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How to revive social and economic interest in agroforestry parklands in West Africa?

Parklands represent the archetypical agricultural landscape in the Sudano-Sahelian region of Africa. Some trees growing in cultivated and grazed areas are selected and spared during land clearing (crop/fallow rotations) and then utilized for the multiple services they provide. Under suitable demographic thresholds, different types of parklands had been set up in accordance with the prevailing agroecological and socioeconomic contexts. Most of these parklands are now degrading. The causes are complex, multifactorial and contextual. Fallow land is gradually disappearing due to population growth, land pressure and the expansion of crop farming. The increase in tree harvesting and agricultural mechanization impedes tree cover regeneration. Finally, traditional land governance systems that underpinned the management of these parklands have been eroded by socioeconomic changes.



▲ *Faidherbia albida* parkland in an area inhabited by Serer communities, Senegal. © C. Clermont-Dauphin

It would be pointless to try to reverse this trend solely through local technical innovations. A system-based multiscale approach seems necessary to foster the renewal of parklands by promoting the services provided by trees within an agroecological intensification framework^(1,2). Participatory approaches geared towards designing viable pathways for change while taking current socioeconomic priorities into account

should—in a single negotiation process—pool all stakeholders, including those with sometimes antagonistic (farmers and herders) or often overlooked (women and youth) interests, as well as agricultural and forestry technical services and representatives of customary and administrative authorities. **Some promising avenues include the joint design of projects to support the development of value chains**

for tree products in which women are key actors, consultation on new rules for the governance of these areas, and the promotion of approaches that combine technical innovations and local know-how to foster appropriation and dissemination. Assisted natural regeneration approaches have thus now been successfully adopted in several West African countries.



▲ *Women, children and deforestation. Niger.* © H.A. Issoufou

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For further information

(1) Seghieri J., Brouwers J., Bidou J.E., Ingram V., Droy I., Bastide B., Sanogo D., 2020. Research and development challenges in scaling innovation: a case study of the LEAP-Agri RAMSES II project. *Agroforestry Systems*. doi: 10.1007/s10457-020-00532-3

(2) Smith M.S., Mbow C., 2014. Editorial overview: sustainability challenges. *Agroforestry from the past into the future. Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 6:134-137. doi: 10.1016/j.cosust.2013.11.017