

## 3.5 Engaging Youth in Water, Land and Ecosystems: WLE's youth strategy: challenges, issues and entry points

### 3.5.1 Background

WLE is developing a youth-inclusive research agenda and approach to sustainable intensification in which a healthy functioning ecosystem is seen as a prerequisite to agriculture development, resilience of food systems and human well-being. WLE's starting point is to equip young men and women to be major stakeholders and active participants in agriculture and natural resource management by raising their confidence, promoting youth leadership, and enhancing their ability to build successful careers and have an active voice in decision making in agriculture and natural resource management. A two-pronged approach is required: at an individual level, appropriate capacities and capabilities need to be developed to take up irrigation and other agricultural and NRM technologies. At a structural level, research will identify opportunities for policy and institutional reforms to enable youth to benefit from water, land and ecosystems access. The aim is to identify how to enable rural and peri-urban youth to sustainable and entrepreneurial farmers, managers and professionals.

### 3.5.2 Youth, why involve them?

In 2012, Asia had a population of 4.3 billion people. More than 750 million of them were young women and men aged 15 to 24 years (UN ESCAP 2012). The sheer number and demographic profile of young people in Asia affects the socio-economic development of the region, as governments attempt to address the "dramatic changes in young people's lives" brought about by "the shift from traditional agriculture toward an industrial, export-based economy" (East West Center 2002). In Africa, half the population is under the age of 25 (World Bank 2014), and a majority live in rural areas. Six in ten rural people around the world are young people (IFAD 2012), deriving their income from agriculture and providing the majority of labor to agriculture and other rural endeavors (IFAD 2012).

There are at least three reasons to involve youth in WLE. First, **youth will bear the consequences of today's decisions**. This makes them relevant stakeholders, and they should have a voice in the interventions and actions that need to be taken to slow down, and even reverse, the degradation of ecosystems and natural resources. Second, **youth are critical to finding solutions and educating others**. Diverse initiatives are spearheaded by young people to address socio-ecological problems they engage in. Developing confidence and space for youth leaders to provide technical and policy inputs to negotiating groups, and engage with decision-makers through high-level meetings and in informal settings can generate novel solutions (UN n.d.). Third, **youth bring energy, vitality, and innovation (IFPRI 2012) into the sustainable management of ecosystems**. Engaging youth can be transformative for societies, for both economic growth and social development. Pairing this with the need for increased agricultural growth, tapping into youth, will provide a substantial "youth dividend".

### 3.5.3 WLE research framework for empowering youth for water, land and ecosystems

A key objective for WLE in phase 2 is to examine NRM roles and the impacts of socio-cultural and economic differentiation and of male and female youth. WLE plans to identify how shifts in intergenerational practices and involvement with water, land and ecosystems affect diverse groups of youth within varying social, economic and environmental agricultural contexts in the WLE regions. WLE will analyze the influence of various age-related perceptions, choices, practices, knowledge, skills, power

relations, decision-making, opportunities and risks on accessing water and land, and related factors such as agricultural inputs, markets, and finance.

WLE will also identify the roles and impacts of youth within agrarian transformations. We will specifically look at the heterogeneous nature of youth, and develop approaches to deal with it. Research shows how rural out-migration impacts the functionality of water and land management institutions and leads to a reduction of intergenerational transfer of agro-ecological knowledge (Punch and Sugden 2013). This is a highly gendered process, as primarily young males migrate, leading to the aging and feminization of agriculture. WLE has also tackled the changing perceptions and aspirations of youth, as a participatory video project in Nepal (Clement and Sugden forthcoming) provided evidence that seeking a job and increasing income are also relevant for young women, while prior generations relied on getting married for social advancement. Much of phase 1 has concentrated on Asia, but phase 2 will expand to Africa as well.

To reach its goal of youth being effective stakeholders in agriculture and NRM, WLE has developed a research framework for examining research areas crucial to empowering youth for water, land and ecosystems (Figure 1)

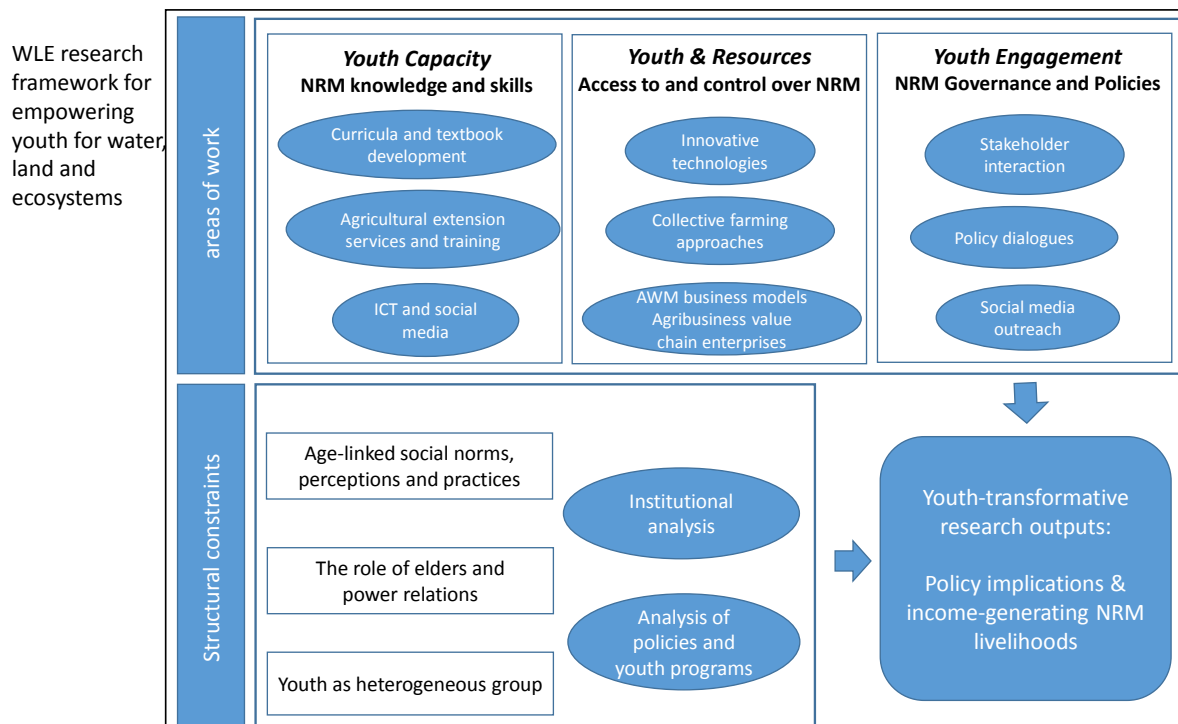


Figure 1: WLE research framework for empowering youth for water, land and ecosystems

### 1) What are the structural opportunities and constraints for youth to access and invest in NRM?

Empirical evidence from WLE and other research projects in the Eastern Gangetic Plains has identified how, alongside a patriarchal system, the dominance of elders challenges and limits the ability of youth to take over farm and natural resource management responsibilities. Building on this understanding and working with our partners, including interested AFS CRPs, we will critically examine how underlying age-

linked social norms, perceptions and practices exercise power over youth and prevent them from achieving their potential for productive agriculture. This includes comparative institutional and policy analysis on structural constraints in accessing natural resources in all WLE focal regions and selected CGIAR country sites. WLE and its partners will systematically evaluate the impact of existing policies and implementation programs on youths' knowledge, skills and access to and control over water, land, finance, markets and decision-making processes. We will investigate these interrelations and the context-specific requirements for different groups of youth, and identify conditions under which policies and interventions have failed to address these.

## **2) How can capacity development of youth on NRM be promoted?**

Educational material highlighting natural resource management has the potential of having a great impact on the next generation of rural and peri-urban youth. Since the knowledge and skills acquired through the formal educational system depict agriculture as an undesirable livelihood (Leder 2015), WLE plans to collaborate with AFS-CRPs to develop methods to integrate knowledge and skills on sustainable agricultural intensification, traditional agro-ecological knowledge, modern agribusiness models and value-chains in curricula and textbooks for business and formal schools. Further, WLE aims to promote access to, and quality of agricultural information, capacity development and skill development through promoting the reform of agricultural extension services for youth and ICT and social media use. We will build on ongoing research in the RUL flagship to promote business curricula, training and enterprise development on options for turning agro-industrial and urban food waste into assets with market value, with direct benefits for urban youth through job creation and capacity development, and indirectly through an improved living environment.

## **3) How can resource access and income-generating opportunities be promoted for youth?**

WLE will build on existing pilot projects to identify wider scaling strategies for youth employment opportunities through other innovative interventions, collaborative farming approaches, AWM business models and agribusiness value chains for regional and global markets. WLE will build on the learnings from the WLE project in the LWS (land and water solutions) flagship which has been piloting new solar irrigation and collective water distribution systems, whereby marginal tenant youth farmers take joint leases for plots of land to farm as a group. This approach encourages youth to see the potential for improved incomes on the farm, and develops enthusiasm for new technologies and joint farming, so migration is not automatically considered the only livelihood choice. Further, WLE will build on stakeholder and institutional analyses involving flow management, sanitation and pollution control by the WLE project "Restoring the Ganges", which is identifying how equitable engagement of women and youth in pollution control increases agricultural activities. Concerning the growing urban farming sector (Thebo et al. 2014), which is particularly attractive for rural youth, WLE will continue to develop innovative options for enterprise development along the value chains (from farm to trade and input supply) as well as in advanced farm support services (irrigation optimization, marketing, soil fertility enhancement and farm-IT), through the RUL and other flagships and in collaboration with the AFS-CRPs.

## **4) How can youth engage in natural resource governance and policy dialogues?**

WLE proactively plans to partner with young farmers, young researchers, youth organizations, teachers, curricula and syllabi designers as researchers, and not only see youth as research subjects. We will work closely with schools, universities, and extension services to develop educational and agricultural

approaches to create incentives for youth to engage and invest in sustainable natural resource intensification. WLE research on sustainable agricultural development tackles intergenerational justice by recognizing the voice of youth in natural resource management and by integrating youth as relevant stakeholders in ecosystem services-based approaches to sustainable intensification. WLE will identify opportunities for youth voices through stakeholder interactions and (social) media outreach to influence policy discussions and debates to address social differences for policy framing and response (Sumberg 2012). With policy briefs and youth research outputs, WLE will contribute to identifying necessary policy changes for curriculum and capacity development opportunities and water and land rights.

### 3.5.4 Implementation

In phase 1, youth already started emerging as an issue for WLE as illustrated above. In phase 2, it will gain more prominence, and within the first year WLE will develop a full youth strategy. We will develop a strategy of engaging with both the WLE flagships and AFS CRPs, sharing accountability and responsibility. Initial discussions have already started with FTA and with DCL. This is will be supplemented with a funding strategy, looking for ways to seek additional W3 and bilateral fund to strengthen the research done on youth. We will further develop and target the research questions and designs within WLE to address youth-related issues. WLE will invest in developing age-sensitive and multi-disciplinary tools, methods and analyses to research awareness raising, capacity building and decision-making processes in NRM and to improve investments and decisions by youth on sustainable intensification.

### 3.5.5 Outcomes and outputs

The outcomes of this youth-transformative research approach within WLE will be evidence-based knowledge of the conditions and solutions for age-specific institutional changes and policies. These are necessary to provide different groups of youth, including young women as well as men, with opportunities and incentives through resource access, knowledge and skills to engage in natural resource management.

WLE will seek to influence development choices to improve sustainable agricultural intensification through youth-inclusive approaches by:

- Providing evidence that youth-inclusive solutions contribute substantially to achieving improved food security, equity, livelihoods and healthy landscapes;
- Integrating youth in solutions to better manage risk related to rising shocks and competing uses as well as models and scenarios to understand trade-off and synergies; and
- Improved youth-inclusive management practices achieved primarily through participatory action research at the community and landscape level in order to promote learning and adaptive management.

The overall outcomes are evidence and solutions for achieving the institutional changes and policies necessary to provide youth opportunities, incentives, knowledge and skills to engage in agriculture through access to water, land, and ecosystems. WLE will aim to grow leaders, build communities, and strengthen agriculture and natural resource management.

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