



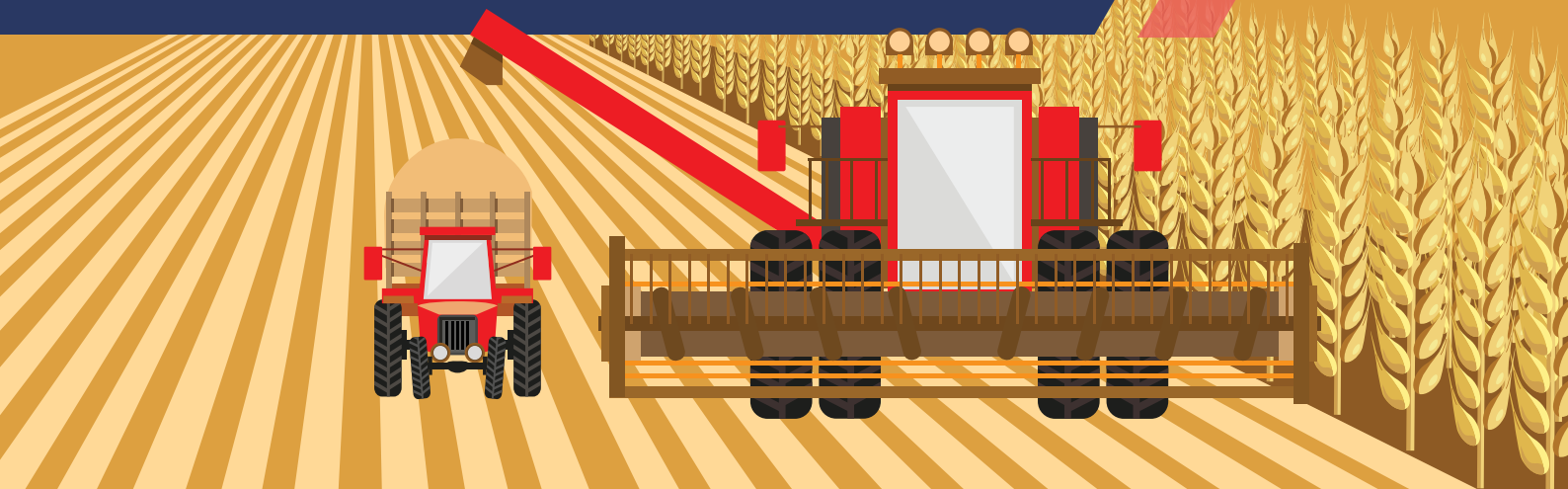
HEALTHY VOICES
youth driving change

WORLD OBESITY



Diet and Food Systems for Health, Climate and Planet

Listening to and supporting youth voices





Young people are working at the forefront of the climate, health, and food agenda. To capitalise on the experience and expertise of youth, World Obesity Federation convened a workshop with young people to help develop their priorities based on the **Health and Climate Network (HCN)**'s recommendations and to discuss opportunities to support youth voices. This brief summarises the discussions and provides recommendations for how climate, health, and food actors can work more effectively with youth. It has been written to support policymakers, civil society organisations (CSOs), and other stakeholders.



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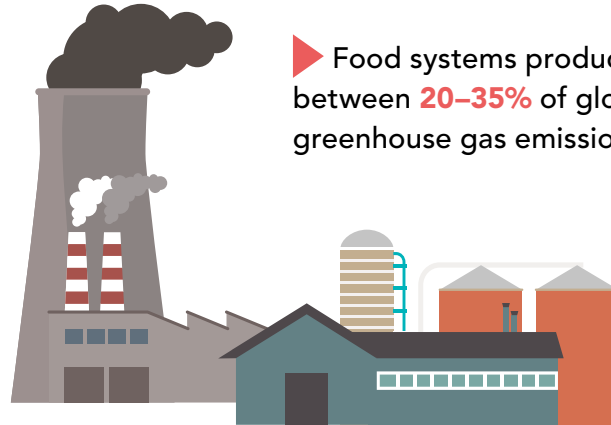
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Introduction

Current food systems are driving poor diets, negatively impacting people's health, and damaging the environment in multiple ways¹:



▶ Poor diet is now the leading driver of noncommunicable diseases worldwide; by 2030, **one billion** people will be living with obesity.²



▶ Food systems produce between **20–35%** of global greenhouse gas emissions.

▶ Malnutrition, including undernutrition, nutritional deficiencies, and obesity, could cost society up to **\$3.5 trillion** per year.

▶ Current methods of intensive livestock farming are increasing the risk of **drug-resistant infections** (AMR).



▶ Current farming and food practices are increasing the risk of **zoonotic diseases** which pass from animals to humans, such as Avian Influenza (bird flu) and coronavirus (COVID-19).

By changing what we eat and how we grow, harvest, and transport our food, we can reduce carbon footprints and premature deaths worldwide. The Lancet Commission report on the [Global Syndemic of obesity, undernutrition, and climate change](#) describes how the complex interactions between climate, health, and food systems require multi-sector working, and systems-based solutions. The Commission also highlights the role of civil society in catalysing the actions needed.

Around the world, young people in civil society are at the forefront of the climate, health, and food agenda.

Examples of youth action on climate, health, and food

1. Climate

The Official Youth Constituency of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) hosts the UN Climate Change Conference of Youth (COY) to build youth capacities to engage in policy and advocacy at the Conference of the Parties (COP). In 2021, the event gathered changemakers from 140+ countries to engage in skill-building workshops and to finalise a **Global Youth Statement**. The document has received approximately 47,479 signatures, conveying support for its key demands. One demand focused on health, urging health agencies and national healthcare systems to strengthen frameworks, policies, as well as initiatives for climate-resilient, sustainable, evidence-based, and people-centred healthcare systems. Young people also targeted leaders with **letters**, and campaigned for the **Food@COP** to be as climate-friendly and healthy as possible.

2. Health

The **CO-CREATE project** brings together young people and researchers to co-create policy ideas that hold promise to halt the rise in adolescent obesity. By focusing on upstream factors and systems change the project aims to promote a healthier food and physical activity environment. Youth alliances were established across 6 countries, where youth received training, aligned on advocacy priorities before discussing these with policymakers and decision-makers through

Dialogue Fora. The **CO-CREATE Youth Declaration Task Force** was born in 2020 from 8 dedicated advocates across Europe, who drafted a declaration highlighting youth call-to-actions.

3. Food

The **Act4Food Act4Change** campaign is a youth-led movement bringing together young people from around the world to contribute to systems change to provide everyone with access to safe, affordable, and nutritious diets. Launched in 2021, the campaign has mobilised 30 youth leaders across 26 countries who have participated in events at the national, regional, and global level rallying for support. A consultation process was held, voicing the priorities of 100,000+ young people who want business and governments to transform our current food systems. **The global priority Actions 4 Change** have been launched and will serve as an advocacy tool for youth to hold them accountable for their actions. The campaign is supported by the Food Foundation and The Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN). Youth leaders are also working in their own capacities with local communities in countries most affected by malnutrition. An example of this is Tailored Food, a social enterprise founded by **Taylor Quinn** in 2019 to advance progress on achieving Zero Hunger by 2030. Tailored Food recently won the One Young World award.

Health and Climate Network Recommendations on Diet and Food Systems for Health, Climate, and Planet:

- 1** Promote access to sustainable, affordable, and healthy diets options for all.
- 2** Remove both financial and non-financial incentives that support and promote high-emission, unhealthy food options, and agricultural practices.
- 3** Rapidly transition away from unsuitable farming and food processing practices that damage the environment and risk human health.
- 4** Prioritise ecologically sustainable food systems to strengthen resilience, increase food and nutrition security, and lower emissions.
- 5** Ensure that the transition to a more sustainable and ecologically friendly food system is done in a fair and just way.



Youth priorities³ to improve diet and food systems for health, climate, and the planet

1

Promoting access to sustainable, affordable, and healthy diets for all.

Make the healthy choice the easy choice

We need to change food environments so that they promote the consumption of affordable healthy diets. Regulation is key: for example, policies such as sugar and sweetened beverage taxes, front-of-pack food labelling, and marketing restrictions (in-person and online) should all be implemented to enable people to make healthy choices.

Invest in school health and nutrition programmes

School food environments that make healthy and sustainably produced food and safe and clean water accessible to students should be prioritised. School settings are a key context for interventions as young people spend significant time at school and consume a large number of their daily calories there. For many, school is the only place they can access healthy food.

Education and knowledge translation

It is important to increase understanding among the public around the implications of consuming unhealthy diets. There is the need for more empathy in communication from advocates; not everyone can or would like to become vegan immediately and flexitarian diets can be promoted as a good first step and could be more sustainable in the long run.

2

Removing financial and non-financial incentives that support and promote high-emission, unhealthy food options, and agricultural practices.

Working together

Working synergistically, we need to advocate together for the removal of incentives such as subsidies for multinational agricultural firms. We need collaborative leadership across industry, civil society, and government sectors to align objectives and promote alternative options, for example, subsidy models that incentivise small-scale, local production of healthy food.

Empowerment and community-driven development

We need to build the capacity of small-and-medium-sized enterprises and farmers to deliver local sustainable food security. Context-specific policies and actions will be required to shift agricultural production and public consumption, taking into consideration cultural practices, local resources, and funds.

Scrutinise the actors that are driving incentives

Lobbying, as well as advocacy, may be required to challenge the power structures that drive current incentives. Raising awareness and increasing understanding of the financial and non-financial incentives that support and promote high-emission, unhealthy food options, such as ultra-processed foods is important too.

3

A transition from unsuitable farming and food processing practices that damage the environment and risk human health.

Involve all actors

We need to consider not only land use, farming, and food processing, but the actions of all the stakeholders who participate in the coordinated production and value-adding activities that are needed to make food products. This includes farmers and horticulturalists, fishers, and aqua farmers.

Leverage cooperative business models

Farmers and small-and-medium enterprises should be enabled to better compete in the market, while encouraging a shift away from the unsuitable health-damaging practices such as mono-cropping or using intensive fertiliser to, for example, adopting agro-ecology. This also supports the localisation of food supply chains.

Regulation policies

Warning labels for ultra-processed foods, for example, as are being implemented in Chile and Mexico can act as a disincentive to the processing that is harmful to health. Front-of-pack labelling that displays environmental impact could also aid the transition.

4

Prioritise ecologically sustainable food systems to strengthen resilience, increase food and nutrition security, and lower emissions.

Advance community-based food systems

Reform land ownership to promote local, small-scale farmers, including ownership opportunities for women.

Invest in localised food and farming systems

Invest in localised food and farming systems in both urban and rural communities: producing food as a whole supply chain in a local context, not exporting them, and subsequently relying on imports.

Implementation of policy measures

Implementation of policy measures that reinforce the inclusion of the environmental cost of foods in the market price. For example, regulation policies like warning labels (described above) can be used to disincentivise the consumption of foods with high carbon footprints, for instance, red meat as well as foods high in sugar, salt and fats.



5

Ensure that the transition to a more sustainable and ecologically friendly food system is done in a fair and just way.

Build local capacity

Support local farms and offer them training to assist them in the transition to climate-resilient agricultural practices. Their livelihoods should not be dependent on the production of one crop type, thus investing in education will be key to supporting fair and just economic and agricultural transitions. It is also important to foster a generation of 'young farmers' and to challenge and break the stigma associated with the industry.

Community engagement

Involve communities and people with lived experiences, particularly young people and local farmers in discussions pertaining to ecologically sustainable food production. This will increase transparency and agreement with decisions being made.

Encourage knowledge transfer from low-income countries to high-income countries.

Countries in the 'Global South' that have experienced the impacts of climate change already have accelerated innovative capacities to develop crop varieties that are resistant to extreme weather events. Across Asia, Latin America, and Africa, rice growers are using rice gene banks to store thousands of climate-resilient forms of rice.⁴



Supporting youth voices⁵

Young people are an incredibly important part of society who are often overlooked in policy discussions. The following outlines some of the ways young people can be supported and provided with opportunities to get involved and have a platform for their voice to be heard.

Involve young people from the start

Involving young people in conversations from the design/inception stage of a project, through implementation, to evaluation and beyond is important for meaningful engagement. Involving young people in policy, practice, and research and allowing space for their contributions to evolve organically to allow for increased commitment, creativity, and motivation, whilst respecting their availability and interests, can help ensure the value of youth engagement is realised for all.

Be inclusive

Involving youth from diverse backgrounds with different life experiences can help get a range of perspectives. Youth roles are often voluntary, which is not practical for establishing long-term commitment or ensuring equal engagement opportunities for all, particularly for disadvantaged young people and young people in LMICs.

Live illustration of youth priorities at the Youth Voices for Climate Health workshop for Climate Health workshop held on February 15th, 2022. The illustration was scribed by Live Illustration UK.

Foster a culture of transparency

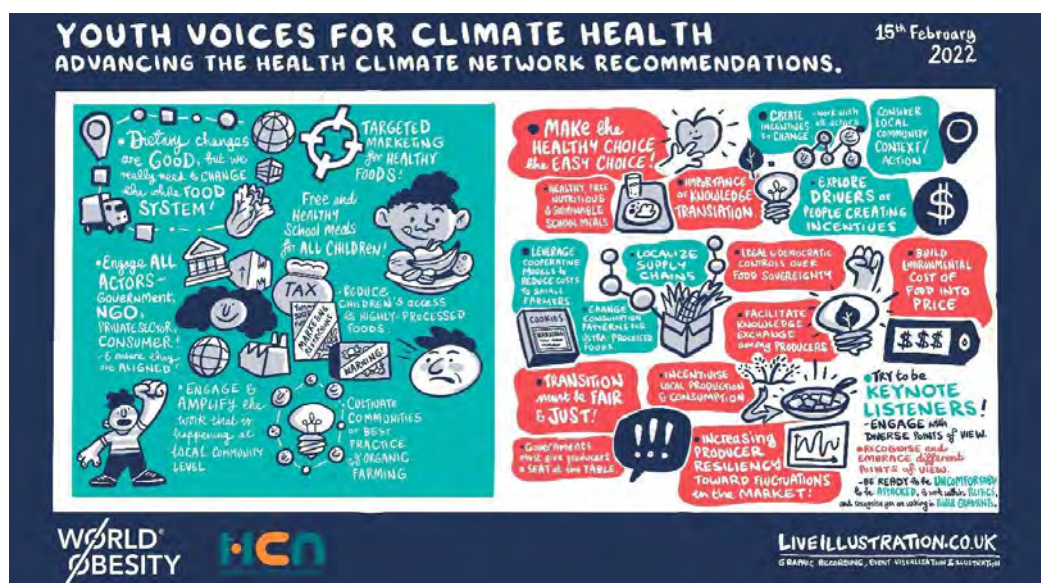
Respect concerns youth may have, for example, around conflicts of interest when working with the private sector. Young people should also receive timely feedback on initiatives and projects they are involved with, and an honest evaluation of their contributions.

Build knowledge, capacity, and skills

As well as practical paid work experience, young people need education (e.g., through mentorship) on policy processes and theories. Young people need knowledge but also support to develop soft skills, to help them understand and manage the power imbalances they may experience. Skills in system leadership should be nurtured (see below).

Facilitate opportunities

Youth advocates working across climate, health, and food embrace and welcome opportunities to connect and exchange ideas, both among peers and in other spaces. Supporting convening that enables young people to learn from each other, appreciate synergies, and ultimately develop meaningful solutions to systemic problems, is a valuable role we can all play.



“...a set of skills and capacities that any individual or organisation can use to catalyse, enable, and support the process of systems-level change. It combines collaborative leadership, coalition-building, and systems insight to mobilise innovation and action across a large, decentralised network.”

Systems leadership

The principles described above extend beyond working with young people. David Nabarro, Special Envoy on COVID-19 for the World Health Organization shared his advice for those working in systems leadership:

Be a keynote listener.

Listen curiously, feel good if you hear things you disagree with. Explore and encounter divergence from our view to growing.

Create spaces to welcome multiple perspectives.

Enlarge the degree to which you engage people with diverse points of view. It makes stronger individuals and societies. It is useful to connect those with different perspectives to create strong societal ecosystems.

Respect and embrace those who think differently.

Collaborate with people you do not get on with and embrace them.

We need to operate inside of politics.

Be comfortable operating in power gradients.

Be ready to feel uncomfortable and unsure.

In conclusion, youth voices have a crucial role to play in advocacy for food, climate, and health, and in the wider fight for intergenerational equity. As the next generation of systems leaders, young people's energy, passion, enthusiasm, and lived experience should be nurtured. Listening to and supporting their priorities is an important part of the journey towards food systems change, and a healthier future for all people and the planet.

Resources

1. Join the Dialogue Forum Community: The Dialogue Forum was created to facilitate policy discussions among youth, policymakers, and business representatives. It allows you to engage people in your community and globally to come together in person or online to discuss an idea and collaborate on actions. It was developed by EAT for the EU Horizon 2020, CO-CREATE project. CO-CREATE aims to educate and empower youth to develop policy solutions to build healthy food and physical activity environments. Access more information about the open-access tool [here](#).
2. Listen to the second season of Youth Voices for Healthy Choices: World Obesity Federation's podcast, co-hosted by Claudia Batz and Dara Karakolis discusses the links between health and climate, sharing stories told by changemakers who are working to achieve a healthier future for the planet. [Learn more and subscribe here today](#).
3. [Learn more about Systems Leadership](#): 4SD (Skills Systems and Synergies for Sustainable Development) has a wealth of resources that explore what systems leadership entails, what working with living systems involves, and how that translates into practice.
4. Read more about actions we can take to [Mitigate the Global Syndemic of Obesity, Undernutrition, and Climate Change](#).
5. Explore the evidence for the new [Syndemic of COVID-19, Obesity, and Food Insecurity](#).

References

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About World Obesity Federation

The World Obesity Federation (WOF) is a not-for-profit organisation which connects over 80 regional and national associations comprising over 10,000 professional members in scientific, medical and research organisations. World Obesity's mission is to improve global health by promoting the understanding of obesity and weight-related diseases through scientific research and dialogue, whilst encouraging the development of effective policies for their prevention and management. Learn more [here](#).



Healthy Voices provides young people with the knowledge and advocacy tools to promote their positive engagement to address health-related challenges. Owned by World Obesity and born out of the work of two EU-level projects – STOP and CO-CREATE – it is an educational and capacity building platform and provides a space for blogs and discussions. It aims to provide young people with some tools and expertise about how to become actively involved in shaping their environments and become agents of change.

More info on the about this site page at www.worldobesity.org/healthy-voices/about-this-site



About the Health and Climate Network

The Health and Climate Network is an alliance of organisations working to put positive health outcomes at the centre of responses to the climate crisis. The Network advocates for evidence-based policy solutions that save lives and improve global health. Learn more about the network [here](#).

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