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Title: Forest youth perspectives on urbanization and community futures

What do youth living in forest communities think about cities and urban living, and how might their related knowledge, experiences, and perceptions shape how they view their futures and those of their communities? Researchers and practitioners need to consider such questions as they frame strategies in support of forest livelihoods, especially in a context of urbanization and significant rural out-migration (see Hecht et al. 2015; Hajjar et al. 2016). We present findings from ‘visioning’ workshops held with young people (ages ranged from 14 to 34) in forest communities in Canada, Mexico, Guatemala, Peru, Bolivia, Uganda, Tanzania, Nepal, and the Philippines. First, participants responded to a questionnaire about their urban experiences, and where they see themselves living and working in the future. Second, workshop activities captured participants’ ideas and perspectives related to rural-urban connections. In 'Keep-Toss-Create' participants listed and discussed things in their communities that they would like to keep, those they would like to see disappear, and those they wanted to see created. 'Push-Pull Matrix' was an opportunity for youth to discuss, debate, and decide upon the factors that determine the relative virtues of village vs. city life. 'What’s your Dream Job?’ asked participants about current jobs in their communities, what jobs they would like to do, and the values underpinning their choices. Across workshops, participants exhibited a detailed knowledge of urban life. While most valued cities for the employment and education opportunities they offered, participants also recognized multiple drawbacks, including crime, discrimination, and contaminated environments. In several places, while many young people saw their futures lie outside the home village, a significant minority did not. Indeed, few actively opposed rural life, with many valuing the environmental services, traditions and customs, security and “peacefulness” that their communities provided. Despite growing concern about the challenges that rapid urbanization can pose for community cohesion, our findings show that young people remain connected to their forests and their communities. These insights should help researchers and practitioners better target efforts and interventions in support of sustainable forest futures.