



UNIVERSITY of the  
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INSTITUTE FOR POVERTY, LAND  
AND AGRARIAN STUDIES (PLAAS)



WORKING  
Paper **40**

Lusaka's local food geographies  
A gendered reading of everyday food  
insecurity in Mtendere, Lusaka

25 August 2016

Frances Davies



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## PLAAS Working Paper 40: Lusaka's local food geographies: A gendered reading of everyday food insecurity in Mtendere, Lusaka

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Partners: *The project is supported by:*

*The DST-NRF Centre of Excellence in Food Security, hosted by UWC and co-hosted by the University of Pretoria  
The African Centre for Cities and Labour and Enterprise Policy Research Group, University of Cape Town*

**Author:** Frances Davies [bistydavies@gmail.com](mailto:bistydavies@gmail.com)

**Series Editor:** Rebecca Pointer

**Design & Layout:** Rebecca Pointer

**Cite as:** Davies, F. 2016. Lusaka's local food geographies: A gendered reading of everyday food insecurity in Mtendere, Lusaka, *Working Paper 40*. Cape Town: PLAAS, UWC and Centre of Excellence on Food Security.

### African Centre for Cities

Environmental & Geographical Science Building  
University of Cape Town  
Private Bag X3,  
Rondebosch 7701

Tel: +27 21 650 5903 Fax: +27 21 650 2032

Website: [www.africancentreforcities.net](http://www.africancentreforcities.net)

E-mail: [maryam.waglay@uct.ac.za](mailto:maryam.waglay@uct.ac.za)

Twitter: @UrbanAfricaACC



### Labour and Enterprise Policy Research Group (LEP)

Institute of Development and Labour Law  
Faculty of Law  
University of Cape Town  
Private Bag X3  
Rondebosch 7701

Tel: +27 (0)21-6505634 Fax: +27 (0)21-6505660

Website: [www.idll.uct.ac.za/idll/lep](http://www.idll.uct.ac.za/idll/lep)

Email: [faldielah.khan@uct.ac.za](mailto:faldielah.khan@uct.ac.za)



### Institute for Poverty, Land And Agrarian Studies

Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences  
University of the Western Cape  
Private Bag X17  
Bellville 7535

Tel: +27-(0)21-9593733 Fax: +27(0)21-9593732

Website: [www.plaas.org.za](http://www.plaas.org.za) Email: [info@plaas.org.za](mailto:info@plaas.org.za)

Twitter: @PLAASuwc

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/PLAASuwc](http://www.facebook.com/PLAASuwc)



### DST-NRF Centre of Excellence in Food Security

School of Government Building  
University of the Western Cape  
Private Bag X17  
Bellville 7535

Tel: +27 (0)21-9593817

Website: [www.foodsecurity.ac.za](http://www.foodsecurity.ac.za) Email: [coeinfo@gmail.com](mailto:coeinfo@gmail.com)

Twitter: @FoodSecurity\_ZA

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/CoEinFS/>



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the input and support from Dr Gareth Haysom at the AAC and Rebecca Pointer for editing and publication. The research contained in this paper was part funded by the National Research Foundation and is acknowledged with gratitude.

## ABSTRACT

Little is known about how individual abilities and food security determinants – at the scale of everyday life – connect to formal and informal value chains, and broader urban structural systems in which daily processes are embedded. Structural inequalities in urban systems make it difficult to translate economic development into improved food security at different city, household or individual scales. Exploring current a-scalar and anti-urban food security policies and practice in Southern Africa, the paper argues that everyday food security strategies – which enable food access and sharing in food communities – are enmeshed in local food system structures. Everyday food strategies are a critical source of livelihoods and are also deeply relational processes, tied to power, identity and agency. The paper also looks at how contextualised food security outcomes are affected by place, space and negotiations of everyday life. The aim is to challenge narrow value chain theories that do not recognise the ‘other’ – currently invisible networks and interactions – in and between local food value chains, such as what and who constitutes value, and who holds the power to assign value in local food networks. The paper draws on a wide literature review and in-depth qualitative work conducted in Lusaka, Zambia. The paper concludes arguing that deeper nuances affect everyday food security outcomes, and this paper purposefully furthers the current (limited) conversation and empirical understanding of food security within value chains analysis.

**Keywords:** agency, gender, urban food security, informality, Zambia

**African Centre for Cities**  
Environmental & Geographical Science Building  
University of Cape Town  
Private Bag X3,  
Rondebosch 7701

Tel: +27 21 650 5903 Fax: +27 21 650 2032  
Website: [www.africancentreforcities.net](http://www.africancentreforcities.net)  
E-mail: [maryam.waglay@uct.ac.za](mailto:maryam.waglay@uct.ac.za)  
Twitter: @UrbanAfricaACC



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Faculty of Law  
University of Cape Town  
Private Bag X3  
Rondebosch 7701

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Website: [www.idll.uct.ac.za/idll/lep](http://www.idll.uct.ac.za/idll/lep)  
Email: [faldielah.khan@uct.ac.za](mailto:faldielah.khan@uct.ac.za)



**Institute for Poverty, Land And Agrarian Studies**  
Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences  
University of the Western Cape  
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Bellville 7535

Tel: +27-(0)21-9593733 Fax: +27(0)21-9593732  
Website: [www.plaas.org.za](http://www.plaas.org.za) Email: [info@plaas.org.za](mailto:info@plaas.org.za)  
Twitter: @PLAASuwc  
Facebook: [www.facebook.com/PLAASuwc](http://www.facebook.com/PLAASuwc)



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University of the Western Cape  
Private Bag X17  
Bellville 7535

Tel: +27 (0)21-9593817  
Website: [www.foodsecurity.ac.za](http://www.foodsecurity.ac.za) Email: [coeinfs@gmail.com](mailto:coeinfs@gmail.com)  
Twitter: @FoodSecurity\_ZA  
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## ACRONYMS

ASCAs	Accumulated Savings and Credit Associations
ROSCAs	Rotating Savings and Credit Associations
UN FAO	United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization

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Private Bag X3,  
Rondebosch 7701

Tel: +27 21 650 5903 Fax: +27 21 650 2032  
Website: [www.africancentreforcities.net](http://www.africancentreforcities.net)  
E-mail: [maryam.waglay@uct.ac.za](mailto:maryam.waglay@uct.ac.za)  
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Website: [www.idll.uct.ac.za/idll/lep](http://www.idll.uct.ac.za/idll/lep)  
Email: [faldielah.khan@uct.ac.za](mailto:faldielah.khan@uct.ac.za)



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Bellville 7535

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Website: [www.plaas.org.za](http://www.plaas.org.za) Email: [info@plaas.org.za](mailto:info@plaas.org.za)  
Twitter: @PLAASuwc  
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Bellville 7535

Tel: +27 (0)21-9593817  
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	II
ABSTRACT .....	II
ACRONYMS .....	III
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	2
3. CASE STUDY .....	5
4. DISCUSSION .....	7
5. CONCLUSION .....	10
REFERENCES .....	12

**African Centre for Cities**  
 Environmental & Geographical Science Building  
 University of Cape Town  
 Private Bag X3,  
 Rondebosch 7701



Tel: +27 21 650 5903 Fax: +27 21 650 2032  
 Website: [www.africancentreforcities.net](http://www.africancentreforcities.net)  
 E-mail: [maryam.waglay@uct.ac.za](mailto:maryam.waglay@uct.ac.za)  
 Twitter: @UrbanAfricaACC

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 Rondebosch 7701



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 Email: [faldielah.khan@uct.ac.za](mailto:faldielah.khan@uct.ac.za)

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 Twitter: @PLAASuwc  
 Facebook: [www.facebook.com/PLAASuwc](http://www.facebook.com/PLAASuwc)

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 Bellville 7535



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 Twitter: @FoodSecurity\_ZA  
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Impoverished urban residents fill forgotten spaces in cities, characterised by poor economic opportunities, inadequate services, limited dietary diversity, and high transport costs (Pieterse&Parnell 2014). In these urban contexts, little is known about how individual capabilities and the determinants of food security – at the scale of everyday life – connect to formal and informal value chains. Daily household food security outcomes are also embedded in broader urban food and structural systems. Poverty is a determinant of food security, limiting an individual's access to available urban food and participation in the food system (Cohen&Garrett 2010; Crush&Frayne 2010a; Dodson et al. 2012). Structural inequalities add limitations to the extent to which economic development translates into comprehensive, improved food security at different city, household and individual scales. Economic development may even introduce new vulnerabilities (Battersby 2011; Crush&Frayne 2010a; Riley&Dodson 2014). Sen (1981), among others, argues that different individuals need different entitlements to reach the same level of development. Household capital assets are known to determine food security outcomes (Frayne et al. 2012). As this paper illustrates however, assets are not translated into food without negotiation – human agency is activity expressed in this process.

The United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (1996) defines food security as existing when 'all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life'. The definition rests on four premises: food availability; food accessibility; food utilisation; and the stability of the food system over time (Frayne et al. 2012). Despite FAO approaches, food insecurity and malnutrition levels have continued to rise around the world. As systematic failures in the global corporate-driven food system are exposed, questions have been raised regarding the narrow market based food security responses commonly offered.

Conventional food security policy and practice in southern Africa have been faulted for being restrictive, a-scalar and anti-urban. Corporate and foreign-driven development agendas dominate in sub-Saharan Africa and methods for achieving local food security for the most vulnerable are founded on a lack of empirical analysis. Narrow food security perspectives are unable to see the dangers of silver bullet approaches in the *real* world; they also do not appreciate how human agency reproduces itself in vastly different ways across the world. Rocha (2008) provides an alternative definition of food security based on five 'As': availability, accessibility, adequacy, acceptability, and agency. The recognition of agency within food security outcomes allows for greater inclusion of the gendered dynamics at play within everyday food system interactions. This research paper is based Rocha's definition.

Household food security outcomes are affected by place, space, and the gendered negotiations of everyday life. Narrow value chain theories do not recognise other, currently invisible, networks and interactions within and between local food systems and their actors. Who or what holds *value*, and who holds the power to assign value in local food networks are part of the deeper nuances that affect food security outcomes. Daily food security strategies enable food access and sharing within food communities and are enmeshed within local food system structures. These strategies are a critical source of economic livelihood as well as deeply related to power, identity and agency. Gender dynamics are implicit in the individual negotiations around food, and gender is known to influence food security outcomes (Dodson et al., 2012; Battersby&McLachlan, 2013; Riley & Dodson, 2014).

This State of Knowledge literature review is backed up with ethnographic research in an informal neighbourhood in Lusaka, Zambia. Theorised through a feminist and alternative food geographies lens, the Mtendere case offers insights into the layered dynamics, connections and

interactions in regional agri-food value chains, including African urban food deserts, food system governance, and food regimes. The questions arising from these theories, and the findings of the qualitative research, highlight wide disconnections and contradictions between conventional food security discourse and common food access and sharing strategies on the ground. Anthropological theory and African urbanism literature support an alternative paradigm for understanding food security, drawing on the lived realities of food system agents.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Conventional discourse views food security from two perspectives: the national macro-scale and the household scale (Battersby 2012a; Ecker&Breisinger 2012; Lang&Barling 2012; Crush&Frayne 2014; Fukuda-Parr&Orr 2014). The two perspectives manifest in national food security agendas, driven by rural and agricultural policies that focus on food production and calories per capita. Quantitative values are applied to household units and used to measure food security in relation to household capital assets and food availability. Conventional perspectives rarely reference the contextual, spatial and deeply gendered dynamics in which food security and food livelihoods are embedded, including: non-market forms of food access, food utilisation, and different ideas about what is valued beyond commercial market rates (Misselhorn 2005; Crush&Frayne 2010b; Battersby 2011; 2012b; Cooke 2012).

Value chain analysis investigates connections and interdependencies within and between firms, between formal and informal parts of food systems, as well as the nature of the livelihoods and food security outcomes produced. However, little empirical research goes beyond investigating the links to examine the dynamics of these connections. For example, how and where gendered power-laden dynamics play out and manifest in daily life, and thereby affect food security outcomes. The 'other', or invisible, scales at which value chains are actively negotiated explicitly affect local food system outcomes and a given household's food security position. Much research discusses the livelihoods generated from formal value chains. This research paper looks beyond the technical formalised processes, to understand gendered food livelihoods from a bottom-up perspective, exploring the daily lives of women urban dwellers who are food insecure. The research also discusses other aspects of the urban food system, including the network of formal and informal value chains that are otherwise invisible in conventional discourse.

### The urban-scaled food system

Historically, urban social and structural development has been defined by interactions between food and local food systems (Steel 2013). The way that food flows in cities is still as critical and influential as ever, although with the increasing corporate control of the food system, the food system works in vastly different and increasingly opaque ways (Thu 2009). Food systems function and take shape, in combination with other urban systems and food system governance mechanisms, to enable food acquisition, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal for growing urban populations (Ericksen 2008; Crush&Frayne 2010a; Battersby&Crush 2014).

From a systems perspective, food security is the product of contextually variable factors with ecological and socio-economic feedback loops, spanning diverse and fluctuating spatial and temporal dimensions (Crush&Frayne 2010a; Frayne et al. 2012; Rosin et al. 2012). Food security is defined by the sustainability of the food system as a whole (Ericksen 2008). Food security is also lived and embodied; it is a reality negotiated at micro-scale within families and households across varied neighbourhoods and socio-cultural contexts, across time. It is vital to emphasise a systematic approach to understanding city food geographies and the prevalence of food insecurity and malnutrition (Ericksen 2008; Ingram 2011; Lang&Barling 2012).



A food systems perspective recognises ‘cross-level, cross-scale and cross-sector’ influences on food security (Misselhorn et al. 2012: 7). The systems perspective makes visible the spatial and temporal factors that affect how individuals interact with value chains, and thus how food insecurity arises and is uniquely experienced in city space.

Southern research has adapted aspects of northern research on local alternative food systems and urban food deserts (Battersby 2012b; Battersby&Crush 2014; Peyton et al. 2015). The food deserts theory shows how the spatial determinants of food access and system level flaws drive the processes that underpin food insecurity, rising malnutrition, and embedded social exclusion and inequality (Shaw 2006). Northern literature on alternative food geographies explores how local actors have rebuilt local food systems, reorienting their control back to the local place (Watts et al. 2005; Follett 2009; Wiskerke 2009). Alternative food geographies largely focus on territorial-scale (often urban or metropolitan) agri-food policy formulation, rather than current national or global policy formulations. These approaches aim to reintegrate direct and indirect food system actors in shortened value chains, and to form new relations between the state and the public sector, the market and civil society (Wiskerke 2009). Alternative food geographies envision contextually distinct holistic local food systems, supportive of sustainable development and the creation of new key roles particularly in governance.

Alternative food geographies have not yet developed in sub-Saharan Africa to the same extent and form. Similar food geographies may not even be suitable for the region, since they focus on middle-class aspirations and food provisioning aspects, and thus miss implicit structural inequalities in food systems (urban planning, poverty, racism) and the continued neglect and erosion of traditional local food systems (Freidberg&Goldstein 2011). The urban food deserts theory may also not be useful in local contexts that ignore the existing foodways of the urban poor and informal value chain livelihoods (Battersby 2012b; Battersby&Crush 2014). Nevertheless, theoretical discussion of food deserts does highlight the role of scale.

Riley and Legwegoh’s (2014) comparative work in Gaborone and Blantyre, illustrates that *place* and *scale* matter in food security outcomes. Diverse historical, geographical and sociological contexts in southern African cities result in context-specific food security determinants and outcomes. Urban residents – particularly the poor – are vulnerable to food system changes that occur at multiple scales (Acquah et al. 2014; Mitlin&Satterthwaite 2013; Resnick&Thurlow 2014). Haysom (2014: 31) argues that ‘(t)he food system thus embodies the scale debate, highlighting the hierarchical components but also reflecting that the contingent outcome of the tensions between structural forces and agentic practices’. Changes in the contextual environment affect (1) the calculated agentic actions at the scale of everyday life within food networks, and (2) the unrecognised connections between value chains and fluid urban spaces. Interactions between local and global forces shape food systems. Local food systems thus differ from place to place, with critical implications for food security responses that are imperative for the future of southern Africa.

## Food system governance

Food security governance – defined by Termeer et al. (2011: 160) as ‘the interactions between public and/or private entities ultimately aiming at the realization of collective goals’ – is receiving increased attention in contestations over global food insecurity. Food system governance aims to oversee direct food security interventions and the surrounding context that shapes food insecurity (Candel 2014). Food system governance links to developing urban governance approaches that need to recognise and enhance the role of everyday urban actors outside the institutional walls of local government (Pierre 2005).

In the global south, food system governance research has been limited, often focusing on agribusiness market power, on specific value chains, and foreign developmental agencies role in steering local food security solutions (Abrahams 2010). Southern theory that supports a broader

understanding of food system governance is quite limited and new,<sup>1</sup> as are comprehensive policies and actual practice in African cities. Where policies are in place, they have been shown to undermine local food economies and exacerbate food insecurity (Tranberg Hansen 2004; Battersby&Crush 2014):

*(M)ost municipalities are ambiguous about the informal food economy. In a neoliberal world, supermarkets are generally free to do business without any significant degree of regulation. The urban informal food economy, on the other hand, is regularly the target of control, regulation and draconian eradication policies.*

*Source: Battersby&Crush 2014: 148.*

The complexity of food security cannot be dealt with by the currently 'fragmented institutional architecture' that pervades southern African cities (Candel 2014: 596). Food system governance is, however optimistically, seen as a key tool to address global food security issues if governance processes are better 'integrated on multiple scales' and if all relevant stakeholders can 'engage in collective rational deliberations' (ibid). Relevant stakeholders must therefore include those who are food insecure and operating on the margins of the 'formal food system' in African cities. 'Informal' value chains, co-existing livelihoods, and the nuances of daily food security strategies outside commercial marketing systems need to be understood, and perhaps even supported, not undermined, as described by Battersby and Crush (2014).

## African urbanism

A sophisticated debate focuses on the African urban condition (d'Cruz&Satterthwaite 2005; Pieterse 2008; Pieterse&Simone 2013; Pieterse&Parnell 2014). The debate focuses on inclusive and contextual governance forms that aim to better recognise alternative or 'informal' value chains and livelihood strategies of poor urban citizens. 'Deep-democracy' (Appadurai 2001) is key to the future development and sustainability of inclusive African cities – bottom-up development, enacted by urban agents and enabling scale- and context-appropriate urban governance formation (Pieterse 2006; 2008; 2011; Swilling 2011).

*At the heart of this new paradigm is the subversive idea that our greatest resource and opportunity to solve the African urban crisis lies with the people who effectively build the cities through their tenacious efforts to retain a foothold there – the agents of slum urbanism.*

*Source: Pieterse and Parnell 2014: 204.*

African urban literature focuses largely on the structural elements of urban life and the everyday contexts of poverty, informality and the engrained and deeply gendered inequality – all of which are critical to urban food security. While African urban literature is surprisingly silent about the role of food systems in cities, it nonetheless provokes important questions about how to develop 'deeply democratic' food system governance and move towards inclusive, equitable and sustainable cities (Swilling 2011). Food security practitioners thus do not need to reinvent the wheel to address the necessary cross-sectorial integration and complexity of urban food security.

Pieterse's (2006: 290) description of epistemic communities as 'knowledge-generating collectives' suggests that urban citizens and their communities possess agency and can enact their collective agency in the daily process of shaping identities, relations, neighbourhoods, and urban structures. Therefore, urban food system governance mechanisms should recognise and be shaped by the epistemic communities that best understand the everyday liveable urban structure and food system. Epistemic communities also share a commitment to finding 'practicable "solutions" to intractable social and economic problems' (Pieterse, 2006: 290); food is one such intractable problem (Haysom 2014). Locally defined governance mechanisms must be genuinely responsive to the local context within which urban residents' food security,

<sup>1</sup> Includes Abrahams' (2010) work on Zambia; and Pereira and Ruysenaar (2012) and Haysom's (2014) on South Africa. Brown (2014) also illustrates the issues around local urban governance in Uganda. Drawing on Rocha and Lessa (2009) provide key work from the example of Belo Horizonte, Brazil.

including locally appropriate value chains and the local food system of which they are part. These concerns will be examined from the point of view of the below case study.

### 3. CASE STUDY<sup>2</sup>

Feminism has a long history of challenging the hegemonic powers embedded in capitalist development. Taking back the discussion to the 'first place' of experience – embedded in everyday lived experiences, opens up theoretical space to understand the role of individual and collective agency, and the reality of dealing with power inequality. Power inequalities are intrinsic to the global food system. Current food security approaches, as opposed to feminist theory, obscure the strategies that marginal people in marginal places perform daily to enable livelihoods, access food and craft meaningful lives. Founded on ethnographic research undertaken in Lusaka, Zambia, over six months in 2014, these gendered power relations are examined in the below case study.<sup>3</sup>

Highlighting lessons for food security discourses and in conversation with broader urban and food debates, the case study uses a thick description (Geertz 1973) of the insights gained from the research participants about their own views of food security. The case study aims to find a different paradigm for conceptualising food security strategies and informal food livelihoods, to align more closely with the everyday lives of poor food system actors and the intricate workings of a local urban food system. For example, women participants spoke about what household food security means:

*It's difficult as the woman because even it's like we running the business together, I'm the one having to stress how I am going to feed the children tonight, John never thinking about that. Last Christmas I managed to save 900kwacha, but then he just said no I want to go to the village, so I can't say anything, he just take that money and go. I just have to be quiet. So every day I'm just having to make that budget again.*

*It's like when he getting angry, like mostly how can I say, he hasn't left enough money for you to cook chicken, just some vegetables. Then in the house, he coming back, (and shouting) 'no why haven't you cooked chicken'? Even though the money he left wasn't enough to cook the chicken you wanted!*

*First he must work, then also you can. (...Otherwise) definitely he will want you to stop, he'll be just complaining every day until you stop.*

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Participants: Aggie, Ruth, and Talrai.

Gender prescriptions add layers of determinants to food security strategies and the outcomes of the local food system. Aggie, a research participant, used to be married and lived a seemingly secure life with her formally employed ex-husband. As she explained, however, although she was well fed and described him as 'a good man, no shouting for food, what what', she lived in constant fear of HIV/Aids and she was completely controlled and dependant on his whims. Her husband was unfaithful, and as he was out working and seeing other women, she was confined to the house, because he was 'just too jealous'. Ruth, Aggie's daughter-in-law, expands on this:

*Now days it's maybe fifty-fifty staying together like this. There are many men keeping the women like this (...); you can't even go to the market to get tomatoes. Maybe the man can go or mostly they send a child. Some friends can come to the house, but others, no allowed friends. If you want to go to buy something, maybe dress for yourself, he won't let you go, must go together. Otherwise just sitting in the house, the whole day! Buying you movies, you must just sit and watch! But these days the police are checking, they are getting strict on this. If they find you (a man) doing this you go to jail for a long time. But also some women don't go to the police because they say if he goes to jail, who's going to feed you?*

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<sup>2</sup> Anonymity was guaranteed to all participants in the case study. All names are pseudonyms.

<sup>3</sup> Undertaken in fulfilment of a MPhil Degree, available at <http://scholar.sun.ac.za/>

Aggie's and Ruth's stories illustrate the deeply gendered, embodied and power-fraught choices and trade-offs involved in actively negotiating food acquisition and broader food security outcomes. Zambia's political economy is such that the Lusaka food system and local agri-food value chains are increasingly formalised and commercialised. Zambia is, however, still imbued with complex socioeconomic and gendered cultural prescriptions. Where food access is based on purchasing power, the gendered and structured socioeconomic inequalities that shape relational power dynamics over the negotiation of assets for food, and how that food is then shared, become central to determining food security.

Hovorka (2013: 125) offers a southern African perspective on urban food geography – through a specifically feminist lens, conceptualising the gendered nature of food that permeates all scales of the food system, and exposing the enduring reality of 'food as power in its own right'. Illuminating the implicit connections between gender, agency and power within the urban food system, Hovorka (2013) highlights the existing power differentials at each node of connection within and between value chains. Forms of inequality correspond to the spatial and structural dynamics of the urban system and influence individual ability to interact with the urban foodscape and craft food livelihoods. Layers of inequality shape individual food security outcomes that must be actively and consciously struggled over in the efforts to access food (Hovorka, 2013). As stated by Dodson et al. (2012: 2):

*Who you are matters because individual demographic attributes such as age, gender, marital and family status combine with class, ethnicity and other axes of discrimination to enable or constrain the individual's means of acquiring food.*

Ruth's husband explains that it is not good for a man to be seen running a small food stall: 'That is a women's job. A man can do those bigger shops for food or electronics.' In Lusaka, gender prescriptions still often inhibit women from engaging in 'work for money'; instead women can 'work for food'. Lusaka's local 'informal' food economy includes a myriad of networked activities from food harvesting and collection from local small farms, to retail in its numerous forms. Historically, and still today, the local economy is a critical livelihood source for poor urban dwellers – particularly women. Women are food producers in the city – their labour enables food acquisition, transit, preparation and retailing of food throughout the city.

At household scale, women are responsible for providing food, but are spatially restricted through economic and gendered boundaries, or subservient to men as the gatekeepers to accessing household cash. Therefore, engaging in the very local neighbourhood food economy becomes an even more critical food security strategy. When food managers cannot access 'money for eating' in a household – a first and primary food security strategy is often: just try and sell something. Participating in the very local informal food sector is a vital strategy to make money – and thus to access food and provide care. Ruth runs a small "Chip and Russian"<sup>4</sup> shop from the front of Aggie's house. She explains that: 'If we don't do business one day, then we won't have food at home that night. That's how it is'. In conversations with participants on how neighbourhood households manage when there is no 'money for eating', responses included:

*Maybe they will try to find piece work ... they come here, ask. I just try to give maybe some things to wash, give her a 5 or 10 kwacha whatever I have. Others will give also something [and] then they can go to the market, maybe buy some vegetables or fish, if they can manage, then go round the compound selling. Then [they] come here maybe give me some fish like that.*

The spatially accessible local informal food market is a critical food security strategy for women as both an income and food source. The little money made in a day is spread among a small community economy of trusted women neighbours or female family members. In this way,

<sup>4</sup> A type of cheap local mixed-meat sausage

women create alternative processes to craft everyday food security in the midst of increased economic and structural marginalisation.

*We just make it... ladies working together. This month you work hard, give (money) together (to) one lady, next month you work hard, give again then (the) next lady. Then it will be my turn, the money comes to me. It helps at least you can start something; you want to make a business ... especially ladies (working) in the market and also in the houses for food. ... Otherwise you can just be getting hungry (and) think today ah I'm just going to eat this money then again tomorrow taking little bit if no selling anything, little bit, until the whole month no even a piece of coin in the house!*

*So that money is like the capital ... Otherwise it's too difficult to raise that money for orders (for small businesses), but also to buy food for the house, especially that big (expensive) one like the mealie meal. So one day put money for the orders, then another day you eat, then again for the orders. The chilimba is keeping the business going, because otherwise you are panicking every day – ah until I sell I can't take this money to buy food. It's like its punishing to save; you have to sell before you can eat.*

*Participant: Aggie.*

Reciprocal economies in particular food communities are critical in simultaneously fulfilling roles and identities around food provision – and reclaiming agency. Ruth explains, her business is slow at the moment, because ‘now it’s like everyone is just chasing kwacha’s, no one has money here at the moment ... everyone is saying business is down here now’. The local neighbourhood and “*chilimba* economies”<sup>5</sup> are incredibly tightly knit and as one person’s earnings facilitates new forms of business, so too does another’s loss have ripple implications. Hence, urban residents, or food managers within households and food communities, actively craft everyday food security. Negotiating food security is a continual process in a complex network of power-laden relationships shaped by time and space; it is by no means static or easily measurable household or community state.

*I've got a lot of businesses going on; you have to do many things to manage ... It's tough because for me, I'm just ok, but it's just for the family. Every time you think you are coming up, then something happening, again coming down .... We still try to help, if the peoples are asking definitely you must try to share. It's good to help ... they is helping us last time, now this time if we can manage, going like so helping each other.*

*Participant: Ruth*

## 4. DISCUSSION

In the everyday impoverished urban life, encompassing restriction and freedom, acts to access and share food become meaningful ways to create agency and craft livelihoods. Daya and Authar (2012) point to the ‘potentially emancipatory forms’ of alternative economic spaces that put reposition agency back with the individual ability to generate and sustain capital, rather than viewing agency as an attribute of the capitalist system and capital itself.

The idea that value is constructed in formal markets and externally determined, disregards other attributes or livelihoods that may hold local or individual non-market, relational, or agency-enabling value. Agency interpenetrates the food system and determines constant interaction and reciprocation between the actors, activities, structures and outcomes that influence food security at any given time. The agency to determine food access strategies and livelihoods – how people, at multiple scales actively negotiate the power and structures interlacing the food system – is largely missing food security discourse, despite the recognition of agency in anthropological work in poverty and development.

<sup>5</sup> A local Zambian phrase used to denote a community scale savings scheme. Such savings schemes are called *stokvels* or *makgotlas* in South Africa, i.e. social organisations formed to help community members save money either at the individual or community level. Two common examples of such schemes are accumulated savings and credit associations (ASCAs) and rotating savings and credit associations (ROSCAs).



## Agency in food security discourses

Rocha (2008: 1) defines agency at a broader governance level – the ‘policies and processes that enable the achievement of food security’. Contrasting Rocha’s definition, Etzold et al. (2009) use a grounded individual concept of agency. The different views about agency and food illustrate the multiple scales influencing food security. Etzold et al. (2009) consider informality, especially informal food, to be an expression of individual agency in contexts of power inequalities. Their work draws on Giddens’ (1997) notion of agency:

*Actors can make choices, they can negotiate their available options, adapt their position and they can challenge the institutions which in turn structure their actions.*

*In Etzold et al. 2009: 7*

Mirroring Giddens’, Payne (2012: 400) defines the concept of everyday agency; not as a ‘new view of agency’, but rather a call for a new perspective of agency rooted in ‘people’s own perspective of their lives’. Payne (2012) argues that people do not necessarily view and talk about their daily experience as a crisis, or as involving extraordinary coping mechanisms.

*‘Everyday agency’ therefore refers to the expressions of agency perceived [by children and young people] to be a part of their everyday life, even though these actions frequently go against the grain of what is considered socially and culturally appropriate.*

*Source: Payne, 2012: 400.*

In this paper, Payne’s work supports the concept of agency as it is expressed through food managers, such as Aggie and Ruth’s everyday strategies to access and share food, and provide care.

Various discourses view agency – in contexts of poverty, or unequal power relationships and spaces – as ‘thin’, ‘constrained’, or ‘tactical’, which undermines individual capacity to ‘exert agency’ (particularly over sexuality, livelihoods, aspirations and the embedded food access strategies) (Bordonaro&Payne 2012). Without condoning spaces of inequality or suffering, the authors argue that agency is subjective. Payne (2012: 402) shows the need to acknowledge individuals grounded everyday agency, and in doing so, admit that people are ‘conceptualised as competent social beings: “doers” and “thinkers” rather than social becomings’.

For the Mtendere research participants, the ability to access and share food is a vital expression of agency and identity. Everyday acts of accessing and sharing food are embodied and enmeshed in relationships that are often unequal and fraught with power. Food activities are also bound up in the ability to have children, maintain relationships of reciprocity and friendship, occupy certain spaces within the ‘modern’ city, maintain a home, express beauty or a sense of fashion, work long hours in an informal market, or provide care. Bordonaro and Payne (2012) explain that the food strategies of marginalised street children and leaders of child-headed households give meaning to their daily lives; being able to access food and look after themselves and others is an important claim to agency and identity. Identity and agency enabled through daily food negotiations are thus critical elements of the food security debate.

With reference to food security discourse and policy direction, it is patronising to view food managers, and the informal food livelihoods embedded in formal and informal value chain networks, as passive recipients of development or market determined value, rather than as active agents and social beings. Existing daily food security strategies are deeply entrenched, embodied and contain meaning, hidden by the normative understanding of food access as a technical process, driven through market value chains, in supermarkets, formal trade, urban agriculture, or food aid. Narrow and patriarchal food policies undermine and devalue food managers’ everyday expressions of agency.

Schlyter's (2009) work on citizenship and women's rights adds to feminist literature calling for recognition of (women's in particular) everyday strategies that create meaning. Even in the context of suffering, restricted autonomy in unequal relationships, and structural disempowerment, the means to create and express agency are crafted through relationships, rituals, occupying sociocultural spaces and social lives (Schlyter 2009). Accessing, preparing and consuming food are part of everyday life, part of the creation of meaning. The strategies involved in the human need to eat and partake in the rituals embedded in food cultures are not disembodied acts, but important expressions of agency.

## Implications for value chain analysis

The grounded evidence of the research participants illustrates how regional agenda's that find solutions to food insecurity in increased production, market control and food commodification through corporate controlled value chains, does not provide useful support to enhance the daily food access strategies for the urban poor. Externally derived, production-biased or market-orientated food security approaches fail to recognise the meaningful expressions of agency and identity that exist within food livelihoods and the daily rituals for accessing, sharing and consuming food.

Clearly, urban food security in southern African cities cannot be generalised. Place and scale matter as food systems are shaped by compounded levels of influence that converge at a locality in unique ways. Individual and collective agency are used to navigate a local foodscape, which directly shapes food security strategies. Given the critical role that the food system plays in determining food security outcomes in particular contexts, why are food system changes increasingly shifting food loci of control away from the scale at which it is negotiated and felt?

While changes in northern food systems towards local production are applauded for benefiting local farmers and economies, bringing nutritious food to poor urban dwellers and reconnecting consumers, food and place. In contrast, the south continues to be cajoled into further liberalising its economy and modernising its 'archaic' local food systems – often in the name of economic growth, poverty reduction and improved food security (Crush&Frayne 2011; Cardoso 2013; African Centre for Biosafety 2014). Local value chains and markets that are connected to formal and informal agri-food networks are viewed through the lens of informality – focusing on chaos, survivalism, and illegality. Therefore, the opportunity is missed to understand local food geographies as an integral part of the local political economy, critical to the food security of poor residents and reflective of the same priorities as northern alternative food geography movements – as democratic, reflexive, and socially just (Abrahams 2010).

Abrahams' (2010: 206) empirical assessment of the Lusaka food system highlights 'trajectories of change and intersecting governances at work', which are time and place bound. Power is easily abused due to the fragmented responses to food system changes, and the clearly inappropriate scales of responses. Instead, we could heed the principles that support local food geographies in the north. Locally scaled and defined food security governance which can potentially embody the uniquely framed urban foodscape, drawing on existing local agency and food knowledge, and directing it to support local sustainable development.

## Lessons from urban literature

Locally defined bottom-up governance processes speak from and to the urban south. Urban literature highlights the potential for inclusive urban development and its governance mechanisms to enable contextually-based agency and to recognise the 'informal' processes poor urban residents engage in to access city resources and craft livelihoods. These informal urban livelihoods often go against the grain of the imagined modern neoliberal city. However, bottom-up tenacious urbanisation persists and often creates and connects the networks by which materials – including food – flow in the city (Swilling 2011). The network enhances equality and

represents a more sustainable liveable urban system. As Haysom (2014: 26) argues: 'The ability to participate in processes that enable the realisation of the interests of urban residents is central to the notions of liveable urbanism.' Existing narrow food security discourses – often based on an imagined modern city where food flows through a commercially connected neoliberal system – misses what is highlighted in the urban discourse and that which is imperative in the transition to more inclusive and sustainable cities.

As Pieterse (2006: 288) argues in the broader debates on African urbanism the conceptual challenge is 'to adopt an approach that recognises the structuring effect of the economy, bureaucracy and discursive diagrams of power without relinquishing an understanding of the saliency of agency'. Drawing on African urban literature, alternative mechanisms should create appropriately scaled and integrated food governance that recognises urban food consumers as active agents. Supporting existing individual and collective agency – which is embodying of everyday food access – could enable a more locally appropriate food environment. The food livelihoods of the urban poor are bound by deeply gendered, relational and contextually shaped agency. Intricate acts of solidarity are evident in everyday food sharing between household food managers. Ethnographic readings of Lusaka's foodscape make clear the forms of agency in solidarity between participants and local neighbourhood market traders, which speak to types of collective agency in support of satisfying everyday needs. Scale-appropriate food security responses can encourage the agency that already exists. These need to be defined by what works in urban residents' daily life negotiations, enhancing autonomy, meaningful identity creation, and the capacity to access food, feed families and lead purposeful lives.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Multiple meshed formal and informal value chains and webs of social relations make up Lusaka's food system. The urban food system is shaped by the intersecting governances of institutional powers and the ground-up throng of urban food system actors – 'informal' producers, distributors, retailers and consumers. This messy system is about more than making food available in the city. It is about participating in order to earn a daily livelihood, feed children, maintain identity and create daily purpose. Lusaka's food networks support spaces in which women are culturally allowed to express more agency, autonomy and freedom. The networks also represent desperate attempts to appease deep-seated hunger.

Viewing Lusaka's food security through the lens of those who negotiate it in everyday life, creates questions about (1) the limited food security responses; (2) the critical role of local urban food systems, actors and governance; and (3) that which is being disregarded or obscured. The lens sheds light on individual and collective agency at work in the everyday micro-and in-between spaces that sustain urban lives. Individual and collective agency involve sharing in the relentless struggle against the routine and systematic processes of occlusion and inequality upon which the urban form is shaped. The engrained nuances that exist in accessing food at the intra- and inter-household level intersect with the neighbourhood-scale social capital networks and local food markets. Global to local agri-food system changes and price fluctuations can affect, and must be negotiated by individuals at the relational scale, impinging on finely balanced and vulnerable everyday food strategies.

Cities and regions play a major part in shaping a given food system and, in turn, its food security outcomes. Given the dramatic population increases in urban areas, structural poverty and inequality, and the under-researched levels of food insecurity in southern African cities, there is an urgent need to rethink dominant food security perspectives that are anti-urban biased, favour formalised, centralised agri-food value chains, and disregard complex local food networks.



A new approach would need to bridge the current scalar gaps between national and agricultural food security perspectives, neoliberal (or developmental) market agendas and the consuming urban household unit on the receiving end.

The qualitative research draws on the vignettes of everyday life that were observed at a particular time, with a particular group of individuals, within a particular space and sociocultural construct. This study does not presume to present a regionally comparable or prescriptive recommendation for urban food security policy and praxis. Reading the Lusaka food terrain in context aimed to contribute to a different paradigm of urban food security work. The voices from below shed light on the nuances of negotiating food (in)security at the inter- and intra-household scale in contexts of engrained urban poverty and informality. Thereby, the voices highlight everyday realities that explicitly and implicitly connect to the broader food and urban system more deeply than current theory and practice. Therefore, food security approaches need to be better contextualised to understand, support and intersect with the locally scaled food system, and the urban form and the urban agents who collectively affect and are affected by, the fluid and inequitable system. Genuinely addressing multidimensional and widespread food insecurity requires recognising the grounded, real and embedded food strategies that impoverished food managers already employ to negotiate the inequitable urban food.

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