

# FOOD IN AN URBANISED WORLD

The role of City Region Food  
Systems in resilience and  
sustainable development

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



3keel

---

## INTRODUCTION

Two of the most profoundly important factors to have shaped human affairs are urbanization and the rise of agriculture. They are of course related and it is no accident that Uruk and Eridu, the world's first cities, were located in the Fertile Crescent, where it is thought that farming first occurred. In some ways little has changed, as the ability of farmers to produce surpluses remains as vital a factor today in sustaining urban areas as it was long ago, although the context today is very different and the consequences are profound.

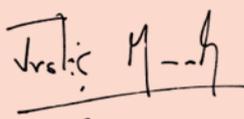
The food system is at the heart of the globalized market and this has resulted in more or less reliable access to food, at more or less consistently affordable prices, for very many people, particularly those in cities. These benefits are significant and have played a fundamental and critical role in moving people out of poverty and improving levels of nutrition.

However, despite the considerable benefits brought by a globalized system, the value of supplying food to towns and cities from their surrounding rural areas is starting to be reassessed. One reason to do this is in response to the need to minimise the range of detrimental social and environmental impacts that are too frequently part and parcel of our modern food system. From climate change to obesity and from ecosystem degradation to rural employment, the ways we produce and consume food determine a wide range of critically important outcomes, some of which might be made more positive through fostering resilient and sustainable food systems at the level of city-regions.

The summary of findings presented in this document is taken from *Food in an Urbanised World*, published in early 2015 by the International Sustainability Unit and 3keel. This report sets out to identify ways of managing some of the impacts that come with modern food systems through building more harmonious and integrated relationships between urban areas and their rural hinterlands.

The evaluation concluded that improving the effectiveness of city region food systems would provide potential for broad and inclusive benefits, especially in relation to regional economic development, nutritional health and governance with additional advantages for ecosystems, food security and social cohesion. The full report can be found at [www.cityregionfoodsystems.org](http://www.cityregionfoodsystems.org).

It is my hope that given the dominating importance of cities in the global economy, the themes that emerge from this report might also provide a point of reflection for some of the discussions at the Habitat III meeting that is set to be so influential in mapping routes toward developing resilient cities and therefore economies. At the very least, in the face of some of the significant and increasing challenges associated with food, energy and water insecurity, I hope that this report will also help highlight the need to take account of the deep and enduring relationships that have historically existed between urban areas and their surrounding rural lands.



**Justin Mundy**

Director, The Prince of Wales's  
International Sustainability Unit

---

## URBANISATION AND THE FOOD SYSTEM

The challenges of the global food system are often framed around feeding the world's growing population. The issue is about much more than scale, however, with population rising but also shifting in character from predominantly rural to increasingly urban. In the latter half of the 20th century the world's urban population trebled in size and for the first time in human history, more than 50% of people were classed as urban dwellers. By 2050, two thirds of the planet's population is expected to be living in urban areas.

Urbanisation has brought tremendous socio-economic shifts. It is also one of the most important factors now shaping food systems, which are becoming more globalized and consolidated: increasingly centralized networks involving fewer individual actors are supplying a growing proportion of the world's food. With urbanisation and increasing affluence, diet is also changing, characterised by a high demand for meat, dairy products and processed food.

The achievements of modern food supply chains are notable: in many countries the availability and choice of food is greater than ever before, and significant progress has been made on reducing hunger worldwide. Yet one in nine people still suffer from chronic under-nourishment, half a billion people are obese, and one third of all the food produced is lost or wasted. Food culture and skills are declining as people lose contact with food production, and many rural areas are struggling with depopulation and underinvestment. Furthermore, the environmental assets and flows upon which our food systems depend are being degraded, not least by the way we produce food now, undermining our ability to feed ourselves in the future.

Tha Kee Lek City,  
Myanmar



---

## CITY REGION FOOD SYSTEMS: LINKING URBAN AND RURAL

Underlying the challenges of a more sustainable food system is a profound disjunction between rural and urban development pathways, even though urban and rural areas remain linked by numerous ecological, social and economic processes. Rural areas provide not only food, but also water, energy, raw materials, and other ecosystem services to urban areas both local and further afield. Meanwhile, the concentration of people, capital and power in urban centres means that decisions and actions taken there affect rural people and places. Arguably, however, this interdependence has expressed itself in an ongoing reorganization of rural spaces to satisfy the demand for cheap food by urban consumers, at the expense of equitable and sustainable development and ultimately to the disadvantage of both rural and urban communities.

The city region food systems approach has evolved as a response to these challenges, and aims to provide systemic solutions oriented towards both equity and sustainability. It proposes that we should work to strengthen and improve the quality of the connections between urban areas and their rural hinterlands and between consumers and nearby food producers, in order to realise a suite of social, economic and environmental benefits. These rural-urban linkages span three dimensions: ecological, socio-economic, and governance. In practice, strategies to strengthen such linkages include facilitating the protection of ecosystem services through land use planning, promoting shorter food supply chains and regional food enterprises, and creating participatory governance structures that include stakeholders from multiple sectors and both urban and rural areas.

While food systems challenges have many global dimensions, a city region food systems approach recognises that these challenges are also bound to specific places, in terms of causes, impacts, and our ability to effect change. It is not, however, a case of unquestioning localism. The ability to source food globally will remain a critical pillar of food security, and local and global markets cannot be seen in isolation from each other. Rather, a city region food system approach is about creating a framework for conscious food governance that fosters improved balance between global and local food supply, with an awareness of the multiple food system outcomes for health, economic development and environmental sustainability. It recognises the central role of the private sector in the food system, but is based on the understanding that public goods will not be delivered by market forces alone, and that greater transparency and greater democratic participation are prerequisites for progress.

## UNDERSTANDING THE BENEFITS OF CITY REGION FOOD SYSTEMS

The city region food system approach is starting to gain traction, but it remains a relatively young concept. Many and varied claims have been made for the positive impacts of adopting policies and practices to strengthen city region linkages, including the benefits to food and nutrition security, economic development, the environment and health. One of the core aims of this paper is to attempt an initial evaluation of the evidence for these claims in order to focus attention on areas that are likely to yield a significant benefit. Through a preliminary but structured process, each potential benefit

---

identified in the literature is evaluated by analysing the feasibility of the proposed mechanisms for change, the potential scale and scope of the impact, and the strength of the empirical evidence.

The evaluation suggests that improving the effectiveness of city region food systems does hold the potential for a range of benefits, especially concerning regional economic development and health. It also finds some evidence of benefits for food and nutrition security and the management of the environment, but recommends that substantial further research is needed in order to base the policy and practice of city region food systems in these areas on categorical evidence. More broadly, the governance characteristics associated with an explicit city region food system approach are in turn likely to generate wider community benefits.

It is important to note that city region food systems alone do not offer a 'silver bullet' solution to current food system problems. Challenges such as food security depend on a large and complex range of factors – including, for example, household income – and their long-term resolution rests on issues that go beyond the scope of the food system itself. Nonetheless, the analysis makes a strong case that city region food systems have the potential to support a wide range of benefits, and lays the groundwork for future research.

## MAKING CITY REGION FOOD SYSTEMS A REALITY

Realising the potential benefits of city region food systems means changing the way that food systems operate, as well as changing modes of thinking about the relationship between urban areas and their hinterlands. The challenges of improving city regional food system linkages should not be underestimated. There generally exists a food policy 'governance gap' at city region level, with progress often hindered by the absence of appropriate structures for multi-dimensional food systems planning and policy. In addition, the severe budgetary constraints under which many local authorities operate mean that food policy may not be seen as a priority, underscoring the need for a rigorous evidence base. Despite these constraints, there are many promising initiatives from which lessons can be drawn. Positive steps include:

- putting in place more integrated and inclusive governance frameworks;
- planning for long-term value, including through spatial planning and the provision of appropriate infrastructure;
- stimulating the demand for sustainable regional food through public procurement policy;
- leveraging enterprise, innovation and business as a way of delivering the benefits of city region food systems; and
- increasing the availability and transparency of information, including through the use of information communications technology.

Reviewing a range of existing programmes and initiatives shows that many have been driven or supported by public institutions working in alliance across jurisdictions, and often also involve civil society, entrepreneurs, farmers, and businesses. Scaling up such approaches will require more multi-stakeholder alliances of this nature, with broad and democratic participation an important factor in reducing the risk of conflict around what are complex and sometimes politically sensitive issues.



Kampala, Uganda

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The range of negative impacts from current food systems is symptomatic of a wider imbalance between urban and rural development. Improving the effectiveness of city region food systems offers the potential to shift towards a more harmonious and equitable development trajectory, based on participatory governance that involves a range of city region stakeholders.

There is now an opportunity for change, with the confluence of an emerging body of thought and practice regarding city region food systems; the increasing commitment to end hunger; and the culmination of several international processes that will have a significant bearing on food systems and the future of urbanisation. Of most relevance in this regard are the finalisation of the Sustainable Development Goals, to be agreed at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015; a climate agreement to be delivered at COP 21 in Paris in December 2015; and, the Habitat III meeting, to take place in 2016. The next two years therefore offer a distinct window of opportunity to demonstrate the relevance and importance of city region food systems to a more balanced and integrated approach to rural and urban development.

Based on practical initiatives detailed in the report, ten actions are outlined that could help to strengthen city region food systems linkages in policy and practice:

---

## CATALYSING CHANGE

**Recognising the ability to act:** City and rural authorities should explicitly recognise the links between food systems and a wide set of public goods (including access to healthy and nutritious food), and recognise the opportunity to facilitate positive change.

**Convening stakeholders:** Local authorities and civil society organisations can play a pivotal role in bringing together wide coalitions of interest, creating the basis for stakeholder engagement and support in future food policies and programmes.

## UNDERSTANDING THE FOOD SYSTEM

**Understanding local food systems:** City region food policies need to be based on good understanding of the local context, including where food comes from ('foodprinting') and what the outcomes of the food system are for both urban and rural populations. Civil society, local authorities and the research community have a role in defining appropriate metrics, analysing data and making information publicly accessible.

## USING POLICY INSTRUMENTS

**City region policy:** Policy and research communities, and development agencies, should actively support local authorities in the development of city region food policies, including land use and planning frameworks that enable multi-sector, territorial approaches.

**Infrastructure and support:** Local authorities and development agencies will need to invest in infrastructure such as market places and rural roads, conserve farm land under their purview, and invest in market information services that support city region value chains.

**Procurement:** City and rural authorities can catalyse city region food system value chains through public procurement policies: e.g. through incentives for meals for schools, prisons and hospitals to be sourced from local producers.

**Enabling policy:** National governments, international institutions and donor organisations should ensure their policies facilitate better city region food system governance.

## LEVERAGING WIDER IMPACT

**Enterprise and innovation:** Local authorities and development agencies should create incentives for and support the development of new enterprises that link consumers and producers. Existing enterprises should invest in social and technical innovations to facilitate these connections.

**Financing:** Development agencies, governments and the investment and philanthropic communities should support initiatives that can strengthen city region food systems. Consideration should be given to financing mechanisms such as municipal bonds and social investment vehicles.

## LEARNING AND SHARING KNOWLEDGE

**Spreading best practice:** All actors should ensure that outcomes of initiatives to promote more sustainable city region food systems are recorded and evaluated. NGOs, national institutions and universities can play a role in facilitating the sharing of policy and practice between city regions nationally and internationally.

## **The Prince of Wales's International Sustainability Unit**

The Prince of Wales's International Sustainability Unit was established by HRH The Prince of Wales in 2010 to facilitate consensus on some of the key environmental and social challenges facing the world.

### **3Keel**

3Keel LLP is an advisory firm specialising in food systems and natural resources. Our team of five Partners bring together skills and applied experience in farming, forestry, food supply chains, corporate strategy, social enterprise and international development. 3Keel provides research services, environmental metrics, strategic advice and other sustainability support to businesses, NGOs and government. Current clients, alongside the International Sustainability Unit, include Tesco, Sainsbury's, Oxfam, WRAP, Defra, National Trust, and The Crown Estate.

Front page photograph:  
Maputo Green Belt by Remi Kahane

Designed by Soapbox,  
[www.soapbox.co.uk](http://www.soapbox.co.uk)

## **The Prince of Wales's International Sustainability Unit**

Clarence House  
London  
SW1A 1BA  
United Kingdom

### **3Keel**

11 Standingford House  
26 Cave Street  
Oxford  
OX4 1BA  
United Kingdom  
[www.3keel.com](http://www.3keel.com)



**3keel**