

Ghanaian Urban Food Environments coalition Scene Setter - The case of Accra

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Even before the onset of the current worldwide Covid-19 crisis, which even clearer exposes dangerous deficiencies in food systems of the most vulnerable in particular, the necessity of transforming them was very clear.³ Reasoning from consumer perspectives in those systems in particular, specifically in African urban settings, can strongly improve food security outcomes for a significant amount of SDG2 target groups that suffer from the double burden of malnutrition. This potential, in combination with the great sense of urgency and increasing international attention for urban food environments, calls for a response of the NFP. To tackle related challenges, a multi-sector partnership is called for that combines expertise from the food and nutrition sector, with that of urban planning and governance, as well as education and marketing, including consumers, producers and retailers, also from the informal sector.

Nutritious diets also offsetting health costs

Overcoming hunger and malnutrition in all its forms⁴ is about more than securing enough food to survive: what people eat – and especially what children eat – should also be nutritious (and safe). Yet, the latest estimates are that 3 billion people or more worldwide, cannot afford a healthy diet. In sub-Saharan Africa, this is the case for 57% of the population. While problems of undernutrition persist, African countries are experiencing a rise in the prevalence of obesity and nutrition-related non-communicable diseases (NR-NCDs) – in short referred to as the double burden of malnutrition.

¹ The mission of the NFP is to boost transformative approaches for sustainable food systems and healthy diets in low- and middle income countries. The NFP has no projects of its own, but will facilitate coalitions which endorse its mission and recognise the need to speed up to achieve SDG2 by acting together.

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³ UN, [Food Systems Summit 2021](#)

⁴Including undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, overweight and obesity.



Recent analysis covering the period 1980-2015 reveals a >500% increase in prevalence of adult obesity in Ghana and that over 40% of current adult deaths in Ghana are attributable to NCDs.⁵ A sustainable transformation of food systems to increase availability, improve access to and utilization of healthy diets would not only save lives, but also allow the health costs associated with unhealthy diets – estimated to reach US\$ 1.3 trillion a year in 2030 – to be almost entirely offset. The FAO assumes that solutions lie with interventions along the entire food supply chain, in the political economy that shapes the larger context of trade, public expenditure and investment policies, but definitely also in the food environment.⁶

The food environment - the transformative potential of putting consumers centre stage

The international research network Agriculture, Nutrition and Health (ANH) Academy⁷ defines this food environment as “the interface that mediates one’s food acquisition and consumption within the wider food system that encompasses multiple dimensions such as the availability, accessibility, affordability, desirability, convenience, marketing, and properties of food sources and products.” Food environments can enable or restrict healthy dietary choices, as these “set the context within which food acquisition occurs by providing a series of opportunities and constraints that influence decisions about what to eat” (FAO, 2016). As consumer behaviour has been and continues to be a major barrier to changing diets (FOLU, 2019), these food environment approaches thus put the consumer centre stage. It is assumed that this reasoning from the needs of consumers has the potential to accelerate demand for healthier food and achieve better SDG2 outcomes. Behaviourism, consumer attitudes and behaviour, and all the different factors that influence them at different income levels, is now being more acknowledged in food security work, and also consumer organisations are now welcomed actors at the table.⁸

African urban food environments as potential substantive SDG2 contributors

Considering that 57% of the Sub-Saharan African population suffers from malnutrition and two-third of the African population will be located in cities in 2050, this NFP-project will focus on African urban food environments. The specific theme of urban food environments is increasingly gaining attention internationally, in particular from nutrition and food systems thinking.⁹

⁵ A. Laar et al. (2020), University of Ghana - Providing measurement, evaluation, accountability, and leadership support (MEALS) for NCDs prevention: Lessons from Ghana.

⁶ Based on FAO, SOFI report 2020 & [Introduction to the Basic Concepts of Food Security \(2008\)](#)

⁷ ANH-FEWG Agriculture, Nutrition and Health Academy - Food Environment Working Group [Concepts and methods for food environment research in low and middle income countries \(2017\)](#) Partners are a.o.: CGIAR, UK Aid, and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

⁸ ICLEI-RUAF-FAO, [Nourishing our Cities \(July 2020\)](#) - Joyce Kinobo, Sokoine University of Agriculture & FAO-GAIN Virtual Roundtable 3 - [Everyone around the table: Private sector on healthy diets \(July 2020\)](#) - Helena Laurent, Consumers International / Peter Bakker, World Business Council for Sustainable Development

⁹ UNSCN, [Food environments: Where people meet the food system \(2019\)](#) / FOLU, [Growing Better: Ten Critical Transitions to Transform Food and Land Use \(2019\)](#) / ICLEI, [Food Policy Councils \(2019\)](#) / Holdsworth & Landais, [Urban food environments in Africa: implications for policy and research \(2019\)](#) / [Global Nutrition Report 2020: Action on equity to end malnutrition](#) / FAO-GAIN Virtual Roundtables - [Everyone around the table: Private sector on healthy diets \(July 2020\)](#) / ICLEI-RUAF-FAO [Nourishing our Cities \(July 2020\)](#)



This year the month of July even was [#AfricanCITYFOODmonth](#)¹⁰ and the ARGF Summit¹¹ (September 2020) with the theme “[Feed the Cities, Grow the Continent: Leveraging Urban Food Markets to Achieve Sustainable Food Systems in Africa](#)”, is a call to action to rethink worldwide food systems to deliver better nourished and resilient outcomes for all. The momentum is here to contribute to these debates from The Netherlands with expertise and support connecting this to policy and action. Recent literature and debates show that in order to contribute to healthier African food environments, it is essential that public-private engagement and multi-stakeholder dialogues and activities improve. A NFP multi-stakeholder coalition could (further) pick up the question that seems central in the debates: How can urban consumer food intake become more healthy by (joint) private and government interventions in food systems that put consumers central?

System challenges and governance solutions for healthy food intake in urban Africa

The reasons why African urban food environments prevent people from eating healthy diets are multiple and cut across issues and sectors both directly and indirectly related to food value chains. While interventions by African governments and other stakeholders have mainly focussed on production, food availability does not immediately lead to purchase and consumption. Main reasons for this include: the higher costs of nutrient- and protein rich food compared to filling stomachs with starch only; increasing urban poverty and inequality; inadequate urban infrastructures and services (unsafe markets, water and energy); advertising of unhealthy processed food and street food; absence of urban food governance perspectives and integration in city design; and incoherence across policies, guidelines and public investment decisions.

Consumers' consumption choices are thus determined by several infrastructural deficiencies at a broader city scale that go beyond household level, also including the food-water-energy nexus.¹² To illustrate: beans are often not excluded from diets because of their price, but because of the bad quality of the available water to soak them in overnight and the high cost of fuel needed for cooking them. Also retailers and transporters' choices are strategically influenced, in their case by what they can stock and sell, which drives food transitions towards dried, high calorie foods.¹³ Moreover, there is limited focus on safe trading spaces and (informal) food markets/outlets in city and town plans, although the large majority of urban households get all their food from there. As a result, governance, particularly at city level, is underscored as a key focus area to be improved, as well rural-urban linkages - considering that urban agriculture seems unattainable for all due to challenges related to urban land contestation and congestion,

¹⁰ An inaugural campaign organised by ICLEI Africa, FAO, RUAF, MUFPP, WWF and other partners, including mayors, city officers, senior food system officers from aforementioned organisations and academic thought-leaders.

¹¹ [African Green Revolution Forum](#): the world's premier forum for advancing Africa's agricultural agenda to achieve the vision and goals laid out in the AU Malabo Declaration, the SDGs, and Africa's Agenda 2063.

¹² See e.g. the [Nexus Resource Platform](#)

¹³ ICLEI-RUAF-FAO, [Nourishing our Cities](#) (July 2020) - Gareth Haysom, African Centre for Cities, University of Cape Town



inequality (e.g. land access), drought and insecurity (e.g. crops theft), amongst others.¹⁴ Research by the University of Ghana has also shown that the tidal wave of obesity and NR-NCDs is a consequence of both market, government, and food system failures.¹⁵

Building further on AgriProFocus (APF) and Food & Business Knowledge Platform (F&BKP) multi-stakeholder activities

Last November, a group of international researchers of CGIAR and WUR, with support of F&BKP and APF Ethiopia, organised a workshop in Addis Ababa on measuring the food environment. Food environment research is considered of key importance to deepen the analysis of current national or regional food systems challenges. It is also seen as a basis to identify opportunities for (more) effective interventions by public institutions and market actors. Various research partners will in the coming years continue to focus on this subject. The challenge is to bridge the gap between this theoretical work and issues and bottlenecks of various practical actors also to be able to measure the impact of PPPs on nutrition outcomes. This was also one of the main conclusions of the F&BKP seminar Improving Food and Nutrition Security in Ghana from a Food Systems Approach organized in January 2019. Professionals of the F&BKP network from Ghanaian civil society, private sector, government and science jointly discussed Ghanaian food systems bottlenecks and concluded that more multi-stakeholder cooperation with actors working on joint aims is essential to all move forward. It is thus key to realise greater coherence of action, requiring public-private integration around common goals, more trust, well defined targets and improved sharing of data. More projects programmes and intervention are needed that have a positive impact on the food environment at scale, requiring an integrated approach and joint effort.¹⁶ All aims an NFP-coalition could start to work on.

The case of Accra, Ghana, a frontrunner in urban food environment thinking and action

Because "the movement towards inclusive, multi-stakeholder food systems governance for cities and city regions gathers momentum, there is a pressing need to document and systematise experiences of city food systems governance from around the world" (ICLEI, 2019). This coalition will take this on through focussing on implementation in a particular city in Ghana, most probably Accra. Ghana is one of the few African countries that takes part in food environment research. The 2019 Ghana Food-EPI¹⁷ study was the first in Africa to successfully apply the Healthy Food-Environment Policy Index (Food-EPI), resulting in the report Benchmarking Ghana's Policies for Creating Healthy Food Environments.

¹⁴ UNSCN, Food environments: Where people meet the food system (2019) / FOLU, Growing Better: Ten Critical Transitions to Transform Food and Land Use (2019) / ICLEI, Food Policy Councils (2019) / Holdsworth & Landais, Urban food environments in Africa: implications for policy and research (2019) / Global Nutrition Report 2020: Action on equity to end malnutrition / FAO-GAIN Virtual Roundtables - Everyone around the table: Private sector on healthy diets (July 2020) / ICLEI-RUAF-FAO, Nourishing our Cities (July 2020)

¹⁵ A. Laar et al. (2020), University of Ghana - Providing measurement, evaluation, accountability, and leadership support (MEALS) for NCDs prevention: Lessons from Ghana.

¹⁶ UNSCN (2019) / FAO-GAIN Virtual Roundtable 3 (July 2020)

¹⁷ Developed by the International Network for Food and Obesity/NCD Research, Monitoring and Action Support (INFORMAS), part of the Dietary Transitions in Ghanaian Cities Project implemented in Ghana from 2017 to 2019.



The MEALS4NCDs Prevention Project, “Measuring the healthiness of Ghanaian children’s food environments to prevent obesity and Non-Communicable Diseases”, is a recent example of Ghana being active in this field. Also, a first Africa Food Environment Research Network (FERN) Meeting will be organised in Accra this year. The capital of Ghana, has been chosen for the presence of many stakeholders, including private sector actors, that are doing very relevant work in the field of Accra’s food environment with an action oriented approach. That said, depending on the concrete bottlenecks or leverage points identified by the future NFP coalition partners, another secondary Ghanaian city, such as Kumasi, might also be chosen to focus on - e.g. if change is expected to be realised better there or as taking away pressure off Accra might be desirable. Moreover, nutrition policy is on the radar of Ghana’s Government, with a National Multi-Stakeholder Nutrition Forum and Ghana’s first National Nutrition Conference taking place in Accra in January this year. The conference, themed “Evidence-Informed Nutrition Policies and Programmes: Now and Beyond” featured actual and potential contributions of studies on undernutrition and the Food Environment in Ghana. Also, the NFP can tap into an extensive existing network of relevant professionals working to improve food and nutrition security in Ghana, acquired through previous activities of F&BKP.¹⁸

A coalition with a broad food systems approach

From a first inventory it became clear that a large range of professionals is doing very relevant work in or related to Ghanaian/Accraian food environments, yet that cooperation between them could be improved. The NFP coalition aims to tackle this fragmentation and improve collaboration, which is underlined by potential coalition actors from different sectors as very helpful. The project will take a food systems approach by including consumer organisations, producers, market vendors and local governments, but also taking other food system aspects into account, such as human mobility, economic strength, inequality, and city design and governance. This requires coalition involvement of actors beyond the food and nutrition sector; mayors and city authorities, civil society representatives and advocacy groups, urban planners and city architects. Potential coalition members include (but are not limited to): - Civil society: Choices International, Sight and Life, RUAFA, SNV, VNG International, FNV Mondiaal, GAIN, World Food Programme, WIEGO Accra, New Town Institute, Rikolto, African Architecture Matters, Scaling up Nutrition, Ghana Trade and Livelihoods Coalition, Consumer Advocacy Centre Ghana, Free Lunch GH, Ghana Food Movement;

- Private sector: GNBC, NABC, MDF, SafiSana Ghana, Farmhub, HortiFresh, AgrilImpact Ltd., Agro Ventures, 2Scale, DSM, Blue Skies, Wienco, Eden Tree;
- Science: University of Ghana, University of Amsterdam, Wageningen University & Research Centre, TU Delft, Erasmus University Rotterdam (IHS);
- Government: Embassy of the Netherlands Accra, Research and Development Department of Ghana Health Service, Ghanaian Ministry of Food & Agriculture, Accra Metropolitan/Municipal Assembly.

Possible questions and potential leverage points for the coalition

The starting point to work from will be: How to combine local needs, policies and scientific insights into joint practical solutions that put the urban consumer central with the aim to make their diets more nutritious? The coalition will start to identify common bottlenecks and concrete leverage points to jointly address, starting with quick wins geared

¹⁸ A recent example of which is the mutual research-practice exchange on transitional food systems drivers, which took place in Accra in January 2019.



towards improving the enabling environment for sustainable interventions and changes on the longer term. Local solutions are sought in accordance with [Ghana's policy](#) aiming to reduce dependence on import of non-nutritious staple foods. Actions the coalition could pick up are e.g.:

- How can needs of informal urban market actors be included in policies for the improvement of urban food environments?;
- How can consumer markets be enlarged to make healthy food more affordable and accessible food for urban populations?;
- How to strengthen rural - urban and urban - peri-urban linkages for more affordable and accessible food for urban populations?;
- How can marketing, labelling, benchmarking, communication, education and other instruments related to consumer behaviour positively shape the food environment for healthy consumer food choices?;
- How can food sensitive and inclusive city planning and governance (of policies, infrastructure and services) be supported?

While it is important to get all relevant stakeholders around the table in order to find and realise the most suitable and efficient solutions for all, the coalition is envisioned as a relatively small group of committed and enthusiastic actors in order to translate ideas into action in the short term.¹⁹ That said, to involve as many stakeholders and relevant parties as possible, a larger circle of knowledge and implementing partners can be formed around the central coalition. This larger circle can be consulted regularly and is kept in the loop, involved in larger events and in action/learning opportunities. Another possibility is the formation of a set of smaller sub-theme coalitions, which corresponds with the diverse yet connected facets of the urban food environment.

Possible NFP services and deliverables

Netherland Food Partnership could support the setup of a coalition by action-oriented brokering through: multi-sector coalition building with (local) policy, private sector actors and thematic experts; mapping available general information on Ghanaian and Accraian food environments specifically; systematising relevant experiences and needs of potential coalition partners; identifying and sharpening (shared) bottlenecks and leverage points and pathways for solutions and increased impact in Accra; defining a joint vision and concrete activities/programme(s); helping to find financial support for implementation by the coalition. The coalition will also work on combined stakeholder input for the [Food Systems Summit 2021](#).

¹⁹ The exact shape and size of the coalition will depend on the jointly defined action plan.