

Urban Agriculture and Youth Employment

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With increasing urbanisation and migration to cities, agriculture and food systems in and around those cities play an important role in income generation – especially for young people. Recognition of both this fact and the presence of intersecting barriers to employment among young people is essential in a City Region Food System (CRFS) approach. Quito, Ecuador is a large city experiencing urbanisation and youth unemployment; its AGRUPAR project has the potential to mitigate some of these issues through urban agriculture (UA).

Youth employment in the Global South

Youth make up the majority of urban populations in the developing world, with an estimated global total of 1.8 billion between the ages of 10 and 24 years (Kundeya, 2018). The World Bank *Youth Employment in Sub-Saharan Africa* report explains that, overall, young women and youth already living in poverty, or those coming from poorer households, are at a greater disadvantage in finding employment because they often have fewer connections and networks (Filmer & Fox, 2014). Over and above finding employment, society imposes the additional expectation that young women also start a family during their transition to adulthood. As well, young women often remain in lower-income jobs.

The World Bank report emphasises the need for education, skill development and access to resources for youth for gaining employment. For agricultural employment, finance and land tenure are needed, and for employment in other sectors the focus should be on infrastructure as well as

access to finance. These factors influencing youth development can be addressed by adopting a CRFS approach. This integrative approach promotes policy and programme development across scales, and includes multiple stakeholders providing a “collective voice for food actors” (Blay-Palmer et al., 2018). According to Blay-Palmer et al. (2018), better rural-urban linkages can improve food security, increase livelihood opportunities and improve the environment. The CRFS approach aims to work towards a sustainable food system (see UAM 29 for more information) and is linked with international agreements such as the Sustainable Development Goals, the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact and the New Urban Agenda. Additionally, the incorporation of gender in further developing the CRFS framework and tools is critical to ensuring equity.

Akinnifesi (FAO, 2018) believes that rural-to-urban youth migration can be reduced by making agriculture more attractive to young people. He sees huge potential in transforming agriculture, from an activity for those living in poverty to a thriving career opportunity for those transitioning to adulthood. He sees UA as beneficial to reducing the pressure of migration and increasing food availability in urban spaces. UA can also provide many benefits along the rural-urban value chain, from production to consumption. Those who participate in UA can not only sell fresh food at markets, they can also transform food into other products. In Quito, for example, urban growers sell processed value-added foods – such as dried beans and fruit, sauces, bakery, snacks, grains and jams – to markets and restaurants.

Youth employment through urban agriculture in Quito

In Quito, the UA project AGRUPAR is led by the Economic Development Agency CONQUITO. The goals of the project are to increase food security and sovereignty, promote social inclusion, increase income and employment, and provide



La Carolina Bioferia on a busy Saturday morning. Photo by Laine Young

In 2010 the population of the Quito urban area was 1.6 million, while the entire Metropolitan District of Quito (MDQ) included approximately 2.2 million inhabitants (MDQ, 2016). Over half of Quito residents were under 29 years of age (INEC, 2010). From 2011 to 2016 the urban sprawl of the MDQ increased by 11% despite municipal planning and regulations; 72% of inhabitants lived in urban spaces and the remaining population was located in the valleys and rural areas. Of the urban population, 30% lived in poverty and 7% of these in extreme poverty. The rate of unemployment was 5%, yet youth unemployment was over 60% (INEC, 2015) and underemployment was at a staggering 40% (MDQ, 2016).



Photo by Laine Young

Quito's participatory urban agriculture programme wins Future Policy Silver Award

The Future Policy Award is the only award to honour policies at the international level. In partnership with FAO and IFOAM – Organics International, the 2018 Future Policy Award crowns best policies on agroecology and sustainable food systems that scale up agroecology to contribute to the protection of life and livelihoods of small-scale food producers, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement climate-resilient agricultural practices.

With over 3,600 urban gardens growing on 32 hectares and more than 21,000 people trained, AGRUPAR fosters food security, increases incomes, and enhances ecosystem functions.

environmental management through sustainability and the promotion of resilience for vulnerable populations. This is accomplished by means of farmer training and support, microfinance opportunities, education on nutrition and healthy diets, building infrastructure and promoting the UA value chain in the city. With the success of the AGRUPAR project has come improvement in the economic situations of many Quito residents. On average, participation in the project gives the growers USD 175 of extra income per month, which is 2.5 times local social assistance rates. Approximately 84% of AGRUPAR participants are women, and 8% are between 18 and 34 years old. Women were far more likely than male participants to report an increase of income related to participation in the project. This is important information for Quito, to ensure that lived experience is included in future AGRUPAR development.

Youth in Quito are vulnerable to poverty and job insecurity; this is reflected in the 60% unemployment rate (INEC, 2015). The 8% youth AGRUPAR participation rate could be increased by analysing youth experiences and tailoring the project towards the specific needs of this target group. It is important to understand the lived experiences of these youths and how

these might affect their ability to participate in employment – UA or otherwise. Youth experiences of inequity or unequal power relations are connected to various intersecting social identities: gender, race, ethnicity, class, ability, among others.

Quito is currently working on a food policy that seeks to improve (temporary) access to municipally owned land for UA, for vulnerable groups and especially for youth. This proposal re-values urban agriculture as a decent way of urban living. Access to these vacant spaces does require a revision of the current regulations. Since 2015 the city has been involved in CRFS studies via RUAF and the FAO (Blay-Palmer et al., 2018). The AGRUPAR project embodies the CRFS approach in its linkages to rural production areas, allowing for more diverse and larger production areas.

Final remarks

Cities need to create opportunities for youth employment. With youth populations already so large and urbanisation increasing, the time for change is now. Organisations like AGRUPAR can help mitigate the vulnerability of youth in urban areas by reducing barriers and increasing employment opportunities. CRFS linkages and UA participation will allow young people more opportunities to support their transition to adulthood and to improve their livelihoods. We must ensure that any solutions proposed in the future are designed to include those who are marginalised and also involve youth in the decision-making processes to guarantee that their voices are brought to the table in building solutions to this global problem.

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