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# Alternative food networks and food insecurity in South Africa

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## PLAAS Working Paper 33: Alternative food networks and food insecurity in South Africa

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## ABSTRACT

Food security remains a persistent global challenge. Inequality means that food insecurity is disproportionately experienced. Despite positive shifts in the state of food security at a global scale, recent reports from the Food and Agricultural Organisation suggest that in Africa the total number of undernourished people continues to increase. The paper argues that there is a certain “stuckness” in food security responses. The mutually converging transitions of the urban transition, food regime shifts and the nutrition transition demand different ways of understanding the food system, food security and the components thereof, including value chains. The paper reviews efforts designed to respond to these mutually reinforcing challenges but argues that generalisations are problematic. Borrowing concepts from the North is equally problematic. Using the concept of Alternative Food Networks (AFNs), the paper interrogates these networks and asks how such alternative networks manifest in the context of food insecurity in South African cities. AFNs evident in Northern cities and regions are generally privileged and present a perspective of the food system that prioritises sustainability and a deep green and often local ethic, embodying aspirations of food system change. In Southern cities, food system engagement is less about engagement for change, but rather, engagement to enable food access. Traditional value chain parlance sees a value chain extending from producer to consumer. The food access value chain present within poor urban communities in South Africa reflects more than just financial transactions. Transactions of reciprocity and social exchange are embedded within food security strategies, and are often informed by the enactment of agency. Using the term “the food access continuum” this paper calls for a far more expansive view of food access strategies and networks. Understanding these networks is essential to effective food and nutrition security policy and programming.

**Keywords:** South Africa, food security, Alternative Food Networks, urban food security, agency, food governance

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## ACRONYMS

AFGs	Alternative food geographies
AFNs	Alternative food networks
AFSUN	African Food Security Urban Network
BFAP	Bureau for Food and Agricultural Policy
CFSC	Community Food Security Coalition
CFS	Committee on World Food Security
DAFF	Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
DCGTA	Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs
FANTA	Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GDP	Gross domestic product
IUDF	Integrated Urban Development Plan (South Africa)
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NDP	National Development Plan
SANAHANES	South African National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey
StatsSA	Statistics South Africa
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Food security remains a persistent global challenge. The Food and Agriculture Organization *2015 State of Food and Agriculture* review reports that in excess of 795 million people are undernourished globally. While this figure has declined in the past years, it masks some very real food security challenges. The decline in undernourishment can be attributed to economic development in certain developing countries, particularly China. Despite this decline, the related but separate issues of hunger, malnutrition and under nutrition remain a persistent challenge globally. The 2015 FAO report offers a number of caveats to the successes enabled through economic development stating, 'economic growth is a key success factor for reducing undernourishment, but it has to be inclusive and provide opportunities for improving the livelihoods of the poor' (FAO, 2015a). This comment highlights the fact that the global inequalities mean that food insecurity is disproportionately experienced. Food insecurity manifests most severely in specific geographies. Despite positive shifts in the state of food security at a global scale, in a regional FAO report, it is stated that 'the total number of undernourished people [in Sub Saharan Africa] continues to increase with an estimated 220 million in 2014–16 compared to 175.7 million in 1990–92' (FAO, 2015b: 1).

In the various global and regional reports on food security, the FAO uses the term undernourishment. Undernourishment is just one component of food insecurity and as such, in its use, a number of other food security challenges are occluded. The interchangeable use of undernourishment, hunger and food security is problematic, even the FAO is guilty of this approach. The challenge and associated complexities are highlighted by the following statement from the FAO Commission on Food Security:

*[T]here is a need to address the fact that malnutrition is more than merely a caloric food deficit. There is a growing recognition that hunger is a complex phenomenon that requires a multifaceted concept for its measurement ... More work is also required to identify the exact root causes of malnutrition, in particular the role of income, income growth, income distribution and large swings in food prices.*

*CFS, FAO, 2011*

This statement may appear reasonable, one that seeks to get to the heart of the challenge of food security. However, questions do need to be raised by such a statement; particularly when the definition of food security adopted by the FAO in 1996 recognised these same challenges fifteen years earlier, a definition that sees food security as a great deal more than just malnutrition. Food security is defined by the same FAO as being 'a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life' (FAO 1996). Drawing from this definition, four critical dimensions are recognised as essential to achieving food security: availability, access, utilisation and stability. This paper applies the 1996 FAO definition of food security and speaks of food security as being a process whereby there is adequate food available, where that food can be accessed from a stable food system and is able to be effectively utilised, preventing the occurrence of food system-related pathologies such as hunger, malnutrition, undernutrition, overnutrition, obesity and a variety of other diet-related challenges.

Food security questions extend way beyond just production issues to involve the intricate relationship between availability, accessibility, utilisation and the stability of the system. These questions play out at multiple scales and in multiple localities. Assuming that food security challenges are uniform in how they are experienced is flawed. Every scale and context is different. The rural bias, discussed in detail later, further compounds the blind spot obscuring the much-needed consideration of contextual food security realities. The outcome of this obfuscation is broad, prompting inappropriate generalisations about food security. The issues

associated with generalisations both drive and are further compounded by global governance processes such as the Sustainable Development Goals where universal measurements at a global scale trickle down to national scales, informing policy and measurement processes (Fukuda-Parr and Orr, 2014). Such generalisations and simplifications (i.e. making uniform) can have problematic consequences for policy and as a result, food security actions at other scales, denying community-level agency.

The consequence of such missed agency is embedded in the quotation by Kalimasse. “There are such streams of energy running through this city and we have not yet sufficiently explored them. Hunger might help us to learn how to do that, it offers a possibility” (Kalimasse, Kinshasa, February 2004, quoted in De Boeck&Pissart, 2004). In his description of Kinshasa, Kalimasse expresses frustration at the inability, despite knowledge of the system, to address hunger. Despite a high prevalence of urban food insecurity (Battersby, 2013; Crush&Frayne, 2011; Frayne et al 2010), questions of food security have been largely absent from urban governance interventions (Haysom, 2015). In the rare instances where urban food security has been considered, actions retain the distinct rural bias, often resorting to project-scale responses such as urban agriculture projects (Battersby, 2012a). Highlighting the rural dominance in how the food system is understood and how food security interventions are approached, Donald et al (2010: 172) argue that ‘past conceptual frameworks applied to the analysis of [food and] agricultural systems have emphasised producer over consumer actions and have often been aspatial’.

The production and rural dominance in efforts to ameliorate food insecurity have a number of consequences. The first consequence reflects a scientific and technology-driven focus on increasing or optimising net calories produced. Secondly, where access to produced food is constrained, welfare interventions are used to mitigate challenges. Such interventions are predominantly reactive and lack strategic focus. The third consequence, informed by the preceding two interventions, sees policies and legislation that reinforce the production/welfare paradigm (Haysom, 2015). Such food security responses disregard the current transitions evident within society and do not necessarily view members of society as change agents in this process. In Sub Saharan Africa global demographic changes have resulted in shifts in the locus of previously understood food security experiences. Food insecurity in urban areas, particularly in developing countries, and specifically African and even South African cities, is a persistent yet poorly understood phenomenon (Frayne et al, 2009). However, there is policy hubris at play in many African cities, driven by the assumption that the policy and development interventions are adequate, or that someone else, or another scale of government, is responsible for addressing food security challenges.<sup>1</sup> Much of the evidence on the scale and nature of urban food security contradicts such perceptions (Crush&Frayne, 2011; Frayne et al, 2010).

The Global South is undergoing a fundamental urban transition and faces an increasingly urban future (Kessides, 2005; Satterthwaite, 2007; Pieterse, 2008; Fox, 2012; Beall et al, 2013; Parnell and Pieterse, 2014). Southern cities will absorb 95% of urban growth in the next two decades, and by 2030, will be home to almost 4 billion people, or 80% of the world’s urban population (Parnell and Oldfield, 2014). Much of this growth will take place in African cities (Pieterse and Parnell, 2014). Food insecurity will become an increasingly important urban problem this millennium (Athreya et al, 2010; Chmielewska and Souza, 2011; Crush and Frayne, 2011; Zingel et al, 2011), particularly in developing world cities. The UNDP (2012) has recently called for ‘inclusive growth and people-centred approaches to food security’. What this means in policy and practice requires further interrogation that is beyond the scope of this chapter.

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<sup>1</sup> Working with the City of Cape Town and the South African Cities Network on urban food strategies has confirmed the perspective that ‘someone else has the mandate to address this’. Conversely, work with the Department of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) provides insight into the fact that it feels that food security is their mandate but have an expressly rural and productionist response to food insecurity. It goes as far as to argue that rural development will retard migration to the city and even drive a migration from the city to the rural areas.



Global food systems are currently undergoing major transformation (FAO, 2004; Von Braun et al, 2008) involving ‘extensive consolidation, very rapid institutional and organizational change, and progressive modernization of the procurement system’ (Reardon and Timmer, 2012). Large agrifood corporations and supermarket chains are driving this change (Reardon et al, 2003; Reardon and Minten, 2011; Crush and Frayne, 2011). South Africa is leading the charge in this transformation, being an early adopter of the consolidation, industrialised production and supermarket model, and now over 80% of poor urban households procure food from supermarkets (Crush et al, 2012).

Grounded in a logic incorporating an ethos other than market-related food system values, different food system-oriented approaches, philosophies and actions are emerging. These represent a maturing body of socio-spatial food theories under the umbrella of alternative food networks (AFNs) (Renting et al, 2003; Watts et al, 2005). AFNs are described as being:

*New rapidly mainstreaming spaces in the food economy defined by ... the explosion of organic, Fair Trade, and local, quality, and premium speciality foods. In these networks, it is claimed that the production and consumption of food are more closely tied together spatially, economically and socially.*

*(Goodman&Goodman 2007: 2)*

In general terms, AFNs are understood to be the domain of privileged developed world food system interventions. In Battersby’s (2012b) review of the emerging Anglo-American geographical studies focus on food deserts, she raises essential questions about how such terms become generalised. The food deserts work highlights spatial inequities in food retail, raising questions of access. Battersby’s review suggests that the ‘[food deserts] research does provide a useful starting point for considering a re-framing of urban food security in cities’ (Battersby, 2012b: 155). However Battersby inserts a concern or caveat, that

*... even in its new forms, [food desert literature] fails to focus enough on how people actually navigate their foodscapes. The food deserts work also fails to recognize the role of other non-formal market sources of food, which are vital sources of food in the southern context.*

*(Battersby 2012b: 155)*

This example highlights the divide between certain Northern literatures and the food system realities of the Global South. The assumption that certain theories can be transferred from one context to another requires serious challenge. Battersby raises questions about how facts discerned from certain contexts become assumptions in other contexts, warning that these assumptions can have problematic policy consequences (Battersby, 2012b).

This paper seeks to apply the caution proffered by Battersby to consider Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) and test how these are playing out in the South African context. The paper begins by describing changes taking place at the urban scale more generally and in the food system specifically. These changes are then linked to speak to the southern and South African urban food security question. The question of conceptual transfer is interrogated further, drawing on research from food security studies carried out in Cape Town. The chapter concludes by highlighting areas where the AFN approaches from both North and South align but further discusses some of the Southern-specific elements of the AFNs identified in the Cape Town research.

## 2. ‘PLUS ÇA CHANGE, PLUS C’EST LA MÊME CHOSE’ – OR DO THEY?

The above French expression denotes a certain “stuckness”, suggesting that despite change, or development interventions, things remain the same. In the case of the food system, this is, and is not, the case. The inequality remains but there have been significant changes in the food system

(Friedmann and McMichael, 1989; McMichael, 2009; Reardon et al 2003; Lang and Barling, 2012). Whether the changes that have occurred have been positive or negative is a question open for debate. This chapter takes the view that the changes benefit some but do not result in positive change across society. Many of the changes have had negative consequences for poor and vulnerable communities (Thu, 2009). When the food system changes are considered within the context of rapid urbanisation (Davis, 2006; Pieterse, 2008; Swilling 2011), these combined changes require far greater analysis. Importantly, the current processes of change are fundamentally different to more traditional transitional processes associated with cities and agriculture in the Global North.

There is a re-emergence of literature describing a variety of transitions taking place in society. Earlier work on socio-technical transitions (Kondratieff, 1935; Schumpeter, 1939), and others focusing specifically on earlier urban change (Lewis, 1954, 1955), emphasise the inevitability of transitions. Contemporary transitions, while following certain pre-existing logics (Perez, 2002; 2007; Grin et al, 2010; Smith et al, 2010; Swilling and Annecke, 2012: xvi) cannot be assumed to be the same as those of the past. Transitions describe reconfigurations of structures of society. Most transition literature describes global scale change (See Perez, 2002; 2007 as an example). Certain transitions are more context-driven and engage specific themes, demographics, industries, systems and social processes (Rotmans et al, 2001: 2). This chapter uses three transitions that have both global and context-specific considerations as a foundation to motivate for the specific focus on agency and contextually informed food security responses. These transitions include the second urban transition, the nutrition transition and food regime change.

The second urban transition draws on the work of a number of urban theorists including, but not limited to, Hodson and Marvin (2010), Beall and Fox (2009), but specifically those described as forming part of the African urbanism school, Pieterse (2008; 2010; 2013a) and Swilling (2011). The food system changes reflect a process of transition or regime change, with a number of attendant, and at times even, separate sub-transitions. This chapter draws on the seminal work of Friedmann and McMichael (1989) on food regime change.<sup>2</sup> The final transition discussed has direct links to the food and urban transitions and has been referred to as the nutrition transition (Popkin, 1998).<sup>3</sup>

The urban transition is a global phenomenon but the nature of the transition in the developing world differs. Driven by the scale of urbanisation and the specific economic conditions present in developing countries, the characteristics of the second urban transition are of particular interest within the context of the urban food question. Likewise, the nutrition transition is a global shift, but when considered within the context of the second urban transition, specific characteristics are evident. Finally, the food regime thesis and attendant sub-transitions highlight specific food system shifts that reflect distinctly different characteristics when considered within the context of developing world urbanisation. Combined, these transitions result in different coping mechanisms, different vulnerabilities and different societal responses. Applying traditional governance approaches to these different responses fails to appropriately address the 'stuckness' in the food security challenge.

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<sup>2</sup> Critics of the food regime thesis have pointed out that there is no clear tipping point from which a shift from one transition to another can be determined. However, McMichael (2009) argues that the regime shifts are evident, driven by global shifts in the powerbase of agricultural policy.

<sup>3</sup> As with the work on the food regime thesis, the broad concept of the nutrition transition has been questioned in the context of the developing world. Saunders (2015) calls for caution in the uncritical adoption of the concept, arguing that in South African cities, what is being experienced is best described as a dietary transition and not a nutrition transition.

### 3. THE SECOND URBAN TRANSITION

The world is urbanising at a rapid rate. It is expected to be just under 60% urbanised by 2030 (UN-Habitat, 2013: 213). Citing global urbanisation trends as a single number obscures shifts taking place in different regions, particularly in developing regions where the scale and nature of urbanisation is dramatic but varied. South Africa is 63% urbanised and is expected to reach nearly 80% urbanised by 2050 (DCGTA, 2016-4). This rapid growth in developing world cities has been termed the second urbanisation transition (Pieterse, 2008; Swilling, 2011); a phenomenon that is clearly evident in South African cities (Pieterse, 2010; Battersby, 2011).

Reference to a second urban transition implies a primary urbanisation process. The description of the second urban transition characteristics and the reasons that these are deemed substantive to this contribution requires more detailed consideration. Agricultural innovation and resultant increases in production reduced the price of food. Lower food prices meant reduced rural employment opportunities. Abundant labour and lower food prices were vital drivers of the industrialisation process, particularly in rapidly growing urban areas (Beall and Fox, 2009: 47). The combination of cheap food, industrialisation and subsequent specialisation, and new forms of urban governance enabled Northern urban development.

The scale of the second urban transition is significant. However, characteristics further differentiate this transition. Pieterse (2013a: 21; 2013b) denotes the endless vistas of shantytowns as ‘the visible face of crisis’ and remarks on ‘the burden of self-help and abandonment that they imply’. His summation is that if 67% of African urbanites live in informal *autoconstructed*,<sup>4</sup> makeshift shelters then ‘the shanty city is by and large the real African city ... this further implies that the bulk of city building can be attributed to actors outside of the state and formal business sector’. These actors and the agentic roles that they play form an important part of the making of the urban space.

Such descriptions, while real, do not effectively capture the processes, networks and dynamics of a developing world city. Regardless of the crisis described by Pieterse (2013a), these cities have other characteristics, some vibrant, others more problematic. The African city does reflect an endless struggle, in which different forms of ‘cityness’, networks and agency emerge.

The changing nature of urban development and the second urban transition have direct, and at times obvious (and at times less obvious), implications for the food system. Understanding how the second urban transition and the food system intersect requires an interrogation into the changes taking place within the wider food system.

### 4. THE THIRD FOOD REGIME

The flows of food to urban residents are neither consistent nor equitable. Inconsistency and inequality manifest as food insecurity. This assertion is confirmed by the high levels of food insecurity in cities in southern Africa. Research within the southern African region in 2008 found that in poorer areas of 11 cities 77% of surveyed households reported conditions of food insecurity (Frayne et al, 2010: 49).<sup>5</sup> This highlights the urban food challenges in South and southern Africa and raises questions about the South African food system. The South African food system has traversed a number of “food regimes” but the contemporary food system reflects the characteristics of the so-called Third Food Regime. The South African food system is immersed within a larger global food system.

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<sup>4</sup> Pieterse borrows this term from James Holston (1991).

<sup>5</sup> This work used the FANTA methodology to assess food insecurity.

The food regime concept focuses on the 'contradictory relations underlying the institutional and power structures across capitalist time, and at a particular conjuncture' (McMichael, 2009: 292). The third regime, founded on the previous regimes, is a 'corporate food regime', where the organising principle is the market, not the empire or the state (McMichael, 2005). Informed by the political economy of the South African agricultural landscape, this paper applies the notion that South Africa is embedded within the third food regime. The third food regime 'express[es], simultaneously, forms of geo-political ordering, and, related, forms of accumulation, ... [which] are vectors of power' (McMichael 2005, 272). Drawing on the key tenets of the food regime thesis, the underlying drivers of regime change are associated 'with various forms of hegemony in the world economy and ... periods of transition, anticipated by tensions between social forms embedded in each hegemonic order' (McMichael, 2009: 281). This description articulates political, social and economic processes as the primary drivers of food regime change. Perhaps the most important manifestation of the third food regime is how power is concentrated at certain parts of the food system.

## 5. THE NUTRITION TRANSITION

The effects of urbanisation and globalisation on dietary patterns and nutritional status in developing countries are complex. The adverse changes in dietary intakes associated with urbanisation are taking place at all levels of society (Mendez & Popkin, 2004: 75). Popkin's nutrition transition thesis suggests two key drivers in nutrition change. The first is that major shifts in population growth, age structure and spatial distribution are closely associated with nutritional trends and dietary change. Second, changes in income, patterns of work and leisure activities, and related socioeconomic shifts, lead to changes in women's roles and shifts in diet and activity patterns (Popkin, 2002). The dietary transition consists of a process of dietary convergence and a process of dietary adaptation (Popkin, 1998: 7; Kennedy et al, 2004: 9).

In South Africa, a country that is increasingly urban (StatsSA, 2013), and in the rapidly urbanising cities of southern Africa (Pieterse et al, 2015), changes in nutrition and retail processes are critical factors in understanding the food system, the changes, policy, and the consequences of inaction by both the private sector and the state. A clear trend is that the diet-related changes in nutrition and health are pervasive, and become visible at progressively lower levels of per capita GDP (Maxwell and Slater, 2003). The changes enabled through the third food regime mean that the agrofood sector becomes a powerful economic and political force. As liberalisation continues apace, the roles played by government diminish.

The track record of both the state and larger global governance institutions in retarding food insecurity has been poor. The persistent nature of food insecurity is reinforced by misaligned policies and developmental and economic agendas. However, in the daily struggle for meaning and access to the food system, agentic actions on the part of society are attempting to engage more overtly in the food system processes. Specific contextual processes or networks often inform these engagements. Such engagements are diverse and varied. Categorising them is understandably problematic but the term Alternative Food Networks has been used to capture the processes at play and the nature and politics of such processes.

## 6. ALTERNATIVE FOOD NETWORKS

Implied in the quote by Goodman and Goodman (2007) (see above) is that Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) reflect processes far removed from the challenges of food access experienced by those in the developing world. AFNs reflect somewhat idealistic notions of sustainability and

eco-friendliness with associated societal-driven concerns described as ‘upper class angst’ (Goodman and Goodman, 2007). AFNs are generally understood to be the domain of middle-class idealism. Food system tensions (Roberts, 2008; McCullough et al, 2008; Patel and McMichael, 2009; Belo, 2009; Guthman, 2011; Clapp&Helleiner, 2012) and the high levels of food insecurity in southern Africa (Frayne et al, 2010; Battersby, 2011) raise questions as to whether AFNs are active in food insecure communities in South Africa. And if so, how do these AFNs manifest and engage in food system issues. AFNs are a dimension of the emerging alternative food landscape representing spatially bound relations between consumers (predominantly urban dwellers) and the food market (Wiskerke, 2009: 375).

Perhaps one of the most defining aspects of the Northern AFN network is that through interactions between society and the state, space has been created for the emergence of a variety of food governance processes. Werkele (2004: 381) suggested that ‘community agencies and the local state have worked together to create a new political space for food justice issues’. Since then there has been a proliferation of such movements across North America and through Europe. These movements (or AFNs) have varied politics and engage the state differently. What they enable is a space for engagement, even if at times overtly oppositional. In a review of over 60 Canadian AFNs, MacRae and Donahue (2013:8) identified six different governance typologies, including:

- Municipality driven
- Hybrid governance with direct government links
- Hybrid governance with indirect government links
- Links to government via a secondary agent
- Civil society organisation with limited and informal government links
- Independent organisations with no government links

Not only does this highlight the diversity of operational and engagement approaches, it also provides insights into varied relationships with the state. In a review of the now disbanded Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC) in the United States, Haysom (2014) reviewed 176 AFNs, and applying the MacRae and Donahue governance typologies, noted that while most were citizen-led processes, over two-thirds of the organisations had some or other link to government.

Drawing on the same CFSC research, Haysom (2014) reviewed the key areas of focus of the US AFNs. The areas of focus were decidedly different to the food system-related challenges experienced by those in the developing world. *Table 1* highlights how some of the US AFNs focus on issues associated with food security, nutrition and school feeding. The focus on local food needs, urban farming and wider food system sustainability questions dominate the focus of these groups.

The analysis in *Table 1* highlights the scale at which interventions are taking place - the urban scale is the primary area of intervention and action. This level of urban-scale agency requires further analysis. While the global food system and food regime-related challenges influence perspectives and the politics of mobilisation, the areas of focus are influenced by the perceived (real or otherwise) needs at that particular context. Wiskerke (2009: 374) challenges the scope (and scale) of AFNs as the primary area of strategic food system change and suggests the need for an integrated and territorial agrifood paradigm, or what Wiskerke calls an alternative food geography. The migration from AFN to an alternative food geography, a territorial agrifood paradigm, requires the coming together of a number of different factors and appears to assume cooperation, at a variety of scales, between a variety of food system actors. This has been attempted in South Africa where the Southern African FoodLab<sup>6</sup> has engaged a variety of food system actors over a period of five years, gradually generating an understanding of some of the

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<sup>6</sup> See: <http://www.southernafricafoodlab.org/transformation-scenarios-process.html>



food system challenges. This process has required considerable funding and support through central organisational and facilitation skills.

Table 1: CFSC AFN areas of focus and predominance

	Province (State)	Regional	District (County)	Local (City)	Total actions
Education	2	12	11	16	41
Food security	2	1	4	10	17
Food access and advocacy	4	6	6	24	40
School Feeding	7	4	8	7	26
Farm to table	5	0	6	0	11
Sustainability	4	5	6	8	23
Local food	10	8	22	25	65
UA/Farm support/Land	7	4	13	26	50
Planning and land-use	2	2	2	9	15
Health and nutrition	5	4	8	26	43
Policies and legal	7	5	12	23	47
Data/Knowledge/Mapping	5	2	5	14	26
Total	60	53	103	188	404

More generally speaking, the AFNs evident in Northern cities and regions present a perspective of the food system that prioritises sustainability and a deep green and often local ethic (*Table 1*). Some organisations challenge wider food system and food regime issues but the focus remains privileged (Haysom, 2014). In the context of the developing world, are there different networks and what do these resemble? Does agency play out in the same way? How do such AFN groups, cities and other government scales engage?

In a review of the book *Food City*, Caruso (2015) argues that the 'specific [AFN] case studies are presented as practices to support a community-led food revolution'.<sup>7</sup> These descriptions speak to aspirations and visions of food system change. The food insecure in developing cities aspire to an ability to engage with the food system. Their food system engagement is less about engagement for change, but rather engagement to enable access. This engagement is very different.

## 7. SOUTH AFRICAN FOOD SECURITY STUDIES

This paper draws on two food security studies carried out in South Africa cities. The one, carried out in 2008/9 was part of the African Food Security Urban Network (AFSUN) study (see Frayne et al, 2009). The 2008/9 survey made use of a survey instrument which drew from both the FANTA and Lived Poverty Index survey tools.<sup>8</sup> This survey reviewed the food security status of poor communities in Cape Town, Mzunduzi and Johannesburg using a purposive survey strategy. The second survey used the same survey tools but focused on Cape Town only. The second survey reviewed all income groups with weighting afforded to poorer communities.

The 2008 survey found extremely high levels of food insecurity in the areas reviewed, with the three cities' averages at 70%. By comparison, the regional average for the total of 11 cities surveyed in the SADC is 77% (Frayne et al, 2009). The 2008 survey identified a number of food insecurity drivers. One driver was that of poverty:

<sup>7</sup> Commenting on the book *Food City* by C.J. Lim, 2014.

<sup>8</sup> See: <http://www.fantaproject.org>

*While poverty may in some instances be relative, in this survey the evidence suggests that in relation to both income and food security, poverty is absolute and pervasive ... When asked to compare their household's economic conditions today to one year ago, almost two-thirds (63%) felt that they were worse off than in the past.*

*(Frayne et al, 2009: 18)*

Levels of poverty in southern Africa are increasing. This is driven by a number of factors, including the consolidation of, and the technical transition in, agriculture, resulting in job shedding. This combined with the failure of rural development strategies, mean that many of the rural poor are moving to cities. As a result, the locus of poverty and therefore food insecurity is shifting to urban areas (Crush et al 2012). A further contributor to food insecurity was found to be that of housing with a statistically significant difference in food security status among the seven housing types included in the survey. Of those households that are food secure, 84% are living in formal structures, compared to only 12% that live in traditional dwellings and informal conditions (Frayne et al, 2009).

The relationship between income, housing typologies and food security results in multiple food access strategies being applied in order to enable food access. In urban areas, food is generally accessed through the market. It would be incorrect to argue for direct causality between poverty and food security. The issues are far more complex. Driven by structural urban challenges, including poverty, society develops multiple avenues to enable "food access". The nature of food access shifts dependent on the level of vulnerability, accessibility, affordability and specific monthly, weekly, seasonal and annual cycles, to name but a few. These manifold food access options and resultant strategies are evident in *Figure 1* below. The scale and nature of alternative food access options, shared food, food provided by neighbours and food borrowed from others – something seldom reported – provokes questions pertaining to processes and networks evident in determining such access.

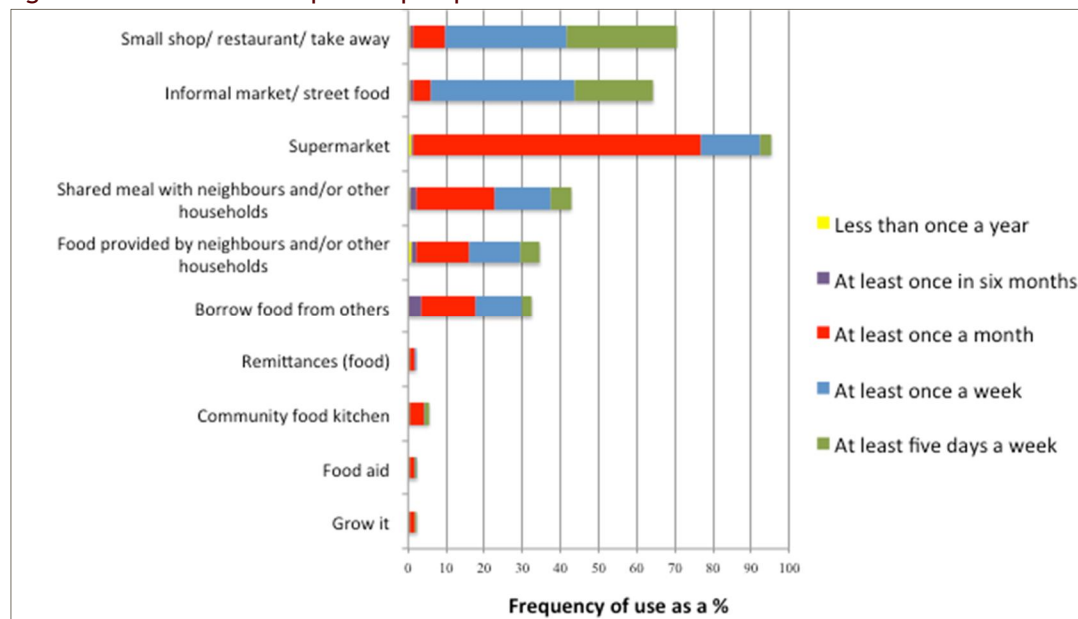
Also of interest is the high use-frequency of informal/street food and small shop (spaza) options. These data highlight the negligible uptake of urban agriculture as a food access strategy, confirming the arguments made by Korth et al (2014). Despite this, policy and developmental programming still see this as a viable food security response strategy, applying a rural lens to the issue – that of proposing the growing of more food.

The further bias towards certain market systems and the occlusion of other food access strategies is perhaps linked to how the urban food system is understood. When the citywide data from the 2013 Cape Town survey is considered, the different food access strategies across the terciles are evident. In 2013 survey the supermarket dominance in terms of both use and frequency as a food access source amongst the middle and upper income groups is evident (Battersby, in press). While an obvious finding, this affirms the point that not only are different urban food systems active in a locality, different groups of society navigate and utilise the food system in different ways. The different access typologies highlights how the different economic strata of society engage in the food system, what food access strategies are most applicable to these strata, and how different food access points enable a measure of food security. *Figure 1* reflects frequency of use but not the amount spent or the items purchased. This is an essential area of research required to add further detail to these food access findings.

Despite the importance of the market as a source of food for the urban poor and the rapid supermarketization of the South Africa food system (Weatherspoon and Reardon 2003; Tustin and Strydom 2006), it is necessary to consider geographies of food access through an alternative frame (Battersby, 2013). While the food retail system, both formal and informal, is the most important source of food for the urban poor, it is clear that the market does not work adequately for the urban poor. Many people are dependent on alternative sources of food

(Battersby, 2012b: 154). It is as important to consider how food is accessed through non-retail related options and how these networks operate, what drives them, and how power and reciprocity play out within these networks.

Figure 1: Food access options per period



Source: Battersby, 2011

Stable food prices support a household's ability to plan, and as a result, manage food access. The poor are most adversely affected by food price increases, as they spend a higher proportion of their incomes on food (StatsSA, 2012). The Bureau for Food and Agricultural Policy (BFAP), working on a household average of four, found that for a household to consume a 'balanced daily food plate', it would have to have a monthly income of R3 732.00 (BFAP, 2015: 151) or R44 784 per annum. What this implies for most South Africans is a real struggle to access food, let alone nutritious food. The scale of this is evident in the BFAP work detailed in *Figure 2*.

*Figure 2* highlights the fact that despite sufficient food being available in South Africa (see NDP, 2012), a large proportion of South Africans are unable to access sufficient food to enable adequate nutrition - taken more broadly, a large portion of South Africans are food insecure. This food security status was confirmed in the SANAHANES study (Shisana et al, 2013).

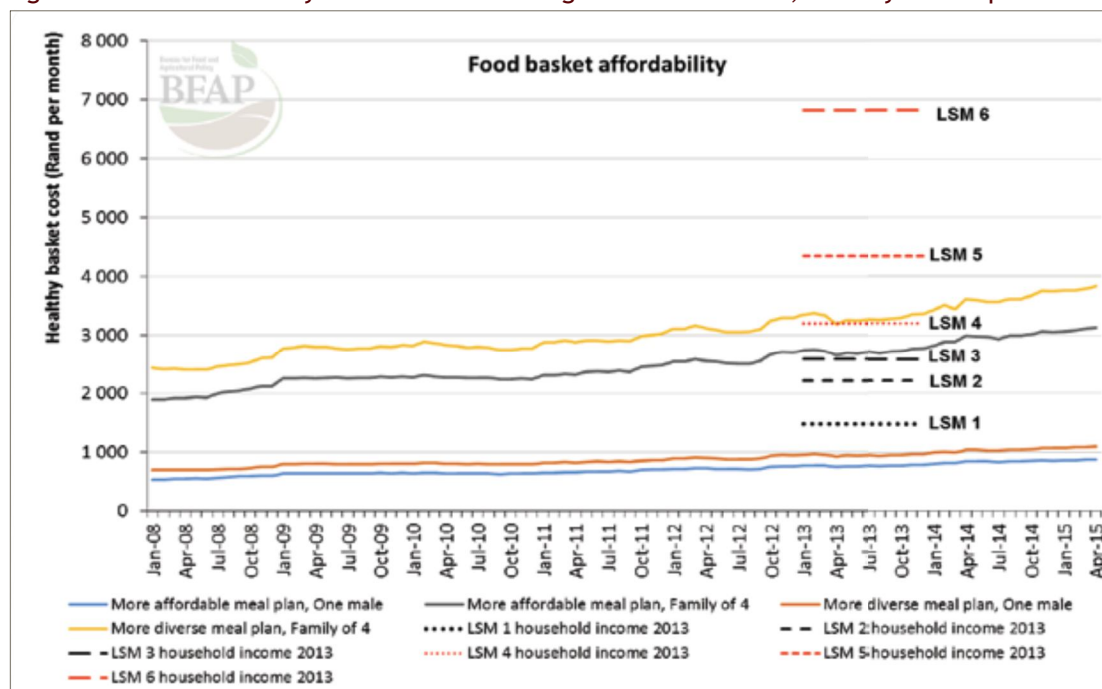
The proportion of the AFSUN sample population that acquired food from neighbours and other households through sharing meals was 44.5%, those eating food provided by others was 34.1%, and those borrowing food was 29.2% (Battersby, 2012b: 154). The sharing and borrowing of food masks the extent of food insecurity amongst the urban poor and obscures the failings of urban food systems (Maxwell 1999). Masking aside, with a high proportion of South Africans unable to access adequate food, questions can be asked about why there has not been more direct civil protest, calling authorities and the food retail system to account for these issues. While there are a number of possible reasons for the absence of food riots and protests similar to those seen elsewhere (Bar-Yam et al, 2013), one reason is that different food access networks are activated by those at risk of food insecurity to moderate the extent of the challenge. It is clear from *Figure 1* that non-retail networks form a core part of a food access strategy for poor households.

Such food access strategies involve multiple relational and cultural interactions. This is not simply a case of knocking on the door of the neighbour and asking for food. Thick and durable networks within communities inform reciprocation and food sharing. There are a number of



theoretical positions that seek to frame these reciprocal strategies. Shaw (2006: 241) attempted to develop a theoretical framework for understanding this inter-play between individual capacity and socio-spatial processes, understanding access as comprising three inter-connected aspects: ability, assets and attitude. Another attempt to frame this interplay is that of Cannuscio et al (2010), arguing not just for a consideration of food environments, but also of ‘foodways’ (Alkon et al, 2013), defined as a combination of cultural, social and economic processes.

Figure 2: The BFAP healthy food baskets for marginalised consumers, January 2008–April 2015



Source: BFAP, 2015: 152

Rocha, drawing on the FAO food security definition posits that the components of food security need expanding beyond availability, accessibility, utilisation and stability, suggesting the inclusion of dimensions of availability and accessibility but adding acceptability, adequacy and agency (Rocha, 2008).<sup>9</sup> The introduction of agency as a component of food security highlights the very different strategies used to enable food security. This agency is arguably in play in Northern alternative food network operations and engagements with cities and others spheres of government. In the adaptive responses where sharing, borrowing and other such strategies are evident in Southern cities such as Cape Town, does this reflect similar agency, or an alternative form of citizen-level agency?

A theme in the writings of Pieterse (2006; 2008; 2010; 2013c) is the question of participation. Communities have a key role to play in (re)building their own societies. Pieterse (2006: 289) suggests that this rebuilding is facilitated through a form of agency that he calls ‘agonistic politics’, or the creation of ‘homebru strategies that emerge and flourish in a context of radical democratic politics that stretch across formal-informal, concrete-symbolic, and consensual-conflictual binaries’ (Pieterse, 2006: 300).

The contemporary view of urban governance still views the city as an entity run through a ‘nucleated and hierarchically nested process of political governance, economic development, social order, and cultural identity’ (Soja, 2000: 13–14). This notion is questioned and challenged

<sup>9</sup> The reference to “5As” was first mentioned by Cecilia Rocha in the referenced 2008 document. The conceptualisation of “5As” was not initially tested within peer review articles. However, reference to the “5As” has subsequently appeared in a number of sources, in documents of the Toronto food policy council (see: <http://tfpc.to/to-food-research>) as well as in peer reviewed journal articles (Lang and Barling, 2012: 320).

in the literature (Bayat, 2000; Appadurai, 2002; Pieterse and Simone, 2013). This notion implies a top-down governance structure that disregards reciprocal networks, agency, phronesis<sup>10</sup> or other forms of deep democracy. While officials may aspire to the hierarchical model of governance, the lived reality is very different. This is evident in parts of the food systems of developing cities. In engagements with City of Cape Town officials, the very mention of agency resulted in a forceful rejection of any citizen-driven processes, reflecting the power-driven hierarchies (and fears of participatory processes).

Questions of agency and the theoretical value of agency have been the subject of much debate within academic literature where 'variants of action theory, normative theory, and political-institutional analysis have defended, attached, buried, and resuscitated the concept in often contradictory and overlapping ways' (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998: 962). In their work, Emirbayer and Mische consider agency from both a philosophical and sociological theory perspective, challenging a number of theoretical approaches to agency. Central to their argument is that current perspectives of agency do not provide insight into how agency 'interpenetrates with and impacts upon the temporal relational context of action' (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998: 1012) – actors live simultaneously in the past, future and present. Agency is inherently social and relational (Emirbayer, 1997) and consists of three key elements: iteration, projectivity and practical evaluation. This agency is clearly evident in how poor urban residents navigate their food system and make decisions to activate reciprocal networks to enable food access.

The food insecure are finding ways to express their agency in how they navigate the food system and find ways to enable food access. Present is an intersection between how ability, assets and attitude (Shaw, 2006) intersect with Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) trilogy of iteration, projectivity and practical evaluation.

The agency enacted by the poor and the food insecure is, however, quite different to the framing of agency in Northern alternative food network processes. The Southern food insecure remain voiceless and excluded from the modern food system. Agency is however expressed in the strategies applied to activate networks that enable food access.

These networks, while thick, are subject to notions of fair exchange and reciprocity. An example of this is that should the ability to reciprocate be unclear, reliance on state or NGO provided welfare supersedes community-level options. This is a deliberate strategic choice, made to avoid eroding one's own networks (and agency). When investigating individual food security responses after disasters in Cape Town, Duncan (2013) found that individuals chose to rely on welfare rather than erode social networks – the unknown temporal consequence of the disaster meant that the ability for later reciprocity was unknown. The likelihood of an extended period of dependency influenced response strategies, confirming the interaction between projectivity and practical evaluation.

It is argued that the networks that enable sharing and exchange are in fact a form of alternative food network and that these may well be at play in developed countries, but have not been framed as AFNs. In the case of Cape Town, the networks activated by the food insecure are a form of AFN. These networks may not be actively engaging with city officials or other networks on the subject of food, but they are networks that enable access and compliment food intake. The presence of these networks allows a measure of food stability. These factors all ensure that the food available is then accessed.

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<sup>10</sup> Pieterse explains phronesis to refer to the skill and reason of practical judgement 'in the moment of action' (Gunder, 2003: 253, in Pieterse, 2006). Further, 'Aristotle found that every well-functioning organisation and society was dependent on the effective functioning of all three intellectual virtues – episteme, techne, and phronesis'. At the same time, however, Aristotle emphasised the crucial importance of phronesis, 'for the possession of the single virtue of prudence [phronesis] will carry with it the possession of them all' (Flyvbjerg, 2004).

## 8. ALTERNATIVE FOOD NETWORKS AND THE VALUE CHAIN

When considering food security and the Southern AFNs described above, the notion of the value chain could be expanded. Traditional value chain parlance sees a value chain extending from producer (perhaps even input supplier) to consumer. These value chains involve networks, history, and relationships, but are generally determined by a measure of financial transaction in the process of attributing “value”. The food access value chain present within poor communities of Cape Town, and elsewhere in South Africa, reflect more than just financial transactions. Transactions of reciprocity and exchange are embedded within community and are often informed by the enactment of a form of agency. This revised view of the value chain is depicted in *Figure 3*. While the term value chain may have utility, it reflects a formal trade structure and perhaps discounts the importance of the informal and reciprocal exchanges that enable food security. The term *food access continuum* has been used as this describes the formal and the informal, as well as the reciprocal and non-economic, engagements in the food system more clearly.

Figure 3: The food access continuum



It is suggested that within the food access continuum agency is perhaps enacted differently at the different points in the continuum. This has implications for policy responses. Assuming generalised strategies will work across the continuum is problematic. This raises a further point often overlooked when questions of agency are discussed, the question of power. Again the use of the food access continuum is useful as it offers a sense of how power may play out differently at different points along the continuum.

## 9. CONCLUSION

The alternative food networks of poor South Africans, enacted to enable food access, may be celebrated as acts of self-determination and proactive agency. While true, they are present because the food system value chains do not work for the poor. The poor are required to then negotiate alternative networks. As Maxwell argued, this process is problematic as it occludes the extent and scale of food insecurity within these communities. Middle class angst of the Northern AFNs described by Goodman is perhaps present in the imaginations of middle class South Africans, but the food networks enacted by the food insecure in cities of the South reflect a very different type of alternative food network. While a comparison can be made across AFNs in the North and South, suggesting processes of solidarity, community and agency, these manifest very differently. Comparisons between Northern and Southern AFNs are mere generalisations of the term and require far more robust interrogation. Southern AFNs reflect something very different. Southern AFNs are enacted to enable food access as a primary concern and not voice, participation and a green agenda as in Northern AFNs.

The focus on Southern alternative food access approaches and the networks that are activated to enable food access have been deliberately chosen as these offer insights into how unequal the food system is. The very presence of reciprocal networks highlights the fact that current and traditional value chains are not working for poor urban residents in developing countries.

These networks or alternative food networks are a critical yet poorly understood part of the food access process. Stress, competition, imposed planning, violence and other lived realities threaten these alternative food networks and increase vulnerability in ways that are unclear. While not part of formal value chains, these networks do link to formal and informal value chains and are thus essential indicators/proxies of food security. While there are multiple causal drivers that prompt the activation of such networks, poverty and the inability to access the livelihoods necessary to afford even a basic food plate (and not a nutritious food plate), mean that such networks are indicators of livelihood failure. As a key coping strategy, this has a longer-term implication for possible livelihood generation and as such requires further consideration.

The alternative food networks emerge when required and then disperse when no longer needed. This fluidity makes such processes difficult to engage. AFN processes are also embedded in community processes and are contextual, and as a result generalisations are problematic. These issues pose challenges for research. Each network has its own history, context and vulnerabilities. Due to their nature and other factors, such networks are also often unseen. How such networks are researched and documented remains a key question? These are however important food system functions and require deeper understanding.

From a policy perspective, these networks require two foundational paradigm shifts. The first is the recognition of the urban in food security policy. The fact that South Africa is over 63% urbanised is absent in the emerging Food and Nutrition Security Policy. This oversight was evident when one of the authors were asked if the policy was not a rural development policy. The response reflected a distinct anti-urban bias.

*Yes, intention [of the policy is] to reverse migration – people are moving to the city looking for a livelihood ... and this creates the challenge – if you could fix the rural community then people will leave the cities and return to the rural areas*

*(Ndimande, 2015)*

Secondly, food security programming and responses need to be delegated to local authorities. While these local municipalities are apprehensive about engaging with communities on issues as volatile as food insecurity, agency as a component of food security requires engagement. Expecting local authorities to engage in food security issues when they have no formal or fiscal mandate to respond will only provoke issues. National government need to recognise that local government is at the coalface of the food security challenges, challenges laid bare by the need to engage in such AFNs. Power, mandates and resources are required to enable local government engagement in such issues. Concerns over local government competence, while real, should not deter actions at the sites where they are most prevalent.

Wiskerke's (2009: 375) earlier suggestion that AFNs are a dimension of the emerging alternative food landscape representing spatially bound relations between consumers and the food market is only partially correct, alluding to its Northern origin. In South African cities, many are *spatially disconnected* (and not bound), and the link between the market and consumers is tenuous at best but often absent.

Kalimasse's quotation reflects how the inhabitants of Cape Town (and other cities), the multitudes of people that make up this city, have responded to the hiatus, filling the food void. The necessity of this response brings into clear focus the failure of the current food regime and its attendant value chains. These failures are further amplified when the convergence of the mutually reinforcing challenges of urbanisation, food regimes and the nutrition transition are considered. Responding to these mutually reinforcing issues requires new actors, new assertions of value and new policy approaches.

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