

## Monitoring Urban Food Security in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Famine early warning organizations have yet to devote serious attention to monitoring the food situation in Africa's cities. The largely rural focus of Africa's early warning systems is related to a limited appreciation of hunger problems in urban areas as well as conceptual and technical impediments to the monitoring of urban hunger. A larger proportion of the continent's population still resides in non-urban areas (WRI 2000). And rural areas have a more notable history of famines. Yet the favored status of the urban resident has eroded considerably since the late 1970s. Twenty years of structural adjustment policies have reduced the number of government employees and curtailed many public subsidies, changes that directly affect many urban livelihoods (Becker et al. 1994; Ridell 1997; Potts 1997). Currency devaluations disproportionately impact the food security of urban populations by increasing the price of certain foodstuffs relative to urban wages (Dioné et al. 1997; Tefft et al. 1997). In many instances, rural incomes now exceed those in urban areas and as a consequence, rural-urban migration has slowed dramatically (Potts 1995, 1997). In spite of the falling status of Africa's urban poor, there is "an alarming lack of information on the patterns and determinants of (urban) food insecurity ... [and] the data and analytical base for public policy formulation in urban areas is surprisingly weak" (IFPRI 1996, 85).

Three methods have been used for monitoring food shortages in Africa – the food balance sheet, an indicator-based approach, and systems approaches. In 1975, the United Nations' Food and Agricultural Organization first employed the food balance sheet for its Global Information and Early Warning System (GIEWS) (Maxwell and Frankenberger 1992). This approach compares demand (population multiplied by per capita food need) to supply (sum of agricultural production, stocks, and imports) to determine if surpluses or shortfalls exist at the national level. The indicator-based approach has been most fully developed and used by the US Agency for International Development (FEWS 1998; Moseley and Logan 2001). USAID's Famine Early Warning System (FEWS) relies on food prices, crop conditions, production data, health conditions, labor prices, and other indicators to predict potential food insecurity. Systems approaches attempt to determine aggregate need through an understanding of processes operating at the household level. One example