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Assessing the Impact of Social Learning and Social Capital for the Adoption of Soil Conservation Innovations: A Case Study in Northern Ethiopia

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Abstract

The adoption of soil conservation innovations demands the development of understanding among the different actors to promote the collective process needed for soil conservation practices. In this regard, social learning and social capital play key roles. However, studies on the impact of social learning and social capital for soil conservation show mixed results. While some studies show positive outcomes of social learning and social capital for soil conservation, others show negative effects. This paper explores the impact of social learning and social capital on the adoption of stone terraces in Ethiopia. Data were collected via semi-structured interviews, group discussions, and in workshops. Moreover, the review of pertinent project documents and literature complements the analysis. The findings show that social learning results for the emergence of social capital elements such as the development of positive interactions among the actors, broader understanding of soil conservation, trust development and mutual understanding. It also opens opportunity to recognize the important role of indigenous and scientific knowledge for the adoption of soil conservation measures. The emergence of the above mentioned outcomes had encouraged the adoption of stone terraces. In contrast, the positive outcomes of social learning were non-existent on non-adopters of stone terraces. The non-adoption can partly be explained by the insufficient participation of non-adopters in learning platforms. Hence, our case study shows that soil conservation policies should invest on the creation or strengthening of social capital through social learning.

Keywords: Social learning, social capital, soil conservation, Ethiopia