

# Seminar report Smart Solutions for Urban Food Supply

Seminar | January 19<sup>th</sup> 2017 | Impulse Building | Wageningen, the Netherlands

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## Smart solutions for urban food supply

### **Introduction**

On January 19<sup>th</sup> 2017, the seminar '*Smart solutions for urban food supply*' took place at the Impulse Building, on the Wageningen University and Research (WUR) campus. The aim of this seminar was to get inspired and to exchange ideas and solutions with organisations and practitioners who are dedicated to urban food systems providing access to safe and nutritious food for all in the world's ever growing urban areas. The seminar was an integral part of the short course 'Market Access for Food Security' of the [Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation](#) (CDI).

### **Welcome and Keynote Speakers**

The seminar started with a warm welcome from Jan Helder (CDI), course coordinator. Marion Herens (CDI), the seminar facilitator, introduced the key question of the seminar: '*How to develop innovative and smart solutions to ensure urban food supply for all people in a rapidly urbanizing world?*' Marion presented the global situation of growing cities and increasing human population. People living in urban areas currently exceed people living in rural areas, often due to insecurities – related to food, climate, or conflict conditions - in rural areas. At the same time, poverty within urban areas is rising rapidly, with both obesity as well as malnutrition present. In the face of this complexity, it becomes important to look at food access and supply from a 'Food systems' perspective. A food system "gathers all the elements (environment, people, inputs, processes, infrastructures, institutions, etc.) and activities that relate to the production, processing, distribution, preparation and consumption of food, and the outputs of these activities, including socio-economic and environmental outcomes" ([HLPE, 2014](#), p.12). Food

systems are changing rapidly and differ globally in terms of characteristics, with varying supply chains, food commodities produced, types of labour, and cultural food preferences involved. A global trend is that people become more dependent on food that is transported and often do not produce (enough) food themselves. International agreements such as the UN Habitat III New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) are known frameworks to address food security, but it is not evident how to fully integrate urbanization and problems regarding food supply. Other important international agreements, such as the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact show that multiple actors, particularly at city level, can play an important role in pushing an urban food policy agenda, for instance at region or city level. However, in order to gain momentum and create crossovers between important stakeholders there is a strong need for bridging exercises.

The first keynote speaker was **Marielle Dubbeling**, Director of Resilient Urban Agriculture Food Systems (RUAF) Foundation. In her presentation, Marielle highlighted that in the Netherlands, a trend is visible whereby cities are taking the lead in urban food policy, and not necessarily national governments or private sector. She highlighted the outcomes of a study on the role and involvement of the private sector in urban food security, which so far is still unclear. This [study](#) to understand the role of the private sector in urban food systems reviewed three city regions: Quito (Ecuador), Rotterdam (the Netherlands) and Bristol (United Kingdom). The study looked at private sector innovations (e.g. Philips) and government examples to see how policy can support the role of the private sector. Marielle discussed the Quito case study. This city region food system is characterized by national and local food systems. In Quito it was found that a traditional private food sector exists, with new, not necessarily food related, urban actors coming in, such as retail and catering, ICT, waste collection and electricity companies. The case study posed that different types of private sector actors can foster diverse innovations that can be scaled or emphasise social or environmental value. Large-scale companies can have a big impact on food supply volumes, but regarding other aspects, such as social involvement, they have less impact. As for the latter, family enterprises can have higher impact since they are more socially engaged and closely interact with their customers.



Marielle recommended that large scale companies should focus on products that are not produced by locals, so there is no competition. For sustainable urban food systems, local and sustainable sourcing should be supported, as well as local businesses, finance innovations, and the entire food chain. Marielle stated that there is an increasing consumer demand that functions as an economic driver that will engage the private sector. However, food security can only be ensured when policy and government are actively involved as well.



The second keynote speaker was **Marc Wegerif**, WUR PhD candidate and Oxfam Food and Land Policy officer. He talked about his research findings in Dar Es Salaam in Tanzania, and the lessons and implications for interventions and policies. Marc discussed the [Symbiotic Food System](#), its definition, its functions, and why it works. This agro-food system operates in many local markets spread over the city and is composed of many small-scale producers, intermediaries and buyers operating in a highly flexible manner without large vertically or horizontally-integrated corporate structures. The word 'symbiotic' captures the perspective that not competition but in fact various forms of collaboration drive actors within these so-called 'informal' food systems. This is due to the close interaction and collaboration within these food system networks, also including families and community members.

The starting points of his research were the 'eaters' and what they do to get access to food. In Tanzania, local food is more often used by many poor urban city dwellers. Marc explained that opportunities to earn an income are essential to address food security. In the informal symbiotic system there is no 'supermarketisation', because a supermarket is not accessible for most of the eaters (due to price, location, timing etc.). Large food chains are not always beneficial for local people. Marc highlighted the example of two milk production chains. In the first, local producers would bring their milk to a depot which sells the milk to supermarkets. However, in this case farmers are not really involved in the milk chain. In the second chain, milk would be transported to local traders directly. Farmers would receive relatively more money and the eaters pay less than they would in the supermarket. This smaller chain might be shorter in length, but more beneficial to local people as there are simply less actors in the chain. Marc noted that both rural and urban food trade are important for a symbiotic food systems approach.

### **Workshop rounds and reflection**

Following the keynote speeches, the seminar participants split up into three groups to discuss and explore the current and future aspects of the presented cases. Participants were able to participate in two rounds. After one hour, both the speakers as well as the participants came back to a plenary session in which the three keynote speakers were asked to share their eye-openers, the main obstacles and the main insights discussed during the workshop.



One of the three workshops was led by Marielle Dubbeling. During this workshop she introduced the question: 'Is the private sector the driving force behind urban food supply?'

- Eye-opener(s): Almost all people in Africa, living in the rural areas, want to move to the bigger cities. The only aspect that stops them from doing so is (the lack of) money. This requires a focus on, especially in Africa and Asia, small scale improvements and innovations that can create jobs and income in rural and city regions. When there is room for creativity, there is room for innovations. Especially young people should be stimulated to participate in these innovation projects.
- Challenges: The first challenge that was raised is how to improve the relation between the private and public sector. Although the private sector certainly is a main driver behind urban food supply, private and public sectors are inextricably linked and there are a lot of mutual relations. Therefore, it cannot be stated that the private sector is the only driver in urban food supply. The second challenge is that every country and every location has its own specific issues, which require a different approach. In Lima, Peru, for instance, the government wanted to maintain private lands around urban areas. This is done by buying these lands from the local people, so the government can maintain these lands in their original state. In some countries the government is more concerned with urban food supply and the role of the private sector than in other countries.
- Main insights/lessons: The private sector has its own advantages for contributing to urban food supply, and invests in food system transformation for urban food security. However, a food system without the involvement of the private sector does not exist. It is important to work with and through the private sector, if you want to achieve a sustainable urban food supply.



The second workshop was led by Marc Wegerif in which he discussed the potential of the symbiotic food system. The main question was: 'How can the symbiotic food system be optimised to feed all the people over the world and feed the people that are moving to cities?'

benefit from globalisation, then they need to fit in and they need help for that. All the unnecessary actors, such as traders, should be taken out of the food supply chain. The local markets are often bigger than central markets in the city. The question thus raised, is: why don't we make the local markets the main markets? An aspect such as the exchange rate could for instance destroy the rice industry in Tanzania. It seems strange that such a 'small thing' can have a big impact on large markets, while it could have less impact on resilient local markets.

- Challenges: One challenge is to unite the private sector. The symbiotic food system uses natural cooperation, but policy makers could have a positive effect on this by listening to people from the private sector. However, local people are often not

- Eye-opener(s): People should build on the things they already have instead always introducing new things. If you want small farmers to

interested in this kind of involvement, because they do not know what to expect from the government. The challenge lies in connecting policy makers with local people. The other challenge lays in the food value chains. Marc explained that most value chains start with producers, but they miss the connection with the 'eater'. It is important to look both at the starting side of the value chain as well as on the ending side.

- Main insights/lessons: For a properly functioning symbiotic food system, it is essential not wanting to control everything, for instance using uniform market standards, because this may lead to misconceptions in local settings. There should always be room for adaptation and change, requiring a flexible system. Innovation should always be placed in the context and carefully weighed whether or not they do harm to vulnerable groups.

The third workshop was facilitated by Marion Herens, the discussion emphasized on involvement of policy-makers into an urban food agenda.

- Eye-opener(s): Food security is the main issue in rural areas. Access to food by developing infrastructure (e.g. roads and ICT) can solve food insecurity, but more important is how to connect cities and rural areas. A holistic approach could be useful in food planning. Researchers should be ahead of policy-makers and take a leadership position to ensure evidence informed policy making. Policy-makers, on the other hand, have the responsibility to build their decisions on evidence. If research is done beforehand, decision-making processes will be easier.
- Challenges: Policy-makers do not connect with farmers. The challenge is to identify the resources and interests of local communities and to incorporate knowledge of cities and rural areas into policy-making. Another challenge is bridging the gap between the researcher and policy-maker. A suggestion to bridge this gap is through simplifying the technical aspects of research, and improving ways of communication. Another challenge is that the credibility of policy-makers is not evident. Due to this, local people often do not want to get involved.
- Main insights/lessons: Research institutes should raise awareness about urban food security and get governments more involved. Dialogue between city-level and national-level governments is needed to engage all policy-makers. A multi-stakeholder approach is necessary to involve policy-makers into an urban food agenda.



### **Wrap-up**

The seminar ended with a network lunch for all participants at the Impulse building. The workshop reports are available online and shared with interested participants. A short video about the two seminars will be shared soon with the participants via e-mail, the CDI website and via the organisers' social media accounts.