

DEFINING URBAN GOVERNANCE FOR NUTRITION

IMPLICATIONS FOR ENABLING BETTER NUTRITION FOR CITIES



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SUMMARY

The world is urbanising rapidly, and malnutrition in urban areas (including both undernutrition and overweight/obesity) is an increasing problem. City policymakers in all countries are well placed to address urban malnutrition by virtue of their access to a wide variety of policy-level entry-points to food access and physical activity. Developing effective policies and programmes to address malnutrition requires coordinated action across sectors within city governments and the involvement of urban stakeholders, such as the private sector, civil society, and academia. Despite recent advances on integrated and urban food policies, work on urban governance for nutrition is still in its infancy. To address the increasing incidence of urban malnutrition, we argue that it is necessary to further develop a definition and desired process and outcomes that characterise urban governance for nutrition.

We thus review the literature on global urban governance of food systems, food security, and nutrition, as well as how food and nutrition governance is put into practice, focussing on low- and middle- income countries. Definitions often focus on either the activities or actors involved in governance, or on the presence or absence of certain indicators. In practice, governance often takes the form of urban food and nutrition strategies or food policy councils, with challenges such as lack of political will, the complexity of adopting a systemic approach to food and nutrition, and competing interests of multiple stakeholders.

We define urban governance for nutrition as “the process of making and implementing decisions that shape food systems to deliver better nutrition for people in cities” and recommend that cities prioritise malnutrition mitigation in their policies, plans, and actions and that the right mix of actors drives this process, adhering to four principles.

KEY MESSAGES

- Urban governance for nutrition can be defined as a “process of making and implementing decisions that shape food systems to deliver better nutrition for people in cities.”
- To tackle urban malnutrition, cities should prioritise urban governance for nutrition.
- Four key principles are central to urban governance for nutrition:
 - Ensuring the participation of a diverse range of stakeholders across the food system;
 - Creating formal governance mechanisms, suitable to the context, that ensure effective participation of public- and private-sector actors, such as civil society, academia, and the private sector;
 - Ensuring that urban governance for nutrition is based on evidence; and
 - Ensuring that there is sustainable financing for the governance process and the actions resulting from it.

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVE

Malnutrition in all its forms contributes significantly to human suffering and socioeconomic losses globally (1,2). In urban areas, population growth, along with shifts in diet, lifestyle, and occupation structure, has complex effects on the incidence and distribution of malnutrition (3). It is expected that by 2050 two-thirds of the global population will live in urban areas (4). Whilst urbanisation provides opportunities for economic development, achieving food and nutrition security in a sustainable way has remained a core shared challenge for cities (5–8).

Although urban areas are often associated with improved nutritional status, higher household income, access to health services and to markets, and better maternal education, malnutrition is also urbanising (9,10). About a third of undernourished children reside in urban areas (11); overweight and obesity are often more prevalent in urban than in rural areas (12,13). Urban women, in particular, tend to be up to three times more likely to be overweight or obese than rural women (14). In rural and especially urban areas, malnutrition disproportionately affects those on low incomes, who may be unable to provide nutritious food for their households and themselves (15).

The drivers of the multiple burdens of malnutrition in urban areas have been well documented and include poverty; lack of time and energy; sedentary lifestyles, encouraged by lower mobility and the type of employment; increased female participation in the workforce; poor sanitation; exposure to food marketing and modern food outlets; and increased presence of highly processed foods (6,16). Recent studies of the urban dimension of malnutrition illustrate the extent to which intersectoral challenges such as a lack of infrastructure, urban planning (roads, pedestrian walkways, parks and recreational facilities), and poor coordination of public services can further sustain or worsen urban nutrition problems (17).

Urban centres have become the destination of the majority of the food produced in rural and peri-urban areas (18). For most urban residents, purchases are the main supplier of food, with own production, gifts, and exchanges being supplementary sources (19). Urban food outlets comprise both formal and informal actors, including fast food, supermarkets, convenience stores, corner stores, street vendors, and wet markets (20–22). These different food outlets provide access to varying levels of healthy and unhealthy foods.

In many areas, healthier foods are more readily available in higher-income neighbourhoods than lower-income ones—a phenomenon known as ‘food deserts’ (23). Nonetheless, there are places where ‘food swamps’(characterised by available healthy foods but excessive opportunity to consume calorie-dense foods and drinks (24)) are a greater concern for obesity-prevention policies than food deserts (25). In many cities in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), healthy foods are readily available in wet markets and from street traders in lower-income areas. Highly processed foods are generally more accessible through modern outlets, including hypermarkets and supermarkets, and in wealthier areas (26). However, there is increasing evidence that they are also present in more traditional outlets, including small grocery stores and neighbourhood kiosks (27). There is thus great variability in the content and quality of food and its freshness, safety, affordability, and nutritional value.

In LMICs, urban households with low incomes spend up to 70% of their income on food (5). With limited income and price fluctuations, some urban residents are unable to access food on a regular basis (28). This inability to access food is further threatened by the decline in traditional markets, where people often have the possibility to buy food on credit (29).

Consequently, improving nutrition in urban areas requires action, policies, and programmes that address the complex, multiple, and intersectoral determinants of food consumption, disease, and energy expenditure (6). There has been increased international focus in the research and programming space on mainstreaming nutrition actions into policy, with a concomitant recognition of the role of government and other actors in this process (30–32). Urban governments are well placed to integrate different municipal policies and address the vulnerabilities of urban food systems (33,34).

Although there is some degree of consensus on what needs to be done on the front line of implementation of nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions,¹ much less is known about how to operationalise the right mix of actions in different contexts and how to do so at a scale that matches the size of the problem, in an equitable manner (35). Therefore, policymakers and programme implementers are unclear on how to ensure that urban food, health, environmental, and business systems work best to support nutrition, and how nutrition challenges in cities can be addressed in a coordinated and integrated way. Additionally, all actors in the policy, programme, and academic space lack a framework to identify successful urban governance for nutrition across space and time.

This paper aims to inform this discourse by putting forward a clear definition and the desired processes and outcomes that characterise *urban governance for nutrition*. We conduct a structured literature review to examine existing definitions. We argue that there is a lack of clarity in definitions of urban governance for nutrition and that the existing definitions have key weaknesses. We then consider how urban governance is implemented in practice and highlight some of the challenges faced when doing so. Based on the examination of urban governance in theory and practice, we propose a clear yet flexible definition as well as four key principles for implementing governance policies and actions.

METHODOLOGY

The outcomes of this working paper are based on a critical literature review, including search terms related to urban food systems governance, urban nutrition governance, and urban nutrition and health outcomes. The review was designed to identify academic (peer-reviewed) papers using Scopus and Web of Science databases as well as documents from the grey literature that have been produced and disseminated by organisations involved in urban nutrition, such as the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), the Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance III Project (FANTA), the International Food Policy

¹ Nutrition-specific interventions or programmes are those that address the immediate determinants of nutrition—adequate food and nutrient intake, feeding, caregiving and parenting practices, and low burden of infectious diseases (94). Nutrition-sensitive interventions or programmes are those that address the underlying determinants of nutrition—food security; adequate caregiving resources; and access to health services and a safe and hygienic environment—and incorporate specific nutrition goals and actions (id.).

Research Institute (IFPRI), GAIN, the World Food Programme (WFP), the World Bank, SNV Netherlands Development Organisation, and others.

The literature review was carried out in May 2018. All studies included needed to provide at least one of the following: a definition or dimension to operationalise the concept of governance of urban food systems and its relationship to food and nutrition security; methods, including indicators and data collection techniques, to understand success or progress in the governance of urban food systems; and/or details on the urban food and nutrition environment, also including studies of specific interventions focusing on mobile and stationary vendors or urban farming. Reviewed papers included studies of governance processes led by the public sector, such as policies, programmes, and interventions, as well as studies of programmes implemented by civil society and other actors involved in urban food and nutrition. All papers included were published in English.

Based on the search, the papers were clustered into two categories: 1) assessment of the whole urban food system and 2) assessment of specific interventions or policies. We built on this review to identify consistencies and gaps in the literature and to propose an operational definition of urban governance for nutrition that can contribute to knowledge and practice.

DEFINITIONS OF GOVERNANCE IN THE CONTEXT OF URBAN NUTRITION

Governance is a term used increasingly in the food security and food systems literature, but it is seldom defined. Governance has been signalled as both a driver of, and a potential solution to, food insecurity (36,37). However, the nature and extent of urban governance that best achieves positive food and nutrition security is not well understood. In this section we review how governance is being defined in the context of food systems, food security, and nutrition, based on the review undertaken.

DEFINITIONS BASED ON THE ACTIVITIES INCLUDED IN GOVERNANCE

Definitions of governance in the context of food security, food systems, and nutrition are often based on a given set of activities. Friel et al. (38) distinguish 'governance for nutrition' from 'global nutrition governance.' The former refers to a combination of activities to influence or avoid the nutrition impacts of non-nutrition policies, and the latter to a network of actors that have as their function to improve nutrition through "processes and mechanisms for convening, agenda setting, decision making (including norm-setting), implementation and accountability" (34 p4).

The FAO emphasises articulation of interest, decision-making, implementation, and sustaining elements in its definition of governance for food and nutrition security (FAO, 2011a and FAO 2011b as cited in (39)). Candel (35 p598), who conducted a systematic review of 'food security governance,' defines this term as the "formal and informal interactions across scales between public and/or private entities ultimately aiming at the realisation of food availability, food access, and food utilisation, and their stability over time."

Moragues-Faus et al. (36 p185) consider all activities aimed towards a certain goal as part of governance. They thus define governance as, "all modes of governing encompassing activities carried out by different actors to guide, steer, control or manage the pursuance of

food security.” The High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis (37 p3) states, “Good governance for food and nutrition security is fundamentally about national governments prioritising policies, plans, programmes and funding to tackle hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity in the most vulnerable populations, whether it be through humanitarian or development assistance, nationally, bilaterally or multilaterally.”

Finally, in a review of climate adaptation governance in the context of food security, Bizikova et al. (39 p17) distinguished between governance activities that involve “creating new policy frameworks, institutional agreements or policies” and those that work with “existing policies or mainstreaming into existing systems and institutions.”

Using activities to define governance is useful because it helps to unpack the specific elements of the governance process. However, it is limited because it is missing the context in which these actions are undertaken, as it does not delineate activities by actors or their mandates.

DEFINITIONS BASED ON THE ACTORS INVOLVED IN GOVERNANCE

Taking a systems approach to transforming the food system and including different stakeholders are two common theses in urban food governance (43,44). Some authors identify the actors that are involved in governance. Stoker (40 p17), for example, defines governance as “the development of governing styles in which boundaries between and within public and private sectors have become blurred.” This emphasises that the term ‘governance’ inherently involves both public- and private-sector actors.

Other authors provide more detail on the function of actors involved in governance of food systems, food security, and nutrition. Friel et al. (34 p4) define global nutrition governance as the following: “the network of actors whose primary, designated function is to improve nutrition outcomes through processes and mechanisms for convening, agenda setting, decision making (including norm-setting), implementation and accountability.” This global network of actors includes philanthropic organisations; multilateral development banks and financial institutions; national governments and plurilateral organisations (with a limited number of members, but more than two); public-private partnerships and multi-stakeholder initiatives; private industries; United Nations organisations; research institutions, networks and associations; and civil society and non-governmental organisations (38). Friel et al. (38) acknowledge that this overview of actors, which was identified through a literature review, is not exhaustive and that governments at other levels, as well as other actors, such as consumer organisations, influence the global nutrition agenda (id). Shiffman and Smith (41 p1372) define the global governance structure as “the set of norms (shared beliefs on appropriate behaviour) and the institutions that negotiate and enforce these norms.”

The food system involves a large range of individual and institutional actors, which makes governance processes particularly complex (47). Whilst it is important to understand these actors and the various networks involved in governance, definitions centred on actors risk missing the context in which these actors operate and the processes and rules that guide their participation in various policy processes, as well as the power differences between them (48,49).

DEFINITIONS BASED ON THE PRESENCE OF “NUTRITION GOVERNANCE”

Some authors conceptualise governance by providing a set of indicators to measure if governance is present in a given situation. Sunguya et al. (50) emphasise nutrition governance as a descriptor of the strengths and weaknesses of different aspects of nutrition activities in a given country. They use the World Health Organization (WHO) (51) assessment of nutrition governance as strong, medium, or weak, based on examining the presence of the factors listed in Box 1 (51).

BOX 1. WHO INDICATORS TO ASSESS NUTRITION GOVERNANCE (51)

1. Existence of an intersectoral mechanism to address nutrition;
2. Existence of a national nutrition plan or strategy;
3. Whether the national nutrition plan or strategy is adopted;
4. Whether the national nutrition plan or strategy is part of the national development plan;
5. Existence of a national nutrition policy;
6. Whether the nutrition policy is adopted;
7. Existence of national dietary guidelines;
8. Allocation of budget for implementation of the national nutrition plan, strategy or policy;
9. Regular nutrition monitoring and surveillance;
10. Existence of a line for nutrition in the health budget.

Similarly, the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP) has developed a monitoring framework. This framework looks beyond nutrition to assess the progress made by cities in achieving more sustainable food systems (and therefore implementing the Pact). Governance is referred to as “ensuring an enabling environment for effective action,” and food governance is operationalised through the indicators listed in Box 2 (52).

BOX 2. MUFPP MONITORING FRAMEWORK INDICATORS (52)

1. Presence of an active municipal interdepartmental government body for advisory and decision making of food policies and programmes
2. Presence of an active multi-stakeholder food policy and planning structure
3. Presence of a municipal urban food policy or strategy and/or action plans
4. Presence of an inventory of local food initiatives and practices to guide development and expansion of municipal urban food policy and programmes
5. Presence of a mechanism for assembling and analysing urban food system data to monitor/evaluate and inform municipal policymaking on urban food policies
6. Existence of a food supply emergency/food resilience management plan for the municipality (in response to disasters; vulnerabilities in food production, transport, access; socio economic shocks, etc.) based on vulnerability assessment

Both indicator sets include some focus on multiple stakeholders and activities ranging from planning and decision making through to adoption, implementation, and monitoring or evaluation. Whilst the WHO focuses on assessing nutrition governance at the national level, the MUFPP focuses on the local level. However, the definitions still lack an explicit theoretical underpinning: following these indicators, the presence or absence of governance could be viewed as subjectively defined. There needs to be a clearer articulation of what defines urban governance for nutrition and consequently how we can detect its presence or absence.

GOVERNANCE FOR NUTRITION: FOOD ENVIRONMENT AND FOOD SYSTEM

There is a growing body of work on how to understand nutrition as being shaped by the urban food environment and the urban food system.² Whilst ‘governance’ in the context of urban food systems and urban food environments is rarely defined and hence has not been included here, research on urban food systems highlights the intersectoral challenges that cities face. Therefore, a definition of ‘urban governance for nutrition’ needs to consider nutrition outcomes from nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive perspectives. This is key also because in most cities, purposeful action from city governments in nutrition and food security has been minimal, because of the lack of a clear direct mandate (29,53). However, the activities of city governments influence those cities’ food systems, physical activity spaces, and energy, water, and sanitation services, which affect nutrition outcomes.

² A food system is made up of the processes and people from the production of food, processing and the distribution to consumers (e.g., 93). The food environment can be defined as the “collective physical, economic, policy and sociocultural surroundings, opportunities and conditions that influence people’s food and beverage choices and nutritional status” (96).

URBAN FOOD AND NUTRITION GOVERNANCE IN PRACTICE

To further inform a definition of urban governance, it is useful to examine how it is implemented in practice. Indeed, nutrition governance is often implemented in cities, even where it is not explicitly referred to or recognised. Many nutrition interventions have been undertaken under the leadership of city councils, civil activists, NGOs, and/or academic institutions. These include actions on food production, social protection, and various nutrition-specific programmes; a range of such actions taken by cities is described in Halliday et al. (54). Considering food production, there has been a focus on addressing challenges around urban agriculture, specifically drawing attention to the establishment of urban farms and food supply and distribution in cities (19,55,56). To address obesity, programmes have aimed at improving school nutrition programmes, increasing physical activity levels, reducing salt intake, and regulating the marketing and labelling of unhealthy food (57–60). Apart from these examples, more formal urban governance initiatives have also been implemented, as described below.

URBAN FOOD STRATEGIES AND POLICIES

Cities have developed food strategies and policies to address food and security nutrition issues in an integrated way. An urban food strategy or policy can be defined in multiple ways. It might refer to a “*process consisting of how a city envisions change in its food system, and how it strives towards this change*” ((56 p6; italics added); written policy documents may be a part of this (id.). Urban food policies can be defined as “a concerted action on the part of city government to address food-related challenges” (57 p9). They serve to integrate activities related to food, social integration, environment, and health (8,63), whilst putting food more prominently on the academic and political agendas (61). Both food policies and strategies include multiple stakeholders, such as civil society (62), and ideally look at the entire food system (61).

The benefit of an overarching food strategy is that it provides the opportunity to “take a critical step back and think about things that people who are in implementing agencies can’t think about” (Wagner & Wu in (59) p24). An overall strategy also helps to clearly define departmental roles and responsibilities, allowing different departments within a city to act whilst still adhering to a cohesive vision (64). Whilst a city might stick to a strategy or policy document, Cunto et al. (8) note that “the development of food strategies often supports the creation of internal governance mechanisms (such as a food department, food policy councils, or partnerships) in the city, which are responsible for the further development or implementation of food-related policies and projects” (18-19). It is essential to note, however, that this literature is almost exclusively written from the perspective of cities in higher-income countries.

FOOD POLICY COUNCILS

Different multi-stakeholder partnerships have emerged across cities to develop and implement food and nutrition policies. Whilst they take different names and forms, in many cases they are identified as Food Policy Councils (FPCs). FPCs are working groups that bring together city department officials and/or other stakeholders to steer or oversee urban food policies. The main functions of FPCs are to characterise strengths and weaknesses of the local

food system, identify key food actors and intervention points, develop a collective vision for a more sustainable and secure urban food system, negotiate and draft local policies, and oversee intersectoral cooperation (8,61,65). It is important to note that FPCs and food partnerships are very diverse; they can be led by the public sector or civil society organisations, and in many cases their rules and mechanisms are rather fluid and flexible (66–68). FPCs emerged in the North American context and have been adopted and adapted within the European context. As with any governance approach, understanding the local context is essential; it cannot be assumed that this model is necessarily viable within a LMIC context.

There are also nutrition committees that FANTA (a long-running USAID-funded comprehensive technical nutrition support programme) has created. These governance initiatives appoint regional and district nutrition officers, provide nutrition guidelines, monitor progress, and train district government staff to budget for nutrition (69). For example, the programme helped establish urban nutrition committees in cities in Tanzania and Uganda; these multi-stakeholder groups support nutrition planning and budgeting at the sub-national level (id.).

CHALLENGES

Putting urban food and nutrition governance into practice comes with several challenges. The review highlighted five of these in particular.

First is a lack of **political will** (62), as the commitment and engagement of mayors and city councils is considered essential for successful urban food systems governance (44). It can be a challenge to get city officials to prioritise food issues. This could arise, for example, because the issue is not formally part of the agenda (as with urban agriculture in Dar es Salaam) (70) or in settings where the focus is mainly on the consumption, not the production, of food, as in New York City (56).

Second, some consider the **food system as being too much for a municipality to address**, as it is broad, complex, and requires multiple levels of government to effect; others see **food as a commodity** that the market could effectively distribute (56).

Third, there is a pervasive **rural bias and anti-urbanism** in many international and regional food security agendas. Food security often just includes production and rural development, which limits the role of cities in transforming food systems (71).

Fourth, **competing interests** of the multiple stakeholders involved in governance can create limitations. These include changing priorities between different mayors and conflict between city, state, and national priorities (72). The New York City programme mentioned above, for example, favoured obesity but not urban agriculture in its initial years, as some within the city government were not convinced of the relevance of urban agriculture (56). Partnerships between the private and public sectors can also create tensions over profit and public health goals (73). Particularly in cities in LMICs, where governance of informal actors is highly politicised, competing interests arise between the informal and formal parts of the food system (74,75).

Finally, the **unavailability and lack of comparability of data** to inform urban actions on food is a major challenge identified by policymakers (6 p26). This is particularly important in the context of informal food system actors, on which data are not reliably collected. Collecting data is challenging in LMIC contexts, where official data are often outdated, inconsistent, and dependent on how urban areas are specified (e.g. 69). A lack of evidence can also be used as a reason to defer giving political priority to an issue (53).

DEFINING AND OPERATIONALISING URBAN GOVERNANCE FOR NUTRITION

Based on the literature review and discussion above, we define urban governance for nutrition as: a “process of making and implementing decisions that shape food systems to deliver better nutrition for people in cities.” This definition includes the wide range of activities and actors that need to be included to improve urban nutrition and recognises that a systemic approach is required. Building on this definition, what is considered ‘good governance’ and how it can be successfully developed and applied depends on where and under what circumstances it is implemented. Following the approach used by studies on urban food policies (e.g., 70), and drawing from the examples and challenges discussed above, we have identified four principles to operationalise the definition of urban governance for nutrition, detailed below.

PRINCIPLE ONE: INCLUDE A DIVERSE RANGE OF STAKEHOLDERS WHO PLAY ROLES ACROSS THE FOOD SYSTEM

Multi-stakeholder groups can include actors from the public sector, community organisations, civil society, and the private sector from a range of different backgrounds (15,44). Using a multi-stakeholder approach enables one to use multiple, diverse perspectives to consider the complex causes and potential solutions to nutrition challenges and ways to create healthy environments (78). Having a diverse team enables a more inclusive framing of existing challenges to be addressed and encourages shared ownership of the work (61,62,65). McKeon (43 p379) highlights how in some multi-stakeholder approaches, “differences in identities, interests, roles, and responsibilities are ignored and power imbalances negated.”

Among these actors, city officials need to be full partners to build capacity within the city government; this is particularly important with regard to the collection of data for policy development (6, 8). Incorporating academics can facilitate the dissemination of research findings and inform policy consultations (79). Although a multi-stakeholder approach can be adversarial at times, continuous interactions can build the trust needed for collaboration and agreement (80).

Multi-stakeholder approaches are no panacea, however. When governance processes involve multiple actors and when responsibilities of, and boundaries between, actors become vague, there is a risk that blame will be avoided by some and other actors will become scapegoats (45). If multiple stakeholders take part in decision making, it is thus critical that there is an effective mechanism outlining processes, roles, and responsibilities (44). It might also be challenging to unite a variety of stakeholders coming from different technical sectors or levels of government (61). In some cases, a diversity of stakeholders results in an inability to create

consensus around the causes of, and solutions to, an issue, therefore limiting the opportunities for informing policies (53).

It is interesting to note in this context that governance analyses in the food security realm are often underpinned by an optimistic or problem-solving philosophy (39). This philosophy is linked to a tradition that emphasises an objective, scientific approach to understanding policy (81). The assumption is that there is a solution to food security challenges, if the right governance mechanism is found. This risks overlooking “conflicts of interest, institutional deadlocks, and/or the existence of winners and losers in different arrangements” (82 p2).

PRINCIPLE TWO: CREATE FORMAL GOVERNANCE MECHANISMS THAT ENSURE EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION

A multi-stakeholder approach allows for governance that is inclusive and fosters participation. Formalising the governance mechanism can support the institutionalisation of inclusive and participatory governance. Inclusion mechanisms include the development of policies and programmes through participatory approaches and processes, involving communities, city governments, and actors across the food system (8) and including urban residents on low incomes (44). These participatory processes contribute to sharing and co-producing knowledge and information and building trust (62,83). They can also be helpful in addressing conflicts and ideological differences between actors. The central argument is that, through self- and social questioning (reflexivity), people are able to engage with the uncertainties and social coordination problems (84) that characterise a complex and fast-changing food system.

It is important that urban governance for nutrition is underpinned by democratic values including representation, accountability, transparency, and legitimacy (85,86). Some of these values are also highlighted in the guidelines for Sustainability Assessment of Food and Agriculture systems (SAFA) (87). The SAFA indicators of good governance are categorised under corporate ethics, accountability, participation, rule of law, and holistic management. In nutrition governance, accountability includes strong management of financial resources, decision-making based on high-quality data, the strengthened capacity of media and civil society organisations (69), and a clear monitoring of programmes based on a transparent results framework (44). Adequate representation and legitimacy are critical, and the question of ‘who has the right to speak for whom’ is important, especially when multi-stakeholder groups take part in decision-making (48). It can also be challenging to create a mechanism that is legitimate when there are a multitude of non-governmental actors that have a stake in urban food and nutrition practices (43). It is important to critically assess different types of multi-stakeholder partnerships and their potentially counterproductive effects in terms of empowerment and democracy enhancement. Problematic features could include a lack of representation of vulnerable groups or the absence of accountability mechanisms (85,86,88).

PRINCIPLE THREE: ENSURE THAT URBAN GOVERNANCE FOR NUTRITION IS BASED ON EVIDENCE

Decisions of how to reshape food systems to deliver better nutrition for people in cities must be based on existing evidence. This includes nutrition data for local populations; food environment assessments, such as retail mapping; evaluations of existing nutrition

programmes; and food systems dashboards (which aggregate and visualise data to facilitate diagnosis of food systems). In addition, baseline research can be used to inform the development of policies and actions and identify levers of change. Indeed, creating opportunities for learning and sharing knowledge among urban policy and food system practitioners is itself a broadly used strategy to further good governance (49).

Practitioners must often account for the diversity of urban environments that exist (89), as governance practices to successfully shape specific landscapes to improve food security and nutrition outcomes will differ from place to place. For example, when seeking to strengthen a specific urban food system, elements such as the type, size, and location of the city, as well as its particular social-ecological dynamics, must be understood and taken into account (5,90). The size of city – whether mega, large, medium, or small – can be a particularly useful entry point for identifying ways of improving rural-urban linkages and the different effects of infrastructure on urban nutrition (5,57).

The implementation of resulting programmes and policies should also generate additional evidence and learning opportunities. Findings from monitoring the impact of programmes can be used to review policy objectives and implementation approaches (62,91). In order to ensure that learning can be used to improve implementation, good governance practices should develop flexible processes and structures and foster the ability to innovate and adapt to changing circumstances (89), such as political priorities, technology, and climate (18).

PRINCIPLE FOUR: ENSURE THAT THERE IS SUSTAINABLE FINANCING FOR THE GOVERNANCE PROCESS AND THE ACTIONS DEVELOPED FROM IT

Whilst there has been a global trend towards decentralisation, a shift in mandate from national to local governments is often not accompanied by a shift in financing from the national to the local level (92). This means that local governments risk having the autonomy and responsibility to act but not the financial means. It is thus essential to ensure that sustained funding exists to implement planned actions. Funding can come from different sources, such as government departments and donors (62,91). Effectively decentralising responsibilities requires local fiscal policy and regulation that enable the government to ensure that funding is available to implement these responsibilities (44). Such funds need to be channelled back into the governance process or be used to implement actions, rather than being absorbed into general revenue. Commitment to and sustained interest in nutrition interventions are enhanced when there are established networks for fundraising, costing of programmes, and sound disbursement processes (69). Funding is also more beneficial when it comes without special conditions, restrictions, obligations, or arrangements that must be met. This allows for smooth implementation of programme objectives without incurring expectations of conforming to the agenda of the funders (93).

CONCLUSIONS

Urban malnutrition is increasing, and the complexity and urgency of the challenge require effective and efficient governance mechanisms. However, our review revealed that there is no singular definition of urban governance for nutrition. Instead, a range of definitions exists, focusing on activities, actors, and indicators. In addition, examples of how nutrition

governance is implemented in practice help point to a definition but do not clearly articulate one. Following our review and analysis of the literature, we thus proposed the following definition: urban governance for nutrition is the process of making and implementing decisions that shape food systems to deliver better nutrition for people in cities.

While the operationalisation of urban governance for nutrition is highly context specific, we draw on the examples of urban governance for nutrition emerging from the review and associated challenges to identify four principles for operationalising urban governance for nutrition. These are: include a diverse range of stakeholders who have roles to play across the food system; create formal governance mechanisms that ensure effective participation; ensure that urban governance for nutrition is based on evidence; and ensure that there is sustainable financing for the governance process and the actions developed from it.

What has not been defined cannot be identified and cannot be measured. We posit that this definition and the operating principles will serve two purposes. First, it will support the development of norms and ideals for successful urban governance for nutrition. Because the definition is clear yet flexible, practitioners and planners can build on it to establish mechanisms for urban nutrition governance that can adequately address the complexity of urban malnutrition. Additional research and case studies will further illuminate the utility of the proposed definition and principles. Second, we suggest that it will aid the development of methods, metrics, and indicators of successful urban governance for nutrition and its constituent domains. Further research is needed to build on existing measurement frameworks to develop ways of assessing its extent and success. While further learning is warranted, this is a step towards enabling cities to ensure better nutrition for their people.

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