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Youth Policy Recommendations for Agrifood Systems Transformation in Asia and the Pacific

Background and methodology

In 2026, the World Food Forum (WFF) Youth Assembly organized a regional consultative process in the lead-up to the Asia and the Pacific Food Forum, engaging young people from across the region to develop youth-led recommendations on inclusive and resilient agrifood systems. The process was led by WFF Youth Policy Board (YPB) members, with the support of the Youth Assembly Secretariat, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, the FAO Subregional Office for the Pacific Islands, and the WFF Fiji and Indonesia National Youth Chapters.

The process comprised three complementary components: an online survey, a subregional virtual consultation for Asia, and a dedicated subregional virtual consultation for the Pacific. Across all three components, the process reached a broad and diverse constituency of over 1 900 young people and youth-led organizations from across the region. Participants came from a diverse range of backgrounds, including farmers, fishers, agripreneurs, nutritionists, livestock producers, engineers, climate and environmental specialists, microbiologists, food manufacturers, agricultural researchers, students, and youth leaders, and represented the full breadth of agrifood systems across the region, from Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and coastal communities to mountainous, rural and rapidly urbanizing settings.

The consultations identified persistent and cross-cutting challenges facing youth in agrifood systems across the region, including low income and limited support for those working in fisheries, aquaculture, and related sectors. Young women, rural youth, and Indigenous Youth in particular face compounding barriers to decision-making, access to capital, land and water rights, digital technologies, and decent work opportunities. The survey found that 63 percent of respondents feel either not represented or only slightly represented in agrifood policy spaces, confirming that the dominant mode of youth engagement remains performative consultation rather than substantive co-leadership. Social stigma associated with fisheries and aquaculture, the digital divide, the high cost of education and training, and mismatches between skills development and labour market needs were identified as significant structural constraints to youth participation and advancement.

The recommendations that follow are grounded in the lived experiences of participating youth and are aligned with recent evidence from FAO publications analyzing these issues, including *The status of women in agrifood systems* (FAO, 2023), *The unjust climate* (FAO, 2024), and *The status of youth in agrifood systems* (FAO, 2025). They call for strengthened and sustained action to address systemic barriers, institutionalize meaningful youth engagement in decision-making, expand equitable access to resources and financing, and foster innovation and knowledge exchange, in support of a more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable transformation of agrifood systems across Asia and the Pacific.



Key Messages

1. Youth are not future actors, they are current actors whose leadership is being structurally blocked.

Over 1 900 young people participated in this process, representing farmers, fishers, researchers, entrepreneurs, and community leaders already deeply embedded in agrifood systems. The barriers they face are structural and institutional, not motivational. Eighty-four percent of the non-sector youth surveyed expressed interest in working in agrifood systems, and therefore the challenge is access, not aspiration.

2. Meaningful participation means co-ownership, not consultation.

Across every session and survey response, young people consistently rejected tokenistic inclusion. Youth tend to be invited to consultations but are excluded from drafting, voting, and implementation. The shift demanded is from symbolic representation to institutionalized co-leadership including reserved seats, formal advisory roles with decision-making authority, and youth-led monitoring of policy commitments.

3. Climate change is the defining agrifood challenge of this generation, and its impacts are not equally shared.

Youth across the region reported direct, lived experience of biodiversity loss, ecosystem degradation, extreme weather, sea level rise, and collapsing fisheries. Climate adaptation ranked as the top government priority in the survey (22 percent). Those who contributed least to emissions – small-scale farmers, young women, coastal communities, herders, and Pacific island youth – bear the greatest burden. Climate action must centre their voices and explicitly integrate intergenerational equity.

4. Food systems cannot be transformed without addressing nutrition equity.

Ultra-processed foods are cheaper and more accessible than nutritious alternatives across the region. Marketing amplifies this inequality. Knowledge about nutrition among youth is rising, but fails to translate into practice due to price, taste, and environment. Structural interventions in advertising regulation, school meals, food pricing, and local production are required, not just awareness campaigns.

5. The blue economy holds transformative potential for Asia and the Pacific, but only if youth and communities are recognized as its architects, not its victims.

Young people in fisheries and aquaculture face low status, poor labour conditions, limited cold-chain infrastructure, and exclusion from governance. At the same time, they are identifying new opportunities in seaweed cultivation, bioprospecting, and bioactive compound research. These innovations deserve institutional support, not just recognition.

6. Digital agriculture will continue to widen inequality unless equity is factored in the design from the start.

Digital literacy gaps topped the list of barriers to digital agriculture adoption ahead of even connectivity. Rural farmers, smallholders, older farmers, Indigenous communities, and young women are at greatest risk of being left behind. Digital transformation must prioritize co-design with communities, offline-first infrastructure, local-language content, and human facilitation, not just technology deployment.

7. Young women face a compounded system of exclusion that must be addressed in its totality.

Land tenure laws that exclude women, care economy burdens, the collateral gap, cultural mobility restrictions, and institutional ageism operate simultaneously to exclude young women from economic opportunity and decision-making. These barriers are not separate issues; they are a system, and recommendations must address them as such.

8. Traditional and Indigenous knowledge is not a supplement to science, it is a parallel and equally valid system that must be formally integrated.

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9. Financial exclusion is among the most concrete barriers youth face, and it requires concrete solutions.

Whether in fisheries, nutrition enterprises, digital agriculture, or biodiversity-based livelihoods, young people consistently identified lack of access to finance driven by collateral requirements, high interest rates, and complex application processes as the primary barrier to translating ideas into action. Blended finance, microcredit, small grant windows, and skill-based collateral models are not merely aspirational; they are operational requirements.

10. Implementation gaps are as damaging as policy gaps. Accountability must be built in, not added on.

Across all four thematic areas, participants identified the disconnect between policy commitments and actual delivery as a critical failure. Climate funding does not reach communities. Youth seats exist on paper but not in practice. Restoration programmes are designed without local knowledge. Governance reforms must come with clear timelines, monitoring indicators, accountability mechanisms, and penalties for non-compliance.



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KEY YOUTH RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MEMBERS AND FAO

Blue Transformation

Fisheries and aquaculture are a major source of livelihoods and nutrition in Asia and the Pacific. FAO's Blue Transformation, a global programme, includes sector transformation to ensure decent incomes for small-scale fishers, affordable access to fish and aquatic products for better nutrition, and combating the impacts of climate change for resilient aquatic systems.

1. Establish formal youth representation mechanisms in fisheries and aquaculture governance, including reserved seats in national fisheries councils, co-management committees, and regional decision making platforms, while strengthening labour frameworks and social protection measures to formally recognise and safeguard young people, especially young women, working in this sector.
2. Improve financial access for youth and women-led enterprises in fisheries and aquaculture by establishing dedicated microcredit training programmes, simplifying application processes and expanding financial tools tailored to small-scale fishers and family-based businesses.
3. Scale up youth focused skills development mentorship, and sector awareness programmes covering sustainable fisheries, aquaculture, food processing and conservation. Increase investment in education and training systems that equip young people with both foundational and technical knowledge, alongside the establishment or strengthening of structured mentorship programmes and targeted outreach initiatives to attract and retain youth in the sector.
4. Priority should be given to addressing gaps in foundational awareness, as survey findings indicate that basic knowledge of fisheries, aquaculture, oceans and local food systems is among the most critical entry barriers, highlighted by 96 percent of respondents. Strengthening early exposure and entry pathways into these sectors will be essential to building a new generation of skilled and engaged youth professionals.
5. Invest in cold-chain infrastructure, including solar-powered freezers and storage facilities, and in improved processing technologies and biofertilizers to reduce post-harvest losses, improve food safety and enhance market competitiveness for small-scale producers.
6. Institutionalize gender-responsive governance in fisheries and aquaculture with meaningful and permanent leadership roles for women, and formally recognize and integrate traditional and Indigenous Peoples' knowledge systems into fisheries management, climate adaptation and forecasting.
7. Invest in marine bioprospecting and research on the nutritional and medicinal profiles of aquatic resources, including seaweed and bioactive compounds, to support diversified livelihoods, nutrition outcomes and non-communicable disease prevention.
8. Develop and adopt blue economy metrics beyond GDP, including ocean accounts, Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) indicators and wellbeing-centred measures that capture intergenerational equity and benefit-sharing, to prevent the blue economy from becoming a new form of extractivism.
9. Address water pollution and climate impacts on aquatic food systems through enforceable standards, including stricter controls on waste discharge into rivers and waterways and by equipping fish farmers with accessible water quality testing tools.
10. Expand upskilling pathways, micro-credentials and labour mobility support for youth not in employment, education or training (NEET) in the fisheries and aquaculture sector across the region, enabling knowledge sharing and reducing skills mismatches.

Nutrition & Vulnerable Communities

Malnutrition in all its forms including undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, and rising overweight and obesity remains a pressing challenge across Asia and the Pacific. Rapid urbanization, changing food environments, and persistent inequalities continue to shape diets and health outcomes, particularly for vulnerable populations such as low-income households, rural communities, Indigenous Peoples, women, and children. Transforming agrifood systems to ensure equitable access to safe, affordable, and nutritious diets, while strengthening social protection and community-based approaches, is critical to improving nutrition and leaving no one behind in the region.

1. Strengthen local food systems by implementing government subsidies, incentives and protective policies for smallholder and traditional farmers, ensuring vulnerable communities have stable, affordable access to nutritious and culturally appropriate food.
2. Improve the affordability and accessibility of healthy food, particularly in low-income and rural areas, by regulating food prices, requiring the availability of fresh and nutritious options in markets, schools and food outlets and addressing income barriers that prevent equitable access.
3. Regulate the marketing and advertising of ultra-processed foods, particularly those targeting low-income and youth populations, while mandating the increased availability of nutritious options in schools, canteens and public food systems. Enforce school meal policies to ensure children access safe, healthy and affordable meals.
4. Strengthen nutrition education and behaviour change programmes from an early age, including targeted label literacy campaigns in schools, access to trusted nutrition information through digital and social media platforms, and measures to counter nutrition misinformation.
5. Invest in the training, deployment and working conditions of nutrition workers and health professionals, especially in schools and underserved communities shifting health systems from curative to preventive approaches that prioritise diet-related disease prevention.
6. Establish and strengthen disaggregated nutrition data systems that capture the status and determinants of malnutrition among youth, young women and vulnerable groups, and use this evidence to design targeted, evidence-based interventions including research on and production of ready-to-use therapeutic foods (RUTFs) for the most marginalised communities.
7. Strengthen food supply chains, distribution infrastructure and community based nutrition interventions through dedicated funding, improved logistics and last-mile delivery mechanisms to ensure nutritious food reaches remote and underserved populations.
8. Promote climate-smart agriculture practices, including hydroponics and vertical farming, as complementary approaches to traditional food production, particularly in urban and peri-urban settings where land access is limited.
9. Institutionalize meaningful youth participation in nutrition policy making, data collection and food system governance, by creating formal advisory roles, feedback mechanisms and youth-led monitoring of nutrition programmes to ensure policies reflect lived experiences on the ground.
10. Protect and promote traditional, local and Indigenous food cultures by countering the framing of 'Western' or processed food as aspirational and by integrating culturally relevant nutrition education that elevates locally available nutritious foods in schools and communities.



Biodiversity, Climate Action & Natural Resources

Asia and the Pacific is one of the most climate-vulnerable regions globally, facing increasing pressures from climate change, biodiversity loss, land degradation and water scarcity. These challenges are further intensified by population growth, urban expansion, and competing demands on natural resources. Protecting ecosystems, promoting sustainable resource management, and strengthening climate resilience across agrifood systems are essential to safeguarding livelihoods and food security. Integrating traditional knowledge with innovative solutions will be key to advancing inclusive and locally adapted approaches to sustainability in the region.

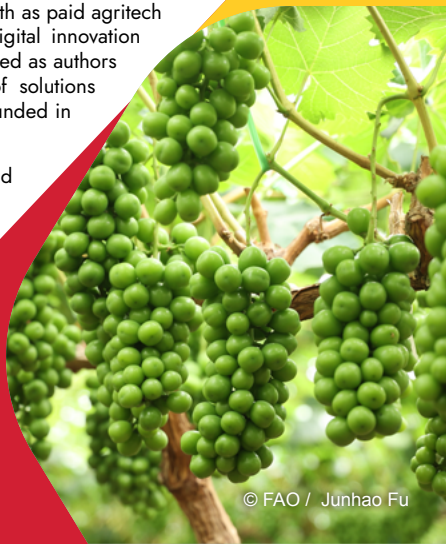
1. Scale up community-based and ecosystem-based approaches to restoration and biodiversity protection, including agroecology, agroforestry, mangrove rehabilitation and landscape approaches that connect forests, agriculture and coastal systems, with priority support to areas experiencing acute degradation such as Sri Lanka, India and the Philippines.
2. Develop context-specific climate adaptation measures for agrifood systems, addressing floods, droughts, extreme heat, extreme cold events, pest outbreaks and unpredictable rainfall across the region, including targeted support for Mongolia's herder communities, Bhutan's agricultural sector and coastal communities across Bangladesh, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and the Pacific Island nations.
3. Shift climate and biodiversity governance from top-down to participatory, community-centred approaches, ensuring the restoration plans, policy frameworks and resource management strategies are co-designed with local communities, youth and Indigenous Peoples are informed by local ecological knowledge.
4. Institutionalize meaningful youth participation in biodiversity, climate action and agrifood governance by establishing reserved seats, formal co-creation roles, and accountability mechanisms that recognize young people as active partners rather than symbolic participants or beneficiaries.
5. Eliminate structural barriers to youth engagement in nature-based livelihoods by expanding access to land, agricultural financing, training, markets and digital infrastructure with targeted measures for rural, remote and Indigenous Youth who face compounded disadvantages.
6. Establish dedicated, flexible funding mechanisms for youth-led climate and biodiversity initiatives, including small grant windows, startup support and co-financing arrangements with development banks, subject to gender audits to ensure funds reach young women, rural communities and youth-led cooperatives.
7. Integrate Indigenous local and scientific knowledge systems in climate adaptation and ecosystem restoration, by developing joint knowledge platforms, co-designed restoration protocols and biocultural monitoring systems that draw on community experience alongside scientific data.
8. Make agriculture, fisheries and nature-based livelihoods more attractive and economically viable for young people by investing in value chains, innovation ecosystems and income diversification pathways that reduce climate risks and challenge the perception that these sectors are "not cool" or financially precarious.
9. Address governance and policy implementation gaps in climate and biodiversity funding by improving transparency, accountability, timelines and intersectoral coordination, ensuring that resources reach communities effectively and that policy clashes between conservation, agriculture, and development objectives are resolved through landscape-level planning.
10. Promote the leadership of young women in climate governance, biodiversity management and agrifood innovation by establishing reserved seats, designing programmes that account for their multiple roles in households and communities, ensuring equitable access to climate finance, and conducting national gender audits of climate budgets.



Digital Agriculture and Innovation

Digital agriculture and innovation are rapidly transforming agrifood systems across Asia and the Pacific, creating new opportunities to improve productivity, market access, and resilience. However, unequal access to digital infrastructure, skills, and financing continues to limit the ability of youth and rural communities to fully benefit from these advancements. Strengthening inclusive digital ecosystems, supporting youth-led innovation, and scaling context-appropriate technologies are critical to ensuring that digital transformation contributes to more efficient, equitable, and sustainable agrifood systems in the region.

1. Expand affordable internet and mobile connectivity for rural and remote youth as a foundational prerequisite for any other digital intervention, integrate data access subsidies into existing agricultural support programmes and mandate offline-first design standards for any publicly funded digital agriculture tool, tools must function without reliable connectivity if they are to reach the communities that need them most.
2. Invest in digital literacy and capacity-building programmes for youth and farmers, with specific focus on young women and indigenous communities, providing practical training on crop planning, weather forecasting, market access and financial tools, delivered in local languages through community digital hubs and mobile platforms.
3. Ensure digital agriculture solutions are co-designed with farmers, youth, especially young women, and Indigenous communities rather than developed for them, drawing on the Fijian principle of Solesolevaki (cooperative shared responsibility) and similar frameworks of cooperative, and intergenerational knowledge exchange to build tools that strengthen rather than replace traditional knowledge.
4. Improve transparency and equity in agricultural value chains by deploying digital marketing platforms, QR code traceability stems and blockchain based tools that connect farmers directly to buyers, reduce dependency on middlemen and improve farmgate prices for smallholders and youth agripreneurs. Public procurement for school feeding and government food programmes should be used to create demand-side incentives for traceability adoption.
5. Establish blended finance mechanisms, regulatory sandboxes and youth agritech accelerators to reduce cost barriers to digital innovation, drawing on development bank funding, subsidised connectivity, crowdfunding and blockchain based lending model, with explicit conditions ensuring that youth-led agritech startups reach smallholders at the last mile rather than concentrating benefits among already-connected and better-resourced producers.
6. Embed digital agriculture, artificial intelligence (AI) tools and agricultural engineering in national education systems, through school curricula, school gardens with real-time sensors and train-the-trainer programmes that certify youth as paid agritech extension workers, ensuring communities are authors of digital innovation rather than passive recipients. Communities must be positioned as authors of digital innovation rather than as passive recipients of solutions designed elsewhere, and this requires digital education grounded in local agricultural contexts from the outset.
7. Develop open-source, interoperable regional platforms and national biocultural databases that document Indigenous agricultural practices in machine-readable formats, enable farmer-to-buyer trade across Asia and the Pacific supply chains, and create peer-learning networks for youth agritech innovators to share tools and avoid duplication.



8. Reinforce youth participation in digital agriculture governance by establishing formal advisory seats in national ministries and regional bodies, ensuring young innovators from across Asia and the Pacific can influence policy, share innovations and hold governments accountable for inclusive digital transformation commitments.
9. Strengthen farmer cooperatives and community digital hubs as anchors for collective access to digital tools, training and market information, enabling smallholders, Indigenous Youth, young farmers and youth to improve bargaining power, reduce exploitation in food value chains, and access extension services.
10. Develop digital agriculture tools, training schedules, and participation mechanisms that explicitly account for the time and mobility constraints facing young women, including flexible and asynchronous learning formats, childcare-compatible training, and mobile-first platforms. The digital divide reproduces existing gender inequalities unless gender equity is intentionally designed into every layer of digital agriculture programming.



Conclusion

The youth of Asia and the Pacific therefore issue a strong and urgent call to FAO Member Nations to adopt and act upon the recommendations presented in this declaration. This call extends beyond symbolic engagement: it demands a shift towards meaningful and institutionalized youth participation in decision-making processes at all levels. Governments, civil society organizations, development partners, and regional bodies are equally urged to work alongside youth in co-creating solutions that dismantle systemic barriers, expand equitable access to resources and opportunities, and strengthen innovation ecosystems across the region. Only through sustained collaboration and genuine inclusion can the transformation of agrifood systems in Asia and the Pacific be achieved in a manner that is resilient, equitable, and driven by the leadership and innovation of its youth.

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Their collective contributions reflect the strength, diversity, and enduring commitment of youth across the region to building agrifood systems that are sustainable, inclusive, and resilient.





The Youth Assembly of the World Food Forum

Connecting Youth Voices to Policy

The Youth Assembly of the World Food Forum (WFF) is a youth-led platform and the cornerstone of the WFF's approach to institutionalized youth engagement in agrifood systems governance. Driven by young people through a Youth Policy Board, with the FAO Office of Youth and Women (OYW) hosting the Secretariat, the Assembly works in close collaboration with FAO technical divisions to ensure that youth engagement is evidence-based, policy-relevant, and technically sound.

The Assembly provides structured and sustained opportunities for youth to engage in global, regional, and thematic policy dialogue through consultations, intergenerational exchanges, and youth-led research and recommendations, bringing together a diverse spectrum of youth stakeholders across regions, backgrounds, and areas of expertise – moving beyond tokenistic representation towards genuine inclusion.

By linking youth perspectives with FAO's technical expertise, the Assembly strengthens young people's capacity to contribute meaningfully to decision-making while serving as a sounding board for FAO on emerging priorities and implementation challenges. This two-way engagement supports youth in moving from consultation to action and embeds their contributions within FAO's institutional processes and broader intergovernmental spaces, including FAO governance bodies and global policy forums such as the Rio Conventions and the Commission on the Status of Women.



Learn more about the
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