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Cultivating the Right to Food? The Contribution of Urban Community Food Gardens to Food Sovereignty in Johannesburg, South Africa

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Cultivating the right to food?
The contribution of urban community food gardens to food sovereignty in Johannesburg, South Africa

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Presentation overview

• Research questions and methods
• Context: Johannesburg
• Policy environment
• Assessment of support
• Urban agriculture: globally and in Johannesburg
• Food sovereignty: imagining the alternative
Research question

Are food gardens contributing to food sovereignty in Johannesburg?

“Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems.” (Nyéléni Declaration on Food Sovereignty, 2007)

• “Food sovereignty is a condition for the full realization of the right to food” (de Schutter 2014, p 20).

• Unlike food security, food sovereignty considers how food is produced, by whom, and who controls the food system.
Research Methods

• Informal survey of 25 gardens
• 2 case study community gardens:
  – Participant observation
  – Food/life history interviews
  – Food diary (written/photographic, 3 days)
• Key informant interviews: NGOs, municipal & provincial government, garden customers, food vendors, etc.
• Literature review/ policy review
Context: Johannesburg

SA 21 years into democracy
Largest city (pop. 4.4 million) in wealthiest province (Gauteng pop. 13m)
Poverty (21.6% of households, 2008)
Inequality (SA highest in the world)
Unemployment (24.7%, 2015)
# Food insecurity in Joburg

- Wide range of numbers in different studies (42%-90%), using different measures
- Key issues: access (spatial, affordability), dietary diversity

<table>
<thead>
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<th></th>
<th>Food Secure %</th>
<th>Mildly Food Insecure %</th>
<th>Moderately Food Insecure %</th>
<th>Severely Food Insecure %</th>
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<td><strong>Inner City</strong></td>
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<td><strong>14</strong></td>
<td><strong>21</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Alexandra</strong></td>
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<td><strong>13</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
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</table>

Policy context

Constitutional right to food

SA Integrated Food Security & Nutrition Policy

Gauteng 20-year Food Security Plan

Food Security Programme

LandCare Programme

City of Joburg Food Resilience Policy
Assessment of support

• Challenge of targets/ monitoring
• Insufficient resources
• Poor communication
• Problems beyond the gardens (e.g. transport)
• Role of the state (facilitation vs. intervention)
Benefits of Urban Agriculture

- **Empowerment of women:**
  - economic
  - cognitive

- **Transformation:**
  - Alternative food system

- **Urban Agriculture**

- **FS/ Nutrition:**
  - Fresh veg (gardeners)
  - Access (community)

- **Livelihoods:**
  - expenditure savings
  - income from sales
  - salary for workers

- **Environment:**
  - nutrient cycling
  - water
  - food miles

- **Food democracy:**
  - local control
Urban agriculture in Joburg

• Participation: est. 9% No city-wide survey
• Why aren’t more people growing food?
  – Access to resources (land, water, tools, seeds)
  – Lack of interest (farming is “dirty” “uncool” “rural”)
  – Lack of knowledge
• Who is farming? Anecdotal evidence suggests:
  – More women than men
  – More older people than youth
  – Not the very poorest/ most food insecure
Urban agriculture in Joburg (2)

• What are the benefits?
  – Income/ savings limited/ some employment
  – Food secure but dietary diversity is low
  – Access to fresh, organic produce/ indigenous veg.
  – Localisation (face-to-face, spending in community)
  – Social space/ stress release
  – Support for vulnerable (donations)
Food sovereignty

Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. ...

Food sovereignty prioritises local and national economies and markets and empowers peasant and family farmer-driven agriculture... and food production, distribution and consumption based on environmental, social and economic sustainability. Food sovereignty promotes transparent trade that guarantees just incomes to all peoples as well as the rights of consumers to control their food and nutrition. ... Food sovereignty implies new social relations free of oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, racial groups, social and economic classes and generations.

(Nyéléni Declaration on Food Sovereignty, 2007).
Six principles of food sovereignty

1. Food for people (food as a right, not a commodity)
2. Values food providers
3. Localizes food systems
4. Puts control (of productive resources) locally
5. Builds knowledge and skills
6. Works with nature

Vía Campesina 2007 Nyéléni Synthesis Report
What does food sovereignty look like?

1. Food for people (food as a right, not a commodity)
   - Rights education
   - Alternatives to highly concentrated corporate food sector
   - Nutrition

2. Values food providers
   - Sustainable livelihoods (wages/unemployment)
   - Gender equality

3. Localizes food systems
   - Brings producers & consumers together
   - Contributes to local economies

4. Puts control (of productive resources) locally
   - Communities control food system decisions

5. Builds knowledge and skills
   - Builds on existing skills
   - Indigenous knowledge
   - Farmer-to-farmer

6. Works with nature
   - Agroecology training & support
Lessons

• Policies/ legislation: Having the right to food on paper is not enough.
  – People need to be aware of it in order to claim it.
  – Government legislation and policies on food must be framed in terms of this right.
• Implementation:
  – Policies cannot succeed without sufficient resources for comprehensive implementation
  – Coordination between levels of government is needed
• Food sovereignty approach would broaden scope of food-related policies, shift goals.
Thank you

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