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# Urban Youth Food Environments and Lived Experiences in Harare and Implications

## Preliminary Policy Brief 2022



# Health

Development Fund

Supporting the National Health Strategy to improve access to quality health care in Zimbabwe



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# Why urban food environments matter for the youth? Evidence from lived experiences in Harare

## The Contextual Background

Poor diets amongst youths within the ages of 10 to 19 has resulted in rising health issues such as chronic malnutrition, anaemia, overweight, obesity and diabetes. Indicators show a 25% prevalence of stunting, 2.3% obesity, 2.5% wasting and 8.3% underweight in this age group. (ZNNs2018). One of the main causes of these health deficiencies has been the increasing Food Security problem in Zimbabwe. About 40% of households struggle to get a balanced meal with nutritional value (Zimvac 2020).

Most households enjoy poor diets with a low dietary diversity. Although there are many institutions that have a responsibility for food in Government and City Councils, the mandates are obscure and leave many people and aspects not covered. Furthermore, urban food matters are only given token attention by the public as well as governance and regulatory authorities. There is now a growing body of literature that observe the deteriorating urban food situation and a call for increased attention to urban food security. Youths have not been considered as an important constituency when it comes to issues of nutrition and health yet they constitute a large portion of the population of Harare. There is a large segment of the urban poor that have a poor food and nutrition status. Many people in poor neighbourhoods cannot afford three meals per day and many are documented to skip some meals (Tawodzera et al, 2019; ZimVAC, 2020).

planners on the need for planning for food using the city food region approach.

- Work with Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to ensure school tuckshops sell nutritious food to students like fruits..(MoPSE)



Photo showing informal food stalls at Budiriro 5 Centre. (MDP 2022)

## Methodological Approach

The characterization of the food system for Harare adopted a city region food systems assessment approach. The assessment had three components: a demographic, socio-economic, jurisdictional, and geographical context of the city, overview of city region food system and examination of the governance and policy framework of the food system. Data was collected from secondary sources as well as from interviews with key informants. Extensive food asset mapping of the different attributes that affect food such as location of food markets, shopping centres, supermarkets, restaurants, fast food outlets, and food outlets was done using GIS. The output was different maps depicting different food attributes. In addition to the food systems focus, we deliberately worked closely with the Food Change Labs, with youth in two neighbourhoods of Harare – Budiriro and Shawasha Hills, using the 'lived-experience' approach. Youth Food Change Labs were used to bring youths together in Harare to discuss issues affecting their food diets and map the way forward in improving their food environments.

## Key Findings from the Harare Food Environment Assessment

Harare is the capital city of Zimbabwe with a population of about 1 542 813. (Census 2012). Population estimates for Harare based on the 2012 population show that about 50% of Harare's population is between 10 and 29 years old. This is a very youthful population. The Harare food system shows that youths buy their food from both formal supermarkets and informal markets. There is one big supermarket in Budiriro 5 and several butcheries. In addition there are some informal restaurants and other food outlets scattered in the area. The high income area of Shawasha has one main store. This is a new residential development and residents are affluent enough to afford buying food from the city centre or other centres from other suburbs.

There are many fresh produce markets in Harare, but traditional and dried foods (key for diversity and nutrition) make up a small percentage of the produce available at these markets. There are also food remittances from the diaspora. These constitute on average around 20% of Harare's food.

## KEY MESSAGES/HIGHLIGHTS

Evidence shows that.

- 70% of food consumed in Harare is coming from outside and only 30% is produced locally and is largely made up of leafy vegetables, cabbages, tomatoes and poultry. Part of the 30% is produced illegally as the city has no policy on local food production and some sites from which the food is marketed are deemed illegal.
- Zimbabwe has the 2013 National Food and Nutrition Security Policy, but despite the comprehensive policy:
  - The laws and policies on Food Security are still fragmented and not clearly worked out at local/city level, and
  - awareness on the policy is still low. This is particularly so among young people in the city
- Councils should work with NFC to raise awareness on the national policy at local level using the food systems approach
- Affordability, availability and desirability (taste) influence food choices for youths in Harare. There is need to ensure that healthy food is accessible to youths in the poor neighbourhoods of the city
- Some households and youths buy their food from the informal markets, and this has implications on food safety. There is need to work with these informal markets in providing minimum infrastructure to improve food safety.
- Raise awareness and capacity amongst urban



requirements. There are several institutions that govern food: Food and Nutrition Council (FNC, Min of Health, Councils). These institutions are mainly Government and not community-based resulting in poor coordination of policy on food and nutrition at the local level.

## Formal and Informal

- Approximately 70% of households interviewed from the low-income area of Budiriro 5 said they grow their own vegetables in their backyards. Most from Shawasha purchase food in bulk from supermarkets.
- Fast foods are popular despite their health connotations with 7 out of 10 youths interviewed in Harare saying they would buy fast food if they could afford it.
- In the low income area of Budiriro the majority (70%) relies on porridge and left over food for breakfast whilst in the high-income area of Shawasha Hills cereals are common for breakfast.
- Most traditional and healthy food is supplied by informal traders yet laws and policies do not support their work e.g. labelling/processing standards that are beyond their reach, criminalizing their operations by rendering them illegal

## Governance

- The legislation governing food is mostly outdated and not reflective of realities on the ground. Most laws support the formal and large-scale sector and do not recognise or support the critical role of small-scale and informal sector in feeding urban residents – estimates that 90% of low income urban residents get much of their food from the informal sector.
- The Food and Nutrition Security Policy for Zimbabwe was launched in 2012 with the goal of promoting and ensuring adequate food and nutrition for all people of Zimbabwe. The policy operates at national level through multi-stakeholder platforms chaired by FNC and is supposed to have city and ward committees at local levels. However, there is still very low awareness on the policy and visibility at city and ward levels in Harare is still very low.
- Harare does not have a local policy on Food and Nutrition and other enabling policies like on Urban Agriculture.

## Schools

- Some youths (55%) in the low-income areas and tertiary institutions skip lunch because they cannot afford it. Those who are in school usually buy cheap snacks like Zapnax which are not very healthy. Those in the high income area of Shawasha Hills normally have sandwiches prepared from home. The majority of the low income youths (80%) indicated that they have sadza and cabbage for dinner, with more variety shown in the high income area of Shawasha Hills (spaghetti, rice, sausages – 65%)
- Schools normally sell fast foods to students or they get these from vendors outside the school premises.

## Policy implications and Actions Required

The people's lived reality, building a healthy communication relationship between the youths and elders in food matters, improving packaging and presentation of good food, improving planners' food literacy, as well as awareness raising.

### a) Awareness

The finding on the limited visibility of well-established institutions such as FNC and municipal nutrition units calls for increased awareness on the existence and work of these critical institutions at grassroots levels. This can be spearheaded by urban local authorities through public campaigns, and community events such as food festivals, especially in cities. This also entails working with MoPSE to encourage healthy diets through their tuckshops.

### b) Planning

Food needs to be part of Urban Planning, and planners need to be active participants in the existing and new multi stakeholder platforms at city and neighbourhood level.

### c) Governance and Institutions

There is a policy gap in terms of policies that can effectively regulate the food environment. Harare and other urban authorities must develop relevant policies that will guide how different aspects of the urban food system can function to create an efficient and responsive food environment. Developing a localised food policy with local food council and linking to food youth labs, or labs involving informal sector will enhance understanding, connect actors, stimulate networking in urban food systems and develop adaptive governance to further develop inclusive development of local food policies.

### d) Infrastructure

Urban authorities must plan and develop food system-sensitive infrastructure to ensure that they address the cities food production, processing, transportation, and retailing to improve access, availability, and affordability e.g. decent small-scale and informal infrastructure for food handling to promote public safety, health, and convenience without making it impossible to accommodate certain groups which is sensitive to gender, different age groups as well as vulnerable groups such as the disabled members of society.

### e) Youths and Vulnerable Groups

Young people's social spaces must be designed to also accommodate healthy food needs. It must be convenient and affordable for them to enjoy good food in their existing social spaces.

## References

ZimVAC (2021) Urban Livelihoods Assessment.

Further Reading

This policy brief is drawn from a full report entitled, An Analysis of the Urban Food Environment and Lived Experiences of Urban Youth in Harare and Bulawayo, March 2022

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