

WLE Ganges Focal Region Meeting

7 May 2014, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Introduction

Following the two-day WLE Ganges Regional Research Workshop on the CPWF Delta Program, a smaller meeting was held with fourteen participants. This meeting focused on providing insights from CPWF's work in the Ganges and developing recommendations for the design team that will develop the WLE Ganges proposal. Discussions were based on the recently drafted Ganges Focal Region Development Challenge concept note following a WLE meeting in Amman, Jordan. Participants included key members of the CPWF-Ganges research team and representatives of the WLE Ganges 'hills' and 'plains' regions. WLE program staff led the meeting.

The task for the day was to further refine the concept note objectives and identify specific areas of WLE research for 2014-16 in the Ganges River basin. Conversations focused on how to adapt the current CPWF program to the WLE Focal Region focus on ecosystem services and influencing decision-making and potential entry points for a Ganges Focal Region. The results contained in this document will be presented to the WLE Ganges Design Team—made up of WLE program staff, members of CPWF-Ganges and the Ganges Regional Coordinator—when it meets in August. Copies of the participant list and agenda are attached.

Meeting Outcomes

Proposal Components

Meeting participants discussed the outcomes required for a successful WLE Ganges proposal. These included:

- *Leverage partnerships with other CRPs and CG Centers:* Opportunities abound to ensure that WLE Ganges builds off the work that has already been initiated in the region and maximizes its research efforts by planning and conducting them in conjunction with others CG initiatives. In particular, AAS has already made significant inroads in the Ganges delta. WLE should also consider opportunities to work with IRRI/GRISP on rice/cropping systems/water management/extrapolation domains; CCAFS; PIM; and Livestock & Fish.
- *Frame research around identified policy entry points and smart investments:* The WLE Ganges project portfolio should be designed with an eye for high-impact change, including national and regional policy and smart investment. CPWF has cultivated great social capital in Bangladesh, but additional entry points and new ways of leveraging influence should be explored in order to achieve WLE's specific goals.
- *Build upon what is there:* WLE Ganges would be remiss to not build on the results, relationships and knowledge that have emerged from the decade of CPWF research conducted in the Ganges, specifically the recent investments in the delta, as well as strong emerging results in the hills. This is particularly important given the short timeframe in which WLE plans to have the Focal Regions operational and the relatively short duration of the Focal Region projects.
- *Clarity regarding Focal Region coordination:* Clarification on the responsibilities and obligations of the Focal Region coordination unit is needed in order to design a cohesive Ganges Focal Region program that spans three geographically distinct areas.
- *Start up of the Focal Region program:* A specific timeline for the Ganges Focal Region is requested, particularly in light of CPWF's work concluding in December 2014.

Research Objectives

The group spent some time discussing the implications of the WLE Focal Region research objectives for the WLE Ganges proposal.

Objective 1: Investment Support

WLE and other CRPs will continue to face a similar challenge when using social media to promote content, or when promoting the content of other CRPs or Centers. Social media admins should be made aware of any existing guidelines for communicating potentially 'confusing' content. For instance, is the goal to promote the CGIAR, the CRP, the Center or the project? The way content is communicated will impact the way that external audiences understand and interact with the CRPs. Such guidelines may need to be updated or made more explicit as the CRPs progress.

Better define and geographically target through appropriate landscape and water resources analysis and planning sustainable agricultural investments in the Ganges basin to ensure that farming is sustainable and effective in feeding the region. To contribute to this objective, each proposal should clearly support:

- a. Already planned agricultural investment which could benefit from an analysis of how ecosystem services (ESS) would be affected or could be strengthened, or
- b. Future investment by designing geographically well-targeted decision support for agricultural interventions (of any social, ecological, technical type)

Participants recognized the need to move beyond a single-polder pilot and link into the wider policy environments of the polder region. Participants generally agreed that impact evaluations and cost-benefit analyses are required to demonstrate the feasibility of proposed interventions and should be added to future Ganges work. There was, however, some discussion as to whether this was the best approach to 'influencing the agenda.' It was proposed that IWMI's suggestions for continued research on homogenous management groups be trialed in WLE's approach to mitigating the differential impacts on females, the landless and other vulnerable groups.

Objective 2: Valuation of ecosystem services and sustainable land and water use under pressure

Value and better manage ecosystem services to deliver improved and sustainable land use under increasing demands on water, food and energy in the Ganges Basin. To contribute to this objective, each proposal should clearly support:

- a. Land use and water resources development plan and related investments to safeguard environmental health and ecosystem service delivery despite growing pressures on natural resources in the rural-urban interface
- b. Scenarios of demographic shift/urbanization or infrastructure planning, and their related costs and benefits, including those of alternative development or investment options.

There was general agreement amongst participants that appropriate ESS activities will vary across the three landscapes of the basin. At the watershed and basin scales, water scarcity remains a challenge. In the delta, opportunities to meet the objectives of improving provisioning of environmental services could be met by improving water management in the polders. Meeting this objective may also provide an opportunity to study the relationship between farming systems in the polders and the Sundarbans, in particular how changes in land and water use might impact them. If there was broad support for such a study, which could be approached either from a transboundary or livelihood perspective (or both), it would benefit from an initial desk study.

Research Synergies Across Landscapes

Presentations from Luna Bharati of IWMI and KH Anantha of ICRISAT provided participants with an opportunity to reflect on the three landscapes of the Ganges and identify potential research synergies across them.

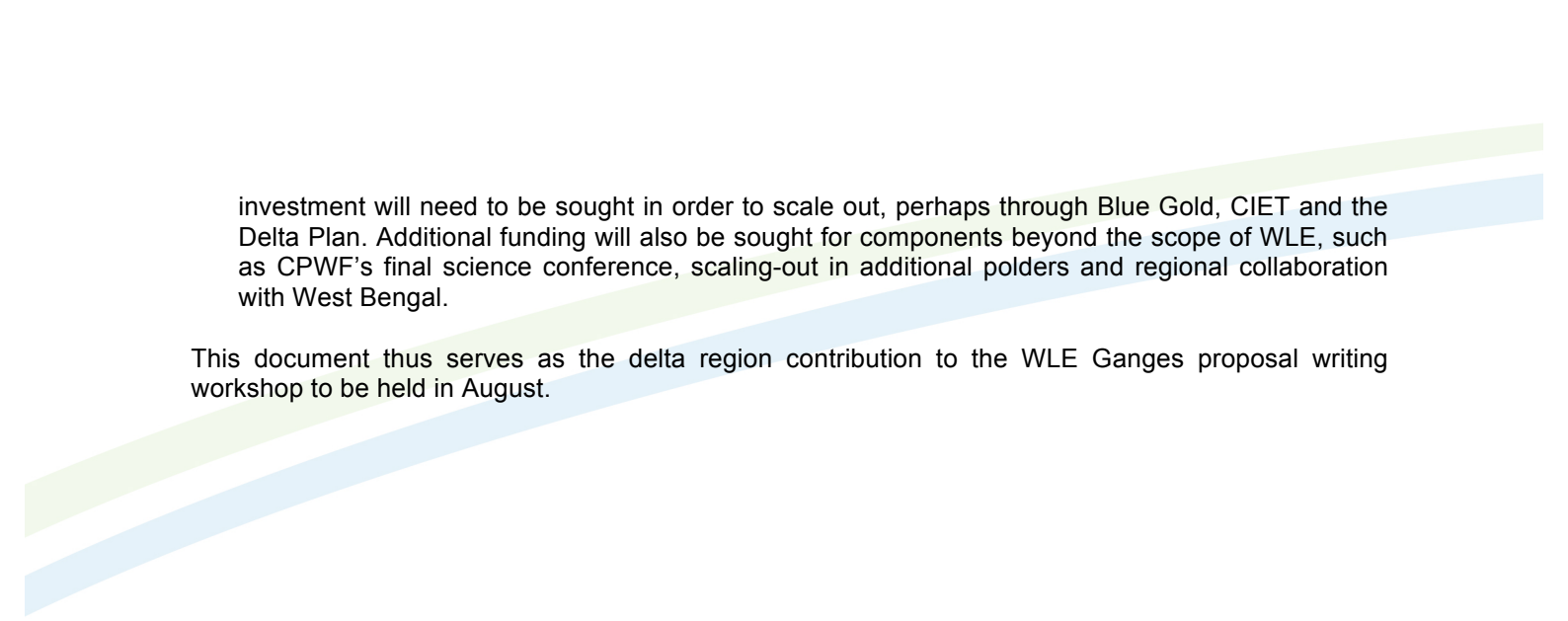
- *Delta*: It is clear that the Delta is furthest along in the formulation of a cohesive program of research, although there is recognition that this will have to be adapted and reduced to fit within the WLE framework and budget. The delta landscape represents a significant opportunity to achieve tangible outcomes in a two-year timeframe, one that can be built on in subsequent years of WLE Phase Two operations.

- *Hills*: IWMI has an emerging program of research on small water storage that can be built upon. It appears to have a number of overlapping themes with the delta.
- *Plains*: ICRISAT also has a long-standing program on watershed management in the plains that should be taken into consideration.
- *Transboundary*: River flows are a priority transboundary issue, with a long and contentious history. For this reason the involvement of the private sector could help to change public sector dialogue. The Joint River Commission may also be a starting point as this Commission works with India and Nepal, while it is based in the Bangladesh Ministry of Water Resources. Migrations and market linkages were two other transboundary issues that were underscored as potential areas for collaboration.
- *WLE Program*: IWMI's GAMES concept was presented. Meeting participants generally felt that the technical feasibility study required as a next step is not in keeping with visions for WLE Ganges.

WLE in the Ganges Delta

The WLE Ganges Focal Region coordinator, Craig Meisner, presented his ideas on an initial vision for WLE activities in the delta based around the structure and results of CPWF research. The presentation prompted a lively discussion that resulted in the following shared understanding:

- WLE should adopt the AAS approach of participatory action research for community development and empowerment in a few polders. This is a desirable method by which to promote CPWF's mini-watershed with improved water management, cropping and aquaculture approach. Research should be conducted on the methodology, not the accompanying technologies. It was recognized that out-scaling to farmers/communities was not built into the original CPWF-Ganges program and attempts at community development and empowerment were therefore sometimes weak. The pilots should include collaboration with Blue Gold in one or more sub-polders where Blue Gold will improve water management infrastructure; this will facilitate implementation of the community water management concept.
- Engage IWM in the identification of other areas for research, such as sedimentation and demographic shifts. Empower communities, especially women, around these to deliver research results. Through this approach, WLE can deliver methods for improving the productivity of the polders while ensuring the provisioning of ecosystem services to a community of rice/crop/fish growers.
- WLE's work in the delta should compare a baseline of community and women resilience and empowerment to what has been achieved after 2.5 years of its research activities. WLE should also work with BRAC to pilot their approach to scaling-out technologies, and compare this to an AAS community empowerment approach to adoption. This should include exploration of how gender issues that impact equity are altered or not altered by the different interventions.
- In terms of projects, partners and staff, the group suggests that Manoranjan Mondal and Kazi Kabir be retained to oversee the creation of the pilot mini-watershed scheme.
- We continue to liaise with WARPO and partners through change models of policies and thus justify the retention of budget for this networking. It is expected that this network will be expanded at all scales with strategic targeting of other change agents based on the comparative advantage of the partnership and the how they operate.
- Further modeling activities that are specifically tailored to WLE objectives could be carried out by the IWM partners who implemented CPWF's external drivers' of change project.
- The work of CPWF's resource profiles, extrapolation domains, and land-use patterns project lends itself well to WLE's focus on decision support tools. Opportunities exist to continue to develop the data and partnerships of IRRI, with the potential for additional funding from other sources. This could include analyzing the impact and comparative advantage of investments made at different scales for a range of interventions, including who actually benefits and what the trade-offs are.
- WLE can build upon the emerging results of IWMI's water governance and community based management gender studies to empower women within water management organizations.
- The new Focal Region Coordination body as it exists at present under the GBDC Coordination and Change project led by WorldFish would absorb coordination and administration activities, with a budget allocated separately from research funds. Communication activities will take place on a volunteer basis, with WorldFish Bangladesh allocating staff as needed.
- The group believes that through these activities, WLE can fulfill its objectives of improved governance and equity, gender mainstreaming and provisioning of ecosystem services. Additional



investment will need to be sought in order to scale out, perhaps through Blue Gold, CIET and the Delta Plan. Additional funding will also be sought for components beyond the scope of WLE, such as CPWF's final science conference, scaling-out in additional polders and regional collaboration with West Bengal.

This document thus serves as the delta region contribution to the WLE Ganges proposal writing workshop to be held in August.

Attachments

Participant List

- Andy Nelson, IRRI (G1)
- Parvesh Kumar, IRRI (G1)
- Elizabeth Humphreys, IRRI (G2)
- Manoranjan Mondal, IRRI (G2)
- Marie-Charlotte Buisson, IWMI (G3)
- Zahirul Haque Khan, IWM (G4)
- Craig Meisner, WorldFish (G5 and WLE Ganges Focal Region coordinator)
- Pamela George, WorldFish (G5)
- Luna Bharati, IWMI (WLE Ganges Hills representative)
- KH Anantha, ICRISAT (WLE Ganges Plains representative)
- Michael Phillips, Worldfish
- Ilse Pukinskis, CPWF/WLE
- TP Tuong, independent consultant
- Michael Victor, WLE
- Amy Fisher, facilitator

Agenda

CONTENT	PRESENTERS/FACILITATORS	APPROACH
Opening <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call to order • Agenda/logistics for day 3 • Review of Focal Region design process and Ganges concept 	Michael & Craig	Presentation
Group Discussion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define the two main objectives of the program based on the questions in Focal Region design document 	Amy	Group Work
Coffee Break		
Presentations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upali-GAMES • The Highlands of the Ganges Basin (Luna) • Ganges Plains (Anantha) • CPWF Delta Concept note (Craig) 	Amy	Presentations with Q&A
Lunch		
Next Steps <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommendations for who can be involved in writing program of research • What should happen next 	Craig and Michael	Discussion