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Improving Resilience of Cities Through Urban Farming: The Case of Kampala City

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Abstract

Statistics show that most of the poorest people living in Kampala City have moved there from rural areas to seek jobs and other opportunities, which are often not as available as expected. The urban poor are often faced with food insecurity, inadequate household incomes and malnutrition. Many households in the city that fail to get a source of income are turning to urban agriculture for survival in terms of nutrition and income generation. Given the role urban farming plays in addressing challenges of food and nutrition insecurity and employment, Kampala Capital Authority (KCCA) is spearheading interventions to promote urban farming in Kampala city through dissemination of skills and knowledge on kitchen gardening and organic waste recycling.

The unique feature of Kampala's urban farming systems is that they are based on organic farming principles that prohibit the use of chemicals such as fertilisers, and pesticides. Among the services KCCA provides to urban farmers practicing organic farming are farmer training, input supply and plant clinics that support plant protection through identification of pest and diseases and recommendation on control methods that comply with organic farming principles.

Use of organic waste for urban agriculture is viewed by KCCA as sustainable management of waste because of its contribution to the resilience of the city through reduction of GhG emissions generated by the transport of food from outside the city, preserving and restoring soil organic structure and water holding capacity making urban farming more draught resistant. The major source of organic waste for making organic fertiliser is KCCA managed markets and city households but the safety and efficacy of this fertiliser for urban farming are still unknown thus calling for a number of major research and innovation issues. Research findings on these issues can readily inform investment decisions on waste management and food security systems in the city.

Keywords: Kampala, organic farming.

Introduction

For a period of over twenty years Uganda's capital city, Kampala has faced a number of challenges which include; A fast population growth which is now estimated at 3 million in the day time, a poorly maintained road network, poor garbage disposal, stray livestock, mismanagement of city markets, chronic traffic jams and unplanned developments. To address the above, the Parliament of Uganda passed the Kampala Capital City Authority Act 2010, which brought into being the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA). By virtue of this instrument the affairs of the City were brought under direct supervision of the Central Government with an Executive Director as an accounting officer.

The new management has made major inroads to transform Kampala into a vibrant, attractive and sustainable city. Urban farming is one of the targeted sectors in the transformation process. In the past, it has been a silent part of Kampala's economy and has not received much attention because it has been perceived as a nuisance, a risk to public health and its economic benefits were not appreciated. These negative views on Urban agriculture are slowly fading away and in recognition of its importance a number of programs have been lined up to guide development of Urban farming from its current state of an unplanned side activity to a well-organized production system which can contribute to economic development of the city and create employment opportunities among the vulnerable communities.

Why promote urban agriculture in Kampala?

Perhaps surprisingly, farming in Kampala is a relatively large endeavour. According to the most recent livestock census (MAAF, 2009), 21.8% of households in Kampala rear one type of livestock or poultry. It has also been documented (FAO, 2012) that up to 200,000 of the city's household cultivate at least one edible crop. Urban farming has numerous benefits which include; food and nutrition security of city residents, creation of employment among the youth and other vulnerable groups and recycling of urban waste among others. Urban farmers are however faced with multiple problems these include low productivity on their production units, low quality inputs e.g. seeds, low market prices for their produce, theft and hostilities from their non-farming neighbours because of the odour and waste generated from their units. Given the numerous benefits of this production system KCCA is rolling out a series of programs with the aim of transforming urban farming into a profitable, sustainable and environmentally friendly venture. For purposes guiding those involved in the production system, 5 Urban farming ordinances were enacted all of which seek to support urban agriculture as an important economic activity, whilst regulating against any potential adverse effects.

Ongoing initiatives

Provision of technical advisory services

KCCA has production officers trained in various disciplines and are stationed at all the five administrative Divisions. These include Animal production, Agriculture and Agribusiness,

Fisheries, Cooperative and Trade Development officers. The team provides technical backstopping and advice to farmers when needed. This is done through on farm visits, farmer training meetings and outreach seminars.

Establishment and management of demonstration sites

For purposes of supporting this viable industry through supply of inputs, field demonstrations and farmer training, KCCA has embarked on establishment of an Agricultural Resource Centre. The facility is set on 31 acres of land and is currently providing farmers with the following services (i) Demonstration of urban farming technologies; (ii) provision of hands-on training for farmers (iii) Production of high quality seed for farmers (vegetable seedlings, piglets, chicks and fish fingerlings); (iv) Provision of Artificial Insemination services for pig farmers and (v) a Plant disease diagnostics clinic.

This centre has made significant achievements over the 3 years of its operation; 450 trainers have been trained in organic vegetable production and these have in turn trained 6750 farmers within the city all of whom have taken up techniques of farming in small spaces. A total of 7448 visitors have been received at the facility on farm tours and the following high quality inputs have been produced and distributed to farmers; 129,000 vegetable seedlings, 954 piglets and 18,365 brooded Kuroiler chicks

Procurement and distribution of technologies

Each year KCCA receives a grant from the Central Government to support at least 1188 new farmers with startup inputs. The participating farmers are selected through a competitive process through groups known as farmer forums. There are 88 active farmer forum groups spread throughout the city. Successful farmers are only supplied inputs after meeting certain requirements. To date a total of 4707 farmers and small processors have been supported to set up mushroom , poultry and piggery production units and some have been supported to establish value addition facilities for production of a wide range of products for example, groundnut paste and solar drying of mushrooms.

What has been the impact?

Households that have adopted urban farming techniques have registered an increase in their household incomes and a reduction on overall expenditure on some food items that can be grown locally. At least 65% of the 4707 farmers that received start-up inputs are still in production and most of them have expanded the sizes of their enterprises. More than 70 % of 6750 farmers that were trained in techniques of food production in small spaces are still in production. These farmers have now organized themselves into 5 production cooperatives through which excess produce from their backyard gardens is marketed.

What have been the challenges?

A number of factors have affected the rate of advancement of urban farming in Kampala key amongst them is the reducing land size to urban development, no official statistics are readily available but many households practicing urban farming are operating from smaller working spaces than was the case a few years ago. Other important challenges include the following (i) Reluctance of youth to participate in the activity (ii) Farmers with excess production at times fail to get consistent markets and (iv) The most vulnerable cannot easily access workspaces

Discussion and Conclusion

Success has been registered in all the initiatives set up by KCCA to promote urban farming. It is also clear that most farmers that engage in poultry, mushroom and to some extent vegetable backyard production are able to produce well above their domestic requirements. These farmers are able to generate reasonable revenue from sales of the surplus. For example farmers rearing Kuroiler chicken on a low input system (mainly market and chicken waste) are able to make a net profit of US \$ 4 per bird reared over a period of 2 months. Similarly well managed small mushroom units are able to generate profits of above US\$ 200 per month. These findings suggest that there is great potential for the current existing small production units to be linked up into a major economic operation. In line with this KCCA plans to roll out a program that aims at improving performance of urban farming units in the country and to improve access to work spaces for youth and women. The key objectives of the program are 3 fold; (i) Create at least 10,000 jobs over a three year period, (ii) Increase productivity of existing farming units in the horticultural value chain by 50% (iii) Link all production units in the city to a traceability system, enforce standard production procedures to guarantee food safety and also to qualify for organic certification and (iv) establish a bulking centre for produce to ensure good market prices.

The above plans are based on the assumption that youth will be willing to engage in Agriculture once they are assured of a ready market and stable prices. It is also assumed that buyers will be appreciating the tractability systems in place and pay a premium price.

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