



URBAN AND PERI-URBAN FOOD SYSTEMS IN AFRICA

UNPACKING INTERLINKED ISSUES CONCERNING FOOD, NUTRITION, AND AGROECOLOGY

Monkey Valley Resort, Noordhoek, Cape Town, SA

27-28 February 2025

CONCEPT NOTE AND PROGRAMME



**AFRICAN CENTRE
FOR BIODIVERSITY**

years of advocating for food sovereignty in Africa

The African Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) is a research and advocacy organisation working towards food sovereignty and agroecology in Africa, with a focus on biosafety, seed systems, agricultural biodiversity, agroecology, and the intersections between biodiversity, climate change, and food systems. We are committed to dismantling inequalities and resisting corporate-industrial expansion in Africa's food and agriculture systems, and to building alternatives rooted in the agency of African people.

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Agroecology has received a lot of global attention in recent years, and space is opening up for its support. However, the focus has tended primarily to be on rural food producers and on building agroecological production capacity. This remains a critical element, but rising urbanisation in Africa requires a wider focus, especially to incorporate urban consumption and diets. The number of people affected by urban and peri-urban food insecurity is surpassing rural food insecurity, especially in countries with big cities.

Concerns relating to this include:

- dietary transitions that are compounding health problems;
- rising food prices and limited access to food for marginalised urban constituencies;
- environmental threats to current food system structures;
- inequality and poverty as drivers of food insecurity;
- the requirement for new infrastructure for redesigned food systems; and
- non-existent, fragmented or top-down systems of urban food system planning and governance.

Agroecology, based on the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) High-Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) principles,¹ highlights environmental production practices, social equity, justice and participation, and economic diversification and democratisation. At the level of principles, agroecology can be adapted to urban contexts. In recent years, some efforts have been made to elucidate the connections.

The ACB would like to build on this base of work to find ways to more practically connect the agroecology movement (broadly speaking) with urban food system dynamics, to integrate urban and rural food struggles and pathways for progressive and sustainable transitions to a just food system, with the right to food at its centre.

Urban and peri-urban food systems are central to the livelihoods of low-income households, particularly in Africa, where urbanisation is progressing at an

unprecedented rate. With Africa's urban population projected to grow by 3.5% annually from 2015 to 2025, the demand for food will also increase.² While megacities capture attention, it is worth noting that more than half of Africa's urban residents live in towns and cities with populations under 500,000. Even smaller towns, some with fewer than 100,000 inhabitants, play a pivotal role in food production and distribution, serving as links between rural and urban areas. These urban centres are crucial for agricultural development, poverty reduction, and employment creation.

Despite this potential, food provision to growing urban populations has skewed heavily towards large-scale staple production, imports of cheap food, and promotion of supermarkets as key channels for food delivery to consumers. Small-scale farmers and informal food actors are marginalised in the process.³ This approach has led to unsustainable, nutritionally imbalanced, and shock-prone urban food systems, and widening inequality.⁴ At the same time, rising incomes and changing consumption patterns have made African cities more complex, with diverse food value chains involving production, processing, distribution, and retail.

These sectors:

- generate income and employment, including for vulnerable groups such as women, youth, and informal workers;
- contribute to household food diversity; and
- may improve dimensions of nutrition and the overall well-being of children.⁵

A key question is to what extent agroecology can play a role in urban food systems to increase resilience and environmental sustainability, reduce hunger and food insecurity, and promote active and democratic participation in food systems governance.

1 HLPE. 2019. "Agroecological and other innovative approaches for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition", A report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, Rome, https://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/hlpe/hlpe_documents/HLPE_Reports/HLPE-Report-14_EN.pdf

2 AGRA 2020. "Feeding Africa's cities: Opportunities, challenges, and policies for linking African farmers with growing urban food markets", <https://agra.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/AASR-2020-Feeding-African-Cities.pdf>

3 HLPE. 2024. "Strengthening urban and peri-urban food systems to achieve food security and nutrition, in the context of urbanization and rural transformation", CFS HLPE-FSN, Rome https://sfcs.fao.org/docs/devhlpelibraries/report-19/hlpe-19---main-report_en_cd1459en.pdf

4 HLPE 2024, as above

5 Kissoly, L. 2023. "Households' participation in agri-food based livelihoods: Insights from urban and peri-urban contexts of Tanzania", *Cogent Economics and Finance*, 11:1, pp. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23322039.2023.2196859>

AREAS FOR CONSIDERATION



FOOD PRODUCTION

Urbanisation and the development of urban food systems pose the question of whether agroecology can meet the diverse food and nutrition needs of both rural and urban populations, including those not directly involved in food production. This is the question of food availability. Agroecology is premised on local production for local consumption, reducing the distance for food to travel wherever possible, diversity to meet socially and culturally heterogeneous diets and needs, and inclusive, circular economies, which create a range of livelihood opportunities beyond agricultural production.

- What impact would these imperatives have on urban food supply and distribution?
- What role is there for urban food production (its extent, potential, limitations, and opportunities) and what forms could this take?
- Can urban food production make a significant contribution to food supply?
- How can agroecological production be deployed in urban contexts?

SOCIAL EQUITY

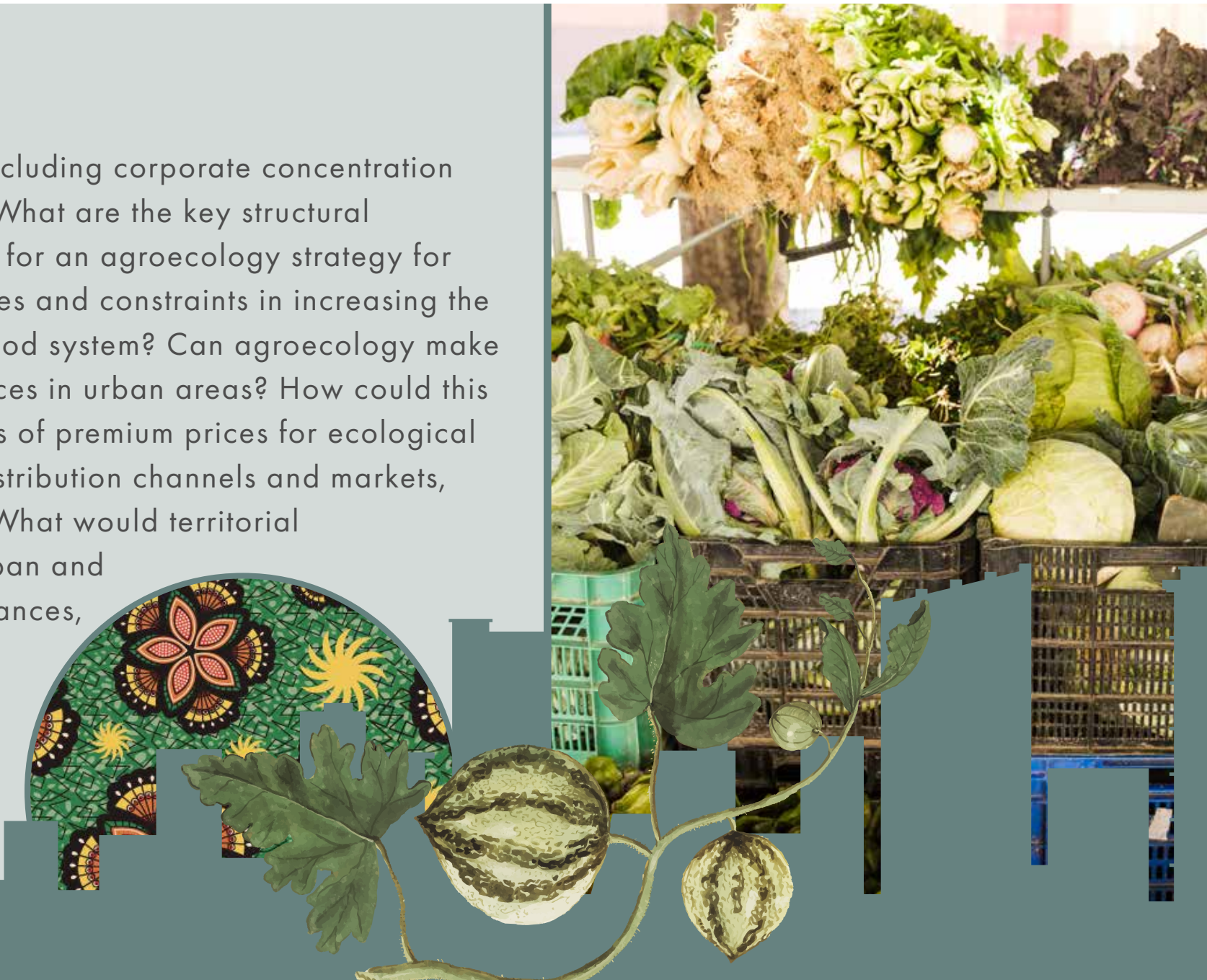
How do gender and racial power relations, poverty and inequality, and other cross-cutting social issues influence food access and choices? How can agroecology respond to these issues? What is the concrete content of principles of social values, co-creation of knowledge, participation, fairness, and connectivity concerning social equity in urban food systems?

HEALTH AND NUTRITION

What is the current status of urban nutrition? What are the trends in dietary transitions, especially relating to ultra-processed products (UPPs) and diet-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs)? How can food safety be ensured in decentralised systems of production and distribution? How do issues of water access, sanitation, and wider health influence the structure and functioning of urban food systems? How can agroecology contribute to sustainable, healthy diets particularly through provisioning of diverse, nutrient-dense foods, as well as through the inclusionary, participatory values that engender transparency and clear information flows?

ECONOMIC

What is the structure of urban food systems, including corporate concentration and its impacts, and the role of other actors? What are the key structural weaknesses or potential points of intervention for an agroecology strategy for urban food systems? What are the opportunities and constraints in increasing the contributions of non-corporate actors in the food system? Can agroecology make a significant contribution to reducing food prices in urban areas? How could this be achieved, especially in the context of ideas of premium prices for ecological products? What is the status of urban food distribution channels and markets, and the pros and cons of different channels? What would territorial markets look like in urban areas? What do urban and rural linkages consist of (product flows, remittances, any other)? How can agroecological principles of connectivity, participation, fairness, and economic diversification be tailored for urban contexts?



ENVIRONMENTAL

What are the specificities of issues of climate change; water availability, access and quality; biodiversity loss; and waste management in urban food systems? What threats and opportunities are presented by these issues for food production and distribution in urban areas? How can agroecological principles of recycling/ circular economy, input reduction, soil health, animal health, biodiversity, natural resource governance, and synergy be tailored for urban contexts?



GOVERNANCE

What forms of participatory and democratic food system governance exist globally and in Africa in the urban context? What roles are there for multi-actor processes, and multiple levels and scales (municipal, provincial, national, global)? What examples of good practices/innovations can be shared, and what can be learned from them for urban food systems in Africa? What is the role of planning and policy, and how can these respond effectively to requirements for just transitions in food systems? What is the feasibility of landscape-level planning in urban contexts?

Across these areas, the meeting will explore the current state of affairs, examples of successful practices/innovations, and gaps in research, policy/regulation, and practice.

PARTICIPANTS

Participants will include between 20 and 25 academic and non-governmental organisation (NGO) researchers, urban food producers, and community activists from South Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, who work on aspects of urban food systems and food security.

OBJECTIVES

This meeting provides an opportunity to critically discuss the role of urban and peri-urban food systems in Africa, particularly in the context of rising urbanisation, ultra-processed foods, and agroecology, to share on current innovative interventions and identify gaps in research, policy, and practice for further work in Africa, while exploring pathways for a just agroecological transition that centres smallholder farmers, local food networks and democratic urban governance to ensure sustainable, nutritious, and resilient food systems across African cities.

LOGISTICS

The meeting will take place in Cape Town on Thursday 27 and Friday 28 February 2025. Participants from out of Cape Town will arrive on Wednesday 26 February. The ACB will cover the costs of transport, meals, and accommodation for participants.

We request Cape Town-based participants to travel to and from the meeting on the two days. However, if any Cape Town-based participant requires accommodation, please contact us.

Please RSVP as soon as possible to Vinern Naidoo on vinern@acbio.org.za. If you have any travel or accommodation-related queries or if you would like to send feedback or inputs on the proposed agenda, please do not hesitate to get in touch.



PROGRAMME

DAY 1 - THURSDAY 27 FEB

09:00 - 09:30

Welcome, introductions, objectives of the meeting

09:30 - 11:00

Setting the context

- Agroecology and urban food systems; sustainable urban food systems
- Different food system configurations in African urban areas, indicating strengths and weaknesses (selected participants to share, discussion)

11:00 - 11:30 **Tea break**

11:30 - 13:00

Food production

- What is the role of urban food production?
- What are the best entry points to promote agroecological production in urban areas?
- What are existing models of urban food production and what lessons can be learned?
- What are the challenges and requirements for success? (presentations and discussion)

13:00 - 14:00 **Lunch break**

14:00 - 15:30

Social

- What are the key cross-cutting social issues that affect access to healthy and nutritious food in urban areas, and how do they affect this access?
- What is needed to respond effectively to these issues?
- Is there a role for agroecology in a response, and what is that role?

15:30 - 16:00 **Tea break**

16:00 - 17:00

Health and nutrition

What is the current state of affairs, key challenges, examples of good practice/innovations, policy frameworks, research gaps, opportunities, and priorities for interventions to improve health and nutrition through the food system?

17:00 **Close for the day**

DAY 2 - FRIDAY 28 FEB

09:00 - 10:30

Economic

Food system structure, markets, and infrastructure requirements for transformed urban food systems

10:30 - 11:00 **Tea break**

11:00 - 12:30

Environmental

Key environmental issues in urban areas impacting on food systems: threats and opportunities, responses, and gaps

12:30 - 13:30 **Lunch break**

13:30 - 15:00

Governance

Policies and regulations that hinder or support sustainable urban food systems - forms of multi-actor collective governance of food systems in urban areas

15:00 - 15:30 **Tea break**

15:30 - 16:30

Research gaps and suggestions

Towards the ACB's contribution to linking agroecology and urban food systems transitions

16:30 **Thanks and close**

