Urban and Periurban Agriculture in Namibia

In Namibia, urbanisation has attained explosive rates since independence in 1990 caused by rapid migration of rural people to the urban areas in search of employment. As the driest country in Africa, Namibia’s agricultural base is weak. Most vegetables and fruits sold in urban centres of Namibia are imported from South Africa. Despite this, intensive urban farming activities take place both on a commercial and a micro scale in backyards, open spaces and along river courses.

There is very little information available on this type of farming in Namibia. A study was therefore conducted to collect, synthesise and analyse all available information in two municipalities in Namibia, namely Windhoek and Oshakati (1). The study reported on here consisted of a desk study and a field study (see Dima and Ogunmokun, 2001 and Dima et al. 2002) between April and May 2001. A total of 244 respondents were interviewed (101 in Windhoek and 143 in Oshakati). In Windhoek the sample was selected from seven northern and western informal settlements, while in Oshakati the sample was selected from six areas across the whole town. It should be emphasised that the survey concentrated in the areas of informal settlements in Windhoek whilst it had a more balanced coverage in Oshakati.

URBAN AGRICULTURE IN NAMIBIA

Lau and Reiner (1993) reported that in good rainy seasons commercial crop production and marketing by smallholder farmers existed in urban/perurban areas of Namibia long before the colonial era. By 1931, local vegetable production constituted almost 42% of Windhoek’s fresh produce market’s annual turnover. However, the South African officials cut off research input and other official support. Furthermore, events related to the planned incorporation of Namibia as a fifth province of the Republic of South Africa resulted in policy shifts around 1968/70 which seriously stifled vegetable production in the urban and periurban areas. In 1973, the Director of Agriculture for the South West Africa region stated “Namibia was approximately 90% dependent on South Africa as regards vegetables” (Lau and Reiner, 1993).

Immediately after independence, the new government gave little priority to horticulture production, preferring to concentrate on livestock and dryland farming. However, the continued rate of urbanisation and lack of income-generating opportunities for recent immigrants to urban areas have resulted in a change in the way government sees horticulture. Moreover, Namibia still depends heavily on South Africa for 80-90% of its total consumption of fruits and vegetables (MAWRD, 1996). So, with the objective of improving the eating habits of the local population and of reducing imports from South Africa, the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Rural Development (MAWRD) through the Namibian Horticultural Development Initiative is supporting several initiatives to improve vegetable production. However, there is still no clear policy on urban and periurban agriculture.

MIGRATION, LAND OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL

The results of the survey show that two-thirds of the respondents are young people in the age range of 21-40 (66.3%), the majority of whom (58%) are single, 23.4% married and 13.5% cohabiting. The figures confirm the migratory patterns in the country. Most of the respondents in Windhoek (82%) have moved recently to their plots. This confirms the high migratory rate into Windhoek in the last six years. For both Windhoek and Oshakati combined, 48% of the respondents owned their houses, while 52% were tenants. More respondents in Windhoek (72%) owned their houses than in Oshakati (31%). In Windhoek 66% obtained their plots through the municipality and the remaining 34% through other means, while in Oshakati 51% acquired their plots through headmen and 47% through the municipality.

In Windhoek, the men (63%) have more control over the land than the women (17%), whereas in Oshakati there is more of a joint control of land by both men and women reflecting perhaps a more liberal male attitude in Oshakati than in Windhoek. Generally, there is joint ownership of land (20% and 64%), tools (35% and 51%) and produce (48% and 45%) in Windhoek and Oshakati respectively. However, in Windhoek the men are more in control of cash (39%) compared to the women (16%). Unfortunately no comparative figures were obtained for Oshakati.

In Windhoek, the main sources of income for the household heads are employment in private companies (48%), government employment (18%) and self-employment (17%). The majority (35%) of the respondents’ spouses in Windhoek are not employed. Interestingly, 9% of the spouses get their income from farming (urban agriculture). In Oshakati, 35% of household heads are employed by government, 19% in private companies, 13% in farming (urban and periurban agriculture) and 8% are selfemployed. However, the highest category of source of income for women in Oshakati is farming (21%).

In Windhoek, 79% of all respondents in the informal settlements are involved in urban agriculture in one form or the other (72% crops only, 5% both crops and livestock and 2% livestock only). In Oshakati 70% are involved in urban agriculture (50% crops only, 13% both crops and livestock and 7% livestock only).

Women constitute the majority of urban farmers (Windhoek 54% and Oshakati 58%). The proportion of men farming is higher in Windhoek (31%) than in Oshakati (13%). A higher proportion of other household members are involved in farming in Oshakati (29%), than in Windhoek (15%). Most of the other farmers in Oshakati (22%) are school children who learned gardening in school. Over 80% of the respondents...
started their gardens on their own initiatives, without any outside influence. These respondents also had gardening experience from the rural areas before they moved to either Windhoek or Oshakati.

The main reason for urban farming is to provide food for family members (Table 1). The majority of respondents stated that they produce vegetables only during the summer to benefit from the summer rains (90% in Windhoek and 72% in Oshakati).

**PRODUCTION**

Water was reported to be a serious limiting factor to urban farming. Many farmers (91% in Windhoek and 57% in Oshakati) use tap water as the main supplementary source of water, probably due to the fixed water tariff irrespective of the level of consumption. But in the last two years, the two municipalities have adopted the use of pre-paid water meters in the informal settlement areas. Consequently, many farmers in Oshakati have stopped using tap water for growing vegetables. 77% of Windhoek respondents and 43% of Oshakati respondents perceive the use of grey water as bad for growing crops.

More people in Oshakati use fertilisers than in Windhoek (52% against 33%). The commonest form of fertiliser used by Windhoek respondents is digested manure from the Gammans Water Works. Its usage is an indication that the people do not have any health and cultural worries about using human faeces as fertiliser. The other sources of fertiliser are household wastes, fresh animal manure and inorganic fertilisers. In Oshakati, 23% of the producers use fresh animal manure followed by compost, household waste, inorganic manure and digested manure in that order. There is no gender differentiation in the use of fertilisers in both towns. However, more women than men use compost for fertilising their soil.

Urban and periurban producers grow a wide range of crops and fruit trees. The most common crop grown in both towns is green maize (88% of all urban farmers in Windhoek and 70% in Oshakati). This is surprising considering that maize requires a minimum of 300 mm of water, while the average annual rainfall for Windhoek is 280 mm and about 400 mm for Oshakati. Despite this, most of the urban farmers prefer to cultivate maize and use irrigation to supplement the rain. The other common crops grown in both towns are beans (42%), tomatoes (41%), pumpkins (26%), watermelons (24%), sweet potatoes (23%) and peppers (17%). The main reason for producing crops is for household consumption in order to improve the household food security and nutrition situation. The remaining products are either given as gifts or sold for income. The major crop sold is maize, though tomato and pepper in Windhoek and fruits and sugar cane in Oshakati are also popular crops for sale. Most of those who sell do so in order to gain extra income. None of the respondents in Oshakati depend on urban farming as a means of employment. However, 6% of the male and 2% of the female respondents in Windhoek considered urban farming as employment.

Few urban producers are involved in keeping livestock (Windhoek 6% and Oshakati 24%). The types of livestock kept are chickens, goats and turkeys. Some local pigs and cows were noticed in Oshakati, but no one claimed ownership of these animals, possibly because the farmers are aware of the by-law prohibiting these animals in the municipal areas.

**CONSTRAINTS TO URBAN AND PERIURBAN AGRICULTURE**

Urban and periurban agriculture producers are faced with numerous problems. These include shortage of water, pests and theft of the produce. Another important problem facing urban farmers is the lack of information regarding vegetable production generally, but specifically on improving water use, identification of pests and diseases and how to combat them, and on effective marketing of their produce. This is partly because of the absence of extension services for the producers. The expectation of the producers in Windhoek (67%) and in Oshakati (41%) is to expand the area cultivated under vegetables. The absence of a national policy on urban and periurban agriculture continues to be a serious obstacle.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Urban and periurban agriculture is practised by over 70% of the residents of Windhoek and Oshakati. Several governments in Southern and Eastern Africa, including Ethiopia, Malawi, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Nigeria, Zaire and Zimbabwe, are creating agencies to manage urban agriculture. The absence of a proper policy on urban and periurban agriculture in Namibia is a serious constraint to its intensification and development.

It is, therefore, recommended that the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Rural Development in consultation with the municipalities and the Ministries of Environment and Tourism, and Regional and Local Government and Housing and other stakeholders evolve a policy on urban and periurban agriculture. Furthermore, it is recommended that the small growers be assisted to organise themselves into producer cooperatives so that they can break into the main market.

**REFERENCES**

- Lau and Reiner 1993: 100 years of Agriculture in Namibia.