

## Seminar brief

# How to ensure food security in a rapidly urbanising world?

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The world is becoming ever more urban. Today already more than half of the world's population lives in urban areas. By 2050, two-thirds of the world's population will live in cities. The continuous increase of urban population is due to factors like rural-urban migration, natural disasters or livelihood insecurities. Providing food and nutrition security for the rapidly expanding populations in the world's cities is a pressing challenge in this changing world. Delivering nutritious food to cities is a complex problem that is also challenged by natural resource scarcity, climate change, and population growth, adding pressure to food systems globally.

### Challenges

Urban populations heavily rely on a multitude of food systems for their daily food needs, varying from industrial agro-logistical networks to local engagement of consumers with producers. The projected population growth puts these food systems at peril (Reardon, Bereuter, & Glickman, 2016; UNDESA, 2014). Especially the urban poor, including vulnerable groups such as the un(der)employed, women and children, are often placed in a difficult position. Their food and nutrition security situation can be severely affected when jobs are lost and high housing costs are combined with rising food prices (De Zeeuw & Dubbeling, 2009).

It becomes clear that sustainable development challenges will be considerably greater in cities, particularly in the lower-middle-income countries where the pace of urbanisation is most rapid. Especially in Asia and Africa the trends of urbanisation are substantial. Asian countries such as Japan, the Republic of Korea and Taiwan have moved from rural to urban societies since

the 1960s, followed by China since the 1980s. It is projected that by 2030 cities in Asia need to incorporate around 1,3 billion people in urban areas (McGee, 2008), with Dhaka in Bangladesh likely to become the world's fifth largest city with 21 million inhabitants (FAO, 2015). It is estimated that around 2030, close to 50% of people in Africa will live in cities and urban areas. In Africa metropolises such as Kinshasa, Accra, Kampala and Addis Ababa are increasingly urbanising, but economic growth is rarely keeping pace with the cities' growth. This disconnect leads to difficulties for young people to find employment, exerts pressure on land and housing allocation, and reinforces challenges in city planning and governance (UN-Habitat, 2014).

### Setting the 'food and the city' agenda

In the light of these challenges, the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (UN-Habitat III), held from 17 to 20 October 2016 in Quito, has adopted a *New Urban Agenda*. This action-oriented document sets global standards of achievement in sustainable urban development, rethinking the way we build, manage, and live in cities through drawing together cooperation with committed partners, relevant stakeholders, and urban actors at all levels of government as well as the private sector (UN-Habitat III, 2016). Similarly, the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, signed in October 2015 by more than 100 cities representing 450 million people, emphasised that urban food systems are at the core of sustainable development. The signatory cities have promised to strive for food systems that are inclusive, safe, resilient and diverse. The signatories committed to aligning municipal food policies with legislation on national and international levels, revising their own urban policies, engaging in cross-sector coordination and actively involving local stakeholders (Signatories of the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, 2015).

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## Integrated urban food systems

Addressing food and nutrition security in cities means paying attention to over- as well as malnutrition, and access and supply of food. In the past, discussions on food security generally departed from production perspectives focusing on national food self-sufficiency rather than on access-oriented perspectives toward food and nutrition security as a part of household survival strategies (Sonnino, 2016). Nowadays, it is broadly understood that providing for food and nutrition security in urbanising societies requires attention to a multitude of dimensions: social, economic, environmental and spatial (Viljoen & Wiskerke, 2012).

Priorities for achieving urban food security differ according to local contexts and often lead to many unanswered questions from different angles. In terms of food access, discussions focus around the so-called 'food deserts' concept, where food insecurity is leading to social exclusion and food (in)justice. More recently, scholars focusing on Africa emphasise the need to also consider the geographies of food retail and distribution when addressing food access. Urban consumers navigate access to food from both formal (supermarkets) and informal sources of food (such as home gardens) (Battersby, 2012).

The processes by which food systems governance takes place are still little understood. Food systems include a wide range of actors and activities from production to consumption. Therefore, governance processes include a wide range of stakeholders and parallel decision-making processes related to food. These processes comprise of regulatory environments, infrastructure provision, support mechanisms, and education and awareness raising. When it comes to supply of food the rural-urban dichotomy needs to be bridged (McGee, 2008). Crossing rural-urban spaces will lead to flowing connections of goods, stakeholder collaboration and information exchange. The links between 'conventional food sources' and 'alternative food initiatives', and the multiple functions of private and public spaces should be addressed (Sonnino, 2016).

A food systems approach is needed to grasp food and nutrition security across a range of public issues in urban contexts. A better understanding of urban, peri-urban and rural food systems from an integrated perspective is vital for rural and urban communities to have access to nutritious, affordable and acceptable

food. Alongside the global, and highly industrialised, food systems in place, regional and local food systems are often the stage where new innovations and governance arrangements are developed, with multiple stakeholders playing a role. With swift urbanisation, interlinked, multifunctional urban and regional food systems are essential in ensuring food security, safety and sovereignty in the years to come.

## Two seminars organised by Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation

In two seminars, Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation (CDI) seeks to explore the issue of food and nutrition security in urbanizing societies. The seminars attempt to explore the urgency for rethinking food systems for urban food and nutrition security from the perspective of research, policy and practice. During the seminars we will explore challenges and insights from all over the world, share knowledge and lessons learned, and raise awareness among participants. The seminars are an integral part of the CDI short course '[Market Access for Food Security](#)'.

- On the 8th of December we approach the topic from the perspective of *access for consumers*: what are their possibilities and options, how can consumption patterns and needs be met?
- On the 19th of January we depart from the perspective of *food supply*: what are the opportunities in urban contexts, how can innovative business models be designed and smart linkages made between producers and retailers of food?

Participants are welcome to register via this [link](#).

The Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation (CDI) is the knowledge broker of Wageningen University & Research. We have built an extensive international track record on issues such as food and nutrition security; sustainable markets; adaptive agriculture; ecosystem governance; conflict, disaster and reconstruction; and innovation and change. In our experience, only an integrated approach leads to sustainable change. Our staff has the unique combination of substantive knowledge, an international network and excellent process management qualities. In this seminar brief we would like to share how we approach urban food and nutrition security and set the scene for our coming seminars.

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