

Theme 6 – Urban food systems

Conference “Research & Policy: two peas in a pod? A dialogue for food security impact”

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Key statements

- We need to ensure to build-in circular economy objectives into urban food systems.
- Urban food system need to become more socio-economically viable and sustainable.
- Current Dutch development cooperation is often focused on rural poor. Policy needs to focus on regional rural-urban interfaces.
- Contribution to FNS by urban agriculture is vital to poor urban dwellers, but limited in scale due to limited space in the city and the inefficiency of urban agriculture.

Rationale

In the midst of global urbanization, poverty and climate change there is an increasing urgency for making cities healthier and reliant on sustainable urban food systems. By the year 2030 an estimated 5 billion people will live in cities and towns, with especially African and Asian cities driving this trend.¹ This will lead to major social, economic and ecological transformations impacting upon urban resource use and distribution. The pursuit of healthier, more just and sustainable cities is supported by three (inter-related) contentions, with links to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. First, rapid urbanization puts urban fresh food supply chains and distribution systems under stress.² There is a need to re-think the social and business model from the perspective of small-scale food producers and marginalized consumers. (SDG 2 & 5). Their contribution and reliance to urban food and nutrition security is not clearly understood, and therefore is not systematically measured/mapped at the level of urban governance³. Second, lack of investments in sustainable soil and water management in urban and peri-urban locations have degraded natural resources, and the rural-urban linkages are not considered (SDG 15).^{4 5 6 7} Third, urban waste management policies have overlooked the potential of organic compost as a resource. Despite multiple urban pockets of food and nutrition insecurity affecting diverse vulnerable groups, a lot of fresh food goes to waste in cities without being re-used (SDG 12).⁸ Where some urban food producers experiment with food waste management and organic compost, these experiments are rarely upscaled.

These developments show the need to take a more **integrated perspective of urban food systems** – seeing the interconnection with health and nutrition, social inclusion⁷, sustainable resource management, economic viability and sustainability, and legal and political support as an overarching goal³. For urban food systems to continue to be able to feed the growing urban populations in the future in a healthy, just and sustainable manner, urban conditions and policies need to be reconfigured⁹. Moreover, at the pragmatic level we need to develop a better understanding of what works best for whom and under what conditions. The RUAF foundation¹⁰ propose the following criteria to assess sustainable and resilient food system attributes (*Table 1*):

¹ UNFPA (2016). *State of World Population 2016*, New York: United Nations Population Fund.

² Ericksen, P. J. (2008). Conceptualizing food systems for global environmental change research. *Global environmental change*, 18(1), 234-245.

³ Dubbeling, M., Carey, J. & Hochberg, K. (2016) The Role of the Private Sector in City Region Food Systems. RUAF Foundation, <http://www.ruaf.org>.

⁴ Drechsel, P., Gyiele, L., Kunze, D., & Cofie, O. (2001). Population density, soil nutrient depletion, and economic growth in sub-Saharan Africa. *Ecological economics*, 38(2), 251-258.

⁵ Cofie, O. O., Veenhuizen, R. V. & Drechsel, P. (2003). Contribution of urban and peri-urban agriculture to food security in sub-Saharan Africa. Paper to be presented at the Africa session of 3rd WWF, Kyoto, 17th March 2003.

⁶ Zezza, A., & Tasciotti, L. (2010). Urban agriculture, poverty, and food security: empirical evidence from a sample of developing countries. *Food policy*, 35(4), 265-273.

⁷ Ros-Tonen, M., Pouw, N., & Bavinck, M. (2015). Governing beyond cities: The urban-rural interface. In *Geographies of Urban Governance* (pp. 85-105). Springer International Publishing.

⁸ Dubbeling, M., Zeeuw, H. D., & Veenhuizen, R. V. (2010). *Cities, poverty and food: multi-stakeholder policy and planning in urban agriculture*. Practical Action Publishing.

⁹ Poulsen M. N., McNab P. R., Clayton M. L. and Neff R. A. (2015) A systematic review of urban agriculture and food security impacts in low-income countries. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.foodpol.2015.07.002>

¹⁰ RUAF (2016) Vision for sustainable and resilient (city region) food systems. RUAF Foundation: www.ruaf.org.

Table 1 - Criteria of Sustainable and Resilient Food System Attributes

#	Criteria
1	Social sustainability and equity: improved health and well-being.
2	Economic sustainability: increased local economic growth and decent jobs; stronger local sourcing by processors, retailers, caterers etc.
3	Environmental sustainability: improved stewardship of environmental resources and promotion of agro-ecological approaches to production.
4	Urban-rural integration: support a localized food production and supply system and circular resource flows.
5	Increased resilience or reduced vulnerability: increasing the diversity of food supply sources and reducing vulnerability to stresses and shocks.
6	Food governance: improved governance for sustainable food systems.

Source: RUAF Foundation (2016)¹⁰

Key lessons, good practices and experiences from ARF and GCP projects

- GCP-2 project [Women Food Entrepreneurs in city slums Kenya and Burkina](#) found that for women food entrepreneurs (producers, processors and marketeers) in Kisumu (Kenia) and Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) the social and economic transaction costs for upscaling their food business are too high. What role could local business and other stakeholders play to reduce these?
- GCP-2 project [Follow the Food – Dutch agribusiness and local food security in Africa](#) found that In spite of obvious connections, rural and urban issues continue to be viewed as belonging to separate domains. Specifically for food and nutrition security this is counterproductive. How to overcome this containerized thinking, in favour of an integrative approach to food, nutrition and business that links the urban and rural domains?
- GCP-3 project [Allotment gardens and food security in Urban Africa](#) experienced that development of peri-urban agriculture not only depends on a convincing storyline of benefits for food and nutrition security but also requires the right legal motives and political support at higher and local levels to enable decision makers to assign land to allotment gardens.
- ARF-1 project [Improving agricultural productivity using organic waste in Ghana](#) found that the utilization of organic waste for urban agricultural has great potential, however, to achieve this effective support systems and institutional arrangements are necessary to ensure effective Public Private Partnerships for driving waste separation and compost production initiatives.

Purpose of the session

The purpose of the session on Urban Food Systems is to bring together researchers, practitioners and policymakers on urban food systems from the ARF and GCP projects and Dutch policy to identify channels for developing and using evidence-based research in practice. Specifically, we aim to build on the specialized scientific and policy knowledge available to co-develop parameters and criteria of (i) circular economy to assess urban food systems in varied contexts (ii) social-economic sustainability, and (ii) potential use of Dutch knowledge internationally, and *vice versa*.

Outcomes of the session

- Increased understanding of the context-specific ways to achieve economic viability of urban food systems in sub-Saharan African cities, and cities in the Netherlands
- Comparative insights and new ideas on how urban food systems can build-in circular economy objectives & become socially and economically sustainable
- Increased linkages between evidence-based research outputs & policy affecting urban food systems
- Policy brief highlighting the outcomes of the session