



The Importance of Feminist Analysis in Urban Agriculture Research

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The work of urban agriculture researchers and practitioners must reflect the experiences of participants if it is to yield knowledge and services that make an impact in the community. We explain the importance of feminist analysis of experiences that considers how identity categories such as gender, ethnicity and class are interconnected, how they are socially constructed, and their ever-changing nature¹. Such analysis is a vital precursor to exploring how to shift power relations and move towards equity.

The importance of gender in urban agriculture (UA) development and assessment has been well documented (see page 33 in this issue on *Women Feeding Cities*²). Women experience UA differently than men because of political, social and economic factors. Their experiences are impacted by social power relations and different rights and responsibilities, like who does what labour and who makes decisions and controls resources. However, gender is not the only identity factor that needs to be considered when analysing the impact of UA.

A person's identity is made up of many intersecting categories. Gender is important, but so is ethnicity, class, ability and sexuality. For example, a programme may help women sell their produce at a local market, but without

acknowledging differences in class an assessment might miss that there is a subgroup of women who belong to a less-valued class within society that is not welcome.

The discrimination women face is not homogenous. To properly assess barriers and successes and to suggest improvements to UA programming, we need to consider all the aspects of women's identities and how power relations affect them. This type of feminist analysis, that considers intersectional experiences, is critical in moving forward in UA research so that resources can be used as effectively as possible. It tells stories about access and barriers to UA that inform researchers and practitioners of the limitations of analysis to date, and influence the future of UA research and programming.

Feminist analysis of AGRUPAR in Quito, Ecuador

The Laurier Centre for Sustainable Food Systems, a member of the RUAF Global Partnership, supports research on feminist UA analysis in Quito, Ecuador with AGRUPAR, a participatory urban agriculture project that is also a RUAF partner. The goal of the analysis is to explore opportunities and strengths of the project, analyse the results using a feminist framework, and make recommendations to AGRUPAR on policy and procedures. Using the project as an example, the research seeks to show the importance of Feminist Political Ecology analysis in this field.

Quito is the ideal setting for this type of research given that AGRUPAR has been running since 2002 and 84% of current participants identify as women. AGRUPAR targets

vulnerable members of society including women, the elderly, people with disabilities, those experiencing poverty, and children. These differences impact the experience of the UA participants.

One of the research participants provides an example of the need for intersectional analysis. This woman was successful in the AGRUPAR programme for many years until she experienced domestic violence triggered by her earning more money than her spouse. Her income from growing and selling food addressed household expenses like education, clothing, and food for the family, whereas his casual job was much less impactful. This generated domestic problems and led to their separation. Consequently, she lost the land she used for her garden, entered a lower economic class, and became a single parent. These compounding issues and resulting societal barriers impacted the woman's ability to participate in the project. Despite all of her challenges, and because of the knowledge she acquired in UA and entrepreneurship, she has been able to start a new garden, return to selling at the markets, and feed her young children.

Using a feminist analysis to consider this experience, the researchers can make recommendations to AGRUPAR that take into account barriers faced by women who are leaving marriages, and how the intersecting experiences and societal impacts can be mitigated to support reintegration.

The gender analysis of the past has served us well and has made important changes to UA globally, but to ensure that UA research on equity continues to be relevant and timely, researchers and practitioners must consider more than just gender. It is time to add other considerations. Feminist analysis that includes the intersections of identity will help us better understand both individual experiences and how social power relations impact access to, and experiences of, UA.



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