

World Urban Forum 7  
Medellín, Colombia  
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**Conference on  
City Region Food System  
and Sustainable Urban Development  
9. April 2014**

**City region food systems and sustainable urbanisation:  
*A call for global action***

**The need for co-operation and partnerships:** The strengthening of city regional food systems can play a key role in helping to feed an increasingly urbanized world in ways that are sustainable, resilient, fair and healthy and that help to create the Future We Want<sup>1</sup>. The importance of territorial or landscape approaches to food systems development is increasingly recognized, but city regions, and the rural urban linkages that they represent, are not yet prominent in international dialogue on the future of food and nutrition security. A concerted effort is therefore required to enable these approaches to help shape the future of our food security and the healthy rural urban linkages upon which future well being depends. This joint effort will require co-operation between subnational and local authorities associations, civil society in both rural and urban communities, the private sector and the donor community. This multi-sector effort will also need to collaborate with all levels of government, integrating economic, ecological, landscape and rights-based approaches.

**A window of opportunity:** Collaborative actions could be particularly effective over the next two years, during which time various key global agreements will be articulated under the broad heading of the Post 2015 development framework. This two-year period is bookended by the Seventh World Urban Forum in 2014 and the UN Habitat III meeting in 2016, with the 2015 Global Expo in Milan providing further opportunity to publicly demonstrate how our food systems can be improved to better satisfy human needs.<sup>2</sup> Coordinated messages and joint actions will be needed to link local, subnational and national governments with civil society and the private sector. Of particular importance will be the development and exchange of knowledge between leading cities from around the world. Also important will be a shared strategy that positions city regional food systems as one element of a broader linked agenda to help strengthen the rural urban continuum. Selected targets for this concerted effort could include:

- The integration of food systems and ecosystem services into urban and regional planning for resilience;
- The development of enabling policy at all levels to support local and regional sustainable food production;
- The implementation of human-rights based and systems approaches to city region food security
- The mainstreaming of participatory governance and capacity building for inclusive development

**Why the city region<sup>3</sup> scale is vital to the future of prosperous, equitable and resilient development in both rural and urban areas:** The social, environmental and economic dimensions of rapid urbanisation are

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<sup>1</sup> i.e. the framework for sustainable development as laid out in the Rio+20 outcome document, The Future We Want.

<sup>2</sup> Between these two events are numerous other important processes and events where city region food systems are important, including the negotiation of sustainable development goals (SDGs), the Bonn Resilience Cities and World Congresses, climate negotiations (UNFCCC), the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) the Hyogo Framework for Action (Disaster Risk Reduction), Committee on Food Security (CFS), the World Trade Organization (WTO) among others.

<sup>3</sup> In this paper we use the terms “cities,” “city-regions,” “urban areas,” and “urban regions” interchangeably to denote metropolitan areas that are centers of population and economic activity. Our use of these terms is also intended to include the important links to

recognized as a challenge to development of the future we want. Human settlements from towns and villages to large cities are expanding and expected to double in their extent and population over the next generation. Rapid urbanization is concentrating natural resource consumption, supply shocks and other vulnerabilities, while confronted by unpredictable and severe weather events and economic volatility. In many regions a pattern of intensifying crises are emerging, with increased food, water, energy and other natural resource insecurity disproportionately impacting the poor, women and children. Cities are indeed becoming the front lines in formulating adaptive capacities for resilience<sup>4</sup> within a multi-scaled, interconnected global reality. The international community is in the process of elaborating a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These goals will build upon the successes and the lessons learnt with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and constitute a central piece in the UN Post 2015 Development Agenda. One thread in intergovernmental discussions towards the SDGs is the idea that cities do not exist in isolation from the wider regions in which they are located. As extended and more frequent crises become a “new normal” of ongoing challenges, such a framework for food and nutrition security – city region food systems - becomes critical.

### **City region food systems are at the heart of the rural urban continuum and sustainable human**

**development:** Since the 2007 food price crisis and financial crisis in 2008, new attention has been brought to the importance of food systems across the urban rural continuum. Food is central to the sustainability agenda, central to wellbeing, human dignity and cultural identity, and central to the health of ecosystems and human populations. Food is central to disaster preparedness in the face of climate change, natural and man-made disasters and other crises. Food is central in relation to ecosystem balance and ecosystem services. Sustainable diets require sustainable food systems. Yet the vital reliance of cities and human settlements on food production from rural, peri-urban and urban landscapes has only recently come on the radar for resilient and sustainable city regions.

**Ecological and economic benefits are mutually reinforcing:** The natural resources, biological and cultural diversity that sustain crops, livestock and forests, and that in turn sustain all human communities, provide vital and reciprocal benefits to the sustainable development of both rural and urban communities. It has become clear from experiences around the world that the most critical spatial intersection of these reciprocal flows of people, resources, goods and services is the city, town or village set within in a larger landscape, territory or region. A growing body of evidence supports the geographic and economic complementarity between rural and urban areas and in balancing and linking urban and rural food supply from urban gardens to rural smallholders and commercial farms.

**Equitable development requires realization of rights across the rural urban continuum:** Primary to the enjoyment of rights in human settlements is ensuring they are places that are democratic, inclusive, sustainable, productive, educational and safe for everyone, everywhere, to live with human dignity. The right to food<sup>5</sup> and the eradication of hunger, are critically linked to food system development that supports local producers and local industry, providing not only food products but livelihood support and employment. This right is dependent on access to, participation in and ownership of local and regional food systems. Thus a successful integration and development of a city region food system is contingent on the coordination of rights-based strategies which enable people to feed themselves, with adequate quantity and quality, through implementation of principles of non-discrimination, participation and a focus on the most vulnerable groups.

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surrounding ecosystems and rural areas. The term “regions” or “subnational governments” – when used alone reflects the intermediate level of government between the local municipal level and the national one, which can take the shape of counties, townships, states, regions, territories or provinces.

<sup>4</sup> “Resilience” is defined by FAO as *the ability to prevent and mitigate disasters and crises as well as to anticipate, absorb, accommodate or recover and adapt from them in a timely, efficient and sustainable manner. This includes protecting, restoring and improving livelihoods systems in the face of threats that impact agriculture, food and nutrition (and related public health and by Oxfam as “the ability of women, men, and children to realize their rights and improve their well-being despite shocks, stresses, and uncertainty”.*

<sup>5</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 25; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Article 11; The Voluntary Guidelines to support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security

**Realization of ecological, economic, and equitable benefits of stronger city region food systems will require new cross-sector integration and approaches.** Such integration at city region levels will help to:

- Integrate non-food and food **ecosystem planning** at the city region level into disaster risk management and climate action plans.
- Link urban and rural planning and implementation in a rights-based framework through multi-level inclusive and transparent **governance mechanisms**.
- Incorporate **new tenure provisions** and frameworks to provide secure access to land and natural resources both within and outside cities.
- Integrate **biodiversity protection and waste management** with food and water flows needed for food and nutrition security in the city region.
- Commit to **expand employment opportunity** in the food chain from producers to supply chain actors including markets of all types including informal farmer and street markets.
- Recognise fair and inclusive **trade dimensions** of city region food systems.
- Strengthen focus on **nutrition** as a core component to food security strategy and health.

*This call was developed from a group of partners and co-organisers of the above mentioned conference in the course of the event preparations, including  
FAO, ISU, CFS Civil Society Mechanism - Urban constituency, Communitas Coalition, Global Food Security Cluster - Urban working group, ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, RUAF, IUFN, UCLG, ILO, IFAD, UNCDF, UN Special Rapporteur to the right to food (Olivier de Schutter).*

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