



**CRISIS, FAMINE, ACTION:**  
**A UK ROADMAP FOR ENDING GLOBAL HUNGER**





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Despite the international community's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) to end hunger by 2030, the number of people facing extreme food insecurity around the world has risen. Since 2015, over three million children die each year from malnutrition-related causes. Yet we know it doesn't have to be this way. Between 1990 and 2015, the number of people suffering undernutrition in the world halved. The UK played an important role in directing Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) to tackling poverty, hunger and its causes which helped achieve this result.

In recent years, the worsening impacts of conflict, climate change and inequality have reversed this progress. The UK government's decision to reduce its ODA budget from 0.7 per cent to 0.5 per cent Gross National Income (GNI) and disband the Department for International Development has come at a disastrous time. In this paper, we set out Action Against Hunger's proposal for the next government to reverse the alarming rise in global hunger. We outline the primary causes of hunger and explain how a joined-up UK ODA and foreign policy approach can help address them.

The UK has a significant opportunity to show leadership and turn the tide on rising hunger.

Firstly, conflict is the leading cause of hunger in the world today and by upholding and championing international human rights and humanitarian law through all diplomatic channels, and ensuring civil service staff are equipped with the right resources and expertise, the UK can play a vital role in defending the rights of the most vulnerable to food, protection and to have their essential needs met. UN Security Council Resolution 2417 puts responding to conflict-induced hunger firmly on the Security Council's agenda. The UK now has an opportunity to build on the important work done so far by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) to champion the implementation of this resolution and translate it into tangible change in conflict-affected countries.

Tackling the escalating crises of climate change and biodiversity loss must be top of the next government's agenda at home and abroad. With droughts, wildfires and floods increasing in intensity, the people most vulnerable to the impacts are those least responsible for causing the crisis, and with least means to adapt.

The recent drought in East Africa is estimated to have claimed a life every 36 seconds.

Responding to this requires that the UK's domestic Net Zero strategy expedites action to bring emissions down now, to mitigate the risk of a climate catastrophe by 2050. On the global front, the UK needs to ensure at least some international climate finance that is additional to the ODA budget is made available, and that grants (not loans) for climate change adaptation reach the most vulnerable people. Investment is also urgently needed from all governments in the Loss and Damage fund being established through The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), ensuring the fund benefits all the most affected countries with least responsibility for the current climate crisis.

Poverty and rising inequality are also forcing families to go hungry. A multi-sector and integrated approach to trade, aid and foreign policy is needed to reverse the sharp 10 per cent rise in people living in extreme poverty since 2020. A particular focus must be on achieving the SDGs on social protection, universal health coverage and on ending the preventable deaths of newborns and

young children. Recognising also that poverty and hunger disproportionately affect women, a gender-transformative approach to delivering social protection and health systems is vital.

We further set out a series of commitments that should guide UK ODA allocation, namely: reversing the rise in global hunger and reducing poverty and inequality; embedding decolonisation and localisation approaches in all partnerships; and ensuring transparency and accountability.

Finally, we provide a series of recommendations for the next UK government, based on these commitments, that can build on recent efforts to re-establish the UK as a global development and humanitarian actor and make tackling the global hunger crisis the guiding objective of ODA and foreign policy. Critically, this requires recalling the commitment to deliver 0.7 per cent of GNI to ODA and re-instating an independent department for cooperation development. Through these commitments and strategies the UK government can once again take a leading role in reducing the needless deaths and development losses resulting from preventable hunger and malnutrition.





Action Against Hunger team help communities in the Philippines create flood warning systems since extreme weather events are becoming more common.

## INTRODUCTION

Between 1990 and 2015, the number of people suffering undernutrition in the world halved. The UK played an important role in helping to achieve this, actively directing ODA to tackle poverty, hunger and its causes, and driving global action on hunger and malnutrition by, for example, hosting the first Nutrition for Growth Summit in 2013. And in 2015, the UK government and its counterparts around the world agreed a global goal to finally end hunger and malnutrition by 2030.

However, we are not on course to achieve this goal. We are now over halfway to 2030, but the number of people at risk has risen. Around 735 million people in the world faced hunger in 2022,<sup>1</sup> which is 122 million more people than before the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2022, around a third of people were food insecure and around a quarter of children had some form of malnutrition.<sup>2</sup>

It is projected that almost 600 million people will be chronically undernourished by 2030. This is due in particular to conflict, climate change and biodiversity loss, and rising inequality. Humanitarian needs are also growing at an alarming rate.<sup>3</sup>

In this context, the recent steep decline in the UK's Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) budget from 0.7 per cent to 0.5 per cent of the UK's gross national income (GNI), coupled with

nearly 30 per cent of the remaining budget<sup>4</sup> being spent domestically on refugee support, comes at a time when the UK can least afford to turn its back on tackling the causes and consequences of hunger and humanitarian crises.

Up to 85 per cent of people facing acute levels of food insecurity in 2022 lived in fragile or conflict-affected states<sup>5</sup> that are also highly vulnerable to the growing impacts of the climate crisis. Such conditions erode years of development gains and dramatically increase humanitarian needs, with women and girls the most at risk.

As a result of rising insecurity, poverty and climate change impacts, the cost of meeting global humanitarian needs has risen by 30 per cent in the last year alone.<sup>6</sup> UK ODA and diplomatic action have the power to help reverse this trend using a joined-up approach that addresses the key causes of rising hunger:

- Conflict and humanitarian crises
- Climate change and biodiversity loss
- Poverty and inequalities, including gender inequality.

Urgent action is needed, and with the right commitments, the UK can play a leading role in reducing humanitarian needs and promoting climate and social justice.

## RESPONDING TO THE KEY DRIVERS OF HUNGER AND MALNUTRITION

### CONFLICT AND HUMANITARIAN CRISES

As of early 2023, globally there were at least 110 active armed conflicts involving national armed forces and/or non-state armed groups<sup>7</sup> and the number of people living in situations of protracted conflict and/or climate-affected countries was rising.<sup>8</sup> In 2022, more than 85 per cent of people facing crisis levels of acute food insecurity - or worse - (IPC/CH Phase 3 and above) were living in conflict-affected countries, and conflict and insecurity were the number one driver of hunger for more than 117 million people.<sup>9</sup> Populations experienced famine conditions across seven countries - Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Haiti, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen<sup>10</sup> - all of which face protracted conflict.

Across the world, humanitarian crises are long and complex, and on average last for over nine years. Nearly three quarters of the people who receive assistance are in countries that have been affected by a humanitarian crisis for seven years or more.<sup>11</sup> Conflict leads to protracted displacement, with over 108 million people now forcibly displaced worldwide: over 62 million are internally displaced persons (IDPs) and over 35 million are refugees.<sup>12</sup> The vast majority (71 per cent) of refugees are hosted in low- and middle-income countries.<sup>13</sup> And the cost of hosting refugees for multiple consecutive years are not shared equally, leaving host countries unable to meet the needs of refugees on their own.<sup>14</sup>

Women and children are the most at risk and disproportionately bear the brunt of conflict.<sup>15</sup> Approximately 450 million children - nearly one fifth of the world's children - live in a conflict zone.<sup>16</sup> Women and girls in conflict situations experience heightened risks of physical, verbal, sexual, and psychological abuse.<sup>17</sup> In times of hunger, they resort to

negative coping mechanisms, including children being taken out of school, forced into labour, child marriage, or recruited by armed groups. Sexual exploitation may be used to secure food or money, and gender disparities often lead to women and girls receiving less food or being last to eat in households.<sup>18</sup>

Alongside civilians, humanitarian and health workers are also at serious risk from conflict. Although an overall downward trend in attacks has emerged recently, 235 aid workers were attacked in 2022 and nearly 2,000 attacks and threats were made against health facilities and personnel in the same year.<sup>19</sup> The safety and security of humanitarian and health workers is an indispensable condition for the delivery of humanitarian aid and healthcare to civilian populations in need.

Sanctions and restrictive counter-terrorism policies adopted by states and donors pose a challenge. These can jeopardise access to populations, staff security, and leave people without assistance. Both national and international NGOs are affected. Adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2664, which provides a standing humanitarian exemption to the asset freeze measures imposed by UN sanctions regimes,<sup>20</sup> marks a significant breakthrough by the international community, but has yet to be fully implemented.

### The UK's response

The UK has played a strategic role since 2020 in driving the UN Security Council's action to respond to conflict-induced hunger, including setting-up the Group of Friends of Action on Conflict and Hunger. In May 2021, the UK also led the establishment of the G7 Famine Prevention and Humanitarian Crises Compact which promotes diplomatic action to hold conflict parties to account for violations of international law.



However, despite these initiatives, the UK's Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy, published in March 2021, emphasised an increasing shift in focus towards the UK's own economic and security interests at the cost of prioritising the reduction of poverty and disease. The latest International Development Strategy (IDS) of May 2022 further confirmed this, placing the UK's economic and security interests at the centre of development policy.<sup>21</sup>

The IDS also addresses humanitarian crises, strengthening health systems and putting women and girls first, which is welcome,

but this is not currently reflected in ODA budgeting. There is a need for the UK to rebuild capacity to really support people in fragile and conflict-affected states to meet protection, health and food security needs. There is also a need to ensure the UK uses its diplomatic power to uphold international humanitarian law and adhere to the UK's obligations under the Arms Trade Treaty regarding weapons exports – this includes ensuring deadly weapons do not get into the hands of people who will use them to commit human rights violations, including genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.



### GEORGINE, A MOTHER DRIVEN FROM HER FARM BY CONFLICT

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, 3.4 million children under the age of five suffer from severe acute malnutrition – the most life-threatening form of hunger. In Ituri, the highest figures are among children who have been displaced by violence.

“The war has driven us from our field. We no longer have access to it or to good food, so the children are always sick,” says Georgine.



© Peter Caton / Action Against Hunger



## THE CLIMATE CRISIS AND BIODIVERSITY LOSS

Climate change-induced extreme weather events are already driving famine-levels of hunger,<sup>22 23</sup> and ever-more frequent droughts and floods are increasing child malnutrition.<sup>24</sup> The recent climate change-fuelled drought in East Africa led to the deaths of around 43,000 people in Somalia alone in 2022, half of whom were children,<sup>25</sup> and the crisis is not yet over. The escalating climate crisis, coupled with rapid biodiversity loss, pose a major threat to global food security, health and the eradication of hunger.<sup>26</sup>

This is especially true for regions and communities with development constraints, poverty, and limited resources, making them highly vulnerable to climate-related hazards. Many African countries are on the frontline of the climate emergency,<sup>27</sup> despite having contributed little to global greenhouse gas emissions. They also have the least financial capacity to deal with the loss and damage resulting from the climate crisis.<sup>28</sup> Today, 27 of the 35 countries most affected by climate change are experiencing extreme food insecurity<sup>29</sup> and by 2030, more than 100 million people in low- and middle-income countries may be pushed below the poverty line by increasingly frequent extreme weather events and the climate crisis.<sup>30</sup>

Ensuring climate finance reaches the people who need it most is vital. Climate vulnerability is higher in communities that have high levels of climate-sensitive livelihoods such as pastoralists, smallholder farmers, and fishing communities. Yet currently, small-scale farmers receive only 1.7 per cent of climate finance.<sup>31</sup> Greater investment is needed in supporting these groups to maintain livelihood practices that are compatible with a changing climate and with protecting nature, such as agroecology. This is particularly important as nearly 70 per cent of wildlife has been lost since 1970.<sup>32</sup> By transforming food systems to be sustainable, healthy, and equitable, agroecological approaches are highly effective in adapting to climate change through improving the fertility and water-carrying capacity of soil, and reducing emissions associated with synthetic fertilisers and pesticides. UK ODA can play a transformative role in agriculture by investing in working with local expertise and promoting inclusive adaptation planning.<sup>33</sup>

As climate-related hazards increase in size, intensity, and frequency, financial costs will range between £233-465 billion annually by 2030, and will continue to grow unless global emissions are reduced.<sup>34</sup> Food systems contributed to approximately one-third of global greenhouse gas emissions, and the lack of focus on emissions reductions in agriculture may make it the primary source of emissions by the 2050s.<sup>35</sup>

### The UK's response

The UK has a responsibility for those whose land and livelihoods have been permanently lost. Tackling the climate crisis requires dramatic action from the UK through a joined up domestic and international policy approach to cut emissions domestically and support the most vulnerable to adapt to the impacts of climate change, fund a green transition and be supported to cope with unavoidable losses.

The Paris UNFCCC Climate Agreement committed governments globally to take action to limit the average global temperature rise to 1.5°C, this threshold will soon be exceeded.<sup>36</sup> The UK has committed to reducing its carbon emissions by 68 per cent by 2030 and by 78 per cent by 2035<sup>37</sup> but is not consistently implementing its Net Zero Strategy to live up to this commitment.<sup>38</sup> Immediate action to drastically cut fossil fuel dependency is the most important step for the UK government to take in limiting global warming to 1.5°C, but significant global temperature rises are already locked in and fragile and low-income countries need far more support to adapt to the adverse impacts, be compensated for unavoidable losses and build future resilience.

The Loss and Damage Fund, established at the UNFCCC COP27 negotiations in 2022 was a major step forward in the response to climate change. Now, the UK must invest in the new fund and finance mechanisms, assure equitable access and enable the world's poorest countries to access flexible grants to pay for climate-change induced losses that are beyond adaptation. Further, a large proportion of existing climate financing is in the form of loans, increasing the debt burden of low-income countries and thus impeding their ability to progress and adapt.



## PANAMA'S RISING SEA LEVELS

The Ngäbe people estimate a sea level rise of 6 metres since 2012. The wind can also be violent and often destroys their homes.

For the Ngöbe community, in Bocas del Toro and surrounding islands, the consequences of climate change are numerous and accelerating. Climate change has effects on the sea level, on fishing and the forest ecosystem.



## REDUCE POVERTY AND INEQUALITIES

Global inequality is increasing<sup>39</sup> and since the Sustainable Development Goals were adopted in 2015, poverty reduction has slowed and the poorest have suffered disproportionate losses in health and education, with devastating consequences. In 2020 alone, the number of people living below the extreme poverty line rose by over 70 million – the largest one-year increase since global poverty monitoring began in 1990.<sup>40</sup> Given current trends, 574 million people globally will still be living on

less than £1.60 a day in 2030, most of whom will be in Africa.<sup>41</sup>

Extreme poverty is increasingly concentrated in places characterised by fragility and violent conflict: by 2030, 85 per cent of the extreme poor – some 342 million people – will live in fragile and conflict-affected states.<sup>42</sup> Within countries, extreme poverty is often rooted in existing inequalities between social and economic groups that leads to discrimination, stigmatisation, and exclusion. This includes gender inequality, with most people living in extreme poverty in 2022 being women and girls.<sup>43</sup>



## Universal social protection

Universal social protection is a basic human right enshrined in international law. It is key to resilience-building in crises and can help people meet their food security, nutrition and other essential needs, and manage the risks and shocks they face.<sup>44</sup> Lack of social protection can keep people in poverty.

While access to financial assistance and basic services is increasing in countries where Action Against Hunger works, such schemes are far from universal.<sup>45</sup> Globally, only 35 per cent of children are covered by child and family benefits and only 41 per cent of caregivers with newborns receive maternity benefits.<sup>46 47</sup> In 2021, 4.1 billion people were not covered by a social protection system.<sup>48</sup> Many health systems fail to effectively reach poor and vulnerable people or ensure equitable access to essential healthcare services.<sup>49</sup>

Limited domestic resource mobilisation is one of the reasons for this low and unequal coverage. Thus, government funding for child and family benefits ranges from 2.2 per cent of GDP in Western Europe to 0.2 per cent in Africa, Asia and the Pacific.<sup>50</sup> Overall, low-income and middle-income countries devote about 1.5 per cent of GDP to social safety nets more broadly.<sup>51</sup>

Food and nutrition security are key components of a comprehensive social protection package.<sup>52</sup> When resources are limited, universal public healthcare – including nutrition services and universal basic income security for carers of children in the first 1,000 days of life – should be a priority.

## Reducing child malnutrition

Acute malnutrition – also referred to as wasting – is the most life-threatening form of malnutrition. Child wasting and stunting increase mortality risk in children and inhibit cognitive and physical development.<sup>53</sup> More than one in five children globally suffer undernutrition: 148 million children are stunted and 45 million are wasted.<sup>54</sup> A record 1.1 million children are estimated to need life-saving treatment for severe wasting this year, nearly double the number in 2018,<sup>55</sup> but only one in three children will get the treatment they need. Less

than 1 per cent of total global development assistance is spent on high-impact nutrition interventions.<sup>56</sup>

Improving nutrition and reducing the number of young children dying every year from malnutrition involves taking action before a crisis occurs, such as investing in health systems strengthening, increasing access to a comprehensive range of basic nutrition services<sup>57</sup> and addressing the underlying causes of hunger and malnutrition outlined in this paper.

## Tackling gender inequality

Gender inequality is a leading cause of undernutrition, putting women and girls disproportionately at risk. Further, lack of control over money and productive assets combined with the burden of unpaid care work can deprive women of the resources and energy to care for under-nourished children, thus feeding the inter-generational cycle of under-nutrition. Gender-based violence and lack of sexual and reproductive health rights can also lead to undesired and early pregnancies.

Promoting gender-transformative development in all programmes is one way in which UK aid can help reduce these vulnerabilities, with a particular focus on agriculture and health. For example, gender transformative social protection programmes with gender equality objectives contributes to women's economic empowerment by increasing their control and ownership over financial and productive resources and developing social protection policies that reduce, recognise and redistribute unpaid care work. Social protection investment should also be gender transformative and nutrition sensitive.<sup>58</sup>

## The UK's response

Social protection and nutrition must be at the heart of UK aid investment. The UK should commit resources to its impactful and effective nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive programming and promote universal social protection floors, with priority given to universal public healthcare and basic income security for carers of children in the first 1000 days of life. All this must be reflected in the UK's ODA

allocations, reversing the 80 per cent decline in UK aid to nutrition in recent years. The cuts have had a disproportionate impact on UK aid to nutrition with 2021 disbursements on nutrition-specific investments below 2013 levels, setting progress and leadership back by a decade.<sup>59</sup>



The UK's commitment to gender equality must also be better reflected in ODA allocations. There has been an estimated £1.9 million worth of cuts to the UK's international gender equality work between 2019-2021,<sup>60</sup> despite the publication of a new UK International Women and Girls' Strategy.<sup>61</sup>



## STUNTING IN KENYA

One-year-old Chepengat Korwo has her height measured at a health centre in Kiwawa, West Pokot county, Kenya.

“When Chepengat was brought to me she was very weak, she didn't even have enough strength to walk. She could only crawl...By one year old a child should be walking,” says her aunt and carer Jackline.



# KEY COMMITMENTS FOR UK ODA TO HELP END HUNGER

Action Against Hunger proposes that all UK ODA allocations should be guided by commitments to:

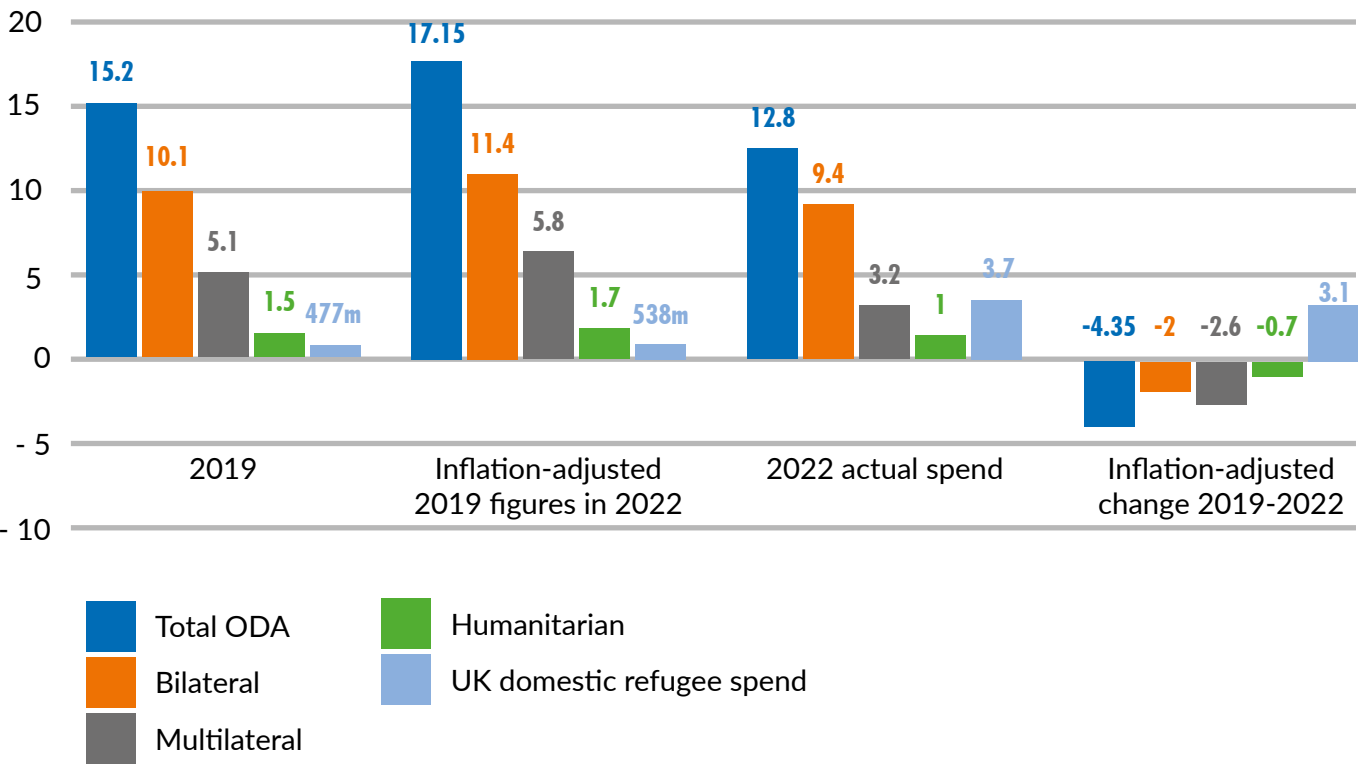
- reverse the rise in global hunger and reducing poverty and inequality
- decolonisation and localisation
- transparency and accountability.

## REVERSING THE RISE IN GLOBAL HUNGER

In 2022 (the year for which latest figures are available), the UK's ODA spend was £12.8 billion – a decrease of £2.4 billion (21.1 per cent) on 2019. The UK has fallen from being the third largest donor in the G7 in 2020 to the fifth largest in 2022.<sup>62</sup> In addition, the

reduced pot of funds available to spend is no longer reaching as many of the poorest people: whereas before UK ODA was targeted at the poorest 30 per cent of people in low-income countries, a growing share is now disbursed to relatively less-poor people in middle-income countries too - spreading a shrinking pot even thinner, as more funding is directed to countries with which the UK wishes to strengthen trade ties.<sup>63</sup>

Table 1: the declining value of UK ODA, 2019-2022 (£billions)



UK ODA has fallen sharply in cash terms since 2019 but even more so when the effects of high inflation since 2020 are factored in (see Table 1). In real terms the humanitarian aid budget is down around 40 per cent from £1.7bn to £1bn, and the UK's commitments to multilateral funds like the UN and World Bank have almost halved. Meanwhile, the proportion of the ODA budget going to supporting refugees living in the UK with housing and other essential services has risen almost tenfold from 3 per cent to 29 per cent.

The UK Government is using almost a third of the UK aid budget to reimburse other departments for refugee support costs at the expense of millions of people facing conflict, climate change and inequality globally. This is more than the FCDO spent bilaterally in Africa and Asia combined, and three times larger than the total humanitarian assistance budget. This is the first time the FCDO (or DFID beforehand) has spent less than 70 per cent of the UK's ODA budget. This domestic refugee spending is primarily the result of meeting the needs of Ukrainian refugees in the UK but while the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) permits the use of ODA for domestic refugee spend, most other major donors have met the costs of domestic refugee needs primarily from sources other than their ODA budget.

This is one reason why, for example, the UK cut its ODA to East Africa by over 80 per cent from the 2017 drought crisis and 2022 drought crisis, which was compounded by growing conflict in the region. These political decisions can have drastic consequences. Cuts to different areas in aid from the UK have directly resulted in a rise in the prevalence of diseases like cholera<sup>64</sup> as well as children suffering from acute malnutrition.<sup>65</sup>

As outlined above, tackling the rise in global hunger means addressing the underlying causes of poverty, inequality and hunger. This means the UK government urgently needs to recommit to delivering an ODA budget that is 0.7 per cent of GNI, from the current emergency level of 0.5 per cent. Further to this, all ODA spend should be directed towards the following:

- Addressing the causes and consequences of conflict
- Upholding and promoting human rights
- Strengthening social protection systems, including health
- Tackling inequalities, above all gender inequality
- Investing in biodiversity, climate change mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage.

## ADAPTING TO THE CHANGING CLIMATE IN SOUTH SUDAN

In South Sudan, three years of persistent rains had left communities' farms and villages submerged. Action Against Hunger helped the community clear the debris from flooded areas to create waterways to transport goods and medical assistance and taught farmers how to - for the first time - grow rice in the flood waters, thus adapting to the changing climate.

Nyachuana Lok tries to dismantle her destroyed home. "I am destroying this flooded house so I can make a house in a dry place for my children," she says.





Action Against Hunger Programme  
Co-ordinator Joe Zubahyea teaches local  
women in Paguir, South Sudan how to plant  
rice in flood waters after their crop fields were  
submerged in the heavy rains.



© Both images: Peter Caton / Action Against Hunger

## DECOLONISATION AND LOCALISATION

There is support for localisation and decolonisation across the UK aid sector, but progress in translating this commitment into action is slow. Globally, in 2022 direct funding for local and national organisations was just 1.2 per cent of humanitarian aid.<sup>66</sup> In the UK this is partly due to challenges generated by the FCDO's own due diligence, funding and application requirements. Even the signing of the Grand Bargain in 2016,<sup>67</sup> committing donors to give 25 per cent of humanitarian ODA directly to local actors, has not had the hoped-for transformative impact.

The UK government must embrace the growing awareness of the legacies of colonialism at home and abroad. The decolonisation and localisation of aid can contribute to overcoming inequalities within and between countries and to tackling the sustainable development challenges of the 21st century.

While the UK is already requesting that local and national NGOs are the lead partners in proposals for some small funding calls, this model needs to be scaled up and complimented by other policy and practice change for long-term localisation of ODA, including by following SIDA's programmes based approach. The next government should make localisation a priority. This should include and commit to overcoming the bureaucratic and structural impediments to localisation.

The recent International Development Committee Inquiry on Racism in the Aid Sector generated many recommendations that should feature in the next aid strategy. It proposes for example that "the FCDO should increase the amount of UK aid funding that goes directly to locally-led civil society organisations. It should reconsider how it conceptualises and calculates risk and work with local civil society organisations to undertake the due diligence and administration associated with bidding for FCDO contracts".<sup>68</sup>

Further, in line with its Grand Bargain commitments, the UK must, at a minimum, ensure that 25 per cent of UK humanitarian ODA goes directly to local and national NGOs.

Local actors, despite being the first responders in a crisis, lack access to the resources and decision-making power they need. Strong and self-sufficient local response systems can ensure that aid truly meets the needs of people affected by crisis.

## EXPERTISE, TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Effective and efficient use of aid requires a breadth of expertise among civil service staff and a transparent and accountable governance structure. The UK's capacity to deliver this has been reduced by the merger of the Department for International Development (DFID) and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in 2020. The merger reduced the political leadership, development expertise and civil service capacity within the UK government to tackle global challenges like hunger, conflict and climate change. Over 200 staff are estimated to have left the FCDO following the merger and the Foreign Secretary is often pulled in multiple competing directions, limiting capacity to give development challenges the focus they need.

Under the current system, geopolitical interests, rather than assessment of need, are playing a central role in determining ODA allocation which, coupled with multiple changes of political leadership, has meant a constantly changing set of ODA priorities that do not fit with a needs-based approach.

The merger has worsened ODA transparency, oversight and accountability. DFID ranked highly in the International Aid Transparency Index (IATI) but the FCDO has recently dropped seven places to 16th in the IATI ranking, meaning there was no UK agency in the 'Very Good' category for the first time since the Index began. The lack of data (performance, beneficiaries, finances) limits the department's capacity to make the changes needed to improve the quality and effectiveness of aid, making those involved in the delivery of aid more accountable. This has a big impact on the prioritisation of ODA spending in the face of budget cuts.





## CONCLUSION

For Action Against Hunger, an NGO providing health and nutrition services, food and social protection to people in over 50 countries, the current trends in rising hunger are alarming to witness first hand. From Georgine, a farmer who has been driven from her land in DRC (see page 6) to the Ngabe communities facing unprecedented sea level rise in Panama (see page 9) we are working with communities around the world surviving on the frontline of the current hunger crisis. From our experience in action including widening access to wasting treatment for young children, providing cash to support people in a crisis and building water infrastructure to prevent disease outbreaks, we know that the solutions are there to save lives now and prevent needs from escalating.

We have valued the leading role the UK has played in the past, investing in action directly and also convening governments and other actors around the world to make a coordinated and ambitious response to emerging challenges. DFID had a domestic as well as global reputation for effective spending of ODA and taking strong diplomatic action too. Establishing an independent ODA spending department and restoring the ODA budget should be priorities for the next government, backed by a suite of coherent policies across government to tackle the underlying drivers of hunger: conflict, climate change and biodiversity loss, and poverty and inequality. The UK has been a leader on hunger in the past and can learn from recent developments to be even more effective in the future.

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE UK GOVERNMENT

## CONFLICT AND HUMANITARIAN CRISES

### Promote principled humanitarian action



- Support principled humanitarian action through inclusive political processes and diplomacy, enhancing accountability for violations of international humanitarian law, protecting humanitarian operating space, civilians, and humanitarian and health personnel. Counter-terrorism measures and sanctions should not impede humanitarian response in a crisis.

### Uphold and champion international humanitarian law



- To prevent the use of hunger as a weapon of war, strengthen the implementation of UNSC Resolution 2417 by championing it via bilateral and multilateral channels. The UK Government should also adhere to the UK's obligations under the Arms Trade Treaty regarding weapons exports.
- Ratify the amendment to the Rome Statute making the intentional starvation of civilians a war crime in non-international armed conflict.

### Implement gender- and child-sensitive action



- Explicitly fund and implement gender-responsive, child-sensitive, locally led anticipatory action to humanitarian crises, and integrate child protection and gender-based violence considerations into food security programming.

### Develop a refugee and displaced people strategy



- Develop a long-term refugee and displaced people response plan, recognising that over 100 million people are displaced worldwide and this number will continue to rise. This plan must incorporate the provision of essential infrastructure and services and address the underlying causes that force people to flee.

### Flexible finance



- Make humanitarian ODA finance multi-year and flexible. This would reflect the complex and protracted nature of crises and support localisation in the interests of promoting partners' reliability and sustainability.



## CLIMATE CHANGE

### Strengthen the UK's domestic climate action



- Strengthen the UK's Net Zero Strategy, frontloading action now to drive down emissions and reduce the risk of catastrophic climate change, not delaying action to the 2030s and beyond. This strategy must reject off-setting schemes that notably do not cap absolute emissions, in place of substantive plans to sharply reduce and ultimately stop coal, oil and gas extraction and use.

### Deliver on climate finance commitments



- Deliver on the UK's climate finance commitments under the UNFCCC, partly or fully from non-ODA sources, ensuring most funding is grant based. The UK should also support and invest in the Loss and Damage Fund. This should include supporting the 'polluter pays' principle in developing funding sources such as a fossil fuel company tax levy. Scale-up climate finance to fragile and conflict affected states using bilateral and multilateral climate funds to reach the most vulnerable.

### Deliver on climate finance commitments



- Extreme weather events driven by climate change can and must be anticipated through early warning systems. Invest in monitoring, and when the data indicate a crisis is imminent, invest in immediate action with funding targeting in those at risk due to factors such as gender inequality.

## EXPERTISE, TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

### Review ODA channels



- Undertake a full review of ODA channels over the last five years, reviewing the impact and effectiveness of grants, commercial contracts, frameworks, NGOs, pooled funds, the UN, and channelling ODA through non-FCDO UK government departments.

### Re-establish an independent department for ODA



- Re-establish an independent department for international development to ensure ODA is targeted at reaching those most in need, guided by expertise and delivered as transparently and accountably as possible.

### Develop an inclusive and accountable strategy



- Ensure an inclusive consultation process for developing the next ODA strategy and have accountability mechanisms built in, in collaboration with affected communities.

### Publish ODA procurement and spending plans in a timely way



- Regularly publish future ODA spending plans, cross-departmental development results and country ODA priorities, with tracking and reporting on funding to local actors. Programme documents should be published in a timely and collaborative manner through a unified system.
- Release procurement pipelines well in advance, uphold procurement timelines, ensure decision making is transparent including sharing business cases and consulting on business case development.

## POVERTY AND INEQUALITIES, INCLUDING GENDER INEQUALITY

### Prioritise social protection



- The UK should prioritise support for expansion of social protection with the goal of universal coverage. Where this cannot be achieved, children under five, adolescents and pregnant women should be prioritised to improve population nutrition.

### Invest in women



- Invest in gender transformative social protection programmes with gender equality objectives to contribute to women's economic empowerment by 1) increasing their control and ownership over financial and productive resources and 2) developing social protection policies that reduce, recognise and redistribute unpaid care work.

### Ensure systems are shock-responsive



- Ensure social protection is shock responsive: social protection and humanitarian response should be linked under a disaster risk management umbrella. Multi-risks analysis, surveillance system use, scenario planning, response triggers and prepositioning should be systematically conducted together, with a focus on tracked cash transfer as an efficient tool for humanitarian intervention.

### Increase funding for nutrition



- The UK government must increase its support for nutrition programmes. It should look to urgently invest its 2021 Nutrition for Growth financial commitment, including through investing an additional £70 million each year to prevent and treat child wasting.

## LOCALISATION AND DECOLONISATION

### Engage with local actors



- Engage local and national actors in the design of funding and partnership strategies, enabling their participation in policies and decisions relevant to them.
- Funding allocations must place local communities in the lead and include indirect cost recovery provisions for local partners/sub-grantees when providing grants to international agencies.
- Reduce due diligence and reporting requirements to facilitate easier access to grants from local and national civil society organisations.
- Ensure partnerships are equal, as localisation is about more than funding local actors, it is about ensuring decision making structures give power to these partners.

### Decolonise ODA



- Implement relevant recommendations from the International Development Committee (IDC) inquiry on Racism in the Aid Sector



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