

Impact Story 25:

ACT4FOOD: A Youth Led Movement to Transform Food Systems

THE OPPORTUNITY

A high proportion of the world's population is under the age of 30. As a collective force, young people have extraordinary potential to mobilise and influence global movements, which can be initiated in the form of a simple pledge. In 2021, over 100 youth led and youth centred organisations united for the first time as a stakeholder group at the United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS). This collective represented young farmers, researchers, activists, entrepreneurs, and more - marking a significant shift and representation around food systems. Known as the Youth Liaisons Group, they established direct links with the UNFSS secretariat, fostering collaboration and learning between "senior" decision makers and youth.

The group organised over 100 youth lead dialogues at the local, and global levels to gain insights into what young people believed the future of food should be.

The UNFSS showed that young people are active as actors in the food system and deserve to be recognised as valid stakeholders and potential drivers of change. Each action track featured a youth co-chair. Young people participated in a variety of events, panels, and dialogues. For example, in the lead-up to the main summit, the group participated in regional dialogues and pre-summit events, contributing to the preparatory discussions, and the agenda of the summit



However, this self-organised group, still faced challenges. Despite their passion, motivation, and involvement in many stages of the summit, they found themselves excluded from the decision-making table. Young people faced several limitations that constrained their ability to effectively organize and advocate for their interests as processes were often top-down leaving little room for youth-led initiatives. Many young people at the UNFSS quickly realized that establishing themselves as a separate entity to the UNFSS was necessary for this group of stakeholders to be taken seriously by decision-makers and to keep pushing for food systems change.

THE SOLUTION

ACT4FOOD was consequently launched as a global youth-led movement to transform food systems, with a pledge to encourage millions of young people to create sustainable food systems and more opportunistically to get involved in the UNFSS and to bring their demands to the decision-making table.

Firstly, ACT4FOOD launched a pledge calling decision makers to act with urgency in transforming food systems. This pledge was then used to demonstrate to decision makers at the UNFSS that a unified community of young people and their allies were committed to supporting transformation.

ACT4FOOD quickly realised that while a pledge demonstrated a desire for urgent action, it did not articulate young people's specific demands. To address this, a sample of 100'000 young people from across the globe were approached with the ask: "if you had a decision maker sitting in front of you what would you want them to do to transform food systems, and equally importantly what can you commit to doing yourself?". Their responses were narrowed down to ten global youth priorities for food systems transformation, now known as the Actions4Change. These represent the collective voice and priorities of young people worldwide, providing clear and actionable guidance for decision-makers and young people alike to drive meaningful change in food systems.

ACT4FOOD has evolved from a campaign to a movement since the UNFSS and has remained youth-led at its core. Today 27 young people from 22 countries lead the movement, set its agenda, lead campaigns nationally and globally, and represent the movement at local, national, and global events. ACT4FOOD is more than just about having a space for youth at the decision-making table. It strives to create a common space for young people and decision makers to elevate, collaborate, and act to create healthier, just, and more sustainable food systems through youth-led campaigns.

The youth leaders actively engage other young people, encouraging them to participate in ACT4FOOD's activities and volunteer for the movement.

ELEVATE!

A core group of youth leaders participate in GAIN's Youth Leadership Initiative, that includes capacity building, access to funding, and participation in key food systems moments both nationally and globally. Through this initiative, they engage other young people and community members to advocate for better food systems and better food policies.

COLLABORATE!

At its core, Act4Food is a community of young people. Former youth leaders' mentor new youth leaders, providing peer support and fostering a sense of solidarity. Youth leaders collaborate to identify a joint agenda for the movement and work together on campaigns aimed at transforming food systems.

ACT!

Focused on the 10 Actions4Change, ACT4FOOD youth leaders collaborate with supporters to advance the movement's priorities through collective action campaigns at local, national, and global levels. Youth leaders participate in global coalitions like the School Meals Coalition and actively engage with decision-makers at global forums, contribute to partnerships and declarations and speak at events. In Zimbabwe, they organized a food festival showcasing local and indigenous foods and recipes. In Canada and the UK, youth leaders led advocacy campaigns asking decision-makers to prioritise healthy school meals. In Nigeria, youth leaders collaborated with policymakers to ensure youth inclusion in the national food systems pathways.



THE IMPACT

In only three years ACT4FOOD has...

- ACT4FOOD has grown the movement to 41 core youth leaders and hundreds of volunteers across the globe to advocate for better food systems. These 41 young people have participated in and led capacity building sessions and co-created GAINs Youth Leadership Initiative.
- ACT4FOOD has organised events, campaigns, and social media initiatives, pushing the agenda and priorities of global youth. This includes participation at the; World Food Forum, the United Nations High Level Political Forum (HLPF), the UNs Conference on Food Security (CFS), three Conference of Parties (COPs) and Women Deliver.
- ACT4FOOD has gathered over 160,000 signatures from youth and their allies to the ACT4FOOD pledge.
- ACT4FOOD has held consultations with over 100,000 young people on their food systems priorities to inform the Actions4Change
- ACT4FOOD has pushed for the inclusion of food in the Global Youth Climate Action Declaration at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of Parties (COP). The declaration was welcomed by COP28 Youth Climate Champion H.E. Shamma Al Mazrui in front of world leaders at the World Climate Action Summit.
- ACT4FOOD youth leaders have been featured in numerous media and communication outlets including Forbes, on Global Citizen, on the Future Food Movement website, on the UNFSS website, the Nobel Peace Prize, the Just Transition Global Movement white paper on a just transition from industrial to animal production, Chefs Africa, Hungry for Action, the Food Foundation, World Obesity Day, Food Tank, The Sierra Leone Telegraph, Speciality Food Magazine, The New Indian Express, The Business Standard, Outlook Planet, Um So Planeta, Unitelife.
- ACT4FOOD has supported and initiated over 11 youth-led community-based projects aimed at improving local food systems with funding from GAIN. These projects include urban gardening, local food markets, and initiatives to reduce food waste.
- The recognition of the role of one of the ACT4FOOD founders at the global level awarded with the Global Citizen prize in 2024 shows that the movement has gained traction and is on the right track for transforming food systems in sustainable ways.

By bringing youth voices to national, regional, and global platforms, ACT4FOOD continues to shape the global agenda and contributing towards food systems transformation.

ACT4FOOD

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