

# **Integrating food in urban governance and planning for sustainable cities: reflections on Ghana's NUP, the SDGs and the NUA**

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## **Abstract**

Carolyn Steel (2013)<sup>1</sup> advises that if we want to understand cities, we need to look at them through food. She goes on to say that 'Both food and cities are so fundamental to our everyday lives that they are almost too big to see. Yet if you put them together, a remarkable relationship emerges – one so powerful and obvious that it makes you wonder how on earth you could have missed it. ... Food shapes cities, and through them, it moulds us – along with the countryside that feeds us.' Steel's statements quoted here so powerfully provide an entry point to interrogate the relationship between food and cities to (1) understand and devise strategies to keep such age-old relationship on moral grounds (2) to pursue and achieve the development imperatives for inclusive, liveable and sustainable urban development enshrined in both the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the New Urban Agenda (NUA). While some cities around the world, including Dar es Salaam, have recognised the centrality of food to attainment of inclusive and liveable cities and have also taken action to integrate food in urban governance and planning<sup>2</sup>, same cannot be said of Ghana. In key national policy documents that relate directly to planning and management of urbanisation in Ghana, there is almost zero mention of food. To illustrate, a search for 'food' in Ghana's National Urban Policy (NUP)<sup>3</sup> returns only one mention of food. Even the single mention comes under objective four of the NUP that seeks to 'improve environmental quality of urban life'. Thus, food is mentioned in the NUP only as an appendage to environmental hygiene. Similarly, food is only mentioned in Ghana's Local Governance Act (Act 936 of 2016)<sup>4</sup> where the Minister for and Director of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture are made members of the Inter-Ministerial Co-ordinating Committee of the local governance system, or where chop bar keepers and cooked food sellers are contemplated for taxation by local government units. In the Ghana Land Use and Spatial Planning Act (Act 925 of 2016)<sup>5</sup>, food is mentioned the same way it is mentioned in the Local Governance Act. However, in the Manual for Spatial Planning<sup>6</sup> in Ghana, food is mentioned with respect to access to local markets, where facilities are provided to sell high quality traditional food to tourists or where food processing is mentioned as a light industrial activity. It therefore means that, as a country, there is a huge lacuna in our thinking of inclusive, liveable and sustainable cities, an orientation that needs to change. This paper therefore seeks to achieve two related objectives: (1) to open up a critical, provocative discussion around centring food in our urban discourse,

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<sup>1</sup> Steel, C. (2013). *Hungry city: How food shapes our lives* (Second). London: Vintage Books.

<sup>2</sup> Sonnino, R. (2009). Feeding the City: Towards a New Research and Planning Agenda. *International Planning Studies*, 4(4), 37–41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13563471003642795>

<sup>3</sup> Government of Ghana. (2012). *National urban policy framework*. Accra, Ghana: Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development.

<sup>4</sup> Republic of Ghana. *Local governance act, 2016*. , (2016).

<sup>5</sup> Republic of Ghana. *Land use and spatial planning act, 2016*. , (2016).

<sup>6</sup> Republic of Ghana. (2011). *Manual for the preparation of spatial plans*. Accra.

(2) to serve as a call for action for integrating food matters in our urban governance and planning practices, especially as we revise our NUP to make it more relevant to our national aspirations for inclusive, liveable and sustainable cities.