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Ranking constraints in a community forestry and soil conservation programme

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In East Harerge administrative zone in the eastern part of Ethiopia, high population density coupled with rugged topography have exposed the highlands to degradation through deforestation and soil erosion. A workshop was held for the agricultural extension workers (DAs) and catchment technicians (CTs) employed by the Community Forestry and Soil Conservation Development Department (CFSCDD). The aim of the workshop was to allow the employees at the grassroots level of the department to identify the constraints in the department's forestry and soil conservation

activities and to suggest possible solutions to encourage sustainability in the future.

The 14 DAs and 18 CTs participating in the workshop were asked to suggest the constraints which they felt most hindered the success of the community forestry and soil conservation programme. These are listed in Table 1. The participants were then asked to group the constraints into three categories of importance:

Table 1. Constraints ranked by grassroots level staff

Constraint	Most important		Next most important		Least important	
	DA	CT	DA	CT	DA	CT
Unnecessary involvement by politicians and administrators	0*	1	3	4	3	3
Existence of 'Food for Work'	3	2	1	0	3	0
Decision-making by Peasants' Association's executive committee on activities and benefits of the programme without consent of peasant members	0	1	0	0	0	0
Lack of involvement of agricultural extension workers in planning and implementing programme activities	0	0	3	1	2	2
Lack of farmer participation	6	8	0	6	5	3
Involvement of technical staff in activities which are disliked by farmers, such as the villagisation programme	0	0	2	1	1	3
Lack of defined land use and forestry policy	5	6	2	5	0	2
Lack of security of getting benefits from CFSC activities	0	0	3	1	0	4
Recommended measures are not technically suited.	0	0	0	0	0	1

* figures show the numbers of respondents

This shows that the most important constraints were felt by the majority of respondents to be the lack of farmer participation, the lack of defined land use and forest policy and the existence of 'Food for Work'. Both DAs and CTs felt that the area in which most improvement was needed was in enabling better participation with farmers.

Ranking by extension workers to assess their own programmes is a useful application of the technique. Furthermore, consulting those at the interface between the programme activities and the farmers themselves enables an accurate picture of the effectiveness of a programme to be obtained. This approach could also help to formulate solutions to the biggest constraints. As the participants were drawn from the grassroots level they are not only closer to the problems, but also to the solutions, than other staff members of the Department.

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