

A publication from the DESIRE project - funded by the European Union's 6th Framework Program 'Global Change and Ecosystems'

Based on experience from DESIRE sites

When researchers talk with local stakeholders, it is a win-win strategy for science and livelihoods



The DESIRE team, 4th plenary meeting, October 2009, Morocco

Why do researchers need to talk with local stakeholders ?

Researchers have a wealth of expertise in conducting scientific experiments and interpreting extensive data collections. However, unless they live where they are carrying out research, and experience local issues for themselves, it is difficult to find out about all the factors that contribute to successful and sustainable land use at the local level. Therefore it is important in most cases to make contacts in the local community. Land users know most about the features of the local soils, vegetation and climate. Members of the community can explain local concerns, that may affect whether scientific recommendations resulting in new technologies or policies turn out to be either useful or unpopular. The land users have the best knowledge of their natural and socio-economic environment, and through collaboration with scientists this can be used to enhance their livelihoods.

Benefits for you as researchers

It is not enough to collect data, to make models of theoretical sustainable land management options, and expect that the local population will welcome innovative ideas. Very often land management ideas that sound sensible on paper will not work well in practice because of social, cultural, economic or political barriers. Therefore it is very important that researchers determine what these barriers might be. Sometimes the barriers can be lifted fairly easily with an educational programme, but other barriers, for example those related to government policies or subsidies that do not support sustainability, may require long term lobbying at national and international levels. Most importantly, involving stakeholders is more likely to result in new research being used where it was intended. In order to find out what barriers associated with policies and regulations may stand in the way of environmental sustainability, working with policy makers can also help to identify different interests that determine various land use options.

Benefits for stakeholders

Partnerships between a wide range of stakeholders (including policy makers) and researchers benefit the stakeholders much more than research carried out in isolation. Stakeholders are usually pleased to see their local knowledge recognised and validated, and are encouraged to find out more about sustainable land use. If they can build up a relationship with scientists based on mutual trust, they may find it easier to collaborate with new initiatives.

Ways in which stakeholders have been involved in DESIRE research

Chile Instituto de Investigaciones Agropecuarias



Researchers discuss options with farmers

In Chile, the Agricultural and Livestock Service (Servicio Agrícola y Ganadero SAG, <http://www.sag.gob.cl>) implements rehabilitation programs for degraded soils. It also contributes subsidies to the farmers to implement the conservation practices which are being studied through the DESIRE Project. The results obtained in DESIRE are being adopted by SAG to generate new policies and practical instruments to help the farmers. This allows implementation of measures for improvement and conservation of soil and water resources throughout local agriculture.

Greece Democritus University of Thrace

In Nestos, Greece, many years of large-scale irrigation with saline groundwater have made the soils salty and less productive for crops. Some stakeholders have helped with demonstrations of remediation strategies, especially with drip irrigation, to combat such soil degradation. In order to help other local stakeholders understand the importance of taking action in the area, some debates at local coffee shops and discussions out in the fields have also taken place.

Discussions with farmers about the quality of water used for irrigation



Green manure and minimum tillage

Spain Estación Experimental de Zonas Áridas

In the Guadalentín basin, Spain, assessments of different conservation measures to reduce erosion and increase soil water content cannot be carried out effectively without involvement of local stakeholders. Farmers are helping by allowing trials of minimum tillage and green manure on their land. However some farmers consider that these approaches are untidy, and they prefer to see ploughed soil. So researchers will need to establish where compromises can be made, to enhance both short-term and long-term sustainability with acceptable technologies.

Compiled by Nichola Geeson, Maude Gentit and Marie Jose Van der Werff ten Bosch, December 2010
For more information see:

The DESIRE Harmonised Information System:
www.desire-his.eu and DESIRE website:
www.desire-project.eu

The DESIRE project (2007-2012) is funded by the European Commission, VI Framework Program, 'Global Change and Ecosystems' and brings together the expertise of 26 international research institutes and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). This project is implemented by ALTERRA - research institute for the green living environment in the Netherlands.

Copyright and Disclaimer:

www.desire-project.eu/disclaimer

Contact DESIRE coordinator: Coen.Ritsema@wur.nl

Contact DESIRE Communications: ngprojects3@googlemail.com

The opinions expressed in this newsletter and on the website are those of the DESIRE project consortium and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Commission.

