

Summary of CFS 51 - Side Event 15

Mobilizing urban youth in climate change adaptation solutions in Africa

Wednesday, 25 October; 8.30 – 9.45 (UTC+2) Sheikh Zayed Center & via Zoom

Organizers:

Green Cities Initiative, FAO Office of Climate Change, Biodiversity and Environment (OCB):

- Mr. Hervé Lévite, Climate Change Officer, FAO OCB
- Ms. Isabel Albinelli, Bioeconomy Specialist, FAO OCB

Co-organizers:

- High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE-FSN)
- University of Cape Town, South-Africa
- Université du Sine Saloum El-hâdj ibrahima Niass – USSEIN, Senegal
- Climate KIC
- International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)

Moderators:

- Mr. Hervé Lévite, Climate Change Officer, FAO OCB
- Ms. Isabel Albinelli, Bioeconomy Specialist, FAO OCB
- Mr. Gilles Martin, Senior Climate Officer, IFAD

Speakers:

- Prof. Dr. Bernard Lehmann, CFS HLPE-FSN Chairperson
- Dr. Jane Battersby, Urban Food Security Researcher from the University of Cape Town, South Africa, and Team Leader on the CFS HLPE-FSN Strengthening urban and peri-urban food systems.
- Dr. Mélika Vodouhnhessi, PhD student at West African Science Service Centre on Climate Change and Adapted Land Use (WASCAL), Ouagadougou, Burkina-Faso
- Ms. Jessie Fagan, FAO Lead Technical Officer of the Green Jobs for Rural Youth Employment project, Inclusive Rural Transformation and Gender Equality Division (ESP)
- Ms. Silvia Doglioni, Programme Manager (Entrepreneurship & Learning), Climate KIC, Paris
- Prof. Diegane Diouf, Head of the Faculty of Social and Environmental Sciences of the University of Sine Saloum El-hâdj ibrahima NIASS, Senegal
- Mr. Rahul Antao, Technical Specialist (Youth and Social Inclusion), ECG, IFAD

Summary

As part of FAO's Green City initiative (GCI), the event aimed at discussing the urgent need to mobilizing young citizens in African cities in addressing climate and food security challenges. The event was introduced by Mr. Hervé Lévite, FAO Climate Change Officer, who emphasized that the GCI has the potential to facilitate the creation of many green jobs, while tackling climate impacts in urban and peri-urban areas.

The event started with opening remarks by a key partner in the event, Prof. Dr. Bernard Lehnman, who serves as the Chairperson of the High-Level Panel of Experts (HLPE). He underscored the inequalities within food systems, as outlined in the latest HLPE report on [Reducing inequalities for food security and nutrition](#). Prof. Lehman stressed the importance of new emerging dimensions of food security, particularly the concept of food agency – the ability to source and prepare food within the context of one's social, physical, and economic environment, seen as crucial for empowering vulnerable and young populations to shape their own future.

Dr. Jane Butterly, researcher from the University of Cape Town and the leader of the upcoming HLPE report on urban and peri-urban agriculture, delivered a keynote speech that framed the scientific ground of the discussion. She highlighted the “youth bulge” phenomenon in African cities, projecting that by 2050, one in three young people globally will be in Africa. She also stressed the significant challenge of unemployment. Urbanization, she explained, affects various aspects such as land use, lifestyle, culture, economy, development, households, and demography, and is influenced by global factors like conflict, climate shocks, and trade flows. Dr. Butterly’s research delved into topics such as informality in African cities, the need for a shift in governance approaches, food safety, circular economy, the impact of climate change on and across the food system, and the crucial role of diversity and resilience. She introduced the new dimension of “Agency”, which can a) support food system diversity, b) increase participation in governance processes with a focus on addressing power imbalances, and c) claim new spaces for engagement and impact. She concluded by providing three concrete examples: the Masi Ambassadors program, the Food Agency Cape Town, and the Citizens for Clean Air project.

The panel discussion was opened by Dr. Melika Vodounhessi, PhD student at WASCAL in Burkina Faso, who reported on the multifaceted challenges encountered by urban youth in Africa as they engage in agriculture. Primary challenges are the lack of agricultural knowledge and the access to resources - particularly loans - but also land tenure systems, financial costs, access to agricultural inputs and modern farming equipment. Additionally, traditional and outdated farming practices are often perceived as unappealing, and the absence of successful role models in agriculture can discourage youth from pursuing careers in the field.

Ms. Silvia Doglioni from Climate KIC presented the Climathon program, launched in 2015 and now spanning over 900 cities globally, aimed at mobilizing young citizens to deploy innovative climate solutions. Climathon focuses on raising awareness about local climate challenges, building and strengthening local ecosystems, and inspiring projects and climate actions that address systemic problems leading to climate change. The number of Climathons in Africa has notably increased, including in Sudan, Senegal, Burkina-Faso and Niger. Ms. Doglioni concluded by sharing ongoing initiatives, such as the Climathon Global Days and the Catalyst project, funded by Germany and the Green Climate Fund (GCF), to boost investment in early-stage climate ventures in West Africa.

Prof. Diegane Diouf from USSEIN University in Senegal discussed the pivotal role of universities in the urban agenda, particularly in training, research, and community services. The University aims to equip young students with vocational training and soft skills, integrating leadership and entrepreneurship into the curriculum. With an emphasis on “restoring hope”, the institution houses an incubator that offers information, orientation, and entrepreneurial skills. In community services, the University actively participated in the Climathon project, collaborating with FAO and the Municipality of Kaffrine to address waste management as a significant urban issue.

After an engaging Q&A session, moderated by Ms. Isabel Albinelli, FAO Bioeconomy Specialist, and Mr. Gilles Martin, IFAD Senior Climate Officer, the event was concluded by Mr. Rahul Antao, IFAD Technical Specialist. Mr. Antao collected the key insights from the discussion into his closing remarks, including the significance of youth agency, the value of inclusive decision-making, and the necessity for access to assets and skills. Additionally, he emphasized the importance of addressing the Aspiration Attainment Gap and advocated for adopting a systemic approach to tackle these challenges.