



Developing resistance to climate change in the West African Sahel: parkland trees and livelihoods ^[1]

The Challenge

Three landlocked African countries—Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger—are threatened with encroachment of the Sahara Desert. In these countries, land, water and other natural resources are all highly degraded due to recurrent droughts, irregular spatial and temporal rain patterns, and climate aridification. Human factors related to increasing needs of the population such as uncontrolled tree cutting and lopping, overgrazing, and bushfires also impact degradation.

Each of the countries has laws, strategies, action plans, and regulatory provisions that have direct or indirect links with environmental protection and management at national, regional, and sectoral levels. However, these generally overlap, creating inefficiencies and transaction costs. Policies have not been well applied in the field due to lack of financial and human resources.

The Solution

To support the countries' efforts to arrest degradation of natural resources, GEF funded three projects collectively aimed to improve livelihoods of rural poor communities by protecting biodiversity and reversing the trend in land degradation and desertification. Each of the projects had specific components working on adapting, diversifying, and conserving parkland agroforests. International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the implementing agency for the GEF projects, provided a grant to [World Agroforestry Center \(ICRAF\)](#) ^[2] to support the knowledge exchange process among the three countries by facilitating better participatory research and identifying innovations for conserving and increasing the value of native tree species in parkland agro-forests. Among the beneficiary communities of the three countries, 44 village committees and 13 inter-village committees were organized. These committees, along with three coordinators from their respective national agricultural research institutes, shared information on climate change adaptation plans, and community-based enterprise in the following series of exchanges:

- Inter-village and stakeholder engagement assessed risk vulnerability of parkland agroforests and natural resources policies and local conventions for better parkland management.
- Annual conference participants shared their progress and detailed new approaches/technologies adopted in respective countries.
- Exchange visits between villages offered opportunities to observe, learn, and discuss seed collection techniques and production. In Mali, these visits opened discussions on transformation of tree food products, after which small-scale pilots were carried out in each country.
- Knowledge from the exchanges was documented and disseminated in technical and training material, journal articles, guidebooks, videos, and extension materials.

Since countering the effect of the encroaching Sahel ecoclimatic zone was of international

significance, a plan was put in place to ensure that knowledge, recommendations, and innovation generated by the project were made available not only to the projects' stakeholders but also to international research and development communities.

Results


- Facilitated dialogue between smallholder farmers and forest services, resulting in the creation of negotiation mechanisms to discuss plans for community management of forest/agroforest resources.
- Improved access in rural poor communities to selected/adapted native trees to enhance parkland development.
- Sharper pro-poor focus of the national partner institutions. For example, small-scale pilots selected trees that rural women preferred for food and revenue generation.
- Better communication of agroforest technologies through videos and publications.
- Strengthened linkages among the rural communities and other stakeholders such as national agricultural research institutes and national forestry extension services in sustainable rural development.

Lessons Learned

For multicountry, multistakeholder engagement, adequate time and potential local constraints should be factored into planning activities. Each country may have its own implementation challenges, but joint planning that takes these factors into account will increase the likelihood of success.

The political environment plays a key role in the success of a national undertaking. Activities in the Mopti region of Mali were cancelled in March 2012 due to the political situation and only started again a year later. This delayed the planned market and value chain analysis. However, having a conducive environment for safe travel and learning should be considered when selecting the location for a knowledge exchange.



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