

# Enhancing decent work

*among older people engaged in nature-based solutions in Indonesia*



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## Key messages

- By definition, nature-based solutions (NbS) provide many environmental and social benefits for older people (e.g. greater food security). However, working in NbS is not without challenges.
- Older people in Central Java engage in informal NbS jobs, which are often undervalued and voluntary, lacking job security, adequate remuneration and social protection despite their contribution to the environment.
- NbS jobs are characterised by low occupational safety, because of poor infrastructure and physical demands of the work.
- While many older people aspire to advance their skills and do jobs other than manual work, they do not have opportunities for skills development.
- Ageism and age discrimination were found to be widespread, calling for an urgent need to address these issues within communities and to create initiatives empowering older people.
- Social dialogue is often lacking in rural areas. Older farmers' aspirations to change the conditions of sharecropping were found to be ignored.
- Ecolabelling standards, while promoting sustainability, can limit income for older individuals, particularly in the trade of non-timber forest products.
- Effective employment policies covering work in NbS in line with the current Indonesia Decent Work Country Programme must be designed and implemented to ensure that the rights of older people are respected.

## Introduction

In rural areas of low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), work in nature-based solutions (NbS), especially in the agriculture and forestry sectors, contributes to the green economy and has the potential to generate employment in the informal sector. NbS imply generating employment and wellbeing for humans as well as conserving and restoring ecosystems.<sup>1, 2</sup>



Over the last decade, Indonesia has developed notably, but many challenges persist. To accelerate this progress, the Government of Indonesia (GOI) has on numerous occasions reconfirmed its strong commitment to a green economy, including through mainstreaming low-carbon development and green economy in its National Mid-Term Development Plan.<sup>3</sup> This renewed commitment aligns the country with the global aspirations outlined in the Paris Agreement. In 2022, Indonesia strengthened its climate targets, increasing its greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction target from 29 per cent to 31.89 per cent unconditionally. Especially in the Forestry and Other Land Uses (FOLU) sector, Indonesia unconditionally pledged reductions of 17.4 per cent and an impressive 25.4 per cent with conditional support.<sup>4</sup>

In Indonesia, both slow-onset events and extreme-weather events have presented a major threat to people's livelihoods. The risk of floods and landslides has increased the need to restore degraded forests and land with poor topsoil fertility. In terms of slow-onset events, Indonesia has been grappling with extended periods of drought, which have had adverse effects on biodiversity and on the livelihoods of local communities. To address these challenges, the National Action Plan for Climate Change Adaptation, published in 2014, aims to build resilience against climate change, safeguarding favourable environmental conditions and fundamental human rights for future generations.<sup>5</sup> Within the national plan, the ecosystem resilience objective focuses on preservation of forest ecosystems, while the living system resilience objective focuses on strengthening livelihoods, covering social and cultural aspects. Agroforestry is a key sector, contributing to both ecosystem and living system resilience.

Environmental studies show that restoration through agroforestry can have multiple benefits, including improved soil fertility, biodiversity conservation, and seasonal crop productivity.<sup>6, 7, 8, 9</sup> The GOI has supported the existing land-use system in community forestry by providing tree seedlings, especially for short-term timber and fruit trees, and it has provided assistance for those who want to participate in ecolabelling in the timber trade. However, the government does not provide support for non-timber forest products (NTFP), which are the source of livelihood for many older people and their households.

Work in NbS, such as restoring water catchments or reforestation that increase agricultural productivity and reduce soil erosion, can reduce rural poverty.<sup>10</sup> However, current jobs and potential employment opportunities in NbS present serious challenges, as this work is frequently unpaid and undervalued. Jobs in NbS are linked with the informal economy, and thus individuals performing such jobs are not protected by labour laws and/or are not included in social protection schemes.<sup>11</sup>

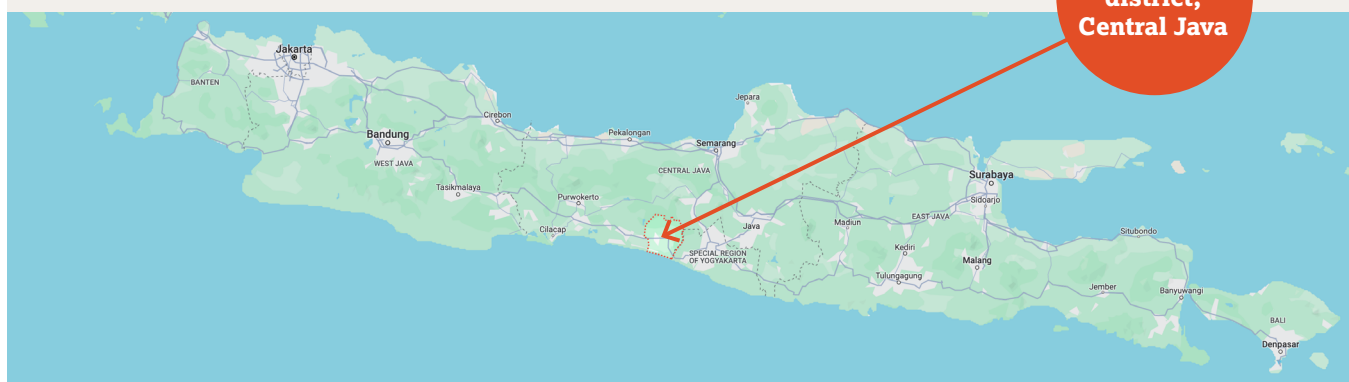
According to data from Indonesia's National Labour Force Survey (Sakernas) in August 2023, approximately 53.93 per cent of older people continue to work.<sup>12</sup> Recent evidence generated by SurveyMETER and HelpAge International shows that older women entrepreneurs often work long hours and face physical, respiratory and economic challenges, especially in rural areas. They often lack social insurance and retirement savings, and nearly half of them have not received government assistance in the last 12 months.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, Indonesia has committed to the decent work agenda, including through the currently implemented Decent Work Country Programme (2020–2025). The country has pledged to transition from an informal to a formal economy<sup>14</sup> to help reduce income inequality in rural areas where 52.82 per cent of older people work in agriculture, and approximately 85.25 per cent of them work in the informal sector.<sup>15</sup>

Given the above context, this study aims to generate new evidence drawing primarily on the experiences of older people. To attain its objectives, the study used a combination of research methods, including a desk review, qualitative interviews, focus group discussions and a collection of case studies. We hypothesised that older people's participation in NbS is gendered and is likely perceived as voluntary and undervalued.

### Location of the study

The study was conducted between December 2023 and January 2024 in the highland, lowland, and coastal areas of Purworejo district in Central Java. Purworejo is known to have a high proportion of older people, approximately 129,000 individuals or 16.51 per cent of the total population, compared to an average of 13.07 per cent in Central Java.<sup>16</sup> Twenty-one in-depth interviews were conducted with 14 older people and seven key informants at the managerial level in local organisations involved in NbS. All the participants gave their consent to be interviewed and recorded.

**Purworejo  
district,  
Central Java**



**Table 1: Key terms used in the briefing**

Key term	Definition
<b>Nature-based solutions (NbS)</b>	Nature-based solutions leverage nature and the power of healthy ecosystems to protect people, optimise infrastructure and safeguard a stable and biodiverse future. <sup>17</sup>
<b>Decent work</b>	Decent work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives. It involves opportunities for work that is productive, delivers a fair income, provide security in the workplace and social protection for all better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organise and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and the equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men. <sup>18</sup>
<b>Slow onset events</b>	Slow-onset events refer to the risks and impacts associated with increasing temperatures, desertification, loss of biodiversity, land and forest degradation, glacial retreat and related impacts, ocean acidification, sea level rise, and salinisation. <sup>19</sup>
<b>Extreme weather events</b>	An extreme weather event is a rare occurrence at a particular place and time of year, with unusual characteristics in terms of magnitude, location, timing, or extent. The characteristics of what is called extreme weather may vary from place to place in an absolute sense. <sup>20</sup>
<b>Ageism</b>	Ageism refers to the stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) directed towards people on the basis of their age. <sup>21</sup>

## Types of work in nature-based solutions

In the rural areas of Purworejo, older people have been connecting with nature for generations to sustain their livelihoods, which involves the extraction of non-timber forest products and agricultural production. Many of their livelihood activities have a positive effect on environmental sustainability through the preservation of soil fertility, the conservation of biodiversity, and by reducing air, soil and water pollution through waste management. Table 2 (below) provides a summary of different types of work in NbS performed by older people in Purworejo district.

**Table 2: Types of NbS jobs performed by older people in Purworejo district**

Village	NbS jobs	Description
Kedung Pucang, Bener, Purworejo	<i>Organic rice farming</i>	<p>Small-scale organic rice farming in Lesos has been evolving and actively participating in organic certification since 2021.<sup>22</sup> Utilising family labour, this method fosters biodiversity and integrates livestock co-production to enrich soil nutrients.<sup>23</sup></p> <p>The Agriculture Office has assisted the farmers' group in the certification process by acknowledging their persistent efforts to help soil nutrients recover from chemical hazards. Older farmers in the Barokah Tani Farmers' Group initiated this process, accompanied by a young farmer, introducing small-scale organic farming by applying manure and exchanging pure-strain rice varieties.</p>
Karangrejo, Loano, Purworejo	<i>Conservation initiatives in community forestry</i>	<p>Community forestry emphasises private ownership, which differentiates it from state-owned forest. Many older villagers are involved in community forestry by using forest ecosystem services, preserving timber, and ensuring there is enough water for trees. There are 44 older men involved in the community forest group, but older women do not participate in such activities.</p>
Tanjungrejo, Ngombol, Purworejo	<i>Waste management through the community-based waste bank</i>	<p>The waste bank in the village not only collects and manages waste from local sources but also from neighbouring villages to supplement their income.<sup>24</sup> The older people were involved in depositing the sorted waste and receiving payment for it. There were 21 older people involved in depositing the sorted waste: 12 older women and nine older men.</p>
Gedangan, Purwodadi, Purworejo	<i>Mitigation and adaptation to climate change through community mangrove conservation and ecotourism</i>	<p>In Gedangan village, there are two community-based groups, namely the community-based tourism awareness group and the Demang Gede farmers' group. The government's attention to community mangrove became more intense as the government started to involve the villagers in various tourism management training programmes.<sup>25</sup> There are 11 older men involved in these two groups; some are involved in tourism, and some are involved in mangrove planting.</p>





Yainur Pratomo

## Decent work deficits in NbS

Rural areas, as reported by the International Labor Organization (ILO), have suffered from decent work deficits, including inadequate earnings, often far below the national minimum wage, due to factors such as seasonal and irregular work, uncompensated family labour, and low remuneration in agriculture.<sup>26, 27</sup>

NbS should help address different social and economic challenges, and improve livelihoods and food security, social capital and environmental sustainability. Furthermore, they have the potential to generate significant employment opportunities in rural areas for older people, capitalising on their connection with nature. However, it should be recognised that in the short to medium term, NbS can pose risks to jobs and livelihoods. Several challenges exist to ensure that employment created in NbS can provide decent work.

The study identified that most work in NbS is conducted voluntarily and is often seen as community service, seasonal, and/or temporary. This kind of work specifically serves the agriculture and forestry sectors and predominantly depends on manual labour, which is informal and either unpaid or characterised by very low remuneration.

The study identifies two main challenges confronting older workers, which are an absence of employment policies and ageism within the workforce. Existing jobs in NbS have yet to address the decent work deficit. Below, we discuss specific findings related to the challenges of decent work in the study area.

### Lack of remuneration, low income and income insecurity

As previously stated, older people in Purworejo participate in NbS jobs that are either undervalued or voluntary. The work takes place in community forests and on certified organic farms. Work in NbS offers little reward for small or landless farmers. Also, mangrove conservation is expected to be voluntary, with older women participating as part of their unpaid domestic responsibilities.

In Bener, a farmers' group named Barokah Tani started small-scale organic rice farming in 2016. Initially, the government provided support to the group by supplying liquid organic fertilizers, enabling them to subsequently utilize manure from their livestock. It took four years until the farmers' group achieved organic certification as part of the provincial government programme in Central Java.<sup>28</sup> The use of organic certification was expected to increase the price of agricultural products. However, land tenure issues have hindered the farmers' ability to generate any benefit from organic certification. This yield was only enough for their own consumption and therefore they were forced to work at multiple informal jobs to survive.

*“Most of the older farmers involved in organic farming are sharecroppers and landless. So they only receive half of their total yields for their consumption; the amount of organic rice for the commodities was so limited...The price is not worth it because we have to sort out the whole grains of rice, which takes two hours per kilogram of rice for 20 thousand rupiahs (around US\$1.2).”*

Key informant

*“To sell in the organic market, the rice must be whole grain to get 20,000 rupiahs per kilogram...Every harvest season, we usually harvest three quintals that are supposed to be divided equally among my siblings. So, I only received 1.5 quintals, or three sacks (about 60 kilograms), for farming production in 25 ubin (350 square meters). That means I earn just about 780 thousand rupiahs (around US\$50) from organic farming every season.”*

Male, 68 years old, study participant

The decent work deficits were also observed in the community forest of Loano, Purworejo.

In addition to the undervaluation of employment in NbS, the study revealed that some NbS practices were undertaken voluntarily because these as activities are seen as social services rather than work. For instance, community-based waste banks involve older family members, particularly females collecting waste that is sold to the waste bank and earns them a small amount of money. The bank was initiated by a group of ten women, part of the Family Welfare Empowerment (PKK), who persuaded ten other women in the neighbourhood groups (*dasawisma*) to collect and sort household waste.



*“Household waste money can be used as savings (in the waste bank) and later used to pay land tax. Yes, the amount is only enough for tax because I usually receive about 40,000 rupiahs (US\$2.5) a year. The highest reward from it is 300,000 rupiahs (US\$ 9) a year.”*

Male, 70 years old, study participant



Mangrove conservation has also been carried out voluntarily. The initiative received community-based investment from household contributions and financial support from the village budget. At the start, the community-based mangrove initiative appeared to offer potential as a viable business opportunity because during the peak holiday season, the tourist destination could earn 4–5 million (around US\$247–309). However, the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted mangrove-planting projects and they have only recently begun to recover. Sadly, as a result of past mismanagement, the mangrove ecotourism business has failed to compensate the community for their contributions and also failed to pay workers.

*“Mangrove tourism does have environmental benefits, because among mangroves, marine biota such as crabs, shrimps and fish will be abundant. But as for wages, no one pays me, nothing! It’s just as if I worked in a search and rescue team; I don’t get paid, I spend money. But I’m happy.”*

Male, 60 years old, study participant



Ciptaningrat Larasiti

### Lack of social protection

In its Decent Work Country Programme 2020-2025, Indonesia has committed to include informal workers in the social protection programme.<sup>29</sup> Those who are categorised as vulnerable older people are also included in non-contributory social protection programmes such as non-cash food subsidies (BPNT) and conditional cash transfer programmes (PKH-Lansia), and contributory social insurance such as assistance for national health insurance (BPJS-PBI).<sup>30</sup> However, the participation of older people in social protection programmes is uneven. In addition, social protection is often perceived as charity.

*“Some older people are beneficiaries of PKH-Lansia and BPNT. However, there is no special attention to persons involved in the forestry sector... My wife always donates 5 kilos of rice, sugar and tea to 90 elderly people every Eid.”*

Key informant in the community forest, head of a village



Paolo Nicotello/Unsplash

The lack of comprehensive social protection and health insurance programmes supporting older people who participate in NbS has serious consequences. Due to their inability to access healthcare, some older people who participate in BPJS-PBI are either unable to receive treatment at all or had no choice but to discontinue their treatment. Participants in the community forest who are not enrolled in PKH-Lansia or BPNT highlighted their difficulties in accessing these schemes:

*“Previously, I was enrolled in KIS, also referred to as BPJS-PBI. However, it only worked for a few years. Seven years ago, I underwent cataract surgery on my left eye using the KIS system. Regrettably, the card was no longer valid during the second cataract medical checkup. I was asked to consult with the BPJS office. Despite my desire to undergo another cataract examination for my right eye, I found that my BPJS card had expired. I encountered difficulty in scheduling an eye checkup with BPJS.”*

Male, 84 years old, study participant

*“I did not receive any assistance from the government, nothing at all.”*

Female, 70 years old, study participant involved in the waste bank

In terms of social insurance related to employment (BPJS-Ketenagakerjaan), most farmers admitted to not being covered by it even though the participation of rural and informal workers in BPJS-Ketenagakerjaan had already been promoted as part of the Decent Works Country programme in Indonesia:

*“I don’t have old-age insurance (part of BPJS-Ketenagakerjaan). So, if I’m sick and not working in the future, I will have to depend on my children’s care.”*

Male, 70 years old, study participant

### Poor occupational safety

In principle, organic farming should be a good example of ensuring occupational safety, by reducing exposure to hazardous agrochemical inputs. However, the results of this study show that older people have been exposed to various occupational safety risks when performing jobs in NbS. First, older farmers encountered physical challenges due to the intensive labour in agriculture, including lifting heavy loads or bending to transplant rice seeds, which can lead to fatigue and increased risk of accidents. When there was a shortage of younger workers, certain agricultural tasks (e.g. transplantation and hoeing) were delegated to older farmers, who worked from 7 am to 4 pm, engaged in demanding physical labour.

*“Even if I fall down in the rice fields or on the slippery road, I will still carry on farming. What else can I do? My job is to be a farmer. If I don’t die, I will still be working because I would never ask my children for help.”*

Male, 71 years old



Second, the lack of road infrastructure and disaster preparedness in the highlands with community forests exposes older people to greater risks. Improving the road infrastructure within the community forest is essential, especially for older people who rely on motorcycles and walking for daily transportation. In the coastal areas, mangrove ecosystems with deep mud and sharp snail shells are also challenging for older people to work in mangrove conservation.

*“It is difficult for older women to participate in planting mangroves because the soil is muddy up to their knees. For myself, as long as I don’t bend over for too long to plant mangroves, I am fine. I cannot stand normally since I had an accident falling from a coconut tree... Besides many sharp shells that can tear our feet in the mud, dangerous animals like snakes and wasps also appear. In this condition, I only wear regular shoes. They are supposed to be boots, but I don’t have any.”*

Male, 60 years old, study participant

## CASE STUDY

### Struggles with occupational safety in organic farming

Mbah Ponito (male, 71 years old) expressed his satisfaction with conducting organic farming and the autonomy to be self-sufficient in manure production and to have pure rice seedlings. The rest of the agricultural work, like seedlings and transplanting pure rice seeds, was also conducted by older labourers. Mbah Ponito managed to strike a balance between drudgery and satisfaction; he was satisfied to transplant the rice seeds with his own hands. When planting, he works daily from 07.00 to 16.00. He observed the practice of covering the soil with an old cloth before sowing the seeds, making it easy to transplant the rice seedlings. He also learned how to reduce his exposure to agrochemicals through the use of water hyacinth as an irrigation water filter and barrier plants as a filter for pesticides. However, in regard to occupational safety, the working conditions around his rice farms are vulnerable. The road to the rice fields is an unpaved, dirt path as narrow as an irrigation channel. It is difficult for bicycles, such as Mbah Ponito uses, to pass without falling. He says:



Yainur Pratomo

*“The road to the rice fields is difficult. I have fallen twice from my bike. That’s very often. The road is only as big as a small irrigation ditch, so when I ride my bicycle, I don’t know what to do. I don’t dare to ride it.”*



Ciptaningrat Larasiti

### Lack of social dialogue

Another challenge relates to the lack of social dialogue that is expected to foster participatory processes and contribute to inclusive policymaking. The study found that older farmers have difficulties communicating their concerns on unequal sharecropping in the village meetings. The village government continues to disregard the aspirations of older farmers in the village to change the share distribution in the sharecropping system.

*“The head of the village kept silent. He did nothing and did not respond to our demands. Maybe he also objected because, in mertelu (a three-quarters share), the landowner only gets one-third and the labourers get two-thirds.”*

Older farmer, Male, 71 years old

Village Law No. 6 of 2014 mandated the village government to promote public participation in village meetings and give more autonomy in allocating the village budget. However, some challenges related to excluding marginalized groups and their interests persisted. Annual village meetings that are aimed at discussing village development priorities are only attended by village officials and the heads of neighbourhoods. Some aspirations from other villagers are assumed to be deliberated by village officials in the village meetings.

*“Grassroots (orang biasa) will not join the village meeting in the village hall. If they have concerns, they will be conveyed by the village officials at the meeting. There is no farmers’ group representative at the village meeting, as it is only attended by village government officials and the village heads.”*

Key informant, also head of a farming group

Despite the village law recognising the role of the community in the decision-making process, more representatives from the farmers’ group still needed to be present at such meetings. On the other hand, an older farmer who never attended a village meeting hoped that the farmers’ group representative could convey their aspirations in the village meetings. He stated:

*“I have never participated in village or hamlet meetings. If I have some concerns, I will just ask the head of the farmers’ group to represent me.”*

Male, 68 years old

## Ageism and lack of opportunities for skills development

Ageism refers to the stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) directed towards people on the basis of their age.<sup>31</sup> Ageism often manifests itself in the workplace through various discriminatory practices and attitudes towards older people. Older workers may face attitudes that they are less productive, adaptable, or technologically savvy than their younger counterparts. They may be excluded from training opportunities or promotions and in many instances are forced into early retirement. Older people shared with us their experiences of stigma and discrimination regarding the types of work they were permitted to undertake.

### CASE STUDY

#### Older women's contribution to clean environment and lack of skills development opportunities

In Tanjungrejo, Ngombol, waste issues and the long drought significantly affected rice production. Older female farmers complained about carelessly discarded waste causing pollution and blocking irrigation channels that was suspected to come from neighbourhood villages. Initially, the local government approached the Family Welfare Empowerment and encouraged the active participation of older women to facilitate the dissemination of waste management and further provide them with the basic infrastructure of a waste bank. Although the women successfully managed their own waste, the community around them was still carelessly throwing plastic trash away.

Older women expressed satisfaction with their voluntary involvement in collecting and sorting household waste and sending it to a waste bank. They shared that they enjoyed developing new skills in waste management and also that it was a novelty. They sorted various types of plastic or paper-based garbage before washing and drying plastic trash and finally sending it to the waste bank. Participation in waste banks could help address waste issues.

Despite their motivation to develop skills in waste management, older participants tend to be prevented from being involved in administrative roles. They face a stigma about being less educated and less capable than their younger peers in the waste bank.

*Right: Older women are eager to develop new skills but are often prevented.*



Titis Puteri Ambarwati



Despite older people's capacity to propose innovations in nature-based activities, they lack opportunities to develop their skills and are frequently perceived as being subservient and lacking education. Older people often experienced discrimination in accessing better work opportunities, such as administrative roles. In the waste bank, older people also encountered stigma associated with their perceived diminished strength because of their age compared with their younger peers.

A key informant from the waste collection sector commented on ageism:

***“Older people also faced a stigma about being less capable due to their aging body than their younger peers in the waste bank.”***

Key informant

Ageist attitudes also appeared in the testimony of other key informants:

***“Our older farmers are so subservient (manut-manut) because they are uneducated.”***

Key informant

***“The younger peers care about waste issues more than their seniors. Just to take care of their bodies, older people complain of being tired; they say that their legs hurt and it is hard to walk. That's why we gather younger ones (to manage the waste bank).”***

Key informant

Due to the prejudice older people experience, they often harbour low self-esteem and in the case of the key informants in the project, tend to view themselves as subservient and uneducated, resulting in a reduced capacity to develop their skills. Ageism acts as a significant barrier to older people's participation and perpetuates negative societal perceptions about what older people can and can't do in relation to work. The absence of policies to support decent work, coupled with ageist perceptions, undermine older people's opportunities to participate in training opportunities, to advance their skills, to fulfil their potential and to improve their livelihoods.



YAKKUM Emergency Unit

An older woman who participated in the waste bank said:

***“I was just a fool; I could only do what I was told. When I was told to collect plastic, I just followed.”***

Female, 70 years old



Fita Herawati

### Impacts of the ecolabelling scheme

Sustainable business contributes to a healthy environment and an efficient social welfare system, which are increasingly recognised as key issues by consumers.<sup>32</sup> Ecolabel certification is a pro-environmental programme targeted at companies with the aim of certifying their products with the ecolabel logo as a sign of environmental awareness and adhering to environmental sustainability standards.<sup>33</sup> Ecolabelling in the forestry sector was mandated through the Ministry of Forestry Decree in 2002 which focuses on environmentally friendly production and sustainable forest management.

Ecolabelling standards may contribute to a better income for older people. However, they also often hinder older people's potential to secure livelihoods through petty trading of non-timber forest products (NTFP). NTFP, such as bamboo or seasonal crops, have often provided a source of regular income for older people, but since the ecolabelling scheme does not cover NTFP, older people have difficulty gaining sufficient income from NTFP.

In Karangrejo, Purworejo, community forests have been supported as part of Indonesia's timber legality assurance system or the SVLK (Sistem Verifikasi Legalitas Kayu), leading to an increased demand for timber. The Association of Community Forest Farmers (APHR) oversees the ecolabelling scheme, which operates under the supervision of a logging corporation. APHR collaborates with the private sector to obtain the Indonesian Legal Wood and the Forest Stewardship Council license, potentially expanding the export market. The scheme aims to influence village leaders and farmers' groups to issue regulations on the selective felling of trees up to 60 cm in diameter. However, there is a risk that older people can be excluded by this policy because traditionally they tend to benefit financially from non-timber forest products instead of timber forest products. In addition, the intensive labour in the harvesting and post-harvesting process of both timber forest products (TFP) and NTFP is not proportional to the income gained.

An older farmer said:

***“The fruit and leaves of the Melinjo trees (which is not covered by the ecolabelling standard) are no longer sold. Farmers do not harvest the fruit, leaving it to rot. Even if farmers want to pay harvesting workers, the price of the melinjo harvest cannot cover their pay. Lastly, I sold the melinjo fruit two years ago at the lowest price, only 1000 rupiahs per kilogram. Not 10,000 rupiahs (around US\$0.6), but 1000 rupiahs! (around US\$0.06) That's why, until now, there has been no demand for melinjo fruit in the local market. In the end, no one wants to harvest it.”***

Male, 76 years old

## Conclusion and recommendations

NbS are increasingly recognised as a key component of the global effort to achieve the goals of the Rio Conventions, the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the Sustainable Development Goals. NbS implementation embedded in a just transition framework can leverage their potential as a driver for decent work, creating tangible added value, enhancing resilience, and supporting countries in achieving their national targets.

This study highlighted the contribution that older people can make to nature conservation as well as climate change mitigation and adaptation responses. The study also highlighted significant decent work deficits that older people face working in NbS. To use NbS's potential as a channel for just transition and advancing the decent work agenda, a number of key policy and programmatic measures are required. These include:

### **1. Ensure adequate remuneration for NbS jobs performed by older people through the adoption of a minimum wage.**

The Industry, Transmigration, and Manpower Office should raise awareness (e.g. through public campaigns) about minimum wage requirements among informal-sector workers and employers. The Governor of Central Java established the provincial minimum wage following the Government Regulation Number 78 of 2015 (amended in 2023), which the various districts within the province then adopted. As of 2024, the provincial minimum wage is 2,036,947 rupiahs (US\$128) per month. Ensuring minimum wage compliance is more challenging in rural areas, so the village government should also provide legal assistance to support informal workers who earn less than the minimum wage.

### **2. Ensure adequate remuneration for NbS jobs performed by older people by developing cooperatives with their potential role as community-based managers of ecolabelling standards.**

The Cooperative and Small Entrepreneurship Affair Office at the district level, as mandated by Cooperative Law No. 25 of 1992, facilitates farmers' groups to develop cooperatives as social businesses with distribution of shares decided by members. The Cooperative Office can help farmers' groups to study the cooperative system from existing cooperatives, such as the Wana Lestari Menoreh Cooperative (a community logging cooperative) in Kulon Progo, Yogyakarta. The cooperative can guarantee micro-credit provision with tree collateral (an approach where trees – or tree-derived products or services – serve as part of the security necessary for loans) for members who need urgent funds, and it can provide better-priced markets for non-timber products such as dried rhizomes and bamboo.

### **3. The existing social protection programme, such as a conditional cash transfer programme (PKH-Lansia) and non-cash food subsidies (BPNT) should be inclusive.**

In response to the uneven participation of older people in PKH-Lansia and BPNT, the Ministry of Social Affairs should update the database of PKH-Lansia and BPNT recipients by including those who are working in NbS and informal jobs in rural areas. This recommendation aligns with the universal social pensions that have already been implemented in Aceh Province despite the fiscal constraints of the central government.<sup>34</sup> In following this path, Central Java Province should also provide a budget for a universal social pension. Village government can also take a role in optimising community-based health cadres to foster understanding amongst older people in regard to their right to a social pension.

### **4. The Ministry of Health should promote and ensure universal health coverage for older people.**

The Social Insurance Administration Organisation (BPJS) needs to ensure full enrollment of older people working in NbS and other informal jobs in the non-contributory national health insurance system (BPJS-PBI). This recommendation aligns with SDG target number 3.8 – to achieve universal health coverage. As mandated through Presidential Regulation Number 64/2020, the contributions of PBI participants are borne by the government through the APBN (State Revenue and Expenditure Budget) and local governments through the APBD (Regional Revenue and Expenditure Budget). In this context, local government, through the health office, could intervene in the participation of senior citizens who work in NbS and informal jobs to access BPJS-PBI. BPJS, in coordination with the health office, could also use community-based health cadres (*Posyandu*) to disseminate information on older people's rights to BPJS-PBI services and assist those who are not yet enrolled.



**5. In ensuring occupational safety for informal NbS workers in rural areas, the village government should allocate funds to enroll older workers in employment-related social insurance schemes (BPJS Ketenagakerjaan).**

BPJS Ketenagakerjaan aims to reach 70 million rural participants who work in the informal sector by 2026 through the *Worry-Free Work (Kerja Keras Bebas Cemas)* programme, offering accessible registration and affordable contribution payments. The village government should cover the contributions of BPJS Ketenagakerjaan, starting at 16,800 rupiahs per month (around US\$1), through the village fund. Village Law No. 6 of 2014 guarantees the village government autonomy to allocate village funds. There is also a need for community leaders' initiatives to disseminate information about the benefits of BPJS-Ketenagakerjaan in the informal sector.

**6. Promote an inclusive village budget sensitive to older people's needs to ensure the occupational safety of those working in nature.**

The village budget should prioritise and promote an age-friendly infrastructure and a working environment designed for older workers. In this context, the village government should also promote intergenerational self-help groups (ISHGs) to help older people tackle the existing infrastructure barriers.

**7. Ensure the compliance of an active labour market policy for developing the skills of older people in NbS.**

Government Regulation Number 43 of 2004, Improving the Social Welfare of Older People, includes employment and vocational training programmes. This regulation is also related to the Active Labour Market Policy (ALMP), allowing older workers to access training and employers to receive incentives for hiring and retaining older workers. The existing vocational training programme includes online upskilling training (known as *Kartu Prakerja*), which aims to retrain one million unemployed and low-income adults aged 18–64. Younger family members could assist older members in registering their participation online, leading them to join specific programmes and receiving a training budget of 3.5 million rupiahs (US\$245) to choose relevant courses on digital platforms. Upon completing the training, participants receive a certificate and will likely be encouraged to find better employment.

**8. The Ministry of Manpower, National Population and Family Planning Board and the Ministry of Health should support campaigns against age discrimination and the rights of older workers in rural areas.**

The UN Decade of Healthy Ageing, spanning from 2021 to 2030, promotes healthy ageing and calls on governments and other stakeholders to address ageism through policy and legislative changes, educational activities and by fostering intergenerational interaction. Anti-ageism campaigns are another useful tool to change how we think, feel and act towards older people. Campaigns should be developed that challenge age discrimination and promote the rights of older people so they can continue working and developing their skills which will allow them to work in NbS. Another potential objective of any campaign would be to promote incentives for employers that currently practice strict labour market regulations to be more open in hiring and retaining older workers.

**9. Intergenerational collaboration related to work in NbS should be strengthened.**

Intergenerational clubs are needed to support older people's empowerment in NbS jobs. The existing intergenerational club, officially promoted by the National Population and Family Planning Agency (BKKBN), is known as the Older People Family Club (Bina Keluarga Lansia). BKKBN developed an intergenerational club based on the membership of older people and their younger family caregivers. Some intergenerational clubs of BKL manage community-based microcredits (*arisan*) with seed funds from BKKBN budgets or other government stakeholders. Some also conduct traditional performing arts and other activities focusing on intergenerational communication and knowledge sharing. One of the significant benefits of an intergenerational club is that younger members of the club can digitalise information about ecosystem services and help older people to access online markets.

**10. Inclusive social-dialogue and decision-making processes should be ensured, addressing inequalities in the sharecropping system.**

The study found that village meetings have not been able to address the structural inequalities that older people have encountered. Yet village law requires village planning and budgeting meetings that involve community representatives, including farmers, fishermen, women's groups and marginalized people. Academic and/or civil-society institutions should assess these inclusive social meeting requirements in the village law, since the poor older people working in agriculture and forestry often do not benefit from it. Government stakeholders are called upon, not only to assist with the technical issues of organic farming and other types of NbS jobs, but also to address the unequal distribution of shares in tenancy-sharecropping farming.



Devi Puspita Amatha Yahya/Unsplash

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**HelpAge International  
is a global network of  
organisations promoting  
the right of all older people  
to lead dignified, healthy  
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