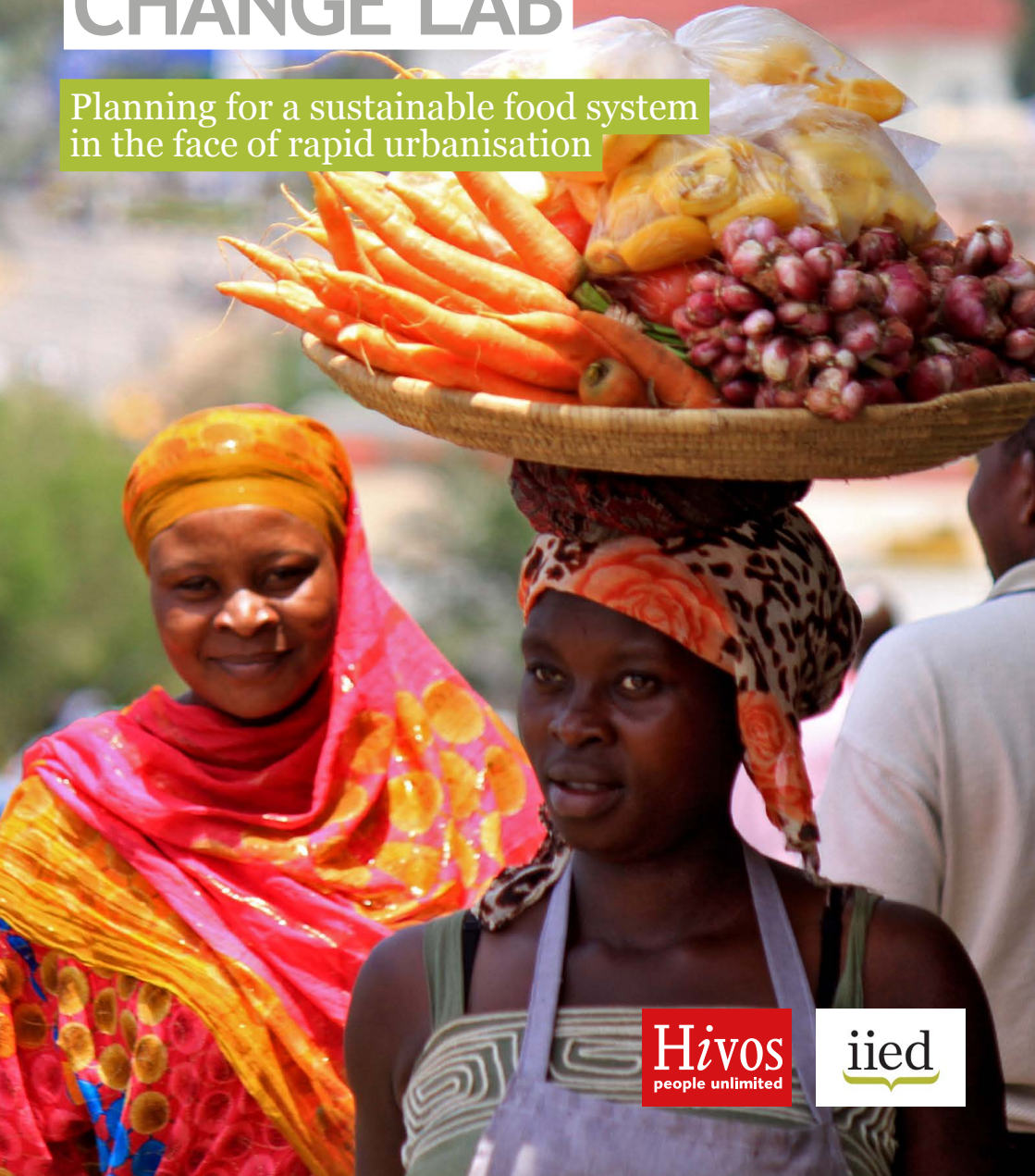


TAKING STOCK: UGANDA FOOD CHANGE LAB

Planning for a sustainable food system
in the face of rapid urbanisation



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The Uganda Food Change Lab includes farmers and farmer groups (men, women, youth), government appointed and elected leaders, nutritionists, hoteliers, street food vendors, traders, processors, and community-based organisations – all of which are also individual consumers.

THE UGANDA FOOD CHANGE LAB STORY

Fort Portal is a regional centre in Kabarole district, Western Uganda, projected to grow tenfold by 2040, from 50,000 to 500,000 inhabitants. Kabarole exports large amounts of the food grown on its farms to Uganda's cities and neighbouring countries. But in doing so it also exports a large share of its organic matter and nutrients as a result of limited local processing options. Moreover, the lack of proper soil management and regenerative agricultural techniques have also contributed to depleting local soils. Climate change and more irregular weather patterns could worsen this situation.

Despite the district's agricultural wealth, 41 per cent of children in the Rwenzori region are stunted - short in stature and low in body mass for their age due to malnutrition - largely due to monotonous diets high in starchy staples such as matooke (cooked banana), but low in protein and micronutrients. Traditional foods like millet that are more labour intensive to produce and to process are in decline, despite their high nutritional value.

This, combined with the rapid urbanisation of Fort Portal and resulting changing demographics of the city and countryside, is raising concerns over the (already stressed)

food system. The country's national planning document *Uganda Vision 2040* is calling for a dramatic growth of the urban population - from 13 per cent to 60 per cent - but fails to address the profound impact this will have on the country's food system, and offers no concrete plans to accommodate this evolution.

The Uganda Food Change Lab (described on page 6) was initiated in 2015 against this backdrop, aiming to achieve both sustainable diets and a productive, sustainable local food system by supporting concrete interventions on the ground and advocating for a more conducive policy environment. Kabarole Research and Resource Center (KRC), with the support of Hivos and the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), convened the Lab as a multi-stakeholder partnership with local actors from Fort Portal town and Kabarole district, national policy makers and Ugandan civil society. The Lab focuses specifically on the inclusion of citizen's voices, particularly those not normally heard, such as women, youth, marginalised communities, and low-income groups such as farmers, street food vendors, students, and day labourers.

The Lab began by gathering government representatives from Fort Portal municipality and the district, farmers, (informal) food vendors and local civil society to map out the core issues in the local formal and informal food system. They identified a need for better data on local diets, regional food imports and exports, and farming practices. In particular, they pinpointed informal street food vending as a key issue for further research in light of the reliance of many low-income people in the region on street food. Urbanisation has brought a large influx of low-wage earners, leading to the rapid growth of street vending.

To move forward, the Lab collected evidence using various methodologies, such as citizen-generated evidence ('food diaries') on rural and urban diets; focus group discussions with farmers; 'lorry counting' in a local trading hub to ascertain the amount of food leaving the region; and assessing the nutritional value of the low-income 'street food diet'. This culminated in the country's first Peoples' Summit on Food, a two-day event held in Fort Portal in April 2016, where the key findings from this research were presented. With a

thunderstorm raging outside, the summit's rather dramatic ending saw representatives of key groups (local, district and national politicians; farmers; religious leaders; informal food vendors; etc.) voicing their newly established commitments on live radio. The summit also gave birth to a self-organised, multi-stakeholder platform, the Coalition of the Willing (CoW), a group of local individuals from varying sectors sharing a common concern and ambition to change the food system for the better.

The Lab works on two levels. 'On the ground' in Fort Portal and Kabarole district, KRC is supporting the CoW in raising awareness and changing consumer behaviour. Activities include nutritional talk shows on local radio, mobilising urban and rural households to promote healthy eating (especially indigenous food varieties) and mobilising informal street food vendors to take the lead in establishing their legitimacy and recognising their capacity for collective action. On a second level, KRC translates feedback from the CoW and findings from its own research into advocacy messages targeted at the local and national levels to promote sustainable diets for all. These messages are then taken forward by



↑ The first People's Summit on Food

Hivos, IIED and partners. The CoW continues to participate more independently in regional and district agricultural and food fairs, including awareness campaigns for indigenous knowledge in food preparation and consumption in schools and communities.

THE FOOD CHANGE LAB PROCESS

A Change Lab:

- Is a multi-actor change process
- Addresses key social issues
- Aims to better understand those issues
- Generates ideas
- Tests those ideas on the ground
- Facilitates adoption and replication of tested ideas

Central to the Change Lab process is **citizen agency** - the notion that people (both individually and collectively) have the capacity to act independently and to make their own choices.¹ Hence the bottom-up approach, which brings different stakeholders together and provides a forum in which they can discuss and act on their priorities and concerns.

Because a Change Lab looks at complex issues, with a myriad of actors and underlying issues and policies, we take a systems approach to ensure a sustainable food system from farm to fork or from field

to plate. We not only strive for tangible, imminent results - such as a change in (or adaptation of) policy, or new investments - but also work on more long-term outcomes. These include strengthening capacities, networks and trust between actors, which has the potential to positively influence the system for many years ahead. We facilitate a step-wise process, spending ample time on building trust between lab stakeholders. The process begins with setting a collective intention, and then we explore and connect to the world outside of our own institutional silos. It continues by collecting and connecting findings, proposing solutions and testing them as prototypes (see page 8). This approach builds in moments of reflection, so that we consider our own habits and sources of inspiration first, without jumping too soon into 'solutions mode'. Through this approach, we find solutions to be more substantiated, rooted and sustainable.

¹Vorley, B (2018) Citizen-generated evidence for a more sustainable and healthy food system. IIED and Hivos, London and The Hague. <http://pubs.iied.org/Go4300/>

Change Lab Methodology

1. Intention setting

Uganda's national planning document *Uganda Vision 2040* is released. KRC, Hivos and IIED are concerned that it does not provide a plan for the country's food system. Actors are convened to discuss the issue in Kabarole district, which is a microcosm of nationwide urbanisation trends.

2. Exploring

Lab participants collectively map their local and national food system, resulting in a concerted research effort on a range of topics. This supplements the problem analysis with firm data and substantiated experiences.

3. Connecting

The Lab's evidence is presented at the People's Summit on Food and connected to experiences and knowledge.

5. Unleashing

National lobby efforts are taken over by other Ugandan NGOs. Locally, the CoW - supported by the Lab - is looking to establish itself as an independent organisation. Informal street food vendors have set up their own association and are collaborating with the municipality to ensure access to healthy diets for all of Fort Portal's inhabitants.

4. Prototyping

Various initiatives take off in the wake of the summit, including a bottom-up organised multi-stakeholder platform in Fort Portal (the CoW), with motivated individuals embarking on a range of activities to raise awareness of healthy, diverse diets and sustainable farming practices.

PROTOTYPES

A prototype is a small-scale intervention intended to test the workability of proposed solutions. A range of interventions came out of the Lab process, which are now being facilitated or implemented by the Lab as prototypes in a range of areas.

1. Redefining the informal food sector:

Lab research showed that a lot of informal street food in Fort Portal is nutritious and therefore a vital source of healthy food. This especially applies to the traditional food served by women vendors, which is also the most affordable for low-income consumers who rely on food stalls for their daily nutritional intake. As Uganda's Public Health Act of 1935 prohibits selling food along the road, the municipality has chased the vendors away for years. Through their participation in the Food Change Lab, vendors and city law enforcement officers are now redefining their relationship, moving from conflict to coexistence and addressing key priorities such as improving food safety. This is a potential model for the rest of the country, and is also relevant to global debates on the informal food sector.

2. Redirecting (national) policy planning instruments to plan for 'the food system':

The Lab works with local and national actors to advocate for inclusive food policy planning and building complementary 'virtuous circles' of development between city and hinterland. The approach factors in the urban food system of the working poor; encourages local value addition to produce healthy food and create jobs; and promotes a more regenerative model of agriculture that increases biodiversity, promotes healthy ecosystems, and is more resilient to climate change. Furthermore, the Lab supports street vendors to advocate for better physical market infrastructure, such as improved lighting and access to water.

[Vendor selling street food →](#)



© Eagonza Nimrod

Diverse food to be cooked for
World Food Day →

3. Awareness raising: The Lab supports the CoW to raise local awareness among urban and rural households about their own diets and consumption patterns. Examples of activities are community events and cooking demonstrations, and talk-shows and mini drama-series on food on local radio. KRC is also continuing to engage with citizens to understand their own diets and prompt a discussion about the changes citizens would like to see. Building on the work within rural households in 2015, KRC has activated more than 450 rural and urban households to self-record their food intake over seven days using food diaries. The food diaries show that most families have a plant-based diet built around a few common staples. Follow-up interviews helped to understand what drives household food choices. The interviews suggest that most of the women who feed their families have a good understanding of their diets and of what's lacking. Cash rather than knowledge appears to be the biggest constraint for a more diverse diet. Some of the families who participated in generating this evidence were invited to share their insights with the community through the KRC radio programmes and in focus group discussions.

4. Building a local food-processing economy. Currently, raw agricultural produce is being exported and processed foods are being imported - this is missing opportunities to produce value-added agricultural products locally to create local sustainable food entrepreneurship and jobs. KRC and the CoW are forging new connections, innovations and knowledge to capitalise on the region's rich agriculture through local value adding and food processing. Citizens are taking charge of this process through the Lab, identifying products and engaging policy makers at district and municipal level to review existing policies. In collaboration with the private sector, the Lab is seeking to set up local processing units.

5. Stimulating food diversity in the local economy: Indigenous varieties were previously perceived as inferior and low-value foods. However, food festivals and awareness raising via radio have been instrumental in changing the mindsets of consumers to appreciate the nutrition and economic value of indigenous varieties. This food is now more present in the local markets and restaurant menus than five years ago.



LAB RESULTS AND THE WAY FORWARD

Working with the National Planning Authority

At the People's Summit on Food in 2016, the Director of the National Planning Authority (NPA) voiced his commitment to better integrate food system planning in national development planning processes. KRC is taking the lead on this, having already organised two meetings with the NPA, alongside Hivos and affiliated organisations. Positive changes, including demarcated spaces for food vendors with infrastructure like water and street lights, have been incorporated in the district plan for Fort Portal Municipality.

Building trust and collaboration between informal food vendors and Fort Portal municipality

Food vendors were mobilised to elect the leaders of their own association, the 'Fort Portal Street Food Vendors Association', with a membership of around three-quarters of all street food vendors. Fort Portal Municipality has officially recognised this as a legitimate association of food providers. This formal membership organisation has pledged to uphold standards of hygiene and overall food safety. The municipality, in turn, has

allocated a safe and hygienic space for selling street food. This includes making street lights available in areas where street vendors work and contributing to the costs of uniforms for the food vendors to wear. Linking up with these local realities, Hivos and KRC are engaging with the nation's Parliamentary Forum on Nutrition to enact a bylaw to amend the 1935 Public Health Act outlawing street food vending to reflect the new realities of an emerging urban food system.

Refining local policies

KRC worked with the CoW and a selection of elected leaders (known as Councillors) to make amendments to the Production and Environment Ordinance on 14 September 2017. Gaps in the original ordinance included diverse production, food safety, seed preservation, kitchen gardening, and post-harvest handling and storage. The amended ordinance will help to improve agricultural production, food storage, diets, household income, environmental protection and sustainable use of natural resources in Kabarole District, and can serve as an example for Uganda's other 121 districts.



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↑ Food festival participant enjoys a traditional meal.

Mobilising farmers

Lab stakeholders in Kabarole district - including farmer group representatives, agriculturalists, traders, and processors - are mobilising farmers to establish small-scale processing facilities that can add value to various local agricultural products, such as bananas. Organic waste from these facilities can then be applied to farmland in the local area to improve soil fertility. Furthermore, the initiative will provide additional income to ensure food security in off-seasons.

Promoting healthy diets in local communities

KRC has helped rural households to take the lead in organising various Orugali² food festivals at various functions and in their rural communities to popularise the production and consumption of nutritious, indigenous local food. To date, almost 1,000 people have been involved.

² A Tooro tradition in which families sit together around a meal served on a flat traditional tray known as 'Orugali'.

LESSONS LEARNED

The diverse backgrounds of the CoW - from hoteliers, farmers, and nutritionists to processors, teachers and religious leaders - were instrumental in reaching different groups. The combination of their knowledge and skills has allowed for experimental and cross-learning among the group. This has extended to citizens and initiated a transition towards healthy diets. KRC's mentorship and advocacy training for this bottom-up initiative has greatly improved the CoW's focus on key relevant nutrition issues and increased the impact in local communities. This process could be strengthened with continuous mentoring to build advocacy capacity and the development of an advocacy plan.

There is power in evidence. Involvement of citizens in research has proven to be a viable means of advocacy for policy and practice change. The research results presented in various multi-stakeholder platforms have been a vehicle for promoting sustainable diets in a range of communities.

When part of the solution involves policy change, politicians must be included from the start. Policymakers are people, and people change their behaviour and approach when they are touched by a topic. Exposing people to real-life experiences and asking them to get out of their comfort zones and connect to their inner sources of inspiration and drive can make them feel involved. Including national politicians in the Food Change Lab also helps to link local experiences and initiatives with national lobby efforts. When politicians change, due to elections or otherwise, the success of the Lab comes under pressure as interests of new leaders may differ from their predecessors and/or the lab objectives. New politicians need to be carefully exposed to and included in the Lab process.

Chairman LC V Kabarole district at exhibition table showcasing local wine made from bananas →



Women and youth should play a key role in food system change. Women can greatly influence what their families produce and consume and we need their involvement to create a lasting impact. Youth are our future leaders and need to have their voices heard and their ideas taken up. Young people can bring an impressive amount of energy to bring about change.

Aim for low-hanging fruit in parallel to longer processes of change. The Fort Portal municipality changed their behaviour towards the street food vendors relatively quickly. A concerted Lab effort to seize this momentum - for example, supporting the vendors to set up their own association to facilitate their engagement with municipal authorities - has helped in arriving at quick, visible results. The next step is to communicate these results to a wider group of stakeholders, so it becomes clear that the Lab is a vehicle for change and worth joining.

Participants are more accepting of the Lab process when it's blended with cultural traditions. Doing so helps them to understand the Lab and mobilises them to act. An example of this is the use of the Orugali tradition to deepen stakeholder understanding and appreciation of the food system and to build a workable framework of solutions.

Local women preparing Sombe, a delicacy made from cassava leaves →



SUSTAINABLE DIETS FOR ALL

www.sustainablediets4all.org

Hivos and IIED began partnering in 2016 through Sustainable Diets for All, a global five-year partnership with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We work with others to influence the policy and practices of markets, government actors and international institutions through citizen action for the promotion of sustainable diets, with the dual ambition to work towards a healthy planet and healthy people. Three strategies are core to our approach: working with frontrunners, supporting local actors to generate their own evidence, and creating coalitions of the willing through a Change Lab approach. The Uganda Food Change Lab is being implemented with local partner, Kabarole Resource and Research Center.

www.krcuganda.org

About Hivos

Hivos is an international organisation that seeks new solutions to persistent global issues. Our primary focus is achieving structural change. This is why we cooperate with innovative businesses, citizens and their organisations. We share a dream with them of sustainable economies and inclusive societies. www.hivos.org

About IIED

The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) is a policy and action research organisation. We promote sustainable development to improve livelihoods and protect the environments on which these livelihoods are built. We work with some of the world's most vulnerable people to strengthen their voice in the decision-making arenas that affect them – from village councils to international conventions. www.iied.org



↑ Small group discussions at the People's Summit on Food

Read more

Boerwinkel, F and Vorley, B (2016) Uganda Food Change Lab: Planning for the future food system of Kabarole district. IIED and Hivos, London and The Hague. <http://bit.ly/2xeBBhC>

Various blog posts at: www.krcnewsupdates.blogspot.com

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