HOW JUST IS ACCESS TO FOOD IN AFRICAN CITIES?

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The working paper *"How just is access to food in African cities?"* was developed between September 2021 and March 2022. The paper discusses significant challenges to the functioning of urban food systems that will continue to grow in relevance in the years to come. Due to the timeframe of the research, the paper does not include updated information on the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on food prices, and the threats this is posing to food security. In addition to COVID-19 and climate change, the war became a new shock that affects food distribution across regions. In May 2022, the FAO Food Price Index showed a 22.8% increase above its value in May 2021. The price of cereals, meat, dairy, sugar, and vegetable oils increased significantly compared to 2021. It is necessary to monitor the variation of these prices and work to put active policies into place that prevent the rise of hunger and food insecurity across the world.

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Introduction

01

Food security is defined by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) as "access to nutritious and sufficient food for all" (FAO, et al. 2019).

In **South Africa**, food security's importance has been recognized as a human and a constitutional right. Section 27 of the country's constitution expresses the right to have access to sufficient food for all the population (Republic of South Africa, 1996).

Its relevance has also been recently highlighted in **Kenya**, where the president has launched the Big Four Agenda that aims at addressing four key issues in the country: affordable housing; universal health coverage; manufacturing; and food security (Presidency of Kenya, 2021).

Access to affordable, good quality food is unequal and limited in Africa. Due to physical barriers, food prices, or the functioning of food systems[1] more broadly, there are groups and communities that have limited access to nutritious and decent meals, which impacts their physical and mental health. Food security in Africa has been undermined by factors such as conflict, climate change, and macroeconomic shocks that result in an increase in food prices and a decline in purchasing power. In 2018, 53.1% of Africa's population was either moderately or severely food insecure. By 2021, this number grew to 59.6%, which is significantly higher than the figures for Latin America and the Caribbean (40.9%) and Asia (25.8%) (FAO, et al. 2019, FAO, 2021b). Africa is also the region with the highest prevalence of undernourishment (FAO, 2021b). Several African countries have been identified as suffering from food and hunger crises (Global Network Against Food Crises, 2021). It is the region of the world that has been experiencing the largest increase (12.9%) in the cost of a healthy diet[2] between 2017 and 2019. This impacts differently across the subregions: while Eastern Africa suffered from a 33% increase, Southern Africa saw a 2.1% increase (FAO, 2021b).

Currently, there are two main factors that have exposed the existing limitations of the food systems in these countries and more specifically in their urban areas.

The first is the **COVID-19 pandemic**, which had significant effects on the job market, on the purchasing power of families, and on the logistics around the distribution of food from rural and peri-urban areas to urban areas, and within cities as well.

1 "Food systems encompass the entire range of actors and their interlinked value-adding activities involved in the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal of food products that originate from agriculture, forestry or fisheries, and food industries, and the broader economic, societal and natural environments in which they are embedded" (UN Food Systems Summit 2021, 2021).

2 Healthy diet refers to the sustained consumption of macronutrients (proteins, fat and carbohydrates) and micronutrients (vitamins and minerals) over a period of time (FAO, 2021b)


In 2018, **53.1%** of Africa's population was either moderately or severely food insecure. By 2021, this number grew to **59.6%.**

The second refers to **climate change-related events** such as floods and droughts that are affecting food production, supply and distribution across the African continent.

The four pillars of the Just City in Africa proposed by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung's Just City Working Group, is a relevant framework to understand the current conditions of food access and to move forward towards more just and equitable food systems in African urban areas (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2020). The following priorities established for the Just City in a broader sense can also be followed when thinking of policies and strategies that aim at guaranteeing fair and just access to food for all urban dwellers:

i. **dignity**, which focuses on the right of individuals to be respected regardless of their socioeconomic or political status;

ii. **equity** and **diversity**, which aims at the fair distribution of benefits among its citizens and the inclusion and protection of minorities;

iii. **rights** and **responsibilities** of citizens and visitors; and

iv. **democracy**, with collective decisions that prioritize rights, dignity and inclusion.

This implies an equal access to enough, decent food for all sectors of society, not only in terms of affordability or economic access, but also in the empowerment of key actors in the food system, such as street vendors, small retailers, and small-scale farmers. The relevance of these actors relies on their capacity to reach the *urban invisibles* of these cities – as recipients of injustices and lack of recognition they cannot escape – particularly those living in informal settlements or deprived areas. The empowerment of these actors implies the recognition of their rights to produce and trade, facilitating access to licenses and permits for their operations, and supporting their economic activities through the creation and maintenance of spaces to work. When this doesn't happen, as is currently the situation, these key actors become *urban invisibles* as well, displaced by stronger and larger actors that do not necessarily work for the distribution of food that reaches all, but that is instead profitable.

This working paper looks at the main features of the food systems in the Gauteng City-Region[3], South Africa and the city of Nairobi, Kenya, as well as their interactions with rural and peri-urban areas where food production takes place. It explores food security within these cities and the main elements that explain the inequalities in the distribution of affordable and high-quality food among urban dwellers. It identifies the main actors involved in food distribution, as well as the challenges and limitations they face in their operations. Secondly, it focuses on the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change as two factors that deepen historic and pre-existing inequalities while posing significant challenges and limitations to the food systems' actors.

The increase in food prices, declining purchasing power and the limitations of street and informal workers to operate during the pandemic, together with the unpredictability of food growth and distribution due to climate-related events, put pressure on these urban food systems. It concludes with reflections that can hopefully contribute to the discussion on a fairer and more just access to food in African cities, while looking at possible changes in food governance, the diversification of the food system, the opening of markets to small-scale producers, and food education and health promotion.

The paper is organized based on the following research questions:

1) How just is access to food in African cities?

2) What are the main drivers of inequality in food access?

3) What are the challenges in achieving a fairer distribution and access to food?

4) What are the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change on food distribution?

A set of conclusions and suggestions on possible ways to move forward are presented.

3 The Gauteng-City Region (GCR) is a cluster of cities and towns within and beyond the Gauteng province. Within the province, it includes the cities of Johannesburg, Pretoria, Germiston, Springs, Alberton, Boksburg, Benoni, Vereeniging, Vanderbijlpark, Krugersdorp, Randfontein and Westonaria. Beyond its boundaries, the GCR includes Rustenburg, Sasolburg, Potchefstroom, Klerksdorp, Witbank, Middleburg and Secunda (GCRO, 2021).

Methodology

02

This paper has looked at two relevant cases of urban food security in Africa: Nairobi and the Gauteng City-Region. For this purpose, ten semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants in each of the cities (six in South Africa and four in Kenya). Key informants were researchers, scholars, civil society representatives, and policy institutes that study inequalities in the food system in these areas and that promote actions for fairer access and distribution of food.

Questions focused on their perceptions around access to food in urban areas, the challenges faced by the actors involved in food distribution, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change, the existence of participatory or discussion spaces with different stakeholders, and their impression of possible policy changes to be implemented. Research on secondary data and literature review was also conducted, looking at survey data, previous research studies and relevant statistics to identify the level of food insecurity in these cities, the main actors in food distribution, and the challenges around fair access to food. Data collected from interviews and desktop review research inform this paper.

How just is access to food in African cities?

03

Food insecurity and inadequacy in Gauteng City-Region, South Africa, and Nairobi, Kenya.

Africa has experienced high levels of urbanization in the past decades, with an urban population growth of 2000% between 1950 and 2015 (OECD & SWAC, 2020). It is expected that urban growth in Africa will continue to be at a higher rate than other regions in the world.

The level of urbanization across the different sub regions and countries varies. However, these trends are remarkable in the cases of South Africa and Kenya. In South Africa, the level of urbanization has reached 67%, while in Kenya, only 28% of the total population is urban. However, it has an urban average population growth of 4% (The World Bank, 2022). High and rapid levels of urbanization require focusing on the effects that the growth of urban areas will have in the long term in terms of access to services and goods. Among them, there is access to sufficient, affordable, and nutritious food. The natural growth of the urban population, combined with rural-to-urban migration, represent a decrease in "people that farm", increasing the number of non-farmers that will still require access to food but who do not produce any (Crush and Frayne, 2014). Key informants for this working paper mentioned the limitations faced in urban areas to promote initiatives related to urban agriculture, mostly due to lack of space and safety.[4] The effects that larger urban areas will have in the future in terms of access to enough and affordable food are still unknown, but currently, both countries show the need to focus on the inequalities around their urban food systems to implement policies that prioritize equal access to food products, especially for minorities and excluded groups.

Analyzing food security requires looking at four different dimensions: the physical availability of food, in terms of the level of production and supply distribution; the economic and physical access to food, in terms of affordability and expenditures in relation to perceived income; food utilization, which determines the nutritional status of the consumers as it refers to the quality of the products used and the preparation of meals; and finally the stability of these three dimensions, understanding that for a household to be food secure it should have access to enough, affordable and decent food on a regular basis (FAO, 2008). Therefore, it is necessary to identify the challenges and current scenarios around food production and its accessibility, as well as its quality.

4 Several urban agriculture initiatives in informal settlements have been mentioned by key informants, such as sack gardening, backyard and high-rise building farming as well as hydroponic farming. They highlighted though the need to promote further actions and support to those who want to undertake them.

South Africa is a large producer of crops and livestock, with a strong flow of exports to other countries (Crush & Frayne, 2014). However, more than 25% of its population was living under the food poverty line (R441 per person per month) in 2015 (STATS SA, 2019). In 2017, out of 16.2 million households, 15.8% (2.5 million) reported having inadequate access to food, while 5.5% (almost a million households) reported having severely inadequate access (STATS SA, 2019). By 2020, the number of moderately or severely food insecure people was 26.3 million (FAO, 2021b), or about 45% of the total population.[5] The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), a common global scale to classify the magnitude of food insecurity, found that between September and December 2020, 16% of the population faced high levels of acute food insecurity: 8,175,000 people were classified as in crisis (phase 3), while 1,160,000 were in emergency (phase 4)[6] (2021). This total of over 9 million people are in need of urgent action to guarantee sustained food access.

Adequate access to food was strongly determined by demographics: black African-headed households had the highest proportion of households suffering from inadequate food access (17.9%), compared to 96.6% of white-headed households who reported having adequate access to food (STATS SA, 2019). At the national level, people living in urban informal areas are at higher risk of hunger (36.1%) than urban formal areas (25.6%). The difference is not only intra-urban: in rural areas, the proportion of people at risk of hunger is 20.3% in the formal areas, and 32.8% in informal ones (Shisana, et al. 2013). These statistics show that, despite South Africa's capacity to produce food and feed other economies, access to food is a challenge and reflects inequalities between formal and informal areas. They also show differential limitations faced by urban areas compared to rural ones.

When looking at the region of Gauteng, indicators follow the same pattern. In the province of Gauteng, 16% of its population was identified by the IPC as being in a food security crisis or emergency, and urban populations in specific areas such as Diepsloot faced higher levels of food insecurity (IPC, 2021). In the Gauteng-City Region, where between 13.4 million and 16.8 million people lived in 2011 (GCRO, 2021), 36% of respondents in the Quality of Life Survey in 2020/2021 lived below the poverty line (R1,193 per person per month for the Gauteng province), compared to 24% in 2017/2018 (de Kadt, et al. 2021). 52% of households were identified as moderately or severely food insecure, which varied across municipalities: Merafong had 65% of households with food insecurity, while Emfuleni and Rand West had 62% and 60%, respectively (de Kadt, et al. 2021). Black households are most likely to experience severe food insecurity, while white households find themselves in a better position as only 2% of them reported suffering from severe food insecurity (de Kadt, et al. 2021). These racial disparities expose historical inequalities that remained after Apartheid. As will be seen, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these pre-existing inequalities, increasing the prevalence of households that skipped meals and that saw their food expenditures reduced as a result of lack of income and the loss of employment.

South Africa is a large producer of crops and livestock, with a strong flow of exports to other countries (Crush & Frayne, 2014). However, more than **25%** of its population was living under the food poverty line in 2015.

5 FAO defines mild food security as the status when there is some uncertainty regarding the ability to obtain food. Moderate food insecurity is identified when a person has insufficient money or resources to obtain a healthy diet, has uncertainty about the ability to obtain food, and has occasionally skipped meals. Severe food insecurity refers to the status of people that have run out of food or gone on an entire day without eating (FAO, 2022).

6 IPC classifies household food security on a scale from 1 to 5: 1 – None/Minimal; 2- Stressed; 3 – Crisis; 4- Emergency; 5 – Catastrophe. Phase 3- Crisis stands for "households that either have food consumption gaps that are reflected by high or above-usual acute malnutrition or are marginally able to meet minimum food needs but only by depleting essential livelihood assets or through crisis-coping strategies". Phase 4 – Emergency is defined as "households that either have large food consumption gaps which are reflected in very high acute malnutrition and excess mortality or are able to mitigate large food consumption gaps but only by employing emergency livelihood strategies and asset liquidation" (IPC, 2022).

In Kenya, out of a total population of 44 million, where more than half are considered poor (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2021), 68.5% are moderately or severely food insecure (FAO, 2021b). In 2016, 29.9% of Kenyan children under the age of 5 suffered from stunting (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). The analysis of urban food security requires paying special attention to the capital city of Nairobi, as a total of 4.9 million people (Nairobi City County, 2018), around 30% of Kenya's urban population, lived in the city in 2015 (Sverdlik, 2021). 70% of its population lives in informal settlements that lack access to basic services, and that are located in only 5% of the total land of the city (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2020). The growth of population density (inhabitants per km²) in some of these informal settlements is extraordinary: between 2000 and 2020, the population density of Huruma increased by more than 760%, in Kibera by more than 500%, and in Mathare more than 470% (Sverdlik, 2021). Poverty and food poverty are, however, less prevalent in this urban area than when looking at rural and urban areas combined. The poverty level in Nairobi County is 16.7%, compared to a 36.1% nationally. The prevalence of food poverty was 16.1% in the County, compared to 21% nationally. The most affected groups are women, elderly people, people with disabilities, and slum dwellers, among others, who become *urban invisibles* in terms of access to food. It should be noted that Nairobi County produces 20% of the food it consumes (Nairobi City County, 2018).

In 2018, a survey of more than 1,400 households in Nairobi City County done by the Hungry Cities Partnership and the University of Nairobi found that 12% of them had experienced lack of food several times, many times or always (Owuor, 2018). The survey also established that only 29% of surveyed households could be considered food secure. Of the rest, 13% were mildly food insecure, 33% were moderately food insecure and 25% were severely food insecure (Owuor, 2018). Food insecurity had a differential effect across population groups: households in the lowest income quintile had 14 more chances of being food insecure, compared to higher-income households (Onyango, Crush & Owuor, 2021).

In August 2020, the IPC Acute Food Security Analysis in urban areas of Kenya (IPC, 2020) assessed the food security situation and vulnerabilities faced in eight informal settlements in Nairobi, two informal settlements in Mombasa and two informal settlements in Kisumu through a telephone survey. 43% of the population surveyed were facing high levels of food insecurity, with 803,000 respondents in a crisis stage and 267,000 in emergency stage. More than 80% of respondents said that the number of meals consumed in the household had decreased compared to March 2020. The identified key drivers of food insecurity were the increase in food prices and reduced incomes as a result of loss of employment occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic-related lockdowns. In the surveyed settlements in Nairobi, the share of population in the crisis or emergency phase of food insecurity was 35% in Githurai, 50% in Kangemi, 50% in Kawangware, 50% in Mathare, 40% in Kayole, 40% in Dandora, 50% in Kibra, and 35% in Mukuru. As in South Africa, populations in phases of crisis and emergency – together with catastrophe, although not registered in these settlements – require active and continued intervention to receive food assistance.

As seen, Nairobi and the Gauteng-City Region show inequalities in terms of food security, mostly linked to the socioeconomic status of the different groups of urban dwellers. In both cities, and in both countries, there is availability of food either through domestic production or food imports. Access to food, however, depends on the availability of income and the purchasing capacity of households.

In Kenya, out of a total population of **44 million**, where more than half are considered poor, **68.5%** are moderately or severely food insecure

What are the main drivers of food inequality and what are the challenges to achieve fairer access?

04

Nairobi and Gauteng-City region's food systems

The analysis of food insecurity in African cities requires understanding the challenges around food access in urban areas, which are determined by specific urban dynamics.

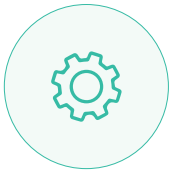
In the first place, urban dwellers rely heavily on income to access food (Chege, et al. 2021). Also, thinking in urban terms requires moving away from an understanding of food insecurity as a rural problem, where the challenge is only located in the production of food, but instead looking at the determinants of inequalities at the city level and the dynamics that might explain them (Battersby, 2012). This is increasingly important not only in the context of growing urbanization levels, but also because of the high levels of food production and the capacity of these national food systems to produce enough food, even to export in the case of South Africa. If this is the case, then limited access to food in urban areas necessarily responds to other challenges that might explain these inequalities. In this sense, it is necessary to look at a variety of elements of the food system, such as actors involved in the distribution, main sources of access to food products, challenges in the logistics of food distribution, policies implemented, and limitations at the production level.

Actors. Though different in some of their dynamics, urban food systems of South Africa and Kenya share common stakeholders involved in the production, retail and distribution of food.

In terms of **production**, there are large and small-scale agricultural and livestock producers working in the rural, peri-urban and urban areas.

The **retail sector** entails a wide variety of actors, including supermarkets or large chain formal retailers, present both in South Africa and Kenya but with stronger impact in South African cities; smaller retailers, including street vendors, informal retailers and *spazas* (small grocery shops) – in the case of South Africa; and the so called "middle-men" in the case of Kenya.

In terms of **assistance** and **distribution** of food to the *urban invisibles*, community, grassroots and faith-based organizations play a significant role in the creation of spaces that guarantee fairer access to food. Finally, the State – at the national and local levels – defines the main policies in relation to production and retail, and contributes or hinders the development of certain activities, such as the ones developed by informal street vendors.



A. PRODUCTION

Large- and small-scale producers. Agricultural and livestock production is divided between larger farms, generally in charge of exports and supplies to large chain retailers, and farmers with a smaller scale of production that predominantly supply to small retailers and the so-called informal retail sector. Between these two groups of producers, there are significant differences and inequalities in relation to their resilience to external shocks (economic, natural events, and biological hazards such as the COVID-19 pandemic); their capacity to influence trade and food policy; the availability of resources to face costs related to supplies such as seeds, water and land; and finally in the products they produce.

In South Africa, the consolidation of food production is evident as only four companies account for 73% of the market share of maize, and 87% of the wheat market (Battersby, Haysom, et al. 2015). The concentration of food production is a result of the deregulation and liberalization policies that started in the 1980s and which have been consolidated since 1994 with the end of Apartheid and the opening of South Africa to international trade. These policies corporatized and concentrated power across the entire food value chain, in terms of production, logistics, manufacturing, and retail (Greenberg, 2017). The main advantage of these highly corporatized businesses relies on the production level: the more they produce, the lower the price of the products, and the higher the competition with smaller producers (Greenberg, 2017). Large-scale farmers are severely advantaged in comparison to smaller producers in terms of the consolidation of land ownership, the privatization of cooperatives and the expansion of white agricultural interests, reflected in monopoly control (Battersby, Haysom, et al. 2015). As a result, production for smaller and black farmers has become a challenge due to limitations in access to natural resources such as land and water, as well as the food system more broadly due to logistics restrictions and market access.

In South Africa, the consolidation of food production is evident as only four companies account for **73%** of the market share of maize, and **87%** of the wheat market (Battersby, Haysom, et al. 2015)

Both South African and Kenyan small producers face similar challenges that limit their capacity to produce and sell at a lower cost to make food more affordable for urbanites. Those challenges range from limited access to inputs such as fertilizers and seeds, to lack of infrastructure, technical skills advice and support, and the unpredictability of climate, which has suffered from notorious changes in the past decades and has affected crops' growth and livestock raising. This is taking place in a context where Africa is seen as the "new frontier of accumulation", where the narrative identifies the continent as a region that missed out on the first Green Revolution, hindering its capacity to increase agricultural productivity (Mayet, 2016). Thus, investments are done in seeds and infrastructure to increase food production but with a significant focus on agricultural outputs and exports and not necessarily focusing on making food more affordable for those in need, particularly in South Africa. At the same time, the Green Revolution supposes the challenges to face the costs of fertilizers and pesticides, and to follow rules regarding the exchange of seeds that push towards mono-crop production (Mayet, 2016).

Regarding seeds, farmers on the continent face significant limitations. More than 80% of seeds in Africa are produced and distributed informally, as the exchange of seeds between farmers is a good source for new and better varieties. The purchase of hybrid seeds is usually not possible for small farmers due to their cost. Maize and crops destined for exports are usually located within the "formal system" (Mayet, 2016). In the case of South Africa, the introduction of GMO seeds poses significant challenges to smaller producers, as they have high requirements, including fertilizers, insecticides and pesticides. This dependency on chemicals for their usage poses financial constraints on smaller farmers, who have less financial margin to face these costs. At the same time, there are concerns about how the current GM-centric agricultural model can help to increase resilience in the food system (Battersby, Haysom, et al. 2015). A key informant in South Africa who is involved in consultancy services for farmers highlighted the need for advice on seeds usage as well as fertilizers to increase and improve production. In Kenya, seeds become a challenge as the exchange of seeds between farmers is discouraged by the government, who seeks a more "formal market" of seeds (Seed Savers Kenya, 2018). In a context of high variability of climate and its consequential impact on food production, the exchange of seeds could be a useful resource to have a more diverse production and, as a result, be able to face financial and climate shocks. In terms of infrastructure, the poor state of roads hinders the distribution and logistics of food.

In terms of natural resources, land is a contested resource for production as it is concentrated under large agro-business corporations, while small-scale farmers face challenges to access land, or live and produce under the threat of being evicted. With regard to water, its limited access due to climate variability, particularly in the case of South Africa, or the highly restrictive issuance of water licenses challenges production.

Food systems in these cities, as part of wider national contexts of condensed and corporatized systems, need to promote the involvement of smaller-scale producers. Even though these producers are able to distribute their products, one of the main problems identified is the lack of access to land that enables larger and more efficient production of crops and livestock. In addition to this, key informants from South Africa have also mentioned biases against black farmers and producers when accessing the food system. Improved access of small-scale producers in urban access could improve urban dwellers' access to more affordable food at more convenient locations.

The *urban invisibles* of Gauteng and Nairobi rely significantly on small retailers and vendors to access their food, as will be seen in the following section. At the same time, these traders acquire these products from small-scale producers. Letting these actors in charge of the production, distribution and retail of food become invisibles and unable to participate in the wider food system pushes urban dwellers to only access food through formal, large retailers, who beyond are not always being able to provide the best supply of food, also play a strong role in terms of consumers' choices and the food environment.

B. RETAIL

Food retail in South Africa and Kenya can be understood as a system that combines formal and informal actors and spaces. Super and hypermarkets are formal retail outlets that offer a large selection of types of processed and ultra-processed foods, as well as cereals, legumes, and fruits and vegetables in smaller quantities. On the informal side of food retail, a wide variety of outlets can be seen in Kenya: kiosks (small, temporary or mobile stands that sell most products in small quantities); mom-and-pop shops (larger than kiosks, offer processed and ultra-processed foods); tabletop vendors or *mama mboga* (small mobile and temporary roadside stands); cereal shops; open-air or wet markets (semi-permanent structures that operate on specific week days and sell fruits, vegetables, cereals, legumes, spices); cooked food street vendors; and informal restaurants (Chege, et al. 2021). In South Africa, the map of informal supply of food retail outlets adds the *spaza* shops, grocery stores that vary in shape and size but that fulfill the role of providing food and sometimes non-food items to residents of townships and settlements (Gastrow, 2022). Street vendors are also relevant actors in the distribution of food.

Supermarkets and large chain retail. In the past decades, rapid rates of urbanization have been one of the enablers for the expansion of supermarket networks in African countries (Weatherspoon & Reardon, 2003). South Africa and Kenya have been two countries on the continent that have experienced a large presence of these services. In South Africa, even though supermarkets were 2% of all food retail outlets, they represented between 50% and 60% of all food retail. In the case of Kenya, supermarkets controlled between 20% and 30% of the retail (Weatherspoon & Reardon, 2003). Supermarkets are a key actor in a highly corporatized and industrialized agri-food system in South Africa (Greenberg, 2017), and in a country with a medium stage level of supermarket expansion, as in the case of Kenya (Weatherspoon & Reardon, 2003), where between 1995 and 2005 it had grown at an average annual rate of 18% (Neven, et al. 2005).

In the Gauteng region, supermarkets have a significant presence in urban areas, although their presence declines in informal settlement areas, where households rely on so-called informal sources of food distribution. Key informants agree on the fact that supermarkets' expansion continues, pushing smaller enterprises from the market, as they open smaller versions of supermarkets in poorer areas. In the case of Nairobi, although supermarkets are also widely expanded, they serve primarily the interests of the middle class or households with larger purchasing capacity. Lower-income households and residents of informal settlements generally purchase their food from smaller or informal retailers.

Smaller "informal" retailers. The so-called informal sector in these food systems includes the operation of the previously identified stores, as well as street vendors and traders that facilitate access to food to households that are either located at long distances from the "formal retailers", or that can benefit from the purchase of smaller quantities of produce according to their purchasing power (Battersby, 2012). In South Africa, street food traders account for 40% of the informal township economy at a national level (Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies 2020). In Kenya, the informal sector employed 11.8 million people compared to 2.4 million employed in the formal sector in 2014 (KENASVIT, 2020).

In South Africa, even though supermarkets were **2%** of all food retail outlets, they represented between **50%** and **60%** of all food retail. In the case of Kenya, supermarkets controlled between **20%** and **30%** of the retail.

In Nairobi City County, small shops, supermarkets, and kiosks are highly frequented by households, followed by market and street sellers. 61% of households (out of more than 1,400) responded that they buy food from the "informal market" on an almost daily basis, which proves the importance these actors have in food distribution at the local level (Owuor, 2018). Visits to and purchases from supermarkets by low-income neighborhoods' residents take place but with less frequency – mostly once a month (Neven, et al. 2005). People usually turn to supermarkets to get maizemeal, bread, rice, pasta, coffee, oil, and sugar, among other products, while small shops, kiosks and street traders are the source for fruits and vegetables (Wagner, et al. 2019). A study drawn from the Nairobi Urban Health and Demographic Surveillance System (NUHDSS) in informal settlements showed that in Nairobi most households bought raw foods from the market (87%), with the rest of households purchasing cooked food from the streets (Kimani-Murage, et al. 2014). It should be noted that small retailers in informal settlements face challenges related to access to services and the maintenance of food safety. For example, the high cost of water in the settlements limit the possibilities to use it for washing produce or cooking pans, and a significant number of them are near open sewers and drains in the settlements of Kibera, Mathare and Mukuru (Ahmed, et al. 2019). These challenges, resulting from inadequate infrastructure, increase risks to food.

In many townships and informal areas of the Gauteng City-Region (GCR), up to 70% of households usually rely on the informal sector for food supplies (de Kadt, Maree & Naidoo, 2020). In Johannesburg, a survey has shown that over 90% of households identified supermarkets as a source of food products, with a monthly frequency. However, small shops and *spazas* were frequented at least once a week by 85% of the respondents (Rudolph, et al. 2021). The frequency with which respondents visited these two types of retail stores is a reflection of the benefits previously mentioned for each type of shop. While supermarkets can offer a wider variety of products and sell cheaper products in a large quantity, smaller or informal retailers show significant advantages in terms of location and economic accessibility both in Gauteng and Nairobi.

Comparing the retail structure between both cities, it is noticeable that the formal system is more present in Gauteng. In Nairobi, large supermarket networks are less developed, which contributes to a larger informal system that includes shops and stores, and the "middle-men" that mediate between producers and retailers. Key informants in Nairobi have mentioned them as sometimes being responsible for price distortions.

Key informants from South Africa and Kenya highlight a lack of significant organization at the informal sector level that could allow workers to ask for better working conditions and less government harassment. In some cases, they consider them to be "politically silenced". Informal and street vendors face challenges related to access to appropriate work environments, such as access to toilets and water. This can sometimes result in extra costs in their operations, adding to the stress and extra time consumption (Carr, 2019). In the case of street vendors, the main

In South Africa, street food traders account for **40%** of the informal township economy at a national level. In Nairobi City County, small shops, supermarkets, and kiosks are highly frequented by households, followed by market and street sellers. **61%** of households responded that they buy food from the "informal market" on an almost daily basis.

challenges are related to the relationship with government authorities. Vendors suffer from harassment as well from the confiscation of their goods. Key informants mention that the number of informal/street vendors is quite large compared to the space available for them to operate, particularly in Nairobi. Space is one of their main limitations, as they are always looking for profitable places to work in, in the case of Nairobi, the CBD. In Nairobi, confederations and organizations of workers are currently trying to push for the creation of pop-up markets where smaller vendors can sell their products in better infrastructure conditions.

Both in Nairobi and the Gauteng City-Region, the advantages and disadvantages of each type of retailer tend to coincide. In the case of supermarkets, some of their advantages are around the lower prices per unit of food products, the higher safety standards of the produce, and the large range of foods available. However, these formal retailers struggle to fulfill certain aspects, such as being affordable for the poorest groups of society, having a more limited expansion in geographical terms, and not offering credit to lower-income households. These limitations make the informal retail sector or the *spazas* more attractive to them (Wegerif, 2020). The unit sizes are more affordable, as households can buy for their everyday use (what in Kenya is known as the *Kadogo* system). They also have a locational advantage, as well as long opening hours (Njanja, 2019). Per unit, however, the price of food can be higher. In this sense, the most vulnerable households are usually faced with the reality of spending more money on food, as they are not able to buy large quantities. Also, the quality of products can sometimes be perceived as poorer. In the case of meat and fresh produce vendors, they can provide cheaper food options and have locational advantages, but the safety of the products can be challenged in bromatological terms, or even in the lack of facilities to ensure the maintenance of the cold chain (Battersby, Marshak & Mngqibisa 2016).

C. ASSISTANCE

Grassroots, faith-based and community organizations are also significant actors in terms of food distribution. They are in charge and responsible for the functioning of communal spaces for food access, such as soup and community kitchens. During the COVID-19 pandemic, these organizations played a key role in the provision of food to households in need. Some of them offered their services to foreign nationals, who were not included in the government's relief programs. However, they generally relied on external funding, which threatens the continuation of these spaces when it decreases. In Nairobi, there is a significant presence of women and youth groups involved in the organization of agricultural economic activity at a small scale.

D. STATE

Food access is also ensured through the implementation of government programs that prove to play a strong redistributive role. School feeding programs in South Africa reach a significant number of households and help to reduce inequalities in term of food access. In South Africa, the National School Nutrition Program targets learners in primary and secondary schools, providing them with one nutritious meal that includes proteins, fresh fruits and vegetables, and carbohydrates. By 2014, the program had reached over 9 million children in over 19,000 schools nationwide. In the Gauteng province, it had reached more than 1.2 million learners (Republic of South Africa, 2014). In Kenya, school-feeding programs play a key role in distributing daily hot lunch to children.

A total of 1.6 million children in primary and pre-primary level were receiving school meals in 2018 through a program that was originally funded by the World Food Programme and later on handed over to the government (World Food Programme, 2018).

However, in terms of food policy, it is possible to see in the case of South Africa a "market-based policy" or a "laissez-faire" approach, as the State does not have an active intervention in terms of limiting the effects of the corporatized food system. Key informants have mentioned that the government lacks information on small-scale production, which limits their capacity to plan and implement effective policies.

Effects of urban food systems on health and nutrition

The high level of corporatization and the relevance of large food companies in the value chain impacts the consumer food environment (CFE) (Greenberg, 2017). The CFE refers to the factors involved in consumers' choices in terms of food consumption. In this sense, the price of products, its relation to the quality of food, as well as the conditions of supply, impact the decisions and the possibilities that households have of satisfying their food needs. It is known that ultra-processed food tends to be cheaper and more affordable than higher quality food, which makes it more attractive to low-income and middle-class households. These decisions, influenced by the actions of the power of corporations involved in the food system, have a direct impact on public health as well (Greenberg, 2017). As diets shift from cereal and fiber basis to sugar and fats, food-related non-communicable diseases rise in African countries, representing an extra cost in terms of health care and treatments. Obesity and diabetes, for example, are resulting health conditions of poor-quality diets where ultra-processed products are key (Galvez, 2018). The effects of poor diets are differential between urban and rural areas in South Africa. The South African National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey showed that overweight and obesity are highest in informal urban areas (20% and 5.2% for boys and 20.8% and 9.3% for girls, respectively), followed by formal areas (11.8% and 5.4% for boys, and 19.4% and 8.9% for girls). Malnutrition as a result of poor quality or lack of access to food is also high. Girls in urban informal areas had the highest levels of stunting, with a 20.9% prevalence (Shisana, et al. 2013).

In Kenya, urban areas are experiencing the same nutrition transition as South Africa and other countries. A survey done in the neighborhood of Makadara in 2017 showed widespread consumption of unhealthy food (fried foods, sweet foods and sweetened beverages), as well as of healthy but energy dense foods. These consumption habits are strictly related to the advertising and commercialization of food products. Sweet beverages are commonly advertised items and they are widely available just as fried and processed foods. Formal retail outlets commonly sell energy dense nutritional food items, such as butter or cookies (African Population and Health Research Center 2019). Studies on Nairobi's settlements have shown the prevalence of diabetes and non-communicable diseases, mostly as a result of behavioral conditions (consumption of food, alcohol, and cigarettes) (Ayah, et al. 2013).

The highly corporatized agri-food systems and the competition in terms of food prices between large corporations and small producers make it more attractive for consumers to acquire poor quality foods. Key informants have called for the promotion of education and awareness campaigns that emphasize the need to have a sustainable, balanced diet that includes the consumption of fresh produce and cereals, among others. These efforts also require a rethinking of government and corporate policies around food donations.

The experience of COVID-19 has proven the relevance that street vendors, local markets, and informal traders have in the distribution of food at the local level. The most relegated areas of cities, inhabited by low-income households, are usually reached by smaller-scale actors of the food system. Working towards a more just access of food in highly urbanised areas such as Gauteng and Nairobi County requires putting into place inclusive policies that acknowledge the relevance of these actors in the distribution process. In this sense, licensing regulations and permits expedition policies should be reviewed and simplified so that so-called informal vendors and traders can continue operating as "last mile deliverers" of affordable food to the households that need it most. Policies should also include the work on the provision of public or market spaces for these vendors to work. It is important to find solutions that allow traders to continue working in areas of relevance for them but also for their buyers, while providing them with the necessary equipment to preserve their products and guarantee the quality of the food they commercialize.

What are the effects of COVID-19 and climate change on food distribution?

05

The COVID-19 pandemic and the rise in climate change events have exposed and deepened pre-existing inequalities in the food systems of African cities.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 in March 2020, the impossibility to continue working and the consequent reduction of income in working families impacted their capacity to access food products. The existence of lockdowns and reduced mobility made it difficult to distribute and transport food products at previous levels. The imposition of lockdowns and curfews also restricted the operation of street and informal vendors, the key actors in the distribution of food in urban areas. At the same time, the increase in events such as floods and droughts in a context of a climate crisis results in unpredictability in the production and supply of food, particularly of crops, and they can have significant effects on the logistics of the food systems. At the same time, these unpredictable events are limiting small-scale producers and farmers' capacity to respond to these shocks due their lack of financial support to acquire the necessary equipment and technology that would help them adapt to climate variability.

This section explores the impact that these two factors have on the different actors involved in food production and distribution in urban areas. It identifies the main challenges and limitations faced by the main groups responsible for the distribution of food products to urban dwellers, particularly to the *urban invisibles* of these cities, in a context of natural and biological emergencies.

Impacts of COVID-19 in the food systems of Nairobi and Gauteng City-Region

The outbreak of COVID-19 represented a significant shock to the food systems of African cities as mobility restrictions impacted the distribution of food as well as there were large disruptions in the supply chain (George, 2020, FAO, 2021a), which affected the prices of food products. At the same time, the impact of the pandemic on the job market impacted the levels of income and, as a consequence, the purchasing power of households. In South Africa, only 15 million out of 40 million working-age people are employed, a situation that worsened during the pandemic (Brookings, 2021). In the Gauteng City-Region, 18% of respondents in the Quality of Life Survey 2020/2021 (de Kadt, et al. 2021) reported having lost a job since March 2020. This had a **significant impact on their capacity to purchase food products**, which has been identified as one of the main challenges during 2020 and 2021. The pandemic not only impacted the job market but also led to an increase in food prices both in Kenya and in South Africa, which between March 2 and March 26 2020 experienced an increase in food prices of 3.3% (PMBEJD, 2020).

The pandemic not only impacted the job market but also led to an increase in food prices both in Kenya and in South Africa, which between March 2 and March 26 2020 experienced an increase in food prices of 3.3% (PMBEJD, 2020).

In March 2020, there was a change in buying patterns in South Africa, as women chose to exclude meat, dairy, fruits and vegetables from their purchases, and focused on acquiring staple foods and non-perishables they could afford to buy (Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies 2020).

The effects of COVID-19 in terms of access to food were clear:

- 25% of households in the Gauteng City-Region had adults who had skipped a meal in 2020 due to lack of money to buy food;
- 20% of households with children reported a child skipping a meal;
- 52% of households did not spend enough to secure a basic nutritious food basket, estimated at R2, 779.10 (USD151.5)[7] for a 4-person household (de Kadt, et al. 2021);and
- Alternative sources of food became more important, as 44% of households with children benefited from school-feeding schemes in 2020, an increase from 38% from 2017/2018, which shows the relevance of these programs in emergency contexts, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. In this sense, schools undertook a significant role beyond education in itself, consolidating their role as key actors in terms of food access.

The restrictions imposed on mobility and circulation affected the functioning of informal networks of food, such as in the case of informal and street vendors. In the case of Gauteng City-Region, only supermarkets and "formal sellers" were allowed to remain open during the first weeks of the 2020 lockdown. Selling activities by informal, street vendors and spazas were forbidden, including in the operation of public markets (Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies 2020). This posed several challenges and limitations to households that relied on local access to food. Even though by April 2020 street vendors were authorized to start working again, some street vendors suffered from harassment and the confiscation of products while operating in the streets (Wegerif, 2020). These practices, already existent before the beginning of the pandemic, continued in 2021, motivating the South African Informal Traders Alliance to call for police to stop confiscating their products and guaranteeing better treatment of informal and street vendors (Mafata, 2021).

In the Gauteng City-Region, the effects of lockdowns and general restrictions due to COVID-19 were also visible in terms of mobility and acquisition of food and other needs. Shopping trips were respondents' most frequent type of trip and had a much more localized nature between 2020 and 2021. More frequent trips are shorter trips: 48% of respondents said that it took them 15 minutes or less to reach the shops, compared to 27% in 2017/2018 (de Kadt, et al. 2021).

The effects of COVID-19 in terms of food acquisition in Nairobi are similar to the ones in the Gauteng City-Region.

- 74% of 200 residents surveyed in May 2020 in five informal settlements of the city reported having skipped meals or eating less due to the incapacity to purchase food (Sverdlik, 2021).

In Nairobi, COVID-19 restrictions on movement and circulation limited informal settlements households' capacity to acquire foods in bulk in areas further away in the city, or on the outskirts of the cities. Key informants mentioned that this forced them to buy from sellers close to their dwellings, sometimes paying higher prices for food due to the generalized increase in food prices. Also, during the first months of the pandemic, panic buying was seen as people were trying to get as many food products as they could afford during the time when stores were open. In general, and as a result of income reduction, vendors experienced decreased sales (GAIN, 2020).

As previously mentioned, informal traders face significant challenges and vulnerabilities that became more visible and deepened during the COVID-19 crisis. Curfews imposed during 2020 and 2021 severely impacted informal vendors as they restricted their operations and the transportation of food products. Informal markets also saw their activities limited due to the closures, for example in the case of Eastleigh in May 2020 (International Food Policy Research Institute, 2020).

7 US dollar-South African Rand conversion May 2020: 1USD-R18.34

COVID-19 relief policies

In terms of relief policies implemented by the governments, 13% of respondents in the 2020/2021 Quality of Living Survey in Gauteng said they had received food support from the government or an NGO during the pandemic. Also, 35% of the respondents reported having applied for the COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress (SRD) grant that the government implemented in May 2020. Black African and colored respondents were more likely to report that they had applied for the grant (de Kadt, et al. 2021). The SRD is promoted by the South African Government and consists of a R350 grant per month (19USD). The grants are assigned only to South African citizens, residents or refugees – not to foreign nationals, who end up being "new" *urban invisibles*. To qualify, one must be unemployed and should not receiving any other income or social grant, or any other government support. The suspension in the distribution of these grants led to riots in July 2021, pushing the government to restart the distribution. Child support grant beneficiaries received an extra R300 (16.35USD) in May 2020, and an extra grant of R500 (27.26USD) per month from June to October.

The government issued relief as well in the form of food parcels as temporary assistance for people who were unable to meet their basic needs. Recipients were citizens, permanent residents, or registered refugees who were receiving disability grants, were suffering from disasters, or who had no member in the household who was employed, among other requirements (South African Government, 2020). In March 2020, the provincial government of Gauteng announced food assistance for citizens who earned a combined household income of R3600 (USD196), recipients of pensions, disability and child welfare, and military veterans. They worked together with organizations and foundations that donated money and/or food and collaborated in the distribution to the neediest households. A hotline was also created for people in need of food assistance from the government (DispatchLIVE, 2020).

In the case of South Africa and the Gauteng City-Region, government financial support received by households in need of access to food during the pandemic was significantly limited. As mentioned above, a household of four people needed around R2800 (USD153) to acquire a healthy food basket to stay away from hunger but also to receive the necessary nutrients. The limitations of the social grants are clear in this sense: they worked as an emergency policy destined to avoid people from starving, but their effects to enable people to access the necessary amount and quality of food to be considered food secure were far from desirable. This is if we consider that the social relief grant distributed R350, while in May 2020 a basic food basket cost R960 (USD52), being 9.8% more expensive than the same basket in May 2019 (IPC, 2021).

13% of respondents in the 2020/2021 Quality of Living Survey in Gauteng said they had received food support from the government or an NGO during the pandemic.

In Kenya, the government established a cash transfer program targeting households in vulnerable urban settlements. The program reached 20,000 households since April 2020, distributing Ksh. 4,000 monthly (38USD)[8]. In addition to the government's intervention, the World Food Programme (WFP) distributed Ksh. 4,000 per person per month to more than 55,000 households in the 11 sub-counties of Nairobi (IPC, 2020). Social pensions were expanded to 300,000 new household beneficiaries, and a public works program called Kazi Mtaani was created with the goal of providing jobs to more than 26,000 Kenyans living in informal settlements (GAIN, 2020).

These social protection programs had some limitations. Even if they worked as a relief to the beneficiaries, they failed to reach the most vulnerable groups. It is estimated that the COVID-19 cash transfer program assisted only less than 5% of all socioeconomically vulnerable households in Nairobi (Human Rights Watch, 2021). In addition, the program was riddled with irregularities, like ignoring eligibility criteria for beneficiaries and diverting funds to officials' friends and relatives (Warah, 2021).

Regarding food production and support to smaller producers, in 2020 the Kenyan government issued an e-voucher system that targeted around 200,000 farmers. The subsidy was expected to assist farmers in the acquisition of seeds, fertilizers, soil testing services, and other tools (Kairu, 2020). In relation to food aid and affordability, in March 2020 the government launched a program to mobilize food at a subsidized price, and in September 2020 it established regulations on maize prices (International Food Policy Research Institute, 2020).

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World Food Programme (WFP) distributed **Ksh. 4,000** per person per month to more than **55,000** households in the 11 sub-counties of Nairobi.

8 US dollar-Kenyan Shilling conversion May 2020: 1USD-Ksh105.05

Climate-related shocks and their effects on food security

As the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed some of the pre-existing inequalities in urban cities, such as income, access to jobs, and to urban services, and has limited food accessibility across urban areas, climate change events are also putting pressure on food systems in South Africa and Kenya. In terms of natural disasters, droughts are the most important reason for agricultural production loss across the world, followed by floods (FAO, 2021a). In Africa, climate change has a high negative impact on agriculture and crop production, as well as on nutrition, and on key economic actors (IPCC 2022). Losses in total crop and livestock between 2008 and 2018 represented approximately 20 billion dollars, and the two largest commodity groups that have been affected are cereals, and roots and tubers (FAO, 2021a). The effects of these losses are not only visible in terms of trade, but also in food consumption. The production loss between 2008 and 2018 represented a loss of 82 days of calorie intake per capita per year (FAO, 2021a).

Since the 1980s, South Africa has suffered economic losses of over 95 billion rands as a result of weather-related disasters such as floods, wildfires, storms and droughts (Institute for Security Studies, 2021). The recent Western Cape drought plus floods and fires in different provinces expose the country's vulnerability to these events, not only in terms of disaster management but also in the effects that these events can have on agriculture production. Crop revenues could fall as much as 90% by 2100 as a result of climate change and variability, primarily affecting small-scale producers (IPCC, 2007).

In Kenya, the economic losses as a result of climate change are estimated to be around 3-5% of GDP annually. The main climate-related events are droughts and floods, with a decrease in cold days and nights and an increase in temperature in certain areas of the country (Kenya, 2020). This poses the challenge to government authorities and main actors in the Kenyan food system to work on the adaptation of production and to increase resilience to face the effects of these events. Among climate-related events, the increase in rainfall and droughts across Kenya possess challenges in terms of adaptation. Kenya will likely experience losses in the production of milk, maize, tea, beef, potatoes, among others, which could impact the price of products, as well as per capita calorie availability. The increase in rainfall has the potential to increase production in the highlands, but in order for this to contribute to agriculture production, investments in inputs and services, such as in infrastructure, water management, and land-use policy, need to be made (Herrero, et al. 2010).

In South African and Kenyan rural and peri-urban areas, small-scale producers are the most affected by these events. The changing nature of the climate context affects the predictability of the crops. An unexpected increase in rains in Nairobi, as well as recent frosts in the Gauteng region, affected agricultural production and the capacity to predict these events. The impact of these challenges is not equally distributed between all actors in the agribusiness. Changes in environmental conditions require farmers to adapt and acquire the necessary equipment and technology that enables them to protect their produce.

While this is feasible for larger producers, agriculture producers at a smaller scale struggle to deal with the financial impacts of these events. The effects on crops and food production – and as a result consumption – are significant, in particular in the case of Kenya. One of the most harmed crops is maize, a staple in Kenyans' food diet. A Kenyan civil society organizer mentioned that "we consider someone is somehow food secure if they have access to maize."

These challenges have been present and evolving for the past years. In 2012, a study of 710 farm households in 7 districts of Kenya showed that small farmers were adopting practices in response to perceived climate change, such as changing the crop variety and type, diversifying livestock feeds, and applying soil and water conservation practices, among others. The main constraints they found were in relation of the lack of financial and natural resources to do so, lack of information, and lack of input. This showed the need for greater investment in agricultural production at a small scale (Bryan, et al. 2013).

The challenges and limitations posed by the changes in climate have motivated the Kenyan government to promote the Kenya Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) Strategy 2017-2026 that identifies the main conflicts around agriculture and livestock production and details strategies to be implemented moving forward, as a way of reducing the impact of climate-related events. The main goals of these strategies are to enhance the adaptive capacity of farmers, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and address several issues around the impact of CSA (Government of the Republic of Kenya, 2017).

COVID-19 and climate-related events have arisen as relevant shocks on food supply and access that need to be addressed. The importance of diversification in crop production has been identified as one of the most important strategies to face these shocks. The existence of lockdowns and mobility restrictions have represented a limitation towards the importation of food products at a global scale. At the same time, climate change poses questions on the possibilities of production as well as logistic limitations in the food supply chain. Seed policies that enable farmers to share and exchange seeds in order for small-scale agricultural producers to have a more diversified production is one strategy that could turn beneficial in case of weather-related events such as droughts, floods or heatwaves that impact the growth of certain crops. Policies that promote agroecology would have to be promoted to promote a larger diversification of food production. In the case of imports and logistics, the impact that climate-related events can potentially have on the distribution of certain products makes it necessary to think about a feasible diversified input chain that aims at acquiring affordable products from different sources/producers to easily replace products in case of shortages.

A study showed that small farmers in Kenya were adopting practices in response to perceived climate change, such as changing the crop variety and type, diversifying livestock feeds, and applying soil and water conservation practices, among others.

Conclusions: Towards more just food access in African cities

06

Traditionally, the analysis of food security and concerns around hunger and malnourishment have been tackled as a "rural" problem, or as a limitation of the system to produce the necessary food to satisfy the needs of the population. The cases of Gauteng and Nairobi show that, beyond the production of food, there are other elements that need to be considered when focusing on food security. Food security in African cities needs to be tackled as a matter of economic access and affordability from the households' perspective, while at the same time considering the realities of actors involved in the wider food system and how they affect the accessibility of food.

Firstly, there is a need to **acknowledge the role that actors from the so-called informal sector play in making food available**, accessible and affordable to the *urban invisibles*. Even though in South Africa, due to its high level of corporatization, formal retail stores have significant relevance, smaller shops succeed in reaching out to the more disadvantaged urban groups. Empowering these actors with the goal of making food more affordable to all urban dwellers implies addressing the priorities of equity and diversity, while **designing food systems "from the people for the people."**

More just food systems in urban areas need to combine policies that focus on production and supply of food, while improving working and social conditions. Urban solutions such as markets and infrastructure are determinant to improve working conditions. The need for active policies that encourage small-scale production in the context of climate change, and support to adapt to and enter the food system, are key to ensuring a more varied and accessible food system among the *urban invisibles* of these cities. Creating more democratic food systems implies supporting small farmers and their connection to retail spaces. In the case of South Africa, this means opening the market to black and poor farmers who compete against larger producers and who do not have the ability to face external shocks. A just food system needs collective and democratic decision-making that includes the *urban invisibles*, and that encourages bottom-up approaches, designed by them and for them.

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