Kingdom of the Netherlands

SOIL VALUES
MAINSTREAMING SUSTAINABLE SOIL MANAGEMENT IN THE SAHEL

# SOIL VALUES

# ANNUAL REPORT 2024



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IFDC SNV WAGENINGEN UNIVERSITY & RESEARCH

AGRA Sustainably Growing Africa's Food Systems | CIFOR | World Agroforestry | IITA Transforming African Agriculture | ISRIC World Soil Information | IWMI International Water Management Institute

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## Abbreviations and Acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| 2SCALE | Toward Sustainable Clusters in Agribusiness through Learning in Entrepreneurship |
| ACReSAL | Agro-Climatic Resilience in Semi-Arid Landscapes |
| AFS | Africa Food Systems |
| AFSH | Africa Fertilizer and Soil Health |
| AGRODIA | Agro-Input Wholesalers and Retailers Association |
| ANR | Assisted Natural Regeneration |
| AU | African Union |
| CILSS | Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel |
| COP16 | 16th session of the Conference of Parties |
| CORAF | West and Central African Council for Agricultural Research and Development |
| DGIS | Directorate-General for International Cooperation |
| FMNR | Farmer-Managed Natural Regeneration |
| FSRP | Food Systems Resilience Program |
| GESI | Gender Equality and Social Inclusion |
| GISF | Global Interagency Security Forum |
| IATI | International Aid Transparency Initiative |
| ICRAF | World Agroforestry Center |
| IFDC | International Fertilizer Development Center |
| IITA | International Institute of Tropical Agriculture |
| INSO | International NGO Safety Organization |
| ISFM | Integrated Soil Fertility Management |
| ISRIC | ISCRIC – World Soil Information |
| ISSD/Sahel | Integrated Seed Sector Development in the Sahel |
| IWMI | International Water Management Institute |
| MEL | Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organization |
| OCHA | United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs |
| PLSO | Partner Liaison Security Operations |
| Pro-ARIDES | Agri-Food Program for Integrated Resilience and Economic Development in the Sahel |
| SDC | Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation |
| SMEs | Small and Medium Enterprises |
| SNV | Netherlands Development Organization |
| ToC | Theory of Change |
| UNCCD | United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification |
| UNDSS | United Nations Department of Safety and Security |
| UNRIA | National Union of Agro-Input Dealers |
| WAFA | West African Fertilizer Association |
| WUR | Wageningen University and Research |

# 1 Introduction

Soil Values is a transformative initiative aimed at redefining the future of soil health and sustainable agriculture across Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Nigeria. As a flagship program of the Netherlands Directorate-General for International Cooperation (DGIS), Soil Values has been launched at a critical juncture, one in which soil degradation, climate vulnerability, and rural poverty converge to undermine the region's food systems and the livelihoods of millions. In response, the program offers an integrated systems-level solution that places soil health at the core of agricultural transformation.

Soil Values is a 10-year program (2024-2034) with a vision to *catalyze sustainable and resilient agricultural transformation across West Africa by embedding soil health and fertility management into broader agricultural development efforts.*

***With an ambitious aim of supporting 1.5 million small-scale food producers, restoring 2 million hectares of degraded land, and catalyzing a transformative shift in soil health and agricultural resilience across the Sahel, Soil Values envisions a future where soil is recognized as a foundational asset for food security, climate resilience, and rural prosperity. By aligning with regional initiatives, leveraging institutional investments, and strengthening local capacities, the program aims to co-design integrated landscape-level interventions that drive long-term impact. Through strategic convening and brokering, Soil Values will serve as a platform for mobilizing resources, fostering innovation, and scaling effective soil management practices across the continent.***

To achieve the above vision and goals, Soil Values works through three interconnected pathways of change, each representing a different area of action: (1) the agroecological pathway, (2) the inclusive market development pathway (markets and finance), and (3) the enabling environment pathway (institutions and policies). The agroecological pathway targets small-scale food producers and farming systems, as well as the landscapes and watersheds that surround them. The inclusive market development pathway focuses on the private sector (markets, investments, business models) and innovative muti-actor platforms, including farmers, to overcome market barriers and strengthen relevant markets and on financial institutions to invest in soil fertility. Finally, the enabling environment pathway focuses on the ability of public sector institutions, policies, and governance structures to support soil health in the long term.

DGIS has positioned Soil Values as a strategic instrument for integration, collaboration, and innovation, bringing together governments, regional institutions, the private sector, and civil society around a common objective: placing soil fertility at the core of sustainable agricultural development. The program does not function in isolation, but it rather complements and reinforces key initiatives, such as the Africa Fertilizer and Soil Health (AFSH) Action Plan, the World Bank–funded Food Systems Resilience Program (FSRP), and regional frameworks led by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU). In doing so, Soil Values will contribute to aligning fragmented efforts and catalyzing coherent, coordinated investments in soil health across the region.

Soil Values puts emphasis on local ownership and long-term resilience. Designed from the bottom up, the program prioritizes the empowerment of local institutions, farmer organizations,

and national stakeholders by equipping them with the tools, knowledge, and financial resources necessary to drive this transformation. By embedding capacity strengthening and social equity across all interventions, Soil Values seeks to foster sustainable, locally anchored change that endures beyond its own lifetime.

A unifying theme that emerged during the first year of implementation, and which runs throughout this report, is the recognition of soil as the essential nexus linking food security, climate resilience, rural livelihoods, and inclusive development. Soil Values does not treat soil fertility as a narrowly technical concern. Rather, it positions it as a strategic entry point for systemic transformation. This perspective is shaping the program's Theory of Change (ToC), guiding its intervention logic, and reinforcing its relevance as a catalyst for broader agricultural and ecological renewal across the Sahel.

This report presents the foundational steps of a unique initiative. It captures the strategic groundwork laid in 2024 to position Soil Values for impact at scale through rigorous diagnostic assessments, institutional engagement, coalition building, and the co-design of context-specific pathways for change. Structured around the three interlinked impact pathways outlined above, the report further organizes its analysis across four result areas aligned with the program's long-term objectives. Although the report is not structured around the five mutually reinforcing areas of intervention – Bundling, Integrating, Brokering, Convening, and Scoping and Learning – the interventions collectively contribute to building a coherent multi-actor platform aimed at driving sustained action and long-term impact.

In sum, this report presents the first steps of an ambitious long-term program to transform soil management in the Sahel. It highlights how Soil Values is laying a robust foundation for scale through evidence-based planning, strategic partnerships, and context-responsive implementation.

# 2 Context

Agricultural production in the Sahel is increasingly threatened by widespread land degradation, driven by recurrent droughts, climate change, advancing desertification, and socio-political instability, including ongoing conflicts. These challenges are further exacerbated by chronic underinvestment in sustainable soil management and the absence of robust systems to integrate soil fertility and health into broader development frameworks. In response to declining yields, many farmers are expanding cultivation into marginal or protected areas. While this may lead to short-term gains in food production, it often contributes to the degradation of natural ecosystems, a decline in biodiversity, and an increase in greenhouse gas emissions, ultimately compromising the long-term sustainability of agricultural and environmental systems.

The Soil Values program has been strategically designed to complement and reinforce the West Africa FSRP, with particular attention to Component 1– Digital advisory services for agricultural and food crisis prevention and management and Component 2 – Sustainability and adaptability of food production ecosystems. Although the FSRP facilitates loan-financed investments in agricultural infrastructure, several critical operational gaps remain. These include outdated or insufficient soil data, limited farmer capacity in integrated soil fertility management (ISFM), inadequate site-specific fertilizer recommendations, and weak input supply systems. In addition, the participation of women and youth in decision-making and governance remains limited. Global supply chain disruptions, such as those resulting from the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, have further strained access to fertilizers across the Sahel.

To address these challenges, Soil Values aims to foster a comprehensive transformation of agricultural systems. The program focuses on scaling up ISFM practices, promoting inclusive land governance, expanding financial inclusion, and advancing gender equality and social inclusion (GESI). These priorities are aligned with the outcomes of the 2024 AFSH Summit and the national commitments currently being developed with support from international partners across West Africa.

The year 2024 marked the foundational phase of Soil Values, emphasizing diagnostics, coalition building, and strategy development in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Nigeria. Despite socio-economic pressures and geopolitical uncertainties, including the potential withdrawal of three countries from ECOWAS, the program sustained strong momentum. It supported the alignment of national action plans with the AU AFSH Declaration and promoted private sector engagement to improve fertilizer production and distribution for last-mile delivery.

Together, these priorities reflect a shared commitment to building resilience, fostering sustainable agricultural transformation, and leveraging digital innovations. By creating an enabling environment with equitable access to technologies, inputs, and finance, Soil Values seeks to empower smallholder farmers, especially women and youth, as key agents in shaping the future of resilient and inclusive food systems.

# 3 Progress toward Realization of the Theory of Change

This section presents the strategic progress made in 2024 toward operationalizing the Soil Values ToC. As the program's foundational roadmap, the ToC was adapted during the inception phase to reflect the specific policy priorities, agroecological realities, and institutional landscapes of Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Nigeria. The section illustrates how Soil Values translated this framework into action through context-specific interventions across its three impact pathways: agroecology, inclusive market development, and enabling environment. It provides evidence of early achievements in aligning activities with the program's long-term outcomes, while demonstrating how the integrated approach is beginning to foster systemic change in soil management, market systems, and policy environments.

## 3.1 Adaptation of the Theory of Change

The process of adapting the Soil Values ToC was informed by national technical workshops held during the inception phase in each focus country, which brought together participants from various national partner institutions to tailor the ToC to their specific context.

Considering the recurrent and prevailing volatile political and socio-economic conditions in the Sahelian countries, efforts focused on adapting Soil Values to the country-specific policy priorities and agroecological conditions for results-oriented implementation and greater country-specific engagement and impact.

The adapted ToC maintains the impact pathways: agroecology, inclusive markets, and enabling environment. It focuses on activities designed to enhance soil fertility and soil health and is grounded in some key principles. In 2024, a detailed trajectory from outputs to outcomes was successfully developed in alignment with the ToC (Figure 1). This framework establishes a clear connection between interventions in soil health, climate-resilient farming, market access, social equity, and policy priorities and objectives of local governments, linking them to measurable impacts such as increased crop yields, enhanced food security, improved climate resilience, and greater economic opportunities for farmers.

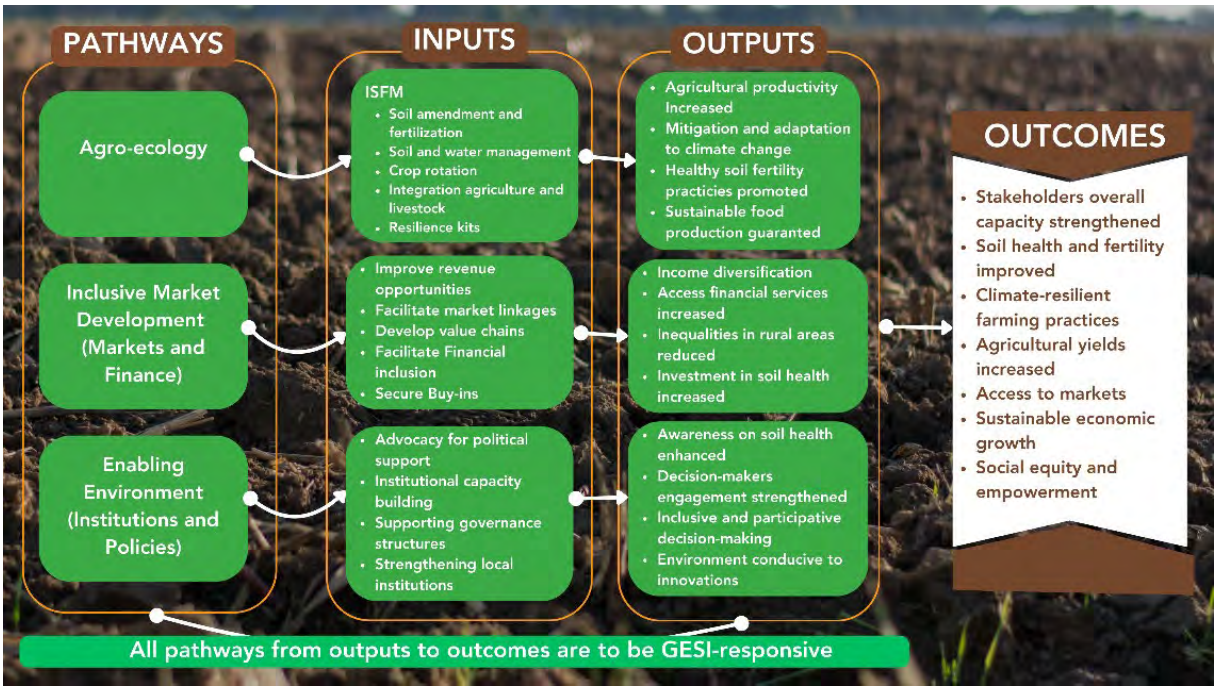



***Figure 1. Schematic of pathways from outputs to outcomes***

The adapted ToC aligns closely with the diverse and heterogeneous needs of beneficiaries, as identified through rapid assessments conducted at the community level. These needs reflect the socio-economic and political conditions and the national soil health policies across the four countries.

The Soil Values program is guided by an integrated framework designed to deliver impact at scale through coherent, cross-cutting actions. Its vision for sustainable soil fertility is operationalized via five complementary intervention areas: Bundling, Integrating, Brokering, Convening, and Scoping and Learning.

*Bundling and integrating* efforts are rooted in country-specific priorities for agroecological knowledge and practices at watersheds. In Burkina Faso, activities include strengthening community-led restoration through farmer field schools and demonstration plots and promoting fertilizer use, soil and water conservation techniques, crop rotation, and drip irrigation. In Mali, activities include promoting bundled technology packages based on ISFM while addressing nutrient deficiencies and erosion. In Niger, activities focus on disseminating drought-tolerant crop varieties (millet, sesame, forage species) and promoting intercropping, mulching, and assisted natural regeneration (ANR), while also supporting forage cultivation and climate-resilient livestock practices. In Nigeria, activities prioritize the integration of soil health interventions in diverse ecosystems, including desert oases, wetlands, and protected areas, through tree corridors, mixed cropping, site- and crop-specific fertilizers, and water management techniques.

*Brokering* activities facilitate engagement with the private sector and financial systems. In Burkina Faso and Niger, this includes enhancing market access, supporting producer organizations, and promoting financial mechanisms, including warrantage systems, cooperatives, and agricultural insurance, to encourage investments in soil health, especially by small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and marginalized groups. In Mali, partnerships with companies like Toguna and organizations such as the West African Fertilizer Association

(WAFA) and the National Union of Agro-Input Dealers (UNRIA) aim to improve farmers' access to agricultural input and post-harvest processing. Activities in Nigeria focus on developing sustainable soil management guidelines and promoting private sector investment in soil analysis and carbon credit markets, thereby strengthening SME and agribusiness engagement.

*Convening* plays a crucial role in facilitating collective governance and policy alignment. In Burkina Faso, land tenure commissions at the village and communal levels are strengthened to ensure gender-balanced land management, foster the adoption of soil fertility charters, and recognize local contributions. In Mali, activities support desertification control through reforestation, erosion reduction, and land restoration.

Finally, *scoping and learning* efforts in all four countries focus on building capacity in the areas of soil fertility management, community- and watershed-level resource governance, value chain development and private sector engagement, integration of institutional and policy frameworks, and conflict prevention and distributive justice. These activities target youth, farmers, students, and extension agents through tailored training, ensuring the continuous adaptation and improvement of practices based on local knowledge and evidence.



***Photo 1. Soil Values pre-launch workshop in Mali, May 2024***

GESI and youth empowerment are central to all interventions and fall under the Integrate intervention area of the Soil Values program. In Burkina Faso, GESI is integrated into land security and biofertilizer initiatives through inclusive land governance mechanisms, targeted capacity building, legal awareness campaigns, participatory decision-making, and support for women's cooperatives and youth groups to access biofertilizer technologies, inputs, and production equipment. In Niger, the program empowers youth and women through training in agricultural mechanization, cooperative development, and land access, aligned with the National Youth Entrepreneurship Strategy. In Nigeria, GESI is operationalized by ensuring women's and youth participation throughout the project cycle and by promoting conflict-sensitive livestock and ranch management practices, including barter trade systems and the utilization of crop residues.

## 3.2 Progress through Impact Pathway 1: *Agroecology*

In 2024, Soil Values took important steps to lay the foundation for achieving the agroecology impact pathway by implementing integrated activities that position the program to scale impactful and sustainable land management practices in 2025 and beyond.

These foundational activities included the development and operationalization of a participatory bundling strategy (see Annex 1), a core pillar of the program. This strategy aims to improve soil fertility and agricultural productivity in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and northern Nigeria by delivering context-specific packages that integrate technical, financial, and market-based solutions. Co-designed with local communities through participatory methods, such as community rural appraisal, the bundles respond directly to farmers' needs. The strategy incorporates ISFM, agroforestry, erosion control, and climate-smart practices, combined with locally adapted business models, to promote sustainable land management, enhance soil health, and increase the uptake of effective technologies. It will support sustainable adoption and strengthen public-private partnerships and policy advocacy for long-term integration.



***Photo 2. Discussions with women farmers on the use of technology to improve soil health and fertility in Niger, July 2024***

To inform the Bundling design, an ex-ante analysis of 42 innovation bundles was conducted by the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), prioritizing those with high productivity, resilience, and adoption potential. This evidence-based selection supports scalable interventions aligned with agroecological goals. Using community rural appraisal and a participant selection process designed to ensure the representation of marginalized farmer groups, the bundles were co-designed with local communities, ensuring service offerings were shaped by inclusive and diverse local voices. This will enhance relevance, scalability, and adoption on the ground.

In Mali and Nigeria, drawing on Regreening Africa's farmer-managed natural regeneration (FMNR) and ANR approaches, co-designed agroforestry systems were tailored to restore ecosystems, reduce erosion, and improve biodiversity. In parallel, over 500 agro-input service

providers in Niger and Nigeria were mapped, setting the stage for strong public-private partnerships to deliver bundled services efficiently during the implementation phase.

To encourage adoption of innovations, results-based financing models were explored, aiming to attract private investment and strengthen service delivery. These financial mechanisms will support performance-driven expansion of agroecological solutions. Capacity building was also advanced, with cascade training provided to extension agents and lead farmers to create a conducive environment for wider knowledge transfer and technology dissemination. Complementing this, a five-day training program on inclusive landscape management was co-designed with national partners to support participatory watershed governance and nature-based planning.

Additionally, climate risk mapping with participatory assessments to understand farmers' perceptions of climate hazards and adaptation strategies was done across watersheds in Burkina Faso, Mali Niger, and Nigeria, seeking to improve climate risk assessments, inform soil fertility management, and enhance adaptation planning.

Furthermore, nine pilot watersheds were selected based on environmental and social criteria, and landscape diagnostics were completed to guide site-specific agroecological interventions. Table 1 shows the watersheds selected across the four focus countries, with their estimated size (in hectares). These targeted efforts will ensure effective, context-relevant application of agroecological practices.

***Table 1. Selected watersheds by country and their size***

| Country | Watershed | Size (ha) |
|---|---|---|
| Burkina Faso | Kou | 2,044,716 |
| | Nakambe | 4,530,688 |
| Mali | Bani | 12,898,598 |
| | Sankarani | 3,294,255 |
| Niger | Maggia | 7,119,768 |
| | Korama | 6,727,691 |
| Nigeria | Fajewa | 2,389,332 |
| | Yartiti | 2,397,525 |
| | Bauchi | 5,265,552 |

## 3.3 Progress through Impact Pathway 2: *Inclusive Market Development*

In 2024, progress on the inclusive market development impact pathway focused on laying the groundwork for a more inclusive and responsive market ecosystem, positioning Soil Values to expand smallholders' access to finance, inputs, and services from 2025 onward.

A key activity included the development of a comprehensive brokering strategy to strengthen market systems and improve financial access for smallholders. The strategy facilitates inclusive access to financing for sustainable soil management by mobilizing public and private investments, introducing innovative financial instruments, and mitigating risk through mechanisms such as blended finance, guarantees, and insurance. It promotes institutional co-financing and supports farmers with de-risking tools, such as output-based payments and carbon credits. By aligning financial incentives with long-term soil health outcomes, the strategy fosters collaboration among market actors and outlines dual incentive models for institutions and farmers. It also provides a roadmap for partnership development, risk-sharing,

and performance-based financing, contributing to improved access to context-specific soil fertility solutions across the Sahel.

To foster cross-sector alignment and create entry points for effective collaboration and bundled service delivery, Soil Values convened over 54 engagement meetings with five categories of actors: projects and programs, financial institutions, agro-dealers, farmer organizations, and output-based mechanism developers. In Nigeria and Mali, partnerships were formalized through Memoranda of Understanding with agro-dealers and organizations such as AFEX, SOPROTRILAD, and Agri-wallet, aimed at improving input access for smallholders, and similar partnership development is ongoing in Burkina Faso and Niger. This will contribute to increasing the availability and affordability of essential agricultural inputs.



***Photo 3. Engaging with producers in Mali, July 2024***

In addition, activities focused on facilitating tailored financing solutions for smallholders. A national-level review of financial products was launched to guide the design of credit, insurance, and guarantee schemes aligned with smallholder realities. In parallel, innovative financing models, such as carbon credit schemes, socio-economic and agroecological result payments, and blended finance pilots, were tested with selected institutions to unlock new funding streams and embed performance-based approaches. This groundwork is key to shaping inclusive and accessible financial tools. Complementing these efforts, capacity building activities equipped national teams and coalition members with contribution-tracking tools to improve visibility of private sector engagement and encourage sustained support.

## 3.4 Progress through Impact Pathway 3: *Enabling Environment*

In 2024, Soil Values made meaningful progress in the enabling environment impact pathway by building political momentum and institutional platforms to integrate soil fertility into policy and planning. High-level program launches in all four countries brought together ministries, donors, the private sector, and civil society, helping to raise national awareness and forge strategic alliances. These efforts collectively established the institutional and policy conditions needed to scale sustainable soil fertility practices, ensuring that interventions are supported by strong governance, inclusive policies, and long-term political commitment.

Regionally, Soil Values amplified its presence through active participation in major policy forums, including the AU AFSH Summit, the 16th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP16) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), World Soil Day, and the Africa Food Systems (AFS) Forum. Participation in these high-level events will contribute to the impact pathway by positioning soil health as a policy priority across African institutions and agendas.

At the operational level, the program supported ECOWAS soil health initiatives and action plan implementation, the launch of the Regional Hub for Fertilizer and Soil Health, and the development of national roadmaps in alignment with its mandate, particularly in Nigeria and Niger. These actions will contribute to the impact pathway by embedding soil health into regional frameworks and aligning national programs with broader policy goals.

To contribute to improving the enabling environment for inclusive and sustainable land management, national coordination mechanisms were strengthened. In all four countries, stakeholder workshops were held to improve collaboration, and national technical committees were formed in Mali and Niger. These structures will contribute to enhancing governance and enabling more cohesive multi-actor action on soil management. In addition, interventions in 2024 supported land tenure commissions at community level in Burkina Faso and Mali to incorporate soil health principles and GESI considerations into land charters. To reinforce this inclusivity, a GESI strategy, under development through stakeholder engagement, will emphasize equitable access to land, finance, technologies, and benefits for women and youth.

# 4 Progress Made under Each Result Area toward the Intended Outcomes

## 4.1 Overview

Two set of activities were planned for the first year of the program. The initial set of activities was included in the proposal as tentative Year 1 activities. An additional set of activities was incorporated into the inception report. Of the tentative activities planned for the first year, 89% were fully (75%) or partially (14%) completed (see Annex 2: Progress Report Against 2024 Tentative Work Plan). In addition, 41% of activities outlined in the inception report were realized. Table 2 provides a summary of the realized activities in 2024 compared to the activities proposed in the 2024 work plan as presented in the inception report.

***Table 2. Summary of 2024 activities compared to those in the work plan***

| Result Area | Intervention Area | Completed Activities (2024) | Pending Activities from Work Plan 2024 (Inception Report) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1. Reduce Yield Gap** | **Bundle** | - Conducted ISFM training on zaï, composting, and crop rotation in Burkina Faso (39 participants). | |
| | | - Established a cascade training model (expert → agents → farmers). | - Establishment of demonstration plots and Farmer Field Schools. |
| | | - Conducted rapid rural appraisals. | - Training on fertilizer deep placement for vegetable production. |
| | | - Completed ex-ante analysis of prioritized innovations. | - Bundling of climate-smart agriculture technologies. |
| | | - Developed a social behavior change framework. | |
| | | - Prioritized climate-smart agriculture technologies through stakeholder workshops. | |
| **2. Ensure Sustainable Land Use** | **Integrate** | - Selected and profiled 9 watersheds through participatory consultations. | - Training in water management techniques.<br>- Land governance and tenure rights study. |
| | | - Delineated watershed boundaries using HydroBASINS. | - Assessment of crop-livestock interaction systems. |
| | | - Conducted a GESI-focused stakeholder power analysis. | - Participatory watershed action planning. |
| | | - Mapped climate risks across 35 communities (drought/flood hotspots). | - Review of Nigeria's water policy framework. |
| | | - Analyzed soil health (organic carbon, pH) via ISRIC. | - Capacity building on GESI practices. |
| | | - Drafted integrated ISFM strategy, including agroforestry. | - Fodder demonstration plots for livestock integration. |
| | | - Launched real-time monitoring geoportal. | |
| **3. Strengthen Policy** | **Broker** | - Drafted a climate finance brokering strategy. | - Diagnostic study on financing gaps. |
| | | - Mapped financial service providers (341 in Niger, 160 in Nigeria). | - Training for village savings and loan associations (VSLAs). |
| | | - Held 50+ partner meetings (e.g., Netherlands embassies). | - Review of index-based insurance policies. |
| | | - Engagement with agro-input dealers > secured private sector partnerships (AGRODIA, AFEX). | |
| **3. Strengthen Policy** | **Convene** | - Formed national policy committees in Mali and Niger. | - Revitalization of Natural Resource Management committees. |
| | | - Participated in Africa Food Systems Forum (Kigali). | - Diagnostic of national soil fertility platforms. |
| | | - Represented program at UNCCD COP16. | - Facilitation of European Union-AU Policy dialogue. |
| | | - Celebrated World Soil Day in Burkina Faso and Mali. | |
| **4. Promote Climate Resilience** | **Scope & Learn** | - Developed Ph.D. research framework (Wageningen University & Research [WUR] collaboration). | - Comprehensive training needs assessment. |
| | | - Enrolled 6 Ph.D. candidates in priority research areas. | - Development of conflict-sensitive modules. |
| | | - Initiated resilience index framework development. | - Establishment of M.Sc. fellowship program. |

Progress against the work plan varied across intervention areas, with realization rates ranging from 27% in Brokering to 54% in Integration (see Table 3). Constraints included delays in contracting implementation partners and slow mobilization of key stakeholders. In addition to the planned activities, approximately 15 supplementary actions were carried out. Although not initially included in the work plan, these activities represented about 30% of total implementation and played a strategic role in supporting the next phases of the program.

***Table 3. Progress in activities by intervention area***

| Intervention Area | Realization Rate | Comment |
|---|---|---|
| Broker | 27% | Late recruitment of broker, which delayed activities |
| Bundle | 36% | Slow response from partner projects, and delays in contracting implementation partners |
| Convene | 35% | Delay in signing contract with knowledge partner |
| Integrate | 54% | |
| Scope & learn | 44% | |
| Overall | 41% | Out of 93 planned activities, 40 were realized. In addition, about 15 activities were realized that were not directly mentioned in the work plan but were useful for subsequent implementation of the project. About 30% of activities conducted were not on the 2024 work plan. |

## 4.2 Result Area 1: Small-scale food farmers, in particular women, sustainably decrease the yield gap

In 2024, Soil Values focused on preparing the way for reducing the yield gap among small-scale food farmers, particularly women, by implementing a series of interconnected preparatory activities. An important starting point was the rapid rural participatory appraisal conducted with the farming communities in watersheds. This appraisal served as a critical diagnostic tool to identify location-specific production constraints, gender-sensitive technology needs, and barriers to the adoption of sustainable practices. These appraisals informed the selection of training topics and technology bundles, ensuring they were aligned with farmers' realities and agroecological conditions. Based on these insights, the program piloted a cascade training model, a core component of the bundling strategy, aimed at strengthening needs-based local capacity on ISFM and climate-smart practices. The appraisal reports are available.

During the last semester of 2024, a training session was designed as a pilot stage, laying the foundation for full-scale rollout across countries in 2025 . The cascade training approach follows a systematic model in which an expert trains extension agents, the latter train relay farmers, who in turn train smallholder farmers. This method ensures continuous knowledge transfer and consistent engagement with targeted farmers across the program's duration. This pilot process started in Burkina Faso where 39 agricultural extension providers and relay farmers, including nine women, were trained in the Kou and Lower Mouhoun watersheds. The training included two days of classroom instruction and three days of hands-on field sessions. Participants were introduced to ISFM principles, such as improved seed use, crop rotation and intercropping, composting, biochar, bokashi production, and soil and water conservation practices, including zaï pits, half-moons, and stone bunds. This pilot training will inform the expansion of the cascade system to other countries in 2025, ensuring an extensive ISFM-based knowledge transfer and technology dissemination.



***Photo 4. Biochar produced during an ISFM training in Burkina Faso, November 2024***

To further consolidate this training strategy, Soil Values and national partners organized virtual, classroom, and field workshops to co-develop content and address key challenges in ISFM adoption. These sessions ensured that training materials were not only technically sound but also tailored to local realities and responsive to climate risks and gender dynamics.

Efforts were made to develop mechanisms for the delivery of required agricultural inputs, equipment, and services in order to ensure that farmers have access for large-scale use and adoption of the championed agricultural technologies and practices. To this end, a comprehensive mapping of service providers was conducted to prepare for bundling partnerships. In Niger, 341 service providers were identified across eight regions, offering inputs and services such as seeds, fertilizers, compost, irrigation tools, solar pumps, microfinance, and marketing. In Nigeria, 160 providers were identified in three states . This mapping will serve as the operational backbone for localized bundling of services in 2025. Complementing this, an ex-ante technology assessment was conducted to identify and rank innovations that are most likely to reduce the yield gap and be adopted, based on their potential profitability, scalability and local relevance/adaptability. These findings, disaggregated by watershed and agroecological zone, will directly inform the design of bundled interventions and support evidence-based scaling, ultimately creating the conditions for sustainably reducing the yield gap and enhancing the likelihood of technology acceptance and adoption by farmers. Table 4 presents findings that can be adapted over time to reflect evolving farming practices, climate variability, and socio-economic conditions.

***Table 4.*** ***Most promising innovations based on their potential economic and poverty-reduction impacts***

| Country/Watershed | Innovations with the Highest Potential |
|---|---|
| Burkina Faso: Nakambe and Kou watersheds | - Mechanization of the zaï technique for sorghum production |
| Mali: Bani watershed | - Organic fertilizer, biostimulants, and biopesticides for maize production<br>- Dual-purpose millet varieties for crops and livestock integration |
| Niger: Korama and Maggia watersheds | - Improved cowpea varieties<br>- Cereal-legume crop rotation and diversification with cowpea<br>- Organic and inorganic fertilizers with cowpea<br>- Soil fertility mapping for millet production |
| Nigeria: Bauchi, Fajewa, and Yartiti watersheds | - Improved cowpea varieties<br>- Organic and inorganic fertilizer with cowpea<br>- Cereal-legume crop rotation and diversification with cowpea<br>- Organic and inorganic fertilizers for maize production |

Together, the rapid appraisal, pilot cascade training, technology prioritization, and service ecosystem mapping represent critical groundwork for enabling 1.5 million small-scale food farmers to sustainably reduce the yield gap. These preparatory efforts position Soil Values to move from planning to scaling in 2025 and beyond with a robust, inclusive, and context-sensitive implementation strategy.




***Photo 5.*** ***Farmer engagement in northern Nigeria, August 2024***

## 4.3 Result Area 2: Farmland is converted to ecologically sustainable use

In 2024, Soil Values activities focused on paving the way for achieving the ecological transformation of farmland across the watersheds in the four implementation countries. Activities were designed to generate data, tools, and community engagement necessary to guide future interventions on soil fertility and restoration and related technology adoption efforts. These foundational actions aim to enable the conversion of degraded farmland to sustainable use, aligned with the program's goal of restoring 2 million hectares.

The starting point was the participatory selection and characterization of nine watersheds (Figure 2), using both local consultations and spatial data. These assessments established baseline information on land use, erosion, and soil fertility. The findings informed the development of tailored restoration strategies, combining ISFM, agroforestry, and water management solutions adapted to the specific ecological conditions of each watershed.

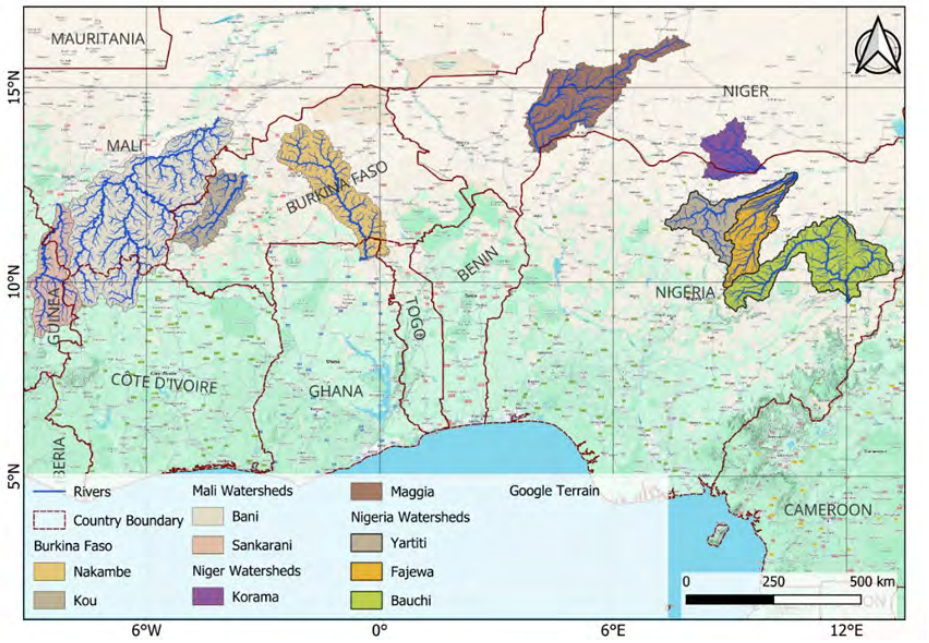



***Figure 2. Map of the nine watersheds in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Nigeria***

To support informed planning, ISRIC carried out a detailed soil information analysis using data from global and regional soil platforms. The assessment focused on soil organic carbon (Figure 3), pH, particle size, and water retention. Results confirmed high acidity, low fertility, and widespread degradation. These insights will guide future ISFM-based practices aimed at increasing soil carbon and improving fertility using carbon sequestrating practices, such as composting, organic amendments, zero/minimum tillage, and agroforestry practices with deep-rooting crop and forage species.

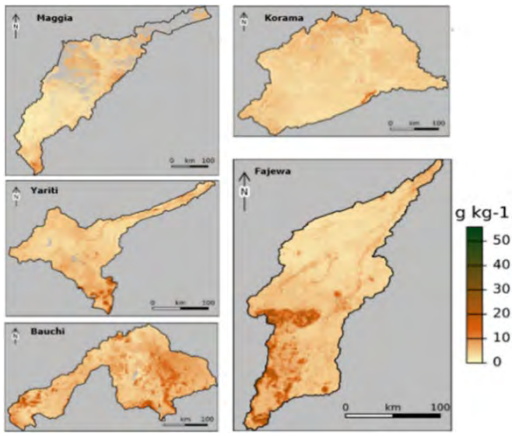



***Figure 3. Soil organic carbon level of the topsoil of watersheds in Niger and Nigeria***

Complementing the soil analysis, the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) conducted watershed-level mapping of water resources to support sustainable planning of GESI-sensitive and efficient water use for agriculture and pastoralism . Findings included rainfall variability, vegetation decline in some areas, and mixed groundwater trends. The maps will inform the design of climate-resilient water management strategies and help mitigate potential risks associated with climate change manifestation, such as flooding, dry spells, and drought.

Furthermore, the program started developing a comprehensive Geoportal to manage and visualize information at watershed level. This digital platform will consolidate spatial data on soil health, erosion, land use, and climate risks. It includes real-time updates, ISFM adoption

tracking, interactive maps, dashboards, and a centralized data repository. Building on inputs from knowledge partners, the Geoportal will ultimately support decision-making and performance monitoring for land restoration at scale (Figure 4).

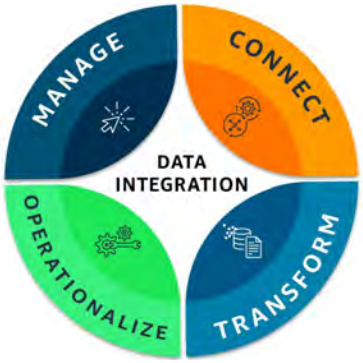



***Figure 4. Data management and integration system for Geoportal***

To set the stage for farmland conversion to sustainable use, substantial progress was made in the co-design of agroforestry-based restoration packages. The Bundling strategy was strengthened through mapping of ISFM technologies and fertilizer use across the watersheds, helping to adapt packages to local farming systems and overcome adoption barriers. These approaches integrate soil health, biodiversity, and resilience into farmer-centered solutions. Participatory workshops in Mali and Nigeria engaged stakeholders in selecting locally appropriate agroforestry species and erosion control practices . These were followed by capacity building sessions and the development of detailed technical reports. Similar initiatives are planned for Burkina Faso and Niger in 2025, using this experience as a model.

The integration of the above activities, tailored to country policy priorities and watershed-specific needs, will lay a solid foundation toward converting farmland into ecologically sustainable use. By generating robust biophysical data, co-designing localized solutions, and building the digital and institutional systems required, Soil Values is well positioned to scale its restoration model from 2025 onward.

Draft reports have been produced for all thematic studies conducted and mentioned above, including Land Use/Land Cover, Soil Organic Carbon, Water Resources, and Weather and Climate Hazards and Adaptation. Final versions of these reports are expected in the upcoming period.

## 4.4 Result Area 3: Regional bodies have strategized soil fertility and national, sub-national, and civil society organizations have strengthened implementation capacity on soil fertility and set policy and marketing conditions for a system change to stimulate soil fertility interventions by farmers and chain actors

In 2024, Soil Values activities focused on strengthening institutional capacities, partnerships, and policy conditions to catalyze system change in support of sustainable soil fertility management. The program worked across national, regional, and civil society levels to set the stage for long-term ownership, coordination, and investment in soil health.

### 4.4.1 Strengthening policy and institutional capacity

The program collaborated with national ministries and teams from the FSRP to assess institutional gaps and develop policy frameworks. As a result, technical and policy committees were established in Mali and Niger, with plans to replicate these structures in Burkina Faso and Nigeria in 2025. The committees will assume a critical role in overseeing and supporting the effective implementation of the program. They will provide strategic guidance to ensure consistency with national agricultural development policies and strategies. Furthermore, the committees will facilitate and, when necessary, authorize collaborative initiatives that require

political endorsement. They will also actively contribute to the scaling up of best practices, the capitalization of results, and the long-term sustainability of the program's achievements.

To ensure inclusiveness, a GESI-sensitive stakeholder engagement framework was developed through targeted analysis. This was further supported by the drafting of an inclusive landscape management training curriculum, which integrates participatory governance, landscape planning, and conflict management. These efforts will contribute to building national and subnational capacity for inclusive and effective soil fertility programming.

### 4.4.2 Creating a favorable policy and coordination environment

Throughout 2024, Soil Values actively participated in and co-organized high-level events to raise the program's visibility, intensifying awareness creation about the importance of soil health in building the resilience of smallholder farmers and the landscape to strengthen its integration into national and regional soil fertility agendas. The program was formally launched through national events in Nigeria, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Mali, mobilizing hundreds of stakeholders including ministries, research institutes, universities, farmer organizations, financial institutions, donor communities, and private sector actors.

At the continental level, the program took part in the AU AFSH Summit in Nairobi, the AFS Forum in Kigali, and the UNCCD COP16 in Riyadh, where the program co-organized advocacy events and reinforced its role in shaping Africa's soil health agenda. Additionally, by joining the ECOWAS-led Regional Fertilizer and Soil Health Hub, Soil Values engaged in technical collaboration and support regional alignment. National workshops were also conducted to explore integration with the Hub's roadmap and secure support from key stakeholders. These strategic regional integration efforts will hopefully result in concretizing additional buy-ins toward consolidating Soil Values interventions at country level and raising its visibility regionally.




***Photo 6. Soil Values Program at COP16 in Riyadh, 2024***

At the grassroots level, the program organized workshops in Nigeria (Kano, Jigawa, and Bauchi) to assess farmer needs related to soil health, water management, and climate-smart agriculture. These engagements connected the program directly with local end beneficiaries and helped in shaping future pilot activities. Soil Values also leveraged World Soil Day celebrations in Burkina Faso and Mali to reinforce national commitment and public awareness, with Mali committing to institutionalize the event annually.

### 4.4.3 Brokering financial solutions for soil fertility investments

To unlock resources for sustainable soil fertility, a comprehensive brokering intervention strategy was developed (see Annex 3). This strategy outlines incentive models for both institutions and farmers, including mechanisms for co-investment, de-risking tools, and output-based payment schemes such as carbon credits. The strategy, supported by an action plan, has been shared with implementing partners to optimize synergy across efforts in financial inclusion and fostering investment appeal.

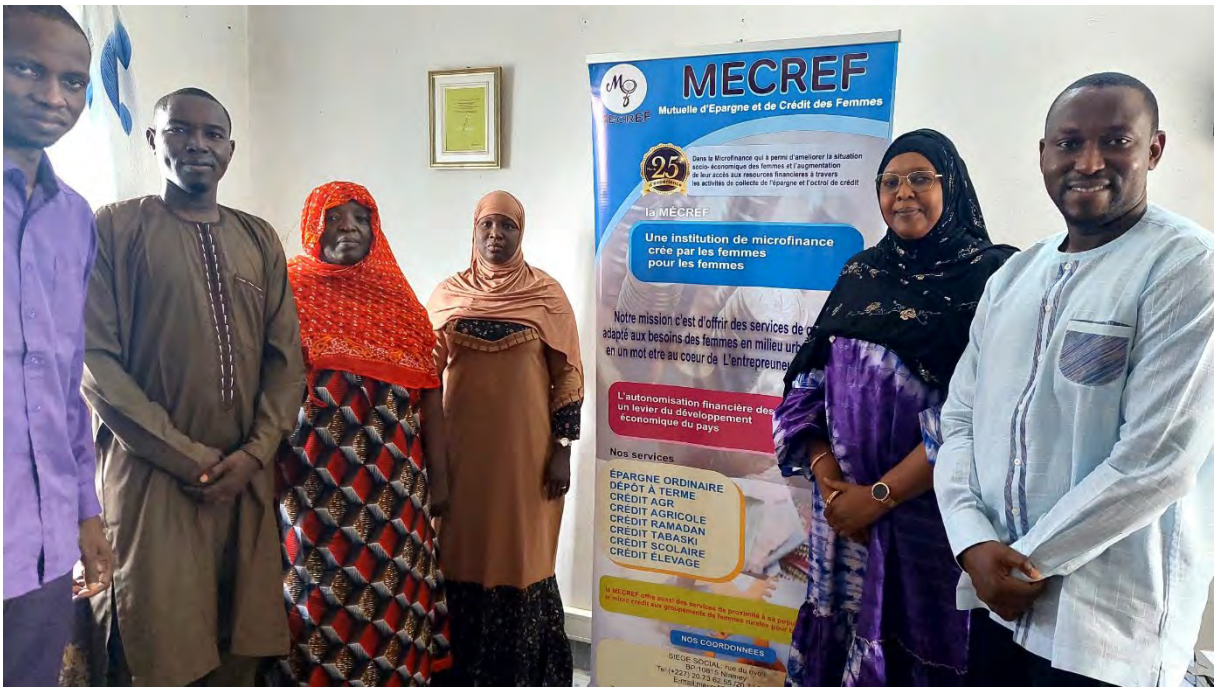



***Photo 7. Meeting between the Soil Values program and the Mutuelle d'épargne et de crédit des Femmes du Niger (MECREF), November 2024***

A brokering report was also produced to assess farmer training needs for market integration and gender-responsive finance. It proposed capacity building programs and the introduction of innovative financial instruments, such as guarantee schemes and climate financing tools. These mechanisms aim to reduce barriers to investment and stimulate farmer and private sector engagement. A national-level assessment of existing financial instruments was launched to inform the design of new credit, insurance, and blended finance products tailored to smallholder farmers. Results from this assessment are expected by mid-2025 and will guide the development of accessible financing solutions for scaling sustainable practices.

### 4.4.4 Expanding partnerships and co-financing mechanisms

In 2024, Soil Values actively built partnerships with five key stakeholder groups: development programs, financial institutions, agro-dealers, farmer organizations, and results-based funding agencies. Over 50 structured meetings were held with these groups to align efforts and explore co-investment opportunities (see Annex 4).

A particular focus was placed on engaging Netherlands embassies as strategic partners to strengthen alignment with the broader Dutch development portfolio and mobilize complementary investments. In Burkina Faso, coordination was initiated with all major Dutch-funded projects to explore opportunities for joint implementation. In Mali, discussions centered on integrating Soil Values into the Embassy's geographic priority zones and aligning with other

programs, such as PRODEAU. In Niger, the Embassy reaffirmed the relevance of Soil Values in addressing climate and food security challenges, while in Nigeria, the Embassy supported the program launch and facilitated dialogue on Dutch investment prospects. In Côte d'Ivoire, a partnership was formalized around soil mapping and input market development, extending the program's reach into strategic regional corridors.

These collaborations not only reinforced Soil Values' role as a flagship Dutch-funded initiative but also laid the groundwork for concrete joint actions. For example, in Mali, a peri-urban horticulture project was jointly conceptualized with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). Looking ahead, participatory sessions with Netherlands embassies are planned for 2025 to sustain momentum, ensure continued alignment, and facilitate coordinated implementation. Through these efforts, the embassies have emerged as key enablers of Soil Values' mission to advance sustainable soil fertility management across the Sahel.




Source: IFDC.

***Photo 8. Workshop to establish a roadmap for fertilizer development and soil health in Côte d'Ivoire, July 2024***

Engagements with banks and microfinance institutions led to the design of tailored financial products for smallholder farmers, addressing barriers such as limited credit access and high perceived risk. Meanwhile, discussions with output-based payment organizations explored results-driven funding models, including carbon credit systems and socio-economic performance incentives. Agro-dealer and agribusiness partnerships were also strengthened, including agreements with actors such as the Agro-Input Wholesalers and Retailers Association (AGRODIA), Elephant Vert, SOPROTRILAD, Indorama, and AFEX (Nigeria). These collaborations are designed to expand farmer access to inputs and services while boosting private sector investment in sustainable soil management.

To ensure the sustainability of these co-financing mechanisms, Soil Values invested in capacity building for its national teams. Training sessions were held in all four countries to help teams identify and track contributions from partners, using standardized templates. Teams were also trained to engage actors from the private sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and financial institutions, mobilizing in-kind and co-investment resources. A detailed report on contributions and leveraged support will be published by June 2025.

## 4.5 Result Area 4: Small-scale food farmers, men and women, and their agroecological systems are less vulnerable to current and expected impacts of climate change and other shocks, thanks to increased resilience

In 2024, Soil Values began laying the groundwork for strengthening the resilience of 1.5 million small-scale food producers and their agroecological systems against climate-related and other shocks. Through a combination of integrated climate risk assessments, participatory watershed planning, capacity building, and strategic learning, the program aimed to inform adaptive landscape management and guide future climate risk interventions. By aligning these efforts, Soil Values has created a solid platform for increasing the resilience of smallholders and their ecosystems. These efforts will ensure that future interventions are context-sensitive, data-driven, and capable of addressing both current and emerging climate risks across the Sahel.

### 4.5.1 Climate risk identification and adaptation planning

To strengthen the resilience of small-scale food producers in the four focus countries, climate risk mapping was carried out across 35 communities at watershed level, identifying drought, flooding, extreme heat, and pest outbreaks as the most prevalent threats. A preliminary report was drafted and is currently being refined. The findings informed the design of adaptation strategies, including the promotion of drought-resistant seeds, soil moisture retention practices, fodder production, and assisted carbon sequestration and natural regeneration practices. A resilience and adaptive capacity index, currently under development and anchored in baseline survey data, will serve to track vulnerability reduction and resilience gains among smallholder farmers over time.

A broader climate risk assessment study, led by IITA and WUR, was launched in Niger and Nigeria and will be expanded to Mali and Burkina Faso in 2025. This assessment will guide tailored resilience-building interventions and deepen understanding of local climate vulnerabilities.

### 4.5.2 Integrated watershed and landscape management

To operationalize landscape-level resilience, Soil Values developed a strategy for integrated watershed and landscape management (see Annex 5). The strategy promotes inclusive planning to address water resources, agroecology, pastoralism, land restoration, and climate resilience. Its implementation includes participatory governance, GESI principles, stakeholder mapping, and alignment with regional initiatives, such as the FSRP, the Agri-Food Program for Integrated Resilience and Economic Development in the Sahel (Pro-ARIDES), and Agro-Climatic Resilience in Semi-Arid Landscapes (ACReSAL). Activities implemented in 2024 included:

- Participatory selection and profiling of nine initial watersheds, using multi-criteria guidelines based on ecological sensitivity, restoration potential, land use patterns, and the security situation.
- Secondary data collection across 20 watersheds to assess biophysical and socio-economic characteristics, such as land tenure, governance, and market development.
- Delineation of watersheds and transboundary basins, supported by ISRIC and the World Agroforestry Center (ICRAF), using HydroBASINS levels 4-6 to inform future digital mapping and restoration planning.
- Development of a structured framework to support community-watershed-level work plans, integrating the LandScale and Geoportal tools for data-driven planning, monitoring, and adaptive management.

- Initial mapping of FSRP's intervention communities at watershed level (Figure 5).

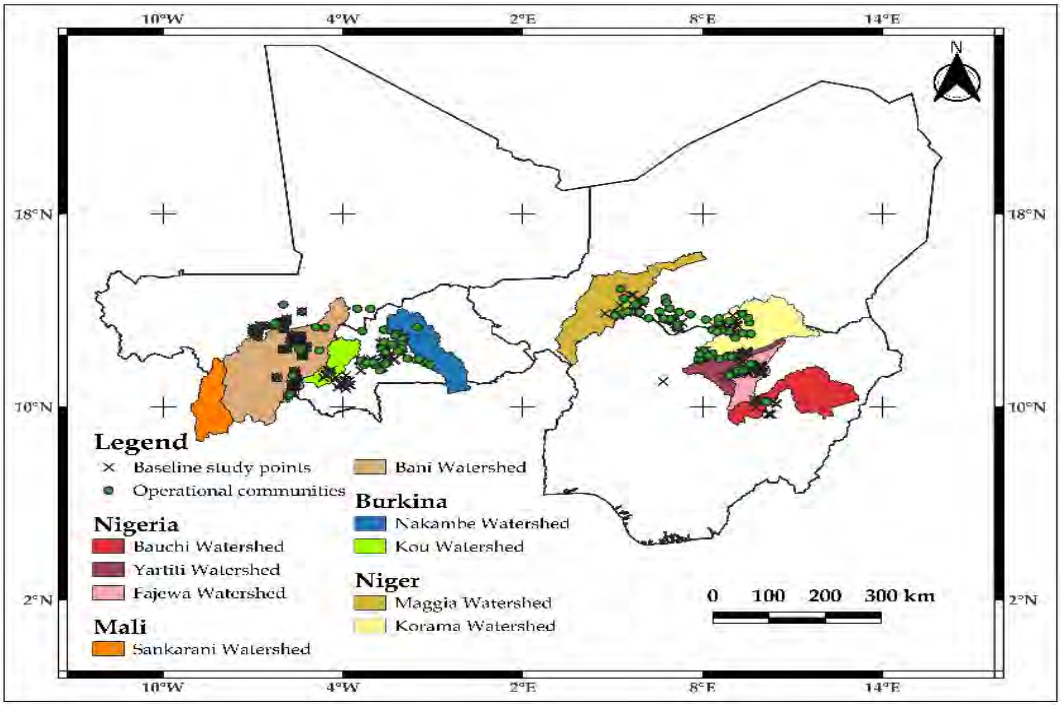



***Figure 5. Watershed-level mapping of FSRP sites***

### 4.5.3 Enhancing knowledge, capacity, and learning for resilience

Knowledge generation and capacity development form a key pillar of resilience building for small-scale food producers and their farming systems. In accordance with this, the Scoping and Learning intervention area focused on identifying enabling conditions for the adoption of sustainable soil fertility practices among different farmer groups in 2024. A comprehensive analysis explored the roles of knowledge, land tenure, security, labor, and market dynamics in shaping farmer decisions, feeding into the refinement of the program's ToC.

A capacity building framework was piloted in Burkina Faso to support implementation across all intervention areas. Developed with input from stakeholders, this framework will be rolled out to all countries in 2025. In parallel, learning sessions were organized in Mali and Nigeria, helping identify agroforestry practices and species best suited to the local ecological and socio-economic contexts. These sessions will be replicated in Burkina Faso and Niger to further localize interventions.

To institutionalize knowledge and support long-term learning, the program made significant progress in its inclusive landscape management training curriculum. A four-day workshop in November 2024 helped define training modules and content, focusing on participatory planning, gender equity, and nature-based solutions. The five-day training program, currently under development, will include practical exercises and case studies to equip facilitators, local authorities, and stakeholders with the tools needed for effective landscape governance.

### 4.5.4 Advancing research through the Ph.D. program

To support long-term evidence generation and integrate resilience for small-scale food producers into broader systems thinking, Soil Values launched multi-phase Ph.D. and master's programs. WUR began by formulating an overarching framework for scoping and learning activities. This framework covers a few relevant dimensions for understanding the various components of ISFM, which are used to formulate broad scoping and learning questions.

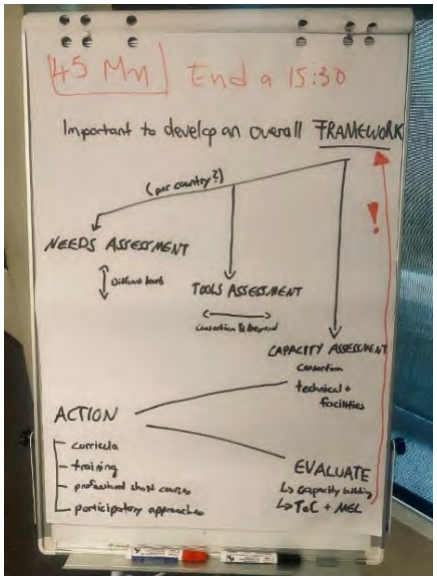



***Figure 6. Framework for capacity building***

Each intervention area is linked to a core research question, with outputs feeding directly into the program's adaptive management processes. Oversight is provided by a scientific board to ensure integration into field operations and policy dialogue.

The first cohort of six Ph.D. candidates from Burkina Faso, Niger, and Nigeria will cover six key research areas based on knowledge gaps in the Sahel and opportunities within Soil Values:

- Soil fertility gradients and long-term sustainability: Assessing soil carbon and nutrient stocks, economic feasibility, and livestock management impacts.
- Positive feedback loops in soil fertility dynamics: Examining ISFM strategies for soil carbon buildup, nutrient efficiency, and economic yield-gap reduction.
- Value chains and private sector engagement: Evaluating how market mechanisms affect farmers' access to ISFM inputs and outputs.
- Community- and watershed-level resource management: Investigating land tenure, water distribution, labor, and community-led ISFM strategies.
- Institutional and policy frameworks: Assessing governance mechanisms for land, water, and livestock management to enhance sustainable intensification.
- Conflict prevention and distributive justice: Exploring equity in soil fertility access, stakeholder interactions, and socio-political obstacles to ISFM adoption.

The program completed climate risk mapping across 35 communities, identifying drought, flooding, heat, and pest outbreaks as major risks. This informed the design of adaptive strategies, such as promotion of drought-resistant seeds, fodder production, ANR, and soil moisture retention techniques. A resilience and adaptive capacity index is under development, anchored in the baseline survey results. These tools will enable tracking of progress toward reducing vulnerability of 1.5 million smallholders.

### 4.5.5 Social inclusion and equity: Stakeholder analysis for governance and GESI

A comprehensive stakeholder analysis was conducted in 2024 to assess governance and GESI dynamics and identify key stakeholders, power relations, and entry points for inclusive engagement (Tables 5 and 6). A preliminary report was developed and is being refined. The

findings from the analysis informed strategies to enhance collaboration and promote equitable decision-making processes.

***Table 5. Stakeholder analysis across Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Nigeria***

| Stakeholder Category | Key Actors | Role in Governance and GESI | Challenges/Barriers |
|---|---|---|---|
| Government agencies | Ministries of women's affairs and social development, agriculture and livestock, social welfare, and local government | Policy formulation, implementation, and enforcement | Limited resources, political interference, weak implementation of policies mechanisms |
| Local governance structures | Traditional leaders, ward/village development committees | Facilitating local decision-making, dispute resolution | Patriarchal norms, resistance to change, limited gender awareness |
| Civil society organizations (CSOs) | NGOs, women's groups, youth networks | Advocacy, capacity building, service delivery | - Funding constraints, policy influence challenges, limited community reach<br>- Low participation of women in decision-making |
| Private sector | Farmer-based organizations and cooperatives, agribusinesses, financial institutions, and agri-tech companies with inclusive practices | - Partnering with governments to improve service delivery<br>- Enhancing efficiency and innovation in public projects | - SMEs often lack platforms or capacity to engage with the government.<br>- Many businesses see GESI as charity or compliance rather than a strategic opportunity |

The developing strategy focuses on ensuring equitable access to climate-smart technologies and fair benefit-sharing for women, youth, and marginalized groups. It will promote labor-saving tools and flexible service delivery to ease workloads, while involving men in the redistribution of unpaid care work. Additionally, the strategy will include gender-responsive financial products, market access, and advocacy for land tenure reforms.

***Table 6. Power and influence matrix***

| **High Influence and High Interest** | **High Influence and Low Interest** |
|---|---|
| Government ministries, departments, and agencies; civil society organizations (CSOs); women's/youth groups | Traditional leaders, religious groups, financial institutions |
| **Low Influence and High Interest** | **Low Influence and Low Interest** |
| Local communities, marginalized groups, grassroots organizations | Informal sector workers; some private sector players |

# 5 Governance, Management, and Partnerships

## 5.1 Staffing and Office Establishment

Soil Values dedicated the first six months of 2024 to enrolling adequate human resources both at country level and program coordination level and establishing offices in the program's four focus countries of Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Nigeria to pave the way for effective implementation. Overall, 33 core staff, mainly from the consortium partners (IFDC, SNV, and WUR), were brought on board and stationed in these offices. The core staff are supported by staff from the program's knowledge partners (AGRA, ICRAF, IITA, ISRIC, and IWMI) who bring specific technical expertise to strengthen the impact of the program in its different intervention areas (Bundling, Integrating, Brokering, Convening, and Scoping and Learning).

During 2024, Soil Values completed setup of its offices in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Nigeria, procured office and staff equipment, and purchased five vehicles to facilitate field operations and program delivery.

## 5.2 Coordination with Coalition Partners

For effective coordination, collaboration, and definition of roles and responsibilities for seamless implementation, Soil Values finalized management tools/mechanisms, such as specific technical and governance agreements, to guide and better utilize partners' complementary expertise and technical know-how/knowledge for greater impact.

IFDC, the program lead, signed specific agreements with all its consortium and knowledge partners: SNV, WUR, IITA, ICRAF, IWMI, ISRIC, and AGRA. These are bilateral contractual agreements between IFDC and the individual partner that define specific roles and responsibilities of each party in carrying out services and/or activities assigned to them in the proposal and subsequent work plans. These agreements contain specific deliverables per partner, each partner's budget, and mechanisms of disbursement of funds. Soil Values also put in place a Governance Agreement that provides a general framework of collaboration mainly for consortium partners. This Governance Agreement was signed by all parties in June 2024.

## 5.3 Partnership Building

In 2024, Soil Values focused on strengthening strategic partnerships through country- and regional-level launch events and technical workshops to embark on soil health-related national and regional programs and initiatives on collective interventions toward addressing ongoing challenges, such as climate change, food insecurity, and soil degradation. The program worked closely with partners, including DGIS, the World Bank, national value chain programs and FSRP teams, and various Dutch-funded initiatives, to collectively tackle soil health, ecosystem resilience, and food security in the region.

This collaboration, known as the Fertile Triangle Partnership (Figure 7), seeks to develop sustainable soil management models, integrate watershed and landscape management, and build the resilience of smallholder farmers and ecosystems in the Sahel. To operationalize the partnership, Soil Values held technical sessions with national FSRP teams to identify gaps and complementary intervention areas in soil health management, followed by participatory appraisals in pilot watersheds. This approach ensured that solutions were demand-driven and addressed the specific needs of rural communities.

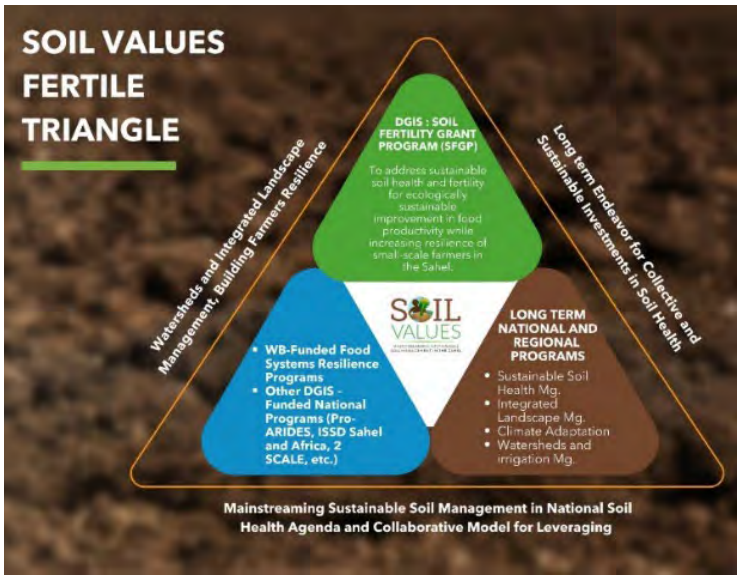



***Figure 7. Fertile triangle partnership***

In addition, the program conducted a gap and complementarity analysis with various Dutch-funded programs including Pro-ARIDES and engaged with other programs, such as Toward Sustainable Clusters in Agribusiness through Learning in Entrepreneurship (2SCALE), Integrated Seed Sector Development in the Sahel (ISSD/Sahel), and HortiPlus, to identify synergies and to maximize impact. These efforts will continue in 2025 with ongoing gap and complementarity analysis and operationalization of partnerships to enhance collaboration and synergies (see 2025 Work Plan).

Soil Values also strengthened its partnerships with ministries, particularly the Ministries of Agriculture and Livestock in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Nigeria. Strategic consultative and technical committees were established with the Supervisory Agricultural and Environmental Ministries in Mali and Niger to ensure participatory implementation, national ownership, and sustainability of Soil Values activities. This collaboration led to Niger's Ministry of Agriculture urging agriculture-related programs to synergize with Soil Values to enhance soil health and food security. In 2025, Soil Values plans to extend the same policy initiatives to Burkina Faso and Nigeria. The program will continue working with World Bank-funded programs and Dutch-funded initiatives, enhancing collaboration through contracts and agreements to optimize synergies and cost-efficiency. Finally, Soil Values will play a catalytic role in implementing field activities with local partners, providing small grants and subcontracts to support their efforts.

## 5.4 Risk Assessment and Anticipated Mitigation Measures

Updating the risk matrix was a crucial activity carried out in 2024. This task allowed the identification and assessment of the various risks that could impact program success. The risk analysis revealed three primary categories of risks: contextual risks, programmatic risks, and institutional risks (see 2025 Work Plan).

*Contextual risks* encompass external factors that lie beyond the program's control but could still significantly affect its implementation. These include geopolitical issues, such as terrorism and political instability, which could create a volatile environment; natural disasters, which could disrupt activities and resources; economic shifts, such as inflation or recession, which

could alter funding availability and priorities; and tensions over resource distribution, which could lead to conflicts that could affect the program's operations in the region.

*Programmatic risks*, on the other hand, refer to challenges directly related to the program's objectives and implementation. These include difficulties in gaining sufficient stakeholder buy-in, where key partners or communities may not fully engage with or support the program. Poor coordination among partners, delays in decision-making, or misalignment of objectives can also hinder progress and diminish the program's effectiveness. Such risks could ultimately undermine the achievement of the intervention goals and result in less impact.

*Institutional risks* are those that arise from within the program itself. These include potential budget overruns, unexpected funding cuts, or even program cancellations due to changes in priorities or political will. Additionally, staff turnover or loss of key personnel could disrupt operations, while reputational risks, such as negative public perception or media coverage, could damage trust in the program and its ability to execute its goals. These internal factors are vital to address to maintain smooth operations and ensure the program's long-term sustainability.

To mitigate these risks and strengthen resilience, the program has adopted a range of proactive measures, including contingency planning and adaptive management strategies. These measures help the program remain flexible and responsive to changing circumstances. Given the complex political context in Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali, the risk matrix will be regularly updated to reflect new developments, ensuring that the implementation approach can be adjusted as needed to address emerging risks and challenges effectively.

Annex 6 details a "what if" risk analysis and outlines potential scenarios and corresponding mitigation measures. This analysis anticipates various risks that could impact program implementation, such as security threats, policy changes, or stakeholder disengagement. By identifying these risks in advance, the program ensures adaptability and resilience, allowing for timely adjustments to strategies and resource allocation.

## 5.5 Security/Conflict Assessment Report and Training

Soil Values consortium members IFDC and SNV have updated important security documents, such as country-specific security plans, evacuation plans, and risk assessments, in all four focus countries to align with the evolving regional security context. Basic security training was provided to staff, and joint coordination meetings were held between the IFDC and SNV security teams at both country and global levels. The security officers of both organizations also organized joint activities to establish common security procedures and promote a harmonized approach across the consortium. In higher-risk areas like Burkina Faso, Nigeria, and Niger, physical office security was strengthened through building assessments and the installation of closed-circuit television (CCTV) systems, fire extinguishers, enhanced lighting, and improved access control. The consortium also established strategic links with international security networks, such as the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS), United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), International NGO Safety Organization (INSO), Partner Liaison Security Operations (PLSO), and the Global Interagency Security Forum (GISF), to receive timely information, anticipate emerging threats, and ensure adherence to global security standards, ultimately fostering a resilient and well-prepared team across the program.

## 5.6 Communications and Outreach

In 2024, a range of activities were carried out as part of a comprehensive communication strategy aimed at ensuring strong visibility for DGIS, Soil Values, its coalition partners, and external partners, while promoting strategic and positive changes in the implementation countries. The strategy focused on raising awareness and advocating for the integration of soil fertility and health into the broader development agenda in the Sahel. To enhance visibility, a logo, graphic charter elements, and the communication strategy were developed, along with media coverage, multimedia content, digital communication, and physical events to effectively reach diverse audiences and leverage opportunities.

The program also completed the branding of all its offices in focus countries and extended this effort to its strategic countries (Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana) to further boost visibility and reach. These strategic corridor countries will play a key role in dialogues about the south-north trade of fertilizers and regional food security to ensure regional coherence. The communication team worked on internal communication to align with the program's broader goals, keeping the internal team informed and fostering a sense of belonging. The program regularly shares updates covering events, activities, and agricultural developments, primarily in its focus countries. Additionally, two newsletters featuring highlights from the program, were published: "Advancing Soil Health and Fertility in the Sahel" and the second "Reflecting on a Year of Growth."

Throughout the year, Soil Values worked to strengthen its presence among partners (ministries, agricultural directorates, etc.) in both focus and strategic countries. Various physical communication materials were provided, such as banners, posters, and informational documents. During Soil Values events, communication was made in local languages to reach farmers through local radio stations. For digital communication, the program leveraged coalition members' web platforms and social media to share information, ensuring that all materials consistently acknowledged the donor and coalition members (Figure 8).

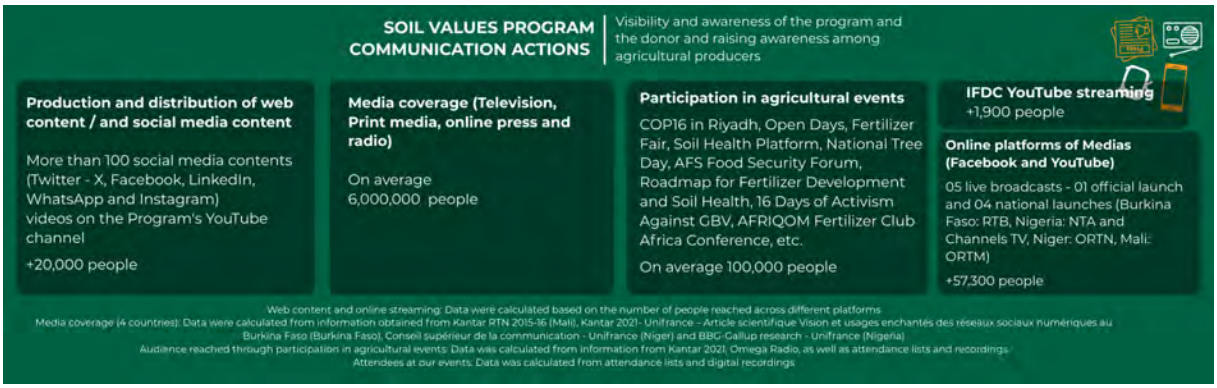



***Figure 8. Overview of communications products and reach***

# 6 Results-Based Monitoring and Evaluation

During 2024, the Soil Values program developed a comprehensive Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) plan to guide impact assessment and track progress. While the document has already been submitted to DGIS, it is still being refined and will include findings from the baseline study (baseline values and targets). This plan outlines the program's ToC, objectives, intervention areas, and key performance indicators, along with data collection and management methods. Initial activities focused on establishing the MEL system, defining evaluation

approaches, and developing tools to measure progress and changes. Baseline studies were initiated to set reference values and targets, ensuring meaningful tracking of changes and improvements through the key indicators. The MEL plan further outlines monitoring and evaluation schedules, learning and adaptation strategies, reporting mechanisms, and budget requirements, providing a robust and comprehensive framework for assessing and enhancing program impact.



***Photo 9. Discussions with farmers in Niger on the use of agricultural technologies, July 2024***

## 6.1 Key Indicators

The Soil Values program employs key impact indicators to assess its contributions to soil fertility enhancement, agricultural resilience strengthening, and sustainable resource management. These indicators track economic gains, yield improvements, technology adoption, and the support platforms effectiveness while monitoring progress in closing yield gaps, enhancing agroecological resilience, and promoting sustainable land and water management. An ongoing baseline study will establish reference values and targets, ensuring effective measurement of progress and impact in the Sahel (see indicator table in Annex 7).

To align with the new Netherlands policy guidelines, the Soil Values program is considering revising its indicators to incorporate measures of change related to food and nutrition security, as well as youth entrepreneurship. Data will be collected to establish a solid baseline, laying the groundwork for evaluating these changes over time.

## 6.2 Results and Changes Measurement

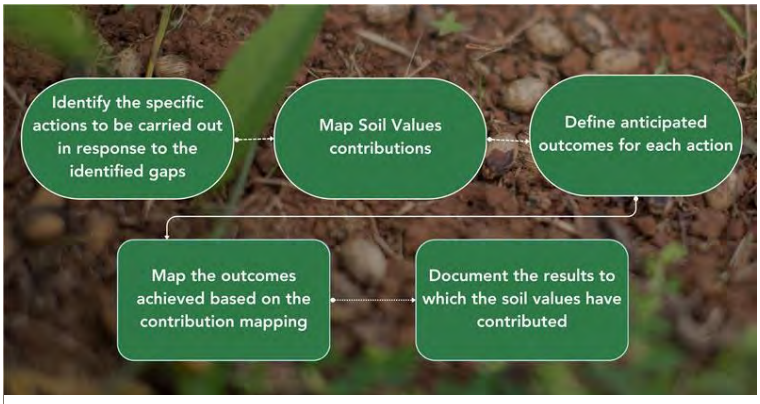



***Figure 9. Contribution mapping process***

Soil Values will implement a contribution-based approach to assess its impact through strategic alignment and collaboration with national programs that target the same beneficiaries. By mapping complementary activities, particularly in sustainable soil management, the program will track both short-term and long-term changes (Figure 9). Methods such as qualitative comparative analysis, outcome harvesting, and baseline/endline studies will measure contributions over a 10-year period. The contribution mapping process involves defining key actions, identifying complementary activities, setting benchmarks, tracking achievements, and systematically documenting results. It will also account for partner roles and contractual agreements to ensure alignment with expected outcomes.

## 6.3 Outcome Harvesting

Outcome harvesting in Soil Values focuses on identifying, verifying, and analyzing outcomes to assess the program's real impact. By adapting traditional evaluation methods, both anticipated and emergent changes in behavior, practices, and activities among stakeholders can be captured. The process involves collecting verifiable, GESI-sensitive evidence through interviews, surveys, and observations. Then, Soil Values' contribution to these changes can be evaluated using a participatory approach. Finally, feedback is solicited from stakeholders to validate findings, enhance learning, and improve decision-making for more effective interventions.

## 6.4 Baseline Data

The Soil Values baseline study, now in its final stages, provides essential benchmarks for measuring progress and impact. It captures the socio-economic, cultural, and environmental context specific to each country, ensuring adaptive strategies align with local realities. The study evaluates farmers' knowledge and practices, farmland conversion, landscape sustainability, economic indicators for smallholder farmers, initial crop yields, and agroecological resilience. It also assesses the adoption of soil and water management interventions, technology packages, and financial instruments supporting long-term soil fertility investments.

To ensure a standardized and comprehensive data collection process, a structured survey questionnaire was developed. This questionnaire covered key aspects that cut across the five Soil Values intervention areas, including household demographics, land tenure, agricultural production, climate resilience, farm management practices, tree and water resource management, and gender inclusion. Four consultancy firms were engaged to conduct the survey across priority countries, using a statistically robust sampling strategy. The sample size was calculated to ensure reliable representation of small-scale food farmers managing soil fertility using a standard formula, considering a 95% confidence level ($z=1.96$), an assumed proportion of 0.5, a 2.5% margin of error, a design effect of 2, and a 10% non-response rate. As a result,

the final sample size made at watershed level (Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso) and state level (Nigeria) composed of individual farmers was 803 for Mali, 694 for Burkina Faso, 753 for Niger, and 1,450 for Nigeria.

The Soil Values MEL team established a monitoring approach to supervise data collection, ensuring accuracy and reliability. Preliminary findings from the baseline study are available but are currently being validated. These findings will provide critical insights to refine interventions, enhance program effectiveness, and guide decision-making for sustainable agricultural resilience.

### 6.5 Progress on IATI Publication for the Soil Values Activity

During 2024, Soil Values was successfully registered and published on the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) platform. All required elements were completed and captured in the IATI activity file, ensuring alignment with reporting standards (see official IATI platform). The activity is accessible on the AidStream platform for authorized stakeholders under the identifier US-EIN-63-0676451-XM-DAC-7-PPR-4000007248 but is also publicly visible on both d-portal and METIS, enhancing transparency and visibility for partners and stakeholders.

The financial report for 2024 has been completed in full. This includes the entry of all relevant transactions, such as disbursements, incoming funds, and incoming commitments. These records ensure a clear and accountable financial trail for the fiscal year. The transaction data for 2025 will be uploaded once the information becomes available and is verified for accuracy.

Regarding results reporting, the activity has been populated in the system with its intended outcomes, impacts, and associated indicators. Although baseline values are available, they have not yet been entered into the system. Similarly, target values for the indicators are currently pending entry. This is due to ongoing multi-stakeholder validation processes aimed at reaching consensus on realistic and context-specific targets. This cautious and participatory approach ensures that the baseline and target values remain credible, and reflective of field realities.

Some program documents have also been uploaded to the platform, including the program proposal, the validated inception report, and the validated 2024 work plan and budget.

This progress marks an important step in ensuring that the Soil Values program adheres to best practices in data transparency, accountability, and results-based management.

## 7 Insights and Reflections from Year 1 and Outlook

### 7.1 Insights and Lessons

The Year 1 inception phase offered valuable insights into the multi-country, multi-stakeholder, and multi-disciplinary dimensions of the Soil Values program, highlighting the importance of realistic planning, adaptive management, and inclusive coordination for its success.

- Realistic timelines are critical. The initial six-month inception phase proved insufficient for full contextual adaptation, stakeholder onboarding, and harmonized understanding of the program’s foundational principles across coalition partners, leading to delays in implementation.

- Effective governance and coordination mechanisms are vital. The creation of focal points in Ministries of Agriculture significantly improved communication and alignment between Soil Values, FSRP teams, and national governments.
- Clear and timely site selection processes help accelerate partner engagement and local buy-in.
- Transparent internal communication requires time and deliberate relationship-building, especially in a program spanning four countries and multiple institutions.
- Integrated planning and contingency budgeting are essential to mitigating unforeseen delays and maintaining strategic alignment.
- Foundational assessments such as the ex-ante analysis, climate risk mapping, and participatory diagnostics were critical for understanding local conditions and shaping future interventions.
- Cross-cutting integration across the five intervention areas must be strengthened to ensure coherence and sustainability of impact.

## 7.2 Challenges

The program faced several critical challenges during its first year of implementation, which collectively rendered the initial work plan overly ambitious for the remaining time frame and required adaptive adjustments to maintain momentum.

- *Short inception phase:* A key challenge was the short inception phase of six months, which proved insufficient to establish a solid foundation for the smooth implementation of preparatory activities. Given the innovative nature of the Soil Values approach, the brief inception period did not allow adequate time for thorough stakeholder engagement, harmonized understanding of Soil Values fundamentals, partnership building and alignment, and contextual adaptation. This limited window of time constrained the program's ability to fully prepare its actors and systems, affecting the pace and coherence of early implementation.
- *Limited stakeholder understanding of the program approach:* A major challenge was the varied and often limited understanding of the program's innovative approach among coalition members and implementing partners. The absence of a shared vision led to misalignment and slow coordination, decision-making, and the effective rollout of inception activities. Uncertainty around the program's objectives and methodology affected early momentum and fostered ongoing engagement and clarification to build ownership and ensure coherent implementation.
- *Delays in formalizing partnerships*: Delays in establishing partnerships, particularly with regional actors, such as World Bank-funded programs, hindered the timely development of collaborative plans and field-level activities. Although the FSRP teams were actively engaged in all major Soil Values technical workshops and events, the approval and formalization of collaborations experienced delays due to bureaucratic processes and the evolving political situation in the Sahelian countries. Additionally, coordination between the Ministries of Agriculture in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger was challenged by shifting policy orientations, with governmental authorities increasingly requesting physical investments over soft interventions and skills like capacity building. These factors collectively delayed the formalization of partnership, disrupted planning, and affected the overall timely rollout of critical program activities.

- *Difficulties in establishing collaboration with the World Bank's country offices*: Establishing collaboration with World Bank country offices faced challenges due to limited responsiveness, which significantly delayed the formalization of partnerships with FSRP initiatives. Although the FSRP teams demonstrated strong commitment, they consistently emphasized the need for formal no-objection clearances from the World Bank to move forward with joint and collaborative field activities, further slowing progress.
- *Data access issues*: Soil Values faced significant issues in accessing essential data, either due to its unavailability from partner programs or a reluctance to share it. Notable examples include the absence of baseline data in Nigeria and Mali and partners' hesitance to provide geospatial data critical for watershed selection and characterization.

## 7.3 Mitigation and Adaptive Measures

In response to the challenges, program management adopted a range of adaptive and mitigation strategies to strengthen alignment, stakeholder engagement, and program coherence:

- Monthly coalition partner meetings were instituted to foster a shared vision, harmonize understanding of the program objectives and approach, and ensure consistent alignment with program goals.
- Technical partnership agreements were signed with the national partner programs and high-level dialogues with the World Bank at the country level and Ministries of Agriculture were held to streamline agreements.
- Several high-level dialogue and technical meetings were held between Soil Values and national partner programs (FSRP initiatives, ACReSAL, Pro-ARIDES, etc.) and related technical teams at the country level were organized to discuss synergy and complementary activities.
- Baseline studies were launched independently to fill key data gaps where FSRP information was unavailable or incomplete.
- Monthly program staff and partner meetings were introduced to regularly monitor implementation and take timely corrective actions. These measures not only mitigated timeline risks but also strengthened stakeholders' resilience for future phases, turning initial obstacles into opportunities for process optimization and deeper stakeholder engagement.

## 7.4 Strategic Perspectives for Year 2 and Beyond

Building on Year 1 achievements and lessons, Soil Values will advance strategic priorities in 2025, setting the stage for achieving its long-term goals by strengthening impact, deepening integration, and aligning evolving geopolitical and policy contexts.

- Soil Values implementation governance and monitoring: Implementation monitoring committees will be established at country level; potential members include Ministries of Agriculture, FSRP teams, the private sector, and producer organizations.
- Soil Values will engage concurrently with World Bank Task Team Leaders at national and regional levels and with the Program Implementation Units of the FSRP. Regular coordination meetings will be established to ensure strategic alignment.
- Bundling and integrating: Bundling and integrating efforts will focus on strengthening service packages by integrating the private sector through robust GESI-responsive business models, while leveraging watershed plans to establish climate-smart villages that

sustainably mainstream soil health and fertility management toward building climate resilience.

- Soil Values will continue supporting implementation of the AFSH Summit recommendations and Lomé Declaration while deepening strategic partnerships, policy advocacy, and collaborative regional integration with regional institutions, including ECOWAS, West and Central African Council for Agricultural Research and Development (CORAF), and Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) .
- Brokering: The focus will be on strengthening partnerships to boost stakeholder engagement, completing a financial assessment to develop tailored financial products, and launching capacity building initiatives. Building on current initiatives, new collaboration opportunities will be actively pursued to leverage additional funding and broaden the program's scope through complementary interventions. In parallel, the program will explore opportunities to integrate carbon benefits, with continued discussions, such as those with Rabobank, aimed at incorporating climate finance into soil health and land restoration efforts. This approach will help ensure that the Soil Values program can continue to make a lasting impact on soil health and land restoration across the targeted regions.
- Convening: Efforts will be made to ensure Soil Values representation on national, regional, and international platforms, including at least one major forum. These convenings will provide an opportunity to showcase the program's progress, exchange ideas, engage with global stakeholders, and stimulate leveraging and program development opportunities. By sharing lessons learned and best practices, the program's visibility and influence can be amplified, while building strategic partnerships will extend the impact of the Soil Values initiatives in Africa and beyond.
- Scoping and learning: Enrolling and training Ph.D. students in priority research areas will help keep Soil Values at the forefront of innovative soil health research. Advisory support will ensure alignment with the program's goals and address key knowledge gaps to boost technology adoption.
- Pastoralism: Pastoralism will be a key focus of 2025 activities, with initiatives such as the regeneration of grazing areas, promotion of dual-purpose crop varieties, and introduction of improved fodder species. Dedicated baseline studies on pastoralism, conflict, and migration will inform these efforts, ensuring context-specific interventions. A doctoral thesis on pastoral systems, identified in 2024 and set to begin in 2025, will also be supported to advance research and foster innovation in pastoralism and agropastoralism.
- Other cross-cutting points: Looking ahead, Soil Values will make deliberate efforts to raise additional resources for addressing soil health issues by co-designing collaborative projects with partnered organizations and institutions. This proactive approach will help to leverage the financial support necessary to scale the program and maintain momentum toward its ambitious goals, including improving the livelihoods of 1.5 million people and restoring 2 million hectares of degraded landscapes.
- Full integration of the GESI strategy and priority actions in the intervention areas: Building on the ongoing GESI strategy, Soil Values will ensure its full integration across all intervention areas in 2025. This includes mainstreaming inclusive approaches in implementation, strengthening partner capacity, promoting equitable access to services, and generating disaggregated data to inform adaptive management and policy engagement.

# 8 Financial Report

The approved budget for 2024 was €9,889,819. However, based on the unaudited Financial Monitoring Report, the program utilized only €5,813,362, or 58.8%, of the planned budget. Summaries of the budget utilization by cost category, country, intervention area, and coalition members are presented in Tables 7-10.

***Table 7. Summary of the budget utilization (€) by major cost category***

| Cost Category | Total Budget for the Program | 2024 Planned Budget | 2024 Utilized Budget | Remaining Budget |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Staffing | 35,859,322 | 3,336,575 | 2,385,373 | 33,473,949 |
| Activity | 40,900,551 | 3,704,400 | 1,938,333 | 38,962,218 |
| Office Operation | 10,527,312 | 1,604,146 | 787,210 | 9,740,102 |
| Indirect cost/OH | 12,712,815 | 1,244,697 | 702,446 | 12,010,369 |
| Total | **100,000,000** | **9,889,818** | **5,813,362** | **94,186,638** |

***Table 8. Summary of the budget utilization (€) by country***

| Country | Total Budget for the Program | 2024 Planned Budget | 2024 Utilized Budget | Remaining Budget |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Burkina Faso | 20,512,966 | 3,955,927.20 | 1,779,818 | 18,733,148 |
| Mali | 19,891,749 | 1,977,963.60 | 1,263,161 | 18,628,588 |
| Niger | 22,435,381 | 1,977,963.60 | 1,308,511 | 21,126,870 |
| Nigeria | 37,159,905 | 1,977,963.60 | 1,461,873 | 35,698,032 |
| Total | **100,000,000** | **9,889,818** | **5,813,362** | **94,186,638** |

***Table 9. Summary of the budget utilization (€) by intervention area***

| Intervention Area | Total Budget for the Program | 2024 Planned Budget | 2024 Utilized Budget | Remaining Budget |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bundling | 31,425,431 | 3,107,380.82 | 1,826,558.34 | 29,598,872.66 |
| Integrate | 30,006,985 | 2,966,945.40 | 1,744,008.60 | 28,262,976.40 |
| Brokering | 15,330,592 | 1,516,109.10 | 891,188.39 | 14,439,403.51 |
| Convene | 16,606,182 | 1,642,698.76 | 965,599.43 | 15,640,582.57 |
| Scoping & Learning | 6,630,811 | 656,683.92 | 386,007.24 | 6,244,803.76 |
| Total | **100,000,000** | **9,889,818** | **5,813,362** | **94,186,638** |

*Table 10. Summary of the budget utilization (€) by coalition member*

| Coalition member | Total Budget for 2024 | 2024 Utilized Budget | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| IFDC | 5,809,060 | 3,905,194 | 67.2% |
| SNV | 2,089,544 | 929,449 | 44.5% |
| WUR | 588,920 | 249,709 | 42.4% |
| AGRA | 328,668 | 117,221 | 35.7% |
| ICRAF-CIFOR | 238,516 | 129,832 | 54.4% |
| IITA | 416,600 | 183,038 | 43.9% |
| ISRIC | 137,523 | 131,537 | 95.6% |
| IWMI | 280,987 | 167,382 | 59.6% |
| Total | **9,889,818** | **5,813,362** | **58.8%** |

There were intertwined factors behind the 41.2% underspending of the program in 2024. The following is a discussion of the critical reasons by cost category.

**Staffing**: Staffing was underspent by 28.5%. This was caused by the long recruitment process for national staff across the four countries by IFDC and SNV. Given the fragile environment in the region, it was challenging to find candidates with the appropriate qualifications for each post; hence, some positions were advertised for an extended period of time. The knowledge partners were also challenged by the fact that senior staff who were supposed to formulate strategies for Soil Values were already engaged in other programs, and it took a considerable amount of time to reassign them. The combination of these factors resulted in underspending of €951,202 for the staffing line.

**Activities**: Soil Values ended the year with 47.6% underspending on activities. Two factors contributed to this. First, Soil Value proposed an innovative way of implementing a development program – working with and through existing institutions and programs in West Africa to catalyze further investment to ensure sustainable soil management in the region. This came with a complicated project implementation design. Bringing in World Bank, ECOWAS, and other major partners took more time than anticipated, and designing specific activities per targeted watershed required a deeper analysis than expected. Since the program operates with a long-term vision, rather than capitalizing on short-term quick wins, a deliberate decision was made to take the necessary time to design an efficient implementation mechanism. The delay in staff recruitment also contributed to the slow start of activities in the field.

**Operations**: Starting program implementation in a gradual manner meant the associated costs of operations to support the program were lower than expected. Operation costs were underspent by 50%.

**Indirect costs**: Indirect costs are derived from the direct project costs (staffing and activities) and operation costs. Because the program underspent in all these cost categories, there was also underspending (43.6%) on indirect costs (both in-country and global overhead costs).

# 9 Conclusion

The first year of implementation has been pivotal in building a strong and strategic foundation for the Soil Values program. Across its four result areas and five intervention domains, the program has made substantial progress in establishing the systems, partnerships, evidence base,

and institutional frameworks necessary to deliver on its long-term vision: improved livelihoods and resilience for 1.5 million small-scale food producers and the sustainable restoration of 2 million hectares of land across the Sahel.

Through a combination of rigorous diagnostics, stakeholder-driven planning, capacity building, and early piloting, the program has ensured that its 2025 interventions will be both evidence-based and community-grounded. Alignment with national programs, such as FSRP, ACReSAL, and Pro-ARIDES, along with strategic partnerships across private, public, and civil society actors, has amplified the program's reach and potential for systemic change. Engagements with regional bodies and continental platforms are currently elevating soil fertility as a strategic development issue, while participatory processes and the development of GESI-sensitive tools have positioned inclusivity and equity at the heart of implementation.

Looking ahead, Soil Values is well positioned to transition from groundwork to scale. Activities in 2025 will focus on intensifying field implementation, scaling bundled services, deploying financial mechanisms, advancing research, and strengthening the enabling environment. The program will engage concurrently with World Bank Task Team Leaders and the Program Implementation Units to ensure strategic alignment.

With solid partnerships in place, strategic direction clarified, and operational systems activated, Soil Values stands ready to accelerate impact in the coming year. The foundation built in 2024 not only enables scale but ensures that future actions are context-specific, inclusive, and transformative, paving the way for a paradigm shift in sustainable soil management and agricultural resilience in the Sahel.