INTRODUCTION

Creating a healthier and more equitable food future for all requires cross-sectoral collaboration, rooted in inter-generational, intercultural, and intersectional change. Essential to this endeavor is the integration of holistic food and nutrition education (FNE) into diverse learning frameworks. Reflecting on the 2023 SNEB conference, particularly its plenary session themed “Youth Change-Makers and Nutrition Education: Connecting, Nourishing, and Inspiring a Better Food Future,” this editorial highlights the exploration of initiatives aimed at empowering youth and fostering meaningful collaboration in FNE.1,2

YOUTH-LED INITIATIVES

The session began with an inspiring presentation and panel discussion where global UN and youth leaders highlighted initiatives aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), notably SDG2-Zero Hunger.3 Let’s briefly explore the remarkable youth-led initiatives discussed:

- **World Food Forum (WFF):** A youth-led global network facilitated by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), aiming to empower youth in shaping agrifood systems, advancing the SDGs, and fostering a better food future. The forum provides interactive events, networks, and content platforms focusing on Youth Action, Innovation, Education, and Culture.4
- **Act4Food:** A global youth-led movement advocating for a sustainable food system, promoting safe, nutritious diets, and addressing issues like climate change and human rights through its #Act4Food and #Act4Change campaign. It centers on a simple pledge and list of actions, reflecting youth collective desires for businesses and governments to tackle food system challenges.5
- **NEST4US’ NEST Nurtures Program:** Addressing global hunger and food waste through community-based initiatives, it has distributed over 300,000 meals, conducted 20,000 food rescues, and saved 2.5 million pounds of surplus food, highlighting the transformative impact of youth engagement.6
- **Project 17:** Led by AY Young, it produces one song for each of the 17 SDGs, engaging over 17 sponsors, nonprofits, and recording artists to foster cross-sector collaboration. All profits support SDGs projects, emphasizing a commitment to positive change.7
- **Global Indigenous Youth Caucus:** Uniting Indigenous youth globally, it focuses on addressing urgent global issues, especially Zero Hunger, with a strong emphasis on indigenous perspectives. Since the first session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), young indigenous participants have voiced concerns in international forums, advocating for their rights and priorities.8
- **UNA-US Youth Observer to the UN:** This program engages young Americans in UN activities to elevate their perspectives on global issues, including food security and nutrition, empowering
them as active participants for greater global impact.9

FOSTERING COLLABORATION

Empowering collective leaders involves creating moments of aliveness—a feeling of being totally present and engaged.10 Following inspiration from youth-led initiatives, the session concluded with an interactive activity using the Collective Leadership Compass, a tool developed by the Collective Leadership Institute.10 This exercise facilitated the exploration of collaborative strategies for empowering youth to broadly foster aliveness among different stakeholder groups through FNE, across six dimensions:

- **Future possibilities:** Conference participants envisioned a future where youth have joyful experiences with food, gardening, and cooking, creating lasting memories and fostering a lifelong connection to healthy eating habits.
- **Engagement:** Strategies such as teaching kitchens, agri-food advocacy and impactful volunteer/internship/research/extension opportunities were discussed to involve diverse stakeholders, particularly youth, in shaping FNE programs.
- **Innovation:** Advocating for a holistic approach, participants proposed incorporating systems sciences, community voices, social justice, and equity considerations into FNE curricula.
- **Humanity:** Prioritizing empathy and inclusivity, participants considered human-centered approaches in FNE that resonate with the cultural diversity of youth.
- **Collective intelligence:** Collaboration, iterative learning, and diversity were emphasized, to drive meaningful change in FNE.
- **Wholeness:** The session underscored the reciprocal relationship between FNE and youth leadership, emphasizing how FNE re-connect, re-nourish and re-inspire youth leaders while also advancing broader goals of nutrition, food systems, and sustainable development.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, recognizing youth as key stakeholders and leaders in FNE underscores the importance of their involvement not only as recipients but also as drivers of transformative change. Amplifying youth voices and fostering collaboration will facilitate the expansion and effective implementation of FNE across wider societal contexts, ultimately advancing efforts for a healthier and more equitable food future for all.

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REFERENCES


