



AfriFOODlinks
FOODChronicles

Ouagadougou



AfriFOODChronicles

Welcome to a new edition of the AfriFOODChronicles!

This edition explores the urban food system of Ouagadougou — from its history as a centre of power and trade to the systems that shape food today.

In this issue we take a look at:

- How Ouagadougou's history has been shaped by food
- Who makes decisions about food in Ouagadougou
- The state of food security in the city
- The role of markets and informal trade in everyday food access

Through these stories we are able to understand how people navigate a food system shaped by pressure, inequality, and everyday resilience.

We hope you enjoy your journey with us,
AfriFOODChronicles Editorial Team



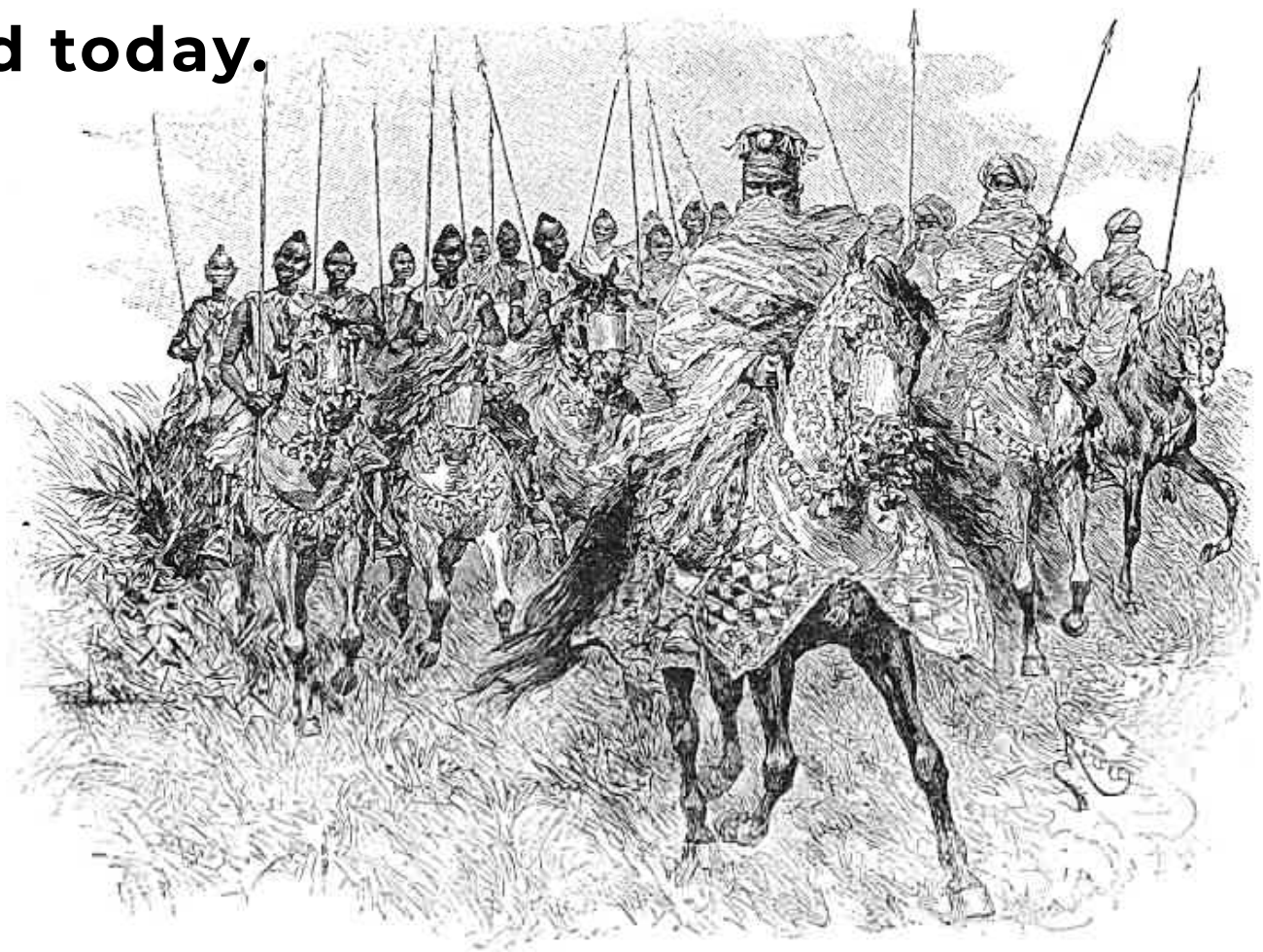
Welcome to Ouagadougou

A City Shaped by Trade, Power and History

Ouagadougou's history is rooted in its role as one of the capitals of the Mossi Kingdoms. The Mossi Kingdoms were a powerful group of decentralised states from the 11th - 19th century, in today's Burkina Faso and Ghana. The Mossi Kingdoms were made up of five kingdoms Ouagadougou, Yetenga, Tenkodogo, Fada N'gourma, and Zondoma and Boussouma.

The kingdoms resisted invasions from neighbouring Mali and the Songhai empires and managed to retain their independence until the beginning of French colonial rule in 1896.

Under the rule of the Mossi Kingdoms, land and political authority were controlled through hierarchical systems. These hierarchies shaped how power and land were organised. In Ouagadougou, **this centralised form of power continued throughout colonialism and independence, continuing to shape how the city is governed today.**



Boukary Koutou, also known as Wobgho, Mossi King of Ouagadougou, with his cavalry escort, 1892, Édouard Riou

Trade and Rapid Urban Growth

Located at the intersection of regional traderoads, **Ouagadougou has long been a meeting point for people, goods, food and ideas across Western Africa.** This history of exchange underpins the way the urban food system currently functions.

From the mid-20th century, Ouagadougou has experienced rapid growth. The city has evolved from a small settlement of approximately 33 000 people in the 1950s, to a population of over 3 million people today. The rapid population growth, as is common in many African cities, has outpaced infrastructure and planning growth, resulting in many residents living in informal or under-serviced areas. This has resulted in difficulties for many residents to access food, water and basic services.

The combination of historical centralised authority, trade routes and uneven rapid urban growth, has shaped who and how people access food in the city.



Governance and Power : Who Shapes the Food System?

Food governance in Ouagadougou is a complicated, often fragmented system. Some of the actors in the system include National ministries (agriculture, trade and health); local municipal authorities; the private sector; informal traders; civil society organisations; and, international organisations.

Overall, the governance of the food system in Ouagadougou is shaped by a strong national government, with little authority given to local municipalities to make decisions about the urban food system. While decentralisation policies have suggested that the local municipality should play a stronger role in urban food governance, the national government maintains significant power, particularly over agriculture, food pricing and food supply.

This fragmented system of governance where many actors and interests are included, can result in weak coordination and delayed decision making.

Despite not having a clear mandate, the municipality is responsible for key elements of the urban food system. These include market management, infrastructure maintenance and local economic development strategies. These mandates are often undertaken in **collaboration with development agencies** such as the Urban Economic Development Agency. Despite this, **urban food systems related work is often under-resourced, limiting the impact the municipality can have on enhancing the urban food system.**

Layers of Power: Beyond State Power

Power and governance in the food system is not only located at a government or institutional level.



Traditional authorities also play a significant role in decision making around agricultural and peri-urban land. This role is **particularly important during times of crisis, as these leaders are the most immediate, trusted and locally embedded form of governance.** These leaders are also able to operate more nimbly than the stretched formal systems of national and municipal governments.

While this is an important element of the food systems governance picture in Ouagadougou, **these authorities can also reinforce existing hierarchies and inequitable decision making processes.**

Food in Ouagadougou

Food Security Snapshot

The state of urban food security in Ouagadougou reflects the wider national challenges that Burkina Faso faces. Some of these challenges include **climate related shocks and stresses, economic vulnerability and global crises.**

In Burkina Faso, **the food system is heavily dependent on rain-fed agriculture.** This makes the production of food vulnerable to climate related events such as drought and environmental change.

Because **the food system is highly centralised at the national government,** this has a knock on effect on how and when urban residents in Ouagadougou are able to access food.

In Ouagadougou, many low-income households face limited access to food. Food prices are high in the city, and **for many residents, the majority of their income goes towards food.** In addition to this, there is **little dietary diversity** in the city due to the limited availability of food. Food in Ouagadougou is not completely unavailable, but **the supply of food is often unreliable or unequally financially accessible.**

Climate pressures, strained and weakened supply systems, rising prices, and rapid urban growth all shape when, where, and how food is available across the city.

As a result, **malnutrition remains a serious concern across the city.** There are currently high levels of child stunting, underweight and wasting which suggest long term challenges in both food access and nutrition.

These pressures of limited access to food, unemployment and malnutrition are exacerbated by rising food prices, drought, and regional insecurity and displacement.

Despite **national policies and programmes** to address these challenges, the food system continues to operate under strain. This has resulted in **many households relying on coping strategies** such as reducing meal frequency and portion sizes, shifting to cheaper staples, reducing the consumption of protein rich foods, or taking on additional debt to afford food. Unfortunately, these approaches increase the ongoing long term challenge of malnutrition and economic stress in Ouagadougou.



Informality, Access and Everyday Life

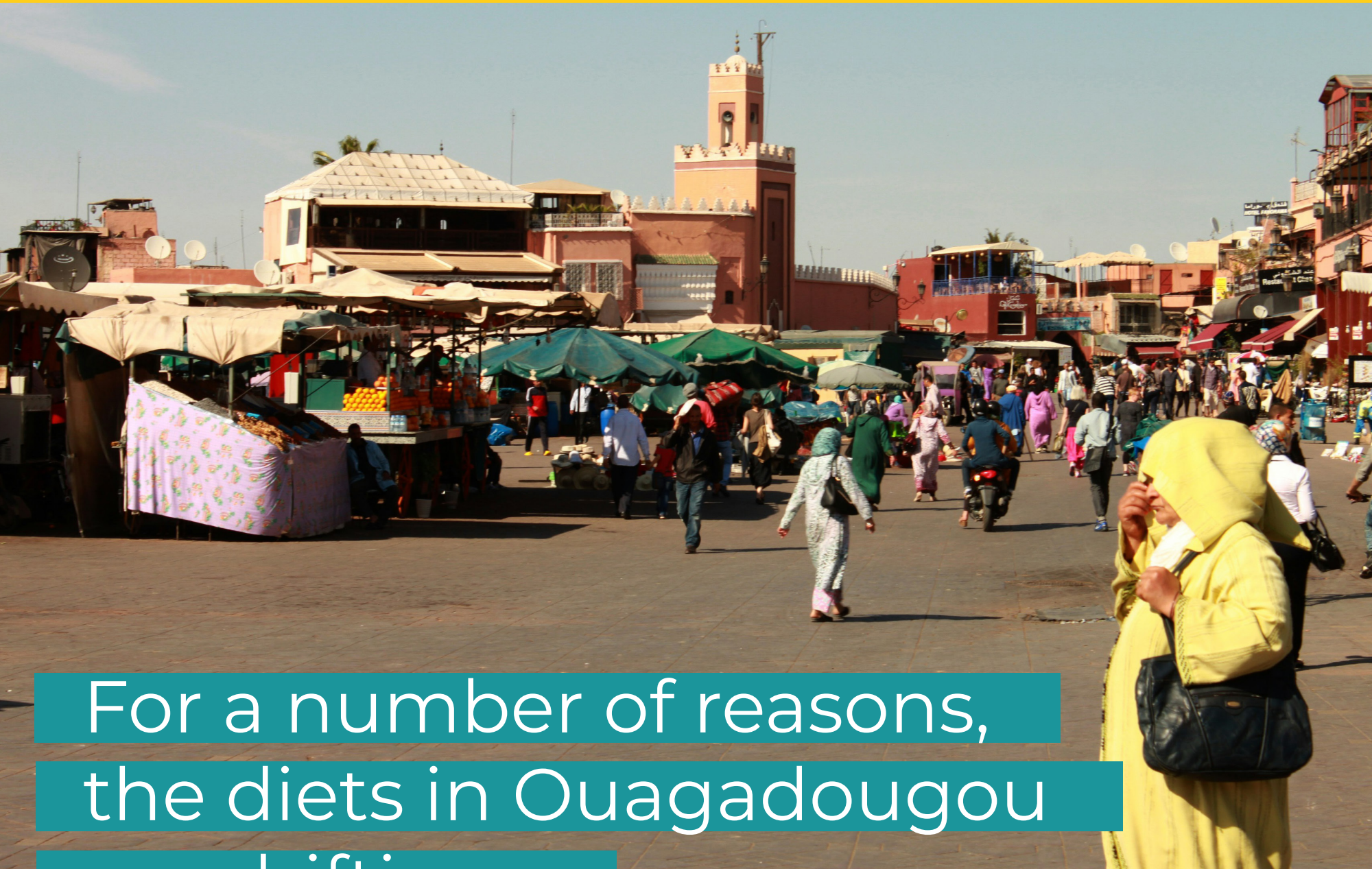


The food environment in Ouagadougou is shaped by informal trade and the proximity to food retail. The majority of residents in the city access food through local markets, small shops, street vendors and kiosks. These spaces are sites of the most accessible and affordable food options for many of Ouagadougou's urban population.

As with many African cities, **markets play a central role in the food system in Ouagadougou.** However, despite this vital role, **market spaces in Ouagadougou are unevenly distributed across the city, and often lack adequate infrastructure.** In low-income areas in particular, market infrastructure is poorly maintained, negatively impacting food safety, storage and hygiene.

Similarly to markets, the informal food economy is a significant element of the everyday food access strategies used by the city's residents. **The informal economy not only provides affordable food for low-income residents, but is also a major source of livelihood opportunities and supports a large number of the city's population.**

Changing Diets and Unequal Choices



For a number of reasons, the diets in Ouagadougou are shifting.

The change in diets is most notable in the shift from traditional nutrient rich diverse diets, to processed and prepared food.

While traditional staples such as millet, sorghum and maize remain important to diets, processed and imported foods are becoming increasingly more common in both rural and urban diets.

These decisions are not made based on a single reason, but rather are influenced by a number of factors such as limited agricultural production due to climate related shocks and stresses, fragmented centralised food system governance and economic vulnerability.

While the shift in dietary choice is concerning, the decisions that households make about food cannot be seen in isolation from the surrounding local and global contexts.

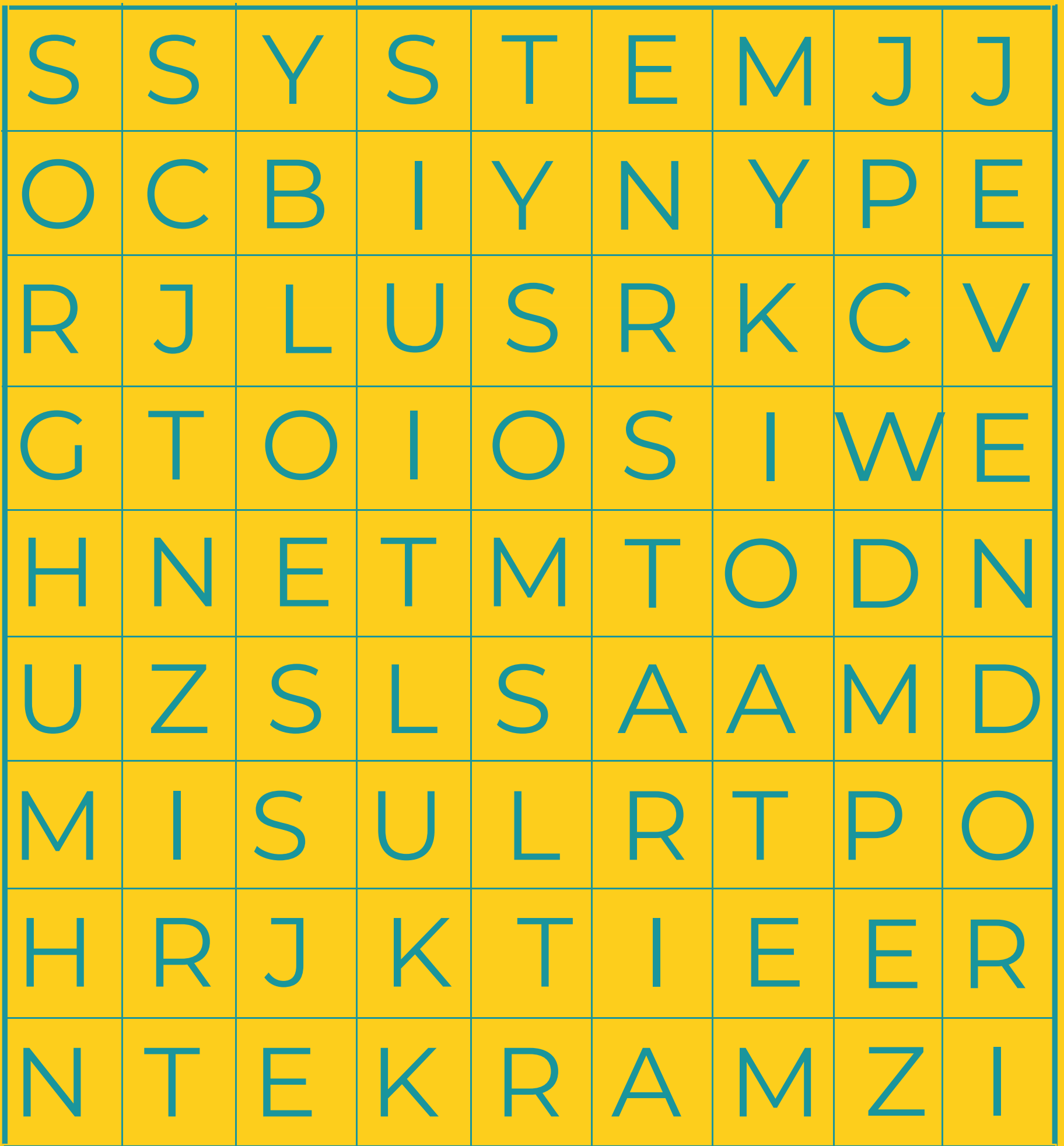
Conclusion

Ouagadougou's food system is one that is shaped and continues to be shaped by history, trade and power.

The system reflects the various pressures that the city faces - environmental change, rapid growth, and unequal development. While food is physically available in the city, access to nutritious diverse diets remains uneven due to the disparate distribution of and financial access to food across the city.

Through strengthening the role of the municipal government, realising the significant role of the informal economy and food markets, and consolidating governance processes, Ouagadougou can begin to build a more just and resilient food system.

Word Search



Can you find all of the following words in the word search above?

-
1. Climate
 2. Justice
 3. Vendor
 4. Sorghum
 5. Mossi
 6. Millet
 7. History
 8. Trade
 9. Markey
 10. System

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