Urban agriculture: addressing practical and strategic gender needs

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This paper considers the role of urban agriculture in addressing the practical and strategic needs of African women, and assesses the gender implications of embracing urban agriculture as a development intervention strategy. Empirical evidence from Botswana and Zimbabwe points to the multi-faceted role of urban agriculture whereby some women use this activity to support their households on a daily basis, and others use it as an avenue for social and economic empowerment over the longer term. In order to benefit rather than burden women, the promotion and support of urban agriculture must take on an emancipatory agenda, which supports individual, practical and strategic goals, and ultimately challenges the structural conditions that give rise to women's involvement in the activity in the first place.

Introduction

A surge of research and international development activities during the last decade has illuminated the benefits of urban agriculture (UA) n sub-Saharan Africa (Page 2002:41; Mbiba 2001:31; Rogerson 2001:1–2). Indeed, crop production and livestock rearing in cities has been 'constructed as an area of urban life that would benefit from the support of development agencies' (Wegelin and Borgman 1995: 131). Promotion of UA revolves around its contribution to household food supply, budgetary expenditures, and nutritional intake, particularly during times of hardship (UNDP 1996:54). An accompanying thread has been the focus of such benefits for women, who often face greater constraints than do men in urban areas. As a key coping strategy, UA facilitates women's ability to combine successfully their multiple roles in subsistence production, income generation and environmental management. A growing number of organisations and programmes have major initiatives that support UA, (1) and development agencies are poised increasingly to implement projects with active involvement by stakeholders at regional, national, and local levels. Given this favourable environment, it is important that appropriate and effective gender planning and policy measures are formulated, evaluated and operationalised if UA is to provide a means of empowerment and improved quality of life for women.

This paper considers the role of urban agriculture in addressing the practical and strategic needs of women in sub-Saharan Africa, and assesses the gender implications of embracing UA as a development intervention strategy. The paper unfolds as follows. First, the issue of whether or not UA should be used as a gender planning strategy in the first place, given the

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risk of burdening women through its promotion. It is argued that, in order to ensure the benefits of UA for women, development support must take on an emancipatory agenda focused on strategic gender needs. Second, I offer my impressions of the role of UA in the lives of women in Gaborone (Botswana) and Harare (Zimbabwe). Empirical evidence points to the multi-faceted role of UA whereby some women use this activity to support their households on a daily basis, and others use it as an avenue for social and economic empowerment over the longer term. Third, based on this evidence, I suggest that gender planning in relation to UA has not only the ability to address practical gender needs, but also the potential to address more strategic needs that challenge existing structural gender inequity. I highlight a number of development interventions focused on individual empowerment and institutional change that can facilitate the role of UA in a broader, emancipatory, development agenda.

Benefit or burden?

Cautionary voices have brought attention to the fact that outright promotion of UA, as a means to development, is not necessarily simple or desirable in some contexts.

Rakodi's caveats stand out among such voices given her specific focus on women's empowerment and gender equality. She notes that 'to advocate that women spend more time gardening may impose additional burdens on an already long working day or it may be a productive use of time which they would welcome' (Rakodi 1985:57). In a later paper, Rakodi (1988:515) suggests 'before advocating more widespread cultivation in cities, not only is more detailed evidence ... required as a guide to programme design, but also the wider implications of such a policy must be assessed'. It is important to compare, for example, benefits to women from urban agriculture for women with those opportunities that may be offered by other development initiatives. Another early caveat was raised by Sanyal (1987:198) who notes that promotion of UA as an 'innovative response from below' may simply maintain the status quo that leads to the need for this survival strategy in the first place. Sanyal's critique centres on UA as contributing to the 'double exploitation of labour' by maintaining unequal and unjust capitalist social relations of production (1987:197). To this end, it relieves state policy makers and planners of the responsibility of improving people's quality of life because individuals are taking responsibility for it into their own hands. These early theoretical critiques, feminist and Marxist respectively, raise a key question: does the support and promotion of UA risk reproducing, or at least leaving intact, the circumstances of social inequality that give rise to the activity in the first place?

In this context, urban agriculture appears as a double-edged sword for women. The crises of institutional breakdown, economic mismanagement and civil conflict have led to major responses from urban dwellers by diversifying income-generating strategies through informal commerce and small-scale manufacturing. Much of this has resulted in increased labour by urban women with UA emerging as one of these strategies. In other instances, gender-segregated labour markets have steered women towards self-employment, particularly within the informal economy, and again with UA featuring prominently as a means of income generation. Freeman's (1993) study notes that this activity is a springboard by which low-income women enter trade and commerce. But the reason they go into this activity is because the gender-segregated labour force does not offer them many different opportunities, because of their social, economic, and political marginalisation. Again the question can be raised: does support for and encouragement of UA provide women with opportunities that embrace their industriousness and creativity? Or does it simply take focus away from the fact that they are marginalised within larger employment structures, saddling them with yet another task? Does the promotion of UA by planners and policy makers actually further exploit women's multiple and pivotal roles in development by capitalising on their survival and entrepreneurial strategies?

Furthermore, the reasons urban agriculture often 'works' for women is because it is marginal and 'invisible' in many circumstances. Mtanda's (1996) study points out the complex power dynamics associated with women's UA activities in Kinshasa. Women gardeners manipulate the gender division of labour to mask the income generated from their urban cultivation, (for example, by hiding money in the kitchen, a feminised space that husbands rarely enter), thus overcoming barriers they face within their household and in society. What would formal promotion of, and support for, this sector mean for the urban women engaged in it? Rakodi (1985:59) warns that formalisation may complicate one's ability to enter the sector, potentially excluding those who could benefit the most. Others note that many informal economic activities in which urban women engage, often become another venue for male control over female labour and income (Ward 1990). Drescher and Iaquinta (cited in Mougeot 2000:18) caution that policies to support UA may make production systems more intensive and commercial, which likens them to areas where men are dominant. As documented by a number of political ecologists, men can manipulate well-intentioned donor programmes in order to recapture female labour and income in circumstances where women have asserted autonomy over their economic activities (e.g. Mackenzie 1998; Schroeder 1997).

In light of the above concerns, it is important to assess the role of urban agriculture in women's lives and to assess the gender implications of formal promotion and support for this activity by the international development community. Does urban agriculture purport to be a band-aid solution, which reproduces, or at least leaves in place, the conditions that give rise to women's marginalisation and participation in the activity? Or does it offer new and concrete opportunities, both short and long term, for women's empowerment? It is certainly important to recognise that, in many instances, UA helps women deal with their inherently marginal circumstances by providing a means of nourishment and income generation. (See Hovorka 2001 for a comprehensive review of these issues.) To this end support for, and encouragement of, urban agriculture can make a significant difference in the lives of women facing impoverished conditions. Yet development interventions focused on addressing these immediate and practical needs of women alone, risk failing to address the structural conditions that give rise to women's marginalised position and their underlying need for the activity. To ensure that UA genuinely benefits women, and to decrease the risk of burdening women further, development support must take on an emancipatory agenda focused on strategic gender needs. In the context of this discussion, I turn to my impressions of UA in the lives of women in Zimbabwe and Botswana. Empirical evidence points out that a number of women engage in this activity in order to achieve social and economic empowerment. If UA can lead to positive structural change in the lives of individual women, then support for such efforts by the development community may ultimately facilitate gender equity at a larger scale.

First and second impressions (Harare and Gaborone)

My initial encounter with urban agriculture came in 1996 during field research in Zimbabwe on access by low-income women to housing in the capital, Harare. I was interested in documenting women's everyday practices and coping initiatives in the context of their impoverished residential circumstances. It soon became clear that UA was a key survival strategy for this group of urban dwellers. The women noted the benefits, and indeed the necessity of this activity, through their life histories. By illegally occupying vacant land owned by the Government of Zimbabwe or Harare City Council, or by planting small gardens around their homesteads, many low-income women depended on self-grown produce for direct consumption and/or sale. In this context, I witnessed UA meeting the immediate and short-term needs of women in Harare's high-density areas of Mbare, Highfield, and Epworth.

For Theresa (2) in Mbare District, urban agriculture allowed her to reserve precious household monies for non-food items with the Z$200 (equivalent to €0.03) per month she made from the sale of her craftwork. This income immediately went to pay for basic rent of a single room. To supplement her meagre budget, Theresa began to practise urban cultivation by establishing a small garden on an abandoned plot some distance from her residence. Theresa and her two children consumed the mainly leafy vegetables and sweet potatoes. She expressed her hope and intention of growing enough produce in subsequent years to be able to sell a portion at the local market. As part of a cooperative catering group in Highfield District, Lillian was actively involved in UA. Early on the group recognised that their marginal socio-economic circumstance was an immediate hindrance to their catering business; they often could not afford to purchase foodstuffs from grocery stores or even at the local market. They began to keep a small number of chickens and grow vegetables as a key input for the business. The group earned relatively significant profits from this strategy, which they divided among the five members, providing their main source of income. In Epworth, Julia started poultry production to reverse the deteriorating nutritional health of her small children. Getting involved with UA was a matter of survival for Julia's household. In addition to chicken meat, she made a small garden on her residential plot to supply fresh, healthy vegetables to ensure her children avoid the malnutrition that plagues many dwellers in this low-income area.

Amid the high-density, low-income districts of Harare, I witnessed women using urban agriculture to help them cope with the 'struggles of everyday life'. Whether UA was used to release household income for non-food items, keep a home-grown business afloat, or ensure healthy, well-nourished children, UA was a strategy that women drew on in impoverished circumstances. These circumstances reflect the fact that women are disadvantaged socially and economically in Southern Africa, so that they have fewer opportunities for education, are often segregated in the urban labour market and are unable to secure full-time and well-paid employment. The women in Harare defined their needs in response to the perceived necessities stemming from such marginalisation, and chose UA to assist them.

A more substantial encounter with urban agriculture occurred in 2000–2001 during field research focused specifically on this sector in Gaborone, Botswana. The opportunity to study in-depth the gender positions of UA entrepreneurs provided me with second impressions of the activity and its role in women's lives. These impressions reflect the complexity of women's experiences with UA, stemming from the diversity of circumstances they face across different income levels. Moreover, they reflect the fact that UA has a role to play beyond daily practical needs, by providing a means through which women can change their economic and social circumstances in strategic ways over the longer term.

Women in Botswana, like those in Zimbabwe, are socially and economically disadvantaged compared to men. Briefly stated, they are economically marginalised and tend to be less educated then their male counterparts, resulting in gender-segregated labour markets and an increasing feminisation of poverty. Women also lack access to productive resources and wield less power than men at all levels of society (CSO 1998:1). While in Harare I focused on low-income women; in Botswana I explored a wider range of circumstances along class lines by conducting interviews with low, medium and high-income women. The use of UA as a survival strategy emerged in the Botswana context, albeit in the minority of cases. For example, Janet spoke about the necessity for her to engage in poultry production because of her 'life of suffering'. She raises 100 chickens on her residential plot in the peri-urban village of Mogoditshane. It is her only means of income generation as her options for securing formal employment are limited, given her lack of education. For Janet, as was the case for the women in Zimbabwe, UA facilitates her access to financial resources and a reliable food source to cope with the constraints of her present situation.

However, other cases reveal the possibilities of using UA as a means of, and a tool for, achieving positive change in women's lives. Many women I interviewed spoke of their involvement in this activity as a central catalyst in improving their economic and/or social circumstances over the longer term. They used UA as a means not only of attaining resources to cope with the constraints of their situations, but also as a tool for empowerment to ultimately transform the conditions in which they make choices and take action. Joan, for example, began raising chickens for subsistence purposes in the backyard of her urban plot in the mid-1970s. As she gained competence and confidence in what she initially considered a short-term endeavour, Joan began to expand her operation into income-generation. In the early 1980s, following complaints from her neighbours and others not fond of agricultural activities in residential areas, the state authorities established several poultry plots by the Gaborone Dam, one of which was granted to Joan. Encouraged by this support from the local authorities, Joan enrolled in courses on agricultural production and management offered at the Botswana College of Agriculture, using formal education to improve her technical skills. Over the past 18 years she has run a successful poultry enterprise which has allowed her to move into, and live comfortably within, the middle-income bracket and has firmly established her social standing in Gaborone as a successful entrepreneur and agricultural producer.

In a similar case, Kay remarks that she began her urban poultry production because she was 'not too educated . . [and] started this business to stop starving'. Beyond her individual initiative, she benefited from valuable skills' training offered through the Ministry of Agriculture, as well as financial support through government assistance. Over a three-year period Kay has accumulated significant profits allowing her to achieve economic security, as well as the status of a 'successful businessperson' in her community. Of this process of empowerment, Kay notes that her relationships and interactions with people have changed: 'My husband has gained new respect for me. He now knows I can be successful as a woman. And women come to me, even those I do not know (they have heard of me through others), to ask me how I am doing, how I have achieved this business'. Kay's agricultural training has also given her confidence to forge new relationships within the poultry industry, drawing on her interactions with poultry suppliers to further improve her production. She feels empowered by her UA activity and is grateful for the confidence it has given her.

The Botswana context also reveals that even for those women entering into UA who are relatively secure financially, this activity offers them a means of personal empowerment through elevated social status, recognition and self-fulfilment, as well as an opportunity for positive change. For example, given her high economic standing as the manager of a financial institution, Gertrude did not become involved in UA for survival purposes but rather she had strategic social motivations for choosing this activity. Social standing among Batswana has been linked traditionally to the ownership of cattle and commercial agriculture, and men benefit disproportionately from such standing. Gertrude saw commercial agriculture, albeit in the urban realm, as an opportunity to establish herself as 'a true Batswana' by involving herself in the agrarian tradition as a female entrepreneur. Entering into what she perceives as a male domain has been both challenging and rewarding: 'I get satisfaction from the agriculture, peace of mind, because it is my own enterprise. Being a woman I have started something like this, raised my own children, and worked full time. It is an achievement'. Gertrude says.

Gillian is similarly of high economic standing, holding a full-time position in the formal sector, and also states a strategic social goal as a reason for establishing her UA enterprise. Gillian sees her involvement in this sector not only as a contribution to her own personal growth and skills development, but also as an opportunity to take on a key role in local food production. Indeed, Gillian claims that she began her horticulture enterprise with the explicit purpose of addressing Botswana's food insecurity, given its dependency on South African

imports. Her personal empowerment has been a positive consequence of this larger strategic goal. Finally, Rose links her personal empowerment through urban poultry production to positive changes in her children's circumstances: 'With my business I have had my kids and raised them. I have educated them in Lesotho and South Africa out of this business. I have encouraged them to study because with education they will not be idling around. They will have greater opportunities than I have had'. Like Gillian, Rose's involvement in UA has been a catalyst for potential strategic changes beyond her individual circumstances, extending new opportunities for the future generation.

These examples from Zimbabwe and Botswana illustrate the diverse and dynamic role of urban agriculture in addressing both basic human needs and strategic goals for individual women. While this activity certainly assists women in sustaining their own daily well being and that of their households (as was the case in Harare), I saw evidence in Gaborone that UA may be of more structural significance in addressing gender inequity in socio-economic terms. The motivations and experiences of Joan and Kay demonstrate a steady process of empowerment via UA that has facilitated positive economic and social change within these women's lives. The examples of Gertrude, Gillian, and Rose reflect the linkages between personal empowerment and strategic goals that take on feminist, national, and generational significance beyond the individual. These examples suggest that possibilities exist for UA, not only as a means of addressing women's immediate, practical needs, but also as a means towards longer-term, strategic change in women's circumstances and positions in society. In other words, urban agriculture can be of both practical and strategic importance for African women.

Gender planning in relation to urban agriculture

Ideally, planning in relation to urban agriculture should address gender issues in two ways. First, by helping women cope with their immediate and often marginalised circumstances, and second, by helping women achieve positive, structural change in their lives, allowing them to participate socially, economically and politically on more equitable terms with men. The latter requires not only support for individual empowerment, but also emancipation from larger institutional frameworks and social norms which produce and reproduce gender inequality. This argument builds on the meaningful and useful distinction between practical and strategic gender needs. According to Maxine Molyneux (1985), practical gender interests are those which are manifest in everyday life as a result of the asymmetrical gender division of labour, resources, and responsibilities. Women themselves formulate these needs, often as a response to an immediate perceived necessity based on human survival (Moser 1989:1803–4), as related to food security, health, household welfare, and financial security. Strategic gender needs, (or interests, as originally coined by Molyneux), are a product of underlying structural inequalities which give rise to these practical needs, and are required for women to overcome their marginalised position relative to men. We must recognise that most women need resources to cope with the constraints of their present situation, before they can take on the task of transforming it. Hence strategic gender needs take on a processual definition whereby women are meeting daily, practical gender requirements in ways that transform the conditions in which they make choices and take action. This is a crucial element of the process by which women are empowered to take on the more deeply entrenched aspects of their subordination (Kabeer 1999a:32–33).

Identification of practical and strategic gender needs is an essential element to achieving women's empowerment through gender-focused development planning. According to Kabeer (1999a:38), empowerment is about questioning the notion of selfhood that men and women

bring with them to their everyday development activities, and the extent to which it is premised on a sense of self-worth and dignity. The empowerment process seeks to bring about changes in the distribution of material and symbolic resources, and the opportunities between men and women in the development process. It also seeks to bring about changes in beliefs and values that have been assimilated in the process of acquiring a gendered sense of selfhood, where these constitute a constraint on their capacity for exercising agency in their own lives. More often than not, the aim of women's empowerment, as defined by development organisations, has been equated with increasing their access to, and control over, economic resources through credit or income-generating programmes. Control over resources may reflect a degree of women's empowerment but access alone cannot empower women. We cannot assume that if a woman earns money she will be able to keep it, decide how it is spent (Sweetman 2001:5) or even have a wide enough scope of opportunities and choices to make use of it. Women having access to income primarily ensures welfare of the family, yet can hardly address the problems of women's oppression and subordination since these are linked to unequal relations of power deeply entrenched in social, political, and ideological issues. Hence the practical worth and value of access to financial or other productive resources generally, is further enabling women to make choices and take action (Endeley 2001:39). Empowerment is ultimately about transforming unequal power relations between men and women, and hinges on a multi-faceted enabling environment that encompasses the economic, as well as social and political realms of life.

A central element of effective gender planning hinges on the potential structural transformation brought about by policy and development projects. A recent UNDP (2003:6) document on gender mainstreaming, notes that development agencies have failed to challenge existing power relations that render women subordinate to men in many parts of the world. The emphasis on more politically acceptable, integrationist approaches, which bring women and gender concerns into existing policies and programmes, has done little to 'transform the mainstream'. As Moser argues, 'it is critical to recognise that practical gender needs only become "feminist" in content if and when they are transformed into strategic gender needs' (1989:1804). In other words, it is critical to recognise that gender planning is an inherently feminist project and development interventions should be tailored ultimately for emancipatory purposes. Emancipatory strategies are politically ambitious because they are about changing the rules rather than playing by them; they seek to give women a much greater role in setting the agenda rather than assimilating them into it. Addressing strategic gender needs requires a focus on self-determination, communication, and choice. This hinges on how interventions are carried out, how evidence is gathered, how ideas are formulated, and who controls and owns the process. Achieving the transformatory significance of gender planning depends on 'the extent to which choices made have the potential for challenging and destabilizing social inequalities and the extent to which they merely express and reproduce those inequalities' (Kabeer 1999b:461). Ultimately, gender planning in relation to urban agriculture must focus on the difference this activity can make in the lives of men and women, and on the significance of this difference in terms of structural inequality of power.

As already noted, UA provides women in Harare and Gaborone with the capacity to pursue, and in many cases address, a variety of personal goals ranging from daily survival and well being to socio-economic empowerment over the longer-term. Given this evidence it is important for planners to recognise the multi-faceted potential of UA, as well as the diversity of the women involved. Planners should promote and support interventions related to similarly multi-faceted agendas suited to the local context and larger structural circumstances within which women participate in this activity. Identifying practical and strategic gender needs remains important, because it can help delineate the type and duration of assistance required of UA interventions. Significant attention should be paid to women's goals and motivations for

entering into this activity, as well as their short and/or long-term intentions for sustaining or enhancing their agricultural production.

For those women caught up in the struggle to obtain even the most basic of needs, development interventions that address practical gender needs are most appropriate. My conversations with women in Harare inevitably drew out the challenges they faced on a daily basis, in order to participate effectively in UA production for the benefit of their households. In many instances the women offered possible solutions to facilitate their efforts. In Theresa's case, for example, her efforts at sustaining an urban garden in Mbare District could be supported through a small line of credit, which would enable her to purchase small implements or even the bus fare to reach her plot. Local extension services could provide Theresa, as well as Julia in Epworth District (and Janet in peri-urban Gaborone), with insights into farming techniques, nutrition and general tips to help them maintain their subsistence production. Local authorities could provide vacant land for cultivation purposes so that women involved with this survival strategy are not producing illegally and have some security of tenure. These conversations with women in Harare culminated in my facilitating their individual access to local authorities at Harare City Council, where they continued to lobby for assistance appropriate to their circumstances. To this end, the research endeavour itself became a key step in the women's empowerment process, which they used to gather information about local authorities and available services.

For those women looking to urban agriculture as a means for longer-term social or economic empowerment, more substantial support mechanisms are required. To date, financial assistance has been the most substantial development intervention related to UA in Botswana. It has been a major source of support for Joan, Kay Gertrude, Gillian, and Rose in Gaborone, enabling them to expand their opportunities, choices and actions over time. The Government of Botswana has long recognised women's socio-economic marginalisation and has made attempts through the Financial Assistance Policy (FAP) to offer women easier access to business grants than to men. Specifically, women were required to contribute 10 per cent of the grant compared to 15 per cent for men (World Bank 1999), and women were allocated 15 per cent more money than their male counterparts (Kidd et al. 1997: 74). Programmes such as FAP can go a long way in assisting women's UA efforts, and they may be administered by various organisations, including governments, municipalities and women's groups.

Three caveats, however, are warranted. First, these women in Gaborone were in a socio-economic position enabling them to capitalise on government grants, unlike others who shared similar goals for their UA enterprise but did not have the initial investment capital to qualify under the policy. Financial assistance therefore must be extended in a way that is accessible to women across all income levels, particularly those in the lowest income brackets. Second, FAP grants were targeted specifically towards investment in fixed assets and labour. So while women were able to purchase land, erect infrastructure and hire waged labourers using government funds, they were unable in many cases to sustain or enhance production because of a lack of liquid capital. Women, even in the middle-income bracket, simply did not have money to pay for the daily operating costs of the enterprise given their relative socio-economic marginalisation within Batswana society. Here, the transformatory significance of women's access to financial resources is limited, given their inability to mount a substantial challenge to existing social inequalities. While individual choice and action are enhanced to some degree, they are ultimately constrained within larger structures which shape access to resources and capacity to create, or capitalise, on opportunities. Third, as noted earlier, empowerment cannot be solely equated with increased access to financial or other productive resources. Many women identified the importance of education, information and skills training in relation to agricultural production, marketing and business management issues. They stressed the need for this support either from extension workers or farmers' organisations, and described

the sense of self-worth and confidence gained through short courses offered by the Ministry of Agriculture or even from brief conversations with fellow producers. The women also saw the private sector as a source of support, with individual agricultural experts and retailers consistently providing them with useful insights on operational and financial management.

Addressing strategic gender needs through the promotion of, and support for, urban agriculture will require that women are equally involved in the planning, decision making and control associated with related policies and projects. It is important for planners and policy makers to recognise that such interventions must emerge from women themselves, in order to decrease the risk of burdening women with yet another (development) activity. Gender planning in relation to UA should confer choice and power on women, who are often marginalised and ignored in decision-making processes. The redistribution of power, along with recognition of women's knowledge, skills and expertise, are key policy issues that must be articulated if strategic needs are to be addressed, and if the empowerment process is to be transformatory both in the lives of individual women and in society at large. Women such as Joan, Kay, Gertrude, Gillian and Rose have benefited precisely because they themselves have chosen and shaped the course of their UA activities, drawing on existing supportive structures and services available to them. Women involved in UA, or interested in becoming involved, must be at the forefront of planning, decision making and control over interventions, so as to shape the form and function of this activity in a given context. Women are in the best position to make suggestions as to which empowering methodologies and projects can help them acquire the tools they need to expand the conditions, consequences and transformatory significance of choices available to them (Kabeer 1999b:460–461).

Facilitating women's ability to present their knowledge to other stakeholders, and to develop dialogue with local authorities and the private sector, can help achieve participation and capacity building among women in the development process. Planners and policy makers should take on the role of facilitators rather than controllers of development activities, for it is the beneficiaries of such initiatives that are often best positioned to provide insights and directions for actions. To this end, support and service delivery must be facilitated through local organisational capacity building and an effective institutional network in order to respond more effectively to those groups, including women, traditionally by-passed by development agendas. This is particularly important given the cautionary note of formalising UA in contexts where its informal form and function has increased women's access to, and benefits from, the activity. The extent to which UA gender planning can directly change larger structural conditions is yet to be determined. Can UA policy, for example, facilitate changes in legal codes and urban-planning mechanisms to assure women's access to, and ownership of, land in and around cities? Can key stakeholders involved in urban food production lobby for a reversal of women's legal status as minors, which hinders their ability to gain access to credit or landholdings without approval or the co-signature of a male family member? Can increased exposure and training for women in a variety of agricultural sub-sectors and commercial forms of the activity promote changes in agrarian-based gender roles, which often delineate women's responsibility for subsistence production?

Gender planning in relation to UA faces a double burden: not only is agriculture in cities a hard sell in many contexts, so too is the challenge to a gender-biased status quo that renders women subordinate to men. Yet given the vital role UA plays in the lives of African women, promotion of, and support for, this activity is warranted. Development interventions that focus on UA activities can help women address their self-identified practical and strategic gender needs. Beyond support for individual producers, the greatest challenge for gender planning around this activity rests with structural change in institutional frameworks and social norms that give rise to gender inequity, and participation in urban agriculture in the first

place. To this end, UA should be promoted as a key dimension in a larger feminist, emancipatory agenda that rejects the gender-biased status quo and views gender equity as an integral part of human development. Couched within a larger human-development agenda that focuses on the transformation of inequitable gender relations, UA has the potential to facilitate individual empowerment and institutional change by addressing both practical and strategic gender needs. Such transformation, and ultimately emancipation, will be achieved when women's participation in urban agriculture comes out of choice rather than need.

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Notes

1. These include Resource Centre for Urban Agriculture and Forestry, International Development Research Centre (e.g. Cities Feeding People Program Initiative, AgroPolis), FAO (e.g. Food for Cities Programme), Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (e.g. Strategic Initiative on Urban and Peri-Urban Agriculture), UNDP/Habitat (e.g. Urban Management Programme), WHO (e.g. Healthy Cities Programme), and ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability (e.g. Local Environment Initiatives Agenda 21)
2. All names have been changed to ensure anonymity.

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