

YOUTH VISION

Strengthening Youth Engagement in Forestry Governance





Introduction

The future of the forestry sector depends on the fresh perspectives and leadership of young people. Sustainable forest management is highly interlinked with climate stability, biodiversity conservation and sustainable livelihoods, yet addressing these complex challenges requires bold innovation and inclusive approaches. Youth are actively driving this transformation, introducing creative solutions that are reshaping forest governance and sustainable land use. Their passion, energy and commitment to sustainable forestry development position them as essential partners in advancing agroforestry, forest restoration and nature-based solutions that integrate environmental health with community well-being.

Recognizing this potential, the World Food Forum (WFF) Youth Assembly is supporting youth engagement at high-level forestry dialogues through the Thematic Youth Assembly on Forestry. Building on the [2024 Youth Call for Action: Empowering Youth in Forestry and Agriculture](#), the 2025 consultative process offered youth a platform to strengthen their contributions to a more sustainable and inclusive forestry sector, culminating in the development of this collective vision for empowering youth voices in forestry governance.

This vision, to be presented at the 2025 WFF flagship, aims to pave the way for stronger youth engagement in the lead-up to the 28th session of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Committee on Forestry (COFO) and other key intergovernmental processes.





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The consultative process

On 28 July 2025, the Thematic Youth Assembly consultation on forestry was held online, engaging youth across FAO regions in an inclusive and intergenerational dialogue. The session combined expert interventions with interactive breakout discussions, providing a space for youth to share local experiences, showcase innovative practices and contribute perspectives on the future of forestry.

The consultation focused on three key thematic areas: forest innovation, ecological restoration rooted in Indigenous knowledge and inclusive forest governance. Participants shared diverse experiences, highlighting community-led restoration projects, practical innovations beyond technology and the pressing need for participatory policymaking. Indigenous knowledge was presented as essential for culturally grounded and sustainable restoration efforts, while innovation was reframed to include accessible, locally driven solutions that bridge policy and practice.

Participants emphasized the importance of embedding youth voices within national and global forestry governance frameworks, advocating for institutionalized engagement to ensure policies are both equitable and ecologically sound. The consultative process concluded with a set of youth-driven priorities, outlined below, which will inform the Assembly's roadmap leading up to the 28th session of COFO.



Key themes identified by youth

Restoration and Indigenous knowledge: A cultural and ecological imperative

Participants highlighted that restoration is more than a technical task, it is a deeply cultural and relational process grounded in Indigenous knowledge. They shared examples of community-led restoration initiatives where youth and older people co-created projects, fostering ownership, sustainability and intergenerational knowledge transfer.

Recognizing the intrinsic link between people and forests, youth called for restoration efforts that respect and integrate traditional practices, strengthening climate resilience while preserving cultural heritage. This approach not only enhances ecological outcomes but also builds community empowerment and continuity.

Innovation: Practical, inclusive and locally relevant

Youth understood innovation broadly, not as limited to technology but encompassing creative adaptations of existing knowledge to local realities. They emphasized the need to rethink ways of connecting people to solutions that already exist, particularly through low-tech, accessible innovations that empower marginalized communities.

Participants discussed persistent barriers such as limited training, funding and resistance to change, prompting calls for expanded investment in youth-led innovation ecosystems. They stressed that innovation must be inclusive, locally driven and aligned with fair governance to effectively support forest restoration and resilience.

Forest governance: Youth at the policy table

Youth highlighted concerns about the limited inclusion in current forestry governance, noting that policies sometimes follow a top-down approach that can overlook local realities. They advocated for institutionalizing youth engagement at all levels of policymaking, moving beyond tokenism to genuine co-creation. Inclusive governance was viewed as essential for long-term stewardship, integrating gender equity, Indigenous voices and social justice. Participants shared examples of youth-led campaigns and community efforts that, despite challenges like land conflicts and weak enforcement, demonstrated the transformative potential of participatory governance.



Interconnected challenges and integrated solutions

Youth recognized the deep interdependence between forest degradation, biodiversity loss, climate change and social inequality. Restoration, innovation and governance emerged as interwoven pillars requiring holistic approaches that combined scientific knowledge with traditional ecological wisdom. Discussions also linked forestry to livelihoods, education, eco-tourism and green jobs, emphasizing the importance of contextualized solutions that serve both people and planet. Youth called for intercultural dialogue facilitated in bilingual and respectful formats to bridge divides and co-create sustainable pathways.

Key recommendations

1. **Centre Indigenous and local voices:** Treat Indigenous communities as knowledge holders and co-leaders, not merely consultants, in forest governance and restoration.
2. **Invest in locally driven innovation:** Expand funding, education and policy incentives that foster inclusive innovation ecosystems, prioritizing equity and accessibility.
3. **Institutionalize youth engagement:** Embed youth participation within forestry policymaking processes at local, national and global levels.
4. **Bridge traditional and scientific knowledge:** Promote intercultural dialogue integrating traditional knowledge with modern science through inclusive, bilingual facilitation.
5. **Make forestry relevant and participatory:** Link restoration initiatives to livelihoods, cultural identity and education via grassroots campaigns, eco-tourism and green jobs.



Call to Action

Through the above-mentioned consultative process, it has become clear that, according to youth, their meaningful engagement in the forestry sector depends on addressing and overcoming a range of barriers, such as limited access to forest lands, funding for restoration projects, forestry technologies and sustainable agroforestry practices. Equally important are less tangible factors, including forestry education, community support, gender equity in land and resource rights, and mentorship opportunities in forest management. Unlocking youth's full potential in forestry requires not only providing these resources but also fostering an enabling ecosystem that integrates capacity-building, innovation and equitable governance tailored to forest landscapes and livelihoods.

To realize a truly sustainable and inclusive forestry future, we call for the establishment of integrated mechanisms that place youth at the center of forest policy, governance and restoration agendas. This includes institutionalizing meaningful youth participation across all decision-making levels and ensuring their voices shape the design and implementation of policies.

We urge FAO to support this vision by assisting the WFF Youth Assembly in connecting relevant youth networks and developing a youth-driven roadmap of activities in the lead-up to COFO28. The WFF Youth Assembly envisions to work with stakeholders to form a youth constituency that bridges the gap between policy and action by amplifying youth-led innovation, promoting intercultural dialogue that integrates Indigenous and scientific knowledge and strengthening youth capacities for stewardship and leadership.

By recognizing youth as equal partners in forestry governance, we can co-create resilient, equitable and effective solutions that benefit both people and the planet, now and for future generations.



Roadmap to COFO 28

The youth-led roadmap to COFO28 includes a series of targeted activities to strengthen youth participation in forest policy, governance and restoration. At the core of this roadmap is the WFF Youth Assembly's work in the lead-up to COFO28, coordinating youth inputs across regions and channeling them into contributions to be presented on the sidelines of the 2026 COFO session. This will also lead to the development of a Youth Position Paper on Forests, bringing together perspectives on forest innovation, Indigenous knowledge and inclusive governance to inform policy dialogues.

To support this effort, the WFF Youth Assembly will partner with relevant organizations and networks, where appropriate, to help co-design regional consultations and thematic dialogues, which may include interactive webinars, intergenerational panels and storytelling campaigns that highlight youth-led restoration and innovation. To deepen engagement, an online survey will gather broader input from youth who are unable to participate in live events, ensuring inclusive and representative insights.

Recognizing the need to strengthen knowledge and skills, the roadmap proposes a capacity development session to be co-designed and delivered with FAO's Forestry Division and the International Forestry Students' Association (IFSA). This session will empower young leaders with tools to engage effectively in forestry governance processes.

In collaboration with partners, youth will also pitch to coordinate a side event during COFO28, presenting key findings, showcasing best practices and delivering actionable recommendations. Together, these efforts form a coherent and inclusive pathway to elevate youth as co-creators of forestry solutions, ensuring they are not just participants, but equal partners in shaping the future of forests.

