

takes a  
lot of  
time each  
day



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The incorporation of gender considerations into urban agriculture research is increasing, and indeed, there have been advances over the last decade in our understanding of both men's and women's experiences with farming in cities around the world. There is a move away from the so-called "urban farmer", an undifferentiated, masculine, normalised urban dweller who engages in agriculture. Instead, there is greater recognition that people's experiences with urban agriculture cannot be easily standardised and that gender neutrality does not necessarily capture the breadth of such experiences.

## Gender Considerations for Urban Agriculture Research

**M**any researchers have begun to emphasise differences amongst urban farmers, thus highlighting the distinct agriculture systems that form along gender, race, ethnicity, class, age, etc. lines. The recognition of context-specificity and distinct standpoints provides greater scope and richness to research. Recognising differences amongst urban agriculture practitioners avoids a single conceptualisation of the needs,

to opportunities and resources as based on local perceptions of masculinity and femininity. Gender relations reflect the continual interaction and (re-)negotiation between men and women regarding their respective roles and responsibilities.

Gender as an analytical category is meant to capture this complex set of social processes that are inextricably linked with power relations. Gender analysis involves the examination of men's and women's roles, responsibilities, and social status in relation to cultural perceptions of masculinity and femininity (CCIC 1991, Feldstein and Poats 1989, FAO 1995, Overholt, et al. 1991, Thomas-Slyter, et al. 1995, Woroniuk, et al. 1997). To this end, gender analysis allows us to disaggregate data on urban agriculture and to explore why certain processes and structures generate different opportunities and constraints for different people (Hovorka 1998).

### GENDER FRAMEWORK

The incorporation of a gender framework into urban agriculture

research involves a two-tiered process of gender-disaggregated data collection, as well as gender interpretation and analysis.

First, researchers must collect information on the different experiences, needs, interests, and access to opportunities and resources of both men and women so as to establish an accurate picture of the local context. This stage of the research aims to answer the questions who, what, when, where, and how urban agriculture systems function with regard to gender dynamics.

Second, researchers must ask why such gender dynamics occur. It is not enough to document differences; rather, researchers must probe deeper and examine the factors that create and influence differential opportunities and constraints for men and women at the local, regional and global level.

It is important to make clear the need for a two-tiered gender framework, for while urban agriculture literature contributes

### It is not enough to document the differences

interests, and experiences of persons. In this context, gender becomes a theoretical, analytical and methodological tool through which to better understand the dynamics of urban agriculture systems.

Gender is the socio-cultural construction of roles and relationships between men and women. The assigned roles and relative position of men and women in society delineate access

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to the understanding of women's roles and responsibilities regarding city farming, it does not often illuminate or question the form, significance, and impact of gender dynamics. Women farmers are often dealt with in isolation from other research components, resulting in a single sentence or paragraph documenting data on, for

## Power relations are central

example, women's relative lack of socio-economic status compared to men's. Researchers do not often go beyond the collection of gender-disaggregated data. Hence there is a tendency to overlook the underlying power relations and structures that create imbalances and inequities between men and women. It is important to remember that gender does not refer to women alone, rather it refers to the dynamics between men and women. Researchers that go beyond simply gender-disaggregated data collection to explore gender dynamics in-depth, provide some of the most comprehensive, interesting, and thought-provoking pieces in the field of urban agriculture (e.g. Freidburg 1997, Lee-Smith and Memon 1993, Maxwell 1994,

Mbiba 1995, Mianda 1996, Mudimu 1996, Rakodi 1991).

Finally, a gender framework must highlight the issue of scale to unearth the complex linkages involved in understanding gender dynamics. Not only is it essential to analyse intra-household relations, it is also important to explore larger social, economic, political, organisational, legal, and ideological structures that shape and reinforce gender differences and inequalities. Rather than considering a particular scale (e.g. micro, meso or macro) in isolation, the application of gender analysis leads to the fundamental examination of social structures and institutions that create specific power dynamics at the local level (Rathgeber 1990: 494). Research may focus, for example, on the gendered effects of urban policy, macro-economics, or cultural traditions on the organisation and functioning of local urban agriculture systems. In turn, localised gender relations can influence structures and processes at the meso and macro scale.

### EXAMPLES OF GENDER ANALYSIS IN UA LITERATURE

Some researchers in the field of urban agriculture have done well to illuminate

how gender hierarchies are constructed, legitimated, maintained, and challenged in specific contexts. Mianda (1996: 91), for example, illustrates how women in Kinshasa, Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo) utilise strategy and tactic to gain advantage over their husbands and hence control over the garden enterprise. Men were found to refuse participation in feminine tasks such as agriculture, allowing women to gain their husbands' approval to begin production on the basis of its contribution to family welfare. The resulting sexual division of labour thus establishes gardening as an entirely female activity and women rely on this categorisation to control the entire process of production from price setting and negotiation to marketing. Women were found to hide portions of profits from their husbands by storing monies in kitchen pots. Again the cultural perceptions of domesticity as women's domain dissuades men from handling cookware for fear of becoming the victims of sorcery. Women in this context thus take advantage of cultural traditions that tend to marginalise them into particular social spheres.

Such investigations of power relations are central to understanding gender dynamics of urban agriculture systems. Mbiba (1993), for example, reveals that while women have control and decision-making power regarding cultivation, the husband's consent is still required due to his potential assistance with financing or dealing with local authorities. Shehu and Hassan (1995) note that dairying activities of female household members serve to balance household power relations by providing women with their own enterprise. It is necessary to understand who in the household actually controls produce or income generated from farming activities and why this is the case. Investigating issues of control and power relations sheds light on how and why distinct urban agriculture activities are chosen by, or assigned to, particular household members.

Beyond household gender relations, some researchers explore the complex linkages embedded in urban agriculture systems at multiple scales. This again can be seen in Mianda's (1996) study, which demonstrates how cultural traditions and

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ideologies delineate masculine and feminine roles that form the basis of a power struggle in the household garden produce sector. Structural adjustment policies in particular have created different problems for women as compared to men. Friedberg (1997) explores trade liberalisations in Burkina Faso that have prompted urban gardeners to adopt more entrepreneurial strategies in order to secure access to external markets and aid. Economic reforms have failed to create a market free of gender biases, leaving women gardeners at a disadvantaged position compared to men. The above researchers make an important contribution to UA literature by advancing our understanding of gender dynamics through both gender-disaggregated data collection and gender analysis.

#### METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The two-tiered gender framework presented above allows researchers to investigate who, what, when, where and how via gender-disaggregated data, and to explore why such dynamics occur through in-depth gender interpretation and analysis. Examples from urban agriculture literature demonstrate the complex structures and processes that are revealed through a focus on gender differences amongst urban farmers. Uncovering such dynamics may seem daunting to researchers, particularly those unfamiliar with gender concepts or feminist approaches to science. Yet gender considerations in urban agriculture research can be applied in varying degrees and through a variety of methods. Indeed, researchers from all theoretical and philosophical standpoints can explore gender dynamics in urban agriculture systems, albeit from different perspectives.

The process of incorporating a gender framework into research design begins by asking key questions to unearth gender processes and structures in a particular context. Table 1 is adapted from an earlier publication (Hovorka 1998: 15) that details a gender methodology for urban agriculture research. This "Gender and Urban Agriculture Issues List" illustrates the types of questions that may be considered using a variety of methodological tools. The list is not inclusive and should not be used as a rigid tool. Researchers are encouraged to draw on

**Table 1 – Gender & Urban Agriculture Issues List: Key Questions to Consider**

#### Division of labour

- ❖ Who are the urban farmers?
- ❖ What roles do male/female adults/children play within the household?
- ❖ What is the division of labour with regard to food security (e.g. planting, weeding, water, harvesting, processing, selling, etc.)?
- ❖ How much time is spent on each UPA-related activity?

#### Economic factors

- ❖ What employment activities are male/female household members involved in?
- ❖ Are there barriers to entry for new UPA producers?  
If yes, who is excluded & why?
- ❖ What sources of income are invested in or derived from UPA?  
Who controls and/or makes decisions about these sources?
- ❖ What training do/have male/female household members receive(d) (e.g. business planning, production techniques)?

#### Resources

- ❖ What economic inputs, resources and services for UPA do men/women have access to and control over (e.g. land, equipment, tools, labour, cash/credit, skills, information, etc.)?
- ❖ What political resources or social networks do men/women have access to and control over (e.g. organisations, education, leadership, etc.)?
- ❖ How are men/women affected by shortages/surplus in a particular resource? How does this affect division of labour and time commitments to various activities?
- ❖ Who owns the land used for UPA? Who controls the land/water sources? Who has access?

#### Social Networks

- ❖ What types of social relationships exist between men/women involved in UPA?
- ❖ Who has access to information, resources, marketing channels, etc., on UPA activities and through what social networks are these achieved?
- ❖ What cooperative organisations exist? Who are the members? How are responsibilities, activities, decision-making processes, and revenues shared amongst male/female cooperative members?

#### Policy and Legal Structures

- ❖ Is there official policy or government support for UPA and does it favour any particular gender (e.g. by-laws, UPA definitions, recognition to only certain social groups)?
- ❖ Do men and women have equal status under the law? If no, how does the law discriminate and what are the repercussions for involvement in UPA activities?
- ❖ Do government authorities engage in dialogue with urban dwellers? How? Who has a voice?

those issues from the list that are relevant to and appropriate within a particular context. Moreover, researchers are encouraged to explore gender and urban agriculture issues that are not found on the list (Hovorka 1998: 14).

Simply asking key questions, such as those listed above, can be used as a springboard for the incorporation of gender issues into urban agriculture research. Certainly the breadth and depth of such inquiry will depend on the scope or focus

of research endeavours. It is a commitment to recognising that different people, in this context men and women, have unique experiences and insights that cannot be easily standardised. By disaggregating data along gender lines, researchers can begin to identify where such differences, or similarities, occur, and what implications they have on farming in cities. Further analyses should investigate why such gender relations of power exist and the impacts felt by men and women involved in urban agriculture.