

Urban Agriculture and Poverty Mitigation in Zimbabwe: Prospects and Obstacles in Bulawayo Townships

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ABSTRACT This paper examines the role and contribution of urban agriculture towards household food security, employment creation and income generation among low-income working class and urban poor households in Bulawayo townships. This is done within the context of a stabilizing Zimbabwean socio-economic polity after a decade of stagflation and political crisis. It also examines factors that inhibit the growth and increased contribution of urban agriculture to the urban poor's livelihoods and proffers evidence-based policy recommendations on how urban agriculture can be transformed and integrated into wider urban planning and development. This would help to optimise the productive capacity of urban agriculture for the benefit of the urban poor and urban food system. Using a qualitative approach, non-probability sampling was employed which involved the use of purposive sampling and the snowball technique to identify respondents. In-depth semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection instrument aptly aided by non-participant observations. The study establishes that urban food production significantly contributes to household food access and security. This production entitlement is improving dietary diversity and nutritional intake. It also finds that a few farmers produce surplus which is traded in informal township markets. Income raised – which gives these farmers exchange entitlement – is used for other household necessities such as basic medication, transport fares and other food commodities. Despite the evident benefits of urban agriculture to the farmers, its potential is constrained by a complex of factors that include land tenure insecurity, erratic water access, small plot sizes, inadequate capital for optimising plot productivity and ambivalent application of urban land-use laws.