7 Socio-economic assessments in the context of large-scale restoration

Livelihood enhancement is one of the key objectives of large-scale restoration initiatives and other projects in the context of the Great Green Wall. Household surveys are an effective way to collect socio-economic data in the area of intervention and are used to measure the actual achievement and impact of these objectives. This socio-economic information helps to better design, plan, prioritise and assess restoration interventions with communities.

Restoration projects need to monitor and evaluate in order to assess where changes have occurred and whether these changes can be linked to project activities. Impact assessment has to be understood here as an approach that helps to judge the effectiveness of the project activities by measuring the changes and long-term effects brought about by those activities. It is an integral part of M&E and as such, can be integrated into the project's logical framework and measured by impact indicators.

A clear distinction should be made between activities or outputs (directly measurable results), outcomes (specific effects which can be observed during the course of the programme), and impacts (long term effects of the programme). Indeed, while outputs can usually be assessed by a simple reporting on project activities (e.g. number of households involved in education activities), outcome and impact indicators must be chosen carefully so as to reflect medium and long-term improvements, respectively.

There are different ways to collect socio-economic data, one of most common and effective ways being through a household survey. Firstly, a household survey identifies the households as the lowest elementary unit from which data will be collected and measurements taken. Household-level surveys predominantly collect information on sources of income, land holdings, housing characteristics, coping strategies, household food production and consumption, diet quality (FAO, 2011).

Secondly, a household survey is based on a standardized set of questions (see chapter 8) generating quantitative data using statistical techniques, thus making measurements more precise. The answers to the survey questions are then used to assess pre-determined impact indicators. The information gathered from a sample (or sub-set of households) can be generalized for the entire population of interest (see chapter 9).

Ideally, the assessment design will combine the two following approaches (fig. 6):

- **Two-time points:** the same questions are asked before the programme begins (providing values for the indicators at the time 0 of the project, or "baseline") and again after it has been implemented ("endline"). Comparison of indicator levels before and after the process provides quantitative evidence of changes that have occurred since the beginning of the programme.

- **Counterfactual analysis:** the same questions are asked after programme implementation in households having participated in the programme, as well as households that have not (i.e. the control group) but live in similar conditions. The comparison between the two groups is divided between the current socio-economic status of the households after the intervention, and the potential situation should the project not be implemented; the counterfactual analysis therefore verifies whether the changes observed can be attributed to the programme.

Household surveys are not only used for impact assessment but can potentially serve to collect a multitude of other useful information related to livelihoods. If carried out prior to a large-scale restoration intervention, a socio-economic assessment can provide key information for decision making, i.e. to better plan and design the intervention. The information needed has to be carefully assessed in advance, and can include:

- the plant species used by the households (which can then potentially be selected as preferred restoration species);
- the main sources of livelihoods (which for example can serve as a guide for the use of fodder or agroforestry restoration species);
- the way forests and land are used (and if conflicts exist);
- existing capacities and capacity needs;
- the identification of potential restoration sites.

FIGURE 6. Two-time points vs counterfactual analysis assessment design