

# NESTED COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE





Co-learning and sharing lessons learned to scale farmer centered restoration options in East Africa and the Sahel

















This brief describes implementation work under the ICRAF led project "Restoration of degraded land for food security and poverty reduction in East Africa and the Sahel: taking successes in land restoration to scale".

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#### **Nested Communities of Practice**

Co-learning and sharing lessons learned to scale farmer centered restoration options in East Africa and the Sahel.

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#### Please see our other project material



www.worldagroforestry.org/project/ restoration-degraded-land-foodsecurity-and-poverty-reductioneast-africa-and-sahel-taking

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**Photography:** © Kelvin Trautman

Cover photo: Caroline Mbuvi guides farmers on tree planting during farmer CoP in Muunguu village, Mwingi East, Kitui County.

**Right photo:** Francisca Mutuadiscusses with members of Tukilianie women's group in Yukulie village, Yatta, Machakos County.

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### **SCALING LAND RESTORATION**

Addressing land degradation is key to achieving food and nutrition security and requires active and deliberate engagement of multiple stakeholders (including farmers, NGOs, government, and researchers. In order to reach the land restoration targets set by National Governments and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), successful restoration efforts need to reach larger numbers of farmers and extend over larger areas than has previously been achieved.

A key constraint to scaling restoration is that the ecological, economic, social, political and institutional context varies from household to household, as well as from village to village and that no one technology will suit all. This means active continual learning and communication between farmers, local community leaders, NGO partners, government, researchers and development partners is critical to ensure context relevant solutions are implemented to meet food and nutrition needs as well as restoration targets.



### The overarching goal of the ICRAF-led project

The goal of the project, "Restoration of degraded land for food security and poverty reduction in East Africa and the Sahel: taking successes in land restoration to scale in Niger, Mali, Kenya and Ethiopia", was to reduce food insecurity and improve the livelihoods of poor people living in African drylands by restoring degraded land, and returning it to effective and sustainable tree, crop and livestock production, thereby increasing land profitability and landscape and livelihood resilience.



This brief describes the implementation of nested Communities of Practice (CoPs) with key stakeholders (farmers, community facilitators, NGOs, government and researchers) to foster co-learning and sharing with evidence and insight drawn from work in Mali, Ethiopia, Kenya and Niger to scale land restoration across the drylands in Africa.



### THE RESEARCH IN DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

A key innovation within the project was the application of the research in development (R in D) approach which aims to address key questions and challenges that inhibit the scaling of land restoration options across the drylands. Key to the success of the R in D approach is the continuous communication amongst key stakeholders

(development partners, government, farmers, and researchers).

The R in D approach represents a key change in the way development initiatives are implemented, giving a larger role to farmers in selecting and adapting options for scaling and evaluating their performance.



Figure 1: What needs to be in place to implement the research in development approach

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### WHAT IS A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE (CoP)

A Community of Practice (CoP) is a group of people with similar **interests**, **goals and context** who are committed to engage in continuous exchange and co-learning around a particular topic.

To scale context-specific restoration options and to increase the inclusion of evidence into decision making, lessons learned were shared within and between stakeholder groups.

### The project utilized CoPs with the following objectives:

- Visioning and goal setting with project stakeholders;
- Identifying challenges and opportunities for restoration at the farm, implementation and policy levels;
- Prioritization and implementation of restoration interventions;
- Sharing of results and lessons learned from the monitoring of restoration options;
- Gathering of perceptions of what is working where and for whom; and sharing information gathered from the other CoPs.



A farmer demonstrating how to measure a planting basin in one of the farmer CoPs

### What is unique about the Community of Practice Approach



Adaptive and responsive to information needs, seasonal changes and context specific opportunities.



Brings evidence in appropriate formats to target stakeholders.



Nested CoP means that information is shared both within and between stakeholder groups. They are strategically organised with continual follow up to ensure the key outcomes and learnings are incorporated into programmatic planning.



There is continual relationship building, knowledge exchange and learning between 'events' and workshops, and tools such as WhatsApp and community village gatherings are used opportunistically.



Researchers and NGOs are continually linked to reflect, respond to requests and adapt workplans and interventions based on timely community facilitator and farmer feedback on what is working and not working on-theground.



Wider impact is created to inform and document this new modality of a 'research in development' approach.

Unlike conventional workshop approaches that are top-down and where meetings and trainings are done in hotels using projectors, and whose content is difficult for majority of farmers to understand as this only favours the literate ones; CoPs are normally done within the villages! farm context and involves free interactions and demonstrations amongst the farmers. This provides a safe and conducive environment for co-learning

- Farmer from Nyanyaa Village, Waita (June. 2019 farmer CoP).

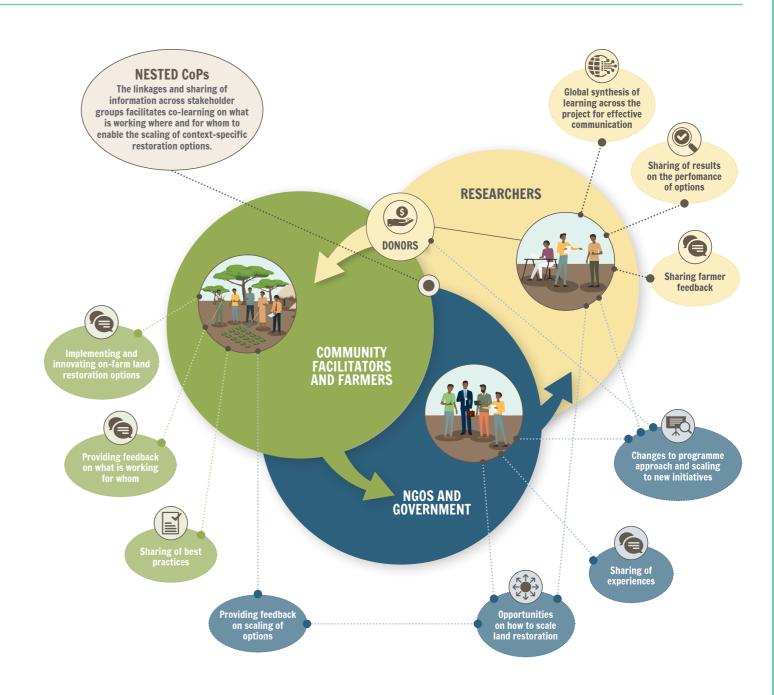


Figure 2: Nested communities of practice, facilitating co-learning across multiple stakeholders

Functioning CoPs across nested stakeholders: farmers, community facilitators, NGOs/government, and researchers are key to scale successful land restoration options.

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### FORMATS OF THE COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Communities of practice were implemented at four key scales within the project

In East Africa and Sahel with partners across the four countries.

Community level with the community facilitators

Farmer level

3

International and national research level

District level to bring together local government and NGOs Key elements of the CoP events include:

- Clearly outlined objectives.
- Structured facilitation.
- Ocumentation of the learning.
- Regular communication.
- Personnel within the project or community responsible for effective sharing and ensuring sustainability of the communities established.
- Analysis from the research and NGO teams following each workshop to document and share lessons learned to enable scaling of options.

Benedict of Jishinde ushinde tree nursery, Kaluluini, Yatta, shares on what is needed to promote tree planting among farmers.

co-learning workshop with farmers on tree planting



Community CoP in Niger



### **Farmer CoP workshops**

Co-learning workshops with farmers were conducted outside, in open areas usually in volunteer farmers' homestead, sub-chief office grounds, or other neutral areas.

Specific objectives varied for each farmer CoP workshops, but in general included:

- 1 Understand farmers' perceptions of the performance of the various land restoration options.
- 2 Identify farmers' motivation and livelihood expectations in implementing the land restoration options using the planned comparison approach.
- Share with farmers, key results from the data collection efforts and elicit farmers' feedback and further interpretation of the data.
- Discuss lessons learned from the implementation of the options and required modifications and farmer innovation.
- Engage farmers in the research approach and discuss scaling strategies for sustainability of interventions beyond

the project timelines.

Share feedback from the CF, and NGO/government CoPs.



- Get feedback from the community facilitators on the performance of restoration options being tested within the project such as tree planting and planting basins, including challenges and opportunities.
- 2 Understand if the restoration options are meeting the expectations of improving farmers' livelihoods and share feedback from the farmer CoPs.
- 3 Identify gaps and challenges that need to be addressed for successful implementation, sustainability and scaling of the restoration options.
- 4 Understand how farmers are communicating the restoration options they are testing on their farm with the community facilitators and other community members.
- 5 Share and discuss data and build capacity around data collection, analysis and reporting writing.
- 6 Improve communication among the team members as well as team building within the project.

### Nested Communities of Practice with NGOs, Government and Researchers



### NGO / Government CoP

1 Facilitate co-learning around the research in development approach and the implementation of planned comparisons in the project.

2 Share feedback from the farmers' CoP.

3 Elicit feedback on the performance restoration options and opportunities to scale these within other programs

Develop a road map and principles for working across disciplines and stakeholders groups to achieve impact on the ground.

5 To facilitate open dialogue across the partners to encourage knowledge sharing and co-learing.

Leigh Winowiecki sharing on the project during an NGOs/ Government CoP



Collate learning across the project team to develop key communication outputs.

2 Share results on the performance of the restoration options, implemented using the planned comparison approach.

Discuss the feedback from the other CoPs (farmer, community facilitators, NGOs, government) to understand their perspectives and identify barriers to scaling land restoration.

Develop timeline and action plan for key steps, including feedback to project stakeholders and adjustments to the workplan as needed.

To present project results and the application of the Research in Development approach at global events including the UNCCD COP14 and Global Landscapes Forum (GLF).



Tabitha from ADRA sharing feedback on the PC results at an NGOs/Government CoP

Testing and learning what works through the planned comparison approach has been key to changing the mindsets of farmers towards tree planting. They have seen that it is not hard to plant and manage trees which has in turn increased their willingness to engage in these activities.

Furthermore, the sharing of these results with the various stakeholders in the Counties increases the scaling of such options. For example, the farmers have also seen that they don't have to wait a very long time to enjoy the benefits from the trees. I am already enjoying the shade from some of the trees I planted in 2016 and others are getting fruits from their mango trees. 99

Veronica Kilonzo, Assistant chief, Kathongo location Makueni County

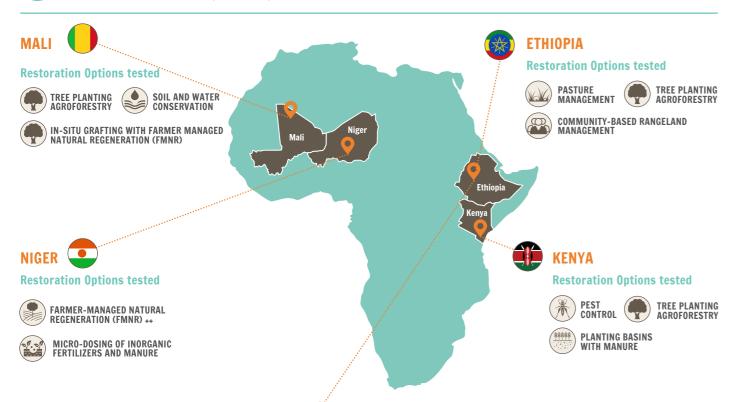


Vincet Bado of ICRISAT sharing the results of the PCs in Niger

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## KEY REFLECTION AND LEARNING FROM THE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICES (CoPs) FROM THE FOUR PROJECT COUNTRIES



### CoPs in communal grazing areas in Ethiopia and Kenya

In the case of communal grazing lands, the approach to building local communities of practice (CoPs) focused on land restoration conducting action research directly with local institutions in the highlands of Ethiopia. These institutions comprised of exclosure user groups and other government-formed associations responsible for managing and using communal grazing lands.

Different key rangeland management institutions that were important to integrate into the CoPs included group ranches, traditional or customary decision-making bodies, conservancies, natural resource management committees, and water resource users associations. The central benefits of working directly with these local institutions were:

- 1 It enables working 'within' their system rather than prescribing solutions from afar, ensuring the relevance of the research locally;
- Discussions on management opportunities and realistic constraints can embolden communities to dream larger; and most importantly;
- These institutions are those who would undertake the ultimate action required for restoration.

CoPs at local and regional levels have furthermore shown strong interest in grazing land restoration, as it stands to provide elusive 'win-win' environment-livelihoods solutions, making the results practical and directly useful for both community institutions to apply, and for policy-makers and government implementing agencies to promote over large scales.





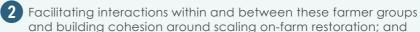
# Communities of Practice in Kenya and Niger - case studies of Impact



### Niger

The CoP positively influenced the activities of the project in Niger by:





3 Facilitating communication within the project team including with key partner stakeholders.

Participatory approaches with patient interactions and consistent communication with farmers are essential for the enthusiastic involvement of farmers and for the scaling of land restoration technologies. In fact, many partners, as well as on-going and future investments in land restoration, will benefit from these communities of practice created by the project.

 Dr Vincent Bado, Principal Scientist, Drylands System & Livelihood Diversification, ICARDA- Niger





### Kenya



In Kenya, this outreach has led the increased uptake of the restoration options across the three Counties, beyond the project intervention areas due to promotion and training of the options and uptake by County Governments and additional NGOs to scale the restoration practices.

66 Most importantly the CoPs demonstrated the importance of bringing together NGOs, County Governments and research organizations to: 1) share challenges and identify solutions for implementing projects together and 2) increase the reach to more farmers, including across a wider geographical area to scale agricultural land restoration technologies.

The CoPs have also been very important in clearly explaining the various aspects of the project to a wide range of audience. This included the planned comparison approach and associated results including implementing the research testing on farms and farmers feedback. The sharing of the data using a data wall in strategic CoP engagements with County Government also helped to clearly show the successful adoption of the planting basins and tree planting options in Kenya and the importance of monitoring tree survival, as tree planting by itself is not enough to restore agricultural land. 99

– David Kitheka, Project manager ADRA Kenya.

### The Impact of the Community of Practice method



### At farm level - building relationships and co-learning with farmers

Encouragement of the farmers to modify the restoration options to suit their context and sharing these

1 Modifications of the land restoration options were discovered early on and suggested changes from the farmers were implemented within the next season.

#### High levels of farmer involvement

- Farmers were involved in decision making, for example, on the tree species they preferred and the restoration options to test, cultivating a sense of ownership of the project and its activities.
- Encouraged scaling to more farmers and across more communities, including the organic development of some farmers to be trainer of trainees (TOTs).

#### Sustainable co-learning beyond the project

- Facilitating farmer CoP groups formed by the farmers has increased ownership of the project and encouraged co-learning and knowledge sharing among the farmers.
- 2 Establishing CoPs at the onset of the project cultivated inclusion and trust. Farmers saw their voices being heard, and actions being taken, which encouraged continual sharing and learning throughout the project.

1) CoPs were deliberately designed to encourage inclusivity, including the participation of men, women and youth, which lead to gender-responsive interventions.





- 1 Demonstrating the utility of research in development, for example the investment in deliberative testing of farmer-centered restoration options to accelerate impact on-the-ground.
- 2 Strengthen capacity of partners to plan, conduct, monitor and interpret information to scale restoration.
- 3 Strategizing on ways to accelerate implementation of land restoration activities through delivery of knowledge and practical skills.
- 4 Demonstrating the value of engaging all stakeholders in scaling restoration.
- 5 Linking farmers to development partners who are in a position to scale interventions once the project comes to an end.

Esther Kiura of ICRAF guiding enumerators in Kalawa Makueni County on using Open Data Kit (ODK) to monitor the performance of planting basins



### At community level

Creating a co-learning and support network of community facilitators in the field to collectively problem solve.

Timely sharing of information and results by community facilitators with farmers increased farmer engagement. Capacity development of the community facilitators in data collection, analysis and interpretation improved their communication of results with stakeholders and also the quality of the monitoring of restoration options. Encouraged regular interaction among and between the CFs and the farmers contributing to the increased scaling of restoration options.



### **Across the researchers**

- Sharing of results and evidence on the performance of the restoration options, hence understanding local context.
- Modification of project activities based on feedback.
- Co-learning on methods and processes for generating and disseminating results and evidence on the performance of the restoration options.
- Timely sharing of data and results from monitoring of the planned comparisons and restoration options to close the learning loop.
- Training of government and NGOs on monitoring and implementation of planned comparison approach to development.
- Sharing of results at international fora on accelerating impact on the ground using the research in development approach and CoPs.

Members of the Muunguu farmer CoP at a colearning workshop in Waita, Kitui County, Kenya





















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