



Research Article

Rural-Urban Transfers and Household Food Security in Harare's Crisis Context

Godfrey Tawodzera^{1*}

Abstract

This paper is based on research carried out in 2009 in the low-income residential area of Epworth in Harare, Zimbabwe. The paper assesses the contribution of rural-urban linkages to the food security of urban households in a crisis context. Research findings demonstrate that in conditions of extreme economic distress such as those that were besetting Zimbabwe at the time, the socio-cultural linkages that exist between the city and the village, as well as the economic relations of reciprocity embedded within these interactions are crucial to the survival of distressed urban households. Reaffirming findings made from other studies elsewhere in the region, the study concludes that through these linkages, urban households harness food and monetary resources from the village to enhance resilience to food insecurity.

Keywords

Urban food security; Rural-Urban linkages; Survival strategies; Resilience

Introduction

Food security defines a state 'when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life [1]. For most poor households in the city, it is often difficult to maintain food security over a reasonable period of time. This is because the poor in the city are generally susceptible to a variety of unfavourable conditions: job losses, poor or inadequate housing conditions, persistent price escalations, hyperinflation and collapsing formal food systems. In Zimbabwe, the general vulnerability of the poor to these conditions was further heightened by the existence of a crisis in the country. The crisis was characterized by a negative Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate, rising unemployment, increasing poverty, hyperinflation and recurrent national food shortages. By the end of 2006, for example, GDP had contracted by over 40% from the 2000 levels [2]. In March 2009, unemployment was estimated to be at 80%, formal sector employment having shrunk to 480 000 from about 3.6 million in 2003 [3]. Poverty increased considerably: the country's Human Poverty Index (HPI) more than doubled from 17% in 1990, to 40% by 2006 [3]. By November 2008, up to 80% of the population was estimated to be surviving on less than

US\$2 per day [3]. The purchasing power of the average Zimbabwean, which, in 2005 had fallen to the same level as in 1953 [4], continued to decline – virtually wiping out any gains that the country had made over the previous fifty years. Consequently, life expectancy, which had peaked at 61 years in 1990, fell to around 36 years in 2008. Inflation continued to rise. Official statistics in the country indicate that inflation peaked at 231 million% in October 2008 [5]. Independent experts however suggest that the figures could have exceeded 500 billion by December 2008 [3]. National food production on the other hand had been declining drastically since the year 2000. In the 2006-07 agricultural season, for example, maize deficits of 1 000 000 tonnes were recorded nationally while an 840 000 tonnes deficit was recorded for the 2008-09 season [6,7].

The general living conditions of the people at the time of the research were dire. This adverse socio-economic situation was largely attributed to the impact of three key events: the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP), the Fast-track Land Redistribution Programme; and, Operation Murambatsvina. ESAP is one of the key issues that greatly affected the lives of ordinary Zimbabweans. While the programme was implemented to boost the country's economy through promoting investment and growth [8] the liberalization of trade as well as the deregulation of markets that ensued precipitated a serious downward trajectory in the country's economy [9]. This negatively affected the livelihoods of the people, especially those in the urban environment. On the back of these economic problems, the government launched the fast track land redistribution programme in 2000: compulsorily acquiring farms from largely white farmers, for redistribution to indigenous blacks. These farm disturbances interfered with farming operations and drastically lowered food production and the country became a net importer of food [10]. This drastically increased levels of food insecurity in the country. In urban areas, the impact was severe as very little food filtered from the rural areas to feed a population already reeling under the general macro-economic meltdown. Adding to these problems, the government launched Operation Murambatsvina in 2005, destroying backyard houses, vending stalls, flea markets and informal businesses in the country's urban areas in what critics argue to have been a preemptive strategy to disperse a restive urban population adversely affected by economic decline, which could have provided a breeding ground for a revolution against the government [11]. The operation destroyed livelihoods and housing in urban areas, affecting more than 700 000 people [12] and worsened the plight of the average urbanite. The crisis thus served to decimate livelihoods and increased household vulnerability to food insecurity.

While this deleterious economic environment generally affected the whole country, the vulnerability of the urban poor to the economic meltdown was severe given their primary dependence on food purchases as well as the substantial amount of money needed to pay for a variety of obligatory urban expenses such as rent and rates. A heavy reliance on imported foods also meant that urbanites were even more vulnerable to shocks resulting from rising world food prices. The central question for this paper then, is, how were poor urban households surviving? This paper assesses the role of rural-urban linkages in the food security of urban households.

*Corresponding author: Godfrey Tawodzera, African Centre for Cities (ACC), Shell ENGEO Building, Upper Campus, University of Cape Town, P.O. Box X3, Rondebosch, 7700, Cape Town, South Africa, E-mail: godfrey.tawodzera@uct.ac.za

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Urban Poverty and Food Security

Poverty is a worldwide phenomenon whose nature, extent and measurement has been widely discussed [13-16]. Some of the world's highest poverty levels are found in sub-Saharan Africa [17]. At the end of 2006, for example, over 50% of the region's population was estimated to be living on less than US\$1 per day [17]. It is the only region in the world where the absolute numbers of people living in poverty has increased in the last decade [18]. Although much has been written about poverty in the rural areas, the discourse on urban poverty is relatively recent [19] largely due to the longstanding conceptualization of cities as more developed, homogeneous areas with no economic differentiation among citizens. As Nelson [19] posits, people migrants to the cities were generally 'often defined as the fortunate, the progressive and the upwardly mobile, no matter how difficult their lives might have been when they arrived there'.

Iliffe's [20] ground-breaking work on poverty in African cities has however amply demonstrated that a significant proportion of the urban population lives with multiple and cumulative deprivations. Most of these urban poor are vulnerable to the fluctuating prices of basic goods and services because of their reliance on the cash economy [21]. Rising costs of rent, rates and transport, usually forces households to cut back on food expenses, thereby rendering them more food insecure. In the absence of social protection measures, as is common in most of Southern Africa, urban households are therefore left to face the vagaries of the urban environment on their own, thereby increasing their food insecurity. Despite problems facing the urban poor becoming all too apparent, the global and national response to food insecurity still largely demonstrates a rural bias [22]. Little attention is paid to the food insecurity problems of the urban poor as more attention is devoted to improving rural, particularly, small scale agriculture. As Crush and Frayne [23] point out, the assumption seems to be that developing agriculture, especially rural agriculture, will solve the food problems of the urban poor by reducing the cost of food. This approach however, is problematic, given that urban food security involves not only food supply issues, but also issues of access and pricing as well as environmental hazards and contamination of food and water [24].

With all these challenges, how then do urban households ensure their food security? Research done on general urban livelihoods suggests a number of ways in which households may be coping: these include migrating to the rural areas [24] farming in the city [25]; getting resources from rural areas [26]; taking children out of school; and; renting out rooms to lodgers to raise income [27]. But, how relevant are these activities for households threatened by food insecurity in the city, particularly in a crisis context such as that of Zimbabwe? Studies by Potts [28] in the late 1990s in the country suggest that urban households with access to rural production may be remitting increasing amounts of food to urban areas. Given the virtual collapse of Zimbabwe's economy and the widespread destruction of the agricultural sector during the crisis years, are these coping mechanisms still relevant and how are households surviving?

Transcending the Rural-Urban Divide: Migration and Food Security

Most development literature often portrays rural and urban areas as separate geographic entities. Regional planning in some countries still considers rural and urban development as economically independent, and governments plan for them separately. The reality however, is

that these areas are not completely detached from each other. They are rather linked in an umbilical exchange of people, money, food, goods, technology, information and ideas [29]. A variety of studies [30-32] have shown that most urban dwellers in Africa live in a dual system of multi-spatial households, one in the city and another in the village. Although such a system is not peculiar to Africa, it is probably in this continent that the links between the two remain important in cultural and economic life [30]. Most urban residents in the sub-continent see themselves as only being temporarily in the city to avail themselves of economic gain, education or health services. Urbanites interviewed in Nairobi, Kenya, for example, reported being in the urban area to generate money and planned to go back to their rural areas to 'rest' upon retiring [33]. Most urban dwellers own pieces of land in the rural areas. In Botswana [34], about 64% of the urban households interviewed owned land in the rural areas. In Durban, South Africa, 39% of surveyed households reported owning homes in the rural areas [35]. During the course of their stay in the urban areas most urban dwellers invest in their rural homes. Such investments include building modern houses, buying property and livestock. Thus in addition to the social linkages, there are resource flows from the urban to the rural areas. While these resource flows were much stronger in the 1960s and 1970s when urban households typically earned enough to suffice their urban needs and send some money to their rural homesteads [36], declining conditions and opportunities in today's African urban centres are reducing these flows to the village.

In Zimbabwe, the practice of circular migration dates back to the colonial period. Although the coming of independence removed restrictions on living in the city, circular migration continued especially after the introduction of the International Monetary Fund backed Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) when urban life became expensive and the rural home became an important safety net for the urban [37]. A significant proportion of Zimbabwe's urban dwellers thus maintain a strong attachment to a particular rural area which they consider to be their home. Most own land, livestock and other property. Potts et al. [37], findings in a survey on post-colonial rural-urban migrants to Harare suggests that migrants were retaining their rural linkages because of the need for security in their old age or when they fell sick or lost employment. Hence, most periodically visit the rural areas for holidays, funerals, ceremonies and rituals.

While in the past net resource flows were directed to the rural areas because of the huge income differences between the areas, there is evidence that these resource flows are changing as the economic decline experienced in sub-Saharan Africa during the past three decades has drastically narrowed the gap between urban and rural incomes [37]. According to Moseley [36] the favored status of the urban resident in most of the region has been eroded considerably since the 1970s, particularly during the period of structural adjustment. In Zimbabwe's case, in addition to the negative impacts of the economic structural adjustment programme, a decade long economic crisis precipitated by political instability seems to have almost closed this gap [3]. Given evidence of the 'urbanization of poverty' in the sub-Saharan African region [38], reduced and in some cases reverse flows from the rural areas to the city have been witnessed.

However, within the context of Zimbabwe's economic crisis, the nature and scale of linkages between the urban and the rural area should not be taken for granted. This is because the scale of urban poverty as well as the depressed economy is likely to affect the

capacity of urban dwellers to remit to rural areas. Some rural dwellers interviewed by Bryceson et al. [39] reported that while they were sustaining urban households by sending them food regularly, they were increasingly receiving fewer groceries in return, suggesting that the net flow of resources between the areas could be reversing. While this observation may point to the increasing importance of rural food resources to the sustenance of urban dwellers, there is a need to investigate the extent to which urban households are relying on these food sources for survival. This is important considering Meagher's [40] assertion that too much poverty in the city may also disable urban households from getting back to rural areas to collect food.

In trying to understand the survival of urban households and their resilience in the face of food insecurity, a livelihoods approach is valuable. This approach seeks to improve understanding of how people use the resources at their disposal to construct a livelihood [41]. The assumption is that households construct their livelihoods by drawing on a range of assets (human, physical, financial, social, and natural) which are available to them within the broader socio-economic and political context [42]. It is the ability of the poor to access assets and other resources that is central to the success of their survival. The paper posits that urban and rural households in Zimbabwe form part of the same multi-spatial entity that transcends perceived borders between the two geographic areas. In times of socio-economic crisis, urban households are likely to call on their rural component to provide food and monetary resources that are crucial for survival in urban areas. These rural resources form part of the larger asset portfolio of urban households and they are therefore able to rely on them for survival. It is the extension of the livelihood of the urban poor to the rural areas that is crucial to their food security in the city.

Methodological Approach

This section discusses the methodology used to examine the contribution of rural-urban linkages to urban households to food security in Epworth, Harare. It also describes the study site and details the research design which combined both qualitative and quantitative methods.

The study site

Epworth is located 15 kilometers to the south-east of the city center in Harare. It lies on land donated by Cecil John Rhodes to the Wesleyan Methodist Mission Trust in 1900 [43]. Originally inhabited by subsistence farmers, the area converted into a residential area to accommodate people fleeing the war in the rural areas during Zimbabwe's liberation struggle. At independence, when restrictive urban legislation was repealed, huge numbers of people moved into the city, and many settled in Epworth. The population of the area expanded rapidly: from approximately 20 000 people in 1980 to 120 000 by mid-2009 [44]. In 1986, faced with a ballooning population and increasing challenges, the Methodist Church passed ownership of Epworth to the government and the settlement was legalized. The government appointed a Local Board to oversee the area's development. Epworth was chosen for this study because of the high incidence of poverty in the area and the expectation that a study there would yield a great deal of information on how the urban poor strategize to meet their food needs. Furthermore, given the implosion of the national economy at the time, the acute food shortages on the market countrywide, as well as the hyperinflationary conditions that subsisted nationally, the situation in Epworth was similar to

conditions in other poor residential areas in the city and the country. The results of the survey, though specific to Epworth, however cast a general picture of how most poor households in Harare and in the country's other urban areas were surviving during the crisis period.

A mixed methods approach

This study combined qualitative and quantitative methods to examine household survival and resilience to food insecurity under Zimbabwe's crisis conditions. Data for the study was collected in March 2009.

The qualitative approach: A total of 30 in-depth semi-structured interviews were carried out in the study. The participants to the qualitative study were randomly selected from ward lists that formed the sampling frame. The purpose of the interviews was to capture the ways in which households dealt with food insecurity. The interview questions included questions on household demographics, household economic data, food sources, and on rural-urban transfers. To capture the diversity of household survival techniques, the interviews included male-headed, female-headed and child-headed households, as well as households with different socio-economic status and varying length of residence in the city. Within the selected households (with the exception of child-headed households where the eldest child was purposively selected), a household member above the age of 18 years was randomly chosen as the informant, in order to capture data from a wide cross section of household members. Key informants were also interviewed, and these included four councilors and five informants from NGOs operating in Harare.

The quantitative approach: The quantitative approach involved the collection of information through a standardized pre-coded household questionnaire administered to 200 households. Data collected using the questionnaire was used to probe the strength of relationships established through the qualitative survey. The questionnaire, which consisted of 18 questions, was designed to capture information on household demographic characteristics, poverty, income and expenditure, household food insecurity experiences, dietary diversity information and household coping mechanisms and linkages to the rural areas as well as the exchange of food between the two areas. On average, the questionnaire took an hour to complete. The sampling frame consisted of all the households in the area, arranged by wards. First, modified random sampling was used to select households from the ward lists. After establishing the starting point in each ward, the desired sample size was selected by choosing households at a predetermined interval. Second, a household member above 18 years (except in child-headed households where the eldest child was purposively selected as the respondent) was randomly selected as the respondent. Four enumerators, university post-graduate students with previous data collection experience were trained as fieldworkers over a two-day period. Communication during the survey was in the local *Shona* language to enhance communication.

To measure household food security, the study used three measures of household food insecurity namely: a) the Household Food Insecurity Access Prevalence Indicator (HFIAP); b) the Household Dietary Diversity Scale (HDDS); and, c) the Months of Adequate Household Food Provisioning (MAHFP) measurement of household food access. The HFIAP categorizes households into four levels of food security: food secure, and mild, moderately and severely food insecure. The HDDS measures how many food groups households

consumed within a given period, with a maximum of 12 food groups used for this study. The MAHFP measures the number of months in which households are able to provision themselves sufficiently with food. These measures, designed by the USAID's Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance (FANTA) project, and have been validated and used extensively in food security surveys internationally.

Results and Discussion

This section presents and discusses results on household food security status among the surveyed households in Epworth, Harare, during Zimbabwe's economic crisis period. It discusses how, during such times of crisis, the social and cultural links between the city and the village are important and how households use these linkages to facilitate the movement of people, food and monetary resources that are crucial for the survival and food security of the urban household. Before presenting these results however, the characteristics of households that were surveyed are presented.

Household characteristics

The average age of the respondents for the household standardized questionnaire survey was 38 years. Female respondents constituted 59.5% of the sample in comparison to 40.5% for males (Table 1). The average household size for the sample was 4.6 persons, which was slightly higher than the 4.1 national average urban household size recorded by the Central Statistical Office in 2006 [45]. More specifically, 73.5% of the surveyed households were made up of between 1 and 5 members while only 2.5% of the households reported having more than 10 members. The majority of households in Epworth were poor. Poverty levels were measured using the Lived Poverty Index (LPI). This is a measure which assesses how frequently, during the course of the year, people go without basic necessities such as food, clean water, medicine or medical treatment, electricity in the home, enough fuel to cook food and a cash income and ranges from 0.00 (complete satisfaction of basic needs) to 4.00 (frequent shortage of basic needs) [46]. Using this measure, the sample average LPI was 2.80, with a median of 2.68 and a maximum LPI score of 3.88, signifying acute levels of poverty in the area.

Levels of household food insecurity

Although food security is complex and multi-faceted, and therefore difficult to measure, a number of ways have been developed to assess its prevalence at the household level. These measures, described in Section 4.2.2 were used in this study, namely: a) the Household Food Insecurity Access Prevalence Indicator (HFIAP); b) the Household Dietary Diversity Scale (HDDS); and, c) the Months of Adequate Household Food Provisioning (MAHFP) measurement of household food access. Survey results indicate that the majority of surveyed households were food insecure as they could hardly maintain a steady supply of adequate food for all household members. The economic conditions in the country during the survey period had reached crisis proportions and most households were finding it difficult to acquire enough food to feed their members. According to the HFIAP indicator for the study, only 3% of the surveyed households in Epworth were food secure, while the rest, constituting 97% of the sample, were classified as food insecure, these being divided into: 6.5% mildly food insecure; 31.5% moderately food insecure and 59% severely food insecure (Table 2). Such a high food insecurity prevalence indicator was indicative of the acute food insecurity

levels that existed in the country during that period. Although the political crisis which was mainly responsible for the catastrophic economic collapse in the country was coming to an end with rival political parties having signed the Global Political Agreement (GPA) in October 2008, the ensuing Government of National Unity (GNU) was only inaugurated in February 2009, and the impact of this political stabilization had not yet had a significant positive impact on the economy. Thus the food insecurity prevalence rate in this survey was only marginally lower than the 98% prevalence rate recorded for the African Food Security Urban Network (AFSUN) household food security baseline survey conducted in Harare five months prior to this study in October 2008 [47]. Most poor households in the city were therefore still experiencing acute food insecurity levels.

The severity of household food insecurity among the surveyed households in Epworth during the crisis period is aptly captured by respondents to the qualitative interviews through vivid descriptions of their experiences. One respondent described her household's food insecurity situation as follows:

Things are really tough and we barely survive. We sometimes spend the whole day without eating anything. Even the stray dogs that used to rummage through our bins have disappeared, for no-one leaves food for them anymore. This is how we live and this is how

Table 1: Household characteristics.

		N	%
Sex of respondents	Male	81	40.5
	Female	119	59.5
		200	100.0
Household type	Male-headed	140	70.0
	Female-headed	60	30.0
		200	100.0
Household size	1-5	147	73.5
	6-10	48	24.0
	>10	5	2.5
		200	100.0
Household monthly income	0-500	139	69.5
	501-1000	27	13.5
	1001-1500	24	12.0
	1501-2000	7	3.5
	>2000	3	1.5
		200	100.0
Lived Poverty Index (LPI)	0.00-1.00(never-seldom without)	17	8.5
	1.01-2.00 (seldom-sometimes without)	40	20.0
	2.01-3.00(Sometimes-Often without)	112	56.0
	3.01-4.00(often-always without)	31	15.5
		200	100.0

Table 2: Household food insecurity access prevalence indicator (HFIAP).

	N	%
Food secure	6	3.0
Mildly food insecure	13	6.5
Moderately food insecure	63	31.5
Severely food insecure	118	59.0
Total	200	100.0

terrible our situation has become¹.

Such descriptions were common among respondents to the qualitative interviews and served to indicate the depth of food insecurity within households where critical food shortages had become daily experiences. Other households variously described their food security situation as 'precarious', 'dire', 'critical' and even 'hopeless'. This was not surprising, given that the country's economy had collapsed, the agricultural sector had virtually crumbled, inflation had skyrocketed, and a critical shortage of foreign currency meant that the country could not even meet its food requirements through imports. Thus even the odd household with enough money found itself being food insecure as there was usually little or no food to purchase on the market. Inflation also drastically reduced the value of wages to a point where a month's salary would not feed an average household for a week. Hence most poor households in the city were generally food insecure. One respondent summarized the severity of her household's food security situation by saying:

I can count on one hand the number of days that we have had a decent meal in this household this month. We worry every day about where to get money, where to find food and how to feed our children. It is the same every day. I used to hope that things would get better, but it seems this is just a dream².

In addition to the high levels of food insecurity as indicated by the HFIAP, survey results also indicated that most of the surveyed households were consuming foods from few food groups, hence were surviving on a narrow diet with a mean dietary diversity score (HDDS) of 4.20 out of a possible maximum score of 12.00. This narrow household diet reflects a deeper food insecurity problem among surveyed households than prevalence measures alone are able to indicate. This is primarily so, given that poor nutrition, for example in children, has been shown to result in poor physical and mental development as well as affecting educational efficacy and productivity in adulthood [48]. The foods that households were mostly consuming include cereals (100%), vegetables (94%), foods made with oil, fat or butter (66%) and sugar or honey (58%). For most of these poor households, they had very little choice of what food to consume as they were forced to eat whatever food was available at the time. Hence, when households made reference to 'the usual meal' or 'our everyday meal', they were generally referring to a diet of the staple *sadza* (thick porridge made from maize meal) and a relish consisting of vegetables. Thus, in response to a question on household diet, one household head summed up their dietary situation in a few words:

"We eat what we can get at the time. To be honest, we rarely think about what we would want to have these days. It is wasting time to think about such things. It does not help"³.

In addition to high food insecurity prevalence rates and narrow household diets, the acute food insecurity levels in Epworth, Harare were reflected in the months of adequate household food provisioning. This indicated the proportion of households that were inadequately provisioned according to the calendar months. A mean score of 5.07 was recorded, indicating that, on the average households were adequately provisioned for only 5 out of the 12 months of the year. As Figure 1 shows, the months in which the greater proportion of households were adequately provisioned (February to June) corresponds to the country's agricultural season, while severe shortages are recorded during the dry months (August to December) indicating the strong relationships that exist between

the city and the rural areas in terms of food flows. This relationship is two-fold: one, that an increase in agricultural produce on the urban market during the agricultural season increases availability and depresses food prices on the market, hence increasing access by households; and two, that most households receive food directly from rural areas, hence increasing food availability within the recipient households. This second relationship is an important aspect that is discussed in the rest of this paper, and details how, during times of crisis, poor households survive by calling upon resources from their rural counterparts to enhance their food security in the city. In order to explore this survival strategy however, it is prudent to discuss the social and cultural relations that exist between the city and the village and how these relations enhance the exchange of people, goods, money and food that is critical to the survival and food security of the poor household in the urban environment.

Social reciprocity between the rural and urban areas

The degree to which urban households have recourse to resources in the rural areas for their survival in the city depends on the extent to which they interact with rural households both physically and socially. Hence according to Owuor [49] the rural livelihood sources that are accessed and used by urban households are embedded in these linkages and interactions as well as the reciprocity that is evident between them. In a study carried out in Windhoek, Namibia, Frayne [50] demonstrates that such interactions are the 'primary assets that ameliorate vulnerability for urban households' and that these urban-rural networks are therefore 'the key to urban survival.' Strong urban-rural interactions are thus a viable tool for militating against food insecurity among urban households [51]. In conformity with these assertions, this study found that there were strong linkages existing between the households in Epworth and their rural areas as 95% of the surveyed households reported having a 'home' in the village, despite the fact that 57% of the sample population had been born in the city. The continued attachment by urban households to their rural homes has been adequately studied by Potts et al. [37] in Zimbabwe. In their 1990 study, they argue that the decision by most household in the urban areas of the country to keep their land in the rural areas is a logical and rational choice which is aimed at giving them 'some security against unemployment or failure of their urban enterprise and, most importantly, old age or disability' [37]. Thus this trend continues, aided by declining opportunities in the urban areas amidst mounting socio-economic challenges precipitated by

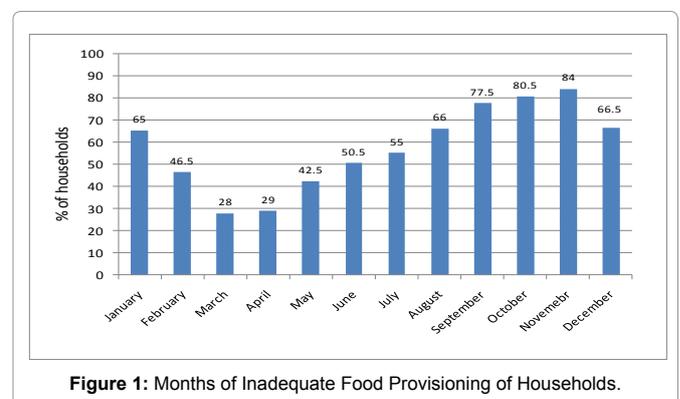


Figure 1: Months of Inadequate Food Provisioning of Households.

¹Interview No. 1, 23 March 2009, Ward 1, Epworth, Harare.

²Interview No. 23, 27 March 2009, Ward VII, Epworth, Harare.

³Interview No. 4, 23 March 2009, Ward 1, Epworth, Harare.

the country's political crisis. An in-depth interview respondent in the survey posited that the worsening socio-economic conditions in the city in the past decade had, in some cases, reawakened ties between the city and the village that may otherwise had been declining. As she summed it up:

Although I have always had a place in the village, I never used to go there as frequently as I do now. Nor did I really focus on the place in terms of keeping it functional, farming or any other things that others do. But the challenges I have faced in this city in the past 8 years have somehow reawakened me to the fact that I must keep my home in a good conditions and do some farming as I do now. Our place in the village in Mutoko has really helped to keep us going here in the city as that is where most of our food comes from⁴.

The above quote validates Potts et al. [28] observation that although Africans in the city have always maintained strong social and economic links with their rural areas, the era of severe economic decline seems to have strengthened these ties and in some cases assumed new significance. Hence in the case of Epworth, severe economic crisis in the country has seen households that are exposed to deleterious economic conditions in the city maintaining strong links with the village to enhance their survival.

While rural-urban linkages are important for urban survival, it is not the mere existence of such linkages, but the strength of such relationships that is also important. Such social reciprocity between urban and rural areas can be analyzed within the context of regular visits that occur between urban-based and rural-based members [49]. This is because it is such interactions that determine the frequency of resource flows between the two areas. Study results shows that nearly two-thirds (64.5%) of the households in the questionnaire survey reported visiting their rural home once every year, while 28% visited every six months (Table 3). There was a significant relationship ($p < 0.01$) between levels of poverty and the frequency of visits to the rural areas (Table 4). As the table indicates, a lower proportion of the least poor households (i.e. those with the least LPI: 0.00–1.00) visited the rural areas than those with high LPIs, perhaps indicating a high dependence on rural resources by the poorer households. On the other hand, the highest proportion of households visiting the village, whether monthly, every 6 months or every year was among the poorer households with an LPI of 2.01–3.00. It should however also be noted that beyond an LPI of 3.00, the proportion of households visiting the rural areas tended to decrease, perhaps indicating a poverty threshold above which households are unable to afford the cost of travelling to and from the village.

Although the increasing costs of travel, as well as declining urban incomes, were curtailing the frequency of visits, most respondents indicated that they make efforts to visit 'home' periodically, especially on special holidays such as at Christmas and Easter or for the often obligatory funerals. Such visits are a way of life, a tradition through which urbanites keep in contact with their kith and kin as well as remaining 'anchored' to their rural homes. As one respondent succinctly put it:

It's part of tradition not to detach oneself from the village, regardless of how well you may be doing in the city. The village is home: my mother, uncles and other relatives still live there and I have to visit them regularly as is expected of me⁵.

Quantitative survey findings bear testimony to the need by urban household members to stay in touch with relatives and friends in the countryside: 80% of the surveyed households reported members visiting the village to check on friends and relatives (Table 3). These findings are not unique to Zimbabwe. In a similar study in Nakuru, Kenya, Owuor [49] found that about 80% of the household heads in the surveyed households had visited their rural homes in the last quarter of 2001, the year in which part of the research was carried out. The study further reveals that these visits were meant to maintain and foster kinship and family ties.

Besides social visits to the village, household members residing in the city have been known to visit the village for a variety of other reasons ranging from holidays, attending funerals and weddings, farming or other social or economic activities. According to survey results, 66% of the household members visited the rural areas for social events such as marriages, funerals and tombstone unveiling (Table 5). However others reported visiting the rural areas for economic purposes: 64% visited their rural homes to collect food and/or money, 35% for farming or general agricultural purposes and others (34%) to send money or food. While ordinarily one can send or receive money through the banking system without the need to physically travel, the collapse of the banking system in the country as well as an acute shortage of cash in the banks meant that most people were loath to use the banking system, hence physically moving between areas to effect transfers. In addition, a third of households (33.5%) indicated visiting the rural areas to take children to attend school there. These

Table 3: Frequency of visits by urban household members to rural areas.

Frequency of visits	N	% of households
Every week	0	0.0
Every month	12	6.0
Every six months	56	28.0
Every year	129	64.5
Never	3	1.5
Total	200	100.0

Table 4: Household frequency of visit by LPI.

LPI	Frequency of visits								Total	
	Every month		Every 6 months		Every year		Never		N	%
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
0.00-1.00	1	8.3	2	3.6	11	8.5	3	100.0	17	8.5
1.01-2.00	4	33.4	12	21.4	24	18.6	0	0.0	40	20.0
2.01-3.00	6	50.0	34	60.7	72	55.8	0	0.0	112	56.0
3.01-4.00	1	8.3	8	14.3	22	17.1	0	0.0	31	15.5
Total	12	100.0	56	100.0	200	100.0	3	100.0	200	100.0

Table 5: Reasons why household members visit their rural home.

Reason for visiting*	N	% of households
To see relatives and friends	160	80.0
Social events (e.g. Marriages, funerals, tombstone unveiling)	132	66.0
To get food and/or money	128	64.0
For farming & other economic purposes (e.g. to sell livestock)	70	35.0
To send money and/or food	68	34.0
To send children to school	65	33.0
Others	11	6.5

⁴Interview No. 30, 29 March 2009, Ward VII, Epworth, Harare.

⁵Interview No. 28, 28 March 2009, Ward VII, Epworth, Harare.

linkages, elaborated in detail in the next two sections, form part of the urban household's portfolio of strategies that enable it to survive in the challenging environment of the city.

Transfers of food from rural to urban areas

The movement of resources from the urban to the rural areas is well documented in literature. In the 1960s, the wide gap between urban and rural incomes meant that urbanites could afford to remit consistently to the rural areas [51]. However, the era of economic decline and structural adjustment in the 1980s and 1990s narrowed this gap drastically. This initiated new forms of migration, where resource flows from the village to the city began to increase. Frayne [51] in a study in Namibia and Smit [35] in Durban, South Africa have documented the importance of rural food transfers to the well-being of the households in the city. In a study carried out in Zimbabwe by Potts et al. [37] in 1991, it was shown that most Zimbabweans in the city held on to their land in the rural areas so that they can grow food and or retire to it. Results from the in-depth qualitative interviews in Epworth mirror these findings as most households indicated that they still had claims to small plots of land in the village where they grow crops and kept animals. For some, visiting the village to take part in agricultural activities is therefore a yearly ritual, as reported by one respondent:

Every year my husband buys seeds and fertilizer and I go to the village for about 2 months during the rainy season to farm on our small 2 acre plot. During the school holidays I also take my children to the rural areas so that they can help me to work in the fields⁶.

By engaging in rural farming, urban household members contribute to generating the food that they eat when they visit the countryside, as well as possibly selling the excess to get a supplementary income that is used in both the rural and urban area. In addition, food is also brought back to the urban area. Urban households on the other hand, were reported to be getting more resources from the village than they were sending, suggesting an increasing dependence by urban households on rural food sources. As one respondent to the in-depth qualitative interview explained:

'We used to send a lot of goods and food to the village for our parents and siblings. It used to be very frequently...sometimes every month. But things are now tough and we rarely send anything anymore. Instead my mother usually sends us *hupfu* (maize meal), sweet potatoes and *mufushwa* (dried vegetables). When they slaughter a goat or a cow they also send us some *chimukuyu* (dried meat) and it helps a lot⁷.

It is this net urban-ward flow of resources, especially food, which was partly responsible for the resilience of poor households in Harare. Quantitative survey findings lend credence to this argument: more than three fifths of the surveyed households (62%) reported normally receiving food from the rural areas, while 34% reported receiving money (Table 6).

The money that urban households reported receiving from rural areas came from a variety of sources ranging from the sale of agricultural products (89.7%), the sale of livestock (55.9%) as well as the selling of fruits (32.4%) (Table 7). Interviews with households indicated that most households were maintaining small plots in the rural areas where they were growing crops to augment their urban income which was being drastically eroded by hyperinflation. This income was thus going a long way in helping urban households to pay

for a variety of urban expenses that include food. In addition to the above mentioned sources, some households also revealed that they were getting income from activities such as gold panning (19.1%) and from diamond mining (8.8%) that their relatives and other household members were engaging in in the rural areas. Other household members indicated that they had, on a few occasions, even gone to prospecting for diamonds, particularly in the Chiadzwa diamond area in the Manicaland province of the country. Although this was an illegal activity, most households nevertheless braved the wrath of the police to engage illegally in the activity in a bid to sustain their livelihoods.

The foods that were being transferred from the rural to the urban areas were many and ranged from cereals/grains, to tubers and meat. Figure 2 below indicates that the most common foods being transferred from the rural areas were cereals (54%), roots and tubers (36%), as meat and poultry (26%) as well as vegetables (24%) and food made from beans and nuts (16%). The predominance of cereal transfers can be explained by the fact that maize is the country's staple crop and therefore is used extensively by households. As one respondent said:

Whenever I go to the village I make sure that I bring some maize or maize meal. If I am able to provide *sadza* for my family, then all

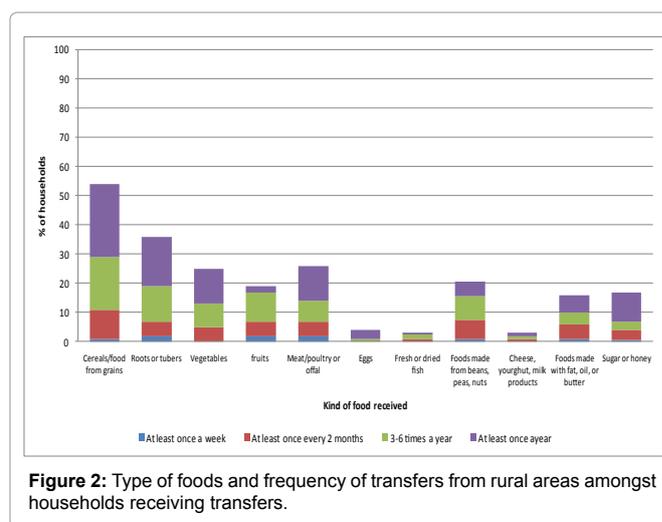


Table 6: Households receiving food and money from rural areas.

	Normally receive food		Normally receive money	
	N	%	N	%
Yes	123	61.5	68	34.0
No	77	39.5	132	66.0
Total	200	100.0	200	100.0

Table 7: Sources of money from rural areas*.

Source	N	%
Selling Agricultural products	61	89.7
Selling livestock	38	55.9
Gold panning	13	19.1
Selling Fruits	22	32.4
Diamond mining	6	8.8

*Multiple response question – percentages do not add up to a hundred

⁶Interview No. 27, 28 March 2009, Ward VII, Epworth, Harare.

⁷Interview No. 17, 26 March 2009, Ward V, Epworth, Harare.

other things do not really matter. When I get a chance to go home, I bring as much as I can, even to last me for six months⁸.

The transfer of cereals from rural to urban areas is therefore central to the economic linkages that exist between the city and the countryside. The importance of food from the rural areas for the survival of households in Epworth was validated by survey responses with 58% of the households reporting that the food they were getting from the rural area was very important, while 18% regarded it as being critical to their survival in the city (Table 8). These findings validate the prediction of O'Connor [52] that rural-urban linkages in Southern Africa were likely to assume new importance with rising urban poverty. Rural-urban food transfers thus represent vital safety valves and welfare options for households vulnerable to economic fluctuations in the city. Through these flows of food and money, food price increases in Zimbabwe lost some of their bite and households were able to survive despite the sky-rocketing cost of living. One respondent aptly summed up their importance by saying:

Without the food that we get from the village we would not be surviving in the city. It is because of that field in the village that we do not buy maize meal, beans and sweet potatoes. Occasionally we also get meat when a goat or a cow is slaughtered. That's what makes us survive⁹.

The importance of food transfers is also seen in the fact that all households receiving food from the rural areas were using it for household consumption, with relatively few selling the food (26%) or giving it away to friends (18%). It is clear from the data that has so far been presented that rural-urban food transfers are an important component of the survival strategies of poor households in Epworth. These households are thus not only making use of the resources that they have in the urban area, but also rely on food and monetary resources from the rural areas to enhance and protect their urban livelihoods. This phenomenon, which Potts et al. [37] characterizes as straddling the rural-urban divide, is a way of life for most poor households that strive to harness sufficient resources for their survival in the deteriorating urban environment.

Sending household members to rural areas

In an urban environment where jobs are scarce and wages low, it is difficult for most poor households to sufficiently feed themselves. This was the case with most households in Epworth during Zimbabwe's crisis period. Under such circumstances, it is strategic for households to send some of their household members to the village to reduce expenses [27,37,53,54]. Such moves are different from the periodic ones that have been observed in most African cities where the wife goes to the rural areas for a substantial period during the main agricultural season and visits at other times of the year for shorter periods, in that these are forced by economic conditions in the city [28]. The move may be temporary or permanent depending on the severity of the crisis. In the same vein, a significant finding of this study was that a significant proportion of the surveyed households in Epworth were reducing their size in response to increasing hardship, by sending some of their household members to live in the rural areas. Forty-six percent of the surveyed households reported that they had household members who were normally domiciled in the city, but were at the time of the research living in the rural areas (Table 9).

By sending some of their members to the rural areas, households aimed to cut costs for food, rent, transport and any of the numerous

urban expenses that households incur. As Table 10 shows, 44% of the surveyed households reported that they had sent one or more of their members to reside in the countryside to save on food costs. For most households, this strategy had a double benefit, in that it not only reduced the number of people to be fed in the city, but also provided labour for farming in the rural area.

Other households had sent household members to the village as a way of saving on the cost of schooling, including fees and transport costs (31%). When questioned on whether the low costs of education in the rural areas could compensate for the lower quality of rural schools, the majority of the respondents argued that it was better for their children to get lower quality education in the countryside than for them to continue living in the city where they could no longer afford the fees.

Other households had sent some of their members to the village to save on rent, by reducing the number of rooms needed.

I used to rent three rooms for my family of six, but things got tough and I had to move into a single room. So we sent our elder children to live with their grandmother in the village in Mutoko. Now we only live with our youngest child aged 2 years. It is better that the children stay in the village: there they have a place to live, the school is just 2 kilometres away and the food is plenty¹⁰.

As the quote clearly illustrates, sending some members to the village and to relatives elsewhere has become a viable coping strategy for poor households facing challenges in the city. It has brought relief to those who cannot afford the high costs of rent and education in the urban area. The money saved is generally used to purchase food for the remaining household members, enabling the remaining city dwellers

Table 8: Importance of rural food transfers to urban households receiving transfers.

Importance of food from rural areas	N	% of households
Not important at all	0	0
Somewhat important	12	9
Important	18	15
Very important	71	58
Critical to survival	22	18
Total	123	100

Table 9: Proportion of urban households with members normally resident in the city now living in rural areas.

Response	N	% of households
Yes	92	46
No	108	54
Total	200	100

Table 10: Reason for sending household members to the rural area.

Reason	N	% of households with a member living in the rural area
To save on food	88	44.0
To save on school fees	62	31.0
To save on rent	47	23.5
For children to be cared for by grandparents	29	14.5
For member to look after the rural home	8	4.0

⁸Interview No. 12, 25 March 2009, Ward IV, Epworth, Harare.

⁹Interview No. 26, 28 March 2009, Ward VII, Epworth, Harare.

¹⁰Interview No. 20, 26 March 2009, Ward V, Epworth, Harare.

to cope. While for many, the relocation of some household members is not intended to be permanent, the rural areas have become a refuge for distressed urban households, giving them enough space and time to reorganize and re-strategize.

Conclusion

This paper has focused on the food security of poor urban households in Harare in a crisis context. It assessed the role of linkages that exist between the city and the village, as well as the economic relations embedded within these relationships and how they contribute to the resilience of the urban poor to household food insecurity. The paper shows that, in a country such as Zimbabwe, strong socio-cultural interactions and linkages that exist between urban and rural households are central to the survival of poor urban households, particularly during crisis periods. Through these linkages, urban households receive money and food from rural areas as well as from their own rural production there. Thus, the importance of rural resources to urban survival during times of crisis should thus not be underestimated. In addition the study also indicated that urban households were sending some of their members to live in the rural areas as a way of reducing food and other household expenses household in the city, enabling households to concentrate on feeding the remaining members. In conclusion, it can be argued that the resilience of the poor facing increased food insecurity during a 'crisis' situation, such as that in Harare, can mainly be attributed to the continued existence of strong socio-cultural as well as the economic links between urban and rural households.

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Author Affiliation

Top

¹African Centre for Cities (ACC), Department of Environmental & Geographical Science (EGS), University of Cape Town, South Africa

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