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Youth Statement for the Triple-COP Year

From Consultation to Partnership: Expectations and Recommendations

I. Introduction

2026 marks a triple-COP year, with UNCCD, CBD, and UNFCCC each convening their respective Conferences of Parties (COPs). This presents an opportunity to strengthen coherence between the three Rio Conventions, particularly around the issues that connect them most directly. These include land degradation, biodiversity loss, climate change, and their combined impact on global food security.

Young people sit at the center of this convergence, directly experiencing the impacts of these interlinked issues, while also serving as advocates and innovators driving solutions on the ground. However, the fragmented youth convergence across the COP processes limits the ability for youth to shape the policies and investments that will determine the systems they will not only inherit, but are currently experiencing.

This statement builds on the Global Flagship Initiative for Food Security's first statement, developed ahead of COP17, which outlined youth recommendations and expectations across finance, water, land, and food systems. Following the initial statement, the Flagship's co-chairs reaffirmed their commitment to translating consultation into genuine, meaningful partnership. Building on the initial consultation, the second global youth consultation was convened to examine the cross-cutting themes linking the three COPs.

The consultation reflects the voices of young leaders, practitioners, and organisations working in climate action, land restoration, food systems, and youth-led advocacy. This statement calls for moving from consultation to collaboration, recognising youth as holders of rights and knowledge and as decision makers committed to defining climate, land, biodiversity and food systems.

II. Key Messages

The Disconnect Between Negotiations and on-the-Ground Realities

Negotiation-Information-Implementation Gap: Participants emphasised that negotiations often reach agreement on the importance of climate finance and food security, but ambitions often fail to translate into practical solutions at the local level. This was attributed to the lack of access to



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data and information at the local governmental and community levels, making global decisions hard to turn into concrete commitments on the ground.

Resource Inequities: Participants highlighted a strategic disconnect in resource allocation and noted that funds often do not reach the areas where they are needed the most.

Youth Inclusion: Youth bring a unique perspective for implementation. While youth are often invited to speak, they lack a true seat at the negotiating table. They also lack long-term support, collaboration, and roles in decision-making and change.

Essential Structural and Policy Changes

Land Tenure as a Major Barrier: It was reiterated that youth lack land ownership and secure tenure. Without land as collateral, youth struggle to access the financing and credit necessary to lead food system transformation. Given that young people make up a significant share of the population, governments should create legal frameworks and opportunities that enable youth to own and securely access land.

Education: Participants called for the deeper integration of climate and food system themes into school curricula in order to reach those without existing family or professional ties to the sector.

Simplify Funding Mechanisms: Participants emphasised that current funding mechanisms are too complex, with short timelines and high requirements for previous institutional experience. Participants suggested that changes should include smaller, flexible grants with simplified requirements in order to support early-stage, community-level projects.

Inclusion of Marginalised Knowledge

Farmers' Organisations: Participants expressed that there is a lack of practical mechanisms to shape and prepare stakeholders for accessing finance. Farmers' organisations often receive very little or none of the financing, despite them providing considerable access to youth and rural areas. Work is needed on both the demand side (youth and Farmers' Organisations) and the supply side (financial institutions creating accessible products).

Transfer of Indigenous Knowledge: A participant shared that in Tanzania, efforts are being put into the inclusion of youth voices as well as the consideration of Indigenous knowledge in policies. However, it was reiterated that traditional and Indigenous knowledge is not being effectively passed on to younger generations, emphasising the need for stronger intergenerational knowledge transfer to build youth capacities.



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The Grassroots Perspective: Participants stressed the importance of including mechanisms at the grassroots level to ensure that women, Indigenous groups, and rural youth are not left out of the decision-making process.

The Impact of Youth-Led Work

Youth Network Advocacy and Declaration Development: Youth networks, such as the Kenya Indigenous Youth Network, have been successful in influencing outcomes regarding land rights, biodiversity, and climate justice. Youth participants have developed multiple declarations which will be presented at the upcoming UNCCD COP17. Participants affirmed that the most successful youth-led work moves beyond “participation” to actively shaping local, regional, and international policies, while simultaneously pushing for implementation.

Accountability Mechanisms

Youth and Community Monitoring: Participants suggested that youth should take on formal monitoring roles in the implementation of policies, to ensure that commitments made are tied to measurable targets, budgets and public reporting.

Future Generations Ombudsman: One specific proposal was the establishment of an independent advisory ombudsman for future generations. This role would give young people a mechanism to require governments to justify decisions that may affect future generations and, potentially, to challenge or prevent short-term decisions that could harm future generations.

Consequences for Non-Compliance: Participants suggested that community-led monitoring mechanisms could be useful. These mechanisms should include mandatory long-term impact assessments and clear consequences for governments or other institutions that fail to meet agreed commitments or directives.

Key Messages for the Triple COP

Youth as Rights-Holders, Not Beneficiaries: Often reiterated throughout the consultation was the need to recognise youth as active rights-holders, knowledge-holders, and leaders rather than passive beneficiaries. Young people know how they want to shape their future. They are not only the leaders of tomorrow; they are leaders today.

Move from Consultations to Real Partnerships: While consultations can be a useful tool for understanding needs, participants stressed the urgent need to shift towards active partnerships and implementation. Existing frameworks and methods should be strengthened rather than “reinventing the wheel” to avoid confusion, and increase impact on the ground.



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Youth in High-Profile Roles: Youth have high energy and generational experience, and this should be recognised as being just as important as traditional work experience. Therefore, policy changes should support youth in occupying more high-profile and decision-making roles.

Direct Access: The participants emphasised the need for youth to have direct access to resources, and simplified, more flexible, and dedicated long-term funding mechanisms to scale-up youth initiatives.

III. Conclusions

As the triple-COP year unfolds, young people call on governments, international institutions, development partners, financial institutions, the private sector, and civil society to recognise them as equal partners in advancing land restoration, addressing climate change, and transforming food systems.

The convergence of UNCCD, CBD, and UNFCCC presents an opportunity to move toward coherent, accountable action. Participants encourage the leadership of all three Conventions, along with governments, development partners, and civil society, to actively engage with this statement and work directly with young people in implementing the recommendations outlined here, including simplifying access to finance, securing land tenure, and integrating youth into formal monitoring and accountability structures.

The Global Flagship Initiative for Food Security is committed to carrying this dialogue beyond the triple-COP year by continuing to facilitate youth leadership, strengthen intergenerational knowledge transfer, and support the meaningful, long-term participation of youth in bringing resilience across land, climate, biodiversity and food systems for the future they will inherit.