

How urban food markets contribute to the food security pillars

Urban markets are vital hubs that sustain livelihoods, and community connections, while supporting the four food security pillars:



AVAILABILITY
Ensuring a steady supply of diverse and nutritious foods.



ACCESSIBILITY
Through proximity and affordability.



UTILISATION
Promoting safe handling, preparation, and consumption of nutritious foods that support a healthy diet.



STABILITY
By maintaining a consistent food supply despite seasonal or economic fluctuations.

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. Insights from Lilongwe¹ and Lusaka² were compiled into this infographic, which illustrates how urban markets contribute to resilient, inclusive, and nutrition-sensitive food systems, while highlighting opportunities to further strengthen their functionality, safety, and overall impact.

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

2 Accessibility



Affordability: Urban markets make nutritious food affordable for every household. By offering flexible pricing and purchasing options, urban markets support families (especially low-income households) to maintain dietary quality and stretch limited resources effectively to meet nutritional needs.



Proximity: Urban markets are geographically well-placed, located close to where people live and work. This allows consumers to save time and transport costs for daily food purchases. Their accessibility strengthens food security by ensuring households can regularly access fresh and diverse foods without relying on centralised supermarkets.

City insights



Traders can offer flexible pricing through bulk discounts, loyalty incentives, seasonal pricing, credit, and flexible payment scheduling.



Consumers access flexible pricing through bargaining, late-day deals, group buying, pre-orders, smaller purchases and switching to cheaper alternatives to maximise savings.



Markets are easily accessible for urban consumers:

LUSAKA

30 min

68%
of households can reach their local market in less than 30 minutes

LILONGWE

15-30 min

78%
of households can reach their local market in 15-30 minutes, with a few traveling slightly longer distances

4 Stability



Urban markets act as the backbone of weekly food security, providing reliable access to food throughout the week.



Markets have diverse supply chains, making them resilient to price spikes, seasonal changes and supply chain disruptions, helping households plan meals and maintain consistent diets.

City insights

Who supplies urban food markets?

Wholesale markets



Market agents



Direct from farmers



Own production



1 Availability



Urban markets ensure households have reliable access to a wide variety of nutritious foods, including daily staples and seasonal indigenous vegetables.



Short, efficient supply chains and regional sourcing means fresh, seasonal, and culturally important foods are consistently available, helping families maintain balanced, nutritious diets.



City insights

Markets supply a diversity of food items, including: grains, roots and tubers, pulses and legumes, fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds, meat, fish, poultry, eggs, dairy products, edible insects, indigenous vegetables, dried foods, and processed foods.

3 Utilisation



The majority of consumers visit urban markets daily, where they develop personal relationships with market traders. This allows them to exchange knowledge and ideas on food preparation, storage, hygiene and handling.



Urban markets have a responsibility to ensure the quality, freshness and safety of food is maintained. Clean, well-managed market environments reduce the risk of foodborne diseases.



Traders stock culturally relevant and nutritious food items that allow consumers to maintain relevant diets - supporting both health and cultural continuity.

City insights

Markets are part of daily life and the pantry of our cities.

LUSAKA

56%

of households visit markets daily

LILONGWE

88%

of a household's weekly food comes from markets



72%
of households source most of their weekly food from markets

Gender, equity and inclusion at urban markets



Women traders are central to market operations, shaping the daily trading rhythms across most markets.



Women customers form the backbone of market activity, driving regular participation in daily food trade, making purchasing decisions and ensuring their household's nutrition needs are met.



Markets serve diverse age groups, in terms of both customers and traders.



Markets are filled with well-established traders, many with over a decade of business experience, as well as young entrepreneurs looking to make their mark.



Markets primarily serve women and low-income households, making them critical for everyday food access.



ILLUSTRATIONS: FREEPIK.COM