**Strengthening urban and peri-urban food systems to achieve food security and nutrition in the context of urbanization and rural transformation**



The [High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition](https://www.fao.org/cfs/cfs-hlpe/about/mission/en) (HLPE-FSN) produces the report “Strengthening urban and peri-urban food systems to achieve food security and nutrition in the context of urbanization and rural transformation”, at the request of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS). The HLPE-FSN report will be presented at the 52nd plenary session of the CFS in October 2024.

With this e-consultation, the HLPE-FSN is seeking your feedback on the proposed scope of this report and the guiding questions below.

**SCOPE AND RATIONALE**

Almost sixty percent of the global population is currently living in urban centres (UNDESA, 2018; Acharya *et al*., 2020). These centres are widely seen as engines of growth and employment, producing over 80 percent of the global GDP, but also facing huge challenges in guaranteeing access for all residents to essential services such as health, education, transportation and food (Ibid.). Urban populations are rapidly increasing, with a growth curve particularly sharp in Africa and Asia. The fifteen fastest-growing cities in the world, for example, are in Africa. Alongside urbanization, there has been a “geographical decoupling” (Langemeyer *et al.,* 2021) of cities from sources of food supply, with urban and peri-urban land use being reoriented for “more profitable” uses. As such, cities and towns are fast losing peri-urban agricultural lands, which have historically provided them with fresh and healthy food. Urban areas are also experiencing higher rates of extreme weather events that affect people’s livelihoods and incomes, while inequalities among urban populations are growing (Pelling *et al.,* 2021). These trends mean that urban and peri-urban areas also concentrate risks for food insecurity and malnutrition, which became clear during the COVID-19 pandemic (see for example Rede PENSSAN, 2021), exacerbated by natural disasters and conflicts. At the same time, urban and peri-urban areas are resourceful, serving as hubs for education, technology and innovation, health and social services as well as for food production, processing and distribution, all roles that could be enhanced.

Often, in impoverished urban areas, informal economic and market relationships in food systems can be critical for food security, but suffer from policy and regulatory neglect. Informal food systems comprise a complex network of suppliers, transporters, hawkers, retailers and street and market food vendors, in addition to farmers, and contribute to making food more accessible and affordable to urban consumers. Yet, these informal sector actors mainly rely on their own resources and capital and have very little policy support for strengthening their enterprises and ensuring quality, such as support for access to market intelligence, transport and logistics, cold chains or waste reuse facilities (Tefft *et al.*, 2017). In fact, in the absence of specific food system planning, the sale and consumption of highly processed foods is growing in most urban centres, while local commerce offering healthy, fresh food at affordable prices, and often in smaller quantities, is neglected, contributing to the so-called “food deserts”. These trends typically have negative impacts on food security and nutrition (Peyton, Moseley and Battersby, 2015; Battersby, 2017; Acharya *et al.,* 2020).

This policy incoherence insists on a general lack of coordination between policies and actors concerned with food security, agriculture, environment, etc., and urban planning, and it is exacerbated by the general dearth of city-level data, analyses and empirical evidence to inform decision-making on urban and peri-urban food policy. As such, it is difficult for policymakers to plan, prioritize, design and track urban and peri-urban food system interventions and ensure coherence across policies and sectors. Furthermore, governments and other organs like famine early warning systems (FEWS) have also not been as good at monitoring food insecurity in urban areas as they have been in rural areas, beyond very basic indicators such as food prices (Moseley, 2001; Krishnamurthy, Choularton and Kareiva, 2020).

Cities can play a vital role in shaping food system policies to bolster their resilience in several ways. They can source locally or regeneratively grown food where appropriate, facilitate sustainable urban and peri-urban production of nutritious food, avoid food waste by strengthening investments in circular bio-economy (broadly defined as an economy based on the sustainable use, re-use and regeneration of natural resources), build inclusive food markets by investing in infrastructure for smaller scale traders and retailers to market healthier food products. They can also play a role in promoting resilience by mitigating and adapting against the adverse impacts of climate change (HLPE, 2020; Heck and Alonso, 2021).

Urban and peri-urban agriculture is an important option with potentially positive impacts on dietary diversity, the quality of city spaces, and community action and empowerment. Yet, in most cities, especially in the Global South, there is little state support for urban and peri-urban agriculture. Instead, current regulations in cities and the rising market value of peri-urban land limit opportunities for local production. A recent FAO survey indicates that municipal governments play an enormous role in identifying and connecting food system actors to foster innovative community-based initiatives to support food security and nutrition (FAO, 2020). In the face of the dramatic consequences of the pandemic, for example, home gardens provided nutritious and healthy food supplements and ecosystem services (Lal, 2020). Local markets multiplied, as did initiatives by family producers for home delivery of baskets of fresh food and initiatives for food donations to low-income communities. Many people in urban areas, especially new migrants, undocumented people and informal workers, were forced to go to food banks and charities, with great harm to their dignity and agency (Rao *et al.*, 2020). These experiences point to the importance and potential of the territorial dimension of food systems for the realization of the human right to food (Recine *et al.*, 2021).

Given the social and economic significance of urban areas, it is imperative to address the challenges of urbanization in relation to rural transformation to “build back better” in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and disruptions to supply chains caused by the war in Ukraine, internal conflicts and natural disasters. It is vital that policies address poverty and inequality, build resilience and social inclusion and foster sustainable livelihoods. The specific needs of diverse rural and urban contexts, the difference between different types of urban areas (e.g. megacities and towns in largely rural areas) and the linkages between them in the rural-urban continuum, should be considered in formulating food policies. The New Urban Agenda, for example, calls for the integration of food and nutrition security into urban and territorial planning (UN Habitat, 2016). The report could also explore the specific issues concerning food security and nutrition that cities face in situations of conflicts, natural disasters and other crises, especially where there is dependence on imported food and vulnerability to price volatility.

A more in-depth analysis of food systems is needed in the context of urbanization and rural transformation to ensure that the right to food and nutrition security, in all its six dimensions (HLPE, 2020), are met. In particular, the report could investigate the potential of territorial and informal markets, the circular economy, and shorter supply chains to strengthen the linkages between urban and peri-urban food production and consumption. The role of food environments in urban areas is particularly important, considering the coexistence of organized distribution (supermarkets) with territorial and informal markets, and the adverse impacts of supermarketization pushing out small and/or informal food retail outlets (Peyton *et al.* 2015). As such, parts of cities, often the poorest, have become ‘food deserts’ for fresh and healthy produce, thus affecting city diets, which are already characterised by increasing prioritization of processed and convenience food. In addition, urban centres, and especially informal settlement areas, are often characterized by lack of basic infrastructure such as access to potable water and sewages. Specific attention to water and sanitation needs is thus required in relation to food utilization in urban and peri-urban areas.

At the same time, urban and peri-urban areas are home to interesting innovations for food production, processing and distribution, such as vertical gardens, ethical purchasing groups and marketing innovations, which could be replicated in other contexts. To strengthen the role of urban and peri-urban food systems, it is essential to reflect on the architecture of food security and nutrition governance, and especially on how city councils, urban planning experts and other partners can engage with actors that are traditionally involved in food systems and food security and nutrition policies to enhance synergies. Some of the policy measures that have been recommended in recent years to enhance the role of urban and peri-urban food systems concern the promotion of equitable access to land and productive agricultural resources for small-scale producers. They also include investment in rural and urban infrastructure, the development of territorial markets and short supply chains, prioritizing people living in poverty in cities and rural areas to access nutritious food and healthier living conditions, and anticipating the inter-connected future of urbanization and rural transformation (HLPE, 2020; Heck and Alonso, 2021).

Building on the outcomes of the CFS Open Ended Working Group (OEWG) on Urbanization, rural transformation and implications for food security and nutrition ([CFS 2017/44/6](https://www.fao.org/3/mu135e/mu135e.pdf) and [CFS 2016/43/11](https://www.fao.org/3/mr205e/mr205e.pdf)), recent literature and policy debates, the report will explore these issues and formulate policy recommendations to the attention of the CFS.

**QUESTIONS TO GUIDE THE E-CONSULTATION ON THE SCOPE OF THE HLPE-FSN REPORT**

The HLPE-FSN is seeking your feedback on the proposed scope of the report “Strengthening urban and peri-urban food systems to achieve food security and nutrition in the context of urbanization and rural transformation”, in particular, you are invited to:

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| A | *Share your comments on the objectives and proposed content of this report as outlined above.* Do you find the proposed scope comprehensive to analyze and discuss the key issues concerning the role of urban and peri-urban food systems in achieving food security and nutrition? Are there any major gaps or omissions? |
| B | *Share good practices and successful experiences on strengthening urban and peri-urban food systems in the context of urbanization and rural transformation, including in the case of emergencies or conflicts.* |
| C | *Share recent literature, case studies and data that could help answer the following questions:*  1. What are the main bottlenecks hampering the contribution of urban and peri-urban food systems to food security and nutrition?  2. How can urban and peri-urban food systems be transformed and made more equitable and accessible both for food system actors and in terms of food security and nutrition outcomes?  3. How can urban food supply chains, formal and informal, local and global, be made more resilient to ensure food security and nutrition within urban settings?  4. What changes are needed in urban planning to better support all dimensions of food security – including support for human rights, agency and sustainability? Which are some of the measures that can strengthen the agency of local actors in urban and peri-urban food systems?  5. How can national and municipal governments strengthen the potential for low-carbon, inclusive, relatively self-sufficient and resilient cities and towns to drive improved food security and nutrition in the wake of climate change and other crises?  6. What are the most appropriate policies (and gaps in existing policies) along the rural-urban continuum to address issues of land tenure, urban expansion into farmland and the growing competition for natural resources?  7. How can urban and peri-urban food systems ensure that food and nutrition needs of specific groups of people, such as migrants, the internally-displaced, children, adolescent, etc., are met?  8. What are the potential benefits and challenges of territorial markets for strengthening food security and nutrition for urban populations?  9. In what ways can the incorporation of climate resilient agricultural and circular economy practices in urban and peri-urban agriculture provide climate co-benefits for all and enhance climate resilience?  10. How can citizens be engaged and empowered to drive inclusive, transparent, participatory processes for urban transformations, ensuring synergies and complementarity with city councils?  11. Which experiences of urban communities to increase access to fresh food and healthy diets can inspire broader public policies? |

The results of this consultation will be used by the HLPE-FSN to elaborate the report, which will then be made public in its V0 draft for e-consultation, and later submitted to peer review, before finalization and approval by the HLPE-FSN drafting team and the Steering Committee.

We thank in advance all the contributors for reading, commenting and providing inputs on the scope of this HLPE-FSN report. The comments are accepted in English, French and Spanish languages.

The HLPE-FSN looks forward to a rich and fruitful consultation!

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