

REMOVING BARRIERS TO SUSTAINABLE LAND MANAGEMENT

Continuing land degradation is an important indicator of the existence of barriers that prevent countries from implementing sustainable land management. Often, the underlying causes of land degradation are complex, and solutions require a systemic and systematic approach. The challenge for policymakers is to make informed decisions about the use of natural resources without jeopardizing the resilience of the ecosystems.

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) funds activities that help remove institutional and governance, economic and financial, social and behavioral, and technological and knowledge barriers to the adoption of sustainable land management. These activities include developing institutional and human resource capacity, strengthening policy and regulatory environments, developing economic incentives, and disseminating best practices and lessons learned.

INSTITUTIONAL AND GOVERNANCE BARRIERS

A developing country's commitment to combating land degradation is frequently undermined by limited individual, institutional, and systemic capacity. At the national and regional levels, government institutions and ministries often lack personnel with technical or policy skills. At the same time, inter-institutional coordination and cooperation are generally competitive or non-existent. Agricultural and rural development infrastructures are often divided by sectors, and land degradation issues are not appropriately incorporated in decisionmaking. Extension services—the link between the national and local levels—often

suffer from budgetary cuts and low capacities, which affect their ability to provide the necessary services to the land users.

In some developing countries, legislation is based on top-down command and control regulations that rely on compliance and enforcement. In others, the government's inability to enforce the law properly often leads to perverse behavior by local land users. In these cases, laws and regulations are often poorly understood, ineffectively enforced, and subject to varying interpretations.

GEF assistance helps remove these institutional and governance barriers. The GEF also supports incorporation of sustainable land management principles into institutional and governance structures.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL BARRIERS

Many developing countries, especially least developed countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS), lack the financial resources to change land management policies and practices. With insufficient budgetary allocations, the goal of sustainable land management remains elusive, as it often conflicts with priorities related to poverty reduction, epidemics, peacekeeping, and economic growth.

The GEF promotes the mainstreaming of environmental concerns into production programs and policies, as well as into cross-cutting sectors such as agriculture, planning, and water management. With GEF assistance, regular sector budgets become available to promote environmentally

sound management of the country's natural resources.

SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL BARRIERS

People can be a major asset in reversing land degradation if they are healthy, politically motivated, and economically empowered to care for the land. Subsistence agriculture, poverty, and illiteracy are important causes of land and environmental degradation.

Some countries are relying on environmental education as an instrument to halt environmental degradation in the long run. These programs provide opportunities to introduce linkages among population dynamics, land use change, and environmental impact.

The GEF supports activities that promote environmental education as a priority in achieving sustainable development goals. Professionals at all levels need regular training that is based on the most recent scientific and technical data and information. Such training can improve job performance and promote better communication with people who use their services.

TECHNOLOGICAL AND KNOWLEDGE BARRIERS

At the local level, the stakeholders' knowledge of sustainable land management practices is often limited to traditional techniques and knowledge that has been transferred through generations. However, what might have been a sustainable land use practice in the past may not be viable anymore. New technologies and information on how to adapt traditional technologies to the new challenges are key priorities. For example, many developing country farmers live and work in isolation, without access to data and information that are essential for choosing the right crop variety, estimating the right amount of irrigation water, and preparing for a severe drought period or a potential natural disaster.

The GEF supports improved access to clear and easily understandable information—for example, new land management techniques, small credit schemes for farmers, information on new and more resilient crop varieties, access to early warn-

ing systems, and data trends on the local climate. Such information helps local farmers make informed decisions on how to use their land in the best way.

GEF SUPPORT IN BHUTAN: A PROJECT EXAMPLE

The Kingdom of Bhutan is a small landlocked country in the eastern Himalayas. The population of Bhutan must make its living within fragile and inherently unstable ecosystems. In areas of intensive use, soil erosion, landslides, forest degradation, and the depletion of soil fertility on agricultural land are becoming increasingly visible and accelerating degradation of the land.

In July 2005, the GEF approved a project, to be implemented by the World Bank, which will promote innovative mechanisms to enhance sustainable land management practices in Bhutan. The project will focus on securing livelihoods for rural people, while at the same time preventing the fragile ecosystems from further degrading.

The project will remove barriers for sustainable land management by:

- Harmonizing planning procedures and improving coordination among line agencies to improve cross-sectoral reviews of proposed investments and environmentally friendly alternatives
- Expanding the participation of local governments and other stakeholders (private sector and local residents) in decentralized natural resource planning and management, providing access to information on proposed activities, and ensuring full involvement in the environmental review process
- Setting up an environmental information and monitoring system
- Identifying hazard-prone and environmentally risky areas as well as alternative sites that are more suitable for proposed development investments
- Identifying and managing the risks of planned and unplanned development
- Assessing, identifying, and promoting sustainable land management options and technologies through local practice, adaptation, experimentation, and dissemination.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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