



SUMMARY

Independent Stakeholders' Report UN Food Systems Summit +4 Stocktake

Shadow Report to the UNFSS+4

July 2025



Ethiopia & Italy 2025

**UN FOOD SYSTEMS
SUMMIT + 4**
STOCKTAKE

Cover photograph: © FAO/Paul Joynson-Hicks

Rwanda – Veronica Jackson, Tanzanian chef, purchasing fresh herbs and spices at a local market.

In preparation for the United Nations Food Systems Summit +4 Stocktake, the United Nations Food Systems Coordination Hub facilitated the preparation of this Independent Stakeholders' Report to reflect the voices, experiences and priorities of non-state actors involved in food systems transformation across all regions and sectors. This report builds on the 2023 precedent and was developed through an inclusive process that included a global online questionnaire, UNFSS+4 regional and thematic preparatory meetings, a SparkBlue public consultation, and iterative reviews by both the Hub's Stakeholder Engagement and Networking Advisory Group (SENA) and the High-Level UN Food Systems Advisory Group. This process ensured that a wide range of non-state stakeholders were able to share practices and propose ways forward for UNFSS+4 and beyond. The findings were analyzed and synthesized in this report by an independent writer to reflect stakeholders' experiences, concerns and recommendations.

This 2025 Independent Stakeholders Report for the UNFSS+4 shows **growing emphasis on inclusive governance and stronger accountability mechanisms to challenge structural power imbalances and reaffirm the role of communities** in shaping food systems. **Multistakeholder platforms and coalitions are increasingly recognized** as key avenues for collaboration, but stakeholders stress the **need to move beyond participation toward rights-based co-governance** - embedding formal roles for marginalized groups, particularly Women and Youth, in decision-making. They are **calling for robust monitoring, transparency, and concrete accountability frameworks** to ensure national commitments are met, as well as institutionalized participation, dedicated financing, and intergenerational equity strategies. There is also a clear demand for **UNFSS+4 to enhance alignment of policies and financing across national, regional, and global frameworks**—such as the SDGs, NDCs, and COP30—**positioning food systems at the core of sustainable development**.

Stakeholders in general call for more inclusive national food systems transformation pathways, including processes of pathway development and implementation. They expressed disappointment with what they described as often superficial or symbolic consultation processes. They underlined that without clear feedback loops, follow-up mechanisms and visible commitment from decision-makers, food systems strategies risk ending up being ineffective. Lack of meaningful inclusion is considered not as a technical oversight but as a matter of political will, calling for real joint decision-making.

FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION PATHWAYS: FAMILIARITY, ALIGNMENT AND VALUES

Stakeholders across regions show varying levels of familiarity with their national food systems transformation plans, though many did not respond to questions on details, suggesting limited awareness or engagement. While some noted positive examples of inclusion, many felt that their perspectives were not fully reflected in national strategies, indicating a disconnect between stakeholder priorities and official plans. There was also a feeling of limited recognition of stakeholders' contributions to policy processes, with many unsure whether their input had been considered. Overall, the responses point to gaps in participation, transparency, and alignment between national directives and the values or objectives of diverse stakeholder groups.

Farmers and Producers express concern over misalignment between national policy objectives and the actual needs of their communities, noting that key issues such as income, soil and water health, and agrobiodiversity, neglected and underutilized species, are not adequately addressed. They emphasize the lack of bottom-up, community-led approaches, calling for greater integration of human rights, gender responsiveness, and local leadership, along with technical and financial support tailored to local contexts. Overall, their feedback highlights the need for more targeted, locally responsive strategies that prioritize domestic markets and reflect the socio-economic and environmental realities of agricultural communities.

Civil Society Organizations stress the absence of structured national pathways or their poor formulation, and underline that awareness of pathways remains limited among grassroots actors, while inclusive implementation mechanisms are largely missing. In particular, **Youth and Women** call for pathways processes that ensure the participation of grassroots and marginalized groups and that are firmly rooted in human rights principles.

Indigenous Peoples stressed the need to place Indigenous Peoples' knowledge and locally adapted solutions on equal footing with conventional research, institutionalizing co-decision mechanisms and creating space for long-term engagement in pathway formulation and implementation through legal and financial support structures.

↓ [El Salvador – At 22, Nubia Fuentes is a youth leader and community promoter supporting sustainable soil management, contributing to more resilient and climate-smart food systems.](#)

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PERCEIVED PROGRESS TOWARDS FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION

Of the respondents which answered questions on this topic, many felt that their country is on track or partially on track to achieve planned food systems transformation results. Fewer respondents viewed progress as falling short, while others noted it is too early to assess outcomes or were uncertain about the implementation status.

Positive examples mentioned include the implementation of dietary guidelines, the active implementation of national pathways through partnerships and dedicated investments, policy alignment with global frameworks, alignment of pathways with other national and investment plans, and promising national strategies for food recovery.

Conversely, frameworks are repeatedly described as aspirational rather than operational, lacking binding commitments and clear, transparent implementation plans. Furthermore, concerns were raised on the lack of technology integration, especially digital solutions. Many stressed the persistent financing bottlenecks preventing the effective implementation of national pathways. In their view, the current fiscal and financing models fail to uphold equity and accountability, particularly for the most vulnerable populations, thereby exacerbating existing inequalities and undermining transformation efforts.

GOVERNANCE AND COORDINATION MECHANISM FOR ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS

Youth and Women-led Workers' and Trade Union organizations report being underrepresented in decision-making processes and lacking meaningful influence on national food systems policies, despite their vital roles within food systems. They highlighted the absence of government efforts to meaningfully engage them in planning and implementation, noting exclusion from key areas such as budget discussions, legislative development, land governance, agricultural extension, and public investment. They argue that this invisibility results in policy frameworks that fail to address their unique challenges.

Youth express concerns over the disconnect between high-level policy frameworks and the lived realities of young people, particularly in marginalized communities and the superficial nature of participatory mechanisms. They call for inclusive and transparent monitoring systems that track how youth inputs inform decision-making, along with disaggregated data collection that captures youth-specific challenges and innovations. They propose concrete accountability structures, such as formal youth advisory bodies embedded within national food systems governance institutions, periodic independent evaluations of youth inclusion and clear, time-bound commitments to intergenerational equity. They stressed the importance of upholding rights-based approaches and ensuring that Youth participation moves from symbolic presence to shared decision-making authority. The exclusion of Youth not only silences a critical demographic group but also overlooks the potential of emerging leaders to drive sustainable practices and innovation within food systems.

Small-scale Farmers and Producers, Indigenous Peoples, including pastoralist communities, NGOs and Local Communities, as well as Education and Academia and Science and Technological Community are concerned by the lack of sufficient engagement and their symbolic representation in the implementation and follow up of national pathways. They highlight that pathways often overlook key issues including the protection of grazing lands and economic rights of pastoralist communities and the realities of indigenous food systems, favouring large-scale agricultural production and monocropping. They also mention the lack of transparency and the prioritization of political interests over inclusive, rights-based approaches as weaknesses of national pathways and their implementation.

Business and Industry express dissatisfaction with limited engagement in shaping national pathways, especially by businesses in the hidden middle which are often neglected in policy frameworks.

Consumers' Organizations noted the absence of consumer-centric approaches within existing frameworks. They point to a lack of emphasis on consumer behavior as a lever for systemic change, underscoring the need for more inclusive and transformative strategies that integrate consumption patterns into the broader food systems agenda.

Forms of engagement

The most common forms of stakeholder engagement in national food systems pathways over the past four years included national dialogues, capacity building, training, and public awareness or advocacy efforts. In contrast, participation in core processes such as monitoring, evaluation, and policy design has been significantly more limited. Stakeholder participation in high-level intergovernmental meetings and resource mobilization for national pathway implementation was notably low, indicating challenges in access and engagement. This limited involvement may hinder the alignment of national and global policy processes and highlights underdeveloped areas in funding and financial planning for food systems transformation.

The most effective engagement channels were i) multistakeholder platforms, ii) dedicated consultations/workshops and iii) direct engagement with National Convenors.

Challenges for engagement

Stakeholders across all groups report significant challenges in relation to meaningful engagement by key institutional actors in food systems governance. At the national level, opaque consultation processes, fragmented governance, and bureaucratic rigidity are mentioned for hindering effective participation, especially for farmer cooperatives, grassroots groups, and those promoting agroecology and rights-based approaches. Business and academic stakeholders note weak interministerial coordination, while political instability and limited access to funding further widen the participation gap.

At the subnational level, engagement suffers from underfunding, limited technical capacity, staff shortages, and leadership turnover. Many stakeholders face barriers rooted in institutional mistrust, cultural dynamics, and exclusion - such as Indigenous Peoples and youth. While some academic and business actors manage to establish ties with local authorities, access remains uneven and often reliant on informal networks.

Engagement with the UN system is seen as excessively complex, lacking transparency, and with limited funding for participation. Small-scale actors, women's organizations and civil society groups face high travel costs and bureaucratic barriers, while business and academic actors cite fragmented engagement and weak follow-up mechanisms.

Stakeholders report limited access to Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) due to restrictive eligibility criteria, technocratic approaches, and unclear decision-making. MDB priorities are observed as misaligned with local needs, and that there is limited support for agroecology and food systems transformation. Green and climate finance mechanisms remain largely inaccessible to civil society actors.

Regional integration organizations are seen as inaccessible, especially for civil society and youth groups. Political imbalances, fragmented agendas, and the low prioritization of food systems limit structured engagement. The scientific community calls for better alignment between policy priorities and local research needs.

International NGOs face criticism for lack of coordination among themselves and information sharing, which leads to duplication and reinforces inequalities. Civil society and academic actors call for equitable, context-sensitive partnerships and improved funding access.

Engagement with multinational corporations is often perceived as lacking transparency and without mechanisms for co-creation. Civil society groups, youth, and women report exclusion, while academic and business actors note corporate dominance in shaping research agendas.

Finally, as far as academia and research is concerned, stakeholders highlight unstable funding, limited collaboration opportunities, and disconnects between research and practice. They report that systemic inefficiencies and power asymmetries in academic institutions hinder inclusive, long-term partnerships and locally driven innovation.

↓ [Azerbaijan – A young beekeeper and his uncle tend to hives, supporting local honey production and livelihoods through farming.](#)

© FAO/Javid Gurbanov





↑ Ghana – Farmers Christabel Kwasi, Jagiti Agishi, and Mohammed Anita cultivate, process, and sell fonio.
© FAO/Fanjan Combrink

Recommended strategies for their improved engagement

To enhance their engagement in food systems transformation efforts, stakeholders most frequently call for capacity building, support with resource mobilization, including shared fundraising platforms, and stronger stakeholder engagement in bridging humanitarian aid with long-term food systems transformation. They also stress the importance of stronger partnerships and collaborations through working groups or multistakeholder platforms, emphasizing that synergies among governments, NGOs, academic institutions and the private sector are essential for sustainable transformation. Enhancing community and grassroot engagement and promoting research and data-driven approaches (e.g. collaborative research and data-sharing partnerships) were also among the strategies recommended. Indigenous Peoples in particular called for the institutionalization of inclusive platforms, legal guarantees for participation and citizen-led monitoring to ensure more equitable and impactful engagement.

TRACKING COMMITMENTS AND FOSTERING COLLABORATION

The report reveals a widespread gap in the formalization and monitoring of stakeholder **commitments** to food systems transformation. Many organizations either lack time-bound, measurable objectives or rely on fragmented internal reviews rather than comprehensive monitoring frameworks. Most commitments remain voluntary, with few supported by structured, centralized mechanisms capable of tracking progress and informing decisions. This may point to limited institutional capacity, low prioritization, or weak awareness of the importance of trackable commitments. Nevertheless, each stakeholder groups presented promising examples for accountability frameworks, including Indigenous Peoples-led initiatives (the Indigenous Navigator), performance indicators by the Science and Technological community, measurable commitments by NGOs, and the increasingly structured and time-bound targets with metric-based indicators often embedded in broader corporate sustainability strategies, building on standardized frameworks, by Business and Industry. These practices can offer valuable insights for other stakeholder groups on strengthening transparency, accountability, and strategic alignment in monitoring commitments.

Many respondents did not provide information on whether their organization has a clear **strategy for partnering** with the public sector and other food systems actors. Among those who did, some indicated the presence of a defined partnership strategy, reflecting active efforts to align with national food systems transformation goals. Others acknowledged the absence of such a strategy, highlighting possible gaps in strategic planning, institutional capacity, or integration into national processes.

Although most stakeholders appear to lack a formal strategy for collaboration, they have nonetheless built a densely interconnected web of partnerships across the food systems landscape through advocacy and awareness raising efforts, multistakeholders engagement and capacity building. Youth have been increasingly engaged in different forms of policy dialogues at global, national and sub-national levels. Business and Industry used broader strategic approaches for collaboration combining capacity development and local farmer empowerment with public-private partnerships and structured collaboration platforms with a clear trend to reduce environmental impact and promote climate-smart practices. Co-governance models also emerged, that engage civil society and Indigenous Peoples fostering transparency and accountability in sustainability efforts. Education and Academia and Science and Technology stakeholders have become more actively engaged in co-developing monitoring frameworks and often engage in formalized partnerships, strategic dialogues and national coordination hubs to streamline stakeholder engagement and align policy actions and data-driven strategies.

UNLOCKING INVESTMENT

Over the past four years, stakeholders have mobilized financial resources to support food systems transformation through strategic partnerships, blended finance, targeted fundraising and capacity-building initiatives. They also leveraged tools such as climate finance, government programmes, and donor-aligned research. Despite these efforts, stakeholders (mainly smaller actors including grassroots organizations) continue to face persistent challenges including limited funding availability, a misalignment between donor priorities and systemic approaches, lack of access to networks and information institutional capacity gaps and regulatory obstacles. Many funding mechanisms are seen as fragmented and short-term, often excluding smaller organizations and failing to support integrated, multisectoral solutions.

To enhance funding mobilization, stakeholders recommend a multi-pronged approach focusing on strategic partnerships, innovative financing (e.g. carbon credits, payment for ecosystem services, social impact bonds and crowdfunding), microfinance and alignment with policy priorities. They also propose leveraging global platforms (e.g. those related to the UNFSS processes), strengthening collaboration through consortia and public-private partnerships, including at regional and local levels. Academic engagement to supporting capacity-building in grant writing, financial management, and targeted financial support for the empowerment of Youth and Women, especially related to agroecology and Indigenous food systems, has also been emphasized. Simplified application processes and long-term funding are stressed for youth-led initiatives. Aligning food systems efforts with national development plans, climate strategies, and global frameworks have also been pointed out for improving access to climate and biodiversity funding, supported by stronger impact measurement and strategic communication to attract investment. Stakeholders underscored that unlocking investments for food systems transformation requires not only capital but also coordination, technical support and increased transparency.



↑ Egypt – Food chain labourers play a critical but often overlooked role in the food supply chain, here shown unloading food for distribution to retailers.
© FAO/Heba Khamis

THE UNFSS+4 AND BEYOND

Expectations from the Stocktake and the Hub

Stakeholders envision UNFSS+4 as a moment to reaffirm commitment to food systems transformation grounded in equity, accountability, and concrete, measurable outcomes aligned with realities on the ground. They stress that the future of food systems transformation depends on meaningful collaboration, transparent follow-up and long-term investment in the leadership of those most affected by current systemic inequalities.

Farmers and Producers expect the Stocktake to prioritize concrete, scalable actions that support climate-resilient and agroecological practices, backed by accessible and sustained financing. They call for robust accountability and monitoring mechanisms, fair pricing, risk reduction, and long-term, inclusive partnerships. Additionally, they would like to see the UNFSS+4 outcomes align with global climate and health agendas, and call for the promotion of nutritious, minimally processed foods, and recognition of traditional knowledge. They expect UNFSS+4 to reinforce local control of resources and access to digital innovation, along with greater cooperation and engagement from governments and stronger support for small-scale producers.

They call on the Hub to establish regional coordination mechanisms (building on the CFS CSIPM) and enable stakeholder engagement beyond high-level forums, through thematic working groups. They envision the Hub strengthening transparency and accountability through periodic progress reports, using a global food systems scorecard supported by third-party monitoring and citizen engagement to track national UNFSS+4 commitments. They urge the Hub to serve as a catalyst for action, promoting collaboration, accountability, and mobilizing financing, and to help expand partnerships among agricultural enterprises, impact investors, and SMEs to advance food systems solutions.

Civil Society Organizations expect the Stockade to elevate the visibility of agroecology amplifying the voices of underrepresented groups such as SMEs, fishers and small organizations from the Global South. They also wish to see UNFSS+4 celebrate grassroots knowledge and local solutions, promote inclusive discussions on healthy diets that consider regional contexts, and lead to concrete financing commitments for climate adaptation and food security. Finally, they expect the Stocktake to lead to stronger multistakeholder platforms, better monitoring of sustainable practices, the integration of human rights -especially the right to food - into policies and improved recognition of pastoralist food systems. They expressed strong interest in discussing topics on sustainable certification, agroecology, regenerative agriculture, agrobiodiversity, policy reform, food loss and waste reduction, innovative financing, healthy diets, and women's and youth empowerment with a focus on inclusive discussions that elevate the voices of frontline actors.

A trade union of informal women workers stressed that informal workers are integral to every stage of food systems yet their contributions often remain invisible due to their dispersed nature. As part of building just and equitable food systems, these stakeholders expect stronger recognition of informal workers, tangible outcomes that support informal workers organization into micro- and meso-level enterprises as well as actionable support for informal worker-led enterprises as a way of enhancing their collective voice, fostering innovative local solutions, and strengthening their bargaining power.

Similarly, there is a clear expectation from the Stocktake to promote the development of *bottom-up* gender data strategy. This would enable greater visibility and inclusion of informal, women, rural, and youth workers bringing forward their challenges and innovations. To achieve this, stakeholders such as governments, multilateral organizations, academia, economists and the private sector are expected to partner with grassroots worker organizations to co-design and implement such frameworks. They argue these outcomes would contribute to more inclusive, evidence-based policymaking that reflects the realities on the ground.

- ↓ [Ukraine – Zaporizhzhia Bakery No. 5 exemplifies the resilience of the business and industry sector in food systems, continuing bread production during conflict, and sustaining food access and local livelihoods.](#)
© FAO/Anastasiia Borodaienko



Youth and Women express clear expectations for long-term and meaningful engagement and collaboration with governments, UN agencies and local institutions, with an emphasis on structured participation in decision-making processes and policy dialogue and access to financing and knowledge-sharing platforms beyond symbolic inclusion.

These stakeholder groups and other Civil Society Organizations urge the Hub to place greater emphasis on integrating grassroots voices not only in UNFSS follow up processes, but within broader global and national food systems governance with a focus on locally adapted solutions. They also call for increased technical and financial support, enabling civil societies to fully engage with the Hub and its initiatives through adequate funding, interpretation services and increased transparency in decision making.

Youth look at the UNFSS as an opportunity to amplify issues related to intergenerational justice, decent work and climate-resilient agriculture. They call for increased global collaboration for better exchanges of technical and educational resources and actively involving young people in achieving the SDGs. They hope the Stocktake will foster stronger integration of food systems transformation into countries' NDCs under the Paris Agreement, and greater alignment between UNFSS+4 commitments and international climate forums such as the COP30. The UNFSS+4 is seen as a critical platform to reaffirm equity, inclusivity and financing as pillars of national and global food systems policy. Their expectations from the Stocktake includes support for the institutionalization of youth participation mechanisms through regular engagement in governance platforms such as the World Food Forum's National Chapters, along with enablers of youth engagement such as digital platforms, open-access dashboards and participatory monitoring tools.

Youth called on the Hub to continue acting as a convenor of intergenerational dialogue and innovation and urged stronger alignment of food systems transformation with broader global frameworks. They wish to see the Hub play a key role in harnessing political will and engaging stakeholders to strengthen connections between grassroots actors and policymakers.

Education and Academia and Science and Technology stakeholders expect that the Stocktake will foster collaboration across diverse actors, including academia, business, UN agencies, financial institutions, and civil society, to co-develop region-specific, inclusive, and innovative food systems solutions. Their priority areas for discussion and action include agroecology, climate-resilient technologies, circular economy practices, sustainable financing, food entrepreneurship, and the integration of Indigenous and local knowledge into food security and nutrition strategies.

Business and Industry actors expect UNFSS+4 to help foster strategic dialogue with governments, intergovernmental organizations, and financial institutions to identify impactful areas for private sector engagement with clear opportunities to unlock private investment in food systems transformation. They seek active roles in implementing national food systems pathways, particularly through investment and collaboration with local communities on food security and climate action. They expect UNFSS+4 to result in their greater inclusion in dialogues and decision-making spaces, and increased focus on the "hidden middle" of value chains, to boost resilience, decarbonization, and food security and tangible outcomes to help improve financing access for SMEs.

Business and Industry, from international and (in particular) national companies to SMEs at local level, aspire to be seen as an ally in both food systems transformation and strengthening accountability. This Stakeholder group believes and recognizes the enhanced need to work collaboratively, reach consensus, ensure uptake and implement practical solutions and approaches. This is a key requisite to address new, unfolding, developments and food security and nutrition scenarios and would support the 3rd objective of UNFSS+4, '*Unlocking Investments for food systems transformation*'. Business and Industry has, and continues to, adhere to all codes of conduct and engagement processes of UN agencies, including the UN Global Compact, and through the respective private sector strategies of the Rome-based agencies. The sector is concerned that the introduction of additional exclusion parameters in accountability mechanisms both limits and discourages engagement (at international and national level) and is contrary to incentivizing companies to make and achieve the needed UNFSS commitments.

To sustain ongoing dialogue, Business and Industry propose that the Hub establishes regular interactive multistakeholder exchange sessions (brief targeted webinars), drawing on the successful model of UN Food Systems Dialogues. They ask for derisking mechanisms as well as a (more) visible Hub presence in global policy spaces, such as COP30, to ensure that food systems remain integrated within multilateral agendas.

A common request among several stakeholder groups (*Farmers and Producers, Business and Industry, Education and Academia, Science and Technological Community and Civil Society Organizations*) is the development of a digital interactive Global Knowledge Hub to compile best practices, including effective regulatory frameworks, standardized measurement methodologies, as well as research and case studies on food systems transformation. They see this as facilitating ongoing, easily accessible engagement, enabling stakeholders to share knowledge, innovations, and progress in real time, while supporting continuous learning and the localization and adaptation of solutions.

↓ Sri Lanka – Scientists at the Food Research and Development Institute apply tissue culture techniques to improve banana and pineapple production, advancing innovation in food systems.

© FAO/David Blacker





↑ Italy – In a greenhouse, a farmer holds basil and tomatoes grown using hydroponic techniques, reflecting how farmers are utilizing innovation to advance sustainable food production.
© FAO/Riccardo De Luca

Stakeholders' priorities for the next five years and support expected from governments

Across all stakeholder groups, clear priorities have been identified to support food systems transformation in the coming years. These reflect a shared focus on agroecology, climate resilience, inclusion, finance and stronger governance mechanisms, anchored in equity and locally led solutions. Governments and partners are urged to create enabling conditions that allow these priorities to materialize and scale through policy support, dedicated resources and long-term planning.

Farmers and Producers prioritize agroecological practices and call for stronger public investment to ensure that producers, especially small-scale, are actively included in food systems transitions. They also seek support for farmers' organizations and cooperatives to access financing and appropriate services tailored to their specific needs.

Business and Industry plan to focus on regenerative agriculture and climate change mitigation, and ask for financial incentives and recognition of the role of different parts of the value chain, especially the hidden middle. They wish to see clear, outcome-based policy and regulatory frameworks, as well as streamlined approval processes for advanced technologies and stronger public-private initiatives.

Civil Society Organizations prioritize actions that include promoting equitable and gender-inclusive food systems, with a focus on traditional and Indigenous knowledge, agroecology, and promoting healthy diets through public procurement. They also emphasize fostering youth entrepreneurship and addressing food loss and waste. They call upon governments to establish policies that facilitate the inclusion of marginalized communities in food systems plans, introduce food donation laws, incorporate food loss and waste reduction into national climate change mitigation strategies; invest in and provide political support to agroecological roadmaps, and facilitate Youth employment in the agrifood sector.

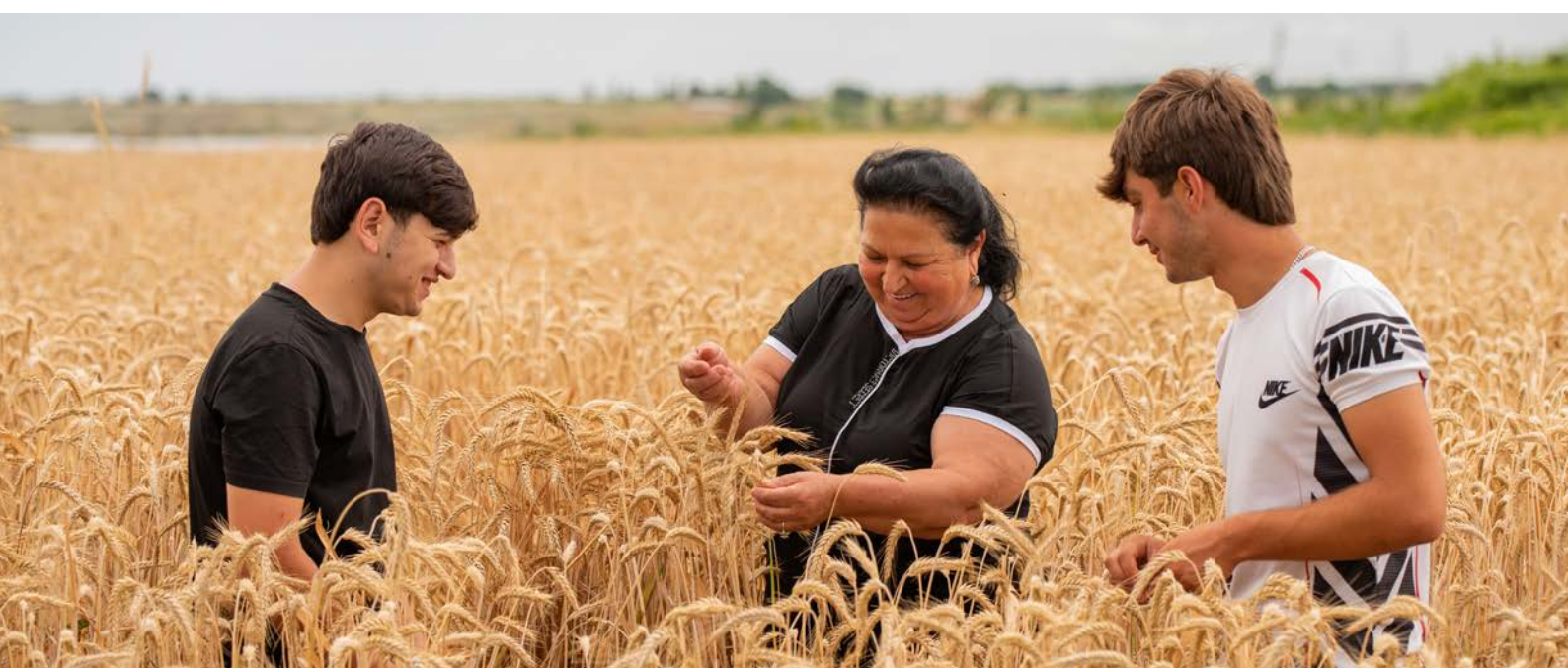
Youth call on national governments to institutionalize structural inclusion and long-term accountability ensuring formal representation of both Youth and Women in national food systems governance, with concrete participation targets. They urge legal reforms that guarantee land tenure and resource access for youth and women; mentorship and training programmes for youth and women agrifood entrepreneurs and dedicated financial instruments—including concessional credit lines, credit guarantee schemes, diaspora bonds, and blended finance mechanisms—to support youth- and women-led enterprises.

Education and Academia and Science and Technology prioritize interdisciplinary research on resilient crops, post-harvest innovations and Indigenous food knowledge positioning themselves as regional hubs for policy studies, youth incubation and technology validation. They aim to strengthen collaboration with private enterprises to foster food innovation, and train rural youth, women and self-help groups in food processing, entrepreneurship and hygiene, thereby strengthening local capacities and promoting inclusive development. Their requests to governments include integrating them into advisory committees, working groups and national consultations on food systems, support for joint research calls and strengthened linkages between Academia and Education and Science and Technology, Business and Industry, international organizations and the government, through stable public-private partnerships.

Linking UNFSS+4 to global initiatives and processes

Stakeholders emphasized the need to align the outcomes of UNFSS+4 with existing global frameworks to ensure coherence and amplify impact. Key recommendations include integrating food systems transformation into national climate commitments (under the Paris Climate Agreement), strengthening synergies with the One Health approach and linking efforts to global biodiversity, health and finance agendas, such as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, the Green Climate Fund, Adaptation Fund, IFAD and World Bank financing and global health initiatives. Several contributions stressed the importance of breaking policy silos, fostering cross-sectoral dialogue and using digital platforms and research networks to disseminate food systems innovations that contribute to climate adaptation, nutrition, and sustainability. Strong partnerships with relevant organizations, such as the WHO, FAO and the Convention on Biological Diversity, is seen as essential to promote holistic food policies that improve public health, protect biodiversity and mitigate environmental degradation.

↓ **Azerbaijan – Women farmers are increasingly taking on leading roles in their communities, driving food production and supporting rural resilience.**
© FAO/Javid Gurbanov



WAYS FORWARD

A key theme across stakeholder contributions is the urgent need for a structural shift from fragmented consultations to inclusive, accountable governance rooted in rights-based co-leadership. Governance should be seen not just as institutional structures but as the political space where decisions are made, power is shared, and responsibilities upheld. While terms like “inclusion,” “empowerment,” and “equity” are common in institutional narratives, stakeholders perceive their implementation as uneven and often symbolic. Without clear duty-bearers, time-bound goals, and enforceable mechanisms, stakeholders stress that these principles risk losing meaning. ***Embedding rights-based approaches authentically within governance is essential for legitimacy, sustainability and impact.***

Many stakeholders also note the lack of consumer-centred approaches in national plans. There is growing demand for policies addressing food environments, dietary patterns, and consumption behaviors. This includes ***promoting healthier diets aligned with planetary boundaries and balancing strategies across the full complexity of food systems, not just production.***

Fragmentation remains a major barrier to transformation. Greater coherence is needed between national pathways and global agendas, including climate, biodiversity, human rights, and development finance. ***Coherence must be built through national planning, institutional coordination, and mutual accountability.*** But coherence also requires credibility: without ***actionable, visible plans***, transformative efforts remain aspirational.

Stakeholders emphasize ***robust accountability and monitoring frameworks*** at all levels, tracking progress, establishing clear responsibilities, enabling participatory oversight, and ensuring transparency. ***Building a culture of mutual accountability based on rights, metrics, and continuous feedback*** is critical to move beyond token participation toward results-driven transformation.

Despite fatigue and disappointment, stakeholders continue to engage and push for change, showing that transformation remains a shared goal. The path forward demands reconfigured governance, shifted institutional responsibility, and committed, rights-based, locally grounded solutions. ***Stakeholders seek recognition as co-creators, calling for a shift from inclusion to co-governance, vision to action, and promises to responsibility.***

↓ South Africa – In Mbombela, packing house workers sort oranges for external defects, ensuring product quality for local and international markets.
© FAO/Madelene Cronjé



