

Our seat at the table: maximizing transformative opportunities across the rural-urban continuum to deliver healthy diets from sustainable food systems

Side Event of the 51st Session of the Committee on World Food Security
25 October 2023 / 1.30 – 2.45 PM (CET). Co-organized by:



Brief Overview

Transformative action to deliver healthy diets from sustainable food systems is essential to end malnutrition in all its forms and achieve the interlinked, and interdependent 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Local and regional governments have successfully promoted the importance of local and territorial food systems in achieving overall food systems transformation and the SDGs. This event showcased the multitude of examples and opportunities to accelerate coherent national and local action.

Moderator Corinna Hawkes, Director of FAO's Division of Food Systems and Food Safety, opened the session by underscoring the commitment of FAO to improving urban food systems and the vital role of CFS in elevating the role of cities, including the upcoming report of the High Level panel of experts on Food Security and Nutrition on [strengthening urban and peri-urban food systems to achieve food security and nutrition in the context of urbanization and rural transformation](#).

The unique opportunities municipalities and local governments provide to the food systems transformation agenda were emphasised within the many examples shared from the Mayors of Quelimane, Mozambique and Chefchaouen, Morocco. These demonstrated the potential of grassroots initiatives which directly respond to residents' needs, data and evidence generation to guide action as well as the great benefits of cross-learnings and solidarity between cities. They also highlighted the challenges to advancing this agenda such as transportation/mobility and the need for supportive national and international policies to foster innovation, clarify governance structures and direct the provision of necessary human and financial resources needed to deliver on the food systems transformation agenda. Moreover, they stressed the importance of including local and regional governments within global food-related policy processes and particularly highlighted the key role that they can play in the CFS as the closest level of government to both communities and nature.

Opportunities for impact were also shared by the World Farmers Market Coalition and Consumers International, emphasising the potential of Farmers Market to unite stakeholders, connect farmers to market and consumers to nutritious foods, as well as the role of local

governments in putting consumers' perspectives at the forefront of policy discussions at CFS. UN-Nutrition emphasized the need for upholding the right to food to guide all transformative action to ensure access to affordable, healthy diets and leave no one behind. Emphasising the rapidly growing trend of urbanization in shifting diets, as detailed in the [2023 SOFI report](#), and the many initiatives and tools to guide healthy transformation at the local level such as [Food Based Dietary Guidelines](#) and the [CFS Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition](#). Many more examples of inspiring initiatives and reports were shared by audience members demonstrating the growing momentum of local governments, and localized approaches in advancing transformation actions to deliver healthy diets from sustainable food systems for all.

Background

Transformative action to deliver healthy diets from sustainable food systems is essential to end malnutrition in all its forms and achieve the interlinked, and interdependent 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Local and regional governments have successfully promoted the importance of local and territorial food systems in achieving overall food systems transformation and the SDGs. The emphasis now shifts to greater facilitation and acceleration of coherent national and local action.

Objectives of the Event

- Discuss the implications of a local and territorial approach to facing challenges and harnessing opportunities for transformative actions to deliver healthy diets from sustainable food systems
- Showcase inclusive, people-centered, locally based food systems tools and solutions to tackle malnutrition, protect the environment, strengthen resilience, and accelerate progress towards the 2030 SDGs
- Maximize the opportunities offered by the upcoming HLPE report and MYPOW's focus on local food systems and territorial governance to further advance advocacy for, and action by, local and regional governments in food systems transformation.

Extended Overview

- **Moderator, Corinna Hawkes Director, Food Systems and Food Safety Division, FAO**

Opened the session, sharing FAO's commitment to work in urban settings and right across the rural-urban continuum. Highlighted the role of CFS as a crucial global platform for discussion, debate and guidelines to advance food security and nutrition- and the essential role of cities in advancing this agenda, evidenced in the upcoming High Level Panel of Experts Report on [strengthening urban and peri-urban food systems to achieve food security and nutrition in the context of urbanization and rural transformation](#). Now need to look at what role CFS can play in bringing together subnational governments with national governments and others, already evident with the inclusion of UCLG in the CFS advisory Group. With the mega trend of Urbanization, which sees the growing role of cities economic power in markets, goods and services and the growing power of cities to transform their own food systems to advance the food security and nutrition agenda.

- **Manuel de Araujo, Mayor of Quelimane, Mozambique**

Quelimane is a coastal city in Mozambique with around 600,000 inhabitants. As it was built on a swamp it is very vulnerable to the climate change and other challenges. During the mayoral campaign, a UNICEF report stating that 53% of the cities children were malnourished which struck a cord, left unaddressed it would mean over half of the youth with be in a very uncompetitive place- so improving food systems became a key priority. First they studied the problem to identify the causes-leading to the first project- [Quelimane Agricola](#) supported by the municipality of Milan. The project works at the farmers level to improve productivity and output by transforming waste to compost, and improve yields. The study also revealed that almost have was lost between the farm and plate- so also worked at the transportation and market level to reduce food loss. Also taught consumers on preparation techniques to maximise nutrition. Over a period of 7-8 year childhood malnutrition has come down from 53% to around 40%. Also implemented the [Qualimane Limpa](#) project training women and youth in biodegradable waste sorting for compost and the [Coastal City Adaptation program](#)- focusing on the protection of mangroves to preserve biodiversity and fish stock. Quelimane won the silver award for these efforts at the [Milan Pact Awards](#) and it is hoped the upcoming report will create an entry point to get urban food systems action on the national agenda, also urges for more follow-up to the international food systems agenda to ensure things are moving and allow mayors to exchange ideas with and scale up good examples of food systems transformation. Noted the opportunities provide by opportunities such as the Green African cities initiative to launch pilots and learn from other cities, and the need to balance efforts to improve food systems while preserving food culture and traditions. The young population of Africa, means youth engagement is essential to preserve culture and advance healthy transformation in light of the growing rates of urbanization. Transportation is a critical challenge in addressing food waste and improve assess for farmers to markets and consumers to nutritious foods.

Mohamed Sefiani, Mayor of Chefchaouen, Morocco

Shared the experience of Chefchaouen, Morocco's 'blue city' of approximately 50,000 inhabitants which Since 2010, Chefchaouen has been recognised as an exemplary community, representing the Mediterranean diet as part of UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage. This has launched many [complementary food systems projects](#) which employ a participatory approach promoting local recipes and food traditions. Emphasised the central role of local governments to creating food systems which deliver sustainable healthy diets for all through the provision of public services such as public meals, waste management, healthy systems, town and territorial planning and transport. Nutritious and sustainable food cannot be underestimated, and requires global, systemic approaches where cities and territories have the resources and means necessary to play an essential role.

Had the privilege of representing of local and regional government in New York, but missing from the discussions as the crucial role for localised action to end malnutrition in all its forms at the heart of the SDGs. That cities and local governments are a significant setting for decision making on food systems transformation- we need greater clarity in the governance- and call for it by 2025.

Emphasised the power of cross learnings between cities to drive forward actions and build solidarity. Delivered strong support for multi-level action- with complementary local, regional, national and global action in the fight to deliver healthy diets from sustainable food systems. examples include the '[Green Morocco Plan 2020-2030](#)' which includes localised action to guide cooperation. Emphasised the need for technical assistance to cities for the human resources and expertise needed to advance this agenda.

Richard McCarthy, President, World Farmers Market Coalition

The World Farmers Market Coalition was born out of the UN Food Systems Summit and has representatives from over 50 countries and employs a multistakeholder approach. Farmers markets are often expressions of consumers and farmers coming together wanting to rebuild rural-urban linkages, developing new pathways and reimagining food systems- they produce triple benefits- connecting consumers to nutritious foods, farmers to new markets and creating public learning spaces for communities. Farmers Markets create an opportunity for ground up systemic change- they are often an independent sector, led by CSOs but at their core are a place of commerce- their happy nature are often seen as small undertakings, but actually they have great potential to elevate the dignity of farmers, create income streams for women and provide a platform for inclusive, class crossing nutrition and social protection programs. One exemplary example of this is the [Dhaka Food Project](#) in Bangladesh, led by CSO and supported by the government and FAO- working to support the farmers market to collaborate with cities to work through zoning, permitting, food handling and cross municipality considerations. Such collaborative approaches to supporting farmers markets can elevate territorial markets generating regional wealth.

Charlie Worthington, Food Systems Lead, Consumers International

Consumers organizations tend to function primarily at the national level, with space to better connect with the unique value of cities and urban food systems governance which Consumers International is eager to expand into. Two advantages of CFS in expanding in this area include the nature of policy, experience and expertise that cities can bring in relation to distribution and consumption. While national governments and agriculture ministers think first of the farm, while city governments tend to think from the fork- bringing the consumer perspective to the forefront with targeted initiatives to meet their constituents needs. CFS is already ahead of the curve in bringing these different perspectives to the table with the voluntary guidelines on food systems and nutrition and the right to food- increased participation of cities within CFS would work to further strengthen this. Second is the strength of local governments in including and engaging grassroots voices in line with the mandate of CFS- connecting us to local communities and engaging them in a systematic, meaningful way. We need to think about what accountability means in this context- ensuring meaningful, more people centered engagements.

Stineke Oenema, Executive Director, UN-Nutrition

Building on the comments from other panelists and reminding us of the event title and its focus on delivering 'healthy diets from sustainable food systems'. It's about change, dynamics- speakers have highlighted the need to address multiple governance levels, and the need to connect and organize- this planning and coordination must also be focused and purposeful in transforming food systems for people and planet. To realise the human right to food access to affordable, healthy diets is essential. Healthy diets are the critical link between food systems, health and nutrition. We know from the literature, and from experience that there should be no strict urban/rural divide- it is a continuum. Reference to the publication Discussion Paper [Urban-Rural Linkages for Nutrition](#) which explores the ways through which urban-rural linkages impact on nutrition (e.g. economic power, value chains)- emphasizing the importance of good governance for nutrition to maximise opportunities within health, food, transport and energy systems. Principles guiding action should be integrated governance, human rights based and cover both functional and spatial elements. The impact on nutrition and environment must be incorporated into planning. The growing attention to this topic is evident in the [2023 SOFI report](#) which emphasizes the impact on urbanization on shifting diets towards energy dense, convenience food and insufficient fruits and vegetables contributing to malnutrition. Though it also creates many opportunities as demonstrated

here. For action across the continuum Food Based Dietary Guidelines are a context specific, localized tool – which increasingly incorporate sustainability elements. UN agencies have a long history and growing portfolio of activities to realize the right to food across the rural-urban continuum, like WHO and UNICEFs work to shape food environments, enacting fiscal and regulatory measures; and FAO and WFP harnessing institutional buying- with the strong example of homegrown school meals. There is also great collaboration between agencies and other stakeholders under initiatives such as the Coalition of Action on Healthy Diets from Sustainable Food Systems. We now need more investment and update of policies at the national and subnational level, supported by evidence to feedback into policy loops and stimulate local governance to realize the vision of healthy diets from sustainable food systems. The upcoming HLP report holds great promise, and as the most inclusive platform to discuss food security and nutrition CFS is the best place to elevate and integrate the voices of local governments.

Initiatives shared during audience Q&A

- Ms. Hala Barakat, Housing and Land Rights network (HIC) with Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism (CSIPM) shared the example of [VeryNile](#) in Egypt, a SME working to clean the Nile of plastics which was inhibiting the livelihoods of fisherfolk on the small island of Corsaya- the project creates job opportunities for these fisherfolk as they collect and recycle it into products- with a meal service created to sustain their work, celebrate local food/heritage and also attract visitors to the island, with an accompanying market now developing around it
- Dr Anthony Marisi shared the development of sustainable urban food systems in Kenyan cities Kisumu and Nairobi- with a [strategy](#) developed to guide a holistic approach addressing the entire value chain from farm to fork, linking crop development, food safety, health and resilience
- Mr. André Luzzi (HIC), CSIPM representative shared the example of San Pablo and the food security observatory producing data for decision making
- Urban-Rural Linkages Guiding Principles and Framework for Action to Advance Territorial Development: <https://unhabitat.org/urban-rural-linkages-guiding-principles>
- IPES-FOOD website where the report on concert examples from local governments in food system transformation will soon be available to inspire national governments on what is possible and the need for policies to support local action: <https://www.ipes-food.org/>
- FIAN International also just published a study on the role of local Governments in Food Systems Transformation with concrete examples from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and MENA <https://www.fian.org/en/press-release/article/key-role-for-local-government-in-food-systems-transformation-3197>
- Codex Committee on Food Hygiene is working on Guidelines for food hygiene control measures in traditional markets for food. This work is being led by Kenya, Bolivia and Nigeria.
- UN-Habitat, program on Urban-Rural Linkages: <https://urbanpolicyplatform.org/>