

SHARED LEARNING, INSPIRED ACTION: INSIGHTS FROM GLOBAL EXCHANGES ON STRENGTHENING URBAN FOOD MARKETS



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SUMMARY

Cities, where an increasing proportion of the world's population lives, are critical for transforming food systems to address widening social inequalities, including food insecurity and barriers to accessing healthy diets, and excessive pressures on Earth systems, like climate, biodiversity, and land. Urban food markets play a central role in this context. They bridge formal and informal economies, support livelihoods, link urban and rural areas, and help shape essential access to affordable, safe, and healthy diets. Despite this potential, these markets remain under-researched and are frequently viewed through a narrow economic lens, such as by focusing on food trade, vendor fees, infrastructure investment, and provision of basic essential services.

To strengthen evidence and practice about local fresh food markets and food systems governance, in 2025, ICLEI CityFood, the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), and World Farmers Markets Coalition published two editions of a handbook about markets and resilient cities. The second edition, launched at COP30 in November 2025, comprises 31 city-market case studies and is structured around the CityFood Market Action Framework. Between May and December 2025, following the launch of the first edition, ICLEI CityFood and GAIN co-convened eight online sessions of a Community of Interest focused on markets and cities. The sessions were structured around four thematic areas: an introduction to how cities shape food markets; gender and social intersectionality; managing food waste; and access to nutrition. Across all eight sessions, a total of 327 participants from 27 cities and 56 organisations took part. This paper shares a summary of those prior sessions and signposts upcoming sessions.

KEY MESSAGES

- Urban food markets are critical places for food system transformation, with potential to address food insecurity, access to healthy diets, livelihoods, and environmental pressures by linking formal and informal economies and urban and rural areas.
- Despite their importance, markets are under-researched and narrowly framed, often viewed mainly through economic and infrastructure lenses rather than their broader social, nutrition, environmental and governance roles.
- Resources, including the CityFood Market Handbook for Healthy and Resilient Cities and the Community of Interest, are advancing knowledge of city-led food systems transformations and serve as important spaces for peer exchange and learning.
- Looking ahead, well-governed and inclusive food markets are a strategic entry point to realise healthy and resilient urban food systems. The CityFood Market Action Framework and GAIN's Food Systems intervention model offer cities and other market actors, like development partners, clear pathways for coordinated, locally led action that enhances the value of markets.

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVE

Fewer than 1% of people worldwide live in a ‘safe and just space’ - enjoying social justice while staying within the Earth’s environmental limits¹ as needed to safely sustain both people and the planet (1). As urban populations increase, cities are exerting a growing influence over agricultural production and supply chains that feed urban residents (2, 3). Cities are also influencing the character of food environments – the spaces in which people are exposed to food options that influence their dietary choices – and the patterns of food waste between retail and consumption (2, 4, 5). Notably, urbanisation is generally driving shifts towards diets that are more affordable and convenient but often less healthy, including ultra-processed foods that are high in sugars, salt, and/or fats (2, 4, 6, 7). Rising consumption of unhealthy foods and the associated increase in public health challenges like obesity and Type 2 Diabetes, together with the evidence that 75% of the 2.3 billion people worldwide who are moderately or severely food insecure live in urban and peri-urban areas, demonstrate the importance of cities as a strategic entry point for food systems transformation (2, 4, 6, 7, 8). These profound realities necessitate urgent and coordinated action across governance levels, sectors, and territories, and harnessing of local agency, to secure fundamental and continued rights to food, decent livelihoods, and a healthy environment (1, 9, 10, 11).

TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL OF CITIES AND MARKETS

Cities and markets are dynamic hubs of people and food, with multiple levers for locally led, resilient, and just food systems transformation that can be used to promote fair livelihoods, foster healthy social-ecological relations, and advance equitable access to affordable, sustainable, safe, and healthy diets (5, 8, 10, 11, 12). Urban food markets, including wholesale and fresh food retail markets for both unprepared and prepared foods, are vital food environments for city residents – especially given their dietary reliance on food purchases (2, 7, 8, 12). These markets connect urban food retailers and consumers, bridge formal and informal economies, are infused with cultural food practices, and connect local food environments with wider food system (5, 11, 13).

Markets can offer regenerative or organically produced food as well as conventionally produced food. They can also provide access to fairly priced, safe, and healthy foods as well as unfairly priced, unsafe, and unhealthy foods. Whether governed and managed entirely as public entities or through versions of public-private partnerships or private-sector-only arrangements markets and market systems inevitably intersect with government mandates (9, 14, 15). These often uncoordinated mandates fall within the roles and responsibilities of multiple city (local) government departments (14). City administrative mandates linked to markets can include public land tenure, land-use planning and zoning, local economic development, public food procurement, healthy communities and environments, food hygiene and safety regulations, provision of basic essential services like fresh water, sanitation and food waste management, and facilitation of inclusive governance. Several mandates, such as overseeing food safety, also involve other sub-national governments as well as national ones. International commitments like

¹ There are nine Earth systems (planetary boundaries) that are interconnected and define the safe, living space for humankind. These are: climate change, biosphere integrity (genetic and functional biodiversity), land systems change, freshwater change, biogeochemical flows, ocean acidification, novel entities (novel synthetic chemicals), stratospheric ozone depletion (reducing protection to incoming ultraviolet radiation), atmospheric aerosol loading (particles in the air from human and natural activities) (1, 10).

Nationally Determined Contributions to climate change mitigation and adaptation can also come into play.

BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF INTEREST FOR CITIES AND MARKETS

City governments often view markets through an economic lens; in many instances, especially in low-and-middle income countries (LMICs), markets (particularly local fresh food retail markets) are regarded as risky investments (2, 9, 15). However, their value is much greater than this, and they are often vital to the health and resilience of cities. Gathering case study evidence from cities from around the world can help inform, inspire, and raise awareness of the value of cities and markets. To this end, ICLEI CityFood², GAIN and the World Farmers Markets Coalition (WFMC) published two successive editions of a handbook³ on markets and healthy and resilient cities in 2025 (16, 17). The handbooks are structured around the four pillars of the CityFood Market Action Framework (Annex 1, Figure 1): Policy and Governance, Food Market Infrastructure, Funding and Incentives, and Capacity Building and Awareness Raising (16, 17). The second edition highlights 31 case studies about how cities are designing and implementing market-related policy through best practices, learning, and innovation (17).

Following the launch of the first handbook edition in March 2025, ICLEI CityFood and GAIN initiated the CityFood Interest Group (Community of Interest) focused on municipal fresh food markets and healthy, resilient cities. This group aims to provide a dynamic space in which city government representatives, experts, and diverse market actors can share, learn, inspire, advocate, and strengthen the evidence and practice base of markets.

This convening paper reports on a series of eight Community of Interest sessions on four themes held in 2025.

COMMUNITY OF INTEREST SESSIONS⁴

Between May and December 2025, ICLEI CityFood and GAIN co-convened eight sessions with the Community of Interest via an online Zoom platform (Annex 2, Table 1). These sessions were structured around four themes. The first two sessions introduced the first edition of the handbook and the theme of inclusive food systems governance. This was followed by thematic sessions on gender and social intersectionality, food waste, and nutrition. Excluding the introduction, the session themes were guided by a Mentimeter poll conducted during the introduction sessions. Community of Interest participants were polled about the topics that they wanted to learn more about in the context of city governments and markets (Figure 1).

² ICLEI is a global network of more than 2,500 local and regional governments committed to sustainable urban development. Since 2013, its CityFood Program (ICLEI CityFood) has leveraged the transformative power of food to build resilience. CityFood accelerates local and regional action for sustainable food systems, fostering collaboration across ICLEI's regional offices and key global and regional partners.

³ Edition 2 of the handbook was launched at COP30 in Belém, Brazil. It is available in English, Portuguese, and Spanish.

⁴ This Community of Interest is also known as the CityFood Interest Group.

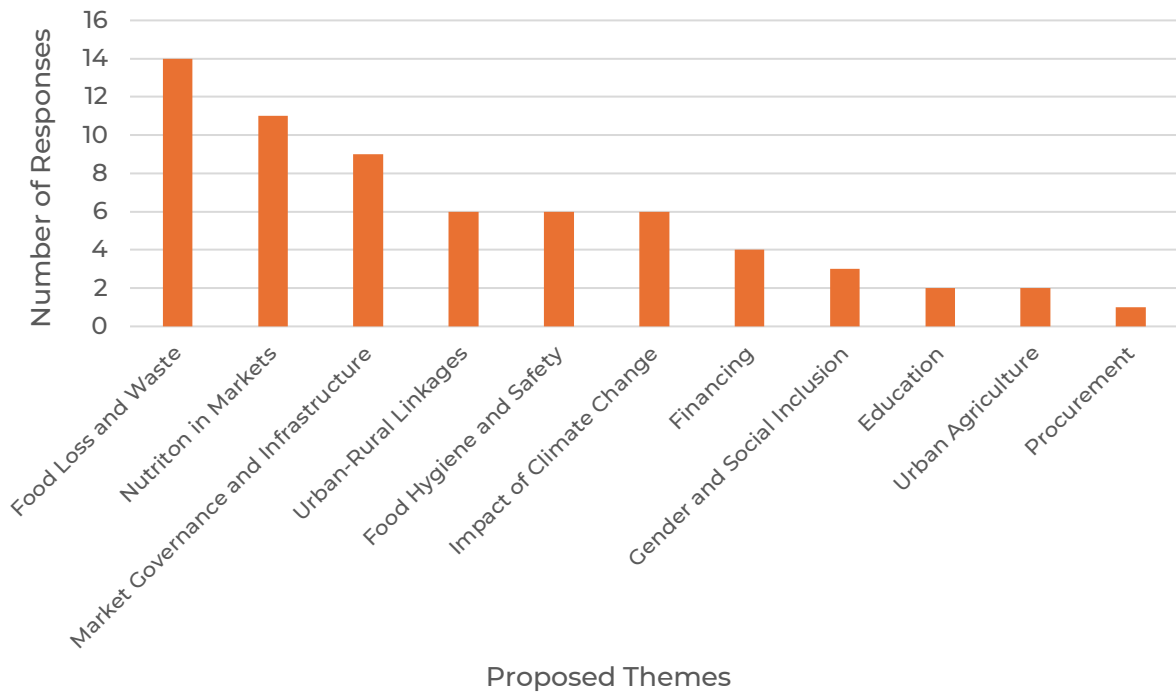


Figure 1. Participants’ interest in a selection of Community of Interest webinar topics. (Combined results of the Mentimeter polls conducted in the morning and afternoon introduction sessions.)

The Community of Interest brings together cities, their key partners, and interested parties from across Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas. To date, 24 cities have formally joined the Community of Interest (Figure 2). To accommodate the global community, the organisers hosted morning and afternoon sessions on the same day and theme. The first sessions were only in English, while Spanish and Portuguese translation was available for the second sessions. Each session followed a similar structure with small variations in the interactive scenario and feedback techniques.



Figure 2. Distribution of formally registered cities in the Community of Interest.

Sessions started with an introduction by ICLEI CityFood and GAIN Food Systems Governance programme representatives, followed by a presentation by an expert, including presentations of real-world market cases by city representatives. This was followed by an open discussion in which all participants could share their experiences, discuss, and ask questions. For each theme, cases from two to three cities were presented in each session, but these varied across the morning and afternoon sessions for a total of four to five cities presented per theme. Details of presenting experts, cities, and their focus topics are listed in Annex 2, Table 1.

Initially, only city representatives from the 16 cities for which cases were published in the first edition of the handbook, as well as cities involved in certain GAIN projects, were invited to be part of the Community of Interest. As part of UN-Habitat's Urban October campaign and with growing interest in the community and progressing on expanding the second edition of the handbook to 31 city cases, the last two sessions were open to all interested parties. In total, 327 participants from 27 cities and 56 organisations participated in the eight sessions in 2025 (Annexes 2 and 3).

THEME 1: HOW CITIES SHAPE FOOD MARKETS

The Community of Interest convened on 15 May 2025 for an introductory morning and afternoon session, titled 'How Cities Shape Food Markets.' In opening both sessions, the ICLEI CityFood team presented on the 'CityFood Market Action Framework' and resourced city cases in the handbook (Edition 1) as examples of the different framework dimensions. Dr Ann Trevenen-Jones, Technical Manager and Food Systems Governance Lead at GAIN, then presented on inclusive food systems governance, cities, and markets for locally led transformation.

'Markets are in the routine of everyday life. They are an ideal place where you can interface with consumers and start to change the choices that they make by changing the food environment that they're exposed to.'

Ann Trevenen-Jones, GAIN

She emphasised the importance of a 'whole-of-society' approach to policy and action and described GAIN's model for inclusive food systems governance interventions using examples from sub-Saharan Africa and Asia (Annex 4, Figure 1). Trevenen-Jones further shared how Codex Alimentarius Guidelines for Food Hygiene Control Measures in Traditional Markets for Food, adopted in 2024, offer an example of what can be achieved if a combination of market evidence, programmatic experience, and advocacy efforts is directed towards developing a practical tool informed by substantive expert and nation-state stakeholder inputs (18).

During the morning session, representatives from the city governments of Bogor, Indonesia and Fort Portal, Uganda, presented case studies and supported follow-up questions and answers. Bogor illustrated their strategic transition from a primary focus on enforcement of regulations to structured management of street food vendors in culinary

canters, through a ‘Pentahelix Approach’⁵ that involves private-sector partners, including Grab and Danone. The city has also transformed various areas into ‘Instagrammable’ gastronomic hubs, such as the Ranga Gading district, where vendors are formally incorporated and given thematic kiosks and digital tools.

This shift has given vendors access to new customers via digital platforms, including Grab Food, and has boosted food order efficiency and food safety control while also rejuvenating the city’s culinary legacy. The Fort Portal presentation demonstrated the city’s work with food systems actors as part of the Coalition of the Willing, a consumer advocacy group consisting of market leaders, vendors, farmers, chefs, media, and women’s groups. The Coalition supports the dissemination of the city’s food safety ordinance, expansion of the city’s markets, and the coordination of nutrition efforts, helping to ensure that safe and diverse food reaches the city’s 60,000 residents.

‘We still have so many farmers that are using pesticides that they do not actually understand in terms of harm to themselves, to the soils, and to the food that eventually is consumed by people. So it’s something that we are day by day trying to address.’

Eric Oteba, Kabarole Research Center, Fort Portal, Uganda

To control taxes and ensure market hygiene, Fort Portal encourages deliberations, decision-making, and assigned responsibilities through a multi-stakeholder governance platform that includes representation from the City’s Department of Health and market vendor leaders. Recently, the city invested in agroecological market stalls and ‘smart’ street vendor stalls. However, challenges remain, such as deterioration of cold chain infrastructure and the need for improved enforcement of food safety legislation.

Representatives from Pemba, Mozambique and Zapopan, Mexico presented in the afternoon session. Pemba’s presentation focused on its experience of managing food systems amid challenges such as poverty, climate change, and the influx of internally displaced people due to conflict. In partnership with GAIN, the city has co-designed and implemented a public-private partnership market management model and constructed two new markets: Eduardo Mondlane (hybrid wholesale and retail) and Muxara (retail). Illustrating the reach of market investments, the city’s ‘Nutribaik’ initiative provided bicycles and cool boxes to support approximately 300 market and last-mile fish vendors to improve food quality across nine municipal markets.

The presentation from Zapopan illustrated the municipality’s waste management diagnostic assessment approach and insights gathered from this tool to inform municipal waste management in fresh food and street food markets. The municipality aims to use some of these findings to reduce food waste by establishing market areas for selling ‘imperfect’ products and composting food unfit for human consumption. Additionally, in collaboration with academic partners, the city developed a ‘Guide to Prevent Food Waste,’

⁵ This approach engages five different types of stakeholders, i.e., government, business, communities, academia, and media, to jointly plan and implement the integrated management of street food vendors as well as to invest in street food market infrastructure upgrades, digitisation, and placemaking.

which includes practical advice, tips, and recipes to help market players and consumers reduce their environmental footprint.

'The goal is to educate the public and encourage behavioural change. We believe that it's not only the government's responsibility. We believe that everybody can be involved.'

Sofia Arvizu, Head of the Integrated Waste Management Unit, Municipality of Zapopan

THEME 2: GENDER AND SOCIAL INTERSECTIONALITY

The two sessions on this theme were about gender and social intersectionality through the lens of city governments and markets. Following the introduction by ICLEI CityFood and GAIN's Food Systems Governance programme representatives, Caroline Eonya Atim, Gender Advisor for Africa at GAIN, gave a presentation and facilitated an interactive 'learning by doing' scenario-based activity that explored how to modernise markets without displacing marginalised groups. She shared conceptualisations of gender equity, justice, and social intersectionality. Atim also elaborated upon how these themes intersect within cities and urban food markets and emphasised the social construction of gender and its influence on power and privilege that different individuals hold. Further insights shared by Atim were that women play an essential but often burdened role as producers, vendors, and food preparers and that equity requires intentional, inclusive city mandates. This could include designing safe and secure markets with facilities such as childcare areas, access to clean water, and adequate lighting to protect women and vulnerable communities when markets operate in the early morning, evening, or at night. Simplifying registration processes and forms for informal food sector vendors can also help foster inclusion.

Cities then shared their efforts in promoting gender equity and supporting vulnerable groups in food markets. From Bangladesh, the Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) showcased its efforts to improve food safety and ensure 'women-friendly' fresh food markets. They described challenges, such as poor drainage, lack of clean water, and the exclusion of women from market governance due to traditional gender roles. DNCC's market strategy involves infrastructure improvements, including better washrooms and waste management, coupled with inclusive policymaking, microfinance initiatives, and training to empower women and marginalised vendors.

Fort Portal, Uganda discussed the city's efforts to strengthen food systems through youth empowerment and the inclusion of marginalised groups, like vendors in the informal food sector. The city has untapped livelihood opportunities involving agroecological food production, while also facing challenges of high youth unemployment and poor food safety in the markets. In addressing this, the city, together with the Food Systems Lab and KRC-Uganda Youth Hub, has trained more than 100 young people in agroecology and business practices and established 'Rwenzori Fresh' branded stalls, which aim to improve consumer trust in safe fresh foods and vendor income. Fort Portal City has formally designated market spaces for women- and youth-led food enterprises, ensuring secure,

eviction-free trading. These spaces are officially designated and part of the city's gender and social inclusion strategy, providing marginalised groups with equitable access to markets, infrastructure, and customers.

In turn, the Municipality of San Luis Potosí, Mexico, illustrated its commitment to inclusion and equity in food systems through several initiatives. The 'Emprende Natural' network connects rural producers to urban consumers, while the 'Mercados al 100' programme adopts a Human-Centered Approach to market rehabilitation. Their food security interventions include 'Fish for Families', 82% of the beneficiaries of which are women, and the Municipal Women's Office conducts community outreach and workshops on the household economy.

Adding to the range of innovative approaches that cities are employing to address gender equity and social intersectionality in governance and markets, Arusha city's Nutrition Officer outlined the city's transformation pathways. These included market infrastructure investment (e.g., construction of 137 market vendor stalls, as part of the AfriFOODlinks project), quarterly health and nutrition trainings to market vendors, and the establishment and operation of a city level, multistakeholder 'Food Systems Pathways' platform together with GAIN, Arusha's Regional government, the Kilombero Market committee, and women vendor leaders.

City presentations were followed by interactive scenario activities led by Caroline Eonya Atim. These activities generated strong interest in integrating gender and social dimensions into market and public health policies. Participants provided rich real-world insights. For example, a participant from Uganda shared how her mother, a long-time vendor, was displaced by unaffordable stall fees following a market upgrade. This is an experience common in Uganda, where upgrades often exclude small-scale vendors.

Discussions highlighted the need to understand the nuances around why vendors operate outside formal municipal markets, including subsidy impacts and barriers to fair access. A suggestion to use Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (KAP) assessments to better understand vendor practices was suggested. To meet food hygiene, safety, and waste standards, participants emphasised inclusive, collaborative approaches, including training, shared decision-making, and engagement with vendor leaders over the use of enforcement. Both sessions closed with a polled reflection on how participants felt their understanding of gender and social inclusion in the markets had evolved during the sessions (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Participant's key takeaways on gender and social intersectionality (Theme 2 sessions).

THEME 3: MANAGING FOOD WASTE IN MARKETS (FOOD WASTE)

In October, a special edition of the Community of Interest was hosted as part of a GIZ initiative aligning with UN-Habitat's Urban October campaign. The paired morning and afternoon sessions focused on the role of markets as places where actors along the food value chain meet, large volumes of food are aggregated, and food is wasted.

Referencing examples of South African cities, Dr Scott Drimie, Director of the Southern Africa Food Lab and Professor of the University of Stellenbosch (South Africa), showed how understanding waste streams allows cities to take effective action to reduce food waste and to harness opportunities for job creation, livelihood generation, access to healthy diets, and local food systems resilience. He noted that municipal markets are places of culture and practice where governance can drive scalable systems change. Reducing food waste requires inclusive governance, political commitment, programming guided by the food waste hierarchy⁶, and a shift to zero-waste, circular economy approaches.

The Science City of Muñoz, Philippines then shared their food waste strategy, showcasing how the city combines regulatory and practical solutions, such as promoting at-the-source separation by imposing fines for improper waste disposal and the establishment of a Materials Recovery Facility. This strategy is part of a broader municipal effort to improve market hygiene and environmental sustainability by ensuring that organic waste is diverted from landfills and repurposed efficiently within the local ecosystems. Similarly, the presentation of the Lusaka, Zambia market case drew attention to challenges and practical solutions for food waste. Examples of challenges in managing food waste were managing informal food waste collection and a lack of adequate market infrastructure.

⁶ The food waste hierarchy is a framework that ranks actions for managing food waste from most to least preferred, prioritising prevention and value recovery (e.g., in forms such as animal feed, composting, and biogas energy) over disposal (19, 20).

Showcased solutions included the in-progress construction of a food waste separation bay, the introduction of colour-coded bins to streamline waste management, solid waste management training, and social media campaigns to raise awareness on waste separation among vendors and consumers. The representative from Cleveland, Ohio, USA noted the value of its waste audits and large-scale composting in managing food waste. The city conducted detailed audits to understand risk factors and the feasibility of various waste reduction actions. Through its partnerships with organisations like Rust Belt Riders, Cleveland successfully diverted organic materials from the waste stream to create nutrient-rich compost, supporting local agriculture and reducing the city's carbon footprint.

'Produce vendors already had sustainable solutions in place. Many were connected with local farms or other ways to handle food waste. Our work was not to reinvent the wheel but to unify efforts, track waste, and make participation easier for those not yet involved.'

Robert Kurtz, Sales Director, Rust Belt Riders

Lilongwe, Malawi presented on the case of the Lizulu fresh food market, which generates approximately five tonnes of organic waste daily. To prevent waste from spilling into the Lilongwe River, the city prioritised the distribution of waste sorting bins and trained 15 waste entrepreneurs in composting and recycling, provided safety equipment, and connected them to off-takers. These off-takers commit to buying market vendors' and waste entrepreneurs' compost and other products, selling them to farmers, waste processors, and local users. As a result, vendor livelihoods are enhanced with additional income streams, and waste destined for final disposal is reduced.

In Curitiba, Brazil robust social and environmental programmes target 'zero waste' in markets. As part of this endeavour, the city operates a Food Bank that facilitates food donations and a 'Solidarity Table' initiative to support vulnerable communities with daily meals. Curitiba is committed to continuous education by providing online and on-site training at markets to its residents on reducing food waste, ensuring that sustainability is integrated into the daily operations of market food systems.

During the open discussion section of both sessions, challenges related to enforcing food waste regulations in markets were points of discussion. Participants advocated for enforcement strategies such as linking vendor operating permits to compliance with environmental standards alongside ongoing education to encourage behaviour change. Technical questions were also raised, including one from a participant in Nigeria on the role of microorganisms in market food waste management. The participant highlighted that composting requires effective waste separation, controlled fermentation, and the use of specific microorganisms to produce nutrient-rich biofertilizer. Participants further discussed public-private partnerships to scale food waste solutions. The City of Cape Town's fresh food markets were shared as an example of partnership innovation. However, participants also emphasised that part of the success of these partnerships is dependent on strong government oversight. Another participant shared how Malawi's public-private partnerships with market vendors' target valorisation of food waste and

provide additional vendor income streams through value-added waste products (e.g., biogas for alternative energy). Beyond the vendors, the involvement of large business entities was essential to the success of waste reduction innovations. To address this, the Malawian government is working with the University of Manchester to identify policy and financial incentives that can attract private-sector investment in waste management and the circular economy.

These sessions reinforced that reducing and valorising food waste are practical and ethical, linked to the health, well-being, and prosperity of people as well as to the environmentally responsible use of natural resources to produce and manage food.

THEME 4: IMPROVING ACCESS TO NUTRITIOUS FOOD IN URBAN MARKETS (NUTRITION)

Following on from the November 2025 launch of the second edition of the handbook at COP30, in early December 2025, the Community of Interest convened to explore the theme of resilient cities and nutrition in markets. ICLEI CityFood representatives introduced the sessions with insights into local actions undertaken in Lusaka and Lilongwe (e.g., market assessments, infrastructure upgrades, and governance strengthening) and global efforts (e.g., CityFood Market Handbook). Then Dr Trevenen-Jones (GAIN) gave a brief overview of GAIN's nutrition-sensitive market interventions in sub-Saharan African and Asian countries, also introducing the key messages and evidence from the 2025 EAT-*Lancet* report on the planetary healthy diet (1). Trevenen-Jones emphasised the goals that everyone can enjoy access to healthy diets and fair and prosperous livelihoods, within the limits of Earth's systems as necessary to sustain the wellbeing of people and planet.

Next, HealthBridge Foundation of Canada representatives from the Liveable Cities programme, Kristie Daniel (Programme Director, Global) and Tran Thi Kieu Thanh Ha (Manager, Vietnam), delivered the expert address. They called for cities to strengthen market nutrition environments by ensuring that healthy options are not only available but also the easiest and most affordable choice for consumers. HealthBridge representatives noted that local markets are vital to addressing the 'triple burden' of malnutrition.⁷ They also stated that local public markets are critical aspects of urban food environments that enable access to healthy, affordable, and culturally appropriate food while supporting livelihoods, biodiversity, and community resilience. Their evidence shows that neighbourhood-based, informal, and mobile markets improve physical access to nutritious foods, especially in low-income and underserved areas. The HealthBridge presentation emphasised the importance for markets to be well-located and well-designed, so that they are easily accessible and trusted by consumers. This means that markets need to be within walkable distances of consumers' daily routines (e.g., homes, offices, and schools), have essential services and basic infrastructure (e.g., water, sanitation, lighting, ventilation, and waste systems), and be 'food safe'.

Daniel and Tran further described the key role city governments play in shaping nutrition outcomes through the exercise of their mandates and tools like land-use planning, zoning, licensing, infrastructure investment, promotion (e.g., of healthy diets), and investment. Whether city governments view these markets as essential public services or

⁷ The triple burden of malnutrition refers to the coexistence of undernutrition (e.g., stunting and wasting), over-nutrition (e.g., overweight and obesity), and micronutrient deficiencies in the same context (21, 22).

only as informal food businesses frames how they help enhance or limit the enabling environment in which these markets operate. Examples from Barcelona, Medellin, and Vietnam were presented, illustrating how government policies on food promotion (e.g., buy-local campaigns), investment, inclusive governance (e.g., food policy councils), public land provision for markets, and dedicated budget support strengthen market sustainability and nutrition outcomes.

Illustrating their efforts to transform culinary street food markets into healthy, vibrant spaces, Bogor, Indonesia presented on their 'Healthy Market' (*Pasar Sehat*) programme. This programme revitalises market infrastructure to improve food safety outcomes and enhance the aesthetic appeal of vendor stalls. Additionally, the programme includes routine food safety inspections and vendor training. This multipronged approach strives to promote consumer trust and encourage city residents to purchase their fresh produce from these markets. Bogor City Government supports street food vendors' use of digital technology by enabling access to delivery platforms like Grab and Go-Jek, promoting QR-code payments, and encouraging digital registration of vendors to improve market access and formalisation. By focusing on both the physical environment and the socio-economic viability of fresh food vending, the city aims to ensure that nutrient-dense foods are an accessible, staple part of Bogor residents' diets.

The Municipality of Brasov, Romania, then shared how it addresses nutrition goals by supporting short food supply chains and farmers' markets. This municipality provides dedicated spaces for local producers to sell directly to urban consumers, ensuring that fresh, seasonal fruits and vegetables are readily accessible. Brasov has also implemented campaigns in schools on nutrition, sustainability, and the benefits of consuming local products. In these ways, the city more effectively links urban community health outcomes with regional agricultural sustainability.

During the afternoon session, the Municipality of Lilongwe, Malawi, shared its efforts to enhance nutrition within its formal and informal market sectors. Recognising that a large portion of the population relies on markets for their daily caloric intake, the city has focused on improving food hygiene and safety in the sections of the market that sell 'Ready-to-Eat' food. Lilongwe is working on initiatives to diversify the products available in markets, specifically targeting the inclusion of more indigenous vegetables and protein sources. However, these efforts are challenged by the ongoing aging of the market infrastructure. As Lilongwe continues to invest in markets, its multistakeholder governance model, which supports inclusion of vendor associations in decision-making, strives to foster local agency and ownership of nutrition interventions.

In valuing markets as places of healthy food environments, the Municipality of Mérida, Mexico, presented its urban nutrition programming involving market management and public health education. The city provides nutrition counselling and cooking demonstrations in the markets to show consumers how to prepare healthy meals using affordable, fresh ingredients found in the markets. Mérida also focuses on improving the 'First 1,000 Days' of life, through food security initiatives that target mothers and young children. By transforming markets into educational spaces, the city is successfully influencing consumer behaviour and strengthening the demand for fresh, local produce over unhealthy alternatives.

'Public markets are essential to guarantee access to fresh and nutritious food, especially for low-income families who depend on them for their daily diet.'

Daniela Gutiérrez Madrigal, Secretaria Técnica, Mérida

Participants were highly engaged in the discussions in both sessions. There was strong interest in the cases shared by HealthBridge and presenting cities, particularly around the complexities of defining and prioritising 'local food' in urban food systems. Concerns were raised about long supply chains. However, participants cautioned against defining local food too narrowly as urban or peri-urban production, noting the need to consider trade-offs between local food and land use pressure, pollution risks, and food safety challenges. Alternative framings were proposed, such as sourcing from suitable nearby regions, with one participant, an intermediary city, defining local food as originating from within 50–100 km. Market labelling systems for local food were highlighted as a practical tool to communicate food origins, build consumer trust, and support informed purchasing decisions.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Through the Community of Interest engagements, city governments, experts, and other interested market actors from around the world shared a range of innovative and context-specific approaches to strengthening urban food markets. Participants opined that these markets were vital parts of food environments that directly influence the (un)healthy diet choices of urban residents and vendor livelihoods, and shape and are shaped by urban-rural and territorial food system relationships.

Key takeaways from the sessions include:

- **City governments are powerful shapers of market food environments.** Through policy and governance, dedicated public budgets, and investments in social infrastructure (e.g., skills capacities, inclusive governance and management mechanisms, and community care options) and physical infrastructure, markets can be leveraged for locally led transformation. Infrastructure and governance directly shape nutrition outcomes.
- **Inclusive governance is critical for success.** Multistakeholder platforms involving key market actors like relevant city government departments, market committees and women vendor leaders are a key inclusive governance mechanism. However, to ensure local ownership and effective engagement, it is important that all market actors are capacitated and supported regularly on market topics like food safety, waste, nutrition, and governance, and are part of decision-making processes including the co-design of market solutions.
- **Gender and social equity must be intentionally integrated** into market policies, investments, planning, design, management, and the implementation of market interventions. These two cross-cutting considerations intersect in institutional structures and practices in the markets. The multiple roles and varying barriers facing

women and men vendors, formal and informal practices, permissions to operate in the markets, youth micro-businesses, elderly traders, indigenous and smallholder farmers, and displaced people all intersect in markets on a routine basis.

- **It is challenging to universally define, 'local food'.** In deliberating on the value of 'local food', cities need to consider an array of local, regional, and cross-border food supply chains, and what diversity is needed to facilitate market resilience, access to affordable, safe, and healthy diets, food culture, and the well-being of communities and the environment.
- **Healthy food choices must be the easy and affordable choices** for urban consumers. A nutrition lens ensures markets actively contribute to healthier diets, not only food access.
- **Adaptive and transparent decision-making** with regards to markets is supported by regular monitoring of and access to information about food prices and the diversity of food that is available and accessible, nutrition indicators, the use of tools like the Diet Quality Questionnaire to rapidly determine diversity of vendor and consumer diets, and on-going assessments of market and vendor operating conditions.
- **Preventing, reducing, and valorising food waste are major opportunities** linked to the generation of income and reduction of potential lost income, resilient and diversified livelihoods, and social and environmental benefits. Social benefits include food redistribution and improved food hygiene practices and food safety, which benefit public health and additionally help reduce food waste. Environmentally, these opportunities involve reduced contribution of markets' organic waste to greenhouse gas emissions as well as helping safeguard resources used (e.g., soil biodiversity, fresh water) in food's journey from farms, fisheries, and oceans to markets.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS AND NEXT STEPS

Markets already serve as nexus food hubs where social, economic, environmental, and governance policy goals intersect. However, more needs to be done to realise the many untapped opportunities within these markets and embedded in markets' relationships with the wider food system.

The ICLEI CityFood and GAIN co-convened Community of Interest has become an influential space in which cities engage with each other to learn, inspire, and advance the agenda of healthy and resilient cities through markets. It has shaped a shared understanding of what effective policy, inclusive market governance, and management can look like alongside investments in infrastructure, skills, and access to finance. The eight sessions strengthened a growing recognition that market systems are shaped not only by physical and social infrastructure but also by social and institutional arrangements and by their wider food system, social, and ecological contexts. The expertise and city experiences shared in these sessions highlighted the many ways in which city governments, local market committees, vendor associations, food producers, women's groups, and a variety of health and nutrition actors across the world are trying to work together to design and implement transformative market solutions.

In 2026, four more convenings of the Community of Interest are planned. A morning and afternoon session in March 2026 will focus on Strengthening Urban-Rural Linkages

through Engaging Farmers in Markets with a further paired thematic session scheduled for May 2026 on the CityFood Market Impact Framework.

Looking to the future, well-governed, inclusive, and adequately resourced food markets are among the most practical and cost-effective entry points for advancing healthy, resilient, and equitable urban food systems. The CityFood Market Action Framework provides a structured pathway for cities to translate these insights into coordinated, locally led action.

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ANNEX 1



Figure 1. Transforming food markets: the CityFood Market Action Framework (10, 14)

ANNEX 2

Table 1. Overview of the eight Community of Interest sessions

Date	Session Title	Details of Presenting Experts and Cities [Morning (AM), Afternoon (PM) sessions]			Topic	Total Participants	Total Participants per City		Total Participants by Organisation	
							Participants	Cities		
15-May-25	How Cities Can Shape Food Markets	A M	Expert	Ann Trevenen-Jones, Technical Manager and Lead, Food Systems Governance, GAIN	Public governance structures: effectively and inclusively strengthening functionality of local food markets in cities	33	10	6	3	
			Bogor	Rudy Mashudi, S.T., M.P.	Street Vendor. Management and Collaborative Synergy					
			Fort Portal	Eric Oteba, KRC-Uganda	Operation of Food Markets in Fort Portal Tourism City					
		P M	Expert	Same as morning			31	12	10	3
			Pemba	Claudia Sonia Roldao Conceição, Council woman for Environmental Sanitation, Pemba Municipal Council	How the City of Pemba is Supporting Street Food Vendors					
		Zapopan	Sofia Arvizu, Head of the Integrated Waste Management Unit, Municipality of Zapopan	Waste Diagnosis for Markets and Street Markets						

Date	Session Title	Details of Presenting Experts and Cities [Morning (AM), Afternoon (PM) sessions]			Topic	Total Participants	Total Participants per City		Total Participants by Organisation	
							Participants	Cities		
23-Jul-25	Gender and Social Inclusion in Markets	A M	Expert	Caroline Enoya Atim, Gender Advisor for Africa, - GAIN	Gender and Social Inclusion	41	16	12	5	
			Dhaka	Brig Gen Imru-Al-Quais Chowdhury	Gender and Social Inclusion in Dhaka's Food Market					
			Fort Portal	Sharon Nalunkuuma, Food Systems and Nutrition Program Manager, Kabarole Research and Resource Centre	Strengthening Sustainable Food Systems, Through Youth Empowerment and Inclusion: The Fort Portal City Experience					
		P M	Expert	Same as morning			31	12	10	4
			San Luis Potosí	Larisa Hinojosa, Dirección de Seguimiento de Gabinete, Secretaría Técnica	Committed to Inclusion and Equity in Markets and Food Systems					
			Arusha	Namsifu Mngulwi, City Nutrition Officer	Gender and Social Inclusion, Arusha City: Pathways to Inclusive Food Systems					
8-Oct-25	Assessing and Managing	A M	Expert	Scott Drimie, Director, Southern Africa Food Lab	Markets as Leverage Points: Municipal Strategies for Food Waste Reduction	40	7	5	7	

Date	Session Title	Details of Presenting Experts and Cities [Morning (AM), Afternoon (PM) sessions]		Topic	Total Participants	Total Participants per City		Total Participants by Organisation
						Participants	Cities	
	Urban Food Waste in Markets		Lusaka	Chaiwe Mushauko-Sanderse, Expert, Catalyst Development				
			Science City of Muñoz	Enzo Alfeo Villacorta, City Environment and Natural Resource Office				
	PM	Expert	Same as morning		43	10	8	11
		Lilongwe	Tapiwa Mkandawire, Chief Commercial Manager, Lilongwe City Council,	Intervention in Lizulu Fresh Food Market in Lilongwe, Malawi				
			Zilire Lusaka, Centre for Community Organisation and Development					
		Cleveland	Robert Kurtz, Sales Director, Rust Belt Riders	Cleveland Market Context				
		Curitiba	Gabriel Ollé Dalmazo, Urban	Smart way to Reduce Food Losses				

Date	Session Title	Details of Presenting Experts and Cities [Morning (AM), Afternoon (PM) sessions]			Topic	Total Participants	Total Participants per City		Total Participants by Organisation
							Participants	Cities	
				Farm Program Manager, Municipal Secretariat for Food and Nutrition Security					
3-Dec-25	Improving Access to Nutritious Food in Urban Markets	AM	Expert	Tran Thi Kieu Thanh Ha, Manager of HealthBridge's Livable Cities programme in Vietnam	Local Public Markets: Enabling Access to Food, Health, and Livelihoods in Cities	55	8	6	19
			Bogor	Bai Kusnadi, SKM, MPH, Bogor City Health Office	The Strategic Role of the Health Office				
			Brasov	Mihaela Damian, Municipality of Brasov	Urban Market and Flywheel Markets				
		PM	Expert	Kristie Daniel, Director of HealthBridge's Livable Cities Programme	Same as morning	53	8	7	31
			Lilongwe	Bai Kusnadi, SKM, MPH, Bogor City Health Office	Strengthening Nutrition through Market Training at Lizulu Market				

Date	Session Title	Details of Presenting Experts and Cities [Morning (AM), Afternoon (PM) sessions]		Topic	Total Participants	Total Participants per City		Total Participants by Organisation
						Participants	Cities	
			Merida	Daniela Gutiérrez Madrigal - Secretaria Técnica.	Nutrition-Related Action in Merida, Mexico			

ANNEX 3

Table 1. Participating organisations and cities in the Community of Interest

Organisations	
Access to Nutrition Initiative	Nutricare
African Food Fellowship	Nutrition Program Staff at Coordinating Ministry for Human Development and Cultural Affairs, Jakarta
Afyabora Nutrition Organization	Nutrition Society of Nigeria
Agri Ayoba	Project for Public Spaces
C40	Rikolto
Central Mindanao University	School of Public Health UCC
Centre for Community Organisation and Development, Malawi	Senior Programme Manager, Grand Challenges Nigeria
Centre for Urban Food Policy and Advocacy (CUFPA)	Slow Food Hanoi
Consultant specialising in Climate Action, Resilience, and Inclusive Urban Development	SNV Netherlands Development Organisation
Country Director, Iles de Paix	Southern Africa Food Lab
EDHECinfra	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
Enlumi	Swiss TPH
EUFIC	TEDx Tirana
European Federation of Food Science and Technology	The Growing Connection
Extension officer at the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock & Fisheries	TITUU' FOODS (U) LTD
GAIN	U.S. Department of State, Public Engagement Specialist (?)
GFair	UCL Institute for Environmental Design and Engineering
GIZ	Universitas Jenderal Soedirman
Global Alliance for Chronic Diseases	University of Barcelona
GMG/FoE-GE - Georgia Tbilisi	University of Guadalajara
GoodTruck Brasil	University of Ibadan
HealthBridge	University of Michigan
ICLEI	Unsung Heroes - Ventures For Humanity
Kabarole Research & Resource Centre, Uganda	Virail
Mzuzu University, Malawi	Wageningen University
National Academies Science and Technology for Sustainability	WHO
Nile University of Nigeria	World Bank
	Yawe Foundation, Kampala, Uganda

Organisations	
North East Foods Limited	
Cities	
Bogor	Nova Lima
Brasov	Osasco
Cape Town	Pemba
Cleveland	Phuentsholing
Curitiba	Pittsburgh
Dar es Salaam	Porto Alegre
Dhaka	Quezon City
Dhankuta Municipality	San Luis Potosí
Fort Portal	Science City of Muñoz
Jawa Barat	Seoul
Kathmandu	Tbilisi
Lilongwe	Turin
Lusaka	Zapopan
Merida	

ANNEX 4

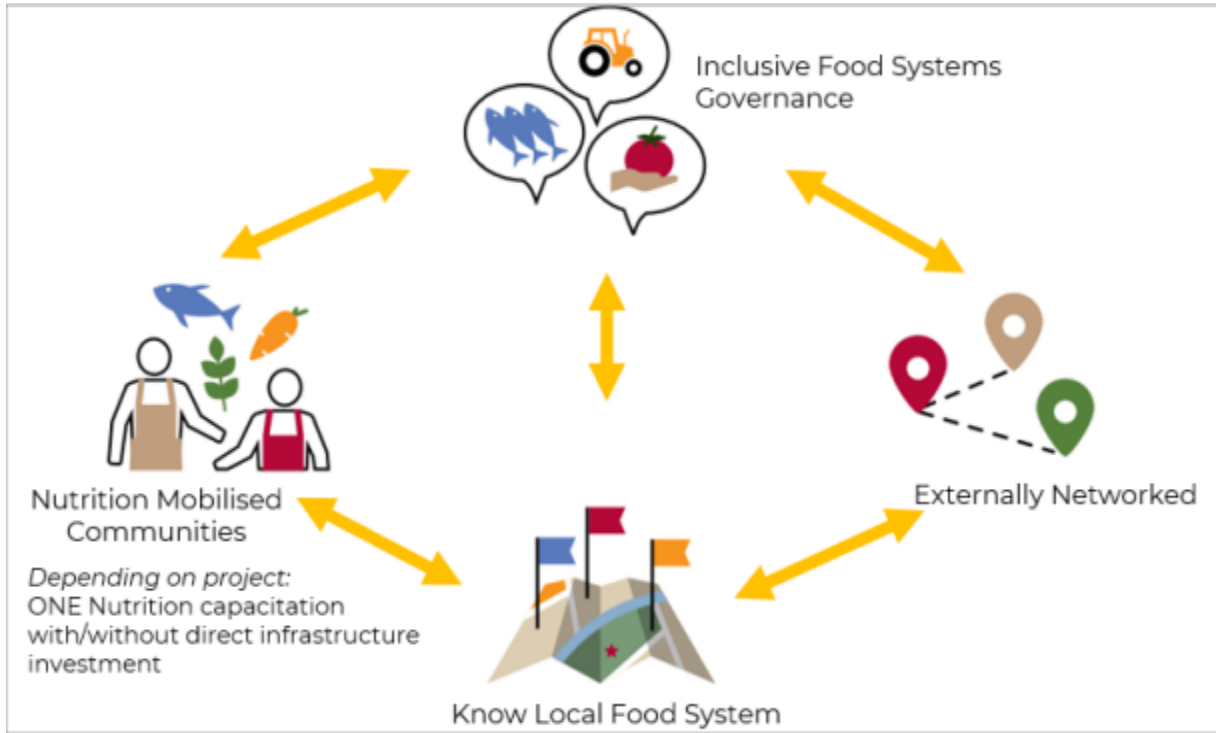


Figure 1. GAIN's Food Systems Governance model (11).



ABOUT GAIN

The Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) is a Swiss-based foundation launched at the UN in 2002 to tackle the human suffering caused by malnutrition. Working with governments, businesses and civil society, we aim to transform food systems so that they deliver more nutritious food for all people, especially the most vulnerable.

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