

An action framework for urban food markets

Fresh food markets are at the heart of urban food systems – supplying nutritious food, supporting livelihoods, and strengthening community connections. They play a key role in advancing food security through improved availability, access, utilisation, and stability. Yet many such markets face persistent challenges with infrastructure, governance, and food safety.

Under the project, “Strengthening Fresh Food Markets for Healthier Food Environments”, a survey was conducted to better understand the impact of urban markets on nutrition and food security in cities. Based on insights from Lusaka¹ and Lilongwe², this infographic presents key recommendations to strengthen fresh food markets, making them more nutrition-sensitive and resilient. The actions aim to improve market functionality, empower traders and consumers, and enhance nutrition and food safety outcomes, contributing to healthier and more inclusive urban food systems.

1. ICLEI Africa. 2024. Lusaka City Nutrition Report
2. ICLEI Africa. 2024. Lilongwe City Nutrition Report

2 Strengthen business & financial management for traders and market operators

Recommendations

- Provide trader training in budgeting, record-keeping, marketing, and inventory management.
- Facilitate access to microfinance or small loans.
- Encourage collective organisation and participation in market committees.
- Put systems in place to ensure financial transparency around market operating costs and revenues.
- Create structures that ensure reinvestment of market revenues into maintenance and improvements.

Lusaka: Many traders reported limited access to capital and a need for financial skills.

“Training in managing money and running a business would help us stay afloat.”

Lilongwe: Market managers do not have financial autonomy, limiting their ability to make improvements to market infrastructure and services.

Why it matters

Financial resilience enables traders to sustain their operations, invest in better infrastructure and protective gear, and make more strategic purchasing decisions. It also strengthens their livelihoods and supports their families’ nutrition, while helping them navigate emergencies and maintain reliable market services.

More transparent financial management of markets can help to reframe markets as more than just social infrastructure – highlighting their income generating potential and encouraging local governments to invest in better infrastructure for increased revenues.

Who should implement:

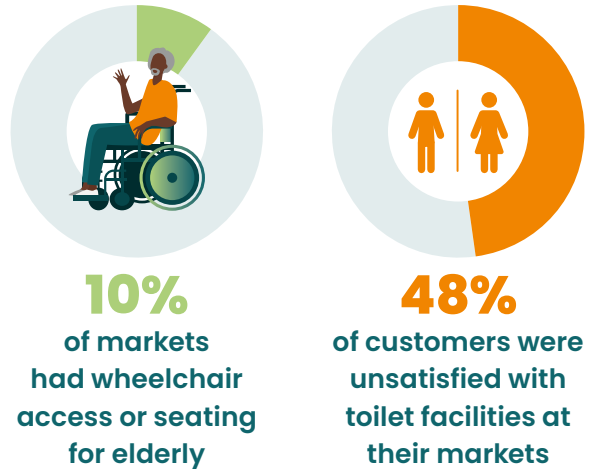
- Community saving groups
- Local government
- Microfinance institutions
- NGOs

4 Improve customer experience through market design

Recommendations

- Ensure safe, accessible market layouts, including disability access, seating and child-care zones/playgrounds.
- Provide clean toilets and a waste free environment.
- Introduce shading, pest control, and protection from sun, rain and dust.
- Improve roofing, pathways, and parking.

Lusaka: Traders reflect the daily struggle to keep markets appealing to customers: *“We pour water in the mornings to keep the dust down so it doesn’t get on the food, but even with that, it’s not enough – we still have to clean as we go.”*



Lilongwe: Poor pathways and drainage reduces consumer willingness to visit the markets. Consumers are calling for shaded stalls and organised layouts to improve accessibility.

Why it matters

Clean, well-designed markets attract more customers. Happy customers mean better income for traders and more revenue to maintain markets. Well designed markets also improve food safety by reducing contamination risks.

Who should implement:

- Local government
- Market committees
- Market owners
- Traders

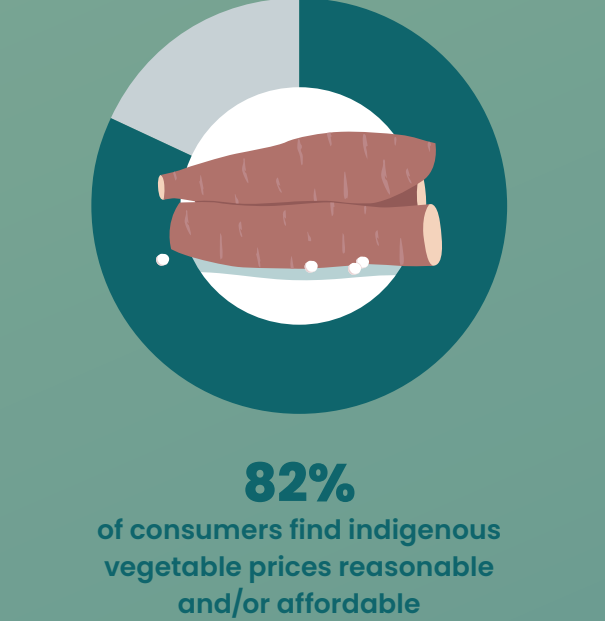


6 Promote access & affordability to nutritious foods

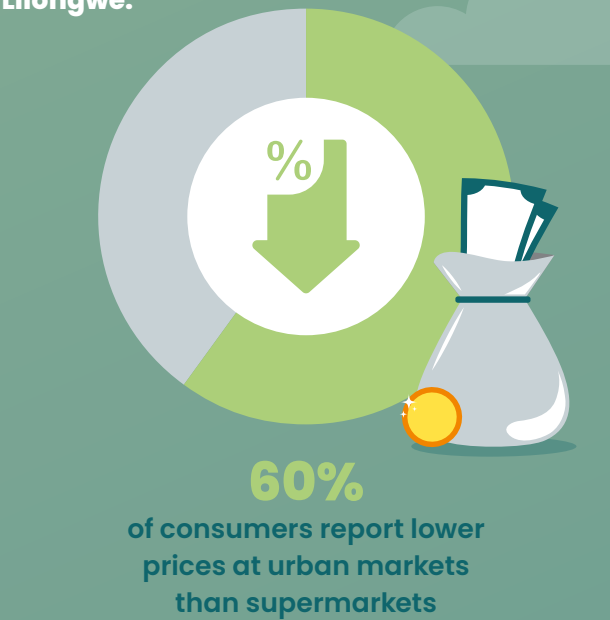
Recommendations

- Implement financial support, such as discounts on market fees charged to traders selling nutrition-sensitive foods.
- Provide preferential stall placement to nutrition-sensitive traders.
- Encourage bulk buying, seasonal pricing, loyalty incentives, and pre-order options amongst traders.
- Regulate or limit the sale of unhealthy foods in markets.
- Ban unhealthy food advertising in markets.

Lusaka:



Lilongwe:



Why it matters

Promoting consumer access and affordability ensures that low- and middle-income households can consistently obtain nutrient-rich foods. This not only strengthens household food security and diet quality but also supports equitable access to healthy diets, reinforces demand for nutritious foods in markets, and enables traders to serve diverse community needs effectively. Adaptive strategies reduce food loss, stretch limited resources, and enable households to maintain a consistent, healthy diet, manage budgets effectively, and strengthen food security.

Who should implement:

- Local government
- NGOs
- Private sector
- Traders

8 Implement integrated food safety & market monitoring systems

Recommendations

- Conduct inspections and trader certification for hygiene, food safety, and nutrition.
- Collect consumer feedback for continuous improvement.
- Establish market committees with trader and consumer representation.
- Work to establish pesticide residue testing protocols at city level which work to protect consumers against the invisible threat.

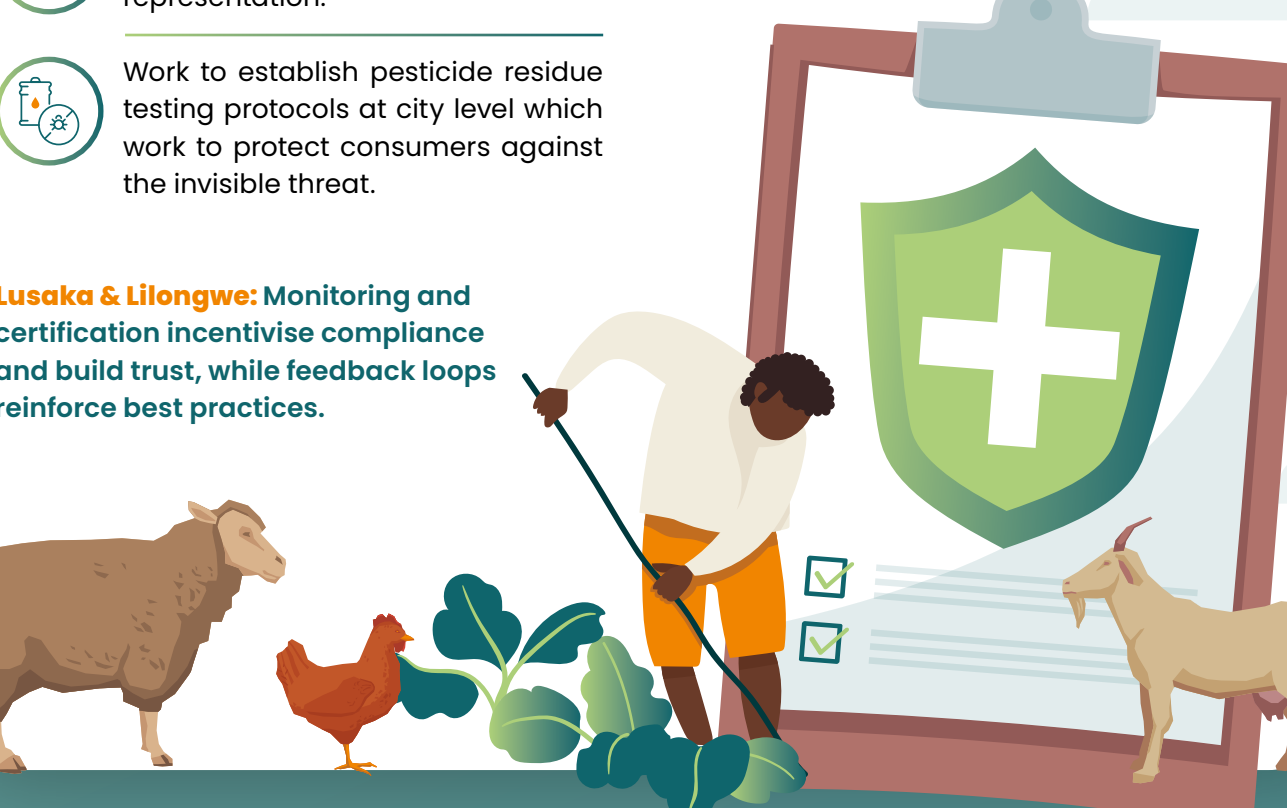
Lusaka & Lilongwe: Monitoring and certification incentivise compliance and build trust, while feedback loops reinforce best practices.

Why it matters

Regular monitoring ensures sustained food safety, quality, and hygiene, building consumer trust and supporting reliable food access.

Who should implement:

- Local government
- Market committees
- NGOs



1 Empower traders as nutrition & food safety champions

Recommendations

- Train traders on nutrition, safe handling, storage, food preservation and hygiene.
- Cascade learning so traders share knowledge with consumers.
- Recognise compliance via certification/badges.

Lusaka: Many traders expressed eagerness to learn and share on nutritious foods.

“We need training to know how to handle and keep nutritious foods.”

Lilongwe:



Why it matters

Traders connect households to fresh, nutritious foods daily. Equipping them with nutrition knowledge, good food safety and handling practices, and preservation skills ensures accurate information reaches consumers, improving diets, reducing foodborne illness, and enhancing public health.

Who should implement:

- Local government
- Market committees
- Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)
- Training institutions



3 Invest in infrastructure for food safety & market functionality

Recommendations

- Invest in cold storage, weather-proof shelters, shading, drainage and pest control.
- Upgrade WASH infrastructure, ensuring clean water, toilets, handwashing areas, and waste management systems are in place.
- Put in place well functioning loading zones and distribution channels to stalls.
- Ensure proper planning and separation of market activities relating to meat, live poultry and other phyto-sanitary risks.



Lusaka: 87.5% of traders rate refrigeration poor/very poor, and report flooded walkways and unreliable power disrupting trading.

One trader noted, *“Flooded walkways make it impossible for customers to come, and it’s unhealthy for us too.”*



Lilongwe: 96% of traders report limited access to cold storage, unsanitary trading conditions, unstable water supply, and parking issues.

Why it matters

Market infrastructure shapes food safety, hygiene, and overall operations. Well-maintained facilities reduce spoilage, protect consumer health, and support trader income, while inadequate infrastructure undermines both business performance and food quality.

Who should implement:

- Local government
- Market owners
- NGOs
- Private sector

5 Build consumer demand through nutrition awareness campaigns

Recommendations

- Conduct nutrition education campaigns (posters, radio, community events).
- Promote balanced diets, nutrient-rich foods, and indigenous vegetables.
- Host cooking demonstrations and peer-to-peer exchanges.

Lusaka: Consumers show interest in learning.

“Learning how to handle, prepare and store fresh food better can motivate us to buy more nutritious options.”

Lilongwe: Low nutrition awareness limits demand, cooking demos and budgeting sessions needed.

Why it matters

Educated consumers make informed food choices, support demand for nutritious foods, and reinforce trader supply.

Who should implement:

- Community health workers
- Media partners
- NGOs



7 Reduce food-waste and spoilage through education

Recommendations

- Educate households on safe storage, handling, and hygiene at home.
- Provide guidance on preparing perishable foods safely.
- Train traders and consumers in food preservation and storage techniques.
- Dispel myths and misunderstandings about cooling and cold storage that limit uptake.

Lusaka: Traders are eager to learn preservation techniques to reduce post-harvest losses and maintain food quality.

“If we can package and preserve vegetables better, we’ll lose less and earn more.”

Lilongwe: Households face challenges maintaining freshness and quality of perishable foods.

Why it matters

Proper handling helps households preserve the freshness and nutritional value of perishable foods.

Preserving food quality reduces waste, maintains nutritional value, and ensures consistent availability of healthy foods.

Who should implement:

- Community health workers
- Consumer groups
- NGOs
- Traders

9 Celebrate markets as centres of local culture and urban place making

Recommendations

- Design markets as multi-functional spaces that leverage community engagement, local practices and tourism.
- Consider the after-hours use of market spaces for cultural, religious, sporting or educational uses.
- Introduce day-care centres as safe spaces for children.
- Incorporate clinics and other government services within or adjacent to new markets.
- Use markets as hubs for knowledge exchange, cooking demos, and indigenous food promotion.
- Involve community champions in nutrition and food safety education.

Lusaka & Lilongwe: Consumers and traders express interest in engaging with community-led initiatives.

Why it matters

Engaging local knowledge and participation strengthens the social fabric of markets, reinforces nutrition education, and builds resilient food systems. Culture is one of the main competitive advantages that markets have over other forms of retail and keeping local cultures alive within markets ensures loyalty and long-term customers.

Layering multiple non-food social and civic services increases the social and economic return on investment into market infrastructure. Markets help to convey the unique cultural identity of regional food systems and draw attention to the broader connections between heritage and agriculture.

Who should implement:

- Community groups
- Market committees
- NGOs
- Ward councillors

