

Recommendations from the DESIRE Project for successful stakeholder workshops

At the beginning of the DESIRE Project 17 study sites in drylands around the world were chosen for study. Life can be challenging to land users in these places, because water supply is often scarce and unreliable, and soils may be easily eroded. A major aim of the project was therefore to examine existing land use and see if new ideas could be introduced to make farming and other activities more sustainable, - in economic and socio-cultural terms as well as in ecological terms .



Infrequent but intense rainstorms can open up deep gullies in dryland soils. Photo by H. Liniger



A DESIRE workshop for researchers and stakeholders in Spain. Photo by J. de Vente

It is very important to conserve soil and soil properties and to avoid land degradation. Otherwise, the people who live in these regions will not be able to make a living from the land and continue to live there. If people abandon drylands and migrate to the towns, leaving the land without management of any kind, they may become even more vulnerable to degradation, and even less productive for future generations.

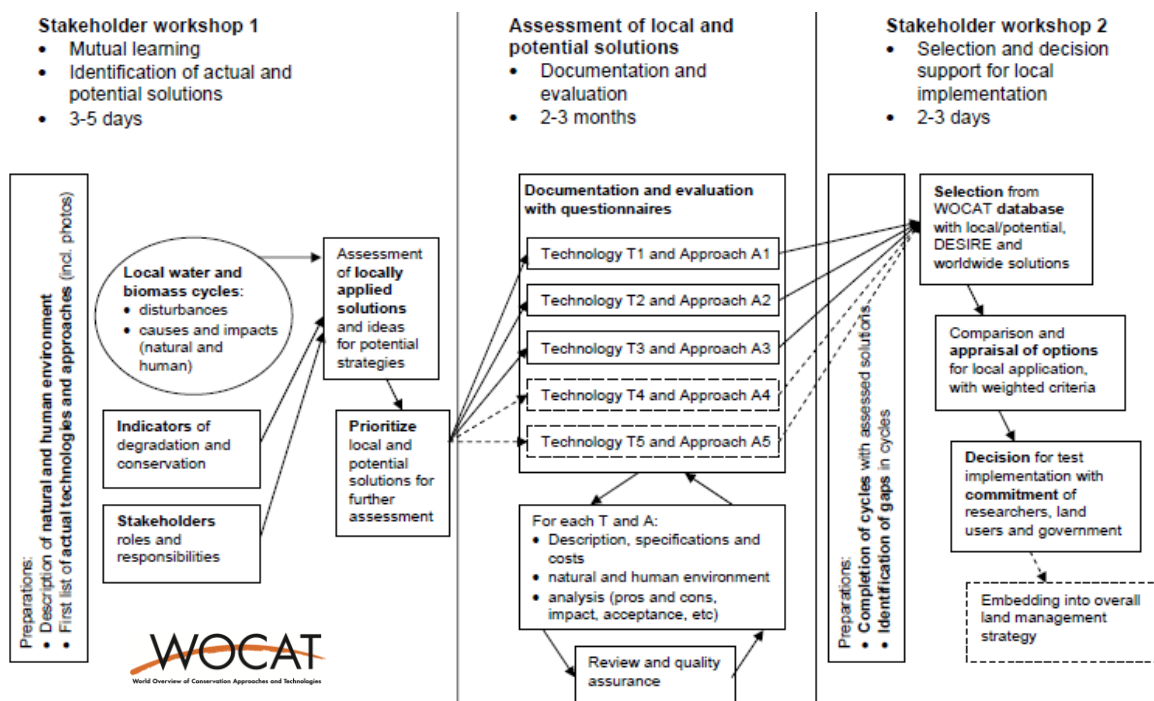
There have been countless scientific experiments to find more sustainable ways to manage land in drylands. However land users are not always convinced by what the scientists tell them. Sometimes new ideas that may be good for the environment are not so economically or socially acceptable to land users. Many of the proposals for sustainable land management need financial investment, at least to start them off. Therefore, no matter how enthusiastic the land users may be, actions at a wider scale need the policy makers and government ministries to be persuaded first. **In this Info-brief we examine DESIRE events and workshops and determine how successful they have been. We have also collected comments from stakeholders that will help us improve similar initiatives in the future.**

WOCAT methodology for stakeholder workshops

Researchers may analyse climate trends and the properties of soils and vegetation, but their resulting maps and models may not match reality completely. The theoretical potential land use of an area as described by scientists on the basis of soil-plant-climate relationships is usually also affected by competing social, economic, political or other factors. The balance of competing factors can make individual livelihoods rather precarious. So what can be done to provide more practical information for land users?

In the DESIRE Project researchers recognised these issues and set out to involve a large number of stakeholders with different perspectives in the project. The stakeholders invited to take part included not only land users and their families, but also NGOs and other advisory groups, and politicians. DESIRE decided to use a sequence of stakeholder workshops to bring these people together to talk about their experience and their hopes for the future.

In the course of DESIRE an approach of “Learning for sustainability” developed by CDE and integrated with WOCAT tools was used. This built on previous efforts with stakeholder workshops and provided a detailed and structured plan to promote optimum interaction. The aim was to find the best ideas for sustainable land use by discussions of a range of options, - including locally applied and external solutions, - in the context of local knowledge.



<http://www.desire-his.eu/en/potential-strategies>



Stakeholders in China. Photo by Wang Fei

DESIRE-WOCAT Stakeholder Workshop I

At the first workshop the researchers and stakeholders discussed their perceptions of land degradation problems and solutions. What were the drivers of degradation or desertification? How did environmental processes impact on land use? Photographs of issues and options were used to facilitate discussions in small groups, and finally a list of potentially useful technologies was formulated.

Exercise	Objectives
Picture gallery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To establish a relaxed working atmosphere and introduce participants and their interest in the topic.
The water and biomass cycles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To explore links between the water and biomass cycles; to identify disturbances in the cycles, their causes and effects in order to understand land degradation processes and their dynamics in the local context. To identify already applied solutions to land degradation.
Local indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To identify indicators used by local stakeholders to recognize land degradation processes and land conservation respectively.
Stakeholder analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To identify the stakeholders relevant for <u>sustainable land management</u>; their motivation / interest and influence / power concerning the implementation of sustainable land management.
Already applied and potential solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To identify technologies / strategies not yet applied but potentially suitable for the local context by integrating the perspective, knowledge and experience of external stakeholders. To briefly assess already applied and potential solutions.
Synthesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outline of an <u>SLM</u> strategy To create awareness on the need of a comprehensive strategy and identify important elements for a draft outline of a SLM strategy for the local context.

Objectives of DESIRE-WOCAT stakeholder Workshop I. Find more details at:

<http://www.desire-his.eu/en/potential-strategies/part-1-identifying-strategies-thematicmenu-177>



Photo by C. Boix-Fayos

The next stage was to use the WOCAT questionnaires on SLM technologies and approaches to evaluate the choices. Then at a **second workshop** a decision support tool was used to arrive at a short list of options, which could be trialled in experimental settings. The DESIRE workshop exercises and WOCAT questionnaires can all be downloaded from <http://www.wocat.net/en/methods.html>

Steps	Objectives
Step 1: Review and adjustment of objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To recall and refresh main discussions and results from the 1st stakeholder workshop. To decide on which objectives to focus on for the selection of options that will be implemented later.
Step 2: Identification of options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To identify with the help of the WOCAT database a range of options (technologies and approaches) that fit the selected objectives. To visualize the potential options.
Step 3: Identification of relevant criteria for evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To identify and agree on a set of 9-12 criteria (ecological, economic, and socio-cultural) per objective, relevant for the local context, along which the different options can be evaluated.
Step 4: Scoring the options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To assess for each option, to which extent it fulfils the different criteria identified in step 3, i.e. to assess the options by the criteria.
Step 5: Creating a hierarchy and ranking criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To organise criteria in a hierarchical order.
Step 6: Analysis and interpretation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To visualise the relative merits of the different options. To interpret the results.
Step 7: Prioritising of options - negotiation and decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To find a final agreement on which option should be selected for test-implementation in the study site.
Step 8: Embedding into the overall strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To refine the overall strategy and to ensure that the options selected for test-implementation fits in and framework conditions are considered.
Workshop evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To evaluate contents, methodology, and results of the workshop.

Objectives of **DESIRE-WOCAT stakeholder Workshop II**. Find more detail at:

<http://www.desire-his.eu/en/potential-strategies/part-3-selecting-strategies-thematicmenu-179>

Results of DESIRE-WOCAT workshops with stakeholders

Workshop I

Most participants praised the organisation and content of the workshops. They found the sessions very interesting and thought-provoking. Some people would have liked to spend more time on discussions, while others found it difficult to give up whole days from their work to attend. It was therefore difficult to get a balance of enough time to cover all the issues, but not so much time that some stakeholders could not be represented. Many participants found it difficult to integrate social, economic, institutional or political perspectives into the discussions. Many of the researchers were environmental scientists with little experience of socio-economic or political issues, and not all stakeholders were used to public or democratic freedom of thought and speech.

For a detailed analysis of Workshop I in all study sites, see: <http://www.desire-his.eu/en/potential-strategies/part-1-identifying-strategies-thematicmenu-177/72-stakeholder-workshop-1-all-study-sites-analysis-and-synthesis>

Workshop II

The clear presentation of steps to achieve the final choices of sustainable land management options was appreciated by participants. Again some wished for more time for more discussion. Although participants enjoyed the process of selecting new options, they were often reluctant to commit to trying new technologies. They were more likely to agree to improving existing technologies that they were already familiar with. This is understandable, as people would not want to potentially jeopardise their livelihoods without considerable trust in the workshop moderators and confidence in the scientific evidence.

For a detailed analysis of Workshop II in all study sites see: <http://www.desire-his.eu/en/potential-strategies/part-3-selecting-strategies-thematicmenu-179/318-stakeholder-workshop-2-synthesis-report>

The next step was to try out the chosen technologies in the study sites. Technologies included minimum tillage, mulching, different types of terraces, water harvesting methods, drip irrigation, rangeland resting, new agricultural crops, etc. Over at least 2 years local stakeholders were invited to assist with experiments and monitor progress. See <http://www.desire-his.eu/en/implementing-field-trials/field-experiments> for more information.



Stakeholders help to assemble a weather station in Tunisia. Photo by F. Youssef

Workshop III was then held in each study site to evaluate the success of experimental trials of the chosen technologies. The aims of the workshop were as follows:

1. To share and evaluate with stakeholders the results of both the field trials and regional scale modelling; which links ecological and socio-economic factors and provides practical recommendations. Also to agree on recommendations for agricultural extension and national/district policy that can be disseminated to a wider audience.
2. To discuss whether the remediation technologies and approaches that gave positive results will be sustained into the future and identify the role of different stakeholders in doing this.
3. To evaluate how the project results can inform future needs and agendas.

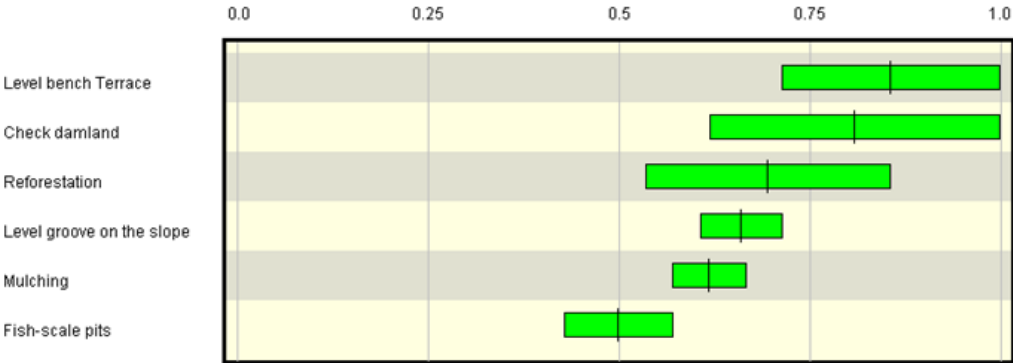
Trials held on land users' fields provided direct evidence of the degree of success of each technology. It was thought that neighbouring land users were more likely to be impressed by this than they would be from trials on a research station. Some participants would also like to see more local or national support for the technology trials, so that successful outcomes could be shared and implemented more widely.

For more details see: <http://www.desire-his.eu/en/implementing-field-trials/evaluation-by-stakeholders>

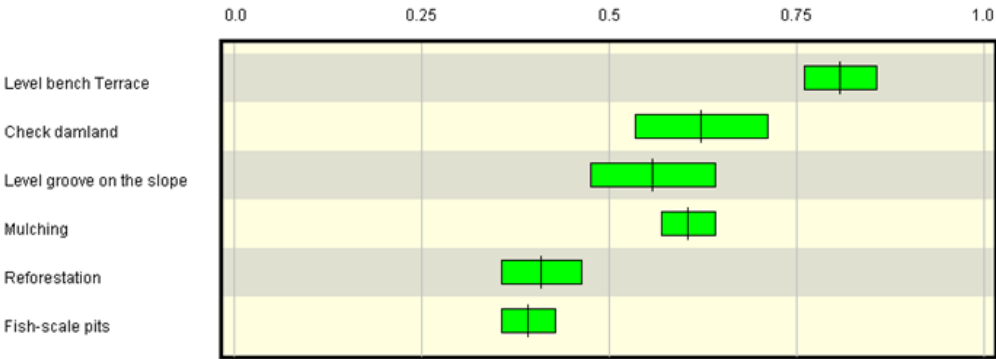
Case study I: Stakeholder evaluation of SLM technologies trialled in Ansai County, China

<http://tinyurl.com/7wss3xg>

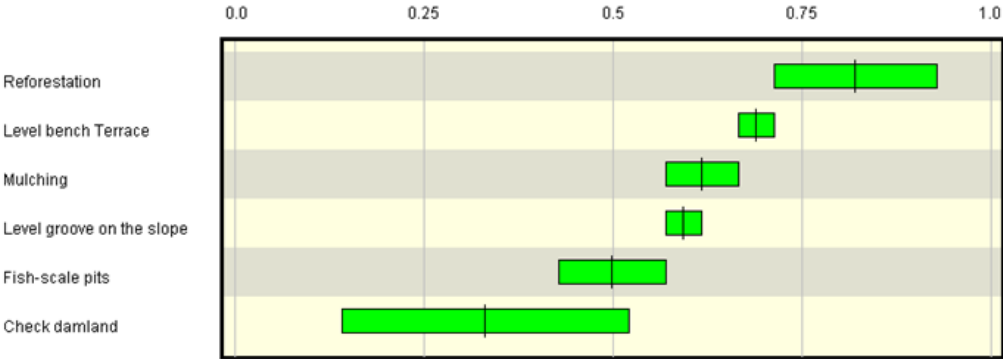
Three technologies to reduce soil erosion: level bench terraces, land held behind check dams, and reforestation were implemented. These were evaluated from different perspectives and all were found to be sufficiently successful to merit further use. Although the terraces are effective in reducing soil erosion, many are remote from villages and the extra time and effort needed to use them therefore makes the net effect much less. The area would benefit from new government investment, particularly for reforestation. The Ministry of Water Resources is building check dams (Light-point engineering), and the Ministry of Agriculture supports the purposes of the “Grain for Green” project. Stakeholder evaluation using the FACILITATOR decision support software is shown below, showing the range of opinions, and acceptability rising from 0 to 1.0. For more about this method of selecting and/or evaluating technologies see <http://tinyurl.com/dyrs8yz>



Ranking of technologies according to ecological indicators shows how well the three technologies performed



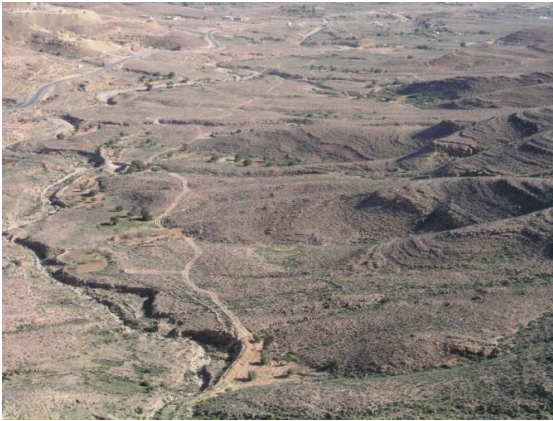
Economic indicators rank the bench terraces as the most cost-effective



In socio-cultural terms reforestation is the most favoured technology

Case Study II: Zeuss-Koutine, Tunisia

<http://tinyurl.com/74v3whk>



Soil erosion by water



Rangeland degradation by overgrazing

In Tunisia there have been big changes in agriculture where fruit trees irrigated with ground water have been planted in place of traditional grazing. Unfortunately this has led to increased soil erosion and high costs associated with drilling for water. Stakeholders were very pleased to debate the problems. There is a harsh environment and a continuing satisfactory income is most important, to curtail the migration of rural people to the towns. A reappraisal of traditional water harvesting techniques has proved very interesting and successful. Usually a combination of methods: Jessour, Tabia and rangeland resting, make the most sustainable plan. Land users encouraged the introduction of new ideas for a sustainable rural economy with government investment, and were pleased that the DESIRE Project had given prominence to the issues.



Jessour system in loess deposits near Béni Khédach



Field work



A Roman dam, near Koutine village
Photos by M. Ouessar



Runoff storage cistern (majen or fasquia)

Stakeholder feedback from individual DESIRE study sites

Guadalentín catchment, SE Spain

<http://tinyurl.com/7qdtxta>

Workshop participants had very much enjoyed meeting one another and sharing ideas. Some were surprised by the results of the experiments while others felt the results were as expected. For best dissemination of information they favoured demonstrations to farmer organisations. They were not so interested in written information or websites. They wished that more land users could have been involved, so that it would be easier to spread messages about the results of the technology trials.

Cape Verde

<http://tinyurl.com/73p67oa>

Stakeholders in Cape Verde realised that land users do have a lot of local knowledge that merits attention in decision-making processes. A representative from the national Focal Point of the UNCCD hoped that the pigeon pea technology could be demonstrated to other farmers in other areas. Farmers trust what they hear from other farmers more than they trust technical advisers. See video clips of stakeholder discussions on <http://tinyurl.com/82bsjkq>



Stakeholder Workshop in Cape Verde



Stakeholder Workshop in Chile

Cointzio watershed, Chile

<http://tinyurl.com/7w6nycy>

Participants in workshops welcomed the rare opportunity to discuss local policies and the relative advantages of different sustainable land management technologies. They did not normally get the chance to express their views. New priorities would be to train technicians better and incorporate more social and economic factors into evaluations of soil conservation practices.

Eskisehir, Turkey

<http://tinyurl.com/86j5wcx>

Land users considered the workshops to be interesting but too time-consuming. They were not always confident enough to discuss issues with researchers, and worried about saying something contradictory. They welcomed information leaflets and newsletters for themselves, and hoped policy briefs could convince decision makers to invest in the most successful technologies.

Karapinar, Turkey

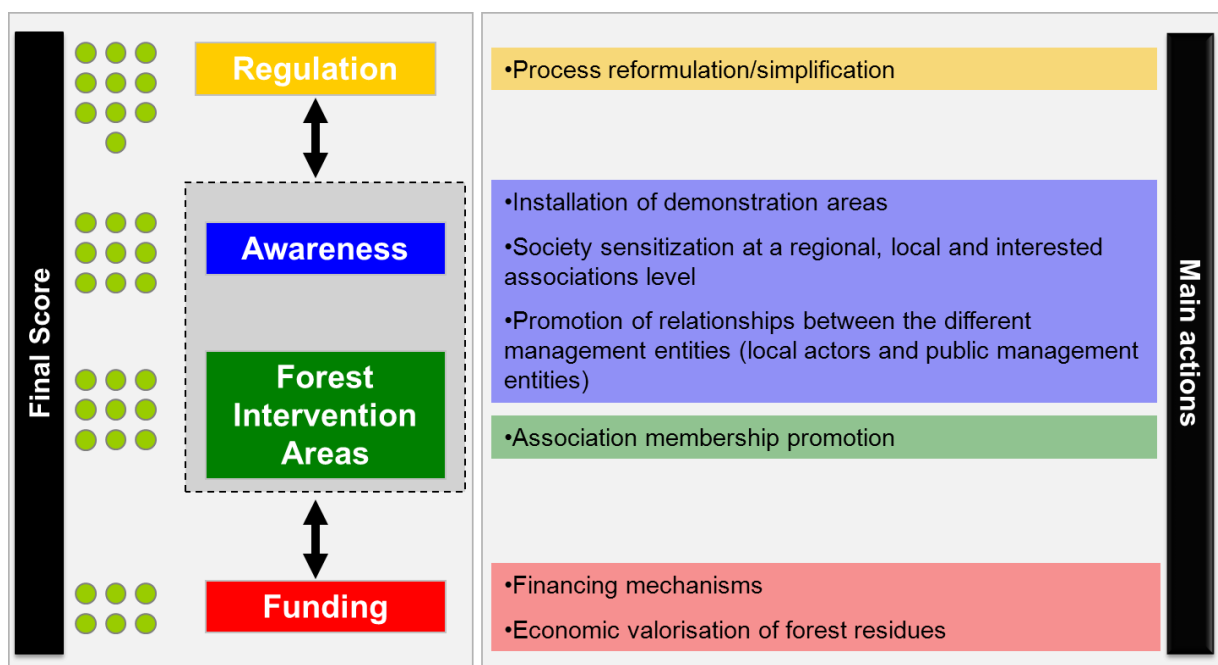
<http://tinyurl.com/73a7xvo>

Stakeholders were interested in the conditions under which technologies showed the best advantages, since sometimes the chosen technologies only led a marginal increase in crop yield. But they considered that if, for example, ground water for irrigation became more scarce and expensive, then marginal differences in technologies would become more important in maintaining their livelihoods.

Mação and Góis, Portugal

Stakeholders agreed on the need to take action to prevent forest fires, but they did not all understand current legislation. The structure of land ownership makes it difficult to plan and implement overall strategies, but small improvements in making land owners better informed about sustainability as well as legislation could have far-reaching benefits. For most stakeholders the incentive to change their ideas and practices is financial gain.

<http://tinyurl.com/6lvo9h6>



Priorities and proposed actions resulting from the third stakeholder Workshop in Mação and Góis

Sehoul, Morocco

<http://tinyurl.com/7orgmok>

The soils on the slopes are very susceptible to erosion with rills and gullies. The measures to address this included increased fencing to control the movement of livestock, and planting of fodder crops (*Atriplex sp.*) to help stabilise the slopes. The benefits of minimum tillage in protecting the soil were also tested. However, the farmers were suspicious. A reliable income is critical to them. Annual profit tends to matter more than long term sustainability. Traditions are hard to change, but there are plans for greater involvement of the regional Agricultural Service, a review of legislation, and agreement among some stakeholders to start a community development project.

Boteti, Botswana

<http://tinyurl.com/7fm8eze>

A biogas plant has been set up since commercial gas is expensive and in short supply, and many people use firewood for cooking and heating, which is unsustainable. The government promotes sustainability, yet still allows schools to use firewood for fuel. The DESIRE stakeholders understand the benefits of extending the biogas programme, and hope that the government Departments of Energy Affairs and Forestry will support new initiatives.

Summary of stakeholder feedback across all study sites

The main outcomes of the DESIRE-WOCAT stakeholder workshops and other meetings were praise for:

- opportunities to share experiences,
- and opportunities to find practical suggestions for mitigating or preventing land degradation in drylands

Feedback on new opportunities for stakeholders	Example comments	No. sites making the comments
An opportunity to express views	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>An excellent opportunity to make their views known regarding the national program of soil conservation and the way they think</i> • <i>It was a very good opportunity to debate frankly key issues relevant to the management of the natural resources in the region</i> 	3
Helped participants prepare for the future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Farmers especially welcomed the team's approach to determining future steps through discussion with them</i> 	2
An opportunity to learn about the DESIRE research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>An opportunity to know the results of the project that they were part of</i> • <i>You see simple and feasible solutions</i> 	2
Learn from and become more tolerant of each other's views	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Learn from participatory projects; tolerance between the different sectors (stakeholders)</i> 	1
An opportunity to connect with people and institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Workshops helped them to identify and connect with the institutions and the people who are working with them</i> 	1
Clear objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The objective was very clear</i> 	1

From Table 1, DESIRE Deliverable 5.4.1, M. Reed, L. Fleskens, L. Stringer



Stakeholder discussions and results in Portugal.

The stakeholders also had lots to say about what they liked and what they did not like at the workshops. The stakeholders provided many ideas for improving stakeholder participation in research projects in the future.

Feedback Theme	Example Comments	No. sites giving comments
Benefits of a participatory approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The participatory approach gave each group of stakeholders the opportunity to be part of the project and share responsibility for the success of the selected technology from the beginning</i> <i>As workshops were open to anyone, the workshops helped to give more transparency to the actions and decisions that arose from the process</i> 	8
Poor stakeholder representation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The only real problem was the difficulty of including some other institutions other than those that typically attended workshops as part of the DESIRE process.</i> <i>Participants agreed that a higher participation of farmers is required and that to achieve this, a different approach may be needed with meetings outside in the field and only for maximum half a day</i> 	5
Learning from each other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Participants indicated they learned a lot from each other, from discussions and from the results of field trials. The interactive approach of workshops was considered effective to achieve interaction between participants, and was highly valued</i> 	4
Contribution to policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The objectives of the DESIRE project fit in the goals of UNCCD and the positive results should be applied to other watersheds...</i> <i>The results of the DESIRE project have been important for a number of programs and actions linked to the Government's Secretariat of the Environment and Natural Resources</i> 	3
Time-consuming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>All participants agreed that the inclusive nature of the DESIRE project was particularly useful, although it was time-consuming</i> 	2
Concerns about follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Lack of funding for some remediation strategies and future research in the area</i> <i>Wish to continue meeting in such events in future</i> 	2
Making connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Highly encouraged the synergies between all the partners: research, development, policy, regional and international cooperation</i> <i>The project integrated different stakeholder groups (farmers, administration, scientists)</i> 	2
Attitudinal change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The project changed the attitude of land users regarding the use of natural resources</i> 	1
Lack of trust in research findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The engineers didn't appreciate a lot the research protocol and were suspicious with some of the results</i> 	1
Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Very tangible results were provided over solutions that are innovative</i> 	1
Learning between researchers and stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>You learn and value other measures</i> <i>I think this is the best available method to facilitate the active participation between scientists and administration</i> 	1
Information overload	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Too much information to deal with</i> 	1

From Table 2, DESIRE Deliverable 5.4.1, M. Reed, L. Fleskens, L. Stringer

Using stakeholder observations, we can do better in future. We can:

- ✓ Find out whether a wider range of stakeholders could be included, make contact with stakeholders more systematically, avoid bias
- ✓ Find out what times are suitable for stakeholders to meet; do not make assumptions
- ✓ Attract stakeholders to attend with appropriate enticements, e.g. the chance to give their views, promise of action, new knowledge, economic benefits, refreshments!
- ✓ Ask stakeholders about their preferred formats for information
- ✓ Set up more opportunities for demonstrations of technologies in the field
- ✓ Put more emphasis on finding a balance between the benefits of technologies in economic terms as well as in ecological terms
- ✓ Identify underlying issues, such as land tenure systems, that can profoundly affect the take up of new ideas for sustainability
- ✓ Always remember that peoples' livelihoods in drylands are likely to be insecure, and that they will naturally be suspicious of new ideas unless they see sufficient evidence of profitability
- ✓ If decision makers and policy makers do not have time to attend workshops, make sure the key features are taken to them, with scientific evidence of any need for change presented concisely and impartially

For more information about research workshops with stakeholders see :

- **DESIRE Manual of Communication and Dissemination:** <http://tinyurl.com/6pras6e>
- Report and synthesis of DESIRE stakeholder workshop I: <http://preview.tinyurl.com/bvxnpgn>
- Database of evaluated strategies from the DESIRE project: <http://preview.tinyurl.com/dyglgzb>
- Decision support tool for strategy selection: <http://preview.tinyurl.com/dyrs8yz>
- DESIRE Stakeholder workshop II, synthesis report: <http://preview.tinyurl.com/bru6fzl>

This Info-brief has been compiled by Nichola Geeson using material from various DESIRE partners, in particular from Mark Reed, Lindsay Stringer, Luuk Fleskens, Gudrun Schwilch, Felicitas Bachmann, Wang Fei and Mohamed Ouessar

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For more information and contact details see:

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

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Contact DESIRE coordinator: Coen.Ritsema@wur.nl

Contact DESIRE Communications: ngproject3@googlemail.com

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