

AfriFOODlinks

Deliverable 1.02

City-scale food and nutrition reports - Hub Cities

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Deliverable details



Del No.	Deliverable Title	Work Package	Version
D1.02	City-scale food and nutrition report with collated images, narrative accounts and programming recommendations	WP1	1.1

Contractual Delivery Date	Actual Delivery Date	Dissemination Level
30 November 2025	28 November 2025	PU
Lead Partner	**Contributing Partners**	**Reviewers**
African Centre for Cities - University of Cape Town	University of Cape Town/African Centre for Cities; Institut National de Nutrition et de Technologie Alimentaire; Rikolto – East Africa; Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology (JOOUST; Rikolto – West Africa	Anesu Makina Alison Pulker

LINCS Framework



	Learning The project stresses the value of experiential learning and that multiple ways of knowing are welcomed, deemed of equal value, and can be connected to enhance understanding. *"NEA ONNIM NO SUA A, OHU" - "He who does not know can know from learning".*	**Inclusivity** and deliberate engagement and empowerment of communities will enhance their agency and participation in decision-making for a people-centred and informed research, policy and practice. *"FUNTUNFUNEFU-DENKYEMFUNEFU" - "Unity in diversity"*	**Novelty** represents the embracing of the new or unexpected, which necessarily requires diverse expertise, skills and perspectives. It includes the dismantling of inappropriate systems in favour of traditional or indigenous practices. *"UAC NKANEA" - "UAC lights" symbolises technological advancement.*	**Collaboration** To successfully ensure transdisciplinary work, societal actors must be continuously engaged to co-define the research objectives and questions, and to continuously contribute to meaning making with the researcher as the research progresses. *"BOA ME NA ME MMOA WO" - "HELP ME AND LET ME HELP YOU".*	**Sustainability** is articulated both as the overarching global imperative to ensure economic, environmental and social wellbeing, and as the ethos that every project intervention must aim to become self-sustaining. *"SANKOFA"- The backwards turning bird symbolises returning while looking forward.*
How does this deliverable contribute to each of the values?	This has involved a deep learning process, specifically the work of deep engagement into specific case studies. Further, this work allowed for the learning (and knowledge) of other food system actors to come to the fore, and for AfriFOODlinks researchers to engage in this knowledge.	This activity actively sought out key food system actors, engaging them as specialists, drawing on their insights and including these actors as key knowledge providers. We will continue with this process further when further insights are published – specifically using their voice and insights.	While case studies are not a new form of research and should not be considered novel, the novelty of this work lies in the role that these cases, and the food system actor voices play in the wider knowledge generation process.	This work involved active engagement with diverse food system actors, immersive learning processes where the entire research activity was largely about the collaboration with diverse knowledge holders.	Building on the logics of D1.1, that the wealth (per a broad definition) of society is embedded how society functions and that is embedded in context and the environment. Through this report we have again centred society as the key actors and engaged the challenging space occupied by society in SD actions, sandwiched between economy and environment.
How did you practice this value in this deliverable?	Through the active process of knowledge validation, and then needing humility and respect to engage that knowledge as the primary learning avenue	This process built the foundation of inclusive conversations with diverse actors who impact the food system across the city	This report is novel and pushed researchers to engage in methods that re at times unfamiliar to them. Further, the richness of the findings resulted in the ethnographic studies being expanded into a novel book, capturing a conversation between the ethnographies and academic positions.	This report was collaborative in terms of how it brought food system actors and researchers together.	This report sought to provide greater understanding of the day-to-day activities and food system knowledge of a diverse collection of food system actors, actors whose voices are seldom part of such processes. We see equitable engagement as a key strand of sustainability.

AfriFOODlinks Project

Launched in December 2022, AfriFOODlinks is a European Union (EU) funded project that aims to improve food and nutrition security, while delivering positive outcomes for climate and the environment, and building social and ecological resilience in 65+ Cities in Africa and Europe. Coordinated by ICLEI Africa, the project gathers 35 partners across the African and European continents.

The project aims to improve food security and urban sustainability in African cities by: applying an urban food systems lens to promote shifts to healthy, sustainable diets; transforming urban food environments through real-world socio-technical experiments; promoting inclusive multi-actor governance to empower public officials, small businesses and communities with ownership and agency to shape their food systems; accelerating innovative, women- and youth-led agri-food businesses to support local value addition and inclusive economic participation.

AfriFOODLinks places particular emphasis on five African "Hub Cities": Cape Town, Tunis, Kisumu, Mbale and Ouagadougou.

Over and above the work in the hub cities, the urban food systems research is further deepened through work in partner "Sharing Cities" which include: Windhoek, Lusaka, Quelimane, Arusha, Antananarivo, Bukavu, Tamale, Dakar, Chefchaouen, Niamey, and Bruges, Montpellier, Lisbon, Turin and Milan.

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https://afrifoodlinks.org/knowledge-hub/

Funded by the European Union

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Abstract

This report consolidates deep ethnographic research and city-scale case studies from five AfriFOODlinks hub cities—Mbale (Uganda), Kisumu (Kenya), Tunis (Tunisia), Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), and Cape Town (South Africa)—to examine the dynamics of African urban food systems and their implications for food security, governance, and socio-economic resilience. The AfriFOODlinks project, launched in 2022 and funded by the European Union, seeks to improve food and nutrition security while fostering climate resilience and inclusive urban development across African and European cities. By applying an urban food systems lens, the project emphasizes participatory governance, infrastructure investment, and the integration of informal economies into urban planning.

The case studies reveal the central role of municipal markets and informal food economies as critical nodes in urban food systems. In Mbale, the modernized Central Market serves as a regional hub for agri-food trade, linking rural production zones to urban consumers and cross-border markets in Kenya and Sudan. Despite hosting over 10,000 vendors, the market faces challenges such as inadequate cold storage, poor waste management, and governance tensions, contributing to high food losses (≈40%) and unsanitary conditions.

Kisumu's Kibuye Market, one of East Africa's largest open-air markets, illustrates similar dynamics. It supports over 7,000 traders but suffers from infrastructural deficits, governance conflicts, and cartel-like tendencies within market committees. Modernization efforts have been hampered by funding gaps and strained relations with traders, reflecting systemic governance weaknesses.

The Central Market of Tunis exemplifies the coexistence of formal and informal economies within a regulated urban food system. While formal vendors operate under municipal oversight, informal traders and socially vulnerable sellers occupy peripheral spaces, creating tensions around fairness and regulation. Key challenges include rigid supply chains dependent on a single wholesale source, deteriorating infrastructure, and governance inefficiencies. Recommendations emerging from stakeholder consultations emphasize diversifying supply systems, strengthening hygiene standards, formalizing informal trade, and promoting inclusive governance to balance economic efficiency with social equity.

In Ouagadougou, the case study focuses on urban and peri-urban agriculture (UPA) as a strategy to reactivate the city's green belt and enhance food security. UPA contributes to dietary diversity, job creation, and climate adaptation, yet faces barriers such as insecure land tenure, limited access to water and inputs, and weak market integration. Despite these constraints, UPA offers opportunities for sustainable urban development through agroecological practices, digital marketing platforms, and integration into school feeding programs. The revitalization of Ouagadougou's green belt through agroforestry and horticulture demonstrates the potential of UPA to mitigate climate risks while supporting livelihoods for vulnerable groups, particularly women and youth, but also offering other social and wellbeing benefits.

Cape Town's Smiley Market in Langa reflects the resilience and vulnerability of informal food economies. Operating without basic infrastructure—such as water, electricity, or waste disposal—traders face health risks and insecurity. Despite these constraints, the market sustains livelihoods and cultural traditions, highlighting the need for targeted interventions that integrate informal food actors into urban planning and support gender-sensitive economic empowerment.

Collectively, these case studies underscore the complexity of African urban food systems, shaped by infrastructural deficits, governance gaps, socio-economic inequalities, and cultural practices. They also reveal opportunities for food and urban systems transformation through multi-stakeholder platforms, inclusive governance, infrastructure investment, and innovative approaches to food safety and waste management. Addressing these challenges is critical to achieving sustainable, equitable, and resilient urban food systems across the continent.

Keywords

Urban food systems; food security; municipal markets; governance; informal economy; infrastructure; waste management; gender empowerment; Africa; resilience; socio-economic inclusion

Executive Summary

African cities are experiencing rapid urbanization, demographic shifts, and socio-economic transformations that profoundly shape their food systems. The AfriFOODlinks project, launched in 2022 and funded by the European Union, seeks to improve food and nutrition security while fostering climate resilience and inclusive urban development across African and European cities. This report consolidates deep ethnographic research and city-scale case studies from five hub cities—Mbale (Uganda), Kisumu (Kenya), Tunis (Tunisia), Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), and Cape Town (South Africa)—to examine the dynamics of urban food systems and their implications for governance, infrastructure, socio-economic inclusion, and resilience.

The research emphasizes the complexity of African urban food systems, which are shaped by infrastructural deficits, governance gaps, socio-economic inequalities, and cultural practices. It also identifies opportunities for transformation through multi-stakeholder platforms, inclusive governance, infrastructure investment, and innovative approaches to food safety and waste management.

Purpose and Approach

This report forms part of Deliverable 1.02 under the AfriFOODlinks knowledge generation process, focusing on deep ethnographies to complement earlier surface-level scans. It employs case study methodology to capture nuanced, context-specific insights into urban food systems, advocating for participatory, multi-stakeholder approaches and African-centred knowledge production.

Key Findings Across Cities

Mbale (Uganda): Central Market as a Regional Hub

Mbale's modernized Central Market serves as a critical node for agri-food trade, linking rural production zones to urban consumers and cross-border markets in Kenya and Sudan. Despite hosting over 10,000 vendors, the market faces challenges such as inadequate cold storage, poor waste management, and governance tensions, contributing to high food losses (≈40%) and unsanitary conditions. Opportunities exist in infrastructure upgrades, participatory governance, and leveraging multi-stakeholder platforms.

Kisumu (Kenya): Kibuye Market and Governance Conflicts

Kibuye Market, one of East Africa's largest open-air markets, supports over 7,000 traders but suffers from infrastructural deficits (lack of refrigeration, drainage), governance conflicts, and cartel-like tendencies within market committees. Modernization efforts have been hampered by funding gaps and strained relations with traders, reflecting systemic governance weaknesses.

Tunis (Tunisia): Coexistence of Formal and Informal Economies

The historic Central Market of Tunis illustrates the coexistence of formal and informal economies. While formal vendors operate under municipal oversight, informal traders and vulnerable sellers create tensions around fairness and regulation. Challenges include rigid supply chains, deteriorating infrastructure, and governance inefficiencies. Recommendations include diversifying supply systems, improving hygiene standards, and promoting inclusive governance.

Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso): Urban and Peri-Urban Agriculture (UPA)

Ouagadougou's case study focuses on UPA as a strategy to reactivate the city's green belt and enhance food security. UPA contributes to dietary diversity, job creation, and climate adaptation, yet faces barriers such as insecure land tenure, limited access to water and inputs, and weak market integration. Despite these constraints, UPA offers opportunities for sustainable urban development through agroecological practices, digital marketing platforms, and integration into school feeding programs.

Cape Town (South Africa): Informal Food Economies in Langa

Cape Town's Smiley Market in Langa reflects the resilience and vulnerability of informal food economies. Operating without basic infrastructure—such as water, electricity, or waste disposal—traders face health risks and insecurity. Despite these constraints, the market sustains livelihoods and cultural traditions, highlighting the need for targeted interventions that integrate informal food actors into urban planning and support gender-sensitive economic empowerment.

Cross-Cutting Themes

1. Infrastructure Deficits: Poor storage, sanitation, and waste management undermine food safety and efficiency.
2. Governance Gaps: Weak regulatory frameworks and tensions between authorities and traders hinder effective market management.
3. Socio-Economic Inequalities: Informal traders, women, and youth face systemic barriers but remain critical to food access and cultural continuity.
4. Opportunities for Transformation: Multi-stakeholder platforms, inclusive governance, infrastructure investment, and innovative approaches to food safety and waste management offer pathways for change.

Strategic Recommendations

1. Infrastructure Investment

- Upgrade markets with cold storage, sanitation, and waste management systems to reduce food loss and improve hygiene – these upgrades, however, need to be supported by a robust maintenance plan held by a responsible entity, ideally a local government department with the necessary fiscal and human resources to ensure sustainability of the facilities.
- Prioritize climate-resilient infrastructure, including water harvesting systems and renewable energy solutions for market operations – outdated technologies, often "dumped" in African cities, do not offer long term solutions. African cities have a unique opportunity to embrace and adopt new forms of climate-resilient infrastructure, and in so doing avoid harmful path dependencies.
- Infrastructure in African cities offer one of the most critical levers to addressing food security, food system challenges and Africa's nutrition transition.

2. Inclusive Governance

- Establish equitable participatory platforms and transparent management structures to bridge gaps between authorities, traders and consumers – all food system actors have knowledge of the food system, and their voice and agency is essential to food systems transformation.
- Given that traditional hierarchical food system governance structure remains the default, cities are frequently marginalised in policy resulting in limited physical and fiscal resources. Participatory food systems governance structures that actively pursue equitable engagement offer unique tools and opportunities for engaging in food system related factors at the city and peri-urban scale.
- Support informal trade through simplified licensing and reduced fees, ensuring social inclusion for vulnerable groups.

3. Support Informal Economies

- Integrate informal traders into urban planning processes and provide gender-sensitive support through deliberate programs that focus on excluded groups, particularly women.
- Where appropriate and where such cultures exist, facilitate access to microfinance and cooperative models to strengthen economic resilience among women and youth.
- Acknowledge the central food system role played by informal food system actors across the food value chain. These actors are often better suited to respond to the food system needs of vulnerable and food insecure urban residents. As such, the essential service that they provide needs due recognition.

4. Food Safety and Waste Reduction

- Implement training programs on hygiene and food safety for vendors – these training programmes need to be duly supported by the necessary support infrastructure and facilities to support the hygiene and food safety actions taken by the traders. Training offers the skill, but the cities need to ensure that they do the work of ensuring that those skills can be applied.
- Promote circular economy initiatives such as composting, insect-based waste conversion (e.g., Black Soldier Fly technology), and resource recovery in ways that respond to specific contextual needs and complexities. Avoid the blanket transfer of technologies and innovations where culture and contextual dynamics are not attuned, suitable

or adequately resourced to embrace these innovations. Local and contextual innovations should guide food safety and waste reduction initiatives.

5. Strengthen Urban–Rural Linkages

- Develop flexible supply chains that allow direct sourcing from local producers to reduce dependency on centralized wholesale markets as the sole sources of urban food. This is key to a wider urban food system resilience strategy where multiple and diverse sources offer buffers to supply shocks and constraints.
- Support agroecological practices and digital platforms to connect urban consumers with peri-urban farmers.
- As a complimentary mode of addressing food system challenges, where suitable, support and enable urban and peri-urban agriculture (UPA) to facilitate wider food systems actions. UPA should not be viewed through a production lens only, but rather as an enabler of improved food environments, circularity and wider notions of wellbeing.

6. Enhance Policy Coherence

- Where suitable, align urban food governance with national food security strategies, moving beyond production-centric approaches to address urban realities.
- Investigate and actively pursue alignment with other non-agricultural and food security policies, such as health, infrastructure, sanitation, economy, education, trade – these policies often offer greater urban food system polity entry points, enabling alignment across a diverse range of policies that combined better serve the urban consumer, particularly the food insecure and vulnerable.
- Given the important role of markets to city food systems it is essential that cities develop clear regulations for market governance, including election of management committees, tenure, and accountability mechanisms.

Conclusion

African urban food systems are complex, shaped by infrastructural deficits, governance challenges, socio-economic inequalities, and cultural practices. Addressing these issues through collaborative, inclusive, and context-sensitive strategies is critical to achieving sustainable, equitable, and resilient food systems across the continent. This cannot be done without the voices of essential food system actors. The AfriFOODlinks project demonstrates that transformation is taking place and this transformation is possible through targeted investments, participatory governance, and innovative approaches that integrate informal economies and other food system activities into broader urban planning frameworks.

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Deep ethnographies and knowledge engagement

The AfriFOODlinks knowledge generation process involved a number of aligned tasks, each focusing on a different knowledge typology and each generating aligned but different knowledge about the food system. This knowledge forms part of an iterative process of "knowing the city". This report captures the deep ethnographic research carried out as part of the second phase of the knowledge generation process. This forms part of Deliverable 1.02

The deep ethnographies and the case studies generated from this process serve as part of the process to deepen knowledge and engage elements of the food system of the five Hub cities of Mbale, Kisumu, Tunis, Ouagadougou and Cape Town.

The deep ethnographies and case studies processes are intended to build on and support the first phase of this work, Task 1.1, sought to capture and engage the so-called surface knowledge, the general knowledge about the food system, as contained in policies, earlier research work, other forms of documentary evidence and whatever other sources of existing knowledge were identified. The second phase seeks to now focus, with depth and focus, on aspects of the food system that are deemed to require greater understanding.

The hypothesis behind this phased approach is that to engage the complexity of the urban food system of any city, we first need to know how others have described and understand that food system (the surface scan). We then need to test this, to deepen our knowledge, and apply deliberate focus. It is only after this process that we can justifiably consider how we may engage and comment on policy, and how we might confront, engage, and interpret knowledge and theory about urban food systems. This approach is depicted in a simplified representation of this process in Figure 1:

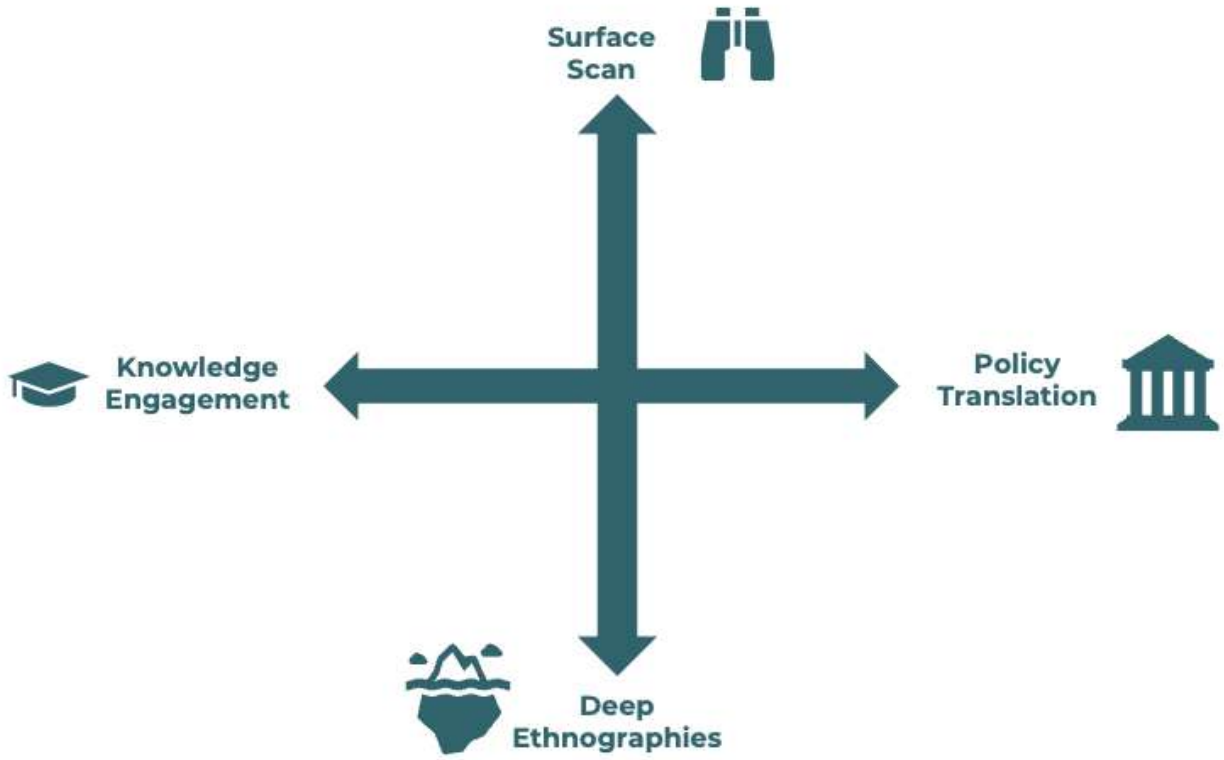


Figure 1: Knowledge Work Package Strategic Framework and approach
(please excuse the food metaphors)

It is important to acknowledge that in some of the science traditions, case studies and ethnographic work more specifically, are often seen as lacking in scientific rigour and utility. While different research methods all offer different utility, it is acknowledged that methods need to be focused on the type and nature of knowledge that is being sought out. For the AfriFOODlinks project, the interaction between different knowledge, seeking out the knowledge of different food systems actors and food systems knowledge holders demands that we actively engage methods that enable access to different forms of knowledge. We also need to do the hard work of developing methods and approaches to knowledge generation that suit those providing us with knowledge.

In order to engage these diverse methods, it is important to reflect on the value, benefits, but also limitations of ethnographic work.

Utility of the Case Studies across AfriFOODlinks

Given the heterogeneity of the urban food systems across the partner African cities, the difference between the depth and wider political economy and accessibility considerations, it is worth clarifying how the project envisages using the information generated from the deep ethnographic studies, but also the wider ambitions of the AfriFOODlinks project, as detailed in Figure 1.

The deep ethnographic studies in this report are drafted in the form of a case study for each hub city.

Firstly, we acknowledge that "Africa is not a country" and neither is every city the same. What we are trying to both understand and develop, is an understanding of the food systems in each of the cities. The detail of the case studies will hopefully offer us rich and in-depth insights into "slices" of the food system in the different cities. When combined with the work done in the State of City Food System Scans, we hope that the depth and nuance of this understanding will be further enhanced. However, even if it creates more questions that these processes are able to answer, this is also deemed a positive outcome.

Secondly, the AfriFOODlinks project was built on the wonderful work done by other urban food system researchers and acknowledges that earlier work. However, that earlier work was atomised, for reasons of funding and scale, often only focused on a few cities, and was unable to build a cohort of urban food system researchers across the Continent. We hope that by engaging the project in this manner, we are able to build on the earlier foundation, but then connect a network of urban researchers who, as research evolves, continue to collaborate and coalesce as a collection of researchers engaged in urban food systems research across Africa. This work seeks to initiate that process. For this reason, being able to follow a specific strategic approach is deemed important.

Linked to this, given the reliance on donor funding for this (most cities still have no urban food governance, or research mandate) we have had to start with what our budgets allow. Previous experience has shown that developing large citywide food system analysis is both time consuming and costly (as a result of data purchase costs, resourcing costs, access costs, and time costs). We see the different elements of the AfriFOODlinks research process as making a start, and we are using methods and processes that can either be replicated (in other cities) or built upon (in the current network of cities).

Thirdly, the scope of AfriFOODlinks means that for the first time in recent years, we can engage the food systems across all four regions of the Continent, and across cities that sit within Anglophone and Francophone Africa. For this reason, while the case studies may not enable a broad scope of knowledge in every city, when viewed across the Continent, this offers a rich and unique repository of evidence that enables far greater urban food system understanding across Africa.

Fourth, for the hub cities, the detail emerging from the case study work, offers important contextual knowledge that would inform, support, contradict, and nuance the work emerging in the other AfriFOODlinks work packages.

The Case Study component forms an essential part of the AfriFOODlinks knowledge generation process (as detailed in Figure 1). However, some, often from more quantitative study backgrounds and sciences outside social sciences, have in the past seen it fit to dismiss case study research. More recently these dismissals have been challenged and found to be wanting. However, as part of the wider knowledge network building process, some thoughts, drawing in key thinkers on Case Studies are detailed below. This is followed by a more technical discussion on processes for case identification, scale and scope, ethics and integrity considerations, and alignment with the SoCFS review.

Case Studies: their merits, the critique and application

While many social scientists have weighed in on the merits, limitations, possibilities and precautions associated with Case Study research, Case Studies are increasingly seen as an important, and perhaps essential component of urban studies. Despite this, many still view a case study as unscientific, non-generalisable and of lower order to quantitative studies. This view, as Flyvbjerg (2006) points out, is misplaced and reflects some of the biases associated with our understanding of knowledge creation. Flyvbjerg reflects on Abercrombie, Hill and Turners' definition of case study in the Dictionary of Sociology (1984) where they state that "The detailed examination of a single example of a class of phenomena, a case study cannot provide reliable information about the broader class", suggesting that the description is indicative of the conventional wisdom of case-study research, which if not directly wrong, is so oversimplified as to be grossly misleading (Flyvbjerg, 2006). It is correct that the case study is a "detailed examination of a single example," but it is wholly incorrect that a case study "cannot provide reliable information about the broader class" (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

Case study methodology is frequently criticised by several researchers for its dependence on a single or few cases not really representing the "whole" and considered "microscopic" because it "lacked a sufficient number" of cases (Tellis, 1997). Several studies counter this view of case studies being inferior (Yin, 1984; Hamel et al, 1993). As the same authors stress, the relative size of the sample, whether two, ten, or 100, does not transform a multiple case into a macroscopic study, adding that the aim of the study should establish parameters and then should be applied to all research. In this manner even a single case is considered acceptable, provided it met the established objective. Case studies, if done correctly, satisfy the three tenets of the qualitative method: describing, understanding and explaining (Tellis, 1997).

A key element of the AfriFOODlinks project and aligned directly with the LINCS framework[1] is the process of validating knowledge, not just theoretical, academic knowledge, but also, the essential knowledge held by those who use the urban food system of a particular site on a daily basis.

Strauss and Corbin (2008) stress that we need to recognise that human reactions to events are largely a consequence of the meaning humans give to those events. Case studies that capture that knowledge (or meaning making) are essential components of post-modern, deconstructionist approaches to research. The authors go on to stress that meaning is derived through knowledge and interpretation, and these are affected by prevailing social knowledge, perspectives and perceptions (Strauss & Corbin, 2008).

Key to this process is to engage specific cases in order to capture and document this knowledge.

By way of further justifying the importance of the case study, as a method, through the process of observation and later detailed description, understanding and explanation, the renowned animal scientist, attributed with discovering the origins of the 1918-1919 Flu Epidemic, W. I. B. Beveridge made the point that "More discoveries have arisen from intense observation than from statistics applied to large groups" (as quoted in Kuper & Kuper, 1985: 95). In short, case study as a method, is "a method that holds up well when compared to other methods in the gamut of social science research methodology" (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 241)

However, case studies have been little understood both from a methodological point of view, and from a content point of view, where there are ambiguities regarding what should be considered a case or research subject (Starman, 2013: 28). Case Studies offer advantages and are at times more suitable than more quantitative forms of study, and even other forms of qualitative study. Case studies are generally strong precisely where quantitative studies are weaker. George and Bennett identify four advantages of case studies in comparison to quantitative methods:

- Their potential to achieve high conceptual validity,
- Strong procedures for fostering new hypotheses,
- Usefulness for closely examining the hypothesized role of causal mechanisms in the context of individual cases, and
- Their capacity for addressing causal complexity.

(George & Bennett, 2005: 9)

[1] The links framework includes the key AfriFOODlinks project values of Learning; Inclusivity; Novelty; Collaboration, and Sustainability

These advantages are critical in the AfriFOODlinks knowledge generation process. AfriFOODlinks wishes to support the need for greater attention to be given to urban food systems and the multiple complex actors that comprise the urban food system. In short, we are in the active process of building a new conceptual terrain, seeking to validate the importance of knowledge emerging from African urban food systems.

This is not to dismiss the knowledge from elsewhere, but to test and foster new hypotheses about the varied and diverse food systems that span the cities in the AfriFOODlinks project. Important in this process is to understand, and describe, and perhaps explain (in part or where it is not possible to know what is not known) these urban food systems. We also need to allow ourselves as urban food system researchers, space to sit in the complexity of these food systems, that cannot be understood in limited reductionist, siloed ways.

As to the debate on generalisability, a key factor that informs this work is that we are seeking to understand and learn, we are not trying to prove anything. Flyvbjerg draws on earlier work by Eysenck (1976) to stress this point that "sometimes we simply have to keep our eyes open and look carefully at individual cases – not in the hope of proving anything, but rather in the hope of learning something" (Eysenck 1976 in Flyvbjerg 2006: 224). This is in essence the objective of the Knowledge Work Package of the AfriFOODlinks project.

However, rigour and due process are required in case study research. For this, while many others have offered steps and methods to enhance rigour in case study work, we draw on the work of Sturman (1997) to propose key case study research, write up and documentary strategies. These include:

- Procedures for data collection should be explained,
- data collected should be displayed and ready for reanalysis,
- negative instances should be reported,
- biases should be acknowledged,
- fieldwork analyses need to be documented,
- the relationship between assertion and evidence should be clarified,
- primary evidence should be distinguished from secondary evidence and description, and interpretation should also be distinguished,
- diaries or logs should be used to track what was actually done during different stages of the study, and
- methods should be devised to check the quality of data.

(Sturman 1997: 65)

Technical discussion on processes

The case study component of the wider knowledge development work forms a key component of the ultimate knowledge building process for both the city and the AfriFOODlinks project. The number of factors detailed below serve as pointers in terms of how the case study components of the project were conceptualised. However, the key overarching principle of this work is twofold, with one technical supporting caveat.

> *The case studies are intended to respond to existing food system questions for the specific city and should be agreed in collaboration with key city officials linked to the AfriFOODlinks project. Secondly, this work should enable knowledge generation that supports ongoing projects, areas of concern, and should connect with other related urban food system activities in that city.*

Ethics and integrity considerations

Given that much of the data collection for the case studies involved engagements with human subjects, the possible creation of expectations, possible moments of conflict and disagreement, and moments where respondents might make assumptions as to the status and power of the researcher, a detailed and process aligned Ethics Values and Integrity submission was required, following one of three processes.

- If the researchers doing the work are part of the AfriFOODlinks project within the wider remit of a university partner, a research ethics report needs to be submitted, and approved by that university.
- If no research ethics is required by the university, or the research falls within a sector where there is no such process, but there is a national research permit, or similar is required, this needs to be applied for and obtained.
- Where no research ethics approach is required and no national research permit is required, an Ethics, Values and Integrity (EVI) application needs to be developed and submitted to the AfriFOODlinks Ethics body for review and approval.

All research included in this document followed the first University aligned protocol approval process. Some city cases reflected a combination of the above. But always followed their own respective ethics and integrity processes and in so doing aligned with the requirements for AfriFOODlinks EVI compliance.

As much as knowledge is a key part of this process. The learnings as these relate to the EVI processes are an essential consideration for this project, and a key element of the knowledge generation process. The EVI process is by its intent, designed to elevate African centred knowledge, support and protect researchers and research respondents. The role, and mandate, of the EVI Body is one of support, not judge and jury. As such, we ask that all researchers make use of this process.

Alignment with the State of City Food Systems (SoCFS) review

The case studies support and align with the State of City Food System (SoCFS) reports. However, it acknowledged that some evidence generated from the case study process might contradict or undermine the "surface" data used in the SoCFS report. In this instance authors have engaged their respective research partners and where possible will amend and correct the SoCFS reports.

The next sections of this report engage the different hub cities and their respective deep ethnographic engagement and the associated case studies.

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AfriFOODlinks

Mbale City



AfriFOODlinks

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Del No.	Deliverable Title	Work Package	Version
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Mbale Central Market: The Food Business hub for East Africa

Author: Kevin Teopista Akoyi

Introduction

Mbale city, the fourth largest in Uganda, is a very young city, created on July 1st, 2020, serving as the capital of Mbale district. In spite of its young city status, Mbale has a long history. The city developed as a commercial centre for Arab slave traders and Indians who came to construct the railway line in 1896 and later attracted Indian traders. Eventually, Mbale became the government's administrative centre for the eastern region. The city emerged at the beginning of the 20th century in 1903 as a small town, was gazetted as a regional centre in 1906 and served as the capital of Mbale district. At that time, Mbale was one of the largest districts in Uganda, covering the current five districts of the Bugisu sub-region. Mbale became the first town in Uganda to be granted official status of a municipality on the 1st of March, 1962 and functioned as such for 58 years.

Summary Introduction to the City

Elevation of Mbale to city status involved the expansion of the administrative area of the former Mbale municipality by annexing seven neighbouring sub-counties, upgrading the administrative status to that of a city, recruiting city level staff and engaging in physical infrastructure improvement in the Central Business District (CBD) and high-end residential areas (SOCFS, 2024). Since 2020, the city is making strides as it transitions from municipality to city status.

Mbale city is unique because it has a large rural area, making agriculture the most important land use type. Moreover, traditionally, the city has served and continues to serve as the economic and administrative centre of the Mount Elgon sub-region. The Mount Elgon sub region is comprised of eight agriculture dependent districts, has an adequate bi-modal rainfall pattern (1250 mm and 1750 mm per year), relatively fertile soils and many small rivers, all of which form good conditions for agricultural production. Mbale is in eastern Uganda, 220 Kilometres (Km) from Kampala and Jinja, respectively, the two major cities in the country. Regarding strategic linkage with Kenya, Mbale city is 51 km from Malaba, 69 km from Busia, 54 km from Lwakhakha and 142 km from Suam border posts, between Uganda and Kenya. Mbale is also 360 km from the Elegu/Nimule border post between Uganda and Sudan.

> "The location of our city, Mbale, makes it a strategic and an attractive business hub in the region, especially facilitating agri-food trade between the city and other major towns and with Kenya and Sudan. Moreover, all surrounding districts are highly productive agricultural areas"

(City Commercial Officer)

Mbale Central Market

Having gone through various stages of development from the time the market emerged in the small town, the city now has a modern central market, located on Naboa Road within its CBD. Mbale central market is the most important point at which food products are delivered into the city from rural production areas and from which food distribution takes place to other selling points in the city, mostly markets. Other markets serving the city are: Kikindu market in Namakwekwe, Bugwere market Nakaloke market both on Kumi Road - these markets on Kumi Road serve towns in Northern Uganda, North-Western Kenya, as well as Sudan. Others are Nylon market in Namatala, Busamaga market and Nauyo Bugema market – serving Western Kenya. This makes a total of eight gazetted markets around the city. In addition, there is also a Juba stage market, though not gazetted (SOCFS Report, 2024).

Specific google satellite location of the city central markets is presented in Figure 2 below.



Figure 2: Mbale Central Market: 1°04'15"N 34°10'42"E

Key Case Study Elements

Market Operations

Although the city central market sells both food and non-food items, this report is focussing on trade in food products. Due to the importance of the Mbale central market for the city, the Eastern region of Uganda and neighbouring countries, operations start as early as 2 am, when trucks come from the rural areas of Mbale city and the neighbouring districts loaded with mostly fresh foods, for distribution to the secondary markets around the city. The delivery trucks are expected to leave the market by 6.30 am when other downstream traders continue with food trade. These deliveries take place daily, except Sunday, due to the high demand for food products. The foods delivered to the central market include a wide variety of vegetables, fruits, roots and tubers, cereals and a wide range of legumes. On reaching the city central market, they park on the streets surrounding the market and commence wholesaling to market vendors who are now estimated to be over 10,000 as well as to hundreds of other transporters for distribution. While most market vendors at the central market are

women (80%), the transporters are all men, mostly youth. Food distribution for city residents happens mostly on boda boda but also in pick-ups, carts and tuk-tuks (Figure 3). Food products going out of the city and the country are re-distributed in trucks, many of which have Kenyan and Sudanese number plates, ready to transport food products across the borders.

Transporters of food products delivering food to the central market face many challenges which lead to food spoilage and food losses (estimated at 40%), including:

I. long distances to farms;
II. poor road and marketing infrastructure;
III. few storage facilities, mostly in poor conditions;
IV. lack of refrigeration facilitates for perishable products;
V. seasonality / climate change effects: in the dry season fruits go bad very easily due to high temperatures, and sometimes there is food scarcity; socio-economic issues: most farmers cannot produce food in bulk, which means a transporter has to go through a difficult and expensive process to gather food products.

Food products are generally carried in ordinary trucks and in raw and fresh forms from the rural areas of production up to the central market. They are either poured on the trucks (for instance carrots and potatoes), while others are packed in ordinary sacks and tied up, for example mangoes.



Figure 3: Boda bodas ready to distribute food from Mbale central market to other parts of the city

The high level of food loss and waste leads to garbage accumulation outside the central market from where vendors and food distributors sort the food products to remove spoilt food. The heap of spoilt food outside the market awaits garbage collectors, sometimes for days. As expressed by city stakeholders, the city cannot cope with its garbage collection needs at the moment, leaving the area in the vicinity of the market always dirty with big heaps of garbage.

> "The central market alone produces about 8 MT of garbage daily, primarily organic food waste" (pers. Comm. Orient city cleaners Ltd). "The city currently uses the landfill method for disposal by dumping the garbage and spreading it over the available area. The city is aware that this is not a sustainable way of managing garbage, and has therefore, partnered with Anhault Africa Ltd to pilot Black Soldier Fly (BSF) technology"
>
> (pers. comm. Senior health inspector).

Inside the market, the vendors are organised in sections, vending specific categories of food products for instance leafy vegetables, fruits, tomatoes, onions, cereal, other dry rations and non-food items, among others. The food products are displayed in stalls within the market. Some of the vendors who have been trained in food safety practices by Rikolto, the AfriFOODlinks coordinator in Uganda, in a previous project, have clean painted and well organised stalls which display food products, considered to be safe (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Trained food vendors display their well organised and clean stalls

Market Infrastructure

About a decade ago, the government spent UGX 26.9 billion (Euro 6,4 million) under the AfDB funded Markets and Agricultural Trade Improvement Program (MATIP) of the Ministry of Local Government (MoLG), to reconstruct a three-storied complex to house the central city market which is now one of the biggest in the country. The market was modernised with the aim of boosting the city economy through agricultural value chain support and employment creation within and outside the value chains (SOCFS Report, 2024). Currently, the Mbale central market has modern infrastructure necessary for proper operations including: sanitation facilities for those working in the market, water – both for sanitation and for food product cleaning and food preparation, a provision for water harvesting to supplement national grid water, well-constructed wooden and metallic market stalls – lined up in rows with corridors for easy flow of people, storage facility and food processing units. There is electricity for cooking and lighting. The market also has a section for non-food products and restaurants, designed with cooking, food storage, serving and eating areas. The recent improvements in roads within the CBD has benefited the city central market with well paved and large streets surrounding it and at the same time serving as parking for delivery trucks. However, despite the investments in modernisation of the Mbale city central market, the facilities have deteriorated over the years and access to the market is no longer convenient for several reasons; some of the market infrastructure, such as cold storage was not completed.

The modernised market is able to accommodate and support business activities of about 10,313 vendors (according to a 2019 vendor census) and allow easy flow of its daily population which goes up to 30,000 people (pers. Comm. Market

management committee member). This means sensitive products such as fish, meat, vegetables and fruits are sold without any specific preservation mechanism, leading to high levels of food loss.

Additionally, the standard of the market facilities is rapidly declining due to poor maintenance. Moreover, areas surrounding the Mbale city central market are over-crowded by informal traders, boda boda riders and garbage heaps which sometimes stay for days un-collected. This congestion and unhygienic conditions discourage consumers and wholesale traders from accessing parts of the market.

On a positive note, following a recommendation in the SOCFS report, Rikolto decided to construct a cooking shade on the veranda of the market, for the women who prepare food for market workers. They also covered sections of the drainage, next to the shade where the women are preparing food from as depicted in Figure 5. Most of these cooks are relatively poor women and are not able to use the designated cooking spaces next to the restaurants in the market because of the high cost of electricity. They instead prepared food using charcoal and firewood on open verandas of the market, next to open drainage channels, both in heat of the day and during rains, posing both a health and food safety risk. It was also a gender issue in that the market modernisation project did not effectively cater for women in terms of providing affordable energy sources and yet they play a critical role in providing meals for vendors and other market and city workers.



Figure 5: Cooking shade for women cooks constructed by Rikolto to improve food safety

Socio-Economic Role of Mbale Central Market

Although the city central market serves a social role for vendors, the prime role of the market is economic. Business activities within the market provide jobs to over 10,000 vendors. There are however, many more jobs associated with the market activities including: a large number of farmers who are able to sell their produce to transporters, the truck drivers who transport the food, many young men who work for garbage collection companies, the city market administrators, as well as various vendors' committees who interface with the city market administrators in managing the market. In addition, the city central market serves as a food distribution hub for city residents, other major towns and neighbouring countries. Economic benefits derived from the market by various business people assures food availability and accessibility in the city.

The market also plays an important social role to vendors, especially women and youth. In the various product specific sections of the market, vendors have formed Savings and Credit Cooperatives Societies (SACCOS) through which they save and lend money to each other in times of need but also to support their own businesses. The market vendors consider these SACCOS and important social support, as expressed by one vendor:

"Our SACCOS is functional and are my fall-back safety net in case of financial needs both for my family and my business. It has also made the of our group known to the city officials for funds under PDM "

(pers. Comm. A fruit vendor member of a SACCO)

"These vendors have also used their SACCOS to access resources from government under the Parish Development Model (PDM) and *Emyooga*[2], both of which required functional cooperatives and the use of peer pressure in following up the investments made."

(pers. Comm. City commercial officer).

These are funds set up by the government of Uganda to support Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to grow and develop. Moreover, the social groups of market vendors have identification mechanisms trusted and used by Micro-Finance Institutions in administering loans to market vendors (pers. Comm. Pride Credit Officer). Additionally, the vendor association committees have also served as a collective vendor voice in dialogue with city authorities. All these socio-economic roles of the market improve food vending activities in the city.

Market Governance

Market governance entails political, organisational and administrative processes, through which market stakeholders, specifically vendors and city authorities, express their interests, fulfil their obligations, mediate their differences and take decisions, which influence the state of the market as well as food trade. By implication, market governance affects food availability, accessibility and utilisation by city residents, thereby influencing city scale food and nutrition security.

It is important to note that market governance is closely linked to and forms part of the city food system governance. While the city authorities are responsible for the governance of the market, the governance boundaries are being pushed by the recently formed Good Food Parliament (GFP) and Good Food Council (GFC) which consist of multi-stakeholder food system representatives who demand a say in the food system in general. This demand is underlined by the fact that a young city like Mbale, is still transitioning from the previous economic model where the government directed and managed everything, to the current situation where the functioning of the market has to be negotiated between public and private stakeholders, all offering voice and asserting agency in the management and governance of the market. Moreover, this demand acknowledges the complexity of governing the food trade that aims to deliver healthy, nutritious, safe and affordable food.

The Mbale city authorities are responsible for the governance of the city central market. It employs a Market Master who manages the market. The city is expected to avail a well-constructed, clean and modern market equipped with good water, sanitation and electricity supplies. It allocates vending spaces, maintains order, ensures that all vendors understand public health and trade regulations, enforces these regulations, manages garbage, collects dues and fees and ensures that the services needed by the vendors are all provided. On their part, all vendors pay their market dues of Uganda shillings three thousand (UGX 3,000) only per month (equivalent to 0.71 euros) as a contribution to the management of the market and provision of services. Considering the 10,313 vendors, it means they contribute UGX 30,939,000 (equivalent to 7,284 euros) a month. According to the market executive committee, there are 34 sectors in Mbale city Central Market dealing in different categories of goods and services for both food and non-food products. Key food sectors, for instance fish, fresh fruits and vegetables, cereals, among others have constituted their own sector associations with their management committees. Selected representatives from these sector management committees, represent these sectors in the executive management committee of the market.

On the one hand, there has been tension between the vendors' association and the city authorities because the vendors believe that once they have paid the market dues demanded of them, they expect the city authorities to provide all the services which include garbage collection, water and sanitation, according to their mandate. The city authorities on the other hand have been pushing for the vendors to contribute for garbage management in the market, claiming that the

[2] Emyooga is a presidential initiative in Uganda, launched in 2019, aimed at creating jobs and wealth by empowering individuals in the informal sector through organized groups. It works by organizing people into Savings and Credit Cooperative Organizations (SACCOs) for specific crafts or trades, which then receive government seed capital to provide low-interest loans to members for starting or expanding their businesses.

funds contributed by the vendors is not enough for all the services the vendors expect. As a result, there is a general dis-organisation of some parts of the market, with some vendors experiencing leakages from un-repaired roof and selling in the corridors, a situation they say affects their businesses negatively:

> "These problems have led some of us to abandon the market and move to sell mostly food on the verandas of the market, mainly because our revenue from sales within the market has reduced substantially because customers fear to buy food from flooded parts of the market.

(pers. comm. Central market vendors).

Ahead of presidential elections at the beginning of 2026, market vendors are demanding that candidates campaigning for political leadership, especially Presidential candidates, should address the precarious situation which in their view is a consequence of corruption. The many challenges notwithstanding, Mbale central market remains the food trade hub, providing a wide variety of fresh, culturally appropriate and nutritious food to city residents on the one hand, and the Eastern region of Uganda, as well as East Africa on the other hand.

Linkage with the State of the City Food System Report

The State of the City Food System report presented a thorough and detailed assessment of the Mbale city food system, addressing the state of the city, food system baseline, food system governance, entrepreneurial innovation and the food environment. Apart from information on market operations above, the food system report covered most of the key components of this report. Market infrastructure and the role of the central market were covered in that report, describing the city food environment, as well discussions on food infrastructure and their spatio-temporal usage. Mbale central market governance is addressed in detail in the Mbale SoCFS Report. Importantly, the SOCFS report also analysed sub-themes including: the city's food and nutrition security challenges, food economy governance and opportunities for change, presented in the following sections.

Food and Nutrition Security Challenges

Despite the many challenges faced by Mbale Central market as a food business hub, Mbale remains a city with surplus food that is distributed beyond the city, the region and beyond the country. This is partly attributed to the uniqueness of the city, with a large agriculture hinterland, good climatic conditions and relatively fertile soils, fit for farming. Ironically however, there are many food and nutrition security challenges.

In its projected acute food insecurity and malnutrition analysis of 2020-2021, the Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) classify the food and nutrition security status of Mbale city to be in a crisis phase, with only 45% of city residents being food and nutrition secure, 40% are food stressed while the remaining 15% are experiencing food crisis. Most of the affected people in the city were the poorest households who had lost their sources of livelihoods, especially by selling productive assets like land to buy boda bodas, which does not generate much money in most areas. Others include those who had lost their employment, their secondary sources of income and households relying on the informal sector for a livelihood. (IPC, 2020). Other factors affecting food and nutrition security are high fuel prices that lead to increased food prices, climate change effects which lead to reduced yield and low consumption of diverse foods (FEWSNET, 2021).

Furthermore, inadequate rural infrastructure in food producing districts surrounding the city, in the rural parts of Mbale city and the smaller markets around the city, are important barriers to food distribution, and moreover, these contribute to high food prices. Other challenges include the manner in which food is transported, sorted, handled in the market, poor hygiene and sanitation, among others.

Food Economy and Governance

The food economy of Mbale city, itself a reflection of contemporary city economies in Africa, is dualistic in nature with the formal food economy coexisting alongside the informal one (Cities Alliance, 2017). On the one hand, the food economy in Mbale city has remained predominantly informal because the city is young and has limited budget for upgrading its status. On the other hand, the city has formal food markets comprising planned markets and supermarkets. The dualistic nature of the food economy notwithstanding, more than 85% of households in Mbale city source their food from traditional markets and less than 24% use supermarkets and even then, only sporadically and for specific products (Mackay et al., 2022).

The governance of the food economy is the responsibility of the city authorities, comprised of elected city council members who make policy and are supported by technical staff who are employees of the city, organised under the departments of production, health, trade and natural resources. The technical team has mainly been involved in enforcing the standards and regulations stipulated by the central government but only to the extent that the budget permits.

The GFP is a broader group of food system stakeholders from private, public and civil society sectors while the GFC is a smaller group selected from the GFP. The GFP highlights and debates food system challenges and proposes solutions which are then analysed and refined by the GFC, and then presented to the City Council for debate, decision and action in terms of policies, by-laws and guidelines to improve and transform specific aspects of the food system. In this way, food system stakeholders, outside the city council authorities, are getting involved in food system governance. In the recent past, the GFP has gained more ground, having been combined with the Food and Nutrition Committee of the Mbale city council. This move has given more clout to the GFP, creating more space for policy influencing and dialogue. Both parties, the GFP and the city council are proud of this initiative, appreciating the mode of operation as follows:

> "The coming into place GFP/GFC has challenged all of us to start thinking critically about the key issues that have plagued our food system. Out of these debates, we reached a consensus that food safety is the number one priority to be tackled. As a result, the city has taken action, through the AfriFOODlinks project to renovate the city Abattoir and is in the final stages of developing a food safety ordinance"
>
> (Chairperson GFP).

Opportunities to Address Food System Challenges

There are many opportunities that can be grabbed in Mbale city to address the many challenges in order to improve the food and nutrition situation in the city.

Availability of natural resources and space for planning: Mbale city has abundant water resources that can support irrigation, for food production. The city's land is relatively fertile, capable of sustaining small-scale urban farming, particularly in areas with volcanic and loamy soils, as well as moderate rainfall. Of the city area of 158 square km, 74% is unplanned, presenting an opportunity for deliberate integration of the city food system into the city comprehensive physical plan, yet to be developed to guide land use and development.

The strategic location for trade: Mbale's central location in the Eastern region and proximity to the border with Kenya, positions it as an attractive and competitive business hub, including food business in the region. The city receives food from various neighbouring districts and serves as a transit centre for foods leaving the region, destined for major cities like Kampala, Jinja and neighbouring countries such as Kenya and Southern Sudan.

Availability of markets: the city has a well-constructed central, and eight secondary markets, all of which can be developed to better serve the residents and stimulate regional trade. Moreover, the city is planning to upgrade and develop markets in peri-urban areas to accommodate street vendors.

Presence of enthusiastic food systems stakeholders: the city food system stakeholders both private and government, are interested in the city's food system and are willing to work for its transformation. The Business Development organisations (BDOs), for example farmer groups and cooperatives, SACCOS, trader associations, among others, which aim primarily at improving their businesses, can support food system transformation efforts.

Governance system, policies and institutions: Mbale City Council has adequate and qualified staff to oversee improvements in the local food system. Since declaration of the city status, the position of heads of department of the city have been elevated and filled with senior staff in their fields with key roles in food system transformation. Some NGOs that are partnering with the city to improve the city food system are making significant contributions, complementing city efforts.

Improving infrastructure: Improvements in the road infrastructure within Mbale city CBD and senior quarters, particularly through the MATIP program, is facilitating better access to food markets from rural areas of the city and enabling faster delivery of perishable food items. Additionally, there have been enhancements in electricity distribution by UMEME[3] and the National Water & Sewerage Corporation is currently upgrading the piped water supply system in the city.

[3] Umeme Limited was the largest energy distributor in Uganda, distributing about 97 percent of all electricity used in the country

Emergence of food system multi-stakeholder platforms: The emergence of NGO facilitated food system Multi-stakeholder platforms (GFP and GFC) provide a valuable opportunity to tackle limitations within the city's food systems.

Conclusion

While many challenges still exist in the food system, including market management, rural infrastructure, food economy governance, among others, there are many opportunities that can be used to move forward with food system transformation and contribute to improvements in the city's food and nutrition situation. An important opportunity is the emergence of food system multi-stakeholder platforms acceptable to the city authorities and availability of stakeholder willing to partner and work towards food and nutrition improvements in the city.

In actioning such, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Improve Market Infrastructure and Maintenance
    - Complete cold storage facilities to reduce spoilage of perishable products like fish, meat, vegetables, and fruits. This will significantly cut down the estimated 40% food loss.
    - Regular maintenance of market facilities (roof repairs, drainage systems, sanitation) to prevent flooding and unhygienic conditions that discourage customers.
    - Expand affordable cooking spaces with clean energy options for women preparing food, reducing health and safety risks.

2. Strengthen Waste Management
    - Introduce organic waste recycling through scaling up the Black Soldier Fly (BSF) technology pilot to manage the 8 MT of daily organic waste sustainably.
    - Improve garbage collection frequency and enforce proper disposal to eliminate heaps of waste around the market.

3. Enhance Food Safety and Quality
    - Expand vendor training programs on food safety and hygiene, building on previous initiatives by Rikolto.
    - Develop and enforce a food safety ordinance, as recommended by the Good Food Parliament (GFP), to standardize practices across the market.

4. Improve Transport and Storage Systems
    - Invest in refrigerated trucks and better packaging for perishable goods to reduce spoilage during transit.
    - Upgrade rural roads and feeder infrastructure to improve connectivity between farms and markets, reducing transport costs and delays.

5. Strengthen Governance and Vendor Engagement
    - Clarify roles and responsibilities between city authorities and vendor associations to reduce tension over service provision and dues.
    - Institutionalize multi-stakeholder platforms like GFP and GFC for inclusive decision-making on food system governance.

6. Promote Socio-Economic Empowerment
    - Support vendor SACCOS and cooperatives with financial literacy and access to credit, leveraging government programs like PDM and Emyooga.
    - Create affordable energy solutions for women cooks and informal traders to reduce reliance on charcoal and firewood.

7. Leverage Strategic Location and Trade Opportunities
    - Develop peri-urban markets and street vendor zones to reduce congestion in the central market and improve food accessibility.
    - Promote cross-border trade facilitation with Kenya and Sudan by improving logistics and compliance with food safety standards.





AfriFOODlinks

Kisumu County



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Kibuye Market: The nerve centre of Kisumu city's food system

Author: Paul Opiyo

Introduction

Kisumu is the third-largest city in Kenya with a population of about 500,000 residents. A significant majority (over 65%) of residents live in informal settlements like Nyalenda and Manyatta, which form a ring around the original planned city and suffer from inadequate urban infrastructure and services. In these settlements, and the high levels of poverty and unemployment (31% unemployment for those aged 20+ in a previous survey), critically shape the food system by constraining economic opportunities and access to basic services.

Municipal markets are key infrastructure in urban food systems in African cities, playing an important role as centres of access to fresh produce and other local foods. They play a crucial role in access to food, especially for low-income communities, create opportunities for livelihood for informal food retailers and enable smallholder farmers to connect to urban consumers.

Kisumu's very name is rooted in its food-centric origins as a regional hub for barter trade, with the Dholuo derivative of its original name, *Kisumo*, meaning 'a place to look for food'.

The city is a net importer of food, relying heavily on other counties and countries for its food supply, which puts it in a precarious position should the supply chain be disrupted. Production within the city and county is challenged by recurrent flooding and droughts. The fishing industry in Lake Victoria is challenged by the invasive water hyacinth, dwindling fish stocks, pollution and overfishing.

Inadequate infrastructure is a major impediment to the food system. Poor road networks and high fuel costs increase the price of food, limiting access for the poor. Crucially, nearly all municipal markets including Kibuye lack essential infrastructure such as refrigeration, secure storage, piped water, and adequate sanitation facilities, leading to significant food loss and safety concerns.

Case Study site: Kibuye market

Kibuye market is a good site to understand Kisumu's food system because it is the main metropolitan market in the city and the city region. It is the main wholesale and retail market, the nerve centre of the city's food system, and therefore the most suitable place to understand the dynamics and intervening governance issues that influence the city's food system.

Kibuye market is located along the Kisumu – Kakamega Highway. It is one of the largest open-air markets in Eastern Africa. The market, which sits on 13.6 acres of land, has existed since the colonial period and owes its origins to the neighbouring Kibuye Catholic Cathedral, which was built in the 1950s. The market was founded by worshippers at the Catholic Cathedral Roman Catholic missionaries. Church members carried their trading commodities to church and sold them after mass. The missionaries eventually allowed the traders to move to a field owned by the Church, but only under the condition that merchants would not build any permanent trading stalls.

Kibuye market is a space of great social and economic significance to the surrounding population of Nyanza Region and the wider East African Region. Farm produce from all over Kenya, some parts of Uganda and Tanzania finds its way to the market, with lorry loads of food items delivered to the market every night in readiness for trade early in the morning. Apart from farm produce, the market offers all forms of grocery, apparels, and a wide range of services including tailoring, carpentry, and ironmongery.

Initially, Kibuye served an indigenous populace disrupted economically and socially by British colonialism. Africans from throughout the region began to move into Kisumu to work as small-scale traders, employees of colonial administrators and Asian merchants and in other businesses to sustain themselves after they were robbed of their livestock and forced off their ancestral homelands. Today, Kibuye remains the main wholesale and retail market for agricultural produce in the Nyanza Region.



Figure 6: Satellite Imagery of Kibuye Market (Source - Google Maps)

Key Case Study elements

Market Operations

Kibuye market operates daily, but Sunday is the main market day. It is a regional metropolitan market bringing together traders from the entire region on the market day. Saturday has also evolved into another busy market day, with numbers of traders and customers rivalling Sunday.

Daily operations of the market begin at the stroke of midnight as trucks start rolling in with different varieties of vegetables, fruits, green maize, dry cereals, and non-food items from all over the East African region. The suppliers offload the merchandise overnight until the wee hours of the morning, as wholesalers get their supplies for the day before daybreak. By 7.00am, most of the trucks would have left the market and the drivers and loaders take time off to the city to relax, run other errands or are on their way back for another trip.

However, the deliveries are not often without hitches: Competition for parking bays leads to conflicts as the parking bays are inadequate. Apart from city authorities who collect official revenue from food suppliers, there are also other non-official levies payable to "market space owners" to get entry into the market. Those who do not pay are denied entry. Some trucks belonging to "known" persons are given preference while others are kept waiting. The wait may be long until the following day. This sometimes leads to food loss, especially if perishable products are kept in trucks in the scorching tropical sun.

Kibuye is the centre for food distribution in the city and satellite towns. After food is received at the market, some wholesalers start distributing food to smaller markets within the city and satellite towns. These are often carried in smaller

trucks, three wheelers (*tuk-tuks*), motorcycle taxis (*boda-bodas*), and passenger service vehicles (*matatus*). There is a lack of specialized food transportation vehicles, and the transporters usually do not bear the cost of any damage or losses. The transporters, particularly *matatu* operators mishandle the merchandise and some of the food gets damaged or spoilt in the distribution process.



Figure 7: A tomato delivery truck at Kibuye market.



Figure 8: Retail section for leafy vegetables at Kibuye Market.

Kibuye is both a wholesale and retail market. Although some of the food is distributed to other markets, some retailers also get food from wholesalers and middlemen in the market and sell in the same market. The over 7000 traders are organised into sections for different varieties of foods – dry cereals, roots and tubers, fruits, exotic vegetables, African leafy

vegetables, etc. Most of the food retailers are women who do not have adequate capital to purchase food in bulk from the wholesalers. They have devised strategies to overcome this challenge: some pool resources to purchase stock which they then split amongst themselves. They have also formed group savings and loans schemes from which members can borrow money for capital or any unforeseen circumstances.

Socio-economic role of Kibuye market

Kibuye market is the nerve centre, not only of Kisumu City's food system, but also the city region's economy. It is the major wholesale hub for agricultural produce from the region, thereby creating a market of farm produce from neighbouring communities. The food sold in Kibuye not only comes from the city region, but also from other farming communities in Kenya and the wider East African region. For example, Mr. Ojowi* (not his real name), a supplier of tomatoes at the market revealed that he sources produce from Kajiado, Taita-Taveta, and sometimes from Tanzania.

The market is the main distribution centre of food in Kisumu City and the satellite towns, enabling access to food for residents. The over 7000 traders who operate in the market dealing in both food and non-food items derive their livelihoods from the market. Additionally, there are numerous informal sector service providers – transporters, porters, waste handlers, commission agents, financial service providers (including M-pesa and bank agents), and eatery operators who are employed in the market.

The market not-only performs an economic function, but also a social role. Most traders in the market belong to social support groups. These take the form of group savings and loans, popularly called *chamas*, social welfare groups that take the form of informal social insurance to support one another in cases of illnesses or financial difficulty, and sometimes during social celebrations like weddings and funerals. The importance of these networks is emphasized by the testimony of Anyango* (not her real name) a female trader:

> "I belong to three chamas in this market. We save a little money every day and this helps whenever one is in need. Last year I was able to get money from the chamas to pay for my son's university fees. I would not have managed if I was not a member of the chamas. Many of our members have also been supported during bereavement, payment of hospital bills and even to build houses".

Market Governance

Market Governance refers to the system by which a market is controlled and operates, and the mechanisms by which the market and market operators are held to account. There are both formal and informal forms of governance in Kibuye market. The market is formally under the administration of the City of Kisumu, which is a semi- autonomous entity under the County Government of Kisumu. The city authorities are ideally in charge of allocation of trading spaces, maintenance of order, enforcement of public health regulations and standards, provision of sanitary facilities, solid waste management and collection of market levies and fees. There is a market superintendent who oversees the day-to-day administration of the market, assisted by a team of revenue collectors, public health inspectors, and enforcement officers.

The market has eighteen sectors – based on the various trades/ goods & services they deal in. Each of the sectors has a committee elected by traders in the sector and are responsible for maintenance of order in their respective sections and lobbies for the welfare of their members. Representatives of all the 18 sectors sit in the central management committee which ideally should work in partnership with the city authorities in managing the market. The leadership of the central management committee is elected by representatives of traders from all the 18 sectors.

Due to inadequate capacity, and complaints by traders about poor services, the city authorities delegated some aspects of service provision to the market management committee. The committee hires people to clean the market and take solid waste to a central place from where the city environment department collects it. The market management committee also hires security guards and maintains the toilets. The committee charges all traders a fee of KES 10/- per day to pay for these services and every visit to the toilet is charged KES. 10/-.

There have been conflicts between the market management committee and city authorities regarding the management of the market. Market leadership has persistently complained about inadequate lighting, poor drainage, inadequate waste management, and inadequate market shades despite the city collecting revenue from the market. According to Nabwire* (not her real name), a female leader of traders:

> "The city officials are only interested in collecting revenue and the services here are very poor, yet we pay millions of shillings to the city. We must hire our own people to clean the market. Even the garbage heap there (points to the direction of a heap of garbage) sometimes takes days before it is removed".

In 2024 a section of market leaders rebelled against the central committee, claiming that their term of office had ended and they had refused to vacate office. This has led to the emergence of two factions claiming leadership of the market. The rebel faction attempted to take control of the toilets – a main source of revenue for the central committee – leading to violent clashes between rival gangs supporting both factions. The city authorities moved in to declare that the management committee's term ended, and there was a need to conduct fresh elections. Some city officials claim the market management committee had developed 'cartel like' tendencies. However, there are no formal regulations or policy guidelines on the management of markets, election of market management committees, their tenure or mandate. The city authorities have realised this weakness and are currently working towards development of a market management policy and regulations.

Despite the numerous challenges including inadequacies of infrastructure, a weak governance system and lack of clear policy on market governance, Kibuye market remains the nerve centre of Kisumu City's food system. Most of the food one would get in homes, restaurants, institutions and informal eateries in Kisumu would most likely be traced to Kibuye. Kibuye also creates a big market for farm produce from the city region and the wider East Africa region as Kisumu is a major transport and communication hub in the Great Lakes Region. There is an opportunity for city authorities to provide adequate infrastructure, streamline governance and realize more revenue from the market.

Market Infrastructure

Kibuye market started as an open-air market, with traders only allowed to build temporary stalls. These shanties proliferated over the years, making the market congested and unsanitary. The market becomes dusty during the dry seasons and muddy during the wet seasons so trading activities are disrupted whenever it rains, and most traders and their merchandise are exposed to open sunshine.

In the recent past, the government has tried to build permanent market stalls, market shades, drainages, toilets, and provide lighting for the traders, but these efforts have been inadequate, poorly targeted and lacking on required investment. Government efforts to improve the state of physical infrastructure in the market have been challenged by inadequate funding, and opposition by traders due to the fear of relocation.

In 2020, the government took advantage of the Covid 19 pandemic when markets were closed to move traders to an open ground outside the city stadium *(Corona market)* to enable rebuilding of the market. The construction of the new market was funded by the World Bank at a cost of KES 500 million (Euro 3,4 million). The project was done in two phases: Phase 1 was planned to accommodate about 3,000 traders and cost KES. 315 million (Euro 2 million), while Phase 2 was planned to accommodate 1,500 traders at a cost of KES 185 million. The upgrade included new ablution blocks, boundary walls, roads, walkways, drainage, and parking areas. The project also included floodlights, street lighting, water storage, and electrical connections all aimed at creating a clean, safe, and healthy environment for traders and customers. The rehabilitation project also included a childcare centre to support female traders who are mostly the food retailers operating daily in the market.

However, to pave the way for the construction traders were evicted and relocated to an open ground outside the stadium. During the relocation, traders complained that their temporary market stalls were demolished at night during the Covid-19 lockdown period. They did not get an opportunity to salvage their goods leading to massive losses. However, the city authorities said they gave adequate notice for traders to vacate as the demolition was justified on public health grounds and the need to build a new modern market.

While Phase 1 of reconstruction of the market was completed and traders moved back into the market in 2022, traders have complained that phase 2 was never successfully completed as traders moved back to the market without paved roads, walkways, adequate market shades, and drainage. Some traders have re-built shanties again to protect themselves from the sun, while others operate in the open. The traders accuse the county government of betrayal - collecting fees without reinvesting in the market.

Through their association and in agreement with the city authorities, the traders organised themselves to maintain some of the infrastructure that was constructed by the local government. For example, the toilets are managed by the trader's association that charges users KES. 10/- per visit. According to the market management committee, the money is used to clean the toilets and pay water bills. However, some traders claim that the toilets generate so much money that is unaccounted for while the services provided are substandard – there is no running water most of the time and they are not very well maintained. However, there is agreement that they are better than when they were managed by the city authorities.



Figure 9: Kibuye market after demolition in 2020 (Photo credit: John Chweya).



Figure 10: One of the new market shades constructed at Kibuye Market in 2020

There are no on-site waste management facilities at the market. The city authorities collect a large amount of solid waste from the market estimated at 100 tons daily, primarily organic matter. The solid waste is transported to the city landfill which is about 15 km away. The existing waste management system is inadequate, leading to cases of overflowing garbage and unsanitary conditions characterized by unpleasant odours, which are a breeding ground for flies, rodents and other pests. In April 2025, there was a standoff between traders and city authorities with traders refusing to pay market levies until the garbage was cleared. The city authorities moved in to temporarily close the market after a public health assessment and found multiple issues including lack of clean water, poor waste management, and inadequate toilet facilities. Traders were directed to vacate the market and relocate to alternative markets within the city. Despite these challenges some community groups like Kibuye Market Waste Management CBO are involved in waste management, focusing on recycling and converting waste into useful products like briquettes and animal feeds.

In July 2025, the city authorities gave a two-week notice to traders to vacate Kibuye market for a fresh round of construction, having secured funding of KES 3 billion from the national government. The proposal from the national government is to build two main modern market blocks, each with a capacity of 3,000 traders, together with associated infrastructure – roads, walkways, drainage, parking bays, lighting, toilets, and solid waste management facilities. Traders have been directed to move to Uhuru Market. However, this latest market project has been received with scepticism by traders who claim that the spaces at Uhuru Market have been taken up by cartels who charge exorbitant rents. They also complained that they have not been involved in the design of the market as the national government intends to copy-paste a design inappropriate to their needs. Further, the traders have expressed lack of clarity on the duration of the project. Awino* (not her real name) a female trader at the market said:

> "They evicted us from here in 2020 to rebuild the market, and they never completed the work. As you can see, we are still trading in the open. What assurance do we have that they will build it this time round? We are not even sure how long it will take. This is where we get our daily bread, and we will not move this time round".

However, city officials attribute the scepticism of the traders to misinformation and incitement by a market management committee whose term has expired and has refused to leave office. According to Mr. Otumbo* (not his real name), a city official:

> "That committee has grown into a monster and turned into a cartel minting money from traders in the market. That is why they are resistant to change".

Alignment with the State of the City Food System Report

The State of the City Food System Report, D1.1 of the AfriFOODlinks project provided a comprehensive overview of the State of the City Food System in Kisumu, examining its intricate connections with the city's governance, economy, culture, and infrastructure. Kisumu, as the principal city of Western Kenya and a major transport hub, serves as a crucial gateway to the Great Lakes region, making its food system profoundly influenced by regional and international dynamics. The city's history is intertwined with the culture of the Luo community, where staple foods like *ugali* (maize meal) accompanied by fish and vegetables are central to the diet.

Food and Nutrition Security Challenges

In Kisumu, the most pressing issue is food insecurity, with a 2016 citywide survey revealing that 71% of sampled households were either moderately (26%) or severely (45%) food insecure. Furthermore, a significant portion of the population faces nutritional challenges, as indicated by a high Household Diet Diversity Score (HDDS) of six or less for 86% of households surveyed. While the county has made gains, reducing stunting in children under five from 18% in 2014 to 9% in 2022, malnutrition remains a leading cause of disease. Data suggests a worrying trend of growing urban food poverty, with the most urbanized sub-county, Kisumu Central, showing higher incidences of nutritional deficiencies among children compared to its less urbanized areas.

The city is a net importer of food, relying heavily on other counties and countries for its food supply, which puts it in a precarious position should the supply chain be disrupted. Production within the city and county is challenged by recurrent flooding and droughts. The fishing industry in Lake Victoria is challenged by the invasive water hyacinth, dwindling fish stocks, pollution and overfishing.

Inadequate infrastructure is a major impediment to the food system. Poor road networks and high fuel costs increase the price of food, limiting access for the poor. Crucially, nearly all municipal markets including Kibuye lack essential infrastructure such as refrigeration, secure storage, piped water, and adequate sanitation facilities, leading to significant food loss and safety concerns.

Food Economy and Governance

The city's food economy is a mix of formal and, predominantly, informal sectors. All represented and active in the Kibuye market. Kibuye market is central to the food economy of Kisumu, serving as a key node in the food system and the wider economy. The Kibuye market facilitates linkages to many other sectors in the Kisumu economy, including transport services, packaging, and many other sectors.

The informal food sector in particular, including small shops, kiosks, and street vendors—is vital, acting as the primary source of food for the majority of poor city dwellers. These informal traders offer accessible, affordable food, and critically, provide credit to customers, a key survival strategy in low-income areas.

Governance is a key challenge. Kisumu's unique structure as a city within a county, managed by a city board with delegated authority, complicates food governance, leading to unclear mandates between the city and county governments. The overall policy and legal environment is complex and fragmented, making compliance difficult and driving many traders to operate informally to avoid licensing and inspections.

However, there are positive developments, including the recently launched Kisumu County Food Systems Strategy 2023-2027 and the establishment of multi-stakeholder platforms like the Food Liaison Advisory Council of Kisumu (FLACK). The strategy aims to strengthen food system governance, production, infrastructure, market access, and nutrition.

Emergent Trends and Opportunities

Urban Agriculture: Despite regulatory challenges, innovative urban farming techniques like hanging gardens are emerging, particularly in informal settlements, helping households supplement their diet with fresh vegetables. The presence of rural areas within the city's jurisdiction also allows for some local food production.

Nutrition Transition: The city is undergoing a nutrition transition, evidenced by the growing preference for highly processed, ready-to-eat foods high in fats, sugar, and salt, particularly among the youth and working-class, contributing to rising non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

Circular Economy: Creative approaches to waste, like at Obunga Market where fish leftovers are processed into food and animal feed, illustrate a growing trend in resource recovery and conservation.

Logistical Innovations: The rise of *boda-bodas* (motorcycle taxis) and *tuk-tuks* (rickshaws) has created an alternative, flexible distribution system for food, sometimes including online order fulfillment, showcasing the dynamic nature of the food trade.

Conclusion

In conclusion, transforming Kisumu's food system requires a holistic approach that moves beyond production to explicitly address the unique challenges of urban governance, infrastructure deficits, and high poverty levels, while leveraging the innovation and dynamism of the informal sector and emerging technologies.

Based on this report, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Infrastructure Development

- Upgrade Market Facilities: Invest in permanent stalls, roofing, drainage, paved walkways, and lighting to address congestion, dust, and flooding issues. Include cold storage and refrigeration to reduce food loss and improve food safety.
- Waste Management Systems: Establish on-site waste segregation and recycling facilities to manage the estimated 100 tons of daily waste and reduce unsanitary conditions. Support community-based initiatives like briquette production and animal feed conversion.
- Water and Sanitation: Ensure reliable piped water and well-maintained toilets, with transparent management of user fees.

2. Governance and Policy
   - Develop Market Governance Policy: Create clear regulations for market management committees, including election procedures, tenure, and accountability mechanisms to prevent cartel-like tendencies and leadership disputes.
   - Strengthen Oversight: Improve coordination between city and county authorities to clarify mandates and reduce governance fragmentation.
   - Stakeholder Engagement: Involve traders in market design and redevelopment plans to build trust and avoid resistance during relocations.

3. Food System Resilience
   - Diversify Food Sources: Promote urban agriculture (e.g., hanging gardens) and peri-urban farming to reduce reliance on external supply chains vulnerable to disruption.
   - Improve Logistics: Support specialized food transport vehicles and cold-chain systems to minimize spoilage during distribution.
   - Circular Economy Initiatives: Scale up resource recovery projects like fish waste processing and organic waste recycling.

4. Social and Economic Empowerment
   - Support Informal Traders: Expand access to microfinance and savings groups (chamas) to strengthen women traders' capital base and resilience.
   - Capacity Building: Provide training on food safety, business management, and digital tools for market actors to enhance efficiency and competitiveness.

5. Nutrition and Public Health
   - Promote Healthy Diets: Implement awareness campaigns to counter the nutrition transition toward processed foods and reduce non-communicable diseases.
   - Food Safety Standards: Enforce hygiene regulations and provide infrastructure for safe food handling in markets.

AfriFOODlinks

Tunis



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The Central Market of Tunis: A beating heart of the city

Authors: Jalila El Ati, Sonia Sassi & Chiraz Béji

Introduction

Tunis, the bustling capital and largest city of Tunisia, is a captivating blend of deep-rooted history and modern vitality. Stretching across the northeastern coastal plain, the city balances the charm of its ancient heritage with the pulse of contemporary life. At its heart lies the Medina of Tunis**,** a UNESCO world heritage site renowned for its labyrinthine alleys, bustling souks, and centuries-old mosques and palaces, a living testimony to the city's rich past. Just beyond its ancient walls unfolds the Ville Nouvelle, or "New City," developed during the French protectorate. Here, elegant colonial-era boulevards, art deco façades, and tree-lined avenues contrast beautifully with the dense, organic fabric of the old city.

Surrounding Tunis, the picturesque suburbs of Carthage**,** Sidi Bou Saïd, and La Marsa lend the capital a coastal elegance. Carthage, once the heart of a powerful ancient empire, whispers history through its archaeological remains, while Sidi Bou Saïd enchants visitors with its white-and-blue houses overlooking the Mediterranean. Home to about 693,000 inhabitants within its city limits and over 2.7 million in its metropolitan area, Tunis stands as the political, administrative, commercial, and cultural hub of the country. Its population is predominantly Arab, yet Berber roots and influences remain interwoven in its cultural identity.

Languages also tell the story of the city's layered past: Arabic is the official and everyday language, French is widely spoken as a legacy of the colonial period, and Berber dialects still echo in parts of the population. With its young and dynamic demographic, Tunis radiates energy and creativity, a reflection of a society constantly renewing itself while preserving its traditions. In essence, Tunis is more than a capital; it is a tapestry of civilizations, a meeting point between Africa and the Mediterranean, and a city where history, culture, and modernity coexist in harmony.

Case Study site: Central Market of Tunis City

The Central Market of Tunis City, once known as *Fondouk el-Ghalla* (fruit market) has been a vibrant symbol of the city's soul since the late 19th century. Built in 1891 under French protectorate in Tunisia (1881-1956), it stands proudly in the heart of Tunis, surrounded by streets with European names, Charles-de-Gaulle, Germany, Spain, and Denmark, just a short stroll from the winding alleys of the Medina.

After years of operation and minimal intertreatment in infrastructure, the Central Market was restored in 2007 by the Medina Preservation Association in partnership with the Municipality of Tunis, the market underwent a meticulous renovation worth 6.5 million Tunisian dinars (around 1.9 million euros). Its four interconnected buildings harmoniously combine Art Deco and Arabesque styles, with wooden structures reminiscent of ancient *fondouks* that once hosted traders and travellers.

Spanning more than 12,000 square meters, the Central Market shelters 568 stalls, forming a colourful labyrinth of flavours and aromas. In its bustling heart, 370 fruit and vegetable stands display gleaming piles of tomatoes, peppers, oranges, and fresh herbs. Along the wings of the market, 96 stalls of fishmongers, 24 of butchers, 28 of poultry, and 50 of other sellers, such as grocers offering everything from dried fruits to spices, olives, cheeses, preserves and warm loaves of bread.



Figure 11: Location of the Central Market of Tunis City
(Source: Ouled Abdelkader R (2022). Les imaginaires pour un renouveau du marché central de Tunis)



Figure 12: Inside of the Central Market of Tunis City (photograph taken around 1910)
(Source: National Centre for Scientific Research, (2021))

From the first light of day, the market awakens in a symphony of sounds, vendors calling out their prices, baskets rustling, knives tapping on wooden boards, and laughter echoing under the iron and glass ceilings. The air is rich with the scent of mint, coriander, and the sea. For locals, it is a place of routine and connection; for visitors, it is an unforgettable plunge into the everyday poetry of Tunisian life.






Figures 13 – 16: The Central Market of Tunis.
(Source: Essai R (2021). Le marché un espace multidimensionnel ; INNTA photo Library (2025))

Methodology

To better understand the complex and often conflicting dynamics within the Central Market of Tunis, a semi-structured qualitative survey with open-ended questions was conducted among key stakeholders.

Participants. Seventeen individuals were randomly selected and interviewed, including formal vendors operating inside the market, informal vendors working in its surrounding areas, small-scale traders in precarious socio-economic situations, and representatives of the Municipality of Tunis. All interviews were carried out on site at the Central Market.

Methodology: Data were collected through face-to-face interviews. The main questions explored the following main questions:

- *How would you describe the relationships between the different groups of traders in and around the Central Market?*
- *What do you consider to be the main causes of conflict or, conversely, of equilibrium among them?*
- *How do these tensions manifest themselves in practice?*
- *What role does the Municipality currently play in managing this situation?*
- *What solutions do you believe would be fair and realistic to improve the situation for all parties involved?*

A detailed version of the questionnaire is provided in the annex.

The interviews, conducted in Tunisian Arabic, were recorded, transcribed, and systematically analyzed by INNTA team. Selected quotations are presented in the results section, either as illustrative examples or because they convey particularly significant insights.

Key case study elements

Organisation and operation

The Central Market of Tunis, a historic landmark located in the heart of the capital, is managed by the Municipality of Tunis. It is a strategic node within the city's food system, ensuring the daily supply of fresh produce to thousands of residents, vendors, and restaurants. Today, it serves as one of the main distribution points for agricultural and fishery products, playing a central role in urban food security, local economic activity, and social life.

Inside the market, stalls are rented to formal vendors for a monthly fee of 60 to 90 Tunisian dinars (approximately 17 to 26 euros). These vendors form the backbone of a structured commercial network that supports stable supply chains and regular access to fresh food. A limited number of spaces near the four main entrances are allocated to small-scale vendors identified as social cases, enabling them to participate in the market's economic activity. Around the perimeter, informal vendors set up makeshift stalls, creating a lively but less regulated commercial environment that contributes to both the market's vibrancy and its management challenges.

The market operates every day except Monday. Activity begins well before dawn, around five o'clock in the morning, when trucks loaded with vegetables, fruits, and fish arrive from the Bir El Kassaâ wholesale market in the Ben Arous governorate. Suppliers of other products such as cheese, spices, dried fruits, and preserves start unloading early and continue throughout the day. By mid-morning, the Central Market reaches its peak activity, transforming into a bustling crossroads where commerce, tradition, and daily urban life converge.

Beyond its commercial function, the Central Market of Tunis is a key component of the city's food governance system. It acts as a critical interface between wholesale distribution, retail trade, and consumer access to fresh and affordable food. Its operations influence pricing dynamics, vendor livelihoods, and the circulation of agricultural products across the metropolitan area. At the same time, the coexistence of formal and informal activities raises important issues of regulation, infrastructure, and social equity.

The main results of the qualitative survey are presented in three main sections.

Composition of the Central Market of Tunis City

The Central Market of Tunis City represents a complex socio-economic ecosystem composed of three main groups of actors whose interactions shape its daily dynamics: formal vendors, informal traders, and small-scale precarious sellers.

Formal vendors: The historical and fiscal core of the market

This group forms the institutional backbone of the market and reflects its historical continuity and economic stability. According to Mr. Mohamed, a formal vendor:

> "We are formally registered and subject to strict regulations related to rent, price control, and taxation. Our supplies come almost exclusively from the Tunis Wholesale Market (Bir El Kassaa), ensuring standardized procurement but limiting flexibility in sourcing".

Despite being unified by their official status, formal vendors are far from homogeneous. Interviews conducted on site reveal three main profiles:

The heirs: these vendors embody intergenerational continuity, with some representing the sixth or seventh generation of families that have operated in the same stalls since the market's creation. Their presence is rooted in family tradition and a deep sense of belonging to the market's identity, such the case of Mr. Anouar:

> "This stall has been occupied by my ancestors for four generations"

The long-established owners: others obtained their trading licenses directly from the Municipality of Tunis several decades ago. They often occupy a respected position, balancing tradition with the need to adapt to contemporary market constraints;

The newcomers: a more recent generation of traders brings a modern, managerial approach emphasizing traceability, hygiene, and compliance with health and safety standards. They often view the market not merely as a place of commerce, but as an enterprise to be efficiently managed.





Figure 17 & 18: The INNTA team interviewing formal vendors in the Central Market of Tunis City. (Source: INNTA photo library (2025))

Informal vendors: competition tempered by empathy

Informal traders operate in the immediate periphery of the market, creating a "gray zone" between legality and necessity. Their activities are described by Abbess, a formal vendor, as

> "a peripheral and disruptive competition because they sell the same products as us at lower prices due to their exemption from taxes and formal fees".



Figure 19: Informal vendor around the Central Market of Tunis City.
Source: INNTA photo library (2025)

Another formal vendor said,

> "They attract customers before they even enter the market and they source their goods directly from small farmers, bypassing the official supply chain and thereby reducing costs".

However, field observations nuance the idea of open hostility between formal and informal traders. While competition exists, it is often tempered by mutual empathy and social proximity. For example, some formal vendors like Mr. Hedi, a vendor of fruits, develop differentiation strategies, focusing on product

> "quality, cleanliness, and trust-based relationships to retain loyal customers rather than competing on price".

Small-scale precarious vendors: resilience amid vulnerability

A third category comprises small-scale traders living in precarious socio-economic conditions, often granted the right to occupy free stalls within the market. Their livelihoods are characterized by economic fragility, unstable supply chains, and a daily struggle for income generation.

Mrs. Aïcha is a social case study of small-scale vendors. She sells made-home products derived from traditional female artisanal knowledge, including condiments, spices, local pasta (*Hlalem*, *Mhames*, *Nwasser*), *brick* sheets, *frik* (crushed barley), harissa, aromatic herbs, and vegetables preserved in brine. Her products are either self-produced or sourced from small regional producers:

> "I'm lucky the municipality lets me use this space for free. Without it, I would be out on the street, facing the wind, rain, and all the daily struggles that come with it".



Figure 20: Social case of small-scale vendor of *brick* situated at one of the entrances of the Central Market of Tunis City. (Source: INNTA photo library (2025))

Staff of the Municipality of Tunis: management of the Central Market of Tunis City

The Municipality of Tunis oversees the management of the Central Market through a permanent team composed of veterinarians, financial and administrative officers, hygiene inspectors, cleaners, and security guards. This diverse team ensures the smooth daily operation of the market and the enforcement of municipal regulations related to hygiene, pricing, and food safety. According to Mr. Habib, a long-serving municipal officer:

> "We have been here since five o'clock in the morning, and we leave only after the market closes, around two in the afternoon. We check everything, e.g. product quality, prices, cleanliness. We even handle conflicts between sellers. Despite our vigilance, some informal vendors still manage to occupy market stalls temporarily and escape our control. Outside the market perimeter, however, we have no authority".

This testimony highlights the constant presence and multifaceted role of municipal staff in maintaining order and hygiene within the market. It also underscores the limitations of municipal control, particularly regarding informal trade activities that take place around the market's perimeter, an issue that remains a persistent challenge for local governance.



Figure 21: Municipal officer with INNTA member in the Central Market of Tunis City.
Source: INNTA photo library (2025)

Perception of the relationship between key stakeholders of the Central Market

The Central Market of Tunis City represents a complex social and economic ecosystem where diverse actors (formal traders, informal vendors, small-scale social vendors, and municipal authorities) interact daily within a shared yet competitive space. The relationships between these groups are shaped by mutual dependence, economic competition, and contrasting perceptions of legitimacy and fairness.

Interrelations among formal vendors

The relationships between formal vendors are marked by differing perceptions of solidarity and competition. According to Mr. Mahmoud, there exists a *"genuine spirit of mutual assistance"* among colleagues, reflected in practices such as lending goods or temporary financial support during difficult periods. In contrast, Mr. Salah disputes this view, describing instead *"a climate of mistrust and suspicion"* that undermines cooperation. Mr. Slim, adopting a more pragmatic stance,

characterizes relations as *"normal"*, driven primarily by market competition rather than solidarity. These divergent accounts reveal a heterogeneous professional culture where individualism and informal mutual aid coexist uneasily within a highly competitive commercial environment.

Formal vs. informal vendors

Many formal vendors largely perceive informal vendors as *"sources of unfair competition that threaten the market's organization and economic balance"*. They associate informal traders with a *"commercial disorder"* that manifests in several ways: *"obstructing carrier and customer access, occupying public space without authorization, and contributing to recurrent tensions with customers and other market actors"*.

As Mr. Lotfi expressed, *"firm municipal regulation is needed to restore fairness among vendors"*.

Conversely, informal vendors view themselves as actors of necessity rather than transgression, struggling daily to secure a livelihood in an environment of economic precarity. For them, *"the main constraint is constant harassment by police forces, not formal traders"*.

They see the market as a shared public good rather than an exclusive commercial territory. As Mrs. Halima, an informal vendor, put it: *"the food market is vast and can accommodate everyone"*. This contrast highlights the social and institutional divide between regulated and unregulated commerce, one rooted less in hostility than in structural inequality and divergent survival strategies.

Formal vendors vs. social small-scale vendors

A third group consists of small-scale social vendors operating within or near the market under municipal tolerance due to their socio-economic vulnerability. Their presence often elicits sympathy rather than hostility from formal vendors and municipal staff. Many vendors recognize that these actors operate in precarious conditions and view them *"not as competitors but as individuals striving to earn an honest living within a constrained urban economy"*.

As Mr. Aziz, a formal trader, explained: *"it is essential that they be able to earn a decent living"*. This sentiment reflects an underlying social solidarity that transcends market competition. The tolerance shown toward these social cases underscores the persistence of human and community values in an environment otherwise dominated by profit-driven logics and regulatory tensions. It also reveals how the Central Market functions as both an economic and social safety net for marginalized populations.

Main management challenges facing the Central Market of Tunis City?

The Central Market of Tunis City faces a range of management and operational challenges that undermine its efficiency, competitiveness, and public service role. Testimonies collected from traders, municipal staff, and other market actors highlight several recurrent problems linked to supply systems, governance, infrastructure, and security.

Formal vendors vs. the Municipality of Tunis City

Relations between formal vendors and the Municipality of Tunis City, which manages the Central Market, are characterized by growing dissatisfaction and mistrust. Formal traders commonly criticize municipal authorities for inefficient market management, citing issues such as poor hygiene, disorganization of stalls, shortage of cleaning materials, insufficient security, and deteriorating infrastructure.

For many vendors, *"these shortcomings symbolize a progressive decline in the market's governance capacity and a lack of municipal responsiveness to their needs"*.

The perceived absence of effective oversight and maintenance contributes to the erosion of confidence in public institutions and fuels calls for better coordination, transparency, and participatory management of the market.

Constraints related to the supply system

The market's supply chain is characterized by a single-source dependency on the Bir El Kassaa wholesale market. While this arrangement is officially justified by traceability and sanitary control concerns, the vendors surveyed unanimously denounce *"the rigidity and exclusivity of this system"*.

According to many traders, this restriction deprives them of opportunities to source fresher, higher-quality, or cheaper products directly from producers in other regions of Tunisia. Some emphasize that a more flexible supply system allowing partial direct sourcing from local or regional producers "*could enhance product diversity, reduce costs, and strengthen ties between urban and rural economies"*.

This structural constraint thus limits both the market's competitiveness and its potential contribution to local food system development.

Divergent perceptions of municipal management

Opinions among vendors are divided regarding the performance of the Municipality of Tunis, which is responsible for the administration, hygiene, and general organization of the Central Market.

A minority of traders acknowledge improvements in daily cleaning routines and waste collection, describing municipal agents as "*present and responsive*." However, the majority express strong dissatisfaction, citing chronic problems of waste accumulation, inadequate sanitation, and insufficient control of product hygiene, particularly in perishable food sections.

The recent regulation imposing a weekly closure day is also a source of contention. While designed to allow cleaning and maintenance operations, many traders view it as a measure that reduces their income without lowering their operating costs, further exacerbating economic pressure on small-scale sellers.

Degraded infrastructure and maintenance deficiencies

The poor state of the market's physical infrastructure represents one of the most visible signs of managerial shortcomings. The building, although emblematic of Tunis's urban heritage, suffers from deteriorating facilities, including inadequate roofing made of fragile plastic sheets, frequent leaks, and inefficient rainwater drainage systems that cause flooding in certain aisles during the winter season.

These structural problems not only hinder daily operations but also affect food safety and the market's overall image. Traders and customers alike point to the urgent need for a comprehensive rehabilitation and modernization plan, which would include improved ventilation, lighting, and waste management systems.

Security and Governance Issues

Security within the Central Market is another major concern. Many traders report frequent thefts and incidents of vandalism, especially during the evening hours after closing. The limited number of security guards and the prohibition on installing private surveillance cameras exacerbate the sense of vulnerability among vendors. Moreover, several participants alluded to *"irregular practices and corruption among certain municipal officials"*, particularly concerning the allocation of stalls and the enforcement of regulations. These issues erode trust in local authorities and highlight the need for greater transparency, accountability, and participatory governance in market management.

In summary, the Central Market of Tunis City faces interconnected management challenges, e.g. a rigid supply structure, inconsistent municipal performance, deteriorating infrastructure, and persistent governance and security issues. Addressing these constraints requires a comprehensive reform approach that balances economic efficiency, social equity, and urban heritage preservation, while promoting greater stakeholder participation in the market's governance.

Conclusion

The Central Market of Tunis City stands as both a historic landmark and a living economic institution at the heart of the capital. Beyond its architectural and cultural heritage, the market remains a vital component of Tunis's food system, ensuring access to fresh produce, supporting hundreds of livelihoods, and sustaining the social and economic fabric of the city.

The field study revealed that the Central Market functions as a multifaceted ecosystem, where formal traders, informal vendors, and small-scale social sellers coexist within a complex web of interdependence, competition, and solidarity. It also highlighted the indispensable yet contested role of the Municipality of Tunis, which manages the market's operations, sanitation, and regulation under challenging conditions.

Despite its vibrancy and central role, the market faces several structural and managerial constraints that hinder its optimal functioning:

- rigid and centralized supply chain, dependent exclusively on the Bir El Kassaa wholesale market, limiting flexibility, competitiveness, and local sourcing opportunities;
- deterioration of physical infrastructure, including inadequate roofing, drainage, lighting, and ventilation, affecting both hygiene and vendor operations;
- deficiencies in hygiene and waste management, particularly in perishable product sections, undermining food safety and the market's image;
- security and informal trade issues, generating tensions between actors and exposing vendors to theft and administrative instability.

Despite these challenges, the Central Market of Tunis City retains remarkable resilience and social cohesion. Mutual empathy between different vendor groups, the municipality's daily presence, and the enduring loyalty of customers all testify to the market's enduring socio-economic importance. Strengthening this ecosystem requires a renewal of governance approaches and targeted investments that preserve its heritage while adapting it to contemporary urban realities.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to guide a sustainable and inclusive revitalization of the Central Market of Tunis City:

1. Diversify and localize supply systems
- Allow partial direct sourcing from local and regional producers, especially for fruits, vegetables, and artisanal goods, under sanitary supervision.
- Develop pilot partnerships with agricultural cooperatives and nearby rural areas to strengthen urban–rural linkages and reduce dependence on the Bir El Kassaa wholesale market.
- Introduce digital traceability tools to ensure product quality, transparency, and compliance with food safety standards.

2. Strengthen hygiene, food safety, and sanitation
- Reinforce daily cleaning operations through better equipment and clearer task coordination between municipal staff and vendors.
- Establish a vendor hygiene charter, including shared responsibilities for waste management, product handling, and stall maintenance.
- Organize training sessions for vendors on hygiene, food safety, and environmental practices in partnership with public health authorities.

3. Promote inclusive and participatory governance
- Create a market management committee bringing together representatives of formal traders, informal vendors, small-scale sellers, and the municipality.
- Encourage transparent allocation of stalls through standardized procedures and public disclosure of available spaces.
- Introduce periodic dialogue platforms (quarterly meetings, satisfaction surveys, consultation workshops) to build trust and collective responsibility among all actors.

4. Formalize and support informal and precarious vendors

- Develop a progressive formalization mechanism allowing informal vendors to transition gradually into the regulated system through simplified permits and reduced fees.
- Maintain social inclusion programs for vulnerable small-scale vendors, especially women and low-income households, ensuring they retain access to livelihood opportunities within the market.

5. Improve security and transparency
- Increase the number of trained security guards and extend surveillance hours to prevent theft and vandalism.
- Introduce transparent complaint and monitoring mechanisms to address corruption, irregular practices, and unfair competition.
- Evaluate the feasibility of installing smart surveillance systems that respect privacy but enhance accountability.

6. Safeguard heritage and cultural identity
- Promote the Central Market as a living heritage site by integrating it into urban cultural tourism circuits and public awareness campaigns.
- Support artistic and educational events (culinary fairs, heritage days, local product exhibitions) to celebrate its historical and cultural value.
- Balance modernization efforts with architectural preservation, ensuring that any renovation respects the market's Art Deco and Arabesque features.

Revitalizing the Central Market of Tunis City is not only a question of infrastructure or regulation; it is a matter of urban food governance and social justice. By valuing the market's human capital, cultural legacy, and economic potential, Tunis City can transform this iconic space into a model of inclusive, sustainable, and locally anchored urban food systems. The success of this transformation depends on sustained political will, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and a shared vision of the market as a public good serving both tradition and the future of the city.



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Ouagadougou background

Author: Charlotte Yaméogo

Before engaging the details of this report, it is worth offering a brief introduction and historical account of the City of Ouagadougou, the capital city of Burkina Faso. Burkina Faso is located in central West Africa with a 2023 population of 23.25 million inhabitants. Ouagadougou, the centre of the former Mossi kingdom in the south, had a population of 33,000 inhabitants in 1950, a population that has grown significantly, reflecting a 2023 population of and estimated 3,204,000 permanent residents. The City of Ouagadougou's current growth rate is estimated at 4.84% (United Nations 2023).

Ouagadougou is the political capital of Burkina Faso. However, with the urban transition and associated changes in society (including changes in traditional social structures, and greater urbanization) today, Ouagadougou also serves as economic and cultural capital. The country is known as the "land of honest people". Burkina Faso is a land-locked country neighbored by Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Benin and Niger.

Ouagadougou cover an area of 600Km^2 (Gloux et al., 2018) which includes a number of surrounding rural communes: Pabré, Tanghin-Dassouri, Komki-Ipala, Komsilga, Koubri, Saaba and Loumbila. To make "the greatest Ouaga" (Périssol et al., 2019).

Ouagadougou is at a strategic position, located in the heart of West Africa. Ouagadougou is located at the crossroads of ancient trade routes, a strategic position on the scale of West Africa, which in history allowed the metropolis Ouagalaise to be the instrument of three state powers: the traditional Moogo kingdom, from the colony of Upper Volta and the independent nation of Burkina Faso. The history of the City of Ouagadougou is founded on an identity constructed through its distinct heritage but also, a dynamic integration of tradition and modernity (Périssol et al., 2019_ .

Decentralization took its roots in Upper Volta three decades before the country's independence; it was in January 1927 that the cities of Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso were established as communes. December 18, 1955 saw the promulgation of a law which enabled the municipal reorganization of West and Central Africa, establishing the authority for the two territorial entities, Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso, to establish municipalities with elected executives.

Historically, the Burkinabe constitution, amended in 1991, re-enforced the established right of communities to administer themselves and manage their own affairs with a view to promoting development and strengthening local governance. However, it was in 2005 that the General Code of Territorial Communities (CGCT) would be promulgated. This is despite the 2001 law which decreed the City of Ouagadougou the capital of the Central Region. Thus, after several legal provisions relating to the planning of the national territory and the functioning of defined entities, Ouagadougou adopted a relatively autonomous territorial and administrative identity (Traoré & Benon, 1998).

Administratively, Ouagadougou is a decentralized community, with legal and financial autonomy. Ouagadougou has 12 districts and 55 sectors. According to Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (Gloux et al., 2018), unlike the overall municipal body, the 12 districts of Ouagadougou do not have financial autonomy or legal status, do not have their own assets and cannot borrow. Thus, governance within the municipality is decentralized and as a result, the districts only receive funds from the central municipality by delegation. However, certain socio-economic institutions, regardless of their geographical location, enjoy financial autonomy. These institutions include the municipal oral health centre, the Bangr Weogo urban park, the independent management authority for commercial facilities, and the urban economic development agency. Overall, the analysis of city governance suggests a difficult implementation of decentralization.

The City of Ouagadougou was governed by special delegations until 1995 when it saw its first elected officials, but this did not free it from the supervision of the public authority despite the legal provisions (MATD, 2018) creating a body for monitoring and strengthening decentralization (MATD, 2001). Concretely, an analysis of the structuring and governance of other bodies subsequently created says a lot about the links between the municipality of Ouagadougou and the public authority In the National Commission for Decentralized Cooperation created by decree in May 2012, twelve ministries are represented, eight members from the association of municipalities, five from civil society and two from the regions. The governance of this body is overseen by the Minister of Territorial Administration. To better understand the interactions

between local and national authorities, in the ten-year decentralization strategy (2015) it was noted that as a result of various interconnected factors, decentralization was limited:

- The quality of local governance.
- The capacity to exercise local public project management.
- The financial resources of local authorities.
- The place of local economic development in strategic and prospective documents.

This initiated a further focus on decentralization to better build the development of the country with local authorities capable of producing accessible and quality local public services and boosting local economic development where it was stated that; "In addition to the ten-year plan which covers the period 2017-2026, Burkina Faso has adopted a vision of decentralization for 2040 to ensure that effective local authorities deliver quality and accessible local public services, drive development inclusive and sustainable local environment and drive a local democracy anchored in the socio-cultural substrate". However, with an unstable political situation, the security crisis and the commune of Ouagadougou which seems to be facing a brain drain, managing effective public administration on the municipal territory remains a real challenge.

Methodology

This work began with a bibliographic search with the publications and reports produced on food in the city of Ouagadougou by the researchers and research engineers of the Food Technology Department (DTA). We applied this logic to the other project partners and finally targeted non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and public institutions involved in the food sector. For the latter, we had to send letters to facilitate data collection. Letters were sent to twelve (12) organisations listing projects underway and those completed three (3) years ago. These include Afrique Verte, Autre Terre, SPONG, ILRI, FIAB, La Fabrique, the COMPANY HOUSE... It should be noted that we have not had any feedback at several levels. Only one of the targeted structures did not receive our correspondence: the Ouagadougou hygiene department.

Studies were identified as well as policies and actions initiated by international institutions (FAO), governments and authorities in the city of Ouagadougou. We focused on diachronic research, which led us to consult the national archives. To this end, the key words were food practices, diet, and the colonial period for the city of Ouagadougou alone. Outside this period, the keywords used for literature are street food, food security, food hygiene, food supply, vegetable transport, urban agriculture, urban food supply and distribution systems (SADA), FAO projects, Ministry of Agriculture project and the keywords used for policy between 2019 - 2023: food policies in Burkina Faso and food policies of the city of Ouagadougou. As far as policies and action plans for Burkina Faso are concerned, the most recent versions were considered. Policy documents that cover Africa or the world were considered regardless of their year of publication, especially when they propose concepts that are topical in food environments. This is the case for in fact a single WHO document published in 1987, which proposed a territorial affiliation of community health workers to achieve better results in terms of health, food and nutrition. We adopted this WHO approach because it was several decades later that Burkina Faso undertook to recruit fifteen thousand (15,000) community health workers for the major towns in the country. Today, the community health workers have taken up their duties and almost half of them are assigned to Ouagadougou. For the time being, however, they are under the supervision of the Ministry of Health. For the time being, the affiliation of community health workers to local authorities, to the Ouagadougou municipality, is not even on the agenda.

Food and nutritional security and environmental problems are of concern at both global and national levels. Six policies have been identified, with national policies responding to international appeals launched under the aegis of the UN by the FAO and WHO. The policies defined at international level are often very forward-looking, which makes it difficult to appropriate and apply them at local level.

-Reorientation of nutritional research towards needs at district level in the African Region (WHO 1987)
-Multisectoral nutrition strategic plan 2020 – 2024 Burkina Faso
-4th international forum of the Milan Pact on urban food policies – Ouagadougou, (February 2021)
-National roadmap for transforming food systems to support the 2030 Agenda (2021)
-International Food Safety Day (JISSA) (June 2019)
-National Agro-Silvo Pastoral Investment Plan (PNIASP) 2021-2026 (Burkina Faso)
-SADA development policy for 2020 (FAO).

These documents were assessed and used to inform key informant questions engaged with several key food system actors in Ouagadougou were engaged through a structured questionnaire designed specifically to better understand the specific respondent's role in the food system. These interviews were then expanded to include a variety of urban food growers in

the case study site. Here questions were asked in a non-structured manner, informed by observation of the respective grower's actions, production processes, and wider food system engagements.

These ethnographic engagements were then engaged within the context of other food system and urban system actions in Ouagadougou.

Economy of Ouagadougou.

The city of Ouagadougou is the economic centre of the country, derived mainly from secondary and tertiary sectors. As stipulated in the study of the National Territorial Planning and Sustainable Development Plan (MEPAT, 2018), in 2021 Burkina Faso officially had 66 industrial establishments, 34 of which are located in the city of Ouagadougou (51.51 %). In addition, at the level of GDP by region, the MEPAT (2018) shows that the increase in GDP growth rates in the Central Region (Ouagadougou) between 2005 and 2012 came mainly from the contribution of the tertiary and secondary sector, and this shows 29 .5% in 2005 compared to 30.9% in 2012 (INSD 2012). However, an in-depth analysis of the economic fabric of the city of Ouagadougou reveals the existence of a predominantly tertiary productive base (commerce and services), which represents 48% of GDP (INSD 2022). It is the main engine of growth. Economic activity is highly dependent and is mainly concentrated around the agri-food and textile sectors.

The informal sector also occupies a preponderant place in the economic fabric of the city. Its contribution to the city's economy is significant. According to data from the business house and the Burkina Chamber of Trade and Industry, the city of Ouagadougou has recorded a high number of business creations (SME/SMI) in recent years. More than sixteen thousand (16,000) new companies were created in 2021, indicating a buoyant sector offering opportunities for income generation.

Besides this, the primary sector is not left out. Urban agriculture remains a primary activity providing food and employment, particularly for vulnerable groups. Ouagadougou and its surroundings produce more than 90% of the vegetable and fruit consumed in the City, as well as creating jobs for city dwellers. According to Kêdowidé et al. (2010), there were around a hundred market gardening sites grouped in 28 zones and cultivated over an area of approximately 750ha occupied by more than 5,000 farmers and 15,000 seasonal workers.

Infrastructure in Ouagadougou

The significant increase in the population of the City of Ouagadougou has led to a growth in economic activity. This led to the establishment of commercial, sporting and social infrastructures, infrastructures are recorded in the Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (Gloux et al., 2018) report on the 2016-2018 performance. The municipality has, in particular, service delivery units made up of 40 health and social promotion centres (CSPS), 8 urban medical centres (CMU), 15 municipal high schools and 5 socio-economic units including the municipal oral health department, the Bangr Weoogo urban park, the municipal centre for the promotion of performing arts, the municipal CEEP management unit, the independent management authority for commercial facilities. In 2018, 2,756 schools, 56 CSPS and 16 sports infrastructures (stadiums) were transferred to the Municipality of Ouagadougou. The Municipality of Ouagadougou has 4 large bus stations, around a hundred commercial infrastructures and a project to build a labelled fruit and vegetable market sourcing produce from the green belt (Gloux et al., 2018). It should be noted that commercial facilities located on the perimeter of the Municipality of Ouagadougou experience variable operating conditions depending on the type of equipment. But since 2019, the Municipality of Ouagadougou has entrusted the management of its large commercial facilities (markets and bus stations) to a department called the Urban Economic Development Agency (ADEU) which has the status of directorate within the municipal administration. However, certain market infrastructures are private initiatives whose management is not the responsibility of ADEU. In addition, the Ouagadougou refrigerated slaughterhouse where the municipality is a 12% shareholder.



Figure 22: Aerial view of the western part of Ouagadougou. Opposition between well-organized subdivided spaces (top) and non-divided spaces (bottom).
(Source Fournet et al., 2008)

Food and Nutrition Security in Burkina Faso

Current Situation and Responses

Burkina Faso's nutritional status remains concerning despite recent improvements. In 2019, 25.4% of children under five were stunted, 17.3% underweight, and 8.1% wasted (National Multi-sector Nutrition Policy, 2020). The country has implemented monitoring systems for agricultural campaigns, cereal balance sheets, vulnerable populations, and markets. A food system profile plan aims to enhance sustainability through two main levers: improved governance and strengthened resilience. In Burkina Faso, data from the 2022 National Nutrition Survey, based on Standardized Monitoring and Assessment on Relief and Transitions (SMART) methodology, show that the nutritional situation is characterized by persistent malnutrition in all its forms. The highest prevalence of acute malnutrition, chronic malnutrition, and underweight were 10.6%, 37.7%, and 20.3%, respectively (Tapsoba et al, 2024). In Burkina Faso, the government's commitment to improving the nutritional status of the population through diverse governmental measures is an indication of its interest in creating a healthy food environment (Tapsoba et al, 2024)..

Nutrition Transition

Sub-Saharan Africa faces a dual challenge: persistent food insecurity and rising chronic diseases linked to urbanization and lifestyle changes. Traditional diets rich in cereals and vegetables are being replaced by energy-dense, processed foods high in fats and sugars, coupled with sedentary lifestyles. This shift has led to increased obesity, hypertension, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases, accounting for 60% of deaths and 46% of morbidity (Raynaud, 2009).

In Burkina Faso, urban areas exhibit a "double burden" of malnutrition—undernutrition alongside overweight and obesity. In Ouagadougou, 24.2% of adults are overweight/obese, with women disproportionately affected by cardiometabolic risks (Zeba et al, 2012).

Persistent Nutritional Deficiencies

Malnutrition in Burkina Faso is driven by poverty, climate shocks, insecurity, and disrupted health services. The COVID-19 pandemic and global crises, such as the war in Ukraine, have worsened food access and affordability. Common deficiencies include iron, vitamin A, iodine, zinc, folate, and vitamin B12.

Recent surveys show progress but continued challenges:

- Acute malnutrition declined from 11.3% (2009) to 9.7% (2021).
- Chronic malnutrition fell from 35.1% to 21.6%.
- Underweight dropped from 26% to 17.5% among children under five.

Micronutrient deficiencies remain high:

- Anemia affects 41% of children under five, with rural prevalence at 49%.
- Vitamin A deficiency impacts over 50% of children.
- Zinc deficiency affects 13%, higher in poorer households.
- Folate and vitamin B12 deficiencies are significant among young children.

Socioeconomic Impact

Child undernutrition costs Burkina Faso an estimated 7.7% of GDP annually through healthcare, education, and productivity losses. Stunting alone affects over half of the adult population, reducing workforce capacity and economic growth.

Key Challenges

- Combat micronutrient deficiencies.
- Promote optimal infant and young child feeding practices.
- Ensure universal access to water and sanitation.
- Strengthen governance, financing, and accountability in nutrition.

Food Diversity and Staple Foods

Cereals occupy a central place in the diet of Burkina Faso (Konkobo/Yaméogo et al., 2002). However, the values linked to their consumption and culinary practices have changed under the effect of evolving urban behaviour. New values based on a perception of modernity have led to a redistribution of local cereals. Corn, a lean cereal, is becoming the main cereal for the preparation of tô to the detriment of millet and sorghum, and its production is extending to traditionally non-producing regions. The diversification of rice-based dishes and the innovations introduced are increasingly evident in the food consumption of urban households. In addition to local cereals, there are imported cereals as well as local artisanal and industrial products. New needs for diversification are accompanied by new consumption practices. The introduction of imported industrial products that are easy to prepare (pasta, Arabic couscous, etc.) promotes the diversification of dishes and influences local culinary practices. Furthermore, economic constraints limit the number of daily preparations, leading to changes in the frequency of consumption of *tô* and rice.

Dishes based on local cereals are recomposed (*tô*), abandoned (millet couscous), or discarded (*boalboal*) in household culinary preparations. Some of these dishes have become objects of commerce for catering saleswomen. The criteria for assessing cereals essentially take into account the organoleptic characteristics of the products and those linked to culinary practices. Promoters of small agri-food businesses seem to have recognized the new demands of consumers and are putting on the market artisanal products that are easy to use and have an appropriate taste. While tubers, legumes, and vegetables occupy a secondary place in household diets, we are also observing changes in eating habits regarding these products thanks to new preservation techniques and market gardening. The popularization of *fabirama*, the diversification of dishes

based on cassava and cowpea, and innovations in the preparation of yam and cowpea couscous constitute the most significant changes. These changes, mainly guided by a search for diversification of the products consumed, result in a modification of the composition of dishes, leading to a modification of culinary practices (Konkobo/Yaméogo et al., 2002).

It also appears that food consumption in the city of Ouagadougou is evolving and diversifying not only by the dishes consumed but also by the modes of consumption: the phenomenon of eating outside the home and snacking is quite characteristic of countries in nutritional transition (Bendech et al., 2000). Danel (2002) found that for foods high in fat, compared to the consumption of cereals, the consumption seems very high, even excessive. Younger populations are most affected by the consumption of more diversified diets rich in sugars and fats. These are therefore emerging diets, distinct from the traditional diets still consumed by older populations (Becquey et al, 2010).

The Food Economy

The food economy can be defined, according to Louis Malassis (2018), as all the functional sub-sectors (agriculture, IAA, distribution, catering, "upstream" sectors) and socio-economic structures (artisanal, capitalist, cooperative, public) that contribute to the satisfaction of food needs in a given society. It analyses the food consumption model and the production model that underlies it. In Burkina Faso, the food economy generally provides employment and is central to household livelihoods, providing 56% of jobs overall, including 51% in agri-food production (Pauw et al, 2023). It constitutes 42% of GDP (INSD, 2022), which still indicates relatively low labour productivity in this sector. As for the city of Ouagadougou, it also occupies an important place in the lives of city dwellers. Generally speaking, the food economy of Ouagadougou takes the form of formal and informal, primary, secondary, and tertiary sectors.

Formal Food Economy

The formal economy obeys economic laws, respecting a division of labour and a separation between places of production, services, and housing. It is part of an ordered social space, which can hardly be other than the city located within a national economy. The formal food economy largely relates to the Agro-Food Industry (AFI), which operates within a legal framework. In Burkina Faso, formal businesses represent only 9.1% of businesses and employ less than 1% of the total workforce. However, they contribute 93.0% of the overall turnover of Burkinabè companies.

The formal private sector is embryonic and concentrated only in urban communes, mainly in Ouagadougou. In the agri-food sector, we observe the emergence of processing SMEs, driven by growing demand from national, regional, and international urban markets. The sector has few sophisticated companies active in the agricultural sector or sourcing local agricultural products. These include cotton factories (SOFITEX, FASO-COTON, and SOCOMA), industrial producers of cottonseed oil (SN-CITEC and SOFIB), a large-scale sugar company (SN-SOSUCO, which produces more than 30,000 tonnes of sugar per year for the national market and employs more than 3,000 people), flour mills (Moulin du Sahel), and the BRAKINA brewery (for which raw materials remain largely imported), as well as mines, hotels, urban supermarket chains, and food multinationals (Nestlé). These companies have little connection with smaller companies (especially food processing SMEs).

Informal Food Economy

The informal economy consists of economic activity carried out without state oversight or regulation; it meets neither registration obligations nor bookkeeping requirements, much less taxation. The Burkinabè economy relies largely on informal micro-enterprises. 90.9% of the 99,261 non-agricultural businesses (INSD, 2018) recorded are informal. In terms of company size, almost all (96.5%) are micro-enterprises (less than 10 employees; annual turnover less than 15 million FCFA). 55.4% of these companies are located in the capital, Ouagadougou, and are dominated by the food sector. Most of these companies are active in commerce (52.6%) and services (28.2%). The importance of the city's informal food economy is reflected in its strong contribution to regional GDP.

A significant portion of Ouagadougou's food consumers are households that derive their income from what is referred to as the "informal sector" or "informal economy" (Léonidas Hitimana et al., 2011). Correlatively, a significant part of the food consumption of this population is supplied by informal sectors—unobserved or poorly observed by official statistics.

For example, each sector individually is a source of job creation and wealth across the entire value chain. Thus, the poultry sector has a strong dynamic of evolution, particularly around the main cities, with the intervention of agro-industrial companies upstream (production of poultry feed), distributors, and processors downstream (sellers of live chickens and

braised chicken). In addition, according to the AIB (2022), the poultry industry allows the consumption of more than 80,000 chickens per day in the city of Ouagadougou and brings in more than 300 million FCFA to the municipal economy.
Food Access Strategies of Households

In Burkina Faso, terminologies used by city dwellers and even Burkinabè people describe the evolution of household food situations. Before the drought of 1973, people said "At the time when there was food and drink" (Charlotte Yaméogo, 1999); "continuous day"; "a Kao shot." These terminologies rhyme with the reduction in the number of preparations and subsequently the number of meals available in households per day. Thus, from three daily preparations depending on their category, households have two, one, or a few weekly or monthly preparations. This reduction in food availability by households has favoured the development of the informal food sector (SIA) in the city of Ouagadougou (Charlotte Yaméogo, 1999). SIAs promote access, individual or at household level, to a diversified diet or even satisfy the hedonic aspects of eating. Could this be the origin of the low rate of severe food insecurity in

Ouagadougou faces significant urban food security challenges due to rapid population growth and urbanization. The city's population grew from 33,000 in 1950 to over 3.2 million in 2023, with an annual increase of approximately 200,000 residents and a growth rate of 4.84%. Internally displaced persons add further pressure, with over 30,000 currently residing in the city. Food supply depends heavily on imports, including 70% of rice consumed nationally, raising concerns about quality and safety. Reports highlight the circulation of fraudulent products such as pasta, tomatoes, and cooking oils, often sold under minimal oversight.

Street food plays a vital socio-economic role. It provides income for women and youth, promotes local cuisine, and supports food tourism. Over 90% of residents consume at least one meal outside the home daily. However, the informal nature of the sector and lack of regulation expose consumers to health risks, including foodborne illnesses, contamination, and chronic diseases linked to poor-quality oils, pesticides, and additives.

Authorities are responding through awareness campaigns, inspections, and experimental models like the "Golden Restaurant" initiative. This model aims to improve food safety and hygiene through vendor training, certification, and infrastructure support, such as access to clean water and sanitation. Mobile vendors follow simplified guidelines based on the "5 Keys to Safer Food": maintain hygiene, separate raw and cooked foods, cook thoroughly, store at safe temperatures, and use safe water and ingredients.



Figure 23: A hackathon was organised in 2024 (Source: Maiga, 2024)

Case Study – Reactivating the green belt through Urban and Peri-urban Agriculture

Migrants from rural areas of Burkina Faso have sought employment in the capital's growing number of small industrial units and its service sector, while more recently the prevailing security crisis in the North, Sahel, North Central and East of the country is increasing the movement of internally displaced people towards urban centres, including Ouagadougou. The demographic explosion has been accompanied by significant food, economic and land challenges, in response to which urban and peri-urban agriculture has emerged as a partial solution. About 3,000 people, 52% of whom are women, earn their living from urban production in the urban and peri-urban area of Ouagadougou (Milan Urban Food Policy Pact Forum, 2021). Although it contributes to food security, job creation and the provision of livelihoods, and to the city's sanitation, urban agriculture is not yet acknowledged by the state and municipal authorities as an important component of the economy of Ouagadougou, due to its precarious nature. This brief document aims to look at urban and peri-urban agriculture in Ouagadougou in a holistic way, which includes discussion of its political and social aspects.

Production patterns and available services in UPA. The distribution of food production in the city of Ouagadougou is determined mainly by the availability of land and water. The city's large dams, located in Koubri and Loumbila (peri-urban area), Boulmiougou, Tanghin, Baskuy have been sites of food production since the 1920s (Bagré et al., 2002). Given the rapid population growth, and associated demand for land for housing, urban farmers struggle to access land. They therefore grow crops in the vicinity of wastewater sources (Sawadogo, 2008), in undeveloped areas or where infrastructure development is not very feasible (Bagré et al., 2002) and in the green belt that surrounds the city (Figure 24).



Figure 24: The Ouagadougou's greenbelt in Burkina Faso. (Source: Griebel, S)

Ouagadougou's greenbelt (2,100 ha in total, of which 1,050 ha are developed over a distance of 21 km and a width of 500 m), extends from the northeast of Kossodo starting from the extension of the Massili branch and crossing the Ouaga-Kaya Road to the Ouaga-Bobo Road at the West of the city (Koueta, 2019). The other 1050 hectares of Ouagadougou's greenbelt are legally (some parts have been parcelled out for housing) or illegally (informal settlements) occupied today due to urbanization and strong population growth.

Market gardening is the main form of agriculture practiced in Ouagadougou. It accounts for nearly 70% of the sown area and the remaining 30% is dedicated to horticulture and cereal growing (Robert et al., 2018). Crops grown are dependent on the season and production areas (Bellwood- Howard et al., 2015). During the rainy season, the main crops produced in urban areas are lettuce, amaranth, okra, and peanuts, whereas farmers in peri-urban villages grow cereal crops such as sorghum, maize, and millet in the same period. In the dry season urban producers grow leafy vegetables such as lettuce, amaranth, cabbage, and the peri- urban farmers grow others. Thus, urban and peri-urban farmers complement each other in food production and contribute to food diversity. Production techniques depend on the available space. According to Sy et al. (2017), most urban and peri-urban farmers practice mixed cropping (polyculture) with the aim of maximising profits on small areas of land. Monoculture is typically practiced only with fairly profitable crops, such as strawberries, produced in Boulmiougou. Horticultural production is organised with an eye to eventual sale, with plants grown in nurseries using plastic bags for easy transport to the place of sale, usually alongside major roads. Agriculture in Ouagadougou and its peri-urban area is not only centred on crop production. Farmers also keep cattle, sheep and goats, pigs, rabbits, and poultry. Due to the high consumption of chicken by city dwellers (more than 80,000 are consumed per day in Ouagadougou), poultry farming is the most common form of livestock farming. Around 93% of the farmers settled in the periphery of Ouagadougou thus combine the production of one of these species with their agricultural production activity (Bellwood-Howard et al., 2015). Depending on the nature of the agricultural inputs used in production, urban and peri-urban agriculture in Ouagadougou, the people tend to categorize it as “conventional” and “agroecological” agriculture.



Figure 25: Food production in the greenbelt

Overview of the commercialisation of market garden products.

The UPA in Ouagadougou is more oriented towards sale than private consumption (Robert et al., 2020). Agricultural products are marketed through several channels and strategies: there is domestic sale, which is based on neighbourhood and street markets; sales in the vicinity of production areas (market gardening fields/sites); and export of products to bordering countries bordering such as Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Togo to mention a few. Exported products are of higher commercial value such as strawberries (Sy et al., 2020).

There is also wholesale to hotels and restaurants in the city, who receive deliveries of organic products from urban and peri-urban livestock farmers (eggs, meat, etc.), and fruits and vegetables from market gardens in the city and on the outskirts. There are periodic fairs organised by professional associations, umbrella organizations and NGOs to facilitate the sale of agricultural products from UPA and help to integrate producers into more structured marketing networks and circuits. In terms of distribution, in most cases it is the producers themselves who take their products to the city markets in small quantities on their own motorbikes and bicycles. Some of the farmers increasingly use digital technology for marketing, e.g., associations like La Saisonnière, contact their customers via WhatsApp when products are available, organise deliveries, but still prefer a marketing policy that customers visit the urban farm to see produce quality and to socialise with the female farmers. Initiatives like mobile markets or online fresh produce markets (such as Ouagayaar or zinbis yaar) could give a boost to urban producers wanting to reach a wider market. Although processing is important to minimize losses and add value to agricultural products, products from UPA in Ouagadougou are rarely processed, and only to a limited extent. This could be maybe explained by the fact that production is small-scale, but also by the lack of expertise.



Figure 26: Food production in the Ouagadougou green belt

Barriers to UPA.

There is a lack of legal and regulatory framework – UPA is neither officially recognised nor prohibited in the city. As such, there is no official law regulating it, but there are incoherent pieces of legislation such as the Agrarian and Land Reorganization Act (1996) that prohibits farming, and the Urban Development Master Plan for 'Grand Ouaga' (1999) that allows farming on condition that the municipal authority can repossess the land for infrastructure projects (Robert et al., 2020). This creates confusing conditions that are detrimental to the development of the sector (Sy et al., 2017).

Access to land is the main barrier to the development of UPA in Ouagadougou. Urban farmers live with the fear of being dispossessed of their land by the municipality, whether they are owners or tenants. Most producers do not have secure access to land. Land security is reserved and granted by customary chiefs, heirs and the municipality, who are the main holders of land control rights. Only 20% of the farmers have a property right on their production land. The majority have a temporary acquired right. This temporary acquisition can be done by renting (an area of 240 m2 is rented for 39 euros per year) or by loan (the landowner gives his land to the producer because he is not yet ready to develop it) (Sy et al., 2017). Only a few well-organised associations (La Saisonnière, Beo-Neere, etc.) are legally established on their production sites with documents acquired from the local council.

Access to water is a barrier –farming in Ouagadougou began around the dams initially intended to supply the city with drinking water. This need has intensified with the population growth, leaving less water available for agricultural purposes. During common water shortages from February/ March until July; the dams dry up, making farming activity difficult. Farmers say they dig wells up to 15 metres deep or pay for water. The difficulty of accessing quality water leads some farmers to settle around wastewater sources (Sawadogo, 2008), resulting in 75% of farmers using wastewater to irrigate crops (Ouedraogo et al., 2018). Although the use of wastewater increases soil phosphorus and potassium levels, which improves soil fertility and crop yields, it raises public health concerns and has adverse effects on plants, animals and humans. Farmers in prolonged contact with this wastewater complain of dermatitis, dry skin and cracked feet. Some consumers report parasitic and diarrhoeal diseases (Ouedraogo et al., 2018).

Market access - Market accessibility remains a major challenge for agroecological farmers. According to them, consumers prefer conventionally produced food of lower price. So, instead of selling at a loss, they try to raise awareness of the nutritional and health value of their products and organise weekly sales to create a market niche.

Expensive agricultural equipment and inputs– Most farmers in Ouagadougou have a very low income. They cannot afford equipment and inputs (seeds, fertilisers, pesticides, etc.). For example, in 2021 we visited a site where there were just two watering cans shared between a dozen farmers. In response to our question as to why, a farmer explained that a quality watering can cost 10,000 CFA francs, which he said is the equivalent of several days of household food.

Opportunities for the future of UPA.

Urban agriculture in Ouagadougou is a source of income for farmers, job creation, environmental management and it contributes to the food security of vulnerable urban dwellers (Sy et al., 2017). Urban agriculture has the potential to mitigate climate change effects and desertification. The African Union has been implementing the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and Sahel project since 2007 to combat the effects of climate change and the advancing desert in Africa. It is an initiative that aims to transform the lives of millions of people by creating a mosaic of green and productive ecosystems in North Africa, the Sahel and the Horn of Africa. Urban architect David Zouré, promotes urban agriculture in Sahelian cities and refers to the green belt in Ouagadougou as a practical case of using urban agriculture in a greening approach. The green belt was created to protect the city from wind and dust to control wind and water erosion, but also to create jobs and to provide rest and recreation areas for the inhabitants. It has subsequently been neglected, but the Ouagadougou City Council has recently undertaken a programme to reforest it, using an urban agroforestry approach. This approach includes transforming the so far illegally run market gardens at the green belt into official market gardens. These gardeners are now responsible to take care of their gardens while maintaining and ensuring the survival of the trees planted for the reforestation of the green belt. In this way, horticulture, market gardening and forestry go hand in hand, each ensuring the sustainability of the other. Urban agriculture could also supply fresh food to schools. In Burkina Faso, the school meals lack nutrition diversity and key micronutrients. None of the feeding programmes serve fruit, raw vegetables, or fresh vegetables from market gardening (Garrido and Sánchez, 2015). In the past few years, the government has committed to provide at least one balanced meal a day for every school-age child. This could be an opportunity for urban and peri- urban agriculture.

Local producers will provide the food for the canteens (in accordance with the new guide for the management of school canteens); this will increase agricultural production capacity (cereals, vegetables, milk, etc.). The "Mangeons bien, mangeons

sain" project initiated by the Ouagadougou City Council, which is an awareness-raising and training on nutritional standards and good hygiene practices and food standards in schools, would be a solid anchor to encourage urban populations to consume what they produce. Urban farmers could benefit from the market access opportunities offered by digital technology. Owners of online shops that specialise in selling fresh agricultural products (Zinbiss Yaar) seem to buy more from urban farmers. At the municipal level, the creation of the e-commerce platform Ouagayaar to increase the economic dynamism and visibility of social and solidarity-based enterprises, is an asset for urban farmers seeking a wider market.

Conclusion

Ouagadougou faces a complex nutritional landscape marked by persistent undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, and a growing prevalence of overweight and obesity. These challenges are driven by poverty, climate shocks, insecurity, and rapid urbanization, which have disrupted food systems and altered dietary patterns toward energy-dense, processed foods. The double burden of malnutrition—where undernutrition coexists with rising chronic diseases—poses significant health and economic risks, costing Burkina Faso an estimated 7.7% of GDP annually through reduced productivity and increased healthcare expenditures.

Urban and peri-urban agriculture (UPA) emerges as one of a number of potential solutions to these intertwined challenges. UPA contributes to food security by supplying fresh vegetables, fruits, and animal products, which are essential for improving dietary diversity and addressing micronutrient gaps. It also creates jobs, supports livelihoods, and strengthens local economies, particularly for vulnerable groups such as women and youth. Moreover, UPA can play a strategic role in climate adaptation and environmental management through initiatives like the revitalization of Ouagadougou's green belt, which combines horticulture, market gardening, and agroforestry to enhance sustainability.

Despite its potential, UPA faces barriers including insecure land tenure, limited access to water and inputs, and weak market integration. Addressing these constraints through supportive policies, investment in infrastructure, and digital marketing platforms can unlock UPA's full capacity to provide safe, nutritious food for urban populations. Integrating UPA into school feeding programs and municipal food strategies would further strengthen its role in combating malnutrition and fostering resilient, inclusive food systems. In this way, urban agriculture offers not only a pathway to improved nutrition but also a lever for sustainable urban development in Ouagadougou.

Given these limitations, the vibrancy of the informal food sector, the critical need for investment in city scale food system infrastructure need to be seen as complimentary food systems actions needed in Ouagadougou. UPA is just one component of a basket of interventions needed to address the intertwined challenges of poverty, insecurity, the nutrition transition and a dietary transition.

Based on this the following actions are recommended:

1. Strengthen Governance and Decentralization
    - Improve the capacity of local authorities to manage public services and food systems effectively by addressing gaps in governance, financing, and accountability. This includes implementing the 2040 decentralization vision and ensuring adequate resources for municipal bodies.

2. Enhance Urban and Peri-Urban Agriculture (UPA)
    - Legal Framework: Develop clear policies to officially recognize and regulate UPA, resolving contradictions in existing laws and securing land tenure for farmers.
    - Access to Resources: Invest in water infrastructure and affordable agricultural inputs to reduce reliance on wastewater and improve food safety.
    - Market Integration: Support agroecological farmers through awareness campaigns, structured marketing networks, and digital platforms like Ouagayaar and Zinbiss Yaar.
    - School Feeding Programs: Integrate UPA into municipal food strategies and school canteens to improve nutrition diversity and create stable markets for local producers.

3. Address Nutritional Challenges
    - Scale up interventions to combat micronutrient deficiencies (iron, vitamin A, iodine, zinc, folate, B12) and promote optimal infant and young child feeding practices.
    - Develop targeted programs to tackle the double burden of malnutrition—undernutrition alongside rising obesity and chronic diseases—through education and healthier food environments.

4. Improve Food Safety and Hygiene
   - Expand initiatives like the "Golden Restaurant" model to train street food vendors, certify compliance, and provide infrastructure for clean water and sanitation.
   - Strengthen regulatory oversight to reduce circulation of fraudulent and unsafe food products in informal markets.

5. Invest in Food System Infrastructure
   - Develop city-scale infrastructure for food storage, processing, and distribution to reduce losses and improve food quality.
   - Support small-scale processing units to add value to UPA products and minimize post-harvest losses.

6. Promote Digital and Inclusive Food Economy
   - Encourage digital marketing and e-commerce platforms for local producers to expand market reach and visibility.
   - Foster inclusive economic policies that strengthen both formal and informal food sectors, recognizing their complementary roles in food security

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Cape Town Background

Author: Thandi Mancoba and Gareth Haysom

Cape Town is the second largest City in South Africa. In 2021 the Western Cape Government reported Cape Town's population, the Cape Town Municipal Area per the 2000 Cape Metropolitan Area designation, to be 4,758,433 made up of 1,303,988 households (PGWC, 2021). This population size and its spatial relationship can be contextualised by the fact that the population density of the Western Cape Province is 55 persons per km^2 while for Cape Town, this is 1 915 persons per km^2 (PGWC, 2021), with significant variability in density being experienced, with informal areas being extremely dense while wealthier suburbs far less so when compared to the demographics of the largest city in South Africa, Johannesburg.

The City of Cape Town remains entrenched in an apartheid city typology with exclusion and significant inequality present. Currently (as of 2024) there is a distinct strategy to attempt to densify the city. This is evident in both the 2012 Densification Strategy, but also, a clear strategic focus of the City of Cape Town's Metropolitan Spatial Development Framework (MSDF). The reasons for this are diverse but managing infrastructure costs is arguably the key driver of this. Addressing the racialized spatial legacies is also argued to be a key motivator for increased densification in the City's urban inner core.

There has been an increase in the number of households in Cape Town. Households grew from an estimated 1,07 million in 2011 to 1,46 million in 2021. The Cape Town housing market, including both private and public housing developers, have lagged and not been able to meet the demand for housing. The City of Cape Town suggests that this is the reason for "a growing number of informal dwellings in the city" (CCT, 2022). The current spatial trends released for 2025, suggest that there has been a 49% increase in informal settlement structures over the past 5 years. However, other stakeholders suggest that the slow pace is impacted by the slow release of land (Cogger & Park-Ross, 2022), skewed land prices and limited access to land for housing (Cogger & Park-Ross, 2022), competing interests and land speculation (Leitner & Sheppard, 2022; Cogger & Park-Ross, 2022; Eidelman, 2021; Ferreira & Visser, 2007).

Cape Town has many infrastructure assets that give its economy a comparative advantage, but due to the legacy of separate and exclusionary development, these do not necessarily facilitate equitable access to infrastructure and services (CCT, 2022).

Unlike other African countries, informal employment, on average, contributes only 11% to total employment in Cape Town (CCT, 2023). In addition to this, the current policy environment is hostile toward informal traders (Skinner and Haysom, 2016). The goods and services provided through the informal economy are important in providing access to goods and services for the most vulnerable residents, including food, childcare and transport services (Tawodzera, 2019).

In 2020, 1,5 million individuals in Cape Town were employed while 429,128 were unemployed but searching for work. These figures do not account for alternative, non-formal employment, but these figures are significantly lower than in most other southern African cities. Although Cape Town's broad unemployment rate has remained lower than any of the other metros, the 30,2% recorded in the third quarter of 2021 is the city's highest recording since 2008 (EPIC, 2020).

South Africa has taken considerable strides to improve the well-being of its citizens since its transition to democracy in the mid-1990s, but progress has stagnated in the last decade, with significant regression as a result of COVID-19. The percentage of the population living below the upper-middle-income country poverty line fell from 68% to 56% between 2005 and 2010 but has since trended slightly upwards, to 57% in 2015, and is projected to have reached 62.7% in 2023 (World Bank, 2023).

South Africa remains a dual economy with one of the highest and most persistent inequality rates in the world, and a consumption expenditure Gini coefficient of 0.67 in 2018. High inequality is perpetuated by a legacy of exclusion and the nature of economic growth, which is not pro-poor and does not generate sufficient jobs. Inequality in wealth is even higher, and intergenerational mobility is low, meaning inequalities are passed down from generation to generation with little change over time (World Bank, 2023).

On a policy level, despite claims of integrated policy approaches, the reality is that South African food security governance remains deeply embedded in a production-as-solution approach, which overlooks the fact that South Africa is over 65%

urbanised. This rural- and production-oriented approach to food security is not only in misalignment with the challenge, but it also draws fiscal resources into largely redundant programmes.

The food system is complex and characterised by interaction and interdependence with other systems such as health, social security, resources, economic opportunity, spatial planning, the state of agriculture and the environment. The operation of this dynamic system determines the availability, access, utilisation and stability of the supply of food.

What both City and Provincial strategies have sought to achieve is to activate food and nutrition actions in processes that can ensure both policy and fiscal embedding. In the case of the City of Cape Town, this was effectively done with the inclusion of the Food Strategy in the Integrated Development Plan and in the Municipal Spatial Development Framework.

However, for most Cape Town residents, precarious employment and the need to access food is a constant challenge. The food system of Cape Town reflects many flaws and limitations of the state.

From a food and nutrition perspective, severe food insecurity across the Western Cape Province was more prevalent in the City of Cape Town and Central Karoo District, where 18% and 17%, respectively, of the households, were severely food insecure, and above 5% experienced severe hunger, as determined by HFIAS and HHS. Additionally, households from the City of Cape Town region had poor diets and the lowest dietary diversity, with 5% of the households found to have consumed poor diets (Simelane et al, 2023).

The provincial prevalence of overall stunting, wasting, and underweight in children aged 0-5 years is 42.4%, 4.2%, and 6.6% respectively, compared to 26.3%, 2.1% and 4.5% in 2012. These results indicate that the proportion of children experiencing acute undernutrition has increased over the past 10 years Simelane et al, 2023).

Over the same period, the combined prevalence of overweight and obesity in adult females has increased slightly from 62.4% to 69.2%, while that of adult males have increased slightly from 43.0% to 44.2%. Among adults, the City of Cape Town and Overberg recorded the highest prevalence of combined overweight and obesity, both at more than 63% (Simelane et al, 2023).

Using only figures to understand the food and nutrition context in Cape Town overlooks the agency of poor urban residents in Cape Town to counter or mitigate such challenges. The next section focuses on a single case study site to reflect on how different food system actors engage such adversity. The report starts by locating the case study site and then engages the lived realities of two unique food system operators.

Methodology

This report involved three different methods. The first involved a desk top review of the existing AfriFOODlinks reports on the City of Cape Town, used here to provide context and background to support the deeper, more engaged work that follows. The second and third process involved a rigorous process of in-depth interviews.

For the in-depth interviews, potential respondents were identified through a process of deep immersion into the City of Cape Town food system. Here prospective respondents were identified through this immersive process. The immersive process involved what could be described as participant observation where one author spent an estimated 35 hours observing the Langa food system. These observations involved acting as a client, buying foods from key vendors and while doing so, engaging them on their processes, how they prepared the food and their daily challenges. These processes of engagement built relationships and trust (Musante & DeWalt, 2010). At no time during this participant observation process was data collected. Additionally, in this time socio-spatial, and other care related infrastructural interactions and engagements were observed. Different types of vendors and vendor areas, and food types were engaged through this process.

This process allowed for the generation of a set of context-specific, and wider food system-related, questions. These questions were to serve as the initial questions asked of key informants in the in-depth interview process (Morris, 2015).

The participant observation process also allowed for the identification of key informants. The criteria for selection of a key informant was based on three factors: the ability of the informant to offer robust detail on the food systems of a specific context and food retail typology. Second was the knowledge held by the targeted key informant, knowledge about the food system but also, the food system's intersection with the wider local and urban system. The final criteria was a sense that the respondent would be willing to engage in such a process.

Once a food systems actor was identified, they were involved and asked if they would be willing to participate in the study. This engagement and the recruitment of respondents aligned with the AfriFOODlinks Ethics, Values and Integrity protocols that served as part of the AfriFOODlinks ethics process. Respondents were advised that their participation in the process was voluntary and that they could exit at any time. Further respondents were advised that if required, they would be anonymised, and that responses offered would not be linked to them in any way. In the case of the respondents whose voices are used in the later sections of this report. All respondents wanted their names used. Signed authorisations are held in a secure lockable cabinet in the office of the lead researcher.

The final stage of the process involved a process of in-depth interviews. Here the identified respondents were engaged and asked the questions that had been formulated through the participant observations process. The answers to these questions were recorded and then reviewed. Following the analysis of the first round of responses, further questions were generated and the researcher returned to the respondents, questions were asked and again recorded. Again, responses were analysed and further questions generated and posed to the respondents. This iterative process continued until no new questions emerged (Morris, 2015). At all times during this process, respondents were asked if the time and the duration of the questions were acceptable. Additionally, respondents have seen the reports drafted from this process and agree with the content. Aspects of these in-depth interviews are included verbatim in the text that follows (Morris, 2015).

Langa – a background

Although Langa literally means "sun" in Xhosa, the name of the township is derived from the name of Langalibalele – a chief who in 1873 was imprisoned on Robben Island for rebelling against the Natal government. Various prominent people fought for his release, and he was subsequently confined to a farm called "Uitvlugt", which is on the site of present-day Pinelands. Langa, which adjoins Pinelands, commemorates this folk hero as it was developed in 1898 on the land known as "Langalibalele's Location". Hence Langa is often called "Kwa-Langa" meaning "place of Langa" (Figure 27).



Figure 27: Langa site with project sites detailed (Source: SAUFFT, 2024)

Langa was originally designed in a way to allow the authorities maximum visibility and control of residents. In the early years local laws prohibiting the brewing of sorghum beer (*utywala*) was strongly resented and in the 1930s prohibition was abolished in the area with the construction of municipal beer halls taking place in 1945. However, the close living conditions of residents in Langa promoted a high degree of neighbourliness and the creation of broader African institutions that promoted a greater sense of community cohesion.

On 30 March 1960 Langa was the starting point for a march of between 30,000 and 50,000 protesters to Caledon Square police station in Cape Town led by Philip Kgosana and the Pan Africanist Congress to protest the apartheid-era pass laws (SAHO, 2014).

Langa has a sizable informal food sector that plays a role in the social and community development of the area and contributes to providing livelihood opportunities. However, the informal sector actors, including food actors, operate in conditions with poor and limited infrastructure, amenities and services such as bathrooms, shelter, storage facilities, waste disposal and face more crime and insecurity.

Traders in Langa

An assessment of the traders in Langa showed that 57% of the traders were female and 43% were male. This contrasts with the socio-economic profile of all Langa residents, where 50.7% are female, indicating a higher proportion of female traders in this environment. Among meat traders, over two-thirds (68%) were female. All the smiley traders sampled were female (UEDE, 2024)

Traders were asked to list the primary difficulties they faced in their role as traders, difficulties that constrained their ability to grow and impeded the expansion of their companies. As a result of their encouragement to identify a variety of problems and challenges.

The two main issues that the traders pointed out were crime and the expense of storage and transportation. Costs associated with storage and transportation accounted for 31.7% of all obstacles mentioned; storage-related issues predominated over transportation-related issues. Trader stalls were typically either mobile, requiring them to keep their inventory off-site, or they were affected by crime, making it impossible for them to store their inventory safely on-site.

A study of the traders found that 93% of meat traders expressed a need for shelter, which is crucial for protecting both traders and their products from weather conditions. This is particularly significant during rainy periods when some traders are unable to operate, resulting in income loss during winter months. However, designing shelters for cooked meat traders presents challenges, as they require ventilation for smoke from open flames. Chimneys are therefore essential in the design concept to address health and safety concerns associated with smoke exposure. Refrigeration (76%) and access to electricity (62%) were identified as the second and third most essential utilities among meat traders. These utilities are closely linked, supporting the cold storage of meat, whether through freezing or refrigeration. Many traders reported insufficient storage at home, with some needing larger storage spaces. While some traders freeze their meat supplies, others, especially *shisanyama* traders, prefer purchasing fresh meat daily to maintain product quality.

Sixty-two percent of meat traders indicated a need for storage, often opting to take valuable stock home due to security concerns, despite having lockable stalls. Only 10% of traders considered their current storage adequate, with the remaining 90% requiring more space. Thirty-eight percent expressed a need for running water, reflecting the limited availability of water points around the taxi rank, where traders typically gather. Similarly, 38% highlighted the need for toilets, underscoring the challenges faced in accessing these basic facilities.

These findings underscore the infrastructure challenges faced by meat traders in Langa and emphasize the critical role of supportive design interventions to improve their working conditions and operational efficiency.

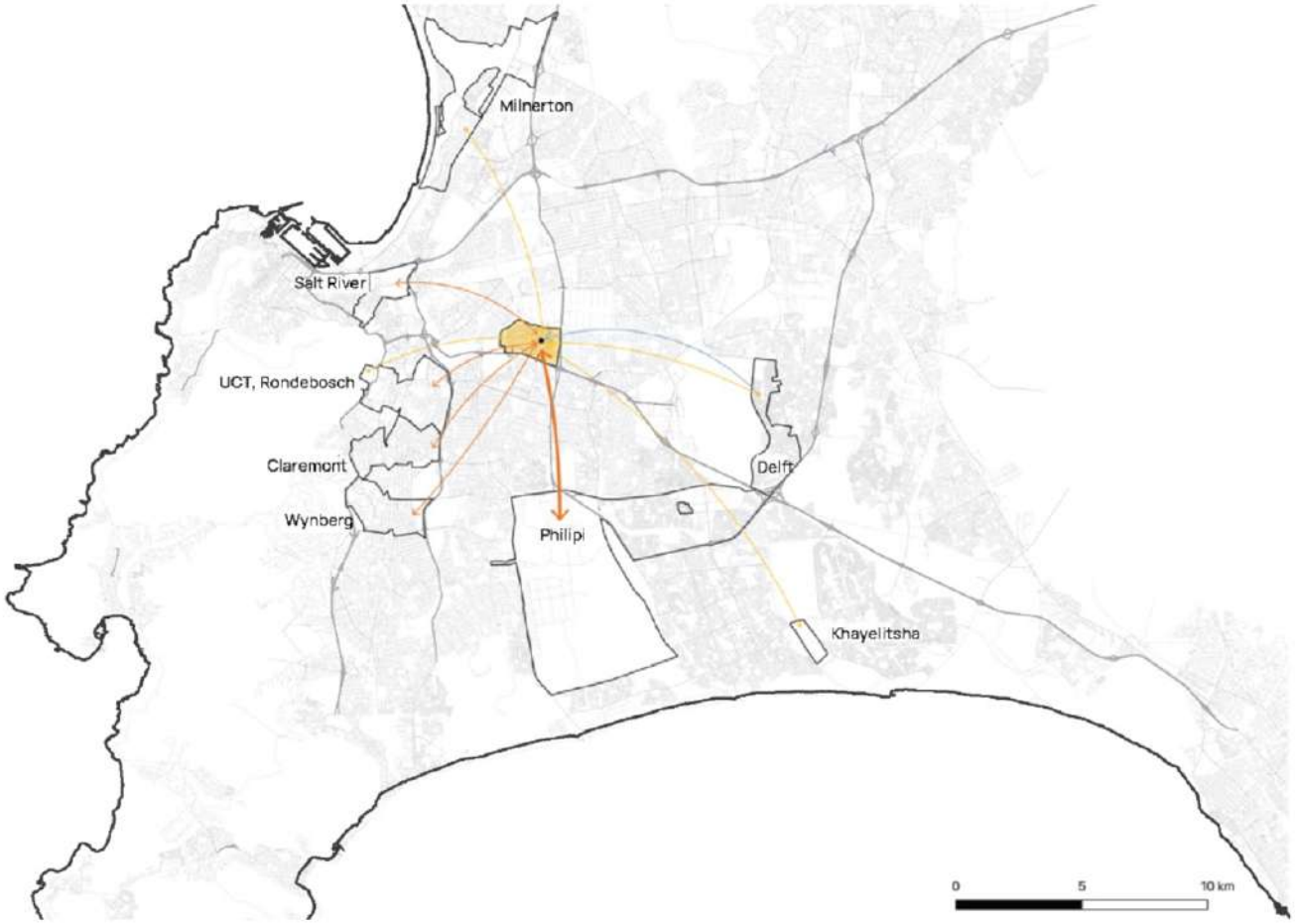


Figure 28: Location of surrounding areas where trader goods are sourced (Source: Yes& Studio)

Case Study: The Smiley Market

Located on a narrow road reserve between housing, civic buildings, and a major historic thoroughfare in Langa, Cape Town, the Smiley Market has operated as an informal meat market known for preparing and selling sheep heads, a culturally significant dish within Xhosa communities since the 1980s. The Smiley Market consists of six women traders operating across four stalls. Traders at the Smiley market have established a longstanding micro-economy, in some cases inheriting the trade from their mothers. The traders, despite their tenure, operate in precarious conditions. The site lacks basic infrastructure such as water and waste services, and it sits on contested public land (Figure 29). Cooking is done over open fires using wood stored in makeshift piles (Figure 30). Waste, especially soot and ashes, is disposed of on-site, slowly altering the terrain conditions and contributing to the deterioration of the space over time. Persistent challenges included waste management, lack of water access, health and safety concerns resulting from cooking on an open flame, lack of refrigerated storage and electricity and lack of infrastructure to safely dispose of wastewater.

Langa's informal trading spaces and food networks are a defining feature of the area's economic and cultural fabric



Figure 29: Meat trader location (marked in yellow) along Rhodes Drive – note informality and proximity to through traffic

However, the market faces growing challenges, including waste management issues, inefficient layouts, and a lack of basic services, necessitating an upgrade that ensures traders can operate with dignity and efficiency.



Figure 30: Recycled wood stored on the trader site

This site is located at the bottom of the avenue, a popular tourism node. The meat market itself currently comprises makeshift structures for traders to utilize in cutting up, preparing and cooking meat, with large stockpiles of wood used to make fires to cook (Figure 30). There is no access to electricity, water or ablution facilities, or means to dispose of organic waste. The current storage facility is unsecured resulting in inappropriate wood (and other building materials) being dumped on the stockpiles exacerbating the environmental health and food hygiene concerns and compromising the dignity of the traders.



Figure 31: Sheep heads being delivered to the market site

The Smiley Market stands as a vibrant testament to the resilience and cultural richness of the local community. Consisting of six traders operating across four stalls, the market specialises in the sale of "smileys," a traditional South African dish made from sheep or goat heads.

The Smiley Market has been a fixture in the Langa area since the 1980s. Its establishment coincided with a significant period in South African history, during which many black women, marginalised by apartheid's oppressive policies, sought economic opportunities within townships. These segregated areas, built on the urban margins, became hubs of entrepreneurial activity. The market's origins are deeply intertwined with the struggle for economic independence and the quest for a better life amidst systemic challenges.

In the 1980s, Langa was a place of both hardship and hope. Women, often the backbone of their families, sought ways to generate income in an economy that offered them few opportunities. The Smiley Market emerged from this environment.

The Smiley Market operates with a structured system for sourcing, preparing, and selling smileys. Traders procure smileys from suppliers a few kilometres away, using bakkies for transportation.

A notable aspect of the market's operation is the involvement of unemployed individuals who often struggle with substance addiction, assisting in collecting water and cleaning smileys. This relationship, while fraught with its challenges, underscores the market's role in the broader community, providing not just economic opportunities but also a sense of purpose and inclusion.

Each day at the market begins with traders arriving to prepare their stalls and start the labour-intensive process of cleaning and cooking the sheep heads (Figure 31). Later in the day, the market begins attracting customers from all walks of life. Table 1 details the daily activities.

Preparation Process	Actions and cautions
Pre-cleaning:	Use metal shears to trim the longest wool from the sheep heads. Cut off tufts of wool until the heads are mostly clean.
Wool removal	Place the cleaned heads on a fire. Periodically remove the heads from the fire to rub off the remaining wool using steel wool. Be careful not to burn yourself. Balance the heads on plastic crates while scraping to avoid burning your flesh. Return the heads to the fire and repeat this process until the heads are nearly naked.
Searing the skin	Use a hot, flat metal rod to sear the sheep's skin. Smoke will rise from the heads during this process. Be cautious as the metal presses into the flesh, emitting a sharp squeak. Be careful not to burn yourself. This step may require nimble and decisive movements.
Final cleaning	Scrub the heads clean in large pots of water. Split open the heads with an axe. Remove and discard the brain. Boil the heads in a large pot for two hours. Serve or display the prepared sheep heads for customers.
Serve or sell	Customers will eat standing along the street edge, enjoying the meal with a cool drink and loaf of bread brought from the neighbouring spaza shop

Table 1: Daily Smiley preparation and retail activities

Sheep heads are sourced from butcheries in Salt River, a nearby neighbourhood but one that requires transport and logistics to ensure delivery (Figure 32).



Figure 32: Diagram illustrating the different systems that occur at the smiley market. (Source: Yes& Studio)

Challenges and Opportunities

Operating in a relatively small and constrained space, the Smiley Market faces several challenges. Theft of firewood used to cook the sheep heads and theft of the metal used to burn the fur off are significant issues. Even though they get assistance from unemployed youth in the community to chop wood and help with various tasks, the youth can sometimes be unreliable. The market structure itself is vulnerable, exposing traders to harsh weather conditions and health risks from constant exposure to smoke. There is also the issue of safety as the women are sometimes required to work until late in the day to sell as many smileys as they can. Despite these challenges, the Smiley Market in Langa has the potential for growth through tourism and continued community support.

For women like Nonkanyiso and Nouniform, the market is not just a place of business but a lifeline that provides for their families and empowers them to overcome the adversities they face.

Beyond the economic benefits, the Smiley Market fosters a sense of community and mutual support. The traders share a bond, often helping each other through tough times. This camaraderie extends to their customers.

As the market looks to the future, there are opportunities for growth and development. Increased tourism and greater community support can help enhance the market's infrastructure and provide better working conditions for the traders.

Faith Sotondoshe

Faith, while not a Smiley trader, echoes the hopes and aspirations of many food system actors. Faith envisions a future where the government plays a more active role in supporting small businesses like hers.

"I believe that with better networking and collaboration opportunities, funding, and youth development programs, the community of Langa could thrive even more," she stated.

Faith hopes that the government will recognize the importance of small businesses in driving economic growth and community development and provide the necessary support to help them succeed.

Nouniform Ntshinka

A remarkable woman at the Smiley Market is Nouniform, who started selling there in 1999. She works to support her children and put them through school.

"Three of my four children have passed matric, and one is almost done with school," she proudly shares.

According to her, the money she makes at the market has provided for all her needs. She can travel home to the Eastern Cape when she likes, has funeral policies, can take herself to the doctor when she is sick and can feed her family while putting her children through school.

"I have never been employed since arriving in Langa in 1999. The market is all I know," says Nouniform.

For Nouniform, the market represents stability and self-sufficiency. Her income from selling smileys has enabled her to build a life for her family. She emphasises the importance of education, noting that her earnings have not only allowed her children to complete their schooling but also to aspire to careers that were once beyond their reach.

"The market has given me all I need," she reflects. "It's not just about making a living; it's about creating opportunities for my children."

Nonkanyiso Krele

Nonkanyiso Krele has been selling sheep heads at the market since 1991. Now 60 years old, she has seen many women traders come and go, but she remains a steadfast presence. When she first started selling at the market in 1991, it was across the road from where it is currently located. The ladies then cleared grass across the street and moved when they

were asked to relocate. According to Nonkanyiso, the lack of job opportunities and the need to make a living brought her to the market.

"Jobs are very scarce, especially for people like me who are not educated. Instead of just sitting and doing nothing, I used the market to ensure my family has food to eat and my children and grandchildren can go to school," says Nonkanyiso.

The job of cleaning and selling sheep heads is very challenging, and the ladies often struggle with health issues from the smoke, rain, and wind in a structure that is not fully covered and practically falling apart.

Nonkanyiso's story is one of unwavering determination. Despite the physical demands of her work and the harsh conditions she endures, she remains committed to providing for her family. Her perseverance has enabled her children and grandchildren to pursue education and build better futures for themselves.

"The market is my lifeline," she says.

"It's hard work, but it's worth it when I see my family thriving.





Figure 33 & 34: View of Smiley market area prior to site cleaning in early 2025 and the Smiley Market after the clearing of ash and timber, utilising new oven prototypes

Conclusion

Cape Town's urban and food system dynamics reflect the deep-rooted legacies of apartheid spatial planning, persistent inequality, and structural economic challenges. Despite being South Africa's second-largest city and a hub of economic activity, Cape Town faces significant pressures related to housing shortages, infrastructure constraints, and socio-economic vulnerability. The city's densification strategies aim to address these issues, yet progress remains slow due to competing interests, land speculation, and systemic inefficiencies in housing delivery. These challenges intersect with food security concerns, where urban poverty, precarious employment, and limited access to affordable, nutritious food exacerbate vulnerability among residents.

The case study of the Smiley Market in Langa illustrates the resilience and agency of informal food system actors operating under adverse conditions. Women traders at the market have created a micro-economy that sustains livelihoods and fosters community cohesion, despite facing infrastructural deficits, health risks, and insecurity. Their stories underscore the critical role of informal markets in urban food systems and highlight the need for inclusive policy interventions that recognize and support these actors. Improving access to basic services, secure trading spaces, and targeted development programs can enhance the dignity and sustainability of such enterprises.

Ultimately, addressing Cape Town's food and nutrition challenges requires a shift from production-centric policies toward integrated urban strategies that prioritize equity, resilience, and local agency. Strengthening informal food networks, embedding food security in spatial planning, and fostering collaboration between government, private sector, and communities are essential steps toward creating a more inclusive and sustainable urban food system.

The following recommendations are proposed:

1. Urban Planning and Infrastructure
    - Accelerate Densification Efforts: Implement the City of Cape Town's Spatial Development Framework and Densification Strategy more aggressively to reduce infrastructure costs and address apartheid-era spatial inequalities. Ensure densification includes affordable housing options to curb informal settlement growth.
    - Improve Basic Services for Informal Traders: Provide essential infrastructure such as shelter, ventilation systems, refrigeration, electricity, running water, and toilets for traders in areas like Langa. This will enhance food safety, reduce health risks, and improve operational efficiency.
    - Design Secure Storage Solutions: Develop lockable, weather-resistant storage facilities to reduce theft and protect inventory, addressing one of the most significant challenges faced by traders.

2. Food System and Nutrition
    - Integrate Urban Food Security into Policy: Shift from a rural production-focused approach to an urban food security strategy that reflects South Africa's 65% urbanization rate. Allocate fiscal resources to urban food programs embedded in municipal planning.
    - Address Severe Food Insecurity and Malnutrition: Target interventions in hotspots like Cape Town and Central Karoo where severe food insecurity and poor dietary diversity are prevalent. Expand nutrition programs for children to combat rising stunting and undernutrition rates.
    - Promote Healthy Diets and Obesity Prevention: Develop community-based education and support programs to address the growing prevalence of overweight and obesity among adults, particularly in Cape Town and Overberg.

3. Economic Development and Informal Sector Support
    - Create Supportive Policy Environment for Informal Traders: Reform regulations that are hostile to informal traders and provide incentives for small businesses. This includes reducing bureaucratic barriers and offering microfinance or grants for infrastructure improvements.
    - Youth Development and Skills Training: Introduce programs that engage unemployed youth in structured roles within food systems, offering training and pathways to employment beyond informal assistance.

4. Governance and Collaboration
    - Strengthen Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration: Foster partnerships between government, NGOs, and private sector actors to support small businesses, improve food security, and enhance infrastructure in vulnerable areas.
    - Embed Food Strategies in Municipal Planning: Continue integrating food and nutrition strategies into the Integrated Development Plan and Spatial Development Framework to ensure long-term sustainability.

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Annexures

Qualitative Survey – Central Market of Tunis City

Section 1. General Information

Name (optional):
Gender:
Age:

Section 2. Installation and activity conditions

2.1. How long have you been operating in this location?
2.2. What type(s) of products do you sell?
2.3. Where do you usually source your supplies?
2.4. Do you encounter any difficulties in obtaining your supplies? If yes, what kind?
2.5. How did you obtain your current selling space or location?
2.6. Do you pay any fees or taxes to the local council or market authorities?
If yes: what is the amount or frequency? What obligations or benefits are associated with this payment?

Section 3. Questions by Type of Actor

3.1. Formal Traders (inside the Central Market)

How would you describe the presence of other traders (formal, informal, or those operating in free spaces around the market)?
Does their presence affect your sales or business activity? If yes, how? (Please give examples.)
What is your opinion of the municipality's decision to allocate free spaces to certain traders?
In your view, what measures or solutions could help restore a fair balance among traders?

3.2. Informal Traders (outside or around the Market)

What motivated you to work informally rather than operating inside the market?
What difficulties do you face in your daily activity?
Have you ever tried to obtain an official stall inside the market?
If yes, what challenges or obstacles did you encounter?
If not, why?
How would you describe your relationship with traders inside the market?
Have you ever been involved in a conflict or tension with other traders? If yes, how was it resolved?
What is your opinion about possible regulation or formalization of your activity?

3.3. Traders Benefiting from Free Spaces Allocated by the Municipality

Can you describe the process through which you obtained your current space?
What conditions or criteria are attached to this allocation?
How would you describe your coexistence with other traders (formal and informal)?
Have you experienced tension, criticism, or conflict with other traders? If yes, could you give an example?
What changes or measures would you suggest to reduce tension and improve coexistence?

3.4. Representative of the Municipality of Tunis

Could you describe how the Central Market currently operates (organization, regulation, main activities)?
What are the main categories of traders operating inside and around the market?
How are market spaces or pitches officially allocated? Are there also informal arrangements or practices?
In your opinion, what are the main management challenges facing the Central Market today?
What changes or trends have you observed in recent years in the commercial dynamics surrounding the market?