

Learning lessons from Urban Food Systems Labs in Africa

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Food systems' ability to feed the people in a sustainable way, whilst dealing with crises of climate change and resource depletion, is hampered by major challenges. These include, amongst others: a rapidly growing population and increased demand for food; inefficient resource use and food distribution; environmental impacts; and high rates of food wasted at all stages of the food system.

The challenges have amplified calls for transformation towards healthier and more sustainable food practices.

However, achieving transformation is far from straightforward. Transformation involves a diverse range of stakeholders who are involved in multiple system-level interactions. Controlled transformative spaces – or 'living labs' – which are devoid of the usual challenges of transformation processes, are a promising approach.

This and the following 3 articles present experiences with the living lab approach as a leverage mechanism for food system transformation in the framework of the Healthy Food Africa project. First, the overall Healthy Food Africa project is presented, followed by two experiences of Food System Labs in Zambia and Uganda. The final article shares a number of lessons on institutional and policy barriers and driving factors for working in living labs.

The context: Living Labs of the Healthy Food Africa Project

Healthy Food Africa (HFA) is an EU funded project that aims to increase the resilience of food systems and to link food production to nutrition performance, thereby increasing the range and quality of food products for a healthy diet. To achieve this, it engages with farmers, food processors, retailers, civil society organizations (CSOs), policymakers and local experts, and helps them create, and test, innovative technologies, practices and governance arrangements that contribute to a more sustainable, resilient and healthy food system for all. HFA is working through 10 Food System Labs (FSLs) in 10 cities and six countries in East, West and Southern Africa. These include: Korogocho & Viwandani settlement (Nairobi, Kenya), Kisumu County (Kenya), Rwamwanja refugee settlement (Uganda), Kabarole District (Fort Portal, Uganda), Bahir Dar city and Koga irrigation area (Ethiopia), Greater Accra Region (Ghana), Tamale (Ghana), Cotonou (Benin), Lusaka Province (Zambia), and Chongwe District (Zambia). See



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Figure 1 for an illustration of the geographical locations of these FSLs in Africa and the different thematic food system areas that are addressed.

Each FSL seeks to bring together local stakeholders – farmers, entrepreneurs, businesses, and policymakers, and aims at reconnecting sustainable food production with (urban) food consumption and healthy diets. In the joint FSL work, we address the related (local) food system challenges. All 10 FSLs have the same goal, but their status quo, priorities, and therefore the trajectories they want to pursue, and their visions and workplans under the auspices of HFA, differ. Each FSL's members have unique local knowledge and expertise, and the FSL provides a space for experimentation, innovation, transformation, application of knowledge and co-learning, and thus the formation of new, collective insights.

Work in the FSLs is supported by a number of Work Packages (WP), including WP7 that aims at transformational impact, scalability and exploitation. The activities and analyses of WP7 aim at maximizing the sustainable impact of the HFA project by encouraging – at the level of the FSLs –



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self-propelling processes that will in turn lead to wider uptake of approaches, technologies, business models and policies. The work includes providing support to FSL teams in the process of creating pathways for change, and in effectively engaging with policymakers. Related to that, WP7 seeks to guide FSLs in the organization of policy platforms in each FSL. At the project level, WP7 identifies and promotes the most promising initiatives emerging from the FSLs and explores options to link micro level (initiatives and governance) to macro level (policy development).

Fostering transformational impact

Important measures for fostering transformational impact are:

1. Building capacities through meaningful stakeholder engagement. This implies fostering self-propelling processes (i.e., embedding the work in adequate local multi-actor and governance processes, and adding new elements to these processes; finding new ways to involve consumer associations, food SMEs and entrepreneurs, etc.)
2. Promoting actual innovation in food chain governance, technologies, and business models.
3. Identification of limiting and enabling factors in a transition management perspective. This includes key lessons learned and key messages (main barriers and opportunities).

4. Gender: Encouraging and enabling gender sensitivity in all work and activities.
5. Applying participatory foresight methods to assess the options for the further development of initiatives and scaling-up. This will ensure longer-term impact, longer-term research and policy agendas and programmes.

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More information

- HealthyFoodAfrica <https://healthyfoodafrica.eu/>

AfriFOODlinks: African cities leading a new era of food system collaboration

AfriFOODlinks is a 4-year EU-funded programme, led by ICLEI, that envisions a thriving network of cities in Africa and beyond, in which food systems and nutrition are firmly established on the local governance agenda. Citizen-led multi-stakeholder governance platforms welcome diverse voices to inform policy and urban planning processes that promote food and nutrition security and environmentally regenerative practices.

The project views urban food environments as the key area for improving nutrition and reducing environmental impact in African cities because this is where residents make the choices about the food they eat. It is also where the food security priorities of food availability, access, agency, utilization and stability manifest. AfriFOODlinks is made up of six work packages: 1) Knowledge

validation, amplification, creation and uptake; 2) Strengthening multi-stakeholder governance processes; 3) Promoting inclusive and circular agribusiness & innovation; 4) Improving food environments through experimentation; 5) Building lasting Africa-Europe partnerships; 6) mutual learning, exchange communications & outreach.

AfriFOODLinks works in over 65 Cities (15 African and five European Hub cities, and another 45+ Sharing Cities). The five African Hub Cities are: Cape Town (South Africa), Kisumu (Kenya), Mbale (Uganda), Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), Tunis (Tunisia). RUAF partner Hivos is leading the work in Tunis and WP2. Rikolto leads in Mbale and Ouagadougou, and WP3. Està is working with the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP) in WP5.

More information

- AfriFOODlinks <https://afrifoodlinks.org>



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