

WOCAT and the way forward

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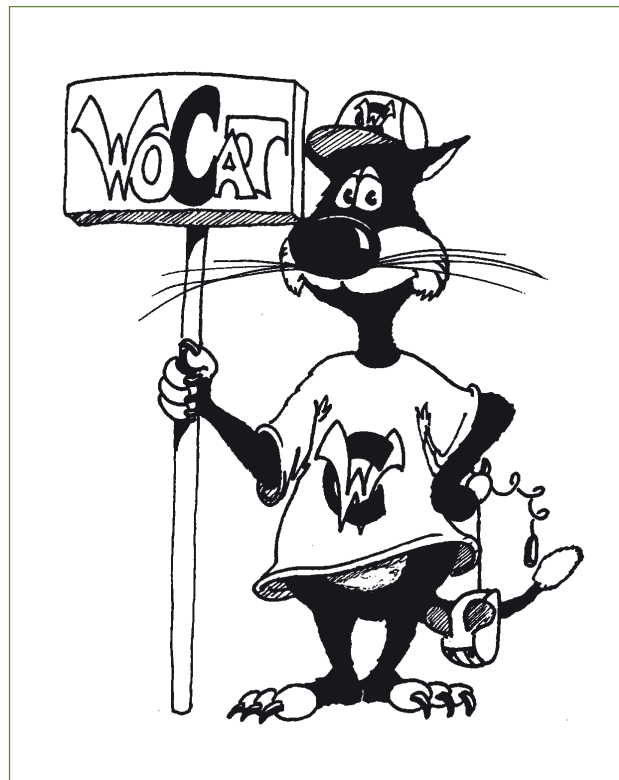
WOCAT's vision is that land and livelihoods can be improved through sharing and enhancing knowledge about sustainable land management. Thus the focus has been on achievements rather than degradation. In the last 15 years four dimensions of knowledge have been developed: SLM know-how; tools and methods; information sharing and networking; research, training and education. These are described in brief, below:

SLM know-how: the book, "where the land is greener" published in 2007 was a major breakthrough with respect to the acceptance of WOCAT, and in raising WOCAT's profile. The book comprises standardised presentations of case studies on technologies and approaches, as well as an analysis and policy implications. This book is being used as a prototype for regional and national compilations of SLM technologies and approaches in several countries, including Nepal (see presentation on 'Use of NepCAT Fact Sheets and future network plans '), Ethiopia, Bangladesh, and China. Thus many more books (and fact-sheet compilations) are under preparation.

Tools and methods: Over the last 15 years the programme has developed a well-accepted framework for documentation, monitoring, evaluation and dissemination of SLM knowledge, covering all steps from data collection, to a database and to using the information for decision support (see presentation on 'Decision support for effective implementation and up-scaling of SLM'). All network partners have been involved in formulating the needs, and in testing and developing these tools. While the methodology for the case studies has been accepted for several years, the mapping of degradation and conservation has only recently taken-off – thanks to the support of, and collaboration with, the FAO-LADA programme (see presentation on 'Mapping degradation and conservation: from local green spots to widespread SLM '). The idea behind the mapping exercise is to capture land use, degradation and conservation, and to spatially assess the impact on ecosystem services, including agricultural production, organic matter, and water availability. This information is intended to support decision making at the local, regional and national levels to indicate where land degradation needs to be addressed, and which SLM technologies should be spread.

Information sharing and networking: the decentralized network is managed by the global management team from CDE Bern (coordination and secretariat), FAO Rome and ISRIC Wageningen. WOCAT is incorporated in the activities and programmes of over 60 institutions world-wide: these constitute WOCAT's network partners. Annual workshops, steering committee meetings and taskforces are key features of the network. WOCAT's major recent emphasis has been on research projects under FAO- LADA, GEF, UNCCD, TerrAfrica and the EU, as well as on national level programmes.

Research training and education: So far, over 500 SLM specialists have been trained to use WOCAT tools and over 30 WOCAT-related MSc and PhD studies have been carried out. The role of WOCAT's research is to assist in filling knowledge gaps, as well as testing and developing methodologies. The key issues addressed by research are: (a) area coverage of degradation and conserva-



Cartoon: Karl Herweg



WOCAT Review by Hanspeter Liniger, CDE
(Photo: Mats Gurtner)

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tion; (b) the assessment of local and global impacts (social, economic and ecological) of degradation and conservation, both on-site as well as off-site, and their relation to poverty reduction, food production, carbon sequestration, desertification, biodiversity, water, and sensitivity/ tolerance to climate variability and change. Some current challenges include using satellite image processing and groundtruthing for assessing “hot” and “bright” spots, and quantifying impact. The involvement of students in WOCAT-related research activities is an asset – for example under the NCCR North South project of CDE, and under EU- DESIRE.

So, what is the way forward under these four dimensions?

SLM know-how: Further building-up of the knowledge base is needed and this requires more data as well as trained and committed people. Addressing the global issues related to SLM and degradation such as poverty, food security climate change, water, and desertification are priorities to donors and investors in SLM and rural development.

Tools & methods for knowledge management (KM) and decision support: Further development of the global and national standard tools and methods with flexible options/ alternatives is important as needs are constantly changing. Impact monitoring of degradation and SLM as well as the assessment on ecosystem services needs further efforts. Up-scaling and decision support are growing demands. The question of how to achieve “maximum impact” through “least effort” is constantly being asked at the local, national and at the global level.

Information sharing and networking: Long-term commitment and continuity is needed (SDC amongst other collaborators have set such an example). Synergies between partners (local, national and international) can be further developed, as WOCAT is not an additional burden but can help and be incorporated into existing programs. WOCAT maintains the principle of being open to new demands and to needs of its partners. The principle of building on its own experiences, while simultaneously learning from others must be further pursued.

Research training and education: Filling knowledge gaps through research, postgraduate training, and capacity building of both specialists and land users is a key investment for the future of SLM. Investment in knowledge management is needed: SLM is complex - and “best-bet” solutions are needed.

Eventually land users will (or may not!) implement SLM. Our role is to support them in the best possible way. woCAT needs a woDOG: Worldwide Orientation towards Development On the Ground “maximum impact” through “least effort” is constantly being asked at the local as well as at the global level.



Cartoon: Karl Herweg



Impressions from the annual WOCAT workshop and steering meeting.
(Photo: Mats Gurtner)

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