

Hello, I am Earlene Cruz, the Director of Kitchen Connection, an Adjunct Professor at New York University, and have the pleasure of serving on the Youth Steering Committee of the United Nations Department of Global Communications Civil Society Unit, where I focus on driving efforts around youth supporting SDG 2. I want to extend a special thank you to the Unit and to NGLS for this invitation.

Esteemed colleagues in the field have alluded to and rightfully have addressed many specific and tangible ways that we can work together to tackle this challenge of increasing global hunger in a multi-sectoral yet unanimous way.

We know that hunger and food insecurity are not the same and that quality foods and quantity thereof can be mutually exclusive: no region of the world is excluded — at the same time that we have over-nutrition, we have undernutrition, with obesity growing at higher rates than overweight, which further increases the risk for diabetes, heart disease, cancer and non-communicable diseases, to date accounting for more preventable deaths than any other diseases and equating to over 68% of deaths globally — but the link between food insecurity and health is not often made.

In Small Island Developing States (SIDS), there is a shift away from traditional diets as a result of consumer demand for ultra-processed foods and climate change, which is leading to a decrease in farmland and arable land. In SIDS, obesity rates are as high as 50%, leading to growing mortality rates and an increase in preventable diseases.

Sustainable farming needs to be more attractive and economically rewarding, but it has to happen in the developed world, too, where often only 10% or less of the population engages in farming practices, with disproportionate production shifts towards Big Food Companies, further increasing the risk for NCDs. Farmers need economic incentives to move away from mono-cropping and commodity-dependence, which discourages biodiversity. 90% of all edible crops have been forgotten. We count on chefs and farmers to remind us of and to help us rediscover ancient grains, many of which are climate-resilient. A sustainable agricultural system for smallholder farmers will decrease their desire to move to urban areas, which further pressures the global supply of food.

Consumer demand will indeed shift the needle on production — production needs to increase but *what* is produced is key: there is a gap between what is wasted and what needs to be cultivated to feed a growing population, expected to be at 11 billion by 2050. While agricultural production needs to increase by up to 50% to meet demand, up to 30% of all food is wasted, with food loss pre-production being a bigger source of waste in the developing world, contributing heavily as well to climate change, which has a symbiotic relationship with the food system. In fact, if Food Waste with a capital F and capital W were a country, we know that it would be the third largest emitter of greenhouse gases. Similar to the way in which the West needs to eat less meat, but Africa can use more of it, there needs to be a global balance, incorporating and strongly looking at this through a systems-wide lens, acknowledging the way in which our consumption patterns are, in fact, connected. Some produce too little: others waste too much. Some eat too much; others have too little, and it is, in fact part of one large system, which we, as a society, need to begin to see as such. What we do on one side of the planet truly does affect what happens on the other.

Ahead of the Food Systems Summit next year, my plea is on behalf of Civil Society, advocating for a strong investment in nutritional education — here, technology and digitalization are key. We have a very strong opportunity to educate in a way that is approachable, in a way that can go “viral.” It is about policy interventions that focus on the health of its people over or at the same time as GDP — from the reduction of advertisements to children, to policies that ensure that companies are reducing the levels of salt, sugar, and fat in their products, there is a need for cross-cutting initiatives that positively link the farmer to the consumer. Not every intervention works universally, and we do have to consider the idiosyncratic nature of regional food systems, but we also don't have to reinvent the wheel.

We saw policy successes in China, which through more allocation of land to the poor among other policies saw poverty rates drastically decrease from 81% in 1981 to .7% in 2015 with higher growth in the agricultural sectors. Due to high levels of inequality, a reduction in poverty rates does not always equate to increasing nutritional capacities, which should also be taken into consideration.

Brazil, with coordinated cash transfers, school feeding, access to health, and family farming, greatly reduced hunger rates. In 1997, Korea and Sri Lanka, separately but simultaneously implemented a public works program to help the unemployed have temporary jobs and rebuild community with basic infrastructure. Through the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme established in 2005, India employed farmers in the lean season as a way to stabilize their incomes and to smooth their consumption all year long. In the 1980s, Costa Rica moved away from commodity dependence, exporting non-traditional items like pineapples, cut flowers, shrimps, and textiles versus traditional ones like bananas and coffee; this contributed to a growth in the service sector, leading to an increase in

tourism revenue, with a strong focus on the education of its people. In the 2000s, Senegal, Sao Tome & Principe connected smallholder farmers with markets by allowing them to create cooperatives, increasing capacity and production by exporting their commodities so that they had more income to diversify their diets. Lesotho established a Child Grant Programme connecting social protection and agriculture innovation by establishing a national cash transfer program, giving children home gardening and nutrition kits and training, especially in households affected by drought.

My plea is also for public health advocates to consider the interests of the private sector in order to find commonalities and potential intersections among their work. *It is possible* to be profitable while also being good for the planet. *It is possible* to be prosperous while also supporting people and human capital. We, as public health advocates, need to have resources in order to make the change - the nutrition transition is happening so starkly because of the power and scale of businesses; their extensive supply chains can only be combatted by ones of similar scale and grandeur. Thus, we need less competition and more collaboration. We need to speak the language of the private sector, and to make sure that Big Businesses are aware that if they continue to do business as usual, contributing to an increase in non-communicable diseases and preventable mortality, that they could have the customers, whose loyalty they have worked hard to gain, for 20 years less.

As an adjunct-professor at New York University, I have the pleasure of working with extremely passionate students around this subject who never fail to teach me, too. This semester, I co-lead a course looking at conflict, climate change, and economic downturns and how the global food insecurity crisis is leading to the double burden of malnutrition, exacerbating the current NCD crisis.

The students' final presentations took place here at the United Nations this past Friday where they shared their practical solutions to these challenges with UN experts using a social entrepreneurial and human-centered-design approach. The proposed solutions ranged from precision agricultural technologies using drones, to the fortification of micro-financing institutions, hydroponics and cooking classes as nutritional educational intervention programs. Now, imagine if these youth and thousands of others around the world were not only listened to but supported, financially encouraged to pursue these careers, over those which often pay more.

It requires a systems-wide approach, and it begins with us, right here, in this room. We need to recognize where there are challenges, particularly for vulnerable groups like children, indigenous communities, and women, looking at these as gaps and opportunities, so that we are not just operating in silos, but instead open to understanding the motivations of one another before coming to a mutual consensus. It is not only about attending high-level conferences throughout the year and speaking about it; it is about remembering who we are working for each and every day; it is about humanizing the problem, in order to find human-centered solutions at a global scale.

Thank You.