

BUILDING YOUTH LEADERSHIP FOR FOOD SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION

HOW YOUTH ARE TURNING FOOD SYSTEM LEARNING INTO COMMUNITY ACTION IN BANGLADESH



GAIN Working Paper n°72

July 2026

Samprita Chakma, Stella Nordhagen, Miriam Shindler, and Mehedi Hasan Bappy



Recommended citation

Chakma S, Nordhagen S, Shindler M, and Bappy M. Building Youth Leadership for Food System Transformation: How youth are turning food system learning into community action in Bangladesh. Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN). Working Paper #72. Geneva, Switzerland, 2026. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36072/wp.72>

© The Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN)

This work is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-Share Alike 4.0 IGO licence (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 IGO; <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>). Under the terms of this licence, you may copy, redistribute and adapt the work for non-commercial purposes, provided the work is appropriately cited, as indicated below. In any use of this work, there should be no suggestion that GAIN endorses any specific organisation, products or services. The use of the GAIN logo is not permitted. If you adapt the work, then you must license your work under the same or equivalent Creative Commons license. The contribution of third parties do not necessarily represent the view or opinion of GAIN.

Acknowledgements

We thank Elizabeth Rusaitis-Graham and Wendy Gonzalez for their early input on this case study. We are grateful to our colleague in Bangladesh, Zawad Alam for his support in collecting data for this case study. We also express our sincere gratitude to Sayi Makwaia, Tesfaye Bekele, and Roseline Remans from Glocolearning for collecting data, and sharing insights from the project evaluation report, which have greatly informed this working paper. The figures in the Annex were designed by Michael Gichane. Finally, we extend our appreciation to all interviewees for their time and for sharing their perspectives.

This work was supported, and this publication has been produced, through the Nourishing Food Pathways programme which is jointly funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands; the European Union; the government of Canada through Global Affairs Canada; Irish Aid through the Development Cooperation and Africa Division (DCAD); and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA). The findings, ideas, and conclusions contained presented here are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of any of GAIN's funding partners.

The photograph on the cover page shows a group of Youth Voices project participants. All photographs were taken with consent for use in publications.

SUMMARY

Young people are increasingly recognised as important contributors to food system transformation: raising awareness, leading community initiatives and bringing new perspectives to food system challenges. However, opportunities for them to move beyond these roles and engage in decision-making processes remain limited. In Bangladesh, the Food Systems Youth Leadership Initiative was introduced to strengthen youth leadership in food system transformation and deepen young people's understanding of food systems. This initiative also encouraged community-driven actions through collective action campaigns, helping young people build the confidence and capacity needed to engage more effectively in policy and decision-making spaces.

This case study explores how the Initiative contributed to the development of youth leadership and advocacy capacities through community engagement. It also highlights enablers and barriers to youth engagement in food system transformation. Twenty in-depth interviews and a focus group discussion were used to understand participants' experiences, learning processes and perceived outcomes of the Initiative.

Participants described developing stronger awareness of food system challenges and increased confidence in engaging communities and local stakeholders. Youth-led initiatives were aligned with Bangladesh's National Pathway for Sustainable Food System Transformation, ranging from school-based nutrition activities and food waste awareness campaigns to small-scale community projects on climate-smart agriculture and healthy diet awareness, translating training into real-world practice. Experiential learning and peer collaboration were key factors that supported the youth engagement. However, participants also highlighted ongoing challenges such as limited resources, gender-related barriers, and difficulties sustaining initiatives beyond project timelines. The case study suggests that combining structured leadership with hands-on community action can help youth move from learning to practice in food system transformation. While these initiatives provide an important starting point for youth engagement, sustained support and clearer pathways are needed to strengthen long-term impact.

KEY MESSAGES

- Experiential learning helped youth move from knowledge to action by applying food system concepts through hands-on community initiatives.
- Leadership training strengthened confidence and food system awareness, enabling youth to engage more actively with peers and local communities and stakeholders.
- Community-based activities made food system issues more visible locally translating training into practical change.
- Peer learning and collaboration supported sustained engagement by encouraging teamwork, creativity and shared problem solving.
- Barriers to long-term action include limited resources, social expectations (particularly for young women) and challenges sustaining initiatives beyond project timelines.
- Youth-led community action offers a strong starting point for broader food system engagement, showing how structured training and real-world practice can prepare youth for future initiatives.

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVE

INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

The global food system is facing myriad interlinked challenges, including climate change, rising inequalities in access to affordable healthy diets, and increasing risks of diet-related diseases (1–3). Transforming the food system has therefore become essential to ensure a future where people have equitable access to healthy, affordable diets derived from sustainable and resilient food systems (1–4).

Youth are increasingly recognised as pivotal agents in transforming global food systems. In Bangladesh, the government defines youth as the group ranging in age between 18 to 35 years (5). Representing the largest demographic group worldwide, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), young people hold the potential to act both as critical stakeholders and changemakers in reshaping food systems toward sustainability and equity (6,7). Despite this potential, youth have been often excluded from formal decision-making processes. However, there has been a growing global shift toward recognising youth as key stakeholders in the food system transformation. Notably, the United Nations Food System Summit (UNFSS) positioned youth as a critical constituency for advancing national and global food system transformation agendas (8,9). Nevertheless, barriers to meaningful youth participation in formal decision-making processes persist. Addressing this continued exclusion is critical, as it limits the extent to which food systems can benefit from young people's contextual knowledge, innovation, and long-term stake in decision-making outcomes.

Historically, policy-making processes related to food, nutrition, and agriculture in Bangladesh have been largely hierarchical and adult dominated, offering limited opportunities for meaningful youth participation. Youth engagement, when present, has often been symbolic rather than influential. However, following the July 2024 political transition, there has been a notable shift in the political and governance landscape, with policymakers demonstrating increased openness to engage youth in decision-making processes (10). This emerging inclusivity represents a critical window of opportunity to advance youth voices in food systems governance. Nevertheless, increased access alone does not guarantee meaningful influence. Evidence from Bangladesh indicates that despite growing opportunities for participation, many young people face gaps in leadership skills, policy literacy, and practical experience in engaging with decision-makers, limiting how effectively they can participate in newly opening policy spaces (11,12). Understanding how youth build the readiness, agency, and organisational strength required to navigate and shape this evolving governance processes remain an underexplored area.

This paper addresses this gap and aims to add to knowledge on this topic by presenting a case study of youth leadership development in Bangladesh, illustrating how community-oriented collective action can function as a formative pathway for building systems awareness, leadership capacity, and readiness for engagement in food system decision making. The next section sets up the case study by discussing existing literature on youth leadership, globally and in Bangladesh, and the opportunities for building youth leadership skills. This is followed by a description of the specific case study, the study methods, and the results, which are then discussed to draw insights for fostering stronger youth leadership in food systems in the future.

GAPS IN LEADERSHIP AND CAPACITY BUILDING FOR YOUTH IN FOOD SYSTEMS

Despite increasing attention to youth engagement in food systems, gaps persist in developing meaningful youth leadership capacities for participation in decision-making. While Positive Youth Development (PYD) approaches¹ explicitly emphasise building young people's skills, agency, and capacity to engage with broader systems, evidence from programme implementation in LMIC contexts suggests that these elements are not consistently translated into practice (13). Gaps are particularly evident in the provision of structured experiential learning and application opportunities. Studies and youth programming landscape analyses indicate that many initiatives tend to prioritise volunteering, behaviour change activities, and employability-focused training, with comparatively less attention to policy engagement, governance literacy, and systems-level analysis (13,14). In Bangladesh, similar patterns have been observed. Youth focused initiatives are often oriented toward community service and livelihood development while structured opportunities to build competencies for engaging in policy and decision-making processes remain limited. This pattern, documented in youth-programming landscape analyses, helps explain why many young people remain under-prepared to engage meaningfully in food-system decision-making, despite the stated intent of PYD-informed approaches (14,15).

Additional barriers such as digital divides, unequal access to education, information, and participation platforms, and limited mentorship opportunities further restrict youth engagement in policy and decision-making processes, resulting in uneven pathways for developing meaningful leadership in sustainable food systems (7).

Rural, marginalised, and underprivileged youth are particularly affected as they often lack access to institutional networks, formal participation mechanisms and decision-making forums related to food, nutrition, and agriculture. Limited access to training, digital technology, and financial resources further constrains their ability to participate in planning processes or influence decisions that shape food, nutrition, and agriculture priorities in their communities (9,16). Young women face additional gender-specific barriers to participation in decision-making. Prohibitions on women's mobility due to restrictive social norms and disproportionate unpaid care responsibilities limit their ability to attend consultations, trainings, or leadership forums. As a result, young women remain systematically under-represented in research, leadership, and decision-making spaces related to food and nutrition (9,17,18). Together, these intersecting constraints shape whose voices are heard in decision-making processes and whose perspectives are reflected in food, nutrition, and agriculture policies, reinforcing unequal leadership opportunities for youth leadership.

Recognising these persistent gaps, efforts to strengthen youth participation in food system decision-making have expanded globally. For example, the Youth Leadership Programme, supported by UN Food Systems Coordination Hub partners such as the Food and

¹ Positive Youth Development (PYD) is an approach that focuses on strengthening young people's assets such as skills, confidence, agency and supportive relationships so they can contribute meaningfully to their communities and participate in decision making processes (14).

Agriculture Organization, is another initiative that aims to build youth capacity in systems thinking and policy engagement as well as to support more structured opportunities for meaningful participation in food systems decision making processes (8). At the UNFSS+4, the Youth Declaration underscored the need to institutionalise youth leadership within food-systems governance by establishing formal roles, strengthening mentorship structures, and expanding equitable access to land, finance and training, therefore ensuring that young people's knowledge and perspectives are embedded in global food-systems transformation processes. Other recent global youth consultations, such as the World Food Forum (WFF) Youth Recommendations on Empowering Young Women in Agrifood Systems emphasise the need for gender-responsive mentorship, equitable access to resources, and inclusive leadership pathways to overcome systemic exclusion (19). These recommendations underscore that transforming food system requires not only youth inclusion but also structural reforms that amplify young women's agency and leadership.

THE BANGLADESH CONTEXT

Bangladesh, home to one of the world's largest youth populations, presents both immense potential and pronounced challenges in building youth leadership for food system transformation. Approximately 30% of the country's total population are youth (18–35 years) underscoring their demographic importance in national development (5). However, while youth play vital roles in agriculture, nutrition, and community resilience, their participation in policy spaces remains under-institutionalised (20). Persistent barriers include limited access to decision-relevant training and advisory support, weak mentorship networks, and restricted access to land and financial resources. As a result, these factors reduce young people's ability to engage credibly with planning, consultation, and policy processes. These constraints are reinforced by power imbalances and the absence of inclusive governance platforms for marginalised youth, ultimately constraining their leadership opportunities in decision-making spaces (21,22). This is even though Bangladesh's National Food Systems Pathway recognises youth as essential actors in food systems transformation (23).

Some efforts have been made to address this. The Department of Youth Development offers a wide range of training programmes primarily oriented toward vocational, technical and livelihood skills, but these do not include dedicated programmes for youth leadership development (24). There are few organisations such as British Council, The Hunger Project, WAVE Foundation, Bangladesh Youth Leadership Center (BYLC), SERAC-Bangladesh Brac's (ANN) and Young Power in Social Action (YPSA) provide leadership training that builds competencies in community engagement, communication, advocacy, social innovation, and community project implementation (25–31). UNICEF has also recently introduced a national youth leadership programme aimed at strengthening young people's capacities in policy dialogue and public engagement (32). These initiatives, however, remain broadly framed with no dedicated focus on food-systems leadership, governance, or transformation, leaving a critical capacity gap in this domain.

GAIN'S NOURISHING FOOD PATHWAYS AND YOUTH LEADERSHIP INITIATIVES

The Nourishing Food Pathways (NFP) programme, led by the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), supports governments in 11 countries to design and implement food-system transformation pathways that increase the availability of nutritious, safe, affordable food in environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive ways. The programme works across several interrelated areas, including aligning national food and nutrition policies,

elevating the voices of youth, women, and informal-sector workers, improving consumer access to healthy diets, mobilising private-sector finance, integrating nutrition and environmental objectives, and strengthening national evidence and monitoring systems to support accountability.

The GAIN Youth Voices project was a three-year initiative (2023-2025) implemented as part of the NFP programme. Building on the unprecedented momentum generated by youth engagement during the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit, the Youth Voices project aims to equip young people with the skills, platforms and opportunities needed to engage more effectively in national food systems pathways and global forums, and to support decision makers to advance the meaningful inclusion of youth voices in decision-making processes related to food, nutrition, and sustainability. The project is implemented in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Tanzania and supports the global youth-led movement Act4Food.

To achieve this, the project was implemented through four interconnected areas; community building, capacity building, collective action, and policy culture.

Community building focuses on fostering youth leadership and a sense of shared purpose. The project established a network of over 1,500 Food System Youth Leaders across 40 districts in Bangladesh. These participants were linked through the SUN Youth Network and affiliated university-based groups, youth clubs, and organisations. Digital platforms including social media and messaging groups facilitated continuous interaction, peer-to-peer learning, and exchange of experiences and collaboration on locally relevant food systems challenges.

Capacity building aims to equip youth leaders with the knowledge and skills required to engage meaningfully in food system processes. In Bangladesh, the Food System Youth Leadership initiative (FoSYL) was implemented by combining a structured training on food system and leadership with applied learning and engagement. Through FoSYL, participants are introduced to key concepts in food systems including how to identify community-level nutrition challenges and design contextually relevant responses. This initiative focuses on building competencies in leadership, communication, stakeholder engagement, project planning, and policy advocacy with the aim of supporting youth to engage more effectively in decision-making processes.

Collective action serves as the primary mechanism through which youth apply their learning in practice. Participants identify priority issues within their communities, often using participatory tools such as problem tree analysis, and form groups around shared concerns. With technical support from the project, they design and implement collective action campaigns aligned with broader food system priorities including national pathways for sustainable food system transformation in Bangladesh. These actions typically focus on three areas: community awareness, advocacy, and communication. Through these initiatives, youth engage local stakeholders including community members and government representatives and contribute to ongoing discussions around food and nutrition.

'Policy Culture' focuses on strengthening the enabling environment for youth participation in decision making. The project works with government stakeholders at different levels to promote more inclusive engagement with young people in food systems dialogues. At the

same time, participation in collective action initiatives provides opportunities for youth to engage with institutions and gain practical experience relevant to policy processes.

Across these areas, the project aims to establish a pathway from individual capacity development to collective engagement and ultimately, participation in decision-making processes (20,33,34).

SCOPE OF THIS CASE STUDY

This case study, part of the Exemplars of Food System Transformation (Box 1, Annex 1), aims to examine two related components, the Food Systems Youth Leadership initiative and Collective Action Campaigns, in order to illustrate how youth participants applied food-systems learning through collective, community-oriented action and how this process contributed to the development of youth leadership and advocacy capacities. While the broader project seeks to strengthen youth engagement in formal policy and decision-making spaces, this exemplar intentionally emphasises the community awareness, mobilisation and leadership and advocacy development dimensions of the campaigns, as reflected in participant experiences.

This case study explores two specific aspects of the Youth Leadership Initiative and its enabling ecosystem in Bangladesh:

1. How the training contributed to the development of youth leadership capacities and how youth leaders applied these capacities through advocacy, communication, and community engagement activities within the Collective Action Campaigns at the community level.
2. The barriers and enablers to youth engagement in food systems transformation.

By analysing these experiences, the study contributes to the growing evidence base on youth-led food-system transformation and offers actionable insights for designing inclusive and scalable youth capacity-building models in Bangladesh and other LMIC contexts.

METHODOLOGY

STUDY DESIGN

This study adopted a case study design, which allows an in-depth and multifaceted exploration of a complex issue in its real-life context (35). In this study, the 'case' is defined as the Food Systems Youth Leadership initiative and associated collective action campaigns implemented under GAIN's Youth Voices project in Bangladesh. This approach was selected to enable in-depth understanding of how a specific intervention influenced youth understanding, leadership, and collective action within a defined context.

BOX 1. THIS CASE AS AN 'EXEMPLAR' OF FOOD SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION

As detailed in Annex 1, this case study, beyond its own merits, can be seen as one approach to trying to achieve a more inclusive process of food systems transformation—which is expected to result in a broader set of issues being addressed, leading to more holistic and inclusive outcomes.

It thus offers some potentially generalisable insights about fostering transformative change. Specifically, it demonstrates how the capabilities of an often-marginalised group (young people) can be leveraged and supported to initiate grassroots action. It also highlights some of the specificities needed in intervention design, such as ensuring sustained mentorship and overcoming systemic barriers such as limited funding, bureaucratic obstacles, and lack of institutional anchoring.

Generalisable lessons from this case, along with those from a wide set of case studies on different topics and in diverse settings, will be used to inform broader understanding of food system transformation as part of the 'Exemplars of Food System Transformation' initiative.

STUDY SETTING AND INTERVENTION

The study was conducted in Bangladesh and focused on the FoSYL initiative facilitated by GAIN in collaboration with Food Planning and Monitoring Unit of the Ministry of Food, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Department of Youth Development of Ministry of Youth and Sports and the SUN Youth Network Bangladesh. The initiative targeted youth aged 18–25 and aimed to strengthen their capacity to engage in and influence food-systems processes through structured leadership development, knowledge building and community-based collective action.

The intervention integrated both a rigorous participant selection process and an intensive training curriculum. Recruitment for the Training of Trainers (ToT) followed a multi-stage procedure beginning with a detailed nomination form assessing applicants' motivations, prior experience, and ability to commit to post-training through Collective Action Campaign implementation and facilitation of similar training in the community level. Shortlisted applicants then participated in a 90-minute briefing and Q&A session with the Bangladesh team of Youth Voices project, outlining their expectations from the initiative, after which they were asked to reconfirm their willingness to participate fully in the training initiative. A second application round and final interviews ensured that only highly motivated candidates demonstrating strong potential for leadership and community engagement were selected.

The ToT consisted of an intensive four-day curriculum structured around two interconnected components, based on a locally contextualised version of a global handbook developed by GAIN. The first component focused on community building, facilitation, and youth leadership development, emphasising the cultivation of peer networks and a shared sense of purpose. The second component centred on equipping participants with foundational knowledge and competencies in food-systems dynamics, nutrition, systems thinking, and community mobilisation, enabling them to support and

lead collective action initiatives aligned with national food-systems transformation pathways. Collective Action refers to individuals or groups mobilising around a common concern in order to initiate change (34).

Within the project design, Collective Action Campaigns are structured around three interrelated pillars: advocacy actions, communication actions, and community awareness actions. In Bangladesh, participant reflections predominantly described engagement through the community awareness pillar, which is the focus of this exemplar case study. These community-oriented actions enabled youth to apply leadership and food systems learning to real-world challenges, generating practical experience relevant to future engagement in policy discussions.

Following completion of the training, youth participants contributed to the Collective Action Campaigns by implementing locally grounded community awareness and nutrition-focused initiatives aligned with the campaign framework, while GAIN provided technical support to them. These activities included community-level trainings delivered across participants' respective localities in collaboration with their university authorities and local government stakeholders to broaden youth engagement and stimulate grassroots food-systems action. Between January 2024 and December 2025, more than 1,500 youth were reached nationwide through the combined ToT and community-level training cycles. Subsequently, a total of 214 collective action campaigns were implemented by the participants of the FoSYL initiative (36).

PARTICIPANT SELECTION

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select participants for qualitative data collection. The Project Coordinator provided a list of youth who participated in the FoSYL initiative, drawn from one pilot cohort and two ToT cohorts, and who were involved in post-training activities. Participants were selected to include youth actively implementing Collective Action Campaign-related community initiatives, as well as selected stakeholders with whom they had collaborated. Because participants from the pilot cohort who were implementing collective actions were all male, additional interviews were conducted with female youth who participated in the FoSYL initiative but were not implementing collective actions, in order to explore gendered patterns of participation. The final sample comprised 26 participants, including 24 youth leaders (15 male, 9 female) and 2 local stakeholders (both male), ensuring representation of those youth actively engaged in post-training community initiatives and the stakeholders they have collaborated with for their community level initiatives.

DATA COLLECTION

Data were collected over three phases between June 2024 and July 2025, corresponding to different stages of program implementation and follow-up. A total of 20 individual interviews were conducted with youth leaders and the local stakeholders who had engaged with them through collective action activities, together with one Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with six youth leaders to explore participants' experiences, their perceived impacts of the training and narratives of collective action initiatives. Separate semi-structured discussion guides were developed for interviews and the FGD. The guides were designed to align with the study's research questions and were informed by project documents and consultation with GAIN's Youth Voices project team. Due to participants

residing in different areas in Bangladesh, all the interviews were conducted online except for two interviews with the stakeholders, which were conducted face to face during a field visit by the researcher accompanying the 'Youth Voices' project team. All interviews and the FGD were conducted in Bangla and audio-recorded with verbal consent from the participants.

DATA ANALYSIS

All the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, with Bangla recordings translated into English during transcription. Data were managed using a qualitative analysis software, ATLAS.TI and thematic analysis was applied following Braun and Clarke's six-step framework (37). A hybrid deductive-inductive approach was applied to analyse the data thematically. An initial codebook was developed prior to transcript analysis, informed by study objectives and interview guides, and was refined through discussion among the research team. However, as analysis progressed, additional inductive codes were generated to capture emergent ideas and incorporated into the final codebook. This ensured both predefined and participant-driven concepts were represented.

The analysis examined participants' experiences of leadership development and collective action, as well as the enablers and inhibitors shaping the frequency and efficacy of their engagement in food system transformation. Enablers and barriers were considered as contextual and programmatic conditions operating alongside the training intervention, while leadership and advocacy capacities were analysed as outcomes emerging through participation.

Codes were reviewed and subsequently grouped into broader categories, from which three overarching themes were developed: (1) emerging awareness of food systems translated into community-based action; (2) enabling conditions for youth engagement in food system transformation; and (3) barriers for youth involvement in food system transformation.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Ethical approval was obtained from the Health Media Lab Institutional Review Board (HLM IRB). The participants were informed about the study and its objectives prior to inviting them for the interviews. Verbal informed consent was attained from all participants, with assurances of confidentiality and the voluntary nature of participation. Pseudonyms were used in transcripts and reports to protect participant identity, and all data were stored securely in password protected files.

RESULTS

Thematic analysis of interview and focus group data generated a final coding framework comprising both deductively informed and inductively emergent codes. These were synthesised into four overarching analytical themes reflecting participants' experiences of the FoSYL initiative. First, participation fostered an emerging awareness of food systems that participants translated into locally specific challenges and corresponding community-based actions. Second, participants described how leadership and advocacy capacities were enacted and developed through experiential learning and collective actions. Third and fourth, the analysis identified a set of enabling conditions and persistent barriers that

shaped youths' ability to engage meaningfully in food system transformation. These themes are presented below.

THEME 1: EMERGING UNDERSTANDING OF FOOD SYSTEMS, TRANSLATED INTO COMMUNITY-BASED ACTION

This theme focuses on how participation in the FoSYL initiative fostered an emerging understanding of food systems among youth participants and how this understanding was translated into concrete community-based action. Participants' narratives indicate that food systems learning, systems thinking, and leadership development were closely intertwined, enabling youth to identify local food-system challenges and design contextually appropriate interventions.

Developing Food Systems Understanding Through Experiential Learning

Most participants entered the training with limited understanding of the concept of the 'food system' or of systems thinking. Many described how the participatory training expanded their worldview and introduced them to interconnections between food production, distribution, and consumption. This was reflected in one participant's narrative of the training process and the breadth of food-systems content covered.

'We were told 30 people would be selected to participate in this training... After we went there, we had an amazing experience. I was trained in a way so that I can train someone else. They taught us about youth leadership and what food systems are, from farms to cooking, and how to keep our food and nutrition safe. We visited mustard fields, talked to farmers about pesticide use, observed community practices, and went to markets to examine price transparency and raise awareness among vendors.' — YL 8, Female Participant, Phase 1

This illustrates how the Initiative combined conceptual learning with practical, field-based activities, enabling participants to translate newly acquired systems knowledge into concrete community-level actions.

Other participants similarly reflected on how the structured training sessions with community-level field visits expanded their understanding of food systems, their own positionality within these systems, and the leadership skills needed to influence change. One participant explained,

'We had many sessions where we learned about the components of the food system, and where we each fit within it. We explored how community and culture connect to food systems, discussed policy, advocacy and safeguarding, and reflected on our own leadership journeys. Through field visits to markets, households and farms, we saw how different parts of the food system operate in practice. These activities helped us understand the full picture of the food system and our role within it.' — YL 11, Male Participant, Phase 1

This narrative illustrates how the training blended systems thinking, leadership development, and community-based inquiry. While also introducing policy relevant concepts and advocacy tools that helped participants understand how food system decisions are made and whose interests they serve.

For some participants, the training also provided the specialisation and structured guidance they felt was missing from their earlier involvement in food-security activities. As one youth leader explained,

‘Initially, I didn’t have much knowledge about the food system. But since I have been involved in social work, I always wanted to work on food security. Through our organisation, we started distributing climate-resilient seeds in several locations. From this experience, I realised that since I wanted to work in this field, I needed specialisation... After the training, engaging stakeholders and utilising available privileges whether from the government or elsewhere helped my work and made a significant impact.’ — YL 1, Female Participant, Phase 3

This narrative highlights how participants connected their prior community activities such as seed distribution to a more structured and systems-oriented understanding of food systems. It also shows how the training enabled them to orient their efforts toward more strategic, stakeholder-engaged action.

Collective Action Campaigns as a Bridge between Learning and Action

Within the Youth Voices project framework, Collective Action Campaigns serve as a core mechanism for translating learning into practice and linking youth engagement to national food systems priorities. Collective Action Campaigns encouraged multiple forms of engagement including community engagement, communication, and advocacy activities. During the period of data collection, participants most frequently reflected on community-level implementation activities, while broader policy and advocacy engagement became more visible in later phases of the initiative.

The campaigns were designed to align with the national pathway for sustainable food system transformation, including efforts related to improving nutrition, promoting sustainable food production, reducing food loss and waste, and strengthening community awareness around healthy diets. Youth leaders were guided to identify problems, work in teams, and develop feasible project ideas during the training.

Through this component, youth leaders were supported to identify locally relevant food system challenges and design collective responses that reflect both community needs and broader national priorities. While the Youth Voices framework emphasises advocacy, communication and community awareness as interconnected pillars, the nature and timing of engagement vary across contexts. In Bangladesh, during the period of this study, youth engagement was primarily expressed through community-level implementation and awareness activities. In addition, some youth leaders extended their learning through peer-to-peer engagement, including organising and facilitating similar training sessions within their universities and networks. More direct policy and advocacy engagement emerged in subsequent phases of the project. One participant described how this process unfolded during the training,

‘They gave us a task on the second day to design a campaign or project on our own—to show how we can identify a problem and run a sustainable project or campaign. They divided us into teams of eight, and we developed a project idea and presented it... that’s how we gradually started.’ — YL 1, Female participant, Phase 2

Others noted that they were guided to select specific food-systems themes using structured prompts from the training materials, which were designed to align with Bangladesh's pathway for sustainable food system transformation:

'We received a project proposal template... there were three topics to choose from— healthy diet, climate smart agriculture and food loss and waste.' — YL 10, Male participant, Phase 1

Through the process of the Collective Action Campaign, participants bridged conceptual learning and practical application, developing foundational skills to design and initiate community-level interventions through coordinated teamwork. These skills were reflected in a range of initiatives including affordable school meal programmes, nutrition and food waste awareness campaigns, and homestead, vertical, and rooftop gardening projects. Collectively, these initiatives reflected participants' capacity to translate training content into concrete action, emphasising affordability, local resource use, and sustainability. As one participant explained, the training 'helped turn ideas into reality' by providing the structure, mentorship, and peer support necessary to turn concepts into actionable plans. Youth already engaged in community organisations also viewed the training as a means of strengthening their ongoing work, 'As I'm leading an organisation, it would be beneficial for me being a leader and I could do better things for my area,' noted one youth leader (YL 10, Male Participant, Phase 1).

Youth-Led Collective Action Initiatives

The following examples illustrate how participants operationalised their training through collective action initiatives that identified local food-system challenges, mobilised stakeholders, and applied systems thinking to develop contextually appropriate solutions. These initiatives demonstrate participants' ability to translate food system awareness and leadership learning into practical, community-based action. According to the project coordinator of Youth Voices project in Bangladesh, participants of FoSYL initiative implemented approximately 214 collective action campaigns by the end of the project in December 2025 (36). These campaigns covered a wide range of themes including school-based nutrition canteens, nutrition and healthy diet awareness, nutrition-sensitive homestead and school-based gardening, maternal nutrition, food safety, climate smart agriculture, and social business initiatives.

School-based Food and Nutrition Initiatives

About 62 collective action campaigns focused on school-based nutrition canteens were implemented across different locations in Bangladesh. Two collective action campaigns are highlighted here,

Affordable School Meal (Nutritious Khichuri/hotchpotch) Project

The Nutritious Khichuri Project emerged as a student-focused initiative designed to improve access to affordable and nutritious meals within a disadvantaged school community in Lalmonirhat district. The youth leader observed that many students in this border region regularly skipped meals or relied on inexpensive fried snacks due to food insecurity and limited dietary options. Teachers confirmed that these habits adversely affected learning, noting that '50–60% of students would go home for lunch, and many did not return afterwards due to the long distance from their homes to school' (Head Teacher,

Male), contributing to low attendance and poor concentration in afternoon classes. Recognising this challenge and school feeding as a strategic entry point to enhance dietary diversity and reduce mid-day hunger, the youth leader designed a daily meal programme centred on nutritious khichuri (Hotchpotch) a balanced dish combining rice, lentils, and vegetables, and sometimes eggs.

Drawing on leadership and problem-solving competencies gained during the training, he established a voluntary contribution model in which students paid 10 taka (about USD 0.08) per day if they wished to participate, while occasional rice donations from teachers and community members helped keep costs low. A cook was formally hired to manage meal preparation; each morning she purchased fresh ingredients from the local market and prepared the khichuri on school premises. Reflecting on the implementation process, the youth leader explained:

'Students contributed 10 taka each day to receive the meal. We hired a cook who purchased fresh ingredients every morning and prepared nutritious khichuri for the students. Nearly 150 students were eating from this programme daily.' — YL 5 (Male), Phase 1

The initiative quickly gained acceptance among students, teachers, and parents. Teachers also reported improved attentiveness in class, noting that many students who previously went home for lunch and often did not return due to long distances were now staying on campus and participating in afternoon lessons. The youth leader expressed plans to strengthen the model by increasing community contributions, formalising the cook's role, and exploring partnerships with local sellers to secure fresh vegetables at lower cost. Overall, the project demonstrates how trained youth can mobilise local institutions, design sustainable food-system interventions, and contribute to improving nutrition in resource-constrained educational settings.

Nourishing Inclusion: A Mid-day Meal initiative for differently abled children

In Dhaka, another youth leader initiated a project focused on raising awareness about the nutritional needs of children with intellectual and developmental disabilities. While working closely with Mirpur Intellectually Challenged Autistic School, she observed that many of the students from low-income families came to school in the hope of receiving a meal. She recognised that these children required special nutritional attention, yet their dietary needs were often overlooked due to financial constraints and limited awareness. Her initiative combined two components: advocacy for sustainable mid-day meal programme and awareness- building on healthy diets. In collaboration with a local organisation, 'Proyash' and the school committee, she began organising sessions to highlight the importance of balanced nutrition of these children. At the same time, she advocated with local organisations to secure funding for a structured mid-day meal programme.

To better understand the situation, she and her team conducted a small survey exploring students' eating habits. They found that many children preferred processed snacks such as chips and fast food, while vegetables and fruits were often rejected. Interestingly, these preferences were linked to behavioural challenges: children became restless when denied unhealthy snacks yet also displayed hyperactivity after consuming them.

Rather than accepting this as fixed behaviour, she experimented with a simple but thoughtful approach. She purchased fruits at her own expense and organised a shared fruit-eating session at school. When provided collectively, the children ate the fruits happily. She later advised parents to eat fruits and vegetables together with their children at home, encouraging shared meals so the children would feel included rather than singled out. She also suggested involving siblings in this process to create positive peer modelling within the family.

Through this work, she sought not only to improve dietary practices but also to challenge the perception that differently abled children are a burden. Her vision is to support their health, dignity, and long-term self-reliance. Looking ahead, she plans to secure sustained funding for the mid-day meal programme through partnerships with local and international organisations. She also envisions integrating vocational skills training such as handicraft production so that students can contribute to income-generating activities, creating an additional funding stream to sustain the initiative.

Reducing Food Loss and Waste Initiatives

Food Loss and Waste Awareness Project

The Food Waste Awareness Project addressed the widespread issue of excessive food waste generated by local hotels and restaurants in Kaliganj district, which the youth leader identified as both an environmental concern and a moral challenge in a context where many people lack sufficient food. Drawing on the training's modules on advocacy, policy engagement, and influencing skills, he designed a campaign targeting hotel owners and staff, to promote responsible food management practices with particular focus on reducing food waste, managing surplus meals, and minimising unnecessary disposal. The project involved selecting 30 hotels, distributing banners and leaflets outlining safe food handling and food-waste prevention practices, and conducting a seminar attended by the municipal mayor, sanitary inspector, and local officials to secure institutional support and reinforce accountability. Through this engagement, hotel owners were encouraged to donate surplus food to those in need, properly dispose of spoiled items, and adopt practices that reduce waste at the source.

Follow-up visits suggested sustained change in several establishments, where banners remained displayed and staff reported donating unsold food or setting it aside for animals. The initiative demonstrated the youth leader's ability to design contextually relevant interventions, strategically mobilise policymakers and community actors, and apply influencing skills learned during the training to shift behaviours within the local food environment.

Climate-Smart Agriculture Initiatives

Approximately 36 collective action campaigns focused on climate-smart agriculture were implemented at community level across Bangladesh.

Low-Cost Vertical Gardening for Waterlogged Communities

The Vertical Gardening Project emerged in response to severe waterlogging affecting households in Patuakhali district, which prevented families from cultivating vegetables on available land. After conducting community visits, the youth team identified that while

residents were interested in homestead gardening, persistent flooding made it impossible to grow food using traditional methods. Drawing on the training's modules on problem identification, systems analysis, and community engagement, the group designed a low-cost vertical gardening model using bamboo and other locally available materials to elevate vegetable beds above floodwater. Although vertical gardening is typically costly in Bangladesh, the team innovated low-cost prototypes by experimenting with materials, consulting academic staff, and engineering structures durable enough to withstand 3–4 months of submersion. Using their own funds, they constructed platforms and engaged households willing to pilot the intervention, with early adoption by two families. The team, supported by 25 volunteers, aims to expand the project across the sub-district, with plans for replication in their home districts should additional funding be secured. Their experience illustrates how participants applied systems thinking to address environmental constraints and develop contextually appropriate solutions for local food production.

Healthy Diet and Nutrition Awareness Initiatives

About 91 collective action campaigns focused on healthy diet and nutrition awareness were implemented across various locations.

Nutrition Garden Project for Teenagers

The Nutrition Garden Project for Teenagers was developed to address low nutrition awareness and poor dietary practices among adolescents in rural communities. Recognising that many families prioritised calorie-dense foods over nutrient-rich diets, the youth leader identified adolescents, particularly girls, as an effective entry point for long-term behavioural change within households. Drawing on skills gained in advocacy and community engagement, he partnered with the Upazila Nirbahi Officer, Agriculture Officer, and local schools to implement a school-based model combining nutrition awareness with practical gardening.

Twenty students were selected through an open call and participated in an initial awareness session, followed by hands-on training led by the Deputy Assistant Agriculture Officer. Students learned to cultivate three nutrient-dense, low-cost crops suited to small household spaces: red amaranth, okra, and snake gourd. Each participant received seeds, saplings, and guidance on organic cultivation methods, with agricultural officers conducting follow-up monitoring in their communities.

The project generated strong engagement from students, teachers, and local officials, who encouraged its continuation and expansion. The youth leader expressed plans to scale the initiative district-wide as a sustainable approach to improving adolescent nutrition while strengthening youth leadership in local food systems.

NutriAL: Adolescent Nutrition Monitoring & Awareness Project

The NutriAL Project was developed to address poor dietary habits among adolescents in Borguna district in Bangladesh, where nutritional deficiencies persisted despite adequate local food availability. Through the training, the youth leader recognised that many young people lacked awareness of their nutritional requirements and the value of diverse foods. In response, he designed a 41-day school-based intervention engaging students from grades 6 to 8 in nutrition monitoring, awareness building, and behaviour change activities.

With a 15,000 taka (about 120 USD) micro-grant and support from Borguna Collegiate School, the project adopted an interactive, youth-centred approach. Students learned to calculate daily caloric needs, evaluate the nutritional content of their meals, and track their intake using structured charts and logs. Encouraging students to design aspects of the monitoring process helped strengthen ownership and sustained engagement, reinforced through daily updates shared in a class messenger group.

The initiative also involved strategic engagement with local authorities, including the Upazila Chairman, Member of Parliament, Civil Surgeon, and local journalists, several of whom attended the launch event and expressed support for adolescent nutrition efforts. Early feedback indicated strong participation and improved nutrition awareness, with final assessments planned following school examinations to guide potential scale-up.

Collectively, these initiatives illustrate how youth participants applied food systems thinking to identify leverage points across food access, consumption, production, and governance translating training content into locally grounded action through collective leadership.

THEME 2: ENHANCING LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY CAPACITY THROUGH EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Participants emphasised that experiential learning through hands on activities, mentoring, and project implementation enhanced their leadership confidence and capacity to influence policy. They highlighted the value of combining theoretical learning with real-world practice through the initiative; as one FDG participant noted, ‘Gaining theoretical knowledge is important, but applying that knowledge practically is equally important.’

Their remarks also made clear that it was important for the training to cover not just factual content (like on food systems) but also the ‘soft skills’ necessary for leadership, through a broader process of personal growth.

‘If anyone wants to build themselves up as a community leader, the first quality that he or she must have is the mentality to learn... If this one thing is present in someone, I believe he or she can become a leader... one who learns and teaches he or she has the ability to do everything.’

— YL 9, Male Participant, Phase 1

Leadership was framed not as a passive outcome of training, but as a continuous process requiring persistence, resilience, and knowledge, particularly in relation to policy engagement. As for example, one participant described persistence and knowledge as essential traits for youth leadership, especially in policy engagement contexts:

‘The first challenge is reaching policymakers whether they listen or not comes later. But to even reach them, youth must go through multiple levels, chase opportunities, and spend significant time and effort. For this, strong mental resilience and knowledge are crucial.’ —

YL 2, Male Participant, Phase 1

Collectively, participants framed leadership not as an outcome of passive learning but as a continuous process of action, reflection, and collaboration. Several participants also described the ToT component as a transformative process that enabled them to transition

from trainees to facilitators and equipped them with the confidence, skills and structured tools needed to train others. Experiential components such as role-play, group design challenges and facilitation practice enabled them to move from passive learners to active trainers. This empowerment became visible as participants independently organised community-level trainings, designed selection processes, and mentored new youth groups.

'What we tried to do was replicate the selection process through which we were chosen while adding a few improvements... We conducted their training in a classroom... delivered all the key elements we had learned... divided them into four teams... They are currently working, and we are mentoring them.'

— YL 1, Female Participant, Phase 3

Another participant described leading a university-based training that attracted over a thousand applications, demonstrating both demand and the multiplier effect created by the project.

'My juniors learned about the food system and generated great ideas...their conceptual development turned into practical implementation, and they are now working on community action. If youth are motivated and given such opportunities, then definitely change will come to our country.'

— YL 2, Male Participant, Phase 3

These experiences illustrate how the FoSYL initiative enabled youth to transition from recipients of training to facilitators of collective action, amplifying the project's reach and community impact.

Participants also described increased confidence as key outcomes of the training, particularly in relation to advocacy. For many, participation in the initiative was their first exposure to advocacy as a structured practice and they were newly able to understand themselves playing a role in it.

'I got to know what leadership skills are important... It also enhanced my confidence. We also learned about policy advocacy... I used to think the process of policy building is only done by government people, but now I know that we can also contribute.' — YL2, Female Participant, Phase 2

Several youth recognised that they had been engaging in advocacy practices unknowingly and that the training helped them name, structure, and strengthen these actions and to see themselves as holding the potentially powerful role of advocate,

'When I learned what advocacy actually means, I realised I had already been working with it... I've learned how to identify the right stakeholders and influence them effectively for community work.' — YL 2, Male Participant, Phase 3

Participants also shared that the networks and advocacy skills they developed while implementing their collective action campaigns had been helpful, as they were subsequently being invited to participate in meetings with local policymakers to discuss community challenges and potential strategies to address them. As one participant stated, 'through the collective action campaign I built connections with local officials. Now, I am

invited to meetings to share community concerns and possible solutions.’ - YL 5, Male Participant, phase 1

These interpretations illustrate how the FoSYL initiative enabled youth to develop leadership and advocacy capacities through experiential learning and collective action, supporting their transition from training participants to facilitators and advocate within their communities.

THEME 3: ENABLING CONDITIONS FOR YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN FOOD SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION

This theme examines the conditions that enabled youth participants to sustain engagement and translate training into action. Participants' narratives indicate that leadership development and collective action were shaped not only by individual motivation and skill but also by support provided through the project such as mentorship, technical guidance, coordination support, and opportunities for implementation as well as broader social and institutional factors operating alongside the FoSYL initiative.

Sustained Mentorship and Post-training Organisational support

Participants emphasised that continued mentorship and organisational guidance following the training were critical for maintaining momentum during project implementation. Unlike conventional training programmes, participants described ongoing engagement from facilitators and organisers, including follow up communication and monitoring of activities. ‘In a conventional training,’ one participant noted, ‘once the training is completed, there is no connection after that. But in this training, they are still providing guidance.... and monitoring our implementation.’ (FGD Participant, Phase 3). This post-training support was perceived as particularly important for navigating implementation challenges and sustaining youth-led initiatives beyond the formal training period.

Peer Networks and Information Exchange

Networking and peer exchange were repeatedly cited as crucial enablers of youth engagement and idea diffusion. Participants described how connections with other youth leaders helped them learn opportunities, share knowledge, and coordinate collective action. ‘Through my networks,’ a female participant noted, ‘I came to know about the training.... and that's how the journey started.’- (YL 1, Phase 2)

Peer networks supported both entry into the project and continued collaboration during collective action initiatives. Despite the presence of these enabling conditions, participants also identified multiple structural, social, and institutional barriers that constrained the scale, frequency, and sustainability of youth engagement.

THEME 4: BARRIERS FOR YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN FOOD SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION

This theme captures the constraints that participants perceived as limiting their ability to sustain or scale youth-led food system action. These barriers operated at structural, institutional, and social levels and often lie beyond the direct control of individual participants or the programme itself.

Limited Access to Youth Leadership and Training Opportunities

Participants highlighted that opportunities for structured training and youth leadership development are limited in Bangladesh, restricting broader youth engagement in food systems processes. Access to such programmes was described as uneven, particularly for youth outside established networks, making it difficult for many to build the knowledge and skills required for meaningful participation.

While the participants valued their involvement in the FoSYL initiative, they noted that such opportunities are not widely available, reinforcing the perception that access to training remains a key constraint for youth engagement. As one participant stated,

‘We have resources, but we lack opportunities... such training is rare in Bangladesh.’ — YL 2, Male Participant, Phase 3

These reflections relate to the broader youth leadership ecosystem in Bangladesh rather than the design or delivery of the FoSYL initiative, highlighting the contextual scarcity of structured platforms for youth engagement beyond the project's scope.

‘Since one-third of Bangladesh is young... the current programs are not adequate.’ — YL 11, Male Participant, Phase 1

Participants highlighted that, if more such programmes were available, there would be considerable potential for scaling impact:

‘If every upazila [county] provides at least three such training programs, then we can expect a significant transformation within three years.’ — YL 3, Male Participant, Phase 1

Financial and Logistical Resource Constraints

In addition, participants consistently noted that personal motivation and leadership capacity alone were often insufficient to fully implement or sustain real-world initiatives, as financial and logistical support remained important constraints. This was despite GAIN providing grants and implementation support for some youth-led initiatives, as participants emphasised that resource constraints continued to shape the scope and reach of their activities. Some participants also reflected a gap between initial ambitions and what was feasible within available resources, indicating the need to align project goals with practical constraints. As one participant noted, ‘We face many problems getting funding... our target is to arrange trainings at the root level’ (YL 1, Female Participant, Phase 2).

Similarly, an FGD participant explained, ‘We plan to extend our project in other districts... we only need funding to make it sustainable.’ — FGD Participant, Phase 3

Bureaucratic Processes and Inconsistent Institutional Cooperation

Engagement with government institutions was often necessary to make their actions work and be impactful, but participants described that interactions with government bodies were often hindered by bureaucracy and inconsistent cooperation. One participant noted the challenges they had in trying to obtain such engagement,

‘Although the senior officer permitted us, the junior officers made the process lengthy, and we had to keep requesting their support.’ — YL 1, Female Participant, Phase 3

Such experiences limited the efficacy and effectiveness of youth-led initiatives, even where formal approval had been granted.

Gendered Barriers to Participation

Female participants, in particular, described facing gendered barriers related to family permission, mobility, and social norms, which affected their both training participation and sustained engagement.

‘There were objections from my home... it took a lot of convincing to get permission. Because of this distance, female participation was fewer.’ — YL 8, Female Participant, Phase 1

Another participant reflected on broader social pressures.

‘Many girls are interested, but they don't want to step out of their comfort zone... social repercussions make it difficult.’ — YL 6, Female Participant, Phase 1

These gendered constraints contributed to unequal participation and posed persistent challenges to inclusive youth leadership in food system transformation.

These barriers illustrate how youth engagement in food system transformation was shaped not only by leadership capacity and enabling conditions but also by structural and social constraints that limited the reach and sustainability of youth-led action.

TRIANGULATION OF RESULTS WITH A PROJECT EVALUATION SURVEY

To triangulate qualitative findings from this case study, we draw on results from a separate project evaluation survey conducted among participants from the first FoSYL ToT cohort, which assessed perceived changes in knowledge, confidence, networks, and food-systems engagement as part of an evaluation of the project (38). That analysis found that all 25 youth leaders surveyed felt engagement with others they met through the initiative had changed how they take food systems action, with over half citing greater confidence or motivation through these connections. All surveyed participants also reported gaining new knowledge through FoSYL, including on what food systems are, key solutions to strengthen them, and how to engage with policymakers. Among those who had engaged in collective action campaigns, most reported seeing some specific changes as a result such as more local community discourse around food systems, or even early signs of behaviour change.

DISCUSSION

This qualitative case study of the Food Systems Youth Leadership (FoSYL) initiative in Bangladesh demonstrates how structured youth engagement through community-oriented collective action can enhance systems awareness and leadership confidence, while also revealing persistent structural and gendered barriers that shape participation in decision-making related to food and nutrition. The findings align with global evidence on youth agency in food systems and reinforce the value of experiential, mentored learning in supporting sustained engagement and leadership development (6,7,39–41). In this case study, youth engagement in food systems refers primarily to community-oriented collective action emerging from food-systems learning, rather than to sustained participation in formal national policy-making processes. These community-oriented

actions are best understood as a formative stage within the Youth Leadership Initiatives, through which youth develop grounded experience and practical perspectives that can inform future engagement in food and nutrition related decision-making spaces.

The findings suggest that FoSYL initiative supported a shift in participants' understanding of food systems from fragmented notions toward a more systems-oriented awareness of the interconnections between production, distribution, consumption, and governance. This aligns with the High-Level Panel of Experts' framing of youth participation as a lever for systemic change (42) and Glover and Sumberg's conceptualisation of youth as agents of transformation within global food systems (6). In Bangladesh, where no formal food-systems curriculum exists, FoSYL initiative served as an entry point for systems thinking connecting participants' disciplinary backgrounds to broader concerns around nutrition, equity, and governance. Similar integrative learning models have been shown to strengthen youth agency, collaboration, and social capital across LMIC contexts (7,39,43,44).

The project's design combining conceptual learning, field tasks, mentorship, and project implementation enabled participants to translate this newly acquired knowledge into practice. Through this process, FoSYL fostered skills in stakeholder mapping, advocacy, and project management, demonstrating that experiential learning can strengthen both leadership confidence and policy literacy. Participants' reflections on implementing community initiatives such as rooftop gardens, school-meal pilots, and food-waste drives illustrate how 'learning by doing' can consolidate civic identity and build strategic understanding of systems change (44). Engagement in these community initiatives enabled participants to encounter real-world constraints, stakeholder dynamics, and implementation trade-offs, experiences that are central to developing policy-relevant understanding even in the absence of formal policy engagement. These youth-initiated projects also illustrate how capacity-building initiatives can translate into locally meaningful innovations echoing global calls for community-driven and participatory food-system transformation (39,40,42).

At the same time, sustaining these youth-led initiatives requires pathways beyond pilot-level activities, including institutional integration, continuity of funding, policy anchoring, and multi-sector collaboration (7,20,45,46). Without such enabling structures, youth-driven innovations risk remaining short-term and isolated rather than evolving into scalable models of transformation. In this regard, the contextually divergence between the policy-oriented ambitions of the Collective Action Campaign framework and the community-centred actions documented in this exemplar underscores the importance of contextual feasibility, institutional access, and staged pathways for youth leadership, particularly in LMIC settings.

BARRIERS AND ENABLERS TO ONGOING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Consistent with the results, enablers are discussed here as contextual and project-based conditions shaping the frequency and efficacy of youth engagement, rather than as outcomes of the training itself. The analysis identified several enabling conditions that supported youth participation in food system action. Sustained mentorship emerged as a critical factor in translating training into long-term leadership. Evidence from broader youth leadership literature similarly highlights the role of supportive mentoring relationships in fostering leadership development and sustained participation in community-based activities (47). FoSYL's mentoring structure reflects these findings, with

ongoing guidance and feedback supporting participants as they navigated implementation challenges and mobilised resources. Peer networks and institutional collaborations further amplified these effects, providing legitimacy and social capital, the factors that are widely recognised as enabling more inclusive participation in multi-stakeholder food-system governance (48–50). These forms of ‘social scaffolding’ have been recognised as essential for just transitions within food-system transformation (7,51).

Despite the project's inclusive design, participants reported systemic barriers such as limited funding, bureaucratic obstacles, and lack of institutional anchoring constraints widely recognised in youth-leadership and governance research (20,42,52). Gendered barriers were particularly evident as young women described familial opposition, travel restrictions, and social scrutiny that limited participation. These experiences reflect broader patterns of women's constrained participation in agriculture in Bangladesh and the persistence of restrictive gender norms as documented in existing literature (21). These findings also echo the *World Food Forum Youth Recommendations on Empowering Young Women in Agrifood Systems* (19), which call for gender-transformative programmes that ensure safe mobility, equitable mentorship, and inclusion of women's voices in agrifood governance.

IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Collectively, these findings affirm that effective youth-leadership initiatives benefit from integrating systems-based education, experiential learning, and sustained mentorship with supportive institutional environments. Embedding gender-responsive components aligned with the *World Food Forum Youth Recommendations* (19) is vital to ensure inclusion and equitable participation, particularly for young women. Scaling such initiatives requires strong coordination between education systems, youth networks, and local governments, alongside clearer institutional pathways for youth engagement in food-systems governance consistent with global frameworks for inclusive and sustainable food-system transformation (7,20,42). Translating capacity building into active youth engagement that can drive systemic change will also require greater institutionalisation of young people's roles in food systems governance and stronger coordination and resourcing for youth engagement (20).

Future research should include longitudinal and comparative studies to explore the sustainability of youth-led initiatives and to identify the institutional conditions that support longer-term engagement. Applying thematic analysis frameworks (37) across multiple datasets may further reveal how social and gender dynamics shape youth agency within diverse food systems contexts.

LIMITATIONS

This case study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, although participants were drawn from diverse districts across Bangladesh, all interviews and focus group discussions were conducted online, which may have affected the depth of interaction and limited the ability to observe non-verbal cues. Second, the purposive sampling strategy focused primarily on youth who completed FoSYL and were engaged in post-training activities, alongside a smaller number of youth, predominantly women, who completed the training but did not implement collective actions, to explore gendered patterns of participation and identify structural or contextual factors that may have limited

their post-training engagement. As a result, the findings reflect the experiences of a motivated subgroup and may not capture the full range of barriers faced by youth who disengaged or were unable to participate. Third, this case study focuses on community oriented collective action and does not assess outcomes related to formal national-level policy engagement. While the Collective Action Campaign framework was designed to encompass advocacy, communication, and community awareness actions, participant experiences in Bangladesh primarily reflected community-level implementation, limiting insight into the full range of intended project pathways. Fourth, many youth-led initiatives were at early stages during the data collection, and the analysis therefore captures emerging practices rather than long term outcomes or sustainability. Finally, the researcher's proximity to the project context may have influenced interactions and interpretation; this was addressed through transparency in analytical decisions, triangulation across data sources, and careful interpretation of participant narratives. These limitations highlight the need for longitudinal and comparative research to examine how early community based experiential learning may shape longer term youth engagement in food system governance.

CONCLUSION

The experience of the FoSYL initiative supports the proposition that youth can act as actors for systemic change, not merely beneficiaries, when projects integrate systems awareness, experiential learning, mentorship, and institutional support. Achieving equitable scaling, however, requires addressing entrenched gender norms and structural barriers. For Bangladesh, the case study and the experiences of youth participating in FoSYL initiative suggests that youth-driven food-system transformation is possible, provided enabling policies, funding mechanisms, and institutional architectures explicitly support inclusive youth participation.

REFERENCES

1. Fanzo J, Haddad L, Schneider KR, Béné C, Covic NM, Guarín A, et al. Viewpoint: Rigorous monitoring is necessary to guide food system transformation in the countdown to the 2030 global goals. *Food Policy*. 2021 Sep 29;104:102163. doi:10.1016/J.FOODPOL.2021.102163
2. Schneider KR, Fanzo J, Haddad L, Herrero M, Moncayo JR, Herforth A, et al. The state of food systems worldwide in the countdown to 2030 Check for updates. *Nature Food* |. 2023;4. doi:10.1038/s43016-023-00885-9
3. United Nations Secretary General. Making food systems work for people and planet UN Food Systems Summit +2 [Internet]. Rome, Italy; 2023 [cited 2025 Jul 15]. Available from: https://www.unfoodsystemshub.org/docs/unfoodsystemslibraries/stocktaking-moment/un-secretary-general/sgreport_en_rgb_updated_compressed.pdf?sfvrsn=560b6fa6_33
4. United Nations Secretary General. Accelerating Inclusive, Resilient and Sustainable Food Systems Transitions for People and Planet UN Food Systems Summit +4 Stocktake Report of the Secretary-General [Internet]. Ethiopia and Italy; 2025 [cited 2025 Nov 18]. Available from: https://www.unfoodsystemshub.org/media/docs/unfoodsystemslibraries/unfss-4/unfss4_en_sg_report.pdf
5. Ministry of Youth and Sports Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. National Youth Policy 2017 [Internet]. Ministry of Youth and Sports Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh; 2017. Available from: [https://dyd.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/dyd.portal.gov.bd/policies/21e565b2_252f_4f80_bfce_31a1cb33163d/Draft%20English%20Version%20of%20National%20Youth%20Policy%202017%20\(1\).pdf](https://dyd.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/dyd.portal.gov.bd/policies/21e565b2_252f_4f80_bfce_31a1cb33163d/Draft%20English%20Version%20of%20National%20Youth%20Policy%202017%20(1).pdf)
6. Glover D, Sumberg J. Youth and Food Systems Transformation. *Front Sustain Food Syst*. 2020;4:101. doi:10.3389/fsufs.2020.00101
7. Huambachano M, Arulingam I, Bowness E, Korzenszky A, Mungai C, Termine P, et al. Knowledge networks to support youth engagement in sustainable food systems. *Front Sustain Food Syst*. 2022 Sep 27;6:867344. doi:https://doi.org/10.3389/fsufs.2022.867344
8. UNFSS. Youth Leadership Programme [Internet]. 2025 [cited 2025 Nov 28]. Available from: <https://www.unfoodsystemshub.org/hub-solution/youth-leadership-programme/en>
9. WFF. The UNFSS+4 Youth Declaration on Food Systems Transformation [Internet]. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; 2025 Jul [cited 2025 Nov 11]. Available from: [https://www.unfoodsystemshub.org/docs/unfoodsystemslibraries/youth-leadership-programme/the-unfss-4-youth-declaration-on-food-systems-transformation-\(new-link\).pdf](https://www.unfoodsystemshub.org/docs/unfoodsystemslibraries/youth-leadership-programme/the-unfss-4-youth-declaration-on-food-systems-transformation-(new-link).pdf)
10. Ahmed E, Ashraf A. Youth Voices Unleashed: Media Narratives in Bangladesh's 2024 Quota Reform Movement. *Qlantic Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*. 2025 Mar 30;6(1):100–6. doi:10.55737/QJSSH.VI-I.25301
11. UNDP. YOUTH ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY (2025–2030) [Internet]. 2026 [cited 2026 Apr 28]. Available from: <https://www.undp.org/bangladesh/publications/youth-engagement-strategy-2025-2030-undp-bangladesh>

12. Matin I, Bhattacharjee A, Shakil M, Narayan A, Das C, Jahan N, et al. Youth of Bangladesh Agents of Change? Youth Survey 2018 [Internet]. 2019 [cited 2026 Apr 28]. Available from: https://bigd.bracu.ac.bd/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/YOUTH-SURVEY-2018_full.pdf
13. Catalano RF, Skinner ML, Alvarado G, Kapungu C, Reavley ND, Patton GC, et al. Positive Youth Development Programs in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: A Conceptual Framework and Systematic Review of Efficacy. *Journal of Adolescent Health*. 2019;1–17. doi:10.1016/j.jadohealth.2019.01.024
14. Niewoehner-Green JE, Bowling AM, Rinehart K. Engaging youth in food systems issues: Approaches to youth development and empowerment. *Advancements in Agricultural Development*. 2025 Apr 30;6(2):28–41. doi:<https://doi.org/10.37433/aad.v6i2.543>
15. Cook B, Rusaitis-Graham E, Gonzalez W, Nordhagen S, Shindler M. Measuring Youth Engagement in Policy Processes: Bringing a Food Systems Focus [Internet]. 2025 Apr [cited 2025 Oct 30]. (GAIN Working Paper 50). Available from: https://www.gainhealth.org/sites/default/files/gain-working-paper-metrics-on-youth-engagement-in-policy_final.pdf doi:<https://doi.org/10.36072/wp.50>
16. WFF. Transforming agrifood systems through climate resilient agricultural practices: A youth perspective [Internet]. Rome; 2025 [cited 2025 Nov 25]. Available from: <https://youth.world-food-forum.org/docs/devworldfoodforumlibraries/programme-ed/better-environment.pdf>
17. Pyburn R, Audet-Bélanger G, Dido S, Quiroga G, Flink I. Unleashing potential: gender and youth inclusive agri-food chains [Internet]. 2015 [cited 2025 Nov 25]. Report 7. Available from: <https://www.kit.nl/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Unleashing-potential-gender-and-youth-inclusive-agri-food-chains.pdf>
18. WFF. Elevating young women's visibility in agrifood systems: Ahead of the International Year of the Woman Farmer 2026 [Internet]. Rome; 2025 [cited 2025 Nov 25]. Available from: <https://youth.world-food-forum.org/docs/devworldfoodforumlibraries/programme-ed/better-life.pdf>
19. World Food Forum. Youth Recommendations Empowering Young Women in Agrifood Systems [Internet]. 2025 [cited 2025 Oct 30]. Available from: <https://youth.world-food-forum.org/docs/devworldfoodforumlibraries/track-youth-assembly/youth-recommendations-empowering-young-women-in-agrifood-systems.pdf>
20. Parikh Panam, Bappy M, Khondker Rudaba, Bipul M, Hasan M, Shindler Miriam. Harnessing youth Potential for transforming Bangladesh's food systems | GAIN [Internet]. 2025 Aug [cited 2025 Nov 11]. Available from: <https://www.gainhealth.org/resources/reports-and-publications/harnessing-youth-potential-transforming-bangladeshs-food-systems>
21. Siddique A. Youth and Women in Agriculture for Economic Development and Food Security in Bangladesh. In: Ali Y, Shrestha B, Bokhtiar SM, Jahan FN, editors. *Youth and Women in Agriculture: Economic Development and Food Security in South Asia* [Internet]. Dhaka: SAARC Agriculture Centre, Bangladesh; Asian Farmers' Association, Philippines; Ministry of Agriculture & Livestock Development, Nepal; and ActionAid Bangladesh.; 2019 [cited 2025 Nov 25]. Available from:

<https://www.sac.org.bd/archives/publications/Youth%20&%20Women%20in%20Agriculture.pdf>

22. Moazzem KG, Shibly ASMSA. Challenges for the Marginalised Youth in Accessing Jobs How Effective is Public Service Delivery? [Internet]. Dhaka; 2020 [cited 2025 Nov 25]. Report Working paper 132. Available from: <https://cpd.org.bd/resources/2020/03/CPD-Working-Paper-132-Challenges-for-the-Marginalised-Youth-in-Accessing-Jobs.pdf>

23. Ministry of Food. Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. Towards Sustainable Food Systems in Bangladesh. National Pathway Document for the UN Food Systems Summit [Internet]. 2025 [cited 2025 Jul 15]. Available from: https://www.unfoodsystemshub.org/docs/unfoodsystemslibraries/national-pathways/bangladesh/2025-07-13-en-unfsspathwaydocument_bangladesh.pdf

24. Department of Youth development. Servic List [Internet]. 2025 [cited 2025 Nov 28]. Available from: <https://dyd.gov.bd/site/page/367ceed0-37c8-4c37-9182-05fade9222a9/->

25. BYLC. Building Bridges Through Leadership Training [Internet]. 2025 [cited 2025 Nov 28]. Available from: <https://bylc.org/bblt.html>

26. Serac-Bangladesh. Youth Leadership Training Program [Internet]. 2025 [cited 2025 Nov 28]. Available from: <https://serac-bd.org/youth-leadership-training-program/>

27. YPSA. Active Citizens Youth Leadership Training (ACYLT) [Internet]. 2025 [cited 2025 Nov 28]. Available from: <https://ypsa.org/active-citizens-youth-leadership-training-acylt/>

28. BRAC. Amra Notun Network: Changemaker Platform [Internet]. [cited 2026 Jan 15]. Available from: <https://www.brac.net/solutions/development/investing-in-future-generations/youth-empowerment-bangladesh/amra-notun-network/>

29. Wave Foundation. Social Development and Youth Empowerment Program - Together for Better Life [Internet]. [cited 2026 Jan 15]. Available from: <https://wavefoundationbd.org/social-development-and-youth-empowerment-program/>

30. The Hunger Project-Bangladesh. Empowering Youth Leadership [Internet]. [cited 2026 Jan 15]. Available from: <https://en.thpbdb.org/empowering-youth-leadership/>

31. British Council. Active citizens [Internet]. [cited 2026 Jan 15]. Available from: https://www.britishcouncil.org.bd/en/programmes/society/active-citizens?trk=profile_certification_title

32. UNICEF. UNICEF Launches Leadership Programme for Young Changemakers in Bangladesh [Internet]. 2025 [cited 2025 Nov 28]. Available from: <https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/en/press-releases/unicef-launches-leadership-programme-young-changemakers-bangladesh>

33. GAIN. Youth Leadership Initiative: Supporting Young People to Become Leaders for Fairer Food Systems [Internet]. 2025 [cited 2025 Oct 30]. Available from: <https://www.gainhealth.org/youth-leadership-initiative>

34. GAIN. Youth Leadership Initiative Handbook [Internet]. Geneva: Switzerland; 2025 [cited 2025 Oct 30]. Available from: <https://www.gainhealth.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/gain-youth-leadership-initiative-handbook.pdf>
35. Crowe S, Cresswell K, Robertson A, Huby G, Avery A, Sheikh A. The case study approach. *BMC Med Res Methodol*. 2011;11. doi:10.1186/1471-2288-11-100 PubMed PMID: 21707982.
36. SUN Youth Network Bangladesh [Internet]. 2026 [cited 2026 Apr 30]. Available from: <https://www.sunyouthnetworkbangladesh.org/>
37. Braun V, Clarke V. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qual Res Psychol*. 2006;3(2):77–101. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
38. GloColearning. A Systems Change Evaluation of the Youth Voices Project. 2025 Jun.
39. Niewoehner-Green JE, Bowling AM, Rinehart K. Engaging youth in food systems issues: Approaches to youth development and empowerment. *Advancements in Agricultural Development*. 2025 Apr 30;6(2):28–41. doi:<https://doi.org/10.37433/aad.v6i2.543>
40. FAO. The Status of Youth in Agrifood Systems [Internet]. Rome, Italy; 2025 [cited 2025 Nov 11]. Available from: <https://openknowledge.fao.org/items/e5d214a7-6046-47e7-bd34-7987fcc44cd6> doi:<https://doi.org/10.4060/cd5886en>
41. World Food Forum (WFF). Youth Recommendations Empowering Young Women in Agrifood Systems [Internet]. 2025 [cited 2025 Oct 30]. Available from: <https://youth.world-food-forum.org/docs/devworldfoodforumlibraries/track-youth-assembly/youth-recommendations-empowering-young-women-in-agrifood-systems.pdf>
42. HLPE. Promoting Youth Engagement and Employment in Agriculture and Food Systems [Internet]. Rome; 2021 [cited 2025 Oct 30]. Available from: <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/034c7cf9-9215-4304-a264-ecb0215a50d2/content>
43. Rinaldi C, McGill E, Petticrew M, Knai C, Egan M. Young people's perspectives on policies to create healthier food environments in England. *Health Promot Int*. 2024;39:133. doi:10.1093/heapro/daae133
44. Affre L, Guillaumie L, Dupéré S, Mercille G, Fortin-Guay M. Citizen Participation Practices in the Governance of Local Food Systems: A Literature Review. *Sustainability* 2024, Vol 16, Page 5990. 2024 Jul 13;16(14):5990. doi:10.3390/SU16145990
45. Ceptureanu SI, Ceptureanu EG, Luchian CE, Luchian I. Community Based Programs Sustainability. A Multidimensional Analysis of Sustainability Factors. *Sustainability* 2018, Vol 10, Page 870. 2018 Mar 19;10(3):870. doi:10.3390/SU10030870
46. WFF. Youth Vision: Advancing Innovation in Water Management in Agriculture [Internet]. 2025 [cited 2025 Dec 4]. Available from: <https://youth.world-food-forum.org/docs/devworldfoodforumlibraries/track-youth-assembly/wff-youth-vision-water-management.pdf>

47. Dubois DL, Holloway BE, Valentine JC, Cooper H. Effectiveness of mentoring programs for youth: a meta-analytic review. *Am J Community Psychol.* 2002;30(2):157–97. doi:10.1023/A:1014628810714 PubMed PMID: 12002242.
48. Barzola CL, Dentoni D, Allievi F, van der Slikke T, Isubikalu P, Auma Oduol JB, et al. Challenges of Youth Involvement in Sustainable Food Systems: Lessons Learned from the Case of Farmers' Value Network Embeddedness in Ugandan Multi-stakeholder Platforms. *Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals Through Sustainable Food Systems.* 2019 Oct 10;113–29. doi:10.1007/978-3-030-23969-5_6
49. UNEP, FAO, UNDP. Rethinking our food systems: A guide for multi-stakeholder collaboration [Internet]. Nairobi, Kenya; Rome, Italy; New York, USA; 2023 [cited 2025 Dec 4]. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc6325en>
50. Boyd S, Mostert RH, Assendelf Y van, Brouwer H, Schaap M, Li C, et al. Toolkit on youth in food systems [Internet]. Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation; 2021 [cited 2025 Dec 4]. Available from: <https://edepot.wur.nl/558210> doi:10.18174/558210
51. Juri S, Terry N, Pereira LM. Demystifying food systems transformation: a review of the state of the field. *Ecology and Society*, Published online: 2024-04-31 | doi:105751/ES-14525-290205. 2024 Apr 31;29(2). doi:10.5751/ES-14525-290205
52. Çamur H. Barriers to Young People's Active Participation and Role of Civil Society Institutions. *SSRN Electronic Journal.* 2021 Mar 24. doi:10.2139/SSRN.3811305

ANNEX 1. THIS CASE AS AN 'EXEMPLAR' OF FOOD SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION

THE EXEMPLARS OF FOOD SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION INITIATIVE

Addressing interlinked challenges related to food systems, such as malnutrition, climate change, and equity in food systems employment, requires integrated approaches that work across all aspects of food systems, as opposed to in sectoral silos. The 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) crystallised widespread agreement on the need for this kind of 'food system transformation' to accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and other development goals. However, concrete examples of what food system transformation can look like in practice remain limited, and not much is known about the factors that can foster or inhibit these transformative steps or processes.

The 'Exemplars of Food System Transformation' initiative, part of a multi-donor programme led by GAIN called Nourishing Food Pathways, thus seeks to document case studies of food system transformation in action. By considering individual cases on their own, as well as viewing a diverse set of cases jointly, the initiative seeks to better understand the process of food system transformation, including facilitating factors and how they can be fostered and barriers and how they can be overcome. Through a compendium of examples, as well as generalisable lessons, the work seeks to inform and inspire others seeking to transform food systems.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The overarching research question for the 'Exemplars' is thus: How does food system transformation come about, and what fosters or hinders food system transformation? To answer this overarching question, the initiative is guided by a framework that divides the transformation process into five phases, based on the Kaleidoscope Model for policy change (4), and identifies factors that promote change within each phase (see Figure A1). These factors are primarily drawn from the Kaleidoscope Model, with additional factors drawn from the 'Three I's' framework, social movement theory, the advocacy coalition framework, Baker et al (2018), Cullerton et al (2016), and (on accountability) Garton et al (2022) (5–7).

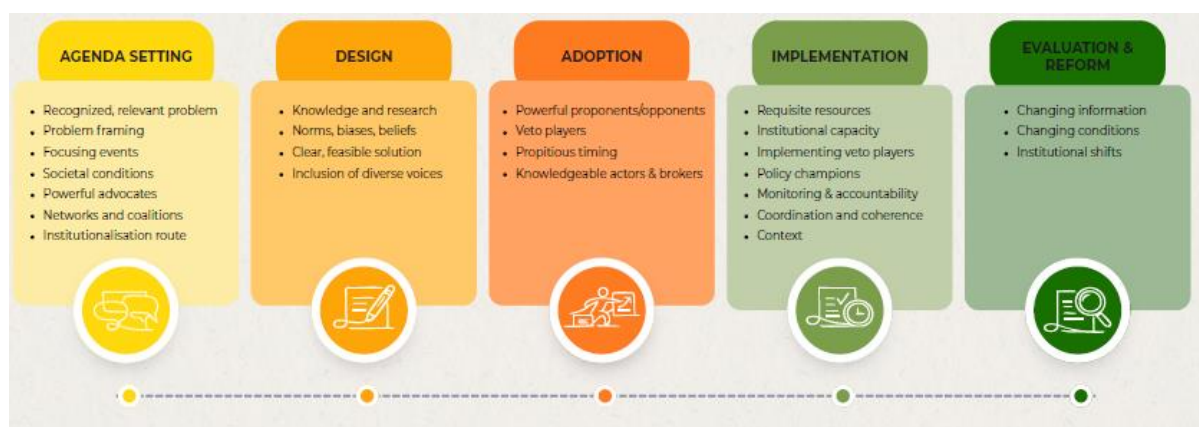


Figure A1. Exemplars Framework for Analysing Change Processes

The exemplars framework specifies a set of research questions that connect to each phase and can be applied to individual cases where relevant. The framework is meant to be a flexible tool, which can be adopted to context but should provide structure for viewing the cases jointly.

In addition, this process-focused framework can where helpful be embedded in a larger framework that considers not just the studied change or intervention but also the context in which it occurs, the stakeholders with which it interacts, and how it affects food system drivers, activities, and outcomes (Figure A2).

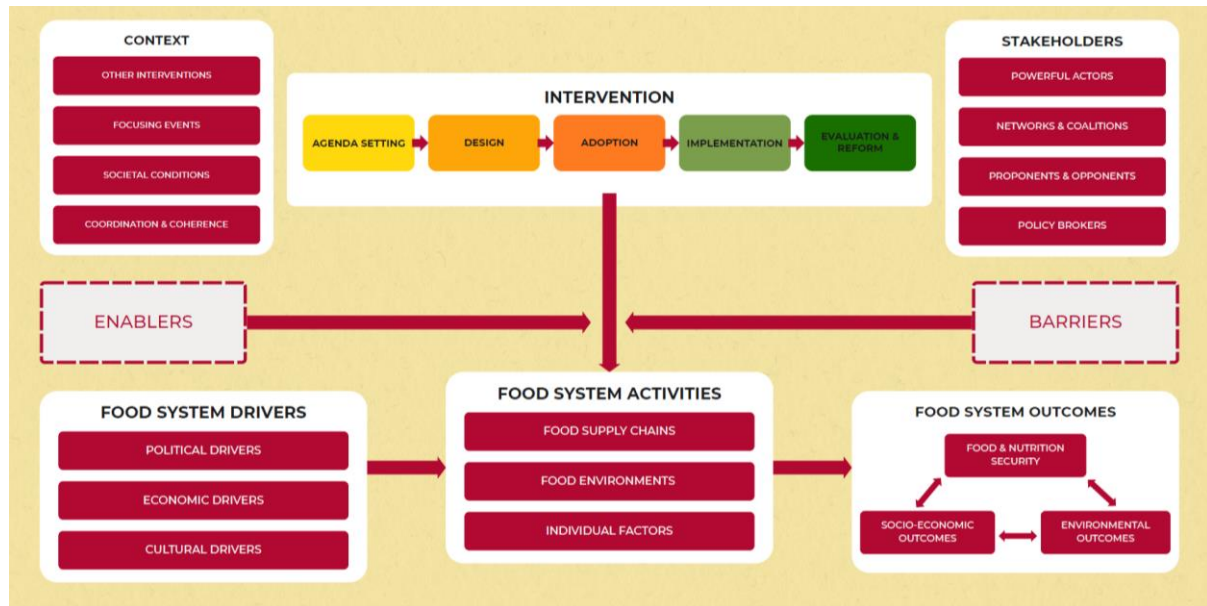


Figure A2. Exemplars Framework for Understand Change Processes within Context

This common framework for identifying research questions and focuses is used to facilitate synthesis and comparison across the studied cases.

How does this case fit within the Exemplars?

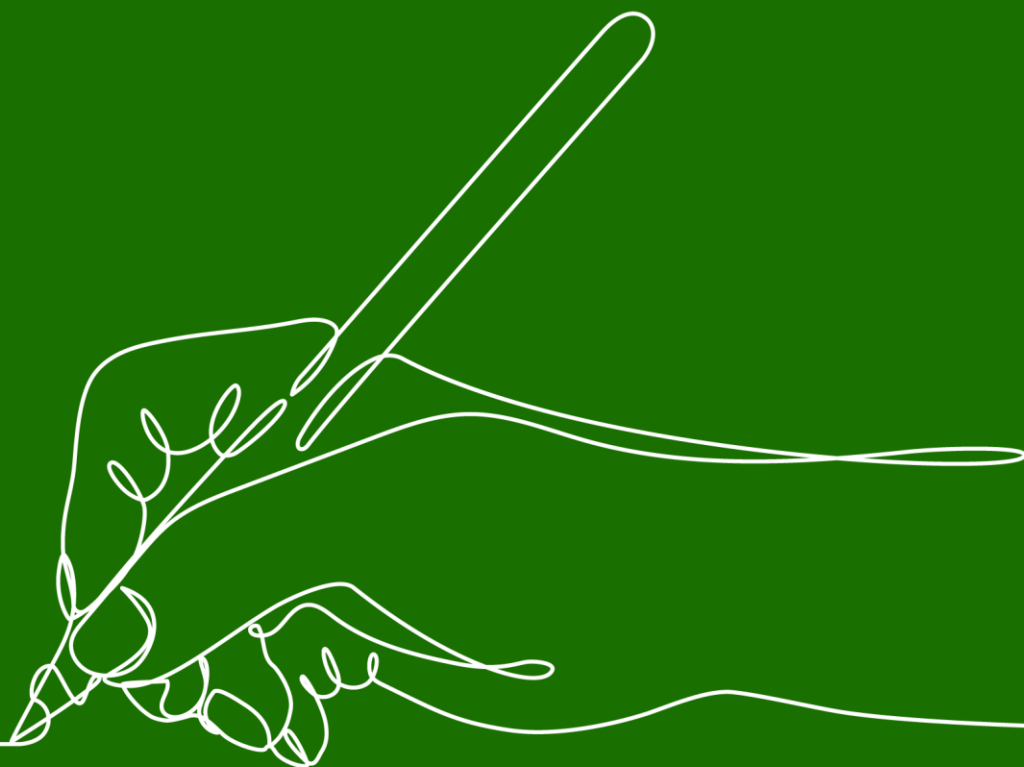
This case focuses on a key element of achieving equitable and inclusive food systems transformation: including a diversity of voices in the process. Including diverse voices may make it more likely that the priorities chosen for transformation reflect those of all of society, with no groups excluded or having their interests unrepresented, and that the approaches used to advance those priorities are equitable and inclusive. Inclusion of diverse voices can also make it more likely that the chosen approaches are effective and less likely that they have deleterious unintended consequences, as more considerations are taken into account during the decision-making process. Specifically, this case focuses on inclusion of young people who, as noted in the main text, are a critical population to engage in food systems transformation.

Within the Exemplars framework, this case is an indirect one: while most other cases examine a specific change (e.g., developing a new policy, implementing a programme to

address a food systems challenge) and how that change happens (including through the steps shown in Figure A1), this case focuses on the background mechanisms that shape those change processes. Specifically, it considers how young people can be effective actors in food systems transformation. This ties to the 'Inclusion of diverse voices' element in the 'Design' portion of the Exemplars framework (Figure A1). While a companion case study (GAIN Working Paper 73) focuses on how young people can be prepared to participate indirectly by sharing their opinions and advocating for change, the present case focuses on how youth can directly act to make change themselves through collective action. GAIN Working papers 67 and 68 explore similar themes in the context of Tanzania.

Youth collective action, where effective, could affect many other parts of the change process shown in Figure A1. In particular, it could wholly shift the agenda for what are considered the relevant food systems challenges and how to address them; it could lead to innovative designs for interventions or policies; and it could foster their adoption and strengthen their implementation. The types of community-oriented actions examined here can be seen as a formative stage, through which youth develop grounded experience and practical perspectives that can inform future engagement in food and nutrition related decision-making spaces. Youth-led collective action can thus be powerful catalyst, driver, or accelerant of food system transformation processes. This case also shows how deliberate interventions can help to encourage more youth to engage in collective action.

Within the broader food system framework (Figure A2), youth-led collective action can not only lead to specific interventions for change but also, over time, shape the societal conditions and political and social drivers that set the context for food systems transformation – in this way, perhaps expanding the boundaries of what kinds of transformation are possible.



ABOUT GAIN

The Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) is a Swiss-based foundation launched at the UN in 2002 to tackle the human suffering caused by malnutrition. Working with governments, businesses and civil society, we aim to transform food systems so that they deliver more nutritious food for all people, especially the most vulnerable.

ABOUT THE GAIN WORKING PAPER SERIES

The GAIN Working Paper Series provides informative updates on programme approaches, research and evaluations, and on topics of relevance for our work. The full series may be accessed at <https://www.gainhealth.org/resources/reports-and-publications>

The Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition

Rue de Varembé 1202 | Geneva | Switzerland | info@gainhealth.org

 www.gainhealth.org

 GAINalliance

 GAINalliance

 Gainadm

 GAINalliance

 Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition