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Food insecurity in urban Tanzania

The urban food security challenge in Tanzania is both distinct and pressing. With an urban population that is set to more than double by 2030, so will its food requirements. Many food security challenges exist, including weak rural-urban food supply linkages, an inadequate food import budget and production constraints on the smallholder farming sector. In light of this, Tanzanian policy is aiming to improve the capacity of rural areas to meet the growing urban food demand.

Many mouths to feed in the city

Among the many challenges facing African cities today, is the need to ensure there is enough food to satisfy their rapidly growing populations. This was the theme of a Food Security journal article, titled [*Food security in Tanzania: The challenge of rapid urbanisation*](#). The article considers the implications on urban food supplies in the period up to 2030, which serves as the current Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) horizon (See this [IGC report on urbanisation in Tanzania](#)).

The SDG's include targets related to food security (SDG 2) and making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable (SDG 11). Even so, the distinct character of the urban food security challenge in relatively poor countries, such as Tanzania, may not be widely appreciated.

Permanent urban consumption

As urban populations grow, under the influence of both natural population growth and in-migration, more people become permanent consumers. This means they become separated from the land and other traditional food sources. This renders them more reliant on urban markets for their food supplies, while their consumption patterns also change, particularly for those whose incomes rise.

Satisfying demand

In order to arrive at an estimate of future food requirements in Tanzania, you need to estimate future population growth rates in the country. We assume population growth rates up until 2030 that are consistent with those used in the United Nations [World Urbanisation Prospects: The 2014 revision](#), for Tanzania

(including Zanzibar). This estimate is somewhat lower than recent trends. On this basis, as shown in Table 1, Tanzania's urban population will have increased by an additional 125% (145% for Dar es Salaam) by 2030. Urban food requirements can therefore be expected to increase by at least this amount – more if urban per capita incomes increase.

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Current needs

This indicates the scale of the urban food security challenge facing Tanzania in the medium term. The country therefore needs to determine how it will:

- Produce or procure a sufficient quantity of food
- Deliver food economically and in good condition to urban markets when required
- Ensure that the needs of marginalised urban populations can be met

What's more, the rural population of Tanzania will increase over the same period by 38%, eating into the local marketable surplus.

Mainland Tanzania	2012 Population (million)	Assumed growth rate (% p.a.)	2030 Population (million)	Population increase	
				No. (million)	%
Dar es Salaam	4.4	5.1%	10.7	+6.3	+145%
Other Urban	8.3	4.3%	17.9	+9.5	+114%
Total Urban	12.7	4.6%	28.6	+15.8	+125%
Rural	30.9	1.7%	42.6	+11.6	+38%
Total	43.6	2.75%	71.1	+27.5	+63%

Table 1: Illustrative projection of mainland Tanzania urban and rural populations

Current challenges

The evidence so far is that Dar es Salaam, Tanzania's main city, has managed to avoid serious problems of food insecurity, although the position is more precarious in other urban areas (and even more so in rural areas). Whether Tanzania can avoid future deterioration in urban food security will depend on how responsive and resilient the urban food supply systems prove to be in the face of continuing urban growth, changing consumption patterns, weak rural-urban food supply linkages and production constraints in the smallholder farming sector.

Current developments

- There have been important developments in large scale food production and processing, such as flour milling, edible oils, sugar and tea and coffee.
- Supplies of milk products, poultry and eggs, and fruit and

vegetables to urban areas from mainly rural producers are also increasing.

- A number of urban supermarkets are now established, particularly in Dar es Salaam, but their contribution to food security is largely confined to the better off urban consumers.
- In addition to the large companies and supermarkets, there are large numbers of small producers, transporters, traders, etc. who play a part in linking mainly rural food production to the growing urban markets, supplying open markets, itinerant traders and small shops.
- Generally, however, systems for getting produce from rural areas to the main markets in Tanzania remain rather poorly developed. Transport is often difficult (particularly during the rainy season), distances can be considerable, vehicles are rarely specialized, and storage is generally inadequate.

The crucial role of smallholder farming

Tanzania has managed to become broadly self-sufficient in basic foodstuffs (except wheat), and may indeed have the potential to become a net exporter of some products. However, Tanzania's balance of payments remains quite dependent on capital inflows through aid and private investment, leaving little scope to cover additional food requirements through imports. This means that future urban food security may depend to a large extent on raising production and productivity in the smallholder rural farming sector, and raising participation of these farmers in food supply chains.

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However, rural smallholder food production is already constrained by the pressure of population on land and other resources, while subsistence requirements, inadequate support services and poor market access limit their market participation. In addition, in rural areas where food insecurity is an issue, household members tend to migrate to the urban centres.

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Moving forward: rural development and strengthening value chains

To overcome these challenges, Tanzanian policy is already shifting from the goal of supplying urban populations with food at favourable prices to a more rural focus with the aim of improving the capacity of rural areas to meet growing urban

demand. We suggest that future policy needs to reinforce these efforts by further promotion of rural development, putting more resources into initiatives such as *Kilimo Kwanza* (a national strategy of the Government which includes increasing crop production, improving livestock husbandry and undertaking fish farming.) Furthermore, rural-urban linkages would benefit from a sustained programme to strengthen value chains, particularly as regards storage, processing, transport and marketing of agricultural products. The potential for market gardening in peri-urban areas could also usefully be explored.

The challenges discussed here are likely to arise in very similar form in other SSA countries so that a dialogue across the region may help to promote a productive exchange on policies to address the issues.