



Building Malaysia's Next Generation of Food Systems Leaders

Strengthening Youth Engagement through Science–Policy–Society Interfaces

Workshop Report

Zenith Hotel Putrajaya, Malaysia | 14–16 April 2026



SUMMARY

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Introduction

The workshop *"Building Malaysia's Next Generation of Food Systems Leaders: Strengthening Youth Engagement through Science–Policy–Society Interfaces"* was held from 14 to 16 April 2026 at Zenith Hotel Putrajaya, Malaysia. The workshop provided a dedicated space to strengthen youth engagement in Malaysia's food systems transformation, with a focus on connecting scientific knowledge, policy processes, community priorities and youth-led innovation.

The workshop was organized around Malaysia's national food systems transformation agenda and its emphasis on improving smallholder livelihoods, advancing sustainable productivity, strengthening supply-chain resilience, ensuring safe and nutritious food for all, and promoting responsible consumption and production. These priorities are closely linked to Malaysia's broader policy direction for a more sustainable, resilient and technology-driven agrofood sector, as well as to national efforts to improve food and nutrition security, support digital transformation and strengthen inclusive development.

Over three days, the programme moved progressively from shared understanding to co-creation and action planning. Day 1 focused on building trust, situating the workshop within Malaysia's national food systems priorities and introducing systems thinking and foresight. Day 2 focused on bridging mechanisms across policy, science, innovation, finance and youth action. Day 3 focused on translating ideas into action, with attention to youth initiatives, coordination mechanisms and follow-up.

Background

Malaysia's food systems transformation agenda is shaped by the need to strengthen food and nutrition security, improve the resilience of agricultural production, increase productivity and ensure that food systems contribute to inclusive and sustainable development. The National Agrofood Policy 2021–2030 sets out a vision for a sustainable, resilient and high-technology agrofood sector, while national nutrition and development policies emphasize the importance of safe, nutritious and affordable food.

Youth engagement is particularly important in this context. Malaysia's agriculture sector continues to face structural challenges, including an aging farmer population, perceptions of agriculture as an unattractive or insecure livelihood, and the need to accelerate



modernization and technology adoption. At the same time, young people can help reposition agriculture and food systems around innovation, entrepreneurship and sustainability.

The workshop responded to this opportunity by bringing together government representatives, research institutions, youth leaders, private sector actors, start-ups and other stakeholders. It aimed to strengthen the role of youth as active contributors to evidence-informed food systems transformation and to explore how Science–Policy–Society Interfaces can support more regular interaction between researchers, policymakers, practitioners, communities and young leaders.

Day 1: Building Trust and Shared Understanding

Tuesday, 14 April 2026

Welcoming Remarks

The workshop opened with welcoming remarks by Mr Muhamed bin Mat Yaakob, Deputy Undersecretary of the Policy and Strategic Planning Division of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, and Dr Nicole de Paula, Technical Officer for Science for Food Systems at the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub.

The opening session introduced the purpose of the workshop and framed the three-day process as a collaborative space for dialogue, learning and co-creation. It emphasized the importance of youth voice, mutual respect and cross-sectoral exchange in supporting Malaysia's food systems transformation. The session also positioned the workshop as part of a wider effort to connect national priorities with youth-led action and evidence-informed policymaking.

Icebreaker

The icebreaker session was moderated by Dr Rathana Peou Norbert-Munns, Senior Agrifood System Policy and Climate Foresight Planning Specialist and Asia-Pacific Regional Focal Point of the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub.

The session supported the creation of an open and participatory environment at the start of the workshop. By helping participants understand who was in the room, the icebreaker contributed to building trust across different stakeholder groups and created the



conditions for more active engagement during the technical and group work sessions that followed.

Setting the Scene: Malaysia's Food Systems Transformation

The session "Malaysia's Food Systems Transformation: Identifying Priorities and Opportunities Based on the National Pathway" was led by Mr Yee Chen Hua, Senior Principal Assistant Secretary in the Policy and Strategic Planning Division of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, and Mr Azizi Ahmad Azmin, Senior Research Officer in the Climate Change Programme of the Agrobiodiversity and Environment Research Center at MARDI.

The workshop covered Malaysia's national food systems transformation priorities. It provided a common understanding of the policy landscape and highlighted the importance of aligning youth engagement with ongoing national processes. This alignment matters because food systems transformation in Malaysia reaches beyond agricultural production into nutrition, supply-chain resilience, technology adoption and human capital.

The discussion created the basis for examining how youth can contribute to implementing national priorities. It also reinforced the importance of Science–Policy–Society Interfaces as practical spaces where scientific evidence, policy needs and community realities can be brought together to support more coherent and inclusive food systems action.

Systems Thinking and Foresight for Long-Term Transformation

The session "Thinking in Systems, Planning for Futures: Malaysia's Journey Toward Climate-Resilient Food Transformation" was delivered by Dr Rathana Peou Norbert-Munns.

The session introduced systems thinking and foresight as tools for understanding the interconnections that shape food systems transformation. In Malaysia, this perspective is important because food systems are affected by multiple and overlapping pressures, including climate change, natural resource constraints, supply-chain vulnerabilities, changing dietary patterns and the need to modernize the agrofood sector.

The session emphasized that food systems transformation requires the ability to look beyond individual interventions and consider long-term pathways of change. Foresight can support this by helping stakeholders anticipate risks, explore alternative futures, identify leverage points and strengthen adaptive capacities. Foresight helps stakeholders



anticipate risks, explore alternative futures and identify leverage points for more resilient food systems.

Connecting Ideas to Real Policy: Multi-Stakeholder Perspectives

The session included an insight talk by Prof Jane Gew of the Sunway Centre for Planetary Health, followed by a panel discussion on multi-stakeholder perspectives.

The session focused on the connection between ideas, evidence and policy implementation. In Malaysia's food systems context, this connection is essential because the transformation agenda spans multiple sectors and institutions, including agriculture, health, environment, trade, finance, education and innovation. The session therefore provided a space to reflect on how scientific and technical knowledge can be made more relevant to policymaking, and how policy processes can be more responsive to societal needs and youth-led innovation.

The panel format supported dialogue across different perspectives and helped underline the importance of bridge mechanisms that connect research institutions, government actors, youth networks, private sector initiatives and communities. This is central to the SPSI approach, which seeks to move beyond one-way knowledge transfer and support more continuous interaction between evidence producers, decision-makers and society.

Bridging Science, Policy and Community: The Case of the UN Youth Leadership Programme

The session was delivered by Dr Noraini Binti Ruslan of Tun Hussein Onn University of Malaysia, a UN Food Systems Youth Leadership Programme alumna.

The session highlighted the role of youth leadership in bridging science, policy and community engagement. Through the lens of the Youth Leadership Programme, it showed how young professionals can be supported to develop the skills, networks and confidence needed to engage meaningfully in food systems transformation. In the Malaysian context, this is particularly important given the need to make agriculture and food systems more attractive, viable and innovation-oriented for younger generations.

The session also positioned youth not only as participants in dialogue, but as actors capable of connecting institutions with communities, translating knowledge into action and contributing to evidence-informed policy processes. This framing supported the broader objective of the workshop: to strengthen youth engagement in a way that is practical, policy-relevant and connected to national food systems priorities.



Group Discussion: Prioritizing Actions to Accelerate Youth Engagement

The group discussion focused on identifying priority actions to accelerate youth engagement in Malaysia's food systems transformation. The discussion was structured around the five national food systems transformation pathways: improving smallholder livelihoods, advancing sustainable productivity, strengthening supply-chain resilience, ensuring safe and nutritious food for all, and promoting responsible consumption and production.

This session encouraged participants to consider where youth-led initiatives could add value within Malaysia's existing policy priorities. Potential areas of engagement included agricultural entrepreneurship, digital and smart agriculture, sustainable production, circular economy approaches, nutrition and behavior change, and community-based innovation. The session also helped shift the discussion from the general importance of youth engagement toward more concrete areas where youth could contribute to implementation.

Reflections and Wrap-Up

Dr Rathana Peou Norbert-Munns and Dr Nicole de Paula moderated the Day 1 reflection and wrap-up session.

The session provided an opportunity to consolidate the first day's exchanges and prepare for the more solution-oriented discussions of Day 2. The first day established a shared understanding of Malaysia's food systems transformation agenda and highlighted the importance of trust, systems thinking, foresight and youth leadership as foundations for Science–Policy–Society engagement.



Day 2: Co-Creating Solutions and Bridge Mechanisms

Wednesday, 15 April 2026

Recap of Day 1 and Icebreaker

Day 2 opened with a recap of the first day and an icebreaker session led by Dr Rathana Peou Norbert-Munns.

The session reconnected participants with the main themes of Day 1 and introduced the focus of the second day: moving from shared understanding to co-creation. The recap helped situate the day's sessions around the need to identify practical bridge mechanisms between policy, innovation, science and youth action.

Deep Dive and Follow-Up of Day 1

The deep-dive session was organized as a group discussion around three guiding questions: what prevents youth from engaging; why science is not always used in policy; and where communities feel excluded.

These questions addressed some of the core challenges that Science–Policy–Society Interfaces seek to overcome. In Malaysia's food systems context, youth engagement can be constrained by limited access to decision-making spaces, insufficient institutional channels, financing barriers, and perceptions of agriculture as a low-opportunity sector. Similarly, the use of science in policy can be affected by gaps between research production and policy demand, limited translation of evidence into practical recommendations, and the absence of sustained spaces for dialogue.

By focusing on systemic barriers, the session helped frame youth engagement as an institutional and governance issue, rather than only a question of motivation or awareness. It also helped identify the need for mechanisms that connect youth-led ideas with policy processes, technical expertise, financing and community-level implementation.

Panel: Bridging Policy, Innovation, Science and Youth Action in Malaysia's Food System



The panel "Bridging Policy, Innovation, Science and Youth Action in Malaysia's Food System" was moderated by Dr Rathana Peou Norbert-Munns and Dr Noraini Binti Ruslan.

The panel focused on the role of bridge mechanisms in supporting food systems transformation. This included the importance of linking research institutions with community enterprises, supporting pilot innovations, and creating pathways for policy support. In Malaysia, this connects to the emphasis on modernizing the agrifood sector and increasing technology uptake.

The session also helped position innovation as a cross-cutting issue. Innovation in food systems is not limited to technology; it also includes new forms of collaboration, financing, institutional coordination and community engagement. Through this lens, youth can contribute as entrepreneurs, researchers, communicators, conveners and implementers.

Youth in Modern Agriculture: Making the Sector Attractive and Viable

Muhammad Muaz Redha Zainudin of Eggscape Poultry Sdn Bhd delivered the session.

The session focused on how modern agriculture can become more attractive and viable for young Malaysians. This topic is particularly important in Malaysia, where youth participation in agriculture remains limited, and the sector continues to face challenges linked to aging farmers, labor intensity, and the need for greater technology adoption.

The session connected youth engagement with entrepreneurship and practical business opportunities in agriculture. By highlighting agropreneurship and youth-led agri-startups, it helped reframe agriculture as a sector that can offer innovation, income generation and professional growth. This is important for strengthening the future workforce of the agrofood sector and supporting Malaysia's wider ambition to develop a more modern, resilient and technology-driven food system.

Capacity Building Session: Youth Leadership in Food Systems

The capacity-building session focused on youth leadership in food systems, with attention to food, nutrition and behavior change, and the role of youth as change agents.

The session recognized that youth leadership requires more than technical knowledge. Young leaders also need skills in communication, facilitation, advocacy, collaboration and community engagement. These capacities are especially important in food systems transformation, where policy choices are shaped by multiple actors and where behavior change is needed across production, consumption and waste management.



In Malaysia, youth leadership can support stronger links between national policy priorities and local action. Young people can contribute to nutrition awareness, responsible consumption, community-based food initiatives and the promotion of more sustainable practices. Capacity-building is therefore an important enabler for translating youth participation into practical contribution.

Climate Resilience and Sustainable Food Systems

Dr Rathana Peou Norbert-Munns and Mr Azizi Ahmad Azmin of MARDI led the session on climate resilience and sustainable food systems.

The session addressed climate resilience as a central dimension of Malaysia's food systems transformation. Climate change poses increasing risks to agricultural production, natural resources and food security, making resilience a key priority for long-term planning. In this context, science and foresight are essential to anticipate risks, identify adaptation options and support policy decisions.

The session also connected climate resilience with sustainability and youth engagement. Young people can support climate-resilient food systems through innovation, awareness-raising, community-based solutions and the adoption of sustainable practices. Their engagement is particularly relevant in areas such as smart agriculture, circular economy, natural resource management and climate-informed planning.

Digital and Smart Agriculture for Sustainable Food Systems

Noor Azman Mohd Johar of Soil Analytics Sdn Bhd delivered the session.

The session focused on digital and smart agriculture as a pathway to more sustainable food systems. This theme aligns with Malaysia's policy direction toward modernization and high-technology agriculture, to enhance productivity and resilience.

Digital agriculture can support better decision-making, resource management, soil monitoring, production planning and market access. However, its potential depends on accessibility, digital literacy, affordability, data governance and collaboration between public and private actors. For youth, digital and smart agriculture can offer new entry points into the sector by connecting agriculture with technology, entrepreneurship and innovation.

Agricultural Financing



Wan Mohd Syazwan Wan Aziz of Agrobank delivered the session on agricultural financing.

The session focused on financing as an enabling factor for agricultural development and food systems transformation. Access to finance is central for young agropreneurs and early-stage initiatives, which often struggle to move from ideas to implementation. Financing is also essential for adopting technology, scaling innovations and sustaining youth-led initiatives over time.

In the Malaysian context, agricultural financing is closely linked to the need to create a more conducive business ecosystem for food systems transformation. When combined with mentorship, technical assistance and market access, financing can help youth-led initiatives become more viable and better aligned with national food systems priorities.

Investing in Food Systems Transformation: Real Solutions on the Ground

The session involved Joel Lai Joe-yi of Promise Earth and Mr Muhamad Firas Faiq bin Mohamad Manan, Project Manager at ARC Berkat Agrofood Sdn Bhd.

The session focused on practical solutions on the ground, including food waste valorization, circular bioeconomy approaches, composting, biofertilizers, alternative feeds and policy incentives for circular practices. These topics are directly relevant to Malaysia's wider transition toward circular economy approaches and sustainable consumption and production.

The session demonstrated how food systems transformation can be advanced through practical, locally grounded initiatives. Waste-to-value approaches can reduce environmental pressure and create business opportunities, improving livelihoods. For youth, circular economy initiatives can provide concrete entry points for entrepreneurship, community engagement and innovation.

Closing of Day 2

Day 2 concluded with informal exchanges and closing reflections.

The second day helped connect policy priorities with practical mechanisms for implementation. Across the sessions, the programme emphasized that youth engagement requires enabling ecosystems, including technical capacities, financing, innovation platforms, institutional partnerships and policy support.



Day 3: From Ideas to Action

Thursday, 16 April 2026

Recap of Day 2

Day 3 opened with a recap of the second day, led by Dr Rathana Peou Norbert-Munns.

The recap helped consolidate the key themes discussed during Day 2, including policy-innovation linkages, youth agropreneurship, leadership development, climate resilience, digital agriculture, financing and circular economy approaches. It also prepared participants for the final day's focus on action planning and follow-up.

Keynote: Food Systems — Connecting the Dots for Actionable Science

The third day included a keynote session titled "Food Systems: Connecting the Dots for Actionable Science."

The session focused on the importance of translating scientific knowledge into practical, actionable pathways for food systems transformation. In Malaysia, this means connecting evidence with the country's priorities on food security, nutrition, sustainable production, supply-chain resilience, technology adoption and inclusive development.

Actionable science means evidence connected to policy needs and implementation capacity. This is particularly important for young leaders, who can help translate scientific and technical knowledge into forms that are relevant for communities, institutions and decision-makers.

Circular Economy

The programme included a session on circular economy led by Dr Noraini Binti Ruslan of Tun Hussein Onn University of Malaysia and the UN Food Systems Youth Leadership Programme.

The session focused on circular economy approaches within food systems transformation. In Malaysia, circular economy is increasingly important as the country seeks to reduce waste, improve resource efficiency and support more sustainable production and consumption practices. Food waste, composting and waste-to-value



solutions are practical entry points for linking environmental sustainability with entrepreneurship and community-level action.

For youth, circular economy initiatives offer opportunities to design and implement solutions that are visible, locally relevant and scalable. These initiatives can help connect responsible consumption and production with innovation, climate action and livelihood creation.

Climate Resilience and Sustainable Food Systems

The programme included a session on climate resilience and sustainable food systems led by Dr Rathana Peou Norbert-Munns and Mr Azizi Ahmad Azmin of MARDI.

The session further reinforced the importance of climate resilience as a foundation for food systems transformation. Sustainable food systems require the ability to anticipate, absorb and adapt to climate-related risks while maintaining food availability, livelihoods and nutrition outcomes. This is especially relevant in agricultural systems where productivity and resource use are closely affected by climate variability.

The session also linked climate resilience with the role of research and innovation. Scientific institutions, policymakers and young practitioners each have a role to play in identifying adaptation options, strengthening knowledge exchange and supporting evidence-informed responses to climate-related food systems challenges.

Q&A and Group Discussion

The programme included a Q&A and group discussion segment.

The session provided space to connect the technical inputs from the final day with participants' own reflections and questions. It supported the transition from thematic discussion to action planning by encouraging participants to consider how the issues addressed during the workshop could be translated into practical initiatives, partnerships and follow-up actions.

SPSI: Connecting the Dots for Future Generations

The session "SPSI: Connecting the Dots for Future Generations" was delivered by Dr Nicole de Paula of the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub.

The session focused on the role of Science–Policy–Society Interfaces in supporting long-term food systems transformation. SPSI offers a way to connect evidence, policy and



social needs in a more continuous and participatory manner. It also helps ensure that different forms of knowledge, including scientific expertise, policy experience, youth perspectives and community realities, can inform decisions.

For future generations, this approach is particularly important. Food systems transformation will require sustained collaboration across sectors and generations. Young leaders can play a bridging role by supporting dialogue, mobilizing communities, engaging with evidence and contributing to the implementation of national priorities.

Roadmap Exercise: Embedding Youth Initiatives into the National Framework

The roadmap exercise focused on embedding youth initiatives into Malaysia's national food systems framework. The session included group work on integrating youth projects into ongoing food systems pathways and identifying coordination mechanisms, focal points and roadmap elements.

The exercise helped translate the workshop's discussions into possible follow-up directions. It focused on how youth initiatives could be better aligned with national priorities and supported through institutional arrangements. Areas such as education, mentorship, capacity building, entrepreneurship, innovation and coordination emerged as important dimensions for sustaining youth engagement beyond the workshop.

Presentation of Action Plan and Next Steps

Groups presented action plans and received feedback. Participants were also invited to identify one action they would take following the workshop.

This session marked the transition from dialogue to implementation. The presentation of action plans provided an opportunity to consolidate the ideas developed during the workshop and consider how they could be carried forward. The identification of individual actions also reinforced the importance of shared responsibility and continued engagement beyond the three-day programme.

Closing Remarks

Representatives of the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, and the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub, including Ms Khairul Zarina Binti Moh Yusop, Mr Muhamed bin Mat Yaakob and Dr Nicole de Paula.

The closing session marked the conclusion of the workshop and reaffirmed the importance of youth-inclusive, evidence-informed and multi-stakeholder approaches to



food systems transformation. It also emphasized the need to sustain momentum through continued coordination, documentation and follow-up.

Way Forward

The workshop highlighted the importance of strengthening youth engagement as part of Malaysia's broader food systems transformation agenda. It also demonstrated the value of Science–Policy–Society Interfaces as practical spaces for connecting evidence, policy, innovation and community priorities.

Moving forward, continued efforts will be needed to link youth-led initiatives with national food systems priorities, support capacity-building and mentorship, strengthen access to finance and technical guidance, and create coordination mechanisms that allow youth engagement to continue beyond one-off events. Developing a follow-up roadmap, including focal points, timelines, and shared indicators, would help ensure that workshop discussions are translated into practical action.

The Malaysia SPSI workshop provided an important foundation for positioning young people as contributors to food systems transformation. By connecting youth leadership with science, policy, entrepreneurship and community action, the workshop supported a more inclusive approach to Malaysia's national food systems priorities.