

Food Banking for a Better Tomorrow

Global Food Banking Network's Innovative Approach in Tackling Food Waste and Hunger



Source: Lagos Food Bank Initiative

The Global Foodbanking Network (GFN) operates in nearly 50 countries with the mission to eliminate hunger by reducing food loss and waste while promoting sustainability. Local food banks in Israel, Nigeria and Mexico are employing innovative methods to recover surplus food and redirect to those in need. Since 2006, GFN has invested USD 48.7 million in grants and supported 580 food bankers worldwide.

Key messages

- Food banks play a major role in providing food and nutrition security within local communities, addressing climate and have seen a growing role since the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Food banks with their network are adopting innovative approaches such as Leket Israel uses satellite technology to detect harvest and redistribute surplus produce while BAMX in Mexico collects surplus food from hotels and restaurants to provide to those in need.
- Challenges in behaviour change and insufficient investment from public and private sectors hinder food donation efforts. This will require reevaluating our food environments and putting in place key policy levers such as food donation policies.
- GFN collaborates with various organisations including Champions 12.3, the Food is Never Waste Coalition among others to accelerate efforts to reduce food loss and waste in line with the Sustainable Development Goal 12.3.

Diverse contexts, one mission

From the sophisticated satellite-led endeavours of Leket Israel to the highly efficient network, BAMX, across Mexico, and the sustainability-driven work of Lagos Food Bank Initiative in Nigeria, the web of The Global FoodBanking Network (GFN) today is spread across nearly 50 countries – and growing. With a simple premise— a world free of hunger – GFN has shown how food banks globally are innovating to reduce food loss and waste, promoting sustainable food systems, and driving critical climate action.

As locally-led organisations, food banks are in tune with unique community needs. The food banking model is premised on the recovery and redirection of wholesome, edible surplus food to those in need. This makes food banking not only an environmental imperative, but also a cost-effective intervention since most nutritious foods can be procured at minimal cost.

Local food banks leading in food security

The real magic of GFN happens at the community level where GFN connects food system actors that have surplus products to food banks and national networks that can redirect healthy and nutritious food to people facing food insecurity. As a technical partner, GFN helps food banks expand partnerships within their ecosystem.

Most critically, in the era of GFN, the idea of food donation has shifted from the canned foods stereotype to include fresh produce, whole grains and animal protein. “We promote healthy dietary choices through adhering to the highest food safety standards. In 2022, healthy and nutritious foods made up 60% of the food we distributed. Twenty-four food banks reported having a nutritionist on board at their local food bank,” says Ignacio Gavilan, Senior Director, Food Systems and Partnerships

In 2022, 26,500 tonnes of fresh produce in Israel – which would otherwise decompose in landfills were recovered by Leket¹, a food bank. Leket recovers surplus produce from a network of 700 farmers and packhouses, using technology to help detect harvest patterns, and has designed an app which alerts them about crops ready for harvest. Climate change has affected agricultural produce and harvest patterns exacerbating food losses in fields. Therefore, to refine food recovery operations, Leket is developing satellite technology to identify when farms are ripe for harvest, ensuring that food reaches its rightful place: the bellies of hungry people.

¹ Leket Israel Red de Bancos de Alimentos de México. Leket Israel: [\(Link\)](#) (Accessed September 25, 2023)

In Mexico, BAMX's El Rescate² programme, a collaboration with over 12 hotel groups and 50 restaurants across the country, has, since 2014, been collecting surplus foods from hospitality buffet lines and meal services to provide 250,000 wholesome meals to those on the breadline.

Since Lagos grows 3% of the food it needs, urban farming and household gardens are essential to meet the nutritional requirements of communities, especially its women. Thus, Family Farming run by the Lagos Food Bank Initiative³, teaches people to grow locally resilient crops, alongside raising small farm animals like chickens.

At the global level, GFN's collaborators include multilateral partnerships like Champions 12.3, Food is Never Waste Coalition⁴, organisations like World Resources Institute (WRI), WRAP UK to accelerate the pace of reducing food loss and waste toward achieving SDG 12.3. Alongside other industry partners, GFN partners with Harvard Food Law and Policy Clinic in tracking the food donation policy landscape and impact through the Global Food Donation Policy Atlas.⁵

Key impact numbers

Since 2006, GFN has

- Granted approximately USD 48.7 million to food banks
- Trained and Guided more than 580 food bankers at the annual Food Bank Leadership Institute
- Connected Food Banks in more than 50 countries

GFN and food bank member activity from calendar year 2022 shows

- 4x more people served over 5 years, from 8 million people in 2017 to 32 million in 2022
- 51,000 community service organizations strengthened in 2022
- Prevented an average of 1.5 billion kilograms of CO2e annually since 2021

The role of financing and food environments in boosting redistribution

Several factors that have worked in favour of the growing food donation movement. First, some cultural predispositions towards "having empty plates" has contributed to the sustenance of community-based food banks. Second, global tragedies such as the Second World War, the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, have periodically reminded people the true value of food making food banks indispensable. Third, technology and food labelling innovations have been catalytic in helping food distributors manage their supply chains.

Despite wide recognition that reducing FLW is a critical aspect of our hunger and climate solutions, sufficient investment from both public and private players hasn't materialised. Gavilan cites commitment fatigue among countries resisting the food donation movement. "In the sphere of climate finance, food and agriculture remain massively underfunded

² Red de Bancos de Alimentos de México. Red de Bancos de Alimentos de México. (n.d) ([Link](#)) (Accessed September 25, 2023)

³ Lagos Food Bank Initiative. Lagos Food Bank Initiative. Lagos Food Bank (n.d) ([Link](#)) (Accessed September 25, 2023)

⁴ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (n.d.). Food is Never Waste Coalition. FAO. (n.d.) ([Link](#)) (Accessed September 25, 2023)

⁵ Harvard Law School Food Law and Policy Clinic and The Global FoodBanking Network. (n.d.). The Global Food Donation Policy Atlas. The Global Food Donation Policy Atlas. ([Link](#)) (Accessed September 25, 2023)

compared to others like energy or transportation.” Despite food waste accounting for a third of greenhouse gas emissions, food systems receive 3% of public finance, according to the Global Alliance for Future of Food.⁶

Out of the nearly 50 countries GFN works with, only 4 have national plans to tackle climate change including food waste. Nonetheless, countries that have embraced food redistribution are reaping significant results. In 2019, three of the largest food bank networks in the world⁷ – GFN, European Food Banks Federation (FEBA) and Feeding America found that – recovered a total of 3.75 million metric tons of food, enough to fill nearly 1,292 Olympic swimming pools. The recovery prevented over 12 billion kilograms of GHG from entering the atmosphere because of food waste. The inclusion of a food systems pavilion at COP27 for the first time signalled changing tailwinds with hopes of a more prominent role of food loss and waste reduction at COP28.

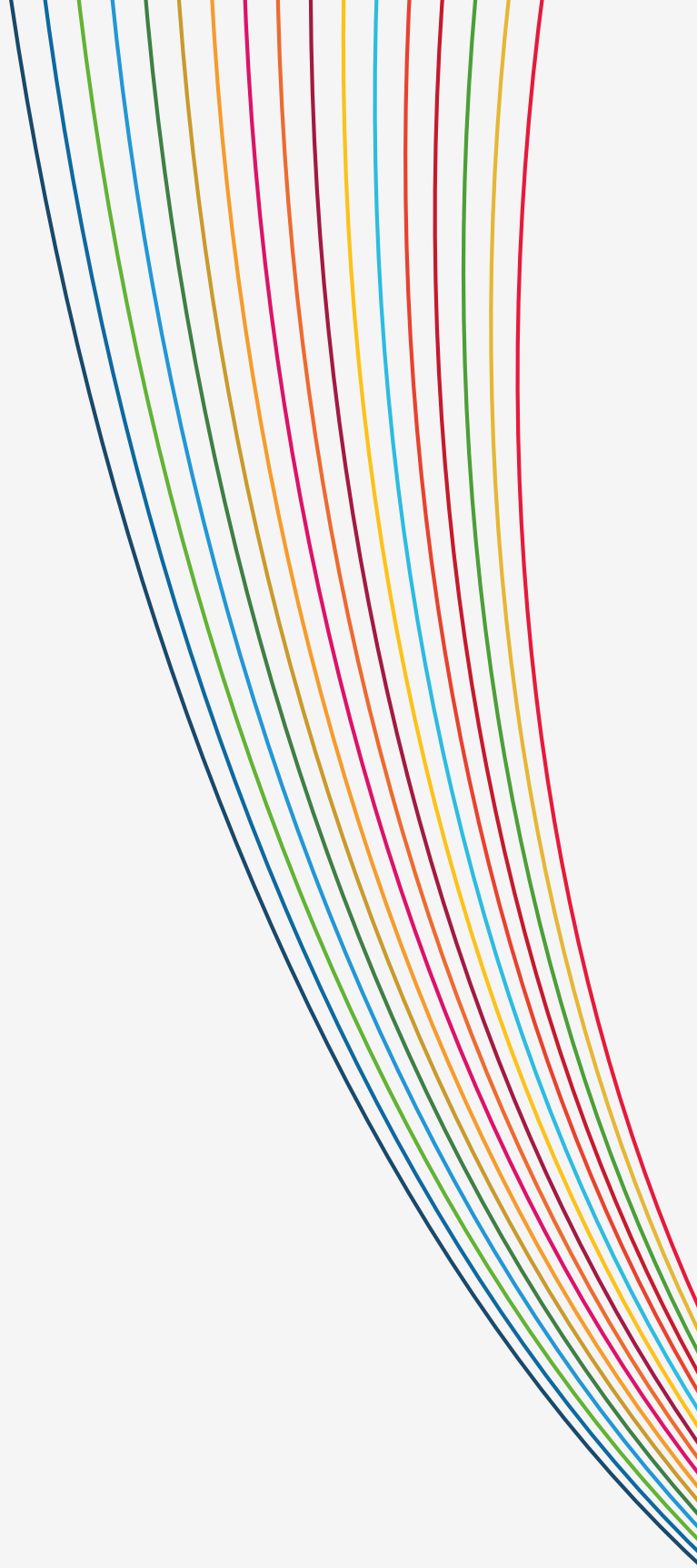
No single organisation can solve global hunger

One of the first steps towards food redistribution is setting clear targets and measurement, that will paint a clear picture of the magnitude of food loss and waste in context, and only then can action follow. They have observed that in high-income countries there are greater efficiencies in the supply chain, but also significant waste due to contractual relations between retailers, manufacturers, and distributors. In the low and middle-income countries, the yield per hectare is less, and there is more efficiency in utilizing food.

Lastly, countries should commit to making food redistribution and climate action a cornerstone in climate strategies in mitigating emissions and supporting vulnerable committees. Systemic problems can best be solved collaboratively.

⁶ Global Alliance for the Future of Food. Untapped Opportunities: Climate Financing for Food Systems Transformation. n.p.: Global Alliance for the Future of Food, 2022. Site: [\(Link\)](#) (Accessed September 25, 2023)

⁷ Global FoodBanking Network (n.d.). Reducing Food Loss and Waste. [\(Link\)](#) (Accessed September 25, 2023)



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