Preface

Certainly, ‘home and mother’ are written over every phase of neolithic agriculture and not least over the new village centers...Women’s presence made itself felt in every part of the village: not least in its physical structures, with their protective enclosures...in the house and the oven, the byre and the bin, the cistern, the storage pit, the granary and from there pass on to the city, in the wall and the moat, and all inner spaces, from the atrium to the cloister. House and village, eventually the town itself, are woman writ large. (Lewis Mumford, The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformation and Its Prospects, p. 12, 1961, Harcourt, Brace and World, New York)

A major motive for the commissioning and writing of this book was the recognition of two contradictory realities. On the one hand, we know from different kinds of study the key role that women have played in agriculture – from its emergence ten thousand years ago to current practice. We also recognize that agriculture has been intimately linked to the growth of urban settlements, and that women have been central to that growth, especially because of their primary contribution to the food security of urban families, either by virtue of their own food production or through trade. On the other hand, food production and food security have been given extremely limited attention in the history of urban development and planning, a fact which has contributed to the invisibility of women’s role in provisioning cities with food.

Fortunately, urban food production and its contribution to the food security of low-income households within and around cities have begun to receive more serious research and development attention over the past 25 years. Studies have begun to quantify the contributions of women and men to various types of urban agriculture, and results confirm the centrality and diversity of women’s roles, particularly in Africa. In many cases the studies suggest that gender roles typically associated with rural-based social structures are often transformed in the city, because urban agriculture is embedded in a wide range of complex social and economic processes in and around the city to which individuals and households have to adjust. They also highlight the fact that urban agriculture is embedded in ecological processes, producing both benefits and risks to human health, with important gender-related implications. These factors reveal the need for research and development tools that contribute to more detailed understanding of the roles of women and men in urban food production, so that research and development organizations can improve their support for this livelihood strategy in the future.
This was the common recognition shared by two leading actors in the field of urban agriculture research and development which led to the publication of this book. The Cities Farming for the Future Programme of the RUAF Foundation (International Network of Resource Centres on Urban Agriculture and Food Security) and Urban Harvest, the System-wide Initiative on Urban and Peri-urban Agriculture of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), have sought to bring attention to gender issues in research, policy, and development interventions relating to urban food production and urban food security. Our efforts began in 2002 with the joint organization of an international workshop on appropriate methodologies for urban agriculture research and development programmes in Nairobi, Kenya. One of the specific conclusions of that workshop was the necessity of highlighting women’s role in urban food production and distribution, and the importance of strengthening the capacity of different types of organization to give proper attention to gender issues in their research, policy, and development activities.

In the following years Urban Harvest and RUAF jointly and individually implemented a number of activities to address the issue of gender mainstreaming – ensuring that the goal of gender equality is central to all interventions in support of urban agriculture. A state-of-the-art review of gender in urban agriculture was commissioned by RUAF, an initial inventory of gender-sensitive methods and tools was compiled, and several case studies with a strong gender focus were undertaken. In 2004, Urban Harvest and RUAF jointly organized ‘Women Feeding Cities’, a workshop on gender mainstreaming in urban food production and food security, held in Accra, Ghana. Based on initial ideas of Diana Lee-Smith, a specialist in gender and urban agriculture with Urban Harvest, and guided by her keynote presentation, the workshop brought together urban-agriculture researchers involved in gender research and development to analyse a number of case studies from cities across the developing world, and to systematize lessons from those case studies.

Stimulated by that workshop, both organizations have subsequently devoted major attention to gender issues. They have supported staff capacity building and have sought and received funding for further exploration and development of guidelines, methods, and tools for integrating gender in the project cycle of Urban Harvest research projects and in RUAF multi-stakeholder strategic planning processes and pilot projects. (See Chapter 16 of this publication for more details of these activities.)

The production of this book has involved broad consultation and active participation by a global network of urban-agriculture specialists, co-ordinated by the book’s editors, Alice Hovorka, Henk de Zeeuw, and Mary Njenga. These three specialists in gender and urban agriculture have been supported by an Editorial Committee, consisting of the three editors together with Diana Lee-Smith, Gordon Prain, and Joanna Wilbers (later succeeded by Femke Hoekstra).

This book seeks to do two main things. First it draws attention to women’s crucial role in bringing food to the tables of urban families, and especially
to the ways in which low-income women locally produce, carry, or trade food in multiple strategies to keep their families food-secure. A series of case studies enrich our understanding of these strategies. Second, the book aims to put into the hands of researchers, development practitioners, and local government officers the guidelines and tools that will ensure the centrality of gender concerns in future projects and initiatives related to urban agriculture and food security.

The book’s Introduction, prepared by Alice Hovorka with important inputs from Joanna Wilbers and Diana Lee-Smith, provides a rationale for the centrality of gender concerns in relation to urban agriculture and offers an analytical approach to its study. Pulling together common threads linking the case studies, the Introduction illuminates key issues on the theme of women feeding cities. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the need for gender mainstreaming of urban agriculture research, planning, and implementation activities and the main ways to achieve it.

Part I consists of case studies on gender in urban agriculture in various cities of Africa, Asia, and Latin America; some are refined, updated versions of the papers presented during the Women Feeding Cities workshop in 2004, others are new work. The case studies, preparation of which was guided by Joanna Wilbers and Mary Njenga, analyse urban agriculture activities in varying political, socio-economic, and cultural situations, revealing the gender dynamics that underlie people’s abilities to secure fresh, affordable, and accessible food and (often complementary) income. They serve as an entry point into considering differences between men and women in urban agriculture activities, highlighting especially the role and significance of women in this context, as well as the gender dynamics within which food production, processing, and marketing take place in urban areas.

Part II provides researchers and development practitioners with specific guidelines on how to include and incorporate gender-related aspects in each phase of urban agriculture research or development project cycles. It also includes a set of gender-sensitive tools that are referred to in the guidelines for each phase of the cycle. The tools are drawn from the experiences gained in the field by RUAF and Urban Harvest partners, but they draw also on earlier frameworks and ‘tool boxes’, which are included in the list of Resources in the final chapter of this publication for use by readers in their own projects.

The collaborative and interactive process involved in developing the guidelines and tools deserves some further explanation. Alice Hovorka took the lead in the preparation of draft guidelines and tools, with additional inputs and revisions provided by other members of the Editorial Committee. The draft drew on outputs from earlier activities of RUAF (especially two documents by Joanna Wilbers and Henk de Zeeuw) and Urban Harvest, and work by Hovorka and Lee-Smith, as well as adding new material.

The field-testing of the guidelines and tools took place between October 2007 and July 2008 in on-going urban agriculture projects around the world, and it was supported by Mary Njenga and Femke Hoekstra. Project personnel
and external consultants knowledgeable about gender issues evaluated the usefulness of the guidelines and tools in particular phases of the project cycle, depending on where the project was in the cycle. The valuable experiences gained and conclusions reached about the draft guidelines and tools were reported back to the Editorial Committee through structured-format reports that were synthesized and discussed during a workshop in the Netherlands in August 2008. We wish to acknowledge with thanks the excellent contribution made by those involved in the field-testing. They are responsible for significant improvements in the final publication.

It is hoped that the guidelines and tools will aid efforts to understand the nature and extent of women’s participation in urban agriculture activities, in order to facilitate appropriate, effective, and beneficial policy and planning interventions in urban centres. Of course, we fully recognize that this is not an exhaustive listing of guidelines or tools. It has not been possible to include all of the specialist research and development initiatives that have seriously addressed the relationship between gender and agriculture. Research on nutrition, for example, has yielded a growing literature in this field which is only partially reflected in the text and in the final chapter on Resources. Nevertheless, the book has concentrated on experiences that link gender with urban agriculture in its broad practice, and we hope that it will contribute to more gender-sensitive and responsive policies and projects on urban agriculture and food security in the future; to cities that are better and more equitably fed; and to women who are better recognized and supported in this crucial role.

Finally, we want to thank IDRC for making possible the preparation and publication of this book.

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