



## City Region Food Systems (CRFS) in the Context of Sustainable Urbanization

**Key words:** city region food systems, sustainable food systems, rural urban nexus, integrated urban, peri-urban and rural planning, landscape and territorial approaches, ecosystem services, sustainable urbanization

### Key facts and figures:

- The achievements of modern food systems are notable. Yet 805 million people remain chronically under-nourished and the food system is responsible for widespread environmental degradation.
- Alongside the growth of urbanization, food supply chains are becoming increasingly globalized, and less tied to specific geographical areas.
- The loss of these regional rural-urban food system linkages creates challenges for balanced rural-urban development and threatens a wide range of socioeconomic and environmental benefits.

### Issue Summary:

**Food systems link rural and urban communities.** Food systems are complex and many-layered, including food production, distribution, processing, marketing, consumption and waste, as well as other socio-economic and environmental inputs and outcomes. There is great *diversity* between contexts, the nature of urbanisation, sizes of urban centre (from small and intermediate towns to megacities), types of food systems, and nature of ties with the surrounding countryside and rural populations. Yet the rural-urban nexus is the foundation of all food systems. Food systems link rural and urban populations in a region within a country, across regions, and sometimes between continents. The interdependencies and the ‘nexus’ between urban and rural development are at the heart of a City Region Food System approach.<sup>1</sup>

**Current food systems do not adequately sustain or support the needs of all actors.** Undernourishment remains rife, even as obesity rises in prevalence. Food producers and food chain workers are amongst the least well paid and most exploited. It is most often the poor, both rural and urban, who are marginalized by current food systems. The food and nutrition needs and rights of affected urban and rural people are linked in many ways, but both suffer the tendency of policy makers and other observers to treat these communities as separate, and even as competing with each other. Food systems are also responsible for large-scale environmental degradation and 19-29% of total global anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions. These same emissions undermine the ability of agriculture to deliver nutrition sustainably into the future, with climate change expected to reduce crop yields globally. Food loss and waste, estimated at one third of global food production, further impacts the environment while taking valuable nutrients from people, animals and the land.

**Better relationships between urban and rural spaces, peoples and environments are vital.** The city region food system approach recognises the need to enhance rural-urban connectivity to maximize the potential benefits, and poverty reducing opportunities, related to urbanization. Rural producers can, under the right conditions, benefit from urban demand for their products, shorter or more efficient value chains, and increased demand to provide urban centres with food, water, natural resources, energy and labour. Urban food demand can stimulate the development of new, higher value markets related to evolving consumption patterns (e.g. fresh fruit and vegetables, meat and dairy). Access to affordable, healthful, and fairly traded foods from local, regional and distant producers can be available to both rich and poor, rural and urban. In

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<sup>1</sup> Several recent papers make this point, including for example IFAD’s Post 2015 policy brief, *Leveraging the Rural Urban Nexus* (2014), <http://www.ifad.org/pub/post2015/english/1.pdf>, EcoAgriculture Partners paper on *City Regions as Landscapes for People, Food and Nature* (2014), [http://landscapes.ecoagriculture.org/global\\_review/city\\_regions](http://landscapes.ecoagriculture.org/global_review/city_regions) and the International Sustainability Unit of the Prince of Wales report, *Food in an Urbanised World: The role of city region food systems in resilience and sustainable development* (2015).

addition to food, city regions can benefit from clean water and other natural resources -- *ecosystem services* -- that unite nature and people.

**Barriers to overcome in operationalizing city region food systems.** There are constraints that undermine the capacity to take full advantage of new opportunities in city region food systems. These include poor and insecure access to, or control over, productive assets, financial services, knowledge and technology, and lack of access to modern energy, transport and infrastructure. Addressing such constraints partly depends on strengthening rural-urban connectivity via infrastructure, input and output markets, financial and rural advisory services, access to information and ICTs. Access to these services, and in particular land, natural resources, seeds, and fair markets for small-scale producers is a critical component towards improving the living and working conditions for these populations, while also streamlining and operationalising human rights obligations.

**Sustainable food systems and the *New Urban Agenda* need to be better understood in relation to each other.** This paper builds on a series of multistakeholder events<sup>2</sup> that occurred in 2013-2015 parallel to the World Urban Forum, the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, the Committee on World Food Security and the Resilient Cities Congress, amongst others, all linked in a collaborative effort to articulate the importance of **city region food systems** within the **rural urban nexus** that is critical to **sustainable food systems** for the future. In the process, stakeholders including UN agencies, local authorities associations, nongovernmental and civil society organizations, foundations, and research organizations, among others, have agreed to a Call to Action<sup>3</sup> and to work together on a global platform for knowledge gathering and exchange.

#### **Key Drivers For Action:**

**Urban centres are drivers of local and national development processes.** Human settlements and cities, including small and intermediate towns, link people to markets, services, food etc. and can leverage their influence for more positive outcomes in both rural and urban areas.

**A landscape or territorial approach will be necessary for sustainable urbanisation.** The city region food system lens leads us to recognise the diverse systems in which urbanisation dynamics are taking place and that these systems include urban and rural elements. Integrated planning across urban, peri-urban and rural landscapes is key to ensure full benefits and potentials of local agriculture and food systems.

**Short value chains and alternative food systems need to be strengthened.** International commodity markets are often volatile, and the globalised food system is not always resilient to shocks. Shorter value chains supplying fresh and minimally processed foods can help alleviate these problems. Strengthening farm-to-market infrastructure can help to reduce the marginalisation of small-scale producers while addressing the food, land and resource needs of the most vulnerable populations. Reinvesting in market systems, encompassing informal and formal markets, private and public markets, farmers, retail and wholesale markets, can shape the future of urban rural linkages.<sup>4</sup>

**The epidemic of obesity and non-communicable diseases will demand sustainable diets for all.** Undernourishment and malnourishment are universal and solutions will be required to make more healthful foods and safe drinking water accessible and affordable, especially to the most vulnerable. Urban and rural

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<sup>2</sup> Co-authors of this paper are Karim Hussein, International Fund for Agricultural Development, Emily Mattheisen, Habitat International Coalition, and Thomas Forster, Post 2015 Food and Agriculture Cluster. This paper was first developed for the first Habitat III prepcom, vetted with core stakeholders from other UN agencies, civil society organizations, local authorities associations and researchers and has been updated.

<sup>3</sup> Call to Action for City Region Food Systems and Sustainable Urbanisation was first launched at the April 2014 World Urban Forum in Medellin, Columbia and can be found on the FAO Food for Cities website: [http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/FCIT/Meetings/WUF\\_7\\_City\\_Region\\_Food\\_Systems\\_2014\\_05\\_09\\_Call\\_to\\_Action.pdf](http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/FCIT/Meetings/WUF_7_City_Region_Food_Systems_2014_05_09_Call_to_Action.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> The importance of public-private market systems at the heart of the rural urban nexus was recognized in the Declaration of the 9<sup>th</sup> International Public Markets Conference in Barcelona, Spain, 28 March, 2015: <http://www.pps.org/blog/sign-the-declaration-promote-healthy-public-markets-for-all/>

communities will need to find ways to collaborate to promote sustainable (healthy, environmentally friendly and fair) diets through appropriate education and communication programs, with special attention to schools, markets and the media.

**Pressures for equitable development will demand multi-stakeholder and inclusive approaches to address challenges:** Interests of different actors need to be taken into account and addressed in a fair and equitable way in policy and decision processes. At a minimum, this will require collaboration between all levels of government, nongovernmental and community-based civil society organizations, the private sector, the research and philanthropic communities and international support.

**People and community-based organizations are vital to city region food systems.** While engagement of formal sectors such as governments, NGOs and the private sector is needed, most community development included in local food systems in the world is achieved by individual, joint and collective initiatives in processes often delinked from the formal market and institutions. There is a need for greater understanding of how current local/regional food systems have formed and are functioning, and how policy at all levels can provide greater support towards positive, or endogenous local practices.

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### **Summary and what's next:**

There is a fundamental need for the development of economically, environmentally and socially sustainable city region food systems across all contexts, integrating urban and rural actors such as small scale producers that are more proximate and distant to urban centres to ensure urban centres can meet food and ecosystem services for sustainable urbanisation. A CRFS knowledge platform will be very useful to help share and learn from information, knowledge and experience regarding different contexts and approaches. It will provide a platform to share evidence on the key trends and drivers of the linkages between rural and urban areas, people and enterprises in relation to food systems, from production through to consumption, and on the diverse nature of city region food systems in distinct contexts.

For more information and to join in the CRFS community, visit the home for this collaborative multi-stakeholder effort at [www.cityregionfoodsystems.org](http://www.cityregionfoodsystems.org). There you will find the global Call to Action launched at the World Urban Forum in Medellin, Colombia in 2014, and links to organizations and resources for further engagement.