



## Local livelihoods and land users' perceptions of land degradation in northwest Tunisia



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### ABSTRACT

Understanding land users' livelihoods and their strategies is essential in order to adapt prevention and adaptation policies and to ensure sustainable land management (SLM) planning. Considering the global call for SLM, and due to a lack of studies on land degradation (LD) in Tunisia, we aimed to explore the livelihoods of farmers, their livelihoods strategies and perceptions about LD and land management, in order to design SLM in rural areas in Tunisia. We used the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) to analyse the livelihoods assets, livelihoods strategies, and the perceptions of people about LD and SLM. Through structured interviews with 90 households, we collected both quantitative and qualitative data on household assets, strategies, and perceptions. Results indicate variation in the status of livelihoods among households, which influences their livelihoods strategies and consequently livelihoods outcomes. When facing environmental issues, farm households apply various livelihoods strategies to shield themselves from negative impacts and shocks. Our study revealed that farmers in the high-livelihoods-assets category chose economic returns over environmental benefits. Farmers in the low-livelihoods-assets category have generated livelihoods strategies that lead to inappropriate management strategies due to low access to assets and, as a result, contributed to LD. This is because these farmers are more concerned about the immediate constraints of their livelihoods and subsistence than the medium and long-term sustainable land management. Compared to the other two groups, farmers in the medium-livelihoods assets category have the best perceptions and flexibility for SLM compared to the other two categories. Thus, as the quality of land is highly dependent on the way it is managed, environmental and land management planning, and policies should not only consider the rehabilitation of land but also require a better understanding of the livelihoods, strategies and perceptions of people as these remain key drivers that affect land condition.

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