

Policy pointers

Government agencies, donors and forest and farm producer organisations (FFPOs) should overcome fears of youth migration, defend migrant rights and foster youth attachment to place of origin for each of three groups (remainers, leavers and returners).

Recognise the value of young 'remainers'. Include them in strategic decision making and prosperity planning of FFPOs. Plans should be gender-differentiated and technologically innovative, with a focus on value addition and diversification.

Offer migrating 'leavers' a youth-associate status in FFPOs. Reduce the cost of sending remittances home, create opportunities to invest in FFPOs and encourage peer mentoring about distant market opportunities FFPOs could develop.

Secure land and resources for young 'returners' to encourage them to invest their knowledge, skills and finance in FFPOs. Reintegration packages should link to key support agencies and be gender considerate.

Places to prosper: engaging with youth migration in forest landscapes

Youth migration shapes economies and ecologies profoundly. Young men and women bring vibrancy to rural communities. But in rural areas, young people must weigh up their chances for prosperity: whether to remain in their place of origin, migrate in search of education or work, or even return home with new skills, capital and ideas. In many rural areas, forest and farm producer organisations (FFPOs) are the only source of support or employment. FFPOs should engage with youth to develop place-specific strategies, enhance their prospects for prosperity and strengthen their vital attachments to place — whether they are remainers, leavers or returners. Understanding the dynamics of youth migration could also help to 'build back better' after the COVID-19 pandemic, with longer-term benefits for resilient livelihoods, both for young people and FFPOs.

Rural landscapes lose life when they lose youth

As young wage labourers flood back to forest landscapes from the cities to try and survive the COVID-19 crisis, bucking the prevailing trend of rural out-migration, it seems a strange time to be drawing lessons from experiences on how local organisations can best handle youth migration. But here we argue that while the dynamics of migration may have shifted during the pandemic, the underlying issues are revealed even more starkly and smart planning can help build back better after the crisis.

In forest landscapes, forest and farm producer organisations (FFPOs) are often the main employers. These formal or informal groups — comprising women and men, smallholder families, indigenous peoples and local communities —

grow, manage, harvest and process much of what comes out of forest landscapes. FFPOs are generally effective at pursuing the common good — with positive impacts on livelihoods and forests^{1,2} for both men and women.³ And as youth are key to the future of rural communities, how FFPOs engage with young people's hopes for prosperity is important.

Young people may join FFPOs to secure resource rights, to exchange technical know-how, to gain scale efficiencies and negotiating power through strength in numbers, or to share investment costs. They can bring energy, enthusiasm, social media connectedness, risk-taking attitudes, long-term perspectives and resilient labour productivity. And FFPOs need to listen to young people to help them achieve their visions of prosperity in ways that also strengthen FFPOs

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— both for those that stay but also for those that might leave, or sometimes return.

The reasons why youth leave FFPOs and forest landscapes are varied, gender specific and interconnected — both push and pull — and linked to perceptions of future prosperity. Here, we define youth as both young men and women, aged between 15 and 24 years (although age ranges can vary across countries and cultures).

United Nations figures indicate there are 1.2 billion youth globally (16% of the global population), with 85% living in developing countries and 70% of those living in rural areas.⁴ Tragically, youth also make up 40% of the world's 172 million formally unemployed,⁵ with 75% of youth classified as underutilised (unemployed, in informal jobs, or outside of formal education and training).⁶

In forest landscapes, youth often experience a lack of access to land, economic opportunities, social networks, social protection healthcare and vocational education. They generally have poor working conditions, while some wish to escape cultural restrictions. Youth under 18 (but above the minimum age for employment) may face challenges accessing productive resources and services or joining FFPOs due to their status as minors. And many young people may struggle to remain at home because of limited employment or the degraded resources on which employment depends. Most of the 1.4 billion people living on less than US\$1.25 per day (829 million girls and women, and 522 million boys and men) work in sectors threatened by the overuse of natural resources, such as agriculture and forestry.⁷

There are also gender differences that affect how FFPOs might best engage young women. This is particularly true for young women who face pronounced gender gaps in employment status. Young women in rural areas are more likely to be contributing family workers but have fewer opportunities than young men to obtain paid work. Additionally, training programmes mostly cater for the needs of young men and not young women.⁸

Little wonder then that young people often choose to migrate. And while COVID-19 and responses to it have changed the calculus for huge numbers recently, the following underlying dynamics remain. Youth are increasingly reluctant to pursue agriculture-based livelihoods in land-constrained, low-status contexts. While

some move due to natural disasters, conflict and persecution, many migrate seeking better education, work or social protection, usually in their country of origin.⁴ Women who migrate can be hampered by regressive social norms, gender discrimination and gender-specific vulnerabilities. But migration can advance women's rights, autonomy, human capital and self-esteem, and their authority and worth in families and communities. Changes 'out there' can improve women's equality back home.

Youth may remain if there is meaningful work

FFPOs might convince more youth to remain in rural areas by offering more meaningful work that matches their own visions of prosperity (see Boxes 1 and 2). A key challenge for FFPOs is how to engage youth to explore more meaningful work options that go beyond remuneration, such as task identity (completing a whole piece of work from start to finish), skill variety and fit (using individual capacities), task significance (doing things with a high impact on others), autonomy (discretion on when, how and where to complete tasks) and feedback (receiving information on performance).⁹

Many FFPOs are taking youth engagement seriously according to a survey of FFPOs in six countries conducted by IIED for the Forest and Farm Facility (FFF). The survey found that 59% of FFPOs had active youth programmes. A further 27% acknowledged the importance of youth engagement but had no specific programmes in place.¹⁰ Most active programmes offered youth technical and business training, with training on value-addition technologies for business in high demand. In terms of gender, the knowledge for which there was highest demand included developing women's businesses and increasing women's roles in leadership and decision making.

Youth remainers, leavers and returners can all be assets

Engaging with a wide range of FFPOs, the FFF has identified innovations for resilience and developing forest and farm production systems to help cope with COVID-19 and 'build back better' after the pandemic.¹¹ But working with youth to realise these innovations is key. FFPOs must consider context-specific youth engagement strategies, which separate out different approaches and options for different types of youth — remainers, leavers and returners. FFPOs should also differentiate issues raised by young women, younger youth or less-skilled youth. The impacts of youth out-migration can be offset if those youth can provide knowledge and stimulate

action in key areas that may be critical to FFPO business interests (see Figure 1).

Motivating remainers

For youth remainers, FFPOs should recognise their unique qualities and innovative ideas, and include them in both strategic decision making and identifying work that is meaningful to them. Having a youth wing, a young leader's group or youth clubs are options. Youth can take responsibility for climate-smart farming innovations and extension, technological innovation and value addition, or transport and logistics. Social media skills might also position them as GIS tenure-mapping agents, stock inventory specialists, product-quality agents responsible for certification, marketing agents developing websites or social media marketing, or finance managers responsible for organising savings and credit cooperative organisations (SACCOs) and mobile banking.

While FFPOs may only be able to fund one or two positions of this sort, engaging youth in this way can provide a major jump forward in FFPO competitiveness. FFPOs also need to fight regular battles to improve youth access to public or communal land and to advocate with local authorities for improved infrastructure such as electricity, water and sanitation, telecommunications and roads.

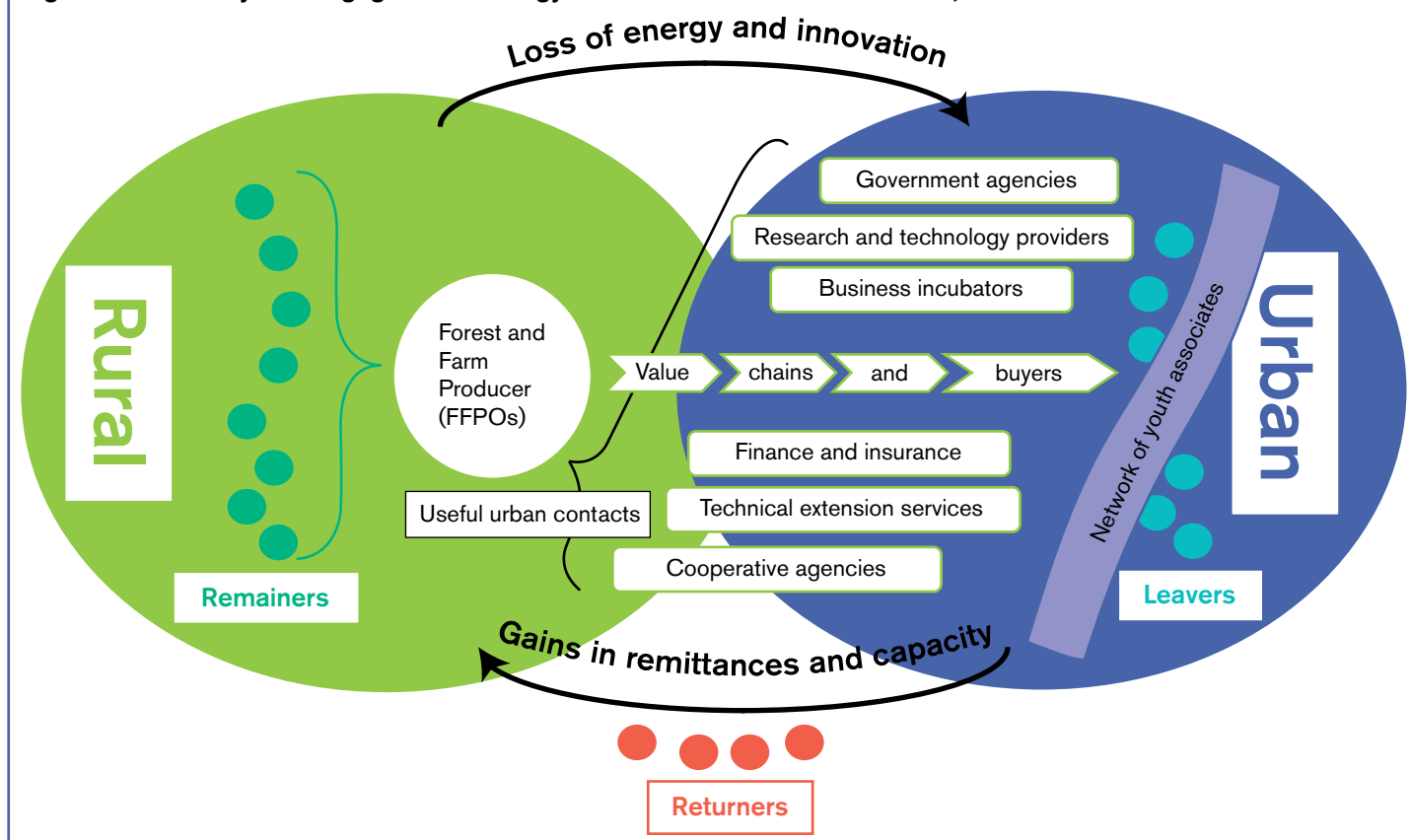
Box 1. Youth leadership in Kamala, Ghana

The FFPO Kamala in Ghana is made up of 3,000 farmers (60% women) producing shea butter, maize, soybeans, groundnuts and livestock. Youth currently make up 30% of FFPO members. But out-migration is worryingly high, as the four-month growing season is too short to provide sustained employment. This leads to seasonal migration, which can become permanent. To help anchor youth to their place of origin, the FFPO has involved them as managers of village savings and loan schemes and leaders of advocacy groups. These groups encourage youth to save and invest in their own and their community's future. The FFPO also provides childcare as well as education on birth control and rights.

Box 2. Youth eco-school in Ecuador

The FFPO Sacha Laran (meaning 'forest wild orange') unites female members in a traditional chakra agroforestry system where they produce and process passion fruit, guava, lemongrass, chonta, yausa, araza, guaba (cotton candy tree) honey and filtered water. Youth make up 58% of members and are key to the FFPO's future plans. In association with the Forest and Farm Facility (FFF), Sacha Laran has set up an eco-school to train youth members in traditional chakra and organic farming. A new processing plant owned by Sacha Laran is managed by a youth association (20 people) to help provide youth employment and keep people in the community.

Figure 1. An FFPO youth engagement strategy should accommodate remainers, leavers and returners



Supporting leavers

For youth leavers migrating on a seasonal or longer-term basis, FFPOs should consider some form of youth-associate status to help maintain an attachment to their place of origin. Leavers are sources of remittance finance, contacts and knowledge. Annual remittance flows into low- and middle-income countries reached US\$529 billion in 2018, exceeding official development assistance by some margin. Where youth attachments to place remain, remittances on average double incomes for receiving households. Women tend to send home higher levels of remittances and make more productive use of remittances received.

Priorities include maintaining an attachment to place of origin by offering departing youth some form of youth-associate status that involves both sending news from home but also receiving insights from 'out there'. Maintaining dialogue with youth associates on urban market opportunities, service-provision options, new technologies, transport options and potential business partners makes considerable sense. Another priority is to reduce the cost of sending remittances and finding ways for FFPOs to provide productive investment opportunities for members.

Welcoming returners

For youth returners, FFPOs should consider providing a reintegration package, including linkages to key support agencies. It should be gender considerate, including gendered peer-mentoring around new knowledge — and help

counter fears that returners might complicate productive partnerships or organisational membership. Debriefing sessions could also identify useful external knowledge and contacts, which could improve FFPO competitiveness. For example, returners with existing urban business interests could help FFPOs develop beneficial partnership arrangements. More seasonal migration could also be supported, such as youth migrating to work in cities or other rural areas outside of the growing season. FFPOs could provide services to protect and maintain migrant workers' property while they are away, in return for a reciprocal commitment to the FFPO during the growing season. Local communities often have such practices in place already.

Resurgence after COVID-19

Changes wrought by COVID-19 vary hugely in different forest and farm areas but are often deep. For many young people, 'remaining', 'leaving' or 'returning' may be more an act of desperation than strategy — an urgent need for food or support. But as the possibilities for meaningful work with FFPOs strengthen, both as a means to and a consequence of recovery from COVID-19, so will the power of active strategies to engage youth in the systems and cultures of FFPOs. And with youth in rural areas, there is life.

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Knowledge Products

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Notes

- ¹ Campbell, J (2018) Putting producers first works: impacts and lessons learned from enabling governments and strengthening forest and farm producer organisations. Forest and Farm Facility, FAO, Rome. <https://pubs.iied.org/G04289> / ² FAO (2016) Mid-term evaluation of the Forest and Farm Facility programme. www.fao.org/3/a-bq504e.pdf / ³ Bolin, A (2020) Women's empowerment through collective action: how forest and farm producer organisations can make a difference. FAO, Rome and IIED, London. / ⁴ UN-DESA (2019) World population prospects 2019. File POP/7-1: Total population (both sexes combined) by five-year age group, region, subregion and country, 1950–2100 (thousands). / ⁵ ILO (2019) World employment social outlook — trends 2019. <https://bit.ly/3c8YGno> / ⁶ UNDP (2014) Empowered youth, sustainable future: UNDP youth strategy 2014–2017. <https://bit.ly/3gu0afC> / ⁷ Poschen, P (2015) Decent work, green jobs and the sustainable economy — solutions for climate change and sustainable development. Greenleaf Publishing, UK. <http://bit.ly/208YUJo> / ⁸ Bolin, A (2018) Transforming gender relations: upscaling collective action in women's entrepreneurship. IIED, London. <https://pubs.iied.org/17475IIED> / ⁹ Fried, Y and Ferris, GR (1987) The validity of the job characteristics model: a review and meta-analysis. *Personnel Psychology* 40: 287–322. / ¹⁰ Macqueen, D and Campbell, J (2020) Prosperity in place for youth: meaningful work for mobile youth that enhances forest landscapes. IIED, London. <https://pubs.iied.org/13615IIED> / ¹¹ FFF (2020) The vital role of forest and farm producer organizations (FFPOs) in COVID-19 responses and plans to build back better. FAO, IUCN, IIED and Agricorn. <https://bit.ly/2yB2fVN>