

Challenges in accessing food during a lockdown

6 April 2020

Gauteng City-Region Observatory (GCRO)

Authors: Julia de Kadt, Gillian Maree and Yashena Naidoo

Reviewer: Richard Ballard

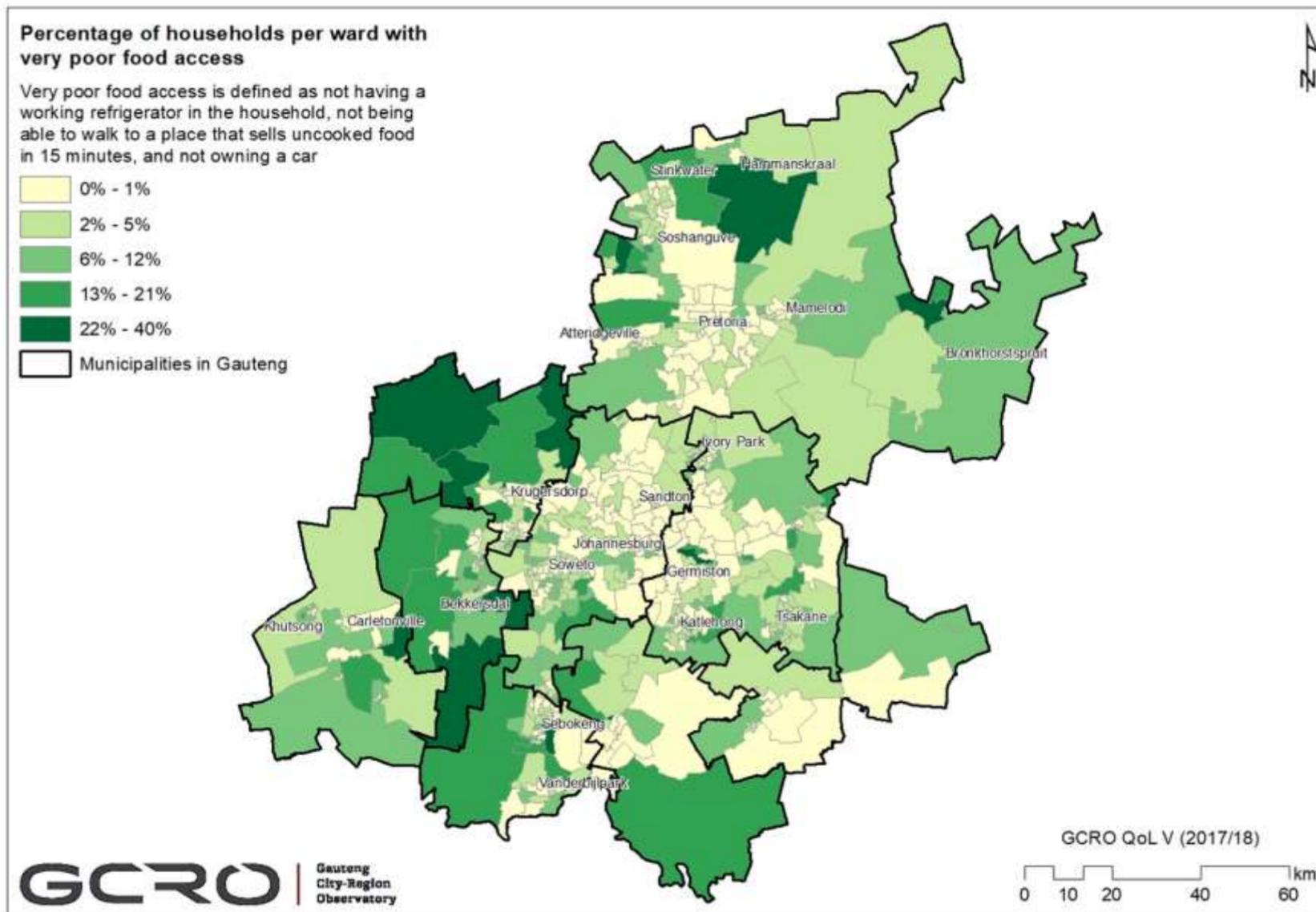


The GCRO March 2020 Map of the Month highlighted localised risk factors that might contribute to the spread of the novel coronavirus causing COVID-19, and amplify its health and socio-economic impact. Hunger was identified as one of a series of these risk factors, particularly in the context of a major shutdown or outbreak of illness. Our analysis showed that even before the onset of the present crisis hunger was widespread in Gauteng. According to data from the GCRO's [Quality of Life survey V \(QoL V; 2017/18\)](#), about 37% of Gauteng households experienced hunger in the 12 months preceding the survey, or were dependent on school feeding schemes. Hunger is damaging to individual and community well-being, health and immunity, and makes the effective implementation of a lockdown impossible.

The current implementation of a lockdown has created a number of additional challenges for many households in accessing adequate food. These are detailed in [this](#) comprehensive analysis. A separate insight on households vulnerable to income disruption showed that many households are likely to experience interruptions to income flows, which in turn may constrain ability to purchase food. In this insight we consider the difficulties that people experience to physically get to a retailer to purchase food, and then store perishable items.

For these maps we bring together data from three questions from GCRO's QoL V survey. This data was collected in 2017/18, and reflects the situation before the lockdown - but can be used to understand patterns which are likely to influence the impact of the lockdown on households and individuals. One question asked respondents to indicate whether they can walk to a 'place where I can buy uncooked food (e.g fresh vegetables, meat etc)' within 15 minutes of their dwelling. A second question asks whether or not the household has a car in working order, and a third asks about whether the household has a fridge in working order. Combining each respondents answers to these three questions allows us to identify the proportion of households in each ward in Gauteng that could not walk to a place to buy uncooked food within 15 minutes, and did not own a working car or fridge.

Households per ward with poor food access during lockdown



Map 1 shows the percentage of households per ward that fell into the category of poor food access during the QoL V 2017/18 data collection period. The darker shading on the map indicates a higher proportion of these households in a ward. Given the limitations on travel imposed by the lockdown, the ability of these households to safely purchase adequate food is a concern.

Furthermore, without a refrigerator, safe storage of perishables or cooked food is difficult. This may further reduce access to adequate nutrition, and also increases risk of sickness due to improper food storage.

Map 1: Percentage of households per ward with very poor food access

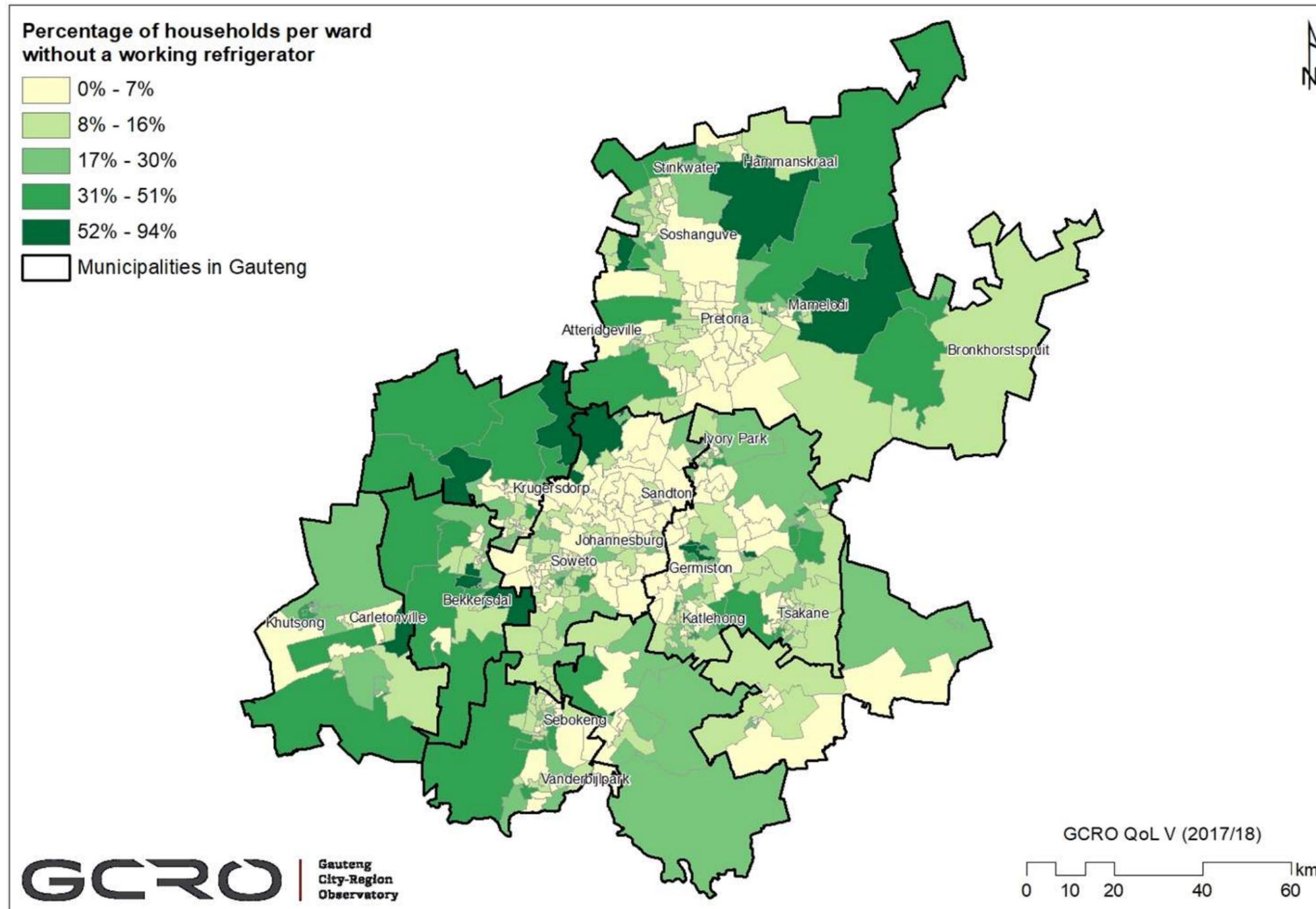
Map 2 shows households without a working refrigerator are mostly found outside of Gauteng's major urban centres. However, as illustrated in Map 3, those without easy access to a place to purchase uncooked food are located across townships and informal areas of Gauteng. The wards where both challenges are concentrated, as illustrated in our Map 1, are high-poverty areas, and largely mirror those with highest risk in our March 2020 Map of the Month. These areas are particularly likely to depend on the informal sector to access fresh fruits and vegetables: In many townships and informal areas of the Gauteng City-Region (GCR), up to [70% of households](#) usually rely on the informal sector for food supplies.

In response to the COVID-19 epidemic, we have seen the widespread closure of food outlets and confusion in the interpretation of the disaster regulations regarding the operation of spaza shops. Consequently, it is likely that the percentage of households who struggle to access food has increased. Amended regulations released on 2 April now permit the informal sector to operate under specific conditions, which should provide some relief.

Nonetheless, through interruptions to household income flows, restrictions on movement, and constraints on the informal sector, the lockdown still appears likely to increase hunger. The creation by Gauteng's provincial government of a [Gauteng hunger hotline](#) and programme to distribute food packages, along with the work of numerous non profit organisations, certainly helps to meet needs - but are unlikely to be adequate. Ensuring adequate access to nutritious food must remain a key priority for government and civil society in the context of a pandemic. Failing this, other public health efforts will be weakened or rendered ineffective.

Supplementary Map

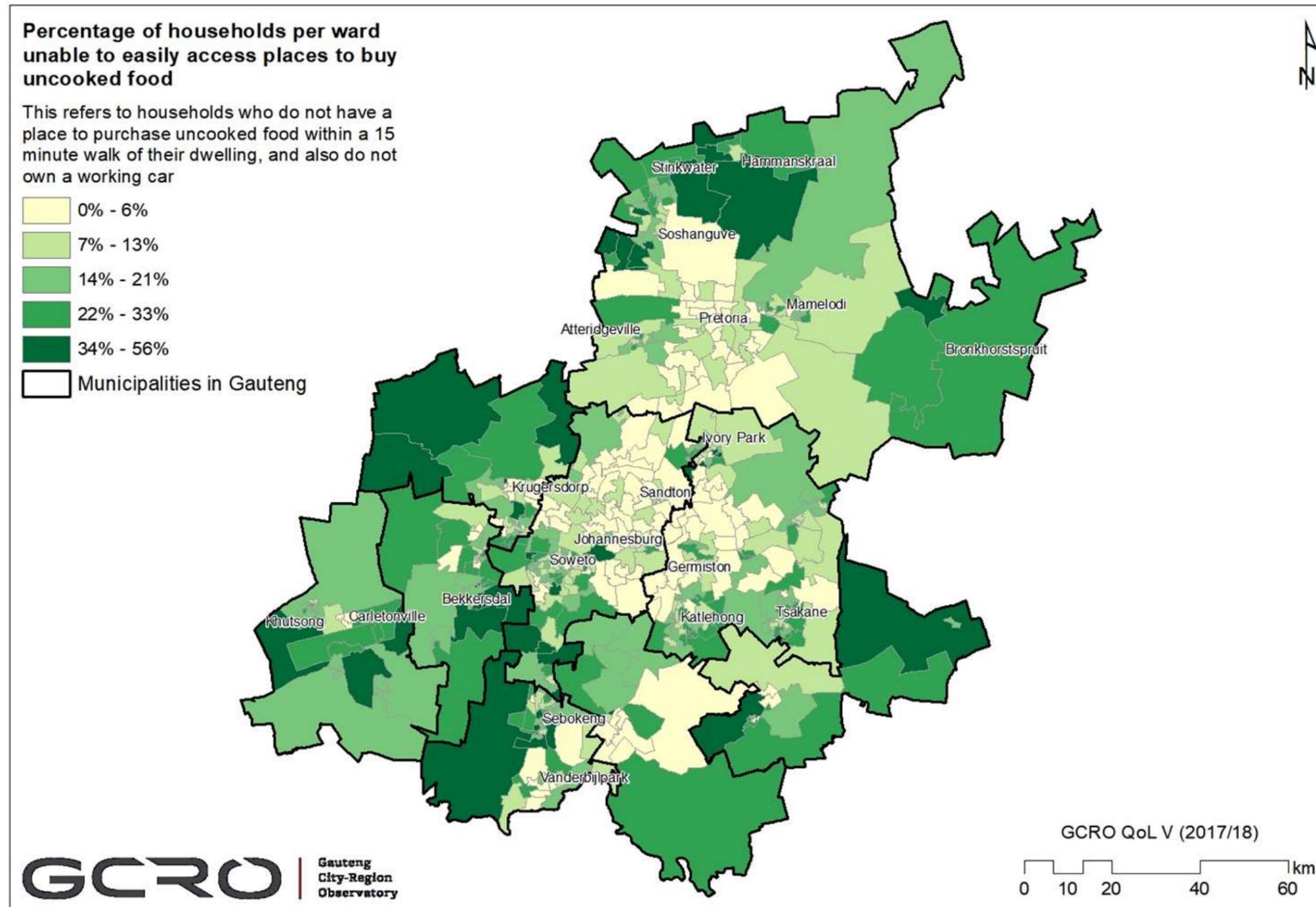
Households without a working refrigerator



Map 2: Percentage of households per ward without a working refrigerator

Supplementary Map

Households unable to easily access a place to buy uncooked food



Map 3: Percentage of households per ward unable to easily access place to buy uncooked food