RIKOLTO

Innovation and multi-stakeholder collaborations as game-changers to strengthen resilience within cities’ food systems

In the last years, different crises have harshly pointed out the importance of strength and resilience in sustainable food systems. Besides trying to keep up with a fast-paced population growth, cities in Africa have been facing several other crises, such as pandemics, climate change and war. Covid-19 disrupted food supply chains preventing food produced in rural areas from being transported to cities, consequently leading to significant post-harvest losses and increase in food prices in urban spaces.

Covid-19 accelerated already high youth unemployment, in addition, the Russia-Ukraine war is leading many African countries to think about food sovereignty. Amidst these challenges are also opportunities in the road to recovery of local food systems. Growing middle-class consumers in African cities who still value traditional foods is contributing to the emergence of local, youth-led enterprises adding value to local crops. This is reorganising local food supply networks, leading to the integration of local production and consumption, and creating jobs for the youth.

Supporting youth-led innovative businesses

In Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), young entrepreneurs participating in the Generation Food programme are living this reality by transforming local food produce from tomatoes, tamarind, baobab, bissap, grains, and seasonal fruits such as mangoes and oranges into ready-to-eat products that are minimally processed and packaged to preserve their nutritional value. Young entrepreneurs are contributing to reduced post-harvest losses, stabilising food prices in the markets, providing access to market for farmers, and earning a decent income paving a way for recovery from some of the global shocks. Efforts to support youth-led businesses go far beyond Ouagadougou, as Rikolto has set up business incubators in Arusha (Tanzania), in Mbale and Gulu (Uganda), and in five regions of Tanzania’s Southern Highlands.

There are however many challenges to overcome for African youth: From lack of policy coordination and coherence from local governments to issues of access to innovative, cheap and adequate finance. For African cities to recover from the global shocks, these challenges will have to be addressed in a holistic manner through consultative stakeholder engagements.

Seeking systemic solutions through multi-stakeholder platforms

Designing solutions that cut across sectors and span across the food system requires strengthening different voices in the food system and including them in decisions about new initiatives and food policies. In Arusha and Mbyea (Tanzania) and Mbale (Uganda), we have contributed to setting-up multi-stakeholder platforms that include a wide variety of food system actors. From local government officials, research institutions and private companies to representatives of NGOs (non-governmental organizations), farmer organisations and youth, multi-stakeholder platforms bring different voices around the same table to discuss challenges and opportunities for collaborations in the city’s food system.

These platforms have been crucial in driving new initiatives such as the participatory food safety guarantee system – a quality assurance mechanism to verify compliance with a localised set of food safety standards – and improving market infrastructure in a participatory way in Arusha and Mbaya. They have also initiated nutrition and food safety campaigns to promote market hygiene and the importance of eating a balanced diet to boost immune systems in the fight against Covid-19. We are looking to expand these multi-stakeholder platforms under Rikolto’s Good Food for Cities programme to Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), Rubavu (Rwanda), Kampala (Uganda), Goma, and Bukavu (Democratic Republic of Congo).

Designing shorter chains to improve resilience

Besides empowering food actors, we also advocate for innovation and stepping away from business as usual to strengthen food systems. In Kampala, Arusha and Dar es Salaam, we have piloted digital food distribution models together with youth-led enterprises, such as Bringo Fresh, Mesula, GreenfootGo and East Africa Fruits. Digital food distribution models can help improve efficiency and make food chains shorter, enabling traceability, better control over food safety practices, and helping balance the need for
affordability with that of a decent income for food producers and vendors. It also allowed consumers to avoid busy marketplaces during the height of covid-19.

To green our cities, we’re piloting circular food economy models that minimise food waste as much as possible. Not only do they contribute to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, but they also increase food availability and significantly improve efficiency within our food systems by diminishing the need for land conversion for food production and lowering methane emissions from food in landfills. For instance, Rikolto partnered with Arusha City, the Arusha Sustainable Food Systems Platform, and two enterprises: Kusanya and Chanzi. Kusanya employs youth to collect food waste from markets, hotels and restaurants as well as residential areas and Chanzi purchases and recycles food waste into animal feeds and fertiliser. Hilda Okoth, Good Food for Cities programme coordinator in Arusha testifies: “Jointly, we wanted to create value to the organic food waste through circular models, while reducing dependency on imported fertilizer. We also wanted to contribute to job creation for youth, improved hygiene at Arusha’s food markets, and environmental sustainability.”

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ICLEI AFRICA

Urban food systems at the centre of resilient and sustainable recovery
The need for sustainable and resilient urban food systems has become more urgent as we approach 2030, the year we are intended to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The multiple global and local food systems shocks and stresses indicate the need to act now to transform towards sustainable and resilient food systems that will be able to nourish the entire urban population. This is desperately needed, considering that Africa is in the midst of a colossal urban transition – its urban population is growing rapidly, from an estimated 200 million (31% of Africa’s population) in 1990 to 548 million (43%) in 2018 and is estimated to reach 1,489 million (59%) by 2050. In 2020, the South African urban population and country at large was acutely affected by a global food system shock, the COVID-19 Pandemic. According to Statistics South Africa (2020), almost 23.6% of South Africans were affected by moderate to severe food insecurity, and about 14.9% experienced severe food insecurity as a result of COVID-19. Shortly after COVID-19, in 2021, the South African food system was disturbed once again, by civil unrest in two economic hubs – KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng. This food system shock made the food system challenges even more apparent.

The total cost of the damage across both provinces amounted to an estimated R25 billion, with essential food systems infrastructure being completely destroyed. Additionally, the floods that were experienced in KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa resulted in the destruction of roads and other infrastructure, restricting the movement of goods and thus negatively affecting the supply of food. Most recently in 2022, the global food system experienced another shock – the Russia-Ukraine conflict – which significantly increased food prices, amongst other issues. The household affordability index revealed that in a year, basic nutritious foods had increased by approximately 11.4%.

It is clear then, that such high price increments have limited the access and availability of food for many households, challenging their food security status. However, although our food systems have experienced significant stresses in the past years, there is still an opportunity to transform our food systems by leveraging on our existing urban assets to ensure consistent access and availability of food at all times.

In 2021, ICLEI Africa, in partnership with FAO, convened independent food dialogues with 1000+ people from more than 26 cities around the world, where the most important drivers of urban food system change were identified. These include but not limited to:
i) Integrating food into planning and urban design to build food environments that facilitate access to land, market space, and healthy, sustainable and culturally appropriate food.

(ii) Fostering territorial linkages to shorten or simplify supply chains, leveraging neighbouring logistics capacities, supporting local investment, growing regional food economies, and promoting nature-positive food supply.

(iii) Investing in critical infrastructure and technologies to improve efficiency and safety across the food value chain, ensuring access to nutritious food for consumers, connecting producers with markets, promoting economic development and enhancing value addition.

(iv) Leading climate action to foster mitigation and adaptation strategies by introducing stress tolerant crops and livestock, making use of climate information services and offering insurance services, as well as by supporting afforestation, reducing food miles and sharing sustainable agricultural practices.

(v) Developing coherent, integrated food policies and inviting multi-stakeholder engagement to provide clear vision and guidance, while equipping actors to effectively implement policy recommendations, and practice inclusive governance.

Food systems rely on strong and healthy natural ecosystems – especially in the urban context. CitiesWithNature, an ICLEI initiative, places special focus on growing food in urban areas to benefit communities and nature – thereby contributing to making sure urban food systems are resilient. It provides a platform for insight, learning opportunities, and support for local governments and food system stakeholders who are interested in shaping sustainable, nutritious & inclusive food systems.

A resilient and sustainable food system is necessary as it will be able to withstand and recover from anticipated food system shocks and stresses in a way that will ensure an adequate supply of food that is acceptable and accessible to all at all times. This is especially important in our planet's efforts in achieving a just and equitable post-COVID-19 recovery.

Moreover, it will maintain progress in desired goals such as the Sustainable Development Goals and meeting other key international policy objectives, such as the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the Global Diversity Framework (GBF), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CDB), and others. Therefore, cities should actively strive to consider and implement a food system perspective in resilience planning that prioritises the most critical infrastructure investments – which will ultimately strengthen food access and food availability for all at all times.

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