

Blog “Sustainable Land Management in Sub-Saharan Africa: Improving livelihoods through local research”



INTRODUCTION



Our blog is intended for project staff as well as interested stakeholders from science, policy and practice, to share experiences and mutually learn. It is an opportunity to showcase the multi-faceted nature in which we improve livelihoods and support sustainable land management through local research.

This current blog, co-authored by Kingnidé Wilfrid Adjimoti and Aiveen Donnelly, shares a recent project highlight of an official UNCCD COP16 Side Event, which was jointly organised by the **INTERFACES** team at IDOS and the GEO LDN, hosted by the University of Energy and Natural Resources in Ghana and run by GIZ.

THE ROLE OF YOUTH IN SUSTAINABLE LAND MANAGEMENT

On December 9, 2024, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, a unique side event was held during the 16th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD COP16). Titled “Sustainable Land Management: The Role of Youth in Innovation,” the event underscored the critical importance of youth in driving agricultural transformation and innovation.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INNOVATIONS IN AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES

Agricultural land use practices largely determine the ecological status of land—both on agricultural land itself and on interlinked landscapes—which are shaped by (the absence of) innovations. A combination of low innovation adoption, stagnant agricultural productivity and an increase in land degradation are particularly accentuated in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). It is widely observed that, agricultural societies are often still traditional in nature, relying on hierarchical structures. It is, however, uncontested that changes (innovations) have to occur if SSA is to achieve sustainable land management (SLM).

To ensure this, a conscious effort towards curriculum review and long-term implementation is needed for the next generation of farmers and leaders alike to practice land stewardship. This is central to overall economic development and critical for the support of the three Rio Conventions. Youth are increasingly more ambitious and open to innovative approaches in SLM; however, often have limited decision-making power within traditional village structures. It can be assumed that without better integrating youth into the development of innovations that support sustainable land use, the next generation will not have the necessary options to combat land degradation.

Therefore, this jointly organised side event brought together actors from across our networks of civil society organisations, governmental and intergovernmental partners to discuss how youth can be better included in agricultural innovation development and transformation in SSA.



AN INTERACTIVE DISCUSSION WITH THOUGHT LEADERS

The event adopted a dynamic Fishbowl format, encouraging active participation and open dialogue. Attendees had the opportunity to exchange ideas on how to better involve young people in agricultural innovations for SLM. Dr. Michael Brüntrup, Senior Researcher at IDOS and German representative to the UNCCD Committee on Science and Technology, who set the framework for the event, moderated the session. Dr. Amos Kabo-bah, associate Professor and currently the Dean for the International Relations Office of the UENR, provided input on the importance of long-term capacity building and continuous learning processes.

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The discussion was enriched by insights from key note speakers from both the scientific community and from the youth community. Samuel Gamede, Senior Soil Scientist at CIMMYT, provided examples of scientific solutions to improve sustainable agricultural productivity and Kingnidé Wilfrid Adjimoti, certified Knowledge Manager and YPARD representative advocated for youth engagement in sustainable agriculture. Also, Dr Sidy Tounkara from IPAR Think Tank in Senegal, provided an intervention from the context of the regional project **COINS**, on the challenges faced by youth in SLM and how the living lab approach and farmer field schools can mobilise and leverage uptake of SLM technologies if youth are properly included from the start of the process.



In addition to in person input, explainer videos displayed what youth in action can look like. The regional project **Minodu** provided input on narrowing existing gaps between available scientific findings and practical solutions adopted at community level, with a focus on knowledge exchange, and the GIZ run 360°AgriJobs project, portrayed a young female agripreneur from Malawi as she details her business that includes a diverse range of products, which



she developed through technical training. UNCCD Land Hero and Founder-President of Green Hope Foundation, Kehkashan Basu, provided inspirational input from her work as young global influencer, educator and environmentalist.

KEY MESSAGES FOR THE FUTURE OF AGRICULTURE

One of the event's highlights was the discussion around youth-driven innovations in sustainable agriculture and the need for inclusive decision-making. The speakers emphasised three key points:



- **Youth as Catalysts for Change:** The creativity and energy of young people are essential to tackling land degradation challenges.
- **The Need for Greater Institutional Support:** Public policies must integrate programmes that foster youth agricultural entrepreneurship.
- **Strategic Partnerships for Impact:** Collaboration among researchers, policymakers, and young entrepreneurs is vital to maximise the impact of SLM initiatives.

A COLLECTIVE CALL TO ACTION

The event concluded with a strong call to action to further integrate youth into efforts to combat desertification and promote agricultural transformation. Online discussions were amplified using hashtags like **#SLM_Africa**, **#United4Land**, and **#COP16Riyadh**, enabling a global audience to engage with these critical issues.

The event was livestreamed with the recordings to be made available shortly on our website www.sustainable-landmanagement-africa.net.

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Furthermore, a set of panel discussions is being organised by Theodore Asimeng (IDOS) and Benjamin Abugri (FARA) at the European Conference on African Studies in Prague coming June 2025, entitled “[From agricultural knowledge to innovation and adoption: empowering smallholder farmers](#)”, including a specific focus on fostering youth-specific solutions.



PHOTOS

Courtesy of Kingnidé Wilfrid Adjimoti, Mark Grasy and Aiveen Donnelly.

ABOUT THE CO-ORGANISERS

A postgraduate programme on SLM has been established through the [GEO LDN Flagship](#)—which is mandated by the UNCCD through the Group on Earth Observation to support the global monitoring of the SDG15.3.1.—and hosted by [UENR](#), with the goal of supporting and transforming long-term capacity building efforts for young professionals in SLM. Complementary, a BMBF funded [consortium](#) for SLM in SSA seeks to improve livelihoods through local research. This is achieved by using theories of change, follow-the-innovation method, decision-support-systems and gender-inclusive participatory approaches.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), within the strategy of its platform [Research for Sustainability](#) (Forschung für Nachhaltigkeit, FONA), the **INTERFACES** project works with four regional projects – **COINS**, **DecLaRe**, **InfoRange** and **Minodu** – to strengthen the integration, coherence and reach in the area of sustainable land management.

MEDIA

Follow us for updates on the research programme on our [website](#) and follow us on [LinkedIn](#) and on [D-Groups](#).

IDOS Newsletter December 2024 - [Official Side Event at COP16 in Riyadh explores Youth’s Role in Innovation](#)

PREVIOUS BLOG CONTRIBUTIONS

[“Geotools for smallholder farmers”](#)

[“Understanding local perceptions of land tenure security in Northern Benin using Mental Models”](#)

LATEST BRIEFING SERIES

1/2024 - [Fostering gender-responsive innovation adoption among smallholder farmers in Africa](#)

LATEST VIDEOS

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[Making Wangatchi: Traditional vs New Approach - Interview with Oroudjo Amina \(with french captions\)](#)

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