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WORKING GROUP ON DRYLAND FORESTS AND AGROSILVOPASTORAL SYSTEMS

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**Enhancing South-South knowledge sharing for better dryland forests and
agrosilvopastoral restoration**

Executive Summary

Land degradation in the Near East and North Africa (NENA) region is strongly linked to land use and cover change in both rural and peri-urban areas, as well as to poor farming practices and climate change impacts. The economic impact of land degradation in the region is estimated to be around 9 billion USD per year¹, which poses a strenuous challenge to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC), a framework for collaboration and partnership between developing countries in the global South for mutual benefit, plays a catalytic role in halting land degradation by fostering intergovernmental support, knowledge exchange, and capacity development, and ultimately, by accelerating progress and action toward the achievement of the SDGs.

Some countries in the NENA region have already pledged restoration targets, and emphasized the importance of capacity development efforts focused on promoting mutual learning, as well as knowledge sharing among stakeholders and communities of practice at local, national and global levels. This joint document, developed together with the Near East Forestry and Range Commission (NEFRC/2023/Inf.5)², presents some of the lessons learned through South-South knowledge exchanges that could benefit NENA initiatives that aim to reverse ecosystem degradation, halt deforestation and land degradation, and enhance ecosystem health. This document also highlights some opportunities to mobilize resources for large-scale restoration programmes brought forth by the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and other related global initiatives.

¹ FAO and ITPS. 2015. Status of the World's Soil Resources (SWSR) – Main Report.

² <https://www.fao.org/neareast/nefrc/en/>

Documents can be consulted at www.fao.org

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I. Introduction

1. Land degradation is an urgent challenge for many countries in the NENA region. This phenomenon contributes to desertification, climate change, declining biodiversity, and has negative impacts on social and economic well-being. One way of promoting solutions to land degradation is through South-South cooperation and knowledge sharing.
2. For FAO, South-South Cooperation (SSC) refers to the mutual sharing and exchange of key development solutions (knowledge, experiences and good practices, policies, technology, know-how, and resources) between and among countries in the global South.³
3. Triangular Cooperation (TrC) involves two or more countries of the global South in collaboration with a third party, typically a multilateral institution, traditional resource partner, or emerging economy, facilitating SSC through the provision of technical or financial resources.⁴
4. FAO has a long history of supporting peer-to-peer learning, the sharing of technical know-how, and policy dialogue and exchange at global, regional, national, and local levels⁵ to support sustainable development and address common challenges.
5. The Twenty-sixth Session of the Committee on Forestry (COFO 26) encouraged FAO to support Members in accelerating SSTC including through the voluntary sharing of knowledge and practices, research, and technology transfer (COFO/2022/REP)⁶.
6. The Twenty-fifth Session of the Near East Forest and Range Commission (NEFRC 25) called on FAO to “strengthen collaboration and synergies with these organizations⁷, including through the implementation of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and other related global initiatives and processes”.⁸
7. According to the approved Terms of Reference (FO:COFO/WG-DF/2019/Inf.1.c)⁹, the Working Group aims to scale up “the adoption of good practices for the protection, sustainable management and restoration of drylands forests and agrosilvopastoral systems, enhancing also environmental and socioeconomic resilience and sustainable livelihoods”.
8. To promote work in this area, this document presents key lessons learned from various FAO SSTC activities in response to some of the most dynamic and complex dryland development challenges, which may be used to benefit restoration initiatives in NENA.

II. Assessment of South-South knowledge on land restoration

9. In 2021, a global capacity needs assessment was conducted by the FAO-led UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration [Task Force on Best Practices](#) to guide the Decade’s capacity development

³ <https://www.fao.org/3/i2980e/i2980e.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.fao.org/3/i6249e/i6249e.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.fao.org/3/nk101en/nk101en.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.fao.org/3/nk728en/nk728en.pdf>

⁷ See Annex 1 for list of participants <https://www.fao.org/3/cb8337en/cb8337en.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.fao.org/3/cb8337en/cb8337en.pdf>

⁹ Terms of Reference [EN/FR/SP](#)

efforts. The main gaps identified by the 1 331 respondents to the global online survey¹⁰ lie within four main categories: i) mobilizing finance from a wide variety of sources; ii) inclusive stakeholder engagement across sectors and actors; iii) planning, researching and monitoring to enhance socio-environmental benefits and the economic sustainability of ecosystem restoration; and iv) developing national policy instruments that support ecosystem restoration.

10. Throughout 2022, FAO and the [World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies](#)¹¹ (WOCAT) collaborated on a South-South initiative for the exchange of knowledge on best practices for sustainable land management (SLM) and ecosystem restoration. As part of this effort, an online survey was conducted with a broad range of organizations on priority topics related to SLM and land restoration. In total 87 responses were collected across NENA, Central Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean. The survey found that all three regions are facing major challenges with the implementation of SLM and land restoration with the most cited being “lack of financing”, “lack of awareness” and “lack of follow up actions” across all regions.

Respondents from the NENA region identified the following as key needs:

- the development of an online platform for informal knowledge exchange focusing on sustainable landscape restoration;
- adoption of a multi-stakeholder approach among a broad range of actors, e.g. researchers, government representatives, practitioners, and donors;
- the organization of a webinar series;
- the development of an innovation hub to co-create and test new financing mechanisms for promoting and scaling-up SLM.

11. In response to the above findings, the key lessons learned in this document have been grouped into SSTC’s main value adds, as reported by the survey. These are: (1) facilitation of policy dialogue for concrete actions and better landscape governance systems; (2) scaling up of South-South collaboration opportunities that can support countries to pursue more resilient and sustainable development in dryland areas; (3) promotion of new tools to tackle issues of food insecurity, poverty and sustainable agriculture; and (4) creation of powerful partnerships to address common restoration challenges.

III. Facilitating policy dialogue for concrete actions and better governance systems

12. South-South knowledge exchange has been recognized as a key means of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, promoting mutual collaboration between governments to achieve the long-term sustainable development of robust agricultural and forestry sectors. South-South knowledge exchange can take place through:

- **Policy dialogue and learning exchanges.** These are important pathways for agricultural development with the aim of achieving a favourable policy environment that enables countries across the global South to work together towards common development objectives. For example, 99 policymakers, 151 farmers’ unions and extension personnel - together with 28 parliamentarians - participated in regional Conservation Agriculture learning activities to promote [Conservation Agriculture](#) technologies in the Southern Africa region. These farming practices help manage agroecosystems for improved and sustained productivity and security and help to address the interlinked problems of food insecurity, degradation of natural resources, and poverty.¹²

¹⁰ <https://www.fao.org/3/cb8019en/cb8019en.pdf>

¹¹ [WOCAT](#)

¹² <https://www.fao.org/3/i6249e/i6249e.pdf>

- **Youth engagement.** The [Middle East North Africa \(MENA\) Youth Network](#), founded by MENA country delegates to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Twenty-sixth Conference of the Parties (COP26) at the Youth4Climate Conference 2021 in Italy, amplifies the diverse voices of young people from the MENA region to encourage region-wide projects and increase climate change awareness amongst MENA youth and the general public. The Network, together with the [World Food Forum](#), is working on a policy paper on agrifood systems transformation in the MENA region to engage youth in policymaking processes. The [Mediterranean Youth Task Force \(MYTF\)](#), a network founded in 2022 as a result of the Mediterranean Youth Dialogue held during the Seventh Mediterranean Forest Week in Antalya, Türkiye in 2022, facilitates youth engagement in forestry issues in the region.

IV. Brokering and scaling up of South-South collaboration opportunities that enable countries to meet land restoration challenges and create more resilient agrifood systems

13. A favourable policy environment is vital to enable countries across the global South to work together in support of common development objectives. There are increasing opportunities to share policy, lessons learned and best practices in one country that could be leveraged to enhance policymaking capacities in another. FAO promotes South-South knowledge exchange through many initiatives, including:

- [The Making every voice count for adaptive management \(MEV-CAM\)](#) initiative, which was launched in 2020 by FAO's Forestry and South-South and Triangular Cooperation Divisions. It empowers community members and stakeholders to demonstrate their skills and share their challenges and successes with other countries in the Global South. MEV-CAM's participatory process has identified 16 best practices through two projects.¹³ Many of these practices have proved beneficial and up-scalable to other projects, such as the Global Environment Facility-7 Drylands Sustainable Landscapes Impact Programme (DSL-IP).¹⁴ These documented practices have been captured by communities through participatory videos and stored in the MEV-CAM's [Knowledge Bank](#), which allows for easy farmer-to-farmer sharing of best practices that are easy to replicate and scale up in other similar landscapes.
- [The 10 Elements of Agroecology](#) publication was developed as a framework to guide FAO's work on agroecology as one approach to feeding a growing population and for supporting countries in achieving the SDGs. It emphasizes the importance of participatory approaches for agricultural innovation, including through combining traditional, Indigenous and local knowledge with scientific and technical knowledge across developing countries.¹⁵
- [The FAO Pastoralist Knowledge Hub \(PKH\) initiative](#) is made up of [eight regional networks](#) and partners, and has supported pastoralists to attend international events such as United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) Fourteenth Conference of the Parties (COP14). The PKH focuses on [knowledge-generation](#) and information sharing, and has a community of practice ([FAO PKH Forum - dGroups](#)) with 1 494 users sharing information on pastoralism and related topics. Over 162 documents and publications related to pastoralism were uploaded to the [knowledge repository](#). It also supports pastoralist organizations in data collection, management and analysis to provide reliable data and evidence on the contribution of pastoralism to countries' Gross Domestic Product (GDP).
- [The Mediterranean Animal Health Network \(REMESA\)](#), a common framework for cooperation made up of 15 Mediterranean countries (Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece,

¹³ GEF-6 Resilient Food Systems project and the Enhancing resilient livelihoods and food security of host communities and Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon through the promotion of sustainable agricultural development – MADAD project in Jordan

¹⁴ <https://www.fao.org/in-action/dryland-sustainable-landscapes/en>

¹⁵ Barrios et al., 2020.

Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Morocco, Mauritania, Portugal, Spain and Tunisia). The network aims to improve prevention and control of the major transboundary animal diseases and strengthen capacities of national institutions through the exchange of experience and harmonization of surveillance.

V. Promotion of new tools to tackle food insecurity, poverty and sustainable agriculture

14. Landscape restoration approaches have changed considerably in recent years, to the extent that homegrown technological solutions are rapidly advancing in several emerging economies. This has created opportunities for sharing participatory innovative tools, platforms, and technologies among developing countries. For example:

- **FAO's [Forest and Landscape Restoration Mechanism \(FLRM\)](#)**, in collaboration with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), has implemented a large-scale GEF-funded programme, [The Restoration Initiative](#), to support the upscaling of Forest and Landscape Restoration (FLR) in nine countries in Asia and Africa. Through both online Communities of Practice and offline interactions and global events, important knowledge and experiences have been shared between project teams and countries. Every year, a joint publication [The Year in Review](#) shares valuable lessons learned and stories from the ground.
- **[The Restoration Factory](#)**, supported by UNEP's Climate Finance Unit, supports commercially viable, community-inclusive and climate-resilient businesses that restore ecosystems and preserve landscapes. During the second cohort in Kenya, 77 percent of entrepreneurs (47 in total) who completed the programme, enhanced their capacities to develop a bankable restorative business plan and pitch it to potential investors.
- Under the French Facility for Global Environment ([FFEM](#)-funded project) in Niger and Burkina Faso, FAO has followed an innovative approach by providing technical support to six local municipalities to plan and budget for restoration and sustainable management practices into their local development plans. In collaboration with the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), FAO supported the national agencies in charge of local development [Agence nationale d'Appui au Développement des Collectivités Territoriales (ADCT) in Burkina Faso, and Agence Nationale de Financement des Collectivités Territoriales (ANFICT) in Niger] to put in place a mechanism for the municipalities to apply for funding through a specific budget window.
- **[Association Initiatives Climate \(IC\)](#)** is a South-South learning platform and best practices database that was established as a knowledge exchange space for Francophone communities, Civil Society Organizations (CSO), and green youth entrepreneurs and municipalities following the UNFCCC's Twenty-second Conference of the Parties (COP22) in 2016 in Morocco. The platform currently contains 230 initiatives and has become a valuable tool for learning about and sharing good practices, designing ideas, and implementing projects. For example, Senegal has shared its experience in solar energy with Guinea and Morocco, and 10 countries are currently working to produce green charcoal based on prototypes designed during the research and development workshops. Furthermore, the ['Improved Traditional Granary' model](#) for seed storage developed in Senegal has now been replicated in six countries.

VI. Creation of partnerships to address common challenges

15. Fostering broader partnerships with national institutions, research and development institutes, extension services and farmers' organizations is essential to the long-term sustainable development of a robust agricultural sector. Below are some examples that have attained a favourable policy environment to enable countries across the global South to work together in support of common development objectives:

- **FAO's [Forest and Farm Facility \(FFF\)](#)**, in partnership with the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), IUCN and AgriCord and funds from Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, Finland, Norway, the United States of America, and IKEA, supports Forest and Farm Facility Organizations (FFPOs) to achieve climate-resilient landscapes and improved livelihoods through rural education and empowerment. Farmer Field School (FFS) groups comprise 20-30 local farmers who are supported by a trained facilitator. Participants meet regularly to improve their farming skills by observing, analysing and testing new ideas on collective FFS study plots before applying them in their own farms or communities. Since 2012, FFF support has enabled FFPOs to improve food security, alleviate poverty and promote sustainable agriculture, which has led to several success stories.¹⁶ FFF currently supports FFPOs in 12 partner countries: Bolivia, Ecuador, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Nepal, Togo, United Republic of Tanzania, Viet Nam and Zambia as well as regional and global FFPOs worldwide¹⁷.
- FAO supports the implementation of diverse and high-quality **[Farmer Field School \(FFS\)](#)** programmes within FAO and by partner organizations through the **[Global Farmer Field School Platform](#)**, which places high emphasis on the application of FFS to forestry and agroforestry. As part of a self-directed and participatory learning and knowledge-building process, over 20 countries involving more than 200 000 producers across Africa, Asia, and the Americas were encouraged to take ownership of change occurring at the local level using FFS to expand the knowledge of food producers. In Kenya, FFS's were developed in collaboration with farmers and communities to intensify the use of trees and forestry in dryland areas, which expanded into Tanzania and Ethiopia to increase the stock of trees on private farms and communal pasturelands. The next FFS-forestry technical workshop will be held in October 2023 to gather expertise and bring together specialists and facilitators to develop technical guidance on adapting FFS to forestry and agroforestry, focusing on comparative experiments and field testing.
- **[The GEF-funded DSL-IP](#)** was launched in June 2021, and fosters programmatic collaboration and integration among 11 countries – Angola, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Malawi, Mongolia, Mozambique, Namibia, United Republic of Tanzania and Zimbabwe – and among several organizations committed to achieving Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN). The DSL-IP Global Project supports countries in overcoming climate change challenges by (1) linking countries to relevant knowledge hubs, (2) developing core themes that allow the application of tailored and demand- driven technical support, and (3) providing a platform for South-South exchange for scaling the evidence good practices. DSL-IP is an excellent example of how participating countries in the targeted regions can be supported following a programmatic approach centred on overcoming common management challenges.
- The **[Initiative on Sustainability, Stability and Security \(3S\)](#)** was launched by the Governments of Morocco and Senegal at UNFCCC's COP22 in 2016. Through South-South cooperation, Morocco shares value, knowledge, skills, expertise and resources and within five years of implementation, the Initiative aims to commit the financial resources necessary to restore 10 million hectares of degraded lands, primarily in the Sahel region of sub-Saharan Africa, through investment, policy reforms and technical and financial innovation.
- The **[WeCaN Nurturing Community of Knowledge Practice for Women in dryland forests and agrosilvopastoral systems](#)** provides a South-South mutual learning space for women leaders to share experiences, good practices and lessons learned, through knowledge exchanges, partnership building and capacity development opportunities. Since its launch in June 2021, WeCaN has grown to include over 200 members across 26 countries. It has held 15 training and enrichment sessions reaching over 100 participants, enabled 10 women's organizations to be

¹⁶ <https://www.fao.org/forest-farm-facility/success-stories/en/>

¹⁷ <https://www.fao.org/forest-farm-facility/countries/en/#/web/map>

accredited to the UNCCD's Fifteenth Conference of the Parties (COP15)¹⁸ and enabled seven representatives to attend the UNFCCC's Twenty-seventh Conference of the Parties (COP27).¹⁹

- **YouthConnekt Africa (YCA)** is a youth empowerment programme that was launched in Rwanda in 2012 and is currently being rolled out across Africa. The programme forges partnerships between YCA initiatives across the region to learn, replicate and implement relevant good practices and initiatives that improve the lives of young people. More than 4 000 000 youth have been involved in YCA activities. They constructed 30 houses for vulnerable families, worked on the rehabilitation of 789 houses, and planted 1 000 000 trees across the country.
- **The UN Coalition on Combating Sand and Dust Storms (SDS)** consists of 19 UN agencies and non-UN organizations and is led by FAO. The coalition works to implement a global programme on SDS to combat the transboundary nature of the SDS phenomena and respond to demands from countries for support in their efforts to combat the impact of SDS on land degradation. Countries are encouraged to share knowledge and experiences on practices and strategies. A large project was established between Iraq and Kuwait, and a regional centre for monitoring and early warning has been established in Saudi Arabia.
- The **UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration** is a call for the protection and restoration of global ecosystems that aims to prevent, halt, and reverse the degradation of ecosystems. UNEP and FAO (co-leaders of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration) are implementing a series of workshops and webinars that aim to increase awareness and understanding of ecosystem restoration in the Near East region, discuss country expectations in terms of ecosystem restoration and sharing success stories and practical case studies on restoration of degraded ecosystems.

¹⁸ <https://www.fao.org/dryland-forestry/news/news-detail/en/c/1512697/>

¹⁹ <https://www.fao.org/dryland-forestry/news/news-detail/en/c/1618043/>