

URBAN FOOD POLICIES – SHARING FOOD SYSTEM INNOVATIONS THROUGH DECENTRALIZED COOPERATION IN AFRICA

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Abstract

Food systems have undergone major transformations over the past decades which have proved to be unsustainable. The world's urban population now stands at 3.7 billion people, and is expected to double by 2050. These two trends represent an enormous challenge for food security and nutrition, which can only be addressed if food systems transition towards sustainability. This paper unpacks SSA's specific challenges and highlights that many countries in Africa, alongside other countries in the South, have come up with their own solutions that can readily benefit others facing similar agro and socioeconomic contexts. Many of these initiatives are led by local governments, who are central to bringing about change at the level. As such, this paper puts forward the concept of decentralized cooperation (city to city cooperation) to foster cooperation for food and nutrition security for all, through cataloguing good practices and sparking innovation on the ground, reaping broad benefits for local economies (including job creation), societies and the environment.

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1 Introduction

Over the past century, food systems around the world have incurred extraordinary transformations (Reardon and Timmer 2012). They led to tremendous progress for global food security and nutrition, but many paradoxes arose: chronic malnutrition (e.g. undernutrition, obesity), access to food (e.g. poverty and inequality, food desert, price volatility), or environmental footprint (e.g. climate change contribution, land degradation, water pollution, biodiversity losses), all taking new forms in a world of abundance and waste. The world's urban population now stands at 3.7 billion people, and is expected to double by 2050. Population growth and unsustainable food systems represent an enormous challenge for food security and nutrition, which can only be addressed if food systems¹ are strengthened and made more sustainable and resilient (Jennings et al. 2015, World Bank 2015).

This paper unpacks some of SSA's specific challenges and argues that local governments are central to bringing about change in local food systems. It puts forward the concept of decentralized cooperation (city to city cooperation), to share good practices at multiple levels, between multiple actors and through many different instruments. It presents a City to City Initiative FAO is mounting, in partnership with local government networks to foster cooperation for food and nutrition security for all, within the framework of the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact. This initiative aims to foster policy dialogues, catalogue good practices and spark innovation on the ground, reaping broad benefits for local economies, societies and the environment.

¹We here define sustainable food system as “a food system that delivers food security and nutrition for all in such a way that the economic, social and environmental bases to generate food security and nutrition for future generations are not compromised” (HLPE 2014, 31), and food system resilience as “the capacity of people to produce and access nutritious and culturally acceptable food over time and space in the face of disturbance and change” (Schipanski et al. 2016, 601).

2 Transforming of food systems is critical in Sub-Saharan Africa

Sub-Saharan Africa faces unique challenges and opportunities in creating more resilient and sustainable food systems which could be a major lever for future growth and prosperity.

2.1 Rapid urbanization coupled with rural population growth

Over the past 60 years, SSA has witnessed unabated urbanization. The urban population represented 11% of the total population in 1950 (19 million people) and soared to 38% (359 million) by 2015. It continues to grow, and is predicted to increase by 50% by 2040 (854 million) and 55% by 2050, adding up to almost 1.13 billion urban people (United Nations 2014). These figures are striking: “Africa is urbanizing twice as fast as did Europe. It took Europe 110 years to move from 15% urban in 1800, to 40% in 1910. Africa has achieved the same transformation in almost half the time: 60 years” (AfDB, OECD, and UNDP 2016).

Equally striking is the simultaneous growth of the rural population. Despite a very rapid urbanization pace, SSA rural population is projected to grow from 537 million in 2015 to 937 million by 2050 (United Nations 2014).

2.2 Food systems and job creations

SSA's current economic and employment structure, coupled with the ongoing demographic transition, raises a critical challenge for the coming decades: job creation. Limited rural employment opportunities fuels migration flows to cities, other rural areas, neighbouring countries or overseas. The working population – 15 to 64 years old – is expected to grow from 520 million to 1.3 billion between 2015 and 2050, i.e. around 3% a year, representing the highest growth rate in the world. This youth bulge could become a major source of social instability, yet it could also turn into a critical asset. SSA could benefit from a demographic dividend – a high working age share of the population – if decent jobs are created for this incoming workforce (Yeboah and Jayne 2016).

A number of sectors hold job creation prospects, however, many have not realized their full potential. Past decades have shown the jobless growth extractive industries have spawned in resource rich-countries, and job creation through such industries will not be significant unless governments shift to artisanal and small-scale mining (Hilson and Osei 2014, Gamu, Le Billon, and Spiegel 2015). In addition, while large-scale industrialization

has not taken off on the continent, a redesign of industrial policies could support future manufacturing growth (UNECA 2016). However, wage jobs in manufacturing will likely remain limited since 1) manufacturing is becoming more capital intensive, and 2) lower than previously estimated productivity gaps between agriculture, manufacturing and services do not create the expected pull effects (McCullough 2016). Meanwhile, the service sector has greatly expanded, but largely in the realm of informal, self-employed, low paid jobs, and not in modern services. This trend will likely continue (Fox and Thomas 2016).

Most African economies rely heavily on the agri-food sector for job creation. On average, 15% of total GDP comes from agriculture in Africa, though there are wide disparities between countries – from 3% in Botswana to 50% in Chad (OECD and FAO 2016) and between a third and a half of total jobs come from agriculture. Most importantly, this sector has been the main job-creator over the past years. In addition, off-farm employment in the agri-food chain may employ up to 20% of the workforce and its potential is real if it could compete with overseas suppliers (Yeboah and Jayne 2016).

Agriculture – and its many related upstream and downstream manufacturing and services as long as food is locally produced and transformed (OECD and FAO 2016) – should therefore remain a major provider of jobs in the decades to come, especially through family farming (Losch 2016, Badiane and Makombe. 2015, AfDB, OECD, and UNDP 2015).

2.3 Climate change vulnerability and natural resource degradation

Current food systems both have deep environmental impact, and face environmental challenges: land degradation and competition for land – including urban sprawling – or water scarcity and pollution, biodiversity losses, or global warming. The latter will increasingly have a critical impact in SSA, causing changes in rain patterns, temperature, ocean acidification, and there will be an increase in the frequency of extreme events like heat waves, droughts and floods, etc. This in turn, compounds issues of poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition for urban and rural already vulnerable populations, fuelling climate migration and social conflicts.

Agriculture will be particularly affected – the ability to grow crops, raise livestock, catch fish, benefit from ecosystems services will all be affected. The consequences on food

security and nutrition will be severe if adaptive measures are not developed and adopted to transition food systems towards sustainability (FAO 2016, Niang et al. 2014). SSA will be the most severely affected region in the world in the long term, together with South Asia, but actual impacts at local levels term remains very difficult to predict.

3 The central role of local Governments

SSA urbanization patterns, coupled with current and expected socio-economic trends (population growth, importance of agriculture in GDP and employment), put local governments at the forefront of action to transform food systems. However, SSA local governments often are not aware of the importance of tackling food security and nutrition, due to competing priorities and more immediate needs where resources and expertise is often directed.

3.1 Awareness

The central role of local governments as a key driver in strengthening local food systems has only recently been acknowledged. A few years ago, only a handful of cities considered food security and nutrition as a priority. Things are evolving rapidly. Over the past few years, a number of city networks dedicated to urban food policies have emerged. The Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (October 2015) plays a critical role in championing sustainable food systems and promoting healthy diets in cities and their connected rural areas. The New Urban Agenda – the outcome of the UN-Habitat III conference (Quito, October 2016) – enshrines food security and nutrition as one of the critical sustainability challenges cities are facing, and therefore one of their key priority for action (UNGA 2016).

Local governments are cited as playing a major role in leading the transition towards sustainable food systems through the provision of infrastructure which support the production and the distribution of food (e.g. roads, markets), the definition of local rules and regulations which shape the demand for food, including through fiscal measures (e.g. public procurements, social protection mechanism, waste management), adequate urban planning to prevent urban sprawling to fertile land and facilitate market access, or local governance mechanisms for sustainable food systems. However, especially in SSA, much is to be done to raise awareness on the consequences of local public intervention on the sustainability of food systems.

3.2 Limited evidence at the local level

Information and knowledge on urban food systems is particularly limited in SSA (Smit 2016). Food systems are very complex and poorly understood. Few initiatives have been conducted with a thorough monitoring and evaluation framework able to provide evidence. As a consequence, it is particularly difficult for local governments to develop suitable initiatives, tailored to their specific contexts and population.

3.3 Incomplete decentralization processes

In many SSA countries, decentralization has been recognized as an important dimension of the good governance agenda since the 1990s, however, it has been mostly driven top-down, pushed by the international community. As a result, in some cases, decentralization laws and regulations are incomplete, ill-defined or partially implemented. Many local governments lack adequate human and financial resources, sometimes competing with informal and/or traditional local governance institutions (Dickovick and Riedl 2014). Capacity building is critical to support the decentralization process.

3.4 The Financial challenge

Most SSA local governments do not have adequate financial resources. Fiscal transfers from national governments are limited, as is their ability to raise local revenue (taxes, fees or rents); access to financial markets remains limited to a few capitals; the private sector assess local governments' initiatives as too risky. Therefore, only official development assistance – be it from traditional or emerging donors, decentralized cooperation or foundation – whatever the source, seems able to take up this risk. There is a need to demonstrate that innovative policies, projects and programmes for sustainable food systems, led by local governments and their partners, can have substantial impacts, making some level of cost-recovery possible. Seed funding and piloting are critical to financial sustainability of these innovative policies, programmes and projects.

4 Sparking innovation through decentralized cooperation – A City to City Collaboration Initiative

While SSA faces unprecedented challenges in addressing food security, many of its urban-rural food systems, have come up with their own solutions. In addition, other southern countries also have solutions to share – see for instance Foster et al. (2015) – that can

readily benefit others facing similar agro- and socio-economic contexts, typically through South-South Cooperation².

Decentralized cooperation can be an effective means to help local SSA governments overcome the many challenges previously described, and address the necessary transition towards sustainable food systems. Through decentralized cooperation (city to city cooperation) innovative actions can be sparked, where cities share good practices at multiple levels, between multiple actors (particularly local governments) and through many different instruments, including policy dialogues, training, study tours and the fielding of experts from one city to another.

To this end, FAO is mounting a City to City Initiative, in partnership with SSA cities, the MUFPP and City networks to foster cooperation for food and nutrition security for all. The initiative aims to:

1. Raise awareness and capacity on sustainable food systems: broad political awareness and enhanced capacity to enable the transition towards sustainable food systems;
2. Catalogue good practices: local governments would be able to utilise the catalogue as a means to respond to their populations' needs by mobilising effective solutions (particularly from other African cities) as models for innovation;
3. Spark innovative action: Local government-led initiatives in partnership with local actors will help turn policy into practice thanks to exchanges of good practices based on collaboration between cities.

Inspired through decentralized, city to city collaboration, local governments can adapt and adopt good practices that strengthen their local food systems, which will reap multiplier effects on local economies, societies and the environment. Beneficiaries will be wide-ranging, and include consumers and key actors in the food chain, from producers and processors to marketers and retailers.

² South-South Cooperation is the mutual sharing of key development solutions – knowledge, experiences and good practices, policies, technology and resources – between and among the global South (FAO 2015).

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