Local Governance

Global Soil Week 2019 Outcome Report

Sustainable Land Management (SLM) provides social benefits that go beyond immediate farm profit or other interests of the individual land user (e.g. carbon sequestration, preservation of water quality, biodiversity). Hence, its implementation at scale largely depends on the strength of governance systems to coordinate local actors, activities and budgets towards a common goal. For this purpose, *Local Governance* can be understood as a system of horizontal and vertical coordination between different stakeholders, sectors and political levels which in turn can have a strong potential influence on the allocation of public tasks and resources towards the promotion of sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture.

In theory and practice, coordination at local level is not straightforward but involves different actors on different levels for different purposes. For instance, in many African countries, SLM-related governance is formally based on centralized decision-making and a top-down approach for policy implementation. However, in order to ensure that national guidelines and frameworks are aligned with highly context-specific needs and interests of the population, issues related to sustainable soil and land management should be dealt with at the most immediate level that is consistent with their resolution. Vertical coordination between

different levels of administration assigns roles and responsibilities accordingly. At the most appropriate level, horizontal coordination by the respective part of administration in charge, is responsible for facilitating the participation of all concerned actors in land use planning processes – with particular emphasis on marginalized groups.

As SLM often requires an ecosystem-based approach to planning (e.g. based on watersheds or other "landscape approaches"), such exercises tend to cut across jurisdictional boundaries, raising the need for horizontal coordination between two or more districts or municipalities. In addition, SLM is a complex and interdisciplinary phenomenon and therefore tends to involve more than one line ministry/agency at the local level (e.g. Agriculture, Lands, Planning, Natural Resources, and Infrastructure), each of which follows their own sectoral frameworks and strategies. Again, horizontal coordination is needed to clarify mandates and responsibilities at the local level while also ensuring that all sectors work towards the same objective. Finally, a careful coordination of different stakeholders' interests and coordinated fulfilling of public mandates is needed as natural resources attract a variety of actors to local communities, some of which provide services in

favour of SLM while others promote technologies and practices that may even impede the successful implementation of SLM.

Ideally, the coordination mandate should reside within local governments (e.g. at municipality or district level) legitimised through elections, but where public institutions are dysfunctional or weak or where non-statutory institutions hold legitimate authority, alternative actors and institutional arrangements such as traditional authorities, community or civil society organizations may play a more prominent role. In this way, local governance can be considered a broader concept that involves multiple forms of governance systems that all have their own characteristics, strengths and weaknesses. Instead of considering one governance system superior to the other, the concept recognizes each system (formal and informal, statutory and customary) as potential element of the enabling environment for sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture.

While there is an international consensus about the relevance of alternative governance systems in implementing SLM, many development initiatives do not sufficiently recognize the importance of systems already in place. Especially, traditional systems are increasingly under stress because of e.g. "modernization" that deny space for traditional arrangements.

The following strategies therefore do not only address the formal and informal governance systems but also the relationships between the different actors involved.

Local governance strategies towards creating and enabling environment

The following will briefly outline the strategies through which local governance can be supported to create an enabling environment for sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture. Each strategy is accompanied by (1) the means and ways of how different actors can promote local governance in contributing to this objective, and (2) insights from workshop discussions of how these strategies can be made sustainable and inclusive in the long-term.

Five out of the seven strategies are based on lessons that can be traced back to seven cases and personal experiences of workshop participants. From a local governance perspective, the seven projects are very diverse in their approach and focus. While some have a strong focus on strengthening local governance institutions (ADECOB), others put a strong emphasis on promoting participatory planning and community organizations (Enhancing food security and market access for land constrained women farmers, Chia Lagoon Watershed Management) or on promoting traditional governance systems (Projet Équateur) or civil society organizations (Improving ecosystem services in degraded dryland areas, The Kenya Agricultural Carbon Project).
While participants appreciated the diversity of

cases, it was noted that lessons from a context in which the statutory and the customary governance systems could both be considered as extremely weak or eroded were missing. Four out of the seven cases are located in Kenya which, compared to other African countries, has made considerable advancements in devolving power to local government institutions and in passing the necessary frameworks that encourage participatory planning processes at the local level. The remaining projects are located in Benin, Malawi and the DRC Congo of which the latter is characterized by weak local government institutions.

The remaining two strategies (Strategy 5 and 7) were identified by participants as missing but relevant strategies during the second and third workshop day. They do not relate to a specific case nor a specific country or region but to personal experiences and expert knowledge of workshop participants.

STRATEGY 1: Integrating SLM into communal development plans for the recognition of SLM by other sectors and for appropriate budget allocation

The promotion of SLM practices by municipalities and villages is hindered by a lack of integrated planning for SLM at the communal level. Municipalities often do not have the flexibility to adopt ad hoc SLM measures and do not have access to the necessary resources for their implementation without the prior integration of

those measures in the budgetary planning of municipalities. Therefore, integrating SLM measures in local development plans and budgets at the communal level is an important tool to strengthen the implementation of such measures.

Means and ways to integrate SLM measures in communal development plans:

- *Organizing regular events on local, national and international level to discuss evidence with policy makers and relevant stakeholders (Upscaling Evergreen Agriculture)*
- *Equipping countries with surveillance and analytical tools to map land degradation dynamics (Upscaling Evergreen Agriculture)*
- *Informing local governments about Economics of Land Degradation and the cost of inaction (Upscaling Evergreen Agriculture)*
- *Providing technical and financial support to consultation processes for developing SLM policies (Domestication and harmonization of policies for SLM)*
- *Local government legally backing (e.g. through punitive measures) communally agreed SLM bylaws at district level to ensure bylaws align with human rights principles and are respected throughout the community (Chia Lagoon Watershed Management)*
- *Developing taxation mechanisms to finance SLM measures and reduce the transaction costs associated with their adoption (e.g. measures against land speculation and non-productive use of land) (example from workshop)*

- *Including SLM measures in annual investment plans to ensure that they are considered between communal development plans' development cycles (example from workshop)*

- *Include land management in the canvas of communal development planning (example from workshop)*

Integrating SLM measures in communal development plans can be achieved if municipalities are provided with information and evidence about the potential benefits of SLM. To this effect, problems have to be mapped and the state of land degradation in different areas analyzed in order to effectively inform priorities and guide action. Once SLM measures are integrated in communal development plans, an important aspect of their effective implementation and long-term sustainability relates to the different ways they can be financed and administered. Participants stressed the necessity of ensuring that transfers of resources (both material and financial) follow transfers of competences/tasks from the national to the local level. They however recognized that the capacity of human resources to adequately manage the implementation of such measures should be reinforced *before* transferring financial resources over to the local level. On funding, participants highlighted the need for establishing funds at the national level (e.g. "Green Windows") to support the adoption of SLM measures by farmers, while observing that SLM is also a question of

local autonomy and that internal funding has to be secured to prevent establishing dependency on external funding.

STRATEGY 2: Achieving local level coordination of SLM service providers for better service provision and broader outreach

At the sub-national level (e.g. villages, catchments, communities) we find a multitude of actors that provide in one way or the other services for SLM. These are constituted of private, public, and state institutions, such as: local authorities (informal and formal), private sector entities, politicians, traditional chiefdoms, merchandizers, private operators, community associations, cooperatives, development cooperation, religious groups, farmer groups and so forth.

All of the above have their own targets, interests, scope of influence and restrictions. Their different interventions and activities are often conducted in silos, with little or scattered coordination with other relevant institutions and organizations. At the same time, an effective coordination body that has an overview of the entirety of SLM efforts and could provide informed decisions in terms of intervention areas, topics and actual needs is often absent. As a result, we observe the duplication of efforts, inefficient use of resources as well as the consolidation of dependencies of external (aid) funding mechanisms and assistance.

Means and ways to achieving local level soft coordination for SLM service providers:

- *Implementing organizations together with national government identify overlaps and synergies in the implementation of various development frameworks (NDCs, SDGs, etc.) (Projet Équateur)*

- *Establishing a local level soft coordination mechanism for SLM activities provided by local government authorities, e.g. platforms for all SLM service providers with the capacity to make interlinkages and find synergies with other sectors. In these platforms all existing forms of governance and organization should be recognized and included (e.g. village level committees, "informal" arrangements that survive the 4-year legislative periods) (The Kenya Agricultural Carbon Project, Projet Équateur)*

- *Local government pooling of resources among municipalities for better service provision which can be supported by the creation of municipal associations and / or municipal councils with the mandate to conduct these kinds of coordination (ADECOB)*

- *Capacity building with a "rights-based approach"[1] to existing community structures to facilitate them taking part in the institutionalized participatory (and other) governance mechanisms to engage with the local authorities, initiate a dialogue and ultimately allow for better service delivery (example from workshop)*

- *Support/implement/establish legal frameworks that support building local/community self-help groups (e.g. cooperatives) with their own fund-generating activities and autonomous management structures (example from workshop)*

- *Introducing guidelines to outline coordination between stakeholders and government or amongst stakeholders themselves. While the latter is important to ensure harmonized SLM approaches at the local level, local government should remain in 'driver's seat' for coordination and provide oversight (example from workshop)*

- *Project design: base project interventions on a needs assessment, listening to and learning from the local level authorities and adapting the project strategy to these needs. This could be done by inviting all mayors or a certain catchment and analyzing their challenges and needs together with a territorial approach (example from workshop)*

It has been identified as a big challenge that especially development cooperation interventions often duplicate their efforts and do not coordinate amongst themselves where to support, which topic, with what kind of resources and strategies. This can lead to confusion and negative externalities in communities. As the main donors are often the main fund providers in these localities, the ability of local authorities and communities to refuse an intervention is limited. Therefore, it has been

1. Rights-based approach meaning here that the capacity development activities primarily focus on delivering information on the individual rights of each person, especially those of women. Find here the explanation of the rights-based approach used by ActionAid: https://actionaid.org/sites/default/files/the_rights_based_approach.pdf

highlighted that the development cooperation agencies need to harmonize interventions, without bypassing national authorities. While the question was posed who disposes of the capacities to coordinate all the different interventions, there was consensus that this coordination capacity could (and should) not be provided by "outsiders", not least to ensure post-project sustainability ("Donors go but the people and the government stay").

It has become clear that the local level authorities remain the domain in which the collaboration between different actors should happen. At the same time local level authorities need to be strengthened in their capacities to be able to provide this. The need to provide a space in which knowledge is pooled and connections amongst sectors and different levels of governance can be realized was highlighted (e.g. a platform to allow for the creation of alliances and exploration of synergies).

STRATEGY 3: Strengthening local/traditional community governance structures in contexts of ineffective statutory local government

Many African countries are in the process of decentralizing and devolving power and resources to lower administrative levels. However, local government structures often continue to lack the necessary financial and human resources that are necessary to effectively promote SLM. This situation is even more serious in fragile countries where local governments often fail to provide minimum services to their citizens, who, on the other hand also have little confidence in their local institutions. In such a context, alternative governance models that build on customary systems and that are deeply rooted in the local societies may become more relevant in promoting SLM.

Ways and means to strengthen local/traditional community governance structures:

- *Developing a framework with customary leaders to manage the process of the development intervention (Projet Équateur)*
- *Involving customary leaders in awareness raising and other community mobilisation events (Projet Équateur)*
- *Working with community representatives elected by community members by clustering of groups of households into topics of interests who elect representatives to ensure diversity in the elected representatives who then work closely with the project (Projet Équateur)*
- *Building on groups who are already engaged in natural resource conservation when implementing natural resource conservation measures (Projet Équateur)*
- *Investing specifically in organisational capacities of communities (Projet Équateur)*
- *Providing intensive managerial and technical capacity building (example from workshop)*
- *Involving smallholder farmers in planning process to create ownership (example from workshop)*
- *Formalizing traditional governance structures*

so that they are legally recognized (example from workshop)

- *Supporting traditional governance structures in formulating bylaws and guidelines for SLM that respond to the national SLM framework (example from workshop)*
- *Drawing up stakeholder map to identify marginalized farmers who are at the risk of being left out (example from workshop)*
- *Promoting coordination and communication between local governance structure and regional government (example from workshop)*

To ensure post-project sustainability, it is important to build on existing structures that are deeply rooted in the local society and are likely to remain after the project ends (e.g. self-help groups, farmer groups, faith-based organization). However, it was noted that when working with such groups, one should be cautions not to impose too many new functions on existing organizations that could overburden these structures. In addition, activities of informal and formal systems of governance should be co-aligned in order to sustain effects beyond project end.

Photo by Francis Dejon/IISD

It is not likely that all members of society have an equal chance to participate in and benefit from local governance structures. Their participation can be encouraged by offering targeted incentives (e.g. use of information and communication technology to attract youth, offer child-care services to women).

Finally, what should be noted is that even in contexts where local governments can be considered inefficient, they are usually not absent. Therefore, development projects that promote SLM through alternative governance structures need to make sure that their activities and outputs are endorsed by and coordinated with formal government structures. In order to ensure long-term maintenance and institutional sustainability of what has been achieved, informal governance must be reconciled with the existing legal frameworks.

STRATEGY 4: Strengthening the relationship between citizens, civil society organizations and governments

The implementation of SLM practices is often undermined by conflicting interests amongst the stakeholders involved. Government is interested in maintaining and legitimizing its power, civil society organizations are interested in maintaining and legitimizing their role as "watchdogs" and citizens are interested in demanding the greatest benefits for the satisfaction of their diverse interest from government. Civil society organizations are not legitimized in a formal democratic process and tend to only represent a certain part of society.

To ensure sound cooperation towards a common SLM objective, it is important not to forget that trust between institutions is usually based on trust between individuals that needs to be maintained through careful relationship-building measures. This underlines the role of development cooperation in general – and with regard to the political aspects of sustainable land management in particular (esp. access to land, access to agricultural inputs, public service delivery, etc.) – to act as a mediator between administrations and civil society advocates.

Ways and means to strengthen the relationship:

- *facilitating exposure visits for government representatives to establish relationships between women farmers and government officials, strengthening the advocacy efforts of women farmer groups in the long run (Enhancing food security and market access for land constrained women farmers)*
- *regular coordination meetings with existing local governance structures (e.g. village Natural Resource Management committees) for them to self-identify their strengths and capabilities in the development of capacity building strategies allows development partners (local government, international organisations, local NGOs, private companies, etc.) to more purposefully fill the gaps and helps to ensure the sustained effect of capacity building activities (Chia Lagoon Watershed Management)*
- *Civil society having strong ties in the community/ region, speaking the local language, playing the role of a mediator between different interest groups (e.g. project implementers, farmer organizations, local government) (Land-access for women through intrahousehold agreements)*
- *ensuring that relationship-building activities are aligned with the available resources (financial, time) of all partners (example from workshop)*
- *understanding government's interest and political priorities in cases of unresponsiveness (example from workshop)*
- *jointly identifying/defining legitimate issues and policy priorities e.g. by government inviting citizens to participate in budget planning and organizing family events (e.g. farmers' day) (example from workshop)*

Trust amongst local actors does not emerge automatically and should not be taken as a given. Against this background, it was noted that relationship-building requires careful attention and should be initiated and coordinated by local government in order to promote oversight and ownership which in turn is expected to ensure post-project sustainability. The public extension service which is not project-related but embedded in local development plans and local budgets was highlighted as one mechanism of strategically creating trust between local government and local resource users. In this way, extension officers are expected to play the role of "trust builders" by staying in contact with citizens and sharing or gathering relevant information for both parties.

At the same time, relationship-building between government and civil society is more direct, e.g. by involving civil society organizations during budget planning processes. However, it was noted that civil society organizations are not by default inclusive of all parts of the population and particularly the most marginalized sections. Taking the example of involving civil society during budgeting or development planning processes, this could lead to a situation in which the interests of marginalized resource users are less reflected in local budgets and local development plans as opposed to the interests of the better-off. To support inclusivity, relationship-building involving civil society organizations should consider their legitimacy and relationship with citizens to ensure that the interests of marginalized groups are equally represented.

Finally, in terms of complementarity, it was noted that relationships can be strengthened by recognizing local institutions as equal partners that can complement statutory institutions. Participants further highlighted that linking difference modes of governance may require a considerable amount of time and commitment while local governments should not be afraid to engage in negotiations with local institutions to find a common understanding of roles and mandates.

STRATEGY 5: Strengthening civil society and citizens to hold their governments accountable

The success of SLM implementation at the local level largely depends on whether local governments respond to citizens' livelihoods, needs and legitimate rights. Soil conservation may not always coincide with the immediate interest of local populations, which may comprise quick returns from farming, engagement in the non-farm economy or other agriculture-related concerns such as secure water supply. In order to avoid that local governments are criticized for taking decisions behind closed doors with little regard for the public interest, effectively communicating the rationale behind public investment into SLM is crucial. Furthermore, the available – and usually scarce – resources need to be made transparent and used efficiently. At the same time, citizens may lack the knowledge and skills to hold their governments accountable while civil society organizations that represent citizens' interests may have little room to navigate SLM related policy processes.

Ways and means to strengthen civil society and citizens:

- *Interest of the populations are flexible and altering over time, policy-makers and administration need to adjust their activities as well as the "packaging of information" accordingly (e.g. in situation where policies are primarily implemented through agricultural extension services)*
- *Local Governments implementing national frameworks for participatory budget planning involve citizens and civil society organizations in the planning processes*
- *Civil society – farmers associations in particular – providing capacity building to citizens so that*

they know their rights and can articulate their needs vis a vis Local Government

- *The "citizen's voice" is easier to be recognized by public administration if it provides a clear message. Civil society groups, therefore, are benefitting if based on a clearly defined common interest of its members*
- *Identifying appropriate channels to make the citizen's voice heard (Local Governance, Strategy 4)*
- *Government providing comprehensive and timely budget information (e.g. budget proposals, mid/end of year reports or audit reports) to inform citizens and civil society organizations*
- *Government ensuring that SLM policies are tailored to the livelihoods of citizens (e.g. advise on labour-intensive structural erosion control measures such as terracing will – albeit necessary from an ecosystem point of view – not be in high demand in areas where dairy farming is the main source of income) (example from workshop) [n.b. although this point is not directly related to strengthening civil society and citizens, it was deemed important by workshop participants during the workshop]*

The post-project sustainability of the strategy largely depends on the commitment of individual local government officials. One way of ensuring this is to identify and promote "local innovators" or "change makers" within local government who are passionate about SLM and eager to promote social change. In addition, civil society organizations can build coalitions to increase their power vis a vis local and regional governments and to scale-up their civic education programmes.

In terms of inclusiveness of marginalized groups, there is the risk of civil society organizations not representing all groups of society (e.g. farmer groups often working with better-off farmers). Thus, when governments engage in negotiation processes with civil society groups about SLM strategies, governments should ensure that these groups also represent the interests of marginalized smallholder farmers (e.g. youth). It was also highlighted by participants that not all members in society share the same level of skills and competences, making it necessary to consider the packaging of information and training materials. Here, it was suggested that civil education should be coupled with technical trainings on SLM to make the information more approachable and illustrative to illiterate farmers.

STRATEGY 6: Strengthening the representation of groups of vulnerable people through community mobilization and organization

Groups of vulnerable and marginalized people often do not enjoy the necessary representation which would allow the proper consideration of their interests in decision-making processes. Mechanisms to ensure that no group is being left out when implementing projects need to be developed to increase their representation.

Ways and means to strengthen the representation of vulnerable and marginalized groups:

- *Facilitating rights and leadership trainings to build bargaining and collective action skills amongst women farmers in order for them to effectively engage in politically mandated participatory processes (Enhancing food security and market access for land constrained women farmers)*
- *Ensuring that capacity trainings on leadership and management skills are offered to the wider group of community members (young and old, men and women) so that ownership of Natural Resource Management is shared throughout the entire community, allowing for the sustained effect of capacity building exercises beyond project implementation (Chia Lagoon Watershed Management)*
- *Conducting a mapping of the households present on a territory to inform the efficient allocation and sharing of resources (example from workshop)*
- *Furthering the representation of households by electing households' representatives (e.g. one representative per 10 households) which can participate in consultation processes (example from workshop)*
- *Developing concertation structures to develop a shared vision between community interests and project aims (e.g. participatory rural appraisal process for inclusion) (example from workshop)*
- *Securing land rights of vulnerable groups (see Land Governance for strategies to ensure access to land for women and landless households) (example from workshop)*
- *Strengthening the capacities of duty bearers in order to enable them to fulfil their roles (example from workshop)*

The discussions revealed that strengthening the representation of groups of vulnerable and marginalized people can be achieved if information on those groups is made available, those groups are organized and their priorities aligned, and their capacity to engage in political processes reinforced. Gathering information about the different groups inhabiting a territory constitutes an essential step in the development of the measures outlined above. Once groups are thoroughly identified, it has been recognized that strengthening their representation cannot happen without their prior organization and mobilization. Consultation structures need to be developed to provide the arena for deliberation and to achieve consensus on general and specific actions. Those structures need to contribute to a common identification of problems and to an equitable sharing of benefits and resources among the members of the community.

Finally, the sustainability of their representation can only be ensured if those actors can effectively make their voices heard. Ideally, the legal framework for formal recognition of CBOs, common interest groups, etc. prescribes institutional mechanisms that ensure that this is possible. Leadership and collective action skills can contribute to actors being adequately empowered and having the

necessary tools to engage in participatory and democratic processes and bring their interests forward.

STRATEGY 7: Ensuring that international frameworks and development interventions reflect the realities of local populations for SLM implementation

Not only the Sustainable Development Goals but also other international frameworks have been developed with the objective to provide an overarching global agenda for SLM strategies and initiatives. In many cases, these frameworks have been developed through a consultative process that involves a multitude of stakeholders, including civil society organizations and representatives from local communities. While the success of global SLM frameworks largely depends on the degree to which they can be translated into local action that is aligned with the realities of resource users, international frameworks do not always respond to the livelihood, needs or priorities of local communities. At the same time, community members are often unaware of international SLM policies that may directly concern them. To strengthen the implementation of international frameworks, local governance can provide the link between local communities and higher-tier institutions and decision-makers.

Ways and means to ensure that international frameworks and development interventions reflect local SLM realities:

- *Aligning language between farmers and policy makers and technocrats (example from workshop)*
- *Organizing regular visits of international decision-makers to better grasp local realities (example from workshop)*
- *Involving smallholders and their representative organizations to participate in the development and decision-making of international frameworks (example from workshop)*
- *Focus reporting of development interventions on impact (adoption rates, yield data, etc.) rather than outputs (farmers "reached", hardware distributed) (example from workshop)*

Participants raised the concern that smallholder farmers and their special interest groups are often left out during international negotiation processes that may affect their lives. It was noted that although there are consultation processes in place, it is very difficult to influence international decision-makers. One possible explanation was that rural areas and land degradation dynamics are highly complex while policymakers may find it difficult to draw general lessons from local experiences that could be up-scaled.

Development interventions (projects as well as donor-funded government programmes) that aim at contributing to these international frameworks, often tackle a specific target through a sectoral perspective. For example, SLM programmes tend to focus on the social benefits or natural resource conservation and fail to answer questions on how

to contribute to wider economic development of rural areas. Moreover, their attachment to national or global target setting undermines their flexibility for learning and rerouting of methods and objectives in cases where baselines assumptions do not hold true.