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SLE BRIEFING PAPER 03-2019

Rethinking required - How can urban agriculture in Cape Town still become sustainable in the future food system?

Policy Recommendations and Results of the UFISAMO project

Nicole Paganini, Razack Karriem, Zayaan Khan, Tinashe Kanosvadhira, Abongile Mfaku, Daniel Tevera & Research Farmer Group

Food and nutrition security is a huge challenge in the vulnerable neighbourhoods of Cape Town. The city's food system is as segregated as the city itself. While the privileged, mostly white population has access to all kinds of food, a significant part of city's the mostly black and coloured population has weak access and can't afford nutrition diversity and healthy food. The City of Cape Town and many NGOs have often promoted small-scale urban agriculture as a means to address food insecurity. Previous research show that urban agriculture's contribution towards food security is negligible. Empirical results from UFISAMO have shown that urban agriculture is not profitable for 90% of the farmers. However it makes a contribution in promoting diet diversity since normally unaffordable vegetables complement staple foods. City dwellers involved in farming activities contributes further to community building, for example through sharing seeds and crops. Urban agriculture plays a crucial role for growers to address their desire to actively engage in urban participation processes, being a part of the local food system and contribute with food or green spaces to their communities. This summary of three years research aims to rethink political support strategies for urban farmers in their biggest challenge to access independent markets. The status quo of the urban agriculture value chain is that most of the produce is sold outside food-insecure neighbourhoods, to affluent, mostly white markets. Urban farmers earn a small percentage of these sales, with a large part going to intermediaries. Central to the successful integration of urban agriculture into the local food system is the empowerment of the producers, especially in urban structures, which could link consumers closer to farmers – obviously through food.

Across the African continent 57% of the population will live in cities by 2050. Cape Town expects an increase of population of 11% until 2030 (UN Habitat 2014). This briefing paper summarises three years of research with small-scale horticulture farmers in the Cape Flats—located on the outskirts of Cape Town, including surveys, biographic interviews, participatory research, multi-actor workshops, and key informant interviews for a food systems study. These results are complemented by masters-theses on food security and organisational structures to examine the role of urban agriculture through different lenses. All the findings have been discussed with twenty farmers from six different townships with diverse cultural background who acted as co-researchers within this project.

Urban farmers in Cape Town grow vegetables on few squaremeters in their backyards or in one of the hundred community food gardens (100sqm-1ha). The ability to grow food in the city, even on little space, is reason to call oneself farmers, connotating the word with access to land, heritage and dignity.

Status quo: urban agriculture in Cape Town

In spite of challenges like lack of land, weak soil quality, scarce water availability and high input costs, several hundred small-scale farmers are cultivating in the Cape Flats.



Photo: Paganini, Cipriani 2018

The average urban farmer is female, between 50-60 years old, is unemployed, moved to one of the townships between 1970-89 and practices urban agriculture to generate income. Approximately 5,000 city dwellers have been trained over the years – mostly by the three NGOs, Abalimi Bezekhaya, Soil for Life and SEED – to grow food in their backyards. Most of the produce is sold through intermediaries such as Harvest of Hope, Philippi Economic Development Initiative (PEDI) or a recent start-up, called Umthunzi.

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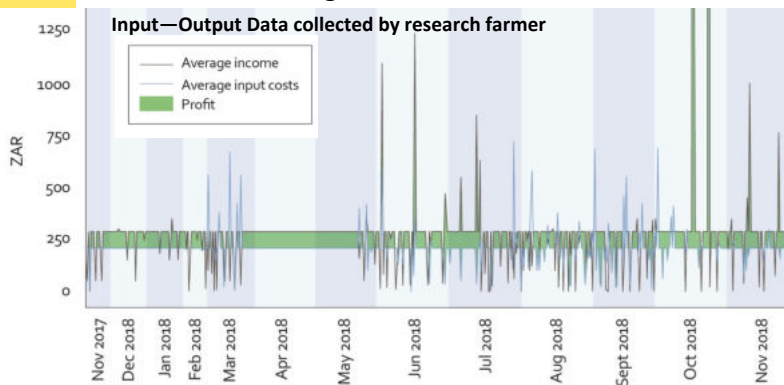
UFISAMO

Urban Agriculture for Food Security and Income Generation in South Africa and Mozambique. (2016-2019)

Financed by BLE, Federal Office for Food and Agriculture based on the decision of the German Bundestag.

Failed support strategies for Urban Agriculture

The City of Cape Town has been promoting urban agriculture activities as response to the high rates of food insecurity, i.e. up to 89% in the township Khayelitsha (Battersby, 2011) through a Urban Agriculture Policy, followed by a Food Garden Policy (City of Cape Town, 2007, 2013). Government support basically consists of subsidised access to basic infrastructure such as boreholes, shade nets and inputs (seedlings and manure). Urban agriculture as a sole livelihood strategy is economically not profitable for more than 90% of the farmers. Results show farmers spent partly more money on farming than they earn from urban agriculture.



The average income of the farmers is around R500 (35€) per month, with only few farmers, with bigger plots earning more than a thousand Rand per month (70€). This income is not enough to sustain families, since a four person household requires 3,000R (200€) per month to meet their basic needs for housing in townships, schooling, electricity, water, and staple food like samp, cooking oil, sugar and maize. 41% of the farmers depend on social grants as main income. Active farmers nevertheless consider their activities important and relevant as farming allow them to act within networks, it provides exercise and crops for the families and thus has beneficial health effects, and it creates green spots in an otherwise dusty and densely built areas.

Market access depending on middlemen

Almost 90% of the farmers aim to produce for their own community and not for the affluent City Bowl dwellers, mostly white and economically well-off persons. Farmers are, however not marketing their products directly and are dependent on middlemen and social businesses, who market their crops mostly through vegetable boxes or wholesale to restaurants, especially serving to middle class consumers out of the townships. This situation has been rather comfortable for the producers as long as it functioned smoothly. It has, however, not provided the producers with the necessary skills to plan profitable production, to define prices, to market products in

their communities and has discouraged them from establishing their own marketing channels. The main challenges identified in UFISAMO's work is a lack of capacity of urban farmers to market their own produce. This includes:

- Crop and production planning to have continuous produce in sufficient quantity
- Affordable inputs (e.g. seeds, compost, manure, land) transport, labour, packing facilities
- Access to own farmer-created markets
- Access to microfinance and support in entrepreneurial farmer-owned businesses

Traditionally NGOs have supported urban farmers with resources such as inputs and the provision of training and monitoring services with the aim to provide poverty alleviation strategies and create healthy and green environments in the townships. It is important to note that the expertise of NGOs, who have been active for decades, has incredible value for the farmers providing a range of information and knowledge on different topics, from seed saving to soil building, from sheet mulching to rainwater harvesting and has shaped the way urban horticulture is performed in Cape Town.

Vision for a sustainable urban agriculture

Most farmers (87%) apply methods from organic agriculture exclusively but very few engage in a holistic way of farming and a full set of agroecological good practices – i.e. from seed to harvest. Soil building is the main organic practices applied by 91% of the food garden farmers, followed by water-saving techniques, partly forced during the water shortages affecting Cape Town in 2017 and 2018. A crucial point for sustainable urban agriculture is a Farmer-based seed system. Up to now farmers plant what seeds and seedlings are provided by their buyers, which contradicts on the one hand good agricultural practices, e.g. crop rotation, intercropping and traditionally adapted crops and on the other hand it determines the yields. The seeds are mostly provided by commercial sources, the subsi-



dised seedlings provided by NGOs are often compromised by the time they reach the farms and farmers stated that these seedlings are often diseased. The group of farmers who have been working with UFISAMO has identified individuals who focus on seed production and some also save seeds, also realising that producing seeds or seedlings is a full-time occupation.

The urban agroecological movement in the city is still in its infancy and much of its potential has not yet materialised, particularly as it is a political concept within the Food Sovereignty movement and addresses politics (Food Justice), producers (Good Practices) and consumers (Food Security). The stigmatisation of urban grown food is high in the townships, especially as it does not fit into the standardised, big, clean look of produce found in supermarkets—hence, increasing supply to communities requires a shift in the mind-set of urban dwellers as only 9% buy vegetables from urban farms.

Farmer-owned markets

Only few products are sold locally within the community. Individual farmers have a Sunday market at a local church, others supply local restaurants or sell through personal WhatsApp groups. Local fairs or regular markets in the community could help farmers to adapt production plans to these market needs in their community, and increase local awareness for organically and locally grown food. For many township dwellers, the food environment is shaped by staple food provided, which is advertised on big publication posters, it is informal traders retailing potatoes, onions and tomatoes from commercial big farms and pre-packed, prepared food in supermarkets, hardly affordable for the urban poor. It is,

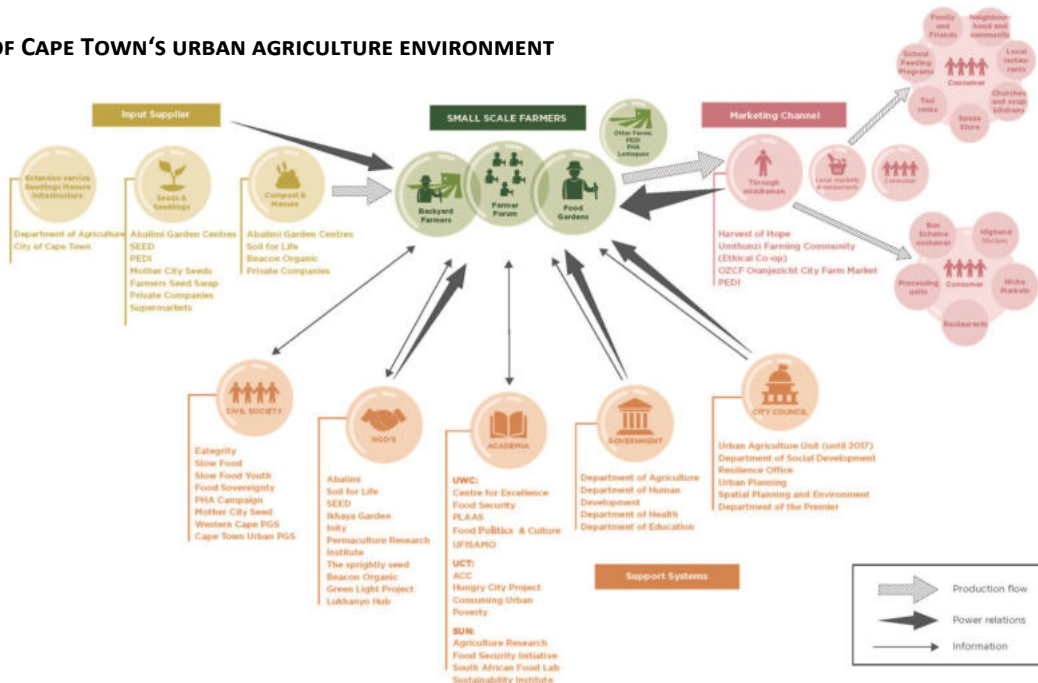
however, not a community farmer market, where producers and consumers meet. The group of research farmers has identified possible locations for such a market in Mitchells Plain Town Centre, Strandfontein, Look-Out Hill and Khayelitsha Station Square. In the last year of research, UFISAMO witnessed the start of a farmer collective, a group of individual farmers who are starting to collaborate and work jointly on a farmer-owned business. This is a promising initiative, which however faces several challenges, from learning to trust each other to simple logistics, transport facilities, access to microcredits or administration skills.

The UFISAMO research has shown, that food waste in the gardens can be up to 70% of vegetables, which are thrown away or rot in the gardens, because there is no market. One solution is to sell and distribute the food to the local dwellers, but also by processing, value adding and preserving of wasting food, which has been tested by the research farmer group with promising success for pesto, tomato sauce or fermentables.

Persisting structural inequality: support strategies

Looking on the current structures with 30 years of NGO and governmental support, there is hardly any independent urban farmer in Cape Town. Farmers are not trained to move a step further to become independent. The historical burden of the apartheid regime has excluded People of Colour in South Africa from higher education and from agricultural education. The post-apartheid system is continuing to exclude non-white small scale farmers from equal participation within the food system. So, urban agriculture in Cape Town remains a structurally unequal concept, because mostly white-managed NGOs train mostly People of Col-

ACTORS MAP OF CAPE TOWN'S URBAN AGRICULTURE ENVIRONMENT



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our what and how to produce and facilitate the sales to mostly white consumers with a “social conscience”. It is nevertheless a fact, that urban farmers need support structures for knowledge exchange and information and most of all for the expensive farming inputs. Not simply through donation or subsidised products. Government and NGOs should continue to provide information and knowledge but also seeds, compost, mulch etc. to help urban farmers to become more self-sustaining. In the long run, however, small-scale farmers should be empowered to establish their own markets, to learn required administration and pricing expertise, add value to their production, and to become self-sustaining. This needs cooperation, trust and self-confidence.

Collective action increases the economic impact of urban agriculture as it includes activities beyond pure production such as processing, packing, transporting, and marketing. A united team of farmers could also strengthen their bargaining power for higher prices from their buyers. Promising local markets have been identified within these studies such as taxi rank restaurants, church markets or teacher communities. Support should provide holistic training for small-scale farmers, from seed to markets to consumption. A training curriculum addressing also entrepreneur skills is essential.

Conclusion - How Policy could give a helping hand

The recommendations and conclusions gathered within this group are summarised for a meeting with City and other governmental officials to discuss to re-include urban agriculture into urban governance processes which provide support to meet farmer’s needs. Instead of a new urban agriculture policy, we argue for a food system policy that is strategically oriented, incorporates urban agriculture into the local value chain, and considers the future issues of social justice and climate stress in cities.

One aspect that reduces the impact of urban agriculture activities in the city is the minimal interaction between state institutions and NGOs. Therefore there is a need to look at opportunities to collaborate no matter how marginal it can be. Identified recommendations are:

- Linking urban agriculture to public institutions like school feeding programmes, clinics or churches/food kitchen. This requires a decentralisation of the existing food procurement system.

- Supporting and establishing local markets in communities. This requires infrastructure (hall, banks, cleaning facilities), security and access for dwellers.
- Simplifying farmland access by having uniform and transparent application mechanisms, develop a list of fallow land in the respective Wards including a contact person.
- Establishing a consumer conscious program in production areas to push the consumption of locally grown vegetables and to support local farmers.
- Linking nutritional education to agricultural training and provide extension workers with basic knowledge of good nutrition practices and guidelines for healthy diets. Involve civil society in the approach to consumer behavioral change. Meeting consumers needs and produce vegetables that are in demand in the communities.
- Conducting multi-stakeholder dialogues should have a clear objective and be designed to result in concrete action, since they would otherwise be seen as a ‘waste of time’. The level of participation (provincial, municipal, etc.) should correspond to the set objectives Multi-stakeholder dialogues should be conducted regularly and give the urban agricultural stakeholders concerned a platform to discuss issues that affect them.

The success of urban agriculture in contributing ambivalently to the livelihoods of urban residents and often relies on institutional decisions and processes. The increased partnership of authorities at all levels is needed to avoid replication of efforts and repeating past failures. Also at the local level, an increased partnership between authorities and other role players is important for the promotion and support of urban agriculture. Including urban agriculture into a governance program which looks at the food system as a whole could have a future in low-income communities and go a long way towards improving the livelihoods of urban farmers and city grown vegetables as source of food for the growing urban population.

Urban agriculture is an additional source of food for individuals and a complementary strategy to supply local markets, create niche markets but it is not a solution to food insecurity in Cape Town. However, it has the potential to fill gaps in the food deserts of the townships by improving access to nutritious food—if the produce of the urban farmers stays in these communities.