FOOD SYSTEMS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

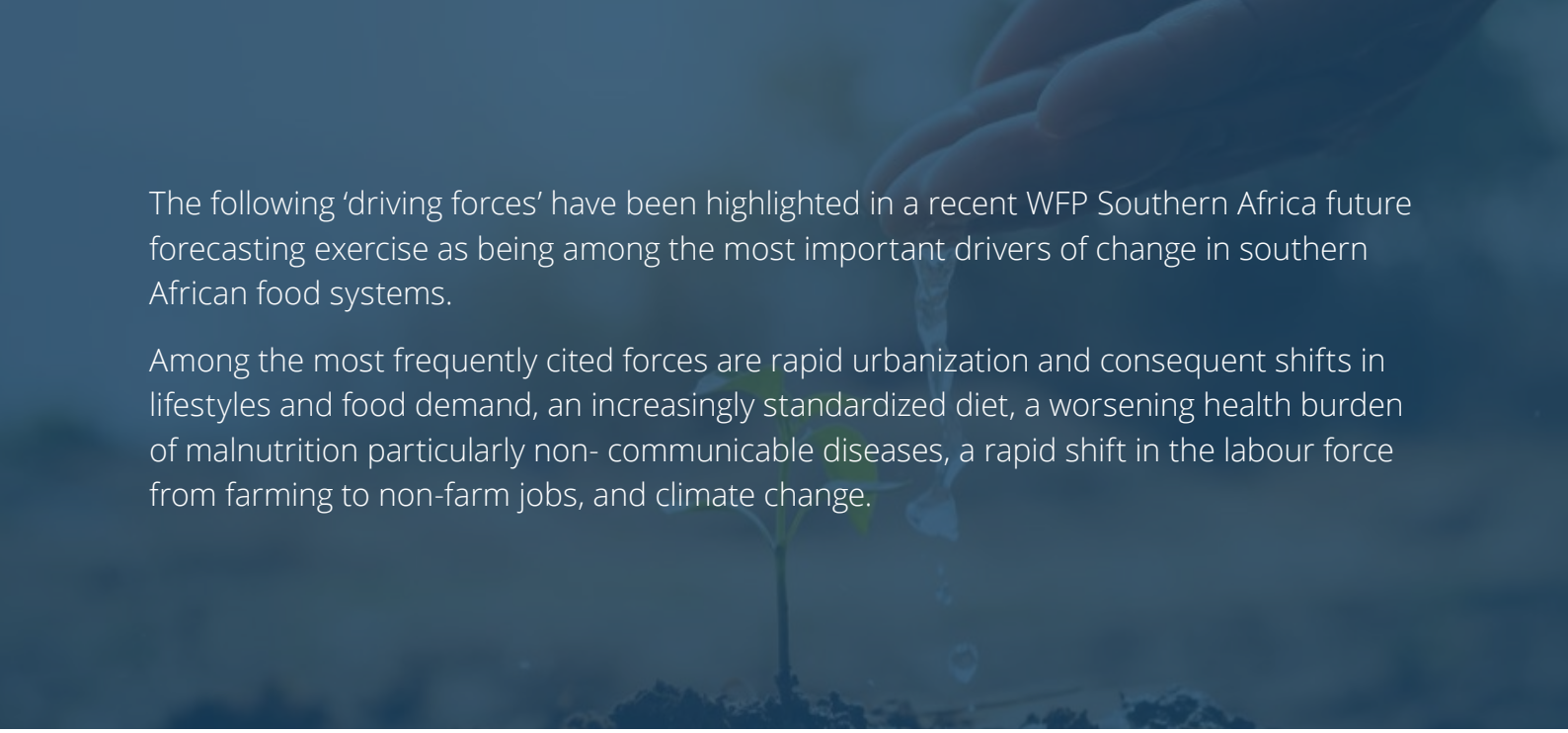
Drivers of change and opportunities for influence

World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES

A Synopsis by the WFP Regional Bureau for Southern Africa and the Southern Africa Food Lab

June 2021



The following 'driving forces' have been highlighted in a recent WFP Southern Africa future forecasting exercise as being among the most important drivers of change in southern African food systems.

Among the most frequently cited forces are rapid urbanization and consequent shifts in lifestyles and food demand, an increasingly standardized diet, a worsening health burden of malnutrition particularly non- communicable diseases, a rapid shift in the labour force from farming to non-farm jobs, and climate change.

INTRODUCTION

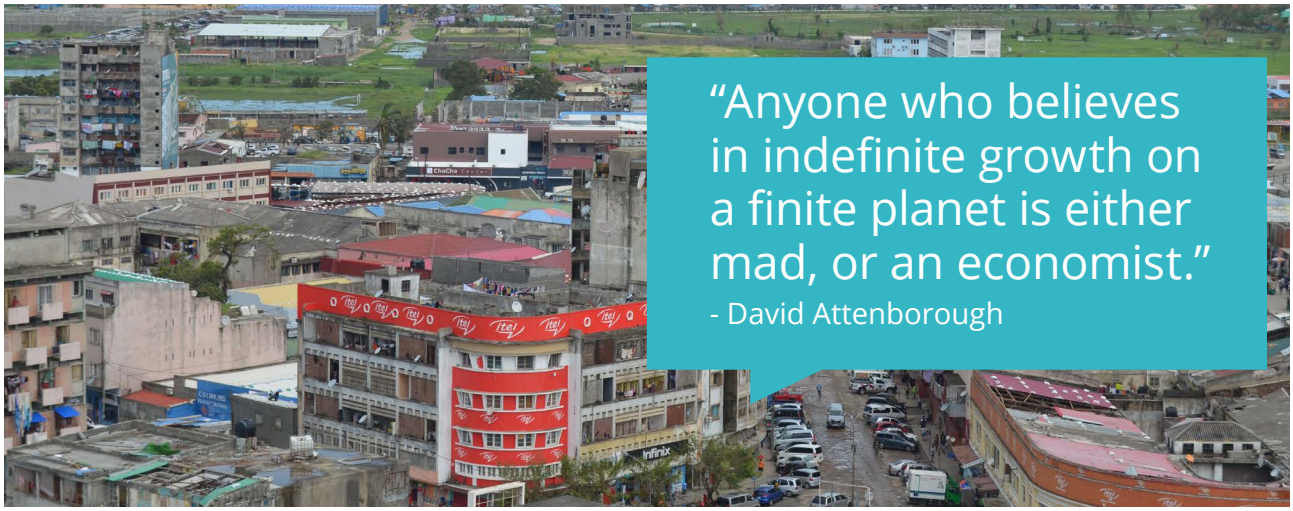
This briefing investigates the 'driving forces' or 'trends' shaping southern African food systems. The analysis is intended to raise awareness of the potential to shape future outcomes in this complex multi-faceted and interrelated systems and argues that the World Food Programme (WFP) can play a major role as a direct stakeholder and enabler of partnerships in the region.

Based on this analysis, plausible scenarios for Southern African food systems will be constructed to enable WFP to assess how the organization might influence these scenarios over the coming decade. The foresight gained from a scenario process helps to inform necessary action. In particular, the scenarios help in identifying leverage points based on WFP's key mandate.

The analysis of 'driving forces' helps determine certain elements of Southern Africa's future that are difficult to predict with complete certainty. Understanding what these are is important because it increases the sense of urgency to act; an appropriate response can decrease the impact of these uncertain development trajectories. A reflection of southern African food systems over past few decades reveals that the way these systems have unfolded has been highly non-linear, with random, unpredictable events affecting it. Looking ahead, this uncertainty seems more acute.

As outlined below, the various 'driving forces' in these food systems are co-dependent (across space, time and sectors) and create fertile ground for a large combination of potential shocks and stressors, places they could happen and pathways they could propagate through to create a high impact. As

WFP, the challenge and opportunity is to make sense of this uncertainty is a systematic way so as to adapt to challenges and to act sooner rather than later.



DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES

The key issue is that urbanization will likely be a “megatrend” affecting southern African food systems for the next 25 years. Along with population growth and a decrease of the rural population, urbanization is already and will be impacting the development of the Southern African region in a number of ways.

While there is relatively high certainty about the upward trajectory of both population growth and urbanization, there remains a question around how strong these rates of growth will be. Projections about how the total population will develop depend on several factors and is bound to uncertainties. There is considerable range in the level of projected increase, depending particularly on changes in total fertility rate.

In 2019, the estimated population of southern African countries was 360,3 million. The largest population share in the region in 2018 was in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (26.6%) followed by South Africa (16.7%) and Tanzania (15.7%). In the region, overall, there has been a downward trend in mortality, particularly infant and child mortality. The combination of high fertility (3.8 children per woman) and declining mortality has been largely responsible for the rapidly increasing population of the region.

Urbanisation, however, is the most certain element in demographic projections. Sub-Saharan Africa is the latest and most rapidly urbanising region worldwide. In southern Africa, urbanisation rates are highest compared to rest of Africa with more than 60% of the population living in cities while it is also the most populous sub-region. Increases in urbanisation are being driven by population growth in urban areas, the reclassification of rural areas as urban as population density increases.

As the urban population is increasing and with it the urban demand for food, rural areas must undergo a transformation to offer more efficiently and sustainably greater amounts of food to meet urban demands.

The growing demand for food is likely to drive an expansion of agricultural land, which would have negative feedback for the environment such as deforestation, soil degradation and might increase climate change. In addition, urban sprawls further diminish agricultural land.

The future of southern Africa will be shaped by the dense clusters of big cities. These are becoming the engine of the continent with significant implications for future energy needs, safety and security, governance and public services. According to the World Bank, this is the single most important transformation that the African continent will undergo this century, with projections showing that more than half of Africa’s population will live in its cities.

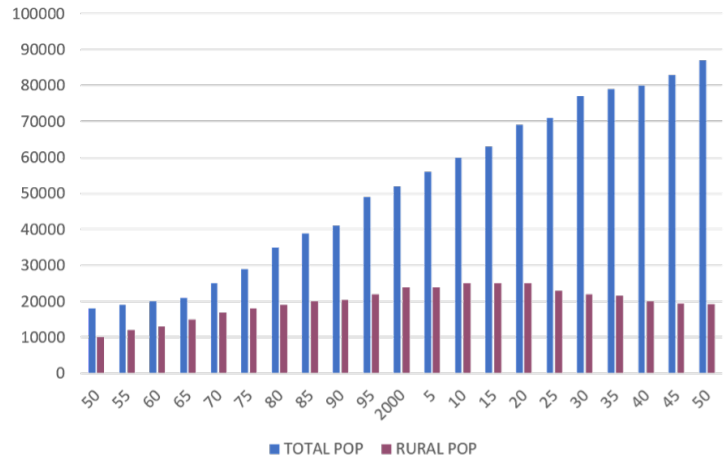
This phenomenon will challenge societies in southern Africa with issues such as the distribution of people and resources, overcrowding, infrastructure, congestion, pollution and crime

among others. Although growth rates are predicted to fall between 1-5% for most southern African cities between 2018 and 2030, these rates are still substantial and regional cities will experience a higher growth rate than other regions in the world. In the next 30 years, urban dwellers will outweigh rural residents for the first time in Africa and cities in the region are expected to experience higher growth rates.

Urbanization affects all aspects of the food system (production, processing and manufacturing, distribution, markets, consumption and food waste) and can lead to food insecurity, micronutrient deficiencies, overweight and obesity. As the relative share of the rural population declines together with growing urbanization, this also affects climate change, changing land use patterns, the shift from agricultural to non-agricultural jobs and the related dependency on food markets and prices.

As southern African is projected to have the strongest urbanization trend on the continent, this makes it a decisive factor for WFP. Important questions arise about the role of WFP in all aspects of these rapidly changing urban food systems and their significant inter-linkages with rural production of food.

FIG 1: POPULATION (THOUSAND PERSONS)



The estimated population in 2050 is forecasted to be 80 million people. The contrast between the purple and the blue bars of the graph show that population growth will exclusively take place in urban areas. As the purple bars indicate, rural populations will not only stagnate, but start decreasing at the beginning of the 2020s. By 2050, the rural population is expected to fall under 20 million people. This means that the vast majority (>3/4) of the total population will live in urban areas in 2050 due to rural-urban migration and population increases in urban areas.

SOURCE: Lipper L and Benton TG. 2020. Mega-trends in the Southern African Region.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEVERAGE

As food production is low in urban areas, an increase in demand for rural producers may increase. Urbanisation and the rapid increase of secondary and tertiary towns increases proximity of urban markets for rural farmers to offer their products.

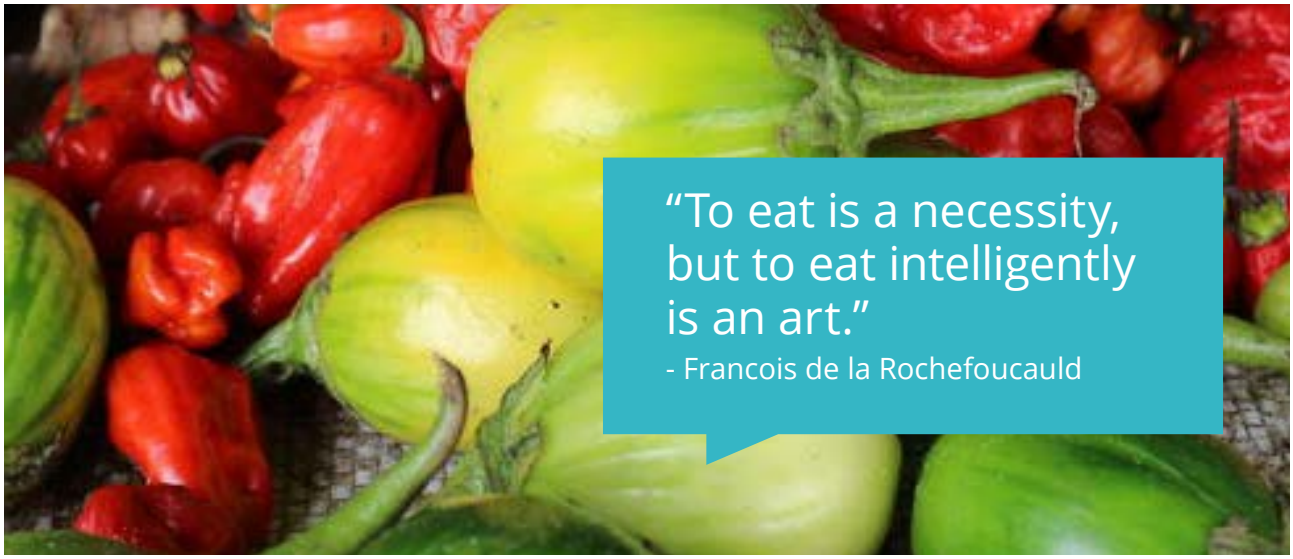
With higher incomes and urbanisation, new opportunities for food producers and processors emerge as demand

for processed foods increases. This creates entrepreneurial opportunities, investments and expansion of already existing capacities. Depending on the degree of mechanisation, more labour will be needed to process food.

Processing and manufacturing are dominantly located in urban peripheries, highlighting the importance of functional distribution networks to deliver food from production to processing capabilities. Agri-food value chains can be adapted accordingly in a sustainable manner.

Domestic processing and manufacturing stands in competition with imported processed foods.

Imported food might be cheaper if domestically produced food cannot keep up with the increased demand and prices for domestic food increase. This would have negative feedback for production capacities and reduce their competitiveness, including employment opportunities of the domestic work force.



DIETARY CHOICES

Demographic changes, particularly urbanisation, has an important an impact on dietary choices, especially when coupled with economic growth and rising incomes - although these choices might also shift as a result of cultural changes.

The nutrition transition is bringing about increases in overweight and obesity with related non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Diabetes, cardiovascular disease, metabolic disorders, hypertension, coronary heart disease, various cancers and osteoarthritis represent a high burden for healthcare systems and result in lower productivity, incomes and premature death.

Urbanisation is associated with important shifts in dietary patterns. These shifts are driven by the transition to off-farm employment and income growth and the availability of a range of food products not available to rural populations.

The change of consumption and dietary patterns is not favourable in urban areas particularly as urban food environments shape the access and availability of food. Urban areas often have limited availability of affordable and fresh food, pushing people to buy cheaper processed foods and staples. Further, as people no longer grow food themselves due to a lack of productive resources, time and space, they resort to accessing processed foods. Income disparities impact the kind of food consumed: increases in income associated with increased consumption of refined food.

Food prices in African cities are higher than in

Many factors influence consumers dietary behaviours, from the personal dimension (knowledge, skills, dietary preferences, culture and time for food preparation) to the economic and political (cost and availability of food). When individuals migrate, they bring their food cultures with them and adapt to the new environment, in an urban environment. The urban environment shapes the access and availability of food.

comparable cities in low- and middle-income countries in Asia and Latin America. The first graph shows a comparison of price of a selection of food items across comparable urban areas. It is evident that fresh vegetables and fruit, as well as fresh animal products such as diary and eggs, are expensive. In comparison, staple food and cereals are more affordable. These prices affect food consumption patterns, especially of poor and vulnerable populations.

The second graph indicates the impact of food prices as a share in budgets, independent of income. Urban populations spend a large share of their budget on food. This is particularly so for the poorest quintiles. This means that food-price volatility will likely disproportionally impact the urban poor, who already spend 60%–80% of their income on food. The high share of income spent for food diminishes the spending on other essential needs such as housing, housing utilities and transportation.

FIG 2: TYPES OF FOOD

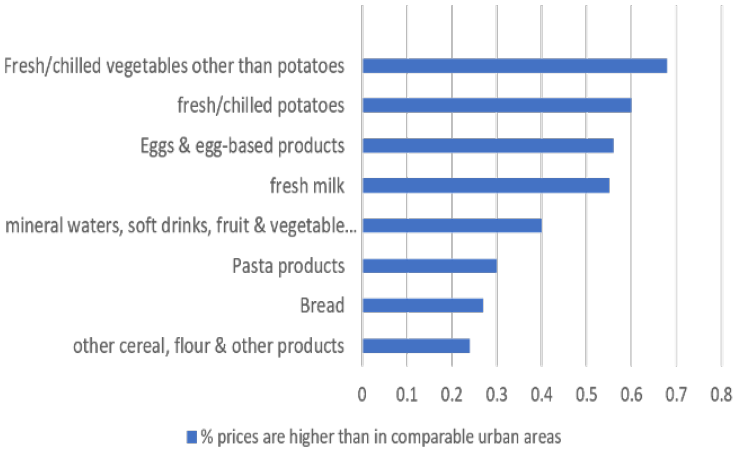
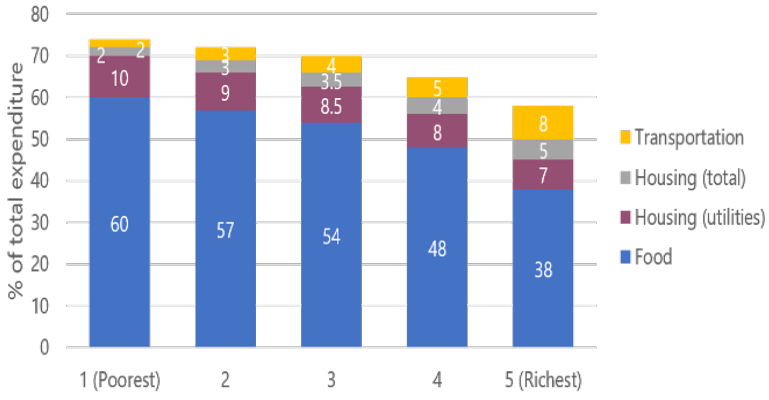


FIG 3: EXPENDITURE



URBAN POPULATIONS SPEND A LARGE SHARE OF THEIR BUDGET ON FOOD

African consumers have purchased increasing amounts of processed food over the past 50 years. The opportunity cost of time of women and men has increased as more of them work outside the home, driving them to buy processed food and food prepared away from home to save arduous home-processing and preparation labor. In the past several decades, this trend has accelerated with a surge on the supply side of the processing sector and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and large private companies making massive aggregate investments. Packaged, industrialized, ultra- processed foods and sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) are a growing proportion of the processed food consumed.

Market dependency has a huge impact on the livelihood of people as food prices often increase faster than the rate of inflation and are subject to volatility with a direct impact on the food consumption or urban households

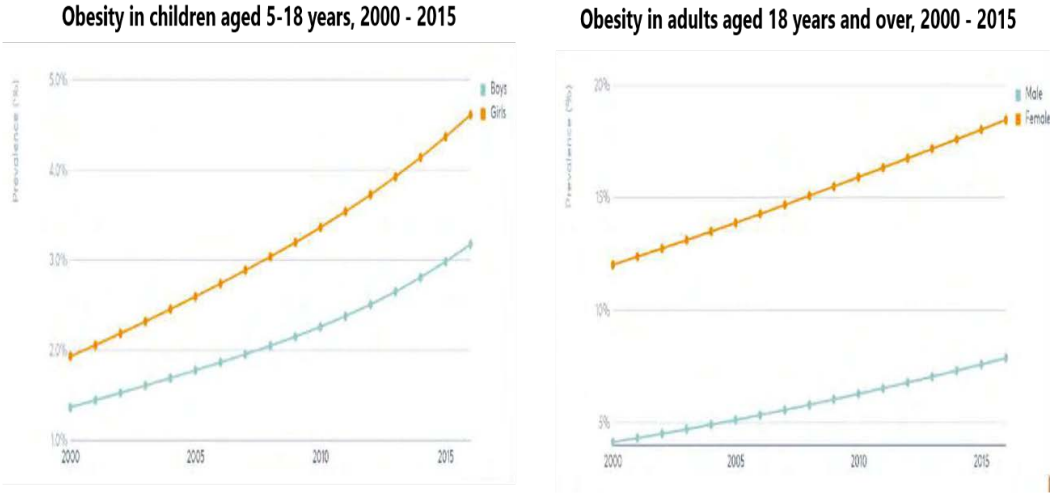
MALNUTRITION

Malnutrition in all its forms - undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, increasing overweight and obesity are fuelling the rise of non-communicable disease (NCDs) – is both a significant outcome of the dynamics of Southern African food systems and a challenge affecting their future trajectory. This multiple burden is a major threat facing the region's development trajectory, as the current and future generations are deprived of reaching their full human development potential.

As argued above, urbanisation and related dietary transitions are clearly major drivers of poor-quality diets, increasingly leading to compromised human health and nutritional status. Indeed, the emerging trend of overweight and obesity across SSA and all demographics is a major public health issue.

There is a strong link between food systems and obesity particularly as food systems influence people's dietary patterns and nutritional outcomes. Further, non-communicable diseases

Fig 4 : Global Nutrition Report (GNR), 2018

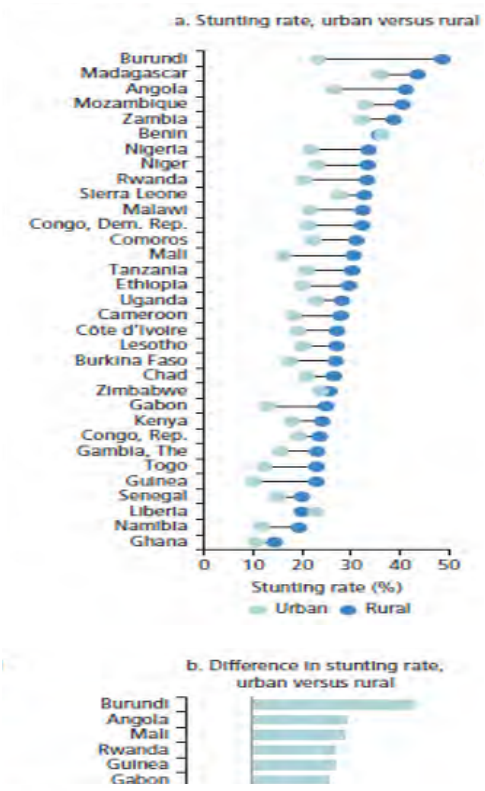


Regional opportunity: Food systems are well placed to influence food production and the consumption patterns of nutritious foods. Applying a nutrition lens to food systems should include a consistent focus on nutritional outcomes and indicators.

such as diabetes are also on the rise. This has been exacerbated by micronutrient deficiencies.

Stunting (chronic malnutrition) remains a major concern in the region with 11 of the 16 countries constituting the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) having stunting rates above 30% , which is classified as very high according to WHO cut-off points. A key trend is that although the stunting prevalence (%) is decreasing, when looking at absolute numbers, it is clear that more children under-5 in SSA are stunted and this is projected to increase.

FIG 5: STUNTING PREVALENCE IN URBAN AND RURAL AREAS (CHILDREN 0--23 MONTHS)



The affordability of nutritious foods is a key factor as demonstrated in the figure below. As argued above, diets are arguably the centre of the entire food system. The choices individuals make determine which products are produced and in what quantities. Household diets have shifted radically over the last 60 years; foods are no longer restricted to seasonal harvests, new cuisines have spread across the world, and there has been a rise in processed foods. This has impacted on health and the health of the planet and, globally, more people are now obese than underweight. Consumers in southern Africa have purchased increasing amounts of processed food over the past 50 years. In the past several decades, this trend has accelerated with a surge on the supply side of the processing sector and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and large private companies making large aggregate investments. Packaged, industrialized, ultra-processed foods and sugar-sweetened beverages are a growing proportion of the processed food consumed.