

## Policy disconnects: trade-offs and synergies between Ethiopia's objectives to increase agricultural production and conserve nature

Achieving environmental and climate change policy goals while increasing agricultural production in Ethiopia is becoming increasingly difficult due to policy disconnects between sectors. These trade-offs will need to be identified and more effectively and equitably mitigated if the national vision for sustainable development is to be achieved, and the country is to fulfil its commitments to global biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation goals.

### Increasing production, agricultural expansion and food self-sufficiency

There is significant pressure on the Ethiopian government to fulfil targets set by an international and regional agenda as well as pursue national economic development, satisfy the subsistence needs of a growing population, and adapt to climate change. Increasing agricultural production and productivity are central objectives of agricultural and environmental sectoral policies, seen as ways of reducing food insecurity, spurring economic growth, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and preventing deforestation. Historically, increases in agricultural production have come from the expansion of cultivated land.<sup>1</sup> Current agricultural development policy indicates that the intensification

#### Policy disconnects

Based on the wording of current or recent national policies, the following very significant disconnects have been recognised:

- Objectives to develop land for commercial livestock farming and horticultural production<sup>2</sup> seem to be at odds with objectives to halve habitat conversion due to agricultural expansion;<sup>3</sup>
- Objectives to increase inorganic fertiliser use<sup>4</sup> seem to be at odds with objectives to reduce the demand for fertiliser in order to reduce pollution and emissions;<sup>5</sup>
- Objectives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from crop production and animal husbandry<sup>6</sup> seem to be at odds with objectives to increase land under farming and input use.<sup>7</sup>

#### Summary

Targets to increase agricultural production are not explicitly linked to projections of future food demand but rather to achieving and/or maintaining national level food self-sufficiency of staple crops in the present, as well as reducing imports and developing the agricultural sector. Trade-offs between policy objectives may hinder progress towards overall national development goals. In particular, strategies to increase agricultural production can be in conflict with environmental goals and commitments. Multi-sectoral policy development, integrated land use planning at the national and local levels, and safeguards to prevent unintended consequences are potential approaches to mitigating trade-offs between policy objectives.

#### Background

This briefing is based on a review of Ethiopia's national-level policies currently or recently in force supported by key informant interviews with individuals in the agricultural and natural resource management sectors across government, policy and research. Policies were analysed based on two questions: 1) How does Ethiopia intend to meet current and future food needs? 2) How do strategies to increase food and agricultural production create trade-offs or synergies with other policy objectives?



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## Definitions

**Trade-offs** occur where achieving more of one objective results in achieving less of another.

**Synergies** occur where achievements towards one objective also contribute to achieving a different objective.

**Policy disconnects** occur when policies, strategies, plans, institutions, processes and objectives within policies do not work in harmony or towards a shared vision, leading to trade-offs. Disconnects may be due to differing priorities at different scales of policy; an imbalance in the division of responsibility between national and lower levels of governance; and mismatches between responsibilities and resource distribution across scales (Adapted from Franks et al., 2017).<sup>8</sup>

**Intensification** is an increase in agricultural production per unit of inputs (consisting of labour, land, time, fertilizer, seed, feed and/or cash).<sup>9</sup>

of smallholder agriculture (increasing yields) has become the dominant strategy through which production growth is to be pursued.<sup>10</sup> Between 2003/04 and 2013/14, the contribution of area expansion to growth in crop production is seen to be declining, while the contribution of increases in the use of inputs such as improved seeds and chemical fertiliser is increasing.<sup>11</sup> At present, smallholder farming expansion continues, largely in the lowlands where land is still available, driven in part by the government's promotion of cereal production.<sup>12</sup> Despite substantial growth since the 1990s, yields also remain far below the potential for several crops and only a third to a quarter of productivity targets under the Growth and Transformation Plan II period have been met.<sup>13</sup>

Alongside intensification of smallholder farming, the government is actively encouraging the expansion of land under irrigated wheat production and commercial agriculture, particularly in the mid-altitude and lowland areas where large land areas require mechanisation, irrigation and capital investment in order to cultivate.<sup>14</sup> A significant objective of the Livestock Master Plan (2015–2020) is to increase land area (and access to land) for forage seed and forage production, and for establishing and building dairy agribusinesses. The Agricultural Sector Policy and Investment Framework (2010–2020) (since replaced by the CAADP National Agricultural Investment Plan) stated that approximately 3.3 million ha of land would be developed for extensive commercial agriculture. These land deals have not occurred to any great degree, however, due to poor land productivity, poor management, lack of infrastructure and labour, and corruption.<sup>15</sup> Despite large concessions being granted to some of the best agricultural land in the country, few projects are operational, much of the investment is domestic, and the environmental and social impacts of these deals are problematic.<sup>16</sup> It is believed that there

are substantial areas of land available for cultivation in the country, especially in the lowlands, but the availability of this land is not guaranteed – government policies have and continue to view pastoral lands as suitable for development without consideration of the needs of pastoral communities.<sup>17</sup>

Agricultural policies and programmes set out targets to increase production and commercialise smallholder farming as ways of contributing to the national priorities of reducing reliance on imports (import substitution), providing raw materials for agro-industries, achieving or maintaining staple crop self-sufficiency, and supplying domestic and export markets.<sup>18</sup> With ongoing production increases, Ethiopia claims to have achieved self-sufficiency at a national level,<sup>19</sup> although self-sufficiency remains one of the objectives of the Ten Year Development Plan (2021–2030). Food self-sufficiency is of great importance for low-income developing countries since they face shortages in foreign currency for purchasing imports and may be lacking the infrastructure to store and distribute food.<sup>20</sup> In addition, some 80% of the population depends on farming for their livelihood, and increasing food availability at the point of access is critical.<sup>21</sup> Some level of importation of food grains by private traders, and associated price variations and exchange rate changes, however, may improve food security in Ethiopia.<sup>22</sup> The factors required to maintain food self-sufficiency into the future, under projections of population growth and climate change, will need to be considered - the amount of new and additional agricultural land needed, for example, to meet the growing demand for food, and the trade-offs this may have with demands on the land from other sectors.

The main pathways by which production increases are being pursued include improving the agricultural extension system, expanding irrigation coverage, increasing fertiliser and improved seed use, reducing land degradation, establishing agricultural commercialisation clusters (ACCs) and farmers' production clusters (FPCs), and improving land tenure security through land certification. While the traditional economic development pathway (or Business as usual, outlined in the Climate Resilient Green Economy Strategy, 2011) is believed to be able to deliver the increases in crop and livestock production the government is seeking, this would require significant agricultural land expansion, including clearing large areas of forest, which would impact productivity through soil erosion, and increase greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>23</sup> Expansion alone is thought unlikely to be enough to keep up with the growing demand for nutritious food.<sup>24</sup> Thus intensification carried out sustainably is the dominant pathway in national policy for increasing production overall, supported by forestry and environmental sector policies promoting climate smart agriculture.<sup>25</sup> It is stated in policy that this intensification (specifically yield increases) will reduce the pressure on forests cleared to develop new fertile farmland.<sup>26</sup> There is no mention in policy documents, however, of the risk that agricultural intensification may motivate rather than reduce farmland expansion, known in economics as the rebound effect or

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Jevon's paradox.<sup>27</sup>

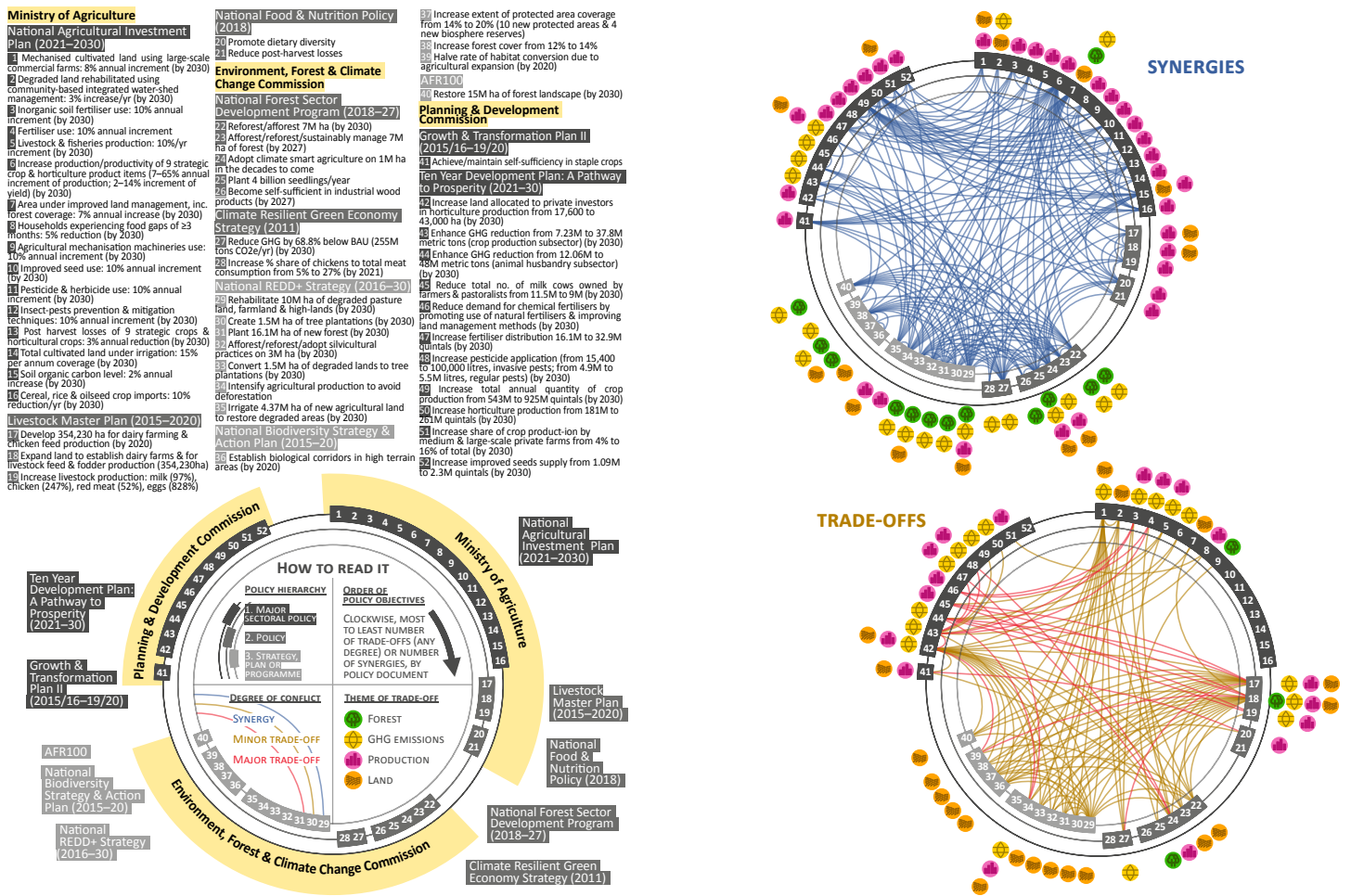
## Identifying policy trade-offs and synergies

Alongside strategies to increase agricultural production and productivity are policies that intend to help smallholder farmers adapt to climate change, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, increase wood and timber supply, increase forest cover and conserve biodiversity. Although many policies in Ethiopia are well integrated, there are some policy objectives that may pose a potential trade-off with one other and with the country's broader development vision. The development of policy in sectoral silos, which is increasingly being raised as a concern, can contribute to developing conflicting policies. The Ministry of Planning and Development (MoPD) has the role of coordinating national planning across ministries and ensuring the alignment of sectoral development plans with national objectives.<sup>28</sup> Identifying and mapping policy trade-offs and synergies may help illustrate where potential disconnects occur and aid the work of the MoPD and its mandate to harmonise sectoral policies and strategies.

The demands on Ethiopia's land are numerous, ranging from the expansion of livestock production and commercial farming, the pursuit of diverse agriculture and diets, establishment of commercial plantations, creation of biodiversity corridors and new protected areas, restoration of degraded lands, allocation of farmland to unemployed youths, industrial development and large-scale programmes of afforestation and reforestation, through initiatives such as Green Legacy, industrialisation and urbanisation.<sup>29</sup> There is not enough land in Ethiopia to meet all of these objectives simultaneously and, as such, pursuing all of the policy objectives listed above will lead to trade-offs. Policy objectives may also conflict based on metrics other than land, such as agricultural production and greenhouse gas emissions. Figure 1 shows the synergies and trade-offs between policy objectives for metrics of production, land, greenhouse gas emissions and forest area.

Figure 1 maps a range of national policy objectives to highlight the ways in which objectives are in synergy with each other, each contributing to the same end goal, or pose a potential trade-off, where maximising both objectives is unlikely to occur simultaneously. This mapping exercise captures a moment in time, given that policy is continually evolving, and one based on the

**Figure 1: Trade-offs and synergies between policy objectives in Ethiopia**



assumption that all claims on land may potentially be at odds with one another if land is scarce and land use is not planned (national land use policy is being drafted but integrated land use plans have yet to be finalised).<sup>30</sup> Production targets and objectives to pursue sustainable agriculture (SA) present both a synergy (if SA increases yields, for example, over the long term) and a trade-off (if SA lowers yields, for example, over the short term). Synergies occur largely around production targets whilst trade-offs are mainly around land and greenhouse gas emissions. Objectives regarding irrigation, increasing soil fertility and reducing post-harvest losses, instances where land and production are used more efficiently, are the least likely to pose trade-offs, although the whole spectrum of policies, ie energy, pollution and water, were not analysed and so trade-offs in other areas may occur.

Higher fertiliser use, more intensive farming, expansion of commercial agriculture and increases in livestock herd size and area could undermine climate change adaptation and mitigation goals.<sup>31</sup> Ethiopia's Climate Resilient Green Economy Strategy projects that, without intervention, crop production will increase from 19 million tonnes in 2010 to over 71 million tonnes in 2030, but that this increase will largely come from increasing fertiliser use and land expansion, driving emissions up from 12Mt CO<sub>2</sub>e to 60 Mt. Livestock emissions, with projected increases in the cattle population, are expected to increase (from 146.4 Mt CO<sub>2</sub>e in 2010 to almost 195 Mt in 2030).<sup>32</sup> Under Ethiopia's green growth plan, lower emitting and yield increasing agricultural techniques could abate much of this growth in emissions, but not if conventional agricultural intensification is still being pursued in the agricultural sector. These potential conflicts are acknowledged to some degree, particularly in reference to livestock, but solutions to mediate the trade-offs are needed. The pursuit of self-sufficiency in staple crops (in particular cereals), livestock and wood products, may similarly be at odds with goals to reduce farm expansion-driven habitat loss, and, as a result, climate change mitigation. The objective of increasing the production of diverse and nutritious food may also pose a trade-off with reducing smallholder agricultural expansion, since these crops may have a larger land footprint. Where the agenda of one sector or policy could negatively impact the goals of another, greater discussion is needed at the national level as to where the country's priorities lie, and how national priorities and international commitments, such as under the UNFCCC Paris Agreement and post-2020 biodiversity conservation targets, interact.

Along with trade-offs, there are also synergies between different policies. Reducing emissions, increasing productivity and increasing soil cover and fertility may complement one another. Crop intensification, if sustainable, and restoration of degraded land may reduce expansion and the need for additional agricultural land as well as reduce emissions. The risk is that if these trade-offs and synergies are not identified, assessed and addressed, production, economic and self-sufficiency goals may dominate at the expense of environmental and sustainability goals.

## Looking ahead: key messages

- Identifying synergies and trade-offs at the policy level provides an opportunity to harmonise and align national priorities and create cohesive policy objectives – important for enhancing efforts towards national goals, regional targets and international commitments.
- Target setting at the regional and international level, for example the Sustainable Development Goals, post-2020 biodiversity conservation goals under the CBD, African CAADP commitments and the Food Systems Transformation process, must consider national priorities in order to help avoid trade-offs and develop global objectives that are achievable.
- Projections of future food demand should guide national production objectives and the source of production increases needs to be considered in regards to land (expansion), technology (intensification), environment and climate (sustainability), and trade (imports and exports).
- Agricultural and other sectors which prioritise production need to be better integrated and informed by environmental sectors that prioritise sustainability, thereby integrating sustainability into all national policies. As is often the case, environmental sectors may have less influence than the agricultural and economic sectors, making integration harder to achieve without strong political will to consider environmental objectives during the development of agricultural policy.
- More could be done to ensure the Climate Resilient Green Economy Strategy is fully adopted by sectorial policies, and implemented in practice.
- It is thought that recent productivity gains will be reversed unless the long-term deterioration in soil fertility and soil erosion, the effects of which are being felt now, are tackled.<sup>33</sup>
- Short-term goals, such as increasing production and feeding people, are often prioritised above long-term sustainability-related goals, partly linked to political term limits and providing immediate benefits for voters, but short-term gains will become harder to achieve, particularly under climate change, without continuous consideration of long-term sustainability.
- Agricultural intensification is seen as a solution to curbing the expansion of farmland and associated deforestation, but restoration of farming onto rehabilitated degraded land is also presented as an additional option, as too is peri-urban agriculture.<sup>34</sup>
- Interventions designed to intensify agricultural production need to include safeguards to prevent improved land efficiency, driving farmers to increase their area of cultivation as opposed to maintaining or reducing their farm area.

- The many demands on land for agriculture, forestry and livestock require national level multi-sectoral land use planning to maximise production, forest cover and biodiversity protection goals. Several policies call for a national land use planning system in order to “synergistically promote environmentally sustainable, socially sound and economically viable land uses, directing economic activities to where they are most suited while avoiding conflicts between land uses”.<sup>35</sup> Such a system will become increasingly important as the rural population grows and land becomes scarcer.
- The land use planning system must consider the geographical component of policy objectives, managing trade-offs in

geographical space. Current systems to identify and mitigate trade-offs need to be revised to ensure objectives not only align with the national development vision but with each other, in order to avoid unintended consequences.

Ethiopia has an opportunity to review current policy and process, to formulate objectives based on evidence, to exploit the synergies and to mitigate the trade-offs between national goals. While the country has successfully invested in its agricultural sector and boosted its economy, it must now consider how investments can maintain long-term sustainable growth, production and natural resources.

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