



# Food, Climate & Identity

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

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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

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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

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“ **Real sustainability requires collaboration between farmers, between citizens, governments, and also the private companies. If we combine local knowledge—like the knowledge of our communities—and technical expertise in public policies, we can guarantee health, food, and life for everyone** .

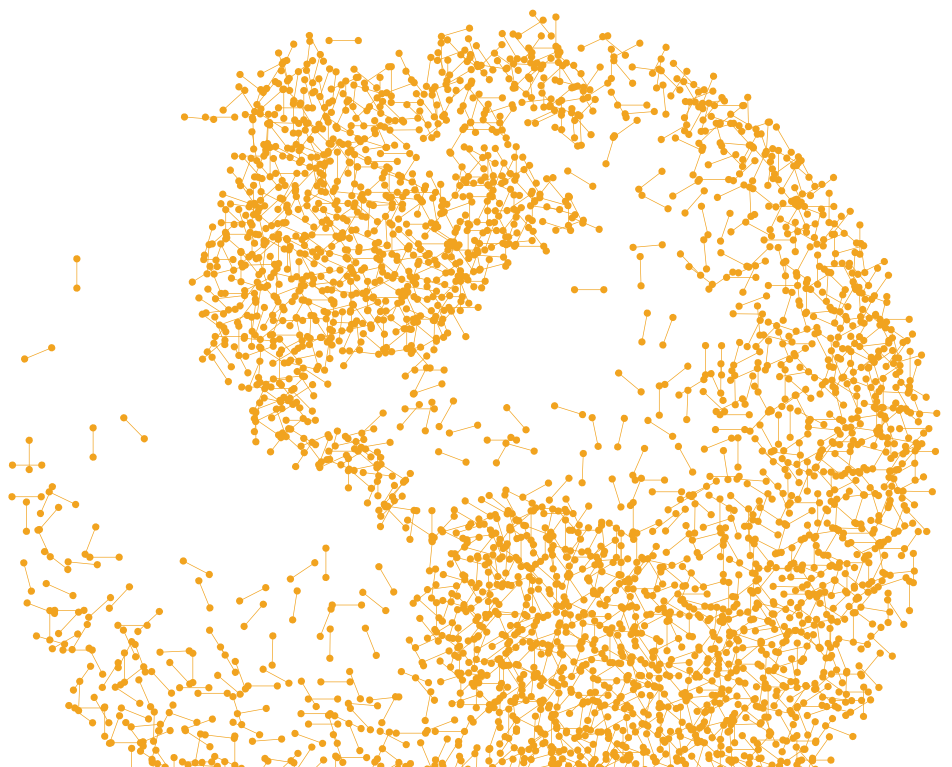
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Participant, 2026 Global Assembly on Food and Climate (Colombia)

Food systems are ultimately human systems. They shape whether people can access nutritious food, support themselves and their families, maintain cultural traditions and live healthy and dignified lives.

A recurring theme throughout the Global Assembly was that meaningful change cannot be achieved through individual choices alone. While personal actions matter, food systems are shaped by countless decisions made by communities, businesses, governments and institutions. Creating systems that are fairer, healthier and more resilient will therefore require collective action at every level of society.

This is particularly important at a time when many communities are facing growing pressures. Food insecurity, poor nutrition and unequal access to healthy diets continue to affect millions of people around the world. At the same time, concerns are growing about the loss of traditional food knowledge, local farming practices and cultural food traditions, as environmental pressures, changing consumption patterns and the increasing standardisation of food systems reshape long-standing relationships between people, food and place.

This is why participation matters. It enables people to exercise rights, contribute local knowledge, identify barriers to inclusion and hold decision-makers accountable. It also helps build the understanding, trust and collective capacity needed to navigate increasingly complex food-system challenges.



# Public priorities emerging

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**“ We have to look back to our knowledge, our ancestors, the way that Africans or Indigenous people did to plant, to have their crops, to take care of nature.**

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Participant, 2026 Global Assembly on Food and Climate (Brazil)

## 1. Making the right to food real

A recurring insight across the assemblies was that recognising the right to food is not the same as making it a practical reality.

The right to food is already reflected in international agreements and commitments. However, a persistent gap remains between formal recognition and lived experience. Rising food costs, unequal access to nutritious food and persistent hunger demonstrate that rights alone do not guarantee outcomes.

This points towards the importance of strengthening the systems that ensure everyone can access healthy food regardless of income, geography or social circumstance. For many, food security was not simply a matter of production, but of fairness, distribution and accountability.

For governments, international institutions and food-system actors, this suggests that protecting the right to food requires more than formal commitments. Ensuring access to healthy, nutritious food depends on the policies, infrastructure and accountability mechanisms that translate rights into everyday reality.

## 2. Protecting food cultures, traditions and community knowledge

**“ It is vital to safeguard this wisdom to ensure it is passed down to the next generation rather than lost forever. Preserving traditional methods is essential, as these practices are inherently sustainable and naturally adapted to local climates. Without them, future generations may be forced to rely on intensive farming methods that are often detrimental to the environment.**

—  
Participant, 2026 Global Assembly on Food and Climate (Philippines)

Across the assemblies, food was consistently understood as more than nutrition. It carries stories, identities, traditions and ways of understanding the world.

Concerns about the loss of traditional farming practices, local food varieties and cultural knowledge surfaced across many regions such as Latin America and the Caribbean, East Asia and the Pacific, and non-anglophone Europe. The discussions highlighted the importance of preserving and sharing knowledge between generations, recognising that traditional practices often contain valuable insights into sustainable resource management, local ecosystems and resilience.

Schools, community spaces, markets and public institutions were frequently identified as important places for connecting generations through food, supporting cultural continuity while helping communities adapt to changing environmental conditions.

For educators, cultural institutions and food-system actors, this suggests that food heritage should be recognised as a living resource rather than a relic of the past. Protecting traditional knowledge, local food cultures and intergenerational learning may help strengthen both cultural resilience and communities' ability to adapt to a changing climate.

### 3. Building informed and accountable societies

**“ The recognition of food as a human right would be the most important thing, because shortages of food are also often used as a weapon against poorer individuals, and that as a basic right would change that. —**

**Participant, 2026 Global Assembly on Food and Climate (United Kingdom)**

A recurring theme across the discussions was that resilient food systems depend on both informed citizens and accountable institutions.

Access to reliable information and practical knowledge was widely seen as essential for helping people make informed choices and contribute meaningfully to decisions about food and climate. Environmental literacy, food education and community learning emerged as important foundations for long-term resilience.

At the same time, responsibility was not viewed as resting solely with individuals. Governments, businesses and institutions were expected to be transparent about their impacts and accountable for the decisions they make. Taken together, education and accountability emerged as mutually reinforcing priorities of resilient food systems, strengthening both public participation and institutional trust.

For governments, educators, businesses and public institutions, this suggests that resilience depends not only on infrastructure and resources, but also on trust. Building informed societies requires investment in education, transparency and access to information, while maintaining public confidence depends on institutions being accountable for the decisions they make.

## 4. Ensuring everyone can participate

Across the assemblies, a consistent insight emerged: food-system decisions benefit from including the experiences and knowledge of the people most affected by them.

Diverse experiences and forms of knowledge were widely seen as essential to building stronger and more resilient food systems. Participation was therefore viewed not only as a democratic principle, but as a practical way of improving the quality and legitimacy of decisions.

Particular emphasis was placed on the inclusion of people facing food insecurity, small-scale producers, Indigenous communities, young people, women, migrant communities and others whose voices are often absent from formal decision-making processes.

For public institutions and food-system practitioners, this suggests that inclusion is not simply a matter of fairness. Bringing a wider range of experiences and forms of knowledge into decision-making can help create food systems that are more responsive, resilient and trusted.

## ASSEMBLIES IN ACTION: Floods, food security and community action in Praça do Cristo, Brazil

In the neighbourhood of Jardim São Paulo, on the outskirts of Recife, climate change is not an abstract concept. It arrives with the floods.

The community sits between two bodies of water that were never meant to coexist: the Guarulhos Canal, which regularly overflows during periods of heavy rain, and a raised federal highway that now prevents water from draining naturally. Residents describe water rising from below as the canal floods while runoff from the highway accumulates above, trapping entire streets between two sources of flooding.

In October 2025, just weeks before COP30, community leaders Regi and Sibéria convened a community assembly on climate change and food security in Praça do Cristo. The meeting took place in a house abandoned after the devastating floods of 2022 and later rented by residents as a permanent reminder of the challenges facing the community.

Participants brought diverse experiences of climate impacts. Some had lost homes to flooding. Others had been displaced by landslides elsewhere in Pernambuco before moving into neighbourhoods exposed to different climate risks. Many spoke about the difficulties of maintaining livelihoods, accessing food and protecting their families during periods of severe flooding.

For organisers, translating global challenges into local realities was essential.

**“ If we said ‘climate change’ and ‘food security’, that wouldn’t work. So we talked about the floods of the Guarulhos Canal, how we need to prepare to survive them, and how they affect our food. ”**

One of the most powerful moments came when participants received messages from communities in other parts of the world facing similar challenges. Residents read reflections from communities in Vietnam and elsewhere describing their own

relationships with water, survival and resilience. The messages helped participants see their local experiences as part of a wider global story, creating a sense of solidarity across very different contexts.

The assembly also took place against a backdrop of frustration with local decision-making. Residents felt that opportunities to communicate their concerns to decision-makers had been limited. Through the Global Citizens’ Assembly network, however, their proposals were able to contribute to a wider international conversation in the lead-up to COP30.

The priorities emerging from the assembly combined both institutional action and community-led initiatives.

Participants renewed calls for the completion of long-delayed public works on the Guarulhos Canal, arguing that unfinished infrastructure continues to leave residents vulnerable to flooding. They also proposed support for a community recycling enterprise that could generate local income while improving environmental conditions, and investment in local food vendors to strengthen neighbourhood food security and livelihoods.

Alongside these institutional demands, residents committed to taking action themselves. Participants organised an artistic photo protest along the canal to draw attention to the community’s situation and began developing digital literacy classes through WhatsApp to strengthen communication and community organisation.

The assembly demonstrated how conversations about food systems often begin with people’s lived experiences. What started as a discussion about flooding quickly became a conversation about food security, livelihoods, community resilience and the relationship between local realities and global climate challenges. It also highlighted how participation can help communities move from shared concerns towards both collective demands and collective action.

# Directions for action

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1

## **Make the right to food a reality**

Translate existing international law recognising the right to food into domestic policies backed by the institutions, protections and support systems needed to make that right meaningful in practice.

2

## **Preserve and pass on traditional food knowledge**

Support community-led education, school programmes and intergenerational learning initiatives that preserve traditional food practices, strengthen environmental understanding and build local resilience.

3

## **Strengthen accountability across food systems**

Create clearer responsibilities for governments, businesses and institutions while improving transparency and public oversight of decisions affecting food security, health and sustainability.

4

## **Design food governance with people, not for people**

Embed meaningful participation into food, climate and public health decision-making processes. Ensure that participation reaches those most affected by the outcomes and that their input is connected to one another, aggregated, translated into policy agendas and treated as a reflection of collective public will.

# Closing reflection

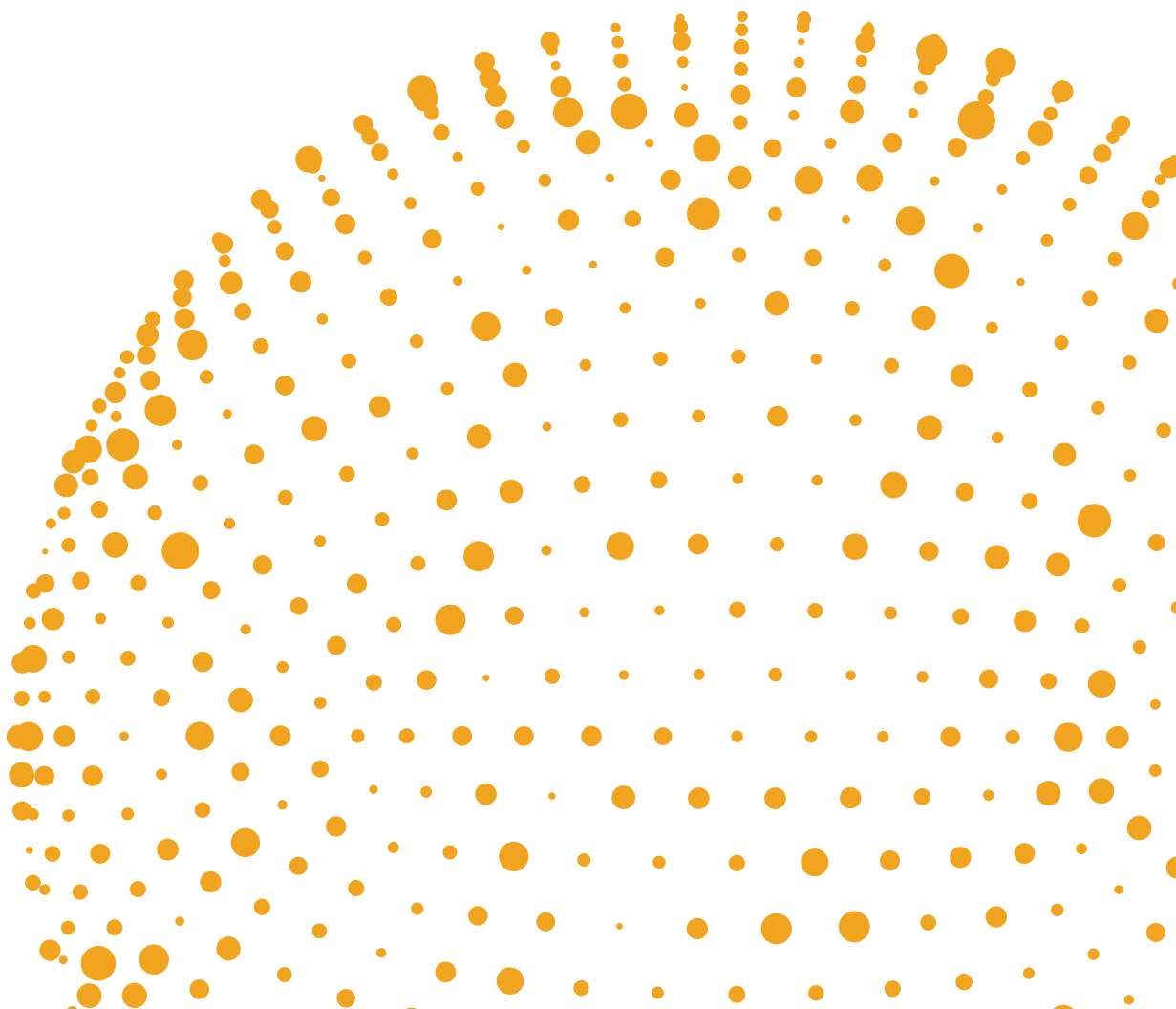
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Across the 2026 Global Assembly on Food and Climate and the wider landscape of participation, a consistent message emerges: food systems are not only about production, distribution and consumption. They are also about rights, culture, knowledge and belonging.

Throughout the Assembly and thousands of participatory processes worldwide, people demonstrated an ability to engage with complex and interconnected challenges. They weighed evidence, navigated trade-offs, reflected on different perspectives and identified shared priorities across diverse contexts and lived experiences.

The discussions suggest that resilient food systems depend not only on technical solutions, but also on informed societies, accountable institutions and meaningful opportunities for participation. Food systems are strongest when they reflect the experiences, knowledge and values of the people whose lives they shape.

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 resilient futures.





[globalassemblies.org](http://globalassemblies.org)