

The fact that handicapped children are involved in urban agriculture is an innovation



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Community-Based Urban Agriculture in Two East African Capitals

Urban agriculture is commonly a solo endeavour practiced by individuals and households in search of fresh food. The benefits of urban agriculture activities are well-documented, so the search for ways to realise its valuable societal contributions is a vital issue particularly within the developing world, where urban farming is frequently the main livelihood activity and has the highest potential for impacting daily lives.

farmers are now better able to unite in order to address common problems and needs. Alice Tebyasa of the Kawempe Division of Kampala is a community leader and organiser of one of many successful collectives.

One of the ways that city farming may contribute exponentially to a developing urban centre is through the collective action of farmers. Repeatedly, groups will form when community members are faced with an overwhelming social crisis or need that is felt by a number of a neighbourhood's residents. Shared struggles give birth to teamwork and cooperation. In two capital cities of East Africa, Kampala, Uganda, and Nairobi, Kenya, evidence of the achievements of community-based urban agricultural ventures abound. This article focuses on creative farmers and their achievements, which came about through hard work and collaboration. Furthermore, it will elucidate some of the distinct differences experienced by farmers and farmers'

groups based on the legal or illegal status of urban agriculture. Illegality can often be equated with a lack of confidence in urban agricultural activities due to the greater risks involved.

This article presents several community-based agricultural endeavours in Kampala, Uganda, and Nairobi, Kenya, as encountered in mid-2006 during research on local innovation in urban agriculture by the author. Involving marginalised groups such as women, physically and mentally disabled as well as at-risk youth, these projects have revitalised impoverished areas and improved the overall health of people in many small neighbourhoods.

KAMPALA, UGANDA

Now that it has been legalised (as of 2005), urban agriculture in Kampala, Uganda, has become a valued addition to the urban livelihood mosaic, and it has been enhanced by governmental recognition and supportive urban policies. Kampala's

In 1997, Alice was elected councillor. In this role she searched for a way to involve her female neighbours in some kind of agricultural activity. She invited extension workers, poultry, fishery and agricultural experts to participate in a workshop to educate women in the community. The women then prioritised their personal needs and abilities and came up with the idea of establishing a catfish pond. This idea was chosen because the pond would provide a nutritious dietary supplement for the neighbourhood families as well as profits from the sale of surplus catfish. The Chairman of the Local Council 1 donated the land, and over a six-month period the women constructed the pond.

About 900 catfish, each with a market value of 5,000 Shillings (USD 3), are now harvested every seven months. The capital for this endeavour originated within the community and maintenance costs are shared, including upkeep, feed and eggs. If a member is unable to pay her portion she will earn less when the profits are divided.

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Alice considers the community and social improvements to be the most important aspects of the project. Forty women and two youths (boys who are paid a small wage for their help) maintain this venture. She has noticed a change in the community atmosphere. Women are better able to negotiate with their husbands and there is a heightened sense of cohesiveness. She notes that people are not leaving for “greener pastures”, but rather have made an investment and seek long-term growth and development.



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Gardening activities by students of the school for disabled in Kampala

Women have become more empowered, are able to contribute to household costs and school fees, and in general are more active and organised. One may wonder what the husbands of these women think about their activities. Alice advocates the project in discussions with the men, and she notes that some of them are “feminists and love the idea”. “Men now see their wives as resources.” Some of the families were struck most by their increased ability to pay their children’s school fees. Income generated from the fish pond has eased this financial burden, resulting in extended education for their children. The families also value the training and cooperation aspects. One further shared benefit, which is not directly linked to the fish pond but rather to the group’s overall success, is a donated water tank. Previously, the community did not have water access of this kind, and now the water can be distributed for irrigation and pond maintenance.

Other local groups and communities have tried similar projects in the wake of the successful fish pond, yet they have not achieved the same results. The secret to Alice and her community’s accomplishment is “openness”. They refuse outside funds and government grants whenever possible in order to maintain a non-politicised atmosphere. This also allows a

greater sense of ownership in which each person is a “stakeholder” and has a deeper commitment to the success of the project. The group even avoids holding meetings during elections in order to allow individuals their political preferences and to circumvent discussion on the hot topic. The group wants to come together when the only thing on their minds is mutual progress and development. Alice’s future plans include expanding her market as well as increasing the pond’s capacity in order to increase the amount of fish each family can receive per month. This is testament to the project’s greatest objective: improved nutrition. Currently, each household receives one fish per month. In addition, each household receives 50,000 Shillings (USD 30) every seven months from sales.

Other community-based urban agricultural cooperatives in Kampala can be found within area schools. Thanks to a project promoting the cultivation of orange-flesh sweet potatoes from 2004 to 2006, in which schools were utilised by FARM-AFRICA as training centres to reach local farmers, relationships were forged and ideas generated for the continuation of cooperation. In the Lubaga Division, the Kampala School for the Physically Handicapped is home to 100 youths who suffer from both mental and physical disabilities. The school maintains a productive garden that contributes to feeding the student body. The pupils range in age from 6 to 24 years and are divided into eight groups. All of the groups participate in some way in the growing of crops and the maintenance of the gardens. The youngest learn about agriculture through observation. Older students maintain class plots, and during the wet season they grow cabbages, carrots, kale, maize, amaranths, and the popular orange-flesh sweet potatoes. The harvested crops go directly into the school nutrition programme, as students reside there permanently.

Agricultural extension agent Pross Owino commented, “Just the fact that handicapped children are involved in urban agriculture, with the weeding and planting, is an innovation! Being able to grow their own food, means that some day they will be able to earn an income and feed themselves, all because of a skill they learned in school.” The community benefit of this programme must be viewed in terms of the future of these children.

In Uganda, physically and mentally handicapped people have a “very, very low chance” of finding employment in the formal sector. These disabilities severely limit their opportunities to achieve stable and secure adulthoods. Florence Tweyambe, a teacher at the school, explained that urban agriculture is an integral part of the school curriculum because it will enable the students to support and feed themselves in the future. They may eventually be able to sell the surplus, and they therefore practice selling techniques with the teachers. They will also have a greater chance of staying healthy and less likelihood of relying on begging or worse for survival. Some of the difficulties the school experiences include land restraints and insufficient labour. Some of the garden maintenance is too difficult for the children; therefore the teachers are obligated to take part. When even they are unable to perform certain necessary activities, such as tilling the soil, they hire outside help and this can become expensive. Nevertheless, the benefits do outweigh the costs.

NAIROBI, KENYA

Urban agriculture is a popular activity in many if not all urban centres of the country, but is not always allowed. In the capital city of Nairobi, community-based agricultural ventures not only provide food but also contribute to youth employment, area safety, and generally enhance the city’s productive capabilities.

For eight years, the Mathare Youth Foundation Centre has run a community-based agricultural project in the slums of Mathare. The project is comprised of 15 young men between the ages of 20 and 30, who used to be petty thieves but are now prosperous farmers and have thereby regained the respect of their neighbours. The Foundation provides a stable income for the young men through crop sales to the local villagers. This money allows them to attend evening adult education courses at the Mathare Hope Achiever Adult Education. With school fees taken care of, they have turned their lives around completely. “We used to mug people in the village. We came together to change that life, and also to support each other,” says Chairman James Karaoke, age 26.

The farm, which includes around ten goats for meat and six dairy cows, and which produces kale, spinach, and many other



Tebyasa fishpond in Uganda

local and exotic vegetables, is located on what was once a regional dump. The land is now fertile and productive, revitalising this part of Mathare and providing a fresh source of food to the community. In addition, it has eliminated the idleness (and joblessness) of some local youths, thus helping them steer away from a life of crime. Some of the problems experienced by the Foundation include struggles with the local gangs. Some of their counseling programmes had to be shut down due to gang resistance to positive change. Gangs also occasionally steal their goats and crops. Other issues arise from the illegal status of urban farming and livestock keeping in Nairobi. When the City Council threatened to confiscate the farm's cows, the group successfully appealed to the officials, telling them, "We don't want to mug people!" The Nairobi City Council then told them to keep their animals where they are not visible and the group has tried to follow this rule.

Finally, the farmers fear they might lose their land. Father Frederick from the neighbouring Catholic girl's school, St. Theresa's, gave them the initial idea and support, including the first acre of land, to get this project up and running. They have been expanding slightly, and some neighbours have grown jealous of their success, even though it has been achieved on previously wasted landfill space. They also lack some inputs such as water pumps.

CONCLUSIONS

The uncertainty faced by urban farmers in Nairobi are in sharp contrast to the confident standing of Kampala's community groups. The catfish pond and other community-based agricultural projects visited by the researcher in Kampala receive clear rewards such as land grants

provided by government authorities. Private organisations also commonly provide support to urban farmers who use sustainable practices. The Heifer International Project, for example, is active in Kampala offering not simply dairy cows to members but also training for hygienic livestock keeping in the city. The support, training and rewards successful projects receive can only occur once leading authorities recognise the benefits of, or *legitimise*, urban farming within their urban centres. Legality is the crucial element for the enhancement of community-based agricultural endeavours, allowing for specialised, progressive urban agriculture policies and strategic support mechanisms. With regard to policies, de Zeeuw *et al.* (2006) commented that "In this way, municipal policy makers and support institutions can substantially contribute to the development of safe and sustainable urban agriculture." Although some of Nairobi's urban farmers' collectives have stood up to local authorities throughout the years with various degrees of success, it is still possible that everything could be taken away from them one day. Legitimation, promptly followed by legalisation and well-formed policies, will encourage these commonly poor farmers while significantly augmenting their returns.

Introduction to many farmers' groups within Kampala and Nairobi was made possible thanks to kind, helpful extension staff provided by the local governments in both cities. In Kampala, the activities of these specialists were clearly legal while in Nairobi the existence of government-employed agriculture and livestock professionals was paradoxical. Although urban agriculture is illegal, Nairobi (unique in Kenya as a municipality, capital and province in one) has provincial represen-

tation of the Ministries of Agriculture and Livestock and Fisheries Development. Indeed, these bodies have extension agents on staff and as one employee explained, "We have to justify our activities with the farmers, so we focus on the safety of the consumer." Regardless of the reason, their activities help Nairobi's urban farmers daily by improving their technologies and practices.

Urban agriculture provides an excellent means of social inclusion for many marginalised sectors of society. In the stories above we see the empowerment of poor women, improved futures for handicapped youth, and at-risk young men who have turned from a life of crime to a life of farming. Collectives not only offer a way out of poverty but also allow farmers to build up social capital in the urban environment. Stronger examples of community-based urban agriculture will be found in locations where its contributions to the city as a whole are recognised, where it is permitted by the government and supported by active NGOs and other regional bodies. The examples described above are testament to the life-changing possibilities of community-based urban agricultural projects for women, youth and those who suffer from mental and physical disabilities. Furthermore, urban farming collectives can also provide a major contribution to families afflicted by HIV/Aids. With a healthier community comes peace and prosperity. These examples may provide inspiration for other individuals to unite, regain their sense of community and improve their lives through empowerment and self-determining cooperative action.

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