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**INTERNATIONAL
YOUTH DAY**

**2021
TRANSFORMING
FOOD SYSTEMS**

International Youth Day 2021 Transforming Food Systems: Youth Innovation for Human and Planetary Health Concept Note

CONTEXT:

In 1999, General Assembly resolution 54/120 endorsed the recommendation made by the World Conference of Ministers of Youth (Lisbon, 8-12 August 1998) that 12 August be declared International Youth Day. Such a day provides an opportunity to celebrate young peoples' views and initiatives on a global scale. Today, young people hold a crucial role working towards the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and related frameworks. Recent global priorities have centered around fighting the impacts of climate change, unemployment, poverty, gender inequality, conflict, and migration. The international community has borne witness to young people's unprecedented mobilization around the world, which has shown the massive power they possess to hold decision-makers accountable. The Decade of Action announced by the Secretary-General in September of 2019 requires people action, inclusive of youth to generate an unstoppable movement pushing for such required transformations.

During the 2021 ECOSOC Youth Forum (EYF) the issues and priorities highlighted by youth participants included their views on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic particularly related to its effect on human health, the environment, and food systems. As part of the official outcome recommendations of EYF, young participants stressed the importance of working towards more equitable food systems. In addition, they highlighted the need for youth to make informed decisions on food choices through increasing global education on the healthiest and most sustainable options for both individuals and the environment. There were also recommendations on providing adequate capacity development with respect to the resilience of food systems, in particular during the ongoing pandemic and in its aftermath. Moreover, participants highlighted the need for inclusive support mechanisms that ensure youth continue to amplify efforts collectively and individually to restore the planet and protect life, while integrating biodiversity in the transformation of food systems. With the world's population expected to increase by 2 billion people in the next 30 years, it has become recognized by numerous stakeholders that simply producing a larger volume of healthier food more sustainably will not ensure human and planetary wellbeing. Other crucial challenges must also be addressed, such as the interlinkages



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embodied by the 2030 Agenda including poverty reduction; social inclusion; health care; biodiversity conservation; and climate change mitigation.

Through youth education, engagement, innovation and entrepreneurial solutions, this year's International Youth Day aims to provide a platform for young people to continue the momentum from the ECOSOC Youth Forum in the lead up to the high-level Food Systems Summit. As part of the Decade of Action for delivery of the 2030 Agenda and under the leadership of the Secretary-General and Prime Minister of Italy a Pre-Summit will take place in July and lay the groundwork for the high-level Food Systems Summit to take place in September alongside the UN General Assembly which aims to highlight the urgency of transforming food systems, particularly in the wake of a global pandemic. In this context, this year's International Youth Day will center around the theme ***Transforming Food Systems: Youth Innovation for Human and Planetary Health***.

THEMATIC BACKGROUND:

Youth engagement is key to the transformation of food systems, and as such, has been incorporated into all Summit work streams and structures. The success of a such a global effort will not be achieved without the meaningful participation of young people. Consumption patterns that impact one's personal health and that of the planet are instilled early in life. Today, global agriculture is facing major challenges, including feeding a growing world population, the need to address rural poverty, and the management of ecosystem goods and services in light of global environmental changes, evident through climate change.

Food systems include not only the basic elements of how we get food from farms to the table, but also all of the processes and infrastructure involved in feeding a population, and the negative externalities that can be generated during the process, such as air and ocean pollution as well as desertification. Population health is also key in addressing food systems challenges, especially as nutrition-related chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and some forms of cancer are major contributors to the global burden of disease.

There is also the risk of zoonotic diseases that can result from unsustainable farming practices and the climate crisis. This has been even more evident during the pandemic that has highlighted those with such chronic diseases are at a higher risk for negative outcomes from COVID-19. Furthermore, the number of people affected by hunger and malnutrition has increased despite the objective of achieving zero hunger which also must be addressed within this context. In addition, hunger drives forced displacement and conversely forced displacement can have a devastating impact on agricultural production.

Youth have stressed that concrete actions, are needed, particularly with regard to the work done around fisheries and aquaculture, as well as the key role of youth employment and entrepreneurship in small-scale farms and in rural areas. Today, COVID-19 is adding to the strains on our food systems, disrupting markets and supply chains for small-scale farmers around the world,



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threatening peace and stability particularly among the most vulnerable and marginalized populations. Youth continue to state that we are facing a health crisis and climate crisis that demands urgent changes to our food systems; business-as-usual is not an option anymore. Therefore, a more holistic and inclusive framework is needed to address these complex issues through integrated approaches.

For new results to be achieved, youth should be put at the center and prioritized in such discussions. They should not be seen as recipients or targets only, but as fundamental contributors and partners towards the identification of new and innovative solutions and its consequent implementation for the promotion of better agriculture, sustainable value chains for our planet, and healthy lifestyles. Dr. Agnes Kalibata, Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for the Food Systems Summit stated that “We cannot implement the science without also addressing questions of access, equality and finance, and we cannot build a better future for tomorrow without including the youth of today”.

CONCEPT AND PARTNERS:

For International Youth Day 2021 the Food and Agriculture Organization and the Major Group for Youth and Children have agreed to work in collaboration with DESA. A webinar will be organized and a survey will be conducted, in collaboration with our partners to report on the outcomes of the event. To ensure no one is left behind in the discussions, civil society youth organizations will participate while ensuring regional representation, as well as the inclusion of Indigenous youth. The aim will be to highlight innovative entrepreneurial ideas by youth around the theme, and to educate participants on work being done surrounding the transformation of food systems.