

Urban Agriculture and Gender: some key issues

2nd Draft Discussion Paper

Joanna Wilbers, programme assistant RUAF
ETC, Leusden
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1. Why this paper?

This discussion paper has been prepared as a start up of the discussions in the recently created RUAF advisory group on gender and urban agriculture as a first step in the preparation of the planned expert consultation. But the paper is also useful as an input for the Workshop on Gender in Urban Agriculture for the RUAF partners.

The discussion paper was prepared by reviewing a number of documents on the topic available in the RUAF library at ETC in order to identify a number of key issues regarding "gender and urban agriculture".

In this paper we have not intended to discuss gender concepts (but this will be discussed in the workshop).

Please take into account that this paper is a project "under construction".

2. Key issues "gender and urban agriculture"

2.1 Women in urban agriculture: an introduction

Over the past decade, the recognition of the fact that a large part of the urban farmers consists of women, has increased. The predominance of women can be found in many regions, including Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Mozambique, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Senegal, Poland and Thailand (Hovorka, 1998; Maxwell, 1995; Mougeot, 2000; UNDP, 1996). The literature recognises that the predominance of women in this group can be ascribed to 2 factors. Firstly, it is still the women that bear the first responsibility for household sustenance and well-being and secondly, women tend to have lower educational status than men and therefore more difficulties in finding formal wage employment (Hovorka 2003). In the following paragraphs some issues, which can be considered to be of key importance within the field of women in urban agriculture, will be raised.

2.2 Access to/control over resources

An important key issue is the access to and the control over resources within the household between male and female members of the household. This matter of access is highly influenced by structures or processes at the macro level, where cultural ideas determine which roles men and women play, and which responsibilities within the household both have. According to Moser (1993, p. 23), external factors like ideological, cultural and economic reasons underlie the symmetries and asymmetries in intra-household resource allocation. Often, traditions more than laws prevent women from inheriting and controlling land and animals on an equal basis with men. Traditions of patrilineal property inheritance limit women's access to a secure place to live, their ability to produce subsistence and to generate income.

In the field of access to and control over resources, two related issues can be distinguished:

- a. Access to and control over productive resources, like land, water, inputs, credit, contacts and interpersonal networks, technical and market information, technology and organisations. Also highly gendered are the rights to control one's own labour and the degree in which one can regulate the actions of others in the household.
- b. The control over the benefits of production, like cash income, food and other products (for home consumption, sales or exchange)

The access to (productive) resources also determines certain rights/obligations over these resources.

The legal standing of resource tenure as well as the kind of tenure tends to reflect gendered relations of power. For example, resource rights are *de jure* often associated with men and *de facto* resource rights with women, which has major implications for the relative strength and security of tenure by gender. Women often have rights of renewable use (for example: harvesting leaves from trees), while men have rights of consumptive use (harvesting the tree itself).

Resources can be divided into different categories, and women and men may have different control over each of the categories. These differences may embody a division between resources for use value and resources as commodities (Hetterschijt 2001, p. 36-37).

Besides gender differences in access to productive resources within households, one can also find gendered differences between women heads-of-households and men heads-of-households. Often, the first tend to own resources of a poorer quality that consequently result in lower production. In a literature review on gender and agricultural practices in rural and peri-urban areas of Ethiopia, done by Tegegne et al. (2002), the differences between female- and male-headed households were extensively dealt with. According to this review, female-headed households are constrained in a number of ways, as opposed to male-headed households. An important disadvantage for female-headed household is the fact that female farmers tend to limit their labour time in farm activities due to heavy commitment to domestic chores (Tegegne et al., 2002, p. 3). Other disadvantages, related to access to resources which are mentioned in this literature review, are limited education and therefore fewer opportunities for employment in the off-farm labour market, while culturally determined rules can also prohibit women to use certain productive resources, which decreases their productivity as opposed to men's. In a study done by Maxwell on the impact of urban agriculture on livelihoods, food and nutrition security in Greater Accra (1998), female-headed households were also recognised as being among the most vulnerable groups of the city.

A debate exists, between the vision that considers informal economic activities (like urban agriculture) for women to be another opportunity for male control, versus the vision that they are an opportunity for women to regain control over household/productive resources. It is important to look into the fact whether both women and men have access to both formal and the informal sector activities. If so, it could be relevant to study whether women and men have comparable or rather different experiences within the two sectors, and how the access to and control over resources can facilitate entry or shape participation within each sector.

Besides the control over and access to productive resources, it is as important to review the access to and control over the *benefits* of the production. According to Hovorka (1998, p. 29), women producers who are not land owners demand their share of revenue derived from

production because they are the ones who are primarily responsible for the care of children. However, when they are not successful in convincing their husbands to share the earnings, women may retain part of the money from their vegetable produce sales without the knowledge or consent of their husbands (Maxwell 1994, p. 9-10).

2.3 Role/bargaining power in decision making

Control of resources and decision-making power are closely related but distinguishable issues.

The role and bargaining power of women in decision-making can be viewed at on two different levels:

- a. Within the farm household, where decisions have to be taken on for example the sale of products, land or animals, on the production process itself (what to produce when where why how), regarding the development of the infrastructure, do we save or invest? Should some members work on the farm or in another job outside? Etcetera.
- b. Within the community/organisation.
The decision making power of women within communities can be highly influenced by the extent to which women's group activities exist. These activities can be viewed as co-operative mechanisms through which women successfully pool resources, skills, information, time and energy. However, in some societies women's groups depend on a male chairman to represent their interest to the rest of the community, which may not be the best possible arrangement for addressing women's strategic needs, including political empowerment and the recognition of the importance of their work (Peters 1998, p. 20-21). The strength of women's social networks and co-operative efforts are noted as potential areas for successful development strategies in the urban agriculture sector (Hovorka 2003). Women farmers may participate in governance, local politics, and community groups, linking social activism and urban food issues.

Productive activities can help strengthen the position of women in the decision making process within the household. For example, in Kampala, farming represents some means of economic self-reliance, as was found in the research of Maxwell (1994, p. 11). Especially married women have other reasons for being engaged in urban agriculture than only food supply: they can practise urban agriculture because it is within the margins of what they culturally are expected to do and make their positions in intra-household conflicts stronger when they have access to their own generated source of income. Culturally, urban agriculture is seen as a marginal economic activity and the women may have reasons to keep this appearance up (Hetterschijt 2001, p. 30; Maxwell 1994, p. 11). According to Dennery (1994), women's decision-making power as was witnessed in Nairobi, may be undermined by factors such as size of plot, need for cash and personal health.

2.4 Division of tasks/labour in urban agriculture

Within the household, the various tasks and responsibilities are divided between the male and female members of the household. This division is subject to context specific circumstances, which can make certain situations rather complicated to comprehend and describe. For instance, when we look at the case studies of 6 different cities in the scooping study done by Ragnekar (2002, p. 20), we find that within every case (city), the division of tasks between men and women in urban livestock is different, according to the cultural group they belong to, the socio-economic status of the household, the species and size of

the livestock and the location of the household in the city (the same factors are found to influence the decision-making power of women and men as well).

Regarding this key issue, a distinction can be made between:

- a. the division of household chores (reproductive tasks)
- b. the division of tasks related to urban agriculture

Many families involved in urban farming come from rural backgrounds where it is the woman's task to provide for the family food through farming and gathering. Such a task might be more difficult in the poor urban settlements. Two different scenarios can be witnessed. According to a case study in Lusaka by Rakodi (1988, p. 510), urban immigrants carry through the traditional (rural) gender division of labour in the urban areas, but in the city areas family labour is hardly supplemented by casual labour, which increases the burden on the women in the households.

According to Lee-Smith (1994, p. 8), in the urban situation often there is no recognition of the traditional gender division of labour, which may be due to loss of influence of the social norms brought from the country side. But we should also not forget that part of the farming households in the city are families that have an urban background and got involved in agriculture just by choice/need.

When it comes to the division of tasks concerning urban agriculture, we first have to recognise the fact that, in many cases, women are more involved in urban agriculture than men (see paragraph 2.1 on the predominance of women in urban agriculture). So often, within urban agriculture more tasks go to the woman of the household. In many situations, men can be found to be active on the sideline of urban agriculture, as the example of Kampala shows. Here, men are more involved in helping to provide cash for the purchase of inputs, and in obtaining land for farming than in the actual urban farming itself (Maxwell 1994, p. 7). However, in another study in Accra, also done by Maxwell (1998), it was found that farming was mainly a male occupation.

Aside from the difference in the amount of urban agriculture work performed, a number of other differences between men and women can be observed.

Firstly, there is the difference in division of responsibility for certain crops. In most urban agriculture farm household systems, men are responsible for (a few) cash crops and larger livestock (and for generating cash income for the family) whereas women are responsible for (a variety) of food crops and small animals (and for securing household food security and nutrition) (Hovorka 1998, p. 19). In research done by Ofei-Aboagye in Ghana (1997, p. 5), it has been found that women are mainly responsible for crops with lower maintenance requirements, which leaves them with more time to spend on their household tasks.

Secondly, Ofei-Aboagye (1997, p. 5) witnesses the difference between men and women in dry and wet season farming in Ghana. Usually, men are more actively engaged in irrigated dry season agriculture, while women are more involved in wet season farming. Women often lack the physical strength to clear the dry season farmland and their access to hired labour, oxen or a tractor is limited. Fewer farmers engage in dry season farming and so more money is made due to relatively lower supply of foodstuffs and unchanged level of demand.

Apart from the above-mentioned distinction of certain activities within the household, one can also look at the division of tasks at community level and other levels. As gender issues play an important role in the division of tasks, it is important to understand that they play this role at both levels and that gender issues do not only have their influence within the household, but also beyond this household level, with according consequences.

2.5 Differences in knowledge/preferences

Another key issue within the field of urban agriculture and gender are the differences that exist between men and women with regard to their knowledge of e.g.:

- a. the cultivation of certain crops and animals
- b. the application of certain cultural practices (e.g. women in the Andes know more about seeds selection and storage, herding, processing of wool and natural medicines)
- c. the use of certain technologies (e.g. irrigation techniques, chemical inputs and castration of bulls are often dominated by men)
- d. certain social domains (e.g. men may know much more about formal marketing channels, whereas women may know more about informal barter relations)

Men and women normally also differ strongly in their preferences and priorities, in relation to their main roles and responsibilities, e.g. regarding production goals (e.g. food versus market oriented), preferred location of plots (women with young children often prefer to work close to the home), preferred mode of production (e.g. single versus multiple cropping), use of the benefits (household consumption rather than sales), etc.

2.6 Role of external factors on gender in urban agriculture

There are a number of external factors that can have a strong effect on gender relations in urban agriculture.

A rather clear external factor concerns the socio-economic conditions, which are often at the root of the involvement of women in urban agriculture. According to Maxwell (1998, p. 25), female-headed households and those occupational groups that are predominantly female (petty trading and street food vending) have the highest levels of vulnerability to food price rises or income shocks. As a result many poor urban women seek to create sources of food that are independent of the formal urban market.

Another factor is the effect of existing inheritance and land laws and regulations, which often disadvantage women. Widows and single women are usually unable to inherit land and may be forced into both urbanisation and poverty (Lee-Smith 1994, p. 9). According to Maxwell, female urban farmers are often more affected than male farmers by tenure change or loss of farmland (Maxwell 1998, p. 23)

Other external factors that are important to analyse for their effects on gender and urban agriculture:

- a. local policies
- b. educational system
- c. grassroots activism (NGOs/CBOs)
- d. social and cultural norms regarding gender relations
- e. environmental factors

Here, it is equally important to look at the different scales at which these external factors affect gender in urban agriculture.

2.7 Gender and the potentials/risks, advantages/disadvantages of urban agriculture

It is important to monitor what the positive (advantages, potentials) and the negative (disadvantages, risks) impacts of certain urban agriculture activities are for men and women respectively, in a given location and under given conditions, and how these relate to the

existing gender dynamics. When looking at the actual merits of urban agriculture for men and women, it is important to first differentiate between *practical versus strategic interests*. Palacios (2003, p. 2) describes practical needs (following Moser) as "immediate needs related to the inadequacy of their living conditions, such as the supply of food, water, health care and employment". They do not imply changes in gender relations. Strategic needs "are related to the division of labour, power and control by the genders, and can include issues such as legal rights, eradication of household violence, equal wages". Satisfying the strategic needs by gender helps women achieve a greater equality and originates shifts in the existing roles. Although they can be identified and conceptualised individually, these practical and strategic needs normally appear and must be treated together. Involvement in urban agriculture can add to both needs.

As positive effects of urban agriculture for women can be mentioned:

- a. it allows women to realise their role in securing family food security and nutrition while being less subject to market fluctuations
- b. In addition it helps them to create more independence by generating some additional income from sales of surpluses and by saving cash on food expenditures which can be used for other purposes.
- c. it allows women to work close to the homestead and to combine it with other tasks
- d. it can be undertaken with relative low capital, technology and inputs attainable and affordable for women with limited education and resources
- e. it stimulates the use of indigenous practices
- f. It may motivate women to go beyond subsistence farming of food for domestic use and engage in related activities like small scale food processing and marketing, production and sales of compost or animal feed, production and sales of herbs, pot plants, mushrooms and other more profitable urban agriculture-micro enterprises.

On the negative side, we see women's problems concerning land tenure. While both women and men face constraints regarding access to land, women are further disadvantaged because they traditionally have less access and control over land than their male companions. Men tend to have the first choice of any available vacant land, which leaves women with low-quality or less secure plots of land or plots that are located at a considerable distance from the homestead. Solving this problem by increasing access to land may not solve the problem of inequitable access to urban land between women and men (Hovorka 1998, p. 31).

Another problem often faced by female farmers are distance and transportation, as is shown by an example of women involved in urban agriculture in Lusaka (Rakodi 1988, p. 513). Although the cost of land in Lusaka is insignificant, physical availability is becoming a more important constraint here, and the distance which has to be travelled to reach gardens is, for a high proportion of cultivators, quite considerable. The physical time and effort involved in such journeys is high and therefore proves to be a significant constraint for women, especially the elderly or those with young children, to become involved in food production.

In addition to travel time is the time involved in the time, energy and costs related to the production itself. Although a strategy to increase the household production of fruit and vegetables, not just for own consumption but also for sale, would appear to be desirable, one must take into account the labour time available to women.

Their response to opportunities to grow more food or better earning crops will depend on the extent to which they can influence the decisions in the household about cultivation, the use or sale of produce, and the distribution of benefits within the household. Also, if women are stimulated to start working with the more profitable crops, which take more time, the

nutritional situation of the household might be jeopardised since they then may not have enough time left to produce nutritious food for the household members.

Other problems women often face are lack of inputs and working capital as well as lack of access to knowledge and information on the use of modern inputs and technologies. The latter a/o due to limited exposure to commercial urban agriculture or limited access to training courses offered by institutions or non-governmental organisations and the fact that women are less likely to benefit from research or extension services that fail to consider gender specific differences regarding methods of plant production, crop species and use of composts, manure and fertiliser.

Although above the positive and negative effects are depicted to influence mostly women, one has to remember that gender dynamics have an effect on advantages and disadvantages of urban agriculture for both women and men.

2.8 Differential impacts of urban agriculture-projects (with/without attention for gender)

Urban agriculture projects can have quite different impacts on men and women, depending the degree gender issues have been taken into account during design and implementation of the project.

If gender aspects are not taken into account urban agriculture projects may result in positive effects on family income and reduction of poverty but may also increase the workload of women and not necessarily result in an improvement of the nutrition and health of the women and children.

Moreover, literature suggests that urban agriculture projects that really integrate gender issues tend to have more positive effects on the position of women, poverty alleviation, food security and family nutrition and health. For example, according to Talukder et al. (200?, p. 1), home gardening activities in Bangladesh increase the income earning capacity of the women and thus contribute to empowerment of women, provides important socio-economic returns through lower health and welfare costs, lower fertility and lower maternal and infant mortality rates. Maxwell shows that female-headed households in Accra have lower mean incomes than male-headed households but their food budget shares and calorie availability are significantly higher than those of the male-headed households. Female-headed households spend 60% of their budget on food, compared to 50% in male-headed households (Maxwell 1998, p. 24).

2.9 Specifics of gender in urban agriculture

Many of the above mentioned key issues can be encountered in many frameworks on gender and agriculture. But what are the specifics of gender in urban agriculture as opposed to gender in rural agriculture or to gender in other urban informal sectors? Or, put differently: is the topic of gender and agriculture different in an urban setting than in a rural setting, and if so, in what ways? And, is gender in urban agriculture different from other informal urban sectors?

Regarding the differences between the rural and the urban setting, we can say that, in theory, in the urban setting often:

- a. There is more diversification in sources of income of a family; various family members may have some sort of urban job (eventually next to a role in urban agriculture)

- b. There are more opportunities for schooling and wage labour for women
- c. There is more insecurity regarding land tenure/land ownership, even more so for women (Hovorka 1998, p. 31), and theft (Hovorka 2001)
- d. There are more opportunities for women to obtain credit (short term)
- e. The food provisioning task of the women is much more difficult for a number of reasons

All these differences have their effect on the topic of urban agriculture and gender.

On the difference between gender in urban agriculture and other urban informal sectors, we can say that, in theory,

- a. urban agriculture is especially convenient for married women with children (close to the home, little cash needed, combines well with prime responsibilities of women)
- b. In urban agriculture production women tend to focus on saving on family cash expenditures by growing their family food (and eventually sell some surplus production), whereas women active in another informal urban sector are focused more on generating a cash income. Animals also fulfil an important role as "security" and in certain socio-cultural practices (e.g. marriage).

However, it is important to note here that certain specifics are only true for certain places and times, and that they are subject to a high degree of variability, following from their specific context.

3. Guidelines and methodologies

Concepts and information is not enough to promote mainstreaming of gender in urban agriculture. We also need tools and instruments for:

- a. engendering the diagnosis of the situation and the identification of problems, potentials, actors
- b. engendering research (a/o technology development and testing) with regard to urban agriculture
- c. engendering policy development on urban agriculture
- d. engendering action planning, implementation and monitoring/evaluation
- e. engendering the integration of urban agriculture in urban planning (territorial)

Many gender guidelines and manuals exist, but those that are adapted to the specific situation of urban agriculture are rare. Attempts are made to develop appropriate methods for urban agriculture (e.g. the methodology workshop RUAF-IDRC, Nairobi 2002) but gender aspects have insufficiently been integrated so far. Hence, the development of such engendered guidelines and instruments specific for urban agriculture is still a challenge.

The importance of gender analysis and planning is described by Palacios (2003, p. 1-2), where it is said that urban agriculture could and should be based on a practice that generates more equitable social relations. If the data in an diagnosis is not broken down by gender, there will be an overall vision that denies the differences between genders and suggests common answers to problems that, in practices, are different, thus deepening those differences and inequalities.

One has to:

- a. recognise that women and men have different needs,
- b. identify the mechanisms that keep women in a disadvantageous position

- c. establish the implications of urban agriculture in the reproductive, productive, community, political and cultural roles and areas of social interaction performed by women and men
- d. identify the practical and strategic needs of men and women and work on both, but especially on the strategic needs, because they tend to balance gender relations
- e. define equality policies and affirmative actions that render gender equality operational in the urban agriculture process

4. Case studies

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- p. 14, farming in Accra is mainly a male occupation. May be one of the reasons for a limited association of urban agriculture with food security and nutritional outcomes. P. 21: women's income-generating activities are heavily concentrated in petty trading, and preparation and sales of street food
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