

Status of urban agriculture and its implication for policy changes in urban land use in Nairobi, Kenya

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Abstract:

Urban agriculture plays a significant role in national development by contributing towards food security, employment creation, poverty alleviation, and ecologising the "artificial" urban systems. However, it is associated with diverse negative impacts to people and the biophysical environment. Further, though generally illegal in Kenya, the practice continues unabated, being a survival strategy for the low income bracket. This study aimed at assessing its status with view of encouraging policy changes that would allow it, but make it people and environment friendly. This study employed a descriptive research design. Primary data were derived from field surveys using questionnaires, key informant interviews and focus group discussions. Secondary data were synthesized from text books, journals, newsletters, electronic media, district development plans as well as other related articles. To obtain the trend of urban agriculture, geographical information systems tools were used to generate maps for land use. Landsat satellite images were acquired covering Nairobi province for the year 2000 and 2009. For the sustainability concerns of agricultural practice the questionnaires were analysed using social package for social scientists software to come up with frequency distribution, percentages and measures of central tendency such as the means and mode which were used to summarize and interpret the research findings. In order to come up with the policy gaps, various Act of Parliament and policy papers were studied and analysed in the context of urban agriculture. The trend of urban agriculture in Nairobi showed it was on the decline due to competition of land by other land uses particularly urban development. The riverline area declined by 36.6% and rainfed agriculture declined by 42.1%, although there was an emergence of irrigated agriculture which occupied an area of 542.4 ha. Over 73.6% of urban dwellers engaged in urban farming. Urban agriculture remains popular due to its contribution to food security, income generation and employment creation. About 81.6% of urban farmers used farm inputs in their farms with potential negative implication on the environment and human health. The morbidity report for Kahawa health centre showed that respiratory diseases, diarrhoea, malaria and intestinal worms were most common. On policy gaps, the study found that urban agriculture though a survival strategy by a majority of the urban dwellers, is not addressed in key policy documents like Local Government Act, Physical Planning Act, Agricultural Act, Vision 2030, SRA, PRSP,ERS. Urban agriculture needs to be legalised, but modalities for its social, environmental and economic sustainability put in place through strategic extension services. Land should be made accessible by introducing secondary land ownership, encouraging use of treated recycled waste water and waste products, more investment in use of space effective technologies like stacked green houses, multi-storey gardens and roof top farming.