

Land reform, housing and urban agriculture: **A gendered approach to realising the right to food**

In many parts of South Africa, women make up the majority of urban farmers operating in their own backyards or driving food security in their communities as part of larger groups that sell or donate their surplus produce. The country's land reform policies require an explicitly gender-sensitive approach to support them, write *Ashley Fischhoff, Adv. Gary Pienaar and Dr Yul Derek Davids*.

The history of land in South Africa is one of conquest, dispossession and structural oppression, geared at the marginalisation of the African majority. Despite the introduction of the land reform programme in the early 1990's, the legacy of institutional subjugation continues to dictate individuals' positionality and socio-economic status.

Land reform operates at the nexus between restorative justice, and the enhancement of human security and dignity, including the realisation of the socio-economic right to food.

“URBAN AGRICULTURE CAN ENHANCE FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITIONAL STATUS, WHILE ALSO INCREASING INCOMES.”

As South African socio-economic development strategies increasingly envisage the promotion of urban agriculture as a sustainable livelihood strategy, we consider the potential effects of this strategy for urban women.

Legal and policy framework

In its 2007 Urban Agricultural Policy, the City of Cape Town defined urban agriculture as, 'the production, processing, marketing and distribution of crops, animals and products in an urban environment using resources available in that urban area for the benefit largely of residents from that area'. A South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) research brief *'The Right to Access to Nutritious Food in SA 2016-2017'* recognises that the realisation of the right to food is complex and 'dependent on the realisation of associated rights such as water, land and social security, and is an enabling right

for other additional rights such as the right to health, education and affects people's potential or capabilities'.

A livelihood strategy

According to the HSRC's 2014 South African National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (SANHANES-1), approximately 26% of all South Africans are food-vulnerable, amounting to 14 million, mainly black people living in rural formal households or urban informal households. Access to food is closely linked to poverty and unemployment, and those lacking access to a disposable income, employment or social grants are more likely to be food-insecure. While healthier and nutritious foods become increasingly more expensive and inaccessible, household agriculture has also decreased across South Africa. SANHANES-1 therefore recommended that government review its food systems, including through encouraging household agriculture.

Nancy Maqungo (71) has been working at the Moya We Khaya community garden in Khayelitsha in the Western Cape since 2014. "I love it. It is therapeutic in many ways. I plant vegetables that I would never have afforded to buy in the shops. I have also learned a lot, so that I am now googling recipes to cook with vegetables and herbs that I did not use before."



Protection against market shocks

Urban agriculture can enhance food security and nutritional status, while also increasing incomes and contributing to an overall improvement and diversification of livelihoods for urban residents. It can also increase protection against external market shocks, as well as opportunities for individual and communal social and economic mobility. Urban agriculture also has socio-political benefits, enhancing social cohesion through “community development”. The City of Cape Town is one of a few municipalities that recognises the benefits and challenges unique to urban woman farmers through an urban agriculture policy that supports woman farmers on the Cape Flats by donating infrastructure, inputs and equipment.

However, there is currently a scarcity of empirical evidence to support the possible benefits of urban agriculture in South Africa. There has also been little meaningful engagement with the role of gender in land reform food security policies, particularly as a means to address the social and structural disempowerment of women.

Need for a gender-sensitive policy

South African land reform hearings highlighted associations between land and notions of citizenship, identity, customs, power, wealth and self-sustainability. For the promotion and development of a gender equitable society, access to land rights needs to be extended to women. In a patriarchal South African society, where women bear the bulk of the burden of caring for and supporting other vulnerable groups, strategic intervention is required to disrupt power imbalances, including by prioritising women's access to opportunities for socio-economic advancement.

Current land reform policy often employs gender-neutral language, specifically within first-tier policy commitments. The use of gender-neutral language fails to take account of women's particular need for land, as it overlooks the many systemic obstacles experienced by women. These include cultural challenges, the existing disparate division of labour and remuneration, the absence of women's voices in decision-making processes, and women's consequent inability to acquire wealth and power within a patriarchal society.

Existing efforts

Since the early 1990's, the government has shown a commitment to the promotion of women's rights with regards to land. However, implementation at grassroots level is rarely observed. The approach to gendered land reform policy has been critiqued as an “add-on” approach. We need radical policy reform to move away from perceiving women as merely vulnerable beneficiaries, to viewing them as key stakeholders whose vulnerable status needs to be prioritised in the land reform programme.

Transformative Governance Index (TGI): Housing Indicators

In 2016, the HSRC initiated a project to create a Transformative Governance Index (TGI). The TGI project encourages a multi-stakeholder process to identify and assemble a body of evidence in support of the development of a multi-year index that can help spur social accountability and responsiveness. One of the key objectives of the project is to enable stakeholders to track efforts through a set of indicators to address the overarching challenges of poverty, inequality and exclusion in our country.

Included are housing indicators as a means through which to accelerate access to the right to adequate

housing. Certain housing indicators are specifically relevant when considering the option of urban agriculture as a livelihood strategy for the empowerment of women.

The ‘*Percentage of houses and basic services allocated to women-headed, child-headed, indigent and persons with disabilities households*’ is one of these indicators. In discussing determinants of food security, socio-economic factors have dominated popular discourse. As indicated in the SAHRC study, the practise of urban agriculture is also reliant on the provision of basic services. Therefore, empirical knowledge of the number of houses and the extent of basic services allocated to women is necessary to determine the viability of urban agriculture for these women-headed households. For this reason, it is essential that TGI indicators use gender-sensitive language. It is envisaged that additional indicators will monitor the extent to which housing developments are designed and constructed to optimise the opportunities for and impact of household urban agriculture on the right to sustainable nutritious food.

As South African socio-economic development strategies continue to explore the trajectory of the promotion of urban agriculture, this cluster of indicators can help contextualise and monitor the extent of urban agriculture development and reform, particularly with regard to the extent of support required for and provided to women in urban agricultural projects.

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