

# NGLC Transformation Story

## We

We are the **Next Gen(d)eration Leadership Collective (NGLC)**, a global network of women working across nutrition, food policy, food systems, academia, and public health. We are committed to advancing **courageous leadership practices** to rebalance power in food systems and cultivate more equitable, just, and nourishing futures for all.

Our Collective began by bringing together women from **diverse geographies, career stages, and disciplines**, including researchers, policy experts, advocates, practitioners, and leaders from institutions across Latin America, the Middle East, Africa, North America, Australia, and beyond. This diversity is embedded in our **Strategy Group (SG)**, **Operations Teams (OT)**, and workstreams (Governance, Collective Support, Evaluation).

- **Advisory Board (AB)**: Guides our growth.
- **Strategy Group (SG)**: Provides strategic direction and oversees collective activities.
- **Operations Teams (OT)**: Manage day-to-day operations of specific projects.
- **Workstreams (GW, CSW, EW)**: Lead research, capacity sharing, and evaluation components.

Through this governance structure, decisions are made collaboratively through regular meetings, consultations, and strategic gatherings. Currently, work is supported by funding from the **International Development Research Centre (IDRC)**, **Bloomberg Philanthropies**, and the **German Development Cooperation (GIZ)**. This ensures sustainable coordination, staffing, and collective resource-sharing.

We already represent a wide spectrum of experiences from academic, community-based, and policy-oriented, to practitioner-led. However, we are continuing to expand our reach by engaging **additional women leaders, marginalized voices, youth actors, and most importantly, global south perspectives**, ensuring that all those most affected by inequities in food systems shape the transformation.

Empowerment is at the heart of the NGLC. We believe that women already possess the power to transform, and that they need to be encouraged and guided to unleash that power in their landscapes. We create safe, supportive spaces—such as **ChangeMaker Connect Forums** and **Peer-to-Peer Mentoring Pods**—where women share experiences, learn from one another, and build the confidence and collective agency needed to shape decisions in food systems. Our Manifesto outlines eight courageous leadership practices that help everyone working in the food system space challenge norms, address power imbalances, and lead transformative change.

## Purpose

NGLC was born from a shared frustration in 2019: despite growing calls to reform global food systems, **progress remained slow, inequitable, and insufficient**. Women, who are often closest to the challenges of food systems, were still largely excluded from decision-making spaces. Recognizing the need for systemic change and courageous leadership, a group of women came together to envision a new approach

to power, influence, and collaboration. This evolved into the NGLC Task Team and ultimately the global Collective we have today.

NGLC's work is rooted in a deep analysis of **how power operates within food systems**, and how gendered and other intersectional inequities lead to overlapping forms of exclusion and shape leadership opportunities and decision-making. Through consultations, interviews, forums, and research, we have examined the systemic barriers women and other marginalized groups face, and why transformation of the food system is urgently needed.

Our goal is to **redress power imbalances in food systems by advancing courageous leadership practices** and strengthening collective agency among women and other marginalized groups globally. This aligns with broader goals such as:

- More equitable, resilient, and nourishing food systems (aligned with SDGs 2, 5, 10, 12, 13).
- Stronger representation of women and other marginalized groups in leadership roles.
- Structural transformation toward fairness and justice.

This time of progress is longitudinal and generational. Still, the Evaluation Workstream assess the impact of our activities Progress is assessed through our **Theory of Change**, capturing shifts in collective agency, coalition-building, leadership practices, and evidence of system-level influence.

## Vision

Our vision is **an equitable food system for a well-nourished world**; a system where power is balanced, leadership is shared, and structural barriers no longer silence the voices of women and other marginalized groups.

The food system must undergo a paradigm shift:

- From **hierarchical, opaque power structures** to **shared, transparent, inclusive leadership**.
- From decision-making dominated by a few to **collective agency led by those closest to the challenges**.
- From extractive practices to **justice-oriented models** that prioritize planetary and human wellbeing.

These shifts require transforming leadership, particularly in the most marginalized communities that are most affected by challenges, to rebalance the distribution of power.

## Ambition

Indicators of progress toward the new leadership paradigm include:

- Increased collective agency among women participating in NGLC activities.
- Growth and diversity of coalitions mobilized through our partnerships.
- Adoption of the eight courageous leadership practices and integration into partnership collective structures and operations.

- Evidence of women influencing food system policies, institutions, and narratives.
- Engagement in mentoring pods and forums.

These indicators are tracked through our **Theory of Change** and evaluation framework.

NGLC already spans multiple regions—Latin America, Middle East, Africa, Europe, and Asia-Pacific—allowing transformations to be realized at local, regional, and global levels.

## Actors

In just a few years, the NGLC has grown from a Task Team of 12 women into a global community of **over 1,500 individuals**, with **more than 650 participants** actively attending our Forums, Pods, and capacity-sharing initiatives. Our Spotlight Dialogue Forums engaged **277 individuals** (653 attendances) and our Storytelling Forums 2.0 engaged **152 individuals** (203 attendances), with our Manifesto, Pods, and global meetings reaching hundreds more.

Support comes from individuals and organizations facing similar gendered power imbalances and seeking new leadership models. These include **Afrifoodlinks / ICLEI (Local Governments for Sustainability)**, the **Lebanese Solidarity Kitchens Network**, **HealthBridge**, **COLANSA (Comunidad de Práctica Latinoamérica y Caribe Nutrición y Salud)**, **AWOLA (African Women Leaders in Agroecology)**, **CONAMURI (Coordinadora Nacional de Organizaciones de Mujeres Trabajadoras Rurales e Indígenas)**, and **GHAI (Global Health Advocacy Incubator)** across Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the US. We aim to expand to similar actors: youth and early-career professionals, local food system actors, grassroots civil society, policymakers, and other gender-justice and leadership initiatives.

Our partners share a common lived experience and are drawn to our approach: safe, honest, and supportive spaces where women feel seen and connected, and a **co-production model** that treats partners as equals throughout the process. This collective, courageous, and solidarity-based way of leading encourages women to bring others into the movement, nurturing a decentralized and relational network.

The strength of NGLC lies in its **co-production approach and expanding network**, which allows it to grow. Other than generating evidence through evaluating and sharing our work, Scaling occurs when our purpose, vision, Manifesto, and leadership practices are adopted by those who participate in our Forums, Pods, and partnerships and carry these principles into their own work. As partnerships grow, so does the wider NGLC ecosystem. Through this, courageous leadership shifts from a niche practice to a credible and replicable paradigm—a new mainstream for food systems transformation.

Actors likely to follow this paradigm include:

- universities and training programs integrating the Manifesto;
- regional food system alliances adopting equity-focused leadership models;
- international NGOs, UN agencies, and funders such as IDRC and GIZ;
- national food-system governance bodies, once they see tangible results of collective agency.

## Levers

The NGLC approaches food systems through a multidimensional and relational perspective, understanding that gender-based power imbalances operate together and structurally. For this reason, the NGLC prioritizes redressing power imbalances in leadership within Food Systems in the various spheres in which its members operate, such as political decision-making spaces, research and development institutions, financial and funding organizations, and collectives organized at the local, regional, and global levels. These arenas constitute strategic leverage points for changing norms, influencing agendas, and promoting a more just, equitable, and gender- and intersectionality-sensitive food system, in line with the NGLC's purpose.

Through our storytelling forums, peer-mentoring groups, Manifesto, capacity-sharing activities, partnership building, and scientific research and dissemination, we directly influence professionals operating across key spheres of power in the food system, including Research and Education, Public Health Policy and Advocacy, NGOs and other non-profit organizations, and the Private Sector (companies, corporations, and consultancies). Our reach currently extends to professionals in nearly 50 countries.

## Justice

From an intersectional perspective, the groups that must be especially considered in a new food system paradigm include women across all regions, marginalized communities, early-career and emerging leaders, and local and Indigenous food system actors. These groups face overlapping forms of exclusion that limit their visibility, influence, and access to opportunities.

We are committed to:

- **Participatory justice:** ensuring women have a voice and role in shaping decisions.
- **Distributive justice:** ensuring fair access to opportunities, leadership roles, and resources.
- **Equal opportunity:** ensuring women across backgrounds can grow, lead, and influence systems.

Justice is understood as the construction of strategies and actions in which the people involved feel seen, heard, and able to influence the process. In this sense, the NGLC developed eight leadership practices present in its Manifesto, which promote more horizontal, collaborative, and inclusive relationships. Capacity sharing contributes to the development of leadership skills and capacities, while Partnerships build coalitions with collectives outside the hegemonic axis, including people, institutions, and countries that have traditionally been outside the decision-making spaces of the food system.

## Navigation

The NGLC has a team of specialists composed of 8 researchers affiliated with renowned global universities, responsible for critically assessing the initiative's development and evolution. To establish scientific parameters for evaluation, a Theory of Change was developed, focused on the process of implementing collective actions. The approach is grounded in the understanding that building collective action capable of contributing to correcting power imbalances in food systems leadership involves several interconnected dimensions that structure and strengthen this process: collective support, collective identity, collective efficacy, and collective agency.

Our evaluation approach is based on learning-by-doing and reflective analysis: the assessment of current activities informs future planning, while new actions provide inputs for ongoing evaluation. In this way, the system was explicitly designed to support adaptive learning, enabling the partnership to adjust its strategies as new insights and emerging needs arise.

Through its learning-by-doing approach, the Collective has significantly advanced toward its core goal. The network has reached more than two thousand people across approximately 50 countries and has established dialogue with at least seven collectives, five of which have already become active partners in shared activities.

Key signals of progress include:

- Growth and diversification of the network, expanding engagement across regions and levels.
- Increasing uptake of the NGLC Manifesto for Leadership, reflected in its use in forums, workshops, congresses, and mentoring programs.
- Expansion of peer mentoring pods and public forums, which broaden participation and strengthen leadership capacities.
- Collaborations and partnerships with global institutions and grassroots collectives, especially those outside hegemonic centers.
- Greater visibility of women's leadership narratives, amplified through storytelling, capacity sharing, and joint initiatives.
- Taken together, these developments demonstrate tangible movement toward the ambitions defined by the Collective.