

# African Food Security Urban Network



## AFSUN Policy Brief BLANTYRE

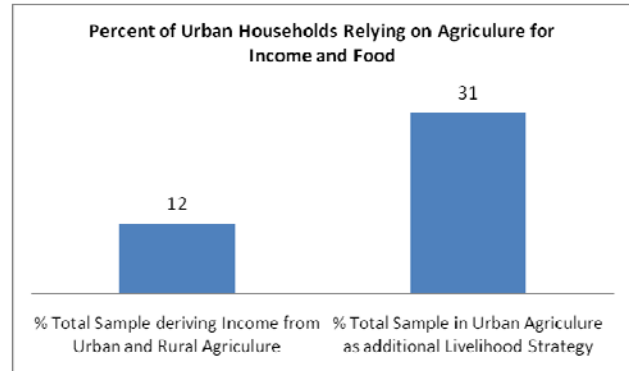
### Overview of the Study

Food shortage is considered as one of the most important problems requiring government response in Malawi. However, unlike rural food security issues, questions of urban food security have received little attention in Malawi's development and political discourses. The Urban Food Security Baseline Survey was undertaken to fill this gap and also to inform urban policy processes. The study was undertaken in the South Lunzu Ward within Blantyre City in late 2008. Blantyre is the second largest city in Malawi. South Lunzu Ward was chosen because it is an area that contains a cross-section of households (rich, middle income, and poor), has households that grow own crops and those that buy from markets. It is also an area that has households that live in an urban village. The area has a total population of 2,230 households and 423 were randomly selected for this study. The study had the following key questions: How food secure are these urban residents? What are the factors that are associated with their food (in)security?

### Key Findings

**Levels of Food Insecurity:** The study found that 34% of the sampled population is completely food secure while the remaining 66% is generally food insecure (with varying levels of food insecurity). The study also noted that while generally the urban residents have an adequate supply of staple grain for the most times during the year, the household dietary diversity is very low with most of them consuming a monotonous diet that is predominated by grain foods and vegetables but have weak or poor access to other micronutrient rich food groups due to inadequate income.

**Poverty, Gender and Sources of Food:** Female headed and centred households, households with large family sizes and low income households are more food insecure than the rest. The study further noted that while the urban poor utilise a variety and number of livelihood strategies, marketing, casual labour, food crops and self employment predominate with varying levels of effectiveness. A cash economy represents the main source of food, followed by agriculture while food aid and social networks play a marginal role in urban food security. The figure which follows shows the importance of agriculture for Blantyre households as both as a source of income and as a livelihood strategy.



**Health and Food Insecurity:** The results show that illness or death of a household member who either used to provide household labour, or brought income from work, or was simply a household head had a negative impact on all food security indicators.

**Inter-Household Food Transfers:** An important contributor to food security in urban areas is food transfers both from rural areas and towns. These transfers were deemed critically for survival amongst food insecure households.

### Policy Issues

These findings have implications on policy strategies that the Government and urban local authorities should consider for urban residents. In Malawi, food security strategies have so far focused on improving availability of food in rural areas with very minimal attention to other aspects of food security such as access and stability. Furthermore, key policy documents guiding food security at both the central and local level in Malawi are silent on urban areas. There is need to address the urban dimensions of food security that this study reveals.

#### Project Support

AFSUN's first funded project is *Urban Food Security and HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa* and is supported by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) under its University Partners in Cooperation and Development (UPCD) Tier One Program. The project is being implemented in the cities of Blantyre, Cape Town, Durban Metro, Gaborone, Harare, Johannesburg, Lusaka, Maputo, Maseru, Manzini and Windhoek.

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