

Ripple Effect International's response to the inquiry on the UK Government's work on achieving SDG2: Zero Hunger

We will mainly respond to this point as set out in the call for evidence:

“The FCDO’s work on achieving food security over the short, medium, and long-term including its work on food systems, climate resilience, and agricultural sustainability.”

Our response will cover these topics:

1. Explaining our unique approach using examples from two FCDO-funded nutrition projects - Improving Nutrition in Kenya, and Improving Nutrition in Ethiopia - delivered by Ripple Effect (formerly ‘Send a Cow’) that are locally appropriate and effective.
 - a. Transformative Household Methodology: what is it and why does it improve nutrition for rural women?
 - b. A holistic approach to farming: our agroecological, climate positive approach.
 - c. How building resilience prior to the COVID-19 pandemic prevented a dip in food security during the crisis in Kenya.
2. Our experience of partnering with FCDO.
3. Making FCDO more accountable to communities we serve.
 - a. Local leadership begins with envisioning: how our project participants are coached to look first at what they have, then create a vision for the future, and build a practical plan to get there.
 - b. The volunteer farmer trainer model: a cost effective approach to ensuring project sustainability.
4. Practical notes on a selection of the 2023-2030 International Development white paper goals.

Section 1: our unique approach

We work with smallholder farming families, who have around 1.5 hectares of land.

We use agroecological principles and systems thinking to create farm systems that are self-sustaining and protect nature.

Our projects are holistic, meaning that we use many¹ approaches to achieve the aim of food security, with an overall goal of dignity and choice.

Section 1.a - Transformative Household Methodology (THM)

Commitment 6.14: “We will change our approach to partnerships with women’s rights and other local organisations so that women, girls and marginalized people can drive the change they want in their lives and communities.” - from the UK government International Development white paper, 2023.

THM is a tool that was developed in Ethiopia by Ripple Effect staff. There are many approaches to improving women’s decision-making, access to and power to use resources, but we have found THM to be particularly effective because it intervenes at a household level, rather than just a community level.

This means that the hidden dynamics holding women back – gender-based violence, financial control, unequal distribution of workload, sole responsibility for growing food and cooking for the family – can be addressed. THM improves nutrition by highlighting unfair food distribution among family members and address taboos related to how pregnant and lactating women should access food. It also lays the foundations for financial independence.

The effectiveness of this tool for improving women’s nutrition has been evidenced in this [research paper](#) with the Global Women’s Institute and the World Bank. Ripple Effect, with funding from USAID, adapted findings from the paper into a [training manual](#) for development practitioners. The manual states:

“The purpose of THM training is to create awareness of the participating household on gender relations, specifically access, control/benefit over resources and division of labour to transform their intra-household gender relations. Whilst other methodologies focus is at group or community level, THM is an effective tool for addressing gender issues at household level. Different family members are encouraged to identify issues and come up with their own solutions.” (Page 8)

¹ To strengthen the effectiveness and sustainability of our projects at the community level, we use various approaches such as Community based Institutions (i.e. Farmer Groups), Transformative Household Methodology, an Agroecological Climate Positive Approach to farming, Peer Farmer Training, and Nutrition Sensitive Agriculture.



Picture: a group Transformative Methodology session in Ethiopia

“In rural Africa average literacy levels are low. Ripple Effect is working with populations that are mostly illiterate, with illiteracy being higher among women. This tool has proven to be particularly effective in rural/agricultural contexts because it is illiterate friendly and promotes a process that is simple and easily understood by all household members.” (Page 8)

Applying THM in FCDO projects

In our FCDO-funded projects, this tool has been applied with incredible results. In the ‘Improving Nutrition’ project in Kenya, food security at the start of the project was 6%, by the end it was 99.7%. Prior to the project, 0% of people were eating a sufficiently varied diet. At the end 88% were. Results like this are the result of multiple interventions, but gender and social inclusion are at the center of the work.

“We start with gender. And once we have addressed that, then we are ready to train our agroecological, climate positive approach to farming”. Meshark Sikuku, Farm Systems and Sustainability lead

We use gender equality as a tool to leverage positive change on food security and nutrition, not as an 'add-on'. When families make decisions together, and women have a say in what crops to plant, which to harvest and which to sell, farm yields increase. Small businesses do better. When you empower women, you empower the whole community.

In our projects we select all people with disabilities in a community to take part in the project, and aim for 60% female participants, a target which we often overshoot. These

more marginalised people are promoted to leadership positions, helping to bring about a culture change and increase inclusion.

Section 1.b - Our Agroecological, climate positive approach

Commitment 5.31: “We will help farmers to secure their livelihoods through sustainable and resilient agriculture and food systems.”

Although effective at reducing malnutrition, one of the issues with micro-nutrient supplements is that they are often not produced locally. To have truly sustainable development, we cannot normalize emergency interventions such as this, creating a long-term reliance on them.

In the communities where we work, we always ensure that the food security and nutrition interventions are locally appropriate, meaning they can be replicated and continued by the communities themselves. An example of this is training [paravets in Rwanda](#) (Rwanda Impact Report, P20) to meet local demand for veterinary procedures and advice. Paravets are trained by Ripple Effect staff, and they go on to set up viable small businesses, providing a local service and also contributing to a thriving rural economy. If the vets we provided were Ripple Effect staff, we would create dependency. But instead, we create independence.

This is also the case for our farming interventions.

Instead of providing micronutrient packages for malnourished women and children, we practice [nutrition-sensitive agriculture](#)². This means we provide people with the seeds, tools and training to grow their own vegetables using organic methods, which contain essential micronutrients.

We apply this nutrition-based approach to agricultural development that puts nutritionally rich foods and dietary diversity at the heart of overcoming undernutrition, overnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies. This is key in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 2: Zero Hunger.

We do this through:

1. Increasing the availability of, and access to, diverse, nutritious foods
 2. Encouraging farmers to use their income for better diets, health, and hygiene
 3. Promoting recognition and participation the central role of women in agriculture and nutrition
 4. Generating a demand for diverse, nutritious foods through trainings
 5. Supporting a broad view of nutrition in our policies and programmes such as working with governments and partners
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The great thing about growing your own micronutrients is that the supply is locally owned, supports local livelihoods, and if farmed sustainably, restores tired land.

Our approach also supports:

Commitment 5.42: “Our vision for 2030 is to achieve sustainable and inclusive growth in low- and middle-income countries that reduces poverty while preserving natural assets for the long-term.”

Agroecological farming is a cheap and effective way of raising rural populations out of poverty, whilst protecting natural resources and biodiversity. It provides employment and supports local economies, whilst improving nutrition and food security.

“Agriculture has traditionally focussed solely on extractive and profit-led production with less considerations to social equity, inclusion, and environment. Overreliance on farm chemicals, synthetic farm inputs such as chemical fertilizers, overreliance on improved seeds and focusing on fewer energy dense monocultures continues to pose challenges to small holder farmers in Africa as climate crisis worsens.

“Our Approach is different. Agroecological Climate Positive Approach (ACPA) is an alternative approach to farming that not only leads to improved yields, but also results to regeneration of farming ecosystem, enhances biodiversity, and contributes to mitigating climate crisis through avoiding or sequestering greenhouse gasses.

“Most importantly also agroecology promotes interventions that ensure communities particularly small holder farmers, marginalized communities, women and youth are part of the food system, having a voice and decisions around it. Agroecology ensures that farmers have access to agricultural inputs, have control over their land and resources and have the capacity to manage productive resources through the systems approach.”

- Meshark Sikuku, Farm Systems and Sustainability Lead, Ripple Effect

Case study from Titus Sagala, Country Director for Ripple Effect Kenya

“A project of ours in Kenya was working in a particularly remote region. There was a World Food Programme office in that village, and every week villagers would go to collect their rations.

“The people in this village that Ripple Effect were working with were extremely poor and vulnerable – unusually for that region, most of them didn’t even have a toilet.

After working with Ripple Effect, the two self-help groups in that village decided to go and speak to the World Food Programme staff to say that they would no longer be requiring their assistance, because now they could provide for themselves.

“The World Food Programme office has since closed, but the teachings Ripple Effect delivered remain. The change is lasting.”

Titus Sagala, Country Director for Ripple Effect Kenya grew up in rural Kenya and his parents graduated from a Ripple Effect project when he was young, paving the way for him to go to school and achieve success later in life. He knows firsthand the challenges people face to achieving food security in rural Kenya.

Integrating gender and sustainable farming

It’s essential that gender equality is addressed as part of improving nutrition. When we ask project participants what they are most proud of after completing their time with Ripple Effect they often say:

“I am most proud of our new family harmony. That has helped me to change everything.” - Jean-Baptiste, a Ripple Effect project participant in Rwanda.

Just making sure there is enough food available doesn’t necessarily mean women will eat more nutritious food – there must also be a shift in power. And this can mean breaking down traditional beliefs about who can eat protein rich food, as well as ensuring there is enough to go round.

In the FCDO funded Improving Nutrition project in Dawuro, Ethiopia, traditional beliefs made the consumption of protein rich dairy products taboo for women, particularly those who were pregnant and breastfeeding, and children. This is an example of social barriers to people having nutrition even if they have access to that food. So, nutrition cannot be addressed without gender.

In another project in Kenya, an Innocent Foundation nutritionist found that there were taboos on what pregnant and lactating women could eat, and that there was a local tradition of pregnant women eating soil to get their minerals. This poses obvious health risks, and is another example of barriers to be overcome.

Section 1.c - Building resilience to shocks in Kenya

Commitment 7.60: “Alongside our core humanitarian spend we will scope a separate fund of up to 15% of FCDO bilateral humanitarian provision to allow us to build in resilience and adaptation alongside delivery of humanitarian relief.”

The FCDO funded 'Improving Nutrition' project in Kenya began its third year in the grips of the global covid-19 pandemic. As noted in our narrative report to FCDO, despite the pandemic food security continued to improve into the third year, suggesting resilient food security was built during the first two years of the project.

In April 2020, food security in Kenya dropped by 38%. Consumption of fruits dropped by 30%, showing people had less food and also less dietary diversity.

However, this trend was not reflected in our project, with food security continuing to rise to 99.7% in year three. This suggests that the interventions in sustainable agriculture, gender and social inclusion and also savings groups together built genuine resilience to unexpected shocks such as pandemics.

We have seen in other projects that resilience to climate shocks can be built through a similar three-pronged approach.

Aminadab Bucumi, a refugee from Burundi living in Uganda, took part in a project with Ripple Effect and the World Food Programme. He says:

“Without skills, we were nothing. Now with farming and business skills, we can't be poor or sleep hungry.” – Aminadab Bucumi

Section 2: Our experience of partnering with FCDO

We have delivered three UK Aid Direct projects and three UKAM projects in about 10 years, ranging from £750,000 to £1.5 million. The following section is a summary of recommendations and observations from Programme Funding staff who have been directly involved in FCDO funded projects.

Reporting

The reporting burden is considerable and specific: quarterly narrative, financial reports with work plan and risk register updates: Annual and PCR, asset registers and related admin. There is significant time required and technical ability, which could make it harder for organisations smaller than us to keep up.

However, rigorous reporting requirements for FCDO funded projects have also helped us to 'grow up' as a medium sized NGO. Theories of Change are now standard practice for us, and our M&E, budgeting and safeguarding across all projects have been improved. Mannion Daniels reporting and planning tools have helped us to think not just about the change we wish to see at the end of the project, but what that change will look like at different stages.

For smaller charities, Mannion Daniels changing the reporting templates has distracted from project delivery. There is a wish for more consistency and resisting 'reinventing the wheel' for smaller orgs.

The focus on adaptive programming has been a hugely important innovation that we welcome. The idea of constantly reflecting and reforecasting helps to keep projects on track. The A+ rating system could work alongside this with a system of adjustment on request with the NGO's contact at Mannion Daniels. Project plans need to be able to change with the reality on the ground, and there must be flexibility within the grant to submit a revision. This newer process has been very good in Aid Match projects.

SDG focus

Funding calls have had a strong SDG focus, particularly on core work of hunger and poverty alleviation and covered a wide range of countries. This ensures that charities aren't excluded based on the countries they work in, or the issues they work on.

Level playing field

UKAID direct was only open to charities earning less than £10 million, which helped small-medium sized charities to access grants. UKAM had a local appeal agenda as well as national (for example, favouring local PR stunts) which smooths the playing field for regional charities such as ourselves, and reduces the advantage of big, London-centric charities.

However, stringent reporting requirements mean that the charities best set up to deliver on the projects in line with FCDO expectations are larger charities, like Save the Children, for example.

Section 3: Making FCDO more accountable to the communities we serve

In the past, the FCDO's risk appetite has been quite low, meaning that although they say they don't want to give to larger orgs, they're often the only ones with the expertise and processes needed to satisfy that risk-averseness. Fewer or amended due diligence controls may be needed to integrate more partners from the Global South directly.

"In the past, FCDO's standard indicators have been pushed on us - but we're not always doing that work. We're not improving % maize yields, we're doing something entirely different. Our work encourages freedom for farmers to choose what they

grow - we're not dictating that, so it's harder to measure. Our journey is towards diversity and resilience, not towards profit and % yields." - Peg Bavin, Director of Programme Funding, Ripple Effect

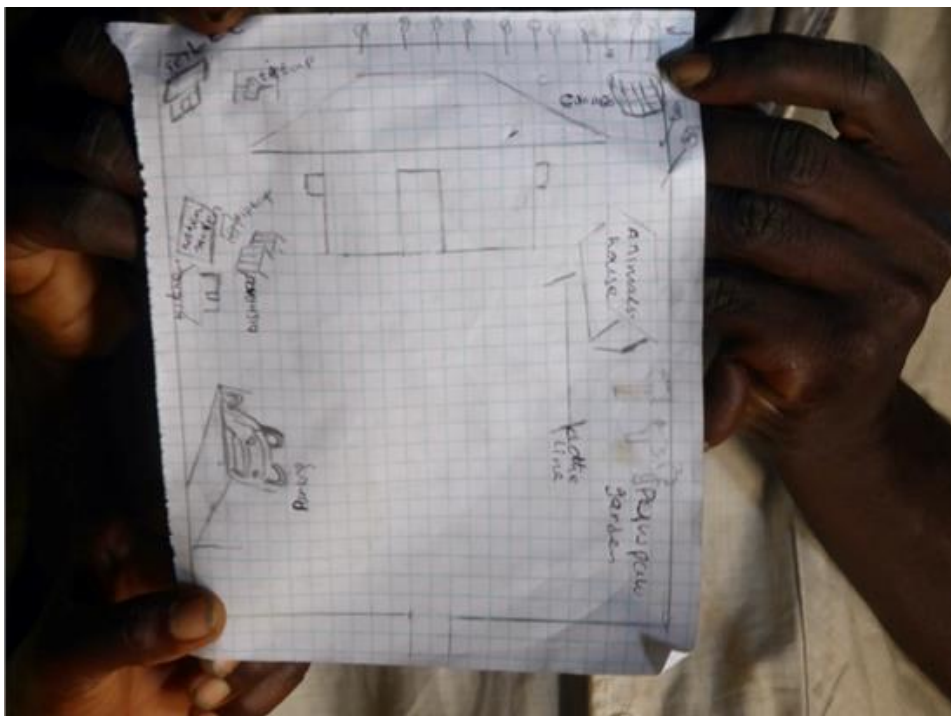
Section 1.a – Local leadership begins with visioning

Locally lead development begins with envisioning. There must be space for improvisation and change in FCDO reporting, to ensure projects are truly accountable to communities.

"In my quest for realizing sustainable development, I have come to the realization that it starts with the people - what do the benefiting or targeted individuals really want? This is what most people refer to as people centered project design that has been popularized as Human Centered Design (HCD)." - Byrone Wayode, Head of Monitoring and Evaluation, Ripple Effect.

More flexible, adaptive programming from FCDO and Mannion Daniels could help NGOs to achieve genuine local leadership in the nutrition space.

Case study: Millicent and Matthew's pencil sketch turned into reality in three years



In November 2018, Paul Stuart, CEO of Ripple Effect, visited Millicent and Matthew's family in Kenya. When the family first joined a Ripple Effect project, they lived in cramped conditions in a small house, their children were out of school and the family lacked access to clean running water and washing facilities. Some of the family live with a disability and as a result, experienced marginalisation in the community.

Envisioning is a key activity Ripple Effect staff undertake with families in our programmes. Farmers are encouraged to visualise what they would like to achieve by working with Ripple Effect. Pictured is the original envisioning drawing that Millicent and Matthew's family produced in 2018. Their envisioning drawing included an animal house, toilet, tip tap and kitchen garden.

In May 2023, Paul returned to visit the family, following their recent journey as part of a Ripple Effect project. Poignantly, he saw that their dream had been realised. Millicent and Matthew showed off their crops, home improvements, an animal shelter for their goat, and health insurance cards for their children. Since their community took part in gender and social inclusion training, they shared how after feeling abandoned by their community, they felt more included and supported by them. Matthew said:

"I never ever owned anything. I didn't know where to begin. The community had abandoned us. Now we have a beautiful house and goat. Come back again and see what we will do in the future."

Section 1.b - The Volunteer Farmer Trainer (VFT) model

Our nutrition projects use self-help groups and volunteer farmer trainers to achieve more sustainable outcomes.

- **Volunteer farmer trainers (VFTs)** are project participants who are selected and given additional training by Ripple Effect so they can support their community with sustainable farm training. After formal projects end, they remain as a community resource, embedding the progress achieved in the project lifetime.
- **Self-help groups (SHGs)** are small groups of 15 to 20 members. The group members use saving, credit, and social involvement as instruments of empowerment. Principles of the SHG are mutual help and self-reliance and the members of the group work together to understand each other's problems better. Members are bound by affinity, natural bonds due to characteristics such as love and affection, mutual trust, respect & support.

Our [research project](#) funded by USAID IDEAL small grants programme, examined the sustainability of the volunteer farmer trainer model.

We found that in Kenya, 87% of farmers still had access to support from a VFT five years after the project had ended. In Uganda, the number was closer to 51%. The reasons for the difference are detailed in the [report summary](#) (page 3).

This model supports locally-led development. VFTs support their self-help groups and others in the community. They can then form Associations, which bring together VFTs from across a geographic area, to advocate for change with their local government. In Kenya, VTF Associations have achieved legal recognition. Strengthening local institutions is an essential part of truly locally led development.

Section 4: Practical notes on a selection of the 2023-2030 International Development white paper goals.

Chapter 5: Tackling climate change and biodiversity loss and delivering economic transformation

Commitment 5.37: “We will advance action on climate adaptation” using “nature-based solutions”. A holistic approach to development and farming works with nature to increase farm yields. See our work on [push-pull agriculture](#) (featured in the New Scientist as a ‘new tech’ solution) for an example of nature-based innovation.

Chapter 6: Ensuring opportunities for all

Commitment 6.13: “We will ensure that development finance reaches those left furthest behind.” Mainstreaming disability and gender inclusion is essential to economic development and food security. Those marginalised people must be lifted up and placed in leadership positions within the community.

Commitment 6.15: “We will partner with national leaders, women’s groups and other experts, to test and scale-up innovative approaches” - A large scale adoption of THM could transform livelihoods.

Commitment 6.41: “We will promote the right of all girls, including those caught up in conflict and crises, to 12 years of quality education.” - in rural contexts there are many barriers facing girls in getting education, but the largest are economic. If you invest in rural livelihoods through sustainable farming, you invest in girls education.

Commitment 6.62: “We will work across sectors to support the implementation of a One Health approach.” An agroecological approach to livestock farming supports One Health. See the work of our Vice-chair of trustees, Simon Doherty.

Commitment 6.68: “We will deliver on our campaign to end the preventable deaths of mothers, babies and children”. Nutrition for rural mothers is essential to this commitment, and agroecology combined with THM are sustainable solutions to this problem.

Chapter 7: Tackling conflict and state fragility, disasters and food insecurity

Commitment 7.36: “We will champion longer-term approaches to protracted displacement and the Global Compact on Refugees.” Displaced people don’t need to be dispossessed of land. Our projects in Uganda working with refugees alongside the World Food Programme have shown that when given a small plot of land, refugees can build small farming businesses for themselves, creating dignity, choice and integration into the host community.

Commitment 7.82: “We will inspire agricultural and food system transformation.” This commitment must work for smallholder farmers, and people must be able to keep access to their land and livelihoods. The farming revolution must work with nature, and agroecology is one very effective way of doing this.

Commitment 7.84: “We will invest in agricultural technology and innovation.” It is essential to keep asking the question, “Who will this innovation benefit?” If it is primarily large agri-tech companies, then the solution needs to be redrawn, and involve smallholder farmers in decision-making. 40% of the world’s food is grown by smallholders (Our World in Data) and yet they are rarely consulted on food and agriculture policy.