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INTERNATIONAL
MIGRATION AND
URBAN FOOD SECURITY
IN SOUTH AFRICAN CITIES

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Abstract

The drivers of food insecurity in rapidly growing urban areas of the Global South are receiving more research and policy attention, but the precise connections between urbanization, urban food security and migration are still largely unexplored. In particular, the levels and causes of food insecurity amongst new migrants to the city have received little consideration. This is in marked contrast to the literature on the food security experience of new immigrants from the South in European and North American cities. This paper aims to contribute to the literature on urban food security in the South by focusing on the case of Zimbabwean migrants in South African cities and discussing the results of a household survey of migrants in Cape Town and Johannesburg. The survey showed extremely high levels of food insecurity and low dietary diversity amongst migrants, which are attributable to the difficulties of accessing regular incomes and the other demands on household income. Most migrants are also members of multi-spatial households and have obligations to support household members in Zimbabwe. Although migration may improve the food security of the multi-spatial household as a whole, it is also a factor in explaining the high levels of insecurity by migrants in the city.

Keywords

food security, migrants, dietary diversity, urbanization

This is the eighth discussion paper in a series published by the Hungry Cities Partnership (HCP), an international research project examining food security and inclusive growth in cities in the Global South. The five-year collaborative project aims to understand how cities in the Global South will manage the food security challenges arising from rapid urbanization and the transformation of urban food systems. The Partnership is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) through the International Partnerships for Sustainable Societies (IPaSS) Program.

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Introduction

International migration and food security tend to be viewed as discrete and largely unconnected phenomena in global policy forums and in the large literature on both topics (Crush 2013). One of the main reasons for this is the anti-urban bias that characterizes much of the research and policy-making on food security in the Global South (Crush and Frayne 2011). The primary focus of food security is the rural smallholder and agricultural livelihoods with a complementary downplaying of the importance of urbanization, migration and the food security of urban populations. In the context of the rapid urbanization of the South and the associated growth in urban food insecurity this view is increasingly untenable. While the drivers of food insecurity in rapidly growing urban areas are receiving some attention (Agarwal et al 2009, Battersby 2011, Chatterjee et al 2012, Crush and Battersby 2016), the precise connections between food security and international and internal migration are still largely unexplored. In particular, the levels and causes of food insecurity among new arrivals in the city have received very little consideration –and the isolated studies that do exist focus more on internal than international migration (Pendleton et al 2014, Rai and Selvaraj 2015).

The dearth of studies on the food security of urban-based migrant populations in the Global South stands in marked contrast to the literature on the food experience of new immigrants from the South in European and North American cities. This literature is framed by the “healthy immigrant effect” thesis which postulates that migrants tend to be more food secure and healthier across a whole range of indicators than those they have left behind as well as local populations (Fennelly 2007, Rubalcava et al 2008, Nolan 2012, Girard and Sercia 2013). Three explanations have been advanced for the effect: health screening policies by destination country authorities prior to migration; good food habits and behaviours prior to migration; and immigrant self-selection where the healthiest and wealthiest source country residents are most likely to migrate. While these explanations might apply to skilled immigrants

who enter countries in Europe and North America, they do not address other kinds of migration such as unregulated lower-skilled temporary migration and forced refugee migration. Various studies of resettled African refugee groups, for example, have suggested that refugees experience higher levels of food insecurity than host populations (Hadley et al 2007, Dharod et al 2011, 2013).

Although the healthy immigrant thesis has not been systematically applied in the Global South, it does highlight the importance of studying the impact of migration on the food security and diets of those who move to another country. This is particularly important in the context of rapid urbanization in Africa and Asia and the fact that a growing proportion of the urban population is made up of migrants seeking a livelihood in the cities (Crush and Battersby 2016). In this context, four essential questions arise: is food insecurity and undernutrition a motive for international migration? Does migration improve or reduce the food security situation of migrant individuals and groups? Do migrants experience greater food insecurity than non-migrant local populations and, if so, why that might be? And finally, do the obligations of migrants to their families at home impact on their own food security in destination countries and communities?

Many international and internal migrants in African cities are members of what have been variously described as multi-spatial, multi-locational or spatially-stretched households that span rural-urban areas and international boundaries (Andersson Djurfeldt 2014, Dick and Schmidt-Kallert 2011, Foeken and Owuor 2001). Because they have often migrated as a livelihood strategy for the household as a whole, they have ongoing responsibilities and commitments to household members at home. This means that their own livelihoods and food security in places of destination are potentially affected by their obligations to others living outside the city. Such obligations lead to regular transfers of money, goods, foodstuffs and consumer goods to household members in the country and community of origin (Tacoli 2007). Viewing migrants as members of multi-locational or stretched households makes it important to delineate patterns of food

consumption and food security that “stretch across space” (Andersson Djurfeldt 2014). Much of the existing literature on rural-urban intra-household linkages focuses on transfers of food from rural to urban areas and their role in ameliorating food insecurity among urban-based members of the household (Frayne 2010). The possibility that outgoing transfers from migrants have the potential to impact negatively on their own food security has received little attention to date.

The situation of Zimbabwean migrants in South African cities provides a potentially important setting for examining questions about the relationship between migration and food security and whether their obligations as members of multi-locational households affects their own food security. In this discussion paper, we examine the food security of Zimbabwean migrants who live in the major South African cities of Cape Town and Johannesburg. We argue that although migrants may be driven to South Africa by poverty, unemployment and food insecurity in Zimbabwe, they remain extremely food insecure in South Africa. The reasons for this are explored in this paper. We argue that the ability of migrants to translate migration into greater food security for themselves is compromised by various aspects of the migration process itself, including the obligations they have to those still in Zimbabwe.

Methodology

The research for this study was conducted in the two main destinations for Zimbabwean migrants moving to South Africa: Cape Town and Johannesburg. These two cities are the major centres for livelihood and employment opportunity for Zimbabwean migrants (Makina 2010, Morreira 2010, Sibanda and Sibanda 2014). A total of 500 heads of migrant households were interviewed in 2015, 250 in each city. The study identified respondents using snowball sampling but in order to increase the diversity of the sample, the initial respondents were as diverse as possible (in terms of age, occupation, and sex). In addition, the research was conducted in three contrasting residential areas in each city:

informal settlements (Du Noon in Cape Town and Orange Farm in Johannesburg); inner city areas (central Johannesburg), older townships (Alexandra Park in Johannesburg and Nyanga in Cape Town) and combined formal and informal areas (Masiphumelele in Cape Town). Despite the size of the sample, it is not necessarily representative of all migrants in low-income neighbourhoods due to the sampling procedure used. In addition, migrants not connected to the particular chosen social networks may not have been included. Finally, by interviewing household heads, the opinions and experiences of other household members were not captured.

The survey instrument used captured detailed information on the demographic characteristics of all household members (including sex, age, education, occupation); household food security; livelihood strategies; food sourcing and migration behaviour. In-depth, open-ended interviews were also conducted with 50 household heads who were willing to be interviewed. These interviews elicited detailed information on the nature of poor migrant livelihood strategies in the South African urban environment, including their personal experiences of and responses to food insecurity. Combined, the in-depth interviews and survey responses provide important quantitative data and personal narratives about migration histories, food security status, dietary information, household food sources, and alternative livelihood strategies.

There is now considerable debate about appropriate quantitative measures of food insecurity (Carletto et al 2013, Coates 2013, Jones et al 2013, Leroy et al 2015). This study used the cross-cultural food access indicators developed by the Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance (FANTA) Project. Three of the FANTA measures were used in this study: (a) the Household Food Insecurity Access Scale (HFIAS) which scores individual households on a scale from 0 (completely food secure) to 27 (completely food insecure) based on answers to nine “frequency-of-occurrence” questions; (b) the Household Food Insecurity Access Prevalence Indicator (HFIAP) which uses the responses to the HFIAS questions to group all households into four

food security categories: food secure, mildly food insecure, moderately food insecure and severely food insecure; and (c) the Household Dietary Diversity Scale (HDDS) which refers to whether or not food from 12 food groups was consumed within the household in the previous 24 hours.

Zimbabwean Migrants in South Africa

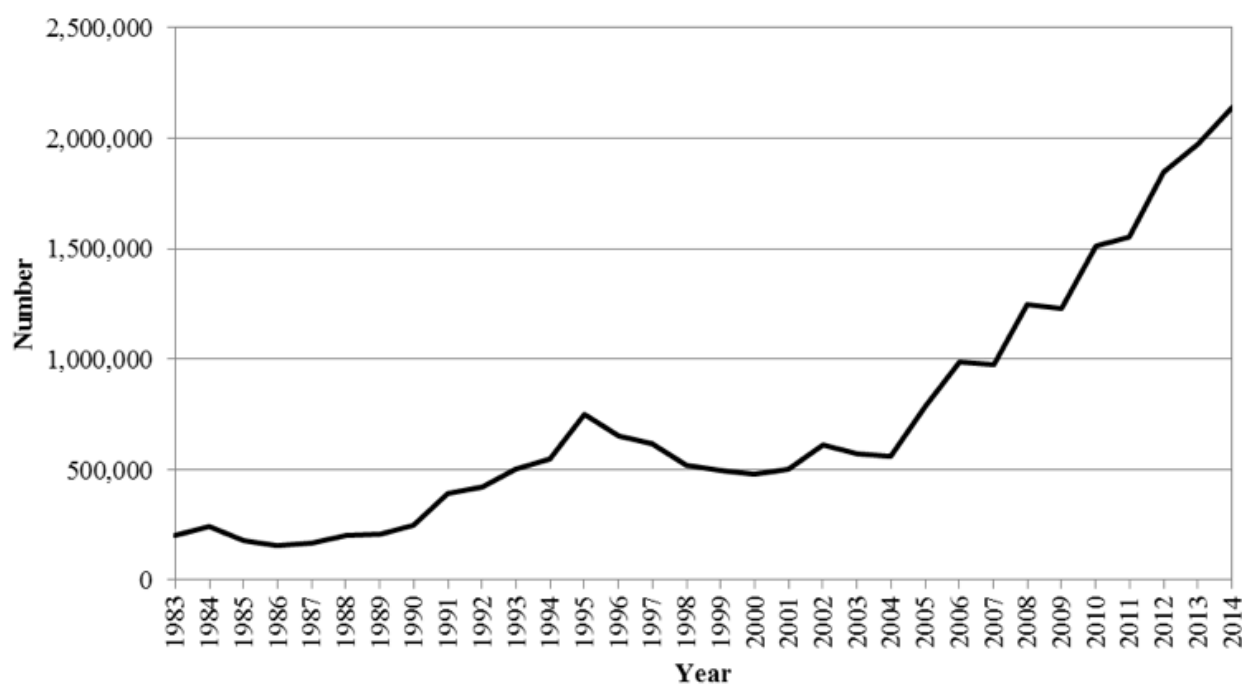
The prolonged economic and political crisis in Zimbabwe has led to a major exodus of migrants (Crush and Tevera 2010). Neighbouring South Africa has emerged as the major migration destination for Zimbabweans (Crush et al 2015, de Jager and Musuva 2015). The growing importance of South Africa as a migrant destination is illustrated by the number of Zimbabweans entering the country each year which increased from less than 200,000 in the mid-1980s to around 600,000 in 2004 to over 2 million in 2014 (Figure 1). The number of Zimbabwean residents recorded by the South African census increased from 66,000 in 2001 to 515,824 in 2011. Crush et al (2015) argue that the migration flow has become increasingly mixed

with equal numbers of male and female migrants, migrants of all ages (though dominated by those of working-age), a range of education and skill levels, and various legal and extra-legal migration categories. The vast majority of migrants retain close ties with household members in Zimbabwe, visit relatively often and regularly remit money and goods (Crush and Tevera 2010, Makina 2013).

Among the 500 surveyed households, 30% were female-centred (with no male partner) while 39% were male-centred (with no female partner present). This means that two-thirds of the household heads did not have a partner living with them. Average household size was also small with an average of less than two. In part, this was because almost two-thirds of the households were single-person units and another 23% were two-person households. Only 12% of the households had three or more members. The members of the surveyed households were all relatively young, with 44% in their twenties and 31% in their thirties. Only 1% were over the age of 50 (Figure 2).

The reasons for migrating to South Africa were dominated by a comparison of living conditions in the two countries (Table 1). Given the high unemployment rate in Zimbabwe, variously estimated at

FIGURE 1: Cross-Border Movement from Zimbabwe to South Africa



70-90%, migration for work in the South African formal and informal economy was cited by many as a reason for migration. The fact that over 70% had moved to access informal sector employment is a clear expression of the difficulty of accessing formal employment in the South African economy. Only 11% gave the search for political asylum as a reason for migration which suggests that classifying this movement as forced (refugee) migration is inappropriate for most migrants. As many as 44% cited food shortages and hunger in Zimbabwe as a reason for migration. Levels of food insecurity among poor urban households in urban Zimbabwe are even higher than those among Zimbabwean migrant households in South Africa (Tawodzera 2011, 2012, 2014).

Of the surveyed Zimbabwean household heads who were earning income, 61% had formal sector jobs and 39% were working in the informal sector (Table 2). The equivalent figures for all adult household members were 64% and 36%. The majority of those in formal employment were working in semi-skilled jobs in the services industry, domestic work, security and truck drivers. Similar numbers were working in skilled and unskilled jobs. Common informal sector activities included the sale of foodstuffs, household goods, clothing, shoes, CDs, and arts and crafts such as baskets, wire and metal toys, brooms, wood and stone carvings, and crochet. Others provide services such as hairstyling and cellphone access while some work as producers, primarily of handicrafts.

FIGURE 2: Age of Zimbabwean Migrants

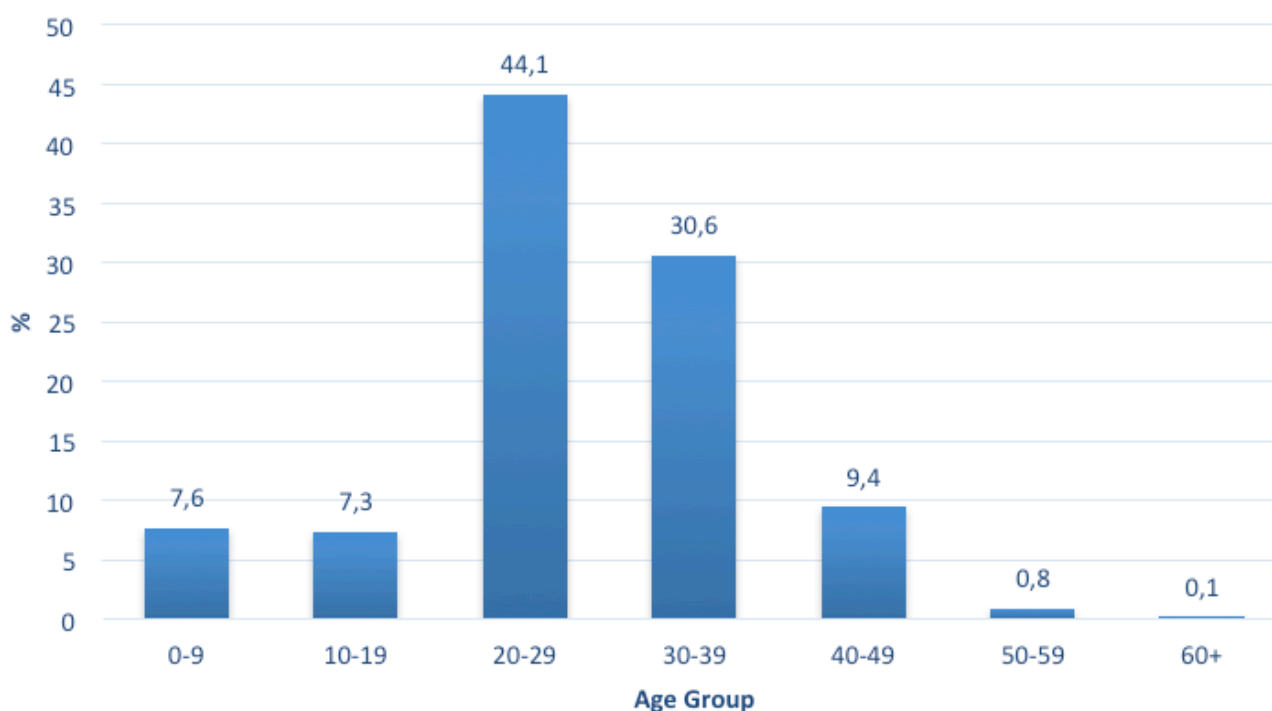


TABLE 1: Reasons for Migration to South Africa

	No.	% of households
Overall living conditions	420	84.0
Informal sector job	356	71.2
Food/hunger	222	44.4
Formal sector job	151	30.2
Moved with family	82	16.4
Education/schools	66	13.2
Safety of self/family	75	15.0
Attractions of urban life	31	6.2
Asylum	31	6.2
Marriage	28	5.6
Political exile	23	4.6
Drought	21	4.2
Freedom/democracy/peace	13	2.6
Sent to live with family	7	1.4
Death	4	0.5
Housing	2	0.3
Note: multiple response question		

TABLE 2: Main Occupation of Household Head and Members

	Household heads %	Household members %
Formal sector jobs		
Skilled jobs	13.1	12.4
Skilled manual	3.5	3.5
Business (self-employed)	3.0	2.4
Office worker	1.7	2.8
Professional worker	1.7	2.0
Teacher	1.0	1.1
Employer/manager	0.6	0.5
Semi-skilled jobs	28.7	29.8
Service worker	10.8	11.7
Domestic worker	9.1	11.3
Security personnel	5.0	3.9
Truck driver	2.3	1.7
Mineworker	0.8	0.6
Police/military	0.5	0.4
Foreman	0.2	0.4
Low-skilled jobs	54.9	50.9
Manual/casual labour	15.9	15.4
Informal sector		
Trade, services, manufacturing	39.0	35.6
Other	3.8	0.6
N	397	540

Most of the households had additional income streams. The most common added income-generating strategy was casual work with 45% of households engaging in this to earn extra income (Figure 3) (Pretorius and Blaauw 2015). Casual work includes activities such as gardening, washing clothes, handing out advertising leaflets at traffic lights, and washing cars. Just over one-quarter (27%) of households had members involved in the marketing of goods at major transport terminals, on the streets, and door-to-door. Some migrants operate in both the formal and informal economies: it was not uncommon, for example, to find migrants employed as teachers or office workers during the week, peddling their wares on the streets on weekends. Other supplementary income sources include begging and borrowing (from formal and informal credit sources). Less than 4% earned anything from urban agriculture.

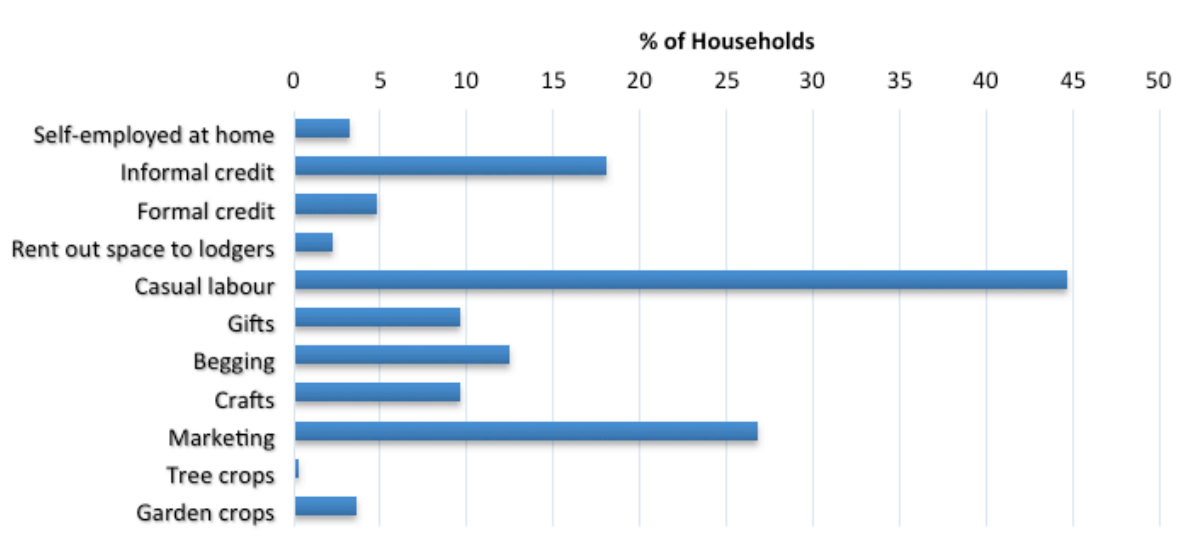
Levels of Migrant Food Insecurity

The average household HFIAS score of the Zimbabwean migrant households was a very high 14.4, with a median of 14.0, a minimum of 0.0 and a maximum of 27.0. On the HFIAP scale, only 11% of the households were food secure with

another 5% mildly food insecure. The majority of migrant households were either moderately (24%) or severely food insecure (60%). The HFIAS and HFIAP scores suggest greater levels of food insecurity among Zimbabwean migrants than among other low-income populations in Cape Town and Johannesburg (Battersby 2011, Grobler 2016, Rudolph et al 2012). Dietary diversity was also extremely low among the migrant households with a mean HDDS of only 5.1 out of a possible score of 12.0, indicating that households had, on average, consumed foods from only five different food groups in the previous 24 hours. Nearly half of the households (46%) had HDDS scores of 4 or less (Figure 4).

A major determinant of food insecurity turned out to be household size: in general, the larger the household, the greater the chance of being food secure (Table 3). For example, only 9% of the one-person households were food secure compared with 15% of two and three-person households and 29% of households with four or more members. One-person households were clearly the most food insecure with 64% severely food insecure compared to around half of the two and three-person households. These findings suggest that as household size increases, so does the income-earning possibilities of the households and this, in turn, generates more income for food purchase and an improvement in overall food security.

FIGURE 3: Additional Income-Generating Strategies



Without an income, access to food in South Africa's urban areas is problematic, since virtually all foodstuffs must be purchased. As a result, food security and household income are closely related. As household income increases so does the proportion of food secure households: from only 1% of households earning less than ZAR500 per month, to 11% of those earning ZAR1,501–2,000 per month,

to 47% of those earning more than ZAR3,001 per month (Table 4). Similarly, the proportion of severely food insecure households declines from 89% of those earning less than ZAR500 per month to 28% of those earning more than ZAR3,001 per month.

FIGURE 4: Household Dietary Diversity Scores of Migrant Households

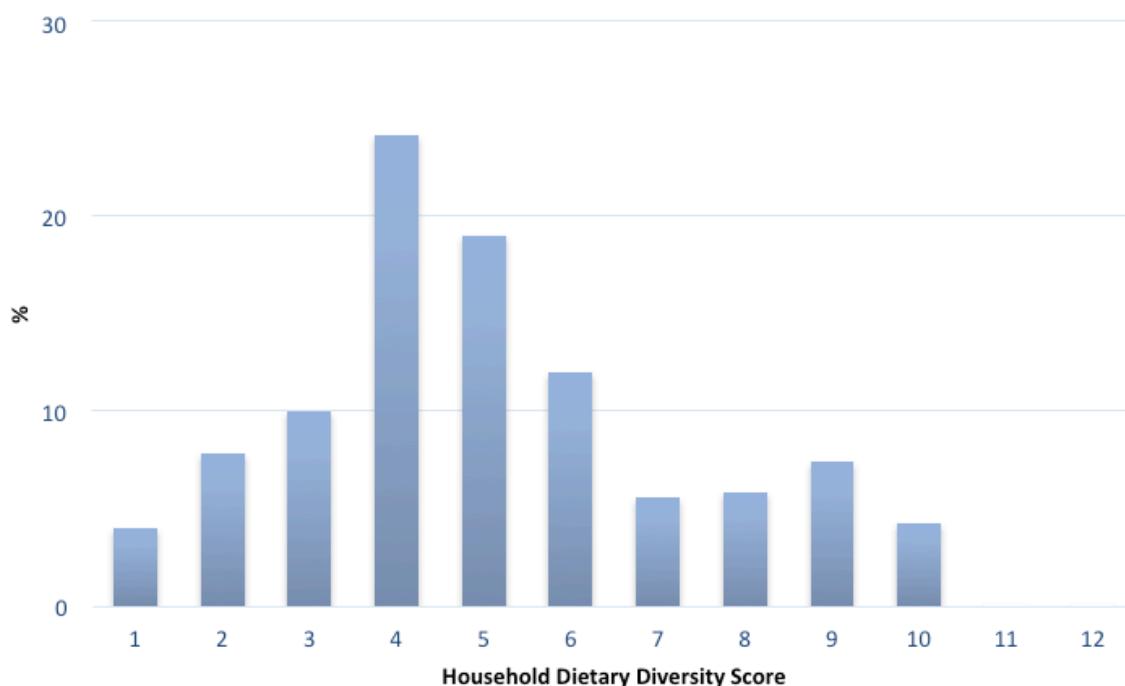


TABLE 3: Household Size and Levels of Food Insecurity

Household size	Food secure	Mildly food insecure	Moderately food insecure	Severely food insecure
1	8.7	3.1	23.7	64.5
2	15.0	8.0	25.7	51.3
3	15.4	7.7	26.9	50.0
4+	28.6	0.0	14.3	57.1

TABLE 4: Household Income and Food Security

Household income (ZAR per month)	Household Food Insecurity Prevalence			
	Food secure %	Mildly food insecure %	Moderately food insecure %	Severely food insecure %
0-500	1.1	2.2	7.5	89.2
501-1,000	2.0	0.7	20.4	86.9
1,001-1,500	5.2	4.2	39.6	51.0
1,501-2,000	11.1	0.0	44.4	44.5
2,001-2,500	31.2	9.4	28.1	31.2
2,501-3,000	23.3	13.3	26.7	36.7
>3,000	47.2	17.0	7.5	28.3

Rising food prices were another major cause of food insecurity among migrant urban households because of the purchasing nature of the environment. The global food price crisis that started in 2007/8 led to a major increase in the cost of food in South Africa (Jayne et al 2008). Although the rate of global price increases had tempered by 2011, internal economic dynamics continued to cause food prices to increase much faster than average income. Only 26% of the respondents said that the household had been unaffected by rising prices in the previous year. Around one-third had gone without food about once per month while 28% had done so once per week. The remaining 14% said this was an almost daily experience. The foods that most households had had to do without because of price increases in the previous six months included meat, poultry or offal (55% of households), cereals (53%), foods made with oil or butter (49%), and eggs (49%).

Coping Strategies of Migrant Households

Behind the statistical indicators of severe food insecurity are the personal experiences of migrants seeking, and generally failing, to access sufficient good quality food to survive. Most respondents said that without a stable income, and given many other basic household expenses, they faced a massive challenge in adequately feeding themselves. As one Cape Town respondent noted, “you are nothing if you do not have money.” Another observed:

The only days that I am okay in terms of food are on weekends because I do get paid every Friday. But by Monday or Tuesday I am back to struggling because the money is too little. My employer gives me R200 every week, but I need to pay rent and transport. It is just not enough, but there is nothing that I can do (Interview No. 36, Cape Town, 28 November 2011).

As this migrant noted, cutting back on expenses such as rent, electricity and transport is not an option. Transport is necessary to get to work, and

failure to pay for rent would lead to eviction from their lodgings. Eating less and eating cheaper are often the only options.

The migrants rely on a variety of coping strategies when food is in short supply. These include reliance on less expensive foodstuffs (84% of households), eating poorer quality food (78%), and consuming cheaper but less preferred foods (74%). Over half said that they reduce the number of meals eaten per day, borrow money to buy food or solicit the help of a friend or relative. Nearly 50% said that they reduce portion sizes while 20% respond by buying food on credit and reducing the amount of food consumed by adults in the household. One, for example, described how they buy cheaper basic foods just to fill their stomachs:

We also want to eat these nice foods, but we cannot afford them. It is pointless trying to buy good food and then eat for one week and then struggle for the rest of the month. So we would rather buy the ordinary stuff that stays longer. We therefore buy mealie-meal; cooking oil, salt, and sugar, for these are the basic foodstuffs that we consume in this house. That way we can keep our stomachs full (Interview No. 19, Johannesburg, 16 November 2011).

Another described how they were very aware which foods were healthy but that they lacked the money to eat properly. Instead they constantly shopped for bargains and bought expired and wasted food:

We know a lot about food quality and the desirability for us to have such good food. That we know. Our only problem as a household is that we do not have the money to buy such foods. So, when I go to the market or shops, I make sure that what I buy is enough for a long time, be it a week or two weeks. I now know where the bargains are. In some of the shops they sell food that is about to expire and if we are lucky we get some before other people grab the lot. When I go to the vegetable market I get a lot of food by buying the breakages – tomatoes that have been squashed, onions that are dirty, carrots that are damaged, and so on. These are cheap so I get more. A hard time teaches you how to survive and I can

say I have been taught by experience (Interview No, 48, Cape Town, 01 December 2011).

The resulting lack of dietary diversity and the monotony of the diet were constantly referred to in the in-depth interviews. For example:

It is difficult to afford the food we want. We eat the same kind of food day in and day out. Usually we eat pap and maguru/matumbu (offal) because that is what is cheap. With matumbu at least you can budget your little money. But we also need to eat beef, but it is expensive. I do not know when I last ate beef... maybe over a year ago, I don't know. It's the same food over and over again. There is no variety, but there is nothing that we can do. I guess we have to be grateful that at least we can get a meal here and there (Interview No. 2, Johannesburg, 11 November 2011).

In addition, food price increases mean that households constantly have to revise their food budget either by increasing the amount of money allocated to food purchase, reducing the amount of food bought, or replacing it with cheaper alternatives when these are available:

The increases are just too much. You cannot budget well in advance because of the increases. When I came to South Africa five years ago, things were different. You could buy a loaf of bread for the same amount of money for over a year without any changes. But now it is different. You cannot just pick a product on the shelf and take it to the till on the basis that you know the price that you bought it for the previous month. No, you can no longer do that; you have to check the price. On many occasions you see people returning or just leaving goods at the till because the price they thought the goods cost would have changed. Although the increases are better than what we experienced back home, it is still difficult because we do not have the money to make up for the increases (Interview No. 12, Johannesburg, 14 November 2011).

As noted above, many migrants come from Zimbabwe to South Africa because of acute food insecurity at home. The expectation is that with wage or informal sector income they will be able to

purchase sufficient food and have access to a better quality, more varied and nutritious diet. However, while migrants may be better off than if they had remained in Zimbabwe, they can still experience acute food insecurity in the South African cities to which they migrate. Those unable to secure employment rely on soup kitchens and hand-outs:

Life is really difficult. The food is never enough and I have gone hungry many times. It is particularly bad on weekends when kitchen soup houses are closed. Yes, things were really terrible in Zimbabwe and that made us come here, but to be honest, I am still struggling. I have to survive on charity and begging. It is tough, as I am not working (Interview No. 9, Johannesburg, 12 November 2011).

One of the most common responses to acute food insecurity is to draw on informal social networks for support through what one respondent called “a community of sharing.” For example, 33% of the migrant households regularly borrow food from one another, 29% share meals with neighbours and friends, and 24% consume food provided by other households.

Zimbabwean migrants are ineligible for state-sponsored social protection and the monthly social grants that sustain many poor South African households (Patel and Hochfeld 2011). As a result, the redistribution of food is one of the main ways to weather difficult periods as lending, borrowing and sharing help food spread the risk and avert the total collapse of households:

If you are unable to help others when they are in dire need, they will also not help you when you are in trouble. Our communities and networks have memories – very long memories and we know who gives and who doesn't. Especially as we are far away from home, we have learnt to support each other. If I have some food, then my neighbours will not starve (Interview No. 28, Cape Town, 25 November 2011).

Although the surveyed households were generally poor and food-deprived, they still shared food among themselves, suggesting a marked degree of migrant community solidarity and positive

social capital (Hungwe 2013, 2015). An increasing number of migrants were also combining households so as to save money. A number of households in the sample were actually composed of non-relatives sharing the same residence to try and reduce housing costs and save money for food and other expenses. Being able to rely on the “community of sharing” at times of crisis is one of the benefits of being a migrant which is unavailable to other poor residents of the city.

At the same time, it is clear that migration itself makes migrants more vulnerable to food insecurity in a number of ways. The general South African public is extremely hostile to the presence of Zimbabwean migrants. This hostility manifests itself in various ways, all of which can negatively affect food security. Xenophobic violence is extremely common in low-income communities and these attacks can lead to loss of shelter, possessions, business premises and stock (for those working in the informal sector) and even physical harm and loss of life (Crush et al 2016). In addition, the phenomenon of medical xenophobia (involving systematic discrimination against migrants in the public health system) means higher health care costs for migrants. Zimbabwean migrants with children are also often denied access to state schools which means more expensive private options have to be accessed (Crush and Tawodzera 2014a, 2014b).

South Africa has deported over 700,000 migrants to Zimbabwe since 2000, creating the additional risk that a household can summarily lose its main income source without notice (Sutton and Vigneswaran 2011). In 2010, 275,000 migrants were given work and residence permits under an immigration amnesty which reduced the chances of deportation for those able to secure the permits (Thebe 2016). Other aspects of the migration process impose added financial costs on migrants which have the potential to divert income from expenditures on food. As members of multi-locational households, for example, many migrants in South Africa return at regular intervals to Zimbabwe. As well as transportation costs, they are expected to come with money, food or goods for family members.

The majority of migrants try to return to Zimbabwe for the festive season in December. This leads to increase food insecurity in the last three and first three months of the year. Between September and November, preparation for travel home, and the journey itself, require funds that reduce the resources available to migrant households to buy food. Some respondents indicated that they eat the bare minimum during these months so that they are able to save money for the journey and to take care of their families when they get back home:

Right now (November) we are saving money that we will use next month. In fact, I started saving last month (September). You see, one needs a lot of money to go home to Zimbabwe. I stay in Kariba, over 300 kilometres from Harare, so I need bus-fare to take me to Harare, the onwards to Kariba. That is more than R2,000 of bus fare from here. Because I will be travelling in December, transport charges will also be high, so I will need more money and also to pay to transport my luggage, which may be more expensive than the fare for the person. My family back home will be expecting a lot of goods because I have not been home for the whole of this year. So that is a lot of money needed. I also have to pay rent for the month of December even though I will not be here, because if I do not do that, then I will have a problem on return. For me, these two months of October and November are very difficult months for I have to save. Otherwise I may not be able to go home (Interview No. 26, Cape Town, 25 November 2015).

Many South African companies shut down in December and only open again in February, depriving returning employees of income that is badly needed at the start of the year. Those in temporary employment return to South Africa in January to look for new jobs and may be unemployed for a month or two at the beginning of the year. In the aftermath of the festive season, the first three months of the year are therefore particularly lean. Savings are gone and many are in debt.

As part of the livelihood strategies of the multi-locational household, most Zimbabwean migrants regularly remit funds and goods to family in

Zimbabwe (Makina 2013). Eighty percent of the respondents in this survey regularly send money home to help with expenses like food, school fees, clothing as well as investments in both movable and immovable assets:

My brothers and sisters contributed money for me to come here. So I have no choice, but to look after them. They played their role, now I am playing mine. Even though it is very tough here, I have to work hard so that they are able to live well back home. One of my brothers is still in school, so I have to pay his school fees. Maybe one day, when he finishes school he can join me here, but for now I am their only hope. So I do it, and I hope that I am making a difference in their lives. Even if I send R100 a month, I know it will help (Interview No. 35, Cape Town, 26 November 2011).

There is a lot of pressure on some of us to send money home. It is difficult to ignore the concerns of those that are back home. Even if you do not have the money you try like a man. You can borrow from friends and work hard to return it. Sometimes the problem is that people back home think that we are making a lot of money here. So every few days you get a call and people are asking for money. It's serious...sometimes people end up not answering calls from home because you know that it is usually about money. Yes, I know they are in problems, but sometimes you need some space to make some money and stabilise. As things are, it is difficult. Maybe when the situation in Zimbabwe improves, then we can stop sending money so often (Focus Group Participant, Cape Town, 01 December 2011).

Nearly 40% of remitting households send funds to Zimbabwe at least once per month and another 41% a few times per year. More than half of the surveyed migrant households were also remitting food to Zimbabwe: 8% more than once per month, 27% once per month, and 43% a few times per year.

What impact does remitting have on the food security of migrant households in South Africa? Given that food insecurity is a significant problem among migrant households, to what extent is this a

function of the need to remit which reduces disposable household income and the amount available to spend on food? In response to questions about the implications of remitting on their own food security, 60% of remitting households said the impact was “negative” or “very negative” and only 11% that it was “positive” or “very positive.”

A final way in which migration itself imposes costs and reduces the food security of migrants relates to the phenomenon of rural-urban food transfers. The urban-based members of multi-locational households throughout Southern Africa rely for some of their food supply on informal transfers of food (Frayne 2010). In Zimbabwe, these transfers are an important way for migrants to stave off hunger in the urban areas. Given the distance and cost involved, migrants living in South Africa are unable to secure food transfers from the Zimbabwean countryside:

Here it is difficult to get anything. In Zimbabwe, we could sometimes ask people in the rural areas to send us food, but we cannot do that here. It is too far and anyway, the people in Zimbabwe will be expecting us to feed them and not vice-versa. But we are struggling here. (Interview No. 36, Cape Town, 28 November 2011).

Conclusion

This paper has examined the food security status of Zimbabwean migrant households in the poorer areas of two major South African cities, Johannesburg and Cape Town. Over 80% of the 500 households interviewed were food insecure in terms of both the amount of food to which they had access, and the quality and diversity of their diet, both of which were extremely poor. Those with higher incomes were consistently more food secure than those with lower incomes. In an all-cash urban environment, with high levels of unemployment, intense job competition and no urban agriculture, the primary determinant of food security is access to regular, paid employment. Overall, almost 40% of migrant household heads with a cash income were working in the informal economy where earnings

are small and inconsistent. Another 16% were unskilled casual workers where, again, employment is unpredictable and income unreliable.

The primary reason for the high levels of food insecurity among migrant households appear to lie in the set of pressures on low and unpredictable migrant incomes. Migrants have to pay rent, transport costs and other daily necessities such as medical treatment and school fees (if they have children with them). However, the major expenses incurred by migrant households which compromise food security are related to the migration process itself. These include the disruptions of deportation, the costs of circular migration, and the need to remit money and food to family in Zimbabwe. Multi-locational or stretched households mean that household food consumption is actually spread across space, between South Africa and Zimbabwe. While remittances in the form of cash and food have a positive impact on the food security of family in Zimbabwe, it makes migrants in South Africa more vulnerable to food insecurity.

The small literature on the impact of migrant remittances on food security tends to look only at the recipients and how their situation improves through remitting. It generally ignores the question of the impact of remitting on those who send remittances. This may be because there is an implicit assumption that those who remit do so because they have disposable income and choose to spend it on remitting. However, the majority of Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa do not have much disposable income or savings on which to draw. They have a strong obligation to remit, but in order to do so, must make choices and compromises because of their limited and unpredictable income. Food, though a necessity, is one of the first things that gets sacrificed. Quantities consumed decline, fewer meals are eaten, cheaper foods are preferred, and dietary quality and diversity inevitably suffer. While the situation of Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa may be somewhat extreme (given the crisis conditions in Zimbabwe itself), this is undoubtedly one end of a spectrum of vulnerability which needs to be explored in other contexts as well.

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