

# City Region Food System Assessment and Planning

Marielle Dubbeling  
Guido Santini

In 2015, FAO, RUA Foundation and Wilfrid Laurier University, with the financial support of the German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture and the Daniel and Nina Carasso Foundation, embarked on a collaborative programme to assess and plan sustainable city region food systems in seven cities around the world: Colombo (Sri Lanka), Lusaka and Kitwe (Zambia), Medellín (Colombia), Quito (Ecuador), Toronto (Canada) and Utrecht (the Netherlands).

The City Region Food System (CRFS) assessment aims to help strengthen 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 the CRFS. The CRFS assessment and planning approach builds on a formalised process of identifying and engaging all relevant stakeholders from the start of assessment through to policy review and planning. This means that a CRFS process can result in revised or new urban food policies, strategies and projects, and also in the creation of new – or revitalised – networks for food governance and



Figure 1: Steps in a CRFS assessment and planning process

policy development, such as urban food policy councils and new institutional food programmes and policies.

Since each city region has its own context, no guideline will fit all; nevertheless, in this article we provide a short outline of the steps generally involved in a CRFS assessment and planning process, based on actual experiences in the project partner cities. These steps are:

## 1. Getting Prepared

The preparation phase consists of setting up a CRFS project team and multi-stakeholder task force that will identify the first steps to take in the CRFS project as well as who to involve, what goals to pursue, what sources of baseline information are available and how to get started. Setting timelines for each stage of the work is important, to balance activities with available resources and aims. From the start, the CRFS project should involve policy makers, a multidisciplinary team of researchers and other food system stakeholders.

## 2. Defining the CRFS

A first key activity in the defining stage will be to conduct a participatory mapping exercise with a wide range of stakeholders to define the nature and boundaries of the local city region and the city region food system. These can be defined using various criteria: main sources of food and food flows, natural boundaries, administrative and jurisdictional boundaries. These boundaries/concepts may be further refined over the course of the process, when more data becomes available and when territorial intervention strategies are designed. A second key activity involves stakeholder mapping to (further) identify and map the key stakeholders directly or indirectly involved in the CRFS.

## 3. Visioning

The aim of the visioning phase is to build a shared common vision for a sustainable and resilient CRFS. The visioning process

### Timeframe for the CRFS process

*It is important to note that the CRFS process is cyclical, not linear. The entry points should be defined based on the local context. For example, as the CRFS process in Medellín, Colombia started during a period of political regional elections, it first focused on Policy Support and Planning to ensure that a CRFS approach was embedded in new political programmes and agendas. Once such support was ensured, the CRFS process continued with the CRFS Scan and Assessment, while work on Policy Support and Planning proceeded in a parallel process.*

*In Quito, Ecuador, the CRFS process evolved from the CRFS Scan to Policy Support and Planning. As part of the design of a new territorial food strategy and the collection of baseline data and indicators, the process embarked on a more in-depth CRFS Assessment. In other cities, like Colombo, Kitwe and Lusaka, the CRFS process followed the steps outlined above. The overall timeline for the entire process was two-three years, as it is so dependent on local dynamics and political processes. Steps 1 through 4 would generally take about nine months, and steps 5 and 6 would take roughly nine to twelve months – although, as indicated, many steps are implemented in parallel.*

runs through the different steps of the entire CRFS assessment and planning process. It generally starts from building a first general project vision that will grow into a more refined, consolidated – and political – vision that is agreed upon by all stakeholders involved as the project progresses. At this stage, which marks the start of the further CRFS assessment and planning, building a general project vision will give direction to the implementation of the CRFS Scan.

#### 4. CRFS Scan

The purpose of the CRFS Scan is to develop an overall view and description of the local context (including the socio-economic, agro-environmental, political and institutional environments) and to start characterising the city region food system. More specifically, it begins to: explore the overall structure, characteristics and functioning of the current food system, including the institutional and regulatory framework; take stock of baseline information and identify gaps; and provide, to the extent possible, an indication of general trends and critical issues relevant to increasing the sustainability and resilience of the CRFS under examination.

#### 5. CRFS Assessment

In each of the project cities, the CRFS Scan illustrated clear food system data gaps, key constraints and challenges. On the basis of these data gaps and constraints and in line with identified policy priorities, key areas were defined for more in-depth assessment. This was followed by new and/or additional data collection and research in each city. The CRFS in-depth assessment can be guided by a CRFS indicator framework designed by RUAF and FAO. See article on page 28. Stakeholder consultation and engagement are vital to collecting further information on the key CRFS data gaps and priority issues from different stakeholders, and also for continued engagement of stakeholders in preparing further policy support and planning processes.

#### 6. Policy Support and Planning

The final goal of the CRFS process is advancement of policy design or strategy planning, to build a more sustainable and resilient CRFS. In this phase, then, the multi-stakeholder CRFS team should develop further strategy for building the results of the CRFS assessment into policies, strategies and action plans. This policy support and planning could involve further policy analysis, policy formulation and revision, policy integration and planning of further action. Continued engagement of policy makers and other stakeholders is key to ensuring policy uptake and effective implementation.

#### 7. Governance

Improvements to governance structures, either through the development of new networks or by facilitating new participation avenues for key food system actors, may be a priority for policy impact. The CRFS process will ultimately help improve food system governance by consistently applying a multi-stakeholder participatory approach and process throughout the various steps of CRFS assessment and planning: through the strengthening and creation of new networks and/or food governance structures, the improvement of government and stakeholder capacity in implementing a CRFS process, and the promotion of food policy design and monitoring (see Policy and planning section).

#### Examples of policy outcomes in the pilot cities

##### *Policy recommendations*

In all cities, results of the CRFS process have led to a set of key policy proposals and recommendations. In some cities this has already led to significant policy or project activity, including new governance structures. In other cities processes will be carried forward, by local stakeholders or under new projects. While policy proposals and recommendations differ, in all pilot cities the CRFS process



*Participatory process of policy development in Quito.* Photo by Alain Santandreu

has allowed the building of more awareness and information exchange on the characteristics and functioning of the CRFS and has created the basis for a common and shared vision of a sustainable CRFS.

In the example of the **Toronto Greater Golden Horseshoe** (Canada), the CRFS work cannot be considered the sole contributor to food policy activity at multiple scales. The work has, however, helped to shape other food policy initiatives either directly or indirectly. The *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2017* that came into effect on July 1, 2017, explicitly calls for curbing sprawl and protecting farmland and green spaces: “*The finite supply of quality agricultural lands that feed the region and beyond must be protected to ensure a vibrant rural and productive agricultural economy and a secure food supply for future generations.*” As further outlined in the Growth Plan, municipalities in the city region are encouraged to implement regional agri-food strategies and provide opportunities to support access to healthy, local and affordable food; urban and near-urban agriculture; food system planning; and promoting the sustainability of agricultural, agri-food, and agri-product businesses and infrastructure.

In **Quito** (Ecuador), the CRFS process has culminated in the design of a territorial food strategy. The food strategy, a formal resolution and ordinance will be submitted to the city council for approval and adoption by the end of 2018. Also, a food policy council is being established.

In **Medellín** (Colombia), the Municipality of Medellín commissioned a study to further assess possibilities for production and commercialisation of food products from the region’s rural villages. Also, a proposal has been developed to renovate the *Campo Valdes* food market into a regional food logistics centre or “food hub” within the city. This would make the urban food market more accessible for producer associations in the rural areas around Medellín, and regulating the role of intermediaries would allow these fresh products to reach consumers at much more accessible prices.

Following the CRFS assessment and policy revision, *Colombo Municipal Council (CMC)* (Sri Lanka) agreed to introduce local level by-laws to promote and regulate *Reduction, Reuse and Recycling* of food waste at the CMC level.

#### *Policy integration*

In **Kitwe and Lusaka** (Zambia) a result of the CRFS process is a proposal to integrate food in the National Zambian Urban Policy currently under development. Another example is the inclusion of local/regional food as a component of the **Utrecht** (the Netherlands) Healthy Urban Living Policy, similar to the inclusion of food in the Quito Resilience Strategy. In **Colombo**, the CRFS work informed the work of the newly formed Ministry of Megapolis and Western Development, responsible for the urban development of the Western Province, to integrate food and agriculture in its urban planning process.

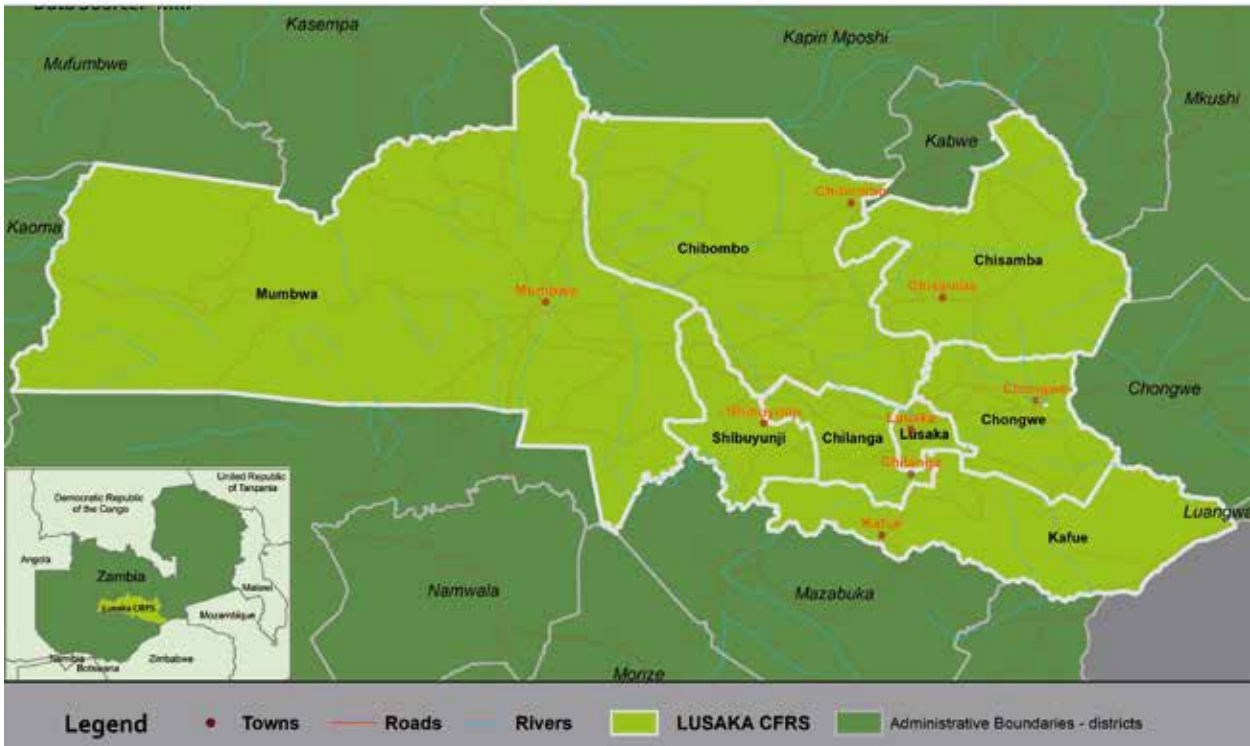
### **Top 3 common challenges**

*The project cities encountered several constraints in implementing the CRFS process. Common constraints include:*

- 1. Limited data availability.** *The CRFS research illustrated the significant challenges arising from the dearth of data on, and empirical analysis of, food systems. Even in “data-rich” environments like Toronto, specific food system data was either not available, outdated or only available for specific jurisdictions (the city, the province), but not for the city region. A combination of secondary and primary research was used to complement missing data. Stakeholder interviews and focused case studies provided needed additional sources of information and analysis. Meeting this challenge will also require first identifying and prioritising the data, analysis and information needs, and, second, determining the multiple, innovative and efficient ways to systematically collect and analyse this data to produce the information required for decision-making.*
- 2. Political buy-in and stakeholder engagement.** *Any multi-stakeholder process comes at the cost of a high level of engagement across most sectors and stakeholders. Participant fatigue can result, or it can be difficult to get key people engaged due to other reasons (lack of institutional versus individual engagement, conflicting agendas, no history of collaboration, no clear outputs from the start of the process). Important tools used in the project were individual stakeholder interviews, training, and a variety of engagement techniques and policy outreach tools.*
- 3. Governance mechanisms and instruments to work at city regional level.** *Interaction and coordination are necessary between different levels of governments (larger and smaller cities in the city region, city and provincial/national government). Many provincial/national programmes still prioritise rural over urban or city regional development. Smaller cities in the city region often have less human and financial capacity for intervention than do larger cities. Urban and rural authorities, and city level versus provincial authorities, may not have much history of engaging in joint policy and planning, especially when different political orientations are at play. From the start of the process, specific training, attention and time efforts have to be put in place to facilitate such coordination, horizontal and vertical policy integration.*

#### *Food governance structures*

The CRFS assessment in the **Medellín** city region resulted in increased awareness among regional public authorities that joint and concerted actions are needed to improve the city region food system, especially in the arena of food provisioning. A new governance structure and institutional platform are planned, in which different public authorities – including the Municipality of Medellín, the Metropolitan Area of the Valley of Aburrá (a collaboration of ten municipalities with strong environmental competences and responsibilities) and the provincial government of Antioquia – collaborate. This tripartite governmental platform on territorial food policy issues, called the “Alianza por el Buen Vivir” (the “Alliance for Good Living”), is intended to serve as



Lusaka city region is made up of eight districts: Lusaka, Mumbwa, Chibombo, Chisamba, Shibuyunji, Chongwe, Kafue, and Chilanga. This area is defined on the basis of origin and flows of the food commodities that represent the typical food basket of the city region dwellers. It has been estimated that about 60% of the food consumed in Lusaka is produced in the city region area.

a space and mechanism for coordination and articulation of the collective development and implementation of policy and project interventions, from a territorial governance perspective, in the Medellín food system.

Multi-stakeholder discussions organised in the context of the CRFS research and the Food Smart Cities for Development Project, the **Utrecht** Municipality, the University of Utrecht (Hub Future Food), the Economic Board, the local Rabobank, the programme Food and Health and the Province of Utrecht resulted in the creation of a regional food network. This network will be a place to meet, exchange and get inspired. The goal will be to collectively develop a healthy, sustainable food environment in the Utrecht Region.

### Conclusion

In order to support on-the-ground policy transformation and implementation of sustainable and resilient CRFS, it is important that city regions assess how they are fed and what their food dependencies are, identify weaknesses and potential pressure points and, where possible, develop targeted strategies to improve their food systems.

The assessment helps city stakeholders to recognise 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.

Each city region food system is unique. It has its own specific characteristics, challenges and solutions. The project developed a toolkit that documents an approach tested in seven cities worldwide to map and assess their own city region food system and to plan specific interventions that address local key issues and needs. The examples and tools documented provide valuable experiences and lessons that may accelerate the development of similar initiatives in other city regions around the world wishing to apply, to customise, and to up-scale similar practices.

Marielle Dubbeling  
RUAF Foundation  
[m.dubbeling@ruaf.org](mailto:m.dubbeling@ruaf.org)

Guido Santini  
The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations  
[guido.santini@fao.org](mailto:guido.santini@fao.org)

### References

- [www.fao.org/in-action/food-for-cities-programme/toolkit/introduction/en/](http://www.fao.org/in-action/food-for-cities-programme/toolkit/introduction/en/)
- [www.ruaf.org/projects/developing-tools-mapping-and-assessing-sustainable-city-region-food-systems-cityfoodtools](http://www.ruaf.org/projects/developing-tools-mapping-and-assessing-sustainable-city-region-food-systems-cityfoodtools)