

Priority Issues for the Policy Convergence Process: Strengthening Urban and Peri-Urban Food Systems

The World Food Programme (WFP) recognizes the critical importance of strengthening urban and peri-urban food systems to achieve food security and nutrition amidst rapid urbanization and rural transformation. Drawing on the findings of the HLPE-FSN report and WFP's extensive experience and operational expertise in food systems across diverse stable, fragile and crisis settings, the following additional priority issues are highlighted to support the CFS policy convergence process:

Priority Issue I:

Ensuring the adequate inclusion of fragile and crisis-prone contexts in the policy recommendations

Why this is Important

Fragile and crisis-prone contexts are disproportionately affected by food insecurity and malnutrition, often due to the convergence of compounding shocks such as conflict, climate change, economic volatility, and displacement. These contexts are characterized by weak governance, degraded infrastructure, and limited access to resources, making food systems particularly vulnerable.

Moreover, addressing fragile and crisis-prone contexts is a strategic necessity for ensuring **global food system stability and resilience**. By integrating these contexts into the policy convergence process, governments and the international community can help mitigate risks, protect the most vulnerable populations, and foster long-term stability in urban and peri-urban areas most at risk.

Needs in urban areas and its food systems will exponentially increase in the coming decades as well as the frequency and complexity of the crises that affects them. The policy recommendations should convey a sense of urgency to address U-PU food systems under these circumstances with clear messages on preparedness, early warning, anticipatory action, disaster risk reduction, and overall resilience building.

The urgency to include these contexts is underscored by the following factors:

- **Global impact:** Of the 309 million people facing hunger globally, approximately 70% live in fragile or conflict-affected settings. These areas are also among the most susceptible to climate-induced shocks and displacement.
- **Interconnected Risks:** Fragile settings often serve as epicenters for cascading crises that destabilize entire regional and global food systems. Addressing fragility is therefore integral to global food system resilience and sustainability.
- **Lessons from recent global crises:** The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the fragility of urban food systems - including those in more stable contexts - revealing gaps in supply chains, loss of income, and reduced access to food for vulnerable populations. The policy convergence process must incorporate lessons from these crises to build systems that can withstand future shocks.

The policy recommendations should promote:

- Policy frameworks that explicitly reference the unique challenges of food systems in fragile and crisis-prone urban and peri-urban areas, and their importance for regional and global food systems.

Preliminary priority issues

- Multi-level governance systems that can prepare for, and respond rapidly and effectively to crises, leveraging local governments, private sector and diverse local actors.
- Strengthening institutional capacities for preparedness, early warning systems, anticipatory action and crisis management, tailored to fragile and crises-prone contexts.
- The use of shock responsive social protection mechanisms as important policy instruments that governments - and sometimes the international actors supporting them) - can deploy at a large scale in urban areas to address food security and nutrition and strengthen U-PU food systems.
- Adequate investment in critical infrastructure (e.g., roads, storage facilities) that support U-PU food system functionality during and after crises.
- Community-driven resilience-building initiatives that address vulnerabilities in urban food systems and ecosystems.
- Enhanced data and analysis that capture the nuances of U-PU food systems in fragile contexts, including the impacts of displacement and compound shocks.
- The use of data to drive evidence-based policy decisions and monitor the effectiveness of interventions in fragile contexts.

Priority Issue 2:

Ensuring the adequate reference to building resilience of U-PU food systems, to tackle increasingly complex and compounded shocks

Why this is Important

The resilience of urban and peri-urban food systems is critical for ensuring food security and nutrition across both urban and rural areas, amidst a growing convergence of challenges such as climate change, economic volatility, conflict, public health crises, and rapid urbanization. These shocks often disrupt supply chains, exacerbate inequalities, and disproportionately affect vulnerable populations in urban areas.

Resilient urban and peri-urban food systems are essential for mitigating the impacts of shocks and ensuring food security in an increasingly uncertain world. By integrating resilience into policies, strengthening adaptive capacities, and promoting inclusive governance, governments and the international community can safeguard urban populations against future crises. These actions will contribute to the long-term sustainability and stability of global food systems.

The importance of building resilient U-PU food systems is underscored by the following factors:

1. Global vulnerability to shocks:

- Climate-related shocks such as floods, droughts, and heatwaves directly impact food production and supply chains. Urban areas, reliant on external sources for food, are particularly vulnerable to these disruptions.
- Economic crises can drive inflation and reduce purchasing power, particularly affecting low-income urban populations.
- Climate change, economic shocks, and public health crises are not isolated events; they interact and magnify vulnerabilities within urban food systems. Resilience-building must account for these interlinkages.
- Urban food systems are at the forefront of global crises, where disruptions can have far-reaching regional and global impacts.

2. Urbanization and inequality:

Preliminary priority issues

- The rapid growth of informal settlements without adequate infrastructure exacerbates vulnerability to shocks, particularly for marginalized groups.
- Many urban areas lack comprehensive systems to respond to food-related crises, leading to cascading risks across health, housing, and sanitation sectors.

Policy considerations

1. Integrate resilience across U-PU food systems policies and planning frameworks

- Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR): Embed DRR into urban food systems planning, focusing on reducing exposure to climate risks, enhancing supply chain resilience, and strengthening infrastructure such as cold storage and distribution networks.
- Early Warning Systems: Develop robust systems to predict and respond to food system disruptions, ensuring timely interventions to prevent cascading effects on urban populations.
- Anticipatory Action: Foster proactive measures, such as pre-positioning food stocks and establishing financial buffers for at-risk urban areas.

2. Enhance adaptive capacities in governance

- Strengthen local institutions: Equip municipal governments with the tools and resources to coordinate responses to food system shocks. This includes fostering partnerships with private sector actors, civil society, and international organizations.
- Support policy coherence: Ensure alignment between food systems resilience strategies and broader urban planning, housing, and transport policies, to name a few.
- Inclusive governance: Facilitate participatory approaches that engage vulnerable communities, enabling them to shape policies that address their specific needs.

3. Promote resilient infrastructure and supply chains

- Invest in resilient infrastructure, including urban food hubs, transportation networks, and storage facilities, to minimize supply chain vulnerabilities.

Priority Issue 3:

Addressing inequalities in U-PU food systems in the context of urbanization and rural transformation

Why this is Important

Urban and peri-urban food systems are increasingly shaped by processes of rapid and unplanned urbanization, which often exacerbate social, economic, and spatial inequalities. These inequalities are deeply embedded in access to food, resources, and opportunities, disproportionately affecting marginalized groups such as low-income households, informal workers, women, youth, migrant and displaced populations, and people with disabilities.

As urban areas rapidly grow and rural areas undergo transformation, the gaps in food security and nutritional outcomes between different populations become more pronounced. Urban areas, especially informal settlements, often experience higher costs of living, limited access to land for food production, and dependence on volatile markets. Food deserts—areas with limited access to nutritious food—are also prevalent in highly unequal cities leading to overreliance on low-quality, calorie-dense diets that drive malnutrition and diet-related diseases. These inequalities, undermine the overall resilience, sustainability, and inclusivity of U-PU food systems, and the resulting food insecurity and malnutrition further reinforces cycles of poverty and vulnerability, particularly in underserved urban areas and informal settlements.

By ensuring the adequate inclusion of the most vulnerable populations and encouraging equitable and inclusive U-PU food systems, the policy convergence process can ensure that no one is left behind in the fight against zero hunger.

Preliminary priority issues

The importance of addressing inequalities in U-PU food systems is underscored by the following factors:

1. **Inequalities undermine food system sustainability:**
 - Unequal access to food, markets, and opportunities threatens the resilience and inclusivity of urban and peri-urban food systems. Addressing these inequalities is essential for achieving sustainable food systems.
2. **Intersectionality of inequalities:**
 - Food system inequalities are often intersectional, with economic, social, and spatial factors compounding to exacerbate food insecurity for specific groups, such as women, youth, displaced persons, and informal workers, among others.
3. **Spatial Inequalities and urban sprawl:**
 - Peri-urban areas, where urban and rural spaces intersect, often lack the infrastructure and governance needed to support equitable food systems, leaving communities in these areas highly vulnerable to food insecurity.
4. **Rapid and unplanned urbanization and rural transformation deepen inequalities:**
 - The prevalent dynamics of urbanization and rural transformation widen the gap between those who can adapt and benefit from change and those who are left behind in both urban and rural areas, requiring policies that address these disparities holistically.

Policy considerations

- Ensure adequate reference to marginalized and at-risk populations and the intersectionality of their vulnerabilities, including through targeted policy interventions for more inclusive U-PU food systems.
- Ensure that the policy recommendations promote equitable access to food, including through instruments that ensure food affordability during situations of economic downturn and climate-related shocks, and that strengthen and empower local markets and the food system actors **that serve the most marginalized populations**.
- Promote and strengthen inclusive urban food governance and the collaboration between governments, civil society, and private sector actors to address inequities in urban food systems.
- Promote the use of disaggregated data to identify food insecurity hotspots and monitor the impact of U-PU food system interventions on vulnerable populations.
- Strengthen and scale up shock-responsive social protection systems that are nutrition-sensitive and that protect vulnerable urban populations during crises.