Fostering Gender Equity in Nature-Positive Solutions:

Strategies for Inclusive and Sustainable Transformation

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1. Introduction

The CGIAR Research Initiative on Nature Positive Solutions (NATURE+) aims to shift agri-food systems toward resilience and sustainability through nature-positive solutions. Implemented in five countries–***Burkina Faso***, ***Colombia***, ***India***, ***Kenya*** and ***Vietnam***–this initiative focuses on addressing challenges like biodiversity loss, land degradation, and unsustainable resource management. Its five work packages are: ***Conserve*** (protecting agrobiodiversity, water, and soils), ***Manage*** (promoting sustainable management of resources), ***Restore*** (supporting community-driven land restoration), ***Recycle*** (advancing circular economy approaches), and ***Engage*** (enabling policy, stakeholder involvement and behavioral shifts). The initiative uses participatory approaches, emphasizing local knowledge and co-creation of solutions.

1.1. Why GEYSI in NATURE+?

Integrating Gender Equality Youth and Social Inclusion (GEYSI) into nature-positive programs is essential for fostering equitable and sustainable outcomes. Environmental challenges, such as landscape and natural resource degradation, biodiversity loss, and climate change, have profound impacts on communities and require the collective effort of multiple stakeholders, including both men and women to address them. Gender and other social differences shape the ways in which people interact with the environment, and the ways they experience and respond to environmental changes. Women often face greater difficulty in addressing environmental challenges through the adoption of nature-positive solutions due to systemic inequalities, including limited access to resources, such as agricultural inputs; and services like market information, extension, and financial services. For example, while control over land is essential to adopt many nature-positive solutions, men are twice as likely to enjoy secure land tenure rights compared to women in 40% of the countries that report landownership statistics (FAO 2023). These constraints also limit women's ability to participate in natural resource governance and decision-making processes at multiple scales, which can place women at a disadvantage in agrifood system transformation.

Yet, ensuring that agricultural transformation leads to greater environmental sustainability requires women's active participation. According to FAO (2023), 66% of working women in sub-Saharan Africa and 71% in southern Asia are involved in agriculture.

Women already play pivotal roles in seed storage, crop diversification, value chains, and food sourcing and preparation, making their involvement key for the success of these solutions. To harness the full potential of women's contributions and work toward equitable distribution of benefits from nature positive solutions, it is crucial to identify and act on opportunities that reach, benefit, and empower women as well as transform destructive gender norms. As women and men's priorities and experiences in agriculture differ, influencing their ability to adopt and benefit from sustainable practices requires that programs are carefully designed and planning to minimize unintended negative consequences. Ensuring that nature-positive solutions are context specific, inclusive and impactful.

2. Snapshot of findings

2.1. What are the gendered barriers to adoption of nature-positive solutions?

Farmers play a key role in how food is produced, as the practices they use are linked with their preferences and expertise, as well as the constraints they face. Understanding preferences of women and men farmers, across different social groups, for the adoption of different practices and their perceptions of the associated costs and benefits is critical to informing policies and activities that can effectively support farmers in transitioning to more sustainable practices. We look at the evidence garnered under NATURE+ on these topics here.

Data from the quantitative baseline surveys conducted in ***Kenya*** and ***Vietnam*** highlight disparities in ownership of various assets as well as the reception of information and decision making on nature-positive solutions in both countries (IFPRI & DEPOCEN 2024; IFPRI and KVC 2024). Figure 1 compares gender disparities in decision-making and the reception of information on five main nature-positive solutions in Kenya and Vietnam across five practices: ***growing local landraces of trees***, ***preparation of bunds and terraces***, ***conservation of local crop varieties***, ***cover crops***, and ***manure fertilizer use***.

In Kenya, knowledge about the main practices is commonly received by women (solely or jointly) in most households and reception of information tends to translate to decision-making. Male-only decision making dominates in growing of native trees, and the preparation of bunds and terraces suggesting a stronger influence in decisions that possibly require more labor or are traditionally seen as male activities. On the other hand, female-only decision making is more prominent in conservation of local crop varieties, and manure fertilizer implying that women might have a greater say in nutrient management and biodiversity. Vietnam, in contrast, demonstrates a starkly different pattern, with male-only information reception and decision-making dominating across all practices. This imbalance in Vietnam indicates limited inclusivity in the dissemination of information and participation, especially for women, compared to the relatively more balanced situation in Kenya.

Figure 1 – Information received and decision making

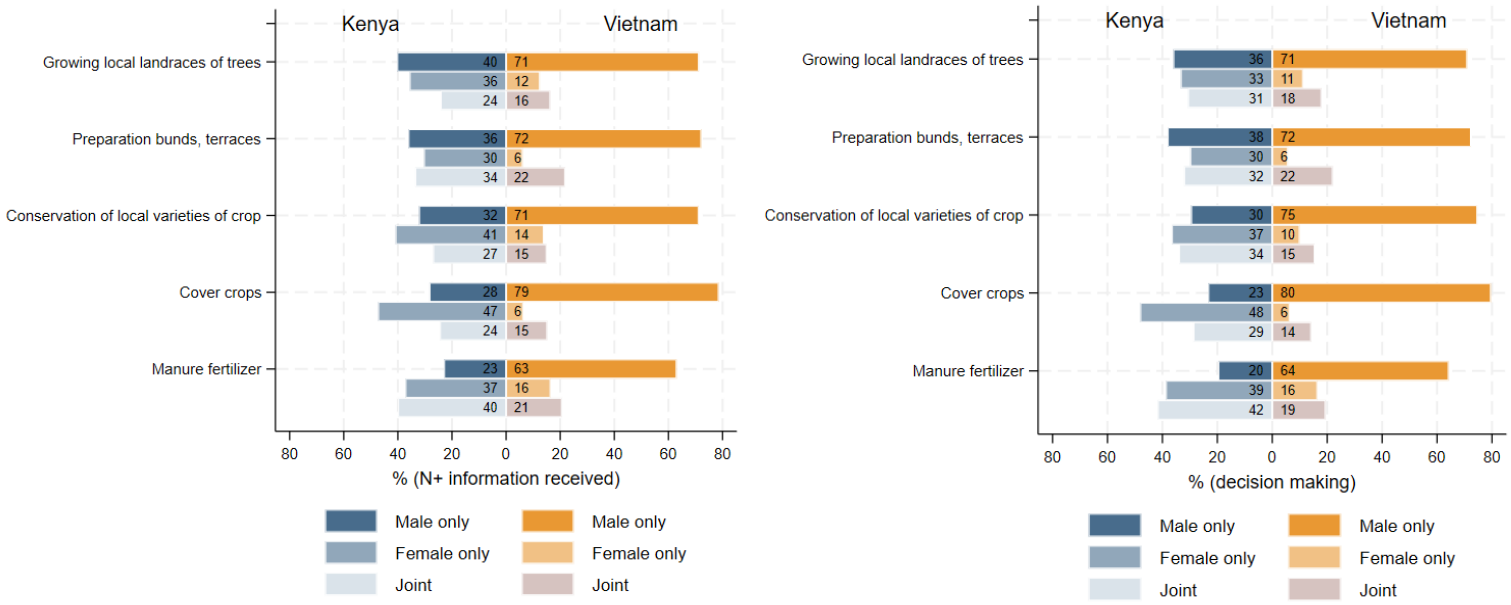


Table 1 provides a comparison of gender dynamics in decision-making related to crop and livestock activities in both countries, revealing notable differences in how management is distributed across genders and the scope of their involvement. Regarding crop activities, in Kenya, joint management is the most prevalent, accounting for 39% of parcel management, followed closely by female-only (31%) and male-only (30%) management. Looking at the productive asset ownership, the data points towards a much higher ownership by men compared to women or joined ownership. This relatively balanced distribution of decision making in table 1 suggesting a balances relationship is nuanced by the qualitative data gathered that shows that although some discussions might happen in the households, it is still predominantly men that make the final decisions. A deeper understanding of what the local meaning of joined decision making is needed to get a better picture of the gendered dynamics. In Vietnam, however, male-only management dominates significantly, with 59% of parcels under male control, while female-only management is minimal at just 7%, highlighting a stark gender disparity. Further analysis of the number of fields and the average area managed reveals that on average, male manage more parcel and larger areas than women in both countries.

Table 1 – Management and decision making

Indicator	Kenya	Vietnam
CROP ACTIVITIES		
Parcel management decision maker (percent)		
Only female management	31	7
Only male management	30	59
Joint management	39	34
Number of fields managed on average		
Only female management	1.8	2.3
Only male management	1.9	3.0
Joint management	2.1	3.3
Average areas of parcels managed (HA)		
Only female management	0.73	0.53
Only male management	1.10	0.78
Joint management	1.03	0.70

Note: Data at the household level for households with only male managed parcels, households with only female managed parcels and households with parcels managed jointly or with a mix of parcels managed by males and females.
HA: Hectares;
Source: Boukaka et.al 2024a, Boukaka et.al 2024b

Another study (Wallin, 2023) conducted under the NATURE+ Initiative in western **Kenya** examined gender dynamics in smallholder farming, particularly focusing on resource allocation and barriers to adopting nature-positive solutions. The findings revealed that women face significant challenges due to systemic inequities, including ***limited access to land***, ***finances***, and ***decision-making opportunities*** in relation to adoption of agricultural practices as well as expenditure of income. While men typically control high-value resources and dominate decision-making processes, women are also often constrained by domestic responsibilities, which limit their time to engage fully in agricultural innovations. Despite incremental progress in women's participation, deep rooted gender norms and structural barriers continue to impede gender equity. These insights provide valuable context for tailoring Nature+ interventions to ensure they address local realities and support both men and women equitably.

To address these challenges and promote gender-equitable participation in the NATURE+ Initiative the study recommended:

- **Strengthen Women's Agency and Capacity:** Provide targeted training programs on Nature positive solutions, leadership, and resource management while promoting women's active participation in household and community decision-making platforms. This can amplify their role in shaping agricultural practices and policies.
- **Reduce Gendered Barriers and Time Poverty:** Introduce labor-saving technologies and advocate for shared domestic responsibilities to free women's time, enabling them to engage more effectively in farming, training, and community development.
- **Foster Women's Networks and Inclusion:** Support the creation and strengthening of women's groups and cooperatives to facilitate resource sharing, collective bargaining, and market access. Empowering these networks will enhance women's visibility and influence in the agricultural value chain.
- **Enhance Access to Resources for Women:** Simplify legal and administrative processes to secure land and property rights for women and improve their access to financial tools such as microloans and grants for agricultural activities. This ensures women can gain equal footing in resource ownership and use.

Read more here: https://hdl.handle.net/10568/135376

2.2. What are the hidden costs to women of food production?

Food production is accompanied by different costs and often environmental, social and health costs are hidden and unaccounted for. As part of the NATURE+ initiative, efforts were made to understand the hidden costs of food production and in turn revealing and understanding the overlooked gender inequalities. True cost accounting studies were conducted in ***Vietnam*** and ***Kenya***. In the latter, Benfica and colleagues (2024) conducted a TCA analysis covering 1,502 farming households and 1,000 agricultural workers. In particular, the data highlighted gender-based disparities in education, labor conditions, and workplace experiences among agricultural workers. For instance, males tend to have higher levels of education and are more likely to be in school. Men also report representation in non-standard working conditions, higher incidences of injuries and certain forced work conditions, while women report slightly more experiences of less severe forced work. However, these data may reflect not only actual differences in experiences but also potential underreporting on the part of women, particularly regarding sensitive issues such as forced labor or workplace violence. This caveat underscores the importance of interpreting the findings with caution, considering possible gendered reporting biases.

More generally, the report reveals that hired labor, followed by seed costs, account for the biggest share of the direct costs, while 35% of the indirect costs of agrifood system output were attributed to social and environmental externalities, out of which 73% were representing social externalities and 27% related to environmental externalities. Key drivers of these externalities include underpayment, land occupation, child labor, climate change and air pollution. The TCA framework helped shed light on some gender-based differences affecting the environmental and social costs of food production that in turn could amplify the hidden costs, particularly for women, as shown below.

Gendered drivers for hidden costs of production

- **Land Tenure and Livestock:** Inequities in land and livestock ownership reduce women's economic empowerment and decision-making power.
- **Limited access to Inputs:** Inequality in accessing improved seeds, fertilizers and pesticides reduces productivity and contributes to inefficiencies in resource allocation.
- **Education:** Illiteracy or lower education levels perpetuate skill gaps and contribute to inequality in the uptake of improved practices.
- **Information Access:** Dependence on informal networks slows access to and adoption of updated agricultural information and improved farming techniques.
- **Agency:** Limited control and influence over agricultural and financial decisions restricts adoption of new technologies.

3. Strategies within NATURE+

3.1. Aggregated farms

Three ***Kenyan*** farming communities, supported by NATURE+, have implemented an innovative farm aggregation model to tackle systemic challenges in smallholder agriculture, including land degradation, fragmentation and limited access to value chains. These issues, compounded by barriers such as lack of financial resources, limited technical knowledge and climate change impacts, mirror findings from broader studies on gendered and systemic constraints in agriculture. To address these challenges, farmers pooled small, often abandoned parcels of land to create larger, nature-positive farms that integrate sustainable practices such as permaculture, composting and high-value crop production. The aggregated farm approach integrates natural resource management, value chain development, and community-driven governance to promote sustainable farming practices and economic growth.

Through collective action, these communities aim to restore degraded lands, enhance productivity and build equitable value chains that share benefits across participating farmers, including women, men, and youth. Women leadership and meaningful participation is vital in shaping activities that enhance agrobiodiversity and local ecosystem services while fostering inclusive economic opportunities.

Collective action emerged as a critical solution to overcome initial resistance and longstanding barriers like gender inequities in land access and decision-making. Extensive stakeholder consultations fostered collaboration and community governance structures to manage profit-sharing, responsibilities, and conflict resolution. The initiative addresses gaps identified in studies, such as enabling women and youth to participate through tailored governance and equitable resource allocation. Using agro-biodiverse planting materials from community seed banks, and reliable water sources, the aggregation model has mobilized about 180 farmers in Agoro East and Jimo East in Kisumu County, and Lyanaginga in Vihiga County, Kenya. Of these farmers 60 percent are women and 20 percent are youth (60% young women and 40% young men). The farmers collectively produce crops on their large farm, integrated with poultry, livestock, fish farming and waste recycling. They also do value addition collectively and market their produce collectively. By linking collective action with nature-positive solutions, the project demonstrates how pooling resources and fostering equitable participation can transform degraded landscapes and improve food security, nutrition and livelihoods in rural Kenya. The initiative also aligns with county-level agricultural plans, further strengthening its scalability and sustainability.

One of the key value chains where the aggregated farms are positioning themselves are African green leafy vegetables, where women play a leading role in cultivation, processing, and marketing. Through activities such as drying and packaging vegetables for sale, women generate additional income streams and contribute to improved household nutrition. This focus on green leafy vegetables also promotes the use of underutilized crops, increasing dietary diversity and addressing local food security challenges. Beyond leafy vegetables, the Aggregated Farm model also includes activities like producing biofertilizers, bio-repellents, and manure to create a circular farming system. Another study by Guettou Djurfeldt et al 2023 showed that women's engagement in African green leafy vegetable value chains have increased their agency and decision-making power over income. The women expressed that they are perceiving themselves as providers and not dependents while men expressed that they now recognize and value women's work and knowledge and are even learning from their spouse, in contrast to before where they did not value their spouse's opinions nor their engagement in growing vegetables.

Draft guidelines are being established to regulate resource management, access to collective farms, and profit distribution. Women in leadership positions in the cooperative can promote the creation of guidelines that influence resource management, access to collective farms, and profit distribution, ensuring their perspectives are integral in fostering fair sharing of benefits and sustainable practices. The aim of the Aggregated Farm model is not only to boosts economic prospects but also elevates women's social standing and decision-making authority in their communities.

3.2. Community seed banks

Community seed banks (CSBs) are grassroots institutions that conserve and distribute locally adapted seeds, enhancing agrobiodiversity, food security and resilience in farming systems. They serve as repositories for diverse seed varieties, providing farmers with access to planting materials that are often better suited to local conditions than commercial seeds. CSBs are also platforms for collective action, fostering community collaboration, knowledge exchange and equitable access to resources. By reducing dependency on external seed markets, they empower smallholder farmers to manage their agricultural practices more sustainably and, in many cases, provide an additional source of income through sound business plans, which are different across CSBs.

CSBs promote gender equity by creating opportunities for women to take active roles in seed management, decision-making and governance. Women often lead efforts in seed selection and value addition, such as in ***Kenya***, where the CSBs are processing grains into flour or drying vegetables for sale, which generates income and elevates their status in the community. Community seed banks also intentionally involve men to ensure their participation and support, preventing a sense of exclusion and fostering shared responsibility. By including women and men in training programs and decision-making processes, CSBs strengthen community-wide collaboration and reduce potential backlash, creating a more inclusive approach to sustainable agriculture. A newly established community seed bank in Cumbal, ***Colombia***, hosted by the Indigenous Technical Agricultural Education Institution of Cumbe, integrates another function in its activities: the education of youth about the importance of the conservation of agrobiodiversity.

By linking local communities with institutional stakeholders like plant breeders and policymakers, CSBs ensure the voices of both women and men are represented in broader agricultural frameworks. In ***Vietnam***, the plan for 2025 is to establish two new CSBs. These CSBs will be managed by two local Dietary Health Clubs, led by women farmers, that promote the knowledge and skill exchange about the production and consumption of a diversity of vegetables for improved health and nutrition security. This inclusive model not only addresses gender disparities but also fosters collective resilience, ensuring that all community members benefit from improved access to seeds, economic opportunities, and contribute to increased availability of diverse and nutritious food.

In ***India***, community seed banks established by our partner BAIF in Akole and Shahada, Maharashtra, play a crucial role in conserving local varieties of millet, rice, and sorghum. Among these, the scented rice variety known locally as Khalbath has been prioritized by farmers for market development, tapping into the local tourism market around Kalsubai peak. Women, who often are custodians of traditional knowledge related to seed selection, storage, and cultivation practices, are vital for the seedbank operations and for transferring this knowledge across generations.

In ***Burkina Faso***, the collaboration with Slow Food Burkina Faso has led to the strengthening and creation of eight CSBs in: Yako, Ouahigouya, Korsimoro, Koubri, Legmoin, Kongoussi, Saaba, and Ouagadougou. These CSBs focus on promoting the conservation and use of Neglected and Underutilized Species (NUS), such as Bambara groundnut, fabirama (a kind of tuber), and moringa (a tree species), which are vital for enhancing food and nutrition security, and resilience in local farming systems. The initiative involves working closely with communities to ensure the sustainability of these seed banks by training local management committees on governance, seed selection, and storage practices. Like other countries in the initiative, women are taking leadership roles in seed management and serving as custodians of traditional agricultural knowledge. Additionally, the CSBs in Burkina Faso collaborate with local and national stakeholders, such as plant breeders and policymakers, aligning with wider agricultural strategies. This approach, which connects seed conservation to local markets and community involvement, enhances livelihoods and agrobiodiversity, serving as a model for other regions.

3.3. Cooperatives

In ***India***, the project area of Nandurbar is renowned for its cultivation of local mango varieties. Here Nature+ has scoped the value chain of amchur (dried raw mango powder), a popular Indian spice, renown from this region and has a Geographical Indication tag. BAIF the main implementing partner of nature+ in India, has supported in creating the Farmer Producer Organization (FPO) which plays a pivotal role in aggregating production, reducing transport costs for smallholder farmers, and ensuring better market access through improved storage and collective sales. Women are the driving force behind amchur preparation, contributing their expertise and labor to critical processes such as peeling, slicing, and drying mangoes, which determine the quality of the final product. Their central role not only supports household livelihoods but also ensures the preservation of traditional knowledge and

the local value chain. Strengthening this value chain holds the potential to provide improved tools, training, and infrastructure will amplify women's contributions, enhance product quality, and create new opportunities for economic empowerment, positioning women as key agents of growth and sustainability in the amchur value chain.

In ***Burkina Faso's*** Loumbila commune, Nature+ is promoting the use of NUS like moringa, amaranth, and sweet potatoes. This initiative, led by the ONG Mani Tese in collaboration with Scientists from the Nature+ Team, equips women with skills in food processing, quality standards (HACCP), and sustainable practices. It also supports the groups to develop attractive branding for NUS-based products to boost market appeal. With training cascades and participatory methods, the program strengthens local expertise, ensuring the sustainability and resilience of agroecological systems in the region.

3.4. Innovative Tools for Experiential Learning

Group Dynamic Game: To strengthen trust, coordination and inclusivity in collective farming, NATURE+ developed a dynamic group game. In this six-person game, players use electronic tablets that are linked to a host tablet through a local network. Players share access to arable land where they can farm, graze animals, and develop their own resources over several agricultural seasons. As they play, participants observe and make decisions that can shift their mindsets, without the potential for risk that comes from real life. Participants, grouped by gender, explore trade-offs between individual and collective benefits, as well as economic and environmental outcomes. Pre- and post-game surveys capture shifts in preferences for collective action and cooperation. We observed a consistent pattern indicating that groups predominantly or solely composed of women were more effective in landscape management, exhibiting increased utilization of farm practices that are in line with nature positive solutions and that have less adverse effects on soil health. The analysis of these findings prompted dialogue with farmers regarding the significance of gender and social inclusion in agricultural settings, where roles are frequently delineated by gender. This methodology can prompt dialogues on co-designed solutions that can tackle the root causes of gender inequalities.

Read more about the methodology here: Games



Farmers playing the group dynamic game in Lyanaginga. Photo: Edmond Khisa

3.5. Financial inclusion

Through mobile money

The NATURE+ Initiative's work in ***Kenya*** highlights the interplay between gender, restoration activities and financial inclusion. Restoration and tree planting are key components of sustainable land management, with gendered differences shaping participation and preferences. Women, particularly older women, often lead in planting and managing trees, favoring species that provide food and small-scale income. Men, by contrast, prioritize trees for fodder and higher-value economic uses. While women are involved in management, decisions on significant revenue from tree products are usually dominated by men, particularly for larger incomes exceeding a set threshold.

Mobile money plays a pivotal role in ensuring equitable benefit distribution in restoration activities, and hence the development and use of My Farm Tree (MFT) tool aims to contribute to women's increased participation as well as equitable access of restoration projects and benefits. Digital solutions like MFT allow women to access payments securely through mobile money services to maintain financial autonomy, particularly for tree planting compensation or collective savings. Mobile money also facilitates savings groups, such as merry-go-rounds, which provide women with financial stability and collaborative opportunities. By incorporating gender-sensitive approaches–such as ensuring women's access to mobile phones and offering digital literacy training– the initiative strives to strengthen women's participation in restoration activities, enabling them to contribute to and equitably benefit from NATURE + solutions.

Through Inclusive business approaches and models

Agro-ecotourism

The strategy of developing agro-eco tourism in NATURE+ countries ***Colombia***, ***India***, and ***Vietnam*** emphasizes the integration of agriculture, food, and culture to promote responsible tourism. This approach boosts demand for local foods and encourages the revival of neglected and underutilized species. Key activities include enhancing the planning capacities of local stakeholders, developing tours that showcase cultural heritage, and improving the quality of tourism services through a series of actions including training, modest infrastructure investments, cultural exchanges at cooking demonstrations and fairs, internships for local cooks in high-end fusion restaurants, and the creation of recipe manuals.

The Association of Women Entrepreneurs of La Boyera, our key partner in agro-ecotourism in Cumbal, Colombia, consists of indigenous women who engage in agro-ecological farming and provide restoration and hospitality services. They promote local foods, indigenous agriculture, and cultural traditions. Beyond enhancing income and diversifying livelihoods, the association plays a crucial role in advocating and negotiating with local authorities for the indigenous community's interests in regional development. They work towards shifting from unsustainable practices, such as resource degrading dairy livestock rearing, to a development approach that centers on cultural values.

Innovative offtake and market linkages

Another strategy, built on previous research by among others Borelli et.al 2021, is being pursued in ***Burkina Faso***, ***Vietnam***, ***Kenya*** (incipient) and ***Colombia*** (incipient) is the promotion of direct linkages between farmers' cooperatives and primary and secondary school, with the objective of improving the school-feeding offer toward a more nutritious and culturally conscious one.

Home-grown school feeding (HGSF) programs and direct linkages between farmers and public procurement can significantly address gender disparities in rural agricultural communities as shown by previous studies (Roothaert et.al 2021, Watkins et.al 2024). By sourcing food from smallholder farmers, particularly women and women's cooperatives, these programs create economic opportunities and empower women who often have limited market access. The assured demand for their produce can contribute to increased income and financial independence as well as their social standing within families and communities.

Home-grown school feeding (HGSF) programs, as part of the NATURE+ initiative and the parallel EU-funded SUSTLIVES project, actively enhance child nutrition and access to education by serving diverse and nutritious meals,

reducing hunger-related educational barriers. In Burkina Faso, collaborations facilitated by the local association Watinoma are introducing new recipes using NUS like sweet potatoes and moringa into schools, educating children about indigenous crops through interactive activities such as school gardens (read more here School Garden) . These programs incorporate educational modules for primary school students, teaching them about the nutritional and cultural significance of these crops through practical, hands-on activities like school gardens, managed in collaboration with local women farmers (read more here: Manual).

Similarly, in northern Vietnam under NATURE+, schools are incorporating local recipes to enrich children's diets and preserve ethnic minority (Hmong) culinary traditions near Sa Pa. In Kenya, efforts are underway to link cooperatives in Vihiga and Kisumu with schools to develop market channels for cereals and vegetables.

Finally, the Association of Women Entrepreneurs of La Boyera, Cumbal, is trying a new way of marketing their farm produce and their homestays. Chefs at high-end restaurants from the three main cities of Colombia have indicated interest in presenting their culinary creations while identifying their suppliers thus also presenting a window of opportunity to showcase the hospitality side of their business. This also provides an arena to feature NUS in the menus served, resulting in more visibility and space to share knowledge about traditional foods that the younger generations do not know about and that is of great concern of the communities.

Targeting informal women-led businesses

Inclusive business models are essential for integrating informal women and youth-led businesses into formal, sustainable value chains, enhancing both their productivity and economic empowerment. A strong example of this approach is the *Tich en Tich Makwangla Women's Group* in Kisumu, ***Kenya***. This group of 30 women, who were previously engaged in informal biomass briquette production using rudimentary methods, faced challenges such as poor product quality and lack of formal training. Despite these limitations, they demonstrated innovation and resilience by leveraging briquette-making as a livelihood strategy. To unlock their full potential, the women received targeted training to improve their production techniques, ensuring higher product quality and efficiency. In addition to technical skills, the group was trained in governance and group dynamics, which enabled them to collaborate effectively and develop a sustainable business model suited to their local context. These efforts culminated in the formalization of their operations, with the group officially registering as the *Tich en Tich Makwangla Women's Group*. By organizing into a cooperative, the women transformed their informal activities into a small-scale, commercially viable enterprise. This case highlights how inclusive business models can support informal women-led businesses by providing capacity-building, technical training, and organizational development, enabling them to thrive within circular bioeconomy frameworks and contribute to local economic development.

A comparable case can be made for the Indigenous Association of Women Entrepreneurs of Boyera (IAWE),Colombia. Following customized experiential training from neighboring indigenous, women-led agrotourism enterprise in Ecuador, trainees have successfully formulated business plans for their respective lodgings and are, with project support, seeking official registration as small businesses. IAWE participants are confident in their ability to provide significant value to visitor and aspire to deliver an optimal experience. A sense of pride in their accomplishments has been fostered through the experiential training, participation in various relevant activities and coaching.

Read more here: From informal to formal

Nurturing young innovators

Creating an enabling environment for young innovators is crucial for promoting sustainable development and advancing nature-positive solutions. Through innovation challenges in ***Kenya***, ***India***, and ***Colombia***, promising talents, particularly from universities and various sectors, are provided opportunities to develop their ideas. These challenges focused on circularity and nature-positive solutions, selecting about 25 exceptional teams from a large applicant pool to join a fully funded bootcamp. This bootcamp offers a supportive setting that includes

masterclasses, interactive workshops, field trips, and mentorship from experts at national organizations, universities, and the CGIAR centers, tailored specifically for early-stage agri-tech and circular bioeconomy innovators.

Read more here: Promotion of Circular Economy Entrepreneurship in Colombia and here: CircularEconomy 4Colombia: Agrichallenge

4. CONCLUSION

The NATURE+ Initiative has made significant strides in promoting sustainable and inclusive conservation of agrobiodiversity, water, and soils (AWS) through innovative governance systems and social incentives that foster collaboration across generations. Elders contribute traditional ecological knowledge, while youth bring innovation and energy, creating a complementary dynamic that strengthens community-driven conservation efforts. Inclusive governance structures that represent women, men, youth and marginalized groups equitably have been instrumental in building collective agency. These structures, supported by participatory decision-making platforms within for example the aggregated farms, ensure that all members of the community contribute to and benefit from AWS conservation.

Efforts to develop markets for neglected and underutilized species (NUS) have been crucial in linking biodiversity conservation with economic empowerment. Community seed banks are central to these efforts, preserving and distributing seeds for NUS while supporting local farmers in integrating these climate-resilient and nutritionally rich crops into their production systems and diets. By connecting farmers to markets, fostering partnerships with private actors, and promoting equitable value chains, the initiative has not only contributed to improved food and nutrition security and resilience but also created new income opportunities, particularly for women and marginalized groups.

Through My Farm Tree platform, mobile money services are being introduced to enhance inclusivity and equity in restoration. These services provide women with secure payment options, promote financial autonomy, and savings mechanisms. While at an early stage, the initiative aims to monitor the impact of mobile money closely, focusing on its potential to foster greater participation in restoration projects and advance equitable distribution of benefits from restoration efforts. Expanding access to mobile phones and providing digital literacy training for women and youth will be critical for maximizing the benefits of this tool.

The adoption of inclusive circular economy business models presents significant opportunities for sustainability, particularly through recycling and resource recovery activities. These efforts focus on transforming agricultural waste into value-added products such as compost, biofertilizers and eco-friendly packaging. Women and youth are central to these initiatives, with training programs and inclusive business hubs strengthening their skills and market connections needed to launch resource recovery businesses. Gender-responsive financing mechanisms, such as grants and low-interest loans, are needed to support women-led and youth-led enterprises.

While collective action through farm aggregation models has shown promise in addressing land degradation and productivity challenges, the initiative is still in its early stages, and long-term impacts are yet to be seen. Initial efforts have successfully mobilized smallholder farmers to pool resources, but barriers remain, particularly for women, who face challenges such as limited land rights and time poverty. Simplified legal frameworks for land ownership, targeted financing, and participatory restoration designs that integrate women's needs are critical for ensuring equitable participation and benefits in future restoration activities.

The hidden costs to women in food production—unpaid labor, unequal access to decision-making, and exposure to environmental degradation—highlight the importance of gender-transformative approaches. Labor-saving technologies, policies that promote women's agency, and fair compensation models are essential for reducing these burdens. By addressing these systemic challenges, the NATURE+ Initiative is laying the groundwork for sustainable and inclusive nature-positive solutions that empower all community members—women, men, and youth—while fostering collective action for long-term resilience and equity.

Recommendations

1. **Monitor, Evaluate, and Publicly Report on Gender-Specific Outcomes:**

Develop robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks that specifically measure gender-related outcomes and impacts. Regularly assess how initiatives affect community dynamics and gender relations, adjusting strategies to foster positive changes across all demographics, including indigenous groups. Publicly report these findings to ensure that the initiatives contribute to creating evidence that can inform future initiatives.

2. **Diverse Leadership and Community Engagement:**

Ensure governance structures, such as the aggregated farms, reflect the diversity of the communities involved, including equitable representation of women, men, indigenous people, and youth. Implement gender and culturally sensitive workshops to foster understanding and cooperation across all community segments, supporting the formation of diverse leadership groups and cooperatives that empower underrepresented voices.

3. **Community-Based Gender Transformative Workshops:**

Conduct workshops that directly address and challenge existing gender norms and biases. These workshops should involve all community members—men, women, youth, and elders from different cultural backgrounds—and use participatory approaches to discuss and redefine gender roles in agriculture and community management. Utilize tools like games and scenario planning to illustrate the benefits of gender equality and shared decision-making. This can build on the already existing game tools.

4. **Sustainable Financing for inclusive business models:**

Secure sustainable financing mechanisms that prioritize gender-transformative projects. This could include setting up dedicated funds for gender initiatives, encouraging impact investing in gender-focused innovations, and integrating gender criteria into funding decisions. This can also build on the circular economy challenge and expand on setting up gender youth and social inclusion criteria in the selection process.

5. **Policy Advocacy and Institutional Alignment:**

Engage in policy advocacy to align national and local policies with gender-transformative goals. Work to ensure that institutional frameworks support the empowerment of marginalized genders and the dismantling of systemic barriers to equality, such as access to and ownership over land.

6. **Systems Mapping and Gender Analysis:**

Conduct comprehensive systems mapping exercises that identify key gender interactions in an agri-food system within a multifunctional landscape. Use these assessments to understand the flow of resources, information, and power, and how they are influenced by gender dynamics. This analysis should include identifying leverage points where interventions can most effectively transform gender norms and inequalities to drive transformative change at a landscape level.

7. **Leverage Consumer Demand and Nutrition Education for Gender Transformation**

Develop inclusive campaigns to raise awareness about the health benefits of diverse, locally sourced, NUS, foods. The campaigns should speak to the different drivers for change for diverse groups and should not apply a one size fits all model. Integration of comprehensive nutrition education into community settings like schools and health clinics, empowering all community members as informed consumers and decision-makers regarding family and community health. Support entrepreneurs from these diverse groups by facilitating access to financing and market opportunities. Continuously assess the impact through gender-disaggregated and culturally sensitive data to adapt strategies and optimize benefits for the entire community.

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