



# UNLOCKING CONSUMER ACTION FOR FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION



**CONSUMERS  
INTERNATIONAL**

COMING TOGETHER  
FOR CHANGE

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Our food systems are failing to meet people's rights and needs. [Nearly 800 million people face](#) chronic hunger, [over three billion](#) cannot afford a nutritious diet, and [one in five deaths](#) globally are linked to unhealthy eating, one of the leading risk factors for non-communicable diseases. The impact on our environment is similarly devastating – food systems are responsible for [more than one-third](#) of global greenhouse gas emissions, and [over 85%](#) of biodiversity loss.

It is clear a fundamental transformation is needed in the way we produce, distribute, and consume food. Momentum for this change is growing, with 129 governments publishing [national pathways](#) as part of the UN Food Systems Summit process, and 160 heads of state [committing at COP28](#) to take action on food systems. Yet in practice, implementation remains narrowly focused on agricultural production; of the latest Nationally-Determined Contributions (NDCs) towards the Paris Agreement, [only five include measures addressing food consumption](#).

The value of transforming food consumption is huge. [According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#), demand-side strategies hold the potential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 40-70% globally, with dietary transition identified as the single most impactful demand-side action. Additionally, a shift to healthy and sustainable diets is estimated to be worth as much as [US\\$7 trillion per year](#) to the global economy.

This transition will not be straightforward – our relationships with food hold great cultural and personal significance, and the price of food can be a powerful driver for political discontent. Food systems transformation can therefore only be achieved successfully if consumers are included in decision-making at all levels (from local to global), ensuring that their rights and needs are upheld.



## ABOUT CONSUMERS INTERNATIONAL

Consumers International is the global membership organisation for consumer groups, bringing together more than 200 member organisations in over 100 countries, to work on the most urgent issues affecting consumers – from food, energy, and plastics, to fair finance and digital rights.

### **We represent the consumer voice on the global stage:**

- Through General Consultative Status at the United Nations, we are recognised as the consumer voice to the UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS), climate and biodiversity COPs, and more.
- Through a Memorandum of Understanding with the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and official relations with the World Health Organization (WHO).
- As co-lead of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) One Planet Network's Consumer Information Programme.
- As an observer to the Codex Alimentarius Commission on food standards.
- As part of the Coordination Committee of the Civil Society and Indigenous People's Mechanism (CSIPM) at the Committee on World Food Security (CFS).
- As a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Director-General's Civil Society Advisory Group.
- As a member of the UN Secretary General's Global Crisis Response Group (GCRG) food expert network.
- As part of the leadership group of the UNFSS action track on healthy and sustainable diets, and the resultant Coalition of Action on Healthy Diets from Sustainable Food Systems.
- And through the advisory committee of the Food Systems Call to Action initiative.



## THE POWER OF CONSUMER VOICE

All around the world, consumer advocates have a strong track record of driving food systems transformation. In 2019, we highlighted [‘How consumer organisations can contribute to sustainable food systems’](#), and in 2021 we partnered with the FAO to catalogue the global impact of [‘Consumer organizations in action’](#), advancing the universal right to food.

In 2021, with global food systems in crisis, we again worked closely with our members to develop an [‘Action Agenda for Future Food Systems’](#). The issues identified – protecting consumers in crisis, building fair food supply chains, transforming food environments, and achieving inclusive food systems governance – formed the basis of our ambitious new strategy.

In this publication, we aim to build on these previous outputs by sharing a sample of the work that Consumers International and our Members have been doing to achieve this vision, as well as outlining a roadmap for further action.

Consumers International aims to unlock the missing demand-side dimension of food systems transformation, aligning our member network to support high-level action, while building future food systems from the grassroots up. However, we can only achieve this in partnership with others, from farmers and businesses to governments and international organisations.





## OUR INTERVENTIONS



**Research for consumer interest** – consumer insights, testing and comparisons to improve the marketplace.



**Public awareness and consumer campaigns** – public awareness campaigns at national or international levels.



**Building bridges** – developing connections, dialogues, and partnerships across silos.



**Inclusive policy development** – influencing policy and standards making at national, regional, or international level.



**Innovation and adaptive decision-making** – supporting and building innovations, tools and business models based on consumer rights principles.



**Community engagement** – building systems change with and for communities around the world.

## SHAPING GLOBAL PRIORITIES IN RESPONSE TO FOOD CRISIS

As the interlocking impacts of conflict, climate crisis, and COVID-19 sent food and nutrition insecurity soaring worldwide, we were called upon by national members and global partners to provide leadership and shape solutions.

In partnership with the FAO in 2022, we convened multistakeholder dialogues in Kenya, Ecuador, and Indonesia, to identify critical actions needed to protect vulnerable consumers and promote resilient food systems. This, along with a survey of our global membership, formed the basis of our [Action Agenda for Future Food Systems](#), launched at COP27.

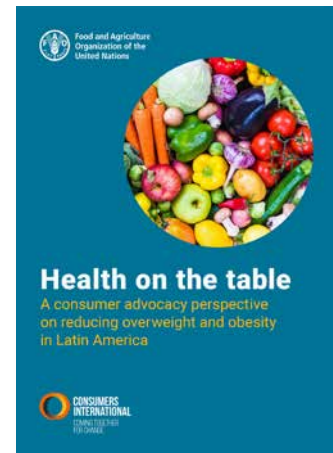
We brought consumer perspectives on the impact of food crisis – and the solutions required – to key global forums. From the UN Secretary-General's Global Crisis Response Group, to the WTO Director-General's Civil Society Advisory Group, and the multilateral Committee on World Food Security, where we are represented on the coordination committee of the Civil Society and Indigenous People's Mechanism.

## MOBILISING REGIONAL ACTION FOR HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE DIETS

Cross-country learnings, especially within regional contexts, are crucial to achieving effective action for healthy and sustainable diets. We worked with groups of members in South America and South Asia to scope innovative solutions and share these directly with key decision-makers.

Our [‘Health on the Table’](#) report, produced in partnership with the FAO and seven members across South America, developed a ‘Consumer-Centred Nutrition Framework’. It identified key levers for shifting diets, based on an analysis of best practices from public policy and innovative business models.

Ahead of the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit, we brought members in India and Bangladesh together with local public health experts and advocates to develop a series of recommendations on food environment policy. These findings were discussed with authorities from both countries at an online roundtable and shared through a dedicated side event at the summit.



## DRIVING RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY FOR FAIR FOOD PRICES

[Together with more than 20 members across Africa](#), we developed new tools for monitoring and analysing food prices in the context of unaffordability of healthy, sustainable and locally-produced foods. We also worked closely with competition authorities to shape and implement regulatory solutions.

**Research for consumer interest:** We developed a food price data monitoring and analysis mechanism for civil society, enabling low-cost tracking of prices at farmgate, wholesale, and retail level, and highlighting increasing price divergences for multiple commodities across three countries.

**Raising public awareness:** To build public support for action, we delivered a media campaign that reached 30+ million people in Kenya, Ghana, and Nigeria through major print, TV, and radio channels. We additionally established Fair Food Prices Coalitions in each country, convening over 200 organisations (including farmers, businesses, and community groups) to deliver direct outreach through trusted sources.

**Inclusive policy for consumers:** By partnering with competition authorities, and delivering a series of cross-government and multistakeholder convenings, we contributed to urgent regulatory responses in Nigeria, Kenya, and Zambia. We also laid foundations for further action in a wide range of countries.

## BUILDING CONSUMER-FARMER CONNECTIONS

Breaking down barriers between food producers and consumers is essential to delivering food systems transformation. This means improving the flow of information, building advocacy alliances, and even direct connections in the marketplace. We are working closely with farmers associations, both globally and locally, to lay the foundations for this transformative alliance.

**Building bridges across marketplace actors:** In 2021 we held a series of global farmer-consumer dialogues in partnership with the World Farmers' Organisation, enabling direct exchange and collaboration between our respective members all around the world. Building on this in 2023, we co-hosted a COP28 event with the World Rural Forum, on '[Connecting consumers and family farmers to tackle food and climate crises](#)', resulting in a joint call to action.

**Innovative and adaptive decision-making:** Also as part of the UN Food Systems Summit process, we co-led a sprint process to develop a '[Digital Marketplace Playbook](#)'. This mapped innovative supply chain models for connecting farmers and consumers more fairly and sustainably, and identified policy solutions that could facilitate the scaling up of such approaches.

## OUR ROADMAP FOR CHANGE

Together with our global member network and high-level partners, we have identified a set of issues where consumer action is most urgently needed to unlock demand-side transformation. These form the basis of our roadmap for action – combining high-level global advocacy with solutions-focused implementation initiatives – to be advanced in partnership with our Member Task Force and multistakeholder Expert Group:

- 1. STRENGTHENING CONSUMER VOICE IN FOOD SYSTEMS GOVERNANCE**
- 2. UNLOCKING HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE DIETS**
- 3. BUILDING RESILIENT AND REGENERATIVE FOOD SYSTEMS**
- 4. ENABLING FAIR FOOD TRADE AND MARKETS**

### STRENGTHENING CONSUMER VOICE IN FOOD SYSTEMS GOVERNANCE

Consumer advocates all around the world have achieved significant impact across multiple areas of food policy and practice. However, they are rarely engaged effectively in cross-cutting food systems decision-making. A concerted effort is needed to put demand-side transformation on the agenda of governments globally, creating pathways for implementation of specific solutions. **Our plan of action:**

- Build a consumer-led, multistakeholder campaign for the inclusion of demand-side action in key strategy documents on food, nutrition, and environment (such as NDCs, national biodiversity strategy and action plans, nutrition commitments, and national transformation pathways). Publicly monitor progress towards this goal around the world.
- Empower consumer organisations as ‘food systems champions’, providing them with the connections and capacity development needed to facilitate more impactful participation in national and global processes. From food environment policies and transformation pathways to climate negotiations and standards development (such as Codex Alimentarius).



## UNLOCKING HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE DIETS

Shifting global food consumption is one of the single most impactful actions we can take to protect people and planet. The Food Systems Economics Commission estimates that of the [US\\$10 trillion per year](#) that can be saved through transforming food systems, 70% can be attributed to dietary transition. Achieving this, however, requires serious engagement with the critical levers of availability, accessibility, and affordability. Information and nudges will not be enough. **Our plan of action:**



Transforming food systems can save up to **US\$10 trillion** per year, and **70%** of that can be attributed to dietary transition

- Connect consumer voices with government and business to champion 'quick wins' for improving food environments – including action on product reformulation, marketing regulation, procurement standards, and dietary guidelines.
- Identify best practices for making good food more available, accessible and affordable – from boosting purchasing power and shifting subsidies, to enabling innovative and inclusive supply chain models – and pilot implementation together with partners.

## BUILDING RESILIENT AND REGENERATIVE FOOD SYSTEMS

Action on food remains disproportionately focused on production. Solutions such as regenerative agriculture and agroecology can only achieve systemic change by integrating demand-side actions, encompassing how food is distributed and consumed. By 2050, [more than two-thirds](#) of the world's population will live in cities – actively engaging these consumers in future food supply chains can build resilience, circularity, and equity. **Our plan of action:**

- Map the demand-side dimensions of resilient local food systems, including solutions for connecting farmers and consumers in the marketplace, and the policies needed to facilitate this. Engage local governments and businesses to put these into practice.
- Convene key actors to navigate the tensions and trade-offs for consumers in circular food systems – balancing the need to reduce food loss and waste with challenges of food safety, affordability, and pollution – and shape innovative solutions that engage with the needs of the most vulnerable.

## ENABLING FAIR FOOD TRADE AND MARKETS

Food systems transformation is impossible while the rules of the game are stacked against people and planet. [Nearly 90%](#) of the US\$540 billion spent annually on agri-food subsidies are harmful to environmental and human health; and [inefficiencies and distortions in national markets](#) are making good food less affordable. Consumer and competition action can play a key role in remedying this situation.

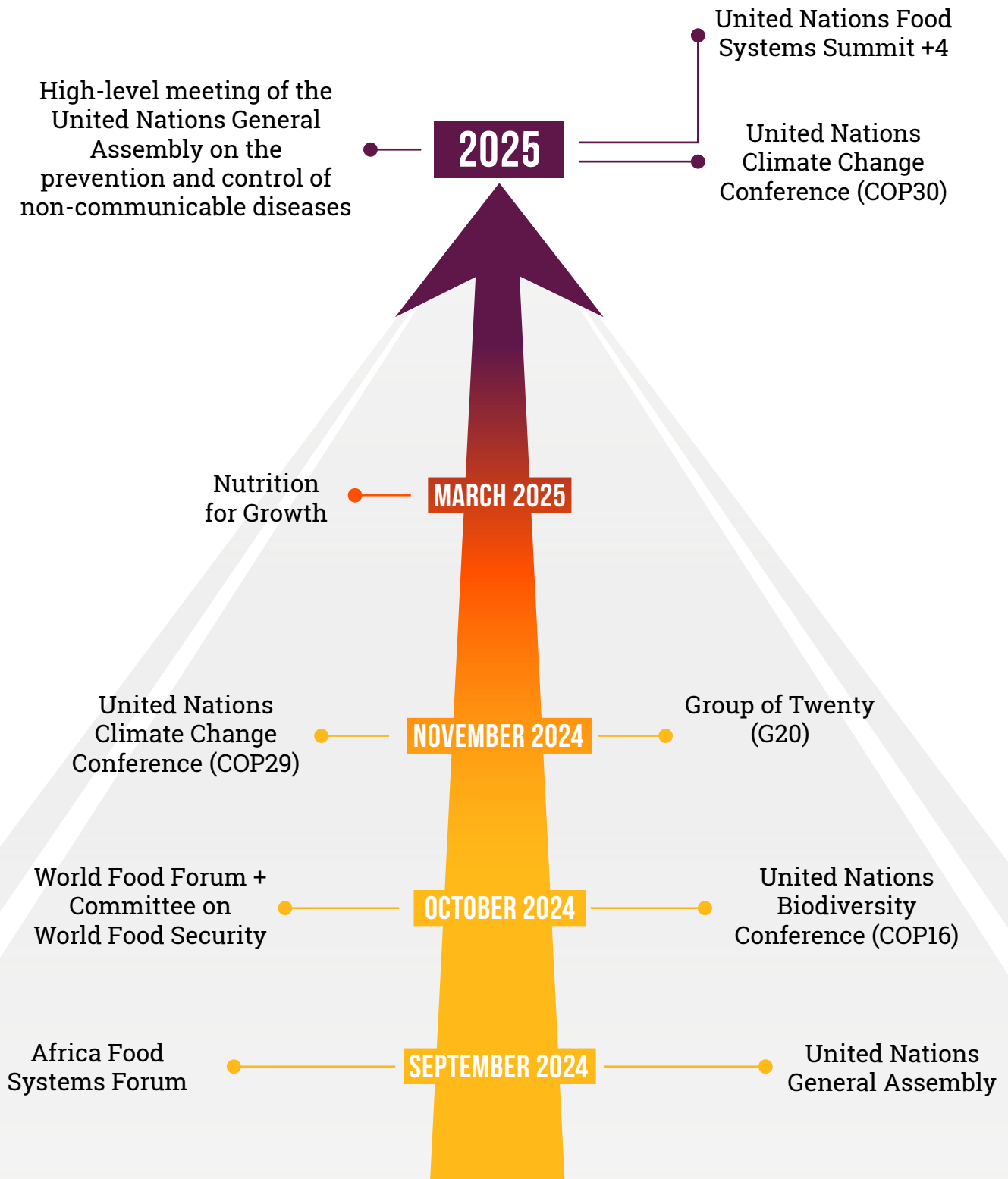
### **Our plan of action:**

- Scale up our work on [Fair Food Prices](#), empowering action from a wider range of national authorities, while building momentum for more consolidated action at global level, to ensure a diverse and competitive food marketplace.
- Mobilise the global consumer movement to drive action on subsidies, advocating for a shift in trade rules and fiscal policies, to centre the true cost of food systems to people and planet.



Nearly **90%** of the **US\$540 billion** spent annually on agri-food subsidies are harmful to environmental and human health

## UPCOMING MILESTONES





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Consumers International brings together over 200 member organisations in more than 100 countries to empower and champion the rights of consumers everywhere. We are their voice in international policy-making forums and the global marketplace to ensure they are treated safely, fairly and honestly.

Consumers International is a charity (No.1122155) and a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee (No. 04337865) registered in England and Wales.

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