

## Agroforestry in Southern Africa: Policies, Potentials and Problems

**Short description:** Agroforestry systems (AFS) are deliberate combinations of agriculture and forestry within the same land holding. They are “land-use systems in which woody perennials are grown in association with herbaceous plants or livestock in a spatial arrangement and/or rotation” (Lundgren, 1982). AFS present a broad range of systems for the co-production of timber and fruits with crops and/or livestock and can be considered an optimisation of space where a multitude of products can be cultivated. AFS can be cost-effective means to mitigate and adapt to climate change and provide enhancement to food security or local employment. Such systems represent stable and long-term solution to meet environmental and socio-economic needs in Southern Africa, especially regarding monocropping or livestock rearing. A palpable re-emergence of interest in agroforestry can be observed recently, as researchers hope to use AFS as means to mitigate and adapt to climate change, enhance food security and local employment.

Since the inception of AFS in the 1970s, the political and social dimensions of the concept remain important and contested for its development and institutionalization. This resulted especially from the framing of AFS as a specific development model, which raised expectations about, among others, addressing several pressing land management problems, securing food production, generating diversified income for rural households, enriching biodiversity through ecosystem services, and furthering carbon storage and other mitigation and adaptation practices. AFS have become increasingly influential in international political processes like the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and important discourses like Sustainable Development. Despite some considerable successes and not denied potential, AFS face numerous social and political “challenges such as unfavourable policy incentives, inadequate knowledge dissemination, legal constraints and poor coordination among the multiple sectors to which it contributes. Nor is it sufficiently addressed in national policy-making, land-use planning and rural development programmes. (...) AFS are often impeded by legal, policy and institutional arrangements, its environmental benefits are mostly unrewarded, and investment is discouraged by the long time between adoption and returns. Policies are needed, therefore, to promote the benefits of AFS” (FAO, 2013).

Besides these factors at national and state level, local and regional success of AFS systems depends on a numerous socio-cultural factors. Barriers to successful AFS at local level are not only posed by climatic and ecological conditions, yet depend on a continued (often state-supported) focus on monoculture food production, industrial agricultural crops, and mechanized farming. Often administrative barriers for establishing AFS are significant, especially when linked to complex land ownership. All these factors potentially discourage the integration of trees into farmland and the adoption of AFS at regional and local level. These points resonate with Nair and Gerrity (2012), who highlight two issues relevant for this thesis as agroforestry research topics of high-potential impact: “Role of government vs. non-state policies in encouraging AFS adoption [and] Evaluation of existing national and regional policies to determine how they create AFS adoption incentives” (522).

A comparative analysis of national institutional, political, social, economic contexts and factors enabling or hindering the definition and implementation of AFS is thus needed. Potential research methods for this task include, e.g. quantitative and qualitative interpretation of data gathered through interviews with policy stakeholders and other actors at national level, questionnaires, participatory observation, literature and legal analysis. Favourably several countries of Southern Africa should be analysed comparatively to delineate institutional frameworks and actor arrangements. These could thus employ various methods and theories.

**Starting date:** At any time.

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