
gain
Global Alliance for
Improved Nutrition
#UrbanNutrition
Why we should care about
improving urban nutrition
and urban food systems

Introduction

Global food systems are transforming in ways that a generation ago would have seemed fantastical.

Today there are more overweight and obese people in the world than underweight and undernourished ones. For some, dietary diversity has reached spectacular heights, with food from every culture and nation on offer daily. The search for a healthier diet is a source of endless research and debate, with moves to reduce the level of salt, sugar and some fats consumed. For the first time in modern society, malnutrition has become a health problem affecting every society, and all generations and classes, rich and poor alike.

Underlying this is a process of massive transformation of the food industries, of seeds and input technologies and global trade in food, and a continuing marginalisation of billions of poor consumers. The food and agriculture sector is dynamic and diverse, from smallholder farmers to large multinationals. We will need them all if we are to feed a population of nine billion by 2050 on the same land, without exacerbating climate change or degrading the planet.

In this debate on how to feed the planet in a more sustainable and healthy way, one area of the transformation has been overlooked – the move to cities. By 2030 five billion people will be urban citizens, not just in the megacities but hundreds of cities or towns with a population of a few hundred thousand to a few million. The majority of this five billion will be from low and middle income countries, many living in slums or informal dwellings.

This challenge can only be met if we see it as a set of opportunities, to shorten supply lines, build a partnership between the food producers and consumers which is local and innovative, utilising new technologies, and making diets more diverse, healthier and sustainable. Larger farms, more specialisation, longer supply lines and more intensive farm inputs may be part of the solution, but this paradigm on its own cannot succeed.

Policy makers need to act fast to ensure cities are designed in a way that enables the production of healthy, sustainable and nutritious urban food systems. Furthermore urban nutrition security can no longer be ignored. Youth engagement, especially adolescent girls, will be crucial. We must not let cities become bottlenecks for nutrition security but instead must take advantage of the powerful tool it can be in producing positive externalities if managed right.

Essential tools will be the regulatory environment, private sector engagement, technology, and demand creation. It is critical that urban infrastructures and local supply chains are optimally implemented taking into account climate change risks and trade, which does not only benefit the rich. Improved global data on consumption patterns of city dwellers and urban dynamics would provide useful insights to produce effective context specific urban nutrition policies. However, urban interactions are not static and urbanization is happening so rapidly that policy makers do not have time to not take immediate action to do what they can in integrating urban nutrition sensitive strategies within their frameworks.

What is the #UrbanNutrition problem?

URBANIZATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY (TRENDS)

By 2030 the world will be 60% urban[1] and 90% of this growth will occur in low and middle income countries in Africa and Asia[1] where the brunt of malnutrition is already felt. Urbanization is associated with economic growth but also home to high inequality. Rapid urbanization, if unplanned, could lead to disaster. However much of the infrastructure of these growing cities will be built in the next 15 years which means there is a huge opportunity to plan cities now for better nutrition[2].

WORLD POPULATION IN 2015		WORLD POPULATION IN 2030	
> 50% urban	4 billion[1] live in cities and almost 1 billion live in slums[3]	> 60% urban	5 billion[1] will live in cities and almost 2 billion could live in slums[4]

URBAN NUTRITION PROBLEMS

Malnutrition affects every country and their cities.

	South Asia		Sub Saharan Africa	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Stunting[5]	39%	49%	30%	43%
Obesity[6]	28%	10%	32%	16%

Many low and middle income countries, and particularly their cities, now face the double burden of malnutrition.

The poorest quintile of urban children under five are three times more likely to become stunted than their wealthier urban counterparts, and in some countries, fair worse than their rural counterparts[7].

Cities have become obesogenic environments; but they don't have to be.

Two in three people who suffer from Type II diabetes, which is largely associated with obesity, live in cities[8].

By 2030 almost two thirds of city dwellers will be less than 18 years old[9]. Considering how critical the first 1,000 days are of a child's life in determining their nutritional status and income earning potential it is critical that we invest in nutrition for poor urban residents now. If we don't, generations of young people will be disadvantaged and denied an equal start in life.

Who should care? Everyone.

GLOBAL LEADERS
Improved nutrition and inclusive and sustainable cities are both global priorities under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework.

SDG 2

End hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

SDG 11

Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

MUNICIPAL LEADERS
Over 100 global cities have signed up to the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, encouraging urban policy to address food systems and nutrition.

THE NEW URBAN AGENDA
In October 2016 the United Nation's conference, dubbed Habitat III, will formulate the New Urban Agenda. It is critical that the New Urban Agenda reflects the importance of nutrition and building better food systems.

MULTI-STAKEHOLDERS
Urban people purchase the majority of the food they consume and the urban poor spend up to spend up to 70% of their income on food[10].

It is not just the government that has a role to play in building an enabling environment for improved urban nutrition. The private sector, civil society, non-governmental organizations, academia, individuals all provide critical components of the solution.

How do we improve #UrbanNutrition?

1 >> URBAN FOOD SYSTEMS
Local urban food systems need to be strengthened particularly in small and medium cities[11]

a) Food markets: Informal, Formal and Urban Food Deserts
The majority of urban poor still purchase their food from and are employed in informal markets; these **markets need to be supported to become more nutritious and safe**. However supermarket chains have rapidly increased in Asia and Africa and should improve their affordability and accessibility. Urban food deserts should be mitigated.

b) The Urban Food Supply Chain
Distribution and storage mechanisms are particularly weak in low and middle income countries and should be strengthened. If low and middle income nations had the **same technological level of cold chains** as in the global north they would be able to save **200 million tonnes of perishable foods** a year[12].

c) Roads, Traffic and Transport
A major cause of post-harvest loss in low and middle income countries is **inadequate road infrastructures** and **traffic congestion**, particularly in dense megacities. Roads, in low and middle income countries, particularly those connecting rural areas with small and medium size cities can be poorly constructed; sometimes they are just dirt roads and can become unnavigable during monsoon seasons.

How do we improve #UrbanNutrition?

2 >> DEMAND CREATION

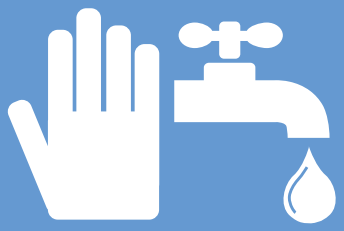
Creating demand for nutritious food is an essential piece of the puzzle and mechanisms to do this include:

a) Regulatory tools such as food labels, taxes and subsidies
In the first year since Mexico implemented their soda tax, sales of sugary soft drinks decreased by 6%[13].

b) Education through schools and health systems on the importance of good nutrition
Many people do not know what a healthy diet looks like or may have misconceptions.

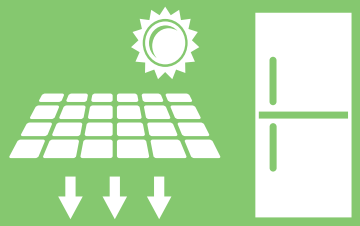
c) Marketing and creation of aspirational products that are nutritious
US fast food restaurants spend around $4.6 billion dollars a year on advertising[14]. Can we make healthy foods trendy?

3 >> WASH



Improving water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities is a proven nutrition sensitive intervention[15]. However, less people in the world have a toilet than a mobile phone[16]. WASH infrastructure is especially poor in urban slum areas.

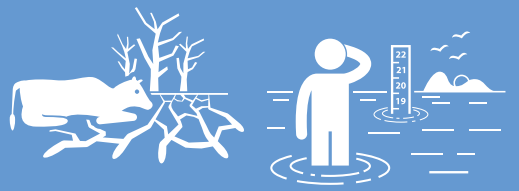
4 >> TECHNOLOGY



Can cities in low and middle income countries leapfrog to **new technologies and innovative approaches to improve the food system**? For example solar powered fridges.

What about climate change, sustainable consumption and the environment?

1 >> EFFECT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON URBAN FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY



Climate change is having and will have devastating effects on urban food security.

It is commonly accepted that climate change leads to an **increased risk of droughts**, **floods** and other **natural disasters** that can severely damage agricultural production and productivity and thus inevitably also raise food prices.

It is estimated that **80% of people** who suffer from **chronic hunger** live in **disaster prone areas** already feeling the brunt of climate change[17].

Overcrowded slum settlements are often at particular risk because they tend to be built in more disaster prone areas.

This can affect a household's ability to purchase food as their **livelihoods have deteriorated**.

Secondly, they are also more at **risk of contracting diarrhoea** due to poor water and sanitation facilities. Climate change can **increase the rate of diarrhoea by 10% by 2030 in some regions**[18].

2 >> EFFECT OF CHANGING DIETS ON CLIMATE CHANGE

Unfortunately, climate change cannot just have damaging effects on the nutrition security of poor urban populations but in fact **urban residents trying to attain better nutrition can be a driver of climate change.** Cities themselves are the largest contributor of greenhouse gasses. Though they only occupy **2% of land** globally they are responsible for **70%** the world's **greenhouse gas emissions**[19].

3 >> FOOD WASTE

Globally, **30–40% of food is wasted or lost** annually[20] while **795 million people** still go hungry[21].

Get in touch

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