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Organization of the  
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Terminal evaluation  
of the project  
“AVACLIM: agroecology,  
ensuring food security  
and sustainable  
livelihoods while  
mitigating climate  
change and restoring  
land in dryland regions”



**Project Evaluation Series**  
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**Terminal evaluation of the project  
“AVACLIM: agroecology, ensuring food  
security and sustainable livelihoods while  
mitigating climate change and restoring  
land in dryland regions”**

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## **Abstract**

This report presents the findings, conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned from the terminal evaluation of the project “AVACLIM: agroecology, ensuring food security and sustainable livelihoods while mitigating climate change and restoring land in dryland regions” (FAO/GEF: GCP/GLO/927/GFF – FFEM: CZZ2009). The AVACLIM project aims to mainstream agroecology in drylands as a tool to address food insecurity, mitigate and adapt to climate change, and restore degraded land. The Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the French Global Environment Facility (FFEM, by its French acronym) financed the project. Launched in October 2019, it was led by the Centre for Actions and International Achievements (CARI, by its French acronym) in partnership with the Environmental Monitoring Group (EMG), the Research Institute for Development (IRD, by its French acronym), Both ENDS and seven national organizations from Brazil, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, India, Morocco, Senegal and South Africa. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is the GEF implementing agency and has provided project cycle management services. The project was found to be entirely relevant and coherent with national and global priorities in the fields of agricultural development, food security, natural resources preservation and climate change response. However, the project design was unrealistic compared to the three-year period of implementation. The project partially achieved its expected outcomes. Overall, the strong integration of project activities into existing global and national dynamics on agroecology strengthened project effectiveness. However, project performance was affected by delays, design gaps and external conditions that jeopardized its strategic approach. It is likely that some of the achieved results will continue after project closure, but others require additional financial resources.



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## Abbreviations

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>English name</b>	<b>Original name</b>
ARFA	Association for Research and Training in Agroecology	Association pour la Recherche et la Formation en Agroécologie
AVACLIM	agroecology, ensuring food security and sustainable livelihoods while mitigating climate change and restoring land in dryland regions	
CAATINGA	Centre for Advice and Support for Workers and Non-governmental Alternative Institutions	Centro de Assessoria e Apoio aos Trabalhadores e Instituições Não Governamentais Alternativas
CARI	Centre for Actions and International Achievements	Centre d'Actions et de Réalisations Internationales
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity	
CIRAD	Agricultural Research Centre for International Development	Centre de Coopération Internationale en Recherche Agronomique pour le Développement
CNABio	National Council of Organic Agriculture	Conseil National de l'agriculture Biologique
CoP	community of practice	
CPF	Country Programming Framework	
DyTAEL	Local Dynamic for Agroecological Transition in Senegal	Dynamique pour une Transition Agroécologique au Sénégal
DyTAES	Dynamics for Agroecological Transition in Senegal	Dynamique pour une Transition Agroécologique au Sénégal
EMG	Environmental Monitoring Group	
Enda Pronat	Environment and Development Association Acting for Nature Protection	Association pour l'Environnement et Développement Action pour une Protection Naturelle des Terroirs
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	
FFEM	French Facility for Global Environment	Fonds Français pour l'Environnement Mondial
GBS	Gram Bharati Samiti	
GEF	Global Environment Facility	

IRD	Research Institute for Development	Institut de Recherche pour le Développement
ISRA	Senegalese Institute of Agricultural Research	Institut Sénégalais de Recherches Agricoles
LOA	letter of agreement	
M&E	monitoring and evaluation	
NGO	non-governmental organization	
NITI Aayog	National Institution for Transforming India	
OPIM	Operational Partners Implementation Modality	
RBF	Renuka Bio Farms	
RIAM	Network of Agroecology Initiatives of Morocco	Réseau des Initiatives Agroécologiques au Maroc
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal	
TAPE	Tool for agroecology performance evaluation	
TOR	terms of reference	
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification	
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change	
VAAGDHARA	Voluntary Association of Agricultural General Development Health and Reconstruction Alliance	

## Map of project countries



Source: UN Geospatial. 2022. *Map of the World*. <https://www.un.org/geospatial/content/map-world-1>. Re-elaborated by the authors.

## Executive summary

### Background

1. This terminal evaluation summarizes the findings, conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned from the project “AVACLIM: agroecology, ensuring food security and sustainable livelihoods while mitigating climate change and restoring land in dryland regions” (FAO/GEF: GCP/GLO/927/GFF – FFEM: CZZ2009), hereinafter referred to as AVACLIM.
2. The AVACLIM project aimed to mainstream agroecology in drylands as a tool to address food insecurity, mitigate and adapt to climate change, and restore degraded land. The project was financed by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the French Global Environment Facility (FFEM, by its French acronym). It was launched in October 2019 with an expected duration of three years. The project was implemented by the Centre for Actions and International Achievements (CARI) in partnership with the Environmental Monitoring Group (EMG), the Research Institute for Development (IRD, by its French acronym), Both ENDS and seven national organizations from Brazil, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, India, Morocco, Senegal and South Africa.<sup>1</sup> The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) was the GEF implementing agency and provided project cycle management.
3. The AVACLIM project was implemented through the following four components. Component 1: building partnerships for experience-sharing and capacity building of agroecology practitioners with international connections among project participants. Under this component, the project supported or established national communities of practice (CoP) by gathering various stakeholders that promote agroecology and experience-sharing. Component 2: assessment of existing initiatives for evidence-based decision-making at the national, local and landscape levels. In particular, AVACLIM developed an evaluation tool to assess the impact of agroecology and to produce scientific knowledge. Component 3: advocacy for informed decision-making. Here, the project aimed to systematize and use the evidence generated under Component 2 to advocate for the integration of agroecology into policymaking processes at the national and global levels. Component 4: communication, learning, knowledge management and adaptive management.

### Evaluation objectives and methodology

4. This evaluation has a dual purpose in terms of accountability and organizational learning. It covers the project implementation period from its October 2019 launch to the end of its data collection phase in mid-January 2023. The project was scheduled to end in March 2023. This report, however, does not address any activities conducted after mid-January 2023, since they are beyond the scope of the evaluation. Essentially, the evaluation focuses on results achieved at the global scale and in two project countries that had been selected as case studies.

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<sup>1</sup> The national organizations were as follows: CAATINGA in Brazil; Enda Pronat in Senegal; ARFA in Burkina Faso; the Institute for Sustainable Development in Ethiopia; the GBS in India; Agrisud International and the Norsys Foundation in Morocco; and the EMG in South Africa, which was also an implementing global partner.

5. This evaluation's objectives are outlined as follows:
  - i. Assess the relevance of AVACLIM to country needs and global concerns, its coherence and added value with reference to national dynamics and with respect to the normative work carried out by the organizations involved.
  - ii. Assess the effectiveness of AVACLIM in terms of the achievement of expected outputs and outcomes across its four components.
  - iii. Examine the efficiency of the project's institutional set up and the quality of the planning, coordination and monitoring mechanisms, and if these could deliver results.
  - iv. Provide an assessment on the potential impact and sustainability of the project's results, including risks and opportunities for continuity.
  - v. Assess a set of performance-related issues deriving from the donors' evaluation criteria and policies (added value of FFEM funding, project design quality, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation [M&E], project readiness, FAO performance as the GEF implementing agency, financial management and co-financing, partnership and stakeholder engagement, and communication and knowledge management).
  - vi. Analyse the mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues (gender, the inclusion of vulnerable people, human rights and social safeguards).
6. The evaluation approach and methodology were grounded on a set of guiding principles: the findings are backed by reliable and provable evidence; data were triangulated from various sources and methods; and a balance was maintained between accountability and learning objectives. The evaluation adopted a participatory approach. Project stakeholders were consulted through in-person and online interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs) and several follow-up meetings. The evaluation exercise was based on a constant consensus-building and participatory process. This involved in-person and virtual presentations of preliminary findings and feedback from partners, as well as an in-person workshop to fine-tune recommendations. Further, the Evaluation Team ensured the integration of a gender-sensitive approach throughout the data collection activities by fostering the participation and representation of women in interviews and focus group discussions. Gender-disaggregated data were sought and specific evaluation indicators were identified to assess the project's achievements from a gender perspective.
7. Data collection relied on a combination of tools: a desk review of the project documents, national and international documents, developmental strategies, FAO Country Programming Frameworks (CPFs), donor and partner corporate documents, and a literature review; 81 in-person and virtual semi-structured interviews (33 percent female); two case studies with field visits to India and Senegal for a country perspective on project performance; four focus group discussions with project beneficiaries (30 people) in India; the direct observation of project activities in France, India and Senegal to assess stakeholder collaboration; and online surveys (32 responses out of 120) for external stakeholders in the seven countries to collect quantitative data on project performance and assess its CoP results.
8. Primary and secondary data were analysed and systematically triangulated through different sources. The evaluation also assessed performance against each of the evaluation

criteria and on several factors affecting performance. This was based on the GEF rating scheme (see Appendix 3). The preliminary findings of the evaluation were presented in-person and virtually to donors, CARI and project partners.<sup>2</sup> The in-person presentation was followed by a participatory workshop to gather stakeholder comments and suggestions on the proposed recommendations. The Evaluation Team used the feedback to inform the final recommendations in this report.

9. Regarding limitations, it was challenging to reach out to stakeholders in countries that were not covered by the field visits. Due to the low survey response, the evaluation was mainly qualitative and relied primarily on case studies, interviews and the desk review. Also, the evaluation exercise took place during the last six months of project implementation. This made it difficult to assess the effects of the advocacy activities that had been carried out in the last months. Further, the evaluation question was linked to the added value of the AVACLIM flagship product, that is, the evaluation methodology of agroecological initiatives. The answers were based on stakeholders' own assessment and perceptions. Considering the time available, thematic and contextual research and technical assessments based on the quality of the methodology were not within the scope of the evaluation. The project's wide geographical coverage and the evaluation's budget constraints did not allow for more than two case studies. It was challenging for the Evaluation Team to obtain valid and disaggregated monitoring data. The output and outcome indicators were not sufficient and, in some cases, irrelevant. This made it difficult to distinguish the project's results from those arising from other initiatives.

## Main findings

### Relevance

**Finding 1.** The AVACLIM project's objectives and overall design appear to be relevant and targeted to address key criticalities that hamper the mainstreaming of agroecology in the countries involved. The AVACLIM project is also aligned with national policies and strategic documents in the fields of agricultural development, food security, natural resources preservation and climate change response, as well as FAO CPFs.

**Finding 2.** The project's envisaged results fully align with the priorities identified by key international development entities and donors, such as the GEF, the FFEM, FAO, and the United Nations and its three Rio Conventions (CBD, UNFCCC and UNCCD). They also contribute to the achievement of all FAO strategic objectives and eight SDGs: 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 12 and 13.

**Finding 3.** According to consulted stakeholders, the AVACLIM multicriteria assessment tool has the advantage of being aligned with the agroecology holistic approach and is designed to capture its multidimensional effects. However, several weaknesses and time mismatches limit its potential added value. The tool has yet to be finalized, simplified and validated within the scientific community, which does not allow for the proper assessment of its utility. Although the stakeholders recognize the need for a holistic method, such as the AVACLIM tool, the Evaluation Team received indications from national partners that the tool, in its current form, may not be utilized in the future as planned. Global stakeholders consider the tool as potentially complementary with other methods, if optimized.

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<sup>2</sup> Two virtual presentations were held in November 2022. One in-person presentation was held in Montpellier, France in January 2023.

**Finding 4.** The project design was accurate and developed over a long period, which allowed for significant consultations with local NGOs during the conceptualization process. This is reflected in a solid and clearly focused strategy. However, several shortcomings were found, which had an impact on the delivery of expected results. These shortcomings were caused by project complexity, time mismatches among project components that could have been foreseen, developments affecting the context in which the project was formulated, and the missed identification of relevant scientific actors since the conceptualization phase.

## **Effectiveness**

**Finding 5.** The analysis of project execution and the comparison of project progress against the set targets for the objective, outcomes and outputs contained in the logical framework validates satisfactory project performance. It is, however, worth recalling that the quality of the logic model contained in the 2019 project document is not conducive to a proper assessment of the changes triggered by the project towards its planned outcomes and objectives. Additionally, data available did not allow for assessing the extent of achievement of the indicators set for the project objective.

**Finding 6.** The project team successfully implemented the activities under Component 1. Consulted stakeholders were found to be satisfied, specifically with the knowledge exchange activities implemented at the national level. Positive effects stemming from the activities linked to the CoPs were reported in all countries, and the project supported the functioning and enhancement of existing networks on agroecology. However, it is difficult to measure the actual impact of these activities. Solid conclusions can be drawn only for those countries that are the subject of case studies. In this respect, Senegal represents a successful case, since the project largely contributed to the strengthening of the existing national coalition, DyTAES, and the establishment of a new CoP, the Local Dynamic for Agroecological Transition in Senegal (DyTAEL, by its French acronym), in the Tambacounda Region. The information available suggests that Outcome 1 was achieved at a satisfactory level.

**Finding 7.** The project generated new knowledge on 14 agroecology initiatives and made important contributions to the discussion on agroecological performance analysis at the national and global level. However, mixed results were found in terms of quality. This involved the timeliness of the outputs delivered and the solidness of the newly established NGO-scientific community partnership. Success, however, depends on enabling factors, such as pre-existing partnerships. Although the AVACLIM multicriteria assessment tool was applied in all countries during field research, the stakeholders consider it complex, and its uptake is uncertain given the delays in its finalization and the gaps in the capacity building of national partners. Overall, the extent of achievement for Outcome 2 is below expectations.

**Finding 8.** The delays accumulated under Component 2 hampered the expected synergies between research and advocacy. The stakeholders consider this a missed opportunity to raise the profile of the AVACLIM discourse on agroecology. It also affected the outcomes of the project's strategic approach. By the time of this evaluation, no national or international policy changes had been recorded as a direct effect of AVACLIM's efforts – except for some contributions in Senegal. However, in all countries, the project was able to strengthen advocacy dynamics and advance existing policy processes. This happened in Senegal, Morocco and South Africa. The project also achieved results in improving the partners' capacities in advocacy planning. At the international level, the project participated in some prominent events. However, it has been difficult to identify any impact. The lack of synergy with FAO's efforts to scale up agroecology is a missed opportunity at both the national and international levels. In general, more time would be needed to assess the extent of achievement of Outcome 3 and the impact of the activities implemented.

**Finding 9.** The AVACLIM project generated new content on agroecology. Project activities were adequately disseminated through different modalities: CoP activities; online databases, including the FAO Agroecology Knowledge Hub; international events; and printed and online materials. However, the dissemination of specific knowledge on the impact of agroecology was hampered by delayed outputs linked to the multicriteria evaluation tool. The project increased access to knowledge but not specifically on the impact of agroecology.

**Finding 10.** The project was implemented in an extremely challenging environment. In particular, the COVID-19 pandemic caused several delays. It also hindered the implementation of the exchange activities at both the national and international levels. This affected the project's strategic approach.

## **Efficiency**

**Finding 11.** Project implementation was significantly delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, lengthy administrative procedures and the late identification of scientific partners. The choice to develop the AVACLIM evaluation tool within the framework of a PhD thesis also affected the achievement of results. It is likely that all pending activities will be finalized by the project's expected closure. However, the delays impacted the coherence of the initiative's strategic approach, which had been designed with a consequentiality scheme among the components. Despite these shortcomings, it is unlikely that additional outputs and outcomes could have been achieved in the same challenging environment in which the project was implemented. The allocation of financial and human resources was generally adequate. Resources for national research institutes, however, were underestimated.

**Finding 12.** Synergies were planned and attained with several national and global dynamics on agroecology. This resulted in a coherent joint effort and a strong premise to maximize results. However, mechanisms to stimulate synergies with other relevant projects were not sufficiently planned, and the poor complementarity with FAO's efforts in scaling up agroecology at the country level is considered a missed opportunity for greater project reach.

**Finding 13.** The project's efficiency was highly affected by the complexity of the administrative setup, which included multiple letters of agreement (LOAs) as an alternative to the Operational Partners Implementation Modality (OPIM). The project's efficiency was also affected by lengthy and cumbersome procedures linked to the signing of LOAs, which required approval from the respective FAO Country Offices. The signature process lasted from seven (South Africa) to 16 (Ethiopia) months after the October 2019 project launch. The inefficiencies were not specifically linked to AVACLIM but to the entire FAO operational framework.

## **Sustainability**

**Finding 14.** Mixed results were found regarding the extent to which the project was designed and implemented to maximize ownership and sustainability. A promising scenario can be envisaged for the CoPs, especially when rooted in existing dynamics. However, there were no cases of partners or scientific institutes replicating and scaling up the AVACLIM evaluation tool. The measures envisaged to foster tool continuity will most likely be delivered too late for a gradual handover. In general, it is critical to develop an exit strategy for both the CoPs and the evaluation tool. On another note, the sustainability potential of a global partnership is high, and the partners will likely continue the work on agroecology.

## Factors affecting performance

**Finding 15.** The design and implementation of the M&E system was weak. The architecture of the project results was un conducive for both results-based management and M&E. Although some M&E planning provisions were envisaged, no evidence was found on the use of a continual, systematic monitoring system shared and used by the entire partnership.

**Finding 16.** Project implementation quality is satisfactory regarding the support provided in relation to the strategic review of progress and results, planning, reporting and overall technical backstopping. However, FAO could have been more proactive and more efficient in carrying out the administrative tasks.

**Finding 17.** The institutional setup was clearly defined and accompanied by written procedures. The stakeholders valued CARI's ability to manage the complex administrative architecture and to deal with the various unpredicted external conditions faced by the project. Areas of improvement concern: strengthen the participatory approach in the decision-making system; provide better clarity on the role of the scientific partners and Both ENDS after its withdrawal as component leader; and enhance the results-based approach in the planning and monitoring processes. The project management team proved leadership and responsiveness to partners' needs and was efficient in adapting to changing conditions and emerging needs.

**Finding 18.** The expected co-financing materialized at 81 percent as of June 2022 and was instrumental in supporting the achievement of the project results. Stakeholders considered it highly likely that the remaining amount of co-financing would materialize by project closure.

**Finding 19.** The crucial role of local stakeholders in facilitating the transition to agroecology was fully recognized in the project strategy. The project partners were fully involved in the project design, and different types of local actors were engaged during implementation. Areas of improvement include strengthening partners' involvement in decision-making processes and a more explicit recognition of national scientific partners' contribution to the development of new methodologies.

**Finding 20.** Several measures were taken to foster internal communication. These efforts, however, were affected by the limited number of general assemblies and the cancellation of in-person international exchanges with partners. The project team efficiently implemented external communication activities. However, the potential reach of these activities remains unknown as the project did not have a database on people reached. Knowledge generation and management was at the core of the project's strategic approach, but delays under Component 2 significantly affected the dissemination of project knowledge.

**Finding 21.** Overall, gender mainstreaming was integrated. Several initiatives, among those capitalized and evaluated, are led by women. The AVACLIM evaluation tool envisaged gender-disaggregated data for eight indicators. However, the project did not adopt a specific gender approach to tackle inequalities, nor were there specific activities and budget provisions for this endeavour – except for one activity implemented by the Brazilian partner. Considering the strong presence of women in agroecology, a specific approach would have been meaningful.

**Finding 22.** Disadvantaged groups were considered, given the project's strong focus on enhancing the visibility of rural agroecological initiatives. However, it did not explicitly mainstream indigenous communities and youth inclusion issues. Nevertheless, traditional knowledge is well mainstreamed within the capitalized and evaluated initiatives and, in some countries, these initiatives were promoted by farmers from indigenous communities. However, no proactive measure was adopted to foster the inclusion of these categories, nor were they empowered in the agroecological transition.

**Finding 23.** Environmental sustainability was at the core of the initiatives capitalized and evaluated, as well as a cross-cutting issue in the communication, advocacy, and knowledge exchange activities.

## Conclusions

**Conclusion 1.** Relevance and coherence: The project was entirely relevant and coherent with national and global priorities, but its design was unrealistic compared to the three-year period of implementation.

**Conclusion 2.** Effectiveness: The project partially achieved its expected outcomes. Overall, the project effectiveness was strengthened by strong integration within existing global and national dynamics on agroecology, but it was severely affected by considerable delays, design gaps and external conditions that jeopardized the strategic approach.

**Conclusion 3.** Efficiency: The project's complex administrative setup, FAO's administrative procedures and external conditions affected efficient implementation. Poor complementarity with FAO's national efforts in scaling up agroecology also played a role. Strong project integration with ongoing dynamics on agroecology was a key mitigating factor in supporting efficiency.

**Conclusion 4.** Sustainability: It is likely that some of the achieved results will continue after project closure, but others require additional financial resources. The project progress against expected results is that sustainability has not yet been ensured.

**Conclusion 5.** Factors affecting performance: The project lacked a solid M&E framework, which hindered progress tracking against the expected objectives. The quality of project implementation was satisfactory, but FAO could have delivered the administrative tasks faster. The quality of execution was satisfactory, and CARI's ability to manage the complex administrative architecture and to deal with the various unpredicted external conditions was highly valued by stakeholders. Finally, stakeholder engagement was satisfactory during design and implementation. However, stakeholders would have appreciated greater involvement in the decision-making processes and in developing the new evaluation methodology.

## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1.** To FAO, CARI and the NGO partners: Update the project design in close collaboration with partners, especially when significant time elapses between conceptualization and operationalization, and eventually consider changes in light of context developments. This action is needed for the project to remain relevant and specific to the context. In this case, it also would have allowed for greater efficiency (see Findings 3 and 4).

**Recommendation 2.** To FAO, CARI and the NGO partners: Identify key stakeholders in the design phase or right at the project's launch. It is also important to clearly assign roles and tasks that consistently match competencies. This action is needed to enhance project efficiency and effectiveness and foster results ownership (see Findings 4 and 13).

**Recommendation 3.** To FAO, CARI and the donors: Develop the project's logical framework accurately. Clarify the outcome indicators, which must be relevant and measurable. This action is needed to enhance project efficiency and effectiveness through the adoption of robust M&E frameworks during implementation and inform timely decision-making (see Findings 4 and 15).

**Recommendation 4.** To FAO, CARI and the donors: Purposely plan synergies with other initiatives and efforts, especially when these are led by the same partners, in the same geographic areas and around the same themes. This action is needed to enhance project efficiency, effectiveness and potential sustainability (see Findings 8 and 12).

**Recommendation 5.** To FAO, CARI and the donors: Continue to support the dynamics on agroecology at the local level. This action is needed to enhance the role of grassroots organizations in promoting agroecological transition and to foster the sustainability of interventions (see Findings 1 and 6).

**Recommendation 6.** To CARI and the scientific partners: Develop an exit strategy for the AVACLIM evaluation tool – including its synthetization, consolidation and elaboration of anticipated synergies with other existing tools – and actions to build the capacities of stakeholders willing to adopt it (not necessarily all of them). This action is needed to enhance the effectiveness of the AVACLIM tool and to foster its uptake and replication (see Findings 7 and 14).

**Recommendation 7.** To CARI and the scientific partners: When developing new methodologies, it is important to promote a more proactive role from national scientific partners. This action is needed to enhance the relevance, effectiveness and ownership of the new methodology (see Finding 19).

**Recommendation 8.** To CARI and the NGO partners: Develop more specific advocacy actions instead of a one-size-fits-all approach. Always include authorities at the national and local levels. This action is needed to enhance the effectiveness and impact of advocacy work (see Finding 8).

**Recommendation 9.** To CARI and the NGO partners: Identify opportunities, stakeholders and modalities to value AVACLIM knowledge for advocacy purposes. This action is needed to support impactful results stemming from the knowledge generated by AVACLIM (see Finding 8).

**Recommendation 10.** To FAO, CARI and the donors: Improve risk management linked to the project's administrative arrangements by identifying and timely applying mitigation measures. This action is needed to promote efficient project implementation (see Finding 13).

**Recommendation 11.** To CARI and the donors: Take more substantial measures so that partners can participate in the project's decision-making processes. This action is needed to support effective implementation and to enhance project ownership by partners (see Findings 13 and 19).

**Recommendation 12.** To FAO and CARI: Develop and regularly implement robust project-related M&E frameworks. This action is needed to enable efficient implementation, risk assessment and the evaluation of results (see Finding 15).

**Recommendation 13.** To FAO and CARI: Increase the focus on gender mainstreaming in both the design and the implementation phases. This action is needed to foster gender mainstreaming (see Finding 21).

10. The GEF evaluation criteria rating table is presented in this report (see Appendix 2).

## Lessons learned

11. Research needs adequate time to produce scientifically valid results.
12. The LOA administrative arrangement can work for the provision of specific services but not the execution of projects with broad geographical coverage. The latter requires leadership and management autonomy, and, in some cases, flexibility from the executing agency.
13. The strong integration of new projects within existing dynamics is an essential factor for success. This strategic approach strengthens project relevance and effectiveness.
14. Donor flexibility in grant management is conducive to the achievement of results, especially when projects are implemented in challenging environments.

15. The time and effort needed to build solid partnerships among stakeholders with different approaches and work modalities should not be overlooked.
16. Although scientific products have more credibility, if not simplified, their complexity can impede adoption by practitioners and end users.
17. The adoption of a participatory approach to develop new methodologies is an important factor in fostering ownership.



# 1. Introduction

1. This terminal evaluation summarizes the findings, conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned from the project “AVACLIM: agroecology, ensuring food security and sustainable livelihoods while mitigating climate change and restoring land in dryland regions” (FAO/GEF: GCP/GLO/927/GFF – FFEM: CZZ2009), hereinafter referred to as AVACLIM.
2. The AVACLIM project aimed to mainstream agroecology in drylands as a tool to address food insecurity, mitigate and adapt to climate change, and restore degraded land. The Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the French Facility for Global Environment Facility (FFEM, by its French acronym) financed the project, which was launched in October 2019 with an expected duration of three years. The project was implemented by the Centre for Actions and International Achievements (CARI, by its French acronym) in partnership with the Environmental Monitoring Group (EMG), the Research Institute for Development (IRD, by its French acronym) and Both ENDS. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) was the GEF implementing agency and provided project cycle management services, as established by the GEF policy. Additionally, seven national organizations were involved to implement the initiative in seven countries from three different continents: Agrisud International and the Norsys Foundation in Morocco; the Association for Research and Training in Agroecology (ARFA, by its French acronym) in Burkina Faso; the Centre for Advice and Support for Workers and Non-governmental Alternative Institutions (CAATINGA, by its Portuguese acronym) in Brazil; the EMG in South Africa, which was also an implementing global partner; the Environment and Development Association Acting for Nature Protection (Enda Pronat, by its French acronym) in Senegal; the Gram Bharati Samiti (GBS) in India; and the Institute for Sustainable Development (ISD) in Ethiopia This report uses the term “partnership” to indicate the project partners, namely the international implementing partners and the seven national implementing non-governmental organizations (NGOs).
3. FAO, as the GEF implementing agency, commissioned the AVACLIM terminal evaluation. It was conducted from 12 September 2023 to 15 January 2023, following the Guidelines for GEF Agencies in Conducting Terminal Evaluation for Full-sized Projects (GEF, 2017) and the FAO Office of Evaluation, Evaluation Manual (FAO, 2015a). The responsibility for this evaluation was decentralized to the FAO Plant Production and Protection Division, which appointed the Evaluation Manager and contracted a Senior Evaluation Consultant (team leader) and an Evaluation Specialist (team member) to conduct the exercise.

## 1.1 Purpose of the evaluation

4. The evaluation has a dual purpose in terms of accountability and organizational learning to provide:
  - i. an overall independent assessment of the performance of the AVACLIM project, paying particular attention to its achievements measured against its expected outcomes and the reasons underpinning such results; and
  - ii. key lessons learned, conclusions, emerging good practices and recommendations to inform and to improve future initiatives in the same areas of intervention.

## 1.2 Intended users

5. The main users of the evaluation are FAO, GEF, FFEM and CARI as executing partners. In particular, the main evaluation audience is represented by the project management teams and members of the Project Steering Committee, the FAO-GEF Coordination Unit, FAO technical personnel at the Country Offices, the FAO Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa and FAO headquarters. Key stakeholders also include the EMG and the IRD as implementing partners, as well as national partner NGOs and Both ENDS. Additional users are other donors; the scientific community; NGOs and civil society organizations (CSOs) in the seven countries involved; central and decentralized government technical services involved in agroecology and sectoral government institutions; decision-makers; international organizations; and regional, national and international entities.

## 1.3 Scope and objectives of the evaluation

6. The evaluation's scope covers the project's implementation period, from its October 2019 launch to the end of the data collection phase in mid-January 2023. It is worth noting that the project was scheduled to end in March 2023. As a result, the activities carried out during the final period were not considered in the exercise.
7. Since the project implemented activities at international and national levels, the geographic scope of the evaluation includes both by focusing on results achieved at the global scale and in the seven countries involved in the project: Brazil, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, India, Morocco, Senegal and South Africa. The evaluation focuses on results achieved across the project's four components and for the various stakeholders involved, such as NGOs, research institutes and civil society organizations.
8. The evaluation's specific objectives are as follows:
  - i. Assess the relevance of AVACLIM to country needs and global concerns, its coherence and added value with reference to national dynamics and with respect to the normative work carried out by the organizations involved.
  - ii. Assess the effectiveness of AVACLIM in terms of the achievement of expected outputs and outcomes across its four components, including an analysis of factors enabling or hindering success.
  - iii. Examine the efficiency of the project's institutional setup and the quality of the planning, coordination, and monitoring mechanisms, and if these could deliver results.
  - iv. Provide an assessment on the potential impact and sustainability of the project's results, including risks and opportunities for continuity.
  - v. Assess a set of performance-related issues deriving from the donors' evaluation criteria and policies (added value of FFEM funding, project design quality, implementation, monitoring and evaluation [M&E], project readiness, FAO performance as the GEF implementing agency, financial management and co-financing, partnership and stakeholder engagement, and communication and knowledge management).
  - vi. Analyse the mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues (gender, the inclusion of vulnerable people, human rights and social safeguards).

9. Identify lessons learned and provide recommendations to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of future interventions.
10. The evaluation considers the normative frameworks of FAO and the donors in order to look at the project's contribution and added value to the work carried out by the organizations. Being a joint intervention co-financed and implemented by multiple partners, the evaluation also considers aspects related to the value of co-design and co-planning and whether this has facilitated the achievement of results.
11. The list of evaluation questions and subquestions can be found in the Evaluation matrix (see Appendix 6).

## **1.4 Methodology**

12. The evaluation was conducted in accordance with the Development Assistance Committee evaluation principles from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 1991), the United Nations Evaluation Group Norms and Standards (UNEG, 2016), the FAO Office of Evaluation Manual (FAO, 2015a) and the GEF Evaluation Policy (GEF, 2019).
13. The methodology was based on the following guiding principles:
  - i. the evaluation findings are based on evidence and rigorous evaluation methods. Evidence was gathered through different tools and techniques;
  - ii. triangulation from various sources enhance the credibility of findings and conclusions;
  - iii. through formative and summative dimensions, the exercise-maintained balance between accountability and learning objectives.
14. The evaluation methodology followed high standards of ethical principles. In particular, the following were adopted:
  - i. Participatory approach: key project stakeholders, including project staff, Project Steering Committee members, project partners, external stakeholders and donors, were consulted. Interviews had several follow-up meetings and email exchanges. Partners and some of the key informants were interviewed more than once. Additionally, the evaluation exercise, which was based on a constant consensus-building process, was facilitated by the evaluators at all levels and with all stakeholders. This included in-person and virtual presentations of preliminary and final findings<sup>1</sup> and their validation from stakeholders through a participatory workshop.
  - ii. Gender-sensitive approach: the evaluators fostered the participation and representation of women in interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). Gender-disaggregated data was sought. Specific evaluation indicators were designed to assess the project's achievements from a gender perspective.

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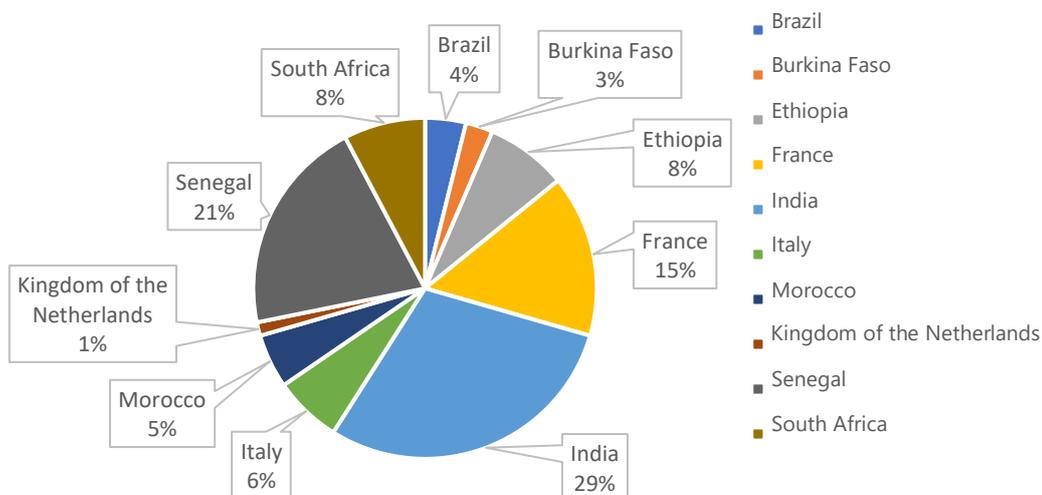
<sup>1</sup> The evaluation case studies and preliminary findings were presented virtually to the evaluation reference group on 17 November 2022. The general evaluation findings were presented virtually to all project partners and donors on 29 November 2022. The lessons learned and recommendations were presented in-person during the project's closing event on 13 January 2023 in Montpellier, France.

- Appropriate methods for data collection that ensure the protection of women were adopted.
- iii. Conflict-sensitive approach: the exercise was guided by the principles of conducting evaluations in a way that was sensitive to conflict. This avoided doing harm and ensured the confidentiality and the security of everyone involved. High standards of ethics and integrity were adopted during data collection. An interview protocol was developed for the Evaluation Team. It clearly states how to present the exercise to interviewees and explains the matters of confidentiality and consent.<sup>2</sup> Sensitive data were protected according to the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation. Confidentiality, safeguard provisions and full respect for local cultures were ensured.
15. The data collection relied on a combination of tools, as described in the following points:
- i. Desk review: an analysis of the project documents (narrative reports, project outputs and products), as detailed in the bibliography, was carried out. This was complemented with relevant national and international documents, developmental strategies and the FAO Country Programming Frameworks (CPFs). Among key project-related documents, the mid-term review of AVACLIM was considered, as well as the logical framework to track project performance. Donors' and partners' corporate documents were also reviewed to assess project coherence and added value.
  - ii. In-person and virtual interviews: semi-structured qualitative in-person and virtual interviews were conducted with staff from the FAO-GEF Coordination Unit, FFEM, FAO headquarters and Country Offices, members of the scientific community involved in the project, CARI, and the other global and national implementing project partners. Interviews were also conducted with national and local stakeholders in the countries covered by the field visits, especially other NGOs and civil society organizations, national government institutions and local authorities. Overall, 81 people were interviewed (see Appendix 1). Figures 1–3 represent the breakdown of interviewees by country, gender and stakeholder type.

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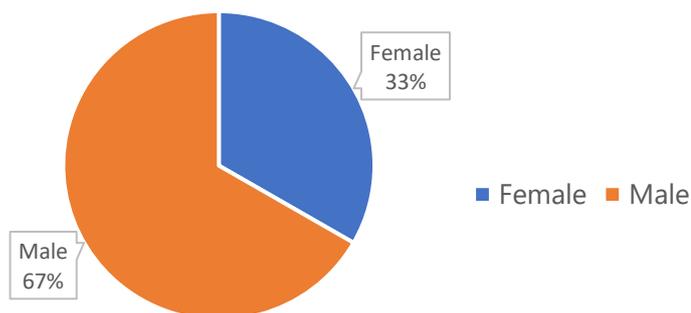
<sup>2</sup> The confidentiality and consent section in the interview protocol states: "All information and comments you provide will be kept confidential. This means that your interview responses won't be shared with anyone and only used by the Evaluation Team members to elaborate findings and conclusions. We will ensure that any information included in the report does not identify you as the respondent. You don't have to talk about anything you don't want to. Are you willing to participate in this interview?"

**Figure 1. Interviewees by country**



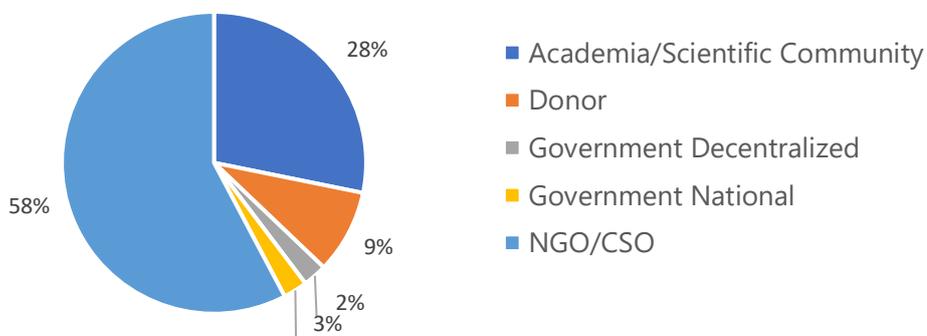
Source: Elaborated by the Evaluation Team.

**Figure 2. Interviewees disaggregated by gender**



Source: Elaborated by the Evaluation Team.

**Figure 3. Interviewees by stakeholder type**



Source: Elaborated by the Evaluation Team.

- iii. Case studies: two case studies were conducted through field visits to India and Senegal. The case studies provided a country perspective so that the Evaluation Team could present evidence on project performance. For each country, a specific project component or good practice was explored: the application of the AVACLIM multicriteria assessment tool in India; and the national and local project-supported communities of practice (CoP) in Senegal. After consultations with the Project Steering Committee, which acted as an evaluation reference group, Senegal was selected because it hosted the pilot AVACLIM multicriteria assessment tool. Only the Senegalese field visit was planned at the terms of reference (TOR) development stage. However, a second field visit was decided upon following unexpected budget availability: During the inception phase, the Evaluation Team selected India in close consultation with the Evaluation Manager and CARI based on implementation challenges that needed to be explored to inform the recommendations. Also, the geographic proximity of the evaluation's team member, based in Sri Lanka, was another criterion for country selection.
  - iv. Focus group discussions: in India, four focus group discussions were conducted to trigger dialogue. This involved information on the following: the project's implemented strategies; the implementation difficulties and concrete solution approaches; lessons learned from AVACLIM participation; and recommendations for future agroecology initiatives. Overall, 30 people were involved in the focus group discussions – 20 of whom were women.
  - v. Direct observation of project activities: the evaluators participated in some project activities that allowed for direct observation. The team leader attended the regional CoP meeting in Senegal and the October 2022 *Desertifactions* Summit in Montpellier, France, which gathered scientists and representatives from institutions, NGOs and civil society organizations to debate and share experiences on land degradation, climate change and biodiversity. The team member also observed initiatives at the Renuka Bio Farms (RBF) and the Voluntary Association of Agricultural General Development Health and Reconstruction Alliance (VAAGDHARA).
  - vi. Online survey: an online survey for external stakeholders in the seven countries was launched to collect quantitative data on project performance. In particular, the survey aimed to assess results from the established or supported CoP, the quality of the modalities used to engage stakeholders and the effectiveness of the implemented capacity building actions. The survey was developed in English, French and Portuguese through the Kobo Toolbox platform. However, the response rate was less than expected: The survey was sent to 120 people, and 32 responses were recorded in the seven countries.
16. Primary and secondary data collected were analysed using a regular process of triangulation through the different sources. Different types of analysis were conducted: a qualitative analysis of interviews, a desk review and focus group discussions; a comparative analysis of information from various stakeholders and countries; and a performance analysis using progress indicators to compare expected outcomes and results with actual performance. The evaluation also assessed performance against each of the evaluation criteria based on the GEF rating scheme (see Appendix 3). Performance according to the GEF rating scheme was also assessed for: project monitoring, implementation and execution quality; co-financing; stakeholder engagement; knowledge management; and

cross-cutting issues. Environmental and social safeguards were not applicable to this project. The rating considered the independent consultants' assessment.

17. The preliminary findings of the evaluation were presented virtually to the evaluation reference group, composed of the GEF, the FFEM and CARI on 17 November 2022. The terminal evaluation findings were presented virtually to the donors, FAO, CARI and project partners on 29 November 2022. The recommendations and lessons learned from the evaluation exercise were presented to project partners and stakeholders during the project's January 2023 closing event in Montpellier, France. The in-person presentation was followed by a participatory workshop to gather stakeholder comments and suggestions on the recommendations presented. The feedback collected was capitalized on by the evaluators to inform the final recommendations and to finalize this report.

## 1.5 Limitations

18. Difficulties in reaching external stakeholders in countries not covered by the field visits are among the main limitations of this evaluation. External stakeholders were generally members of civil society organizations, farmer organizations and local authorities that were involved in the project's CoP through knowledge exchange activities. The evaluators were able to involve this category during field visits in India and Senegal. In other countries, however, the external stakeholders could not do virtual interviews. This category was reached through the online survey, but the number of responses (32 out of 120 people) was not representative to allow for an appropriate assessment of the project benefits.
19. Due to the low survey response rate, the evaluation design was predominantly qualitative and mainly based on case studies, interviews and the desk review.
20. Another limitation is that the evaluation exercise took place before the end of the project implementation period. This made it difficult to assess the impact of the advocacy activities carried out in the last period. Not enough time had passed since the advocacy activities were conducted. Therefore, the exercise did not aim to evaluate the medium- or long-term effects, but rather make preliminary observations on the advocacy component. The evaluation exercise was extended until mid-January 2023 so that the last advocacy activities could be captured. However, these activities could only be assessed in terms of the outputs delivered.
21. The evaluation question linked to the added value of the AVACLIM methodology was answered through stakeholders' assessment and perceptions and through inputs collected from the scientific stakeholders. Considering the time available, thematic and contextual research and technical assessments based on the quality of the methodology were not within the scope of the evaluation. Additionally, questions linked to the increased access to knowledge and improved skills for practitioners were addressed only in terms of outputs and stakeholder perceptions, since no assessment of capacity building had been done during project implementation (tests and questionnaires).
22. An important limitation was represented by the project's wide geographical coverage and the evaluation's budget constraints that did not allow for more case studies. Although the main country stakeholders were reached through virtual interviews and in-person meetings in Montpellier, additional case studies would have allowed for a more in-depth perspective on national results and potential impact.

23. Finally, a significant challenge for the evaluators was in obtaining consolidated and disaggregated data on the achieved values for the output and outcome indicators. This required several exchanges with the project's management and partners. The lack of an adequate project-related M&E system also made it difficult to capture project results during field visits in India and Senegal. The evaluators faced challenges in properly differentiating results achieved through the project and results stemming from other ongoing initiatives that support the same areas of intervention and involve the same local stakeholders. Although this was overcome for the Republic of Senegal case study, it hampered a proper assessment in India.

## **1.6 Structure of the report**

24. This report is structured following the GEF project template for terminal evaluations. Following this introduction, section 2 presents the background and context of the project, as well as the project's theory of change (TOC). Section 3 presents the main findings for each evaluation question. Conclusions and recommendations are in section 4, followed by lessons learned in section 5.
25. The report is accompanied by the following Appendices:
- i. Appendix 1. Stakeholders interviewed;
  - ii. Appendix 2. The GEF evaluation criteria rating table;
  - iii. Appendix 3. Rating scheme;
  - iv. Appendix 4. The GEF co-financing table;
  - v. Appendix 5. Results matrix;
  - vi. Appendix 6. Evaluation matrix;
  - vii. Appendix 7. The Republic of Senegal case study executive summary; and
  - viii. Appendix 8. The Republic of India case study executive summary.
26. The report is also accompanied by the following Annexes:
- i. Annex 1. The Republic of Senegal case study;
  - ii. Annex 2. The Republic of India case study; and
  - iii. Annex 3. Evaluation terms of reference.

## 2. Background and context of the project

### Box 1. Basic project information

- The GEF project ID number: FAO/GEF: GCP/GLO/927/GFF
- Recipient countries: (Africa) Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Morocco, Senegal, South Africa; (Asia) India; and (Latin America) Brazil
- Implementing agency: FAO
- Executing agency: CARI
- Date of project launch and expected closure: from 1 October 2019 to 31 March 2023
- Date of mid-term evaluation: November 2021

### 2.1 Brief description of the context and the project

27. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) strive to end hunger for all – especially the poor and the vulnerable – to achieve food security and improved nutrition and to promote sustainable agriculture by 2030 (UN, 2015). However, agriculture is increasingly confronted with challenges such as: water scarcity; soil degradation; desertification; climate change; a decline in biodiversity due to poor farming practices; and pollution. The effects on drylands are even greater. Agroecology provides an optimum solution to overcome food shortages, low yields, pests and diseases. It is beneficial for not only the agricultural producers of family farms but also the global environment (Coulibaly, 2015). Therefore, a greater focus on agroecological practices, data and impact assessment is essential.
28. A deeper understanding and awareness of agroecology is an important step to support policymakers, farmers and researchers in applying the approach. However, agroecology initiatives have been piecemeal and mostly implemented in isolation (FAO, 2019d). The AVACLIM project aimed to contribute to mainstreaming agroecology in drylands as a tool to address food insecurity, mitigate and adapt to climate change, and restore degraded land.
29. The project objective is that policymakers, civil society organizations and farmers prioritize agroecological systems in drylands as a means to sustain the productivity of agroecosystems. This aims to support food security and agricultural livelihoods and to reduce environmental degradation and greenhouse gas emissions (FAO, 2019d). The project was implemented across four components, which are outlined in the following:
  - i. **Component 1:** building partnerships for experience-sharing and capacity building of agroecology practitioners at the landscape and local levels with international connections among the project participants.
  - ii. **Component 2:** assessment of existing initiatives for evidence-based decision-making at the national, local and landscape levels.
  - iii. **Component 3:** advocacy for informed decision-making.
  - iv. **Component 4:** communication, learning, knowledge management and adaptive management.
30. Seven countries with drylands across three continents – Brazil, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, India, Morocco, Senegal and South Africa – were selected for project intervention. All countries

- are signatories to the United Nations and its three Rio Conventions, which involve: the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) (UN, 1992b); the relevant Aichi Biodiversity Targets (CBD, 2020); the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (UN, 1992a); and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) (UN, 1994). The poorest smallholder farmers are among the majority in these countries.
31. Project design started in 2012 based on the agroecological experiences of the executing agency, CARI, and its partners, specifically the Drynet network. The first version of the AVACLIM project was finalized in 2015. Its geographical scope initially covered ten countries, and its financing plan included support from the FFEM and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).
  32. Following the withdrawal of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, the GEF was contacted and expressed its interest in supporting the project. This modification had two implications for the project. Support from the GEF required the identification of an appropriate implementing agency. FAO was asked to undertake this function and integrate it into the institutional setup. The geographical scope had to be revised due to less financial support from the GEF than was the initially expected amount from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.
  33. The revision of the AVACLIM project took place from 2015 to 2019. It considered the following changes: the geographic scope; a restructured institutional setup; and the FAO procedures integrated into the partnership. The project finally started in early 2020.
  34. In its final version, AVACLIM was co-financed by the GEF and the FFEM. It proposed to work with seven NGOs in seven countries to build a capital of knowledge around agroecology. On the one hand, this aimed to make agroecology more visible, but on the other hand, it allowed for the development of reliable arguments to facilitate its integration into public policies (local, national and international development orientations and strategies).
  35. The AVACLIM project's objectives are in line with key policy documents from the seven countries involved and the strategies drafted by the main international actors promoting agroecology at a global level. The project objectives are coherent with all of FAO's Strategic Objectives, as well as SDGs 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 12 and 13 (UN, 2015). The AVACLIM project is consistent with FAO's 10 Elements of Agroecology and other sectoral frameworks, especially FAO's 2018 Scaling up Agroecology Initiative (FAO, 2023b; 2018c). It also aligns with each country's priorities as identified in the past and current FAO CPFs.
  36. Within the United Nations development and environment protection framework, the project's objectives and expected results are in line with the involved countries' commitments regarding the CBD and the relevant Aichi Biodiversity Targets, the UNFCCC and the UNCCD. The AVACLIM project is also aligned with the GEF focal areas of climate change mitigation, land degradation and biodiversity, as well as the FFEM's priority of sustainable forests and agricultural lands, particularly the promotion of sustainable agricultural practices.

## 2.2 Theory of change

37. The project's theory of change was illustrated in the 2019 project document (see Figure 4). The TOC was developed based on the following assumptions:
- i. The definition of agroecology varies from one source to another. Therefore, the theory of change was developed on the assumption that there will be a consensus on the definition of agroecology among all actors involved in the project.
  - ii. Significant results achieved through agroecology initiatives worldwide – obtained through the practical assessments undertaken in Component 1 and the scientific assessments around agroecological innovations in Component 2 – will be sufficiently verified under the project intervention.
  - iii. The results obtained through the project assessments demonstrate that agroecology is a cost-effective tool for enabling food security, improving livelihoods and farmer income, and addressing land degradation and vulnerability to climate change. These results will prove to policymakers that agroecology is an efficient modality to address socioeconomic and environmental issues. Therefore, it should be promoted and mainstreamed at local, national and regional levels, as well as internationally.
  - iv. Agroecology practitioners and scientists will dedicate sufficient time. They willingly share their experiences with the CoP.
  - v. Despite the complexity of the agroecology concept and the diversity of agroecological innovations, a common set of indicators and methodology can be developed. A standardized assessment tool and user guide can therefore be agreed upon by all project actors and validated to be mainstreamed thereafter.

### 2.2.1 Preconditions

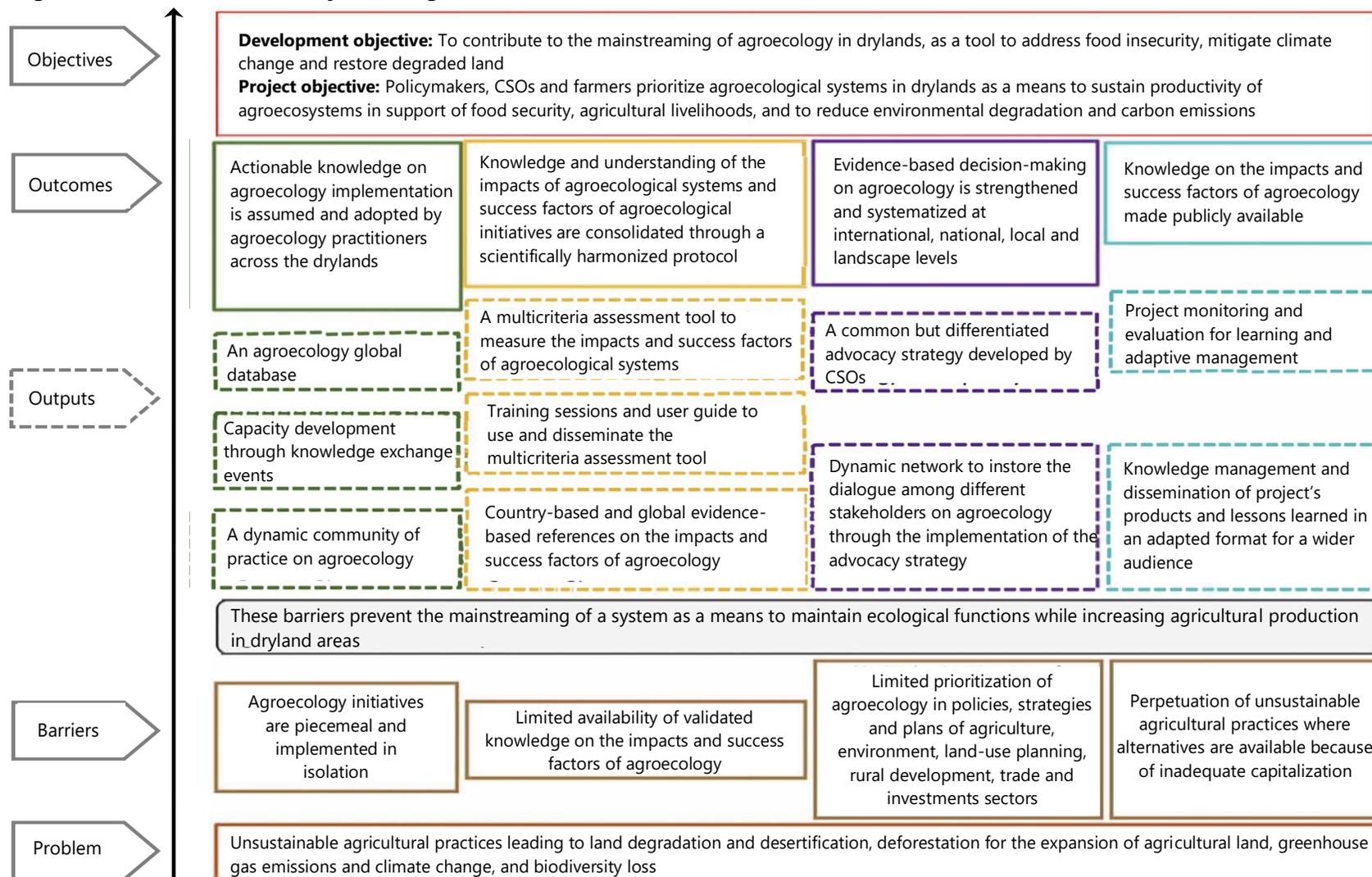
38. According to the design logic, the achievement of the expected impact presupposes a series of intermediate steps that take the form of outcomes to be achieved and outputs to be produced. The outcomes necessary to achieve the expected impact are detailed in the following points:
- i. Outcome 1: actionable knowledge on agroecology implementation is assumed and adopted by agroecology practitioners across the drylands.
  - ii. Outcome 2: knowledge and understanding of the impact of agroecological systems and success factors of agroecological initiatives are consolidated through a scientifically harmonized protocol.
  - iii. Outcome 3: evidence-based decision-making on agroecology is strengthened and systematized at international, national, local and landscape levels.
  - iv. Outcome 4: knowledge on the impact and the success factors of agroecology are publicly available.

39. The outputs necessary to achieve these outcomes are outlined in the following points:
- i. Output 1.1: an agroecology global database with i) successful agroecological innovations in dryland areas; and ii) quantitative, qualitative and spatial data on projects.
  - ii. Output 1.2: capacity development through knowledge exchange events to disseminate agroecological innovations in participating countries.
  - iii. Output 1.3: a dynamic CoP on agroecology.
  - iv. Output 2.1: a multicriteria assessment tool to measure the impact and success factors of agroecological systems.
  - v. Output 2.2: training sessions and a user guide to use and disseminate the multicriteria assessment tool.
  - vi. Output 2.3: country-based and global evidence-based references on impacts and success factors of agroecology.
  - vii. Output 3.1: a common, but differentiated, advocacy strategy developed by civil society organizations.
  - viii. Output 3.2: a dynamic network to establish dialogue among different stakeholders on agroecology through the implementation of the advocacy strategy.
  - ix. Output 4.1: project M&E for learning and adaptive management.
  - x. Output 4.2: knowledge management and dissemination of the project's products and lessons learned in an adapted format for a wider audience.

### **2.2.2 Variables**

40. A series of variables that are internal to the project can facilitate the expected impact. In particular, this concerns: active stakeholder participation; collaboration between CARI and the partners; collaboration among partners, scientists and individual farmers; behavioural changes of the farmers; and the degree of skills and abilities of the staff involved in project execution.
41. There are a number of variables that are not under the project's control and that can positively or negatively affect the achievement of the expected impact. In this sense, a decisive variable concerns the commitment and a more systematic and prominent integration of agroecology into national and sectoral policies, strategies, plans and investments at the local, national and regional levels, as well as internationally. Even the limited availability of state resources to mainstream agroecology interventions can slow down or limit the expected impact.

**Figure 4. The AVACLIM theory of change**



Source: FAO. 2024. Evaluation of the project "AVACLIM: agroecology, ensuring food security and sustainable livelihoods while mitigating climate change and restoring land in dryland regions" – Annex 1. Terms of reference. Rome.



## 3. Findings

### 3.1 Relevance

**Finding 1.** The AVACLIM project's objectives and overall design appear to be relevant and targeted to address key criticalities that hamper the mainstreaming of agroecology in the countries involved. The AVACLIM project is also aligned with national policies and strategic documents in the fields of agricultural development, food security, natural resources preservation and climate change response, as well as FAO CPFs. By building on solid, pre-existing partnerships with significant accumulated experience around the promotion of agroecology, AVACLIM also seems coherent with the existing dynamics on civil society organization-led agroecology.

42. The seven AVACLIM countries have considerable dryland territory as a common geographic feature (FAO, 2019d). Moreover, a large part of the population in those areas is composed of small households in severe poverty. They live on household agriculture with limited access to food and nutrition and face the hardest consequences of climate change on agricultural production. Against this backdrop and aside from national specificities, several common sectoral challenges emerge from the available country programming documents drafted by international donors and agencies, as well as the key national governmental policies and strategies,<sup>3</sup> namely:
  - i. soil and other natural resources degradation;
  - ii. poor resilience to climate change and insufficient action for the sustainable management of natural resources;
  - iii. rural poverty;
  - iv. food insecurity and undernutrition.
43. Additional issues include insufficient institutional capacities for designing and implementing national policies that are capable of tackling: sectoral criticalities; gender inequality in access to land and related productive resources; and scarce knowledge of contemporary, more efficient and cost-effective agricultural techniques. In this context, existing scientific literature and on-the-ground experiences from across the continents suggest that agroecology is an effective instrument to tackle these challenges (IFAD, 2022; FAO, 2015b; Bezner Kell *et al.*, 2021). Further, with regard to the management of natural resources, the preservation of soil against degradation and the adaptation to the consequences of climate change, the relevance of agroecology to these challenges is in line with the UNFCCC and the related Koronivia Joint Work on Agriculture, which is also supported by FAO (FAO, 2023a), the CBD (IFAD, 2022), and the UNCCD (Elaydi, 2021; UNCCD, 2022a; UNCCD, 2022b; UNCCD, 2019). Contemporary views on the deep connection between agroecology and food and nutrition security were extensively discussed in the FAO International Symposium on Agroecology for Food Security and Nutrition (FAO, 2015b). A thorough scientific review of existing case studies and literature on this subject over the past 20 years has been conducted in (Bezner Kerr *et al.*, 2021).

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<sup>3</sup> This includes, among others, the available FAO CPFs: Burkina Faso 2017–2020 (extended to 2022); the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 2016–2020; the Federative Republic of Brazil 2013–2016; the Kingdom of Morocco 2017–2020; the Republic of India 2016–2017 (updated through 2018); the Republic of Senegal 2019–2023; and the Republic of South Africa 2014–2015 (interim). More country-specific information is systematized in the AVACLIM's project document and advocacy strategies.

Moreover, a more comprehensive overview on these themes is also included in FAO's 10 elements of agroecology (FAO, 2023b).

44. Agroecology has already been implemented to different degrees and levels of commitment in the seven countries covered by AVACLIM. The involvement of political institutions and civil society offer, to varying extents, a generally favourable environment for its development. The range of context is fairly wide. For instance, in Brazil, agroecology was promoted by ad hoc national strategic documents, despite the prevalence of intensive large-scale farming. Moreover, there are deeply rooted, active civil society calls for more sustainable agricultural practices, as shown in AVACLIM's advocacy strategy for Brazil (FAO, 2019d). Alternatively, in Senegal, where agroecology was explicitly endorsed by the President in 2019 (CIRAD, 2020), the country can count on consistent support from a very active, multistakeholder platform. This contextual variety shifts further in Morocco, where agroecology is a relatively new practice, only thought of in relation to protecting the environment and consumer health, as noted in AVACLIM's advocacy strategy for Morocco (FAO, 2019d). Nonetheless, greater agroecology has been favoured in the last few years due to civil society organization commitment and support from the research community.<sup>4</sup>
45. On country-level alignment with key policies, it must be mentioned that not all seven countries demonstrated the same level of political commitment and official endorsement of agroecology. Strategic frameworks and references vary greatly, but a focus on sustainable farming and natural resources management can be found in most of them. Examples range from the presence of an ad hoc National Policy for Agroecology and Organic Production (2012) and the subsequent national plans for agroecology and organic production (2013–2015; 2016–2019) in Brazil<sup>5</sup> to the growing integration of agroecology and its principles in various key policy documents and action plans. The latter concerns agricultural development and natural resources management and conservation in response to climate change in Senegal and South Africa (Republic of Senegal, 2014a; Republic of Senegal, Ministry of Economy, Finance, and Planning, 2018; AgriSETA, 2018). In Ethiopia, India and Morocco, the integration of agroecology principles was also found in several key national documents linked to food security and poverty reduction. Ethiopia's National Nutrition Programme II 2016–2022 includes a study on the "effect of agro-ecology and varieties of teff on nutritional, sensory and shelf-life stability of injera" among operational priorities for food safety and quality (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2016, p. 79). India provided for a Doubling Farmers Income programme (FAO, 2023c). Finally, Morocco put into action its Green Plan 2008–2022 and an increasingly structured and regulated organic food production chain and market (FAO, 2019d, p. 5).
46. In Burkina Faso, the severe effects of drought on agricultural productivity led to greater attention on sustainable practices. The 2015 Orientation Law for Agrosilvipastoralism, Marine Resources and Fauna (National Council of the Transition of Burkina Faso, 2015) mentions the use of agroecology and organic farming as good practices for environmental safeguards. Other relevant documents that include approaches that are compatible with

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<sup>4</sup> In terms of the research community in Morocco, agroecology has been supported by the Agricultural Research Centre for International Development (CIRAD), the Mohammed V University in Rabat and the Mohammed VI Polytechnic University in Ben Guerir.

<sup>5</sup> The National Policy for Agroecology and Organic Production was endorsed in 2012 to articulate and integrate the various existing policies, programmes and initiatives on agroecology and organic agriculture. This policy, which has a strong focus on the role of women, youth and traditional knowledge, was the result of a historical and political process initiated in the 1970s by farmer organizations.

agroecology principles are the National Economic and Social Development Plan 2016–2020 (Government of Burkina Faso, 2016), the Strategic Investment Framework for Sustainable Land Management 2015–2025 (AVACLIM, ARFA’s advocacy strategy in Burkina Faso), (Burkina Faso, CPDN, 2015) and the Rural Development Strategy 2016–2025 (Government of Burkina Faso, 2015). In particular, the National Economic and Social Development Plan 2016–2020 includes the development of a productive, resilient and market-oriented agroforestry, wildlife and fisheries sector. The Strategic Investment Framework for Sustainable Land Management formulates Burkina Faso’s vision towards sustainable rural production systems. It takes into account knowledge and local know-how to achieve: i) the preservation of soil fertility; ii) greater animal and plant production; iii) improved well-being among rural populations; and iv) the restoration and preservation of integrity and ecosystem functions. The rural development strategy features: Axis 1, strengthening food and nutritional security; Axis 2, improvement of the competitiveness of the agrosilvipastoral fisheries and wildlife sectors; and Axis 3, sustainable development and natural resources management. In April 2022, the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal and Fishery Resources approved a National Strategy on Agroecology for 2022–2026 (Ministry of Agriculture, Animal and Fishery Resources of Burkina Faso, 2022). This will trigger additional actions to support agroecological transition (Ministry of Agriculture, Animal and Fishery Resources of Burkina Faso, 2022). In South Africa, a draft Agroecology Strategy was created in 2013, but was neither finalized nor implemented because it was not deemed appropriate by the network of sectoral civil society organizations involved in making it. This was due to a poor political understanding of its key concepts, such as food sovereignty and the actual transformation of perspective that scaling up agroecology would require (African Centre for Biosafety, 2015, p. 13). The Indian Bharatiya Prakritik Krishi Paddhati, under the centrally sponsored Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana Plan within the National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture, aims to promote traditional indigenous practices. It focuses on farm biomass recycling to reduce externally purchased synthetic chemical inputs. However, it was only in May 2020 that the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog), which serves as the apex public policy think tank for the Government of India, organized a high-level roundtable on agroecology. FAO participated in this roundtable.

47. Senegal is an example of long-standing governmental commitment to agroecological transition. Its first approaches date back to the 1980s when the need to tackle the long-term effects of the Great Drought (1968–1972) led to the adoption of cornerstone pieces of legislation on natural resources management. For example, this involved the Code of Forestry (originally published in 1981; for the updated version, see Republic of Senegal, 2018 for the updated version), the Code of Water (Republic of Senegal, 1981) and the Code of Environment (Republic of Senegal, 1983). Since then, agroecology has progressively gained importance, and laws have since been updated. Recently, the country launched the Emerging Green Senegal Plan (Republic of Senegal, Ministry of Economy, Finance, and Planning, 2018). This contains a set of development and resource preservation action policies. It also launched a new Agricultural Programme for Sustainable Food Sovereignty 2022–2026, which explicitly refers to several agroecology practices. This programme was validated in July 2022 but has not been published (IPAR, 2022).

48. Overall, the promotion of agroecology is consistent with each country's priorities, as identified in the past and current FAO CPFs.<sup>6</sup> Although not all of them explicitly mention agroecology, the focus on sustainable agriculture and natural resources management has been a key pillar. The 2019–2023 CPF for Senegal (FAO, 2019a) places considerable importance on agroecology as "an integral part" of its vision for sustainable food and agriculture. Priority 3 expressly mentions the "institutionalization and integration of agroecological practices into policies, strategies, programmes and projects through the strengthening of planning and governance of the agrosilvipastoral and fisheries sector at national and local levels", as well as "the scaling up of good agroecological practices in production systems, in conjunction with the producer and agropastoral field schools" among its main areas of intervention. All 2019–2022 CPF priority areas for India clearly identified support for smallholder farmers. Improving agricultural productivity through sustainable natural resources management is specified alongside greater resilience of rural livelihoods to climate change and recurring natural disasters under Priorities 1 and 3, respectively (FAO, 2023c).
49. Beyond the project's overall relevance to country priorities and policies, the specific problems and identified areas of intervention were found to be fully consistent with the main obstacles in consolidating the approach and position of agroecology that stakeholders had reported during consultations. The project design identified the following sectoral challenges: i) fragmentary and isolated agroecology initiatives; ii) limited and often unscientific knowledge on the impact of agroecology and its success factors; iii) limited mainstreaming of agroecology in national strategic documents on structural criticalities faced by the seven countries; and iv) agroecology initiatives that were neither communicated nor harnessed.
50. Ethiopian interviewees confirmed that agroecological practices were fragmented and not adequately documented due to low research investments, despite an estimated 40 million allocated hectares. Weak policy prioritization also brought low financial aid for farmers willing to switch to agroecological practices. Brazilian and Moroccan stakeholders confirmed the need to raise the profile of the public discourse on agroecology through better communication on successful experiences. In this respect, stereotypes persist: agroecology is associated with poverty and conservative techniques. There is a need to point out its positive effects on food security and innovation in agriculture. In Senegal, the project responded to the need for agroecological CoP at the local level. Interviewees confirmed that this is a priority of the national coalition on agroecology, namely the Dynamics for Agroecological Transition in Senegal (DyTAES, by its French acronym).
51. The AVACLIM project stems from previous agroecology collaborations among involved partners, specifically the Drynet network. All partners have extensive experience in agroecology promotion and restlessly fight soil degradation and desertification. This has ensured a strong, consistent partnership on issues addressed by the initiative.
52. The project was well integrated into existing national initiatives on agroecology. It was able to fully align with advocacy efforts on sustainable land management, biodiversity conservation, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and food sovereignty. By means

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<sup>6</sup> This involves the following FAO CPFs: Burkina Faso 2017–2020 (extended to 2022); the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 2016–2020; the Federative Republic of Brazil 2013–2016; the Kingdom of Morocco 2017–2020; the Republic of India 2019–2022; the Republic of Senegal 2019–2023; and the Republic of South Africa 2014–2015 (interim).

of knowledge exchange and the capitalization of good practices, AVACLIM contributed to the overall strengthening of existing dynamics (where active) and the reinforcement of agroecology civil society organization networks. Among these, it is worth recalling: the National Articulation of Agroecology and its affiliated Northeast Feminism and Agroecology Network, Articulation in the Semiarid, and ATER Network in Brazil; the National Council of Organic Agriculture (CNABio, by its French acronym) in Burkina Faso; Agroecology South Africa; and the Network of Agroecological Initiatives in Morocco. In Senegal, the project had an extremely synergistic strategy to support efforts in scaling up agroecology that the national multistakeholder coalition DyTAES had undertaken since 2019. In Burkina Faso, the project leveraged pre-existing efforts to evaluate agroecology performance led by the National Centre of Scientific and Technological Research and civil society organizations, such as the CNABio and the project partner ARFA.

*The rating for this criterion is Highly Satisfactory.*

**Finding 2.** The project's envisaged results fully align with the priorities identified by key international development entities and donors, such as the GEF, the FFEM, FAO, and the United Nations and its three Rio Conventions (CBD, UNFCCC and UNCCD). They also contribute to the achievement of all FAO strategic objectives and eight SDGs: 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 12 and 13.

53. The AVACLIM project is well-aligned with the priorities of the main international actors that support agroecology in achieving sustainable agricultural and rural development, resilience against the adverse effects of climate change, and increased food and nutrition security. According to the new FAO Strategic Framework 2022–2031 (FAO, 2021), systemic approaches, such as agroecology, are recognized among the main drivers affecting food and agricultural production and distribution. FAO also recognizes the importance of establishing national legal frameworks that are conducive to the overall reinforcement of agrifood systems as a means to achieve food security and to strengthen basic human rights. Among the various interventions for this purpose, there is also the enactment of "laws relating to sustainable agriculture in general, as well as specific legislations on sustainable pastoralism, responsible fisheries, agroecology and organic production." (Parent and Collette, 2021, p. 58).
54. The project is highly coherent with FAO's vision. In this respect, the project had the potential to contribute to FAO's strategic objectives, as set out in the 2017 Strategic Framework (FAO, 2017a; FAO, 2019c). Agroecology can help to: eliminate food insecurity (Strategic Objective 1); increase the sustainability of forestry and the management of natural resources (Strategic Objective 2); enhance the inclusiveness and efficiency of agriculture and food systems (Strategic Objective 4) in strong connection with increasing the resilience of livelihood to crises (Strategic Objective 5); and reduce rural poverty (Strategic Objective 3) (FAO, 2014a; 2018b; 2018d). The AVACLIM project is also relevant and contributes to the forward-looking perspective offered by the FAO Strategic Framework 2022–2031. Indeed, it revolves around the four betters as means to attain the goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In particular, AVACLIM's objectives can be said to contribute to all of the four betters (better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life). This is because the project focuses on the transformation of agrifood systems. In this respect, AVACLIM's contribution is relevant to the identified overarching challenges, such as addressing climate change and building resilient and healthy food systems through the sustainable use of natural resources, progress towards food security, and the elimination of malnutrition and poverty among rural households.

55. The AVACLIM project has promoted an overall approach to agroecology that is consistent with FAO's 10 Elements of Agroecology (FAO, 2023b). These have been mainstreamed across the project's four components and with other sectoral initiatives, especially FAO's 2018 Scaling up Agroecology Initiative (FAO, 2018a; 2023b).
56. The AVACLIM project contributes to the attainment of several SDGs by supporting evidence-based, agroecology-related good practices. These aim to positively impact sustainable resources management and to improve agricultural systems' adaptation to climate change: SDG 1, end poverty in all its forms everywhere; SDG 2, end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture; SDG 3, good health and well-being; SDG 5, gender equality; SDG 6, clean water and sanitation; SDG 8, decent work and economic growth; SDG 10, reduced inequalities; SDG 12, responsible consumption and production; SDG 13, climate action; and SDG 15, life on land – as far as its target, 15.3 of land degradation neutrality, is concerned. It must be highlighted that agroecology is recognized by FAO as key in reaching the SDGs (FAO, 2018b).
57. Within the developmental and environmental protection framework of the United Nations, the project objectives and expected results align with the seven countries' commitments to the CBD and the relevant Aichi Biodiversity Targets, the UNFCCC and the UNCCD (UNCCD, 2019; 2022).
58. It is worth recalling that the original project design was aligned with the GEF-6 focal areas of: climate change mitigation (Objective 2, demonstrate systemic impacts of mitigation options and climate change adaptation); land degradation (Objective 4, sustainable land management mainstreaming and climate change adaptation); and biodiversity (Objective 3, sustainable use of biodiversity and Objective 4, mainstream biodiversity conservation and sustainable use into production landscapes, seascapes and sectors). As of today, AVACLIM fully aligns with the GEF and retains its validity with the following GEF-8 focal areas for the years from 2022 to 2026:
  - i. Climate change adaptation: the AVACLIM project contributes to Theme 1, agriculture, food security and health, to support adaptation through agroecological transformation, and improving ecosystem management and livelihoods.
  - ii. Land degradation: this relates to AVACLIM's indirect contribution to the sustainability of natural resources and land management, and the enhancement of food security.
  - iii. Biodiversity: this is against the backdrop provided by the CBD and specifically refers to Objective 1, improve the conservation, sustainable use and restoration of natural ecosystems (GEF, 2023).
59. Strong coherence was also found in relation to the FFEM priority theme of sustainable forests and agricultural lands, particularly the promotion of sustainable agricultural practices. Among this, agroecology plays a crucial role. The project also relates to the sustainable exploitation of resources and the protection and promotion of biodiversity to encourage a proactive response to climate change and other crises. It is worth noting that AVACLIM adds value to the FFEM's support for agroecology, which has been mostly based on practical initiatives and empirical evidence. Indeed, it embraces research to generate scientific evidence that supports advocacy work and fosters the scaling up of agroecology.

*The rating for this criterion is Highly Satisfactory.*

**Finding 3.** According to consulted stakeholders, the AVACLIM multicriteria assessment tool has the advantage of being aligned with the agroecology holistic approach and is designed to capture its multidimensional effects. However, several weaknesses and time mismatches limit its potential added value. The tool has yet to be finalized, simplified and validated within the scientific community, which does not allow for the proper assessment of its utility. Although the stakeholders recognize the need for a holistic method, such as the AVACLIM tool, the Evaluation Team received indications from national partners that the tool, in its current form, may not be utilized in the future as planned. Global stakeholders consider the tool as potentially complementary with other methods, if optimized.

60. The research component linked to the development of a multicriteria assessment tool that measures the multidimensional impact of agroecology was the project's core. The 2019 project document and the accompanying theory of change emphasize the generation, use and dissemination of knowledge on agroecology. All project components revolve around the concept of knowledge. This was practically produced under Component 1 through exchange activities among practitioners and scientifically generated under Component 2 through the development of the multicriteria assessment tool. Components 3, advocacy, and 4, knowledge dissemination, build on this knowledge.<sup>7</sup> During implementation, Component 2 became predominant in the project discourse and a pillar of its strategy. This was confirmed by stakeholders. They stated that they had devoted significant efforts to Component 2, which required much more time than the other components. The budget repartition per component also confirms the crucial role of Component 2 (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Budget share per component**

Component	Budget share (percentage)
<b>Component 1:</b> building partnerships for experience-sharing and capacity building of agroecology practitioners at the landscape and local levels with international connections among the project participants	16
<b>Component 2:</b> assessment of existing initiatives for evidence-based decision-making at the national, local and landscape levels	43
<b>Component 3:</b> advocacy for informed decision-making	11
<b>Component 4:</b> communications, learning, knowledge management and adaptive management	12

Source: Elaborated by the Evaluation Team.

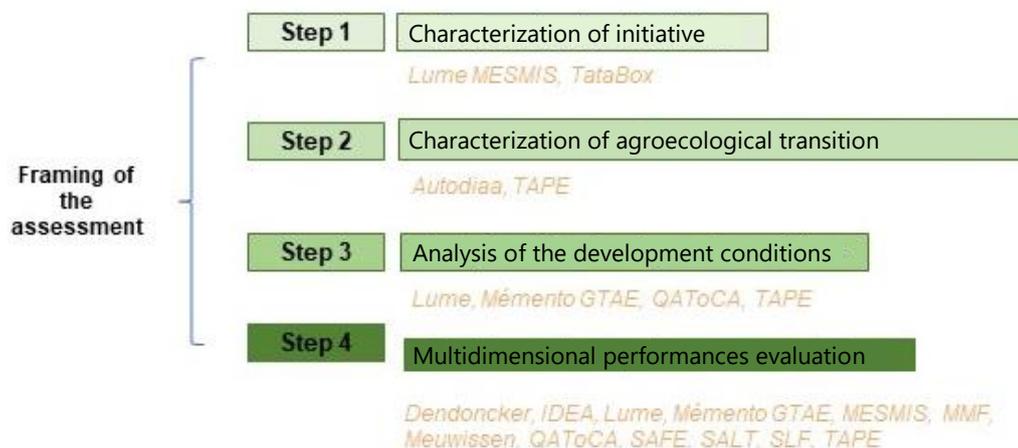
61. The tool consists of a four-step methodology to tackle the following four dimensions:

- i. Step 1, characterize the agroecological initiative;
- ii. Step 2, clarify and assess the level of the initiative's agroecological transition, including its evolution over time;
- iii. Step 3, analyse the development conditions;

<sup>7</sup> The 2019 project document states on page 68 that "the project focuses on capitalizing on agroecology initiatives in seven countries in drylands to generate scientifically-proven information on the positive effects of agroecology at the environmental and socioeconomic levels, and – based on these results – advocate for the integration of the agroecology approach in development planning for improved management of land, soil, water and forest resources across drylands".

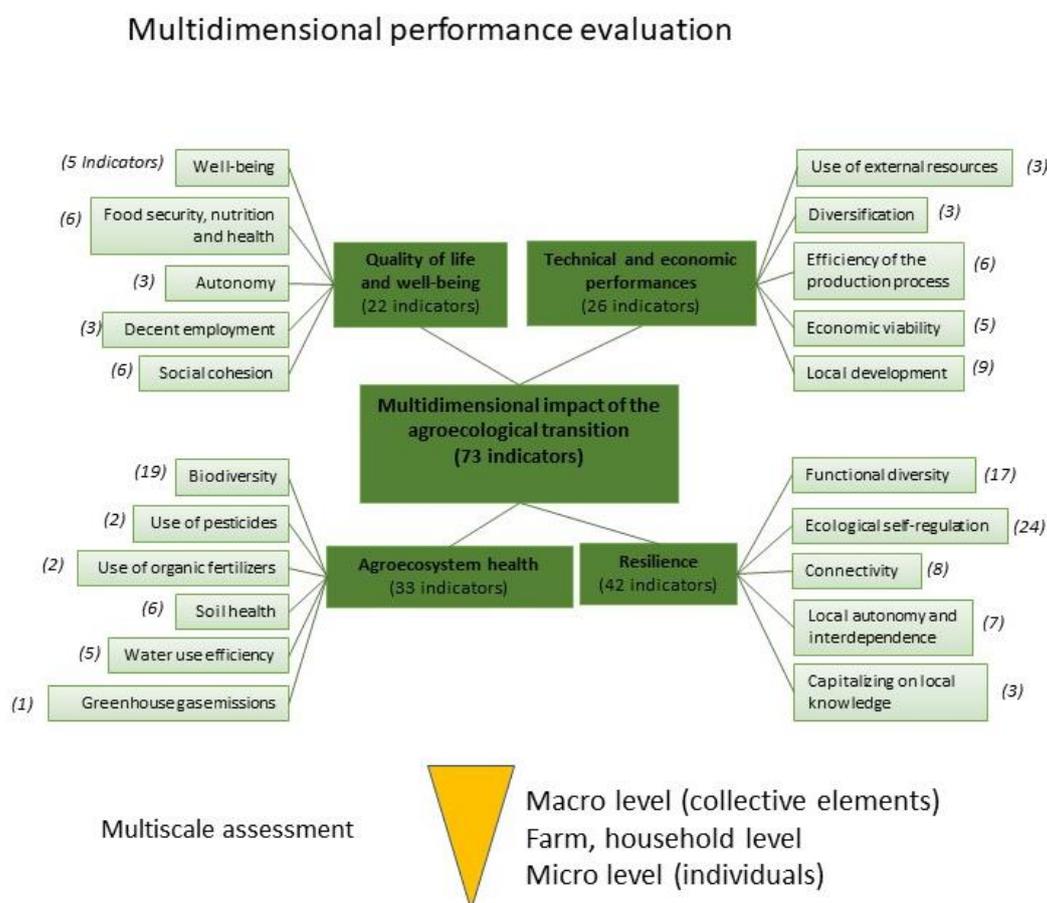
- iv. Step 4, assess the multidimensional impacts (social, economic, agronomic and environmental) across 73 indicators.

**Figure 5. The AVACLIM project's four-step methodology**



Source: Maryline Darmaun and AVACLIM project. n.d. PhD thesis. Internal document.

- 62. For Step 4, the methodology initially had 83 indicators. Recently, these became 73. These indicators relate to agroecology technical and economic performance, quality of life and well-being, agroecosystem health and resilience (see Figure 6). A variety of qualitative and quantitative methods are used to collect related data, both from primary and secondary sources.

**Figure 6. Step 4 of the AVACLIM multidimensional evaluation**

Source: Maryline Darmaun and AVACLIM project. n.d. PhD thesis. Internal document. The end users are NGOs. Ideally, these are supported by the research community. This proved to be the best setup for the methodology to work. To date, the evaluation tool prototype has been applied to the evaluation of 14 agroecological initiatives (two per country involved) identified under AVACLIM. The evaluation of such initiatives has been carried out by national NGOs and research institutes.

63. It is worth mentioning that the project went through three waves of concept updates. During early project conceptualization, from 2012 to 2013, most accredited agroecology evaluation tools had not been developed. However, by the third project conceptualization in 2018, the development of some aforementioned, new tools were in progress, specifically FAO's Tool for Agroecology Performance Evaluation (TAPE) (FAO, 2019b).<sup>8</sup> The latter was available for use at the beginning of the project in late 2019. Interviews and a desk review (AVACLIM meeting reports) confirmed that there had been initial discussions on the option of using TAPE within AVACLIM. However, further reflection and discussions within the Project Steering Committee led to the decision to develop a different tool which, according to stakeholders, was aimed at being more aligned with AVACLIM's scientific objectives.

<sup>8</sup> The development of the multidimensional assessment tool, TAPE, started in 2018 upon request of FAO's governing bodies. It was developed through a multistakeholder consultation process and was ready to be tested and used in 2019. The tool has been tested in 40 countries, even though it still requires final validation. More than 5 000 producers and farms have been assessed. The tool has been translated into 24 languages and is used with governmental and institutional partners, NGOs, academia and research institutions (evaluation interviews).

64. Interestingly, the tool's development was framed within a PhD thesis and under the strategic guidance of the project's international scientific consortium of partners: the IRD, the Agricultural Research Centre for International Development (CIRAD, by its French acronym) and the French Institute of Higher Education in Agricultural Sciences. A comparison review of existing evaluation tools preceded its development. Overall, the AVACLIM method was built on 14 pre-existing evaluation tools. More tools were reviewed, but the development of the AVACLIM method was based on these 14 tools. Among them, TAPE, the agroecological transitions working group of Agrisud International, Agronomists and Veterinarians without Borders, CARI, GRET Memento (Levard *et al.*, 2019), and the Lume method for the economic-ecological analysis of agroecosystems (Peterson *et al.*, 2020)<sup>9</sup> in Brazil are underscored. During the project's first year, online consultations with country partners were also conducted to assess their expectations. The prototype was presented in February 2021 through a four-day online scientific workshop. Several meetings in countries allowed for the adaptation of the envisaged set of indicators to local contexts.
65. The prototype was piloted in France, through CARI's resources, and in Senegal within the AVACLIM project. During the field mission in Senegal, the PhD student was supported by the project partners Enda Pronat and the Senegalese Institute of Agricultural Research (ISRA, by its French acronym). The research activity linked to the tool involved one community- and one farm-based initiative. The former is an agroecological collective initiative in the village of Sare Boubou (Koussanar Municipality, Tambacounda Region), where nine households were included in the sample. The latter is the Guélack-Peulh agricultural private farm (Gandon Municipality, Saint-Louis Region).
66. The tool has been adopted exclusively by the AVACLIM project partners. It is still in the finalization process and has yet to be validated within the scientific community. The expected scientific article on the method has not been published but is under review by a scientific journal. The final results on applying the method have yet to be consolidated in the expected national and global synthetic documents,<sup>10</sup> and the final research results still need to be communicated in some of the involved countries (see Finding 9).<sup>11</sup>
67. The assessment of the intrinsic quality and value of the AVACLIM methodology is beyond the scope of this evaluation. However, the Evaluation Team collected significant opinions in this regard, which should reasonably be taken into consideration for the improvement and, most importantly, the adoption of the methodology.
68. When asked if the AVACLIM evaluation tool would present additional value compared to existing methods, several stakeholders noted that the tool has broader coverage that is aligned with the intrinsic and holistic approach of agroecology. As such, the tool allows for capturing broader outcomes of agroecological initiatives. The AVACLIM methodology embraces a variety of dimensions and indicators to be assessed and intends to answer aspects that are not addressed by other methods. Although GRET Memento was found to

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<sup>9</sup> The Lume method was developed under the Brazilian Family Farming and Agroecology NGO (known as AS-PTA, by its Portuguese acronym).

<sup>10</sup> A global synthesis and seven national summaries of the evaluation results are planned. These outputs, in contrast to the initial planning, were assigned to an external provider. Brazil, Burkina Faso, Morocco, Senegal and South Africa received a first draft of these outputs in the beginning of January 2023 and will provide their feedback for finalization.

<sup>11</sup> The planned national restitution workshops were not implemented in India and Ethiopia. They were organized in Senegal, Burkina Faso and South Africa at the end of 2022.

cover several dimensions, the AVACLIM partners did not think it had implementation potential due to its complex design. The level of the initiatives evaluated was another important feature highlighted by the consulted stakeholders. Compared to other instruments, AVACLIM focuses on the initiative rather than the farm or cooperative levels. Therefore, the method has the potential to assess the diversity of the initiatives across different scales of implementation (individual farm, cooperative, village, territorial). It also includes an analysis of the agroecological transition triggers, the characterization of the different phases, and the relations among the farmers involved. Additionally, the balanced combination of quantitative and qualitative methods is considered an added value that allows for building the needed scientific evidence to nourish the advocacy work.

69. Interdisciplinarity was not highlighted enough in previous evaluation tools. The criteria focused on performance in specific parameters, for example, soil quality. These instruments were more consistent with a classic approach that does not obtain a holistic overview. In fact, having an impact on different dimensions is one of agroecology's key contributions (stakeholder interview).
70. As described, AVACLIM was built on a comparative review of existing tools. According to stakeholders, AVACLIM proposes an evolutionary and innovative approach based on the strengths and weaknesses of other methods.
71. The flexibility of the AVACLIM tool was repeatedly reported by interviewees as an added value. The set of indicators linked to the four dimensions to be assessed can be modified to fit local contexts. Additional indicators can be proposed by implementing partners, while others can be eliminated.<sup>12</sup> This implies that the methodology is more adaptable to the context and the specific feature of each initiative. In Burkina Faso, for example, the research institute was deeply involved in the selection of appropriate indicators and decided to add a pesticide residue analysis to assess the final product's sanitary quality. This was an important aspect in the advocacy discourse at the national level. However, this did not appear among the initially envisaged indicators.
72. The AVACLIM method is very flexible in adapting to any region or country. It is practically impossible to have a uniform tool with standard indicators for the project's seven countries across the globe. In Burkina Faso, for example, it was possible to integrate the tool with the most relevant indicators to the context (stakeholder interview).
73. In Senegal, most of the stakeholders highly valued the project's participatory approach in developing the AVACLIM methodology. On the one hand, the international scientific consortium and the PhD student regularly consulted the national partners, Enda Pronat and ISRA. On the other hand, the tool was discussed with the producers involved in the research. Although it was not designed for them, the consultation made them active participants throughout the process. The preliminary results were also presented to the community, leading to what has been defined a "co-construction" process. This approach resulted in a continued process of adaptation arising from extensive discussions on the indicators with both the national partners and the local community. This stands out as an important added value of the methodology.

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<sup>12</sup> According to CARI, the rule is to retain a minimum of one indicator per criterion.

74. Notwithstanding the aforementioned strengths, several weaknesses were reiterated by interviewees. Concerning the tool's solidness, it was noted that the AVACLIM methodology had been developed on a limited sample that was not representative: 9 out of 14 Senegalese households in the Sare Boubou village (Koussanar Municipality, Tambacounda Region). Beyond the restricted sample, several stakeholders argued that the selected village was not representative due to its atypical agroecological transition. In fact, for a considerable period of time, the village was supported by Enda Pronat and a GEF-funded FAO project to advance agroecology. According to Enda Pronat's estimates, the majority of inhabitants currently practise agroecology.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the village could not represent the majority of cases in which agroecology coexists with more conventional practices in the same community. Consequently, the reliability of the method is questioned, since it was developed on a sample that was not representative. This reflects the choice of indicators, which should be tested on different categories of the population, in different agroecological zones and, in particular, in areas experiencing different stages of agroecological transition.
75. The AVACLIM method does not include any analysis that allows for drawing a causal link to claim attribution, for example, a comparison between primary data collected in both "treatment" (farmers practising agroecology) and "non-treatment" (farmers practicing conventional agriculture) groups. This impedes a counterfactual analysis. In this respect, the methodology mobilizes external reference values, for example, national statistics to appraise the initiative in comparison with others implemented in different areas of the country.
76. The reported weakness of the evaluation tool is its complexity. Indeed, this hampers the tool's adoption and continued application. The tool is seen as time-consuming and resource intensive, considering the wide range of indicators to be assessed (73 indicators at present). In turn, this requires a massive amount of data to be collected and analysed (see section 3.2 on effectiveness). A tool that is unlikely to be replicated possesses limited validity and added value – unless it is fine-tuned and simplified, as suggested by almost all of the interviewees.
77. In several cases, consulted stakeholders were not entirely convinced of the usefulness and added value of the AVACLIM methodology compared to other existing ones. In some of the countries covered, there were consolidated experiences of joint collaborations between scientists and practitioners. Different methodologies were adopted by both NGOs and academia prior to AVACLIM. This involved, for example, Brazil, depending on the different types of application and the specific dimensions to be covered like the agroecology impact on gender. In other countries, partners have been using tools, such as TAPE, which is considered more user-friendly. They have not found valid reasons to change or integrate the tools. In most of the countries, the partners acknowledged the research results stemming from the use of the AVACLIM tool. However, the Moroccan partner did not acknowledge the results from applying the AVACLIM evaluation tool to the local, selected initiatives. In particular, one of these initiatives has been long supported as an agroecological initiative by national stakeholders. However, the AVACLIM assessment

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<sup>13</sup> The village of Sare Boubou has integrated a dynamic of agroecological transition since 1994 under the impetus of NGOs, such as Enda Pronat. This emerged with the advent of organic cotton and the establishment of the Yakaar Niani Wulli Federation, which advocated for integrating an agroecological vision into the framework of the village's agricultural production.

concluded that the initiative weakly complies with the agroecological criteria, as established by the AVACLIM tool.<sup>14</sup>

78. In general, the final product has not been finalized and, according to interviewees, several aspects should be fine-tuned. For example, it currently seems that there are still no summary indicators that have been informed by a set of different variables. This limits synthesizing the analysis. Some stakeholders reported that it is still unclear as to what should be the final message of the evaluation tool; and how the impact can be measured in the absence of a comparative analysis. At this stage, the methodology can offer a state-of-the-art analysis rather than an impact analysis.

*The rating for this criterion is Moderately Satisfactory.*

**Finding 4.** The project design was accurate and developed over a long period, which allowed for significant consultations with local NGOs during the conceptualization process. This is reflected in a solid and clearly focused strategy. However, several shortcomings were found, which had an impact on the delivery of expected results. These shortcomings were caused by project complexity, time mismatches among project components that could have been foreseen, developments affecting the context in which the project was formulated, and the missed identification of relevant scientific actors since the conceptualization phase.

79. The analysis of country needs and global concerns on agroecology was extensively done during project design. It was developed over a period of six years from 2012 to 2018 and relied on ad hoc consultancies.<sup>15</sup> As stated in the Evaluation terms of reference, the revision of the initial AVACLIM structure took place from 2015 to 2019 and included several changes: geographic scope; a restructured institutional setup; and FAO procedures integrated into the partnership. The project design was able to make the most of the previous experiences of the partnership. Points of view were duly collected during several virtual and in-person meetings, as well as through the submission of ad hoc questionnaires.<sup>16</sup>
80. The project strategy was well articulated in four interlinked and synergetic components, with objectives and outcomes clearly responding to identified problems. In practice, however, it was too ambitious in terms of areas tackled and the diversity of stakeholders targeted (scientists, practitioners from NGOs and civil society organizations, decision-makers, farmers). "Too ambitious" and "too complex" were among the recurring statements when stakeholders were asked to comment on the project's architecture. The most inadequate design aspect highlighted was the development of a new evaluation tool aimed

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<sup>14</sup> The initiative is the sustainable olive oil production project in the Skoura palm grove (Morocco). The application of several AVACLIM indicators led to a negative assessment in terms of compliance with the principles of agroecology, but the partner research rejected the results. For example, the application of the indicator related to the extent of irrigation resulted in poor performance, but the partner considers irrigation normal in the oasis context.

<sup>15</sup> Despite the extensive conceptualization process, the project design phase has involved FAO only since 2018.

<sup>16</sup> During the first conceptualization period from 2012 to 2013, the partners were consulted by CARI on the basis of good relationships and previous collaborations on agroecology. In the second period from 2014 to 2015, the FFEM mobilized two consultants to conduct bilateral interviews with CARI and the IRD, as well as administer questionnaires to all project participants. Two field missions were organized in Burkina Faso (for ARFA) and Senegal (for Enda Pronat). A meeting with all partners was held and took advantage of the organization of *Desertifactions* in Montpellier in 2015. The third conceptualization in 2018 was carried out by a South African consultant and was mobilized within the framework of the GEF procedure. The consultant sent questionnaires and engaged in bilateral interviews with all project partners. A meeting between the component leaders was also held in Montpellier in 2018.

at producing evidence to inform the advocacy work, which contrasted with the project timeline of three years.

81. Time mismatches among project components strongly affected the expected internal synergies. This was mainly linked to shortcomings in the project's theory of change. Building evidence for agroecology through a new tool to feed advocacy work within the three-year period of project implementation was unrealistic. FAO's TAPE development and piloting process dates back to 2018. So far, TAPE has been tested in 40 countries and among more than 5 000 producers and farms. The tool's validation is expected by March 2023 (evaluation interview). The agroecological transitions working group for GRET Memento took seven years to be fully ready (evaluation interview). In addition, the choice of developing a new tool over three years within the framework of a PhD thesis was criticized by several interviewees. The incompatibility between the project's duration and the PhD student's schedule has been fully acknowledged by stakeholders.
82. The COVID-19 pandemic was the most important development affecting the overall context in which the project was designed. The pandemic strongly hampered the achievement of expected results, many of them being linked to in-person activities and field visits. The creation of FAO's TAPE was another important factor affecting the overall context in which the project was formulated. This had a considerable impact on the project's rationale. FAO's TAPE presents a significant comparative advantage. It has, in fact, been tested in a wide range of countries, as well as published, acknowledged and peer reviewed. It is considered user-friendly and was developed upon request of the Member States, which ensures fair sustainability potential. FAO stated that the two tools do not overlap and might be complementary in the future, provided that the AVACLIM method is validated and offers an advantage. However, such a massive effort to develop and implement the AVACLIM tool within the project's lifespan was considered neither fully efficient nor consistent with the changed scenario. The ambition to create a new method was perhaps excessive, considering there were other existing tools. This statement was declared during a stakeholder interview. Another stakeholder interviewee stated: "When we started, the context had changed. Our initial assumption was overtaken by reality".
83. The project was further weakened by the lack of a thorough identification of the relevant scientific partners, which was supposed to be developed in the conceptualization phase. Except for Senegal, to a limited extent,<sup>17</sup> these partners were, in fact, identified during implementation through a long and complicated process that caused additional delays. Anticipating this effort at the design stage could have saved time and allowed scientists to be more in line with the type and scope of work to be done. As a matter of fact, the national scientific partners were not present at the project's launch event.
84. An analysis of the quality of the logical framework was also conducted by the Evaluation Team (see Finding 15).
85. There is high relevance, coherence and alignment at the global and country level. There were some developments in the context of intervention (multicriteria evaluation tools) and

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<sup>17</sup> The 2019 project document cited ISRA among potential scientific actors. However, interviews during the field visit confirmed that the partner had not participated in the design phase and was only informed when the project had already been launched.

mixed results on the added value of the evaluation tool for agroecology (see Findings 1, 2 and 3).

*The overall strategic relevance criterion is rated Satisfactory.*

## 3.2 Effectiveness

**Finding 5.** The analysis of project execution and the comparison of project progress against the set targets for the objectives, outcomes and outputs as outlined in the logical framework validates satisfactory project performance. It is, however, worth recalling that the quality of the logic model in the 2019 project document is not conducive to a proper assessment in view of the changes triggered by the project towards its planned outcomes and objectives. Additionally, data available did not allow for assessing the extent of achievement of the indicators set for the project objectives.

86. The results matrix shows the extent of achievement of outputs and outcomes (see Appendix 5). At the output level, the project is on track with the values targeted for the output indicators linked to Outcome 1 (there is only one pending national exchange visit for Ethiopia). By the time of this evaluation, some output indicators linked to Outcome 2 had not been completed: i) Indicator 1.2.7 (there are two pending scientific workshops to be organized in India and Ethiopia); and ii) Indicator 1.2.8 (national and global evaluation syntheses pending). Other outputs were delivered with delays (namely, the evaluation reports and the national restitution workshops) and affected the achievement of the expected results. Overall, the output indicators linked to Outcome 3 are on track, except for one pending national advocacy workshop. However, the advocacy workshops were delivered too late to have an impact during the project's lifespan (see Finding 8). The output indicators linked to Outcome 4 were achieved overall, but an important gap relates to the following indicator: at least one scientific article in an international journal of rank A and one article in an international minor journal. Two articles were written. However, they have yet to be approved and published.
87. At the outcome level, the target values of the indicators under Outcome 1 (actionable knowledge on agroecology implementation is assumed and adopted by agroecology practitioners across the drylands) were achieved for one indicator (number of agroecological initiatives shared). This exceeded expectations. It is, however, worth mentioning that this indicator is not relevant to the linked outcome. It is a project output and cannot prove the achievement of Outcome 1. While the second indicator linked to the outcome (number of practitioners involved in the CoP) was below expectations,<sup>18</sup> for another (percentage of women involved in the CoP), the available disaggregated data is not sufficient to draw conclusions. The indicators under Outcome 2 (knowledge and understanding of the impacts of agroecological systems and success factors of agroecological initiatives are consolidated through a scientifically harmonized protocol) have been achieved overall, but similar considerations can be made on their relevance: none are the most relevant to demonstrate the related expected change. Under Outcome 3 (evidence-based decision-making on agroecology is strengthened and systematized at international, national, local and landscape levels), the values achieved for the different

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<sup>18</sup> Although the indicator for Outcome 1 involves the number of practitioners involved in the CoP, the target value for this indicator in the logical framework refers to "2 000 participants to events and users of the collaborative tools." Considering the inconsistency between the indicator definition and its set target value, and the fact that participating in project events and accessing the project website is insufficient in proving that Outcome 1 is achieved, the Evaluation Team considers the target of 2 000 in reference to the number of practitioners involved in the CoP.

indicators are on track – except for the pending advocacy workshop (India) and the indicator (number of international organizations endorsing the advocacy messages generated under the project), which were slightly below expectations. The indicators under Outcome 4 (knowledge on the impact and the success factors of agroecology made publicly available) have been achieved overall, except for the pending press conferences in India, Morocco, Ethiopia, and South Africa.

88. The available project data did not allow for tracking the progress on the indicators set for the project objectives. Some developments were recorded in Senegal where the project contributed to a governmental decision on organic fertilizers. Other developments were recorded in Burkina Faso, where a national strategy on agroecology was approved in April 2022. However, it is not possible to assess any project contribution to this achievement. In general, the selected outcome-level indicators are not the most relevant to prove the achievement of expected outcomes (see Finding 15).

*The rating for this criterion is Satisfactory.*

### **3.2.1 Achievement of project outcomes**

**Outcome 1.** Actionable knowledge on agroecology implementation assumed and adopted by agroecology practitioners across the drylands

**Finding 6.** The project team successfully implemented the activities under Component 1. Consulted stakeholders were found to be satisfied, specifically with the knowledge exchange activities implemented at the national level. Positive effects stemming from the activities linked to the CoP were reported in all countries, and the project supported the functioning and enhancement of existing networks on agroecology. However, it is difficult to measure the actual impact of these activities. Solid conclusions can be drawn only for those countries that are the subject of case studies. In this respect, Senegal represents a successful case, since the project largely contributed to the strengthening of the existing national coalition, DyTAES, and the establishment of a new CoP, the Local Dynamic for Agroecological Transition in the Tambacounda Region, Senegal (DyTAEL, by its French acronym). The information available suggests that Outcome 1 was achieved at a satisfactory level.

89. Component 1 aimed to enhance practitioners' knowledge and partnership dynamics on agroecology at the national and international level. A CoP per country was either supported or established, and several knowledge exchange actions were implemented. As noted during the mid-term evaluation, in all countries, the activities linked to the CoP relied on existing national and local networks on agroecology – even when a new CoP was established. These networks were mobilized to different extents, specifically for the identification of the agroecology initiatives that had to be characterized under Component 1. In addition, a CoP facilitation strategy per country was produced, and seven national exchange workshops were implemented (one per country). Virtual workshops and national exchange visits are still planned.
90. Despite a general appreciation of this project component by the different interviewees, the evidence that the evaluators were able to collect is not sufficient to draw overall conclusions on the impact achieved under Outcome 1. This is mainly due to the low survey response rate (see section 1.5 on limitations). Such a limitation heavily influenced the assessment of the changes affecting the external stakeholders (positive or negative), namely the CoPs' members, particularly in countries that were not visited as part of the evaluation field work. It was not possible, for example, to assess the progress in the implementation of the

national CoP facilitation strategies – at least for those components of the strategies that were not covered by AVACLIM. It is also worth noting that the project did not envisage any mechanisms, whether formal or informal, to assess the extent of knowledge and skills acquired by the CoP members as a result of their participation in AVACLIM. As such, information gathered on increased knowledge and skills is exclusively based on the personal perceptions of the participants. These gaps are partially mitigated by the information collected through a desk review, interviews conducted with national implementing partners – who were also members of the CoPs – and the evaluation survey targeting the external stakeholders, though the response rate was quite low, and as mentioned. More robust conclusions can be drawn for India and Senegal, where the evaluators were able to meet an adequate number of external stakeholders involved in the CoP.

91. There was a very satisfactory level of stakeholder diversification for CoP in all countries. FAO recognizes that “agroecological transitions require greater integration among sectors, disciplines and actors to achieve multiple objectives” (FAO, 2018c, p. 3). Stakeholder diversification fosters joint efforts needed for agroecological transition. The CoPs supported by AVACLIM are generally composed of: NGOs; civil society organizations; producer and consumer organizations; individual farmers; universities and research centres; decentralized government services, such as the Regional Directorate of Waters and Forests of Marrakech and the Regional Department of the Environment in Morocco; and several pre-existing networks on agroecology, such as the National Articulation of Agroecology, Articulation in the Semiarid, and ATER Network (network for technical assistance for agroecology and the Northeast Feminism and Agroecology Network in Brazil; CNABio in Burkina Faso; the DyTAEL in Senegal; the Network of Agroecology Initiatives of Morocco [RIAM, by its French acronym] in Morocco; and the Agroecology South Africa Network in South Africa). Interestingly, in India, the CoP also involved the promoters of the Renuka Bio Farms and VAAGDHARA agroecological initiatives.
92. In Burkina Faso, the project activities supported the consultative framework for the East Region under the CNABio. Security-related travel restrictions were faced in this part of the country. In Morocco, AVACLIM facilitated the interaction between the pre-existing RIAM network on agroecology and representatives of the scientific community. Overall, the CoPs allowed for the exchange of knowledge and experience through in-person and virtual meetings, as well as by WhatsApp groups.
93. It is rather difficult to draw overall conclusions on the improvement of personal and organizational knowledge and skills on agroecology. As mentioned, the evaluators collected little evidence on this aspect, which was mainly based on stakeholder perceptions. In fact, this element was not even monitored or assessed by project management and partners during implementation. Most of the Senegalese interviewees reported improved capacities in methods for characterizing the different levels of agroecological transition learned under Component 1. Similarly, interviewees in other countries mentioned that they were able to learn the methodology of characterization, as well as improve their skills in organizing knowledge exchange activities and building CoPs.
94. The survey gives some elements in this regard. Most of the external stakeholders who responded said that their knowledge and skills had improved “to a great extent” by

participating in knowledge exchange activities organized by the project.<sup>19</sup> Asked about the specific skills they had acquired through AVACLIM, the answers ranged from the "understanding of the different stages and modalities of the agroecological transition" to technical aspects (organic fertilizers, compost, soil biology, pest control), better knowledge of national policies and the AVACLIM multicriteria assessment tool which, apparently, has been adequately circulated among CoP members in the different countries.<sup>20</sup> Interestingly, someone commented that the knowledge sharing activities "were an inspiration for our forthcoming agroecological initiatives."

95. Concerning enhanced partnerships, almost all stakeholders reported that AVACLIM had strengthened existing dynamics by offering opportunities to meet and share experiences and giving visibility to existing agroecological initiatives. The most important success factor reported was strong integration within existing efforts in promoting agroecology and capitalizing on existing initiatives.
96. In Senegal, the project was able to take advantage of existing knowledge exchange events among farmers and practitioners after capitalizing on the five initiatives. These initiatives were, in fact, identified under the framework of a key national event on agroecology: Agroecology Days.<sup>21</sup> The same approach was adopted in designing and implementing the other activities of Component 1 (exchange visits, workshops, WhatsApp groups), which largely supported the implementation of the action plan of the national coalition on agroecology, DyTAEL. This approach resulted in an extremely synergetic strategy to support the efforts for scaling up agroecology, which the DyTAES had undertaken since 2019. More importantly, the project was a catalyst in establishing a local dynamic on agroecology in the Tambacounda Region, the DyTAES, which currently gathers 40 participants among civil society organizations, farmer organizations, decentralized government services, local authorities and research institutes. The first launch event of the DyTAES was implemented through AVACLIM's support<sup>22</sup> and allowed for the elaboration of a roadmap led by the multistakeholder platform. This local network, aimed at developing synergies and fostering knowledge exchange among members, had continued to work through a WhatsApp group, meetings and exchange visits that were frequently supported by AVACLIM. An innovative exchange modality was also developed through the project: the *Agroecology morning* involves morning group visits to local initiatives. Indeed, since the DyTAES had existed before AVACLIM, the project acted as a leverage of the development of the new dynamic in Tambacounda. This contributed to an elevated role of local actors in agroecological transition.
97. The AVACLIM project "helped us deepen the reflection on agroecology that we had been undertaking through the DyTAES framework. But AVACLIM was important, since it triggered the agroecological dynamic in Tambacounda by creating opportunities for

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<sup>19</sup> This reflects the following survey question: "While participating in AVACLIM, to which extent have your knowledge and skills on agroecology improved?" Sixteen out of 31 respondents have answered "to a great extent," and ten answered "to some extent" on a scale ranging from "not at all" to "totally".

<sup>20</sup> This reflects the following survey question: "Are you aware of the multicriteria evaluation tool developed through AVACLIM?" Twenty out of 31 respondents answered "yes".

<sup>21</sup> Enda Pronat sent an invitation to the promoters and participants in the third edition of the national event on agroecology, held in February 2020, in order to identify appropriate agroecological initiatives on which to capitalize.

<sup>22</sup> A workshop on the establishment of a local dynamic for an agroecological transition in the region of Tambacounda, held from 23 to 24 March 2021.

- members to meet and exchange. This reinforces our vision that local communities are at the core of the process” (stakeholder interview).
98. Fourteen out of 31 survey respondents who were asked, “to which extent have your organization’s AVACLIM-related activities contributed to broadening your organization’s networks in the field of agroecology?” answered “to a great extent,” and seven answered “to some extent.” Those who answered “to a great extent” or “to some extent” were asked to provide examples or references of new partnerships that had been established. Upon request, all of them provided related evidence. The enhancement of networks ranged from new or reinvigorated contacts within the DyTAES and the DyTAEL in Senegal to partnerships with the scientific consortium in Brazil, the agroecology network in South Africa and more individual-level new contacts referenced in India.
  99. In India, the project formed an informal CoP consisting of civil society organizations, farmers, practitioners and professionals. It developed a strategy to promote agroecology in the country. However, it seems challenging for a small-scale informal group to achieve a similar result within the project’s short period of implementation and in a country with a vast geographical reach. On a different note and among unexpected results, the project has helped in systematizing agroecological practices within two local initiatives in the states of Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh, which could be further scaled up. This is a significant step towards the attainment of Outcome 1.
  100. The international exchange activities that had been initially planned to foster knowledge sharing among project partners (two international field visits) were cancelled due to the COVID-19 travel restrictions. According to stakeholders, this aspect has greatly affected the extent of knowledge sharing among project partners, since the virtual meetings are seen as inadequate compared to the expectations in terms of peer-to-peer learning.
  101. International exchanges were replaced by national field and exchange visits and three international webinars. According to interviewees, both activities were useful in improving participant’s knowledge and skills on agroecology. In Brazil, for example, farmers participated in a certification experience through the Association of Agroecological Farmers of the Araripe Territory, known as ECOARARIPE, in Chapada do Araripe. These farmers exchanged experiences with Coopercuc and *Recaatingamento* in the Ouricuri community of Fundo de Pasto, Uauá Municipality, in the subregion of the Sertão do São Francisco Baiano. In Morocco, two field visits were organized. The first was implemented in Ouarzazate to exchange agroecological practices among farmers, which was also attended by one FAO official. The second was organized in collaboration with the Institute of Specialized Agriculture Technicians of Souihla, Marrakech and fostered knowledge on agroecology, which is a neglected topic among students and teachers.
  102. CAATINGA, the Brazilian partner, organized two webinars as planned. One webinar on feminism and agroecology explored the role of women and family farming in agricultural transition. It also offered an exchange opportunity with South African participants from the EMG. Fifty-six participants from Brazil, France, the Netherlands and South Africa attended this webinar.
  103. The information collected suggests a good level of achievement for Outcome 1.

*The rating for this criterion under Outcome 1 is Satisfactory.*

## Box 2. The communities of practice in Senegal

### DyTAEL and DyTAES in Senegal

Following the 2018 Presidential statement pointing at agroecological transition as one of the priority axes of his five-year political programme for Senegal, more than 50 organizations and platforms involved in agroecology have come together in the DyTAES alliance. This network brings together umbrella organizations of producers, consumers, NGOs, national and international research institutes, and national and West African civil society organizations, as well as locally elected officials with the aim of promoting agroecological transition in the country through advocacy, political dialogue with the government, awareness raising, experience-sharing and support for territories in transition.

The DyTAES operates to support political and institutional decision-makers in Senegal at all territorial levels and to sustain all actors involved in the agrosilvipastoral and fisheries sector in the development and implementation of public policies related to agroecological transition. Additionally, it supports agroecological transition projects by leading multistakeholder intersectoral consultations, co-designing transition plans, supporting experiments and performing monitoring and co-evaluation. Awareness raising, knowledge- and experience-sharing are among the core activities performed by the DyTAES, together with the creation of national, subregional, and international strategic alliances and networks.

Preceded by a thoroughly conducted participatory process launched with the first *Agroecology Days*, the DyTAES obtained one of its most striking achievements in 2020 when it finalized its comprehensive policy document entitled Contribution to national policies for an agroecological transition in Senegal (DyTAES, 2020). The report not only provides an extensive overview on agroecological transition in Senegal but also – and most significantly – highlights 15 current challenges in the field and includes detailed policy recommendations for governmental action to address them. The document's preliminary consultation involved more than 1 000 stakeholders and included visits to 30 sites in all six geographical regions in the country, leading the drafters to identify 26 successful and promising agroecology experiences throughout Senegal (CIRAD, 2020).

Grounded on four main pillars, 1. Improving and securing production bases; 2. The sustainable increase of productivity, agrosilvipastoral and halieutic production; 3. The promotion of agroecology products within the value chains; and 4. Improving governance, working conditions and funding frameworks for a large-scale agroecological transition by 2035, the report formulates three broad policy-level recommendations:

- i) establish a framework for national multistakeholder dialogue to build a national agroecological transition policy integrating the objectives set by DyTAES;*
- ii) encourage and provide financial support for experiments on a municipal or departmental scale in which stakeholders work together to design and implement a territorial plan for agroecological transition; and*
- iii) pinpoint and implement immediate measures capable of leveraging the agroecological transition (e.g. subsidizing biofertilizers and biopesticides, cutting the price of productive water and supporting assisted natural regeneration strategies) (DyTAES, 2020).*

The latter has been addressed by two subsequent rounds of public subsidies for the purchase of organic fertilizers, while the first recommendation is still considered a key goal by one of the interviewees from the involved NGOs. Following the positive establishment of the DyTAES, the alliance has initiated similar processes at the local level through the creation of a number of DyTAEL initiatives across the country to build synergies between agroecological initiatives and support agroecological transition planning at the local level. So far, the DyTAEL initiatives have been instituted and operate in the regions of Tambacounda, Podor, Fatick and Bignona (DyTAES, 2021).

Source: Elaborated by the Evaluation Team.

**Outcome 2.** Knowledge and understanding of the impacts of agroecological systems and success factors of agroecological initiatives consolidated through a scientifically harmonized protocol

**Finding 7.** The project generated new knowledge on 14 agroecology initiatives and made important contributions to the discussion on agroecological performance analysis at the national and global level. However, mixed results were found in terms of quality. This involved the timeliness of the outputs delivered and the solidness of the newly established NGO-scientific community partnership. Success, however, depends on enabling factors, such as pre-existing partnerships. Although the AVACLIM multicriteria assessment tool was applied in all countries during field research, the stakeholders consider it complex, and its uptake is uncertain given the delays in its finalization and the gaps in the capacity building of national partners. Overall, the extent of achievement for Outcome 2 is below expectations.

104. Under Component 2, the project aimed to foster knowledge and understanding of the multidimensional impact of agroecology through the development and application of an innovative multicriteria assessment tool. The assumption is that practitioners from national partner NGOs and representatives of the scientific community work together on the project research component and throughout the adaptation of the tool. The final objective involved generating evidence-based knowledge on the positive effects of agroecology, making it less abstract and ideological. Essentially, it aimed to value-existing initiatives. This would contribute to providing solid arguments for decision-making processes at the international, national and local levels.
105. Two agroecological initiatives per country were assessed by national partners (NGOs and research institutes) through the new methodology. A long process of data collection and analysis of these initiatives took place<sup>23</sup> and resulted in 28 evaluation reports, namely two reports per initiative (one for Phases 1 to 3 of the evaluation methodology and one for Phase 4) and per each country. The production and application of the tool has also nourished the debate on the multidimensional assessment of agroecology, both among the countries involved and at the global level.
106. In the project countries, the involvement of practitioners and scientists fostered the reflection on how to assess the benefits of agroecology. In Senegal, the evaluation field visit recorded rudimentary knowledge on the new impact assessment tool by some members of the national and local CoPs, even though they were not directly involved in the research. The AVACLIM methodology was, in fact, presented in some of the meetings and workshops organized under Component 1.
107. At the global level, the evaluation tool prototype was presented during the Fifteenth Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 15) of the UNCCD (Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, May 2022); the Sustainability Research & Innovation Congress (Pretoria, South Africa, June 2022); the Seventeenth Congress of the European Society for Agronomy (Potsdam, the Federal Republic of Germany, August 2022); the Ninth Latin American Congress of Agroecology on biocultural diversity for healthy communities and ecosystems (San José, Costa Rica, October 2022); the *Desertif'actions* Summit organized by CARI (Montpellier, France, October 2022); the Eleventh Latin American Congress of Rural Sociology (Oaxaca, the United Mexican States, November 2022); and the AVACLIM Scientific Workshop

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<sup>23</sup> The data collection and analysis phases were conducted between May 2021 (in Senegal) and November 2022, with different implementation periods depending on the country.

- (Montpellier, France, January 2023). These events fostered international visibility and triggered an international discussion on various evaluation tools.
108. However, mixed results were found in terms of local commitment and capacities to properly use the methodology during field research.
109. The partners were generally able to adapt the AVACLIM evaluation methodology to the local realities. The flexibility in selecting the indicators was, in fact, particularly appreciated. Many stakeholders valued the holistic approach of the method and the fact that it has fostered exchanges and collaborations among scientists and practitioners. However, there is a general consensus on the complexity of the tool, which has caused various challenges. Overall, the partners agreed that the research activity required significant time and effort that was not comparable to other project activities (see Finding 3).
110. A smoother process was achieved in Senegal. Here, the tool was developed and piloted by the PhD student through two field missions and extensive consultation with Enda Pronat and researchers from ISRA. This implied several adaptations.<sup>24</sup> The strong collaboration between these local actors, the PhD student and the guidance of the international scientific consortium have all contributed to the good quality of the evaluation reports delivered and the effective application of the tool.<sup>25</sup>
111. Although the Senegalese NGO and scientific institute have had previous collaborations, the participation in AVACLIM offered a new opportunity and highlighted the added value of joint work. Enda Pronat's long-standing field presence in the village of Sare Boubou, where the tool was developed, facilitated farmers' openness in providing information and data. ISRA's participation greatly facilitated the soil sampling and analysis tasks. Although the presence of the PhD student was significant, the stakeholders interviewed reported a good extent of knowledge and skills acquired throughout the process.
112. It is worth recalling the time and resources needed to implement the methodology within the two initiatives evaluated in Senegal. This required four months per initiative for the data collection phase and three months per initiative for the data analysis. While the data collection was implemented by an inclusive group composed of the PhD student, two ISRA researchers and two Enda Pronat interns, the subsequent analysis was mainly done by the PhD student and Enda Pronat. This implies the following considerations: i) the time needed for tool implementation was significant (seven months per initiative evaluated); ii) the presence of the PhD student for both data collection and analysis, including field missions, was highly conducive to the results; and iii) the assumption of a joint collaboration among

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<sup>24</sup> From the information collected and in addition to the participation of the Senegalese NGO partner in the international meetings where the method was discussed (January 2020 and February 2021), regular national meetings on the method were held: one in 2020; two in 2021 to prepare the field mission; three during the PhD student's field mission in 2021, and two times per month after June 2021 to monitor evaluation progress; and three key meetings on preliminary research results in 2022, of which two were held during the PhD student's second field mission.

<sup>25</sup> The CARI appointed one person to support partners in applying the methodology, overseeing and ensuring the quality control of outputs delivered (evaluation reports), and developing the accompanying operationalization tools. The quality of the outputs delivered by Senegalese partners is deemed satisfactory. In particular, under Component 2, one evaluation report per country and per initiative is expected to describe the results arising from the application of Phases 1 to 3 of the AVACLIM evaluation tool, and one evaluation report per country and per initiative is expected to describe results from Phase 4 of the tool. Overall, 28 evaluation reports are planned.

scientists and practitioners took place, at least for data collection, which is the best set up for the methodology to work.

113. However, not all of these conditions were found in other countries. For instance, the strength of the partnership between the national NGOs and the scientific stakeholders was unequal among countries and contributed to the mixed quality of the outputs delivered. In countries where the partnerships had already been established, the research process enhanced the collaborations underway, as well as created a smoother implementation of the methodology. For example, in Brazil and Burkina Faso, the project took advantage of previous collaborations. In the Brazilian case, there was a wide multistakeholder platform with practitioners and scientists.<sup>26</sup> On a different note, project implementation was already behind schedule in India. A formal memorandum of understanding with a research institute would have required additional time. As a result, the GBS had to engage its own team: an agriculture scientist associated with the GBS on a voluntary basis; two employees from the VAAGDHARA initiative; and two interns. The research institutes were only limitedly involved in soil testing and assessment of the tool. This affected the capacity building process and ownership of the method. In Ethiopia and South Africa, the lack of solid, pre-existing collaborations, compounded with in-country coordination issues, led to challenges in terms of the consistency of data collected and the quality and timeliness of the analysis undertaken. It is worth mentioning, for example, that the two evaluation reports for Phase 4 in South Africa were finalized at the end of November 2022, while one report was available for Ethiopia and one for India.
114. The multicriteria assessment tool developed by AVACLIM was tested for the first time. The tool includes worksheets for step-by-step guidance. However, the researchers were not at the same level of understanding on the tool, which influenced the pace of completing the study. Both the NGO and the research institute learned more about assessing the impact of agroecology, but none carried out such a detailed step-by-step assessment that was required (stakeholder interview).
115. Several stakeholders have recognized the importance of an earlier identification of research partner institutions (see Finding 4). This is because it was particularly challenging to find local expertise that could cover the vast spectrum of skills required to apply the AVACLIM tool. The identification of these partners was done during project implementation and took a long time, which affected the overall process.
116. In contrast to Senegal, and specifically for those countries where partnership with the research community was less successful, such as in India, the mostly virtual guidance offered by the project was inadequate for the type of support needed to apply the methodology.<sup>27</sup> In addition, the gap period between the presentation of the tool prototype in February 2021 and the arrival of a person appointed by CARI to provide guidance to the partners (also in charge of developing the operationalization tools) in September 2021 greatly influenced the level of partner preparedness in applying the tool. This supporting role was initially expected to be performed by the IRD and the PhD student. However, when it was realized that the scientific consortium could not perform this task, CARI intervened

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<sup>26</sup> In Brazil, fieldwork was carried out with a team of technicians from local organizations, researchers from five teaching and research institutions, and undergraduate students (different project documents and evaluation reports).

<sup>27</sup> Country partners received only virtual guidance, except for Senegal, where the evaluation tool was developed, and India, which hosted a field mission with the person appointed by CARI to support partners in using the tool.

to mitigate the gap and decided to recruit one person to cope with the partners' support needs.

117. The modality and timing of skills and knowledge transfer process also affected the use of the tool in a consistent manner across the countries and its potential replication by partners. On the one hand, the time needed to develop the methodology in the framework of a PhD thesis could not align with the project timeline and caused significant delays (at the time of this evaluation, the evaluation tool has not been finalized). On the other hand, the partners received the methodology fragmented in different stages, since it was transferred while being developed. Even though this was also due to the participatory approach in building the spectrum of indicators, which required back-and-forth questions and consultations, the fact of not having the entire methodology ready for use generated frustration among the partners.<sup>28</sup>

We went through a long and laborious period of successive phases. The development of the fourth phase at the central level took so long that once it arrived, we had already finished our field work. When the new phase began, it required us to repeat steps we had already undertaken. Imagine the difficulties encountered in going back to the same farmers, with all the work of the people involved.

Stakeholder interview

118. Because of delays in finalizing the methodology, the delivery of accompanying tools for the operationalization was also delayed. The operationalization tools for the first three steps of the methodology were produced by a CARI intern and communicated to partners in April 2021.<sup>29</sup> However, the guide for drafting the report on the results of the first three phases was delivered in November 2021. The operationalization tools for the fourth phase of the methodology were delivered between October 2021 and February 2022. A first draft of the methodology guide of the evaluation tool was presented in the Project Steering Committee meeting held in September 2022. The final product still needs to be finalized. The methodology was therefore applied without the partners having a clear overview of the entire process. It was not accompanied by all the necessary operationalization tools, at least until February 2022.
119. To date, the AVACLIM tool has been adopted exclusively within the project. Most stakeholders recognize that it is still a prototype that needs to be fine-tuned through additional tests and validated within the scientific community. The CARI is working on digitalizing such a tool in order to make it more user-friendly. However, the evaluators believe that its digitalization is premature, since the tool has not been finalized and validated.
120. Overall, the expected target values for the indicators under Outcome 2 were achieved (see Appendix 5), except for some pending outputs. It is, however, important to recall that the project's logical framework has mostly identified output-level indicators, even if these had

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<sup>28</sup> The gap was particularly felt regarding the time elapsed between the guidance on the first three phases of the methodology and the reception of the fourth phase of the methodology, which required going back to the same farmers twice to collect the new data necessary for Step 4 of the methodology.

<sup>29</sup> These include: a memorandum for cartography; a list of stakeholder types; interview guidelines; a grid for characterizing the level of agroecological transition; and a summary table of brakes and levers.

been included as outcome indicators. From an evaluation perspective, the expected “scientifically harmonized protocol”<sup>30</sup> is incomplete and, to date, the “accessibility” and “functionality”<sup>31</sup> of the evaluation tool are uncertain. These shortcomings have considerably affected the expected effects of this project component.

*The rating for this criterion under Outcome 2 is Moderately Unsatisfactory.*

**Outcome 3.** Evidence-based decision-making on agroecology strengthened and systematized at international, national, local and landscape levels

**Finding 8.** The delays accumulated under Component 2 hampered the expected synergies between research and advocacy. The stakeholders consider this a missed opportunity to raise the profile of the AVACLIM discourse on agroecology. It also affected the outcomes of the project’s strategic approach. By the time of this evaluation, no national or international policy changes had been recorded as a direct effect of AVACLIM’s efforts – except for some contributions in Senegal. However, in all countries, the project was able to strengthen advocacy dynamics and advance existing policy processes. This happened in Senegal, Morocco and South Africa. The project also achieved results in improving the partners’ capacities in advocacy planning. At the international level, the project participated in some prominent events. However, it has been difficult to identify any impact. The lack of synergy with FAO’s efforts to scale up agroecology is a missed opportunity at both the national and international levels. In general, more time would be needed to assess the extent of achievement of Outcome 3 and the impact of the activities implemented.

121. Component 3 aimed to systematize and use the evidence base generated under Component 2 (research) in order to advocate for the integration of agroecology into policymaking processes at the national and global levels.
122. Consulted stakeholders agree that the significant delays, accumulated under the research component, hampered the expected synergies between the two components. On the one hand, the national evaluation results were made available mostly during the second semester of the third year of project implementation.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, the analysis of such results, including a comparative cross-country analysis, was still pending at the time of the terminal evaluation. It is worth noting that, according to interviews, in November 2021, one project partner requested to use TAPE until the AVACLIM tool was ready. However, the proposal was rejected by the Project Steering Committee. The advocacy component was then implemented without using specific advocacy messages arising from the assessment results on the impact of agroecology initiatives.
123. The research component only partially informed the advocacy messages, specifically through the use of data collected under Component 1 (the initiatives’ fact sheets) and under the application of the first three phases of the multicriteria assessment tool. For example, the fact sheets of the agroecological initiatives characterized under Component 1 were disseminated in the national advocacy workshop held in South Africa. Position papers disseminated during international events by the Senegalese and Ethiopian partners presented some initiatives that had been capitalized and evaluated. However, these fact

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<sup>30</sup> Outcome definition: knowledge and understanding of the impacts of agroecological systems and success factors of agroecological initiatives are consolidated through a scientifically harmonized protocol.

<sup>31</sup> The outcome indicator states: number of functional and accessible tools for the multidimensional assessment of agroecology initiatives developed.

<sup>32</sup> Except for Brazil, which finalized the delivery of the evaluation reports in April 2022, all other countries delivered the reports from Step 4 of the evaluation methodology between September and December 2022.

sheets and position papers did not embed content arising from the multicriteria assessment tool, which mainly stems from Phase 4 of the tool.

124. Against this backdrop, the national advocacy strategies developed through AVACLIM lacked messages and demands from project-generated evidence and, in a few cases, resulted in general objectives that embrace broad arguments (land access, the sustainable management of natural resources, more research funds).
125. Overall, the extent of execution of these strategies was delayed due to the slowdowns cited under Component 2, the restrictions linked to the COVID-19 pandemic and the security situation in Ethiopia and Burkina Faso. In Ethiopia, for example, it was decided to postpone the activities until the end of 2022 due to security concerns, general delays in project execution and pending research results. However, it is worth mentioning that Ethiopia is among the few partner countries that have publicly presented a position paper stemming from AVACLIM.
126. To date, the planned national advocacy workshops have been organized in all countries, except India. In all countries, NGOs, civil society organizations, academia and farmer organizations have largely participated in these events. In several countries, local authorities also attended, but the participation of national authorities from the respective ministries of agriculture were recorded only in South Africa and Ethiopia.<sup>33</sup> These workshops were generally organized late,<sup>34</sup> and it is unrealistic to expect policy decisions or changes stemming from these events during the project time frame.
127. A more promising scenario was found in countries where the project was able to create synergies with other existing advocacy networks and initiatives. In Senegal, the project largely participated in national and local advocacy initiatives underway, thus contributing to a strengthened multistakeholder consultative process on agroecology. Advocacy activities were implemented under the framework of the DyTAES strategic document on agroecological transition in Senegal (DyTAES, 2020). The document is a milestone. It includes a set of policy recommendations elaborated through a consultative multistakeholder process involving all Senegalese regions. The document was validated during a national workshop attended by government officials, parliamentarians, FAO and other international organizations. It is accompanied by an action plan that AVACLIM supported in its implementation through the organization of meetings and workshops.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, the project contributed to the dissemination of the national document at the local level, specifically in the Tambacounda Region. The AVACLIM project also supported some communication and advocacy events, reinforcing the connections between the national dynamic on agroecology (DyTAEL) and the local one (DyTAES). An example is the DyTAES caravan stop in Tambacounda (March 2022), during which a local consultative process linked to the Emerging Green Senegal Plan (Republic of Senegal, Ministry of Economy, Finance, and Planning, 2018), the World Water Forum (Dakar, 2022) and the COP

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<sup>33</sup> One representative from the Ethiopian Biodiversity Institute of the Ministry of Agriculture attended.

<sup>34</sup> Except for Brazil and South Africa, other advocacy workshops were implemented between November and late December 2022.

<sup>35</sup> Several AVACLIM meetings and events contributed to the advancement of the DyTAES action plan that had been developed in 2020. In particular, AVACLIM supported: i) the DyTAES national knowledge exchange event held in 2020; ii) the restitution workshop on the DyTAES strategic document during the Agroecology Days event held in the Tambacounda Region in 2020; iii) the production of the DyTAES position paper on access to water; and iv) the establishment of a local dynamic on agroecology in the Tambacounda Region.

- 15 of the UNCCD (Abidjan, 2022) took place. As a result of the DyTAES caravan, the network developed a position paper on the restoration of arid soils and degraded forests for the agriculture of the future in Senegal, which was presented at the COP 15 of the UNCCD.
128. The Moroccan partner engaged with civil society specialists and mobilized additional funds for the advocacy component through the Heinrich Böll Foundation. The AVACLIM advocacy activities contributed to raising awareness among stakeholders and disseminating information and knowledge on agroecology within the CoP and the research community. This, in turn, supports a national consultation process with the Ministry of Agriculture in the framework of a proposed national strategy on agroecology. Similarly, in South Africa, the project advocacy activities support a process for a national agroecology strategy. In this respect, an open letter was sent to the Minister of Agriculture, Thoko Didiza Call, asking for an agroecology strategy and related programme to be launched by the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development. Ad hoc meetings are going to be organized to disseminate some of the letter's content.
129. The seven planned position papers on the multiple benefits of agroecology were delivered. However, they were recently produced,<sup>36</sup> and their use in targeted meetings with governments, donors, international institutions, civil society organizations, and mass media was generally low or absent. From the information collected, only the Ethiopian and Senegalese partners presented their position papers during prominent international events. The Ethiopian paper entitled Agroecology for a better food system resilience and diversity in dryland areas (AVACLIM, 2022b) was presented at the Green Action Forum held in Ethiopia in October 2022. The Senegalese paper, Agroecology at the service of water in arid and dry areas (AVACLIM, 2022a) was presented at the World Water Forum held in Dakar in March 2022.
130. In some cases, the contribution of the advocacy component was helpful in conveying actors and systematizing advocacy elements already underway. With a few exceptions, interviewees considered the advocacy strategies that had been developed useful to give a broader perspective to the work normally carried out by the organizations. This was significant where partners already had advocacy elements that needed to be structured into a coherent medium- and long-term vision. As such, the effort resulted in a more general capacity building exercise.
131. The AVACLIM project "allowed us to implement our national advocacy strategy, which had been elaborated before AVACLIM started. But the project supported us in its implementation. The AVACLIM project sent us some questionnaires to help structure this embryonal strategy, for example, how to analyse the context, what are the priorities and what targets we want to achieve. This allowed us to organize some important events and to communicate on agroecology in general" (stakeholder interview).
132. However, in some countries, the exercise to develop the advocacy strategies was not considered useful – nor was the final document. It seems that the impact of the advocacy strategies triggered a more interesting capacity building exercise for those partners midway in their advocacy processes. For other partners engaged at the grassroots level, such as the Indian partner, it is more difficult to predict the likelihood of impact from a strategy that embraces a national perspective, considering the partner's limited outreach

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<sup>36</sup> In October 2022, only two position papers – the Senegalese and the Ethiopian – were ready.

- within an enormous nation. For those partners already fully engaged in pre-existing national advocacy networks, such as the Brazilian partner, it is more difficult to see the utility of the exercise, which could overlap rather than integrate with existing dynamics.
133. Except for Senegal, where the FAO Country Office is an active member of the national coalition on agroecology, DyTAES and the FAO Country Offices have not participated in any of AVACLIM's advocacy efforts. This is a missed opportunity according to many stakeholders. The FAO Country Offices have neither been engaged in raising external awareness by using AVACLIM's content nor in promoting the project partners' interaction with line ministries. This is the situation, despite FAO's remarkable position and its engagement in promoting the scaling up of agroecology in some of the countries involved. Similarly, the project has not leveraged elements for discussion within the processes linked to the FAO CPF.
  134. No significant interactions were found with global fora in which FAO is active in promoting agroecology. Although the international advocacy strategy contains specific recommendations for FAO, it seems as though these messages have not been brought into related international fora.
  135. At the international level, three global position papers linked to the COP 15 of the UNCCD themes on drought, land degradation and food safety were elaborated and presented during the *Desertifications* Summit. In addition, one international policy brief (Both ENDS, 2022) and one document containing ten project recommendations were produced. These documents were disseminated physically during several events, notably the COP 15 of the UNCCD and the *Desertifications* Summit (CARI, 2022). The project participated in several prominent international events: the COP 15 of the UNCCD in Abidjan through a dedicated AVACLIM side event; the Sustainability Research & Innovation Congress in Pretoria in June 2022,<sup>37</sup> and the *Desertifications* Summit in Montpellier in October 2022.
  136. Overall, no tangible results were observed at the national or international level in terms of policy decisions and changes triggered by AVACLIM – except for Senegal. Here, one advocacy result of the collective process, to which the project participated, is the recent governmental decision to subsidize organic fertilizers.
  137. No evidence was found on the achievement of the outcome indicator contained in the logical framework: number of international organizations (for example, the UNCCD, the UNFCCC, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and FAO) within which the relevant department(s) endorse the advocacy messages generated under the project. The evidence in this respect is at a more general level, also considering that the project has not yet generated specific advocacy messages that should have been based on the knowledge generated by the AVACLIM evaluation tool. The Sahara and Sahel Observatory (OSS, 2023) endorsed the *Desertifications* dynamic and its messages on agroecology. This can be seen from eight fact sheets – Biodiversity; Climate Change; Drought; Ecosystem Restoration; Food Security; The Great Green Wall; Land Degradation Neutrality, and The One Health Approach – produced by the organization (Desertifications, 2022) and the summit's position papers that also contain the Sahara and Sahel Observatory logo. The UNCCD agreed to hold an open dialogue session on agroecology during the COP 15 in Abidjan,

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<sup>37</sup> During the event, the project held a session entitled Agroecology, the Game Changer Lever for SGDs: Case Studies from African Drylands.

which was organized by AVACLIM. Additionally, the UNCCD co-financed the 2022 *Desertifications* Summit, where one of its representatives attended the event. In a broader perspective, it can be considered that these organizations have endorsed the AVACLIM content.

138. The expected target values for the indicators under Outcome 3 (outcome and output indicators) were mostly achieved (see Appendix 5). Additional progress on the achievement of the indicators is expected through the forthcoming planned activities, but it is unrealistic to expect an impact in terms of policy improvements within the project time frame. Realistically, any impact at the policy level could be assessed after a certain period from the project's closure.

*The rating for this criterion under Outcome 3 is Moderately Satisfactory. On the one hand, its project outputs were mostly delivered, and the project contributed to strengthening advocacy dynamics underway in most countries. On the other hand, the impact on policy changes is not yet visible and several weaknesses, such as the missed synergy with Component 2 and the lack of interaction with the FAO Country Offices, jeopardized project effectiveness.*

**Outcome 4.** Knowledge on the impact and the success factors of agroecology made publicly available

**Finding 9.** The AVACLIM project generated new content on agroecology. Project activities were adequately disseminated through different modalities: CoP activities; online databases, including the FAO Agroecology Knowledge Hub; international events; and printed and online materials. However, the dissemination of specific knowledge on the impact of agroecology was hampered by delayed outputs linked to the multicriteria evaluation tool. The project increased access to knowledge, but not specifically on the impact of agroecology.

139. Under Component 4, the project aimed to disseminate AVACLIM knowledge on the impact and success factors of agroecology, as well as to promote communication on project activities. Additionally, a subcomponent is linked to efficient project monitoring, internal learning and adaptive management (see section 3.5 on factors affecting performance).
140. The international events in which AVACLIM participated<sup>38</sup> (see Finding 7) and the CoP exchange activities allowed for an adequate dissemination of the information gathered under Component 1 (the characterization of the initiatives) and the application of the first three steps of the AVACLIM methodology. In Senegal, for example, the AVACLIM research activity was presented during some of the meetings and workshops organized under Component 1.<sup>39</sup>
141. The FAO Agroecology Knowledge Hub is another crucial tool that supports the dissemination of AVACLIM knowledge. This online platform systematizes and shares knowledge on three aspects linked to agroecology: science; practices; and social processes. It is a living tool that collects case studies, articles and videos, and has thousands of visitors.

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<sup>38</sup> At the global level, the evaluation tool prototype was presented during the COP 15 of the UNCCD; the Sustainability Research & Innovation Congress; the Seventeenth Congress of the European Society for Agronomy; the Ninth Latin American Congress of Agroecology; the *Desertifications* Summit, organized by CARI; the Eleventh Latin American Congress of Rural Sociology; and the AVACLIM Scientific Workshop.

<sup>39</sup> The AVACLIM evaluation tool prototype was presented during the DyTAES national workshop held in November 2020 and during a meeting of the Tambacounda DyTAEL in September 2021. The preliminary research results were presented during a meeting of the DyTAEL in March 2022.

The project, in turn, contributed to expanding the information available in the database on the AVACLIM website. In particular, 35 AVACLIM fact sheets were uploaded to the FAO Agroecology Knowledge Hub, and 43 fact sheets to CARI's website.

142. Despite these achievements, the project's reach under Component 4 was hampered by the pending outputs related to Component 2. Indeed, the project aimed to generate and disseminate specific knowledge on the impact of agroecology, which should result from the application of a fourth phase of the multicriteria assessment tool. As mentioned, such specific knowledge has yet to be consolidated. At the time of the terminal evaluation, neither the national and global syntheses of results were ready nor had all of the national restitution workshops been implemented. As a result, the project has disseminated no specific knowledge on the impact of agroecology.
143. Initially, the intention was to present a global synthesis with cross-country results during the COP 15 of the UNCCD and the *Desertifactions* Summit. This would allow for a wide dissemination of AVACLIM knowledge on the impact of agroecology. The AVACLIM evaluation method was indeed presented during these events but not supported by the consolidated results from the comparative analysis.
144. The pending scientific validation of the AVACLIM evaluation tool has also had an impact. Among the expected outputs under Outcome 4, the project planned to ensure the scientific validation of the methodology through the publication of two scientific articles.<sup>40</sup> An article authored by the PhD student was submitted to the *Agronomy for sustainable development scientific journal* (rank A) but not accepted. Another article has been submitted to the *International Journal of Agricultural Sustainability* and was under review at the time of the evaluation.
145. Concerning communication about project activities, several online tools were used, such as an AVACLIM hashtag: #AVACLIM. This made it easier to find information linked to the project on social media (Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook). A WhatsApp group for project partners was created, as well as WhatsApp groups for the CoP members in the countries. Printed materials were produced. In Brazil and Senegal, radio programmes were also used to disseminate project activities and content. In Senegal, for example, the knowledge exchange workshop of the CoP held in 2021 was disseminated through local television and several radio channels (Echo Oriental 1, SenTV, RTS, Radio Koussanar). The collaboration with the national and local dynamics on agroecology has also allowed for a wide dissemination of project activities. It is worth mentioning that both the DyTAEL and the DyTAES used WhatsApp groups as a means of communication. The DyTAES also has a Facebook page with 1 000 subscribers and publishes a quarterly newsletter. In India, communication materials, such as fact sheets and brochures, were translated into local languages (Hindi and Telugu) and shared with the CoP network members during the national workshop with local government representatives in Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh.
146. One global and seven national videos were produced. Both CARI and the partners are disseminating them through different channels (see Finding 20).

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<sup>40</sup> The project proposal foresees the publication of "at least one scientific article in an international journal of rank A and one article in an international minor journal".

147. Although stakeholders were generally satisfied with the outreach of the project activities, the evaluators were unable to estimate the approximate number of people reached through dissemination and communication. Overall, these data were weakly monitored during implementation.
148. In conclusion, while the expected target values for the outcome and output indicators were substantially achieved, there are some important pending outputs (restitution workshops, global and national synthesis, scientific article, press conferences) hampering the full achievement of Outcome 4.

*The rating for this criterion under Outcome 4 is Moderately Satisfactory.*

*The overall rating of progress towards achieving objectives and outcomes is Moderately Satisfactory.*

**Finding 10.** The project was implemented in an extremely challenging environment. In particular, the COVID-19 pandemic caused several delays. It also hindered the implementation of the exchange activities at both the national and international levels. This affected the project's strategic approach.

149. The project was carried out in a very challenging context determined by the COVID-19 pandemic. The planned international exchange visits were cancelled. This affected the quality of the peer-to-peer learning strategy that was meant to be triggered by those exchanges. The restrictions also caused many delays in implementing the activities. In particular, the field research linked to the development of the multicriteria assessment tool and the evaluation of the agroecological initiatives were delayed, since they required field observations and in-person interviews with producers.<sup>41</sup>
150. In three countries, the significant distance among project locations posed serious challenges for activities linked to CoPs. This hindered effective implementation. In some countries, the CoPs involved actors located up to 700 km away, such as in Brazil, Ethiopia and India. Cultural diversity and language barriers also represented an additional challenge to be tackled during project implementation, specifically under Component 1.
151. The security situation in Ethiopia and Burkina Faso hampered the organization of meetings and exchange activities under Component 1.

### 3.3 Efficiency

**Finding 11.** Project implementation was significantly delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, lengthy administrative procedures and the late identification of scientific partners. The choice to develop the AVACLIM evaluation tool within the framework of a PhD thesis also affected the achievement of results. It is likely that all pending activities will be finalized by the project's expected closure. However, the delays impacted the coherence of the initiative's strategic approach, which had been designed with a consequentialist scheme among the components. Despite these shortcomings, it is unlikely that additional outputs and outcomes could have been achieved in the same challenging environment in which the project was implemented. The allocation of financial and human resources was generally adequate. Resources for national research institutes, however, were underestimated.

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<sup>41</sup> Some international internships were also planned in each country but could not be implemented due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

152. The implementation of activities and the delivery of outputs have been considerably delayed compared to the initial timetable. These delays affected the reach of results achieved. In particular, the delays under Component 2 weakened the extent of results achieved under Components 3 and 4.
153. Many Component 3 advocacy activities took place near project closure. However, due to delays in delivering the research results and the COVID-19 pandemic, most of them were implemented without being structured on the specific knowledge that had to be generated from the application of the multicriteria assessment tool. In addition, the delayed finalization of the tool did not allow for scientific validation and dissemination among the practitioners and scientists not directly involved in the project. Time-sensitive outputs linked to the AVACLIM tool were consequently delayed. As an example, the results from country evaluations were delivered during the second semester of 2022. The evaluation synthesis and comparative analysis have not been produced, which hampers the elaboration of specific advocacy messages. The user guide for the implementation of the multicriteria assessment tool, the national and international restitution workshops, and the capitalization on research results have all accumulated, on average, one year of delay compared to the planned chronogram.
154. The delays were mainly due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and lengthy and cumbersome administrative procedures (see Finding 13), specifically the signing of the national letters of agreement (LOAs) for the management of the GEF and FAO funds. In addition, some strategic decisions and gaps in the project design also had an impact. The decision to develop the multicriteria assessment tool under the framework of a PhD thesis, which normally lasts three years, was mentioned among the factors that contributed to delays. According to many stakeholders, this could have been prevented if thought of ahead of time. Interviewed stakeholders provided the following comments: "Anyone who works in the academic environment knows that research usually takes longer than the initial planning. The time required to obtain scientific results does not match the project's time frame. It takes about ten years for scientific demonstrations to be solid. The purpose of publishing a PhD thesis implies obvious requirements, so this means that the trajectories were different."
155. As noted, the scoping of appropriate national scientific expertise and partners when the project was already in progress, rather than during conceptualization, caused additional delays. Discussions and negotiations between CARI and FAO on the property rights of outputs delivered also required some time and caused delays at the project inception phase. In India and Ethiopia, the two NGO representatives involved in the project design passed away while the project was in the process of being launched. The handover process caused additional delays in these countries.
156. Although all planned activities are likely to be implemented by project closure, the delays accumulated prevent the consolidation of the preliminary results. This includes the follow-up needed to ensure the uptake of the multicriteria assessment tool by partners. Additionally, most of the advocacy activities take place in the last period of implementation. This hinders the expected impact on decision-makers within the project's time frame.
157. The financial and human resource allocation has been considered generally adequate according to partner testimonies. Even though partners would have appreciated more resources for activities linked to the CoPs, they generally agree that resource allocation has

been fair. The only gaps highlighted concern the financial and human resources planned for the national research institutes involved in Component 2. These were considered insufficient and required significant in-kind participation from those partners and the pre-financing of activities from country partners. This was intrinsic to the LOA and represented a burden in some cases.<sup>42</sup> According to interviewees, the underestimation of financial resources allocated to research institutes also affected the extent of their commitment to the research activity in some countries.

158. Overall, the project was judged efficient in the use of financial resources. In Brazil, resources under Component 2 would have allowed for the hiring of one researcher. The partner was able to mobilize a group of seven trainees to support the researcher. This helped in carrying out the field work. The total budget appears reasonable compared to the proposed activities, outputs and expected results, and with the size of the partnership and geographical coverage.
159. The evaluators find it unlikely that additional outputs and outcomes could have been achieved in the same challenging environment in which the project was implemented. The project was, in fact, tremendously impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the complex and time-consuming administrative FAO procedures, and several country-level external conditions – such as the security situation in Ethiopia and Burkina Faso. The quality of project coordination is tackled under Finding 17.

**Finding 12.** Synergies were planned and attained with several national and global dynamics on agroecology. This resulted in a coherent joint effort and a strong premise to maximize results. However, mechanisms to stimulate synergies with other relevant projects were not sufficiently planned, and the poor complementarity with FAO's efforts in scaling up agroecology at the country level is considered a missed opportunity for greater project reach.

160. The synergies that the project was able to establish with national and local dynamics were significant in all countries (see section 3.2 on effectiveness). The project was also designed to ensure interaction with global networks advocating for sustainable natural resources management and agroecology, especially Drynet and the Sahel Sustainable Network. The participation of the partners in international events, such as COP 15 of the UNCCD and the *Desertifications* Summit, allowed partners to establish new contacts and discussions for future interventions.
161. In terms of synergies, several projects implemented by the IRD provided baseline data during project design, as well as a repository of good practices.<sup>43</sup>
162. However, other potential, external synergies were not adequately explored. In Senegal, for example, there are no concrete plans to integrate AVACLIM's evaluation tool into the project Promoting agroecological intensification of agriculture to boost the resilience of farms in the Sahel – FAIR Sahel, even though the project envisaged the "multicriteria co-evaluation of innovative systems." (Emerging Senegal, 2017). According to the information collected, if retained, the AVACLIM tool will only be included in the comparative review of

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<sup>42</sup> For example, as per testimonies, the Ethiopian partner was unable to implement some of the last project activities under Outcome 1 due to the needed pre-financing.

<sup>43</sup> This includes: the SoCA project, Beyond climate, soil carbon sequestration to sustain tropical family farming; the SECURE project, Soil ecological function restoration to enhance agrosystem services in rainfed rice cropping systems in agroecological transition; and the DSCATT project, Dynamics of soil carbon sequestration in tropical and temperate agricultural systems.

existing tools and methodologies that is expected under the project. However, it seems that not one concrete step has been taken in this respect, even though many of the project leaders are also AVACLIM partners (IRD, CIRAD, ISRA, Enda Pronat). Additionally, some stakeholders noted that more synergies between the two projects would have allowed the PhD student to widen the sample of its research, also considering that both initiatives cover the Zone Kousanar in Senegal. This would have mitigated one of AVACLIM's evaluation tool weaknesses that was highlighted by several interviewees: the analysis was developed on a restricted sample that was not representative.

163. More significantly, no synergy was established between AVACLIM and FAO's initiatives on agroecology in the seven countries involved. There was also no exchange in terms of impact assessment methodologies at the country level or an integration of efforts in the area of advocacy.
164. It is true that FAO influenced the process of developing the AVACLIM multicriteria evaluation tool to some extent and the initial discussions on the option of using FAO's TAPE within AVACLIM. In this respect, it is worth recalling that FAO participated in the AVACLIM preparation workshop (July 2018), where the idea of developing an evaluation tool for agroecology was discussed. Additionally, two representatives from CARI were invited to the TAPE inception workshop (October 2018), considering the AVACLIM focus on agroecology assessment. FAO participated in the discussion around the development of a new tool through its representatives on the Project Steering Committee. In addition, one member of the TAPE team is also a member of the external thesis committee of the PhD student in charge of developing the AVACLIM tool. While the PhD student built the AVACLIM methodology through a previous analysis of TAPE, the first steps of the AVACLIM methodology retain some of the methods of TAPE. However, during the implementation of AVACLIM, the interaction with the FAO TAPE team was limited to the participation of the TAPE team to AVACLIM international events, and the project took a separate track. Consulted FAO personnel recognize the potential of the AVACLIM tool for further TAPE adjustment, and it has, in fact, stated that synergies and cooperation may arise in the future. If synergies between FAO and the AVACLIM methodologies would have been planned in a more thorough way, then they would have been feasible in the already existing project.
165. At the country level, none of the national partners reported any interactions with FAO Country Offices. In Senegal, not even the FAO Country Office was aware of the development of a tool different from TAPE within AVACLIM. This is perceived as a missed opportunity, since FAO is able to offer support in different areas related to AVACLIM:
  - i. methodological exchanges on the use of impact assessment tools for agroecology, since several Country Offices already use TAPE;
  - ii. facilitation of advocacy initiatives by involving relevant national stakeholders, given the well-positioned Country Offices with the respective government authorities;
  - iii. participation in the scope and selection of agroecological initiatives to be included in project activities and support for the implementation of knowledge exchange workshops, given many of FAO's country initiatives to scale up agriculture as found, for instance, in Senegal;
  - iv. mutual feeding between AVACLIM and the process related to the FAO CPF in the countries involved, where potential areas of interaction were identified, such as supporting the current or future involvement of AVACLIM national stakeholders in

- the FAO CPF planning process (considering the focus that many CPF-related processes have on the inclusion of civil society organizations); and
- v. support in disseminating AVACLIM's content and results through FAO's national networks.
166. According to interviewees, the poor complementarity with FAO's efforts on agroecology was due to several circumstances. For example, there were several discussions on the use of the FAO logo on AVACLIM publications, which was not resolved for publications at the country level. This limited the AVACLIM outreach and had implications on AVACLIM linkages with other FAO work. In addition, the project's limited budget did not include costs for FAO country representations, which limited interactions at the country level.
167. However, synergies were purposely planned and achieved around the dissemination of the agroecological initiatives capitalized on by AVACLIM. These initiatives, in fact, have been disseminated through FAO's Agroecology Knowledge Hub (see Finding 9), which also ensures an outstanding visibility opportunity for the project. In addition, the production of communication materials, such as documentaries, was supported by FAO.

**Finding 13.** The project's efficiency was highly affected by the complexity of the administrative setup, which included multiple letters of agreement as an alternative to the Operational Partners Implementation Modality (OPIM). The project's efficiency was also affected by lengthy and cumbersome procedures linked to the signing of LOAs, which required approval from the respective FAO Country Offices. The signature process lasted from seven (South Africa) to 16 (Ethiopia) months after the October 2019 project launch. The inefficiencies were not specifically linked to AVACLIM but to the entire FAO operational framework.

168. CARI was the main executing partner for the project based on: i) a financing agreement signed between the FFEM and CARI; and ii) LOAs signed between FAO and CARI (Evaluation terms of reference, August 2022).
169. The project was confronted with cumbersome administrative arrangements linked to the management of the GEF-FAO funds, which caused inefficiencies and significant delays. The agreement between FAO, as the GEF implementing agency, and CARI, as executing partner, could not be framed under the OPIM, since CARI did not meet all the necessary financial and administrative requirements. The project was therefore implemented through LOAs, which are "cost-reimbursable service contracts signed with not-for-profit entities" (FAO Manual, Section 507, Letters of Agreement). The LOA arrangement was a suboptimal solution that did not foresee subcontracting and required the signature of additional LOAs for each country in which the project was implemented. The operational modality proposed (multiple LOAs) made sure that CARI could continue coordinating the whole partnership and linking to the FFEM portion of the project. As such, CARI also had to pre-finance most of the project expenses incurred under the FAO-GEF budget.<sup>44</sup> In addition, while the OPIM seems more appropriate for the type of partnership established under AVACLIM, the LOA was mostly intended as an agreement with a service provider for the delivery of specific activities and outputs. This does not allow for the management autonomy and the leadership that was needed by CARI under this project. Under the project agreement for the management of the GEF funds, FAO delegated the near entirety of the project execution to CARI and the EMG through LOAs. However, CARI would have enjoyed full project execution responsibility under the OPIM modality – except for audits, the terminal

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<sup>44</sup> The rest of the GEF funds were pre-financed by CARI, except for an initial allocation upon project launch.

evaluation and spot checks, which would have been retained by FAO. The LOA modality allowed FAO to retain a limited engagement in execution, specifically for the preparation and management of the LOAs.

170. This situation limited CARI's executing functions in dealing with the seven country partners. On the one hand, CARI assumed the financial risks in the event of country partners' non-compliance, but on the other hand, FAO had to validate any country LOA between CARI and the implementing national NGOs through its Country Offices.<sup>45</sup> The validation of these national LOAs was extremely lengthy and seriously impacted the time available to implement the national activities funded through the GEF-FAO funds, such as in Brazil and Ethiopia (see Figure 7). In the case of the Indian partner, GBS, the validation from the FAO Country Office did not materialize, since the national partner selected was not included in the quality list approved by the national authorities.<sup>46</sup> It is worth noting that, according to Project Steering Committee meeting reports as of January 2021 – more than two years after the start of the project – it was still unclear whether the GEF funds would have covered activities in India. When this was clarified, it was decided that the activities in the country would have been financed through FFEM funds. Thereafter, the agreement between CARI and the Indian partner was finally signed in June 2021.
171. The lengthy procedures for the validation of the national LOAs were even exacerbated because each national LOA was split into two separate agreements, each one covering a specific period of implementation. This was deemed necessary to mitigate the financial risks for CARI in case of partners' non-compliance. Overall, the project was implemented under the framework of: 12 LOAs;<sup>47</sup> five memorandums of understanding signed between the EMG and country partners for activities under Component 1;<sup>48</sup> one financing agreement between CARI and the FFEM; one partnership agreement between CARI and the GBS; and one partnership agreement between CARI and the IRD.
172. The complex administrative set up and the lengthy FAO validation of the LOAs led to uneven progress in the implementation of activities in the different countries. For example, while the first LOA with the Moroccan country partner was signed in June 2020, it was only signed in February 2021 for the Ethiopian partner. The Senegalese and Brazilian partners signed the LOAs with CARI in September 2020, and the partner of Burkina Faso in October 2020, meaning approximately one year after the project launch in October 2019. In India, the full operationalization of all project components occurred in June 2021 after

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<sup>45</sup> For each country, except India, an LOA between CARI and the national NGO was signed upon FAO Country Office approval. In Brazil, Ethiopia, Morocco and Senegal, the LOA was split into two agreements with each one covering a specific implementation period. Specifically, CARI signed the first LOA covering the first implementation period and a second one after the approval of the first set of expenses incurred by partners. Each one of these agreements had to be validated by the FAO Country Offices.

<sup>46</sup> According to interviewees, India was the only country where the national authorities had influenced LOA approval. While some interviewees made reference to the quality list of NGOs, other interviewees mentioned that the national authorities were rather interested in engaging with a governmental body through a selection process.

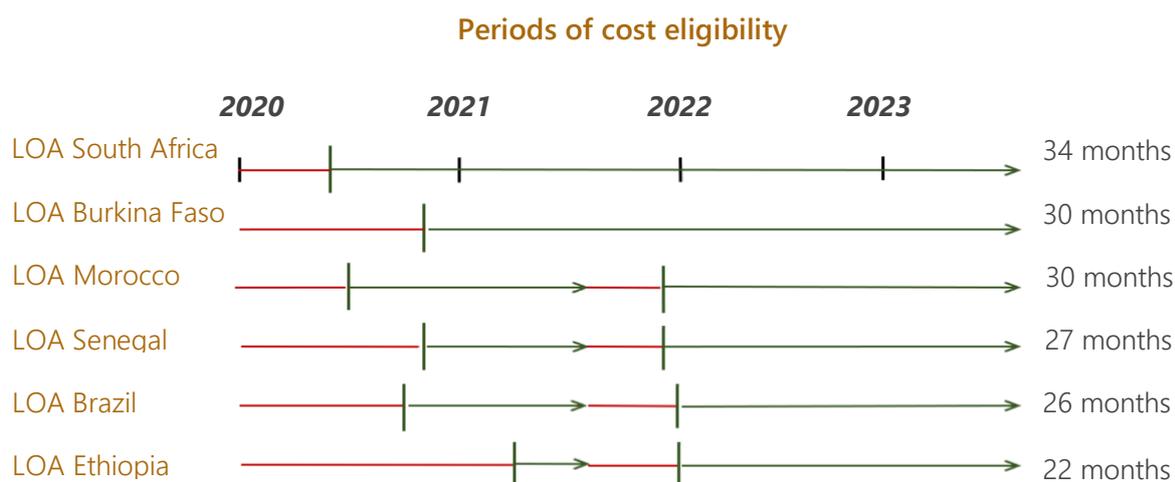
<sup>47</sup> This includes one LOA for FAO and CARI; one LOA for FAO and the EMG; one LOA for CARI and Both ENDS; one LOA for CARI and ARFA; two LOAs for CARI and CAATINGA; two LOAs for CARI and Agrisud International; two LOAs for CARI and the ISD; and two LOAs for CARI and Enda Pronat.

<sup>48</sup> The EMG signed memorandums of understanding with CAATINGA, Agrisud International and the Norsys Foundation, ARFA, Enda Pronat and the GBS.

the agreement between CARI and the GBS for activities to be implemented through the FFEM funds had been signed.<sup>49</sup>

173. In addition, the significant time that had elapsed between the closure of the first LOA and the signing of the second one caused periods in which the costs incurred were ineligible under the GEF-FAO funds.<sup>50</sup> The limited time lapse for certain country partners to implement activities, whether due to the delayed signing of the first LOA or the gap between the first and second LOA, such as in Ethiopia, is presented in Figure 7.

**Figure 7. Expenditure eligibility periods for the Global Environment Facility funds**



Partner	First LOA	Second LOA
EMG	From 27 May 2020 to 31 December 2022	
Brazil	From 18 September 2020 to 31 July 2021	From 18 December 2021 to 31 March 2023
Burkina Faso	From 12 October 2020 to 31 March 2023	Amended on 30 July 2021
Ethiopia	From 27 February 2021 to 31 July 2021	From 18 December 2021 to 31 March 2023
Morocco	From 22 June 2020 to 31 July 2021	From 16 November 2021 to 31 March 2023
Senegal	From 25 September 2020 to 31 July 2021	From 19 November 2021 to 31 March 2023

Source: Elaborated by CARI upon request of the Evaluation Team.

*The overall rating for this criterion is Moderately Satisfactory.*

<sup>49</sup> According to interviewees and evaluation reports for initiatives delivered under Component 2, research activities started in January 2021 – even though the agreement with the FFEM was pending, as well as the response from the FAO Country Office. However, the implementation of Component 1 started after the final response received from the FAO Country Office, since this component was initially planned to be covered through the GEF-FAO funds.

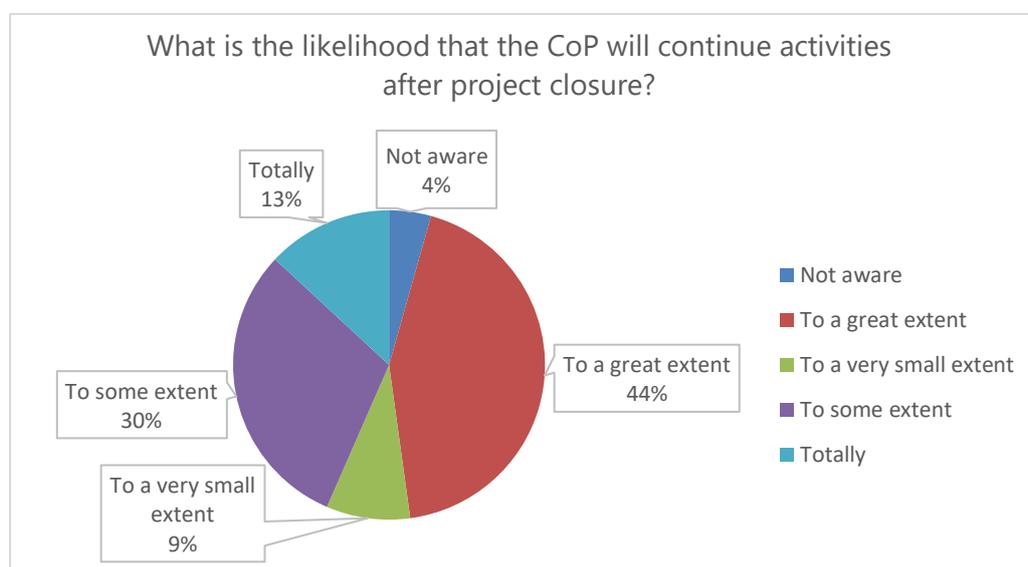
<sup>50</sup> According to some interviewees, if the ongoing country LOAs would have been extended before expiration, then it would not have been necessary to sign a new LOA. This would have avoided time lost for the necessary procedures to sign a second LOA. Since this was not done, a second LOA was needed for all countries, except Burkina Faso and South Africa. According to other interviewees, the two separate agreements would still have been necessary to mitigate the financial risks for CARI in case of partners' non-compliance under the framework of the first agreement.

### 3.4 Sustainability

**Finding 14.** Mixed results were found regarding the extent to which the project was designed and implemented to maximize ownership and sustainability. A promising scenario can be envisaged for the CoPs, especially when rooted in existing dynamics. However, there were no cases of partners or scientific institutes replicating and scaling up the AVACLIM evaluation tool. The measures envisaged to foster tool continuity will most likely be delivered too late for a gradual handover. In general, it is critical to develop an exit strategy for both the CoPs and the evaluation tool. On another note, the sustainability potential of a global partnership is high, and the partners will likely continue the work on agroecology.

174. Regarding approaches to foster sustainability, the project was designed with a strong focus on knowledge exchange and capacity strengthening of local actors engaged in agroecology, partnership building and advocacy to foster a more enabling environment for agroecology. Although delayed, training materials (the expected user guide) and tools to support the uptake of the AVACLIM evaluation methodology were envisaged. These are important premises which, if implemented, will contribute to sustainability alongside the integration of project activities with existing dynamics on agroecology. This was found to be strong in all countries.
175. On CoP continuity, survey respondents, although not statistically representative, were confident that the CoPs will continue their activities after project closure (see Figure 8). This tends to confirm the information collected through interviews with CoP members in Senegal and India.

**Figure 8. Community of practice sustainability**



Source: Elaborated by the Evaluation Team.

176. In Senegal, the likelihood of sustainability for the national dynamic on agroecology, DyTAES, after AVACLIM is very high. The network had existed before the project and was well-positioned to work with the government. It receives support from international organizations. In fact, FAO and several projects financially support its activities. Although not formally registered, the network is well-structured through a General Assembly, Steering and Technical Committees, and a Secretariat. It is worth mentioning that the

DyTAES is also involved in several regional and international networks: the Alliance for Agroecology in West Africa, which interacts with the Economic Community of West African States; and the Global Convergence of Land and Water Struggles. The DyTAES actively contributes to international advocacy dynamics, such as the consultation process for the United Nations Food Systems Summit in 2021 (Enda Pronat, 2021).

177. The sustainability of the local DyTAEL dynamic created by the project in the Tambacounda Region is likely to occur but needs to be further supported. The network is relatively new and mainly animated by AVACLIM's implementing partner, Enda Pronat. Its 40 members is significant and includes municipalities, decentralized government services and the prefecture. The network also undertakes progressive organizational steps and holds regular meetings. Stakeholders have already identified actions to support the network's activities by involving local municipalities in hosting the network's meetings and by mobilizing financial resources from the members' ongoing projects.
178. In India, greater involvement of the agriculture extension officers within the CoP dynamic has been considered vital in fostering the agroecological transition. It is not feasible for a group of NGOs to accomplish the expected level of transition due to the country's vast geography. The project may advocate for this through the planned national press conference and advocacy activities. However, the untapped FAO Country Office support is a missed opportunity in this regard – especially since it is in contact with NITI Aayog, the government's apex public policy think tank.
179. Stakeholders were asked about the enabling factors for CoP sustainability. Key concepts emerged from the survey which highlighted the importance of the following: joint projects and common goals; the need for opportunities so that different stakeholders from different geographical areas can meet; and the role of good communication networks, including WhatsApp, especially where security concerns and distance may hinder in-person meetings. Capitalizing on existing networks and ensuring a leadership role for the CoPs also emerged as pillars for sustainability.
180. Context-related challenges were found in some countries. In Burkina Faso, the local dynamic in the east was confronted with a regional security situation. Adaptive measures, such as organizing local subgroups in order to avoid deployments, were taken. This helps them keep the dynamic at the local level. In India, the distance among localities may hamper the continuity of the CoP meetings, unless additional funds are secured. In this respect, stakeholders believe that, without new projects, the network will continue mainly through virtual modalities and mobile telephone groups. Most CoP members highlight the availability of financial resources as a common hindering factor.
181. Interestingly, the Moroccan CoP was able to mobilize additional funds through the Heinrich Böll Foundation. The foundation has financially supported the production of a policy brief on agroecological public policies, which helps in preparing the ground for the advocacy activities to be conducted. Despite this achievement, uncertainty about the network's sustainability has been recorded in Morocco, since the AVACLIM closure may entail a lack of leadership. Against this backdrop, it has been deemed important to strengthen the synergies and joint work with the pre-existing RIAM network.
182. No CoP institutionalization process was recorded in any country. However, the evaluators do not see formalization as ensuring sustainability. Some partners noted that the financial

implications of formalization represent a burden that may hinder sustainability. For example, at a certain point, formal registration of the Indian CoP was discussed but kept informal to avoid financial difficulties. What seems of interest is the activation or reinforcement of dynamics rather than the establishment of formal structures. For example, if the Moroccan CoP merges with the existing RIAM network, then this would be positive in terms of sustainability. Indeed, it has been highlighted that FAO can provide an interesting framework to raise the profile and foster the sustainability of the CoPs supported through AVACLIM. In particular, a project exit strategy should include a reflection on how the CoPs can feed into FAO initiatives on agroecology, such as farmer field schools and teaching platforms.

183. Sustainability concerns could be seen more clearly with respect to the replicability and scale up of the AVACLIM evaluation tool. While in some countries the practitioners and researchers directly involved in the tool's application expressed their willingness to replicate the tool, the assumption is that the tool will be simplified and fine-tuned. However, only a few people could use it. In fact, there is no evidence of having disseminated the knowledge gained or the skills to train new practitioners and researchers. In addition, organizations that are not directly involved in the tool's application are unlikely to adopt a method that is seen as too complex. This was confirmed, for example, by the CoP members interviewed in Senegal. These members had some knowledge of the tool but were aware of its complexity and doubted the likelihood of learning how to use it.
184. Even in countries where researchers and practitioners felt competent to replicate the tool, such as in Senegal and Burkina Faso, the need to simplify it emerged strongly. It is worth mentioning that these partners already had experiences in multidimensional assessment prior to AVACLIM. In addition, in Burkina Faso the project arrived at the right time, when the government had already requested involved the research institute to provide evidence on the impact of agroecology. As mentioned, Senegal was also strongly supported by the field visits of the PhD student. These stakeholders were, however, fully aware that, besides streamlining, the tool requires significant resources. These resources are both human and financial, and are additional factors to consider in terms of sustainability. The partners in two countries showed neither intention nor stake in replicating the tool, which was considered inefficient in terms of cost and potentially overlapping with other tools. Three partners were vaguer in their responses. On the one hand, they expressed interest in continued tool use, but on the other hand, they did not prove to have any clear idea on how, when and for which purpose the tool would have been replicated. It is worth recalling that these countries were the same where the tool was less efficiently applied because of the weaker collaboration among scientists and practitioners.
185. Some measures were adopted to support the sustainability of the AVACLIM evaluation tool. For example, this included the user guide under production and a project to digitalize the tool, specifically the score attribution phase. However, the evaluators noted that these products would be delivered too late for proper utilization. The digital tool would need to be tested before being transferred to partners, and a gradual handover period would be necessary. From information collected, it seems there is no clear plan on how the partners will gain capacities and through which financial resources. For example, it has been envisaged that the tool would be simplified in a way that training on its use would not be necessary (TAPE has been used as an example), but this seems unrealistic. Further, no exit strategy has been developed, except for a budget allocation from CARI for the maintenance

- of the digitalized tool for the next two years and some ongoing discussions with potential donors.
186. Concerning potential synergies with FAO's TAPE, some FAO stakeholders have noted that TAPE is still under development. It is envisaged that the tool should integrate as much feedback and contribution as possible from other actors engaged in the assessment of agroecological impact. There has also been hope for interactions with the AVACLIM scientific consortium on mutual benefits from exchanges between TAPE and AVACLIM. However, there are no concrete collaboration plans.
187. The collaborations between NGOs and research institutes are likely to continue in the countries with more advanced experiences, such as Brazil, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Morocco and Senegal. In these countries, common interests and mutual benefits between research and development work have been highlighted. However, financial resources are needed to ensure continuity, specifically through new projects. In Senegal, practitioners reported that outside the scope of specific projects, it is difficult to work with scientists due to the lack of financial resources. Although challenging, the interaction is considered essential to foster agroecological transition. On the one hand, research supports NGO advocacy actions by generating scientific arguments. On the other hand, it generates knowledge that can be translated into expertise to be disseminated among communities and decentralized government services by NGOs. In Burkina Faso, it has been noted that, while practitioners are more and more convinced of the value of having the scientific community support advocacy through solid arguments, scientists can benefit from NGOs that offer field research opportunities within their projects.
188. With regard to the sustainability of the advocacy work initiated, it is premature to draw conclusions, since most of the activities were implemented near project closure in late 2022. In Senegal, it was noted that the local implementing partner can replicate the skills acquired through the AVACLIM advocacy component. For instance, what was learned while developing AVACLIM's advocacy strategy is currently valued within the project – Promoting agroecological intensification of agriculture to boost the resilience of farms in the Sahel – FAIR Sahel. This NGO co-leads the advocacy component. In fact, it implements capacity building activities with project partners in Burkina Faso and Mali, and the training relies on methods learned through AVACLIM. In Senegal, results under Component 3 are likely to remain due to the strong integration of AVACLIM advocacy efforts with the national initiatives underway.
189. The likelihood of future advancement in implementing the developed AVACLIM advocacy strategies is mixed. It ranges from countries, where some of these strategies are well framed within pre-existing national or local efforts to countries in which the type of work done seems to overlap with what is already underway, such as in Brazil, or unrealistic in terms of the scope of implementation, such as in India (see Finding 8).
190. The likelihood of global partnership sustainability was found to be high. Most country partners are members of several networks that address land degradation and agroecology. Partners were identified at the project design stage in this way, which provides an optimal base for continuing joint work in the same area.

191. All partners demonstrate high ownership of the initiative and are fully engaged in promoting agroecology in their countries. As such, it is highly likely that they will continue to capitalize on and scale up agroecology in the country.

*The rating for this criterion is Moderately Likely.*

### **3.5 Factors affecting performance**

#### **3.5.1 Monitoring and evaluation system**

**Finding 15.** The design and implementation of the M&E system was weak. The architecture of the project results was un conducive for both results-based management and M&E. Although some M&E planning provisions were envisaged, no evidence was found on the use of a continual, systematic monitoring system shared and used by the entire partnership.

192. M&E design: The project's M&E system was based on the results matrix that had been developed by merging the two logical frameworks contained in the GEF and the FFEM project documents. The evaluation found that the overall results architecture is not conducive to adequate M&E, particularly for the weak design of project indicators. Not all indicators were developed according to the specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound criteria (OECD, 2014). For example, not all of them are the most relevant to prove the achievement of the linked outcomes. Additionally, most of them are output-level rather than outcome-level indicators. For instance, Outcome 1, actionable knowledge on agroecology implementation is assumed and adopted by agroecology practitioners across the drylands, is accompanied exclusively by output indicators: i) number of practitioners involved in the community of practice; and ii) number of agroecological innovations shared. These indicators prove that the CoP was established and functions but cannot demonstrate that knowledge was assumed and adopted by practitioners. Similarly, Outcome 2, knowledge and understanding of the impacts of agroecological systems and success factors of agroecological initiatives are consolidated through a scientifically harmonized protocol, has only output-level indicators: i) number of functional and accessible tools for the multidimensional assessment of agroecology initiatives developed; ii) number of initiatives assessed; and iii) number of knowledge products developed, which can prove that activities were implemented, but not that knowledge was consolidated. Outcome 4, knowledge on the impact and the success factors of agroecology made publicly available, is accompanied by one indicator that is not relevant to the outcome: number of M&E systems developed and implemented. Rather, it is linked to efficient project implementation. The second indicator of at least four printed tools, four digital tools, eight documentaries, eight press conferences and participation in at least four scientific conferences is an activity and output-level indicator. It does not indicate the extent to which the project was able to reach out to indirect beneficiaries.
193. Overall, the results framework includes a very limited number of outcome indicators. This is why it is challenging to assess the project's progress towards outcomes and objectives based only on those indicators. If based only on output indicators, then it should be concluded that a project is successful if all activities are implemented and outputs delivered. However, this does not prove that positive changes were triggered. Alternatively, the few outcome indicators that can be identified in the results framework, namely the two

- indicators chosen for the project objective,<sup>51</sup> might be achieved in the long run. This depends on many factors beyond the project's sphere of influence. In this respect, it would have been preferable to design indicators more aligned with the type of changes that can be achieved within the project time frame.
194. The risks and assumptions were correctly formulated. However, a more pertinent approach to each target group would have increased their utility while monitoring the project. In general, assumptions, risks and external conditions should be as detailed as possible, and they should meet specific situations and target groups. Every level (outcomes and objectives) should forecast specific assumptions and various external conditions, since multiple factors may influence the achievement of the results.
195. M&E implementation: The project utilized activity-level monitoring, field monitoring missions, one mid-term and one terminal evaluation, and an M&E handbook for an M&E plan. However, monitoring was neither systematically nor effectively implemented. The allocation of dedicated financial resources was never even recorded.
196. An M&E plan indicating data collection methods, frequency, and responsibilities for data collection and analysis was envisaged in both the GEF and the FFEM project documents. However, the evaluation only found an M&E handbook produced upon project launch. It described the main M&E principles and lines of action,<sup>52</sup> and had a rudimentary Excel matrix used only by the former project coordinator for internal use. Neither the handbook, nor the Excel matrix included what an M&E plan should normally contain. In fact, there was no information on how the values for the indicators would be calculated, the type of data that would be collected, and the methods, frequency and responsibilities of data collection. Part of this information is mentioned in passing, without presenting a clearly linked M&E plan. Additionally, it was found that the partners had poor or no knowledge of the existence of such tools. In fact, each partner was using its own method to monitor the project.
197. Although project progress reports containing necessary information as per donor reporting requirements were submitted in a timely manner, the monitoring mainly consisted of these progress reports that had been prepared with ad hoc data collection around the activities implemented and the outputs delivered. This hampered its use as an instrument to support result-based decisions and timely risk management. Timely modification of the implementation strategy due to COVID-19 restrictions indeed happened. However, the evaluators did not find an overall structured matrix shared with all partners to provide a real-time overview of project implementation and risk management.
198. The absence of M&E tools was evident during the evaluation exercise, since the evaluators could not timely rely on updated and consolidated output- and outcome-level data.

*The rating for this criterion is Moderately Unsatisfactory.*

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<sup>51</sup> The two indicators are as follows: number of project proposals and draft policy documents (strategies, laws, financial plans) integrating agroecology and its principles; and number of countries who have agroecology on their government agenda for discussions on agricultural development planning.

<sup>52</sup> The M&E handbook was presented to the Project Steering Committee and the partners during the inception workshop held in January 2020. A final version was disseminated to the partners in July 2020, after donor approval.

### 3.5.2 Quality of implementation and execution

**Finding 16.** Project implementation quality is satisfactory regarding the support provided in relation to the strategic review of progress and results, planning, reporting and overall technical backstopping. However, FAO could have been more proactive and more efficient in carrying out the administrative tasks.

199. FAO is the GEF implementing agency for the project. It provides project cycle management services, as established in the GEF policy. Overall, FAO is accountable and responsible to the GEF for the delivery of results. FAO implemented the project through internal personnel: i) the FAO Funding Liaison Officer from the Climate and Environment Division of the GEF terminal evaluation unit; ii) the FAO Lead Technical Officer from the Plant Production and Protection Division, who provided technical backstopping and technical clearance of services procured by the Organization; and iii) a part-time Operations Officer, responsible for administrative and financial management of the GEF funds (Evaluation terms of reference).
200. The FAO-GEF Coordination Unit provided oversight of the GEF-financed activities, outputs and outcomes largely through Programme Implementation Reports and periodic backstopping. FAO ensured the approval of technical and financial reports and provided overall guidance and technical assistance. Through the Project Steering Committee, FAO participated in general project oversight, monitoring, strategic review and planning. In addition, FAO oversaw the production and validation of communication materials and the quality of the technical expertise required. The GEF reporting was regular and no deficiencies were highlighted. Risks were overall well managed and constantly monitored through the Programme Implementation Reports. FAO contributed to the timely modification and adaptation of project activities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
201. However, weaknesses were reported around the management of administrative aspects (see Finding 13). Delays were related not only to the validation of national LOAs, but also the approval of the amendment needed under Component 1. In this case, a six-month period elapsed between the request and the approval.<sup>53</sup> It is underscored that these inefficiencies are not specific to AVACLIM-related FAO provisions but are mainly linked to FAO's entire administrative apparatus. There were divergent opinions on the likelihood that FAO personnel could have delivered faster under the same conditions linked to the whole FAO framework and the complex project administrative setup. This required several discussions to reach agreements that included the aforementioned amendment and use of the FAO logo.<sup>54</sup>

*The rating for this criterion is Moderately Satisfactory.*

**Finding 17.** The institutional setup was clearly defined and accompanied by written procedures. The stakeholders valued CARI's ability to manage the complex administrative architecture and to deal with the various unpredicted external conditions faced by the project. Areas of improvement concern: strengthen the participatory approach in the decision-making system; provide better

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<sup>53</sup> During the Project Steering Committee meeting in May 2021, it was agreed to use the funds available for international in-person exchanges to organize country-level visits and virtual meetings (meeting report, May 2021). An amendment was prepared by FAO in December 2021 and approved in June 2022.

<sup>54</sup> A lot of time was needed to reach an agreement on the use of the FAO logo and the intellectual property rights of project deliverables. The FAO logo was finally agreed upon for the project's global products. This, however, required ad hoc agreements per each output – not for country deliverables.

clarity on the role of the scientific partners and Both ENDS after its withdrawal as component leader; and enhance the results-based approach in the planning and monitoring processes. The project management team proved leadership and responsiveness to partners' needs and was efficient in adapting to changing conditions and emerging needs.

202. The project's management was clearly framed. A Project Steering Committee, chaired by CARI, was established. It included representatives from component leaders (EMG, IRD, CARI), FAO and the FFEM.<sup>55</sup> CARI was responsible for the project's day-to-day management. A Project Director was based at CARI and was responsible for supervising and guiding the Project Coordinator. A Project Management Unit was also established within CARI. Its main functions, following the Project Steering Committee guidelines, were to ensure efficient project management, coordination, implementation and monitoring through the effective implementation of the annual work plans and budgets. The Project Management Unit is composed of a Project Coordinator, an Administrative and Finance Manager and CARI's Project Director. The Project Coordinator is in charge of daily implementation, management, administration and technical supervision.
203. The implementing partners in charge of the coordination and implementation of AVACLIM's four components were as follows:

**Table 2. Implementing partners**

Component	Implementing partner	Country
<b>Component 1</b>	EMG	South Africa
<b>Component 2</b>	IRD	France
<b>Component 3</b>	CARI	France
<b>Component 4</b>	CARI	France

Source: FAO. 2024. *Evaluation of the project "AVACLIM: agroecology, ensuring food security and sustainable livelihoods while mitigating climate change and restoring land in dryland regions" – Annex 1. Terms of reference.* Rome.

204. Both ENDS is another global project partner. Seven national partner NGOs were also responsible for implementing the project in the respective countries (see Table 3).

**Table 3. Implementing national partners**

Partner NGO	Country represented
<b>Agrisud International – Norsys Foundation</b>	Morocco
<b>ARFA</b>	Burkina Faso
<b>CAATINGA</b>	Brazil
<b>EMG</b>	South Africa
<b>Enda Pronat</b>	Senegal
<b>GBS</b>	India
<b>ISD</b>	Ethiopia

<sup>55</sup> The Project Steering Committee meets virtually and physically every quarter to ensure: oversight and quality assurance of technical outputs; close linkages between the project and other ongoing projects; timely availability and effectiveness of co-financing support; the sustainability of key project outcomes; the effective coordination of government partner work under the project; approval of the biannual progress and financial reports, the annual work plan and the budget; and management decisions, made by consensus, when guidance was required by the Project Coordinator.

Source: FAO. 2024. *Evaluation of the project "AVACLIM: agroecology, ensuring food security and sustainable livelihoods while mitigating climate change and restoring land in dryland regions" – Annex 1. Terms of reference.* Rome

205. The overall partnership, composed of the component leaders and the seven national NGOs, met in the general assembly.
206. The operational and financial management procedures were clearly described in the project manual that was delivered to partners. The manual presents in detail the principles related to annual planning, monitoring, communication and visibility. It explains the administrative, financial and accounting project mechanisms. However, the monitoring system was not fully clarified from an operational point of view in the absence of a related M&E plan and dedicated financial resources (see Finding 15).
207. The Project Steering Committee convened regularly,<sup>56</sup> providing necessary strategic guidance. The performance of component leaders was viewed as highly satisfactory by stakeholders, who stated that they had received the needed support to implement the activities. A clear and smooth system of internal coordination and communication was established by CARI, which proved leadership skills and responsiveness to partners' needs, including ad hoc field missions.<sup>57</sup> According to interviewees, the handover between the previous and current project coordinators had no impact on the continuity and efficiency of the management, and the two profiles fully met expectations.
208. However, stakeholders reported some weaknesses in the institutional setup: the centralized decision-making system did not allow for adequate project partner participation in the global strategic aspects (see Finding 19). It was also noted that partners did not have any contact with the donors which, according to them, could have been of mutual benefit.
209. There was also a lack of clarity on the role of the leader of Component 2, especially its liaison function with the NGOs and the research institutions in the seven countries. There are some discrepancies in the understanding of this role from the IRD and CARI. Although the agreement between the two partners clearly explained that the IRD was supposed to support the country partners in adopting the methodology, the choice of assigning an operational and coordination role to a scientific actor did not seem to be the most appropriate. In addition, from information collected, it seems that the IRD had not fully understood the magnitude of support requested and eventually no longer performed this function.
210. A lack of clarity on who should lead the research component in countries, whether the NGO or the research institute, were also reported. In this respect, variable situations were found. They ranged from the optimal setup where NGOs and scientists worked together – despite a clear division and understanding of roles, such as in Brazil, Burkina Faso, Morocco and Senegal – to more nuanced situations that did not allow stakeholders to have a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of each one. This lack of clarity also affected the quality of the guidance and capacity building offered by CARI. In some countries, the practitioners were trained and in others, the scientists – and sometimes both – were trained together. In this regard, it was noted that the roles and responsibilities should have been

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<sup>56</sup> Ten Project Steering Committee meetings have been held since project launch.

<sup>57</sup> The CARI organized field missions in Brazil, Ethiopia, India and South Africa to support partners in management and administrative issues.

planned more accurately and prior to direct implementation in order to enhance the quality of the research activity.

211. A lack of clarity was also reported on the role of Both ENDS after its withdrawal from being the leader of Component 3 and on how the advocacy component was to be led in the absence of results arising from Component 2.
212. The planning process was only partially results-based due to the aforementioned weaknesses of the M&E system (see Finding 15). While there is evidence that the Project Steering Committee and the Project Management Unit were able to focus on results and long-term impact,<sup>58</sup> the predominance of output indicators in the logical framework directed monitoring efforts on activities and outputs rather than on expected outcomes and changes to be triggered for the beneficiaries. For example, an assessment of the capacity building outcomes among CoP members after having participated in project activities was not considered. Similarly, there was a strong focus on the evaluation tool output. This hampered the reconsideration of its features given the difficulties that partners had faced in applying it at the field level.
213. Despite these shortcomings, it is worth mentioning that the stakeholders highly valued CARI's efforts and capacities to manage the complex administrative architecture. The Project Management Unit proved to be flexible in adapting to changing conditions, especially the limitations due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Virtual modalities were fostered to strengthen internal communication. An internal WhatsApp group was created and virtual open calls were launched to discuss specific topics.<sup>59</sup> The project was also able to adapt to emerging needs. For example, CARI decided to hire someone to support the country partners in applying the AVACLIM evaluation tool. This happened following the realization that the scientific partners based in France could not fully perform this role.

*The rating for this criterion is Satisfactory.*

### **3.5.3 Financial management and mobilization of expected co-financing**

**Finding 18.** The expected co-financing materialized at 81 percent as of June 2022 and was instrumental in supporting the achievement of the project results. Stakeholders considered it highly likely that the remaining amount of co-financing would materialize by project closure.

214. The project has been co-financed by the GEF and the FFEM. In accordance with the GEF progress reports provided to the evaluators, the FFEM's funds are considered co-funding (see Appendix 4). The joint financing was valued by the stakeholders, even though this resulted in a heavier workload that required double reporting to the two donors. The FFEM funds greatly contributed to the achievement of the expected results across the four project components. The FFEM's flexibility in managing and reporting expenditures within its funds was particularly appreciated by stakeholders. This made it possible to modify the FFEM budget lines so that expenditures not eligible under the GEF-FAO funds could be covered.

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<sup>58</sup> The CoP sustainability issue was extensively discussed during several Project Steering Committee meetings.

<sup>59</sup> Two open calls were organized. One was on the evaluation methodology and another was on the knowledge exchange activities.

215. According to the last progress report available, the amount of co-financing materialized was USD 3 393 110.00 as of June 2022. This is in addition to the GEF funds, which correspond to the originally planned 81 percent.
216. The FFEM co-funding (USD 1 100 000) was administered by the project management and directly contributed to the results and objective. However, the rest of the co-funding was administered under other projects, mainly by research institutes, FAO and CARI.<sup>60</sup> These parallel projects indirectly contributed to AVACLIM's long-term objectives. The evaluators could not find evidence on the type of interaction between AVACLIM and these initiatives. Stakeholders reported that these projects had provided baseline data during project design and provided a repository of good practices and levers for better results.

*The rating for this criterion is Satisfactory.*

### **3.5.4 Project partnerships and stakeholder engagement (including the degree of ownership of project results by stakeholders)**

**Finding 19.** The crucial role of local stakeholders in facilitating the transition to agroecology was fully recognized in the project strategy. The project partners were fully involved in the project design, and different types of local actors were engaged during implementation. Areas of improvement include strengthening partners' involvement in decision-making processes and a more explicit recognition of national scientific partners' contribution to the development of new methodologies.

217. The project built on a solid partnership of NGOs that had already collaborated within Drynet. Their involvement in the project design phase was significant in the three conceptualization phases (2012–2013, 2014–2015, 2018). In-person meetings and workshops were held (2015 and 2018 in Montpellier), as well as field visits to Senegal and Burkina Faso, and the administration of online questionnaires. According to interviews, the project design duly considered the previous experiences of the partners in agroecology. Their role and contribution to the initiative were also clarified and documented in project agreements. All partners demonstrated a clear understanding of the project strategy.
218. The national partners led the project planning and implementation in their respective countries, which rooted the project in local realities. However, it was noted that the general management framework was centralized due to CARI's predominant role and the Project Steering Committee composition, which did not include country partners. According to stakeholders, these arrangements did not allow for sufficient participation of all partners in strategic decisions.
219. It is worth noting that CARI's predominant role had not been explicitly planned since the beginning. Upon project launch, Both ENDS was expected to lead Component 3, and the IRD should have been the only leader of Component 2. However, according to interviews, an initial disagreement between CARI and Both ENDS on the activity repartition and the budget allocation led to the withdrawal of Both ENDS as component leader – a role that was then covered by CARI. Although the IRD continued to be the leader of Component 2, it could not fulfil its intended liaison role with country partners. As a result, CARI also

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<sup>60</sup> Some of these projects are mentioned in footnote 46 under Finding 12. Other FAO projects are as follows: Strengthening Multistakeholder Cooperation on Agroecological Approaches for Sustainable Agriculture (MTF-GLO-664-MKF); Capacity building for adaptation planning for food security and nutrition (GCP-GLO-921-GQC); and Support for the Establishment of Pilot Ecovillages in Burkina Faso (TCP-BKF-3703).

- intervened in this component, hiring a person to support the partners in using the AVACLIM evaluation tool. Although CARI proved to be responsive in addressing an emerging need, this decision contributed even more to centralizing tasks.
220. The Project Steering Committee composition was also reported as an example of centralization. Although partners considered themselves independent in choices regarding implementation at the country level, not being members or attending the Project Steering Committee meetings, was seen as hindering their degree of participation in collective decisions. It is worth mentioning that variable opinions were found on this topic. Some stakeholders argued that a Project Steering Committee limited to donors and the component leaders had ensured timely decision-making in a challenging environment created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Others perceived their roles as implementers rather than partners.
221. Due to not being members of the Project Steering Committee, the national partners did not have any exchanges or interactions with donors. This was perceived as a missed opportunity to raise the visibility of the work being done in the countries.
222. The evaluators found no evidence of institutional mechanisms in place to enable the participation of partners in the strategic decision-making process or in more general matters not directly related to the country's activities. The only existing mechanism is the general assembly that met three times during the entire duration of the project, which is insufficient to allow for adequate participation in decision-making processes. These general assemblies are not even described in the project manual.
223. Concerning stakeholder engagement, it is important to note that the project involves a wide range of actors in addition to NGOs. In particular, civil society organizations, farmer organizations, research institutes, public authorities and international organizations are targeted through different types of activities. One of the widely recognized values of the project is to bring together scientists and NGOs, even though some shortcomings have been reported in this respect. On the one hand, the collaboration was affected by the delayed involvement of national scientific partners (see Finding 4), but on the other hand, their participation in developing the AVACLIM evaluation methodology was limited to providing inputs to adapt the range of indicators to the local contexts. Furthermore, while their participation in the application of the tool was mostly limited to data collection and soil-related analysis, a greater involvement in the analysis phase would have fostered an increased ownership of the tool.
224. An important project feature is the recognition of the crucial role that local communities, farmer organizations and practitioners play as knowledge brokers and promoters of agricultural innovations. Strengthening local knowledge through exchange activities and capitalizing on locally rooted initiatives was a major focus. It is worth recalling that several activities under Components 1 and 2 dealt with capitalizing on local good practices based on traditional knowledge (see Finding 22), and that their dissemination through the FAO Agroecology Knowledge Hub highly contributes to their visibility.
225. In Senegal, the AVACLIM evaluation tool was also discussed with the producers involved in the research, even though it was not designed for them. The consultation made them aware of the methodology's objectives. In addition, in Brazil and Senegal, the preliminary research results were presented to the communities. This fostered greater awareness on the

strengths and weaknesses of the agroecological transition underway, as documented by the minutes of the focus group discussions held in Senegal by the PhD student.

226. The extent of support provided by national executing partners to the project is high. Concerning governmental support, national government authorities were weakly involved in project activities. Therefore, it is not possible to assess governmental commitment to the project.

*The rating for this criterion is Moderately Satisfactory.*

### **3.5.5 Communication, knowledge management and knowledge products**

**Finding 20.** Several measures were taken to foster internal communication. These efforts, however, were affected by the limited number of general assemblies and the cancellation of in-person international exchanges with partners. The project team efficiently implemented external communication activities. However, the potential reach of these activities remains unknown, as the project did not have a database on people reached. Knowledge generation and management was at the core of the project's strategic approach, but delays under Component 2 significantly affected the dissemination of project knowledge.

227. Internal communication was supported through a WhatsApp group of project partners, general assemblies and open calls (see Finding 17). An online platform for sharing information and documents was also created. Despite these measures, the cancellation of in-person international exchange visits affected the extent of peer-to-peer learning among partners. The general assemblies were deemed insufficient to foster knowledge sharing and proper internal communication. On a different note, the international events (COP 15, *Desertifactions*, final project events) allowed for better communication among partners. It was noted that in the future, pivotal measures should be adopted to foster internal communication. For example, the internal online platform could have been developed by allowing for interactive options. English and French were chosen as project languages and a budget for translation was allocated for the Brazilian partner, which was also supported by an English-speaking consultant. However, these measures could not fully mitigate the language barriers for this partner.
228. External communication was well planned. Seven national and one global communication strategies were developed. This included indications on responsibilities, tools and target groups. Each partner appointed a person in charge of the project's communication tasks. Outcome 4 aimed to disseminate the knowledge generated by the project through various outputs: newsletters, news and press releases; a website; and eight documentaries.<sup>61</sup> The documentaries – seven national and one global – will be disseminated through the partners' networks and, as far as the global documentary is concerned, by FAO's communication service through the organization's social networks. So far, the documentaries have been uploaded to YouTube. FAO's YouTube channel featured the global video. These videos will also be displayed during AVACLIM's final events, and CARI signed an agreement with the *Cité des sciences et de l'industrie de Paris* (City of science and industry, Paris) for the use of the six documentaries within a permanent exhibition about climate change starting in April 2023. These outputs will likely have significant outreach. However, the documentaries were delivered near project closure in November 2022. This

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<sup>61</sup> A full list of news and publications on AVACLIM was provided to the evaluators by CARI. This list was also included in the June 2022 progress report.

prevented the evaluator's from estimating the number of people reached and their impact in raising awareness on agroecology.

229. At the country level, the partners used different modalities to disseminate project activities, such as radio programmes in Brazil and Senegal, press releases and social media networks. More significantly, according to interviewees, the project's integration within the existing dynamics on agroecology in the countries involved allowed for an extensive dissemination of AVACLIM content and messages. However, the evaluators could not elaborate any estimation of the people reached, and the partners could not provide such data.
230. Knowledge generation and management was at the core of the project's strategic approach. The multicriteria assessment tool, the capitalization and evaluation of agroecological initiatives are all around knowledge generation and strengthening. These efforts were highly supported by FAO. The Organization published all of the initiatives capitalized on through FAO's Agroecology Knowledge Hub, which reaches thousands of people.
231. Several international events (see Finding 8) strongly supported the dissemination of the knowledge generated. However, as explained, no scientific article has been published on the AVACLIM evaluation tool, and the final research results still need to be consolidated into national and global summaries. This delay highly affected the achievement of one of the main project goals, namely the production and dissemination of scientific knowledge on the impact of agroecology.

*The rating for this criterion is Moderately Satisfactory.*

## **3.6 Cross-cutting concerns**

### **3.6.1 Gender**

**Finding 21.** Overall, gender mainstreaming was integrated. Several initiatives, among those capitalized and evaluated, are led by women. The AVACLIM evaluation tool envisaged gender-disaggregated data for eight indicators. However, the project did not adopt a specific gender approach to tackle inequalities, nor were there specific activities and budget provisions for this endeavour – except for one activity implemented by the Brazilian partner. Considering the strong presence of women in agroecology, a specific approach would have been meaningful.

232. Gender equity is a principle of agroecology, as stated under Element 7 Human and Social Values of the FAO agroecology principles (FAO, 2023b). The AVACLIM project document recognizes that women play a vital role in household food security, dietary diversity and health, as well as in the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, and in improving the management of natural resources due to in-depth knowledge and experience (Project document, 2019). Project documents provide adequate analysis of gender-related issues at global and country levels. Approaches on gender mainstreaming during implementation is also sufficiently described: the adoption of gender-sensitive criteria for selecting the initiatives to be capitalized and evaluated; and a female participation rate of 40 percent in project activities. However, only one indicator of the logical framework, Outcome 1 on the percentage of women involved in the CoPs, envisaged gender-disaggregated data. This is insufficient for understanding the extent of the results achieved from a gender perspective.

233. Gender integration was among the common criteria in identifying the initiatives to be capitalized and evaluated in each country. Many Brazilian initiatives were led by women, for example, the Sabià Agroecological Development Centre Initiative in the CAATINGA semi-arid region to recover soil fertility. Some of the collective action arrangements in the community of Oziel Pereira are self-organized women's initiatives. These types of socio-organizational arrangements regulate cooperative work in production, processing and food distribution. Further, pastoral communities work to restore natural resources through the CAATINGA recovery programme. Indeed, women improved their socioeconomic conditions through the adoption of new technologies like water storage. In Burkina Faso, around 60 percent of the participants in the intervillage natural resources preservation area of the Zondoma Province are women. In the same province, the ARFA horticulture support project has encouraged the emergence of a new income generation activity for TégaWendé, a female group of compost producers. In India, within the VAAGDHARA initiative in Rajasthan, female self-help groups and microcredit support the empowerment of women. The Renuka Bio Farms initiative in Andhra Pradesh empowers rural people, especially women, in agroecological production through eco restoration practices.
234. In some countries, the project activities under Component 1 involved important female networks, such as the Senegalese national network of rural women, which is a member of DyTAES. The Brazilian CoP facilitation strategy explicitly states that a feminist approach "to deconstruct submission, oppression, and patriarchal social relations is adopted" (Brazilian CoP Facilitation Strategy, project output).
235. The AVACLIM multicriteria assessment tool includes Phase 4, the individual level. Its objective is to understand the level of gender equity within the initiative evaluated. Under this level, eight indicators are considered and analysed through gender-disaggregated data: i) education level; ii) empowerment level; iii) the level of protection when using pesticides; iv) the perception of work drudgery; v) decent work; vi) involvement in professional structures; vii) involvement in the sharing of knowledge networks; and viii) life satisfaction level.
236. Specific gender-sensitive measures were adopted to foster female participation in the research activities of Sare Boubou in Senegal. Gender-differentiated groups were formed for both data collection and restitution seminars so that women could express themselves freely.
237. Female presence in project activities was almost adequate. For example, female participation in Senegal was 26 percent. Moreover, CARI estimated female presence in project activities at 40 percent. Overall, available data were not consolidated due to the weak M&E project system – not even for those related to gender. For this reason, the Evaluation Team cannot elaborate conclusions on the extent of results achieved from a gender perspective.
238. Few implemented project activities had a specific gender approach. In particular, stakeholders recognized that the Brazilian partner had the most advanced gender expertise. This made a difference in the type of meeting discussions and by organizing one specific activity with a gender focus. For example, a 2022 project webinar was organized on the topic of agroecology and feminism. Further, the Indian partner used alternative funds to conduct three programmes per year on gender equality. This was done parallel to AVACLIM's implementation in the village of VAAGDHARA.

239. However, relying only on partners' commitment to gender may not be an effective way to ensure gender equality in projects. Overall, the project did not adopt a specific gender approach to tackle inequalities, nor were there specific budget provisions for this endeavour.

*The rating for this criterion is Moderately Satisfactory.*

### **3.6.2 Minority groups, including Indigenous Peoples, disadvantaged, vulnerable and people with disabilities, and youth**

**Finding 22.** Disadvantaged groups were considered, given the project's strong focus on enhancing the visibility of rural agroecological initiatives. However, it did not explicitly mainstream indigenous communities and youth inclusion issues. Nevertheless, traditional knowledge is well mainstreamed within the capitalized and evaluated initiatives and, in some countries, these initiatives were promoted by farmers from indigenous communities. However, no proactive measure was adopted to foster the inclusion of these categories nor empower them in the agroecological transition.

240. Indigenous communities and traditional knowledge play a pivotal role in agroecology. This is usually based on locally rooted knowledge, as well as practices related to food production and the management of natural resources. Agroecology is also key in job creation for young people. In fact, the role of youth is seen as crucial in unlocking business potential in an agroecological sense (YALTA, 2022).
241. During project design, measures to foster the inclusion of indigenous community issues were identified within the selection criteria for initiatives to be capitalized.<sup>62</sup> During project implementation, indigenous communities and minorities were addressed within the broader project focus on local agroecological initiatives. Indeed, the great extent of the initiatives capitalized and evaluated were rooted in local rural communities and, in some cases, within indigenous communities. For example, most of the Indian farmers of the VAAGDHARA initiative belong to indigenous communities (76.4 percent according to the initiative's project output fact sheet). Traditional knowledge was mainstreamed across several of the initiatives capitalized through research activities. For example, in Ethiopia, the Borusillasie agroecological initiative in the North Wollo Zone aims to revitalize the use of indigenous seed varieties. In South Africa, the Heiveld Cooperative produces market organic rooibos tea by leveraging farmers' traditional knowledge. Similarly, the Biowatch initiatives in the country's southeast focus on reviving traditional seeds and associated traditional knowledge on wild plants for food and health.
242. Given this focus, the project generally involved rural communities and indigenous groups. However, there was neither explicit targeting, nor specific proactive measures adopted to foster the empowerment of these categories in the field of agroecology. Although the project did not specifically target indigenous groups, it focused on traditional knowledge which, in some cases, included knowledge related to indigenous groups. In this context, the involvement of indigenous communities might have been considered, according to the GEF Principles (GEF, 2012). The criteria to identify such groups were not even clarified, and each country partner might have had its own understanding of concepts, such as minority, indigenous community or disadvantaged group. During the interviews, for example, country partners did not have a clear understanding of such concepts and generally agreed

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<sup>62</sup> This involved: Activity 1.1.1, identify and document at least five initiatives per country; and Criterion 5, adequate integration of Indigenous Peoples, including ethnic minorities.

that the project targeted disadvantaged groups only to capitalize on initiatives implemented by the rural poor. In the absence of clear definitions, the targeting cannot be explicitly pursued and "every group" may appear as a "minority or disadvantaged group." Similarly, promoting proactive measures to foster the participation of minorities and indigenous groups should be based on clear definitions that might differ from one country to another. This categorization and the methods for explicit targeting could have been included, for example, in the CoP facilitation strategies.

243. Against this backdrop, the project surely communicated good practices rooted in rural areas. These were sometimes within indigenous communities and often based on traditional knowledge. However, there was no specific targeting criteria or quota in the project activities for these populations.
244. Similarly, youth inclusion was not explicitly pursued. In fact, it was by chance when it did occur. For example, the Udo Wotatie initiative in the south of Ethiopia was among the capitalized initiatives and was promoted by young farmers. Not even age-disaggregated data were planned and recorded. No specific measure was adopted to facilitate the participation of people with disabilities.

*The rating for this criterion is Moderately Satisfactory.*

### **3.6.3 Environmental and social safeguards**

**Finding 23.** Environmental sustainability was at the core of the initiatives capitalized and evaluated, as well as a cross-cutting issue in the communication, advocacy, and knowledge exchange activities.

245. As far as environmental and social safeguards are concerned, the project is classified as low. Therefore, it has not triggered any FAO environmental and social safeguards and does not require any environmental and social safeguards impact assessment (FAO, 2012). Consultations with stakeholders confirmed the absence of negative effects, either environmental or social, as results of project implementation.
246. As stated in the project document (FAO, 2019d, p. 42), "the global environment benefits of the project are mainly indirect" and stem from behavioural changes of producers and decision-makers in the context of mainstreaming an agroecology approach in the drylands. In turn, agroecology was expected to contribute to combating desertification, land degradation and climate change effects.
247. The initiatives capitalized and evaluated through AVACLIM generally have a strong focus on the sustainable management of soil and water resources, climate change adaptation and biodiversity conservation. The various knowledge exchange, communication and advocacy activities have constantly addressed environmental issues, whether at national or international levels. Participation in COP 15 and *Desertifactions* have been significant in this regard. Knowledge products were also well-integrated into environmental concerns, such as documentaries to disseminate good environmental practices.

## 4. Conclusions and recommendations

### 4.1 Conclusions

**Conclusion 1.** Relevance and coherence: The project was entirely relevant and coherent with national and global priorities, but its design was unrealistic compared to the three-year period of implementation.

248. The project objectives and design were entirely consistent with national (the seven countries covered by the project) and global (the GEF, the FFEM, FAO, the United Nations Rio Conventions) concerns and priorities in the areas of agricultural development, food security, natural resources preservation, and climate change response. Its intervention areas were consistently linked with the main obstacles that hamper the consolidation of agroecology at country and global levels. In fact, the project was built on solid and experienced pre-existing partnerships. This created a coherent effort that strengthened the dynamics and initiatives underway in the countries involved. Yet, the project objectives proved to be unrealistic compared to the three-year period of project implementation. The project architecture was too ambitious, particularly regarding the development, piloting and use of a new tool to assess the multidimensional impact of agroecology. This was expected to provide evidence-based knowledge in order to inform the planned advocacy actions.

**Conclusion 2.** Effectiveness: The project partially achieved its expected outcomes. Overall, the project effectiveness was strengthened by strong integration within existing global and national dynamics on agroecology, but it was severely affected by considerable delays, design gaps and external conditions that jeopardized the strategic approach.

249. The major results were the enhancement of the partnership dynamics in the countries involved and the capitalization of local initiatives on agroecology. However, the data available do not allow for measuring the extent to which new knowledge was adopted by practitioners (Outcome 1). The project also stimulated a significant reflection on the multidimensional impact of agroecology at both the country and global level. However, the expected research results still need to be consolidated, and the AVACLIM multicriteria assessment tool has yet to be finalized and validated within the scientific community. Against this backdrop, the project has not achieved its expected outcome of consolidating knowledge on the impacts of agroecology through a scientifically harmonized protocol (Outcome 2). The delays accumulated in finalizing the research activities also hampered the strengthening of evidence-based decision-making on agroecology (Outcome 3). Concerning advocacy, the project achieved more significant results in improving the capacities of some partners in advocacy planning and in strengthening current advocacy efforts, rather than in systematizing evidence-based knowledge aimed at determining national or international policy changes. The latter were not recorded as a specific result of AVACLIM. In Senegal, some contributions to policy improvement were observed due to the strong integration of AVACLIM with advocacy efforts that are in progress. In Brazil, Morocco and South Africa, the project contributed to several ongoing policy processes. While project information and activities were adequately disseminated through different modalities, the dissemination of specific knowledge on the impact of agroecology (Outcome 4) was hampered by delayed outputs linked to the multicriteria evaluation tool. The project has therefore increased access to knowledge but not specifically on the impact

of agroecology. Overall, the project provided several inputs that help to prioritize and implement agroecological systems, but it did not fully achieve its intended objective.

**Conclusion 3.** Efficiency: The project's complex administrative setup, FAO's administrative procedures and external conditions affected efficient implementation. Poor complementarity with FAO's national efforts in scaling up agroecology also played a role. Strong project integration with ongoing dynamics on agroecology was a key mitigating factor in supporting efficiency.

250. Project efficiency was greatly affected by significant delays due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, lengthy FAO procedures linked to the signing of national LOAs and external conditions in three of the countries involved: security conditions in Ethiopia and Burkina Faso; and the demise of the person in charge of the project in Ethiopia and India. Further, there were design gaps under the research component that limited the expected internal synergies. The complexity of the administrative setup was another important factor hindering efficient implementation. In fact, national activities started with considerable time lags between countries. There were several standstills of GEF-funded activities due to lengthy procedures in validating the different LOAs. Although synergies with existing global and national dynamics on agroecology contributed to efficiency, poor complementarity with FAO's efforts in scaling up agroecology in the involved countries jeopardized the maximization of results.

**Conclusion 4.** Sustainability: It is likely that some of the achieved results will continue after project closure, but others require additional financial resources. The project progress against expected results is that sustainability has not yet been ensured.

251. It is likely that the partnerships will continue in countries in which the CoPs are well rooted in existing dynamics. The knowledge that has been generated, though not specifically tackling the impact of agroecology, will likely be further harnessed through the CoPs, the FAO Agroecology Knowledge Hub, and the project partners that are fully engaged in agroecology promotion. However, there was no evidence of partners or scientific institutes adopting, replicating or scaling up the AVACLIM multicriteria evaluation tool. The measures envisaged to foster its continuity will be delivered too late to allow for a gradual handover. Additional funds are needed to ensure tool consolidation and the transfer to partners. Financial resources are also needed to ensure the continuity of the NGO and scientific community partnerships. It is premature to draw conclusions on the sustainability of the advocacy work initiated, considering that most of the activities were implemented in the last period of implementation.

**Conclusion 5.** Factors affecting performance: The project lacked a solid M&E framework, which hindered progress tracking against the expected objectives. The quality of project implementation was satisfactory, but FAO could have delivered the administrative tasks faster. The quality of execution was satisfactory, and CARI's ability to manage the complex administrative architecture and to deal with the various unpredicted external conditions was highly valued by stakeholders. Finally, stakeholder engagement was satisfactory during design and implementation. However, stakeholders would have appreciated greater involvement in the decision-making processes and in developing the new evaluation methodology.

## 4.2 Recommendations

252. The evaluators offer the following recommendations based on the findings. The participatory workshop held during the presentation of the evaluation results allowed the partners to acknowledge the recommendations and to contribute to the identification of the needed actions and roles to implement some of them. There was also a group discussion on the criticalities to implement the recommendations, which may be considered for future projects. The partner contribution is reported under the corresponding recommendation.

**Recommendation 1.** To FAO, CARI and the NGO partners: Update the project design in close collaboration with partners, especially when significant time elapses between conceptualization and operationalization, and eventually consider changes in light of context developments. This action is needed for the project to remain relevant and specific to the context. In this case, it also would have allowed for greater efficiency. Although the project design was accurate and went through three phases of conceptualization (2012–2013, 2014–2015, 2018), including exchanges with partners, the context related to the analysis of the agroecological impact had been changed upon project launch in October 2019. There were several evaluation tools available at the time, and it would have been appropriate to thoroughly consider them before deciding to create a new one. Despite the various meetings held to review state-of-the-art developments, as confirmed by the Project Steering Committee meeting reports, probably not all factors were adequately considered. This included the time needed to effectively operationalize a new tool, which was of utmost importance (see Findings 3 and 4).

**Recommendation 2.** To FAO, CARI and the NGO partners: Identify key stakeholders in the design phase or right at the project's launch. It is also important to clearly assign roles and tasks that consistently match competencies. This action is needed to enhance project efficiency and effectiveness and to foster results ownership. The late identification of national scientific partners, which took place when the project had already been implemented, delayed the research activities and prevented the project stakeholders from being promoters and leaders of the new scientific method. Additionally, their roles were only clarified during implementation. This caused some misunderstandings on what the respective roles of NGOs and research institutes should be. Similarly, the role of the French-based research institutes with respect to their counterparts in the seven countries was not fully clarified. The operational task that was initially assigned to the IRD was impractical. In the future, the extent to which each partner can or cannot contribute to the project, should be carefully assessed, and clear TORs should be drafted accordingly (see Findings 4 and 13).

**Recommendation 3.** To FAO, CARI and the donors: Develop the project's logical framework accurately. Clarify the outcome indicators, which must be relevant and measurable. This action is needed to enhance project efficiency and effectiveness through the adoption of robust M&E frameworks during implementation and to inform timely decision-making. Several indicators were not consistent with the outcome they had intended to measure, or they were not the best options compared to the specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound criteria. This is not conducive to project monitoring and hampers the assessment of the changes triggered by the initiative. In the future, more attention must be placed on the relevance,<sup>63</sup> measurability and feasibility of the indicators, as well as a coherent formulation in terms of: i) change variable (what changes?); ii) its quantification (how much does it change?); iii) the reference target group (who is

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<sup>63</sup> This can be done using the Do You Believe Me Test (Kedzia and Gegenheimer, 2018).

involved in the change?); iv) time (in how much time or when do we expect to be able to detect the indicator?); and v) localization (where will change be detected?) (see Findings 4 and 15).

**Recommendation 4.** To FAO, CARI and the donors: Purposely plan synergies with other initiatives and efforts, especially when these are led by the same partners, in the same geographic areas and around the same themes. This action is needed to enhance project efficiency, effectiveness and potential sustainability. Despite the strong synergies created with national and local dynamics on agroecology, no significant synergies with individual projects and FAO's national efforts to scale up agroecology were recorded. In particular, synergies with the FAO Country Offices could have been fostered on: i) methodological (formal) exchanges on the use of impact assessment tools for agroecology; ii) CoP strengthening through interaction with FAO's agroecological initiatives, such as the farmer field schools, and CoP involvement in the CPF processes; iii) facilitation of the advocacy initiatives with respect to national authorities; and iv) the scoping and selection of agroecological initiatives to be capitalized and evaluated. Despite some interactions with the FAO TAPE team, the project took a separate path on the AVACLIM evaluation tool. Consulted FAO personnel recognizes the potential of the AVACLIM tool for further TAPE adjustment. In fact, it has stated that synergies and cooperation may arise in the future. However, if synergies between the FAO and AVACLIM methodologies had been planned more thoroughly, then they would have been feasible in the already existing project (see Findings 8 and 12).

**Recommendation 5.** To FAO, CARI and the donors: Continue to support the dynamics on agroecology at the local level. This action is needed to enhance the role of grassroots organizations in promoting agroecological transition and to foster the sustainability of interventions. While there is still work to be done on the national and political level – for example, advocating for the development of national strategies or institutional frameworks on agroecology – stakeholders emphasize the role of local communities, authorities and decentralized services in promoting impactful agroecological initiatives. Decentralized governmental services are particularly important to accompany producers during the transition, and their skills should therefore be enhanced. Additionally, in some AVACLIM countries, several municipalities have already obtained important results in promoting sustainable agricultural practices in their territories. These should be further supported and scaled up (see Findings 1 and 6).

**Partner contribution to the recommendation:** This recommendation is key for three project partners: Enda Pronat, ARFA and the Institute for Sustainable Development. The partners have identified the following needed actions to implement the recommendation: i) identify modalities, opportunities and funds to continue to facilitate the CoP meetings at the local level, and to involve national authorities and international stakeholders, namely FAO and CARI; ii) promote international exchanges among CoP members; iii) foster the involvement of new members in the existing CoPs; iv) establish a network between the CoPs and FAO; and vi) identify agroecological projects supported by FAO in which the CoP members can be involved. The role of local NGOs and country networks in implementing the recommendation has been underscored, such as that of the CNABio in Burkina Faso, and the DyTAEL and the DyTAES Senegal. FAO and CARI have been identified as knowledge brokers. They can provide technical support and mobilize funds. Some criticalities to implement the recommendation require more reflection for future projects. For example, this may involve: security conditions in Burkina Faso; health crises that hamper in-person meetings; budget constraints; a turnover of political representatives; and obstacles in the policy environment of some countries.

**Recommendation 6.** To CARI and the scientific partners: Develop an exit strategy for the AVACLIM evaluation tool – including its synthetization, consolidation and elaboration of anticipated synergies with other existing tools – and actions to build the capacities of stakeholders willing to adopt it (not necessarily all of them). This action is needed to enhance the effectiveness of the

AVACLIM tool and to foster its uptake and replication. On the one hand, the tool should be fine-tuned by piloting it on an increased sample with different socioeconomic situations and geographical locations.<sup>64</sup> The following is also suggested: develop synthetic indicators; consolidate the use of references, since some indicators are based on primary data and others on secondary data; and reflect on potential comparisons among primary data collected in “non-treated” groups to support the analysis of the impact of agroecology. The final message stemming from the use of the tool should be further clarified. On the other hand, the tool should be simplified, tailored to practitioners and be more user-friendly. Stakeholders reported that it is unlikely that practitioners or researchers not directly involved in its development would adopt it. To enable replication and scale up, additional training is also needed. It is important to highlight that only stakeholders that showed interest in adopting the tool should be involved in these additional efforts to avoid resource waste and overlap. Considering the number of existing evaluation tools, it is also important to consider the type of synergies that can be established, particularly with FAO’s TAPE. The January 2023 international scientific seminar seems to be an appropriate venue to discuss this topic.

**Partner contribution to the recommendation:** This recommendation is relevant to CARI, the IRD, FAO and the FFEM. The actions identified for its implementation are to: i) undertake a review of the existing evaluation methods for agroecology, including the AVACLIM method, GRET Memento and TAPE by analysing their coverage and application, as well as their current strengths and weaknesses; ii) elaborate a concept note (as an AVACLIM deliverable) on the analysis to be used as a decision-supporting tool by donors and practitioners on the ground who need guidance on the best tool based on different contexts, circumstances and research objectives; iii) recruit the needed human resources to elaborate the concept note during the AVACLIM lifespan; and iv) discuss different evaluation methods with the teams. The criticalities to implement these actions are related to the budget and time constraints (see Findings 7 and 14).

**Recommendation 7.** To CARI and the scientific partners: When developing new methodologies, it is important to promote a more proactive role from national scientific partners. This action is needed to enhance the relevance, effectiveness and ownership of the new methodology. While developing the AVACLIM evaluation tool, the participation of the national scientific partners was mainly limited to the adaptation of the range of indicators to the local realities. Except for Senegal, stakeholders who received the methodology considered the approach a top-down modality. Additionally, their participation in the application of the tool within the research activities was mostly limited to data collection and soil analysis. It is suggested that the participation of local scientific actors is fostered throughout the whole process, from the design phase to the analysis and dissemination of results. This would foster their proactive role even in disseminating and replicating the methodology (see Finding 19).

**Partner contribution to the recommendation:** This recommendation is relevant for the EMG. The main, necessary action to implement the recommendation involves participatory action research from the design phase. This includes contextualization and direct inputs from NGOs, academia and farmers. While scientists and NGOs have a crucial role in implementing this recommendation, the research should be farmer driven. The time and budget needed for participatory action research, which implies workshops, mentoring and discussions, are among the main criticalities to implement.

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<sup>64</sup> This was developed and tested in a village, where an estimated 99 percent of inhabitants practise agroecology. However, this is not representative of the more common situations, where agroecology co-exists with conventional agricultural practices.

**Recommendation 8.** To CARI and the NGO partners: Develop more specific advocacy actions instead of a one-size-fits-all approach. Always include authorities at the national and local levels. This action is needed to enhance the effectiveness and impact of advocacy work. The national advocacy strategies developed were needed in some countries, but they overlapped with existing ones in others. In other countries, the intended coverage of these strategies did not seem appropriate to the scope of the NGO involved. Diagnostics and the mapping of existing initiatives should always precede advocacy planning, and project activities should support specific requests that are in progress. Indeed, sometimes there is no need to develop a strategy from scratch. However, it is more effective to nourish an existing strategy with new content. Additionally, some stakeholders noted that national-level decision-makers were weakly involved. This shortcoming needs to be addressed when organizing the forthcoming AVACLIM advocacy activities.

**Partner contribution to the recommendation:** This recommendation is the most important for Agrisud International and the Norsys Foundation. The following actions should be implemented: i) early multistakeholder consultation (decision-makers, practitioners, experts), ideally since the design phase, to develop shared advocacy strategies; ii) develop advocacy messages based on scientific evidence, linked to the specific national context; and iii) value the collaboration between NGOs and academia that has been established through AVACLIM. The role of the CoP, established through AVACLIM, has been highlighted alongside that of national academia and research institutes. Some criticalities need to be addressed for future projects in order to implement the recommendation, namely the involvement of different stakeholders and the consolidation of the collaborations established under AVACLIM (see Finding 8).

**Recommendation 9.** To CARI and the NGO partners: Identify opportunities, stakeholders and modalities to value AVACLIM knowledge for advocacy purposes. This action is needed to support impactful results stemming from the knowledge generated by AVACLIM. The use of the AVACLIM knowledge in advocacy work has not occurred due to delays accumulated in finalizing the research activities. Ensuring the future use of this knowledge is of paramount importance, both at the national and international level. While the assumption is that the local CoPs and AVACLIM partners will do their best to disseminate the knowledge, concrete ideas are needed to launch the process and to ensure follow up. The final international project event is an appropriate venue to discuss this topic (see Finding 8).

**Recommendation 10.** To FAO, CARI and the donors: Improve risk management linked to the project's administrative arrangements by identifying and timely applying mitigation measures. This action is needed to promote efficient project implementation. Throughout its implementation, the project experienced considerable slowdowns due to over-complex administrative arrangements and procedures that hampered a smooth advancement of the original schedule. These arrangements and procedures are beyond the scope of the project, since they are linked to FAO's corporate procedures and to CARI's non-compliance with the OPIM requirements. This made the LOA modality necessary for managing the GEF-FAO funds. The suggestion from the specific project experience is to reflect upon the administrative arrangement implications in advance in order to anticipate the risks and plan timely mitigation measures (see Finding 13).

**Recommendation 11.** To CARI and the donors: Take more substantial measures so that partners can participate in the project's decision-making processes. This action is needed to support effective implementation and to enhance project ownership by partners. Although the Project Steering Committee setup proved to be conducive to timely decision-making and responsive to the various challenges faced by the project, it was noted that such an arrangement reflects the project's approach to the partnership. Some stakeholders perceived their role as "implementers" rather than "partners", because they were not members of the Project Steering Committee and had no chance to participate in strategic discussions. Additionally, no formal mechanisms for partners

to participate were planned, except for three general assemblies. Considering the strategic role of countries in this project, an enhanced participatory approach with partners is suggested. This can be implemented by considering their participation in the Project Steering Committee. Alternatively, if this is not considered an efficient option, then it is important to establish formal mechanisms to increase the opportunities for them to express their opinion on how the project should evolve. A viable modality could be to increase the number of general assemblies (see Findings 13 and 19).

**Partner contribution to the recommendation:** This recommendation is important for CAATINGA. The necessary actions to implement the recommendation are as follows: i) involve local stakeholders since the project design phase; ii) promote local adaptation of the project's strategy and early identification of participatory processes to be followed during implementation; iii) establish an international project committee that meets regularly; iv) strengthen dialogue opportunities throughout the project's lifecycle and allocate adequate funds for translations; and v) allocate adequate funds to promote locally-based actions targeting farmers and women in which the national partners might play a leading role. The project's international committee would have a role in promoting this recommendation. The main criticality to implement the recommendation is linked to the diversity of the actors involved in the partnership, as well as their different background and the context of the intervention.

**Recommendation 12.** To FAO and CARI: Develop and regularly implement robust project-related M&E frameworks. This action is needed to enable efficient implementation, risk assessment and the evaluation of results. Over the course of the evaluation period, it was challenging to obtain accurate and updated data for both output and outcome indicators. This means that the project was implemented without having a clear overview of the extent of progress against expected target values for the indicators. As such, monitoring was done on an ad hoc basis rather than a process that continuously accompanies project implementation and decision-making. It is recommended to always establish M&E project frameworks linked to a data collection system and the objectives to be achieved. This instrument can provide a real-time overview of the values achieved at a given time and allow for better risk management. Further, it should be kept simple and feasible so that it can be used by the staff and, potentially, by partners who can then be kept adequately informed about the overall progress and deviations from the plan (see Finding 15).

**Partner contribution to the recommendation:** The GBS highlighted the following actions that are needed to implement the recommendation: i) proper and early M&E planning; ii) real-time M&E implementation; and iii) a periodic M&E framework review. The roles of each project partner in developing and implementing the M&E project framework has been underscored, as well the needed support from the leading NGO. Some criticalities to implement the recommendation have been raised and need further reflection for future projects, namely: challenges linked to the potentially wide, national geographical scope and seasonal adversities that might hamper proper data collection; technical capacities of national NGOs to properly implement M&E; and time constraints.

**Recommendation 13.** To FAO and CARI: Increase the focus on gender mainstreaming in both the design and the implementation phases. This action is needed to foster gender mainstreaming. Although gender mainstreaming was integrated to some extent – for example, in the AVACLIM evaluation tool and as a criterion for capitalizing on the agroecological initiatives – the project did not adequately include gender-disaggregated data nor make budget provisions for this endeavour. Overall, the project did not adopt a specific gender approach to tackle inequalities. Considering the strong presence of women in agroecology, such an approach would have been meaningful. In the future, projects may be structured in such a way so that women's voices are heard in order to influence the system linked to food production and distribution (see Finding 21).



## 5. Lessons learned

**Lesson learned 1.** Research needs adequate time to produce scientifically valid results. The project design was ambitious and did not adequately consider what was feasible in a short period of time. It aimed at developing, piloting, validating, and disseminating a new tool in order to use the results for advocacy actions in a three-year period. This proved to be unrealistic. In addition, the choice of developing such a tool within the framework of a PhD thesis lengthened the process even more. Too much work and responsibility weighed on the doctoral student alone, at least until a person was appointed to support the transfer of the methodology to partners. By building the core of the project on the development of a new tool to feed the advocacy work, the project design failed to adequately consider potential time mismatches among project components, which were likely to occur.

**Lesson learned 2.** The LOA administrative arrangement can work for the provision of specific services, but not the execution of projects with broad geographical coverage. The latter requires leadership and management autonomy and, in some cases, flexibility from the executing agency. The LOA arrangement for the management of the GEF-FAO funds was needed, because CARI did not meet the requirements to manage the funds under the OPIM modality. The LOA was the only alternative found. However, this modality, together with FAO's lengthy procedures in validating the country LOAs, caused inefficiencies and delayed the delivery of outputs. For the future, it is important to anticipate the risks linked to administrative arrangements and to reflect on the most appropriate solutions or, at least, it can be considered to reduce the geographic scope of the initiatives if administrative alternatives are not found. FAO had to liaise with several Country Offices to obtain the LOA validation, and communication was not smooth enough. Reducing the number of countries covered by the GEF-FAO funds might have reduced the burden and sped up the processes.

**Lesson learned 3.** The strong integration of new projects within existing dynamics is an essential factor for success. This strategic approach strengthens project relevance and effectiveness. In all countries, the project was able to capitalize on existing networks and multistakeholder platforms. It leveraged on pre-existing experiences and relied on credible and well-positioned national partners that are leaders in agroecology promotion. These elements allowed the project to trigger spill-over effects and contributed to enhancing coherence and potential sustainability.

**Lesson learned 4.** Donor flexibility in grant management is conducive to the achievement of results, especially when projects are implemented in challenging environments. The FFEM was particularly flexible in varying the budget lines covered by its funds to accommodate ineligible activities under the GEF-FAO funds. This supported a results-based approach while organizing the project activities.

**Lesson learned 5.** The time and effort needed to build solid partnerships among stakeholders with different approaches and work modalities should not be overlooked. Better results were achieved where the AVACLIM evaluation tool was applied by a mix of expertise stemming from the scientific community and the NGOs. However, it took time to build a common vision of the tool, develop a joint approach and harmonize different work modalities. It is worth considering these aspects before going into the field. This includes mapping different competences and the added value of each actor, as well as properly clarifying roles.

**Lesson learned 6.** Although scientific products have more credibility, if not simplified, their complexity can impede adoption by practitioners and end users. At present, the predominant scientific feature of the AVACLIM evaluation tool makes it impractical and unlikely to be adopted by practitioners, even though they were envisaged to be the end users. Now, the imperative is to

rebuild the link between research and application on the ground by greater involvement of practitioners during its streamlining. The pilot experience in applying the tool to the countries covered by the project represents a wealth of knowledge from which to draw inspiration for addressing the gaps identified by practitioners.

**Lesson learned 7.** The adoption of a participatory approach to develop new methodologies is an important factor in fostering ownership. In Senegal, most of the stakeholders highly valued the participatory approach adopted in developing the AVACLIM methodology. On the one hand, the international scientific consortium and the PhD student consulted regularly with the implementing NGO and the national scientific partner. On the other hand, the tool was discussed with the producers involved in research at the village level. Although it was not designed for them, the consultation made them active participants throughout the process. The preliminary results were also presented to the community, leading to what is defined a co-construction process. This approach resulted in a continued process of adaptation arising from extensive discussions on the indicators, with both the national partners and the local community. This was pointed out as an important added value. Indeed, it lays the foundation for the ownership of the new methodologies that are developed.

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## Appendix 1. People interviewed

No.	Category	Position	Organization	Location
1	Donor	Forestry and Agriculture Responsible	FFEM	France
2	NGO/CSO	Assistant to the Project Coordinator	ISD	Ethiopia
3	Academia/scientific community	Researcher	PELUM	Ethiopia
4	Academia/scientific community	Researcher	Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University	South Africa
5	NGO/CSO	Project Coordinator	ISD	Ethiopia
6	Government national	Mayor	Municipality of Ndiob	Senegal
7	NGO/CSO	Founder/Director	Prayas Kendra Sanstha Harsoli	India
8	NGO/CSO	Executive Director	ISD	Ethiopia
9	Donor	Senior Natural Resources Officer	FAO	Italy
10	NGO/CSO	President	CARI	France
11	Donor	Agricultural Officer	FAO	Italy
12	NGO/CSO	M&E Responsible	Am Be Koun-Solidarité	Senegal
13	Government national	Subprefect	Tambacounda Prefecture	Senegal
14	Academia/scientific community	Professor	University for International Integration of the Afro-Brazilian Lusophony	Brazil
15	NGO/CSO	Project Component Responsible	CARI	France
16	NGO/CSO	Secretary	Social Action & Mobilization Participatory Rural Community	India
17	Academia/scientific community	EcoSoil Director	IRD	France
18	Academia/scientific community	Agroecology Advisor	FAO Plant Production and Protection Division	Italy
19	NGO/CSO	Communications Officer	EMG	South Africa
20	Academia/scientific community	PhD Student	IRD/CARI	France
21	NGO/CSO	General Coordinator	CAATINGA	Brazil
22	NGO/CSO	Sare Boubou Social Worker	Enda Pronat	Senegal
23	NGO/CSO	Programme Manager	CARI	France
24	NGO/CSO	M&E Responsible	Enda Pronat	Senegal

Appendix 1. People interviewed

No.	Category	Position	Organization	Location
25	NGO/CSO	Project Officer	Caritas	Senegal
26	Academia/scientific community	PhD Student	University	India
27	NGO/CSO	Project Officer	Agrisud International	Senegal
28	NGO/CSO		Agrisud International	Morocco
29	NGO/CSO	Project Coordinator	CARI	France
30	NGO/CSO	Finance Officer	EMG	South Africa
31	Academia/scientific community	Researcher	National Centre of Scientific and Technological Research	Burkina Faso
32	Academia/scientific community	Researcher	Senegalese Agricultural Research Institute	Senegal
33	NGO/CSO		Social Welfare Society, Karoli Rajasthan	India
34	Academia/scientific community	Professor	Federal University of the São Francisco Valley	Brazil
35	Academia/scientific community	Project Evaluation Responsible	CARI	France
36	NGO/CSO	Programme Manager	ISD	Ethiopia
37	NGO/CSO	Senior Officer Policy Development	Both ENDS	Netherlands
38	NGO/CSO	Secretary	GBS	India
39	Academia/scientific community	Researcher	Federal Rural University of Pernambuco	Brazil
40	NGO/CSO	Financial Responsible	CARI	France
41	NGO/CSO	Project Specialist	Enda Pronat	Senegal
42	NGO/CSO	Secretary	GBS	India
43	Academia/scientific community	Researcher	CIRAD	France
44	NGO/CSO	Project Coordinator	Agrisud International and Norsys Foundation	Morocco
45	Donor	Livestock and Agroecology Specialist	FAO Animal Production and Health Division	Italy
46	Academia/scientific community	Principle Scientist, Soil	Institute of Frontier Technology, Regional Agricultural Research Station	India
47	NGO/CSO	Finance Manager	ISD	Ethiopia
48	Donor	Livestock Development Officer	FAO Animal Production and Health Division	Italy
49	NGO/CSO	Executive Director	EMG	South Africa

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No.	Category	Position	Organization	Location
50	Academia/scientific community	PhD Student	Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University	South Africa
51	Academia/scientific community	Professor	Indian Institute of Technology	India
52	NGO/CSO	AVACLIM Coordinator	GBS	India
53	NGO/CSO	Secretary	GBS	India
54	Academia/scientific community	Researcher	Gramin Vikas Samiti	India
55	NGO/CSO	Chairman	Gramin Vikas Samiti	India
56	NGO/CSO	Lead, Janjatiya Swaraj Sangthan Sahyog Ikai Hiran	VAAGDHARA	India
57	NGO/CSO		Welfare India, Bihar	India
58	Academia/scientific community	Researcher	ISRA	Senegal
59	Academia/scientific community	Researcher	ISRA	Senegal
60	NGO/CSO	Office Coordinator	VAAGDHARA	India
61	Academia/scientific community	Researcher	National Institute of Pedology	Senegal
62	NGO/CSO	Senior Advisor	EMG	South Africa
63	NGO/CSO	Consultant	CAATINGA	Brazil
64	Academia/scientific community	Researcher	University	India
65	NGO/CSO	Cluster Facilitator	VAAGDHARA	India
66	NGO/CSO	Theme Leader of Agriculture	VAAGDHARA	India
67	Farm	Agroecology Farmer	Tirupati	India
68	NGO/CSO	Consultant	GBS	India
69	Academia/scientific community	Scientist, Agriculture Extension	Aacharya N. G. Ranga Agricultural University	India
70	Farm initiative	Farmer/Proprietor	RBF	India
71	Farm	Agroecology Farmer	Chitoor District	India
72	NGO/CSO	Office Secretary	GBS	India
73	Donor	Assistant FAO Representative	FAO	Senegal
74	NGO/CSO	Project Coordinator	ARFA	Burkina Faso
75	Academia/scientific community	Research Unit Director	CIRAD	France
76	NGO/CSO	Agronomist	Enda Pronat	Senegal

Appendix 1. People interviewed

<b>No.</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Location</b>
77	Decentralized government	Assistant Director, Horticulture	Department of Agriculture	India
78	NGO/CSO	Project Coordinator	Enda Pronat	Senegal
79	NGO/CSO	President	Enda Pronat	Senegal
80	NGO/CSO	Director	Agrisud International and Norsys Foundation	Morocco
81	Donor	Natural Resources Officer, Office of Climate Change, Biodiversity and Environment	FAO-GEF	Italy

## Appendix 2. The GEF evaluation criteria rating table

GEF criteria/subcriteria	Rating <sup>i</sup>	Summary comments
<b>A. STRATEGIC RELEVANCE</b>		
A1. Overall strategic relevance	S	High relevance, coherence and alignment at the global and country level. Some developments in the context of intervention (multicriteria evaluation tools). Mixed results about stakeholder perceptions on the added value of the developed agroecology evaluation tool. Evidence in Findings 1, 2 and 3.
A1.1. Alignment with the GEF and FAO strategic priorities	HS	High alignment. Evidence in Finding 2.
A1.2. Relevance to national, regional and global priorities and beneficiary needs	HS	High relevance. Evidence in Findings 1 and 2.
A1.3. Complementarity with existing interventions	MS	High complementarity with national dynamics on agroecology underway but poor complementarity with FAO's efforts in scaling up agroecology in the countries involved. Added value of the AVACLIM evaluation tool not fully evident. Evidence in Findings 3, 4 and 12.
<b>B. EFFECTIVENESS</b>		
B1. Overall assessment of project results	MS	Several important results achieved but also several shortcomings. Evidence in Findings 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 and Conclusion 2.
B1.1. Delivery of project outputs	S	Overall delivery rate: <b>94%</b> Outputs under Outcome 1 average of delivery: <b>97%</b> Outputs under Outcome 2 average of delivery: <b>73%</b> Outputs under Outcome 3 average of delivery: <b>112%</b> Outputs under Outcome 4 average of delivery: <b>92%</b> Evidence in Annex 5 and Findings 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 11. It is likely that all project outputs will be delivered by project closure, but several delays affected their effectiveness.
B1.2. Progress towards outcomes <sup>ii</sup> and project objectives		
▪ Outcome 1	S	Partnership dynamics strengthened but not possible to measure if the new knowledge has been adopted by practitioners. Evidence in Finding 6 and Conclusion 2.
▪ Outcome 2	MU	Expected research results have not been consolidated and the AVACLIM multicriteria assessment tool has yet to be finalized and validated within the scientific community. Evidence in Finding 7 and Conclusion 2.
▪ Outcome 3	MS	Delays accumulated in finalizing the research activities hampered the strengthening of the evidence-based decision-making on agroecology. More significant results achieved in improving the capacities of some partners in advocacy planning and in strengthening advocacy dynamics underway. Evidence in Finding 8 and Conclusion 2.
▪ Outcome 4	MS	While project information and activities were adequately disseminated through different modalities, the dissemination of specific knowledge on the impact of agroecology was hampered by the delayed outputs linked to the multicriteria evaluation tool. Evidence in Finding 9 and Conclusion 2.

Appendix 2. The GEF evaluation criteria rating table

GEF criteria/subcriteria	Rating <sup>i</sup>	Summary comments
- Overall rating of progress towards achieving objectives/outcomes	MS	Evidence in Conclusion 2.
B1.3. Likelihood of impact	MS	The project has provided several inputs that help to prioritize and implement agroecological systems. It has also provided important elements to strengthen the involved partners. However, it has not fully achieved its intended development and project objectives. Evidence in Findings 6, 7, 8 and 9, and Conclusion 2.
<b>C. EFFICIENCY</b>		
C1. Efficiency <sup>iii</sup>	MS	Significant delays and a complex administrative set up affected efficient implementation. The project was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, complicated and time-consuming FAO procedures, and external conditions. However, CARI proved to be responsive and flexible. It is unlikely that additional outputs and outcomes could have been achieved in the same challenging environment. Evidence in Findings 11, 12 and 13, and Conclusion 3.
<b>D. SUSTAINABILITY OF PROJECT OUTCOMES</b>		
D1. Overall likelihood of risks to sustainability	ML	It is likely that the partnerships will continue in countries where the CoPs are well rooted. The knowledge that has been generated will probably be further harnessed through the CoPs, the FAO Agroecology Knowledge Hub and the project partners. However, the measures envisaged to foster the continuity of the AVACLIM evaluation tool will be delivered too late to allow for a gradual handover. The tool seems too complex for future use. Evidence in Finding 14 and Conclusion 4.
D1.1. Financial risks	ML	Additional funds are needed to ensure AVACLIM evaluation tool consolidation and transfer to partners. Financial resources are also needed to ensure the continuity of the NGO/scientific community partnerships. Partners are already engaged in finding new financial resources to continue the work, even though there are no concrete plans. Evidence in Finding 14 and Conclusion 4.
D1.2. Sociopolitical risks	ML	Security concerns might affect continuity of the CoPs in two countries. However, at least for one country, a mitigation measure (localization of the CoP) has already been implemented. Geographic distance is another hindering factor for CoP continuity. Evidence in Finding 14 and Conclusion 4.
D1.3. Institutional and governance risks	L	High project ownership was found among project partners and stakeholders. It is highly likely that the partners will continue to capitalize and scale up agroecology in the country. Evidence in Finding 14 and Conclusion 4.
D1.4. Environmental risks	L	No environmental risks. Evidence in Finding 23.
D2. Catalysis and replication	ML (CoP continuity) MU (AVACLIM evaluation tool)	There was no evidence of partners or scientific institutes adopting, replicating nor scaling up the AVACLIM multicriteria evaluation tool. It is likely that CoPs will continue. Evidence in Finding 14 and Conclusion 4.

GEF criteria/subcriteria	Rating <sup>i</sup>	Summary comments
<b>E. FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE</b>		
E1. Project design and readiness <sup>iv</sup>	MS	Project design was accurate but with some gaps. The partners are ready to start, but the scientific partners were not identified in the design phase. Evidence in Finding 4.
E2. Quality of project implementation	MS	FAO could have delivered the administrative tasks faster. The latter highly affected project efficiency. However, this weakness is related to the entire FAO system and is not specific to the project. Evidence in Findings 13 and 16, and Conclusion 5.
E2.1. Quality of project implementation by FAO (Budget Holder, Lead Technical Officer, Project Task Force, etc.)	MS	FAO could have been more proactive in performing the administrative tasks. Evidence in Findings 13 and 16, and Conclusion 5.
E2.2. Project oversight (Project Steering Committee, project working group, etc.)	S	Project implementation quality was satisfactory in terms of oversight, planning and technical backstopping. Evidence in Findings 13 and 16, and Conclusion 5.
E3. Quality of project execution For decentralized projects: Project Management Unit/Budget Holder For OPIM projects: executing agency	S	Execution quality was satisfactory. The CARI's ability to manage the complex administrative architecture and to deal with the various unpredicted external conditions was valued by stakeholders. Evidence in Finding 17 and Conclusion 5.
E4. Financial management and co-financing	S	Expected co-financing materialized at 81 percent as of June 2022 and played an important role in supporting the achievement of the project results. Evidence in Finding 18.
E5. Project partnerships and stakeholder engagement	MS	Stakeholder engagement was satisfactory during design and implementation. However, the partners would have appreciated greater involvement in the decision-making processes and in developing the new evaluation methodology. Evidence in Finding 19.
E6. Communications, knowledge management and knowledge products	MS	Despite some measures adopted, internal communication was affected by the limited number of general assemblies and the cancellation of in-person international exchanges among partners. The project team implemented external communication activities, but the reach remains unknown due to a lack of consolidated data. Knowledge generation and management was at the core of the project's strategic approach. However, the delays under Component 2 significantly affected knowledge dissemination. Evidence in Finding 20.
E7. Overall quality of M&E	MU	Evidence in Finding 15.
E7.1. M&E design	U	The design of the M&E system was weak. The architecture of the project results was un conducive to results-based management and M&E. Evidence in Finding 15.
E7.2. M&E implementation plan (including financial and human resources)	MU	Although some M&E planning provisions were envisaged, no evidence was found on the use of a continual, systematic monitoring system shared and used by the entire partnership. Evidence in Finding 15.
E8. Overall assessment of factors affecting performance	MS	Average score attributed to each criterion under factors affecting performance. Evidence in Findings 15, 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20.

Appendix 2. The GEF evaluation criteria rating table

GEF criteria/subcriteria	Rating <sup>i</sup>	Summary comments
<b>F. CROSS-CUTTING CONCERNS</b>		
F1. Gender and other equity dimensions	MS	Overall, gender mainstreaming was integrated. However, the project has not adopted a specific gender approach to tackle inequalities, nor were there specific activities and budget provisions for this endeavour – except for one activity implemented by the Brazilian partner. Evidence in Finding 21.
F2. Human rights issues/Indigenous Peoples	MS	Disadvantaged groups were considered, given the project's strong focus on enhancing the visibility of rural agroecological initiatives. However, it did not explicitly mainstream indigenous communities and youth inclusion issues. Evidence in Finding 22.
F3. Environmental and social safeguards	UA	Not applicable.
<b>Overall project rating</b>	<b>MS</b>	

Notes: <sup>i</sup> See the rating scheme in Appendix 3.

<sup>ii</sup> Assessment and ratings by individual outcomes may be undertaken if there is added value.

<sup>iii</sup> Includes cost-efficiency and timeliness.

<sup>iv</sup> This refers to factors affecting the project's ability to start as expected, such as the presence of sufficient capacity among executing partners at project launch.

## Appendix 3. Rating scheme

See instructions provided in Annex 2. Rating scales in the “Guidelines for GEF Agencies in Conducting Terminal Evaluations for Full-sized Projects” April 2017 (GEF, 2017).

### PROJECT RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

Project outcomes are rated based on the extent to which project objectives were achieved. A six-point rating scale is used to assess overall outcomes:

<b>Rating</b>	<b>Description</b>
Highly Satisfactory (HS)	Level of outcomes achieved clearly exceeds expectations and/or there were no shortcomings.
Satisfactory (S)	Level of outcomes achieved was as expected and/or there were no or minor shortcomings.
Moderately Satisfactory (MS)	Level of outcomes achieved more or less as expected and/or there were moderate shortcomings.
Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU)	Level of outcomes achieved somewhat lower than expected and/or there were significant shortcomings.
Unsatisfactory (U)	Level of outcomes achieved substantially lower than expected and/or there were major shortcomings.
Highly Unsatisfactory (HU)	Only a negligible level of outcomes achieved and/or there were severe shortcomings.
Unable to Assess (UA)	The available information does not allow for an assessment of the level of outcome achievements.

During project implementation, the results framework of some projects may have been modified. In cases where modifications in the project impact, outcomes and outputs have not scaled down their overall scope, the evaluator should assess outcome achievements based on the revised results framework. In instances where the scope of the project objectives and outcomes have been scaled down, the magnitude of and necessity for downscaling is taken into account. Despite the achievement of results as per the revised results framework, a lower outcome effectiveness rating may be given, where appropriate.

### PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION AND EXECUTION

Quality of implementation and execution will be rated separately. Quality of implementation pertains to the role and responsibilities discharged by the GEF agencies that have direct access to the GEF resources. Quality of execution pertains to the roles and responsibilities discharged by the country or regional counterparts that received GEF funds from the GEF agencies and executed the funded activities on the ground. The performance will be rated on a six-point scale:

<b>Rating</b>	<b>Description</b>
Highly Satisfactory (HS)	There were no shortcomings and the quality of <b>implementation</b> or <b>execution</b> exceeded expectations.
Satisfactory (S)	There were no or minor shortcomings and the quality of <b>implementation</b> or <b>execution</b> meets expectations.
Moderately Satisfactory (MS)	There were some shortcomings and the quality of <b>implementation</b> or <b>execution</b> more or less meets expectations.
Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU)	There were significant shortcomings and the quality of <b>implementation</b> or <b>execution</b> was somewhat lower than expected.
Unsatisfactory (U)	There were major shortcomings and the quality of <b>implementation</b> or <b>execution</b> was substantially lower than expected.
Highly Unsatisfactory (HU)	There were severe shortcomings in the quality of <b>implementation</b> or <b>execution</b> .
Unable to Assess (UA)	The available information does not allow for an assessment of the quality of <b>implementation</b> or <b>execution</b> .

## **MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

Quality of project M&E will be assessed in terms of:

- i. design
- ii. implementation

## **SUSTAINABILITY**

*The sustainability will be assessed by taking into account the risks related to the financial, sociopolitical, institutional and environmental sustainability of project outcomes. The evaluator may also take other risks into account that may affect sustainability. The overall sustainability will be assessed using a four-point scale:*

<b>Rating</b>	<b>Description</b>
Likely (L)	<i>There is little or no risk to sustainability.</i>
Moderately Likely (ML)	<i>There are moderate risks to sustainability.</i>
Moderately Unlikely (MU)	<i>There are significant risks to sustainability.</i>
Unlikely (U)	<i>There are severe risks to sustainability.</i>
Unable to Assess (UA)	<i>Unable to assess the expected incidence and magnitude of risks to sustainability.</i>

## Appendix 4. The GEF co-financing table

This table was extracted from the June 2022 FAO project progress report and confirmed during some of the evaluation interviews. However, CARI raised an exchange rate (USD/EUR) issue and did not confirm the figures related to the materialized co-financing. Since the issue was not fully clarified, the Evaluation Team decided to retain the figures from the official FAO progress report (fpmis\_1680431336976).

Name of the co-financer	Co-financer type <sup>i</sup>	Type of co-financing <sup>ii</sup>	Co-financing at project launch (amount confirmed at the GEF CEO endorsement/approval by the project design team) (in USD)	Materialized co-financing as of 30 June 2022 (in USD)					
				In-kind	Cash	Total	In-kind	Cash	Total
FFEM	Government	Grant		1 100 000	1 100 000			517 444	
IRD	Research institute	Grant		280 000	280 000			258 866	
SoCa project: soil carbon for tropical subsistence farming	Research institute	Grant		779 800	779 800			779 800	
SECURE project: soil ecological function restoration to enhance agrosystem services in rainfed rice cropping systems in agroecological transition	Research institute	Grant		237 000	237 000			237 000	
DSCATT project: dynamics of soil carbon sequestration in tropical and temperate agricultural systems	Research institute	Grant		1 000 000	1 000 000			850 000	
CARI	NGO	Grant		70 560	70 560			50 000	

Appendix 4. The GEF co-financing table

Name of the co-financer	Co-financer type <sup>i</sup>	Type of co-financing <sup>ii</sup>	Co-financing at project launch (amount confirmed at the GEF CEO endorsement/approval by the project design team) (in USD)	Materialized co-financing as of 30 June 2022 (in USD)				
			In-kind	Cash	Total	In-kind	Cash	Total
FAO	UN	Grant		700 000	700 000		700 000	
<b>Total (in USD)</b>				<b>4 167 360</b>	<b>4 167 360</b>		<b>3 393 110</b>	

Notes: <sup>i</sup> Examples of categories included: local, provincial or national governments; semi-government autonomous institutions; the private sector; multilateral or bilateral organizations; education and research institutions; non-profit organizations; civil society organizations; foundations; beneficiaries; and the GEF agencies.

<sup>ii</sup> This involves grants, loans, equity participation by beneficiaries (individuals) in the form of cash, guarantees, and in-kind or material contributions.

## Appendix 5. Results matrix

Two project documents were elaborated for this initiative: one was submitted to the GEF and the other one to the FFEM. At project launch, CARI elaborated a merged logical framework from the two available documents to facilitate monitoring and reporting. The results matrix corresponds to the merged logical framework as decided upon during the evaluation's inception phase. It reports the achievements of the outcome indicators, as established in the logical framework. As commented under Evaluation question 1.3, several indicators chosen for the outcomes are rather output indicators. However, the evaluators relied on the approved matrix and commented on it.

### PROGRESS TOWARDS TARGETS AS OF 13 JANUARY 2023: OUTCOMES

AVACLIM						
Objective/outcomes	Outcome indicators	Baseline	Target	Progress to date	Percentage achieved against target	Comments
<b>Objective: policymakers and stakeholders are able to implement agroecological systems in drylands as a means to sustain the productivity of agroecosystems in support of food security and agricultural livelihoods, and reduce environmental degradation and greenhouse gas emissions</b>	i. number of project proposals and draft policy documents (strategies, laws, financial plans) integrating agroecology and its principles	/	3	N/A	N/A	This indicator was not monitored during project implementation. The evaluators could not find related evidence of policy documents/proposals attributable to the project. Only Senegal had a recorded contribution on a governmental decision to subsidize organic fertilizers.
	ii. number of countries that have agroecology in their government agenda for discussions on agricultural development planning	/	7	N/A	N/A	This indicator was not monitored during project implementation. The evaluators could not find related evidence on the integration of agroecology on the political agenda attributable to the project. There were some developments (for example, in Brazil and Burkina Faso) but these cannot be attributable to the project intervention.
<b>Outcome 1: actionable knowledge on agroecology implementation is assumed and adopted by agroecology</b>	i. number of agroecological initiatives shared	/	35	43	123%	Forty-seven initiative fact sheets (more than expected) delivered, of which 43 were shared in public databases. Forty-three published by CARI at <a href="https://avaclim.org/en/factsheets/">https://avaclim.org/en/factsheets/</a> Thirty-five published by FAO at: <a href="https://www.fao.org/agroecology/database/en/">https://www.fao.org/agroecology/database/en/</a>

PROGRESS TOWARDS TARGETS AS OF 13 JANUARY 2023: OUTCOMES						
AVACLIM						
Objective/outcomes	Outcome indicators	Baseline	Target	Progress to date	Percentage achieved against target	Comments
<b>practitioners across the drylands</b>	ii.a. number of practitioners involved in the CoP	/	not applicable (N/A) <sup>65</sup>	163	N/A	Brazil 29; Burkina Faso 27; Ethiopia 16; India 30; Morocco 24; Senegal 26; South Africa 11. Calculation based on the list of CoP members in the CoP facilitation strategies. The mid-term review reported different figures (1 201 members) that CARI confirmed to be estimates, including people indirectly reached. 2 197 participants to project events + 1 398 viewers + 5 400 visitors to the website.
	ii.b. participants to project events					
	ii.c. YouTube viewers		N/A	8 995	N/A	
	ii.d. website visitors					
	iii. percentage of women	/	40%	data not available	N/A	CARI reported 791 women involved in the CoPs, but this is an estimate that is not supported by evidence and considers indirect beneficiaries. Regarding participants to project events, 822 women out of 2 197 participants attended, representing 37 percent of the overall participants.
<b>Outcome 2: knowledge and understanding of the impacts of agroecological systems and success factors of agroecological initiatives are consolidated through a scientifically harmonized protocol</b>	i. number of functional and accessible tools for a multidimensional assessment of agroecology initiatives developed	/	1	1	100%	The tool was developed and used but not finalized and validated.
	ii. number of initiatives assessed	/	14	14	100%	All initiatives were evaluated across four steps. However, India (one report), Ethiopia (one report) and South Africa (two reports) delivered their final reports only in November 2022, and Burkina Faso delivered its second report at the end of 2022.

<sup>65</sup> Outcome 1 is: actionable knowledge on agroecology implementation is assumed and adopted by agroecology practitioners across the drylands. The indicator for this outcome explicitly refers to the number of practitioners involved in the CoP. However, the target set for this indicator mentions 2 000 event participants and users of the collaborative tools. Since the indicator and the target are inconsistently linked between them, the target for the indicator is split into: i) number of practitioners involved in the CoP (163); and ii) event participants and users of the collaborative tools (2 197 participants at project events + 1 398 viewers + 5 400 visitors to the website). Considering the inconsistency, the target value is omitted and reported as not applicable.

**PROGRESS TOWARDS TARGETS AS OF 13 JANUARY 2023: OUTCOMES**

<b>AVACLIM</b>						
<b>Objective/outcomes</b>	<b>Outcome indicators</b>	<b>Baseline</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Progress to date</b>	<b>Percentage achieved against target</b>	<b>Comments</b>
	iii. number of knowledge / products developed		8	6	75%	The following knowledge products have been developed/communicated: - Vade mecum - three action sheets (one for Steps 1/3 and two for Step 4) - Step 1 tools (eight tools, from 1A1 to 1C2) - Step 2 tools (three tools, from 2.1 to 2.3) - Step 3 tools (three tools, from 3.1 to 3.3) - Step 4 tools (two tools: 4.1 and 4.2) Two tools are under development: - methodological guide of the evaluation tool - national and international synthesis
<b>Outcome 3: evidence-based decision-making on agroecology is strengthened and systematized at international, national, local and landscape levels</b>	i. number of advocacy / opportunities created (including meetings, communication tools, radio emission)		7 national advocacy seminars + 1 collective advocacy intervention in international events,	6	86%	National advocacy workshops were held in six countries (India is pending).
			1 international seminar and	2	200%	The project partnership participated in the COP 15 side event and the Sustainability Research & Innovation Congress in Pretoria.
				1	100%	The project organized the international <i>Desertifactions</i> Summit.

PROGRESS TOWARDS TARGETS AS OF 13 JANUARY 2023: OUTCOMES						
AVACLIM						
Objective/outcomes	Outcome indicators	Baseline	Target	Progress to date	Percentage achieved against target	Comments
		/	10 advocacy documents (position papers)	10	100%	Position papers elaborated by partners from all countries. Concerning dissemination, only the Senegalese and Ethiopian ones have been publicly presented. The Ethiopian paper was presented at the Green Action Forum held in Ethiopia in October 2022. The Senegalese paper was presented at the World Water Forum held in Dakar in March 2022. Three international position papers were drafted and presented for <i>Desertifactions</i> 2022. In addition, one international policy brief and one document containing ten project recommendations were produced.
	ii. number of international organizations (e.g. UNCCD, UNFCCC, World Bank, Asian Development Bank, FAO) within which the relevant department(s) endorse the advocacy messages generated under the project	/	3	2	67%	The project has not generated specific advocacy messages, which should have been based on the knowledge generated by the AVACLIM evaluation tool. However, the Sahara and Sahel Observatory endorsed the <i>Desertifactions</i> dynamic and its messages on agroecology, as can be seen from eight fact sheets produced by the organization and the summit position papers that also contain the Sahara and Sahel Observatory logo. The AVACLIM partners advocated for an open dialogue session about agroecology during COP 15 of the UNCCD in Abidjan. During this session, 2 out of 4 speakers were AVACLIM partners: one from Enda Pronat (Senegal) and one from the Moroccan CoP. Additionally, the UNCCD co-financed the 2022 <i>Desertifactions</i> Summit and a UNCCD secretariat representative attended the event. Fact sheets available at: <a href="https://desertifactions.org/en/homepage/desertifactions-2022/preparatory-phase/">https://desertifactions.org/en/homepage/desertifactions-2022/preparatory-phase/</a> These facts can be considered an endorsement of the AVACLIM content in a broad sense.

**PROGRESS TOWARDS TARGETS AS OF 13 JANUARY 2023: OUTCOMES**

<b>AVACLIM</b>						
<b>Objective/outcomes</b>	<b>Outcome indicators</b>	<b>Baseline</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Progress to date</b>	<b>Percentage achieved against target</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Outcome 4: knowledge on the impact and the success factors of agroecology made publicly available</b>	i. number of M&E systems developed and implemented	/	1	N/A	N/A	Some tools were developed (M&E manual, initial Excel monitoring tool), but a robust project-related M&E was not developed and implemented by any partner.
	ii. number of evidence-based communication tools and events on the benefits of agroecology developed and disseminated	/	4 printed tools	4	100%	Printed tools delivered: - seven posters (one for each country) - one international brochure - one international leaflet - two national leaflets (India and Senegal)
		/	4 digital tools	4	100%	One website; one newsletter; hashtag (#AVACLIM); one WhatsApp project group. FAO and CARI databases incremented.
		/	8 documentaries	8	100%	Eight movies delivered (one per country + one international).
		/	8 press conferences	3	37%	Press conferences organized in Brazil, Burkina Faso and Senegal.
		/	4 scientific conferences	6	150%	The project participated in the following scientific conferences: - Sustainability Research & Innovation Congress (Pretoria, June 2022) - Science Day at COP 15 of the UNCCD (Abidjan, May 2022) - European Society for Agronomy (Potsdam, August 2022) - Latin American Congress of Rural Sociology (San José, October 2022, online)

<b>PROGRESS TOWARDS TARGETS AS OF 13 JANUARY 2023: OUTCOMES</b>						
<b>AVACLIM</b>						
<b>Objective/outcomes</b>	<b>Outcome indicators</b>	<b>Baseline</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Progress to date</b>	<b>Percentage achieved against target</b>	<b>Comments</b>
						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Latin America Congress of Rural Sociology (Oaxaca, November 2022)</li> <li>- AVACLIM Scientific Workshop (Montpellier, January 2023)</li> </ul>

Terminal evaluation of the project "AVACLIM: agroecology, ensuring food security and sustainable livelihoods while mitigating climate change and restoring land in dryland regions"

**PROGRESS TOWARDS TARGETS AS OF 13 JANUARY 2023: OUTPUTS**

**AVACLIM**

**Outcome 1: actionable knowledge on agroecology implementation is assumed and adopted by agroecology practitioners across the drylands**

<b>Project outputs</b>	<b>Output indicators</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Progress to date</b>	<b>Percentage achieved against target</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Output 1.1: an agroecology database with i) successful agroecological innovations in dryland areas; and ii) quantitative, qualitative and spatial data on projects</b>	I.1.1: two databases are incremented by a minimum of 35 "factsheets" (minimum five per country) and complementary documents related to these initiatives	2	2	100%	More initiatives than expected shared: two databases incremented with 43 fact sheets. Forty-three published by CARI at: <a href="https://avaclim.org/en/factsheets/">https://avaclim.org/en/factsheets/</a> Thirty-five published by FAO at: <a href="https://www.fao.org/agroecology/database/en/">https://www.fao.org/agroecology/database/en/</a>
	I.1. 2: a national seminar to share experiences in agroecology is organized in each of the seven countries of intervention and allow for the participation of 20 participants (per country)	7	7	100%	No variance. Seven national seminars were organized (one in each country), gathering the CoP members.
		I.1.3. national knowledge exchanges/visits organized in seven countries	7	6	86%
<b>Output 1.2: capacity development through knowledge exchange events to disseminate agroecological innovations in participating countries harmonized protocol</b>	I.1.3.b: international webinars	3	3	100%	The international sharing activities were cancelled due to COVID-19 travel restrictions. They were replaced by national field visits for the CoP members and three international webinars. The three webinars were organized by CAATINGA (Brazilian partner) and Agrisud International – Norsys Foundation (Moroccan partner).

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**PROGRESS TOWARDS TARGETS AS OF 13 JANUARY 2023: OUTPUTS**
**AVACLIM****Outcome 1: actionable knowledge on agroecology implementation is assumed and adopted by agroecology practitioners across the drylands**

<b>Output 1.3: a dynamic community of practice on agroecology</b>	I.1.4: at least one CoP is supported by a country of intervention to promote the dissemination of relevant practices and national dynamic through collaborative tools designed by CARI (forum, database, etc.)	7	7	100%	No variance. Seven CoP with their own national facilitation strategies created in 2021. The project partners in each country facilitate the CoPs through WhatsApp groups and mailing lists, and disseminate communication documents.
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**Outcome 2: knowledge and understanding of the impacts of agroecological systems and success factors of agroecological initiatives are consolidated through a scientifically harmonized protocol**

<b>Output 2.1: a multicriteria assessment tool to measure the impacts of agroecological systems and success factors of agroecological initiatives developed and validated using a participative approach</b>	I.2.1: a set of criteria and general indicators is proposed for all countries, as well as optional criteria and indicators to define according to the country	1 set of criteria and indicators	1	100%	No variance. The set of criteria and indicators are defined. Countries adapt the methodology to their local context.
<b>Output 2.2: training sessions and user guide to use and disseminate the multicriteria assessment tool</b>	I.2.2: a methodological framework for evaluating the initiatives designed	1 methodology designed	1	100%	No variance.
		7 country partners receive training/support	7	100%	The indicator should have indicated the <b>number of people trained</b> in a better way. Overall, seven partner countries had capacity building, but some weaknesses were found (see section 3.2 on effectiveness).
	I.2.3: a specific methodological protocol designed per country	7 national protocols designed	4	57%	Protocols were developed only for India, Morocco, Senegal and Ethiopia.

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Terminal evaluation of the project "AVACLIM: agroecology, ensuring food security and sustainable livelihoods while mitigating climate change and restoring land in dryland regions"

**PROGRESS TOWARDS TARGETS AS OF 13 JANUARY 2023: OUTPUTS**

**AVACLIM**

**Outcome 1: actionable knowledge on agroecology implementation is assumed and adopted by agroecology practitioners across the drylands**

<b>Output 2.3: country-based and global evidence-based references on impacts and success factors of agroecology</b>	I.2.4: at least two initiatives per country are identified, at least one of which is led by the partner	14 initiatives	14	100%	No variance.
	I.2.5: priority axes requiring knowledge strengthening identified	N/A	N/A	N/A	No variance. Knowledge sharing meetings on theoretical and technical aspects of the methodology were held.
	I.2.6: biophysical and socioeconomic data are collected following the methodological protocol with the support of trainees in each country and under the supervision of scientists	N/A	N/A	N/A	No variance. Data collection finalized in 14 initiatives.
	I.2.7: a national seminar is organized per country of intervention to report and discuss the results	7	5	71%	National restitution workshops have not been implemented in Ethiopia and India.
	I.2.8: for each country, an evaluation report and a synthesis are written	28 evaluation reports (7 reports for Steps 1/3 per initiative; 7 reports for Step 4 per initiative)	28	100%	The delivery of the evaluation reports was delayed due to general delays in finalizing the evaluation methodology.
		7 syntheses	0	0%	Pending. The syntheses were delayed due to delays accumulated in the finalization of the evaluation reports. The CARI decided to hire a service provider to elaborate the synthesis.

**PROGRESS TOWARDS TARGETS AS OF 13 JANUARY 2023: OUTPUTS****AVACLIM****Outcome 1: actionable knowledge on agroecology implementation is assumed and adopted by agroecology practitioners across the drylands**

	1 global synthesis	0	0%	Pending. The synthesis was expected to be presented at the <i>Desertifactions</i> Summit but could not be prepared in the absence of the national synthesis.	
	I.2.9: an international seminar is organized, gathering at least 20 people and allowing to identify the content of international advocacy	1	1	100%	International scientific seminar organized in Montpellier in January 2023.

**Outcome 3: evidence-based decision-making on agroecology is strengthened and systematized at international, national, local and landscape levels**

<b>Output 3.1: a common but differentiated advocacy strategy developed by civil society organizations</b>	I.3.1: a strategy for international advocacy is in writing	1	1	100%	No variance.
	I.3.2: seven national strategies are in writing, and advocacy is in writing	7	7	100%	No variance.
	I.3.3: a document summing up all messages conveyed by national and international advocacy actors is produced	1	1	100%	One document containing ten recommendations was delivered. Not reported if/how it has been disseminated.
	I.3.4: at least ten position documents and/or flyers and other advocacy materials are produced (including one per country) based on the advocacy strategy	10	10	100%	All partners elaborated their position papers. Three global position papers delivered.
<b>Output 3.2: dynamic network to establish a dialogue among different</b>	I.3.5: seven national advocacy seminars (one per country) are organized and gather public authorities, donors and international institutions	7	6	86%	National advocacy workshops held in six countries (India is pending).

Terminal evaluation of the project "AVACLIM: agroecology, ensuring food security and sustainable livelihoods while mitigating climate change and restoring land in dryland regions"

**PROGRESS TOWARDS TARGETS AS OF 13 JANUARY 2023: OUTPUTS**

**AVACLIM**

**Outcome 1: actionable knowledge on agroecology implementation is assumed and adopted by agroecology practitioners across the drylands**

<b>stakeholders agroecology through implementation of the advocacy strategy</b>	<b>on the</b>	I.3.6: at least one collective intervention is organized for advocacy during international events	1	2	200%	The AVACLIM partners participated in: - COP 15 of the UNCCD in Abidjan (2022) and organized one specific side event on "Agroecology: a way to achieve prosperity by 2030?". - Sustainability Research & Innovation Congress in Pretoria (2022) with a session on "Agroecology the game changer lever for SGDs: case studies from African Drylands".
		I.3.7: an international seminar on the relevance for agroecology to face climate change in the drylands gathers project partners, international institutions and different country representatives	1	1	100%	The project organized the <i>Desertifactions</i> Summit in Montpellier (2022).
<b>Outcome 4: knowledge on the impact and the success factors of agroecology made publicly available</b>						
<b>Output 4.1: project M&amp;E for learning and adaptive management</b>		I.4.1: tools for M&E exist	1	1	100%	One M&E handbook produced. However, there is not a shared tool to operationalize the monitoring system. The M&E system has not been properly developed and implemented.
		I.4.2: the project governance system works	10 Project Steering Committee meetings	10	100%	Ten Project Steering Committee meetings held.
		I.4.3: the project schedule is respected	N/A	N/A	N/A	The project had considerable delays.

**PROGRESS TOWARDS TARGETS AS OF 13 JANUARY 2023: OUTPUTS****AVACLIM****Outcome 1: actionable knowledge on agroecology implementation is assumed and adopted by agroecology practitioners across the drylands**

	I.4.4: all partners participate in the plenary assemblies of the project: launch assembly; mid-term assembly; and closing assembly	100% attendance	1	100%	All partners participated in the inception assembly and the mid-term assembly meetings.
	I.4.5: members of the steering committee participate in all project steering committees	100% attendance	78%	78%	This figure considers the participation of organization representatives and not individuals.
	I.4.6: an internal evaluation is carried out at the mid-term and at project closure	2	2	100%	
<b>Output 4.2: knowledge management and dissemination of the project's products and lessons learned in an adapted format for a wider audience</b>	I.4.7: a website and Facebook page are active	2	1	50%	An AVACLIM Facebook page was decided against as it would only last for the project's duration. Instead, it was decided that partners would use their own social media and refer to the project using the #AVACLIM hashtag as often as possible: one website; one hashtag.
	I.4.8: a poster and presentation leaflet per country, a poster and a presentation leaflet for international use	8	16	200%	Two products/country + two international products.
	I.4.9: at least one film per country (testimonies) and one global film are produced on the initiatives evaluated and the results achieved (short version: transversal teaser)	8	8	100%	Eight movies delivered (one per country + one international). Not broadcasted, only published on YouTube.
	I.4.10: news sent regularly	N/A	N/A	N/A	The AVACLIM and CARI website are frequently updated with project news. One newsletter in both French and English was sent.

Terminal evaluation of the project "AVACLIM: agroecology, ensuring food security and sustainable livelihoods while mitigating climate change and restoring land in dryland regions"

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**PROGRESS TOWARDS TARGETS AS OF 13 JANUARY 2023: OUTPUTS**

**AVACLIM**

**Outcome 1: actionable knowledge on agroecology implementation is assumed and adopted by agroecology practitioners across the drylands**

I.4.11: articles and press releases produced	N/A	N/A	N/A	A press release was created prior to the <i>Desertifactions</i> Summit.
I.4.12: at least one scientific article in an international journal of rank A and one article in an international minor journal written	2	0	0%	A scientific article was submitted to an A-ranked journal (Agronomy for Sustainable Development): Multidimensional and multiscale assessment of agroecological transitions. A review. However, this article was not retained, and must be modified before being resubmitted. Another article was submitted in January 2023 to the International Journal of Agricultural Sustainability, but it has not been accepted and published yet.

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## Appendix 6. Evaluation matrix

Evaluation criteria	Key evaluation questions	Subquestions	Data source
<b>RELEVANCE AND COHERENCE</b>	Evaluation question 1. To what extent were the project design and objectives aligned with existing local/national, regional and international dynamics and remained suited to the context, over time?	1.1 To what extent are the project objectives relevant to the countries' needs, challenges and priorities in the food, agricultural and environmental sectors?	Desk review; in-depth interviews; Montpellier summit
		1.2 To what extent were the project design and approach appropriate for delivering the expected outcomes?	Desk review; in-depth-interviews
		1.3 What was the coherence and added value of AVACLIM with reference to local/national dynamics operating on the topic of agroecology, including other advocacy initiatives, and with global concerns and donor strategies on agriculture and the environment?	Desk review; in-depth interviews; case studies; Montpellier summit
		1.4 What is the added value of the evaluation method developed by AVACLIM compared to other multicriteria evaluation methods?	Desk review; in-depth interviews; Montpellier summit
<b>EFFECTIVENESS</b>	Evaluation question 2. To what extent has the project achieved, or is expected to achieve, its results (intended and unintended) across its four components?	2.1 What was the project's performance against indicators set in the logical framework for expected results and objectives?	Desk review; in-depth interviews
		2.2 To what extent has the project succeeded in fostering the adoption of actionable knowledge on agroecology implementation by practitioners across the drylands? (Component 1)	Desk review; case studies; in-depth interviews; online survey; FGDs

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Evaluation criteria	Key evaluation questions	Subquestions	Data source
		2.3 To what extent has the project succeeded in fostering knowledge and understanding of agroecological systems and initiative impacts? (Component 2)	Desk review; case studies; in-depth interviews; online survey; FGDs
		2.4 To what extent has the project strengthened and systemized evidence-based decision-making on agroecology at international, national and local levels? (Component 3)	Desk review; case studies; in-depth interviews; online survey; FGDs
		2.5 To what extent has the project increased access to knowledge on impacts and success factors of agroecology? (Component 4)	Desk review; online survey; FGDs
		2.6 To what extent has the project enhanced partnership dynamics at the international, regional or national/local levels, and what are the determining factors in the activation of the collective dynamics?	Desk review; in-depth interviews; case studies; online survey
		2.7 To what extent have the advocacy activities been complementary to others already underway? Have they been instrumental in bringing about changes that are already taking place?	Desk review; in-depth interviews; case studies; online survey; Montpellier summit
		2.8 Was there any external condition impacting (positively or negatively) the achievement of project results?	Desk review; in-depth interviews; case studies; online survey
<b>EFFICIENCY</b>	Evaluation question 3. To what extent has the project been well coordinated, implemented in a	3.1 To what extent has the project been implemented timely? Has it efficiently used the resources?	Desk review; in-depth interviews

Appendix 6. Evaluation matrix

<b>Evaluation criteria</b>	<b>Key evaluation questions</b>	<b>Subquestions</b>	<b>Data source</b>
	timely way and adapted to changing conditions?	3.2 To what extent has the project promoted complementarity, harmonization and coordination among and with other donors and key development partners to maximize the achievement of results?	Desk review; in-depth interviews; online survey
		3.3 To what extent has the planning and coordination of the project components efficiently contributed to a coherent implementation and to the achievement of results?	Desk review; in-depth interviews; online survey
		3.4 To what extent does the project governance and management structure facilitate the achievement of project objectives?	In-depth interviews; online survey
		3.5 To what extent have project indicators, assumptions and risks been adequately monitored throughout project implementation?	Desk review; in-depth interviews; online survey
<b>ORIENTATIONS TOWARDS IMPACT AND SUSTAINABILITY</b>	Evaluation question 4. To what extent has the project driven progress towards mainstreaming agroecological innovations across drylands to increase food security, diversify agricultural livelihoods, reduce environmental degradation and increase soil carbon sequestration?	4.1 What knowledge has been generated from project results and experiences, which have a potential for broader application, replication and use?	In-depth interviews
		4.2 Was there any evidence of any change in the policy/legal/regulatory framework related to agroecology in the countries covered by the project?	Desk review; in-depth interviews; case studies
		4.3 Are there any barriers or risks that may prevent future progress towards long-term impact?	Desk review; in-depth interviews; case studies

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<b>Evaluation criteria</b>	<b>Key evaluation questions</b>	<b>Subquestions</b>	<b>Data source</b>
		4.4 What is the likelihood that the project results will continue to be useful to key stakeholders or remain after the end of the project?	In-depth interviews; case studies
		4.5 What are the factors that promote or hinder the sustainability of partnerships established through the project, with particular regard to the CoP?	In-depth interviews; case studies
<b>FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE</b>	Evaluation question 5. Factors affecting performance	5.1 Project design	Desk review; in-depth-interviews
		5.2 Project readiness	Desk review; in-depth interviews
		5.3 Quality of project implementation	Desk review; in-depth interviews; online survey
		5.4 To what extent did FAO deliver on project identification, concept preparation, appraisal, preparation, approval and start up, oversight, and supervision?	Desk review; in-depth interviews; online survey
		5.5 M&E	Desk review; in-depth interviews; online survey
		5.6 Financial management and co-financing	Desk review; in-depth interviews; online survey
		5.7 Project partnership and stakeholder engagement	Desk review; in-depth interviews; online survey
		5.8 Communication, knowledge management and knowledge products	Desk review; in-depth interviews; online survey

Appendix 6. Evaluation matrix

<b>Evaluation criteria</b>	<b>Key evaluation questions</b>	<b>Subquestions</b>	<b>Data source</b>
<b>CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES</b>	Evaluation question 6. To what extent has the project mainstreamed cross-cutting issues?	6.1 Human rights issues/minorities and Indigenous Peoples/social safeguards and cultural concerns	Desk review; case studies; FGDs during field visits
		6.2 To what extent did the project integrate a gender dimension?	Desk review; case studies; FGDs
		6.3 Conflict-sensitive programming	Desk review; case studies; FGDs
		6.4 To what extent did the project mainstream environmental sustainability?	Desk review; case studies
<b>THE FFEM ADDED VALUE</b>	Evaluation question 7. What is the FFEM funding and added value to the project?	7.1 The FFEM added value to the project	Desk review; in-depth interviews

## Appendix 7. The Republic of Senegal case study executive summary

### Objective and methodology of the case study

1. The Republic of Senegal case study aims at providing a country perspective for the terminal evaluation of the AVACLIM project. It allows the Evaluation Team to highlight project achievements and performance at the country level using the Development Assistance Committee evaluation criteria from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 1991). This includes: relevance; effectiveness; efficiency; sustainability; and the mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues. It also aims at analysing the country's project implementation difficulties to highlight key lessons and recommendations for improving and adapting future projects in the same area of intervention. The case study covers the implementation of the AVACLIM project from October 2019 to January 2023.
2. The case study is based on the findings of a qualitative analysis of data obtained through a desk review, in-person and virtual interviews, and direct observation. A field mission was implemented by the evaluation's team leader from 24 to 29 October 2022. In total, 16 interviews were conducted<sup>66</sup> with the national non-governmental organization (NGO) partner; the scientific partner ISRA; external stakeholders; local authorities; and the FAO Country Office. The desk review focused on available project-related documents and relevant national documents, developmental strategies and plans.
3. In terms of limitations, the short period of time (five working days) of the field mission was a challenge. In turn, this limited the number of days spent in the local areas where some of the project activities were carried out. Remoteness also contributed to this. Another challenge was that some of the identified key stakeholders were not available for interviews. In particular, this included the focal point on agroecology, who had been appointed by the Ministry of Agriculture. This limited the perspectives of the institution directly responsible for the topic addressed by the project. Interviews were carried out with French-speaking stakeholders, except in one case where a translator was hired. The evaluator acknowledges the bias that this fact can bring to the findings of the present case study. Therefore, the findings only represent the views of the consulted groups and cannot be considered true for all groups of stakeholders. In terms of analysis constraints, the major obstacle was the subtle distinction that stakeholders had between the activities supported by AVACLIM and those implemented by the national and local stakeholders through the support of funds other than AVACLIM. This required additional analysis after the field visit.
4. Despite these limitations, an adequate number of stakeholders were consulted. This allowed for a triangulation of perspectives from different sources and methods (interviews and a desk review) that were sufficient to obtain an understanding of project implementation at the country level to answer the evaluation questions.

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<sup>66</sup> Fourteen interviews were conducted during field visits in Senegal, and two were conducted during *Desertifications* in Montpellier, France.

## Findings

### Relevance

**Finding 1.** The AVACLIM project design and objectives are well-aligned with the main national policies that tackle agriculture, the sustainable management of natural resources and food security. These policies have become more focused on the role of agroecology. The project was also fully responsive to agroecological stakeholder needs of enhancing the knowledge, the existing dynamics and the policy discourse on agroecology.

### Effectiveness

**Finding 2.** The project significantly contributed to the enhancement of the existing national agroecology coalition and enabled the establishment of a new CoP in the Tambacounda Region. The latter fostered the involvement of local communities and organizations, as well as decentralized authorities. Overall, project implementation in Senegal made important contributions to the attainment of Outcome 1.

**Finding 3.** Project implementation in Senegal strongly contributed to the development and piloting of the AVACLIM agroecology multicriteria assessment tool. This, in turn, allowed for an effective interaction between agroecology practitioners and the scientific community. However, the tool has yet to be validated, and its adoption is hampered by its perceived complexity. These factors prevented the full achievement of Outcome 2.

**Finding 4.** The project contributed to strengthening the multistakeholder consultative process on agroecology by largely participating in the national and local advocacy initiatives. However, the advocacy messages only partially relied on the scientific knowledge stemming from AVACLIM.

**Finding 5.** The AVACLIM project's content and messages were widely disseminated due to integration in the existing local and national dynamics on agroecology. This contributed greatly to the achievement of Outcome 4.

### Efficiency

**Finding 6.** In Senegal, the overall project management was efficient. It was flexible and took advantage of a good coordination and communication mechanism between the international and national levels, which included the respective scientific communities. More communication opportunities between partners from different countries would have enhanced the project's internal knowledge sharing. Despite the significant delays that had accumulated under Component 1, internal synergies between project components were adequate. External synergies with national and local agroecology dynamics were significant, yet insufficient with respect to interaction with the FAO Country Office and similar international projects.

### Orientations towards sustainability

**Finding 7.** Sustainability is highly likely for the results achieved under Components 1 (sustainability of networks supported and created) and 3 (continuity of advocacy processes and skills herein acquired), for which several elements are designed for continuity. The uptake and scale up of the AVACLIM evaluation tool are uncertain, since no concrete plan of replication has been recorded. The tool needs to be simplified and fine-tuned. Further training is also required. The continuity of the collaboration between NGOs and the scientific community needs to be supported through new projects.

## Cross-cutting issues

**Finding 8.** Overall, environmental sustainability and gender have been well integrated. However, the project has not adopted a specific gender approach to tackle inequalities, nor explicitly mainstreamed indigenous communities and minority inclusion issues.

## Lessons learned

5. Strong integration of individual projects within existing dynamics is an essential factor of success. In Senegal, the project was able to build on existing levers for agroecological transition and proved to be supportive of an interesting multistakeholder and multilevel platform combining knowledge exchange, research, technical and advisory support, and advocacy. It also relied on a credible and well-positioned implementing partner,<sup>67</sup> which is a leader in promoting agroecology in the country. These elements have allowed the project to trigger spillover effects and overcome the limited scope and resources.
6. A strong partnership between practitioners and scientists is needed to adopt the AVACLIM multicriteria assessment tool. The peculiarity of the Senegalese experience in piloting and effectively applying this AVACLIM tool relies on the effective collaboration established between the NGO, the research institute, the PhD student and the guidance of the international scientific committee. However, additional projects, capacity building and financial resources are needed to replicate the tool and to continue the partnership between practitioners and scientists.
7. The participatory approach adopted, while implementing the research activities in the village of Sare Boubou, has generated cascading positive effects within the community. On the one hand, the community has become more aware of its potential, but on the other it has benefited from a concrete output (cartography) that can be exploited within new initiatives.

## Recommendations

8. The CARI should invest additional resources to synthesize and consolidate the AVACLIM multicriteria assessment tool. On the one hand, the tool should be fine-tuned by increasing the sample and geographical scope. For instance, it could be piloted in other types of agricultural zones, indicators could be synthesized, and the use of the references could be consolidated, since some indicators are based on primary data and others on secondary data. On the other hand, the tool should be simplified and more user-friendly. Stakeholders reported that the use of the tool by practitioners or researchers not directly involved in its piloting would be very unlikely. For this reason, additional training is needed to enable the replication and scale up the initiative.
9. The CARI, FAO and Enda Pronat should continue to strengthen the local dynamics on agroecology. While there is still work to be done on the national and political side, such as advocating for the establishment of an institutional framework on agroecology at the interministerial level, stakeholders emphasize the role of local communities, authorities and decentralized services in promoting effective agroecological initiatives. Decentralized governmental services are particularly important to accompany producers throughout the transition, and their skills should therefore be enhanced. Additionally, in Senegal, several

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<sup>67</sup> Enda Pronat's commitment to agroecology in Senegal dates back to 1980, and the organization currently holds the DyTAES Secretariat.

municipalities have already reached important results in promoting agroecology in their territories. These should be further supported and scaled up.

10. The CARI, FAO and Enda Pronat should strengthen the synergies with other initiatives and efforts, especially when these are led by the same partners in the same geographic areas and around the same themes. While CARI and Enda Pronat were very effective in interacting with the national and local coalitions on agroecology, they missed the opportunity to establish synergies with FAO's ongoing initiatives on agroecology, both at the technical and advocacy levels. For instance, exchanges on the different evaluation tools adopted to assess the impact of agroecology were not recorded. Similarly, no exchanges with the project Promoting agroecological intensification of agriculture to boost the resilience of farms in the Sahel, FAIR Sahel, were recorded in the evaluation methodology, even though this project also implements research activities.
11. The CARI and Enda Pronat should design and make use of a project-specific monitoring system to track progress against set targets. No specific monitoring tool was developed – not even, for instance, a matrix of both output and outcome indicators linked to a data collection system. A similar instrument could have provided a real-time overview of the values achieved at a given time and of the progress compared to the target values set. It also would have enhanced the quality of the reporting, which was found to be an area of improvement for Enda Pronat.

## Appendix 8. The Republic of India case study executive summary

### Objective and methodology of the case study

1. The Republic of India case study aims to provide a country perspective for the terminal evaluation of the AVACLIM project, which was implemented from October 2019 to March 2023. It allows the Evaluation Team to highlight project achievements and performance at the country level using the Development Assistance Committee evaluation criteria from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 1991). This includes: relevance; effectiveness; efficiency; and sustainability. It also aims at analysing the project's implementation difficulties in the country to highlight key lessons and recommendations for improving and adapting future similar projects.
2. The case study is based on the findings from a qualitative analysis of information gathered through a literature review, focus group discussions (FGDs), in-person and virtual interviews, and direct observations, which enabled obtaining stakeholder perceptions on project achievements. A field mission was implemented by the Evaluation's Team members from 31 October to 6 November 2022. A total of four focus group discussions and 19 in-person and virtual interviews<sup>68</sup> were conducted with external stakeholders, the national non-governmental organization (NGO) partner, the scientific partner working with the Gram Bharati Samiti (GBS) on a voluntary basis, and public sector officials. The literature review focused on available project-related documents and relevant national documents, developmental strategies and plans.
3. There were several limitations in conducting the field mission. The vast national geographical project coverage was a major challenge. As a result, considerable time was spent on travelling from one location to another in order to visit the two agroecological initiatives involved in the project. This limited the number of days spent in the project areas. There was not enough time within the seven days allocated for field work to visit the national partner organization, GBS, which is situated in a third, different location. It was not even possible for the evaluation consultant to visit the CoP network of NGOs established through the project, as its members are dispersed across several locations. Therefore, two of the GBS representatives visited the field sites in order to meet the evaluation consultant, while interviews with other NGO representatives and some of the CoP members were conducted on a virtual platform. All focus group discussion participants and some of the interviewees were not conversant in English. The local languages spoken in the two locations also differed. Hence, two translators were hired, while another one worked on a voluntary basis. The evaluator acknowledges the bias that this fact can bring to the findings of the present case study. Therefore, the findings represent only the views of the consulted groups and cannot be considered true for all groups of stakeholders. Nevertheless, the field observations and similarities in the meanings of some of the words of the consultant's local language were helpful in mitigating this issue.
4. In terms of analysis constraints, the major obstacle was the low quality of monitoring data shared about the VAAGDHARA initiative villages. It was challenging to distinguish the AVACLIM project activities from the training activities on the Sustainable Integrated

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<sup>68</sup> A total of seven virtual interviews were conducted; three with the implementing partner, GBS, and four with the NGOs, as they were not reachable due to the vast distance involved.

Farming System and agroecology, which were implemented through funds that were different from those of AVACLIM. This required additional time and effort in obtaining the narrative reports for further analysis and triangulation purposes well after the field mission.

5. Despite these limitations, an adequate number of stakeholders were consulted. This allowed for the triangulation of perspectives from different sources and methods (focus group discussions, interviews, desk review), which was sufficient to obtain a satisfactory understanding of project implementation at the country level.

## Findings

### Relevance and coherence

**Finding 1.** Consulted stakeholders agreed that AVACLIM's project design, objectives and contribution were well-aligned with the government's policies in agriculture, food security, employment, and the sustainable management of natural resources (water, soil, biodiversity). The intended contribution from all project components was relevant, particularly the focus on disseminating evidence-based knowledge on agroecology. The AVACLIM project was also aligned with FAO's CPF from 2019 to 2022 for India.

### Effectiveness

**Finding 2.** The AVACLIM project formed an informal CoP consisting of civil society organizations, farmers, agroecology practitioners and professionals, and developed a strategy to promote agroecology in the country. However, it may be a challenge for a group of informal actors to achieve such ambitious results within a short implementation period and in a country with vast geographical reach. This network has not been able to accomplish the expected objective of mobilizing collective efforts to promote agroecology at a desirable level. The delays in operationalizing the project, the COVID-19 pandemic, the recent cyclone and the wide geographical coverage of the CoP restricted the opportunities to achieve this endeavour. Nevertheless, the project has helped in systematizing agroecological practices for two local initiatives in the states of Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh. These could be further scaled up and replicated in other areas facing similar issues. This is a significant step towards the attainment of Outcome 1, which was not fully achieved at the time of the terminal evaluation.

**Finding 3.** The pilot phase of the AVACLIM agroecology multicriteria assessment tool was completed and triggered an interaction among practitioners and scientific community members. However, the GBS is not a research institution, and its mandate does not envisage the implementation of the tool developed through AVACLIM in similar initiatives. Unless more resources are provided, it is not guaranteed that the tool will be replicated after project closure. Moreover, only a single scientist working on a voluntary basis has been trained on the use of the methodology. Hence, replication of the tool in a country with vast geographical reach will be highly challenging. Further, the failure to get patronage from the relevant authorities, such as the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog), will make it even more difficult to systematically promote the tool in the entire country. The untapped FAO Country Office support is a missed opportunity in this regard, especially, since it already interacts with the NITI Aayog for other purposes.

**Finding 4.** An advocacy strategy to promote agroecology in India was developed under the project but has yet to be implemented. It is, however, very ambitious to target country-wide policymakers, national civil society organizations, journalists and politicians across a large geographical area. Moreover, many government officials interviewed consider that agroecology is not viable for large-scale operations. This needs to be addressed through continuous advocacy and on-the-ground

evidence, if agroecology is to be sustained in the country. Patronage from the relevant authorities, such as the NITI Aayog and the National Programme for Organic Production, combined with greater effort from the extension services of the Department of Agriculture, could help in achieving a positive impact. Collaboration with the existing advocacy strategies of the FAO Country Office and other international actors with similar interests also appears to be a missed opportunity in implementing the AVACLIM advocacy strategy.

**Finding 5.** A communication plan for India was developed. Communication materials were translated into two local languages and shared with the CoP members and local government representatives in Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh. In order to exhibit and document good practices and innovations, a movie on the two agroecological initiatives, VAAGDHARA and the Renuka Bio Farms (RBF), was produced but not properly disseminated. Further, some communication outputs, such as a press conference and dissemination materials, are pending. Outcome 4 in terms of AVACLIM content dissemination has yet to be achieved. Therefore, project integration within local and national dynamics on agroecology is still insignificant.

### **Efficiency**

**Finding 6.** There was a significant delay in project operationalization due to lengthy procedures in getting approval on the selected NGO from the FAO Country Office. In the end, this did not materialize. External factors, such as the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the demise of the implementing partner president, further affected the timely delivery of the expected outputs and outcomes.

### **Orientation towards sustainability**

**Finding 7.** The sustainability of the two model farms that VAAGDHARA and the RBF supported under Component 1 is likely. Indeed, they have reaped many benefits and have sufficient resources to continue. With on-the-ground evidence, they have already commenced knowledge sharing with the established CoP through sessions on good practices. It is also likely that the CoP's WhatsApp group created by the project will continue for a considerable period of time, thus supporting the knowledge exchange process initiated through the project.

### **Lessons learned**

6. The establishment of a national multistakeholder CoP in a country, in which agroecology is still at the early stage of development, is an important step forward. Its members can learn from one another by improving their knowledge and practices. However, to ensure the continuation of the network, more capacity development and financial and human resources are required. Collaboration with the government focal points is also important for country-wide adoption.
7. The capitalization of existing initiatives is an important factor in the promotion of good practices. The project was able to capitalize on the results achieved by the agroecological initiatives of VAAGDHARA and the RBF, which have also been involved in the project's CoP. The two initiatives were, in turn, able to build on the knowledge gained from the project and reached the level of "model farms." In fact, VAAGDHARA has already started to promote agroecology among the farmers from the nearby villages, while the RBF is collaborating with academia to provide hands-on knowledge to undergraduates. These initiatives provided a platform to promote agroecology within the CoP network through the exchange of good practices organized by AVACLIM. This was a win-win situation that can be replicated.

8. The support, guidance and flexibility of the implementing partner is a good practice that can motivate local partners to stay engaged when they face major constraints in project implementation.
9. When developing new scientific tools, it is important to deeply involve national research institutes in order to foster replicability. Since the national partner, GBS, is not a research institute and its mandate does not envisage the implementation of the tool in other initiatives, it is not known whether the tool would be replicated in other agroecology initiatives. This is compounded by the fact that only a single scientist, working on a voluntary basis, was engaged to apply a comprehensive new methodology with complex data.
10. If a new scientific tool is to be promoted nationwide, it is crucial to get the patronage of the relevant authorities. In India, the missed patronage from the NITI Aayog hampers its wide adoption. Further, collaboration with the Department of Agriculture would facilitate the involvement of agriculture extension officers working across the country in promoting the tool. Collaboration with the FAO Country Office would also help in harnessing the external synergies that could facilitate promotion of the tool due to their good relations with the government authorities.

## Recommendations

11. **Promote more intensive awareness raising on agroecology by addressing government officials.** The attitude of government officials who are of the view that agroecology is not viable for large-scale operations needs to be addressed. Continuous advocacy through people, farmer organizations, groups and awareness creation of the relevant government sector officials and politicians – together with on-the-ground evidence from other large-scale initiatives, such as the RBF and other non-AVACLIM agroecology initiatives – could be used to change this notion and promote agroecology in the country. It will also help in setting up standards and policies for agroecology, including the provision of government subsidies and support for agroecology during the transition period from conventional farming. These are already being enjoyed by the conventional farmers.
12. **Due consideration should be given to involve the FAO Country Office.** In fact, it is well positioned to promote advocacy actions.
13. **The CoP network should advocate for more efforts by the Department of Agriculture in training their agriculture extension officers in agroecology.** Field visits by the agriculture extension officers, coupled with linkage building with the farmers, could help in promoting agroecology practices to a great extent. Learning by doing will foster a faster transition. This includes: organizing webinars with the participation of leading agroecology actors in and outside the country; the creation of more demonstration farms, such as VAAGDHARA and the RBF; organizing exposure visits; and capturing evidence from effective agroecological initiatives. In fact, advocacy aimed at the national level will help in promoting agroecology among practitioners, as well as public sector officials and politicians.

## **Annexes**

Annex 1. The Republic of Senegal case study

[https://www.fao.org/3/cc9759en/GCP\\_GLO\\_927\\_GFF\\_Annex\\_1.pdf](https://www.fao.org/3/cc9759en/GCP_GLO_927_GFF_Annex_1.pdf)

Annex 2. The Republic of India case study

[https://www.fao.org/3/cc9759en/GCP\\_GLO\\_927\\_GFF\\_Annex\\_2.pdf](https://www.fao.org/3/cc9759en/GCP_GLO_927_GFF_Annex_2.pdf)

Annex 3. Evaluation terms of reference

[https://www.fao.org/3/cc9759en/GCP\\_GLO\\_927\\_GFF\\_Annex\\_3.pdf](https://www.fao.org/3/cc9759en/GCP_GLO_927_GFF_Annex_3.pdf)

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