

OPTIMISING AGRICULTURAL LAND USE IN THE CITY AREA

CONTRIBUTION FROM KANO, NIGERIA

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That They May Become Poorer

Introduction

The title of this contribution may seem at variance with the general objective of this e-conference. However, that is the summary of the urban cultivation scene in Kano at the moment. Unless positive intervention emerges soon, urban cultivation may be snuffed off in Kano and the urban resource poor would be the worse for it.

This contribution shall summarize the findings of a 1996 collaborative research by National Resources Institute, Charlton, England, and the Department of Geography, Bayero University, Kano, Nigeria, which was commissioned by the DFID (Olofin 1996); the report of three scientists on a re-visit to one of the 1996 sites in 2001 (Lynch et al. 2001) and this writer's current (2003) observations at four of the 1996 sites. Although the 1996 research studied field production of horticultural crops, compound cultivation (mainly by women) and marketing of horticultural crops, this contribution shall be limited to the field production of horticultural crops, with cross references to other forms of urban production.

Characteristics of Field Production

Three sub-systems of field production have always been present in Kano urban and peri-urban fringes. These are dry season production of market gardening crops, wet season production of staple food crops and permanent fruit orchards. Of these, the permanent orchards usually belong to well-to-do individuals. Also, poultry, fishery and animal rearing are undertaken by the middle and upper classes of the society. Indeed, in the case of animal rearing, the animals are kept in the compounds of rich people and grazed on available pasture anywhere. Thus, the dry season horticultural crop production and the wet season production of staples shall be highlighted in this contribution.

Production Systems

The 1996 report (Olofin 1996) established that men whose ages range between 30 and 70 years undertook urban production of crops during the dry and wet seasons. The situation is still true today. They live in simple

traditional houses and only a few receive Western-type education, usually to the primary school level. However, most have received Islamic instructions. The checklist used for the 1996 study revealed that about 98.2% of the 109 interviewed on one-on-one basis were urban resource poor. Thus, urban cultivation is actively pursued by the urban resource poor - the victims of urban poverty and squalor. Most of them are indigenes as less than 5% are migrants from other parts of Nigeria.

The agricultural inputs they could access are rudimentary - hoes, machetes and sickle as implements and own harvest or open market as the source of seed. A few had access to improved seeds, fertilizers and pesticides. Many relied on household refuse, animal droppings and ash.

The plot size is very small averaging 0.2 ha per plot in proper urban areas and about 0.5 ha in suburban areas. However, about half of the respondents had more than one plot. Some of these sites are urban vacant lands belonging to some Government establishments such as the railway, airway, afforestation unit and the like. It is only in about two urban sites that private ownership was noted. It was clear in 1996 that there was insecurity of access in five of the seven vegetable production sites investigated and the report expressed the fear that: "indeed, urban sprawl may soon catch up with the other sites ... if appropriate steps are not taken" (Olofin 1996: 2).

Vegetable production by irrigation during the dry season is undertaken on flood plains, floodable low terraces and depressed, seasonally flooded upland areas, subject to the availability of water either on the surface or in dug up ditches. Highly polluted urban waste stream is used for irrigation throughout the year in several sites, supplemented by a few tube wells. Flooded low terrace and upland depressions are irrigated when water is available usually at the beginning of the dry season. Depending on the condition of water availability they may be irrigated towards the end of the dry season, leaving the crops to mature later under rainwater conditions. Otherwise, they are left after the first crop for the cultivation of staples during the wet season.

A study of one of the risky sites in 2001 (Lynch, et al., 2001) confirmed that about a quarter to a third of land that was available for cultivation in 1996 was no longer available for that purpose in 2001. Current observation at that site has shown that more than half of the 1996 space is no longer available for urban cultivation. Indeed, the two most extensive sites at the edge of the urban area where tenure appeared to be private and safe in 1996 are now under great threat. About half of the area at these sites has now gone under urban concrete structures.

Crops Produced

Thirty-three dry season horticultural crops were identified at the sites studied. The ten main ones in the order of decreasing abundance in 1996 were: spinach (amaranthus), green maize (maize-on-the-cob), okra, lettuce, onion, tomato, carrot, sorrel, pepper and sugar cane. The least five in an ascending order of abundance were: cassava, aubergines, moringa (zoghale), eggplant and bitter leaf.

The main staple food crops produced during the wet season are: millet, sorghum, rice, cowpea and sweet potato. Some green vegetables, tomato,

pepper, okra, water melon, green peas and sorrel are also produced during the wet season.

Access to Land

The issue of the negative impact of urban sprawl has been cited above. It is regrettable to note that certain policies on ground actually encourage this to happen. The main culprit is the Land Use Decree of 1978 (Act 1999). The decree makes no provisions for the use of urban land for crop production. Agriculture is associated only with rural land use. As far as the decree is concerned, urban land development means the construction of urban structures. Secondly, all urban land is vested in the chief executive of state governments (that is, the governors). This policy statement has encouraged governors to deprive urban cultivators access to land through compulsory acquisition of land and ejection, without compensation (except for mature crops), of urban cultivators from acquired sites. Indeed, some of these governors have no regard for green sinks within the urban environment because they allocate green belts for urban construction.

Unfortunately, the permission that encourages the cultivation of vacant parcels of land that cannot be allocated for urban construction (such as in areas of aviation installations, aprons of railway tracks, etc) is not formal. It has not been written anywhere, or authorized in any government gazette. It was part of a speech that ushered in "Operation Feed the Nation" in 1976 and re-echoed during the launching of "Green Revolution" in 1980, encouraging Nigerians to cultivate all available land in the cities and at one's backyard. Thus, the cultivators of such public vacant lands are mere squatters whose tenure is very insecure. Yet mutual benefits have been established by the use. The cultivators improve their livelihood and the relevant government establishments agree that cultivating the places saved them money for periodic clearing and remove the anxiety that, if not used, such places could become suitable hideouts for criminals and other undesirable urban ! dwellers.

Access to Water

Access to water goes with access to land. Culturally, and following Islamic principles, water belongs to God. Thus, a man has access to any source of water on the land he cultivates. The problem here is that many sites in Kano depend on urban waste stream for irrigation. The urban resource poor find it financially difficult to construct tube wells or wash bores through which water of a better quality can be obtained. It must be noted that they operate as individuals and the insecure nature of their tenure precludes the formation of cooperative groups that could obtain agricultural loans and other inputs from governmental sources.

Enhancing Access to Land and Security of Tenure

The issue of access to and security of cultivated land in an urban environment is controversial since urban developers would not be pleased to leave large tracks of urban land vacant while millions of urban dwellers are craving for decent shelter. However, it would be useful to identify urban areas that are not suitable for urban construction and reserve such areas for urban cultivation. Flood plains and floodable depressions easily come to mind because urban constructions that block natural channels and artificial drains have resulted in devastating floods within urban areas in recent years, particularly in the site re-visited by Lynch et al. (2001).

Secondly, in view of the mutual benefits cultivators and relevant government establishments have derived from the informal policy that permitted the cultivation of urban public vacant lands, this policy should be made formal and occupants assured of their tenure for a reasonable period of time, say twenty years and renewable at expiration.

With assured tenure, the farmers should be encouraged to form cooperative groups that would technically qualify to obtain government assistance and financially strong to construct tube wells and buy water pumps to source groundwater for their production.

Conclusion

One concludes that as things are in Kano currently, the urban poor farmer would become poorer in the near future unless policies and strategies, such as the ones suggested, are put in place to secure better access to land and assured security of tenure.

Reference

Olofin, E. A. (1996) Highlights of the Field Production Survey, Paper presented at the Seminar on Horticultural Activities in Urban and Peri-Urban Kano, Organized by NRI in Kano, 7 pp

Lynch, K.; Binns T. & Olofin, E. (2001) Urban agriculture under threat: the land security question in Kano, Nigeria, *Cities*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 159 - 171