

Urban Food and Nutrition Security Workshop, 29-30 September 2020: Brief

Beatrix Alsanus¹, Magnus Jirström, Yemane Berhane, Chris Turner, Hanna Berhane, Eva-Charlotte Ekström

1 Take home message

- Inadequate diets and malnutrition are the leading causes of mortality and morbidity, and collectively represent one of the greatest public health challenges of our time.
- The importance of a holistic approach due to the complexity and interconnectedness of the food system is decisive.
- There is a need to develop common concepts that account for the inter- and transdisciplinary character of food and nutrition security and food environments
- Research tools and methods to be used for inter- and transdisciplinary research on urban food and nutrition security have to be standardized.
- Dilemmas regarding urban poverty, food safety, the informal food sector as well as gender aspects deserve emphasis.

2 Introduction

Inadequate diets and malnutrition are the leading causes of mortality and morbidity, and collectively represent one of the greatest public health challenges of our time (Black et al., 2013; Development Initiatives, 2017). The double burden of malnutrition, characterized by persistent undernutrition and the increasing prevalence of overweight, obesity, and diet-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs), presents a complex scenario for public health research and policy (WHO, 2017; HLPE, 2017).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, urban food and nutrition security is high on the public health nutrition agenda. Recent years have seen increasing recognition regarding the need to complement the four well-established pillars of food security – availability, accessibility, stability and utilization (FAO, 1996) – with broader food systems perspectives to capture the multi-scalar determinants of food and nutrition security (HLPE, 2020; FAO, 2020), particularly when investigating urban settings (Crush and Battersby, 2016). Calls have also been made to address urban poverty, the use of urban space, and the social aspects of food systems in order to tackle the multi-dimensional nature of urban food and nutrition insecurity and malnutrition (Tacoli, 2019).

The urban food and nutrition security workshop took place on September 29-30, 2020. Initially planned as a physical workshop to be held at SLU in Uppsala, the ongoing pandemic forced a switch first to a hybrid, and finally to a completely virtual platform. This 2-day workshop focusing on urban food and nutrition security in African cities covered topics such as the limited availability, affordability and consumption of micronutrient rich food groups in urban food environments, the importance of the informal sector in distribution and availability of such food groups, role of school environments for children's diets as well as interventions.

¹ SLU, Dept of Biosystems and Technology, Microbial Horticulture Unit, PO Box 190, SE23422 Lomma Sweden; email: Beatrix.alsanius@slu.se

The workshop was based on the cornerstones of a healthy life as key components of several sustainable development goals, comprising SDGs 2, 3, 5, 1, 10, 8 and 11. It pursued an interdisciplinary approach and involved invited expertise from dealing with natural resources, nutritional sciences, food security and food safety, public health as well as social geography and economics. To explore opportunities for new and joint collaboration and research applications together with representatives from national and international organizations and research institutes. The core group of the workshop consisted of members of the ongoing EAT Addis project, funded by Formas and included researchers from SLU, Uppsala university, Lund university and Addis Continental Institute of Public Health, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Invited participants were recruited from universities in Sweden (Lund University, SLU, Umeå University, Uppsala University) and abroad (Canada: University of Waterloo, France: UK: Sheffield University, University of Greenwich), institutes (Ethiopia: Addis Continental Institute of Public Health, UK: International Institute for Environment and Development Policy institute) and stakeholder organizations (NL: RUAf; SE: SEI/SIANI, SIDA, SLU Global, Swedish Government).

Key themes emerging from discussions following the keynote presentations are synthesized below, reflecting the perspectives of participating representatives from stakeholders and academia.

Theme 1: Urban food environments

Michelle Holdsworth presented on the topic of “Dietary transitions in African Cities – leveraging evidence for interventions and policies to prevent diet-related non-communicable diseases”. A common theme from the ensuing discussion was the need to improve the integration of concepts, methods and datasets from multi- and interdisciplinary research around food environments, food systems, and food and nutrition security. The need for standardized tools to enable the comparison of data from across diverse settings and scales was identified, in order to improve knowledge and understanding of the complex drivers of urban food and nutrition security. The need for longitudinal data was discussed to facilitate monitoring of urban food environments and food and nutrition security. The INFORMAS tools were recognized as a potential point of inspiration for the development of integrated tools to address urban food and nutrition security. However, the need to move beyond the INFORMAS focus on obesity was acknowledged, in favor of addressing malnutrition in all its forms, including underweight, overweight, obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases.

Theme 2: Why the growth of hunger and malnutrition is an urban issue

The plenary talk on urban hunger and malnutrition was given by Dr Cecilia Tacoli, IIED. Urban food and hunger is a multidimensional urban tension area at the intersection between, and consequences to, a general trend of increased urbanization, income and non-income poverty, environmental hazards and urban planning as well accessibility and affordability of food. To disentangle the dilemmas coming along with the multidimensional character of the urban food and hunger requires both detailed and holistic understanding of the interactivities between food and nutrition security and urban poverty. For example, income poverty puts an additional burden on individuals purchasing smaller quantities (poverty penalty), high levels of indebtedness, reduced quantity and quality of food leading to a vicious cycle of ill-health and hunger and maintained income poverty. The role of infrastructure, being a part of non-income poverty, needs the attention of local city administrations, city planners and must be implemented in policies and interventions in collaboration with the urban poor. The urban poor need to be given a voice to define and measure their own food security.

Group discussion highlights can be summarized in the following tension areas:

Food safety along the food system is an important issue for public health but negatively affects the informal sector. Food safety is often used to criminalise and to evict informal food vendors, concomitantly affecting the poorer consumers. Emphasis on food safety pushes aside affordable food as informal food vending provide affordable food, constitutes large employers for urban poor and provides livelihoods). However, foods sold at supermarkets are not necessarily safer.

The contextualization of urban food is necessary to create resilience. There is a need to identify what cities have in common and what might be different on different hierarchical levels.

The role of the local governments and multi-stakeholder engagement: food might serve as a convenient entry point to bridge between different ministries and enable to see across strata.

Food security needs may be combined with other *grand challenges*, e.g., land use, environmental issues

A holistic approach and groundbreaking new thinking are needed, keeping in mind that there are different interest groups with powerful interests. There is a bigger story that may undermine and politics is an important factor to take into account.

Theme 3: Diet and neighbourhood food environment in Addis Ababa

The discussions of this group followed after presentation of the project “*Food and nutrition security and neighbourhood food environment in Addis Ababa (EAT Addis)*” given by Eva-Charlotte Ekström. Some of the highlights of the project were that neighborhood food environments in general showed low availability of vitamin A rich vegetables, leaves and fruits. Staples in terms of cereals as well as legumes/nut/seeds, milk products and other vegetables were highly available and were the major components of the families’ diet. Unhealthy foods, such as ultra-processed- and energy dense ready-to-eat foods were also highly available. A closer look at determinants of a healthy family diet revealed that consumption of nutrient rich foods was limited and associated with perception of affordability but also wealth and maternal education.

The group discussion focused on aspects of availability; how can vendors, including informal, be motivated to provide healthier foods? Discussion included issues such as business opportunities as well as potential food policies. Further affordability of healthy foods appears to be an issue, but not the only determinant of consumption. Which aspect beyond affordability are important? Particularly the contexts of schools were discussed both in terms of food environment but also as an educational opportunity. How can individual behaviour be changed? Advertisement, role models and nudging were briefly addressed. In all, it was also clear that there is a need for a system of classification of types of unhealthy foods.

Theme 4: Diets, wealth status and food insecurity in secondary cities

Heather Mackay spoke on the topic of “*Variation in diet composition, diet diversity and food security by socio-economic circumstance across six secondary cities of Ghana, Kenya and Uganda*”. The discussion that followed centred around the need to question commonly held assumptions regarding

transitioning agri-food systems, diets, and rural-urban livelihoods in Sub-Saharan Africa. The need for contextually specific evidence was debated on the basis of multiple case studies presented at the workshop. Urban consumers were considered to interact with a diverse range of food sources to acquire and consume foods as part of daily life. Key food sources among urban residents in multiple settings included market-based sources, agricultural sources and food transfers. The need to challenge commonly held assumptions around the supermarketization of Sub Saharan Africa was also discussed. Particular attention was drawn to the need to unpack the supermarket typology, and focus on who frequents these stores, the kinds of products they are buy, and why.

Theme 5: Challenges of animal-based food sources

Julia de Bruyn's presentation "*Animal-source foods in African diets: A focus on drivers and barriers in urban context*" was followed by discussions reflecting both opportunities and challenges related to current developments of urban food systems in Africa. Expanding markets for perishable food such as animal source foods may carry several potential nutritional benefits as well as livelihood opportunities for local actors along the value-chains in African cities. However, important aspects of food safety need to be addressed in all sections of these value chains. Also, for intensive local livestock production systems to become sustainable they need to contribute to circularity, for example manure for soil fertility, but simultaneously avoid short-cuts resulting in contamination and pollution. Evolving urban food systems also need to be inclusive and benefit small-scale producers, informal vendors, and low-income consumers. Health awareness is a central aspect for producers and consumers alike and particularly the urban poor need to be in focus. Urban food system governance may contribute to structures ensuring food and nutritional security and food safety.

4 Stakeholders' perspectives

Stakeholders mentioned the importance of holistic approach due to the complexity and interconnectedness of the food system. Beyond affordability the local food culture, food preferences, peer pressure, media advertisements, school environments, and taxations influence the food environment and food consumption. In low-income settings, particularly in SSA, the need for mapping of food system from farm-to-plate and beyond is critical to informing policy. Additionally, the potential of urban food production to ensure food and nutritional security and food safety, and community resilience through localized/short supply chains was emphasized. The issues of resilience and mobilizing collective actions around food security during health emergencies such as COVID19 pandemic was raised. To systematically research these areas; there is a need to develop common concepts, methods and tools. Alongside advocacy and mobilizing funds for a coordinated high impact research.

5 Reoccurring issues

Some issues are of overall importance and were emphasized during the thematic group and plenary discussions following several keynote contributions.

- 1) ***Need to develop common concepts, methods and tools*** in order to work systematically and to allow comparison between longitudinal studies, but also at various levels of complexity
- 2) ***Aspects beyond affordability***: given the complexity and interconnectedness of factors involved into urban food and nutrition security as well as of goals for sustainable development a holistic approach is needed

- 3) **Focus on the urban poor:** given the different roles of the urban poor in the food system (*e.g.*, consumers, food producers, food wholesalers, retailers and distributors) as entrepreneurs, employers and employees, a shift in focus towards the urban poor and the informal sector is needed.
- 4) **Focus on food safety** as a phenomenon needs to be disentangled both with respect to public health but also with respect to associated dilemmas, *e.g.*, informality, urban poor, affordability
- 5) **Focus on the informal market** deserves stronger attention due to its intimate link to gender aspects and thereby household food security

6 Needs to move forward

To move forward in the conversation on urban food and nutrition security

- a holistic approach,
- the development of common concepts, methods and tools taking the inter- and transdisciplinary character of the topic into account as well as
- a dilemma-based procedure

are crucial. The present conversation on urban food and nutrition security focuses on the situation of low income countries. Although from some perspectives less alarming and urgent, the situation and disparities in high income countries deserve attention in order to reach the sustainable development goals observing the SDGs time frame.

7 Reflections on the process

The current pandemic situation had an impact on the meeting mode. Unfortunately, perspectives on informality had to be left out due to acute illness of one keynote speaker. Also, the initial idea of a physical meeting was abandoned in favor of a virtual meeting. This allowed more participants to attend and to focus on specific topics. However, the transcontinental character of the meeting reduced actual time for discussion, especially discussion in clusters to meet different disciplines. A step forward is to repeat the process in some time and to have thematic cluster meetings and round table discussions to continue to build the platform for sustainable urban food and nutrition security.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Program

Appendix 2: Participant list

Appendix 1

Booking list Urban food and nutrition sec, 29-30 Sept 2020, Uppsala

Name	Email	Organization
Lotta Ekström	Lotta.Ekstrom@kbh.uu.se	Uppsala University
Magnus Jirström	Magnus.jirstrom@keg.lu.se	Lund University
Beatrix Alsanus	Beatrix.alsanus@slu.se	SLU
Yemane Berhane	yemaneberhane@gmail.com	Addis Continental Institute of Public Health
Hanna Berhane	hannayaciph@gmail.com	UU, Addis Continental Institute of Public Health
Michelle Holdsworth	michelle.holdsworth@sheffield.ac.uk	Sheffield University
Cecilia Fåhreis	cecilia.fahraeus@gmail.com	Uppsala University
Heather Mackay	heather.mackay@umu.se	Umeå University
Chris Turner	C.J.Turner@greenwich.ac.uk	University of Greenwich
Julia de Bruyn	j.m.debruyn@greenwich.ac.uk	University of Greenwich
Bruce Frayne	bfrayne@uwaterloo.ca	University of Waterloo
Cecilia Tacoli	cecilia.tacoli@iied.org	IIED
Alison Blay-Palmer	ablaypalmer@wlu.ca	RUAF/University of Waterloo
Georg Carlsson	Georg.carlsson@slu.se	SLU
Ola Hall	ola.hall@keg.lu.se	Lund University
Madeleine Fogde	madeleine.fogde@sei.org	SEI/SIANI
Sara Gräslund	sara.graslund@slu.se	SLU Global
Esse Nilsson	Esse.nilsson@sida.se	Sida
Linda Engh	Linda.engh@slu.se	SLU

Appendix 2: Agenda

Day 1: Sept 29, 2020		
Time	Subject	Zoom room
10 am - 10.45 am	Welcome, practical issues and tour de table Chairperson: B Alsanus	https://slu-se.zoom.us/j/64535523411 Meeting ID: 645 3552 3411 Passcode: 589846 For other modes of joining the meeting, please see the document "zoom link at urban food"
10.45 am – 11.45 am	3 presentations (10 min + 5 min clarifying questions) Chairperson: M Jirström Technical facilitator: L Engh <i>leg stretcher between the presentations</i>	
	Urban food environments in Africa: implications for policy and research (Michelle Holdsworth)	
	Why growing hunger and malnutrition is an urban issue (Cecilia Tacoli)	
	Diet and neighbourhood food environment in Addis Ababa (Lotta Ekström)	
11.45 am - 12.45 pm	Break	
12.45 pm – 1.30pm	Group discussions in concurrent sessions (3 groups/breakout rooms) Facilitators: M Holdsworth (group 1), C Tacoli (group 2), L Ekström (group 3) Technical break-out room facilitator: L Engh <i>30 min for discussion</i> <i>15 min for joint preparation of the bulleted list and conclusions</i> <i>Each group focuses on one presentation.</i>	

		Group 1 Facilitator: M Holdsworth <i>Rapporteur: C Turner</i> Group members: J de Bruyn G Carlsson S Abdelmenan A Kebede J Trenholm M Jirström	Group 2 Facilitator: C Tacoli <i>Rapporteur: B Alsanus</i> Group members: C Fåhraeus T Shifraw H Berhane A Blay-Palmer Y Berhane	Group 3 Facilitator: L Ekström <i>Rapporteur: H Mackay</i> Group members: O Hall S Gräslund M Fogde M Knobel E Nilsson
1.30 pm – 1.40 pm	Coffee refill			
1.40 pm – 2.25 pm	Reports from group discussions (5 min) and further discussion (10 min) with input from all participants (Group 1-3)			
2.25 pm – 2.30 pm	Leg stretcher			
2.30 pm – 2.45 pm	Stakeholders' panel: specific input from stakeholders Input from A Blay-Palmer, M Fogde, M Knobel, E Nilsson, S Gräslund, Cecilia Tacoli Chairperson: Y Berhane Technical facilitator: L Engh			
2.45 pm – 2.50 pm	Rounding up day 1 Chairperson: B Alsanus			
Day 2: Sept 30, 2020				
10 am - 10.05 am	Recap Day 1 Chairperson C Turner			
10.05 am – 11.05 am	3 presentations (10 min + 5 min clarifying questions) Chairperson: M Jirström Technical facilitator: L Engh			

	<i>leg stretcher between the presentations</i>		
		Diets, wealth status and food insecurity in secondary cities of Ghana, Kenya and Uganda (Heather Mackay)	
		Informality, gender and food-based livelihoods in slums (Cecilia Fåhraeus)	
		Animal-source foods in African diets: Contrasting drivers and barriers in rural and urban contexts (Julia de Bruyn)	
11.05 am - 11.15 am	Coffee refill		
11.15 am- 12.00 pm	<p>Group discussion Facilitators: H Mackay (group 4), C Fåhraeus (group 5), J de Bruyn (group 6) Technical break-out room facilitator: L Engh</p> <p><i>30 min for discussion</i> <i>15 min for joint preparation of the bulleted list and conclusions</i></p>		
	<i>Each group focuses on one presentation.</i>	<p>Group 4 Facilitator: H Mackay <i>Rapporteur: C Turner</i></p> <p>Group members: O Hall E Nilsson C Tacoli S Abdelmenan B Alsanus</p>	<p>Group 5 Facilitator: C Fåhraeus <i>Rapporteur: Y/H Berhane</i></p> <p>Group members: S Gräslund M Fogde A Kebede L Ekström</p>
		<p>Group 6 Facilitator: J de Bruyn <i>Rapporteur: G Carlsson</i></p> <p>Group members: J Trenholm M Knobel T Shifraw A Blay-Palmer M Jirström</p>	
12 pm – 1 pm	Break		

1 pm – 1.45 pm	Reports from group discussions (5 min) and further discussion (10 min) with input from all participants (Group 4-6) Chairperson: H Berhane Technical facilitator: L Engh	
1.45 pm – 1.55 pm	Coffee refill	
1.55 pm-2.10 pm	Stakeholders' panel: specific input from stakeholders Input from A Blay-Palmer, M Fogde, M Knobel, E Nilsson, S Gräslund, Cecilia Tacoli Chairperson: Y Berhane Technical facilitator: L Engh	
2.10 pm -2.25 pm	What happens next?: Process plan for the next steps Chairperson: M Jirström	
2.25 pm -2.30 pm	Farewell	

