



# 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.

