

# THE MEGAURBAN FOOD SYSTEM OF DHAKA / BANGLADESH

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*The analysis of food systems in megaurban contexts offers special insights into the discontinuities, fragmentations and conflicts, which global processes generate in local arenas.*

### Two Central Research Questions

- How is the megaurban society of Dhaka organized around food?
- How might the food system change in the future under various plausible scenarios?

Based on an actor-oriented research approach, the project seeks to dismantle the processes, which make marginalized people in Dhaka vulnerable to food insecurity.

### Major Research Assumptions

- 1) Megaurban food systems reflect the dynamics between global and local forces.
- 2) Megaurban food systems are located at the interface between formal and informal spheres of food production, exchange, distribution and consumption.
- 3) The functioning and efficiency of the informal sphere of the food system is of utmost importance for sustaining the livelihoods and food security of the urban population.

### External Drivers ①

It is essential to understand the functioning and driving forces of a food systems. We seek to explore the interlinkages of Dhaka's spheres of production, exchange, distribution and consumption in relation to megaurbanization and globalization.

### Food System Activities ③

Food security depends highly on the abilities of the urban population to adapt to a highly dynamic environment. We look at the assets and strategies of actors in Dhaka's food system, e.g. urban farmers, traders, vendors and consumers, and how they cope with multiple stresses and challenges to their livelihoods.

### Food System Outcomes ④

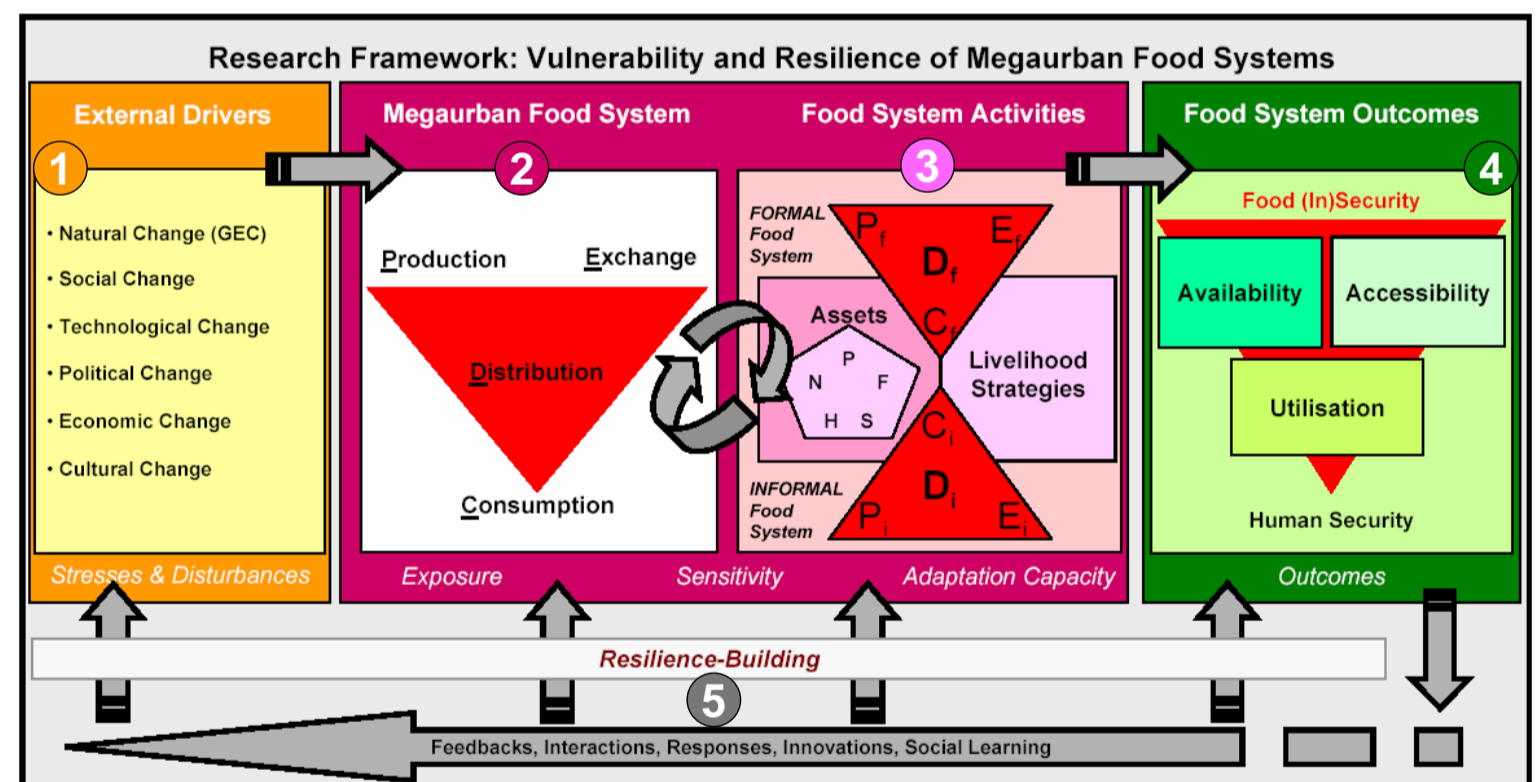
Critical for people's food security is not only the availability of food, but in particular its accessibility: Whether they can afford to purchase the quantity and quality of food they require for an active and healthy life.

### A Resilient Food System ⑤

The resilience of Dhaka's food system is mainly determined by the magnitude of the perturbations that it can absorb and still retain its overall function - food security for the megaurban population. Components of the megaurban food system are complexly linked through multiple feedbacks and responses. We seek to understand these highly dynamic interactions with the aim of contributing towards building a resilient food system.

### Megaurban Food System ②

„A *food system* can be defined as the specific combination of social and 'natural' components that leads to the potential satisfaction of nutrition for a given individual or household through their combination of livelihood activities based on assets and incomes. A food system includes four sub-systems: Production, Exchange, Distribution, and Consumption" (Cannon 2002).



The research framework serves as a guideline to assess the vulnerabilities and resiliences in Dhaka's food system (Draft: Benjamin Etzold & Markus Keck, May 2007).

### The Role of Street Food Vending in Dhaka's Food System

Particularly important for megaurban food security is the informal sector. Street food vending is a popular type of self-employment in third world cities. It provides the vendor's families with a reasonable income to sustain their livelihood. At the same time, it serves as the backbone to food security of the urban poor, who do not have the assets to prepare their own meal. Whereas authorities often impede the street food business with the aim of improving food safety and 'clearing' public space, this has detrimental effects on the functioning of a megacity's whole food system. Street food vendors are important and flexible nodes within urban distribution networks of food, connecting actors and activities in the food system. Additionally, they provide cross-scale linkages of rural-urban, national-regional and global-local interactions.