



## MY MEETING NOTES

### WORLD FOOD FORUM 2024 October 14–18, 2024, Food and Agriculture Organization Rome, Italy



In this meeting note, Bhuvana and Aditya reflect on their experience participating in the World Food Forum (WFF) flagship event 2024.

#### BACKGROUND

The World Food Forum (WFF) 2024, held at the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) headquarters in Rome, Italy, from October 13–17, 2024, brought together nearly 8,000 delegates from around the world (researchers, innovators, and policymakers) to discuss the theme *"Good Food for All, for Today and Tomorrow."*



Our team – Bhuvana, Aditya, and Bhavya – was selected under Global Youth Action as finalists of the Transformative Research Challenge 2024 (TRC), a competition (Box 1) aimed at encouraging researchers to come up with innovative research ideas in the field of agricultural food systems. Our research idea focused on understanding stakeholder perceptions of India's transition to solar-powered irrigation within the broader context of the water-energy-food nexus.

World Food Day, the Rome Water Dialogue, and the Global Family Farming Forum were the major themes across one week of deliberations. This was a mega event consisting of close to 200 sessions across themes, and without attempting to be comprehensive in coverage, we would like to highlight our experiences, learnings, and major takeaway messages.

### BOX 1: Selection Process

The WFF advertises for the Transformative Research Challenge (TRC) every year through its [website](#). The advertisement includes the different focus areas for the competition, like health, plant breeding, water, etc. The teams can consist of three or more persons (aged below 35) and are required to submit a short research idea (like a concept note). Out of more than 1,000 applications, 50 teams were shortlisted based on the quality of the proposal, innovativeness, and scientific rigor. The selected teams were paired with mentors to refine their proposals.

In the second stage, expanded proposals, detailing the literature gap, expected contributions, methodology, etc., were submitted along with a short 2-minute video presentation (recorded and uploaded). Again, the proposals were evaluated by expert panels, shortlisting 20 teams from around the world to participate in the WFF weeklong event in Rome.



### KEY FOCUS AREAS

#### Youth Potential in Sustainable Agri-Food Systems

One of the key focuses of the deliberation was on harnessing and leveraging the potential of youth in bringing about a sustainable transition of food systems. Along this line, the FAO launched the [Four Betters Courses initiative](#)—better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life. FAO will collaborate with academia to use e-learning and FAO resources to promote education and innovation in agri-food systems. The [FAO Learning Academy](#) already has close to 600 courses offered free of cost, and with this new program, these will be integrated with the curricula of universities.

#### Water Scarcity in Agriculture

Water was also at the centre of discussions. The [Rome Declaration on Water Scarcity in Agriculture](#) was accepted by ministers, heads of delegations, and partners of the Global Framework on Water



Scarcity in Agriculture (WASAG). The declaration highlighted the urgency of action to address water scarcity, mitigate the worsening of the situation, and adapt measures in agriculture in response to water scarcity. There was also an emphasis on promoting scaling up the use and adoption of indigenous, nutritious, and drought-resilient crops, and we feel the EAS has an important role to play.



### Family Farming

Another interesting area of debate was family farming. During the WFF flagship event, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) launched the [Global Family Farming Forum](#), highlighting the importance of family farmers in bringing about a sustainable transition of agri-food systems. The discussions emphasized that family farmers, by their very nature, grow diverse crops, possess indigenous knowledge of the local agro-climate, and follow sustainable practices. However, the livelihoods of family farmers are not secure, more so due to the effects of climate change and price variations. The forum aims to develop a knowledge base on how to support family farmers and how to facilitate them through technologies, information, and institutions. Again, the EAS at large will have to play a key role in bringing family farming to the centre of the sustainable development of agriculture.

### Youth Action in Agri-Food System Transformation

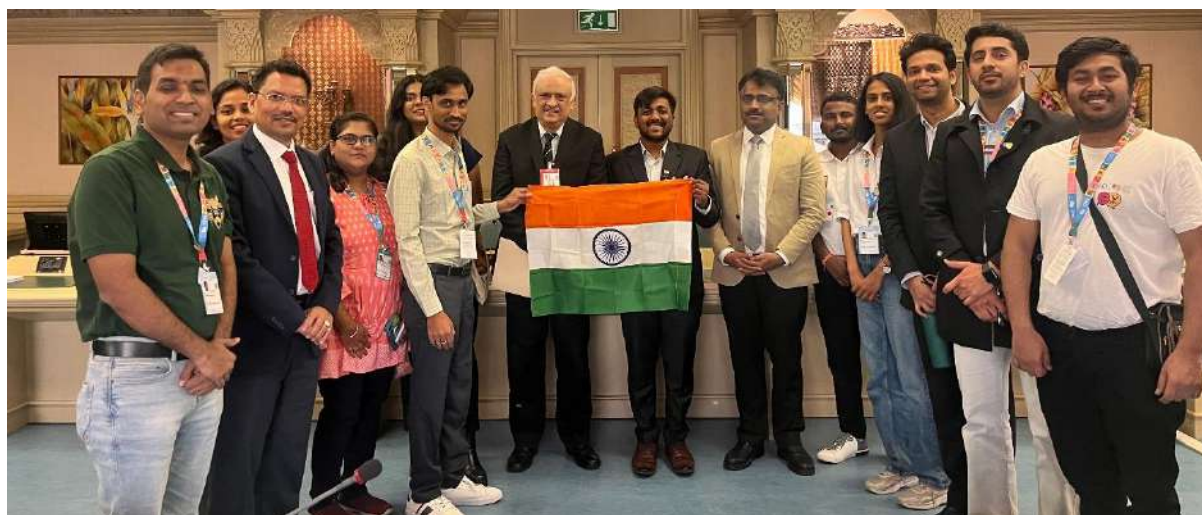
Agri-food system transformation through youth action was also a core component of the WFF flagship event. The *Youth Assembly* is a year-round program to engage youth across the globe on different issues related to food systems. In these thematic platforms, youngsters meet regularly and discuss pathways to address present-day challenges in food systems. The *WFF Youth Innovation Lab*, on the other hand, organizes different competitions like the Startup Innovation Award and the Transformative Research Challenge to encourage youth to come up with innovative ideas and solutions to challenges faced by agri-food systems.

### Science and Innovation Forum

WFF facilitated the Science and Innovation Forum, where the works and publications of the Tropical Agricultural Platform-Agricultural Innovation Systems (TAP-AIS) project of FAO were presented and displayed. FAO representative from Lao PDR, Chanthalath Pongamala, presented Lao's agriculture and rural advisory works under TAP-AIS.

### National Chapters Initiative

The event also featured discussions on National Chapters, an initiative aimed at formulating country-specific strategies for agri-food system transformation. India's participation was notable, with delegates from the Indian Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare engaging in multi-stakeholder dialogues. Dr. Devesh Chaturvedi, Secretary of the Ministry, interacted with Indian youth and students presenting their ideas and innovations to a global audience. He highlighted India's contributions to global food security and the government's efforts to promote agricultural startups and innovation through platforms like the Global Family Farming Forum, the FAO Hand-in-Hand Investment Forum, and other FAO events.



The National Chapter discussions emphasized the importance of adapting approaches to each country's unique context while promoting global collaboration. Participants explored steps to achieve more sustainable agri-food systems, focusing on shared initiatives to address contemporary agricultural challenges. This platform provided an opportunity for countries to showcase their progress, exchange best practices, and align their national strategies with global goals for food security and sustainable agriculture.

The WFF also highlighted the role of Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services (EAS) in driving sustainable agri-food system transformations and addressing contemporary agricultural challenges.

These include:

- Driving youth engagement in agriculture through innovative methodologies and digital technologies;
- Promoting water-efficient practices to address scarcity challenges;
- Supporting family farmers by blending indigenous knowledge with sustainable practices;
- Prioritizing climate change adaptation strategies;
- Embracing and promoting innovative technologies like solar-powered irrigation systems to enhance productivity and sustainability;
- Facilitating cross-border knowledge exchange and adaptation of best practices.

## OUR LEARNINGS

For early-career researchers like us, it was a wonderful platform to listen to the deliberations on various themes, identify the priority areas, and learn from the experiences of other countries and regions. Specifically, to point out a few, we see a focus on developing capabilities at the regional level through various activities of WFF. The youth action platform, through various programs, aims to develop capabilities and leadership skills to play a key role in food system transformation across regions, while National Chapters aim to develop region-specific plans and catalyse change by coordinating with different stakeholders in their specific countries.

Our other observation is with respect to the emphasis on family farms: literature has an extensive focus on small and marginal farmers, but during the event, we observed a lot of interest in examining family farms.

Another key highlight across all the deliberations is the recognition of the need to consider a holistic approach to include all relevant stakeholders to accelerate the sustainable food system transition.

For us, in addition to these learnings, it was a great platform to network with both early-career researchers like us and global leaders in our fields. We hope to build on these learnings and continue to play a role in generating relevant research knowledge to drive the agrifood system transformation in India.

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