



# Urban Farming in Tanzania: Opportunities and Challenges

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## Key messages

- Urban farming has failed to provide tangible income and to bridge the farming cultural gap due to limited attention it gets from Urban Authorities.
  - It is not part of urban planning when it comes to land allocation.
  - Perception that non-farm activities within the urban setting have more returns in terms of revenues has marginalized attention given to urban farming.
- Urban farming has a potential good market due to mushrooming of supermarkets, but production and supplies from the sector has remained unreliable.
- Urban farming has received limited attention in the national strategies for improving agriculture productivity, food security, and green cities.

## Introduction

Throughout the history of Tanzania, agriculture has remained an important sector in the economy due to the role it plays. Its share to GDP has been high, averaging 27.2% between 2011 and 2019 (URT, 2019). The revised export performance statistics shows that the sector contributes to the tune of 17% of the export earnings (BoT, 2020). This is a decrease compared to the past when it contributed up to 50% of export earnings. The decrease in the share reflects the huge increase in the contribution from other sectors, mainly services and minerals in recent years than an absolute decline in the amount agriculture contributed to the forex earnings. Its contribution to poverty reduction is huge, as about three quarters of Tanzanians derive their livelihood in the agriculture sector.

Despite its importance to the economy, the sector is facing a number of challenges, making it difficult to make a substantive impact on the country's development agenda. The country, for instance, is estimated to have about 2.3 million hectares classified as high potential for

irrigation, out of which only 20% has well developed irrigation infrastructure (MAFS, 2015). Production is still dominated by smallholder farmers using traditional farming practises, the main production tool being hand hoes. Farming is characterized by low land and labour productivity due several factors. The Agriculture Sector Development Programme (ASDP) phase II document cites poor production techniques, poor market system, poor rural infrastructure, inadequate financing and low usage of modern inputs as some of the factors causing low production in the sector (URT, 2016).

Urban farming is part of the agriculture sector, practiced in most, if not all urban areas in the country. While there is a consensus that urban farming contributes to livelihood by improving food security and incomes (Mlozi, 2008) and empowerment through its involvement of women and youth (Kidunga and Shomari, 2017), it is mainly the rural sector that has dominated debates on agriculture. As a result, urban farming has remained unattended and hence considered a periphery activity.

This brief analyses the importance of urban agriculture within the context of the challenges it faces in Urban and Peri-Urban areas, using the case study of Mwanza and Dodoma. The study is part of Political Economy Analysis of Service Delivery at the LGA level in growing Urban and Peri-Urban areas.

## Findings

### Urban farming is meant to bridge income and cultural gaps

Key actors in urban farming range from businessmen, public servants, to the disadvantaged poor slum dwellers. Both economic and cultural factors account for existence of urban farming. Economically, the reason given for practicing urban farming is mainly livelihood, in which public civil servants and businessmen use it to compliment other income sources and the poor slum dwellers practice it for survival.

*...Urban workers and dwellers are facing high costs of living which have forced some to be involved in urban farming for self-food sufficiency by reducing the cost of buying foods. They even try to farm in open spaces but are always chased out by the council officials (FGD, Mirongo Ward, Mwanza CC)*

Culturally, most of the urban dwellers, including the current generation, still have remnants of rural culture. They tend to have preference of the types of cultural foods. Thus, it is not surprising to see societies with the tradition of eating banana having such plants within their compounds. Similarly, you see plants like cassava, potatoes, yam etc, on the compounds of families coming from villages with culture of growing those crops. This culture explains the reasons why some urban residents plant various types of crops and keep some form of livestock for cultural rather than purely economic ends.

While a well-planned urban farming equipped with necessary infrastructure would have resulted into more outputs and with intended impacts, urban farming is fragmented and has not been taken by the Local Authorities as part of their important engagement in Urban areas. Usually, land within urban areas is typically zoned out to accommodate residential areas, business centers, industrial sites, roads and railway construction, recreational activity etc. Generally, it has been perceived by urban authorities that urban agriculture contributes to problems than benefits among urban dwellers (See also Mkwela, 2013). Thus, urban plan does not take it as a priority to have proper land allocated for that purpose and to ensure other important infrastructure, including water supply.

As a result, urban farming is practiced in open spaces and marginal areas, such as along valleys where water can be easily obtained, and along the roadsides which, in the absence of road expansion, it is considered no man's land (Mwajombe & Mlozi, 2015). This practice makes farmers vulnerable as they can be vacated anytime, regardless of the stage of farming. Hence, they end up farming in a small scale, without meaningful agribusiness and agro-processing activities, which could contribute directly to poverty reduction by providing jobs for unskilled and semi-skilled workforce in the urban setting as well as by adding value to agricultural products.

Again, due to limited land allocation, urban farming is subjected to environmental risks, like hydrocarbon fumes from cars along the roads and downstream industrial chemicals etc (See also Foeken, Sofer and Mlozi 2004). This is likely to pose serious health challenges to the consumers of products from such farms.

### Limited attention at the Local Government level

One of the arguments of the local government reforms of the late 1990s and early 2000s was to enhance efficiency in service delivery. The efficiency argument is based on the fact that knowledge about needs and challenges in the local communities, and thereby the ability to act on that knowledge, is placed better at the local administrative level. Local governments can better interact with local citizens than central governments due to their geographic closeness. People's demands and needs are channelled to public officials more easily than in a centralized system (Mehrotra, 2005).

The ultimate goal is to improve service delivery at the local level. A lot of successes have been recorded in improving local service delivery. The recent Afrobarometer Survey, for instance, has indicated citizens' satisfaction with government performance in some social services, especially education and health (Afrobarometer, 2017). This is not surprising because reforms have paid more attention to social services and little or even no attention to local economic development (LED), agriculture being one of them. This came clearly from interviews with Councillors in our selected area. They pointed that Local Economic Development (LED) has not been the top agenda in all the decentralization efforts made so far in Tanzania apart from the main focus on governance and financial resources.

*In the past decentralization reforms, more emphasis was given to service delivery as compared to local economic development. Local governments weren't given higher priority in promoting and coordinating LED activities. You could see, for example, trade officers engaged more in revenue collection with little efforts made to promote business opportunities at the local level. This has been a considerable mistake in all the reforms, especially in agriculture (LG Official in Mwanza CC)*

For urban authorities, the need to secure money to pay for service delivery has, therefore, increased attention to non-agriculture sources as they are perceived to be more potential, thereby affecting urban farming. Reallocation of staff meant for agriculture to other areas has been common. An interview with officials from the Ministry of Agriculture revealed that some LGAs in Tanzania are misusing/underutilizing agricultural extension staff by engaging them in other administrative roles. In urban councils they mostly act as revenue collectors in markets, bus stations, parking lots etc., which undermine their professionalism and impairs service delivery towards urban agriculture.

#### **Urban farming has not been part of national development strategies**

In relation to the aforementioned, urban farmers, including those from peri urban and other small towns have a very good potential markets provided by mushrooming of supermarkets in many towns and cities. This is due to their proximity to these markets, which substantially reduces transport costs and goods can reach the market while very fresh. However, agriculture sector strategies have not considered urban farming as part of agriculture development and food security. Necessary investments to promote productivity and food security have explicitly focused on rural farming. The national Irrigation Act of 2013, article 34 (1) on allocation of irrigation plots clearly states that,

*“For the schemes owned by irrigators organization, the management committees of the irrigators’ organization, shall in consultation with the village general assembly, authenticate ownership of plots or allocate plots on an irrigation scheme as the case may be, to its members for such terms and conditions as it deems fit for effective development of irrigation within its area” (URT, 2014)*

The article does not say anything on allocation of irrigation schemes in urban areas. As a result, even at the policy level, discussions on water allocation have

centred around allocation of water between different sets of irrigators, and between farmers and urban water users (See also Wiggins, 2017). All these means that water use in urban areas is designated mainly for domestic or industrial purposes and not meant for agriculture. In Chamwino-Dodoma, for instance, Buigiri scheme was constructed in 1960s to serve as a source of drinking water. Now after advancing to peri urban, new and more protected water sources were identified for domestic use. This could have made Buigiri scheme a good water source for urban farming but it has not been maintained for a long time, as a result, its capacity has dropped from conserving 900,000 cubic meters to 250,000 cubic meters.

Within the same context in which national strategies on promoting agriculture tend to neglect urban farming, we also see it in recent initiatives to increase farm productivity among small-holders through National Agriculture Input Voucher Scheme (NAIVS). Under these scheme, small-holder farmers with a maximum of one acre and the identified poverty characteristics were provided with a voucher to enable them to access fertilisers and seeds at a subsidized price. Some of the characteristics included priority to female headed households, tillage of land not exceeding one acre, having no history of using modern inputs etc (See also Jahari, 2016). These characteristics could fit most urban farmers, but the scheme concentrated in rural areas, focused on paddy and maize, and not horticulture, and required an acre farm, which is not often available for farming in urban areas.

#### **Conclusions and recommendations**

This brief has analysed the challenges of urban farming. It is noted the potential of urban farming as a source of income and as a source of traditional foods in urban areas. However, this objective is hardly met due to limited attention given by urban authorities. As the result the sector remains fragmented and operating in urban periphery, mostly in open spaces and along valleys. This makes urban farming unsustainable, unfriendly to the environment and some crops become exposed to environmental hazards. It is also noted that national strategies in promoting agriculture have hardly considered urban farming, a practice that has affected investment in necessary infrastructure, turning urban farming into an unreliable activity.

**It is recommended that, first, urban farming should be integrated in the urban planning and LED efforts by urban LGAs.** This will enable farming in a well designated places that are safe for farmers and consumers.

This is likely to increase productivity, which is potential to contribute to the revenue sources of urban councils. In addition, this is likely to improve output quality and expand market access for urban horticulture farmers, in both domestic supermarkets but also to potential exporters.

Second, national agriculture policies and strategies to promote agriculture production and food security should take on-board urban farming. This will ensure proper investment in necessary infrastructure and provide urban farmers with access to necessary inputs for improved productivity, sustainability, output quality and increased contribution of urban farming to economic growth. This will not only improve food security in urban areas but also increase urban employment and contribute to the green cities agenda.

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