

6.1 Empowering and mobilizing consumers within food systems to deliver sustainability

What problem is your proposition addressing?

Only 53% of countries are fulfilling the UN Guidelines on Consumer Protection 'priority areas of essential concern for the health of the consumer' (Consumers International Global Member Survey 2020). Only 30% of countries have a sustainable consumption plan. Few countries engage consumers and consumer rights into the food system in a coherent manner. Policies, practices and institutions which empower consumers and consumer rights are siloed, under-resourced, and inadequately enforced, and consumer engagement as a force for innovation is under-utilised. As a result, consumers are distrustful of change, disengaged from behavioural changes needed for net zero, and under-served by the marketplace.

How does your proposition address the problem?

Consumers who are more empowered and engaged in the future of food systems will have a greater stake in building this future. Our solution is to strengthen the voice of consumers in the development of healthy and sustainable food systems, and to reinforce the levers of consumer protection and empowerment as a means for food systems transformation. This includes:

1. Strengthening the role of consumers and consumer rights in policy-making and standard-setting.
2. Creating institutions and mechanisms which effectively identify and address consumer harms.
3. Incubating and scaling-up sources of innovation from consumer empowerment and engagement (e.g. data stewardship, product design, and supply chain solutions).

We need to ensure that consumer voices are heard in national, regional and international decision-making on food systems. Policies and standards that are informed by a strong and independent consumer voice are more likely to enhance consumers' motivation and capacity to change behaviours. Businesses need to see consumer rights and empowerment as a tool for product design, enabling more agile and innovative decision-making. Finally, siloed problem-solving needs to be replaced by a more holistic approach, for example by bringing consumers and farmers together in dialogue.

UNFSS brings together representatives from government, the private sector, and consumer advocacy, offering a unique opportunity to integrate consumer rights advocacy into policy and business design.

The summit will enable: (a) the collective consumer voice to reach new audiences and increase its influence over food value chains; (b) consumer organisations to connect with government representatives and decision-makers to help inform policy formation; (c) discussions between companies and consumer organisations on how to involve consumers in the design process; (d) the sharing of mutually beneficial solutions between consumers, farmers, and other food systems actors whose voices are not often included in policy conversations.

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

Existing solution that needs scaling

Which organisation/s, institution/s or groups of individuals are associated with the solution?

[Consumers International](#), along with our membership of 200 consumer advocacy organisations across more than 100 countries. Consumers International is also co-lead of the UNEP One Planet Network's [Consumer Information Programme](#) (CI-SCP), which would be mobilised in support of the solution. We would also create a coalition of leaders from across business and government to explore this issue and build together.

What is the scientific evidence that supports your proposition?

This solution draws on substantial evidence and research on the capacity of consumers to support and strengthen the processes of policy-making, standard-setting, and innovation, as well as on the practical experiences of consumer organisations from across the world.

This includes evidence on the [capacity of consumers to drive food systems transformation](#), through engagement with both [national governments](#) and [private sector actors](#); on international standards and best practices regarding [consumer rights](#) and [consumer policy](#); on the challenges of [enforcing consumer protection](#) in countries across the world; and on practical evidence of how engaging consumers can strengthen food systems in areas ranging from [supply chain solutions](#) to [data stewardship](#).

Is this idea applicable to a particular geography, demography, landscape or other type of setting?

Consumer rights and consumer advocacy are applicable and necessary in all contexts.

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

National governments, private companies, consumer advocates, individual consumers

Source and process

- Helena Leurent – Director General of Consumers International, AT2 leadership team member
- Consumers International's UNFSS Task Force, comprising representatives from: Consumer VOICE (India), Rwanda Consumer's Rights Protection Organization, Forbrukerrådet (Norway), Citizen Consumer and Civic Action Group (India), Consumentenbond (Netherlands), El Poder del Consumidor (Mexico), Instituto Brasileiro de Defesa do Consumidor (Brazil), Which? (UK), Consumers Lebanon, Federacja Konsumentów (Poland), and more

