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Analysis of Fodder Value Chains in Burkina Faso and Niger Using Social Network Analysis

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Abstract

In this paper we present an innovative transdisciplinary methodology that links value chain analysis with social network analysis. Our specific contribution is to investigate fodder value chains and the role social networks play to enable farmers to participate in fodder markets in two semiarid locations in Niger and Burkina Faso, respectively. The sites are part of the rapidly transforming subsistence mixed crop livestock farming systems of the Sudano-Sahelian zone. The relative high rainfall variability and degraded agro-ecological production systems constitute considerable challenges to provide sufficient biomass resources for livestock and people. Growing and selling fodder has the potential to improve farming systems as well as generate additional income for smallholder farmers. However, limited access to markets constitutes a persistent challenge for farmers to participate in fodder markets and lever agro-ecological production and productivity opportunities. In order to better understand existing opportunities and constraints faced by farmers in the Burkinabe and Niger field sites, we investigated critical actors and linkages across fodder value chains through a participatory network research approach. Social network analysis, a well-established method in sociology, is used to systematically assess how men and women farmers are embedded in webs of relations and what the implications of these relations are for functioning fodder value chains. The research methodology employs participatory visual network methods, where research participants draw network maps that describe their social relations with relevant actors along the value chain (e.g. traders, wholesalers etc.). The network maps are gender disaggregated to identify specific barriers as well as opportunities to address gender inequalities. We highlight key actors and discuss how a better understanding of the patterns of social relations affect small producers ability to take advantage of fodder related market opportunities to improve their farming systems and hence improve rural development. The research is part of the CGIAR funded Water, Land and Ecosystems Program, a ten year research initiative that has the aim to develop scalable solutions for reducing poverty, improving food security and maintaining healthy ecosystems.

Keywords: Agriculture, rural development, social network analysis, value chain analysis, West Africa