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Facilitating multi-actor planning towards aspirational multifunctionality of landscapes

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Abstract

Vibrant, diverse, healthy landscapes managed holistically can support resilient livelihoods, healthy diets, and planetary boundaries through sustainable eco-agrifood systems. Enhancing multifunctionality requires collaboration among diverse landscape actors to co-design technological, socioecological, and institutional innovations with transformative potential.

The CGIAR Multifunctional Landscapes Science Program fosters inclusive stakeholder conversations for shared visions, medium-term transition pathways, and concrete action plans outlining behavioural commitments. Under this program, the Vision to Action (V2A) approach - a multi-actor (producers, traders, enterprises, consumers, policymakers), multi-dimensional (agricultural, environmental, economic, social), and multi-scalar engagement process - was developed and is being tested and implemented in Kenya, Ethiopia, Tunisia, Zimbabwe, Peru, and India. It starts with aspirational visions and backcasts required behaviour changes. The process is always facilitated through close long-standing national civil society–CGIAR collaborations. The resulting action plans are owned by the landscape actors, with responsibility for implementation lying with them. At the same time, the plans point to opportunities and entry points for responsive external support - including by research-for-development partners such as the CGIAR.

This paper shares experiences from a multi-method assessment of prior V2A steps. In India, for instance, actions toward the aspirational future were mainly motivated by societal and environmental benefits rather than economic gains - though tangible benefits mattered more to farmers. Key barriers included insufficient finance, inadequate tools/machinery, and limited water access. Skills and knowledge were not major bottlenecks, which contrasts with the widespread perception that training and capacity development are critical to drive change. Market constraints like unfair prices for natural produce were seen as government responsibilities. The landscape actors involved saw only a limited role for the private sector in moving toward the vision.

Our experiences highlight the need for reflecting on change narratives to guide investment priorities by governments, development partners, and donors. The effort further demonstrates an innovative approach to identify most demanded and most effective strategies to support transformative change.

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