ADDRESSING URBAN FOOD INSECURITY IN WINDHOEK, NAMIBIA

NDEYAPO MARTHA NICKANOR

SUMMARY

• Namibia is a country that is urbanizing rapidly. As population growth rises, there is urgent need for urban policies that will promote food security.

• Windhoek requires a food security strategy that pays particular attention to the plight of the urban poor and provides a source of affordable nutrients for common health problems.

• Food security strategies requires the involvement of the housing, environmental health, transport and social development sectors, and should focus on assisting the development of local markets in close proximity to the informal settlements.

INTRODUCTION

Although food security has been a focus of scholarly activity for over 40 years, interest in urban food security is fairly recent. In Sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, food insecurity has long been an "invisible phenomenon to policy makers" (Crush and Frayne, 2010) and is "scarcely recognized in contemporary political debates" (Maxwell, 1998). While urban food insecurity is growing, national and municipal policymakers have focused on what are perceived to be more urgent urban problems such as unemployment, overcrowding, decaying infrastructure and declining services. In contrast, food insecurity has been dealt with as an agricultural production issue.

Urban policy makers have generally failed to recognize that levels of urban food insecurity are especially vulnerable to supply problems or sudden price increases, which affect a large number of city dwellers. The complexities of cities and the structural drivers of food insecurity seem to make the idea of developing coherent city-specific food security strategies a difficult proposition. However, a number of cities (Belo Horizonte, Cape Town and Stellenbosch,

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ndeyapo Martha Nickanor

Ndeyapo Martha Nickanor is a doctoral candidate at the University of Cape Town's Department of Environmental and Geographical Science, researching issues of urban food (in)security, strategies for survival, and resiliency to food insecurity among Southern African women. Ndeyapo also lectures in the Department of Statistics at the University of Namibia, where she teaches courses on population and development at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Toronto) around the world have begun to develop such strategies (Haysom, 2009; Rocha, 2001) and there is no reason why Windhoek, the capital city of Namibia, should not begin to factor food insecurity into its urban development plans.

Fuelled by rapid urbanization, a large proportion of Windhoek's population lives in low income and informal settlements, with lack of adequate tenure, and poor access to infrastructure and social services. Added to this is limited employment creation which translates into a daily struggle to meet basic needs in many households. Urban development planning should not be allowed to submerge the key issue of urban hunger where urban food insecurity requires urgent and immediate attention.

THE CHALLENGES OF URBANIZATION

In 2011, the world population surpassed 7 billion (UNFPA, 2011). Slightly over 50 percent of these people live in urban areas, an increase from 29 percent in 1950 (UN, 2011). About 70 percent of these urban dwellers live in the developing countries of Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and Asia (excluding Japan). In these regions, the majority of people experience acute shortages of water, housing, schools, cooking facilities, inadequate health and sanitation, decaying urban infrastructure and acute food insecurity. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the problems are even greater, given that an estimated 71 percent of the urban population is estimated to be living in slums (UNDP, 2011).

In Southern Africa, 50 percent of the population is estimated to be living below the poverty line (UN, 2009). The Namibian Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2010) has reported that Southern Africa is the only region in the world where the absolute numbers of poor people have been rising. Most poverty statistics are income-based and do not adequately account for the large numbers of people who are impoverished in terms of inadequate housing, transportation, sanitation and clean water. Central to the urban poverty challenge is the issue of food insecurity.

A baseline survey by the African Food Security Urban Network (AFSUN) in 2008/2009 illustrates that urban food insecurity is widespread in Southern Africa, where 77 percent of the surveyed households were found to be food insecure (Frayne, Pendleton, Crush et al. 2010). The majority of urbanites

in Southern Africa live in a state of constant hunger and food insecurity. Windhoek is no exception. The city is the largest urban area in Namibia, with 36 percent of the total urban population. It is experiencing very rapid urbanization and intense poverty and food insecurity. The food security of Windhoek's urban poor, however, has received little attention from both researchers and policy makers.

FOOD INSECURITY IN WINDHOEK

Urban migration to Windhoek has been rapidly increasing in recent decades, especially following Namibian independence in 1990. In 1991, for example, Windhoek's population was about 147,000; by 2011 it had more than doubled to 322, 500 (National Planning Commission, 2012). Although annual growth rates have declined they are still high at 2.8 percent, posing serious urban management problems (Becker and Bergdolt, 2001).

Previous research in Windhoek suggests that urban poverty is widespread (Frayne, 2004; Pomuti and Tvedten, 1998; Simon, 1984) and that urban poor are constantly food insecure (Dima et al., 2002). The recent result from an AFSUN survey indicates that 63 percent of surveyed households were severely food insecure (Frayne et al., 2012: 29; Pendleton et al., 2012: 16). High levels of poverty, unemployment and inequality, combined with economic decline in the city has left many households particularly vulnerable. Based on the AFSUN survey, poverty is widespread and unevenly distributed because the poorest in Windhoek are found in the informal settlements and also are the most food insecure. The comparison between those living in the formal areas and those in the informal areas shows that 76 percent of households in the informal areas were severely food insecure (Pendleton et al., 2012).

POLICY RESPONSE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Subsequent recommendations from the UN in 2009, whilst acknowledging the impact of the emergency on urban areas, called for urgent food and cash interventions for the rural community (GRN/NRCS/UN 2009). In the ensuing years, crop production levels have improved somewhat. However, the estimated production level of 141,000 tonnes of coarse grain (white maize, pearl millet, wheat and sorghum) for 2012 is well below the required

level of 332,800 tonnes. The country therefore has to import more grain to offset a cereal deficit (Namibia Early Warning and Food Information Unit (NEWFIU), 2010).

The implications of these production trends for food security in urban areas are dire. This is because the country increasingly relies on food imports from South Africa to meet the shortfall. In urban areas, increases in the price of food prices and other basic commodities continue to make the population more vulnerable to food insecurity.

Namibia's National Food Security Council, The Food Security and Nutrition Assessment Report, and The National Food and Nutrition Policy and Plan of Action address food security at all sectoral levels (FSNTC, 1995; FSNC 1995; NFSNC, 1995). However, these policies advocate purely rural strategies in addressing food insecurity in Namibia. Although Dima et al. (2002) report a number of people involved in urban and peri-urban agriculture in Windhoek and Oshakati, in Windhoek 90 percent produced vegetables only during summer when there is rain water available. Thus water is a major obstacle for urban farmers in urban Namibia. The low production and limited practice of urban agriculture is attributed to a lack of policy on urban agriculture (Dima et al., 2002). Certainly, measures to support urban agriculture must be part of any new city food security strategy to promote healthy growth and development. It would be unreasonable, however, to conclude that this alone would solve the crisis of urban food insecurity.

While increased agricultural production may have positive implications for urbanites, the primary challenge facing them is food access, not availability. For the growing urban population of Namibia, the challenge is to deliver affordable and nutritious food and to raise household incomes. These challenges need to be at the centre of any new food security strategy for Windhoek.

WORKS CITED

Becker F. and A. Bergdolt (2001). "Managing urban sprawl in Windhoek: Problem, formations of potable water supply and housing development." In *Proceedings of the International Symposium on government, governance and urban territories in Southern Africa*, edited by Mulenga MC. Pages 135-54. Lusaka, Zambia: University of Zambia.

City of Windhoek (2004). *City Development Planning*. Available at http://www.windhoekcc.org.na.

Crush J. and B. Frayne (2010). "The Invisible Crisis: Urban Food Security in Southern Africa." African Food Security Urban Network, No.1. Cape Town.

Dima S., A. Ogunmokun and T. Nantanga (2002). *"The Status of urban and peri- urban agriculture, Windhoek and Oshakati, Namibia."* In *Report for Integrated Support to Sustainable Development and Food Security Programme (IP) in the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the UN.* FAO.

Food Security and Nutrition Council (FSNC) (1995). *Food and Nutrition Policy for Namibia.* Windhoek, Namibia.

Food Security and Nutrition Technical Committee (FSNTC) (1995). "Namibia Food Security and Nutrition Assessment Report." Windhoek, Namibia.

Frayne B. (2004). "Migration and Urban Survival Strategies in Windhoek, Namibia." *Geoforum* 35: 489-505.

Government of the Republic of Namibia (GRN) and the International Community (NRCS/UN) (2009). *Floods 2009: Post-Disaster Needs Assessment, Namibia.* Windhoek, Namibia.

Haysom G. (2009). "Urban Agriculture and Food Security." In *The Sustainability Institute. Sustainable Neighbourhood Design Manual: A Non-Technical Guide. Final Draft for comment.* Funded by the National Department of Housing and Cordaid. The Sustainability Institute. South Africa.

Maxwell D. (1998). "The Political Economy of Urban Food Security in Sub-Saharan Africa." In *Food Consumption and Nutrition Division (FNCD) Discussion Paper No. 41.* International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI).

Moorsom R. (1977). "Underdevelopment, Contract Labour and Worker Consciousness in Namibia, 1915-72." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 4, no. 1: 52-87.

Namibia Early Warning and Food Information Unit (NEWFIU) (2010). *Namibia Crop Prospects and Food Security Situation Report.* Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry.

Namibia Statistics Agency (2012). *2009/2010 Namibia Household Income and Expenditure Survey.* Namibia Statistics Agency.

National Food Security and Nutrition Council (NFSNC) (1995). *National Food Security and Nutrition Action Plan.* Windhoek, Namibia.

Shaanika, Helvy (2012). "Namibia faces grain deficits," news release April 18. Available at: http://www.newera.com.na/articles/44340/namibia-faces-grain-deficits.

Pendleton W., N. Nickanor and A. Pomuti (2012). "The State of Food Insecurity in Windhoek, Namibia." African Food Security Urban Network No.14. Cape Town.

Pomuti A. and I. Tvedten (1998). "Namibia Urbanization in the 1990s." In *NEPRU, In search of research.* NEPRU Publication No. 6. Namibia Economic Policy Research Unit (NEPRU). Windhoek, Namibia.

Rocha C. (2001). "Urban Food Security Policy: The Case of Belo Horizonte, Brazil." *Journal for the Study of Food and Society* 5, no. 1: 36-47.

Simon D. (1984). "Urban Poverty, Informal sector activity and intersectoral linkages: Evidence from Windhoek, Namibia." *Development and Change* 15, no. 4: 551-576.

ABOUT THE AFRICA PORTAL

The Africa Portal is an online knowledge resource for policy-related issues on Africa. An undertaking by the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) and the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA), the Africa Portal offers open access to a suite of features including an online library collection; a resource for opinion and analysis; and an experts directory — all aimed to equip users with research and information on Africa's current policy issues.

A key feature to the Africa Portal is the online library collection holding over 3,500 books, journals, and digital documents related to African policy issues. The entire online repository is open access and available for free full-text download. A portion of the digital documents housed in the library have been digitized for the first time as an undertaking of the Africa Portal project. Facilitating new digitization projects is a core feature of the Africa Portal, which aims to improve access and visibility for African research.

www.africaportal.org

The Africa Portal is part of the Africa Initiative project.

AFRICA INITIATIVE

The Africa Initiative (AI) is a multi-year, donor-supported program, with three components: a research program, an exchange program, and an online portal. The Africa Initiative aims to contribute to the deepening of Africa's capacity and knowledge in five thematic areas—conflict resolution, energy, food security, health, and migration, with special attention to the crosscutting issue of climate change. By incorporating field-based research, strategic partnerships, and online collaboration, the Africa Initiative is undertaking a truly interdisciplinary and multi-institutional approach to Africa's governance challenges. Work on the core areas of the initiative focus on supporting innovative research and researchers, and developing policy recommendations as they relate to the program's core thematic areas.