

# Urban food policies

Proceedings of the international meeting on experiences in Africa, Latin America and Asia.

16-18 November 2015, Montpellier, France

MARKETS

CATERING SERVICES

URBAN/RURAL CONNECTIONS



United Nations  
Educational Scientific and  
Cultural Organisation



UNESCO Chair in  
World Food Systems  
France



# Urban food policies

Proceedings of the international meeting on experiences in Africa, Latin America and Asia.

16-18 November 2015, Montpellier, France

MARKETS

CATERING SERVICES

URBAN/RURAL CONNECTIONS

JULIE DEBRU, SYLVIE ALBERT, NICOLAS BRICAS, DAMIEN CONARÉ, EDITORS



## Coordination and scientific editing

Julie Debru, UNESCO Chair on World Food Systems;

Sylvie Albert, independant scientific editor;

Nicolas Bricas, CIRAD and director of the UNESCO Chair on World Food Systems;

Damien Conaré, UNESCO Chair on World Food Systems.

## Organizing Committee

Julie Debru, Program officer, UNESCO Chair on World Food Systems, Montpellier SupAgro;

Nicolas Bricas, CIRAD scientist and director of the UNESCO Chair on World Food Systems;

Florence Mouton, expert on Food security and nutrition, Research and Development Division, French Development Agency;

Julien Woessner, Project Manager, Charles Léopold Mayer Foundation for the Progress of Humankind;

Marielle Dubbeling, director, RUAF Foundation;

Guido Santini and Louison Lançon-Daumas, project managers for the Food for the Cities Programme, FAO;

David Edwards, deputy director, International Sustainability Unit, The Prince of Wales's Charitable Foundation.

Translation: David Manley and Paul Cowan.

ISBN 978-2-900792-28-5

Citation: Debru J., Albert S., Bricas N., Conaré D. (Eds), 2017. Urban food policies. Proceedings of the international meeting on experiences in Africa, Latin America and Asia. 16-18 November 2015, Montpellier, France, 200 p.



# Overall conclusion

**Nicolas Bricas, CIRAD**

*MOISA Joint Research Unit and UNESCO Chair on World Food Systems*

**Marielle Dubelling**

*RUAF Foundation*

**David Edwards**

*International Sustainability Unit of The Prince of Wales' Charitable Foundation*

**Florence Mouton**

*French Development Agency.*

**T**he renewal of urban food policies that has taken place over the past decade can be traced to the fact that cities in industrialized countries are coming to terms with the negative externalities and the limits of the industrialized food system. Those cities are in any case the ones that have had the lion's share of attention. And yet, of the hundred-odd cities that signed the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, about a third are in Latin America, Africa or Asia. The evidence that they presented to the international meeting in Montpellier, which is collated in this book, shows that while their urbanization experiences are quite different from those of cities in the industrialized countries, they too are keenly aware of the food issue.

Given the rapid urbanization they must deal with, they are looking to make sure of their food supplies, in quantitative as well as qualitative terms. To do so, many of them are going to distant sources of supply, including imports, and industrial distribution channels that are considered modern, such as supermarkets. Compared to cities in the industrialized countries, the search for alternatives is less often their primary motivation for the design of urban food policies. Instead, some of them want to speed up the industrialization of their food systems. That notwithstanding, we need to rid ourselves of the simplistic vision of urban food policies in the developed world as alternative and those in developing countries as "normalizing", for the limits of industrialized

and globalized food systems in the developing world are already becoming clear. Over-reliance on imports has made many cities vulnerable to sharp price rises on international markets. Supermarket development has put competitive pressure on the micro-commerce sector, which provided many jobs to less well educated population groups. When there are thousands of unemployed young people in cities, a socially explosive situation builds up, as was seen during the riots resulting from soaring international prices in 2008 and 2011. Cities of the global South are seeing explosive growth of obesity and the diseases associated with unbalanced diets. As eaters' relationship to food systems suffers from geographic, economic, cognitive and political distancing, their anxiety grows.

The international meeting in Montpellier and this book, which emerged therefrom, have sought to give a voice to cities of the global South from whom little has so far been heard. The evidence they have presented shows that their problems, while different, still have similarities to those found in the North. The North/South distinction is fading. In both cases, policy design at first focused narrowly on securing food supplies, on urban agriculture and therefore on relations with agricultural production, but the issues addressed have broadened. They now include nutrition, health and the wholesomeness of food, the fight against food insecurity, and environmental management, to name only these. The issues of climate change, biodiversity and land grabs are also coming to the fore. Clearly, the issue of city food supply is no longer just an agricultural one. Increasingly it overlaps with town planning, health, social action, culture, trade, etc. The issue of relations with the rural world nevertheless remains. There is still a risk of conflict between the cities and the countryside, and heavy pressure on producers to provide quality food at low cost. Again, a new synergistic relationship between the cities and the countryside has yet to emerge. That is why the "City-Region Food System" concept, which aims to strengthen the relationship between rural and urban communities, is being promoted.<sup>20</sup> Significantly, that issue was made an explicit agenda item at the United Nations Conference on Housing and

---

20. Cf. <http://cityregionfoodsystems.org/>

Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) held in Quito in October 2016. Pending the implementation of real urban food policies, many cities are progressively integrating food issues into their political agendas.

More generally, the food issue is now interlinked with issues of territorial development and decentralization. However, political and institutional contexts are very different between North and South: in many countries of the global South, the nation is still very much a work in progress. Decentralization is more recent there, and local institutions still underdeveloped. Resources and power are monopolized by capital cities, at the expense of secondary towns. While local communities' power is everywhere growing, their scope for action remains limited. Because their food economy (transport, trade, processing, catering, waste) is still often largely informal, policy design and implementation are problematic. For example, many cities have no statistics on their food systems. It is only recently that their universities and research centres have begun looking at the food industry and cities, as up until now they have mainly focused on rural and agricultural issues.

Many cities have created their food policies gradually, expanding their activities step by step. Fewer, however, have planned their action in different sectors from the outset, based on a global view of all the problems they encounter and a general diagnosis of food situations. Most often, cities' policies are made up as they go along. They nevertheless need diagnostic tools and references to map out their actions. Networking of cities is most germane thereto, and is indeed addressed by the Milan Pact. It would seem vital for experiences to be increasingly shared among them through meetings such as the one in Montpellier. One might suppose, however, that the exchanges that occur are between twinned cities or are mediated by national or regional networks of cities conducting food policies, as has lately been happening in certain countries.

In following the presentations and discussions at the meeting, however, it has become clear that the changes in cities' food systems are to some extent beyond their control. National policies, international agreements, and the strategies of large corporations in the food sector also shape city dwellers' food supply, and cities have

## **URBAN FOOD POLICIES**

PROCEEDINGS OF THE INTERNATIONAL MEETING., NOV. 2015

little power to counter those influences when necessary. That is one of the important issues affecting cities' food futures and their ability to organize collectively to exert some political influence at the levels mentioned. But this is not solely an issue of balance of power: every day, through a host of private, associative or citizen initiatives, cities are finding new ways of producing, exchanging, eating, all of which constitute responses, "from within" in the words of G. Balandier, to the food problems they encounter. While the problems mainly affect cities, that is also where most of the resources needed to solve them can be found.

Hence, what the organizers of this international meeting are seeking to do is: to decompartmentalize food issues so that all of the city's policymakers can have input; to foster knowledge exchanges between cities; to heed societies' genius for invention; and to devise diagnostic tools to help in policy development. This book stands as a first step in that exercise. May it be the first of many! ★