

Evolution of Urban Food Markets in Zimbabwe and Strategies for Enhancing their Contribution to Urban Resilience¹

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Abstract

Food markets in Zimbabwe's urban areas have evolved in several ways. There have been changes in the types of markets, players in the food markets, and local and market-level functions. While markets operate under the Departments of Housing and Community Services or Social Services, this department works closely with other council departments to ensure the functionality of food markets. The allocation of trading spaces at markets to marginalised residents such as widows, the aged and urban poor is changing as employed, non-poor residents and the unemployed are also seeking trading spaces. Market management functions now involve traders' associations or committees with direct or daily council involvement receding to strategic functions. The roles of local authorities in terms of identifying traders, regulating trading activities, providing infrastructure, and maintaining markets are shifting, pointing to the need for dynamic policy-making. The article discusses the findings of a study on the state of urban food markets in 10 local authorities in Zimbabwe. A mixed-methods approach was adopted for the study in a two-stage assessment process. Stage One involved the collection of information on the state of food markets in all local authorities in Zimbabwe focusing on each council area's main market. Stage Two was administering questionnaires at 10 markets in 10 local

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authorities to traders and customers accompanied by key informant interviews (KIIs). The article examines factors affecting urban food markets' contribution to urban resilience in Zimbabwe. It contributes to a transformative approach to facilitating them as socio-economic hubs.

Keywords: *informal sector, urban food markets, market regulation, urban resilience, market actors*

INTRODUCTION

Food markets are places within and run by local authorities where farm produce and other processed foods are handled and sold to the public. The original function of food markets was the supply of fresh produce to the population with guarantees of quality and at relatively favourable prices. This has been maintained, although other forms of commercial distribution have also taken on this role (Guzmán-Pérez *et al.*, 2021). Across the globe, markets make food trade an essential and ubiquitous part of the urban landscape (Stacey *et al.*, 2021). Urban food and agricultural produce markets in Africa constitute an integral part of the urban infrastructure, fulfilling a range of basic human needs and vital economic and political roles. Main urban food markets are in the most populous of Zimbabwe's urban settlements, the oldest townships. These are famed for being the cultural heartlands of each city. The 'oldest townships' also host bus termini linking rural and urban areas, which makes them critical social and economic contact points. Zimbabwe's buses plying rural-urban routes are ubiquitously called 'chicken buses' because of having a longstanding tradition of ferrying rural produce to the cities with varieties of fowl, a key farm produce on bus carriers.

FAO (2000) has noted that urban food markets in Sub-Saharan Africa are characterised by inadequately developed marketing systems resulting in congestion and overflow of traders onto streets and pavements. The marketing systems have underdeveloped chains for different value chains that affect the performance of some key services necessary to move food from producers to consumers. Ideally, most produce is processed, packaged, stored, and transported as it moves through the marketing

channels⁴. Where some of these functions occur within the vicinity of the main market like Mbare Musika in Harare, it may help create jobs and generate additional value. The lack of value chain services may explain why a significant number of food markets are underutilised in Zimbabwe. For instance, in Kadoma, a study by Monga and Dzvimbo (2019) revealed that 55% of the food and non-food markets in various residential areas were not being utilised, while only 45% were being utilised. In Harare, 71.4% of the markets were utilised while 28.6% were underutilised (City of Harare, 2021).

THEORY/CONCEPTS

The importance of markets is also reflected in the proliferation of markets as sources of food and livelihood. There has been a rise in markets of different levels all over the country, in the city centres, commercial centres, residential areas, growth points, and rural service centres as people seek means of making a living (Chigumira *et al.*, 2015). The sprouting of markets is linked to the Zimbabwean economic meltdown. It is noted that small food markets (both formal and informal) are generally characterised by low barriers to entry, relatively low capital requirements, and product homogeneity that in turn promotes a high likelihood of new entrants in the market (Matondi and Chikulo, 2012).

Safe urban food markets have become important nodes where residents interact with council policies and by-laws in ways that have not always been supportive of resilient livelihoods. The markets are not used as indicators of socioeconomic recovery but have become a means of last resort for marginalised groups with local authorities not fully tracking what happens at the markets as economic spaces. However, since markets are evolving, there is need for review/developing regulatory frameworks that are gender-responsive in the context of building resilience at the urban food markets. This supply-and-demand-side importance of urban food markets suggests their importance in local economic development (LED) specifically and local-national governance broadly.

⁴ <https://www.princeton.edu/~ota/disk3/1978/7806/780609.PDF>

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A mixed-method approach was used for this study. Secondary and primary data were collected from national and local authority officials and traders and buyers. International, regional, and local literature on the informal sector, market infrastructure, safe food markets, and market governance were also reviewed. The literature provided an understanding of the informal sector, food markets, and strategies for improving food safety at markets. Apart from academic sources used to frame the study, informal sector policies, local authority minutes and reports, policies, bylaws, and development literature were reviewed. The first stage of primary data collection involved a checklist for all local authorities. The tool focused on collecting information on the state of the main food market in each council. Thirty-eight (38) out of the 92 local authorities completed the checklist. Table 1 shows the total number of markets and the average by category of local authorities that responded to the checklist.

Table 1: *Number of Markets by Council Category* (DEGI, February, 2022)

Council Type¹⁴	City (6)	Municipality (6)	Town (6)	Local Board (4)	Rural District (16)
Total number of markets	130	56	38	13	82
Average per Council type	22	9	6	3	5

Of all the local authorities, 10 were purposively sampled including five of the Zimbabwe Urban Resilience Programme and five others. A semi-structured question guide was developed and used with key informants in the 10 local authorities, reaching 18 key informants. These included officials at the national, council, and market levels. At national and local authority levels, key informant interviews were undertaken with officials of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprise Development, local authorities, representatives of informal

traders' associations, and market committee members. Key informant interviews allowed the research team to gain an understanding of the status quo, policies, and other statutory instruments used to regulate market operations.

A questionnaire was also used to gather data from traders and customers, selected on a 'chance basis' over the duration enumerators were at sampled markets. Survey data were collected using tablets loaded with KoBoCollect Software. A total of 182 questionnaires were administered. About a third (33.52%) of the respondents were males and 66.58% were females. The age of respondents was dominated by middle-aged respondents aged between 36 and 45 years. Traders (64.3 %) and customers (37.7%) participated in the survey.

The emergence of food markets in Zimbabwe is influenced by the prevailing socio-economic conditions. The phenomenal growth of informal trading is deeply rooted in the economic policies that the government pursued especially after the first decade of political independence from 1990. This resulted in an increase in designated food markets in all local authority areas. Urban areas have the largest number of formally designated markets. This has also put much pressure on the local and national governments in terms of managing trading and related spaces. The designs and range of services available at the markets vary across local authorities. In terms of several markets, larger local authorities tend to have the highest overall, suggesting a positive correlation between the urban population and the demand for trading spaces. Population density has a close correlation with high-density residential areas having more markets than low-density ones.

Local authorities have designated main fresh fruit and vegetable markets. In urban local authorities, the markets are in the commercial business districts (CBDs) and at neighbourhood commercial centres in residential areas. For rural district councils (RDCs), these are mainly at growth points, and district service centres. The markets are at different stages of development. For Chipinge Town Council and Mutare RDC, traders are currently using makeshift markets. This was also the case in Harare's

Mabvuku, and in Masvingo City were the establishment of new markets or refurbishments of existing ones was in progress. For Mutare RDC (Zimunya Market) traders abandoned the existing shed mentioning that it was at an 'unprofitable location'. Recent market infrastructure had been established and commissioned in Mutoko (Bulk Shed, 2019), Mutare (Diamond, 2017) and Gwanda (Fresh Fruit and Vegetable, 2022), Gweru - Kudzanayi (Fresh and Vegetable, 2021).

MARKET UTILISATION

There are varying levels of market utilisation within local authorities. This was established by looking at design capacities and 'actual use' (number of trading places provided for versus trader numbers). Half (50%) of the markets were operating below capacity with some abandoned, while 25.5% were at capacity and 24.5% were above capacity or overcrowded. The above capacity existed where traders exceeded the design capacity.

Seventy percent (70%) of the councils indicated that not all trade occurred within the provided market structures. While part of this might arise from the absence of sheds at some markets, there are socio-economic factors that have led traders to operate outside market structures. The cases at Zimunya in Mutare RDC, Sekusile in Bulawayo, Bulk Shed in Mutoko, and Jotsholo markets in Kusile RDC were explained concerning i) changes in public transport services and infrastructure such as bus-stops and modes (buses to *mshika-mshika* and kombi's that stop anywhere), ii) evading council regulations and fees, iii) profitability challenges at the designated places, and iv) location of markets at sites that the traders felt were non-profitable. Existing markets are, therefore, not fully utilised. An extreme case of underutilisation was represented at the Jotsholo Market where only two traders out of a potential 16 traders were at the market at the time of the study. For Mutare RDC, only one trader sometimes used the council-provided shed.



Abandoned food market in Magwegwe North, Bulawayo



Abandoned food market in Zimunya, Mutare RDC



Infrastructure for roasting maize is now used for cooking sadza at Jahunda Food Market, Gwanda

Figure 1: *Abandoned Food market Infrastructure* (DEGI Fieldwork, 2022)

Emerging socio-economic trends have changed trading patterns and generated new uses that at times contradict market locations and designs. Food markets are no longer just physical or retail spaces but accommodate several uses including wholesale, storage, and processing spaces. Due to these changes, markets have adopted broader land uses. While the uses have changed, the infrastructure and services provided to these markets have not been adopted. Chatiza *et al.* (2021) observed this at Chigovanyika Market in Chitungwiza where a council market had become an entertainment place for youth and men forcing mainly female traders out of the shed. Drawing insights from other main markets, local authorities are experiencing challenges in regulating both market-level and surrounding socio-economic activities. In essence, councils are failing, like

other public agencies in the country, to effectively facilitate local economic development (*ibid.*). At the Jahunda Market in Gwanda, traders used infrastructure meant for roasting maize, and groundnuts to prepare hot meals for sale. Further, at all the markets, grocery sales had become common at times replacing fresh fruit and vegetable markets.

Due to increased trader competition and reduced use of mass public transport termini, mobile trading to reach customers has resulted in some established food markets being abandoned. In addition, some of the traders were not willing to pay for trading licenses as that would confine them to the markets while those traders without permits are making more sales by being mobile. The markets have not adapted to the rapid transitions related to i) characteristics of traders, ii) trading patterns, iii) preferred trading locations, iv) types of customers and preferences, and v) complexity and variety of traded goods. The study observed that infrastructure and facility flexibility in public sector-provided markets was difficult, if not impossible, without direct investments from users or other private investors. Further, collectively and individually, traders and their associations were not sufficiently concerned about the negative consequences of abandoning physical markets in favour of mobile or street trading. This reflected a lack of ownership of publicly provided urban market infrastructure. Collectively, traders appeared capable of but disinterested in engaging councils to avoid urban market infrastructure disuse.

Market over-utilisation arose from the unavailability of adequate trading spaces. Traders were setting up stalls so close to one another or sharing the same spaces making it difficult to distinguish one business from another. Though COVID-19 prevention measures forced local authorities to closely monitor over-utilisation to ensure adherence to social distancing, inspections were neither systematic nor regular. Due to lack of space, some traders had also put their wares in front of designated tables.

MARKET DESIGN AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Designs and space organisation at food markets vary. There are no minimum design standards and fittings for market stalls across the country⁵. For interior designs, traders use wooden tables and concrete slabs. The shed designs and associated infrastructure are also different across markets. Some had sheds with concrete floor slabs and plastered brick or concrete shelving. However, not all markets had lockable shelving for storing produce. Food markets are not always separate from non-food ones. For instance, Diamond and Lusaka Markets in Mutare and Harare, respectively, combine a range of goods beyond food. The food markets that are under construction had improved ventilation and provided for better human movement compared to existing (and not adapted) ones. Figure 2 shows some of the designs at the various food markets.



⁵ Safe Markets Guidelines Workshop Report, 15/07/2021: 08:29 AM, Harare. Attended by Urban Local Authorities (Mutare, Chipinge, Gwanda, Bulawayo); Responsible parties (Care, Oxfam, DCA), Informal Sector Representatives, UN Women, ILO, Development Governance Institute, Ministry of Local Government and Public Works and UNDP.



Pictures by Dr. Percy Toriro

Figure 2: *Market Interior/External Designs* (DEGI Fieldwork, 2022 and Dr. Percy Toriro, February 2022)

Some of the markets had makeshift structures, unpaved floors, and storage spaces. These include Nkulumane's Sekusile in Bulawayo, Zimunya and Chipinge's fresh fruit and vegetable markets. Some of the traders at Sekusile traded from council-demarcated bays while at Zimunya, Chipinge traders were not organised and mixed with those trading in non-food items. Traders and customers were using open spaces exposed to weather elements such as rain, wind, and the sun with negative impacts on trader/customer health and perishable produces. In general, the interior and exterior designs of most food markets do not meet some of the basic design and infrastructure standards necessary for food safety.

INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING MECHANISMS

Funding mechanisms for the construction and maintenance of food markets vary. They include council capital budgets, funding by donors (directly and through UN and NGO projects), and private players including traders. Local authorities have funded most of the existing

market infrastructure. Councils were also partnering with the private sector and international and local development organisations for support. In such partnerships councils were providing land, technical designs, and making service connections while partners financed actual construction works and trader capacity development.

In general, traditional state funding for market infrastructure (council capital budgets and Public Sector Investment Programme loans) has slowed. As a result, councils are now looking to the private sector and international and local development organisations for support. In Mutare City, a local radio station, Diamond FM, funded the renovation of the Diamond Market. Key informant interviews at the City of Bulawayo and Mutare RDC indicated that due to limited capital budgets, local authorities were looking for external funding for the reconstruction of food markets at new locations acceptable to traders. As a result, most food markets remain public assets whose sustainability is correlated with that of the sponsoring public agencies, mainly councils. Given shrinking capital budgets prospects of sustainability and expansion of existing markets and establishment of new ones is therefore in doubt.

THE MANAGEMENT OF FOOD MARKETS

LOCAL AUTHORITY

Urban food markets fall under departments of housing and community services (urban local authorities) or social services (rural local authorities). They constitute an important social safety net for people not formally employed in other key sectors of the urban economy. This suggests a poverty reduction focus as trading spaces were allocated mainly to widows, the aged, and the urban poor. As a result, food markets have, for the most part, been developed for, run by, and benefited the urban and rural poor. While markets still fall under the same departments, growing job losses in other sectors of local economies have resulted in the ‘non-poor’ becoming key actors in markets. The traders equally serve a segment of society not adequately served by formal food retailers. Increasingly, markets are no longer exclusively serving the urban poor. Food commodities at the markets are cheaper and readily available to a wider population of varied socio-economic characteristics.

Councils have remained the main actors at food markets. However, they have not sufficiently adapted to the reality of the emergence of other new actors and the changed nature of traders. No appropriate institutional transformations have taken place within councils. Local authority departments, other than housing and community/social services, with a stake in the operations of markets have not redefined their roles regarding market regulation and the provision of services. Staff responsibilities and competencies have not been adjusted accordingly. Even where the functions of different council departments are clear (Table 2) their performance concerning food markets remains unadjusted thereby limiting the ability of Councils and other market stakeholders to appropriately facilitate markets as high-performing and diversified hubs for food-related economic development.

Table 2: *Council Departments/Sections that have a stake in the food Markets*
(Adapted from Chatiza *et al.*, 2022)

Department/Section	Role
Housing and Community or Social Services	Allocation of trading spaces and managing traders' operations
Physical/Town Planning	Spatial planning and regulating land use, i.e. identifying land suitable for trading areas
Chamber Secretary /Administration	Development and enforcement of relevant regulations
Finance/Treasury	Budget preparation, setting tariffs for markets, and collection of revenue
Health	Health inspections, safety awareness, and waste management
Engineering	Infrastructure design, development, and maintenance

Coordination across Council departments to ensure effective management of food markets was observed to be weak for various reasons. As a result, data collection on market operations including the collection and

application of revenue was inadequate. The research team was referred to different council departments to access data on market regulation. This confirmed that information on food markets was neither collated nor analysed for effective use at policy level and managerial decision-making. In some councils, databases of traders were not shared across different council departments which presents a challenge in terms of management of issues that cut across departments for instance revenue collection and application for infrastructure maintenance and relevant service expansion.

NON-COUNCIL STAKEHOLDERS OF FOOD MARKETS

There are other stakeholders in the operation of markets within council areas. The mandates of these stakeholders are derived from Acts of Parliament for state institutions. Even though the legislated mandates of national state agencies and local authorities are defined, coordination concerning market infrastructure and regulation appears inadequate. Some non-state support towards market infrastructure is not accompanied by plans for infrastructure maintenance and expansion. However, the development and management of council-run markets by different stakeholders are gaining momentum. This is important in terms of socio-economic development and contribution towards LED. At the same time, it reflects the emerging complexities that councils alone are unable to manage. The latter factor arises from the negative implications of the weak macroeconomic framework and performance on local economic regulation. Table 3 shows different examples of actors and the roles the study¹³ consolidated.

Table 3: Stakeholders at food markets and their roles (Chatiza *et al.*, 2022)

Stakeholder	Role
Ministry responsible for home affairs – Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP)	Enforcement of the law to ensure a secure trading environment
Ministry of responsible for health	Ensure health standards, food safety, etc. are followed, raising awareness on diseases and relevant prevention

Ministry responsible for women's affairs and SMEs	Business development (and group formation/strengthening) facilitation, regulatory compliance, providing & brokering access to finance, and awareness of women's rights
Environmental Management Agency (EMA)	Monitor regulatory issues affecting the environment, on waste management
Development Partners (e.g. UNDP), NGOs/CSOs	Infrastructure development at markets, group formation/strengthening, providing and brokering access to finance lobbying, and awareness of rights
Private companies and financial services institutions (e.g. banks)	Business linkages, some infrastructure development, providing access to finance, and awareness of women's rights
National Social Security Authority (NSSA) ⁶	Safety and health information dissemination and ensuring compliance
Trader/Market Committees	Working closely with councils and other stakeholders, e.g. CSOs
Trader's Associations	Pressure groups that articulate mainly traders' interests or rights, lobbying for alternative policies and practical approaches to meeting their members' needs, strengthen member organisations, mobilise technical and at times financial support for their members

FOOD MARKET COMMITTEES

Food markets have some structures to assist in their day-to-day management. A big number of councils (89.5%) indicated that there were committees at the food markets, while 10.5% indicated that they did not have any. These findings were corroborated by traders and customers, with 84% confirming the existence of markets, while 11% stated there were no committees in place and the rest (5%) did not know. The committees were selected mainly by the traders with cases of market 'pioneers' being consulted on market issues cited at the markets in

⁶ NSSA was noted as a relatively emerging function at the food markets

Mutoko (Bulk Shed), in Harare (Hatcliffe ‘Dust’), and Gwanda (Jahunda). Most committees were reported to be balanced concerning sex, age, and disability. The markets had constitutions and regulations guiding their operations. These regulatory instruments helped committees address issues of health and hygiene at trading spaces, operating times, new traders, security, and negotiations with regulators.

Market Committee roles were limited to basic functions that include organising market cleaning rosters, monitoring COVID-19 compliance, organising security personnel to guard the premises, and consulting and being consulted by councils on issues related to trading activities. As such, concerns with more strategic issues of economic management remain as limited with market committees as with councils. This may explain why documented conversations relate to tariff levels and blame councils for the non-collection of waste rather than job potentiation for instance. Relations between the committees and local authorities were noted to be cordial. Engagement meetings were undertaken on issues of traders’ expectations from local authorities, encouraging traders to pay their rentals, challenges being experienced, and possible solutions. Eighty-four percent (84%) of councils indicated that market committees were active and assisted them to keep markets functional, while 16% said they were not. Close to sixty percent (59.5%) (with 30.5% very good, 29% good) of traders and customers rated the market committees positively, 24% rated them as average, and 16.5% negatively (12% poor and 4.5% very poor). This shows that market committees are a key food market governance institution.

Their structures are clear, and they had constitutions with well-defined roles and obligations. The Mutoko Association is actively involved in the allocation of tables/stalls to applicants. This in some markets is a role assumed by market gatekeepers and space barons for instance in Gwanda at the Jahunda Market where there are *old madhalas* (market elders) performing functions of a food market committee. For Mutoko, the local authority has delegated the association to perform the functions of assessing applicant statuses and recommending allocations to the council. This is not the case for other markets. These functions remain under the

council while in some instances, councils do so in close consultation with the committees as was noted in Gwanda at Jahunda Market.

These varying operational models suggest a considerable change in the role of councils in the food markets. This is a gap that market actors identified and formulated strategies while in some instances, councils are no longer sufficiently connected to the markets in governance terms, as there are many organisational dynamics beyond local authorities at the markets. Some of these strategies/innovations point towards alternative and more sustainable models where food market traders have taken additional roles, unburdening councils in the process. However, this process requires adequate engagement to ensure that the different emergent models are assessed and agreed on as opposed to leaving it to the unfacilitated festering of alternative governance models.

CONCLUSION

Food markets are evolving but local authority operations have not changed to accommodate the increasing functions of the markets. The business-as-usual approach that councils are still using is creating problems in terms of infrastructure provision, support services, and overall governance. Large capital investments are required to make food markets business hubs and complex workplaces but are beyond the capacities of local authorities. An investment package is needed that has several options: i) do it alone (individual council efforts), ii) do it with others (partnership) and iii) get others to do it (overseeing). These various components must be held together by a clear LED strategy and implementation plan. Due consideration has to be given to the planning, and regulation to ensure enabling food markets. They must be viewed as socio-economic nodes and workplaces as part of local government LED competencies. Food markets must be seen and developed as workspaces meeting relevant standards, hence their operationalisation must prioritise specific value chains. Works are underway to make food markets compliant in terms of occupational health and safety (OHS), drawing on the momentum created under COVID-19 prevention protocols. This includes redesigning most to ensure inclusivity. The national and provincial governments are expected to play a supportive role to enable councils to execute their functions at food markets.

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