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Testing soil and water conservation methods in 16 countries; do best practices exist?

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In order to find suitable conservation measures to protect the land from further deterioration leading to desertification, sustainable land management technologies were applied in 16 locations in countries having land degradation problems such as erosion (by wind and water), salinization, vegetation degradation and wild fire. The technologies were selected in consultation with all the stakeholders involved which included farmers, land users, local administrators and scientists. The selected technologies varied from vegetative (planting trees) through agronomic (crop rotation, contour ploughing, minimum tillage) to mechanical (terracing, fencing, prescribed burning) measures. They were applied in the 16 hotspot locations in semi-arid and arid regions to test their suitability for conservation purposes. Improvement on soil conditions was monitored during 2-3 years and the effectiveness of the applied technologies were evaluated. Although data from monitoring is available for only 2-3 years the results show improvements of soil conditions and indicate that good land management practices can help in minimizing land degradation. The results also show that the so called “the best practices” which could be applied everywhere with big success do not exist. Each region is characterized by having its own bio-physical and socio-economic factors which determine whether certain land management practices can be applied successfully which is also socially acceptable in the area.