Bellagio Meeting Input

Project/Area of focus: Hungry Cities Partnership

Brief overview

The Hungry Cities Partnership (HCP) is an international network of city-based partner organisations using food as a lens to investigate the relationships between rapid urbanization, informality, inclusive growth and urban food systems in the Global South. The HCP conducts collaborative research, training and advocacy with the objective of providing innovative solutions to the challenge of building sustainable cities and policies and programs that promote food security in Sothern cities.

The HCP currently operates in China, India, Jamaica, Kenya, Mexico, Mozambique and South Africa, and is funded by the International Partnerships for Sustainable Development (IPaSS) program of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

Evolution

Work investigating the relationships between the growth of Southern cities, poverty and food security is not new. Rakodi and others drew attention to theses issues in the 1980s (Rakodi, 1985). Maxwell, speaking more broadly described food insecurity as a critical development challenge (Maxwell, 1995) with "food security" part of a developmental imperative (Abrahamsen, 2003). While many entry points into and perspectives on the urban food challenge exist, two perspectives dominate. First is the focus on urban agriculture as a practice to enhance food security and/or to address urban poverty through enhancing livelihoods (Binns and Lynch 1998; Foeken 2006; Lee-Smith, 2010). Secondly, linked to the urban production view, in sub-Saharan Africa, urban agriculture tends to be advocated as a household scale poverty and food insecurity alleviation strategy, a powerful development tool (Zezza and Tasciotti 2010) with this focus on the household being the dominant scale of urban food security analysis (Battersby, 2013).

These scalar and normative tensions were evident in the African Food Security Urban Network (AFSUN) research that commenced in 2007 with fieldwork rolling out at the same time that the stressors of the 2007/2008 food crises were becoming evident. The AFSUN survey work was conducted in 11 cities in 9 southern African countries. The AFSUN research was carried out in predominantly poor localities in the 11 cities and highlighted the relationship between poverty and urban food insecurity. Using the Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance (FANTA) methodologies applied by USAid, the AFSUN work reported average food insecurity levels across these poorer localities within the partner cities of 77 percent. Over and above highlighting the extend of food insecurity, the 2008 AFSUN survey highlighted five additional (and predominantly non production oriented) food security issues, most linking to the food access, food utilization and stability dimensions of food security: Of critical importance in the

development of Southern and specifically African urban food security research, the AFSUN research demonstrated how the poor navigate the urban food system (the spatial and urban planning question), the multiple market options used to access food and the importance of the informal sector (diverse food access strategies), the low levels of dietary diversity and what comprised the majority of diets (nutritional challenges), the extreme changes in food availability often unrelated to traditional harvest cycles (different hungry season drivers), linked to many other systemic issues, as well as the relatively small role played by urban agriculture in most cities (limited urban agriculture). Perhaps where these findings had the greatest relevance was that they ran counter to most policy and governance interventions, either at the national scale or at the urban scale.

The AFSUN work was not without its shortcomings. The deliberate focus on poor neighbourhoods negated wider city references. The focus on southern African cities only limited the generalizability of the findings. The predominant source of data was a household survey and while this generated novel and useful data, cross-referencing these data with other household surveys across the cities, and additional survey methodologies across the urban food system is required to supply the information required to provide realistic food system solutions, policies and programmes that promote food security in cities - and facilitate the building sustainable cities.

The Hungry Cities Partnership responded to these challenges in its design and approach to research.

The Hungry Cities Partnership

Drawing on the view preferred by Carolyn Steel that "Food and cities are so fundamental to our everyday lives that they are almost too big to see. Yet if you put them together, a remarkable relationship emerges" (Steel 2008: ix), the Hungry Cities Partnership uses food as a lens to explore key Southern urban development challenges.

At the core of the project is a global partnership linking researchers at five Canadian universities with their counterparts at institutions in seven cities and countries across the South. The Southern or LMIC Partner institutions include Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana – Azcapotzalco, Mexico City, Mexico; University of the West Indies, Kingston, Jamaica; University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa; Eduardo Mondlane University, Maputo, Mozambique; University of Nairobi, Nairobi, Kenya; Indian Institute for Human Settlements, Bangalore, India; and Nanjing University, Nanjing, China.

By planning research collaboratively, and conducting research simultaneously in seven different countries, the project ensures comparability and highlights differences across the partner cities of the South.

HCP objectives and research modules

The HCP has three overarching project objectives. First, advancing knowledge by building new methods and fields on enquiry into the intersecting areas of urbanisation, food security, food systems and inclusive growth. Second, to contribute to the shaping of policy and informing practice through high quality research and knowledge mobilization. Third, and linked to the academic funding component of this project is the training the next generation of scholars through support for graduate students and in the methodologies applied in the execution of the surveys. In order to achieve this, the HCP has five areas of work, each, building on the preceding work activity. These activities, running over the five year cycle of the project include:

1. Urbanization, Urban Food Security and Informality in Global South
   - A detailed review/audit of literature, policies and practice (or the absence thereof) conducted across scales, from the city, to the region, to the general continental/economic block perspective supported by a review at the global scale.

2. Rapid Urbanization, Food Insecurity and Inclusive Growth review
   - This component of the research has been investigated using a collaboratively designed food system assessment tool, linked to the FANTA tools, using the household as the primary entry point but surveyed across the city. The survey contains a number of additions to speak to wider food system and urban development issues in the partner cities. Partner cities also added their own modules, for example, food safety in Nanjing.

3. Reshaping Food Systems Through Inclusive Growth
   - Recognising the flaws in the formal versus informal economy discourse, this component of the project sought to engage the food system across the food retail continuum, but with a predominant enquiry into the so-called informal food vendor sector. All seven cities reflect very different food vending typologies and governance arrangements. Despite such challenges, a general survey tool was co-developed and has been administered in two of the cities to date. Initial findings highlight differences, but also offer useful insights into aligned trends and issues.
   - This survey is supported by a variety of qualitative research approaches designed to add depth, assess issues and extract key narratives relating to the food retail environment.

4. Youth Employment and Entrepreneurial Activity in the Informal Economy
   - As with the food retail survey, the survey to understand youth entrepreneurship within the food systems of the partner cities was developed collaboratively and is currently being administered.
   - This survey is supported by a variety of qualitative research approaches designed to add new layers, narratives and insights into individual food system experiences of youth engaged in food vending within the cities.

5. Competition and Inclusive Growth in the Urban Food Economy
   – This module of the research project is yet to be developed but is intended to consider the key transitions taking place within the retail food system, most specifically the role that the big food and the supermarkets transitions are playing in changing (or not) the food system of Southern cities.
   – Different countries are at different stages in these transitions with South Africa and Kenya being at advanced stages in terms of supermarket roll out. Jamaica, Mexico and South Africa are all experiencing the impact of the big food transition and China reflects a very different food system transition with innovations such as an "uber-type" take out delivery service changing how food is consumed. Nanjing also reflects real concerns about food safety.
   – Engaging these transitions from a formal food system perspective is the key objective of this module.

To date, the project has completed the seven-city urban food system audit and implemented a city-wide household food security baseline survey in all seven partner cities, collecting detailed demographic, food security and consumption behaviour for a sample of over 9,500 households covering a combined urban population of 50 million people.

Central themes emerging from the research to date

The data are still being reviewed and country partners are in the process of completing data analysis. However, a number of generalizable themes are emerging:

- Key issue but absent urban focus - Perhaps the overarching theme is the centrality of the urban food system to the urban functioning – a key urban process but one that no city directly manages or has a policy or fiscal mandate to oversee.
- Generally high levels of food insecurity - The HCP surveys were carried out across the city, spanning income strata. In most cities, with Nanjing and Mexico City being the exceptions, when divided into three distinct income terciles, the surveys found high levels of food insecurity in the poorest tercile with levels of "food stress" being evident in middle tercile.
- Food system transitions taking place - The food system in each city is undergoing some form of transition with food retail being the area where some of the greatest change is taking place. Food markets are also becoming more global with products from a wide variety of sources being sold across the cities, even by the so-called informal traders – traders in Maputo are selling frozen chickens imported from Brazil and fruits they have imported from South Africa, while Kenyan traders are selling fresh produce imported by airfreight from Egypt.
- City region food system questions - The food systems servicing these cities reflect global food system networks raising questions about the applicability and utility of city region food system perspectives.
- Food and urban design - While different sectors of society engage the food system in different ways, many of the actual urban functions are dictated by or are directly related to the functioning of the food system.

- Historical influences drive current systems - The food systems of the different cities are most certainly not uniform with the current food systems being influenced by history, specifically colonial histories, and other restructuring processes that have impacted the cities and wider urban functioning.
- Vibrant economies - Linked to the project theme, the food system offers vibrant economic activities, whether these city food systems reflect a measure of inclusive growth is yet to be seen. Most cities reflect high levels of inequality.
- Modern food system imaginations - In many cities, excluding Mexico City, singular (read as modern) food systems appear preferred as official and policymaker imaginations of effective food system functioning. Active processes are in place to remove informal traders and to relocate traditional wet markets, imagining clear streets and formal food retail only.

Despite evidence of high levels of food insecurity in most poor areas of the partner cities, coupled with an active and vibrant "less than formal food system", the general findings support Maxwell's (1999) argument citing the political invisibility of urban food insecurity to urban governments.
Despite the fact that many have called for caution when transferring rural plans and processes to urban food security (see Garrett and Ruel 1999, 1972), when food security is considered in the partner cities, either by city administrators or non-governmental organisations, a rural perspective predominates.

Policy contribution of Hungry Cities Partnership

The Hungry Cities Partnership hopes to offer a Southern focus to the broad themes of inclusive growth, urban food system perspectives, the differences and similarities in Southern urban food imperatives, as well as generating policy and practice oriented research relevant to the specific partner countries. At this time, the project is on track to deliver these policy objectives.

At a global scale, the Southern urban food systems focus offers a unique entry point to support the emerging work linking different Sustainable Development Goals (with Goals 2, 3 and 11 being primary, while also contributing to the links to goals 8 and 10). One of the understood outcomes of the NUA will be the development of National Urban Plans. The HCP research is actively seeking to engage urban partners, through a facilitated process, to support processes to insert food and urban food systems thinking into city specific Urban Plans.

Links to other food research and engagements

Links to Consuming Urban Poverty:

The HCP links directly with the Consuming Urban Poverty project in that its Southern focus aligns with the work being carried out by CUP. The difference is that CUP focuses primarily on secondary cities while most HCP partner cities could be deemed primary or at least key large metropolitan areas.

CUP and HCP have used similar research and survey tools and hope to run a set of comparative analyses once project obligations are addressed. The value of these comparisons is unknown at this time as the CUP cities scale and typology, and survey methods differ slightly. If these comparisons generate areas for future enquiry only, this is still deemed to be useful. Central to both the CUP and HCP research is the imperative to place food on the agenda of the rapidly growing developing world cities and those engaging in and with these cities.

Links to other projects and activities:

As a project using food as a lens to understand cities and city functions, food offers interesting insights into other urban issues. The point here is that linking food security, food systems, inclusive growth and the drivers of food insecurity and under nutrition of cities of the Global South means that the HCP partnership speaks to many of the objectives and focus areas of those present at the CUP Bellagio meeting.

Five of the HCP partner cities are members of the **C40** cities initiative, with Mexico City being one of the C40 steering committee cities. Our work is still in the data collection phase and has not been fully analysed as yet but links to C40, specifically across the different regions, would offer great value.

As mentioned, the HCP work is providing insights into the developing New Urban Agenda work and so provides a useful link to the organisations such as **UN-Habitat** and the **NUA** teams seeking to operationalize the NUA into city functions.

The HCP works in a number of cities in which organisations such as the **IIED** are already working and generating excellent research. Being able to engage IIED (as we have already done) and engaging in the outcomes from our research, would support our partners in these cities (specifically Nairobi) and build knowledge that could have wider Southern city policy impact.

Organisations such as **RUAF** have been active in the area of urban food for a considerable time, with a reputation to support the excellent research and projects already in place. RUAF have partnered with organizations in a number of our partner countries and as the work of CUP, HCP and RUAF develops, there are significant connections and opportunities to engage further.

As the food system work considers the outcomes of limited food access in the Southern HCP cities, coupled with change in the urban food system and resultant dietary transitions, the HCP work directly supports urban health related research and provides insights into some of the urban food system challenges. This, it is believed, supports the work of organisations such as **WHO**.

A number of other organisations such as the **World Bank** the **World Food Programme** are active in the urban food arena and are seeking ways to engage and develop specific activities and urban food programmes. It is believed that the HCP could feed into these activities, as and where there is alignment.

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