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Strengthening stakeholders' capacities and behavioural change for sustainable land management: lessons from the participatory learning platform in northern Ghana

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Abstract

Promoting sustainable land management is crucial for achieving sustainable development, yet, sustainable land management is a complex socio-ecological solution involving different actors, competing interests, preferences and needs, and contested sociocultural norms and practices. Consequently, sustainable land management requires participatory approaches that enable the active participation of diverse stakeholders, thereby strengthening capacities and behaviour change for a collective action. The INTERFACES project funded by the German Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space sought to promote sustainable land management in Africa through a participatory learning platform (PLP) with diverse stakeholders. In Northern Ghana, INTERFACES established a PLP in 2023 following robust contextual systematic review and stakeholder mapping to identify diverse stakeholders for sustainable land management. Comprising of stakeholders drawn from government and policy, civil society organisations, traditional authority, farmer-based organisations, private sector, academia and research institutions, minority group and international development partners, the platform applied diverse approaches including joint reflection, participatory social learning, multi-annual workshops, co-developing gender-responsive theories of change, field visits and self-recommended trainings aimed at building stakeholders' capacities and behavioural change for sustainable land management. Lessons from over three-year engagement reveal that diversity in stakeholder composition of the platform and skillful facilitation were key features that facilitated democratic space for joint learning and co-creation, enabling stakeholders to deeply reflect on diverse lived and gendered experiences relevant for collective decision-making for sustainable land management. Integrating gender transformative approaches including gender-responsive theories of change, gender model family, and land tenure regimes enabled stakeholders to deeply reflect their positionality on gender, leading to gradual transformation in mindset, attitude and behaviour of stakeholders, particularly among men. These changes are crucial for sustainable land management, as stakeholders transfer the PLP approaches and lessons to their broader institutions and communities of practice, leading to a change in practices at both institutional and community levels. We recommend that interventions and

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policies for sustainable development need to prioritise the active participation of diverse and crucial stakeholders from the outset, provide the democratic space for joint learning and reflection, and integrate solutions and approaches that address context-relevant and gendered needs and challenges.

Keywords: Co-creation, gender transformative approaches, social learning, sustainable agriculture, theory of change