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OUTCOME DOCUMENT

Youth Assembly session on strengthening youth roles in Integrated Land Use Planning and emerging issues

Introduction

The World Food Forum (WFF) Youth Assembly, in collaboration with the UNCCD Youth Caucus, Save Soil and the International Association of Students in Agricultural and Related Sciences (IAAS), convened a global youth capacity development session on "Strengthening youth roles in Integrated Land Use Planning (ILUP) and emerging issues". Held virtually on 1 August 2025, the session gathered over 150 youth stakeholders from diverse regions.

The session introduced participants to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)'s updated Guidelines for Integrated Land Use Planning (ILUP), which modernize the 1993 framework by embedding participatory and inclusive approaches across nine planning steps. Presentations explored ILUP's role in promoting sustainable land management, biodiversity restoration and climate resilience while addressing tenure rights, urban and peri-urban agriculture and land degradation neutrality.

The consultative process

The session combined technical inputs with interactive dialogue. It opened with welcoming remarks and a live poll to assess participants' familiarity with ILUP, creating a shared starting point for discussion. An FAO Land and Water Officer delivered a technical presentation on the nine-step ILUP methodology, explaining how it differs from traditional top-down planning by promoting inclusive, evidence-based and strategic decision-making. Youth speakers complemented the presentation by exploring emerging issues such as soil revitalization, agroecology and climate change adaptation and their relevance across the ILUP steps.

The consultation concluded with facilitated plenary discussions. Guided by a series of framing questions, participants explored how youth can engage across the nine ILUP steps, challenges to implementation within their regions and opportunities to make the methodology more inclusive and youth-responsive. These discussions allowed for peer-to-peer learning, context-specific insights and creative brainstorming.



Key themes identified by youth

Meaningful participation and representation

Participants identified formal youth representation within ILUP governance structures as essential. Suggested entry points included youth seats on ILUP task forces, designated youth focal points with advisory or voting roles, periodic youth forums integrated into planning processes and formal mechanisms requiring authorities to respond to youth recommendations. Participants also emphasized that meaningful participation requires capacity development, orientation and transparent reporting on how youth contributions influence decision-making.

Digital and hybrid engagement

Participants emphasized the value of digital tools for outreach, data collection and storytelling, including mobile applications, SMS surveys, social media platforms and youth portals. However, they stressed digital engagement should complement, rather than replace, in-person consultations. Hybrid approaches combining digital platforms with community workshops, local radio and printed materials were considered essential for reaching communities with limited connectivity while ensuring that digital inputs are validated and integrated into formal ILUP processes.

Community bridging and inclusion

Participants described youth as important bridges between communities and decision-makers, capable of translating technical planning concepts into accessible language and facilitating dialogue across generations and stakeholder groups. They emphasized the need for training in facilitation, conflict sensitivity and tenure rights, alongside explicit safeguards that protect the participation of Indigenous Peoples, women, pastoralists and other marginalized communities.

Youth-led data and innovation

Participants proposed practical approaches to strengthen evidence generation, including participatory GIS mapping, mobile surveys, photovoice, citizen science initiatives and low-altitude drone imagery where permitted. They emphasized the importance of quality assurance, standardized metadata and clear data-sharing mechanisms to ensure that youth-generated evidence can inform official planning processes.

Capacity, resources and pilot funding

Participants identified a significant gap between youth interest and available opportunities. They called for practical training in GIS, remote sensing, community facilitation, monitoring and evaluation, combined with mentorship from planners and practitioners. Participants also highlighted the importance of micro-grants, incubator support, equipment loans and digital connectivity to aid youth-led pilot initiatives and scale successful local solutions.



Challenges faced by different regions

Africa

- Insecurity and political instability limit sustained participatory planning processes.
- Weak and fragmented data systems constrain evidence-based ILUP and youth inclusion.

Asia and the Pacific

- Fragmented governance across ministries complicates coordinated ILUP implementation.
- Limited local technical capacity and youth migration reduce continuity of engagement.

Near East and North Africa

- Political instability and limited funding restrict long-term ILUP planning.
- Water scarcity prioritizes short-term resource management over integrated land-use approaches.

Latin America and the Caribbean

- Uneven institutional coordination and strong private sector interests can limit community participation.
- Risks and limited protection when engaging in land-related decision-making processes.

Cross-cutting issues

- Structural inequalities, gender norms and tenure insecurity limit inclusive youth participation.
- Digital divides and weak decentralization frameworks constrain effective youth engagement.

Recommendations

1. Institutionalize youth representation

- Establish formal youth roles in ILUP governance structures.
- Introduce accountability mechanisms requiring formal responses to youth inputs.

2. Scale practical capacity building and mentorship

- Design and fund modular, competency-focused training packages like: short courses on participatory mapping and GIS, mobile data collection and basic remote sensing, multi-criteria analysis for option appraisal, facilitation and conflict sensitivity, and monitoring and evaluation tailored to youth.
- Pair youth with technical mentors and integrate practical assignments.

3. Provide seed funding and digital access for youth pilots

- Establish micro-grant schemes to support youth-led ILUP pilot initiatives.
- Provide basic equipment and digital access (e.g. smartphones, data support).

4. Deploy hybrid engagement models and practical toolkits

- Combine digital tools (apps, surveys) with in-person consultations.
- Develop youth-friendly ILUP toolkits adapted to local contexts and languages.

5. Institutionalize accountability, data integration and policy alignment

- Create standardized data-sharing protocols and minimal quality standards so that youth-collected data can be accepted into official monitoring systems (with metadata, sampling notes and validation steps)
- Align youth contributions with national planning frameworks for policy uptake.