The issue

The intermediate and small cities in Latin America are growing, their food basin incorporates rural areas where food is produced, services are provided, and jobs are created, for a food system that does not stop. 600 million people live in Latin America, only 100 million live in cities with more than 1 million inhabitants. The rest of the population, 500 million, live in intermediate cities, towns and villages, and it is estimated that 45 percent of the municipalities in the region have up to 500 000 inhabitants and consume up to 70 percent of the food supply (FAO, 2019). The urban area of a region has an influence in the rural territory, which stimulates markets, partnerships and innovation, leveraging public and private investment, facilitating the articulation of productive initiatives and generating direct links with national policy (FAO, 2019).

Food security, nutrition, food safety, and quality are essential objectives of the food system, in times of crisis ensuring its stability is the key. In a recent survey carried out by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations on impacts to the food system and municipal response to COVID-19 (FAO, 2020), small and intermediate cities coincide in emerging phenomena such as the return of population from large cities to rural municipalities, rising food prices, shortage of basic foods and risk of increased food insecurity in the most vulnerable population. All agree that promoting a local food system, with schemes to articulate supply and demand with biosafety standards, would facilitate recovery from the pandemic and promote healthier eating and a more dynamic local economy (Intini, Granados, Ramirez, 2021).

The youth from rural areas and small and intermediate cities look for opportunities, as well as entrepreneurs and actors from the entire food system, who seek to improve and incorporate nutrition and sustainability objectives in their actions. Digital innovations and technologies can be part of the solution. The so-called “fourth industrial revolution (industry 4.0), is causing a rapid transformation in various sectors due to revolutionary digital innovations such as blockchain technology, the Internet of things, artificial intelligence and immersive reality (Trendov, Varas, Zeng, 2019). These new technologies are improving smallholder access to information, inputs, and markets, financing, and training. Digital technologies are creating new opportunities to integrate small farmers into a digitally based agri-food system (USAID, 2018).

However, the mayors and their technical teams demand technical assistance to address problems for which they currently have little capacity, including migration / population growth (5–7 percent per year), food insecurity, droughts, contamination, poverty / indigence, all aggravated by COVID-19. Likewise, access to healthy food at the local level is limited because producers and consumers are disconnected by multiple intermediation chains, in addition to the lack or dispersion of market information, supply, consumption preferences and use of surpluses (FAO, 2017).
The action

The Functional Food Circuit have the objective to reduce the access gap to healthy food in small and intermediate cities and towns of Latin America, by articulating supply and demand of healthy food for the most vulnerable population, enabling coordination and promoting the adoption of new technologies.

Functional Food Circuits have two components that interact with each other:

1. **Participatory component** promotes social innovation in the development of new strategies for the governance of the local food system. Given that they materialize in the territory, through this component, there is a virtual and face-to-face community of practice and learning, where the data contributed, practices and technological innovations, are incorporated into policy definitions, investment plans, public-private partnerships, civil society initiatives and the promotion of an environment conducive to the development of technological innovations.

2. **Technological component** provides a Food Information System for the local territory, characterized by accurate criteria for analyzing infrastructure and connectivity (mobile subscriptions, network coverage, Internet access and electricity supply), affordability, the degree of instruction (literacy, information and communication technologies education) and institutional support of the local territory. This component promotes a culture of fostering the digital agro-entrepreneurial spirit and digital innovations. It promotes an environment conducive to innovation by farmers and agro-entrepreneurs, further advanced with the aim of promoting actions that reduce the digital divide between urban and rural territories.

The opportunity

The FAO Urban Food Agenda identifies the local environment as a suitable space for the design of comprehensive policies for the food system, since it represents the physical, economic, political and sociocultural context in which the interaction of individuals with the food system; determining the possibilities and decisions of people on how they acquire, prepare and consume food.

Country focus

Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Honduras, Mexico and Peru

Impact

The participating municipalities manage in a transparent and participatory manner their territorial food system with a focus on nutrition and circularity.

Expected results

By 2021, municipal authorities have a system for the governance of the territorial food system.

By 2022, authorities and communities implement a Km-0 food strategy.
References


Contact

Maya Takagi – Regional programme leader
FAO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean
RLC-IR1@fao.org

Joao Intini – Policy officer
FAO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean
RLC-IR1@fao.org

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
Santiago, Chile