



Investing in rural people

# Rural-urban linkages and food systems in sub-Saharan Africa

The rural dimension

by  
Karim Hussein  
David Suttie  
IFAD

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A decorative graphic in the bottom-left corner of the cover, featuring several stylized wheat stalks in a vibrant orange color. The stalks are rendered with fine lines for the grain and thicker lines for the stems and awns.

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# Table of contents

Acknowledgements .....	2
Abstract.....	5
Introduction.....	6
Background: Emerging rural-urban dynamics .....	8
Urbanization, structural transformation and food systems: The role of smallholders .....	12
The contemporary landscape and lessons from history .....	12
Urbanization patterns in Africa: Implications for smallholders .....	14
The potential of small and medium-sized towns .....	15
Understanding rural-urban dynamics and food systems in SSA: Key trends and opportunities .....	17
Trends.....	17
Opportunities .....	18
Policies and actions for inclusive and sustainable food systems in Africa.....	24
Reducing rural-urban inequalities, strengthening linkages and improving connectivity.....	24
Strengthening and improving the inclusivity of agricultural value chains.....	24
Adopting territorial or city-region food system approaches that encompass cities and the regions they are situated in .....	26
Creating decent jobs in food systems, particularly for rural women, youth and migrants .....	26
Facilitating livelihoods, enhancing migration and remittance flows.....	27
Conclusions .....	29
References .....	31

# Abstract

Given the context of transitions related to rapid urbanization, the roles that rural economies and societies will have to play (particularly smallholder farmers and other rural producers) in creating sustainable and inclusive food systems, in generating employment and incomes and in contributing to more balanced, equitable and mutually reinforcing patterns of rural-urban development in Africa require the attention of analysts, policymakers and development programmes in the years ahead. Addressing challenges related to a bulging population of young people will be particularly important in any work on the rural-urban nexus, in which youth migration plays critical roles. This is borne out by an analysis of evidence from sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere, which stresses the importance of increasing productivity and incomes among rural people, particularly smallholders, during processes of economic and social transformation. Emerging trends and opportunities – such as the increasing demand for food and the changing nature of that demand as consumer preferences evolve, urbanization, demographic patterns that mean young people are an increasingly important proportion of the overall population, and more integrated food value chains – all point to the importance of ensuring key rural dynamics are taken into account in developing rural-urban linkages. Taking account of these dynamics will mean addressing key rural-urban inequalities and connectivity gaps, developing more integrated and inclusive links within food systems and agricultural value chains, testing spatial and territorial approaches to development that provide valuable tools to integrate the rural dimension into debates surrounding urbanization, the promotion of a more sustainable urbanization, and building decent employment in food value chains. Nonetheless, the review of evidence in this paper suggests that, while urbanization potentially opens up opportunities for inclusive rural and structural transformation, this can only be achieved when suitable policies and investments are put in place to adequately address the particular needs of often-neglected rural people who play critical roles in food systems.

# Introduction

According to Olinto et al. (2013), over 78 per cent of the poor in developing countries reside in rural areas and the rural population constitutes 58 per cent of the total population. Moreover, a large share of the poor (some 63 per cent) work in agriculture, mostly smallholder farming. According to Losch (2013), two thirds of the population in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) derive their livelihoods primarily from agriculture. The same author projects that rural areas will host two thirds of the labour force increase in the next two decades, as urbanization processes under way across the continent are not projected to be accompanied by rapidly increasing shares of manufacturing jobs witnessed during the structural transformation of many East and South-East Asian countries. Currently, rural-based populations remain primarily engaged in informal sector economic activities, with many engaged in low-productivity agriculture, and continue to lack access to basic services (Proctor, 2014). These rural-based populations are increasingly connected to urban areas and the people who live there (IFAD, 2010: 15).

Globally, and even more so in Africa, smallholder family farming dominates agriculture in developing countries, making vital contributions to household food consumption and constituting the basis of the livelihoods and incomes of rural women and men. Rising incomes coupled with rapid urbanization are contributing to expanding the demand for agricultural products, particularly high-value ones. The emergence of supermarkets is spurring the establishment of modern value chains, especially for high-value foodstuffs. These supermarkets are generally more organized and have higher standards than traditional markets, though the latter continue to play an important role in national food systems. Potentially more remunerative markets offer new opportunities for smallholders, with higher returns set against higher entry costs and risks of marginalization (IFAD, 2010). Smallholders in regions connected to urban settlements could be particularly well placed to respond to this demand, where they have the capacity to increase the supply of food and agricultural products that effectively satisfy consumer demand in both rural and urban areas.

However, rural smallholders<sup>1</sup> face a number of barriers that limit their capacities to respond to this demand, for example limited access to finance, education and training, and infrastructure. Ensuring a stable and reliable supply of fresh food and agricultural products that meet quality and safety norms in local, national and regional markets is also a challenge; here, agricultural value chains in SSA often face gaps in terms of storage, packaging, processing and transport. Patterns of growth that have excluded smallholders and people residing in rural areas have exacerbated this situation and undermined their capacities to respond to opportunities created by increasing demand.

1. Smallholder in this paper is understood in a broad sense and is intended to include a wide range of economic actors based in rural areas, including smallholders, small-scale rural food producers and processors, agriculture and food workers, artisanal fishers, pastoralists, rural artisans, indigenous peoples and the rural landless people.



This paper examines the role of rural-urban linkages in fostering inclusive and sustainable food systems, focusing in particular on sub-Saharan Africa, while drawing on experience, analysis and historical perspectives concerning other regions and countries in the South. It reviews the issues raised in the broader literature on rural-urban transformations and provides a basis on which to identify ways in which they are relevant to IFAD in its work and investments to encourage inclusive and sustainable rural transformation. While other authors have published original research on this topic, this paper draws on a review of the literature to highlight the value of using a territorial approach, or lens, to understand and address the development challenges related to rural-urban linkages and food systems, including production through to sustainable consumption and food safety, food losses and waste.

The analysis and review in this paper are based on the premise that well-functioning and inclusive agricultural value chains, from production to transformation and marketing, are a critical dimension for building positive rural-urban linkages and, as recognized within the sustainable development goals (SDGs) (Target 11a<sup>2</sup>), that they can be a powerful means to help realize the ambitious vision of the post-2015 development agenda.<sup>3</sup>

As poverty continues, by and large, to be concentrated in rural areas in SSA, with key roles being played by rural-based populations and producers, particularly smallholders, in economic transformations, the analysis in this paper purposefully takes a rural entry point and perspective. This is also justified given that many international development actors and analysts take an urban or city entry point in addressing food system challenges in urban areas.

Section 2 sets out the background relating to rural-urban dynamics and urbanization processes in SSA, while Section 3 discusses the potential role of smallholders given urbanization and related transformations that are under way. Section 4 looks in greater detail at key trends and features of African food systems – where food systems are interpreted in their broader sense to include conditioning, processing, packaging, marketing and transport and all related activities, including analysis of food safety, food losses and waste – and how these relate to prospects for and processes of inclusive development in rural and urban areas.

Finally, the paper discusses entry points for policies that build on rural-urban interdependencies and synergies, or the rural-urban “nexus”,<sup>4</sup> to foster inclusive and sustainable food systems. The conclusions affirm the importance of integrated, coordinated and multistakeholder approaches to spatial, territorial and regional development that properly take into account the importance of strengthening rural-urban linkages and the complementarities between the people who reside in more rural and more urban settings, and to develop inclusive and sustainable food systems, and contribute more broadly to sustainable and inclusive development.

2. “Support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning”.
3. The paper draws on a chapter prepared for the joint UNCRD/UN-Habitat issue of the Regional Development Dialogue, Volume 35, on “Urban-Rural Linkages in Support of the New Urban Agenda”, written by the same authors (Hussein, Suttie and Bleicher, forthcoming).
4. See IFAD, 2014, on leveraging the rural-urban nexus for development.

# Background: Emerging rural-urban dynamics

Urbanization is a global megatrend. While the rate and nature of urbanization differ greatly between regions of the world and across SSA, the proportion of people living in urban areas has been rapidly increasing at a global level, in many cases at unprecedented rates, and particularly in many developing and emerging regions and countries. In 2014, around 3.9 billion people lived in settlements classified as urban, equivalent to 54 per cent of the world's population.<sup>5</sup> At a global level, this figure is expected to reach 66 per cent by 2050. By way of comparison, in 1950 just 30 per cent of the world's population was urban.

While increased proportions of people living in larger towns and cities can be observed throughout much of the developing world, rates of urbanization in Africa, particularly SSA, are, in general, lower than in other regions. In Africa, 40 per cent of the population lives in urban areas compared with 48 per cent in Asia, which is the next least urbanized region of the world (see Table 1). The process of urbanization is expected to continue in the decades ahead, however, with the figures rising to 56 per cent and 64 per cent, respectively, by 2050, and with SSA frequently described as the latest and most rapidly urbanizing region. The urbanization process is bringing major changes in economic and social development processes, with significant implications for inclusive development, investment, markets, infrastructure and finance in both rural and urban areas.

There is a high degree of heterogeneity across different regions and countries in Africa. In Eastern Africa, urbanization rates are still very low, with just one quarter of the region's population living in urban centres in 2014. By contrast, Middle Africa, Northern Africa, Southern Africa and Western Africa<sup>6</sup> all have higher proportions of the population living in urban areas: 44 per cent and above. The highest urbanization rates in Africa are found in Southern Africa<sup>7</sup> and Northern Africa.

While agglomeration in urban centres can offer certain development advantages – for example by enhancing access to services, generating economies of scale in the provision of education, health services, infrastructure, energy, water and sanitation, and business services – many people who live in rural areas, and particularly those in more remote areas, are often unable to access these services at reasonable cost in terms of time and resources. These people include social categories that typically constitute the majority of the poor and hungry: smallholders, particularly rural women and young people, the poorest people in rural areas, migrants and indigenous peoples.

5. Unless otherwise stated, figures for global and regional urban and rural populations are drawn from UNDESA (2014).
6. Regions referred to are as reported in UNDESA, 2014.
7. In the case of Southern Africa, the figure is higher in large part due to extremely high levels of urbanization in South Africa, by far the most populous country in the subregion.

Table 1: Urban and rural population: Asia, Africa and world, 2015 projections<sup>8</sup>

Regions	Population by area of residence Projections (millions)		Share of urban population (%)
	Urban	Rural	
World	3 957	3 368	54.0
Asia	2 113	2 272	48.2
Africa	472	695	40.4
<b>Africa subregions</b>			
Eastern Africa	101	294	25.6
Middle Africa	63	80	44.1
Northern Africa	112	105	51.6
Southern Africa	38	24	61.3
Western Africa	158	192	45.1

Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (UNDESA, 2014).

It is striking that in many regions that are undergoing rapid urbanization processes in Africa, outcomes with respect to poverty reduction and food security have not met expectations. Increased urbanization has usually not led to dramatic improvements in wealth, access to services and decent employment opportunities, or better living conditions for the majority of Africans. Indeed, in spite of high urbanization rates and rising incomes registered at an aggregate level across Africa, progress in reducing poverty levels has been modest – poverty rates falling by just 14 per cent (from 56.5 per cent to 48.4 per cent) between 1990 and 2010 – (UNECA et al., 2015), and the continent’s share of global poverty subsequently increasing from 15 per cent to 34 per cent in the same period (World Bank, 2014).

A review of the evidence indicates that sustainable models of urbanization need to be underpinned by mutually supportive and beneficial rural-urban linkages to foster an inclusive development process. The recognition that the majority of foodstuffs, and of course other essential agricultural products, are produced in rural areas and mostly consumed by the growing proportion of the world’s population living in urban centres<sup>9</sup> must be central to a balanced and integrated analysis, exploring how rural transformations affect both food consumption and production. This evidence confirms the importance of narrowing rural-urban gaps across key development indicators, including, for example, access to infrastructure, health, education and training.

8. 2015 figures are calculated using medium fertility variants from actual 2014 figures.

9. See, for example, IIED, 2015.

In support of this observation, UNECA/AU/AfDB/UNDP (2014) note that poverty is at least three times higher in rural areas than in urban areas across the continent, a situation brought about by “the deplorable state of rural infrastructure, rural livelihoods and youth employment, limited access to quality education and high child labour”. In Northern Africa, IFAD notes that poverty rates among the rural population are estimated at around 34 per cent compared with 18 per cent among the urban population (IFAD, forthcoming). Access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities is far worse in rural areas than in towns and cities: in Morocco, for instance, 94 per cent of the urban population has access to safe water compared with 58 per cent of the rural population. And in most countries, illiteracy rates are far higher in rural areas than in urban areas (especially for women). These disparities are driving inequitable patterns of development and constraining the potential of rural producers to contribute to, and benefit from, the creation of inclusive and sustainable food systems, access to safe food is maximized, and food losses and waste minimized. In contrast to dichotomous approaches to development that view rural and urban areas in isolation – often seeing them being at opposite ends of a spectrum – more holistic, territorial-based approaches<sup>10</sup> are needed to better address rural-urban inequalities, leverage interdependencies and promote policy coherence at both the sectorial and spatial levels. Fortunately, these issues are receiving greater attention at the regional and national levels: in Morocco, for example, transition towards territorial approaches to development is under way. As well as creating a new institution, with substantial financial resources, specifically dedicated to addressing prevailing gaps evident between the country’s urban and rural areas, the government has launched the innovative new 2020 Rural Development Strategy. This strategy prioritizes multidimensional territorial approaches through measures, such as the promotion of democratic autonomy for regional authorities, local participation in territorial planning, creation of local development associations and promoting increased productivity among smallholder farmers, the latter being seen as an avenue for greater incomes among this group while contributing to food availability in intermediate and larger cities (Suttie and Hussein, 2016).

The relationships between rural and urban areas are changing. The geographical spread of cities and peri-urban areas, the expansion of small and medium-sized towns in some areas and the reclassification of rural land into urban land are making it more difficult to clearly distinguish rural from urban areas. Indeed, in many countries, a growing “continuum” has been observed between farming zones and rural settlements, medium-sized towns and suburbs, peri-urban areas, informal settlements and larger cities. Nonetheless, to facilitate governance and the allocation of resources, countries maintain their own classifications of urban and rural for official purposes, defining the number of residents that makes an agglomeration officially a town or city. In most countries, a city is considered to start at between 1,000 and 5,000 residents. This paper discusses key interactions between rural and urban interfaces at the same time as recognizing the diversity and dynamism that lie behind the rural-urban distinction.

10. A territorial approach to development does not have one single definition, but it can be characterized by the development of a territory (including both areas that are “more rural” and those that are “more urban” in a defined region) by addressing the development of multiple sectors, implemented by a range of stakeholders and structured by multilevel governance – or governance that involves coordination and collaboration between local-, regional- and national-level authorities and stakeholders (Suttie and Hussein, 2016).

As boundaries become blurred, interdependencies are becoming even greater. Urban centres depend on rural areas for a range of goods and services, notably food, clean water, environmental services and raw materials among others. For example, wood fuel represents more than 80 per cent of domestic energy consumption in Africa, and it is expected that it will continue to be the main source of energy for the next decades (UN-Habitat, 2015). Rural areas in turn typically depend on urban areas for access to services, employment opportunities and markets. Under the right conditions, growing densities in urban areas potentially mean closer cities with increasing accessibility, access to services and more dynamic rural-urban relationships (Losch et al., 2014). Recognition of key and growing interdependencies must underpin balanced modalities of investment, fair and accessible markets, inclusive finance, and infrastructure in rural and urban areas. Territorial, regional and other spatial approaches to planning, governing and developing food systems and the ecosystems upon which they rely can address these interdependencies.

Rural and urban spaces and people are linked through food systems. Urbanization and growing incomes are driving transformations in food production and trade, with major implications for smallholders, peri-urban producers, and those reliant upon agricultural waged employment for a significant share of their livelihoods. It is therefore increasingly recognized that a territorial approach and systems perspective that encompasses the complex range of actors and interactions relating to food production, processing, marketing and consumption within a regional space is needed. A "city-region food system" approach tries to do this by including the small and medium-sized towns that provide critical links between rural producers and urban services, markets and employment opportunities (Forster, Hussein and Mattheisen, 2015).

# Urbanization, structural transformation and food systems: The role of smallholders

## The contemporary landscape and lessons from history

Smallholder family farmers<sup>11</sup> dominate the agricultural landscape in sub-Saharan Africa. Smallholder units represent an estimated 80 per cent of farms in the region and contribute up to 90 per cent of food production in some African countries (Wiggins & Keats 2013). The contribution smallholders make to food production in Africa is significant, despite the enormous limitations they face in accessing and using new technologies, inputs and technical support, and accessing output market opportunities. The potential returns of addressing these limitations and fostering a conducive environment for smallholder agriculture can be expected to lead to improvements in food security, strengthen rural economies and contribute to balanced and sustainable urbanization. Inclusive rural businesses, through which smallholders are better linked with markets for inputs, outputs and services in both rural and urban areas, are an important complement to a focus on agriculture.

The potential of productivity and income growth on smallholder family farms to contribute to greater food security in rural and urban areas, and to underpin sustainable urbanization processes, has been well documented and supported by historical evidence (HLPE, 2013). Key mechanisms through which agricultural growth, as supported by evidence from Asia and Latin America over the last 40 years (HLPE, 2013), has underpinned urbanization and industrialization processes include:

- (i) Higher agricultural productivity leads to greater labour availability for non-agricultural activities and employment.
- (ii) Increased profits and exports from agricultural production finances imports of key technology and capital that can be invested in emerging urban sectors, particularly non-farm sectors.
- (iii) Higher smallholder incomes raise demand for non-food consumer goods and services, creating new markets for urban businesses to exploit.
- (iv) Expanded marketing engagement of smallholder farmers in agricultural value chains stimulates commercial distribution and processing activities in both rural and urban areas.

The labour intensity of smallholder activities leads to opportunities to generate remunerative employment for large numbers of poor and vulnerable people. Smallholder-generated agricultural growth can have important positive effects on non-food sectors and the wider

11. A narrower definition of “smallholder” than that indicated in footnote 1 is used here, given the definitions used in the literature from which the statistics are drawn, and in order to comply with parameters used in frequently cited data on smallholders in Africa by researchers such as Wiggins (2009) and Nagayets (2005). This definition is based on the physical size of smallholder farms (less than two hectares) and farm management at the household level, characterized by a marked dependence on household labour.

economy where rural-urban linkages are strong. The effects of agricultural growth are transmitted to industry and services via forward, backward and consumer demand linkages. Consumption demand linkages occur when increases in household income are spent on locally produced consumer goods and services, thus stimulating production in non-farm sectors; backward production linkages are generated when increased agricultural output is achieved by greater use of locally manufactured inputs or locally provided services such as fertilizer and machinery; and forward production linkages are the result of local processing and distribution of agricultural produce such as restaurants, small retail outlets for processed and non-processed food, and storage facilities (Haggblade, 2005). Enhancing this dynamic in SSA represents a significant development opportunity.

In Asia, enhanced productivity in agriculture since the green revolution has been a driver of economic diversification and structural transformation and has supported – and been supported by – the strengthening of linkages (economic and institutional) between rural and urban areas. This has led to the share of agriculture in Asian economies declining, even as productivity growth in the sector has continued. However, in sub-Saharan Africa, the share of agriculture in the economy is still relatively high (some 60 per cent of the economically active population is engaged in agriculture) (Losch et al., 2014), farm productivity remains low compared with other regions, and urbanization has not been supported by thriving manufacturing or industrial sectors.

Empirical evidence demonstrates the potential for smallholder farming to contribute to inclusive economic development and that smallholders have been key drivers of economic transformations in much of Asia and Latin America over the past 40 years (HLPE, 2013). Despite persistent yield gaps in Africa, as compared with other developing regions, Wiggins (2009) notes that 13 countries doubled their agricultural production in two decades since the 1980s. The factors behind agricultural growth are complex, but a strong body of research covering a wide variety of countries has demonstrated the comparative advantage of smallholder farms in terms of land productivity performance.<sup>12</sup> Thus, there are robust reasons to be optimistic about the role of smallholders in promoting inclusive economic development outcomes in Africa.

However, in order for smallholders to fulfil this role in a changing context with rapid urbanization, investments to improve productivity and increase access to finance and markets in urban areas are needed. Facilitating access to markets and service centres in small and medium-sized towns is particularly important, as they are often easier for smallholders to access, particularly those in hinterland areas. In this respect, the interface between agricultural value chains and territorial approaches needs to be better understood and leveraged. Agricultural value chains usually function across territories, linking people from different sectors and spaces. It will be crucial that the promotion of rural-urban linkages does not lead to the extraction of value from rural smallholders, but instead creates enhanced opportunities for rural and urban people upstream and downstream, and enables smallholders to meet more exacting standard and certification requirements associated with urbanization. Where appropriate and enabling territorial environments encourage such investments, opportunities for smallholders to do business with urban-based supermarkets, traders and agribusiness operators can provide mutually beneficial and inclusive outcomes.

12. For example, see: HLPE, 2013; FAO and OECD, 2012; Wiggins, 2009; Wiggins, 2016; Lipton, 2005; and Sen, 1966.



## Urbanization patterns in Africa: Implications for smallholders

Urbanization has the potential to offer new agricultural and non-agricultural economic opportunities for rural people and smallholders. Growing urban/rural population ratios, and increasing *average* urban incomes,<sup>13</sup> point to the possibility that markets will expand for smallholders in the proximate and hinterland areas around urban centres. In addition to food, rural sectors play a central role in delivering a range of goods and services to meet the growing needs for clean water, energy, environmental services and raw materials. Growing population density and the spatial expansion of urban areas potentially facilitate better access to markets and services for rural people – and more dynamic rural-urban interactions – calling for the need for territorial and ecosystem-wide approaches to planning and development.

At the same time, the specificities and diversity of urbanization processes and agricultural markets in SSA need to be better understood. SSA will not necessarily follow the same types of urbanization and processes of integration into global food and agriculture value chains as has been seen in Latin America and parts of Asia. There is significant heterogeneity of subregional urbanization and agricultural market development processes, requiring differentiated responses to address the constraints and opportunities faced by distinct types of rural producers, specifically smallholders, in order to effectively meet demand in urban markets. The classic structural transformation of agriculture that accompanied urbanization in countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and other industrialized countries – based on high use of chemical inputs and mechanization, and accompanied by rapidly growing productivity and a huge shedding of agricultural jobs – is unlikely to be replicable at the same scale in SSA, particularly because of the unavailability of sufficient employment alternatives (Losch et al. 2014). This transformation pathway has encouraged farm specialization, increased farm sizes and advanced the development of “corporate” agriculture. These trends have not tended to favour agricultural labour. Public policies, therefore, have important roles to play in smoothing transformation processes, supporting smallholder farming, and encouraging support for development pathways that favour the creation of new job opportunities that rural people can take up as appropriate (ibid).

The nature and pattern of urbanization and the depth of rural-urban connectivity (via infrastructure, roads, transport, electricity, communications, etc.) will, to a large extent, define the degree to which hoped-for opportunities from urbanization can be realized by rural people. Globally, in countries where urbanization has been associated with large-scale reductions in poverty and hunger, economic growth linkages between rural and urban areas have been catalysts for inclusive development. Driving these linkages has been increased productivity, access to markets and incomes among smallholders. For example, in Viet Nam’s Mekong Delta, a recent study by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), IFAD, the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development and other donors has found that farming zones and urban centres have developed mutually beneficial relationships leading to economic growth and reduced poverty. For urban residents, higher incomes have led to better diets, in particular, growing consumption of fruits and vegetables. For rural smallholders, income from seasonal migration to cities has often been used to invest in high-value fruit orchards, reducing poverty and increasing living standards (IIED, 2015).

13. In many developing country urban centres though, the number of people living below national and international poverty lines can be very high despite higher average incomes overall.



These elements all inform IFAD's operational approaches to developing inclusive models of hunger and poverty reduction, which are cited to complement the analysis in this paper with practical examples of approaches. For instance, in Uganda, the IFAD-supported Community Agricultural Infrastructure Improvement Programme promoted economic empowerment of smallholder family farmers by investing US\$81.9 million in supporting infrastructure development for district and community access roads and markets and provision of agroprocessing equipment. The promotion of community participation in the selection and implementation of local infrastructure development projects, particularly of rural access roads and market centres, was central to the success<sup>14</sup> of the programme. Organizational committees, such as road management committees, played a critical role in overseeing construction, resolving land conflicts and certifying completed works. Market management committees ensured maintenance and operation of markets by providing efficient handling of simple repairs, maintaining hygiene and liaising between vendors and local governments. In total, 200,000 households directly benefited from the programme.

### The potential of small and medium-sized towns

Discussions on the contribution of small and medium towns to development have a long history and have undergone a variety of shifts over the past several decades in Africa. Much research over the past 30 years has shown that small and medium-sized towns play critical roles in fostering dynamic rural-urban linkages in Africa, through food systems, labour, migration and other interactions (see, for example, Tacoli, 2015a, and Baker, 1990).

After initially failing to live up to expectations as centres for innovation, multiplication and growth, small and medium-sized towns in the 1970s were again seen as centres for exploitation where resources were extracted from rural areas for the benefit of cities. This was no doubt influenced by the traditional colonial role of primate cities as export harbours for resources extracted from rural areas, which persisted for a time throughout much of post-colonial Africa (Pedersen, 1990). However, this has been changing since the 1980s, when a variety of countries introduced new urban policies favouring the development of small towns. Subsequently, the important role of these centres in providing key services to expand agricultural productivity, providing non-farm income diversification opportunities, and absorbing some of the rural migrant population to reduce stress on large cities has been increasingly acknowledged.

The influence on the transformation of small and medium-sized towns in shaping the degree of inclusivity of urbanization processes is important to emphasize. IFAD (2010) notes that urbanization, and particularly the growth of small or medium-sized centres and the growing integration of rural and urban economies, is spurring the development of the non-farm economy. In Africa, around half the urban-based population live in small to medium-sized urban settlements of less than 500,000 people, compared with two thirds in Europe and one third in North America (UNDESA, 2014, cited in IIED, 2015). These small urban centres have the potential to play a key role in the development of inclusive food systems and represent a crucial conduit in rural-urban linkages. Economic interdependencies between urban businesses and rural smallholders are often stronger around small urban centres.

14. In July 2013, IFAD and the African Development Bank, with whom it worked in partnership, received the Development Impact Honors award from the United States Department of the Treasury for their contribution to the programme.

These centres offer opportunities for rural producers to access markets, particularly smallholders who may find it difficult to integrate into large supply chains requiring strict quality and quantity specifications (IIED, 2015). Smaller urban settlements are often centres where rural non-farm activities are consolidated and much employment is located. As such, they often attract migrants searching for non-farm employment opportunities or waged work on local farms. Notably, research by Christiaensen and Todo (2013) in the United Republic of Tanzania finds that migration to small towns is more likely to lead to poverty reduction compared with migration to large cities.

In contrast, where urbanization is focused disproportionately around the growth of large cities, with a consequent neglect of the development of the rural non-farm economy and secondary or small towns, impacts in terms of poverty reduction tend to be more limited. Lack of infrastructure, as well as missing public goods and services in small, intermediate and secondary towns, has resulted in limited creation of economic opportunities alongside urbanization in many African economies.

Evidence confirms the need to acknowledge the roles of dynamic small and medium towns in developing local smallholder agriculture, diversifying livelihoods, creating non-agricultural economic and employment opportunities, and fostering broader development. Berdegúe et al. (2015) associate the presence of these centres with greater poverty reduction in three countries studied in Latin America,<sup>15</sup> concluding that “rural and territorial development largely depends on what happens (or does not happen) in these...centres”. Christiaensen and Todo (2013) find that countries fostering migration from agriculture into the rural non-farm economy and secondary towns yield more inclusive growth patterns and faster poverty reduction than countries where migration is centred around the growth of large cities. Similarly, Hutter and Neidhardt (2006) assert that the inclusion of small and medium-sized towns in development interventions was a key element in the sustainable benefits of projects in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia. Clearly, more attention – and investment – is needed on leveraging the role of small and medium-sized towns to provide a bridge between rural and urban economies, which will provide more efficient and sustainable urbanization pathways and ensure that large numbers of people are not left behind in development processes (see Tacoli, 2015a).

15. The three countries in the analysis were Chile, Colombia and Mexico.

# Understanding rural-urban dynamics and food systems in SSA: Key trends and opportunities

## Trends

### Changing diets

Changing food consumption patterns are shaping the demand for food in both rural and urban areas. New findings show that rural poor people and other households are altering their diets. This is happening in Africa along similar lines to the changes observed in Asia. For instance, in Eastern and Southern Africa, Dolislager, Tschirley and Reardon (2015) estimate that the share of non-grains in the total food expenditure of an average urban household is 66 per cent compared with 61 per cent for the average rural household and 54 per cent among poor rural households; in Asia, the respective figures are 74 per cent (urban households), 63 per cent (rural households) and 62 per cent (rural poor). Other notable dietary changes observed include greater demand, particularly in urban areas, for processed foods, meat products, and diverse fresh fruits and vegetables. All of these are positively associated with higher incomes and urbanization. The nutritional impacts of the increased consumption of products with higher nutritional values are potentially very positive. However, the rapid increase in the consumption of more processed foods that has accompanied rising incomes and urbanization in other regions beyond Africa has tended to lead to the increasing prevalence of “over-nutrition”. Some 1.4 billion people are estimated to be overweight globally, with 500 million of them obese (FAO, 2013). Also noteworthy are the potential environmental threats associated with dietary transitions towards more meat-based diets, which are less efficient per calorie. These all have important implications for spatial and territorial planning to foster inclusive investments and policies that support balanced rural and urban development.

### Larger food markets

Alongside urbanization, people increasingly need to buy the food they consume, while they are also increasing the amount of non-grains they consume. This process tends to increase the size of food markets. The United States Department of Agriculture (2013) estimates that food sales in Africa will rise by almost 60 per cent between 2012 and 2022. The extent to which smallholders – who constitute the majority of farmers in SSA as well as a large proportion of the poor – are able to benefit from these opportunities will be an important determinant of the inclusiveness of any food systems-driven growth that is fostered through policies and development interventions. It will require investments to strengthen agricultural value chains and food systems, coupled with efforts to strengthen the capacities of rural producers, for example, in meeting norms and standards.

### **Growing proportions of net food buyers**

There is a growing tendency of rural people – including the poor – to rely on purchased and prepared food. In Eastern and Southern Africa, Dolislager, Tschirley and Reardon (2015) find that rural households purchase 44 per cent of the food they consume, with 95 per cent of the rural poor purchasing at least 5 per cent of their food. Consequently, it may be useful to re-examine commonly held assumptions that changing diets among urban middle classes are transforming patterns of demand for food. In fact, it seems that much of the transformation in diets is being driven by sub-segments of the poor, and that the rural market for purchased food is actually bigger (in total volume) than the urban one in some subregions in Africa (ibid.). A more balanced approach to analysing drivers of food system transformation from the demand side – looking at rural consumption markets as well as those in urban areas – may be required in order to ascertain spatial dynamics and appropriate actions to foster inclusive development outcomes for society as a whole. It will also be important that food security narratives and policies are informed by the recognition that a high, and often overlooked, proportion of rural populations is now net food buyers. This reinforces the need to increase the incomes and purchasing power of people in rural areas.

### **Increasing importance of non-farm income**

As African economies undergo a range of transformations and increasing shares of people become net food buyers, non-farm income sources are growing in importance for rural people. Non-agricultural sources of income already accounted for an estimated 37 per cent of rural incomes across Africa during the 1990s and 2000s (Haggblade, Hazell and Reardon, 2007).<sup>16</sup> This growth was strong even in countries where agriculture remains the dominant economic sector in terms of proportion of GDP generated: in the United Republic of Tanzania, for instance, rural non-farm income shares increased from 11 per cent in 1991 to 46 per cent in 2000 (ibid.). At least some of this trend can be attributed to increased mobility – in particular seasonal migration, as the physical distances between rural and urban worlds diminishes – and the sending of migrant remittances. The growing importance of non-farm employment among rural residents, including those engaged in food production, will have important implications for the way policies and programmes interact with food systems in a post-2015 world.

## **Opportunities**

### **Urbanization and food systems**

Urbanization can offer opportunities with respect to developing food systems that are inclusive and sustainable. In particular, where urbanization processes are associated with macroeconomic frameworks and investments that promote inclusive, broad-based growth (for example, progressive taxation, social protection systems, investment in core public goods and infrastructure), new and larger food markets can be expected to emerge. In many cases, this encompasses the emergence of market opportunities for non-staple products, such as meat, dairy, fruit and vegetables, as middle-class populations widen. In addition, the emergence and growth of non-farm sectors creates employment and income diversification

16. The informal nature of many rural activities, especially in part-time and seasonal occupations, pose particular challenges in compiling reliable data in this area and should therefore be viewed with some caution.

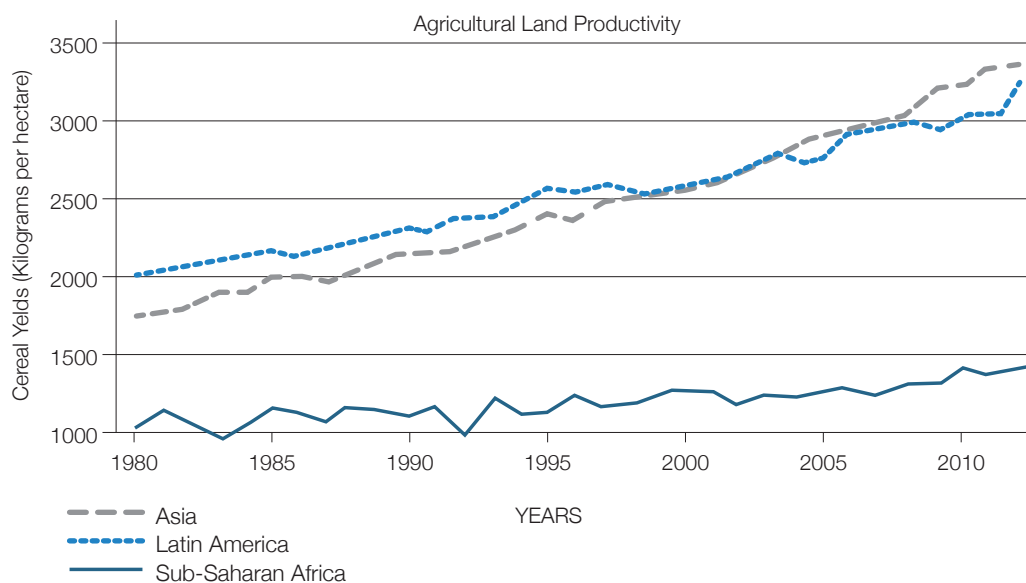
opportunities for smallholder families – particularly those living near or at the periphery of cities for whom seasonal migration or commuting are viable. More permanent forms of migration also potentially increase the remittances flowing back to rural producers, as well as generating options for increased investment in farm or non-farm businesses in their communities of origin. However, in order for these opportunities to be realized, a range of conditions must be in place, including transport systems, cheap and reliable remittance facilities, and investment in training of smallholder producers.

### Need to close productivity gaps in African agriculture

The growing reliance of both urban and rural poor people on food purchases suggests that investments to close productivity gaps at different stages along food value chains to reduce costs of local foods to consumers should lead to inclusive economic gains.

The larger share of income that poor people in general devote to food purchases implies that poor people would gain most from increased efficiencies and productivity improvements in segments of agricultural and food value chains, such as storage, transport, processing, packaging and marketing, that would ultimately reduce prices to consumers. Productivity gaps in African agriculture must be addressed in order to achieve the changes needed for broader welfare gains (see van Ittersum et al., 2013). From the production side, the scope of the issue is illustrated by studies showing that cereal yields across sub-Saharan Africa are significantly lower than the yields of comparator early transforming countries from Asia and Latin America (ACET, 2014, see Figure 1).<sup>17</sup> Further, in West Africa, farmer yields from rainfed crops are reported to be typically below one half of their potential (Nin-Pratt et al., 2011). Investments and policies in infrastructure, agricultural research and extension, and the provision of finance and other key services will increase yields and quality, and therefore must be central to any inclusive economic development agenda in Africa.

Figure 1: Lagging agricultural productivity in sub-Saharan Africa



Source: World Development Indicators.

17. Comparator early transforming countries in this benchmark analysis comprise Brazil, Chile, Indonesia, Malaysia, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam.

### **Strengthening agricultural value chains**

Increasing productivity alone is not enough to enable smallholder farmers to access opportunities that emerge in food systems in the process of urbanization. Strengthening agricultural value chains, and bridging the gaps between the different elements of these value chains, is critical. These may relate to access to inputs and other elements of production processes, or to storage and processing, or indeed to establishing adequate transport facilities to ensure products get to the right urban markets at the right time. This means investing in strengthening the links within agricultural value chains from production, storage, processing and packaging through to transport and marketing, and building producer capacities to respond to changing consumer tastes and to meet quality and safety standards. Such investments provide potential for creating more and better opportunities for both rural and urban people across agricultural value chains to take up business opportunities that may ultimately enhance the livelihoods and food security of groups who are often at particular risk of food insecurity and malnutrition in rural areas – rural women, young people, migrants and indigenous peoples.

### **Domestic and international markets**

Market opportunities for the majority of African smallholders are likely to be greater in domestic markets and, to some extent, in regional markets. Domestic agricultural production, in SSA in particular, is more geared to supplying local, national or, in some cases, regional markets than to supplying global value chains and international markets. Growing local, national and regional markets for agricultural products, food and starch products are becoming increasingly important in the commodity chains that link agricultural producers with urban consumers and other buyers of agricultural products in African urban centres (Hussein, 2015). However, these local markets are frequently not highly profitable and can be subject to price manipulation by major players in these markets to the detriment of smallholders.

Equally, international competition, through trade and producer support measures for example, coupled with the dependency of many African countries on food imports, particularly coastal states apparently related to urbanization, creates barriers for smallholder competitiveness in many domestic and regional markets. Agricultural policies in Africa over several decades have often emphasized cash crops for export. At the same time, there has been a growing dependence on imports of staple foods such as cereals (including wheat), grains and pulses. In 2012, SSA countries spent US\$37.7 billion on food imports (Montpellier Panel, 2014). An Africa-wide study by FAO for the period 2000-2005 showed that the majority of Africa's low-income countries (mostly in SSA) were net food importers, importing US\$17 per capita per year. These countries had difficulty covering their food import bills, as their export revenues were limited. Furthermore, in many sub-Saharan African countries, more than 50 per cent of small-scale farmers (73 per cent in Ethiopia) are net buyers of staple grains (IIED, 2013). Domestic food production has remained relatively low and increased by 2.7 per cent per year, just barely above the population growth rate, implying that any increase in per capita consumption had to be met by an increase in imports (FAO, 2011).

This may have the effect of squeezing out opportunities for smallholders to benefit from growing urban markets in SSA (Hussein, 2015). Moreover, in some countries, past policies have shaped demand for food in a way that will be difficult to reverse. Policies that have encouraged food imports, focusing on satisfying the demand of urban consumers for affordable food rather than supporting the livelihoods of rural producers, have led to a situation where consumers have become accustomed to imported crop varieties and foods at the expense of local varieties. As a result, local crop varieties often have a bad image among consumers in African towns and cities, for reasons that extend beyond quality and taste (Demont, 2013). For national food security and macroeconomic stability, it can therefore make good economic sense to invest in the development of national and regional smallholder agricultural value chains, linking smallholder farmers and agricultural production to urban markets through agricultural value chains.

### **Developing the potential of youth**

The proportion of people of working age is increasing in many of the world's developing countries and regions, creating the conditions for growth in rural and urban areas (IFAD 2010). This is particularly so in SSA, where approximately 60 per cent of the population are currently under the age of 25 (UNDESA, 2013). Given this, it would be fair to suggest that the future of agriculture in SSA lies in the hands of young people, with strategically planned investments in today's youth vital to link their needs for economic and social advancement with the mandate to expand food production. The urgency of this issue is reflected in many of IFAD's projects across the African continent. For example, IFAD-supported projects in The Gambia are working with existing village groups (*kafos*), bringing together young people, women or other people with common interests to facilitate their access to productive land.<sup>18</sup> Projects have been successful in facilitating access to land for women and youth through the land-for-labour arrangements between landless young people and landowners. Establishing village vegetable gardens managed by youth *kafos* has also enabled young people to gain access to land that they can cultivate and make an income from. Projects both rehabilitate existing vegetable gardens to improve production and provide training to *kafos* members in best practices and marketing of vegetables. Youth *kafos* also receive starter kits, which include seeds, fertilizers, chemicals and small tools, as well as small equipment for watering, transport and the preparation of produce for markets (carts, watering cans, hoses, sprayers, and tubs and tables). In order to secure these lands, the projects support the community in registering its land following written agreement between the *kafos* and traditional and government authorities.

The need for approaches such as these is particularly pressing given the difficulties urban economies are experiencing with respect to generating employment opportunities for Africa's young rural people. Africa's demographic structure is very young, with over 60 per cent of Africa's population currently below the age of 25 (Jayne, Meyer and Traub, 2014). Many of these young people live and work in small towns and settlements. Even under the most optimistic scenarios, there are doubts about the potential of urban economies to absorb these young people into waged employment (*ibid.*). Clearly, the role of agriculture, and smallholder family farming in particular, in providing decent livelihood opportunities for youth – and harnessing balanced development processes – in the years ahead will be a crucial one.

18. For more on the role of *kafos* in fostering local participation in development and in supporting agricultural and rural development more broadly in The Gambia, see Brown et al., 2002.



### **Gender equality and women's empowerment**

Smallholder and family farming is a major activity for women throughout Africa, in addition to responding to household food security and nutrition needs, typically offering them income-earning opportunities, higher social status and enhanced intra-household bargaining power. However, entrenched gender gaps in rural areas with respect to access to productivity-enhancing resources (e.g. land and water, irrigation, new varieties and innovations), services and training mean that rural women are less likely to enjoy the benefits of increased access to markets and better rural-urban connectivity. As household work distribution is typically gendered, with tasks such as food storage and preparation falling to women (as well as other time-consuming duties such as fetching water and caring for children), lack of time and space constraints are factors that can significantly constrain the productive potential of women farmers (Tacoli, Bukhari and Fisher, 2013).

Addressing gender inequalities, which tend to be particularly stark in the rural sphere, is recognized as being an indispensable tool for achieving food security. Women make up a significant proportion of the global agricultural labour force, while gender-based inequalities in access to productive resources are estimated to constrain their yields by 20-30 per cent, resulting in foregone production (FAO, 2011). Further, where women have more control over household incomes there tends to be greater welfare-enhancing and poverty-reducing impacts. Given this, investments in smallholder family farming that explicitly address the barriers that rural women are facing can be expected to provide significant benefits in terms of reducing poverty and eradicating food insecurity.

Responding to these gendered realities has been a cornerstone of IFAD's work, where gender equality means equal access to technology, education, financial services (including credit), basic infrastructure (e.g. water supply) and decision-making, as well as shared distribution of labour and household responsibilities. The empowerment of rural women is central to achieving thriving, inclusive rural areas that are a precondition for developing sustainable food systems. The benefits of prioritizing gender equality have been widely documented. Examples from documented IFAD-financed programmes in SSA include: rural women in Sahelian Mali diversifying their income sources through market vegetable gardens and increased access to training and markets, which have enabled them to meet the growing demand for vegetables in surrounding regions; and in Senegal's groundnut basin, encouraging women into leadership positions in grass-roots organizations, which has had a transformational impact on gender relations (IFAD, 2015a).

### **Migration, labour mobility and remittances**

Where connectivity to urban areas is strong and information flows smoothly, seasonal or permanent migration can offer a valuable household income diversification strategy, particularly for those in peri-urban areas. Remittances from family members who have migrated to towns or other countries constitute an increasingly important source of income for rural households. Efficient, rapid and low-cost channels to transfer remittances from urban to rural areas will play an increasingly important role.



Enabling gender-sensitive approaches to fostering labour mobility is particularly important and should respond to the opportunities that migration offers for the empowerment of women in terms of access to paid employment outside the family, access to services, and relaxation of the rigid gender norms that prevail throughout many rural societies. On the other hand, UN Habitat (2013a) indicates that migrating women are likely to continue experiencing forms of gender discrimination – including gender gaps in labour and employment, lack of decent work opportunities, lower pay, unequal tenure rights, limited access to assets or possibilities to accumulate assets, threats to personal safety, and poor representation in formal structures of urban governance. Women are therefore not always well placed to benefit from economic opportunities available in their destination towns and cities. In addition, women and girls are the most affected when governments struggle to maintain services and infrastructure; migrant women living in poor urban neighbourhoods often have to compensate for a lack of services and infrastructure by working longer hours and caring for children who are frequently ill due to inadequate water and sanitation.

# Policies and actions for inclusive and sustainable food systems in Africa

## **Reducing rural-urban inequalities, strengthening linkages and improving connectivity**

Increased investments are needed in education, health, infrastructure and modern energy services in rural areas. This is necessary to strengthen the human capacities required to enable African countries to transform the structure of their economies and achieve higher productivity in all sectors, but particularly in agriculture, in the years ahead. This will also be critical for emerging urban-based activities as new sectors emerge and higher agricultural productivity allows labour to be released into these areas, building synergies to foster positive rural-urban development dynamics.

Smallholder access to urban markets, productivity-enhancing technologies and training opportunities are contingent upon greater connectivity and smoother flows of goods, services and information between rural and urban areas. In this respect, improving rural-urban connectivity will be critical for food systems and broader national development. Particular areas of priority include: facilitating linkages between rural and urban economies through better infrastructure for transportation and communication; sound institutions facilitating inclusive food systems, and leveraging the role of small and medium-sized towns as conduits between rural and urban economies; financial inclusion and migration flows spanning rural and urban areas; and sustainable management of ecosystems and natural resources shared by urban and rural areas.

## **Strengthening and improving the inclusivity of agricultural value chains**

Developing stronger connections between the different segments in agricultural value chains can foster wider market opportunities for smallholders and can lead to inclusive outcomes for rural areas and cities that depend on this group for the majority of their food. Increasing demand for agricultural products, particularly pronounced for higher-value perishable goods, is an important driver of agricultural value chain development. When smallholders can tap into these new and expanded sources of demand to a sufficient extent to increase their own spending on local goods and services, the basis for developing diversified local economies exists.

Adopting a value chain approach and prioritizing strategic and complementary investments along the whole value chain will be needed. For instance, at the input supply stage, the training and employment of people as input vendors in distribution networks is an effective means of promoting inclusivity. Ensuring equal access by smallholders, particularly rural women and young people, to improved seeds, other agricultural inputs, rural finance and advisory

services is critical to enabling them to honour contracts, and to meet expected production quotas and quality and safety standards. At the processing and marketing stages, upgrading storage facilities, using modern technology to distribute timely information, and addressing infrastructure challenges all help to foster inclusive and tightly linked value chains.

The role of local traders in value chains is key and frequently under-recognized. These traders are often able to buy the entirety of the harvest of smallholder farmers – in contrast to supermarkets and multinationals companies that frequently are only able or willing to purchase a proportion of it because of the relatively strict quality, grading and food safety requirements. Given the key role local traders, who often operate in informal markets, play in providing markets for smallholders, the need for local authorities to provide greater support must be emphasized. This includes fostering inclusive market approaches and business models and establishing regulations that safeguard against monopsonic structures (Suttie and Hussein, 2016).

These approaches can build mutually beneficial gains for rural and urban areas and populations. For example, when smallholders, particularly rural women and youth, have access to attractive markets for their products, they are better placed to invest in improving their productivity. This enables rural and urban-based companies to profitably sell production factors such as machinery, improved seeds, fertilizers and irrigation systems. This potential is particularly growing in sub-Saharan Africa, where input markets are estimated to increase from around US\$8 billion a year in 2010 to US\$35 billion a year by 2030 (Sanghvi, Simons and Uchoa, 2011, cited in GIZ, 2012).

In addition, more emphasis on developing appropriate policy environments that stimulate domestic and regional markets will be vital for smallholders. In general, for national food security and macroeconomic stability, it makes good economic sense to invest in the development of national and regional smallholder agricultural value chains, linking smallholder farmers and agricultural production to urban markets through agricultural value chains. Again, emphasizing the role of small and medium towns will be important in this respect. To ensure the inclusiveness of investments, simultaneous efforts to enhance transparency and reduce transaction costs in domestic markets will be needed, such as strengthening information and communication technologies and market information systems.

Analysing and responding to the effects of urbanization on local, national and regional consumption habits is also a matter of priority. Changing patterns of consumption in urban areas are critically affecting agricultural value chains through the types of products that are purchased, and whether they come from local, regional or international markets. Understanding what fresh and processed foods urban consumers buy and eat, and why, is central to understanding where opportunities lie for smallholders in SSA's urban markets (see IIED, 2015). If smallholders are to benefit effectively from these markets and sell higher-value products to food processors and to urban consumers, they will need to be able to access the facilities to condition, semi-process and package fresh products (Hussein, 2015). In particular, it will be important to ensure smallholders are equipped with the necessary capacities and equipment to ensure food is safe and nutritious and that it does not spoil before reaching urban markets. This implies the need to invest in transport and storage, and in ensuring smallholders are able to acquire the skills needed to comply with transparent quality and safety standards, thus allowing them to benefit from state-run programmes (for example, school feeding).

## **Adopting territorial or city-region food system approaches that encompass cities and the regions they are situated in**

Regional and subregional differences shape the degree to which rural people living around urban centres and in hinterlands can take advantage of urban linkages and markets. A systems perspective is therefore vital to analysing and understanding the linkages from smallholder production, agricultural value chains and consumer demand – whether that be in urban or rural areas. In this context, a territorial perspective and city-region food system approaches create a critical lens for analysis, underpinning policy transformation and implementation (Forster, Hussein and Mattheisen, 2015).

Dynamic city regional food systems will enable balance between rural and urban development, facilitating easier access to affordable and nutritious food for both rural and urban people. More closely linked, and in many cases shorter, value chains – supported by territorial ecosystem governance approaches – will provide wider opportunities to smallholders, linking producers and consumers from urban and rural areas to markets, and contributing to more sustainable and inclusive modalities of food production and consumption. In particular, regional disparities and territorial differences need to be dealt with through integrated approaches, capable of mobilizing untapped resources and involving subnational governments and relevant stakeholders in food systems. A territorial approach to developing inclusive and sustainable food systems is needed to foster coherence among different sectorial policies and levels of government. This requires better multilevel governance systems and the capacity to scale up local and regional experiences implemented at the community level by connecting them with the national policy frameworks (see OECD, 2015 and OECD/FAO/UNCDF, 2016). Key in this respect will be decentralized governance that brings local actors to the table and ensures the interests of often underrepresented rural groups, in particular, smallholders, are represented. For this, strong civil society presence and functional democratic institutions must be in place to ensure local governments are accountable to and represent their constituents (Suttie and Hussein, 2016). For example, in Niger, the government is implementing an agricultural transformation plan, called the Nigeriens Feed Nigeriens initiative (or 3N initiative), that focuses on the concentration of interventions at the local level, granting territorial authorities the roles of designing and implementing activities. The 3N initiative is based on geographic programming and operational convergence of activities, focusing on synergy of interventions and on multisector and multiactor approaches. Action plans are implemented by local authorities and monitored by the High Commissioner for the 3N initiative.

## **Creating decent jobs in food systems, particularly for rural women, youth and migrants**

The labour intensity of small-scale farming places it at a particular advantage in terms of employment generation. Given that many of the poorest people are net food buyers and rely on income from their labour in order to be able to access sufficient nutritious food, the nexus between decent employment, food systems and food and nutrition security deserves greater attention. In this respect, it is notable that poor progress in job creation, despite relatively strong and sustained economic growth, has been cited as a major reason why growth and rising per capita incomes in many of the least developed countries – including those

in Africa – has often not led to significant reductions in poverty and hunger (UNCTAD, 2013). Consequently, supporting labour-intensive sectors such as smallholder farming should be a matter of priority. More specifically, providing incentives and regulations, where appropriate, for supermarkets and agribusiness operators sourcing from rural areas and small towns to prioritize the creation of decent employment across value chains, from local producers, input suppliers, processors, transport workers and so on, will be central to ensuring that people working in food systems are themselves able to access sufficient, safe and nutritious food.

Stronger urban-rural linkages can strengthen the empowerment of women in terms of access to paid employment and access to services and changing norms related to gender roles. However, women are not always well placed to benefit from economic opportunities available in their destination towns and cities. A gender-sensitive approach is therefore critical in efforts to enhance the benefits that accrue to women in agriculture and their access to decent agricultural and non-agricultural job opportunities both in rural and in urban areas. Creating decent jobs for disadvantaged groups who are traditionally over-represented among the poor (particularly rural people, women, young unemployed and migrants) is one of the most effective means of ensuring inclusive outcomes from growth and transformation. This need is particularly pressing in Africa where it is projected that, by the year 2025, 25 million young people will enter the labour force annually (World Bank, 2013). In this respect, creating opportunities for rural women so they can participate, and benefit from, economic and political processes is a key priority. In turn, this will improve their ability to access productive resources (particularly land), knowledge, modern jobs and entrepreneurship or management skills, thus better positioning them to participate in rural and urban-based business.

Significantly, evidence demonstrates that when women are empowered, it has significant benefits for the nutritional and educational outcomes of children. Efforts to strengthen farmers' organizations and other rural people's organizations and to ensure women and other minorities and disadvantaged groups such as indigenous groups have greater voice and are involved in decision-making processes are important to achieving women's empowerment.<sup>19</sup>

### Facilitating livelihoods, enhancing migration and remittance flows

Temporary and longer-term migration from rural areas to larger towns and cities across the rural-urban nexus can help to diversify incomes and expand livelihood opportunities (Tacoli, 2011). Given migration's inherent role in transformative development processes, and the likelihood that some smallholders will struggle to compete as food systems transform, policies designed to constrain migration can be counterproductive. Some governments have adopted specific policies that aim to reduce these migration flows, with the number of governments designing such policies doubling since 1996 (Tacoli, 2015b). Fears concerning the extent to which rural-urban migration can contribute to urban poverty and the unsustainable growth of cities often lie behind these policies. However, rural to urban migration is not necessarily the main contributor to the expansion of cities; UN-Habitat (2013b) reports that 60 per cent of the growth in urban populations is due to natural increases in the urban population, with another 20 per cent as a result of the reclassification of rural settlements into urban spaces.

19. See IFAD, 2010. *Promoting women's leadership in farmers' and Rural Producers' Organizations*. Special Session of the third global meeting of the Farmers' Forum in conjunction with the Thirty-third Session of IFAD's Governing Council. IFAD headquarters, Rome, 12-13 February 2010; available at <https://www.ifad.org/documents/10180/498cfa01-fbda-410e-b356-df1203cdf976>. See also the Report of the Fifth Global Meeting of the Farmers' Forum, IFAD headquarters, Rome 17-18 February 2014.

Hence, policies should focus on creating opportunities for people in the areas they live and for migrants when they migrate, accompanied by proactive measures to enhance rural-urban connectivity, facilitate the access of smallholder families to seasonal and income-diversifying opportunities further afield, in particular in nearby small and medium-sized towns, and increase rural people's access to services.

Improving the access of rural people to quality education and training can enhance the employment prospects of those who decide to migrate. Provision of suitable transport and communications infrastructure – either directly by the public sector or by fostering private investment – will be important to bring down the costs associated with both travel and sending remittances as well as to facilitate information flows on employment and business opportunities.

Urban-rural mobility needs to be reflected in urban and food system planning processes. Effective planning and political commitment can lead to better and more integrated city region planning, leading to a reduction in slums in urban centres, better employment opportunities and improved living conditions. In addition, facilitating migrant remittances and the capacity of migrants to invest in and move back to rural areas as opportunities evolve, can – under the right conditions – enhance opportunities for inclusive development in both rural areas and urban centres.

# Conclusions

Rural transformations profoundly affect urbanization, and sustainable models of urbanization need to be underpinned by mutually supportive and beneficial rural-urban linkages to foster an inclusive development process. The majority of food is produced in rural areas and much of it is consumed by people living in urban centres (IIED, 2015).

Based on a review of the literature, this paper has highlighted the implications of urbanization patterns and rural-urban linkages for the transformation of agricultural value chains and food systems and for the prospects of achieving sustainable and inclusive development. Rural areas, including those more distant from and close to small, medium and large urban centres, are critically important to achieve sustainable urbanization processes. Rural and urban areas are linked by agricultural value chains and food systems, but also by ecosystem services, labour, natural resources, energy, transport and, crucially, by small and intermediate towns that play increasingly important roles as connectors. Urbanization is also transforming agriculture and rural opportunities and challenges; this transformation can be inclusive or destructive, with negative consequences for the economy, society, the environment and equality. Urbanization potentially opens up pathways for inclusive transformation and more balanced urban and rural transformations, but only when suitable investments and policies create appropriate conditions.

Meeting the growing and changing food needs of residents of urban centres depends on the development of thriving agriculture and rural areas. Smallholder family farmers continue to play a central role in African economies and food systems despite the difficult conditions under which they operate. Inclusive policies to support smallholder farming, rooted in territorial approaches to development that emphasize local participation, can strengthen the sustainable supply of fresh and nutritious food for cities at the same time as providing livelihood benefits for smallholders. This can also create positive feedback effects in the wider economy through expanding business opportunities upstream and downstream of food value chains and into non-farm sectors. There is therefore a need for a balanced approach to urban and rural development, integrating smallholder agriculture and coherent planning for regional food systems to ensure urbanization is socially, politically and economically sustainable. As has been highlighted, territorial approaches offer significant potential to pursue such balanced, coherent and inclusive approaches, with innovative, integrated and inclusive city-region food system approaches developed by FAO and partners being one way of addressing certain challenges from a territorial and food systems perspective.<sup>20</sup> Policies and processes that foster more sustainable urbanization processes therefore need to incorporate the rural dimensions of urbanization fully into the reflection and in programming and policy choices.<sup>21</sup>

20. For example, for city region food systems approaches, see Forster, Hussein and Mattheisen, 2015 and <http://cityregionfoodsystems.org>.

21. See also IFAD's statement at the UN-Habitat Preparatory Committee meeting, New York, November 2014: available at <http://unhabitat.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/IFAD.pdf>.

The central argument of this paper is that it is necessary to establish the conditions that ensure mutually beneficial rural-urban linkages that respond to the interdependencies between rural and urban areas. The potential in the agriculture and food systems that link urban and rural areas needs to be maximized as a normal part of a balanced development process. Within this, the role of smallholder farmers has been highlighted, with emerging demographics and socio-economic transformations under way, pointing to the need for specific attention to the role of women and young people to ensure inclusive models of development and transformation.

In this context, several areas that there has not been space to develop in this paper merit further exploration, analysis and evidence, specifically: (i) empirical evidence on the potential for further increasing agricultural productivity in smallholder-dominated agricultural systems; (ii) the impacts and extent of the youth exodus from rural areas on agricultural development; and (iii) the extent, drivers and implications of the feminization of agriculture.

Equitable, balanced and sustainable rural development and urbanization depends on efforts to build vibrant local economies and foster social cohesion through policy measures and actions that recognize the importance of rural areas and people, agricultural value chains and food systems for sustainable urbanization. Taking a territorial or regional approach in policy and planning can be critical to ensuring this balance. Given the roles of rural people and areas in broader economic and social transformation, development policies need to integrate the rural dimensions of urbanization. Leveraging the rural-urban nexus is an opportunity to make a substantial contribution to developing food systems that provide sufficient, nutritious and safe food for all.



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