



YAS

YOUNG
AMBASSADORS
SOCIETY



WORLD
FOOD
FORUM

GLOBAL
YOUTH
ACTION



2026 **WORLD** **FOOD** **FORUM** **FLAGSHIP** **EVENT**

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About The Young Ambassadors Society

The Young Ambassadors Society (YAS) is a non-profit association founded in 2011 with the goal of empowering young people, offering them opportunities to make an impact and join official global policy making processes.

Together with a global network of international associations, YAS is one of the founding members of the Y20 and Y7, the official youth engagement groups of the G20 and G7 Summits. Since their foundation, YAS has been responsible for these engagement groups for Italy, in collaboration with the Italian Presidency and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

On the occasion of the G7 Italy, YAS served as the Chair of the Y7 Italy, involving thousands of young people in the process. It had previously chaired Y20 Italy in 2021 and Y7 Italy in 2017. YAS also recruits and trains Italian youth delegations for major international forums, including the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP), the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the World Food Forum (WFF), and the Paris Peace Forum, among others.

In 2024, the Young Ambassadors Society (YAS) launched the first edition of the Global Youth Leaders (GYL) Programme, a training program developed in collaboration with institutions, international organizations, and the private sector. The initiative brought together youth from across Italy to explore key topics such as sustainability, innovation, and artificial intelligence, and to learn how to draft policy proposals on these issues through dedicated policy labs. According to participant feedback, 98% would join a new edition, 96% would recommend the program, and 95% reported an improvement in their personal or professional skills.



Preamble

This thematic brief presents a synthesis of key insights and reflections emerging from the participation of the YAS delegation in the **World Food Forum 2026**, in Rome, drawing on direct engagement in plenary sessions, workshops, roundtables and high level events. The insights and analyses reflect the exclusive work, judgment and interpretation of the individual delegates, and highlight the main themes, challenges and opportunities they identified, with a focus **on the role of young people in transforming agrifood systems**.

The brief is structured into **four sections**, one for each working group. The first section, **Climate**, examines the growing pressure of extreme events, water scarcity and food loss and waste on agrifood systems. It reflects on the role of forecasts, satellite monitoring, real time data and Artificial Intelligence in anticipating risks, while stressing the need for human oversight and for combining scientific innovation with Indigenous and local knowledge.

The second section, **Economics**, reflects on the gap between conventional financing and agricultural realities, and on the barriers that keep smallholders from credit, markets and certification. Drawing on examples such as the cocoa sector, the Amazon bioeconomy, the Lobito Corridor and the Central American Dry Corridor, it questions who ultimately captures the value generated by investment.

The third section, **Innovation**, discusses the need to move beyond isolated technological interventions towards integrated and inclusive approaches. It highlights the importance of infrastructure, extension services and capacity building, and the need for digital tools to safeguard smallholder data sovereignty and human agency while valuing traditional knowledge.

The fourth section, **Inclusion**, explores what meaningful participation means for young people, women, Indigenous peoples and rural communities. It stresses that inclusion should be measured by the ability to influence decisions and access resources, rather than by presence at the table, and addresses the structural barriers, the role of data and digitalisation, and water governance.

These sections offer the perspective of the delegates, reflecting the view that climate resilience, sustainable financing, technological innovation and inclusion are deeply interconnected, and that **young people are already contributors to agrifood transformation**.

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Working Group Climate

Climate change is increasing the pressure on agrifood systems through more frequent and intense extreme events. Droughts, floods, heatwaves, hurricanes, irregular rainfall and climate phenomena like El Niño are already disrupting agriculture production and are among the main drivers of agricultural losses and food insecurity. These impacts are particularly significant in climate-sensitive regions with fewer resources to adapt. Between 1991 and 2023, disasters caused an estimated USD 3.26 trillion in agricultural losses worldwide, around USD 99 billion per year [1]. Building resilience therefore requires not only responding to crises but anticipating risks and reducing vulnerabilities before losses escalate.

Increasing water scarcity adds further pressure to agriculture production, making efficient irrigation, healthy soils and transparent water governance essential to climate resilience. Reducing waste must become part of the response: around one third of food produced globally is lost or wasted, while inefficient use of water and other natural resources increases the environmental cost of production [2]. The Central American Dry Corridor in the SICA region offers a concrete example, where recurrent droughts and irregular rainfall threaten agriculture and rural livelihoods. Hand-in-Hand investments of approximately USD 217 million support climate resilience through integrated water management, climate-risk mapping and agricultural innovation, linking investment with local needs and community participation [3]. Greater impact does not always require more resources, but also more effective use of those already available. Seasonal forecasts, satellite monitoring, real-time data and Artificial Intelligence (AI) can improve the prediction, identification and management of climate risks, supporting more timely and practical decisions. Greater access to real-time information makes it possible to target problems more precisely, but ambitious policy goals still depend on researchers, startups and technical experts capable of turning that knowledge into practical tools. Data gaps remain, particularly in least developed countries, while AI requires human oversight and equitable access to technology and finance. Innovation should also remain open to critical evaluation: being “critical friends” of science can help challenge greenwashing and top-down approaches that fail to reflect local realities. The environmental footprint and cost of digital innovation itself should also be considered, including the water demand associated with AI infrastructure and data centres.

Resilient solutions must therefore combine scientific and digital innovation with the knowledge, traditions, and experience of local and Indigenous communities, whose long-standing relationships with territories and ecosystems can inform more context-sensitive approaches. Protein diversification, circular practices, and a shift towards diets richer in plant-based foods can reduce environmental pressures and contribute to a more resilient food system. These transitions, however, must remain nutritionally adequate, affordable and culturally appropriate.

Young people are already contributing to these transitions, but meaningful participation requires access to land, finance, technology, training, research, and decision-making. They should be able not only to use solutions but to question, design and adapt them, connecting scientific knowledge with local experience and turning innovation into action. Continuous learning and knowledge sharing remain essential, while policies should recognise youth as drivers of innovation and sustainable development.

Today's youth will live longest with the consequences of a changing climate, so they should not just inherit the future of agrifood systems but help set its direction.

[1] FAO (2025), The Impact of Disasters on Agriculture and Food Security 202.; [2] FAO, Waste & Circularity – Bioeconomy for Sustainable Food and Agriculture; [3] FAO (2026), Dry Corridor and Arid Zones – Hand-in-Hand Investment Forum 2026.

Working Group Economics

Transforming agrifood systems requires more than mobilising capital: it needs investment models that reflect agricultural realities and deliver lasting benefits to local communities. Conventional lending often excludes smallholders lacking collateral, credit histories or protection against climate-related risks. Blended finance, loan guarantees, affordable credit and stronger local financial institutions can help address these barriers, provided that public-private partnerships are guided by evidence-based priorities and local ownership. Such partnerships also require a shared understanding between actors, since finance and sustainability make use of different languages [4]. Yet, financial viability simply cannot become the end goal. The cocoa sector illustrates how profitable global value chains can coexist with producer poverty, raising a fundamental question about who ultimately captures the value generated by investment. It is then equally important to connect local production to functioning markets. The Amazon bioeconomy and Lobito Corridor, among others, highlight the potential of regional cooperation, cross-border coordination and infrastructure investment to strengthen local value creation, economic integration and environmental resilience. However, higher agricultural output does not automatically translate into higher incomes. Storage facilities, transport networks and energy access must be accompanied by reliable market connections and affordable compliance mechanisms. Digital certification, mutual recognition of food-safety standards and shared testing laboratories could help small producers compete with larger intermediaries. Agrivoltaics offers another opportunity to combine clean energy production, food security and climate adaptation, but its success similarly depends on inclusive financing and meaningful community participation. The effectiveness of these investments also rests on institutional capacity, transparency and sustained commitments. The Central American Dry Corridor demonstrates both the potential of climate-resilient investment portfolios and the consequences of financing gaps, particularly where limited rural opportunities contribute to youth migration. Investment plans should therefore account not only for projected financial returns, but also for the research, technical expertise and human capital needed to operate and sustain the assets they finance. Digital innovation can improve this process: regularly updated, representative data and participatory evidence-gathering, including surveys accessible in local languages, can strengthen investment decisions. AI may further support agricultural planning and address rural labour shortages, but its deployment requires human oversight, protection of smallholder data sovereignty and safeguards against reinforcing existing inequalities.

Across these discussions, young people emerge not simply as beneficiaries of agrifood transformation, but as potential contributors to its design and implementation. Their participation in sustainable finance, entrepreneurship, research, digital innovation, food-safety compliance and regional trade can strengthen local economies, provided that education, practical skills and access to decision-making are treated as investment priorities. Ultimately, the success of agrifood transformation should be assessed not only through capital mobilised or projected returns, but through fairer value distribution, stronger local ownership, resilient livelihoods and the capacity of communities to shape their own economic development.

[4] Emeline Fellus, Senior Director Agriculture and Food, World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD). Statement at the Official Opening of the Hand-in-Hand Initiative Investment Forum.

Working Group Innovation

Transforming global agrifood systems through innovation requires moving beyond isolated technological interventions toward integrated, inclusive frameworks that deliver genuine, lasting value to local communities and agricultural supply chains. For technical solutions to generate meaningful impact, they must be fully accessible, economically affordable, and contextually adapted to the operational realities of smallholder producers. Achieving this outcome depends fundamentally on establishing resilient foundational infrastructure - encompassing reliable connectivity, energy systems, and transport networks - alongside sustained investments in capacity building, education, and upskilling. Without accessible extension services, technical advisory support, and training programs that bridge scientific research with practical field application, even the most promising technological advances risk remaining underutilized or reinforcing structural inequalities.

At the core of modern agrifood transformation is the effective deployment of relevant data to enhance agricultural production and drive proactive climate change adaptation. Real-time monitoring mechanisms and predictive analytics enable institutions and farmers to anticipate emerging food crises, weather shocks, and environmental risks before they escalate, facilitating timely anticipatory action. A key priority is to ensure that climate and geospatial data are translated into accessible, locally relevant decision-support tools that help farmers and rural communities manage land and water resources more sustainably.

Crucially, data-driven innovations must be respectfully integrated with local traditions, agroecological heritage, and traditional knowledge systems. Indigenous Peoples, women, and vulnerable populations must not be treated merely as passive recipients of external solutions, but recognized as essential rights-holders and co-creators of research and development. To ensure democratic access and widespread adoption, digital tools must be localized into regional languages and rigorously evaluated during design to identify and eliminate underlying algorithmic biases.

Furthermore, the realization of sustainable precision agriculture relies directly on robust digital and physical infrastructure that optimizes resource use, nutrient management, and water efficiency. Advanced instruments - such as artificial intelligence-driven meteorological forecasting models, geographic monitoring platforms for vulnerability mapping, and inclusive digital advisory services - mitigate market information asymmetries and bridge critical investment gaps across value chains. However, while these predictive technologies offer unprecedented analytical power, they must function as inclusive public goods that explicitly safeguard smallholder data sovereignty and preserve human agency. Digital tools must augment human ethical judgment and local agricultural wisdom rather than replace human decision-making with opaque automated systems, ensuring that technological progress fosters authentic empowerment, social equity, and resilient food security for all.

Working Group Inclusion

Across the World Food Forum discussions, a clear message emerged: inclusion in agrifood systems cannot be measured by the number of young people who are invited to join the conversations, but by their ability to influence decisions, access opportunities, and shape the future of the systems that affect their lives.

Young people are already agents of change today: they are transforming agrifood systems through innovation, local knowledge, entrepreneurship and community leadership. However, meaningful inclusion requires moving beyond symbolic participation. Youth must be recognized as drivers of change and creators of sustainable solutions, with formalized access to decision-making processes, clear follow-up mechanisms, and sustained opportunities to lead. The goal is not to simply hear young voices, but to ensure that their contributions influence policies, investments, and outcomes. Achieving this objective requires a dismantlement of the structural barriers that continue to exclude many young people, including limited access to land, funding, technology, education, training, and networks. Young women, Indigenous peoples, rural youth, and other marginalized groups are disproportionately affected and face additional obstacles linked to discriminatory social norms, insecure land rights, and unequal power relations. Yet these discriminations remain largely unaddressed. Cultural barriers, for instance, have been identified as the greatest obstacle for women in the agrifood sector, but no approach has been proposed to overcome them. Inclusion must therefore be intersectional, recognizing that a single approach cannot be sufficient to address all these barriers.

True empowerment occurs when people gain agency and control over the decisions that shape their livelihoods. Access to resources alone is not sufficient, especially for young women in food, land, and water systems, where participation in programmes does not automatically translate into economic independence or decision-making power. Skills training must therefore be connected to accessible finance, mentorship opportunities, childcare support, safe transportation, and other enabling conditions that allow young women to apply their knowledge to build sustainable careers.

Digitalization has the power to promote communities' autonomy and contribute to a more inclusive society. Digital technologies offer significant opportunities to strengthen productivity, information sharing, and women's agency, but they can also contribute to reinforcing existing inequalities when infrastructure, affordability, digital literacy and equitable governance are lacking. Human rights must remain at the centre of digital transformation, and communities should be treated as knowledge holders rather than data points. Young people and women should participate in designing, governing, and adapting digital innovations to local realities, while ensuring that traditional knowledge continues to be valued alongside technological advancement.

A recurring priority that emerged from the discussions is the need for better evidence to drive more inclusive policies. Rural populations, Indigenous communities, young people, and women are often underrepresented in datasets, making their vulnerabilities less visible. The use of intersectional, age- and sex-disaggregated data should be mainstreamed to guide investments, monitor outcomes, and improve accountability. Data should not only identify who is excluded, but help ensure that resources reach those most affected by inequalities and challenges. The discussions also highlighted the importance of strengthening local capacities. Teachers, for

instance, have long been undervalued and underrecognized, although they play an important role as catalysts for change in local communities [5]. Young people play a unique role as a bridge between agricultural heritage and innovation, combining traditional knowledge with new approaches to food production, climate adaptation, and value creation. The potential of local crops, fermentation initiatives, and water-efficient agriculture often remains inaccessible due to limited financing, infrastructure, and equipment. Public and private investments should therefore prioritize locally driven solutions and cooperative models that enable communities to manage their own resources.

Water governance emerged as another critical dimension of inclusion. Sustainable agrifood systems depend on equitable access to water, supported by efficient technologies, ecosystem management and international cooperation. However, water efficiency should not be measured solely through resource savings, but also through its contribution to food security, nutrition, livelihoods and environmental sustainability. Women, youth, Indigenous peoples and marginalized farmers must be actively involved in decisions regarding water management and enjoy the benefits.

A broader recognition underlying all discussions is that inclusion must be embedded into development models from the outset, rather than being treated as a separate or secondary objective. Programmes and institutions should adapt and accommodate the needs of participants, accompanying them in overcoming structural barriers. Investing in youth leadership, female empowerment, accessible finance, mentorship, and community-based governance is a prerequisite to achieve sustainable growth and transformation.

Looking ahead, the transformation of agrifood systems will depend not only on technological innovation or financial investment, but also on who is empowered to shape decisions and drive solutions. The inclusion of young people, Indigenous communities, women, and rural populations should not be measured by their presence at the table, but by their ability to influence outcomes, access resources, and participate meaningfully in decision-making processes. Investing in this vision means investing in a generation that is already leading change and enabling them to exercise agency over their own futures. By providing young people with the necessary space, resources, and decision power, we can build more resilient, equitable, and sustainable agrifood systems for the future generations.

[5] Daniel D. Foster, Associate Professor of Agricultural and Extension Education, The Pennsylvania State University. Keynote speech at the Global Youth Forum Opening Ceremony.