

Access to land for urban agriculture in Kampala

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1. The emergence of Urban Farming in Kampala

Urban farming is becoming an omnipresent, complex and dynamic feature of the urban landscape and socio-economic reality in Uganda and African cities in general.

In Uganda, urban farming started in early 1970's. This period was characterised by political turmoil and concomitant economic crisis (Nuwagaba and Mwesigwa 1997). Meanwhile, urban population growth remained on course. For instance during the period 1970-1980, the population of Kampala grew at an average 3.14 % per annum (Nuwagaba 1999). The major implication of such galloping urban population amidst dwindling capacity of the urban economy was the growth of both open and disguised unemployment. This culminated into urban poverty of the majority of the urban population (Onibokun 1993). It is amidst this euphoria of looming urban population crisis that the urban poor population devised means of survival through engaging in various activities, mainly as survival strategies. These activities included; petty commodity trade, artisanship including carpentry, metal fabrication and urban farming.

An increase in rural-urban migration and the economic hardships brought about by the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) added to this scenario in the eighties and nineties. An increasing number of vulnerable households turned to urban cultivation as an alternative source of food, to save on food expenditure and to raise cash income.

In these years urban agriculture has gone through a process of serious change. While in the 1970s urban agriculture was mainly a survival strategy of the poorest of the urban poor, in the 1980s and 1990s the farming activities have increasingly gained importance not only among the urban poor but also by a significant proportion of low and medium income earners.

While urban farming started as a survival strategy for the urban poor population, it has been found to function nowadays as a 'double edged sword' with both nutritional and health as well as economic benefits to the farming as well as other urban households.

However, despite this significant contribution, there is no substantive provision in the law that aims at streamlining informal sector activities such as farming in urban areas.

2. Access to Land for Urban Agriculture

Land for urban agriculture is accessed in many different ways (Nuwagaba et al, 2003). These include squatting (46%), borrowing (34%), inheritance (11%), renting (5%), co-ownership with spouses (4%). It is important to note that co-ownership means a situation where the spouse has the same stake in the land held by the partner. It is pertinent to note that even those who squat, rent and borrow could be having spouses who own land. Currently in Uganda, the co-ownership of land is a contentious issue particularly among gender activists who contend that women have for long been left out from

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benefiting from family resources. Therefore, co-ownership comes out as a strong advocacy issue.

The majority of urban farmers in Kampala (60%) indicate that they are actively searching for land in order to ascertain their livelihood entitlements. They apply the following strategies to find land for urban agriculture in Kampala city: borrowing (22 %), gather funds to buy land (18%), requesting or begging relatives, friends or neighbours (17%), request government (2 %) (Nuwagaba et al 2003)

The existing institutional procedures for accessing land in Kampala city are highly bureaucratic, time consuming and complex, which makes it very intimidating for urban farmers, who generally lack the knowledge, information and contacts to file an application for acquiring land. Urban farmers in their quest for farming land have often violated and contravened regulatory measures for allocation, utilisation, use and plot layouts. All this has been attributed to lack of policy responsiveness in view of the need for planning with urban farming in context.

3. Urban policies and regulations regarding urban farming in Kampala City

The 1964 Town Planning Act mandates the Local Urban authorities to enforce regulations for 'development control' in their areas of jurisdiction. In earlier years this act provided the basis for Kampala City enforcement officials to harass those who carried out urban farming in the city, since in this Act farming is viewed as an activity at odds with the urban standards.

Recently city planners and national policy makers increasingly have recognized the central role of urban agriculture in the wider urban economy. Informal sector activities (urban farming inclusive) provide 66% of employment and 60% urban food requirements in Kampala (Maxwell 1995). Since 1990, there has been a growing tendency to tolerate to and even to legitimize urban farming activities in Kampala. The city enforcement officers have ceased harassment of local people who cultivate around the city (Nuwagaba and Mwesigwa 1997).

Since 1994, a section known as Urban Agriculture unit was established within Kampala City Council's (KCC) Production and Marketing Department. Formerly, before decentralization of Kampala District, it was directly under the Ministry of Agriculture Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF). The broad objective of the section is to support and guide the communities in urban agriculture and to ensure household nutrition and food security. According to the review of the section's activities (Kampala City Council 2001), a number of achievements have been made though with some financial setbacks. The achievements include:

- ◆ Training farmers in various crop and animal husbandry skills.
- ◆ Domestic garbage management and re-use in urban agriculture.
- ◆ Training and extension services

According to Kampala district strategic plan KCC (2000) financial support by KCC is still small (covering about 4% of the annual budget).

Under the Local Government Act (1997), Sections 39 and 41 the local authorities are empowered to enact byelaws to regulate all activities within their areas of jurisdiction. Kampala City Council has accordingly legislated urban agriculture in the Kampala City

(Urban Agriculture Ordinance 2001). The ordinance provides for the licensing, control and regulation of growing crops and rearing of animals in the city.

The urban farming ordinance prohibits farming in certain areas. The ordinance states that a person shall not engage in commercial agriculture in a road reserve, wetland, green belt, park, abandoned landfill or an area less than 10 feet away from an open drainage channel.

In practice, urban farming is taking place in all the areas mentioned, probably with the exception of parks. Urban landless have encroached on marginal areas comprising wetlands and lagoons for survival which is affecting negatively the urban ecosystem.

Urban farming is also prohibited in 'high density areas'. 'High density' is unrealistically defined as an area with more than two households per acre of land whereas in most Kampala neighbourhoods there can be as many as 40 households on an acre of land.

A permit issued by the City Council is required to engage in urban agriculture. However, the urban poor do not know that they need a license and the City does provide licenses only to agro-business entrepreneurs (e.g. large poultry farms) Meanwhile, urban agriculture is carried out without any restrictions, regulation or authorisation.

The present legal framework regarding urban farming is not supportive. The city authorities have made attempts to recognise urban farming but do not provide for the planning or zoning of such activities.

The enactment of a specific and clear framework is needed in order to make urban agriculture sustainable and productive.

Both the earlier "harassment" approach as well as the present "permissive" approach do not function well.

A more pragmatic and multi-sectoral approach integrated approach is proposed that includes partnering with farmer organisations and other civil society organisations, capacity building, identification of zones where urban farming is permitted, programmes that focus on poverty reduction through urban agriculture including planners, agriculture specialists, environmentalists, and community development specialists.

An approach that would transform urban farming from an illicit practice to a buttressed activity that is forward in outlook.

References

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