

Development aid funds for agroecology

Support for agroecology of Dutch ODA
spending

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About this report

This report has been commissioned by Both ENDS. Its purpose is to provide an overview of Dutch ODA resources related to food and agriculture spent since 2010 and the extent to which they have been (or continue to be) supportive of agroecology, providing an indication as to whether or not the Dutch government has participated in fostering the agroecological transition.

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Summary

Agroecology is a scientific, ecological, social, and political movement aspiring to transform the global food system into one that is more sustainable, equitable and inclusive. Putting ecological science at the core of agricultural production, agroecology builds on indigenous and local knowledge, respecting the dynamic balance of an ecosystem and using its biodiversity, synergetic networks and natural cycles to produce nutritious food that requires few external inputs. At the same time, agroecology provides a more sustainable, equitable and resilient alternative to the industrial, globalised and market-driven food system through responsible governance, close interaction between producers and consumers, knowledge co-creation, circular economies and upholding human and social value.

There is increasing consensus among scientists, political leaders, and civil society that agroecology is a crucial strategy to realise global food security in the face of the climate crisis, and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Despite the widespread recognition for the need to adopt agroecology and unlock its potential, funding to promote the agroecological transformation of our food system remains minimal. Various studies across the EU found that Official Development Aid (ODA) monetary flows by European institutions and countries hardly fund agroecology, or at most promote sustainable intensification projects that do not integrate core agroecological principles. Only a very small minority of funds contribute to transformational agroecological transitions, but still usually in a limited or partial manner.

This raised the question how the Netherlands, as a major donor country and leader in agricultural innovation, compares to its European peers on supporting agroecological approaches through ODA flows. This report therefore presents an overview of the Dutch ODA policies on agriculture and food security in the past decade and how these relate to agroecology (Chapter 3), an in-depth assessment of the actual funding flows contributing to agroecological transformation (Chapter 4), and key recommendations on how an agroecological transition could be stimulated more strongly through ODA incentives by the Dutch government (Chapter 5).

In total, 260 projects funded by Dutch ODA between 2010 and 2020, with a funding of over € 2.6 billion, were assessed on the level and degree to which they promoted agroecological principles. Linking the findings to the Dutch development aid policy framework in the same period, this report includes the following key findings:

- The Netherlands' strategy to channel increased ODA funding through multilateral organisations and Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) is not favourable to promoting agroecology. PPPs and multilateral organisations are not strong drivers of agroecology, and the projects funded through these channels have mostly promoted conventional agriculture.
- The traditional rationale of aid for trade has hindered an agroecological approach. Dutch ODA funding for agricultural development tends to centre around objectives of intensification, market access, and increased productivity. These objectives often go together with monocultural cash crops and mechanisation.
- Thirty-five percent of ODA funding did not contribute to agroecology, and instead promoted conventional agriculture and trade.
- When agroecological elements were part of a project, this mostly remained limited to sustainable intensification through increased efficiency of external inputs (26 percent).
- A significant gap exists in Dutch ODA funding for agroecosystem transformations, such as recycling, resilience, synergies, and biodiversity. Only 4 percent of projects promoted these elements, despite the importance of these transformations in the face of the climate crisis.

- There is significant support for creating the social and political factors necessary to transition to more equitable and just food systems. Around 9 percent of Dutch ODA funding supports transformational agroecological food system change (9 percent), as well as projects that create the socially enabling conditions (18 percent) or governance structures (9 percent) that may help support agroecology. However, these social and political elements were not strongly linked to agroecological and sustainable practices.
- Dutch ODA funding makes important and crucial efforts to focus on smallholders, particularly women and youth, but does not adequately ensure that these projects foster co-creation, adaption to local contexts and bottom-up empowerment.

In concluding, support for agroecological transformation within Dutch ODA funding on agricultural and food security remains limited. Although there is a clear interest to promote sustainable agriculture as well as just and fair governance, these principles are not strongly or holistically connected in funding activities. For this reason, recommendations are made to strengthen stimuli for agroecological transformation through Dutch ODA.

The Dutch government, in particular the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Quality and Nature, should:

- Assess funding applications for Dutch ODA based on the integration of the ten elements of agroecology, regardless of whether the project seeks to promote agroecological transformation, to assess a project's objectives around the core agricultural challenges of sustainability, equity, inclusivity and social justice.
- Implement funding stimuli for projects that move beyond sustainable intensification through input efficiency towards more ecological integration of recycling, regulation, diversification, synergies and resilience.
- Urge ODA recipients, including governments, NGOs, PPPs and academic institutes, to adopt bottom-up approaches in agricultural projects by partnering on equal grounds with grassroots organisations that prioritise local expertise, context-specific knowledge and inclusive, co-created processes.
- Expect agricultural projects with runtimes longer than five years to prioritise long-term climate resilience, including by decreasing external input dependencies and strengthening ecological synergies, rather than promoting short-term productivity outcomes.
- Align MoFA strategies on food security and international agriculture with the LNV strategies on circular agriculture and ensure that this strategy is reflected in ODA funding.
- Prioritise local socio-economic benefits, such as shorter value chains and closer connections between producers and consumers through local markets, above international trade objectives or Dutch private-sector interests.
- Participate actively in multilateral discussions, particularly within United Nations agencies such as the FAO and UNEP, to activate stronger linkages between the environmental, social and human values of food systems with agroecological principles.

In addition, civil society organisations and non-governmental organisations supportive of an agroecological transition, such as BothENDS, can further support these incentives through advocacy that should:

- Socialising the findings of this study amongst allied Dutch MPs and urging them to raise parliamentary questions and engage in budget discussions regarding ODA and how these should align with Dutch food and agriculture policy.
- Lobby the new Dutch government that will be formed after the parliamentary elections of 17 March 2021 to explicitly commit to agroecology as a key strategy in the new food security, agriculture, and development aid policies.
- Utilise storytelling of successful agroecological transitions as a key strategy to restore ecosystems in the context of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030, which will be launched on World Environment Day on 5 June 2021.

- Leverage momentum around the UN Food Systems Summit 2021 to advocate for stronger integration of agroecological methods with socially enabling governance on the multilateral ODA level.
- Inform representatives of MoFA of the value they can add to the Food Otherwise (Voedsel Anders, VA) movement during the 2021 VA conference and how MoFA can benefit from engaging in discussions with civil society about agroecological transformations taking place in the Netherlands and abroad.

Lastly, it is recommended that BothENDS and its civil society allies explore the following potential future research avenues and follow-ups advocacy activities:

- Assess the degree of agroecological promotion in other funding flows including the Directorate-General for Foreign Economic Relations (DGEBE), regular contributions and membership fees to multilateral organisations and fora, or bilateral governmental cooperation around food and agriculture.
- Understanding the role of the financial sector in agroecological transformation by investigating private-sector financing, potentially focusing on the role of Dutch banks and financiers (such as Rabobank) in investments into agricultural activities. This can be done in collaboration with Profundo.
- Likewise, exploring opportunities to raise the promotion of agroecological principles on the agenda when it comes to e.g. the implementation of the FMO's Sustainable Trade Initiative (Initiatief Duurzame Handel); Dutch role as shareholder and board member of International Financial Institutions (such as World Bank); improving financial regulation of food agriculture investments through for example, the Network for Greening the Financial System and within GroenLinks and D66 in Dutch Parliament work on visions to reform the financial system.
- Promoting agroecological principles in other investment multi-stakeholder fora such as International Responsible Business Conduct and the Association of Investors for Sustainable Development (VBDO).
- Conduct in-depth case studies of ODA-funded projects in each sector to assess the integration of the ten elements in detail, potentially including independent field evaluations. This can function as a learning tool to identify how development aid projects could better integrate and interconnect different agroecological elements and may also provide tools and storytelling for advocacy efforts.

Abbreviations

ACT	Agroecology Criteria Tool
AsDB	Asian Development Bank
CAWR	Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience
CIDSE	International Cooperation for Development and Solidarity
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EU	European Union
EUR	Euro
EZ	Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs (Ministerie van Economische Zaken)
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GAFFSP	Global Agriculture and Food Security Programme
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GNI	Gross National Income
IATI	International Aid Transparency Initiative
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFDC	International Fertilizer Development Center
LNV	Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food (Ministerie van Landbouw, Natuur en Voedselkwaliteit)
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MoFA	Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken)
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ODA	Official Development Aid
OECD	Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development
PPP	Public-Private Partnership
RVO	Netherlands Enterprise Agency (Rijksdienst voor Ondernemend Nederland)
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
TBI	Tropenbos International
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
USD	United States Dollars
WB	World Bank
WFP	World Food Programme
WUR	Wageningen University & Research

Introduction

Facing a global pandemic amidst an accelerating climate crisis, it is more important than ever to strengthen a food system that is resilient, sustainable, and inclusive. Agroecology is increasingly recognised as a key strategy to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) while ensuring food security in the face of global warming. This recognition, however, does not necessarily translate to government policies and funding to realise this shift. This study provides an overview of Dutch Official Development Aid (ODA) expenditure in the past decade and how this supports agroecological approaches.

1.1 Agroecology: a practice, a science, and a social movement

As a practice, agroecology refers to a farming approach that applies ecological principles to foster interactions between plants, animals, humans and the environment to produce nutritious food in a sustainable, resilient and responsible way.¹ This approach builds on indigenous knowledge and is locally rooted. Moreover, it respects the dynamic balance of an ecosystem and uses its biodiversity, synergetic networks and natural cycles to produce nutritious food that requires few external inputs.² In practice, this means that, for example, manure from livestock is reused as fertilizer on polycultures (different plant species within one field at the same time), crop residues are used as animal feed, while a wide variety of crops provide balanced diets all year round. Agroecological farming practices do not rely on mechanical processes, high-productivity cash crops or synthetic pesticides and fertilizers. Instead, these practices aim to create synergies between the environment, animals and humans to achieve food security.

But agroecology is more than an approach to farming: it is a scientific, ecological, social, and political movement aspiring to transform the global food system into one that is more sustainable, equitable and inclusive.³ Agroecology is a scientific discipline, a set of practices, and a movement all in one.

Agroecology as a science first appeared in academic literature in the 1930s, combining the studies of agronomy with ecology to understand biological interactions between crops and natural elements, but the scientific interest in agroecology only truly surged from the 1980s when researchers such as Stephen R. Gliessman became inspired by the Latin American agroecological peasant movements.⁴ These grassroots movements started to stand against the social injustices that industrial agriculture was causing on small-scale farmers, while at the same time tropical ecologists started to warn that the replacement of traditional polycultures for industrial monocultures was threatening local ecosystems, forests, biodiversity, soil health and nutrients.⁵ In the 1990s, the movement grew stronger when smallholders who were being marginalised by the Green Revolution formed peasant-to-peasant networks to counteract this marginalisation.⁶

This grassroots peasant movement in Latin America increasingly grew into a global countermovement to the market-driven system of industrial farming that has dominated the 20th and 21st centuries. Despite its promise of feeding the world through economic growth and increased productivity, conventional agriculture's focus on economies of scale through high input, high productivity monocultures have led to mass degradation of land and water, incredible loss of biodiversity, high GHG emissions, persistent hunger, and micro-nutrient deficiencies due to less diversity in diets along with the rise of food-related non-communicable diseases, such as obesity, diabetes, cerebrovascular accidents, and cancer.⁷

Agroecology provides a more sustainable, equitable and resilient alternative to the industrial, globalised and market-driven food system. Since the 2000s, the agroecological framework started to encompass not only local food systems, but also the global network of food production, distribution, consumption as well as the governance of this system.⁸ Principles of responsible governance, close interaction between producers and consumers, knowledge co-creation, circular economies and upholding human and social value are as much part of such a food system as the methods to produce the food in the first place.⁹ Blending all these different principles and approaches, agroecology has steadily but surely gained ground amongst NGOs, policymakers, scientists, unionists, organised consumers and other allies, as a movement, a scientific discipline and a practice that seeks to make our global food system fairer and better for humans, animals, and the environment.

1.2 Investing in agroecology to transform the global food systems

Increased recognition for the agroecological approach to food security has also sparked debates about its role in transforming the global food system in the context of sustainable development. Amongst academics, practitioners and stakeholders, there is increasing consensus that agroecology is key in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Agroecology not only holds potential to eradicate hunger (SDG 2), but it can contribute to achieving all SDGs. Gender equality (SDG 5) can be achieved by supporting female small-scale farmers. Creating sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11) can be realised through localised food systems that are more resilient and fighting climate change (SDG 13) by reducing the emissions and negative climate impacts caused by industrial agriculture. Likewise, safeguarding life on land (SDG 15) can be championed by improving biodiversity, reducing land degradation and investing in reforestation, as well as positive impacts on all other SDGs.¹⁰ Various governments,¹¹ the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisations (FAO),¹² donors,¹³ and other key decision-makers such as the EU¹⁴ have acknowledged that agroecology addresses the root causes of many of the crucial problems of our global food system, and that investing in agroecology is essential to transform this system.

Despite the widespread recognition for the need to adopt agroecology and unlock its potential, funding to promote agroecological practices remains minimal. In fact, between 2016 and 2018 only a small minority of EU funding through Rome-based UN agencies was directed towards projects that promote agroecology, though none of these projects supported 'transformative' agroecology. Instead, nearly 80 percent of EU funds channelled through the FAO, IFAD, WFP, and GCF into agricultural-related projects was invested into initiatives that support conventional agriculture or, at most, efficiency-oriented approaches such as sustainable intensification.¹⁵

These sober results are also reflected in the funding for agroecology by European governments through official development aid (ODA) budgets. The UK barely supports agroecology through ODA funding: only 5 percent of the agricultural development budget and less than 0.5 percent of the total aid budget since 2010 was spent on agroecological projects. Between 2010 and 2018, the UK did not commit any ODA funds to projects that were completely dedicated to developing and promoting an agroecological transformation.¹⁶

Similarly, in Belgium, 39 percent of development aid to agriculture did not promote agroecological practices on any level and 27 percent only supported the agroecological principles of improving input and output efficiency of conventional agricultural methods.¹⁷

Despite France's explicit commitment to agroecological farming, only 12.6 percent of French investments into agriculture between 2009-2018 were used to promote transformational agroecology, whereas 25.2 percent of funding was invested into promoting industrial and conventional agriculture.¹⁸

In Denmark, 58.2 percent of the ODA budget for agriculture between 2017 and 2018 did not support agroecological practices at all, and the vast majority of projects that did apply agroecological principles only focused on sustainable intensification and input efficiency, which, again, does not truly address agroecological transformation.¹⁹ In Switzerland, only 22 percent of projects funded by the Swiss ODA sought to achieve agroecological transformation.²⁰

This lack of funding is also reflected in the financial barriers in sub-Saharan countries to implement an agroecological approach to farming. Most agricultural development funding flows into the region (63 percent) were focused on reinforcing or tweaking conventional agriculture. The majority of projects by major funders such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation supported industrial agriculture or at most attempted to increase efficiency of conventional methods. Only a few prominent donors in agricultural development, namely Germany, France, Switzerland, and the FAO, have explicitly committed to agroecology as key to achieve equitable and sustainable food systems. But even for those committed funders, only around half of agricultural projects promoted agroecological practices in some way, and in most cases in a limited manner.²¹

Across all these studies, several broad trends can be identified. Despite the stated commitment to agroecology, international funding through development aid for agroecological transformation remains extremely limited. When donors or projects integrate agroecology, it often remains limited to increasing input efficiency of conventional and industrial farming or promoting 'climate-smart' practices without addressing larger ecological transformation. Only a very small minority of projects seek to foster transformation on a social and political level as well, and large shares of the ODA budgets (between a third and a quarter of funding) even counter agroecology by promoting conventional and industrial agriculture. The gap between the commitments that European countries have made as part of the SDGs, the Paris Agreement and the European Green Deal, and the actual ODA funding choices within agriculture and food security continue to stand in the way of achieving a direly needed global food transformation.

1.3 Netherlands & agroecology in international development cooperation

The studies on funding for agroecology in various European countries also raised the question how the Netherlands, as a country that prides itself on agricultural innovation, compares to its neighbours on supporting agroecological principles through development cooperation. The main objective of this report is to provide an overview of Dutch ODA resources related to food and agriculture in the last 10 years, and the extent to which these funds have been supportive of agroecological practices, providing an indication on if and how the Dutch government has contributed to an agroecological transition. To do so, this report provides (1) an overview of the Dutch ODA policies on agriculture and food security in the past decade and how these relate to the agroecological approach, (2) an in-depth assessment of the actual funding flows contributing to agroecological transformation, and (3) key recommendations on how an agroecological transition could be stimulated more strongly through ODA incentives by the Dutch government.

2

Methodology

To assess Dutch contributions to agroecological practices in the last ten years, we analysed the Official Development Assistance budgets allocated to agriculture, food security and biodiversity, and assessed the extent to which these funding streams contribute to a global agroecological transformation.

2.1 ODA project data

For this study, we analysed all ODA projects within the agricultural, rural development, biodiversity, forestry, fishery, and food security sectors (co-)financed by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) between January 2010 and November 2020. The ODA project data was retrieved through the International Aid and Transparency Initiative (IATI Registry),²² where the Dutch government has published all ODA funding since 1997, corresponding to the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) ODA reporting standards.²³

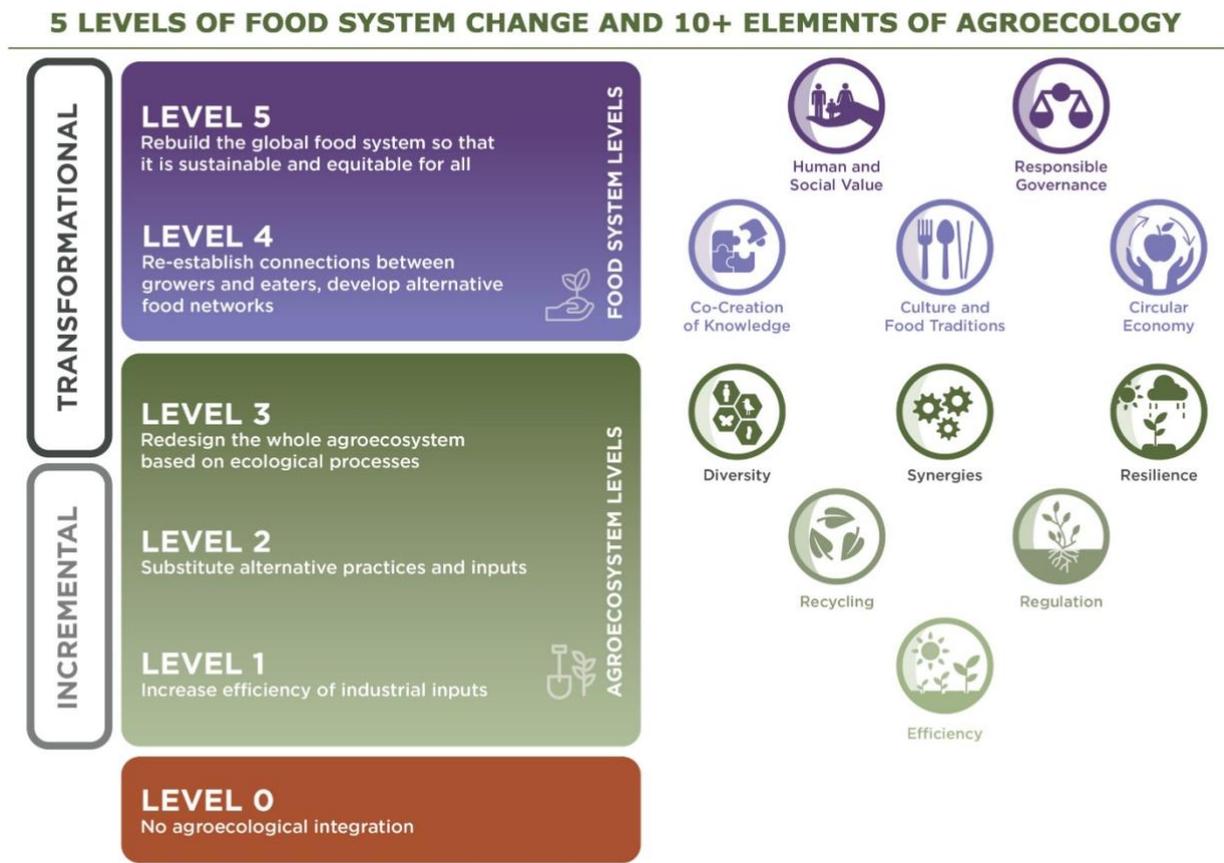
Several filters were applied to the complete IATI dataset of ODA projects between 2010 and 2020 to achieve a highly relevant set of projects and funding streams. From the subset of all ODA funding into agriculture and food security, we filtered out humanitarian or emergency food assistance and projects shorter than 2 years. The rationale was that these types of projects are generally focused on meeting immediate needs rather than long-term development or transformation of food systems. Moreover, we left out projects that did not actually receive funding (i.e., had a budget of EUR 0.00). This resulted in a final list of 260 projects with any start date after 01-01-2010. A complete overview of the included sectors and projects and filters applied is provided in Annex 1.

The resulting dataset included information on recipient organisations, budgets, timelines, project titles and descriptions, geographical project location, and links to the public database OpenAid.nl. However, this information was insufficient to analyse and assess the projects. Only in a very limited number of cases, the open data included a link to a relevant project document (such as evaluation reports, or project websites). In most cases, additional documentation was found through online searches. Two attempts to gain additional information through a Freedom of Information (FOI) request with the Dutch MoFA and Open Data platform yielded no results. Therefore, we manually searched for at least one document per project, including evaluation reports, project websites, news articles, Theories of Change (ToCs), Minutes of Understanding (MoUs) and other documentation that provided at least project descriptions and objectives. Where we could not identify at least one document and had insufficient information to reasonably assess the project, we omitted the project from the analysis (in total, 18 projects were omitted).

2.2 Assessment of projects

To assess the projects and funding flows on their contribution to agroecological farming, this study builds on a set of recognised methodologies applied in various previous studies on ODA funding for agroecology in the UK,²⁴ Belgium,²⁵ France,²⁶ Denmark,²⁷ and the European Union funding for Rome-based UN agencies.²⁸ These studies combine the ten elements of agroecology as defined by the FAO²⁹ subdivided into five levels of agroecology according to Gliessman's categorisation,³⁰ in line with the Agroecology Criteria Tool (ACT) by Biovision³¹ (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Overview of the elements and levels of agroecology



Source: Biovision (n.d.), "Agroecology Criteria Tool", online: <https://www.agroecology-pool.org/methodology/>, viewed in November 2020.

The ACT model differentiates between agroecological elements on the agroecosystem level, in which ecological principles are applied to agricultural practices (Levels 1, 2 and 3), and food system levels of change in which food networks are governed through principles of equity and sustainability (Levels 4 and 5). Levels 1 and 2, which do not challenge conventional agriculture but rather increase efficiency and substitute organic practices, only realise incremental agroecological change. In contrast, the complete redesigns of the agroecosystem and food network of Levels 3 through 5 foster a transformational change towards an agroecological food system.

The present analysis involved an iterative assessment process with two rounds. The first round consisted of a pre-categorisation according to Gliessman's levels of agroecology, followed by an external review to check the assessment, which was based on the ten elements and, depending on the presence of one or more of these elements, a classification of the extent to which the project promotes a given level of agroecology (potential, partial, fully, or not at all).

During the second iteration of the assessment, Level 0 projects (i.e., projects that did not integrate agroecology) were further subcategorised to allow for nuance between projects that promoted industrial and conventional agriculture, and projects that did not strictly fall within the scope of agroecology but do create enabling conditions for it through policy work, social empowerment, or other social-economic stimuli. Examples of this include land tenure projects to protect Indigenous lands and forests, or projects targeted at empowering and training youth in agricultural skills and employment. An overview of criteria and examples of how projects were categorised can be found in Table 7 2.

2.2.1 Levels of agroecological integration

The different levels of agroecology, based on the extent to which a project integrates the ten+ ecological, social and political elements, are defined as follows:³²

- **Level 0: No agroecological integration**

Projects in level 0 fall outside of the agroecological scope. These may include projects that have either no focus on agroecological development or instead promote conventional farming ('Other'), projects that may create socially enabling conditions despite not directly addressing agroecological principles ('Social Enabler'), and projects that seek to promote equitable governance that may be supportive of agroecological transformation ('Governance').

- **Level 1: Increasing input efficiency**

The first level of agroecology focuses on incremental efforts towards more ecological agriculture by increasing input and output efficiency. These types of projects may focus on sustainability, climate-smart production or ecological objectives but do not challenge conventional agricultural methods. Activities in level 1 may include activities to increase efficiency of external inputs as synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, irrigation and energy, reduce waste, improve precision agriculture and optimise plant variety or animal breeds.

- **Level 2: Substitute conventional practices and inputs**

In level 2, projects seek to substitute conventional farming practices and inputs, for example through recycling or regulation. Project activities may include efforts to replace industrial fertilizers with natural alternatives such as compost or manure, finding alternatives for pest-controls and eradicating the use of synthetic pesticides, reusing biomass waste to generate energy, planting crops to improve soil conditions, or even implement organic farming.

- **Level 3: Redesign the agroecosystem to integrate ecological practices**

The third level of agroecology moves from incremental to transformational change. It aims at redesigning the entire agricultural system based on ecological science, with a focus on biodiversity, creating synergies and building resilience of the system. Activities in level 3 utilise agroecological approaches of multi-cropping or complex crop rotations, agroforestry, or using integrated crop-animal systems. The key differentiator with level 2 is that in level 3, the system as a whole is based on ecology rather than replacing only some methods or inputs.

- **Level 4: (Re)connect producers with consumers**

Level 4 moves beyond agricultural practices towards social and political transformation through agroecology. In this level, projects aim to shorten the chain between consumers and producers by focusing on more direct interaction, co-creating knowledge between stakeholders, building on cultural and food traditions towards a circular economy. Activities can include a wide variety of efforts to reconnect food and consumption through local markets, local economic development through solidarity systems, community supported agriculture, and directly linking farmers with consumers.

- **Level 5: Create a new global food system**

The last level of agroecology is the most transformational on a global scale, where the food system is designed based on human and social value through responsible governance. In level 5, projects aim to create equity in the food system through participation, democratic principles and social justice. Projects in this level may focus on strengthening peasants' organizational capacities, establish equitable governance over natural resources, or implement inclusive policymaking on agroecology as central to the global food system.

It is important to note that projects often do not perfectly fall within one category, or that projects in higher levels may not have addressed all previous levels of agroecology. However, projects are classified according to their highest level of agroecological integration. In the analysis, Levels 4 and 5 were combined since few projects integrated social and political elements and these often overlapped between those two food system levels.

2.2.2 Degree of agroecological promotion

Although projects may combine different elements of agroecology within a project, not every project supports agroecological principles to the same extent. For this reason, a second iteration to the analysis was added assigning the following degrees of promotion to all projects within each level:

- **Not promoting agroecology**

Projects that are not promoting agroecology include those that instead only support conventional agriculture, projects that are not explicit on supporting agroecological principles and do not contain any agroecological criteria, and projects that are off topic.

- **Potentially promoting a given level of agroecology**

Projects that potentially promote agroecology may contain some notions of ecology, for example biodiversity principles or soil conservation, or state an intention to prioritise agroecological techniques, but do not clearly state concrete activities that implement agroecological elements.

- **Partially promoting a given level of agroecology**

Projects that partially promote agroecology only spent a portion of the budget on activities that benefit agroecological activities. This may also include projects that overall are genuinely dedicated to sustainability, ecology and agroecology but only integrate this commitment partially, or at the same time promote conventional agriculture.

- **Promoting a given level of agroecology**

Only projects of which the main objective is to promote a transformation in line with the agroecological principles can be classified as promoting agroecology. It needs to include a clear progress objective on at least one or more of the agroecological elements.

2.3 Analysis of results

After the two iterations of project assessment, the results were analysed per recipient sector (academic, multilateral, governmental, non-governmental and public-private flows). These sectors were separated due to the unique working methods as well as project types across recipients.

The analysis and results are based on budget amounts, i.e., the amount of funding that contribute to agroecological transformation, rather than project counts. By analysing the results based on budget amounts, we can draw conclusions on how much ODA funding indeed promotes agroecological principles. This is particularly important to ensure that small, short projects that receive little budgets do not have equal weight to long-term, multi-year projects funded with millions of ODA funding. However, it is still important to consider the number of projects within each level, particularly because large projects may skew the results.

In addition, it is important to note that particularly in large projects, not the entire funding amount may actually contribute to a given level of agroecological change, but it was impossible to separate flows within a project. This is where the nuance of the promotion framework is particularly important: a 100-million-euro project may only partially promote agroecology, whereas a 20,000-euro project may fully promote agroecological transformation. The results should therefore be read in this light and seen as a general overview of how Dutch ODA funding supports agroecological principles.

2.4 Challenges and limitations

This study, as any research project, faced several challenges and limitations that need to be considered. A first important challenge was difficulty to access sufficient project information. The IATI registry used to identify ODA projects only contained limited project details such as the recipient organisation, dates, project title and description. These usually only included a one-sentence description.

To access more information, we filed two Freedom of Information (FOI) requests through the Open Data department of the Dutch government. The two different requests (one asking for more detailed project objectives and one asking for evaluation reports) were both unsuccessful because the government did not have the information readily available and informed us that links to evaluation reports would be published in the spring of 2021. Other sources, such as the OpenAid.nl website or government registers did not yield adequate results. This meant that we had to rely on targeted internet searches to find more information for each project. As a rule, only projects for which at least one document could be identified were included in the assessment.

However, this meant that for a number of projects, the information was still fairly limited and did not always allow for a deep assessment, resulting in the omission of 18 projects for which sufficient information could not be accessed. In addition, the limited information and wide variety of types of documents used for the remaining 242 projects meant that projects were mostly assessed based on their objectives and theories of change, not on the actual outcomes. This limitation was also encountered in other studies and the lack of transparency and inaccessibility of ODA data raises concerns in and of itself, limiting the ability of civil society actors to check and assess these significant government funds.

Secondly, although this report replicated the methodology used in previous studies, which as a tested and tried methodology has significant groundwork done by academics and researchers, some important limitations in the methodology have been highlighted in several reports and were also encountered in this research. Gliessman's levels of agroecology suggest a hierarchical and temporal approach to achieving agroecological transformation, in which the system experiences change upwards from level 1 through to 5. These false hierarchies imply that a project must necessarily first achieve more 'basic' elements of agroecology, such as input efficiency, before it can start to address higher-level elements such as co-creation of knowledge or responsible governance.

In reality, this is not necessarily the case. The ten+ elements may be applied in any combination and are not necessarily unique to an agroecological system, and projects that may not necessarily seek to achieve agroecological transformation may still contribute to it by ascribing to its principles, which are widely accepted beyond the agroecology movement. This is also the case for development aid, where we observe projects that address a wide variety of elements in unique mixes or may specialise in very specific elements. In addition, the complex realities of development cooperation, facing external restraints as well as limited funding and time considerations, do not always allow for a holistic approach that addresses all agroecological principles. This does not mean that these projects do not contribute to agroecology at all, but in Gliessman's classification, many of these projects would rank outside of the scope.

Nevertheless, to realise a transformed, agroecological food system, all these elements need to be realised and function in synergy, and Gliessman's levels combined with the ten elements of the FAO provide a framework to capture the degree to which a system integrates agroecological principles. With all, this methodology is currently the most well-established approach to measure ODA funding flows to agroecological promotion, and this allows for replicability and comparisons between studies and countries. Therefore, in line with the latest study by Moeller,³³ we took the following steps to overcome the methodological limitations described above:

1. Projects were assessed generously according to the highest level that they address based on the integration of the agroecological elements. In other words, the focus of the assessment was to identify the elements, not the levels, and projects do not need to meet all elements to be ranked in a certain level. In this sense, the levels indicate an overall commitment to agroecology, rather than a hierarchy of transitory steps.
2. The use of the promotion classification provides nuance. From this perspective, some projects may only partially or potentially promote a given level of agroecology. For example, some projects may not address all elements, or at the same time also promote conventional agriculture, whereas other projects fully promote agroecology because all project objectives are geared at meeting the elements.

3. Projects that could not be ranked on any level were further subdivided to differentiate between Level 0 (does not promote agroecology in any way), social enablers (do not address agroecology as a practice but create an enabling environment) and governance (focus on responsible and sustainable governance that may or may not lead to a promotion of agroecology).
4. In the analysis to determine how Dutch ODA funding contributes to agroecology, these nuances were considered in addition to a quantitative and qualitative analysis based on incremental versus transformation agroecological change and agroecosystem versus food system level change rather than merely considering Gliessman's five levels.

Lastly, it is important to note that this report only considered ODA funding in agricultural and food security sectors with a limited dataset as defined in section 2.1, which may have excluded other Dutch funding streams and projects that promote agroecology. For example, some agroecological projects may have been undertaken as part of a different sector excluded in this analysis, such as humanitarian aid and food assistance, or social dialogue. In addition, some of the included projects included pooled funds which may have been subdivided among multiple smaller projects. In these cases, the general objectives of the pooled funds were considered, not of the specific projects funded under this pool. Indirect recipients of Dutch ODA funding or projects shorter than two years were not considered either.

However, we expect that the effect of these exclusions has been minimal or even favourable, since the occurrence of agroecological projects in fields other than food security or agriculture is expectedly rare. Moreover, the vast majority of Dutch ODA is dedicated to direct recipients for long-term projects. As such, the dataset included in this study should be regarded as a highly detailed and accurate sample of Dutch ODA funding for agroecology.

3

Dutch policy and ODA strategies for agriculture and food security

This chapter describes the general policy framework of the Netherlands' investments into agriculture and food security through the development aid budget. We assess the attention given to agroecological principles within Dutch ODA funding by revisiting several policy and strategic trends of the past ten years.

3.1 Policy Framework and Developments

In the two decades between the late 1980s and 2008, investments in agriculture through development cooperation had declined significantly over the years. In later years, the Netherlands even referred back to this as a *“period of neglect”* for agriculture and food security.³⁴ Starting in 2008, there was a growing recognition that these years' focus on economic growth and trickle-down effects had failed to solve hunger, particularly among the most impoverished, and that a more targeted approach on food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture was crucial to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and, after 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).³⁵

Because of the renewed interest for agriculture and food security as a key pillar in development aid, the Netherlands, as one of the world's biggest exporters in agricultural commodities and innovation, significantly changed its strategies. In 2008, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) and the Ministry of Economic Affairs (EZ) – later the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food (LNV) – started a cooperative approach to the Dutch international strategy on food security. While the MoFA remained responsible for distributing ODA funds to agriculture and food security, the EZ was put in charge of ensuring coherence with the international agriculture policy and coordinating the Dutch agricultural sector, knowledge infrastructure. In practice, however, the overlap between the two ministries was minimal, so in 2014 a covenant was launched to improve coordination and better align strategies.³⁶ A central objective to this cooperation remains an effort to promote global food security through trade, international cooperation, and development aid.

In 2011, the Dutch government named food security as one of four priority areas for development aid, and the MoFA and EZ announced that the ODA budget for food security would nearly triple, from € 160 million in 2011 to € 435 million in 2015.³⁷ In a letter to parliament, the two ministries outlined that the key objective of this ODA funding was to increase agricultural productivity, partially through the *“efficient usage and sustainable management of scarce resources like land, water, nutrients, biodiversity and energy”*.³⁸

The Dutch Food Security Policy 2012-2015 also outlined sustainable agricultural production, access to better nutrition, more efficient markets and a better business climate as key pillars.³⁹ Despite integration of sustainability and efficiency, the main focus remained on intensification of conventional agriculture and trade.

In fact, the Dutch government increasingly started to channel ODA funding to public-private partnerships (PPPs), and multilateral organisations with an economic focus, such as the World Bank. Consistently between 2010 and 2020, governmental strategies on food security emphasise the importance of the private sector and prioritise trade as a key objective of ODA funding.⁴⁰ The key motive of development aid to ultimately benefit the domestic economy was described as follows:

“The focus is on public-private collaboration and the use of Dutch knowledge and expertise (value chains, agro-logistics, and financial services), especially in the Dutch priority ‘top sectors’. The policy promotes self-reliance through economic development and distribution of food and income, while avoiding negative impacts on water and environment.

This policy aims at utilising a market driven approach with a focus on innovation, and lobbying for national policies to create a favourable business climate as precondition. [...] The broader foreign policy aims at combining development objectives with international positioning of Dutch companies and institutions.”⁴¹

This strong focus on trade fits into a more general approach to international affairs of the Netherlands, which for centuries and to this date has prioritised trade as a key objective of cooperation. Positioned almost as a precondition, projects that receive ODA funding often revolve around or at least integrate trade objectives, for example commercialising local agricultural markets in developing countries to better facilitate import from these countries. Despite recognition that the trickle-down approach had thus far not achieved food security and there was a need to improve inclusion of vulnerable groups, this approach continued to build on the ideas of classic school of development economics that ultimately, economic growth, agricultural productivity, and trade will provide food for everyone.

In 2014, an increased focus on “*inclusive and sustainable growth in the agricultural sector*” and “*realising ecologically sustainable food systems*” was initiated. However, this mostly focused on intensifying production of small-scale farmers, often by promoting cash crops and grains rather than diversified food systems and increasing input efficiency.⁴² Three key outcome objectives were identified:⁴³

1. Eradicate hunger and malnutrition.
2. Promote inclusive and sustainable growth in the agrarian sector.
3. Realise ecologically durable systems.

In 2016, a revision of these intended outcomes led to incremental revisions with a stronger focus on sexual and reproductive health and rights, women’s rights, resilience, and sustainability in each of the three objectives. In addition, a new pillar was added focused on facilitating policy frameworks and food systems that create an enabling environment to realise food security, for example through equitable land governance, knowledge creation, and safety and security, adding a fourth objective:⁴⁴

4. Preconditions for food security.

According to Oxfam Novib, the increased ODA funding on agriculture and food security between 2010 and 2015 did not, despite the strategic objectives, reach the correct target groups such as women smallholders, but instead mostly focused on cash crop production through PPPs.⁴⁵ The Netherlands’ own review of its strategy between 2012 and 2016 also recognised important shortcomings:

*“The policy review concludes that Dutch food security policy has been effective in contributing to increased farmer production and income, to an improved business environment, and – by means of specific activities – to reduced hunger and malnutrition. The review also concludes that **overall the contribution to reduced hunger and malnutrition has been limited, because part of the agricultural development programme was not designed to make nutritious food available for the current group of malnourished people.**”⁴⁶*

Since 2016, however, the Dutch international development strategy on food security and agriculture has more strongly integrated agroecological principles. The 2016 food security policy mentioned promotion of global 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.⁴⁷

This new recognition for agroecology, albeit sparsely integrated, coincides with the new LNV policy introduced in 2018 that envisions the Netherlands as a leader in circular agriculture, which it defines as follows: *“In a circular agriculture system, arable farming, livestock farming and horticulture primarily use raw materials from each other’s supply chains and waste flows from the food industry and food supply chains.”*⁴⁸ This includes re-using of products and energy, for example by using livestock manure as organic fertilizer and feeding cattle with crop residues.

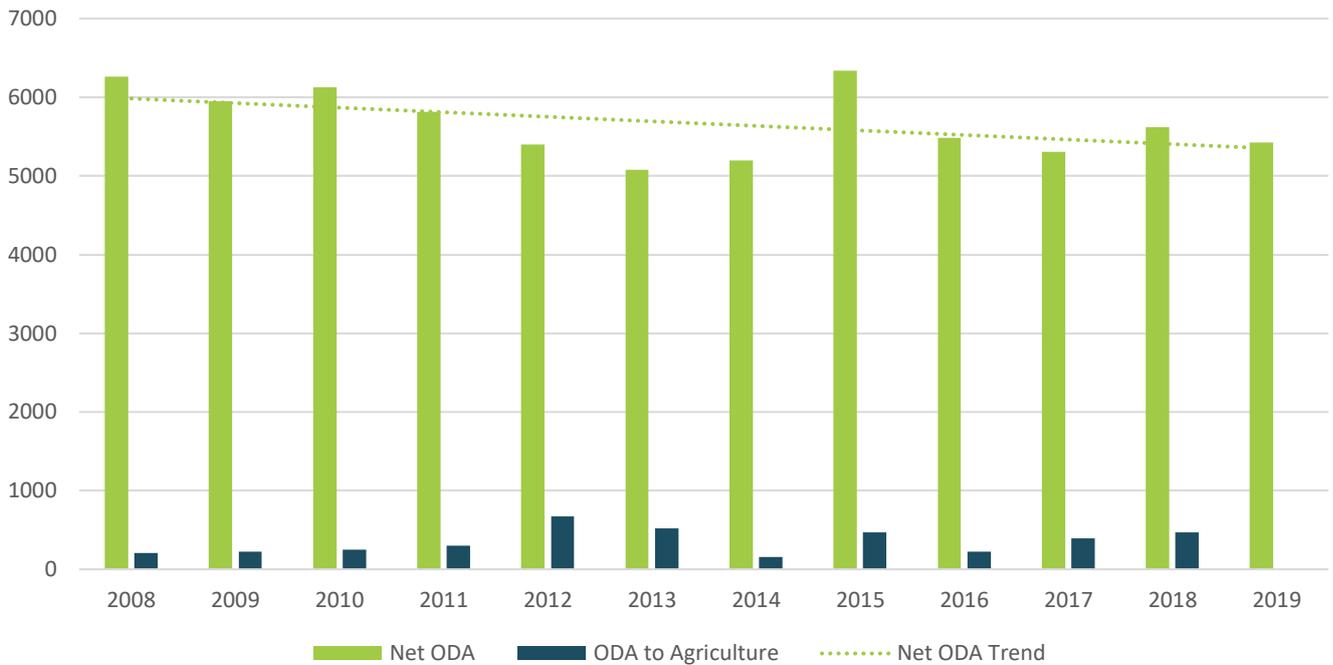
These principles were also integrated into the new development cooperation efforts by MoFA and LNV, which in 2019 reiterated the commitment to a circular system in order to achieve SDG 2. While emphasising sustainable intensification, maximising value from crops, and reinvesting profits into enhanced resilience, the government commits to using ODA funding for inclusive and sustainable growth in the agricultural sector, ecologically sustainable food systems, and securing land rights, particularly for women and young people.⁴⁹

However, throughout these years, the Dutch government has not explicitly committed to promoting agroecological farming other than mentioning it in government documents and strategies as one of multiple methods to achieve more sustainable and fairer food systems. Nonetheless, there is an increased integration of Level 2 and Level 3 agroecological elements. Still, a consistent trend in Dutch ODA strategies between 2010 to 2020 is a strong emphasis on sustainable intensification of agriculture, commercialisation of smallholder production, supporting access to arable land and resources particularly for women and youth, and promotion of trade (Chapter 4).

3.2 Dutch ODA funding

The total ODA funding distributed by the Netherlands has remained fairly stable since 2008, though a slow downward trend can be observed between 2008 (USD 6,261 million) and 2019 (USD 5,429 million). A portion of this funding, fluctuating between three to twelve percent, is dedicated to agriculture and food production (not including food assistance or short-term emergency food disbursements as part of humanitarian aid). The total ODA volumes flowing from the Netherlands, including towards agriculture, between 2008 and 2019 are summarised in Figure 2.

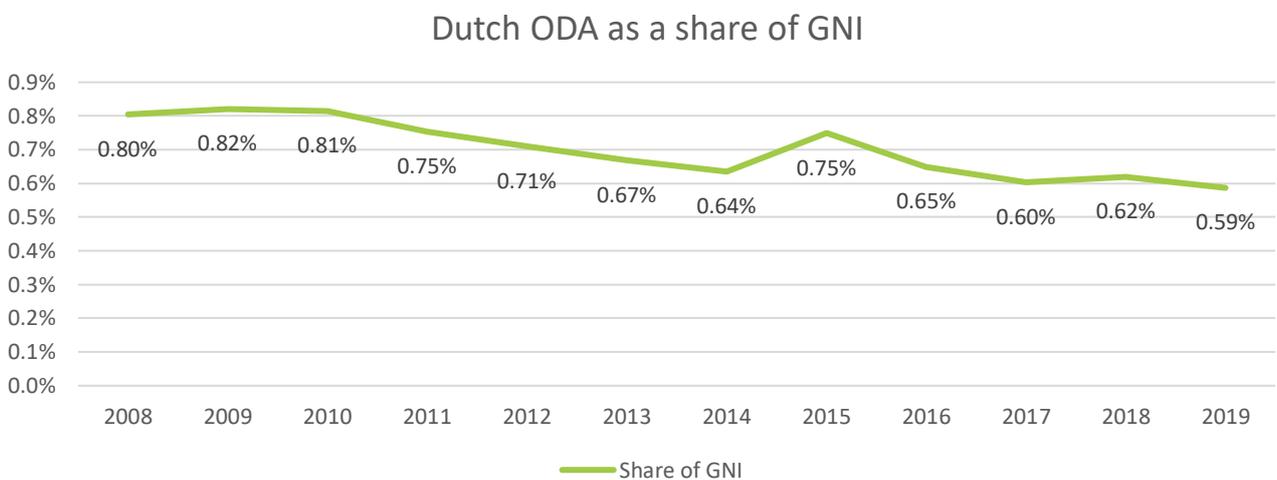
Figure 2 Netherlands Net ODA volume per year (millions of USD)



Source: OECD (2020), Net ODA (indicator). doi: 10.1787/33346549-en (Accessed on 14 December 2020);
 OECD (2020), ODA by sector (indicator). doi: 10.1787/a5a1f674-en (Accessed on 14 December 2020).
 *Proportion of ODA to Agriculture in 2019 not available.

To compare countries' relative contribution to development aid, ODA flows are also measured in proportion to a country's Gross National Income (GNI). The Dutch government has committed to achieving a 0.7 percent ODA/GNI ratio every year, and to achieve a collective ODA/GNI of 0.7 percent at the European level by 2030.⁵⁰ However, a slow decrease in the GNI share that the Netherlands allocates to ODA can be observed over the last years. Nevertheless, the Netherlands is one of the biggest contributors to ODA in the world, ranking seventh among the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) countries – 24 members of the OECD dedicated to collectively framing and implementing official development policies.⁵¹

Table 1 Netherlands ODA as a share of Gross National Income (%)



Source: OECD (2020), Net ODA (indicator). doi: 10.1787/33346549-en (Accessed on 14 December 2020)

4

Missing links: lack of financial support for agroecological practices

Between 2010 and 2020, the Dutch government spent over € 2.5 billion on ODA in agriculture and food. This chapter takes a look at the recipients through which these funds were channelled and the extent to which these supported agroecological practices.

4.1 Overview of funding flows

In total, 260 projects between January 2010 and November 2020 were included in the analysis, with a total budget of € 2,651,180,958. Grouped per type of recipient organisation, multilateral organisations received the lion's share of the ODA budget (55 projects, 37.6 percent of the budget) whereas NGOs conducted the greatest number of projects (91 projects, 26.5 percent of the budget).

Table 1 Dutch ODA projects agriculture and food 2010-2020

Recipient type	Number of projects	Total Budget	Share of Budget
Academic & Research	30	€ 234,562,920	8.85%
Government	32	€ 414,402,414	15.63%
Multilateral Organisation	55	€ 997,160,864	37.61%
NGO	91	€ 703,027,199	26.52%
Private Sector & PPP	52	€ 302,027,561	11.39%
Grand Total	260	€ 2,651,180,958	100.00%

The vast majority of projects were conducted in Sub-Saharan Africa: 53.3 percent of the budget was allocated to projects in this region, particularly in Ethiopia (23 projects, 11.1 percent of the budget), Rwanda (12 projects, 5.5 percent of the budget), Burundi (14 projects, 4.6 percent of the budget) and Uganda (17 projects, 4.4 percent of the budget).

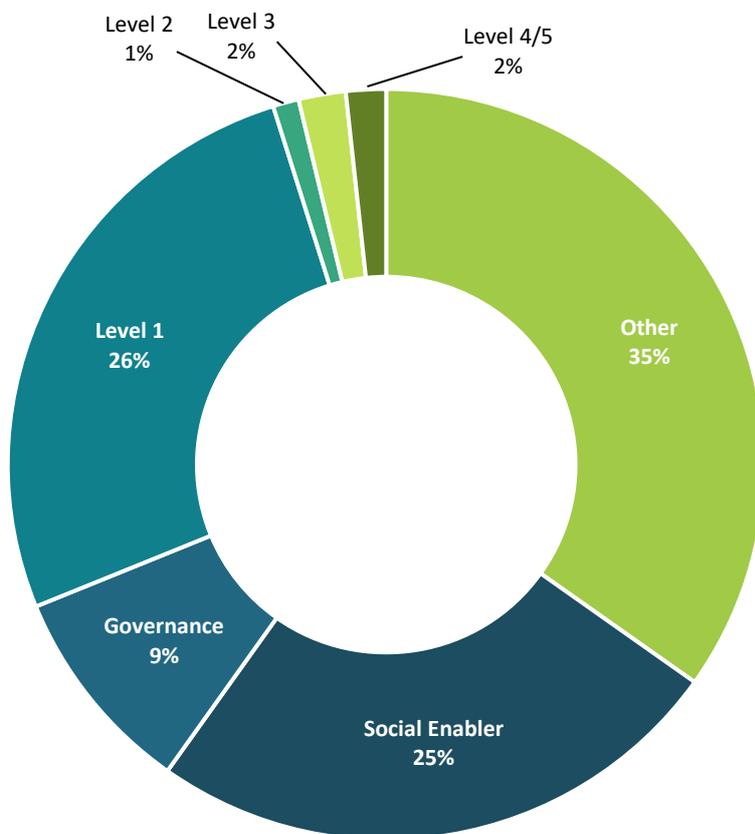
In addition, 21 projects were conducted in the Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan, and Pakistan (MENAP) region (particularly Palestine, Lebanon and Afghanistan), 18 projects in Asia (Bangladesh and Indonesia) and 8 projects in Latin America (Bolivia and Colombia). Lastly, 57 projects had either a global orientation or an unspecified geographical focus.

4.2 Agroecological principles in Dutch ODA funding

This section presents an assessment of both the level of integration of agroecological principles as well as the degree to which Dutch development cooperation funding flows promote agroecology. Over one third of the ODA funding flows did not promote agroecological elements in any way and instead promoted conventional agriculture, representing € 910 million between 2010 and 2020. Other projects outside the agroecological scope had a potential to support agroecology by creating social enabling conditions (25 percent) or creating favourable governance conditions (9 percent), but the actual potential of these flows to promote agroecology is unknown.

Of the projects that do fall within the agroecological scope, 26 percent only touches on input efficiency or sustainable intensification (Level 1, € 698 million), which could questionably qualify as supportive of agroecological practices since it focuses merely on making conventional agriculture slightly less harmful. Around three percent of funding contributes to a more meaningful shift within the agroecosystem level through recycling and regulation (Level 2, 1 percent), and creating synergies through crop diversification and resilient ecosystems (Level 3, 2 percent). Around two percent (€ 44.7 million) of the ODA funding flows contributed to Level 4 or 5 agroecological transformation of the food system by facilitating co-creation of knowledge, linking consumers with producers, promoting equitable governance, and creating human and social value through a circular economy.

Figure 3 Levels of Agroecology in Dutch ODA 2010-2020 (budget)

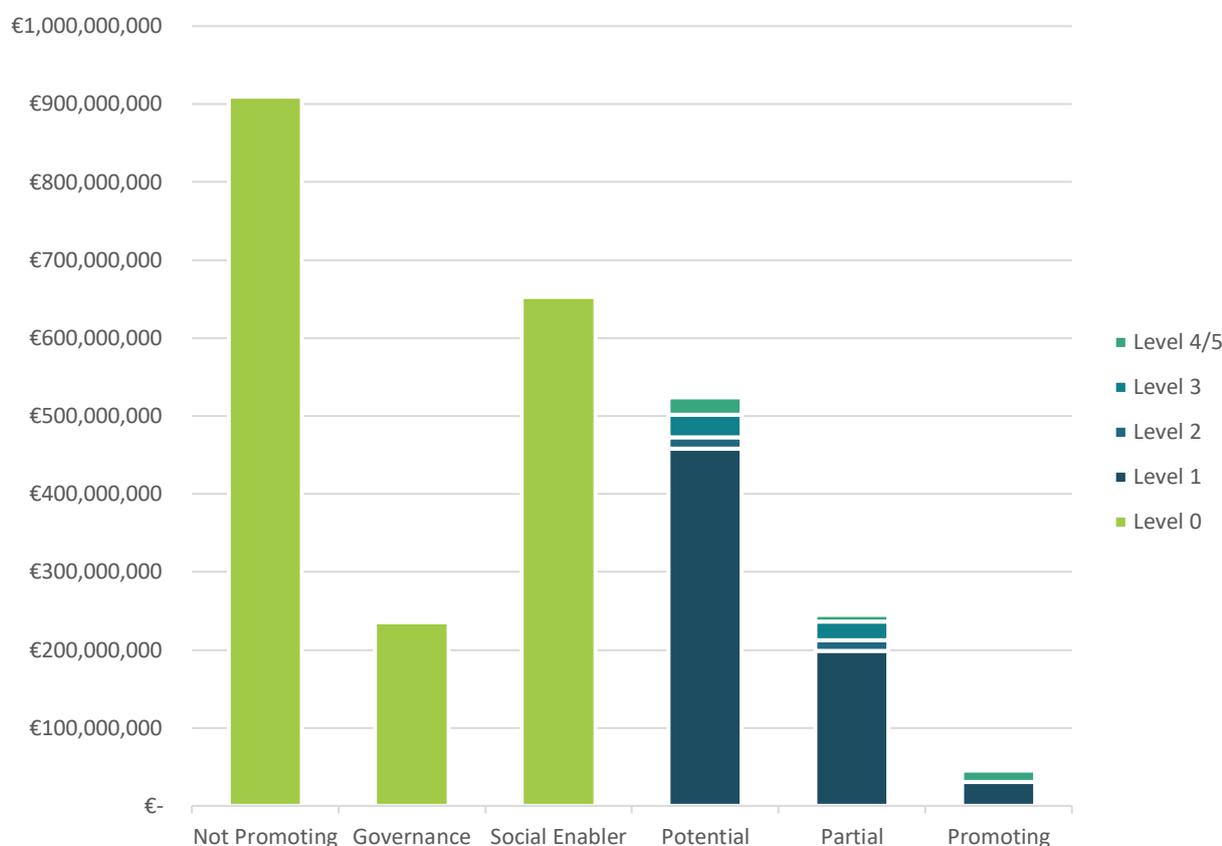


Aside from the project listed as not promoting or social enabler and governance projects, most of the funding (20 percent) was ranked as potentially promoting. This assessment was made because, despite integration of some agroecological principles, it was not clear to what extent the project actually realised these elements. Often this was due to a lack of sufficient project information, particularly on objectives and outcomes, which did not allow us to ascertain whether the project realised any level of agroecology. In addition, popular buzzwords such as ‘sustainable’, ‘climate-smart’, ‘inclusive’, and ‘equitable’ were common qualifiers across nearly all projects. However, often it could not be verified whether those principles were actually implemented. Because in these cases the actual and exact impact on agroecology remains unclear, many of these projects were judged as potentially promoting. Further, social enabling and governance projects are also seen as potentially promoting since the intended contribution of these projects to agroecology is unclear.

Nine percent of ODA funding partially promoted a given level of agroecology, which includes projects that only promoted a limited set of elements, or that alongside some agroecological principles also supported conventional agriculture.

Only a very small portion of funding flows (1.7 percent) fully promoted and supported agroecological principles across the different levels, suggesting that projects that seek to holistically support an agroecological transformation funded by Dutch ODA are scarce.

Figure 4 Degrees of agroecological promotion in Dutch ODA flows (in EUR)



4.3 Academic, training and research flows

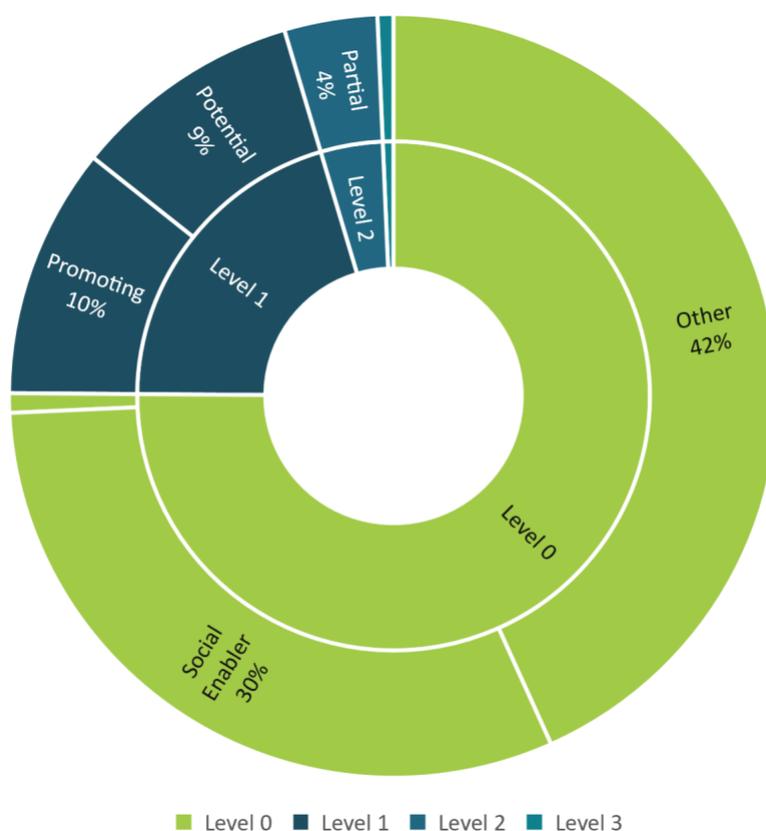
A significant recipient group of the ODA budget allocated to agriculture and food security are academic, training and research institutions. Twelve organisations received together nearly € 235 million in 2010-2020 across 30 different projects. The five most important organisations in this category, with Wageningen Universiteit (WUR) as the biggest recipient, are listed below:

Table 2 Five biggest research recipients of Dutch agricultural ODA funds

Recipient type	Number of projects	Total Budget	Share of Budget
Wageningen Universiteit (WUR)	16	€ 112,103,118	47.79%
Dutch organisation for internationalisation in education (NUFFIC)	1	€ 64,801,465	27.63%
CABI	2	€ 24,046,500	10.25%
Netherlands Scientific Organisation (NWO)	1	€ 15,000,000	6.39%
Bioversity International	3	€ 5,150,400	2.20%

Of the 30 projects analysed, two projects could not be assessed due to a lack of publicly available project data. Most projects did not implement agroecological approaches or only promoted agroecological principles to a limited extent. Twelve projects, representing 36 percent of the budget in this category, promoted conventional or industrial agriculture (Level 0, Other), and five projects that together received over 19 percent of the budget only included elements of input efficiency (Level 1). Just a small minority of projects implemented more ecological principles to agro-food systems (Level 2 and 3) but only partially or potentially promoted agroecological principles. Although some projects in Level 0 could contribute to a socially enabling environment for agroecological farming through smallholder empowerment or knowledge-cocreation, none of the ODA-funded projects by academia and research institutes promoted transformational agroecology on a food system level (Level 4 and 5).

Figure 5 Agroecology in ODA-funded Academic & Research Projects



Box 1: Wageningen University and agroecological research

Born in 1876 as an 'agricultural university' (landbouw universiteit), Wageningen University has evolved to become the Netherlands' only university to focus specifically on the theme 'healthy food and living environment'.⁵² As such, Wageningen University's curricula and research agenda show high affinity with the themes of Dutch development policy: food security, sustainable agriculture, and water management; climate change; education; and to a lesser extent equal rights for women and girls; sexual and reproductive health and rights; refugees and migration; and security and rule of law. Moreover, since its beginnings, Wageningen University has always had an international orientation (especially tropical countries and former Dutch colonies).⁵³ These characteristics perhaps explain the share of ODA funding channelled through Wageningen University, which between 2010 and 2020 amounted to over € 112 million, or 4.22 percent of the total ODA spending.

While agroecological science and farming principles are researched and promoted across various chair groups and study courses at Wageningen University (there is even a M.Sc. degree on offer on Agroecology),⁵⁴ these exist alongside research programmes that support conventional agriculture: from breeding technologies that use genetic engineering to research projects in Sub-Saharan Africa involving fertilizer subsidies and micro-credits.⁵⁵ This research found that the majority of ODA spending channelled through Wageningen University goes to the latter, with eight out of sixteen projects not promoting agroecological principles, and only one project (partially) promoting these principles on a level that fosters the redesigning of the entire farming system.

4.4 Governmental flows

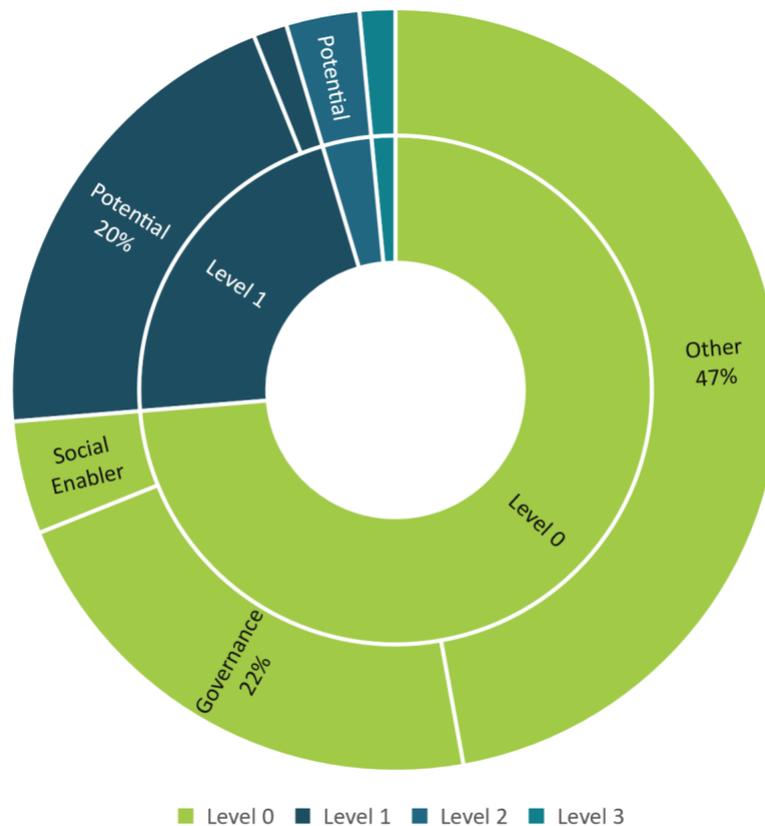
Of the total ODA budget dedicated to agriculture and food security between 2010 and 2020, 15.6 percent was allocated to governments, including Dutch government agencies as well as foreign ministries or governmental organisations. In total, governmental recipients received over € 414 million across 32 projects.

Table 3 Five biggest governmental recipients of Dutch agricultural ODA funds

Recipient type	Number of projects	Total Budget	Share of Budget
Ethiopian Agricultural Transformation Agency (ATA)	3	€ 73,693,153	17.78%
Netherlands Space Office (NSO)	1	€ 67,005,016	16.17%
Rwanda Local Administrative Entities Development Agency (LODA)	2	€ 65,430,760	15.79%
Netherlands Enterprise Agency (Rijksdienst voor Ondernemend Nederland, RVO)	4	€ 55,109,293	13.30%
Netherlands Ministry of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation (Ministerie van Economische Zaken, Landbouw En Innovatie)	1	€ 23,092,268	5.57%

Similar to the research and academic projects, the governmental project funded by Dutch ODA hardly promote agroecology in any way (Figure 6). The bulk of the budget, over € 229 million, was spent on projects that promoted industrial or conventional agriculture, usually through trade-oriented projects (Level 0, Other), or at most invested in sustainable intensification through input efficiency (Level 1), which hardly qualifies as promoting agroecology. Only a small minority of project focused on integrating agroecological elements such as regulation, resilience or recycling but only at very limited levels (Levels 2 and 3, potentially promoting).

Figure 6 Agroecology in ODA-funded Government Projects



Box 2: RVO and agroecology

An important recipient of Dutch ODA in agriculture is the Rijksdienst voor Ondernemend Nederland (Netherlands Enterprise Agency, RVO). This government agency was founded in 2014 as an operational service of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate (EZ), and the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (LNV) to support entrepreneurs and businesses in sustainable and innovative agrarian production and international trade through subsidies, knowledge creation and increasingly through development cooperation projects.⁵⁶

Since then, the RVO received over € 55 million in ODA funding, of which RVO redistributed € 32 million through the LAND-at-scale project, a land governance support programme as part of which Dutch embassies can receive funding to improve just and fair land governance in low- and middle-income countries. With this fund, RVO aims to achieve outcomes that may contribute to agroecology, by supporting inclusive access to land, knowledge co-creation, multi-stakeholder networks and sustainable land management. However, at the same time, aid for trade principles are strong drivers of Dutch development aid, particularly in the case of trade-oriented agencies like RVO. As such, the land governance activities supported under this fund, as the name suggests, focus on scaling agriculture and promoting trade.⁵⁷ Indeed, OECD data shows that Dutch aid for trade support focuses on building the productive capacity of agriculture.⁵⁸

Because RVO may contribute indirectly to agroecology by supporting just and inclusive land governance yet does not support overall agroecological transformation, these projects were categorised as Level 0, Governance. However, since inherently RVO seeks to promote trade and business opportunities for Dutch enterprises, which tends to focus on conventional agriculture, the agroecological transformation by such initiatives is expectedly limited.

4.5 Multilateral flows

Multilateral organisations were by far the biggest recipients of Dutch ODA funds dedicated to agriculture and food security. Between 2010-2020, the Netherlands funded 55 projects by multilateral organisations for a total of over € 997 million.

Table 4 Five biggest multilateral recipients of Dutch agricultural ODA funds

Recipient type	Number of projects	Total Budget	Share of Budget
World Bank (WB)	10	€ 391,270,438	39.24%
International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)	8	€ 327,903,818	32.88%
Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP)	1	€ 110,283,818	11.06%
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)	19	€ 97,049,351	9.73%
Asian Development Bank (AsDB)	2	€ 14,004,000	1.40%

Of the 55 projects included in this analysis, one project could not be assessed due to a lack of publicly available information and was therefore omitted from the analysis. Of the remaining 54 projects, most funding flows fell outside of the agroecological scope (Level 0, 55 percent), although an important portion of this was invested into social enabling projects (12 projects, 33 percent of the budget) and governance (5 projects, 17 percent of the budget). In addition, 23 percent of funding flows to multilateral organisations only partially or potentially supported input efficiency (Level 1), and a small portion contributed to Level 3 (2 projects, 2.5 percent) and Level 5 (1 project, 0.8 percent).

Although the total multilateral flows did not significantly promote an agroecological transition, there is significant potential to integrate agroecological principles as evidenced by the sizable social enabler projects. Many of these socially enabling flows were ranked as such because they did not quite meet the requirements to fall within any of the levels, but they strongly implement and support principles such as equity, social justice in food systems, access to local markets as well as ecological principles to farming. However, because multilateral organisations received large pools of funding, sometimes over 100 million per flow, this could not be more accurately separated to identify exactly how much funding contributes to agroecological principles. As such, there may be significant potential for agroecology within multilateral flows, particularly in projects under social enablers and governance.

Box 3: FAO and agroecology

In September 2014, FAO organised the International Symposium on Agroecology for Food Security and Nutrition. This initiative stemmed from the recognition that, in the words of FAO's former Director-General Jose Graziano da Silva, "agroecology [...] is an approach that will help to address the challenge of ending hunger and malnutrition in all its forms, in the context of the climate change adaptation needed." FAO's recognition of agroecology followed endorsements by the former U.N. Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier De Schutter, as well as the current Special Rapporteur, Hilal Elver, by the Latin American Scientific Society for Agroecology, by La Vía Campesina, the world's largest organisation of peasant farmers, and by a large international group of scientists and experts, amongst others.⁵⁹

While this move could be seen as a giant leap for non-state actors supporters of agroecology, for FAO it was like "opening a window in the Green Revolution cathedral", as expressed by Graziano da Silva as well.⁶⁰ This is to say that within FAO agroecology exists in a context where the prevailing discourse favours conventional agriculture and that not always capture the extent of the economic and structural causes of, for example, food insecurity.⁶¹

Accordingly, half of FAO projects financed with Dutch ODA reviewed for this research did not promote agroecological principles, while one fourth qualified as “social enablers”.

Figure 7 Agroecology in ODA-funded Multilateral Projects



4.6 Non-governmental flows

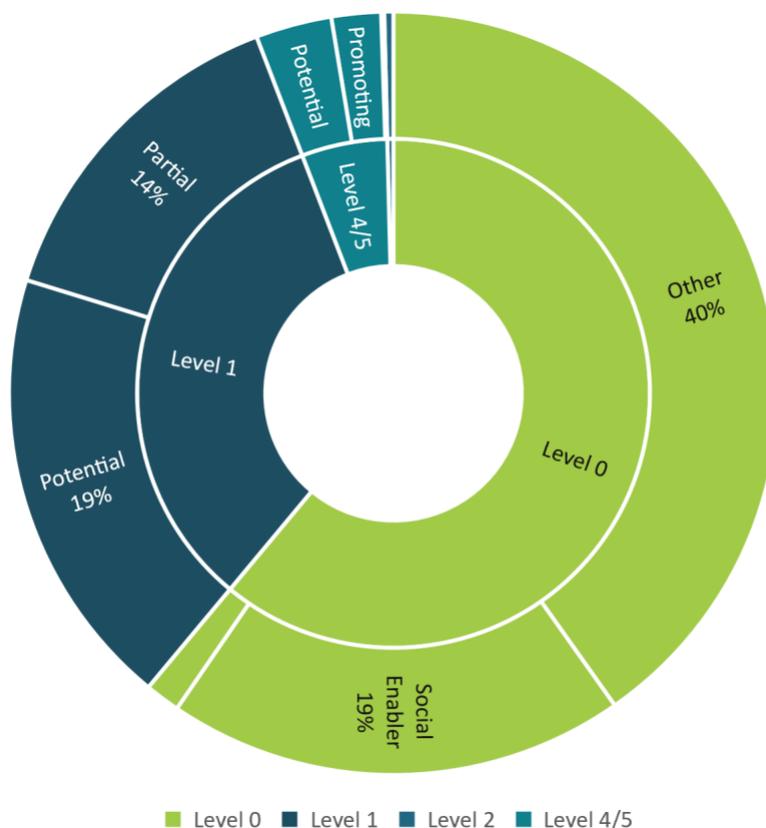
Although NGOs were responsible for the greatest number of projects, 91 out of 260 analysed projects, non-for-profit organisations only received 26.5% of the ODA funding dedicated to agriculture and food security between 2010-2020. Although a total of 47 organisations received funds within these sectors, two organisations, SNV and IFDC, received by far the largest portions of Dutch ODA funding:

Table 5 Five biggest NGO recipients of Dutch agricultural ODA funds

Recipient type	Number of projects	Total Budget	Share of Budget
SNV	17	€ 223,720,714	30.36%
International Fertilizer Development Center (IFDC)	12	€ 188,759,171	25.62%
Solidaridad Network West Africa	4	€ 45,719,716	6.21%
ICCO	6	€ 37,861,126	5.14%
One Acre Fund	1	€ 25,949,400	3.52%

Of the total of 92 projects, 8 projects were omitted from this assessment due to a lack of publicly available information. Most of the NGO funding flows did not promote agroecology (Level 0, 60 percent), though part of this (19 percent) did contribute to creating socially enabling conditions in which agroecology can be pursued, for example through land tenure projects for indigenous communities. In addition, 34 percent of funding flows only potentially or partially promoted increased input efficiency or sustainable intensification, while 5.3% supported food-system level, transformational agroecology (Levels 4/5). A small, negligible portion of funding contributed to Level 2 or Level 3 agroecological change.

Figure 8 Agroecology in ODA-funded NGO Projects



Box 4: Tropenbos and agroecology

Though not a major ODA recipient organisation, the Dutch NGO Tropenbos International (TBI) is a strong NGO driver of agroecology. TBI was founded in 1986 and is currently a network organisation of independent members operating in Indonesia, Vietnam, Ghana, DR Congo, Suriname, Colombia and the Netherlands. TBI’s mission is to improve the governance and management of tropical forests to benefit people, biodiversity and sustainable development, and over the years has strongly integrated agroecological principles in its work.⁶²

Between 2018 and 2024, TBI is receiving nearly € 11.5 million from Dutch ODA funds for its Working Landscapes project, which seeks to promote climate-smart landscapes that “*maximise synergies between mitigation and adaptation objectives by combining climate-smart practices at the farm level, a diversity of land uses, and deliberate management of ecological, social and economic interactions among different parts of the landscape. Achieving climate-smart landscapes requires the active involvement of both small-scale and large-scale producers, inclusive and coordinated governance arrangements, and financial investments.*”⁶³

The project activities proposed by TBI focus on a circular approach where sustainability and social values are interconnected through smallholder participation, inclusive landscape governance and knowledge co-creation with local foresters and farmers, communities and indigenous peoples.

Because the project is ongoing and the specific activities are unclear, this project was ranked as potentially promoting a Level 5 of agroecology, demonstrating how ecological and sustainability practices integrated with human and social values can potentially achieve transformational change.

4.7 Public Private Partnerships flows

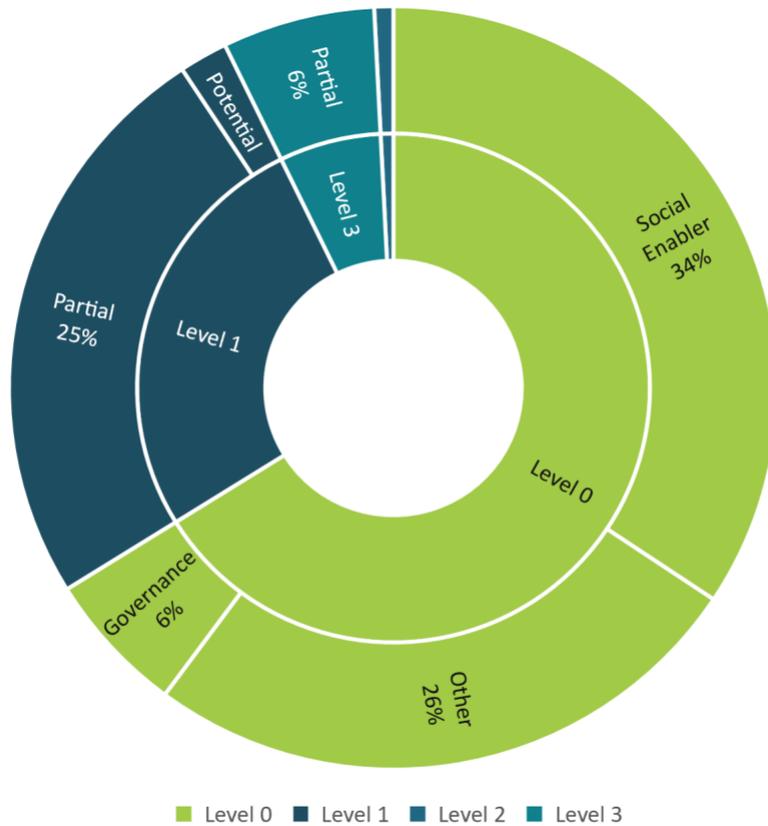
The last category of ODA recipients includes Public Private Partnerships (PPP) and private sector players. Together, PPPs conducted 55 projects for a total of € 302 million (11.4 percent of the total budget analysed). Recipients listed as PPPs may also be governmental organisations or NGOs but are listed here because the project was conducted in partnership with the private sector. The top five recipients accounted for 60.4 percent of the total budget spent.

Table 6 Five biggest PPP recipients of Dutch agricultural ODA funds

Recipient type	Number of projects	Total Budget	Share of Budget
Netherlands Enterprise Agency (Rijksdienst voor Ondernemend Nederland, RVO)	1	€ 68,801,682	22.78%
International Fertilizer Development Center (IFDC)	1	€ 46,893,590	15.53%
Agri-Profocus	4	€ 31,422,349	10.40%
Solidaridad Network Asia Limited	1	€ 17,813,444	5.90%
MDF Training & Consultancy	1	€ 17,522,049	5.80%

Seven out of 52 projects were excluded from the analysis due to insufficient information for assessment. Among the remaining flows, PPPs are the least supportive of agroecology among the different sectors: 66 percent did not promote agroecology at all, and 27 percent only included limited elements of input efficiency. In addition, 7.3% of funding partially supported Level 2 and 3 agroecology through elements of crop diversification, recycling and synergies, but no projects fully promoted agroecology nor addressed the human and social elements of transformational agroecology.

Figure 9 Agroecology in ODA-funded PPP Projects



BOX 5: AgriProFocus and agroecology

AgriProFocus is an international multi-stakeholder network in the agri-food sector consisting of farmer entrepreneurs, private sector enterprises, government, knowledge institutions, and civil society organisations.⁶⁴ While not having a clear stance on agroecology, AgriProFocus regularly publishes news items written by its partners (especially in East Africa) that promote agroecology. Accordingly, only one project implemented by AgriProFocus that was received ODA funding (making up for 3.7 percent of the total ODA funding awarded to AgriProFocus) supported agroecological principles.

5

Conclusions and recommendations

This chapter draws conclusions from this study's main findings and provides recommendations to reinforce support for agroecological practices through ODA spending.

5.1 Conclusions

This research concludes that:

- **The Netherlands' preference for channelling ODA funding through multilateral organisations and PPP projects is not favourable to promoting agroecological principles.** In the past ten years, the Dutch government in its ODA policies and strategy frameworks consistently favoured the allocation of ODA funding to multilateral organisations and the private sector. This research, however, shows that PPPs and multilateral organisations are not strong drivers of agroecology, and the projects funded through these channels have mostly promoted industrial/conventional agriculture, or at most support sustainable intensification of monocropping through input efficiency.
- **The traditional rationale of aid for trade has hindered agroecological practices.** The Dutch rationale behind development ODA, particularly in economic and productive sectors such as agriculture, relies heavily on the idea that supporting productive sectors in low-income countries pays itself back through beneficial trade relationships. For this reason, a majority of ODA funding for agricultural development centres objectives of intensification, market access and increased productivity, which often goes hand-in-hand with monocultural cash crops and mechanisation. At strong odds with agroecological principles, these aid for trade policies have countered rather than fostered the ecological transformation of food systems. While the aid for trade principles were mostly dominant between the 1990s to the early 2010s, the Dutch focus on trade is still strongly reflected particularly in PPP and private sector-driven projects.
- **Implementation of agroecological elements within Dutch agricultural ODA has mostly remained limited to sustainable intensification through increased efficiency of external inputs.** While most projects did not address agroecological elements at all, 26 percent of funding only included input efficiency, an element associated with the lowest level of agroecology. However, many of these projects were in fact focused on sustainable intensification and overall increased, rather than decreased, the use of external inputs though the conventional reliance on fertilizers, pesticides, irrigation and genetically modified seeds. Since one of the goals of agroecology is to reduce or even eliminate reliance on external inputs, these projects counter rather than foster agroecological practices in most cases, or only promote agroecological principles on an extremely limited level.
- **A significant gap exists in Dutch ODA funding for Level 2 and 3 elements of agroecosystem transformations, such as recycling, resilience, synergies, and biodiversity.** These elements that are crucial in the face of the climate crisis. However, just over 3 percent of Dutch ODA funding supported a meaningful integration of ecology in agricultural production. This significant gap points at a limited understanding of sustainability, which too frequently remains limited to input efficiency, and a failure to adapt projects to the long-term needs of climate resilience while reducing agriculture's ecological footprint.

- **There is significant support for creating the social and political factors necessary to transition to more equitable and just food systems.** However, this needs to be linked to sustainable and ecological production. Dutch ODA funding supports transformational food system change through Level 4 and 5 agroecological projects (9 percent) but mostly through projects that create the socially enabling conditions (18 percent) or governance structures (9 percent) that may help support agroecology. These are crucial elements to ensure just and equitable access to nutrition for everyone, and to achieve global food security. However, human and social value of food is inherently intertwined and interdependent on its sustainable and ecological production, and a failure to link efforts on social food justice to the agroecosystem risks being unsustainable and ineffective in the long run.
- **Dutch ODA funding makes important and crucial efforts to focus on smallholders, particularly women and youth, but needs to ensure that these projects foster co-creation, adaption to local contexts and bottom-up empowerment.** Although not assessed as part of this research, it became apparent from analysing the 260 projects that Dutch ODA funding has strongly focused on supporting and empowering smallholders, paying particular attention to women and youth. Equality, feminism and inclusion are crucial elements of agroecology, and this focus of Dutch aid may therefore be beneficial to agroecology. However, a concerning pitfall is that many of these projects implement a top-down approach in which knowledge is conveyed through one-way teaching or export of fixed entrepreneurship and agriculture models rather than co-creation.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the analysis in this report and the trends observed both in the policy framework as well as the actual funding flows of Dutch ODA on agriculture and food security, we propose a set of recommendations to stimulate an agroecological transition more strongly through ODA incentives.

The Dutch government, in particular the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Quality and Nature, should:

- Assess funding applications for Dutch ODA based on the integration of the ten elements of agroecology, regardless of whether the project seeks to promote agroecological transformation, to assess a project's objectives around the core agricultural challenges of sustainability, equity, inclusivity and social justice.
- Implement funding stimuli for projects that move beyond sustainable intensification through input efficiency towards more ecological integration of recycling, regulation, diversification, synergies and resilience.
- Urge ODA recipients, including governments, NGOs, PPPs and academic institutes, to adopt bottom-up approaches in agricultural projects by partnering on equal grounds with grassroots organisations that prioritise local expertise, context-specific knowledge and inclusive, co-created processes.
- Expect agricultural projects with runtimes longer than five years to prioritise long-term climate resilience, including by decreasing external input dependencies and strengthening ecological synergies, rather than promoting short-term productivity outcomes.
- Align MoFA strategies on food security and international agriculture with the LNV strategies on circular agriculture and ensure that this strategy is reflected in ODA funding.
- Prioritise local socio-economic benefits, such as shorter value chains and closer connections between producers and consumers through local markets, above international trade objectives or Dutch private-sector interests.
- Participate actively in multilateral discussions, particularly within United Nations agencies such as the FAO and UNEP, to activate stronger linkages between the environmental, social and human values of food systems with agroecological principles.

In addition, civil society organisations and non-governmental organisations supportive of an agroecological transition, such as BothENDS, can further support these incentives through advocacy that should:

- Socialising the findings of this study amongst allied Dutch MPs and urging them to raise parliamentary questions and engage in budget discussions regarding ODA and how these should align with Dutch food and agriculture policy.
- Lobby the new Dutch government that will be formed after the parliamentary elections of 17 March 2021 to explicitly commit to agroecology as a key strategy in the new food security, agriculture, and development aid policies.
- Utilise storytelling of successful agroecological transitions as a key strategy to restore ecosystems in the context of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030, which will be launched on World Environment Day on 5 June 2021.
- Leverage momentum around the UN Food Systems Summit 2021 to advocate for stronger integration of agroecological methods with socially enabling governance on the multilateral ODA level.
- Inform representatives of MoFA of the value they can add to the Food Otherwise (Voedsel Anders, VA) movement during the 2021 VA conference and how MoFA can benefit from engaging in discussions with civil society about agroecological transformations taking place in the Netherlands and abroad.

Lastly, it is recommended that BothENDS and its civil society allies explore the following potential future research avenues and follow-ups advocacy activities:

- Assess the degree of agroecological promotion in other funding flows including the Directorate-General for Foreign Economic Relations (DGBEB), regular contributions and membership fees to multilateral organisations and fora, or bilateral governmental cooperation around food and agriculture.
- Understanding the role of the financial sector in agroecological transformation by investigating private-sector financing, potentially focusing on the role of Dutch banks and financiers (such as Rabobank) in investments into agricultural activities. This can be done in collaboration with Profundo.
- Likewise, exploring opportunities to raise the promotion of agroecological principles on the agenda when it comes to e.g. the implementation of the FMO's Sustainable Trade Initiative (Initiatief Duurzame Handel); Dutch role as shareholder and board member of International Financial Institutions (such as World Bank); improving financial regulation of food agriculture investments through for example, the Network for Greening the Financial System and within GroenLinks and D66 in Dutch Parliament work on visions to reform the financial system.
- Promoting agroecological principles in other investment multi-stakeholder fora such as International Responsible Business Conduct and the Association of Investors for Sustainable Development (VBDO).
- Conduct in-depth case studies of ODA-funded projects in each sector to assesses the integration of the ten elements in detail, potentially including independent field evaluations. This can function as a learning tool to identify how development aid projects could better integrate and interconnect different agroecological elements and may also provide tools and storytelling for advocacy efforts.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Included Sectors in the ODA Funding for Agroecology Dataset

The following filters to the IATI Registry CVS Query Builder were applied to retrieve the correct dataset of ODA funding:

1. Reporting Organisation: Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DGIS) (XM-DAC-7)
2. Sector:
 - a. Agriculture
 - Agrarian reform
 - Agricultural alternative development
 - Agricultural co-operatives
 - Agricultural development
 - Agricultural extension
 - Agricultural financial services
 - Agricultural inputs
 - Agricultural land resources
 - Agricultural policy and administrative management
 - Agricultural research
 - Agricultural services
 - Agricultural water resources
 - Agro-industries
 - Food crop production
 - Food security policy and administrative management
 - Industrial crops/export crops
 - Plant and post-harvest protection and pest control
 - Livestock
 - Livestock/veterinary services
 - Bio-diversity
 - Household food security programmes
 - Food security policy and administrative management
 - Rural development
 - Fishing
 - Fishery development
 - Fishery research
 - Forestry
 - Forestry development
 - Forestry education/training
 - Forestry policy and administrative management
 - Forestry research
 - Forestry services
3. Filter by date: Activity / Budget start date (from) 2010-01-01
4. Format: One Activity per row, not repeating row, entire selection.
5. Additional filters applied within dataset:
 - a. Filter out projects shorter than 2 years.
 - b. Filter out projects with a budget of 0.

Appendix 2: Criteria for levels and degrees of agroecological support

Table 7 Criteria for categorisation

Level	Definition	Degree	Description
Level 0	Projects that fall outside of the agroecological scope and cannot be classified within any of the 5 levels.	Other Social Enabler Governance	<p>Projects that are either completely off-topic or promote conventional and industrial agriculture. This includes agricultural intensification to benefit trade, exclusive wildlife conservation projects.</p> <p>Projects that create enabling conditions for agroecology through social-economic policies, empowerment, inclusivity, and community-based stimuli. For example, projects that secure land rights for local and indigenous communities, train youth in agricultural skills, or promote local food markets without addressing sustainability issues.</p> <p>Projects that focus on equitable, just or responsible governance regarding food that may or may not promote agroecology, such as efforts to strengthen sustainable agriculture or land governance.</p>
Level 1	Projects that integrate sustainability objectives in the form of increasing the efficiency of external inputs to reduce ecological footprints.	Partially Promoting Potentially Promoting Promoting	<p>Projects that aim to reduce the environmental impact of agriculture by making some, though not all, inputs more efficient and sustainable, such as installing more efficient irrigation systems.</p> <p>Projects that mention sustainability, efficiency or climate-smart principles but it is not clear if input efficiency is realised. This includes climate-smart intensification projects that focus on increasing productivity.</p> <p>Projects that have as a core objective to make inputs more sustainable. This may also be through education projects, access to better input resources, investment in efficient irrigation infrastructure etc.</p>
Level 2	Projects that seek to substitute conventional farming practices and inputs for ecological, sustainable and recycled and regulated alternatives.	Partially Promoting Potentially Promoting Promoting	<p>Projects that seek to substitute some though not all external inputs and practices, such as replacing industrial fertilizers with compost or manure, or finding alternatives for synthetic pesticides.</p> <p>Projects that aspire to increase the use of organic on-farm inputs, but do not specify how this is to be achieved.</p> <p>Projects that express a plan to achieve full nutrient cycling within the farming unit, often with a strong integration of organic or biological farming principles.</p>

Level	Definition	Degree	Description
Level 3	Projects that target a transformational redesign of the agricultural system with ecological science at the core, with a focus on biodiversity, creating synergies and building resilience of the system.	Partially Promoting	Projects that strongly implement ecological approaches to the farming system, for example where farmers and researchers work together to solve farm-specific problems such as pests and diseases and low yields. These solutions are based on ecological science and the farmers' experience.
		Potentially Promoting	Projects that aspire to overhaul production methods, but it is not clear how this is achieved.
		Promoting	Projects that seek to fully transform the agricultural system by putting ecology at the core of production methods.
Level 4 & Level 5	Projects in level 4 and 5 move beyond the agroecosystem towards politically and socially transforming the food system based on principles of social justice, equity and sustainability.	Partially Promoting	Projects that link social and political change to ecological transformation. For example, projects that enhance knowledge co-creation between farmers, scientists, and extensionists and this knowledge feeds into decision-making processes
		Potentially Promoting	Projects that seem to target a transformational change towards equity, justice and ecology but it is unclear how it links these different elements. For example projects that promote organic markets with local produce.
		Promoting	Projects that have as a main objective to promote agroecology on scientific, social and political levels, integrating equitable decision-making and community-based farming drawing on knowledge co-creation through sustainable and ecological methods. These projects seek to realise holistic change by addressing most if not all agroecological principles.

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