Briefing

iied **IFAD** Investing in rural people

Policy pointers

Food consumption and its drivers are changing in both urban and rural areas, with profound implications for food production, processing and trade, as well as for rural-urban linkages.

Mapping where food comes from, and why, is critical to understanding consumption trends and their implications.

Informal street vendors are becoming a permanent fixture of food systems, and policymakers must make the link between informality, food and nutrition and urban planning.

Food and agriculture policymaking must be inclusive, giving a voice to residents of low-income urban settlements and rural net food buyers, as well as smallholder farmers and the informal sector.

Creating a new menu for food security policy

The nature of food consumption and production is changing. In the past, rural areas produced food primarily for cities. Urban residents often consumed more than they needed, while the poorest rural smallholders often went hungry. Today, rural areas still produce, but they are also consumers, and poor city dwellers now also suffer from hunger. In Kenyan cities, for example, 80 per cent of the low-income populations suffer food insecurity; meanwhile, in Vietnam — one of the world's largest producers of rice — 55 per cent of rural households are net rice buyers. Given these long-term changes, policymakers must look at food security issues through the lenses of consumption and inclusion, and recognise the crucial interdependence between urbanisation and rural development. Unless food policy reflects this shifting terrain, the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda will be put at risk.

With the landscape of food security shifting quickly, a group of researchers from Africa and Asia, along with staff from international agencies, met in London in December 2014 to identify the building blocks for a more accurate, coherent narrative. This briefing reflects their views on the links between changes in food demand/ consumption patterns associated with urbanisation (including both cities and small towns) and rural transformation, and interrelated priority issues for knowledge integration, consolidation and advocacy. These priorities will help inform the implementation of the post-2015 agenda, including progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda.

Food systems through the lens of consumption

Food systems in rural and urban areas are changing, and one way to view these differences is through the lens of consumption. Interrelated factors such as where people live, their ability to buy and store food, and how much time they have to prepare meals all affect consumption patterns.

In Kenya, as in many southern African cities, 80 per cent of the urban low-income population suffers from food insecurity. Casual workers on daily wages are particularly vulnerable, typically buying food every day from informal traders who sell small quantities. Often, this involves a higher per unit cost. In Dakar, Senegal, however, the price of food in informal markets is much the same as in supermarkets, and with the added advantage of easier physical access.

Convenience also plays a role in food consumption. Low-income urban consumers may lack space to store food. Both adults in a family are likely to be in the labour market and face long commutes. They may struggle to afford fuel for cooking. Consequently, traditional foods, which can take longer to cook, are losing out to 'faster' but less nutritious foods from street vendors. With high levels of street food consumption, malnutrition is moving from rural to urban areas. In many African cities, an alarming proportion of poor households feature both overweight or obese adults and stunted children.[1]

External factors, such as power failures, floods and political violence, can also cut off access to markets on a given day. This heightens food insecurity for those who buy their food every day, and lack a safety net in case of emergencies.

In addition, cultural and practical factors play a role in changing diets. In West Africa, for example, women prefer to cook yam but their children want rice. In addition to cooking faster, rice is easier to store. For these reasons, initiatives to make traditional staple foods more convenient have not caught on.

Rural smallholders are vulnerable to changes in agricultural production systems such as increased mechanisation and land division and concentration, as well as to environmental hazards such as droughts or floods. As a result, agriculture has declined as the primary source of income. More rural people — especially low-income groups, land-poor smallholders and the landless — are buying food instead of growing it. In Vietnam, for example, 55 per cent of rural households are net rice buyers, and 22 per cent do not have access to productive land.[2] Even if these households can generate diverse sources of off-farm income, they remain vulnerable to rising food prices.

A rural family may rely on remittances to buy basic necessities, including food. If this money falls short, they may not eat well. Migrant workers who are sending money — and even food — back home may not have enough left to feed themselves properly. Migrants are a diverse population whose food consumption patterns depend on their particular living situations. In China, urbanisation caused by an influx of migrant workers has increased demand for meat, milk and eggs. In sub-Saharan Africa, where much urban population growth is due instead to a higher number of births than deaths, urban citizens have no links to rural areas. They are more likely to consume imported food such as rice and maize rather than traditional staples such as sorghum.

In the past, rural areas produced food that was delivered to urban dwellers for consumption. Now both people and food are flowing out of rural areas. Moreover, the flow out of villages is often directed towards other villages rather than cities. Rural settlements with high rates of out-migration, especially among younger people, often also have high rates of in-migration, with seasonal labourers coming to work on family farms. Policymakers need to respond to these changes, and their implications for food security and labour.

Mapping the diverse origins of food

Trends in consumption have consequences for food production, processing and trade. To understand these consequences we need to map where food comes from, including the impacts of changes in supply and demand. Increasingly, large-scale processors are producing more food, including imports. This is true for rural and urban settings alike, even in regions where most people are farmers.

The rise of imports has consequences for both local consumers and producers. Changes in consumption can draw in food from further afield, including imports, but the supply of cheap imports can also change consumption patterns. With respect to economic issues, large trading companies can gain an economic advantage over local traders. In West Africa, for example, international rice traders can sell on credit and out-compete local traders who will only take cash. The workshop heard that in Nigeria, it is cheaper for farmers to import rice for their workers than to rely on local produce.

Little is known about the impact of street food consumption on agriculture. Some informal 'local' markets, however, are clearly bypassing local producers. In a small urban centre of Uganda, students and 'boda boda' (motorcycle) taxis depend on informal vendors for cheap, high-energy street food such as chapatti. But although these vendors do buy some ingredients from rural markets, the flour for the chapattis is imported from Tanzania, putting into question whether the food can be seen as 'local', or even Ugandan. At the Mafalala Market in Maputo, Mozambique, informal vendors sell fresh produce imported from South African commercial farms and frozen chicken from Brazil.

Although rural communities remain the primary food producers, various forms of urban agriculture are taking root. In Vietnam, a combination of concerns about food safety and high prices is driving the growth of urban

agriculture. In Nairobi, Kenya, keeping livestock in urban areas is relatively common. Since land is so limited, however, urban agriculture has little room to expand in informal settlements. On the outskirts of cities, residential developments are taking over prime agricultural land, pushing production farther away. This makes the connection between road conditions and urban food security even more important.

The blurring of rural-urban boundaries

Changing consumption patterns are affecting the way food is produced and the links between rural and urban areas – for both better and worse. The once clear-cut definitions of 'rural' and 'urban' are becoming blurred, and policymakers have been slow to recognise the change. Although millions of rural workers have migrated to the cities, China, for example, continues to classify households according to either rural or urban status. These labels can penalise migrant workers, affecting job opportunities and access to public goods and services.

Many people in rural areas no longer work in agriculture, and are net purchasers of food. At the same time, many urban 'residents' do work in agriculture, returning home for planting and harvesting. Some studies on urbanisation have begun to disaggregate data to reflect such trends, but differences in livelihoods and lifestyles need to be reflected more accurately.

Many policymakers still emphasise increasing the supply of food to meet the needs of a growing world population. For their part, workshop participants agreed on the need for a policy shift towards improving access to food in both urban and rural locations. One approach that brings consumption and production into a more integrated framework is the 'city region food system' that spans territory and city governance.

Market towns and large villages are playing an important role in transforming food systems. These small and intermediate urban centres expand both market linkages for local producers and access to information. They also provide job opportunities off the farm, ranging from agricultural processing and distribution to a more 'urban'-style focus on goods and services. Small towns also provide routes for imports and processed foods to enter rural areas, increasing competition with local production. Although these emerging 'urbanising spaces in rural areas' are important to rural development and poverty reduction, national policymakers typically underestimate the infrastructure needs of rural areas, as well as the technical and revenue capacities of local government.

Box 1. Empowering informal vendors in Indonesia

The experience of Indonesia shows how working with local vendors, instead of against them, can be a positive experience for everyone.

Following the last regime change and the Asian economic crisis of 1998, the Indonesian economy was almost bankrupt and many of the jobless became street vendors. After the 2004 election, government attempts to remove vendors who sold both food and other products often led to violence.

One of the policies of the new mayor of Solo, Joko "Jokowi" Widodo, was to clear the streets. Instead of using force, however, he invited vendors to talks. After 54 meetings, an agreement was reached for the city to build designated spaces for vendors and give them six months of free rent. By 2014, 77 per cent of the 5,817 street vendors had been relocated. Registered vendors receive permits, which can be inherited by family members. They can also receive training from the government on topics ranging from sanitation and food safety to business development and financial management.

These efforts have effectively 'semi-formalised' the informal sector. The process rebuilt citizen confidence in the government, which had been eroded by the previous regime. The goodwill generated by this kind of process helped propel Jokowi to the governorship of Jakarta and, eventually, the presidency.

A role for informal vendors

The informal food distribution and vending sector can be dynamic, creative and efficient. Since they lack the economic capacity and room to grow, most informal settlements rely on street vendors. City authorities often view these vendors as a temporary irritant on the way to building a modern city.

In fact, informality has become a permanent state. For example, 60 per cent of poor urban households across 11 southern African cities regularly buy food from informal traders.[3] Many predicted that supermarkets would sweep away informal vendors in sub-Saharan Africa; the market share of supermarkets in Nairobi has stagnated. Informal trade and wholesale markets can, however, be controlled by mafias, depriving local farmers of revenue. With this in mind, local authorities can play an important role in regulating informality and keeping space open for public markets.

The link between street vending and health is mixed – street vendors sell both healthy food and junk food in different formats. In Maputo, for example, vendors sell non-perishable junk food to children outside schools. In addition, informal vendors must try to keep their food safe despite local environmental hazards such as open-air sewage, lack of solid waste collection and inadequate water supply. In Nairobi, balloon mapping has helped citizens visualise the

intersection between food and environmental hazards.[4] This has led to greater connections between the food vendor association and grassroots residents' associations. Together, they have developed local initiatives, including negotiating with municipal authorities to improve basic infrastructure.

A seat at the table for the less powerful

The concentration of power can have profound consequences for food policy and the value chain. National policy must be more inclusive, involving everyone from smallholders to local government. Effective policy, then, needs a coherent vision based on evidence, including the relative merits and weaknesses of local and global value chains.

Policy dialogues often reflect imbalances of power. Powerful actors (such as government and large/international trade and retail stakeholders) can drown out less powerful voices (smallholder farmers, formal and informal traders and low-income consumers).

Well-intentioned policymakers may have trouble identifying a representative group. In Senegal, for example, there is no association of informal retailers to invite to a meeting. Meanwhile, the relationship between government and individual informal actors is often adversarial. Some governments eschew dialogue with urban informal traders altogether. In South Africa, Operation Clean Sweep quickly and brutally removed informal vendors from the streets of Johannesburg. In Indonesia, in contrast, an inclusive approach to relocation empowered local vendors and ended in celebration[5] (see Box 1).

Policy discussions of urbanisation ring hollow without recognition of the changing relationship between urban and rural areas. In East Africa, urban planners tend to focus on infrastructure,

ignoring questions about food because they are 'rural' issues. Yet best practices in urban food strategies, from Brazilian cities for example, could inform African policy.

By 2050, an extra 2.5 billion people will be living in cities, with close to 90 per cent of the increase concentrated in Africa and Asia. The sheer scale of this transformation demands a global response. Individual cities will need to tailor their strategies to their specific needs, however, linking to the national, regional and global levels.

Consequently, any new 'global' narrative for food security must recognise that much rural-urban transformation will be determined at the national and regional levels. Although local governments may not be directly responsible for food security, individual departments do touch indirectly on the food system. In South Africa, research has shown the dynamic relationship among different levels of government with respect to food security. It showed how local government needs tools to assess priorities, and that all of the drivers of food security are in constant flux.

Looking ahead

The workshop participants agreed on the need for more research into and analysis of rural-urban transformations, and how the food policy landscape is changing. It has already become clear, however, that policymakers must start to view food security issues through the lenses of consumption and inclusiveness, and to recognise the crucial interdependence between urbanisation and rural development. Failure to do so could jeopardise the goals and targets identified in the Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda.

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Notes

[1] Kimani-Murage, E W *et al.* (2015) Evidence of a double burden of malnutrition in urban poor settings in Nairobi, Kenya. *PLoS ONE* 10(6): e0129943. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0129943. / [2] Thanh, H X *et al.* (2013) Food security in the context of Vietnam's rural-urban linkages and climate change. IIED, London. See http://pubs.iied.org/10649IIED. / [3] Frayne, B *et al.* (2010) The state of urban food insecurity in southern Africa. Urban Food Security Series No. 2. Queen's University, Kingston and African Food Security Urban Network, Cape Town. See http://www.afsun.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/AFSUN_2.pdf. / [4] Ahmed, S *et al.* (2015) Cooking up a storm: Community-led mapping and advocacy with food vendors in Nairobi's informal settlements. IIED, London. See http://pubs.iied.org/10734IIED.html. / [5] Natawidjaja, R S *et al.* (2015) Inclusive governance of informal markets: the street vendors of Surakarta. IIED, London. See http://pubs.iied.org/17300IIED.html.

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