This policy brief is informed by the findings of the ESRC/DFID-funded Consuming Urban Poverty Project (CUP) (formally called “Governing Food Systems to Alleviate Poverty in Secondary Cities in Africa”) on work conducted in low-income neighbourhoods of Epworth, Zimbabwe, from 2016 to 2017. The central focus of the study was to understand the connections between poverty, governance and urban space. This brief draws on findings from CUP research and suggests broader engagement with the wider food economy as a way to unlock potential benefits to urban planning, food access, food security and economic opportunity.

Governance in Zimbabwe and Epworth

Zimbabwe's independence in 1980 was followed by extensive reforms to overhaul the country’s governance structure. The removal of repressive, apartheid-era influx control legislation saw many Zimbabweans migrate to urban areas, resulting in significant urban growth. This growth was not just in the main cities but also in secondary cities like Epworth. The austerity measures of the 1990s led to food-related riots and civil unrest as prices rose, poverty levels increased and informal economic activities became more prevalent. A brief period of growth from 2010 began to slow after 2013 due to poor agricultural harvests and decreased investment, causing many manufacturing companies to close or reduce operations, resulting in further growth of the informal sector as a key urban livelihood strategy. Yet the state has not altered its repressive approach to informality.

Laws and policies that affect food governance in Epworth

The management and governance of Epworth and its food system is mainly guided by the Regional Town and Country Planning (RTCP) and Urban Councils Acts. These legislative instruments are steeped in colonial norms of land use planning and only provide for single function-zoned urban activities. Such zoning approaches do not take into account mixed land use patterns and the growing informal sector that represents Epworth. The RTCP Act also excludes many of the new, mostly informal, economic actors, as it requires that only land owners with title deeds and retailers with licences be consulted in the planning process. Key Epworth-based economic actors, the informal food sector, are therefore not consulted in the development of by-laws and planning of market areas. Figure 1 provides a sense of the scale and geography of economic activity in Epworth where a large proportion of those listed are in fact informal operators.

Epworth Local Board (ELB) by-laws and the Strategic Plan (2016-2020) perpetuated the colonial era-informed spatial function divisions and imaginations of a modern developed world city, with little regard for the current lived reality, and economic practice in Epworth. The strategic plan focuses on formalisation and regulation of trade and land use planning. The by-laws emerging from the plan, when enacted, do little to facilitate the economic activities that form the backbone of the Epworth economy and food system.

Other governance legislation such as the Public Health Act and the Food Standards Act govern the vending of cooked foods in Epworth, effectively preventing the sale of cooked foods. These Acts further dictate what types of foods (e.g. vegetables) may be sold and where. Informal food vendors were found to be the key enablers of food access in Epworth. These vendors are routinely subjected to evictions and other punitive actions by municipal or national police tasked with enforcing such Acts and Statutes. The ELB's involvement in the food system reinforces tight regulation and control

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through the channeling of a diverse set of economic, policy and legal instruments set by the national government, as opposed to working to consider the contextual policy and governance needs.

These restrictive controls enable the emergence of other forms of food system governance (or capture) with the emergence of middlemen as key actors in the governance of the urban food system, resulting in food commodities moving through many hands along the value chain before reaching the consumer. The food system in Epworth, outside of the state and council, is influenced by gatekeepers (*makoronyera*) and marshals (*mahwindi*) who control who is able to sell certain products in Epworth and also directly determine the price.

Various governance actions, when combined with the actions of new, non-state actors in the food system, have profoundly impacted the food system at both national and local levels.

Epworth presents a unique case. The small window of opportunity exists to rework the economic and policy landscape. Epworth is unique in that it is linked to Harare but sits outside the capital’s governance structures. The Epworth Local Board reports directly to national government. This somewhat unusual governance situation offers an opportunity to apply new and innovative policy interventions. Currently, there is a mis-match between laws and planning paradigms enacted by both national government and the ELB. On the other hand, other “food system” actors have been able to insert themselves into this system and extract unjust value. The most vulnerable – the poor urban residents – are in need of alternatives. There is a policy space in which these alternative policy opportunities could be tested. It is clear that while the colonial-era planning and policy approaches offered some stability, the events of the past two decades now mean that different approaches are required if development and opportunities are to be unlocked.

Food and the food system connect to multiple other urban systems. Food also connects to many development and health related challenges. There are many urban development advantages that come from a proactive response to urban food issues.

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3 These groups of people are gatekeepers that charge for access often likened to bus conductors, collecting fees from passengers on a bus as they arrive.
Policy suggestions

- Given the fact that informal activities have become key to urban livelihoods in the country and in Epworth, Epworth’s by-laws need to change to work with this sector in ways that enable win-win outcomes.

- Acts shaping Epworth’s by-laws and policies require re-alignment to Zimbabwe’s 2013 Constitution, which guarantees individual rights to work, and collective rights to public space and economic associations (inclusive of street vending).

- Informal and formal economic activities co-exist in Epworth. Yet the informal food system continues to be viewed as illegal. Given the challenging economic environment, all opportunities, be these formal or informal, need to be leveraged to stimulate the economy. Currently, they are mutually dependent. Policy needs to recognise this co-dependence as opposed to focus exclusively on the formal.

- Processes are required to curtail and deter the activities of exploitative middlemen and marshals whose actions increase food prices and further impoverish consumers.

- The Epworth Local Board needs to be empowered to restructure the planning and by-law processes to reduce governance bureaucracy and facilitate greater activity in the local food economy – in its multiple forms.