

Feeding Africa's cities: opportunities, challenges, and policies for linking African farmers with growing urban food markets

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The Africa Agriculture Status Report is an annual publication of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa. Since 2013, it has become a reference point for emerging topics on agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa. The Report is now regarded as an important handbook for Africa's leaders in their plans to transform the continent's agricultural prospects.

Across the whole of Africa, over the past several decades, rates of urban population growth have exceeded those of all other continents. These trends are expected to continue for several more decades. Presently, Africa has 42 cities of over two million people and small towns have grown rapidly as well. Currently, over half of Africa's urban population resides in towns and small cities of less than 500,000 people. As a result, the continent's urban areas currently provide the largest and most rapidly growing agricultural market in Africa. Hence, the importance of the 2020 Report focussing on 'Feeding Africa's cities'. The Report comes at an important time, as national governments and international institutions worldwide struggle to rebuild from the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID- 19) pandemic in ways that ensure the long-term efficiency and safety of urban food supplies.

The Report was presented virtually at the African Green Revolution Forum's summit in Kigali in September 2020. Its theme, 'Feed Africa's cities, grow the continent', is a call to rethink Africa's food systems, including through developing urban food markets to achieve sustainable food systems and deliver resilient, better nourished and more prosperous outcomes for all. The Report identifies that cities are now beginning to shape Africa's agribusiness environment through increasing demand and changing patterns of agricultural production, requiring a rapid expansion of food processing and distribution plans. An assessment is made of the

opportunities, challenges and policies required to enable African farmers and associated agribusinesses to supply the rapidly growing urban food markets. This presents opportunities for the continent's 60 million farms to fully participate in urban markets and for the agricultural industry stakeholders to identify both the agenda and, importantly, practical next steps to meet the growing demand.

As urban areas expand, Africa's agri-food systems require new actors such as city councils and planners, trader organisations and public health professionals, who are becoming key players in the implementation of agricultural policy. At the same time, effective governance and regulation of developing urban food systems requires coordination and harmonisation of the actions of the diverse players involved.

Presently, traditional markets and small shops dominate urban food retailing in most African cities, with supermarkets having only a small share but likely to play an increasingly important role. At present, small-scale farmers reach urban food markets largely through traditional wholesale markets, and so the efficiency of those markets will be key to small-scale farmer participation and competitiveness.

The Report identifies five focus areas for accelerating urban food system planning and overcoming problems of urban under-nutrition: improved urban food system governance; efficient urban wholesale markets; food safety regulation and enforcement; regional free trade and agricultural policy harmonisation; and agricultural research focussing on high-value and high-growth food commodities. Domestic food distribution systems, intra-African trade and food safety are other themes of the Report, which leads to the conclusion that improved urban food system governance and performance can create new opportunities for Africa to transform its agricultural endeavours into thriving businesses.

In conclusion, the Report provides an excellent contribution to the understanding of the structure and scale of urban food markets, the current challenges faced by farmers and agribusiness, and key policies required to ensure affordable, safe urban food supplies and the expansion of rural economic opportunities in the agri-food chain.

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