Food, agriculture and cities

The challenges of food and nutrition security, agriculture and ecosystem management in an urbanizing world

A majority of people now lives in cities worldwide. In 2050, 70 % of the world population, forecasted to be more than 9 billion, will live in urban areas. This urban development will mainly occur in low-income and transition countries. During the 2007 – 2008 food crises, food riots occurred in numerous cities. Food entered the political agenda. Conflicts, extreme natural events and economic turmoil further elevated the volatility of the food supply and prices and put millions of people at risk, particularly the poorest. The feeding of the world population involves a complex system of ecological, social and economic relationships. The world community has acknowledged that the human right to food must be progressively realized despite the enormous challenges and inequities that exist in the food systems of both rich and poor countries. The diverse array of present food systems is changing rapidly on a global scale and will continue to change.

Critical needs are to:

1. Bring together multiple elements for a common understanding of both local and global challenges to address food and nutrition security, agriculture and management of natural resources for food and nutrition security and health in a context of rapidly growing cities.
2. Identify priorities for implementation of improved rural to urban linkages and partnerships to provide for sustainable food and nutrition security across the rural, peri-urban and urban landscapes.
3. Facilitate and support future coordinated contributions at technical and policy levels to existing and new partners, including partnerships of administrators in national and local government agencies, civil society including community based organizations, and private sector stakeholders.

The food system is a continuum from rural to urban: We need to consider food systems with their urban, peri-urban and rural components together, including the geography of food production (in rural and urban and peri-urban areas), food distribution, storage, processing, marketing and consumers. We therefore have to consider and examine the urban-rural continuum of the food system with in all its landscape and social dimensions. There is strong potential for complementarities and synergies resulting from dialogue, planning, and action led by local authorities and stakeholders across the urban rural continuum. A key question for the future of food and nutrition security is whether actors at global and local levels will join together and take on both rural and urban dimensions of an *integrated* food system, connecting producers and consumers.

The transformation of the roles of actors in the food system: Trends affecting food and nutrition security for people living in cities include increasing hunger and poverty, chronic non-communicable diseases such as obesity, extreme weather events and repeated disasters and emergencies, economic instability, food price volatility and climate change -- all increasing the vulnerability for poor urban and rural households in both low and high income countries. Urban to rural and rural to urban linkages for food and nutrition security, environmental resilience and economic vitality, bring to the foreground fundamental challenges of conserving biodiversity, improving land use, adapting to climate change and increasing food security and sustainable diets. All are mutually-reinforcing, and a holistic approach to their management can establish bundled solutions – generating results important to each and all of these challenges.

Tools for addressing the challenges: The integration of elements and dimensions of food systems planning need to be taken together, in a holistic framework to support multi-level, multi-sector and multi-stakeholder food system approaches. Through such means, rural-urban linkages in relation to food and nutrition security will become critical when assessing the food system. Among the most challenging socio-economic and health factors related to the food system for local authorities are poverty and livelihoods, hunger, malnutrition, shifting diets and health, food safety, and addressing human migration and labor challenges from rural to urban areas. If solutions to these challenges are linked, these and other components of the urban and rural food landscape can contribute significantly to greening the economy, a major goal for many cities and national governments for whom resilience has become a matter of urgent concern.

Approaches to urban rural food system resilience: Building on the components of the food system, four interrelated dimensions to address these elements are:

1. a people-centred and social development policy dimension,
2. a natural resource management dimension,
3. a multi-level governance dimension, and
4. a territorial planning dimension across the urban rural continuum.

These four dimensions can be mutually reinforcing for stronger urban-rural linkages. They can be encompassed within action plans or operating frameworks for sustainable development related to social, environmental and economic goals which for the food system, demand new approaches in governance and new planning tools. Moreover, the role of food systems in the context of planning for resilience and sustainability should be a part of addressing climate change across all levels of government. As the awareness and capacity increases for food system planning among local governments working with civil society and the private sector, policy and programmes linking food and nutrition security with economic development, biodiversity conservation and climate change adaptation can become more integrated. Concerted efforts with national support are needed to support coherent policy and action across these vertical levels of governance. Just as important are mechanisms that support horizontal learning and linkages of urban and rural authorities to promote people-centred for food and nutrition security.

Next steps: Key roles of local and national governments, collaborating with civil society and the private sector, need to be acknowledged and formally engaged in coming efforts and collaborations. Improvements of the technical competencies of partners to address challenges to food and nutrition security, and to provide educational and policy guidance to national governments and ministries to enable local urban and rural decision makers and planners are needed. Collaborative strategies for implementing technical and policy support need to be developed in greater detail. A key step is to recommend areas of policy support, such as effective implementation from the global and national levels, engagement of local authorities and communities in a more coordinated and systematic manner so as to address the challenges of food and nutrition security, agriculture and natural resources management in an urbanizing world.

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Global network:
http://dgroups.org/fao/food-for-cities

You're are in invited to the

Food for the Cities side event at the CFS

Friday 21 October – 12:30 – 14:00 – Iran room