

Reducing Barriers to the Consumption of Traditional Fruits and Vegetables by Migrant Communities in Johannesburg:

Recommendations for Urban Policy and Planning

Policy Briefing Note 2

February 2024

Executive Summary

This Briefing Note is the second in a series of four deriving from research conducted between May and July 2023 in the City of Johannesburg (CoJ) at two research sites: the Central Business District and Soweto South. The research explored the role of traditional fruits and vegetables (TFVs) in the lives of local and cross-border migrant communities. This Briefing Note reports key findings on the drivers of, and barriers to, the consumption of these TFVs on the part of migrant communities. It then proposes a series of policy and planning recommendations for national and local government, civil society organisations and communities in order to foster increased consumption of these products, given their cultural and nutritional value. This is important in the context of a city in which more than one-third of residents have recently experienced food insecurity.¹

Context

Our research explored the role of TFVs in the lives of urban migrant communities in the CoJ – both international (from other parts of the African continent) and South African rural-to-urban migrant groups. The research identified the range of TFVs consumed and the factors driving and hampering their consumption by these communities. This policy note focuses on the potential for increasing consumption of TFVs in the context of cultural and economic drivers and barriers. Responding positively through urban planning and development, with support from civil society organisations, can help tackle the double burden of malnutrition and urban food insecurity, particularly in the context of rapid urban growth.

Research Findings

Drivers of Consumption of Traditional Fruits and Vegetables

TFVs are **regularly consumed**, typically two to three times per week, by urban migrants in Johannesburg, with highest consumption reported in the Central Business District. In South Africa, traditional leafy vegetables have several names depending on the home language of the consumers. For example, they are known as imfino in isiZulu and isiXhosa, morogo in Sesotho, and miroho in Tshivenda and Xitsonga.²

Presumed and historically based **health benefits** are cited as a key reason for purchasing, cooking, and eating TFVs. Almost all respondents reported that they regularly consume TFVs for health reasons. This includes understandings that these fruits and vegetables can relieve symptoms of chronic ailments such as diabetes and high blood pressure.

Production of TFVs by family members and friends in respondents' places of origin, mainly in rural areas, is a key driver of their consumption in the CoJ. Many migrants grew up consuming these TFVs and continue to attempt to do so in the CoJ. In terms of distribution, this enables the **supply of TFVs to migrants via familial networks and visits**. This maintains dietary and cultural connections for migrants with their families, friends, and places of origin.

Cultural norms and values were reported to strongly influence the consumption of TFVs, with clear regional preferences. Within the CoJ, West African food was seen to be specific to immigrants from Nigeria, Cameroon, and Ghana, for example. For South African rural to urban migrants, foods specifically produced in Kwa-Zulu Natal, Limpopo, and Eastern Cape were preferred. For example, mutshaina is mainly eaten by people from Limpopo. However, other local residents also eat it, not just migrants now, and it is quite prevalent as an item sold in Soweto and Ivory Park. It is also available in some Central Business District markets though not official fresh produce markets.

Some respondents reported a blending of ingredients and recipes through cross-cultural kinship and friendship networks and experiences.

The **taste** of TFVs from migrants' countries or provinces of origin was widely reported to be preferred over the taste of conventional products sold in Johannesburg.

Most migrant respondents indicated **preferences for organically produced TFVs** over those produced using fertilisers and pesticides (as is suggested to commonly occur with production in Johannesburg).

Availability and **accessibility** of TFVs are key to enabling their consumption by migrant communities.

Availability: In addition to informal sourcing through family members and friends, some fruits and vegetables that are traditional to the countries and provinces of origin of the migrant communities in Johannesburg are **available predominantly through trading channels peripheral to mainstream markets**. Their availability is, therefore, not widespread, and migrants must carefully navigate the city's retail spaces to purchase them. A few respondents reported purchasing their fruits and vegetables from mainstream supermarkets including Shoprite and Pick 'n' Pay, but typically that does not include TFVs. TFVs are mainly available through street markets and traders, the majority of which are informal and often located at transport terminals, such as major taxi ranks and bus stations. Long standing markets of these products are the Yeoville market and the Mozambiquan market. The former is in a building, the latter on the street.

Accessibility of markets and traders to consumers: The main locations for purchasing TFVs identified by respondents were City Deep, Yeoville market, Hillbrow market, Braamfontein, and the Central Business District (including Eloff Street and Klipton along Klein Street within walking distance of Bree where residents can catch a taxi); and Ivory Market, outside the CoJ in Ekurhuleni near Tembisa. In addition to buying from **hawkers and vendors selling in markets**, respondents also purchase from **mobile vendors**, who move around with TFVs in trolleys, for example in the Central Business District. In Protea Glen and Protea South, these are vendors who move around carrying their TFVs and selling from one street to another, often shouting as a way of advertising their goods.



Photo 1: Ulude (dried greens), peanuts, and dried mealie, Hillbrow Market

2. Maseko, I., Mabhaudhi, T., Tesfay, S.Z., Araya, H.T., Fezzehazion, M., & Plooy, C.P. (2017). African leafy vegetables: a review of status, production and utilization in South Africa. Sustainability, 10, 16.

Examples of traders located at bus stations and taxi ranks include Newtown, Park Station, the Nigerian Mall situated next to the MTN taxi rank where TFVs are sold alongside a wide range of herbs and spices, the Bree taxi rank and MTN taxi rank.

In **Soweto**, consumers mainly buy from **mobile hawkers** who travel through neighbourhoods with trollies. This can benefit demographic groups with limited ability to travel.

"I usually buy from the people selling near taxi ranks when I go home after work. At times, there are people who walk around the CBD [Central Business District] selling traditional fruits and vegetables especially okra and cowpea beans" (Female from Zimbabwe living in Braamfontein, Central Business District).

These vendors are commonly traders from Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Zambia. **E-hailing services** are also used by households, enabling traders to send products by Uber to customers.



Photo 2: Okra, cassava, cowpea leaves, and *nkaka-Momordica balsamin*, Ivory Market

"We usually move door-to-door, selling the vegetables to elders because it happens that maybe an elderly lady went to the clinic in the morning, and they are tired, so we usually take a trolley and go door-to-door to sell the vegetables we produce here." (Trader, Soweto).

Barriers to the Consumption of Traditional Fruits and Vegetables

There is a general **decline in the consumption of TFVs**. Although demand was reported to be high amongst respondents, indicating a desire for more of these products, there are significant economic and cultural barriers hindering their consumption.

A key barrier concerns **affordability**, where most households are willing to consume TFVs, but some cannot afford them because of high prices. Prices of TFVs can be higher in some instances than those for mainstream fruits and vegetables sold in supermarkets. This is notable in niche shops and markets that cater for immigrant communities. They typically import TFVs from other African countries.

Limited availability is another key impediment. Various TFVs native to regions of West, East, and Central Africa cannot be grown in Johannesburg because of the differences in climatic conditions and soil types. There is some local production of selected varieties of TFVs, but this is at a very small scale owing to the limited availability of land in Johannesburg.

The rapid increase in **availability of modern processed and fast foods** through supermarket and food service sectors has also seen many people, particularly those in younger age groups, shunning TFVs despite their health benefits.

The availability of TFVs predominantly through informal and peripheral trading channels in limited locations can **hamper accessibility** for some members of migrant communities. Consumers' transport costs add to the costs of the produce, making visits more infrequent than desired.

High **crime rates**, including theft, robbery, assault, and xenophobic attacks, were reported by respondents in migrant communities to be a problem for traders of traditional foods.

Policy Recommendations

Opportunities for reducing barriers to the consumption of TFVs in Johannesburg, particularly for domestic and international migrant communities, have been identified by respondents in the research, as well as through multi-stakeholder dialogue at the project inception workshop in November 2022 and by the project team. This Policy Note focuses on policy, planning, and civil

society recommendations that are household and consumer facing, but which also address issues of production and trade where those impact upon product availability and accessibility to citizens. The recommendations support an approach of broadening out the stakeholder groups engaged in the city's food resilience policies.³

The South African Government should:

- Invest in support for TFV supply chains, including **support for formalised trading platforms**.
- **Consider reducing restrictions at borders** on TFVs being brought into the country from West, Central, East and Southern Africa.
- **Reduce restrictions on trading** by migrant groups.
- Work towards setting up **bilateral partnerships**, for example between South Africa and Nigeria, to enable smoother cross-border trade in traditional foods.

The City of Johannesburg Government should:

- Incorporate TFVs in **food redistribution programmes** (e.g. food parcels).
- Put measures in place to **tackle crime** affecting traders as well as consumers of traditional foods.
- Provide support, with Central Government, for **formalised trading platforms** for sellers of TFVs.
- Through the Department of Agriculture Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD), support the **provision of land, manure, and seeds through grants, subsidies, and loans** to enable households to produce TFVs where possible.
- Help encourage and **promote the affordability of TFVs**, where possible.
- Consider relaxing regulation of TFV producers and traders by **reducing requirements for certification**.

Civil Society Organisations should:

- **Support partnerships with schools and small-scale farmers** that can help secure space for production and training as well as feeding school children.

3. Mazenda, A., Mushayanyama, T., Masiya, T., Simawu, M. (2021). Cities, Poverty and Food: The role of municipalities in enhancing food security. *Urbana*, 22, 26-43.

Briefing Note Authors

Prof Alexandra Hughes (University of Newcastle, United Kingdom)

Dr Tim Hart (Human Sciences Research Council, South Africa)

Prof Henrice Altink (University of York, United Kingdom)

Prof Katherine Denby (University of York, United Kingdom)

Dr Blessing Masamha (Human Sciences Research Council, South Africa)

Dr Mathias Fubah Alubafi (Human Sciences Research Council, South Africa)

Dr Precious Tirivanhu (Human Sciences Research Council, South Africa)

Dr Emmanuel Fundisi (Human Sciences Research Council, South Africa)

Dr Tholang Mokhele (Human Sciences Research Council, South Africa)

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