

Heifer International Calls for Local, Youth-Led Solutions at Africa Food Systems Forum 2025

Global nonprofit urges urgent action to back youth innovators, unlock catalytic finance, and scale locally led solutions as 307 million Africans face hunger.

DAKAR, SENEGAL, August 25, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- With Africa facing a worsening hunger crisis that now affects nearly one in five people on the continent, [Heifer International](#) is calling on governments, investors, and development partners to urgently prioritise youth-led innovations, innovative finance models, and strengthen locally-driven solutions as urgent levers to transform Africa's food systems.



Heifer International's staff with some of their partner farmers and agritech innovators at last year's forum

The organisation also announced its strategic partnership with and participation in the upcoming Africa Food Systems Forum (AFSF 2025) taking place in Dakar, Senegal, from August 31

to September 5. At the forum, Heifer will present a transformative approach that supports Africa's youth to lead agricultural innovation and shows how local partnerships and creative financing are helping smallholder farmers achieve lasting scalable results.

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Adesuwa Ifedi

A Crisis Demanding Bold Action

This year's forum convenes as new data highlights the scale of the African food and nutrition crisis. The 2025 State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI)

Report revealed that 307 million people in Africa, nearly one in five, are hungry. At the report's launch, UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed, warned, that the world is “far off track” to meet the goal of ending hunger by 2030.

AFSF, Africa's premier platform for dialogue and collaboration on food systems transformation, brings together thousands of policymakers, development agencies, farmers, agripreneurs, innovators, investors and private sector leaders. This year's theme 'Africa's Youth: Leading Collaboration, Innovation and Implementation of Agri-Food Systems Transformation', directly aligns with Heifer's new strategic direction to foster inclusive, resilient, and sustainable food systems, powered by youth, centered on smallholder farmers.

From Aid to Ecosystem Facilitation

Heifer's strategy differs from traditional donor models through an ecosystem approach that supports youth led innovations, unlocking catalytic finance, and advancing community ownership. This new approach has shown significant promise.

Through its AYuTe NextGen initiative, Heifer has supported young African innovators developing agtech and climate-smart solutions that are directly improving smallholder farmer productivity. Since its launch in 2021, AYuTe has mobilized over \$11 million in catalytic investments and directly supported nearly 100 youth-led agri-tech businesses. These agtechs have in turn created 23,000 jobs and reached more than 3.5 million smallholder farming households across the continent.

At AFSF 2025, Heifer will present results of how collaborative action and systemic shifts toward inclusivity and sustainability are yielding results. The organization will also spotlight collaborative financing models that move beyond traditional donor approaches. A recent benchmark report by Aceli Africa, featuring the Heifer/Hello Tractor partnership, for instance, highlighted how blended finance and tech-driven mechanization initiatives are improving incomes for hundreds of smallholder farmers, demonstrating scalable pathways for sustainable, resilient growth.

"Africa's food systems demand bold, collaborative action that evolves traditional donor models to meet the continent's food security needs sustainability and at scale," said Adesuwa Ifedi, Senior Vice President of Africa Programs at Heifer International. "At AFSF 2025, we are presenting solutions where blended finance, catalytic capital, and youth-powered innovation converge to drive lasting change for farmers, communities and the continent."

Tackling Systemic Barriers

At AFSF 2025, Heifer will challenge stakeholders to dismantle the barriers that perpetuate hunger by advancing solutions in these priority areas:

- Youth Enablement: Empower youth to drive agtech solutions and climate-smart innovation.
- Local Ownership: Strengthen community-driven approaches across the agri-food value chain.
- Financial Innovation: Expand blended finance and catalytic capital to reach smallholder farmers.

One example comes from Senegal where limited access to finance is a major barrier for rural women, often excluded from banks and microcredit. Through community-based Savings and Loans Groups, Heifer is supporting farming communities in closing this gap.

Aissatou Deh, Treasurer of the JAM Group in Senegal, affirmed: “Before Heifer’s support, each of us struggled on our own. With training and our savings group, every woman now runs a business, earns an income, and has the confidence to lead. We are not just beneficiaries, we are shaping our community’s future and passing on the gift to others.”

Heifer at AFSF 2025

During the six-day forum, Heifer will:

- Host side events featuring successful youth-led agricultural innovations
- Participate in deal room sessions to attract investment for these scalable solutions
- Highlight authentic farmer voices and locally funded project successes
- Demonstrate how ecosystem facilitation delivers sustainable impact beyond traditional project models.

After eight decades of working alongside smallholder farmers, five of those in Africa, Heifer understands that lasting transformation requires addressing not only immediate needs but also the root causes of hunger, poverty, and climate vulnerability.

“Heifer International calls on all stakeholders to invest in Africa’s youth and smallholder farmers to build resilient, inclusive, and sustainable food systems,” Ms. Ifedi concluded.

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About Heifer International

Since 1944, Heifer International has partnered with over 52 million people worldwide to sustainably end hunger and poverty. Operating in 19 countries across Africa, Asia, and the Americas, including the United States, Heifer supports farmers and food producers in strengthening local economies and building secure livelihoods that provide a living income. For more information, visit www.heifer.org/about-us

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