

# YOUTH 4 RIGHTS INFOBRIEF

The Youth 4 Rights Infobrief, published by the Global Landscapes Forum (GLF) and the Youth in Landscapes Initiative, is the first such publication highlighting youth leadership on rights. It is meant to put a spotlight on some of the remarkable work being done by young people around the world on land tenure, community rights, gender equality, on the intersection of traditional knowledge and development, and many other topics related to rights and landscapes.

## MAINSTREAMING YOUTH-LED APPROACHES IN FORESTRY

### Bio

I am Mayumi Sato, a research associate at the Center for People and Forests (RECOFTC), where I have been working on mainstreaming gender and social inclusion in forest landscapes across Southeast Asia and Nepal. I am currently completing my second year as a Princeton in Asia Fellow, through which I have spent the last two years living in Thailand, learning a tremendous amount about Southeast Asian culture and society, and of different approaches to social change. Originally from Japan, I have grown up in various locations across North America and Asia. I am passionate about learning languages, activism, and understanding identity.

### Introduction

There is a common narrative that I have encountered since entering the forestry sector – one with a patronizing undertone that assumes our capacities, as young people, need to be “built” and our leadership skills “developed.” Although these well-intentioned efforts supposedly increase our sense of empowerment, I began to wonder: what about our

desires and feelings? Educated in top-down ways, we are rarely given space to inform the forestry sector with our progressive views. Traditional approaches to forestry education and practice are masculine, technical, Global-North-centred, hierarchical, and focused mainly on forest production. My project challenges that approach.



Conducting focus group discussions with labourers in wood processing and furniture companies for research on the social and gender dimensions of FLEGT.

## Project outline

**The geographic area of the project:**

Thailand, Asia

**Year of Development\Duration**

First-year of Implementation

**Target people**

Forestry sector

**Main theme**

Mainstreaming Youth-Led Approaches in Forestry

**Organization**

Princeton in Asia Fellowship

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## Project Description

My workplace, the Center for People and Forests (RECOFTC), serves as the base for my project, with the hope that other organizations will follow suit. RECOFTC supports community forestry practices to decentralize control over forest resources and restore forest cover in Asia. Capacity building and participatory action research plays a vital role. Understanding how power and hegemony underlie uneven natural resource extraction and management provides opportunities for redress and reclamation of rights for marginalized people. As youth, we are not just thinking: 'what?' and 'where?' but we are also considering more deeply: 'how?' and 'what can we do about it?'

This project attempts to sensitize RECOFTC staff to consider the social impacts of forest and natural resource management from youth perspectives. The idea is to critically reflect upon one's own worldview and to reshape forestry education in a way that considers the voices of those who have been left out of the mainstream discourse. By leading sessions on gender sensitization, power, and intersectionality at RECOFTC, I hope to create a gender-responsive and socially-inclusive workplace. Through ethnographic

**Global Landscapes Forum**

The Global Landscapes Forum (GLF) is the world's largest knowledge-led platform on integrated land use, dedicated to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and Paris Climate Agreement. The Forum takes a holistic approach to create sustainable landscapes that are productive, prosperous, equitable and resilient and considers five cohesive themes of food and livelihood initiatives, landscape restoration, rights, finance and measuring progress. It is led by the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), in collaboration with its co-founders UN Environment and the World Bank and Charter Members.

**Charter Members:** CIRAD, CIFOR, Climate Focus, Conservation International, Ecoagriculture Partners, EFI, Evergreen Agriculture, FSC, GEF, IPMG, CIAT, ICIMOD, IFOAM - Organics International, INBAR, IUFRO, Rainforest Alliance, Rare, RRI, UN Environment, Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation, part of Wageningen Research, World Agroforestry, WRI, WWF Germany, Youth in Landscapes Initiative, World Bank Group

**Funding partners**



observation, this participatory action research monitors behavioural changes and work within RECOFTC that is expected to better reflect the needs of marginalized people. The hope is that the future direction of the forestry sector will better support local people through youth-led initiatives.

## Upscaling possibilities

Between 2013 and 2018, RECOFTC directly supported over 410 forest user groups comprised of almost 83,000 households, and managing 273,000 hectares of forest land. Given RECOFTC's rapport and reach with local communities, I am hopeful that my formal and informal efforts aimed at increasing staff awareness around equity will lead to gender- and socially-sensitive language and practices in the field. Ultimately, I believe that when forestry organizations accept our new perspectives and progressive ways of thinking, young people will no longer be "tokenized" and youth used as another development buzzword, but instead, will be genuinely empowered. Although I have faced setbacks and resistance during this process, I hope to ultimately inspire others within the forestry sector to undertake similar projects.

## Challenges

1. For young, aspiring scholars and practitioners, it is not easy to convince experienced professionals to rethink their established approaches to forestry and landscape management. Allies within your organization or community are key to overcoming this natural resistance.
2. Even in cases where your own team or community agrees to consider the youth perspective, relaying this buy-in at the community level is much harder and often is not applied in practice.
3. With each country and contextual reality defining what can and cannot be done at the community level, the challenge is to find a safe way to integrate new vocabulary and social concepts.

## What is your tip for young people developing their own project?

If you truly believe in something, you should not seek validation from others to feel as though your project has purpose.