



Contrasting and not-so-contrasting perspectives between local stakeholders and scientists and across dryland sites in participatory assessment of land management

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The participation of stakeholders and the integration of scientific and local knowledge in the assessment of environmental problems and potential solutions have been increasingly demanded by international institutions. Participatory assessment has the potential to engender social learning among all stakeholders, including scientists, which then has the potential to increase collaboration and the probability for adoption of good practices. Using PRACTICE participatory assessment tool, IAPro, a number of assessment criteria were identified, selected and weighted by local stakeholder platforms (SHPs) and scientists in 18 dryland sites distributed across 11 countries. These criteria were then applied to the assessment of a variety of local land management actions. In total, around 50 criteria were proposed by the SHPs, ranging from 6 to 14 per platform. The proposed criteria represented a wide variety of social, economic, cultural, and environmental aspects. Many of them were proposed by many of the SHPs, stressing their potential as universal assessment criteria across drylands. In most cases, these repeatedly proposed criteria were the same criteria proposed by the scientific panel. The relative importance given to the variety of criteria by each SHP was evenly distributed among the economic wealth criterion and each of the main categories of ecosystem services (provisioning, supporting & regulating, and cultural). In general, African and American sites where local people economies heavily rely on natural lands gave higher weights than European sites to “economic-wealth”, “provision of goods”, and “supporting and regulating services” criteria, and also to “socio-cultural services”. All European SHPs selected and gave great importance to criteria that are related to security, such hydrogeological hazard, flood prevention, and fire risk. The participatory assessment process in IAPro facilitated social learning among the stakeholders, including scientists, and promoted knowledge exchange at multiple levels. The change between the initial and final perspectives on the assessment criteria and the quality of the management actions assessed was considered to be a metric of the learning gained through the IAPro process. A decrease in the variability of weights and rates given by the stakeholders to each criteria and management action reflects the consensus building process that takes place during the discussion sessions.