

BEST CLOSING WORKSHOP, ILRI, NAIROBI 13 August 2013

Plenary feedback from 'Researcher' breakout group

Rapporteur: Lance Robinson

- The group would have liked to hear more about the underlying processes built into the economic games (eg. how these incorporate herd growth and mortality, drought risk, risk of being caught grazing illegally etc) and the assumptions underpinning the SDP models (processes, probabilities and ranges of values built into the successive rounds, and how these are applied to deliver the results shown).
- The games are currently played on the basis of no prior information and no communication between participants, focusing on individual household decisions. That helps simplify things for the purposes of the games, but has its own implications. It would be interesting to develop additional game structures and scenarios which take into account communal as well as individual decision making. People make conscious decisions to optimize relative to a particular goal: in this case, economic survival of the household in the long term
- How generalizable is the model? From the results so far, the approach can highlight a range of possible outcomes under different combinations of circumstances, and that it can flag up unexpected outcomes.
- The group saw the main impact of this work as being at the practitioner/ decision-making level, more than at the policy level through policy briefs. However, it can also impact policy (eg. legislation on conservancies and whether these are defined as livestock-free zones).
- Overall, the main driver of change is seen as loss of land (whether to conservancies or to large scale farming).
- In conveying these findings to a diversity of communities and addressing their diverse land uses in real landscapes, the main lessons / issues to consider will be
 - Communication
 - Information about the conditions in the game
 - Feedback on people's losses and gains need to make a clearer link between decisions people take and the outcomes they experience
- Understanding the different components of 'optimal' strategy from the model needs further work and this is still under consideration. For example, it's necessary to be clear about
 - optimization over what time frame? Long vs short term horizons?
 - What are the thresholds used (and why)
- In interpreting the games, need to distinguish
 - what people say they do vs what they actually do
 - how culture and mindsets change through time
 - how decision-making processes and strategies change through time
- there should be follow up work returning to Maasai groups that played games to see how the process has impacted their behavior and livelihoods
- Disseminating the results:
 - The graphical presentations are good - a good first step
 - Playing the economic game could have real impact at the policy and programme levels as well as the user groups
 - The games could become tools to support land use planning and could be the basis for 're-building' 'policy packages' from individual traits.
 - Videos are a possible dissemination option
 - Portability could be extended through flow diagrams, smart phone apps