

CDS POLICY

Lekgotla



WHAT IS URBAN AGRICULTURE?

WHAT DOES THE CURRENT POLICY ENVIRONMENT SAY?

WHO ARE THESE URBAN FARMERS?



HOW DOES URBAN AGRICULTURE HELP TO REDUCE POVERTY?

SO WHAT CAN THE AUTHORITIES DO?

URBAN AGRICULTURE AND POVERTY

Executive summary: This CDS Policy Lekgotla argues that urban agriculture plays a small yet significant role in addressing poverty. Urban agriculture could benefit from a more systematic policy approach in various spheres of government.

Within the above context of job loss, persistent poverty, food shortages and rising food prices – further exacerbated by rising fuel prices in 2008 and the production of bio-fuel – the poor are increasingly seeking remedies for food insecurity and unemployment through both an individual and a community-based response known as *urban agriculture*. Up to now, the potential role to be played by urban agriculture in addressing the needs of the poor and in helping to meet the MDG targets for Africa has neither been well understood nor have the implications for policy responses been well defined. A number of critical questions should be asked in this regard: What is urban agriculture? What is the current policy environment? Who are these urban farmers? What do urban farmers do? What role does urban agriculture play in respect of addressing poverty? What can local authorities do to support urban agriculture?

Identifying the role of urban agriculture in modern cities and urbanised areas as a livelihood and a food-security strategy has proven to be no mean task. Despite some positive results having emanated from international studies, the majority of South African studies have however clearly indicated the limitations of urban agriculture.

Methods: This CDS Policy Leghotla is based on data from the annual General Household Survey, 400 interviews with urban agriculturalists in Soweto, eThekweni (Durban), Cape Town and Mangaung (Bloemfontein) and from individual interviews with role players in each of the said metropolitan areas/municipalities.



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... the White Paper on Agriculture identified the need for further research into smallholder farming.

... estimates suggest that that there are approximately 300 000 – 500 000 households involved in urban agriculture across South Africa.

What is urban agriculture?

There are several useful definitions of urban agriculture or urban and peri-urban agriculture. In the broadest of terms, *urban agriculture* can be understood as referring to any agriculture-related activities, which include production, processing and marketing, and that occur in built-up 'intra-urban' areas and on the 'peri-urban' fringes. However, urban agriculture is not restricted to food crops, and can also include animal husbandry, aquaculture, agro-forestry and horticulture. Researchers further point out the difficulties involved in making a spatial distinction between 'urban' and 'peri-urban' areas, arguing that urban dwellers may also practise farming in the rural areas of the region in which they grew up.

What does the current policy environment say?

The concepts of *nutrition* and *food security* are commonly found not only in South African policy documents, but also in the South African Constitution. Concepts of food security and small-holder farming have since 1995 been common in both agricultural policy and social development policy. While the White Paper on Agriculture identified the need for further research into smallholder farming, the Discussion Document on Agricultural Policy encouraged home gardens and smallholder production as means of addressing food security.

Yet, policy on urban agriculture is seldom integrated into mainstream development programmes at the local, city level. Cape Town and Durban, however seem to be exceptions in this regard. It is especially in Durban that a sophisticated policy environment exists and where a deliberate attempt is made to avail public open space in some of the lower-income suburbs for urban agriculture. The justification for said approach lies in the fact that it saves the municipality the expense of maintaining open spaces, it helps to address the problem of alien plants and, at the same time, provides people with access to an income opportunity. Mangaung has an interesting partnership arrangement with the University of the Free State to help urban stock farmers to develop and access land in line with land reform programmes. Yet, in many local municipalities across South Africa there are deliberate attempts to discourage such practices or, at most, a luke-warm acceptance lacking an active support mechanism.

Who are these urban farmers?

A precise estimate of the number of urban agriculturalists in South Africa is virtually impossible. However, our estimates suggest that there are between 300 000 and 500 000 households involved in urban agriculture across South Africa (up to 2 million people are somehow linked to this activity). This means that approximately 3.5% of South African urban households are involved in some form of urban agriculture. It should also be noted that the urban areas located in regions with higher rainfall and at the coast have significantly larger numbers of urban agriculturalists



There is adequate evidence from the surveys and from the household survey that urban agriculture is utilised by the poorest section of the population as a coping mechanism to address their poverty. Also, regarding numbers, urban farmers seem to be skewed towards older household members, female-headed households and individuals with a very low skills base. There also seems to be a direct link between urban agricultural activities and either social grants or another job. Only 5% of households involved in urban agriculture are solely dependent on urban agriculture, and the majority of households also have other sources of income.

What are the agricultural activities in which urban farmers engage?

- Most are involved in crop production. Approximately 60% grow crops in their backyards, while 27% do so on communal land.
- Animal husbandry is practised by 12%
- A combination of crops and animal husbandry is practised by 1%.
- Forty percent have been involved in urban agriculture for longer than 10 years.

In this regard, 70% of all practitioners mention either another job or a social grant as a source of funding for inputs. Only about 12% indicate that the source of input originates from the profits of their agricultural activities. While urban agriculturalists who produce products in their backyards are more inclined to use such produce for their own consumption; those who produce crops on communal land are more likely to sell some of their produce.

How does urban agriculture help to address urban poverty?

There are two arguments for the role of urban agriculture in addressing poverty. First, it provides some form of livelihood for low-skilled people. In an increasingly technology oriented global economy, the ability of urban agriculture to absorb low-skilled people should not be ignored. The second point relates to direct incomes generated from urban agriculture. Figure 1 below provides an indication of the role played by urban agriculture in addressing poverty. The figure considers the role of urban agriculture in addressing poverty in terms of the Millennium Development Goals targets of lifting people out of the 1USD and 2USD targets.

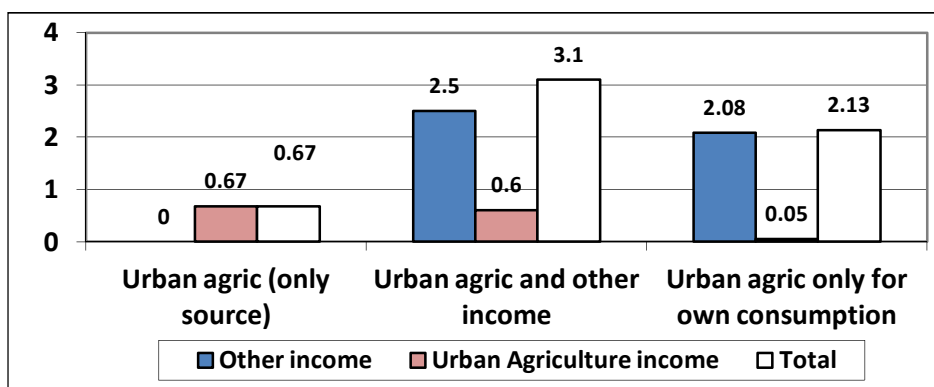


Figure 1: The role of urban agriculture in addressing poverty (in terms of USD income)

... urban agriculture is used by the poorest section of the population as a coping mechanism

... agriculturalists producing products in their backyards are more inclined to use the products for their own consumption, while those producing crops on communal land are more likely to sell some of their produce.

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Urban agriculture is one of many survival strategies which poor people use and its role should be understood in this context

Develop different support programmes for different categories of urban farmers.

The results reflected in Figure 1 suggest that the incomes of about 75 000 to 100 000 urban people have risen from no income whatsoever to 0.67 USD per person per day because of their involvement in urban agriculture. For urban agricultural households involved in urban agriculture but who also have other income, urban agriculture has helped to raise their income from 2.5 USD per person per day to 3.1 USD per person per day – thus making these households significantly less vulnerable in terms of income. Households who are involved in urban agriculture for own consumption only derive approximately one month's share of their annual food budget from their involvement in urban agriculture.

So what can the authorities do?

The authorities need to understand the policy-related aspects and then take action. The following aspects should be well understood:

- Though urban agriculture will not solve all poverty problems, systematic support could help to make some contribution in this regard.
- Urban agriculture has the potential to absorb people with low-incomes and low skills into the economy.
- Urban agriculture is one of many survival strategies that poor people use and its role in this regard should be acknowledged.
- There is a danger that too much emphasis could be placed on supply-side mechanisms (providing seed and other inputs) as opposed to helping farmers to access or open markets. However, supply-side mechanisms could play a prominent role in ensuring food security at the household level.
- Urban agriculture could play a prominent role in municipalities' open-area policies and could thus reduce maintenance of such areas.

The following recommendations are made for municipalities:

Key recommendation 1: Profile your urban agriculturalists in terms of the types of activity and also the role of urban agriculture in their income. Develop different support programmes for different categories of urban farmers.

Key recommendation 2: Find provincial and national programmes to support those who are accessing significant income through urban agriculture – for example by involving agricultural extension services or by forming partnerships with NGOs or universities.

Key recommendation 3: Integrate urban agriculture into the planning system of your municipality – for example, in your open-areas management system, and in your planning for larger erven on the urban periphery.

Key recommendation 4: Provide technical support to backyard growers, which can assist them to optimise output and to farm sustainably.

