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Urban Food Policies and Governance in Kenya: Examining the Linkages

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Abstract

Urban food systems have increasingly been recognised as a topic that needs to be better understood, in order to address issues of urban food security and urban poverty. This is particularly so in Africa, which has the fastest rates of urban population growth and high levels of urban food insecurity. There has, however, been surprisingly little work on examining the existing processes and policy framework through which urban food systems are governed. Using a case of Nairobi city, in Kenya, this paper assesses the policy, legislative and administrative environment to identify if it provides an enabling environment for sustainable urban food system. Data were collected through an extensive review of existing urban food policies in Kenya complimented with 27 key informant interviews involving actors in the urban food system. In addition, five Focus Group Discussions (FGDS) with government, NGO officials, traders and other actors in the food system were conducted. The paper finds that food policy in Kenya continues to treat rural and urban areas the same way despite the recognition that food insecurity, malnutrition and income opportunities are highly context specific and that diverse geographic areas (rural or urban) react differently to specific policies. The governance of Nairobi food system is highly complex with a multiplicity of actors with competing agendas which limit the implementation of existing policies. While there have been some attempts to enhance coordination among the key actors, actions to follow enactment have largely been lacking. The implication is that greater coordination is needed among the multiple actors and institutions involved in the formal and informal governance of the urban food system. The paper reflects on how to improve the policy environment to address the challenges of food insecurity for the most vulnerable in cities such as Nairobi. We propose a territorial approach to food security and nutrition as an alternative framework for capturing the variety of conditions across urban and rural regions as well as across different territories.

Keywords: Food and nutrition security, governance, Kenya, urban food policies