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Funding African agroecological food systems?

The Netherlands' public funding of agriculture abroad

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About this report

This report has been commissioned by Oxfam Novib to inform the new Dutch government's international aid and trade agenda and policies on international food security and agricultural development. This report analyses how Dutch foreign, trade development, and any other economic policies are promoting or hampering the advent and adoption of agroecology, agro-biodiversity and agroecological approaches and practices. More specifically, how public resources (both ODA as well as non-ODA, including through vehicles like Public Private Partnerships and blended finance constructions) are allocated to support agricultural development projects, and what share, to what extent, and how that funding is supportive of transformational agroecological approaches and practices.

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Authorship

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Summary

Today, nearly 690 million people live in hunger, and Sub-Saharan Africa is currently the only region where a rising number of children are affected by stunting. Hunger and food insecurity in the region are further exacerbated by an accelerating climate crisis, which is posing direct threats to sufficient production of nutritious food. In this context, agroecology is emerging as a viable pathway to transform the global food system by optimising the interactions between plants, animals, humans, and the environment while respecting the principles of equity, inclusivity and justice. In addressing both social and environmental faults in our food system, agroecology is increasingly recognised as a key strategy to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to end hunger and make the food system more sustainable, inclusive and climate resilient.

But despite widespread recognition for the transformative potential of agroecology, support for its implementation by large donors, including the Netherlands, remains insufficient. In 2018, the Netherlands outlined an ambition to be a 'global leader in circular agriculture', yet only nine percent of Dutch Official Development Aid (ODA) in the last decade supported an agroecological transformation of the food system.[1] Because the Netherlands plays a large role for agricultural development in Sub-Saharan Africa as an important development aid donor and trade partner, this study seeks to analyse to what extent the Netherlands supports an agroecological transformation in Africa.

To analyse how Dutch public funds in development cooperation and trade are impacting the adoption of agroecological approaches and practices in Sub-Saharan Africa, this study assessed 159 projects in the agriculture and food sector funded by Dutch public agencies in Ghana, Ethiopia, Uganda, and Mozambique since 2012. Most of these projects directed funding to private-public partnerships (54 percent of projects), followed by non-governmental organisations (18 percent), governments and public agencies (12 percent), and academic and research institutions (8 percent). The projects were assessed based on the implementation of the ten agroecological elements according to the definition by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), and the degree to which the project as a whole promotes an agroecological transformation.

This study found that Dutch public funds directed to agriculture and food systems in Sub-Saharan Africa do not significantly support an agroecological transformation. Out of the 159 assessed projects, 67 percent did not promote agroecology in any manner. While 51 projects partially (25 percent) and potentially (7 percent) supported agroecology, in most cases these projects only implemented one (26 percent) or two (7 percent) agroecological elements. As such, this promotion of agroecology usually remained limited to sustainable intensification by making the use of external inputs such as pesticides and fertilizers more efficient. In contrast, only two projects fully promoted an agroecological transformation and implemented more than five elements simultaneously.

These findings were similar in Ethiopia, Uganda and Ghana, where the number of projects that did not support agroecology ranged between 67 to 77 percent. In Mozambique, however, most projects in fact potentially (52 percent) or partially (17 percent) promoted agroecology – significantly more than in the other three focus countries. This corresponds to the Dutch foreign policy and development cooperation strategy in each of these countries. While the Netherlands supports a transition from aid to trade in Ethiopia, Uganda and Ghana with a focus business development and market access, the approach in Mozambique emphasises development aid, food security and climate resilience.

In addition, this study found that the majority of projects (72 percent) did not mainstream gender into the project's objectives or activities, as only 44 out of 159 projects stated an intention to impact women's inclusion or economic empowerment. This is not surprising given that the Dutch theory of change for women's rights and gender equality does not specifically target agriculture and/or food security as a cross-cutting theme.

Despite the relatively low support for agroecology, this study also found that the following developments and practices in Dutch public funding for agriculture in Africa create several crucial opportunities for an agroecological transformation:

- **An increasing support for agroecological potential.**

The level of support for agroecology by Dutch public funding has significantly grown over the past decade, and an increasing number of projects at least potentially or partially support a food system transformation. This fits into a globally shifting narrative around sustainable development, as defined by the SDGs, and the increasing recognition for the role of food systems in climate change and food security. In the context of the Netherlands' commitments to the SDGs, circular agriculture and climate action, further increasing funding for agroecological projects promise to form a key strategy for the Netherlands to fulfil these commitments.

- **A strong focus on creating the social, political and legal prerequisites for agroecology.**

The Dutch development cooperation strategy in agriculture strongly integrates social, political and legal approaches that can support an agroecological transformation. Particularly the ODA distributed by MFA focuses on land tenure for smallholders, empowering women and youth, and helping local businesses to flourish, all of which create an enabling environment for agroecology.

- **Innovation and knowledge creation at the centre of agricultural development.**

The Netherlands' role in agricultural innovation is also central in its foreign policy, and the government distributes significant funds to knowledge creation, innovation, training and knowledge-sharing platforms across businesses and countries.

On the other side of the coin, however, several funding strategies of the Netherlands may hamper rather than foster an agroecological transformation. To overcome these barriers and support a more inclusive and sustainable food system in Africa, the Netherlands should adjust the following strategies:

- **A shift away from the focus on export crops.**

Dutch public funding tends to support the development of export crops due to the focus on international trade. However, these cash crops often involve monocropping, high use of (chemical) inputs, and do not benefit local food security, all of which stands in stark contrast to the principles of agroecology. To achieve the SDGs, the Netherlands should shift its funding away from these harmful forms of agricultural production and increase support for sustainable and inclusive production of food for local markets.

- **A move from market-based to community-led approaches.**

The Netherlands adopts a strong focus on market-based approaches implemented by private partners often led by Dutch companies, but this strategy is not necessarily supportive of an agroecological food system due to emphasis on private rather than public interests. Instead, the Netherlands should focus on community-led initiatives in which local grassroots organisations or farmers cooperatives lead the way in implementing development projects.

- **Decentralise knowledge and foster knowledge co-creation.**

The Netherlands invests significant resources into knowledge creation and innovation, but this often takes a centralised approach in which a (Dutch) research institution or company owns the intellectual property or knowledge products. Similarly, training and capacity approaches tend to implement one-way knowledge transfers. However, an inclusive, agroecological food system relies on shared knowledge co-created by communities and farmers, scientists, companies and research institutions. This not only makes knowledge creation more inclusive, but also ensures that local environmental and cultural contexts are an enhancing factor of agroecological transformations.

- **Provide requirements around implementation of sustainability and inclusivity.**

Particularly in recent years, projects funded by Dutch public agencies strongly emphasise sustainability and inclusivity in project objectives. However, it is often unclear how these projects actually seek to realise those principles, as they are often not reflected in the project's activities and outcomes. To ensure that sustainability and inclusivity are at the core of Dutch public funding for food security and agriculture, the government should set clear expectations and requirements for projects to receive funding, including (measurable) indicators for evaluation purposes.

Abbreviations

BHOS	Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation *(Buitenlandse Handel en Ontwikkeling Samenwerking)*
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
EBA	Everything But Arms
EPA	Economic Partnership Agreement
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
HGIS	Homogeneous Budget for International Cooperation (*Homogene Groep Internationale Samenwerking*)
IOB	Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (*Directie Internationaal Onderzoek en Beleidsevaluatie*)
LDC	Least Developed Countries
LNV	Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (*Ministerie voor Landbouw, Natuur en Voedselkwaliteit*)
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken*)
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
ODA	Official Development Aid
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PPP	Public-Private Partnerships
RVO	Netherlands Enterprise Agency (*Rijksdienst voor Ondernemend Nederland*)
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SMEs	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa

Introduction

Today, nearly 690 million people, or 8.9 percent of the world population, live in hunger. Despite producing enough food to feed the world population, over the past few years, the number of people affected by food insecurity has only increased.[2] The highest levels of undernourishment occur in central and eastern Africa, while Sub-Saharan Africa is currently the only region where a rising number of children are affected by stunting, a direct consequence of malnourishment.[3] Hunger and food insecurity are further exacerbated by an accelerating climate crisis, whereby global warming and extreme weather events pose direct threats to the production of nutritious food. According to recent estimates by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), increasing heat, droughts and pests will reduce crop yields by 13 percent in West and Central Africa and 8 percent in East and Southern Africa by 2050.[4] This is particularly worrisome given that the world's population is expected to reach 9.7 billion by 2050, with a doubling of the population in Sub-Saharan Africa.[5]

In this context, it is evident that the global food system needs to be radically transformed into one that is more sustainable, inclusive, just and climate resilient to ensure that the world can feed itself now and for the generations to come. Agroecology is emerging as a viable pathway to address the vulnerabilities in food supply chains. Agroecology is a scientific, ecological, social and political movement that seeks to optimise the interactions between plants, animals, humans and the environment while respecting the social context and principles of equity, inclusivity and justice in the food system.[6]

Agroecology is not a recent invention and has already been practiced and promoted by peasant communities around the world for decades. But it is also increasingly recognised by international institutions, such as the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) as one of the key strategies to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, not only in relation to eradicating hunger (SDG 2), but *all* SDGs due to the role of our current food system exacerbating poverty, inequalities, biodiversity loss, and climate change.[7] This is certainly also the case for African countries. Several studies have shown that agroecological interventions in Africa are a key to achieving the SDGs.[8] In fact, a scenario where an agroecological food system is implemented doubles the achievement levels of zero hunger (SDG 2), sustainable communities (SDG 11), climate action (SDG 13), and life on land (SDG 15), but also boosts the performance on other SDGs between 10 to 35 percent for no poverty (SDG 1), gender equality (SDG 5), responsible consumption and production (SDG 12), peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16) and global partnerships (SDG 17).[9]

Despite widespread recognition for the transformative power of agroecology, support for its implementation by large donors and development actors remains insufficient. Various studies that analyse funding streams towards agricultural research for development (AgR4D) and financing of agroecological systems by institutional donors show that the potential is not being unlocked. Nearly 80 percent of Rome-based UN agencies, including the FAO, funded conventional agricultural activities or at most implemented efficiency-oriented approaches between 2016 and 2018.[10] Similar studies found that the governments of UK[11], Belgium[12], France[13] and Denmark[14] as major development donors, barely fund agroecological approaches or mostly fund production-level agroecological activities instead of holistic food system approaches. Likewise, a recent study on the Dutch development aid for food security and agriculture revealed that 35 percent of funding supported conventional and industrial agricultural practices, while another 26 percent supported increased efficiency of external outputs without addressing other sustainability and social concerns.[15]

Zooming into the African context, a study by Biovision and IPES-Food found that because agricultural research in Africa is mostly funded by donors and lead by research institutions from the Global North conventional agriculture is favoured to the detriment of agroecological development. Even when these donors recognise the need to reduce the environmental footprint of food production, the approaches funded often remain limited to sustainable intensification while less attention is paid to the circular, social and human value aspects of the food system.[16]

Because of the large role as a donor for agricultural development aid in Sub-Saharan Africa, as well as a major trade hub of agri-food commodities, the Netherlands has the potential to leverage an agroecological transformation in African food systems. Although the Netherlands has committed to circular agriculture, sustainable development, and mitigating climate change and hunger, only around nine percent of Dutch development aid funding of the last decade supported a transformational agroecological food system change.[17]

To inform the new Dutch government's international aid and trade agenda and policies on international food security and agricultural development, Oxfam Novib has commissioned an in-depth study of policies and the allocation of Dutch public funds for agricultural development in Ghana, Ethiopia, Uganda, and Mozambique. Specifically, this report outlines how Dutch foreign trade, development, and any other economic policies are impacting the adoption of agroecology, agro-biodiversity and agroecological approaches and practices in these countries. Against this background, the objective of this report is to inform the Dutch and wider international debate on agricultural development strategies regarding the role agroecology can play in transforming food systems towards sustainability and equality, and in realising the SDGs.

A summary of the findings of this report can be found on the first pages of this report.

1

Methodology

This study analyses Dutch public funding and reviews foreign policy to assess the extent to which the Netherlands supports the implementation of agroecology in Sub-Saharan Africa. Focussing on four African countries, the analysis looks at the allocation of Dutch governmental resources to projects implementing agricultural and food security development objectives. This chapter outlines the methodology used in these analyses.

This study set out to answer two research questions:

1. What Dutch public funding resources are being invested in agricultural development projects in four African countries by (agencies linked to) the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (LNV)?
2. What Dutch foreign policies are in place that promote agricultural and market development in these countries?

To answer these questions, we included a combination of qualitative and quantitative analyses.

1.1 Country selection

We began this study by selecting on four countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) for an in-depth analysis of how Dutch public funding resources are invested in this region. The following criteria were taken into consideration for the selection:

3. Located in Sub-Saharan Africa.
4. An active development cooperation relationship with the Netherlands.
5. Food security is a priority topic as defined by the Dutch multi-annual strategy plans in the development cooperation with these countries.
6. At least two countries should have an agricultural envoy present at the Dutch embassy.
7. The selection should cover different regions in Sub-Saharan Africa (i.e., West Africa, East Africa and Southern Africa).
8. The countries should be of broader interest for Oxfam Novib.

Based on these criteria and in consultation with Oxfam Novib, the selected counties were Ghana, Ethiopia, Uganda, and Mozambique.

1.2 Quantitative analysis

In assessing how Dutch public funding resources are invested in agricultural development projects in Ghana, Ethiopia, Uganda, and Mozambique, we conducted a quantitative analysis of Dutch funding streams to the selected countries and assessed each funded project. This assessment was based on (1) integration of agroecological elements, and (2) degree to which the funding promotes an agroecological transformation. For this purpose, we paid particular attention to the different ways in which resources are allocated (i.e., through different sectors and through different types of organisations), as well as the extent to which these addressed the specific needs and rights of vulnerable groups, such as women smallholders.

1.2.1 Funding data

Data of Dutch public funding was accessed through the International Aid and Transparency Initiative (IATI Registry), where the Dutch government has published all development aid funding since 1997 in line with the Official Development Aid (ODA) standards by the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

Funding streams included in the data set include all funds in the agriculture, development food assistance and forestry sectors by Dutch public agencies in recipient countries Ethiopia, Ghana, Uganda, and Mozambique. Only projects with a start date since 1 January 2012 were included with the objective to look at recent trends in line with policy frameworks that have been in place since 2012. The complete list of filters applied to the dataset is provided in Appendix 1.

1.2.2 Assessment of funding

Based on several regional seminars on agroecology conducted between 2015 and 2017, the FAO formulated ten elements that describe the common characteristics of agroecological systems, foundational practices, and innovation approaches, as well as context factors and enabling environment elements (Table 1). This classification has since been embraced as an analytical tool to operationalise agroecology and to identify the properties of food systems and approaches.

Table 1 The ten elements of agroecology

Element	Description
Diversity	An agroecological system is one that is highly diverse in terms of species and genetic resources, for example through diverse multi-cropping, relying on local breeds, and fostering natural biodiversity. Embracing this diversity helps to conserve, protect, and enhance natural resources while also generating diverse and sustainable food.
Co-creation of knowledge	The functioning of any agroecological system is highly dependent on the local environmental, social, economic, cultural, and political context. Because of the importance of context-specific knowledge, agroecology seeks to blend knowledge from Indigenous peoples and local communities, producers' and traders' practical know-how, and scientific evidence to co-create agroecological practices through participatory processes to better respond to local challenges. This includes a strong emphasis on mutual trust, inclusive and participatory processes, bottom-up innovation, and context-appropriate solutions.
Synergies	Agroecology emphasises the need to enhance synergies between production and ecosystem services to improve resource-use efficiency and climate resilience. This includes practices such as intercropping and crop rotations to reduce the need for fertilisers while contributing to the quality of soil, or the use of hedgerows to prevent soil erosion while at the same time generating feed for livestock.
Efficiency	Agroecology seeks to produce more using fewer external resources and emphasising the use of natural resources that are abundant over those that have negative environmental impacts. This includes enhancing biological processes and recycling resources and reducing dependency on external resources.
Recycling	Recycling resources minimises waste and pollution while reducing costs, and more closely resembles natural ecosystems in which biological processes allow for every resource to be reused. Recycling can take place at the farm level, for example by using manure as fertiliser or crop residues as livestock feed but can also be implemented on a larger scale.

Resilience	The reality of the climate crisis requires the global food system to be more resilient and to be able to withstand extreme weather events, pests, diseases, or other disturbances. But resilience can also be built on the socio-economic level by ensuring that communities and producers are less vulnerable to shocks. Resilience must be achieved through a multitude of approaches, including through reducing dependency on external inputs, imitating natural ecosystems and diversifying diets.
Human and social values	Agroecology emphasises the importance of protecting and improving livelihoods, equity and inclusion, dignity, and justice. A just food system prioritises the needs of those who produce, distribute, and consume food, build autonomy, and empower people to combat malnutrition and hunger while fully exercising their human rights. This also includes considerations for gender inequalities, including the economic marginalisation of women and non-normative genders in the agricultural workforce, and autonomous access to food. It is key that an agroecological approach is grassroots, bottom-up and inclusive, and allows people to be agents of change rather than passive consumers.
Culture and food transitions	Food is more than nutrition. Diets should not only be health and diversified, but also culturally appropriate with respect for food traditions and habits. This includes balanced food habits that cater to a healthy relationship with food while sustaining culinary values and cultural practices.
Responsible governance	To realise a just and sustainable food system, agroecology calls for responsible governance of food systems that is transparent, accountable, and inclusive. This is necessary to support producers and consumers to transform the food systems, for example through enabling market regulations, school feeding programmes, or subsidies for innovative ecosystem approaches. This can be implemented at the national or regional/local level through formal policies or legislation, but also on a community level in customary decision-making mechanisms and cooperation.
Circular and solidarity economy	A circular and solidarity economy seeks to (re)connect producers and consumers while prioritising local markets and development. Short food value chains can increase the incomes of producers while ensuring access to diverse food for consumers at a fair price and can be more sustainable by cutting food waste and reducing emissions from transportation.

Source: FAO (2018), *The 10 Elements of Agroecology: Guiding the Transition to Sustainable Food and Agricultural Systems*, p. 3-12.

Funding was analysed on a case-by-case basis, meaning that each individual project was assessed against the degree of implementation of the ten elements of agroecology, and regardless of the amount of dedicated funding that the project received. This allowed for significant nuance and detailed insights into how many agroecological projects the Netherland's supports in Ghana, Uganda, Ethiopia, and Mozambique without discounting meaningful projects with small budgets. However, this case-by-case analysis did not provide insights into how much funding in total was directed at an agroecological transformation. Due to a lack of data on budget amounts, particularly for RVO-funded projects, it was not possible to estimate the share of funding dedicated to agroecological projects.

For each project, at least one document has been identified with detailed project information. At a minimum, this document must contain the project objectives and a break-down of the main activities for which the relevant funding was used. In most cases, this constituted a mid-term or end-of-project evaluation. Where evaluation documents were not available, terms of references or another detailed project descriptions, including those captured in the IATI Registry, were deemed satisfactory. Projects for which insufficient information regarding project objectives and activities was available, were excluded from the analysis.

Based on these project objectives and activities, each of the ten elements of agroecology were assessed. Basing the assessment on objectivities and activities rather than outcomes allowed us to include projects that have been funded but have not yet been completed. In addition, it means that this study assesses what Dutch public funds *intended* to fund rather than what has been achieved. This is an important difference since in this study, we sought to analyse how public investments aim to contribute to agroecology. This means that the results do not necessarily reflect the degree to which agroecology was implemented in practice, but rather the intention of Dutch funding to promote agroecological practices.

When applying the ten elements of agroecology, it is important to note that these elements are interlinked and interdependent, and only as a holistic approach can transform food and agricultural systems towards a more inclusive, sustainable, and just system. While it is often not within the scope of an individual project to tackle all elements of agroecology, it can still contribute to a holistic, agroecological transformation through specific objectives and activities that align with its principles. Previous studies on funding for agroecology, including the authors' own, have relied on Gliessman's levels[18] of agroecology for the analysis. While this framework is useful to analyse large datasets and to compare the findings with similar studies, a major constraint is Gliessman's levels suggest a hierarchy between different elements of agroecology.[i] As a result, more recent studies have adapted Gliessman's framework to create analytic tools that more accurately reflect the holistic nature of an agroecological transition. Against this background, we argue that the ten elements of agroecology allow for a more detailed and nuanced assessment.

To guide the assessment based on the FAO's ten elements of agroecology, the following additional rules were employed:

- The element needs to be explicitly part of the project's objectives and activities. Where an element may be an (unintended) side-effect, the element is not deemed present.
- Projects do not need to implement an element in its entirety. For example, if the project implements mixed cropping but does not refer to wider biodiversity, this can still be counted as the presence of the 'diversity' element since it still seeks to contribute to higher biodiversity.
- Where an objective or activity may be part of multiple elements, the most closely fitting element will be counted, unless it explicitly contributes to multiple elements. For example, when the project aims at recycling manure as fertiliser, this may also contribute to synergies but because the main purpose is recycling, it fits this element. However, if the project explicitly refers to using this manure to enhance other synergies, such as to manage nitrogen levels in soil, it can fit both elements.

1.2.3 Degree of agroecological promotion

Following the assessment of projects based on the ten elements of agroecology, projects are classified based on the degree to which the objectives and activities partially, potentially, fully, or not promote an agroecological transformation of the food system. This classification allows for nuance, pointing to each project's potential to leverage an agroecological transformation.

[i] See Achterberg, E., Quiroz, D. (2020, December), *Development aid funds for agroecology. Support for agroecology of Dutch ODA spending*, Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Profundo, p. 7-9.

The following degrees of agroecological promotion were used:

- **Not promoting agroecology**

Projects that do not seek to support an agroecological transformation and have not integrated any of the ten elements of agroecology. This also includes projects that instead seek to promote conventional forms of agricultural production, and projects that are off topic such as construction projects.

- **Potentially promoting agroecology**

Projects that contain some notions of agroecological principles or outline an intention to prioritise agroecological techniques, but that do not clearly state concrete activities that promote its elements. These projects could potentially have a positive impact on an agroecological transformation, but it is not clear how and if this will be realised.

- **Partially promoting agroecology**

Projects that are dedicated to agroecological principles such as sustainability, inclusivity and equity, but only integrate this commitment partially or while also implementing conventional agricultural methods.

- **Promoting agroecology**

Projects whose main objective is to promote an agroecological transformation that is completely aligned with its principles, even if not all ten elements are addressed. For a project to classify as promoting agroecology, it needs to include clear and explicit objectives on how it seeks to promote agroecological principles.

1.3 Qualitative analysis

To answer the research question what Dutch policies are in place that promote agricultural and market development in these countries, a policy review of Dutch development, financial, economic, trade and agriculture policies in relation to the four selected countries was conducted. The following types of policies were included:

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs policy frameworks, policy letters, theory of change, development objectives and results, and other relevant documents in relation to international development cooperation and trade in general and in relation to Sub-Saharan Africa, including the Multi-Annual Strategic Plans and Policy Frameworks between the Netherlands and the selected countries and policies and agendas of the Dutch embassies in the selected countries.
- Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality policies on promoting sustainable agricultural practices, and policies on international cooperation and trade in agricultural commodities, including the Agricultural Envoys in the selected countries.
- Netherlands Enterprise Agency policy frameworks.
- Trade agreements and policy frameworks between the focus countries and the Netherlands, and/or between the focus countries and the EU.

2

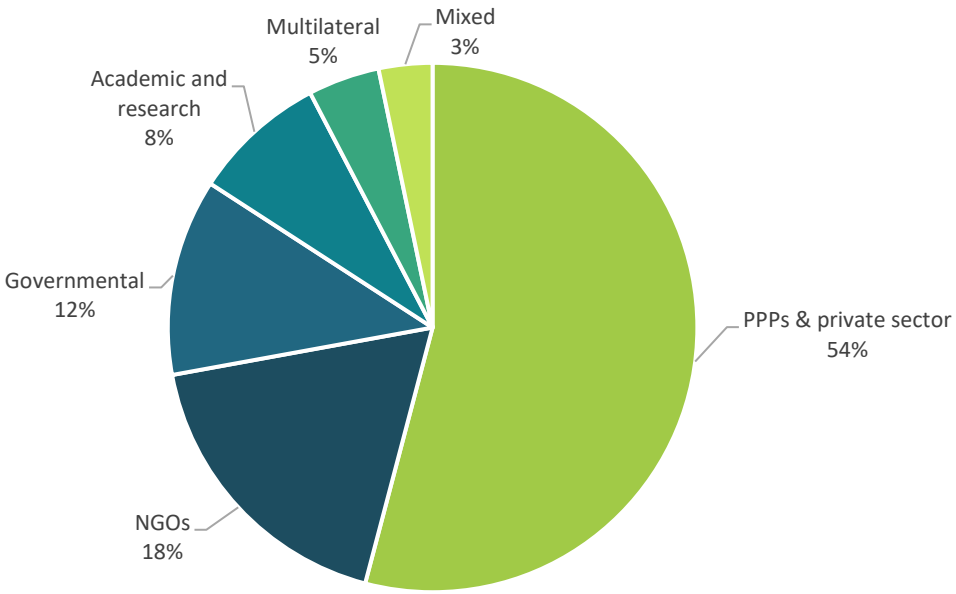
Dutch funding for agroecology in Africa

This chapter presents an assessment of development projects funded by Dutch government agencies in Ethiopia, Ghana, Uganda, and Mozambique, and the extent to which they promote the principles and elements of agroecology.

1.1 Data overview

In total, 183 projects funded by four Dutch public agencies (MFA, LNV, Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research, and Netherlands Space Office) were included in the analysis. Most of these projects directed funding to PPPs and private-sector actors (54 percent of projects), followed by NGOs (18 percent), governments and public agencies (12 percent), and academic and research organisations (8 percent). A handful of projects were directed to multilateral organisations (8 projects, 4.4 percent) and a mix of different recipients in the case of pooled funding (6 projects, 3.3 percent). The projects were varied in terms of the types of activities and objectives, ranging from business development to fostering trade relationships, and from development aid to land tenure policies. All the included projects, however, were focused on agriculture, food production or the management and governance of food systems.

Figure 1 Number of projects per type of recipient organisation



The data set included a reasonable geographical spread of projects across the different focus countries, though significantly fewer projects were implemented in Mozambique (see Table 2).

Table 2 Number of projects per focus country

Countries	Number of projects	Percentage of projects
Ethiopia	62	33.9%
Uganda	51	27.9%
Ghana	40	21.9%
Mozambique	24	13.1%
Multiple countries	6	3.3%
Total	**183**	**100%**

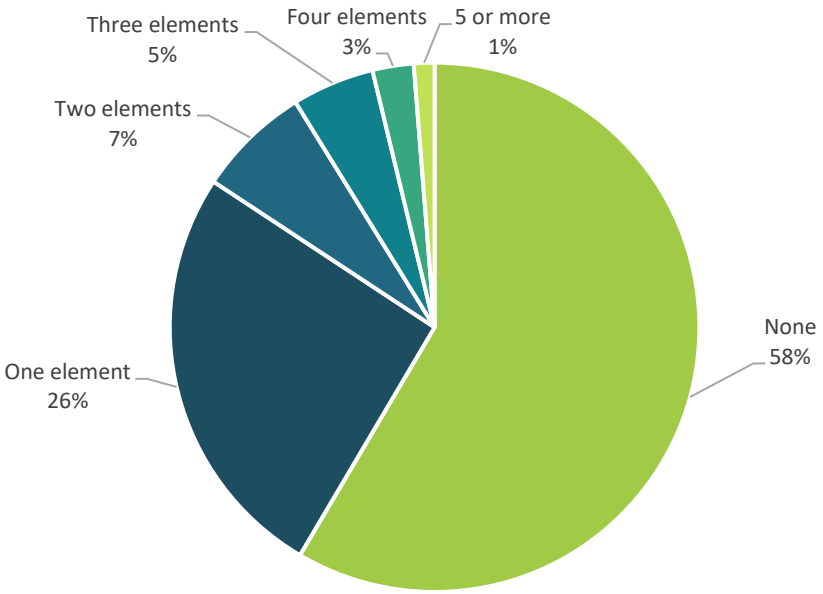
1.2 Analysis

In total, 24 projects were omitted because not enough information was available to allow for a reliable assessment. The remaining 159 projects were assessed on the presence of agroecological elements in the project's objectives and activities, and on the project's overall potential to promote an agroecological transformation of the food system.

1.2.1 Integration of the 10 elements of agroecology

Most projects (93 of 159) did not integrate any of the ten elements of agroecology. Some projects implemented one (26 percent), two (7 percent), three (5 percent) or four (2.5 percent) agroecological elements as defined by the FAO, but only two projects (1.3 percent) implemented more than five elements simultaneously.

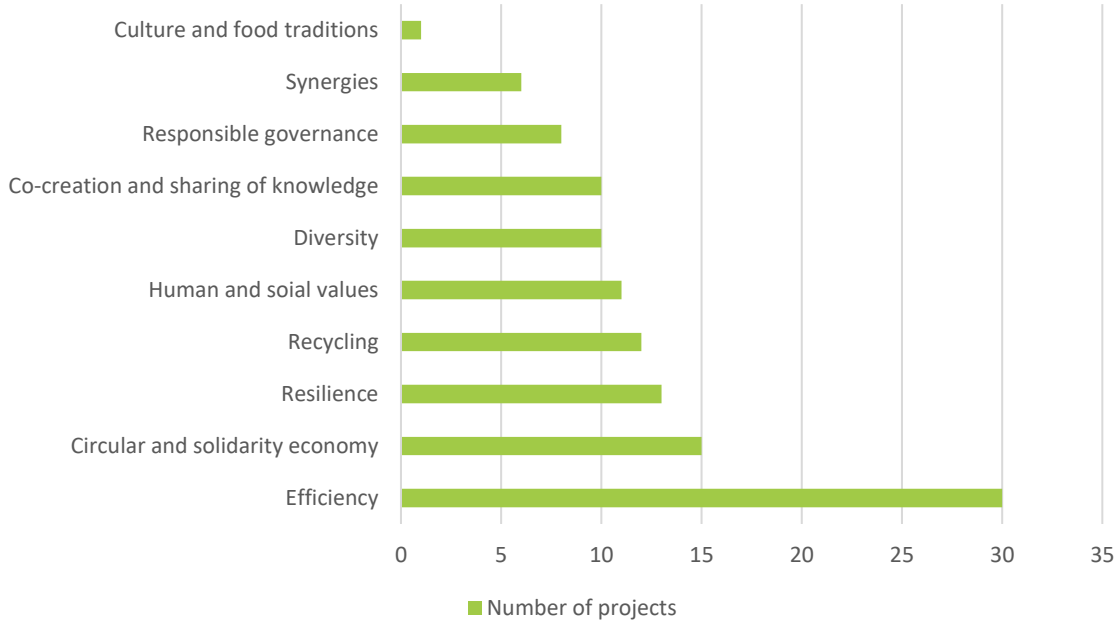
Figure 2 Number of agroecological elements per project



The projects that did integrate agroecological elements most often focused on efficiency, such as the construction of more efficient irrigation systems to reduce water usage or the 'rational' use of inputs such as fertilizer or pesticides. Often, these projects referred to these activities as 'sustainable intensification', which in most cases meant that the project sought to stimulate conventional agriculture while recognising the need for more sustainable methods, albeit in a very limited manner.

Other agroecological elements were much less present in the projects funded by Dutch public agencies in all four focus countries (Figure 3). As mentioned earlier, the assessment was based on project objectives or stated activities, and not to the actual outcomes. In other words, though projects may emphasise objectives related to circular and solidarity economies, often in the form of stimulating local markets or connecting producers with consumers, it was not clear from the document reviews the extent to which such outcomes are achieved.

Figure 3 Integration of agroecological elements across projects

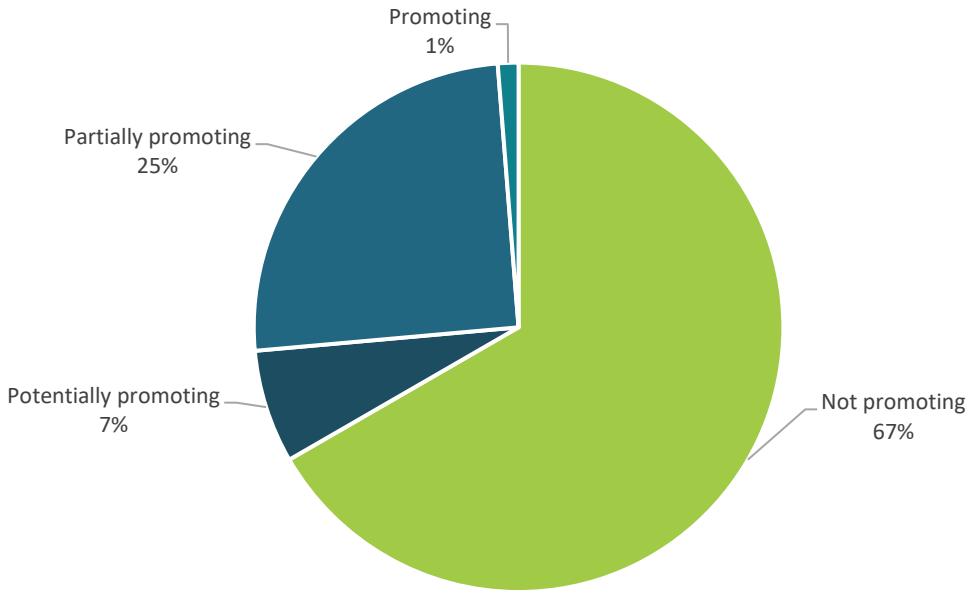


1.2.2 Degree of promoting an agroecological transformation

When investigating the overall potential of a given project to stimulate an agroecological transformation, measured as the degree to which a project promotes agroecology, the outcomes are even more sober (Figure 4). Most projects (67 percent) did not promote agroecology. This includes projects that part of their objectives included an agroecological element but overall did not seek to promote agroecology or support its principles. This most significantly includes projects that implemented the element of efficiency through a claim of sustainable intensification, while promoting conventional agricultural methods with little other sustainability or ecological considerations.

The projects that did in some manner promote agroecology only did so partially (25 percent). Only two projects (1 percent) fully promoted an agroecological transformation. In addition, 7 percent of projects had the potential to promote agroecology indirectly. This includes projects that did not actively seek to promote agroecology but implemented activities that could potentially support a transformation, such as securing land tenure for peasant farmers.

Figure 4 Degree of agroecological promotion



1.2.3 Country comparison

The Dutch MFA has outlined unique development cooperation and trade policies for each of the focus countries. This has potential impacts on the degree to which funded projects promote agroecology. Accordingly, we compared the assessments for Ghana, Ethiopia, Uganda, and Mozambique (Table 3**Error! Reference source not found.**), to assess if these different policies reflected the differences in agroecological promotion in each country. For this analysis, projects implemented across multiple countries were omitted to avoid a distortion of the data.

Table 3 Promotion of agroecology per country

Countries	Not promoting	Potentially promoting	Partially promoting	Promoting	Total
Ethiopia	66.7%	27.5%	5.9%	0%	100%
Uganda	73.3%	17.8%	6.7%	2.2%	100%
Ghana	76.5%	17.7%	2.9%	2.9%	100%
Mozambique	30.4%	52.2%	17.4%	0%	100%
Total	**65.4%**	**26.1%**	**7.2%**	**1.3%**	**100%**

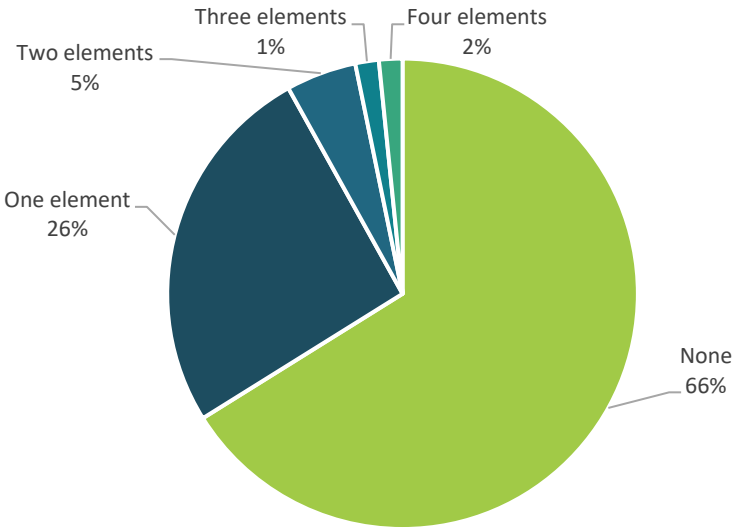
The comparison across countries based on the percentage of projects in each country that promoted agroecology raises some interesting differences. Ethiopia, Uganda, and Ghana all have a high number of projects that do not support agroecology at all, ranging from 67 to 77 percent. In Mozambique, however, this percentage is much lower at 30.4 percent, where instead most projects potentially (52.2 percent) or partially (17.4 percent) promote agroecology –significantly more frequently than the other three focus countries. Country-specific results of the assessment are presented in the sections below.

1.2.4 Ethiopia

Between 2010 and 2021, over € 245 million of Dutch development aid dedicated to agriculture and food security was allocated by the MFA to Ethiopia, in addition to the funding of companies operating in Ethiopia through RVO and the Netherlands Space Office. In total, 62 projects were implemented in that country, most of which were funded by RVO (37 projects) and MFA (23 projects).

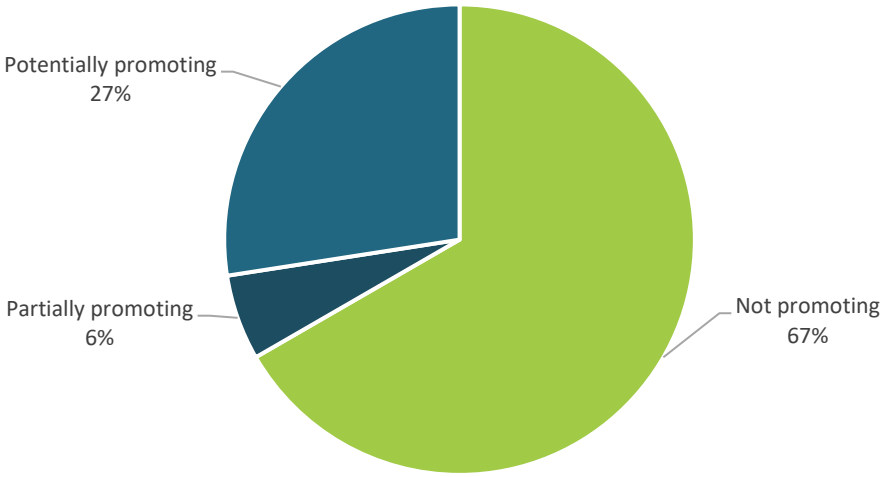
The majority (66 percent) of these projects did not implement any agroecological element as defined by the FAO (Figure 5). Projects that did integrate agroecological elements mostly focused on increasing efficiency of inputs (9 projects) or recycling agricultural inputs and outputs (5 projects). For example, a consortium of five Dutch floriculture companies, funded by RVO and the Netherlands Embassy in Addis Ababa, aimed to develop a sustainable large-scale horticultural area in the Kunzila region. From the project documents reviewed, it potentially supported agroecology. Within the project, several techniques were implemented to increase efficiency and recycling, such as reducing water usage, integrated pest management to decrease the use of chemical pesticides, and recycling of fertilizers.[19]

Figure 5 Ethiopia: number of agroecological elements per project



Most projects in Ethiopia, however, did not contribute to an agroecological transformation: 67 percent of projects did not promote agroecology, while the remainder only potentially (27 percent) or partially (6 percent) supported a transformation (Figure 6). None of the projects implemented in Ethiopia between 2010 and 2020 funded by Dutch public resources fully promoted agroecology or implemented its logic as a main framework. Instead, most projects focused on developing agricultural sectors in Ethiopia with trade opportunities with the Netherlands as a primary driver, particularly in the horticulture sector.

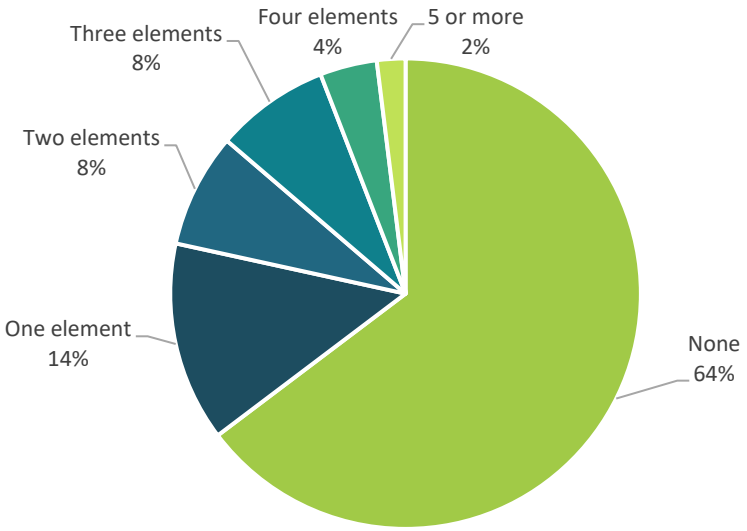
Figure 6 Ethiopia: degree of agroecological promotion



1.2.5 Uganda

Compared to Ethiopia, Uganda received a significantly lower budget of Dutch public resources: € 128.6 million for 19 projects from the MFA, € 7.5 million from the Netherlands Space Office for two projects, and at least € 6 million for 30 projects through RVO. Although most of these projects did not integrate any agroecological elements, others implemented multiple agroecological activities (Figure 7). This was the case for an RVO-funded project (€ 200,000) implemented by a consortium of social entrepreneurs who, using an innovative and biodegradable cardboard fibre structure, contribute to restoring agricultural landscapes and improving soil quality while improving resilience of the ecosystem.[20]

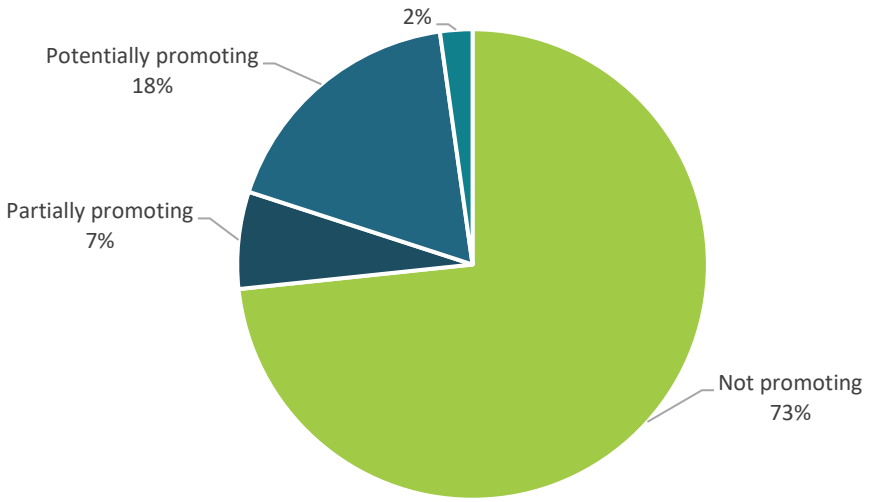
Figure 7 Uganda: number of agroecological elements per project



Nevertheless, nearly three quarters of projects did not promote agroecology, either because the project did not refer to any sustainability, ecological or social justice concerns, or because the

project instead promoted conventional agricultural methods that counter agroecology, such as top-down approaches or harmful practices such as monocropping (Figure 8). The only project that fully promoted agroecology was part of RVO's SDG Partnership Facility and focused on building organic, sustainable and inclusive value chains for cotton, sesame and shea.[21]

Figure 8 Uganda: degree of agroecological promotion



1.2.6 Ghana

Compared to Ethiopia and Uganda, Ghana received much less funding through MFA (€ 63.4 million across 10 projects), but instead received larger funds through RVO (at least € 17.8 million, 29 projects) and the Netherlands Space Office (€ 3.9 million), which is explained by Ghana's transition from aid to trade (Chapter 3). Nonetheless, the extent to which these projects integrate agroecological elements is largely similar to Uganda and Ethiopia, as the majority of projects did not integrate any element of agroecology or only a couple of them (Figure 9).

In line with the findings from Uganda and Ethiopia, Ghana also showed a very low number of projects that in any form promote agroecology (Figure 10). Most projects focused on Ghana's cash crops such as cacao and palm oil, for which the Netherlands is an important trade partner. Because of the very nature and systems design of these cash crops – namely, monocultural production destined for export markets – projects in these sectors tend to neglect agroecological elements, or any social justice, sustainability or ecology efforts for that matter. Important exceptions include projects that seek to transform these systems, such as the agroforestry and collaborative landscape approach to the cocoa sector by Tropenbos International.[22]

Figure 9 Ghana: number of agroecological elements per project

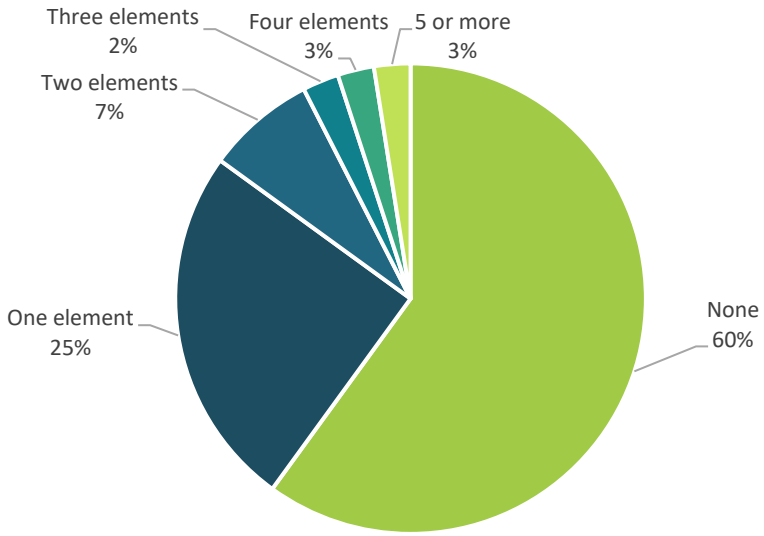
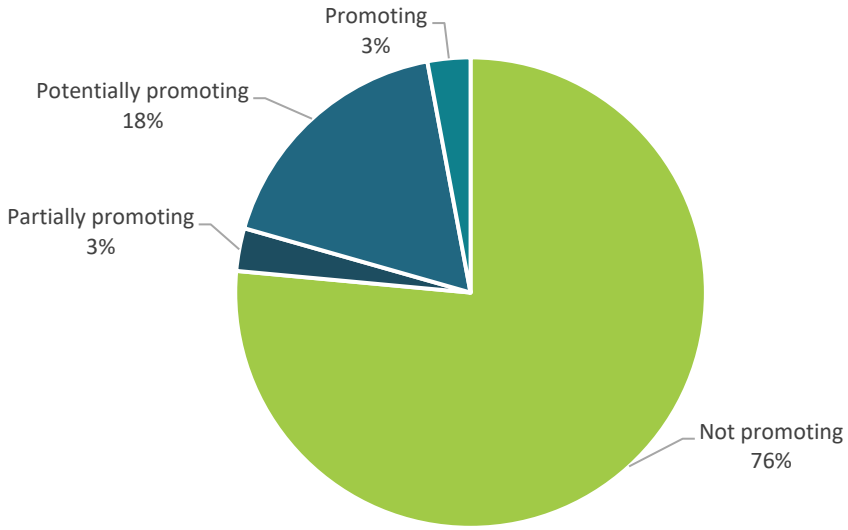


Figure 10 Ghana: degree of agroecological promotion

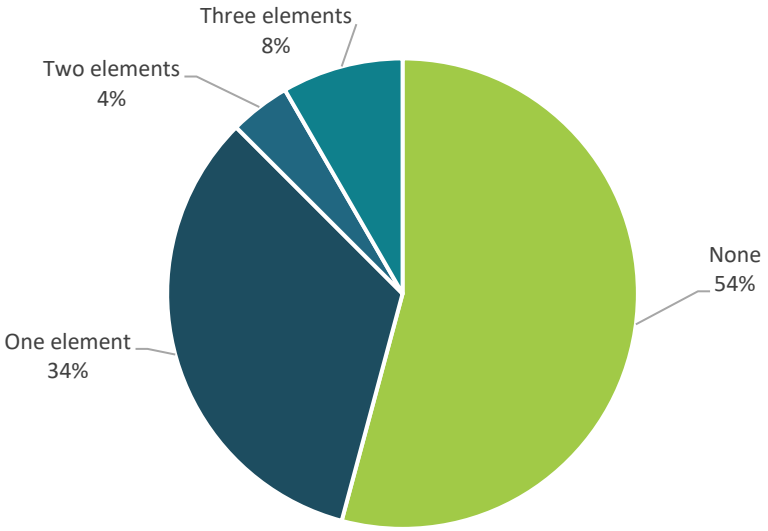


1.2.7 Mozambique

While the results of the assessment are similar across Ethiopia, Ghana and Uganda, the analysis of Mozambique paints a different picture. Mozambique received € 45.9 million from the Dutch MFA dedicated to agriculture and food security across 13 projects. In addition, 11 projects in these sectors were funded by RVO for at least € 22.9 million.

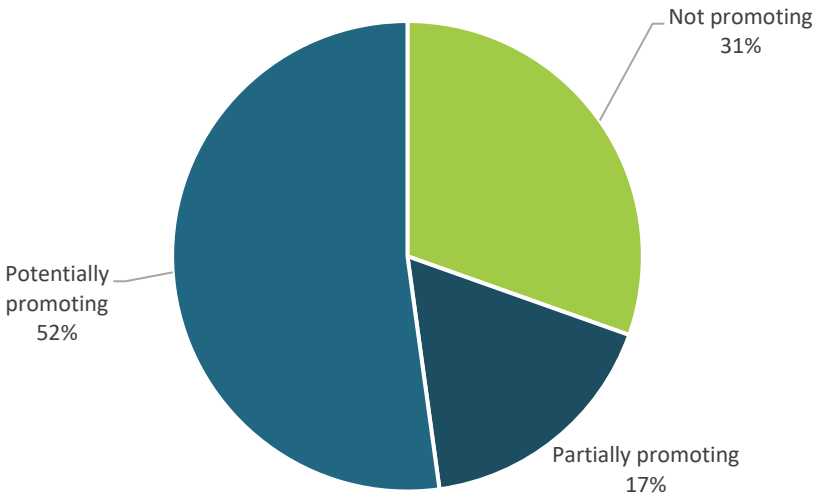
Not unlike the other countries, most of projects in Mozambique did not integrate any, let alone multiple elements of agroecology. However, Mozambique showed a considerable higher number of projects that implemented one element, which in most cases included efficiency or responsible governance (Figure 11).

Figure 11 Mozambique: number of agroecological elements per project



But despite the relatively low integration of different elements, the projects implemented in Mozambique more frequently potentially (51 percent) or partially (17 percent) promoted agroecology (Figure 12). These include projects that do not directly implement agroecological activities but through their bottom-up support for smallholder farmers, or through a focus on securing land tenure rights for women and youth, can potentially contribute to a system that is more sustainable and fairer. Projects that partially promote agroecology include those that help farmers recover after the 2019 cyclones by making food production more resilient for future extreme weather events.

Figure 12 Mozambique: degree of agroecological promotion



1.2.8 Gender mainstreaming

To assess whether the analysed projects mainstreamed and implemented gender as a cross-cutting issue, we analysed the presence of project objectives and activities that set out an intention to impacts women's social-economic position. This includes projects that primarily target women, such as projects seeking to secure land rights for female smallholders, as well as projects that at least consider gendered impacts, such as projects that explicitly include women among the target beneficiaries or that commit to collecting gender-segregated data.

We found that 44 out of 159 projects integrated gender into project objectives and activities. Most of these projects, however, only did so as a sub-objective, or as a small element of the project. In many cases, these included broad commitments to impact women without evidencing how project activities would realise these impacts, or limited targets in which women only represented a small minority of project beneficiaries. Only 14 projects were explicitly committed to prioritising positive outcomes for women specifically, of which only five projects partially or potentially promoted agroecology.

It was beyond the scope of this study to evaluate whether and to what extent the analysed projects had positive impacts on women's livelihoods, or to assess the different gendered strategies in agricultural projects. However, the rapid analysis of the integration of gender in projects' objectives and activities gives an indication whether gender has been mainstreamed across agricultural projects implemented in Ghana, Ethiopia, Uganda and Mozambique. The findings suggest that roughly 28 percent of projects at least somewhat integrate gender as a cross-cutting issue. However, most projects (115 of 159) did not integrate gender and women in project objectives or activities at all.

1.2.9 Development of agroecology over time

It is important to note that the results above relate to all projects with a start date since 2010. However, since then, trade and development policies have evolved, priorities on the international agenda have shifted (for example the launch of the SDGs in 2015), and agroecology gained greater recognition over time (such as the FAO's recognition of agroecology in 2014). To investigate whether Dutch public funding support for agroecology in Ghana, Ethiopia, Uganda, and Mozambique has shifted over time, we investigated the percentage of projects in each year that did not promote agroecology compared to projects that promoted agroecology (potentially, partially, or fully), and plotted these results over time (Figure 13**Error! Reference source not found.**). Despite the large fluctuations over time, a trend analysis reveals that on average, the share of projects that do not promote agroecology is decreasing (Figure 14), whereas the share of projects that potentially, partially or fully promote agroecology is increasing slightly (Figure 15).

Although the sample size is too small and the selection of focus country is too narrow to draw broad conclusions about Dutch policies, the fluctuations in the data may correspond with shifts in the Dutch government in 2012 and 2017, between which the funding of agroecological projects decreased compared to other years. Additionally, the overall increasing support for agroecology can be explained by the adoption of the SDGs in 2015, which strongly shaped Dutch development cooperation policy into a more holistic approach to sustainable, social, and economic development. In this context, the narrative around global food systems has also gained prominence in the past years as a framework to discuss a transition towards sustainable production of food worldwide.[23]

Figure 13 Evolution of Dutch public funding for agroecology 2012 - 2020

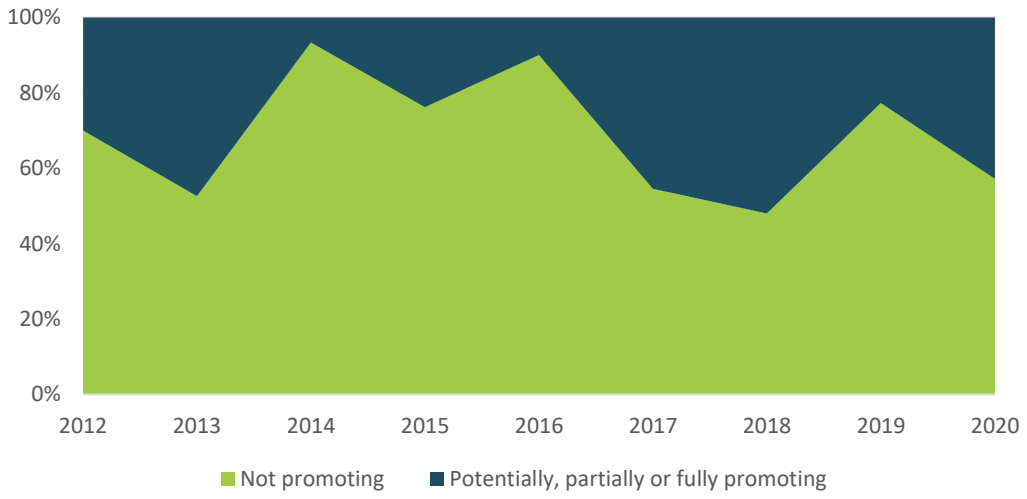


Figure 14 Share of projects not promoting agroecology 2012-2020

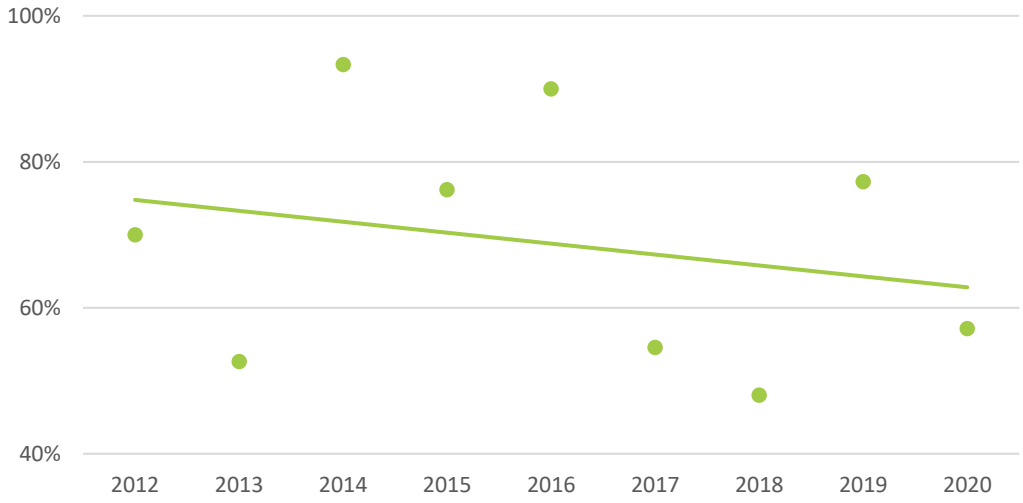
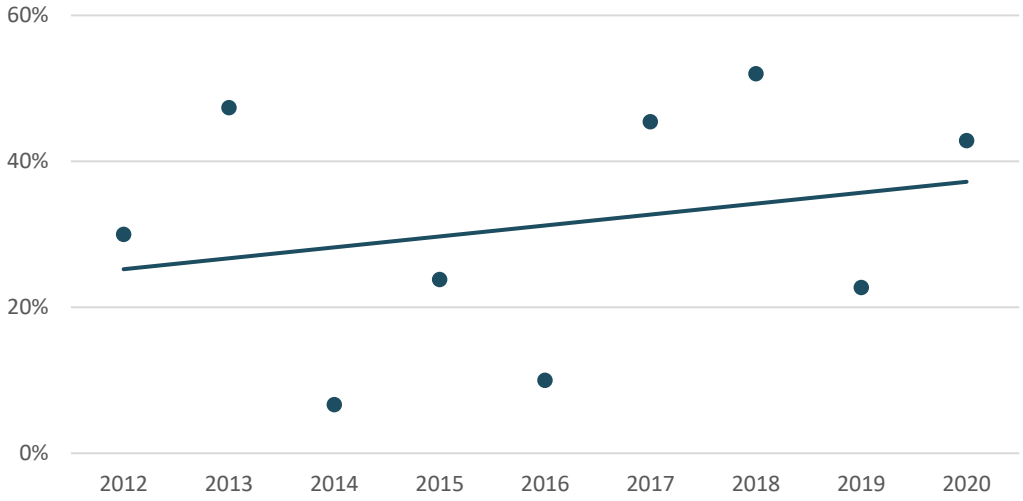


Figure 15 Share of projects potentially, partially and fully promoting agroecology 2012-2020



3

Agroecology in Dutch foreign policy

To contextualise the findings presented in Chapter 2, this chapter reviews Dutch policies in place that aim at the promotion of agricultural and market development in Ethiopia, Ghana, Uganda, and Mozambique. In doing this, we analysed the organisation of Dutch public funding as well as the role of Dutch missions overseas as well as Agricultural Envoys in the implementation of these policies.

3.1 Dutch foreign policy funding

The funds spent by the Netherlands to operationalise its foreign policy are set out in the Homogeneous Budget for International Cooperation (*Homogene Groep Internationale Samenwerking*, HGIS).[24] Since 1997, HGIS has been a separate budgetary structure within the national budget. It combines the international cooperation budgets of individual ministries, enabling them to be viewed in conjunction with each other. As such, the HGIS is an important instrument for an integrated and coherent foreign policy because it provides an overview of the principal foreign spending items.[25] Within HGIS, a distinction is made between spending that meets the criteria for ODA and other, non-ODA spending on international policy. As the coordinator of Dutch foreign policy, the Minister of Foreign Affairs also coordinates the HGIS. [26]

The Dutch government goes by the definition of the OECD of ODA, which includes government aid such as grants, "soft" loans, and the provision of technical assistance designed to promote the economic development and welfare of developing countries. This definition excludes loans and credits for military purposes.[27] In this context, aid may be provided bilaterally, from donor to recipient, or channelled through a multilateral development agency such as the United Nations or the World Bank.[28]

The countries and territories that qualify for ODA are provided in a list issued by the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC). However, as of 2018, Dutch development cooperation has concentrated primarily on the unstable regions near Europe: West Africa/the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, the Middle East and North Africa. The aid destined for these focus countries is meant to address the root causes of poverty, migration, terrorism, and climate change.[29]

3.1.1 HGIS policy themes

The HGIS is divided according to 9 policy themes, each with a dedicated budget, including both ODA and non-ODA expenditures. While these policy themes undergo periodic changes that respond to shifting government coalitions and priorities, the HGIS budget is adjusted annually in agreement with the Dutch government's commitments to the OECD target. The OECD target is a commitment by UN member states, who have agreed that developed countries will spend at least 0.7% of their Gross National Income (GNI) on development cooperation.[30] As of 2020, the HGIS policy themes are:[31]

Policy theme 1: Strengthened international rule of law, respect for human rights and host country policy

The general objective of this policy theme is to promote a well-functioning international legal order, with a permanent commitment to human rights as an integral part of foreign policy. The Hague, as legal capital of the world, is home to major international institutions such as Europol, Eurojust, the International Court of Justice, and the International Criminal Court. The funds to pay for these institutions stem partly from the HGIS.

Policy theme 2: Peace, security, and stability

The general objective of this policy theme is to promote Dutch and international security and stability through targeted bilateral and multilateral cooperation. Humanitarian aid to people in need also falls under this policy theme. The main HGIS programmes within this policy theme include Dutch participation in crisis management operations, the Stability Fund, the Matra programme (to help build and strengthen the rule of law, respect for human rights and democratisation in prospective EU countries and the Arab region), as well as activities to combat piracy.

Policy theme 3: Effective European cooperation

In the context of the Netherland's role within the EU, not only as a founding member of the union but also as a critically constructive partner, the general objective of this policy theme is to invest in a Europe that works. In this context, HGIS programmes within this policy theme include the Dutch contributions to the Council of Europe and the European Development Fund.

Policy theme 4: Consular advocacy and the international propagating Dutch values and interests

The general objective of this policy theme is to provide excellent consular services to Dutch nationals in need abroad, as well as providing travel documents to Dutch nationals abroad. Moreover, this policy theme aims at strengthening the Dutch cultural sector through international exchange and presentation and to create an attractive business climate for international organisations in the Netherlands.

Policy theme 5: Sustainable economic development, trade, and investment

The objective of this policy theme is to reduce poverty and social inequality, promoting sustainable inclusive growth worldwide and strengthening the international earning capacity of the Netherlands.

Policy theme 6: Sustainable development, food security, water and climate

This policy theme embodies one of Netherland's biggest efforts to advance SDG 2 (food security) and SDG 6 (water). The objective is to better and healthier nutrition (especially for young children), increase of agricultural productivity and income and sustainability of food systems in addition to improved access to drinking water and sanitation and hygiene. The focus here is on land rights, employment, climate change and conservation of tropical forests and (agro)biodiversity.

Policy theme 7: Social progress (incl. education)

The objective of this policy theme is to champion human fulfilment, social equity and inclusive development through the promotion of women's rights and gender equality, as well as reproductive health and rights, and strengthening education and civil society and promoting and protecting the political space for civil society organisations.

Policy theme 8: Reinforced frameworks for development

This policy objective aims to support multilateral cooperation and inclusive growth through enhanced multilateral engagement and other engagement; the use of culture and sport in developing countries to stimulate a social and promising society and to promote social involvement in the Netherlands.

Policy theme 9: Operating costs (incl. network of items) and other expenditure

This policy objective encompasses expenditures that cannot be classified under one of the policy-related chapters. This mainly concerns expenditures on equipment for the MFA, the majority of which is intended for the postal network and the expenditure for envoys, who are sent from the various departments to the Dutch representations abroad to contribute to their specific knowledge.

3.1.2 Envoys (attachés)

An envoy, or attaché, is a seconded employee of a department or (government) body other than the MFA who works at an embassy, consulate, or permanent overseas representation of the Netherlands. About a quarter of the posted personnel are envoys, as of 2021, there were 324 envoys.[32] Not all envoys are paid from the HGIS budget. While there are no recent figures publicly available regarding the number of HGIS-paid envoys, what is known is that there are currently agricultural envoys deployed in 58 Dutch representations overseas serving 79 countries.[33]

In the envoy note *Samen uit Samen thuis*, the MFA and the specialist ministries have made agreements to improve cooperation at the post. The purpose of these framework agreements is to contribute to the organisation of cooperation between the departments and services in The Hague, the Chef de Poste (CdP) and the envoy in such a way that scarce resources are used efficiently and effectively, and Dutch interests are optimally represented abroad. This concerns, among other things, agreements on deployment, cooperation and regulations.[34]

Agricultural envoys represent the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality abroad. These envoys are in charge of informing (potential) partners and governments overseas about opportunities for cooperation with the Netherlands. Moreover, they provide advice and information to Dutch companies and entrepreneurs from the agricultural sector doing business abroad. Lastly, the agricultural envoys play a facilitating role in veterinary and phytosanitary trade barriers.[35]

3.2 Dutch theory of change for women's rights and gender equality

The Netherland's international policy on women's rights and gender equality, aims to contribute to the achievement of SDG 5 (gender equality and empowerment of women and girls). In the Dutch theory of change for women's rights and gender equality focuses on four sub-goals: [36]

1. Increasing women's leadership and participation in political decision-making.
2. Giving women a greater say in the economy and improving the economic environment for women.
3. Preventing and stopping violence against women and girls.
4. Strengthening women's role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

To achieve these sub-goals, the Netherlands engages globally in gender diplomacy, and supports gender mainstreaming and gender-specific programmes. In the context of the Netherland's support for gender specific programmes, the MFA backs civil society organisations and individual women's rights defenders who are committed to achieving the same goals. This support comes from an acknowledgement of CSO's major role in urging attention for and strengthening the position of women.[37] Moreover, the Netherlands strives for increased cooperation with businesses to improve the working conditions for female employees as well as to generate opportunities for women entrepreneurs.[38]

With regards to the Dutch engagement in gender diplomacy, efforts are geared towards connecting and catalysing action of different actors, including women's rights and gender equality organisations, as well as governments, companies, knowledge institutes, etc. Moreover, the Netherlands is committed to strengthening women's rights and gender equality in international conventions, treaties, and agreements.[39]

In terms its gender mainstreaming efforts, the Netherlands' foreign policy aims at ensuring that women have an influence on and benefit from Dutch support and investments for development cooperation, promotion of foreign trade, security, and human rights. The Netherlands acknowledges that the improvement of gender equality requires active involvement in all aspects of policy through integrating the needs and interests of women and girls in all phases of policy, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of programmes.[40]

Also, in the context of gender mainstreaming, the MFA ensures that gender analyses are conducted for each programme and that these are translated into a concrete gender strategy with clear gender results and indicators. In 2019, four results areas were targeted and reported:[41]

1. Preventing violence against women
2. Women, peace and security
3. Economic participation
4. Political participation

3.3 Dutch theory of change for food security

After two decades now recognised as a "*period of neglect*" of agriculture and food security in the Dutch development cooperation, the Dutch MFA recognised in 2008 that a targeted approach to sustainable agriculture was crucial to combating hunger.[42] Since then, food security has been a key pillar in the Dutch priorities for international affairs, development cooperation and trade. To align these international policies with the domestic approach to agriculture, the MFA and LNV started a cooperative approach in 2008. While the MFA remained responsible for distributing ODA funds to agriculture and food security, LNV has been in charge of ensuring coherence with the international agriculture policy and coordinating the Dutch agricultural sector and knowledge infrastructure, though in practice this overlap between the two ministries has remained minimal.[43]

In 2012, the Dutch Food Security Policy 2012 – 2016 outlined sustainable agricultural production, access to better nutrition, more efficient markets, and a better business climate as key pillars in the MFA foreign policy. Despite integration of sustainability and efficiency, the focus remained on intensification of conventional agriculture and trade. A review of this policy conducted by the independent evaluation service of the MFA, the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (*Directie Internationaal Onderzoek en Beleidsevaluatie*, IOB), concluded that while this approach had indeed been effective in improving business environments and farmers' incomes, it only had a very limited impact on hunger and food security because the policy did not appropriately target malnourished people.[44]

Since 2015, the Dutch approach to international development cooperation and foreign affairs in food security and agricultural development has been formulated around the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), specifically the goal to end hunger, achieve food security, improve nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture (SDG 2). To assist in these global goals, the Netherlands seeks to lift 32 million people out of malnutrition, to double the incomes of 8 million smallholders, and to convert 7.5 million hectares of land into ecologically sustainable food production systems.[45] This includes a recognition for agroecology by strengthening regional markets, resilience of developing countries, creating enabling conditions through social and ecological requirements such as land rights, and limiting damage to and where possible improving agrobiodiversity.[46] The agroecological approach, while sparsely integrated, was also reaffirmed in 2019 when the MFA committed to a circular system to achieve SDG 2 with commitments to invest in climate resilience, inclusive growth, ecologically sustainable food systems, and land rights for (women) smallholders.[47]

However, the Dutch government has not explicitly committed to an agroecological transformation, and instead refers to agroecological principles as one of many methods to achieve more sustainable and fairer food systems. In terms of strategies, Dutch foreign policy since 2012 more strongly stresses sustainable intensification, commercialisation of smallholder production, access to arable land and resources particularly for women and youth, and trade. While these priorities are not necessarily at odds with agroecology, it does not inherently address its key principles. Instead of community-based approaches, the Dutch theory of change integrates a market-based approach, which focuses on supporting local private sectors while stimulating international trade. In this, the Netherlands seeks to leverage Dutch expertise in agricultural innovation, which includes mechanisation, inputs such as seeds and fertilizer, and circularity. In this line, the theory of change states that "*technological development leads, under the right preconditions, to progress/growth and increased sustainability. Investing in modern technologies is not a threat to people and the environment, but part of the solution*." [48] It is not clear, however, what these 'right preconditions' are, nor which technological developments should be fostered.

The centrality of private sector innovation in the Dutch development aid approach is manifested in the increased financial support for public-private partnerships (PPPs) and an emphasis on multi-stakeholder approaches in which both local and multinational corporations and commercial banks play important roles. According to the MFA, inclusive consultation processes as part of such multi-stakeholder approaches may take longer initially but are likely to be more efficient in the long run than fast, top-down interventions.[49]

3.4 The Netherlands and circular agriculture

For decades, the Netherlands has prided itself as a global leader in highly productive and mechanised agricultural systems with domestic production mostly focused on dairy and meat. But more recent scientific insights into the damaging effects of this approach in the context of a looming climate crisis has laid bare the need to shift away from harmful practices such as the widespread use of chemical pesticides and fertilizer, or the need to diversify crops to prevent soil degradation. To address these issues, the Dutch government has been shifting its approach to agriculture, both domestically and in its foreign policy, over the last few years to better align with its commitments as part of the SDGs and the Paris Agreement. In this context, LNV outlined a vision that positions the Netherlands as a leader in circular agriculture in 2018.[50] Recognising the need to make food production more sustainable, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and prevent degradation of soil, water and biodiversity, the Minister Schouten of LNV calls circular agriculture the "*inevitable and conclusive solution to these issues*".[51]

Failing to define circular agriculture and its exact components, LNV refers to broad sets of actions from recycling to climate-smart technologies. Central to circular agriculture is what LNV calls 'nature-inclusive agriculture', which seeks to rely on natural ecosystem services rather than external outputs, minimise adverse impacts on the environment, and to contribute to biodiversity. On a food production level, these values are in line with agroecological principles such as increasing efficiency, fostering regulation of different components in the food system in synergies, recycling and a stronger emphasis on local markets and shorter food supply chains. However, LNV's interpretation of circular agriculture does not strongly integrate the social and political elements central to agroecology, such as knowledge co-creation, grassroots innovation and the centrality of human value and food traditions.[52]

LNV's vision for circular agriculture is not just a domestic aim, as it strongly emphasises the role of the Netherlands as a 'global leader in circular agriculture'. According to LNV, this leadership role and Dutch expertise should be utilised to combat malnutrition and make the global food system more sustainable while strengthening economic perspectives for farmers.[53] To realise the vision of the Netherlands as a global leader in circular agriculture by 2030, LNV subsequently adopted a 'plan of action' in 2019.[54] The broad guidelines in this action plan include recommendations for foreign policy such as multi-stakeholder collaboration, transparency deals with the farm and food sector, and support for certain approaches in EU policies. However, the guidelines do not outline any policy recommendations relating to development aid or trade with lower income countries, nor concrete and measurable commitments on supporting other countries to achieve this circular vision. Despite its claim to a global vision for sustainability, LNV's circular agriculture policy focuses on benefiting domestic production first and foremost, and it is not clear how Dutch expertise or funding is envisioned to contribute to a global food system transformation.

3.5 The Netherlands in Africa: From aid to trade?

One of the primary drivers of Dutch development aid is the opportunity of trade and the rationale that this creates self-reliance in the long run. A 2018 policy brief on *Investing in Global Prospects* phrased this economically-driven objective as one of mutual interest between donor and recipient country: "*The Netherlands' relations with developing and emerging countries will be used to open up markets for Dutch businesses. We make our innovative strength and capacity available for development, and the Netherlands will focus on the interests we share with developing countries*."[55]

Given that the agri-food sectors traditionally form one of the most important industries in Dutch trade, it is no wonder that agriculture, food security and nutrition has formed one of the most crucial pillars of Dutch development cooperation. While the private sector has had an important role in the agricultural development aid for decades, this role has been consistently strengthened and reaffirmed through the policy framework. After MFA announced food security as one of the four pillars for development aid priorities in 2011, the Dutch Food Security Policy 2012 – 2015 focused on sustainable intensification, more efficient markets, and creating a business climate that fosters international trade.[56] In parallel, the Dutch government increasingly channelled public funds through public-private partnerships (PPPs) and NGOs and multilateral organisations with economic development as primary objectives. The rationale behind this focus on trade, in addition to creating benefits for the Dutch economy, is that this policy promotes self-reliance and long-term economic sustainability.[57]

This approach was reaffirmed in the 2018 *Investing in Global Prospects* foreign affairs policy, which announced "*a larger role for the private sector and knowledge institutions, including the Dutch 'top sectors'*" such as the agri-food sector.[58] In order to achieve the SDGs, the government aims to strengthen and modernise the African agricultural sector by leveraging the business skills, innovation and knowledge of the Dutch agri-food sector. Through a combination of private sector development, support for farmers and agricultural research, the Netherlands aims to double the productivity and revenues of at least eight million farms by 2030.[59]

Within the broad development aid and trade policy frameworks, the Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation (*Buitenlandse Handel en Ontwikkeling Samenwerking*, BHOS) note of 2018 outlines specific strategies and priority areas for countries and regions.[60] Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is traditionally one of the most important recipient regions for Dutch development aid, and the Netherlands has forged strong ties with development actors through its embassies.

3.5.1 Ethiopia

While the 2019 - 2022 Dutch development strategy in Ethiopia is predominantly focused on security and conflicts and support for refugee reception in the region, food and nutrition security remains another focus area alongside private sector development.[61] According to the MFA, Dutch development programmes in Ethiopia reached 476,093 family farms directly and another 1.3 million indirectly in 2019, mostly through the five projects under the BENEFIT programme umbrella in collaboration with the Netherlands Embassy and Wageningen University.[62]

The Dutch Embassy in Addis Ababa also hosts an Agricultural Envoy from LNV, whose main mandate is to connect Dutch and Ethiopian agri-food businesses and facilitate trade. In fact, LNV phrases this responsibility as follows: "*The core of the work of the Agricultural Team in Addis Ababa focuses on market access, stimulating trade and investments in agri-food products, agro-technologies, transfer of knowledge and capacity building, public-private partnerships and integrated cooperation in projects that promote social and sustainable entrepreneurship, sustainable food supply and efficient food value chains.*"[63]

The Netherlands imported goods worth 128 million euros from Ethiopia in 2020, predominantly cut flowers (80 percent). Likewise, the Netherlands is Ethiopia's 23rd most important export partner.[64] Ethiopia does not currently have a free trade agreement with the EU, but because it is listed as a least developed country (LDC) by the EU, Ethiopia is exempted from import tariffs and quota under the Everything But Arms (EBA) scheme.[65]

3.5.2 Ghana

The Dutch strategy in Ghana is focused on moving away from aid to trade, prioritising private sector development. Accordingly, the Dutch food and nutrition strategy in Ghana focuses on partnering with local and international businesses, particularly those run by young Ghanaian entrepreneurs.[66] This strategy is aligned with Ghana's own *Ghana Beyond Aid* agenda to realise economic growth by creating favourable conditions for agribusiness to trade internationally. With a strong emphasis on cash crops like cocoa and palm oil, the Netherlands aims to support sustainable private sector investments, for example through increasing yields and efficiency, building capacity, and ensuring access to finance for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).[67]

Because of this focus on developing Ghana's agribusiness sector, the Dutch embassy in Accra hosts an Agricultural Envoy from LNV. The envoy, which also covers Ivory Coast and Nigeria, was established in 2018 due to recent economic growth in the region, which is presented as an opportunity for trade for the Netherlands. Facilitating trade and creating business opportunities for Dutch companies in West Africa is the main priority for the Agricultural Envoy in Accra. According to Bram Wits, agricultural advisor at the embassy, Dutch companies play a crucial role in realising Ghana's transition from trade to aid, although it is crucial that local needs are considered in this relationship.[68]

Alongside Nigeria, South Africa and Ivory Coast, Ghana is already one of the Netherland's most important trade partners in Africa. In 2020, the Netherlands imported goods valued at € 718 million from Ghana, of which most importantly cacao beans (30% of total imports), followed by tropical fruits, processed cocoa products, and vegetable fats. Likewise, the Netherlands is Ghana's fifth largest export partner, partially because of Port of Rotterdam, which serves as a gateway to Europe.[69] Since 2016, Ghana has an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the EU with a development-oriented free trade agreement which grants free access to the EU market for all products made in Ghana, and a preferential access to the Ghanaian market for 80 percent of EU export.[70] The EPA is supposed to function as a building block towards a long-term perspective of a continent-to-continent free trade agreement between the EU and the African Continental Free Trade Area.[71]

3.5.3 Uganda

In Uganda, Dutch development aid is currently focused on fostering stability and democracy, although increasing food production and climate resilience are other focus points.[72] In line with Uganda's own Vision 2040 to accelerate economic growth, the Netherlands seeks to support commercialisation of the agricultural sector. As such, the agricultural aid has focused on creating youth employment in the agricultural sector, improving incomes, and supporting businesses particularly in the dairy and seed development sectors.[73] The Multi-Annual Country Strategy 2019 – 2022 states that Dutch bilateral support to Uganda in the food sector will be market-led through a combination of investments in private and public innovative, climate-resilient food systems initiatives. In several subsectors, such as dairy, potato, rice, seeds and horticulture, the Netherlands "*has the ambition to be a dominant player.*"[74] While the strategy prioritises outcomes relating to improved nutrition, increased resilience, and economic growth, the MFA claims that promoting commercial farming and branding of the Netherlands in Uganda will lead to increased trade benefits. This includes significant funds channelled through RVO to improve market access and sustainable trade.[75] In line with these policies, the Agricultural Envoy covering Rwanda and Uganda recently relocated from Kigali to Kampala because "*research showed that Uganda offers more opportunities for the Dutch agri-food sector than Rwanda*," particularly in the dairy, potato, and poultry sectors.[76]

In 2020, the Netherlands imported goods worth € 58 million from Uganda, particularly cut flowers, which makes the Netherlands Uganda's seventh largest export partner.[77] In 2014, the Eastern African Community (EAC) finished negotiations for an EPA with the EU. However, it was not signed by three of the EAC members, including Uganda, because of the uncertainties surrounding Brexit as well as concerns that the agreement would deplete East African countries of raw materials and thereby hamper its industrial development. Because of this, the EPA did not come into force.[78] Nonetheless, Uganda's status as LDC, exempts it from import tariffs and quota on its agricultural commodities exports to the EU under the EBA Scheme.[79]

3.5.4 Mozambique

Mozambique is one of the most impoverished countries worldwide and is highly dependent on agriculture (80 percent of the labour force is employed in the sector).[80] The Multi-Annual Country Strategy (MACS) 2019 – 2022 of the Netherlands in Mozambique outlines a scaling back in development cooperation with an increased focus on 'aid to trade' support.[ii] One of the measures taken include a phase-out of development funds to organisations in agriculture, land management and water, as well as the termination of support to social protection safety nets. Instead, the current strategy outlines climate-smart agriculture as the main approach to improve productivity of smallholder farmers, and a focus on economic development through investments in public and private resources. According to the MFA, Dutch development funding in Mozambique has mostly benefitted smallholder farmers, in contrast to the support to commercial farmers by other major donors.[81]

[ii] It is important to note that the Multi-Annual Country Strategy 2019-2022 Mozambique was elaborated and finalised prior to the cyclones Idai and Kenneth that made landfall in Mozambique in the months of March and April in 2019 and has not been adjusted accordingly.

However, extreme weather events, such as two devastating cyclones that hit the country in 2019, have been destabilising nutrition security as agricultural areas were destroyed and productivity was severely impacted. Because of this, the Dutch development aid strategy has temporarily and partially shifted to humanitarian aid and recovery funds, in addition to development projects focused on increasing agricultural productivity of smallholders and enhancing climate resilience. The cyclones also meant that Dutch aid did not achieve its objectives, as only 25,000 smallholders were able to increase productivity instead of the targeted 60,000.[82]

There is no Dutch Agricultural Envoy present in Mozambique, as trade in agri-food commodities between the two countries is limited. In 2020, the Netherlands imported 155 million euros worth of goods from Mozambique of which mostly aluminium (over 75 percent of imports), making the Netherlands Mozambique's fifth largest export partner.[83] Mozambique joined the EPA between the EU and Southern African States in 2018.[84]

Shifting ministries: recent institutional changes to Dutch foreign policymaking

In recent years, the responsibilities of different ministries within the Dutch government relating to its international policy on agriculture and food systems has shifted significantly.

In 1965, the post of Minister of Aid to Developing Countries was developed as a minister without portfolio position (i.e., the minister does not head the ministry but falls within the wider MFA), which later changed names to Minister of Development Aid in 1971. But in 2012, the government Rutte II moved the foreign trade portfolio from the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation to the MFA and changed the title to 'Minister of Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation'.

Similarly, agricultural policy has shifted ministries recently. The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries was a separate ministry until in 2010, the Rutte I government merged it with economic affairs under the new Ministry of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation. In 2017, however, this decision was reversed, and a new Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality was separated from the new Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy.

These shifts are not merely organisational formalities but may have tangible implications for Dutch policies, and the decisions reflect the priorities of the Netherlands' international affairs. These possible implications should be the subject of future research.

4

Discussion and conclusion

Dutch public funding does not lend significant support for projects that implement agroecological approaches to agriculture and food security, particularly in countries where foreign policy emphasises international trade over aid. This chapter discusses the key findings of this study based on the funding analysis and policy review, with a focus on the strategies to foster more support for an agroecological transformation of the food system in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Dutch public funds directed to agriculture and food systems in Sub-Saharan Africa do not significantly support an agroecological transformation. Out of 159 projects implemented in Ghana, Uganda, Ethiopia and Mozambique since 2012, 67 percent did not promote agroecology. While 51 projects partially (25 percent) and potentially (7 percent) supported agroecology, in most cases these projects only implemented one (26 percent) or two (7 percent) agroecological elements. As such, this promotion of agroecology usually remained limited to sustainable intensification by making the use of external inputs such as pesticides and fertilizers more efficient. In contrast, only two projects fully promoted an agroecological transformation and implemented more than five elements simultaneously. These findings were similar across Ethiopia, Uganda, and Ghana, where the number of projects that did not support agroecology ranged between 67 to 77 percent. In Mozambique, however, most projects potentially (52 percent) or partially (17 percent) promoted agroecology – significantly more than in the other three focus countries.

This can largely be explained by the Dutch foreign policy and development cooperation strategy in each of these four countries. International trade is a central objective of Dutch development aid, based on the rationale that trade between the Netherlands and low-income countries will result in mutual benefits through economic opportunities for both the donor and the recipient country. For this reason, Dutch public funding for agriculture in the Global South tends to adopt market-based approaches that seek to develop agricultural production destined for regional and international export markets. This was also observed in the focus countries in this study, such as the financial support for Ghana's cash crops (particularly cocoa and palm oil), Ethiopia's horticultural sector, and Uganda's potato and dairy farming. This approach also calls for a large role for the private sector, in particular the traditionally important Dutch agri-food sector, and public development funds are increasingly channelled through PPPs.

The country-specific policies of Dutch development cooperation in Ethiopia, Ghana, and Uganda are currently in a transition from *aid to trade*, focusing on reducing humanitarian and development aid in favour of investments in trade relationships. This is also reflected in the presence of the agricultural envoys at the embassies as facilitators of agri-food trade with the Netherlands and significant number of RVO projects and private sector-led initiatives focused on agri-food export markets. In Mozambique, however, the focus remains on development aid, and the Netherlands to date does not have a significant trade relationship with Mozambique. Instead, most projects in Mozambique were implemented by NGOs and governments to secure land tenure rights for women and youth, and to increase the resilience of local food production to extreme weather events.

Agroecology as a practice promotes fair and sustainable trade that respects the ecological, human, and social values of the food system, but the type of trade logic promoted by Dutch funding is not necessarily conducive of agroecology. For one, the economic asymmetries between the Netherlands (and the EU) and its trading partners in developing countries render the latter prone to accept terms of trade that result more profitable for the partner with the larger bargaining power.[85] Moreover, the focus on high input, monocropping of cash crops destined for export markets contrast with agroecological systems that focus on producing nutritious foods for local markets in a circular system. This is reinforced by the focus on funding PPPs, which focus on agricultural productivity, or at most implement sustainable intensification, but generally do not seek to realise an agroecological transformation on an ecological, social or political level. This seems to be particularly true in countries where the Netherlands has a vested or growing trade interest, as is the case for Ghana, Uganda and Ethiopia, whereas the emphasis on export crops is much less strong in countries like Mozambique.

In terms of Dutch ODA support for SDG 5 (gender equality), from the project documents reviewed, this study did not find indication of the gender analysis promoted by MFA as part of its gender mainstreaming strategy. This is not surprising, given that the Dutch theory of change for women's rights and gender equality does not specifically target agriculture and/or food security as a cross-cutting theme. Instead, gender equality in agriculture is addressed in the result area of Economic participation (section 3.1.1). This result area focuses on improving legislation, working conditions, values, norms, and behaviour and on supporting civil society organisations working to create an environment in which women can earn a decent income and fulfil their economic potential. Accordingly, only 44 projects out of 159 included objectives or activities linked to women's economic position and inclusion, or measured gender impacts in project outcomes. In most cases, however, these projects mentioned gender as a sub-objective and not as one of the core priorities.

Despite the relatively low support for agroecology, this study also found developments and practices in Dutch public funding for agriculture in Africa. In concluding, we highlight several crucial opportunities that could be created by Dutch ODA funding for an agroecological transformation:

- **An increasing support for agroecological potential.**

The level of support for agroecology by Dutch public funding has significantly grown over the past decade, and an increasing number of projects at least potentially or partially support a food system transformation. This fits into a globally shifting narrative around sustainable development, as defined by the SDGs, and the increasing recognition for the role of food systems in climate change and food security. In the context of the Netherlands' commitments to the SDGs, circular agriculture and climate action, further increasing funding for agroecological projects promise to form a key strategy for the Netherlands to fulfil these commitments.

- **A strong focus on creating the social, political and legal prerequisites for agroecology.**

The Dutch development cooperation strategy in agriculture strongly integrates social, political and legal approaches that can support an agroecological transformation. Particularly the ODA distributed by MFA focuses on land tenure for smallholders, empowering women and youth, and helping local businesses to flourish, all of which create an enabling environment for agroecology.

- **Innovation and knowledge creation at the centre of agricultural development.**

The Netherlands' role in agricultural innovation is also central in its foreign policy, and the government distributes significant funds to knowledge creation, innovation, training and knowledge-sharing platforms across businesses and countries.

On the other side of the coin, however, several funding strategies of the Netherlands may hamper rather than foster an agroecological transformation. To overcome these barriers and support a more inclusive and sustainable food system in Africa, the Netherlands should adjust the following strategies:

- **A shift away from the focus on export crops.**

Dutch public funding tends to support the development of export crops due to the focus on international trade. However, these cash crops often involve monocropping, high use of (chemical) inputs, and do not benefit local food security, all of which stands in stark contrast to the principles of agroecology. To achieve the SDGs, the Netherlands should shift its funding away from these harmful forms of agricultural production and increase support for sustainable and inclusive production of food for local markets.

- **A move from market-based to community-led approaches.**

The Netherlands adopts a strong focus on market-based approaches implemented by private partners often led by Dutch companies, but this strategy is not necessarily supportive of an agroecological food system due to emphasis on private rather than public interests. Instead, the Netherlands should focus on community-led initiatives in which local grassroots organisations or farmers cooperatives lead the way in implementing development projects.

- **Decentralise knowledge and foster knowledge co-creation.**

The Netherlands invests significant resources into knowledge creation and innovation, but this often takes a centralised approach in which a (Dutch) research institution or company owns the intellectual property or knowledge products. Similarly, training and capacity approaches tend to implement one-way knowledge transfers. However, an inclusive, agroecological food system relies on shared knowledge co-created by communities and farmers, scientists, companies and research institutions. This not only makes knowledge creation more inclusive, but also ensures that local environmental and cultural contexts are an enhancing factor of agroecological transformations.

- **Provide requirements around implementation of sustainability and inclusivity.**

Particularly in recent years, projects funded by Dutch public agencies strongly emphasise sustainability and inclusivity in project objectives. However, it is often unclear how these projects actually seek to realise those principles, as they are often not reflected in the project's activities and outcomes. To ensure that sustainability and inclusivity are at the core of Dutch public funding for food security and agriculture, the government should set clear expectations and requirements for projects to receive funding, including (measurable) indicators for evaluation purposes.

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Appendix 1 IATI Registry: Data Query and Filters

Data Query IATI Registry:

- **Reporting Organisations**
  - IUCN National Committee of The Netherlands
  - Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands
  - Netherlands Commission for Environmental Assessment
  - Netherlands Enterprise Agency
  - Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO)
  - Netherlands Space Office
  - Netherlands Water Partnership
  - PUM Netherlands
- **Sector Category**
  - 311: Agriculture
  - 520: Development Food Assistance
  - 312: Forestry
- **Additional Sub-Sectors**
  - 32165: Fertilizer Plants
  - 32267: Fertilizer Minerals
  - 43071: Food Security Policy and Administrative Management
  - 43072: Household Food Security Programmes
  - 12240: Basic Nutrition
  - 32162: Forest Industries
- **Recipient Countries**
  - Ethiopia
  - Ghana
  - Uganda
  - Mozambique
- **Date Filters**
  - Activity Start Date from 01-01-2012
- **Row format**
  - Each Unique Activity
- **Repeat rows**
  - No

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