

Spotlight on Agriculture

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URBAN AGRICULTURE Is it a reality?

WHAT IS URBAN AGRICULTURE?

Urban agriculture is the growing of plants and the raising of animals for food and other uses, and related processing and marketing activities, within and around cities and towns (FAO, 2001).

Research in Africa and elsewhere in the world has publicized that a rapid expansion of urban agriculture and livestock numbers are growing in many cities. Urban agriculture can be both a nuisance and a benefit, serving several direct and indirect functions in the urban ecosystems, each with different priorities at household, city and national level.

WHAT IS ITS CONTRIBUTION TO PEOPLE'S LIVELIHOOD?

The importance of urban agriculture is increasingly being recognized by international organisations like UNCED (Agenda 21), UNCHS (Habitat), FAO (World Food and Agriculture Organisation), and CGIAR (International Agricultural Research Centres). Urban agriculture plays an important role as a source of food, income and creates employment especially for the poor (Waters-Bayer, 2000).

Urban agriculture can help improve food security in several ways such as: reduces the cost burden of acquiring food, puts more food within reach and reduces seasonal gaps in fresh produce (FAO, 2001).

By increasing the diversity and quality of food consumed, it can significantly improve the quality of urban diets (Ghirotti, 1999).



Chicken and pig keeping as part of Urban Agriculture.



Technology such as hydroponics are found in many cities and are very interesting for urban Environment.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL AND OPPORTUNITIES OF URBAN AGRICULTURE?

According to Waters-Bayer (2000), a key opportunity offered by urban agriculture is waste recycling that otherwise would be difficult to dispose of. Organic waste from households, streets, market places and agro-industries can provide valuable feed for animals. Solid waste has also been used for compost production that can be applied to city gardens or sold to commercial farmers outside towns. Urban waste water can also be used for irrigation for gardens.

The waste from livestock keeping can also become a valuable input to gardens. The rapid recycling of animal waste help reduce the health risks caused by livestock in towns.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS AND CHALLENGES POSED BY URBAN AGRICULTURE?

Ghirotti (1999) and Waters-Bayer (2000) identified the following problems associated with urban agriculture: the risk of transmitting diseases from animals to human such as *salmonella*, *E-coli* and Avian flue. Manure, dirty bedding materials, feed rests and the waste of animal processing, can attract flies and lead to water and air pollution.



Manure can be a source of pollution if not properly handled.

Traffic accidents may be caused by roaming animals. Neighbours often complain about noise and odours from livestock in town. Without proper guidance, the use of wastewater may lead to health and environmental problems. Excessive and inappropriate application of pesticides and fertilizers to gardens may also lead to environmental pollution.

WHAT ARE THE POLICY IMPLICATIONS?

Wherever urban agriculture is practiced, it should be recognised as a policy issue, taking into consideration its potential contribution to food security and income generation of urban households. According to Bakker *et al.* (2001), weak regulations and policies governing urban agriculture, can lead to illegal practices.

Bakker *et al.* (2001) further recommended that urban agriculture can be integrated in the following policy areas: Urban land use policy, Urban food security, Health policy, Environmental policy and Social development policy.

WHAT IS THE SITUATION IN NAMIBIA?

Namibia is not an exemption as far as urban agriculture is concerned. However, there are a number of unanswered

questions surrounding this subject. There is no clear evidence or documented information available to support that. Furthermore, there are no official policies regarding urban agriculture in Namibia either. Based on this reality, MAWF is currently carrying out a basic survey on urban livestock practices in Windhoek with the aim of analyzing its potential effects on poverty alleviation, income generation, food security and on the environment.

CONCLUSION

The reality for today is millions of people in cities have gardens and are living with livestock, either their own or that of their neighbours. This calls for the involvement of all stakeholders to plan how urban agriculture can best contribute to food security and income generation of urban families. It is hence essential to thoroughly examine this phenomenon, including both its risks and benefits, in order to create urban agriculture policies that maintain the health of the people.



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