



# DRAFT CALL TO ACTION

## Towards a Coalition on Urban Food Systems<sup>1</sup>

### Context

Over half the global population resides in urban areas, and by 2050 this is expected to rise to 75%. The pace of urbanization increases the demand for basic goods and services, including food. At present, urban areas consume 70% of all food produced, are responsible for 70% of global waste and for 60% of global greenhouse gas emissions.

Many urban and peri-urban communities experience food insecurity, malnutrition and undernutrition. At the same time, the over-consumption of nutrient-poor, calorie-rich foods is increasing overweight and obesity rates, with associated negative impacts on physical and mental health, a part from constituting energy, water and plastic resource intensive food.

The UN decision to call for a Food Systems Summit recognizes the role of food systems in achieving all SDGs, which raises the need for urgent and coordinated action at all levels. As the level of government closest to communities, cities have a key role to play in meeting the needs of their citizens, as evidenced by the creative responses they have provided (often beyond their mandate) to the COVID-19 crisis to ensure the functioning of food systems and to protect the most vulnerable. In most cases, however, city governments, especially in low-income countries lack the financial and technical capacity and/or the regulatory authority to meet the challenges associated with food systems transformation and to resolve the trade-offs involved.

### Building Inclusive and Sustainable Urban Food Systems

The informal Working Group on Urban Food Systems<sup>2</sup> acknowledges that national food policies are often characterized by sectoral approaches that fail to mobilise or engage with sub-national

<sup>1</sup> This is a draft Call to Action which will be enriched and expanded as stakeholders join the coalition.

<sup>2</sup> The informal Working Group on Urban Food Systems (the Working Group), led by FAO and GAIN and currently comprising 25 UN and civil society organizations, city networks and research institutes, was established in early 2020 to support cities in playing their essential role in food systems transformation and bring their voices to the global processes such as the Food Systems Summit (FSS) and Nutrition for Growth Summit. In the process of the FSS, the Working Group has: i) co-organized 26 independent dialogues; ii) undertaken the city consultation among cities to discuss game changing solutions; iii) collectively submitted game changing solutions; iv) organized one Global Summit Dialogue on cities food systems; v) organized a session as part of the main programme of the Pre-Summit.



governments. Policies and programmes to shape urban food systems are also generally fragmented, compartmentalized and de-linked from other interventions such as social protection, climate action plans and the development of green infrastructure. There is clearly an urgent and increasingly recognized need for: (a) better integration of food systems transformation in urban policies and planning; and (b) for enhanced coherence between urban, national and global food system governance. The Working Group recognizes that food systems transformation towards sustainability requires both horizontal and vertical policy and planning coherence across different levels of governance. This entails strengthening the technical, regulatory, institutional, and financial capacities of urban administrations.

## What are the key levers of change?

Establishing **mechanisms for better coordination** of policies, planning, investment and interventions at the urban and local level is key to ensuring food system transformation. This requires new forms of place-based governance that cut across administrative boundaries and jurisdictions.

To be effective and *inclusive*, policies and programmes in support of food systems transformation must be co-designed and co-delivered through the consistent use of **multi-disciplinary and multi-stakeholder** mechanisms (such as multi-actor platforms) that incorporate diverse perspectives and knowledge, ensuring the active and meaningful engagement of all communities (including in particular the most deprived and vulnerable groups) in the delivery of sustainability co-benefits (i.e., socio-spatial inclusion, environmental sustainability and economic growth).

**Integrating food into local planning** implies: (a) strengthening the connections between the different components of a sustainable food systems (food environments, food procurement and distribution, urban agriculture, food waste, school nutrition, etc.), building on synergies and minimising trade-offs; (b) connecting food system transformation with other policy priorities (such as public health, green spaces, sustainable transport and land use); and (c) developing a place-based approach that exploits the potential of rural-urban linkages for sustainable development. This requires fostering integrated spatial, sectoral and strategic planning that embraces urban areas and their rural “catchment” areas. Food Policy Networks (especially their most formalised version: Food Policy Councils) can be an important governance modality to ensure that food is integrated into the planning system.

**Establishing emergency food plans at the urban level** or integrating urban food provisioning into existing emergency plans to ensure availability of, and access by all to nutritious food during emergencies (as

the recent COVID-19 experience demonstrates) especially in areas prone to natural disasters, conflict and/or economic distress.

Building **capacity** (including through strengthened data and information systems) **to put in place policies and programmes to address systemic and cross-sectoral issues** to ensure sustainability and resilience of food systems and, more widely, the social, environmental and economic wellbeing of urban populations. As a first step, there is a need to develop the skills to collect, map and analyze data on urban food systems as a fundamental step for providing consistent baseline information and better integrate evidence from the local to the global scales.

## The Coalition on Urban Food Systems

The Working Group recognizes that the UN Food Systems Summit provides a unique opportunity to establish a coalition on **urban** food systems as an innovative mechanism for the identification and implementation of solutions for food systems transformation. By their sheer weight in terms of levels of food consumption, urban areas need to be considered as key actors in this effort. The Coalition will work to create incentives and to build the institutional, and financial capacities of urban administrations to design and implement policies and programmes that: i) address the challenges associated with food system transformation; ii) contribute to the creation of sustainable food systems also at the national and global levels.

The coalition will strive to connect urban and national governments to enable integrated food policy and action.

Given its multi-stakeholder character, the Urban Food Systems Working Group will be the nucleus of the Urban Food Systems Coalition. The Working Group is a valuable informal forum for exchanging knowledge, experiences and coordinate activities undertaken by multiple existing city networks, international organizations, NGOs, and academics. Its effectiveness at ensuring that the voice of cities is consistently present in all national and global policy fora on food systems transformation, will be augmented by its expansion to include national and sub-national governments and a wider pool of urban and peri-urban food system stakeholders.

The Urban Food Systems Working Group is determined to work with national and sub-national governments and urban food systems stakeholders to accelerate food systems transformation. The Working Group will encourage others to join to ensure that the voice of cities is consistently present in all national and global policy fora on food systems transformation.



## The Urban Food Systems Coalition is expected to<sup>3</sup>:

- ▶ **Create space for dialogue** among stakeholders at all levels over issues related to urban food systems, in which priority action areas may be agreed and further game changing ideas elaborated;
- ▶ **Promote evidence-based actions** and **enrich the evidence-building agenda** by taking into account knowledge from a spectrum of urban stakeholders and tracking progress using (as far as possible) existing indicators;
- ▶ **Promote linkages between national and sub-national governments** to enable coherent food policies, empowerment of local government (legal, financial and institutional), and place-based policies and action within geographical regions;
- ▶ **Leverage actions by existing networks and initiatives** for city-to-city exchange on integrated place-based food policies and climate action plans (including urban, peri-urban and rural linkages), multistakeholder governance mechanisms, and capacity building;
- ▶ **Leverage resources in support of the capacities of urban administration** through knowledge exchange, technical support, and supporting needs assessment towards financing priorities.

**Therefore, the Working Group calls upon all stakeholders to:**

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| 1 | Join the process of establishing an Urban Food Systems Coalition and elaborate its goals and functioning         |
| 2 | Disseminate this draft Call to Action to all urban and relevant national food systems stakeholders               |
| 3 | Amplify the voices of cities and local actors in policies, planning, and actions for food systems transformation |

**For more information, please contact [urban-food-actions@fao.org](mailto:urban-food-actions@fao.org)**

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<sup>3</sup> This section will be expanded and further elaborated as the Coalition takes shape.