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Nidhi Paikra
M.Sc. Forestry, Department of Silviculture and Agroforestry, College of Forestry and Research Station, Mahatma Gandhi Udyanikee Evam Vanikee Vishwavidyalaya(MGUVV), Sankara, Patan, Durg, Chhattisgarh, India

Dr. Yamini Baghel
Assistant Professor, Department of Silviculture and Agroforestry, College of Forestry and Research Station, Mahatma Gandhi Udyanikee Evam Vanikee Vishwavidyalaya(MGUVV), Sankara, Patan, Durg, Chhattisgarh, India

Tanu Sahu
M.Sc. Forestry, Department of Silviculture and Agroforestry, College of Forestry and Research Station, Mahatma Gandhi Udyanikee Evam Vanikee Vishwavidyalaya(MGUVV), Sankara, Patan, Durg, Chhattisgarh, India

Pragya Chandrakar
M.Sc. Forestry, Department of Silviculture and Agroforestry, College of Forestry and Research Station, Mahatma Gandhi Udyanikee Evam Vanikee Vishwavidyalaya(MGUVV), Sankara, Patan, Durg, Chhattisgarh, India

Corresponding Author:
Nidhi Paikra
M.Sc. Forestry, Department of Silviculture and Agroforestry, College of Forestry and Research Station, Mahatma Gandhi Udyanikee Evam Vanikee Vishwavidyalaya(MGUVV), Sankara, Patan, Durg, Chhattisgarh, India

Agroforestry systems: A sustainable approach to land use rural development

Nidhi Paikra, Yamini Baghel, Tanu Sahu and Pragya Chandrakar

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Abstract
Agroforestry is a method of managing land usage that includes crops, livestock, and trees and shrubs on the same piece of land. There are several ecological, financial, and societal advantages to this strategy, which replicates natural ecosystems. Reducing erosion, increasing soil fertility, improving biodiversity, and sequestering carbon help mitigate climate change and promote sustainable agriculture. Agroforestry has significant advantages for the environment, but it also helps to improve rural livelihoods by enhancing food security and diversifying sources of income, especially in developing nations. This review aims to critically analyze how agroforestry systems serve to advance rural development and sustainable land use. The purpose of this research is to review the literature to emphasize the ecological roles, socioeconomic effects, adoption barriers, and policy frameworks related to agroforestry, focusing on how it might help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Agroforestry enhances environmental sustainability through biodiversity improvement, water regulation, and soil protection. It contributes to food and nutritional security by offering a variety of revenue sources (such as fruit, timber, fodder, and medicinal plants), hence diversifying rural livelihoods. In addition to increasing climatic resilience, agroforestry helps mitigate climate change by sequestering large amounts of carbon. Agroforestry systems have several advantages, but a lack of market access, legislative gaps, land ownership concerns, and low awareness hampers their implementation. Supportive policies, institutional structures, and farmer-centered extension services are necessary to scale the adoption of agroforestry.

Keywords: Agroforestry, sustainable land use, rural development, climate change mitigation, carbon sequestration

Introduction
Agroforestry is a comprehensive term encompassing land-use systems where woody perennials like trees, shrubs, and bamboos are cultivated alongside herbaceous plants such as crops, Pasture, and/or livestock. (Bargah *et al.,* 2024) [2]. It is recognized for its dense forests and significant biodiversity, earning it the designation of a "green state (Bargah *et al.,* 2024) [2]. Agroforestry is a distinctive and sustainable land-use system that blends tree management and cultivation with agricultural methods. It combines the benefits of forestry and agriculture, offering several environmental, financial, and social advantages for society (Singh *et al.,* 2021) [25]. Agroforestry is described by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) as "a dynamic, ecologically based, natural resources management system" that increases the social, economic, and environmental benefits for land users at all levels by diversifying and maintaining productivity through the incorporation of trees on farms and in the agricultural landscape. The intentional planting of trees in agricultural settings to optimize land use, increase productivity, and encourage environmental preservation is known as agroforestry. Agroforestry is based on the cooperation of trees with agricultural components such as crops and cattle. In addition to providing shade, trees in agroforestry systems also improve soil fertility, fix nitrogen, prevent erosion, serve as windbreaks, and produce important products like lumber, fruits, nuts, and medicinal plants. Groups like the International Council for Research in Agroforestry (ICRAF), now known as the World Agroforestry Center, were established as agroforestry's global awareness grew as environmental movements gathered momentum. According to Nair *et al*. (2021) [16], agroforestry is still evolving and changing to fit various circumstances.

Carbon sequestration, biodiversity conservation, and climate change adaptation all depend on it. Governments and international organizations increasingly highlight agroforestry's importance in agroecological systems and sustainable development goals. Developing agroforestry techniques and historical perspectives demonstrate its enduring significance and promise as a sustainable land management strategy. In farming systems, agroforestry has been a powerful tool to address environmental, social, and economic problems since the beginning of civilization.

Importance and Objectives of Agroforestry

The importance of agroforestry in the modern era cannot be overstated. While the world's population is growing, so is the demand for food, lumber, and other forest products, but deforestation and conventional farming practices have led to soil degradation, biodiversity loss, and climate change, posing significant challenges to sustainable development. Agroforestry's objectives include:

- **Improving Biodiversity:** Agroforestry systems provide a variety of habitats for wildlife, hence preserving endangered species and biodiversity.
- **Soil Health and Erosion Prevention:** Trees in agroforestry systems maintain soil structure and productivity by reducing soil erosion and improving soil fertility through nutrient cycling.
- **Mitigation of Climate Change:** Agroforestry helps lessen the effects of climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions associated with conventional farming practices and storing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere through tree growth.
- **Diversification of Revenue Sources:** Agroforestry helps farmers become more financially robust by combining different products such as fruits, nuts, lumber, and medicinal herbs to provide a variety of revenue streams.
- **Increased Food Security:** Agroforestry increases food security by providing a consistent supply of a range of foods, especially in regions that are vulnerable to climate change.
- **Sustainable Livelihoods:** Agroforestry systems can reduce migration to urban areas by providing rural communities with sustainable livelihoods and employment possibilities.
- **Cultural and Traditional Values:** Agroforestry frequently contributes to the identity and well-being of local people by conserving cultural and traditional knowledge about resource management and land use.

Table 1: Agroforestry systems and practices

Types of agroforestry system	Description
Alley cropping	Involves planting rows of trees or shrubs at wide spacings with an agricultural or horticultural crop grown in the spaces between the rows.
Silvopasture	Integrates domesticated animal grazing with forestry on a single piece of land. In addition to being managed for timber, trees give the pasture and animals below shade and protection.
Forest farming	Includes raising valuable specialized crops beneath the cover of a regulated forest canopy. Shiitake mushrooms, ginseng, and ornamental ferns are a few examples.
Windbreaks or shelterbelts	Tree or shrub rows are planted to shield cattle, crops, and soil from wind. Additionally, it can enhance crop microclimates, regulate snow deposition, and provide habitat for wildlife.
Riparian buffers	The presence of vegetation, such as trees, shrubs, and grasses, close to rivers and streams helps shade them and shields them from the effects of nearby land activities. They offer wildlife habitat and enhance the quality of the water.
Multi-strata agroforestry	With several layers of trees, shrubs, and crops growing together, these intricate systems, also called "home gardens" or "food forests," replicate natural forests.

Benefits of Agroforestry

Ecological Benefits

Biodiversity Enhancement

Agroforestry systems give plants and animals various habitats, enhancing biodiversity. The stability of the ecosystem is supported by this increased variety, which guarantees that different species are available to carry outecologicalresponsibilities and react to environmental changes.

Soil Health and Erosion Control: In agroforestry systems, trees are essential for preserving the health of the soil. Their vast root systems bind the soil, preventing wind and water erosion. Tree leaves improve nitrogen cycling and water retention by contributing organic matter that improves soil fertility and structure (Murthy *et al*. 2013) [14].

Climate Change Mitigation: Through the sequestration of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, agroforestry helps mitigate the effects of climate change. Trees decrease greenhouse gas emissions because they store carbon in the soil and in their biomass. Because agroforestry systems absorb carbon, they lessen the effects of global warming and climate change.

Socio-economic benefits

Diversification of Income Sources: Diversifying income sources for farmers is one of the major economic benefits of agroforestry. By combining a range of tree crops, including fruits, nuts, timber, and medicinal herbs, with traditional crops and livestock, agroforestry offers multiple revenue streams, which helps farmers reduce risks related tomarket volatility and climate variability.

Improved Land Productivity: Agroforestry makes effective use of the resources that are available to increase land production. Trees give animals and crops cover and shade, which lessens heat and water stress and can improve livestock production and crop yields.

Sustainable Forest Product Harvesting: Certain agroforestry systems cultivate trees for fuelwood, lumber, and other forest products. Through selected harvesting methods and long-term tree cultivation, agroforestry practices provide sustainable forest management.

Food Security and Nutrition: The combination of trees and crops offers a year-round supply of food, lowering the vulnerability of populations to seasonal fluctuations and

guaranteeing a balanced diet. Agroforestry systems also boost nutrition and food security by offering various food products. Seed germination is the initial step in the life cycle of plants, which begins when the inactive dry seed imbibes water and is completed with the protrusion of the radicle from the seed coat (Bargah *et al.,* 2025) [4].

Enhanced Livelihoods for Rural Communities: Agroforestry helps farmers and their families make more money, which helps sustain rural livelihoods. When tree-based goods are included in agricultural methods, it facilitates the creation of jobs and business prospects in sectors including nut harvesting, fruit processing, and the lumber industry (Bangarwa and Sirohi 2017) [1].

Cultural and Traditional Values

Cultural and traditional methods of managing natural resources and land usage are frequently embodied in agroforestry. These systems are extremely valuable cultural assets for indigenous people that preserve theirspirituality, wisdom, and legacyties to the land.

Agroforestry Livestock Integration

The deliberate coexistence of trees, crops, andgrazing animals on the same plot of land is known as agroforestry livestock integration, or silvopastoral systems. This integration promotes ecological synergies and offers several benefits for the environment and farmers' livelihoods, claim Chaurasia *et al.* (2022) [7].

Table 2: Policy and Institutional Support

Policy	Institutional	
Government Initiatives and Support	Policy Formulation Financial Incentives Extension Services	Governments may play a major role in agroforestry development by enacting legislation that recognizes and promotes the use of trees in agriculture. Governments can finance agroforestry initiatives through grants, low-interest loans, and reimbursements for planting, maintaining, and preparing land for trees. Information exchange and technical support for agroforestry practices depend on improving agricultural extension services.
International Organizations and Funding	Capacity Building Financial Support Policy Advocacy	International organizations can support capacity-building efforts by providing training, workshops, and knowledge-sharing programs. Initiatives involving agroforestry in developing countries may qualify for funding from funding agencies and international organizations. International organizations can advocate the inclusion of agroforestry in climate change agreements and global policy frameworks.

Challenges and Constraints: Although agroforestry has many benefits, several issues and barriers could keep it from being broadly accepted. Understanding these challenges is essential to creating effective plans to promote and support agroforestry practices (Sharma *et al.,* 2017) [25]. The following are the primary challenges and barriers to agroforestry implementation.

Table 3: The Challenges and Constraints in Agroforestry Implementation

Challenges	Implementation consideration/Solution
Land tenure and ownership	For agroforestry practitioners, securing land tenure and ownership rights is a significant challenge. Uncertain land titles, disputed claims, and ambiguous land tenure regulations may discourage farmers from supporting long-term agroforestry projects.
Knowledge and technical support	Many farmers are unaware of the potential benefits of agroforestry systems. In many cases, installing an agroforestry system requires certain technical expertise and experience. Inadequate access to training, extension services, and technical help may hinder the adoption of agroforestry practices.
Market assessment and value chains	There may be problems with market accessibility for agroforestry products such tree fruits, nuts, and lumber. Agroforestry products may not sell well due to inadequate infrastructure, poor transportation, and limited market connections.
Policy and legal constraints	Insufficient or contradictory laws and regulations may seriously hamper agroforestry implementation. There may be limited support and incentives for agroforestry because some forestry and agriculture regulations do not fully acknowledge it as a valid land-use system.
Financial and investment challenges	Agroforestry initiatives frequently call for upfront costs, and results might not be immediately seen. Smallholder farmers may find it more difficult to invest in agroforestry if they lack access to financing and credit.
Agroforestry and Climate Change Adaptation	Agroforestry is essential to climate change adaptation since it provides a sustainable and climate-resilient farming method. Agroforestry is a crucial tactic for reducing the effects of climate change on agriculture and the environment and adjusting to its effects because of these characteristics (Quandt *et al.,* 2023) [21]
Agroforestry's Role in Climate-Resilient Farming	Diverse Agro Ecosystems Water Management Shade and Windbreaks Soil Fertility and Carbon Sequestration

Table 4: Agroforestry and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Agroforestry and SDG	Description
Agroforestry and SDG 1: No Poverty	Linkage: By giving rural populations access to more revenue streams and livelihood options, agroforestry aids in achieving SDG 1. Income streams are diversified by the incorporation of tree-based products such fruits, nuts, lumber, and medicinal plants strengthening economic resilience and lowering reliance on single crops. Impact: Agroforestry strengthens marginalized communities and smallholder farmers by providing sustainable and climate-resilient revenue-generating opportunities. Having access to a variety of sustainable livelihood opportunities aids in removing individuals from poverty and helps reduce poverty.
Agroforestry and SDG 2: Zero Hunger	Linkage: By enhancing nutrition and food security, agroforestry helps achieve SDG 2. A year-round food supply is ensured by integrating trees and a variety of crops, which also reduces seasonal food shortages and increases dietary diversity. Impact: Nuts, fruits, vegetables, and animal feed are only a handful of the numerous food items that agroforestry systems offer, enhancing dietary quality and reducing susceptibility to food crises.
Agroforestry and SDG 5: Gender Equality	Linkage: Agroforestry can contribute to the achievement of SDG 5 by promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. Women are usually essential to agroforestry operations because they manage tree nurseries, collect non-timber forest products, and participate in decision-making. Impact: By using agroforestry practices that recognize and appreciate their work, women in rural areas may improve their incomes, quality of life, and social status. Agroforestry initiatives have the potential to advance gender equality.
Agroforestry and SDG 13: Climate Action	Linkage: Agroforestry directly promotes SDG 13 by mitigating climate change through carbon sequestration and boosting climate resilience. Trees in agroforestry systems store carbon dioxide, acting as carbon sinks and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Impact: By improving carbon storage in trees and soils, agroforestry aids in the fight against climate change. Communities can better adapt to the effects of climate change thanks to the diversified agroecosystems, making farming more resilient to catastrophic weather events.
Agroforestry and SDG 15: Life on Land	Linkage: By encouraging sustainable land management and biodiversity conservation, agroforestry supports SDG 15. Numerous plant and animal species are supported by the varied ecosystems created when trees are incorporated into farming methods. Impact: By halting soil erosion, preserving watersheds, and repairing degraded areas, agroforestry supports conservation and land restoration initiatives.

Future Prospects and Recommendations

Research and Innovation: India has a significant demand for region-specific agroforestry research, given the country's different agro-ecological zones. This includes being aware of the appropriateness of different tree-crop combinations for varying soil and climate circumstances, (Teli 2020) [26]. Furthermore, research on the long-term ecological effects of agroforestry methods in India—such as biodiversity, water table levels, and soil health—is essential for their sustainable application. Technological developments like GIS and remote sensing for agroforestry system monitoring might be extremely important in India. These tools can help improve agroforestry operations' design, execution, and monitoring across various environments.

Policy and Practice Recommendations: Policy changes are crucial to promoting agroforestry in India. Policies that recognize and support are necessary. Unlike traditional forestry and agriculture, agroforestry is a unique land use system. Policies should also incentivize farmers to adopt agroforestry, including tree planting subsidies, and ensure that agroforestry products may be sold in markets. Furthermore, if the rules controlling the harvesting and transportation of agroforestry products were simplified, more farmers would incorporate trees into their farming operations.

Global and Local Collaboration: International cooperation is essential to developing agroforestry in India. Partnerships with international research institutions and groups can facilitate the exchange of knowledge, resources, and expertise. With this assistance, India can solve global concerns including food security, biodiversity loss, and climate change. In India, agroforestry's effectiveness depends on community engagement and local cooperation. The local population is a significant partner in agroforestry projects because they often possess traditional knowledge about native plants and sustainable land use practices.

Encouraging Agroforestry: Strategies for Implementation and Policy: The numerous benefits of agroforestry for climate change adaptation and sustainable land management make it essential to promote its broader adoption. This section discusses the primary methods for promoting agroforestry, such as government programs and support, international organizations and funding, community engagement and capacity building, research and innovation, and more (Pantera *et al.,* 2021) [20].

Policy	Implementation strategies
Government Initiatives and Support	Policy Formulation: By creating laws that acknowledge and encourage the use of trees in agriculture, governments may significantly contribute to the growth of agroforestry. Financial Incentives: Through grants, low-interest loans, and subsidies for tree planting, upkeep, and land preparation, governments can fund agroforestry projects. Extension Services: Enhancing agricultural extension services is essential for sharing information and providing technical assistance on agroforestry techniques
International Organizations and Funding	Capacity Building: International organizations offering workshops, training, and knowledge-sharing initiatives can aid capacity-building initiatives. Financial Support: Agroforestry initiatives in underdeveloped nations may be eligible for financial support from international organizations and funding agencies. Policy Advocacy: International organizations can push for agroforestry's inclusion in international climate change

	accords and policy frameworks.
Community Participation and Capacity Building	Local Ownership: For agroforestry initiatives to be successful and sustainable, local people must be included in their development and execution. Training and Education: By enhancing farmers' and community members' abilities through training programs on agroforestry practices, nursery management, and value addition, agroforestry systems will be easier to adopt and maintain. Social Inclusion: Promoting social engagement is crucial to ensuring equitable access to resources and the benefits of agroforestry initiatives, especially for women and marginalized communities.
Research and Innovation in Agroforestry	Scientific Research: Results from continuing studies on agroforestry practices, including those on carbon sequestration capability, tree-crop interactions, and ecosystem services, provide evidence for the advantages of agroforestry. Technology and Innovation: Fostering innovation and applying appropriate technology in agroforestry can lead to improved practices, such as climate-resilient tree species, efficient irrigation systems, and sustainable agroforestry management tools. Demonstration Sites: By creating agroforestry demonstration sites, farmers and communities can see successful models and be encouraged to follow suit. Public-Private Partnerships:. Agroforestry initiatives are guaranteed to be sustainable and advantageous for all parties involved when local organizations expand agroforestry projects worldwide.

Conclusion

Agroforestry, a complex and sustainable land management approach, is especially remarkable in its capacity to tackle essential problems relating to food insecurity, environmental protection, and the resilience of rural finances. By incorporating trees within agricultural landscapes, this practice not only promotes ecological resilience by improving soil quality, water retention, and biodiversity but also forms a robust basis for fighting climate change through carbon sequestration. Socioeconomic benefits are equally remarkable, as they offer diversified sources of income and enhanced food security to smallholder farmers, promoting resilience against market shocks and climatic upsets. All in all, agroforestry is a powerful approach congruent with world sustainability goals and portrays a clear trajectory toward a brighter, more productive, equitable, and environmentally friendly future.

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