

MEET MUTINTA

AS SHE NAVIGATES CHOMA'S URBAN FOOD SYSTEM

JULY 2023

Diverse food sources in an urban food system support household resilience.



After a long day working as a maid for a wealthy family, Mutinta is waiting to catch a bus to her home in Chandamali, an unplanned area in Choma where she lives with her four children.



Mutinta is grateful for her job – since the outbreak of COVID-19 and decrease in the Kwacha's value, her family has struggled to make ends meet. It seems like jobs are harder to get and food is more expensive than ever.

Mutinta boards her bus and thinks about what she will prepare for dinner. She has some maize meal left in the big bag that she bought from the supermarket last month, so she will make some nshima, but she needs to ration it until payday arrives – another week from now.



She will stop at the open-air market near her neighborhood for onions and tomatoes, and possibly some kapenta if she can get a good price from the vendor. Without refrigeration in her house, Mutinta goes to the market almost every day to buy fresh food and to the small tuck shop next to her house for items that aren't sold in the market. She enjoys meeting her friends who work as vendors, and some of them give her mbasele – a little extra.

Mutinta, like many people living in southern African cities, relies on diverse sources of food within her urban area to ensure the well-being and nourishment of her family. These food sources shape the local food system that sustains them. However, local, regional, and global shocks – such as food price fluctuations, climate change, and conflicts – can disrupt food flows and negatively impact urban food systems.

Some urban households can withstand these challenges because they have more cash income or they can access a wide range of food sources and supportive mechanisms like social cash transfers, food or cash remittances, and urban farming. However, many other households struggle to survive during difficult times. When multiple stresses and shocks occur, it becomes increasingly difficult for people to access and afford the food that they need.



During the bus ride, Mutinta notices street vendors selling small quantities of maize meal, fruit, and vegetables. Although sometimes she buys from them, today her mind turns to the vegetable garden she started in her backyard. The leafy greens will be ready to harvest soon, although the sweet potatoes and pumpkins need more time.



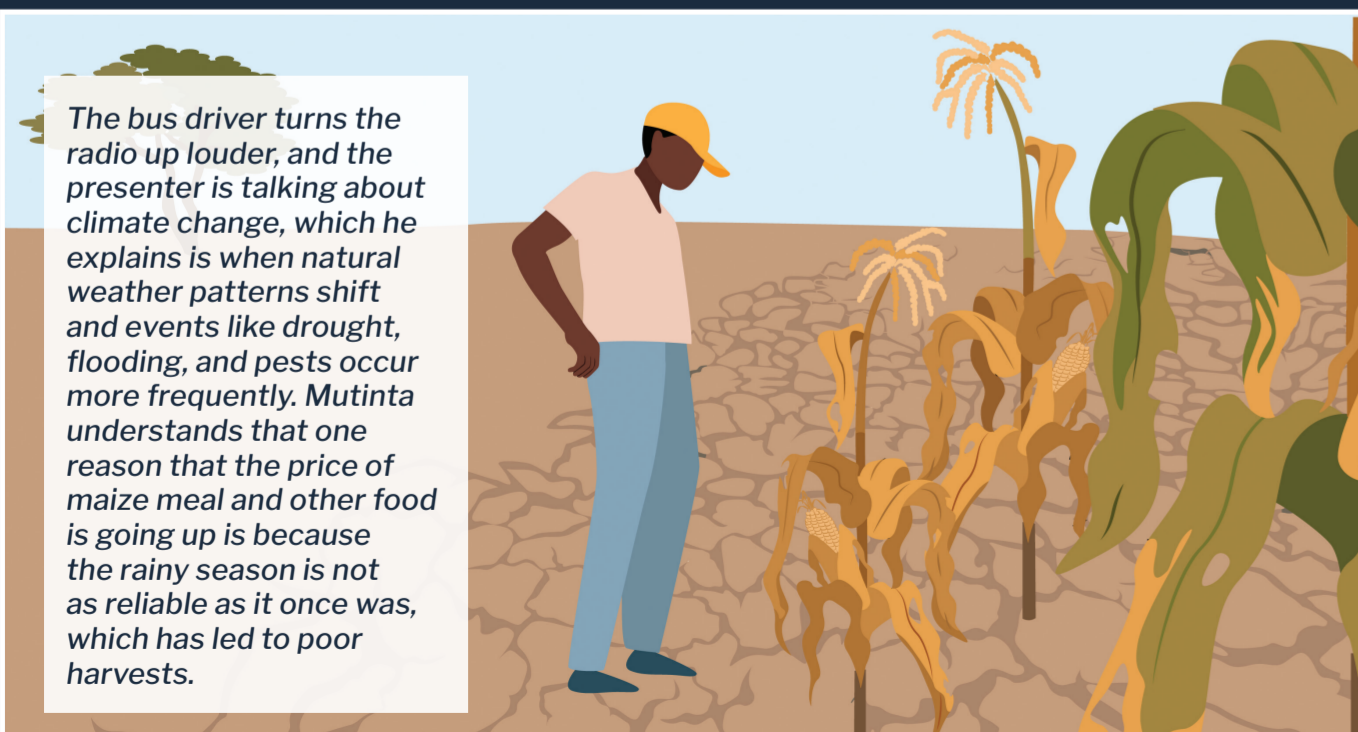
Mutinta's children helped her plant the garden when schools closed due to the pandemic, and she used funds from a social cash transfer program to purchase the seeds.



Mutinta is grateful her children are back in school, where they receive lunch, but it is challenging for her to maintain a garden without their help due to the time and effort required.

Food systems policy and planning play a crucial role in ensuring that safe, nutritious, affordable, and culturally appropriate food reaches individuals like Mutinta and her family, particularly during difficult times. This is because regulations and policies directly and indirectly affect the type of urban food system that exists in an area and how people can navigate that system.

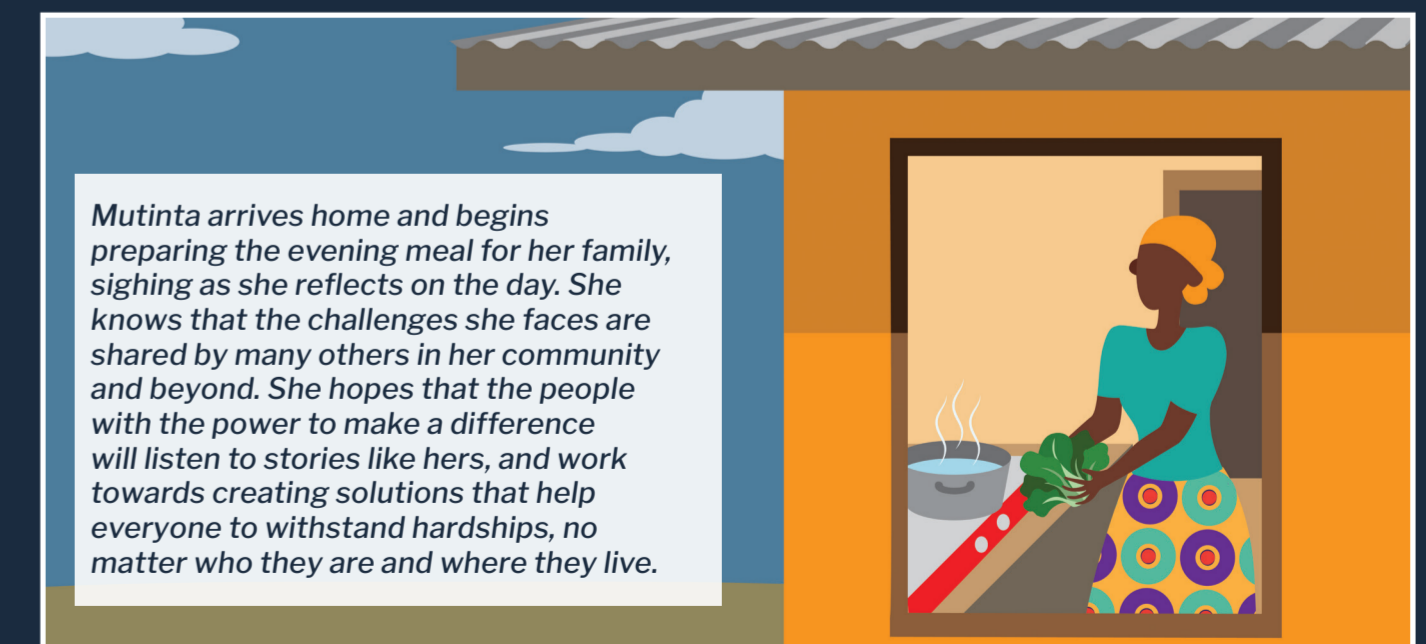
Resilient and equitable urban food systems have the capacity to withstand and recover from shocks and stresses throughout the entire value chain, from production to consumption and waste management, while ensuring fair and sustainable access to safe, nutritious, affordable, and culturally appropriate food for all residents within an urban area, regardless of their socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, gender, or geographic location.



The bus driver turns the radio up louder, and the presenter is talking about climate change, which he explains is when natural weather patterns shift and events like drought, flooding, and pests occur more frequently. Mutinta understands that one reason that the price of maize meal and other food is going up is because the rainy season is not as reliable as it once was, which has led to poor harvests.



Her brother, who farms in Kabwe rural, has struggled with poor rains and a fall armyworm infestation on his maize. Mutinta hopes he can still provide her family with dry beans and ground nuts, as they rely on these food transfers during lean times when they cannot afford meat or fish.



Mutinta arrives home and begins preparing the evening meal for her family, sighing as she reflects on the day. She knows that the challenges she faces are shared by many others in her community and beyond. She hopes that the people with the power to make a difference will listen to stories like hers, and work towards creating solutions that help everyone to withstand hardships, no matter who they are and where they live.

