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“Agricultural development within the rural-urban continuum”

## Importance of Vegetables for Food and Nutrition Security in a Rapidly Urbanising World

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### Abstract

The high priority of increasing the availability, access, and use of adequate, safe and nutritious food in the United Nations Post-2015 Development Agenda is recognised by the World Bank and other development agencies. However, it is important to distinguish between having sufficient food and having adequate nutrition. Micronutrient deficiency or “hidden hunger” affects more than 2 billion people worldwide and can exist in populations even where the food supply is adequate in terms of meeting energy requirements. Poor nutrition causes physical stunting and mental impairment in children, leading to reduced potential to succeed in education and the workplace. Even in regions where significant progress has been achieved in reducing the proportion of malnourished children, such as South and Southeast Asia, malnutrition continues to persist, affecting large numbers of children. While these regions continue to deal with the problems of infectious diseases and undernutrition, they are at the same time experiencing an upsurge in non-communicable disease risk factors such as obesity and overweight, particularly in rapidly increasing urban areas. An increase in the availability, affordability and consumption of nutrient-dense fruit, vegetables and pulses is one way malnutrition may be reversed. The World Health Organisation and the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations recommend a minimum intake of at least 400 g of fruit and vegetables per person per day to achieve nutrition targets, but consumption far below this level is common in many countries. To improve accessibility and availability, local vegetable production may be the solution. Vegetable gardens can improve food and nutrition security, generate additional income, contribute to better health, and promote gender equity. Home gardens provide a variety of fruit and vegetables throughout the year, thus contributing significantly to a nutritious diet for family members and offering opportunities for income generation through sale of extra produce. School and community gardens encourage the production and consumption of a diversity of vegetables and fruit, which is particularly important when persuading children to favour a balanced and nutritious diet as part of a healthy lifestyle.

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