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- Translating science into policy and practice



Participatory methods for sustainable management of Shea trees in Burkina Faso

Importance of Shea trees in Burkina Faso

Shea tree (*Vitellaria paradoxa*) is a plant species found exclusively in sixteen countries in West and Central Africa. The nuts and butter from Shea trees are used in food and beauty products, and are popular in the two regions as well as on the international market.

Burkina Faso is the leading Shea exporting country in the world, contributing more than one fourth of total exports and accounting for 7 percent of the country's total exports in USD (excluding gold). The sector employs more than 500 000 people, out of which 90 percent are women. Today, 45 percent of agricultural households in Burkina Faso depend on Shea nuts as part of their livelihood. However, the potential of Shea tree production in Burkina Faso is underutilized; in 2015, the annual Shea nuts production reached 122 000 tons, while the potential yield is estimated to 850 000 tons of Shea fruit.

Despite their importance and potential, Shea trees are subject to many constraints that threaten their production despite their importance and potential. These include:

1. Insufficient knowledge of the biology of Shea trees which hinder sustainable production;
2. The relatively long duration before trees bear their first fruits; about 15 to 20 years. This contributes to farmers' lack of interest

Key messages

- Stakeholders need to improve the management of Shea trees – a key natural resource in Burkina Faso - in a more sustainable direction.
- To increase knowledge about how to sustainably use Shea trees and at the same time increase their productivity, local governments and communities need to work together and develop management plans. This brief illustrates an example with so called Shea tree management charters.
- The charters are a participative response to the multidimensional difficulties of sustainable resource management in a complex context, and to the wide variety of management rights that exist in the area.

in replanting trees once they are no longer productive;

3. The slow growth rate of Shea trees. Bushfires and harvesting of bark for traditional medicine are factors that have a negative impact on the species growth rate;
4. The regeneration of the trees are low due to livestock pressure on seedlings, as well as severe tree cutting of both new and old trees for feed requirements and fire-wood supply;

Multiple user groups, including many poor households, are dependent on Shea tree production as part of their income in Burkina Faso and the users often have conflicting interests. As a result, the degradation of Shea trees has a great impact on the livelihoods of the rural poor in the country.

A domestication and conservation strategy of key threatened indigenous tree species, including the Shea tree, needs to be developed in Burkina Faso and implemented by policy-makers with participation of local communities.

To provide sustainable solutions for production of Shea fruits, the government of Burkina Faso adopted a national strategy for sustainable development of the Shea sector. The objectives of this strategy are, first, to increase volumes of Shea nuts produced with support from research and development, ensuring sustainable management of the Shea tree resources. Second, to strengthen the capacities of various actors in the Shea tree sector (farmers, collectors, traders etc.) for better self-organization. Third, to improve Shea nut value addition chains by creating processing units and product development facilities supported by research.

Charters – a way to sustainably use a natural resource

Governments of the Sahelian countries have aimed at adopting participatory approaches to sustainably

manage natural resource capital for more than ten years. However, participation among populations remains low and natural resources are continuously exploited in an unsustainable manner. As a response, TREE AID - an NGO operating in Burkina Faso, is working towards increasing farmers' knowledge by using participatory methods for sustainable resource management.

Since June 2015, TREE AID carries out extension activities of technologies for Shea tree and local governance of natural resources through the research and development project "Restoration and improvement of the productivity of Shea tree production in Burkina Faso". The project has two general objectives: (i) to translate scientific results for policy-makers and practitioners working with the restoration of Shea, and (ii) to improve knowledge of Shea production by research activities. Amongst other things, the project focuses on developing charters together with relevant stakeholders. A charter is a consensual document that defines the rules and the modes of how to sustainably manage a natural resource.

Thus, a charter can be used in many localities. The principle of the charter is based on observation of the multitude of rules that apply to natural resource management, the multitude of actors, the different

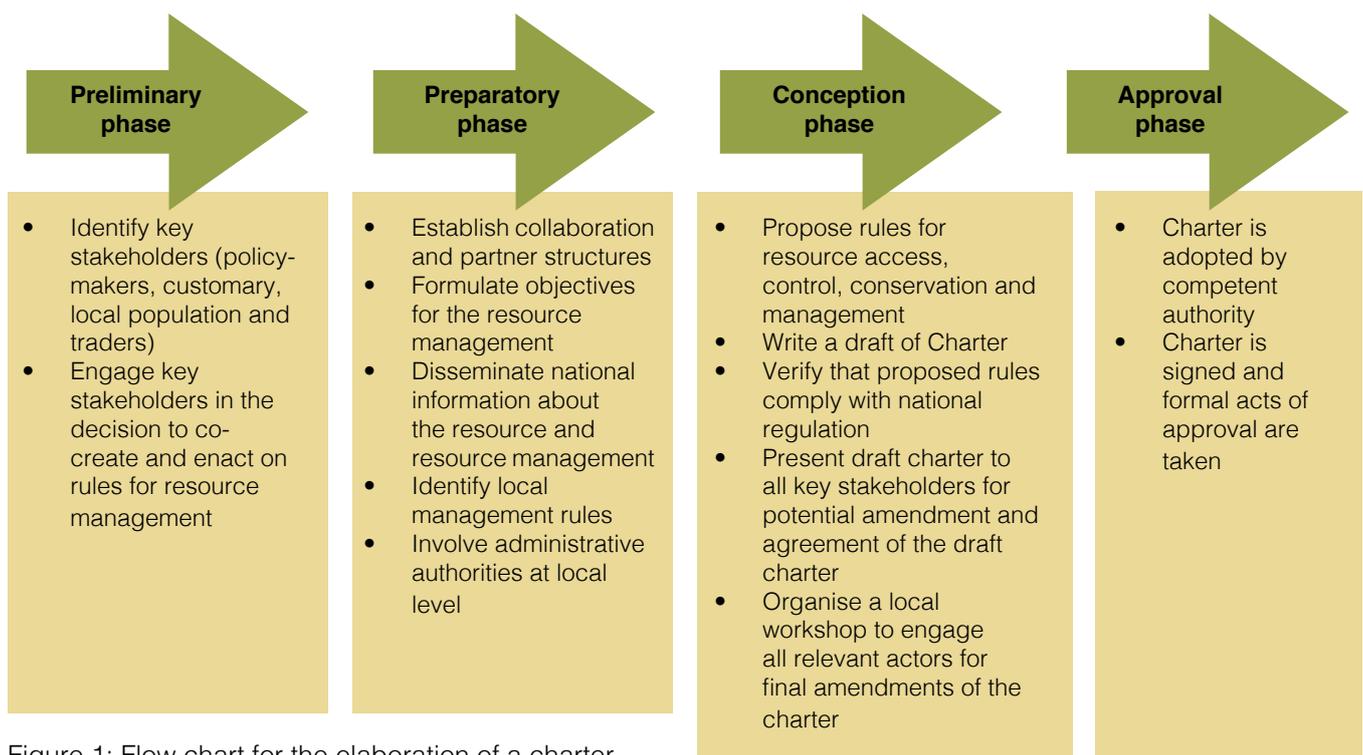


Figure 1: Flow chart for the elaboration of a charter

types of interventions and procedures for access to the resource. A successful charter requires networking and engagement of all key actors, as well as identification of all the rules and land access structures.

Previously, the role of the local policy-makers was to authorize permits, apply taxes and use powers of sanctions for the Shea tree management. This role often lacked legitimacy and local responsibility, resulting in poor governance practices. In contrast, the co-creation of a charter by farmers and local authorities provides a real opportunity to change this situation. The process of drawing up the charter is organized in four successive phases as shown in the flow chart in Figure 1.

Where communities have applied charters, we can already see results in increased awareness of the importance of Shea trees and that management needs to be improved. Local authorities engage with all stakeholders in the decision-making processes to develop the charters. This has led to an increased capacity of a wide range of key stakeholders (policy-makers, customary and local population, traders) to contribute to sustainable management of natural resources. This is illustrated with the fact that eleven local co-partnerships for Shea tree management have been established in Burkina Faso.

When it comes to the management practice itself, it has resulted in a knowledge transfer of techniques for taking care of Shea trees in farms as illustrated in Figure 2.

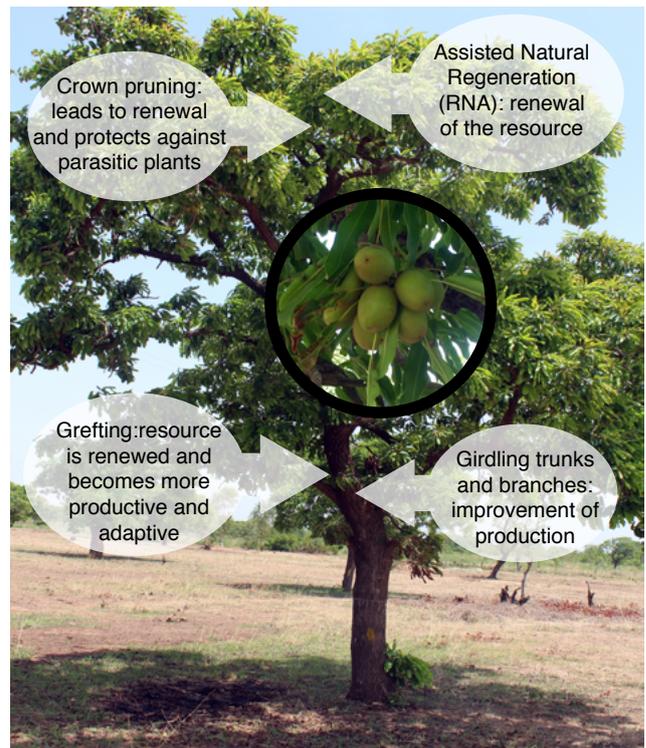


Figure 2. Techniques transferred to the population

Farmers have, for example, started to protect seedling populations of Shea trees to facilitate regeneration in farms and forest. In addition, farmers have begun to abandon the cultural perception that Shea trees are wild and therefore cannot be planted and managed as an agricultural product.

Carried by a community, a charter brings together all the actors of a territory who design a program of actions and enact rules of access and management to increase the value of the natural resource.



Photo 1. A municipal council in Burkina Faso, after adopting the proposed charter

Charter development process

The charter development process starts with inviting local stakeholders to sit around the same table to discuss current challenges around sustainably managing a resource, in this case Shea trees (Photo 2). Second, they co-define rules of good management with the support of customary and technical services, as well as local authorities and organisations. At the end of the consultation, a first version of a management charter for Shea trees is developed. Third, the charter, after potential revision, is adopted by the local authorities (municipal council) before it is implemented by local communities (Photo 1).

A charter always includes a management plan, which is a document that contains all the actions to be taken over a given period, both short and long-term, to achieve specific objectives.



Photo 2. Meeting with the communities to discuss the NRM issues

Conclusions

Charters have facilitated the involvement of key stakeholders, including policy- and community decision-makers and helped find better ways to manage a natural resource sustainably. This brief has described the charter process with the example of Shea trees in Burkina Faso.

The charters reinforce the involvement of the customary management in the overall management of Shea trees and all stakeholders take part in the execution of the actions identified in the charters. Furthermore, the existing charters are taken into account in the drafting of municipal development plans for how to manage natural resources, resulting in the local communities' automatic involvement in the process. The participatory process has brought the departments for natural resource management and other local actors closer together.

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