



Youth-led solutions for inclusive and resilient food systems: paving the path to SDG 2 at the 2024 Summit of the Future

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This policy paper presents insights and recommendations collected through consultations with the Better Learning Better Innovation (BIBO) Network, led by youth innovators and supported by UNESCO IESALC, to contribute to the 2024 United Nations Summit of the Future. Held on [June 3](#), [June 17](#), and [July 15](#), these consultations gathered youth from all five UNESCO regions –Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Arab States, Europe and North America, and Latin America and the Caribbean- ensuring a diverse and inclusive process.

The paper highlights the role of youth in achieving SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) by harnessing their energy, innovation, and leadership for transformative action. Empowering young people to drive efforts toward a sustainable and resilient future aligns with the Summit's goal of shaping a more inclusive and forward-looking global agenda.

As part of a broader initiative by the BIBO Young Innovators Network, this paper also connects with reviews of SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). Together, these papers present a comprehensive youth-led vision to inform and support the outcomes of the 2024 Summit of the Future, advancing progress across the Sustainable Development Goals.

Introduction

As the world grapples with interconnected crises, the goal of achieving Zero Hunger (SDG 2) has never been more urgent (United Nations, 2015). Despite the historic strides in reducing hunger and malnutrition, progress has stalled and, in many regions, it has even reversed. While a cornerstone of development, the global food system faces significant challenges, including climate change, economic instability, and

persistent inequalities that disproportionately affect the most vulnerable populations—small-scale producers, women, and youth.

Achieving SDG 2 by 2030 requires an inclusive, coordinated approach recognising the critical role of diverse stakeholders, particularly young people, in driving transformative change. As current and future leaders, youth bring innovative ideas and energy vital for building resilient, equitable agrifood systems. Empowering young people, ensuring their voices are included in decision-making, and providing them with resources and opportunities will unlock the full potential of global food systems to eradicate hunger. This policy brief highlights the importance of inclusive governance, targeted investments, and multisectoral partnerships in fostering collaboration and engaging marginalised groups to transform agrifood systems and build a sustainable, hunger-free future.

Background

The 2023 State of Food and Nutrition Security in the World Report highlights that 691 million and 783 million (United Nations, 2023) people faced chronic hunger in 2022, representing 9.2 per cent of the global population (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2023). This marks a stark increase from 2019, when 7.9 per cent of people were affected. The report further projects that by 2030, nearly 600 million individuals will remain chronically undernourished, far from the Zero Hunger target. Additionally, alarming statistics reveal that in 2022, approximately 148.1 million children under five years of age were stunted, 45 million were wasted, and 37 million were overweight, indicating severe challenges in achieving nutritional security for all (United Nations, n.d; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2023).

Compounding these issues is the uneven global recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, which has left many regions, particularly the poorest and most vulnerable, lagging (Laborde Debuquet & Martin, 2018). The war in Ukraine, along with surging food, fertiliser, and fuel prices, has further eroded income gains and hindered access to food, especially among households that spend a disproportionate share of their income on food. The effects of these crises are most pronounced in regions such as Western Asia, the Caribbean, and Africa, where hunger continues to rise. At the same time, food security has improved in parts of Asia and Latin America (United Nations, 2023).

Declining investments in agriculture are further deepening the global food crisis. Government spending on agriculture has decreased relative to its contribution to GDP, dropping from 0.50 in 2015 to 0.45 in 2021 across all regions except North America and Europe. While some positive developments have been made, such as reducing agricultural export subsidies following the 2015 WTO ministerial decision, these gains cannot counterbalance the broader decline in support for sustainable agriculture (World Food Policy Center, 2020).

Climate change and conflicts are exacerbating the situation, straining food production and the affordability of nutritious food (Kreidenweis et al., 2016; Leclère et al., 2014). Between 2015 and 2021, aid to

agriculture in developing countries initially increased but fell sharply by 15 per cent in 2021, returning to pre-pandemic levels. This reduction in aid and ongoing environmental degradation from agrifood systems underscore the urgent need for a transition towards more sustainable, resilient, and inclusive food systems (Mogollon et al., 2018).

Finally, it is imperative to recognise the interlinkages between agrifood systems and other SDGs. Agriculture contributes significantly to global greenhouse gas emissions, biodiversity loss, and freshwater use while also being the primary employment sector for women in low-income countries (Strzepek & Boehlert, 2010). Yet, agricultural households are disproportionately represented among those living in extreme poverty, highlighting the need for more equitable and sustainable food systems.

In conclusion, achieving SDG 2 by 2030 requires a concerted global effort to address these interlinked challenges. This will necessitate increased agricultural investment, targeted support for vulnerable populations, and a transformative approach to food systems prioritising sustainability, equity, and resilience.

Recommendations and calls to action.

1. **Empower small-scale producers, youth, and vulnerable groups:** Governments should implement policies that secure land rights and improve access to resources, financing, and markets for small-scale producers, particularly women, youth, and indigenous peoples. Young people should actively participate in decision-making processes and leadership roles to drive innovation, enhance resilience, and increase productivity. Additionally, targeted climate finance should be directed toward youth-led agrifood initiatives that promote sustainable practices and community resilience.
2. **Integrate climate action with agrifood systems, leveraging youth innovation:** Stakeholders must adopt policies that align climate action with food security, emphasising sustainable agricultural practices like agroecology. Governments should incentivise practices that reduce fossil fuel dependency and promote renewable alternatives. Youth-led projects and innovations should be supported and scaled, recognising the unique contributions of young people in developing climate-smart solutions that enhance agrifood system resilience and biodiversity conservation.
3. **Promote gender equality in agrifood systems, focusing on young women and girls:** Addressing gender disparities is crucial for enhancing productivity and reducing hunger. Policies should focus on closing the asset and wage gaps in agriculture, challenging discriminatory norms, and empowering women, especially young women, through targeted support and leadership opportunities. By encouraging youth participation in gender-focused agricultural programs, we not only boost overall productivity and food security but also foster a more inclusive agrifood system that values and supports the contributions of all genders.

4. **Enhance data-driven decision-making involving youth participation:** Invest in developing and using reliable, disaggregated data to monitor and assess the impact of policies on food security and nutrition. Young people should be engaged in data collection, analysis (Van Wijk, 2014), and dissemination processes to ensure that youth perspectives are integrated into policy decisions. To reduce food insecurity and malnutrition, stakeholders should support mechanisms that improve market transparency and enable informed policy decisions, particularly during crises.
5. **Strengthen multisectoral governance and partnerships, empowering youth voices:** Establish and reinforce multisectoral governance structures that facilitate collaboration across sectors and stakeholders, including civil society, the private sector, local communities, and youth organisations. This approach should prioritise aligning policies across the agrifood supply chain, ensuring sustainable practices, reducing post-harvest losses, and enhancing food safety. Youth must be recognised as key stakeholders in these governance structures, as their active participation is essential in shaping and implementing strategies to achieve Zero Hunger, particularly in conflict-affected and vulnerable regions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, youth are pivotal in shaping inclusive and resilient food systems, essential to achieving SDG 2 by 2030. Their innovative ideas, energy, and commitment to sustainability can drive transformative change across global food systems. As the world continues to face interconnected crises, from climate change to food insecurity, it is imperative to empower young people by involving them in decision-making processes, providing necessary resources, and fostering their leadership in agrifood systems. The recommendations outlined in this policy paper underscore the need for multisectoral collaboration, targeted investments, and gender equality, all while recognizing youth as critical agents of change. By acting on these strategies, we can build a future that not only eradicates hunger but also promotes sustainability, equity, and resilience for all. The 2024 Summit of the Future offers a pivotal opportunity to prioritize youth-led solutions and ensure their contributions are at the forefront of global efforts toward Zero Hunger (Parson & Fisher-Vanden, 1997).

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