

Report of the 18th Community of Practice Meeting — West Africa Mandé hotel, Bamako March 4 to 8, 2024



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Contents

I. **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

II. 4

III. 5

IV. 24

V. 26

VI. 27

APPENDIX 1: MEETING AGENDA	26
APPENDIX 2: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS	27
APPENDIX 3: SUMMARY OF PROJECT STORIES	28
APPENDIX 4: PHOTO DOCUMENTATION OF THE MEETING	30
APPENDIX 5: GRAPHS OF MEETING EVALUATION RESULTS	30

List of tables

Table 1: Project strengths and weaknesses	8
Table 2: Project scaling experiences	12
Table 3: Summary of student seminar discussions	17
Table 4: Summary of participants' feedback	21

Photo list

Photo 1: The facilitator in action	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Photo 2: Introductory session, participants grouped by age group	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Photo 3: Poster session/ Written observations on a poster	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Photo 4: CRFS common house	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Photo 5: Steve Vanek's presentation at the Landscape and Territory session	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Photo 6: Group work at the landscape and territory session	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Photo 8: Display of group work results on the wall	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Photo 9: Panel on the role of women in AET and FST	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Photo 10: Panelists at the FRN session	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Photo 11: Feedback from the Malian government representative	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Acronyms and abbreviations

CIMMYT :	Centro Internacional de Mejoramiento de Maíz Y Trigo
CMDT :	Malian Textile Development Company
CoP:	Community of Practice
CRFS :	Global Collaboration for Resilient Food Systems
FRN :	Farmers Research Network
NGO:	Non-Government Organization
AET :	Agroecological Transition
FST :	Food System Transformation

I. INTRODUCTION

The CRFS program operates in the field of agroecology in South America, West, East and Southern Africa. In West Africa, it works in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. Each year, the program's West Africa Community of Practice organizes an annual meeting at which participants and agroecology players share and learn from each other's diverse experiences. The 2024 annual meeting was held in Bamako from March 04 to 08, 2024 at the Hotel Mandé, and had both general and specific objectives.

Overall objective: Accelerate the progress of West African CoP initiatives towards agroecological transition to catalyze the transformation of food systems as part of the CRFS strategy.

Specific objectives :

1. Explore the biophysical, social and human dimensions of landscape transformation and territorial management from a climate risk management perspective.
2. Become familiar with the 3 levels of scaling (scaling up, scaling out and scaling deep) and explore their applicability through project implementation.
3. Reassess synergies and (strategic) connections with other system players (donors, networks and allies) in the drive to transform food systems.
4. Perpetuate the reinforcement of the equity issue through our work and actions.
5. Improve students' scientific communication skills and competencies.

This report describes the workshop and is structured into 4 main sections: (i) a general introduction; (ii) the workshop proceedings; (iii) lessons learned and prospects; and (iv) overall assessment.

II. METHODOLOGY

The workshop brought together over 80 participants from research centers, NGOs and farmers' organizations partnering the CRFS program, ministries of agriculture (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger), agroecology alliances and networks, research institutions and international NGOs actively working on agroecology.

Facilitation was provided by a lead facilitator and 3 co-facilitators, using active and innovative methods based on the inclusion and contribution of participants through silent activities (individual), in pairs, in groups, followed by sharing and exchanges in plenary. These plenary exchanges were analyzed and synthesized by the various facilitators. In addition, note-takers and the rapporteur of the group work sessions regularly summarized the results of the various exchanges.

The facilitation team prepared the various sessions in advance, as well as the materials needed to run them. Regular debriefing sessions were organized at the end of each day, enabling the meeting planning team to take stock, day after day, of what had worked well and what had not, as well as strategies for improvement. The workshop took place over 5 days, the key moments of which are briefly described below.



Photo 1 : The facilitator in action

III. ACTIVITY SCHEDULE

The workshop took place over 5 days, according to the schedule in Appendix I.

The first day's activities focused on the following points:

➤ Introductory session/ kick-off to the meeting

The introductory session took place in the courtyard of the Hotel Mandé, bringing all participants together for a fun and energizing group activity, led by the McKnight Foundation's regional representative in West Africa. Initially arranged in circles, participants were eventually grouped by age with a 10-year age gap. Each group then brainstormed and shared their ideas on the contributions they could make to the others to foster a successful agroecological transition in the West African region.



Photo 2: Introductory session, grouping participants by age group

It is clear that different age groups make distinct but complementary contributions to the success of agroecology. Younger participants emphasized their ability to bring energy and their mastery of information and communication technologies (ICT) to bear on CRFS objectives. On the other hand, participants aged 60 and over highlighted their wisdom and maturity as valuable contributions. This relaxed introductory session was highlighted as a significant departure from traditional presentation approaches, where everyone often seeks to demonstrate the value of their qualifications. This observation highlights the added value of the inclusive approach at the heart of

the McKnight Foundation's principles of action, centered on human connection and shared commitment to shared goals.

➤ **Regional update and meeting objectives**

The second activity of the first day was an update on the political and social context in West Africa, presented by the McKnight Foundation's West Africa regional team. This context is marked by a series of challenges, notably on the climatic, demographic and security fronts, with violence and population displacements impacting education, health and research, and hampering population mobility. These challenges have also had an impact on food security in many localities, underlining the need for greater resilience among populations.

This regional update also presented the CRFS objectives and principles such as inclusion, authentic collaboration, contextualization, Agroecological Intensification, among others). In addition, it highlighted the missions of the McKnight Foundation, the CRFS portfolio in West Africa and the highlights of 2023. It emerged from these presentations that the West Africa CoP currently has 21 projects, some of which are in both Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali¹ or in just 2 countries². This portfolio is characterized by a diversity of lead institutions such as NGOs, producer organizations and research institutions, as well as by the diversity of themes addressed. Of the 21 projects, only 3 are led by women.

According to the regional team, the West Africa CoP has a number of strengths, including the diversity and complementarity of players and projects, the active participation of partner farmers and project leaders, the adoption of the FRN (Farmers Research Network) approach as a working method, and the concentration of research on agroecology, among others. However, improvements are needed in a number of areas, including the inclusion of the circular economy, better integration of climate solutions, the use of monitoring and evaluation tools for the agroecological transition (AET), political influence, and equity and governance.

Among the highlights of 2023, the CRFS program was represented at several regional and international meetings, including:

- World Sorghum Conference in Montpellier,
- at the Vermont University meeting,
- international conference on millet in Burkina Faso.

The session ended with a presentation of the meeting's agenda and objectives by the meeting's main facilitator.

➤ **Interactive poster session**

Project presentations this year took the form of a poster session. The aim was to give teams the opportunity to present their activities, objectives and highlights of the past year on posters.

¹ Networking4Seed ; Sahel-IPM (former GIMEN) ; Grain processing.

² FaReNe ; Farmer Knowledge ; CowpeaSquare ; Child nutrition.

The principle of the exercise was to form sub-groups of 7 to 8 people to visit each poster; record observations on post-it notes and stick them next to the poster; move on to the next poster at the facilitator's signal, every 5 minutes until all the posters had been visited by all the groups.

Three batches of 7 posters were made for the purposes of the exercise, i.e. three sequences to cover all 21 posters. Two observers were appointed to report on each sequence. The points to be observed on the posters concerned the points they had in common, the challenges or limitations of the posters, etc.

Discussions in the poster session focused on the value of *scaling* aspects for project teams; equity; collaboration between farmers and researchers; motivating producers to adopt innovations; improving accessibility to innovations; facilitating scaling-up; the link between local actions and national policies; and project sustainability.



Photo 3: Poster session / Written observation on a poster

It emerged from these discussions that *scaling* aspects are already implicitly integrated into projects and posters; *scaling* can be enhanced by digitizing images. Accessibility to water, which is a major challenge in agroecology, is little taken into account in the projects. With regard to equity, it is requested that it be dealt with in the context of activities promoting the empowerment of women and young people. Soil protection is not taken into account in many posters. Every project should have a social dimension that will work on sustainability or have a scheme to perpetuate the project's achievements.

Scaling up can be supported by a number of strategies and approaches, including :

- synergies, such as joint open days;
- FRNs (who are in contact with producers) can act as intermediaries;
- promoting agroecological products;
- the creation of an economic model, because the market drives production;
- have a project dedicated to influence, or have an "influence" component in each project;
- have scientific evidence to share with producers and politicians,
- the involvement of farm advisory services, among others.

It was recommended that the posters be presented in a harmonized format to facilitate discussion and understanding.

The following strengths and limitations emerged from the poster session, summarized in the table below.

Table 1 : Project strengths and weaknesses

Highlights	Weak points
Use of local expertise	Synergies are not concrete
Innovations based on local resources (more available and easily acceptable)	Extension tools often unsuited to target audiences
Holistic approach (integrating several aspects of development)	Overloaded posters
Grassroots involvement	Failure to take consumer needs into account
Producers at the center of activities	Markets don't stand out on posters
Gender aspect considered, with specific activities for women and young people on certain posters.	Technology adoption rates do not stand out
Clearly identified research problem	Gender and equity
Research with and by producers	Monitoring and assessment
Representation forms used (arrows)	Low involvement of local politicians in project activities
Product recycling	The food environment does not stand out in the posters
Lessons learned taken into account on some posters.	
Attractive poster, arousing readers' curiosity	

✓ Group activities on synergies

This activity was conducted in duplex with McKnight's Minneapolis-based staff.

The activity consisted in working in groups (around the same table) to build a house (our CoP house). Each group should reflect and give feedback on the following points:

- the foundations of the house or what brings us together ;
- how we work together or how we collaborate (the body of the house);
- and achievements and perspectives (representing the roof of the house).

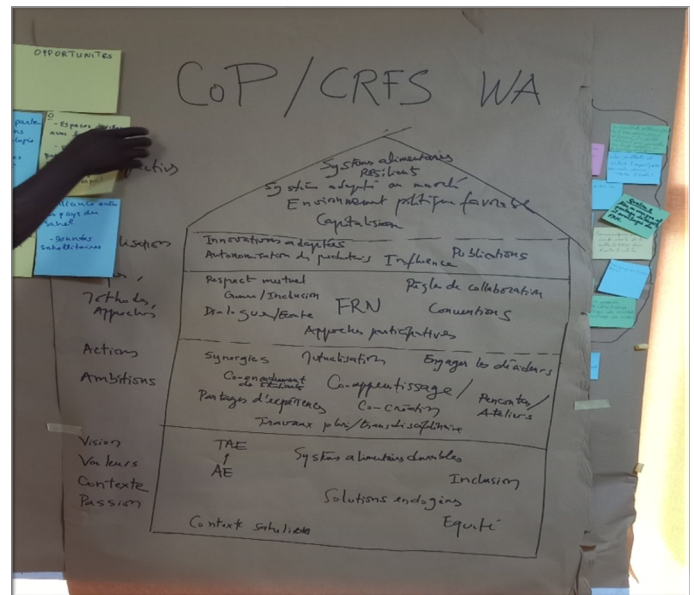


Photo 4: CRFS common house

After each group had finished its work, it was agreed to create a common house using elements from the 7 houses created by the different groups (photo 5).

The second day's sessions can be summarized as follows:

✓ Importance of local-global links

The session was moderated by Dr. Jane Maland Cady and Dr. Paul Rogé of the McKnight Foundation. The presentation highlighted that food systems contribute to one third of greenhouse gas emissions, and that small-scale farmers play a crucial role in maintaining climate, biodiversity and resilience strategies, through their farming, livestock raising, processing, etc. activities. Thus, it is imperative to adopt an integrated approach (one health) that takes into account the interdependence of human, animal and environmental health.

Following the presentation, discussions focused on: the possibility of having direct exchanges with organizations to benefit from more funding, the possibility of co-financing between the CRFS program and other partners to pool their efforts to finance agroecology.

✓ Communication with external guests

This session was devoted to the communication of external guests, offering them the opportunity to present their organizations and discuss their activities in the field of agroecology, with a view to exploring possible synergies with the CRFS program.

The external guests were divided into 4 groups:

- Government representatives from the ministries of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger;
- Agroecology alliances and networks, represented by 3AO, AFRICAN, RESAPAC and the World Agroecology Fund;
- Research represented by ISRA, CRDI and CIMMYT
- International NGOs represented by Îles de paix, Sassakawa Africa Association, WHH and Groundswell International.

- **Communication from representatives of the governments of the three countries (Mali, Burkina, Niger)**

Presentations by government representatives from the three countries revealed that only Burkina Faso has a national agroecology strategy, a validated action plan and a steering committee for the strategy. In Mali, a steering committee has been set up to draw up the national AE strategy, but AE does not benefit from substantial financial support. AE activities are mainly the initiative of certain civil society players (producer groups, movements, training centers, etc.). In Niger, the AE charter is currently being drawn up.

At the end of the 3 presentations, discussions focused on the following points:

- Identification of research priorities by countries ;
- exploring synergies between projects evolving in the field of AE at national level;
- monitoring AE practices in the PDSEC ;
- the mechanism for managing pollutants from chemical pesticides ;
- the translation of Burkina Faso's EI strategy documents into local languages;
- funding for the national AE strategy steering committee;
- updating the creation of the Niger AE steering committee;
- the main actions carried out in favor of AE in Niger and the results obtained, among others.

- **Communication on agroecology from representatives of alliances and networks**

The Alliance pour l'Agroécologie en Afrique de l'Ouest (3AO) is a cross-sectoral cooperation mechanism, bringing together 75 member organizations, with the vision of strengthening synergies of action to create a strong impact in the adoption of AE in the region. RESAPAC is a network of producers, processors and consumers of organic produce in Mali, who organize 5 weekly organic markets in Bamako. As for Africa Catalyzing Action for Nutrition (AfriCAN), whose vision is to harness Africa's untapped and under-utilized resources to sustainably improve nutrition on the continent. The Global Fund for EI is a consortium of technical and financial partners dedicated to financing AE worldwide.

Discussions on the presentation of the networks focused on the following points:

- the training approach used to produce organic products;
- 3AO member organizations in the 3 ESA countries;
- 3AO's financing sources and mechanisms ;
- the extension of RESAPAC in the sub-region;
- the existence of links between EI and nutrition;
- the existence of a certification system for organic products;
- incorporating local knowledge into nutrition ;
- opportunities for networks to collaborate with research ;
- conditions of access to funding from the global fund for EA ;
- the objectives of the global fund for EA.

- **Communication from representatives of research institutions**

CIMMYT is an international sorghum, millet and groundnut research organization operating in 7 countries, including 5 in West Africa and 2 in Central Africa. The Institut Senegalais de Recherche Agricole (ISRA), through its regional agronomic research centers, carries out research activities in the field of AE, notably through the use of biofertilizers and the development of varieties resistant to certain constraints such as pests, strigua, low productivity, etc. As for the Canadian International Development Research Center (IDRC), it works in the fields of health, education, sorghum, millet and groundnut, democratic and inclusive governance, sustainable and inclusive economy and climate-resilient food systems.

Discussions on the presentation of research institutions focused on the following points:

- CIMMYT's research activities on irrigation systems;
- IDRC funding for master's and doctoral students;
- The role of local knowledge in the fight against striga ;
- Planning field trials with growers.

- **Communication from representatives of international NGOs**

Sasakawa Africa Association is a Japanese NGO working in Mali, Nigeria, Ethiopia and Uganda in the fields of regenerative agriculture, market-oriented agriculture and nutrition-sensitive agriculture. WHH is a German NGO working in 37 countries with 266 national organizations to combat hunger worldwide. Groundswell is an international NGO founded in 2009, working in West Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and Asia. It conducts research and development activities in the field of AE, notably on assisted natural regeneration, soil and water conservation, organic manure production, etc.

Key points from the discussions on the international NGO presentations:

- **Reconciling agroecology and business:** It is noted that the market and financial gain can serve as motivations for engaging in agroecology, underlining the importance of striking a balance between agroecological principles and economic imperatives.
- **The relay farmer:** It is suggested that direct beneficiaries can play the role of relay farmers on a voluntary basis, which could contribute to better dissemination of agroecological practices.
- **Integrating innovations into storage activities:** Discussions highlighted the importance of integrating technological innovations into agricultural storage activities to improve efficiency and sustainability.
- **Synergy between organizations in favor of agroecology:** It was noted that there are opportunities for cooperation between different organizations to promote agroecology and transform food systems.
- **Co-financing models for agroecology:** The idea of exploring collaborative financing models to support agroecology was raised, underlining the need to diversify funding sources.
- **Strengthening national strategies with the help of CRFS experts:** It is mentioned that strengthening national agroecology strategies is essential, and CRFS experts are identified as potential resources to support this process.

✓ Session on scaling up, out and deep

The aim of this session was to enable project teams and participants in general to gain a common understanding of the concept of scaling, and to see what teams are doing as scaling activities in their projects.

This session was introduced by a brief presentation by Mary Richardsdson. The presentation showed that :

- Horizontal **scaling out** aims to reach a larger number of people, territories, etc. Examples include open days and cascade training.
- **Scaling up** aims to affect national policies, rules, texts, etc., for example by integrating EI into national policies, training programs, etc.
- **Scaling deep** aims to change habits, attitudes, behaviors, individual perceptions and so on. For example, we can make producers aware that there are other ways of fertilizing soils than chemical fertilizers.

The presentation was followed by group work, the principle of which was to brainstorm and share, in pairs and then in groups of four and by country, the scaling-up experiences used in the projects.

The results of the group work have been reported by country, and the scaling-up activities carried out in the projects focus on the following aspects:

Table 2 : Project scaling experiences

Scaling up	Scaling deep	Scaling out
<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Involving local authorities in research and development activities○ Integration of AE practices into the communes' PDSEC	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Training on new practices and processes○ Raising awareness of AE practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Training players○ Test large-N○ Open days○ Setting up demonstration plots○ Creation of sales outlets for new variety seeds

The following points were discussed by participants.

- Make representations to the government, which will take the necessary decisions;
- Identify all stakeholders and involve them in the process from the outset, so that everyone is aware of the role they will have to play;
- It's difficult to keep track of the 3 concepts (scaling up, out and deep) over time because they overlap.

✓ Session on landscapes and territories

The aim of this session was to enable participants to differentiate between the concepts of **landscape** and **territory**, and to understand the relevance of these concepts to project activities. The session was introduced by a brief presentation from Steven Vanek. According to him, a **landscape** is context-specific, characterized by the social aspects of the community and its people, complex, observed in a defined territory. It goes beyond the farm level. As for the **territory**, it designates an administrative space with limits resulting from government action, for example administrative divisions (region, department, commune etc.).



Photo 5: Steve Vanek during the Landscape and Territory session

The presentation was followed by group work on the following questions:

- What are your plans or synergies in terms of landscape work?
- What do you need to do to do it better or more if you see it as important?



Photo 6: Group work at the Landscape and Territory session

The following key points emerged from the participants' feedback:

- Participatory mapping of village resources and infrastructures;
- Conducting trials on a regional scale ;
- Conducting soil fertility surveys at village level ;
- Spatio-temporal evolution maps of natural resources;
- Optimizing soil use according to crop species;
- Implementation of actions to defend and restore soil fertility ;
- Analysis of space and resource typologies, etc.

Day 3's program focused on the following elements:

✓ **Project story session**

This session follows preparatory work carried out by the Soils cross-cutting project, the University of Vermont's Institute for Agroecology, RMS, the Coordination of Research Networks with and by Producers (FRN), through a series of webinars involving CRFS projects. This preparatory work was coordinated and supervised by the regional team. During this session, each project team was invited to prepare a 5-minute story, illustrating a specific success story or learning experience related to aspects of scaling up, agroecological transition and food systems transformation, and presented using their preferred medium (visual, audiovisual, oral, vignette, etc.).

The projects were divided into 4 groups of 5 for the presentation of the "stories" in the following order (photo 6).

The first group included the following projects: Women's field, FRN AMSP, Savoirs paysan and AE Burkina (see summary of stories in Appendix 3).

The stories from this first group of projects highlighted several key aspects, including soil fertility, agroecology, scaling up to different levels, and genuine collaboration with producers. In essence, the following points were made during the discussion that followed the presentation of the first stories:

- Accompanying measures put in place to enable producers to make effective use of soil fertility maps;
- The role and contribution of producers in drawing up fertility maps ;
- The existence of requests from producers or organizations to draw up soil fertility maps, in particular the collaboration with CMDT, which has signed a contract with the Savoir Paysan project for the use of these maps in its intervention zones;
- The possibility of reproducing the digitization carried out in Niger and scaling it up in Mali and Burkina Faso;
- The optimum carbon level for soil fertility ;
- Sources of FI seeds for community seed multiplication by growers.

The second group included the following projects: FaReNe, Processing, Child Nutrition, AGrOW and Recycling. Several elements emerge from the different stories told by the projects in the second group; notably the landscape and territory aspect, the resilience of the displaced populations of the 3 borders zone, the vulnerability of the populations and the environment, as well as the challenges linked to the scaling-up of certain innovations, and so on.

Questions and comments from participants focused on the following points:

- The possibility of replicating the recycling project in Mali, given the amount of plastic waste in Bamako;
- Beyond impact, the FARENE project will have to assess the adoption of the technologies scaled up;
- The capacity of urine alone to provide the various nutrients in the soil, bearing in mind that it mainly provides nitrogen;
- Possibility of doing an economic study on the OGA to turn it into a business;
- Different approaches to overcoming social barriers to the use of human urine, including the involvement of religious leaders and the use of scientific evidence..;

- How the displaced populations obtain the enriched flour produced by the Processing project;
- The valorization of voandzou and other legume seeds in incubation centers, given their nutritional value;
- The need to combine local knowledge and science to find solutions to community challenges;
- The importance of communication for effective influencing.

The third group comprised the following projects: Sahel IPM, Fonio, 3F, Pathways AEI and CATI GAO. Participants' questions and comments related to the following points:

- The existence of a Mungbean collection for synergies with other partners;
- There are disruptive innovations such as urine and human excreta used for soil fertilization;
- Managing the funds of the Chemins vers IAE women's association, etc.

The last project group was made of Networking 4 seeds, Dual purpose sorghum and cowpea, Cowpea Square and TAG. The accounts of these projects highlight the evolution of growers' attitudes, moving from a posture of beneficiaries to a strong commitment in the direction of breeding and varietal improvement.

✓ Session on solutions and climate

The session was introduced by David Stern, head of the WAF research methods support team. The central question was how climate can influence work in agroecology and vice versa, and what agroecology can contribute to climate. He emphasized the need to take climate variability into account in research results, as well as the availability of meteorological data.



Photo 7: Group work results displayed on the wall

Following his presentation, group work was carried out around the following question: how can we communicate our experiences and scientific evidence in AE to the scientific and political climate community?

The results of the group work show that various strategies and approaches can be used to share scientific results on AE with the climate science and policy community, including :

- Advocacy with policy and decision-makers, scientists and farmers
- Organize symposia and conferences to share scientific publications and communications;
- Prepare policy notes, videos, etc.
- Use media (TV, radio, digital platforms, etc.);
- Organize open days, etc.

The takeaway points from this session are :

- It doesn't take a lot of resources to present climate information in research work, and the RMS team can provide support in this direction;
- It is essential to explore how the work supported by the CRFS program can contribute to helping policies bring about/catalyze change;
- Share scientific evidence with the public and politicians to influence political decisions, who often lack scientific information;
- It is important to develop communication between scientists and politicians.

✓ **Session on the role of women in Agroecological Transition (AET) and Food System Transformation (FST)**

The session was introduced by the McKnight Foundation's regional representative for West Africa, Dr. Batamaka Somé together with Dr Lucie Panel-Hazelgrove. From the outset, he emphasized the nuance between key concepts such as equity and equality, how understanding these nuances can help top give everyone the resources they need to access opportunities, taking into account the specificities of vulnerable groups.



Photo 8: Panel on the role of women in AETAET and TSA

This was followed by a panel discussion involving junior and senior researchers, producers and development agents. This panel was strongly marked by discussions around women's participation in food and farming systems, and their role in the transition to agroecology. Women are identified as key players in the processing and conservation of agricultural products, in which they play a central role in the management of traditional knowledge, thus contributing to the conservation of biodiversity. However, they face obstacles such as limited market access due to intermediation.

The concept of equity, evoked in the context of social justice and inclusion, is seen as essential to enabling rural women to defend their rights and flourish. Agroecology is presented as a path towards gender equity, recognizing the obstacles women face in terms of access to agricultural resources despite their significant contribution to food production.

Within the WAf Community of Practice (CoP) and supported projects, the importance of including women is emphasized, highlighting their essential role and the need to give them an authentic voice. It is also noted that women are not a homogeneous group, and that understanding their diversity is crucial to informed choices about equity. Suggestions were made to address issues of land access bearing in mind the relevant sociocultural backgrounds. It also emerged from the presentation the need to carry out social audits to improve equity practices within CRFS projects in WAf, and to conduct research on women's empowerment and take into account the weight of domestic tasks

in the careers of women scientists. The presenters also highlighted the importance of intersectionality in considering gender equity.

The procedure for Day 4 is described below:

✓ Student session

Each year, the annual CoP meeting devotes a space to Masters and PhD students, with the aim of enriching their skills and abilities in scientific communication. For the 2024 edition, the winners were selected following their submission to a call for papers, for which a selection committee had been set up. Out of 17 candidates, 5 students received awards.

During the session, each of the 5 students had 8 minutes for their presentation, followed by 7 minutes for discussion. The table below summarizes the topics covered and the discussions that followed:

Table 3 : Summary of student seminar discussions

Theme	Summary of discussions
«Investigating the efficacy of neem seed biopesticides and sanitized human urine (OGA) for the management of major pests of cowpea» , presented by Master student Abdou Sani Souleymane.	Participants discussed a range of issues, including the efficacy of biopesticides versus chemical pesticides, the optimal timing of biopesticide use, neem growers' views on results, and the economic evaluation of neem-based biopesticides, among other topics. The results show that chemical pesticides are generally considered more effective, but it is stressed that it is crucial to take into account the concentration and frequency of treatments with biopesticides. Neem growers are satisfied with the efficacy of the product, largely thanks to the widespread availability of neem and the existence of community units dedicated to its production and marketing.
« Bio-efficacy of neem seed extracts against the fall armyworm in a farming environment » , presented by Yarifou Elhadji Moussa, Master's student.	Discussions covered several aspects, including the effect of neem on insects beneficial to plants, the classification of OGA as a biofertilizer or biopesticide, and the health implications of its use. It emerged that the use of OGA, considered as a biopesticide, can have a dual effect by fertilizing the soil while influencing crop yield.
«Evaluation of biomass flows in agro-forestry parks following an agroecological gradient in the Maradi region of Niger» , presented by Djibo Sabarah Abdoul Aziz, Master student.	Discussions looked at losses outside agroforestry parks and the methodology for establishing the agroecological gradient in a specific area. It was concluded that the study on the assessment of biomass flows in Maradi agroforestry parks could benefit from synergy with the AGROW project.
«Advantages of agro-ecological practices on the nutrient content (protein, iron, zinc) of sorghum in Burkina Faso: the case of sorghum-legume intercropping and biomase enrichment of legumes» presented by Nebie Sibiri PhD student	This theme highlights several important points: the nutrient composition of soils, the improvement in the food and nutritional situation of children thanks to crop associations, and the increase in the protein content of cereals through their association with legumes.
«Spatial optimization of the agricultural development of organic	Discussions covered a number of points, including the need to assess the metal content of waste, the

waste product deposits in the greater OUAGA » , presented by Derra Bibata, Master student.	desirability of producing biofertilizers in the context of increasing urbanization and waste management problems, and advice for peri-urban farmers on the use of waste products.
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At the close of the students' presentation, a panel of mentors was organized. The panelists were invited to briefly share their student journeys, the challenges they faced and to offer advice to the students. It emerged from the panel that the mentors had been through different journeys as students, and that the major challenges included, among others, choosing a research topic, finding a mentor, seeking funding and adapting to a cultural context different from their own. The mentors' advice focused mainly on the following points:

- Accept to work in all conditions, giving the best of yourself;
 - Have a clear goal and stay focused on it;
- Show perseverance, resilience and get involved in networking.

✓ **Session on research networks with and by farmers (FRN)**

The session was facilitated by Dr. Bettina Haussman of the CRFS regional team, who outlined the principles of the FRN before opening the panel of producers and researchers from the three countries (Burkina, Mali, Niger).

The use of the FRN is a capacity-building and empowerment tool for producers. It is a hub for densifying real synergies. The FRN is an effective approach to research work adapted to the Sahel's context of insecurity for AET, and enables the inclusion of rural women. It also enables technologies to be scaled up. The FRN (research networks by and with producers) creates favorable conditions for co-learning and the transformation of food systems. The assessment and adaptation of results are context-specific.



Photo 9: Panelists at the FRN session

The panel discussion on Farmer Research Networks (FRNs) highlighted several key points. From the growers' point of view, FRNs have enabled capacity-building of organization members, notably through the conduct of trials, participatory varietal selection and data collection. In addition, databases have been set up to track producers' socio-economic statistics, and outlets for the sale of seeds of improved varieties have been established. However, challenges remain, such as the lack of consideration shown by some partners and the need for more facilitators to cover all activities.

For researchers, FRNs offer crucial access to growers, particularly in difficult areas, making it easier to scale up technologies and monitor research and development activities.

In terms of their contribution to agroecology (AET) and the transformation of food systems (FST), FRNs can play a key role in highlighting local expertise and facilitating producers' understanding of technologies. Approaches such as open days, awareness-raising caravans and the integration of agroecological options into commune development plans could support other actions in favor of VT. In addition, contact with several institutions provides a means of exerting institutional and political influence to promote these practices.

✓ Session on participant feedback panels

A panel discussion was organized to get feedback from participants on the West Africa CoP. Participants were divided into two groups:

1. Producers, NGOs and researchers;
2. Governments, alliances and international NGOs

Table 4 summarizes the participants' feedback in terms of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and prospects.



Photo 10: Feedback from the Malian government representative

Table 4 : Summary of participants' feedback

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Perspectives
Establishment and regular holding on an annual basis of the West Africa CoP meeting, a space dedicated to mutual learning and exchange of experience on agroecology and other related topics.	Potential synergies between different countries not yet fully realized	Strategic partnership and financial alliance for AE	Creating a corps of agroecology researchers
In-depth knowledge of agroecology	Making nutrition a cross-functional project	Existence of scientific evidence to promote	Have a regional office for regional coordination
Diversity of projects and themes	Low mobility of researchers	The dynamics of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES)	
Producer research	Little recognition of prior learning	Satellite data availability	Capitalize on CoP's evidence for policymakers.
Mastering the main constraints	Tangible results of CRFS projects poorly reflected in national statistics	Contact with NGOs, researchers and other agroecological players	Mobilize other partners to finance AE
Strategic partnership alliances	No projects on political influence		Allocate larger amounts for EI implementation
Interaction research	Few proposals for ecological models to improve crop yields		Organize specific workshops between stakeholder groups
Technology availability	Limited geographical coverage, given West Africa's huge potential		Making nutrition a cross-functional project
Availability of pest management techniques	Little visibility on equity in project implementation		Media coverage to reach more people
The connection	Weak support for integrating students into professional life		Enhancing skills in local languages
Focus on capacity building	Lack of project brochures		Develop a project for post-harvest activities
Synergies between projects	Develop networking.		Document FRN co-creations and activities to inspire others
Capacity building	Integrating students into professional life		Have a brochure on the objectives of the meeting, the principles of the program, etc.

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Perspectives
CoP expansion			A theme for the annual meeting
Focus on young researchers			Set up a digital platform for sharing information.
Connecting with institutions			
Active participation of all participants			
The presence of politicians			
A place to connect and learn			

✓ Closing the meeting

The closing ceremony took place after feedback from the participants. It gave the regional team the opportunity to thank all participants for their attendance, the McKnight Foundation for its support despite the security situation, and the organizing committee for the success of the workshop. However, members of each project team were given the opportunity to meet with the McKnight Foundation regional team for 10 minutes on day 5 of the meeting, according to a running order defined the day before. This open space on the fifth day also enabled participants from different projects or structures to establish or strengthen relationships according to their areas of interest.

IV. LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The lessons learned from the event include several points:

1. Better preparation and communication of sessions, particularly those on synergies and landscapes and territories, is essential to overcome the difficulties encountered.
2. Time management proved to be a challenge due to the length of the sessions, suggesting the need to optimize time according to the specific content of each session.

At the end of the meeting, the following recommendations were made:

To the project teams :

- Take soil protection into account in project activities;
- Improving the way gender and equity are taken into account in projects;
- Improve project monitoring and evaluation ;
- Use a variety of approaches for scaling up technologies, including synergies of action, FRNs, the use of economic models, the use of scientific evidence, etc.
- Create synergies between CRFS projects;
- Involve local authorities more closely in project activities to accelerate scaling-up ;
- Promote the certification of organic products to facilitate their traceability and promotion;
- Advocate better representation of producers at the COP meeting.

To the regional team :

- Propose a poster presentation format to harmonize presentations and facilitate understanding.
- Develop communication between scientists and politicians to accelerate change in attitudes and behaviour;
- Media coverage of CoP meetings to raise the profile of the CRFS West Africa program;
- Document FRN co-creations and activities to inspire others;
- Set up a digital platform for sharing CRFS program information.

At the McKnight Foundation:

- Support the three countries (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger) in strengthening and/or building their national agroecology strategies;
- Explore models for co-financing agroecology between the CRFS program and other partners;
- Set up an advocacy project to raise the profile of CRFS West Africa;
- Set up a regional coordination office.

V. CONCLUSION

The 18th edition of the West Africa CoP annual meeting enabled project teams and students to acquire new knowledge on various themes that will enable them to reinforce the achievements of their research work while opening up new perspectives. External participants were enriched by the discussions, and now, thanks to this meeting, the way is open for more collaboration between different players to support AET and FST initiatives. The opportunity for a strategic alliance with other partners to co-finance agroecology was noted.

Discussions and activities at the meeting deepened understanding of the biophysical, social and human factors that influence landscape transformation and territorial management in the face of climate risks. The sharing of research results and exchanges illustrated the importance of taking these dimensions into account in adaptation and mitigation strategies in Sahelian countries and beyond.

Participants gained a better understanding of the different levels of scaling and explored how to apply them in their respective projects. Discussions focused on strategies for extending the impact of initiatives to a larger scale, while ensuring their relevance and anchoring in local contexts.

In addition, the importance of taking equity and gender into account in projects was highlighted, requiring particular attention from project teams.

The meeting also provided an opportunity to strengthen the scientific communication skills of students supported by the CRFS, through the presentation of their research and the ensuing discussions, as well as a panel on the challenges faced by students and the corresponding advice.

In addition, participants at the annual CoP West Africa meeting expressed their general satisfaction with the organization of the event, describing it as excellent and efficient (see evaluation results on <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1HPWMnuEbWJR6UL-8Mu4bZxAKYvPVZIWjKxfxUFHs-18/edit#responses>). Overall, participants appreciated all sessions positively. Per the evaluation results, the sessions on scaling and women's roles in AET and FST were the most appreciated. Two main points require improvement for future sessions. Firstly, time allocation for the various sessions. Although the themes chosen were all interesting, it would have been beneficial to have more time to tackle them in depth. Some participants suggested adopting a lighter agenda in terms of topics, to give more time to those selected.

VI. APPENDICES

Appendix I: Meeting agenda

Annual Meeting of the West African Community of Practice 2024 in Bamako, March 4-8, 2024 : Agenda

Date	Slot 1: 08.00-10.00h	Coffee / Tea	Slot 2: 10.30-12.30h	Lunch	Slot 3 14.00-15.30h	Coffee / Tea	Slot 4: 15.45-16.45h	Evening
My 04/03/24	8.00 Arrival 08.30 Welcome Regional updates Agroecology Science Meeting objectives, agenda		CRFS Project presentations- (Interactive poster session)		CRFS Project presentations (Interactive poster session)		Group activity "Our house Connecting with McKnight people in Minneapolis <i>Hybrid meeting with McKnight</i>	Group Dinner at Hotel
Kill 05/03/24	Importance of local-global linkages (JMC, PR) Presentations of external invitees		Presentations of external invitees (cont.) Group work - Opportunities for strategic synergies?		Scaling up, out and deep <i>Hybrid meeting with McKnight</i>		Landscapes and territorial action	Free
Wed 06/03/24	CRFS Projects' story telling		CRFS Projects' story telling (cont.)		Climate solutions <i>Hybrid meeting with McKnight</i>		Role of women in AET & FST <i>Hybrid meeting with McKnight</i>	Free
Thu 07/03/24	Students' session		Farmers' and Researchers' voice on FRN-4-AET Group discussion		Feedback panel: Strengths -weaknesses in the WAf CoP/ Gaps and opportunities to tackle AET and FST What's next?		Closing session	Group Dinner/ Recreative night
Fri 08/03/24 <i>Women's day!</i>	Speed dating with RT, open space, tools		Speed dating with RT, open space, tools		Free time			Departures

Appendix 2: List of participants

Category of actor	Players	Number of participants
Research centers, producer organizations and NGOs, CRFS partners	IER INERAN INERA UDDM ULPC ICRISAT IRSAT/CNRST IMAAAN WORLDWEG/MALI KI ZERBO UNIVERSITY DA DICKO UNIVERSITY DIOBASS ECOLOGY SOCIETY AGRICULTURE SECTOR KOUTIALA NGO AMEDD ONG ADAFE/GALLE ONG RAIL	47
Government	Ministry of Agriculture Mali Ministry of Agriculture Burkina Ministry of Agriculture Niger	3
Invited agroecology alliances and networks	AfriCAN (Africa Catalyzing Action for Nutrition), 3AO (Alliance for Agroecology in West Africa), RESAPAC (Solidarity Agroecology Network)	3
International NGOs invited	Islands of Peace, WHH (Welt Hunger Hilfe), Groundswell international, Sasakawa Association for Afrique	5
Guest research institutions	Institut Sénégalais de Recherche Agronomique (ISRA), CIMMYT West Africa, Agroecology Fund, CRDI-CRFS	4
Students	Students	5
Staff McKnight	Management Regional team Support team	10
Partners supporting the McKnight Foundation's West Africa regional team	IDEMS (RMS) Sahel Institute for Research and Development (SIRD) UVM, SOILS Project, FRN Coordination	14
Total		91

Appendix 3: Summary of project stories

Group 1:

Women's field shared a poignant story of how the project's activities, launched in 2006, have changed the mindset of growers from beneficiaries to partners.

FRN AMSP Burkina shared a story about a climatic shock in Burkina Faso, which led to a famine known as "hunger weeks in the Sahel". This shock led to seed exchanges of a sorghum variety called "Diakunbè" with a Malian producer organization. This variety was subsequently released in Burkina Faso, helping to develop the community seed system.

The Farmer Knowledge project has shared a video on the development of a soil fertility map in the rural commune of Kifosso in Mali, with the aim of improving advice to producers to optimize the use of fertilizers.

As for the **AEI Burkina project**, it told an inspiring story about the joint experimentation of IAE options, followed by their scaling-up with the involvement of the authorities at every stage of the process.

Group 2:

FaReNe shared a story about research and development activities carried out in collaboration with producers, which have led to the co-creation of various associated crop arrangements and the generation of income using the solidarity fund for small ruminant fattening activities.

The **Processing project** shared a video on the use of millet-based enriched food flour by refugee populations in the tri-border area. Consumption of this flour has improved the nutritional and health situation of the displaced population.

The **Child Nutrition project** involves setting up incubation centers for agricultural processing technologies to combat child malnutrition in 3 regions of Burkina faso.

The **AGrOW** project presented a sketch on the introduction of OGA (human urine used as fertilizer) in a Nigerian village. The story recounted the challenges associated with perceptions and social barriers to the popularization of OGA, and the approaches used by extension agents to add value to this product.

The **Recycling** project presented its activities, which focus on the recovery of organic waste and the recycling of plastic waste to make tables and other objects.

Group 3:

Sahel IPM shared the results of activities carried out in the 3 countries over the course of 2023, including expanding the basket of options available with neem, setting up 36 community production units for parasitoids and biopesticides, capacity building for 150 young people (bachelor's, master's, PhD), etc.

The **Fonio** project has focused on activities such as the use of fonio straw to improve soil fertility and the reduction of fonio sowing quantities from 30 kg to 4 to 5 kg per ha.

The history of the **3F** project relates to the popularization of Mungbean, a very nutrient-rich legume, the rotation of Mungbean with sorghum, the organization of training sessions on Mungbean-based recipes in synergy with Child Nutrition, the organization of an open day on Mungbean, and so on.

The **Pathways to AEI** project presented its activities in VCT and livestock farming, which have boosted the income of women beneficiaries and changed attitudes.

The activities of the **CATHI-GAO** project have focused on the organization of experience-sharing visits between growers on the use of human urine and excreta for soil fertilization, the urine collection and conservation system, etc. These exchanges between growers have raised a research question on the dosage and period of application of these human feces.

Group 4:

The story of **Dual purpose Sorghum and Cowpea** concerned the co-development of a new dual-purpose sorghum variety at the request of growers. This story highlights the change in mentality of producers, who have gone from being beneficiaries to taking on a strong sense of responsibility in the orientation of selection and varietal improvement.

Networking 4 Seeds told a story about capacity building for seed producers. The producers involved in the project's activities have mastered the seed production process to such an extent that they have sometimes refused training from another partner on the same topic.

Cowpea Square told a story about the challenges of setting up a hub.

Appendix 4: Photo documentation of the meeting

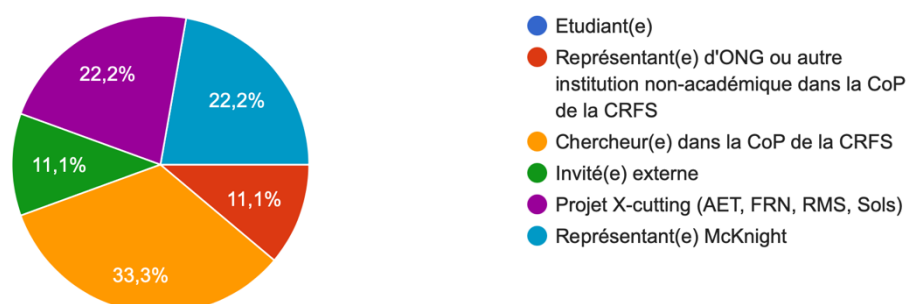
The link to the photo document of the meeting is as follows:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1HLId6LjRzxBfzGx7BDLcrJk6yPn0PVYo>

Appendix 5: Graphs of meeting evaluation results

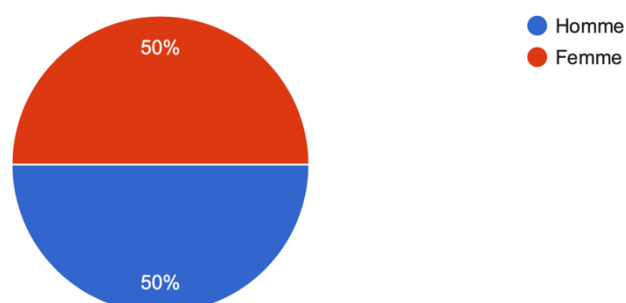
Vous êtes:

9 réponses

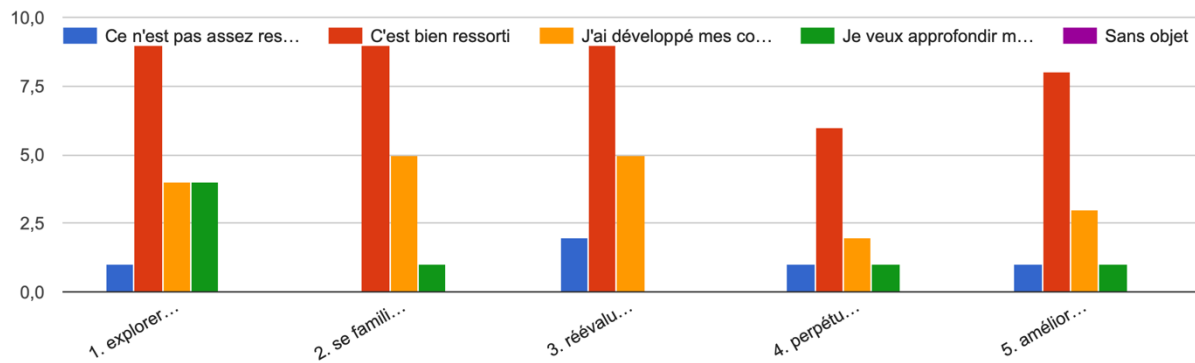


Vous êtes:

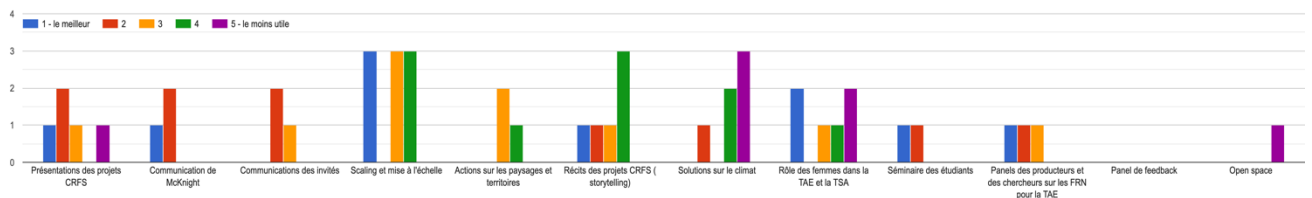
10 réponses



Évaluez la semaine par rapport à nos objectifs spécifiques :

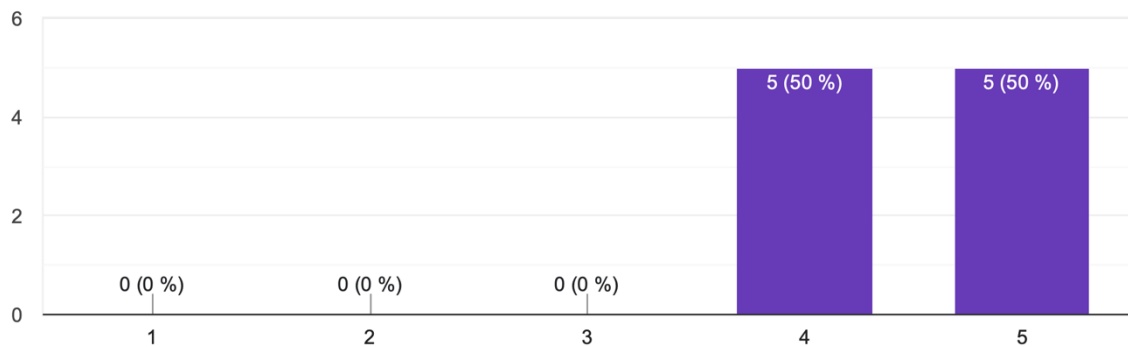


Classez les 5 meilleures sessions de la réunion par ordre d'utilité.



Quelle est votre opinion sur l'organisation générale de la réunion, les aspects logistiques et l'exécution de l'agenda de la réunion ?

10 réponses



Comment avez-vous participé dans la semaine ?

10 réponses

