

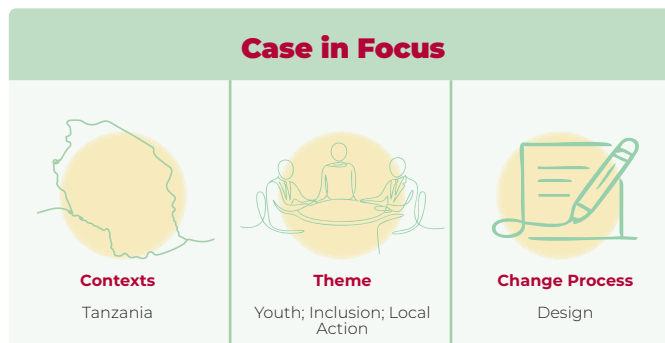
# USING COLLECTIVE ACTION TO AMPLIFY YOUTH VOICES AND INFLUENCE FOOD SYSTEMS POLICY IN TANZANIA



*Young people represent a critical yet underutilised force in transforming food systems. This case study examines how youth-led collective action campaigns can serve as a mechanism to amplify youth voices and influence food system transformation. It shows how young people can engage with decision-makers at both local and national levels to shape agendas, embed inclusivity, and create opportunities for meaningful participation in policy processes. This case underscores how collective action can reposition young people as active agents of change in food system policy and offers insights on how policymakers and stakeholders can support the integration of youth perspectives into formal decision-making structures.*

## Motivation

Young people can play a critical role in food systems transformation, particularly if they are able to not only contribute to but also co-lead initiatives, shape policy agendas, and hold decision-makers accountable. Despite this transformative potential, policy-making processes rarely provide young people with opportunities to share their aspirations or lived experiences to inform policy formulation. Instead, young people often remain nearly invisible or seen as passive beneficiaries rather than active drivers of change. Collective action offers young people with shared food system priorities an opportunity to create sustained pressure for policy change while strengthening their capacity for long-term engagement in decision-making processes. This case study examines how youth-led collective action in Tanzania strengthened youth voice by engaging decision-makers and integrating collective action initiatives into local and national food policy processes.



## Case Study Context

In the context of this study, 'collective action' is defined as the coordinated efforts by young individuals or groups who pool their resources, knowledge, and agency to amplify their perspectives within food systems policy processes. A 'collective action campaign' emerges once these groups outline a structured and time-bound set of activities and strategies to advance a shared objective within such processes. This case study draws on the first cohort of the GAIN Youth Voices project in Arusha, Tanzania. It is based on 24 interviews completed with 9 youth leaders and 15 stakeholders representing state actors, non-state actors, and representatives from the collective actions' sites, including schools and a local market. These key informants were purposely selected based on their involvement in the collective action campaigns. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and thematically analysed, and were complemented by information obtained from the project team.



This case study was developed as part of the 'Exemplars of Food System Change' project of the Nourishing Food Pathways programme, which seeks to document examples of food system transformation in action and explore what enables and holds back change. You can access the full report for this case study at <https://doi.org/10.36072/wp.68>, and all the case studies here: <https://www.gainhealth.org/exemplars>

## Linking Youth-Led Action to National Food Systems Pathway Implementation

Through the GAIN Youth Voices project in Arusha, youth leaders designed and implemented collective action campaigns that translated Tanzania's National Food Systems Pathway into practical, community-level action. With targeted financial and technical support, youth focused on priority areas aligned with national goals: improving access to safe and nutritious diets, strengthening school feeding programmes, reducing food waste, and promoting inclusive and resilient food systems. The project also engaged governments and policy stakeholders to generate impetus for engaging youth in food systems policy processes

Four complementary campaigns were implemented. First, youth worked to improve food safety and food waste management in local markets by training vendors on food safety practices, organising food waste management, and conducting public awareness campaigns to create safer market environments. Second, they promoted healthy school meals by working with school leaders and parents, establishing nutrition clubs and school vegetable gardens, and advocating for consistent access to nutritious meals for learners. Third, youth worked to strengthen nutrition education and local food production by establishing urban vegetable gardens, training peers on eco-friendly farming practices, and delivering nutrition and food safety awareness through community outreach and social media. Finally, youth aimed to advance inclusion in food systems decision-making and policy processes through youth-led dialogues; training peers on food policy, advocacy, and leadership; participating in policy platforms; and running social media campaigns to amplify youth voices.

Together, these collective actions sought to operationalise national food systems priorities at the local level, demonstrating how youth engagement could improve food safety, nutrition, sustainability, and participation in decision-making. Importantly, the campaigns were implemented through small, coordinated youth teams that worked collaboratively to influence food system transformation. This collective approach ensured that interventions were not isolated responses to local challenges, but rather strategic efforts aligned with existing government priorities and policy directions.



*I wasn't working on this alone. We had a group of 5 to 6 youth leaders. We chose this [our topic] because it was one of the challenges that we identified in Arusha. There are many issues, but this was more of a priority also to the government, so we thought it required more effort from the youth as well.*



## Youth as Catalysts of Community-Led Innovation and Change

By leveraging their demographic presence, creativity, and energy, youth leaders were able to mobilise peers, initiate practical and context-specific innovations to improve food accessibility challenges, and link community-based interventions to broader systemic change. Stakeholder interviewees consistently recognised young people as catalysts of change, capable of influencing perceptions, mobilising peers and communities, and introducing new ideas and strategies.



*The value I see is that the youth themselves are the catalyst of change, meaning they have a great ability to change perceptions, and they have already demonstrated this capacity.*



Through the collective action campaign activities, the young people established strong connections with the local community, especially existing youth groups. Recognising this value, stakeholders leveraged the youth-led networks established through collective action campaigns to effectively reach and engage local populations. Rather than creating parallel implementation structures, stakeholders adopted a collaborative model that integrated existing youth networks into formal programme delivery.



*While implementing a programme on urban and peri-urban agriculture, we realised there was an active youth leaders' working group, we chose not to duplicate efforts or create parallel structures but instead engaged the youth themselves to implement the project.*



## Youth Shifting Local Action into Policy Engagement

Young people participating in the Youth Voices project were exposed to national and regional food systems networks, expanding their understanding of how local action connects to wider policy processes. This exposure helped them to recognise that their voices could influence not only community practices and behaviours but also national-level food systems policy processes.



*Policies on nutrition and health need to be improved. Through the youth voice[s] initiative, we [youth leaders] can help improve these policies.*



Collective action campaigns enabled young people to engage directly with decision makers and elevate local food system issues in formal decision-making spaces. Interviewees confirmed that, through the campaigns, young people enhanced their capacity to present proposals, negotiate priorities, and influence policy agendas.



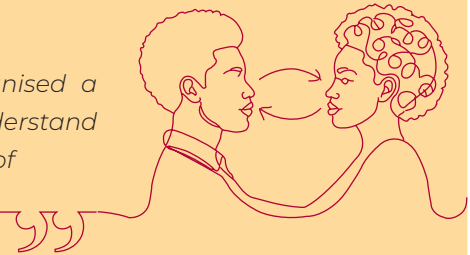
*Youth have been able to discover themselves and become leaders. Some who were once afraid to speak in public can now present proposals on new community interventions directly to government officials, follow up on its implementation, and actively engage in broader policy discussions.*



The Youth Voices project facilitated direct engagement between youth leaders and food system policymakers at national, and regional levels. For instance, During the 2025/26 national budget cycle, the project supported youth leaders in engaging senior representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture, creating practical opportunities to connect community realities with national policy priorities. Following the passage of the national agriculture budget, youth leaders participated in a post-budget analysis exercise in which they scrutinised public resource allocation, identified critical funding gaps, and strengthened their capacity to hold decision-makers accountable for delivering on policy commitments.

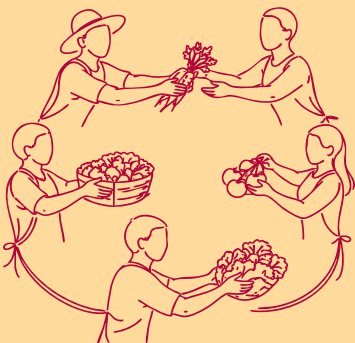


*When the national agriculture budget was passed, we organised a post-budget analysis to involve youth directly so they could understand how resources are planned and used, identify gaps, and be part of bringing change.*



### **Redefining Youth Roles in Food Systems Policy processes**

Youth collective action campaigns helped begin to redefine young people's role in food system policy processes by changing how decision makers perceived them. Whereas youth are often regarded as passive recipients of decisions, collective action initiatives enabled them to demonstrate their expertise, leadership, and credibility. This started to shift policymakers' perceptions, positioning youth as active change agents towards food system transformation.



*...Now they [policymakers] see that we can influence them and support them. Through the programme, they also saw that we can advise them, too, and bring change in food systems.*



### **Barriers to Sustainable Youth Collective Action**

The sustainability and effectiveness of youth collective action in influencing food systems decision-making in Tanzania are constrained by several interconnected barriers. These include challenges related to the formalisation and operational capacity of youth collectives, youth engagement and retention, and the dynamics of multi-sectoral collaboration.

Whilst the Youth Voices project intentionally supported youth-led initiatives operating informally, offering flexibility to work outside rigid institutional structures, stakeholders pointed out a broad structural challenge. The findings show that a significant proportion of youth-led collectives operate within informal structures that lack official recognition by both local and central government and do not have established institutional frameworks. This undermines both the long-term engagement of young people and the effectiveness of their campaigns.

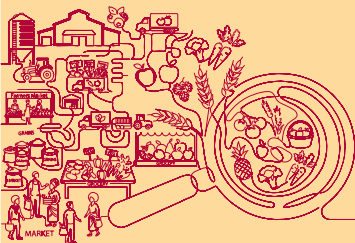


Those youth have sufficient knowledge on leadership and the capacity to carry out these activities. However, the groups need to be given more formal structure. They operate informally without official recognition or institutional frameworks.



Owing to their age and career stage, youth in Tanzania also tend to move regularly to other parts of the country; this can disrupt ongoing initiatives and affect both individual capacity building and the sustainability of collective action. Some young people involved in the collective action relocated for education and employment, which affected the continuity of their campaigns.

Interviewees also noted that some young people prioritise immediate results over sustained engagement in the lengthy processes required for systemic change to happen. When the process appeared long, and not aligned with their personal interests, these young people withdrew. This short-term engagement can weaken collective cohesion, as it can lead to inconsistent participation in policy dialogue, limited follow-up with decision-makers, and reduced institutional learning.



So sometimes they [youth leaders] don't see the bigger picture. They want results quickly, and if they don't see them, they can withdraw.



## BARRIERS AND ENABLERS TO CHANGE

### ENABLERS

Youth collective action to influence food systems decision-making in Tanzania was facilitated by:

- *Alignment of collective action campaigns with national food systems priorities*
- *GAIN's ability to generate political impetus for government and decision-makers to engage youth in food systems policy.*
- *Ability of young people to mobilise peers and establish strong connections with local communities*
- *Exposure to national and regional food systems networks*
- *Integration of collective action campaigns into the youth leadership initiative*

### BARRIERS

Barriers it faced included:

- *Lack of formal recognition and institutional frameworks for youth collectives*
- *Youth mobility affecting continuous engagement with policymakers*
- *Mismatch between youth expectations or priorities and slow policy making processes*
- *Unclear incentives for multi-sectoral collaboration*

## Conclusion

Youth-led collective action has emerged as a promising mechanism for advancing food systems transformation. This case study demonstrated how the Youth Voices project in Tanzania successfully initiated and supported youth collectives to translate community-level action into national food systems priorities through coordinated campaigns. Youth were recognised by some stakeholders as catalysts of change, capable of mobilising communities, introducing innovative solutions, and shifting from local action to meaningful policy engagement. Through collective action, young people began to redefine their role in food systems decision-making, moving from passive beneficiaries to active agents who presented proposals, negotiated priorities, and influenced policy agendas. However, several barriers constrained the sustainability of their engagement: informal structures lacking official recognition and institutional frameworks, youth mobility due to education and employment opportunities, and mismatches between youth expectations for quick results and slow policy making processes. Addressing these structural and institutional challenges is essential to harness the full potential of youth collective action in amplifying youth voice and influencing food system transformation.



*This case study was produced by Leonard Mulei, Stella Nordhagen, and Miriam Shindler; we thank Elizabeth Russaitis, Saddam Khalfan Ahmed, Wendy Gonzalez, and Joan Msuya for their contributions to the work. The full case study can be accessed at <https://doi.org/10.36072/wp.68>. This work was produced through GAIN's Nourishing Food Pathways programme, which is jointly funded by*



In partnership with  
**Canada**



Co-funded by  
**the European Union**



**german  
cooperation**

DEUTSCHE ZUSAMMENARBEIT



**Irish Aid**

An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha  
Department of Foreign Affairs



Ministry of Foreign Affairs



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
Confederazione Svizzera  
Confederaziun svizra

**Swiss Agency for Development  
and Cooperation SDC**

*The findings, ideas, and conclusions presented in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of GAIN or any of the agencies mentioned above.*

## Resources:

EOSG. 2023. *Meaningful Youth Engagement in Policymaking and Decision-making Processes (UN Executive Office of the Secretary-General (EOSG) Policy Briefs and Papers)*. United Nations. <https://doi.org/10.18356/27082245-26>

HLPE. 2021. *Promoting Youth Engagement and Employment in Agriculture and Food Systems*. <http://www.fao.org/3/cb5463en/cb5463en.pdf>

Mulei L et al. 2026. *Youth Collective Action as a Catalyst for Food System Transformation: A Case Study from the Youth Voices project in Tanzania*. GAIN Working Paper #68.