



Afrifoodlinks: Embracing an Innovative Path Towards African Urban Food Policies

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Introduction:

AfriFOODlinks is a transformative initiative revolutionizing urban food systems in 65+ African and European cities. Challenging traditional research models, it prioritizes African-led approaches, focusing on inclusivity and aligning solutions with stakeholders' needs. This collaborative effort targets multifaceted challenges in African urban food systems, emphasizing the importance of informal systems, empowering women, youth, and small-scale entrepreneurs for economic growth and inclusion. By fostering citizen-led platforms and partnerships, AfriFOODlinks aims to reshape governance structures, promoting inclusive dialogue and policy development for food security and environmental sustainability. The project focuses on knowledge creation, governance enhancement, environmental regeneration, entrepreneurial empowerment, and fostering EU-AU partnerships to drive resilient urban food systems. This visionary initiative aims to amplify African voices globally, promoting fair trade practices and scaling innovative solutions through shared methodologies. AfriFOODlinks stands as a pioneering force, fostering sustainable and equitable urban food systems across continents.

The project:

AfriFOODlinks represents a paradigm shift in addressing the challenges

of equitable food provision in African cities. This groundbreaking initiative advocates for a transformative approach to conducting research within the continent, challenging the existing paradigms and theories inherited from external institutions. It's time for African research entities to lead the charge, leveraging their experiences and perspectives to reshape the discourse on urban food systems. Endowed with abundant resources and opportunities, Africa stands as a fertile ground for pioneering new solutions to its inherent challenges. AfriFOODlinks, a collaboration between African and European institutions, aims not only to revolutionize food system governance but also to overhaul the research landscape between these continents. By uniting leading scientific teams, food system practitioners, advocacy groups, and local governments committed to progressive urban food policies, the project seeks to impact over 65 cities, fostering inclusive and sustainable governance models.

This innovative project approaches research differently, engaging end-users such as political actors, stakeholders, and the general populace in co-creating solutions. It's a departure from conventional methods, prioritizing the alignment of research with the needs of those it aims to benefit. This innovative approach blends the co-generation of knowledge with collaboration for implementation. Focusing significant investment into the real-world application of co-generated knowledge, AfriFOODlinks

is working with researchers and city officials to initiate tangible food system interventions at a city level. Careful monitoring and evaluation of these, seeks to support Cities in the mobilization of investment the so urgently need to scale their responses to the food system challenges they face.

AfriFOODlinks integrates the expertise of ICLEI, the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact and a coalition of leading food systems researchers, facilitating city engagement, knowledge sharing, and pioneering approaches that surpass existing standards. The urban transition in Africa presents significant challenges, with rapid population growth leading to increased food insecurity and malnutrition. However, the issue isn't solely about food production but also revolves around equitable access to nutritious food and combating the rise of obesity and non-communicable diseases in African cities. While African cities are increasingly gaining attention for their urban challenges, the focus on food-related issues within urban planning remains limited. Through AfriFOODlinks, cities are pushing to reimagine their mandate around food and reframe the narrative that local governments have limited role to play when it comes to ensuring cities right to food is upheld.

Urbanization in Africa has intensified consumption patterns, straining water and land resources, threatening biodiversity, and amplifying environmental concerns. The surge in packaged food consumption has led to increased waste production, escalating the environmental footprint of food systems. Addressing these challenges necessitates investment in circular business models and infrastructures to create sustainable, resilient, and low-impact systems. The COVID-19 pandemic shed light on the vulnerabilities within African urban food systems. African cities faced food loss, price hikes, limited food availability, and increased vulnerability among certain segments of the population. However, the crisis also highlighted the resilience displayed by local actors, including civil society and informal systems, in mitigating the impact.

Empowering women and youth is crucial in harnessing the potential of Africa's urban demographic shift. Women constitute a significant portion of the urban workforce, particularly in the informal economy but face barriers due to socio-economic constraints, cultural norms, and unequal access to resources. Similarly, Africa's burgeoning youth population requires increased investment in entrepreneurship and job creation to unleash their potential. The burgeoning urban food markets in Africa offer vast economic opportunities. However, the role of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) is impeded by challenges such as limited finance, infrastructure, and disorganized value chains. Creating an enabling environment within which sustainable and employment intensive local enterprises can flourish is pivotal for economic inclusion and growth across the continent. A policy and investment environment which celebrates local fresh produce markets and enhances the ability of the informal economy to compete with large-scale agri-food companies is key. Addressing the systemic challenges within African food systems necessitates cohesive governance structures, effective systems of accountability and the integration food policies into urban planning. Despite growing awareness among city authorities, there remains a lack of capacity and institutional frameworks to effect substantial change. Additionally, the existing governance tends to favor powerful corporations and larger retail chains, often overlooking the real benefits offered by smaller-scale food systems actors predominant in African cities.

The confluence of climatic, health, and political crises has amplified concerns regarding the resilience of African food systems. Structured, targeted responses are imperative to navigate these challenges and instill robustness within the food systems that cater to the majority in African cities - the informal and semi-formal systems. In summary, AfriFOODlinks endeavors to revolutionize African urban food systems by bridging the gap between research and action, fostering inclusivity, and prioritizing the needs of diverse stakeholders. Through collaborative efforts, innovative strategies, and reshaped governance, it aspires to pave the way for

sustainable and equitable urban food systems in Africa.

AfriFOODlinks is a visionary initiative dedicated to revolutionizing urban food systems in 65+ cities across Africa and Europe. The project focuses on direct food system transformation in 5 African Hub Cities and collaborates with 10 African and 5 European Sharing Cities. These cities, diverse in size, language, and economic functions, engage in mutual learning, co-designing pilot projects to drive implementation within their unique contexts. AfriFOODlinks aims to establish these cities as beacons of inspiration by developing novel practices, methodological guides, and awareness toolkits. The LINCS value framework, emphasizing Learning, Inclusivity, Novelty, Collaboration, and Sustainability, forms the core of project activities. The initiative is guided by a visionary objective, envisioning thriving cities where food systems and nutrition are integral to local governance agendas. This involves citizen-led multi-stakeholder governance platforms that foster inclusive dialogue and policy development for food and nutrition security while addressing environmental impacts.

To achieve its vision, AfriFOODlinks has delineated five overarching objectives, implemented through seven work packages:

1. Building Action-Oriented Knowledge Bases: Focusing on place-based knowledge creation to empower local actors in driving resilient urban food systems.
2. Enhancing Multi-Stakeholder Food Governance Platforms: Strengthening governance processes in cities to support diverse and vulnerable voices in policy development.
3. Improving Specific Food Environments: Conducting socio-technical experiments to enhance physical and economic access to nourishing foods while promoting environmental regeneration.
4. Empowering Small-Scale Entrepreneurs: Facilitating the growth of circular food businesses by overcoming barriers and enabling access

to finance and training.

5. Facilitating EU-AU Partnerships for Mutual Learning: Engaging with existing projects and fostering partnerships to spread fair trade practices and amplify African voices in global urban food agendas.

AfriFOODlinks is committed to innovation, grounding itself on African-led initiatives and partnerships, recognizing multiple knowledge sources, and employing real-world experiments to influence food environments positively. The project is poised to elevate its innovative solutions to a broader scale and aims to empower network cities through shared methodologies and training packages.

The project is coordinated by ICLEI Africa and Funded by The European Union. Here's the list of the 28 partners involved in the project:

- ACRA
- African Population and Health Research Center
- African Centre for Cities at University of Cape Town
- Agence de Financement et de Promotion des Petites and Moyennes Entreprises
- Agence du Developpement Economique Urbain
- CIRAD
- Centre for Food Policy, City, University of Londono
- Comune di Milano, Milan Urban Food Policy Pact
- EStà – Economia e Sostenibilità
- Food Rights Alliance
- Institut de Recherche en Sciences Appliquees et Tehnologie
- HIVOS
- ICLEI