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Engaging youth to improve livelihoods and the environment through sustainable forestry in Kenya

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Young Kenyan forestry entrepreneurs and activists met forest scientists and community leaders.



Workshop participants discuss the role of youths in sustainable forest use and conservation.

Photo: Felix Odhiambo/AFF, SLU.

Africa is the world's youngest continent. Africans make up 26 per cent of the world's young population under the age of 25 and their share will increase over the century. This "youth bulge" could either become a dividend or a liability to the continent – especially in the context of climate change and the current stress on natural resources.

Highlighting their role at a workshop held from 7th to 9th November 2022, young Kenyan forestry entrepreneurs and activists had the opportunity to meet forest scientists and community leaders and share their experiences in forest-based livelihoods as well as their initiatives to respond to the challenges in sustainable management of forests. Titled "[Promoting the involvement of young people in sustainable forestry and livelihoods in Kenya](https://afforum.org/youth-workshops-on-promoting-involvement-of-young-people-in-sustainable-forestry-and-livelihoods-in-kenya/)" (<https://afforum.org/youth-workshops-on-promoting-involvement-of-young-people-in-sustainable-forestry-and-livelihoods-in-kenya/>), the inaugural event brought together 19 participants, aged 18-25, both from rural and urban areas of Taita Taveta and Nairobi counties, respectively for an interactive discussion on the potential role youth can play in the protection and management of forest resources to hasten green transition in Kenya. The event gave the youth a platform to find a shared vision in their action plans and gain an entry point for inclusive forest and tree-based value development.

Workshop and guided tour

Speaking at the opening session, Professor Godwin Kowero, Executive Secretary of the African Forest Forum (AFF) said that active engagement of the youth was key in restoring degraded forests in Kenya, sustaining the provision of critical ecosystem services. He also called for a shift in focus towards forestry for young people that promotes green jobs and poverty reduction, and sustainable forest use.

Through the much-needed scientific knowledge on nature-based solutions, Professor Anders Roos from the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU), reiterated that youth have the creativity and innovativeness to unlock the potential of the forest-based bio-economy. The youths also have the potential to explore new opportunities in the value addition of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs).

Dr. Joshua Cheboiwo, Director of Kenya Forestry Research Institute (KEFRI) affirmed that tapping into the youthful demographic would help the country increase forest cover. He said that supporting the youth to establish nurseries for tree seedlings, participating in the propagation of trees through tissue culture, and developing and producing herbal products, could unleash new revenue streams.

The workshop raised the visibility of grassroots activities in Kenya and, by extension, across Africa that promoted climate resilience at the same time when the 27th Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change summit was being held in Egypt. Success stories from youth-led forestry/conservation-based organizations and initiatives were highlighted and shared.

To connect with the young participants' realities and concerns, a guided tour through Ngangao forest led to an appreciation of the environmental services that natural forests provide. Home to endemic birds, giant caves, diverse butterfly species, and gigantic trees, Ngangao forest is the second-largest moist forest fragment of the Taita Hills in Kenya. They also visited the area community resource centre and campsite for eco-tourism.



*Participants at the *Aningeria adolfi*, or the Muna tree in Ngangao forest; on the high peaks of the Taita Hills in Southeast Kenya. Photo: Felix Odhiambo/AFF, SLU.*



Participants during a group session at the AfricanYouth4forests workshop. Photo: Felix Odhiambo/AFF, SLU.

During the workshop, participants engaged in interactive sessions to address critical issues in the forestry sector. Such issues included the crucial role of young people in forestry, green entrepreneurship options that aligned with their interests, and how future African forests should be governed, protected, and sustainably utilized. They worked in groups and came up with various illustrations, which conveyed their niche in forestry.

Way forward for youth in forestry

Participants indicated their willingness in engaging in the forestry sector with the precise message that the current generation must shape the future of forests for the benefit of the present and future generations. In their deliberations, the youth made a resolve to contribute to forestry and drafted vision statements as follows:

1. A world where young people are more involved in sustainable development by participating in a green economy; and
2. Improving forest cover to curb climate change effects for improved livelihoods.

Background



The workshop was organized by the African Forest Forum (AFF), the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU), through SLU-Global and Kenya Forestry Research Institute (KEFRI) within the framework of a joint pilot project dubbed “AfricanYouth4 Forests”. It was hosted by the County Government of Taita Taveta in Kenya. Grounded in knowledge co-creation and dialogue between

researchers and young people, the project seeks to: (i) explore the roles of forests in young people’s lives and their communities and society; (ii) inform and communicate with the youth about Kenya’s and Africa’s forests, their richness, and importance (iii) empower and encourage the youth to articulate their vision of future forests in Kenya and also on the continent, and to explore creative approaches for sustainable forest use.

Project team

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Further information

Youth in African forestry – Facebook page
(https://www.facebook.com/groups/743817886042286/?ref=share_group_link)

Broadcast news feature in Kenya (English subtitles)
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ecDBbBD7aCU>)

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Video messages