



World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES

Zimbabwe

Fostering Urban Resilience through Preparedness Activities in Southern Africa

CONTEXT

Approximately 2.4 million people in urban areas of Zimbabwe are food insecure—a number which increased sharply from 30% in 2019 to 42% in 2021. This increase can be mainly attributed to the Covid-19 pandemic. Four-fifths of Zimbabwe’s urban residents rely on outdoor casual labour for their livelihoods, which was no longer an option once lockdown measures came into effect. Yet, even before the pandemic, families were already struggling in urban areas across the country.

The combination of widespread poverty, HIV/AIDS prevalence, limited job opportunities, and climate-induced shocks is contributing to food insecurity and malnutrition across the country. According to the World Bank, there is a likelihood that by 2040, Zimbabwe may begin encountering an increase in drought experiences, compared to the period between 1966 and 2005.⁶ This will have significant economic implications as about 80% of the population depends on rain-fed agriculture—the sector which employs most of the population and of which the majority is female—with induced effects on remittances, rural-to-urban migration, and food availability in urban areas. Droughts are not the only climatic hazard to which the country is exposed. In 2017 and 2019, Zimbabwe was hit by two of the deadliest meteorological events in Africa—storm Dineo and Cyclone Idai, respectively.

URBAN ZIMBABWE

At a glance

32%
of the total population (14.6 million people) lives in urban areas¹

63%
of the country's population lives below the poverty line²

29%
of urban dwellers live in slums and informal settlements³

4.34M
people in Zimbabwe are food insecure⁴

40%
of the population employed in the informal sector, are found in urban areas⁵

43%
of the population has access to improved sanitation facilities

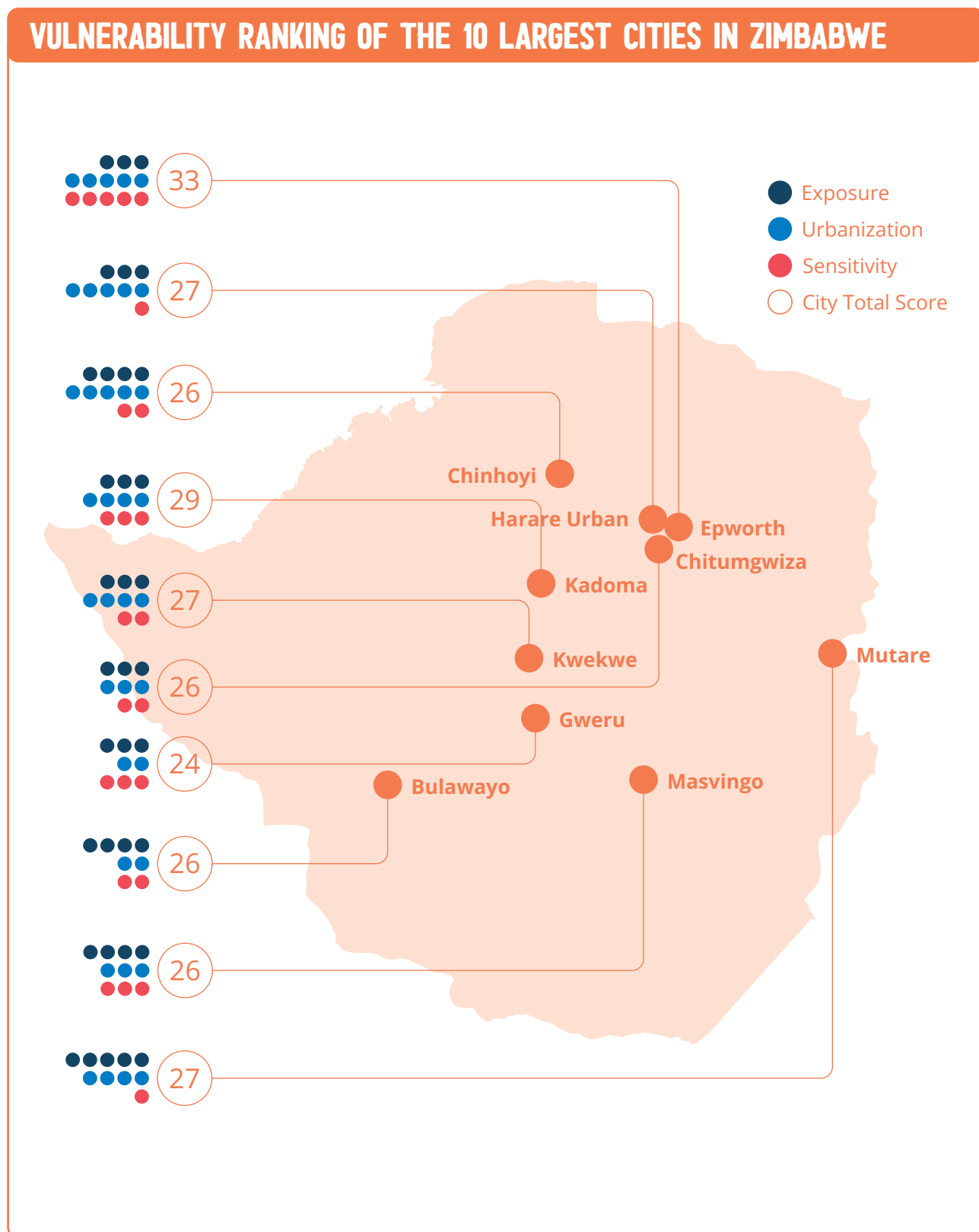


June 2023



Zimbabwe also has the second-highest inflation rate in the world after Venezuela, further impeding access to food. More recently, the Covid-19 pandemic, a predominantly urban crisis, demonstrated how vulnerability is multi-dimensional and influenced by household characteristics and services required

to meet a wide range of essential needs. A holistic picture is needed amongst disaster risk management (DRM) stakeholders to address the unique challenge of simultaneously managing the impact of recurrent natural hazards, protracted economic instability, and urbanisation in Zimbabwe.



THE REGIONAL URBAN PREPAREDNESS PROJECT IN ZIMBABWE

The Regional Urban Preparedness Project, implemented by WFP in Zimbabwe in partnership with the Department of Civil Protection (DCP), the Secretary for Provincial Affairs and Devolution's Offices, and the District Development Coordinator's Offices, is working to build a common understanding amongst stakeholders of who is vulnerable in urban areas, where and why, as well as who should be involved in preparedness and response. Assessments were carried out in the urban areas of Epworth, Gweru, and Mutare following a step-by-step multi-stakeholder engagement process involving communities, national government representatives, local authorities, international agencies, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The participatory approach taken allowed for gathering in-depth knowledge of the roles and responsibilities of both formal and informal urban actors in preparedness and response.

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The project was a unique platform for local authorities, WFP, and [the Department of] Civil Protection's framed conceptual and programmatic approaches to Disaster Preparedness. It shed light on the need for legislative reform for DRR and disaster preparedness, and institutional reconfiguration of the Department of Civil Protection and the Civil Protection Committees, particularly to facilitate community presence at the ward level. I also learned that local authorities must undertake vulnerability assessments and disaster risk profiling of areas within their jurisdictions. The project recommended human and financial resource allocations to the DRR portfolios at the local level.

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Solomon Mungure,
DanChurchAid

FINDINGS #1

Emergency coordination. The Department of Civil Protection under the Ministry of Local Government, Public Works, and National Housing coordinates disaster risk management (DRM) activities, working with relevant governmental and non-governmental stakeholders to perform its duties.

DRM responsibilities are split between two different institutions charged with respectively managing floods (National Civil Protection Committee) and droughts (National Food and Nutrition Council – FNC). FNC coordinates the development of rural and urban vulnerability assessments through the Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee (ZimVAC), a multi-stakeholder consortium developing research on urban livelihoods, nutrition, and people's vulnerability status.

This dual disaster response coordination structure, split among the National Civil Protection Committee chaired by DCP for flood and other sudden-onset disaster response and the FNC chaired by the Office of the President and Cabinet (OPC) for drought management and response, **presents a set of challenges, particularly for institutional cohesiveness, and efficient use of resources** at all levels in the context of extremely limited availability of such resources.



FINDINGS #2

Urban vulnerability dynamics. Focus group discussions with urban stakeholders, key informants, Community-Based Organizations and Civil Society Organizations' representatives, provided an opportunity to learn from the experiences of urban community members. It was found that poor urban households have insufficient income to access even basic food and non-food commodities such as toothpaste, bath soap, clothing, and footwear. The quality of the built environment also presents challenges for households, especially in locations such as Mutare which are particularly exposed to climatic sudden events, such as cyclones and floods. In Gweru, endemic water scarcity results in long queues at community boreholes, which has become a burden for women and girls and an extremely difficult task for older women. Older persons, persons with disabilities, orphan and vulnerable children, and widows were identified as the most vulnerable groups in each of the urban centres.

With the economic crisis deepening in Zimbabwe, most urban dwellers now resort to peddling, running flea markets and tuck shops, and other informal trades as their main source of livelihood. In Gweru, an estimated 60-70% of informal workers fall under the low-income bracket, and occasionally embark on seasonal informal mining activities. Meanwhile in Mutare, households (and particularly women) reported spontaneously practicing urban and peri-urban agriculture to sell produce and earn additional income.

Key drivers of urban food insecurity and vulnerability in Zimbabwe include high unemployment or poor/unstable remuneration, volatile economy, high food prices, lack of access to diversified livelihoods, inadequate provision of infrastructure, climate-induced shocks, and stressors, as well as ineffective governance and development policy. Contributory factors to urban poverty and food insecurity in urban areas include large family sizes, low educational level of household heads, lack of income from permanent employment, a short length of residence in the suburb, and social fragmentation.

WHO ARE THE MOST VULNERABLE?

Dimensions of urban vulnerability in Zimbabwe

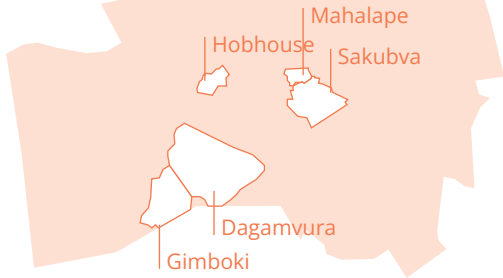
	EXTREMELY VULNERABLE					VULNERABLE				
DEMOGRAPHICS	Child-headed households	Chronically ill head	Elderly household heads (65 and above)	Disabled household head	Single women head	Households with orphans	Household headed by a widow	Households with more than 6 members		
LIVELIHOOD	Begging	Waste pickers	Vending	Informal jobs			Casual work	Farming on small plots	Pension income	Informal business
HEALTH	Cannot fund health expenses	Disabled household heads					Chronically ill household members	No medical insurance	Owe health institutions	
EDUCATION	Children dropping out of school because of lack of school fees	Children do not complete primary education					Children skip school because of school fees arrears	Children enrolled in unregistered schools	Children not enrolled in secondary schools	
WASH	Use of pit latrines	No access to piped water	Shared toilets				Struggle to pay water bills (regular water disconnections)	Use communal taps and boreholes	Share toilets with more than one family	
ASSETS & FOOD STOCKS	Skipping meals	Purchase food in small quantities					Skip meals	Eat small inadequate portions		
HOUSING	Dilapidated, substandard and incomplete houses in informal wetlands	Overcrowded families	Evictions due to non-rent payment				Struggle to pay house rent	Overcrowding (more than 3 people per room)		



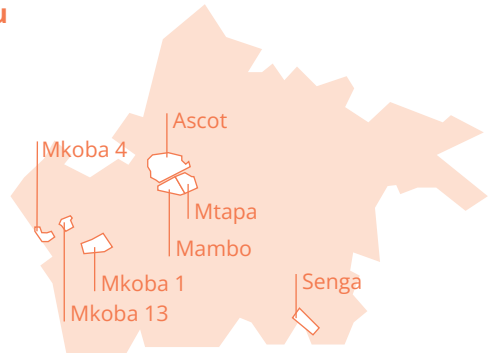
WHERE ARE THE MOST VULNERABLE?

Urban vulnerability hotspots in Mutare / Gweru / Epworth

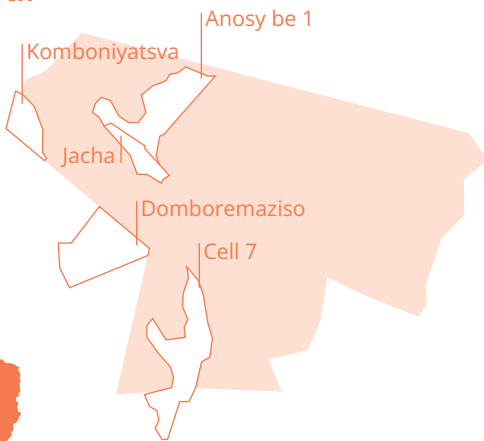
Mutare



Gweru



Epworth



FINDINGS #3

Cash-based responses in urban areas. Community members reported that voucher assistance has helped improve food security in their households and allowed them to save enough money to meet other essential needs. Yet, more flexible assistance through unconditional cash would allow them to cover other essential needs crucial in urban areas, such as rent, electricity bills, school fees, and purchasing cooking fuel. In Epworth, most women rent their houses; renting a single room can cost anything between USD\$ 5-15 per month, while a family of five people or more can expect to spend around USD\$ 20 per month on rent. Through the project, an urban Minimum Expenditure Basket (MEB)⁷ was determined, tailored to the essential needs and costs associated with urban living in Epworth, Mutare, and Gweru, as well as the national average.

The urban MEB was done through a right-based qualitative approach leveraging key informants and community knowledge. The data collection has confirmed that, despite the national MEB being lower than the one calculated within the project for the three locations, the national value is still adequate to represent the urban household essential needs.

In an effort to build the buy-in of national government and partners, WFP has managed to receive acknowledgement from the National Cash Working Group⁸ on the need to collect primary data (qualitative approach) to complement secondary data in reviewing the MEB to better capture



The project results pegged an average monthly MEB for an urban household in Zimbabwe at **USD\$ 363.13**, or **USD\$ 72.62** per person, to be able to meet food and other essential needs.

The project used an average food and non-food gap of between 54% (food) and 59% (non-food), being the percentage of the basket that vulnerable households cannot meet. The project has identified a theoretical Transfer Value (e.g. purely resulting from the mixed method analysis) for an urban response in Zimbabwe to be corresponding to this percentage, equivalent to **USD\$ 45** per household in Epworth, **USD\$ 52** in Gweru and **USD\$ 66** in Mutare.

households' expenditure priorities and patterns. In constructing the current MEB, the committee working on the MEB did not manage to get primary datasets from the government and committed to include the project recommendations in the next MEB review.



WAY FORWARD

As a result of the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 in cities, the last two years have seen significant investment in social assistance and urban livelihood programmes in Zimbabwe, led by the national government, UN agencies, international organisations, and NGOs. The recently published National Development Strategy frames urban vulnerability as a new priority, providing a policy framework for adapting the current social protection system to better respond to urban crises.

The review of institutional arrangements, coupled with an improved understanding of vulnerability and essential needs in urban areas, has also led to identifying next steps for improving urban preparedness and response at the national and local level. This includes capacity strengthening for ZimVAC to revise the current urban vulnerability framework and for the Department of Civil Protection to establish an information management system for urban areas, as well as the establishment of community engagement mechanisms that can enable diverse community stakeholder involvement in early warning, preparedness, and response.



ABOUT THE PROJECT

WFP is implementing a Regional Urban Preparedness Project in **Lesotho, Madagascar, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe**, focusing activities in 12 urban areas. Funded by the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO), the project, titled “Fostering Community Resilience through Preparedness Activities in Southern Africa,” aims to build a common understanding on the specific characteristics of urban vulnerability and essential needs, and provide partners, local governments, and national institutions a set of tools to better prepare for responding to shocks in urban areas.

World Food Programme

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For more info on the project

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Photo credits

Photos page 1, 3, 7 (group): WFP/Hannah Barry
Photo page 5 (map): WFP/Arianna Francioni
Photos page 5 (woman), 6, 7 (woman):
WFP/Tatenda Macheke

Endnotes

- 1 OECD/SWAC, Africapolis, 2015
- 2 WFP
- 3 UN-Habitat, 2020
- 4 Integrated Food Insecurity Classification, 2020
- 5 ZimStat, 2019
- 6 World Bank, 2020
- 7 A minimum expenditure basket (MEB) is defined as what a household requires in order to meet their essential needs, on a regular or seasonal basis, and its cost.
- 8 National Cash Working Group aims to support the coordination, harmonization, and development of an effective approach to implementation, delivery, and quality Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) for the humanitarian response.

