



Cities and Agriculture: Developing Resilient Urban Food Systems

A book review by Aiperi Otunchieva

Authors: Henk de Zeeuw and Pay Drechsel

Book title: Cities and Agriculture: Developing Resilient Urban Food Systems (450 pages, 57.50 Euro)

Year of publication: 2015

Publisher: Earthscan Food and Agriculture, Routledge

ISBN: 978-1138860599

Growing populations pose serious challenges to urbanization by putting natural resources under the risk. Within the last few decades migration from rural to urban areas has increased in most countries. As points of economic development, opportunities for employment and technological advancement, cities attracted those in search of better incomes and higher standards of life. However, these trends put stress on limited resources. Urban ecological footprints have dramatically increased due to large populations within cities covering relatively small spaces and intensified use of resources. Securing safe and sufficient food for urban populations is one of the main objectives of sustainable development. The fact that around eight million people go hungry every day, 12.9% of people in developing countries are undernourished, one of six children in developing countries are underweight and 45% of child mortality is due to poor nutrition (World Food Programme) forces us to think about ways of ensuring food security for everyone.

Henk de Zeeuw was the first director of the International Network of Resource Centres on Urban Agriculture and Food Security (RUAF) until 2012. Pay Drechsel works in IWMI Headquarters in Sri Lanka as the Theme Leader on Resource Recovery, Water Quality, and Health. Having been engaged in a number of national and international urban food projects, the scholars wrote a unique contribution to the debate which should be used by multiple stakeholders within the urban food circle.

The first chapter of the book presents world food con-

sumption patterns, changes and increases in the last fifty years. Nutrition transition takes place putting pressure on the resources such as energy, soil, air and water. However, the inclusion of food resilience policies in the city planning agenda is a recent phenomenon which is rapidly increasing in such cities as Casablanca, Keshbawa, Antananarivo, Bogota and others. The authors engage in a thorough discussion of urban food policies in the second chapter outlining various existing programmes around the world. Although given examples of how urban food policies differ from each other, four main objectives have been outlined. These are: insurance of access to safe and healthy food, secure public health, ensure sustainable food value chain 'from field to fork' and promoting local economies through enhancing food resilience. The third chapter is specifically designed for the decision makers, civil society and market players directly engaged with urban food policy. It provides a detailed overview of different stakeholders and their roles and specific steps policy makers should take in ensuring food security within the administrative divisions. The fourth chapter engages with the challenges related to cost, legal rights and availability of land in intra- and peri-urban areas. It also outlines ways for the integration of agriculture in cities and the design of urban spaces suitable for farming and agricultural production. Furthermore, it is evident that consumers prefer daily, fresh, easily available and affordable food. Short food chains satisfy this market demand, if food is grown within or in the vicinity of a city. This phenomenon is dominant in a number of developing countries positioning themselves in a comparative advantage in comparison to supermarket chains. The authors be-



lieve that more research is needed in revealing how urban producers and Small to Medium Enterprises (SME) can utilize the benefits of urban agriculture. Chapter six discusses a number of factors affecting urban food security and nutrition which include access to food, nutrition change, and nutrition related health problems. Urban populations do not only consume the most resources but is also a source for renewable resources such as biological waste and wastewater. In the case of proper recycling and reusing, it would make urban agriculture comparatively independent from external inputs turning it into a sustainable project. The challenges of waste recovery and reuse are discussed in the next chapter. The complex interrelations between urban agriculture and climate change mitigation are the central point of chapter eight. Benefits of urban horticulture, among others, includes possibility for income generation for farmers, freshness of fruits and vegetables and decreased reliance on imported food. The next chapter concentrates on urban livestock keeping, its management and its risks and benefits. Research on urban forestry is increasing rapidly in the last decade. Chapter twelve makes an overview of the strategies of urban aquacultural production in terms of food security. Furthermore, urban agriculture is analyzed through the feminist foodscapes framework which implies power imbalances existing in cities. Financing projects related to agriculture in intra- and peri-urban areas is another significant and crucial aspect discussed. Finally, the last chapter outlines the role of urban agriculture in disasters and emergencies.

The book is designed both for practitioners and for scholars as it provides up to date scientific findings on improved urban food policy, successful examples on this theme around the globe, and specific guidance for government officials. It also demonstrates food policies implemented in developing countries, thus facilitating mutual learning within the Global South and Global North paradigm. Decision makers should definitely consult chapter three in order to capture the idea of city food governance. In addition, the book opens new perspectives for future research thus setting a new agenda for further scientific studies on urban agriculture.

Information of the author:

Aiperi Otunchieva is a member of the Department of Organic Food Quality and Food Culture, Faculty of Organic Agricultural Sciences, University of Kassel, Germany.

References:

World Food Programme. (2016). Hunger Statistics. Retrieved on 16 March 2016, available at <https://www.wfp.org/hunger/stats>