

UNLEASHING THE AGENCY OF THE YOUTH IN REGREENING AFRICA



As a large scale, multi-country, multi-stakeholder restoration initiative, Regreening Africa offers a unique opportunity to generate actionable lessons on the cost-effectiveness and impact of local, national and global restoration efforts. As part of the Regreening Africa Insights Series, this brief shares key learnings and insights from programme activities and interventions that boosted youth inclusion in continental restoration initiatives and provided opportunities to improve current and future livelihoods for the youth.

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KEY INSIGHTS



Africa currently has the **youngest population globally**, with an estimated 77% of sub-Saharan Africa under the age of 35.



The **extensive engagement of the youth** in various initiatives relating to climate change and the environment is **hardly mentioned in mainstream media**.



Effective promotion of youth in decision-making policies requires putting in place policies that support their participation. Youth also need to be empowered to understand planning processes and policy documents.



Successful ground-level implementation of restoration initiatives requires **embracing meaningful partnerships** between the youth and state, local, national and global partners.



Income generating restoration initiatives provide young people with livelihoods sources while restoring degraded landscapes.



Youth-led CBOs and school environmental clubs are a very effective way to engage school-attending youth in restoration projects such as building woodlots or orchards to grow and sell fruit.



Technology is a major point of interest among the youth that can be used as a **catalyst** for youth to learn more about landscape restoration.

Why youth engagement is critical in land restoration

The latest IPCC special report 'Climate Change and Land' highlights, "land degradation affects people's livelihoods and occurs over a quarter of the Earth's ice-free land area. The majority of the 1.3 to 3.2 billion people affected are living in poverty in developing countries."² **Africa is one of the most severely affected region, and is particularly vulnerable to land degradation**³ – the latest available data from 2020 estimates that 46% of the continent's land area is degraded, directly impacting at least 485 million people.

Climate change is actively exacerbating the rate and magnitude of land degradation in Africa and, critically, it is starting to introduce new degradation patterns.² **The combination of land degradation and climate change has profound consequences for the continent**, and in particular its burgeoning youth population. Individually and collectively, climate change and land degradation are contributing to food insecurity, population displacement, severe stress on water resources, the loss of livelihoods, increased civil conflict and threats to peace.⁴

This context is also compounded in Africa given its young population, with almost 60% of the population under the age of 25 years and 77% under 35. Furthermore, the continent is projected to account for 57% of the global population growth (1.4 billion people) by 2050. In other words, by 2050, two in every five children will be born in Africa.⁵ As Graça Machal warned, "Even though our youth have the potential to transform Africa, if neglected, they could exacerbate poverty and inequality while threatening peace, security and prosperity."⁵ It is therefore essential to **proactively invest in the youth** by engaging with them in development issues, enhancing their education systems, and creating green jobs for them.

The youth's ability to act as agents of change in restoration is influenced by their geographical, biophysical and socio-economical setting (amongst other factors). This in turn affects their access to education, knowledge, resources, land, and funding, to enable meaningful engagement in land restoration.⁶ Given that rural areas are home to many young people, their quality of life and overall wellbeing is directly impacted by the decisions taken on land and ecosystem management.⁷

THE UN DECADE ON ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION – A FRAMEWORK TO SPARK COMMITMENT AND BUILD A LARGE COLLABORATIVE MOVEMENT OF YOUNG AND OLD TO RESTORE OUR PLANET – RECOGNISES THE GREAT POTENTIAL THE YOUTH OFFER IN TERMS OF CONTRIBUTING TO LAND RESTORATION.

Essential to the land and ecosystem restoration agenda are **rural youth in subsistence agriculture** and **indigenous youth in rural areas**. Indigenous youth have learned natural methods of managing ecosystems and lands, and how to live their life in harmony with the landscape. Urban youth have a role in encouraging the greening of cities, as well as influencing land degradation by adopting more sustainable consumption behaviours.⁷ The majority have also been born into the information age, and are therefore tech-savvy and able to find innovative ways to improve their livelihoods and in turn, the quality of life in urban areas.⁸

The potential the youth offer to land restoration includes their influence in society and on social media, their large population size, as well as their ability to come up with innovative ideas for land restoration and entrepreneurship. Partnering with young and innovative people interested in the environment is vital for the

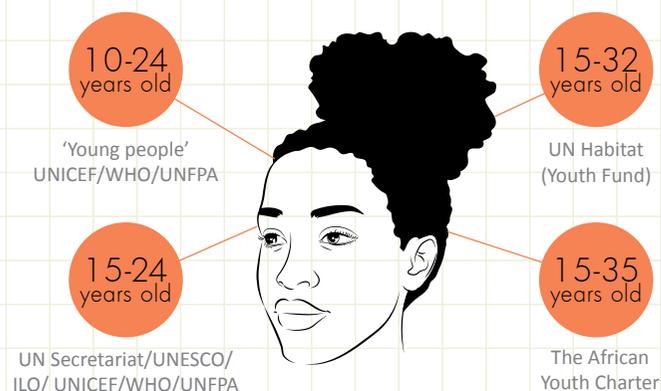
success of land restoration work as well as the achievement of Regreening Africa and the UN Decade ambitions of restoring forests, along with croplands, wetlands, oceans and other natural ecosystems.⁹

This insight brief highlights the key findings from youth engagement in Regreening Africa's various programme activities across eight countries, including:

- The Youth Cross-Country Webinar
- The Kenya National Landscape Restoration Conference
- Youth engagement in restoration and value chains
- Nursery establishment and management
- Goals 4 Trees

DEFINING YOUTH

The UN Secretariat uses the terms 'youth' and 'young people' interchangeably, to refer to 15-24 year olds. It recognises that several UN entities, instruments and regional organisations have somewhat different definitions of the youth¹⁰, summarised as follows:



YOUTH EMPOWERMENT HIGHLIGHTED AT UNCCD COP 15

At the fifteenth session of the Conference of the Parties (**COP 15**) of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in 2022, leaders from government, private sector, civil society and other key stakeholder groups sought to explore the links between land – “the bedrock of a healthy, productive society” – and key sustainability issues.

Youth empowerment was amongst the top items on the conference agenda, with the third **UNCCD Youth Forum** provided as a side event and specifically designed for the youth to voice their commitments towards achieving land degradation neutrality. The Youth Forum brought together young farmers, young entrepreneurs and other youth representatives to reinforce their capacities, share knowledge and create networks. The platform focused on:

- Land jobs of the future and the sustainable use of land
- Green economy and youth employment
- Meaningful engagement of the youth in advocating for the protection and rehabilitation of land.

Additionally, in the interactive high-level segment of COP15, many of the **solutions** put forward included schools specializing in innovative agricultural techniques with internships and trainings to engage young people.

Towards the end of the high-level segment, the participants gathered to reflect on the rights, rewards and responsibilities regarding the future of land stewardship, land restoration as a path to sustainable post-pandemic recovery and how to move from disaster to drought resilience.¹¹



Youth engagement activities in Regreening Africa

The Regreening Africa programme has engaged youth across various initiatives in all the eight programme countries, through activities such as:



Building capacity for technology use and monitoring via the Regreening Africa App



Learning exchanges and virtual workshops



Restoration and value chain interventions



Nursery establishment and management



Supporting existing youth groups to promote land restoration



Using sports (namely soccer) to promote Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR) and tree planting



BUILDING CAPACITY FOR TECHNOLOGY USE AND MONITORING

It is impossible to achieve global, regional and local restoration goals without the active participation of the largest group of changemakers – the youth.¹² In keeping with the global movement to ensure the participation of the youth in the 2030 Agenda, Regreening Africa is committed to supporting the empowerment of young people as agents of change, with relevant resources that will help young people contribute to restoration.

The **Regreening Africa App and Dashboard** serve as some of the critical tools in enabling the youth to participate meaningfully in local, national, regional and continental restoration initiatives and build a skills base to use emerging technology for monitoring. As such, the youth have been the key target audience of recent capacity building workshops on the Regreening Africa App, developing the capacity of the youth for technology use in restoration and monitoring restoration initiatives.

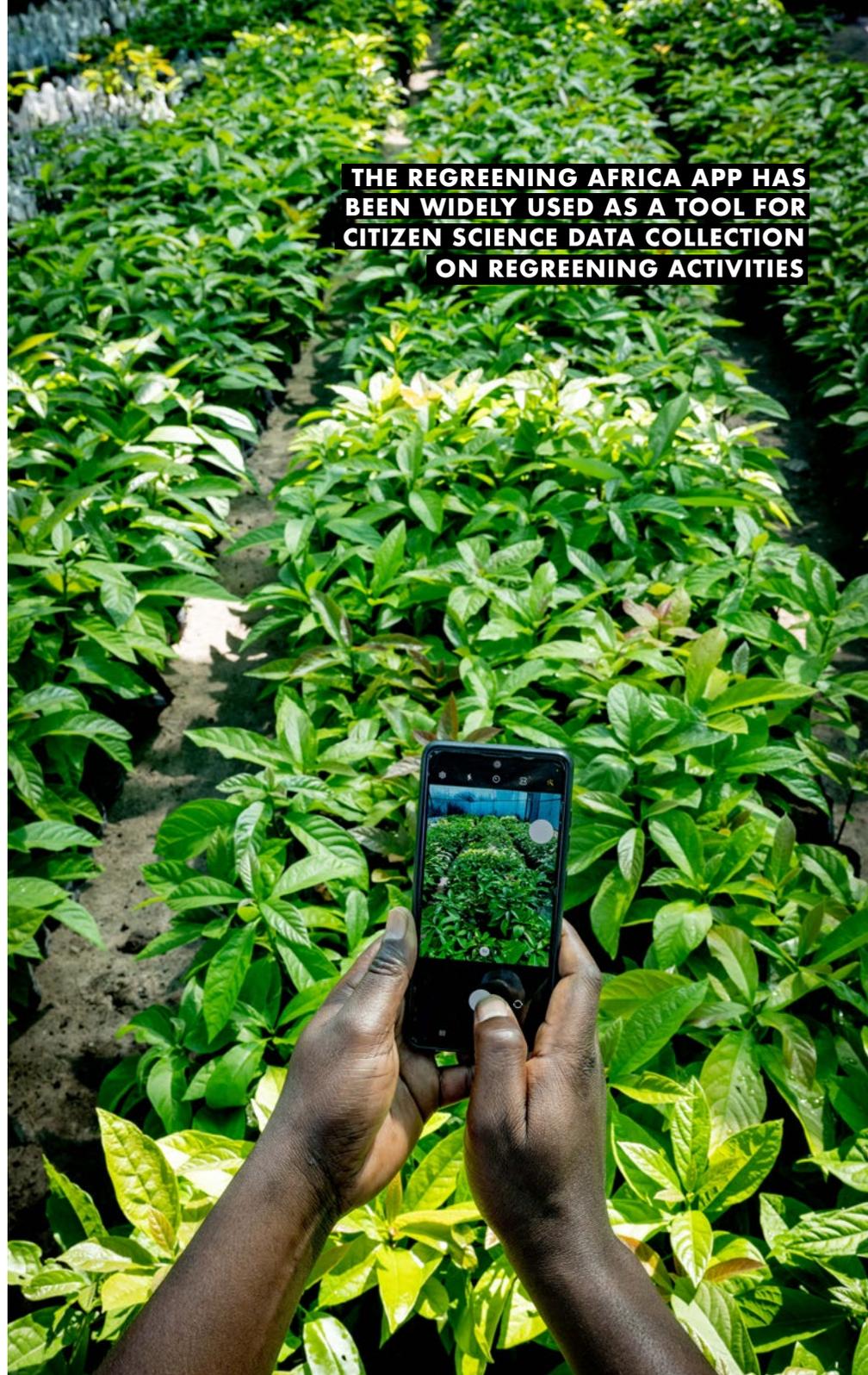


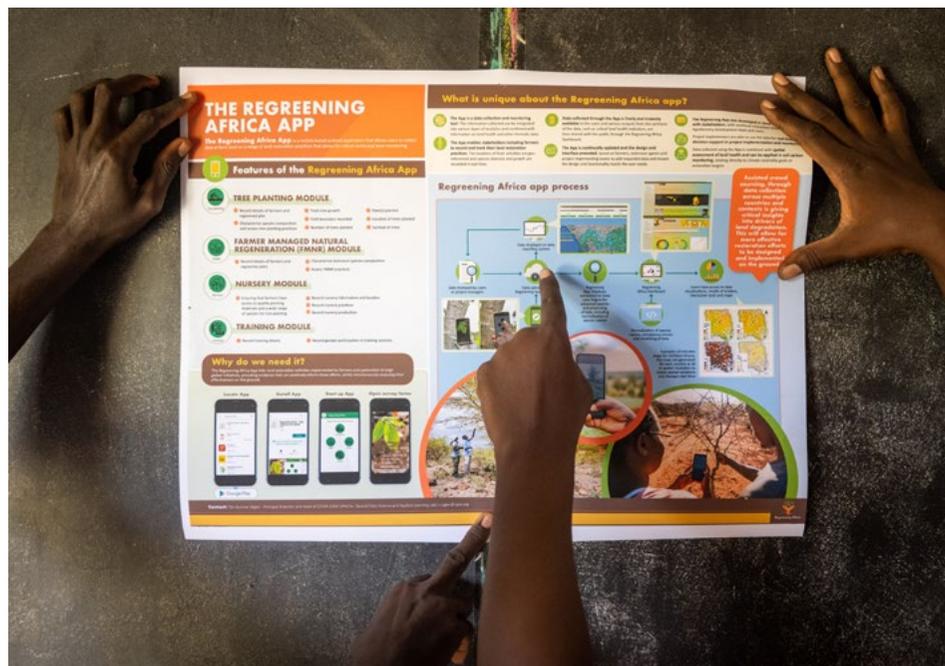
The Regreening Africa App is a mobile-based android application that allows users to collect data at farm level on a range of land restoration practices that allows for robust landscape level monitoring. It is critical in linking land restoration activities implemented by farmers and pastoralists to large global initiatives, providing evidence that can positively inform these efforts while simultaneously assessing their effectiveness on the ground.

The app was designed to **fill a critical knowledge gap** by providing local stakeholders that implement land restoration activities (including farmers, government agents and project officers) with an opportunity to participate in data collection on key indicators of land restoration and to monitor restoration efforts.

The Regreening Africa App has been widely applied in the Programme countries as a tool for **citizen science data collection** on regreening activities (FMNR and tree planting), nursery establishment and species inventories, and training activities as part of the Regreening Africa Programme. Many of the NGO field agents, enumerators and data collectors and lead farmers that use the Regreening Africa App are young people.

THE REGREENING AFRICA APP HAS BEEN WIDELY USED AS A TOOL FOR CITIZEN SCIENCE DATA COLLECTION ON REGREENING ACTIVITIES





A series of training workshops on the Regreening Africa App have been carried out across the eight Regreening Africa focus countries. The objectives of the trainings are threefold:

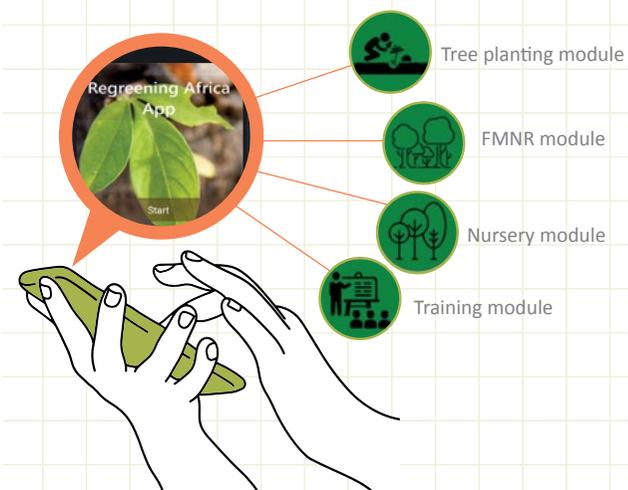
- 1 For participants to learn about monitoring land restoration and monitoring tools;
- 2 To learn how to apply tools in a practical setting; and
- 3 To elicit feedback from users.

In-class technical sessions and a field session seek to achieve these objectives, and to prepare participants to facilitate the use of the Regreening Africa App with other untrained stakeholders, and to scale the use of the App and dashboard with a larger audience.

In addition to the Regreening Africa App, youth empowerment has also been realised through **WhatsApp groups** (as seen in Kenya). The WhatsApp group is a platform for youth to share opportunities, discuss and deliberate on ideas for meaningful youth engagement as well as plan joint youth events related to restoration.

As highlighted in the UN Working Paper “**Believe in Better**”, “transparency in SDG accountability processes should also translate to better access to information for young people [and] enable young people to do monitoring more broadly across the targets.”¹³ By engaging the youth in data collection on restoration efforts and their monitoring, Regreening Africa supports an integrated and comprehensive approach to not only restoring degraded landscapes, but also sustainable development more broadly, given the centrality of addressing youth needs and rights.

REGREENING AFRICA APP FEATURES





USING SPORTS TO PROMOTE FMNR AND TREE PLANTING

'Trees 4 Goals' case study¹⁴

"It does not matter how small you are, everything you do for the environment counts. I am 15 years old, and I love football and outdoor adventure.

I understood the impact of deforestation, climate change and plastic pollution when I was about 11 years old. I decided to do something about it. I combined my love for football and nature. I committed that for every goal I score I plant a tree. That's how the Trees for Goals initiative was born.

Through the initiative, I have influenced change in my school, football club, local community as well as encouraging my peers to join the tree planting and growing efforts.

I increased my target seven times; for every goal I score I plant 10 trees, then to 11 times my initial target: for every goal I score I plant 11 trees. It represents team effort in football and the contribution by my football team. I have planted over 1000 trees in the last two years."

Story as told by founder Lesein Mutunkei. His passion for football and the outdoors gave birth to the Trees 4 Goals Initiative. Through the platform, he advocates for afforestation to increase Kenya's forest cover.



EXAMPLES OF INSIGHTS FROM YOUTH-TARGETED PROGRAMME ACTIVITIES

The participation of young women in restoration activities enhances the effectiveness and sustainability of restoration efforts. In Niger, for example, the inclusion of young women in the decision-making processes regarding restoration of degraded lands had a positive influence on the regeneration and management of degraded forests, as well as the resolution of land conflicts.



The youth have been key to raising awareness of restoration opportunities and actions via social media, including promoting Regreening Africa programme activities. The youth (particularly in Niger) have also played a key role in sensitizing older generations in the communities to technologies and project activities.



The use of soccer tournaments – Trees 4 Goals - is very effective in fostering youth involvement in land restoration in Ghana, Senegal and Kenya.



In Ghana at least 20 male and female youth were trained as animators. Animators organised a series of step-down trainings on various regreening topics for farmers at community level through training centres.



In Ghana, 60% of the 80 fire volunteer groups established and trained to lead the fight against bushfires are youth aged 15–30.



Out of school youth make up a large number of farmers involved in tree seedling production and tree planting in Rwanda.



Regreening Africa's youth engagement has demonstrated not only how land degradation is a youth issue that threatens current and future generations' quality of life, but also the importance of including the youth in restoration initiatives and governance. Programme activities have also emphasised the urgency of recognising and promoting land governance for and with the youth – identifying them as catalysts of change, and tapping into their energy and ability to easily adopt technology.

The best practices for youth and gender inclusion in Ethiopia's regreening movement are home gardens (fruit orchards and gesho plantations) and rural resource centers. Both have provided job opportunities and improved the income of unemployed youth and women.



At the youth-led virtual learning experience on 27 January 2021 held in Nairobi, Kenya, speakers noted that thousands of young people in Kenya are taking an initiative on climate change and the environment, despite this not mentioned in mainstream media.



Overcoming barriers to meaningful youth engagement

Regreening Africa's engagement with the youth has shown that there are several common barriers across the eight Programme countries that prevent youth from actively participating in restoration and greening work, and that cut across all agricultural activities beyond land restoration.

The various youth engagements throughout Regreening Africa have demonstrated that in order to overcome the existing barriers to catalysing the energy, innovation, knowledge and vibrancy of the youth for greater restoration outcomes, we need to ensure that restoration initiatives embrace and enhance:



Meaningful partnerships in implementing restoration initiatives on the ground with state, local, national and global partners.



Intentional youth engagement in the project teams. This means tracking and recording youth engagement activities to see the differences of the youth's wellbeing, pre-and post-intervention.



Recognition of the youth as community champions – encouraging them to influence others in the community to take initiatives aimed at restorative practices.



Access to knowledge and technology through capacity building that helps the youth address real-world challenges and can draw more youths to restoration. Other forms of technology beyond the Regreening Africa App and Dashboard need to be further explored within the Programme and introduced to the youth.



Income-generating restoration initiatives that provide young people with sources of livelihoods while restoring degraded landscapes. Funding for restoration projects can also be sourced by youth-led CBOs, such as 'One Vision Kenya' that has been engaged by Regreening Africa in Kenya. The founder and youth in his organization have been engaged in many activities of Regreening Africa, including FMNR and nursery establishment, and have been exposed to other opportunities such as training youths during the Kenya National Landscape Restoration Conference.



COMMON BARRIERS TO MEANINGFUL YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

- **Land tenure rights and issues.** For example, many youths work on land that is owned by a family member, limiting their decision-making power on how the land is managed.
- **Traditional socio-cultural beliefs.** This includes respect for the traditional leadership role of elders, resulting in the entrenched common belief amongst adults—and some youth—that elders are better equipped to make decisions about the youth than youths themselves.
- **Poor incentives** for youth to engage in greening and restoration activities.
- **Inadequate or unappealing livelihood options,** resulting in a rural exodus of young people to urban areas in search of job opportunities.
- **Shortage of resources,** including restrictive access to finance and land.
- **Cultivable land insufficiency,** making it difficult for youth to appropriate plots.
- **Lack of technical capacity** for sustainable businesses, and **limited knowledge** on tree production, planting and management.
- **A perceived lack of understanding at the timeframe of restoration activities.** Youth expectations do not match the reality of restoration activities that take longer to be profitable.



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS



PROMOTE YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES LINKED TO RESTORATION

- ✓ **Government at all levels should promote the participation of youth in decision-making processes** by putting in place the policies supporting their participation and by improving communication of public participation opportunities.
- ✓ Government should **empower young people to understand planning processes** and policy documents such as Urban/Rural/County Integrated Development Plans.
- ✓ Greater investment is needed in training boys and girls on leadership.
- ✓ Government agencies, researchers and NGOs need to support **clear grassroots communication of restoration targets and plans** and make materials available at the local level in more accessible and simpler formats.
- ✓ NGOs and other actors should engage in continuous sensitization of boys, girls, men and women, to promote a change in mindsets at the community level to **embrace women leadership**, the role of women in restoration and the youth for their role restoration.



CREATE INCENTIVES TO PROMOTE YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN RESTORATION

- ✓ **Introduce alternative, nature-based livelihood opportunities** such as agribusinesses, ecotourism, fish farming, beekeeping, etc.
- ✓ **Ensure equal benefit sharing mechanisms** from restoration activities.
- ✓ **Land tenure rights must be strengthened** to enhance land access and ownership by women and youth



ENABLE ACCESS TO RESTORATION FINANCING FOR THE YOUTH

- ✓ **The youth should organize themselves into groups** such as CBOs or youth groups and register to access funding.
- ✓ Young people should **capitalize on social media** to document their work and showcase their success, in order to increase visibility and attract funding.
- ✓ **Capacity building** among young people on resource mobilization should be supported.
- ✓ **Funding criteria** by donors must guarantee the eligibility of youth.
- ✓ **Financing**, including bank loans, must be adjusted to suit the needs and constraints of women and youth.



ENCOURAGE THE YOUTH TO NETWORK

- ✓ **A youth network should be developed** in order to share experience and opportunities, and to advocate for the restoration agenda at decision making.
- ✓ **Networking should take on various forms** so as to be as attractive to youth.



IMPLEMENT YOUTH-FOCUSED CAPACITY BUILDING ACTIVITIES AND WORKSHOPS

- ✓ **The youth need capacity building** in areas such as: bookkeeping, management, personal branding, organizational branding, digital marketing and fundraising.
- ✓ **Different forms of capacity building should be promoted**, including exchange visits, peer to peer learning, and mentorship.
- ✓ **Youth should take advantage of online resources** and learning platforms such as Land Accelerator.



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ABOUT REGREENING AFRICA

Regreening Africa is an ambitious five-year project that seeks to reverse land degradation among 500,000 households, and across 1 million hectares in eight countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. By incorporating trees into croplands, communal lands and pastoral areas, regreening efforts make it possible to reclaim Africa's degraded landscapes.

As part of a larger global and regional effort to halt and reverse land degradation, the European Union-funded project, Regreening Africa, aims to improve smallholder livelihoods, food security and resilience to climate change in eight African countries. More specifically, it seeks to reverse land degradation over at least one million hectares and benefit 500,000 households, while also catalyzing an even larger scaling effort to restore tens of millions of hectares of degraded land across Africa.

With an initial phase over 2017-2022, this unique research in development is led by World Agroforestry (ICRAF) and implemented by consortium of international non-governmental. The consortium includes World Vision, Catholic Relief Services, Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere and Oxfam, as well as national NGO Sahel Eco. The eight countries that it is active in are Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, Ghana, Mali, Niger and Senegal, with a light touch in Burkina Faso.

Regreening Africa focuses on the incorporation of trees into many land-use types, including croplands, communal lands and pastoral areas, with complementary soil and water conservation and soil improvement practices. It leverages science and research to track the impact of implementation and enhance concurrent social inclusion and livelihood-enhancing efforts as well as creating a sustainable enabling policy environment for land restoration at national and sub-national levels.

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