

# Pathways out of Poverty for Burkina Faso's Reservoir-dependent Communities

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*The project brings together an interdisciplinary team of researchers from Bioversity International, King's College London, SNV Netherlands Development Organisation, and Université Ouaga 1 Pr Joseph Ki-Zerbo. The 15-month study is situated in two water reservoirs in the centre-east region of Burkina Faso.*

## Study aim

Working with communities facing the triple challenge of poverty, limited and declining common pool resources, and tensions among resource users, the study aims to develop and pilot participatory approaches that facilitate the equitable and sustainable collective management of small water reservoirs. We specifically interrogate the role of shared knowledge in shaping inclusive, collective decision-making to resolve resource management challenges, and the use of low-cost social and environmental monitoring tools to allow ongoing assessments that inform governance.

## Research approach

Drawing on 'contact theory', co-development of knowledge is achieved through Innovation Platforms (IPs) that foster multi-level dialogue and negotiation of shared solutions and field days to build capacities in low cost monitoring techniques. Local women and men from different social groups (ethnic, class, generational, and livelihood groups from several localities) come together under a managed set of social conditions to discuss problems with the reservoir and identify solutions that satisfy the interests of diverse users. Communities dialogue with local NGOs and technical government services (water technicians, extension workers, etc.) to discuss the feasibility and potential effectiveness of envisioned solutions. Together, they develop action plans and implement prioritized solutions. Lessons are distilled from the process to inform broader efforts to manage water reservoirs for multiple purposes.



## Innovation Platform Workflow



## Primary Audience

- Research participants, including water users, local NGOs, civil society organizations, and technical government services;
- Institutional stakeholders at the national (agricultural, water, environmental ministries and water management institutes) and international (e.g. Volta Basin Authority) levels.

These stakeholders are all playing specific roles in developing, implementing, and monitoring the innovations proposed.

## Effecting Change

Project participants have gained capacities to analyze their problems and develop equitable collective solutions. Previously under-recognized groups (e.g. women horticulturalists) have realized the value of their participation for defending their interests. They have created a sub-group to advise (male-dominated) water user committees, and are thus assuming new roles in local reservoir governance. Men too have acknowledged the value of women's participation in decision-making. Participants report having changed their perceptions and practices with respect to (gendered) reservoir use, and sensitizing others about the impacts of their use. Relations among users and between communities and government services, NGOs, etc. have been strengthened. All actors better understand their own role in collective reservoir management, and have aligned their actions.

## Findings

- 1) Innovation Platforms can raise the visibility of the knowledge and interests as well as the self-awareness of actors (e.g. women horticulturalists) whose stake in decision-making (e.g. regarding use and management of reservoirs) is under-recognized.
- 2) Creating separate working groups based on social differentiation (e.g. gender, social status, and generation) can foster more equitable innovation spaces; yet, the richness of Innovation Platforms lies in ultimately bringing groups together to create a dialogue across difference.
- 3) Supporting community and institutional (government, NGO) actors to define their own problems and solutions enables them to gain ownership over the proposed solutions, and to cultivate a common vision that extends beyond the scope and lifespan of a short-term (externally-led) project.