



# CRP Review 2020: Water, Land, and Ecosystems (WLE)



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The CGIAR Advisory Services (CAS) Secretariat is conducting independent reviews of the 12 CGIAR Research Programs (CRPs), including the Water, Land, and Ecosystems (WLE) CRP.

## CRP Background

WLE is one of four cross-cutting Global Integrating Programs within the CGIAR portfolio. WLE's mission is to provide the evidence base and solutions to help decision-makers scale up sustainable water, land and ecosystem management innovations and investments in agricultural landscapes that reduce risks and increase the resilience of women and men in developing countries

WLE is led by the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), and delivered in association with six CGIAR Centers: Bioversity International, Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and the World Agroforestry Center (ICRAF). The CRP also partnered with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and with the Global Partnership on Sustainable Urban Agriculture and Food Systems. WLE has five Flagships (FPs): Restoring Degraded Landscapes (FP1); Land and Water Solutions for Sustainable Intensification (FP2); Rural - Urban Linkages (FP3); Managing Resource Variability, Risks and Competing Uses for Increased Resilience (FP4); Enhancing Sustainability across Agricultural Systems (FP5).

## WLE CRP Review

The 2020 WLE CRP review builds upon research conducted under the first phase of the CRP which was [evaluated in 2016](#). This review assessed the extent to which the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of the WLE CRP delivered quality of science (QoS) and demonstrated effectiveness in relation to the CRP's theory of change (TOC) during 2017–19. The review used mixed methods of data collection: Review of program documents and management data, bibliometric analysis of 257 peer-reviewed journal articles (out of 663) and other communications outputs, key informant interviews (58 KIIs), and deep-dive analysis of 5 Outcome Impact Case Reports (OICRs).

### Q1: To What Extent Does WLE Deliver Quality of Science (2017–2019 Work)?

WLE staff are experts in their fields, leaders who are exceptionally good at fostering collaboration. WLE authors published with an average of six co-authors. The CRP's partnerships were crucial to its success.

The quality of scientific output was remarkably high. The top 25 publishing researchers have a median H index of 16.5. Journal impact factors (IFs) where WLE-affiliated authors publish and Altmetric scores are relatively high, with a median IF of 4.2 and Altmetric scores exceeding 20 in 40 publications. Although WLE's W1 and W2 funding is considerably lower than that of most other CRPs, scientific output is remarkably high given these constraints. WLE publications in the CGSPACE database focused on SDG-related topics in Africa and Asia. Publications about methods and innovations were particularly well received and

**Photo:** Hamish John Appleby/IWMI

accessed more than 23,000 times since 2017. WLE's research seems to expand its reach via briefs and reports, not just peer-reviewed publications.

## Q2: What Outputs and Outcomes Have Been Achieved, and What is the Importance of Those Identified Results?

Out of 89 milestones, 79 have been reached (90%). The 32 WLE innovations are solution-oriented and represent an important bridge between science and the practice oriented WLE targets and CGIAR sub-Intermediate Development Outcomes. The 20 WLE policies include strategic outcomes at the national level. Four global level policies include the uptake of WLE science in MEAs and in SDG reporting, with potentially far-reaching implications for national practice and reporting.

WLE recorded 20 OICRs between 2017–19. Deep dives into five OICRs demonstrate the potential for WLE to move from outcomes to impact, from local to large district scales, and showcase innovations and services with potential broader uptake through replication or scaling up with relevant partner support.

CRP program managers value the WLE ToCs and impact pathways as a framework for advancing thinking about program interventions and informing project design.

### Cross-Cutting Themes

**Climate change** is strongly represented in the WLE results framework, and was featured most prominently under FP2 and FP4. A fifth of OICRs identified the theme as a principal issue. **Capacity development** was at the apex of the WLE structure, bridging from research results to contributions to the IDOs, SLOs and ultimately to the SDGs. It is the most frequently referenced as a cross-cutting theme in OICRs, with 5 of the 20 OICRs (25%) identifying capacity development as a principal issue. WLE is contributing to system-wide consideration of and learning on **gender** issues including through the CGIAR Platform on Gender. One OICR identified gender (5% of all OICRs) as a principal issue, and three (15%) identified it as a significant issue. **Youth** has received less attention than other cross-cutting issues and is currently considered as one of many dimensions of inclusion. However, annual reports reflect consideration of youth as a distinct target group for CD and in studies related to employment opportunities and migration.

## Q3: Future Orientation

WLE's achievements provide an important reference point for One CGIAR for transdisciplinary work at the interface of livelihoods, landscape resilience, and food and water security. WLE's experiences in applying integrated systems approaches to real-world development challenges through leveraging multi-scale partnerships represents a significant opportunity for One CGIAR.

## Key Lessons

- It is important to recognize the extended timeframes needed to achieve outcomes in complex interventions, which often extend beyond the timeframes of individual projects or even a CRP phase.
- The skill sets required for successful development, scaling up, and outreach differ from research skill sets and, in some cases, may be best accessed through partnerships.



**Photo 1.** Pumping water in Malawi.  
*Credit: Mann/ILRI.*

## Recommendations for CGIAR

- Support integrated approaches on water, land, and environment in SDGs context.
- Develop appropriate incentives to encourage researchers and Centers to engage in interdisciplinary and systems research.
- Develop guidance for integration of social sciences into action research projects with an understanding of factors required for sustaining solutions.
- To promote engagement across CGIAR of local partners (NGOs, NARS/NARES) and local communities as collaborators in project design and implementation.

**Read the full report:**

<https://cas.cgiar.org/evaluation/crp-2020-wle>