



KEY MESSAGES

- In areas of high internal migration, the well being of rural household members and that of their urban relatives are strongly interdependent, and should be analyzed as part of a single, unified livelihoods system.
- Rural-urban linkages represent efforts by households to create their own safety net – migration is not always a negative coping strategy – and as such reflect their priorities and capacities. Policymakers and practitioners thus have an opportunity to advance participatory development by designing interventions that strengthen this self-generated safety net.
- Rural-urban linkages often follow a strongly seasonal pattern; the opportunities and constraints of rural and urban household members vary over the course of the year. Designing with seasonality in mind can amplify the impact of development interventions.

Action Against Hunger | ACF International is an international humanitarian organisation committed to ending child hunger. Recognised as a leader in the fight against malnutrition, ACF works to save the lives of malnourished children while providing communities with sustainable access to safe water and long-term solutions to hunger. With 30 years of expertise in emergency situations of conflict, natural disaster and chronic food insecurity, ACF runs life-saving programmes in some 40 countries benefitting nearly 5 million people each year.



CASE STUDIES OF GUINEA, ZIMBABWE, AND GUATEMALA

Rural deprivation and its urban counterpart are typically thought of as distinct phenomena, with unique causes and solutions. Development agencies thus analyze and respond to child undernutrition using approaches tailored to either the city or the countryside.

There is wisdom to this approach: the nuances of locality have doomed many a one-size-fits-all development project to failure. But, as we argue in this brief, actors working to reduce undernutrition must in their research and action not only seek to be context-specific, but also must be cognizant of the dense web of interdependencies between the urban

and rural worlds. Between September and December 2011, the Action Against Hunger International Network commissioned case studies of the impact of rural-urban linkages on household food security and child nutrition in the countries of Guinea, Zimbabwe, and Guatemala.

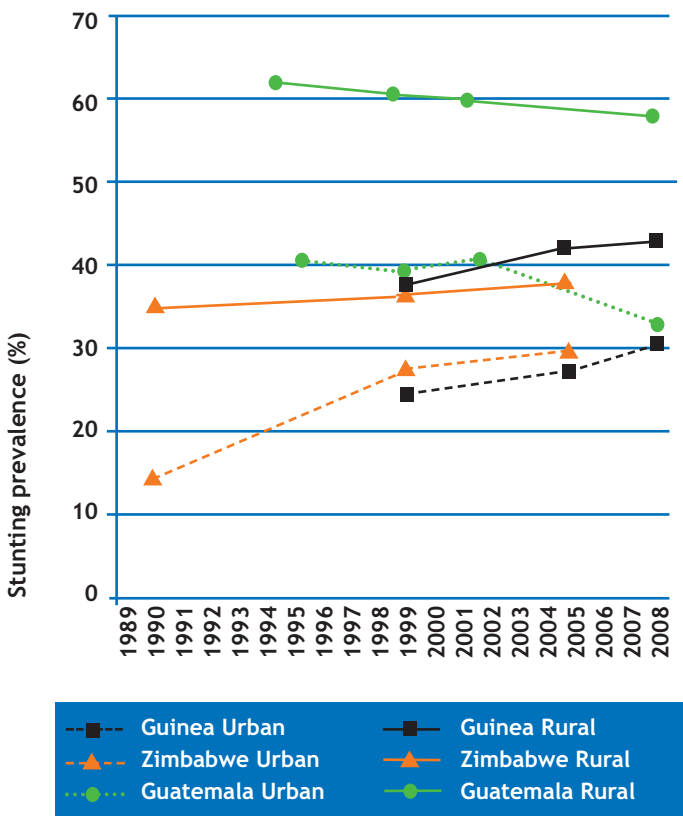
Following an initial summary on the state of child undernutrition in the case study countries, the next three sections of this brief expand on these messages, drawing on specific examples from interviews with households, community key informants, NGO and government officials.¹

CHILD NUTRITION IN THE CASE STUDY COUNTRIES

In Guinea, research was conducted in three neighborhoods of the capital of Conakry as well as three villages surrounding the smaller urban center of Kindia; in Zimbabwe, in Rujeko suburb of Masvingo town and Mushayavanhu village in Gutu district; and in Guatemala, among rural and urban residents in the department of Solalá. As Figure 1 shows, chronic undernutrition (as measured here by child stunting prevalence) is a serious problem in all three countries, with the situation markedly worse in rural areas.

The trends are also worrying. In Guinea, stunting appears to have deteriorated in the past few years, especially in urban areas. Zimbabwe has seen little progress in the last two decades, with the HIV epidemic and economic instability undermining development efforts. Stunting rates in rural Guatemala are the worst of any region in our research, with nearly three of every five children stunted in 2008. In short, the data points to the critical need to identify strategies by which development actors can increase their effectiveness in these countries. As discussed in the following sections, we propose that leveraging of rural-urban linkages is one such strategy.

FIGURE 1: CHILD STUNTING PREVALENCE IN CASE STUDY COUNTRIES



¹ Full-length case study reports for each country are available from ACF-UK. The methodology utilized for each case study is outlined in these individual reports. The Guinea and Zimbabwe case studies were conducted in partnership with existing ACF country offices; the Guatemala case study was conducted independently, and results shared with ACF.

‘SEEING LIKE A HOUSEHOLD’: ANALYSIS OF RURAL-URBAN INTERDEPENDENCE

One cannot deny that rural undernutrition often has qualitatively different causes than urban undernutrition. For example, the former is often the result of seasonal deficits in food availability, while the latter frequently arises from unsafe health conditions in urban slums. It follows that public sector and civil society response to undernutrition should also vary according to the diagnosis of the cause.

However, in the many areas of the developing world where internal migration is common, the welfare of urban households and that of their rural relatives are strongly linked. These linkages occur in many forms, and vary in their character according to context, as our three case studies show. Figures 2 and 3 below,

taken from the Guinea and Zimbabwe research, illustrate the importance of cash and material goods flows between the city and the countryside; note that because the type of flows in each location differed, the categories vary.

Figure 2 below summarizes bi-directional flows between urban and rural households, and shows that over 60% of households reported sending some cash to their relatives, and over 70% sent food; livestock, especially poultry, and clothes were also important. Figure 3 below, meanwhile, shows results for urban households only. Linkages are also strong: nearly half of urban households sent cash, almost 60% sent groceries (that is, non-staple items like cooking oil, soap, flour, etc.), and a substantial portion sent agricultural inputs, especially seeds.

FIGURE 2: GUINEA: BIDIRECTIONAL FLOWS

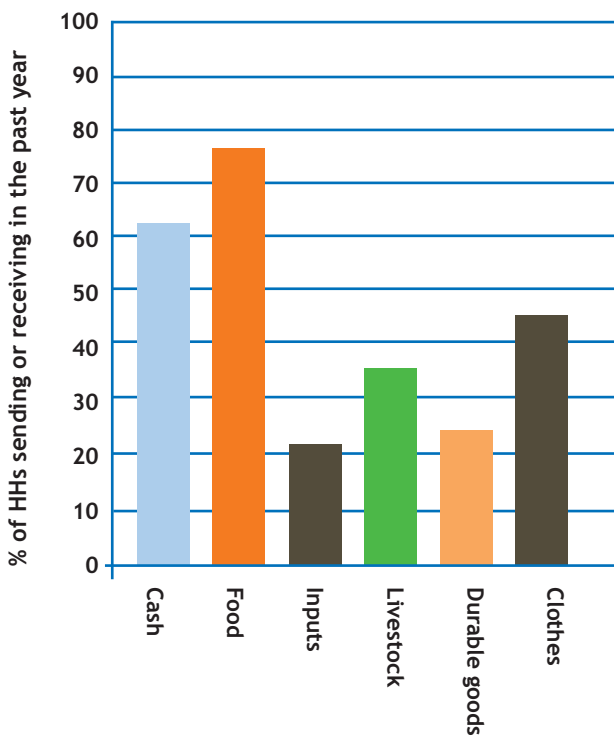
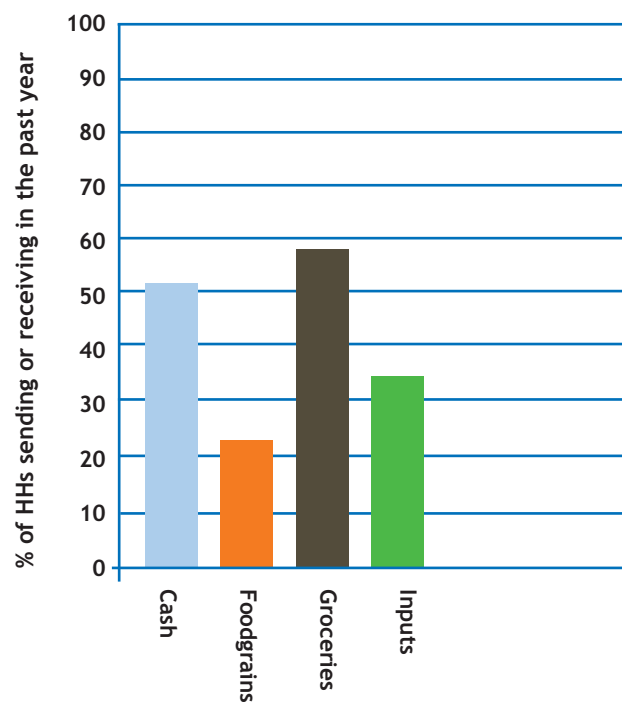


FIGURE 3: ZIMBABWE: URBAN-RURAL FLOWS



In contrast, in Guatemala, flows of cash and goods between internal migrants and their rural relatives were relatively weak, although remittances from international migrants were indeed common. However, other forms of connections between the urban and rural economies were important, especially the increasing participation of rural dwellers in income generating activities within the urban context. In addition to work on their own farms, many of our rural resident interviewees in Guatemala worked in a diverse set of activities in the urban market: wholesaling and retailing agricultural goods, selling traditional clothes and jewelry, doing logging and construction work, and so on. Urban residents also heavily participated in agricultural activities, with over 80% growing food, largely for subsistence production. Overall, while linkages in terms of cash and goods flows were weaker in Guatemala, we found that the distinction between the rural and urban worlds was much more blurred here than in Guinea or Zimbabwe.

Other important differences between the countries exist. In the area we studied in Guinea – an agricultural region four hours from the capital, Conakry, where transport infrastructure is stronger than in more remote areas – even poor rural households were able to send some goods, usually rice, to their urban relatives, especially during the initial period of migrant establishment in the city. In Zimbabwe, meanwhile, only middle-income and better-off households were able to establish links. In addition, recently arrived urban migrants in Zimbabwe were rarely able to send assistance; a multi-year period of establishment was required before flows of cash and goods to rural areas became significant.

The implications of these findings for development actors are clear. Where migration is important, livelihoods analysis should attempt to ascertain to what extent households are redistributing their cash, food, and assets in an effort to support their rural or urban relatives. Such interdependence can have

important impacts on welfare and, as discussed in the following sections, development project planning can greatly benefit from leveraging rural-urban linkages.

‘AUTOMATIC PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT’: REINFORCING HOUSEHOLD SAFETY NETS

Migration is not always a negative coping strategy; in many situations it can help households to spread risk. Further, in many countries communities have a long history of labor migration. In Zimbabwe, for example, young men have left home since colonial times to work in the mines, not only in the country itself, but also in the neighboring nations of South Africa, Botswana, Zambia. Although the mines no longer drive the economies of the region, migration remains an integral part of livelihoods.

Migration is also caused by more intangible – and often ignored – reasons. Many young people go to urban areas to leave the hard manual labor of farm life, pulled by the idea of the city as a glamorous, exciting place. This may seem obvious, but too often development organizations assume that migration is purely for economic reasons, and design interventions accordingly (for example, focusing on projects to increase agricultural productivity as a way to lessen migration). Ultimately, household welfare may be better served if some degree of migration is seen as inevitable, and public sector agencies and NGOs concentrate instead on strengthening the linkages that result, as well as easing migrant transition into the urban economy.

Economic and non-economic reasons also play an important role in why urban households maintain a link with their home areas. All of the urban interviewees in Guinea and Zimbabwe returned to their village in the past year, with half of the respondents in Guinea returning at least four times. The urban migrants often return to help in times of high agricultural labor demand, especially during planting and harvest; many continue to maintain plots



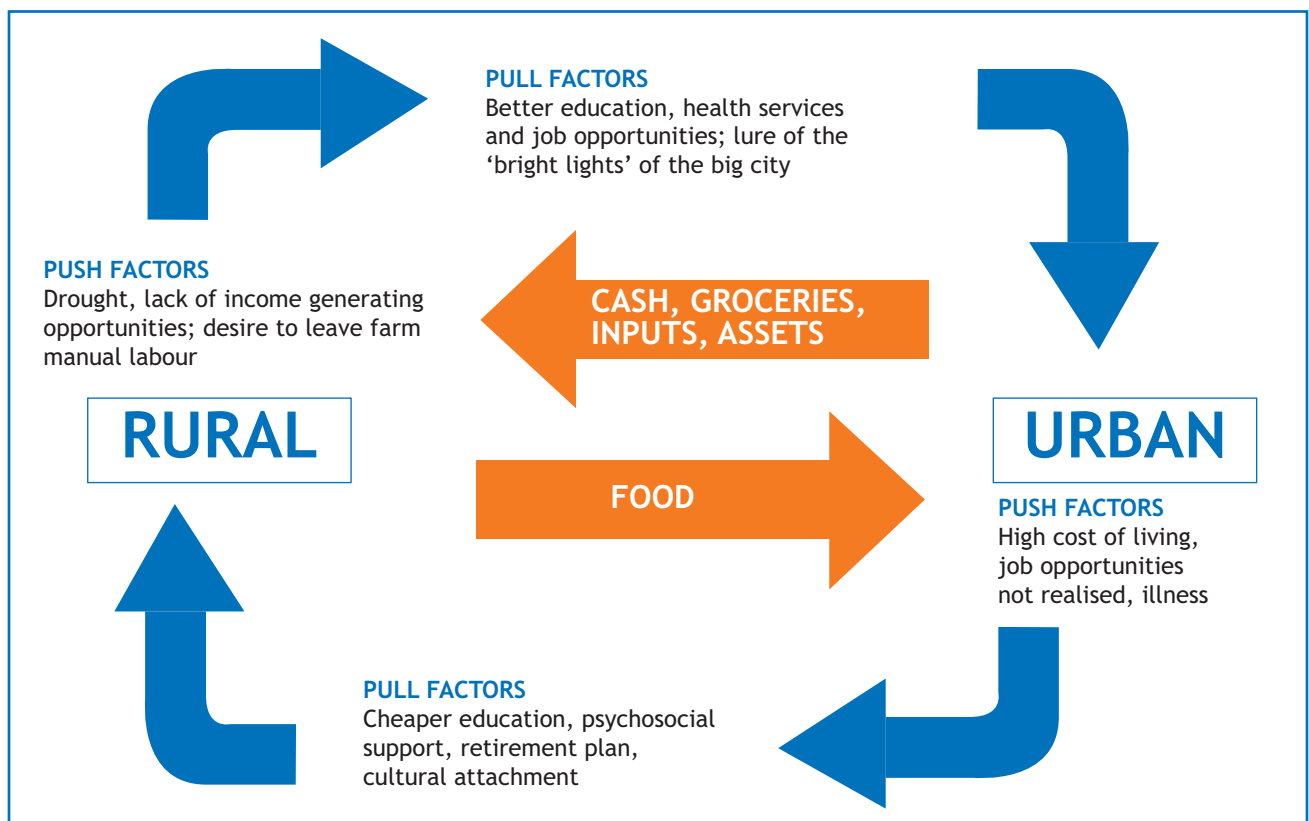
of land in the village, watched over by relatives. Others, particularly in Zimbabwe, stayed in the rural area for the entire growing season, returning to the town only once the harvest was complete. In addition, in Zimbabwe the countryside (called musha) retains a strong cultural significance, and many of the people we talked to expressed a desire to eventually return home to the village, not only for retirement but also as a way to remain connected to ancestors and cultural traditions throughout their lives. In sum, there are a variety of push and pull factors that drive migration, as Figure 4 below shows.

Further, the linkages that result from migration serve as a safety net, cushioning both sides of the household from shocks. Redistribution of income, food, and assets can mean the difference between a ‘merely bad’ year and a catastrophic one that destroys assets and traps

families in poverty for years to come. The importance of such safety nets should not be underestimated; in Guinea, for instance, around 10-15% of the food consumed by urban residents was provided by their rural relatives, and a similar proportion of cash obtained by rural families came from urban migrants. This percentage is greater than the amount of food or cash obtained from the public sector or aid organizations.

In addition, these safety nets reflect – perhaps as well as any objective analysis can – the priorities and capacities of households themselves. The linkages can be seen as choices that contain trade-offs: for example, urban migrants sending cash to protect rural relatives from undernutrition forego investment in their own livelihood activity; and rural producers sending part of their harvest so that urban relatives

FIGURE 4: PUSH AND PULL FACTORS FOR MIGRATION



can save money on purchasing food forego investment in their agricultural system. The overall impact of linkages may be to allow both sides to preserve and increase their capital stock, or may only suffice to redistribute poverty more equally across the household (but potentially protect one side from disastrous health or livelihood consequences). If development actors are able to understand these choices and their implications, they can not only amplify the impact of their interventions, as the next section discusses, but also engage in a kind of ‘automatic participatory development’, taking their lead from household decisions instead of attempting to dictate them.

REINFORCING LINKAGES TO AMPLIFY PROJECT IMPACT

Designing projects around linkages can help increase impact on food security and child nutrition. Taking account of seasonal patterns is one way to leverage rural-urban linkages. In the three case study countries, as well as in many areas of the developing world where the agricultural economy is dependent on a single rainfall period, cash and food availability follows a

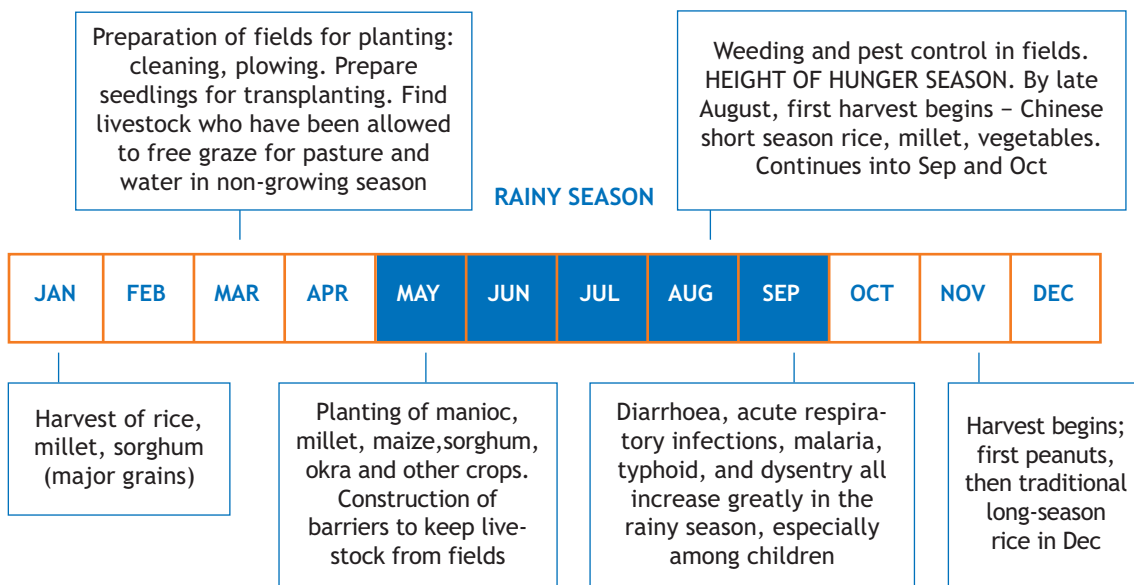
strongly seasonal pattern. The diagram below shows the seasonal calendar for the rural areas in our Guinea research.

As figure 5 shows, the rainy season – when last year’s harvest stocks are beginning to run low and this year’s crop is not yet mature – is also the time when hunger and illness are at their peak (and also when a great deal of household labor is required for crop and livestock management). Undernutrition among children is exacerbated by diarrheal diseases and other illnesses that make absorption and retention of nutrients difficult.

It is during this hunger season that transfers from urban relatives are particularly useful for rural families. Conversely, middle-income and better-off farm households often have a sizable surplus following the harvest, and are able to send food and other supplies to migrant families at this time.

Development actors can leverage this timing of resource availability and need to increase the impact

FIGURE 5: SEASONAL CALENDAR, RURAL AREAS AROUND KINDIA, GUINEA





of rural-urban linkages. For example, although urban migrants send cash to their rural relatives throughout the year as cash becomes available, it is clear that the time of greatest need is during the hunger season. One way to amplify the value of the migrant cash resources would be to facilitate the creation of “remittance savings accounts” in which urban residents could deposit money at any time, and which would gather interest until becoming available for transfer at a pre-specified time during the hunger season. Similar ideas might help increase the value of the rural harvest sent to urban residents, for example the creation of a voucher system between urban and rural traders. In this system, migrants could buy food at any time of the year from a participating urban

trader up to the value sold by farm families to a partner rural trader. This would help save both transport and storage costs for the household and thus preserve the full value of the harvest. These ideas are indicative and may not be appropriate for every context, but the larger point is that the combination of existing rural-urban linkages and predictable seasonal patterns offers opportunities for development actors to increase impact.

Besides designing for seasonality, there are other aspects of linkages that have implications for planning. For example, NGOs can help to amplify the potential value of linkages by helping new migrants establish themselves successfully in the urban economy. This



may entail providing job search resources, conducting employment training programs, or offering cash transfers. There are also threats to be confronted. In both Guinea and Zimbabwe, we found that urban migrants faced particular problems with respect to child feeding practices. Urban mothers, especially those participating in the labor market, often have less time available for childcare. This can lead to suboptimal decisions, including early abandonment of exclusive breastfeeding and use of less diverse and healthy complementary foods. While migration brings with it the opportunity to create beneficial linkages between rural and urban components of a household, as has been argued throughout this brief, development actors must also help families to confront risks like these that accompany migration.

The messages contained in this brief are straightforward and can be summarized succinctly: analyze rural and urban livelihoods as interdependent worlds; use linkages to better understand household priorities and capacities; and design projects to amplify the impact of linkages. Yet, despite that simplicity of these ideas, few development agencies working in areas of high migration fully incorporate these guidelines into project design. We argue that by doing so, the fight against food insecurity and undernutrition can be accelerated, with potentially tremendous positive consequences on the welfare of poor households, and especially young children.

