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“Reconcile land system changes
with planetary health”

Stories through the lens: youth aspirations, and agroecology

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Abstract

We explore the perspectives of the youth from agriculture-dependent families towards agroecology, in Mandla district of Madhya Pradesh in India. The study is conducted using a qualitative photo-voice methodology where participants share their perspectives by capturing pictures from their lives. We ask 12 young males and females, their perspectives towards: their dream farm, current association with social groups, attitude about current state of environment, current degree of agency and decision-making, and understanding about agroecological farming. This was supplemented with 6 key informant interviews of government stakeholders and women's self-help group leaders.

Our results show that presence of water for irrigation is a significant component of dream farms of both male and female youth. Collectives play an important role in youth's lives -either directly or indirectly for improving their livelihoods. The youth is aware of the current issues arising due to climate change such as deforestation, in agriculture and the need for climate-smart and sustainable farming methods. However, there are differences in the level of agency/ decision-making between young males and females, and in how they perceive agroecology. Young women often take the lead in initiating organic practices or experimenting with techniques learned through community groups but face more resistance in asserting decision-making power.

Insights from interviews with institutional stakeholders reveal that agroecology is recognised as a promising and sustainable farming model. However, its implementation and adoption are hindered by top-down planning, limited flexibility for local adaptation, human resource constraints and physical challenges such as terrain, irrigation gaps, and poor access to livestock-based inputs. Demonstration efforts remain minimal, and young people-though viewed as key to future agricultural transformation-are often excluded from programme targets.

These learnings entail for a need to create targeted policy frameworks that include youth as a specific category in agricultural schemes. Investments in on-field agroecological demonstration units, flexible programme design at district levels, and stronger inter-departmental collaboration can enhance outreach and impact. Supporting youth-led innovation, particularly by young women through women collectives, interest-based trainings and multimedia learning could be a key to enabling a more inclusive and sustainable agricultural future.

Keywords: Agroecology, India, photovoice, youth

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