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Towards inclusive development: Forest landscape restoration impacts on Tchamba Prefecture communities, Togo

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Abstract

In recent years, forest landscape restoration (FLR) projects have emerged as critical interventions for environmental conservation and sustainable land management. However, understanding their impact on local communities, particularly within diverse socio-economic contexts, is essential for effective implementation and community engagement. This study in Tchamba Prefecture, Togo, aims to examine the effects of FLR projects on local communities, focusing on socio-economic impacts and the interplay of the social and ecological dimensions of FLR. Employing a mixed-methods approach, I conducted focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews with villagers, NGO staff, and local government officials. By comparing communities with and without FLR projects, insights into differential impacts and context-specific approaches for sustainable outcomes were provided. Using the livelihood framework, key themes were identified, emphasising the role of social capital in motivating participation in FLR projects. Findings suggest positive perceptions of FLR projects among local communities, influenced by traditional ecological knowledge, cultural practices, and community-specific contexts. Gender and age differences were evident in participation, underscoring the importance of inclusive approaches tailored to diverse community needs. The study further highlights multiple socio-economic benefits of FLR initiatives, including improved agricultural productivity, education opportunities, health, and enhanced social cohesion. While limited to observational trends, the findings indicate promising prospects for FLR projects in enhancing local socio-economic conditions. This research contributes to a nuanced understanding of the relationship between local communities and FLR initiatives, emphasising the importance of context-specific approaches for sustainable outcomes. The implications extend to policymakers, farmer groups, donors, and local communities, facilitating informed decision-making and promoting inclusive and sustainable development pathways.

Keywords: Community perceptions, FLR projects, livelihoods, local context