



Africa's urban food and nutrition transition – A CALL TO ACTION

We, as African researchers and food system practitioners, recognise that the forthcoming decades will define Africa's urban transition. In light of the Urban Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) and the New Urban Agenda (Habitat 3) urbanisation, and specifically Africa's urban transition, is now a focus of the global development agenda. Who drives this agenda and where action is planned and implemented will directly influence development outcomes. It is high time that Africa, and particularly African cities, drives this agenda. This need is particularly evident in the context of urban food and nutrition security.

Rapid urbanization and the challenge of building inclusive cities is the critical development issue of the 21st Century. Africa will give birth to thousands of new towns and cities as it crosses the 50% urban threshold shortly after 2030.ⁱ The absolute growth and increasing concentration of people in cities will transform governance and policy imperatives over the next decades.ⁱⁱ This is not a future challenge, this transition is taking place right now. While a uniquely African perspective is important within the global debate on the New Urban Agenda, it is essential to acknowledge the diversity of African urbanisms.ⁱⁱⁱ There is significant variation in the levels and rates of urbanization across the continent.^{iv} In addition to this, Africa's colonial legacy means that while much of the policy attention in the past has focused on Africa's primary cities, much of the continent's urbanization is taking place in secondary cities.^v

Food has not been considered central to the urban agenda. We believe that it is core to Africa's urban development.

Food insecurity will become an increasingly important urban problem this millennium.^{vi} Urban food insecurity in the Global South has been largely sidelined in research and policy-making over the last decade.^{vii} The result is that the urban food and nutrition response remains framed as an agricultural and production-related issue.^{viii} This 'agro-production' focus means that the scale at which action and interventions are planned, legislated and funded remains the national scale.

Urban food systems in the Global South are currently undergoing major transformation.^{ix} The growth of poor urban populations, and the growth of informality as an entrepreneurial rather than survival strategy, all suggest that the formal and informal food economies will compete, complement and co-exist long into the future. This coupled with the levels of urban food insecurity raises critical developmental and governance questions. The visible manifestations of the Africa's urban food and nutrition crisis include food poverty, hunger and malnutrition, a lack of dietary diversity, child wasting and stunting, increased vulnerability to disease, and a growing obesity epidemic.^x Enhanced food security for the urban poor is therefore a critical outcome and measure of urban policy-making.^{xi} There is a growing consensus that

this situation poses one of the major threats to public health in Africa, and that it impacts the poor – and therefore the most food insecure – to the greatest extent.

These trends, coupled with the renewed urban focus of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Habitat III deliberations, and the goals set out in the African Union's Agenda 2063, present an ideal opportunity for all spheres of government to focus on food and nutrition security as a key urban development challenge. This requires action from all affected stakeholders – governments, non-governmental organizations, researchers and society at large. The urban food challenge calls for action from multiple players. These actions include:

National Government

- To actively pursue the ideals of democratic decentralization, facilitating effective and accountable urban governance.
- To ensure that the requisite national urban development frameworks are in place to guide and support the devolution of powers to local governments.
- To proactively drive effective policy and legislative processes to enable urban managers full authority to engage in urban food related matters.
- To ensure that the requisite fiscal allocations are provided in accordance with the urban food governance authority.
- To play a facilitative, knowledge building (and not management) national coordinating role, supporting local governments in their urban food system interventions.
- To develop reporting methods that ensure that the urban food governance interventions feed into national reporting processes that support the SDG structures.

City Government

- To proactively address all the dimensions of food insecurity – availability, access, utilization and stability – with appropriate focus on the most relevant dimension to the urban food and nutrition challenge.
- To actively engage all urban food system actors to generate effective and utilizable knowledge systems that can inform urban food system policies.
- To proactively engage all food system actors and facilitate processes whereby knowledge, interventions and innovations can be shared and supported.
- To develop an urban food charter or urban food system principles that inform policy and practice.
- To identify the most appropriate governance structures to govern urban food and nutrition insecurity.
- To develop effective and scale appropriate urban food system policies and implementation strategies.
- To ensure that policies and strategies align with, and complement, national, regional and wider constitutional legislative agreements.
- To convene and facilitate processes whereby groups with disparate or conflicting perspectives can be retained to ensure focus on wider urban food system challenges.

International agencies and donors

- To proactively engage urban managers responsible for urban food system governance to identify needs and areas requiring support

- To utilize their existing positions to raise the profile and importance of the urban food system challenge
- To act with caution when transferring perspectives, methodologies and development interventions from other regions to African cities
- To draw on existing and contextual informed knowledge to guide interventions and processes.

Civil society organisations

- To constantly pursue the agenda of pro-poor urban food system development and governance and to hold all actors, across scales, accountable for this agenda.
- To engage critically in urban food system support interventions and processes
- To assist in cross sector collaborations, enabling process access to multiple food system players.
- To ensure the interventions supported address the targeted processes or projects but caution against processes that direct attention away from the core reasons for a particular urban food system challenge.

Researchers

- To build the essential context-specific urban food system knowledge platforms necessary to ensure urban food security.
- To draw on, and critically assess, international urban food system knowledge and, where possible, test applicability to local contexts.
- To generate research specific to the following key outcomes: Policy, practice, economy, nutrition, wellbeing and wider development interventions.
- To generate food security relevant knowledge that engages wider food system issues from an urban context, avoiding the urban/rural dichotomy, where possible.

Endnotes

- i Pieterse, E., Parnell, S. & Haysom, G. (2015). *Towards an African Urban Agenda*. United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). UN-Habitat, Nairobi.
- ii Turok, I. (2012). *Urbanisation and development in South Africa: Economic imperatives, spatial distortions and strategic responses*. Human Settlements Group, International Institute for Environment and Development.
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- iv United Nations (2014) *World Urbanization Prospects. The 2014 Revision*. New York: The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs.
- v Habitat, U. N. (2014). *The state of African Cities 2014: re-imagining sustainable urban transitions. United Nations Human Settlements Programme: Nairobi, Kenya*; Roberts, B. (2014). *Managing Systems of Secondary Cities, Policy Responses in International Development*, Cities Alliance/UNOPS, Brussels.
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- viii Dev, 2010; Spoor, M. and Robbins, M. (eds.) (2012). *Agriculture, Food Security and Inclusive Growth*. The Hague: Institute of Social Studies; Hanson, C. (2013). "Food Security, Inclusive Growth, Sustainability, and the Post-2015 Development

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- x Athreya, V. (2010). Food insecurity in urban India. *The Hindu*; Crush, J., Frayne, B., & Pendleton, W. (2012). The crisis of food insecurity in African cities. *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition*, Vol. 7(2-3): pp. 271-92; Crush, J., Frayne, B., & Pendleton, W. (2012). The crisis of food insecurity in African cities. *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition*, Vol. 7(2-3): pp. 271-92.
- xi Crush, J., Frayne, B., & Pendleton, W. (2012). The crisis of food insecurity in African cities. *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition*, 7(2-3), pp 271-92.

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