



COMMITTEE ON FORESTRY

WORKING GROUP ON DRYLAND FORESTS AND AGROSILVOPASTORAL SYSTEMS

Third Session (Hybrid)

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Review of the relevance and operational modalities of the Working Group on Dryland Forests and Agrosilvopastoral Systems - Findings and Recommendations

Executive Summary

At its Twenty-third Session, the Committee on Forestry (COFO) established the Working Group on Dryland Forests and Agrosilvopastoral Systems based on Rule XXXI, paragraph 10 of the General Rules of the Organization, and endorsed its Terms of Reference.¹ The Working Group was therefore established as a subsidiary body of COFO. During the same session, COFO requested to review the continued relevance and operational modalities of the Working Group.

Following COFO 26², and under the guidance of the Steering Committee of the Working Group the following actions were taken:

1. an independent review expert was hired to conduct the review of the relevance and operational modalities of the Working Group;
2. the independent review was carried out between April and June 2023; (Document COFO/WG-DF/2023/Inf.4³ contains the independent report of the review, carried out by an independent review expert);
3. the methodological approach for the review consists of Working Group reports review, semi-structured questionnaires for primary stakeholders and FAO Statutory bodies, and a short online survey for secondary stakeholders including members and observers;
4. the online survey launched from 10 May to 5 June 2023 provided input to the independent review. The review surveyed members' priorities for future workplans and the criterion of the Working Group relevance;

¹ Terms of Reference [EN/FR/SP](#)

² COFO/2016/7.3

³ <https://www.fao.org/dryland-forestry/working-group/third-session-jordan/official-documents/en/>

5. five semi-structured interviews were conducted with new members, other FAO statutory bodies and observers. The interviewee provided insights to strengthen the contribution of the Working Group to international processes, technical and policy dialogue on management of dryland forests and agrosilvopastoral systems.

Steering Committee members assessed the independent review report and provided recommendations to the Secretariat on future areas of work, with the aim of enhancing the Working Group's contribution to international initiatives and pledges on transforming the drylands production systems. The key strategic recommendations elaborated by the Steering Committee are:

1. the Working Group should continue its role in strengthening the South-South knowledge sharing across the dryland regions;
2. the Working Group should make further efforts to identify new opportunities for collaboration, including with the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the GEF, and universities and research institutes to scale up sustainable management and restoration practices;
3. the Working Group should contribute to countries' capacities in designing on-the-ground silvopastoral investment proposals to restore the dryland forests and agrosilvopastoral systems and support the achievement of their national commitments, including Land Degradation Neutrality goals, National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), and Nationally Determined Contributions to the Paris Agreement (NDCs).

This document summarizes the main findings of the above actions and presents the recommendations of the Steering Committee on possible strengthening and operational modalities of the Working Group.

Suggested actions by the Working Group

The Working Group is invited to:

- consider the key findings of the independent review report as summarized in section II and the Working Group Steering Committee's recommendations;
- take note of the key challenges and opportunities identified in the review report, and consider addressing them swiftly with the aim of strengthening the Working Group's operational modalities;
- continue the facilitation of technical collaboration between members, multiple stakeholders and across disciplines, including with other FAO statutory bodies such as the Committee on Agriculture Sub-Committee on Livestock (COAG-LI), to enhance coordinated responses to members' needs for an integrated dryland management approach;
- strengthen partnerships and collaboration to better understand the status, trends and development of dryland forests and agrosilvopastoral systems and the people who depend on them, in particular with the UNCCD, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and other members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), to support countries facing serious drought and desertification-related challenges.

Queries on the substantive content of the document may be addressed to:

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I. Introduction

1. The Working Group on Dryland Forests and Agrosilvopastoral Systems is a subsidiary body of the Committee on Forestry (COFO), established on the basis of Rule XXXI, paragraph 10, of the General Rules of the Organization.⁴ It aims to report to COFO on the status, trends, issues and developments in dryland forests and agrosilvopastoral systems, and make recommendations to COFO on these matters.
2. Under the general guidance of the Working Group's Steering Committee, a participatory review of the Working Group's relevance and operational modalities was conducted between April and June 2023.
3. Consultation interviews were conducted with other FAO statutory bodies, observers, and Working Group members to take stock of and strengthen the Working Group's strategic workplans and its operational modalities. The review surveyed members' priorities for future workplans, giving special consideration to the need for extra-budgetary resources.
4. The review included a desk study, semi-structured interviews, and an online survey. The Working Group Secretariat identified 12 stakeholders for interviews and 91 Working Group members for the online survey. The response rate to the interviews was 33 percent (15 percent women and 85 percent men). The response rate to the survey was 22 percent.
5. The Working Group Steering Committee assessed the review findings and provided recommendations to the Secretariat on future areas of work, with the aim of enhancing the Working Group's contribution to international initiatives and pledges on transforming the drylands production systems. This document presents the main findings of the Independent review report (for details Document COFO/WG-DF/2023/Inf.4) including the areas for considerations in the Working Group's future priorities, as well as the key strategic recommendations elaborated by the Steering Committee

II. Main findings of the Independent review report

6. The review addressed the Working Group's relevance, efficiency and effectiveness to evaluate both stakeholder satisfaction and the Working Group's contribution to international processes.
- **Relevance:** The review found that the Working Group remains highly relevant for its members and observers and fills a necessary knowledge gap, particularly as a platform for technical exchanges. Respondents felt that the Working Group contributes significantly to international processes. With drylands and agrosilvopastoral systems considered a key discussion point for FAO's COFO and Committee on Agriculture Sub-Committee on Livestock (COAG-LI), members noted that the Working Group operates at an important interface bringing together the agriculture, forestry and land sectors to seek common solutions. Respondents referred specifically to several FAO publications, such as the 'Grazing with Trees'⁵ report, and various policy briefs such as 'A turning point for drought management: upscaling the silvopastoral approach',⁶ 'Blooming drylands - a practical approach for context-dependent economic, social and environmentally sustainable transformations'⁷ and 'Doing no harm while doing good: Climate and conflict

⁴ <http://www.fao.org/3/a-mp046e.pdf#page=117>

⁵ <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cc2280en>

⁶ A turning point for drought management (globallandscapesforum.org)

⁷ Blooming drylands – a practical approach for context-dependent economic, social and environmentally sustainable transformations | Policy Support and Governance Gateway | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations | Policy Support and Governance | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (fao.org)

sensitivity in dryland humanitarian projects’, in addition to the Working Group’s quarterly digital newsletter.

- **Efficiency:** Respondents appreciated the Working Group’s governance structure, describing it as fit for purpose due to the proactive role played by the Working Group’s Secretariat, Steering Committee, and the engagement of members and observers. There was an 85 percent satisfaction rate for the Working Group’s institutional setup for technical exchange, 80 percent for the policy dialogue initiated by the Working Group, 82 percent for its contribution to members’ goals, and a 92 percent satisfaction rate related to the quality of documentation. Moreover, the Working Group has carried out its operations through voluntary contributions from its members and observers, with resources provided by the several members, including the Swedish Forest Agency and Morocco’s Ministry of Agriculture. Other financial resources were provided by Spain’s Ministry of Environment, who covered various translation expenses, and Iran’s Ministry of Agriculture – Jihad through a Global Environment Facility (GEF)-funded project,⁸ which aided with the technical review, translation, and production of the first FAO elearning course on Sustainable Dryland Management. Major technical contributions were received from the Working Group members in providing case studies and feedback on the approach.
- **Effectiveness:** The review found that the Working Group achieved very high results when assessing the activities accomplished. Members identified the Working Group’s main priority as the sharing of knowledge and lessons learned, with a 95 percent approval rating. Providing advice on dryland forests and agrosilvopastoral systems’ contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was another area of success, receiving an 85 percent approval rating. In this area, the Working Group supported FAO efforts in initiating South-South Cooperation between the targeted countries. FAO provided technical advice and a training programme for the “Making Every Voice Count for Adaptive Management” initiative,⁹ which uses a participatory video approach to monitoring and evaluation for 19 countries across the dryland regions. The Working Group also supported the testing phase¹⁰ of the Framework for Ecosystem Restoration Monitoring (FERM) through Dryland Restoration Initiatives Platform (DRIP) tool in 25 countries.¹¹

7. Moreover, the respondents indicated that the Working Group should continue to identify opportunities for collaboration and scaling-up of sustainable management and restoration practices (88 percent), such as collaboration with the UNCCD, the CBD, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and other members of the CPF. It should also continue to assess and follow the status of dryland forests and agrosilvopastoral systems (89 percent).

8. The review also assessed the Working Group’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, with the aim of improving its operational modalities.

9. **Strengths**

- Positioned as an inclusive, multi-stakeholder platform, working across disciplines;
- global reach covering all dryland regions;
- technical expertise across multiple topics such as dryland sustainability and reconciling land restoration with livestock production;

⁸ [Rehabilitation of forest landscapes | Dryland Forestry | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations \(fao.org\)](#)

⁹ [MEV-CAM | Dryland Forestry | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations \(fao.org\)](#)

¹⁰ [Publication: A Framework for Ecosystem Restoration Monitoring: Catalyzing a Science-Based Restoration Movement through Transparent, Fit-for-Purpose Monitoring in Support to the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration - Global Landscapes Forum](#)

¹¹ [Accelerating Action on the Ground: GLF Launch of the Framework for Ecosystem Restoration Monitoring \(FERM\) and the Dryland Restoration Initiative Platform \(DRIP\) | Dryland Forestry | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations \(fao.org\)](#)

- capacity-building work, including the FAO e-learning course on Sustainable Dryland Management, launched in March 2023 in collaboration with 17 partners¹².

10. Weaknesses

- Limited resources, noting that this resulted in limited opportunities for trainings, meetings, and the production of technical papers;
- while the WG has a global reach, this reach is not balanced, as some regions are less active than others due to their inability to communicate in languages other than English.

11. Opportunities

- Many opportunities to amplify the Working Group's efforts by partnering with international initiatives. These include the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists 2026 (IYRP26), with which the Working Group is already collaborating on its Summer School initiative¹³, which aims to build a team of champions to transform the global management of dryland forests and agrosilvopastoral systems;
- potential for action on the ground through funding sources such as the GEF, the Green Climate Fund, and the Middle East Green Initiative.

12. Threats

- Insufficient financial resources, which could discourage members' future engagement;
- escalating insecurity and conflict in some dryland countries, which could lead to complications for cooperation, meetings, and international funding, especially in least-developed countries and between regions.

III. Areas for consideration in the Working Group's future priorities

13. When the Working Group was established, COFO recommended various work areas that could enable the Working Group to achieve its mandate, which are listed in its Terms of Reference. The review assessed which of these are the highest priorities for members to ensure that they are adequately represented in the Working Group's next workplan, which can be found in Document COFO/WG-DF/2023/5.¹⁴

14. The review confirmed that the set of proposed activities - as included in the original Terms of Reference - remains relevant.

15. The main focus of work has been the sharing of knowledge, lessons learned, and best practices in order to strengthen the collaboration between Southern countries. Ninety-five percent of respondents emphasized the crucial role of the Working Group in sharing knowledge on sustainable management, restoration, and monitoring of dryland forests and agrosilvopastoral systems.

16. The Working Group should continue to assess capacities and knowledge gaps, and advise on capacity development needs for the sustainable management, restoration, assessment, and monitoring of dryland forests and agrosilvopastoral systems. Eighty-nine percent of respondents listed capacity development as a priority.

17. The Working Group should make further efforts to identify new opportunities for collaboration, including with the UNCCD, the GEF, and universities and research institutes to scale up

¹² <https://elearning.fao.org/course/view.php?id=942>

¹³ <https://www.fao.org/dryland-forestry/working-group/cofo-wg-summer-school/en/>

¹⁴ [Official documents | Dryland Forestry | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations \(fao.org\)](#)

sustainable management and restoration practices. Eighty-eight percent of members rated collaboration as a priority.

18. Lastly, 84 percent of members said that the Working Group should prioritise identifying appropriate tools and approaches for dryland forests and agrosilvopastoral systems management, such as the Dryland Restoration Initiative Platform¹⁵ (DRIP) in the context of the UN Decade Framework for Ecosystem Monitoring (FERM).¹⁶

IV. Steering Committee Recommendations

19. At its meeting in June 2023, the Working Group Steering Committee analysed the results of the independent review as presented in section III. It further recommended that the Working Group's technical focus should include the following topics:

- **Drought:** Drought is an increasingly relevant topic, emphasized by both the Glasgow Climate Pact of the UNFCCC and the united global pledge to boost drought resilience by the UNCCD's Fifteenth Conference of Parties (COP15). Drought is of increasingly relevance as the FAO biannual theme for 2024-25, approved by the Forty-third Session of FAO Conference,¹⁷ is "Water resources management for the four betters: better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life, to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development".¹⁸ The Working Group could support food systems, food security, and drought management dialogues and planning at national and regional levels, emphasizing the critical role that dryland forests and agrosilvopastoral systems play in feeding the world, and call for sustainable forest and land management as an effective way of reducing drought risks.
- **Encouraging restoration initiatives through the 'Grazing with Trees' approach:** A growing number of global initiatives and pledges are now calling for landscape restoration. Silvopastoralism is an important sustainable land management technique that combines livestock and trees in an integrated agricultural system. Being uniquely adapted to landscapes with water scarcity and climatic variability, if properly implemented, silvopastoralism can improve the resilience of landscapes and communities to the impacts of climate change, combat desertification, and improve watershed management. The benefits of silvopastoralism were highlighted in the Grazing with Trees report in 2022.¹⁹ Looking ahead, the Working Group could generate further evidence and understanding on the Grazing with Trees approach through the facilitation of South-South dialogues and investment fora to share challenges, opportunities and lessons learned.
- **Policy support:** The Working Group is the only FAO technical body that deals with drylands in a cross-sectorial manner. It should strengthen its partnership and collaboration with the UNCCD, CBD, UNFCCC, and other members of the CPF to contribute to the SDGs and other decisions adopted by international instruments, processes, and initiatives on dryland issues.
- **Resource mobilization and finance:** Mobilization of additional funds, including from bilateral and multilateral partners and vertical funds, is needed to help stimulate and enhance the Working Group's technical and policy roles in the global agenda on sustainable use and conservation of dryland forests and agrosilvopastoral systems. The Working Group may wish to contribute to countries' capacities in designing on-the-ground silvopastoral investment proposals to restore the dryland forests and agrosilvopastoral systems and support the achievement of their national commitments, including Land Degradation Neutrality goals, National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), and Nationally Determined Contributions to the Paris Agreement (NDCs).

¹⁵ <https://www.fao.org/in-action/dryland-restoration-initiative-platform/en/>

¹⁶ <https://ferm.fao.org/>

¹⁷ <https://www.fao.org/3/nm800en/nm800en.pdf>

¹⁸ <https://www.fao.org/3/nm123en/nm123en.pdf>

¹⁹ <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cc2280en>