# 12

# Urban Food Systems Governance in Africa

## Toward a Realistic Model for Transformation

*Gareth Haysom and Jane Battersby*

### 12.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on African cities and problematizes emerging food system and urban system trends and actions in these cities. The focus on Africa is deliberate. While other areas of the Global South are encountering dramatic urban transitions (UN-DESA 2018), Africa's dramatic demographic shift raises important political economy challenges. Specifically, Africa's median age is only 19 years, and 41 percent of the population is 14 years of age or younger (Saleh 2021); the continent will become increasingly younger over the next 30 years (UNICEF 2017). Given past demographic trends and rates of urbanization, the majority of those born in Africa will be born in cities (UNICEF 2017). Ensuring that the urban food system guarantees the attainment of optimal developmental and health outcomes is therefore essential, both to ensure the youth dividend and for society at large.

The rapid transformation of both Africa's cities and food systems demands new and novel forms of governance. Until recently, Africanists have largely ignored, or were openly hostile to, almost all aspects of a wider urban agenda, focusing instead on issues such as the peasantry, agriculture, natural resource use or national sovereignty (Pieterse et al. 2018). Food insecurity therefore has been framed as predominantly experienced in rural areas, and to be addressed by increased agricultural production (Crush and Frayne 2010), and food and cities are seldom seen as being spatially connected and mutually dependent on one another in African food system discourses. Beyond being the recipient of food produced in rural areas, urban areas have largely been neglected in food security policy and governance.

This predominantly rural and production bias framing of food insecurity has meant that many African cities lack a holistic mandate over food systems governance. African cities might have policies and mandates to manage components of the urban food system, such as waste management or public health (Smit 2016), or informal food vending (Duminy 2018), but a wider and deliberative focus and engagement in urban food system governance is largely absent. Moreover, urban

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food system governance encompasses multiple framings of both the food system and governance (Smit 2016). In this chapter, we position governance as encompassing, but extending beyond, state-centered institutions. In particular, while the state plays a role as the *authorizing environment* in African cities, societal actors, including civic bodies, the private sector and the general public at large, are part of the *activating environment*. In other words, institutional and societal actors all have equally important—albeit different—governance functions.

Drawing on these observations, this chapter presents three main arguments. First, as mentioned, we highlight that urban food governance requires not only focusing on traditional government-led policies and projects but also a systematic focus on societal relationships and processes. Secondly, ambitious, emerging food systems agendas need to be commensurate with extant governance structures and the allocation of power across multi-level structures, from local, to regional to national, but at times, also global processes, such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Third, given the preceding considerations, we conclude by arguing that it is inappropriate and generally not useful to import models for food systems governance that do not suitably correspond to citizen and state capacities, especially in those cities that have inadequate fiscal and political authority to effectively govern their food systems.

This chapter begins with a reflection on the historical approaches to governance of urban food in Africa. The chapter then reflects on the food and governance vacuum that exists in African cities, stressing that for food and nutrition security to be achieved, governance processes are needed for both urban systems and food systems to connect in mutually beneficial ways. Several approaches to urban food governance subsequently are discussed, highlighting emergent processes and actions, as well as the actors involved in such actions. In turn, we reflect on the manner in which global governance and development processes are misaligned to the emergent African urban reality, specifically in terms of contextual governance needs, and how these processes intersect with emerging urban governance actions. The chapter uses these reflections to call for alternative approaches to urban food governance, whereby the state at both national and urban levels (i.e., the authorizing environment) and society (the activating environment) play far more active and mutually supporting roles.

## 12.2 Governance of African Urban Systems and Food Systems

Although rarely acknowledged in academic or policy dialogue, the history of control of urban space and urban populations in Africa is inherently and fundamentally linked to the control of food. Historical work on urban food governance in Africa focused on the functioning of market systems or on urban food supply (Duminy 2018). Far less attention was directed at official responses to urban food

issues in relation to problems such as nutrition, poverty, and labor unrest (Clayton and Savage 1974; Cooper 1987). Research focusing on African colonial town planning shows official interest in controlling disease and migration and, coupled with the colonial project, of promoting racial segregation (Duminy 2018).

Building on the control position and the manner in which control, and governance, over urban food was asserted, Duminy (2018: 84) suggests the emergence of a "dual mode of addressing the urban food system … on one hand, in concerns over food contamination and the spread of disease, … and anxiety over urban food supply and nutrition, understood as a wider economic problem involving food production, distribution, pricing, and income." This resulted in what Duminy (2018: 84) describes as colonial Africa's urban governance being "limited to regulating and preventing certain kinds of food preparation, supply, and trade." Such governance approaches remain, as demonstrated through by-laws controlling food vending, food market regulation and control, and even zoning regulations prohibiting urban food growing (Battersby and Muwowo 2018).

However, as Tacoli and Vorley (2015: 1) correctly note, "our food security narratives are outdated: urban dwellers are not all 'over-consumers'; rural communities are not exclusively producers." As Lang and Barling (2012: 313) point out, food security responses have "suffered from more than just the common policy ailment of a mismatch between evidence and policy. It is dominated by a discourse emanating from an analysis first charted scientifically in the early to mid-20th century. This is that food insecurity must be centrally addressed by producing more food." The focus on agriculture in food security policy discourses has remained even more pronounced in Africa due to the enduring perception of African societies as predominantly rural and the relatively high percentage of employment and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the agricultural sectors of African countries (Crush and Riley 2018: 46). This production orientation has created a rural bias in food security programming and policy (Battersby and Haysom 2018; Crush and Riley 2018). This bias has its origins in earlier framings of the role of cities in development, specifically the urban bias theory.

Under the urban bias framing (Lipton 1977), it was argued that urban consumers and industry were able to exert political pressure on government to ensure cheap food to the cities, at the expense of appropriate prices for rural farmers. The neglect of urban food security is the residual effect of this urban bias, which saw cities as parasitic on rural areas (Baker and Pedersen 1992). Agricultural terms of trade were, according to this argument, tipped to favor urban areas over rural (Bates 1981), what Lipton referred to as price twists (Lipton 1977). A rural development agenda arose in the wake of this urban bias, supported by UN architecture, the Consultative Group structures and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (Battersby and Njogu 2023).

The resultant focus on rural areas and production has meant that both food security research and policy responses in Africa have disregarded urban areas

beyond being viewed as sites of consumption. The focus has instead been on rural household food insecurity or mechanisms to improve national food security through production (Battersby and Njogu 2023).[1] The production focus has been to grow staples to ensure base level food security across urban and rural areas, thus feeding urban populations. This need is not disputed, but such approaches have failed to actually address food and nutrition insecurity in urban areas, enabled poor diets in urban areas, and led to an extremely limited set of policy tools to engage urban food systems.

This framing has had at least three consequences on urban food governance and wider food governance policy, programming, and resourcing. First, interventions and policies focus on the individual or household, often resulting in efforts to improve livelihoods or encourage household food production (Battersby and Haysom 2018). Second, the production and livelihood interventions have a distinct project focus, missing the systemic drivers of food and nutrition issues. Thirdly, because of these two framings, wider food system failings are overlooked, even occluded, in policy and programming. Such issues are compounded when challenges associated with the urban food system intersect with the multiple other modes of urban functioning (Battersby and Haysom 2018). As a result, governance interventions that emerge are what Kirsten (2012) has termed "second class" interventions, interventions that seek to mitigate the negative impacts of the prevailing food system but fail to directly engage the structural problems of the urban food system.

In the last twenty years there has been an increased focus on the role played by local government in food systems governance. Globally, cities are attempting to develop new approaches to urban food governance with concepts such as food policy councils (FPCs) and other localized governance processes emerging as possible options to connect cities to their food systems (MacRae and Donahue 2013; Haysom 2015). However, in the African context, food governance has remained largely confined to the state and government.

In Africa, colonial, racialized control measures reinforced through apartheid-type planning approaches (see Duminy 2018), as well as more recent legacies linked to the impacts of structural adjustment policies (Maxwell 1999) and the rolling back of social safety nets (McClintock 2014), make governance shifts in urban Africa all the more challenging. In African cities, the policy and subsequent governance landscape often undermines urban food governance and neutralizes re-imagined urban food system governance processes, despite dramatic demographic and economic changes. It is necessary that these legacies are considered when analyzing the applicability of emerging urban food governance approaches.

[1] In a review of the rural bias in research, in a search on the Scopus database in February 2022 using the search terms "Africa" and "Food Security" Battersby and Njogu (2023: 164) "found 5,603 publications between 1980 and 2021, just 528 of these mentioned the term 'Urban.'"

## 12.3 Food Governance in African Cities

Added to these dynamics is the fact that although many African countries have decentralized over the last 20 years, governmental hierarchies and allocated mandates and the associated fiscal allocations still reflect a national, government-dominated orientation to governance. This is particularly evident in the case of food security, and food systems more broadly. Past colonial or structural governance approaches of centralized control remain deeply entrenched. In urban areas, the role of centralized governance has taken on a new dimension given the shifting political landscape in Africa's urban areas with the rise in power of opposition parties in urban areas. For this, and other reasons, devolution is more of a work in progress than a reality. Combined, this means that from a food governance perspective, the historical sites of food struggle—rural areas—still dominate perceptions and understandings of need (Crush et al. 2020).

Despite an absent urban food system-specific governance and policy mandate, city management activities intersect directly with the urban food system. Many cities govern urban food markets (Battersby and Muwowo 2018), approve development plans for new food-oriented developments, like supermarkets (Peyton, Moseley, and Battersby 2015), collect license fees and permits from market food vendors, regulate informal food traders, manage market infrastructure, and build and regulate local transportation infrastructure (Smit 2016).

Local governments are governing components of the food system, but most governance actions fail to actively connect the urban system and the urban food system. Local government departmental mandates and structures dictate that governance takes the form of managing compliance, often operationalized through urban by-laws and policies. These processes are unable to keep pace with rapidly growing African cities. Equally, most urban food system governance activities disregard the majority of African urban food system users, such as the informal food vending sector. African cities are sites of continual hybridity, of contingent processes intersecting with governance in varied and unclear ways.

## 12.4 Disrupting Food and Urban Governance—Misalignment in Global Processes

Given this context, multilateral processes seem disconnected from the contemporary urban food governance needs in African cities. On the one hand, the SDG approach to the "food goal"—SDG2—further affirms not only the siloed nature of these goals but also existing food perspectives and governance agreements, amplifying a production-focused and a rural orientation to food (Crush and Battersby 2016; Battersby 2017). The dominance of production-focused and availability-oriented perspectives of, and responses to, food security presents an

urban governance challenge because it directs food policy and governance to scales of government beyond the urban milieu. This becomes incongruent with Africa's urban demographic trends.

On the other hand, multilateral processes that center on urban issues have incorporated a focus on food in an equally unsatisfying fashion. For instance, the UN-Habitat New Urban Agenda (NUA), adopted in Quito in 2016, inserted food into urban governance processes (UN-Habitat 2016) and framed food within a wide group of inalienable rights. Accordingly, the NUA

> [e]nvisage[s] cities and human settlements that [f]ulfil their social function, … with a view to progressively achieving the full realization of the right to adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, without discrimination, universal access to safe and affordable drinking water and sanitation, as well as equal access for all to public goods and quality services in areas such as food security and nutrition, health, education, infrastructure, mobility and transportation, energy, air quality and livelihoods.
>
> (UN-Habitat 2016: 5)

Cities will deliver on this aspirational position through support for

> urban agriculture and farming, as well as responsible, local and sustainable consumption and production, and social interactions, through enabling and accessible networks of local markets and commerce as an option for contributing to sustainability and food security.
>
> (UN-Habitat 2016: 24)

And when considered in context and spatially, the NUA would

> promote the integration of food security and the nutritional needs of urban residents, particularly the urban poor, in urban and territorial planning, in order to end hunger and malnutrition. … promote coordination of sustainable food security and agriculture policies across urban, peri-urban and rural areas … [and] further promote the coordination of food policies with energy, water, health, transport and waste policies.
>
> (UN-Habitat 2016: 32)

Such statements present a significant urban governance challenge because the NUA articulates an approach to both urban governance and urban food governance that is at odds with current governance processes and regimes in Africa, presenting positions that lack any grasp of the political economy of urban food and urban governance systems in Africa. These goals reflect political, spatial and mandate ambiguity, espousing flawed assumptions about urban governance

authority, voice and local politics, resourcing, and the centrality of mandates, and associated fiscal flows, in ensuring governance action. Such articulations, which reinforce and justify the actions of global multilateral organizations and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), divert focus and attention to ideas and concepts disconnected from everyday forms of governance, both formal and informal, in African cities.

## 12.5 Emerging Global Urban Food Governance Processes

In parallel to these multilateral processes, there is a global trend that seeks to decentralize food governance, a trend that sees urban areas, regardless of their governance domain or type (government, society, or both) attempting to reclaim control of the city food system (Ilieva 2017; Raja, Morgan, and Hall 2017; MacRae and Donahue 2013). These emerging trends are, however, largely confined to the Global North (Haysom 2015). Urban food governance trends are varied, including processes linked to devolution of food governance that are seen as part of a wider reclaiming of the urban food space. Such processes include a focus on food system embeddedness (Hinrichs 2000), localism and localization (Winne 2009), and a focus on urban agriculture (McClintock 2010). These are processes and actions through which citizens aim to reclaim a measure of urban food system agency while actively seeking to activate urban food systems change.

While simplified, current urban food governance processes can be divided into three categories": city-led food governance interventions, pluralistic governance processes, and issue-specific actions. First, cities innovate and initiate direct food system actions such as Belo Horizonte in Brazil or the City of Cape Town in South Africa. Second, there is a broad category of efforts whereby diverse actors come together in a democratic and egalitarian manner to co-create a food governance agenda, through, for example, food policy councils (FPCs). These efforts encompass pluralistic local food governance structures, seeking to engage food governance through multi-stakeholder groups that adopt different food system governance roles at scale (per Koc and Bas 2012). Third, there are distinct issue-oriented processes whereby activities focus on a specific problem or an aligned collection of issues and champion these under the banner of urban-scale processes; in this third category, interventions fall under the mandate of a single governance actor or related department rather than the wider urban governance domain.

Some of these processes are externally initiated by organizations such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP), and Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI), all of which are engaging African cities in an effort to stimulate urban specific food governance

approaches.[2] Often donor-funded development organizations drive processes, frequently in partnership with cities or key urban stakeholders. All offer opportunities and have limitations. City-led processes offer great promise, particularly when policies and actions can align to fiscal allocations to ensure effective programmatic resourcing. Activities led by external actors, often from global governance or development organizations offer prestige, may bring additional funding and can draw on lessons from other cities and engagements. Some of these externally driven processes also promote and advocate for food policy council approaches. Pluralistic multistakeholder approaches can offer different benefits, such as potentially increasing agency and enhancing the influence of non-state actors on the food system.

Each category of urban food system governance efforts also brings its own politics, own views of food system needs, and different forms of convening authority and legitimacy. However, all three domains make specific assumptions about participation, agency, and stakeholder voice. Some processes, such as city-led processes generally operate through top-down governance processes. Equally, project actions generally operationalize actions according to a specific agenda with associated authority and budget-aligned prescripts.

### 12.5.1 City-led Efforts

Some examples of city-led and city-governed approaches to urban food governance include those in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, or the transversal governance experiment emerging in the City of Cape Town and its wider region (FAO 2022). These processes reflect city-led change whereby the city leads the process but at times crowd in other, non-city, processes. Specifically, Belo Horizonte, a city of nearly three million residents and capital of south-eastern Brazil's Minas Gerais state, was the first Brazilian city to successful adopt a specific urban food system governance agenda (Göpel 2009; Rocha and Lessa 2009). A central consideration in Belo Horizonte was an emphasis on urbanizing a national mandate pertaining to the realization of the right to food and wider programmatic activities linked to the country's Zero Hunger (Fome Zero) strategy (Rocha and Lessa 2009). Food was therefore seen as a tool to enable development, and to ensure health and well-being, drawing on a wider national scale authorizing environment to legitimize the devolution of food governance to the urban scale. By viewing food as an essential public good, the city adopted a direct obligation to respond to the identified need. Food and nutrition were also governance tools to engage a wide array of urban

[2] Local Governments for Sustainability was previously named the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives.

activities from land use to education, from skills development to urban health, from food retail to equity (Rocha and Lessa 2009).

National-scale processes are often blind to the urban food system challenge and miss key urban food and nutrition issues. Most importantly, the national-scale processes are ill equipped to effectively govern the intersection between the urban system and the urban food system. While the Belo Horizonte example is not from Africa, what this does show is the utility of drawing on national policy frameworks and policy positions to enact city-scale processes that speak to specific contextual needs.

Within Africa, the city of Cape Town has sought to embed a form of food systems governance in the city's internal processes through a phased approach that started with detailed research, identification of food system challenges, the integration of these into its resilience strategy (CoCT 2019) and finally, inclusion into the Integrated Development Plan (IDP). The IDP is the mechanism through which longer term fiscal allocations can be directed at specific actions. Cape Town is showing evidence of a new form of transversal urban food governance, driven through the City's Resilience Department, but with increasing political and operational support, across over 40 ongoing city programs or policies (Faragher 2021). Here, a variety of actions have coalesced to legitimize the process and amplify need. Although officials in the City of Cape Town have been working on urban food issues since the early 2000s (Battersby et al. 2014), further alignment to networks such as C40, ICLEI, and the MUFPP have served to legitimize processes (CoCT 2019). Partnerships and networks with academic institutions have deepened engagement and enabled critical reflections. Importantly these emergent actions were then amplified through two crises, first the protracted drought of 2016–2019 (Ziervogel 2019) and then the extreme food crises that emerged as a result of COVID-19 (Battersby 2020).

The Cape Town case reflects four factors. Firstly, the transversal mandate of the Resilience Department facilitated processes across many mandates and silos in local government. Secondly, it leveraged inputs from international networks, as opposed to adopting these uncritically. Thirdly, a specific government department took on the food mandate in the city. Finally, similar to the case in Brazil, the overarching legal obligation of the Right to Food served to ground actions in the country's overarching legal framework. While Cape Town does not have a proactive process to understand and engage the food insecure, it interfaces with parallel processes like a Community of Practice on urban food governance hosted by a local university and a civil society food forum hosted by a local not-for-profit organization.

Drawing on the four factors evident in the Cape Town case, many African governments, specifically city and county governments, can act in similar ways. African governments, both local and national, have a far greater role to play in responding to urban food system challenges. Cities in Africa are increasingly

becoming sites of struggle. These issues frequently escalate to become national issues. When development challenges, such as high levels of informality, inequality, joblessness, increasing food costs, aligned to other increases in costs for essential items such as infrastructure combine, situations become volatile, as seen in the case of food riots (Moseley 2022). It is in these circumstances where people's necessities require their political representatives to act. And if leaders, both national and urban fail to act, this can provide the urban poor with the political leverage to act in their own interest. It is here where the politics of provisions—those moments when it is safe to challenge the state, even actively protest and disrupt wider societal needs—will certainly become far more evident in African cities (Bohstedt 2014: 3; Hossain and Scott-Villiers 2017).

### 12.5.2 Food Policy Councils (FPCs)

International development support organizations, such as the Resource Centre on Urban Agriculture and Food Security (RUAF), the Humanist Institute for Development Cooperation (HIVOS) and others, have been active in food systems change in Africa for several decades. RUAF works seeks to create sustainable, equitable and resilient food systems in African cities. One of the ways in which these processes are enacted is through a form of FPC. The initiatives of the MUFPP are aligning with these engagements. International organizations such as ICLEI have worked with African cities and run several city-focused food programs, working with cities to develop city-scale food visions, supporting city-to-city food system exchanges and increasingly focusing on urban food system governance innovation. A specific area of focus for ICLEI has been to support certain African cities in the development of FPCs, drawing on international examples. Cities where such food policy structures are being developed include Antananarivo (Madagascar), Arusha (Tanzania), and Stellenbosch (South Africa) (Haysom and Currie 2023), as well as similar multistakeholder processes in Lusaka (Zambia) and Fort Portal and the Kabarole District (Uganda) (Chirwa and Yossa 2019).

Internationally, food policy councils (FPCs) have gained increased attention since the early 1980s (Harper et al. 2009). MacRae and Donahues' (2013: 16) account of the increase in initiatives in Canada demonstrate a clear escalation from the initiation of the Toronto Food Policy Council in 1990 to over 55 such councils by 2012. Innovations are not confined to North America alone, with structures emerging across Europe (Moragues-Faus and Morgan 2015; Sonnino 2017; Sieveking 2019) and Latin America (Dubbeling et al. 2017). A 2015 review of localized FPC governance structures in North America demonstrated diverse governance positions, ranging from structures officially embedded within city government, enacting food policy processes at the urban scale, to structures actively seeking to engage food system issues independent of government

processes (Haysom 2015). A similar trend was identified by Gupta et al. (2018: 12) who "noted structural autonomy—being organized outside of the government while maintaining strong collaborations with the government [that] helps food policy councils retain their independence while promoting more inclusive policy making processes that link community members to the government." The overarching theme of such processes is broader urban food system participation, as the pluralistic terminology denotes, to actively engage the governance of the food system in context.

FPCs, while focusing on a variety of urban food system related issues, are increasingly argued to be more than just governance processes. FPCs are increasingly seen as levers to shift the wider food system but are also places where different politics are enacted and given life. FPCs have been celebrated for their democratic potential (Sieveking 2019), espousing inclusive democratic processes associated with voice and participation. While most still directly support policy-related activities and food systems change (Gupta et al. 2018), increasingly FPCs are seeking ways to expand urban governance mandates, at times even seeking change beyond the urban food system (Schiff 2008; Harper et al. 2009; Moragues-Faus and Morgan 2015), engaging wider issues such as sustainability, climate change, and urban governance writ large.

Yet, while FPC-type processes espouse far greater participation and a democratic ethic, some have challenged such processes for de-politicizing urgent issues that are inherently political (Swyngedouw 2005). Examples of such issues include avoiding policy failures that result in certain societal groups experiencing severe hunger and food related vulnerability, such as migrants, disproportionate leeway to private sector actors, and adverse treatment of informal food vendors. It has been cautioned that such governance processes are characterized by processes "based on spurious participation that disregards dissent and champions consensual modes of decision-making led by dominant economic and political interests" (Moragues-Faus 2020: 76). These critiques challenge the articulation of multi-actor partnerships, such as food policy councils, as a democracy-enhancing process (Levkoe 2011). Dissenting voices call for a deeper examination of the values and politics at play in these governance mechanisms (Moragues-Faus and Morgan 2015). Such politics include the frequent exclusion of informal food vendors, as Skinner (2008) and Young (2018) show in the cases of Durban, South Africa and Kampala, Uganda, respectively. Swyngedouw (2005: 1991) raises essential questions about the assumption that such processes are inherently democratic and aligns with the caution that "emerging innovative horizontal and networked arrangements of governance-beyond-the-state are decidedly Janus-faced," further pointing out that the "arrangements of governance have created new institutions and empowered new actors, while disempowering others. … that this shift from 'government' to 'governance' is associated with the consolidation of new technologies of government, on the one hand, and with profound restructuring of the parameters of political democracy on the other, leading to a substantial democratic deficit."

These cautions are important in the context of African urban food governance actions. Given the levels on inequality in African cities and the historical marginalization of certain groups, claims of democratization of the urban food system might not translate in practice. Despite claims of inclusion and democracy, most emerging local food governance actions remain ensconced in elite enclaves speaking for the poor and of the poor, but not with the poor and marginalized (Haysom 2020).

### 12.5.3 External and Issue-Oriented Interventions

Different actors outside city-led or bottom-up governance processes also shift the nature of the urban food system. Many private sector development funders and global funding agencies are actively investing in Africa's urban food systems. These actors often bring a specific operational and ideological view of where the food system challenge lies. Such actions at times disrupt and destabilize existing food system activities, and even lobbying the state for food system actions that might serve the interests of specific lobby groups, but not always the needs of the most food insecure. These urban food system engagements, including the development of shopping malls with supermarkets as their anchor tenants resulting in the clearance of traditional food vendors from the area, or the closure and relocation of traditional wet markets to areas peripheral to the city, are altering African urban food systems (Battersby 2017; Joubert et al. 2018). International development finance-driven developments of both shopping malls and multi-story trader malls further disrupt traditional urban food system processes and networks (Young 2018).

Relatedly, urban food systems can be disrupted by issue-led interventions that address distinct bottlenecks in a disconnected manner. The identification of the issues to prioritize may emerge from bottom-up processes or from donor-funded actions and concerns. Issue-led actions might include urban greening, school gardens, early childhood development center support, and urban food growing projects, among others. Although issue-led processes bring benefits and can facilitate wider urban food engagements, such as witnessed in the case of Stellenbosch, South Africa (Haysom 2015), this is generally not the case. Instead, such interventions typically lead to a project-oriented approach, which prevents tackling the wider systemic drivers of the issues being addressed.

### 12.5.4 Summary

As a result of the convening authority and the increasing importance placed on local or city governments by devolution aspirations, many donor- and INGO-funded programs target local governments as the key agents of change. Some of these nascent city-level food systems governance processes are often presented as

inclusive and participatory. Yet, many urban actors, particularly the poor and those disaffected by under-performing urban food systems, are not part of these processes (Moragues-Faus 2020). Given the marginalization of so many in African cities, it is doubtful that the poor would ever be able to be part of such processes. In addition, given the remaining rural bias and production focus of national governments, many city governments lack effective autonomy and resources to implement the food systems policies envisioned by donors. The fiscal vacuum has other consequences. External donors, development agencies and equity funders can bring much needed resources, and prestige, but this skews power relations and frequently redirects attention away from more democratically determined processes, to enclave-type developments for more affluent communities that can siphon limited resources to support their needs as opposed to the urban majority (Pieterse et al. 2018).

## 12.6 Combining Authorizing and Activating Environments

Drawing on the examples provided above, there are at least five reasons why urban food governance processes that originated in the Global North may not be fully effective for transforming urban food systems in African cities. First, in Global North contexts, many urban food governance processes are domestically driven and have their roots in longer-term activism, but in the African context, these processes are often created by outsiders. Second, the scope of engagement is informed by the experiences and world views of these external actors. These perspectives may negate or dilute actions around wider urban systems change informed by local contexts. Third, Northern food system governance is linked to the agency and voice of the various stakeholders. The ability to actively engage in democratic governance processes is often absent in African cities: colonial histories, post-independence self-sufficiency programs, structural adjustment, and neoliberal economic policies have resulted in a particular type of food system. Most problematically, many African cities are not in democratic countries and therefore pluralistic models do not align with the broader restrictions on civic space. There is often active protest demonstrated at components of these food system issues, such as food price and food quality, but far fewer opportunities to challenge wider food system issues and the historical underpinnings of these issues, and resultant outcomes such as hunger (see Moseley 2022). Fourth, from a policy perspective, food system issues are generally not the exclusive mandate of local/urban governments. Many devolution reforms give local governments authority over agriculture and food but many of these powers are shared concurrently with national actors. This creates significant challenges, and it is here where the problem of accountability and authority for actions comes into play. Fifth, processes that avoid questions of

scale, be these hyper-local or regional interventions, or concepts such as nexus actions (e.g., Weitz et al. 2014), miss the politics of scale and the essential governance question of authority and mandate. Clearly there is a need for wider engagement across scales but from an urban food governance perspective, each scalar governance entity needs to hold authority over the actions within their area of responsibility. If other governance actors dictate for other scales, actions are diluted.

Combined, these challenges reduce the potential for governance actions that are truly representative across all city food system actors. Mirroring Swyngedouw's (2005) concern, many of the current urban food governance structures and associated processes reflect both new technologies of government and profound restructuring of the parameters of political democracy. These are often facilitated through INGOs and development organizations. Although convenors of these groups attempt to make these inclusive structures, existing networks and trust relationships mean that in many cases the structures include small groups of connected officials and individuals and groups with histories of working with the state or INGO sector. These groupings may not be responsive to the needs of the urban majority.

Given the high levels of urban food insecurity, and the increasingly challenging food system outcomes (Frayne et al. 2010), urban food systems in African cities require fundamental change. The need for democratic processes that enact input, voice, and participation across the urban majority in change processes is not disputed. The inclusion of agency and wider sustainability as dimensions of food security are essential (Clapp et al. 2021). The food insecure in African cities need to be able to engage with the governance of the food system. Over and above negative food security outcomes of hunger, food insecurity, and under-nutrition, the trend lines in the rise in diet related non communicable diseases and overweight and obesity, are already shifting in the wrong direction (Global Nutrition Report 2020).

Governance responses require a deliberate activation of different actors and scales of action. The state does not hold absolute franchise over food system actions. Equally the state does not hold all urban food system knowledge. Significant knowledge, strategic thinking, as well as legitimacy vests at the community scale, which we refer to as the activating environment. Bottom-up processes that draw on actors and processes that elevate voice and participation are as important to urban food governance as policies. At the same time, urban governments need to act with other governmental tiers, such as county, provincial, regional, or national, to reclaim governance authority over urban food systems and engage issues in a manner aligned to political and policy mandates. We refer to this governance scale of action as the authorizing environment. Figure 12.1 depicts a stylized view of the activating environment and the authorizing environments.

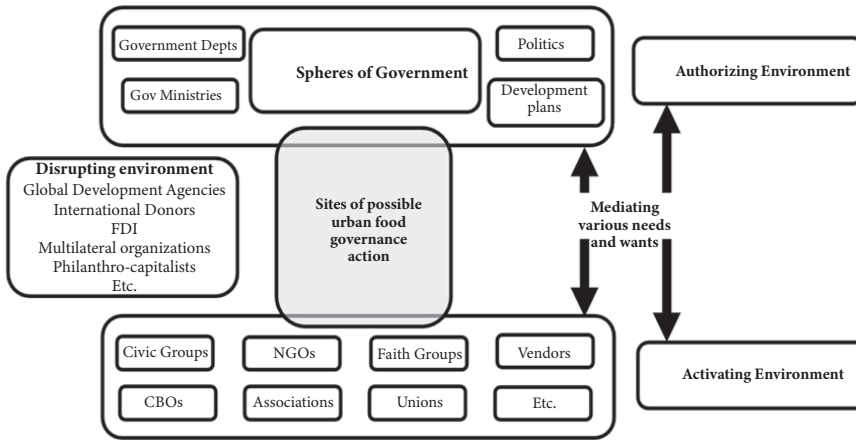


**Figure 12.1** Stylized view of urban food governance through activating and authorizing environments.

*Source:* Authors' own representation.

Most examples of urban food governance from cities from the Global North have been cases where the activating environment—the sites of struggle within communities, key stakeholder groups and community level activists—have sought out ways to engage and shift the urban food agenda. These activating environment actions generally engage processes located within the authorizing environment—the sites of policy, power, and fiscal allocations—to enact context specific food systems transformation.

Currently in African cities, most food systems change processes either focus on single sites of struggle, at the activating environment (e.g. through urban agriculture projects). Other actions focus solely on the authorizing environment, through, for example, high level networks driven by city leadership actors. Urban food governance processes across African cities seldom engage both environments to enact change.

The essential question is whether both environments, activating and authorizing, are able to effectively engage the other? We suggest that the political economy of both the state and civic actions often limits or constrains the ability of either to engage systematically. Engagements are generally confined to processes between one actor from the authorizing and another form the activating environment. Central to this model is the key role played by those who facilitate processes that mediate the various needs and wants to enable change. These actions require very specific skills and attributes, such as the ability and experience to engage the messy politics of the contested food space. Facilitators also need to be trusted and respected by all actors involved in governance processes, often informed by past actions and resumés from similar processes. These actions

often come with costs associated with such roles, and it is here that external donor and development actions might be better directed. Further, we suggest that it is when the needs, wants, and practices of these two different environments are not attended to that the fertile ground for the proliferation of the actions of the disrupting environment, external actors, vested interests, and sites of system capture, emerge.

Such a framing, we propose, demands far deeper engagement in how urban food systems governance might be operationalized and enabled. This requires nuance, contextual specificity and a multi-scalar and multi-mandate approaches. Almost all discussions on urban food governance in the African context have focused on food alone. Key to the food system challenge is the intersection between the urban system and the food system.

Roberts suggested that "more than with any other of our biological needs, the choices we make around food affect the shape, style, pulse, smell, look, feel, health, economy, street life and infrastructure of the city" (Roberts 2001: 4). Equally, the choices made about urban infrastructure shape the economy and food environments of the city and will affect the food system, health system, social system, and overall wellness outcomes of a city. These intersecting systems are the sites of required urban food system governance in African cities, expanding the governance actors in such processes. Arguably, urban infrastructure is the "keystone" where the urban system and the food system intersect. Given that local governments often have a greater infrastructure mandate than a food mandate, engaging a wider remit, and including key urban aspects, such as infrastructure, can offer greater legitimacy to more localized urban food engagements.

As a general framing, this calls for approaches that differentiate between food sensitive governance actions and food specific governance actions. Many urban governance activities, from planning to education can inculcate a food sensitive approach. But equally, food specific approaches need to espouse and align with a sensitivity to urban system needs.

Histories of the city's and the country's food systems, of power relationships, in both government and society, and of approaches to and styles of governance all require far greater consideration when enacting urban food governance processes in African cities. Attempting to replicate food governance processes copied from contexts removed from a city's history, politics and power dynamics is naïve and dangerous given that it sets the process up to fail, and in so doing often disenfranchises those facing the greatest need.

Given the development challenge in Africa, and specifically in African cities, we have argued for a different approach to urban food systems governance. We have suggested that current urban food governance models active in African cities have not necessarily paid due attention to entrenched power and processes of exclusion (as highlighted by Moragues-Faus et al. 2023). Differentiating between the modes of urban food governance (formal or less formal) and the approaches and practices

of actual governance of urban food systems is a pre-requisite in understanding the agency at play and their power (Moragues-Faus and Battersby 2021). Similar concerns have been voiced pertaining to wider food system governance and the dominant role of vested interests in governance processes (McKeon 2017). In the case of urban food governance, similar concerns around unequal power relationships and the impact of these on agency are evident. As Moragues-Faus et al. (2023: 14) caution, "despite wide acknowledgement of the importance of considering and engaging with multiple stakeholders in urban food governance transformation, there is an increasing critique that multistakeholderism does not clearly contend with power." It is essential that governance processes avoid creating the democratic deficit described by Swyngedouw (2005) and enable greater participation, embracing the politics of urban food.

Traditionally, cities have not had an explicit mandate to govern the urban food system. However, as the urban transition unfolds, an essential urban food system governance approach must be one that connects the urban food systems needs to the urban system. It is here where city governments have an essential role to play. However, urban government is not the only food system actor in African cities. The Cape Town case showed how cities adopt a far more transversal and integrated approach to understanding, and potentially governing, the urban food system. Nongovernmental organizations, civic groups and general citizens, among others, have detailed food systems knowledge, understand local needs, and often hold greater legitimacy than the state in site specific contexts. There exists significant food systems knowledge at the community scale that is yet to be included in the longer-term governance.

We argue here that for the variety of reasons discussed, in African cities, neither the authorizing environment or the activating environment are as yet suitably equipped to engage novel urban food governance processes. For this reason, those able to facilitate engagement across the authorizing and activating domain are essential in laying the foundation of robust urban food systems governance in Africa. Such mediated structures and approaches differentiate the emergent processes from more traditional FPCs.

## 12.7 Conclusion

Given the transition to a predominantly urban world, many external actors and development actors, such as development agencies, funders, and researchers, are turning their attention to cities. The historical anti-urban bias discussed earlier that typified African development discourse and policy is receding (Myers 2014) with a diverse range of urban issues attracting attention. A similar city-centric reworking is evident in the shifting focus of global governance institutions, multi-lateral institutions, and global philanthropic actors. This shift in focus has allowed urban food to become an area of governance focus.

At the same time, current governance processes are ill-equipped to engage Africa's dual challenge of rapid urbanization and negative urban food system outcomes. Both challenges are escalating, requiring urgent governance responses. This chapter has questioned the utility of existing urban food governance approaches to meet the urban, urban food system, and wider food system needs of Africa.

Cities have always been sites of experimentation, particularly in different forms of governance. Urban food governance offers a unique opportunity to engage in such experimentation. In African cities, urban food governance actions that engage the physical, material, and relational properties of urban place and space are urgently required. In this context governance is about more than just policies, but active processes and agents shaping the nature of development and enactment of these processes, as sites of complex socio-spatial and material relations that engage both food and urban system needs.

Such a relational view requires far deeper engagement in three intersecting processes that determine the nature and form of urban food governance: agency and voice, power, and policy. This requires contextual specificity directly aligned to a governance mandate. Both the state and society need to be actively involved in such a process. For successful governance to be achieved, it is essential that politics, power, convening authority, and voice are recognized and embedded in processes and by governments across all tiers. Equally, external and multi-scalar interventions that portend to support the urban system offer certain benefits. However, if urban food systems are not actually governed at the urban scale—but rather only dictated by national authorities, overseen by discrete local government departments, or ignorant of diverse societal actors in the city—urban food systems *governance* will remain elusive.

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