

WORKSHOP URBAN MICRO-FARMING AND HIV-AIDS
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**Urban and HIV-AIDS; The experiences of Action
Aid in Zimbabwe**

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INTRODUCTION TO AAI AND ITS FOOD SECURITY PROGRAMME

ACTION AIDS INTERNATIONAL (AAI) was founded in 1972 to help children living in poverty. Since then the organization has moved from providing short term relief assistance to long term development assistance and finally to the rights based organization the organization now is. Today AAI is operational in more than 42 countries globally, with more than 20 of them in Africa. The country offices are coordinated by four regional offices in Nairobi (Africa), Brussels (Europe), Bangkok (Asia) and Rio de Janeiro (Americas)

Our vision is a world without poverty and injustice in which every person enjoys his/her right to a life with dignity. Our mission is to work with organizations, alliances and movements at all levels to foster approaches rooted in a global identity and consciousness and formulate alternatives that will eradicate poverty and injustice in Africa

Since 2003 Action Aid International (Zimbabwe program) has been supporting nine local NGOs in Harare and Bulawayo on a food security program targeting poor and vulnerable households affected by HIV/AIDS. The overall goal of this project is to improve the livelihood security of poor, marginalized and vulnerable households affected and/or infected by HIV and AIDS, especially women and children. More specifically the project has aimed to improve household food security through food aid and own food production in low input gardens. This project has been part of the protracted relief program that DFID has been supporting in Zimbabwe since 2003.

In supporting urban agriculture this project is seeking to augment the food aid component by assisting households to produce a wide variety of foods to improve the quality of their diet through consumption of a greater quantity of nutritious foods and sale of surpluses. The project has also sought to use these gardens to produce medicinal and nutritional herbs, particularly important for people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA).

Urban agriculture¹ is not a new phenomenon in Zimbabwe's urban landscape and dates back many years. However, its prevalence and significance has grown in line with worsening urban poverty, particularly after Zimbabwe adopted the structural adjustment in 1990. With the continued macroeconomic decline, rising unemployment and the HIV/AIDS pandemic, urban agriculture has become key source of livelihood for many urban households in Zimbabwe in recent times.

At its inception this project sought to support individual household gardens within their residential areas or other open spaces that these households had access to². The project also introduced the concept of low input gardening (LIG) that uses locally available resources to help beneficiaries plan and manage their crops without expensive chemicals to achieve healthy, productive gardens. LIG uses ideas from other approaches such as permaculture, integrated land-use design, and sustainable agriculture. Specifically designed for urban areas, the LIG approach maximises the diversity of food that can be grown in small plots. This sustainable approach to

¹ In this paper urban agriculture is viewed as the production of crops and/or livestock in areas designated as urban. It may occur within residential properties or in open public land. Depending on prevailing land use regulations such urban agriculture may be a legal or illegal (Masoka 1997).

² Since 1980 local authorities had tolerated open space cultivation in urban areas but the legislation governing urban land use prohibited this and this legislation has not been amended (Mbiba 1994).

livelihoods is tailored to meet the specific needs of people affected by HIV and AIDS (e.g. crop diversity for nutritional needs and gardening approaches that require minimal financial and physical resources).

Beneficiary training has encompassed land use design, seasonality, water access, pests, use of compost/mulches, soil structure, seed collection, nurseries, and food handling, preparation and preservation. The project trains local volunteers who then train beneficiaries.

As a strategy to minimise the risk of losing public land areas (given the fluid policy environment in Zimbabwe and the current 'clean up' operation) the project has partnered with local schools in both Harare and Bulawayo. These schools have offered land for LIG within their premises.

To improve sustainability of this partnership, the schools have become active participants, not just providers of land. The schools have made LIG a part of their curriculum and so their gardens will likely be secure from possible policy change restricting land use in future. In these school gardens the heads of schools, teachers and students are all involved and participate.

The project beneficiaries also take part in maintaining these gardens. This gives the project collective ownership. Vegetables from these gardens are consumed by the children from vulnerable families jointly identified by the school and the local IP. School teachers have been trained on LIG and they in turn, train their students. So far a total of 33 school gardens have been established and another 49 more are planned.

In both the household and community garden beneficiaries grow leafy vegetables (Cabbage, rape and other traditional vegetables), root or tubers, and herbs.



RESULTS OBTAINED

An assessment of the project results so far has found that the benefits of the LIG approach include economic returns, increased food security and nutrition as well as psychosocial benefits, such as increased self-esteem, improved group cohesion, decreased stigma, and increased community support. Furthermore the herbs being produced in these gardens have been used for medicinal purposes, improving the health of HIV affected beneficiaries.

Urban gardens are an essential part of urban livelihood systems particularly of the poor and vulnerable.

LESSONS LEARNT

Access to Land and Water

Access to land for cultivation by poor households has always been a big challenge in Zimbabwe's urban areas. Most poor households do not have houses of their own and often live as tenants in backyard cottages (before the 'clean up' exercise). Most such tenants often do not have access to land to cultivate their crops. But with creativity even under those conditions agricultural activities are taking place.

Production Issues

In this project beneficiaries grow a wide variety of crops including vegetables, herbs and trees. Although the projects gives beneficiaries a start up seed kit, they are usually free to grow crops of their choice including indigenous and wild plants. Our emphasis has been to ensure that beneficiaries grow crops that are nutritious, have medicinal value, help with soil fertility improvement and also offer insecticidal value to protect the garden from pests.

Due to space limitations in the urban areas the project has not used micro irrigation although there is drip kit technology on the Zimbabwean market.

To ensure sustainable availability of seeds and tools, the project has provided start up tools and seeds to all beneficiary households. Furthermore the project also cooperates with agents that provide training in permaculture and LIG. These institutions are also key sources of seeds and seedlings, particularly of herbs and other trees.

Labour has been one major problem for households affected by HIV/AIDS as some of them are ill or have large numbers of young and dependant orphans. To minimise this problem, the project has targeted the household instead of the sick individuals in the household. Where the affected households have more than one adult member this strategy has worked well.

Security of produce is an important factor. Produce in open places is often vulnerable to theft. The school gardens have tended to be safer as most schools have security arrangements.

Organizational and institutional issues

Training and mobilisation of beneficiaries is a crucial factor. Beneficiaries need to be trained in an ongoing process. Most of the growers are poor with limited agricultural or horticultural skills. Mobilising the communities motivates them to continue working.

It is important to de-stigmatise the project. Although our project targeted households affected by HIV/AIDS, it would not have survived if it had been viewed as an HIV/AIDS project. For instance, when this project was first introduced in schools, only children from HIV/AIDS affected households were targeted to work in school garden. Immediately it became apparent that the other children viewed the project as an HIV/AIDS project and nobody wanted to be associated with it; not even the beneficiaries. The strategy had to be changed to involve all the children to remove the stigma.

For the success of ***household gardens***:

- a large pool of volunteers is needed to work with a small number of households, providing training and monitor progress. Working with a small number of beneficiaries gives the volunteer more time to support the beneficiaries and to attend to their own (the volunteer's) needs and to restrict transport needs

- The beneficiaries need to be organised into groups of say 20 to 30 households to make mobilisation and training easier. Even if gardening activities will be organised at household level, bringing the participants together provides opportunities for peer influencing, training, support and motivation.

In ***school gardens***:

- The whole school needs to be actively involved in the project: the head of the school, the teachers and all students.
- There needs to be a strong cooperation between the households participating in the school garden and the school authorities.



In order for urban agriculture to succeed in Zimbabwe, there is a need to develop ***an enabling policy and regulatory environment*** that guarantees access to and security of tenure for the poor. In Zimbabwe, following the '*clean up operation*' many poor households were displaced following the destruction of their homes. Many households being supported by the project lost their gardens in this process. Even where the owners were not displaced some of these gardens destroyed. However, in uluwayo recently a process of multi-stakeholder policy formulation and action planning has started.