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Can Science Lower Risks of Failure for Transformative Development Projects? the Example of Restoration and Regreening of the Sahel

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Abstract

An estimated 83% of Sub-Saharan Africans are dependent on the land for their livelihoods, yet two-thirds of African land is already degraded to some degree. In many African countries, more than 65% of the land area is degraded. By eroding the productivity of farming systems, land degradation reduces incomes and food security. By reducing the resilience of the ecosystems populations depend on, land degradation worsens their exposure to the vagaries of the increasingly erratic weather of the Anthropocene. Migration is thus, unsurprisingly, accelerating with about 60 million people at risk of being uprooted by desertification and land degradation in the next few decades in Sub-Saharan Africa. Can the science of agroforestry, land health assessments and the economics of land degradation be integrated into development projects so that they can lower their risks of failure? The presentation explores the joint experiences and plans of the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF) and GIZ as they seek to answer this question while improving the livelihoods of 500,000 smallholder farmers in eight countries in the Sahel as 1 million ha of their degraded farm land is ‘regreened’. Taking a ‘research in development’ approach that seeks to integrate evidence into decision making on policies and investments by a range of stakeholders and partners, the project focuses on the potential of agroforestry and especially Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration and our understanding of the processes of land degradation and rehabilitation to act as the vehicles for transformative change. The presentation will discuss collaborative, institutional and technical arrangements in this structured ‘learning for development’ project supported by the European Commission.

Keywords: Africa, agroforestry, economics, investment, land degradation, resilience, restoration, rural development, small holder farmers