



16-20 OCTOBER 2023



YOUTH ACTION | SCIENCE & INNOVATION | INVESTMENT



FAO World Food Forum: Report by the Africa – Europe “Youth Core Group”

Preamble

We, a group of young people from Africa and Europe committed to build friendship between Europe and Africa from the grassroots, through people – to – people daily work together, from a variety of associations, united under the umbrella of the “youth core group” platform, are pleased to present you this report of the event, for your information and any appropriate follow – up.

World Food Forum Final Agenda

<https://flagship.world-food-forum.org/2023/en>

Opening Speeches

Day 1:

World Food Day - 16 October 2023

The opening of the World Food Forum 2023 was on World Food Day, coinciding with the anniversary of the founding of FAO in 1945. There were several speeches during this special session, the first being the one of FAO’s Director-General Qu Dongyu. He reiterated the day’s theme, “Water is food, water is life”, because there can be no food security without water security. Water is a finite and essential resource that is threatened in terms of both quantity and quality, yet is the basis of life for all humanity.

As different speakers stated, 2.5 billion people live under water stress today. Water scarcity is caused by mismanagement of resources, climate change, conflict, population growth while at same time being at the root of and sometimes instrumentalized in conflict, migrations, health and food crises. To counter this, Director-General Qu Dongyu as well as many others emphasized the importance of bringing together governments, the private sector, academia and civil society to increase the collective impact while “leaving no one behind”, a phrase and sentiment repeated multiple times during other opening speeches.

Mr. Qu’s speech was then followed by speeches from the President of the Italian Republic, Sergio Mattarella, who stressed that to fight hunger today, its root causes need to be addressed: He cited conflicts and humanitarian crises as one root cause, especially in our “multipolar world without multilateralism”. This was meaningfully echoed by many speakers following, including the Vatican representative to FAO bringing the message of His Holiness Pope Francis, Iraq’s prime minister Abdul Latif Rashid as well as Jordan’s prime minister, who particularly pointed out the situation in Gaza and its historic roots.

Speeches, live and recorded, from United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, President of IFAD Alvaro Lario, and WFP Executive Director Cindy McCain followed and were sobering in terms of their statements regarding significant cuts in humanitarian funding during these dire times, representing “a new normal”. The Minister of Climate Change and Environment of the United Arab Emirates Mariam Almheiri, on the other hand, gave a more optimistic preview of food and water security issues to be discussed at COP 28.

This year’s World Food Forum focused on Youth Action, Science Innovation, and Investments. President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins, therefore addressed young people in particular, urging them to ensure that food security is on top of the global agenda. He stressed that changing the food systems is not about adjusting but about changing. Changing the transformation of the agricultural system is about changing mindsets. In the same vein as systems change, he, as well as some of the high-level speakers and several youth speakers, spoke on the importance of the role of women and indigenous people in these processes.

The King of Lesotho Letsie III then emphasized the importance of investments to foster a resilient and sustainable agrifood system. The President of the Central-African Republic Faustin-Archange Touadéra likewise highlighted the importance of dedicated investments and research and to adapt to the disruptions of climate change and conflict. The Prime Minister of Tanzania Kassim Majaliwa also echoed the importance of investments, particularly from the private sector, in order to accelerate positive improvements in the agricultural sector. Science and technology were also mentioned several times in relation to putting them at the service of the well-being of all. Contributions from youth and musicians rounded off the ceremony.

*****Summary of the panels (a selection)*****

DAY 2:

Africa Regional Youth Assembly

This Youth Assembly provided a platform for young people to engage on “investing in nature-positive and environment-friendly agrifood systems”, discussing issues such as meaningful stakeholder engagement (women, indigenous people, refugees, youth, children, smallholder farmers, as well as private sector, academia, research and financial institutions), social incentivization, technologies, investments and subsidies in the agricultural sector in Africa.. Recommended actions included: youth participation in policy formulation; promoting technical and entrepreneurial education in agriculture; scaling existing technology and capacity-building; and improving land governance especially for youth and women farmers. These measures should help the mentioned groups get access to education, financial markets, infrastructure, land, social support, and technologies.

Europe Regional Youth Assembly

This regional Youth Assembly focused, amongst other topics, on a new methodology for measuring food waste. The data collected from it from Member States in 2022 will set a baseline and propose legally binding targets to reduce food waste across the EU. For this end, the food waste platform brings together public entities (Member States/EFTA countries, EU bodies and international organizations) and actors in the food value chain including consumer and other non-governmental organizations.

Youth for Sustainability: A Journey through Food Choices (organized by Ghent University)

This panel aimed to conduct a multicultural and international dialogue on sustainability aspects of food systems. For this, a game called the “Food Choice Dilemma” was played, where participants were

asked to choose the most sustainable option in food choices. The concluding thought was that “there is no one size fits all” solution, and that we must keep the CHANGE (Context specificity, Hunger, Activism, Nutrition, Gaps in Research (e.g. high-income countries vs. ‘developing’ world), Environmental sustainability) paradigm in mind.

The food around us: creating our local food maps (organised by [foodeducators](#), EIT, a project funded by the EU)

This session was held by a group of five women who developed a methodology of foodscapes. The audience interacted by participating in a game. Following this, the researchers shared their experience in playing the same game with children. This methodology can be used in any youth group! Finally, the floor was opened to questions and Valentina (Youth Core Group) asked the researchers if they plan to include a wider audience. The answer was mostly positive and dependent on the amount of funding the group will get.

Advocating for sustainable food education and career opportunities (organized by [plant futures](#))

The two panelists talked about their experience as founders of the "plant features initiative" in Berkeley. It was developed with the main idea of making the university curriculum more in line with today's job requests. Most enterprises look for expert figures on environmental matters, but also around 80% of Gen Z is now looking for a working place that shares their ethical values and is environmentally aware and active. The founders thus decided to create their own multi-disciplinary course, touching on animal agriculture, factory farming, regenerative cell cultured meat, diets, environmental issues, amongst other topics.

DAY 3

Regional Youth Assembly Session 5 – Near East and North Africa

This session was designed to discuss gaps, challenges and opportunities to “advance environmentally and socially friendly practices in agriculture by promoting accessible education and multi-stakeholder collaboration in the Near East and North Africa region”. The panels and discussions presented these solutions: Promoting knowledge-sharing platforms and resources; Increasing scholarships, vocational training, and paid internship opportunities; Advocating for supportive policies and regulations that tackle social inequalities; Communication between educational Institutes, youth groups, farming unions, and relevant CSOs.

Event on oceans and sustainable use of water in the MENA Region

An enterprise from Maghreb is trying to scale up a mechanism of collecting evaporated water. Another Maghreb enterprise presented a new possible way of desalinizing salty water with less chemicals. Another innovative project about producing purses with recycled waste materials, collected from the El Manzala Lake in Egypt was presented; as was the project “Cellulose”, which produces cellulose with bio-waste. Last but not least, the “Water Action Agenda” of the United Nations was presented with its main outcomes and takeaways. Unfortunately, interaction with the audience was completely missing.

Empowering youth for water and ocean sustainability in MENA

Fundamental topics related to water resource management, overfishing, community education, and awareness, scientific research, and public policies were discussed. Speakers emphasized that young people played a key role in advancing innovative solutions and promoting social change, as does collaboration among stakeholders. Finally, a complex issue related to water ownership was raised as a

significant future issue.

Hand-in-Hand Investment Plan for Togo

The Republic of Togo had a hand-in-hand investment plan present to many countries around the world to help bring in investments and also promote its agricultural sector. A presentation by one of their Delegates was done to explain in detail all the investment opportunities available in Togo including their most important produce: cashew nuts.

Roundtable of Traditional Donors

On this exclusively European/US-American roundtable panel, there were following speakers: Carla Montesi (Directorate-General for International Partnership at the European Commission), Nicola Pochettino (CFA Director at the European Investment Bank), Peter Betello (USAID Mission Rome), and Martin Hoppe (Head of Division Food and Nutrition Security, Fisheries FMECD). Ms Montesi highlighted the need to go beyond financing that creates leverage towards public funds; while the EIB remains the largest multilateral lender and borrower in the world. Bringing in a “strictly national” perspective, Mr. Hoppe focused on aspects of “cooperation”, prioritizing grants rather than loans. USAID also prefers grants to help mobilize commercial money. However, the representative also believed that they need better relationships with local actors.

Empowering youth and women in agrifood systems with digital innovation

The session was held in TED-style, with presentations by farmers and startup entrepreneurs from countries covered by the Flexible Voluntary Contribution sub-programme on Global Network Digital Agriculture Innovation Hubs. Vincent Martin, director of the office of innovation FAO, gave a brief introductory speech. Then, Henok Laike from Ethiopia, business development and innovation services director at the entrepreneurship development institute in Ethiopia, took the stage, presenting the programs that give the platform to innovators who transform challenges into business ideas and jobs. After that, the floor was given to Loubna ElMansouri, the director of the digital pole in Morocco sharing how to manage digital issues for women and youth and their recent strategy called “Generation Green”, which they created through a private-public partnership. Finally, the third speaker, Founder and CEO of Akta Farmers in Grenada Bevon Chadel Charles, explained how today’s women still have their challenges, because the sector is still focused on traditional farming: thus, they created a platform where youth and women can train and learn digital skills.

“Promoting home gardening practices for agrobiodiversity and nutrition” (organized by [FAO - Plant Production and Protection](#), [Cercatori di semi association](#), [Scuola del Verde](#), Giardino Botanico di Roma)

To begin, the FAO Deputy Director of Plant Production and Protection division Mr. Mba Chike gave an introductory speech. Then, the Italian association “Cercatori di Semi” presented their work and shared with us a guide on how to start home gardening. Since 1900s, more than 75% of plant genetic diversity has been lost, for this reason, they actively work on bringing it back and preserving it. One of their members then demonstrated three ways to produce seeds. The session continued with the presentation held by the researchers of “Scuola del Verde” and the live creation of a home garden. In fact, starting with an empty box, they filled it with perlite and organic soil and then planted several small plants. Finally, there was time for a short Q&A session. At the end, the participants were invited to collect seeds.

“Because youth matters: investing in youth potential” (organized by Nestlé, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation)

This session was focused on the UNESCO and Nestlé Program “Because youth matters”, an initiative that aims to provide young people with the resources and the skills they need to develop innovative solutions to achieve positive social impact in their communities. Angeles Marcial Mejia, from Puebla, Mexico, is the founder of Earth-IoT, a startup that helps small-scale farmers across Mexico simplify and facilitate access to technical assistance and disruptive technology. Stefany, from Barranquilla, Colombia, is the founder of Plantù, a social enterprise that recycles single-use paper waste and transforms it into plants using circular economy.

After their presentations we have been divided into two groups. A group had to discuss how we can harness the circular economy principles to design new, innovative products and packaging to reuse food waste to contribute to a more sustainable future and how to engage local communities to participate in the transformation of paper waste into valuable resources. The second group had to think about how to celebrate a joint approach between different actors in the agricultural value chain and which specific needs have to be approached through digitalization. It was very formative and enriching to discover the ideas of two young women who contribute so much within the communities from which they come.

DAY 4

Thematic Youth Assembly Session 2 – Review of SDG 2 progress: Lead up to High-Level Political Forum 2024

This session was designed to discuss gaps, challenges and opportunities to achieve the targets and indicators of SDG 2. The session was composed of a presentation by young members and interns at FAO. The audience was divided into 5 smaller groups and the work done by everyone resulted in a set of recommendations that will be transmitted to FAO. From the initial joint presentation one prevailing problem emerged: the gap between young and old voices and the lack of inclusion of the first in decision-making. The session continued with the division of the participants in 5 groups to discuss the following questions: Share successful stories in your/any country to achieve SDG 2; What main challenges persist with respect to SDG 2 progress?; Propose 3 recommendations to achieve SDG 2 by 2030 with examples. Finally, among the recommendations, the following suggestions came up: Improve accessibility to markets (build roads, public transport) and storage facilities; Promote connectivity between food wasters and those in need; Promote information flow; Provide adequate salaries to buy food; empowering farmers.

Artificial Intelligence and Digital Tools for Climate Resilient Agrifood Systems

This panel was opened by remarks from FAO’s DG. Then, the first speaker Najat Mokhtar spoke on what AI can do in agriculture, highlighting its potential to improve the efficiency and sustainability of the sector. Vincent Martin of FAO’s Office of Innovation, then gave insights on FAO’s role: aside from being a knowledge-leading organization with an open database and leading the AI for Good platform, FAO uses AI and Digital for Transformative Climate Action to support evidence of planned policy, planning and implementation to improve efficiency, productivity for agriculture, also reducing negative environmental impacts. The need to co-create and co-design with different actors was highlighted so that AI can be used for good in a simple, customized and localized manner, if existing gaps are identified. FAO has a planned journey on the use of Ethical AI which they believe is a unique opportunity to empower rural communities and agricultural stakeholders. One big unanswered question remained, though: Under whose mandate does AI fall?

Enabling research, science, and innovation in Low- and Middle-Income Countries and Small Island Developing States

Disappointingly, this panel on LCI Countries and SIDS seemed to have only featured one SIDS speaker from Tonga, who highlighted the importance of brokering local knowledge. Mr. Patrick Okori from Uganda, the only African speaker on the panel, likewise spoke on different needs for different contexts. Mr. Paulo Alberto Nussenzweig, part of a state-funded agency for research in Brazil, echoed the need for localized research and illustrated this with an example of production of hydrogen via ethanol from sugar cane. Mr. Luxian Liu from China also highlighted the importance of *South-South* cooperation. This was also illustrated by an example given by Mr. Nussenzweig, who cited the importance of exchange programs and cooperation between LICM countries to also bridge the gap between higher education (domestic vs. abroad). Finally, Ms. Esther Esteban Rodrigo, representing public research institutions in Spain, stressed the importance of cooperation between research institutes and private companies for innovation. Private-public cooperation was also mentioned in the closing remarks by Deputy Director-General Beth Bechdol.

DAY 5

Final Youth Assembly

The global youth forum at the FAO separated the room into five teams to discuss how to structure all our suggestions and opinions during the seminars into an actual proposal/mechanism to be presented to policy makers and FAO. What was proposed in our group was to make sure communication from international organizations to farmers in rural areas are done directly instead of through the national government or ministries. This is due to years of lack of information with regards to farmers hearing of opportunists from international organizations especially for young people, indigenous people, and women.

*****Our feedback to FAO*****

Positives

Overall, the World Food Forum was judged as opportune and positive. A number of events were perceived very well, and namely:

- The Regional Youth Assemblies (in particular the Africa one).
- The “Youth Food Lab” with mentors and the presentation of 10 innovative start-ups.
- The “urban gardening” workshop.
- The “Food Educators” EIT by 5 young researchers that presented tools to help teachers.
- Youth Forum on SDG 2.
- Youth Assembly - Final drafting.

And some others. Most young people enjoyed participating in the WFF and learned new things, while also having possibilities to get in touch with other young people from all around the globe. The WFF was a successful **networking** event; the fact that it took place in-person favoured so. The way in which the WFF presented the agrifood system was a good attempt to make it more appealing for young people that could be attracted to start a career in the field. Also, the online participants could share ideas during some events, such as the

Regional Youth Assemblies. Finally, it was a good occasion to **meet other youth associations** and establish connections for possible future partnerships like “Silva Mediterranea” or with **representative of government and institutions**, such as the Ambassador of Niger.

Negatives

Since the inception phase, it has not been clear which sections of the event it would have been possible to join freely: in particular there was little clarity for the possibilities to join the Youth, Investment and Indigenous People streams.

The opening session was judged pretty formal and too “sequential”. A number of meetings were largely perceived as superficial, too theoretical and of not much practical use. There was not enough attention to Human Rights in agriculture, business accountability and how to create a value chain out of small-scale agriculture. In a number of meetings there was **no possibility for the audience to interact nor to raise questions**. It was a rather top-down approach despite that in theory the event was meant for and by young people. There were no possibilities for a reimbursement, at least in part, of the visitors, despite the fact they came from far away and brought agricultural expertise to the event, which was in any case not put in value. Indeed, for the small farmers we met, it was a non-negligible investment to come to Rome for the Forum and they expected to have more space to talk themselves instead of being represented.

Logistically speaking, interpretation was often an issue, especially in the “outdoor” events (the tents of the indigenous people), where it was not easy to get the headphones. Some events were perceived as “distant” and very little interactive and highlighted the gap between young and old, meaning that the target audience was of the same age group, there was a **lack of intergenerational dialogue**. The potential of connecting people and associations (networking possibilities, etc..) was not exploited enough and could have been put in value much better. For instance, there was no time between sessions to exchange contacts with other people.

Suggestions

1. To have a **bottom-up approach** and ensure that young people influence decision makers, it would be appropriate to give an open list of high-level speakers, businesses, CSOs and Country’s representatives to schedule appointments with them.
2. The WFF networking purpose could be improved by providing the participants with a **“Networking Room”** where it is possible to flexibly and spontaneously present participants’ purposes and connect with each other.
3. **Food** should be free and accessible or refundable.
4. To ensure the participation of young people, there should be a mechanism of **funding or refund** for travelling and stay expenses.

5. More space should be given to **Q&A sessions** and **interaction** between participants and presenters.
6. There should be panels led by practitioners in the field such as **FAO employees** and **farmers**. A meeting with the first ones could also be used by young, interested people to gather **career tips**.
7. Establishment of a **Youth Delegation at FAO** as in many other institutions (came up during the forum).

*****Our Declaration*****

Transforming agrifood systems in Africa for people and climate

We, the young people from Africa and Europe participating in the World Food Forum organised by the FAO from 16 to 20 October 2023 in Rome, Italy, on the theme "Transforming agrifood systems accelerates climate action" declare as follows:

- **Global food security is threatened by two major challenges today: political instability and climate change**

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has shown the impact of political instability on global food chains and severely impacting food security in Africa.

Our reliance on global food chains amplifies the risks associated with climate change. Disruptions in one part of the world reverberate across the entire system. Climate change has created massive population displacements and unprecedented human and food insecurity.

We are sounding the alarm about the impact of climate change in Africa specifically, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, where people are being severely tested by the effects of climate change through droughts and floods.

- **We must therefore embrace diversified, regenerative practices, for our current and future generations**

Admittedly, there is a need to feed the world's population, but achieving this objective cannot be done at the endless expense of the climate. Therefore, we must first acknowledge the role of monoculture, of intensive animal breeding that consumes the resources that could otherwise be used to feed people in a much more efficient way, as well as of globalisation, in raising food insecurity.

The correlation between food insecurity and climate change is deeply entrenched in the impacts of current farming practices, notably deforestation and desertification.

- **Two key areas that hold immense potential are renewable energy and, again, sustainable agriculture.**

Furthermore, we wish to draw attention to the link between agriculture and energy. Agriculture uses energy directly and indirectly. When there is a surge in fuel prices, it directly impacts the agricultural sector.

With a growing population, changing climate patterns, and limited access to traditional energy sources, addressing these challenges requires innovative approaches.

- **Lack of food in Africa, and dependence on foreign crop imports**

As youth organisations representing the youth of Africa and Europe, we want to once again draw attention to the African context in particular. 70% of Africa's natural resources consist of fertile and arable land. It is a huge potential for nutritious food for everyone.

There is a chronic lack of food in Africa, and dependence on foreign crop imports Why? We have thus far mentioned the impacts of climate change and political instability as reasons.

However, is it also because Africa cultivates mainly food for export on the world markets? Or because of the unequal land distribution that concentrates property of land in the hands of just a few? Or due to unadapted public policies not supporting sufficiently the agricultural sector?

We expect the World Food Forum to debate these issues with us and provide answers or at least elements of response and a clear direction and guidance to tackle food insecurity in Africa and elsewhere.

We ask urgently

- **We urge the EU to promote the African Continental Free Trade Area and African monetary union,**

Further, we want to stress how these complex challenges are opportunities for us youth. We are a living example of that: the global challenges faced by our generation have brought us together and we have written our proposals into the Torino Joint Communiqué, following the first edition of the Africa - Europe Youth Conference in October 2022.

As an African-European group, we addressed our demands to international organisations. We particularly urged the EU and AU to support local agriculture to reach food sovereignty through low environmental impact production.

Further, we urged the EU to promote the African Continental Free Trade Area and African monetary union, with particular sensitivity towards economic initiatives that empower African women and youth and create decent job opportunities.

The importance of enhancing the African Continent Free Trade Area to achieve zero hunger, ensure the resilience of the food supply chain, and promote sustainable environmental solutions in response to the current environmental challenges, cannot be understated.

- **It's important to have for EU a long term vision. The effects of climate change have created massive population displacements and unprecedented food insecurity, not to mention human insecurity.**

We therefore invite the FAO to strengthen an environment for such international collaboration. We further wish to address all international organisations to continue collaborations with government and non-governmental organisations and civil society, particularly us youth.

- **Promote new laws on food production system to enable synthetic meat**
- **Promote in the developed countries new laws on the consumption of lands**
Give economic benefits such as low taxation to the virtuous factories.
- **We strongly ask for international common laws for the use of water in Africa.**
To prevent conflict and asymmetrical agriculture development between African countries.
- **Tax on the consumption of meat in the richer countries**
To prevent waste of precious food and bad nutrition fast food culture.



To reach us: youthidea.onehourforeurope@gmail.com
