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Jonathan Crush

Balsillie School of International Affairs/WLU, jcrush@wlu.ca

Bruce Frayne

Southern African Migration Programme

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THE INVISIBLE CRISIS:
URBAN FOOD SECURITY
IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

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IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

JONATHAN CRUSH & BRUCE FRAYNE

SERIES EDITORS

JONATHAN CRUSH AND BRUCE FRAYNE

AUTHORS

Jonathan Crush is Professor of Global Development Studies at Queen's University, Honorary Professor in the Department of Environmental and Geographical Science at the University of Cape Town and Co-Director of AFSUN

Bruce Frayne is a Research Associate of the Southern African Research Centre at Queen's University, Visiting Researcher in the Department of Environmental and Geographical Science at the University of Cape Town, and Programme Manager of AFSUN

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I INTRODUCTION

Food security is emerging as one of the key development challenges for Africa in the 21st Century. Yet it is often misleadingly seen as an issue that only affects rural populations. The right “fix” for food insecurity is viewed as increased smallholder agricultural production. Much of the writing, and most of the development interventions, around food security focus on rural food security and the plight of the rural poor. Recent international calls and new programmes for a “green revolution” in Africa similarly focus on “rural development” and how to increase the production of food for subsistence and sale amongst small farmers in Africa.

This background paper seeks to systematically address another critical aspect of African food security: the vulnerability of the urban poor to food insecurity. In a continent undergoing rapid urbanization, with an increasingly greater proportion of the population looking to the towns and cities for their livelihood, the issue of urban food security has been curiously neglected. While the food security of urban populations obviously cannot be divorced from rural agricultural production, the relationship is far from simple. Many urbanites, even the very poorest, do not buy their food from small farmers within the boundaries of their own country. Large commercial farms are integral to urban food supply chains in many African countries, as are food imports from within and outside the region. Urban agriculture, in which the urban poor produce their own food, is sometimes advocated as the “key” to greater urban food security. But urban food security is much more than an issue of backyard gardens or rural-urban food transfers.

The very complexity of the urban food security situation seems to prompt many governments, international agencies, donors, NGOs and researchers to prefer the conceptual and programming simplicity of “rural development” and “green revolutions” for smallholders. The starting point for this paper is very different. We argue that urban food security is the emerging development issue of this century. And we maintain that the food security strategies of the urban poor, and how these are thwarted or enabled by markets, governments, civil society and donors, are critical to the future stability and quality of life in African cities. The food security challenges facing the urban poor, and the factors that directly or inadvertently enable or constrain urban food supply, access, distribution and consumption, can no longer be wished away or marginalized.



The current global food crisis has seen soaring food costs in all of the cities of the South, and food and bread riots in many. The frustrated urban poor, driven by escalating food costs, food shortages and inadequate diets and constrained by ill-informed and insensitive urban policies, will make themselves heard, and not in the orderly and measured way that governments and international agencies might prefer. The problem, of course, is that very little is actually known about the food security of the urban poor, the strategies that urban households adopt to feed themselves and the obstacles they face in doing so. At present, the evidence is so fragmentary and inadequate that it can only lead to misguided or ill-considered interventions at the municipal and national level.

This paper first examines the emergence of food security as a central development issue on the global and continental stage, arguing that rural bias is being reproduced and perpetuated in international, regional and national policy agendas. The “invisible crisis” of urban food security refers to the marginalization and silencing of the voices and plight of the urban poor. The second section examines global and regional trends in urbanization and the dimensions of urban poverty and food insecurity in Southern Africa. The final section of the paper presents a new programme for addressing food security issues in African towns and cities.

2 AFRICAN FOOD SECURITY AND RURAL BIAS

The current round of heightened international attention to food security can be traced back to 1996 and the World Food Summit in Rome. The Rome Declaration on Food Security noted that 800 million people worldwide were under-nourished 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.”¹ The Declaration’s stated objective was to reduce the number of undernourished people by half no later than 2015, a commitment later reaffirmed in the first of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000.² MDG Goal One included a commitment to halve the proportion 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 policy-oriented plan of action with several “commitments”:³

- 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;
- 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 utilization;
- Developing participatory and sustainable food, agriculture, fisheries, forestry and rural development policies and practices;
- 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;
- Preparing for natural disasters and man-made emergencies and to meet transitory and emergency food requirements in ways that encourage recovery, rehabilitation, development and a capacity to satisfy future needs; and
- Allocating public and private investments to foster human resources, sustainable food, agriculture, fisheries and forestry systems, and rural development.



These “commitments” signalled that food security was not simply a technical challenge of how to increase food production. Rather, it demanded a broader set of policy interventions to create and sustain enabling policy environments for the food security of all. From the outset, however, food security tended to mean rural food security and poverty meant rural poverty.

In 1997, following the Rome Summit, the United Nations 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.⁴ Some 75 countries and 20 United Nations organizations were represented in this network, including national institutions, bilateral donors and representatives of civil society. An FAO Committee on World Food Security (CFS) was also appointed to monitor progress on the implementation of the 1996 Plan of Action.

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 noted dismally that “progress in reducing the number of undernourished people has been negligible.”⁵ In Sub-Saharan Africa, the number of undernourished people actually grew from 169 million in 1990 to 206 million in 2002. Africa, the CFS reported, was still the “most food-insecure region in the world” with East, Central and Southern Africa, in particular, showing “negative trends.” In 2009, the FAO estimated that the number of undernourished passed 1 billion for the first time.⁶

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 etc) 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.⁷ The rural orientation of the twin-track approach was justified by reference to the geographical distribution of poor and undernourished populations:

On the available evidence, the majority of the world’s poor and undernourished live in rural areas. Taking this fact as its point of departure, a two pronged approach is likely to lead to swift reductions in hunger and poverty: fight hunger through direct

public action and fight poverty by focusing on rural areas since this is where most of the poor live and depend on agriculture and rural off-farm activities for a living. Hence if the development of these activities raises the incomes of the rural poor, this should reduce poverty and, to some extent, hunger.⁸

Similarly, the CFS maintained that “as 75% of the people who suffer from hunger are rural-dwellers, increased rural production by small-holders is ... the key to food security.”⁹ Furthermore, said the CFS, “the World Food Summit target and the MDGs ... can only be achieved if rural livelihoods are improved.”¹⁰ Thus, priority should be accorded to financing agricultural and rural development.¹¹

The only significant new element in 2006 (almost entirely absent in 1996) was a recognition that HIV/AIDS is having a devastating impact on food security in the regions most affected by the pandemic: “Households affected by HIV/AIDS are more vulnerable to food insecurity and their number is growing rapidly. HIV/AIDS is now one of the greatest threats to the eradication of poverty and hunger.”¹²

The dramatic escalation in global food prices in 2007-8 greatly intensified international concern with food security as it threw millions more into a state of undernourishment. 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.” The Task Force decided that the goal of the 1996 Summit and MDGs were even less achievable if rising food prices put basic foodstuffs out of the reach of the poor. Indeed, the number of undernourished people would rise still further:

The dramatic rise over the past twelve months in global food prices poses a threat to global food and nutrition security and creates a host of humanitarian, human rights, socioeconomic, environmental, developmental, political and security-related challenges. This global food crisis endangers millions of the world’s most vulnerable, and threatens to reverse critical gains made toward reducing poverty and hunger as outlined in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It requires an urgent comprehensive, coherent, and coordinated response.¹³

The fact that rising food prices disproportionately affect the urban, as opposed to rural, poor generally goes unremarked.

The CFA proposes two urgent “sets of actions” as part of a “comprehensive response” to the global food crisis: (a) meeting the immediate needs of vulnerable populations through 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 through expansion of 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 organizational composition of the FAO Committee on World Food Security and the UN High Level Taskforce on the Global Food Security Crisis, the ways in which food security is conceptualized and the solutions proposed by the two bodies are strikingly similar. Urban food security is not specifically precluded from the discussions of either the CFS or the CFA, but nor 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 are primarily rural ones. While the CFA appears to take a broader perspective on possible solutions, its core proposals actually duplicate the “two-track” approach of the CFS i.e. social protection systems to be strengthened and rural smallholder agricultural production to be supported and improved.

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 again reiterates the two-track approach (described in the Report as “widely adopted by the development community”) as the remedy: (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.¹⁴ 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 the particular food security problems of the urban poor. There seems to be an implicit assumption that rural development will make the urban poor less food insecure by reducing urban food costs.¹⁵

The current global consensus is that the key to meeting the food security objectives of the 1996 Rome Conference, the Millennium Development Goals and the High Level Taskforce on the Global Food Security Crisis is thus to support rural smallholder agricultural production. In July 2009, the G8 pledged \$20 billion for a new Food Security Initiative. The Statement on Food Security released at the Summit focuses on

boosting production in developing countries, particularly amongst small farmers.¹⁶ Enthusiasm for rural development and the “small farmer” is also permeating the world of donors and philanthropic foundations. The Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), headed by former UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, and backed by the Gates Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation and UK-DFID, views small farmer production as the key to food security in Africa:

Investments in African agriculture must focus on the continent’s high-potential breadbasket areas. These areas have relatively good soil, rainfall, and infrastructure—and could rapidly transition from areas of chronic food scarcity to breadbaskets of abundance. 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.¹⁷

Food security, as it was in the 1980s and before, is defined as a production problem which “rural development” in the guise of a new Green Revolution will supposedly resolve.¹⁸

In similar vein, the World Bank has actively begun to champion a new rural development agenda after a period of relative disinterest in agriculture, following the failures of its Structural Adjustment Programmes. The Bank’s 2008 World Development Report advocates a new “agriculture for development” strategy and warns that the sector must be placed at the centre of the international development agenda if the goals of halving extreme poverty and hunger by 2015 are to be realized.¹⁹ Justifying the “new agenda”, the Bank notes that “while 75 percent of the world’s poor live in rural areas in developing countries, a mere 4 percent of official development assistance goes to agriculture.” The Bank proposes a market-oriented “policy diamond” of four types of intervention for addressing rural food insecurity: (a) improving market access and establishing efficient value chains; (b) enhancing smallholder competitiveness and facilitating market entry; (c) improving livelihoods in subsistence agriculture and low-skill rural populations; and (d) increasing employment in agriculture and the rural nonfarm economy and enhancing skills. The urban slides into the policy diamond as a place of demand for agricultural products, but is otherwise on the margins. Though mention is made of migration and remittances, there is no exploration of what role they play in rural and urban food security.

Whether couched in terms of “commitments”, “tracks”, “pillars” or “diamonds,” the underlying message is the same: food insecurity largely

affects rural populations and can be mitigated by increases in small farm production. The representation of food security as a rural and agricultural challenge has been echoed at the regional and national level within Africa. The African Union's New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) Plan of Action, for example, couples food security and agricultural production as a sectoral priority.²⁰ The latest iteration of the Plan of Action notes that "in order to address Africa's high levels of poverty and hunger, the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Program (CAADP) was established as a growth-oriented agriculture agenda, aimed at increasing agriculture growth rates to six percent per annum to create the wealth needed for rural communities and households in Africa to prosper."

The CAADP was released in 2002, following a meeting of African Ministers of Agriculture in Rome.²¹ The CAADP was prepared by the FAO and NEPAD in consultation and begins with the blunt assertion that "Africa, most of whose people are farmers, is unable to feed itself." Furthermore "the rural areas, where agriculture is the mainstay of all people, support some 70–80 percent of the total population, including 70 percent 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" to cope with Africa's growing food insecurity: (a) extending the area under sustainable land management and reliable water control systems; (b) improving rural infrastructure and trade-related capacities for market access; (c) increasing food supply and reducing hunger by increasing small farmer productivity levels, use of irrigation, and support services and complementing production-related investments with targeted safety nets; and (d) agricultural research, technology dissemination and adoption. The issue of urban security is not explicitly mentioned nor is it demonstrated how the implementation of the CAADP would reduce the vulnerability of urban populations. The 2006 Abuja Declaration of the AU Food Security Summit recognized the "efforts and progress being made by many African countries in agricultural growth and reducing food and nutrition insecurity" and made 15 commitments to supporting agriculture including "up-scaling agricultural successes within and across countries in Africa," promoting public sector investment in agriculture, and establishing a technical support programme for agriculture and food security.²²

At the sub-regional level, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has a similar rural and production-oriented focus to its

food security agenda. The SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) calls for specific capacity to be built in food security and early warning systems.²³ The RISDP recognizes that poverty is widespread and increasing in many countries in the region, with 26% of children under five years malnourished. The losses experienced over the past decade in the Human Development Index (HDI) for the region is seen in a drop in average adult life expectancy to below 50 years, which is largely a reflection of increasing AIDS mortality. In addition, the SADC HDI is much lower when gender disparities are factored into human development through the Gender-related Development Index (GDI). The RISDP states that this “gender disaggregated index stood at 0.536 in the late 1990s and declined by 0.87 percent from the mid-1990s.” It also notes that approximately 14 million people are food insecure. A reference to drought in relation to food insecurity suggests a primary focus on the rural population. Poverty is understood to be the result of a number of factors working together, and includes limited economic opportunities for the poor (linked to climate change and poor agricultural yields), the removal of agricultural subsidies and associated rises in food prices, and governance structures which do not support the poor.

The RISDP notes that SADC’s Food Security Policy will “ensure that all people have access to an adequate diet to lead an active and normal life.” Just as the RISDP discusses food security in generalities, so too does the SADC Food Security Framework document. Both the RISDP and the Food Security Framework urge increases in agricultural production at household, national and regional levels to mitigate rising food insecurity, especially with regard to poverty experienced at the household level. The RISDP also refers to the Dar es Salaam Declaration on Agriculture and Food Security in the SADC region. In the Declaration, food security remains firmly a rural issue of increased small farmer agricultural production for the SADC and member states. In terms of practical initiatives at the sub-regional level, the function of the Food, Agricultural and Natural Resources (FANR) Directorate in Gaborone is “the coordination and harmonization of agricultural policies and programmes in the SADC region ... to ensure food availability, access, safety and nutritional value; disaster preparedness for food security; equitable and sustainable use of the environment and natural resources; and strengthening institutional framework and capacity building.”²⁴

In Chapter 2, the RISDP presents information and explanations at the macro level, with no differentiation between or reference to the very different urban and rural situations within SADC. This is a major weakness in this key chapter on social and economic conditions in the SADC, given that close to half of the region’s population lives in towns and cities.

Indeed, urbanization in the context of limited economic growth (or growth without labour) is resulting in an increase in the proportion of urban citizens living in poverty. The likely consequence is a subsequent widening of the food gap for many urban households. A more nuanced analysis that differentiates between rural and urban populations would be necessary in order to adequately address the challenges of poverty and food insecurity.

Section 3.4 on “Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources” argues that agriculture contributes 35% to regional GDP, with perhaps as much as two thirds of the population dependent to some extent on agriculture for their livelihood. However, the absence of any discussion of the relationship between rural agricultural production and urban food supply, including urban-rural household links and formal marketing systems, effectively ignores the pro-poor objectives of the RISDP with regard to over 100 million city dwellers. This gap is all the more important as urbanization continues unabated in a region which will be more urban than rural within the next twenty years.

The RISDP identifies “sustainable food security” as one of four sectoral cooperation and integration Intervention Areas (the others being trade/economic liberalization and development, infrastructure support for regional integration, and poverty eradication and human and social development.) The plan analyses these intervention areas in some detail, but does so in a geographic vacuum, and makes no reference to differences between rural and urban areas. In all cases, the social and demographic characteristics, as well as governance structures, resources, infrastructure and the like are so variable between rural and urban centres that not only are the challenges different but the potential solutions required also vary.

At the level of national policy, the rural and agricultural orientation of food security interventions and planning is largely being reproduced by national governments and most donors.²⁵ Following the regional “food crisis” of 2001-2 (when widespread drought and harvest failure led to massive imports of food aid) many SADC states developed national food security strategies and plans of action. Although some of these evolved from a broader consultative process, responsibility for implementation was generally devolved to line Ministries of Agriculture. Almost by definition, therefore, food security programming (and the supporting efforts of donors) became about revitalizing rural agricultural production. In Lesotho, for example, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security prepared a National Food Security Policy and National Action Plan for Food Security in 2005-6, with technical assistance from FAO and

DFID.²⁶ According to Stephen Turner, although the Plan “emphasises that food security is about more than just food production and that it concerns many other ministries and agencies, there is little evidence that (this) has been understood, and still less that it has been put into practice, elsewhere in government.”²⁷

The more fundamental problem is not who is responsible for the Plan but what they are responsible for:

Decades of development planning for Lesotho assumed that this is an agrarian economy whose development challenge is primarily one of agricultural and rural development. Criticisms of this superficial understanding have been circulating for almost as long, but have still only partially been heard. These simplistic views of Lesotho as an agricultural and rural development challenge often translate into an assumption that food security is about adequate food production by the agricultural sector. Lesotho’s prospects for sustainable economic development remain poor, but those prospects – and consequently the food security of the Basotho nation – look more promising outside the agricultural sector than in it. This means that, for a growing proportion of Basotho, food security must be sought largely or entirely outside the agricultural sector.

Turner’s observation applies to other SADC countries as well. Namibia, for example, was one of the first countries to adopt a national food security strategy as long ago as 1995. That year, Namibia’s new inter-departmental National Food Security and Nutrition Council issued a Food Security and Nutrition Assessment Report as well as a National Food and Nutrition Policy and Action Plan.²⁸ Namibia is still a regional leader in adopting a ‘whole of government’ approach to food security. However, the Food and Nutrition Policy placed rural development at the centre of the country’s food security strategy, where it has been ever since.²⁹

In Mozambique in the 1980s and early 1990s, “the pendulum swung in the direction of the agriculture sector and the food security impetus was drawn into the agricultural field. Post-war agricultural policy has food security as its central tenet with emphasis on improving food production and the role of the small farm sector in post war recovery was emphasised.”³⁰ Following the World Food Summit in 1996, the Mozambican Cabinet adopted a national Food Security and Nutrition Strategy (ESAN) which was overseen by a Technical Secretariat for Food and Nutrition Security in the Ministry of Agriculture. In June 2008, the

government launched its second Food Security and Nutrition Strategy (ESAN 11) reiterating the centrality of rural production for food security and nutrition.

In Swaziland, the 2005 National Food Security Policy is a product of the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives and forms part of the Comprehensive Agriculture Sector Policy (CASP).³¹ The focus is almost exclusively on food security in rural areas and on measures to boost agricultural production on communal Swazi Nation Land. A similar rural food security and smallholder agricultural emphasis is evident in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe.³²

In South Africa, the most urbanized country in the SADC, the contribution of agriculture to household welfare and food security is particularly low. In 2000, only five percent of South African households used agriculture as their primary source of food, with a further 20% using agriculture to supplement household food supplies.³³ Cash therefore remains the primary source of food security in South Africa, a trend which is being increasingly duplicated in other countries in the region. When South Africa formulated its first post-apartheid food security strategy, it recognized the need for a “comprehensive and multisectoral approach of all spheres of government.”³⁴ However, in practice there has been a “disjuncture between the IFSS and the complexity of food security” in the country.³⁵ One disjuncture, inherent in the Integrated Food Security Strategy (IFSS) itself, is a focus on rural areas and rural food security to the detriment of a more holistic view.³⁶

The IFSS “remains frustrated by institutional arrangements that have limited the success of the strategy” including: (a) no Department has been assigned responsibility for addressing food security in a comprehensive fashion; (b) the Department of Agriculture which was appointed to coordinate food security inside the government focuses on a prosperous agricultural sector rather than assuring “food security for all” including the urban population; (c) the coordination of food security was tasked to a Food Security Directorate that has limited administrative power, a lack of political will and no clear mechanisms to drive the process. The Directorate has been unable to develop a Bill or even a Green Paper; (d) there are no dedicated funds for government to spend on food security; and (e) dialogue with civil society has been minimal.³⁷

Donor-funded food security initiatives in Southern Africa include the multi-stakeholder national Vulnerability Assessment Committees (VACs),³⁸ the FAO-funded Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Information and Mapping Systems (FIVIMS),³⁹ the USAID-funded Famine

Early Warning Systems network (FEWSNET)⁴⁰ and the DFID-funded Regional Hunger and Vulnerability Project (RHVP), all of which have a predominantly rural focus.⁴¹ Local conceptualizations of the determinants of food insecurity have also tended to have a rural orientation.⁴²

While the focus on the rural reflects the past and ongoing emphasis of the donor and development aid sectors in Africa, and the rural orientation of the new international food security agenda, the absence of any systematic discussion of urban food security is noteworthy. If the SADC is to meet its stated development challenges, not least with regard to food security and health, policy efforts will have to explicitly include the millions of poor urban residents in the region.

3 THE DIMENSIONS OF URBAN FOOD INSECURITY

The core element of the new international and regional food security agenda is its focus on rural poverty and hunger and on technical inputs to smallholder agricultural production as the primary means of reducing rural impoverishment, increasing rural food security and meeting the WFP and MDG goals. A critical analysis of the assumptions and feasibility of the agenda is emerging.⁴³ At least one commentator, for example, has challenged the “romantic” assumptions that undergird this new agenda:

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 recognize 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.⁴⁴

Another has argued that the exclusive focus on smallholders is very inappropriate in highly urbanized countries where the rural poor depend on remittances and social grants, not agriculture.⁴⁵ Our concern here is not with how the new international agenda characterizes the countryside but rather with what it has to say about urban food security. The answer is very little, at least explicitly. In all of the many policy documents and programmatic statements of the new food security agenda, many of which are cited above, it is almost as if the urban does not exist in developing countries. Nowhere is there any systematic attempt to differentiate rural from urban food security, to understand the dimensions and determinants of urban food security, to assess whether the rural policy prescriptions for reducing hunger and malnutrition are workable or even relevant to urban populations, and to develop policies and programmes that are specific to the food needs and circumstances of the urban poor. There is even no indication how massive increases in rural smallholder production (the key goal of the new agenda), even if successful, will improve the food security of urban populations.

The evidence suggests that with urbanization, 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 recognize the limits of smallholder agriculture to meet the household food gap or to provide 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 or even greater than the rural poor. The reality is that rural populations in almost all developing countries are increasing at a decreasing rate while the opposite is true of urban populations.

The UN predicts that by 2020, the urban population of less developed countries will exceed the rural population 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 2006–7 *State of the World Cities Report* predicts even higher rates of urbanization for Africa:

Cities of the developing world will absorb 95 per cent of urban growth in the next two decades, and by 2030, will be home to almost 4 billion people, or 80 per cent 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.⁴⁶

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) (Figure 2).⁴⁷

The level and rate of urbanization in the South varies from region to region and country to country but nowhere is it insignificant. In 2005, Latin America was the most urbanized region of the South at around 77%, a figure expected to rise to 84% by 2025 (Table 1). Asia was 40% urbanized 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). Even in the most "rural" of continents

(Africa), urbanization is proceeding at a rapid rate. In fact, urban growth rates are highest in Sub-Saharan Africa (at 4-5% p.a.). In the target year for achievement of the MDG's (2015) there will be an estimated 2 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. By then, there will be more urban-dwellers in Africa than Latin America.

FIGURE 1

Urban and Rural Population in Developing Countries, 1960-2030

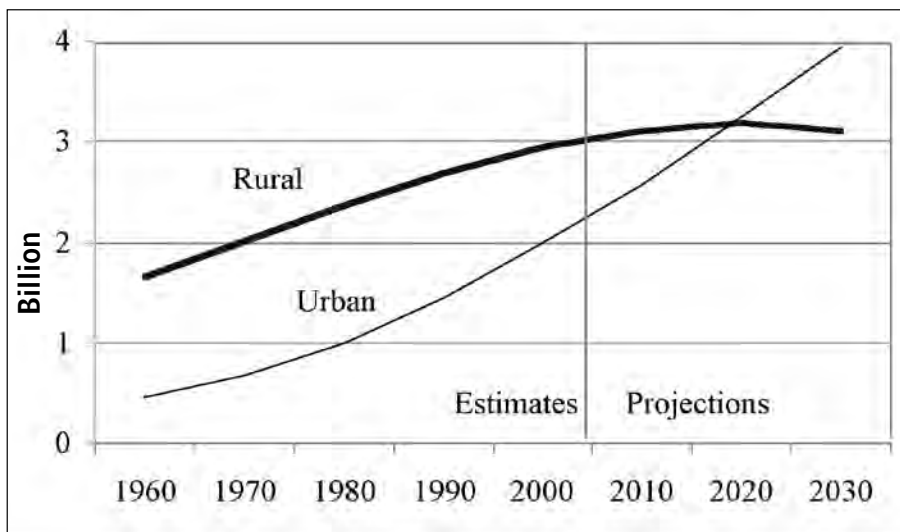


FIGURE 2

Urban and Rural Population in Sub-Saharan Africa, 1960-2030

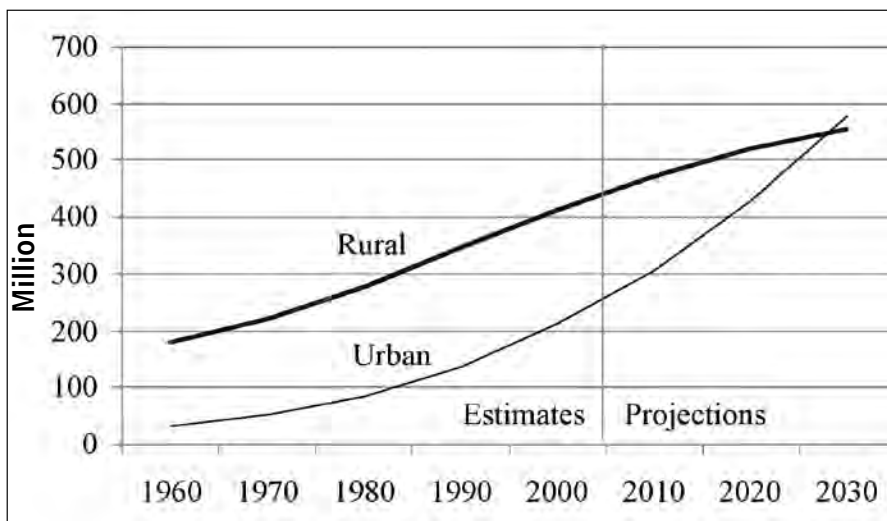


TABLE 1: Global Urbanization, 1995-2025 (% urban)

	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: UNHABITAT

TABLE 2: Urban Population of Less Developed Regions, 1995-2025 (millions)

	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025
Latin America	353	394	433	471	508	543	575
Asia	1187	1373	1565	1770	1987	2212	2440
Africa	248	295	349	412	484	566	658

Source: UNHABITAT

The fifteen countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) have a combined population of approximately 220 million, of whom just under a half are estimated to live in urban and peri-urban areas for some or all of the time. In virtually all of the countries of SADC, the urban population has been growing rapidly since independence and is expected to continue to grow for several decades to come. In 1990, the urban population of SADC was 53.2 million and only one country had more than half its population in urban areas (South Africa at 52%). By 2030 the figure is expected to increase to 205.3 million (Table 3). Eight countries will then have more than half their population in urban areas (Table 4). Another four will be more than 40% urban. Even predominantly rural countries will continue to see a massive increase in the proportion of their population living in urban areas. It is worth noting, too, that several SADC countries are major sources of migration to South Africa (Lesotho, Mozambique, Swaziland and Zimbabwe). Most migrants go to live and work in South Africa's urban areas. If migration is taken into account, the proportion of the population of these countries living in urban areas is even higher than UN data suggests.

	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: *State of African Cities, 2008-9*

Southern Africa has the highest urbanization rate in the world; at current growth rates more than two-thirds of the region's population will be urban by 2030. In every single country (with the exception of Mauritius and Zambia for a period in the 1990s), urban growth rates are significantly higher than rural growth rates (Table 5). Between 2005 and 2010, nine countries are expected to have rural growth rates of less than 1.0% p.a. Three are even expected to have negative rural growth rates. Urban growth rates, by contrast, have been and will continue to be in the 3.0-5.0% p.a. range in most countries. Malawi's urban population is growing at over 5.0% p.a. and the urban population of countries such as Angola, DRC, Lesotho, Mozambique and Tanzania has been growing at over 4.0% p.a. The degree and rates of urbanization in Southern Africa do vary from country to country but it is clear from this data that is a "rapidly-urbanizing" region.

	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: State of African Cities, 2008-9

	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: State of African Cities, 2008-9

The overwhelming reality of massive and growing urban populations in developing countries poses a considerable challenge to the (renewed and almost exclusive) international attention on the food security of rural populations.⁴⁸ If all of the world's poor and food insecure lived in rural areas, this would seem justifiable. Yet, as the 2006-7 *State of the World Cities Report* noted although poverty is a chronic rural phenomenon, 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.⁴⁹

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. It is time that donor agencies and national governments recognized the urban penalty and specifically targeted additional resources to improve the living conditions of slum dwellers."⁵⁰

The World Bank has estimated that 750 million people in urban areas in developing countries were below the poverty line of \$2/day in 2002 and 290 million were below the poverty line of \$1/day (Table 6 and Figure 3).⁵¹ This means that approximately one third of all urban residents (\$2/day) or 13 percent (\$1/day) were below the poverty line. Almost half of the world's urban poor were in South Asia (46%) and another third in Sub-Saharan Africa (34%) using the \$1/day line. Using the \$2/day line, Africa's proportion rose to 40% while Asia's dropped to 22%. The urban share of the African population increased from 30% to 35% between 1993 and 2002 while the share of the ultra-poor living in urban areas increased from 24% to 30% (Table 7).⁵² In 2002, 40% of the urban population in Africa was living below the poverty line of "\$1 a day" (a situation that had not improved since 1992). The situation of the rural poor had improved slightly (with a fall from 53% to 51%).

Table 6: Global Urban Poverty Estimates, 2002

Region	Urban poor (millions < \$1/day)	Urban poor (millions < \$2/day)	Headcount Index (% < \$1/day)	Headcount Index (% < \$2/day)	Urban Share of the Poor \$1/day	Urban Share of the Poor \$2/day	Urban Share of population
EAP	16	126	2.2	17.7	6.7	15.1	38.8
China	4	53	0.8	10.7	2.2	9.5	37.7
ECA	2	32	0.8	10.7	33.4	49.9	63.5
LAC	38	111	9.5	27.5	59.0	65.6	76.2
MNA	1	20	0.7	12.4	19.9	29.3	55.8
SAS	135	297	34.6	76.2	24.9	25.2	27.8
India	116	236	39.3	80.1	26.0	26.0	28.1
SSA	99	168	40.4	68.5	30.2	31.1	35.2
TOTAL	291	752	13.2	34.0	24.6	26.4	42.3

Source: Baker, "Urban Poverty: A Global View"

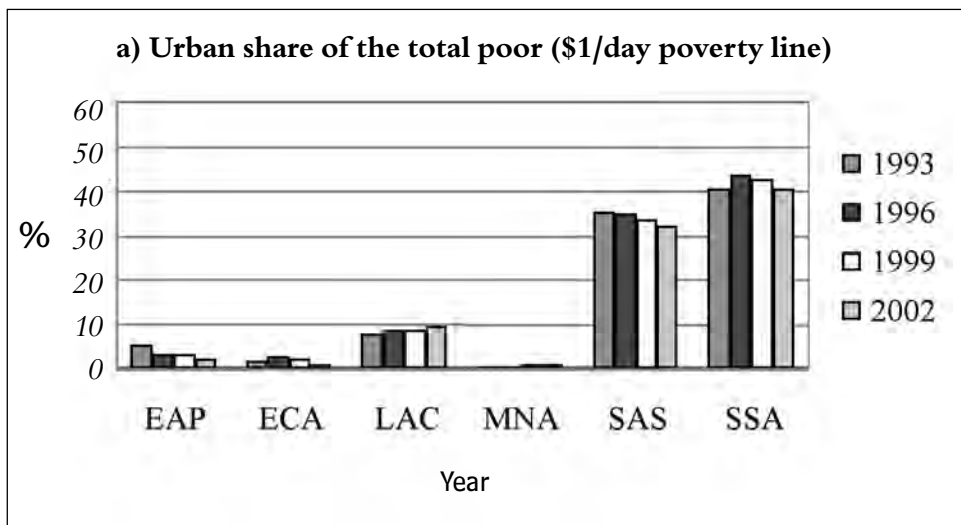
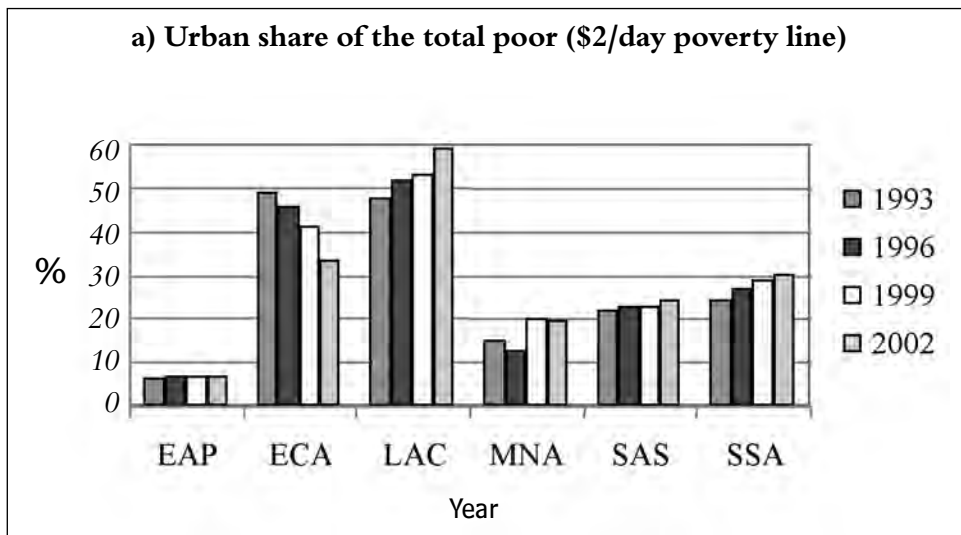
EAP – East Asia and the Pacific; ECA – Eastern Europe and Central Asia;

LAC – Latin America and the Caribbean; MNA – Middle East and North Africa;

SAS – South Asia; SSA – Sub-Saharan Africa

FIGURE 3

Trends in Urban Poverty, 1993-2002



Source: Baker, "Urban Poverty: A Global View"

TABLE 7: Regional Distribution of Ultra-Poor, 1992 and 2002 (\$1/day line)

	Number of Poor (millions)			Percentage below Poverty Line			Urban Share of Poor (%)	Urban Share of Pop. (%)
	URBAN	RURAL	TOTAL	URBAN	RURAL	TOTAL		
1993								
E.Asia/Pacific	28	407	435	5	35	26	6	31
E.Europe/C.Asia	6	6	12	2	4	3	49	63
L.America/Carib.	26	29	55	8	22	12	48	72
M.East/N.Africa	1	4	5	1	4	2	15	53
South Asia	114	385	499	37	44	42	23	26
SSA	66	207	273	40	53	49	24	30
Total	241	1038	1279	14	37	28	19	38
2002								
E.Asia/Pacific	16	218	234	2	20	13	7	39
E.Europe/C.Asia	2	5	7	1	3	2	33	63
L.America/Carib.	38	27	65	9	21	12	59	76
M.East/N.Africa	1	5	6	1	4	2	20	56
South Asia	135	407	542	35	40	39	25	28
SSA	99	229	328	40	51	47	30	35
Total	291	890	1181	13	30	23	25	42

Source: Ravallion, Chen and Sangraula, "New Evidence on the Urbanization of Global Poverty"

A common proxy measure for urban deprivation is the proportion of the total population of a region, country or city living in "slums."⁵³ UNHABITAT estimates that the global slum population totaled 722 million in 1990, passed 1 billion around the turn of the century and is expected to rise to 1.48 billion people by 2020 (Figure 4). Over 95% of slum-dwellers are in developing countries. The absolute increase in numbers is expected to be greatest in Asia but the proportional increase greatest in Africa.

In 1990, Africa had 17% of the world's slum-dwellers, a figure projected to rise to 28% by 2020. Africa has 164 million people living in slums out of a total urban population of 264 million. In other words, over 60% of people in African cities live in slums, compared to only 36% of the urban population of the developing world as a whole. The 2008 *State of African Cities Report* provides data for selected SADC countries on the

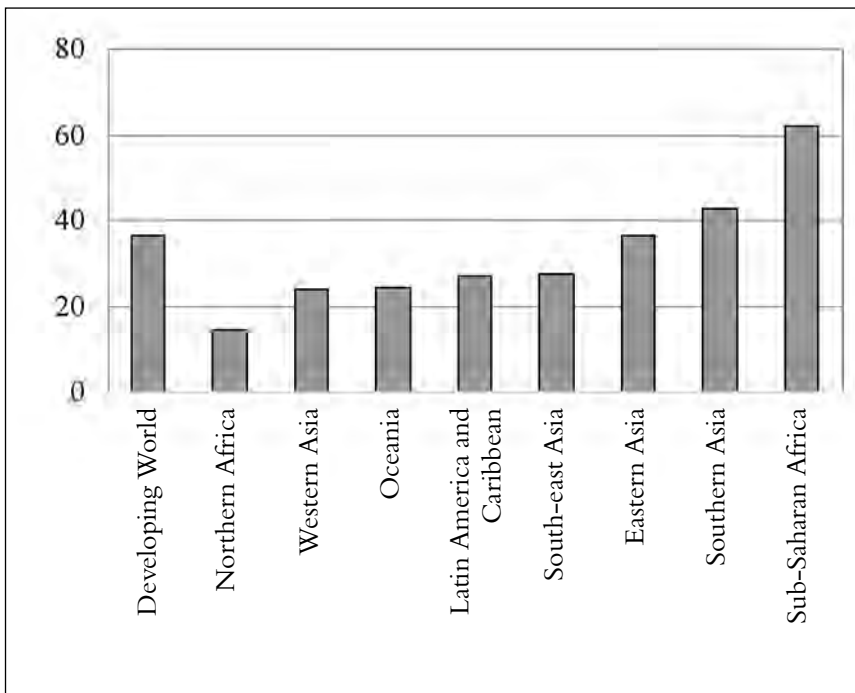
proportion of the urban population living in slums. Mozambique is in the worst situation (at 94%) followed by Madagascar (93%), Tanzania (84%), Malawi (83%), Namibia (66%), Zambia (58%) and South Africa (31%).

In Southern Africa, particularly rapid urbanization and slum-dwelling has meant increased poverty and food insecurity. The region’s towns and cities are characterized by extreme poverty and are especially vulnerable to disease, environmental stressors and food insecurity. The extent of urban poverty is often underestimated because of definitional and measurement shortcomings.⁵⁴ 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.”⁵⁵ 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.

FIGURE 4

Proportion of Urban Population Living in Slums by Region, 2005



Source: *State of World Cities 2008-9* p.91

In the late 1990s, researchers at the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) drew attention to the extent of urban food insecurity in many developing countries.⁵⁶ A subsequent study compared quantitative data on urban food security from nationally representative consumption/expenditure surveys from ten African countries (including Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia in Southern Africa).⁵⁷ The authors concluded 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 percent of the urban population is energy deficient; with percentages reaching 90 percent in urban Ethiopia and 76 and 72 percent in urban Malawi and Zambia, respectively.” The study found high levels of child undernutrition in urban areas although they were generally lower than in the rural areas. However, while “urbanization 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.”

A systematic baseline survey of contemporary poverty and urban food insecurity in the urban areas of Southern Africa is urgently needed. However, there is some evidence from individual case studies on the nature and dimensions of the “invisible crisis.” A 2002 study of 624 poor households in the Khayelitsha and Greater Nyanga areas of Cape Town in South Africa, for example, found that 76% fell below the official poverty line of R352 per adult per month (50% were at less than R185 and 33% less than R100).⁵⁸ Most households depended on multiple sources of income (Table 8). Wage income was the most important source of income (58% of the total) but more than half of the households had no wage income at all. Fifty two percent of male adults and 72% of female adults were unemployed. Households with a wage earner averaged a total income of R1,463 per month compared with R502 a month for those without.

	Average per household	% of Total
Wages	R 556	58.4
Social Grants	R 166	17.5
Temporary Employment	R 82	8.6
Self-Employment	R 16	7.9
Employer Pension	R 13	1.4
Remittances	R 13	1.4
Money from Friends	R 13	1.4
Agriculture	R 9	0.9
Rent	R 6	0.6
Seasonal Work	R 3	0.3
Other	R 16	1.6

Source: de Swardt, "Cape Town's African Poor" p. 5

Food was the largest single household expense (at 39% of average monthly expenses). Fifty six percent of households were in debt, the most important reasons being for food, school fees and medical expenses. A total of 81% of households had insufficient food in the previous year, 70% reported hunger and an average of 43% were short of food at any given time of the year. Only 3% of households engaged in urban agriculture. Even when food is available, diets are extremely poor: more than half the households reported that they rarely or never have meat or eggs, 47% never eat fruit and 34% rarely eat vegetables.

In Mozambique, data from the 2002-3 Mozambican Household Survey showed that food deprivation was higher among urban than rural populations (52% versus 23%).⁵⁹ 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 1996-7 to 41% in 2002-3. Only 54% of people over the age of 15 were economically active.⁶⁰ Of these, 23% were in formal employment and 76% in the informal sector.

In the poorest quintile, however, formal employment was only 15%. Households in this quintile spent 43% of their income on food. The survey of 120 poor households in four barrios showed, as in Cape Town, that households have a variety of income streams. Formal sector income

was the main source of income for 65% of households although informal sector income, urban agriculture and remittances appear to be more important than in Cape Town. Some 70 percent of the surveyed households were involved in informal economic activities, most commonly the sale of foodstuffs and petty commodities. Twenty seven percent of households received remittance income from outside the city (primarily South Africa). Thirty percent of households had access to plots for agriculture (either in the city, peri-urban or rural area) and 25% produced enough for sale. High food prices are considered an important reason for impoverishment and many “have to live only on bread.”⁶¹

A recent survey of 1,278 households in 10 urban centres in Lesotho, including Maseru the capital, defined several “livelihood groups” in terms of the most important source of household income (Table 9).⁶² Most households had more than one income source but median monthly income was only M300 in the month prior to the survey. As many as a third of 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%) were receiving assistance from outside Lesotho. Since most of this assistance comes from migrants in urban areas in South Africa, it is clear that inter-city transfers of cash and goods are an important element in urban food security in Lesotho.⁶³ Three-quarters of the households have a “home garden” in the urban area and 20% cultivate “other land.” Fifty one percent of expenditures for the “very poor” are on food.

TABLE 9: Livelihood Groups in Urban Lesotho, 2008		
Main source of income	% of Households	Average Monthly Income (Maloti/Rand)
Salary/Wages	22	M228
Pension/Allowances	12	M80
Small Business	11	M100
Non-Agriculture Wage Labour	9	M42
Remittances	9	M100
Gifts/Begging/Aid/Borrowing	10	M12
Brewing	6	M32
Petty Trade	5	M34
Agricultural Wage Labour	3	M15
Agricultural Production	8	M67
Livestock	1	M50

Source: "Vulnerability and Food Insecurity in Urban Areas of Lesotho"

Finally, studies in urban Zimbabwe show how food insecurity has 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%.⁶⁴ The proportion of households consuming two or less meals a day increased from 42% to 76%. The proportion of households with adequate dietary diversity declined from 87% to 59%. Food purchase (70%) and own production (15%) are the major sources of food for urban households.

Coping strategies in evidence in 2009 included limiting portions, reducing the number of meals, borrowing food, buying food on credit, eating less preferable foods and selling off assets. Household income came from a wide variety of sources including self-employment (43%) and formal employment (30%). Nineteen percent of the households received remittance income although other studies suggest the proportion may be much higher. Agriculture "continues to be one of the most important sources of livelihoods for the majority of households in the peri-urban and high density areas."⁶⁵

These case studies provide insights into the seriousness of the food

security situation in urban areas across the region. However, the results are not strictly comparable since they were undertaken at different times using different methodologies and different kinds of food insecurity and poverty measures. A truly comparative baseline survey of the state of urban food insecurity across the SADC region would require a standardized methodology, the same measures of food insecurity and be implemented at the same time in each country.

Within regional, national and local policy frameworks, the urban reality is all but invisible. Policy prescriptions predominantly focus at the national scale and on the food production side of the food security equation. Where livelihoods and gender are discussed, a rural framework is employed, assuming no difference between the rural and urban experiences. However, the urban is the critical development frontier and has particular dynamics and cross-scale linkages that need to be considered in order to understand the dimensions of urban food security.

Will deep-seated and worsening problems of poverty and food insecurity amongst the millions of people in Southern African cities automatically be resolved by the “twin-track” approach currently favoured by the international development community? To think this would be naïve at best. Urban food security is a complex and challenging issue which will not be resolved by pumping donor funds into seed and fertiliser packs for rural communities or by social security hand-outs.

4 PLACING URBAN FOOD SECURITY ON THE TABLE

In 1999, Maxwell argued that “food insecurity in African cities is relatively invisible to policymakers and is scarcely recognized in contemporary political debate.”⁶⁶ A decade later, urban food security is scarcely more visible.⁶⁷ If anything, the view that food security is primarily a rural issue requiring support for small farmers is more entrenched than ever. Maxwell suggested several reasons for the invisibility of urban food security, all of which still apply. First, at the city level, 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. Secondly, national policymakers tend to equate food insecurity with rural areas, where it is a more visible seasonal and community-wide phenomenon. Thirdly, urban food insecurity is usually dealt with at the household or individual level: “so long as food insecurity is a household-level problem and does not translate into a political problem, it does not attract policy attention.”

The editors of the same volume suggest more general reasons for the silence.⁶⁸ The first relates to “the complexity of cities – the diversity of their class, gender, ethnic, and demographic characteristics and their corresponding needs and access problems – (which) creates new challenges in the attempt to ensure urban food security.” The second concerns the fact 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 globalization of agri-food systems poses considerable challenges to all who would seek regulatory mechanisms that would work in the interests of the urban poor.

Urban food insecurity is simply not reducible to the “grow more” solutions currently on offer through international organizations, philanthropic foundations and national governments. There needs to be an overt recognition in the corridors and programmes of UN agencies, international organizations, regional bodies and national and sub-national governments that urban food security is a critical issue requiring urgent attention. The food price crisis, which has disproportionately affected the urban poor, may be the trigger for renewed thinking and focus.⁶⁹ There are some preliminary signs that a new awareness of the importance of urban food security may be emerging, especially in response to the recent food price hikes and civil unrest in many developing countries.

In 2006, FAO Executive Director, Jacques Diouf, for example, issued a programmatic call on behalf of urban food security:

Urban poverty tends to be fuelled by people migrating towards the cities in an attempt to escape the deprivations associated with rural livelihoods. Partly due to the rural decline, the world is urbanizing at a fast pace and it will not be long before a greater part of developing country populations is living in large cities. Therefore, urban food security and its related problems should also be placed high on the agenda in the years to come.

The FAO has also earmarked “Food for the Cities” as a Priority Area for Interdisciplinary Action, although it is not altogether clear what this means.⁷⁰

In June 2008, the FAO’s Regional Conference for Africa focused on the theme of Urbanization and Food Security in Sub-Saharan Africa, recognizing that urban food insecurity was a much-neglected phenomenon in development planning and intervention:

The phenomenon of urbanization, which will be one of the strongest social forces in the coming years, brings severe challenges to ensuring household food security in a context characterized by high rates of unemployment, increasing development of the informal sector, deteriorating infrastructure, overcrowding and environmental degradation. One major challenge will be how to provide adequate quantities of nutritious and affordable food for more urban inhabitants, with less water, land and labor.⁷¹

The Regional Conference identified urban governance as a key, perhaps the key, level of intervention in addressing urban food security. This includes:

- planning ahead for the needs of the poor and monitoring urban poverty, its intensity and symptoms;
- recognizing the role played by urban agriculture sector and street food in making food available to poor families in urban areas and in generating income for women;
- developing specific food control activities by municipalities and capacity-building of municipal technical staff;
- implementing appropriate strategies to ensure availability and affordability of safe and healthy foods and encourage appropriate consumer behaviour;
- encouraging the production of such foods in both rural and urban and peri-urban areas and enhancing livelihoods of actors along the value chain; and

- addressing land and basic services issues for the poor in order to secure improved tenure security and better homes, livelihoods strategies in urban areas and to give them the opportunity to participate in policy processes to find solutions for their problems.⁷²

This is by no means a comprehensive list but it has the virtue of reinstating municipal authorities as key agents in the development and implementation of food security programming.

The proposed establishment of a Global Partnership for Agriculture and Food Security (GPAFS) “to meet emergency and nutritional food needs, reinvigorate agricultural systems and increase investment in agriculture” has the potential to further sideline urban food security.⁷³ However, the Executive Boards of the UNDP/UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP did meet in New York in January 2009 and placed “rising urban food insecurity” on their agenda.⁷⁴ The meeting background paper noted that urban areas are growing at 1.3 million people per week and that 92% of world urban growth will be in developing countries in the next two decades. This represents a historically “decisive shift from rural to urban growth.” The Background Document discusses the differences between urban and rural food insecurity and advances five issues and challenges for discussion:⁷⁵

- Urbanisation is an unstoppable phenomenon. Hence, there is a global need to adequately prepare for the challenges that it generates, rather than concentrating on measures to avoid or to exclude people from cities. This will include to the extent possible, making sure that urban dwellers have access to land, housing, services such as health and education and adequate access to food and nutrition. Cities have the potential to be places of better nutrition and heightened food security, and so should not be viewed negatively. In an organized city, people can more easily access basic services than in rural areas. While cities may have poverty, they should also be an escape from poverty, by offering various job and education opportunities.
- There is an urgent need to collect evidence on, and monitor, the food and nutrition security situation of the urban poor, recognizing the complexity involved given the mobility of the urban poor within and across cities. Such data collection faces a number of challenges, including:
 - **Needs Assessments**
Urban assessments need a household and neighbourhood assessment model which is very different from the community-based or geographical models used in rural areas.

- **Targeting**

In urban settings, poor people and more prosperous people live in close proximity. Unregistered urban residents have to be taken into account and safety nets need to vary to match fluctuating demand.

- **Monitoring**

Different criteria need to be developed that take into account the effects of different food consumption patterns on food security.

- **Rural bias**

Because existing guidance among the organizations is intended to be applicable in both rural and urban contexts, it tends to exhibit a rural bias. Indeed, the same may be said of staff experience and expertise. Both are a reflection of the fact that prior to recent global food and fuel price increases – most needs assessments and programmatic activities have been focused primarily on rural areas. An extensive and comprehensive knowledge of the urban context will allow for enhancement of targeted safety nets, including fortification of household food and food/cash transfers, as well as longer-term social protection systems that are critical actions in addressing food and nutrition security in urban areas.

Rural and urban areas cannot function separately and must develop exchanges for mutual benefits. The rural–urban partnership should be an important basis for a rural renewal policy. For those who continue farming, direct access to markets is essential and markets are usually located in urban centres. Better access to markets can increase farming incomes and encourage shifts to higher-value crops or livestock. Strengthening agricultural production in rural areas, especially that of smallholder farmers, would certainly enhance food availability and support food and nutrition security in urban areas.

- **Partnerships**

Coordinated action among United Nations agencies in support of government responses needs to mobilize a wide coalition of actors especially among non-governmental and civil society groups engaged in addressing urban poverty; multi-stakeholder participation in urban contexts should be a major element of interventions.

There is an urgent need to collect evidence on, and monitor, the food and nutrition security situation of the urban poor, recognizing the complexity involved given the mobility of the urban poor within and across cities.

While this issue list is again far from comprehensive – no mention of urban food production or HIV/AIDS for example – it is an important (re)statement by leading players of the importance of the urban food security issue. It is also extremely timely, coming at a critical juncture when the global food security issue threatens to be overwhelmed by a small farmer, production-focused, rural agenda. That these organizations also acknowledge the existence of “rural bias” in their own ranks and the specificity of the urban food security challenge is also important. The basic point is that a decade or more after Rome, very little is actually known about the determinants of urban food insecurity and until that situation changes, programmes and policy interventions will not be based on a solid evidence-based foundation. As a result, there is now “an urgent need to collect evidence on, and monitor, the food and nutrition security situation of the urban poor.”

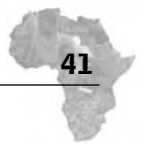
5 THE AFRICAN FOOD SECURITY URBAN NETWORK (AFSUN)

The African Food Security Urban Network (AFSUN) was established as a vehicle for universities, NGOs and municipal governments to collaboratively identify and help solve the pressing issues of urban food insecurity in African cities. In its first phase, AFSUN is focusing on the Southern African region and, within that region, on nine rapidly-urbanizing countries and eleven diverse cities of varying size and complexity. Subsequent phases will see the expansion of the network to the rest of Africa. AFSUN includes partners from SADC cities representing a mix of primary and secondary cities; large and small cities; cities in crisis, in transition and those on a strong developmental path; and a range of local governance structures and capacities as well as natural environments. These particular cities were selected on the basis of local expertise, expressed interest and engagement from policy makers and the fact that they collectively offer a wide platform from which to address the issues of urban food security and its links to HIV/AIDS, gender, environment and migration. A basic set of comparative indicators for each city, clearly demonstrating key features of rapid urbanization, poverty and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS is provided in Table 10.

TABLE 10: AFSUN Participating Cities

Country	City	Country Urban as % of Total Popn 2005	Country Urban as % of Total Popn 2025 (est)	Urban Growth Rate %	City Popn	% Country Urban Popn	National Urban Poverty Rate %	HIV Prev %
Botswana	Gaborone	53	64	6.0	200,000	50	30	39*
Lesotho	Maseru	32	46	3.5	180,000	44	46	31*
Malawi	Blantyre	14	17	6.0	711,233	35	54	28
Mozambique	Maputo	45	57	6.3	966,837	31	62	17.3
Namibia	Windhoek	33	46	4.2	233,000	36	32-71	24
South Africa	Cape Town	52	62	2.5	3,278,000	14	40	15
South Africa	Msunduzi	52	62	2.4	600,000	3	40	28
South Africa	Jo'burg	52	62	4.1	3,200,000	14	40	24
Swaziland	Manzini	28	39	5.5	90,000	50	66	39*
Zambia	Lusaka	41	52	3.6	1,600,000	40	52	22
Zimbabwe	Harare	39	52	5.0	1,700,000	35	70	25

* National HIV prevalence



In the context of urban food security, there are a number of reasons for the multi-country, multi-partner, inter-disciplinary and regional focus of AFSUN:

- Food production and distribution networks typically operate across and between cities and countries in Southern Africa and globally. Comparison between cities and policy responses is critical in the development of harmonized, best practice approaches.
- Urban household food security strategies commonly straddle the region with “stretched households” operating between urban and rural areas and through cross-border migration between countries. AFSUN will show how food security strategies are not confined to city limits but influenced by migration, remittances and internal and cross-border food transfers.
- State and civil society capacity to respond to food insecurity is weak across the region. Local institutional capacity and human resource development would be strengthened by regional networks of training, research, policy and advocacy, and community support. By focusing on different cities in different countries there are opportunities for sharing experience and lessons learned, and fostering regional cooperation on this issue.
- Capacity-building and research in urban food security require an inter-disciplinary approach and varied skills sets.

AFSUN’s objectives include:

- Building individual and organizational capacity within Africa to respond to the challenges of urban food insecurity;
- Establishing partnerships between Canada and Africa and between different African countries to promote a comparative perspective on urban food security and a coordinated regional response;
- Developing participatory methodologies and collecting and analysing data on the extent and determinants of food insecurity in African cities;
- Providing policy advice and facilitating policy dialogue between researchers and policy-makers at the international, regional, national and municipal levels;
- Promoting the mainstreaming of urban food security in international, regional, national and municipal development programmes and plans;
- Equipping municipal officials in African cities with the tools to understand and respond to the policy challenges of urban food security in their cities;



- Capacitating community change agents to design, implement, monitor and evaluate projects and programmes that will enhance the food security of urban populations;
- Conducting public education campaigns to give voice to the food insecure and achieve a change in public and official understanding of the plight of the urban poor and how their livelihood strategies can be supported and enhanced.

More information and progress reports on how each of these objectives is being accomplished is available on the network website at:

<http://www.afsun.org>

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AFSUN PARTNERS

SOUTHERN AFRICAN PARTNERS

Programme in Urban Food Security, Africa Centre for Cities, University of Cape Town

University of Botswana

National University of Lesotho

University of Malawi

Eduardo Mondlane University

University of Namibia

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THE INVISIBLE CRISIS: URBAN FOOD SECURITY IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Over 1 billion people in the world are now undernourished. The current international food security agenda focuses almost exclusively on the food insecurity of rural populations and ways to increase smallholder production. The plight of the urban poor is marginalised in this agenda leading to neglect of the 'invisible crisis' of urban food insecurity. This paper argues that the future of Southern Africa is an urban one and that urban food insecurity is therefore a large and growing challenge. The causes, determinants and solutions for food insecurity are not the same in rural and urban settings. This paper suggests that urban food insecurity needs to be urgently inscribed on the food security agenda of local and national governments, regional organisations and international organisations.

