



## WHITE PAPER

# Territorial Governance and Food Markets for Sustainable Food Systems

Strengthening Urban-Rural Linkages through Local,  
Traditional and Farmers Markets

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## **Territorial Governance and Food Markets for Sustainable Food Systems**

Strengthening Urban-Rural Linkages through Local, Traditional and Farmers Markets

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### **Acknowledgements**

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Fresh food markets, encompassing local, traditional, and farmers markets, are vital food environments that are interconnected and spatially dispersed in food systems.<sup>1,2,3</sup> These markets connect urban consumers with peri-urban and rural producers, value chains, landscapes and communities, sustaining crucial urban-rural linkages. As such, these markets offer multiple levers for locally-led, sustainable and just food systems transformation, access to safe, healthy diets, and opportunities for greater inclusion, equity, investment and innovation in food systems and governance. This underscores their value as places for socio-ecological resilience, particularly in the face of escalating polycrisis i.e., mutually reinforcing crises associated with challenges from climate change, biodiversity loss, land degradation,

poverty, poor public health and other widening inequalities, instability, to increasing conflict. Current governance structures and operations often fail to adequately support these food markets or leverage their full potential due to the fragmentation of governance across administrative boundaries, power disparities, differing ways of 'knowing' food systems, underinvestment, and insufficient integration in urban and rural planning.<sup>4,5,6</sup> Contributing to these problems is the historically narrower perception of these markets as economic hubs, rather than more holistic places for livelihoods, health, nourishment, cultural identity, learning, food systems knowledge, social protection and financing, community building, and fostering of balanced ecosystems.



Fresh food  
markets are key  
environments

Urban consumers  
residing in cities

Peri-urban and  
rural producers  
and vendors



This White Paper argues for a territorial governance approach that strengthens urban-rural linkages by empowering local actors and facilitating their mobilized agency. Local, traditional, and farmers markets are strategic places offering multiple levers and multi-capital for just food systems transformation within cities as well as across urban-rural and territorial landscapes.



Investing in hard (physical) and soft (capacity) market infrastructure, diverse forms of knowledge, and inclusive “whole society” governance is critical to unlocking present and long-term resilient, sustainable food systems. Communities, government and sectors can then routinely implement best practices and be part of decision-making in ways that can facilitate a variety of local, broadly regenerative, biodiverse food value chains and market food environments that are characterized by lively public spaces, access to affordable, safe, culturally preferred, healthy diets, reduced and valorized food waste and opportunities for dignified, prosperous livelihoods. In effect, this provides enabling conditions for thriving communities, food security and nutrition, mitigating and adapting to climate change, promoting responsible use and preservation of biodiversity, and fostering land degradation neutrality (LDN).

### Key Messages:



Local, traditional, and farmers markets are critical infrastructure for resilient and sustainable food systems, local economic development and livelihoods, innovative social protection, community cohesion and nourishment - especially for women, youth, indigenous communities and other vulnerable communities.



These markets are important hubs where food is managed, shared, sold and talked about, and where waste can be valorized into forms like compost and animal feed and/or wasted (e.g., ending up in municipal landfills). Markets offer many opportunities to improve how food is grown, distributed, and accessed in cities in fair and inclusive ways; and how food waste can be reduced and valued through broadly regenerative and circular food systems - which in turn provide co-benefits for urban, peri-urban and rural communities and the environment.



By influencing and linking what people want to eat, and how they eat and waste, with what and how farmers grow food—especially local, safe, and diverse, regeneratively produced, nutrient-rich food—these markets strengthen



connections between cities and rural areas. This supports the development of sustainable food systems that can be scaled up and adapted in cities and communities, globally.



To better manage the multiple transformative levers through the entry point of these markets, local, sub-national and national governments and non-government sectors need to work and co-invest together – recognizing their respective mandates to effectively translate policy into action in ways that are attentive to contexts and promote local agency. Planning, for example, must include both urban and rural areas, involve different sectors, and give power to local communities.



Investing in hard and soft market infrastructure—like buildings, WASH facilities, cool rooms and ice makers, training, and technical support—is important. They provide structures and capacity for local actors to engage in routine best practices, such as, food, hygiene, better distribution of food, and reduction of food waste.<sup>7</sup> However, this needs to be done inclusively, using quality and diverse forms of evidence, encouraging fair participation, attentive to local laws and policies, building strong networks (like city-to-city partnerships), and bringing in public, private, and other funding. Innovative finance for markets needs to be “fit for purpose”, built within robust “real world” business investment cases, attentive to finance and management country legislation, involve public, private and/or philanthropic partnerships and investment entities like development banks, and be supported by practical de-risking tools. Noting that the misalignment in the “language” used by different actors, from market vendors to city and national governments, researchers and funds like climate adaptation funds, can act as a barrier to financing. For example, where climate funds and researchers speak in the language of CO<sup>2</sup> equivalents and decarbonization and city governments and markets in the language of food hygiene for human health and reduced food waste, and service delivery targets such as volumes of municipal market waste that can comprise a mix of food and non-food waste, like packaging. Consideration of these elements of fresh food markets’ financing is essential for local and territorial sustainable development.



Responding to climate change, preserving nature and biodiversity and protecting land must be part of how markets are planned, managed and evaluated. Achieving Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN)—where the amount and quality of arable land resources stay stable or improve over time—is a key goal in building resilient and sustainable market systems.



**Recommendations:** This White Paper recommends actions for local, sub-national, national, and international actors. These actions encompass efficient, effective and quality integration of market systems with local and territorial planning, fostering inclusive, effectively influencing multi-actor platforms, investing strategically in market soft and hard infrastructure, prioritizing nature-based solutions, and ensuring policies support inclusive, equitable access and participation in decision-making and co-designed solutions, particularly with vulnerable communities – including urban and rural communities experiencing poverty, women, youth, elderly, smallholder farmers, indigenous communities, and displaced people.

## Introduction and Context

The global food system faces an unprecedented polycrisis, including persistent poverty and widening inequalities, rising hunger and multiple forms of coexisting malnutrition, conflict-driven shocks, socio-economic instability, climate change impacts, biodiversity loss, and land degradation.<sup>8</sup> These challenges underscore the urgent need for accelerated, sustainable food system transformation and resilience. All food and agriculture systems are dynamic interactions of rural, peri-urban and

urban communities and places, resulting in complex webs of interdependent relationships between all scales of human settlements and rural landscapes. These urban-rural linkages are defined as reciprocal flows between urban, peri-urban, and rural areas, encompassing people, goods, capital, information, and environmental services.<sup>9</sup> Strengthening these linkages is vital for all five UN Food Systems Summit Action Tracks:





**Access to Safe and Nutritious Foods:** Ensure on-going availability and access to fresh, diverse, safe, culturally preferred and nutritious food within markets and across urban and rural food system linkages. This benefits both urban, peri-urban and rural communities – but especially urban communities and those living in poverty, who rely heavily on market purchases for their sustenance.



**Pivot to sustainable consumption:** Diversification of and increase in shorter supply chains can build value chain sustainability and influence consumer dietary choices and food practices. This promotes reduced food loss and waste, limits transport carbon emissions and supports broadly regenerative production including organic and agroecological practices.



**Promote Nature positive solutions:** Inclusive and participatory governance and planning mechanisms across urban, peri-urban, and rural areas are necessary to protect shared ecosystems, economies, and cultural landscapes.



**Advance equitable livelihoods:** Fostering an enabling environment wherein communities, like smallholder farmers, vendors (especially women in many regions), and associated Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are resilient, offer innovative social protection practices, and can pursue dignified prosperity, with livelihood assets including access to land, income, financial resources, social capital, information and skills.<sup>10</sup>



**Build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress** - Value Chain Sustainability: Strengthening urban-rural territorial cohesion enhances resilience to systemic risks, supports multifunctional land use, and ensures that development pathways are inclusive, ecologically sustainable, and grounded in place-based identity and stewardship.

Local, traditional and farmers markets stimulate local and regional economies while addressing urban and rural peoples' needs, inputs and innovations, especially for women, youth, indigenous communities, and other vulnerable communities.

These markets which are often overlooked in high-level policy discussions, are vital components of local and territorial food systems, key to the success of localizing several sustainable development goals, and have demonstrated significant resilience during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic.





## Conceptualizing local, traditional and farmers markets

Fresh food markets encompass those that only sell fresh produce as well as others which sell a variety of fresh, dried, on ice, frozen, and/or processed foods; with some also selling and offering clothing, airtime, financial services, and/or household goods like pots, pans, baskets and brooms. These markets can be formal and/or informal, fixed or mobile, open daily, at specific time slots, or on special days, and focused or not on specific food products like fresh fish or fruits and vegetables and/or methods of production such as organic. Where formal, such markets may be further characterised by informality with respect to practices and links to the informal economy. Local and traditional food markets further vary in size, modernization (or lack thereof) of infrastructure, processes and practices, and volume of food sold, such as wholesale versus retail and hybrid versions thereof.

Universally shared definitions of these markets are illusive; in part because of regional differences, blurring of governance in informal and formal contexts, contrasting views of community members, academia, government and other practitioners, as well as the presence of digital marketplaces (with some like those

in Asia having a physical and digital presence) and conflated definitions of "territorial markets" with numerous local, traditional, and farmers markets dotted across a large, mostly undefined area, comprising several shorter urban-rural linkages. Insightfully, physical food markets tend to be considered local, but not all **local markets** directly or mostly connect to local or regional agriculture with several selling fresh and processed food that is sourced from longer and more global value chains. Wholesale and retail markets of all types may offer foods produced locally or supplied in local food supply chains, but consumers may not be informed about or connected with the places or the farmers where the food on offer is produced.

**Traditional markets**, a broad and diverse category of markets, encompass wet markets, groupings of streetside vendors, enclosed and open air public markets and informal markets where farmers, their families and other vendors may have operated markets for generations.<sup>11,12</sup>

**Farmers markets**, are defined as "a recurring and coordinated assembly of local farmers or their representatives, selling local agricultural products they have grown, harvested, and/or processed, directly to the public".<sup>13</sup>



These markets are essentially food environments embedded in wider food systems, connecting food and people in the routines of everyday life.<sup>14,15,16</sup> They serve as critical places of exchange of food, goods, services, culture, practices and information, as well as everyday nurturing of relationships between community members and with nature, fundamentally helping to shape urban-rural linkages. However, the food systems transformative potential of these markets is often hampered by fragmented governance across jurisdictions, lack of investment, uncoordinated and siloed investment, insecure land tenure, inadequate soft and hard infrastructure, and policies that favour large-scale, global supply chains over local, territorial systems.

Rapid urbanization is a key food systems driver in ways that are not well understood by policymakers. Urban and rural communities' diets are now influenced by urbanisation towards less healthy forms that are high in salts, sugar and/or fats. Increasing affluence and cost of living like housing rent in cities, also informs dietary choices with an evident preference for more affordable, energy-dense, unhealthy and convenience foods - including processed and ultra-processed foods.<sup>17, 18</sup> The increase in unhealthy dietary consumption is notably contributing to a rise in avoidable non-communicable, chronic diseases (e.g. heart disease, hypertension, Type 2 diabetes, some cancers).<sup>19,20,21</sup> Furthermore, urban expansion can and does encroach on fertile agricultural land, while hard infrastructure development, such as housing and highways, can fragment landscapes and degrade ecosystems, further stressing the urban-rural interface.

In most countries, market webs of social and ecological relationships and flows of food, finance, and human resources, are the primary currency for territorial governance and underpin resilience and forms of innovative social protection. Transport systems, land use patterns, digital connectivity, housing, health, education and many services essential for thriving local economies support and are supported by these urban-rural market relationships.

Many different actors, sectors, and government agencies are responsible for different aspects of governing these complex territorial webs of human/nature interaction. Most governance, whether informal and formal, is insufficiently integrated around the focus on food systems, leading to fragmentation, duplication of services and administrative gaps. Furthermore, while local food market systems, inclusive of MSMEs, are anchored in local and city governance, there is often a lack of their effective inclusion and equity in policy decision-making alongside a history of power imbalances between urban and rural communities. These markets and their relationships with wider civil society, including community-based and nonprofit organizations, vendor savings groups, credit offerings between producers and vendors as well as vendors and consumers, food banks, religious organizations, charities, among others, are strategic places for localized sustainable development - especially given that they operate within formal and informal food systems, locally and across territories, spanning several administrative boundaries, and socio-economic, political and bioregional contexts.

**Urban expansion  
is a growing  
challenge**

## The Role of Territorial Governance

Effective governance is critical to unlocking the potential of local, traditional and farmers markets and strengthening urban-rural linkages, including peri-urban connectivity, for just and sustainable food system transformation that enables access to diverse, safe and healthy diets for all.<sup>22</sup> Fragmented governance - where responsibility is uncoordinated and spread across multiple agencies and jurisdictional boundaries and which don't align with functional food system territories - is a major barrier. Broadly inclusive, participatory "whole society" or "whole of food system" governance approaches are viewed as critical to addressing power asymmetries fueled by competing and/or non-aligned agendas between different government levels, government departments and sectors – including wider civil society.<sup>23,24</sup>

Territorial governance promotes a "whole society" approach, through integrating planning, investment and action across the urban-rural continuum to facilitate co-benefits across communities and landscapes. Territorial approaches to sustainable development have been revisited in the context of food systems transformation, learning from global pandemics and in relation to multiple challenges and crises.<sup>25</sup> The framework for a new approach to territorial development that integrates urban and rural spaces and communities is found in the Urban-Rural Guiding Principles and Framework for Action to Advance Territorial Governance, endorsed by Member States in 2019.

This multi-actor-led normative framework has led to a variety of tools and normative guidance for governments and other stakeholders.

Among these are a stocktaking of territorial approaches published by GIZ in 2021 based on an initial White Paper in 2018.<sup>26</sup> Following COVID-19 and the 2021 UN Food Summit, an updated 2023 White Paper on Territorial Approaches to Sustainable Development was endorsed by 12 international organizations and intergovernmental bodies.<sup>27</sup> Contributions to and decisions from recent Conferences of the Parties for the UN Convention on Biodiversity (CBD COP 15) and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD COPs 15/16) also include tools related to market systems such as integrated land use planning and integrated landscape management (ILM). Tools for integrated approaches to territorial governance and ILM are increasingly present in implementation guidance for sustainable development.<sup>28,29,30,31</sup> Noting the recent efforts regards the nexus of climate, biodiversity and desertification in COPs agendas and convergence, also with the Sustainable Development Goals and UN food systems summit transformative pathway initiatives. However, despite the enormous practical multi-lever and multi-agenda transformative opportunities in market systems, these are often absent in national and global deliberations. Localizing climate, biodiversity, desertification and food pathways commitments through the entry point of local, traditional and farmers markets needs to be incorporated into planning, governance, and investment.



## Strengthening Urban-Rural Linkages for Just Transformation

Strengthening urban-rural linkages (URL) through well-governed local, traditional and farmers markets is a cornerstone of food system transformation. These markets are not just points of sale but dynamic interfaces mediating flows of goods, people, finance, information and ecosystem services, such as water, soil nutrients, and pollination, between urban and rural spaces. The vitality of local, traditional and farmers markets is also a major tourist attraction and economic driver in many places.



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Enhanced urban-rural linkages contribute to multiple sustainability goals:



### Resilience to Shocks:

- » Market systems that traverse territories, connecting different types and sizes of local, traditional and farmers markets, communities and environment, are often characterized by shorter supply value chains and diverse local actors. These have enabled resilience to disruptions (e.g., pandemics, climate events) compared to other market systems, dominated by large business, that have less diverse value chains and greater dependence on longer, complex global value chains.<sup>32</sup>
- » Strengthening local market infrastructure and networks enhances this resilience while providing higher value jobs and increased incomes for local food producers, including laborers, traders, food processors and caterers, and are thus an engine for local economies and livelihood resilience and dignity.



### Sustainable Diets and Nutrition:

- » Markets are strategic food environments influencing food availability, accessibility, safety and affordability – and in turn the environment in which consumer dietary choices are made on a routine basis.

- » Well-functioning markets increase seasonal and/or year-round access to fresh, diverse, and nutritious diets, from multiple local sources. Markets are typically spread out in diffuse networks of short, long and cross border value chains, including a variety of markets from wholesale to hybrid wholesale-retail and retail markets extending to last mile vendors. Wholesalers are often an important dimension of local and territorial food retail market sourcing networks.
- » Local, traditional and farmers markets promote a food retail context in which other market retailers, last mile vendors and consumers can better and more easily exercise preferences for healthier diets in urban and rural areas.
- » Systemic nutrition education that includes food hygiene and safety and linkages to culture and the environment, best practices and information sharing within markets can further influence and mobilize communities to support these markets and actively engage in decision-making.

### Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation:



- » Shorter supply chains can reduce transport-related emissions.
- » Markets can promote climate-smart agricultural practices by providing outlets for diverse, locally adapted crops, including indigenous and culturally preferred foods.



- » Reduced food loss and waste through better hygiene handling, storage (e.g., cool rooms), stock management, efficient distribution and valorized food processing in or near markets decreases associated emissions. Circular economic and social doughnut approaches can further support diversification pathways with income, nutrition and regenerative food production benefits.<sup>33, 34</sup>



- » Integrating markets as grey infrastructure into green and blue infrastructure planning (e.g., proximity to urban gardens, peri-urban farms, use of rainwater harvesting) supports adaptation.



- » Markets are a vital public health good, potentially thriving places of nourishment and community as well as a being central to investments in locally meaningful, socio-economic resilience from many types of stressors and shocks. These critical added values should be included in climate mitigation and adaptation and biodiversity mainstreaming strategies.

### Biodiversity Protection:



- » Markets support agrobiodiversity and regenerative food systems by providing outlets and incentives for diverse and culturally preferred traditional, indigenous and local crop varieties and breeds, a diversity of local value chains, and broadly regeneratively produced food (including organic and agro-ecological).<sup>35</sup>

Enhanced collaboration between farmers, other land managers, market actors and local governments is needed to give institutional support for long term stability, resilience and diversity of markets in cities.



» Territorial planning linked to market systems, which integrate ecosystem values, can help establish biodiversity-friendly corridors and protect natural habitats within the city region landscape.



» Reduced reliance on long-distance transport and associated built infrastructure lessens habitat fragmentation (and supports decarbonization) which has become increasingly important with urban and peri-urban sprawl. Policies should integrate biodiversity mainstreaming and the importance of territorial and indigenous knowledge and priorities.

### **Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN):**



» Markets can incentivize sustainable land management (SLM) practices (e.g., regenerative, agroecology, organic farming) by creating demand and offering fair prices for products grown using these methods.



» Integrated territorial and landscape planning, linking new market development and effective, efficient and quality market distribution networks, built infrastructure and spatial placement with land use strategies, helps prevent urban sprawl onto fertile land and protects vital ecosystems and protected areas, benefiting urban, peri-urban and local agriculture, livelihoods and access to affordable food.



» Strengthening rural livelihoods by shortening and enhancing efficiencies between rural areas and markets can reduce pressure for unsustainable land use change such as those influenced by industrial monoculture practices, poverty or migration.

Focusing investment and policy on strengthening the infrastructure, connectivity, and governance of these market-centered urban-rural linkages offers a powerful and practical pathway to simultaneously advance food security and nutrition, socio-economic development, and environmental goals.





# Key Elements of Effective Territorial Governance for Market

## Systems:



**Integrated Planning:** Moving beyond treating urban and rural areas as separate. This requires integrated spatial and land-use planning (ILUP) that considers the entire city region food system, balancing demands for housing, infrastructure, agriculture, and ecosystem integrity. ILUP should explicitly incorporate and contextualize strategies for LDN, climate resilience, and biodiversity protection at the local level, integrating the Rio Conventions locally. Functional territories (e.g., foodsheds, watersheds) should inform planning boundaries and investments to respond to these objectives.



**Multi-Level Coordination:** Establishing mechanisms for vertical (local-national) and horizontal (inter-municipal/inter-sectoral) coordination. National governments play a key role in creating enabling policy frameworks and providing resources, while empowering local and sub-national authorities who are often best placed to implement context-specific solutions. Multi-level and cross-sectoral governance frameworks with attached financing and de-risking instruments are essential.



**Multi-Actor Collaboration:** Recognizing and enhancing existing platforms and co-establishing value-based platforms for dialogue and joint action. All relevant actors should be involved, including local/national government authorities, market committees, vendors, farmers, cooperatives, CSOs, private sector entities (SMEs, transport), the finance sector and consumers. Local leaders such as local/city government focal points, food policy councils, market committees and market food group leaders are key to leading, convening, inspiring, guiding and co-facilitating sustained momentum for this 'whole of society' collaboration. These platforms must be inclusive and equitable, committed to ensuring women, youth and other intergenerational groups including the elderly, indigenous communities, smallholder farmers, migrants and displaced people are identified, effectively empowered, participate in and otherwise influence decision-making.



**Empowered Local Agency:** Recognizing and strengthening the capacity of local actors (government officials, market committees, vendors) to make informed decisions, develop relevant evidence, manage resources, co-design locally meaningful solutions and participate meaningfully in governance processes. This includes acknowledging local experience and capacities, building technical competence, providing adequate support systems, facilitating access to innovative "fit for purpose" finance and ensuring access to information.

5



**Supportive Policies and Legislation:** Formulating and implementing policies and regulations that facilitate an operational space in which both formal and informal markets are supported<sup>36</sup>, ensuring fair access, promoting food safety, addressing tenure security, mediating conflict, providing appropriate financial mechanisms and incentivizing sustainable practices. Policies help create the enabling conditions through incentives, regulations, technical and financial support to facilitate desired practices and outcomes.

Adopting a territorial governance lens allows for a more holistic understanding and integrated management of the complex systems interactions within city food environments and across urban-rural and territorial.



## Key Actions and Policy Recommendations

Transforming food systems through territorially governed markets requires inclusive, efficient and coordinated action and investments across multiple levels and by diverse actors. Based on reviewed experiences from different regions, the following actions are recommended:

### A. For Subnational and Local Governments (Cities, Municipalities, Regions):



1. **Integrate Food Systems into Planning:** Create awareness of the need for and support to embed food systems, including market infrastructure and urban-rural linkages, into urban, territorial, and land-use planning processes (e.g., Kenyan County Integrated Development Plans). Adopt integrated spatial planning and investment plans that integrate agricultural land and ecosystems.



2. **Establish Multi-Stakeholder Platforms:** Co-establish and strengthen inclusive food policy councils or market committees with representatives from government, market vendors/leaders, farmers, civil society organizations, and the private sector to co-design and oversee market improvements and policies. Ensure meaningful participation of women, youth, indigenous communities and other vulnerable and often excluded communities.



3. **Establish Comprehensive Policy Support:** In the context of an inclusive, rights-based approach, policies can address food safety, quality control, informal sector authorization for vendors and smallholders, safe working conditions for women and children, etc. in an integrated framework that accounts for the impacts on and tradeoffs for the more marginalized and vulnerable actors in market systems.



4. **Invest in Market Infrastructure:** Prioritize public investment in both 'hard' (e.g., roofing, sanitation, water access, drainage, waste management, cool storage, digital connectivity) and 'soft' (e.g., capacity building for farmers, finance providers, vendors and managers on food safety, nutrition, business skills, climate adaptation) market infrastructure. Explore public-private partnerships as well as partnerships with non-profits and others like food banks and financial institutions.



5. **Support Smallholder Farmers Operational Models and Market Access:** Implement measures to improve smallholder farmers' agency, resilience and access to markets, including infrastructure investment, grants, finance, regenerative, food safety and nutrition training, and business advice.



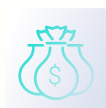


6. **Promote Sustainable Practices:** Use public procurement policies to favour locally produced, sustainable, and nutritious foods. Examples are emerging in every region. See for example the School Meals Coalition, the City Food Policy Project and many others.<sup>37</sup>

## B. For National Governments:



1. **Enable Multi-Level Governance:** Create policy and legal frameworks and use best practice tools, that support integrated spatial territorial planning and empower subnational governments to contextualize national strategies towards actionable investment plans across sectors and land-uses<sup>38</sup>. Facilitate vertical and horizontal coherency and coordination.



2. **Provide Finance and Technical Assistance:** Allocate national budgets and channel donor funds, as well as other funds, such as national and/or regional development banks, to support local market assessments, planning, and infrastructure development. Support capacity building at local levels.



3. **Integrate Markets into National Strategies:** Include resilient and sustainable market systems in National Urban Policies (NUPs), National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), LDN targets, biodiversity strategies (NBSAPs), and SDG reporting (VNRs/VLRs/VSRs); and recognize markets as a key entry points for sustainable, locally led transformation, benefiting from the intersection often of multiple levels of government, departments and sectors.



4. **Address Tenure Security:** Ensure land policies recognize and protect the tenure rights of market actors and smallholders, particularly women and vulnerable groups.

## C. For Market Actors and Civil Society:



1. **Participate Actively:** Engage in multi-stakeholder platforms, decision-making, planning processes, investment processes, market management and implementation - including tools like the Codex Guidelines for Food Hygiene Control Measures in Traditional Markets for Food (where all actors including vendors and consumers have a role to play)<sup>39</sup>. Advocate for needs and rights as well as ownership of responsibilities in shaping market food environments.



2. **Map and Assess:** Participate in market system mapping and assessments to build and continually add to knowledge of the food environment and wider food system and to identify challenges and opportunities.



3. **Build Capacity:** Seek and share knowledge on nutrition, food safety, sustainable practices, finance access and instruments, and business skills. Champion best practices.



4. **Foster Collaboration:** Build partnerships between market associations, financial institutions, community organizations, NGOs, and local authorities. Support social and solidarity economies (SSE).

#### D. For International Organizations and Donors:



1. **Promote Territorial Approaches:** Support the adoption of integrated territorial development and URL frameworks. Provide technical guidance and tools.



2. **Facilitate Knowledge Sharing:** Support platforms for sharing best practices and evidence on city – urban-rural - territorial food systems and market governance.



3. **Support Capacity Development:** Assist national and local governments and market actors with financing and capacity development, particularly for infrastructure and inclusive governance for landscapes and territories.



4. **Advocate for Investment:** Highlight the importance and economic benefits of investing in traditional markets within broader development finance agendas connected to the themes of bioeconomy, adaptation and resilience.



5. **Address the specific needs of different sized towns and cities;** appreciating the critical opportunities secondary (or intermediary) cities present for food systems transformation as they connect rural landscapes and larger metropolises; and target investment accordingly.



# Conclusion

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Local, traditional, and farmers markets are vital places of food and community; they are social, economic, and cultural institutions at the heart of communities and urban-rural linkages. These markets offer multiple levers for locally-led and just food systems transformation, building socio-ecological resilience and influencing consumer preferences for healthy and sustainable diets. Strengthening and protecting these markets through effective and inclusive territorial governance, involving a “whole society” approach, offers a powerful, integrated approach to food systems sustainability - alongside other actions.

By adopting integrated planning, fostering inclusive multi-stakeholder collaboration, investing strategically in hard and soft infrastructure, and empowering local actors, the potential of these markets to address critical local, regional and global challenges can be unlocked, innovated, and amplified. This approach directly contributes to achieving food security and improved nutrition, enhancing prosperous and dignified livelihoods, contributing to local economic development, building climate resilience, conserving biodiversity, and promoting land degradation neutrality. A systems-based transition requires a shift away from fragmented, sector-specific policies towards holistic, place-based strategies that recognize

the interconnectedness of urban and rural spaces. It demands investment models that value social and ecological co-benefits alongside economic returns - moving beyond conventional cost-benefit analyses that usually fail to capture the full value of broadly regenerative food production, circular economic and social doughnut systems found in local, traditional and farmers markets.

Different sized towns and cities, including secondary (intermediary) cities, will have diverse pathways to support smallholder farmers, value chain MSMEs and market and last mile vendors. It is imperative that these transformative pathways are inclusive of low-income groups, women, youth, indigenous communities and other vulnerable communities whose voices are often excluded from food systems and nutrition policies and decision making. Some of the most promising pathways leverage local and indigenous knowledge and other forms of place based, experiential knowledge, to connect local action to national and global agendas. Now is the time for action: to reimagine and invest in local, traditional and farmers markets and their governance; where these markets are viewed as core components in the vision for just, sustainable, and resilient food systems and access to safe, healthy diets for all.

# Endnotes

- 1 Varying conceptualisations of local and traditional markets can be found in the literature and amongst practitioners. Supermarkets while part of the food distribution network are not the focus of this paper.
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- 36 The definitive line between formal and informal markets can often be blurred in the real world. Formal markets can be considered to be under government oversight in some form, whether a public or private market e.g., official registration of vendors; legitimate operating space; use of zoning by-laws; collection of vendor fees, land lease fees and any additional service delivery fees; conflict mediation; monitoring of compliance and enforcement of regulations such as food safety; delivery of trainings. Informal markets tend to be defined by what they are not i.e., not officially recognized/legitimated, owned and/or managed by government. These include groupings of unregistered vendors and mobile street food

vendors, most of whom sell in areas not designated for food sales. Informal markets and unregistered vendors are highly vulnerable to exploitation e.g., inconsistent enforcement of regulations and self-appointed managers collecting vendor fees, and do not have access to essential basic services like WASH.

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## Territorial Governance and Food Markets for Sustainable Food Systems

This White Paper is a collaboration of UN-Habitat's Urban-Rural Linkages Program with the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) as background for discussions at the upcoming UN Food System Summit Stocktaking (UNFSS+4). The paper draws upon recent working papers, expert group meetings including the GAIN-FAO-Rikolto Local and Traditional Food Markets Global Technical Meeting (June 2024), programmatic delivery, and reports from organizations referenced in this paper. Noting the contributions received from the World Farmers Markets Coalition, ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability, EcoAgriculture Partners, HealthBridge and the Resilient Local Food Supply Chains Alliance.



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