

The Role of Traditional Food Systems in Rapid Urbanization:

Facilitating enterprise development around the production and/or supply of traditional fruit and vegetables

Policy Briefing Note 4

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Summary

This Briefing Note is the fourth in the series. Our research project “The Role of Traditional Food Systems in Rapid Urbanization” was designed to investigate the challenge of food insecurity in cities as experienced by migrant communities, specifically asking how knowledge of the production, trade and consumption patterns of traditional fruit and vegetables (TFVs) in urban (im)migrant communities can help design local and national policies to enhance consumption of fruit and vegetables to combat the growth of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). The purpose of this brief is to summarise our findings on the patterns and barriers of TFV production and trade in Johannesburg and present policy recommendations on how to stimulate sustainable enterprise development to enhance availability, accessibility, and affordability of TFVs within the city to help tackle the problem of urban food insecurity and malnutrition. The following recommendations are made: 1) Promote information on the benefits of TFVs; 2) Develop and support urban farming initiatives, training, entrepreneurship and partnerships; and 3) Promote business along the TFV supply chain.

Context

Our fieldwork identified significant demand within the City of Johannesburg (CoJ) for a wide range of TFVs including traditional leafy vegetables (e.g. blackjack, mutshaina, pumpkin leaves, amaranthus, cowpea leaves and spider plant), okra, root crops (e.g. cassava, amadumbe, cocoyam), internationally traded fruit (such as banana, naartjie, mango, apple, pineapple, litchee) as well as indigenous fruits (Umtshwankela, African melon, sourplum, prickly pear, wild medlar, wild currant, mahlatswa, kei apple, marula and baobab). Respondents reported that these TFVs were prepared fresh or blanched and dried to prolong storage and then later cooked as part of a meal. TFVs were being consumed for cultural associations and health benefits, with many respondents wanting produce grown without the use of agrochemicals. TFVs were being bought at formal and informal markets, including stalls at taxi ranks, bus stations, outside shopping centres, and from door-to-door vendors.

Challenges to production and trade of TFVs in the CoJ

Transport from outside the CoJ

Many respondents consumed TFVs that were produced outside of Gauteng or South Africa, with this 'home' production vital to their continued consumption of these crops. Produce is transported by family or friends travelling back and forth, using buses and larger shipments via truck or ship. Traders interviewed reported importing fresh fruit, leafy vegetables (dried and fresh) and other foodstuffs, including dried/smoked fish, yams, cassava and plantains from Cameroon, Nigeria, Mozambique, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Malawi and Zimbabwe.

The quality and taste of produce grown in other provinces or countries (as well as the cost) was perceived as better than produce grown in the CoJ, at least partly due to less use of chemical fertiliser and pesticides. However, for some supply routes (see Quote Box 1), the transport from where they are produced takes considerable time, limiting the supply of non-perishable items and dried products. The transport adds to the cost of TFVs and requires bulk buying to make the purchase worthwhile.

"If I want something I have to be sent that thing through the bus. If I want sweet potato from Malawi because it is nicer like the one from Mozambique, it can be sent to me via the bus...so if you want something, you can call someone and then they buy and send it. I can go and get it from Intercape, Munorurama, Eagle Liner; there are many buses...It costs about R2500 when you have all the documentation, and it takes 2 days to get here. But you pass by Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia"
Trader, Braamfontein

Land and access

Production within the CoJ was seen to be mostly limited by the availability of land, with many households reporting a desire to grow their own TFVs because of the high cost in the shops/markets but were unable to do so. Many respondents did not have a garden, and those who did reported the garden was too small for what they wanted/needed to grow. The land allocated by the local government for urban vegetable gardens was also seen as too small. Most of the farmers interviewed in the Central Business District (CBD) were largely unsuccessful in producing on rooftops and confined spaces despite using some costly methods, such as hydroponics. There is a lack of production near to residential areas with disparity in access to TFVs for those living in different areas. Some areas (e.g. Hillbrow, Yeoville and the inner city) have easy access to markets selling TFVs, whereas people living

in some suburbs require a car, bus, or taxi to get to the local markets. Traders in Soweto South reported the vast transport expenses to access farms and markets outside the city (e.g. Randfontein and Brits). Even travelling to the City Deep market in the CBD, the largest fruit and vegetable market in South Africa, was considered expensive by some traders.



Fig 1: A thriving TFV farm in Protea Glen

Viability

The viability of TFV production and trade is hampered by the lack of capital to invest in infrastructure to enable consistent production, buy produce to sell, and improve storage of TFVs, many of which are perishable. The exclusion of many producers from mainstream markets, and the need to have more than one source of income was also highlighted. One producer reported generating income from making and selling compost. Production losses due to pests and disease can be significant, with producers unable to afford chemical pesticides or unwilling to use them due to consumers' desire for "healthy produce". Crime and theft from traders were also reported as a problem, along with the lack of clarity and cost of relevant certificates/permits for trading. Traders without visas or identity documents are unable to get a permit and hence a space to sell. Immigrants reported being harassed by the police and vigilante groups even if they had permits. Respondents felt that TFVs were competing with fast food and cheap convenience food,



Fig 2: Trader selling perishable TFVs

which were actively promoted and easily accessible in both sites. Some respondents had obtained seeds from the CoJ, with others keeping seeds from their own gardens for the following year or buying seeds/seedlings from nurseries. One producer in Soweto mainly focused on producing seedlings but not always traditional vegetables.

Technology and knowledge exchange

A significant challenge to consistent production of TFVs in the CoJ is the seasonality of crops and, for some TFVs, the climate. Producers reported that polytunnels would enable year-round production but that the capital and maintenance costs of these are high. There is a lack of knowledge amongst producers on how to grow TFVs from other regions/countries and/or a lack of knowledge of how to adapt the production of TFVs for the South African climate. Similarly, some producers mentioned that they were not always sure what produce local residents required. A few were experimenting with different vegetable crops, and another was attempting to grow fruit crops but without adequate knowledge. Hydroponic farming was being used by one respondent who had attended a two-year training programme at Wits University (supported by the CoJ), which can reduce the water needed for production but requires electricity. The respondent was hoping to use biogas with further training at the University of Johannesburg.

Policy recommendations to drive enterprise development

1. Promote information on the benefits of TFVs

There is a general awareness of the nutritional and health benefits of TFVs and organic production but a lack of easy-to-access evidence for this. It is recommended that the city produces clear and concise information in a form that can be used by TFV entrepreneurs to increase demand. Such information could also be critical in helping overcome perceptions that TFVs are a poor person's food. Furthermore, there is a perception that organically grown produce is expensive and this needs to be challenged.

2. Develop and support urban farming initiatives, training, entrepreneurship and partnerships

Land availability for urban farming was seen as the major constraint on TFV production and hence consumption in CoJ, with increasing production in the CoJ seen as a major factor for meeting the demand for TFVs. TFV producers require larger areas of land, and there is an immediate need to provide land for households who wish to grow their own TFVs but have little or no garden access. Allocation of land to entrepreneurial individuals for farming would be a top priority for the CoJ.

Alongside land provision, another key recommendation is to enhance opportunities to access low-input organic and agroecological training. This **training** should include education on TFVs, how to produce them, how to prepare them and the benefits they will gain from TFVs as well as key business skills such as book-keeping and accessing finance. Such training of entrepreneurial household members is one of the main opportunities that the Government and/or the CoJ can use to promote enterprise development. The impact of training opportunities can be further enhanced through establishment of networking schemes to promote peer-to-peer sharing of expertise and knowledge among citizens and across cultures.

The benefits of increased availability of TFVs, increased consumption of TFVs, and resulting impact on population health can be significantly enhanced through effective **partnerships**, which could be actively encouraged and supported by the CoJ or provincial government. Linking TFV producers with schools can help secure space for production whilst training school children on how to grow and cook TFVs. Farming at schools can also provide spaces for improving maths, physical science, and biology. Produce can be used to feed school children and sold in the local community. Individual access to portions of communal land or commonage within the CoJ would enable individual entrepreneurs to manage production and enable the sharing of communal land.

3. Promotion of business along the TFV supply chain

Respondents highlighted improving the ease of importing TFVs into South Africa from surrounding countries to meet demand and increase the consumption of TFVs. However, any such border control changes would need to be balanced against the risk of spread of plant pests and diseases and invasive species amongst others. A lower risk strategy is to boost TFV production in South Africa and particularly within the CoJ. Central and local governments need to collaborate with civic, private, and public sector players to develop a holistic framework that supports TFV producers, traders, and processors. There are significant opportunities for job creation but investment in enterprise development along the supply chain is needed. Provincial and city governments can also play a crucial role in building links between businesses along the supply chain for mutual benefit, for example, provision of manure for TFV producers.

A major opportunity for TFVs would come from enabling small-scale producers to access formal and commercial markets. Mainstreaming TFVs into supermarkets would expand the TFV market (beyond migrants) and provide a platform for marketing campaigns. **Public procurement** is a major lever that the provincial and city governments can use. Prioritising TFVs and local small-scale producers for public sector catering would boost demand and provide a stimulus to enhance production and trade. Although perishable TFVs would be problematic in food parcels, they could be used in cooked form in, for example, homes for the elderly, soup kitchens, and other sites providing cooked meals.

The availability of **financing** to support TFV enterprises is critical. Infrastructure such as polytunnels can increase the breadth of TFV production possible and lengthen the growing season, but upfront and maintenance costs can be prohibitive. Investment to improve storage facilities for traders would not only enhance the economic viability of these enterprises but crucially help maintain the high nutritional content of fresh produce to point-of-sale. Enhancing the availability and accessibility of financial support through subsidies, grants, and loans for purchasing inputs and infrastructure for trading and processing was seen as critical for enabling the development of viable businesses along the supply chain.

Reducing the requirements for certification of TFV producers and traders and enabling immigrants to obtain permits and trade would encourage business development along the TFV supply chain. Addressing the crime rate was also seen as critical, with respondents reporting theft of produce as a major issue. Improving transport links to key TFV markets (e.g. City Deep) would be advantageous to producers, traders, and consumers.

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