





1 INTRODUCTION

This report explores the emerging challenges to and opportunities for enhancing coordination between donors and between donors and other development partners to support food systems transformation and rural development. It was commissioned and produced by the Global Donor Platform for Rural Development (GDPRD) at the request of its membership.

This focus on donor coordination has emerged from the GDPRD's wider work on the role donors can play in supporting food systems transformation and in helping to build on the outcomes of the United Nations Food System Summit (UNFSS). This has included the [*GDPRD Stocktaking Report on Donor Contributions to Food Systems*](#), released in December 2021; the [*GDPRD Declaration of Intent on Food Systems Transformation*](#), released in September 2021; and the [*GDPRD white paper Transforming Food Systems: Directions for Enhancing the Catalytic Role of Donors*](#), released in April 2022. The GDPRD's [*2022 Annual General Assembly*](#) emphasized the importance of focusing on national pathways for food systems transformation. All this work has highlighted the critical and catalytic role that donors can play in supporting the structural change that will be needed to transform food systems for future health, well-being, environmental sustainability, and resilience. However, a strong recurring message has been the need for improved donor coordination both nationally and at the global level.

The recognition of the importance of aid effectiveness and development partner coordination is not new. What is new is taking a systems approach to issues related to nutrition, health, the environment, livelihoods and poverty, while at the same time needing to deal with the compounding effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, escalating humanitarian crises, growing geopolitical tensions and rapidly expanding demands for limited development assistance funds. In this context, donor coordination has arguably never been more important but also never more challenging.

At the country level, governments and donors face challenges in finding the proper balance between short-term crisis response and longer-term development, making resources catalytic, and ensuring coherence between donors and countries. The national food systems pathways

emerging from the UNFSS have been an important mechanism in driving discussions on the food systems agenda at the country level, but in many countries, greater support is needed to sustain these processes, as are efforts to better align donor priorities and investments with national food systems pathways and national development plans. The 2023 [United Nations Food Systems Summit +2 Stocktaking Moment](#) has also reflected the clear need for a deeper understanding of the practicalities of improving the coordination of donor investments.

In July 2022, the GDPRD initiated this review of good practices on donor cooperation for food systems and rural development. This report provides the key messages that emerged from a literature review on donor coordination, and 30 interviews with donors, experts and practitioners working on food systems issues across a range of countries, including Cambodia, Ethiopia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Liberia, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania, as well as at the regional and global levels. It draws on the discussions of the virtual seminar "[From Rhetoric to Reality: How can donors better coordinate their responses for profound change in how food systems function](#)", held on 22 November 2022 and attended by 40 people. The report also incorporates the discussions and outcomes of the hybrid high-level dialogue "Donor Coordination for Food Systems Transformation: A forward agenda", held in Rome, Italy, on 27 June 2023, co-hosted by the GDPRD, IFAD and the European Commission, and attended by 70 participants.

Section 2 of the report outlines the context of the current food systems crisis and the need for increased donor coordination and investment in food systems. Section 3 provides background to the donor coordination and aid effectiveness agenda, and Section 4 describes some of the specific challenges to and opportunities for donor coordination on food systems transformation. Section 5 outlines the key dimensions of donor coordination. Section 6 highlights the main messages from key informant interviews on the emerging opportunities and challenges for donor coordination. Section 7 provides an overview of the emerging food systems and rural development architecture. Finally, Section 8 draws key conclusions and provides recommendations and the way forward for donors and development partners to improve coordination on food systems at the country level.

