The UN’s Habitat III Looks To Redesign Urban Food Systems

Habitat III will be held in Quito, Ecuador on October 17-20, and will be the UN’s most intrusive transformation of urban life ever attempted. This is truly the heartbeat of Technocracy. ⬕ TN Editor

The year 2016 is crucial for both food and cities. In October, UN member states will convene for the Habitat III conference in Quito, Ecuador, to discuss guidelines for sustainable urban development for the next 20 years.

In relation to food, 2016 has seen increased interest in bringing food to centre stage of many non-traditional domains. For example: this is the International Year of the Pulses; food waste is getting more attention, such as the announcement of the first global standard to measure food loss and waste; and food and agriculture lie at the very heart of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
At the 2016 Global Forum for Food and Agriculture (GFFA), UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said:

Ensuring that everyone in expanding urban areas has access to nutritious food is critical to achieving the goal of zero hunger set out in the 2030 [SDG] Agenda.

Sustainable diets are gaining traction, and many governments are demonstrating high-level commitment.

**Will the new urban agenda put food on the table?**

But on the road to Quito, the zero draft of the New Urban Agenda bears only oblique references to food systems.

Food (security) has been “sprinkled” over physical and social infrastructure, natural resources and ecosystems, sustainable consumption, resilience, urban planning, land and mobility. It is conspicuously missing from urban basic services and altogether from heritage and culture.

This omission has occurred despite common knowledge of food’s profound impacts. It shapes rural landscapes, provides spaces for buying, selling and eating food in cities, and is integral to everyday individual and collective identities.

If the New Urban Agenda carries a promise for change, sustainable and equitable food systems in cities will perhaps only be a side dish at Quito.

**Cities’ role in food systems is growing**

The Milan Urban Food Policy Pact is testament to the increasing realisation of the need for urban planners to make food systems central in city planning. More than half of humanity lives in urban areas.

According to the UN, nearly 70 per cent of the global population will live in cities by 2050, making urbanisation one of the 21st century’s most transformative trends.
Increasing recognition of the multiple dimensions of food in cities is driving the urban food debate. It encompasses nutrition, ethics and social justice, and sustainability.

In Canada, the US, South America, the UK and a few cases in Australia (notably Melbourne), municipal governments are increasingly seeking ways to promote synergistic relationships between food consumers and producers. But this process remains sporadic and non-systemic.

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