



**ACHIEVING  
A WELL-  
NOURISHED**



**WORLD: A Manifesto  
for Leadership**

*from the* **Next Gen(D)eration Leadership Collective**

We recognise that the views and beliefs expressed in this Manifesto reflect our own experiences.

We recognise and value that people have diverse experiences and are often situated in different contexts than our own.



**This Manifesto was prepared by the Next Gen(D)eration Task Team:**

Corinna Hawkes, Shu Wen Ng, Rebecca Namara, Kathryn Backholer, Elaine Borazon, Namukolo Covic, Ana Clara Duran, Purnima Menon, Anne Marie Thow, Carmen Torres Ledezma. We thank Neena Prasad and ChangeMakers Connect forum attendees who contributed towards informing on the leadership practices and ideas reflected in this document through conversations held from 2020 into early-2022. We would also like to thank Heidi Fritschel for editing the text so skillfully and Emily Busey for her commitment and expertise on the graphics and design. We acknowledge Bloomberg Philanthropies for providing seed funding to support the efforts of this Collective.

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## Transforming nutrition and food systems depends on transforming leadership



Solutions to poor-quality diets and inequitable, unsustainable food systems exist—what is missing is the leadership needed to put these solutions to work.

Accelerating progress towards a well-nourished world is going to take courageous leadership capable of navigating complex, systemic challenges; it will mean unleashing the power of women to redefine leadership and reimagine new systems.

**This is our Manifesto for transforming *how* we lead and *who* leads.**

*Despite growing calls to reform  
our food systems for the sake  
of human and planetary  
health, things aren't  
getting much better.  
Indeed, they are  
arguably getting  
worse.*



# Why a Manifesto?

In 2020, we—a group of women working in public health, food policy, food systems and nutrition—began a series of conversations about leadership. We shared the frustration that, despite growing calls to reform our food systems for the sake of human and planetary health, things aren't getting much better. Indeed, they are arguably getting worse. Without accelerated progress, inequalities and injustices in global diets will continue to perpetuate human suffering and planetary destruction. We recognized that the status quo is not working for most and that deep, systemic change is needed. With the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, the failings of our food systems came into greater relief and bolstered our motivation to act.

In talking to each other we realised we shared a powerful belief that the changes the world needs—reformed systems in support of a well-nourished world—will require a transformation in leadership.

Despite our diverse contexts, career stages and personalities, we discovered our experiences of leadership were remarkably similar. We found that the many challenges rooted in the economic, social, cultural, and political systems in which we live and work prevent us from leading in the ways we believe will bring accelerated change.

As we connected with a larger group of women around the world in our ChangeMaker Connect Forums,<sup>1</sup> we felt bolder, more powerful, less alone. We became inspired by each other's stories of changes, of coalition-building and collective action. As we voiced our experiences in open and transparent discussions, we found we shared an understanding of the leadership practices needed to effect change. We began to see that we, as women, could build on our collective experience to lead the way. We agreed that making transformative change to poor diets and inequitable, unsustainable food systems across the world requires transforming how we—the community of people working in nutrition and food systems—lead and who within that community has the power to lead. We shared the belief that together with allies we could build a movement to achieve this transformation on a wide scale.

This Manifesto is a call for and a commitment to transforming *how* we lead and *who* leads. A Manifesto for leading together for a well-nourished world.

# Transforming how we lead

Through our discussions, the Next Gen(D)eration Leadership Collective came to a shared vision of what leadership needs to look like to rise to the complex challenges of achieving a well-nourished world. (See figure.)

We identified the leadership practices—the things we can actually do in our everyday leadership at whatever level we are—needed to push towards systemic and sustainable change. We identified, too, the differences we believe they can make.

The practices are drawn from existing evidence and our own experiences of leadership, grounded in our daily work and lives. They reflect existing understandings of the leadership needed to change complex systems.<sup>2</sup> All eight practices are interconnected, and all are equally important.

*The practices are drawn from existing evidence and our own experiences of leadership, grounded in our daily work and lives.*

## Eight courageous leadership practices for a well-nourished world

Convert commitments into action



Tackle power hierarchies to unleash innovation



Navigate through conflicts



Address fragmented governance to align solutions



# What leadership needs to do to accelerate progress towards a well-nourished world

Experience and evidence show that to create systemic change to tackle poor-quality diets and inequitable, unsustainable food systems, courageous leadership is needed at all levels to:

**Change the economic, political, and institutional imperatives that prevent commitments from being converted into action.**

Many people, organizations, and institutions say they are committed to achieving healthier diets for all and transforming food systems; others appear not to care. For both groups, organizational demands and economic and political imperatives get in the way of prioritising the goal of improving diets and the systems that underpin them—let alone taking action that will really bring results. Even among those passionate about making change, turf wars, egos, institutional metrics, and ideological arguments can distract us. **Prioritising social purpose in decision-making** and **persisting by learning and adapting** will be vital to rising to this challenge.

**Tackle the power hierarchies and dynamics holding back transformative ideas and innovations.**

New ways of doing things and bold ideas will be essential to transform the global diet and the way our food systems function. Diverse expertise, transformative ideas, and innovations are key. Deeply rooted power structures and established norms are holding back the potential to tap into and implement ideas from a larger collective. These structures do little to elevate the voices and decision-making power of a broader diversity of leaders. **Deviating from the norm** and **lifting others up** are ways of leading that can work to unleash the needed innovation.

**Navigate across the diverse perspectives and conflict inherent in complex systems.**

The interconnected nature of causes and solutions and the diversity of perspectives on those solutions inevitably create complexity. Engaging with different perspectives is hard. Conflict is exhausting, even when constructive. It is tempting to fall back on what we are accustomed to or favour silver-bullet solutions that may “work” in the short term but do little to shift systems. The temptation to elevate our own views above those of people who advocate solutions we disagree with—or to give in—is strong. If we are to work out what to change and how, we need to embrace, not avoid, the complexity involved, requiring leadership that **listens with curiosity** and **prioritises reflection, both individually and collectively**.

**Address fragmented governance and siloed ways of working that get in the way of aligning solutions for collective impact.**

Experience tells us that making progress will take effective action by a wide range of sectors and entities. Real change will take place only when all relevant stakeholders are pulling in the same direction towards social purpose. Collective efforts that draw on the contributions and creativity of multiple stakeholders are key. At present, the system is fragmented. People work in silos with their own metrics and objectives, often competing for scarce resources or creating an unhelpfully competitive environment. **Connecting with others for collective action** and **speaking openly and authentically** will be central to aligning solutions for collective impact.



# Prioritise social purpose

## The practice

How will our actions and decisions help achieve a well-nourished world? This question is at the core of leading with social purpose. Social purpose means making change to benefit society, not merely to meet organizational, economic, or career goals. Grounded in vision and focused on results, leadership guided by purpose involves making tough choices about what to do and how to get it done, aligning internal and external colleagues in the same direction, and allocating time, money, and skills to that purpose. It does not mean just saying we care; it means putting social purpose first, communicating it, and working ambitiously and collectively to achieve it.

***Leadership guided by purpose does not mean just saying we care; it means putting social purpose first, communicating it, and working ambitiously and collectively to achieve it.***

## The difference it could make

Maintaining commitment to effective action is hard when there are so many disincentives and distractions. So is generating commitment from other people when they have other priorities. But experience in nutrition and food systems shows that establishing a clear political commitment to a specific policy change or outcome, such as a target to reduce childhood stunting or obesity, enables and sustains action.<sup>3</sup> Leading with social purpose keeps us strategically focused, powering us through the conflicts, challenges, discomforts, and distractions we are bound to encounter. Making decisions guided by social purpose converts commitment into meaningful action, not just into more words. Clear communication of purpose likewise inspires and motivates commitment in others. Leading with social purpose also creates a sense of self for both individuals and organisations, fostering self-confidence, enabling others to recognise us as leaders, thus potentially lending us more power and influence.

# 2



## Persist by learning and adapting

### The practice

The path to enacting commitment is hard. We must never stop learning from our setbacks, missteps, and failures as well as our successes. The courage to try is key, even if we fail, and we must afford others the freedom to try and fail as well. Reflect, adapt, and continue. We may have to break down what we want to achieve—or what we are advocating for others to achieve—into smaller steps, accepting we have to be patient with the structures we are trying to change, with others, and with ourselves. But our long-term vision and ambition must remain; we must adapt the pathway, not the destination. If we are pushed back, become discouraged, or fail, we must get up again. Not letting others—or ourselves—keep us down is core to the practice of patiently persisting. Given how challenging that is, we will need to seek support from others to keep us going and to hold us accountable for making the change we want to see. Being flexible, creative, and tenacious will help us stay the course.

***Our long-term vision and ambition must remain; we must adapt the pathway, not the destination.***

### The difference it could make

Converting commitment into action is a marathon not a sprint. We know change takes time, persistence, and a spirit of experimentation.<sup>4</sup> Evidence from efforts to tackle different forms of malnutrition is clear: we get results when we learn and adapt as we move forward—building these opportunities for improvement directly into the process of change.<sup>5</sup> Patiently adapting our strategies and tactics while remaining ambitious works better than assuming we have all the answers to begin with.

# Deviate from the norm

## The practice

Many of us have ideas about what needs to change based on a grounded understanding of the problems. Many of these ideas go against the grain. Deviating from the norm is the practice of drawing on the power we have to voice these ideas and identifying when, where, and how to use that power. It takes courage to go up against the power hierarchies and inflexible mindsets we are bound to encounter, pulling many of us out of our comfort zones. We may feel vulnerable, uncertain, defensive, angry, ineffective, and fearful of what we might lose. We may not, after all, even be right. There is a risk, too, that deviating from the norm will impose costs we cannot afford—we may lose allies or even our own positions. We must balance those risks. Working as a collective can help. By building alliances, we can create collective power to challenge norms. Or we can exercise our own power in quieter, less adversarial ways. No matter how, we must find the power to challenge standard ways of doing things to achieve results.

***If we do not speak up, new approaches will never surface.***

## The difference it could make

If we do not speak up, new approaches will never surface. The reins will remain in the hands of those who already hold power and make the most noise. History tells us that deviating from the norm is essential if we are to advance change. Challenges to orthodox ways of thinking and action have always been the impetus for change, leading to shifting paradigms and approaches.<sup>6</sup> Defying the status quo is how new knowledge and science have been built in food systems; transforming them will be impossible without it.<sup>7</sup>

# 4



## Lift others up

### The practice

How can we empower each other to find new ways of doing things? By lifting each other up and unleashing the potential in others. Lifting up involves creating opportunities for others to shine. It involves sharing and giving credit rather than pushing ourselves to the front and centre, involving each other in making decisions, and providing each other with the support to navigate barriers and conflicts. As such it is particularly important for people who are in positions of power and privilege to lift others. Praising others or giving them a platform is not enough. Sharing spaces of power in decision-making is vital. For those at more senior levels of leadership, this may well mean ceding some power, getting out of the way, and encouraging others to do the same.

***Praising others or giving them a platform is not enough. Sharing spaces of power in decision-making is vital.***

### The difference it could make

Lifting others up is essential if we are going to work together and generate innovation and ideas from leaders at all levels. Lifting others up for a collective journey builds leadership capacity by creating engaged and invested teams. It disrupts uneven power dynamics that serve the interests of seemingly heroic, powerful, well-resourced leaders who do not have all the answers—though they might think they do. By paying particular attention to lifting up people who experience marginalisation in decision-making, we can ensure more inclusive participation and benefit from perspectives that may otherwise go unheard. Only by elevating the voices of those experiencing marginalisation, will we achieve more equitable food systems that benefit all.



# Listen with curiosity

## The practice

Being open to different perspectives takes time. It means asking creative questions to colleagues within and outside of our standard circles; listening carefully to those who offer different solutions; being curious about the mindsets, values, meanings, and feelings that lie beneath different positions; and reflecting on what we have heard. This is listening with curiosity. It is not about automatically agreeing with what is said but considering and then making a judgement about whom and what to listen to. Whether our response is to adopt what we have heard, work harder to find common ground, or fight against it, we will be better placed for having listened.

***Listening builds trust—  
an essential ingredient to drive  
stakeholders towards change.***

## The difference it could make

Studies show that effective leaders in nutrition navigate complexity by listening closely to others' perspectives and learning from them.<sup>8</sup> Evidence shows, too, that members of the public are more likely to be convinced by proposed policy changes—such as taxes on sugary drinks—when arguments take their concerns into account. Crucially, listening builds trust—an essential ingredient to drive stakeholders towards change.

# 6



## Reflect individually and collectively

### The practice

Standing back and asking ourselves why—deliberating on all aspects of a problem—is central to the practice of reflection. So is looking inward to understand our reactions, thoughts, emotions, biases, and decisions, whether as an institution, collective, or individual. Reflection can be done in the moment, during an interaction. It can also mean taking time to consider potential intended and unintended consequences before making a decision or, after taking action, examining what went well and what could have been improved. It does not mean unproductive rumination based on partial information or harsh self-criticism, which only leads to loss of confidence and discouragement. Rather, it means asking questions collectively such as “What can we learn from that?” and individually such as “What role did I play in creating that situation?” and “What biases am I bringing to this?”

***Self-reflection leads to greater self-awareness, a process through which we understand our strengths and address weaknesses, and the perspective of others who have had different lived experiences.***

### The difference it could make

Whether individually, peer-to-peer, or collectively, reflecting enables us to diagnose what might be going on in all its complexity, helping us learn from both “failure” and success and giving us a stronger basis for deciding where to go next. Self-reflection leads to greater self-awareness, a process through which we understand our strengths and address weaknesses, and the perspective of others who have had different lived experiences. Reflection is thus an important way to overcome roadblocks and navigate complexity. This is why it is used as a methodological and teaching tool to navigate complex issues in food systems and public health research and education.<sup>9</sup>

# Connect with others for collective action

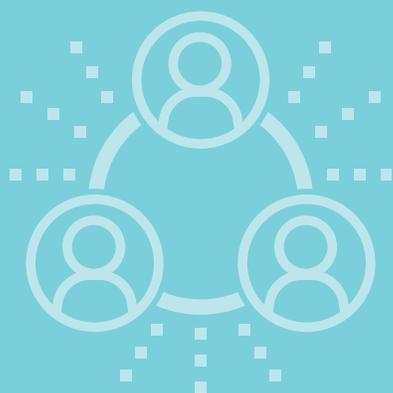
## The practice

Building collectives with others with shared ambition will take us and those around us further and help develop a stronger sense of shared identity and purpose. It will enable us to engage with others in a collective journey, tame our worst instincts, and strengthen our best. We should reach out, too, to those in other spaces who may not care about the things we do or who look at the world through different lenses but who have the power to help bring about change. Start the conversation by listening with curiosity and building trust. In this way, we can learn from existing collective actions to break down unnecessarily competitive cultures to strengthen and build participatory cultures where diversity, collaboration, and democratic decision-making can thrive..

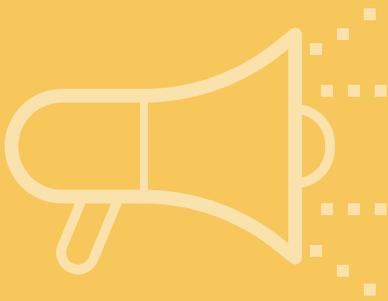
***We can learn from existing collective actions to strengthen and build participatory cultures where diversity, collaboration, and democratic decision-making can thrive.***

## The difference it could make

Evidence suggests that nutrition coalitions are critical to generating sustained commitment for action.<sup>10</sup> For example, coalition building in different parts of Latin America was key in connecting actors from academia, government, and civil society within and across countries and regions. They proved vital for the development of regional and national dietary guidelines, implementation of taxes on ultra-processed foods and beverages and front-of-pack nutrition labelling.<sup>11</sup> Heroic crusades by individual nutrition champions, however welcome and impressive, are sustained only when coalitions form around them.<sup>12</sup> Connecting with others means we can share our successes, celebrate our achievements. It allows us to develop a shared common purpose, work collectively against the grain, and strategise on how to persist, learn, and adapt. Working in a network can also make us accountable for doing what we say we will do.



# 8



## Speak openly and authentically

### The practice

Finding our voice, honing it, and using it are among the most rewarding things we can do. We can speak out in two directions—internally to our own colleagues, and externally to others—and each has its own value. Taking the time to talk regularly and openly to our teams, colleagues, or senior leaders enables us to share our concerns and our doubts as well as our plans and our passions. Investing time in difficult conversations when things are not right allows us to navigate relationships. Speaking in public enables us to inspire and engage. Wherever possible, we should speak openly and authentically, unafraid to show vulnerability. But it is not always possible or prudent to speak with full openness. What we want to say will vary between audiences, so thinking purposefully and mindfully about how to articulate our messages in different spaces is critical. In our role as leaders, we must also create safe spaces for others who may face barriers in speaking up.

*If we communicate our own vulnerabilities, we create environments where problem solving and innovation can flourish.*

### The difference it could make

Regular and open communication is crucial to getting things done in a collective approach to leadership. If we also communicate our own vulnerabilities, we create environments where problem solving and innovation can flourish. Sharing our fears and hopes will help instill trust, inspiration, courage, and confidence in a group and provide a safer space for others to speak out as well. Speaking out in public can also help us to be seen and self-identify as leaders. Experience in rural agricultural communities suggest that when women speak out for a social purpose they contribute to a sense of collective agency.<sup>13</sup>

# Transforming who leads

**The transformation in *how* we lead will require a transformation in *who* leads.**

We believe that if more women are in spaces of power and influence, the eight leadership practices are more likely to be enacted; equally, if these practices are more valued and rewarded in our workplaces and our world, women will be better able to exercise their leadership in spaces of power and influence.

We know, after all, that women are the backbone of nutrition and food systems. Women typically bear the primary responsibility for putting food on the table for their families. It is often women who do the work on farms. It is women who are the mainstay of factory and retail work in the food system and who dominate informal work in small food enterprises in many places.

As we saw during COVID-19, it is women who lead community efforts to provide food in crises. It is largely women too who, like us, dedicate their professional lives to nutrition and food systems, showing their passion and dedication working as nutritionists, dietitians, public health researchers and practitioners, educators, scientists, business professionals, advocates, campaigners, and civil servants. In short, women bring to the table intimate knowledge and grounded experience of the food we eat and the many systems that affect it.

Although women are the ones closest to the problems we seek to address, we live and work in a world where men dominate decision-making. To be sure, many women are finding and have found ways to lead, but power and influence still accrue in large part to men. In this context, it is hard for women along with many others who experience discrimination and oppression to be heard and to fully leverage our power.

Thus we believe that gender equality is vital to unleashing the leadership practices needed for a well-nourished world.<sup>14</sup>

**When women are able to participate fully in nutrition and food system leadership, efforts to create a well-nourished world will benefit from:**

**...a more diverse array of leadership skills and aptitudes.**

While there is no clear delineation between women and men in the way they lead, the evidence is compelling that women bring skills and aptitudes to leadership that, on balance, are aligned with the leadership practices we propose. Practices such as questioning with curiosity rather than confident assertion, lifting others up rather than concentrating our power, revealing doubt rather than showing false certainty, and encouraging inclusive participation rather than thinking we have all the answers are often dismissed as “feminine traits” associated with weakness. We believe these are undervalued strengths. They provide fertile ground for greater reflection, openness to different perspectives, and new ways of doing things. Rewarding these practices can also re-incentivise women and men who work in unhelpfully competitive environments where self-promotion and self-aggrandisement are rewarded; in these challenging circumstances, people may fail to support each other and push others down rather than lifting them up.

**...grounded understandings of the problems.**

Women have real-life experiences in acquiring, preparing, eating and often growing and selling food. While these experiences are diverse, too often, women work in difficult or exploitative conditions within the food system or face entrenched social, political, and economic conditions that make it hard for them to feed themselves and their families. Ensuring that these women have a voice and decision-making power is one of the most important things we can do. If the voices of these women are not brought forward through leadership, we will lose the opportunity to learn what the problems really are and in turn how to fix them.

**...a stronger focus on social purpose.**

A sense of social purpose is a key reason that so many women choose to work in nutrition and food systems. It's something we care about. When women work collectively to prioritise social purpose in making decisions about nutrition and food systems, they can unleash enormous untapped potential to ensure that commitment is converted into action.

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# Moving forward in a spirit of inquiry

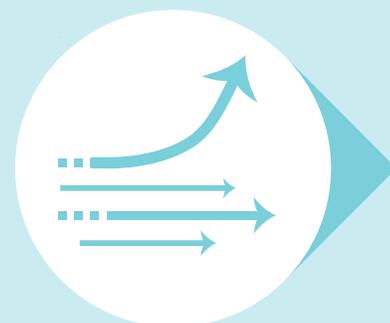
**Writing this Manifesto was not easy. As we wrote it, we found ourselves asking many questions. What is the real problem here?** Is the problem top-down, hierarchical, macho ways of leading? How does this relate to barriers to systemic change in nutrition and food systems? How does that connect to women's inclusion in spaces of influence? Is the solution providing spaces where women can support each other in leadership? Or is it about breaking down the systemic challenges we face? Do we have evidence that the presence of more women in leadership roles would benefit food systems and nutrition? Who are the "we" here? Are we trying to speak just to women? Or to anyone leading in this space? Are we speaking to individuals? Or to structures? How can we be truly inclusive? Is leadership an individual or collective process? Why do we believe people can take agency in leadership when we know we—women and men—are up against structures of power that actively get in the way?

**With the help of the women who joined our Forums, and by reflecting, and reflecting again, we persisted. We navigated the complexity as best we could, recognizing that staying silent was not an option.**

We continue to grapple with many of these questions, well aware that we still have much to learn. We know we must move forward in a spirit of inquiry, listening, learning, and adapting as we go. In this spirit, we see this Manifesto as a living document, which we will revisit as we learn.

Our hope is that researchers will build a new evidence base on the topic so we can all learn from it. We already know that leadership in nutrition and food systems is characterised by gender inequality.<sup>15</sup> We now need more evidence on the difference gender equality makes, the impact of applying the leadership practices, and the challenges of doing so.

***Our journey in demanding change in how we lead and who leads will benefit from inclusive dialogue, deep listening, and adapting what we do based on what we learn.***



# Our commitment and our call

As a collective, the women in the Next Gen(D)eration Leadership Collective commit to proactively adopting and strengthening these eight leadership practices for ourselves as individuals, in our work environments, and within our broader food systems and nutrition networks. We commit to lead from where we stand and to share and support the development of these leadership practices in others to build momentum for collective impact. We commit to calling out the structural challenges created by the economic, social, cultural, and political systems in which we work as we come up against them and to working collectively to break them down.

***We call on everyone who works in nutrition and food systems to integrate the eight courageous leadership practices into the way you work.***

In turn, we call on everyone who works in nutrition and food systems to integrate the eight courageous leadership practices into the way you work, as best you can. From whatever level you lead, whether as an individual, community, company, or institution, test them, try them, study them. You are likely practicing some already; others will be harder. Work out how each applies in your context, career stage, and sector. For those with the power to do so, enable and reward these practices.

This must be a collective endeavour. Adopting these practices is the hard path. In responding to this call, we will encounter structural challenges rooted in the economic, social, cultural, and political systems in which we live and work. We will need collective courage to strategically call out and address these challenges. We will need to ally with each other as we walk this path, taking action together to enable these practices to be not ridiculed, but rewarded.

**Please join us.**



# About the Next Gen(D)eration Leadership Collective

The Next Gen(D)eration Leadership Collective was established because food presents a huge opportunity to improve the health of people and the planet while also supporting the livelihoods of millions. We believe solutions to poor-quality diets and inequitable, unsustainable food systems exist—what is missing is the bold and courageous leadership needed to put these solutions to work. We believe effecting real change towards a world where everyone eats well, underpinned by food systems that regenerate the planet and support equitable livelihoods, will take transformation in who leads and how they lead. Our purpose is therefore to create a leadership movement towards a well-nourished world. Our vision is courageous leadership practices in action at all levels for more impactful decision-making in nutrition and food systems.

Founded in 2020, our Collective is run by a voluntary task team and one project manager. We have started our work by hosting forums to provide a space for mutual support, to share resources, and to spark a collective leadership movement. This Manifesto sets out what the Next Gen(D)eration Leadership Collective is calling for and what we are building our movement around.

Please visit our website and sign up for our forums and database: [nextgenerationleaders.org](https://www.nextgenerationleaders.org)

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