considered, but focused on jobs and nutrition, with limited consideration given to strengthening local food systems, land tenure rights and participation in decision-making.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on UK ODA spend on agriculture, 2010-2019 under the AFF category (Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries)

## **The Golden Opportunity in 2021**

2021 offers a golden opportunity to harness the role of agriculture to help the UK meet its commitments under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Paris Climate Agreement (UNFCCC), and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which can be done through the three priority areas below.

### **1. Harness the potential of UK ODA for agriculture to deliver for nature, climate and people**

Domestically, a new UK international development strategy is planned, with climate change and biodiversity as key priority areas. The UK has committed to doubling its climate finance over the next five years to £11.6bn, including a commitment to £3bn nature-related aid.

The report argues for:

- A new **strategic vision** for agriculture and land use at the heart of UK Aid
- A **new approach to make all ODA nature-positive, climate-positive, and poverty-focused**, using the funds being developed within the UK's International Climate Finance (ICF) as a chance to get this right from the start
- A **review of current expenditure** on agriculture, with a commitment to stop funding that is harmful to the environment, climate, or people.

### **2. Tackle UK's global footprint in agriculture**

The UK's agricultural footprint goes beyond our shores through the impacts of finance flows, business activities overseas and consumption patterns. There are opportunities to make progress through the Environment Bill as well as through global discussions on reform of harmful agricultural subsidies, which can complement UK proposals to reform domestic agricultural subsidies.

Priority actions are to:

- **Strengthen the provision on supply chain due diligence for forest risk commodities in the Environment Bill** to protect human rights, including free, prior, informed consent of communities defending their land and forests; to include financial institutions; and to apply to all deforestation, not just illegal deforestation according to local laws.
- **Commit to reform the UK's public support for agriculture**, both domestically and internationally, moving finance flows away from harmful environmental practice towards sustainable agriculture, in line with the Leader's Pledge for Nature and commitments under the CBD.

### **3. Use opportunities in 2021 to galvanise global action**

Internationally, the UK is chairing the G7 Leaders meeting in Cornwall in June and is president of the COP26 climate summit in Glasgow in November. Coupled with the CBD COP15 and the Food Systems Summit, these are key moments for the UK to encourage and lead global action that supports a green recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Key outcomes from these global events need to include:

- **Commitments by G7 countries and at the UN Food Systems Summit to reform harmful agricultural subsidies** and align public support for agriculture with CBD 2030 goals, Paris Agreement and SDGs.
- **A nature positive global goal at CBD COP15** to commit by 2030, to "Halt and reverse the loss of all biodiversity and to put nature on a path to recovery for the benefit of all people and the planet". This should be underpinned by concrete commitments for agriculture to tackle countries overseas footprint, eliminate harmful subsidies, reduce pollution, and manage land sustainably.
- **Increased climate finance commitments ahead of COP 26** to focus on supporting climate vulnerable countries and communities to adapt to climate change, including through sustainable agriculture.