

THE STATE OF FOOD INSECURITY IN BLANTYRE CITY, MALAWI

Peter Mvula and Asiyati Chiweza

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PETER MVULA AND ASIYATI CHIWEZA

SERIES EDITOR: PROF. JONATHAN CRUSH

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1. INTRODUCTION

Malawi's population is growing rapidly. The last Census, in 2008, showed that the country's population had increased by one-third to just over 13 million since 1998. This landlocked country is predominantly rural, with 80% of its people residing outside towns and cities. Partly because of this, poverty and food insecurity have been viewed by donors and international agencies as rural problems. Most research on food insecurity in Malawi has focused on agricultural production by rural households.¹ Despite its image as a rural society, Malawi's major urban centres are growing fast. In 1966, the total population of the five largest urban centres was 157,000. This number rose to 644,000 in 20 years and had doubled again to 1,546,000 by 2008 (Table 1). In 2010, UN-HABITAT estimated the urban population of Malawi at 2.9 million, and projected further growth to 4.8 million in 2020 and 7.6 million (or 32% of the population) by 2030.² Urban growth rates in Malawi are around 5% per annum, much higher than rural growth rates of less than 2% per annum, suggesting that urbanization will continue.

Prior to the late 1990s, Blantyre was Malawi's largest urban centre, growing from 110,000 in 1966 to 661,256 in 2008. By then it had been overtaken in population size by the capital city of Lilongwe, although it still had a higher population density (3,269 persons per km² in 2008). During the day, Blantyre's population swells to over one million as people travel into the city from the countryside.³ If the current annual growth rate of 4% is maintained, the population of the city will rise to 884,497 in 2015.⁴

City	1966	1977	1987	1998	2008
Blantyre	109,461	219,011	333,120	502,053	661,444
Lilongwe	19,425	98,718	223,318	440,471	669,021
Mzuzu	8,490	16,108	44,217	86,980	128,432
Zomba	19,666	24,234	43,250	65,915	87,366
Total	157,042	358,071	643,905	1,095,419	1,546,263

Source: National Statistical Office, Population and Housing Censuses: Reports for 1977, 1987 & 1998 and Population and Housing Census: Preliminary Results for 2008.

Blantyre is Malawi's commercial and industrial hub. About 45% of residents with jobs are employed in the private sector, 12% in the public sector, and 36% are self-employed, mostly in the informal economy.⁵ High unemployment rates and low earnings per capita have led to the development of many informal, unplanned settlements in the city. Over



65% of the population lives in these informal areas with little or no basic services and infrastructure. UN-HABITAT observes that informality “will continue to grow, given the ever-increasing population, if no policies are put in place to arrest this situation.”⁶ A situation analysis of Blantyre’s informal settlements in 2006 found that average monthly household income in low density areas was MKW34,052 (USD100), compared to MKW12,442 in medium density areas, MKW8,881 in high density areas, MKW6,816 in squatter areas and MKW6,991 in traditional housing areas.⁷ Nearly half of all households (46%) earned less than MKW4,000 (USD12) per month.

The high rate of urbanization, coupled with the poor performance of the economy, has played a major role in hindering the delivery of housing and serviced land. The demand for housing and land far surpasses supply. The scale of demographic growth and urbanization mean that Blantyre’s development challenges are bound to intensify, including the problem of increasing urban food insecurity, which differs fundamentally from issues of food insecurity in the rural and agricultural sectors. Yet little is known about the extent of food insecurity in urban Malawi, making it difficult for development practitioners and policy makers to quantify the challenge and proactively plan to reduce the food gap that exists in the cities and towns.

2. METHODOLOGY

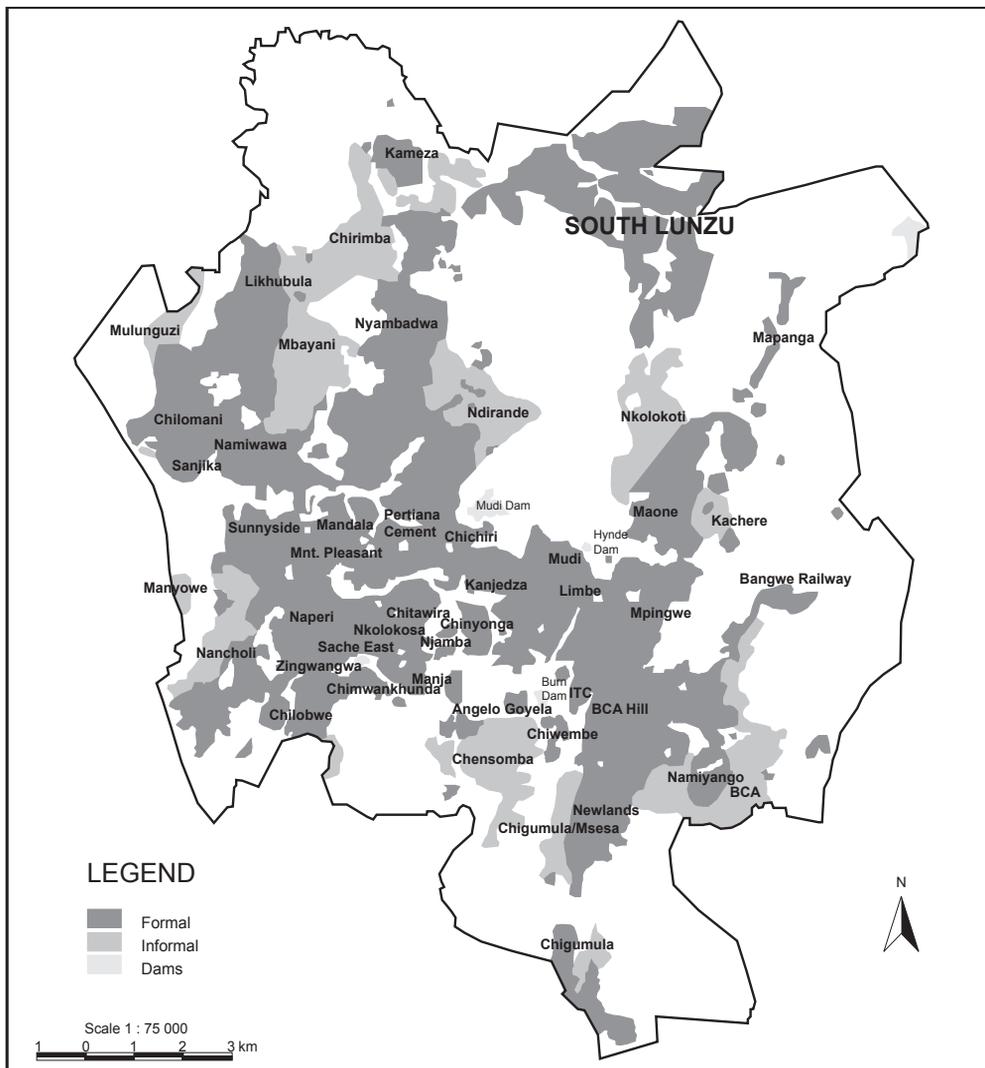
The AFSUN survey on the state of food insecurity in Blantyre was carried out as part of a broader AFSUN baseline survey of 11 SADC cities using a standardized methodology and survey instrument. Blantyre City’s residential areas are of three main types (Figure 1). The first comprises planned low-density housing where high-income residents live. In these areas, although plots are large enough for urban agriculture, most residents do not prioritise their own food production. The second are planned high-density areas. These are mainly inhabited by low-income residents and the plots are generally small, making urban agriculture difficult. The third type consists of previously traditional areas that have been turned into plotted areas but have land to spare, either on the plot or just outside the area. These areas are generally inhabited by low-income earners as well as some higher-income residents who buy land there to build their own houses. They are also where much of Blantyre’s urban agriculture takes place.

South Lunzu, where this study took place, belongs in the third category and was chosen for the survey in consultation with city officials. It was



thought that a focus on this peri-urban area would provide insights into the role and potential of urban agriculture in mitigating food insecurity, especially since most households had pieces of land on which they could grow crops, unlike in the first two types of area. In each of the enumeration areas in the ward, 16 households were randomly selected, giving a total sample of 432.

FIGURE 1: Formal and Informal Settlements in Blantyre



Source: Blantyre City Assembly (2005)

South Lunzu is a relatively new, poor peri-urban area situated within the Shire Highlands between 1,100m and 1,200m above sea level. Seasonal rivers and streams flow through the area from Ndirande Mountain with Lunzu River on the eastern side providing perennial water. The area has two seasons: a rainy season from November to April with an average



rainfall of 1,122mm, and a dry season from May to October with light rain between May and July.⁸ In 2008, South Lunzu had a population of 38,290, of which 19,093 were male and 19,197 female. Nearly half of the ward population (46%) was under the age of 18. South Lunzu grew primarily because of its proximity to the two major industrial areas of Chirimba and Limbe. More recently, there has been an increase in middle-income residents building and renting homes in the area.⁹

3. LEVELS OF FOOD INSECURITY IN SOUTH LUNZU

Food security concerns the ability of a population to secure an adequate daily supply of food that is affordable, nutritious, hygienic and culturally appropriate, and involves the reliable and sustainable production, procurement, distribution and consumption of goods in general. Three distinct variables are essential to the attainment of food security: availability, access and utilization. Food availability refers to there being sufficient quantities of appropriate and necessary types of food through a combination of domestic production, commercial imports and donor food aid. Just because sufficient food is available, it does not automatically follow that it is accessible, however. Food access depends on individuals having sufficient income or other resources to purchase or barter for the food needed to maintain consumption at an adequate nutritional level. Finally, food utilization refers to proper food use, employment of proper food processing and storage techniques, and adequate knowledge of nutrition. This study focused mainly on the access dimension of food security. A food-secure household is considered to be one with access to enough food of sufficient dietary quality and diversity. To measure food accessibility, the AFSUN survey used several standardized cross-cultural indicators developed by the Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance (FANTA) Project.

4. FOOD ACCESS

The first of these, the Household Food Insecurity Access Scale (HFIAS), allots each household a score between 0 (completely food secure) and 27 (completely food insecure) on the basis of answers to nine frequency-of-occurrence questions relating to food accessibility.¹⁰ Based on their responses to the HFIAS questions, the Household Food Insecurity Access Prevalence Indicator (HFIAP) categorizes households into four



groups: food secure, mildly food insecure, moderately food insecure and severely food insecure. A food secure household experiences none of the food insecurity conditions. A mildly food insecure household worries about not having enough food sometimes or often, and/or is unable to eat preferred foods and/or eats a more monotonous diet than desired and/or sometimes consumes food deemed undesirable. But it does not cut back on quantity or experience any of the three most severe conditions (running out of food, going to bed hungry, or going a whole day and night without eating). A moderately food insecure household sacrifices quality more frequently by eating a monotonous diet or undesirable foods sometimes or often, and/or has started to cut back on quantity by reducing the size of meals or number of meals, rarely or sometimes. But it does not experience any of the three most severe conditions. A severely food insecure household is reduced to cutting back on meal size or number of meals often, and/or experiences any of the three most severe conditions (running out of food, going to bed hungry, or going a whole day and night without eating).

The HFIAP found that almost one-third of the South Lunzu households surveyed were completely food secure, while two-thirds experienced varying degrees of insecurity. Just over half of the households were moderately (30%) or severely (21%) food insecure. While these figures provide clear evidence of a serious problem of food insecurity in Blantyre, it is worth asking how the city fares in comparison to poor areas in the other 10 cities surveyed by AFSUN.

	No.	%
Food secure	147	34.1
Mildly food insecure	62	14.4
Moderately food insecure	130	30.2
Severely food insecure	92	21.3
Total	431	100.0

Of the 11 cities surveyed, Blantyre had the second highest proportion of food secure households (after Johannesburg) and the lowest proportion of severely food insecure households (Table 3). Levels of food insecurity were significantly lower than in several other large cities outside South Africa, including Harare, Lusaka, Maputo and Windhoek. They were also lower than in Cape Town and Msunduzi Municipality in South Africa. This unexpected finding requires closer inspection and explanation. What is it about South Lunzu that appears to set it apart from other cities in the region? Before attempting to answer this question, it is necessary to see if it also differs on other measures of food insecurity.



	Food secure %	Mildly food insecure %	Moderately food insecure %	Severely food insecure %
Johannesburg, South Africa	44	14	15	27
Blantyre, Malawi	34	15	30	21
Windhoek, Namibia	18	5	14	63
Cape Town, South Africa	15	5	12	68
Gaborone, Botswana	12	6	19	63
Msunduzi, South Africa	7	6	27	60
Manzini, Swaziland	6	3	13	79
Maputo, Mozambique	5	9	32	54
Maseru, Lesotho	5	6	25	65
Lusaka, Zambia	4	3	24	69
Harare, Zimbabwe	2	3	24	72

5. DIETARY DIVERSITY

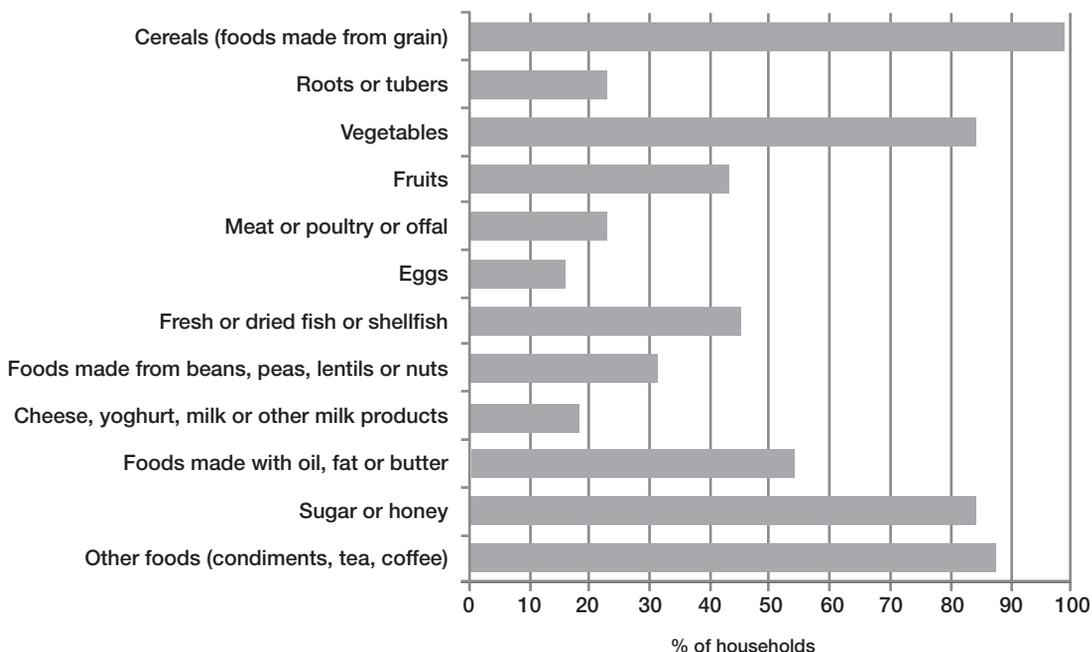
The Household Dietary Diversity Scale (HDDS) provides information on how many food groups were consumed within the household over the previous 24 hours.¹¹ Based on the FAO classification of food groups for Africa, the HDDS ranges from a score of 0 (least diverse) to 12 (most diverse, an indication that foods from all food groups are being consumed in the household). An increase in the average number of different food groups consumed provides a quantifiable measure of improved household food access. In general, any increase in household dietary diversity reflects an improvement in the household's diet. The survey found that the mean household score in Blantyre was 6.05 and that 61% of households had a score of 6 or lower, which indicates poor average dietary diversity amongst the residents of South Lunzu (Table 4). However, this picture is marginally better than for the region as a whole (5.7 and 71%) and significantly better than poor areas in all the other cities with the exception of Johannesburg, Cape Town and Gaborone.

The Blantyre diet is dominated by cereals and food made from grain (such as bread) as well as tea and sugar (Figure 2). Well over 80% of households had consumed these foods in the 24 hours prior to the survey. The relative diversity of the diet compared to other cities is attributable to the consumption of vegetables (by 84% of households), fish (45%) and fruit (43%). However, protein-rich foods, such as meat, poultry, eggs and milk products, are consumed much less frequently.



TABLE 4: Comparative Household Dietary Diversity		
	HDDS	% households with HDDS 6.0 or less
Johannesburg, South Africa	7.61	32
Cape Town, South Africa	6.75	46
Gaborone, Botswana	6.52	43
Blantyre, Malawi	6.05	61
Windhoek, Namibia	5.94	58
Maputo, Mozambique	5.67	68
Msunduzi, South Africa	5.48	71
Lusaka, Zambia	4.85	60
Harare, Zimbabwe	4.77	79
Manzini, Swaziland	4.09	83
Maseru, Lesotho	3.43	91
Total	5.70	71

FIGURE 2: Household Dietary Diversity



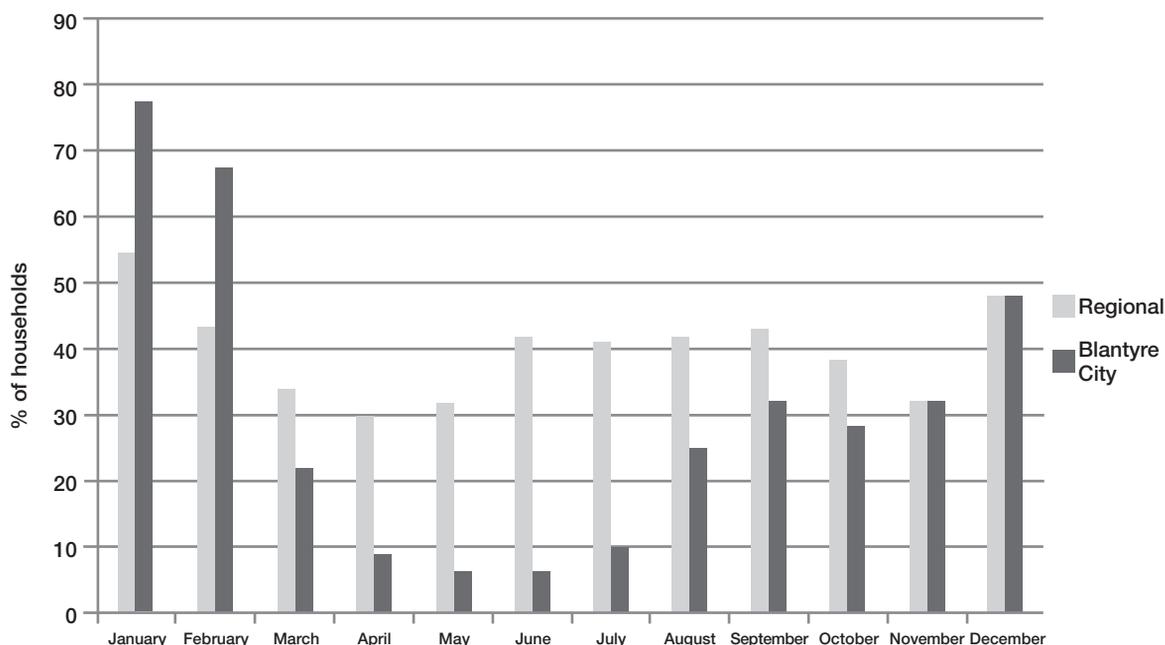
6. MONTHS OF ADEQUATE FOOD PROVISIONING

The Months of Adequate Household Food Provisioning Indicator (MAHFP) captures the household’s ability to ensure that food is available above a minimum level over the course of the year.¹² Households are asked to identify in which months (during the previous 12) they did



not have access to sufficient food to meet their household needs. Cereals constitute an important staple in Malawi and many households equate food adequacy (*chakudya chokwanira*) with the availability of maize. Not surprisingly then, when the respondents were asked about months in which the household did not have enough food to eat, the maize-growing months of December, January and February were most frequently cited. The average MAHFP score of the sampled population was 11 months (of adequate provisioning). Even amongst moderately and severely food insecure households, the average was 9. The seasonality of food access in Blantyre is far more pronounced than in other cities in the region and the AFSUN data set as a whole (Figure 3). Maize, whether grown or bought, is abundant from the time of harvesting in April to around August and then it starts becoming scarcer and less accessible.

FIGURE 3: Inadequate Household Provisioning by Month



The Malawian Integrated Household Survey (MIHS), albeit using a different measure of food security to AFSUN, found that in 2010–2011, 41% of the population of Blantyre City had a low/very low food security status.¹³ Thirty-five percent of households had experienced food shortages in the previous 12 months.¹⁴ The MIHS also captured coping responses to food insecurity in the city. In the week prior to the survey, 36% of the households relied on less preferred food, 25% had reduced the normal number of meals, 23% had limited portion size, 20% had reduced adult consumption and 11% had borrowed food or relied on others.¹⁵ Despite



the different indicators, these more recent figures indicate that there has not been any significant improvement in the prevalence of food insecurity since the AFSUN survey.

7. DETERMINANTS OF HOUSEHOLD FOOD INSECURITY

7.1 Household Size

The relationship between household size and food insecurity is rarely simple. Urban households tend to be smaller than rural households but because food purchase is critical to the urban household, there is a common-sense belief that smaller households, with fewer mouths to feed, may be less food insecure. However, if a household has several adults in it then the chances of earning income increase, which may compensate for larger household size. Certainly, households with larger numbers of children face a significant challenge as children tend to be food consumers not income earners.¹⁶ The survey suggests that very large households do tend to experience greater food insecurity in South Lunzu, Blantyre (Table 5). For example, only 17% of households with more than 10 members are food secure and 33% are severely food insecure. Interestingly, households with between six and 10 members have a slightly greater chance of being food secure than those with up to five members (36% and 33% food secure and 19% and 22% severely food insecure respectively). This would be consistent with the idea that larger households have more than one income earner.

TABLE 5: Food Insecurity and Household Size (% of households)

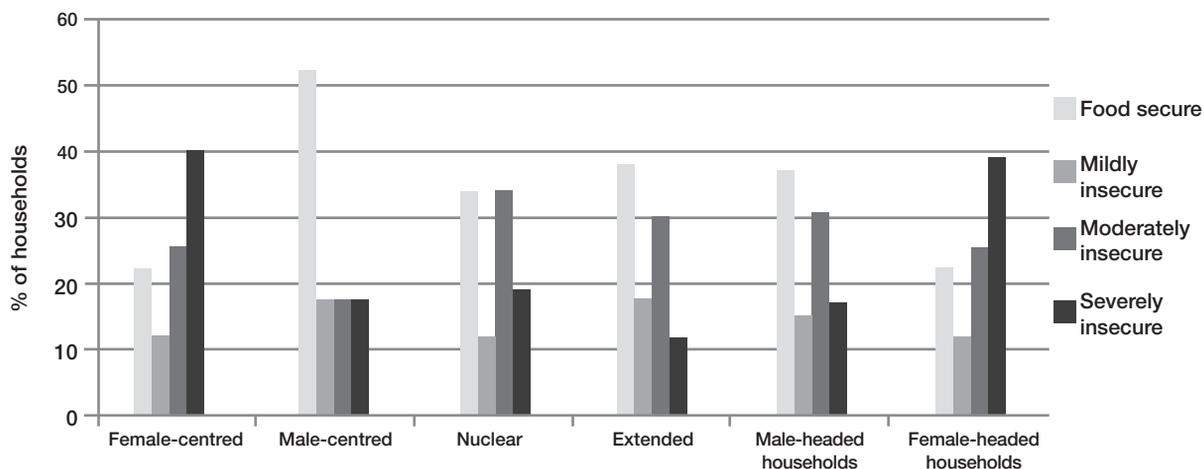
Household size	Food secure %	Mildly food insecure %	Moderately food insecure %	Severely food insecure %
1–5	33.2	13.1	31.3	22.4
6–10	36.1	15.7	28.9	19.3
>10	16.7	33.3	16.7	33.3

7.2 Household Type

Female-centred households (with a woman as head and no male partner) have a very different food insecurity profile from the other types of households. The lowest incidence of severe food insecurity is found amongst extended family households followed by nuclear households. Levels

of food security are highest among male-centred households, followed by extended family households, nuclear households and finally female-centred households. The proportion of severely food insecure households is significantly higher among female-centred households than amongst male-centred, nuclear and extended family households (Figure 4). Combining the various categories of households into two main types (male-headed and female-headed) clearly shows that when a household has a male head it is far more likely to be food secure.

FIGURE 4: Food Insecurity and Household Structure



A similar pattern is evident in the relationship between household type and the three food insecurity indicators. The raw HFIAS scores show that female-centred households are most food insecure (7.34), followed by nuclear households (5.08), extended family households (4.59) and finally male-centred households (3.48). Female-centred households also have the lowest dietary diversity and the fewest months of adequate household food provisioning. Households with a female head also have a higher HFIAS score (greater food insecurity), lower dietary diversity and fewer months of adequate provisioning than their male counterparts. Again, this shows a clear and consistent tendency for female-centred households to be more food insecure.

TABLE 6: Food Insecurity, Household Structure and Sex of Household Head

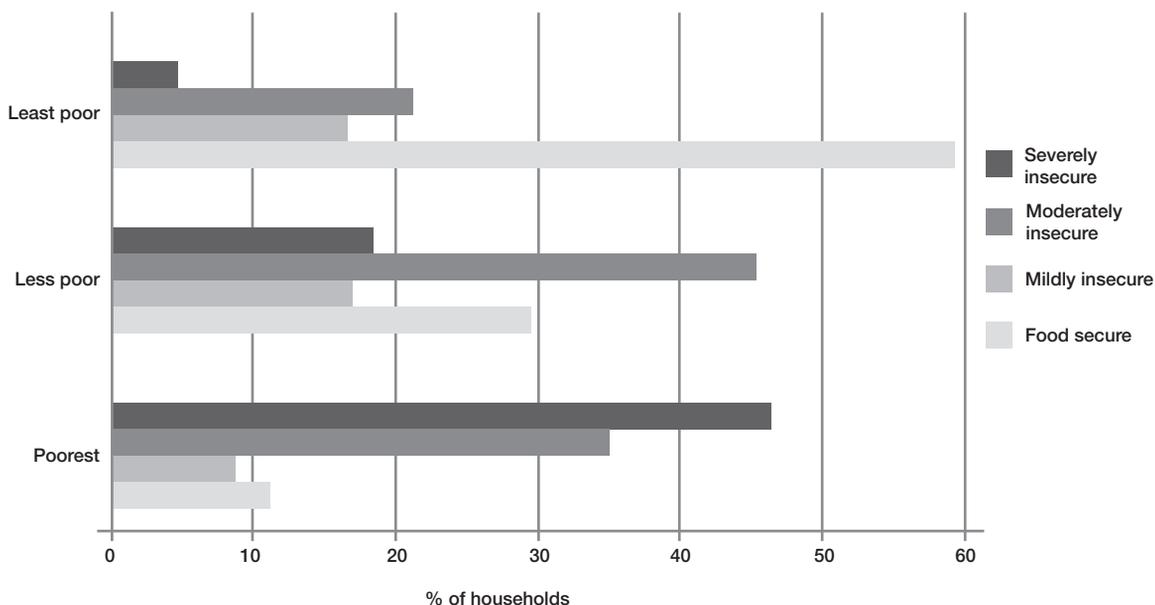
		HFIAS	HDDS	MAFHP
Household structure	Female-centred	7.34	5.31	9.63
	Male-centred	3.48	5.71	10.48
	Nuclear	5.08	6.05	9.94
	Extended	4.59	6.53	10.38
Sex of head	Male	4.79	6.21	10.14
	Female	7.17	5.40	9.70



7.3 Household Income

In the urban setting, household income is likely to have a major impact on food security. This is certainly the case in Blantyre, where 59% of households in the upper income tercile of South Lunzu were food secure and only 4% were severely food insecure (Figure 5). In contrast, only 11% of households in the lowest income tercile were food secure while 45% were severely food insecure. Even more dramatically, 80% of households in the lowest tercile were either moderately or severely food insecure, compared to only 25% in the upper tercile.

FIGURE 5: Household Income and Food Security



A similar pattern emerges when income is related to the key food security indicators. HFIAS scores for households in the lowest income tercile are almost four times higher than those in the upper income tercile (Table 7). The HDDS, which measures the impact of food access in terms of the types of foods households consume, clearly shows much less diversity amongst the lowest income households, reflecting a more monotonous diet. Similarly for the MAHFP, which measures months of adequate household food provisioning, the scores indicate that lower income households have insufficient food for more months of the year than higher income households. This suggests that during the growing season when households have generally low maize stocks, higher income households are able to use their disposable income to buy grain and other foodstuffs; an option that is considerably more difficult for the lowest income households.

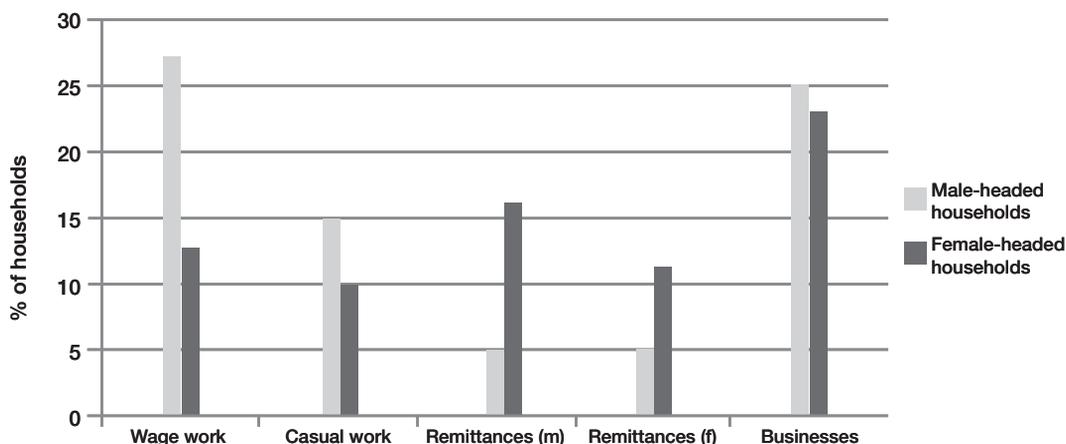
Another way of looking at the relationship between food security and income is to examine patterns of expenditures. By dividing the surveyed households into expenditure terciles, it is clear that households with greater purchasing power experience much lower levels of food insecurity. For example, households in the upper expenditure tercile have an HFIAS of less than 2 compared to nearly 9 amongst households in the lowest tercile. There are also wide discrepancies in the HDDS and MAHFP scores.

		HFIAS	HDDS	MAHFP
Household income	Poorest	8.86	4.69	8.50
	Less poor	5.29	5.86	10.09
	Least poor	2.09	7.45	11.43
Household expenses	Poorest	8.81	4.74	8.41
	Less poor	5.09	6.03	10.28
	Least poor	1.88	7.40	11.44

8. ADDITIONAL LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES

The most important income-generating activities are formal wage work, followed by informal business, casual work and remittances. Male-headed households clearly have more access to wage work and therefore to a more stable income source than female-headed households (Figure 6). Male-headed households are also more likely to obtain income through business activity, although it may well be the female household members who actually engage in these activities. Female-headed households rely more on informal business activities and cash remittances than on wage work.

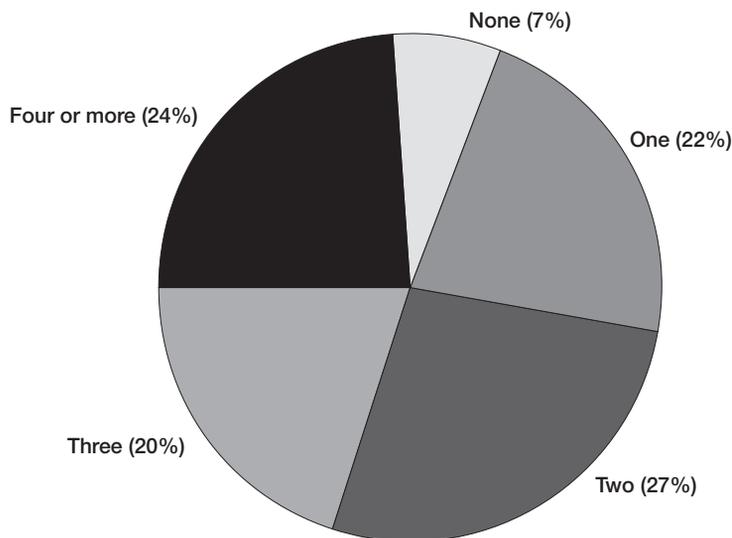
FIGURE 6: Household Type and Main Household Income Categories





Diversification of income sources is a key livelihood strategy in Blantyre. Nearly 80% of the households in the survey deployed two or more income-generating strategies in addition to their main strategy (Figure 7).

FIGURE 7: Number of Additional Livelihood Strategies



Common additional strategies include casual work, self-employment, marketing, begging and borrowing. However, while there appears to be a relationship between the number of additional strategies that a household employs and the level of food insecurity it experiences, the relationship is not a simple one. For example, households with four or more additional strategies are more food secure than those with three, two or one (according to the HFIAS measure) (Table 8). A similar pattern emerges with respect to dietary diversity and adequate monthly household provisioning.

TABLE 8: Food Insecurity and Additional Livelihood Strategies			
	HFIAS	HDDS	MAHFP
None	3.1	6.4	10.6
One	5.8	5.9	9.8
Two	6.3	5.8	9.7
Three	5.2	5.8	10.1
Four or more	4.3	6.5	10.5

The relationship between food security and types of additional livelihood strategy can only be gauged for a small number of activities as the actual number of households pursuing some of these strategies is too small to draw any significant conclusions. The three strategies in which a significant minority of households participate are casual work, marketing and self-employment. Marketing is clearly and positively related to food secu-

rity with 50% of participating households in the food secure category and only 13% in the severely food insecure category (Table 9). Self-employment has a similar, though less marked, correlation with 29% of engaged households in the food secure category and only 10% in the severely food insecure category. The opposite pattern is true for casual labour, indicating that this is a strategy of desperation not one that markedly improves food security. For example, only 16% of households involved in casual labour are food secure, compared to 43% that are severely food insecure. What this analysis reveals is that the type and mix of strategy is more important than the actual number of strategies employed.

Type of additional livelihood strategy	Food secure %	Mildly insecure %	Moderately insecure %	Severely insecure %
Marketing	50.0	16.2	20.3	13.5
Casual labour	15.9	10.1	30.4	43.5
Self-employed	28.9	17.1	43.4	10.5

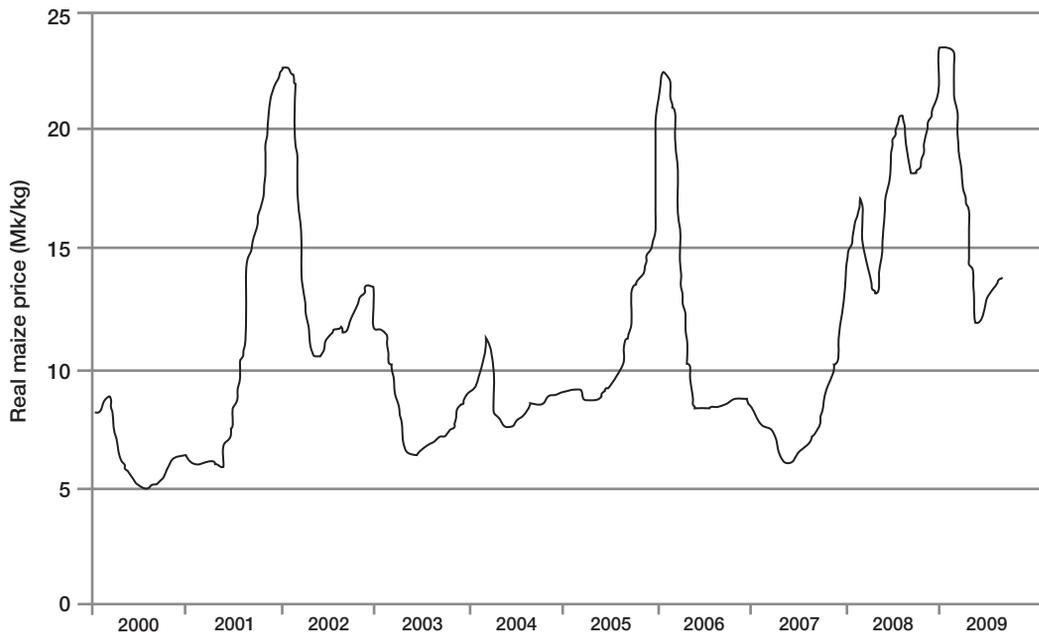
9. FOOD PRICE INCREASES

Malawian consumers have had to contend with a series of food price shocks over the last decade.¹⁷ An analysis of food shortages in Malawi in 2000–2001 and 2003–2004 concluded that “the rapid increase in prices, combined with low purchasing power of a large section of the Malawian population, adversely affected household food access.”¹⁸ In late 2008, despite a good harvest, maize and other food prices rose dramatically (Figure 8).¹⁹ In 2011, the urban poor were again hit by food and other price increases, reportedly stretching their resources to “breaking point.”²⁰ The AFSUN survey was done at a time when food prices had been on the rise for over a year and therefore offers an opportunity to examine the impact of food price shocks on urban households.

Around 60% of the Blantyre households surveyed said that they had gone without food due to unaffordability in the previous six months (Figure 9). Nearly 50% were affected at least once a week. Price increases impacted on the consumption of virtually every food group, although the greatest cuts were made in the consumption of meat and chicken, dairy products, cereals and eggs (Figure 10). In effect, price increases reduce dietary diversity and reduce the nutritional quality of urban diets.²¹ Finally, it is clear from the survey that food price increases are felt more by female-headed households than male-headed households (Figure 11). More households headed by women have gone without food due to food price increases; a function of the different income profiles of the two types of households.



FIGURE 8: Maize Prices in Malawi, 2000–2009



Source: Ellis and Manda (2012)

FIGURE 9: Frequency of Going without Food due to Unaffordability

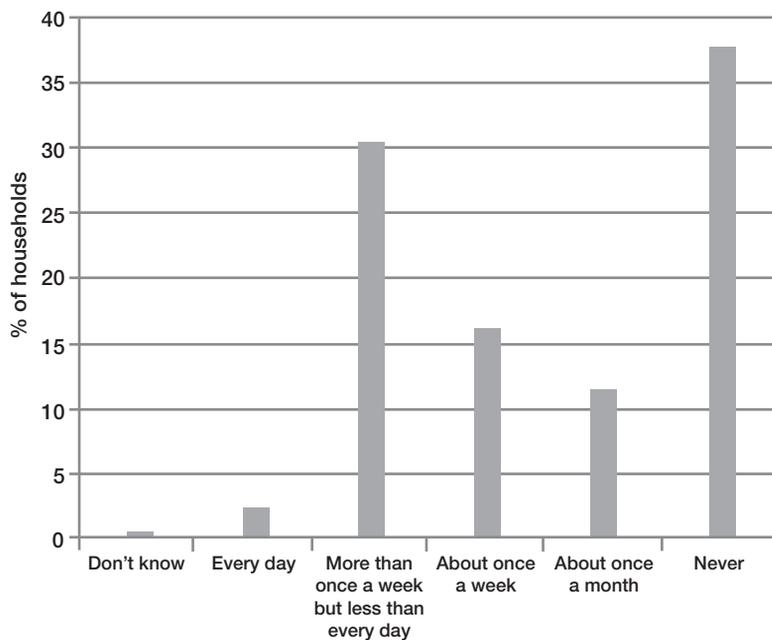


FIGURE 10: Impact of Price Rises on Consumption of Particular Foods

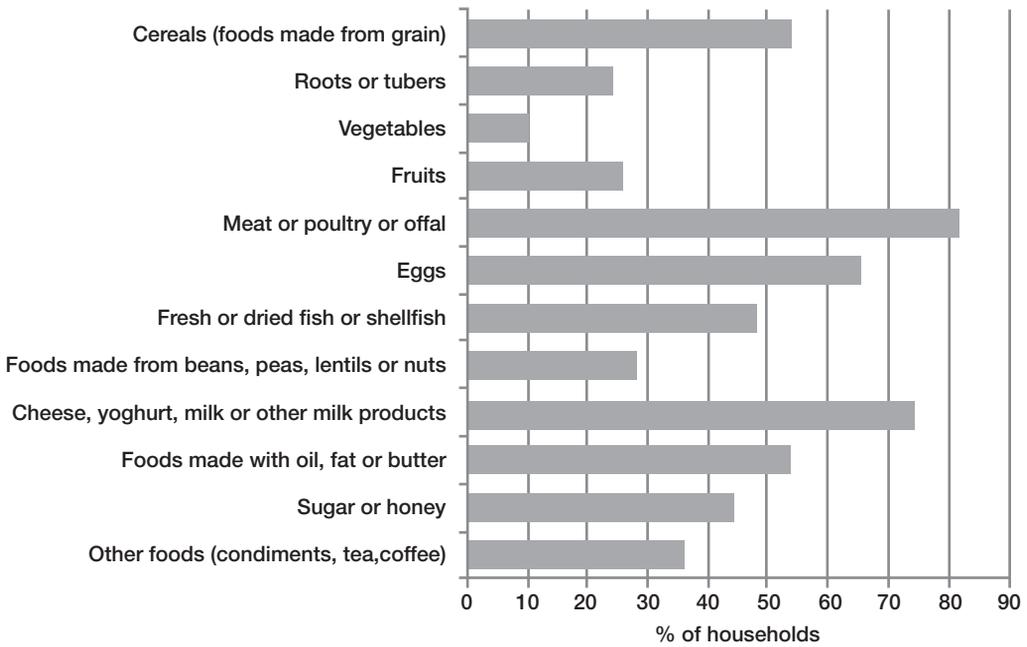
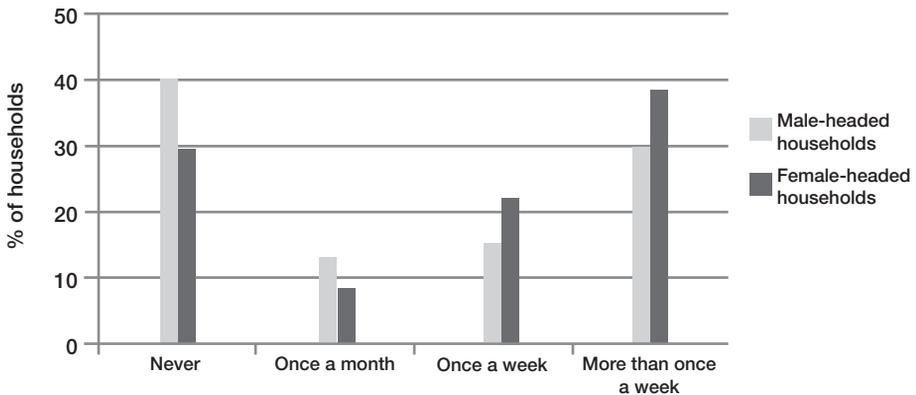


FIGURE 11: Differences in Impact of Food Price Rises by Household Type



10. FOOD SOURCING IN BLANTYRE

A recent in-depth study of food acquisition by poor households in Blantyre demonstrates both the variety of sources on which households rely and the complexity of their sourcing strategies.²² The major fixed-location food sources include five supermarkets (some South African-owned and one owned by US multinational Walmart), three official markets oper-



ated by the City and five unofficial markets. Some households also obtain some of their food from nearby rural markets. Numerous informal kiosks and roadside stalls are scattered across the city. Door-to-door informal vendors take food to the consumer in virtually all residential areas.

The AFSUN survey found that the food-sourcing strategies of residents of South Lunzu were very different from those of residents of poor urban neighbourhoods in other cities in the SADC region. First, around half (53%) of the households said they normally obtain food from supermarkets (Table 10). This is quite unlike other cities where either the vast majority or a small minority of households shop at supermarkets. In cities such as Windhoek, Gaborone, Maseru, Manzini, Johannesburg, Cape Town and Msunduzi Municipality, for example, the proportion was over 80%, while in Maputo, Harare and Lusaka it was 30% or less. A clear difference in supermarket patronage emerged within the sample between food secure and food insecure households. Over half of the food secure households shopped at supermarkets, compared with only 10% of food insecure households. This does not mean that supermarket shopping leads to greater food security. Rather, it suggests that households with higher incomes and greater ability to purchase food tend to use supermarkets more than those who have less.

TABLE 10: Household Food Sources

	Super-market	Small shop/restaurant/take-away	Informal market/street food	Grow it	Food aid	Food remittances	Shared meal with neighbours and/or other households	Food provided by neighbours and/or other households	Community food kitchen	Borrow food from others
Windhoek	97	84	76	3	1	5	14	11	0	12
Gaborone	97	56	29	5	6	4	21	22	0	3
Maseru	84	89	49	47	3	14	20	29	1	41
Manzini	90	49	48	10	1	3	9	13	18	18
Maputo	23	78	98	23	1	12	19	10	0	20
Blantyre	53	69	99	64	2	17	23	18	0	11
Lusaka	16	80	100	3	1	13	13	10	0	8
Harare	30	17	98	60	2	19	19	19	3	42
Cape Town	94	75	66	5	3	6	45	34	6	29
Msunduzi	97	40	42	30	5	5	18	21	1	24
Johannesburg	96	80	85	9	2	2	14	13	9	6
Total	79	68	70	22	2	8	21	20	4	21

Multiple responses. N=6,453

The second difference between the South Lunzu area of Blantyre and other poor neighbourhoods in other cities relates to the heavy patronage of

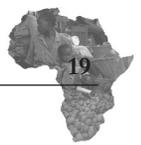
informal food markets and street vendors by residents. Blantyre is one of a small cluster of cities (that also includes Harare, Lusaka and Maputo) where almost every household normally obtains food from informal sources such as markets, tuckshops and roadside stalls. While supermarkets are mainly patronized on a weekly or monthly basis, food is obtained from informal sources almost daily (Table 11). Fully 85% of households purchase food from informal sources at least five days a week, and another 15% do so at least once a week.

	Supermarkets % of households	Informal sources % of households
At least five days a week	5	83
At least once a week	16	15
At least once a month	25	1
At least once in six months	6	0
Less than once a year	1	0
Never	47	1

The third major difference between South Lunzu in Blantyre and the bulk of the other poor neighbourhoods is the degree of participation in urban agriculture. The proportion of households growing some of their own food was as high as 64%. Only Harare (at 60%) was even remotely comparable.

11. URBAN AGRICULTURE

Urban agriculture plays a potentially significant role in the livelihoods of residents of Malawian cities with access to land.²³ At the same time, a recent study of urban agriculture in Blantyre and Lilongwe concludes that urban agriculture “will not provide the solution to food insecurity because it provides more food for middle and upper-income households than it does the poor.”²⁴ The 2010–2011 Malawi Integrated Household Survey classified 38% of urban households as “agricultural”, meaning that they grow some of their own food and/or raise livestock.²⁵ The average area cultivated by urban households is 0.5ha, although two-thirds cultivate less than this. In Blantyre, the average plot size is only 0.17ha.²⁶ Maize is the dominant crop (cultivated by 73% of households involved in urban agriculture). A few (less than 15%) grow groundnuts, beans, peas and sorghum. In terms of plot ownership, 55% of plots are inherited, 18% are rented, 8% are purchased and 5% are granted by local leaders. Interestingly, the average distance between place of residence and plot

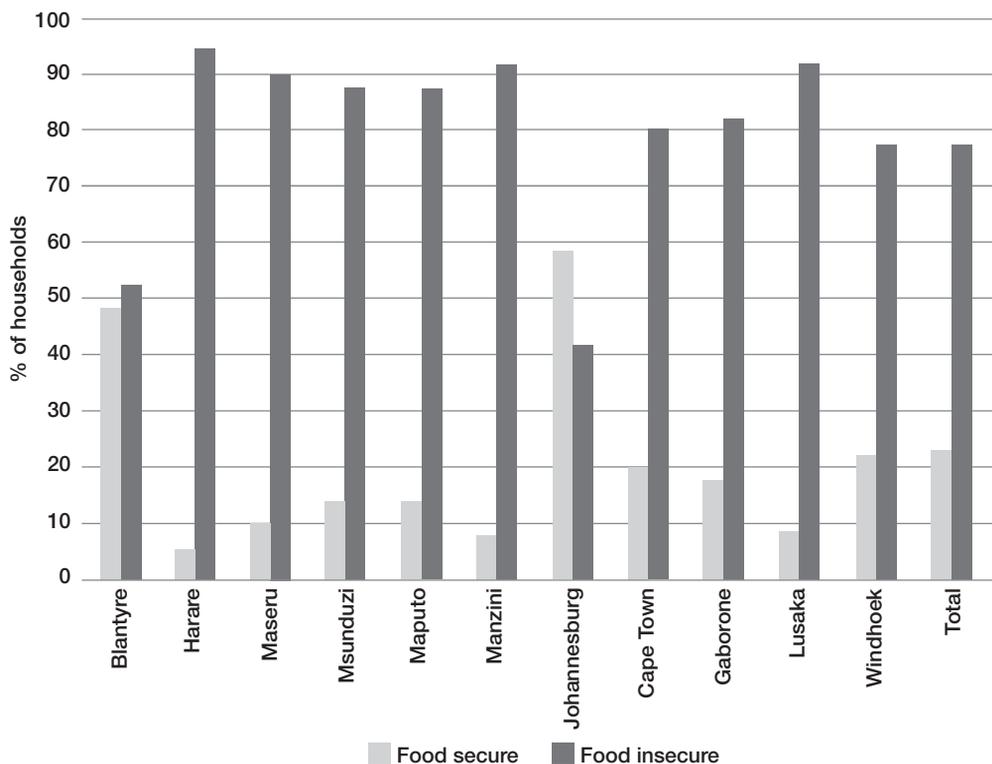


for urban households is 6km. What this suggests is that the majority of urban agriculture takes place on land that is held in customary tenure, and largely outside the cities.

These are all national statistics and do not reveal inter-urban variations. However, the survey did show at least one interesting difference between Blantyre City and the Blantyre District as a whole. In the week prior to the survey, only 1% of the adults in Blantyre City had undertaken any household agricultural work (compared to 55% in the district as a whole). The figures for other Malawian cities were also relatively low, for example, Lilongwe was 10% and Mzuzu 7%.²⁷

The AFSUN survey found that 64% of households in South Lunzu were involved in urban agriculture. This figure is higher than for any other city surveyed (Table 10), although the comparison is in some ways misleading. In many of the other cities, the surveyed areas were high-density, informal settlements and not, as in Blantyre, peri-urban areas where households have greater access to cultivable land. The proportion of households cultivating land is likely to be much lower in comparable areas of Blantyre closer to the city centre. The figure is potentially misleading for another reason. Although two-thirds of households grow some of their own food, this says nothing about how dependent they are on the food or what kind of contribution it makes to household food security.

Less than 2% of the households engaged in urban agriculture said they sourced produce from farming activities every week and only 13% said they did so at least once every six months. As many as 86% said they sourced home-grown food less than once a year. These figures suggest high participation in, but very low reliance on, urban agriculture. Less than 10% of households grew garden crops (such as vegetables) while 61% grew field crops (such as maize). Only 4% had livestock. This pattern of food production suggests that urban agriculture is certainly not a source of dietary diversification. On the other hand, urban agriculture is a source of income for some households. A total of 14% of all households surveyed (and 26% of urban agriculture households) sell produce for income. This is a much higher proportion than in other cities.²⁸ Across the region, urban food production is motivated by household survival rather than commercial income-generating opportunities. This is further confirmed by the fact that food insecure households are far more likely than food secure households to engage in food production. As Figure 12 shows, the pattern in Blantyre is rather different with half of the participants classifying as food secure (HFIAS categories 1 and 2) and half as food insecure (HFIAS categories 3 and 4). This finding is consistent with the observation that participants in urban agriculture in Malawi are either middle-income households or very poor and marginalized.²⁹

FIGURE 12: Urban Agriculture and Household Food Security

12. RURAL-URBAN FOOD TRANSFERS

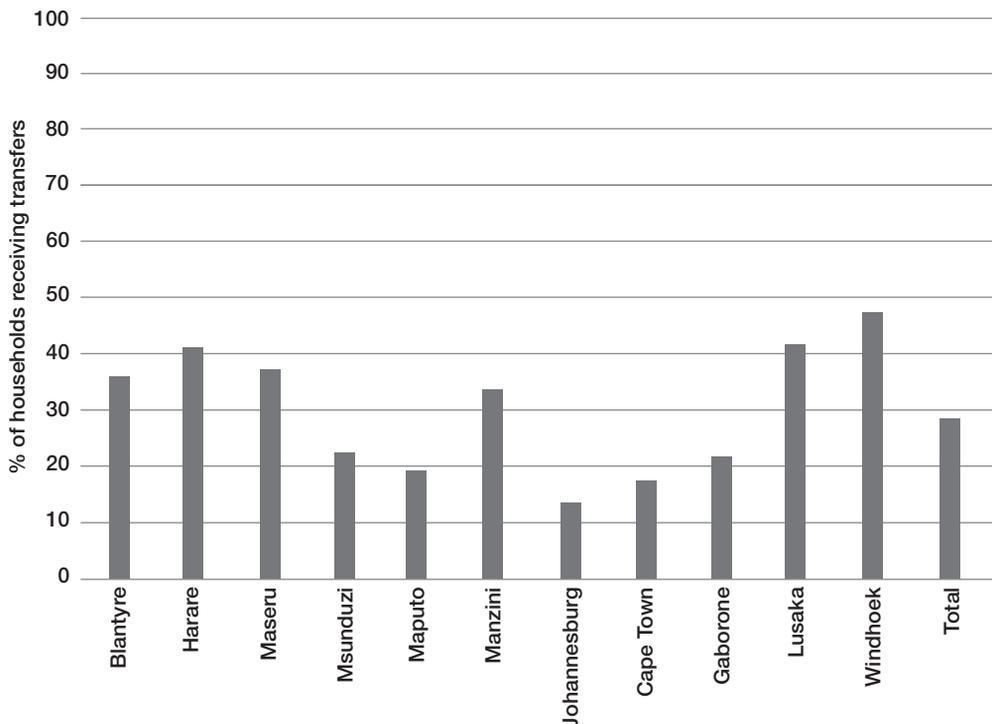
In a predominantly agricultural country such as Malawi, we might expect that households in Blantyre are regular recipients of food from relatives and friends in the rural areas. However, nearly two-thirds of households did not receive any food in this way. This put Blantyre on par with cities such as Manzini and Maseru but lower than cities such as Windhoek, Harare and Lusaka (where over 40% of households received food transfers) (Figure 13).

There does appear to be a relationship between food insecurity and food transfers. For example, 21% of moderately food insecure and 18% of severely food insecure households received transfers, compared to only 13% of food secure households. What this suggests is that transfers are motivated by food insecurity in the urban areas and that, for some households at least, they may take the edge off the most extreme forms of food insecurity. Transfers from non-relatives in the rural areas are insignificant. More important are food transfers from relatives and friends living



in other urban areas. Here again there is a relationship between transfers and food insecurity with a higher proportion of severely food insecure households receiving urban-urban transfers (possibly from migrant family members in South Africa).

FIGURE 13: Food Transfers to Urban Households



	Food secure	Mildly food insecure	Moderately food insecure	Severely food insecure
Rural areas from relatives	13.3	18.3	21.3	18.2
Rural areas from friends	0.7	1.7	0.0	1.1
Urban areas from relatives	13.7	21.3	10.3	20.7
Urban areas from friends	5.6	9.8	7.3	12.4

Among the households that received the transfers, 54% considered them “important” and 37% considered them “very important”. However, none of the food secure households considered them critical to their survival. In contrast, among the severely food insecure households, 30% said they were important and 60% that they were very important, while 8% considered them critical to their survival. The key finding, then, is that it is the most food insecure households that rely more on informal rural-urban transfers.

13. CONCLUSIONS

Chronic food insecurity is considered to be one of the most important challenges facing the people and government of Malawi. Most attention tends to be given to the rural areas where the majority of the population live and where the prevalence of food insecurity is higher than in the urban areas. However, Malawi is urbanizing at a rapid rate and those who move to the cities do not automatically become food secure. Urban food insecurity is likely to increase and therefore it is important for policy-makers to begin to think about this issue.

Using three standard food security indicators, the study found that 34% of the sampled population are completely food secure, while the other 66% are generally food insecure but with varying levels of food insecurity. The surveyed households were in the peri-urban area of South Lunzu and this report therefore does not provide a comprehensive picture of the food security situation of Blantyre as a whole. Such a study is certainly recommended. What this study does provide insights into is the food security status in peri-urban areas of the country. These areas are growing rapidly in number and extent as urbanization proceeds, so it is important to understand the survival strategies adopted by peri-urban households.

The study established that household dietary diversity is very low with most consuming a monotonous diet dominated by grain foods, especially maize. The lack of income means poor access to other micronutrient-rich food groups. While the dependence on maize and its availability on the market means that absolute levels of food insecurity are lower than in many other cities surveyed by AFSUN, there is also a clear seasonality to food security that coincides with the rural agricultural cycle. However, when maize prices rise, households immediately feel the pinch and levels of insecurity rise. The main determinants of household food security in peri-urban areas include the type of household (with female-centred households being most food insecure), the sex of the household head, the size of the household, the income level of the household and the number of livelihood strategies pursued by the household. More specifically, female-centred households, households with large family sizes, households who have lost a breadwinner through death, households with a sick member, and low-income households are more food insecure than the rest.

Given the aim of this study to shed light on the role of urban agriculture in peri-urban Malawi, we need to ask how important urban agriculture is to the surveyed households. This study found the following:

- Urban agriculture is practised by as many as two-thirds of households

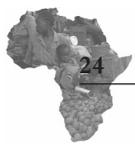


in the study area. This is considerably higher than the 38% of households identified in the 2010–2011 Malawi Integrated Survey and in poor neighbourhoods in other cities surveyed by AFSUN. This suggests that urban agriculture is practised by many more households in poor peri-urban areas than in urban areas proper.

- The primary reason why urban agriculture is more significant in peri-urban South Lunzu is because of access to fields for crop production that are either inherited, rented or allotted by traditional authorities. Only a few households cultivate garden crops on their own residential plots.
- While a significant number of households are involved in cereal cultivation, it appears that the crop is quickly consumed after the harvest and that households then revert to purchasing maize on the market. That is the only plausible explanation for the fact that the vast majority of households do not regard urban agriculture as an important or constant source of food.
- A small number of households acquire income from the sale of agricultural produce. These are generally better-off households who sell maize on the open market. Poorer and more food-insecure households tend to consume the food they produce.

This study provides important insights into the nature of peri-urban agriculture in Blantyre. A comparison with peri-urban areas in other cities would be instructive to see if these findings can be generalized. As peri-urban areas are swallowed up by expanding cities, and neighbouring fields are converted to housing, it may well be that urban agriculture will become less significant in areas like South Lunzu.

Food security in African urban areas is concerned with the ability of individuals to secure sufficient income to be able to afford food and other basic necessities, which in turn is dependent on wages and prices (as opposed to physical and climatic factors that traditionally dominate rural food security issues) or lack of entitlements to food. The urban poor in Blantyre utilize a variety of livelihood strategies in addition to formal employment. These include marketing, casual labour and self-employment. The cash economy represents the main source of food, while food aid and social networks play a marginal role. The illness or death of an adult household member who either used to provide household labour or brought income from work is therefore likely to have a major negative impact on almost all food security indicators. Instead of, or in addition to, encouraging urban agriculture, the government and urban local authorities should pay greater attention to the barriers to a sufficient and nutritious diet: high unemployment, limited income opportunities and food prices.



ENDNOTES

- 1 See, for example, R. Bezner Kerr, “Informal Labor and Social Relations in Northern Malawi: The Theoretical Challenges and Implications of Ganyu Labor for Food Security” *Rural Sociology* 70(2005): 167-87; C. Sahley, B. Groelsema, T. Marchione, and D. Nelson, “The Governance Dimensions of Food Security in Malawi” Report for USAID, 2005; T. Makombe, P. Lewin and M. Fisher, “The Determinants of Food Insecurity in Rural Malawi” Report for International Food Policy Research Institute, 2010; C. Miller, M. Tsoka and K. Reichert, “The Impact of the Social Cash Transfer Scheme on Food Security in Malawi” *Food Policy* 36 (2011): 230-38; P. Webb, “Achieving Food and Nutrition Security: Lessons Learned from the Integrated Food Security Programme (IFSP), Mulanje, Malawi” Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy, Tufts University, Boston, 2011; F. Ellis and E. Manda, “Seasonal Food Crises and Policy Responses: A Narrative Account of Three Food Security Crises in Malawi” *World Development* 40(2012): 1407-17; M. Javdani, “Malawi’s Agricultural Input Subsidy: Study of a Green Revolution-Style Strategy for Food Security” *International Journal of Agricultural Sustainability* 10(2012): 150-163.
- 2 UN-HABITAT, *The State of African Cities 2010* (Nairobi, 2010).
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- 12 P. Bilinsky and A. Swindale, “Months of Adequate Household Food Provisioning (MAHFP) for Measurement of Household Food Access: Indicator Guide” Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance Project, Academy for Educational Development, Washington, D.C., 2007.



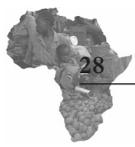
- 13 Republic of Malawi, *Integrated Household Survey 2010-2011: Household Socioeconomic Characteristics Report*, National Statistical Office, 2012, p. 190.
- 14 Ibid., p. 200.
- 15 Ibid., p. 193.
- 16 Other research has demonstrated a relationship between food insecurity and the number of orphans in Blantyre households; J. Rivers, J. Mason, D. Rose, T. Eisele, S. Gillespie, M. Mahy and R. Monasch, “The Impact of Orphanhood on Food Security in the High-HIV Context of Blantyre, Malawi” *Food & Nutrition Bulletin* 31 (2010): S264-71.
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- 19 G. Cornia, L. Deotti and M. Sass, “Food Price Volatility over the Last Decade in Niger and Malawi: Extent, Sources and Impact on Child Malnutrition” WP 2012-002, UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa, 2012, p. 44; see also E. Chirwa, “The 2007-2008 Food Price Swing: Impact and Policies in Malawi” *Commodities and Trade Technical Paper 12*, FAO, Rome, 2009.
- 20 “Malawi: Urban Poor Hit by Slew of Price Increases” *IRIN* 19 December 2011.
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- 27 Ibid., p. 93.
- 28 J. Crush, A. Hovorka and D. Tevera, “Food Security in Southern African Cities: The Place of Urban Agriculture” *Progress in Development Studies* 11(2011): 285-305.
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THE STATE OF FOOD INSECURITY IN BLANTYRE CITY, MALAWI

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AFSUN