KEY MESSAGES

- Rural–urban linkages, characterised by the movement of people, cash and goods, remain significant in Zimbabwe. The strength of these links varies over time and space, and depends on a number of variables, not least household economic status.

- Stakeholders need to start approaching migration as one element of typical livelihood strategy which can provide benefits to the household unit, rather than as a negative coping strategy.

- The existence of rural urban linkages can impact upon many of the underlying causes of malnutrition. This research has found that the most obvious of these is food security, which is directly affected by these linkages. Child care practises – such as breast feeding and weaning – are also affected.

- Rural urban linkages have both positive and negative implications for nutrition. Certain linkages are born out of necessity due to weak livelihoods, while others manifest regardless of whether a household is in crisis or not. Identifying the negative effects of linkages should lead to policy interventions which may alleviate the damage.

- For typical poor households the advantages of having rural urban linkages are initially accrued to the urban migrant. Poor households do not send or receive remittances.

- Rural and urban components of the household are part of one economic unit. This implies that a holistic approach is needed, which takes into account the fact that policies and programmes implemented in urban areas will have knock on effects in rural areas and vice versa.
CONTENTS
At independence in 1980, the Zimbabwean economy experienced a period of gradual growth and relative stability. A diverse economy, dominated by agricultural production was complemented by a strong manufacturing base. However, since the mid nineties, years of political, economic and social upheaval combined with recurrent drought has brought the nation to the brink of collapse. At its height in August 2008, inflation stood at an eye watering 231 million percent, before the Zimbabwe dollar was suspended in April 2009.¹ The demise of the formal economy and most public services followed. Unemployment has remained above 80% for the last two decades, pushing many people into the informal economy.² The situation is exacerbated by an AIDS epidemic, which has hit the economy hard, leaving many children orphaned. Improvements have been noted since 2009 through the formation of a coalition government and adoption of a US$-based economy but the country is still reeling in the aftermath of a decade-long crisis. Chronic malnutrition in children under 5 is high, with both rural and urban rates above twenty five percent, as indicated in Figure 1, left.

Traditionally, ACF’s target group has been the rural poor. Now, however, it is becoming increasingly recognised that in many places, there is no longer a clear cut distinction between rural and urban livelihoods. Rather, they are interconnected on many levels. Recognising that this rural-urban gap no longer exists, that households often have one foot in the rural economy and another in the urban economy, implies that ACF needs to understand the system as a whole rather than focussing exclusively on the rural sector. Rural urban linkages and interactions play an increasingly significant role in local economies and in the livelihoods of a large number of people.

Understanding the impact of rural urban linkages on the main causes of childhood undernutrition, and the

---

ways in which these linkages can make a contribution towards addressing the causes of undernutrition, is key. With this in mind, ACF designed a research project to strengthen our understanding of how multi spatial households function. The field work aimed to answer the following broad questions: To what extent does the existence of strong links boost household resilience in times of difficulty? To what extent are urban households able to draw on assets and resources of their rural counterparts in times of stress? And, to what extent are rural households able to draw on urban relatives?

In Zimbabwe, two research sites were chosen: Rujeko suburb in Masvingo town was chosen as the urban research location, and Mushayavanhu village in Gutu District – approximately 2 hours by bus from Masvingo – was selected as the rural location. In Rujeko, data collection involved an initial survey of 20-30 migrant households, followed by more detailed focus group discussions (FGDs) for household economy analysis, in addition to discussions with recent migrants (post 2008) and long term migrants, plus a care givers’ focus group. Gutu District was selected partly due to its proximity to Masvingo Town, but also because ACF has implemented various projects in the district and has good access to the population. In Gutu, initial surveys were targeted at the relatives of urban migrants. These were followed up by focus group discussions along the same lines as the urban site. Key informant discussions were also held government officials from the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare, the Ministry of Agriculture Extension Service, Ministry of Local Government, Rural and Urban Development and with Action Contre la Faim (ACF) and CARE Zimbabwe staff.

TYPES OF RURAL URBAN LINKAGES

Rural – urban linkages, predominantly characterised by the movement of people, (both short and long term migration) cash and goods, remain significant in Zimbabwe. Migration is entrenched in the history of southern Africa. Since colonial times, young men have left home to work in the mines in South Africa, Botswana, Zambia, and indeed Zimbabwe. Although the mines no longer drive the economies of the region, and miners have long since been retrenched, migration remains an integral part of livelihoods, as illustrated by this research.

Masvingo Town, provincial capital is home to a growing number of migrants originating in various districts across southern Zimbabwe. The decision to move to
town long term is based on a combination of ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors, represented in figure 3 below. These are considered by individual households before deciding to migrate.

According to FGDs, households will perceive different push/pull factors as being more or less important, depending on their wealth group and their circumstances. There are a number of reasons why people migrate, and not all of these are economic; the lure of the ‘bright lights’ of the city for the youth was noted as a strong pull factor. As one market trader in Rujeko commented, “I wanted to experience life in the city... I wanted to see electricity!” For middle and better off households, the education system and health facilities in town are a major incentive to migrate. For this type of household, it is common for children to go to school in town, staying with relatives if their parents are still in rural areas. By contrast, poor households are more likely to migrate in search of better economic opportunities. Ultimately however, the relative importance of each push/pull factor will be unique to each household. The economy in rural Gutu revolves around rain fed agriculture. However, with increasingly unpredictable patterns of rainfall, leading to deteriorating yields, agriculture can no longer be relied upon to provide the reliable livelihood base that it once did. Poor market infrastructure does not help. Limited opportunities for working on other people’s farms do exist and it is common for poor households to generate a considerable proportion of their household food this way. The acquisition of cash for poor households in rural Gutu is extremely difficult. Instead, an intricate exchange system is used whereby people are paid for their work in kind³, and they are able to exchange agricultural produce for groceries in shops. Put simply, people leave their rural homes, or the musha as it is known, because aside from agriculture, there are few opportunities to generate income in rural areas. As indicated in

---

³ Typically, a labourer will be paid in maize. For example 6 days weeding earns 40 Kg maize grain.
Typical poor households have three main sources of income. Crop sales includes sale of onions and tomatoes and petty trade refers mainly to selling wild foods such as insects, wild meats and wild fruits. The majority of labour is agricultural in nature and is therefore seasonal.

The overwhelming majority of longer term migrants interviewed in Rujeko (those that had been in the city since before 2008) maintained access to land in the musha. In fact, 100% of those interviewed had visited Gutu at least once in the preceding year. Respondents commented that maintaining access to the musha is important for a number of reasons. First and foremost, access to land enables households to have direct access to food. Over half of those interviewed had consumed crops grown in the musha. This is evidenced by figure 5, opposite which indicates that a typical poor urban household derives almost 40% of food income from ‘own production.’ It is the second most important source of food, after purchase. This will partly be from urban agriculture, but will also incorporate food grown in the rural areas.

Participants in FGDs in both urban and rural areas noted that agricultural production in rural areas involves labour power from family members remaining at home as well as those who have migrated to the city. It is common for migrants (or their spouses) to return to the musha during the agricultural season to participate in all aspects of agricultural production, from land preparation to harvesting. Some people interviewed managed to travel back and forth between town and the musha, pursuing their regular economic activities alongside agricultural production, but others stayed in musha for the whole season, returning to town once more when harvest was complete. The actual quantity of harvest received by urban migrants varied from less than 20kg of maize to over 300kg. Unsurprisingly, yields were determined partly by the size of the area cultivated and the wealth group of the migrant, but also by the climate. Recent migrants (those who moved to the city after 2008), were much less likely to return home for such long stints to help with agricultural production. This could partly be related to the desire for them to prove that they can ‘make it’ in the city. Returning home too soon, even if only on a temporary basis was perceived by younger migrants in particular, as losing face. Less than twenty percent of recent migrants interviewed mentioned wanting to return to the musha at some stage in later life.

By contrast, for more than eighty percent of long term migrants, the ultimate plan was to return to the musha for retirement. They acknowledged that if they become seriously ill, then they would be more likely to return to the musha because health care is cheaper in rural areas, and family members could care for them. But beyond the economic benefit of returning to the musha, most long term migrants wanted to
return ‘home’. The cultural attachment households have to the musha cannot be underestimated. The musha takes on particular cultural significance for Zimbabweans; as confirmed in our research, it is the place of choice to retire to and be buried, but importantly, also represents connection to ancestors:

“...It is very important for people in the city to maintain rural links; our culture, our history and traditions are in the rural areas. People can quickly abandon their traditions if they lose that connection.”

Obert Mubayi, 51, key informant, Masvingo

Interviews and FGD in Rujoko found that working women with pre-school age children regularly leave their children in the rural areas with extended family – usually sisters or parents for short periods to enable them to continue with their work. In particular, cross border traders, will leave their young children with relatives so they can travel across the border to South Africa to purchase blankets, clothes and shoes for sale in Zimbabwe. Without the ability to rely on their extended families in rural areas, the income generating opportunities for these women would be severely restricted. Another increasingly common practice is for families with school age children, who now live most of the time in Rujoko, to return to the musha during the school holidays, to see family and to reduce expenditure. As one participant in a FGD commented,

“Everything in the city costs money – rent costs money, bills cost money, transport costs money, school fees cost money. Money, money, money. Everything costs... it is too expensive.”

Beatriz, 27, cross border trader and mother of 2

Similarly, for households that remain split (with the mother and children staying in rural areas, while their husbands live and work in Masvingo), it is common for the children to visit urban areas during school holidays, but usually for shorter periods. If work commitments permit, their fathers will also come to the musha to visit when possible. Participants in FGDs in urban areas noted that the spread of mobile phone technology across the region has already made communication better. This is reinforced by the fact that 84 % of households interviewed in Gutu had spoken to their relatives in urban areas, by phone, at least twice in the past year, something which would not have been possible a few years ago. Although ownership of mobile phones may be out of reach for many poor households, it is common for those who do own them to allow other community members to borrow their phones occasionally. While in its infancy at present, there are telecommunications companies promoting the use of the mobile phone network as a means of transferring cash across the country. This is likely to expand in popularity as phones become more accessible for those in rural areas.

In sum, the majority of people interviewed in Rujoko felt that retaining a foothold in rural areas, keeping in touch with the musha, is beneficial. Keeping the rural link alive spreads risk by diversifying the household livelihood base and strengthening household’s asset base. On the other hand, urban areas provide a place of refuge where single mothers for example, are able to avoid social costs which would have come to bear had they remained in rural communities. In addition, FGD highlighted the importance of the musha as a place where traditional cultural practises and knowledge are preserved and protected. For them, maintaining the rural link provides a means of safeguarding the intergenerational transfer of these important cultural values.

Participants in FGD highlighted that it is mainly middle and better off rural households that benefit from flows of cash from urban areas within Zimbabwe, such as

Masvingo, Bulawayo, Mutare and Harare, but also from further afield in South Africa. As discussed further in the next section, poor households are unlikely to send or receive remittances. For the most part, cash is brought home in person, or sometimes migrants may give cash to relatives or friends to pass on. Not surprisingly, the quantity of cash sent back to the rural areas varies significantly. According to participants in FGD, the closer the family tie, the more likely it is that remittances will be sent back on a regular basis. They pointed out that close family members such as children, spouses and siblings are most likely to support their families by sending back cash regularly whereas extended family will help out in a crisis but are otherwise focused on supporting their own immediate families. The quantity of cash sent to the rural areas varied widely, from $50 to more than $500 per month. Remittances are an important source of income for better off and middle rural households, representing 18% of total income for better off households in Gutu, as indicated in figure 6, above.

Interestingly grain was also reportedly sent back to rural areas by 20% of urban households interviewed. On further probing, it was found that this is a relatively recent phenomenon, starting in response to successive failed harvests relatively recently. It could be argued that this represents a preventive strategy employed by the urban component of the household to avert food insecurity in the rural household; in other words a spatial redistribution of food security.
RURAL-URBAN LINKAGES AND COPING ABILITY: DO THEY MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN TIMES OF CRISIS?

We have seen that the majority of migrant households interviewed in urban Rujeko maintain links of some sort with their rural area, the strength of which is dependent on a number of factors. The question to which we now turn is, to what extent do these links make a difference in times of crisis?

The rural economy in Masvingo Province revolves around rain fed agricultural production, with some wealthier households also keeping livestock. The only other economic activity of note is trade, which requires a certain level of capital outlay to cover start-up costs; such costs are beyond the capacity of most poor households. For them, sending a member of the household to an urban area (Masvingo or further afield) represents a risk spreading strategy. The logic being that if harvests fail, which is becoming a relatively common occurrence, the rural component of the household will be able to draw on income earned by those in the urban areas in order to cover shortfalls in food income. However, reality is somewhat different. Our research has shown that migrants need to reach a certain level of food security themselves, before being in a position to send cash home. In many instances, those remaining in rural areas do not benefit from the income earned in town for a number of months, since the migrant has numerous costs he/she must cover, such as rent, bills, transport which must first be paid, before being in a position to send any cash home to the musha. As indicated in figure 8, below, this category consumes the lion’s share, almost 40% of total expenditure for these households.

"I am looking after 3 of my grandchildren alone, their parents died last year. None of my children are at home any more. They have left for the city. I speak with all my family regularly, every week at least. I am lucky, my children send home money quite regularly. When they come and visit me, I am usually able to send them back with some food produced here, whether it’s a bag of maize or ground nuts or some vegetables."

Abiya Zimutu, 73 resident of Gutu
Furthermore, until the migrant is established in town, it is less likely that he/she will return to the musha to help with agricultural production, so there will be less labour power available at critical times of year. This may imply that yields are lower, or income generated reduced, putting a further strain on the household. As one participant in a FGD in Gutu commented,

“There is a time lag between the migrant leaving for town, and the [rural] household feeling the benefits, it may take months or even years. Some never do.”

Zivengwa Nunangangwa, 71, resident of Gutu

In fact, many participants in FGDs perceived that it is the migrants who move to urban areas who benefit most from maintaining linkages with their rural area. Those left behind felt that, for the most part, they did not feel the benefits to the same extent.

For middle and better off households, the picture is slightly different. For these households, the benefits of linkages are felt by both rural and urban components. They are more likely to remit cash to rural areas on a regular basis, sometimes making a significant contribution to household income, as seen in the previous section. In turn, they are more likely to benefit by bringing food produced in rural areas for consumption in town, thereby freeing up income to be spent on other essentials such as rent, bills, education and health, as indicated in figure 9, above.

They also have the added bonus of being able to use family in rural areas for childcare purposes, and for instilling important cultural values, which cannot be found in town.

In sum, those who can access, and exploit, elements of both the rural and urban economy are able to spread risk, taking advantage of a diverse range of seasonal opportunities across the spatial divide, to generate food and cash. Investment is channelled back into the rural area, the musha thereby boosting household resilience, and strengthening safety nets. The fact that many middle income and better off households choose to keep on investing in the rural areas despite residing in the city further demonstrates the perceived importance of the musha, not least as a place to safeguard assets which can be passed to future generations.

IMPLICATIONS OF RURAL-URBAN LINKAGES FOR NUTRITION

The existence of rural urban linkages can impact upon many of the underlying causes of malnutrition. This research has found that the most obvious of these is food security, which is directly affected by these linkages.

The case of Memory Tabneni, a single mother with a 13 year old daughter, demonstrates well the impact that maintaining rural links can have on urban household food security. Memory lives in Rujeko but like many, she still has access to land in the rural areas, where her grandfather lives. He grows maize, ground nuts, round nuts, kovo and cabbage. Memory has a stall selling tomatoes, onions, and oranges at the small market in Rujeko. She is able to cover the bus fare to the musha to help with planting and will then return

FIGURE 9: BETTER OFF HOUSEHOLD EXPENDITURE, RUJEKO (URBAN)
“Usually, come harvest, I can bring back enough maize to last me and my daughter around six months. I am lucky. I can always go back to my grandfather and stay with him ... but I don’t stay long, I always want to come back to town.”

Memory Tabneni, 34, vegetable trader, Rujeko urban

to her stall in town while simultaneously going back and forth during the season to help with weeding.

For people like Memory, having access to land in the rural areas translates into a significant food source: she estimates that 50% of the maize consumed in her household originates in the musha. Furthermore, income that may otherwise be spent on purchasing food in urban markets is freed up for other essentials such as rent, health costs or school fees. Memory’s case is typical of a middle income household straddling the rural urban divide.

““It is really important to have links with town, as my children can grow up knowing the countryside and knowing town too... they will be ok.”

FGD participant, Gutu

Care practises such as breastfeeding and weaning, may also affected by rural urban linkages. The Ministry of Health advises mothers to exclusively breastfeed for the first six months, and to introduce complementary foods while continuing to breastfeed until the child is twelve months. FGD participants commented that many urban women introduce solid foods younger than six months. This is perhaps related to the fact that urban mothers are less likely to be able to take their children to work with them. Rather they need their babies to be of a certain weight so they can be left with a carer in town, or with family in rural areas so they can go out to work. Stopping exclusive breast feeding before six months has clear implications for nutrition. Infants are not capable of digesting solid foods before six months of age, and as a result they may end up with diarrhoea, which is one of the most common underlying causes of malnutrition.

Long term and recent migrants felt that the diets of their infants and babies had improved since moving to town. The overriding perception among those interviewed was that modern processed foods, those that could be purchased from shops, were equally, if not more nutritious than fresh foods typically consumed in rural areas, as the following statement shows:

““In rural areas we used to cook with peanut butter. Now we have cooking oil, which is much better for us.”

FGD participant, Rujeko
In fact, our research found that, as a rule, infants’ diets were more diverse and nutritious in rural areas. Consumption of empty calories in the form of snacks such as popcorn, sweets, iced lollies and crisps, bought from roadside stalls is relatively common for urban dwellers. Infants may also be given bread and tea between meals. Tea is high in tannin which inhibits absorption of iron, which can have implications for child development.

Contrary to expectation, our research found that infants in rural areas are more likely to consume nutritious food in the crucial weaning period. Here babies are often weaned on nhopi – a mixture of mashed pumpkin, peanut butter and maize meal. This implies that infants of urban mothers who are left in rural areas with their families may in fact benefit from being left behind, as long as they are not weaned too early, as indicated in Table 1, below.

Participants in FGD perceived hygiene levels and health to be particularly challenging in urban areas. Rujeko is a high density suburb of Masvingo, in some unfinished parts of the settlement rooms are rented out without running water or functioning sanitation. The lack of regular waste collection, combined with burst sewers and persistent water cuts lead to an environment in which diseases, particularly diarrhoea, can spread easily. The table below clearly outlines the impact that rural urban linkages can have on nutrition security.

**CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS**

Rural-urban linkages, predominantly characterised by the movement of people, (both short and long term migration) cash and goods, remain significant in Zimbabwe. Linkages persist for the majority of urban households.

### TABLE 1: RURAL URBAN LINKAGES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR NUTRITION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LINK</th>
<th>OUTCOME</th>
<th>IMPLICATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Urban migrants maintain access to land in rural area | Proportion of HH food for urban migrants comes from musha | • Expansion of sources of food: spreads risk  
• Frees up expenditure for use on other essentials such as rent, bills, healthcare  
• Urban HH maintains dietary diversity. Less likely to purchase empty calories in urban areas |
| Urban migrants participate in agricultural production in rural area | Rural households able to maximize returns from land | • Rural household benefits from labour power of urban relatives. Able to plant at the right time  
• Rural household may use seeds brought by urban dwellers |
| Urban migrants leave children with rural relatives | Migrant able to pursue income generating activities | • Migrant expands sources of income: spreads risk  
• Separation from mother at young age results in stopping exclusive breastfeeding before the recommended age  
• Solid foods may be introduced too early BUT infants are more likely to be given nutritious food on weaning |
| Urban migrants take or send groceries back to rural areas | Rural households save cash (or kind) as don’t need to barter for these goods | • Frees up limited cash/kind to purchase/exchange for other goods |
| Urban migrants send remittances back to rural areas | Rural households income increased | • Enables HH to increase expenditure on non-agricultural products such as cooking oil, non food items, school fees etc  
• Urban migrants are not able to accumulate capital |
and rural households interviewed. The strength of these links varies over time and space, and will depend on a number of variables, not least household economic status. Furthermore, the existence of rural urban linkages can have both positive and negative implications for nutrition security.

Data collected suggests that certain urban and rural linkages are born out of necessity due to weak livelihoods, while other linkages manifest regardless if a household is in crisis or not. The former type of linkage, especially for poorer households, tends to be exploited as a coping strategy – and may cause more long-term detrimental effects for nutrition. For example, the migration of mothers during times of food insecurity can increase household income (improving food security in the short-term) but it may also lead to inappropriate weaning practices, influencing the child’s long-term growth and cognitive abilities. The migration of a rural household member to an urban area, may cost the household more in the short-term (until the migrant finds a form of income) and can also imply that the migrant has switched to the less healthy urban diet.

Policy makers need to recognize that rural and urban elements of the household are part of one unit: the household. This implies that a holistic approach is needed, which takes into account the fact that policies and programmes implemented in urban areas will have knock on effects in rural areas and vice versa. Strengthening safety nets in both the rural and urban areas is key.

Migration has featured as an important part of the regional economy for hundreds of years. This is not about to change; people will continue to migrate from rural to urban areas, (and usually back again), in search of better economic and social opportunities. So, instead of perceiving migration as a predominantly ‘negative’ coping strategy, stakeholders need to start approaching migration as one element of typical livelihood strategy which can provide benefits to the household unit. To this end, NGOs could target migrants in urban areas, providing them with appropriate skill training which will improve their chances of accessing the formal economy. This in turn will increase the likelihood of remittances being received in the rural household. Furthermore, NGOs could consider adding ‘recent in-migration’ as a criteria of vulnerability in urban areas. Monitoring programme impact in both the rural and urban component of the household would then be necessary.

This research has found that typical poor rural households have few sources of income beyond agriculture. With increasingly unpredictable rainfall in the region, a rural economy based solely on rain-fed agriculture is just not sustainable. In order to encourage households to spread risk, instead of predominantly promoting agricultural activities such as community gardens, NGOs need to explore options for off farm income generation which will allow women in particular to become more financially independent.

By Morwenna Sullivan and Anna Brazier