



# Urban-Rural Linkages for Nutrition

## Territorial approaches for sustainable development



**UNSCN**

United Nations System Standing Committee on Nutrition

January 2020

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# 1

## Introduction

The nutrition challenges facing the world of today are daunting. One out of three people suffers from at least one form of malnutrition, and current trends suggest this may increase in the coming years. Every country in every region in the world is affected. The causes of malnutrition are multisectoral, and so reaching global and national goals requires addressing numerous underlying and structural factors as well as securing the concerted attention of a broad range of actors. The persistence of malnutrition has severe consequences for social and economic development, thus inhibiting attainment of many of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The systems that determine nutrition need to undergo transformational change. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016-2025) reaffirm this analysis and call to action.

Although the multisectoral nature of nutrition is well known, how nutrition is affected by linkages across the rural–urban continuum is not. Increased attention to the impact of changes in food systems, urbanization and rural transformation has highlighted the importance of territoriality and urban governance in addressing nutrition. Nutritionists now need to better understand how urban–rural linkages shape the factors that affect nutrition (factors that are often embedded in complex, non-health-related systems) and how these broader policies and programs are designed and governed. Governance for nutrition is the process by which the impact on nutrition of non-nutrition policies – such as for education, employment, health, environment and trade – is leveraged or mitigated (UNSCN, 2017).

In this context, most planners are already keenly aware that “urban” and “rural” are not distinct territories with hard edges, but exist along a continuum. Actors and factors affecting any particular issue are part of complex systems that cross administrative boundaries. Urban planners and those working within this continuum must deal with the complexity of governance every day, as they face a multiplicity of governmental agencies and overlapping horizontal and vertical levels of administration. What may not be as clear to them, however, is how urban–rural linkages and territorial considerations apply to nutrition.

The inherent complexity of nutrition and the numerous systems that influence it (not only health, but also food, energy and transport) as well as the concern for improving nutrition for everyone everywhere underpin this need for nutritionists as well as planners to consider how urban–rural linkages and territorial approaches affect nutrition, to take this into account in the way they work and so increase the positive impact of nutrition policies and programmes.

This paper provides, first, an overview of nutrition and the urban–rural context and how, in general terms, this relates to integrated territorial governance and development. The discussion is then situated in the context of the global development agenda, particularly initiatives dealing with nutrition, urban settlements and urban–rural linkages. The paper then explores how the Guiding Principles for Urban–Rural Linkages (URL-GP) and Framework for Action (FfA) (UN-Habitat, 2019) relate to nutrition actions. Recognizing that the links between urban-rural linkages are not direct, but mediated by other systems and factors, and noting that experiences with applying a territorial approach to nutrition policies and programs are still limited, the paper concludes by outlining initial steps towards promoting more integrated territorial planning for nutrition, while also encouraging further thinking, initiatives and research in this direction.

## 2

## Nutrition and the urban-rural context

The Guiding Principles for Urban–Rural Linkages (Figure 1) and Framework for Action (FfA) developed by UN-Habitat and other stakeholders are a useful starting point for considering why and how those working in nutrition should seek to understand the effects of urban–rural linkages on nutrition. Similarly, this provides an opportunity to look at the URL-GP and FfA through a nutrition lens and see how to incorporate nutrition into integrated territorial planning, policy and development.<sup>1</sup>

Nutrition is a complex issue, and as such, when addressing nutrition, the various dimensions of urban–rural linkages and integrated territorial development can be brought together. The URL–GP and FfA suggest principles and a framework for holistic, inclusive ways of planning and implementing policies and programs that reflect these linkages and territorial needs. Together through the nutrition and URL lenses, we can see how urban–rural linkages affect and can be shaped to produce better nutrition outcomes, healthier diets, and more sustainable territories. This paper represents the application of URL-GP and FfA to a specific theme—nutrition—with insights into potential nutrition-related interventions and governance as part of an integrated territorial development approach.

Although perhaps administratively convenient in the past to categorize issues, analyses and actions spheres of “urban” and “rural,” this reflects an artificially siloed version of reality. Indeed, this view has become an obstacle to progress, as it masks the fact that livelihoods and landscapes do not represent clear divides but range along a continuum from the “more rural” to the “more urban” (Tacoli, 2003; Garrett, 2005). With growing urbanization, and strengthening connections between urban and rural areas that have potentially both positive and negative impacts, decision makers and planners in the public and private sectors and in civil society need to take into account the numerous ways that urban and rural areas are linked.

These “more urban” and “more rural” areas, and the spaces in between, are connected by dynamic ecological, physical, socioeconomic, political, cultural, institutional and even ideological interactions and flows, which are themselves shaped by various structures, processes and mechanisms. These flows include movement of people, goods (both inputs and outputs), services (including legal, financial, informational and technological), natural resources and waste. They are affected by different actors with varying capacities at different administrative levels operating in diverse agroecological, socioeconomic and political contexts (Tacoli, 1998; Tacoli, 2003).

A better understanding of rural–urban connectedness can serve as a basis for policies and investments that strengthen urban–rural linkages and territorial governance and shape them to benefit nutrition, especially through impacts on food systems (Proctor and Berdegué, 2016).

<sup>1</sup> Urban and territorial planning can be defined as a decision-making process aimed at realizing economic, social, cultural and environmental goals through the development of spatial visions, strategies and plans and the application of a set of policy principles, tools, institutional and participatory mechanisms and regulatory procedures (UN-Habitat, 2015).



Figure 1.  
UN-Habitat Guiding Principles for Urban-Rural Linkages



Source: UN-Habitat, 2019.

For instance, better transportation links, more widely available electricity and greater access to the internet and other information sources can give rural households more information about product prices and markets and healthy diets and practices. On the other hand, a lack of transportation and information systems can prevent producers from supplying fresh produce to local and more distant urban markets. There can also be negative consequences due to better transport and marketing links, as they can bring more ultra-processed foods to rural areas, changing healthier local diets to ones with higher levels of fats, sugars and salt. Subnational and local policies and plans (which can also be cross-border), including those for infrastructure and public procurement, can help local producers and traders ensure a more diverse supply of foods to local markets.

Administrative and decision-making structures will also need to change to ensure integrated, effective action. For instance, in many areas, programs to address malnutrition arise from different sectors (such as food, health, water and sanitation and education), but their urban-based program offices may have little understanding of rural inhabitants and their priorities and lack an integrated territorial perspective that would facilitate the coordination needed for programmatic convergence.

Of course, understanding, shaping and benefiting from the connections between nutrition and urban–rural linkages will require more than simply carrying out integrated planning exercises at regional or metropolitan level. Relevant flows, structures, processes, mechanisms and actors will need to be identified, along with the various sectors and levels for which they have responsibility. A comprehensive, cohesive set of policies, programs and investments will need to be designed and implemented.

# UNITED NATIONS DECADE OF **ACTION ON NUTRITION**



2016–2025

# 3

## The global agenda as it relates to nutrition and urban-rural linkages

Since the early 2000s, in particular, nutrition has been recognized as both a driver and outcome of sustainable development. It now holds a place as an independent development objective. Global, national and municipal actors have also shown increasing concern with the challenges of managing the city, and food and nutrition have increasingly become part of the urban agenda. Numerous platforms, initiatives and networks deal with nutrition, urban settlements and urban-rural linkages, but often not joined-up, meaningful way (UNSCN, 2017). Among the most important global statements on these issues are those that have emerged from the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2) (FAO, 2019a), the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs) (United Nations General Assembly, 2015), the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition (United Nations General Assembly, 2016) and the United Nations' New Urban Agenda (United Nations, 2017), and the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP, 2015).

In November 2014, at ICN2, the global community came together to present a common vision for action on nutrition. The Rome Declaration on Nutrition (FAO and WHO, 2014a) was accompanied by a voluntary Framework for Action to implement commitments (FAO and WHO, 2014b). Although ICN2 documents refer to urban settings and to local food systems, and recognize the multisectoral determinants of nutrition, they do not highlight urban-rural linkages or territorial planning as key components of policies or investments.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted in September 2015, is more encompassing (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). It commits governments to achieving 17 comprehensive, people-centered, transformative goals in areas such as economic development, urban settlements, social justice, gender, food, health and natural resources (United Nations, 2019a). An Expert Group Meeting organized by the United Nations System Standing Committee on Nutrition (UNSCN) in June 2018, linking nutrition with the SDGs, showed how most of these areas are relevant to nutrition and how policy and program solutions cut across urban and rural areas (UNSCN, 2018).

SDG 2, which pledges to “end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture”, is of particular relevance. SDG 2 connects this commitment to agriculture, largely a rural endeavor, and seeks to ensure that all people (those in rural and urban areas and across the continuum) have safe, sufficient and nutritious food to eat.

SDG 11 calls for making “cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”. While nutrition, food or agriculture are not specifically mentioned among the SDG 11 targets, SDG 11 recognizes the importance of urban-rural linkages and calls for stakeholders to “support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning”.

To back up general normative statements with organization-specific pledges and plans of action, the UN General Assembly in 2016 proclaimed a Decade of Action on Nutrition (United Nations General Assembly, 2016). This called upon governments and other stakeholders to undertake sustained and coherent implementation of policies and programs to address problems of nutrition (UN, 2019b). In addition to more direct nutrition actions, food-systems approaches and the international organizations that work primarily in food and agriculture are being recognized as key to successfully addressing global nutrition problems.

As nutrition has become more prominent on the global and national development agendas, attention has also increasingly been paid to urban issues, including urban food systems, at municipal, national and global levels. At the 2014 C40 Mayors' Summit<sup>2</sup> the mayor of Milan, Italy launched a proposal for an agreement to develop more resilient urban food systems. The resulting Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP) was signed by more than 100 cities during the 2015 Milan Expo (MUFPP, 2019). The Pact now has more than 200 signatories. In it, city policymakers from around the world agreed to “develop sustainable food systems that are inclusive, resilient, safe and diverse, that provide healthy and affordable food to all people in a human rights-based framework, that minimise waste and conserve biodiversity while adapting to and mitigating impacts of climate change” (MUFPP, 2015). By taking urban–rural linkages into account, the MUFPP has adopted a food-systems framework for urban food policy and planning.

In 2016, the UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, or Habitat III, issued the New Urban Agenda (NUA), which was subsequently adopted by United Nations member states (United Nations, 2017). The NUA makes numerous specific references to conditions in both urban and rural areas, simultaneous urban and rural development, interactions and connectivity, and the need to support territorial systems that integrate both urban and rural functions across the urban–rural continuum (United Nations, 2017).

The NUA also expresses concern for the food security and nutrition needs of urban residents and ties this to an appreciation of urban–rural interactions and integrated territorial governance and development. It recognizes the integral roles of smallholders and fishers to food security and nutrition in the integrated territorial development of urban and rural areas. It emphasizes the importance of connecting urban and rural supply and demand and highlights the ways in which sustainability and natural-resource management, infrastructure, social and economic development and sustainable food and agricultural policies must cut across urban, peri-urban and rural areas to meet urban needs.

Though the nutrition and urban agendas are becoming more comprehensive, they do not yet fully appreciate the importance of the urban–rural continuum and often maintain a rural–urban distinction in their analysis and prescription. While the increased prevalence of overweight and obesity and diet-related diseases has sparked greater recognition of the importance of food systems (and their relationship to health systems), nutrition agendas do not yet extend that analysis to a more integrated understanding of spatial systems and territories. And urban agendas do not yet fully appreciate the importance of truly including rural and peri-urban areas in understanding causes of urban problems and their solutions. Even more startlingly, rural development agendas hardly mention cities, even towns and intermediate cities, except as economic drivers (as markets) and magnets for labor.

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<sup>2</sup> C40 is a network of the world's largest cities dedicated to addressing climate change (C40 Cities, 2019).

## 4

## Nutrition in the context of urban-rural linkages: Expanding on the Guiding Principles and Framework for Action

In the midst of these global conversations, in 2017, UN-Habitat convened a process to generate a set of principles to support and strengthen urban–rural linkages as part of integrated territorial development. These principles aim to ensure that the importance of rural areas is taken into account, that an integrated territorial approach is pursued and that the urban-rural linkages that bind territories together are fully leveraged as part of a planning perspective essential to the success of the NUA. The URL–GP and FfA were developed with input from a multi-stakeholder group of government authorities and representatives of civil society, academia and other development partners, including UN agencies. They were published in July 2019 (UN-Habitat, 2019).

While the Guiding Principles focus largely on good governance and planning practices, FfA provides a set of specific, concrete actions for implementing them. The Principles are expected to be adapted to specific contexts, thus recognizing roles for different actors at national, regional and local levels and inclusively connecting them, spatially and functionally, across the urban–rural continuum. By taking a holistic, integrative approach, working to develop a common vision, valuing the meaningful participation of and partnership among stakeholders, and developing clear roles and actions for them, the Principles seek to enhance synergies and flows of people, products, services and information and achieve inclusive economic, social and environmental sustainability across the urban–rural continuum.

The URL-GP and FfA make explicit reference to the objective of improving nutrition, in addition to planning and actions in multiple areas, including production, health and natural-resource management. Table 1 shows how the URL–GP can be linked to actions in the FfA (related principles are sometimes grouped) and the sorts of nutrition-relevant actions that could be taken to reflect urban–rural linkages and territorial development.

To underscore the importance of urban–rural linkages to nutrition and promoting further thinking, this section also contains comprehensive descriptions of how each principle relates specifically to nutrition and gives selected examples of country-level policy and program interventions that reflect that principle. Unfortunately, documented country and program examples are very limited. There is little systematic analysis of the design process and effectiveness associated with these interventions. Nevertheless, the experiences described emerge from current practice and show the range of efforts being made by policymakers and programmers to take advantage of a more territorial perspective in dealing with nutrition.

**Table 1.****Applying the UN-Habitat Guiding Principles and Actions for Integrated Urban and Territorial Planning to nutrition**

Guiding Principles	Guiding Principles: Summary statement	Relevant actions from FfA (sections A–J)	Potential nutrition-related actions
<b>1.</b> Locally grounded interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking local context into account in the translation of global agendas into interventions</li> <li>• Ensuring national and subnational actions are coherent and integrated across the territory</li> </ul>	<p>Action framework</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Governance, legislation and capacity development (A)</li> <li>• Integrated planning across the urban–rural continuum (B)</li> </ul>	<p>Nutrition actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Locally-led development of plans, policies and investments that take into account the local context and its effects on nutrition challenges and opportunities</li> <li>• Initiatives and programs that are coherent and integrative and link national, regional global nutrition discourses to actions at local level</li> <li>• Capacity development and awareness-raising of stakeholders and beneficiaries on the importance of urban-rural linkages to nutrition</li> </ul>
<b>2.</b> Integrated governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporating thinking on urban–rural linkages into multi-sectoral, multi-level, multi-stakeholder governance structures, integrating issues horizontally (across geographically linked areas), cross-sectorally (across actors such as civil society, private sector and academia) and vertically (across levels of governance)</li> </ul>	<p>Action framework</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Governance, legislation and capacity development (A)</li> <li>• Integrated planning across the urban-rural continuum (B)</li> <li>• Territorial economic development and employment (F)</li> <li>• Infrastructure, technology and communication systems (F)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Governance structures that link and support the coordination of government and stakeholder actions in nutrition, both horizontally and vertically (across a territory or from regional to municipal levels, for example)</li> <li>• Interventions that cut across and integrate actions from various sectors relevant for nutrition</li> <li>• Clarification, rationalization and support for the most effective roles and responsibilities (functions) of specific actors within a holistic understanding of actions that are aligned for maximum synergy</li> <li>• Identify, integrate and incentivize actions from nutrition-relevant actors and stakeholders; support the integration of rural, peri-urban and urban food and agriculture systems and of livelihoods and nutrition-relevant services, technologies and infrastructure</li> </ul>
<b>3.</b> Functional and spatial systems-based approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using systems-based approaches to promote integrative and inclusive territorial planning and policies that consider all the different levels and flows of urban and rural systems (such as people, natural resources and food) and that appropriately consider variations in the scale of urban and rural settlements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Infrastructure, technology and communication systems (F)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify, integrate and incentivize actions from nutrition-relevant actors and stakeholders; support the integration of rural, peri-urban and urban food and agriculture systems and of livelihoods and nutrition-relevant services, technologies and infrastructure</li> </ul>
<b>4.</b> Financially inclusive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring that sufficient and sustainable public and private investment is available to balance and strengthen urban–rural linkages and to inclusively meet rural and urban needs, including the needs of the multiple actors involved, across the continuum of scale, from smaller to larger</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investment and finance for inclusive urban–rural development (C)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that sufficient and reliable funding for harmonized, coherent, synergistic nutrition actions is available (by intervention, by actor, by sector and across the system of interventions) in ways that are balanced and inclusive across rural and urban areas</li> </ul>

Guiding Principles	Guiding Principles: Summary statement	Relevant actions from FfA (sections A–J)	Potential nutrition-related actions
<b>5.</b> Balanced partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fostering inclusive and participatory partnerships, alliances and networks that link sectors and urban and rural actors, especially the most marginalized groups and communities, harnessing their capacities and skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Governance, legislation and capacity development (A)</li> <li>Empower people and communities (D)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve the way that government, private sector and civil society address nutrition through inclusive and collaborative activities, processes and mechanisms</li> </ul>
<b>6.</b> Human rights-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Embedding human rights-based approaches in all instruments and actions, so they respect, promote and fulfil human rights</li> <li>Protecting an area's natural biological diversity should complement this</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Empower people and communities (D)</li> <li>Territorial economic development and employment (F)</li> <li>Coherent approaches to social service provision (G)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employ participatory approaches that honor human rights in nutrition-related approaches and interventions and emphasize their cross-cutting benefits in achieving other key goals, such as improved wellbeing, women's empowerment and protection and the valuation of natural resources</li> </ul>
<b>7.</b> Do no harm and provide social protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthening urban-rural linkages to overcome conflict, recognize cultural diversity and reduce inequalities</li> <li>Achieving this by promoting wellbeing, social protection, health, food security and nutrition, and protecting mobility, shelter, biodiversity, natural resources and land tenure for all genders, ages and socioeconomic groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Integrated approaches for food security, nutrition and public health (I)</li> <li>Environmental impact and natural resource and land management (J)</li> <li>Conflict and disaster (K)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prioritize actions that address conflict and address inequities and honor cultural values and diversity</li> <li>Identify how biodiversity and action, appreciation and valuation of ecosystem services and indigenous cultures and knowledge inform and support actions to improve nutrition; ensure actions to improve nutrition do no harm to the environment and local cultures</li> </ul>
<b>8.</b> Environmentally sensitive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Protecting, sustaining and expanding areas important to biodiversity and ecosystem services, ensuring an integrated urban-rural transition to efficient, resilient, resource-efficient, low-carbon and circular economies</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seek the inclusion and meaningful representation of vulnerable groups so as to benefit from their voice, vision, influence and capabilities in addressing challenges and opportunities of improving nutrition</li> </ul>
<b>9.</b> Participatory engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensuring meaningful participation by people, local institutions and communities in integrated territorial governance by creating spaces and mechanisms, as needed, and building capacity to empower vulnerable groups and protecting and respecting local and indigenous cultures</li> </ul>		
<b>10.</b> Data-driven and evidence-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishing or improving knowledge systems and spatial and disaggregated data (qualitative and quantitative) to support planning to reinforce the urban–rural continuum and improve territorial cohesion</li> <li>Facilitating knowledge sharing, monitoring performance and evaluation and making information accessible, transparent, interactive and available for all</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Knowledge and data management for dynamic spatial flows (E)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify and fill the critical gaps in data, knowledge and information around nutrition and the nutrition actions needed for decision-making, planning, advocacy and awareness-raising</li> <li>Establish systems for information and decision-making in nutrition and nutrition actions in the context of urban-rural linkages that are accessible, useful to and usable by all stakeholders</li> </ul>

## GP1. Locally grounded interventions

The nutrition challenges in urban and rural areas differ, but this is largely due to context rather than different underlying determinants (Ruel et al., 2017). Such differences vary across social, cultural, economic, political, institutional, agroecological and environmental conditions and can express themselves in a variety of ways – for example, as variations in the status of women, the quality and density of infrastructure, food preferences, or the abundance or fragility of natural resources. These conditions can vary among and within countries, and within the urban and rural areas themselves, creating different opportunities for or challenges to good nutrition. For example, access to agricultural inputs, output markets, healthcare and environmental services, such as water and sanitation, can differ across rural–urban landscapes. The array and affordability of foods available from the market, stalls, restaurants or from own production also vary, from common commercial crops to local, underutilized species. The structure and effectiveness of policies and institutions, such as those connecting the diversity of local production to local or regional markets, or the outreach associated with nutrition education, may be stronger or weaker in different locations (Tacoli, 1998; Tacoli, 2003).

Public policies that affect these conditions are made at different levels – global, national and local. For interventions to be locally grounded, therefore, national and global policies should not merely be translated to the local context, but should fully reflect and respond to local challenges, needs and priorities.

Policy and program prescriptions, therefore, cannot simply be generically normative. The frameworks, commitments and lessons learned from global initiatives can provide guidance and impetus for action and connect local efforts to national and international ones. However, the diversity of situations and solutions mandates flexibility and adaptation. For example, consumer education, capacity building of local administrators on nutrition, the promotion of indigenous crops linking urban dwellers to the “traditional diets” of local food systems are all situationally diverse.

Adaptation to the local context and the empowerment of local authorities and target groups are essential to avoiding a top-down, inflexible approach to policy, program and investment design and implementation and to fostering the co-design, co-management and co-evaluation that will lead to more successful interventions. Local actors (both local authorities and civil society) need to be fully informed about the global agenda, of course, but then actively engaged in the adaptation of global agendas to local policies and actions.

Ensuring the meaningful participation of all those whose nutrition will be affected is an essential element in designing and implementing well-adapted and effective interventions. Local leadership and governance should be empowered and possess the legitimacy necessary to influence decision-making if global discourses are to be linked with local dynamics. Authorities should be encouraged to facilitate the inclusion of different people's needs and voices to make sure everyone is heard. Local capabilities may need to be strengthened, as these almost always determine the quality of implementation. The knowledge held at local level that informs their own actions, and which should inform the perspective of those from outside, is of fundamental importance.



## Country and program examples

In **Senegal** the development of a national multisectoral nutrition plan relies on decentralized mechanisms at sub-national and local levels (Youssofane et al., 2018). Coherence between sectors has been strengthened and individual sectors have begun to take more responsibility for incorporating nutrition. **Nepal** is another country where the establishment and implementation of a decentralized multisectoral nutrition structure has shown the importance of nutrition in national and regional planning (Banerjee et al., 2018). It has further highlighted the need for participatory nutrition programming in sub-national and local contexts.

The **Kenya** Food and Nutrition Security Policy (KFNSP) (Republic of Kenya, 2011) is the country's main policy framework and it acknowledges the need for multi-sector action to eradicate hunger and improve nutrition. The governance system for nutrition is underpinned by an institutional framework that places considerable importance on the role of sub-national governance entities and local structures.



## **GP2. Integrated governance**

## **GP3. Functional and spatial systems-based approaches**

## **GP5. Balanced partnerships**

Guiding Principles 2 and 3 call for an inclusive approach to action. GP2 focuses on linking governance levels and structures horizontally and vertically and distributing responsibilities appropriately, while GP3 promotes an integrative approach that captures both functional and spatial dimensions.

Actions and interactions across multiple stakeholders, sectors, and systems underlie the effectiveness of policies, programs and investments that seek to improve nutrition. This complicates the coordination of actions essential for impact, which is greatest when interventions arrive at the same beneficiaries, at the same time, in the same place.

Many of the determinants of nutrition also have a spatial dimension, as they are affected by administrative structures that cover both rural and urban areas or that have strong effects on rural areas, even if they are urban based. Resources and administrative structures for specific interventions will, therefore, flow across governance levels and structures (vertically and horizontally, especially during implementation).

Policymakers and planners dealing with nutrition need to think not in terms of a rural-urban divide, but a rural-urban continuum. Examples abound whereby conventional approaches to planning that divide territories into rural and urban areas impede information flows and coordination between national, regional, district, city and village planners, with urban planners often focused on infrastructure and their rural counterparts focused on agricultural enterprise. A new approach to integrating vertical (local to national) and horizontal (cross-jurisdictional) governance systems is necessary to address the complex and dynamic interactions of people, goods and services across the urban-rural continuum.

At the same time, when considering specific interventions to address nutrition, policymakers and planners would also benefit from taking a functional rather than a solely spatial approach. In other words, even as they consider the problem of nutrition within a specific space, decision makers should analyze the issue “functionally” as well (Berdegue et al., 2014). They should conceive of the problem, and especially its causes and solutions, beyond that of simple location or sector. Specifically, here, analyses of causes and responses to nutrition problems should be placed within the larger context of integrated territorial development and governance, with consideration of how they relate to issues of urban-rural linkages. Answers to the nutrition problem will emerge from a more comprehensive, integrated subnational, territorial perspective.<sup>3</sup>

While GP2 and GP3 are about integrating governance functionally, spatially and across levels, GP5 focuses on the character of the collaboration among governmental and non-governmental actors. The potential positive role of the private sector, on its own or through public-private partnerships, is often overlooked. A lack of understanding of local, including indigenous, culture and a lack of engagement to ensure community actors

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<sup>3</sup> *Agreeing on Causes of Malnutrition for Joint Action* (FAO, 2014) provides a methodology for addressing malnutrition in an integrated way at the subnational (provincial or district) level.

have a meaningful voice in governance can undermine the effectiveness of policies and programs related to urban-rural linkages and nutrition.

When it comes to nutrition, governance must account for this diversity and complexity, as well as the dynamics of the context and challenges. Policymakers and planners need to consider what needs to be done and what governance structures are appropriate for coordination, participation and accountability, which actors should undertake what functions, for what period of time and over what territorial spaces. There will need to be a rethink and revamp of structures, processes and mechanisms to deal with these challenges. This may include the identification and development of new forms of urban and rural governance that apply more participatory and flexible approaches.

The use of multisectoral, multistakeholder, multilevel participatory platforms, grounded in a territorial approach, may be helpful (OECD et al., 2016). Food policy councils and food charters can generate regional and municipal food plans (Cabannes and Marrochino, 2018). These plans, which tend to be short declarations of values, principles and priorities, are useful for bringing actors together to develop a common vision (Simcoe County, 2012). The incredibly difficult challenge is to figure out how to make that vision a reality among all the competing (though potentially collaborating) sectors, actors, levels and spaces working in nutrition. The operationalization of city charters or councils must traverse levels and sectors, identifying needs at local level and then helping rural areas and local communities to reach out to needed programs.

The principles of adaptive governance may provide some solutions to this complexity. Adaptive governance relies on more open, inclusive processes for decision-making than traditional, centralized approaches. It recognizes multiple interests, values community voices and community-based initiatives and has space for various types of organizations and knowledge (Brunner et al., 2005). “Systems of cities”, such as those in Colombia, which join governance structures across geographies rather than forcing a unified authority, provide an alternative, flexible approach to the complexity of cross-jurisdictional relations (Samad, Lozano-Gracia and Panman, 2012; World Bank, 2009).

### Country and program examples

The **Toronto** Food Policy Council was launched in 1991 to advise the city on food-policy issues, including nutrition, and to serve as an advocate for community food-security strategies and foster dialogue between stakeholders across sectors (Forster et al., 2015). The Council connects grassroots initiatives with city and municipal planners to focus on food strategies that look beyond municipal borders to rural areas and farmers.

In Colombia, the city of **Medellín**, the Metropolitan Area of Aburrá Valley and the departmental government of Antioquia used the City Region Food System (CRFS) approach developed by FAO to establish the Alianza por el Buen Vivir (Good Living Alliance) (CFS, 2017). This enabled them to create a coordinated system to manage and monitor the agri-food system of the city region, which includes Medellín, smaller urban centers, and the surrounding peri-urban areas and hinterlands, through a single, comprehensive policy. The alliance aims to improve the growth, efficiency and competitiveness of food markets through financial and non-financial means, including the facilitation of organization and collaboration among social, public, private and academic stakeholders.

Public-private partnerships in Ecuador and Brazil focus on the sustainable and equitable management of natural resources and agri-food systems (Dubbeling et al., 2016). In **Quito**, the Fondo para la Protección del Agua-FONAG (Water Protection Fund) is a sustainable finance mechanism that seeks to improve the management and long-term protection of surrounding watersheds. The fund encourages governmental and non-governmental agencies and private-sector actors to work together to sustainably and efficiently manage water resources for urban and rural consumers, as well as for industrial, agricultural and other purposes in the city region system.

In the municipality of **Belo Horizonte**, Brazil, under the umbrella of a food and nutrition security program, the Abastecer initiative allows licensed local traders to sell fruit and vegetable products in designated areas. The products are sourced largely from regional and smallholder farmers, who benefit from being able to participate in city markets. Licensees also must commit to selling food products at discounted prices in the city's peri-urban and marginalized areas, thus improving access to and the availability of nutritious and safe foods for vulnerable social groups.



## GP4. Financially inclusive

Nutrition finance is fractured and complex, perhaps unsurprisingly, given the multisectoral determinants of nutrition. Nutrition actions and related budgets have traditionally been managed and allocated by numerous departments, agencies and sectors, over multiple levels of government. Funds, too, come from multiple sources, from taxes levied and allocated by various levels of government to bi-lateral aid and multi-lateral lending (Action Against Hunger, 2017). Private and non-governmental actions contribute, too, some of them, in turn, benefitting from public-sector spending.

Financial mechanisms capable of adequately addressing funding requirements and supporting more balanced and harmonized links between urban and rural areas need to be put in place with supporting policy and legislation. Funding decisions should be consonant with the requirements of a territorial approach and guided by meaningful participation of stakeholders in rural and urban areas. Budgets will need to reflect the varying roles, responsibilities and revenue-raising mechanisms across governance units, including the effects of national versus more decentralized structures.

Government policies and investments can significantly affect food systems in ways that promote or undermine healthier diets. These policies, including regulatory frameworks, can have important territorial characteristics. For instance, policies and programs arising from regional planning with a territorial dimension can seek to diversify food production and improve processing, storage, transportation, market information and infrastructure, thereby lowering costs and promoting the consumption of local foods. This leads to shorter food chains and higher incomes for market actors across the rural–urban space. In this way, planning and investments deliver a greater variety of nutritious, safe, affordable and seasonal foods to both rural and urban residents and potentially reduce greenhouse gases.

Public procurement can be another important avenue for impact. For example, in Brazil, the government has prioritized local producers for institutional procurement by public-sector entities such as schools and facilitated links between these producers and sources of local and regional urban-based demand in non-institutional markets (Campos et al., 2013; FAO, 2019b). Local farmers and small-medium enterprises may need to be supported with public investment and facilitation to promote the shared use of infrastructure, pooling of resources or connections to urban consumer demand or supply chains (Dubbeling et al., 2016). In India, the government has now sanctioned the purchase of healthy, but underutilized grains, such as millets, for school meal programs, creating significant market demand and, thus, financing to strengthen links between farmers and urban-based consumers (Padulosi and King, 2018).

### Country and program examples

Nutrition finance mechanisms, such as nutritional impact bonds and taxes on foods that are high in fat, salt and sugar (HFSS), such as those levied in **Mexico** can be used to finance nutrition programs, reducing undernutrition in developing countries and over-nutrition in developed countries (Action Against Hunger, 2014). They can also be employed to build capacity to benefit nutrition goals across the urban–rural continuum.



Power of Nutrition (PON) is a UK-based partnership, launched in April 2015, of international investors and implementing partners in nutrition (PON, 2019). Primarily a financial catalyst for nutrition, PON attracts new donors, including private donors and other “smaller” lenders, then leverages their investments using pre-negotiated financing arrangements.

The United States Department of Agriculture’s Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) gives financial and technical assistance to eligible healthy food-retail projects across the **United States**, aiming to expand access to healthy foods in underserved areas, create and preserve quality jobs and revitalize low-income communities (PolicyLink et al., 2015).

## **GP6. Human-rights based**

## **GP7. Do no harm and provide social protection**

## **GP8. Environmentally sensitive**

## **GP9. Participatory engagement**

GPs 6, 7, 8 and 9 share a common respect for human rights and the related establishment of participatory mechanisms that reconcile differences, reduce social inequalities and power imbalances, ensure the participation of all stakeholders and achieve sustainable agreements between public and private interests. While the participation of all stakeholders in decision-making, particularly those who are often marginalized, such as indigenous peoples, women or youth, is an evident outcome of a human-rights based approach, GP6 links this to care for others and for the environment by explicitly stating that “protecting an area’s natural biological diversity should complement this.” GP6 also incorporates the valuation, protection and promotion of indigenous customs and local, often underutilized species of crops and animals, including wild foods.

Embedding human rights in urban and rural decision-making for nutrition, along with consideration of environmental impact and protection of biodiversity, supports the goals of doing no harm to beneficiaries, particularly women and children, or to natural resources, so that livelihood and ecological systems are sustained and nurtured. Such an approach has a direct, positive effect on the determinants of nutrition, for example, by guaranteeing that everyone has the possibility of achieving their potential by ensuring they have the capacity to earn a decent income, have access to essential public services and enjoy an inclusive social environment that celebrates diversity and uniqueness as well as common culture.

Governments are the duty-bearers responsible for enforcing a rights-based approach to nutrition, rooting this commitment in policies, programs, and law. A human rights-based approach commits governments to respect the right to wellbeing, education, health and freedom from hunger and directly commits them to ensuring that their citizens receive such services and enjoy such liberties. Beyond this, governments must ensure that these elements and the necessary actors come together to create, develop, energize and participate in improving nutrition. This connects back to the Guiding Principles, which focus on governance and on how to design and deliver effective policies and programs in ways to take the urban–rural continuum into account.

The reference to the environment recognizes the importance of biodiversity and ecosystem services to achieving sustainable, resilient and environmentally balanced economies and communities; safe, diverse and healthy diets; and a healthy environment for disease-free production, storage, processing, transport, preparation and consumption of food.

The causes, impacts and solutions to these environmental issues as they relate to nutrition respect no division between urban and rural areas. Healthy and sustainable diets in urban and rural areas are underpinned by sustainable agricultural practices that embed biodiversity and provide ecosystem services. Good agricultural practices should be adopted to reduce the risks to human health from disease and contamination. Guidance on practices and input supplies often come to rural areas from technical experts and institutions based in cities and towns. Safe, hygienic practices should accompany food at every point in the food system, from activities involving rural producers to those involving rural, peri-urban and urban consumers (UNSCN, 2018). Encouraging agricultural

production and natural-resource management with a nutrition perspective again reflects the principles of doing no harm and of being environmentally sensitive and responding to climate change while ensuring a safe, diverse, healthy, accessible, affordable supply of food.

In many cases, consumer choice has gone beyond the purchase of healthy food to considering how to support farmers' stewardship of natural resources and ecosystem services. Indeed, all four principles deserve to be incorporated into market messaging and branding to include protection of farmers' land rights, protection and conservation of natural resources, and direct consumer participation in support of the territorial identity in consumer choices. Over the past two decades, for example, farmers' markets and community-supported agriculture, where urban consumers commit to supporting particular peri-urban and rural farms, have become major drivers of farm production and marketing decisions.

Revisiting this nexus of biodiversity, ecosystem services and agricultural practices with a nutrition lens in the context of climate change could prove a good launchpad for exploring and identifying common challenges and opportunities across the many issues that should, like nutrition and sustainable development generally, take a territorial approach to development. Collaborative initiatives that bring stakeholders together through shared cultures or concerns can empower often overlooked, unheard or unheeded groups.

The human-rights-based, participatory approach embedded in the Guiding Principles mandates their inclusion. For instance, agricultural biodiversity is protected, nurtured and maintained by indigenous peoples, pastoralists, forest dwellers and fishers, and smallholder farmers who produce most of the world's food (UNSCN, 2018). These groups, who are often marginalized, can promote the sustainable use of land and respect for environmental, traditional and territorial interests. Similarly, social protection mechanisms can help to address factors that impinge on the production and consumption of diverse foods, including the protection and promotion of local or underutilized species, and on the provision of health services, especially maternal-child care or nutrition knowledge, or water and sanitation. Clearly, the concerns, needs and perspectives of all stakeholders must be taken into account for policies and programs to be effective in improving nutrition. Producers, the food and agricultural industry and consumers are all major influences.

### Country and program examples

The **United Nations** declarations concerning the human right to adequate food and nutrition (United Nations, 1948; OHCHR and FAO, 2010) and the Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (United Nations General Assembly, 2019) can be harnessed to promote meaningful change in food policy, where civil society participation is fundamental. The extent to which human rights are realized at the local level is directly related to government accountability and effectiveness.

The "250 000 Families Challenge" launched by Colectivo Agroecológico in **Ecuador** is a successful bottom-up, citizen-led process aimed at ensuring the basic rights to food and health by creating links between producers and consumers and establishing healthy and sustainable production and consumption practices (FAO, 2017).



Schools supply the next generation with meals, knowledge, skills and values that shape their health as well as future food systems. They are an important means of bridging urban–rural gaps and raising children’s, teachers’ and parents’ awareness of the importance of local biodiversity for healthy diets and sustainable territorial development. School meals have been mandatory in primary and secondary schools in **Brazil** since 1955. In 2009, a new policy was introduced that set a 30 percent minimum quota for procuring organic agricultural products from local farmers (Kitaoka, 2018).

In Antananarivo, **Madagascar**, agroecologically trained smallholders are connected directly to consumers and markets through designated intermediaries (Cerdan et al., 2015). This gives farmers greater agency by increasing their knowledge of market pricing and creates a market for environmentally safe and healthy food.



## GP10. Data-driven and evidence-based

Significant knowledge gaps still exist in the context of urban–rural linkages and nutrition, especially when it comes to providing a holistic vision of the nature and effects of the various linkages and of knowing which interventions and governance structures are most effective. While the connections between nutrition and health are fairly well known, knowledge gaps associated with agriculture and food systems, education, a healthy diet and nutrition are still being identified and addressed. The political and institutional environment related to urban-rural linkages needs to be better understood. These issues, in the context of the urban–rural continuum, have been researched only to a limited extent.

Up-to-date information on the prevalence and characterization of malnutrition (especially micronutrient deficiencies) in urban and rural areas is scarce, making a comprehensive understanding of trends and potential interactions difficult. Studies of food consumption patterns and sourcing are few, especially in low- and middle-income countries. The data that are available are insufficient to track trends or produce comparative analyses across the rural–urban continuum (say, by size of the urban area or by income group) (Garrett and Ruel, 2018). Although there are studies of urban and rural livelihoods, few take an in-depth look at how nutrition determinants work across the urban-rural space and, in particular, how households manage or are affected by the panoply of urban-rural connections and how nutrition-relevant services, programs, and investments are delivered to them.

While progress has been made on analyzing a number of connections (for example, between urbanization and diet change and between urban-area expansion and loss of crop land), more research is needed to further our understanding of even the basic interplay between urban and rural areas as it affects nutrition. The full implications of urbanization are unclear for farm and non-farm rural employment, economies and societies, climate-changing production and dietary patterns, and the demand for processed or fresh food. For example, how will these interactions and changes affect women’s roles and empowerment and the sustainable use of natural resources and ecosystem services? In a broader context, what role will small cities and rural towns play in linking producers to consumers? What will the impacts be of these changes on lower-income or marginalized groups (smallholders, landless, net food buyers, informal-sector traders, low-income urban consumers, indigenous peoples) (CFS, 2016)? And what are the most practical and effective governance structures when having to deal with a multisectoral, multi-level, multi-actor issue such as nutrition?

While policies and programs naturally need to be grounded in reliable data and solid evidence, there need to be changes in how that evidence is generated, specifically, in how data are collected, managed and used. Although fundamental gaps in information exist on what the situation and context are, what the problems are and what needs to be done, those gaps are perhaps even larger when it comes to how to do what needs to be done. Descriptive case studies are not sufficient. Practice-based evidence, generated by rigorous, inclusive research – often using participatory methods – is urgently needed and must inform research protocols for a rapidly evolving world in which the nutrition challenges have become and will continue to become more complex. At the same time, approaches to collecting, disaggregating, managing and using data are already being revolutionized by technology.

## Country and program examples

The **FAO/World Health Organization (WHO)** Global Individual Food consumption data Tool (GIFT) collects quantitative individual consumption data from around the world (FAO, 2019c). Information comes from all types of surveys, from large nationwide polls to small-scale community questionnaires, and includes information from across rural and urban areas. The platform provides food-based indicators for nutrition and food safety, helping policymakers, planners and staff at non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders to make informed decisions.



## 5

## Conclusion: Messages for key actors in nutrition, urban–rural linkages and integrated territorial development

This paper notes the importance of urban-rural linkages as key drivers of the factors affecting nutrition and has shown how nutrition can be incorporated into actions for integrated territorial development. It makes a case and provides a framework for directly targeting nutrition issues when planning integrated territorial development projects, programs and policies and suggests a new way of thinking when designing and implementing nutrition-related interventions.

More explicit consideration of how relationships between rural and urban areas affect nutrition should generate multiple benefits, including more diverse, affordable and safe nutritious foods; sustainable landscapes with enhanced biodiversity; more efficient provision of clean water, sanitation, energy and other services, such as health care; more effective transmission of nutrition-related education, knowledge and information; and greater potential for economic development and decent jobs that can, in turn, ensure better social integration and more sustainable, secure, fulfilling livelihoods.

Of course, acting across the urban–rural space will also bring challenges when it comes to defining clear responsibilities and scopes of action for various actors and institutions at different levels of government. Governance to improve nutrition will need to function vertically (spanning administrative levels from local to national and global) and horizontally (across administrative divisions and jurisdictions, sectors and territories). It will need to be inclusive, comprehensive, multilateral, multisectoral and sufficiently flexible to enable the administrative integration of multiple stakeholders (UNSCN, 2017). Integrated territorial planning and actions within a framework of effective governance can bring these causal imperatives and governance needs together, allowing consideration of the different determinants, sectors, actors and linkages across a particular geography in devising program and policy solutions (UN-Habitat, 2015).

The following areas, then, emerge as relevant to actors in this space, in particular nutritionists, urban and territorial planners.

### **View nutrition policy and programs through a territorial lens and incorporate nutrition into urban and territorial planning and governance**

- As more levels of governance, sectors and actors recognize the continuum between rural and urban areas, it is crucial that nutrition actions take a more integrated, territorial approach and abolish the urban–rural divide. To boost efficiency and efficacy, they should consider how interventions should reflect urban-rural linkages and the underlying systems that connect them.

- When planning, actors should think about how to understand and address determinants of nutrition with actions that may span urban and rural areas, rather than thinking of actions that happen in either urban or rural areas, resulting in separate institutional solutions and actions. Public procurement of local produce for school meals is one example.
- In nutrition terms, a rethink and revamp of structures, processes and mechanisms is needed, including the identification and development of new forms of urban and rural planning and governance that incorporate actions to affect nutrition and its determinants through participatory, flexible and adaptive approaches.

### **Consider how to effectively raise and shape inclusive urban-rural finance to address poverty, hunger and malnutrition**

- Finance mechanisms and investments emerging from policies and planning with a territorial dimension can and should have a significant impact on nutrition, for example, by diversifying food production and processing, storage, transportation, market information and infrastructure, leading to shorter food chains with positive benefits for nutrition.
- Nutrition-specific finance mechanisms (such as PON, nutrition impact bonds and taxes) should incorporate inclusive approaches to address nutrition impacts across the urban–rural continuum.

### **Address human rights, environmental sensitivity and participation in policies and programs to improve nutrition**

- Embedding human rights in urban and rural decision-making for nutrition and considering the environmental impacts and protection of biodiversity support the goals of doing no harm to beneficiaries, particularly women and children, and to natural resources, promoting and sustaining livelihood and ecological systems.
- Revisiting the nexus of biodiversity, ecosystem services and agricultural practices with a nutrition lens in the context of climate change could act as a launchpad for exploring and identifying common challenges and opportunities in the many areas that should, like nutrition, take a more territorial approach to development actions.

### **Include nutrition in the context of urban–rural linkages and territorial governance and development in the research agenda**

- Studies of urban and rural livelihoods and studies that take an in-depth look at how nutrition determinants work across the urban–rural space (in particular, about how households manage or are affected by urban–rural connections) and how nutrition-relevant services, programs and investments are delivered to them are essential to good decision-making and largely lacking.
- Practice-based evidence on policies and programs generated by rigorous, inclusive research (often using participatory methods) is urgently needed.

### Develop tools to guide implementation of URL-GP incorporating nutrition actions

- The development of assessment tools and learning materials undertaken by UN-Habitat in collaboration with URL-GP partners should incorporate the nutrition analysis and recommended actions set out here and by other follow-up work to link URL-GP with nutrition.
- Application of URL-GP and related implementation frameworks, such as the National Urban Policy planning, SDG 11 implementation and the International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning (UN-Habitat, 2015), should also include nutrition dimensions in guidance to national and subnational governments.



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## Acronyms

<b>CFS</b>	Committee on World Food Security
<b>CGIAR</b>	Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research
<b>CIRAD</b>	French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development
<b>CRFS</b>	City Region Food System
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations
<b>FfA</b>	Framework for Action
<b>GFF</b>	Global Financing Facility
<b>GIFT</b>	Global Individual Food consumption data Tool
<b>HFFI</b>	Healthy Food Financing Initiative
<b>HFSS</b>	High in fat, salt and sugar
<b>IFAD</b>	International Fund for Agricultural Development
<b>IFPRI</b>	International Food Policy Research Institute
<b>KFNSP</b>	Kenya Food and Nutrition Security Policy
<b>MUFPP</b>	Milan Urban Food Policy Pact
<b>NUA</b>	New Urban Agenda
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>OEWG</b>	Open-Ended Working Group
<b>OHCHR</b>	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
<b>PDS</b>	Public Distribution System
<b>PON</b>	Power of Nutrition
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>UNCDF</b>	United Nations Capital Development Fund
<b>UNSCN</b>	United Nations System Standing Committee on Nutrition
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization

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# UNSCN vision

A world free from hunger and all forms of malnutrition is attainable in this generation

UNSCN Secretariat

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