Bellagio Communique: Harnessing urban food systems for sustainable development and human well-being

1. This meeting was convened at the Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Center (Italy) from 14-16th March 2017 by the ESRC/DFID-funded research project Governing Food Systems to Alleviate Poverty in Secondary Cities in Africa Project (Consuming Urban Poverty) at the African Centre for Cities, University of Cape Town. The purpose of the meeting was to consider the potential impact of the research findings of this project on ongoing consultation and implementation of Agenda 2063, Agenda 2030, and the New Urban Agenda. They emphasise the fundamental role that urban food systems play in achieving sustainable cities, along with health, income, jobs and inclusive growth. The meeting included experts from a number of organizations and agencies[1] who concluded the following:

1.1. That there are severe problems of urban food and nutrition insecurity and inequality across the globe but most particularly in developing countries undergoing rapid urban transitions;

1.2. That food is a major source of expenditure of the urban poor in Africa and therefore significantly impacts urban poverty;

1.3. That because a growing proportion of the world's and Africa's population will in the future be living in cities and towns we anticipate that the scale and severity of urban food and nutrition insecurity will escalate accordingly. Africa's urban transition is still underway, with secondary cities and towns growing most rapidly;

1.4. That food systems – comprising the production, processing, distribution, retail, consumption and management of food waste and food losses - are shaped by and shape urbanization. The food system is a major contributer to greenhouse gas emissions and climate change. Interventions in the urban food system can have significant positive impacts on urban sustainability;

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[1] C40, Esta (Economia e Sostenibilita), IIED (International Institute for Environment and Development), RUAF (Global partnership on sustainable urban agriculture and food systems), South African Department of Human Settlements, UNECA (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa), UN-Habitat, University of Sydney, World Food Programme, World Health Organization, University of Cape Town, Kisumu Local Interaction Platform, Copperbelt University, University of Zimbabwe.

1.5. That access to healthy and nutritious food is a basic human right and needs to be a central concern of the public and governments, also in the urban context;

1.6. That urban food insecurity, poverty and dysfunctional urban form and management are inextricably linked and mutually reinforcing;

1.7. That food systems and food security should, given their interdependent relationship with urban form and urban management, therefore become a priority of local government;

1.8. That inadequate access to safe and nutritious food (physically as well as economically), particularly by households in vulnerable situations, is a dominant reason for food insecurity;

1.9. That spatial/territorial planning and land management has a critical role in affecting the food system;

1.10. That urban food security and nutrition are important determinants of urban health and well-being, and strongly impact on both communicable, including zoonotic, and non-communicable disease;

1.11. That current urban health transitions to non-communicable diseases dominance (obesity, diabetes) are associated with changing urban diets linked to food and the triple burden of malnutrition (undernourishment, micronutrient deficiency and obesity;

1.12. That a healthier population is also a more productive population, hence addressing the issue of urban food security and nutrition can directly contribute to national economic development;

1.13. That the food system is a major generator of urban employment and livelihoods in areas of food processing and food distribution (and potentially recycling and waste management), and both large and small scale (in some regions termed 'informal') enterprises benefit from the food system; and it is often a key source of work for women and youth;

1.14. That inadequate access to food, infrastructure, and exposure to environmental hazards has a highly gendered impact, increasing the burden on women related to unpaid care activities;

1.15. That in low-income urban contexts small-scale food vendors (informal traders) provide critical access to food for low-income households;

1.16. That local sourcing of food, secure access to land and agro-processing offer vital pathways for local economic development and job creation;

1.17. That the urban food system can play a role in risk management and resilience to short-term urban shocks and long-term urban stressors;

1.18. That because food supply and distribution is a system operating across global and local scales, it concerns international agencies, national governments and authorities at regional and local urban level, as well as civil society and private sector organizations, and requires actions at a range of scales and across a range of actors.

The meeting noted further that the issue of urban food security is recognized in the New Urban Agenda, and hence needs to be integrated into policies and plans to implement it. It also recognized that achieving all the SDGs will depend largely on the future of cities, and hence the urban food issue has importance beyond SDG 11 to the entire 2030 Agenda, particularly SDGs 2, 3 and 12.

2. Achieving sustainable urbanization and addressing urban inequalities across the globe requires focus on the issue of urban food insecurity as part of a wider urban agenda. This requires:

2.1. Integrating urban food security within local, regional and national urban policy processes;

2.2. Recognizing the inter-sectoral and multi-level nature of food systems and food security, hence the need for cross-cutting food policy measures at all scales of governance;

2.3. Recognition that the urban food system is a central component of the functioning of urban centres – hence cities and towns which are sustainable, efficient and which work for poor households, are also more likely to have greater food security;

2.4. Aligning social protection, which plays a vital role in urban food security and nutrition, to the broader sustainable food system agenda;

2.5. Recognition of the important role of urban management and planning in impacting on urban food security and nutrition - through a wide range of issues including urban form, land management and tenure security, infrastructure and housing, access to energy and water, the planning and use of public spaces for small producers, vendors and food retailers, the public provision of food retail markets etc, the relationship of these to poor households, and the protection of nearby agricultural areas and natural resources for ecosystem services;

2.6. Support for research and data production to improve understanding of the functioning of the urban food system and its links to sustainable development and human well-being.

3. At the core of Africa's long term vision as set out in the African Union's Agenda 2063 is a target to eradicate poverty, hunger, and malnutrition within a generation. The pursuit of this will unfold in a context of rapid urban growth, and a demographic and economic shift towards cities and human settlements. It is thus critical to recognize and integrate the urban dimension in policy responses to eliminate hunger and food insecurity. Aware of the continental efforts and momentum in addressing urban, agricultural, and nutrition development in Africa[2], we emphasize:

3.1. The need to align urban food policy with the long term continental agenda of structural transformation driven by investment in infrastructure and industrialization that is inclusive and job-rich;

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[2] Common African Position on Habitat III; Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme; Continental Free Trade Area; African Development Bank Feed Africa Strategy 2016-2025; African Regional Nutrition Strategy (ARNS) for 2016-2025; Africa's Renewed Initiative for Stunting Elimination (ARISE) initiative

3.2. The importance of integrating an urban dimension, including food, into national development agendas through a concerted effort to embed it in broader plans and policies;

3.3. The vital role of urban governance and planning in addressing food insecurity, and hence the need to locate this issue in national urban plans;

3.4. The urban dimension of food insecurity in Africa, intertwined with poverty, inequality, periodic conflict, and political and economic instability becomes central to national policies to address food security and nutrition;

3.5. The impact of urban food systems on urban-rural linkages, and thus policies and strategies for the transformation of rural economies and agricultural modernization;

3.6. The impact of food on health and well-being, and hence promotion of a productive urban population and workforce for manufacturing and modern services;

3.7. The role of urban food systems in job creation and access to employment opportunities, especially for youth and women;

3.8. The opportunities presented by changing and growing patterns of food consumption and related urban food systems for Africa's agenda of accelerating manufacturing and agro-processing;

3.9. The impact of improved urban food systems as a basis for eradicating poverty in Africa and building shared prosperity;

3.10. The critical role of small scale and informal urban food distribution networks for nutrition and well-being of poor and vulnerable households;

3.11. Human settlements cannot be sustainable without food security and adequate nutrition.

Done on this day, 16 March 2017, at the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Center, Italy.