



Call for experiences and effective policy approaches in addressing food security and nutrition in the context of changing rural-urban dynamics



Template for submissions

(Approximately 1000 words in total)

Proponent

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Main responsible entity

Mercato Metropolitano ltd
The FarMM ltd

Date/Timeframe

May 2015 – ongoing

Funding source

Private

Location

Two pilots have been launched in Milan and Turin in 2015.
Since July 2016, the initiative is active in London.
The program targets urban and associated rural areas across the world in need of regeneration (from Miami to Tokyo, from Manchester to Nairobi, Teheran, Tel Aviv and Cape Town).

Background/Context

In a context of broken food systems, data show:

- A convergence towards a diet high in fat, sugar and processed food, often associated with sedentariness and high levels of Non-Communicable Diseases;
- The exacerbation of the Double Burden of Malnutrition, which encompasses both undernutrition and over-nutrition
- Limited access of small producers to national and international markets due to:
 - Scarce education and use of ICT
 - Infrastructure gaps
 - Fragmentation related to small/micro business dimension

- Lack of business capacity to organize into integrated, result-oriented structures
- Limited capacity to find appropriate marketing channels and access to appropriately priced local financing
- Global competition from big industries, which can reach all markets at low prices
- Scarce customer education on value of natural, sustainable products, compared with low-price, easy-to-prepare “junk foods”.
- Rise in urban agriculture (UPA), now responsible for 15/20% of global food supply. Still illegal in some countries, it provides a significant contribution to household food security and valorizes the nutritional and social value of food.

In this complex and emerging context, the project celebrates food as an important catalyst for conviviality and social cohesion. At the same time, it helps build inclusive development in local communities and contributes to economic development by supporting the regeneration of declining urban areas. Mercato Metropolitano acts as magnets for education around food and nutrition, community led gardens and sourcing ventures, as well as other community development activities, embracing the arts and focused on young people. Food is put at the center of culture and community in a sustainable way.

Focus/Objectives

The initiative aims to:

- create a sustainable community market concept, which targets urban and rural areas in need of regeneration. Working with local governments and strategic partners, it generates business and social ecosystems, where neglected metropolitan areas need it most, thereby stimulating private investments with the initiative providing an anchor for sales and marketing.
- bring natural, sustainable food producers and consumers closer together. Acting as an aggregator, the initiative reduces supply fragmentation while providing a reliable marketing channel for small-scale agri-food actors.
- raise awareness about sustainability, environmental, economic and social issues. To educate adults and children on the nutritional, cultural and social value of food.
- boost sustainable and inclusive economic growth by creating new jobs for low-skilled workers. The initiative is able to offer opportunities across the community and encourages social engagement, involving individuals and organizations independent of their political, religious or social status. Simply put, in the communal experience of eating and preparing food together acts as a foundation for integration helping people to meet in a place where they can experience the taste of simple and authentic beliefs.
- promote research and innovation, inside and alongside the agri-food sector. To promote start-ups and cooperate with educational institutions, providing support to talented students in developing their career in the field of food, nutrition or environment.

Key characteristics of the experience/process

The experience is characterized by a holistic approach to food and nutrition security, embracing a multitude of factors such as food availability, food access, education, social inclusion, innovation, and urbanization.

This approach is combined with a Quadruple Helix model: the program is designed and implemented in a continuous dialog with public authorities, business actors, universities and communities.

Food becomes part of a broader intervention, a means of stimulating sustainable and inclusive development in challenging and declining environments.

This is a flexible model that adapts itself to specific conditions: there are no rules, but values that aim to empower traditions, while enhancing local food security.

Key actors involved and their role

Participation is at the basis of the present initiative, which involves several key actors:

- Local communities. A first contact is established to present the program, set up conditions for project's acceptance and understand local needs.
- NGOs and non-for-profit. This collaboration ensures the participation of the most vulnerable people to the project
- Farmers and small-scale producers. They act as project's partners for the supply of high-quality food, which complies with sustainable production standards
- Customers. Direct customer feedbacks help to shape the program and adapt to changing necessities.
- Public and private institutions (governments, international organizations, universities). This cooperation aims to create a highly collaborative environment where academics, policy-makers, professionals and entrepreneurs work together to address issues such as food security, sustainability and traceability, sharing vision and principles for coordinated intervention.

Key changes observed with regards to food security and nutrition and sustainable agriculture and food systems

The success of a retail concept, which does not commercialize any industrial mass products (e.g. Coca-Cola) but only natural and locally owned ones demonstrates that people are naturally attracted to healthy, nourishing food and to food education.

In a low/middle-income residential area in South London, a vibrant melting pot of ethnic groups (the highest number of Colombian and Congolese residents in London), MM captivates 150.000 people/month.

Children participate in cooking classes; families, young adults and the elderly populate the whole place. The multi-generational space, rare in modern city life, is centered around healthy food and brings people into contact with food and nutrition security in a way that allows them to engage with issues naturally. It is offering a demonstration of how food security is a cross-cutting issue which concerns people of all ages, sex and social status.

More than 100 local producers have found in MM a platform for internationalization and aggregation, an opportunity to try their hand at direct marketing with minimal upfront investment.

National and international institutions have shown their interest in the project and universities are in contact with MM's board of directors to present and study the project as a Sustainable Business/Policy Case (Harvard Model).

Mercato Metropolitano is now recognized to be a movement, a complex structure of highly passionate professionals, who share a vision for a world without hunger, poverty and social injustices.

Challenges faced

One of the main challenges of the project is the current level of underfunding, which creates constraints for development. Nevertheless, the management has been able to implement an innovative approach with a solid basis for further expansion. A closer collaboration with the public sector might help to overcome this limitation. Expressions of interest are multiplying from cities around the world, and depending on the city, the possibility for redevelopment of large tracts of land in marginal urban areas offers public sector leadership that would allow the initiative to move forward more swiftly.

Scarcity of well-performing small artisans needs a structured approach to vendor onboarding and start-up. Suppliers evaluation and selection, combined with education and training is fundamental to achieve project objectives.

Lessons/Key messages

The FarMM and MM profess the following values:

- Food excellence
- Craftsmanship
- Urban renewal
- Sustainability
- Short food value chain
- Engagement
- Consistency
- Glocal approach
- farm-to-mouth CSR

This experience shows that people care about social projects focused on local and global issues that affect present and future generations. In Milan, more than 2 million people came to visit the site in 4 months, about 28.000 micro and small farmers have been involved in the project, and more than 300 new jobs have been created.

An effective policy should be based on participative processes. Public/private initiatives must be presented beforehand to target communities, which share opinions, express doubts and specify needs. This step eventually brings to adjustments before implementation.

Finally, recognizing the multiple dimension of food security is a key element to success. A comprehensive public/private program is not sector-specific. Instead, it analyses and tackles direct and indirect causes of food security.