



Democratization of agricultural cooperatives in the fight against desertification in Burkina Faso

In Burkina Faso, desertification and accelerated land degradation threaten the livelihoods of rural populations, particularly small-scale agricultural producers. In the face of these challenges, agricultural cooperatives are positioning themselves as key players in environmental resilience. They bring together producers organized around collective and sustainable practices, including water and soil conservation (WSC) techniques such as zaï, half-moons, stone barriers, and reforestation. These techniques, derived from peasant know-how and reinforced by support from NGOs and the government, help restore degraded land, retain soil moisture, and improve agricultural productivity. The cooperatives operate according to democratic and solidarity-based principles, promoting the pooling of efforts, continuing education, and the involvement of young people and women. Their work contributes not only to food security but also to combating the effects of climate change.

• A community structure adapted to environmental challenges

Burkinabe agricultural cooperatives are generally made up of producers united around a common goal : to improve agricultural production while regenerating the land. Their organization is based on a democratic model inspired by the OHADA Uniform Act on Cooperative Societies. Each cooperative includes a General Assembly (the supreme body) and an Executive Board responsible for day-to-day management. Specialized technical committees are sometimes established to plan field activities.

When it comes to combating desertification, cooperative members mobilize collectively to carry out community projects: building stone barriers, zaï pits, half-moons, retention basins, or planting local species. Work is often organized weekly or seasonal, with a clear division of tasks and prioritization of the most degraded areas. Local trainers or NGO technicians support these initiatives in the field.

○ The General Assembly: the sovereign decision-making body

The General Assembly (GA) is composed of all the cooperative's member members. Each member has one vote, regardless of their contribution level, in accordance with the cooperative principle of "one member = one vote." The AGM meets at least once a year in ordinary session, and in extraordinary session in case of urgent need. Its missions are to validate activity reports, approve the accounts, elect members of the Board of Directors or the Executive Committee, define the major strategic directions, and decide on the membership or exclusion of members. It is the democratic heart of the cooperative.

- **The Executive Board: the daily management body**

The Executive Board is responsible for implementing the decisions made by the General Meeting. It is elected for a renewable term, generally three years. It is composed of :

- ✓ A President: ensures the legal representation of the cooperative, oversees activities, and chairs meetings.
- ✓ A Vice-President: assists the President and replaces him or her in his or her absence.
- ✓ A Secretary General : manages correspondence, takes minutes, and maintains administrative documents.
- ✓ A Deputy Secretary General : assists with correspondence management, takes minutes, and maintains administrative documents.
- ✓ A Treasurer: responsible for financial management, revenue, expenditures, and bookkeeping.
- ✓ A Deputy Treasurer: assists with financial management, revenue, expenditures, and bookkeeping.
- ✓ Other members (advisors, sector managers, technical facilitators), depending on the size and needs of the cooperative.

The Board meets regularly (monthly or depending on the agricultural season) to plan, coordinate, and evaluate activities.

- **Technical Commissions : operational units in the field**

Technical committees are established to strengthen the cooperative's operational efficiency, particularly in technical areas. They are composed of volunteer or designated members with skills or experience in specific areas. These committees vary depending on needs, but the most common are :

- ✓ The Agricultural Production Committee is responsible for developing crop calendars based on the seasons and members' needs. It provides technical support to producers, organizes access to agricultural inputs, and monitors yields to assess crop performance. It plays a key role in optimizing production.
- ✓ The Environment and CES/DRS Committee coordinates actions to combat land degradation. It plans and supervises zaï, half-moon, stone barriers, and reforestation work. It mobilizes members, identifies priority areas, and monitors environmental impacts to sustainably restore farmland.
- ✓ The Training and Innovation Committee identifies members' capacity-building needs and organizes training sessions on sustainable agricultural techniques. It facilitates the exchange of experiences between producers, introduces innovations adapted to the local context, and ensures the dissemination of best practices to improve productivity and resilience.
- ✓ The Gender and Inclusion Committee ensures the equitable representation of women and youth in all cooperative activities. It raises awareness about equal opportunities,

encourages their involvement in decision-making, and supports specific initiatives to strengthen their economic autonomy and community leadership.

- ✓ The Marketing and Market Committee is responsible for centralizing the collection of members' agricultural products, organizing their secure storage, and identifying profitable outlets. It negotiates prices with buyers, facilitates access to local and regional markets, and promotes the value of the cooperative's processed products.

Each committee works closely with the Executive Board and reports to the General Assembly.

- **A mixed and solidarity-based financing method**

Cooperatives' land restoration efforts rely on a combination of internal and external resources. On the one hand, member dues, revenue from the sale of agricultural or processed products, and equity provide a financial base. On the other, government subsidies, support from cooperation projects (FAO, IFAD, PASARC, UNDP), NGOs (SOS Sahel, AZND, etc.), or local authorities help finance major CES/DRS (Soil Protection and Restoration) projects.

Some cooperatives also access green loans or financing from partner microfinance institutions, particularly when their actions are aligned with the fight against climate change and the promotion of agroecology.

- **Procedures for creation and cooperative taxation**

To be legally recognized, a cooperative must follow a specific administrative procedure. This begins with drafting the articles of association and internal regulations, holding a constituent assembly, and then filing the documents with the provincial High Commission. Registration with the Register of Cooperative Societies is mandatory. This recognition allows the cooperative to sign agreements, open a bank account, benefit from public or international support, and engage in economic activities.

In terms of tax, agricultural cooperatives benefit from certain exemptions, particularly when they focus on subsistence farming or the social and solidarity economy. Agricultural cooperatives also benefit from a reduction in subsidies for agricultural inputs and fertilizers. However, they must comply with their accounting obligations, keep records, and produce financial reports. When they engage in commercial activities, specific taxes may apply.

- **A work organization adapted to resilient agriculture**

The success of cooperatives in combating desertification relies on rigorous coordination of agricultural activities. Before each campaign, community plans are established, often during participatory meetings. Members collectively define the plots to be restored, the tasks to be performed (digging, stone collection, planting, maintenance), and the intervention periods. The

approach is inclusive : women and youth play a growing role, particularly in nursery activities, reforestation, and agroecological monitoring.

Some cooperatives also integrate simple digital tools (phones, GPS, local apps) to track results, increase transparency, and improve the coordination of actions.

Conclusion

Faced with the devastating effects of desertification, Burkina Faso's agricultural cooperatives are emerging as a local, collective, and sustainable response. They are democratically organized around a General Assembly, an executive board, and technical committees, encouraging the participation of all members. Thanks to their strong community presence, they effectively mobilize populations to implement water and soil conservation techniques, such as zaï, stone barriers, and half-moons. Their ability to attract funding, through projects or partnerships, strengthens their action. To increase their impact, ongoing support in training, governance, innovation, and access to financing remains essential.