

Urban Food Systems: Nutrition and the Climate Emergency

Outcome Policy Recommendations


On 27 April, UCLG, the city of Barcelona, World Capital of Sustainable Food in 2021, the Food and Agriculture Organization, and the World Sustainable Urban Food Centre (CEMAS), in collaboration with UN-Habitat and Metropolis, held the #CitiesAreListening experience on “Urban Food Systems: Nutrition and the Climate Emergency”. The session included representatives from cities and regions, international organizations and civil society to consider the food-climate nexus. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the relevance of urban and territorial food systems to the wellbeing of people and the sustainability of the planet was discussed.

Building on the lessons learned from the crisis, food systems are highly placed on the agenda of local and regional governments with a transversal and multidisciplinary approach, and considering a territorial lens. In cities and regions flourish models of proximity, strengthening the collaboration with local producers and communities, while prompting additional awareness of consumers on the climate, environmental, economic and social impact of food systems.

The right to food is closely linked to local service provision, to mobility, water and sanitation, health, housing, ecological transformation and more. Sustainable urban and local food system transformation will be thus vital to achieve a fairer and more resilient national and global food systems, which is more socially equitable and less harmful to ecosystems and biodiversity, while contributing to tackle the climate emergency.


In the 21st century, the worst threat that looms over the approximately 7.7 billion inhabitants is climate change. Some data and many realities force us to rethink the current food system.


In the world there are already 31 cities that support more than 10 million inhabitants, more than a third of greenhouse gases are produced by the global agri-food system and a third of the food that is produced goes to the garbage without being ingested.



Working to provide and maintain sustainable urban food systems is a formidable meeting point. An exercise in multilateralism, which is important to accelerate the urban food agenda. This is a common issue where every voice must be heard. Local administrations, but also national, regional and supranational, private sector, knowledge centres, civil society, universities. Different points of view of knowledge converge around how we can help improve food systems; we all have our space for action to develop. Food in cities implies protection of small producers, establishing rural urban relations, promoting gender policies, taking care of local market networks, active public policies in public purchasing, food waste management, education, 'big data', urban development, food sovereignty, and so on.

The following are key messages and policy recommendations stemming from the #CitiesAreListening Experience held on “Urban Food Systems: Nutrition and the Climate Emergency”:

- Cities and territories should no longer be understood as only consumers and producers of food, but rather as **catalytic actors of a new and inclusive food governance**, which builds on solidarity and prioritizes the **caring and wellbeing of people, communities and planet**; but while the role urban, local and regional governments in the transformation of food systems is increasingly recognized, their capacities and potential may not be fully utilized.
 - Demand for food is increasing and policies, targets and actions to address **food injustices** and **secure access to nutritious and sustainable food for everyone in order to tackle hunger and vulnerability** will need to be developed with local and regional governments;
 - The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the need to **increase the resilience of food systems, especially during emergencies**, which will require, inter alia, enhancing food procurement policies, addressing food waste, providing market opportunities for nutritious and sustainable food products, reassessing urban planning, logistics, distribution and food provision to schools along with other forms of assistance to the needy. Strengthening food environments is a key step in this direction
 - The pandemic also increased the interest and **awareness of communities on food provenance and systems**, their impacts and challenges, resulting in higher demands for coherent and coordinated responses from governments with stakeholders and communities and for additional alternatives provision of and access to nutritious and sustainable food;
 - **Culture is closely linked to food habits and our relationship with nature.** Art exhibitions, festivals and other will play an important role in changing consumption patterns and promoting different food systems, supporting
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cultivation of food without invasion of habitats and in close collaboration with communities, processors, distributors, retailers including restaurants and producer and consumer associations;


- Food systems have a relevant impact on **GHG emissions** and integrated approaches are necessary to address the **journey from farm to fork and waste**. In this regard, a territorial approach to food systems considers urban-rural linkages and emissions throughout the entire process, including its impact on global commons such as on water, biodiversity and ecosystem resources;
- **Creating networks across spheres of government, and with civil society associations, indigenous communities, farmers and relevant stakeholders** is fundamental to develop transparent and inclusive food systems at city level, to enable information and knowledge sharing and fostering the concept of “**food citizenship**”;
- Food is core element in a systemic approach to **women’s rights to the city and leadership** and a gender-sensitive perspective should be included in urban and territorial food policies. Hence, food systems need to be also be considered for their potential to address inequalities, including concerning **employment and labor rights, particularly with a view to youth**.
- **Technology and a science-based approaches** are increasingly relevant to help improve food systems. Innovative tools can help connecting consumers with sustainable value chain alternatives including sustainable production, improving food governance including through data and information and tackling food waste.

Contributing to international milestones in 2021

Major international conferences and events in 2021 provide a unique opportunity to further increase the recognition of urban, local and regional governments for their unique role to transform food systems. The joint and strong political mobilization of the constituency gathered in the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments is ready to present the recommendations and commitments of cities and territories to sustainable food systems.

The city of **Barcelona is the World Sustainable Food Capital for 2021** and has undertaken a series of innovative food projects and policies. Barcelona invites other cities to join the challenge and show the commitment on the food-climate nexus.

As part of the Decade of Action to Achieve Sustainable Development, local and regional governments will continue to develop and provide inputs to different frameworks. Sustainable food systems are crucial for achieving the New Urban Agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement. Important landmarks this year include:





- **UN Food Systems Summit, September 2021 and pre-Summit in July 2021:** partners are involved in Urban Food Systems working group and others, facilitating independent and a Global dialogue, contributing to the game changing solutions, work with action track leads, and key messages on food systems. A Global Summit Dialogue on “empowering cities and local governments to promote food systems globally”, co-convened with Agnes Kalibata, is scheduled for 28th of June.
- **7th Forum of the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP), 19-21 October 2021, hosted by Barcelona:** focused on the theme "Growing Resilience: Sustainable Food to Tackle the Climate Emergency", it will oversee the actions of cities to promote new food systems while addressing the pandemic, ecological and climate crises.
- **UN Biodiversity Conference, CBD COP 15, 11-24 October 2021:** unique moment to recall the impact and potential contribution of urban and territorial food systems on the environment, which should be reflected in the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.
- **Glasgow Climate Change Conference, UNFCCC COP 26, 1-12 November 2021:** the contribution of cities and regions to address the climate emergency will be conveyed, including regarding the impact on food systems. **Glasgow food and climate declaration and outcomes of 7th MUFPP Forum** as joint inputs.

