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Land users' perceptions of land degradation and implications for sustainable land management and governance in Niger State, Nigeria

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Declining land productivity remains a challenge for agricultural-based livelihoods and for achieving food security. This is particularly the case in social-ecological contexts where people are largely dependent on local food production for their livelihoods and food security, such as among rural communities in the Nigeria Guinea Savannah. Yet how land users perceive the problem of land degradation and their capacity to manage land in an environmentally sustainable manner, can influence the measures they can initiate to address land degradation. Using a case study of Niger state, Nigeria, this study examines land users' experiences and land management measures to address land degradation in the Nigeria Guinea Savannah. 30 communities were purposively selected based on the validated mapping of the hotspots of degraded areas. We adapted the World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies Sustainable Land Management questionnaires to also capture perceptions and administered 225 questionnaires to land users. Through, key informant interviews further insights and data on perspectives and motivations of land users and communities were collected to understand the land degradation situation and interpret the questionnaire surveys. Through qualitative and statistical analysis of differences in perceptions between socio-cultural strata, we show the relations between socio-demographic, socio-economic factors, and land degradation. We discuss land governance and sustainable land management practices for improving land productivity in the region.