

URBAN AGRICULTURE IN NIGERIA: IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES FOR JOB CREATION AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

BY

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Abstract

Urban agriculture is a contemporary issue gaining importance and popularity especially in developing countries like Nigeria. In spite of its importance and vast opportunities, urban agriculture has been widely neglected in Nigeria, with many unemployed individuals searching for white collar jobs. The paper focused on urban agriculture as a sustainable tool for job creation and national development. Specifically, the paper emphasizes the socio-economic and development priorities of urban agriculture in Nigeria, highlighted opportunities in urban agriculture for job creation, identified constraints to urban agriculture in Nigeria and discussed strategies for improved commercialization of urban agriculture in Nigeria. Based on the identified opportunities of urban agriculture in Nigeria, recommendations were made towards the successful entry and advancement of the initiative by unemployed and employed individuals.

Keywords: Urban Agriculture, Opportunities, Unemployment, Nigeria

Introduction

Urban areas are important drivers of economic and national development accompanied by numerous opportunities, as they provide crucial links with rural areas and across international borders. According to Harvey (2010) urban areas are cities, towns or conurbations with various economic activities, provision of basic facilities, services, and physical development. In the opinion of Chand (2010) an urban area is best thought of as the lighted region that can be observed from an airplane (or satellite) on a clear night. An urban area can be defined as a location with high human population density and structures built within a labour market which characterizes urbanization. In light of a shift in population from rural areas to cities with attendant pressure on nature and the government to provide basic necessities like food, shelter and source of income; people have

responded in various ways, most notably by diversifying their source of income specifically with urban agriculture.

Urban agriculture (UA) can be defined as the production of food within cities, for home consumption or for industries (Hovorka, Zeeuw & Njenga, 2009). Similarly, Evan (2013) opined that urban agriculture is the practice of food production within a city boundary or on the immediate periphery of a city. Mohammadi and Soleimani (2014) averred that urban agriculture involves the growth of plants and breeding of animals including its marketing to provide food around cities. Urban agriculture can be described as a process and system of food production, marketing and distribution for the satisfaction and sustenance of the urban populace and beyond. According to Salau and Attah (2012) urban agriculture has become a

contemporary issue, gaining prominence in developing the economy of Nigeria as it has been discovered to be a viable poverty intervention strategy for the urban poor. This implies that urban agriculture is capable of eradicating poverty and enhancing job creation.

Job creation according to Muhammad (2011) is the process of providing new functions especially for people who are unemployed. Sule (2013) defined job creation as the establishment of a labour market with social and economic dimensions capable of accommodating the unemployed. James (2012) opined that job creation is the notion that paid occupations are created in response to some sort of event or situation. Conceptually, job creation is the proactive opposite of unemployment. It involves the identification of paid occupation or opportunities capable of generating income and meeting the needs of people in a particular region. Sequel to this, jobs can be created by governments or an individual who is willing to enter into an occupation and advance in it. However, the term job creation has been used for political rhetoric in recent time. For example, a candidate might suggest that a particular taxation, subsidy programme or regulatory framework, will create new jobs and foster national development.

National development is defined as the capability of a nation to improve the socio-economic wellbeing of the people by providing social amenities such as good education, employment, infrastructure, security and social services (Matthews, 2010). Tolu and Abe (2011) described national development as the overall growth or a collective socio-economic, political as well as religious advancement of a country or nation. This implies improvement in material well being including job creation for all citizens, in a sustainable manner. National development according to Caleb, Nsini and Hart (2012) is a system of continued socio-

economic policies and paradigms to provide sound governance and events causing change with an eye on the future. The authors further explained that national development is characterised by suitable economic growth and social advancement capable of providing equal opportunities for all. Therefore, for a country to achieve national development, goals and objectives must be carefully planned and implemented through operational programmes, with the aim of exploiting the available opportunities, in order to create jobs for the teeming population, especially for those in urban areas.

Urban areas in Nigeria have been hit by declining economies which have been disproportionately felt by a number of people in the city. A wide range of activities are being employed in the informal sector to diversify the source of income in urban areas, specifically with urban agriculture (African Studies Centre, 2006). Government on their own part have initiated different kinds of programmes aimed at alleviating poverty and creating jobs, but it is worrisome that no significant progress has been recorded in that direction (Eke & Egbenu, 2011; Hassan & Sadiq in Ogbuanya & Okoye 2015; Alimi, 2012 & Wike, 2012). Uya (2014) argued that the various poverty alleviation and job creation programmes of the Federal and State governments are political programmes deliberately designed to service the economic interest of the political class in the country rather than the interest of the poor in the society. As a result of this phenomenon, thousands of youth are left to hang around and search for what to do to survive with their families. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2012) put the figure of unemployed Nigerian youth at 23.9% an increase from 21.1% in 2010 and 19.7% in 2009. Many of these youth involve themselves in illegal activities like kidnapping, stealing among others. Ebomuche and Okozie in Maduka (2016) stated that about 8 million

graduates of tertiary institutions are operating on social vices like armed robbery, kidnapping, internet fraud in addition to compounded poverty and other crimes.

In the light of unemployment and rapid urbanization that has occupied the attention of various successive governments for many years, urban agriculture has evolved with significant opportunities capable of creating jobs for the unemployed and makes them self-reliant to establish personal businesses and enhance national development. This paper will therefore attempt to explore the prospects of urban agriculture in Nigeria as a sustainable tool for job creation and national development. Specifically, the paper will be discussed under the following headings:

- the socio-economic and development priorities of urban agriculture in Nigeria;
- opportunities in urban agriculture for job creation in Nigeria;
- constraints to urban agriculture in Nigeria; and
- Strategies for improved commercialization of urban agriculture in Nigeria.

The Socio-economic and Development Priorities of Urban Agriculture in Nigeria

Urban agriculture in Nigeria has played a prominent role with regard to food security and poverty reduction, which are key issues in every developing nation. Urban agriculture may seem to be a new concept but it should be said that city and agriculture have an old relationship with each other (Mohammadi and Soleimani, 2014). Dehghan (2006) noted that there are lots of evidence about agriculture in old cities such as Mexico, London, Paris, Rome, Pekan and Ibadan (Nigeria). Most urban areas in Nigeria and their adjoining peri-urban communities reflect landscapes and neighbourhoods practicing urban agriculture. Sheila (2013) reported that backyard chickens, community gardens, farmers markets, and Community Supported Agriculture programmes (CSAs) are

gaining popularity, as local food continues to find its place on the tables of urban residents. According to Salau and Attah (2012) urban agriculture is a strategy for business development, sustainable planning, community development, health education, democratic process and a tool for job creation in urban areas. Consequently, many notable individuals in Nigeria have ventured into agri-business in urban areas either as a part-time investment or as a life time occupation.

A Multi-Stakeholder Team (2007) reported that the average monthly income of 60% urban farmers in Ibadan is between eighty to one hundred thousand Naira (₦80-100,000). Similarly, Egbuna (2008) carried out a study on “Urban Agriculture: A Strategy for Poverty Reduction in Abuja”. The study revealed that, the least earning from the urban agriculture chain is put at about ₦200 per day for weeding or watering the farms, women and children mainly do this job. The youth who carry out other agriculture labour like digging and hedging etc earn between ₦400- ₦600 per day. While the middlemen i.e. between farmers and sellers earn incomes of their own, for instance a respondent (vegetable middleman) interviewed said he earns an average of about ₦50, 000 a month from the activities. Other income generating activities from urban agriculture are pest control/fumigation, harvesting, transportation, small scale industries like plantain chips, groundnut, popcorn selling and corn roasting activities. Salau and Attah (2012) reported that the major benefits derived from urban agricultural activities in Nasarawa State are; additional income (75.56%), household feeding (55.56%) and full time employment opportunity (28.89%). The authors averred that urban agriculture contributed about 74% of the total annual income of people in the State. This implies that urban agriculture is capable of providing a means of livelihood for the unemployed while accommodating the medium

and low social status in the society. It affords opportunities for people to be self employed or engage in menial activities like labourers, middlemen as well as home service delivery of fresh agric produce thereby producing a food security chain among others. These activities are suitable for achieving economic, social and environmental stability which are key features of national development.

Opportunities in Urban Agriculture for Job Creation in Nigeria

Investment options and opportunities in urban agricultural activities in Nigeria are influenced by urban polices, climate, culture, soil conditions, social and economic conditions, certain food diet and food consumption pattern of a city and its suburb (Mohammadi and

Soleimani, 2014). However, there are some commodities with high market opportunities capable of creating jobs in different geopolitical zones in Nigeria. The study carried out by Manyong, Olayemi, Yusuf, Omonona, Okoruwa, and Idachaba (2005) on agriculture in Nigeria: identifying opportunities for increased commercialization and investment, presents the agricultural commodities in which the different zones in Nigeria have a comparative advantage in urban, regional or world market. The authors divided these commodities into six groups namely, root and tubers, cereals, grain legumes, livestock and fish, vegetables, and tree crops, as shown in the table blow

Table 1: Agricultural Commodities with Comparative Advantage for Investments as Ranked by Stakeholders in each Zone

Primary production	Northcentral	Northeast	Northwest	Southeast	South-south	Southwest
Staple crop Production			Millet		Yam	Yam
				Yam		Yam
			Sorghum	Sorghum	Cassava	Cassava
			Maize	Maize	Rice	Maize
		Rice, Maize	Millet	Cowpea	Maize	Vegetables
		Sorghum Millet	Cowpea	Cassava	Vegetable	Rice
		Cowpea Cassava	Cassava	Rice	Cowpea	Cowpea
		Yam Beniseed	Rice	Beniseed	Soybean	Groundnut
			Beniseed	Maize	Plantain	Groundnut
				Yam	Soybean	Soybean
Industrial crop production	Soybean					Pineapple
	Groundnut	Groundnut		Cocoa	Cocoa	Oil palm
	Cotton	Soybean	Soybean	Oil palm	Oil palm	Rubber
	Vegetables	Cotton	Vegetables	Rubber	Rubber	Cashew
	Coffee	Sorghum	Groundnut	Rubber	Cashew	Ginger
	Oil palm	Vegetables		Groundnut	Orange	Cocoa
Livestock	Cattle	Cattle	Cattle	Poultry	Cattle	Cattle

production	Sheep	Sheep	Sheep	Sheep	Small ruminant	Sheep	
	Goat	Goat	Goat	Goat	Rabbitry	Goat	
	Poultry	Poultry	Poultry	Cattle	Poultry	Rabbitry	
	Piggery	Piggery	Piggery	Piggery	Piggery	Piggery	
Fishery	Fish	Fish	Fish	Fresh fish	Aquaculture	Fish	
				Smoked fish		Cray fish	
						Shrimps	
Forestry	Gum Arabic	Gum Arabic	Teak	Timber	Timber	Ginger	
	Ginger	Fuel wood	Mahogany			Teak	Cashew nut
	Cashew nut	Gmelina	Gmelina				
			Ginger				

Source: Manyong, Olayemi, Yusuf, Omonona, Okoruwa, and Idachaba (2005)

Close observation of the table above shows that different zones have a comparative advantage of some specific agricultural commodities in urban, regional or world market. Although most of the commodities can be produced with comparative advantage in more than one zone, there are also some commodities that are specific to only one or two zones. Good examples of these are crayfish and shrimps in the Southwest zone and aquaculture in the South-south.

In a related view, Van Veenhuizen and Danso (2007) identified profitable products in urban agriculture such as green leafy vegetables, chickens, eggs, milk, mushrooms, medicinal herbs, flowers and ornamental plants. The authors opined that these products are high in demand and have a comparative advantage over rural production. Salau and Attah (2012) grouped opportunities in urban agriculture into crop and livestock production. According to the authors, commodities in crop production includes; vegetable, maize, cowpea, ornamental crops, melon, sesame, sweet potato, yam, and tree crops. In the case of livestock; poultry farming, piggery, goat, cattle, sheep and rabbit

production were all identified. In an attempt to identify products suitable for investment in urban agriculture Thomas (2012) introduced three main production systems.

- i. **Professional production systems:** this system is especially for producing and breeding a certain type of crop (rice, vegetables, fruit, mushrooms, yam, cassava, maize, etc) or animal (fish, hen, rabbit, sheep, cow, pig, bees, etc).
- ii. **Mixed production systems:** this is the combination of two activities. It involves investment in two main parts of crop or a combination of animal and crop production.
- iii. **Compound production systems:** this system involves more than two main activities either in crop or animal production.

The opportunities identified so far are familiar activities and products around urban areas, with little attention focused on these areas. Most urban dwellers are either ignorant of these opportunities or consider farming as an occupation for the poor or rural people. However, evidence abounds in literature that urban agricultural activities account for higher

income on a monthly basis than the Nigeria minimum wage.

Constraints to Urban Agriculture in Nigeria

Urban agriculture is an economically viable industry that is constrained by a variety of factors. Some of these constraints are identified below.

- ***Socio-cultural Biases and Institutional Constraints***

The socio-cultural biases against urban agriculture are often strong. Some arise from outdated views of what a city should be, while others are related to local cultures. They involve attitudes and misconceptions about aesthetics, efficiency, hygiene, and modernity in general. According to Jac, Nasr and Ratta (2011) this constraint tend to be persistent, particularly when they become institutionalized through policies, laws, regulations, and their enforcement mechanisms. Negative attitudes from critical actors are particularly constricting. For example, when planners and economists regard urban agriculture as a marginal activity of the informal sector, the bias spreads to market and credit agents, legislators, and the general population. The result is insufficient official support, public policies and legislation that are not favourable to farming in cities, and consequently restrained involvement in urban agricultural activities

- ***Constrained Access to Resources, Inputs, and Services***

Limited access to farming inputs, credit loans, research centres, extension services and training are major factors militating against urban agriculture in Nigeria. Most cities have sufficient usable land and water to allow farming. Yet urban farmers are not recognized as legitimate owners of land or as a legal consumer of water. Egbuna (2008) reported that lack of accessible land, proper irrigation system and waste management facilities are the

greatest constraints to urban farming. Similarly, Jac, Nasr and Ratta (2011) stated that lack of access to farming inputs such as seeds, fertilizer, pesticides, chicks and heifers, feed, veterinary medicine and equipment is another major constraint facing urban farmers. These inputs are not readily available in cities because the markets and sales channels are either not developed and organized or are oriented toward rural farmers. Furthermore, tools and equipment are usually designed for rural agriculture and are not often suited to urban needs and more intensive production.

- ***Special Risks of Urban Farming***

Unlike most other industries, urban agriculture occurs mostly in unguarded areas, a circumstance that can pose security risks for the farmer. Urban farming is particularly subject to theft because most people passing by can make use of the product, whether food or fuel. Several surveys have reported that theft and lack of police protection are among the most common problems of urban farmers. In the extreme, farmers are sometimes attacked in isolated gardens (Ango, Abdullahi and Abubakar, 2011). Jac, Nasr and Ratta (2011) reported that the problem of theft is most serious where farmers cultivate open land far from their homes.

- ***Post-Production Constraints***

Urban farmers are also handicapped during the post-production phase by inadequate processing storage packaging distribution and marketing facilities. Lack of processing capacity hinders progress and growth of the industry. Many products benefit from quick or early processing and packaging, such as fish and easily damaged fruit. Jac, Nasr and Ratta (2011) averred that processing, storage, and packaging capacities are oriented to rural agriculture. Although these facilities may be located in towns and cities, they may not be able to cater for smaller-scale urban farmers. They deal in big quantities and are controlled by large-scale operators who transport from rural

areas to wholesale markets that distribute to retailers or supermarkets. Similarly, Mohammadi and Soleimani (2014) opined that many urban food markets were designed, often since colonial times, to import food from rural areas. Input-producing agribusinesses are also geared to serving rural agriculture. The market structure may be composed of wholesalers who purchase directly from rural areas or from intermediate wholesale markets at the edge of the city, and then supply retail outlets throughout the city. Smaller-scale urban farmers generally do not fit well into this structure.

- **Organizational Constraints**

The wide dispersion and lack of cohesion among small-scale urban farmers hinders the development of markets for both their products and the inputs they require. According to Egbuna (2008) urban farmers in Nigeria have not been able to organize themselves in such a way as to attract official recognition in order to benefit from some government and corporate incentives such as credit and other financial assistance as well as input subsidies

Strategies for Improved Commercialization of Urban Agriculture in Nigeria

The level of awareness and improved participation in urban agriculture is dependent on its commercialization. Ikpi (2012) noted that increased commercialization will boost the adoption and market value of urban agricultural produce. Sequel to the foregoing, the following have been identified as strategies for improved commercialization of urban agriculture in Nigeria.

- **Integration of Urban Agriculture into Urban Planning:** Federal and State governments should consider issues that concern farming in cities as priorities and possibly create an agency to manage official allotment of land for urban agriculture. Salau and Attah (2012) stated that urban agriculture should be integrated into land use planning of all urban centres in Nigeria.

This can be achieved by establishing a greenbelt zone in all major cities specifically for farming.

- **Design Programmes to Cater for Urban Farmers:** Attention is often directed to rural farmers as regards extension services, research centres, farm input subsidy credit loans among others, with little or no programmes allotted to urban farmers. Egbuna (2008) suggested that a sectoral agricultural policy should emphasize the need to give urban farmers easy access to farm inputs like pesticides, fertilizers and services that could raise productivity and output. Similarly, Salau and Attah (2012) opined that urban farming should be integrated into our national agricultural research agenda so as to evolve: environmental friendly technologies for commercial production, small-plot agronomic requirements and intensified sustainable cropping system.

- **Public-private Sector Agro-industry Investment:** This strategy is essentially a private-sector-driven initiative Ikpi (2012) explained that a State government may decide to initiate commodity agro-industrial/marketing investment by leading in the provision of the basic infrastructure and the “warehousing” of it for a limited period before handing the entire investment over to selected private sector stakeholders who, within the period of government

warehousing, showed sufficient dedication and commitment to the successful running of the project. Two good existing examples that are already operating in the country are: *The Akamkpa Model Agro-industrial Village*, where the Cross River State Government has successfully established a modern agro-processing facility as a model to process pineapples (into pineapple chunks and pineapple juice) and cassava (into cassava chips and pellets) produced within the State for both domestic

consumption and export. Also, *The Maigatari Model Commodity Free Trade Zone and Export Free Zone*, created by the Jigawa State Government in the Maigatari international border town, right next to the Nigeria/Niger Republic official border. In the 7 km × 7 km Export Free Zone, the Jigawa State Government has so far constructed processing plant industrial houses that are to be rented by the private sector within a walled enclosure in the town.

- **Cooperative Enterprise strategy:** This strategy requires the coordination of urban farmers to form an association, through which they establish simple, jointly owned, and low-scale processing and marketing facilities for their produce. Salau and Attah (2012) reported that urban farmers should be mobilized to form associations/cooperatives so as to help in inputs supply and mobilization of credit.

Integrated Commodity Marketing System:

This strategy requires a symbiotic link or association being formed between large operators (producers and/or processors of a named commodity) and small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) in the same commodity subsector in order to manage the market economy of their product. Ikpi (2012) stated that a good rapport between large commercial, small and medium-scale urban farmers will avail opportunity to the small-scale and medium-scale urban farmers in the country to operate an assured integrated marketing system for disposing of their produce.

Conclusion

The main thrust of this paper was to identify opportunities in urban agriculture, capable of creating jobs and enhance national development. The contribution of urban agriculture to the socio-economic development of urban dwellers cannot be underestimated as it goes a long way in improving their livelihood.

Urban agriculture should be regarded as an integral component for income generation, employment and food systems. However, certain constraints facing the enterprise which includes land availability, poor extension service and lack of access to credit facilities among others has limited the commercialisation of the enterprise. Legal proceedings must therefore be put in place to promote this enterprise.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are essential for making urban agriculture a job-oriented enterprise and a sustainable tool for national development in Nigeria.

1. Financial institutions, government and nongovernmental organizations should provide urban farmers with facilities such as loans and agricultural inputs.
2. Urban farmers irrespective of their gender should be provided with agricultural extension support.
3. Federal and State government should initiate an urban land use plan such as the Ikoyi- Victoria Island model city plan and creation of regulatory mechanisms friendly to urban agriculture.
4. Comprehensive demand and supply analysis of favoured sea food, crop and livestock products should be carried out by the Ministry of Agriculture to encourage commercialisation of urban agricultural products.
5. Coordinated and effective marketing scheme that will enhance daily sale of harvested produce should be initiated by urban farmers.
6. A security network should be provided for urban farmers to check mate the problem of theft.

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