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Urban food insecurity and the new international food security agenda

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The new global and African food security agenda is overwhelmingly productionist and rural in its orientation, and is based on the premise that food insecurity is primarily a rural problem requiring a massive increase in smallholder production. This agenda is proceeding despite overwhelming evidence of rapid urbanisation and the growing likelihood of an urban future for the majority of Africans. Urban food insecurity can therefore no longer be ignored. This paper argues that achieving urban food security is the emerging development challenge for the 21st century and that the complexities of urban food systems urgently need to be addressed by researchers, policy makers, and international donors and multilateral agencies.

Keywords: AGRA; AFSUN; food security; urban; poverty

1. Introduction

Achieving food security is emerging as one of the key development challenges for Africa in the 21st century (NEPAD, 2006; FAO, 2008, 2009). Yet it is often misleadingly seen as an issue that only affects rural populations. Much of the literature on food security – and most of the development interventions to achieve it – focus on smallholder agricultural production and the plight of the rural poor (AU, 2006; UN, 2008; World Bank, 2008). International calls for a ‘green revolution’ in Africa similarly focus on how to increase the production of food for subsistence and sale amongst small farmers (AGRA, 2009; Sanchez et al., 2009). In southern Africa too, food insecurity is usually seen as a problem that affects rural populations and that to solve it small farmers must increase their production (Vogel & Smith, 2002; De Klerk et al., 2004; Misselhorn, 2004; Hendriks, 2005; Maunder & Wiggins, 2006; Aliber & Hart, 2009; Matshe, 2009; Altman et al., 2010).

In a continent undergoing rapid urbanisation, the issue of urban food security has been curiously neglected. The complexity of the urban food security situation prompts governments, international agencies, donors, NGOs and researchers to prefer the conceptual and programming simplicity of ‘rural development’ and ‘green revolutions’ for smallholders. However, soaring food costs have provoked food and bread riots in many cities of the South (Cohen & Garrett, 2009; Ruel et al., 2010). The frustrated urban poor will make themselves heard, and not in the orderly and measured way that governments and international agencies might prefer.

We argue here that urban, not rural, food security is the emerging development issue for southern Africa. The food security challenges facing the urban poor, and the factors that affect urban food systems, can no longer be wished away or marginalised. Urban food insecurity is not reducible to the ‘grow more’ solutions currently on offer in the world

of international development. There needs to be greater recognition by international organisations, regional bodies and national and subnational governments that urban food security is a critical issue requiring urgent attention. The food security strategies of the urban poor, and how these are thwarted or enabled, are critical to the future stability of African cities and the residents' quality of life.

This paper first reviews the recent emergence of food security as a central development issue on the global and continental agenda, arguing that rural bias is being reproduced and perpetuated in these policy agendas. The next section examines global and regional trends in urbanisation and the dimensions of urban poverty and food insecurity in southern Africa, arguing that the rural bias of the contemporary food security agenda is misplaced and inconsistent with Africa's increasingly urban future. The final section presents an agenda for addressing food security issues in southern African towns and cities.

2. Global food security and rural bias

The publication of Amartya Sen's seminal work, *Poverty and Famines* (1981), revolutionised thinking about the nature and causes of food insecurity. As Simon Maxwell observes, 'It has been impossible since the early 1980s to speak credibly of food security as being a problem of food supply, without at least making reference to the importance of access and entitlement' (1996:157). Sen argued that sufficient food is often available, even in the midst of devastating rural famine and acute hunger. Rather, food insecurity was more often about the inability to access sufficient food. Sen's vision of dearth amidst plenty is very relevant to the urban areas of contemporary Africa. The supermarkets are bursting with fresh and processed foodstuffs while on their doorstep poor households struggle to access enough staples to feed themselves more than once a day. Food may be more plentiful and more diverse in the city than in the countryside but it is far from being uniformly accessible. As Bryant notes, 'The donor [and government] emphasis on increasing production as a response to hunger is limited, since a substantial part of the problem is that poor people cannot afford to purchase the food they need' (1988:11). Her observation is as pertinent today as it was 20 years ago.

The current round of international attention to food security can be traced back to the 1996 World Food Summit in Rome (FAO, 1996). The Rome Declaration on Food Security noted that 800 million people worldwide were undernourished and affirmed 'the right of everyone to have access to safe and nutritious food, consistent with the right to adequate food and the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger' (FAO, 1996:1). The Declaration's stated objective was to reduce the number of undernourished people by half by no later than 2015, a commitment later reaffirmed in the first Millennium Development Goal (MDG) in 2000. Goal One included a commitment to halve the 1990 level of people living on less than a dollar a day and to reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger (as measured by the prevalence of underweight children under five years of age and the proportion of the population below the minimum level of dietary energy consumption).

The 1996 World Food Summit adopted an ambitious plan of action with a number of policy commitments: (a) achieving sustainable food security for all by creating an enabling political, social and economic environment for the eradication of poverty and for durable peace, based on the full and equal participation of women and men, (b) implementing policies aimed at eradicating poverty and inequality and improving

physical and economic access by all people, at all times, to sufficient, nutritionally adequate and safe food and its effective utilisation, (c) developing participatory and sustainable food, agriculture, fisheries, forestry and rural development policies and practices, (d) ensuring food, agricultural trade and overall trade policies that are conducive to fostering food security for all through a fair and market oriented world trade system, (e) preparing for natural disasters and man-made emergencies and meeting transitory and emergency food requirements in ways that encourage recovery, rehabilitation, development and a capacity to satisfy future needs, and (f) allocating public and private investments to foster human resources, sustainable food, agriculture, fisheries and forestry systems, and rural development (FAO, 1996). These 'commitments' were a clear signal that food security should not just be seen as a technical challenge of how to increase smallholder food production. Rather, it demanded a broader set of policy interventions to create and sustain enabling policy environments for the food security of all.

In 1997, following the Rome Summit, the UN Administrative Coordination Committee established a Network on Rural Development and Food Security to support efforts by governments and their partners to implement the Plan of Action and new rural development and food security programmes. Seventy-five countries and 20 UN organisations were represented in this network. A Committee on World Food Security (CFS) was also appointed by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN (FAO) to monitor progress in implementing the 1996 Plan of Action. Despite the promise of the Declaration, however, food security programming was increasingly constructed by the international community as a rural and small farmer issue.

At the World Food Summit in 2002, 180 heads of state and government reaffirmed the Rome commitment to halve the number of undernourished people in the world by 2015. In its 2006 mid-term report, however, the CFS (2006:1) noted dismally that 'progress in reducing the number of undernourished people has been negligible'. In 2009, the FAO estimated that the number of undernourished people had passed one billion for the first time. In sub-Saharan Africa, the number grew from 169 million in 1990 to 265 million in 2009. The CFS reported that Africa was still the 'most food-insecure region in the world' with east, central and southern Africa in particular showing 'negative trends' (2006:9).

In its 2006 progress report, the CFS responded to the evidence of 'zero progress' by paring back the bold and far-reaching 'commitments' of the 1996 Plan of Action and replacing them with a narrower 'twin-track' of (a) direct interventions and social investments to address the immediate needs of the poor and hungry (food aid, social safety nets, and so on) and (b) development programmes to enhance the performance of the productive sectors (especially to promote agriculture and rural development), create employment and increase the value of assets held by the poor (2006:16). The rural bias of the twin-track approach was justified as follows: 'As three-fourths of the people who suffer from hunger are rural-dwellers, increased rural production by smallholders is . . . the key to food security' (CFS, 2006:11). Furthermore, 'the World Food Summit target and the MDGs . . . can only be achieved if rural livelihoods are improved'. With regard to Africa, the mantra was repeated: 'revitalisation of the agriculture sector remains fundamental for altering the region's hunger trend, especially since 80% of Africans depend on farming for income' (CFS, 2006:9). In 2008, the FAO approvingly claimed that this twin-track approach had been 'widely adopted by the development community' (FAO, 2008:33).

The dramatic escalation in global food prices in 2007/08 greatly intensified international concern about global food insecurity (Clapp & Cohen, 2009; Cohen & Garrett, 2009). Despite abundant evidence that the urban poor were more seriously affected than the rural poor, the rural twin-track response survived unchallenged. The UN Secretary General appointed a High Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis in April 2008 to coordinate a global response. In July 2008, the Taskforce released a Comprehensive Framework for Action (CFA) which affirmed that 'high food prices may be driving another 100 million more people into poverty and hunger to add to the 800 million already in this parlous state' (UN, 2008:2). The CFA proposed two urgent 'sets of actions' as part of a 'comprehensive response' to the global food crisis: (a) meeting the immediate needs of vulnerable populations by enhancing emergency food assistance, nutrition interventions and safety nets; boosting smallholder farmer food production; adjusting trade and tax policies; and managing macroeconomic implications; and (b) building resilience and contributing to global food and nutrition security by expanding social protection systems; sustaining the growth of food production through smallholder farming; improving international food markets; and developing an international biofuel consensus.

Unsurprisingly, given the similarities in organisational composition of the CFS and the UN High Level Taskforce, the ways in which they conceptualise food security and the solutions they propose are strikingly similar. Urban food security is not specifically precluded from the discussions but neither is it explicitly mentioned. A closer reading of their documentation suggests that when they refer to food security, their vision of the problem and its solutions is primarily rural. While the CFA appears to take a broader perspective on possible solutions, its core proposals actually duplicate the 'twin-track' approach of the CFS, i.e. rural smallholder agricultural production is to be increased and social protection systems are to be strengthened.

The 2008 FAO report on *The State of Food Insecurity in the World* focuses on the theme of 'High Food Prices and Food Security' and also reiterates the twin-track approach by proposing (a) measures to enable the agriculture sector, especially smallholders in developing countries, to respond to the high prices, and (b) carefully targeted safety nets and social protection programmes for the most food-insecure and vulnerable (FAO, 2008:4). Despite the fact that the urban poor are more vulnerable to high food prices than the rural poor, no proposals are advanced that take account of their particular food security problems (FAO, 2008:11).

In July 2009 the G8 pledged \$20 billion for a new Food Security Initiative focused on boosting smallholder production in developing countries. In similar vein, the World Bank has begun to champion a new 'rural development' agenda after a period of relative lack of interest in agriculture, following the failure of its Structural Adjustment Programmes (see World Bank, 1986). The 2008 World Development Report advocates a new 'agriculture for development' strategy and warns that the sector must at the centre of the international development agenda if the MDG goal is to be realised (World Bank, 2008). Justifying the 'new agenda', the Bank also notes that '75% of the developing world's poor live in rural areas' (World Bank, 2008:45). The Bank proposes a four-part 'policy diamond'. Each part is allocated a priority, with the highest priority going to a 'smallholder revolution and export promotion' followed by 'securing livelihoods and food security of subsistence farmers'. Once again, the urban is all but invisible.

The rural bias of the FAO, UN, World Bank and Western donors is echoed at the regional and national level in Africa. The Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA),

headed by Kofi Annan and backed by the Gates and Rockefeller Foundations, views small farmer production as the key to food security: 'Investments in African agriculture must focus on the continent's high-potential breadbasket areas . . . Such investments must support the millions of smallholder farmers who grow the majority of Africa's food; nurture the diversity on their farms; and bring about comprehensive change that strengthens the entire agricultural system' (AGRA, 2011) Food insecurity, as it was in the 1970s and 1980s, is defined as a production problem which 'rural development' will supposedly solve (Broca, 2002; Shaw, 2007).

The 2006 Abuja Declaration of the African Union Food Security Summit committed the organisation to supporting small farm agriculture 'within and across countries in Africa' (AU, 2006). NEPAD's Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP) was established as a growth-oriented rural agriculture agenda. The CAADP begins with the assertion that 'Africa, most of whose people are farmers, is unable to feed itself' (NEPAD, 2002:7). Furthermore, 'the rural areas, where agriculture is the mainstay of all people, support some 70 to 80% of the total population, including 70% of the continent's extreme poor and undernourished'. In the short term 'the need is for an immediate impact on the livelihoods and food security of the rural poor through raising their own production'. The CAADP proposes four rural action 'pillars': increasing small farmer productivity, agricultural research, and technology dissemination and adoption (NEPAD, 2006).

The food security agenda of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has a similar rural and agricultural focus. SADC's Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) calls for specific capacity in food security and early warning systems (SADC, 2003). Both the RISDP and the SADC Food Security Framework document urge increased agricultural production at household, national and regional levels to mitigate food insecurity. One of the four directorates in the SADC Secretariat is for Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources (FANR). FANR's mission is 'sustainable food security' through programmes in agricultural information management, crop development, livestock development, natural resources management, environment and sustainable development, and agricultural research and development.

SADC's rural and small farmer agricultural orientation has been reproduced by individual SADC governments (Drimie & Mini, 2003; Maunder & Wiggins, 2006). Many have developed national food security strategies and plans of action. Responsibility for implementation has generally been handed to Ministries of Agriculture (see, for example, GoN, 1995; Cammack et al., 2003; Kalinda et al., 2003; Mudimu, 2003; De Klerk et al., 2004; Cromwell & Kyegombe, 2005; GoL, 2005; GoS, 2005; Chopra et al., 2009). By definition, food security programming (and the support efforts of donors) has become synonymous with strategies for smallholders to revitalise rural agricultural production (Matshe, 2009).

Criticism of the new global food security agenda is starting to grow (Ellis & Harris, 2004; NAI, 2007; Collier, 2008; Holt-Giménez, 2008; Patel et al., 2009). One argument is that the agenda relies on the simplistic view that Africa is – and will continue to be – a primarily or exclusively agrarian economy. Collier (2009:62) suggests that there is misplaced romanticism about rural areas and small farmers in Africa:

Peasant agriculture offers only a narrow range of economic activities with little scope for sustaining decent livelihoods. In other societies people have escaped poverty by moving out of agriculture. The same is true in Africa: young people want to leave the land; educated people want to

work in the cities. Above all, people want jobs . . . The reality of peasant life is one of drudgery, precarious insecurity, and frustration of talent . . . We should do whatever we can to ameliorate the conditions under which African peasants struggle to lead satisfying lives. But we should recognise these approaches for what they are: they are highly unlikely to be transformative. We know what brings about a transformation of opportunities and it is not this.

Turner (2009:1) suggests there is an erroneous assumption that 'food security is about adequate food production by the agricultural sector'. In Lesotho, food security 'must be sought largely or entirely outside the agricultural sector'. This is increasingly true for other southern African countries as well. Others argue that the focus on smallholders is inappropriate in highly urbanised countries where the rural poor depend on remittances and social grants (Kepe, 2009).

Our concern is not with how the new international agenda understands the nature and causes of rural food insecurity but rather with what it has to say about the food security of urban populations. The answer is 'very little', at least explicitly. In all the policy documents and statements of this agenda, it is almost as if the urban does not exist in Africa. Nowhere is there any systematic attempt to differentiate rural from urban food security, to understand the dimensions and determinants of urban food security, to examine the links between rural and urban food security, to assess whether the rural policy prescriptions for reducing hunger and malnutrition are relevant to urban populations, or to develop policies that are specific to the food needs of the urban poor.

3. Urban futures

Over a decade ago, Maxwell (1999) argued that food insecurity in African cities is invisible to policy makers. With the exception of work on urban agriculture, it is hardly more visible today (Mougeot, 2005, 2006; Van Veenhuizen, 2006; Hovorka et al., 2009; Redwood, 2009). Maxwell suggested several reasons for the situation. First, policy makers tend to equate food insecurity with rural areas, where it is a more visible seasonal and community-wide phenomenon. Second, urban food insecurity is obscured by more urgent urban problems such as unemployment, the burgeoning of the informal sector, overcrowding, decaying infrastructure, and declining services. Third, 'so long as food insecurity is a household-level problem and does not translate into a political problem, it does not attract policy attention' (Maxwell, 1999:28). Koc et al. (1999:4) suggested additional reasons for the silence. One was that 'the complexity of cities – the diversity of their class, gender, ethnic, and demographic characteristics and their corresponding needs and access problems – creates new challenges in the attempt to ensure urban food security'. The other was that the food security of the urban poor is not simply a function of what goes on within the boundaries of the nation-state. The globalisation of food systems poses considerable challenges to those seeking regulatory mechanisms that would work in the interests of the rapidly growing numbers of urban poor.

The rural population in most developing countries is growing at a decreasing rate while the opposite is true of the urban population. The UN predicts that by 2020 the urban population of developing countries will exceed 50% and continue to climb thereafter (Figure 1). Over the next 30 years virtually all of the anticipated three billion increase in the human population is expected to occur in cities of the developing world. The authors of the 2006/07 State of the World Cities Report predict very high rates of urbanisation for Africa:

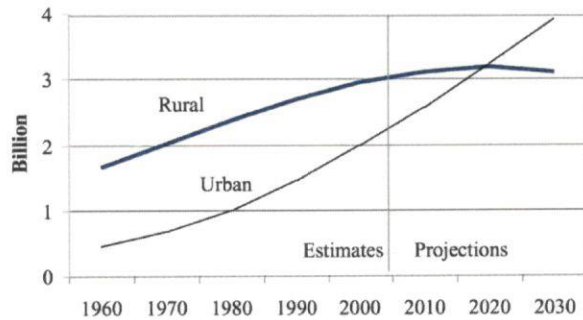


Figure 1: Urban and rural population in developing countries 1960–2030

Cities of the developing world will absorb 95% of urban growth in the next two decades, and by 2030 will be home to almost 4 billion people, or 80% of the world's urban population. After 2015, the world's rural population will begin to shrink as urban growth becomes more intense in cities of Asia and Africa, two regions that are set to host the world's largest urban populations in 2030, 2.66 billion and 748 million, respectively. (Moreno & Warah, 2006:iv)

Between 2000 and 2030 Africa's urban population is projected to increase by 367 million and its rural population by 141 million. By 2030, Africa will have a larger urban than rural population (579 million versus 552 million) (Kessides, 2005) (see Figure 2).

In 2005, Latin America was the most urbanised region of the South at around 77%, a figure expected to rise to 84% by 2025 (Table 1). Asia was 40% urbanised in 2005, a figure projected to rise to 51% by 2025. In 2005, Asia had an urban population of 1.6 billion, Latin America 432 million and Africa 350 million (Table 2). In the 2015 target year for the MDGs, there will be an estimated two billion urban dwellers in Asia, 508 million in Latin America and 484 million in Africa. By 2025, these numbers are projected to reach 2.4 billion, 575 million and 658 million. Even in the most 'rural' of continents (Africa), urbanisation is proceeding at a rapid rate, with urban growth rates at 4 to 5% per annum.

The 15 SADC countries have a combined population of approximately 220 million, of whom just under half are estimated to live in urban and peri-urban areas for some or all of the time. In virtually all SADC countries, the urban population is growing rapidly and this is expected to continue for several decades. In 1990, the urban population of SADC was 53.2 million and only one country had more than half its population in

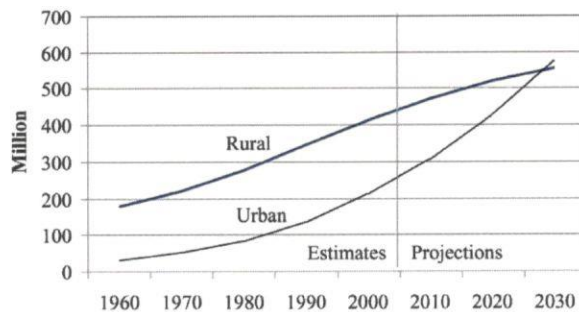


Figure 2: Urban and rural population in sub-Saharan Africa 1960–2030

Table 1: Projected global urbanisation 1995–2025 (% urban)

	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025
North America	77.3	79.1	80.7	82.1	83.4	84.6	85.7
Europe	71.0	71.4	71.9	72.6	73.5	74.8	76.2
Latin America	73.0	75.3	77.5	79.4	80.9	82.3	83.5
Asia	34.4	37.1	39.7	42.5	45.3	48.1	51.2
Africa	34.1	35.9	37.9	39.9	42.2	44.6	47.2
World	44.7	46.6	48.6	50.6	52.7	54.9	57.2

Source: UN-HABITAT (2008).

Table 2: Urban population of SADC countries 1990–2030

	1990	2000	2010	2020	2030
Angola	3 908 114	6 825 700	10 818 405	15 951 540	21 946 832
Botswana	572 773	919 828	1 142 505	1 463 540	1 714 266
DRC	10 547 876	15 096 382	24 291 520	39 217 500	60 385 128
Lesotho	224 140	377 200	549 836	746 235	954 848
Madagascar	2 839 788	4 386 677	6 432 298	9 424 745	13 633 434
Malawi	1 095 736	1 766 696	2 977 326	4 883 250	7 630 200
Mauritius	464 023	506 422	549 966	623 796	732 160
Mozambique	2 857 784	5 585 558	8 691 840	12 412 567	16 709 829
Namibia	392 509	608 796	819 660	1 078 032	1 379 170
Seychelles	35 496	42 330	48 664	56 212	63 936
South Africa	19 020 040	25 831 462	30 404 526	34 153 146	37 957 268
Swaziland	198 085	246 514	295 800	369 054	467 680
Tanzania	4 818 366	7 548 327	11 495 088	17 324 322	25 354 692
Zambia	3 200 068	3 636 948	4 507 125	5 910 077	7 987 890
Zimbabwe	3 041 230	4 277 728	5 270 080	6 698 262	8 430 396
Total SADC	53 216 028	77 657 568	108 290 639	150 312 278	205 347 649

Source: UN-HABITAT (2008).

urban areas (with South Africa at 52%). By 2030 the figure is expected to increase to 205.3 million (Table 2). Eight countries will then have more than half their population in urban areas (Table 3). Another four will be more than 40% urban.

Southern Africa has the highest urbanisation rate in the world. In all of its countries (with the exception of Mauritius and Zambia for a period in the 1990s), urban growth rates are significantly higher than rural rates (Table 4). Between 2005 and 2010, nine countries are expected to have rural growth rates of less than 1.0% per annum and three to have negative growth rates. Malawi's urban population is growing at over 5.0% per annum and the urban population of countries such as Angola, the DRC, Lesotho, Mozambique and Tanzania has been growing at over 4.0% per annum.

Rural to urban migration is fuelling the growth in urbanisation. A recent AFSUN (African Urban Food Security Urban Network) survey of poor communities in 11 SADC cities found that only 13% of poor urban households were non-migrant

Table 3: Projected urbanisation in SADC countries 1990–2030 (% urban)

	1990	2000	2010	2020	2030
Angola	37.1	49.0	58.5	66.0	71.6
Botswana	41.9	53.2	61.1	67.6	72.7
DRC	27.8	29.8	35.2	42.0	49.2
Lesotho	14.0	20.0	26.9	34.5	42.4
Madagascar	23.6	27.1	30.2	34.9	41.4
Malawi	11.6	15.2	19.8	25.5	32.4
Mauritius	43.9	42.7	42.6	45.4	51.1
Mozambique	21.1	30.7	38.4	46.3	53.7
Namibia	27.7	32.4	38.0	44.4	51.5
Seychelles	49.3	51.0	55.3	61.1	66.6
South Africa	52.0	56.9	61.7	66.6	71.3
Swaziland	22.9	23.3	25.5	30.3	37.0
Tanzania	18.9	22.3	26.4	31.8	38.7
Zambia	39.4	34.8	35.7	38.9	44.7
Zimbabwe	29.0	33.8	38.3	43.9	50.7

Source: UN-HABITAT (2008).

Table 4: Projected rates of SADC urban and rural population growth

	Urban (% p.a.)			Rural (% p.a.)		
	1995–2000	2000–2005	2005–2010	1995–2000	2000–2005	2005–2010
Angola	4.6	4.8	4.4	0.6	0.8	0.7
Botswana	3.6	2.7	2.8	0.2	-0.6	-0.6
DRC	3.2	4.4	5.1	1.8	2.3	2.3
Lesotho	5.0	4.0	3.5	1.1	0.1	-0.3
Madagascar	4.0	3.8	3.8	2.6	2.8	2.2
Malawi	5.5	5.5	5.2	2.4	2.1	1.8
Mauritius	0.8	0.7	0.9	1.3	1.0	0.7
Mozambique	5.8	4.7	4.5	1.4	1.3	0.7
Namibia	4.1	3.0	2.9	1.8	0.6	0.4
Seychelles	1.9	1.8	1.4	0.9	0.3	-0.6
Swaziland	2.2	1.9	1.7	1.9	1.0	0.3
Tanzania	4.1	4.2	4.2	2.0	2.1	2.5
Zambia	1.1	2.0	2.3	3.1	1.8	1.7
Zimbabwe	2.7	1.9	2.2	0.8	0.1	0.2

Source: UN-HABITAT (2008).

(i.e. every member born in the city). Of the rest, 38% were migrant households (no one born in the city) and 49% were mixed (with migrants and non-migrants). Although the overall SADC trend is towards greater urbanisation, this is rarely a one-time rural-urban move (Potts, 2010). Many migrants maintain strong links with the countryside and engage in circular migration. Ongoing attachment to the rural areas will be far less significant for subsequent generations who are born and grow up in urban areas.

The reality of Africa's urban transition poses a considerable challenge to the (renewed and exclusive) international attention on the food security of rural populations. If all of the world's poor and food insecure lived in rural areas, this would seem justifiable. Yet, as the 2006/07 State of the World Cities Report notes, large sections of the urban population in developing countries are suffering from extreme levels of deprivation that are often even more debilitating than those experienced by the rural poor:

It is a myth that urban populations are healthier, more literate or more prosperous than people living in the countryside. The report provides concrete data that shows that the world's one billion slum dwellers are more likely to die earlier, experience more hunger and disease, attain less education and have fewer chances of employment than those urban residents that do not reside in a slum. But the report also cites examples of how good housing and employment policies can prevent slums from growing. (Schlein & Kruger, 2006)

UN-HABITAT's Executive Director characterised cities of the South as 'two cities within one city – one part of the urban population that has all the benefits of urban living, and the other part, the slums and squatter settlements, where the poor often live under worse conditions than their rural relatives' (UN-HABITAT, 2006).

In the SADC countries, rapid urbanisation and increased slum dwelling are accompanied by growing poverty and vulnerability to disease, environmental stressors and food insecurity. The extent of urban poverty is often underestimated because of definitional and measurement shortcomings (Parnell, 2005). Chronic poverty is increasingly concentrated in urban centres. In South Africa, while a 'higher proportion of the rural population is poor, the proportion of the poor who are in rural areas is declining' (Leibrandt et al., 2006:113–14). Large numbers of people live in urban informal settlements, lack adequate tenure and have poor access to infrastructure and social services. The high costs associated with urban shelter, transport, health and education also undermine the ability of the chronically poor to access sufficient food.

4. The dimensions of urban food insecurity in SADC

In the late 1990s, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) found high levels of urban food insecurity in developing countries around the globe (Ruel et al., 1999a, 1999b; Garrett & Ruel, 1999, 2000). The IFPRI examined data from household surveys in 10 African countries and found that 'contrary to expectations, the percentage of the population found to be energy deficient is higher in urban areas in six of the ten countries studied. In all countries except Kenya and Uganda, at least 40% of the urban population is energy deficient; with percentages reaching 90% in urban Ethiopia and 76 and 72% in urban Malawi and Zambia, respectively' (Ruel & Garrett, 2004:243). The study also found high levels of child under-nutrition in urban areas although they were generally lower than in rural areas. However, while 'urbanisation seems to bring about positive improvements in young children's diets, it also brings a number of unhealthy diet changes such as increased consumption of saturated and trans fats, sugars, salt and processed foods that contain excessive amounts of these components' (Ruel & Garrett, 2004).

A more focused case study of 624 poor households in Cape Town provided important insights into the relationship between poverty and food insecurity (De Swardt, 2004; Chopra, 2004; De Swardt et al., 2005). Three-quarters of the households in the study fell below the official poverty line of R352 per adult per month (50% less than R185

and 33% less than R100). Most households depended on multiple sources of income; more than half had no wage income at all (with 52% of males and 72% of females unemployed). Food was the largest single expense (39% of average monthly expenses). A total of 81% of households reported having insufficient food in the previous year, 70% reported hunger and 43% were short of food at any given time. Only 3% engaged in urban agriculture. Even when food was available, diets were extremely poor: more than half the households rarely or never had meat or eggs, 47% never ate fruit and 34% rarely ate vegetables.

In Mozambique, data from the 2002/03 Mozambican Household Survey showed that food deprivation was higher among urban than rural populations (52% versus 23%) (Diogo et al., 2008). The depth of hunger (measured in terms of the average dietary energy consumed) was also higher in urban than rural areas. Another study in Maputo found that the proportion of urban households in the lowest two income quintiles increased from 18% in 1996/07 to 41% in 2002/03. Only 54% of people over the age of 15 were economically active (Paulo et al., 2007). Of these, 23% were formally employed and 76% were in the informal economy. In the poorest quintile, formal employment was only 15%. Households in this quintile spent 43% of their income on food. The survey of four *barrios* (neighbourhoods) showed that households have a variety of income streams. Twenty-seven per cent received remittance income from outside the city (primarily South Africa), 30% had access to plots for agriculture (in either the city or peri-urban or rural areas) and 25% produced enough for sale. High food prices were an important reason for impoverishment as many 'have to live only on bread' (Paulo et al., 2007:54).

A recent survey of 1278 households in 10 urban centres in Lesotho defined several 'livelihood groups' in terms of the most important source of household income (LDMA/LVAC/WFP, 2008). Most households had more than one income source but median monthly income was only 300 maluti.¹ Fifty-one per cent of the expenditure of the 'very poor' is on food. A third of the households were receiving food, cash, or both, from friends or relatives inside the country and 8% were receiving support from outside the country. This varied considerably from town to town: in Maseru, for example, nearly half the households (46%) received assistance from outside Lesotho. Since most of this assistance comes from migrants in South Africa, it is clear that inter-city transfers of cash and goods are an important element of urban food security in Lesotho (Crush et al., 2010).

Studies in urban Zimbabwe by the Zimbabwe Vulnerability Action Committee (ZVAC) show how food insecurity increased for urban dwellers as the political and economic situation in the country deteriorated. Between 2006 and 2009, for example, the proportion of food insecure urban households increased from 24% to 33% (ZVAC, 2009). The proportion consuming two or fewer meals a day increased from 42% to 76%, and the proportion with adequate dietary diversity declined from 87% to 59%. Food purchase (70%) and own production (15%) were the major sources of food for urban households (ZVAC, 2009:18). Coping strategies included limiting portions, reducing the number of meals, borrowing food, buying food on credit, eating less preferable foods and selling off assets.

These case studies provide insights into the seriousness of the food security situation in some urban areas in SADC. However, the results are not strictly comparable since the

studies were undertaken at different times using different methodologies and kinds of food insecurity measures. In 2008/09, AFSUN therefore developed and implemented a baseline food security survey in 11 major cities in nine SADC countries. A total of 6453 households were interviewed. The detailed findings of that survey are discussed elsewhere (AFSUN, 2010). However, three general findings need to be highlighted here.

First, overall levels of household food insecurity across the region are very high (at 76% for all poor urban households) (Figure 3). This means that about four out of five households do not have enough to eat at any given time. In the cities of Maseru, Manzini, Lusaka and Harare, 90% or more households are food insecure. Even Cape Town (80%) and Msunduzi (87%) have higher than average levels of food insecurity, despite South Africa being the wealthiest country in the region.

Second, on virtually every measure of food insecurity and consumption, there is considerable variation from city to city. Sometimes this variation is very significant. For example, 22% of urban households sampled grow some of their own food, but this ranges from a low of 3% in Windhoek to a high of 60% in Blantyre. This suggests that local conditions are extremely important in determining the level of food insecurity and confirms that large-scale quantitative, statistically representative surveys need to be supplemented by in-depth qualitative research at the level of the individual, household and community (Hendriks, 2005; Hart, 2009).

Third, the majority of poor urban households purchase the bulk of their food. Household income and the cost of food are therefore critical determinants of food security. The households purchase food from a wide variety of sources, the most important being supermarkets, the informal economy and small outlets (grocers, corner stores, restaurants and fast-food outlets.) Perhaps the most striking finding of the survey was the importance of supermarkets to poor urban households (with 80% purchasing food there) (Crush & Frayne, 2011). The informal economy is also extremely important to households, with 70% obtaining food from this source. Two-thirds of households reported sourcing food from small outlets. As food insecurity increases, however, so households rely less on supermarkets and more on the informal economy (Figure 4).

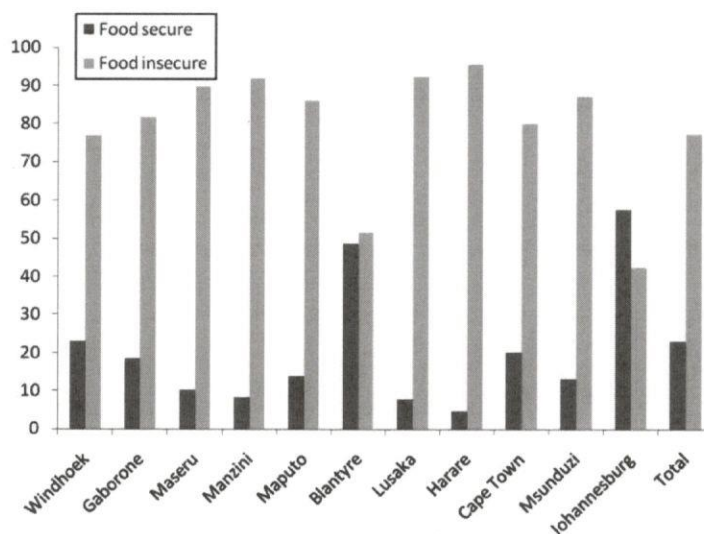


Figure 3: Comparison of city levels of household food insecurity

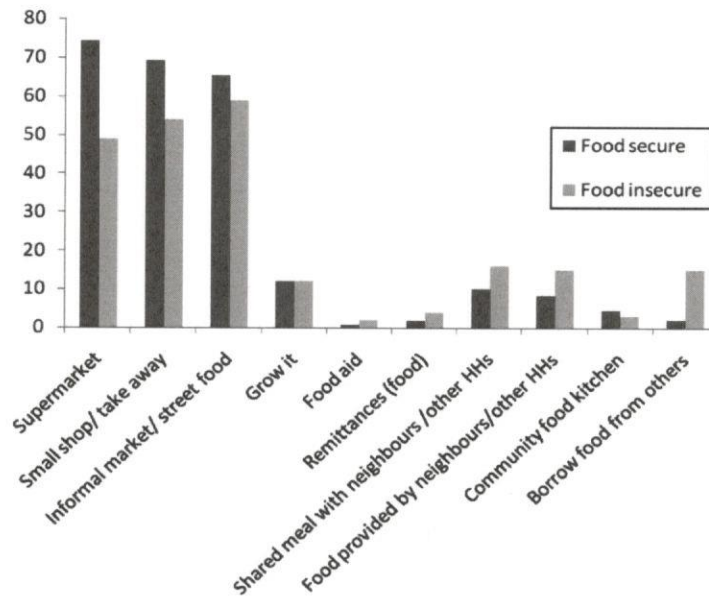


Figure 4: Sources of food for food secure and food insecure households

5. Conclusion

Within contemporary global food security discourse, the urban is all but invisible. Policy prescriptions focus on the national level and on food production by small farmers. Where livelihoods and gender are discussed, a rural framework is employed, assuming no difference between the rural and urban. However, the urban has particular dynamics and cross-scale linkages that need to be considered in understanding the dimensions of urban food security. Will deep-seated and worsening problems of poverty and food insecurity in southern African cities be resolved by the 'twin-track' approach favoured by the international development community? To think this would be naïve at best. Urban food security is a complex issue which will not be resolved by pumping donor funds into seed and fertiliser packs for rural communities or by social security hand-outs.

The evidence suggests that, with urbanisation, household agriculture is becoming less significant as a primary food source. Food purchase is critical in urban areas and becoming more so in rural areas. Yet in most countries food prices are rising faster than inflation, with deleterious consequences for household food security amongst the poorer sectors of society. Increasingly, the most vulnerable populations are in urban areas. A strong case can therefore be made that food security development interventions also need to focus on urban areas and recognise the limits of smallholder agriculture for meeting the household food gap or providing the engine for long-term economic growth. Nothing is to be gained by ignoring the urban poor, who are growing inexorably in number and whose vulnerability to food insecurity is often as great as or even greater than that of the rural poor.

Endemic poverty is expanding as the region's population grows and the urbanisation process unfolds. Under current conditions, the ongoing failure of economic growth to lift the majority of people out of poverty is contributing directly to the inability of urban people to access sufficient food, resulting in chronic food insecurity. At the

same time, urbanisation is leading to significant urban sprawl, increasing the cost of living in the city, destroying valuable agricultural land and increasing the demand for energy, water and food. The ecological footprint of some southern African cities is already large and comparable to that of cities in industrial countries, which are also ecologically unsustainable. This cycle of poverty and unsustainable urban growth can be broken, and one way to do that is through an orchestrated effort by all levels of government that focuses on food as the major requirement for well-being and as the major driving force behind the re-engineering of cities into sustainable, inclusive and healthy environments.

The findings and analysis in this paper demonstrate that food insecurity is a widespread, poverty-related phenomenon in the cities of southern Africa. These high levels of chronic hunger exist in the context of rapid urbanisation and, in the absence of large-scale, sustained employment growth, are likely to persist in the coming decades. While there are now substantive regional initiatives to address food security, these policies and frameworks have gaps which limit their potential impact, particularly with regard to *urban* food security. The city is a critical development frontier and has particular dynamics and cross-scale linkages that need to be considered in order to understand – and ultimately address – the growing epidemic of urban food insecurity.

Urban food insecurity does not easily lend itself to the small farmer prognostications of the international food security agenda. Nor is urban agriculture the panacea it was once thought to be. Crush et al. (2011) show that urban agriculture and its contribution to household food security are insubstantial in many poor areas of SADC cities. Urban food security is more about access, regularity, food safety and nutritional diversity and quality. To fully understand the complexity of urban food insecurity we need to know much more about urban food supply and distribution systems, both formal and informal (and the ways they interact). The informal economy is a key determinant of food access for the urban poor and needs to be better supported and less pilloried in policy. Supermarkets are rapidly emerging as a major food source for the urban poor throughout southern Africa and the implications of supermarket expansion for food insecurity therefore need much more attention. In policy terms, regional, national and municipal governments need to build on the evidence from a comprehensive programme of research to create a new urban food security agenda and formulate city-specific food security plans.

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