

**Thematic Evaluation Series**

**Evaluation of FAO's contributions to  
Sustainable Development Goal 2 - "End  
hunger, achieve food security and improved  
nutrition and promote sustainable  
agriculture"**

**Urban Food Agenda**

## **Abstract**

This report is part of the evaluation of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) role in supporting Members' efforts to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG 2), providing a critical analysis of the potential of FAO's work on the Urban Food Agenda. It is forecast that by 2050, two-thirds of the global population will live in urban areas, with 90 percent of the increase in Africa and Asia. This poses a great challenge to the urban and peri-urban food systems that will need to be transformed to deliver quality food in sufficient quantity in a sustainable manner. FAO's framework for the Urban Food Agenda takes a fresh approach to tackling the main food and nutrition security challenges in urban and surrounding areas – a key focus of this review.

The study finds that FAO has adapted its approach to address the challenges of urbanization. Its strategy on urban food has evolved from a focus on urban agriculture to building more efficient, sustainable and resilient food systems in urban and surrounding rural areas. However, this approach is considered complex to implement on the ground. Some of the challenges stem from difficulties in assembling holistic governance structures and coordinating complex relationships between levels of government. The study recommends that FAO prioritize the replication of positive experiences from urban initiatives such as the City Region Food Systems Programme and the NADHALI project. The study also recommends that FAO strengthen and diversify its personnel at country level and implement strategies to capitalize on private-sector social and environmental responsibility.

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## **Abbreviations and acronyms**

CRFS	City Region Food System
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FNS	Food and nutrition security
MUFPP	Milan Urban Food Policy Pact
RUAF	Resource Centre on Urban Agriculture and Food Security
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal

# 1. Introduction

1. This report is one in a series of reviews conducted as part of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) evaluation of its role in supporting Members' efforts to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG 2). It provides a critical analysis of the potential of FAO's work on the Urban Food Agenda to assist countries in achieving SDG 2 targets and principles. It identifies key achievements, lessons learned and challenges to implementation and upscaling.
2. Because of the unprecedented urban growth taking place around the world, actions to ensure the food and nutrition security (FNS) of urban populations will have significant implications for the goals of the 2030 Agenda. It is forecast that by 2050, two-thirds of the global population will live in urban areas, with 90 percent of the increase occurring in Africa and Asia (FAO, 2018a). This poses a great challenge to the urban and peri-urban food systems that will need to be transformed to deliver food in sufficient quantity and of sufficient quality in a sustainable manner. It is in this context that FAO has been working on the issue of urban food since the 1990s. It recently launched its framework for the Urban Food Agenda, taking a fresh approach to tackling the main FNS challenges in urban and surrounding areas – a key focus of this review.
3. As FAO's Urban Food Agenda is broad, the review concentrates on more consolidated actions and initiatives that are relevant in terms of their contribution to achieving SDG 2 targets, their potential to be replicated and to enhance FAO's positioning. The key initiatives and strategies analysed are:
  - i. the promotion of integrated food-systems planning and inclusive or multi-stakeholder food governance mechanisms in cities and peri-urban areas;
  - ii. linking cities to exchange best practices and concerns; and
  - iii. urban and peri-urban agriculture and horticulture.
4. The analysis looks at potentially relevant achievements with regard to SDG 2, links to the key principles of the 2030 Agenda (acting at scale, holistic view and social inclusion), lessons learned, factors in the success of interventions and challenges to the implementation, replication or scaling up of projects.
5. The study was based on an extensive review of documents, both internal and external to FAO (policy documents, evaluations, technical briefs, programme implementation documents, communication materials, specific pieces of research and studies, among other things), as well as interviews with key people within FAO (in headquarters, regional and country offices) and outside it. The list of documents reviewed can be found in the bibliography and a list of people interviewed in Appendix 1.

## 2. Background

### 2.1 History of FAO's work on the Urban Food Agenda

6. FAO's work on urban food dates back to the late 1990s. Since then, FAO has been leading the Urban Food Agenda at global level. It has published numerous position papers and advocated for urban food issues to be put on the global agenda, calling attention to the implications of growing urbanization for FNS. The Organization's focus has changed over time. Initially, its focus was on highlighting the shifts in food consumption and challenges to nutrition and food production brought about by growing urbanization. After that, the focus was on urban agriculture and gardening.
7. Since the early 2000s, the focus has progressively shifted towards a systemic, multisectoral and territorial approach, looking at food systems and broadening the territorial focus to take a more in-depth look at urban-rural linkages. Lately, FAO's approach has become even more comprehensive and connected to other priorities, as highlighted in the framework for the Urban Food Agenda. It aims to build more efficient, sustainable and resilient food systems in urban and surrounding rural areas by implementing initiatives to improve knowledge and information, building multi-stakeholder governance mechanisms to construct multisectoral plans and strategies to transform food systems.
8. The main developments in FAO's work on urban food have been (FAO, 2019a):
  - i. 1989: FAO's Committee on Agriculture publishes "Urbanization, Food Consumption Patterns and Nutrition" (FAO, 1989).
  - ii. 1990: FAO's Food Policy and Nutrition Division co-authors a document on "Patterns of Urban Food Consumption in Developing Countries" (Delisle, 1994).
  - iii. 2000: FAO launches Food for the Cities—a multidisciplinary initiative that aims to address the challenges of urbanization for the urban and rural population, as well as the environment, by building more sustainable and resilient food systems.
  - iv. 2011: FAO produces its "Feeding the Cities" factsheet (FAO, 2011a) and a position paper on food, agriculture and cities (FAO, 2011b).
  - v. 2012: An FAO Council paper states that "as a consequence of urbanization, food insecurity will increasingly appear as an urban problem which will make it more visible and politically sensitive and will require different types of intervention" (FAO, 2019a).
  - vi. 2014: FAO starts a three-year project to assess City Region Food Systems (CRFSs) in seven countries, supported by the Government of Germany, in cooperation with diverse partners, including the Resource Centre on Urban Agriculture and Food Security (RUAF Foundation).
  - vii. 2016: FAO hosts the first expert group meeting on integrating food into urban planning at United Nations (UN) headquarters to inform the first round of intergovernmental negotiations in the process leading up to HABITAT III<sup>1</sup> and the New Urban Agenda (Habitat III Secretariat, 2017). In Quito, FAO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP) make a joint statement to stress "the importance of building sustainable cities and human settlements that are free of hunger

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<sup>1</sup> Habitat III was the UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development that took place in Quito, Ecuador, on 17–20 October 2016.

and all forms of malnutrition” (FAO, 2019a). The same year, FAO makes a formal commitment to provide technical support to the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP).<sup>2</sup>

- viii. 2017: FAO is one of the UN agencies supported by the Habitat III Secretariat to organize an expert group meeting to discuss ways of implementing the New Urban Agenda under the banner of “integrating food security and nutrition into urban and territorial planning”. It launches the multi-donor flagship NADHALI project to foster evidence-based participatory governance and comprehensive food-systems planning processes in Nairobi, Dhaka and Lima.
- ix. 2018: FAO organizes a side event at the High Level Political Forum to enhance the key role of food systems and natural resources management for SDG 11, stressing the importance of drawing on cities to address other SDGs under review that year (SDGs 15, 12, 9 and 8). FAO also produces several publications to assist local and national governments and policy practitioners in enabling resilient and sustainable food-systems planning, policies and actions.
- x. 2019: FAO launches its framework for the Urban Food Agenda to guide its actions in line with its core corporate functions.

## 2.2 Different forms of implementation

9. FAO delivers urban food actions through different initiatives and specific projects. One important aspect is that most of FAO’s actions are designed and implemented in partnership with other international and national stakeholders (such as the RUAF Foundation, CGIAR, UN Habitat and universities) and are multi-donor funded. At national level, it implements actions in partnership with local governments and national ministries.
10. FAO’s role comprises:
  - i. facilitating dialogue between national and local governments, by convening different ministries (agriculture, environment, social protection, etc.) to be part of the multi-stakeholder platforms created to define plans and strategies;
  - ii. knowledge and evidence generation to support urban food planning processes by supporting the implementation of food-systems assessment and in-depth analysis, research and studies in collaboration with academia and research institutions; and
  - iii. capacity building and technical support for participating stakeholders on food systems, FNS, urban agriculture, food waste management and other topics depending on context.

## 2.3 FAO’s implementing partners

11. FAO’s key implementing partners in its parliamentary and legislative work on FNS are listed in Table 1. In LAC, they include the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), which is the main contributor of financial resources and technical support under the Hunger Free Latin America and the Caribbean Initiative, particularly for FAO’s PFH work. Other important partners are the Mexican Agency for International Development Cooperation (AMEXCID), which supports specific actions in Central America and the Dominican Republic. The Government of Brazil was key to putting hunger and FNS on the political agendas of countries in the region, spurring the development of legal frameworks to address these issues.

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<sup>2</sup> The Milan Urban Food Policy Pact is an international agreement on urban food policies, now signed by more than 200 cities around the world.

12. In Africa, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and PAP promote the inclusion of the FNS-related aspects in the debate on legal frameworks. The Government of Morocco supports the inclusion of the right to adequate food and FNS in parliamentary agendas in North African and Arab countries. At national level, the Parliament of Rwanda has been very supportive of capacity development processes for parliamentarians and the inclusion of FNS in debates.
13. At global level, the European Union is an important interlocutor and potential supporter of furthering FAO's work with parliamentarians. Indeed, the European Union just contributed to the Global Parliamentary Summit against Hunger and Malnutrition, to FAO's work with ECOWAS and to its work with parliamentarians in East Africa.

**Figure 1. Lists FAO's key stakeholders and partners in implementing urban food actions**

<b>Stakeholder/partner</b>	<b>Main role</b>
City councils, municipalities and local governments	They are responsible for designing and implementing development plans for cities, including FNS, and establishing regulations and norms for the delivery of services, including those related to food systems.
International and national universities (University of Zambia, Copperbelt University, Wilfried Laurier University)	Third-level institutions generate knowledge, information and evidence through research, assessments and studies to inform decisions and planning processes on urban food systems. They support the development of methods and technologies to improve different components of urban food systems.
Network of resource centres on urban agriculture and food security (RUAF) (seven regional centres and one global centre)	RUAF's mission is to contribute to urban poverty reduction, employment generation and food security and to stimulate participatory city governance and improved urban environmental management. It provides training, technical support and policy advice to local and national governments, producer organizations, non-governmental organizations and other local stakeholders. RUAF implements actions related to urban food both in partnership with FAO and other stakeholders and independently.
International Development Research Centre (IDRC)	IDRC supports projects to develop institutional capacity for urban agriculture in developing countries (both in partnership with FAO and independently).
Regional and national research centres (African Centre for Cities)	Research centres facilitate urban research and policy analysis. The African Centre for Cities is partnering with representatives from the African academic sector to better understand the connections between poverty, governance, urban space and food in several African cities, including Kitwe, Zambia.
German Ministry of Food and Agriculture	The Ministry of Food and Agriculture is the main donor to the City Region Food Systems (CRFS) programme in Sri Lanka and Zambia.
Belgian Development Cooperation	Belgian Development Cooperation provides financial support to FAO's Food for the Cities Programme in Colombia.
CGIAR	Its research programme on water, land and ecosystems conducts research and policy analysis on rural–urban linkages, assessing the performance of city-region food systems and of urban and peri-urban agriculture from a landscapes and territorial perspective. It is implementing the CRFS project in Sri Lanka in partnership with FAO.
Ministries of agriculture, health and education at national and sub-national level	Sectoral ministries are responsible for formulating policies and plans, allocating resources, providing technical guidance and norms and implementing programmes, including those related to FNS and food systems. Their jurisdiction is national or subnational, so actions in cities and nearby areas are conducted separately or in coordination with local governments.
Finance ministries	Finance ministries are responsible for central planning and budgetary allocation, including resources to local governments.
IFAD	IFAD promotes integrated approaches to foster the socioeconomic development of the vulnerable populations, building on urban–rural linkages.



<b>Stakeholder/partner</b>	<b>Main role</b>
UN Habitat	UN Habitat is a UN agency in charge of supporting countries in building inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities and communities. It oversees the implementation of the New Urban Agenda.
Civil-society organizations (consumer, producer and other associations)	Civil-society organizations are involved in the multi-stakeholder platform, bringing the voice and interests of the populations they represent to food-systems policy and planning processes. If adequately empowered and sensitized, civil society organizations could play an important role in generating and calling for the transformation of food systems.
Private sector (through transport, food processing and distribution firms, retailers)	The private sector is involved in the multi-stakeholder platform, bringing sectoral interests to food-systems planning processes. It is responsible for implementing important elements of actions to improve food systems and can provide resources. If adequately sensitized, it can be a key ally in transforming food systems.

### **3. Effectiveness and relevance to SDG 2**

#### **3.1 Relevance of FAO's work on urban food to SDG 2**

14. Because of the rapid urbanization rate, tackling the food and nutrition concerns of urban population is key to achieving SDG 2 goals. The New Urban Agenda, signed in Quito in 2016, clearly addresses the need for "integrating food security and nutritional needs of urban residents in urban and territorial planning" (Habitat III Secretariat, 2017). Sustainable food systems in urban and surrounding rural areas are also fundamental to achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda.
15. In this context, the need to incorporate food into urban planning is being seen as a priority action for many national and local governments. However, being a relatively new area, authorities face numerous challenges when it comes to implementation. The main hurdles lie in a less-than-full understanding of urban food systems and their interlinkages with rural areas, and failure to identify the actions and mechanisms necessary to improve food systems and to facilitate changes in an effective and inclusive way.
16. FAO has been implementing various initiatives to try to plug these gaps. Some of the most advanced are the CRFS initiative, the NADHALI project, the promotion of city-to-city cooperation and supporting the MUFPP. Box 1 summarizes some of these initiatives.

#### **3.2 Achievements**

17. The main achievements of FAO's various urban food initiatives are:

##### ***The creation of multi-stakeholder governance mechanisms for food-systems planning at territorial level***

18. Through the CRFS and the NADHALI initiative, and in collaboration with local governments, FAO supported the creation of inclusive multi-stakeholder platforms to debate and support CRFS decision-making and planning processes. The platforms brought together national institutions, local governments, civil society, academia and the private sector to discuss and agree common strategies to improve territorial food systems. Although one of the challenges was the weak links between national (which usually have the decision-making power on resources and budget allocation) and local governments, efforts were made to convene as many actors as possible.
19. For example, in Medellín, Colombia, the *Alianza por el buen vivir* platform helped the city government to prioritize actions to improve food systems and allocate funds for implementation. In Antananarivo, a multi-actor platform convening national (Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries) and local government has been created to decide on a CRFS plan. Lima's multi-stakeholder platform has been formally recognized by city ordinance and it has signed a Carta Alimentaria (food charter) that includes a vision and priorities for city food system.
20. Governance mechanisms also helped to frame the discussion on potential conflicts between rural and urban communities, especially for the use of natural resources such as land and water. However, a lack of clarity on which body has authority over the use of land and water in city regions stalled progress in planning the use of the territory (and the protection of agricultural land in city surroundings). For instance, in Antananarivo, territorial planning falls under the Ministry of Spatial Planning, Housing and Public Works, while the protection of agricultural land and investments in the agricultural sector is the responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries.

21. Another challenge of the territorial approach to urban food systems is a lack of communication with national administrations, which hampers planning and the allocation of resources. There tends to be no one administrative body for cities and their surrounding rural areas (city regions). Such challenges require strong coordination and engagement by different administrative levels (national, district and local), which can be easier said than done.

### ***The creation of knowledge, information and evidence to support planning***

22. FAO starts its planning process by undertaking descriptive and in-depth assessments, which provide knowledge and information on the structure and characteristics of territorial-level food systems. The assessments themselves are considered one of FAO's main achievements, as the use of such assessments was pioneering in terms of providing knowledge and evidence on the specific qualities, gaps, challenges and potential of urban food systems and their links to the surrounding areas. This has helped to raise awareness and create a better understanding of the specificities of food patterns, food chains, food waste problems, food safety, affordability and access, as well as the interests of territorial actors. All of this information feeds into FAO's context-specific planning and also results in greater engagement and ownership by territorial-level stakeholders.

### ***The expansion of urban agriculture and city-to-city exchange***

23. FAO has promoted urban agriculture in a large number of cities around the globe. One of its strategies for replicating experiences has been to promote city-to-city exchanges. FAO has played a leading role as a facilitator, helping to connect one city with specific requirements with other cities that might offer solutions. A good example of such an initiative was the connection of Dakar (Senegal) with Douala (Cameroon) and Praia (Cabo Verde).
24. Dakar initially started its micro-gardening project in 1999, drawing on the experience and success of such projects in Colombia. More than 4 000 families were trained, with the initiative targeted at vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities, the elderly, orphans and those in ill health. The success of the project in Dakar enabled its replication across other African cities. To facilitate this, FAO and the City of Dakar signed a memorandum of understanding to enabling Dakar to share its knowledge and experience of micro-gardens with Douala and Praia (FAO, 2019b).
25. The main objectives of the exchanges between the cities were to enhance the capacity of representatives in Douala and Praia on micro-gardening techniques, provide technical assistance to both cities in implementing micro-garden projects at local level and raise awareness of the importance of establishing a framework to facilitate the adoption of urban food policies at local level. This cooperation resulted in the installation of vegetable gardens in both cities. Nevertheless, this successful example was not replicated in or expanded to other areas or cities.
26. The most important forum by far for city-to-city cooperation is the MUFPP, a unique global agreement on standards of work in urban areas. Since its foundation, it has been a means of exchanging experience, information and lessons learned and has been highly beneficial to participant cities. It also gives access to funding. City representatives interviewed for this review said that two key advantages of being part of the Milan Pact were the opportunity to mobilize resources and to learn from the experience of others. FAO has partnered with MUFPP since its establishment in 2014 and facilitated the creation of several forums. FAO and the MUFPP Secretariat, with the support of RUAF, developed the MUFPP monitoring framework, which was approved at the pact's annual gathering in Tel Aviv in 2018 (FAO, RUAF Foundation and Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, 2019).

### ***Capacity building***

27. Training local actors on a new vision of urban food systems and the formation of an extensive group of experts and technicians in urban and peri-urban agriculture have also been significant achievements of the urban food initiatives promoted by FAO.

### **3.3 SDG 2 and other SDG targets addressed by FAO's work on the Urban Food Agenda**

28. The main goal of FAO's Urban Food Agenda is to ensure sustainable food systems and better nutrition, so it is directly connected to the reduction of food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms (SDG 2 indicators 2.1.2, 2.2.1 and 2.2.2). Initiatives such as the CRFS and the NADHALI project, however, explicitly address urban–rural linkages and the interconnection with food and non-food systems in a systemic, multidimensional and multisectoral way. In this sense, the new approach is more comprehensive. It pursues the sustainability and resilience of the food system as a whole, by promoting the economic development of all actors in the food chain, the sustainable management of natural resources and social inclusion. This approach, therefore, has the potential to contribute to the attainment of other SDGs, such as SDG 11 (sustainable cities), SDG 12 (promotion of sustainable consumption) and SDG 6 (ensuring access to clean water, promoting sustainable management of water). In practice, plans and strategies formulated to improve food systems cover diverse areas, such as food safety, food waste, activities to enhance resilience to climate change (and now to pandemics), as demonstrated by Antananarivo.

## **4. Links to the key principles of the 2030 Agenda**

### **4.1 Acting at scale**

29. FAO's food-systems approach is relatively new and still in the development and piloting phase, with some expansion. However, those cities where it has been implemented have shown interesting results in terms of local (and even national) political influence and resource mobilization.
30. The multi-stakeholder platforms become spaces to foster the development of action plans and to incorporate FNS issues into the national and local policies. Action plans, in turn, become important instruments for mobilizing resources, not only from local governments, but also from national governments and international organizations. For instance, based on an in-depth CRFS analysis, the City Council of Colombo formulated a food waste management norm, as food waste was identified as one of the city's main problems. In Quito, the multi-stakeholder platform came up with a territorial food policy covering the surrounding rural areas.
31. In Antananarivo, the CRFS initiative helped to spur the interest of government in promoting and scaling up urban and peri-urban agriculture in the country's main cities. In Peru, Lima's experience has been replicated to other cities, fostering the establishment of a network of cities in South America (Lima, Rosario and Quito).
32. The Greater Golden Horseshoe CRFS in Canada has led to renewed food policymaking and the incorporation of food-systems issues into the national agenda. The State of Ontario's 2017 Growth Plan for the region calls for municipal food-systems planning, protection and preservation of agricultural landscapes and support to agrifood infrastructural development (State of Ontario, 2017). The Canadian Federal Government reported on the importance of mid-level infrastructure in its December 2017 Standing Committee report (House of Commons Canada, 2017).
33. There are also new food policy initiatives with the City of Toronto that are informed directly by the work of the CRFS (Miller, 2017).
34. FAO-supported initiatives also had catalytic effects on resource mobilization. The NADHALI project, for instance, proved a magnet for additional funds: in Dhaka, a proposed follow-up succeeded in raising USD 12.5 million for a five-year project (from the Government of the Netherlands). In Nairobi, a project funded by the Government of Italy was to put into operation many of the actions recommended by the food-systems strategy. In Lima, additional funds were obtained through a Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) to promote good local food governance mechanisms based on the NADHALI experience. The project has been also replicated in Douala, Cameroon, where the municipality has received seed funding to create a food liaison advisory group using the NADHALI approach. In Medellín, Colombia, the government allocated funds to implement actions such as the design and implementation of a digital market and information system for producers.

### **4.2 Holistic views and interconnectedness**

35. As mentioned, FAO's new food-systems approach promotes multisectoral plans and actions. By promoting the creation of multi-stakeholder platforms, the new approach pursues the

interconnectedness of various levels of government and the public and private sectors,<sup>3</sup> as well as the incorporation of civil society. A systemic approach is crucial to the development of more holistic plans that consider elements across the entire food system, such as waste management, food safety, logistics, food production, consumer views and nutrition education.

36. However, the complexity and multidimensional nature of the food-systems approach can result in very complex planning and coordination systems, which can be less efficient and less feasible. It was acknowledged, for instance, that such comprehensive plans of action can be difficult to fund, so identifying appropriate entry points is vital. For instance, in Colombo, food waste management was the entry point for developing an awareness-raising campaign on sustainable consumption.

### **4.3 Social inclusion to “leave no one behind”**

37. The review found that initiatives ensured the representation of women in multi-stakeholder platforms. For instance, in Lima and Nairobi, 50 percent of the members were female. Gender analysis was also considered in the assessment phase, such as in the Rapid Urban Food Systems Appraisal Tool surveys. Solutions based on women’s organizations, such as community kitchens and fairs, were incorporated in the planning phase (for example, in Lima). Urban agriculture in Colombo was explicitly oriented towards women and youth as a means of improving their access to fresh food and generating income.
38. However, despite promoting the participation of women and other vulnerable groups, the initiatives are still weak in terms of being gender transformative. They also fall short in other areas, for instance, ensuring adequate working spaces and conditions for women involved in food chains, securing women’s access to decision-making levels and ensuring that women receive recognition for and greater visibility of their roles, as well as equitable access to financial and other resources.

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<sup>3</sup> In Antananarivo, the private sector has been represented by associations of transport enterprises, food-processing firms and retailers.

## **5. Factors contributing to successful initiatives**

39. Building ownership at political and technical level and promoting the engagement of the different stakeholders has been key to the success of FAO's interventions.
40. The participation of champions and opinion leaders was crucial to raise awareness and encourage stakeholders to engage in the planning process for the improvement of food systems in cities such as Lima and Antananarivo. Building on existing networks of consumers and producers around the cities facilitated the formation of multi-stakeholder platforms. The participation of the City Council Against Hunger and academia's provision of evidence on the necessity for interventions in the food systems proved key in Lima.
41. As food systems are a relatively new area for local governments, the promotion of exchanges between cities was essential (through the MUFPP, for example).

### ***How FAO's work on the Urban Food Agenda contributes to its positioning***

42. At global level, FAO leads the Urban Food Agenda. It is well positioned to cover all aspects of the food systems (production, processing, distribution and consumption).
43. It also has the convening capacity to link state and non-state actors at various levels, national to local, which are often not well connected.
44. FAO also has comparative advantages in its prominent position at global level and broad technical expertise, capacity and reach.

## **6. Challenges and limitations**

### ***Within FAO***

45. Funding based on short-term TCPs hamper the achievement of expected results and does not allow FAO to complete the entire project cycle from assessment and planning to implementation, as these are long processes.
46. Donor-driven and centrally designed projects can be in line with donor priorities, but not necessarily with the interests and needs of local actors. In some cases, there is only a narrow window to adapt projects to local contexts. In addition, the coordination of centralized projects often flows directly between headquarters and the country team, bypassing the regional offices, which can leave them reluctant to provide technical assistance (Sri Lanka).
47. The implementation of the Urban Food Agenda is fragmented over different programmes and technical departments, so it is difficult to ensure a systemic approach.
48. FAO's contractual systems, which protect property rights, pose difficulties for research institutions.

### ***Outside FAO***

49. The fragmentation and complexity of governance mechanisms that oversee food systems complicate the process of planning, administration and resource allocation. The city-region approach adds more complexity, as their boundaries do not usually lie in one administrative jurisdiction. The interconnections between different levels of government are weak and, depending on a country's degree of decentralization, the bulk of decisions and powers can be concentrated in national institutions, leaving local and municipal authorities with limited roles, responsibilities and authority. For instance, in Sri Lanka, actions and strategies on FNS are primarily the responsibility of national ministries, guided by national policies, while, local authorities, such as the Colombo City Council, have fewer powers to oversee local food systems and allocate resources. These undermine efficient territorial planning and resource allocation and use.
50. Potential conflicts of interest among actors – for example, between food producers and commercial associations and government over regulatory mechanisms that go against their interests – can weaken coordination and collaboration.



## **7. Use of innovation and digital technologies**

51. FAO's Urban Food Agenda initiatives have been innovative in their approach, tools and implementation mechanisms.
52. The city-region approach is an innovation in itself, as it shifts the narrow focus of urban FNS programmes from cities to a more territorial approach, building on urban–rural linkages. Multi-stakeholder platforms and multi-sector planning are also innovative, flying in the face of traditional sectoral planning, and should foster the creation of city environments that are conducive to FNS.
53. The use of a spatial data-collection system based on geographic information systems was considered crucial in the heterogeneous context of a city, to rapidly visualize key elements such as infrastructure, informal settlements, transport systems and other aspects important for food-systems planning. In the same vein, an app-based monitoring system of fresh food markets (for monitoring food stocks and prices), linked to a communications campaign, is being developed in Lima.
54. Despite these advances, there is considerable room to explore the use of technology (big data) to collect information, plan and optimize the functioning of food-systems components in urban areas.

## **8. Usefulness in addressing shocks and stresses**

55. Having a better understanding of CRFS and identifying the gaps, bottlenecks and opportunities along the food chain are crucial to the design and implementation of interventions in emergencies. Urban agriculture becomes important in the context of potential interruptions to distribution chains because of its proximity of supply, as in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic. At times like this, up-to-date information on the flows of food across food chains, as well as prices, logistics and safety issues, becomes highly important in deciding what actions are needed where. Information on markets and flows of food has proved important, for instance, in deciding the location of temporary farmers' markets in Lima during the pandemic.

## 9. Conclusions and recommendations

### 9.1 Conclusions

56. The following conclusions can be drawn from this review:

**Conclusion 1.** The rapid urbanization process carries significant implications for the achievement of SDG 2, with 68 percent of the population expected to be living in urban areas by 2050 (UN, n.d.). FAO's work on the Urban Food Agenda, therefore, is vital if countries are to achieve their SDG 2 targets. FAO is well positioned to drive the Urban Food Agenda at global level.

**Conclusion 2.** FAO has adapted its approach to address the challenges brought about by urbanization. Its strategy on urban food has evolved significantly, from a focus on urban agriculture to building more efficient, sustainable and resilient food systems in urban and surrounding rural areas. It has made a clear shift towards a comprehensive and multisectoral approach that encompasses food production, distribution, food waste and consumption, promoting knowledge creation, governance and planning processes on a territorial basis. However, the new approach is not yet fully replicable and scalable. It is being implemented through specific initiatives and projects and different components are still being tested.

**Conclusion 3.** The urban food-systems approach is considered complex to implement on the ground. Some of the challenges stem from difficulties in assembling holistic governance structures and in coordinating complex relationships between different levels of government. FAO initiatives such as CRFS and NADHALI have shown that territorial approaches that focus on a specific region and/or specific entry points can help reduce complexity. Still, progress has been slow and project design has been somewhat top-down. Moreover, the funding of initiatives based on short-term TCPs does not facilitate uninterrupted support throughout the assessment, planning and implementation process.

**Conclusion 4.** A key area of FAO's support has been the creation of knowledge, information and evidence to inform urban food-systems planning. Its development of in-depth and comprehensive assessments of city regions was pioneering as one of the few exercises to produce knowledge on the specific characteristics and potential of territorial-level food systems.

### 9.2 Recommendations

57. These recommendations are based on a rapid review of a large programmatic area and should be taken as suggestions for programme development:

**Recommendation 1.** FAO should prioritize the replication of positive experiences stemming from urban initiatives such as CRFS and NADHALI. This could be achieved by advocating and generating interest among local and national governments for the upscaling of projects, especially those that promote South-South cooperation and the exchange of experience, using existing forums, such as the MUFPP.

**Recommendation 2.** Transforming the Urban Food Agenda requires different visions from a diversity of disciplines, so it is important to strengthen and diversify the personnel profile at country level (so that it does not solely comprise agronomists).

**Recommendation 3.** Engagement with the private sector as key player in the urban food system is important to realize transformation across the food chain/ food systems and to mobilize resources. Strategies to capitalize on private-sector social and environmental responsibility are needed.

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## Appendix 1. People interviewed

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Zuluaga Orrego	Juan	FAO Colombia	National Coordinator of Territorial Management

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