

# Press Release

## Youth Declare Commitment to Forest Governance and Climate Action at AY4F Workshop in Cameroon



*AY4F National Youth Workshop participants during a field visit to the Mbalmayo demonstration and training forest, managed by Cameroon's National Forestry School (ENEF). Credit: Felix Odhiambo / AFF.*

**June 25, 2025.** Young environmental leaders from across Cameroon have issued a bold joint declaration calling for greater youth involvement in forest governance, as part of their commitment to climate action and the transition to a green economy.

This declaration was issued at the conclusion of the *AfricanYouth4Forests* (AY4F) National Youth Workshop, held from 11–13 June 2025 at the National Forestry School of Cameroon in Mbalmayo. Convened under the theme "*From Science to Youth Action for Sustainable Forestry*," the workshop was organized by the African Forest Forum (AFF) in collaboration with the Kenya Forestry Research Institute (KEFRI) and the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) and hosted with the support of Formas – the Swedish Research Council for Sustainable Development.

Participants identified key threats to Cameroon's forests—illegal logging, agricultural-induced degradation, weak law enforcement, urban expansion, and limited youth involvement in environmental decision-making. They also cited restricted access to finance, digital tools, and technical training as major barriers to effective youth-led actions in sustainable forestry.

Despite the challenges, youth demonstrated strong commitment to leading change through innovation, entrepreneurship, and community-based action. Their proposed pathways include:

- Precision agroforestry and land restoration
- Tree nurseries and reforestation efforts
- Eco-tourism and nature-based enterprises
- Digital tools for conservation, advocacy, and NTFP marketing
- Sustainable forest management for climate and biodiversity
- Community-based carbon markets and innovative green financing (e.g., blockchain)
- Responsible non-timber forest product enterprises

*"Nothing for us without us. Young people are not waiting to be invited to the table – we are building our own,"* states the youth declaration. *"We don't have to choose between earning a living and saving the planet. We can – and must – do both."*

Calling for mindset shifts and behavioural change, the youth emphasized their readiness to act: *"Give youth the tools and trust – we will build a greener tomorrow."*

The **AY4F initiative** empowers Africans aged 18–35 to lead environmental transformation by bridging scientific knowledge and indigenous ecological wisdom. In Mbalmayo, participants were trained in sustainable forest management, green enterprise development, digital tools, and advocacy, with a focus on turning knowledge into action.

However, they stressed that youth remain underrepresented in forest governance structures — despite being digitally savvy, highly motivated, and deeply connected to their communities.

To address this, participants urged the **Cameroonian government** to:

- Create enabling environment for youth-led climate actions.
- Simplify administrative procedures to favour youth engagement.
- Improve access to internships [and permits] through incentives to entities.
- Mainstream environmental education at [all levels] basic education level.

- Create more community-managed, youth-led forest reserves.
- Enact incentive laws supporting youth-led climate action

They also called on the **private sector, NGOs, and international partners** to offer mentorship, financing, and digital platforms to amplify youth-led forest businesses, storytelling and advocacy.

*"This workshop is a turning point,"* said **Mitin Sandrine Yaah**, environmental engineer and CEO's Youth Advisor at the Global Centre on Adaptation. *"We have gained not just knowledge, but purpose,"* added **Anya Dabite Abeh**, a young conservation biologist.

**Dr. Chemuku Wekesa** (KEFRI/Taita Taveta University) noted: *"To deliver on forest restoration and green goals, the ambition of young researchers must be as big as the forests they protect."*

AFF Consultant **Dr. Peter Mbile** encouraged youth to embrace frontier opportunities like **carbon markets, GIS, drones, and AI**, urging them to *"focus less on what hasn't worked, and more on what's possible."*

Representing the AFF Executive Secretary **Prof. Labode Popoola**, Dr. Moussa Massaoudou emphasized the importance of digital literacy among African youth: *"Training young people on emerging technologies. GIS, drones, and AI can save time and unlock resources."* Dr. Massaoudou, a Visiting Scientist / Programme Officer at AFF, concluded: *"With over 60% of Africa's population under 30 years, meaningful youth inclusion in forest governance is vital for long-term sustainability. Youths don't have a choice. They must engage, innovate, and stay informed."*

As the world prepares for **COP30**, the Mbalmayo workshop stands as a testament to the transformative power of youth in shaping Africa's climate and forest future—equipped with science, solidarity, and an unshakable sense of purpose.

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