



RESEARCH  
PROGRAM ON  
Water, Land and  
Ecosystems


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by:



## CGIAR Research Program on Water, Land and Ecosystems: Communications Strategy

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CGIAR Research Program on Water, Land and  
Ecosystems (WLE):  
**Engagement, Communication and  
Knowledge Management Strategy**



Cover photo: Sven Torfin/Panos

## 1. Introduction

The Water, Land and Ecosystems Program is an ambitious ten-year initiative that brings together innovative thinking on agriculture, natural resource management and poverty alleviation to deliver effective solutions for food security and environmental protection. Unmatched in the CGIAR, both in its scope and its breadth of partners, it requires a vibrant multi-faceted engagement, communications and knowledge management plan in order to achieve development impact.

This “Engagement, Communication and Knowledge Management Strategy” builds upon experience in implementing in the first year and current plans for where WLE is heading in the next three years. It is also based upon the partner consultation that was held in October 2012 on KM for CGIAR Research Programs. As part of this process, it was recognized that ‘engagement’ is becoming a major element of WLE particularly through the establishment of its Focal Region sites. Engagement and communication will be crucial aspects of the work to ensure that the research addresses the needs of clients and stakeholders that we take advantage of opportunities to be involved in various stages and in turn, that research can be fed into different decision-making processes.

The move towards multi-partner CGIAR Research Programs (CRPs) places emphasis on the transformation of how research is carried out so that it has more relevance and direct contribution to development outcomes. The CRPs provide opportunities for CGIAR centers and others to work together – to co-create, share and use knowledge in new ways. To do this, communication and knowledge management will need to be an integral part of the research process.

### The implications for researchers are that

- Impact pathways and theories of change will guide the development of communication products and processes – it will not just be journal articles, policy briefs and glossy stories.
- Communication and knowledge management will start at the beginning of the research process and that we communicate “about” research as well as “for” research.
- Researchers will need to engage more with the actual users of research to understand their needs, preferences and challenges.

In this strategy, communication, information management, knowledge management and uptake are considered a family of interlinked disciplines and activities that are essential to help research move from outputs (journal articles and international public goods) to outcomes (changes in knowledge, attitudes and how decisions are made). We see these methods and systems (engagement/uptake, communications, information management, knowledge sharing and knowledge management) as an integral part of the research process, rather than serving solely as support functions. They ensure that knowledge and information can be used by different stakeholders to support their own decision-making and that they are involved in the co-creation of knowledge. Impact happens through people, not simply by delivering information products or messages.

This strategy lays out the overall scope and focus of work as well as the roles and responsibilities of different actors. ***WLE is constantly evolving and this strategy should be seen as a framework rather than a blueprint and thus, should be updated as we learn.***

## 2. Communication Objectives

The communication objectives are focused on the key areas that WLE works in. Each of these is articulated as an intervention area in section 5.

1. **A new discourse and engagement in global/regional fora:** to influence global, regional and national debate on new perspectives in sustainable intensification by supporting a continuous dialogue and interaction with diverse groups of stakeholders and communities of practice
2. **Strategic Communication:** Inform key stakeholders beyond the program of WLE's focus, emerging results and insights so that they can use them in their own work.
3. **Internal knowledge sharing:** Support partners in the program to take advantage of a range of tailored communication and knowledge sharing tools, approaches and methodologies to effectively share information and learning.
4. **Making information accessible:** Develop systems and tools to aggregate and harvest partner data and information related to WLE so that it is properly documented, archived and published to maximize its wide accessibility and re-use by others.

## 3. Principles of work

1. **Engagement and communication linked to impact pathways and behavior change:** Engagement and communication activities need to be linked and integrated with the identified Intermediate Development Outcomes (IDOs), impact pathways and the changes in knowledge, attitudes and skills sought in different actor groups to achieve the IDOs. Achieving impact requires not just providing knowledge but also changing how different groups behave and act.
2. **Build upon partners' knowledge and skills:** IWMI, as the lead, and partner institutions have established a number of information and communication systems and have high capacities in communication, knowledge management and knowledge sharing. WLE will marshal these systems and skills rather than developing its own separate skills and systems.
3. **Integrated engagement and co-creation of knowledge:** WLE will use a number of ways to engage and bring together different clients and stakeholders for shared mutual learning and collective action. Effective ways to improve interactions

between different groups of actors is essential. The power to convene is central to any research for development approach.

4. **Access to information:** Ensuring that information is open, accessible and appropriate for different targets
5. **Repackaging and repurposing knowledge for different target groups.** WLE program has a duty not only to produce research results and journal articles, but also to synthesize and appropriately package its knowledge for different target groups. WLE will work with key groups to ensure the information it is generating is useful to end users and in formats and styles they can use.

#### 4. Actors and Audiences

Everyone engaged in the Program is a potential creator and consumer of information, and knowledge. There is also a large audience beyond the Program—locally, nationally and internationally—that will be interested in its results. The main target audiences are shown below.

1. **Decision makers at the national, regional and global level:** are struggling to make appropriate decisions on the trade-offs of different agriculture development investments. While they need evidence based research, it has to be recognized that the decisions are often made on vested political or self- interest. Changing how decisions are made is just as important as providing evidence-based information.
2. **Development practitioners:** need targeted knowledge products, decision-support tools, synthesized data and the chance to join events and dialogues to improve their support to farmers, extension services, etc. We will look carefully at communication between these groups and the researchers—there is frequently a cultural/communication gap that needs to be overcome. In addition to NGOs, these include networks, working groups (e.g ag sector working groups), and capacity building entities.
3. **Donors- Partners:** we should view our donors and investors as partners in research as they can easily act as boundary partners and have influence in the areas we work. Donors can determine how NGOs and some governments invest in development activities, so there is huge potential to improve and leverage donor investments.
4. **Strategic partners:** these are the national, regional and international partners that are engaged in research activities. This can be broken down into three levels: international, regional/continental and national partners.

Level	Organization
International	SEI, CARE, Conservation International, etc., other CRPs
Regional	CONDESAN, FANRAPAN, CAADP, etc.
National	Local NARS, NGOs, Government Agencies

They need a clear understanding of how WLE operates and benefits of partnering.

5. **Private sector:** is increasingly interested in the business models being developed by WLE partners on agriculture water management solutions. In addition, large scale investors are concerned about the impacts of their investments. WLE will engage with the private sector and provide appropriate business models that can be used in their work.
6. **Researchers and research institutions:** national and international researchers with a research interest in the topics being pursued by WLE. They will need access to WLE knowledge and information, which should be made easily accessible.
7. **WLE Core Partners:** the 13 current partners may be considered as co-investors. They need to understand the WLE approach and how they can participate. They also need tools to communicate WLE messages in a coherent fashion.
8. **WLE Managers and implementers:** a vital 'internal' community of program managers and implementers needs access to an effective M&E system, information on current program activities, shared methods and tools, training and capacity building products, outcome support tools, communication and collaboration spaces, and event planning tools.

## 5. Interventions areas

WLE recognizes that if research is going to contribute to development outcomes, there is a need to facilitate and catalyze rich interactions and communication among the key actors and partners. WLE Theories of Change and Impact Pathways will guide these intervention areas.

### 1) Supporting a new discourse on agriculture and ecosystems:

WLE is advocating a paradigm shift in agriculture development. One aspect of a paradigm shift is creating a new discourse on how we talk and describe agriculture and ecosystems. This area will be carried out by the following work:

- Engagement in regional and global fora and co-hosting major events in order to influence the discourse at different levels.
- Flagship assessments on the state of water, agriculture and ecosystems. This will be done through creating flagship databanks to highlight certain topics.
- Flagship publication series will be established for WLE.

- Agriculture and ecosystems blog: this is an open space to develop a new discourse and discussion on agriculture and ecosystems. This is where messages are developed and formed through a debate on the paradigm shift.
- Compelling videos and stories which illustrate an alternative vision for agriculture and ecosystems to show the paradigm shift in an easy to understand way.
- Appropriate engagement platforms will be identified at the national, regional and global level; these include but are not limited to multi-stakeholder platforms to bring in diverse perspectives on water management, existing networks, sector working groups or learning alliances to improve value chain production.

## **2) Knowledge sharing across the program**

Internal communications and knowledge sharing is given high priority in order to build a sense of community, share results and lessons learnt more widely, and communicate messages to staff and partners. We will use both virtual and physical ways to improve sharing across the program. Some of the main ways this will be done is through:

- Developing effective web-based information management systems so managers and researchers can access WLE related information (i.e. Wikis, Sharepoint, etc.)
- Identifying and implementing effective web-based tools to improve learning and sharing between WLE partners such as webinars, Yammer, and other tools.
- Effective facilitation of workshops and meetings; ensuring that meetings maximize learning and sharing using adult learning methodologies rather than traditional presentation based science meetings.

## **3) Strategic communication**

The WLE mandate is complex and thus it is crucial to communicate what WLE is about so that clients and stakeholders understand its unique promise. As we progress we will focus on communicating emerging results, insights and the science itself and then assist in repackaging knowledge for different target groups. Some key areas include:

- Branding guidelines
- A series of multi-media materials to articulate WLE key messages
- Web and social media presence
- Repackaging science into different materials appropriate to different stakeholders and synthesizing previous knowledge and research.
- Strategic Communication campaigns through traditional media releases
- Ensuring materials are available to support engagement in regional and global events

## **4) Harvesting and making accessible collective knowledge and data of the program**

WLE is posed with the challenge of integrating research in different agricultural systems in eight regions and at different basin and landscape scales; WLE will achieve this together with a host of partners for core research, implementation as well as influence and outreach. Each of these partners has its own data and information systems. In

addition, CGIAR has mandated that all research outputs are made open access. Here we intend to develop ways to aggregate and harvest the knowledge of partners rather than developing our own systems. Much of this will build open OAI-PMH systems, which most of WLE’s partners already use. These will include:

- Ensuring research outputs are captured and harvested using CG-Space
- Making WLE datasets accessible
- Ensuring information systems, such as water availability, information decisions, ecosystem health, etc., are widely accessible
- Developing knowledge bases on ecosystems health, water, socio-economic indicators and using the data already captured by partners.

## 6. Organizing ourselves for impact

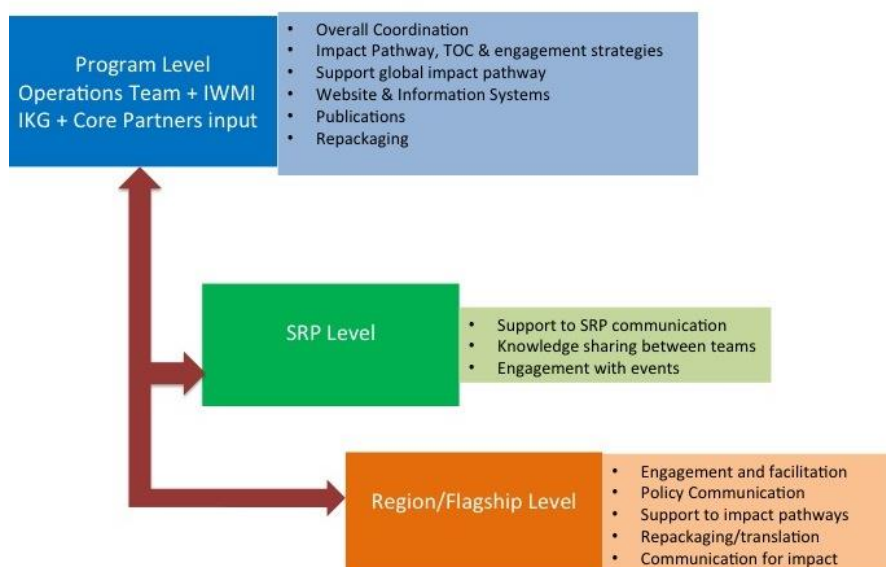
WLE is the sum of its many parts and partnerships. The potential reach of WLE is unprecedented considering the knowledge and networks of the 11 core partners and hundreds of strategic partners at different levels. The way in which we are organized will be crucial to maximize the potential reach of the program and provide a platform for partners to take advantage of this opportunity.

Through this strategy we seek to change the way communication, knowledge and management is carried out within a research for development program, such as WLE. It seeks to build upon and build the skills of partner institutions.

We will use a decentralized approach, leveraging existing platforms and systems of our partners, rather than creating new ones. Below is a summary of emerging ideas for how we will organize to support research to move to outcomes.

### 6.1 Operational structure

The roles of the different levels are shown in the diagram below.





**Role of the operational team:** A small operational team will be housed at IWMI HQ. This team will work closely with IWMI IKG and the Uptake Coordinator as well as the Heads of Communications of key partner organizations. It will be responsible for:

- coordination and implementation of activities,
- management of the WLE website, blog and information systems,
- knowledge sharing activities amongst program level management,
- and building a network of communication staff amongst partner organizations and reaching out to different stakeholders.

Given the size and scope of WLE, it is important to have dedicated staff working on the program while leveraging resources from IWMI IKG and partner institutions as much as possible. Staffing needs will evolve but current staffing includes the following:

- Full time Senior Engagement, Communication and KM Coordinator
- Communication officer (national/regional hire)
- A Blog Manager and Editor (Young Professional)

As long as support is provided at the SRP and Focal Region level this current staffing should be fine for the coming 2-3 years.

**Role of communication at SRP Level:** communication will focus on documenting and communicating SRP level activities as well as supporting knowledge sharing activities within the different SRPs. It is expected that communication staff will be assigned from lead centers who manage the SRPs. This is a part time job within the lead centers– requiring around 30-50% of staff time depending on needs.

As shown below, many partner organizations leading a particular SRP or cross cutting program have assigned staff to work on SRP related communication. These arrangements need to be formalized and ways for supporting IWMI led SRPs addressed.

<b>Rainfed Systems</b> – Stefanie Naylor (CIAT assigned Kenya staff)/ ICRISAT (TBC)	<b>River basins</b> – Nilar Chit Tun (IFPRI assigned staff) and IWMI Comms person (TBC)
<b>Irrigated systems</b> – IWMI Comms (TBC)/ICARDA (TBC)	<b>Information</b> –Samuel Gaturu (ICRAF assigned staff) and IWMI (TBC)
<b>RRR</b> – IWMI Comms (TBC)	<b>ESS&amp;R</b> – Camilla Zanzanaini (Bioversity assigned staff)

**Role of communication at the focal region level:** this will be focused on engagement and coordination at the regional and national levels. The responsibility for engagement and communication will rest in IWMI or partner offices. The approach would build upon existing communication capacities or work with IWMI and partners.

The current set up could be this:

Volta/Niger – Thor Windham-Wright (IWMI Africa Uptake Coordinator )	Mekong – Bounmee Maokhamphoui
Indus/Ganges – IWMI Asia Uptake Coordinator and communication staff	Limpopo/Zambezi – Thokozani Dhlamini
Nile – ILRI/IWMI KM team in Addis	Andes/Surya Daya -TBC

## 6.2 Integration with IWMI services

WLE Communication works through and with IWMI IKG. WLE should be seen as a testing ground and way to support the development of IKG itself. It also has to be recognized that WLE is a large program and IWMI IKG already has a tremendous amount of work. The main approaches we use to integrate include:

- WLE staff that work for the program but also provide support to IWMI,
- Jointly developing regional communication nodes,
- Using available IWMI services, such as publishing, document management, IT support,
- Working on activities of shared interest, i.e. strategic events and campaigns,
- Using WLE as a testing ground for activities that later can be mainstreamed into IKG, for instance the Agriculture and Ecosystems blog which is currently being tested and managed by WLE. Likewise the Comms Coffee Chats is a new initiative started mainly by WLE Comms staff and will over time be institutionalized by IWMI.

## 6.3 Integration with Core Partners

Core partner communication provides a “network of opportunity” to create alliances and leverage existing capacities. Core partners will be actively involved in producing communication products, engaging with different actors and clients, and sharing data and information. Harnessing the potential to disseminate information and ‘crowd source’ activities will allow WLE (and partners) to spread messages widely and more effectively.

Core partners will play a role in all levels of WLE communication. At the global level they will develop materials and products, lead and contribute to strategic events and support knowledge sharing between and amongst the program members. At the SRP and Regional levels, they will take the lead in implementing these communication and engagement plans.

An “opportunity fund” has been established to provide partners with small funds to carry out engagement, communication and knowledge management activities relevant to WLE.

## 7. Monitoring and Evaluation

It is important that communication plans and activities are regularly monitored and evaluated as this shows good management practice, ensures lessons are learned, demonstrates accountability and helps WLE demonstrate how communication contributes to the research effort.

Monitoring and evaluation for communication should go beyond distribution numbers and reach, but should also look at how information was used and how insights were applied. We will also begin to assess and ask target audiences and stakeholders what type of information they need and how this should be presented to ensure we have a solid understanding of users' preferences.

Three levels of monitoring and evaluation that should be done include;

- **Establishing Key Performance Indicators** for events, campaigns and activities to measure reach and dissemination of results
- **Measuring impact** through the percentage of the target audience that correctly comprehends a given message, expresses knowledge, attitudes and beliefs consistent with the message, who acquire the skills recommended by the messages, who discuss message with others, by type of person, who engage in recommended practices.
- **Evaluating the process and products:** evaluate the effectiveness and usefulness of products and processes so that learning can improve future efforts

A priority activity for 2013 will be to develop a M&E Framework and indicators.

## Annex 1: Assessment of key Target Audiences

Below is an assessment of key target audiences needs and the products and processes used to communicate and share information with them.

Target groups	Specific examples	Processes	Products
<b>Decision-makers</b>	CAADP, SADC, MRC, ASEAN, Planning Comissions, etc.	Policy events, media, platforms, campaigns at conference and events	Policy briefs, technical reports, Infographics, press releases, synthesis, Decision support tools, business models
<b>Develop practitioners</b>	NGOs, sector groups, networks, local government agencies	Events, study tours, workshops	Manuals, posters, technical briefs, presentations, extension materials, blog
<b>Donor Partners</b>	CGIAR , SDC, Sida, AusAID, DFID, IFAD	Roundtables, Events, face-to-face, media	Outcome stories, Annual report, website, press releases, blog
<b>Strategic Partners</b>	SEI, CARE, CONDESAN, Ag-eco partners	Networks, platforms, workshops	E-letters/newsletters, activity reports, repository, website, blog
<b>External Researchers / Academics, Universities</b>	Local NARS, universities	Participatory Research, Systems Research, teaching material, internships	Research reports, technical manuals, repository, teaching materials
<b>WLE Core Partners</b>	Researchers, Comms/KM, managers, DGs	Face-to-face meetings, webinars,	Yammer, Sharepoint, Wiki, monthly report, blog, website
<b>Value chain actors – private sector</b>	Investors, business operators, seed manufacturers, hydropower companies	Field trips, roundtable discussions, joint piloting	Business models
WLE Managers & Implementers	SC, MC, operational team	Regular meetings, spaces to share information	Repositories, calendar of events, website/intranet

## WLE Comms, Marketing and KM Activity plan

Area	Activity/Outputs	Tasks	Timeline			
			Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
<b>1. Engagement and new discourse</b>	WLE paradigm shift is articulated and program refined	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support development of a range of materials to articulate and explain (Strategy, booklet, Videos)</li> <li>Support IDO, Impact Pathway and focal regional process</li> </ul>	X	X	X	X
	Participate in strategic events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain strategic events calendar</li> <li>Provide support at strategic meetings (GWSP, Africa Science Week, COP 18, SWWW, ESPA Workshop)</li> </ul>	X	X	X	X
	Establish Flagship series of key publications	Develop publication guidelines and series	X			
		Support production of flagship publications		x	x	x
Develop Ag& Eco blog a discussion space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to write and develop articles on key themes and issues</li> <li>Engage partners and promote</li> </ul>	X	X	X	X	
<b>2. Knowledge Sharing</b>	Develop and maintain web-based sharing systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain and facilitate use of yammer, wiki space and other areas</li> </ul>	X	X	X	X
	Develop management tool for improved management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop and impelment Sharepoint system</li> </ul>	X	X	X	X
	Support SRPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support to facilitating and documenting meetings</li> <li>Support production and dissemination of materials</li> </ul>				
	Improve internal sharing with partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hold webinars on different topics</li> <li>Use the blog as a discussion space</li> <li>Hold comms chats centers</li> </ul>	X	X	X	X
	Maintain Communication Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify SRP and regional focal leads and develop TORs for them</li> <li>Provide regular update and interactions with network</li> <li>Hold one face-to-fae meeting</li> </ul>	X	X	X	x
	Regular monthly updates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monthly updates on the program are provided.</li> </ul>	X	X	X	X
<b>3. Strategic Communication</b>	Finalize branding and publishing guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Produce suite of branding guidelines, template and materials for use by WLE</li> <li>Roll out</li> </ul>	X	X		
	Develop materials to articulate program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Produce Annual preort</li> </ul>		X		
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Produce Video on WLE and its value added proposition</li> </ul>		X	X	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop multi-media products to improve how the program is communciated</li> </ul>	X	X	X	X	

Area	Activity/Outputs	Tasks	Timeline			
			Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
	Continually update website and information provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Redo website to make it more user friendly</li> <li>Engage partners in updating</li> </ul>		X		
<b>4. Harvesting and making information accessible</b>	Develop strategies for sharing data and information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop document repository strategy</li> <li>Develop data management policy</li> </ul>	X	X		
	Establish initial repository for outputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop WLE Taxonomy and guidelines for using repository</li> <li>Establish WLE harvestable repository</li> <li>Test out and work with partners to harvest/agreggate outputs</li> <li>Implement and develop module to put on website</li> </ul>			X	X
	Develop contact database of partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify suitable systems</li> </ul>		X		

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