

Organising Urban Farmers' Groups in the City of Nairobi and Environs

Various types of informal groups can be found in urban and rural areas in Kenya. One would expect farmers, livestock keepers and producers' groups to be located only in the rural areas, but they actually also exist in the cities and their environs, where they are engaged in urban and periurban agriculture.

Some groups in Nairobi

- Kabete Women Farmers' Group in Lower Kabete is interested in obtaining information on farming practices and marketing.
- Crop farmers in Soweto Kahawa West grow kale, spinach, onion, arrowroots and carrots, and their main interest is in obtaining information on increasing yields.
- Mathare Youth Foundation in Mathare grows crops such as spinach and other vegetables and rears cows, goats and pigs.
- Mathare Mbolea in the Mathare area is made up of compost makers and their interest is in marketing compost.
- Mwirimiri Mugunda Self-Help Group in Wangige area keeps livestock and would like to obtain more information on marketing.

The groups listed in the box above are mobilised in a multi-stakeholder forum – Nairobi and Environs Food Security, Agriculture and Livestock Forum (NEFSALF) – which has been operated by the Mazingira Institute¹⁾ since 2003.

NEFSALF

NEFSALF is a mix of actors from the community, government and market sectors. It promotes cooperation around the city and environs in matters related to food security, agriculture and livestock keeping. The Forum envisions creating a better way of enhancing food security and sustainability for the greater population rather than just a few in Nairobi and its environs through urban crop production and livestock keeping.

The goals of the Forum are to facilitate

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Farmers and livestock keepers from the Farmers' Network and members of NEFSALF Secretariat.

sectoral interactions; to acquire and target relevant knowledge; and to monitor process and evaluate outcomes. One of the key objectives of NEFSALF is to facilitate organisation at community level through group and network building. Other objectives are to:

- enable farmers and livestock keepers to exchange information through periodic meetings of NEFSALF and through the NEFSALF Bulletin (www.mazinst.org);
- facilitate access by communities to appropriate provincial and municipal services;
- provide knowledge on current research being undertaken by the Institute's collaborators;
- produce policy-relevant information and knowledge in collaboration with all stakeholders;
- facilitate interaction between the community and the market sectors; and
- track the process and activities.

NEFSALF FARMERS' NETWORK

The Farmers' Network was set up in January 2004 by Mazingira Institute. It consists of individuals and groups practicing agriculture, livestock keeping and composting in the city and environs of Nairobi. A Steering Committee of eight members of mixed gender from different locations in Nairobi and environs was elected in January 2004 by farmers present during the first NEFSALF meeting. Currently there are 32 groups,

with membership ranging from 5 to 1000 members (an average of 10 members per group) and 141 individuals from Nairobi and environs.

The members of the Network get together during the periodic meetings of NEFSALF, the annual International Trade Fair held by the Ministry of Agriculture and other events such as the World Food Day and the launch of the Nairobi Agriculture Livestock Extension Programme (NALEP).

NEFSALF provides the farmers and livestock keepers with an opportunity to interact with all stakeholders present during Forum meetings, which are usually held three times in a year. The participants are kept abreast of the latest happenings and information on urban agriculture, including progress on research being undertaken on zoonoses and brucellosis. The discussions and debates are lively, with the concerns of the farmers, the livestock keepers, the market sector and researchers being aired and discussed openly in order to enable and regulate urban agriculture and livestock keeping in Nairobi and environs.

SUPPORT PROVIDED

Training courses

The Institute organises training courses on urban agriculture and livestock keeping in collaboration with the Nairobi Provincial Livestock Production



NEFSALF meeting in October 2005

Office of the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries Development, Urban Harvest and Kenya Green Towns Partnership Association. Pre-training site visits are made to assess the type of training required by the farmers. So far, about 120 farmers, livestock keepers and compost makers have been trained on a variety of pertinent urban agriculture topics. Post-training site visits have indicated that 80% of the trainees have adopted skills gained from the training courses.

In the words of Sylvia Oluoch, a member of a women's periurban group, "Through the Forum we have learnt not to fight with our neighbours but to teach them what we know". Another farmer, Julius Mirara, a dairy goat keeper in the Nairobi environs commented, "Before the course, we were in the dark. By taking the course we have learnt what profit is and how to keep records".

Research on zoonotic diseases

The Faculty of Veterinary Science, University of Nairobi, in collaboration with NEFSALF, has conducted research on the risks associated with livestock keeping in slums in Nairobi. Currently a study is being undertaken on the prevalence of human brucellosis. The study on zoonoses revealed the possible existence of brucellosis among the livestock keepers.

Nairobi International Trade Fair

The Nairobi International Trade Fair is an annual event hosted by the Kenyan government. NEFSALF has taken part in the Fair for the past two years as a collaborator with the Nairobi Provincial Extension Service Office of the Ministry of Livestock Fisheries Development. Members of the NEFSALF Farmers Network represent the Forum. Their role is to explain the functioning and activities of NEFSALF and to register new members. The farmers say that they learn a lot through the exchange of information and by seeing new developments at the Fair.

Networking with other organisations in Kenya

Two other cities in Kenya, Nakuru and Kisumu, have replicated the NEFSALF approach. The Mazingira Institute participated in several meetings held in Nakuru and Kisumu. The Nakuru initiative "Local Participatory Research and Development on Urban Agriculture and Livestock

Keeping", was undertaken by Urban Harvest, Kenya Green Towns Partnership Association, the Municipal Council of Nakuru and the Department of Soil Science, University of Nairobi. Several multi-stakeholder forums have already been held in the two towns.

NALEP

NEFSALF has been actively involved in the National Agriculture and Livestock Extension Programme (NALEP) of the Ministry of Agriculture, which is in its second phase. Its mission is "to provide and facilitate pluralistic and efficient extension services for increased production, food security, higher incomes and improved environment". The long-term objective is overall empowerment of farmers, sustainability of service delivery and a bigger role for the private sector. The implementation process follows a bottom-up approach.

Realisation of NALEP Phase II objectives are dependent on effective partnerships with other government ministries, the private sector, and other collaborators. When NALEP began its second phase (2006-2010), the Ministry of Agriculture realised that in order to fulfil its objective of pursuing a pluralistic approach, it was important that NEFSALF be involved, as it had already set up a Farmers' Network, had a strong relationship with other stakeholders and had built up networks in other cities in Kenya besides Nairobi. The Ministry formed a Provincial Stakeholders Forum, and an interim Steering Committee was elected with Zarina Ishani of Mazingira Institute as its vice-chairperson.

TOWARDS A POLICY FOR URBAN AND PERIURBAN AGRICULTURE IN NAIROBI

In the next phase, beginning January 2007, NEFSALF intends to collaborate with relevant institutions involved in the

formulation of policies for urban agriculture and livestock keeping. The policies and bye-laws currently in practice are outdated and disjointed. The process began in July 2004, when a stakeholders' meeting on "Urban and periurban agriculture policy prospects in Kenya" was held at the Kenya Agriculture Research Institute, which was attended by some NEFSALF members. At the meeting, it was resolved that the Ministry of Agriculture would be the most apt institution to carry forward the process of developing a policy for urban and periurban agriculture.

In March 2006, the Nairobi Provincial Agriculture Board hosted a two-day "Stakeholders' workshop on urban and periurban agriculture". The meeting adopted a road map for the development, regulation and enabling of a legal framework for urban and periurban agriculture. It concluded that the PAB would appoint a Steering Committee on urban and periurban agriculture to spearhead the roadmap. A technical committee would be formed to guide and implement the recommendations. NEFSALF members are keen to push the matter forward and are working on the modalities for doing so.

Mazingira Institute has been campaigning for just reform and against land grabbing and corruption since 1996 in its "Operation Firimbi" (Blow the Whistle) Campaign. The campaign has a national support base, with over 165 local chapters in Kenya. The Institute also advocates for women's equal right to land and property, particularly at the regional and international levels.

NOTES

1) Mazingira is a Kenyan NGO that has pioneered research, advocacy, and organising on urban and periurban agriculture for the past two decades. For further information contact: mazinst@mitsum-inet.com