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POLICY BRIEF

URBAN AGRICULTURE: THE NEGLECTED GEM FOR FOOD SECURITY IN KENYA



Key Messages

- Urban agriculture is an important activity for household food security and income
- Some production practices used in urban agriculture pose serious food safety risks
- Urban farmers should be supported through training and extension advice

Urbanisation is the trend of the future

Official census data indicate that Kenya's population was only 10.9 million when the first comprehensive census was conducted in 1969 ¹. The country has witnessed a rapid population growth, recording 38 million people by 2009, and later estimated at 47 million in 2015 ^{1,2}. By 2030, nearly two-thirds of Kenyans will be living in urban areas, much earlier than the expected average for Africa ³. But this rapid urbanisation in Kenya has not been accompanied by equivalent economic growth and employment,

resulting in widespread urban poverty and food insecurity. One out of three households in urban areas experiences both head count and food poverty ⁴. These are becoming major problems in urban areas ⁵. Formal employment has not kept pace with the rapidly rising population and urbanisation, leaving urban residents to earn their livelihood from a variety of other alternative employment opportunities, including urban agriculture ⁵. This involves the growing of crops and raising of livestock within towns.

Status of urban agriculture

Urban agriculture is an activity undertaken by households of all income groups. These households mostly grow crops or keep livestock within their own plots. Others lease land for agriculture while some farmers use undeveloped public plots such as on roadsides, along railway lines, under power lines, on riverbeds, on private plots. Urban agriculture also takes place on institutional lands, including schools, hospitals, and public servants living quarters. One out of four urban dwellers engages in urban agriculture, producing a variety of crops and livestock ⁶. The most commonly produced crops are vegetables, maize, and beans (Figure 1). Most urban livestock producers keep poultry because it does not require much space and has lower investments

and quicker returns than other types of livestock. For example, urban indigenous chicken farmers generate a profit of KES 756 per bird, implying a farmer with 100 chickens can earn up to Ksh.75,600 in 5 months ⁷. The products of urban agriculture are usually consumed within the farming households. Surplus production is normally sold to generate income ⁶. Some urban farmers utilise modern, innovative, and efficient farming technologies such as the use of vertical (sack) gardens and hroponics in vegetable farming. These technologies maximise the use of limited urban agricultural land for vegetable production. The use of multi-storey chicken houses constructed using locally available cost effective materials also increase the chicken house holding capacity.

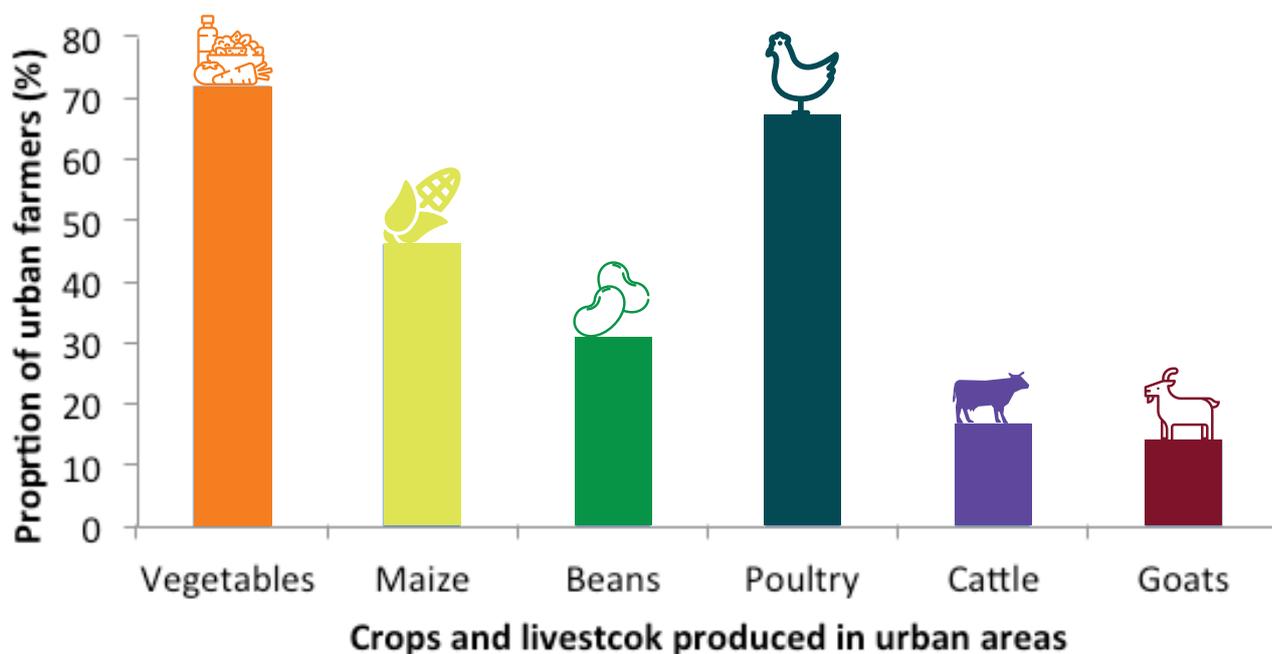


Figure 1: Different types of crops and livestock produced in the urban areas of Thika and Kisumu, 2013

Benefits and potentials of urban agriculture

1. 83% of urban farmers consider the practice important for food security and income
2. 36% of urban farmers sell some of what they produce, thereby generating income
3. 36% of household income is from sale of urban agricultural products
4. Savings in food expenditure
5. Recycling urban organic wastes

Risks of urban agriculture

1. Some relatively large urban vegetable farmers use untreated sewage water for irrigation.
2. Use of untreated sewage water for irrigation and crops contamination with heavy metals pose food safety risks
3. 78% of urban broiler farmers slaughter their poultry on-farm without inspection posing food safety risks
4. Risk of transmitting livestock diseases to humans

Policy and regulatory framework for urban agriculture

Kenya is yet to finalise a national policy on urban and peri-urban agriculture and livestock. This means that urban agriculture is unregulated. The need for a policy on urban agriculture arose from the realisation that the practice has significant potential for improving livelihoods and a lack of framework to guide practitioners¹. Devolution of agricultural development to county governments means that it is the responsibility of each county to spur agricultural development in their areas of jurisdiction. Whereas most counties are silent about urban agriculture, Nairobi City County passed

a Bill aimed at promoting and regulating urban agriculture⁸. Non-governmental organisations have been active in promoting urban agriculture in Kenya, notably Mazingira Institute and Solidarités. These organisations have been involved in urban agriculture research and facilitating forums that bring together urban farmers, public, and private institutions^{9,10}. They also provide urban farmers with inputs such as seeds and sacks for vertical gardening.



Conclusion/policy messages

Urban agriculture is an important livelihood activity among a significant share of urban dwellers. Practitioners and the practice should therefore be supported through the following channels:

1. Developing capacity of farmers on safe food production, crops and livestock management, and diseases through extension services. They should be trained on best production and management practices.
2. Creating awareness among farmers and consumers on food safety.
3. Providing support services through training on the use of and motivating them to adopt high yielding production inputs.
4. County governments investing in supporting farmers by subsidising production inputs and water harvesting technologies and supporting producers in marketing their products.
5. Setting of rules and regulations through a policy to govern urban agricultural production. If a policy governing urban agriculture is not formulated and implemented, consumers will continue to face food safety risks from consumption of vegetables and poultry meat produced in urban areas.



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