

Fruit market
in Harare



Beacon Mbiba

The Marginalisation of Urban Agriculture in Lusaka

In 1987, Sanyal suggested that Lusaka, Zambia, was the capital city of urban agriculture (UA) in Africa. This was at the peak of Zambia's economic crisis when residents took up UA as a form of employment and to improve their nutritional status. Travelling in the region today, one will easily agree that Harare, Zimbabwe, has taken over as the capital of urban agriculture and that the activity may not be as widespread in Lusaka as observed by Sanyal in the 1980s.

There is no longer abundant maize growing outside the boundary fence of the elegantly designed Hotel International. In addition, there is little integration into planning. In fact, urban and peri-urban agriculture has been marginalised out of planning; it is not considered a priority by the city authorities and is being gradually squeezed out by residents seeking lodgings to rent, as well as developers. Under these circumstances, a recurring question is 'what factors determine the integration (or otherwise) of urban agriculture into city planning?'

The integration of UA into planning is determined not only by the character of planning and planning institutions in a given place but also by socio-political dynamics relating to access and control of land resources. In Lusaka, it can be observed that

the local planning institutions are weak; the planning department lacks the capacity to plan and most of the current strategic planning is carried out by donor agencies and their externally appointed consultancy firms (especially from South Africa)¹.

The combined effect of these determinants in Lusaka is to marginalise agriculture in the planning processes (institutional marginalisation) while also pushing it towards the periphery of the city: peri-urban agriculture (spatial marginalisation).

SOCIO-ECONOMIC SETTINGS AND LUSAKA'S STRATEGIC PLANNING

Lusaka's current population is about two million people, over half of whom reside in peripheral 'compounds', largely unplanned previously informal or squatter settlements. Reports suggest that

70% of the city's population resides on 20% of the land, thus pointing to a dual city comprising of extremely high density areas co-existing with spacious low population density zones (Muwowa 2000, Lusaka City Council 2000). Planning for Lusaka since the 1970s has largely revolved around programmes to upgrade the 'compounds' in terms of provision of improved housing, roads, social services, water and sanitation infrastructure. This is a domain in which large multinational donors and local NGOs play a significant role (see for example, Agyemang *et al.* 1997, Lusaka City Council 1999, Nippon Koei Co. Ltd. 1999).

The spatial growth of the city to date was supposed to be guided by the 1975 'Greater Lusaka Development Plan' whose full implementation was however constrained by limited capacity and financial resources, due to a shrinking economy since the late 1970s. Recently, signs of economic stability and recovery have emerged, buttressed by donor funding. A new strategic plan for the city has been identified as necessary to guide these new developments. Whereas, the legal requirement is that the master plan be reviewed every five years, this has never been undertaken for the 1975 Development Plan. Thus over the years, land use has developed in unforeseen directions hence the need for a new

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The result is that UA is pushed out of the more central areas

strategic plan. However, despite all these obvious reasons, local actors in Lusaka allege that the impetus for this plan came from the World Bank which provided the financial resources and appointed a team of South African consultants to prepare it². A draft strategic plan was then submitted in June 2000 and was still awaiting ministerial approval as of March 2001.

THE NEGLECT OF URBAN AGRICULTURE IN THE STRATEGIC PLAN

Generally, little direct mention is made in the plan, on urban and peri-urban agriculture. It appears that there was no attempt to conduct a detailed primary survey of the activity, though the report by Agyemang *et al.* (1997) which included

boundary, where close to 90% of the actors are possibly foreign business people³. The plan supports a vigorous environmental approach to management of these activities.

However, other than the environmental view of these activities, the study to the plan did not capture the political and economic dimensions of UA and its poverty alleviation potential. It seems to have been influenced by a modernisation philosophy leading to a strategic perspective that fails to draw out employment potentials in the sector as initially identified in another section of the plan. This issue could be gleaned in section 3 where it is stated that:

Agriculture is a major employer in the Lusaka economy. However, as Lusaka is a built up urban area and more and more agriculturally productive land is taken up for urban purposes, it is *not believed that there is any scope for long term growth* in this sector.

The plan thus fails to interrogate the issue further. Yet maps produced show that a lot of open spaces exist which could be comprehensively used for agriculture, to boost growth and employment. Secondly, no synthesis and strategy to protect agriculturally productive land from being replaced by building development sites is given. Lusaka still has untapped potential for upward growth, an approach that would draw away pressure from existing open spaces.

THE “COMPACT CITY” PERSPECTIVE AND IMPLICATIONS FOR URBAN AGRICULTURE

Urban agriculture in Lusaka will also be affected by the “compact city perspective” adopted in the strategic plan (also seen in Nairobi and Harare) and described as part of the ‘*new urbanism*’ (Mbiba 2001). Section 2 of the Lusaka Integrated Development Plan captures this as follows: “Before Lusaka expands outside the current district boundary, it is imperative that infilling of residential and commercial areas takes place.” This implies that all vacant land within residential areas should be used for building development sites before further expansion outwards. The rationale is that such open spaces are better serviced (with water, roads and sewer lines) relative to more peripheral sites and therefore cheaper to develop.

The result is that agriculture is pushed out of the more central areas towards the periphery of the city; these sites demand longer travel times not available to poor urban residents. This peripheral future of urban agriculture was endorsed in an interview with Councillor Judith Simusya of *Lubwa Ward 29* who indicated that:

“As council, we have not tackled UA. We do not have a strategy as such.... For us, we provide UA on smallholdings 5 km away from the city... that we promote. On open spaces within the city, we discourage it but do not slash crops.” (Interview 08/03/2001)

However, even in the smallholdings, the council does not provide any material support. Instead, this support comes



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Roasted Maize cobs sold along the major roads in Harare

a small section on UA was used. Even in terms of secondary data, the plan did not draw on the large literature base that exists on the topic for the city of Lusaka.

Urban agriculture was discussed in the context of open space management and the need for sustainable environmental development. In section 1.8.4.3, the plan recognises the presence of open spaces and agricultural land amounting to 400,000 hectares in the form of agricultural smallholdings at the periphery and kitchen gardens, where a variety of crops such as potatoes, cassava, maize and vegetables are grown. Aspects of livestock production and commercial horticulture were also identified. The latter is largely found in areas outside the Lusaka District

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**Crop production
along the road in
Dar Es Salaam**

The rental income option appears more attractive than the benefits derived from UA

from NGOs who work with cultivators and community groups.

SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXTS AND LAND DIMENSIONS

The view by councillor Simusya that ‘urban agriculture is an issue of land’ is shared by many in Southern and Eastern Africa (see Mbiba 2001). The urban land on which agriculture does or can take place could be used for many other purposes. Ownership, access and perceptions of good use of land are all socially contested matters that do not favour it. Prevailing processes in Lusaka seem to confirm this view.

As from 1975, land ownership and access in Zambia was governed by the Land (Conversion of Titles) Act (Chapter 289) which abolished land sales, transfers, alienation of land for value and restricted agricultural landholdings. This act was repealed in 1995 restoring value to undeveloped land. As a result of these statutory changes, public perceptions changed on how to use land, as well as on the importance of ownership, control and access to land sites for building development. A real estate market emerged and is now growing steadily with an emphasis on building site development and not on urban agriculture. Key processes observed are: (a) Open spaces are used for prestigious commercial and residential developments with involvement of international capital such as at Manda Hill Out of Town Shopping Centre, the upcoming OAU Complex in Long-acres, housing developments in the Ibex area, the Chinese Trade/Cultural Centre near

Kalingalinga residential area, and so on. (b) Investments and investors take land from the poor or get preferential treatment *vis à vis* the poor and UA. (c) Land is being sold illegally by officials and politicians. (d) Conflicts between different groups and competing claims on the same piece of land occur. (e) Illegal development of houses for rent is taking place. (f) There are rising levels of land disputes.

The *Times of Zambia* has reported on many of these processes while the City Council in 2000 set up a Committee to investigate the ‘rampant’ illegal land dealings by its officials and councillors (Lusaka City Council, 2000-2001). The *Times of Zambia* reported on July 6th 2000: “Police in Lusaka Yesterday evicted over 500 squatters who invaded 40 acres of University of Zambia land and demarcated it into residential plots on the border with Kalingalinga Township.” At the time, the land being reserved for future expansion of the university was being used for agricultural production by some residents.

But this article clearly shows that the ‘residential movement’ and demand for houses by the poor seem to be stronger than that for agriculture. Other press articles and the Lusaka (2000/2001) report suggest that powerful local politicians and patrons use the poor to invade urban open spaces not only for political patronage but also as a way to access sites on which to build structures from which to generate rental incomes. The rental

income option appears more attractive than the benefits derived from agricultural activities.

CONCLUSION

Grey literature and anecdotal interview evidence from Lusaka highlight that among other things, the conduct and content of current strategic planning efforts coupled with formal and informal land market dynamics reinforce the exclusion of agriculture rather than its integration into urban planning and development. Current efforts at strategic planning in Lusaka are largely managed by external agencies driven by a western modernist view of the city. These have tended to ignore the urban agriculture reality. Although these efforts have strong concerns for ‘environmental biodiversity’, they have missed opportunities to explore and develop urban agriculture as a sector within which to tackle issues of urban economy and poverty alleviation. The plans and planning exclude rather than integrate urban agriculture.

Urban agriculture is further excluded by ongoing social and political processes around issues of control and access to land in the city. The priority seems to be to focus on the conversion of undeveloped sites (both formally and informally) for building site development and away from UA. Given these processes and the context, it seems that Lusaka’s agriculture will become more active at the periphery (peri-urban agriculture) than in other city open spaces. Consequently, there is a need for a formal process to explore and put in place a peri-urban agriculture review programme as an extension or complement to the just completed Lusaka Integrated Development Plan.

NOTES

- (1) A view expressed by officers in the City Council and confirmed by a cursory review of planning and programme documents for the city.
- (2) A view expressed by Mr F Mwale, former mayor of Lusaka City (Interview discussion, March 2001).
- (3) The team of consultants comprised of V3 Consulting Engineers, LASCO Engineers, Urban Dynamics and Urban Econ.