

1. Introduction

Street vendors play a crucial role in East African urban food systems. Through their extensive distribution networks and provision of affordable products, they significantly enhance food access for low-income urban consumers [1-3] and decrease the food system's vulnerability to shocks [3-5]. In addition, their activities provide a critical source of income, reducing the risk of undernutrition for themselves and their families [2, 3].

Nevertheless, existing evidence indicates that East African policymakers frequently subject street vendors to exclusionary practises, such as violent evictions, forced relocations and harassment [6, 7]. While there is limited data on the motivations behind these practises, studies suggest that concerns related to city planning, mobility and food safety are significant drivers [7, 8]. This growing vulnerability of street vendors¹ is a pervasive issue, echoing a global trend observed in various locations [9-12]. Studies consistently highlight that these vendors operate in legal grey areas. Their status and economic - and social rights are frequently unrecognised in official policy documents [4, 13]. This lack of recognition hinders vendors' participation in decision-making and deprives them of political and social agency [5, 14-16].

Civil society organisations and scientists have been looking for ways in which marginalised groups, including street vendors, can gain a voice in decision-making processes related to just and sustainable food systems. They call for more inclusive and participatory approaches that empower these groups to contribute to policies that directly impact their well-being and livelihoods [4, 14]. However, due to their low political and social agency, they need support negotiating their rights and responsibilities [4].

Urban Food Policy Councils (UFPCs) could provide a valuable setting for organising such support, as many UFPCs are established as democratic fora to discuss food policy-making [17-19]. Designed to foster context-specific practises, UFPCs bring together a wide variety of actors. However, as several scholars have noted, UFPCs can only fully realise this potential if they actively address internal inequalities and engage with the inherently political nature of food systems [17, 20, 21]. To account for these challenges, this paper introduces the conceptual framework of UFPCs as politicised spaces. Building on the food democracy literature, we define these spaces as socially and epistemically just arenas that empower local actors to challenge prevailing societal, political and economic structures [22, 23].

Academic research on UFPCs has historically concentrated on Europe and North America, leaving, amongst others, East Africa underexplored [24, 25]. Our literature search has revealed only four documented examples of East African UFPCs, none with an in-depth focus on one case, indicating a significant gap in the literature [26, 27].

Studies addressing the broader topic of urban food governance [24, 26, 28-30] reveal that key elements within the Western discourse on urban food governance do not entirely correspond with the context of other regions, such as East Africa. Cities in this region often have to deal with limited resources [29] and rapid urban growth [31]. Additionally, a persisting rural bias in African food studies leads to incorrect or incomplete conceptualisations of what it means to be food insecure, poor or healthy in an urban region, resulting in ineffective policies [32].

Without context-specific information, there is a tendency to overgeneralise findings, which can easily occur in the African context, as illustrated by some of the studies mentioned above [24, 29, 30]. As such, there is an urgent need to study more of the UFPCs already there to create more effective urban food governance arrangements. Addressing this need, the current study explores the Arusha

¹ While the terms "Street vendors" and "Machinga" encompass a wide spectrum of traders and hawkers vending various goods (such as clothes, jewellery, and shoes), in this paper we will specifically use them to refer to those who specialise in selling fresh fruits and vegetables.

Sustainable Food System Platform (ASFSP). Established in 2018, the ASFSP includes a diverse group of stakeholders, such as NGOs, local businesses, a farmer-network organisation and policymakers. One of the platform's key principles is to "*ensure that stakeholder processes are inclusive and address priority issues concerning Arusha's sustainable food systems.*"

A central focus of this study is the ASFSP's response to a directive to relocate street vendors, known locally as *Machinga*. As a subgroup within the informal sector, *Machinga* represent a significant economic force: informal workers make up approximately 29.4 per cent of Tanzania's workforce, with an estimated three million (about 5 per cent of the population) engaged in petty trade, primarily as food vendors [33]. Like street vendors globally, *Machinga* face challenges such as harassment, inconsistent access to customers, insufficient infrastructure and limited financial services. The national government has promoted formalisation as a solution to these issues, positioning the recent relocation effort as part of this broader agenda [34]. However, despite these decisions directly affecting them, *Machinga* could not participate in the decision-making processes surrounding this relocation directive.

The ASFSP's commitment to inclusive governance suggests it could be a valuable partner in helping *Machinga* participate in decision-making processes. However, a closer examination of the platform's response to the enforced relocation directive reveals a notable lack of engagement with the displaced *Machinga*.

This situation prompts a broader question about the opportunities and barriers for UFPCs to advocate for the rights and interests of street vendors and other marginalised groups within the realm of food-related decision-making in East Africa. In other words, **we want to explore if and how UFPCs function as politicised spaces.**

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: the theoretical framework (see section 2) builds on the premise that food systems are inherently political. Building on food democracy literature, we develop the conceptual framework of UFPCs as a politicised space. This framework is further operationalised by integrating it with the dimensions of the critical governance framework [35]. In the methodology section (section three), we elaborate on the research approach, positionality, research methods and data analysis. After describing the historical development of the platform for context, the results section (section 4) follows the dimensions of the critical governance framework to structure the findings. The concept of UFPCs as politicised space will provide the base for discussing the results in section five. We conclude the paper with recommendations and avenues for further research.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. The role of UFPCs in democratising food systems

In this paper, we argue that the lens of politicised spaces is useful to examine UFPCs critically. Food is inherently political because it encompasses power relations over the control, distribution and access to resources that are essential to human life. How food is produced, distributed and consumed reflects broader social inequalities and the influence of political and economic systems [36].

At all policy levels, decisions have to be made while balancing social, ecological, nutritional or economic elements [37, 38] highlighting the food system's political nature. In recent decades, multiple trends, including rapid urbanisation, competition over natural resources, insufficient global investment in social protection, and a concentration of power among a few multinational corporations [39, 40], have exacerbated disparities in food access and distribution, contributed to unhealthy diets, and had severe environmental consequences [39, 41].

Responding to these challenges, early food democracy scholars have argued against leaving decisions on the food system's future in the hands of an elite group of corporations, scientists and international policymakers. Instead, they advocate for a deliberative framework wherein citizens affected by food issues have a say in shaping solutions to these issues through bottom-up participation and public debate [42-46]. In the same vein, the *food sovereignty* movement, championed by organisations like La Via Campesina, seeks to shift power back to local communities and small-scale producers, advocating for the right to define their own food systems rather than being subject to global corporate control on what communities eat and how their food is produced. Both movements emphasise the importance of democratising food systems as a means to resist the commodification of food and foster social justice [47, 48].

In urban settings, the deliberative framework as described by these movements finds practical application through the establishment of UFPCs. Schiff et al. [49] define UFPCs as "*collaborative, membership-driven organisations that bring together stakeholders across private, public and community sectors to examine opportunities to implement integrated strategies for improving local and regional food systems*". They represent a governance solution which can entail discussing complex issues, disclosing values, and fostering collaboration among diverse actors. UFPCs, as urban governance arrangements, underscore a shifting paradigm that acknowledges the limitations of traditional top-down governmental approaches amidst increasing complexity and uncertainty and attempts to create more inclusive settings [50, 51].

2.2. UFPCs as politicised spaces, a conceptual framework

While UFPCs offer a lot of potential, several authors have raised concerns about their potentially depoliticising effects [20, 52-54]. Coulson and Sonnino [52] caution that UFPCs can lead to a transfer of state responsibilities to underfunded multi-stakeholder partnerships. Similarly, Candel [20] warns that, in the context of weaker democracies, arrangements like UFPCs can easily be co-opted by the state to realise its own agenda or by powerful private food system actors with conflicting interests.

Crucial questions here are when and how UFPCs can realise their transformative potential, and if they can live up to their promise to challenge existing political and economic structures? Food democracy scholars have extensively discussed the organisation of spaces and structures to achieve a politicisation and democratisation of food system issues. Drawing upon this literature field, we developed a conceptual framework defining UFPCs as politicised spaces (figure 1).

The first principle of UFPCs as politicised spaces is that they **address social injustices**, which entails protecting the rights of all affected actors to speak and be heard [55]. UFPCs are influenced by social hierarchies, local political cultures and vested interests [52]. When they fail to recognise and address social inequalities within their operating environment, they risk perpetuating existing dynamics of exclusion, further marginalising actors already in vulnerable positions and diminishing the politicising potential of the space [35]. Even though UFPCs are not likely to include large food industries and representatives of international institutions, neoliberal logic can persist [56].

The second principle of UFPCs as politicised spaces is **epistemic justice**, meaning that they create the capacity to accept diverse ways of knowing [57]. There is a growing recognition of the need to transition from an expert-centric approach towards a more pluralistic understanding of knowledge [22]. Within many UFPCs, scientific standards dictate the norms of knowledge creation and evaluation, resulting in the predominance of academic knowledge over other forms such as experiential, indigenous and tacit knowledge [58]. This dominance marginalises alternative ways of understanding and addressing food-related issues. The shift towards epistemic pluralism acknowledges the richness and validity of various knowledge systems, fostering greater inclusivity and effectiveness in addressing complex food challenges within urban contexts.

The final principle of UFPCs as politicised space is **empowerment**. In the context of UFPCs, and through the lens of food democracy, empowerment refers to the process by which individuals and communities gain the skills, knowledge and agency to influence decision-making related to their local food systems. It involves creating inclusive spaces where diverse stakeholders such as producers, consumers, marginalised groups, civil society and policymakers can equally participate in shaping food policies. It includes making explicit power relationships, dominant framings and priorities at play [52]. Empowerment therefore means shifting power away from corporate or centralised entities and into the hands of communities, enabling them to assert their rights to and democratic control over healthy, culturally appropriate and sustainably produced food [43].

These three principles establish “*the what*”, the conceptual foundation for understanding UFPCs as politicised spaces, hence connecting them with the food democracy debate. To examine “*the how*”, the way these principles are enacted within the case, our analysis integrates the principles of the UFPCs as politicised spaces with the analytical dimensions of the critical governance framework. Both frameworks adopt a critical perspective on UFPCs, emphasising the social and political dynamics that shape these platforms. However, the critical governance framework provides a more practical structure for operationalisation, making it particularly useful for analysing the results. As shown in Figure 2 and explained below, some dimensions align closely with specific principles, while others provide insights across all principles.

2.3. The critical governance framework, an analytical framework

Moragues-Faus [35] draws upon political ecology, post-political scholarship and participative justice to develop a three-dimensional framework for unpacking political and justice claims in UFPCs. The first dimension “equity, participation and inclusion,” examines how UFPCs are organised, the procedures in place and the framing of food system issues by UFPC members. By exploring these aspects, the framework sheds light on all three principles of UFPCs as politicised spaces. It highlights how organisational structures and issue framings influence dynamics of exclusion, whether of people or their knowledges, and how these dynamics impact the capacity of UFPCs to empower marginalised groups.



Figure 1: UFPCs as politicised spaces.

The second dimension, "knowledge, values and reflexivity", addresses how platform members co-produce knowledge and values and how dissent and reflexivity are managed within the platform. Insights into these processes directly inform the empowerment principle of politicised spaces, as they reveal how knowledge-sharing and critical reflection can challenge entrenched power dynamics and involve more people in food policy-making.

The third dimension, "connectivity and autonomy", focuses on the interactions between actors, sectors and scales, and how the spaces where they occur shape these interactions. This implies looking at relationships both within and outside the platform. This dimension also examines the capacity of platform members to collaborate effectively and operate independently. These aspects are central to all three principles, illustrating how both internal and external dynamics are crucial to politicise UFPCs.

By linking these dimensions with the principles of UFPCs as politicised spaces, the critical governance framework serves as a robust analytical tool for understanding the ASFSP’s capacities and constraints in advocating for the rights and interests of street vendors and other marginalised groups in food-related decision-making processes in East Africa.

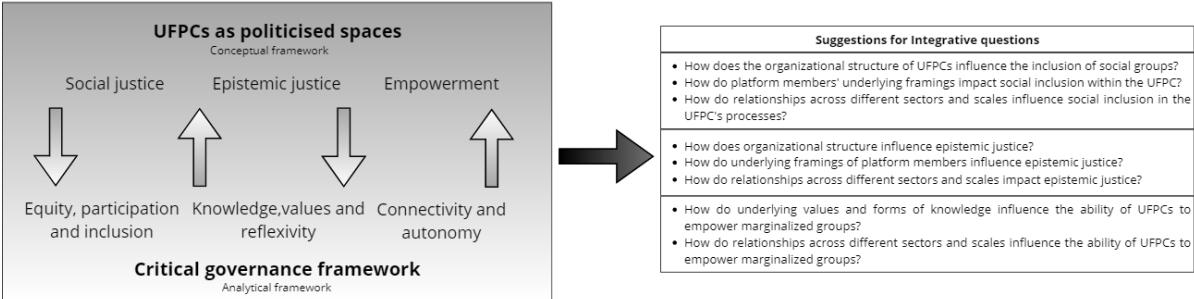


Figure 2: Integrative framework.

3. Methodology

This study is based on an action-research approach, combining the pursuit of academic knowledge to realise a specific change. A distinctive feature of action research is its iterative process involving cycles of research, action and reflection [59]. To bridge the communication gap between the main researchers and local actors, we translated the conceptual framework to make it understandable in the local context. For instance, from the onset of the research, we experienced difficulties regarding the concepts of food democracy and politicisation. On the one hand, food democracy is mostly an academic concept, rarely used in contexts of civil society and policy. On the other hand, we noticed that local sensitivities such as food democracy and politicisation are associated with anti-government actions and sentiments. After extensive discussion between researchers and the platform coordinator, we decided to translate our research objective as “to create more inclusive and participatory urban food systems” in our interactions with local actors.

Throughout this study, we strategically implemented interventions at various points in the research process (see Figure 2). To support the platform’s work, data was collected on the perspectives and interests of underrepresented actors in food safety management and informal vending.

Reflection on the collected data occurred during three workshops with platform members, complemented by several one-on-one conversations with the platform coordinator. In each workshop, 15 to 25 members participated. The insights and feedback from these workshops were triangulated during conversations with the platform coordinator. They played a pivotal role in shaping subsequent research cycles and guided our actions, such as including new platform members, developing strategies for the participation of groups in vulnerable positions, and collecting data on urban consumers and market vendors.

This approach benefits from the first - and second author’s unique positions to the object of study. The first author, a researcher at a university, initiated the research project in collaboration with the NGO leading the platform. During the research process, they made four visits of three weeks on average to Arusha. The second author was employed by an NGO that participates in the platform between October 2021 and November 2023. They attended all platform meetings during this period.

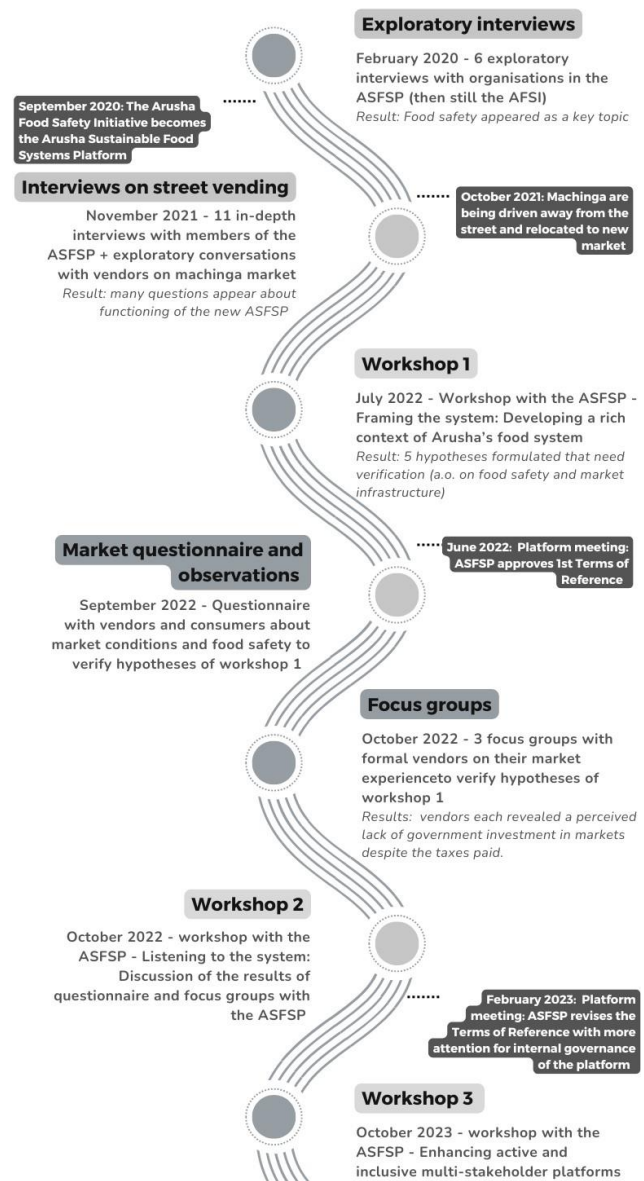


Figure 3: Stages of the action research. From dark grey to light grey the colours represent: (1) workshops with the platform, (2) interviews to determine and explore research scope, (3) research phases that were co-designed with the platform and (4) important events during the period of the research.

This combination of an insider and an outsider perspective facilitates a nuanced analysis of the data. While both authors are non-Tanzanian, the second author's close connexion with platform members allows them to include local sensitivities and helps to situate the data within the cultural context. Additionally, the close collaboration with the platform coordinator, coupled with the full-time presence of one researcher, ensured the effective translation of results into actions, hence feeding the iterative process.

Given the nature of our research on participatory arrangements, addressing our positions regarding participatory approaches in policy-making is necessary. Informed by our educational backgrounds in political sciences, sociology and anthropology, we hold the conviction that the participation of civic actors is fundamental in shaping policy decisions. We acknowledge that this perspective leads to a focus on the internal processes guiding the ASFSP. We openly communicated our focus and assumptions throughout the research process to navigate potential biases and ensure that our research remains grounded in transparency and integrity.

The study employs a holistic single-case design, focusing specifically on the ASFSP's response to the relocation of Machinga [60]. This case was selected for two main reasons. First, the ASFSP represents one of the few documented examples of a UFPC in East Africa, offering a unique opportunity to study this type of platform in an understudied region. The researchers' positions gave advantageous access to data, allowing for an in-depth examination and analysis of a phenomenon that has, until now, largely remained unexplored. Second, the timing of the Machinga relocation at the start of the research process presented a unique and valuable opportunity to examine inclusion-exclusion mechanisms as they are central to the case.

The study adopts a qualitative methodology with a mixed-methods approach (see Figure 3) designed to align data collection with the dimensions of the critical governance framework. Participatory observation of six platform meetings and events provided insights into the platform's organisational structures and framings. These observations were complemented by a document analysis and two rounds of interviews. Explorative interviews narrowed the research focus and informed the development of interview guides. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews with platform members then explored organisational structures, framings, perspectives on street vendors and cross-sectoral and cross-scale interventions. An interview with the platform coordinator provided historical context and broader observations across the three dimensions. Three focus groups with street vendors enriched our understanding of their situation. Finally, co-creative workshops with platform members were used to verify and discuss findings. The market questionnaire mentioned in Figure 3 was part of the action research, however, its results were excluded from the final analysis as they fell outside the scope of the paper. However, discussions about the questionnaire findings during Workshop 2 are included in the analysis.

The research team transcribed recordings of interviews, focus groups and workshops in clean non-verbatim. They subsequently uploaded these transcriptions, along with documents and field notes, to NVivo software for data management and thematic analysis [61]. After familiarising ourselves with the data, we agreed on a set of deductive codes based on the critical governance framework [35], after which one researcher began the coding process. This process was complemented with inductive codes (see Figure 4) during the first round of coding. These codes were discussed with the research team to capture emerging themes followed by a second round of coding. After reviewing these themes, we drafted the structure of the result section and discussion to produce the final report.

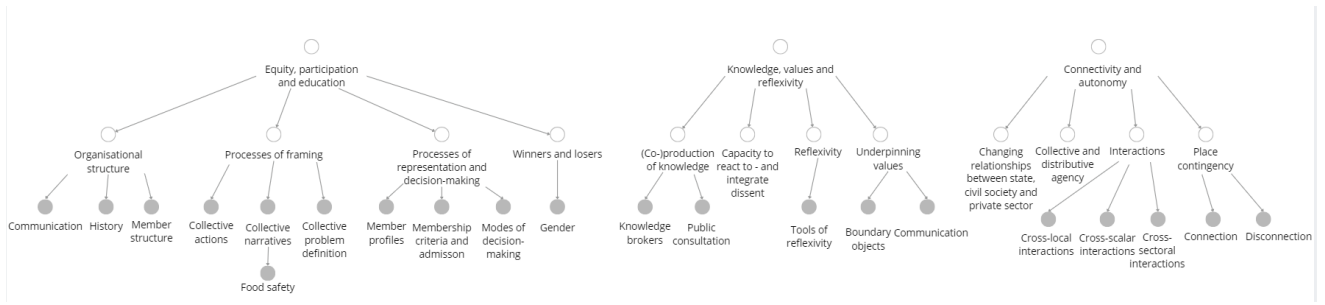


Figure 4: Inductive (●) and deductive codes (○) used during the coding process

4. Results

In this section, we first provide a historical context of the platform and the relocation of the Machinga (section 4.1), which helps to provide a frame of reference when reading the examination along the three dimensions of the critical governance framework. This examination involves an analysis of the organisational structures of the platform and underlying framings (section 4.2), a reflection on shared values, knowledges and mechanisms of reflexivity (section 4.3), and an exploration of the dynamics of engagement both locally and cross-scalar (sections 4.4). The last three sections start with a general discussion of the platform dynamics related to the topic at hand, followed by a focus on the Machinga case, serving as a concrete example of the dynamics at play within the platform.

4.1 Historical context of the platform

The platform historically emphasised food safety. The ASFSP was first started as the Arusha Food Safety Initiative which was launched in March 2018 by The Tanzanian Horticulture Association and Rikolto (an international NGO with a focus on sustainable food systems). The incentive for establishing this initiative was that in 2017, Arusha has become a member of the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact². Rikolto, together with other organisations, deemed it necessary to assist the Arusha City Council (ACC) in meeting the objectives of this pact by harmonising initiatives from various actors in Arusha. The initial steps were several studies around access to food, the local economy and a food risk assessment. As one of the respondents stated:

“The results of this food risk assessment were so alarming, raising food safety issues around fruit and vegetables, that they needed a multi-stakeholder sort of approach in solving them. So, the Arusha Food Safety Initiative was started to address issues around food safety in the fruit and vegetable sector. (INT 1, NGO)”

The Arusha Food Safety Initiative met every 3-4 months to discuss issues concerning food safety in a multi-stakeholder setting. In 2019, the group observed a growing interest from a diverse array of actors, including civil society organisations, private companies and research institutions. These actors have introduced a range of topics beyond food safety. This shift prompted the platform to transform, reemerging as the ASFSP in 2020. Under this new identity, it adopted a food system approach, aiming to address issues spanning the whole food system from production to consumption.

In September 2021, the new platform was immediately put to the test as President Samia Suluhu Hassan of Tanzania issued a directive to city, municipal and regional councils, instructing them to designate new areas for the relocation of informal street traders and hawkers, commonly known as Machinga, with the aim to free up the public space they occupied [62]. In Arusha, the national directive has resulted in the implementation of new regulations in October 2021.

These new regulations have prohibited Machinga from selling their goods alongside roads, at dedicated markets, near other shops, and near hospitals, health centres and schools. One month later, city officials went around the streets to register Machinga and assign a stall to them at one of the existing or newly established formal markets. The Machinga indicated later that not all of them received a stall. After the registration period, law enforcement officials drove the remaining Machinga away from the prohibited locations and destroyed their vending infrastructure [63].

During this time, the platform did not take a public stance on these events, nor did it directly engage with the Machinga, halting any ongoing interactions. The following sections delve into the governance of the platform to explore which dynamics influenced its response, or lack thereof, to this significant shift in the city's food vending landscape.

² The Milan Urban Food Policy Pact is an international agreement signed by over 200 cities worldwide, committing to the development of sustainable food systems at the urban level. By fostering cooperation with peers, the pact supports cities in this development.

4.2 Equity, participation and inclusion

After the transformation in 2020, the ASFSP emerged as an instrument for organisations engaged in food-related work, especially NGOs, to foster personal connexions and information exchange. The platform has eighteen members among which representatives of the city administration, (member-based) private sector organisations, research institutions, a farmer-network organisation and national and international NGOs. Our data revealed that while all members regularly attend the meetings, most interactions and collaborations happen between a nuclear group of four organisations (Rikolto, TAHA, Trias and IDP), three of which are Belgian NGOs.

Our member mapping shows a notable absence of grass-roots civic groups, food movements and interest groups within the platform. While formally organised farmers cooperatives are common in Arusha, and present in the platform, vendors are often organised in informal groups that lack a formal, overarching structure.

Rikolto and ACC serve as the platform coordinators. The ACC has recently taken up this role after a long period of inactivity and disengagement. However, despite their formal leadership, our observations during meetings suggest that in practise Rikolto continues to handle all coordination tasks. These include managing operational aspects, facilitating knowledge exchange, exploring opportunities for food system change, and overseeing the platform's resources.

Since 2023, the platform has five working groups (see Table 1), comprising all members involved in initiatives related to the thematic focus. Since then, the platform meets at least three times a year and working groups are meeting every quarter. Members are free to choose which working group(s) to join.

Although these working groups have been established to diversify the platform's focus across the food system's various areas, most successful collaborations continue to centre on coordinating food safety actions. They have effectively brought together multiple organisations focusing on various aspects of food safety in the working groups on safe production, consumer sensitisation and food safety standards. Particularly noteworthy is the large-scale consumer sensitisation campaign on food safety, considered one of the main success stories of the platform. Eight platform members collaboratively developed and implemented this initiative.

This focus on food safety coupled with the relative ease of reaching a shared understanding of food safety compared to the platform's other focal areas, such as organic agriculture and fair wages, has led to the platform frequently framing food system challenges in terms of shortcomings in ensuring safe and nutritious food.

The focus on food safety also plays a role in the platforms' interactions with the Machinga. However, different visions among members do exist. During our interviews with platform members, we encountered three framings. The first frames Machinga as heedless actors. They are perceived to cause nuisance by occupying sidewalks and frequently visiting areas to sell as many goods as possible, hindering mobility in the city. Additionally, they are perceived as unfair competitors to formal vendors because they ask for lower prices and sell in front of established stores. In this perception, Machinga sell unsafe food because they do not care about food safety standards.

The second framing, which was amongst others used by a representative of the local administration, described Machinga as unknowledgeable actors. They are pitied due to their limited access to education and lack of essential entrepreneurial skills. In this perception, Machinga sell unsafe food not out of negligence, but rather because they lack awareness and understanding of food safety standards.

Working groups	Goals	Members <i>International NGO (iN), Government (G), Private sector (P), NGO (N), Research (R)</i>	Joint actions of members
WG1: Safe Production	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop urban and peri-urban agriculture. 2. Promote good agriculture practises that ensure sustainable food production. 	TPRI (R), Iles de Paix (iN) Trias (iN), TAHA (P), MUVIKIHO (P), Recoda (N), World Vegetable Center (R), Echo (P), MVIWA Arusha (P)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participatory Market Research (IDP, MVIWA Arusha) • Capacity building on organic farming (IDP, Mesula) • Construction of a learning centre for Urban Agriculture (ACC, Rikolto, IDP) • GAP training for farmers (TAHA, Trias)
WG2: Consumer Sensitisation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create awareness of healthy nutritious and sustainable food. 2. Build the capacity of market vendors to ensure accessibility of affordable safe healthy and nutritious food for all. 	Iles de Paix (iN) ACC (G) Trias (iN), Mesula (P) STAWI (N), MVIWA Arusha (P)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KIOSK model (Rikolto, TAHA, Trias, TCCIA, ACC) • Green KIOSKs (TAHA, Trias) • Capacity building for journalists on Agroecology and sustainable food systems (IDP, MVIWA Arusha) • Training for restaurants on the preparation of nutritious and healthy food (IDP, MVIWA Arusha) • Radio campaigns on safe production and consumption for farmers (MVIWA Arusha, IDP) • Food safety training for 125 market vendors of fresh vegetables and fruits (ACC, TCCIA)
WG3: Youth in Agriculture	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Encourage and support youth to engage in sustainable food systems. 2. Facilitate youth to participate in decision-making processes such as the Arusha food policy. 3. Encourage youth to be ambassadors of healthy nutritious and sustainable food. 	TRIAS (iN), ACC (G), TAHA (P), World Vegetable Center (R), ECHO (P) TCCIA (P), STAWI (N), TAFONEGO (N), MVIWA Arusha (P)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth entrepreneurship training and mentoring (Trias, TCCIA) • Youth business competition (Trias, TCCIA)
WG4: Food Safety Standards	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish a national food safety standard. 2. Establish socially acceptable food standards and a traceability system through a participatory guarantee scheme and a participatory food safety scheme. 	MUVIKIHO (P), TBS (G), Greencert (P), ACC (G), Mesula (P), Solidaridad (iN), TPRI (R), Iles de Paix (iN), TAHA (P)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a Participatory Food Safety System (Rikolto, TAHA) • Food safety training for seventy-two market vendors of fresh vegetables and fruits (Rikolto) • Food safety training for eighty farmers producing fresh vegetables and fruits (Rikolto) • Improving safety and compliance in the meat value chain (TCCIA and TRIAS)
WG 5: Logistics and city planning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support urban planning that promotes easy access to healthy nutritious and sustainable food. 2. Establish efficient food distribution systems that ensure food safety. 3. Promote sustainable food waste management, especially in markets. 	Trias, ACC (G), FEPT (N), Urban Planning for community change (R), TCCIA (P), TRIAS (iN), TAFONEGO (N)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating safe market structures for meat vending (Trias, TCCIA) • Support for Mesula organic shop (IDP, Mesula)

Table 1: Overview of the platform's structure

A third, less frequently discussed, framing also emerged during these interviews, portraying Machinga as potential service providers. Here, Machinga are seen as valuable partners in spreading awareness about safe and healthy food and guaranteeing food security. One of the respondents illustrated this viewpoint:

*“You know previously we used the concept of Machinga for people who do not have any business. At some point, we were disapproving of people who just wanted to do business to survive. But they are not just doing business, they are facilitating a service to the people. The awareness and consumption of fruits and vegetables [...] will be increased because people see fruits and vegetables everywhere. It makes them think: if all these vendors are selling this, it must be important. We have to consume it.
[rephrased] (INT 2, private sector)*

4.4 Knowledge, values and reflexivity

When examining the shared values and knowledge within the platform, the Terms of Reference (ToR) provide valuable insights, as platform members collaboratively drafted and approved this document. The ToR outlines both the shared values for a sustainable food system and the internal values guiding the platform's operations. The food system values, initially developed by ACC, were later adopted by the platform. These values envision a food system that is safe and nutritious, provides employment for youth, and ensures food access for everyone.

Based on our observations, we found that most members have a similar understanding of what constitutes a sustainable food system and share a common jargon to discuss these issues. Additionally, platform members actively engage in various joint initiatives (see Table 1) aligned with their values. This alignment not only strengthens collaboration but also facilitates knowledge sharing during platform meetings, where members discuss how their respective initiatives contribute to distinct aspects of a sustainable food system.

However, a critical observation is that while there is an extensive list of joint actions within the platform, many of these initiatives would likely have existed even without the platform's presence. Rather than the platform actively creating new collaborations, it appears that organisations have brought their existing project partners into the platform, integrating pre-existing partnerships into the broader structure.

Furthermore, much of the jargon commonly used within the platform originates from the development sector and is difficult to translate into Kiswahili, as these terms often lack direct equivalents. As a result, important connotations may be lost in translation, making it harder for local partners to develop a shared understanding of certain concepts.

The values guiding the platform's operations emphasise inclusivity in stakeholder processes, equality during discussion and active participation of all members. Additionally, the neutrality of the facilitator is seen as ensuring legitimacy, while operations prioritise trust-building and maintaining relationships between members. Finally, continuity in efforts and close collaboration with policy bodies will ensure the support of policy frameworks and sector coordination systems.

When observing platform meetings, it is evident that the coordinator consciously incorporates the platform's values into the organisation of these gatherings and creates opportunities for reflection. Since the platform's inception, several reflective moments have been built into the process to assess the inclusiveness of actions taken by platform members. Moreover, when a new group of members joined, the shared values were brought into discussion again. Meetings are often accompanied by shared meals, such as breakfast or lunch, which provide opportunities for informal networking. Additionally, members have made efforts, however, not always equally successful, to engage policy actors. For instance, during one of the meetings we attended, the mayor was invited to learn about platform initiatives and the city director did attend another meeting. As mentioned earlier, there have

also been attempts to involve someone from the urban administration as a co-coordinator of the platform.

Despite the coordinator's efforts, platform members continue to struggle with keeping the platform active. The coordinator indicated that during assessments, members actively participate, contributing many ideas on how to improve the platform and align its work more closely with its internal values. However, once the assessments are over, these ideas often go unimplemented, with little action taken to bring the suggestions to life.

When it comes to the response to the relocation of the Machinga, one important value that the ToR does not explicitly mention, but plays a crucial role is formality. Most of the member organisations explicitly state in their project calls that only formalised partners are allowed to join their initiatives. This requirement effectively excludes a significant portion of the population, particularly informal workers like the Machinga, from participating in or benefiting from these projects. This emphasis on formalisation also reveals a disconnect between the platform's stated commitment to inclusivity and the realities of its operational practises.

4.5. Connectivity and autonomy

When it comes to engagements between actors, the first type of interactions affecting platform dynamics are those between ASFSP members and ACC. This relationship is complex for several reasons. Firstly, despite being co-coordinator, the council is not very engaged in the platform. They perceive the platform as a useful instrument to steer the actions of NGOs to support the realisation of their policy objectives, however, they do not involve the NGOs in the development of these objectives. As the platform aims to address food system issues collaboratively, this lack of openness to policy input poses challenges to the effectiveness of their work.

Secondly, Tanzania's anti-corruption policy involves frequently reassigning government officials to different cities. As a result, current representatives are often unfamiliar with the platform's structure and food system approach, hindering the platform's ability to establish strong relationships with ACC. Moreover, the lack of government-provided training for new officials places the burden of educating them on the platform.

Thirdly, there is a notable disparity in resources between NGOs and the government within the platform. In Arusha, a broad field of NGOs works on sustainable food system development. Due to their linkages with international funders, these NGOs often possess the resources to develop and pilot innovative models to address food system challenges. As a result, governments frequently chose to allocate their limited resources elsewhere and delegate food system investments to NGOs. However, since the funding that NGOs receive is relatively modest, many of their pilot initiatives cannot be effectively scaled without government support. Additionally, criticising policies is a sensitive issue, as international NGOs depend on the government for permits to operate.

When it comes to the enforced relocation of the Machinga, member organisations fear that their policy partners see supporting the informal vendors as undermining government decisions. At the time of the relocation, the relationship between ACC and the platform was less established. Consequently, platform members were concerned about potentially losing the government's interest in collaborating with them if they openly supported the Machinga. As such, the platform aligned itself with the government's directive by refraining from engagement and even discontinuing their ongoing interactions with these vendors. For example, before the relocation a Belgian NGO had installed two kiosks (selling points for safe food) on road reserves where many street vendors operated. However, following ACC's decision to prohibit the use of road reserves for trading, they removed these kiosks.

When talking about the future, respondents identified two different visions. The first future vision is in line with the current government's strategy of relocation and its plan to create specialised markets for

every product group. Part of this plan is to build a new market infrastructure. Some of the platform members are satisfied with the relocation as this centralisation makes it easier for them to reach the vendors in one place and to work with them without undermining their relationship with the government. These organisations strive to support the government in the market's construction, although they urge the government to consult all vendors (including the Machinga) during the building process.

Other members envision smaller vending hubs being created across the city to increase the accessibility to food for consumers. They point to the current traffic obstructions that surround the main city markets due to their position close to each other in the city centre. These organisations fear that a new market complex would require many resources and vendors would not make use of the complex when it is finished. For example, many of the stalls that were established for the Machinga after their relocation have stayed empty because of a perceived lack of consumers, increased competition with other vendors (due to being suddenly all in the same place) and fear that the use of these new stalls would come with an increase in taxes.

The relocation has been an incentive for the Machinga to organise themselves. Our document analysis revealed the existence of a Machinga organisation in Arusha. After communicating this to the platform coordinator, she invited their leader to platform meetings. However, as platform meetings are held in English and not in Kiswahili, it was difficult for this leader to attend, which made the coordinators decide it would be better to engage with her on the operational level only, instead of making her a permanent platform member.

The second type of interaction determining platform dynamics is the one between the national and the local level in Tanzania. In theory, Tanzania's government processes are largely decentralised. City councils have considerable authority over budget administration, such as the mandate to raise taxes and public service provision which includes managing market infrastructure and food safety. However, in practise, the national and regional administrations retain control over policy development and resource allocation. City councils face limitations in budgets and staff, while the regional level, more specifically the "President's Office of Regional Administration and Local Authorities," oversees policy implementation. The national level appoints senior positions for the region, while local representatives need to be elected.

This structure implies that national policy plans largely influence local policy-making. In 2023, the national government of Tanzania developed the sustainable food system action plan. A detailed review of the document reveals that there is nothing mentioned about how to deal with the informal economy and it only mentions markets in the context of market access (except for one goal: "*to improve and construct better infrastructural facilities*"). This reflects a food system vision focused on increasing production and improving nutrition while lacking attention to the diversity of market actors and their role in the food system.

This lack of national policy plans concerning market actors is also illustrated by the contradictions between presidential decisions when it comes to street vending regulations. The decision to ban street vending and relocate the vendors, issued by the current president of Tanzania, stands in contrast with the decision of the late president, John Magufuli. Under his presidency, the Tanzanian government launched a plan to legalise street vending. During the interviews, several members stated that this fickleness of government policies contributes to the Machinga's insecure position.

"The issue of the Machinga is governed by the politics around it. Six years ago, the president said, do not touch these people. Let them do whatever they want. Let them sell. [...] This new era, we have a new president, we have new directives. Now the city has to be planned to have a place where these people can be. It is really a very good thing, but we aren't sure about the sustainability of it. [INT 8, NGO]"

As such, when the directive to relocate the Machinga came, the absence of national policy plans concerning market actors left ACC without clear guidance to integrate this directive within a holistic and long-term approach. This situation complicates the platform's efforts to develop such an approach. Additionally, while political defects are recognised by platform members, the ASFSP lacks direct linkages with the national level on topics like markets and informal vending, hindering its capacity to effectively contest national decisions. Members are aware of this and expressed a feeling of powerlessness when it came to decisions about the Machinga. They indicate that they need representation from higher levels within the platform, as well as representation of the platform in higher policy forums.

5. Discussion

The analysis of the platforms' response to the relocation of the Machinga from a critical governance perspective reveals valuable insights into the platform's potential and UFPCs that operate in a similar context to function as politicised spaces. The following section discusses the results of the analysis following the principles of a politicised space (social justice, epistemic justice and empowerment), while contextualising them within the broader context of UFPCs in the East African region.

5.1. UFPCs as socially just spaces

In assessing the capacity of UFPCs as politicised spaces, the first aspect to consider is social justice. According to Fraser [64], *"overcoming injustice means dismantling institutionalised obstacles that prevent some people from participating on a par with others, as full partners in social interaction."* This entails a commitment to protect the rights of all affected actors to speak and be heard, as well as efforts to address social inequalities within its operational environment.

The examination of the platform reveals several important observations. Firstly, the ToR provides what Duncan and Claeys call common rules [55] concerning the internal governance structure, the platform coordinator is actively striving towards ensuring equal and active participation of all members.

The platform lacks both internal cooperation and recognition from higher governance levels. This institutional shortfall limits the platform's ability to effectively address inequalities within the food system of Arusha.

In the Machinga case, where vendors impacted by the platform's actions lack direct access to its decision-making processes, these limitations become apparent. In some instances, vendors have been instrumentalised by platform members to achieve their own or the government's objectives regarding food safety, rather than empowering them or giving them a voice in decision-making. This instrumentalisation underscores a limitation in the platform's commitment to genuine inclusion and participation. Consequently, the platform falls short of being fully recognised as an egalitarian space, as Machinga actors remain sidelined from meaningful participation.

Framings used in the platform can lead to social injustices. As discussed above, public health concerns frequently overshadow the potential implications for the livelihoods of vendors. In this context, food safety framing often takes precedence over concerns of social injustice, which includes the inability to produce equal and equitable benefits for vendors. This prioritisation can be perilous, particularly when considering the case of the Machinga, where a food safety narrative shapes the perception of Machinga, and food safety measures can become a mechanism of exclusion.

Reflecting on social justice in UFPCs as politicised spaces, it becomes evident that the absence of civic groups from governance structures perpetuates unjust power dynamics and exclusionary practises. This finding was also reported by Moragues-Faus [35] and Brons, Oosterveer [54] in their studies in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, respectively. Both studies found that while UFPCs tend to bring in "new sectors" such as health and trade actors, marginalised groups like street vendors continue to be excluded. Failure to acknowledge and rectify social inequalities within their operational context

risks perpetuating or even aggravating existing patterns of marginalisation, further disadvantaging actors that are already in a vulnerable position.

The instrumentalisation of vendors' participation in UFPCs, whereby it becomes a means to achieve the platform's pre-defined objectives rather than a genuine avenue for democratic engagement, as shown in the engagement of platform members with vendors on food safety issues, is one of the most compelling findings of this study. This approach leaves unanswered questions about the fate of groups who are affected by decisions, but whose participation members deem too challenging or unnecessary for realising UFPCs' goals, highlighting broader issues of representation and inclusivity within UFPCs.

5.2. UFPCs as epistemically just spaces

The second aspect to consider is whether UFPCs manage to transition from an expert-centric approach towards acceptance of epistemic plurality.

Throughout our interviews, framings that acknowledge the Machinga's capacities were scarce. Even though some of the observations might be valid, the consequence is that the interactions with Machinga most often start from their perceived weaknesses (unmotivated or uneducated), not from their strengths (increasing access to healthy food through their flexibility and omnipresence). In essence, when food safety becomes the focal point, Machinga are consistently approached as subordinates rather than experts in their field.

Reflections on the data lead us to reveal several conditions of epistemic discrimination [65] present among platform members. The first condition is the prejudice condition, which entails an unfair judgement about the epistemic capacity of the Machinga community. When some platform members consequently portray Machinga as indifferent to - or uninterested in food safety, they undermine their status as knowledgeable actors. This prejudice fosters an unequal dynamic, impeding the recognition of the valuable insights and contributions that Machinga can bring to the platform. This links to the second condition, which is the stakeholder condition. This condition involves excluding individuals or groups from a decision-making process in which they have a direct stake. Some of the platform's actions and decisions, such as altering vending infrastructure and providing training for vendors, directly impact Machinga (and small vendors in general). However, they currently have no say in the platform, effectively excluding them from decisions that affect their livelihoods.

Excluding the Machinga as well as their knowledge from the platform is not only unbeneficial for the Machinga, there are also epistemic ramifications for the platform. Epistemic injustices lead to less effective knowledge production and make actions meant to achieve sustainable development less relevant and effective [57]. Critically examining the negative perceptions about Machinga is imperative for fostering a more inclusive and collaborative environment within the platform.

In a broader reflection on UFPCs as politicised spaces, it becomes evident that implicit framings play a significant role in determining who is recognised as a knowledge holder and who is not. Making these underlying framings explicit is necessary to ensure fairness and inclusivity within the platform.

5.3. Empowerment and challenging power structures in UFPCs.

When it comes to empowerment, the question is if the platform can motivate and enable its members to challenge and reshuffle existing power structures towards more egalitarian governance settings. This includes making them familiar with alternative economic and political models, enhancing collaboration in developing these alternatives, and recognising the importance of collective actions [23].

Our analysis reveals that over the years the platform has undertaken various initiatives to familiarise its members and target population with alternative economic models, stimulate the collaborative development of such models, and work on collective actions to implement them. These include guiding

participatory market research, establishing participatory guarantee and food safety systems, and promoting short supply chains, all of which address issues related to market dependence and the commodification of labour power.

In a similar vein, the platform has put alternative governance models in the picture by adopting the principles of the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, supporting farmer cooperatives, organising (online) exchanges with other cities interested in food governance and hosting workshops around inclusive and participatory UFPCs.

While the platform does challenge certain aspects of top-down governance and neoliberal logic, we echo Coulson and Sonnino's [52] observation that micropolitics limit UFPCs' transformative potential. For example, social hierarchies manifest within the downplaying of vendors' concerns and their instrumentalisation to provide safe food to consumers, rather than being treated as equal stakeholders. Additionally, the platform adopts a supportive rather than a critical role in relation to ACC, aligning with the local political culture, which is hesitant to grant platform members a voice in policy development. Instead, ACC primarily views the platform as a tool for policy implementation, consequently, the platform only possesses soft power when advocating for food systems transformation.

When situating this within the broader context of UFPCs, we find that many UFPCs' way of working resonates with liberal food democracy discourses [66]. In this paradigm, the participation of non-members is encouraged but is typically enacted through specific actions, such as food safety training for vendors. Here, the emphasis shifts away from direct participation towards enhancing choice and steering behaviour by providing accurate information and responding to societal demand and values. Accountability within this paradigm is typically reached through delegated powers, where decision-making authority is entrusted to designated entities (such as the ASFSP).

5.4. Navigating complexities: unique challenges for UFPCs in East Africa

The research on UFPCs in East Africa remains limited. Addressing this gap, our study delves into an empirical case study of the ASFSP. Upon comparing our case study with existing literature on UFPCs in a European and North American context, it becomes evident that many of the challenges encountered by the platform are not uniquely tied to the East African setting; rather, they are prevalent across UFPCs worldwide. However, in this final segment, we aim to shed light on some peculiar challenges that UFPCs in East Africa may confront and suggest some pathways forward.

The first challenge to consider is the predominance of international NGOs within the platform. These NGOs operate not only in Tanzania but also in other countries across Africa, Asia and South America. They develop their programmes in collaboration with partner countries. These programmes are often coordinated by individuals from the Global North, and primarily funded by Western governments or institutions. This setup offers significant advantages, including opportunities for in-depth learning between countries and access to and efficient use of resources. Indeed, without the involvement of international NGOs, the platform might not have existed.

However, it is essential to approach this with caution, as values attached to participatory governance and direct citizen participation differ across contexts. As several authors have already shown [67, 68], initiatives designed to attract funders from the Global North may often reflect Western ideals, such as a greater emphasis on bottom-up participation, rather than being rooted in local priorities and practises. Additionally, international NGOs frequently use Western concepts to discuss food system, this vocabulary, typically in English and specific project jargon, is adopted within the platform. This can result in communicative hermeneutical injustice [69] for local organisations, as they may struggle to express certain thoughts and processes in a foreign conceptual vocabulary (governance, participation, UFPC, etc.).

The second challenge to consider is the top-down governance setting. ACC struggles with similar issues as described by authors studying governance in other cities [29, 70]. They often have limited instruments available to design and implement policies and operate within a strict hierarchical structure. Smit [71] highlights that effective food governance in African cities depends on establishing multi-stakeholder settings; however, our in-depth analysis of such a setting suggests that without active support from local government, these platforms struggle to drive substantial food system transformations.

In Arusha, the UFPC operates locally and follows a bottom-up approach yet faces difficulties in achieving policy recognition and influence. Platform members expressed an interest in engaging with consumer advocates, but no formal consumer organisation exists in Arusha. Aside from farmer cooperatives, there appears to be a notable scarcity of grassroots organisations. This lack of bottom-up mobilisation limits opportunities for community advocacy, which could otherwise complement UFPC's efforts and counterbalance the top-down governance model [29], thereby fostering a more participatory approach to food system governance.

To address these challenges, the first step is to actively engage informal sector representatives as active members of participative processes [6, 72]. Doing this within the platform can ensure the perspectives and needs of Machinga are represented. Given that in Arusha, these organisations are often small and not formalised, targeted outreach and capacity-building initiatives will have to be part of this effort. These initiatives should include financial support and training in governance, participatory methods and technical areas related to food systems. Platform members should discuss among themselves to determine if any of the current members have the knowledge and resources available for this effort. If not, they could consider attracting new partners with expertise in agency building and bottom-up organisation.

Secondly, capacity-building efforts on food governance should include local food policymakers and administration. The platform could organise training sessions on inclusive food policy-making and food governance. This training should regularly take place, considering frequent relocations of these officials. While some training programmes already exist at the international level (organised by city food networks), these often lack local embeddedness. As such, we recommend combining this more general training in city food networks with training specific to the context of Arusha.

Finally, in line with many authors pleading for inclusive innovations that recognise local knowledge [73-75], we recommend that platform members share the interpretive burden for marginalised groups by investing time and resources in mapping their knowledge and developing a shared language. This should include the involvement of these groups within monitoring and evaluation processes, to ensure that evaluations reflect their priorities and criteria for success. Subsequently, the findings from this participatory M&E can be used to continuously adapt and improve programmes.

6. Conclusion

This study has investigated the potential of UFPCs to support and advocate for street vendors within the realm of food-related decision-making in East Africa. For this purpose, we have built on food democracy literature to develop the concept of a UFPC as a politicised space, delineating three principles: social justice, epistemic justice and empowerment. The application of this framework in the case of the platform's response to the relocation of the Machinga has revealed opportunities, but also challenges both for UFPCs in general and within the specific context of East Africa.

Three key insights emerge from this study regarding the development of UFPCs as politicised spaces. Firstly, facilitators of UFPCs should be aware of the framings they promote, as these framings guide their actions and influence whose knowledge is recognised within the platform and whose is not. Food system issues are often framed from perspectives such as food security, nutrition security and health, social justice or agrobiodiversity [38]. Practitioners should reflect on which framings dominate their platform and whether these framings are in line with their ambitions and goals.

Secondly, while researchers, policymakers and NGOs should continue to strive for increased participation of marginalised groups in UFPCs, they must also be cautious of the instrumentalisation of such participation. When the involvement of certain groups is linked to the realisation of pre-set platform's goals, these groups risk being marginalised again once the platform achieves these objectives. Additionally, there is the concern of what happens to groups affected by food systems issues but not considered relevant to the platform's goals. Therefore, participation should be an end in itself, with different visions and perspectives being heard and considered, not merely a means to achieve the platform's objectives.

This links to a third insight, which is the need to go beyond "participation in action," common in liberal food democracy discourses. A way forward could involve developing a strong food democracy discourse [66] where legitimacy within UFPCs is achieved through open, inclusive and deliberate dialogues aimed at producing common values and preferences. The assumption here is that through such deliberation, participants can transform their preferences and educate themselves, thereby avoiding a patronising approach to behaviour change and education.

We would like to recommend several avenues for further research. Firstly, the topic of epistemic injustice has not received significant attention within current practise and research on UFPCs, highlighting a potential area for further exploration and development. Secondly, we perceived a notable absence of grassroots organisations in our study context. However, as our study did not conduct an in-depth search for such organisations, this is an area that requires further research. Several questions arise: Are grassroots organisations less prevalent in East Africa compared to other regions? If so, why? Alternatively, are these organisations structured differently, making them difficult for researchers to identify? Thirdly, there is a need for more in-depth engagement with informal vendors to understand what tools and instruments they would require effectively organising themselves and participate in structures such as the platform.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, when preparing our research, we did not find any studies that gave an in-depth description of a UFPC within East Africa. More research in this context is urgent to avoid the overgeneralisation of African contexts. Africa is often mistakenly perceived as a monolithic entity, and limited studies can lead to skewed conclusions that do not reflect the diverse realities across different regions. Expanding research in this area, preferably in collaboration with local universities or organisations, is crucial to provide a more accurate and nuanced understanding of UFPCs in various African settings.

A limitation of this study is its single-case design, which focuses exclusively on Arusha and, more specifically, on the Machinga case within this context. As a result, we might have overlooked certain insights related to the broader politicising capacity of UFPCs in other settings. This narrow focus potentially limits the generalisability of the findings to UFPCs operating under varying conditions or addressing the needs of other vulnerable populations.

In conclusion, our case study of the AFSFP has demonstrated that UFPCs show significant promise in addressing democratic deficits in local food systems. However, further steps are needed to function as politicised spaces. Additionally, their transformative potential is contingent upon being embedded within a broader democratic context. Therefore, ongoing efforts are essential to enhance the overall democratic quality of political systems, ensuring that UFPCs can effectively contribute to meaningful and inclusive food system transformations.

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process.

During the preparation of this work, the authors used Chat GPT-3.5 to improve the readability and language of the manuscript. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the published article.

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