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Impacts of Social Cohesion on Farmers’ Soil Conservation Behaviour: Analyzing the Case of Bushehr, Iran

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Abstract

Land degradation in the form of soil erosion is a serious threat to food security, sustainable agricultural production, and environmental sustainability. Soil conservation is considered as a precondition for achieving food security and adopting environmental policies. Iran is a vulnerable country in terms of land degradation and soil erosion. In Iran, many activities have been conducted for soil conservation but did not meet the intended effects. Social cohesion, in terms of levels of trust, cooperation and socio-economic inclusion, is considered a key factor and catalysts of adoption practices such as soil conservation. However, limited knowledge exists on how social cohesion impacts on the acceptance of soil conservation practices at the community level. Therefore, this study investigates the impact of social cohesion on the soil conservation behaviour of farmers in Bushehr County, Iran. Based on random sampling, a face-to-face survey with a total of 180 farmers was conducted. In this study, we examine seven different components of social cohesion (1) public trust, (2) trust in institutions, (3) trust in communities, (4) norms, (5) formal networks, (6) informal networks, and (7) network size. The results show that (1) public trust, (3) trust in communities, as well as trust in (5) formal and (6) informal networks are the key to adopting soil conservation. These components explain 30 % of changes in the acceptance of soil conservation behaviours. (7) Network size, (4) norms, and (2) trust in institutions were not significant in accepting soil conservation behaviour. Accordingly, trust seems to have higher importance for the adoption of new practices than the network communication dimension. Trust is the catalyst that converts information into usable knowledge. Networks provide the context of information exchange. A network with a high level of trust is able to do more because networks are built on trust and confidence, thereby reducing risk by providing a safety net for people. The results of this study help to understand farmers’ complex decisions about accepting soil conservation and help design strategies and policies to further accept soil conservation.

Keywords: Behaviour, network, social cohesion, soil conservation, trust