

Stories through the lens: Youth aspirations, and agroecology

Shweta Gupta, Meghajit
Shijagurumayum, Sonali
Singh, Anne Rietveld

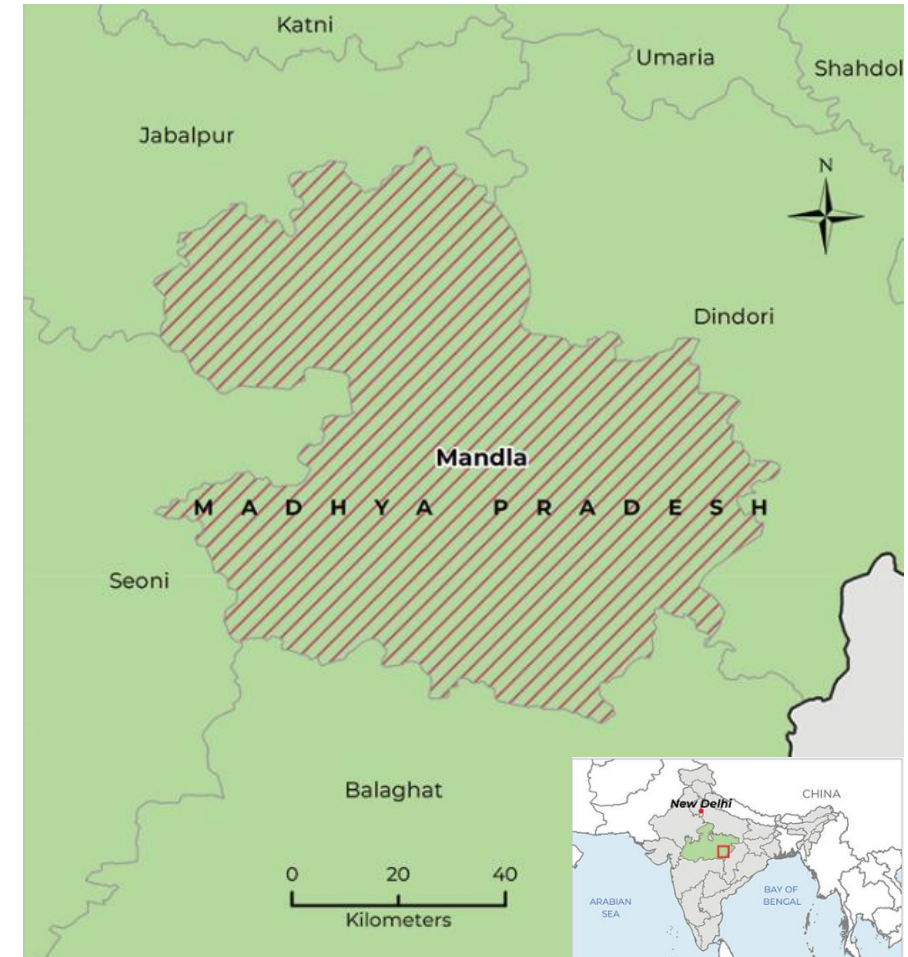
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Introduction

- Visioning and field interactions with stakeholders:
 - Under-representation of young men and women from agriculture, collectives, rural spaces?
 - Does agriculture and agroecology have opportunities for young farmers?

Study site



Key research questions

- What are the perspectives of young farmers towards agroecology as a livelihood activity?
- What influences these perspectives? Role of political economic factors such as access to productive resources, representation in political spaces, work and labor, and income generation?

Methodology

- **Individual semi-structured interviews** of 10 young women and 10 young men (aged 18-29 years)
- **Key informant interviews** of govt. stakeholders to gain insights on youth involvement in agriculture and their perspective of agroecology

Methodology (cont.)

- **Photo-voice** with 8 young men and 4 young women
 - Multiple workshops on agroecology & photovoice
 - Formed single-sex FGDs (6–8 participants) to surface gender-specific perspectives.
 - Participants captured photos over a reflection period (2-3 weeks interval) and drafted short narratives.
 - Assistance in clicking pictures on 5 themes
 - Screening pictures, selected 1–3 per theme

Themes for clicking pictures

Dream farm

Collective groups

Environment

Action and Agency

Agroecology

Challenges

- High dropout due to competing commitments and migration.
- Difficulty recalling instructions and linking concepts to photos.
- Limited or low-quality photo submissions.
- Youth aspirations often lay outside agriculture, reducing engagement.

Making adjustments

- Refined selection of participants to youth actively engaged in farming.
- Replaced FGDs with guided “photo-walks” to demonstrate observation and narration to increase retention capacity.
- Collected narratives before field visits to strengthen clarity and reduce burden.
- Retained only committed participants for the final round to improve data quality.
- Introduced a local photovoice competition and opportunity to participate in national workshop for confidence building.

- Designed pamphlets and visual aids to improve recall and relevance.

13 Agroecological principles



- 1. Recycling:** Preferentially use local renewable resources
- 2. Input reduction:** Reduce dependency on purchased inputs & increase self sufficiency
- 3. Soil health:** Improve soil health & soil biological activity for better plant growth
- 4. Animal health:** Ensure animal health and welfare
- 5. Biodiversity:** Maintain diversity of species & genetic resources at farm, field & landscape
- 6. Synergy:** Enhance complementarity amongst elements of agroecosystems (animals, crops, trees, soil, water).
- 7. Economic diversification:** Diversify on-farm incomes for small-scale farmers.
- 8. Co-creation of knowledge:** Enhance co-creation exchange of local knowledge
- 9. Social values and diets:** Promote healthy, diversified, seasonal and cultural diets & social & gender equity
- 10. Fairness:** Promote food systems based on fair trade, employment
- 11. Connectivity:** Ensure proximity & confidence between consumers & producers.
- 12. Land & natural resource governance:** Strengthen institutional arrangements to manage natural & genetic resources
- 13. Participation:** Social organization & participation in decision-making by food producers & consumers



5 themes for photos



Dream Farm: Youth's idealized visions of a farm.

Collective Groups: Youth's relationship with farming associations, self-help groups, or agriculture cooperatives

Environment: What is the youth satisfied with & not satisfied with in their living environment?

Agency and Action: Youth's accomplishments & activities that contribute to their livelihoods, expressing pride & happiness in their achievements.

Agroecology: Youth's understanding & perspectives on Agroecology & how it is present in their lives.

How to participate?



Step 1: Participant clicks 1-2 photos for each of the five themes.

Step 2: Participant confirms and validates each picture with the research team and local supporting partner.

Step 3: Participant prepares a story on why and how the photo explains the theme.

Step 4: In a live workshop, each participant explains the photos and their story associated with each theme, and an overall key message.

Photo competition



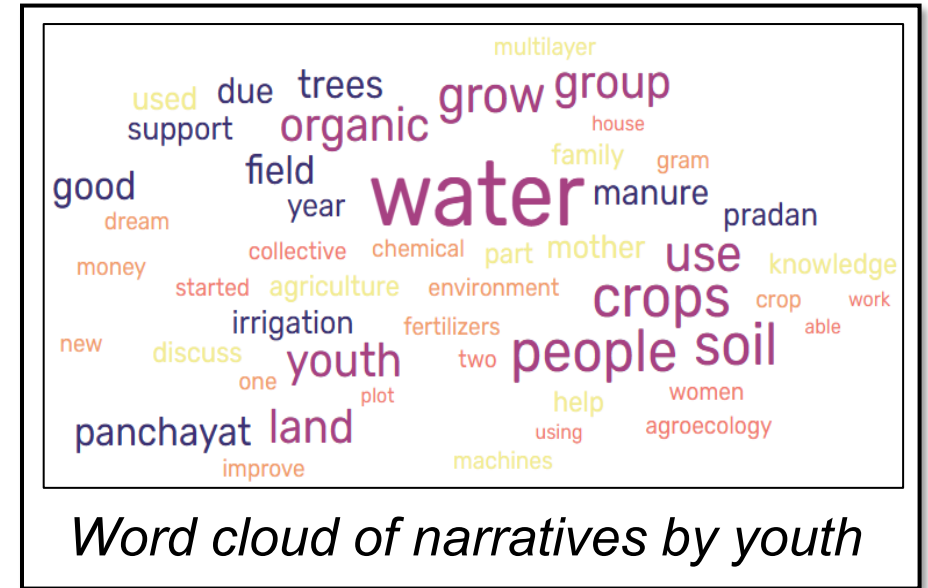
From each block in the study, 2 photos are selected per theme (one by male and one by female) to enter district level competition. Through a voting process, a winner for each theme will be declared, with exciting prizes.

The selected photos & accompanying stories would be displayed in a local photovoice gallery event, providing an opportunity for interaction with local food system actors.

Top 5 photos (one per theme) from this event would be nominated for participation in the Global Level competition (details coming soon).

Glaring outcomes

- Water scarcity for irrigation highlighted as a major issue and resource, cross all themes by both male and female youth



Drying water-bodies



Drying well



Dry hand-pump



Irrigation

Understanding agroecology



Integrating animals with farm for manure, Need for veterinary hospitals



Growing chemical free crops, revitalizing barren lands, using plot boundaries to grow crops



Use of manure and natural inputs; labour intensive practices

Benefits for everyone; Need for more demonstrations on AE; Learning by looking at others



Complementary findings-1

For instance, Migration was a key issue in Mandla

- **Limited prospects in agriculture push youth to migrate**

“Some young men... have migrated and worked in factories and non-agricultural industries to earn income as agriculture only provides a seasonal income.” – Young man, 29

- **Lack of agency discourages youth from staying**

“For sowing and deciding which crop to cultivate, I have to take permission from my father and brother.” – Young man, 25

- **Migration seen as insecure, especially by young women**

“People who migrate for work are not able to save money... that’s why we only work on our farm.” – Young woman, 25

- **Desire for diversified futures makes retention difficult**

“Along with agriculture, I also want to learn stitching... to generate additional income.” – Young woman, 23

Complementary findings-1

Environment Theme: defined environment as the place, services and situation.

What it eventually highlights: To retain youth, it was not only presenting agriculture as a viable livelihood option but also required putting in place quality welfare services.



The **market** is about 10 km away from my house, it is not easy to go, moreover, we don't get many items – Young man



Our village doesn't have proper **hospitals**; we have to go to Mandla or Jabalpur, which are far away. – Young woman



We do not get **water** in summer, we wish that irrigation services were effective – Young Woman



Local government services and agricultural service institutions are located far and not effectively functioning. This demotivates us as we don't often get the support we require. – Young Man



We do not have good **educational facilities**; more residential schools are required. Many of the youths migrate for education- Young woman

Complementary findings-2

Understanding agency of youth in rural environment



I planted mango trees...and did mixed farming of mango with other crops on a 25 decimal patch of land..-young female



I told my father to **grow wheat on main field instead of onion**. And the wheat output turned out very well. We were able to keep a lot for home consumption which previously we couldn't- young female



The well I made it myself after learning it from the watershed, and we have some water in the well. This has helped my family during this extreme drought- young male



I wanted to pursue higher education but due to non-availability of college at gram panchayat level, my parents do not allow me to migrate to other cities. Hence, I **ended up doing farming**

Quotes from surveys

"I have to take permission from my husband, my father-in-law, and from my mother-in-law on agriculture- related matters" (Young Woman, 26 y/o)

"For sowing and deciding which crop to cultivate, I have to take permission from my father and brother" (Young Man, 25 y/o).

Engagement with stakeholders

- A block and national level photo gallery event
 - Showing pictures and narratives
 - Attendees: Youth & family, Government (block & district), NGO partners, researchers
 - Building connect between different stakeholders



Achievements of combined approach

- Higher degree of youth engagement by emphasis on visual output → technical skills of youth, participation of highly motivated individuals
- Make youth as part of the research team → from data providers to evaluators
- Engagement of youth with other youth, and stakeholders, feel included in the research
- Able to triangulate information across multiple sources of information
- Narratives from youth helped in reducing researcher bias in interpreting photos
- Better communication of results with stakeholders



Key takeaway

Understanding perspectives of youth towards agroecology requires unpacking experience of youth across multiple dimensions which photovoice helped us understand better



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