

The Next Gen(d)eration of Leaders for a Well-Nourished World Initiative

Powering courageous leadership practices in nutrition and food systems

Summary

Next Gen(d)eration of Leaders for a Well-Nourished World is a new initiative that builds on the experience of professional women working in the field of nutrition and food systems.

Currently led by a Task team of 12 women, the initiative started with a survey of 60 women from all over the world. After collective discussion and engagement with existing, complementary, leadership initiatives, it is now undertaking its inaugural activities with the ambition of reaching thousands more leaders at all levels committed to applying a set of what we are terming “courageous leadership practices.”

Our purpose is to create a leadership movement towards a well-nourished world.

We believe that transforming what the world eats requires transformations in leadership. By transformations, we mean shifting power to those who apply leadership practices crucial for change (see Box). Applying these practices is not easy; in fact, structural barriers mean they are the hard path. This is especially true for women, given their efforts to assert them are all too often held back. We want to see the power that women already have achieve greater influence in decision-making towards a well-nourished world.

What are courageous leadership practices?

1. Prioritising social purpose
2. Deviating from the norm
3. Listening & showing curiosity
4. Clear & consistent communication
5. Lifting others up
6. Patience and adaptation
7. Regular self-reflection

Our activities will focus on advancing the application of leadership practices at all levels to enable more impactful decision-making in nutrition and food systems.

Our solution is to provide transition pathways towards the widespread adoption of these leadership practices, pathways that many - of all genders - can commit to taking, forming a movement to tackle structural barriers together. Our strategic priorities are designed to establish these pathways, each working to complement the other.

Strategic Priority 1. *Create the forums and tools to build the collective power to navigate and disrupt structural barriers.* We will prioritise providing inclusive, safe spaces for conversations where women can give each other courage and honest feedback, championing and learning from each other. We will create resources and tools to guide decision-makers who may not be aware of how to most effectively ally with women, shifting them towards applying these leadership practices.

Strategic Priority 2. *Create visibility for leadership practices and those who practice them.* Many people working in nutrition and food systems, especially women, are applying these practices. But these women are often invisible, allocating less time to pushing themselves forward. We will prioritise activities designed to make the invisible visible, so elevating women to positions of greater power while inspiring others to join the pathways.

Strategic Priority 3. *Create knowledge about the leadership problem and the proposed solution.* At this stage, our articulation of the leadership solution remains a hypothesis, emerging from our own experience, observation and reflection. We thus want to generate more evidence about the role leadership practices play in our ability to achieve a well-nourished world.

Our primary audiences are decision-makers in nutrition and food systems across all genders and professional women navigating the challenging terrain of leadership at all levels. We are committed to advancing the latent, unrealised potential of this leadership. With major international initiatives like the UN Food Systems Summit, and the greater attention paid to all forms of malnutrition in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the time to transform leadership is now.

The Next Gen(d)eration of Leaders for a Well- Nourished World Initiative
Facilitating Powering courageous leadership practices in nutrition and food systems
Draft Strategy 2021-2026. March 5 2021

Who we are

“Next Gen(d)eration of Leaders for a Well-Nourished World” is a new initiative that builds on the experience of professional women working in the field of nutrition and food systems. Currently led by a Task team of 12 women, the initiative started with a survey of 60 women from all over the world. After collective discussion and engagement with existing, complementary, leadership initiatives, it is now undertaking its inaugural activities with the ambition of reaching thousands more leaders at all levels committed to applying a set of what we are terming “courageous leadership practices.”

Our purpose

Our purpose is to create a leadership movement towards a well-nourished world. We are driven by a vision of courageous leadership practices being applied at all levels to effectively tackle malnutrition and diet-related ill-health, equitably and sustainably, across food systems and beyond, no longer held back by structural barriers.

Our principles

We believe that transforming diets, and the food systems and inequalities influencing them, requires transformations in leadership. By transformations, we mean shifting power to those who apply leadership practices we believe are crucial for change in this complex, multi-sectoral space (Box). We believe that spaces must be created to provide room for this power to grow. Given the right support and environment, anyone can apply their radical power to leading in this way. But applying these practices is not easy; in fact, structural barriers mean they are the hard path. We thus call these “courageous leadership practices.” The challenges are particularly significant for women, whose power to apply these practices is so often thwarted. Tackling structural barriers to ensure women can lead and making their voices and decisions count will be vital to transformations in leadership.

Taking the hard path: what are courageous leadership practices?

More analysis is needed to understand the leadership practices for positive change in nutrition and food systems. However, drawing on our experience, we have collated the following practices which form the working, evolving, set of leadership practices guiding our work. Our principle is that all of these practices must be applied in synergy in mutual support of each other.

Practice 1. Making decisions guided by social purpose. Leadership must involve a relentless drive to achieve the outcome we want to achieve, meaning the decisions we make everyday must be guided the goal of better nutrition and food systems, and the policies, governance, and institutions to support that, not just what is expected by our institutional structures.

Practice 2. Deviating from the norm to act with ambition. This must be part of our everyday practice. Finding the radical power in ourselves, daring to imagine a different way of doing even when faced with structural barriers, sharing bold ideas even when imperfect, having hard conversations, and living with the discomfort that putting this into practice creates.

Practice 3. Listening and curiosity. Being inclusive of diversity is vital to make progress. Leaders must create participatory spaces for listening to those with whom they work and diverse sets of stakeholders rather than only pushing their own solution. They must listen to understand the positions of others, even where they disagree, and show curiosity for what lies beneath different perspectives. They must interpret what they hear and make sound judgements of what and who to listen to.

Practice 4. Communicating clearly and consistently. Since the ways forward are often uncertain, consistent communication is key. Transparent communication is needed for leaders to build trust and effective, inclusive collaborations. Leaders must not shy away from showing vulnerability by sharing their own fears and hopes.

Practice 5. Lifting others up. Leaders with shared purpose should lift each other up for a collective journey, even where they disagree on issues of style and content, recognizing purpose is more likely to be achieved by collaborating in partnerships and coalitions.

Practice 6. Patience and adaptation. The path is hard. We must be patient when navigating the conflicts that emerge in the complex waters of contemporary leadership practices, including with those who apply them. Those who use those practices must be patient with those who apply different practices and adapt to create space for them. This will require emotional intelligence.

Practice 7. Regular self-reflection, personally and professionally. Leaders must reflect on their progress to learn from what is working and what is not. When things go wrong, or they make mistakes, they must reflect on their own role and understand the true source of the problem. They must use this to know themselves, styles and strengths.

Our reason for existing

Our initiative was established to address two problems, rarely considered together.

- Efforts to tackle one of the great challenges of our time – diet-related ill-health – are insufficiently effective. Child and maternal malnutrition are the leading risk factors for healthy years life lost globally; dietary factors are the second largest cause of global deaths for women and third for men, largely due to link with noncommunicable diseases. The burden of these problems falls disproportionately on the world’s more vulnerable people. The systems that produce and sell our food are geared towards generating calories and cash rather than nourishing people. They are also not socially sustainable, built on the labour of millions of people, largely women, who remain the poorest. Nor are they environmentally sustainable (e.g., they are responsible for 35% of greenhouse gas emissions).
- Leadership is practiced every day in nutrition and food systems, largely by women, who go about their everyday practices producing and providing food throughout the food system, acquiring and preparing food at home. It is practiced everyday by nutritionists, researchers, civil society advocates, and programme managers, who are taking initiative, showing courage, openly communicating and collaborating while navigating conflicts. Yet our observation is that these practices (Box) are often un-credited and under-recognized and have less power of influence on decision-making. Our experience is that when we apply these practices, we – often, but not only, women – face frustrations, barriers and struggles. Our mistakes are treated more harshly. Approaches that challenge the status quo are pushed back; and the pressure is high to adopt more standard contemporary leadership practices in order to succeed. Structural inequities limit our ability to apply courageous leadership practices, resulting in women’s voices being missed from higher-level decision-making processes. Our hypothesis is that this is limiting our collective ability to create a well-nourished world.

With major international initiatives like the UN Food Systems Summit, and greater attention being paid to all forms of malnutrition (obesity and undernutrition) in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, now is the time to be breaking down the barriers that impede the courageous leadership practices from taking power for impactful and equitable decision-making on pressing food system issues.

Our solution

We applaud and admire the leaders who adopt these practices who are breaking down barriers to change. They – often women – inspire us all. But it needs to go beyond those inspiring individual leaders with their immense courage and skill. We need to make it broader, for leaders at every level at scale. These leaders need a space to act differently and practice entrepreneurialism without being punished or demeaned.

Our solution is to provide transition pathways towards the widespread adoption of these leadership practices, pathways that many - of all genders - can commit to taking, forming a movement to tackle structural barriers together. ***The strategic goal of the Next Gen(d)eration of Leaders for a Well Nourished World Initiative is thus to advancing the application of courageous leadership practices at all levels through tackling structural barriers to more impactful decision-making in nutrition and food systems.*** Our strategic priorities are designed to establish this pathway, each working to complement the other.

Our strategic priorities

Our first strategic priority is ***to create the forums and tools to build the collective power to navigate and disrupt structural barriers.***

The transition pathway will be full of potholes, closed gates, slippery mud, and bad weather. Lifting each other up as we face these hurdles is much more likely to mean we can overcome them. It is much more likely we will be able to find ways to come together to build our collective power in addressing them. Contemporary culture means many of us feel our own struggles are due to personal inadequacy

rather than structural barriers. We will thus prioritise providing inclusive, safe spaces for conversations where women can give each other courage and honest feedback, championing and learning from each other. This will also act to bring people together with different roles in nutrition and food systems, providing an opportunity to identify how to work more coherently together. We will create resources and tools to guide decision-makers who may not be aware of how to most effectively ally with women, shifting them towards applying these leadership practices. For example, targeting senior men and women with guidance on allyship and how to evolve existing structures to prepare the path for the next generation of leaders and identifying when and how to “pass the baton.” This will also ensure that as a new generation of leaders come to bear in the future, there are lessons learned on how they can “pass the baton” to others.

Our second strategic priority is ***to create visibility for courageous leadership practices and the people who practice them.***

Many people working in nutrition and food systems are applying these practices, especially women. These women are able to step up and participate in decision-making and influencing processes, such as expert groups, advisory councils, conference panels and lead authors. But these women are often invisible, allocating less time to pushing themselves forward. Shining a light on the people trying to take this pathway will reveal who they are, the struggles they face, and the ways they have tried to keep going. It will act to hold us all accountable for finding ways to applying these practices. We will thus prioritise activities designed to make the invisible visible, elevating women who apply these practice to positions of greater power while inspiring others to join the pathway. We will place particular emphasis on women from low- and middle-income countries where structural barriers can be even higher.

Our third strategic priority is ***to create knowledge about the leadership problem and the proposed solution.*** At this stage, our articulation of the leadership solution (and the leadership problem) remains a hypothesis, emerging from our own experience, observations and reflection. It is not yet informed by data. We know from experience that evidence is vital to fully understand the nature of problems and from there identify solutions. We thus plan to prioritise the generation of evidence about the role leadership practices play in the ability to achieve a well-nourished world. We want to know more about if and how courageous leadership practices can make a difference, the most critical structural barriers, and the gender imbalance in senior leadership in nutrition and food systems. While we know from experience that imperfect knowledge is no excuse not to act, we must hold ourselves accountable to not fall back on assumptions that need more testing to hold up. More clarity about the nature of the problem and solution will help guide us along the path.

In taking this forward,, we will be complemented by an existing range of leadership initiatives designed to encourage and sustain leadership in nutrition, global health and food systems. These include the African Nutrition Leadership Programme and associated programmes in Europe and Oceania, LilaNut in Latin America, Women Lift, Women Leaders in Planetary Health and Women Lead Food. These leadership initiatives do important work building leadership skills, mentoring and networking, largely focused on developing leadership capacity at the individual level. Our initiative will add to these ongoing efforts with a sustained focus to breaking down the structural barriers to leadership practices in the field of nutrition and food systems with a gender lens. We will support, champion and where possible collaborate and partner with the work of these existing initiatives.

Our audience

Our primary audiences are twofold: decision-makers of all genders in the position of breaking down the structural barriers and changing their own practices; and senior- and mid-career professional women currently navigating the structural barriers to applying these leadership practices. It will also seek to inspire and provide pathways for early-career professionals.

Our activities

Our four core activities will serve to advance our strategic priorities for 2021-2026 in synergy:


1. Storytelling by women to bring *visibility* and generate *knowledge* of experience as well as be a source of people to involve in the collective network and include in the database.
2. Creating a collective forum of women in leadership at all levels supporting and empowering each other in navigating their everyday professional lives in applying courageous leadership practices, lessons gleaned from others and *tools* developed
3. To create *visibility*, a database of women working in nutrition and food systems committed to applying these leadership practices and willing to step up to influence policy and practice. The database will be openly accessible for all and have a series of criteria for entry, including commitment to the leadership practices, and willingness to be part of the collective network.
4. Establishing a funding stream to create capacity to generate *knowledge* products and *tools*. Priority knowledge products for better understanding the challenges women face to applying courageous leadership practices and identifying the nutrition and food system spaces where women, and courageous leadership practices, are under-represented.

As a small task team of 12, with 11 of us with existing work commitments, we need to be strategic about using our limited capacity and resources effectively. We are thus prioritising three actions to get us started:

- Initiating the collective network by facilitating and managing forums. To begin to build a leadership collective, we will organise forums to gauge needs and experiment formats that might work well for women ‘in the field’ so that they can hear from others, share their own experiences, lessons and successes. By creating a safe space for reflection and sharing, there will be opportunities for increased visibility, identification of tools or resources, and development of knowledge.
- Beginning to build more knowledge through a ‘this is how our world looks’ survey. Conducting a survey of the challenges women face to applying courageous leadership practices; the spaces that women struggle to apply them; asking what they need to overcome these challenges; and gauging their interest in being part of a collective network and a database. This will start with the 50 women already surveyed and snowball out from that and will also act as a baseline metric from which to measure progress.
- Using a communications forums to kick-off our storytelling. Telling the stories of women working in nutrition and food systems about their experience of contemporary leadership practices and structural barriers holding them back; and of men who have been allies in breaking down the structural barriers. Communications (TBD) will feature positive stories of commitment to courageous leadership practices and navigating structural barriers, and understanding how they vary between country contexts. This will create visibility, generate knowledge of experience, and serve to communicate the initiative to a broader audience of decision-makers of all genders working in nutrition and food systems.

Summary: Our theory of change

Many of us are frustrated that the leadership practices we want to use and apply in our work are being held back; our theory is that when unleashed, collectively they would create the leadership needed to effect change.



The problem we are trying to solve	Our key audience	Our entry point to reach our key audience	The steps we will take to bring about change	The intended impacts in 5 years	The potential intangible benefits in 5 years	The long-term vision
Unrealised potential leadership to address nutrition and food systems and lack of women in leadership (decision-making) positions who already apply these practices	Senior- and mid-career professional women working in nutrition and food systems Decision-makers (all genders) in nutrition and food systems able to break down the structural barriers to application of the leadership practices	Our own networks, snowballing out from there, plus visible communications (website, podcasts)	Create networks and tools Create visibility Create knowledge	- Key leadership practices valued and used more frequently across all decision-makers in nutrition and food systems to support courageous decision-making - Greater perceptions of the power in decision-making by the women involved	Barriers to the application of courageous leadership practices are lower so enabling them to thrive	A leadership movement towards a well-nourished world in which leadership at all levels are applying courageous practices to make decisions that effectively tackle malnutrition and diet-related ill-health, equitably and sustainably, across food systems and beyond