



Global Donor
Platform for
Rural Development

2025 Annual General Assembly Report

**Investing in the Future
of Agrifood Systems:
New directions for
development finance**

**Friday, 12 December 2025
Brussels, Belgium**

Hosted by the European Commission

GLOBAL DONOR PLATFORM FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

2025 Annual General Assembly Highlights

Investing in the Future of Agrifood Systems: New Directions for Development Finance

12 December 2025

European Commission, Brussels, Belgium



The **Global Donor Platform for Rural Development (GDPRD)** held its 2025 Annual General Assembly (AGA) at the European Commission in Brussels, bringing together members and partners at a time of significant change for international development cooperation.

Discussions took place against a backdrop of pressure on official development assistance (ODA), evolving financing instruments, and shifting geopolitical priorities. Rather than dwell on disruption, the AGA focused on how development partners can continue to support agrifood systems effectively in the coming years.

Across sessions, a shared message emerged: **agrifood systems are not a niche development issue**. They are central to economic stability, climate resilience, trade, health and global security. With 2026 widely seen as a transition year before new leadership cycles (including at the UN, FAO and IFAD) begin in 2027, positioning food systems politically and financially will be critical.

ODA remains essential, but it must work alongside other sources of finance and stronger partnerships. Participants also highlighted the importance of coordination and reliable data to strengthen the place of agrifood systems within broader development and economic agendas.

Reclaiming the Political Narrative on Agrifood Systems



The day opened with a keynote address from **Alexander Müller**, Founder and Managing Director of TMG Think Tank for Sustainability, who reflected on the need to situate agrifood systems within broader policy debates.

"We have to position ourselves in the centre of these political debates, because investment in future food systems is directly linked to global stability."

Reducing investment in agrifood systems could have long-term negative consequences:

"Cutting back on investments in the future of agrifood systems is probably the most expensive way to save money."

Agrifood systems, he argued, must be framed not as discretionary development spending, but as strategic investments in global stability.



Bruce Campbell, GDPRD Co-Chair from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, reinforced the economic case for action:

"Suboptimal food systems are currently accumulating some 12 trillion dollars per year in hidden costs — through malnutrition, food insecurity, and extensive greenhouse gas emissions."

Participants discussed how, with the right political will and financial architecture, agrifood systems could become "a powerful engine of economic growth and environmental protection."

[Watch the opening and keynote](#)

[Session info](#)

What Does ODA Mean in an Evolving Financing Landscape?



How is development finance evolving and what does this mean for the future role of ODA?



Federica de Gaetano, GDPRD Co-Chair from the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, observed that:

“ODA has traditionally meant highly concessional finance, such as grants and low-interest loans. But today the landscape is shifting, as multilateral development banks (MDBs) and development finance institutions (DFIs) increasingly use less concessional instruments.”

This raised broader questions about how ODA can remain effective in a financing environment that increasingly combines public, private, and blended finance approaches.



From the European Commission perspective, **Leonard Mizzi** emphasized the need to ensure agrifood systems remain visible within wider policy priorities.

“We must make a convincing case that investing in agrifood systems is not just good for development, but is politically interesting — a win-win solution.”



The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)'s **Max von Bonsdorff** highlighted that:

“When we talk about financing, the role of public development banks — including national development banks — is now recognized more strongly than before.”

Agrifood systems are competing for attention. The task ahead is to demonstrate clear returns — economic, political, and strategic.

[Watch the session](#)

[Session info](#)

Collaboration in a More Fragmented Aid Landscape



A high-level panel explored evolving roles in development finance, discussing a more fragmented ecosystem marked by shrinking budgets and rising expectations for measurable impact.



Máximo Torero Cullen, Chief Economist of FAO, stressed the importance of coordinated approaches and reliable information:

“Don’t think isolated, think as the whole ecosystem that we already have in place.

We cannot move in the dark.”

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Participants agreed that stronger evidence, data, and mapping of investments are essential to guide decision-making and more strategic allocation of resources.



Carlo Batori from Italy’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation summarized the need for stronger collaboration:

“There is no magic formula— for the next 12 months, we just need to do better. More collaborative mechanisms, shared platforms, multi-stakeholder governance.”



Stefania Lenoci, World Bank Group:

“The financial architecture needs to move at the speed of the world’s needs, but it is not.”

“Agriculture continues to be seen as a safety net, but it needs to be seen as a job engine.”



Lawrence Haddad, Executive Director, GAIN, encouraged donors to act despite uncertainty:

“Donors: don’t wait for the dust to settle. There might be nothing for it to settle on. You might not invest in the perfect thing, but you’ll invest in something that’s moving the needle forward.”

Across the panel, the call to action was consistent: coordination, not proliferation. As Lawrence reflected, *“Aid is dead but long live aid”*.

[Watch the session](#)

[Session info](#)

Strengthening Coordination to Catalyse Finance



A dedicated session brought a practical lens to the discussion on catalysing finance and impact, exploring how development finance institutions, governments, and private sector actors can better align risk-sharing, policy reform, and pipeline development.

Panellists stressed that de-risking is not solely a financial exercise, as technology, infrastructure and policy all shape investment decisions. Reliable information was also recognized as a powerful de-risking tool, enabling better assessment of opportunities and risks across value chains and geographies.

The conversation reflected growing recognition that public development banks — including national institutions — have a key role to play in bridging public and private finance.



Tim Diphorn, One Acre Fund, encouraged partners to balance innovation with proven mechanisms:

“There is a tendency to favour innovation only, but let’s focus on the existing things that we already know are working.”



Rodrigo Madrazo, CEO, EDFI Management Company, challenged institutions to be even more ambitious:

“Can we do more? Can development finance institutions be bolder? In our experience, agriculture is not even the riskiest sector.”



Songbae Lee, Independent Advisor and former Agricultural Finance Team Lead, USAID, highlighted the value of effective collaboration:

“We all talk about cooperation and collaboration, but this [FASA, Aceli Africa, One Acre Fund] is a concrete way to do it.”

“Better allocation of existing ODA is the best way to show the argument for investing more in the future.”



Ambassador Khusrav Noziri, Assistant Director-General, Islamic Organisation for Food Security (IOFS)

“IOFS experience shows that empowering enabling entities accelerates national and sectoral progress.”

[Watch the session](#)

[Session info](#)

Youth Engagement in Agrifood Systems: Addressing land and finance constraints



A thematic session focused on the structural barriers affecting youth participation in agrifood systems, particularly the interconnected challenges of access to land and access to finance. These two challenges often reinforce one another. Without secure land tenure, young people struggle to access credit and insurance. At the same time, without finance, acquiring or formalizing land remains out of reach.



Ward Anseeuw, FAO, set the scene with a presentation on “Access to land without finance? Access to finance without land? The dilemma for youth engagement and leadership in agrifood systems”.

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As **Elisabetta Cangelosi** from the International Land Coalition put it:

“When it comes to land and finance with a focus on youth, you end up with a catch-22 situation; is it access to land or access to financial assets that come first?”



Evance Ochola (YPARD) emphasized the importance of youth participation in current efforts to transform food systems:

“Youth are not just the future of food systems — we are the present of food systems.”

Participants underscored the need for coordinated approaches that combine policy reform, inclusive financial instruments, and partnerships between governments, donors, and civil society

Gender-sensitive financing, regulatory reforms, and long-term investment in rural ecosystems were also identified as important elements for enabling youth engagement.

As **John F. Kelvin**, International Land Coalition (ILC), says:



“Without access to finance, youth cannot invest in land, value chains, or technology. Finance can be both a barrier and an enabler for youth.”

The takeaway was clear: addressing land and finance simultaneously is essential to unlocking youth potential — particularly in regions with rapidly growing youth populations.

This session was jointly organized by the GDPRD’s Thematic Working Groups on [Land Governance](#) and on [Rural Youth Employment](#).

[Watch the session recording](#)

[Session info](#)

Food Systems as Constructive Multilateralism



The final session explored how multilateral processes and geopolitical developments are shaping agrifood systems financing.

Despite fiscal pressures and political uncertainty, speakers highlighted ongoing engagement across international platforms.



Nikita Eriksen-Hamel from Global Affairs Canada noted that continuity across initiatives remains an encouraging sign:

"I do not think it is all doom and gloom... nothing has been explicitly ended or knocked down or killed off."



From the perspective of the **Committee on World Food Security**, Chair **Anas A. Al-Nabulsi** pointed to continued cooperation across international forums.

"We are seeing high level commitment, coordination across forums and initiatives."



Looking to France's 2026 G7 Presidency, **Clara Albergaria Pacheco** from the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs highlighted the importance of building on existing initiatives,

"To deepen existing initiatives and not to create new objects."

As well as frame food systems as:

"A platform for constructive multilateralism."



Echoing this forward-looking agenda, **Sandra Bartelt** from the European Commission noted that:

"Agrifood trade will be an important, priority issue in the near term."

Across the discussion, agrifood trade emerged as a growing political priority, alongside infrastructure finance, private sector mobilization, and climate integration. The message was

consistent: agrifood systems must be integrated into broader economic and geopolitical agendas — without losing their identity.

[Watch the session](#)

[Session info](#)

Looking Ahead

The discussions in Brussels provided an opportunity for donors and partners to reflect on recent developments and identify priorities for the coming year. Compared to early 2025, participants noted renewed energy and clearer focus. Rather than reacting to budget cuts and fragmentation, the community identified priorities and practical steps for the coming year:

- Position food systems as strategic political priorities.
- Use data and evidence to guide investment decisions.
- Scale impact through coordination.
- Address risks beyond finance, including policy and technology barriers
- Support inclusive opportunities, particularly for youth and women
- Recognize transactional aid as a tool — and engage with it strategically.
- Coordinate new funding and initiatives.

If Brussels demonstrated anything, it is this: agrifood systems are not peripheral to global debates. They sit at the intersection of security, prosperity, and sustainability.

In words that resonated throughout the day: Investing in the future of agrifood systems may not pay back tomorrow — but it pays back in stability.

And in uncertain times, stability is one of the most strategic investment of all.