

Perceptions and attitudes of participants toward urban gardening. A case study of nutrition gardens in Mucheke town, Masvingo

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Abstract

The main objective of the study was to determine participants' attitude and perceptions towards urban gardening. Characterising the participants and determining the challenges and benefits obtained from urban gardening were also objectives of the study. Data was collected through questionnaire, focus group discussion and observations from the field. The study made use of a sample of 40 participants. Statistical tools such as descriptive statistics were employed and data was analysed through SPSS. The study revealed that urban gardening is an important programme to the community and that it is a better way of generating income. Most of the participants indicated that they can continue gardening without any form of assistance from donors. Benefits from urban gardening include, additional income from sales of vegetables, vegetables for family consumption, and time to socialize. Participants mentioned theft, dilapidating canals, one water point, and limited access to some of the vegetable markets as challenges that they face. The nutrition gardening programme targeted mainly the widowed, orphans, elderly and the sick. The study recommended that the city council should open more areas for urban gardening as this has proved to be a source of food and income so that those that are unemployed and the poor can engage in gardening. This will reduce urban poverty and create employment.

Key Words: Urban Agriculture, Perceptions, Attitude, Nutrition gardens.

1. Introduction

Urban agriculture is increasingly gaining popularity in developing countries and Zimbabwe is not an exception. According to IDRC 1994 urban agriculture is the practice of food production within a city or town. It includes cultivation of crops, vegetables, herbs, fruits, flowers, forestry, fuel wood livestock aquaculture and bee keeping. It is also viewed as sustainable agriculture, this because it contributes to development by improving health, food security, management of urban environment and integrating the urban poor (FAO 2008). Urban agriculture also yields fresh food (Armstrong 2000)

Official urban community gardens are slowly emerging in towns and cities of Zimbabwe. Before town administrators did not recognise urban agriculture, this was evidenced by the slashing of maize crops in various towns by city council authorities (Herald 2009). Some of the community gardens that have emerged are nutrition gardens in Masvingo town. These urban community gardens have been constructed on open spaces and utilize the land that lay idle. Community gardens of this sort contribute significantly to meeting the needs of the urban dwellers through absorption of the city waste, employment creation and stabilizing urban temperatures.

The people that can immensely benefit from these gardens and urban agriculture in general are the urban poor. They can supplement their nutritional value intake through growing crops and using their own labour and land that is freely available (Bowyer-Bower and Tengbeh 1997). The urban poor receive very low, erratic and unreliable income (Smith 1998, Mitlin 2005) and most are unemployed. The high unemployment in urban areas has pushed most people to seek employment in the informal sector and the most common one is urban agriculture. Urban agriculture improves urban dwellers' livelihoods by augmenting meagre salaries or incomes and boosting their nutritive levels (Tshuma and Mashoko 2010).

Researches done in Zimbabwe, looked mainly at the impact of urban agriculture on food security, income and poverty (Tshuma and Mashoko 2010, Kutiwa et al 2011, Smith et al. 1995) and not on attitude and perceptions of the urban cultivators towards urban farming. This study will therefore look at the attitudes and perceptions of urban farmers towards nutrition urban community gardens in Masvingo town.

2. Problem statement

Poverty incidence in Masvingo was pegged at 76% in 2003. Masvingo urban still has a very high poverty incidence level for an urban area, which is a sign that not all who are in the town are making a decent living (Parliament 2011). In incidence of high poverty and unemployment in the urban areas, urban dwellers opt for urban agriculture as an alternative way of earning a living. Urban farming has become one of the most important informal sector practices for city dwellers. Despite all its advantages, urban nutrition gardens have been abandoned in most areas of Masvingo town. According to Smith et al 2001 Urban agriculture is an economically viable entity but can be constrained by a number of obstacles and negative attitudes are one of them. Understanding the attitudes and perceptions of the nutrition garden participants is therefore vital because the

urban nutrition gardens cannot be sustainable if participants have a negative attitude toward the project. This study will therefore look at the attitude and perceptions of urban nutrition garden participants toward urban gardening.

3. Purpose of the study

The main purpose of the study is to determine attitude and perception of participants of nutrition garden towards urban gardening. It also looks at the challenges and benefits of participating in nutrition gardens

4. Methodology

A survey was carried in nutrition gardens in Mucheke F, Mucheke Stadium and Runyararo Clinic of Masvingo town. The study made use of a questionnaire as survey instruments. The questionnaire was pre tested in nutrition gardens of Rujeko as a pilot study. The questionnaire was design to collect information demographic characteristics of participants, benefits and reasons for participating and attitudes and perceptions of participants toward the nutrition garden project. The study also made use of focus group discussions and observations from field. A likert scale with score ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree was used to examine the attitude towards Urban Agriculture. A random sample of 40 participants was selected. The study made use of both qualitative and quantitative methods of data analysis. Data was analyses using SPSS.

5. Results and discussion

Demographic characteristics of respondents

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents

Demographic variable	Number of respondents	Percentage
Sex Male	4	10%
Female	36	90%
Age (Yrs) 16-25	0	0%
26-35	5	12.5 %
36-45	12	30%
46-50	15	37.5 %
56-60	8	20%
Marital status Married	15	37.5 %
Widowed	19	47.5 %
Single	1	2.5 %
Divorced	5	12.5 %

Table 1 above summarizes the demographic characteristics of respondents. the majority of the respondents were female and a greater percentage of the respondents are aged between 46 and 50. Over 40 percent of the respondents are widowed. These results show that the nutrition gardens programme targeted female headed households and most of these women are widowed.

Crops produced by respondents

Table 2: Crops produced

Crop	Number of respondents	Percentage
Covo	40	100%
Tomatoes	36	90 %
Spinach	27	67.5 %
Rape	38	95%
Okra	21	52.5 %
Butternuts	18	45%
Beans	23	57.5%
Onion	34	85%

From table 2 above it shows that a greater percentage of respondents produce Covo, Tomatoes Rape and Onion. This is mainly because the vegetables are easy to grow and usually have a ready market

Challenges faced by nutrition garden participants

Table 3: Challenges faced by nutrition garden participants

Challenge	Number of respondents	Percentage
Difficulty securing manure/ fertilisers	40	100%
Pests and diseases	40	100%
Low producer price	17	42.5%
High transport costs	21	52.5%
Rejection of vegetables by buyers	5	12.5%
Theft	36	90%
One water point	25	62.5%
No seeds	5	12.5%

Participants were asked to identify the challenges that they face in producing and marketing their produce and the results are shown in table 3 above. Most of the respondents had difficulty in securing manure and fertilisers. Pest, diseases and theft were noted as some of the major challenges that the participants faced. Over 50 percent of the participants also identified one water point and high transportation costs as challenges.

Benefits of participating in nutrition gardens

The three main benefits mentioned by participants are that participants obtain income from vegetable sales, they can easily access vegetables for family consumption and that they get time to socialize. This is also supported by Kutiwa et al 2010 who asserts that through urban agriculture participants can access fresh produce and that urban farming contributed a lot to household food supply.

Attitudes and perceptions of nutrition garden participants

Perceptions

A number of issues were pointed out by participants and these have been listed below

Themes that emerged from the interviews

- Participation in nutrition garden programme improves household income
- We can access fresh vegetables
- We received training from funders
- We have something to do
- We can socialize and it reduces stress
- Gained access to free land
- We thought that the funder will continue to supply inputs
- We do not gain much because of theft
- The sponsors did not find markets for us
- We have just one water point and dilapidated canals
- The space given is too small

Most of the participants pointed out that participation in nutrition programme improve household income. This is mainly because some of the households could sell part of their produce and reserve some for family consumption. This view is supported by Landman 1993, who noted that for the low income gardeners community gardens are a potential source of fresh produce at relatively low costs.

“We can access fresh vegetables” is one of the points that emerged from the interviewees. Egyir and pbeinpoo 2009 in their study strategic innovations in urban agriculture, food supply and livelihood support systems performance.

In Accra, Ghana, revealed that one can access fresh produce from urban agriculture. Over 46 % of fresh produce from the forum markets that were surveyed in Accra metropolitan was from urban agriculture.

Some of the participants noted that they received training from the funders, nutrition urban gardening programme gave them something to do and one can socialize and in the process reduce stress. Literature points out that having a garden offers a social outlet (Francis and Hester 1990) and that participation in gardens relieved stress and provided an environment where people can meet (Sinang 2002).

Some of the urban gardeners said that they gained access to free land. In the high density suburbs there is not much land to use for gardening and tenants do not have land for gardening. Studies have shown that urban community gardens gave participants free land for gardening (Armstrong 2000, Landman 1993).

Some of the participants noted that because of theft they did not gain much and that the area that they were given for gardening is too small. Some complained about dilapidated canals and one water point. Some of them

had this to say “We thought that the funder will continue to supply inputs” and “The sponsors did not find markets for us”

Attitudes

Table 4: Perceptions of urban garden participants

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. Do you think nutrition gardens programme is an important programme to the community	35%	17%	40%	8%	0%
2. Do you believe that the nutrition gardens have a positive impact on your life	20%	40%	35%	5%	0%
3. Do you think that one can earn a living from producing vegetables	27%	83%	0%	0%	0%
4. Producing vegetables increases access to nutritious and fresh vegetables	50%	50%	0%	0%	0%
5. Do you think that you can produce vegetables without any form of assistance	45%	40%	0%	0%	5%
6. Vegetable production is a better way of generating income	40%	5%	0%	20%	35%

Positive attitude towards nutrition gardens was reflected by 35 %agreeing strongly and 17 % agreeing slightly with statement that nutrition garden programme are an important programme to the community. this is supported by statement that the nutrition gardens have a positive impact on participants life, as also reflected by 60% of the participants agreeing to the statement , 35 percent undecided and 5 %disagreeing.

Positive attitude towards urban gardening and nutrition garden projects is also reflected by all participants agreeing to the following statements

Do you think that one can earn a living from producing vegetables (27% strongly agree and 83% agree).

Producing vegetables increases access to nutritious and fresh vegetables (50% strongly agreeing and 50 percent agreeing)

The statement that participants can produce vegetables without any form of assistance had 45 % of the participants that strongly agreed and 40 % agreed and 5% strongly disagreed 45 % of the participants agree that vegetable production is a better way of generating income with 20 percent disagreeing and 35 percent strongly disagreeing. This shows that more than 55 percent would rather work on something else to generate income than produce vegetables.

7. Conclusion

Majority of the respondents are females, widowed, and in-between 46 and 50 years of age. Covo, tomatoes, rape and onion are the main crops that the participants grow. The main Challenges noted by the respondent are difficulty to secure fertilizers or manure, pests and diseases and theft. Majority of participants have positive perceptions and attitudes towards the nutrition garden programme. They however would prefer to continue participating if the programme is funded even though a greater percentage of the respondents noted that they can produce vegetables without any form of funding. The participants also do agree that the programme is important but not a better way of earning a living.

8. Recommendations

Participants noted dilapidated canals and one water point as challenges, the city council should therefore repair canals and increase the number of water points in nutrition gardens

Participants in this programme where mostly the old, sick, widowed and the orphans, the city council should therefore open up land for community urban gardening so that some of the people that do not fit in these categories but disadvantaged and interested in urban gardening can also benefit from community urban gardening.

The programme should be supported financially for some time or at least until participants are well establishing that is in terms of markets that they sell their produce and income that they receive from their sales.

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