

Supporting forests, people, growth and sustainability: Green Forest Job opportunities for rural youth

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Abstract

As we witness, at a global level, increasing youth unemployment, rural outmigration and the aging of farmers, the sustainability of rural landscapes are at stake. On the other hand, the forestry sector holds enormous potential to significantly and cost-effectively reduce global emissions, while supporting adaptation, biodiversity and livelihoods. Today, youth play a critical role in this process.

Promoting the generation of green jobs for rural youth in the forestry sector can provide a strong solution for rural development and environment sustainability. Supporting Green Forest Jobs can take place through education, vocational training, policy reform and (rural) youth-engagement and employment strategies but also by supporting rural institutions.

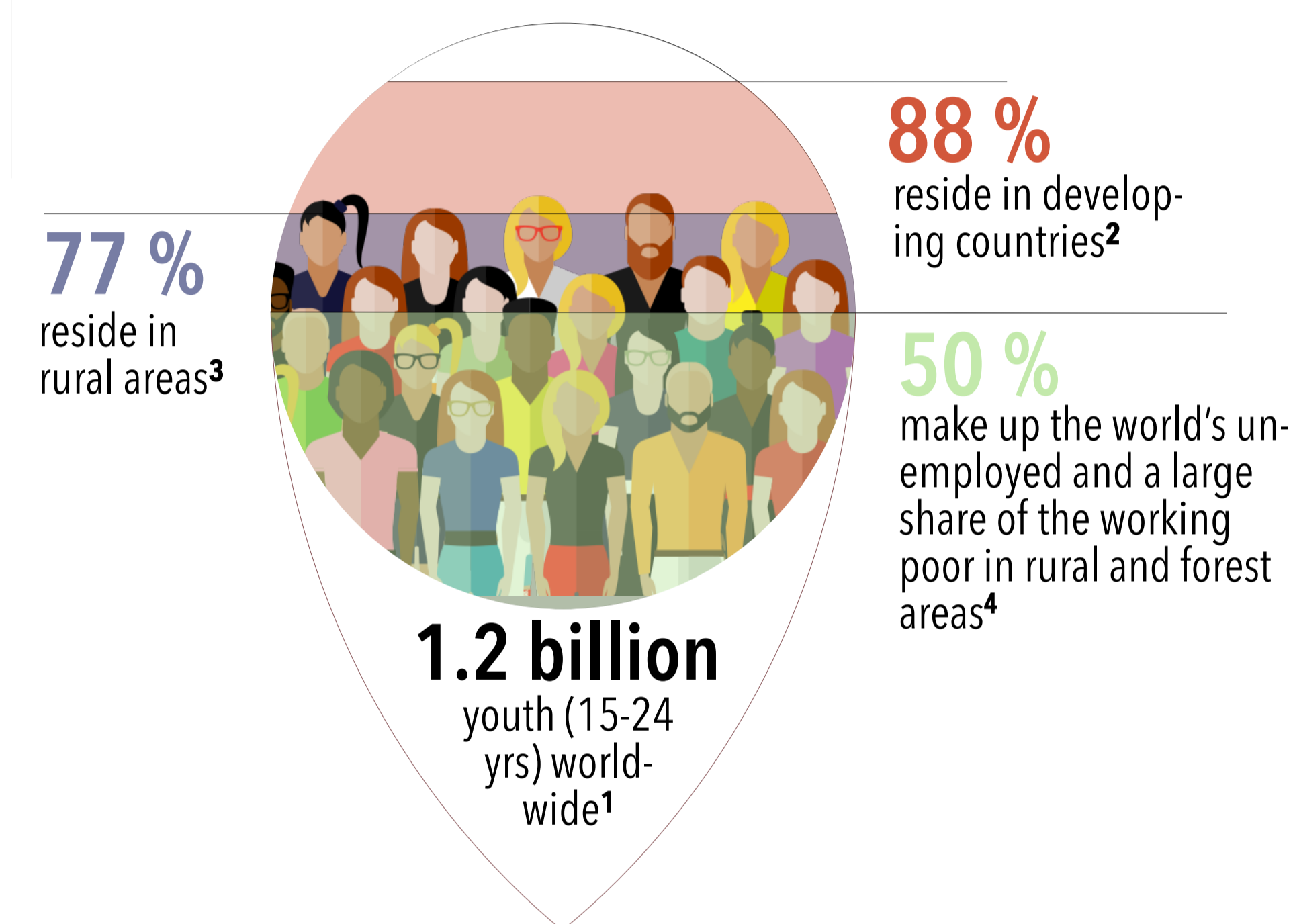
Working through and supporting Forest and Farm Producer Organizations, has been proven to support reforestation and provide youth with attractive and meaningful livelihood opportunities.

1. Introduction

Today, more than 1 billion youth reside in developing countries, accounting for 24 percent of the working poor. Many of these youth are found in rural areas and a large portion of which are classified as forest dependent (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Youth facts & trends

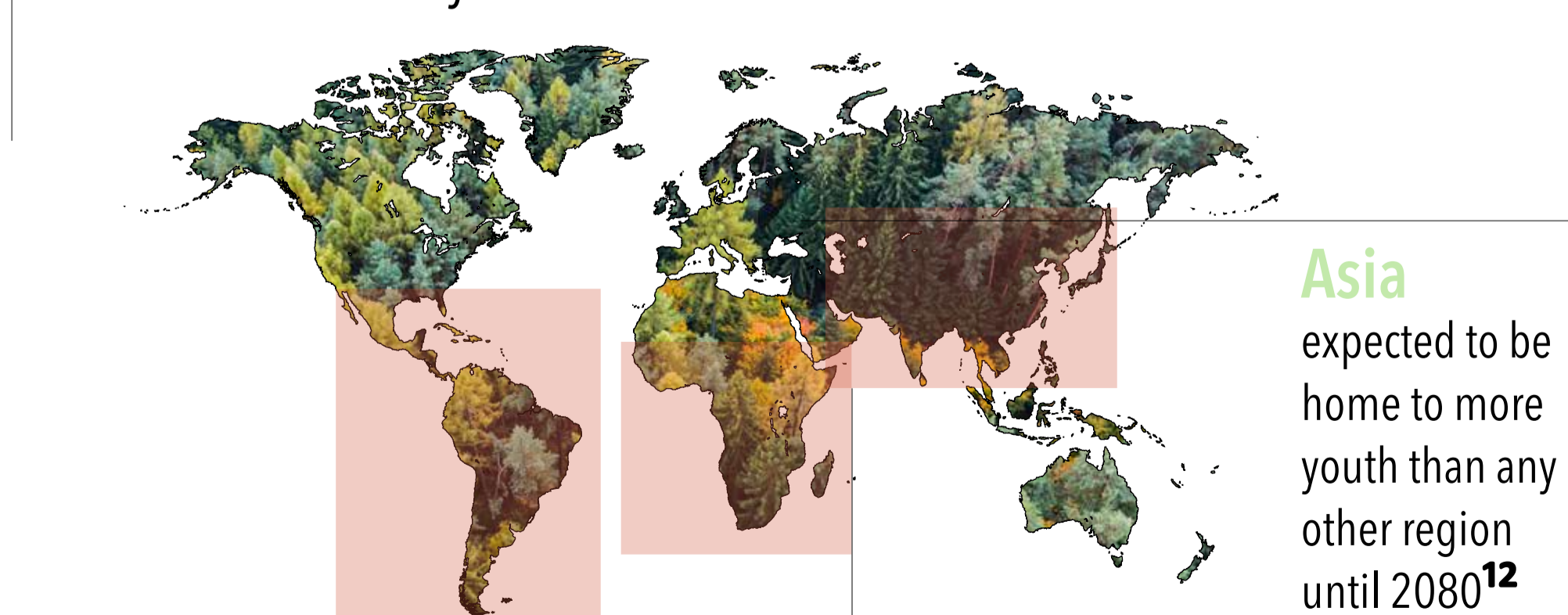


Forest facts and worrying trends:

- Forests are home to 80 percent of terrestrial biodiversity⁵
- 2/3 of Earth's freshwater comes from forest watersheds⁶
- 252 million people living in forests and savannahs have incomes of less than USD 1.25 per day⁷
- Between 2015–2020, forests lost of 10 million ha/year (over 420 million since 1990)⁷
- Between 1990 and 2020, loss of 6 gigatons of carbon stock due to a decrease in general forest area⁸
- Impact on forest communities: rural marginalization and poverty, loss of infrastructure and services, loss of cultural tradition, aging farmers, unemployment, outmigration⁹

Figure 2

Forests provide more than 86 million green jobs and support the livelihoods of many more⁷



2. Addressing forest degradation and unemployment with Green Forest Jobs

A Green Forest Job is a “job that complies with the principles of sustainable forest management, contributes to the transition to a green economy, and is involved in the manufacture of forest products and/or in the performance of forest services”.¹³

Supporting **Green Forest Jobs** can address rural youth unemployment and underemployment and preserve and strengthen forest landscapes. So, what are some examples of Green Forest Jobs in the northern (Table 1) and southern hemispheres and what mechanisms can support their promotion? In a recent FAO survey of 41 **Forest and Farm Producer Organizations** (FFPO) from Ecuador, Ghana, Kenya, Nepal, Vietnam and Zambia, it was demonstrated that more than 40 percent of farmers were involved in a mixed agroforestry system, which involved the production of a diverse basket of agriculture crops along with a wide range of timber and Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) and agricultural crops. It has been identified that this form of productive diversity can offer livelihood opportunities across multiple different value chains as well as important opportunities for youth.⁴

3. Establishing a conducive environment for Green Jobs in forestry

While many countries attempt to move towards a transition to a green economy, new skills and education frameworks will be needed to accommodate these changes in legal and policy frameworks. It is important that forest experts are involved in knowledge-building initiatives related to vocational and education training for the sector.¹³ Based on the same FFPO survey mentioned above, Figure 3 shows what skills were voted as necessary to overcome barriers faced by youth to access opportunities in the forest sector (1 box = 1 answer).⁴

A conducive environment can also be supported through policy, including on rural youth employment or youth engagement strategies. This can include wider inter-ministerial supported strategies on youth employment in agriculture or rural areas or more specific strategies focusing on youth engagement in forestry initiatives in identified areas.

Table 1: stock taking of existing Green Forest Jobs in North America and Europe by UNECE and FAO¹³

Wood and Energy Production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Forest machine operator › Log salvager › Wood supply chain manager › Local energy procurers › Procurement forester › Short rotation plantation manager
Agroforestry and Mountain Forestry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Agro forester › Project manager forest and natural hazards › Project manager forest and protective structures › Forest soil bioengineer › Urban permaculturist › Local natural hazard advisor
Social and Urban Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Forest historian › Arboricultural officer › Forest culture interpreter › Funeral forest manager › Urban forester › Adventure park forester
Forest Management, Inventory and Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Forest planner › Forest inventory specialist › Forest policy coordinator
Biodiversity and Ecosystem Functioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Forest wildlife manager › Forest fire fighter › Forest protection advocate and grassroots organizer
Health and Recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Forest interpretive guide › Forest ecoteraphy guides
Education and Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Forest communiator › Marketing and communication manager › Forest pedagogue (teacher) › Civil science facilitator

4. The role of local FFPOs

FFPOs are formal/informal associations composed of farmers and communities. They can:

- Develop and implement a strategy for youth engagement/membership;
- give space to the voices and needs of younger youth, young women and men;
- promote opportunities to access land;
- promote/provide education, vocational training and apprenticeships;
- create opportunities for youth to access value-added segments of the value chain;
- extend access to support services including social protection in rural/forest areas;
- carry out regular measurement on youth engagement, including gender-disaggregated assessments.

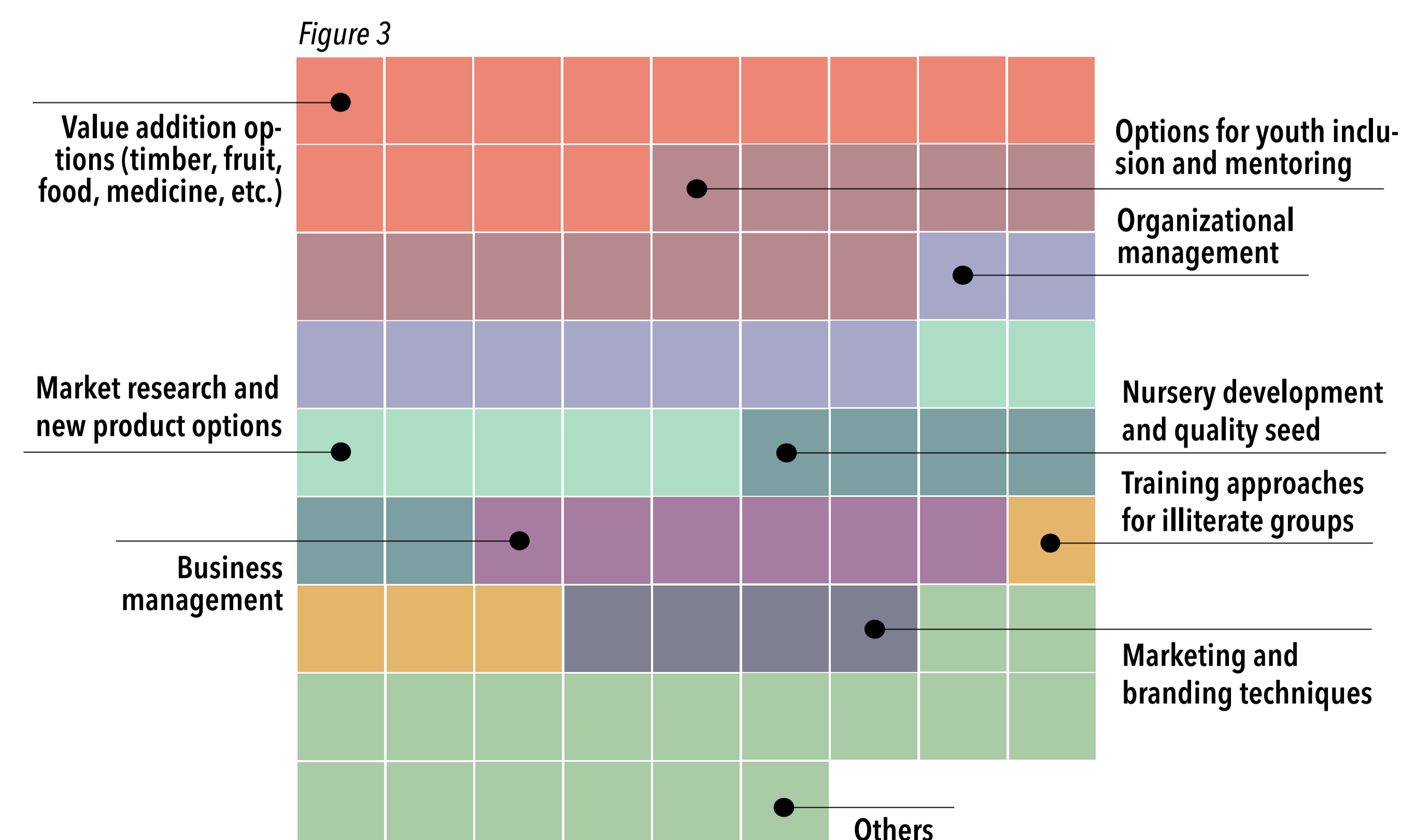
FAO FFF case study from Madagascar

Soa-Mitsinjo is a FFPO located in central Madagascar supported by the FAO Forest and Farm Facility (FFF) since 2019. Prior to training, many young farmers lacked interest in agriculture and forestry and did not see the benefit to their community and their livelihoods. Today, 320 young members have received technical training on resilient agriculture and forestry, water management, soil fertility along with entrepreneurial skills. These young people have developed nursery activities and are producing fruit and forest trees, supporting local food security, and contributing to the Government goal of 40000 hectares of reforestation per year.

(Source: FAO Madagascar)

5. Conclusion

Youth's active participation in the forest and farm landscapes cannot be understated. Supporting the provision of decent and attractive green employment opportunities within forest landscapes and the forestry sector, including visions of prosperity, is of utmost importance as it will determine the future [sustainability] of forest landscapes.^{4 13}



"Others" include:

Exchange visits to business successes; contract negotiation; agroforestry diversification options; organic production methods; timber planting and quality management; leadership training; tree valuation and pricing; certification and labelling; remote farmer training methods.

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