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SHORT FOOD SUPPLY CHAINS FOR PROMOTING LOCAL FOOD ON LOCAL MARKETS

INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

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Comments

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List of abbreviations	1
Introduction	2
1. Conceptual framework	4
1.1. Defining short food supply-chains	4
1.2. “Short” or “alternative” food supply-chains?	6
1.3. Short food supply-chains and “local food”	8
2. The variety of short food supply-chains initiatives	10
2.1. On-farm selling	10
2.2. Farmers’ markets	13
2.3. Farmers’ shops, box schemes	17
2.4. Consumers-driven initiatives	18
2.5. Public (collective) procurement	21
2.6. Hotels, Restaurants, Catering (HoReCa)	22
2.7. The many dimensions of SFSCs initiatives	22
3. Display the potential of SFSCs	25
3.1. Short food supply-chains: a win-win game?	25
3.2. Expected benefits for producers	26
3.3. Expected benefits for consumers	28
3.4. Expected benefits for society	31
4. Effectiveness of Short Food Supply-Chains	33
4.1. Key-functions in SFSC and effectiveness	33
4.2. Coordination and governance functions, and the issue of price regulation and risk sharing	34
4.3. Logistic functions, and the issue of food hubs	37
4.4. Information and guarantee functions, and the issue of common labelling	41
5. The way forward. Some reflections for action	44
References	47
Annex - UNIDO case study	50
Boosting market access and local development of the fig farmers’ community of Djebba, Tunisia	
List of Boxes	52

List of abbreviations

AAFN:	Alternative agri-food networks
CSA:	Community supported agriculture
EU:	European Union
PYO:	Pick-your-own
SDG:	Sustainability development goal
SFSC:	Short food supply chain
SPG:	Solidarity purchasing group

Introduction

In recent decades, the agri-food system has been subject to rapid and deep changes. A number of demographic, political, social, technical, economic, and cultural factors has led to the emergence of an industrialized model of food provisioning, where large-scale food processing firms and supermarkets chains dominate the scene in the framework of a growingly globalized food system.

Consumers' behaviour and needs did change too, due to the evolution of society and economic systems. Urbanization is one of the main factors that distance the places of agricultural production from those of food consumption, which asks for a growing number of connections (transport, storage, packaging, processing) carried out by a plurality of actors. Moreover, both income growth and changes in work organisation and family structure ask for improved services incorporated into food.

In order to achieve scale economies and cut production costs, the industrialized model of food provisioning forced farms to specialize on a few products and phases of the production process. Consequently, farmers gradually stopped performing direct delivery to final consumers, as well as processing their products on-farm, thus delegating food processing and distribution to specialized firms outside the borders of the farm, increasing the number of steps between agricultural production and final consumption.

Today, food processing industry and distribution are asked to provide a growing number of functions and operations to meet the new needs of more and more urbanized consumers, thus increasing the geographical, temporal, and cultural distance between agricultural production and final consumption.

The industrialized model of food provisioning seems to be highly efficient in performing these new functions as compared to previous models of organising production and

distribution, and this explains why this model has spread and is currently dominant at world level. However, this model is raising concerns and is subject to criticisms under many points of view, among which difficult access to market to smallholders and small and medium enterprises, environment pollution, and menace to food safety and nutrition appear the most important ones (Renting et al., 2003, Ilbery and Maye, 2005, Sonnino and Marsden, 2006).



Contest of typical food products in Morocco

The high number of steps, and the increasing distance between production and consumption, are at the basis of the “revolution” brought by Short Food Supply-Chains initiatives (SFSCs), especially in Europe and in the United States, although a number of interesting opportunities is also pointed out for other countries, included developing ones (Moustier and Renting, 2015).

The growing interest for SFSCs around the world, especially from farmers, consumers and citizens, and public institutions (Marsden and Arce, 1995; Aguglia, 2009; Allen et al., 2003), witnesses the need for searching alternative food systems able to provide some



Promotion of PDO Djebba figs in a supermarket in Tunis, Tunisia

“functions” that the industrialized model seems not able or willing to provide (Anderson, 2008). Expected positive effects from enhancing SFSCs initiatives range from economic benefits to both producers and consumers, to strengthening social relations, preserving the environment, improving nutritional aspects, and enhancing local development.

Shortening food chains can contribute to more than one of the objectives of United Nations Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. In particular, expected effects of SFSC initiatives can mainly contribute to Responsible consumption and production (Sustainable Development Goal 12). Moreover, SFSCs can contribute to other Sustainable development goals related to social issues, in particular Poverty and hunger reduction (SDGs 1 and 2), as well as to enhancing gender equality (SDG 5) considering that territorial products are often produced by women. SFSCs also contribute to the environmental ones, specifically Making cities

and human settlements more inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable (SDG 11) and to Combat climate change and its impacts (SDG 13). With their positive impact on income generation and job opportunities as well as on building productive capacities in an inclusive manner, SFSCs can contribute to inclusive and sustainable economic growth and industrial development (SDG 8 and 9). Finally, SFSCs contribute to diversify food production systems and marketing channels, allowing for higher resilience in front of global market disruption.

The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) is fully committed to contributing to the achievement of the above-mentioned SDGs, thus the relevance for the Organization of promoting SFSCs. UNIDO has a long-standing experience in agri-food value chains development around the globe by fostering business linkages, improving quality compliance, enhancing productivity and promoting market access.

Since 2010, UNIDO has been implementing projects valorising food origin-linked products and shortening food supply chains. These projects ensure that Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and farmers within the assisted value chains become the driving force of endogenous process of local development, maximizing the potential of agri-food products, including the linkages with the tourism sector, and that the benefits are fairly distributed along the value chain.

The aim of this paper is to give an insight over the main typologies of SFSCs initiatives, and to discuss their potential benefits and drawbacks. The ultimate goal is to raise consciousness on the potential of SFSCs initiatives for achieving local development, better

market access to smallholders, and higher food quality to consumers, and to discuss how these initiatives may be developed in a sustainable way.

Section 1 is devoted to introducing the main features of SFSCs and give the general framework and basic concepts. Section 2 describes the main typologies of SFSC initiatives, together with some dimensions that characterize these initiatives. Section 3 analyses potential benefits and limits of SFSCs for producers, consumers, and society as a whole, while section 4 focuses on main functions affecting the performance of SFSC initiatives. Section 5 draws some conclusions and recommendations. A UNIDO case study is presented in the Annex.

1. Conceptual framework

1.1. Defining short food supply-chains

The term “short food supply-chains” (SFSCs) encompasses different typologies and operating models. Farmers might sell their products to consumers in many ways: off-farm, in the neighbouring places of consumption such as farmers’ markets, in shops owned by farmers themselves, in food festivals and fairs, through farm-based delivery schemes, or through one single trade intermediary (cooperative shops, specialist shops, supermarkets, etc.). Farmers can also sell their products directly to public institutions’ collective catering, such as school or hospital canteens, in the framework of public procurement schemes, and to restaurants, hotels and private catering companies (HORECA). In some of these cases, SFSCs can also correspond to non-local sales, in particular direct internet sales/long distance farm-based delivery schemes (Kneafsey et al., 2013). Other types of on-farm schemes involve consumers travelling to the place of

production for shopping (farm shops, farm-based hospitality and agritourism, roadside sales, pick-your-own schemes, etc.), and some other types are based on long-term partnerships between one or more producers and consumers, where the latter have a say in farmers’ decisions and labour, such as in Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) or Solidarity Purchasing Groups (SPGs).

Broadly speaking, SFSCs aim at reducing the “distance” between agriculture and final consumption, directly re-connecting farmers to consumers, and are at the crossroad of economic, environmental and social issues and needs.

The shortening of the supply chain may be interpreted under three different points of view:

- the reduction of the physical distance between the farmer and final consumers;
- the reduction of the number of steps that connect the farmer to final consumers;

- the increase of cultural and social proximity between farmers and consumers.

SFSCs are often defined according to these three dimensions, which are not mutually exclusive¹, although they may have different emphasis depending on the players involved and the objectives of the initiatives. Definitions vary according to cultural, political, social, and economic specific contexts where these initiatives are embedded in (EIP-AGRI, 2014)². Therefore, the world of SFSC initiatives can be conceived as a universe of different types of connection between production and consumption (Slee and Kirwan, 2007; Goodman et al., 2011).

In the context of SFSCs, farmers and consumers are the key categories of stakeholders, and the success of the initiatives is often measured comparing outcomes to their expectations:

- farmers' expectations normally involve prices, in terms of higher level and stability over time, but also other benefits such as market diversification, long-lasting trade relations, access to direct information from consumers; moreover, there are “non-economic” expectations too, such as better social gratification, or the awareness of contributing to environment protection;
- consumers' expectations are equally

both products and production process, to activate social relationships and participated initiatives, to support local producers, and to contribute to environmental preservation.

In other words, objectives pursued may attain to different aspects:

- economic aspects: allow better market access for small farmers, jumping marketing middlemen and improve the value distribution along the supply chain, benefitting farmers to gain higher value added and/or consumers to obtain final price reduction (Belletti et al., 2010);
- environment/health-nutrition aspects: reduce the geographical distance between the place of production and of consumption, which aims at granting



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