

What about the Land User? An African Grassroots Innovation for Livelihood and Environment (AGILE) Approach

A collaborative effort between ICRAF, AHI and partners, with financial support from Italy, is helping in the facilitation and development of local farmer-led groups and organizations interested in livelihoods and environment.

Why the Land User?

Environmental degradation such as erosion, deforestation, siltation and loss of biodiversity have particularly severe impacts on poor, natural resource-dependent communities in developing countries. In this respect a lot of effort through research



Figure 1. The two farms on steeply sloping land awaken questions as to factors that stimulate adoption of technologies. Questions arise why some farmers adopt conservation technologies while others do not as illustrated above.

and dissemination have gone into the development of technologies and natural resources practices to address these problems. These efforts have yielded disappointing results. Adoption has been far below expected levels. While land degradation is a physical process, its underlying causes are deeply rooted in the cultural, socio-economic and political environment in which the land user lives.

The failure of farmers to adopt technological innovations as expected suggests a need to move beyond technical solutions in addressing environmental problems. One of the more plausible suggestions is the strengthening of existing social capital

within local communities, as expounded in the ethics and principles of the Landcare concept.

Development of the AGILE Approach to Land Management

Landcare is defined as a movement led by the grassroots to foster improved livelihoods and environment, and spreads through social energies of individuals, communities and supporters. It is based on autonomous farmer-led organizations that are concerned about the long-term health of the land.

In the AGILE approach, a bottom-up methodology is used to determine the mode and entry point to community development. This approach is also used to obtain insights into grassroots institutional innovations for natural resource management in the region. Responses to local inquiries are indicative of whether Landcare can provide an inspiration to community land management efforts in Africa, and whether it can be structured so as to build on African initiatives and innovations. AGILE integrates Landcare experiences in other regions such as the Philippines and Australia into the eastern Africa setting, drawing on knowledge of African institutions, technologies and enabling policies. The aim is to “scale up” African grassroots innovations in technology, NRM, policy reform and livelihood while not losing their relevance to local needs.

Agile operates at three levels, namely through local sites, nationally and regionally. Experiences gathered through engagement with local communities in selected sites are collated at the national level, where scaling out strategies are generated. Best

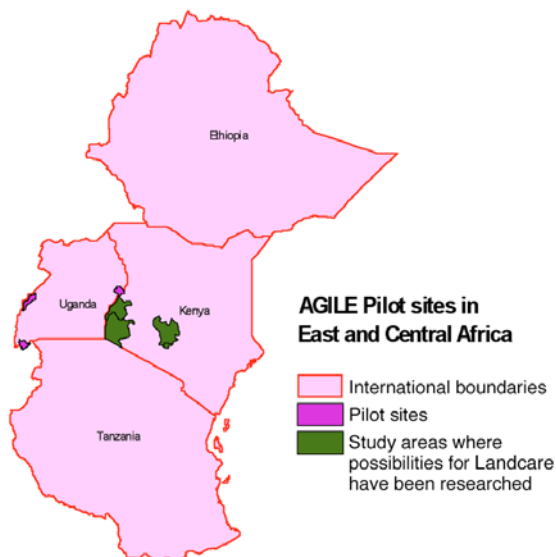


Figure 2. AGILE sites where activities have already been initiated.

practice cases nationally will inform the regional level, where findings can be generated for more global application.

In the AGILE sites of Uganda (Kabale, Kapchorwa and Bundibugyo districts), a Situation and Institutional Analysis was carried out. This involved dialogue with communities in each site on land degradation and general environmental conservation issues. A consensus was reached among

local actors in pilot sites that there is a need for a holistic approach to land degradation where the land user leads the process. This is represented in Fig. 3, where components of the AGILE approach are illustrated.

The community-level AGILE planning process pointed to primary issues facing land users in pilot districts, as depicted in Fig. 4.

Conclusion

There is a clear indication that understanding the land user, their land use history, and interrelationships among various stakeholders is key in evolving a sustainable land management process. Lessons learned from pilot sites point to a number of important elements to the AGILE approach. These factors include the identification, development and dissemination of community level innovations in land management; evolving sustainable initiatives through the strengthening of farmer-led organizations; and developing quality partnerships.

—Joseph Tanui

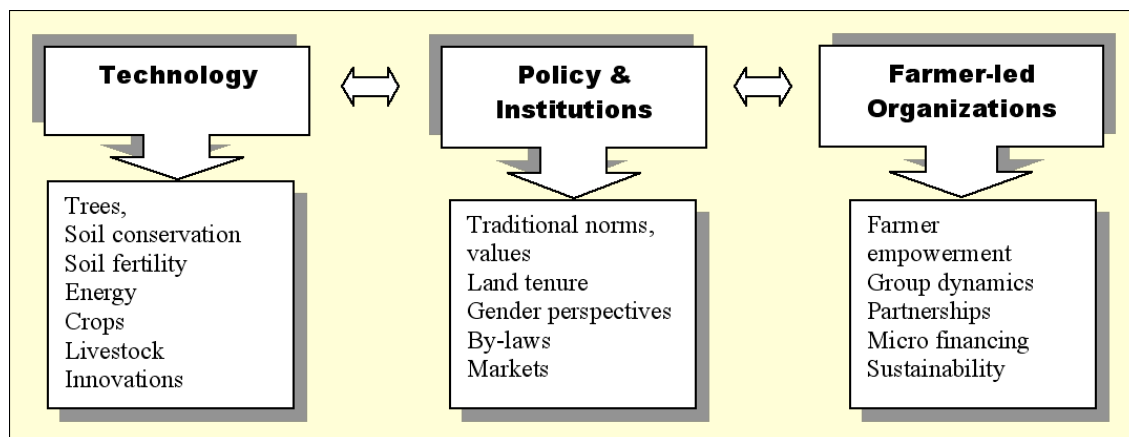


Figure 3. Components of the AGILE approach.

Kapchorwa District		Kabale District		Bundibugyo District	
Technology needs	Policy and institutional needs	Technology needs	Policy and institutional needs	Technology needs	Policy and institutional needs
Dairy animals	Security	Soil erosion	Marketing	Physical soil conservation	Security
Biogas	Protected areas	Soil fertility	Land tenure	Labour Saving techniques	Protected areas
Fodder-trees	Land fragmentation	Bee keeping	Micro-financing	High value Crops	Marketing of cash crops
High value fruit trees	Governance of farmer-led organizations	Fish farming	Gender disparities	Agroforestry-fuel	Gender disparities
Physical soil conservation	Local government involvement	High value fruit trees	Harmonization of institutions activities	Post harvest handling	Land tenure, land fragmentation
Energy saving stoves	Gender disparities	Afforestation	Wetlands	Food crops—especially on the hills	Institutional capacity of development organisations

Figure 4. Technology, policy and institutional needs identified in AGILE pilot sites.

Key partners in this work include farmer organizations, institutional network and coalitions in pilot sites.

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