

## 2.6 Civil society and youth

### ***Mobilizing civil society and lifting up youth-led initiatives***

[Note: To create a cross-cutting solution, this approach could also be joined to or draw from the WS3 game changing solution, *Activate the Activists: Ending Food Waste Through a Global Activist Network* that aims to empower a global network of activists to drive culturally relevant behaviour change among citizens that lead or engage closely with local people's movements.]

#### **What problem is this initiative addressing?**

The 'sleeping giant' in the power game is civil society (including consumers/citizens) which potentially has a lot of collective power but is usually poorly coordinated and funded and therefore weak. The problem is not that experts do not know what to do – there are numerous excellent reports on this with concrete recommendations for action. The problem is policy inertia – the big players (governments and food industry) will not enact the game-changing policies in those reports unless there is social demand for them. The so-called "Bloomberg Approach" has been trialed in about a dozen countries where civil society and scientific organizations are funded to communicate and create the demand for food policy action and to then measure the impact of the policies on food environments, behaviors, and public health measures. Their targeted food policies aim to reduce obesity and non-communicable diseases, but at the same approach can include sustainability policies.

Collective thinking and action across different sectors of the food system is necessary to deliver a more sustainable future. Equally important in delivering this future is inclusion across ages, given that youth under 30 now account for more than half of the world's population, and have extraordinary potential to mobilize and influence global movements. Young people across the world already play crucial roles in the food system and they have visionary and practical ideas for improving it, as well as networks to support needed change. As a matter of equity, they will inherit this planet and so must have a voice in bringing about the urgent shifts required. As a matter of practice, they are devising and finding ways to deploy a range of game-changing solutions that could be scaled-up and accelerated.

#### **The initiative:**

The [**Bloomberg Approach**] is purposeful funding of civil society organizations to bring about policy change and measure its impact. Among the strategies civil society has used are: 1) effective coordination across sectors; 2) communications to create demand for policies; 3) social lobbying to inform and influence legislation, regulation, and policies; and 4) scientific evidence of the need for shifts and impacts of the policy implementation. This comprehensive approach has been successful in several countries that have adopted measures to reduce consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages, "junk" foods, and unhealthy snacks marketed to children (e.g. Mexico, Brazil, Peru, Chile, South Africa). Countries with little government interest in food policies or where civil society organizations are weak or vulnerable may not be 'ready to go' with this solution in the early stages but, as with other global movements, they can be part of later waves of change,

building on the vanguard actions. Investing in civil society in this way is suitable for high-income countries, through national rather than global philanthropy, as well as for low- and middle-income countries where civil society organisations are active and legitimate. A more cautious approach may be needed in countries with weak or at-risk civil society organisations.<sup>1</sup>

The linked initiative is to enhance the reach and impact **of youth-created and youth-led civil society interventions** underway to redirect food environments in a more healthy and sustainable direction. In this initiative, youth is not defined by an age range, to allow for broader inclusion of young people across geographies, particularly given the inconsistencies in defining youth. Specific steps at and in the lead up to the UNFSS could be taken to build the profile of these efforts, leverage financial resources, and secure government and private sector commitments for them. These include the youth-founded [Food@COP campaign](#) for healthy and sustainable food catering at COP26 and other UN climate conferences and [Youth Climate Save](#), the first youth climate organization to focus on the link between climate change and animal agriculture and to promote sustainable, healthy diets. [Real Food Systems](#) is an organization of youth ambassadors who stand for plant-based whole foods as the foundation of human and planetary health. The Summit could also be used to coordinate efforts amongst these organizations and solidify joint action in addressing food systems issues. Linking many youth-focused efforts ahead of the Summit is the Youth Pledge, which is spearheaded by UNFSS Action Track youth representatives with the support of public, multi-lateral, and civil society stakeholders. The Pledge aims to galvanise action (advocacy and policy) to defeat hunger, improve health and heal the planet in local and global contexts. The Pledge is bringing young people from around the world together to focus on personal actions as a contribution to system change, and urge governments and businesses to act boldly and rapidly. The Pledge, and the efforts noted above, provide a menu of strategies that could be popularized by a global network of gender-balanced, globally representative Youth Food Ambassadors<sup>2</sup> appointed and supported in collaboration with youth-led projects and organizations. Elevating the voices of existing activists through this ambassadorship could help further enhance their existing reach and impact.

In looking to build the next generation of civil society leaders, these initiatives could be further linked by pairing mentors from civil society organizations with young people from youth-led organizations to share lessons and learnings in advocacy, social lobbying and impact generation.

### **Is this a new solution or an existing solution that needs scaling?**

Existing and new solutions, all in need of scaling.

### **Which organization/s, institution/s or group of individuals are associated with the solution?**

Bloomberg Philanthropies, Food@COP, Real Food Systems, Youth Climate Save, Youth Pledge (led by youth members of the UNFSS action tracks and affiliated organizations) the Food Foundation (UK).

### **If selected as a game-changing solution, how will you leverage the UNFSS to scale your solution?**

Use the UN Food Systems Summit to bring together other philanthropies willing to contribute to supporting and empowering civil society to work with governments and the private sector, and to hold them accountable. Action Track 2 Chair could work with Michael Bloomberg to convene a side meeting with other philanthropic organizations on this at the UNFSS.

### **[Bloomberg Approach]**

The UNFSS provides a crucial opportunity to recognize, center, and engage youth-led initiatives and youth leaders in the work of food systems transformation, and to further the reach and impact of projects already underway, including the Youth Pledge. It also offers a venue to center youth visions, aspirations, and demands as a force for transformative change, and promote the participation of youth in awareness-raising, norm changing, and implementation agendas. Youth food ambassadors could be announced at the UNFSS and their work aligned with that of game-changing solutions for food environments and across AT2, as well as all the ATs. **[Youth-led initiatives]**

### **Is this idea applicable to a particular geography, demography, landscape or other type of setting (e.g. high- or low-income countries, aquaculture)? If so, please specify.**

Suitable for high-income countries (through national rather than global philanthropy).

Suitable for low-and middle-income countries where civil society organisations are active and legitimate. A more cautious approach is needed in countries with weak or at-risk civil society organisations. **[Bloomberg Approach]** Suitable for all countries (UNFSS youth leaders represent all regions), although some initiatives may be more immediately relevant to e.g., high and middle-income countries or urban populations. But the approaches do reflect perspectives from the global South and many already cross demographics and geographies. **[Youth-created and led initiatives]**.

### **Who are the main actors that would put this action into place?**

Civil society organizations, youth-led organizations and projects, individual youth leaders, consumers (individuals), as well as governments and the private sector

### **Source and process**

- <sup>1</sup>Boyd Swinburn, University of Auckland, WS1 member
- Initiatives suggested by Lana Weidgenant, AT2 Youth Vice-chair
- <sup>2</sup>Food Foundation through the public survey
- Related solution: The China Action Hub, an innovation/action space for mobilizing changes
- Related solution: Activate the Activists vs. Food Waste (WS3)