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Migraciones y Territorios

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Índice

Tema central

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Cross-border food remittances and mobile transfers: The experiences of Zimbabwean migrants in Cape Town, South Africa.

Remesas de alimentos transfronterizas y transferencias móviles: Las experiencias de los emigrantes zimbabuenses en Ciudad del Cabo, Sudáfrica.

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Abstract

Mobile transfers have become a defining feature of cross-border remittance transmission in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). However, recent studies on mobile transfers have mainly focused on cash remittances and need to pay more attention to mobile food transfers. This paper addresses this research gap on mobile food transfers by examining cross-border food remittances and mobile transfers by Zimbabwean migrants residing in Cape Town, South Africa, to their families and friends back home. In this paper, we seek to understand the factors influencing the uptake of digital food remittances by Zimbabwean migrants who have lived in South Africa for at least three years. The paper is based on a mixed research study carried out in Cape Town during the nationwide COVID-19 lockdown in 2020. The mixed-methods study involved a questionnaire survey of 100 Zimbabwean nationals that was complemented by in-depth interviews with 10 participants selected from the interviewed group. The study findings reveal that the national COVID-19 pandemic lockdown disrupted informal food-remitting channels and, at the same time, helped to solidify the digital and mobile food transfers across national borders that have emerged in SSA in recent years.

Keywords: Food remittances, mobile transfers, digital remittances, food security, COVID-19, Zimbabwean migrants

Resumen

Las transferencias móviles se han convertido en un rasgo definitorio de la transmisión transfronteriza de remesas en el África subsahariana (ASS). Sin embargo, los estudios recientes sobre las transferencias móviles se han centrado principalmente en las remesas en efectivo y es necesario prestar más atención a las transferencias móviles de alimentos. Este artículo aborda esta laguna en la investigación sobre las transferencias móviles de alimentos examinando las remesas transfronterizas de alimentos y las transferencias móviles de los emigrantes zimbabuenses que residen en Ciudad del Cabo (Sudáfrica) a sus familias y amigos en su país. En este trabajo, tratamos de entender los factores que influyen en la aceptación de las remesas digitales de alimentos por parte de los emigrantes zimbabuenses que han vivido en Sudáfrica durante al menos tres años. El artículo se basa en un estudio de investigación mixto realizado en Ciudad del Cabo durante el cierre nacional de COVID-19 en 2020. El estudio de métodos mixtos incluyó una encuesta por cuestionario a 100 ciudadanos de Zimbabue que se complementó con entrevistas en profundidad a 10 participantes seleccionados del grupo entrevistado. Las conclusiones del estudio revelan que el bloqueo nacional por la pandemia COVID-19 interrumpió los canales informales de transmisión de alimentos y, al mismo tiempo, contribuyó a consolidar las transferencias digitales y móviles de alimentos a través de las fronteras nacionales que han surgido en el ASS en los últimos años.

Palabras Clave: Remesas alimentarias, transferencias mobiles, remesas digitales, seguridad alimentaria, COVID-19, migrantes Zimbauenses

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1. Introduction

Migration studies in global South countries have shown the potential of remittances to improve the food security situations of impoverished rural, and urban households through cash and goods sent back home by migrants. Scholarship on the contribution of transborder food remittances in the global South to household food security has expanded in recent years (Apatinga, Asiedu and Obeng 2022; Crush and Caesar 2018; 2020). In Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), remittances are an essential aspect of national economies and origin households in particular (World Bank 2021; Smith and Floro 2021; Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe 2021; Crush and Caesar 2018; Tevera and Chikanda 2009b). Studies carried out in Zimbabwe, and Eswatini (formerly Swaziland) have revealed that trans-border and in-country urban-rural food remittances provide social protection for household food security and nutrition (Tevera and Chikanda 2009b; Tevera and Simelane 2014). However, while a broad narrative is emerging on South-South food remittance flows, there are considerable knowledge gaps in our understanding of the emerging dynamics due to the effects of global shocks, such as COVID-19 national lockdowns and the fast-growing cross-border mobile money services.

Research on cash-remitting Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa, Botswana, and Eswatini (formerly Swaziland), reveals the intersecting constraints presented by the unbanked nature of many migrants and the high costs involved when using formal remitting channels (Nzima 2017; Tevera and Chikanda 2009a). Since the COVID-19 lockdowns, there has been a shift in cross-border cash remittances from money transmission services to low-priced wireless transactions. Pre-COVID-19 lockdowns, most of the cash remittance recipients across SSA got their money mainly through cash pick-ups at banks or agents of remittance service providers. As recent international studies show, the transition to mobile money and digital remittances has made cross-border cash remittances inexpensive and quicker than traditional money and bank transmissions (McAuliffe and Triandafyllidou 2021; World Bank 2021). The literature shows that factors such as comparatively low transaction costs, transparent charges, and reachability have driven the 'fintech revolution' in the global South that has contributed to the rapid growth of mobile/digital cash transfers and remittances in recent years (Ilinitchi 2020; Kitimbo 2021; Rotondi and Billari 2022; Cirolia, Hall and Nyamnjoh 2022; Gukurume and Mahiya 2020; Merritt 2011; Tyce 2020).

For example, in SSA, low transaction costs and the elimination of proof of residential address and immigration papers when sending cash and goods back home have removed transfer barriers that have changed the remitting landscape in East and Southern Africa through the rapid expansion of transborder cash and mobile food transfers. Kenya's mobile money service, popularly known as the M-Pesa system, has been presented in the literature as a model mobile money service when international lending agencies are making a case in favour of creating ideal conditions for innovative remitting channels. Similarly, EcoCash, which Econet Wireless Private Limited launched pre-COVID-19, has emerged to domi-

nate mobile money services in Zimbabwe. The company also launched EcoCash Diaspora, which is a cross-border mobile money service that is commonly used by South Africa-based Zimbabweans to remit cash back home.

Cross-border food remittances have received inadequate attention (Apatinga, Asiedu and Obeng 2022; Crush and Caesar 2016), and yet they contribute directly to household food security, especially in the poverty-stricken informal settlements and in rural villages where peasant cultivation has been ravaged by drought or floods. Recent studies by Sithole and Dinbabo (2016) and Smith and Floro (2021) have highlighted the vital contribution of remittances to household food security in several countries in the global South. Studies of remittances to Zimbabwe have revealed that because of the country's economic challenges, which are reflected by shrinking industrial production and high rates of unemployment in the formal sector, cash remittances that are sent back home to family members of nationals in the diaspora are mainly used to meet basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, health, and education (Crush and Tevera 2010; Sithole and Dinbabo 2016; Tevera and Chikanda 2009a; 2009b; Ramachandran et al. 2022).

This article contributes to the academic debate on migration and cross-border food remittances by examining remitting food channels and the role of mobile transfers in SSA using the experiences of Zimbabwean migrants in Cape Town as a case in point. This article is based on a mixed-methods study that was conducted in 2020 (the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic) and involved one hundred (100) questionnaire interviews and ten (10) in-depth interviews on the food-remitting experiences of Zimbabwean migrants residing in Cape Town, a major city in South Africa. More specifically, the article seeks to answer the question, how have Zimbabwean migrants in Cape Town been sending food remittances back home during the national mobility-restricting COVID-19 lockdowns enforced by the central governments in both countries? In this article, our use of the term 'mobile remittances' is based on the conceptualisation of the term by Siegel and Fransen (2013) in their paper on new technologies in remittance sending in Africa.

2. Mobile remittances and food remittances

Mobile money has transformed remitting patterns through expanded financial inclusion (especially of the previously unbanked population groups), including migrants who previously did not have access to safe money transfer facilities. Studies have highlighted how mobile banking sources have facilitated the expansion of mobile remittance and have become a vital instrument in offering financial reach to the often unbanked groups (Siegel and Fransen 2013). In SSA, the mobile money sector has expanded considerably during the past decade, and this has facilitated the growth of trans-border remittance transfers and the financial inclusion of unbanked groups, including migrants and informal sector

entrepreneurs. Migrants across Africa increasingly use remittance service providers (RSPs) to send cash or goods back home to their countries of origin. This is because they can deliver inexpensive, easy, and speedy money transmissions (Siegel and Fransen 2013; Tembo and Okoro 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic and the national lockdowns have disrupted traditional remittance channels due to the curtailment of everyday human mobility. At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, remittances through mobile money facilitated flows and experienced limited to no adverse effects; therefore, they were resilient compared to other channels (Andersson-Manjang and Naghavi 2021). International remittances transferred and collected via mobile money grew by $5 billion or 65% in 2020, reaching an annual amount of $12.7 billion in international transfers (Andersson-Manjang and Naghavi 2021). The volume of the mobile remittance transmissions observed in 2020 is a tiny fraction of the total remittances but has considerable potential to expand (World Bank 2021). At the policy level, governments have facilitated the expansion of mobile and digital remittance services by relaxing the terms and conditions for completing transactions (World Bank 2018).

There is evidence in Southern Africa that mobile and technological innovation facilitates the transfer of goods, such as food items (Muhamba 2020; Santosdiaz 2020; Sithole 2022; Washinyira 2020), through fintech and service providers such as Mukuru Groceries, Malaicha, Tinokunda, Ahoyi Africa, Shumba Africa and Senditoo. In Zimbabwe, mobile money transmission services such as EcoCash Diaspora facilitate the transfer of remittances straight to the EcoCash mobile phone wallet of beneficiaries (Nyanhete 2017; Mutsonziwa and Maposa 2016). Mobile transfers have made it possible for people residing in remote rural locations to receive cash and food remittances if they have access to mobile phones. Elsewhere in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a rapid expansion of digital and online food purchasing and direct delivery in local settings due to mobility restrictions and lockdowns (Ben Hassen, El Bilali and Allahyari 2020; Liang, Zhong and Crush 2022; Njomane and Telukdarie 2022).

Addressing the digital and mobile food transfer gap can be crucial in understanding how mobile channels have the potential to provide accessible, inexpensive, and convenient methods of transmitting cross-border food remittances. Apatinga, Asiedu and Obeng (2022) argue that while cash transmissions represent a large volume of remittances, in-kind remittances are progressively highlighted as essential and consequently compel policy and research consideration. In-kind remittances, such as food items, have gained limited focus mainly because the transmissions are undertaken in informal channels (Crush and Caesar 2018; 2020). Studies on international remittances within Africa characterise them as the transfer of goods and money; nevertheless, the research generally excludes the effects, significance, and quantity of cross-border in-kind transfers like food (Crush and Caesar 2016). Noteworthy, in-kind remittances such as food are generally transferred through informal channels because of the relatively low remitting cost (Tevera and Chikanda 2009a).

However, Crush, Thomaz and Ramachandran (2021) have shown that COVID-19 and various containment measures, such as travel restrictions, disrupted the well-established informal channels of remitting cross-border goods.

However, with the innovations in mobile and digital technology, there is developmental potential for formal or semi-formal mobile channels to transmit goods such as food items. The disruptions of informal channels and South-South migration movements at the height of the COVID-19 lockdown measures and border closures enhanced the emergence of digital and mobile channels to send food remittances. Also, the digital and mobile pathways are expanding because they are accessible to informal traders and irregular migrants who can use the services to send remittances back home despite not having immigration papers and bank accounts. Therefore, extensive attention to mobile and digital cash remittances should be directed to in-kind remittances, such as food which can also be transmitted via mobile and digital channels.

3. Methodology

This research was based on primary data collected in 2020 in Cape Town's southern and northern suburbs of Claremont, Rondebosch, Wynberg, Kenilworth, and Bellville. A mixed-methods approach involving ten (10) in-depth interviews and 100 questionnaire surveys was conducted, and Zimbabwean migrants in Cape Town were interviewed. The study used the snowballing sampling method to select the migrants who participated in the questionnaire survey, whereby the first Zimbabwean migrant polled was asked to recommend the next food-remitting Zimbabwean migrant to interview. The population of Zimbabweans in Cape Town is estimated to be at least 55 000. The steps followed in qualitative data analysis included transcription, codification, cleaning, and analysis based on the emerging themes. Quantitative data analysis involved inputting the data into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and then transferring it to STATA 13.0, a statistical software. Accordingly, the subsequent phases comprised data labelling, defining, cleaning, and examining. All ethical protocols were adhered to throughout the data collection process.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Profile of food remitting migrants

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the 100 migrants in Cape Town who were interviewed for this study. The profile of the interviewed migrants shows considerable diversity in terms of gender, age, marital status, occupation and amount of money spent on food

Table 1: Background and demographic information

Variable	Category	Percentage
Gender	Male	50%
	Female	50%
N = 100		
Age	30 years and below	20%
	31 - 45	69%
	46 +	11%
N = 100		
Marital status	Married	45%
	Single	42%
	Divorced/Widowed	13%
N = 100		
Breadwinner	Myself	75%
	Husband	15%
	Wife	10%
Dependents	None	13%
	1-2	41%
	3-4	42%
	More than 4	4%
N = 100		
Education	Primary	6
	Secondary	17
	University	77
N = 100		
Occupation	office worker	18%
	student	22%
	waiter	16%
	bartender	12%
	domestic worker	8%
	health professional	6%
	teacher	6%
	Business man/woman	4%
	lecturer	2%
	informal trader	6%
N = 100		

Source: Field survey (2020)

remittances. However, the group is relatively homogenous regarding educational attainment because 77% had university-level qualifications. Their occupations ranged from professionals, such as office workers, health professionals, and lecturers, to blue-collar workers, such as domestic workers and informal traders. This suggests that Zimbabwean migrants in Cape Town with diverse backgrounds use digital channels to remit food back home.

The qualitative findings were based on the narratives of ten (four female and six male) Zimbabwean migrants interviewed in Cape Town. Table 2 provides information on the respondents' population group, gender, duration of stay in Cape Town and livelihood sources. Several had part-time jobs in addition to their full-time jobs and were employed as office workers, lecturers, teachers, post-graduate students, bartenders, gardeners and servers at food outlets.

Table 2: Background and demographic data

Participants	Population group	Gender	Main occupation	Duration in Cape Town
Participant 1	Black	Female	Lecturer	10+ years
Participant 2	Black	Male	Post-graduate student	4+ years
Participant 3	Black	Female	Office worker	10+ years
Participant 4	Black	Female	Office worker	5+ years
Participant 5	Black	Female	Post-graduate student	7+ years
Participant 6	Black	Male	Waiter	3+ years
Participant 7	Black	Male	Bartender	8+ years
Participant 8	Black	Male	Gardener	5+ years
Participant 9	Black	Male	Teacher	6+ years
Participant 10	Black	Male	Lecturer	11+ years

Source: Field survey 2020

4.2 Migration and food remittance drivers

Zimbabwe has been one of the significant migrant-sending countries in Southern Africa. About 25-33% of the population is believed to be residing outside the country, with South Africa being the main host country. In the current study, the respondents were asked to explain why they had left Zimbabwe for Cape Town. They were allowed to give multiple reasons for emigrating from Zimbabwe to South Africa (hence the percentages in Figure 1) do not add up to 100. Figure 1 shows that the main reasons for leaving Zimbabwe include seeking job opportunities (85%), and escaping the economic crisis that Zimbabwe has

been experiencing since the 1990s. The main outmigration drivers were increasing unemployment, high inflation rates, and recurring droughts that have contributed to food price hikes) (72%); food insecurity or food shortages (64%); the need for foreign employment in order to send remittances back home (52%); educational or school purposes (47%); and escaping political violence (30%). These findings are consistent with earlier studies that have been conducted elsewhere in SSA that show that social, economic, or political factors continue to be the drivers of international migration in Africa (Crush, Chikanda and Tawodzera 2015; Crush and Tevera 2010; Dinbabo and Carciotto 2015; Mazwi 2021; Tevera 2020).

Figure 1: Drivers of migration
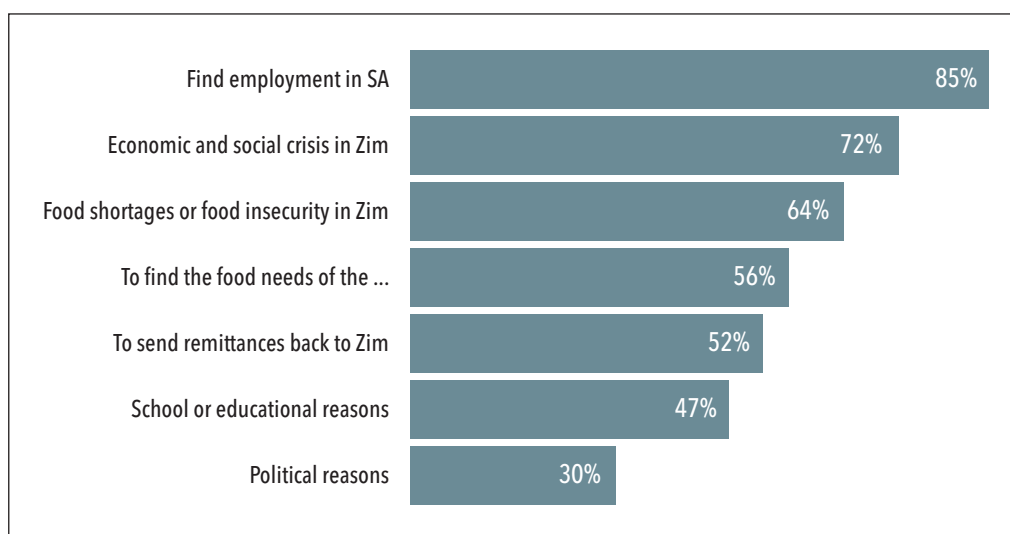
Source: Field survey 2020

Table 3 highlights the factors that motivated the Zimbabwean migrants to remit food back home to Zimbabwe. The results show that 43 per cent of the participants remit food because of requests from household or family members back home, and 33 per cent do so because the food remittances were essential items that the recipients back home needed but could not afford. Only 24 per cent did so because their families were food insecure because they could not afford the food or because the food was unavailable back home in Zimbabwe. The findings reveal that food remittances are a response to a lack of access to food due to the family's lack of resources to buy the required groceries and to general food shortages in Zimbabwe. Since the fast-track land reform programme carried out by the government at the beginning of the millennium, Zimbabwe has been a net food-importing country that mainly relies on neighbouring countries for grain imports. Ramachandran and Crush (2021) posit that food remittances mitigate economic shocks and afford con-

sumption-smoothing purposes for deprived households. In this context, food remittances have a developmental potential for food insecurity reduction and improved access to food for poor communities.

Table 3: Motivations to remit food to Zimbabwe

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Motivation to remit food	Response for food requests from family/household members back home	43	43%
	To provide essential food items that the recipients back home need but cannot afford	33	33%
	Food shortages/household food insecurity back home	24	24%
N = 100			

Source: Field survey 2020

The respondents' experiences illustrated that the drivers of food remittances are high food prices, requests from relatives and family members, and the entrenched socio-economic challenges in Zimbabwe. As explained by a Zimbabwean migrant (Participant #5), a married female aged 30 with one child. She was pursuing her post-graduate studies at the time of the interviews and had lived in Cape Town for over seven years. She worked part-time as a student assistant at the university where she was studying. During the in-depth interviews, she expressed concerns about getting full-time employment and immigration documents (work permits), especially given the context of increasing anti-immigrant sentiments in South Africa. Failure to secure full-time would affect her capacity to send food remittances back home, and this worried her constantly. Regarding reasons for sending food remittances, she noted that '…sometimes family members back home phone me to say, we have run out of basic food'.

Another respondent (Participant #1), a single female lecturer aged 31, had lived in Cape Town for more than ten years and had managed to get full-time employment eight years after arrival. She migrated to South Africa for educational reasons and later got a job at the same institution where she obtained her undergraduate and post-graduate degrees. During the in-depth interviews, she noted that she had a special skills work permit but was struggling to get a permanent residence permit due to delays in the outcome of her application at the Department of Home Affairs. She regularly sends food and cash remittances to support her family members in Zimbabwe. She said, '…my reasons for sending back food are mainly based on the requests that my family makes'. Clearly, in this case, participant #1 provided social protection to her family, which was food insecure and dependent on her.

This research revealed that the main reasons for remitting food are varied, including requests from the recipients who are household or family members, high food prices, socio-economic crisis back in the country of origin, food insecurity or food shortages and because the recipients may require the food items. The research corroborates the assertions by Crush and Tevera (2010), Sithole and Dinbabo (2016), Tevera and Chikanda (2009a; 2009b), and Ramachandran et al. (2022) that social, economic and political calamities in Zimbabwe are the drivers that compel families to encourage some of their members to migrate with the goal of sending remittances. In other words, migration is used as a rational family strategy whose goal is to provide social protection in situations where official social protection programmes are non-existent.

4.3 Commonly remitted food items and frequency of transfers

The main food items remitted regularly are diverse, and they include grain-based foods, staple foods in Zimbabwe, and perishable and non-perishable foods. Table 4 provides a list of the main food items sent and the number of respondents who normally send the food types. Worth noting is that the list includes both perishable and non-perishable food items; food items experiencing regular supply shortages (e.g. bread). The most common items include cooking oil (68%), rice (62%); sugar (57%), mealie meal (50%), beans (46%), juice or drink (45%), peanut butter (45%); meat (41%); and flour (40%).

Notably, perishable food item transfers were facilitated by the usage of mobile food remitting channels like Malaicha and Mukuru Groceries. The transfer of perishable foods is facilitated by the conditions of the mobile services, which enable beneficiaries of the transmitted food to collect their food items in Zimbabwe as soon as the transactions in Cape Town are completed.

When asked how regularly they send food remittances to Zimbabwe, most participants stated that they did not have pre-determined times to send food remittances back home. Instead, they did so whenever it was possible (59%); while only 14% were able to do so every month, an additional 14% were able to do so only once a year, followed by 9% who could do it twice a year; and 4% were able to send food back home every three months (Figure 2).

Table 4: Remitted food items

Food type	Frequency	Percentage
Cooking oil	68	68%
Rice	62	62%
Sugar	57	57%
Mealie meal	50	50%
Beans	46	46%
Drinks or juice	45	45%
Peanut butter	45	45%
Meat	41	41%
Flour	40	40%
Salt	39	39%
Jam	38	38%
Milk	31	31%
Kapenta (dried small fish)	29	29%
Soups and spices	28	28%
Tinned tomatoes and onions	27	27%
Nuts	26	26%
Cereals	26	26%
Tinned fish	24	24%
Bread	22	22%
Honey	21	21%
Vegetables	20	20%
Tea	20	20%
Eggs	17	17%
Fruits	15	15%
Margarine	14	14%

Source: Field survey 2020

Figure 2: Food remitting frequency
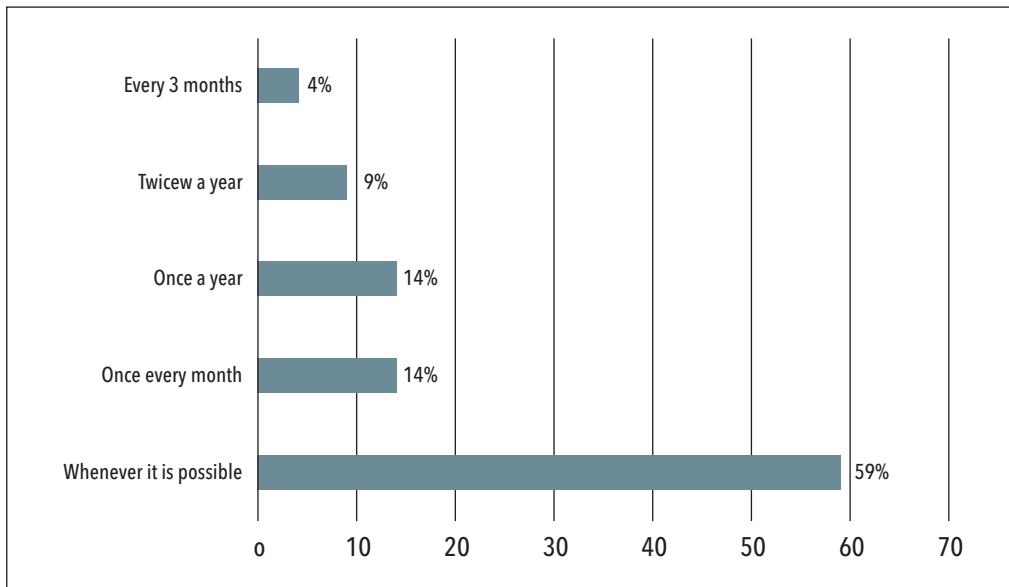
Source: Field survey 2020

Notable in the study was an association between the amount used on purchasing food each time they transmitted food and the average monthly incomes. For example, all the participants who had monthly earnings of R0 – R4000 transferred foodstuffs valued at R1000 or less, with a majority of those who transmitted foodstuffs valued between R3001 – R4000+ had monthly incomes of R15001 or more (Table 5).

Table 5: Amount spent on purchases of food that is remitted to Zimbabwe

Monthly income	Average expenditure on food remittances to Zimbabwe					
	< R1001	R1001 – R2000	R2001 – R3000	R3001 – R4000	R4001 +	Total
R0 – R4000	10	0	0	0	0	10
R4001 – R8000	29	3	1	0	0	33
R8001 – R15000	8	9	5	1	0	23
R15001 – R20000	0	6	3	3	2	14
R20001+	0	2	6	5	7	20
Total	47	20	15	9	9	100
N = 100						

Source: Author's field survey 2020

4.4 Mobile and informal food remittance channels

The study findings indicated that 48 per cent mainly transmit food remittances from the host country to the home country through mobile channels, 8 per cent personally, 11 per cent via friends, kin or associates, and 33 per cent via transport carriers (Figure 3). The experiences of the Zimbabwean migrants highlighted that the channels to transfer food items to Zimbabwe include transport carriers, family or associates and mobile passages.

Figure 3: Main food remitting channels
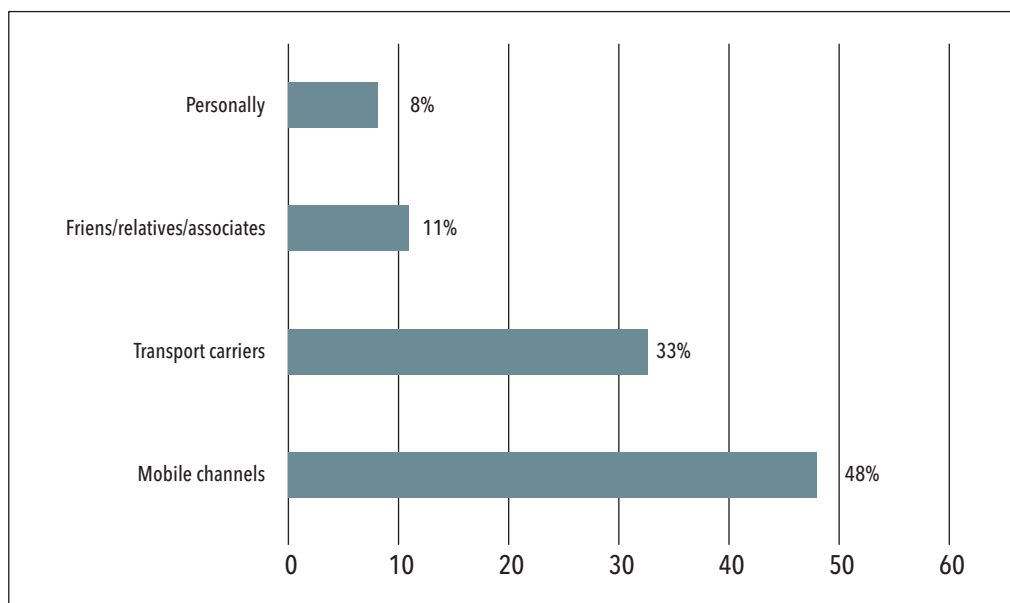
Source: Field survey 2020

To illustrate the significance of mobile remitting channels, one respondent (Participant #9), a 42 years old male teacher with four children and married to a South African woman. He had been in South Africa for six years and holds a master's degree, and previously worked as a waiter before getting a teaching job in Cape Town. He was working using the Zimbabwean Exemption Permit Visa. However, after the announcement by the South African government that the special permits were to be phased out, he was worried about not qualifying for other immigration categories and losing his job. He stayed in a low-income area, and his salary was inadequate to support his housewife and children. Regarding the use of digital and mobile services to transfer food remittances, he stated, 'I was using buses to send my family some groceries. But because the pandemic caused the border to close, I decided to use the Malaicha and Mukuru services on my phone'. The critical part that

mobile channels perform in transmitting food items from the place of destination to the area of origin was corroborated by other participants who noted that mobile channels are dependable, cheap, accessible and rapid.

Channelling food items through informal passages was also vital, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic and limitations. In periods of crisis, the Zimbabwean migrants seem to cope by looking for unusual methods of transferring foodstuffs and goods back home. For example, (Participant #3), a married female office worker aged 32 with several university degrees, cared for family members (including extended family members) in both South Africa and Zimbabwe. She noted that the household income had reduced because her husband, who worked in the informal sector, could not engage in any economic activities because of the COVID-19 pandemic, lockdown and restrictions on informal trading. In terms of channelling remittances to Zimbabwe, she indicated that

> …so the regular forms of transportation I used could not work because the borders were closed, but because funeral companies were allowed to move around for repatriation purposes, I also had to resort to using that…

The COVID-19 pandemic presents an increasing challenge to humanity's economic, health and social welfare (Dinbabo 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic pressed governments to take measures that negatively impacted local food systems and supply chains (Crush and Si 2020; Paganini et al. 2020). Also, the COVID-19 pandemic affected migration currents; for example, in 2020, limitations on cross-border movement and border post closings resulted in decreased migration movements into South Africa (Crush, Thomaz and Ramachandran 2021). Crush and Si (2020) assert that the COVID-19 control measures abruptly affected food security in several Southern cities. The effects include the interruption of vital economic ventures, such as prohibitions on street vending and informal food markets, the distraction of food supply chains, restrictions on mobility, job losses, and lessening household income (Crush and Si 2020).

Noteworthy, mobile channels were valuable in sending food remittances to Zimbabwe. However, mobile channels were also mainly used by professionals who had access to legitimate immigration documentation, such as office workers, health professionals and students. Although undocumented migrants and informal traders can access digital and mobile services to transfer low-cost food remittances, they are still hesitant to use them. This is due to the fear that their personal details (phone number, ID documents and photograph) could be used by immigration and law enforcement officials to track, arrest, persecute or deport them. The Zimbabwean migrants utilised various channels to transfer food items to their relatives, family, or household members in Zimbabwe. Previous studies (Maphosa 2007; Nyamunda 2014; Nzima 2017; Tevera and Chikanda 2009a) have also indicated that Zimbabwean migrants use various channels to transfer remittances, this

includes formal and informal passages. Thus, the findings of this research illustrate that the paths to transmit food included informal tracks like transport carriers, associates, relatives, friends and personally.

Social networking and social capital on social media sites like Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter amongst the Zimbabwean migrants and their associates, friends, family, and household members were crucial in channelling food remittances. Social media transforms migration networks through social networking and as a valuable resource for helpful information (Dekker and Engbersen 2014; Dekker et al. 2018). Accordingly, 69 respondents were in social media groups comprising family or household members (53.62%), friends (24.64%) and fellow Zimbabweans (21.74%). Content and communication in social media groups assisted in deciding the channels to transmit food (46.38%), food types to transfer (37.68%), and the period to channel the food (15.94%). The study highlighted the significance of social media communication and content in accessing the cheapest channels (29%), accessible channels (27%), quickest channels (25%) and reliable channels (19%). Also, 74% of the 100 respondents in the study revealed that social media interaction via texts or voice mediums impacted the selection of the food-remitting channels they utilised the most. Additionally, 58% of the participants noted that social media posts and news affected their decisions to choose the food-remitting channels they used the most.

The respondents' narratives highlighted that interaction and content on social media sites like Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp facilitated the flow of helpful information on the reachable, dependable, and inexpensive channels to transfer food. For instance, (Participant #3) remarked that '…on the Zimbabweans in Cape Town, Facebook page, and when we were under level five lockdown. Many people were also asking on social media how people with urgent requests from Zimbabwe are sending through the things.' The participant also said, '…somebody wrote that they were working with a funeral company that repatriates bodies of deceased Zimbabweans. And that's how they were getting their goods through….' The utilisation of funeral businesses to transmit in-kind remittances to Zimbabwe was undertaken covertly and illicitly to evade exposure from law enforcement personnel.

Additionally, the significance of social networking in social media groups and information sharing between migrants and their associates or family members were revealed in the research as remarked by a respondent (Participant #3), a female office worker aged 32 added:

> We have several family groups with different members in almost all the groups I'm part of. I mean, we have a group for our nuclear family, we have groups who are extended families from the mother's side from the father's side, we have church groups that I'm part of, I'm in groups with friends. And in all those groups, we discussed the escalating food prices in Zimbabwe at some point.

The participant also stated the importance of the conversations in social media groups between the migrants and their associates or family members that are useful in offering beneficial information related to the transfer of remittances:

> ... as those conversations go, we talk about how we, as migrants in South Africa, can send things home. We also get the opportunity to ask how other people are also sending home, so in all of those groups, I can't think of any group where at some point, we have not had a discussion on sending things to Zimbabwe and just sharing ideas and suggestions on which way or method is best to use ... .

Smartphones, digital platforms and mobile gadgets can facilitate virtual interaction or sharing of information on social media platforms. Therefore, the effectiveness of social networking on social media in the backdrop of constrained face-to-face communications initiated by the COVID-19 pandemic and movement constraints was apparent in the study, as noted by a female lecturer aged 31 (Participant #1):

> The biggest challenge with food remitting based on COVID-19 is human-to-human contact. So, social media assists in communicating specific information because, as I said before, now you know we've entered into a period where businesses can operate within the restrictions of Covid or the recognition of Covid restrictions, so social distancing masking etc.

The research also uncovered that social media is resourceful in channelling food remittances by enabling consumers to make transactions on social media platforms like WhatsApp.

> Social media enables individuals to communicate via WhatsApp, even, you know, engaging and making purchases. You can find links on social media to shops you might want to buy from. And also you can share all of this information via WhatsApp and social media.

4.5 Food remitting challenges

There are several reasons why the frequency of sending food back home is lower than expected. First, there is a relatively high cost of food transfers by bus or the malaichas because of the long distances between Cape Town and the various food destinations in Zimbabwe. Second, there is a risk involved when food is sent by road, as it can be confiscated at the Beitbridge border by the ZIMRA officials if the quantity is high or the importation protocols are not observed. Third, remitting food using malaichas or friends is risky because it is based on trust, and if something goes wrong, the sender is not compensated. This explains why some Zimbabwean migrants in Cape Town have opted to do virtual food transfers. However, as shown below, several challenges are associated with virtual food transfers.

The food-remitting Zimbabwean migrants faced various challenges when channelling food items to their country of origin. The results of the study indicated that the challenges included delivery delays (22%), destroyed/broken foodstuffs (11%); missing/lost/stolen (11%); expensive to remit food (21%); and 35% did not encounter any challenges (Table 6). Also, mobile channels primarily had challenges such as being expensive to remit and transaction problems.

Table 6: Food remittance channels and challenges

Food remittance channels	Food remitting challenges experienced by the migrants					
	Frequent delivery delays	The food gets lost/stolen in transit	The food gets damaged/spoilt in transit	High remitting costs	No challenges experienced	Total
Buses, Trucks, Taxis, transport, carriers, couriers	14	11	7	0	1	33
Mobile	1	0	0	19	28	48
Personally	0	0	0	2	6	8
Friends, relatives, and associates	7	0	4	0	0	11
Total	22	11	11	21	35	100
N = 100						

Source: Field survey 2020

The above challenges were also echoed in the narratives of the Zimbabwean migrants. For instance, (Participant #10), a male and full-time lecturer aged 59 years old, migrated to Cape Town with his family in 2008 at the peak of the economic crisis in Zimbabwe. Before relocating, he was a lecturer at a local University in Zimbabwe, where the low salaries were inadequate to support himself and his family. His recent employment at a university in South Africa provided adequate resources for personal, family and remittance transfers to help relatives back in Zimbabwe. He indicated the problems faced when using mobile applications to transfer food by saying, 'Sometimes the system is down, which makes it difficult to complete a transaction.' The respondent also highlighted that 'In some situations, I buy groceries online, but when my family wants to collect the goods, they are told that the items are out of stock…to resolve the problem, you get a refund or wait until the goods are available'.

Also, another respondent, a male post-graduate student aged 27 (Participant #2), had multiple income streams, such as a full scholarship, lecturing and research jobs at the university he was studying. He also transmitted remittances to support his family in Zimba-

bwe. He commented on mobile channels and their challenges '… many stories where the food doesn't arrive on time, or the order has changed, you know, end up getting what you don't want or something'. Registering to use semi-formal or formal channels like mobile passages was also a problem. A respondent in the study stated that registering to use mobile applications was challenging because of the requirement to show a photograph, proof of residence and identity documents. In the survey, bartenders, servers, gardeners and workers in the informal sector who were irregular migrants were hesitant to use digital and mobile services to send remittances. Because of concern, law enforcement and immigration offi-cials could acquire their identity information and trace, detain, persecute or deport them.

Commenting on the challenge of registering to use mobile channels, Participant #2 stated that 'the main issue that makes someone not want to, you know, go through that process is because I'm a bit sceptical of giving out the information because they say send a photograph of your passport, and then send a selfie of yourself'. Additionally, mobile applications had delays in the approval of registration and problems in the acceptance of provided documents. This was illustrated by the respondent who added, 'sometimes you can take a photograph of yourself and then it's not approved, they sent a query back to say maybe the picture is not the right size, or the lighting is poor, we can't compare the selfie and the passport.' In this study, informal channels mainly had challenges such as misplaced, stolen, or lost goods, broken or destroyed food items and delivery delays. Informal channels to transmit food, such as transport carriers, also had notable challenges, such as impounding goods by border officials because of not paying taxes or duties and misplaced goods.

For example, (Participant #3), a female office worker aged 32, remarked that '… be-cause there is no warranty on your goods. There was no refund process, so whatever was given to the wrong person was the money I lost. It could not be recouped in any way, and the guy was also unable to reimburse me.' The study findings concur with earlier studies by Maphosa (2007), Tevera and Chikanda (2009a), and, more recently, Nzima (2017), who observed that migrants who used informal remittance channels to remit cash or goods back home often experienced problems like the unreliability of remittance carriers, delivery delays, and thefts. The research findings revealed that the informal and mobile channels of transferring food remittances were associated with various challenges. Despite these challenges, many migrants reported that several factors compelled them to continue using informal remittance channels to send food back home because they do not have bank ac-counts due to their irregular status. The other constraints relate to access challenges, such as limited access to the internet and online services.

5. Conclusion

The use of digital and mobile technology by migrants is increasingly becoming the way of sending transborder food remittances back home in SSA. This article provides insights into how digital and mobile technology presents a speedy, reachable, low-priced, and easy-to-use food-remitting channel. For example, mobile grocery or food remitting channels were accessible during the COVID-19 pandemic when travel restrictions and border closures disrupted informal food remitting channels. Social media platforms have been crucial in facilitating the flow of information, such as accessible and reliable food remitting channels, types of food items to remit, and the best times to do so. The mobile money facilities are making it possible for unbanked groups, such as migrants, without regular employment or immigration papers, to transfer remittances. The article has highlighted how mobile food transfers have become a convenient and dependable way of remitting food back home. The potential effects of food remittances on household food security should be of interest to national policymakers so that they can design policies for harnessing the potential of these remittances into the development of blended food systems that involve both local and imported foods. However, since we did not interview the recipients of mobile food transfers in Zimbabwe, it is impossible to determine the impact of these transfers on the food security circumstances of the receiving households. Therefore, there is a need for further research and policy attention on the food remitting channels and, more importantly, the impact of food remittances on household food security back in Zimbabwe. Similarly, there is a need for research on the use of mobile/digital technologies by Zimbabwean migrants in other neighbouring countries to transmit food remittances and internal food transfers within Zimbabwe.

Acknowledgements

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