



AfriFOODlinks

URBAN FOOD SYSTEMS NEED BOLD TRANSFORMATION.
AfriFOODlinks creatively unlocks this transition, and will drive change in 65+ cities. It is delivered by 26 partners and funded by the European Union.

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AfriFOODlinks conceptual framework

AfriFOODlinks aims to address the systemic underpinnings of food insecurity and environmental impact, to lead to real transformation. AfriFOODlinks views urban food environments as the key arena for improving nutrition and reducing environmental impact in African cities. This is because food environments are where residents make the choices about the food they eat and it is where the food security priorities of food availability, access, agency, utilization and stability manifest [37]. AfriFOODlinks proposes three drivers of food environment form, function and dynamics. These are Infrastructure Investment, Social and Cultural Preference & Business Innovation.

Infrastructure shapes the way in which food is produced, processed, transported and arrives at the consumer, how it is purchased, stored, prepared and consumed. The form of infrastructure therefore, has direct implications for food quality and safety, greenhouse gas emissions, loss and waste. Investing in, for example, robust transport infrastructure, market blocking (to reduce congestion) or storage facilities can reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve the longevity of food produce and products, and thus improving food safety (Pieterse et al, 2018; Battersby and Watson, 2018). AfriFOODlinks argues that consumer behaviours are also shaped by the form of infrastructure present in the city. For example, limited energy supply infrastructure may be a stronger driver of residents' preference for quick cooking meals (such as two-minute noodles) than proposed perceptions of Western dietary aspirations.

Social and cultural preference drives many of the food choices by residents and is influenced by education on sustainable healthy diets and nutrition, cultural and religious norms and by marketing and advertising present in urban environments.

Business innovation is vital for economic development in cities. This applies both to formal and informal businesses, both of which display a form of flexibility, not currently possible in government bureaucracies. It also contributes to increasing the local availability of diverse improved food products. The presence of businesses and facilities that locally add value challenges the trend of importing processed foods from other regions and around the world. Business innovation is also vital for improving the availability of environmentally friendly food-related practices such as through developing bio-based packaging, ensuring the use of less desirable produce for new food products, or increasing the availability of desirable and nutritious foods. Business innovation shapes preferences through new retail and food experiences.

These three levers and the urban food environment are all shaped by local and national governance processes which encompass both the written policies, laws and practices, and the many relationships between food system

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policymakers, businesses, civil society mobilizers, researchers and residents. Governance processes are typically influenced by vested interests. The presence of large multinational food retailers in African cities often exerts more influence on policy than urban residents, communities and small businesses. AfriFOODlinks aims to strengthen governance processes both to engage with vested interests and assure that citizen voice and local needs are represented equitably. It further wishes to demonstrate that, contrary to many claims, there does exist a local government mandate for improving urban food security which needs to be resourced. The urban food environment is also influenced from beyond its territorial food system by global health and economic shocks, exemplified by the COVID-19 pandemic and associated government lockdowns [26]. Climate change and associated shocks, and regional trade regulations, are notable drivers of food availability and quality. These three external drivers are important considerations for ensuring the stability of food security, which can be improved by building resilience in urban food systems. By improving business innovation, infrastructure investment, and shaping cultural preference, AfriFOODlinks expects to contribute systemically to the realisation of fair, equitable, healthy and environmentally friendly urban food systems from primary production to consumption.

