



# Youth Handbook on African Forests







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Young people on a guided tour of Ngangao forest, located in Taita Hills in Kenya (African Forest Forum/Felix Odhiambo); Tropical rain forest, Nyungwe National Park, Rwanda (Shutterstock); A wood trader's daily routine in Ghana. Photo credit: Stella Agbley via Wikimedia Commons

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- **Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU)** – for its academic partnership and valuable scientific contributions that have significantly enriched the content and rigor of this handbook.
- **Kenya Forestry Research Institute (KEFRI)** – for its research leadership and steadfast commitment to promoting youth engagement in sustainable forestry, particularly within Kenya.

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insights and highlighting both the challenges and opportunities facing African youth in the forestry sector. We also appreciate **Godwin Bonge-Muhwezi** for his invaluable support in the development of this resource.

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We gratefully recognize the generous financial support from Formas – the Swedish Research Council for Sustainable Development. This support reflects the donor community's commitment to advancing science-based communication and strengthening sustainable forestry efforts across Africa.

The collective wisdom, energy, and passion of all contributors have been instrumental in bringing this handbook to life. We hope it serves not only as an informative guide but also as a rallying call—empowering young people across Africa to lead the way in forest conservation, sustainable development, and climate action.





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# Preface

The *Youth Handbook on African Forests* is a product of the *AfricanYouth4Forests (AY4F)* initiative—a collaborative effort led by the African Forest Forum (AFF) in partnership with the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) and the Kenya Forestry Research Institute (KEFRI). This initiative recognizes Africa’s youth as a dynamic force for innovation, sustainability, and change, and acknowledges the vital role that forests play in the continent’s climate, biodiversity, and development aspirations.

This Handbook is designed to bridge the gap between scientific knowledge on African forests and the everyday understanding and actions of young people across the continent. Targeted at youth aged 18–30, it offers accessible, engaging, and practical information about the significance of Africa’s forests in addressing pressing global challenges—from climate change and biodiversity loss to food security and sustainable livelihoods.

Through clear messages, key facts, inspiring stories, and opportunities for involvement, the Handbook highlights both the immense value of Africa’s forests and the urgent threats they face—such as deforestation, land degradation, and climate vulnerability. It encourages young people to explore sustainable solutions and take action to protect, restore, and responsibly manage forest resources.

The ultimate goal of this Handbook is to empower youth to become informed advocates and active participants in forest conservation and sustainable development. We envision this resource as a springboard for deeper youth engagement in the forestry sector—helping them to navigate challenges, seize emerging opportunities within the green and bioeconomy, and contribute meaningfully to national, regional and global forest goals.

By sparking curiosity, strengthening knowledge, and promoting action, we hope this Handbook will inspire a generation of young African leaders to become stewards of the continent’s forests—shaping a greener, more resilient, safer and inclusive future for all.





## Labode Popoola

**Executive Secretary–CEO, African Forest Forum (AFF)**

At the African Forest Forum (AFF), we envision an Africa where forests and tree resources serve as foundational pillars of sustainable development, poverty alleviation, and environmental stewardship. We firmly believe that Africa's youth are not only the leaders of tomorrow—they are also the driving force of change today.

Through the *AfricanYouth4Forests (AY4F)* initiative, AFF is proud to support and invest in the next generation. Our goal is to equip young people with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to lead in sustainable forestry and to thrive in the growing green economy.

This *Youth Handbook on African Forests* is a testament to that commitment. It bridges the gap among scientific knowledge, policies and youth engagement—translating

the complexities of African forestry into accessible, practical, and empowering insights.

We invite young Africans to seize the vast opportunities that our forests offer—to recognize their essential roles in climate resilience, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable livelihoods; become informed advocates, innovative green entrepreneurs, and dedicated stewards of our continent's natural heritage.

Your creativity, determination, and vision are vital to amplifying the voices of Africa's forests and securing their future. Together, let us build a resilient and sustainable Africa—where forests thrive, and youth lead the way, leaving no one behind.



# Anders Roos

Professor, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU)

At the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU), our mission is to advance knowledge for the sustainable use and management of natural resources in pursuit of a better, more resilient world. We believe that empowering the next generation is essential to achieving lasting sustainability—particularly in the forestry sector.

Our involvement in the *AfricanYouth4Forests* (AY4F) initiative reflects this belief. It underscores our commitment to sharing scientific expertise and supporting young people in deepening their understanding of the ecological, social, and economic importance of Africa's forests.

Through this *Youth Handbook on African Forests*, we aim to inspire young Africans to explore the rich interconnectedness among forests, climate, and livelihoods—and to recognize the critical role science plays in shaping sustainable solutions. We encourage you to ask questions, seek knowledge, embrace innovation, and engage in collaboration that promotes responsible forest management.

Consider the broad and exciting opportunities in the forestry sector—from using technology for monitoring and restoration, to launching green enterprises that contribute to the bioeconomy. Let your curiosity and creativity guide you as you become agents of change and stewards of Africa's forests.







## Jane Njuguna

Director/CEO, Kenya Forestry Research Institute (KEFRI)

The Kenya Forestry Research Institute (KEFRI) is dedicated to generating and sharing cutting-edge research and technologies that support the sustainable management of forest ecosystems in Kenya and across the African continent. We firmly believe that the meaningful engagement of young Kenyans and Africans is essential to securing the future of our forests and advancing national, regional and global sustainable development goals.

Our partnership in the *AfricanYouth4Forests* (AY4F) initiative reflects this commitment. Through this *Youth Handbook on African Forests*, we aim to equip the next generation with accessible, youth-friendly insights into the vital and multidimensional roles of forests—and the vast potential that lies within the forestry sector.

We envision a future where young people not only understand and value the role of forests in conserving biodiversity, building climate resilience, and sustaining livelihoods, but also take the lead in driving conservation efforts, pioneering innovations, and developing green enterprises.

We encourage youth to explore rewarding careers in forestry, harness emerging technologies, and play active roles in forest-related initiatives at both local and national levels.

Be the generation that protects Africa's forests—for prosperity, for the planet, and for the generations to come.

## Message from the

# AfricanYouth4Forests Youth Advisory Council

As the AfricanYouth4Forests Youth Advisory Council, we are proud to introduce the *Youth Handbook on African Forests*—a powerful resource designed to inform, inspire, and mobilize young people across Africa and beyond to take action for our forests.

Forests are the lungs of our planet and the backbone of many African communities—providing food, medicine, energy, livelihoods, cultural identity, and climate resilience; yet, they face increasing threats from deforestation, land degradation, and unsustainable development.

This Handbook reflects the voices, experiences, and aspirations of African youth who are rising to meet these challenges with passion, knowledge, and innovation. It serves as both an educational tool and a

call to action—highlighting practical steps young people can take to advocate for forest conservation, participate in restoration efforts, and shape policy and decision-making at all levels.

We believe that youth are not just beneficiaries of forest protection efforts, they are leaders, solution-builders, and custodians of Africa's natural heritage.

We invite all young people, partners, and stakeholders to use this guide, amplify its message, and join us in championing a future where forests and communities thrive together.

**In solidarity and action,**

AfricanYouth4Forests Youth Advisory Council



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# Chapter 1: Understanding forests

## What is a forest?

A forest is a big area where trees grow naturally and cover a large space—usually more than half the size of a football field! To be called a forest, the tree cover should be thick enough to cover at least one out of every ten square meters of the ground. The trees are also expected to grow at least as tall as a one-storey building (about five meters high).

Forests are not farms or cities—they are places where nature is in charge. They are full of trees, other plants, animals, and insects, all living together in an interconnected ecosystem.

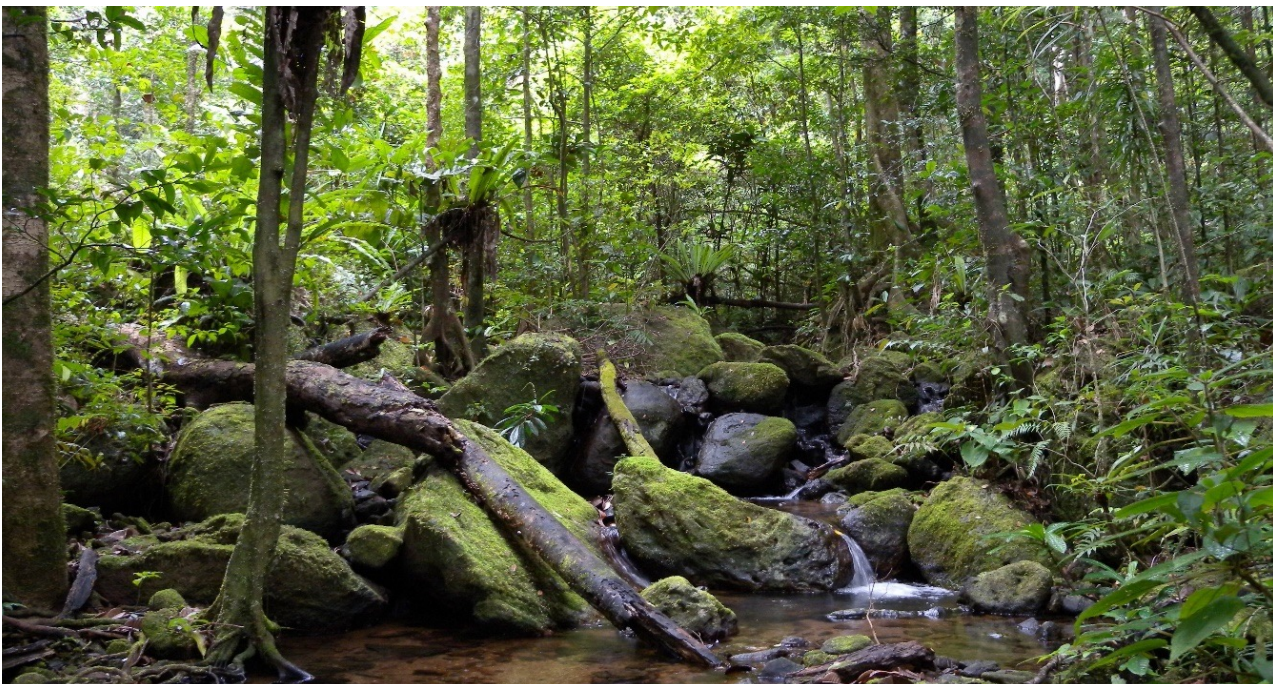


*Chimpanzee in Sierra Leone (photo via Wikimedia Commons)*

## How much forest does Africa have?

Africa is a continent rich in forests—around **636 million hectares of them**! That's a massive area, covering nearly one-fifth of all the land in Africa. Even more amazing, Africa holds about 16% of the world's total forest cover.

But forests are not spread out evenly. Most of them are found in **West and Central Africa**, where the famous Congo Rainforest lies. This region alone holds about **48% of Africa's forests**. Then there is **East and Southern Africa**, with beautiful woodlands and montane forests that make up around **46.5% of the**



*Lowland rainforest, Masoala National Park, Madagascar (Photo credit: Frank Vassen, Brussels, Belgium via Wikimedia Commons)*





*African Tulip Tree (Spathodea campanulata), Kibale Forest, Uganda. Photo credit: Bernard Dupont*

**total.** Finally, **North Africa** has a much smaller share, with only about **5.5%**, mostly made up of dry or scattered forest patches.

### **Forest ecosystems and biodiversity**

African forests are among the most biologically diverse ecosystems on Earth. From the tropical rainforests of Central Africa to the coastal and montane forests scattered across the continent, these ecosystems support a stunning array of plant and animal life.

Within these forests thrive thousands of species—many of which are endemic, meaning they exist nowhere else in the world. Africa's forests are home to iconic wildlife such as elephants, gorillas, chimpanzees, and leopards, alongside countless birds, reptiles, amphibians, insects, and microorganisms that play vital roles in maintaining ecological balance.

Equally impressive is the plant diversity found in African forests. These include towering hardwood trees, rare orchids, African violets, food, medicinal plants, and culturally significant species used for food, shelter, and traditional medicine. The genetic richness embedded in these plants is crucial for research, agriculture, and climate adaptation.

This biodiversity is not only a source of wonder and ecological wealth, but also a lifeline for millions of people who depend on forests for their livelihoods, cultural practices, and well-being. Conserving this richness is essential for sustaining Africa's environmental health, food systems, and resilience to climate change.

African forests are more than just trees—they are vibrant, living networks full of life, holding immense value for the continent and the world.



*Forest Canary (Serinus scotops) endemic to southern Africa. Photo credit: Alan Manson via Wikimedia Commons*



# Chapter 2: Forests and us

Forests are far more than just a collection of trees; they're dynamic ecosystems that work tirelessly to support life on Earth. Every day, forests provide us with so much more than just beautiful landscapes—they're the backbone of our livelihoods, the air we breathe, essential for biodiversity, crucial in the fight against climate change, and deliver countless other vital services. In a word, forests are life.



Market in the village of Minwoho, Lekié, Center Region, Cameroon. Photo credit: Ollivier Girard/CIFOR-ICRAF

## Forests and daily life

For millions of people, forests are a lifeline. They are not just green spaces but are central to the well-being of countless communities across Africa. Forests provide a wealth of foods—fruits, nuts, and edible plants—that complement agricultural resources, contributing to food security, especially in rural areas where fresh food can be hard to come by.

The utility of forests extends to construction and fuel as well. Timber and other forest resources are used to build homes, schools, and critical infrastructure. In many communities, forest products like firewood are essential for cooking and heating, supporting daily life and economic activities.

In short, forests are not just a source of raw materials—they are an endless source of hope, health, and prosperity for those who depend on them. When we protect forests, we protect the future.



A wood trader's daily routine in Ghana. Photo credit: Stella Agbley via Wikimedia Commons



## Living spaces of culture and tradition

African forests are also rich cultural landscapes that have shaped the traditions, beliefs, and lifestyles of communities for generations. Across the continent, forests are seen as sacred spaces, where people gather for prayers, rituals, healing, weddings, and other important community events.

These forests are also a source of inspiration. From the vibrant dances of the Congo Basin to the folktales of the West African woodlands, forests have sparked songs, folklores, art, and crafts that celebrate the beauty of nature and the strength of cultural identity. Forest products like leaves, bark, resins, and flowers are used in traditional clothing, medicine, and spiritual practices across many African traditions and cultures.

African forests also hold the memory of the past. They are the setting of ancestral stories, the home of sacred animals, and the resting place of cultural heritage passed down through oral traditions. In this way, African forests are not only natural treasures, but also living museums of history, wisdom, and community life.

For many Indigenous Peoples and local communities, forests are part of daily life and spiritual connection. They offer a sense of peace, identity, and belonging, and hold the knowledge of how to live in harmony with nature.

## African forests and indigenous communities

For generations, indigenous communities across Africa have lived in harmony with the forests, drawing on deep-rooted knowledge of the land, plants, and animals. Their traditions emphasize sustainable use of natural resources—protecting the environment while meeting their needs.

These communities are among the most effective guardians of Africa's forests. They manage vast areas of land and play vital roles in preserving biodiversity, safeguarding wildlife



*Yao tribe in Malawi participating in circumcision and initiation rites. Photo credit: Steve Evans via Wikimedia Commons*

habitats, and combating climate change by keeping forests healthy and intact. Their traditional knowledge of biodiversity offers important leads to useful species critical for nature-based solutions for local communities' adaptation to climate change.

By valuing and learning from the wisdom of Indigenous peoples, we can discover more sustainable, inclusive, and respectful ways to care for Africa's forests—today and for generations to come.



*Indigenous hunter-gatherer Baka woman in the Central African Republic. Photo credit: Max Chiswick*



# Chapter 3: Forests and the planet

Forests are essential to the well-being of our planet. They act as the Earth's natural lungs, absorbing carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen, helping to stabilize the global climate. Through this process, forests play a critical role in mitigating the effects of climate change. But their benefits go far beyond carbon storage. Forests regulate water cycles, play central roles in other biogeochemical cycles, prevent soil erosion, and support countless species of plants, animals, and microorganisms. By maintaining these ecosystems, we are not only protecting biodiversity—we are also preserving the forests that make life on Earth possible.

Here is a closer look at the many ways African forests contribute to our world:



*An eco-tour guide in Ngangao Forest, Wundanyi, Kenya.  
Photo credit: AFF/Felix Odhiambo*

## Carbon sequestration: nature's air filter

Forests, often referred to as the lungs of the earth, perform an extraordinary function that positions them as nature's ultimate air filter: carbon sequestration. Through the elegant process of photosynthesis, trees draw in carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>)—a major greenhouse gas—from the atmosphere. They convert this CO<sub>2</sub> into oxygen and store the carbon in their trunks, branches, leaves, and roots, locking it up for years, decades, even centuries, thus reducing pollution.

## Forests and climate change

This natural carbon capture system is one of our most effective defences against climate change. Unlike artificial technologies that attempt to replicate this function, forests have been perfecting carbon storage for millions of years. A single mature tree can absorb hundreds of kilograms of CO<sub>2</sub> over its lifetime, and when multiplied across entire forests, the impact is staggering.

## Forests and water cycles

But their contributions go far beyond carbon absorption. African forests play a super important role in keeping the water cycle going strong—not just nearby, but all across the continent. Here is how it works: trees in the forest take up water from the ground and then release it into the air as water vapor through a process called evapotranspiration (kind of like trees sweating!). This moisture rises into the atmosphere, forms clouds, and eventually falls back to the earth as rain.

This awesome natural system, called moisture recycling, helps bring rain not only to the forests themselves, but also to places far away that depend on that water. That means African forests help keep rivers flowing, crops growing,





*Indigenous afro temperate forest growing in a river valley. Western Cape South Africa. Photo credit: Abu Shawka via Wikimedia Commons*

and people thriving—even in areas downwind from the forest.

Moreover, forests serve as the guardians of the soil. One of the biggest ways they help is by cycling nutrients like nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium. These nutrients are super important for plant growth and soil fertility. Forests also boost something called soil organic matter (or SOM), which is made up of things like dead leaves, roots, and tiny organisms that break down over time. This organic matter is like a natural fertilizer, helping the soil to stay rich and ready to support new plant life.

### **Forests and soil health**

But that is not all—forests also help shape the soil itself. The roots of trees hold the ground together, stopping erosion and making it easier for water to soak in and be retained. This helps the soil hold onto moisture, which is especially important during dry seasons. Forests even create their own mini or microclimate, keeping the area cooler and protecting the soil from harsh sun and strong winds. On top of that, they are home to tonnes of tiny creatures—like bacteria, fungi, and worms—that live in the soil and help keep it healthy.





# Chapter 4: Threats to forests

## Deforestation and degradation

African forests are some of the most incredible and important ecosystems on the planet, but right now, they are facing some serious threats. One of the biggest challenges is **deforestation**—when forests are cleared or damaged and not replaced. A lot of this happens because people need more land to grow food. Farming is super important for feeding families and communities, but when huge areas of forest are cut down for large-scale agriculture, it leads to massive forest loss. In fact, over four million hectares of forest in Africa have already disappeared because of this.

## Illegal logging and land use change

Another big problem is logging—cutting down trees for wood used in buildings, furniture, and fuel. Some of this is done legally, but illegal logging is a growing issue that causes even more damage. It often leaves behind broken landscapes and weakens entire ecosystems. And as new roads, cities, and buildings are developed, forests get chopped into smaller and smaller pieces. This makes it hard for animals to find food or shelter and can even drive some species away for good. Bit by bit, African forests are shrinking—and it is not just the trees that suffer, but the people, animals, and planet that rely on them.



*Deforestation in West Africa. Photo: Shutterstock*





*Rosewood being removed illegally from Marojejy National Park, Madagascar. Image by Marojejy.com via Wikimedia Commons.*

## Climate threats, pests and diseases

As the planet gets warmer, African forests are facing new and growing threats from pests, diseases, and invasive species. Climate change creates the perfect conditions for harmful insects and plant diseases to spread faster and reach areas they could not before. When these pests attack, they can weaken or even kill large numbers of trees, leaving behind damaged ecosystems and making it harder for forests to recover. It is like the forest getting sick—and without help, it can take a long time to heal.

Invasive species are another big problem. These are plants or animals that come from outside the forest and don't naturally belong there. When they move in, they often grow too fast or take over, pushing out native species and upsetting the natural balance. This can lead to a loss of biodiversity and make the forest more fragile. Together, these threats make it even more important to protect forests and help them stay strong in a changing climate.



*Cirina forda outbreak on shea nut trees (Vitellaria paradoxa) observed in Bolgatanga, Ghana*



*Insect specimen at the Kenya Forestry Research Institute (KEFRI). Photo: AFF*



# Chapter 5: Taking care of forests for the future

## Sustainable Forest Management

Sustainable Forest Management (SFM), is all about using and protecting forests in a smart and careful way so they stay healthy and useful for a long time. It means making sure that forests can keep giving us things like clean air, water, wood, and homes for animals—without being destroyed in the process. People are a big part of SFM because it's all about balancing our needs with the forest's needs.

The goal is to take care of forests *today* so they can still be around *tomorrow*. That means planting more new trees when some are cut down, protecting wildlife, stopping illegal logging, and making sure local communities'

benefit from forest resources too. When we manage forests sustainably, we're not just saving trees—we are protecting the planet and helping people live better lives, now and in the future.

## Restoration and reforestation

Forests are powerful, but they need our help to recover when they have been damaged or cleared. That is where **forest restoration** comes in. It is the process of bringing life back to land that used to be forested—by planting native trees, protecting wildlife, and taking care of the soil and water. It's like giving nature a helping hand so it can bounce back stronger and healthier than before.

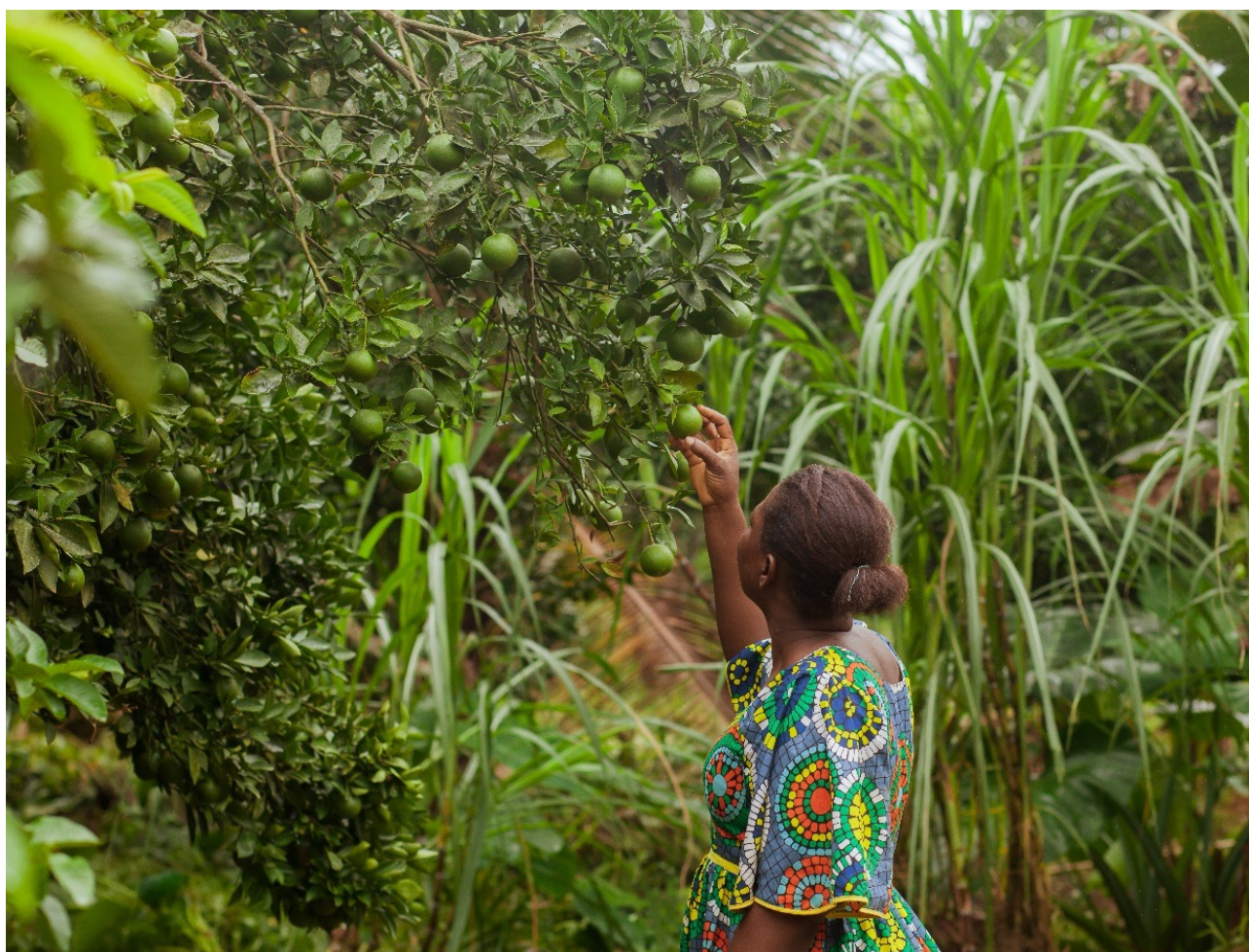


Photo © AFF





*Kenyan girls planting trees. Photo credit: Former USAID Africa Bureau via Wikimedia Commons*

Then there is **reforestation**, which means replanting trees in places where forests were cut down, often after logging or farming. Both restoration and reforestation are super important—they help pull carbon dioxide out of the air, boost biodiversity, and make ecosystems more balanced and resilient. There is also something called **afforestation**, which is when trees are planted in places where there were never forests before. Whether we are restoring old forests or creating new ones, every tree planted brings us closer to a greener, healthier planet.

## **Protected areas and community forests**

Protected areas, or PAs, are special zones that are set aside to protect nature. These places might be home to endangered animals, unique plants, or important ecosystems, and they're often managed by governments to make sure they stay safe. Protected areas are

super important because they help preserve biodiversity, provide clean water and air, and support sustainable development. Think of them as nature's safe havens, where wildlife can thrive, and ecosystems can stay healthy.

But saving forests isn't just about setting land aside—it's also about working with people. That's where community forests come in. These are areas managed by local communities who live near or within the forests. People in these communities take care of the land while also benefiting from it through things like farming, tourism, or gathering resources. Community forests often surround protected areas, acting as buffer zones that help reduce pressure on the PAs and keep them safe from harm. When local communities are involved in protecting nature, it often leads to better results for both people and the planet. It's a powerful partnership where everyone wins—especially the forests!



# Chapter 6: Youth in Action

## Youth-led forest initiatives

Young people all over Africa—and the world—are stepping up to protect and restore forests in amazing ways. Youth-led forest initiatives are all about young minds and hands coming together to take action for the planet. Whether it's planting trees, starting eco-clubs at school, creating awareness through social media, or leading clean-up campaigns, youth are proving that you don't have to be an adult to make a big difference.

These projects are powerful because they bring fresh ideas, energy, and passion to forest conservation. Some youth groups are restoring degraded land in their communities, while others are educating people about the importance of trees and biodiversity. With the right training, youth can learn how to care for forests in ways that keep them healthy and productive for years to come. From planting the right trees to managing resources wisely, young forest stewards are helping to ensure that forests continue to provide clean air, water, and biodiversity far into the future.



*African youth engaging in restoration efforts. Photo: Global Youth Biodiversity Network*

## Youth stories of change

### Restoring roots: How GYBN Africa is empowering youth to reclaim forests

The Global Youth Biodiversity Network (GYBN) Africa is proving that young people are powerful agents of change when it comes to restoring and protecting our planet's forests. Through its national chapters in countries like Uganda, Kenya, Cameroon, and Senegal, GYBN Africa has been leading youth-driven efforts to bring life back to degraded forest ecosystems. These actions are not only helping to enhance biodiversity and fight climate change but also promoting sustainable forest management for future generations.

In Kenya, the GYBN chapter has taken bold steps along the South Coast in Msambweni, where more than 15,000 mangrove trees have been planted, boasting an impressive 80% survival rate. The project engaged 245 local people, including youth, women, and local leaders, and contributed directly to community livelihoods by paying out over 500,000 Kshs. This initiative not only restores nature but also strengthens equitable conservation strategies and supports locally conserved areas through youth-led action.



*Youth leading butterfly conservation efforts in Ngangao forest, Taita Taveta County, Kenya. Photo credit: AFF/ Felix Odhiambo*

Meanwhile, in Cameroon, GYBN is actively working across the Coast, Littoral, South, and South West Regions through its Aquatic Ecosystems Restoration and Conservation project. Here, more than 250 young people have joined the mission, with eight degraded zones identified, two already mapped, and a new mangrove nursery established to support ongoing efforts.

### Youth powering forests and carbon solutions in Zambia

In Zambia's Luangwa Valley, young environmental leaders are stepping up to protect forests and fight climate change through a powerful initiative called the [Luangwa Community Forests Project](#). This award-winning project shows how youth can be at the heart of creating real change—by protecting nature, cutting carbon emissions, and supporting communities.

The project is all about working with local communities to manage and restore forests. By planting trees, stopping deforestation, and caring for existing forests, the Luangwa project helps absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere—one of the key ways to slow down climate change. But it doesn't stop there. Through the sale of carbon credits (basically, companies pay to offset their emissions by supporting this forest work), the project brings in money that supports local jobs, education, and better living conditions.



Quentin's Falls, Mutinondo Wilderness, Zambia  
iStock photo credit: Alex Froom

What makes this project extra special is the role of young people. Youth are being trained in how carbon markets work and how to manage forests sustainably. They are learning, leading, and helping to build a greener, fairer future—proving that when it comes to climate action, young Africans are not waiting around. They are already making it happen

### Youth leading the way: restoring forests under AFR100

Across Africa, young people are stepping up as powerful leaders in the [AFR100](#) movement—a bold effort to restore over 100 million hectares of degraded land by 2030. With fresh ideas and strong community ties, they are not just planting trees—they are rebuilding ecosystems, creating green jobs, and helping their communities adapt to climate change.

In Rwanda, Honorine Uwase Hirwa founded the Youth Forest Landscape Restoration initiative, training over 15,000 young people in tree planting and land restoration. Her work empowers youth to protect their environment and ensures that restoration is deeply rooted in local communities. In Cameroon, environmentalist Tabi Joda leads the “One Billion Trees for Africa” campaign, rallying young people across the continent to take part in massive reforestation efforts. And in Kenya, youth are blending culture and conservation—using art, sports, and digital tools to raise awareness and get their peers involved in healing the land.

Together, these young leaders are proving that youth-led restoration is not only possible—it's powerful.

### Green careers and innovation

Beyond conservation, African youth have exciting opportunities to engage in forestry in ways that build rewarding careers, innovative businesses, and stronger communities. While these opportunities vary across regions, the growing involvement of young people is driving positive change and helping to shape a more sustainable and inclusive future for forestry across the continent.





*Drying of the cocoa bean by a farmer at Nkyerepoaso in Juaben municipal of the Ashanti region of Ghana (photo credit: King Bangaba/Wikimedia Commons).*

In Central Africa, community forestry has become a promising space for youth participation, offering hands-on involvement in sustainable forest management and local governance. In West Africa, young people are deeply engaged in agroforestry systems, particularly in cocoa-producing regions where they are driving sustainable cultivation practices. In North Africa, eco-tourism linked

to forest conservation and restoration is gaining traction, creating new pathways for youth employment and entrepreneurship.

Technology is opening even more doors—like using drones to monitor forest health, GIS mapping, and digital platforms for sharing knowledge and tracking deforestation. And for creative entrepreneurs, there are green business ideas like starting tree nurseries, making eco-friendly products, or urban farming.

There is also a growing call for climate-resilient forestry practices and greater respect for Indigenous and local knowledge—particularly regarding the use of medicinal plants and sustainable harvesting methods. This evolving space presents exciting opportunities for youth to become leaders in a green transition, blending tradition with technology.

### **How to start a green project: a guide for young changemakers**

Starting a green project might sound like a big task, but it all begins with a simple idea—and a desire to make a difference. Whether you care about planting trees, restoring a local forest, or teaching your community about conservation, your voice and actions can spark



*KEFRI deploying drone technology to advance ariel seeding. Photo credit: AP/Haroub Hussein*



*Traditional medicine in a market in Antananarivo, Madagascar. Photo credit: Marco Schmidt*

powerful change. So, where do you begin?

### Choose your focus

First, think about an environmental issue you care about. Does your community lack green spaces or suffer from soil erosion and flooding that trees could help prevent? Or maybe you want to raise awareness about deforestation and its effects on climate and biodiversity. Pick something that feels personal and meaningful. Then, take a little time to research. Look around and ask questions: What's already being done? Who could help? Are there groups, teachers, or organizations that might support you?

### Create a plan and take action

Next, gather a few friends who share your passion. A small group of committed young people can make a huge difference. Together, come up with a plan—something simple and clear. Decide what you want to do, when and where you will do it, and what you will need to get started. You don't have to wait for the perfect moment or big funding to begin. Start

small. Plant a few trees. Host a clean-up day. Start a recycling drive at school. Every action counts.

### Raise awareness

As your forestry project grows, tell your story! Share your efforts on social media, create fun videos or posters, or give a talk at school. When people see what you're doing, they'll want to join or support you. You can also reach out to local businesses, environmental NGOs, or youth programs for help. Many groups are excited to support youth-led green projects—especially those that protect forests and biodiversity.

### Reflect and improve

Finally, take a moment to reflect. What worked well? What would you change next time? How can you make your project even better or bigger? The most important thing is to keep going. You've already taken the first step toward making your world a little greener—and that's something to be proud of.



# Chapter 7: Policies and rights

## Forest laws and governance

Forest laws are the rules and regulations that help to protect our forests. They guide how trees can be used, who has the right to manage land, and what must be done to restore nature when it is damaged. These laws are there to make sure that forests are not destroyed for short-term gain but are instead managed wisely so they can support both people and the planet for generations to come.

But laws alone are not enough. Forest governance is about how those rules are put into action—and who gets to decide. Good governance means making sure everyone,

including local communities and young people, has a voice in how forests are cared for. It means making sure that decisions are fair, that corruption is kept out, and that forests are managed for the benefit of all.

As African youth, your role is powerful. You can help shape the future of forest conservation. Whether it is by raising awareness, joining local restoration projects, speaking up for community rights, or learning more about the laws that protect our environment—your energy and ideas can bring change. Forests are part of our heritage, and with your leadership, they can also be part of a greener future.







*Hadza scout Ezekiel Phillipo overlooking Tanzania's Yaeda Valley. Roshni Lodhia / Carbon Tanzania*

## Indigenous and community rights

In Africa, there is a growing movement to acknowledge and uphold the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities who rely on and safeguard forest ecosystems. These rights are essential—not just for justice, but also for the health of our forests and the future of our planet. When communities have secure land rights and a real say in how their forests are managed, everyone benefits: ecosystems are protected, cultures are preserved, and young people have a stronger, more sustainable future to build on.

Progress is being made, but it's not equal everywhere. Some governments and organizations now understand how crucial it is to support Indigenous and community rights as part of sustainable development and peacebuilding. Still, there are challenges. In many places, these rights exist in law but are not fully respected in practice. That is why your voice matters. Youth across the continent are

raising awareness, pushing for change, and supporting community-led solutions. From the Ogiek people in Kenya fighting for their ancestral land, to the Yaeda Valley Project in Tanzania empowering local conservation leaders, to policy shifts across Central Africa—real change is happening. And with more youth leading the way, that change will only grow stronger.

## Global goals and forests: REDD+, SDGs, and more

Around the world, countries have agreed to work together to protect forests. One of these efforts is **REDD+**—a program that supports countries to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation. It also promotes forest conservation and sustainable management. If and when done right, REDD+ can bring funding into communities, support reforestation, and strengthen environmental protection.

Forests also connect deeply to the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**—the world’s plan to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure a better future by 2030. Forests help us achieve clean water, climate action, biodiversity protection, and more. That’s why the United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests 2030 was created. It’s a global roadmap with six big goals and 26 targets focused on stopping forest loss, restoring ecosystems, and managing trees sustainably—whether in wild forests or in cities.

As young Africans, you have a powerful role to play. With the **Sustainable Forest Management Framework for Africa (2020-2030)** and the **African Union’s Agenda 2063**, we have our own roadmap toward a thriving, sustainable continent. Whether you are planting trees, studying environmental science, or advocating for your community’s forest rights—this is your time to lead the change and shape the green future Africa deserves



*The 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals*





Youth participants of the AfricanYouth4Forests workshop at the *Aningeria adolfi*—commonly known as the Muna tree—in Ngangao Forest, located in the high peaks of the Taita Hills, Southeast Kenya. Photo: Felix Odhiambo/AFF, SLU.

## Chapter 8: Get involved

### Join the *AfricanYouth4Forests Initiative*

Are you passionate about forests, climate action, and building a greener, fairer future for Africa? Then *AfricanYouth4Forests* (AY4F) is your movement!

AY4F aims to cultivate a space where young people can embrace scientific knowledge about Africa's forests to understand their own role in shaping the future governance of forests, share their concerns with experts and society, and seize opportunities from an evolving bioeconomy. Whether you are planting trees, leading awareness campaigns, studying environmental science, or simply care about nature, there is a place for you in this youth-powered initiative.

### Why Join AY4F?

- **Learn and lead:** Gain access to science-based knowledge about Africa's forests and discover your role in shaping forest governance and policies.
- **Speak up:** Share your ideas and concerns with experts, institutions, and society. Your voice matters—and AY4F is your platform.
- **Take action:** Get involved in restoration, conservation, and climate projects that are making a real impact across Africa.
- **Connect and grow:** Join a continent-wide network of young people who are passionate, motivated, and ready to collaborate.



AY4F is driven by the African Forest Forum (AFF) in partnership with the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) and the Kenya Forestry Research Institute (KEFRI). It's supported by a dynamic Youth Advisory Council (YAC) that helps shape the initiative to truly reflect the needs and ideas of young Africans.

🔗 **Become a part of our movement by registering for our Community of Practice at:** <https://african-forestry-community.in.howspace.com/africanyouth4forests-ay4f>

Be part of *AfricanYouth4Forests*. Shape the future of Africa's forests—starting today.

*#AfricanYouth4Forests #ForestChampions  
#RestoreAfrica #GreenAfrica #YouthAction*

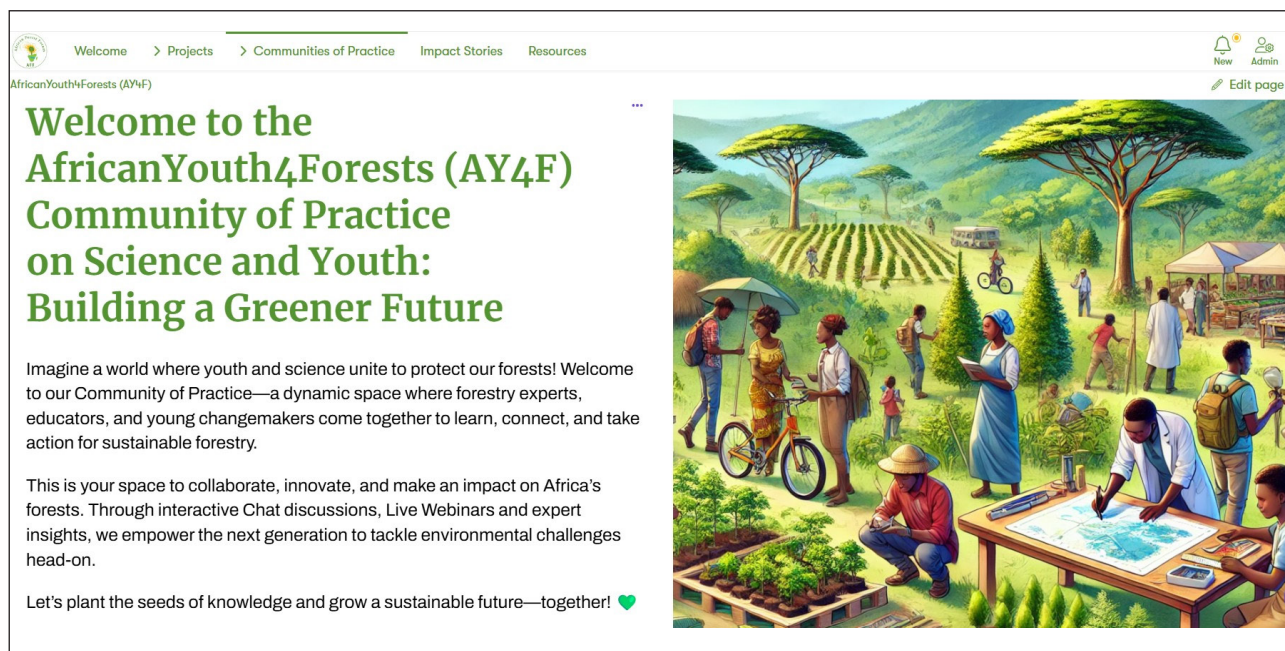
## **AfricanYouth4Forests virtual community**

The AY4F Community of Practice serves as a collaborative space where members can exchange ideas, share best practices, and co-create innovative solutions to advance forest conservation, enhance climate resilience, and

unlock green and blue economy opportunities. Through knowledge-sharing, capacity-building, and networking, the platform aims to equip Africa's youth with the tools and resources needed to address pressing environmental challenges and contribute meaningfully to sustainable forest management.

The launch of the AY4F Community of Practice aligns with AFF's broader mission to promote sustainable forest management and ensure that Africa's forests continue to provide essential ecological, social, and economic benefits. With support from SLU and KEFRI, the initiative will facilitate research collaborations, mentorship programs, networking, and policy dialogues to enhance youth participation in forestry and environmental governance.

Young changemakers, students, educators, activists, scientists, experts and policy makers in the forestry sector are invited to join the AY4F Community of Practice and be part of this transformative journey towards a greener and more sustainable Africa.



*Virtual AfricanYouth4Forests Community of Practice hosted on Howspace.*



## 12 Key Messages for decision makers<sup>1</sup>

### 1 Forests are Africa's lifeline—let's protect them together!

Africa's forests are more than just trees—they're our climate heroes, cultural roots, and everyday essentials. They hold over 171 gigatons of carbon, give us food, water, medicine, and shelter countless species. From the Congo Basin to the Guinea forests and Miombo woodlands, these forests support millions of lives—but they're disappearing fast.

It's time for forest-smart choices to lead Africa's fight against climate change and drive development. And **we, the youth**, must be at the center—creating, leading, and innovating. Our voices and actions should be part of every plan: from Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to global goals like SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 8 (Decent Work), SDG 13 (Climate Action), and SDG 15 (Life on Land). The future is green—and it's in our hands.

### 2 Heal the land—let's make forest restoration a top priority 🌱

Across Africa, we're proving that restoration works—and **young people are making it happen**. From Ethiopia's 7-billion-tree movement to the Great Green Wall stretching through the Sahel, we're turning drylands green again. In Benin, local youth efforts helped mangroves grow from 94 to 407 hectares in just 10 years. In Kenya, the "Trees for the Future" program restored 41,000 hectares, boosting both the land and local food systems. But we can go even bigger—if youth have the right tools. We need secure land rights, funding, and training to scale these wins across the continent. Let's grow a greener Africa—restored by youth, for all.

<sup>1</sup> These 12 messages were developed by participants during the AfricanYouth4Forests Community of Practice on Science and Youth: Building a Greener Future, held virtually on [Howspace](#) from 31 March to 11 April 2025.

They reflect the voices, insights, and aspirations of African youth committed to forest restoration, climate action, and sustainable development—offering practical guidance and bold ideas for shaping policies that support youth engagement and forest governance across the continent.

### 3 Plug into youth power—tech + talent = real climate solutions ⚡

We're more than the numbers—youth are 60% of Africa's population, and we're already building the future with **tech in our hands and forests on our minds**. From Ghana to Cameroon, we're using drones, GIS, mobile apps, and AI to monitor and protect forests. In Kenya, the Green Generation Initiative is mixing tech with tree-planting. And in South Africa, young people under AFR100 are leading the charge in community-led restoration.

We're not waiting—we're already innovating. But to go bigger, we need governments to back us with innovation hubs, digital skills training, and real support for green tech entrepreneurship. Youth + tech isn't the future—it's the now. Let's scale it!

### 4 See forests as living systems—not just sources of timber or profit 🌳

Forests aren't just about wood—they're the heartbeat of our climate, our cultures, and the ecosystem services we depend on, like flood control and pollination. But the truth is, many of us, especially young women aged 18-24, don't fully grasp their role in this (with awareness gaps reaching -0.316 correlation).

Take Gorongosa National Park in Mozambique, for example. It's a shining model of how we can blend biodiversity, education, and local livelihoods—showing us how much more forests give us when we look beyond profit.

**Now is the time to rethink how we teach and connect** with the full potential of forests.

We need to push for ecological literacy in schools and communities across Africa to bridge the awareness gap.

## 5 Back youth and women as the future of green entrepreneurship 🧡

We, the youth and women, are driving Africa's green economy, and with the right support, we're unstoppable! From cocoa agroforestry in Ghana to eco-tourism in Morocco, we're leading the way with climate-smart businesses that are changing the game. In Kenya, Patricia Kombo's PaTree Initiative is empowering us through forest education and restoration.

But there's still work to do—access to finance and land are major obstacles for many of us. To unlock our full potential, we need micro-loans, training, and gender-sensitive support systems.

**Let's invest in us—the green entrepreneurs of today**—and build the green and blue economy of tomorrow!

## 6 Make forest wealth work for local communities 💡

Forests have massive economic value, **but less than 10% of youth under 30** in places like Cameroon actually own forested land. In Burundi, initiatives like Greening Burundi are showing how we can engage communities in reforestation while creating economic opportunities.

To unlock inclusive green growth, we need governments to enforce fair benefit-sharing, simplify land laws, and ensure that youth and women have real access to land ownership. Let's make sure the wealth from our forests stays with the people who protect them.

## 7 Reimagine education to include forest-based careers and skills 🎓

Many of us are eager to work in **ecotourism, agroforestry, and sustainable product innovation**, but outdated education systems are holding us back. Countries like Nigeria, Ghana, and Cameroon are showing the way with successful reforms, and in Kenya, African Youth Initiative on Climate Change (AYICC) is giving youth hands-on forestry training.

Now is the time for national education

strategies to align with the growing green job markets and give us the practical, applied skills we need to thrive in these industries. Let's shape the future of work in a green economy—starting with the right education!

## 8 Support the youth bioeconomy revolution 🌍

Across Africa, youth are leading the charge in creating value-added Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) businesses—from medicinal plants to essential oils. In fact, medicinal plants are one of the top opportunities for youth in Central and West Africa. In Kenya, the Mwaroko Youth Group is managing nurseries with over 20,000 seedlings, connecting forest restoration to livelihoods.

To keep this momentum going, policies must incentivize sustainable NTFP enterprises and support the development of the full value chain. **Let's make sure youth have the resources to turn forests into thriving businesses** for a greener, more sustainable future!

## 9 Fund and celebrate 'Green Hustles' led by Africa's youth 💚

Youth across Africa are turning green hustles into real income—whether it's through reforestation, sustainable charcoal, or eco-tourism. Mount Cameroon National Park and Ghana's MASO program are shining examples of this success. In Kenya, the Young Forest Champions have planted over 150,000 trees and engaged more than 10,550 community members in sustainable forestry.

Now, it's time to fuel this movement. **We need more public and donor investment in youth-led green businesses**, including grants, incubation, and mentorship to help these ventures grow and thrive. Let's amplify the green hustles that are shaping Africa's sustainable future!

## 10 Institutionalize youth voices in forest policy-making 🗣️

Youth representation in forest governance is still too low, with only 15% of forest bodies in Central Africa including young voices (AFF, 2023). But there's hope—Algeria's Mediterranean Youth Task Force is pushing for youth inclusion in restoration policies, and Kenya's Forest Policy Dialogue Forums are increasingly amplifying youth voices.

**It's time to institutionalize youth quotas in forest governance.** We must ensure that youth are co-shaping laws, restoration goals, and climate plans to secure a sustainable future for all.

Let's make our voices count!

## 11 Partner with digital-savvy youth for forest advocacy 📱❤️

Youth across Africa are stepping up with mobile apps, social media, and AI to spotlight issues like illegal logging and track forest health. In Congo, camera traps are monitoring canopy species, while in Kenya, digital campaigns are mobilizing mass tree planting and raising awareness.

To amplify this impact, **we need to equip and scale youth-led forest monitoring, civic tech, and digital storytelling platforms.** Youth are already driving change—let's support them to do even more!

## 12 Create lasting youth pathways through education, mentorship, and opportunities 🚀

Mentorship is the bridge that connects youth aspirations to leadership. From the Regional Network of Young Environmental Leaders in Central Africa (REJEFAC) to the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI) in Southern Africa, young people are being trained to lead in forestry and beyond. In South Africa, the Run, Regreen, Restore program is connecting forest action with community impact.

To build on this momentum, we need to **scale mentorship platforms, innovation networks, and job pipelines** that open doors for young forestry leaders. Let's create pathways that help youth turn their passion into long-lasting impact!







# Glossary and resources

This glossary and resources section provides a starting point for young Africans to deepen their understanding of forestry and climate issues and to connect with relevant networks and opportunities. Remember that getting involved, no matter how small the action, can make a significant difference.

## Glossary of key terms

- **Agroforestry** is a land management system that integrates trees and shrubs with crops and/or animal production. Think of it as farming with trees!
- **Biodiversity** is the variety of life in the world or in a particular habitat or ecosystem. It includes the different species of plants, animals, fungi, and even microorganisms.
- **Bioeconomy** is an economy that uses renewable biological resources from land and sea, such as forests, to produce food, materials, and energy in a sustainable way. It's about using nature's resources smartly.
- **Carbon sequestration** is the process of capturing and storing atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) in carbon sinks such as forests and soils, reducing the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Forests are like giant carbon sponges!
- **Climate change** is a result of long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns, largely caused by human activities that release greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.
- **Community forestry** is an approach where local communities, including youth, are at the center of decision-making and management of forest resources. It's about forests by the people, for the people!
- **Deforestation** involves clearing of forests for other land uses such as agriculture, mining, or settlements. It's a major threat to our forests.
- **Ecosystem services** include many benefits that humans freely gain from the natural environment and properly functioning ecosystems. Examples include clean air and water, pollination, and climate regulation.
- **Green economy** is an economy that aims to improve human well-being and social equity while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities. Forests play a vital role in building a green economy.
- **Indigenous species** include plant and animal species that naturally occur in a specific area.
- **Land degradation** is the decline in the quality of land, making it less productive for agriculture, forestry, and other uses.
- **Mangrove forests** are salt-tolerant forests found along tropical and subtropical coastlines, providing important habitats and coastal protection.
- **Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs)** are products obtained from forests that are not timber, such as fruits, nuts, medicinal plants, honey, and resins. They can be used as "green hustles" to generate income.
- **Reforestation** is the process of replanting trees in areas where forests have been cleared or degraded. Let's plant the future!
- **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** are a collection of 17 interlinked global goals designed to be a "blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all." Forests are crucial for achieving many SDGs.
- **Sustainable Forest Management (SFM)** is the sustainable use and conservation of forests with the aim of maintaining and enhancing multiple forest values for present and future generations. It's about using forests wisely.

## Further Reading

- **The African Forest Forum (AFF)**  
Learn more about their work in promoting sustainable forest management in Africa. Visit their website for publications and resources: <https://afforum.org/>
- **The Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU)**  
Explore their research and academic contributions to sustainable forestry. Check their website for research findings and educational programs: <https://www.slu.se/en/>
- **The Kenya Forestry Research Institute (KEFRI)**  
Discover their research expertise and support for forestry in Kenya and beyond. Their website offers valuable information and technologies: <https://www.kefri.org/home.html>
- **The UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2030**  
Read the full text of the global framework for sustainable forest management. Available on the UN Forum on Forests (UNFF) website: <https://www.un.org/esa/forests/documents/un-strategic-plan-for-forests-2030/index.html>
- **The Sustainable Forest Management Framework for Africa (2020-2030)**  
Access the complete framework document for strategic guidance on SFM in Africa. Contact the African Union Commission (AUC) for more information.  
Available at: <https://afforum.org/publication/the-sustainable-forest-management-framework-for-africa-2020-2030/>
- **FAO Guidelines on Sustainable Forest Management in Drylands of sub-Saharan Africa**  
Learn about best practices for forest management in dryland areas. Available on the FAO website: <https://openknowledge.fao.org/items/796dbcb4-de50-4ff9-bca8-fb46e64ed3f8>
- **Global Guidelines for the Restoration of Degraded Forests and Landscapes in Drylands**  
Find guidance on restoring degraded lands in dryland regions. Available on the FAO website: <https://openknowledge.fao.org/items/8f5bffe6-da40-490a-9d74-26313799db94>
- **The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**  
Understand the global goals that forests contribute to. More information is available on the UN website: <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>
- **The Paris Agreement**  
Learn about the international agreement on climate change and the role of forests. Details can be found on the UNFCCC website: <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement>
- **The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)**  
Explore the international legal instrument for the conservation of biological diversity. Visit the CBD website for more information: <https://www.cbd.int/>
- **The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)**  
Understand efforts to combat desertification and land degradation. More information is available on the UNCCD website: <https://www.unccd.int/>





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