Food, Climate & Cities

A deep dive into citizen-informed directions for food systems transition

Global Citizens' Assembly

> Food systems are often approached through efficiency and supply chains. The [Global Citizens' Assembly's] framing, connecting food to climate, health, equity, and livelihoods, should be prioritised because it reflects a more accurate understanding: food systems are deeply interconnected systems that shape and are shaped by human and ecological relationships.

Wakanyi Hoffman, The New Institute and Global Citizens' Assembly Strategic Advisory Board

About this Deep Dive

This Deep Dive is part of a series from the Global Citizens' Assembly exploring different dimensions of food systems transformation in the context of the climate crisis.

Food systems are the focus for 2026 because they cut across climate, health, equity and livelihoods. They are where planetary pressures and everyday realities meet, from extreme weather and rising costs to trade disruption, energy shocks and growing concerns about food security. This makes them a powerful entry point into climate governance.

Its central insights are drawn from 22 Calls to Action developed through the 2026 Global Assembly on Food and Climate, where 105 people from 60 countries and territories deliberated on food systems and climate change over seven weeks. These insights are situated within a wider ecosystem of participation through analysis of more than 7,000 participatory processes worldwide, contributions from local assemblies and exchanges with practitioners, researchers and experts working across food systems, climate, governance and systems change, including Ertharin Cousin, former Executive Director of the UN World Food Programme; Sandrine Dixson-Declève, Former Co-President of the Club of Rome, Executive Chair of Earth4All; Kirsten Dunlop, CEO of Climate KIC; Wakanyi Hoffman, writer and African Indigenous Knowledge scholar & researcher; Dr. Bonny Ibhawoh, professor of History and Global Human Rights at McMaster University; Sir Geoff Mulgan CBE, professor of Collective Intelligence, Public Policy and Social Innovation at University College London; and Otto Scharmer, Senior Lecturer at MIT and founder of the Presencing Institute.

Together, these sources help identify emerging public priorities, tensions and directions on how food systems need to be transformed and governed to ensure they are more resilient, equitable and sustainable.

This Deep Dive should not be read as a technical policy blueprint or statistical survey. Its value lies in what emerges when people from very different realities are given the time, information and space to work through complex questions together, exploring what food-system transformation could look like in practice and what it may require from governments, institutions, communities and citizens.

For the full framing, methodology and sources, see Appendix A, Appendix B and Global Citizens Assembly website

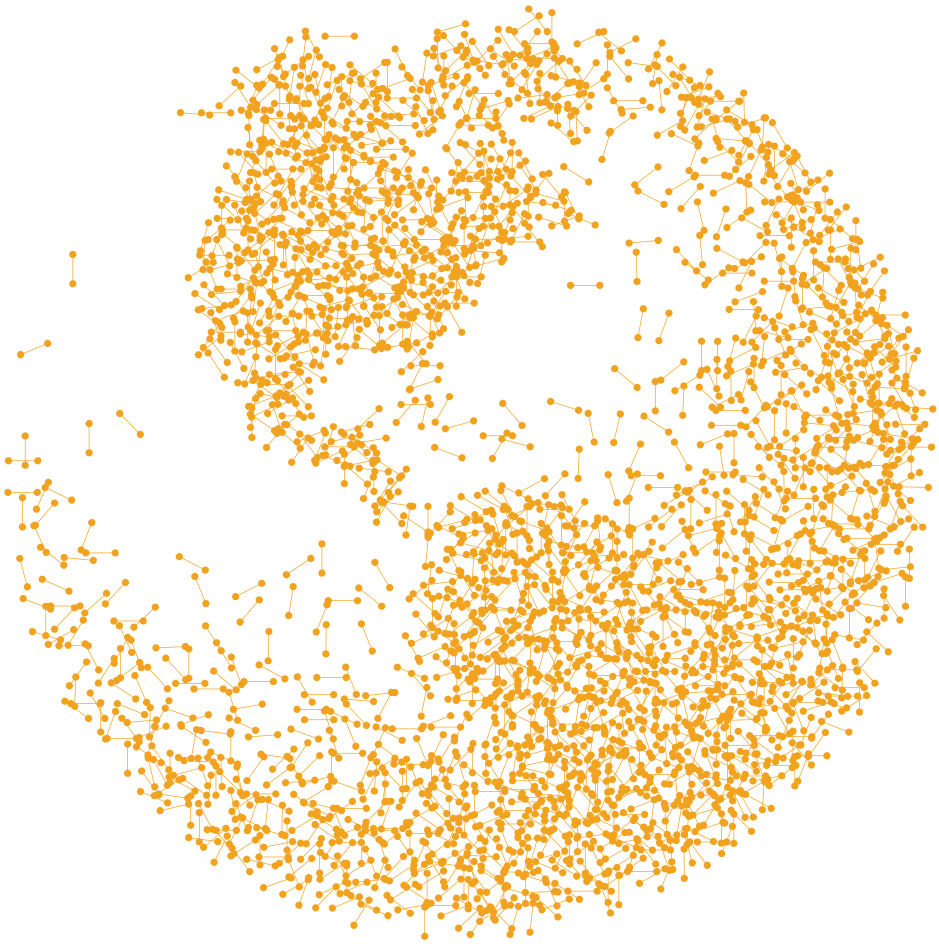
Why this matters now

More than half of the world's population now lives in cities, and the decisions made in urban areas will play a significant role in shaping the future of food systems, climate resilience and quality of life.

Yet many cities have become increasingly disconnected from the systems that sustain them. Food, water, nature and the communities that produce and steward these resources often remain largely invisible in daily urban life, despite being essential to long-term prosperity and resilience.

At the same time, cities are becoming important arenas for climate and food-system transition. Decisions about planning, housing, transport, public space and food access increasingly shape how communities experience climate change and respond to its impacts.

Across the 2026 Global Assembly on Food and Climate and the wider landscape of participation, a consistent insight emerged: healthier, fairer and more connected cities are often more resilient cities. The priorities explored in this Deep Dive reflect growing interest in reconnecting cities with the systems that sustain them, while creating urban futures that are more resilient, equitable and rooted in place.



Public priorities emerging

1. Reconnecting cities with food, nature and the landscapes that sustain them

> **The responsibility to do all this... does not belong only to the rural areas, because the food is not only to be produced there. Cities can also contribute producing their own food through urban gardens and community spaces... Real sustainability requires collaboration between farmers, between citizens, governments, and also the private companies.**
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> Participant, 2026 Global Assembly on Food and Climate (Colombia)

Across the assemblies, a consistent theme emerged: cities have become increasingly disconnected from the ecological systems that sustain them.

Food often appears in cities only at the point of purchase, obscuring the people, ecosystems and resources involved in producing it.

Food-growing repeatedly emerged as something that should become a normal part of city life rather than an exception. Community gardens, local markets, rooftop agriculture and neighbourhood growing spaces were all identified as ways of strengthening resilience while reconnecting people with food and nature.

This pattern is also visible across the wider participation landscape. Urban participation is frequently centred on green spaces, urban agriculture, urban planning and sustainability, suggesting that cities are increasingly being viewed as places that should be reconnected with nature rather than separated from it.

Another recurring theme was the relationship between cities and the surrounding landscapes that support them. People expressed concern about the loss of farmland, forests and natural ecosystems to poorly managed urban expansion. They questioned whether current models of development adequately account for the long-term importance of food production, biodiversity and ecosystem services.

Protecting natural landscapes was not viewed as competing with human development. Rather, healthy ecosystems were seen as foundational to long-term prosperity, resilience and quality of life.

For city leaders, planners, funders and policymakers, this suggests that urban resilience cannot be treated solely as an infrastructure challenge. The assemblies point towards a broader understanding of cities as part of wider ecological systems. Protecting and strengthening the relationships between urban areas, food-producing regions and natural landscapes may be as important to long-term resilience as investments in transport, housing or public services.

2. Cities as catalysts of climate transition

> **The key problem is not cities growing themselves, but the lack of strategic planning, because when you have building without control, it destroys productive farmlands and ecological systems.**
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> Participant, 2026 Global Assembly on Food and Climate (Russia)

Across the assemblies, cities emerged as one of the most practical and meaningful arenas for climate action.

While international agreements remain important, many of the decisions that shape emissions, resilience and quality of life happen locally through urban planning, infrastructure investment and the design of public space. Climate transition was often discussed not as an abstract global challenge but as something experienced through housing, transport, food access, public services and neighbourhood design.

This pattern is also visible across the wider participation landscape. Around the world, cities are increasingly using participatory processes to shape climate strategies, urban planning decisions and long-term development pathways. Examples include the Barcelona Citizens' Climate Assembly, the Tallinn Climate Assembly and Future Montevideo, all of which sought to connect public priorities with the future direction of the city.[1]

Cities were viewed not simply as places where climate impacts are experienced, but as places where solutions can be developed, tested and scaled. Urban transformation was rarely framed as a purely technical challenge. Instead, it was seen as a broader societal project requiring difficult choices about infrastructure, investment, development and quality of life, while balancing environmental sustainability, economic wellbeing and social inclusion. In Grenoble, the Metropolitan Citizens' Climate Convention's recommendations spanned categories such as education, carbon capture, agriculture, and mobility; the Musqueam First Nation Comprehensive Community Plan in British Columbia saw environmental protection as one facet of community and cultural protection and tribal sovereignty.

For city leaders, planners and public authorities, this suggests that cities are uniquely positioned to translate climate ambition into practical action. Many of the choices that shape emissions, resilience and quality of life are made at the urban level, where climate goals must be balanced with everyday concerns such as housing, transport, development and public services.

1 See Appendix B

3. Designing healthier, fairer and more resilient cities

> **I live in a little developing city where many families are dependent on agriculture. So, in our city, changes in weather and even water directly affect livelihoods that we have. Global policies and local actions together are very important and crucial to support.**
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> Participant, 2026 Global Assembly on Food and Climate (Russia)

A recurring insight across the assemblies was that healthier, fairer cities are often more resilient cities.

Discussions about food systems frequently became discussions about health, affordability, public services and quality of life. Access to healthy food, clean environments and thriving communities was recognised as being unevenly distributed across cities, with these inequalities often shaping how people experience climate and food-system challenges.

Questions of justice emerged throughout these discussions. Inequalities in access to fresh food, healthy environments, public services and opportunities to shape local decisions surfaced repeatedly across the assemblies. Access to good food was not seen as a lifestyle choice but increasingly as a matter of fairness, resilience and public wellbeing.

Alongside questions of access and fairness, the role of nature in creating healthier and more resilient cities emerged as another recurring theme. Green spaces, urban rewilding and other nature-based approaches were valued not only for their environmental benefits but also for their contribution to healthier, more liveable communities. As climate pressures intensify, bringing more nature into cities was increasingly viewed as an important way to strengthen resilience while improving quality of life.

Food growing in cities emerged as a particularly tangible example of this connection between environmental resilience and community wellbeing. Market gardens, vertical farms and community growing spaces were seen as ways to improve access to fresh food while reducing dependence on fragile supply chains. Their wider social value was also frequently highlighted, including their potential to strengthen community ties and reconnect people with food, nature and one another.

These discussions ultimately led to broader questions about how urban decisions are made and who gets to shape them. Across the assemblies, people worked through trade-offs around land use, food systems, environmental protection, development and public investment. What emerged was a recognition that more resilient cities will depend not only on technical solutions and physical infrastructure, but also on governance systems that strengthen trust, build social cohesion and meaningfully involve residents in shaping the future of their communities.

For urban planners, local governments and public authorities, this suggests that resilience should be understood as more than a question of infrastructure and climate adaptation. Across the discussions, healthier, fairer and more connected communities consistently emerged as important foundations of long-term resilience.

ASSEMBLIES IN ACTION:
Urban Indigenous Community Assembly in Aldeia Maracanã, Rio de Janeiro

Aldeia Maracanã is the only urban Indigenous village in Rio de Janeiro. Located beside Rio's iconic Maracanã stadium, the community exists within a highly urbanised environment while maintaining strong cultural and social ties to Indigenous traditions. Despite living in one of Brazil's largest cities, residents face challenges including water insecurity, inadequate housing, limited planting space and a lack of formal recognition by the State.

In 2026, members of the Indigenous peoples who make up the Aldeia Maracanã community came together to explore the relationship between climate change, food systems and urban Indigenous life. A central question emerged: is climate change also an urban Indigenous issue?

For many participants, climate change was something associated with forests, rivers and distant territories. Through discussion, they began to recognise how it was already present in their own lives: extreme heat, the rain that floods the homes of indigenous people living in favelas on the hillsides. The flowers blooming out of season. The chickens and ducks they raise because sometimes there is nothing else to eat.

> **"Because we live outside the forest, we think it's not our problem. We think it's only a problem for those who live in the forest. But it is our problem too.**

For one of the participants, the discussion was transformative. She later reflected that she had never connected the heat, the water shortages and the challenges facing the community to the wider climate crisis. The assembly helped her see that these experiences were not isolated problems, but part of a larger story in which urban Indigenous communities are also living with the impacts of climate change.

The assembly surfaced practical proposals, including:

- Demanding municipal water connection, sanitation infrastructure and secure housing.
- Advocating for expanding climate discussions to better reflect the experiences of urban Indigenous communities.
- Creating a community growing space for herbs, fruit and vegetables, with an aspirational goal to develop a cassava flour house, contingent on space for cassava cultivation.

The discussions concluded with a shared traditional meal of fish roasted in banana leaves. For participants, the meal symbolised something deeper than hospitality: one participant later reflected that the gathering had helped "[bring] us back a feeling of our roots."

The Assembly highlights a central message of this Deep Dive: cities are not separate from climate change, food systems or nature. Even in one of the most urbanised settings imaginable, participants emphasised the importance of reconnecting people with food, land and community, while ensuring that voices often absent from urban planning and climate debates are included in shaping the future.

Directions for action

The findings from the 2026 Global Assembly on Food and Climate and wider ecosystem mapping suggest several priorities for policymakers, city leaders and practitioners seeking to build more resilient and sustainable urban food systems.

1. **Integrate food systems into urban planning**
   Food systems should be considered alongside transport, housing, energy and water when planning for resilient cities.

2. **Protect and expand space for food-growing and nature**
   Cities should support urban agriculture, biodiversity and green infrastructure through planning frameworks, zoning regulations and public investment.

3. **Strengthen links between cities and surrounding food-producing regions**
   Urban resilience depends on healthy relationships with the landscapes and communities that sustain cities. Policies should protect farmland and support regional food systems.

4. **Embed participation into urban decision-making**
   Cities are one of the places where food, climate and land-use decisions can be influenced most directly. Citizens should have meaningful opportunities to contribute to urban planning, climate strategies, food policy and land-use decisions.

5. **Measure success beyond growth alone**
   Urban development should be assessed not only through economic growth, but also through food security, climate resilience, biodiversity, public health and community wellbeing.

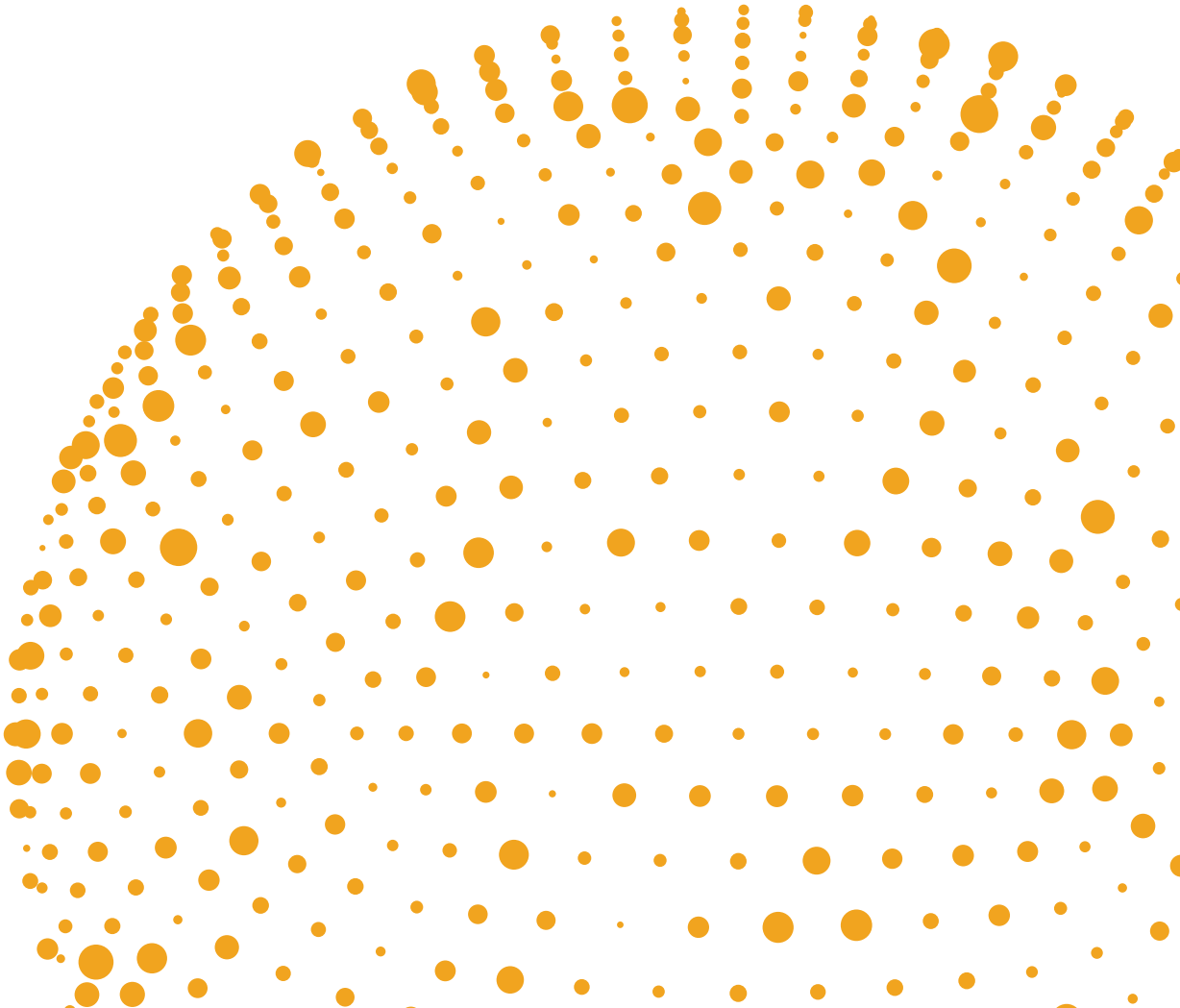
Closing reflection

Across the 2026 Global Assembly on Food and Climate and the wider landscape of participation, a consistent message emerges: cities cannot be separated from the food systems that sustain them.

Urban food security, public health, resilience and environmental sustainability depend on relationships that often remain hidden from daily life — relationships with farmers, ecosystems, watersheds, supply chains and surrounding rural regions.

Many of the solutions discussed throughout this Deep Dive already exist in different forms around the world. The challenge is not simply identifying what needs to change, but creating the conditions for healthier, fairer and more resilient cities to emerge. This requires recognising cities not as isolated urban centres, but as part of wider social, ecological and food systems on which they ultimately depend.

At a time when climate change, food insecurity and social pressures are becoming increasingly interconnected, participation offers a way to navigate complexity collectively. Not simply to improve decisions, but to build the understanding, trust and legitimacy needed to shape urban futures that are resilient, equitable and connected to the systems on which they depend.



Appendix A

Global Assembly 2026 on Food Systems and Climate Change

22 Calls to Action from the Global Assembly – March 2026

Global Citizens' Assembly

Between January and March 2026 over 42 hours of small and large group discussions, 105 people from 60 countries and territories, selected by geographic and demographic lottery, deliberated on the topic of food systems and climate change. The responded to the framing question:

> **What changes, if any, should we make to how we grow, share, eat and use food, so that everyone has enough to nourish themselves, while tackling the causes and impacts of climate change?**

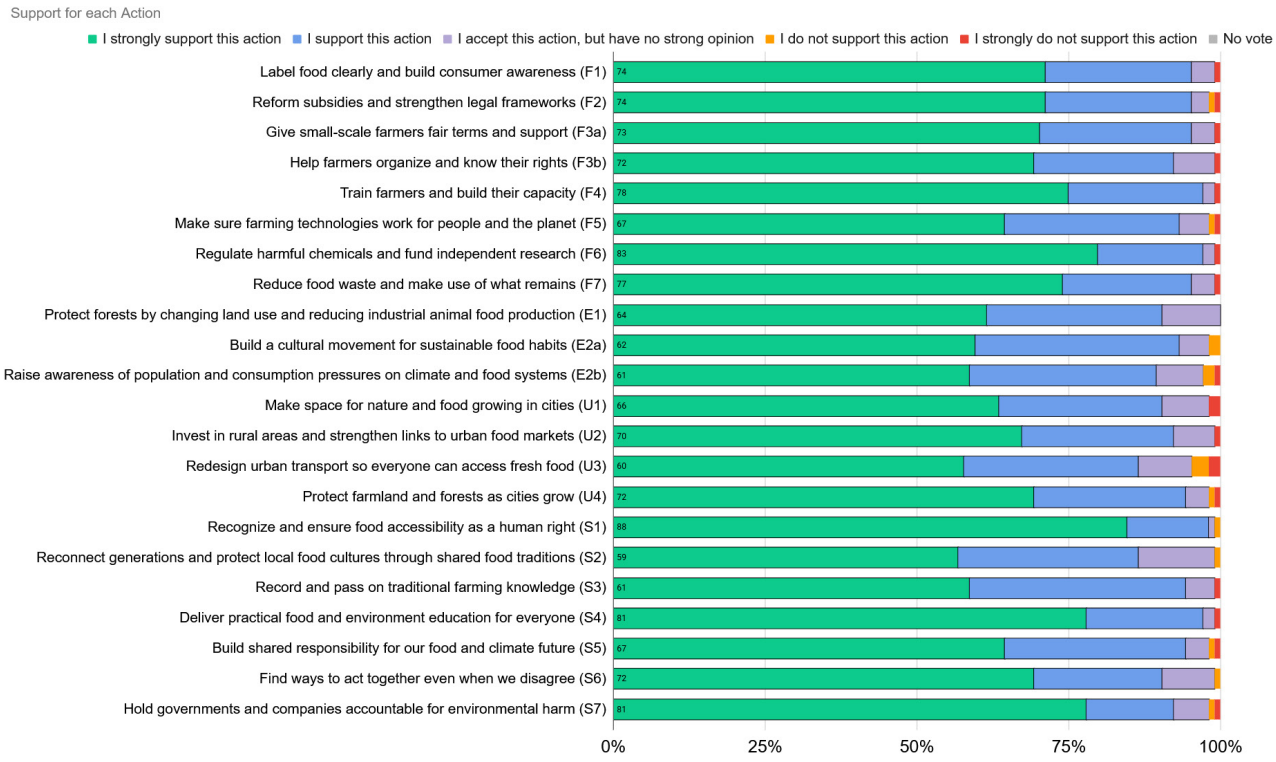
This document provides an early summary of the main outputs from these deliberations.

Calls to Action: summaries

The Assembly Members' collective vision was used to define a series of challenges and opportunities. Calls to Action to address these were developed across asynchronous working groups over several sessions, with synthesis occurring in between. A summary table of each Calls to Action is presented in this section, preceded by a chart showing the level of Assembly Member support for each. The full Calls to Action are detailed in the following section.

Level of support for each Call to Action

All Calls to Action received a high level of support during the Assembly's final vote. Active support (green + blue) is well over 80% for every Action, and acceptance (green + blue + purple) is at least 95% for every Action.



Theme 1: Food Systems and Agriculture

F1: Label food clearly and build consumer awareness

Responding to challenge: How can we make it easier for consumer preferences to drive the adoption of more sustainable farming methods?

Who	What	How	When
Governments (all levels)	Require clear sustainability labels on food products; give preference to agroecological food in public procurement	Laws mandating sustainability labelling; procurement policies favouring agroecological food in schools, hospitals, and canteens	2–5 years
Regional authorities & certification bodies	Develop agroecology certification schemes; set shared standards across regions	Create regional certification systems consistent across regions, giving added value to small-scale producers	2–5 years
Agricultural cooperatives	Raise awareness among farmers and customers; help farmers access markets	Member outreach; support for farmers adopting sustainable practices	Immediate

Why: Consumers cannot support eco-friendly farming without clear labels. Strong certification creates market demand for sustainably produced food; key to the Assembly's target of at least 60% of global food to come from agroecological farming.

F2: Reform subsidies and strengthen legal frameworks

Responding to challenge: How could we reform public funding and subsidies so that sustainable farming is rewarded, and small and local farmers are supported rather than large industrial farms?

Who	What	How	When
National/state governments, environmental agencies	Reform subsidies so at least 75% rewards sustainable practices; remove minimum farm size requirements	Link payments to verified sustainable practices; transparent public registries; cross-departmental coordination; yearly reporting; meaningful penalties for missed targets	Begin within 1 year
National/state governments	Prioritise small and medium-scale farmers; simplify subsidy applications; involve communities directly in funding decisions	Legal recognition for small farmers; streamlined applications; direct community involvement in planning and distribution	Within 1 year
National/state governments	Develop long-term climate-friendly food plans; progressively redirect fossil fuel subsidies to renewables	Public reporting against measurable targets that go beyond short political cycles	2–5 years
UN, FAO, World Bank, regional bodies	Review trade rules to protect countries reforming subsidies; provide climate finance and technical support	International trade coordination; climate finance especially for lower-income and fragile states; public-private energy partnerships	2–5 years
Governments / private sector	Tax large commercial agricultural companies; fund support for small-scale and sustainable farmers	Tax mechanisms; financial incentives and technical support for small-scale farmers adopting sustainable practices	Within 1 year
Local farm organisations, cooperatives, international development partners	Channel support locally where national government capacity is limited	Route funding through local farm organisations and cooperatives in fragile contexts	Within 1 year

Why: Public money mostly flows to large industrial farms. Redirecting subsidies and strengthening laws is essential to building a fair and resilient food system, and in line with this Assembly's preference for funding small scale, agroecological farmers.

F3a: Give small-scale farmers fair terms and support

Responding to challenge: How can we make sure small-scale farmers can access land, seeds, and markets on fair terms and get the practical support they need to farm well and earn a fair living?

Who	What	How	When
Governments	Ensure fair access to land, seeds, and markets; limit land concentration; support fair redistribution	Legal limits on land concentration; publicly accessible seed banks; fair land redistribution where large ownership blocks small farmers	Within 1 year
Governments	Regulate intermediaries; guarantee minimum prices; require businesses to contribute to the sustainable farming transition	Licensing and monitoring of intermediaries; direct-purchase platforms so farmers get a fairer share of value; anti-corruption enforcement	Within 1 year
Governments & financial institutions	Provide financial and mental health support for sustainable transition and climate shocks	Microfinance tools and grants tailored to small-scale farmers; cooperative formation support	Within 1 year
Governments & international organisations	Invest in infrastructure small-scale farmers need to reach markets	Fund transport, storage, and irrigation suited to local needs; prioritise the Global South	2–5 years

Why: Large corporations control supply chains, making fair competition impossible for small farmers. Proper support enables farmers to invest in their land, feed their communities, and put social and environmental needs first.

F3b: Help farmers organise and know their rights

Responding to challenge: How can we make sure small-scale farmers can access land, seeds, and markets on fair terms and get the practical support they need to farm well and earn a fair living?

Who	What	How	When
Governments	Legally recognise farmers' organisations and unions; fund rights education focused on rural and remote areas	Formal legal recognition of local and regional farmer organisations; funded rights education programmes for remote communities	Within 1 year
Governments & farmer organisations	Support spaces for knowledge sharing, collective demands, and advocacy; connect groups nationally and internationally	Create forums for knowledge sharing and solidarity; link groups to national and international networks	Within 1 year
Press & media organisations	Cover the challenges and value of small-scale farming	Media coverage highlighting barriers facing small farmers and the value they provide	2–5 years
Educational institutions & student organisations	Engage young people in farmer rights and advocacy	Student involvement in farmer rights awareness and advocacy	2–5 years

Why: Organized and legally recognized farmers gain real bargaining power, fairer access to support, and a stronger voice in shaping the policies that affect them.

F4: Train farmers and build their capacity

Responding to challenge: How could we ensure that farmers have the knowledge, skills, and support they need to adapt to climate change and a modernising agricultural sector?

Who	What	How	When
Governments & NGOs	Fund and deliver training in sustainable farming and climate adaptation; focus on smallholders, older farmers, and those with less formal education	Farmer schools focused on climate resilience; subsidised eco-friendly inputs; agricultural machinery and improved seed access; reduce post-harvest loss	Within 1 year
Agricultural cooperatives & farmer organisations	Run peer learning workshops, community events, and mentorship programmes between experienced and younger farmers	Regular workshops; food festivals; farmer competitions; mentoring; support for older farmers passing on land and knowledge	Within 1 year
Educational institutions & universities	Two-way knowledge exchange between researchers and farming communities; connect schools to local farms	Students and researchers into communities; farmers' practical knowledge into research and teaching; school procurement from local farms	2–5 years
Governments & NGOs	Help farmers access digital tools, climate forecasting, and rural innovation hubs	Digital advisory platforms; mobile training services; farmer-led research; rural innovation hubs	Within 1 year
Governments	Support income diversification for small farms	Programmes for e.g. agro-tourism, beekeeping, intercropping, and value-added products	2–5 years

Why: Small farmers lack the training to farm sustainably as the climate changes, traditional knowledge is disappearing, and younger generations are not being prepared; all of which threatens long-term food security.

F5: Make sure farming technologies work for people and the planet

Responding to challenge: How could we make sure agricultural technologies are governed well and deployed in ways that are fair to farmers and good for the environment?

Who	What	How	When
National & local governments	Create inclusive oversight bodies for farming technology decisions; balance technological advancement with environmental protection	Oversight bodies with equal parts scientists, farmers, and civil society; meet at least annually; assess which technologies suit local conditions	Immediate
Governments & international food and agriculture organisations	Organise regular international forums to share knowledge on farming technologies across countries	International meetings to identify needs, share findings, and coordinate support; inclusive, deliberative model	Immediate
Governments & independent institutions	Shift research funding from industry to independent bodies; fund independent research on pesticide and fertiliser impacts	Redirect funding away from companies profiting from pesticides or fertilisers; independent findings feed directly into regulation and bans	Immediate

Why: New technologies can harm communities and environments when those affected have no say; and industry-funded research cannot always be trusted. Inclusive decision-making ensures technology serves everyone.

F6: Regulate harmful chemicals and fund independent research

Responding to challenge: How could we protect people and the planet from the pollution and health damage caused by industrial farming and hazardous chemicals?

Who	What	How	When
UN & international bodies	Coordinate consistent chemical safety standards across countries; set shared standards for food transport emissions	International coordination mechanisms for chemical regulation and cleaner transport standards	2–5 years
National governments	Reduce and ban dangerous chemicals and plastics; tax pollution based on harm; ban the most toxic substances	Legislation and enforcement; taxes proportional to environmental and health damage; findings from independent research used to guide bans	2–5 years
Independent research institutions	Research health and environmental impacts of agricultural chemicals, free from industry influence	Independent research funding; findings used to guide regulation and identify the most toxic substances	2–5 years
Governments & NGOs	Help farmers adopt low-cost alternatives to harmful chemicals and crop burning	Guidance and incentives for safer alternatives; reduce agricultural air pollution	2–5 years

Why: Industrial farming chemicals pollute water and cause illness; and research is often industry-funded, creating bias. Clear rules and independent science are needed to drive change toward cleaner food systems.

F7: Reduce food waste and make use of what remains

Responding to challenge: How could we reduce food waste at every stage, from farm to table, and make sure that what cannot be used is managed safely and responsibly?

Who	What	How	When
Governments	Limit food overstocking by retailers; improve date labelling; redirect safe unsold food to food banks	Rules limiting retail store size and product volumes; clearer use-by and best-before labels; food bank redistribution schemes; public awareness campaigns	Within 1 year
Governments & businesses	Invest in storage, refrigeration, and transport to prevent losses; use digital tools to match supply and demand	Infrastructure to reduce waste before food reaches consumers; digital tracking systems; platforms connecting consumers directly with producers	2–5 years
Farmers	Compost agricultural waste on-site; use traditional circular practices	On-site composting; biochar production; crop waste as animal feed; animal dung for biogas	Within 1 year
Supermarkets, distributors & private companies	Collect and convert food waste into energy or useful materials; establish biogas partnerships	Collection systems for composting or processing; biogas partnerships with farmers; government tax relief for circular practices	2–5 years

Why: Food waste squanders the land, water, and energy used to produce it. Preventing waste and treating it as a resource cuts costs, reduces harm, and builds a fairer food system.

Theme 2: Environment, Climate and Nature

E1: Protect forests by changing land use and reducing industrial animal food production

Responding to challenge: How could we eat and produce food in ways that stop destroying forests and give nature a chance to recover?

Who	What	How	When
National/state governments & agricultural departments	Stop forest conversion for livestock; set measurable limits on livestock per person or area; actively reforest land used for livestock	Laws designating livestock zones with quotas; measurable land use targets tracked and reported publicly; enforcement of conversion bans	Within 1 year
Governments of major agricultural exporting countries & major global food companies	Stop importing or selling food linked to deforestation; require deforestation-free supply chains	Legally binding supply chain tracking for beef, palm oil, soy, and cocoa; trade penalties and financial sanctions for non-compliance	Within 1 year
Governments	Fund farmers to switch from forest-clearing practices to agroforestry and intercropping	Training, subsidies, and farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing; tree-replacement rules; encourage farm labour over heavy machinery where it requires cutting trees	2–5 years
Indigenous/tribal communities & local village councils	Participate as stakeholders in land use planning and monitoring	Inclusion in land use decisions; recognition of local conservation knowledge and monitoring role	Within 1 year

Why: Industrial livestock farming is the main driver of deforestation, and this Assembly has voted to restore 5% of forests by 2100. Laws targeting land use and supply chains address the root cause, since diet change or farming shifts alone will not be enough while deforestation remains profitable.

E2a: Build a cultural movement for sustainable food habits

Responding to challenge: How could we feed a growing world population without destroying the land, water, and nature we depend on?

Who	What	How	When
Social media influencers & high-profile public figures	Launch aspirational campaigns making sustainable eating and reducing food waste popular and desirable	High-quality, positive social media content showing the benefits of sustainable food habits	Within 1 year
High-income & high-status communities	Act as visible early adopters to build social proof for sustainable habits	Demonstrate that sustainable living is desirable, not a sacrifice; build a model others want to follow	Within 1 year
Community educators	Deliver on-the-ground education following up digital campaigns, tailored to specific community needs	Community workshops complementing online campaigns; reach communities that organisations cannot physically reach	Within 1 year
Youth organisations & private sector	Support and amplify the cultural movement	Participation in campaigns; funding and support for community education activities	Within 1 year

Why: Making sustainable habits feel desirable rather than sacrificial, and spreading that message from influential groups outward, can shift cultural norms at scale and reduce pressure on food systems and the environment.

E2b: Raise awareness of population and consumption pressures on climate and food systems

Responding to challenge: How could we feed a growing world population without destroying the land, water, and nature we depend on?

Who	What	How	When
National governments & health and education ministries	Run education campaigns on links between population growth, consumption, food systems, land, water, and climate	Country-specific campaigns reflecting local demographic context; joint planning and knowledge-sharing between governments and community groups	2–5 years
Governments & international health organisations	Ensure voluntary family planning services are accessible and affordable for all who want them	Rights-based, voluntary services; no coercive targets; access to information treated as personal empowerment	2–5 years
Ministries of education	Integrate reproductive health and sustainability connections into school curricula	Age-appropriate curricula; digital and web-based tools where in-person provision is limited	2–5 years
Civil society, community leaders & local authorities	Normalise conversations about reproductive health in communities where they remain culturally sensitive	Sensitive community dialogue; joint planning with local authorities; respect for cultural context	Long term

Why: A growing population and high-consumption lifestyles increase pressure on food systems, land, water, and climate. Education and awareness, rather than population control, are the foundation for a sustainable future that respects cultural values and individual choice.

Theme 3: Urban Life and the Built Environment

U1: Make space for nature and food growing in cities

Responding to challenge: How could we make space for nature and food growing within cities?

Who	What	How	When
City, local & national governments	Require green spaces, food-growing areas, and nature infrastructure in all new developments; open unused land and rooftops for food growing; prioritise lower-income areas	Reform planning laws to make green infrastructure a standard requirement; make abandoned and government-owned land available for community gardens; dedicated funding and tax incentives for priority areas	1–5 years
Urban developers & planners	Embed green infrastructure into all new city development; reduce urban heat; manage stormwater; protect existing trees	Use existing structures over new construction; incorporate stormwater features; climate adaptation built into all new development	2–5 years
Businesses & building owners	Create food-growing or nature spaces in existing buildings and on unused land	Tax breaks, grants, and better loan terms; public-private partnerships; large food companies contribute to urban growing projects in return for government incentives	Within 1 year
Schools & NGOs	Integrate food growing into school and community education; run public awareness campaigns	School garden programmes; community food growing; awareness campaigns on growing food in small spaces	Within 1 year

Why: As more people live in cities, many lose connection to food and nature. Changing planning rules and providing incentives can increase fresh food access, cool cities, and strengthen communities.

U2: Invest in rural areas and strengthen links to urban food markets

Responding to challenge: How could we bridge the divide between rural and urban areas so that food moves freely and people don't feel forced to leave?

Who	What	How	When
National & local governments	Invest in rural infrastructure (roads, schools, hospitals, digital systems); reduce rural-urban wage gap; create opportunities for young people; extend social protection to older farmers; compensate farmers for conserving land	Dedicated public funding for rural roads and services; review wage policies; social protection schemes; regular reporting and independent oversight to ensure funding reaches communities	Immediate
Transport companies, agricultural societies, community groups	Provide affordable shared transport collecting produce from farmers; coordinate local collection points to reduce travel distances	Partnership schemes between transport companies and farmers; shared low-cost routes; community coordination of local distribution networks	2–5 years

Why: Making sustainable habits feel desirable rather than sacrificial, and spreading that message from influential groups outward, can shift cultural norms at scale and reduce pressure on food systems and the environment.

U3: Redesign urban transport so everyone can access fresh food

Responding to challenge: How could we redesign urban transport and food access so that all residents, regardless of income, can easily reach fresh, affordable food?

Who	What	How	When
City & local governments, mayors, transport planners	Expand public transport; improve pedestrian routes to food markets; locate grocery stores and community canteens within easy reach, especially for lower-income areas	Operate bus systems; improve walking and cycling infrastructure; coordinate housing, transport, and planning so food markets are reachable without a car	Within 1 year
Local governments	Support food delivery and mobile food markets for residents who cannot easily travel	Public funding for mobile food markets; delivery programmes for elderly, disabled, and low-income residents	Within 1 year

Why: When cities are built around cars and public transport is weak, low-income residents cannot easily reach fresh, affordable food. Better transport and smarter market locations reduce inequality and improve access for everyone.

U4: Protect farmland and forests as cities grow

Responding to challenge: When a city needs to grow, how do we decide what land is worth protecting and what can be built on?

Who	What	How	When
Local & national governments	Designate clearly which land must be protected; enforce regulations against unplanned building; stop conversion of forests to farmland and farmland to urban areas	Enforce existing land-use laws with meaningful financial penalties; proactive 5-year planning process to map and protect land before development begins; strong oversight	Within 1 year
Local governments with village committees	Consult communities when deciding which land to protect; hold regular, meaningful community dialogues	Community dialogues including local and village committees; educate communities, students, and developers about land protection rules	Within 1 year

Why: Uncontrolled building swallows farmland and forests, threatening local food production and destroying the natural benefits that healthy land provides, such as clean water and flood protection

Theme 4: Society, Culture and Wellbeing

S1: Recognise and ensure food accessibility as a human right

Responding to challenge: How could we ensure that everyone, regardless of their background, wealth, or where they live, has reliable access to enough healthy, affordable food?

Who	What	How	When
National & local governments, UN & international organisations	Formally recognise food as a human right in national and international law; translate principle into practice with clear accountability mechanisms	Laws treating food as a right not a commodity; measures to stabilise prices and prevent excessive profit-making; community-led systems to identify families in need; international coordination on food access crises	Immediate
Governments	Stabilise food prices; provide targeted financial support; establish clear channels for community voices to shape policy	Food vouchers and assistance programmes; investment in local food infrastructure (storage, supply chains); channels for community dialogue to influence policy	Immediate
Governments & international organisations	Monitor hunger; improve transparency on food availability, distribution, and prices	Public digital platforms showing food prices, availability, and hunger data, with farmers contributing to price information	2–5 years
Food companies, suppliers & retailers	Reduce food waste; support fair distribution of surplus food	Digital tracking; clearer date labelling; redirect safe surplus to food banks and community kitchens	2–5 years

Why: Millions go hungry not because there is too little food, but because the food system is built around profit. Recognising food as a human right is the foundation for transparent, coordinated systems that ensure food reaches everyone.

S2: Reconnect generations and protect local food cultures through shared food traditions

Responding to challenge: As communities become less connected around food and shared traditions fade, what should we do and how can we bring people and traditions back together?

Who	What	How	When
National & local governments	Fund community food events and festivals; formally recognise local and traditional foods as intangible cultural heritage	Specific government funding for events; dedicated media programming celebrating traditional foods; subsidies for food festivals	Within 1 year
Employers & employment policymakers	Protect time outside work for family and community life	Workplace guidelines safeguarding shared meal time and community participation	Within 1 year
Markets, restaurants, schools & universities	Feature traditional and locally produced foods in menus and curricula; treat food culture as a core subject	Traditional and local foods in school, university, and restaurant menus; food culture emphasised in curricula	Within 1 year
Governments & market actors	Reduce production, transport, and packaging costs for local food producers so they can compete with imported alternatives	Bring government and market actors together to reduce costs; help local products compete on price and shelf appeal	Within 1 year

Why: Food traditions carry real nutritional, social, and cultural value which, once lost, are very hard to recover. Shared meals and food traditions can rebuild community bonds, strengthen resilience, and preserve cultural heritage.

S3: Record and pass on traditional farming knowledge

Responding to challenge: How do we preserve traditional food and farming knowledge before it is lost?

Who	What	How	When
Universities & research institutions	Record traditional farming and food knowledge from elders — crops, seed saving, water practices, medicinal plants, food preservation	Oral histories, films, demonstrations; seed banks; written, filmed, and digital public knowledge libraries; focus on elders who learned outside formal education	Immediate
Schools & governments	Integrate traditional farming knowledge into school curricula and community training alongside modern practice	Elders teaching alongside formal educators; practical and community-based learning; government subsidies and media coverage for food festivals and living traditions	Within 1 year
FAO, international regional bodies	Fund preservation efforts, especially in communities where knowledge is most at risk, including diaspora and immigrant communities	Dedicated international funding; targeted support for diaspora communities to reconnect with their food heritage	Within 1 year

Why: Traditional farming knowledge is disappearing as older generations retire. Once lost, it is very hard to recover. Preserving it strengthens cultural identity and helps communities adapt to climate change

S4: Deliver practical food and environment education for everyone

Responding to challenge: How can we make environmental learning and practical life skills a normal, accessible part of life for everyone, no matter where they live?

Who	What	How	When
Governments & education ministries	Integrate food, climate, and sustainability into national curricula; invest in digital access for rural communities; enforce environmental laws so education leads to real action	Hands-on learning; teacher training; fair teacher pay; adequate school funding; digital infrastructure for rural communities	Immediate
Schools & teachers	Deliver practical food and environmental learning in classrooms and communities; encourage students to share learning at home	School gardens; community workshops; farmer partnerships	Immediate
NGOs, community organisations, UNESCO, UNICEF	Support community-based food and environment education for all ages, including those who have left formal education	Community workshops; non-formal adult education; farmer partnerships	Immediate

Why: Many people grow up without understanding how food choices affect the environment. Practical education builds the knowledge and skills needed for better decisions and greater climate resilience.

S5: Build shared responsibility for our food and climate future

Responding to challenge: Who is responsible for driving change, and how do we build a sense of shared responsibility for the future?

Who	What	How	When
Governments (all levels)	Create transparent governance and economic incentives that reward sustainable choices	Reward sustainable choices through taxes, subsidies, and transparent public reporting	Within 1 year
Community organisations	Run local projects showing how everyday actions connect to food and climate outcomes	Local food and environmental projects with visible community impact	Within 1 year
Governments & educators	Update education to link food, climate, and collective responsibility; encourage active community participation in local decisions	Curriculum updates; foster community participation in shaping local food and environmental decisions	Within 1 year

Why: Shared goals encourage people to change behavior and support wider change. Education, local action, fair incentives, and transparent governance can help societies move from short-term thinking to lasting solutions.

S6: Find ways to act together even when we disagree

Responding to challenge: How can we act together when we disagree?

Who	What	How	When
All individuals & community members	Engage in open dialogue to find shared solutions; raise awareness that diverse viewpoints lead to stronger solutions	Inclusive spaces for respectful dialogue across diverse perspectives; ensure all affected groups have a meaningful voice	Immediate
Community leaders & organisations	Ensure accountability so dialogue leads to real policies and action	Accountability mechanisms linking community dialogue to concrete policies and national follow-through	Immediate
Governments & international organisations	Enable conversations between people from different countries on shared challenges like climate change	Establish and support forums for international dialogue	Immediate

Why: Disagreement over how to change food systems can stall all progress. Inclusive dialogue builds trust and ensures diverse voices are heard, turning shared goals into fair and widely supported action.

S7: Hold governments and companies accountable for environmental harm

Responding to challenge: Why do global promises so rarely become real change?

Who	What	How	When
International bodies (UN)	Establish rules requiring countries to fund restoration after war-related environmental damage	International rules and financial penalties for war-related environmental destruction	Within 1 year
National governments	Conduct regular, publicly transparent independent audits of polluting industries; enforce meaningful consequences for violations	Environmental audits with public transparency; meaningful penalties for violations	Within 1 year
Citizens & civil society	Use democratic tools and buying choices to hold governments and companies to account	Voting, public pressure, anti-corruption action; consumer choices to make companies compete on environmental responsibility	Within 1 year

Why: Wars devastate soil and land for decades. Corruption and weak enforcement mean climate commitments are often ignored. Financial penalties, audits, and democratic pressure are essential to deliver justice for people today and future generations.

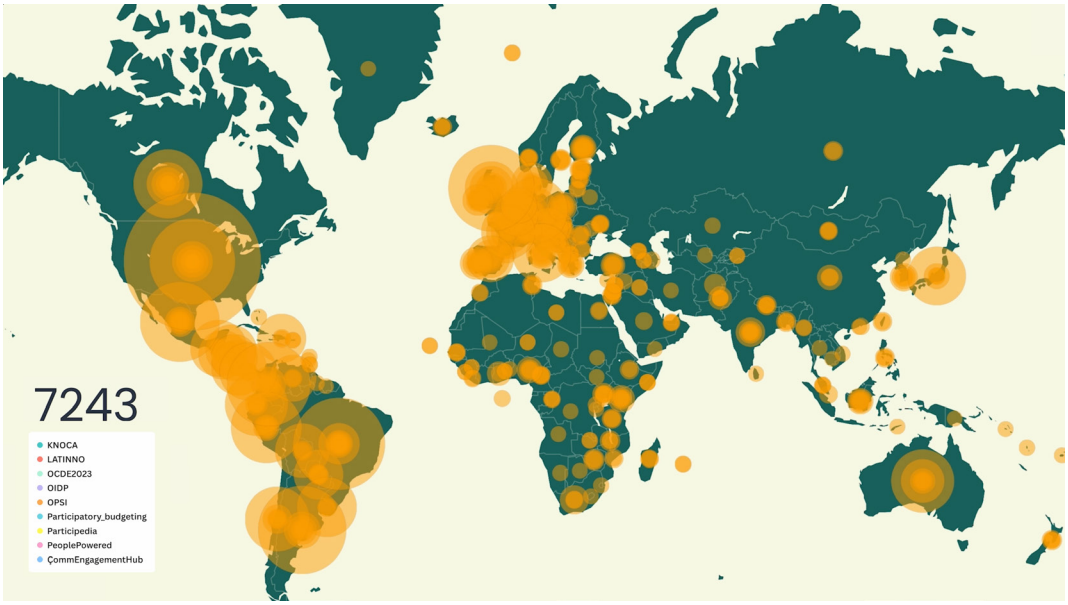
Appendix B

Mapping global cases of participation

Global Citizens' Assembly

Between late 2025 and 2026, we have sought to map formal participatory processes reported over the last decade from a diverse set of repositories and networks. Indicative sources include: KNOCA, LATINNO, the OECD 2023 repository of deliberative processes, OIDP, OPSI, Participatory Budgeting networks, Participedia, People Powered, and the Community Engagement Hub. The mapping spans deliberative mini-publics such as citizen assemblies and juries, participatory budgeting, co-production initiatives, and formal community processes at local, regional, national, and transnational levels.

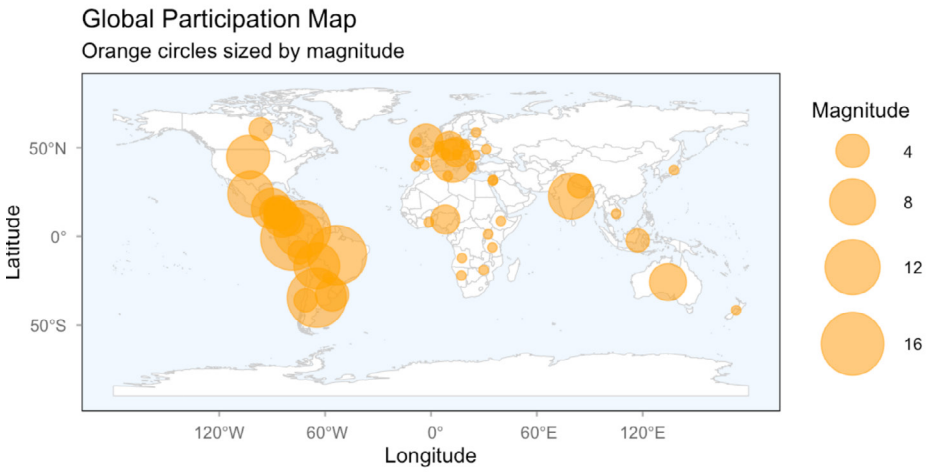
Records were standardised, very broadly de-duplicated across overlapping catalogues, and enriched with minimal metadata (years, topics, locations). Text fields (process titles and descriptions, if any) were analysed using Natural Language Processing (NLP) with the help of Dr Maria Paz Raveau from Faro UDD Chile. Below is the resulting map of 7243 cases for reference. Here is a technical summary of the process.



The dataset is intentionally heterogeneous, combining government-led, civil-society-led, and hybrid initiatives. It encompasses processes focused on young people, small businesses, and vulnerable groups across various continents. However, it is important to acknowledge that this dataset is incomplete and reflects the language, reporting, and visibility biases commonly found in open repositories. In our analysis, it effectively demonstrate how different participatory processes have tackled the themes of the Deep Dives, aiming to stimulate further debate on this critical issue.

Deep Dive 1: Climate, Food, and Farmers

The figure below illustrates the number of participatory processes from our original mapping that connect to this topic. This was derived using a set of indicative keywords, which were iteratively tested and validated against the database to ensure they captured relevant cases.
While the original mapping of over 7,000 cases is unevenly distributed across continents, the results nevertheless offer a useful indication of underlying patterns.



Keywords used: ['food waste', 'farmer', 'land', 'seed', 'food label', 'agroecological', 'pesticide', 'compost', 'biogas','consumer awareness']

The distribution of cases in the source material of the original map shows a strong concentration in South America (36%), followed by North America (28%) and Europe (23%), with other regions representing a much smaller share. This indicates a clear geographical imbalance in the dataset.

Region	Total Cases	%
Africa	249	3%
Asia	465	6%
Europe	1726	23%
North America	2054	28%
Oceania	232	3%
South America	2705	36%

Within Food Systems and Agriculture, South America remains dominant (42%), and its positive variation (+6) suggests that this theme is particularly overrepresented relative to its already large baseline. Asia (+4) and Africa (+3) also show moderate increases, indicating a stronger relative engagement with this theme compared to their overall share.

In contrast, Europe (-7) and North America (-6) display negative variation, suggesting that, although they have a high number of cases overall, food systems and agriculture are comparatively less prominent within the participatory processes available in that region.

Region	Total Cases	% change vs total
Africa	11	+3
Asia	19	+4
Europe	29	-7
North America	41	-6
Oceania	6	0
South America	77	+6

Overall, the pattern suggests that Food Systems and Agriculture is especially salient in the Global South, particularly in South America, while being comparatively less central in regions with a higher overall number of cases.

The countries with over ten cases of participation with at least one of these keywords were the following:

Country	Frequency
Argentina	14
Brazil	14
Colombia	13
Ecuador	16

The wordcloud below shows pairs of words (bigrams) that include at least one of the selected keywords. To keep the analysis focused and meaningful, only combinations following NOUN–NOUN (e.g. land use) and ADJECTIVE–NOUN (e.g. small farmers) structures were included. This is a common text analysis technique, as these grammatical patterns tend to capture stable and interpretable expressions of key ideas. In simpler terms, this approach helps identify how important topics are most often described in practice, by looking at which words tend to appear together.

The most frequent bigrams, such as land use (19 cases), food waste (9), land management (7), and land tenure (6), suggest a strong focus on issues related to land governance, resource management, and sustainability. At the same time, expressions like small farmers, rural farmers, and women farmers point to the visibility of different types of agricultural actors, indicating that the dataset pays attention not only to land itself, but also to the social groups involved in these contexts.

A topic modelling analysis was used to identify clusters of concepts that are mentioned in participatory processes that also mention this theme. In this sense, the topic modelling was used to assess which other topics are discussed in conjunction.

Main findings

Idea 1: Participation is already being used to shape food systems, particularly in regions where the impacts are most immediate

Our analysis of global cases of participation shows that across the world, communities, civil society organisations, public authorities and other actors are already convening participatory processes to address questions of farming, food production, food security, land use and agricultural transition. In other words, participation is not an aspiration or future desire. **It is already part of how societies are negotiating these transformations in practice.**

From our mapping of more than 7,000 registered cases of public participation, at least 183 explicitly focus on farming and food production. This is a significant finding because it demonstrates that farming issues are already being treated as matters of public concern and collective deliberation. These cases suggest that **affected communities are not only responding to food-system pressures as passive recipients of policy or technological change.**

The geographical distribution of these cases is particularly important. Compared with the overall distribution of participation cases in the database, farming and food production are more strongly represented in South America, Asia and Africa, with increases of around five percentage points relative to the baseline. By contrast, participation cases in Europe and North America are comparatively less likely to focus on this topic. This pattern suggests that **participatory engagement around food systems is especially prominent in regions where the social, ecological and economic consequences of food-system change are perhaps more immediately, or at least, unevenly felt.**

This matters for two reasons. First, it challenges the assumption that democratic innovation and participatory governance are primarily driven by the Global North. In the field of food systems, many of the most relevant participatory practices around farming are emerging from regions in the Global South, where communities face acute pressures linked to climate vulnerability, land-use change, food insecurity, rural livelihoods and agricultural dependency. Second, it shows that participation is already functioning as a practical infrastructure for collective problem-solving. People are already creating spaces to deliberate over priorities, contest trade-offs and imagine alternative futures.

The broader implication is that future work on food-system governance should not begin from the question of whether participation is needed, but from the recognition that participation is already happening. The key challenge is to understand where it is taking place, who is involved, what forms it takes, and under what conditions it can influence policy, institutions and material outcomes.

Idea 2: Food systems discussions are deeply connected to land, livelihoods, and local economies, not just production or consumption

Our analysis of global cases of participation shows that when people discuss farming and food production, key concepts that emerge are 'land use', 'food waste', 'land management', and 'land tenure'. In that sense, we see a strong connection to questions of **ownership** and livelihoods, not just the food that is produced and consumed.

Examples include Argentina's land forums and land policy roundtables, Bolivia's National Summit of Land and Territory, Colombia's rural development municipal councils and participatory land reform processes, Mexico's ejidal assemblies and community land management, Nepal's National Land Rights Forum, and we even analysed a case Zimbabwe on traditional authorities and fast-track land reform. These examples show that food-system participation is often inseparable from struggles over land access, tenure, territory and rural rights. **Participation here is connected to fundamental questions of sovereignty.**

Idea 3: Farmers are not a homogeneous group

Our analysis of global cases of participation shows that when people discuss farming and food production, they make relevant distinctions and qualifications. This differentiation is visible both qualitatively, when looking at each specific event, and quantitatively, in the language used to describe participants and issues. Across the dataset, we see this through the use of terms such as 'small farmers', 'smallholder farmers', 'family farmers', 'women farmers', 'young farmers', 'Indigenous farmers' and 'aquaculture farmers'.

Indeed, a significant group of cases concerns Indigenous and community-based territorial governance. Examples include Brazil's Indigenous Land Management Plans and Map of Indigenous Lands, Nicaragua's 3D mapping of Indigenous territories, Colombia's Afro-Colombian community councils, Mexico's consultation processes connected to Indigenous and communal land, New Zealand's Māori women's rights mobilisation, and Ecuador's National Council of the Montubio Nation. These cases are important because they show that food-system governance is also about recognising the centrality of people and their connection to communities.

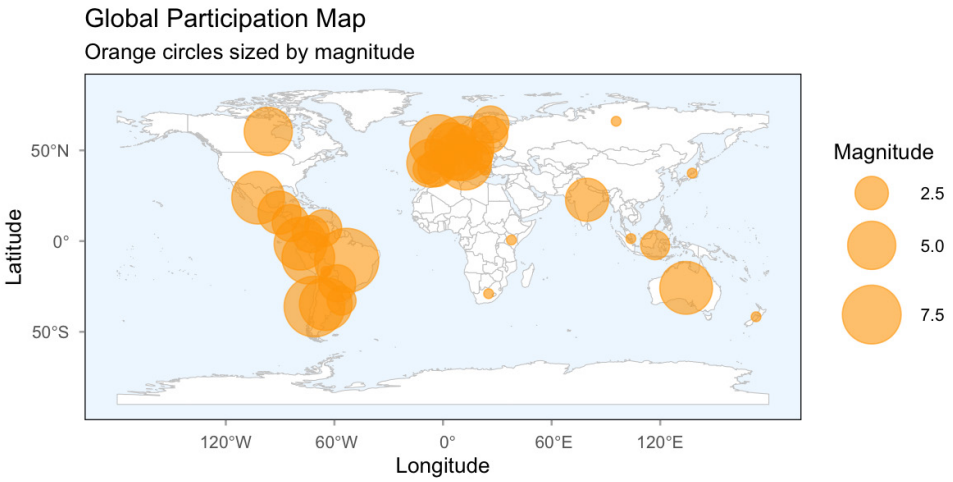
And more generally, the most frequent qualifiers associated with farmers relate to scale and economic position, especially small, smallholder, family and local farmers. This is reinforced by the prevalence of participatory cases focused on food security, solidarity economies, cooperative ownership, and access to markets. Examples include family farming councils in Uruguay, participatory approaches to productive chains in Ecuador and Peru, smallholder-focused programmes in Bolivia and Guatemala, and cooperative governance structures in Ghana's cocoa sector.

Gender is another recurring axis of differentiation. References to women farmers, female farmers and women's farming cooperatives appear across regions, including Latin America, Africa and Asia. Examples include Argentina's National Meeting of Female Landworkers, Nicaragua's initiatives to advance women's rights in farming cooperatives, and Ghana-based women-led cooperative development. These cases suggest that participatory processes are being used to **surface gender-specific constraints related to land access, labour, credit, care responsibilities and representation.**

As we map different cases of participation around farming and food production, the main lesson is clear: food-system participation works best when it acknowledges heterogeneity rather than assuming uniform interests among "farmers". **The global evidence shows that when organising around farming and food production, participation reflects the real diversity of farming actors, with notable differences in relation to the role of community, economic scale and gender.**

Deep Dive 2: Food, Climate and Cities

The figure below illustrates the number of participatory processes from our original mapping that connect to this topic. This was derived using a set of indicative keywords, which were iteratively tested and validated against the database to ensure they captured relevant cases. While the original mapping of over 7,000 cases is unevenly distributed across continents, the results nevertheless offer a useful indication of underlying patterns.



Keywords used = transport, zoning, rooftops, mobility, urban, green spaces, community garden, nature spaces, food market, fresh food. The keywords ('transport','mobility','urban') were also used, but only when in conjunction to GCA related terms ('planet', 'green', 'food', 'climate', 'energy', 'sustainable','sustainability','agriculture', 'environment', 'biodiversity', 'ecosystem','ecology')

The overall distribution of cases in the source material of the original map shows a strong concentration in South America (36%), followed by North America (28%) and Europe (23%), with other regions representing a much smaller share. This indicates a clear geographical imbalance in the dataset.

Region	Total Cases	%
Africa	249	3%
Asia	465	6%
Europe	1726	23%
North America	2054	28%
Oceania	232	3%
South America	2705	36%

In contrast to the overall distribution, this theme shows a pronounced concentration in Europe (34%), which displays a strong positive variation (+11). This suggests that Urban Life and the Built Environment is significantly more prominent in European participatory processes than in the dataset overall.

South America (38%) remains the most represented region, broadly in line with its overall share (36%), with a slight positive variation (+2), indicating a continued but not disproportionate emphasis on urban issues.

By contrast, North America (19%) shows a notable negative variation (-9), suggesting that, despite its large overall share of cases, urban themes are comparatively less central within its participatory processes.

Asia (-1), Africa (-1), and Oceania (-1) all show slight negative variations, indicating that urban issues are somewhat underrepresented relative to their already smaller shares.

Region	Total Cases	% change vs total
Africa	9	-1
Asia	27	-1
Europe	169	+11
North America	92	-9
Oceania	11	-1
South America	188	+2

Overall, and unlike any other GCA theme, this “Urban Life” reveals a shift towards Europe as a key site of urban-focused participation, while North America appears comparatively less engaged, and South America maintains a strong but proportionate presence.

The countries with over five cases of participation with at least one of these keywords were the following:

Country	Frequency
Argentina	6
Australia	6
Belgium	6
Brazil	9
Chile	8
Ecuador	6
Germany	9
Italy	6
Mexico	6
Peru	6
United Kingdom	7

The wordcloud below shows pairs of words (bigrams) that include at least one of the selected keywords. To keep the analysis focused and meaningful, only combinations following NOUN–NOUN (e.g. land use) and ADJECTIVE–NOUN (e.g. small farmers) structures were included. This is a common text analysis technique, as these grammatical patterns tend to capture stable and interpretable expressions of key ideas. In simpler terms, this approach helps identify how important topics are most often described in practice, by looking at which words tend to appear together.

The most frequent bigrams, such as urban development (12 cases), green spaces (12), urban mobility (10), and sustainable mobility (8), indicate a strong focus on the planning and transformation of urban environments, particularly in relation to transport and environmental sustainability. Closely related terms, including urban environment (7) and urban agriculture (6), reinforce this emphasis on cities as key sites for ecological and socio-economic intervention. This is further supported by the recurrence of terms like green space (4) and urban space (3). That is, one key framing of cities is that they are part of the ecology as well.

At the same time, expressions such as urban planning (5), urban growth (5), and urban areas (4) point to structural and spatial dimensions of urban change, suggesting attention to how cities expand. Indeed, looking at the texts, a key framing of the challenge is the observation that cities expand and are unlikely to turn back.

In parallel, terms such as public transport, transport transition, and urban cycling signal a concern with mobility systems and their transformation towards more sustainable models. Meanwhile, expressions such as urban regeneration, urban renewal, and urban infrastructure frame cities as places in need of actual investment.

Overall, the distribution of bigrams suggests a convergence around urban sustainability, combining concerns with mobility, environmental quality, and spatial planning, while also reflecting the diverse challenges and interventions associated with contemporary urban development.

A topic modelling analysis was used to identify clusters of concepts that are mentioned in participatory processes that also mention this theme. In this sense, the topic modelling was used to assess which other topics are discussed in conjunction.

Main findings

Idea 1: Participation in this space is strongly centred on cities as sites of transformation, particularly in relation to sustainability and infrastructure

Our analysis of global cases of participation shows that participation in the field of urban life and the built environment is heavily organised around the city as a key site of transformation. The most recurrent terms in the dataset include urban development, green spaces, urban environment, urban agriculture, urban planning, urban growth, urban areas, and urban space. In particular, urban development and green spaces are some of the most frequent concepts, followed by urban mobility and sustainable mobility. This indicates that participatory processes are not treating urban issues as isolated service-delivery problems, but as interconnected questions of sustainability, spatial planning, infrastructure and quality of life.

The country-level cases reinforce this pattern. Examples include Participatory Forums for a Sustainable Buenos Aires in Argentina, Sustainable Cities Platform and Urban Management SP in Brazil, Metropolitan Platform for Sustainability in Mexico, Paraguayan Network for Sustainable Cities, Águeda Sm@rt City Lab in Portugal, and Future Montevideo in Uruguay. These cases suggest that participation is being used to deliberate over the future of cities as complex systems.

The sustainability orientation is particularly visible in cases focused on climate, green spaces and urban environmental quality. Examples include Tallinn Climate Assembly on Green Spaces, Tartu Climate Assembly, Barcelona Citizens' Climate Assembly, Milan's Permanent Citizens' Assembly on Climate, Canton Geneva Forum Citoyen on nature conservation and climate protection, and multiple UK climate assemblies in places such as Adur and Worthing, Blaenau Gwent, Herefordshire, Southampton, Brighton and Hove, and Newham. These cases show that urban participation is increasingly being used to address climate action at the local level, especially where climate policy intersects with mobility, green infrastructure, air quality and neighbourhood-level change.

At the same time, the data suggests that participation in urban sustainability is not limited to large global cities. Cases appear across metropolitan, municipal and neighbourhood contexts, including Buenos Aires, São Paulo, Quito, Tallinn, Tartu, L'Aquila, Montevideo, Barcelona, Geneva, Southampton, Brighton and Hove, and smaller localities such as Érd and Szeged in Hungary. This breadth is important for policy because it shows that participatory urban transformation is not only a "megacity" agenda. It can be adapted to different scales of governance, from neighbourhood improvement and public-space redesign to city-wide climate strategies and long-term urban development plans.

Idea 2: There is a clear focus on mobility and transport systems as key levers for change within urban environments

Main findings

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Idea 2: There is a clear focus on mobility and transport systems as key levers for change within urban environments

Our analysis of global cases of participation also shows a strong concentration around mobility and transport. The most frequent mobility-related concepts include urban mobility, sustainable mobility, climate mobility, transport transition, public transport, green transport, urban cycling, transport planning, mobility plan, mobility agenda, democratic mobility, municipal mobility and mobility behaviour. This suggests that transport is one of the main entry points through which the public is being invited (or claiming space) to deliberate on urban transformation.

The dataset contains a great diversity of examples. These include Debates on mobility and transportation in São Paulo, Konstanz Climate Mobility Plan, Planning Cells on Smart Energy and Transport Changes in Berlin's City Districts, Mini-borgersamling om klimavenlig transport in Denmark, SUMP City of L'Aquila Urban Sustainable Mobility Plan in Italy, World Bicycle Forum in Peru, Bicycle Barometer in Belgium, and Tartu's Climate Assembly on Urban Planning and Sustainable Mobility in Estonia.

This focus is not surprising. Mobility systems are one of the most visible and contested dimensions of urban life. Decisions about transport affect emissions, air quality, road safety, commuting time, access to work and education, public space, social inclusion and the distribution of urban benefits. Our technical analysis also shows that mobility appears alongside terms such as air quality, infrastructure, planning, public service, social equity, urban development, urban planning, sustainability, sustainable development and governance. This indicates that participatory transport debates are often broader than transport alone: they connect mobility to social justice, climate action, access to services and the everyday experience of the city.

Mobility should be treated as a priority domain for participatory urban governance. Transport transitions will require not only technical planning but also democratic legitimacy. This is particularly the case considering the many trade-offs of expanding cycling infrastructure, reallocating road space, investing in public transport or introducing low-emission zones, which can generate public resistance if they are perceived as imposed from above. Participation can help cities identify locally acceptable pathways for reducing emissions, improving accessibility and redesigning public space.

Idea 3: Urban contexts emerge as critical spaces for linking participation with governance, where citizen input connects directly to planning and decision-making.

Our analysis of global cases of participation also shows that urban participation matters most when it is linked to actual planning and decision-making. The strongest examples are not just conversations with citizens; they are processes connected to city plans, climate strategies, mobility plans, participatory budgets, infrastructure projects, urban development frameworks and long-term municipal decisions. This is crucial. People are more likely to trust and engage with participation when they can see how their input will be used. If participation only collects opinions but does not influence decisions, it risks becoming symbolic. But when it is connected to budgets, plans and implementation, it can become a practical tool for better governance.

This connection between participation and governance is visible in cases such as Municipal Strategic Plans in Argentina, Urban Management SP in Brazil, Quito Decides in Ecuador, Participatory Budgeting in Ilo, Peru, Auckland's 10-year Budget consultation, Strategic Plan for Zonal Development in Montevideo, Future Montevideo, Citizens' Assembly Urban Development Plan 2040 in Germany, Planning Cells on the Development of the District at Tempelhofer Damm, and Citizens' Assembly on Lynetteholmen in Denmark. These cases show how the subnational institutions can play a pivotal role in making participation consequential and create specific policy instruments to dock the outputs.

This matters because cities are where many governance challenges become concrete. Climate commitments, infrastructure plans, transport policies and sustainability goals all require decisions about land, money, services and everyday behaviour. Participation can therefore act as a bridge between high-level policy ambitions and the lived realities of residents.

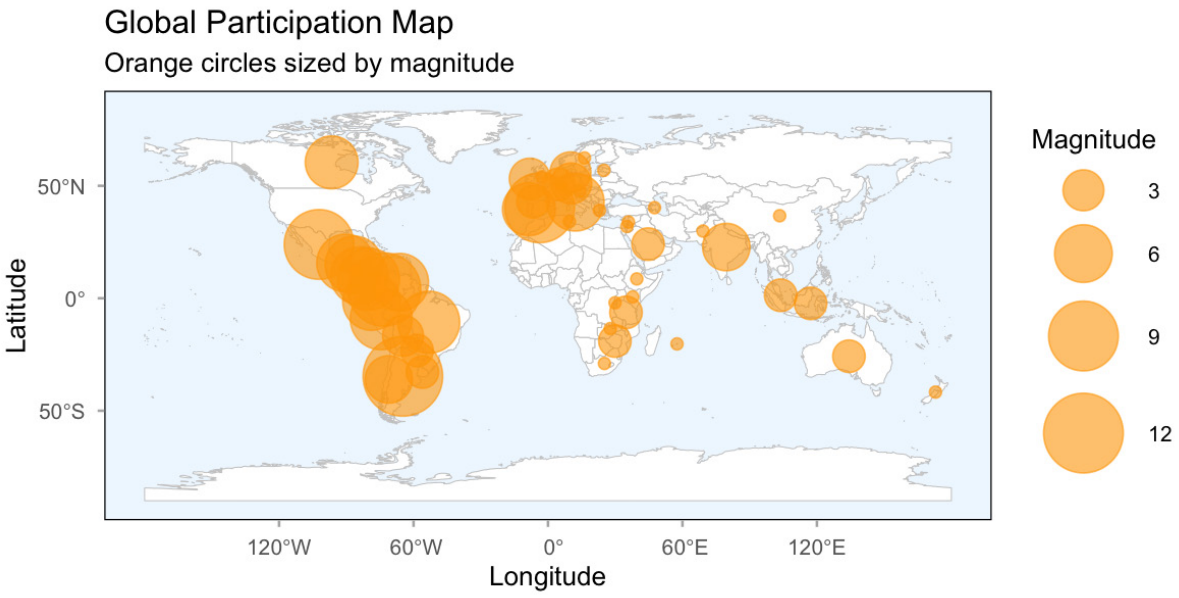
The data also suggests that participatory urban governance is multi-sectoral. Mobility appears alongside energy, housing, infrastructure, public space, air quality, water, waste, social equity, economic development and environmental sustainability. This is important because urban challenges rarely fit within one departmental silo. For example, a decision about transport may also affect air quality, public health, neighbourhood cohesion, climate mitigation and access to employment. Participatory processes can help governments identify these interdependencies and avoid narrowly technical solutions.

The cases also show that participation can operate at different stages of governance. Some processes help define agendas, such as citizen assemblies on climate or urban futures. Others contribute to planning, such as mobility plans, strategic plans, green-space assemblies and urban development processes. Others support monitoring, innovation or implementation, such as digital platforms, hackathons, citizen science tools and participatory budgeting. This suggests that participation can be embedded across the policy cycle: agenda-setting, design, implementation, monitoring and revision.

Overall, through our analysis, the subnational level and cities are positioned as perhaps the strongest way to link participation and policy instruments. However, city governments should design participatory processes with clear institutional pathways. Participants should know how their input will be used, which decisions it can influence, what constraints exist, and how authorities will report back on implementation.

Deep Dive 3: Food, Climate and Identity

The figure below illustrates the number of participatory processes from our original mapping that connect to this topic. This was derived using a set of indicative keywords, which were iteratively tested and validated against the database to ensure they captured relevant cases. While the original mapping of over 7,000 cases is unevenly distributed across continents, the results nevertheless offer a useful indication of underlying patterns.



Keywords used: ['right', 'tradition', 'education', 'responsibility', 'access', 'legal'] in conjunction to GCA related terms ['planet', 'green', 'food', 'climate', 'energy', 'sustainable','sustainability','agriculture', 'environment', 'biodiversity', 'ecosystem','ecology']

The distribution of cases in the source material of the original map shows a strong concentration in South America (36%), followed by North America (28%) and Europe (23%), with other regions representing a much smaller share. This indicates a clear geographical imbalance in the dataset.

Region	Total Cases	%
Africa	249	3%
Asia	465	6%
Europe	1726	23%
North America	2054	28%
Oceania	232	3%
South America	2705	36%

Compared to the source distribution, this theme shows a relatively balanced pattern, though with some notable regional shifts. North America (28%) aligns exactly with its overall share (0 variation), indicating that issues of Society, Culture and Wellbeing hold a consistent level of importance within its participatory processes.

Europe (22%) is also broadly in line with its baseline, with only a slight negative variation (-1), while South America (33%), despite remaining the most represented region, shows a small decrease (-3), suggesting that this theme is somewhat less prominent relative to its overall weight.

In contrast, Africa (+3) and Asia (+2) display positive variations, indicating that societal and cultural issues are relatively more emphasised in these regions compared to their baseline shares.

Region	Total Cases	% change vs total
Africa	11	+3
Asia	15	+2
Europe	39	-1
North America	50	0
Oceania	3	-1
South America	59	-3

Overall, this theme appears more evenly distributed than others, with a modest relative strengthening in Africa and Asia, and a slight rebalancing away from South America

The countries with over five cases of participation with at least one of these keywords were the following:

Country	Frequency
Argentina	12
Brazil	7
Colombia	10
Costa Rica	6
Ecuador	6
Guatemala	6
Honduras	6
Italy	6
Mexico	9
Panama	7
Peru	7
Venezuela	6
Spain	9

The wordcloud below shows pairs of words (bigrams) that include at least one of the selected keywords. To keep the analysis focused and meaningful, only combinations following NOUN–NOUN (e.g. land use) and ADJECTIVE–NOUN (e.g. small farmers) structures were included. This is a common text analysis technique, as these grammatical patterns tend to capture stable and interpretable expressions of key ideas. In simpler terms, this approach helps identify how important topics are most often described in practice, by looking at which words tend to appear together.

The most frequent bigrams, such as human rights (13 cases) and legal environments (5), indicate a strong emphasis on rights-based approaches and the institutional frameworks that underpin them. Closely related terms, including human right, property rights, civil rights, and fundamental rights, reinforce the centrality of ‘rights’ as a key organising principle within this theme. In parallel, terms like environmental rights, citizenship rights, consumer rights, and land rights indicate the extension of rights-based framings across multiple domains.

In the same vein, expressions such as legal identity, legal framework, and legal representation point to the specific importance of formal legal structures and access to justice, suggesting that the law remains a central site of political participation targeted by participatory processes

Meanwhile, the presence of expressions such as and environmental education (4) participatory education, quality education, and environmental education suggests a link between rights, knowledge, and capacity-building. After reading the source material, we can identify a close tie with access-related terms, such as equitable access, universal access, and service access, which highlight concerns with inclusion and the ability of different groups to engage with services and rights in practice.

Overall, the distribution of bigrams points to a convergence between rights, legal frameworks, and access, with participation framed largely in terms of inclusion, education, and the conditions required for individuals and groups to effectively exercise their rights.

A topic modelling analysis was used to identify clusters of concepts that are mentioned in participatory processes that also mention this theme. In this sense, the topic modelling was used to assess which other topics are discussed in conjunction.

Main findings

Idea 1: Participation in this space is strongly grounded in rights-based approaches, with a clear focus on legal and institutional frameworks

A central finding from our analysis of global cases of participation is that participation in the area of food, climate and culture is often framed through rights. The most prominent phrase in the data is human rights, followed by related terms such as fundamental rights, civil rights, property rights, environmental rights, citizenship rights, consumer rights, land rights, water rights and rights of children and adolescents. Legal language is also visible through terms such as legal environments, legal identity, legal capacity, legal representation, legal status, legal needs and legal framework.

This matters because it shows that participation is not only about consultation or the 'good will' of powerholders to involve people. Across the cases, participation is tied to formal rights, institutional obligations and legal recognition. Examples include Argentina's local council for the protection and promotion of the rights of children and adolescents, Costa Rica's national policy for a society free from racism and discrimination, Guatemala's consultation of Indigenous peoples on the right to food, Uruguay's national education plan for human rights, and Tanzania's work on mapping land rights of Maasai women. Participation is a key mechanism to enforce already established rights and legal commitments.

The dataset also includes several processes linked to public accountability and legal or institutional oversight. Examples include transparency in the justice system in Argentina, citizen participation in open government in Costa Rica, public policy dialogues in Peru, citizen guardians in Mexico, and environmental law organisations in Zimbabwe and Zambia. These cases suggest that participation can help connect citizens with the institutions responsible for protecting rights and delivering public goods.

The policy significance is clear: when participation is linked to rights, it becomes more than a space for expressing preferences. Participation should be designed as part of rights-based governance. This means linking public engagement to clear institutional responsibilities, legal protections and mechanisms for accountability.

Idea 2: Issues of access, inclusion, and representation are central, highlighting participation as a means of addressing structural inequalities

The analysis of global participation cases also shows that access is one of the most important themes in in the field of food, climate and culture. The data includes repeated references to food access, service access, education access, health access, water access, justice access, information access, market access, care access, loan access, resource access, wheelchair access, equal access, equitable access and universal access. This range suggests that participation is often used to address barriers that prevent people from fully exercising their rights or benefiting from public policy.

This is important because structural inequalities are often experienced through unequal access: access to food, health services, education, information, justice, public services, digital tools, environmental resources or political voice. Participation can help make these barriers visible. It allows communities to explain where systems are failing, which groups are being left out, and what kinds of changes are needed.

The country examples show this clearly. In Panama, cases include national meetings of young people of African descent and a national council for early childhood care. In Brazil, there are municipal councils for children and adolescents and Indigenous climate alert initiatives. In Mexico, cases include a centre of social policy and human rights, citizen guardians and platforms for public engagement. In Colombia, the dataset includes community action boards, rural populations, ethnic and popular sectors, and initiatives to guarantee citizen participation during the pandemic.

Participation should be used to identify and reduce barriers to access. It should prioritise groups affected by exclusion and ensure that participation itself is accessible, inclusive and representative.

Idea 3: Education and capacity-building play a critical role, linking knowledge with the ability to exercise rights and engage in decision-making

Another finding from our analysis of global cases of participation is the importance of education and capacity-building for tackling food, climate and communities. The data includes references to environmental education, participatory education, citizen education, electoral education, quality education, school education, virtual education, water education, sustainability education and broader forms of learning connected to rights, public services and democratic participation.

This suggests that participation depends not only on being invited into a process, but also on having the knowledge, confidence and resources to take part meaningfully. People need to understand their rights, the institutions involved, the choices on the table, and the possible consequences of decisions. Without this, participation can reproduce inequalities, because those with more education, time, confidence or institutional knowledge have more effective means to influence.

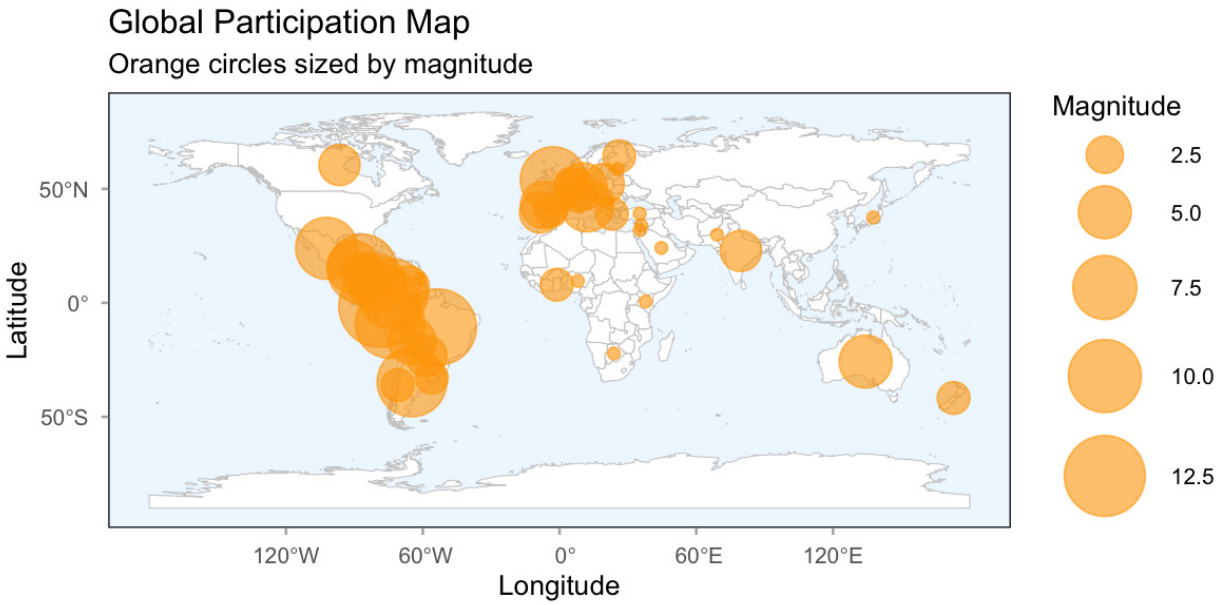
The cases show different ways in which education and participation are linked. Examples include Nicaragua's construction of a national education plan, Uruguay's national education plan for human rights, Greece's initiative on young consumers and basic rights, Ecuador's student watchdog clubs monitoring school health, Ireland's Youth Assembly, and youth participatory budgeting in Portugal. These examples show that education and youth policy itself is a core concern that can be tapped into.

Environmental and sustainability education also appears strongly. This is important because many of the cases connect rights, wellbeing and environmental challenges. Participation around climate, biodiversity, food, water, energy and environmental protection requires citizens to engage with complex information. Capacity-building can help people understand these issues and participate more effectively in decisions about sustainability and public resources.

Across the cases of participation, we see a strong pattern: Governments should invest in civic education and capacity-building as part of participatory processes. People need information, skills and support to exercise their rights and influence decisions effectively.

Deep Dive 4: Food, Climate, and Health

The figure below illustrates the number of participatory processes from our original mapping that connect to this topic. This was derived using a set of indicative keywords, which were iteratively tested and validated against the database to ensure they captured relevant cases. While the original mapping of over 7,000 cases is unevenly distributed across continents, the results nevertheless offer a useful indication of underlying patterns.



Keywords used: ['health', 'healthy', 'nutrition', 'nutritive', 'nutritious', 'food access', 'affordable food', 'fresh food', 'food security', 'hunger', 'hungry', 'wellbeing', 'safe food', 'processed food', 'quality of life'] in conjunction with GCA-related terms ['planet', 'green', 'food', 'climate', 'energy', 'sustainable', 'sustainability', 'agriculture', 'environment', 'biodiversity', 'ecosystem', 'ecology']. The keywords ['health', 'healthy', 'wellbeing', 'quality of life'] were counted only when they appeared alongside these climate-related terms.

The distribution of cases in the source material of the original map shows a strong concentration in South America (36%), followed by North America (28%) and Europe (23%), with other regions representing a much smaller share. This indicates a clear geographical imbalance in the dataset.

Region	Total Cases	%
Africa	249	3%
Asia	465	6%
Europe	1726	23%
North America	2054	28%
Oceania	232	3%
South America	2705	36%

Compared to the source distribution, this theme broadly mirrors the overall regional pattern. South America remains the most represented region with 36% of all cases, exactly matching its baseline share, while Europe also aligns fully with the baseline at 23%. Africa likewise shows no variation, with 3% of cases.

The main shifts appear elsewhere. North America reaches 30% of cases, which is 2 percentage points above its baseline share, suggesting that health-related issues are somewhat more prominent within its participatory processes. Oceania also shows a modest positive variation (+1), while Asia falls below its baseline share at 4% (-2).

Overall, the theme of health appears widely distributed but not radically rebalanced across regions. The strongest overrepresentation is found in North America, whereas Asia is comparatively less represented than in the overall map

Region	Total Cases	% change vs total
Africa	5	0
Asia	8	-2
Europe	43	0
North America	55	+2
Oceania	7	+1
South America	65	0

The countries with over five cases of participation with at least one of these keywords were the following:

Country	Frequency
Argentina	9
Brazil	11
Colombia	9
Ecuador	13
Honduras	9
Mexico	7
Panama	6
Peru	9
United Kingdom	8
United States of America	15

The visualisation below shows pairs of words (bigrams) that include at least one of the selected keywords. To keep the analysis focused and meaningful, only combinations following NOUN–NOUN and ADJECTIVE–NOUN structures were included. This helps identify how important topics are most often described in practice, by looking at which words tend to appear together.

The most frequent bigram is food security (29 cases), followed by mental health (13). This indicates that the health theme is strongly articulated through concerns with basic provision, nutrition, and vulnerability, rather than through narrowly clinical framings alone.

Other recurrent expressions, such as public health (5) and health care (5), reinforce the salience of institutional and service-oriented dimensions of health. Meanwhile, terms like healthy food (4), nutritious food (4), nutrition security (3), and community health (3) point to a close connection between health, food systems, and local collective wellbeing.
The broader set of lower-frequency bigrams further extends this picture. Expressions such as health insurance, health facilities, health workers, health services, health coverage, and health prevention suggest attention to access, infrastructure, and delivery. At the same time, terms such as healthy environment, healthy ecosystem, environmental wellbeing, emotional wellbeing, reproductive health, and physical health show that participatory processes often frame health in ecological, social, and holistic terms.

Overall, the distribution of bigrams points to a convergence between food security, mental health, public health provision, and broader questions of wellbeing. Participation is therefore framed not only around health systems and services, but also around nutrition, care, and the socio-environmental conditions that support healthy lives.
A topic modelling analysis was used to identify clusters of concepts that are mentioned in participatory processes that also mention this theme.

Main findings

Idea 1: Food security is being reframed to include nutrition and health, pointing to a broader paradigm of “nutrition security”

Looking through our map of global cases of participation from the angle of health, food and climate, the most dominant concept is food security. However, it does not appear in isolation. It is closely associated with concepts like ‘healthy food’, ‘nutritious food’, “nutrition security’, and related phrases such as family nutrition, nutrition programme, nutrition issues, nutrition skills and nutrition subsidies. This suggests that participation in this space is not only concerned with hunger or food supply, but also with the quality, health value and social distribution of food. As we see it, this pattern indicates a conceptual broadening of security.

The country-level cases reinforce this pattern. In Ecuador, the dataset includes the Special Program for Food Security, Food Security Workshops, and Andean Organizations for Advocacy on Food Security Policies. In Honduras, the cases include the National Council for Food and Nutrition Security, National Food and Nutrition Security Forums, the Innovation Forum for Food and Nutritional Security, and the University Observatory on Food and Nutritional Security. In Brazil, relevant cases include State Food and Nutritional Security Councils, the National Committee on the National Policy of Agroecology and Organic Farming, and the Food Advertising Observatory. El Salvador includes a National Consultation on Sustainable Food Systems, while Germany includes a Citizens’ Assembly on Sustainable Nutrition, and Serbia includes a Citizens’ Assembly on Food Labelling.

These cases show that participation is being used to discuss not only whether people have enough food, but also what kinds of food systems support health, nutrition and wellbeing. The evidence points to a broader paradigm of food security. The dominant language is still “food security”, but the surrounding terms and cases show that participation is also engaging with nutrition, healthy diets, child and family nutrition, food labelling, urban agriculture, agroecology and food-related health outcomes. For policy, this means that participatory food security processes should not be framed only around access to sufficient food, but also around access to healthy, nutritious and socially appropriate food.

Idea 2: Health policy is becoming integrative, linking mental health, public health and ecological conditions

Our analysis of global cases of participation shows that health-related participation is not narrowly focused on hospitals or clinical services. Indeed, the most frequent health-related phrases after food security are around mental health and clean environment. The data also includes terms such as community health, healthy environment, healthy ecosystem, emotional wellbeing, environmental wellbeing, health outcomes, health systems, health services, population health, physical health and integral health. This indicates that participation is engaging with a broad understanding of health that includes mental, social and environmental dimensions.

The prominence of mental health is particularly important. Country-level examples include Argentina's Honorary Advisory Council on Mental Health and Addictions, the United States case on Reversing Youth Mental Health Outcomes, and broader youth and wellbeing-oriented cases such as Uruguay's Refreshing a Right: Youth Discussing Health. These cases show that mental health is one of the clearest ways in which participation is being connected to health policy. These may not immediately link to food and climate, but they are certainly gathering civic energy. And they also intersect, as we consider the angle of climate and food anxiety.

Environmental and ecological dimensions also appear clearly. Our analysis shows the importance of concepts like a healthy environment and a healthy ecosystem. In the cases, these concepts are also link healthy conditions, clean water, sanitation, physical activity and climate neutrality. In the case list, this ecological dimension is visible in examples such as Argentina's social monitoring of the sanitation of the Matanza-Riachuelo basin, Ecuador's Comprehensive Solid Waste Management Program in Loja, Finland's Healthy Outdoor Premises for Everyone HOPE project, and the UK's Wandsworth Citizens' Assembly on Air Quality.

The data suggest that participation is being used to expand the scope of health policy. Health is connected to mental wellbeing, environmental quality, sanitation, clean water, air quality, climate change, food systems and quality of life. We take from this that participatory health approaches should not be limited to health services alone. They should also include the environmental and social conditions that shape health outcomes. And, conversely, a broader conception of health situates it as a key entry point to the food and climate debate.

Idea 3: Community-governed approaches are central to linking health, food and climate

Looking through the global cases of participation in the intersection of health, food and climate, the presence of community-based, council-based and locally governed approaches is notable. Key concepts include community health, that is also connected in the cases to community organising, citizen participation, participatory management, governance, local health, population health, vulnerable populations, public service and wellbeing. This matters because food- and climate-related health challenges are deeply contextual. Community-governed approaches can allow local knowledge to inform policy, help identify risks early, and support solutions that are socially acceptable and culturally grounded.

The country-level examples are relevant to this approach. Peru includes a Community Health Surveillance System and the Glass of Milk Committees. Brazil includes Municipal Councils for Children and Adolescents, and Innovation Labs of the Unified Health System. Venezuela includes Working Committees of the Communal Councils and the Special Program for Food Security. These cases suggest that participation is being institutionalised through councils, committees and other instances that connect communities with food and health governance.

As we see it, the global cases of participation point to community governance as a central feature of participation at the food, climate, and health nexus. The cases include councils, observatories, committees, community surveillance systems, participatory budgeting, urban agriculture initiatives, food security workshops and local climate-health deliberations. We believe community-governed approaches should be treated as part of health infrastructure, especially in contexts where food insecurity, environmental risk and wellbeing are closely connected.

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