

## **THE ROLE OF URBAN AGRICULTURE IN EMPOWERING URBAN WOMEN FARMERS IN THE CITY OF LAGOS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The study examines the role of urban agriculture in empowering urban women farmers as well as meeting their practical and strategic gender needs. The study used Longwe's framework based on the five different levels of empowerment. The study revealed that the emphasis on urban agriculture is on the welfare and access level and that urban agriculture addresses more practical gender needs than strategic gender needs.*

*Key words: Urban agriculture, Gender roles, Decision making, Empowerment, Strategic gender needs, Practical gender needs, Control.*

### **Background Information**

Urban Agriculture (UA) has been defined in different ways by various scholars. Mougeot (2000) defined urban agriculture as an industry located within (intra-urban) or on the fringe (peri-urban) of towns, urban centres or cities, which grows or raises, processes and distributes a diversity of food and non-food products, reusing mainly human and material resources, products and services found in and around the urban area, and in turn supplying human and material resources, products and services largely to the urban area. It can also be defined as an informal sector activity that contributes greatly to the production of food within the urban area (Foeken, 2005; Kutiwaet *al.*, 2010).

There are more women in informal sector employment in most developing countries as women often have limited access to formal education, employment, and gender issues continue to shape education within the country (Aina, 2013). Thus, it becomes imperative for women to seek for other means to generate income to sustain their household other than in formal sector employment. Women in traditional African society are commonly deprived access to productive and natural resources, such as land, capital, labour, capital, forestry resources, water bodies, and are practically overlooked in the prospects for extractive industries (solid minerals, oil and gas). Women therefore often encroach into what they see as 'free' spaces (forest

lands) for subsistence farming, gathering of fuel-wood, herding, and gathering of wild resources amongst others (Aina, 2011).

Henk de Zeeuw (2004) emphasized that women in the urban areas can easily combine agricultural activities with other domestic activities, especially when agricultural plots are close to their home than in the case of other occupations that might necessitate them travelling to town centre, industrial areas, or more developed residential areas. The income generated from the sales of farm produce and reduced household expenditures on food thus make essential impact on economic sustenance of the urban household. The pride gained from producing food and generating income in the urban areas has been noted to improve the dignity, self-respect, hope and self-reliance of women (Bradford *et al.*, 2009). This can transform into empowerment of the urban women farmers as Moser (1989) conceptualises empowerment as gender interest that can be translated into practical and strategic gender needs. The point of departure of Moser's theory on empowerment is the assertion that gender relations, men and women's role in society, are socially constructed, and moulded by ideology, history, culture, religion, ethic, and economy. Practical gender needs are needs that reflect what interests' women or men have from their present gender role and do not aim to change the level of asymmetry in gender relations. They are needs that women identify within their socially and culturally accepted roles in the society. It addresses physical needs of women which often differs from those of men. Strategic needs are the needs women and men identify in order to improve their status and position within the society. This will then give them a greater control of themselves instead of limiting them to the restrictions imposed by socially defined roles. These needs are not easily identified by women themselves. Practical gender needs are easier to identify than strategic gender needs, but addressing strategic gender needs can be crucial in attaining equity and empowerment.

There are quite a number of available literatures which have examined urban agriculture in different contexts and diverse agricultural practices (Mougeot, 2000; Olawepo, 2008; Adeyemo and Kuhlmann 2009; Lawal and Aliu, 2012; Adedayo and Tunde, 2013; Ibok et al., 2014; Edeoghon and Izekor, 2017). Some of these studies focused on urban agriculture as a strategy to reduce poverty and food insecurity in urban areas. These studies concluded that urban agriculture is a veritable source of food, income, and poverty alleviation. However, most of these studies failed to reveal the extent to which urban agriculture can meet both practical and strategic gender needs of urban farmers. It therefore becomes imperative to examine the benefits incurred in UA activities providing urban women farmers with opportunities that embrace industriousness, survival, creativity and entrepreneurial strategies or UA activities is just

burdening them with yet another responsibility that further give rise to women's marginalisation and subordination within the society.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

- i. Examine the extent to which urban agriculture meets the practical gender needs of women
- ii. Examine the extent to which urban agriculture meets the strategic need of women
- iii. Describe the impact of urban agriculture on urban women farmers

### **METHODOLOGY**

A multistage sampling technique was adopted for this study. This study was conducted in Lagos Metropolis, and all the three senatorial districts (Lagos East, Lagos West and Lagos Central). Three LGA (Ojo LGA, Kosofe LGA, and Surulere LGA) were purposively selected from each senatorial district based on their predominant agricultural activities. Out of which one urban farming community (Ojo, Alapere and Tejuoso respectively) was purposively selected from each senatorial district. All urban female crop farmers actively involved in agricultural activities served as the population of the study. 255 urban women farmers were randomly selected for this study using questionnaire. For the qualitative data, one female Focus Group Discussion and one male Focus Group Discussion were conducted in the three 3 LGAs. Key Informant Interview were also employed to elicit information from Extension officers in the three (3) LGAs, women leaders in six (6) Women Farmers Groups (WFG) and Head of Department of agriculture in the three LGA. The data collected were analysed using STATA while qualitative data was analysed using content analysis.

### **Results and Discussion**

Cumulatively, the age distribution of the respondents shows that 82.1% of the respondents were less than 50 years of age, while 17.9% of the respondents were more than 50 years. The data also revealed that majority of the respondents were married (86.1%), 9.2% are widowed, and 4.7% are either single or separated. This is in line with the findings of Olawepo (2008) and Iboket

*al.* (2014) that urban farmers are usually in their active years and majority of them are married. Cumulatively, majority (90.8%) of the respondents had formal education (i.e. 29.5% had primary education, 39.4% had secondary while 21.9% had secondary education), while few others (9.2%) had no formal education. The ethnic background shows that 45.8% are Igbo, 35.5% are from other ethnic group (Edo, Delta, Calabar, Rivers, Tiv, Benue), while only 18.7% are Yoruba. The average monthly income of the respondents is about ₦24,000 per month while the mean years of farming experience for the respondents was eleven (11). This is not in tune with the findings of Adeyemo and Kuhlmann (2009) where the average monthly income of the urban farmers in South western, Nigeria, was ₦51,294. Majority of the women farmers are members in women farmers group with an average of 2 years in such group. The minimum year and maximum years spent in women's farmers group is 1 year and 18 years respectively.

**Table 1: Socio-economic characteristics of the respondents.**

<b>Socio economic characteristics</b>		
<b>Age</b>		
< 40	90	35.9
40-49	116	46.2
50+	45	17.9
<b>Marital status</b>		
Single/Separated	12	4.7
Married	216	86.1
Widowed	23	9.2
<b>Education qualification</b>		
No Formal Education	23	9.2
Primary	74	29.5
Secondary	99	39.4
Tertiary	55	21.9
<b>Ethnic group</b>		
Yoruba	47	18.7
Igbo	115	45.8
Other ethnic (Edo, Delta, Calabar, Rivers, Tiv, Benue)	89	35.5
<b>Monthly Income</b>		
<=10000	27	10.8
10001-20k	71	28.3
20001-30k	106	42.2
<b>Minimum income = ₦5000; Maximum income = ₦55000; Mean income = ₦ 24,000k; SD = 12870</b>		
<b>Member of any women ' s group</b>	<b>Yes Freq. (%)</b>	<b>No Freq. (%)</b>
	179 (71)	75 (29)
<b>Years of membership in women ' s group</b>	<b>Freq.</b>	<b>%</b>
1- 5 years	81	32.3
6-10 yrs.	69	27.5
11-18 yrs.	26	10.36
<b>Mean years of membership = 2.18; SD = 0.979; minimum no years = 1year; maximum no of years = 18years</b>		

### **Urban Agriculture and Improvement in Respondent' s Quality of Life**

Using the Longwe Framework, this study assessed the extent to which UA supports urban female farmers' empowerment. It aimed at showing the varying level of empowerment of the female farmers based on the notion of five different levels – Welfare, Access, Conscientisation, Participation, and Control being the highest level. Applying Longwe's levels of equality, Table 2 shows that the emphasis of UA is on the welfare and access level. Urban Agriculture has financially empowered the urban women to support their households on daily basis through the provision of better and nutritious food for their family ( $\bar{X} = 0.729$ ;  $SD = 0.729$ ), ability to provide better clothing for their children ( $\bar{X} = 0.685$ ;  $SD = 0.465$ ), ability to send their family members to better health centres and clinics with better health facilities ( $\bar{X} = 0.673$ ;  $SD = 0.470$ ) as well as the ability to produce most of the food for their household ( $\bar{X} = 0.550$ ;  $SD = 0.499$ ). The positive welfare impact seems to be sustainable as urban agriculture serves as a source of nutrition, income for the urban women as they are not dependent on the men for their practical needs.

The impact of UA on women was more on the lower levels than on the higher levels involving participation (40.2%,  $\bar{X} = 0.401$   $SD = 0.089$ ) and control (38%,  $\bar{X} = 0.381$   $SD = 0.081$ ). It can also be deduced from the study that urban female farmers have attained some degree of empowerment, though many of the respondents have not been able to reach Longwe (1991) highest level of empowerment. The influence of UA was lowest on the control cadre which means that women involved in UA activities still have little or no power alongside men to influence their destiny and that of their society. This shows that even though urban agricultural activities shed a progressive indication towards the achievement of women's needs, it still indicates that women's role and participation, even in urban area development, are still restricted to domestic issues.

**Table 2: Distribution by the extent to which urban agriculture empowers the respondents**

Variable	Disagree Freq. (%)	Agree Freq. (%)	Mean ( $\bar{X}$ )	SD	Rank
<b>Welfare</b>					
I am able to buy peculiar things I need as a woman	119 (47.4)	132 (52.6)	0.526	0.500	<b>7</b>
I am able to provide better clothing for my children	79 (31.5)	172 (68.5)	0.685	0.465	<b>2</b>
I am able to provide better and nutritious food for my family	68 (27.1)	183 (72.9)	0.729	0.445	<b>1</b>
I am able to produce most of the food for my family	85 (33.9)	166 (66.1)	0.661	0.474	<b>4</b>
<b>Access</b>					
I am now in a better position financially	113 (45.0)	138 (55.5)	0.550	0.499	<b>5</b>
I am able to contribute towards the financial needs of my community	123 (49.0)	128 (51.0)	0.510	0.509	<b>8</b>
I and my family members have better access to health centre and clinics with better health facilities	82 (32.8)	169 (67.3)	0.673	0.470	<b>3</b>
<b>Conscientisation</b>					
I am more confident than before	130 (51.8)	121 (48.2)	0.482	0.501	<b>10</b>
I am able to provide better education for my children	114 (45.4)	137 (54.6)	0.546	0.499	<b>6</b>
<b>Participation</b>					
I am able to take care of my own personal health issues	126 (50.2)	125 (49.8)	0.498	0.501	<b>9</b>
I am able to make financial decisions for me and my family	134 (53.4)	117 (46.6)	0.466	0.499	<b>11</b>
I am able to make important decisions for myself and my family	141 (51)	110 (41)	0.438	0.497	<b>12</b>
My community consults me on key issues concerning our community	170 (67.7)	81 (32.3)	0.323	0.468	<b>15</b>
<b>Control</b>					
I feel I am in control of my life	153 (61.0)	98 (39.0)	0.390	0.489	<b>13</b>
My community respects me because of my achievements in farming	184 (73.3)	67 (26.7)	0.267	0.443	<b>16</b>
I am able to assist other women who are struggling with setting up their farming business	97 (38.7)	154 (61.4)	0.386	0.488	<b>14</b>
<b>Aggregate</b>					
<b>Aggregate Welfare</b>	<b>88 (35)</b>	<b>163 (65)</b>	<b>0.650</b>	<b>0.087</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Aggregate Access</b>	<b>106 (42.2)</b>	<b>145 (57.8)</b>	<b>0.578</b>	<b>0.028</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Aggregate Conscientisation</b>	<b>122 (48.6)</b>	<b>129 (51.4)</b>	<b>0.514</b>	<b>0.045</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Aggregate Participation</b>	<b>143 (56.9)</b>	<b>108 (43.1)</b>	<b>0.431</b>	<b>0.089</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Aggregate Control</b>	<b>145 (57.6)</b>	<b>106 (42.4)</b>	<b>0.348</b>	<b>0.081</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Aggregate extent to which urban agriculture empowers women</b>	<b>119 (47.4)</b>	<b>132 (52.6)</b>	<b>0.504</b>	<b>0.501</b>	

### **Urban Agriculture and Meeting the Respondents' Gender Needs**

Moser framework of Practical and Strategic Gender Needs (PSGN) was used to assess the influence of UA on the women farmers. Data presented in Table 3 shows that UA addressed respondents' practical gender needs (PGN) such as access to food (87.3%), safe drinking water (70.9%), regular income (68.9%), health care facilities (62.5%), and favourable living condition (55%). Urban agriculture also addressed more PGN (59.4%) which involve welfare and access than strategic gender needs (SGN) (32.3%) which deals with sex roles, gender roles, traditional and subordinating sex-stereotype.

PGN and SGN are inter-related; and of course, participation in UA is contributing to meeting both needs. The quantitative data was corroborated by qualitative evidence which reflects that agricultural productive activities of urban female farmers have increased their negotiating powers within their various homes. It was evident from the female FGDs across the three (3) LGAs that UA gave urban women access to regular source of income and thereby reinforces women position within their respective households.

#### ***Excerpts 1:*** A 39-year old Focus Group Discussant in Ojo LGA

*Before ehnnnnn, my husband used to use me as a punching bag anytime I asked for money from him and he did not want to give me... now that I have my money, the story is different.*

Other corroborating evidences shows that UA is an alternative to formal employment for women who lack access to waged labour. Hence, UA contributes to livelihood support in the study area. Preference was also given to urban agriculture activities because the women were able to manage it with their domestic activities and child-care responsibilities. The findings from both the quantitative and qualitative evidence supported Olawepo (2008), Kutiwa et al. (2010), and Adedayo and Tunde (2013) that UA contributes directly to women empowerment in various ways.



**Excerpt 2:** A 39-year old Focus Group Discussant in Ojo LGA

*Planting and selling of vegetables is better than what I was doing before... I was initially selling Abacha and Ugba at Iba and sometimes at Trade fair, but it was too stressful, the profit was small and I did not have enough time for my children because the time we sell most was when they return from school.*

**Excerpt 3:** A 33-year old Focus Group Discussant in Kosofe LGA

*I have been jobless for so many years until my sister linked me up to join the vegetable farmers' cooperative here and I started planting uguwu, shoko, tete, and bitter leaf. Even if I am not that rich, I am still able to feed myself and my little boy and shame those who thought I will not survive on my own.*

**Table 3: Distribution of respondents on influence of urban agriculture on meeting their gender needs**

Variable	n=251 Yes Freq. (%)	No Freq. (%)
<b>Practical gender needs</b>		
Access to food	219 (87.3)	32 (12.7)
Access to health care facilities	157 (62.5)	94 (37.5)
Access to regular income	173 (68.9)	78 (31.1)
Access to favourable living condition	138 (55)	113 (45)
Access to safe drinking water	178 (70.9)	73 (29.1)
<b>Strategic gender needs</b>		
Land rights	67 (26.7)	184 (73.3)
Control of the use of time	120 (47.8)	131 (52.2)
Increase Participation in Decision making in the household	100 (39.8)	151 (60.2)
Increase Participation in Decision making in the community	74 (29.5)	177 (70.5)
<b>Aggregates Influence of Urban Agriculture on meeting respondents gender needs</b>	<b>121 (48.2)</b>	<b>130 (51.8)</b>
<b>Aggregates gender needs</b>		
Practical Gender needs	173 (68.9)	78 (31.1)
Strategic Gender needs	90 (35.3)	161 (64.7)

The women farmers also established that there is an increase in their financial contribution towards their household and they now also depend less on their spouse. In Ojo LGA, due to the

nature of the jobs of the men folks (Military officers, many of which are away to the far Northern parts of the country), women increasingly head urban households and the responsibility to take care of the family is on the woman's shoulders. Many of these female headed households use urban agriculture as a major means of survival. UA plays an active role in income generation, food for household consumption, livelihood support, self-worth and social inclusion for poor urban female dwellers.

**Excerpts 4:** A34-year-old Focus Group Discussant in Ojo LGA, Lagos

*I must confess that the first few months of my husband's deployment to the far North was the most difficult period of my life, aside from not hearing from my husband for a long time, it was very difficult for me to feed my family. My friend introduced me to farming within the barracks, although I am not where am supposed to be but my life is far better than I had ever imagined.*

**Excerpt 5:** A 45-year old Focus Group Discussant in Kosofe LGA

*I take care of myself and five kids with the money I get from sales of vegetables in Mile 12 market since my husband and I separated. ...I have also bought so many stuffs like clothes, Television, Handset, food for myself and my children...*

Data from theFGD across the three (3) LGAs affirmed that the women farmers are able to participate more in decisions making process within their household through their participation in UA. The negotiating and bargaining powers of women have greatly increased within their homes. They identified areas such as children's education, children nutrition, sexual and reproductive health, major household purchases, membership in various associations, marketing of crops, hiring of farm workers, marketing of crops, and other areas in which they had previously been ineffective. This implies that the decision making power of the urban women dwellers are gradually increasing and that gender roles are not constant but can change with access to better economic opportunities. This is similar to the study of Oyediran and Odusola, 2004 that there is a significant relationship between decision making power in a household and income generating capacities.

It was also affirmed during the FGD that UA does not only meet the immediate gender needs of urban women farmers but also serves as a basis for better opportunity for the future generation. It

is therefore evident from the study that many of the urban female farmers are into UA as a survival strategy for their overall household units rather than in their own personal interests or capital accumulation. The findings of the study also revealed that there is a gradual change in sex roles as women are now taking over household maintenance that men could no longer afford. Although urban female farmers in the study area do not have permanent rights over lands, but through their usufructary rights, they were able to control their agricultural produce which has basically helped them to accomplish reproductive and social obligations to their household, thus changing women otherwise redundant status in the society.

**Excerpt 6:** A 48-year old Focus Group Discussant in Ojo LGA, Lagos

*My labour on this farm is not only because of me ooo, I train my children from what I get from this business, I ensure that I give them the best health care and education, so that they can have better and bigger opportunities in the future...in fact, my first daughter is in a private university.*

In the same vein, when women have access to adequate productive resources, their success in entrepreneurial activities is often highly visible. It has paved way for them to become more respected and valued members of their families and community

**Excerpt 7:** IDI with a 43-year old Women Farmers Association Leader, Kosofe LGA, Lagos

*...most people in my area know me to be a successful farmer, they specially invite me to important meetings in our community ...even when I am not interested in an on-going matter, they always love to hear my opinion.*

Nonetheless, the qualitative data also reveals that gaining economic empowerment does not significantly imply that the social and cultural aspects will be affected with the same strength as some of the women farmers' opined that their spouse find them deviating from the traditional gender roles. On the other hand, UA has negatively reinforced established gender roles and has not directly led to a re-division of labour. During the FGD, some of the respondents unanimously submitted that they scarcely have free time, and there is no change in the attitude of their husbands towards supporting them with household and domestic activities. Despite their participation in UA activities, they have not been able to influence their spouse in sharing the daily domestic work. This was made known as women's participation in productive economic

activity was reportedly used as a tool for domestic violence against a participant, to restore male dominance within the household. Though there are many benefits accrued from practising UA, if gender aspects are not taken into consideration, it may increase the workload of women and may not result in empowerment; the women can either be less or more exposed to domestic violence.

**Excerpt 8:** A 39-year old Focus Group Discussant in Surulere LGA, Lagos

*what are you saying, the slapping has turn to double sef ... chai, men are jealous, at times, if my husband needs me to do something for him or he wants to borrow money from me, and I do not want to give him, the way that man use to get me is to just lock the door and keep the key in order to stop me from going to the farm or market. I do not usually have any other choice than to give him whatever he wants because I do not want my vegetables to spoil and I do not like trouble...*

## **Conclusion**

Findings showed that UA contributed to respondents' nutrition, household food security, clothing, income generation, children's nutrition, children's education, employment, health, respondents' rights and decision-making process. Furthermore, UA is able to meet short term and immediate needs of women farmers by giving them access to regular source of income and reliable food source. Women farmers did not only use farming in the city as a means of daily survival but also as an empowerment tool to change the conditions in which they take actions and make decisions within their various households and community. This implies that urban agriculture provides a means through which women can change their economic and social circumstances.

In conclusion, urban women farmers should be involved in all stages of policy and programme development, that is, from the planning stage to the evaluation stage. All the programmes designed for them should be gender sensitive.

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