



## Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition

### • FSN Forum •

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# Urbanization, Rural Transformation and Implications for Food Security

## Online consultation on the background document to the CFS Forum

### About this online discussion

This document summarizes the online consultation *Urbanization, Rural Transformation and Implications for Food Security – Online consultation on the background document to the CFS Forum*, held on FAO's Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition (FSN Forum) from 15 March to 12 April 2016, and facilitated by **Deborah Fulton**, CFS Secretary.

Over the four weeks of consultation, participants from 21 countries shared 51 contributions. The topic introduction and questions proposed, as well as all contributions received, are available on the consultation page:

[www.fao.org/fsnforum/forum/discussions/urbanization-rural-transformation](http://www.fao.org/fsnforum/forum/discussions/urbanization-rural-transformation)

The purpose of the consultation was to gain input on the background document prepared by the CFS Secretariat to support the discussions at CFS 43 in October 2016 on *Urbanization, Rural Transformation and Implications for Food Security*.

## General remarks

Participants shared many ideas on the further development of the Zero Draft of the background document put out for consultation. While the draft received much positive feedback, participants suggested including or modifying the following aspects:

### Framework and approach

- There is a need to move from a sectoral, thematic approach towards a *"rights-based, holistic, multidisciplinary, multisector and multiactor approach"*. Attention should also be paid to the neutral approach to controversial topics, as this can lead to false complacency with the status quo (**Thomas Forster**).

- Instead of a *classical, supply-driven value chain approach*, the focus should be more on food consumption and food systems, with special attention given to indigenous people (**Florence Egal, George Kent**).
- A *human rights based approach* and specifically the *right to food* should be at the centre of the analysis, with specific attention given to women and indigenous people (**CSM**).
- More attention should be given to the *role of food security and nutrition* in the wider territorial approach (**Louison Lançon**).

- The approach is excessively *top-down*. A discussion is needed on how local people might be agents of change. Local leaders should be better supported by higher-level agencies ([George Kent](#)).
- By using the “*rural vs urban*” dichotomy, many elements are lost. When framing the topic as “urbanization and rural transformation”, the question seems to be how rural areas should be transformed to better meet city needs. Instead, we should reconsider how urban development can be transformed in order to fulfil the rights of rural communities ([CSM](#)).

## Concepts and definitions

### City-region food system

It is better to refer to “territorial food systems”, as this term overcomes artificial boundaries ([CSM](#)).

### Food security

A more complete and clearer definition is needed. Access to food and nutrition information was part of the initial FAO definition, but is not included here. The quantitative and qualitative dimensions of food security should be addressed ([Hélène Delisle](#)).

### Food systems

The definition is useful, but the source is not indicated. HLPE’s definition of “sustainable food systems” should also be considered ([Vito Cistulli](#)).



### Linkages

“Partnerships” would be more appropriate as they are based on reciprocity, while “linkages” imply that the rural is linked to the urban for the sake of supplying urban markets ([Eileen Omosa](#)). Another concern related to the assumption of the strength of rural-urban linkages: tracing from field to fork there are strong rural-urban linkages, but vice versa, different linkages may become evident ([Jane Battersby](#)). In this respect, including the concept of “rural-rural linkages” is crucial ([Uchendu Chigbu](#)).

### Malnutrition

Malnutrition has to be clearly defined to avoid confusion and should include both undernutrition and nutrition-related chronic diseases ([Manuel Moya](#), [Hélène Delisle](#)).

### Minimally processed and ultraprocessed foods

A distinction is needed between “minimally processed” foods and “ultraprocessed” foods ([Hélène Delisle](#)).

### Rural urbanization

The paper could define “rural urbanization”, as now the focus is more on the implications of urbanization than on rural-urban linkages ([Jackson Kago](#)).

## Information collection

Participants shared ideas and resources (all included in the references list) that could help strengthen the document, specifically:

- making better use of the HLPE reports produced in the past, which would deepen the discussion ([CSM](#));
- including the study *Food, Agriculture and Cities: Challenges of food and nutrition security, agriculture and ecosystem management in an urbanizing world* (FAO, 2011), which adopted a comprehensive approach and which has informed many cited papers ([Thomas Forster](#));
- including more information on Latin America and the Caribbean ([Sarah Granados](#)).

In order to assess rural-urban transformation as comprehensively as possible, it is also important to consider cross-region effects and scales of analysis. Regarding the latter, fine-scale data for urban areas is often lacking. Yet in order to best assess urban food security and nutrition needs and to create targeted interventions, the production of household-/neighbourhood-level data would be useful ([Cascade Tuholske](#)).

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## Question: Are the key challenges and opportunities related to food security and nutrition in the context of changing rural-urban dynamics addressed? Are there issues missing, or are any not included that don't seem directly related?

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Participants shared many ideas on which challenges and opportunities could be addressed and how this could be done. A general remark was made that linkages are not only about migration, but about three types of flows: people, services and goods. This should be included in the document from the very beginning (Vito Cistulli); flows of information might also be mentioned (Louison Lançon).

### Demographics and shifting settlements

Migration contributes significantly to urbanization (as stated in the draft), but is not necessarily the main cause of it; rather, it is caused by the natural growth of the population (Vito Cistulli).

The contribution of urbanization and growing population to food insecurity is overemphasized. Economic access to food plays a dominant role. Poverty in rural areas results from low agricultural productivity, which can be improved by better market integration (Aimée Hampel-Milagrosa). Food security also depends on social relations: in strong, stable communities where people look after one another, no one goes hungry. This is not recognized in analyses produced at the top (George Kent).

### Consumption patterns – diets, well-being, health, nutrition

Nutrition or malnutrition is hardly discussed in the draft document, and changing dietary patterns and food safety are symptoms of larger systemic issues that are not fully addressed (Stineke Oenema, CSM, Jackson Kago). In particular, rural-urban linkages lead to the marketing of "global" foods to rural people. Consequently, households abandon familiar foods for often overprocessed foods of which the nutritional value is difficult to understand (Eileen Omosa, CSM). More sustainable food systems should include locally appropriate nutrition education and communication (Florence Egal). Traditional/indigenous diets and food practices deserve special attention (Florence Egal, Manuel Moya, Héléne Delisle).

Additionally, rural households are left with less nutritious products or they cannot afford food, as the pricing is uniform for all buyers. The aggressive marketing of food markets in urban areas results in the cultivation of food geared more towards the needs of the market than the needs of rural people (Eileen Omosa, George Kent).

The poor are more exposed to the "double burden of malnutrition" than wealthier people – this should be emphasized (Héléne Delisle).

As for promoting the production of nutritious food, the production of perishables with high micronutrient value in urban and peri-urban areas should also address their nutritional value, and not just the income potential for farmers (Diana Lee-Smith). A participant argued that climate-controlled, industrial-scale grasshopper farms should be promoted, as grasshoppers provide considerable nutrient content (Dror Tamir).

### Trade / markets / value chains

Participants expressed concern regarding international treaties that increasingly seem to contain infringements of their rights and food sovereignty. It would be conducive to promoting food and nutrition sovereignty<sup>1</sup> and self-reliance if policies were designed at the national level (Myriam del Carmen Salazar Villareal, CSM). The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership in Asia was specifically mentioned in this regard, as not all stakeholders were to be included in its negotiations (Subhash Mehta).

The "pull effect" of urban food demand on local production should be emphasized. The challenge is how to increase and improve local food processing in order to strengthen its consumption. Local food systems thus have to be protected and made more efficient (Héléne Delisle). In particular, the role of non market-oriented, community food production practices in preventing or avoiding food insecurity and promoting food sovereignty should be recognized (Bert Cramer, George Kent, Florence Egal). States should specifically support and scale up local seed exchange systems to improve the situation of the most vulnerable (Subhash Mehta).

Additionally, local or regional markets located in rural or peri-urban contexts are crucial for smallholders, and allow profit maximization for producers. Other benefits include countering the desertification of rural space, as well as reduced food loss and waste (CSM). Public procurement

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1 A participant referred to an agro-ecosystem diversity index developed by the Cuban National Institute of Agricultural Sciences to define the requirements that local agro-ecosystems must meet to ensure food sovereignty (Angel Leyva Galán).

(CSM) and the "Family Farmers" approach (Hélène Delisle) constitute other important market opportunities for smallholders.

## Employment / labour

Participants expressed concern that the large workforce needed for smallholder production would no longer be available as urbanization proceeds and demand for food increases (John Kazer, Lal Manavado, SaidA'zam Khabibullaev). The majority of the people do not want to become farmers anymore (Peter Steele, Vethaiya Balasubramanian). At the same time, pilotless farm equipment is causing family farms to be replaced with corporate farms; with the lower demand for human labour, the countryside will become empty (Jim Boak, Peter Steele). Eventually, cities will have to support a lot of people without (proper) jobs, and food security may be seriously at stake (Jim Boak, Lal Manavado). Addressing this problem means, *inter alia*, according greater social prestige to agriculture (Lal Manavado, Peter Steele).

In development planning, the fact that farmers derive their income mainly from off-farm activities has been neglected (John Weatherhogg). In the draft, the role of non-farm activities could be further analysed regarding the implications on rural urbanization in small and intermediate towns as well as territorial approaches (Jackson Kago).

In general, linkages between rural and urban agriculture and employment are often forgotten: the city drives the development of urban agriculture, but so does rural agriculture by providing inputs to urban farming activities and vice versa (Ophélie Robineau).

## Land use

A concept still to be included in the document is "tenure responsive land-use planning" (Uchendu Chigbu, CSM). Land grabbing, for instance, drives people away from their livelihoods and increases urban migration (Olivia Muza). Promoting tenure security will have considerable impact on food security, as most developing countries depend largely on land-based activities for their food security (Uchendu Chigbu, CSM). Also, if land rights are well-defined, rural people could benefit from increased land prices as a result of urbanization and from increased demand for food (Vito Cistulli).

Currently, farmers increasingly sell or lease their land to private companies. Yet due to unequal bargaining power, the former end up with a lesser bargain. (Eileen Omosa, Florence Egal).



Generally, food security and nutrition are not prioritized in planning policies (Sarah Granados). Land-use planning could include designing multipurpose areas (e.g. parks) in and outside cities for food production. In addition, food security planners should integrate "green solutions" (e.g. recycling) in their thinking (Kien Nguyen Van).

## Natural resource use / flows

Rural-urban linkages also entail flows of pollutants and waste disposal, which deserve more attention in the document (Vito Cistulli, Jackson Kago).

The role of resource conflicts in contributing to mass population displacements could be mentioned, as well as the subsequent impact on urbanization and overall food security (Jackson Kago, Louison Lançon). Conversely, the impact of rural transformation and urbanization on natural resources could be strengthened with examples. Fisheries (especially in Latin America and the Caribbean) should be considered as well, as three quarters of large cities are located on coastlines (Louison Lançon, Sarah Granados).

## Climate change

The impact of climate change on the whole food system, and the vulnerability of different types of food flows at different places, could be included (Jane Battersby).

Migration as a result of floods, drought and famines, and its effect on urbanization, should be considered. How can

rural-urban linkages address this, and what is its effect on food systems (Jackson Kago)? In particular, for coastal areas fisheries can play a major role in food security and nutrition, but these could be strongly affected by climate change (Florence Scarsi).

## Food loss and waste

Food loss and waste is a symptom of a larger problem concerning the production system. One should distinguish between the current wasteful industrial system and local, small-scale producer-to-consumer chains that are not wasteful (CSM). Furthermore, food loss and waste prevention and reduction should be dealt with more comprehensively (Camelia Adriana Bucatariu); wider issues of waste and ecological waste reuse should be discussed,

as now the debate is about "getting rid" of food waste (Diana Lee-Smith).

## Access to infrastructure and services

Providing urban amenities in rural areas is crucial to reversing the trend of rural-to-urban migration; rural youth should be encouraged to undertake agriculture and related enterprises by making these attractive (Vethaiya Balasubramanian, Florence Egal).

The role of infrastructure as a transformative force in urban and rural areas could be more emphasized regarding small and intermediate towns that are more directly linked to rural areas. Also, access to farm inputs, access to finance in agriculture, and their effect on food security need to be better discussed (Jackson Kago).

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## Question: Is it clear how each of the dynamics explored affects food security and nutrition? If not, how could this be better clarified?

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Participants' comments centred more on the challenges related to food security and nutrition in the context of changing rural-urban dynamics, and on the additional dynamics that could be explored, rather than on the dynamics already mentioned. Yet the following aspects were mentioned as deserving further clarification:

- "Food loss and waste" seems to be more an indicator of a distortion of the food system than a dynamic. It should be more related to "efficiency", where the development of food systems in an integrated way is required (Sarah Granados).
- What evidence is referred to concerning the statement that trying to reduce rural-to-urban migration can lead to a number of negative consequences for food security and nutrition, but that there are also challenges and opportunities? Middle and long-term scenarios should be conducted to assess the risks associated with large-scale rural-to-urban migration (Marie-Hélène Schwoob).
- Environmental hazards are mentioned as possibly threatening food safety and health, but how relevant is this in the context of rural-urban linkages (Vito Cistulli)?
- The impact of inadequate infrastructure should be better explained. For example, does this affect urban and rural areas in different ways? The focus could be placed on urban markets and street food and the related risks associated with lack of hygiene, for example (Vito Cistulli).
- Some of the points emerging from the literature (e.g. bullet points 3 and 5 of the draft document) may not be necessarily related to urbanization and rural transformation unless they are better explained (Vito Cistulli).



## Question: Have the key elements of governance issues and integrated approaches to addressing rural-urban linkages been captured? If not, what is missing?

In general, participants mentioned that the section on governance and integrated approaches could be further extended.

### Governance

The transformation of the countryside caused by urbanization takes place according to the way in which a country is administered (Emile Hougbo). For example, informal governance can considerably influence official land-use planning policies. Power imbalances can cause poor families to lose their land, while wealthy families might benefit from urban planning policies (Ophélie Robineau).

A political economy approach allows for better inclusion of the actors (in particular, non-state actors) involved in food policy (Jess Halliday).

One needs to look at how decentralized local governments can coordinate in order to strengthen rural-urban linkages. These can enhance food system performance by providing for the efficient flow of commodities, inputs, information and technology (Luis Antonio Hualda, Jackson Kago). Also, food security issues in cities should be better understood by national and local governments. Otherwise policy responses will merely reflect the "urbanization" of food security programming conceived in the rural realm – the

policies will be poorly aligned, with local governments merely passively implementing programmes from higher levels (Jane Battersby).

Secondary cities have particular economic vulnerabilities. For example, if they are dependent on one industry and that industry fails, the impact on food security and rural-urban linkages is profound. They may also have governance challenges associated with a lack of government capacity and supporting institutions (Jane Battersby).

Land governance and the role of local and metropolitan authorities in enhancing rural-urban linkages could be discussed as well. Policy recommendations regarding governance issues could also be developed (Jackson Kago), particularly guidelines or criteria on territorial governance (Sarah Granados).

### Integrated approaches

Generally, participants agreed on the importance of territorial and city-region approaches for understanding the links between urbanization, rural transformation and food security, but it was also argued that this focus encourages the neglect of global players who shape the food system (Jane Battersby).



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## Question: Where/how do you think CFS can add the most value to current initiatives aimed at addressing food security and nutrition in the context of urbanization and rural transformation?

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Various participants emphasized the crucial role CFS should play in order to design and implement effective (future) initiatives:

### Facilitating inclusive participation

Participants strongly agreed on the role of CFS in giving a voice to local/rural stakeholders and civil society. However, inclusive participation is not possible without proper knowledge; therefore, connections with local universities and research centres are needed ([JC Wandemberg](#)). Related to this aspect of inclusiveness, concrete suggestions were as follows:

- CFS should push for a balanced investment and policy prioritization regarding rural and urban development ([Louison Lançon](#)).
- CFS could discuss the importance of inclusive food systems in the urbanization discourse ([Louison Lançon](#)).
- CFS should provide guidance to member states on how all levels of government could be included in policy implementation ([CSM](#)).
- CFS should facilitate intersectoral dialogue for the formulation and implementation of public policies, especially those regarding territorial development ([Sarah Granados](#)).

### Knowledge sharing

CFS should focus on knowledge sharing and providing information regarding best practices and lessons learned ([Florence Scarsi](#)). The expert community within the CFS network is an important asset in assisting the implementation of the desired policies ([Jackson Kago](#), [Luis Antonio Hualda](#)).

### Policy convergence product

CFS could develop:

- guidelines on how to implement adequate governance ([Florence Scarsi](#));
- guiding principles on rural-urban linkages, building on successful case studies ([Jackson Kago](#));
- a policy guidebook on the integration of food systems in town/city plans to address the gap in knowledge and skills of planners ([Luis Antonio Hualda](#)).

### Awareness raising

CFS should play a key role in raising the profile of the issue of urban food security in international discussions such that it becomes a part of national and local debates ([Jane Battersby](#)).

### Connecting

CFS could connect large-scale research and policy projects working on city region food systems and urban food systems ([Jane Battersby](#)).

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African Food Security Urban Network:

<http://www.afsun.org>

FAO Food for the Cities Initiative publications:

<http://www.fao.org/fcit/fcit-publications>

FAO Food for the Cities side event, 21 October 2011,  
37th CFS:

<http://www.fao.org/fcit/meetingevents/37th-cfs-food-for-cities-side-event>

FAO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean  
– Panorama of Food and Nutritional Insecurity in Latin  
America and the Caribbean 2015:

<http://www.fao.org/americas/recursos/panorama>

FAO's Technical Platform on the Measurement and  
Reduction of Food Loss and Waste:

<http://www.fao.org/platform-food-loss-waste/food-waste/food-waste-reduction/country-level-guidance>

FAO Urban and peri-urban forestry:

<http://www.fao.org/forestry/urbanforestry>

FAO/UNEP Sustainable Food Systems Programme:

<http://www.fao.org/ag/ags/sustainable-food-consumption-and-production>

Global Initiative on Food Loss and Waste Reduction:

<http://www.fao.org/save-food>

Governing Food Systems to Alleviate Poverty in Secondary  
Cities in Africa:

<https://consumingurbanpoverty.wordpress.com>

Malnutrition Matters:

<http://www.malnutrition.org>

United Nations System Standing Committee on Nutrition:

<http://www.unscn.org>

World Food Day at Expo Milano 2015:

<http://www.fao.org/world-food-day/wfd-at-milan-expo>

10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable  
Consumption and Production Patterns:

<http://www.unep.org/10yfp>

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