

## FOOD, NUTRITION AND ENERGY SECURITY IN AN URBANISING WORLD

Increasing urbanisation is accompanied by a rapid growth of the poor population's share in urban areas. Changes in food systems brought about by this, the opportunities it creates for farmers and what investments are needed to turn the changed conditions into a win-win situation for both the (peri-)urban and the rural population are being looked at by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation in an on-going "learning journey".

By Ueli Mauderli and Fabienne Stämpfli

Between 1990 and 2018, the share of the urban poor increased from 18 to 25 per cent on average in most of the low and middle-income countries. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) is giving increasing attention to this trend. In order to identify relevant fields of action, it conducted four case studies on urbanisation processes from 2017 to early 2018. The studies were carried out in Bolivia, Ethiopia, Haiti and Laos. One of their most striking findings was that e.g. Laos, with generally low percentages of urbanisation and a stable population growth rate of approximately 1.6 per cent since the 2010s, showed record urban growth rates for peri-urban and urban zones. While three quarters of the population live in rural areas, the country experiences an annual urban growth rate of 17.3 per cent.

Based on the findings of the case studies, the core group of SDC's Agriculture and Food Security (A+FS) network organised a webinar and a contiguous three-week online dialogue on the topic of city region food systems with the Food for the cities experts of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Both the webinar and the online dialogue underscored win-win investment for rural and urban areas, demonstrating in particular the strategic importance of the cities for the rest of the country. Some of the main topics and key findings are presented below.

### MAINSTREAMING FOOD ISSUES, IDENTIFYING INVESTMENT POLICIES

According to the FAO webinar presenters, it is essential for the issue of food – as a basic need for all – to be mainstreamed into the four key instruments of urbanisation policy and urban planning: logistics, zoning, procurement and waste management. Relevant food systems should be integrated from field to plate through spatial synergies, social inclusion and ecological resilience. Participatory multi-sectoral platforms should be created to achieve this integration. Public and private stakeholders of food and value chain systems in city re-



Towards clean energy cooking. A new solar cooker.

Photo: Jörg Böhling

gions need to come together, become aware of their mutual interests of territorial nature and be active in the following three fields:

- Food systems planning, policy support and governance (analyses, assessments, platforms, strategic design, monitoring frameworks). Two issues cannot be overemphasised in this context: securing land tenure for the poor and the less well-off along the rural-urban link and integrating post-harvest measures for different food crops in value chain approaches.
- Specific actions related to institutional procurement of food, supply and value chains, circular economies (regenerative systems related to resource input and waste in which emissions and energy leakage are minimised by slowing, closing and narrowing energy and material loops) and to urban agriculture and gardening;

- Knowledge sharing, partnerships and co-operation (local, national, regional and global networks).

Participants of both the webinar and the online dialogue highlighted the following agricultural investment priorities along the rural-urban link:

- analysing and developing food and market systems with the market system development (MSD) approach (see <https://beamexchange.org/>) and testing the FAO City Region Food System toolkit (see Box on page 21),
- improving nutrition,
- disseminating knowledge,
- improving territorial governance,
- conducting research on the externalised costs of imported and exported agricultural products, and
- creating better institutions for safe food production and consumption.

### RESPONDING TO DIET TRENDS AND GRASPING MARKET OPPORTUNITIES

The prevalence of food insecurity and malnutrition is clearly higher in urban populations (50 per cent) than in rural ones (43 per cent), and obesity is increasing with accelerating speed in urban and peri-urban areas. In the new millennium, these trends are also observable in Asia, where changes in food preparation habits among time-saving urban dwellers set in later than in other parts of the world. Participants were divided into two groups. One group thought that it would be important to also focus on large cities, which undoubtedly presents lots of opportunities for interventions through development agencies, although it bears risks, too. Another group insisted on the significance of focusing on medium-sized towns ("market towns") that might be better suited to test new approaches in.

The discussions suggested a focus on nutritious foods for urban and peri-urban production and markets such as dairy products, fish (from aquaculture), meat and poultry, pulses, fruits

and vegetables – products that provide either essential proteins or micronutrients for their consumers. Apart from a few exceptions, these goods are much more perishable and are therefore ideal for being produced in proximity of (peri-) urban markets.

Here, changes in diet trends formed a further focal aspect of discussions. For example, in the context of the above mentioned trend that also people of urbanising areas in low and middle income countries dispose of less time for food preparation “healthy ready-to-eat foods” – pre-processed or cooked foods such as pre-cut vegetables and fruits, pre-cooked rice, cured and dairy products such as yoghurt, curd – might become a new and growing niche for a whole range of micro to big entrepreneurs in the context of nutrition awareness campaigns.

## THE ENERGY ISSUE MUSTN'T BE IGNORED

Cooking time for inexpensive proteins such as pulses and less costly unprocessed food remains high. Increasing prices for cooking energy and lacking alternatives to biomass are thus both an obstacle to safe and healthy nutrition for poor consumers and a market opportunity for rural and peri-urban farmers and other stakeholders. In several sub-Saharan countries, biomass products including fuel wood and charcoal are cash crops with a higher national annual turnover in million US dollars than any food crop in the country. To prepare a sustainable biomass production means convincing land tenants to use part of their land for a crop that can only be harvested after a couple of years. This increases the need for clear property rights and for intensification on the rest of the land in order to generate enough income. Closely interlinked is the promotion of affordable energy-efficient and smoke-reducing, healthier stoves. Simultaneously, it will become more and more crucial to raise awareness on all aspects around nutrition. It should become a priority to address the behaviour of millions of consumers and producers through information and training on appropriate production, processing, preparation and consumption. The creation of producers' and consumers' organisations was proposed as a possible strategy to achieve this. These awareness-raising efforts should lead to an intensification in producing the above-mentioned goods, additional cereals and tubers, while respecting environmental sustainability and food safety.

Finally, agricultural producers – rural or peri-urban ones – face more and more chal-

## THE CITY REGION FOOD SYSTEM (CRFS) TOOLKIT

The City Region Food System (CRFS) toolkit aims to help local authorities and other stakeholders to strengthen the understanding of the current functioning and performance of a food system in the context of a city region within which rural and urban areas and communities are directly linked. It forms the basis for further development of policies and programmes to promote the sustainability and resilience of CRFS. The toolkit is based on the experience of the CRFS assessment and planning process in seven cities around the world: Colombo (Sri Lanka), Lusaka and Kitwe (Zambia), Medellín (Colombia), Quito (Ecuador), Toronto (Canada) and Utrecht (the Netherlands).

A CRFS process must take into account existing and specific agronomic, economic and institutional-political conditions, the variety, interests and expertise of the different stakeholders involved, available resources, existing data and information, and specific goals set in the local context. The process, structured in a number of steps, is cyclical, not linear. In a nutshell, a CRFS assessment and planning process may include the following results:

- A mapping and characterisation of the local city region food system. This includes understanding and mapping of the city region foodshed, how food is processed, distributed and marketed, what people eat and what their food security and nutrition status is, how food waste is managed and who the government and institutional actors involved in the food system are.
- An analysis of current food system performance with regard to different sustainability dimensions, food system vulnerabilities, threats and weaknesses. Also, identifying the opportunities for strengthening the CRFS.
- Proposals for concrete policy and planning interventions and action plans through a multi-stakeholder dialogue process. This may also include the identification of policy lobbying needs and elaboration of specific advocacy materials. The process fosters inclusive multi-stakeholder dialogue to support local governments and multi-stakeholder bodies in taking informed decisions on food planning, recognising the great importance and added value in consultation-participative processes and knowledge sharing.

The assessment helps city stakeholders to spot the links between food and various other sectoral policies, such as transport (as a large part of city transport is food-related), health (malnutrition, obesity, school feeding), land-use planning for agricultural and multi-functional areas, community development and revitalisation, employment generation (in food production, processing and retail) and waste management (productive use of waste and waste water, management of food waste). In addition, a CRFS approach helps cities to understand the extent to which their urban food security is dependent on rural production areas and how the food system impacts both urban and rural populations in the city region. This understanding helps city governments to start seeing food as a driver for other sustainable urbanisation policies.

**Guido Santini**, FAO

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For more information visit: <http://www.fao.org/in-action/food-for-cities-programme/toolkit/introduction/en>.

lenges related to finding enough and appropriate labour forces. Intensification, light mechanisation and online job markets – the latter allowing higher transparency and accountability in the agricultural labour market – appear to be approaches worth trying.

**Ueli Mauderli** is Policy Advisor of the SDC Global Programme Food Security and Focal Point of the Agriculture and Food Security network of SDC and partner organisations. He is particularly interested in phenomena defining the future of development co-operation, e.g. climate change and urbanisation.

**Fabienne Stämpfli** has an M.Sc. in Development Studies in which she analysed Indian government policies and environmental migration. She co-facilitates the SDC Agriculture and Food Security Network.

Contact: [ueli.mauderli@eda.admin.ch](mailto:ueli.mauderli@eda.admin.ch)

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