

Local Action on Sustainable Land Management

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Mrs Tsvakai Moyo, a farmer who produces sorghum in Zimbabwe using climate-smart agriculture. Credit: Pascal Manyakaidze.

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Foreword

Land is being degraded rapidly worldwide, largely due to climate change, unsustainable agriculture practices, and deforestation. Our current agricultural practices are causing soils to erode up to 100 times faster than natural processes can replenish them. Land degradation also leads to biodiversity and ecosystem services loss, and ultimately to decreased agriculture production and food insecurity. It affects the livelihoods of up to 3.2 billion people around the planet, particularly vulnerable populations in developing countries.

Using locally adapted solutions, local communities – including Indigenous Peoples, women, and youth – play a pivotal role in reversing this trend through sustainable land management, agroecology, sustainable agriculture and sustainable forest management practices, which provide both environmental and socio-economic benefits.

The Small Grants Programme (SGP), a corporate programme of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) that is implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), has been supporting community-led sustainable land management initiatives that promote climate resilient agriculture and food practices that improve productivity and increase ecological services. As of 2021, SGP has awarded over 3,800 small grants to sustainable land management projects in over 125 countries. SGP's portfolio in this area has shown multiple benefits on the ground, not only on sustainable land management, but also on improved biodiversity, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and hazardous chemical management. In many instances, these good practices have been scaled up and replicated nationally and globally with partners.

This publication offers an overview of SGP's sustainable land management portfolio, highlighting local actions to achieve the goals of Land Degradation Neutrality at the national and global levels, as agreed under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. The case studies that are highlighted here also demonstrate how local action can be scaled up for global impact. Moreover, it sheds a spotlight on the importance of partnerships to achieve larger impacts by highlighting SGP's partnership with SOS Sahel to promote sustainable land management and strengthen value chains for agriculture products in the Sahel region of Africa, with involvement of women and youth.

We hope the examples included in this publication provide inspiration to further invest in and upscale innovative sustainable land management practices. Together with partners, and in line with GEF and UNDP strategies, SGP is committed to further its support to community-led sustainable land management initiatives, contribute to the achievement of related Sustainable Development Goals and secure Land Degradation Neutrality across the globe.

1 Introduction



Launched in 1992, the Small Grants Programme (SGP) is a corporate programme of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), which is implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). SGP has expanded operations to 128 countries, supporting bottom-up actions for global environmental issues by empowering local civil society and community-based organizations (CSOs and CBOs). SGP is implemented through a decentralized governance and delivery mechanism at the country level with GEF resources, along with co-finance from communities, governments, and other donors. In partnership with governments, the private sector and other stakeholders, SGP facilitates upscaling and replication of successful initiatives. SGP also promotes civil society's participation in national and global policy dialogues and its decision making on environmental and sustainable development issues.

With 30 years of experience in working with local communities, SGP plays a unique role in meeting the objectives of multilateral environmental agreements and contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. SGP specifically contributes to the SDGs on climate action, life below water, and life on land, respectively. It also contributes to the achievement of other goals, such as no poverty, no hunger, access to energy, and sustainable production and consumption.

2 SGP approach for sustainable land management and sustainable agriculture

The SGP portfolio on land degradation supports community-based initiatives that are focused on land restoration and prevention of land degradation as well as promotion of sustainable land and forest management. Under the SGP's 7th Operational Phase (2020-2024), four specific areas of work are being supported, namely:

- Increased efficiency and effectiveness of overall environmentally sound food production and value chain, including certification schemes of organic agriculture, fair trade, and others
- Agrobiodiversity conservation, including extending support to producer networks, movements and value chains among small-holder farmers
- Promotion of agro-ecological production methods, including diversification and improved livelihoods
- Implement community-based actions to remove deforestation from supply chain and expand restoration of degraded lands

Support is provided for integrated projects that aim at restoring ecosystem services or reducing negative environmental trends such as land degradation and deforestation, biodiversity loss and emissions of greenhouse gasses. SGP supports community-based sustainable land management actions that integrate climate-resilient sustainable practices and standards (e.g. secure land tenure and community participation), while also promoting diversification and improved livelihoods. These actions include water harvesting, post-harvest management, and business skills development to empower communities to better manage their natural resources, which all also lead to global environment benefits. SGP supports national and local efforts to address the challenge by supporting work towards land degradation neutrality (LDN), applying the LDN framework of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).



Soil and water conservation activities in Zimbabwe.
Credit: Pascal Manyakaidze.

3 Updated overview of SGP sustainable land management and agriculture portfolio

3.1 OVERVIEW SUMMARY

A review of the SGP's sustainable land management portfolio shows a constant increase in the number of community-based projects, which is correlated to the level of investment. Between 1995 and 2021, SGP supported the implementation of more than 3,860 community-based projects related to sustainable land management. Total funding of more than US\$140 million was allocated as grants to these projects, generating about \$145 million in co-financing.

During the last five years of that period (2016 to 2021), the SGP sustainable land management portfolio saw an increase in the area of land conserved and brought under improved management systems. During this period, 962 projects were completed in the sustainable land management focal area, resulting in more than 1,297,495 hectares of land brought under improved management practices (Figure 2).

The portfolio also saw a consistent number of community members involved in the related projects, as illustrated in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1: Trends in surface area of land improved and number of communities involved in sustainable land management practices

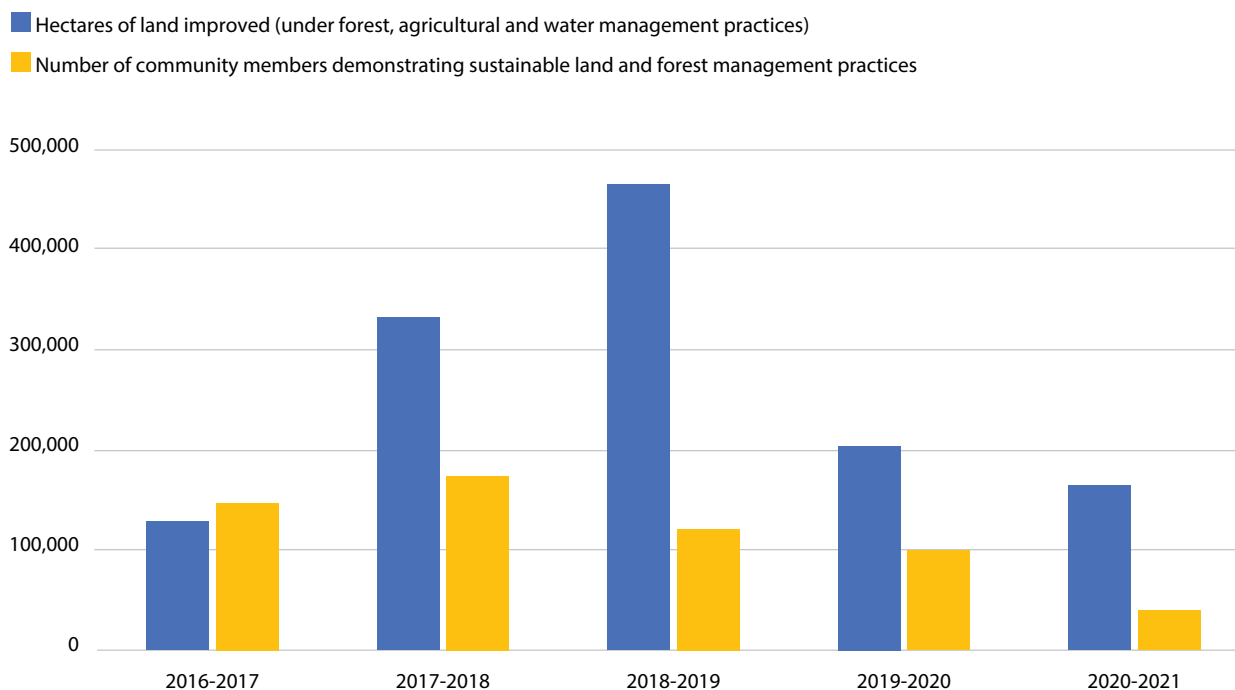


FIGURE 2: Key facts on the SGP sustainable land management portfolio 2016 – 2021



962

Projects completed
on **sustainable land
management**



>583,000

Community members
demonstrating sustainable
land and forest
management practices



>572,000

Hectares of land
brought under improved
management practices

119

Projects completed
on **sustainable forest
management**

>724,000

Hectares restored through
improved forest management
practices

Sustainable forest management by communities continues to be a key focus of SGP's sustainable land management focal area portfolio, as well as a focus of the portfolios on the focal areas of biodiversity, and of climate-change mitigation. This approach to land degradation across several focal areas has helped to increase the number of SGP projects related to sustainable forest management.

For instance, from 2016 to 2021, a total of 119 sustainable forest management projects were completed, contributing to the restoration of more than 724,000 ha of land through improved forest management practices.

In terms of regional distribution, Africa had the most sustainable land management projects implemented (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3: Regional distribution of projects in the sustainable land management portfolio

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