Africa's Urban Food and Nutrition Transition: A Call to Action

Consuming Urban Poverty
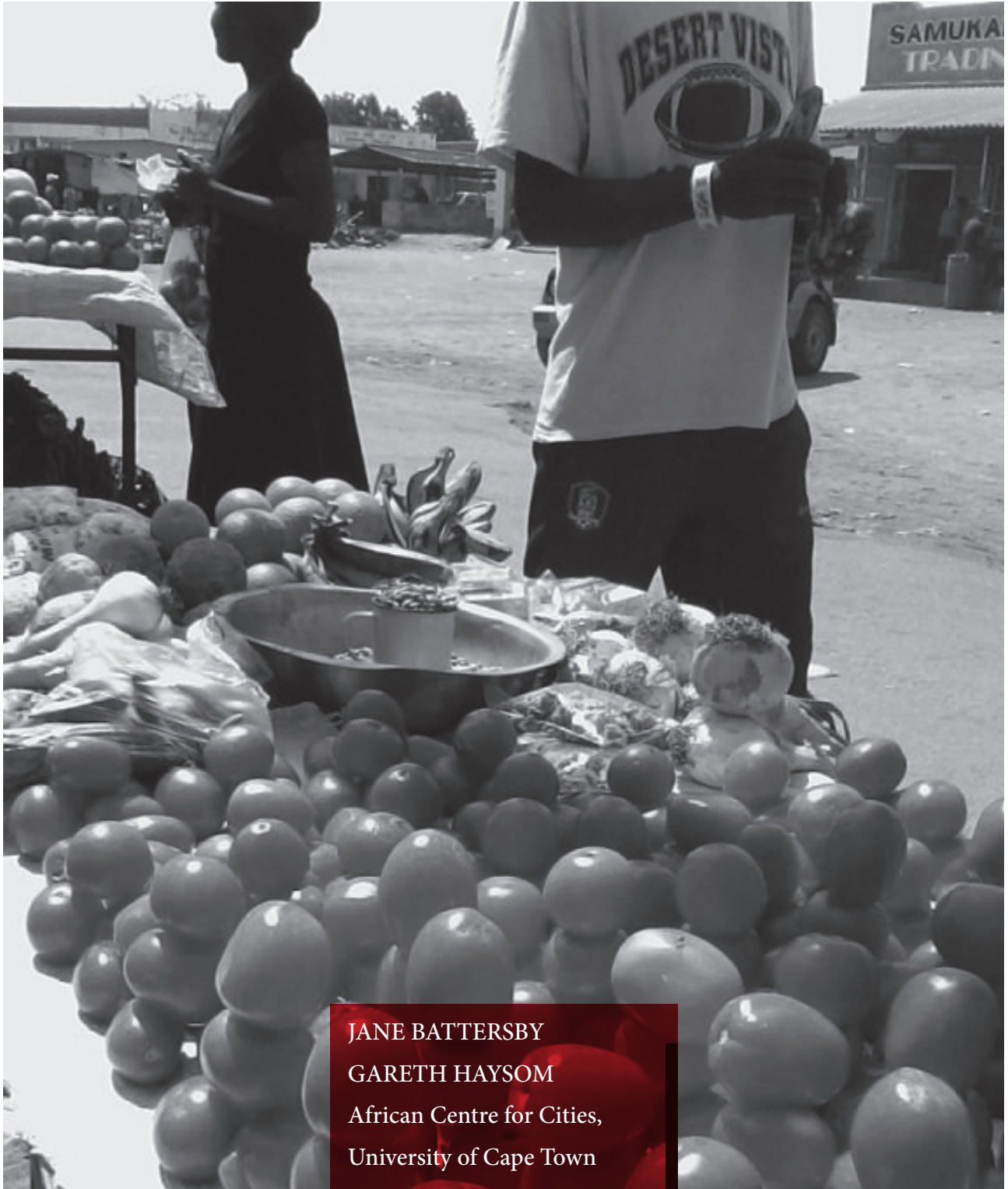
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The project argues that important contributions to debates on urbanization in sub-Saharan Africa, the nature of urban poverty, and the relationship between governance, poverty and the spatial characteristics of cities and towns in the region can be made through a focus on urban food systems and the dynamics of urban food poverty. There is a knowledge gap regarding secondary cities, their characteristics and governance, and yet these are important sites of urbanization in Africa. This project therefore focuses on secondary cities in three countries: Kisumu, Kenya; Kitwe, Zambia; and Epworth, Zimbabwe.

Summary

With urbanisation taking place at a rapid rate and Africa set to cross the threshold into being predominantly urban shortly after 2030, this paper calls for Africa – particularly African cities – to drive the continent's urban transition agenda. It sets out carefully considered actions required from affected stakeholders in Africa's urban food and nutrition challenge. This paper is a redrafted call to action that was conceptualised in preparation for discussion at a 2016 Consuming Urban Poverty/African Food Security Urban Network/Hungry Cities Partnership policy workshop. The workshop, on "Food Consumption and Food and Nutrition Security in Africa's Hungry Cities" was held at the World Nutrition Conference at the School of Public Health, University of the Western Cape, from 29 August to 3 September 2016. Subsequent to input from workshop participants, further input was solicited via targeted social media over a period of 30 days. The call to action and this working paper reflect these inputs and debates. The consultative process reached just over 4,000 people.

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1. Background to the Consuming Urban Poverty Project

In its work to build knowledge of urban poverty and related issues in secondary cities in Africa, the Consuming Urban Poverty (CUP) project – housed at the University of Cape Town's African Centre for Cities – has four linked sub-projects that seek to generate an understanding of the connections between poverty, governance, urban space and food. The secondary cities under investigation are Kisumu in Kenya, Kitwe in Zambia and Epworth in Zimbabwe.

CUP's Urbanisation and Poverty work package seeks to ascertain the patterns and drivers of urbanisation and poverty in the three secondary cities. It draws on existing large-scale data sets and, in combination with remote sensing work, it is assessing land use and land cover change. This analysis will generate new understandings of the overall patterns of urban change in secondary cities.

The Urban Food System and Food Poverty work package's objective is to scrutinise food poverty as an indicator of the workings of persistent, pervasive and systemic urban poverty. Fieldwork is being conducted in Kisumu, Kitwe and Epworth examining the nature of the urban food system and the experience of food poverty, drawing on both qualitative and quantitative methods.

The Governance work package focuses on the governance of urban food systems, both current and historical. An environmental and social life cycle assessment of the urban food system is being conducted, followed by an investigation of the applicability of a cleaner production approach to informal work in food supply chains, focusing on roadside catering in Kitwe.

The final work package focuses on implementable policies and strategies through analysis of successful interventions in urban food systems, and assessment of their applicability to the African secondary city context.

The Consuming Urban Poverty project seeks to communicate a range of messages throughout its duration. There are, however, three over-arching messages that form the basis of our communication strategy. These are:

1. Not all cities are alike. Therefore, policies and strategies to address urban poverty need to be responsive to the needs of secondary cities, which this project seeks to understand;

2. Seeing the city through food opens up new ways of understanding poverty, and its interplay with use of urban space and with governance; and

3. Intervening in the food system can have a significant impact on urban poverty.

This Call to Action represents CUP's position on the role of national governments, city governments, international agencies and donors, civil society, and researchers in generating food-secure cities.

2. Introduction – Call to Action

We, as African researchers and food system practitioners, recognise that the forthcoming decades will define Africa's urban transition. In light of the UN's urban Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) and the New Urban Agenda (Habitat III) urbanisation, and specifically Africa's urban transition, is now a focus of the global development agenda. Who drives this agenda and where action is planned and implemented will directly influence development outcomes. It is high time that African cities drive this agenda. This need is particularly evident in the context of urban food and nutrition security.

Rapid urbanisation and the challenge of building inclusive cities is the critical development issue of the 21st Century. Africa will give birth to thousands of new towns and cities as it crosses the 50% urban threshold shortly after 2030 (Pieterse et al, 2015). The absolute growth and increasing concentration of people in cities will transform governance and policy imperatives over the next decades (Turok, 2012). This is not a future challenge; this transition is taking place right now. While a uniquely African perspective is important within the global debate on the New Urban Agenda, it is essential to acknowledge the diversity of African urbanisms (Pieterse et al, 2015). There is significant variation in the levels and rates of urbanisation across the continent (UN, 2014). In addition to this, Africa's colonial legacy means that while much of the policy attention in the past has focused on Africa's primary cities, much of the continent's urbanisation is taking place in secondary cities (UN Habitat, 2014; Roberts, 2014).

Food has not been considered central to the urban agenda. We believe that it is core to Africa's urban development.

Food insecurity will become an increasingly important urban problem this millennium (Chmielewska and Souza, 2011; Crush and Frayne, 2011: 527-544; Zingel et al, 2011: 301-319). Urban food insecurity in the Global South has been largely sidelined in research and policy-making over the last decade (Crush and Frayne, 2011: 527-544). The result is that the urban food and nutrition response remains framed as an agricultural and production-related issue (Spoor and Robbins, 2012; Hanson, 2013). This 'agro-production' focus means that the scale at which action and interventions are planned, legislated and funded remains the national scale.

Urban food systems in the Global South are currently undergoing major transformation (FAO, 2004; Weis, 2007; Von Braun et al, 2008). The growth of poor urban populations, and the growth of informality as an entrepreneurial rather than survival strategy, suggest that the formal and informal food economies will compete, complement and co-exist in the long term. This, coupled with high levels of urban food insecurity, raises critical developmental and governance questions. The visible manifestations of Africa's urban food and nutrition crisis include food poverty, hunger and malnutrition, a lack of dietary diversity, child wasting and stunting, increased vulnerability to disease, and an obesity epidemic (Athreya, 2010; Crush et al, 2012: 271-292). Enhanced food security for the urban poor is therefore a critical outcome and measure of urban policy-making (Crush et al, 2012: 271-292). There is a growing consensus that this situation poses a major threat to public health in Africa, and that its greatest impact is on the poor, who are the continent's most food insecure.

These trends, along with the renewed urban focus of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Habitat III deliberations, and the goals set out in the African Union's Agenda 2063, present an ideal opportunity for all spheres of government to focus on food and nutrition security as a key urban development challenge.

The urban food challenge calls for action from all affected stakeholders – governments, non-governmental organisations, researchers and society at large. These actions include:

2.1 National Government

- To actively pursue the ideals of democratic decentralisation, facilitating effective and accountable urban governance.

- To ensure that the requisite national urban development frameworks are in place to guide and support the devolution of powers to local governments.

- To proactively drive effective policy and legislative processes, enabling urban managers to engage in urban food related matters with full authority.

- To ensure that the requisite fiscal allocations are provided in accordance with the urban food governance authority.

- To play a facilitative, knowledge building and coordinating role, supporting local governments in their urban food system interventions.

- To develop reporting methods that ensure that the urban food governance interventions feed into national reporting processes that support the SDG structures.

2.2 City Government

- To proactively address all the dimensions of food insecurity – availability, access, utilisation and stability – with appropriate focus on the most relevant dimension of the urban food and nutrition challenge.

- To actively engage all urban food system actors to generate effective and usable knowledge systems that can inform urban food system policies.

- To proactively engage all food system actors and facilitate processes whereby knowledge, interventions and innovations can be shared and supported.

- To develop an urban food charter, or urban food system principles, which inform policy and practice.

- To identify the most appropriate structures to govern urban food and nutrition insecurity.

- To develop effective and scale-appropriate urban food system policies and implementation strategies.

- To ensure that policies and strategies align with, and complement, national, regional and wider constitutional legislative agreements.

- To convene and facilitate processes whereby groups with disparate or conflicting perspectives can be retained to ensure focus on wider urban food system challenges.

2.3 International agencies and donors

- To proactively engage urban managers responsible for urban food system governance to identify needs and areas requiring support.

- To utilise their positions to raise the profile and importance of the urban food system challenge.

- To act with caution when transferring perspectives, methodologies and development interventions from other regions to African cities.

- To draw on existing and contextual informed knowledge to guide interventions and processes.

2.4 Civil society organisations

- To constantly pursue the agenda of pro-poor urban food system development and governance and to hold all actors, across scales, accountable for this agenda.

- To engage critically in urban food system support interventions and processes.

- To assist in cross-sector collaborations, enabling process access to multiple food system players.

- To ensure that the supported interventions address the targeted processes or projects; and caution against processes that direct attention away from the core reasons for a particular urban food system challenge.

2.5 Researchers

- To build the essential context-specific urban food system knowledge platforms necessary to ensure urban food security.

- To draw on, and critically assess, international urban food system knowledge and test applicability to local contexts.

- To generate research specific to the following key outcomes: Policy, practice, economy, nutrition, wellbeing, and wider development interventions.

- To generate knowledge relevant to food security that engages wider food system issues from an urban context, avoiding the urban/rural dichotomy.

3. Conclusion

This is the first in our Working Paper series, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (UK) and the UK Department for International Development. The papers are available for download here: https://consumingurbanpoverty. wordpress.com/working-papers/

Our Call to Action is one of many collaborations with the African Food Security Urban Network (AFSUN), the Hungry Cities Partnership and other research networks.

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