

Urban Agriculture in Middle Income and Developing Countries

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Urban Agriculture

Unlike in the United States (US) and other developed countries where it is focused mainly on community revitalization and recreation, urban agriculture in many developing and middle income countries is serious business supporting livelihoods and playing a key role in food security particularly among the urban and peri-urban poor (Figure 1). Often high value perishable products are preferred because they confer competitive advantage to urban growers particularly in countries with poor infrastructure. However, all types of products and crops are found in urban and peri-urban agriculture, including field and horticultural food crops, livestock, and non-food (aromatic, medicinal, and ornamentals plants) products.

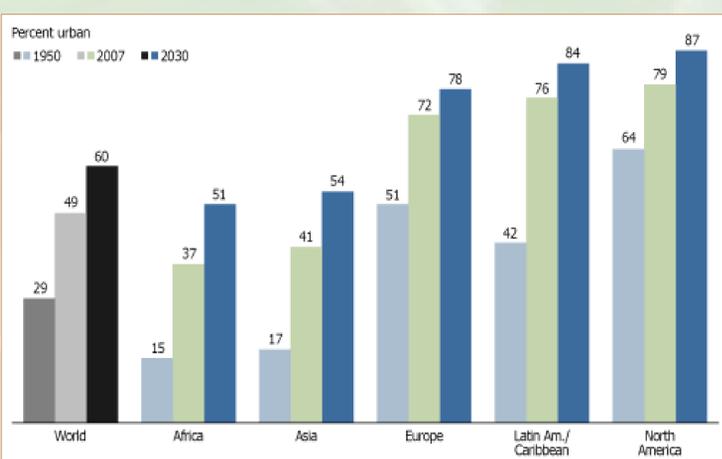


Figure 2. Projected growth in urbanization to 2030 for different regions of the world. (Source: United Nations, *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2005 Revision (2006)* and Carl Haub, *2007 World Population Data Sheet*).

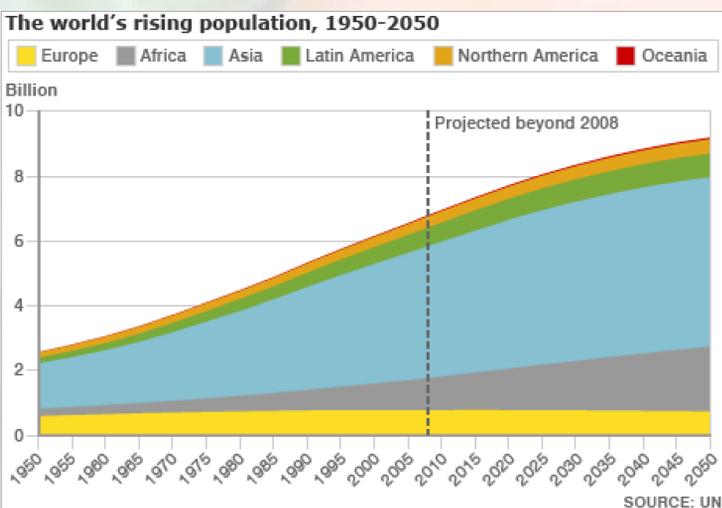


Figure 3. Projected world population by the year 2050.

Urban Agriculture and Poverty

In developing countries, urban agriculture is a reaction to the twin problems of rapid urbanization and rising urban poverty. According to the United Nations Population Fund, the world's urban population exceeded the rural component for the first time in history in 2008 (UNFPA, 2007). Urbanization is progressing most rapidly in developing countries (Figure 2) due to population growth and increased pressure on farmland. Urban poverty goes hand-in-hand with food insecurity. Relative to rural areas, inequality is much higher in cities and the urban poor, with limited purchasing power, spent a significant portion of earnings on food highlighting the importance of urban agriculture.

Furthermore, frequent events including food and economic crises, natural disasters and armed conflict, that disproportionately impact the poor accelerate the process of rural-urban migration. These have brought to the fore the problem of urban food insecurity and national governments and international agencies are starting to take note. For example, a report (p. 15) by the United Nations High Level task Force on the Global Food Crisis calls for a paradigm shift in design and urban planning that aims at:

.....reducing the distance for transporting food by encouraging local food production, where feasible, within city boundaries and especially in immediate surroundings. Without sacrificing core principles to observe public health standards, this includes removing barriers and providing incentives for urban and peri-urban agriculture, as well as improved management of water resources in urban areas (UN, 2008).....

The Opportunity to Lead

Population trends (Figure 3) and the rapid urbanization being witnessed globally suggest that the role of urban agriculture in food security and equity will continue to grow. The US must position herself to lead the evolution of urban agriculture by investing in research at home and abroad to generate knowledge and guidelines on good agricultural practices, policy (including in the areas of land tenure and access), and the economics of urban agriculture. This knowledge will greatly benefit initiatives by the US Agency for International Development and other US agencies involved in human development and humanitarian work.

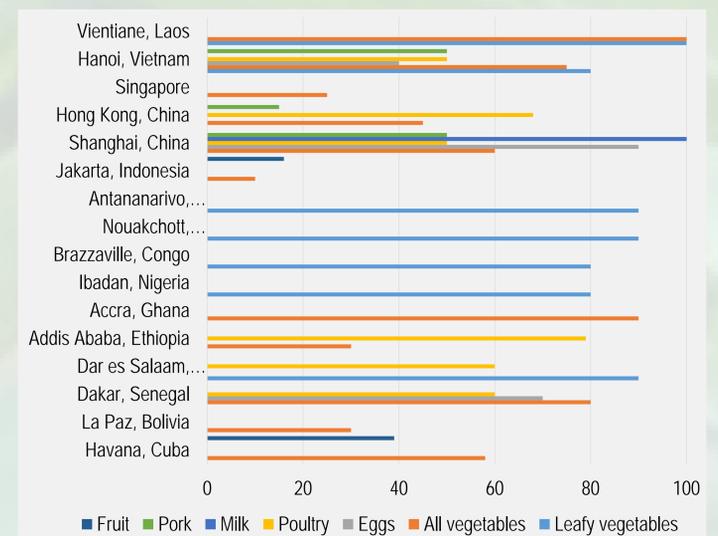


Figure 1. Percentage of urban demand met by urban agriculture in different cities of the world. (Modified from Dubbeling et al., 2010).



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- Dubbeling, M., de Zeeuw, H., and van Veenhuizen, R. 2010. Cities, poverty and food: Multi-stakeholder policy and planning in urban agriculture. RUA Foundation, Leusden, The Netherlands.
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