

IASS ACCOMPANYING RESEARCH: SOIL PROTECTION AND REHABILITATION FOR FOOD SECURITY IN BENIN

Under its special initiative “One World, No Hunger” (SEWOH), the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) is prioritizing efforts to deliver food security and enhance the management of natural resources. The protection and rehabilitation of agricultural land managed by smallholder farmers are central to this dual agenda and form the objectives of a GIZ programme implemented in five countries. Seeking to explore new forms of development cooperation, SEWOH mandated the Global Soil Forum (GSF)

to accompany the work of the GIZ through transdisciplinary research. The accompanying research project focuses on the socio-economic and cultural factors that constrain the uptake of sustainable land management (SLM) techniques by smallholder farmers. The GSF’s approach stresses co-development and the pursuit of research themes with local partners, including researchers, policymakers, actors of development cooperation, civil society organisations, and farmers.

2015

April-October 2015: Project inception: Exploratory missions to Benin; interviews with farmers, researchers, project implementers, and policy-makers; focus group discussions (FGDs) with farmers in ProSOL (Projet GIZ “Protection et réhabilitation des sols pour améliorer la sécurité alimentaire”) intervention areas

November 2015-April 2016: Stock-taking phase: Impact Plus prepares an inventory of past SLM projects in the GIZ intervention area and a detailed analysis of 10 selected projects using interviews and focus group discussions with farmers and implementers

2016

April 2016: Four Lessons Learnt workshops in Northern and Southern intervention areas respectively, one with farmers who benefited from and one with institutional stakeholders who implemented SLM projects

May-December 2016: Co-development of research packages on: gender aspects; land tenure and SLM; factors impacting adoption of SLM technologies

July-October 2016: Socio-economic survey of 200 households in two ProSOL intervention villages in Northern Benin (close accompaniment of SLM technology roll-out)

2017

August-December 2016: Gender Study on SLM technology adoption and land governance

November 2016: African Soil Seminar in Nairobi; session on land governance co-hosted by GRAF, Synergie Paysanne and IASS Potsdam

Baseline Study

Objective: Learning from past experiences with SLM promotion in Benin

Partner: Cabinet Impact Plus

Guiding question: What were successes and challenges in past SLM promotion projects in Benin? What lessons can be learnt?

Focus areas: Selection of target groups; selection of SLM technologies; approaches to diffuse SLM technologies; enabling conditions for enhancing adoption; results, constraints and success of SLM technology diffusion

Method: Inventory of 36 projects with SLM components in total; in-depth analysis of 10 selected projects through interviews with project implementers and key informants and discussions with farmers

Findings:

Selection of SLM technologies

- Too much attention given to agro-ecological optimization of technologies too little to socio-cultural factors influencing adoption
- Despite efforts to enhance farmer participation in project development and technology selection, participation levels remain low, resulting in limited “ownership”

Approaches to diffuse SLM technologies

- Demonstration plots as the standard approach work well with model farmers, but outreach beyond these remains very limited.
- Diffusion strategies are not well designed and often rely on written communication tools despite high rates of illiteracy
- Much of the training is provided in a classroom setting, with little follow-up training in the field, despite a clear need for this among farmers

Adoption of SLM technologies

- Among leguminous plants only *cajanus cajan* (or pigeon pea) is easily adopted by farmers due to its nutritional and economic value
- Impact of soy as a leguminous crop on soil fertility is often not known to farmers
- Compost and manure is used only on plots near the house due to difficult access to transport facilities

Enabling conditions, in particular tenure security

- Women generally have user rights to land only through their male relatives and the land allocated is oftentimes of lower soil quality, with men using productive land for cash crops; when they successfully invest in soil productivity, women often risk losing their access rights
- Under customary law land tenants are prohibited to significantly improve the land they are leasing, as once they have increased the value of the land, they may claim ownership

Gender Study

Objectives: Identifying challenges faced by women and disadvantaged groups investing in SLM and opportunities to empower them to invest and be effectively and equally involved in SLM promoting initiatives

Partner: Cabinet Yara Obirin Dide (YOD)

Setting and methods: In-depth interviews and focus group discussions with female and male farmers as well as with key-informants, including village chiefs and leaders of farmer producer groups, in four villages in ProSOL intervention zone

Lessons Learnt Workshops

Objectives: Jointly drawing lessons from past SLM projects together with the stakeholders and farmers that were involved

Setting: A total of four Lessons Learnt workshops in Northern and Southern intervention areas respectively, one with farmers who benefited from and one with institutional stakeholders who implemented SLM projects

Guiding question: What works and what does not work in SLM promotion?

Method: Close analysis of ten projects through participatory workshop methods (break-out groups, World Café, etc.)

Outcomes: Three research axes identified by the stakeholders as essential for successful SLM promotion; to be pursued through co-designed research agendas:

- Socio-economic factors impacting adoption of SLM technologies
- Gender dimensions in land governance and sustainable land management
- Impact of land insecurity on SLM technology adoption

Collaborative Adoption Research

Objectives: To understand why farmers adopt or reject certain technologies and to provide GIZ with insights within the shortest possible timeframe by accompanying the rollout of SLM technologies

Partners: GIZ, IASS focal point Check Abdel Kader Baba and team of research assistants from the University of Parakou

Guiding question: Which socio-economic and cultural factors enable or hinder farmers’ uptake of technologies promoted by GIZ?

Setting and methods: Close accompaniment in two villages of ProSOL intervention area: Sinawongourou, Commune of Kandi, and Kabanon, Commune of Bembèrèkè; villages identified based on village selection tool that focuses on the level of community organization;

Focus and steps: First step: in-depth household survey identifying poverty and other socio-economic characteristics of 100 households per village; steps to follow: analysis of SLM technology perceptions, integration of gender study, and more