



FOOD FOR THE CITIES



Neither the Millennium Development Goals nor the World Food Summit's goals will be achieved if appropriate attention is not given to cities and rural-urban linkages.



Challenges

In 2008, the world's urban population outnumbered its rural population for the first time in history. By 2030, 60 percent of the world's population is expected to live in cities. This urbanization process goes together closely with growing urban poverty and food insecurity. Currently, approximately one-third of the world's population is living in slums and informal settlements. If prevailing trends continue, this figure could reach 2 billion by 2030.

As cities expand, so do the food needs of urban families. While impacts of the food and financial crisis affect both rural and urban populations, the urban poor have been among the hardest hit. Urban consumers are almost exclusively dependent on food purchases and variations in food prices and income directly translate into diminished purchasing power and rising rates of food insecurity, thus compromising dietary quantity and quality. Changes in lifestyles have further contributed to increased urban malnutrition and diet-related chronic diseases.



Impacts on the urban poor

FAO estimates that, mainly as a result of high food prices, the number of chronically hungry people in the world rose by at least 100 million in the past years to currently reach over 1 billion people, with the urban poor, women and children being particularly vulnerable. Moreover, the financial and economic crisis is expected to continue affecting the urban poor in the near future, following projected declines in export growth and capital inflows.

Changes in climate, coupled to humanitarian crisis, add to challenges faced by cities and the urban poor. Agricultural production and urban food supply are increasingly affected by droughts and floods. More and more refugees and internally displaced persons are seeking refuge in urban neighbourhoods as opposed to camps, and demands for urban food are increasing.

Need to invest in cities and urban food programmes

The 4th World Urban Forum cited the need for policies and interventions to ensure that the increasing number of urban poor do not get left behind. The food dimension of poverty in urban areas still has not been translated into sufficient policy action in many countries. Rural-urban linkages will become increasingly important. Urban policies also need to acknowledge the role of urban and peri-urban agriculture in urban development, ensure urban food supply and strengthen livelihoods of poor urban producers. This includes removing barriers and providing incentives for urban and peri-urban agriculture (UPA) as well as improving natural resource management in urban and peri-urban areas. UPA was officially recognized by the 15th Committee on Agriculture session in Rome (1999), and subsequently the World Food Summit: five years later (2002) and the UN High Level Task Force on the Global Food Crisis (2008), as a strategy to alleviate urban food insecurity and build cities that are more resilient to crisis.

A paradigm shift in both urban and agriculture development, planning and policy formulation is required in order to ensure access to urban food security, improved environmental management and enhanced rural-urban linkages.

Urban food security requires a reliable year-round supply of nutritious and safe food. Urban consumers generally rely on purchased foods, mainly from rural areas or imported into the country. Many urban poor have long practised urban and peri-urban agriculture as a livelihood and survival strategy. In response to high food prices and disrupted food supplies, their number has increased. Urban households involved in UPA are generally more food secure





and benefit from a more diverse diet. Urban and peri-urban food production also helps increase the availability of healthy and affordable food, mainly fresh fruits, vegetables, eggs and dairy products, for a larger number of urban consumers.

In order to assure that UPA contributes to improved urban food security, support in terms of access to land, technical guidance and training on good production practices and farmers and consumers' education is required. Additionally, potential health hazards caused by use of wastewater and agrochemicals, poor food handling, urban pollution and the raising of animals close to people in combination with poor sanitation should be reduced.

Food production, processing and marketing also contribute to generating income and employment for many poor urban households. Income generated by the informal food sector is often equivalent to or higher than the official minimum wage. The sector specifically provides an opportunity for social and economic integration of women, urban newcomers, people living with HIV/AIDS

and youth. It helps reduce their vulnerability by diversifying livelihood opportunities and functioning as a safety net in times of economic crisis. In order to be sustainable, the sector needs support in the following areas: enterprise development; access to finance, markets and key natural resources such as land and water; and capacity building of producers' organizations.

Building more resilient cities is a key issue for future urban development. City adaptation to climate change has become a growing concern and a significant number of poor populations are exposed to floods and landslides. Multifunctional landscape management, integrating agriculture, trees and forests help to make cities more resilient. It does so not only by diversifying urban food sources and income opportunities, but also by maintaining open green spaces, enhancing vegetation cover and water infiltration, and contributing to sustainable water and natural resource management. Urban forestry, including agro-forestry, especially helps to improve air quality, reduces urban

warming, curbs erosion and enhances urban biodiversity. As water becomes increasingly scarce, UPA provides an ideal opportunity to productively use urban organic wastes and wastewater as well as collected rainwater; and official guidelines are currently acknowledging the use of untreated wastewater as long as sufficient risk reduction strategies are applied. Appropriate techniques and practices as well as health risk reduction measures should be promoted to ensure safe production and healthy environments.

City and national authorities, as well as international agencies, have a key role to play. City-to-city cooperation is on the increase with municipal authorities acting within multilevel partnerships to include (sub) national governments, civil society and non-governmental organizations, and the private sector in coordinated action to improve urban infrastructure, living conditions and health. This should result in integrated interventions in urban and peri-urban food production, food processing and marketing systems, more modern urban-rural linkages, water and waste management, land administration and promotion of healthy food cultures at the municipal level.



What FAO is doing

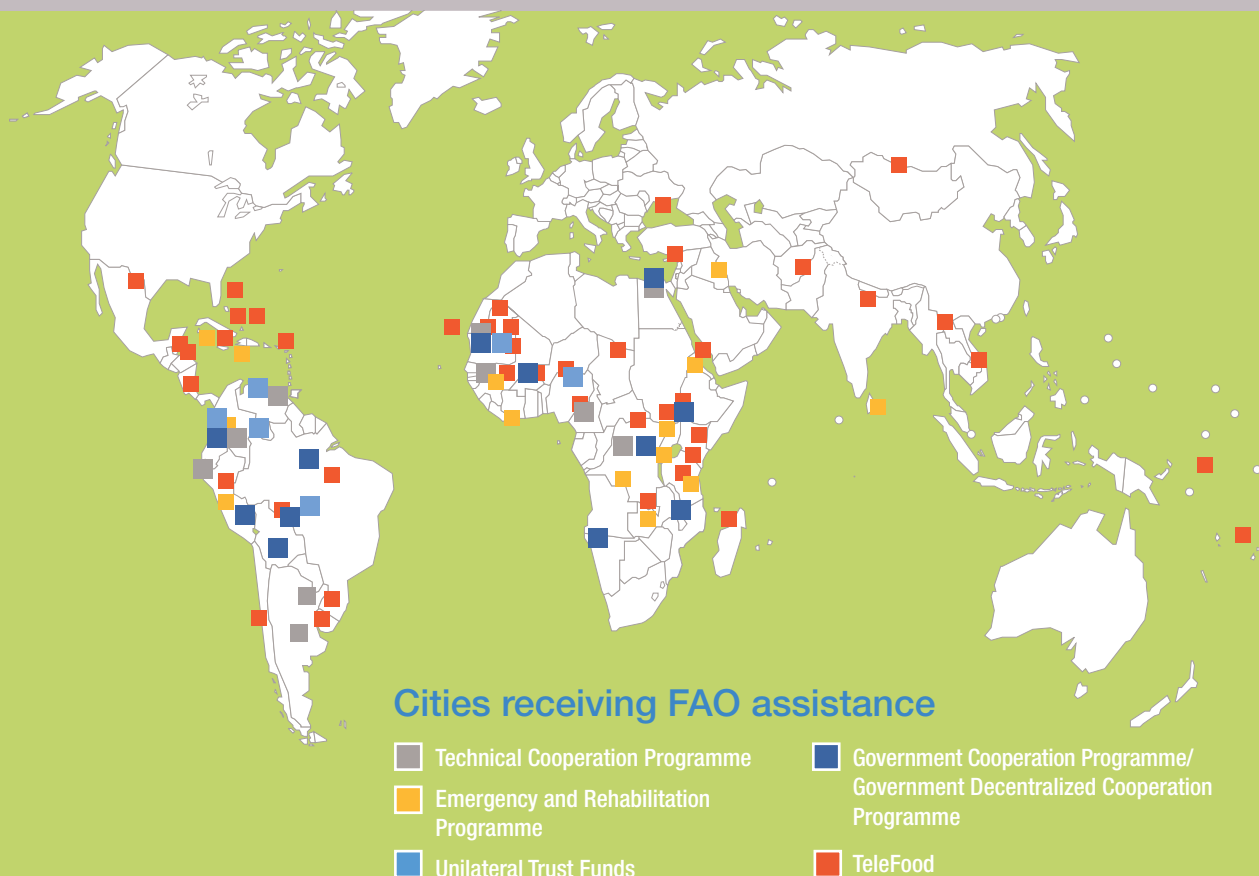
FAO already has been taking action by providing direct assistance to cities through a variety of programmes and projects, including its Special Programme for Food Security, its Decentralized Cooperation Programmes, its emergency operations, and TeleFood.

Such assistance includes the development of specific strategy and action plans and programmes:

- to support urban and peri-urban agriculture production to enhance access to quality irrigation water for urban and peri-urban agriculture;
- to improve the urban food supply and distribution systems;
- to support small livestock and dairy production;
- to promote urban and peri-urban forestry;
- to provide emergency support to internally displaced persons and other communities at risks.

FAO puts information within reach and shares experiences through:

- the production of resource materials (e.g. guidelines, manuals, resource books) for local authorities and technical staff;
- the organization of expert consultations and workshops on urban food supply and nutrition and urban and peri-urban agriculture and forestry;
- the monitoring and evaluation of performance indicators, including HORTIVAR (www.fao.org/hortivar).



Response and actions required

FAO member countries, municipal authorities and relevant institutions need to:

- become aware of the need to give specific attention to urban food security, especially of poor households;
- make available technical guidance and capacity building tools to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of UPA production and post-production systems with special attention to strengthening livelihoods and increasing food availability, safety and accessibility;
- provide policy guidance at the municipal and national level to integrate food and agriculture as part of urban and territorial land use planning, taking into account the need to enhance rural-urban linkages;
- promote the protection and improvement of the urban and peri-urban environment;
- improve urban resilience and adaptation to natural disasters, including climate change, to reduce negative impacts on agriculture, water and urban infrastructures and consequently provide opportunities for significant saving in budget and human resources.



FAO calls for increased collaboration, networking and joint activities with partner organizations.

At UN level, FAO and UN-HABITAT are increasing their collaboration in various fields, such as rural-urban linkages and land tenure issues. FAO is also involved in a variety of inter-agency initiatives to improve water quality and wastewater management, nutrition and humanitarian responses to crisis in urban areas.

FAO also partners with the RUAF Foundation (an international network of Resource Centres on Urban Agriculture and Food Security) and other partners engaged in food and agriculture in cities such as the CGIAR (IWMI, CIP, Bioversity International), International Development Research Centre-IDRC and CIRAD, the World Bank, as well as local authorities and a variety of NGO/CSO partners.

“World hunger is projected to reach an historic high in 2009, with 1.02 billion people going hungry every day

The urban poor will probably face the most severe problems in coping with the global recession, because lower export demand and reduced foreign direct investment are more likely to hit urban jobs harder ...”.

FAO, 136TH COUNCIL, 2009



For further information and resources

please visit the Web site of the FAO Food
for the Cities multidisciplinary initiative at
www.fao.org/fcit



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