

Summary of Side Event 23

Investing in Youth to Reduce Inequalities – Implementing the CFS Guidelines on Engaging Youth in Agriculture and Food Systems

Organisers: Canada, Private Sector Mechanism, Next-Gen Ag Impact Network (NGIN), Nuffield International, Global Alliance for Climate Smart Agriculture (GACSA), International Association of Students in Agriculture and related Sciences (IAAS), World Food Forum (WFF)

Moderator:

Nele Hermann Valente, Chair of NGIN

Event Speakers and Panellists:

Mr. Maarten de Groot, Deputy Permanent Representative, Canada

Omar Farhate - IAAS

Kenneth Obayuwana - IAAS

Abdullah Maruf - WFF

Pablo Samuel Perreira - WFF

Valentina Vitale - GACSA

Josiane Irakarama - GACSA

Femi Adekoya - NGIN

Ana Carolina Zimmerman - NGIN

David Dolan – Nuffield International

Joana Mendes – Nuffield International

Background:

Following the endorsement of the *CFS Policy Recommendations on Promoting Youth Engagement and Employment in Agriculture and Food Systems for Food Security and Nutrition* during CFS's 50th Plenary session in 2022, the time has now come to ensure effective implementation of those policy recommendations. Investing in Youth through education, capacity development and academic programs on a scale that transcends national and regional boundaries, has incredible potential to reduce inequalities, accelerate economic development in rural areas, transform our food systems and ensure the next generation of food producers and food system professionals inherit more equitable, sustainable, and resilient food systems.

Many programs currently exist to precisely do this yet lack the necessary financing and resources to expand their reach and grow their participation beyond the countries that they were established or traditionally operate within. This event intends to showcase these programs and link them to international funding and development organizations they can work with to achieve scalability on a global level. Recognizing that the youth of today inherit the success or failure of our global food systems, ensuring increased access to opportunities for youth can be the greatest driver to reduce inequalities in the future.

Summary:

Five leading organisations that promote the role and active participation of youth in agriculture and food systems spoke for 8 minutes each showcasing their existing programs that focus on education, capacity development and academic opportunities for youth engaged in agriculture and food systems that require additional investment to be scaled to a global level. Panellists gave critical insights into how each of their organisations are advancing the implementation of the CFS Guidelines on Engaging Youth in Agriculture and Food Systems across five relevant topics addressed in the CFS policy recommendations:

- Technology and knowledge transfer between producers and production sectors for accelerated innovation and technological solutions.
- Opportunities for young people in food systems through the recognition of ecosystem services.
- Science based decision making for climate action in the context of food systems.
- Capacity Development for young people in agri-food systems.
- Innovative finance models for youth entry into agri-food systems.

Following the presentations, a moderated discussion occurred that addressed the issues facing youth, youth organisations and the necessity to increase the level of funding and resourcing available to organisations that can advance young people in agriculture and food systems.

Key Takeaway Messages and Outcomes:

Following remarks by Mr. de Groot of Canada who spoke to the negotiation process that led to the CFS policy recommendations being endorsed at CFS50, Ms. Hermann Valente of NGIN made the following statement to frame the context of this side event:

“Today, 50% of the world’s population are under the age of 30. Decisions, however, are taken by leaders of a different generation who are often more than twice their age and will not be the inheritors of today’s food systems successes, or failures. We are still far from eradicating poverty and hunger, and therefore from achieving any of the interlinked SDG’s. I could continue to outline the challenges, regrettably though we are all far too aware of what those challenges are and today we are here to talk about the solutions. The solutions lie not within the policy decisions made by CFS or any other body, but in how 50% of the world’s population is given the opportunity, resources, and financial capabilities to effectively implement those Policy Guidelines in an inclusive, equitable, and impactful manner.

Even though the challenges we face are significant and growing, young people are up to tackling and overcoming these challenges. Never has the world experienced so much sense of purpose, so much – often selfless – commitment to finding solutions that help people, the planet and secure a food secure future for all.

It is important to recognise that this has been, and must continue to be, a multistakeholder effort with considerable contributions from government, academia, philanthropies, civil society, and the private sector. Only by working together, collaborating, and including the youth that these policy guidelines were developed for, can we ensure that they are implemented effectively and do not become another series of policy guidelines that gather dust here at FAO or in agriculture departments worldwide.

The challenges we face are great, our timing to address them is limited and we must act now to ensure the programs, organisations, and initiatives that we already have are given the opportunity and resources to scale their impact and continue to build on the momentum that CFS has built around this critical topic on the future of our food systems.”

Key takeaway messages from the ten panellists during this event included the following:

- That young people are very innovative and can bring solutions to the food systems crisis that we face to the table, but that they often lack the financing to bring new products and services to the market.
- Investment in education and capacity development are essential if we are to overcome the challenges faced by the 50% of the world’s population who are under the age of 30.
- That actions to advance food systems transformation must be informed by tradition and powered by innovation.
- That young entrepreneurs entering agriculture must be recognised for restoring the environment they operate their businesses within.
- Young people have an incredible ability to not wait for opportunity but can create it when given access to the necessary financing and resources.
- Three key ingredients that young people have that can accelerate food systems transformation are aspiration, advocacy, and action.
- The earlier we give Youth a place on the table the sooner we can get going with providing holistic solutions to food security and gender equality.
- In 10 years’ we don’t want to be looking at another panel of young speakers but a panel of all different ages simply because we are all equal and all have essential perspectives to bring to the table.
- Investment in programs that empower professional and personal development are boosters in our society and it facilitates knowledge exchange at an international level.