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STIMULATING COMMUNITY INITIATIVES IN SUSTAINABLE LAND MANAGEMENT (SCI-SLM)

SCI-SLM: Results and Lessons Learned



SCI-SLM Evaluation Country Visit with Kandiga Community, Ghana, 24 November 2015.

About the Project

The medium-sized project ‘SCI-SLM’ was implemented between September 2009 and December 2014. It sought to refine ways of stimulating the further improvement and spread of community-based sustainable land management initiatives while developing a methodology to upscale and institutionally embed SCI-SLM approaches at local and regional level in four African countries, namely South Africa, Uganda, Ghana and Morocco. This project was a GEF funded, UNEP implemented project. The project was coordinated by the University of KwaZulu-Natal’s Centre for Environment, Agriculture and Development (CEAD), where the Project Management Unit was based. CEAD was also the South Africa country implementer. The Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries implemented the project in Uganda, the University of Development Studies in Ghana, and the TARGA-Aide in Morocco. The Centre for International Cooperation of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam in the Netherlands provided methodological and technical support. The total budget of the project was USD 2, 095,572.00, of which USD 912,391.00 was GEF allocated, the remainder was co-financing from the four countries. This brief is a summarises the results and lessons learnt from the Terminal Evaluation Report of the SCI-SLM project.

Relevance

Combating land degradation is a key issue globally that is being invested heavily to curb. This project took a novel approach to addressing land degradation that went a long way towards improving land and human wellbeing. The project aligned to GEF-4 land degradation focal area strategy. The SCI-SLM was a constituent part of the Strategic Investment Programme for SLM in sub-saharan Africa. The project was consistent with the UNEP mandate and aligned with the Mid-Term Strategy (2010-2013) objectives and expected accomplishments under two cross-cutting themes, namely climate change and ecosystem management. The project ensured gender balance, stakeholder participation was a strong component of the project, and it aligned to the Bali Strategic Plan. At regional level, the project was consistent with Sub-Regional Action Programmes of the UNCCD. The project also aligned with the national priorities at the highest level.

Performance

The SCI-SLM managed to achieve major strides towards upscaling community-driven initiatives in the four countries, especially considering this was a medium-sized project. Increased knowledge in especially the social innovation methodology, may be one of the biggest successes of this project.

The likelihood of achieving project impact, which is improved ecosystem health and improved wellbeing through social cohesion and innovations applied to SLM initiatives regionally for wide spread and knowledgeable community of practice through local knowledge-science interface, with social innovation at the core, is highly likely, especially if the global community absorbs the success and lessons into the greater SLM umbrella. The methodology that was developed through the implementation of the project is highly replicable. The SCI-SLM went beyond achieving its project goal in that it was a novel and replicable approach to the way that land degradation is addressed in Africa, and indeed elsewhere.

Factors affecting Project Performance

The project was very well designed, based on solid stakeholder participation processes, with key implementers part of the design process. The design was also built on years of previous experience in the field. It is possible that financial planning was slightly under-budgeted because a small number of activities could not be carried out in some countries as a result of limited financial resources. The project managed to more than achieve its results, and set an example for other projects on what is achievable with very little resources, using passion and effective overall management.



‘Look, Conservation Pays!’ The Mukono Family Association’s sign for the showcasing of their initiatives on conservation agriculture, SCI-SLM Evaluation Country Visit with Mukono Community, Uganda, 13 November 2015.

Key Lessons Learned

There are multiple strong lessons that were identified in the book ‘Stimulating community initiatives in sustainable land management’ in its last chapter (which was being published at the time of this evaluation). The four lessons below add on the book’s (Chapter 12) synthesis.

Lesson 1: Community as centre of learning and entry point

As mentioned in the book, designing a project to look at community initiatives opens the door to social innovation rather than just technical innovation. The way a community organises itself and creates learning environments for the community members has the power to create upscaling and sustaining of initiatives.

Using the community as a centre for learning and sharing, as was done for the communities during the project, had enormous success in creating replicable environments. It is no secret that like-minded people are more trusting of each other.

Communities who face similar challenges and live in similar contexts can relate to each other in such a way that if one community is overcoming a certain challenge it has inspiring influence on another. This seemed a strong element coming out of this project. Additionally, some communities from the project continue to be centres for learning for other communities coming to visit them (or being visited).



SCI-SLM Evaluation Country Visit with Gudwini/Msinga Community, South Africa, 3 November 2015.

Lesson 2: Social innovation is an untapped treasure in upscaling and replication

The way a community or organised and structured is the key to whether any initiative will get momentum or not. What makes some communities spread a novel idea better than others? What does it take to create real spread and upscaling? The SCI-SLM went a long way to answering this question and doing ground-testing. The understanding of true social innovation was one of the key strengths of the SCI-SLM process and has opened the door to understanding that no technical innovation will spread without an element of social innovation.

Lesson 3: Platforms for sharing and exchange at local level is a powerful experience

Most respondents elaborated on the importance of the community exchanges in the project. This contributed strongly to the South-South learning, along with the Africa exchange/international exchange visits.

The community specific in-country exchanges created a strong platform for exchange, this links to Lesson 1 above, in that peer learning is much more effective than externals coming in to teach.

Communities during the country visits spoke about how other projects often identify 'favourite farmers' who are usually then taken out and lectured on various new tools and skills (mostly western based approaches) and then brought back to the community to teach the rest of the community on these new skills.

The advantages of the SCI-SLM approach was to create a sharing mechanism, giving ownership to the community and letting ideas and knowledge flow more freely within the spaces and communities who deal with their challenges and come up with solutions every day, and adding in a scientific interface on the side, to be embedded further. Everything was done at local level.

Creating the international platform i.e. having the countries come visit each other (researchers and communities alike) was also powerful. Many communities were very honoured to host groups which gave them the opportunity to not only share their innovations, but also forge relationships.

As the book states, recognition has proven, through the country visits, to truly empower and encourage, and visitors endow the communities with greater ambition and determination.



SCI-SLM Country Coordinator Stephen Muwaya discusses the NACIA community project's land rehabilitation initiative, SCI-SLM Evaluation country visit with NACIA, Uganda, 17 November 2015.

Lesson 4: Strong foundations of previous practice builds a good project

This project was built on years of experience, interest, motivation, and practice of researchers and practitioners who have been testing innovation in the field in countries of Africa.

This laid an immensely strong foundation for effective project implementation. It also proves that through previous testing and information building, based more on experience and field research than project documentation, can have a strong positive influence on project design and subsequent implementation.

This project also proves that when implementers are directly involved in project design, project implementation can work towards broader impact with the context of mutual understanding of project achievements under the greater framework umbrella.

