

Women Feeding Cities: Mainstreaming Gender in Urban Agriculture and Food Security

Mary Njenga

'Women feeding cities: Mainstreaming gender in urban agriculture and food security', published in 2009, is essential reading for practitioners to ensure gender is a central consideration in urban agriculture projects. The book shares experiences that link gender with urban agriculture in its broad practice. It is designed to contribute to more gender-sensitive and responsive policies and projects on urban agriculture and food security; to cities that are better and more equitably fed; and to women who are better recognised and supported in this crucial role.

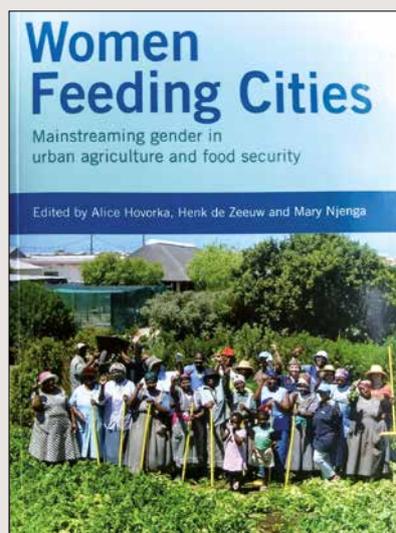
Scope of the book

The book was produced from the experiences of two leading actors in the field of urban agriculture: RUAF (then the International Network of Resource Centres on Urban Agriculture and Food Security); and Urban Harvest, the System-wide Initiative on Urban and Peri-Agriculture of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and partners. Funding was provided by International Development Research Centre (IDRC).

The first part of the book draws attention to women's crucial role in bringing food to the table of urban families and to the ways in which low income women locally produce food, carry or trade food in multiple strategies to keep their families food secure. This is presented in the form of case studies in various cities in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The case studies analyse urban agriculture activities in varying political, social-economic and cultural situations, revealing the gender dynamics that underpin people's abilities to secure fresh, affordable and accessible food and (often complementary) income.

The second part of the book provides researchers, development practitioners and local government officers with guidelines on how to incorporate gender-related aspects in each phase of urban agriculture project cycles, and a set of gender-sensitive tools.



Why "women feeding cities"?

The work leading to the publication of the book had its origins in two observations about gendered aspects of food provisioning for cities.

Firstly, women are in the majority among urban farmers and play an important role in feeding urban populations. They tend to predominate in subsistence farming, however, whereas men play a greater role in urban food production for commercial purposes.

Secondly, food production and food security had been given extremely limited attention in the history of urban development and planning. This has contributed to the invisibility of women's role in provisioning cities.

These observations led to an identified need for tools for gaining a detailed understanding of the role of women and men in urban food production, so that research and development organisations can improve their support for this livelihood strategy.

Producing the book

Implementation of activities to promote gender mainstreaming – that is, ensuring that gender equality is central to all intervention in support of urban agriculture – began in 2002, with the organisation of an international

workshop on methodologies for urban agriculture programmes held in Nairobi, Kenya.

RUAF then commissioned a state-of-the-art review on gender in urban agriculture that comprised methods, tools and case studies. This material was analysed, and lessons were compiled at another workshop in Accra, Ghana in 2004.

The book was produced subsequently and involved broad consultation and active participation by global network of urban agriculture specialists, coordinated by the editors and supported by an editorial committee.

The tools included in the second part of the book were field-tested between October 2007 and July 2008 in urban agriculture projects around the world. The experiences and conclusions were reported back to the editorial committee through structured-format reports that were synthesised and discussed during a workshop in the Netherlands in August 2008.

An important legacy

The book is more relevant now than ever due to rising urbanisation and the expansion of refugee settlements, which take the form of urban centres. For example, the Water Land and Ecosystems (WLE) programme of the CGIAR International Water Management Institute, together with partners, is applying lessons from the case studies and some of the tools and guidelines for gender integration in their work on resource recovery and reuse (RRR) for food and energy in refugee contexts in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda (see page 29).

A decade on, the book remains a good source of information to help meet the on-going need for capacity building among researchers, trainers and development practitioners, to develop their skills and knowledge on gender analysis, gender mainstreaming and gender integration in the fields of food security, energy security, poverty alleviation and environmental management.

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Women feeding cities: Mainstreaming gender in urban agriculture and food security was co-edited by Alice Hovorka, Henk de Zeeuw and Mary Njenga and published in 2009 by Practical Action Publishing, UK. It is available as a free download at ruaf.org/assets/2019/11/Women_feeding_cities.pdf

Transforming Value Chains with Women Farmers

Ziad Moussa,
former RUAF regional coordinator,
Middle East and North Africa

'As part of RUAF's From Seed to Table programme from 2009-2011 we worked with several cities in the Middle East to mainstream urban agriculture at the regional level. This experience, which coincided with the publication of Women Feeding Cities, included working with women's organisations to improve value chains.

'For example, we worked with Iraq El Amir Women's Co-op in Amman, Jordan, on improving the green onion value chain – introducing new cultivars, maximising the processing, purchase of inputs, presentation and marketing, creation of a brand, increasing the price. It paid off handsomely and was really transformative. The cooperative is still going, and has diversified into handicrafts, agrotourism and fair trade.

'The two main lessons learned were:

- 1) to work on the institutional set up, such as by-laws, the importance of keeping books, holding elections, etc, to promote durability;*
- 2) to diversify in order to reach an economy of scale. If you stick to a microvaluechain, you might succeed but the opportunities could be limited. If you use a pilot to scale up and build momentum and develop new ways of thinking and working, the results will be greater.*

'Women Feeding Cities is still relevant, although ten years on the approach would benefit from integration of Agenda 2030; the "no-one left behind" philosophy and approach is an opportunity to highlight equity and economic empowerment.'

More information on Iraq El Amir Women's Co-op can be found at iraqalamir.org