

The growth and geographical spread of urban agriculture in Zimbabwe is largely attributed to the harsh effects of economic structural adjustment programmes (ESAP). The negative impact of ESAP has been manifest by the erosion of basic wages, escalating prices of basic commodities and the widening of the gap between rich and poor households. Studies by ENDA-Zimbabwe (1994) indicated that the total land under cultivation in the City of Harare increased dramatically, by 92.6% between the years 1991-1994. This period coincides with the early phases of ESAP launched in 1991. The land under cultivation has also increased under the economic hardships of the last years.

The responsiveness and actions of urban local authorities in addressing the pressing needs of the urban community has become of utmost significance.

Beacon Mibiba



Women selling maize in Harare

# The Urban Planning Dilemma in Harare, Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe, the nature and practice of agricultural activities within the urban environment are posing chronic headaches to the largely conservative urban planners, who are keen to observe and perpetuate the status quo. Traditionally, urban environments have been identified by the absence of agricultural activities as these are more aligned to the rural forms of settlement (Mbiba 1995).

Urban farming activities in Zimbabwe broadly fall into two categories: intra-urban farming activities and peri-urban farming activities carried out on the outskirts of the urban environment. Whilst all farming activities are of great concern to local urban planning authorities, the off-plot mode of intra-urban agricultural production is the most contentious and problematic in urban planning practice, and officially illegal.

The uncontrolled encroachment of 'traditional' cultivation practices upon environmentally sensitive land, and the ill-advised use of chemicals in vegetable and crop production are often put forward as reasons why urban agriculture should never be considered as a serious urban land-use option. Urban planners

are thereby caught up in a jigsaw puzzle in which, on one hand, they are expected to address the current needs of the urban citizenry, whilst on the other hand, protecting and preserving the urban ecological and physical environments in tandem with prescribed notions of urban management. In most instances, matters pertaining to the livelihood systems of the urban populace, mostly the poor, have often taken second fiddle to inflexible environmental planning considerations.

Food produced within the urban environment is primarily consumed by producing households, whereas the surplus is sold to the urban market. Next to production-related problems, planners have to grapple with marketing aspects of agricultural produce. In the cities of Harare and Gweru, local authorities have been engaged in incessant conflicts with fruit, vegetable and crop vendors who sell their products in undesignated areas often in conflict with other urban land uses. Urban land and water resources are critical in the development and practice of urban agriculture. Accessibility of such resources to the urban poor farmers is curtailed by intense competition from other urban land uses such as housing and industrial developments. Planners in most Zimbabwean urban centres view urban open space cultivation as standing in the way of urban development.

Furthermore, the promotion of free market operations in the distribution of urban land entails the poor and powerless being completely pushed out of the urban economic operations.

One would expect the role of the planner to be an advocacy role, by deliberately setting aside land for agricultural production by the poor, but the institutional environment in which the urban planner operates is a major obstacle to responsive and innovative planning.

## INSTITUTIONAL PROCESSES AND URBAN LAND-USE PLANNING

Historically, urban planning in Zimbabwe has been guided by rigid Master and Local Plans, which tended to stifle rele-

### Local authorities have been engaged in incessant conflicts

vant adaptations to emerging and unforeseen urban socio-economic needs, while the urban planner is also faced with political pressures that tend to be concerned with short-term political gains.

A review of local authority response to urban planning would show that political forces have been at the forefront in determining the course of urban agriculture.

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For instance, the City of Harare promoted urban farming 'cooperatives' as far back as 1985 following a directive from the Minister of Local Government and Town Planning. These farming 'cooperatives' never functioned as cooperatives in the true sense of the word, but more as groupings for the purposes of acquiring land. The farming 'cooperatives' were more of a manifestation of the ruling party's experimentation with socialist ideologies, than a deliberate and carefully thought out planning intervention to address the needs of the citizens. Similarly, toleration of urban agriculture in other urban centres such as Gweru, could be seen as being more politically motivated than as a conscious planning intervention. In election years for local government, councillors and Members of

Parliament, even the worst environmentally damaging practices of urban agriculture have been permitted to continue.

The urban planner operates in an institutional environment that is at the centre of diverse political interests. The fact that urban planning officials are accountable to politically elected councillors, most of whom have no relevant urban planning and management expertise restricts development of innovative ways for integrating agricultural activities into the urban land-use system. Consequently, most practising planners are content with observing the status quo by implementing development control according to laid down procedures and standards and provisions of enabling legislation such as the Urban Councils

#### REFERENCES

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Act. A further critical shortage of skilled planners also hampers innovative and responsive planning.

The successful and sustainable integration of urban agriculture into urban land-use systems in Zimbabwe is a complex task requiring a multi-stakeholder approach with the urban professional planners taking a leading role and providing a conducive operational environment. This requires intensive public and political awareness-raising and strict observance of ethics of good urban governance.

## The Women and Land Lobby Group in Zimbabwe

Urban agriculture is an important social and economic activity providing nutritious food, employment and income to a large number of people in urban areas, especially women. This importance has increased as a result of Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes (ESAP) initiated in Zimbabwe since the 1990s, because of the sharp rise in the cost of living due to the removal of subsidies on basic commodities. This period also saw an increase in urban agriculture and the commercialisation of the activity. Research has shown that, in Zimbabwe, the majority (90 %) of urban cultivators is women who are engaging in urban agriculture as a strategy for poverty alleviation. Households save money by consuming their own produce

rather than by purchasing it. As in many other developing countries, urban agriculture is a necessity as it is practised to supplement household food supplies, unlike in developed countries where it is practised as a leisure activity.

Urban agriculture has only recently been identified as an activity area for the Women and Land Lobby Group, in which the focus is more on the poor sector of the community because these are the people who practise the activity out of need. Also, these people live in the high-density suburbs, and as a result, most of their activities are carried out on municipal, state or privately owned land that is vacant. This land is not designated for agriculture, and agricultural activities are therefore considered to be illegal.

ians, the municipal government, city council officials, urban council associations, relevant NGOs and the urban cultivators themselves. Once a policy framework governing urban agriculture is put in place and when legalisation is expected, the Women and Land Lobby Group will carry on to the second stage of its strategy. In partnership with other organisations such as the Farmers' Development Trust, the Extension Service and Compassionate Ministries, they will assist cultivators to undertake urban agriculture in a sustainable and viable manner.

Female farmers will be assisted through the provision of agricultural training in farming techniques and management practices, and by offering low-interest loans (from the Farmer Development Trust Input Loan Scheme).

The ultimate goal is to have urban agriculture included in urban land-use planning in Zimbabwe's urban areas and to have the activity realise its full potential in terms of food security for the urban population.

The mandate of the Women and Land Lobby Group is to advocate and lobby for gender-sensitive land policies and promote women's economic empowerment through the equitable access to and control of land. The organisation is concerned with ensuring that policies affecting women's access to land are effectively translated into practice and implementation.

**Vegetable production**  
in  
**Mbare**  
**high**  
**density**  
**area**



Beacon Mbiba

#### URBAN AGRICULTURE STRATEGY

Several problems are associated with urban agriculture in Zimbabwe, related to policy and land-ownership issues, production techniques, marketing and the negative environmental impacts. The Women and Land Lobby Group has a two-stage strategy to bring attention to the need for a relevant policy. The first stage relates to lobbying for the legalisation of urban agriculture through stakeholder workshops, to highlight its importance and to map out strategies to have it legalised. The key targets in this regard are the parliamentar-

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