

Urban Agriculture and Social Inclusion



Adrienne Martin
Joep Verhagen (Corresponding Author)
Luke Abatania

Understanding social exclusion requires an in-depth investigation
Photo: IWMI Ghana

The SWITCH programme promotes a participatory, multi-stakeholder approach via its city learning alliances. As these stakeholder participation processes do not necessarily give a voice to socially excluded groups, SWITCH is initiating specific activities to address issues around social inclusion. The ultimate objective of these activities is to ensure more equal and sustainable management of, use of, and access to urban water.

Social inclusion describes the state of being included in a community and society as a whole; a condition in which individuals and groups can access the range of available opportunities, services and resources and contribute to planning and decision making. This notion of social inclusion has come to the fore because of the growing recognition that well-being involves more than reasonable income levels and access to material goods. Its converse is social exclusion, which refers to a “process by which certain groups are systematically disadvantaged because they are discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, caste, descent, gender, age, disability, HIV status, migrant status or where they live. (DFID, 2005). Hence, social exclusion and poverty are not necessarily the same, but poverty is often an important contributing factor to social marginalisation. Social inclusion also refers to the policies and actions intended to influence institutions and change the perceptions that create and sustain exclusion (Beall, 2002). To identify such actions, it is necessary to understand the existing context and processes of social exclusion.

Dimensions of social exclusion

Understanding social exclusion and identifying the types of actions needed to promote social inclusion, requires an in-depth investigation of the following three dimensions of social exclusion:

- what people have or do not have, in terms of access to natural, monetary, and other resources;
- where they live; spatial deprivation occurs when stigma or the bad reputation of a specific neighbourhood acts as a barrier to creating social contacts or accessing markets;
- who they are; discrimination flowing from specific group identities as perceived by others; for instance, discrimination based on gender, ethnicity or occupation.

These different dimensions of social exclusion may overlap, simultaneously excluding people from employment, livelihood opportunities, property, housing, education, citizenship, personal contacts and respect (Silver, 1994). For example, poorer urban areas inhabited by excluded social groups tend to have limited access to water and sanitation.

Social exclusion and urban agriculture

This article presents lessons learned related to social inclusion in the work of the SWITCH working group on urban agriculture in Accra. Action research, with urban agricultural producer groups as described in the previous article, pays close attention to the dimensions of inclusion and access. A baseline study was undertaken at the Dzorwulu-Roman Ridge site, one of the largest sites in Accra. The social component included discussion at the level of the producer association, farmers’ group and individual producers and market traders. It explored the diversity of households

involved in urban agriculture (gender, age and ethnicity) and its contribution to livelihoods. It looked at the inclusiveness of producer organisations and the capacity of urban producers to have a voice in city planning and other relevant platforms.

Identity and social exclusion

There is a vegetable producers' association at the site, as well as an informal group. Many of the association members were originally migrants from Northern Ghana and Burkina Faso and members of northern origin remain the majority. The association has twenty-six members, three of whom are women. There are no written membership criteria for membership of the group. In general any person farming at the site qualifies to join the group. There was no indication of exclusion or discrimination either within or from outside the group on the basis of ethnic origin or religion. Vegetable production at the site is a male-dominated venture. The women generally have smaller plots than their male counterparts, which the women said reflects their limited capacity to manage a larger area. Female household members are not involved in vegetable production, but harvesting the crops is mainly done by women market traders.

The land is fully occupied so there is limited potential to expand farming at this location. Following the acquisition of plots by the original occupants, subsequent transmission of plots has been through inheritance or allocation from relatives, friends or employers. Existing farmers or new entrants can only obtain additional or new plots through fragmentation of existing plots or when an occupant leaves his/her plot for good. Allocation thus depends on social relationships, although once the plot is allocated, it is a permanent arrangement. The group has investigated the possibility of acquiring additional farm land at another site, but so far without success. The main form of social-exclusionary attitudes relates to the negative public image of urban agriculture (exclusion based on occupation and location) and the group's associated low social status.

Economic basis of social exclusion

The baseline study indicated that urban agriculture is an occupation that has provided sustainable livelihoods for farmers and their families, in some cases, for decades. Vegetable farming is the most important economic activity among the survey households – for six households out of twenty-five interviewed, it was their sole source of income. For the others, vegetable farming was the first among the three most important economic activities of the household, providing up to 82 percent of household income. While the producers are not well off, vegetable production

Harvesting the crops and marketing is mainly done by women market traders Photo: IWMI Ghana



provides a reasonable living in comparison to occupations of people with similar levels of education. Seven of the twenty-five farmers interviewed were illiterate, nine had Koran or primary schooling, eight had junior secondary or middle schooling and one had secondary schooling. Farmers report profits in the range of US\$ 600–1,500 per farmer per year with a mean profit of about US\$ 1,000 per farmer per year. Apart from cash benefits, the group mentioned urban agriculture as a source of employment and better nutrition. An estimated 95 percent of vegetables consumed by the households is grown on their own plots. Thirteen households reported that they have savings and no debts while a further five indicated they have both savings and debts.

The farmers commented that urban agriculture “is a source of employment and more remunerative than any other job they could get given their backgrounds”. They said that others may be financially better off, but they are healthier because of better nutrition from the consumption of vegetables. The group was convinced that urban agriculture can be a pathway out of poverty, but added that larger areas of land would be required. Land is a limiting factor for poverty reduction through urban agriculture.

Group organisation and empowerment

The perception of urban agriculture and the impression of poverty associated with it contributes to the lack of ‘voice’ experienced by the farmers. Strengthening their organisation is one strategy to build internal cohesion and support and a structure through which their needs can be articulated.

Social relationships among the farmers were generally described as cordial or good and most thought there was trust and willingness to share information. There are shared arrangements for using piped water for irrigation. The vegetable growers' association (founded in 2001) was initially motivated by the need for social as well as financial mutual support. Membership is voluntary, but applicants are expected to pay a registration fee (about \$2) as well as monthly subscriptions (\$1). Levels of mutual social support are good, but payment of subscriptions is sometimes delayed or missed, which limits the group's ability to finance farm inputs or to provide loans for members.

The farmers do not hold title to the land they cultivate. Although there is an informal arrangement, there is no written agreement between the farmers and any recognised individual or organisation. Though there have been attempts to evict the farmers, they still feel that the land will be secure for many years to come. The association members reported that they sometimes meet with city authorities and other organisations to discuss their vegetable production activities. They send representatives to meetings at the Accra Metropolitan Assembly when invited (and participate in RUAF and SWITCH working groups). Despite this, the group feels it lacks the social recognition to make its views or situation known to the relevant organisations. However, the group has the cohesion to do everything possible to counter any threat to its activities. The informal group does not have linkages with other farmers' organisations. However, the group interacts with research organisations and government institutions. Information on agriculture practices and policies is made known to them by Ministry of Agriculture and IWMI. Input dealers also provide information on the proper use of agricultural inputs.

Conclusion

The baseline study findings illustrate the importance of urban agriculture as a strategy for poverty alleviation, community building and social integration of disadvantaged groups. Despite the instability of the market and other constraints, the performance of vegetable production in Accra over the past five years has been good, and is providing sustainable employment and food security to the farmers and their households.

It is important to combine approaches that seek to secure sustainable and profitable use of water in urban agriculture with those focused on socially inclusion and poverty reduction. In particular, programmes need to support capacity strengthening for group development, networking, marketing, financial management and other skills. Ultimately this would widen access to urban agriculture opportunities including access to water and improved water treatment and for facilitating contact between farmers groups and decision making bodies. These issues will be fully taken into account in the follow up activities in the frame of the SWITCH and RUAF projects.

Adrienne Martin

Natural Resources Institute, University of Greenwich, UK.
Email: a.m.martin@gre.ac.uk

Joep Verhagen (Corresponding Author)

IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre, The Netherlands
Email: verhagen@irc.nl

Luke Abatania

University of Ghana, Accra. Email: abat142002@yahoo.co.uk

End notes

1) This article is adapted from Nelson, V., Martin A., Sutherland, A., Casella, D., Verhagen J. (2007), Social inclusion and integrated urban water management, a concept paper, NRI/University of Greenwich & IRC, SWITCH programme. The information on Urban Agriculture and Social Inclusion is from the report of baseline study field work in Accra by Luke Abatania and Seth Agbottah.

References

Beall, J (2002) Globalisation and social exclusion in cities: Framing the debate with lessons from Africa and Asia. Working Paper Series 02-27, Development Studies Institute, London School of Economics and Political Science.

Department for International Development (2005) Reducing poverty by tackling social exclusion, A DFID policy paper. London.

Silver, H. (1994) Social Exclusion and Social Solidarity: Three Paradigms. International Labour Review. Vol. 133, no. 5/6 pp. 531-578.

Improving Decision-making on Interventions in the Urban Water System of Accra

Suleiman Ibrahim¹
Henk J. Lubberding
P. Drechsel
Peter van der Steen

Management of water in an urban context has an important effect on the general health status of the city's population. Whereas a good water supply and sanitation improve people's health, the absence of these may cause serious health problems for thousands of citizens. Most sub-Saharan African cities are suffering from poorly managed urban water systems (water supply, sanitation, surface waters, groundwater). Wastewater, septage and solid waste are often not properly treated and disposed of, so that they become instrumental in the transfer of diseases from one person to another. Providing full collection and treatment is usually too expensive. Reuse of (treated) wastewater in urban agriculture may create some revenues to pay for the partial treatment of the wastewater, before it is used for irrigation. Simultaneously, use of this water in agriculture prevents it from polluting receiving waters. There is, however, also the danger of contamination of crops with pathogens.

Accra is one of these cities where the urban water system is far from optimal, and therefore a number of projects are underway to improve the situation. In the current situation, only a part of the expanding city has reliable access to drinking water. Moreover,

many citizens do not have access to well-functioning sanitation. Most people rely on septic tanks or some type of soakaways. The effluents from these tanks or from overflowing soakaways are discharged in open roadside drains. These drains may be an important disease transfer pathway. The small drains combine into larger ones, which ultimately end up in one of the lagoons that subsequently discharge into the ocean. Urban farmers use water from these drains to irrigate their crops, which include vegetables consumed uncooked.

For planners and decision makers it would make sense to invest the available budgets in upgrading the urban water system in such a way that the health effects are maximised. To determine which intervention is most effective, one could use a method called Quantitative Microbial Risk Assessment (QMRA). This method starts with an inventory of all possible transmission routes of infectious diseases that are somehow related to the urban water system, including wastewater reuse. It then predicts the number of disease cases for each transmission route. In the figure a schematic overview is presented of the different trans-