

Gendered Urban Agriculture in Greater Gaborone, Botswana

Three key dimensions of urban agriculture in Greater Gaborone make it an interesting and insightful case study on gender issues: it is predominantly commercial, it is formally recognised, and an equal number of men and women participate.



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Participation in commercial urban agriculture in Greater Gaborone is gender balanced

Urban agriculture in Greater Gaborone has a predominantly commercial character whereby the bulk of produce is sold on the urban market. It did not emerge as a response to stifled economic opportunities in the city but rather through a favourable political economic environment, fuelled by government financial assistance for local businesses, as well as urbanisation trends (Hovorka, In Review a). A total of 114 commercial agricultural enterprises operate within Greater Gaborone, varying in scale and type of production. Persons involved

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with this urban economic sector operate exclusively for income-generating purposes. Past studies confirm this (Matsila, 1999; Mosha, 1999; Byerley, 1996).

The majority of urban agriculture operations in Greater Gaborone are formally recognised, often initiated by government grants, and stand thus in contrast to many African contexts where urban agriculture is an informal activity. Seventy-four percent of these operations are registered as companies, with business trade names, under the Financial Assistance Policy, or operate on "agricultural" land in urban and periurban areas. The remaining enterprises operate within the informal sector yet remain income rather than subsistence oriented.

An equal number of men and women participate in this urban economic sector with 44 percent of the enterprises being male-owned and operated, 47 percent female-owned and operated, and 9 percent male/female co-owned and operated. This is an important dimension given that in other African contexts women are relegated often to subsistence realms while men predominate in commercial forms of the activity. These three dimensions prompted an initial exploration of urban agriculture by the author, and particularly its gender dynamics, in Greater Gaborone, Botswana.

This article provides an overview of research findings and conclusions drawn from the study, as detailed in Hovorka (2003). Fieldwork for the study took place between October 2000 and September 2001 in Greater Gaborone, which includes Gaborone City, as well as the periurban villages of Tlokweng, Mogoditshane, Mmopane, Gabane and Metsemotlhabe. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with owners of 109 (out of 114) urban agricultural enterprises, 33 percent of which are located within the city proper. Access to these enterprises was facilitated by official records from the Ministry of Agriculture, Registrar of Companies, Tribal Land Boards and Department of Lands, as well as through key informants, private suppliers/distributors, veterinarians, farmers' organisations, and personal observation.

The key research question focused on the relationship between gender and productivity levels of commercial urban agriculture systems. Participants responded to questions relating to net outcomes, including gross earnings and quantity of foodstuffs, as well as a number of socio-

economic, location and environmental variables that affect their urban agricultural enterprise. Data analysis combined quantitative with qualitative methods in order to give the research both statistical and conceptual significance.

KEY FINDINGS

The research reveals that both men and women have entered into commercial agricultural production in equal numbers in Greater Gaborone and view this activity as an opportunity for economic and/or social empowerment. At the same time, however, gender segregation and inequality plague this urban economic sector and hinder its potential contribution to local economic diversification and food security.

The equal number of men and women participating in urban agriculture may be attributed to two factors. First, women's entry into commercial production in Greater Gaborone has been facilitated in part by the Financial Assistance Policy, which provides special eligibility terms for women qualifying for business grants. Between 1995 and 2000, seventeen grants were provided to women (compared to eleven for men) who might otherwise not have entered the sector. Second, and perhaps more significantly, analysis reveals that both men and women perceive of this sector as accessible and a key means to empowerment. In other words, commercial urban agriculture is not viewed as an inherently masculine or feminine realm. It is not surprising then that individual motivations for entering into production are diverse and complex but not specifically gendered (Hovorka, In Review b). Men and women equally draw on a number of economic motivations, and the entrepreneurs range from profit-motivated,

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including those who want to supplement their income, to those engaged in survival-oriented production. Men and women also equally draw on a number of socio-cultural motivations. These relate to increasing social status or perpetuating cultural norms through a sustained agrarian tradition, as well as enhancing self-empowerment or contributing to local food supply and national economic growth. Economic and/or socio-cultural motivations are influenced further through networks of family, friends, neighbours, private suppliers, and government channels. Beyond the gender-balanced entry into the sector, however, commercial urban agriculture in Greater Gaborone is clearly gendered. Men generate higher levels of gross earnings and contribute greater quantities and value of foodstuffs to the urban market than women. Gender differences in productivity levels stem from differential socio-economic status and income disparities between male and female entrepreneurs. Men feature prominently in middle- and high-income categories, while women are concentrated in the lower income brackets. Such income disparities are linked to the fact that men often have higher levels of education, hold full-time employment in addition to their agricultural enterprise, and live in a two-income household. Socio-economic gender differences have a major impact on women's access to productive resources, including capital, land, and labour, and more women than men operate enterprises informally. These discrepancies impact the spatial distribution of male- and female-owned enterprises across the urban landscape, reflecting the strong correlation between levels of capital and ability to purchase land for agricultural production. Men are located on plots of agricultural land that are more expensive, larger in size, and located throughout tribal, leasehold and freehold tenure categories. Women more often occupy tribal land that is allocated free of charge, and in some instances associated with the residential homestead.

Analysis reveals that women operate at smaller scales, with greater intensity, and within limited agricultural sub-sectors (namely broiler production) while men participate more broadly in terms of scale and type of agricultural production. Gender analysis along class lines reveals that low-income women operate highly efficient and effective broiler production systems,

drawing on their own resources (e.g. social networks, homemade equipment) to sustain production at the small scale. Their yields are consistently higher than the yields of those operating at higher income levels and larger scales. Yet their efforts are constrained by urban zoning, given that plots are relatively small (on average 4000 square metres compared with 4.8 hectares for those in the middle-income bracket), and their ability to accumulate enough capital to acquire larger plots of land is limited. Middle-income men and women operate independently and tend to be constrained by a lack of extension and support related to agricultural inputs, including training and information on commercial production and business management techniques. Middle-income women in some instances face a double burden because they lack adequate capital to support the daily operations of the enterprise, despite acquiring land and fixed assets through the Financial Assistance Policy. The few men and women operating in the high-income bracket rely on their own resources, and have significant options for larger-scale and diversified production systems.

IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Gender segregation and inequality associated with commercial urban agriculture in Greater Gaborone is detrimental not only to the livelihood strategies of individual entrepreneurs, but to the functioning of the sector itself and the nation as a whole. Both men and women view entrepreneurial urban agriculture as a means to achieving economic and social empowerment. Unfortunately, women's opportunities within the sector are generally more constrained than those of their male counterparts. At the sectoral level, this inequality has profound impacts on the type and quantity of foodstuffs produced for the urban market. Not only are women limited in their ability to contribute substantial quantities of foodstuffs to the urban market, they are also marginalised to and within particular sub-sectors. With the broiler sub-sector reaching its saturation point in Botswana, it is questionable whether the market can accept expansion of existing enterprises, let alone the emergence of new operations in the area. This suggests that the future for women producers, who predominate in broiler production, is uncertain. Finally, gender

segregation and inequality in this urban economic sector threatens to undermine government efforts to diversify the economy through local entrepreneurial efforts and to enhance local food production. The potential contribution of commercial urban agriculture to both economic diversification and food security is stifled by gendered production dynamics.

Recognising the gender-segregated nature of commercial urban agriculture sets the stage for an action-oriented agenda offering tangible tools for redressing the imbalance. The equal number of men and women in this sector can be viewed positively given that in many African nations women are often absent from commercial production. The focus should be on enhancing women's ability to participate within this urban economic sector, particularly through increased access to productive resources. For example, financial schemes should be developed that support agricultural operations with capital for operational costs, along with fixed asset investment. Many female entrepreneurs, including those who received government grants for infrastructure, expressed their frustration with the lack of liquid capital available to keep daily activities running. Also, greater access to technical and business management aspects of agricultural production could complement such financial assistance in supporting female entrepreneurs, as well as their male counterparts, who struggle with limited access. Strategic planning around practical and strategic needs of men and women, paired with an analytical understanding of gender inequality, is essential in harnessing the potential of urban agriculture as a key dimension of urban development and sustainability.

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