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Title:

Multi-stakeholder territorial cooperation for the development of agroecology on a regional scale: the example of the implementation of Agroecological Development Plans in rice-fish farming areas in Madagascar

Abstract:

In Madagascar, carp farming in rice paddies, or rice-fish farming, is an agroecological practice adopted by many farmers in the highlands. However, in the context of climate change, droughts at the start of the cycle, followed by periods of flooding due to cyclones or tropical storms, are having a negative impact on production, by reducing the length of cycles or leading to the loss of fish. In addition, demographic pressure leads to a year-on-year reduction in irrigated farmland and unsustainable exploitation of the hillsides. This contributes to massive erosion, leading to the silting up of rice fields and damaging production. Faced with these facts, and to enable farmers to continue to develop rice-fish farming, it became necessary to intervene on a catchment scale rather than on a plot-by-plot basis. By applying agroecological practices on the hillsides, such as contour farming, cover crops, reforestation, compost production, etc., the farmers are better able to protect their catchment area and hence their fish farms in the lowland plots. This work on a range of practices mobilises different partners with complementary skills and requires a multi-actor territorial approach, placing the community of farmers at the centre. In fact, it is essential that the various development measures are designed to be consistent with the organisation of the area and respond to the concerns of the stakeholders who develop them. To this end, a specific working methodology has been devised for setting up Agroecological Development Plans (PDAE), which are co-constructed with the farmers concerned. These plans are based on the concerns encountered by the community of farmers in a sub-catchment area, which limit their ability to develop their land. These concerns are collected by field agents, using non-technical skills such as comprehensive interviews, village mapping and study walks, inspired by the approach developed by GERDAL (Groupe d'expérimentations et de Recherche: Développement et Actions Localisées) and other networks promoting participatory approaches. The technicians from the various development players involved in this process thus become territorial facilitators whose aim is to get farmers to transform their concerns into treatable problems, and to seek solutions that will enable them to protect their sub-catchment areas. These solutions are then brought together in a coherent way in these PDAEs, which are specific to each area. These plans are then implemented in the territories under the coordination of representatives chosen by the community, with the support of territorial facilitators. This methodology makes it possible to anchor the development of agroecology in the long term by ensuring that the practices implemented respond to the concerns of the farming communities and that they take ownership of their implementation.

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