



FOOD *for* THE CITIES

[...] urban poverty tends to be fuelled by people migrating towards the cities in an attempt to escape the deprivations associated with rural livelihoods. Partly due to the rural decline, the world is urbanizing at a fast pace and it will not be long before a greater part of developing country populations is living in large cities. Therefore, urban food security and its related problems should also be placed high on the agenda in the years to come.

Jacques Diouf,
FAO Director-General. *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2006*, FAO



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Challenges...

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- Food security, nutrition and livelihoods
- Production systems – Urban and peri-urban agriculture
- Food marketing and distribution
- Food processing and street foods
- Environment
- Rural-urban linkages
- Policy, planning and institutions
- Cities in crises

During the course of 2007, for the first time in history, half of the world's population will be living in cities. These will continue to be the main centres of growth, expecting to house almost 5 billion people in 2030. While megacities – with a population over 10 million – will likely continue to grow in size and numbers, most of the increase is expected to be absorbed by small – less than 500 000 – and intermediate – 1 to 5 million – cities.

Urban-rural linkages will therefore become increasingly important. Cities should be seen as engines of rural development, providing markets and infrastructure, as well as a range of support services essential for the increase of rural productivity.

Food security, with the influx of rural poor and rising unemployment, has become a major concern in most cities. Even so, the food dimension of poverty in urban areas is not given the appropriate attention in either poverty reduction strategies or international development fora. Furthermore, policies and resources dealing with poverty, exclusion and inequality in cities remain highly inadequate.

As a result, urban diets are affected and malnutrition has become a major concern.

Environmental issues – such as scarcity, degradation and contamination of land, water and forest resources – generated by poorly planned urbanization are coming to the forefront. The risk of disasters increases with significant numbers of predominantly poor populations exposed to floods and landslides.

Neither the Millennium Development Goals nor the World Food Summit's goals will be achieved if appropriate attention is not given to cities and rural-urban linkages.



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The task of feeding the world's cities adequately constitutes an increasingly pressing challenge, requiring the co-ordinated interaction of food producers, transporters, market operators and a myriad of retail sellers. [...] Not least, it involves a shared understanding among city officials and national and international development agencies of the common problems and the potential solutions faced when seeking to feed cities on a sustainable basis.

Jacques Diouf, FAO Director-General.
The State of Food and Agriculture 1998, FAO



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FAO's response and action...

Harmonious urban development will require an integrated approach, involving government institutions and local authorities, as well as development agencies and the civil society. FAO has a key role to play in the management of natural resources for food security and sustainable urban development, and, to this end, has established a multidisciplinary initiative. Since 2001, the Food for the Cities initiative has been contributing to increased dialogue and partnerships with institutions at international and national levels, and in particular with municipalities. Technical assistance and support in policy formulation and urban planning to institutions and groups is required, in order to ensure access of the urban population to safe food and healthy and secure environments.

Urban food security necessitates a reliable year-round supply. This food is produced both, in rural areas and in urban and peri-urban areas. The challenge of feeding cities consists in facilitating access to food by consumers and creating favourable conditions to ensure the investments needed to increase food production, processing and distribution capacities; and facilities and services under hygienic, healthy and environmentally sound conditions.

Food production, processing and distribution also contribute to the livelihoods of urban people and are important sources of income and employment. Support to small-scale food and agriculture activities should therefore be seen as a key component of urban poverty alleviation.

Environmental sustainability is a key issue in the frame of urban development. Therefore, appropriate techniques and practices should be promoted to ensure food



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safety and healthy environments, prevent soil erosion and floods, and protect and improve water and air quality.

FAO has been taking action through a variety of activities including the organization of national and inter-country workshops on urban food supply, urban and peri-urban agriculture, urban forestry and low-income producer organisations; production of written and audio-visual resource materials; and participation in international fora and networks. Furthermore, FAO provides technical assistance at regional, national, and local levels, through supporting or implementing National Programmes for Food Security, emergency relief operations, TeleFood projects and decentralized cooperation projects, many of which are relevant to urban development.



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**Food for the Cities
Multidisciplinary Area
FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL
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