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3.2 Urban Food Supply Under Stress

Flooding in northern Ghana.

Pay Drechsel and Richard Appoh

How do cities react to supply shortfalls? To answer this, 90 traders were interviewed on 25 retail and wholesale markets in Accra, Kumasi, Tamale, all in Ghana, and Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, about their commodity-specific experiences and coping mechanisms, considering the supply of yam, cassava, plantain, millet, maize, local rice, okra, onions and eggplant. The most common supply challenges were extreme climatic events such as large-scale flooding as well as lack of rain and drought. Traders recorded supply problems for one crop or another every year, mostly related to particular weather conditions in their production areas, but also across commodities, in particular due to fuel price increases. In particular, 2011 posed severe challenges due to low rain, as mentioned by every third trader who could recall the exact year across the cities. Supply losses due to changes in rainfall ranged between 40% and 100%. However, in two out of every three cases alternative sourcing

allowed the wholesalers to buffer losses. Related extra costs (like additional transport costs for a longer distance) were eventually passed on to the customer. Several traders reported extra profits when they were able to benefit from elevated prices based on the demand–supply gap. Supply shortfalls, which some traders could not buffer, concerned products such as local rice, millet, maize and onions.

A tendency to increased city vulnerability to shortfalls of food from south to north was observed. Compared with Accra and Kumasi, many more cases of unsuccessful coping were reported in Tamale, and even more in Ouagadougou. Larger geographical diversity of food sourcing areas (foodsheds) appeared to enhance the resilience of urban food systems. However, while urban traders generally appeared prepared to cope with extreme climate events, price increases up to 35% or more are not easy to absorb for low-income consumers.^{3,14} It has to be explored to which extent such

trade-offs could be addressed by the government through storage facilities for key commodities. For perishable commodities that cannot be stored, the risk of supply shortfalls is even higher, in particular if cities depend on one supply area. This applies to the supply of tomato from Burkina Faso to Tamale during the dry season, where tariff regulations, road damages or the closure of borders may have a serious impact on the supply (see below).

The existing regional early-warning systems on threats to food security are based on a

geographical disaggregation of food and nutrition insecurity zones but do not make an explicit distinction between urban and rural areas. Even though the numbers of urban and rural residents in West Africa are now roughly equivalent, analyses are lacking and the available tools are insufficient for providing an accurate picture of the food and nutrition situation in urban settings and designing effective response mechanisms. The development of tools and indicators for monitoring food and nutrition (in)security in urban areas has been initiated

by the Sahel and West Africa Club Secretariat (OECD) in collaboration with the Comité Permanent Inter Etats de lutte contre la Sécheresse dans le Sahel (CILSS).

Cross-border trade challenges

Edmund K. Akoto-Danso and Hanna Karg

To better understand social and organizational factors influencing food trade across borders, we travelled with a truck carrying Indian rice from the port in Tema, Ghana, to Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. The exploratory study revealed that long-distance and cross-border trade entails various challenges, including delays caused by equipment malfunction and numerous checkpoints on the route, most of which are managed by the Police Service and Customs (Figure 3.12). At these checkpoints, drivers usually buy their way out in order to avoid further delays by officials who easily find faults with the state of the vehicle or request documents. For a journey of 920 km from Tema to Ouagadougou, we counted about 108 checkpoints, the large majority in Ghana, run by these institutions as well as various tollbooths (12) and weighing bridges (10). Informal interviews revealed that drivers employed by transporting companies or organized in drivers' unions experience far less harassment than drivers transporting local goods who are not backed

by a powerful institution. For example, in the dry season, Ghanaian traders rely on Burkina Faso for fresh tomatoes. Police and customs officers tend to harass these drivers, who have no other option but to quickly settle the matter to avoid that their highly perishable goods start to rot. As a result, tomato traders reported payments of more than \$USD 500 on the route from Techiman to Ouagadougou, 10 times more than a vehicle transporting rice

imported from overseas. Thus, the extent to which drivers experience harassment on the road depends on the organization of drivers and truck owners, drivers' literacy rates and other factors. The lack thereof among local food transporters seriously affects cross-border food trade in the ECOWAS region, despite it being a sector with a high potential of offering employment along the entire supply chain.

More information: www.urbanfoodplus.org



Figure 3.12. Checkpoints recorded on the route from Tema, Ghana, to Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.