Ecosystem services are especially important for millions living in rural communities in developing countries. Many rural communities depend directly on a range of ecosystems services for their livelihoods and well-being and, due to isolation and a paucity of resources, may have few substitutes or alternatives to the services provided by ecosystems if they are lost or degraded. However, even where “rich” in ecosystem services many of these people remain mired in poverty with few opportunities to improve their wellbeing. Economic development is needed to improve their livelihoods. This has traditionally been achieved by significantly altering ecosystems to provide food and energy services. However, these changes can affect other ecosystem services, often resulting in unintended, negative consequences for those dependent on them. Hence, in the past, poor people have often paid the price of development. A key challenge for the water-energy-food nexus is to understand exactly how ecosystem services contribute to poverty reduction and how development can be achieved in ways that are sustainable and do not undermine vital ecosystem services. This session will comprise presentations from researchers contributing to the CGIAR Water, Land and Ecosystems (WLE) program, which addresses this fundamental issue.