

Backyard farming key to food security in cities

Revising regulations to increase backyard gardening in cities could be key to sustainable food production in sub-Saharan Africa, an expert says.

According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, about 40% of Africans lived in cities by 2010, with the proportion expected to increase to 60% by 2050, making Africa the region with the fastest growing urban population.



Image by Flxaline from Flxabay

As the Sustainable Development Goal 11 calls for countries to sustain urbanisation by 2030, a study published in the May issue of Land Use Policy journal suggests that promoting agriculture in cities and their surrounding areas is a must to boost food security.

“ City authorities should consider exercising the right of acquiring land from the private sector and zoning them for urban agricultural purposes. - Owusu Amponsah, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology ”

"City authorities should consider exercising the right of acquiring land from the private sector and zoning them for urban agricultural purposes," says Owusu Amponsah, the expert and a co-author of the study. "This is particularly important because of the hybrid and fragmented nature of the land tenure system in most countries in sub-Saharan Africa."

Amponsah, who is a senior lecturer at the Department of Planning of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana, said that the study was conducted to identify secure sources of land for agriculture within urban areas and their peripheries following reports by Ghanaian farmers that they were either being threatened or evicted from their farms by institutional heads.

"The phenomenon undermines the sustainability of cities at a time that the clarion call for the sustainability of cities across the globe has been louder," adds Amponsah.

The researchers conducted a systematic review of 81 publications on urban agriculture published in English and indexed in databases such as Scopus and PubMed.

The researchers looked for evidence of backyard gardening, which involves growing crops on private domestic spaces called 'backyards' mainly for household consumption.

"Approximately 50% and 40% of all households in Accra, Ghana and Cagaya de Oro, Philippines, respectively, engage in backyard farming," says the study. "City authorities should create awareness about the need to keep greens and encourage landlords to allow for the practice of backyard gardening on the premises of their housing units."

Amponsah says that African governments need to realise the inherent potential of urban agriculture in creating jobs, supporting food supply and offering ecosystem services, adding that "urbanisation in Ghana is characterised by the annexation of agricultural lands for residential and commercial purposes".

Thus, city land in Ghana now belongs to the highest bidder, with most farmers unable to afford land, a situation which is common in sub-Saharan Africa, according to Amponsah.

"Without any attempt to improve the situation, African governments could be encouraging the 'extinction' of farming within cities. This will undermine their efforts at achieving the SDG 11," adds Amponsah.

Anthony Gyamera, deputy-director of Ghana's Land Use and Spatial Planning Authority, agrees with the researchers regarding increased urbanisation and its negative effect on farming.

"Over the past two decades in Ghana, some landowners have sold farmlands in some communities to developers and this has also increased land prices," says Gyamera.

"The Government of Ghana does not own land but regulates the use of land. For this reason, it can set in motion regulations that can ensure that some areas are reserved for farming purposes only," explains Gyamera, adding that currently, the country has not designated land that should not be used for urban development.

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