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URBAN – RURAL LINKAGES FOR FOOD: RELATED OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN BOTH MUNICIPAL PLANNING AND GOVERNANCE OF THE FOOD SYSTEM; IN CASE OF ADDIS ABABA CITY AND ITS HINTERLAND, ETHIOPIA

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ABSTRACT

Kibrom Fesseha Tesfay, Urban – rural linkages for food: related opportunities and challenges in both Municipal planning and Governance of the food system, in case of Addis Ababa city and its hinterland, Ethiopia.

Due to the concrete data derived from research on urban population dynamics and growth, Addis Ababa has emerged as one of the rapidly expanding cities in East-African region. Based on projections by the Ethiopian central statistical authority in 2007, the city now accommodates approximately 25% of the entire population of the country. Additionally, the city has experienced significant physical expansion, where it has engulfed surrounding farmlands, forests, quarries, and even rural villages. Because of these demographic and landscape changes observed in recent years, the agricultural region, particularly the significant portion responsible for vegetable production, has been pushed back within a 90-kilometre radius. Manifestation of the urban population growth typically in small and medium towns (61-64%) has affected the consumption pattern. These towns consume the produce from the rural farms before it reaches big cities like Addis Ababa (Lize, 2017). According to official reports (2021) of Addis Ababa city municipality; poor infrastructure to transport and store the harvest, limited market opportunities for local producers, uncoordinated efforts in management, and lack of significant incentives to the farmers become some of the major reasons for the poor accessibility, and price hiking on food and food related items in the city. The ever-growing population size of the city has also created a stress on the already known food supply and accessibility problems.

According to the official reports of the city administration, the data on price increase on food items reaches 42% (April 2021), unlike the other goods, which was 23%. The price increase on food related items were much higher as anticipated, key informants has revealed that the price of key staple food “*Teff*” has doubled itself in mid-2023. Considering insignificant changes in income of the residents, higher inflation rate, and a bunch of political and socio-economic problems in the last few years; it would be a big blow to many of the families in that city. Both the legislations by the city council in 2018 and

2021 to establish an agency/council to regulate the ‘school feeding program’ and regulation of market functionality respectively, were critical in terms of stabilizing market volatility and food safety.

According to this study, there were misunderstanding among the stakeholders’ regarding how to resolve the existing urban food problems. Key informants from Addis Ababa city and Meki¹ town administrations’ and other stakeholders believed that the urban food issue could only be solved by the interventions made in the rural areas. However, in recent years, we have observed an increase in agricultural production but still more than a quarter of the population of the country in general, and Addis Ababa city in particular were food-insecure. Besides, the federal government spend over 600 million dollars in order to buy grains every year, just to fill the gaps. Therefore, this brings us to the point that something was missing which can bridge the link between an increase in food production, and still significant portion of the population living in a highly food insecure environment.

This study was part of the growing body of studies concerning the role of urban planning and regional integration in shaping urban food system, with a specific focus on Addis Ababa city and the town of Meki. Institutionalization of the urban food sector and having viable policies on this regard could be considered as a springboard and a major step in the process. Main components of the policy may include, but not limited to, institutionalization of the urban food sector, participation of stakeholders on real terms, supporting the urban and rural farmers through creating market access and other incentives, and adopting innovative and technologically supported solutions could improve the poverty level of cities. The core point of this research lays on the investigation of the thoughts and discourse of Addis Ababa city administration in connection to its hinterland on some of the ‘key pillars’ in the establishment of the urban food policy or system of governance.

According to this survey, 41.2% of the stakeholders have never participated in any key decision-making process regarding the urban food issue. Only 11.8% have witnessed that they have previously participated in such decisions. Besides, 50% of those taking part in the decision making believe that their comments and suggestions were not incorporated. This was partly against the city administrations claim that the municipality, in our formal discussions with the officials, assume they were taking “spaces of deliberations” on the urban food agenda. In the town of Meki, the local administration has lower level of awareness on this regard; they consider it as if they were sharing their power to someone, which they do not normally interested on.

¹ Meki is a small town found in the East-Shewa zone of the Oromia regional state.

All the stakeholders considered the urban – rural linkages as vital. The problem lay on figuring out the key issues, which need to be addressed. Besides, the urban – rural linkages were not well defined, and to some extent, used interchangeably with the notion of urban agriculture.

The data collected on stakeholder’s priorities in key municipality’s agenda also reveal employment generation should be the main agenda (33.3%). The second priority was urban food management and regulatory activities, which counts to 25.9%. Service provisions also had significant backing which was 14.8%. On top of this, stakeholders were asked about their involvement in creating citizen awareness; the data depicts that 70.6% had ‘never’ or ‘rarely’ participated in any activities. Accessibility to city budget information were also ‘highly dissatisfied’ or ‘dissatisfied’ by 48% of respondents. The data regarding accessibility of public procurement information also reveal that 64.7% were in ‘dissatisfied’ or ‘highly dissatisfied’ category. Finally, 41.2% of the stakeholders reveal that they were ‘dissatisfied’ regarding their participation on urban development plan and projects concerning food issue.

As a case building, this study has attempted to assess the ‘school feeding program’ of the Addis Ababa city administration, as an initiative towards the bigger goal of the city, which was poverty reduction. According to the results of the KAP survey, this program has let stakeholders to participate. Significant portion of the stakeholders (64%) know the program well. The data also reveal, this program reduces dropout rates by 40.8%. 76% of the respondents said, it reduced economic burden of families.

As continuation of its efforts, the current city administration took concrete steps in funding program’s/projects. These projects were directly related to urban food resilience; sustaining the urban agriculture; legislation of a policy for the establishment of a council/agency at the city level; creating market ventures for local and nearby producers; strengthening linkages, and financing unions and consumer cooperatives. These interventions definitely improve the livelihood of the city residents, and as a result reduce poverty.

In line with this, Addis Ababa city has won the eighth Milan Urban Food Policy Pact global forum award on sustainable diet and nutrition, in October 18, 2022. The city won the accolade for its ‘school feeding program’ best practice. However, they still need to exert more efforts on strategic approach to the agenda, mainstreaming the activities of the urban food issue in the city master plan, and institutionalization of the sector.

Empirical research on food policy councils was limited (Larissa Calancie, 2017). Despite the growing policy interest and support, there were limited research into food initiatives as an urban economic development strategy, and both municipalities should work with academic and research institutes.

Initially, in this study, the researcher chose an ethnographic approach as a methodology of this specific research. However, the researcher was obliged to use a 'mixed methodology' in order to cope with the problems encountered at field level. This has been done in consultation with the supervisor, and the details has been stated in section 5.2 of this document. Both qualitative and quantitative data has been collected by using different tools ranging from observations, KAP surveys, seminar and scorecard, questionnaires, and key informant interviews. The research highlights the importance of the legislation of the urban food policy, which standardises the urban food activities, and in return, food accessibility and sustainably.