

# HARNESSING YOUTH POTENTIAL FOR TRANSFORMING TANZANIA'S FOOD SYSTEMS

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## KEY MESSAGES

- Youth in Tanzania are active at the community level but remain largely absent from formal governance. There is potential for Tanzanian youth to more actively help Tanzania in its ambition to achieve a nutrition-sensitive, climate resilient, inclusive food system.
- This policy brief introduces a practical framework to enable meaningful youth engagement in food systems policymaking and recommends concrete actions to institutionalise youth participation across national and sub-national governance platforms.
- Institutionalise youth participation in food systems governance through mechanisms such as Youth Advisory Panel and operationalising the National Youth Council, to ensure youth priorities are systematically and sustainably integrated into policy decisions.
- Develop structured local-to-national representation pathways, leveraging existing channels such as Tanzania Youth Alliance in Food Systems (TYAFS) and Youth Development Officers in Local Government Authorities to strengthen coherence between local priorities, community action and national decision-making.
- Strengthen cross-ministerial coordination and accountability by aligning youth mandates across ministries and integrate youth specific objectives and indicators in national frameworks, for efficient resource mobilisation and sustained youth participation.
- Develop a pipeline of youth leaders through structured fellowships, internships and mentorships; and integrating capacity-building into vocational curricula and programmes like Building a Better Tomorrow – Youth and Women Initiative for Agribusiness (BBT-YIA) to equip the next generation with the necessary skills and networks to transition from community actors to national-level leaders.



# TANZANIA'S PATHWAY TO FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION

Tanzania has made steady progress in strengthening its food and agricultural systems, supported by strong economic growth. Food production has increased, extreme poverty has declined, and key nutrition and health indicators have shown signs of improvements<sup>1,2</sup>. This progress is guided by long-term national frameworks like the Tanzania Development Vision 2025 and the emerging Vision 2050, which reflect the government's commitment to building an inclusive and resilient economy by mid-century<sup>2</sup>. However, several challenges remain. Tanzanian diets remain heavily reliant on cereals and lack dietary diversity. Stunting rates are still high (30%) and micronutrient deficiencies such as anaemia among women of reproductive age (42%) and children under age 5 (59%) persists despite supplementation efforts<sup>3</sup>. Food loss along the value chain remains high, driven by value chain inefficiencies including inadequate infrastructure and climate variability that undermine productivity and food security. These challenges are further compounded by high youth unemployment, rapid urbanization, and weak cross-sectoral coordination in food systems governance, putting both livelihoods and nutrition outcomes at risk<sup>1,4</sup>.

Central to this vision is a food system (**Box 1**) that is productive, sustainable, fair, and resilient. With over 65% of the population employed in agriculture<sup>7</sup> and a growing youth demographic<sup>8</sup>, transforming food systems presents a strategic opportunity to achieve inclusive economic growth, improve nutrition, climate resilience, and intergenerational equity. This ambition is reinforced by the National Five-Year Development Plan (FYDP III)<sup>4</sup> and the Agricultural Sector Development Programme II (ASDP II)<sup>9</sup>, both of which prioritise agri-food system as a driver of employment and rural development. Complementing this, the National Multisectoral Nutrition Action Plan II (2021–2026) (NMNAP II) outlines a coordinated approach across 17 sectors to deliver improved nutrition outcomes through strengthened local governance and integrated multisectoral action<sup>3</sup>. Together, these frameworks provide a strong foundation for Tanzania's food systems transformation and integrating youth as key agents of change will be essential for impact and sustainability.

## Box 1: What are food systems?

Food systems comprise all the people, institutions, places and activities that are involved in the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption and ultimately, disposal of food products. Food systems influence diets by determining what kinds of foods are produced, which foods are accessible and peoples' food preferences. They are critical for ensuring food and nutrition security, people's livelihoods, and environmental sustainability<sup>5,6</sup>.

In line with this ambition, Tanzania adopted the National Food Systems Pathways following the 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS)<sup>1</sup>. The pathway sets out six priority transitions to guide systemic change:



Realising these six priority transitions will require cross-sectoral collaboration and the institutionalised engagement of youth in planning, implementation and accountability.

1 The United Republic of Tanzania. Pathways for sustainable food systems 2030. Tanzania: Government of Tanzania; 2021.

2 Draft Tanzania Development Vision 2050 [Internet]. 2024. Available from: [planning.go.tz](https://planning.go.tz)

3 2022 Tanzania Demographic and Health Survey and Malaria Indicator Survey. Available from: [https://www.nbs.go.tz/uploads/statistics/documents/en-1705490100-Policy\\_Implications\\_23-10-2023.pdf](https://www.nbs.go.tz/uploads/statistics/documents/en-1705490100-Policy_Implications_23-10-2023.pdf)

4 Prime Minister's Office, United Republic of Tanzania. National Multisectoral Nutrition Action Plan II (2021–2026) [Internet]. Prime Minister's Office, United Republic of Tanzania; 2021. Available from: <https://www.pmo.go.tz/uploads/documents/sw-1646121553-NMNAP.pdf>

5 Lasbennes F, Morrison J, Nabarro D and Victoria P. Food System Pathways: Improving the Effectiveness of Support to Countries. Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN). Discussion Paper #15. Geneva, Switzerland, 2023. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36072/dp.15>

6 <https://www.foodsystemsdashboard.org/information/about-food-systems#a-food-systems-framework>

7 The United Republic of Tanzania. National Five Year Development Plan 2021 - 2026 [Internet]. Ministry of Finance and Planning; 2021. Available from: <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/tan205461.pdf>

8 UNICEF. Young people engagement: A priority for Tanzania. Available from <https://www.unicef.org/tanzania/young-people-engagement-priority-tanzania>

9 <https://asdp.kilimo.go.tz>

Tanzania's food systems agenda is closely aligned with African Union's priorities. The Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) Post Malabo Strategy and Action Plan (2026-2035) presents a bold commitment to eliminate hunger and reduce poverty through agriculture-led development, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and African Union's Agenda 2063. This strategy recognises young people as essential leaders and decision makers in governance, delivery, and innovation required to meet Africa's food systems targets<sup>10</sup>. The CAADP Post-Malabo Strategy explicitly urges African countries, including Tanzania, to embed youth meaningfully within policy, planning, and accountability processes as co-leaders in the transformation of the continent's food systems. The 2025 Kampala Declaration on Building Resilient and Sustainable Agrifood Systems in Africa reinforced this call, urging governments to institutionalise youth participation in agrifood systems governance for inclusive and sustainable development<sup>11</sup>.

Tanzania's alignment with this strategy is not only essential but critical. With about 12 million young people between the ages of 15 and 24<sup>13</sup>, the country holds a powerful demographic potential and economic opportunity. Involving them meaningfully (**Box 2**) in food systems governance can be a key driver of transformation and help deliver on long-term national development priorities and Agenda 2063.

#### Box 2: What is meaningful youth engagement?

Meaningful youth engagement is the process of recognising, enabling and valuing young people as agents of positive change. It requires actively, intentionally and systemically including them as partners and co-leaders in policymaking, planning, implementation and accountability processes<sup>12</sup>.

Acknowledging this, Tanzania's national strategies including the National Food Systems Pathway, FYDP III, ASDP II, and the Vision 2050 acknowledge the key role of young people in shaping inclusive, climate-resilient, and nutrition-sensitive food systems. However, youth participation across these frameworks remains largely peripheral, while young people are recognised as a priority group, they are rarely assigned formal roles in governance structures or included as stakeholders in implementation and monitoring processes<sup>14</sup>. The National Food Systems Pathway, FYDP III, ASDP II, and NMNAP II offer limited guidance or pathways for structurally embedding youth within coordination platforms or decision-making bodies. This gap threatens to sideline the generation that will inherit the decisions of today.

Building on the momentum of 2025 UNFSS+4 and as the country accelerates the implementation of Vision 2050, this is a timely opportunity to structurally integrate youth in food system policy processes. This policy brief aims to support national stakeholders in identifying clear entry points for action and present a practical framework for enabling meaningful youth participation for Tanzania's food systems transformation.

## FRAMEWORK FOR MEANINGFULLY ENGAGING YOUTH IN FOOD SYSTEMS POLICY

Achieving sustainable, equitable, and inclusive food system is not possible without the active participation and leadership of young people. Recognising this, the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) has embedded Youth Voices as one of the core pillars in its programme is supporting the design and delivery of national food systems pathways in 11 countries, including Tanzania. Drawing on established models, Youth Voices had developed a practical and adaptable framework to support governments and other actors in engaging youth actively and effectively in food systems governance<sup>15</sup>.

10 African Union's Extraordinary Summit in Kampala to adopt 10-Year CAADP Strategy and Action Plan to advance agricultural transformation and food systems in Africa | African Union [Internet]. Available from: <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20250109/extraordinary-summit-kampala-adopt-10-year-caadp-strategy-and-action-plan>

11 Kampala CAADP Declaration on Building Resilient and Sustainable agrifood systems in Africa. Available from: [https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/44699-doc-OSC68072\\_E\\_Original\\_CAADP\\_Declaration.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/44699-doc-OSC68072_E_Original_CAADP_Declaration.pdf)

12 United Nations. Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 3: Meaningful Youth Engagement in Policymaking and Decision making Processes. 2023. Available from: <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/our-common-agenda-policy-brief-youth-engagement-en.pdf>

13 Ministry of Finance and Planning, Tanzania National Bureau of Statistics and President's Office – Finance and Planning, Office of the Chief Government Statistician, Zanzibar. The 2022 Population and Housing Census: Age and Sex Distribution Report, Key Findings, Tanzania, December 2022. Available from: <https://sensa.nbs.go.tz/publication/report7.pdf>

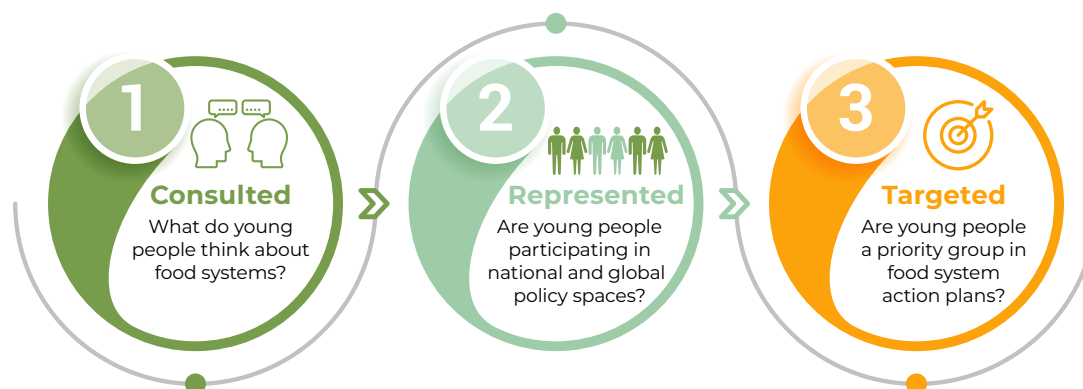
14 FAO. The status of youth in agrifood systems. Rome, Italy. 2025. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4060/cd5886en>

15 Parikh P, Khunga M and the GAIN Youth Voices team. The Unsung Heroes of Global Food Systems Transformation: Strengthening Youth Participation in Global and National Decision-Making. Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN). Discussion Paper #19. Geneva, Switzerland, 2025. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36072/dp.19>

## Three progressive levels of engagement and what it looks like in practice

The framework (**Figure 1**) outlines three progressive and interconnected levels of engaging young people into decision-making processes<sup>8</sup>:

**Figure 1:** Framework describing levels at which government can engage youth in food systems policy



- 1. Consulted:** Youth are engaged as contributors whose perspectives, needs, and priorities help inform food policy. This requires inclusive, participatory mechanisms such as intergenerational dialogues, workshops, and digital platforms that reach youth across geographies, gender, and socioeconomic backgrounds. To be meaningful, consultations with youth must also include feedback loops between youth, policy makers and other actors to demonstrate how inputs shape decisions.
- 2. Represented:** Youth move beyond consultation to serve as formally represented actors with decision-making roles. This includes participation in governance structures as members of youth advisory groups, technical committees, national councils, and/or multi-stakeholder platforms. To be effective, these roles must be backed by institutional mandates, clear terms of reference, and capacity-building support to ensure meaningful influence.
- 3. Targeted:** Youth are recognised as targeted beneficiaries and co-architects of food systems transformation. This includes policies and investments that address youth's immediate needs and long-term aspirations, such as access to land, finance, training, technology and market opportunities, as well as programmes that support innovation, entrepreneurship, and employment in the agri-food sector. Realising this level of engagement requires cross-sectoral and inter-ministerial coordination to ensure that efforts are coherent, scalable, and rooted in long term systems change.

These three levels are cumulative and interdependent, each offering recommendations and an opportunity to strengthen youth leadership across policymaking, implementation and accountability mechanisms. Ultimately, youth should be consulted, represented and targeted through policy simultaneously to ensure engagement is meaningful, sustained and embedded across food systems governance processes.

## WHERE YOUTH FEATURE IN TANZANIA'S POLICY SPACES

**Tanzanian youth are actively leading change in across the food system, influencing policies, driving public investments, and advancing more inclusive food environments.** At the sub-national level, youth have engaged local authorities to address pressing food systems challenges. In Arusha, youth participated in budget consultations and successfully advocated for increased investment in youth-led food enterprises and the renovation of Kilombero Market, resulting in government budget commitments and catalytic support from partners such as Rikolto, an international non-governmental organisation. In Kagera, trained youth leaders contributed to the adoption of local food safety bylaws, working alongside district authorities to improve hygiene standards and raise community awareness. Platforms such as the Tanzania Youth Alliance for Food Systems (TYAFS)<sup>16</sup>, led by youth and supported by GAIN, have been instrumental in enabling and amplifying youth perspectives at local, sub-national, and national levels. Through collaboration, capacity strengthening, and advocacy, TYAFS enables young actors to meaningfully participate in policymaking, programme planning, and implementation. These examples illustrate the potential of youth as both advocates and implementation partners, when adequately supported, for reshaping food systems.

<sup>16</sup> <https://vijana4food.or.tz/about-us/>

## Youth shape public investment and market upgrades in Arusha

Kilombero (Central) Market's cramped stalls, blocked drains and unreliable water supply was affecting sales of youth-run food businesses and posing clear food-safety risks. Youth urged the Arusha City Council to take necessary measures to improve the Kilombero market in order to boost sales of youth-run food businesses and enhance food safety.

During the 2024–25 Local Government Authority (LGA) budget cycle, youth successfully lobbied for the upgrading of Kilombero Market. They leveraged their training in policy negotiations and budget processes to mobilise funds to improve market hygiene, infrastructure and vendor access. Importantly, this advocacy not only influenced LGA resource allocation, but also attracted financial support from RIKOLTO, an international organisation supporting sustainable food systems.

- Tailored capacity building equipped youth to translate their demands into strategic and credible proposals.
- Clear advocacy goals tied to market improvements made it easy for external actors like RIKOLTO to align and support.
- Locally relevant focus resonated with all stakeholders.

**At the national level, youth participation in formal policy processes is steadily growing.** Youth leaders have contributed to the review of the National Food and Nutrition Policy and engaged in cross-sectoral budget planning processes, presenting their priorities to several parliamentary committees and ministries. During the 2025 Africa Food Systems Summit, Tanzanian youth participated in high-level panel discussions, including a dialogue with the former President of the United Republic of Tanzania, Hon. Jakaya Kikwete of the United Republic of Tanzania. The inclusion of youth in these events signalled an increasing recognition of youth as stakeholders in food systems transformation.

**National policy frameworks show youth potential and are creating an enabling environment to acknowledge them as key actors of change.** The newly launched Youth Development Policy provides a comprehensive framework for educational advancement, job creation, and entrepreneurial opportunities. Importantly, it recognises the critical role of youth in governance and decision-making, positioning them as active contributors to national development<sup>17</sup>. The FYDP III and ASDP II similarly identify youth as key actors in economic and agricultural transformation.

Initiatives including Building a Better Tomorrow – Youth and Women Initiative for Agribusiness (BBT-YIA) and Tanzania Food Systems Resilience Program (TFSRP) present promising platforms for institutionalising youth participation in governance. ASDP II's flagship initiative BBT-YIA provides land, infrastructure for irrigation and production, mentorship, and skills training to youth-led agribusinesses. The recently launched TFSRP, with support from World Bank, further reinforces the government's commitment of leveraging the demographic dividend. TFSRP targets youth as direct beneficiaries of agricultural services, climate-resilient technologies, and extension support, with defined indicators tracking youth access to assets and services across the programme<sup>18</sup>. While the current focus of both BBT-YIA and TFSRP is on enterprise support and service delivery, if complemented with structured mechanisms, these programmes could serve as scalable models for integrating youth as co-architects of food systems transformation.

<sup>17</sup> UNFPA Tanzania. Putting Young People front: Youth Engage with Vision 2050 and New Development Policy [Internet]. Dodoma (TZ): UNFPA Tanzania; 2024. Available from: <https://tanzania.unfpa.org/en>

<sup>18</sup> World Bank. Tanzania Food Systems Resilience Program. Washington DC: World Bank Group; 2023. Available from: [worldbank.org](https://worldbank.org)



## Seeding the future: How BBT-YIA is powering youth-driven food systems

Tanzania's Building a Better Tomorrow – Youth and Women Initiative for Agribusiness (BBT-YIA) is a flagship programme of the Ministry of Agriculture, designed to tackle systemic barriers limiting young participation participating in agriculture. To date, the programme has allocated over 77,000 hectares of irrigated land to youth through block farms and Youth Agribusiness Parks, enabling scalable and sustainable enterprise development. In addition, BBT-YIA offers training, tailored mentorship, market-oriented skills combined with access to a Youth Start-up and Growth Catalyst Fund, projected to mobilise TZS 72 billion (approximately USD 27.5 million) to support youth-led agribusiness ventures. The initiative marks a significant shift from short-term youth employment schemes toward long-term investment in youth entrepreneurship.

Why it works:

- Government ownership and cross-ministerial ensure scale, legitimacy and continuity.
- Integrated services package addresses the interlinked barriers of land, finance and skills
- Cohort-based model fosters peer networks, mentorship and sustained engagement

While currently centred on production and enterprise development, BBT-YIA holds strong potential as a platform for cultivating the next generation of youth leaders, especially if aligned more closely with governance systems.

**Building on this progress, youth must be engaged meaningfully and structurally in formal food systems governance to ensure their voices are integrated.** The National Food Systems Pathway must explicitly identify youth as governance actors to leverage the full potential of youth. To support this, dedicated mechanisms should be established, such as assigning youth a defined role in planning, implementation, and/or monitoring of policies. National curriculum or training infrastructure focused on food systems governance, policy design, or accountability is needed to support the transition of young people from community actors to policy leaders. In addition, fellowships, internships, or mentorships opportunities within key ministries can provide the youth with exposure to policymaking environments and enable their meaningful participation in decision-making processes.

**Existing institutional platforms present promising opportunities.** Youth Development Officers in Local Government Authorities (LGAs) could act as key intermediaries, if formally connected to decision-making structures. Strengthening coordination across ministries with youth mandates such as Agriculture, Health, Youth, and at Local Government levels, and operationalising the National Youth Council, would further institutionalise youth participation in governance. Ensuring that youth budget allocations at LGAs are informed by local priorities will also support policy coherence and responsiveness. Implementing these efforts through structured, well-resourced mechanisms and aligning them with existing governance frameworks can ensure systemic inclusion of Tanzanian youth in food systems policy.



# WHAT IS NEEDED TO ENABLE YOUTH LEADERSHIP IN FOOD SYSTEMS POLICY

Tanzania stands at a critical juncture. Young people are taking ownership and driving food systems actions at the local and sub-national levels. They are increasingly being included in national dialogues. Policymakers acknowledge youth as key beneficiaries and are creating opportunities for them. This shift is promising but not sufficient. To realise inclusive, resilient food systems transformation aligned with Development Vision 2050, youth must be recognised and embedded as strategic actors in governance. To achieve this, Tanzania should take focused actions across governance, systems-wide coordination, and capacity building across local and national levels. The recommendations below build on existing opportunities and offer practical steps for government ministries and partners to take forward:

## Create formal roles for youth in policy and coordination platforms, ensuring their perspectives systematically shape policies, programmes and investments

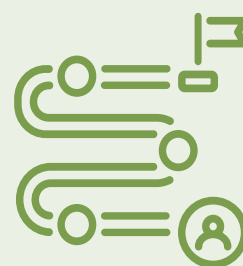
Embed youth in the formal governance architecture of Tanzania's food system at both, national and sub-national levels to ensure their contributions are recognised, sustained, and linked to accountability.



- Establish a “Youth Advisory Panel on Food Systems”, placed within the Ministry of Agriculture and linked to inter-ministerial coordination platforms to bring youth perspectives into cross-sectoral decisions
- Operationalise the National Youth Council with a defined mandate in food systems governance, including policy development, review, and monitoring mechanisms, to institutionalise youth engagement in national decision-making.
- Mandate youth representation in sub-national and national bodies, including NMNAP committees, agricultural boards, and LGA planning forums, supported by formal Terms of Reference (ToR) that define roles and ensure accountability.

## Develop structured local-to-national representation pathways, ensuring youth engagement is representative, inclusive and responsive

Establish mechanisms to ensure local priorities inform national decision-making processes, whilst also making youth engagement more inclusive, transparent and responsive to diverse realities.



- Convene periodic youth forums at LGA and regional levels (coordinated by Youth Development Officers) and leveraging platforms like the TYAFS to consolidate local perspectives.
- Appoint Regional Youth Coordinators to synthesise inputs from LGAs and amplify these youth priorities at the national level.
- Use digital consultations platforms to widen participation, to collate local priorities and establish feedback loops between authorities and youth.

## Strengthen systems-wide coordination and resourcing for youth engagement, ensuring sustainability

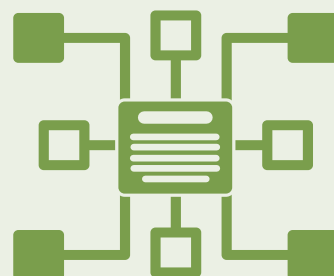
Transform youth motivation and intent into leadership through targeted capacity building, hands-on policy exposure and digital engagement across all levels.



- Integrate youth-specific objectives and indicators into key national frameworks (such as ASDP II, FYDP III, and NMNAP II) to institutionalise youth as key actors in food systems transformation
- Include youth-specific metrics into the UNFSS+4 stocktake process to track and report progress on youth inclusion in food systems governance
- Mandate youth engagement plans and budget lines in sectoral programmes at both national and LGA levels, to safeguard resources for meaningful participation.
- Track engagement by all relevant ministries through a “Youth engagement scorecard” integrated within the national monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

## Build youth capacity and expand participation pathways, ensuring a pipeline of national food system leaders

Equip youth with targeted capacity building, exposure, and access to policy processes and decision-making environments across all levels to create the future generation of national food system leaders.



- Expand existing youth programmes (such as BBT-YIA) and vocational curricula to include trainings on food systems leadership, policy, planning, and accountability, delivered in accessible, localised, and hybrid formats.
- Create fellowships, internships, and secondments, placing young leaders in relevant ministries, giving them direct experience in policy discussions and processes.
- Expand opportunities for participation, particularly for underserved communities, through stipends, travel support, and use of digital tools.

These four recommendations provide a structured approach for institutionalising youth participation in Tanzania’s food systems, shifting from isolated initiatives to systemic inclusion with accountability, dedicated resources, and clear pathways linking local action to national decision-making.

With approximately 12 million youth aged 15–24<sup>7</sup>, Tanzania holds a demographic sector that, if meaningfully engaged, can accelerate the country’s progress toward inclusive and resilient food systems. The decisions made today will shape the food systems young people will inherit. It is, therefore, only fair that they have a role to play in shaping them now.

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