



feeding Africa's cities in the 21st century

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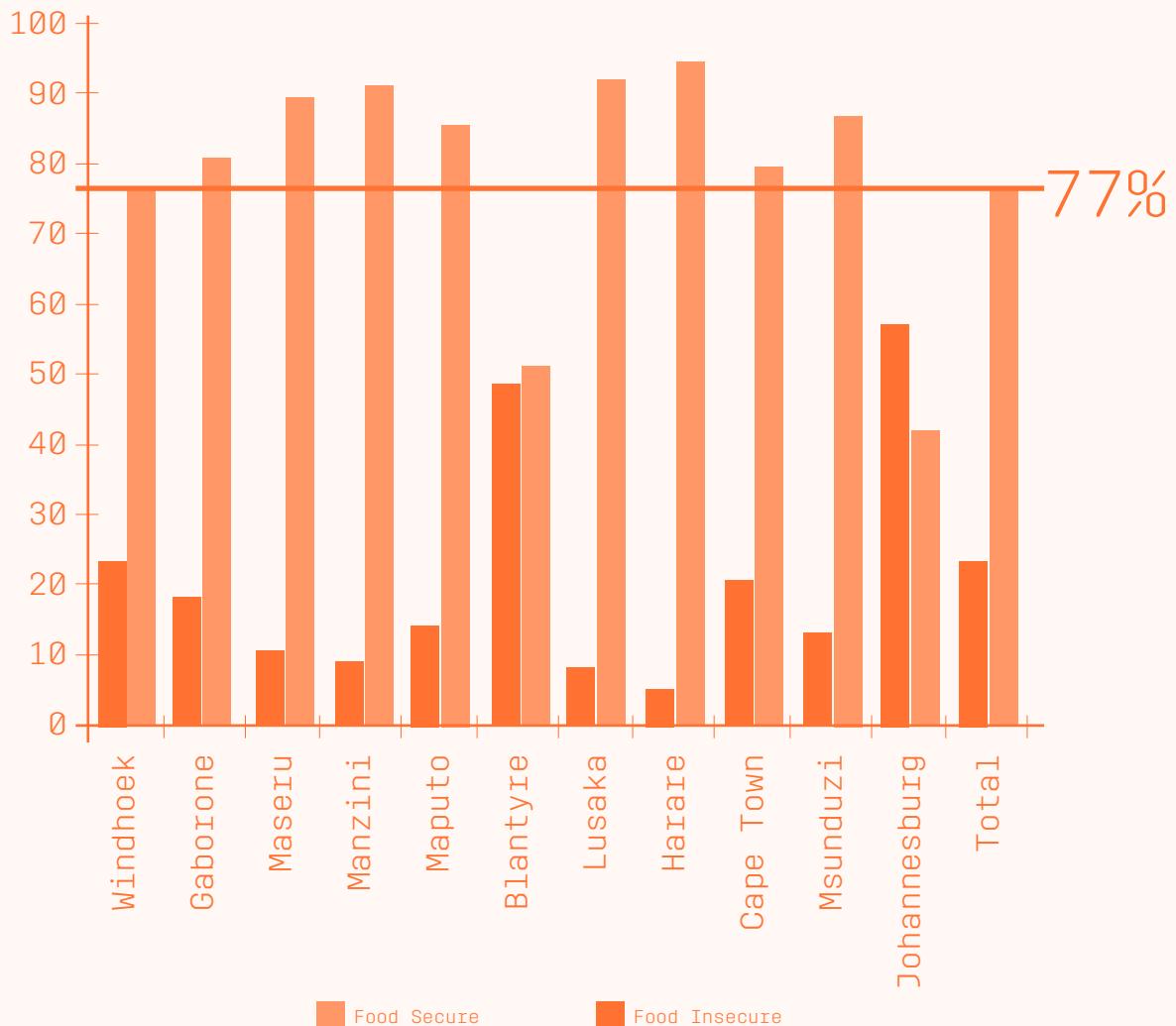
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POLICY BRIEF

AFRICAN
URBAN
RESEARCH
INITIATIVE

Initiative Africaine de Recherche Urbaine

**FACED WITH RAPIDLY
GROWING POPULATIONS
AND A FOOD SYSTEM
WHERE THE LEAST
NUTRITIOUS FOOD
IS OFTEN THE MOST
ACCESSIBLE, HOW
CAN AFRICAN CITIES
ENSURE ADEQUATE
ACCESS TO
NUTRITIOUS FOOD
FOR ALL?**



**SPECIFIC TO SAMPLED POOR HOUSEHOLDS IN THESE CITIES
HOUSEHOLD FOOD SECURITY STATUS FOR 11 CITIES**

Frayne, B. and Pendleton, W. 2009 Urban Food Security in Southern Africa. Presented at African Food Security Urban Network (AFSUN) Regional Policy Conference, 10-12 June, 2009, Ekurhuleni Municipality.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sub-Saharan Africa is the world's hungriest region¹, with about 220 million undernourished people². There is enough food produced globally to feed the world³, yet millions are hungry because they cannot afford to buy nutritious food.^{4,5,6}

Feeding Africa's rapidly growing urban poor population – and thus preventing the many problems that arise from food insecurity – is one of the region's biggest development challenges⁷. To meet this challenge, questions of urban food security must first be understood in the context of a larger and flawed food system that is often led by global and market forces rather than the needs of hungry people⁸. Policy measures must address the complex and multi-sectoral nature of food systems. Underlying all action, however, is the urgent need for policymakers and government officials to actively address the systemic drivers of food insecurity.

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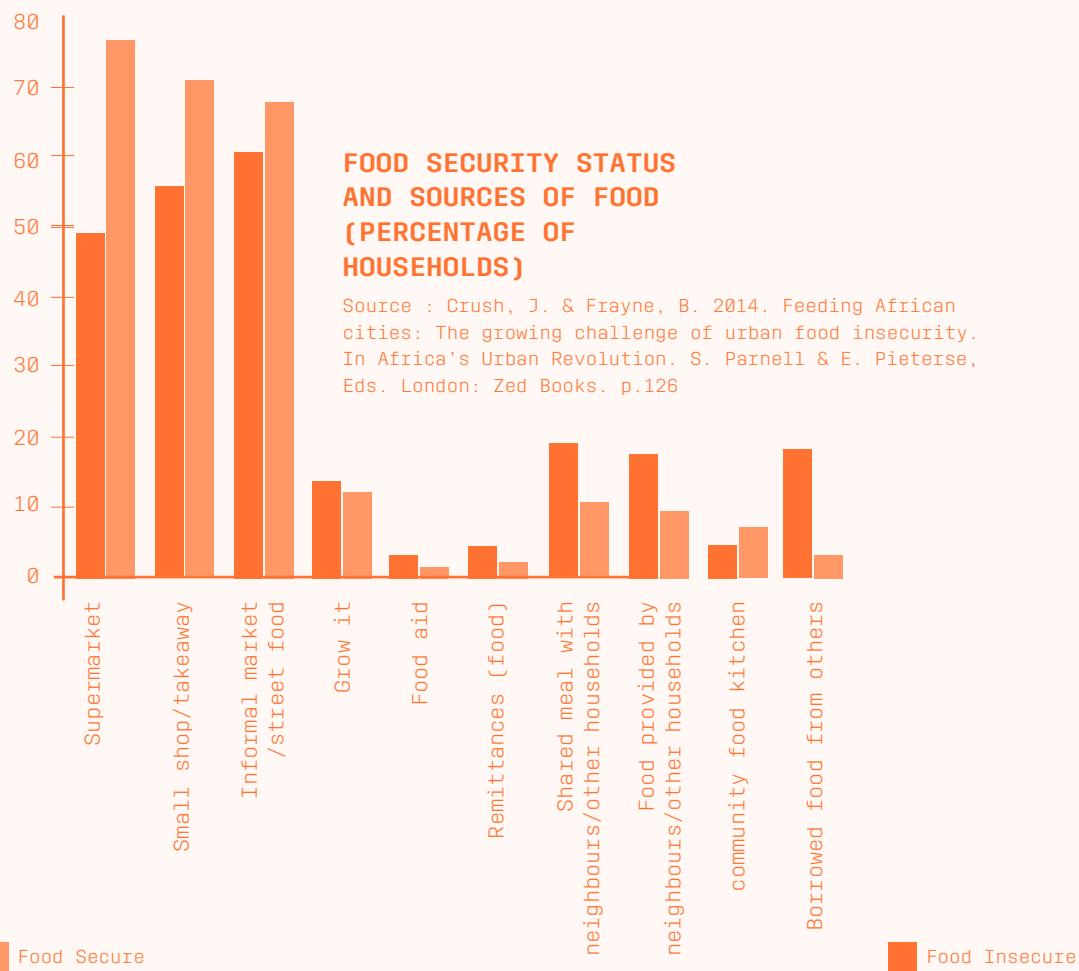


RECOMMENDATIONS

- Urban food security needs to be understood in the context of the larger food system, where hunger is more a consequence of access than production challenges and where global forces affect food prices, quality and availability. Lack of access to food is a result of both spatial and socioeconomic realities, and should be addressed through cross-sectoral municipal planning and social protection interventions.
- Cities need a direct policy mandate to actively engage in the urban food system and address the systemic drivers of food insecurity. Dedicating and building capacity will be vital to identifying opportunities and addressing inequalities in the system.
- Interventions promoting access to more nutritious food should be widely undertaken in African cities to improve public health and productivity.

“Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.”

Source: World Food Summit, 1996



- ¹ WFP 2015
- ² FAO 2015
- ³ Rio+20 2012: 3
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Ruel et al. 2010: 170
- ⁶ Hammond & Dube 2012; Schonfeldt et al. 2013
- ⁷ Crush & Frayne 2014
- ⁸ World Food Council 2009: 1
- ⁹ WFP 2015
- ¹⁰ FAO 2015
- ¹¹ Rio+20 2012: 3
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ FAO 2009: 1
- ¹⁴ Crush & Frayne 2014
- ¹⁵ Rio+20 2012
- ¹⁶ Crush & Frayne 2014
- ¹⁷ Crush & Frayne 2014; Frayne et al. 2010
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Ruel et al. 2010: 170
- ²⁰ Van der Merwe 2011: 2
- ²¹ FAO 2009; Ruel et al. 2010
- ²² FAO 2009; Ruel et al. 2010: 173
- ²³ Hammond & Dube 2012; Schonfeldt et al. 2013
- ²⁴ Donovan et al. 2011; Van der Merwe 2011: 2

FOOD ACCESS IN AN URBANISING WORLD

Sub-Saharan Africa has the world's highest prevalence of hunger⁹, with about 220 million undernourished people¹⁰. Enough food is produced to feed the global population¹¹, yet hunger and undernourishment persist due to unequal access to income and food.¹² For example, an additional 100 million people did not have consistent access to enough food after losing their jobs during the 2008 global financial crisis.¹³

While the international food security agenda continues to focus on small farmer production in Africa,¹⁴ the region is urbanising at twice the global rate.¹⁵ Half of Africa's population is expected to live in cities by 2035,¹⁶ adding to the continent's food security pressures. Most new urbanites are young, unemployed or underemployed, and living in slums characterised by high levels of poverty.¹⁷ This is particularly troubling because there are clear links between high levels of urban food insecurity and household poverty, with more than 80% of urban poor households studied in 11 southern African cities suffering some degree of food insecurity.¹⁸

Unlike their rural counterparts, the urban poor buy most of their food instead of growing it, which means that access to cash – and, by extension, stable employment – are vital to food security.¹⁹ The urban poor are also highly vulnerable to price shocks.²⁰ To cope with rising food prices and/or contracting employment, many people are forced to reduce the amount and quality of the food they eat; reduce their spending on basic needs such as healthcare, sanitation and education; and sell their productive assets.²¹ The long-term effects of these strategies include stunting and permanently reduced cognitive function for small children; school-leaving and child labour; illegal activities; and an increased prevalence of nutrition-related diseases. These consequences will have a damaging effect on the continent's economic and human development.²²

URBAN FOOD IN A GLOBAL SYSTEM

In addition, changing dietary patterns and the availability of cheap food that is low in nutritional value but high in fat, sugar, salt and additives are leading to a nutritional crisis where obesity and malnutrition simultaneously threaten to further stress public health systems in both the developed and developing world.

²⁵ Van der Merwe 2011: 3

²⁶ Rio+20 2012: 4

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Drimie & McLachlan 2013

²⁹ Rio+20 2012: 5

³⁰ World Food Council 2009: 4-5

³¹ Cohen & Garrett 2009: 22-23

³² Rio+20 2012: 5

³³ Cohen & Garrett 2009: 18

³⁴ Crush & Frayne 2014

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Rocha & Lessa 2009: 7

³⁸ World Food Council 2009: 4-5

³⁹ Cohen & Garrett 2009: 22-23

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ FAO 2006: 1

⁴² Cohen & Garrett 2009: 18-23; Rio+20 2012: 5; Van der Merwe 2011: 6

⁴³ FAO 2006: 4

Global thinking: local mandate

Urban food security is largely an issue of access, which must be understood in the context of a wider food system that involves a complex chain of producers, processors, wholesalers, distributors, transporters and retailers (both commercial and informal vendors).²⁴ These systems, primarily supplied by profit-driven commercial agriculture,²⁵ are in turn subject to global forces. Access to food and food prices are also affected by connections to the energy and financial markets²⁶ and policies around import duties, export taxes and subsidies.²⁷ Food system dynamics, which are partly determined by city planning and infrastructure, also affect local access and availability.

To effectively address the drivers of food insecurity, cities need to understand and engage with this system as a whole. To understand

the system's many components cities can, for example, commission a report on the food system to provide a baseline mapping of the system and its stakeholders.

Understanding and transforming the food system will require coordination and collaboration between various actors, including universities, nongovernmental organisations and civil society.²⁸ Interdisciplinary research, dialogue between players in the scientific field and policymakers, and greater institutional flexibility²⁹ should all be part of cities' approaches to the urban food system. This will help identify efficiencies (such as integrating and locating local supply chains to lower costs)³⁰ and opportunities (such as waste reduction).³¹ Understanding the complex relationships and roles played by various sectors at the municipal level – water, energy, transport, marketing, consumption and trade – will help to identify where closer coordination can yield benefits.³² The process will also identify macroeconomic strategies that may better serve local needs, such

as adjusting trade and tax policies to moderate food price increases.³³

Supporting the right to food

Local authorities need to understand the channels that food-insecure communities use to access food. This includes supply and distribution systems of both the formal and informal markets, and how they interact with and depend on one another (for example, supermarket chains buying crops from smallholder farmers or informal traders buying stock from formal retailers). Although commercial supply chains (formal supermarkets) play a critical role in Africa's cities,³⁴ the informal food economy is the system used most frequently by the urban poor,³⁵ and its importance only increases as households become more food insecure.³⁶

Cities should support the stability of these systems by, for example, compiling a weekly list of basic household staple items with prices so consumers know where to buy them at the lowest price;³⁷

supporting farmers' markets in poor areas (including reforming regulations to facilitate rather than restrict informal trade); creating selling incentives for local producers;³⁸ and supporting informal traders with microcredit to improve food hygiene and storage.³⁹ Creating platforms for dialogue between consumers, traders and transport associations will help to identify additional efficiencies.⁴⁰

Where market access becomes impossible, however, the state must consider food security an integral part of its social protection package.⁴¹ Urban food security and stable income are intrinsically linked, meaning household poverty must be addressed to ensure people have enough food. In addition to supporting longer-term national strategies to meet this universal development goal, municipalities can use mechanisms such as food vouchers, food banks, food supplementation programmes and nutrition interventions.⁴²

City authorities can play an important role in planning and implementing food security measures. However, national poverty reduction strategies should also incorporate food security objectives, placing particular emphasis on reducing hunger and extreme poverty.⁴³ Regional, national and local governments should work together to develop research-based urban food security agendas, along with city-specific food security plans.⁴⁴ New institutional arrangements and enabling policies that promote cooperation between public and private investors in food systems are also needed;⁴⁵ however, these relationships must be formed in the interests of an equitable food system and not stakeholder profit.

Nutritious food

The dominance of the global food system is leading to a dietary shift towards highly processed foods that are cheap but high in salt, sugar, bad fats and multiple additives. Processed foods are usually the most affordable option for people living in cities, but these foods are responsible for a simultaneous public health crisis of obesity and malnutrition.⁴⁶ To address this crisis, urban food system strategies need to actively promote nutritional food, especially for the poor.

⁴⁴ Crush & Frayne 2014

⁴⁵ Rio+20 2012: 2

⁴⁶ Hammond & Dube 2012; Schonfeldt et al. 2013

⁴⁷ Crush & Frayne 2014

⁴⁸ Cohen & Garrett 2009



WHAT ABOUT URBAN AGRICULTURE?

Although used as a backup (and generally nutritious) food source, urban agriculture is increasingly seen as less significant in terms of its contribution to household food security in cities.⁴⁷ Urban agriculture can provide nutritious fresh food, but it is a project-level response to the food crisis and does not address systemic challenges. There are also a variety of complications associated with urban agriculture, including social (many people do not wish or know how to farm), environmental (issues around water and land use) and municipal (competing claims for land and hygiene concerns about animal husbandry within city limits)⁴⁸ issues. Cities can and must do much more to address the urban food crisis than just telling their poorest residents to grow their own food.

CONCLUSION

Urban food insecurity is a systemic problem resulting from interactions between many sectors, both locally and globally. Without a systemic approach to change, the food crisis will only increase as Africa continues to urbanise. Extremely high levels of hunger and undernourishment reduce the productive capacity of Africa's urban population and negatively affect national and regional development goals. Urban food systems are complex, which means that solutions will require all sectors involved to work together at all levels on a shared urban food security mandate. Access to nutritious food for all, especially the urban poor, should be the guiding principle of change. Urban food security is not about privileging urban dwellers over rural populations, but rather understanding that well-functioning food systems depend on the connection between urban and rural for adequate provision in both areas. To achieve urban food security, a more equitable and resilient system across rural and urban areas, combined with universal poverty relief, is required.



PRO-POOR POLICY RESPONSES FOR FOOD SECURITY IN GHANA

The global financial crisis had a severe effect on Ghana, resulting in jobs lost at home and abroad. Poverty and hunger worsened after the crisis, especially in poor urban communities where about 98% of food is purchased rather than grown. The Ghanaian government responded to the crisis by implementing direct and indirect policy measures. Direct interventions included reducing taxes on imported cereals and petroleum products, and increasing support for domestic production of food to reduce hunger. Indirect measures (all of which were already in place before the crisis) included the President's Special Initiatives (a youth employment creation scheme); grants to support school fees, textbooks and school uniforms in basic public schools (increasing enrolment and reserving household funds for food and basic needs); school feeding programmes; and free use of metro mass transport for pupils.

SOURCE: Humanity Focus Foundation, 2010

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