



# COMMITTEE ON FORESTRY

## WORKING GROUP ON DRYLAND FORESTS AND AGROSILVOPASTORAL SYSTEMS

### Third Session (Hybrid)

Amman, 11-13 September 2023

### Independent Report of the review of the relevance and optional modalities of the Working Group on Dryland Forests and Agrosilvopastoral Systems - Findings and Recommendations

#### Executive Summary

The Twenty-third Session of the Committee on Forestry (COFO) asked the Working Group to review its continued relevance and operational modalities following COFO's Twenty-sixth Session, allowing for time-bound, strategic planning to contribute to the FAO Four Betters. An external FAO statutory bodies' expert conducted the participatory review of the Working Group. This independent report expands on the document COFO/WG-DF/2023/3<sup>1</sup>, providing the key findings and recommendations of the participatory review of the Working Group's relevance and its operational modalities for Members' considerations.

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## I. Introduction

1. FAO recognizes the vulnerability of drylands and their key contribution to global agrifood systems (C2021/3).<sup>2</sup> In 2014, the Committee on Forestry (COFO) agreed to establish a subsidiary Working Group on Dryland Forests and Agrosilvopastoral Systems to make recommendations to COFO on the status, trends, issues and developments for the protection, sustainable management and restoration of dryland forests and agrosilvopastoral systems.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fao.org/dryland-forestry/working-group/third-session-jordan/official-documents/en/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.fao.org/3/ne576en/ne576en.pdf>

Documents can be consulted at [www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org)

2. The Working Group review was conducted from April to June 2023 through a participatory approach that gathered the perspectives of its members, observers and other FAO statutory bodies. The methodology included a document review, semi-structured questionnaires for primary stakeholders and FAO statutory bodies, and a short online survey for secondary stakeholders.

3. The Working Group Secretariat identified 91 members and observers for an online survey and 12 stakeholders for telephone interviews. The response rate to the anonymous survey was 24 percent (22) and to the interviews 33 percent. In total, 26 members and observers participated in the review, four female (15 percent) and 22 male stakeholders (85 percent).

## II. Review findings

### A. Relevance: Is the Working Group doing the right thing?

4. This section addresses the review criterion of the Working Group's relevance. The sources of evidence are stakeholder interviews, document review, and telephone interviews.

5. Despite the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, 95 percent of respondents highlighted that the Working Group has successfully met the needs of its members to a very large extent (95 percent). The Secretariat mitigated challenges through highly proactive engagement with members, amongst other actions shown in Figure 1. The main needs addressed by the Working Group are:

- **Knowledge exchange:** Survey respondents acknowledged the plentiful opportunities for dialogue on shared challenges through various side events and meetings. Respondents also noted the FAO e-learning course 'Transforming Dryland Forests and Agrosilvopastoral Systems'<sup>3</sup> and the planned Drylands Summer School<sup>4</sup> to support the International Year of Rangeland and Pastoralists 2026 (IYRP) as important contributions to knowledge creation and exchange.
- **Agenda setting and research:** Respondents noted the Working Group's important role in disseminating technical expertise and research on drylands through projects and publications. Respondents repeatedly referred to the recent 'Grazing with Trees' report published in 2022<sup>5</sup> and highlighted the report's relevance for dryland management and restoration.
- **Advocating for and practicing an integrated approach to Dryland Forests and Agrosilvopastoral Systems management:** Respondents highlighted the Working Group's role in encouraging proactive collaboration between multiple stakeholders and across disciplines, including within FAO. In particular, respondents noted the Working Group's relevance as a platform for preparing for the IYRP 2026. Members also appreciated technical guidance and FAO's support towards accessing funding from, for example, the Global Environment Facility (GEF), Green Climate Fund, and the Middle East Green Initiative.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://elearning.fao.org/course/view.php?id=942>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.fao.org/dryland-forestry/working-group/cofo-wg-summer-school/en/>

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

*Figure 1: How the WG meets the needs of its members*



6. Contribution to international processes, pledges and impact at scale: Drylands and Agrosilvopastoral Systems are key agenda considerations for COFO, the Committee on Agriculture (COAG), and its Sub-Committee on Livestock (COAG-LI). The Working Group is in a unique position to contribute expertise on this theme, operating at the intersection of agriculture, forestry and land, which aligns with FAO's overall integrated approach for implementing its Strategic Framework with a stronger focus on drylands. The Working Group already supports up-and-out scaling of dryland management practices and showcases the effectiveness of cross-sectoral approaches through its support to the Drylands Sustainable Landscapes Impact Program (DSL-IP)<sup>6</sup>, which fosters programmatic collaboration and integration among 11 countries.

### **B. Efficiency: is the Working Group's governance structure fit for purpose?**

7. This section analyses the efficiency of the Working Group. This section's principal sources of evidence are interviews, the survey, and the document review.

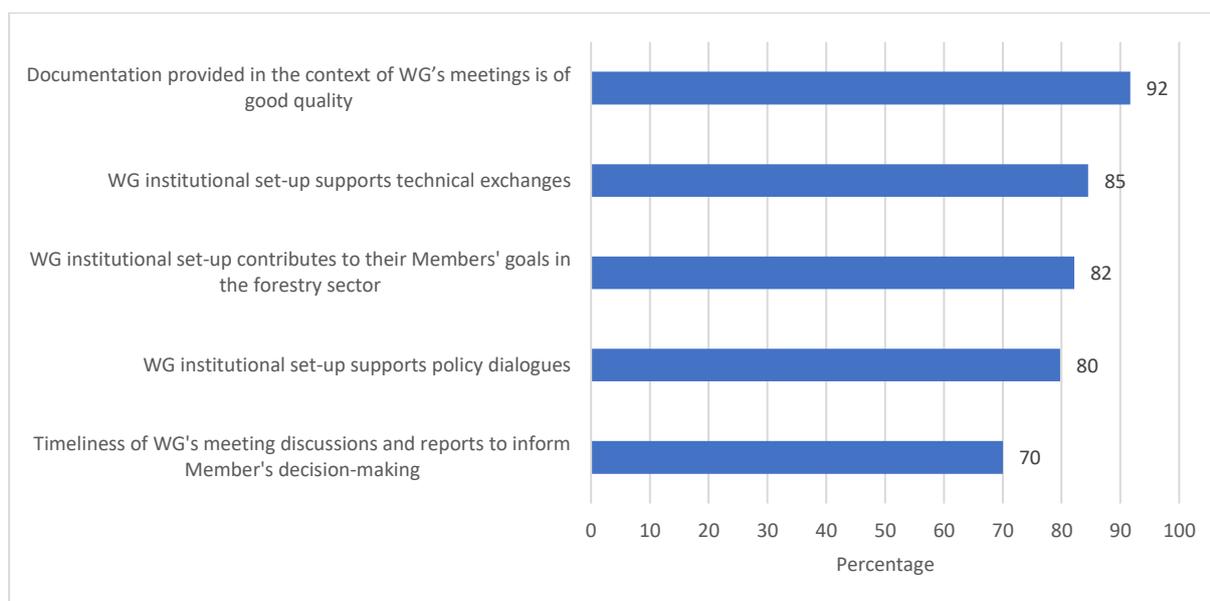
8. Respondents appreciated the Working Group's institutional setup for technical exchange with an 85 percent satisfaction rate. The Working Group achieved an 80 percent satisfaction rate for its role in policy dialogue, and 82 percent for its contribution to Members' goals. The quality of documentation reached a 92 percent satisfaction rating, and respondents referred again to the Grazing with Trees report, policy briefs, and regular newsletter. When asked about official Session documents and their utility for informing Members' decision-making, the satisfaction rate was lower at 70 percent.

9. These high ratings are driven by the technical role of the Working Group, its leadership role in the agroforestry approach in drylands and its efforts to highlight silvopastoralism. Respondents also appreciated the Working Group's practical cooperation, and technical support in projects in countries such as Angola and Egypt, with exchanges from different ecological niches.

10. Respondents appreciated the cooperation of experts from various countries who facilitated exchange and learning during the preparation of Working Group publications. Figure 2 summarizes respondents' views on the Working Group's institutional setup and efficiency.

<sup>6</sup> [The GEF-funded Drylands Sustainable Landscapes Impact Program \(DSL-IP\)](#).

*Figure 2: The appropriateness of the WG's institutional setup and its efficiency*



11. The proactive and inclusive approach of the Working Group Secretariat is welcomed, though respondents are aware of the dependency on the FAO Secretariat to manage the Working Group. Its institutional setup abides by FAO rules and regulations, but respondents noted that these formalities might limit flexibility.

12. Given the Working Group's strategic positioning between COAG and COFO, with relevance for both Committees, there is room for improvement to strengthen its influence of cross-fertilization further, as expressed by FAO stakeholders.

13. In the context of FAO's GEF-funded DSL-IP, the Working Group plays a special role, as Working Group members are also members of national steering committees. This arrangement helps overcome barriers, with the Working Group playing a facilitating role.

14. Given the heterogeneous membership of the Working Group, topics of discussion can be particular to one country or a sub-region, for example, sandstorms or specific pests. Respondents noted the potential for sub-regional working groups to counter this and diversify topics of discussion.

15. Extra-budgetary funding was raised as a concern by survey respondents who noted that it led to limited opportunities to hold dialogues and events. However, the review found that reports, documentation and training materials met the needs of regions, countries and organizations in a timely manner.

### **C. Effectiveness: Is the Working Group achieving results?**

16. This section of the report assesses the effectiveness of the Working Group, i.e. to what extent results are achieved. Data sources are the interviews, the survey, and the document review.

17. The review found that the Working Group accomplished 90 percent of its planned activities in 2021. Respondents were asked to consider the achievements of the two workplans approved so far (2019–2021<sup>7</sup> and 2022–2024<sup>8</sup>) and the progress reports endorsed by the Working Group to assess the achievements and effectiveness of its activities.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.fao.org/3/cb7242en/cb7242en.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.fao.org/3/cb8038en/cb8038en.pdf>

18. The utility of the WG in studying and reporting on technical matters reaches 89 percent, and the utility for formulating and implementing policy reaches 76 percent.

19. Members identified the sharing of knowledge and lessons learned as the WG's main priority with a 95 percent approval rating.

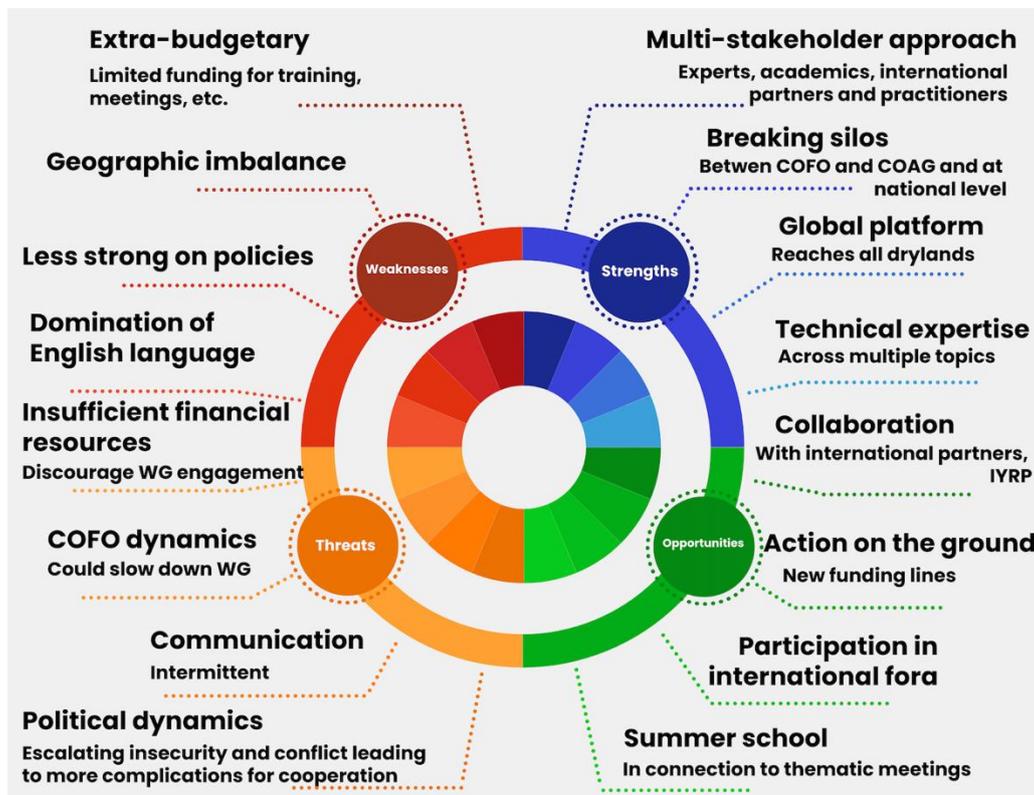
20. Other priorities include: identification of tools and approaches appropriate for dryland forests and agrosilvopastoral systems (84 percent); providing advice in support in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in dryland forests and agrosilvopastoral systems<sup>9</sup> (85 percent); identification of opportunities for collaboration and scaling-up of sustainable management and restoration practices (88 percent); and assessment and monitoring of the status of dryland forests and agrosilvopastoral systems globally (89 percent).

21. Respondents highlighted the need to encourage members to nominate technical staff as serving members of the Working Group to contribute to its technical mandates and support in assessing the emerging issues such as drought issues in dryland regions. The need for skilled members to write policy papers was also highlighted by respondents to the interviews.

#### D. Working Group strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats

22. The review conducted an analysis of the Working Group's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) to inform its future workplans and strategic operational modalities. Figure 3 summarizes members' perceptions of these.

*Figure 3: Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the Working Group*



<sup>9</sup> and decisions adopted within the framework of other international instruments, processes and initiatives, in particular the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

- **Strengths:** Respondents considered the main strength of the Working Group to be its multi-stakeholder approach across disciplines. The Working Group is a global platform with a reach covering all dryland areas, though to varying degrees.<sup>10</sup> Another strength is the Working Group's technical expertise across multiple topics, including productivity and upscaling dryland sustainability restoration practices, silvopastoralism and cross-sectorial support. By leveraging the expertise, perspectives, and resources of experts, academics, international partners and practitioners, stakeholders can work together to address issues even more effectively. This collaboration contributes to breaking thematic silos, using the Working Group as a global platform for exchanging technical expertise across countries and continents.
- **Weakness:** The extra-budgetary nature of the Working Group results in limited opportunities for trainings, meetings, and the production of technical papers. Respondents also commented on the imbalanced geographical focus of the Working Group, the domination of the English language in the Working Group, which was less appreciated by French and Spanish speakers, and the weaker policy work of the Working Group despite its relevance. There is room for improvement in creating more diversity and inclusivity in the Working Group's membership by actively seeking engagement with stakeholders from under-represented regions.
- **Opportunities:** Respondents identified exciting opportunities for the Working Group, such as collaboration with international partners and the IYRP 2026. The review also identified potential for action on the ground through funding sources such as the Global Environmental Fund, Green Climate Fund, and the Middle East Green Initiative. Opportunities include the Drylands Summer School, held in parallel with the Working Group's Third Session hosted by the Ministry of Agriculture of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, as well as continued participation in international forums.
- **Threats:** Insufficient financial resources are a threat that may discourage members' future engagement in the Working Group. Respondents also noted that COFO dynamics could slow down the Working Group's activities and may lead to less frequent communication and meetings. Finally, it was noted that political dynamics may threaten ecological integrity where forests and silvopastoral lands are perceived as a panacea to economic challenges. Also, escalating insecurity and conflict may lead to more complications for cooperation, meetings, and international funding, especially in least-developed countries and between regions.

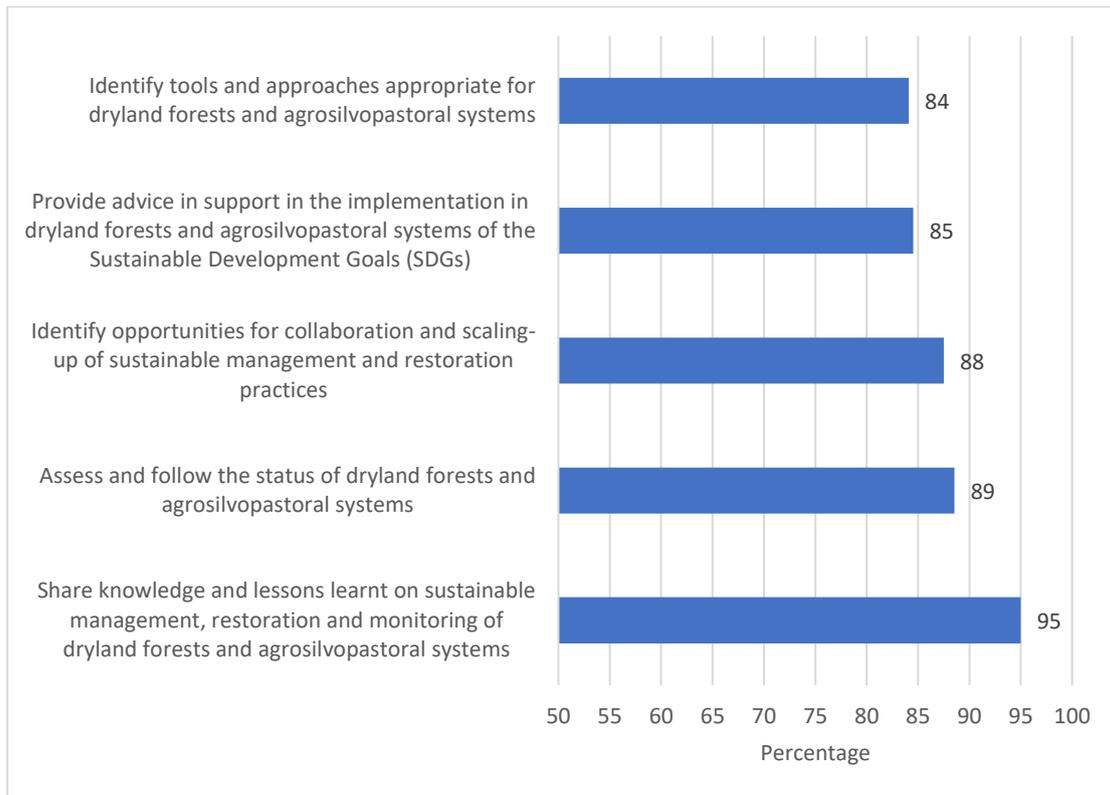
## E. Future priorities for potential Multi Year Work Plan

23. The review enquired about members' priorities concerning the future work of the Working Group. Based on the SWOT analysis and review findings, respondents approved and prioritized the activities mentioned in the Working Group's Terms of Reference and approved by the COFO. Figure 4 summarizes the review results, presented in paragraph 20 above, showing items considered by respondents as priorities for future work plans. Document COFO/WG-DF/2023/5<sup>11</sup> includes the draft Multi-Year of Work Plan for members' consideration.

<sup>10</sup> While the WG's reach is global, a geographic imbalance in covering dryland areas across regions and continents shows, as stated under weaknesses, with the French speaking countries of the Sahara, for example, being less represented.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.fao.org/dryland-forestry/working-group/third-session-jordan/official-documents/en/>

*Figure 4: Approval ratings for Working Group priorities*



## F. Conclusions and recommendations

24. The following review conclusions and recommendations are grouped by review criteria.

### Relevance:

25. The review concluded that the Working Group remains highly relevant for its members and observers, filling a necessary gap, particularly for technical exchange.

26. Recommendations:

- The Working Group should continue to facilitate collaboration between multiple stakeholders and across disciplines, including in FAO, as this contributes to meeting members' needs for an integrated dryland management approach.
- Through the Working Group, FAO should continue providing technical guidance and start helping members to access funding, for example, from the GEF, Green Climate Fund, and the Middle East Green Initiative.

### Efficiency:

27. The review concluded that there is room for improvement to enhance the timeliness of Working Group deliverables.

28. Recommendations:

- The Working Group should publish reports earlier to inform Working Group meetings and Members' decision-making.

**Effectiveness:**

29. The report concluded that all Working Group objectives are still highly valid and worth prioritizing. Working Group members have to join forces and work together. Hence, resource mobilization, finding synergies for technical cooperation, and engaging more donors and partners are the top priorities.

30. Recommendations:

- The Working Group should identify opportunities for collaboration and scaling-up of sustainable management and restoration practices within COFO and with other FAO Technical Committees and relevant other partners to apply a programmatic approach and integrated programmes.
- Other priorities for the Working Group should be as follows:
  - a) sharing knowledge and lessons learned;
  - b) providing advice in support of the implementation of the SDGs in dryland forests and agrosilvopastoral systems;
  - c) assessing and following the status of dryland forests and agrosilvopastoral systems;
  - d) identifying tools and approaches appropriate for dryland forests and agrosilvopastoral systems.