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# What can the Latin American cities of Cali, Quito and Medellín learn from each other's efforts to build sustainable food systems?

Lessons learned from a South-South exchange on urban city–region agri-food practices and policies

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## Key messages

- Movements to create sustainable food systems in Latin America are beginning to transform agri-food dynamics and the concept of conventional urban development.
- Addressing the problems associated with ensuring food and nutritional security in urban areas requires a systemic approach, collective action and the involvement of different actors and sectors.
- Regional exchanges allow learning about experiences adapted to the realities of each territory, identifying successful practices, generating cooperation linkages as well as inspiring and encouraging innovation.

According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Latin America is the most urbanized region in the developing world. Two-thirds of the Latin American population lives in cities with 20,000 or more inhabitants, and almost 80% of people are located in urban areas.<sup>1</sup> This represents a challenge, which is compounded by factors such as migration and climate change that translate into increased pressure to use natural resources efficiently. When talking about urban planning the need to promote sustainable development throughout the whole territory that comprises a city and its rural hinterland is important. It ensures that city

development can be linked to new forms of production and systems that guarantee access to healthy and nutritious food for all people, particularly the most vulnerable groups. The need for such development can only be met when accompanied by the strong involvement of civil society and the establishment of new institutional and governance mechanisms.

In recent decades, Latin America has witnessed the emergence of initiatives and movements that seek to promote urban and organic agriculture, waste management, short distribution chains and healthier consumption as part of urban development. This is in response to current challenges, and it has happened in parallel with the establishment of new international frameworks and agendas. One prominent example is the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, which is the first international protocol that calls for cities to develop sustainable food systems that grant healthy and accessible food to all, protect biodiversity and reduce food waste.

In general, the efforts undertaken in Latin American cities have aimed to

- increase food system sustainability and resilience
- promote food and nutritional sovereignty and food safety through local, fresh and diverse products for the growing population
- generate employment and income
- strengthen community life

These initiatives have begun to transform agri-food dynamics and the concept of conventional urban development, but have also brought up new challenges for the wide range of actors involved.

Countries such as the Netherlands and France have long made sustainable food systems a priority, consolidating successful practices and processes that have been replicated and

<sup>1</sup> ECLAC. 2012. *Population, territory and sustainable development*. Available online in Spanish at: [https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/22425/1/S2012034\\_es.pdf](https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/22425/1/S2012034_es.pdf) (accessed on February 5, 2019).

adapted by other regions. For their part, Latin American cities as diverse as Quito (Ecuador), Medellín and Cali (Colombia) have in recent years been promoting initiatives that seek primarily to strengthen urban food security, but that also address other dimensions of the food system.

To promote cooperation among these three Latin American cities, and to learn, analyze and understand various experiences associated with the construction of urban food policies, a South-South exchange workshop, on urban city–region agri-food practices and policies, was held in 2018. It was supported by the CGIAR Research Program on Water, Land and Ecosystems (WLE), the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), the RUAF Foundation, the French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development (CIRAD) and the World Food Programme. This note presents the main results, conclusions and lessons learned.

## I. Developing sustainable urban food systems

Addressing the problems associated with ensuring food and nutritional security in urban areas is complex and requires a **systemic approach** that integrates human, social, economic, environmental and cultural components. Likewise, planning a sustainable food system requires **collective action** and requires the participation of different actors and sectors that are motivated by different priorities and interests.

### *All roads lead to Milan*

In these three cities, Quito, Medellín and Cali, the approaches to solving urban agri-food problems have been driven by **different motivations** and have materialized through strategies specific to each case.

Quito, for example, has successfully spent more than 16 years consolidating family- and community-based urban farming practices. It is something that began as a program fostering social inclusion and economic development of the city’s most vulnerable areas, promoted by the Human Development Agency of the Mayor's Office.

In Medellín, solutions to agri-food problems arose from the need to counteract supply problems by promoting productivity and short supply chains. In Cali, solutions have emerged from a multi-year effort led by the Secretary of Municipal Health as part of a strategy to improve the nutritional status of vulnerable populations.

Despite diversity in starting points, these initiatives share common challenges and the idea of the territory as a **city–region space**. This is a concept of decentralization that has been acquiring great importance due to its connection with globalization processes as well as regional and local development. It includes the complex network of actors, processes and relationships that have to do with food production, processing, marketing and consumption within a given geographical territory (i.e., an urban center, its peri-urban surroundings and its closest rural areas).

The RUAF Foundation has, along with other organizations, documented several case studies on city–region food systems projects, programs and policies developing around the world. Scientists with the foundation have stated that “city–region food systems offer concrete policy and program opportunities within which multiple development goals can be addressed and

through which rural and urban areas and communities in a given city region can be directly linked.”<sup>2</sup>

Activities focused on city–region food systems also constitute an **opportunity for local governments to align their efforts with international frameworks**, such as the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact. Approved in 2015, the pact gives visibility to successful initiatives related to sustainable, fair, inclusive and climate-friendly urban food systems. It also proposes a framework and guide for planning and monitoring, and it legitimizes the importance of the issue as a development axis.

### Quito: Urban agriculture drives development and resilience

- 72% of the population concentrated in urban areas
- 37% in poverty and extreme poverty
- 29% of child population is chronically malnourished
- Accelerated urban sprawl – high natural risk and food supply vulnerability

Source: Rodriguez, A. 2018. *CONQUITO*. Presentation during Urban agro–food practices and policies in city region workshop. Cali, Colombia.

In Quito, it all started with an urban agriculture project that ended up including urban, peri-urban and rural areas. The project wanted to explore how to contribute to food safety and sovereignty, environmental management, income and employment improvement, social inclusion, sustainability and resilience through self-production of food by the most vulnerable population.



Figure 1: Quito’s conceptualization of the food system.

The **initial focus of this intervention was social inclusion**. Later, Quito Economic Development Agency, CONQUITO, began managing the project. It implemented an **economic development** approach aimed to include all stakeholders, with a strong emphasis on marketing and certifications of labor competencies and organic production, technical assistance, implementation of productive infrastructures,

short alternative marketing circuits, promotion of responsible consumption, alternative technologies and circular and collaborative economy.

Since 2015, this urban agriculture project has been considered a sustainability indicator for the city, and it **integrates the climate action plan, the resilience plan and Quito development plan**. In 2016, it promoted and achieved the **city's adherence to the Milan Urban Food Policy**

<sup>2</sup> Dubbeling, M.; Bucatariu, C.; Santini, G.; Vogt, C.; Eisenbeiß, K. 2016. *City region food systems and food waste management: linking urban and rural areas for sustainable and resilient development*. Available at: <http://edepot.wur.nl/413114> (accessed on March 13, 2019).

**Pact** by initiating a process of **diagnosis and evaluation of its food system and the construction of a city food policy**.

At present, progress is being made in the formulation of this policy, which will be accompanied by the signing of a "**food chart**", which represents the commitment of **other actors**, such as academics, private sector, production guilds, social movements and producers' associations, to this planning process for the construction of a sustainable food system.

### **Cali: Food and nutritional security is a key element of health**

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- 6% of child population suffers from malnutrition
  - 56% of the adult population is overweight or obese
  - 50-60% of child deaths are related to malnutrition

*Source:* Resultados Encuesta Nacional Situación Nutricional (ENSIN). 2010. *Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar, Ministerio de Protección Social*. Available at: <https://www.icbf.gov.co/bienestar/nutricion/encuesta-nacional-situacion-nutricional> (accessed on February 11, 2019)

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In Cali, the starting point was the population's struggles to access a healthy diet. This led the municipality to face a double nutritional burden: on one hand, high rates of **child malnutrition** and, on the other, the highest rates of **overweight and obesity in the country**. Different strategies have been developed to encourage a better diet for the entire population, especially the most vulnerable.

For several years now, Cali City Hall, through its Secretariat of Health, has been working on activities such as

- promoting appropriate breastfeeding practices, with nutritional recovery of lactating mothers and a human milk bank as strategies for promoting breastfeeding at the hospital level.
- carrying out intervention programs to reduce excess weight in children and adults. One example is the Healthy School Kiosk program that promotes sale and consumption of healthy foods in the city's public educational institutions.
- developing community canteens targeting vulnerable populations.

Aware of the need to engage with different actors, Cali has begun work to **improve its understanding of the food system to identify its needs**. Through the creation of a **food and nutritional security table** and an **academic dialogue platform**, in which various actors involved in the value chain participate, the municipality recently put together a **local food policy proposal** (the Food and Nutritional Security and Sovereignty (SSAN) Policy). This proposal aims to promote an **inclusive, fair and resilient food system** that reaches the majority of vulnerable producers and consumers, responding to the specific needs of the territory. If approved by the municipal council, it will establish the legal framework, actions and direction for the initiatives that are developed in the city around this primordial theme in the next 10 years.

In the process of constructing this proposal, the **need for a broader and more comprehensive picture of Cali's food system became evident**. To this end, CIAT has promoted the identification and subsequent observation of **food system monitoring indicators** proposed by the RUAF Foundation and the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact. The indicators are structured along six main lines: governance, sustainable diets and nutrition, social and economic equity, food production, food supply, and food waste. As far as possible, gender-disaggregated

indicators have been suggested to show certain differences associated with the dynamics and characteristics of women’s role in these contexts. If implemented systematically and formally, this monitoring will make it possible to know the real state of the food system and monitor its future evolution, measuring at the same time the impact of the actions enacted under the SSAN Policy.

### **Medellín: Addressing violence and supply problems by promoting productivity and short supply chains in the city–region.**

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- 60.6% of rural households are food insecure
  - 53.2 % of urban households are food insecure
  - 79% of the population is located in social strata 1, 2 and 3 (socio-economic classification)

*Source:* Secretaría de Salud de Medellín, Alcaldía de Medellín. 2015. Nutritional food profile Medellín 2015. 226p. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2MVUjB8> (accessed on February 11, 2019).

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For Medellín, the identification of the **rural–urban gap of food insecurity** led the city to visualize the problem in a city–region framework, with key focus on food supply. The approach of the city–region agri-food system was then adopted as a guideline for the consolidation of equitable and sustainable relations between the city and the region around it (El Valle de Aburrá). The goal was to influence the supply system, understanding its logic and its components, in order to influence public policies.

In this context, the Municipal Mayor's Office created the **Alliance for Good Living program**. This is an integral development tool that seeks to reduce the urban–rural gap in terms of quality of life, help improve citizens’ food indices and generate economic development for the region’s farmers. This program also links public entities with rural and community associations to promote food productivity, reduce the channels of intermediation between producers and consumers, and promote consumption of locally produced foods. The initial actions focused on three aspects:

1. To identify the configuration and efficiency of the food supply system
2. To propose more efficient and inclusive territorial supply models, with new forms of governance and short supply chains
3. To estimate the relationship between food supply and demand for staple food items produced by farming families

## **II. Public food policies provide opportunities for scaling**

Despite the diverse starting points of city programs or initiatives related to food sovereignty and food security, a common imperative is the need to consolidate public policies that can establish a comprehensive and intersectoral framework for action and can secure resources for planning and execution of long-term activities.

For some cities, such as Cali, the formulation of public policies that overcome transitory local government programs is a starting point. On the contrary, in the case of Quito, the successful implementation of a program and the continuous work in urban agriculture have transcended legislative periods for more than a decade and have led to the current effort to formulate a policy and its indicators.

### III. Intermediate cities: Key allies

When talking about urban issues, the concept of the intermediate city is not very widespread, and it is generally associated with the notion of a medium city, based on demographic and territorial criteria. In Latin America and the Caribbean, where nearly 80% of the population lives in urban centers with less than 500,000 inhabitants,<sup>3</sup> these cities represent an important aspect of urban networks.

Following the idea of conceiving urban spaces within a city–region perspective, it is necessary to address the strategic role of these intermediate cities, integrated into the same territory, which offer a unique opportunity to strengthen and articulate sustainability agendas. The cases of Lago Agrio (Ecuador) and Palmira (Colombia) made it possible to identify common challenges as well as three key lessons learned. It is vitally important to i) **develop processes according to the characteristics and specific contexts** of the intermediate city of interest, ii) **foster public–public or public–private partnerships** where common goals are established and iii) **manage communication actions for change**, which invite, include and generate collective actions.

Both intermediate cities are working to create an environment conducive to dialogue, positioning the issue of sustainable food systems and sensitizing local actors on highly relevant associated issues, such as land tenure, extension of monocultures, lack of availability of productive soils and food dependence.

In a bigger perspective, intermediate cities are key actors because they are well placed to replicate experiences and initiatives from bigger cities while supporting consolidation of sustainable food systems in the region.

### IV. Common challenges of three Latin American cities

The discussions held in this South-South exchange between Quito, Medellín and Cali allowed the identification of the following common challenges:

1. **Understanding** the food chain as a system within a city–region approach.
2. **Better integrating** food and nutritional security and agri-food systems into urban planning (e.g., land use planning).
3. **Mobilizing** participation of diverse actors. The planning of a sustainable agri-food system is a collective action that demands the involvement of all actors and the participation of all stakeholders.
4. **Institutionalizing** integral food and nutritional security policies and programs.
5. **Adopting and implementing indicators for monitoring** progress, results and impacts of public food policies.
6. **Aligning with international frameworks**, such as the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, to harmonize objectives and adjust to local realities.
7. **Overcoming information gaps** as well as lack of data and social mapping.
8. Accounting for the time required to achieve economic and social development goals for cities.

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<sup>3</sup> ONU-Habitat. 2012. *ESTADO DE LAS CIUDADES DE AMÉRICA LATINA Y EL CARIBE 2012. Rumbo a una nueva transición urbana. Programa de las Naciones Unidas para los Asentamientos Humanos*. Available at: <http://nacionesunidas.org.co/biblioteca/estado-de-las-ciudades-de-america-latina-y-el-caribe-2012/> (accessed on February 11, 2019).

## Conclusions and lessons learned from the South-South exchange

- Knowing the experiences of similar cities not only generates bonds of cooperation, but also inspires and encourages innovation.
- Working on sustainable food systems creates an ideal space for strengthening collaborative work between actors and sectors within the territory.
- The establishment of urban–rural alliances is a key tool for an integral development that promotes short supply chains within city–region production, promising better quality of life.
- Intermediate cities are key players in the consolidation of sustainable food systems on a territorial scale.
- Despite diversity of contexts and experiences, Latin American cities today demand public policies on food sovereignty and security, which are also seen as a fundamental commitment of social investment and development.
- It is highly important to connect local and regional activities to international networks and initiatives such as the Milan Pact, City Food, C40 and others that can provide tools, advice on technical and policy aspects as well as city-to-city exchanges and learning.

Finally, the participants issued three recommendations for future actions:

1. Reinforce exchanges between cities in the region, with priority consideration given to intermediate cities that make up part of the city–region system.
2. When formulating agri-food policies, consider establishing a baseline with quantitative, qualitative and spatial indicators that constitute the basis for regular monitoring of progress, results and adjustments throughout their implementation.
3. In cities that already have agri-food policies, define a monitoring system from a multi-actor perspective and integrate it into participatory local observatories, local government performance monitoring programs or municipal urban food councils.

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