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RESEARCH



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THE STATUS OF CROP FARMING IN UYO URBAN, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study was conducted to analyse the practice of urban crop farming in Uyo metropolis of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria; as a first step towards seeking ways to enhance its contributions to the attainment of food security in the country. Seventy urban crop farmers were positively sample for investigation, and result presented with descriptive statistics. It is revealed that the present subsistence level of this potentially importance farming sector cannot enhance food security in the study area. It is recommended that the practice of urban crop farming be institutionalized in the study area and the entire Nigeria nation. This would however involve a psychological re-orientation among the populace and relevant governmental authorities, as to the recognition of the importance derivable from this importance practice.

Key word: Urban crop farming, Food Security attainment.

Introduction

Urban agriculture involves the cultivation of crops and raising of livestock (including aquaculture) within the boundaries or immediate periphery of a city (Chaplowe, 1997). Urban crop farming derives from urban agriculture, and may be describe as the cultivation of crops using intensive production methods, on any available space, to meet the daily demands of cultivators and consumers within a specified city.

The concept of urban crop farming (UCF) has assumed considerable importance of recent, mainly due to efforts to overcome the stressed of structural adjustment and collapse of the formal economy The importance of UCH also derives from the numerous benefit derivable from its practice. Apart from economic benefit like job provision, income generation, and substitution of purchase and

realignment of spending: from food, to health care, education, and housing; UCF also provides nutritional benefits like: greater variety and quality of food items.

In aspect of environmental harmony, UCF reduces the cost of waste management and provide a better living environment by improving a city appearance and micro-climate (UNDP, 1996; Rabinovitch and Schemetzer, 1997; CTA, 1999).

UCF is practice in many metropolitan areas and utilises large tracks of public and quasi-public land, and any small open space that is idle, even on road sides. It may also take place in and around buildings, including waist dumps and on plots awaiting development. Stream sides and flood plains within cities also provide spaces for UCF. Crops grown are mostly arable, short seasons and fast maturing.

From all indications, produce from urban farmers have a very strong potential capacity to enhance food security in metropolitan areas. The issue of food security is of serious concern in developing countries essentially because of the wide discrepancy between, the about 2.5 percent annual agricultural growth rate and the rapid, 8 percent, yearly urban growth rate (Spore, 1999). It is a known fact that food item prices in the city increase in geometric proportion to population increase. Mougeot (1994) reports that in 1990, the typical household in third world countries spent between 50—80 percent of its average income on food stuffs. The proportion is obviously higher now. Urban crop farming is practised in most metropolitan areas of Nigeria and especially Akwa Ibom State. However, the productive capacity of these farms are very far from the optimum. Examples abound of countries like China, Italy, Cuba and especially, the Netherlands; where the city population is virtually dependent on produce from urban farms.

Our urban farms must be made to play desired roles in urban food security. A first step towards an actualization of this desire is to analyse the practice of UCF in its entirety, as a first step towards identifying areas of deficiency that may need to be overhauled in order to articulate policies for its sustenance.

This study analysed the practice of urban crop farming in Uyo metropolis of Akwa Ibom State. Specifically, the study attempted to identify the socio-economic characteristics of urban based crop farmers; determine the salient characteristics of UCF as practised in the study area and delineate the roles of gender and generation, in this potentially very important urban activity.

Study Area and Methodology

The study area is Uyo Metropolis, the capital city of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria's 21st State. The study area extends from the circus in the city center, to a one kilometer radius covering all the minor streets linking the major roads. The city population is most dense around the study area and consists of an amalgam of people from different States and tribes. Major occupations within the study area include; trading, civil service work, artisanship, private businesses and farming. About 70 respondents were purposively sampled. Data was generated through interviews and structured questionnaires. Descriptive statistics was thereafter utilized to analyse collected data.

Results and Discussion

Socio-economic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 reveals that 55.7 percent of the respondents are not indigenes of the study area, while 70 percent are females, indicating the dominance of women in urban crop farming. It was also recorded that all the farmers were between the age range of 21-60years (Table 1.3), while 35.7 percent of the respondents had not acquired any form of formal education (Table 1.4). as per marital status (Table 1.5) more than 68 percent respondents were married, while more than 70 percent had children who could render assistance in crop farming activities. Table 1.7 reveals that more than 50 percent respondents were civil servants, indicating that the practice of urban farming helped to augment meagre wages accruing from paid employment. This finding was confirmed by the revelation (Table 1.8) that 50 percent of the

respondents do not sell, but rather consume crop products from their farms. The subsistence nature of urban crop farming activity is confirmed by the information (table 1.9) that about 83 percent respondents utilized personal money as source of capital for their farming activities.

3.2 Characteristics of Urban Crop Farming

The practice of urban crop farming has some salient characteristics as exhibited on Table 2. The table reveals that all the farms were less than 0.8ha. in size. The dominant form of labour utilized was supplied by individual farm owners (Table 2.2) while the children and wards also rendered some form of assistance. Most (62.9%) of the farm holdings were small scale in nature, while 31.4 percent of the respondents practised UCF on a part-time basis (Table 2.3). The most dominant form of space utilized for UCF activities (Table 2.4) were surplus or reserve public/community space, belonging to government parastatals (including Universities). This may be attributed to the unhindered and cost-free access to such properties by the farmers, who are either employees or relatives of employees of such parastatals or institutions. This assertion is confirmed by Table 2, which shows that 40 percent of the farmers were utilizing their farm plots under rent free-informal agreement or permit. It was also realized that 60 percent farmers had unfettered, all year round, control over their farm plots.

A related finding on respondents' farming operations revealed the dominant crops cultivated and which were mixed in varying proportions to be: fluted pumpkin, water leaf, maize, cassava, pepper, cocoyarn, okra, yam, tomatoes and *Amaranthus* spp (green). Hoes and cutlasses were mostly utilized to work the farm plots. A surprisingly high percentage (72.9) of respondents however utilized chemical fertilizer on the plots (Table 2.8) while farm records were hardly kept (Table 2.7).

ROLE OF GENDER AND GENERATION IN URBAN CROP FARMING

Table 3 depicts the role of gender in UCF and reveals that the female sex was highly involved in 6 of the 7 role activities, it was deduced that women mostly initiated the idea of embarking on an urban crop farming venture, either because of excess spare time at their disposal or the realization that the venture would help augment the ever dwindling stock of family food reserves.

The female folk also took very active parts in crop cultivation; advising on types of crop to plant (especially in households where the male also cultivated crops); harvesting of crops; sale of produce and storage of surplus produce. The male household heads were actively involved in choice of location on which to crop (probably because they had more access to land, situated in the vicinity of their offices or had the means to lease or rent farm plots). The results above confirmed that female folk in the study area take more active part in crop farming than their male counterparts.

Table 4 showed that adults took more active parts in all of the seven operations involved in running the farming ventures, mainly because they are the sole decision makers in any household. Children also joined with the adults to play active roles in harvesting and sale of produce: mainly because they are required to participate in these activities, as part of their household chores. The grandparents also played relatively important roles in initiation of idea and also advised their children whenever they encountered problems in the course of their farming venture.

CONCLUSION

Urban crop farming in Uyo metropolis is undertaken by mainly uneducated married, middle-aged females; on a part-time basis, mostly on surplus or reserved public or community spaces; on farm plots, that are less than 0.8 hectare in size. Minimal expenses were incurred in procuring these farmlands and the farmers had unrestricted all year round access to their plots. Vegetable crops were mainly

produced, and for household consumption. Male household heads participated in choice of location for cultivation: the children helped in harvesting and sale of produce; while the grand parents played advisory roles.

Urban crop farming is a cheap and cost-effective enterprise with a lot of inherent benefits. It is however obvious that this activity, as practiced in its present state, cannot contribute much to the attainment of food security and other benefits in Uyo metropolis. This situation has to be redressed. The government and its agencies, responsible for urban planning and agricultural development must contribute to ensure the vibrancy of this neglected agricultural sub-sector.

It is apparent that a psychological re-orientation is necessary in order to accept UCF as an important agro sub-sector. Thus efforts should be focused towards, the identification of green belts and public spaces for UCF.

The extension service will also have to re-orientate its field agents, to the peculiar nature of UCF, especially as it relates to uneducated female farmers.

Credit facilities should also be made available to these farmers, and they should be encouraged to form themselves into cooperative groups, so as to enjoy the economies of large scale production.

By the time urban crop farming is institutionalized in the State, it will become a thriving sector that will provide succour to jobless and hungry urban indigenes of the state.

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