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The Resilience of Urban Agriculture in the Face of Adversity from the City Authorities: The Case of Mkoba

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Abstract- Against a backdrop of serious hunger and general poverty in the country residents in most urban areas have embarked on urban agriculture as one of the safety valves. General food insecurity has become a permanent feature of most rural and city households. This is because opportunities in the formal sectors are all but non-existent. Pursuance of urban agriculture has been done despite the spirited ruthlessness from the city authorities who regard the practice as being against urban by –laws. This paper analyses this phenomenon. Drawing on empirical evidence from one residential area in Gweru, Mkoba, the paper argues that urban agriculture is a safety valve that is here to stay and the sooner the city authorities reform legislation to accommodate it the better. Urban agriculture generally practiced by women, and to some extent men, has aggravated the burden that women carry in raising the family and it has therefore entrenched their characterization in society as "Beasts of Burden". The contestation over urban spaces between the residents and city authorities is one which the latter are slowly but surely losing because urban agriculture has become a significant feature of urban livelihoods.

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The Resilience of Urban Agriculture in the Face of Adversity from the City Authorities: The Case of Mkoba

Nyasha Chaminuka [α] & Peter Makaye [σ]

Abstract- Against a backdrop of serious hunger and general poverty in the country residents in most urban areas have embarked on urban agriculture as one of the safety valves. General food insecurity has become a permanent feature of most rural and city households. This is because opportunities in the formal sectors are all but non-existent. Pursuance of urban agriculture has been done despite the spirited ruthlessness from the city authorities who regard the practice as being against urban by –laws. This paper analyses this phenomenon. Drawing on empirical evidence from one residential area in Gweru, Mkoba, the paper argues that urban agriculture is a safety valve that is here to stay and the sooner the city authorities reform legislation to accommodate it the better. Urban agriculture generally practiced by women, and to some extent men, has aggravated the burden that women carry in raising the family and it has therefore entrenched their characterization in society as "Beasts of Burden". The contestation over urban spaces between the residents and city authorities is one which the latter are slowly but surely losing because urban agriculture has become a significant feature of urban livelihoods.

Keywords: urban agriculture, survival strategy, resilience, by-laws, city authorities.

I. Introduction

This paper analyses urban agriculture (UA) that is practised by the residents of Mkoba in Gweru, Zimbabwe. Urban agriculture takes place on private, leased or rented land in peri-urban areas, in backyards, on vacant public lands such as industrial or residential lots, roadsides, or on semi-public land such as school grounds and other institutions as well as in lakes and rivers. Urban agriculture often differentiated as intra-urban and peri-urban agriculture can be defined as the production of food for example vegetables, fruits, meat, milk, fish and non-food items such as fuel, herbs, ornamental plants, flowers within the urban area and its periphery for home consumption and for the urban market. It also encompasses related small scale processing and marketing activities including street vending of fresh or prepared food and other products. In many places urban agriculture is also closely linked with recycling and use of urban organic wastes and waste water. "Eight hundred million people were practicing urban agriculture, 200 million of them market producers employing 150 million people full time '' (UNDP, 1996: 9). Since then the numbers have increased. For a long time the importance of urban agriculture was overlooked or dismissed as merely the result of traditional habits brought by rural migrants to the city, expected to fade away over time when these people integrated into the economy. There was opposition to urban agriculture from public health and urban planning circles which perceived urban agriculture either as a threat to public health that should be abandoned or as a low rent land use that would not be able to compete with other urban land uses. Such perceptions were institutionalized in restrictive by laws and regulations at national and city levels although these have remained largely ineffective. This paper analyses the resilience of urban agriculture against adversity from the city authorities who have failed to accommodate this survival strategy despite its strategic importance in the lives of the city dwellers. It essentially argues that this phenomenon has been resilient despite the adversity from city fathers because of food insecurity and general poverty afflicting many in the city.

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II. Historical Development of the Practice

Although urban agriculture is an activity that has set roots in Zimbabwe, it remains a contentious issue. Reports of battles between urban farmers and city council authorities most of which would have resulted from councils having directed the burning or slashing of people's crops are quite common. It is about time people know the policy and legislative framework as far as urban agriculture in Zimbabwe is concerned. Municipal governments to a large extent have looked upon agriculture as incompatible with urban development and as a relict of rural – urban migration that dwindles as cities and urban economies grow. Historically no support has been given to poor urban farmers to access land on which to practice agriculture. Access to land for urban agriculture had largely been through informal ways such as invasion, self-allocation, inheritance, squatting and a few rent land from those who might not want to cultivate crops that season. The

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lack of recognition of UA and failure to allocate land to it has intensified urban land conflicts.

Gweru City Council (GCC) has expressed concern over the high levels of illegal urban farming taking place in the city and threatened to slash maize cultivated in prohibited areas and said the illegal cultivation had become an eyesore. In an interview on 5 January 2012 with the Standard newspaper reporter, Gweru City Council Deputy Major Councillor Taurai Demo said "some residents in the city went to the extent of hiring tractors to till pieces of land in prohibited open spaces including those earmarked for urban expansion". Demo further stated that "Local authorities had for long been lenient and would now act on the practice as the City Council has not acted for some years to stop urban farming, a development which is said resulted in residents flouting city by-laws" (The Standard 5 January 2012).

Despite by laws restricting urban agriculture because of its perceived side effects more and more Gweru residents like others in urban areas across the country are planting crops hoping to provide food for their families. While acknowledging the growing importance of urban agriculture by- laws restricting gardens were intended to promote proper land use. Such laws must not be flouted as doing so could devastate common urban lands. Research is needed into ways to balance people's needs with the preservation of natural resources. However in the face of economic crisis and widespread hunger, local authorities who used to strictly enforce such laws are now tolerating urban crops. The livelihoods of a large number of people in cities in Zimbabwe depend on urban agriculture.

It is believed that urban cultivation in Zimbabwe dates back to the formation of the first colonial cities. It was practised by people in various socio-economic groups and for a variety of reasons including subsistence, economic development and hobby. Within the last 15 years the practice has gained attention in urban centres due to increasing urban food insecurity, concerns over environmental degradation, competition from other land uses and its popularity as a longstanding practice of open space cultivation. Over the years the responsible authorities have made endless attempts to curb the practice which some still think of as a rural phenomenon albeit with very little success. The point some authorities seem to be missing is that people in urban settings engage in farming not because they enjoy the activity and feel the overwhelming urge to disregard the law, but primarily for subsistence purposes.

The urban poor throughout most of Africa have experienced difficulties over recent years and one of the coping mechanisms has been increased self-help in satisfying basic household needs. Food is one of these basic needs and urban agriculture both legal and illegal has grown as a consequence of the difficult economic climate.

III. The Importance of Urban Agriculture

As the biting economic situation that continued to escalate, most urban dwellers resorted to UA to augument their subsistence sources. The resultant effect was that the traditional form of UA has taken a new dimension as people diversify into such areas as horticulture and permaculture. In terms of scale, there has been a marked growth both in scale and substance. There has been an unprecedented increase on the number of urban farmers. Furthermore there has been a marked improvement in some instances from subsistence farming to market gardening. This has resulted in the backyard garden becoming too small to accommodate the increased demand for land by both urban land owners and non-traditional urban functions. The importance of this development is that it marked the official recognition of UA by local authorities collectively. It ceased to be activity that concerned particular local authorities, individuals but instead became a common phenomenon for which a common approach was sought. This presupposed a concerted effort to a common position for the advancement of UA. A similar pledge was made at regional level in August 2003 when Southern and Eastern African Ministers of Local Government signed the Harare Declaration pledging their support for UA and emphasized the need to create an enabling environment for its integration in urban planning and the urban economy. The Ministers of Local Government from Kenya, Malawi, Swaziland, Tanzania and Zimbabwe met in Harare on 28 and 29 August 2003 to discuss the theme of urban and peri-urban agriculture (UPA). At the end of the conference they signed a declaration where they acknowledged inter alia that "UPA is a widely practiced activity in and around towns and cities within the region"(ZELA and MEDPESA 2005 ;8).

UPA has generally been practiced internationally without appropriate policy and institutional framework. UA plays and will continue to play a significant role in promoting food security, employment creation and income generation, health and nutrition and improving the economics of urban areas. Some governments in the region have made significant progress in incorporating UA and others are now beginning to rise to the challenge. The government of Zimbabwe directed that urban councils consider areas and sectors where new ventures could be started setting up municipal enterprises in agriculture, commerce, establish systems for marketing, provision of inputs required by co-operatives. As a result of this directive, many municipal councils established cattle ranching projects and cities such as Gweru went a step further

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and set up abattoirs for the slaughter of cattle. Horticulture enterprises were also set up by some municipalities for selling flowers to the public (ZELA and MDPESA 2005 ;9).

The practice of UA cuts across all income groups as both the rich and poor are involved in the activity. The main difference is expressed in terms of access to resources and the driving force behind the activity. Cities are viewed as engines of economic and social development and as a result of harsh economic environment, pressure on urban resources has been rising uncontrollably. This trend has been exacerbated by increasing rates of rural–urban migration by job seekers and incessant droughts. The rise of UA in Zimbabwe is attributed largely to economic hardships (ENDA Zimbabwe 1994 ;96). "It is viewed as a coping strategy by urban households to sustain their livelihoods '' (Matshalaga 1997, Mudimu1996 ;11). UA takes place on home front or backyards (on plot) and on open public places around the city built environment (off plot). On plot farming is mainly confined to vegetable production. Open space cultivation (off plot) is devoted largely to production of cereal crops such as maize.

Within the last 15 years the practice of UA has gained attention in urban centres due to increasing urban food insecurity, concerns over environmental degradation competition from other land uses and its popularity as a long practice of open space cultivation. Studies have shown that "UA should be recognized as an integral and permanent element of the urban socio economic and ecological system" (Van Veenhuizen and Danso2007 ;17). It forms an important part of the livelihood strategies of large numbers of the urban poor.

In many cities rapid urbanization is accompanied by increasing urban poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition. As a result in many cities the number of people involved in UA tends to increase with urbanisation rather than decreasing as has been previously assumed. Another factor is the growing urban demand for perishable products coupled with the comparative advantages of production close to markets and the availability of productive resources including urban organic waste, waste water and vacant public land.

The history of crop slashing as a regulatory measure dates as far back as the 1980s but municipal councils have not been consistent in this regard as they shift between accommodation of UA and repression .Urban councils have generally tolerated UA in periods of drought and economic hardship, however there is no consensus on the issue. Politicians appear double-faced as in their constituencies they sympathise with the plight of the urban farmers but are sometimes silent or supportive of regulations that prohibit open space cultivation .This in some instances has seen the politicisation of the practice of UA.

Urban agriculture was considered an informal sector activity (Pryer & Crook, 1998, Bowyer –Bower & Tengbeh, 1997, Tevera, 1995). Most literature reflects the negative publicity it has received where those involved have been discouraged and punished .This has been due to arguments by local authorities that the uncontrolled encroachment of traditional cultivation practices upon environmentally sensitive land and the ill-advised use of chemicals in crop production have many ills. These include the spread of mosquitoes, rodents and the uncontrolled animal husbandry which compromises public health (Mbiba 1995 ; 8).

The uncontrolled urban farming in Gweru with stream bank cultivation and the use of fertilisers and pesticides is said to have contributed to pollution of water reservoirs'' (Ngwenya 2003). It is argued that if not sustainably practised urban agriculture could cause serious environmental damage hence there are arguments that agriculture must be confined to rural areas and where it encroaches urban areas it ruralises them thus making them ugly.

The official view remained that urban agriculture was bad for the environment and dangerous to health because stagnant water and damp vegetation attract mosquitoes and rodents. Central government land policies preferred to stress the rights of the poor to return to white owned rural farming areas through land reform. Many rural families were drawn to cities by the need to find work but they retained their rural links and urban farming made them feel complete as human beings.

Urban agriculture was commonly perceived as an activity that is marginal, temporary and archaic. Some regarded it as an activity that is actually harmful to urban farmers, the environment, the urban land economy and the appearance of the city. Most concerns about urban agriculture are about the potential rather than the inherent problems. If not practised properly UA can indeed be both unsanitary and polluting. Government and local authorities have frequently responded to these problems by prohibiting urban agriculture rather than trying to resolve them. This was due to mere attitudinal biases and mistaken beliefs for instance that farming is anaesthetic or that it serves as a hiding place for criminals.

It is thus from the foregoing that the stance of Gweru City Council has been hostile towards the practice of urban agriculture. This prohibitive stance of the local authority can be attributed to a number of factors such as the perceived hazards posed by urban agriculture , its incompatibility with the notion of urban development as well as misconceptions by local authorities regarding the practice of urban agriculture.

The Gweru Public Health by laws are extensive and deal in detail with public health issues that may affect urban agriculture. Having been adopted from public health general by-laws most of the provisions are

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similar to those of other local authorities. An important point to note is that generally the relevant by laws for all the local authorities are couched in a negative language that first deals with prohibition of the activities unless certain conditions are met. This probably explains the perception that has been created that urban agriculture is illegal in Zimbabwe.

In the past urban agriculture was illegal in cities and towns in Zimbabwe (Pryer and Crook 1998 ;29). It was often criticized for causing a drying up of the urban water supply and for causing soil erosion. In a report by Bowyer-Bower and Tengbeh (1997) on environmental implications of urban agriculture, they cited changes in the hydrological regime, vegetation change, chemical pollution resulting in eutrophication, crop toxicity. Urban farming is often against urban land use regulations or banned for reasons of perceived effects under existing environmental protection legislation (Drakakis - Smith, Bowyer-Bower and Tevera 1995; 21). Municipal authorities in Zimbabwe have used legislation to repeatedly destroy crops prior to being harvested.

In other cities such as Harare some urban farmers have formed cooperatives to contribute money towards buying inputs such as seed and fertilizer (Herald 2009). It would appear that urban farming has been legitimized and the government has become supportive of peri-urban farming. Peri-urban field days have been held in Harare and these have been supported by the government.

The absence of clear policies and statutory documents relating to urban agriculture has been associated with multiple conflicts between UA practitioners and urban managers. The central government is not entirely opposed to open space urban cultivation in Gweru. The general view of the central government departments noted above is that city councils should state their preferred position to the central government for recommendation and approval. Urban agriculture in Zimbabwe subsists in a plethora of fragmented and uncoordinated legislation dealing with environmental issues. This context hampers implementation of comprehensive urban environmental planning and management systems. Most current environmental legislation originated in the colonial era and is not suited to contemporary and emerging socio-economic and environmental problems in urban centres. Cities are fast becoming the principal territories for intervention and planning strategies that aim to eradicate hunger and poverty and improve livelihoods requiring innovative ways to enhance the food security, nutrition of the urban poor and vulnerable households. In Mkoba Gweru this has seen the intervention of donor agencies such as CARE International, providing material, technical and financial support for the establishment of cooperative gardens in Mkoba which are operational to date. The local municipality has also been supportive in this regard by allocating land for these cooperative gardens.

IV. Legislation Governing Urban Agriculture

UA is regulated by various policies and pieces of legislation such as the Country Planning Act, Environmental Management Act, Public Health Act, Bees Act, Forest Act, Farmers Licensing and Levy Act as well as the Protection of Land law which deals with the use of municipal land. The pieces of legislation are meant to order and regulate urban agriculture as opposed to prohibiting it. The misinterpretation and selective application of the numerous pieces of legislation has been previously taken to imply that urban agriculture is an illegal activity. Urban agriculture faces a number of fragmented and uncoordinated legislation dealing with environmental issues. This has hampered the implementation of comprehensive urban environmental planning and management systems.

Despite antagonism from city council authorities, the practice of urban agriculture has proved to be resilient since the practice has stood the test of time. The resilience of UA is due to rising poverty, unemployment and food insecurity which leave urban dwellers with no option besides urban farming.UA has also been resilient due to policy inconsistency among local municipalities who vacillate between hostility and accommodation of urban agriculture. There is no single legislation or policy for UA in Zimbabwe but several legal instruments address the issue of UA in one way or the other. It is the combination of the various pieces of legislation on UA as a practice coupled with misinterpretation by those that enforce laws that has led to lack of clarity on the legal standing of the sector as well as selective application of the laws governing the practice of UA.

V. Turning a Blind Eye to Urban Agriculture

Local authorities have also acknowledged the immense positive contribution of UA hence the tolerance of the practice. Available research indicates that urban agriculture can be a profitable undertaking especially in the case of products that are in high demand and have a comparative advantage over rural production. Market-oriented urban agriculture generates net income that in most cases is equivalent to or better than the minimum urban wage. Urban agriculture has proved to be a resilient and a dynamic sector with all year round production, small scale processing. Urban farming also provides a source of employment not only for urban farmers themselves but for hired labourers and workers in micro enterprises such as processing of produce and street vending. Urban agriculture has proved to be a contributing to food security and resilience. During times

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of economic crisis as was experienced in Zimbabwe from 2006-2009, urban agriculture increased rapidly since it provided safety nets for the poor in Mkoba by augmenting household dwindling incomes. The practice of UA enhanced their access to fresh food and nutrition by making fresh food available. The practice of UA also enhances nutrition and health as suggested by some studies that urban farming households have a better nutritional status as compared to non-farming households. It creates better conditions for poor urban families to produce and market various products.

UA as a sector can also promote sound urban environmental management since it has a high potential for improving the urban environment by using organic wastes. It also conserves energy and food because there are fewer food losses during transportation and handling and offers an alternative to the long distance transport of food from elsewhere. The practice of UA also enhances civic participation in urban management of municipal resources including land, water and urban wastes. The planning and implementation of UA and related projects for recycling and reuse of urban organic wastes and waste water can have direct positive effects on people's living conditions while generating feelings of self-reliance and creates links between the urban poor and other actors.

The economic meltdown that was experienced in Zimbabwe from 2006-2009 saw an unprecedented increase in the number of urban farming households as a coping mechanism. Almost every household in Mkoba grabbed every vacant space to practice farming while those in villages 13,14,15,16,18,19 and 20 leased land from a farm owned by Mr Mauto situated on the western outskirts of Mkoba 14 and 19.The urban farmers pay an annual rent of US$7 to the farm owner for them to cultivate in his farm.The economy of Zimbabwe shrunk significantly which resulted in a desperate situation and widespread poverty. Hyper-inflation was a major problem from about 2003 to 2009 and the economy deteriorated significantly. In recent years there has been considerable economic hardship in Zimbabwe as the national economy contracted resulting in shortages of foreign currency, fuel and food. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita dropped by 40%, agricultural output dropped by 51%, industrial production dropped by 47% and Foreign Direct Investment declined to US$30 million in 2007 (UNDP 2009).Price controls were imposed in 2007 on a wide range of products including food, medicines and soap which resulted in severe shortages of basic commodities in shops. Although a few years ago urban agriculture was mainly carried out by women and children, the economic hardships in 2008 saw more and more men becoming actively involved in the practice to supplement family income. The phenomenon has grown in magnitude, significance and scope hence it is now practised by both men and women due to the changing gender dynamics of this sub sector. In most cases women were viewed to be the major players in UA. In instances where the husband was employed he only bought the needed inputs while leaving the woman to provide the necessary labour. The working husband would however help the wife during his free time. Men also felt that it was culturally appropriate for women to be concerned than men on the type of food that their families ate hence it was their major responsibility. This could be a reflection of the African culture where traditionally a man was expected to allocate a portion of his fields to his wife (Cheater 1984: 14). Men who actively participated in UA were either unemployed, self-employed or if employed earned so little that they were motivated to supplement their meagre salaries through UA. The rising percentage of active males could be attributed to the changing attitudes towards gender roles associated with farming. A growing number of men realised that farming was not gender specific since everyone eats hence farming must be every one's responsibility. As breadwinners men have the responsibility of fending for their families and in this case UA is not only defined by gender but also by the occupational status of male members of the household. Formally employed men could contribute financially by hiring servants to undertake manual tasks of crop production. Poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition have become critical problems and meeting these challenges both men and women play a crucial role in household food production. This can boost household nutrition as well as generating income and building social inclusion of the urban poor in Mkoba. The vital contribution of UA was largely neglected by city officials, economic planners and development practitioners who tended to concentrate on the industrialisation of food production. This perception has however since changed due to the growing realisation of the immense contribution of UA to sustainable urban livelihoods.

Local authorities now realize the existence of urban agriculture as a worthwhile endeavour .An increasing number of local and national governments are promoting urban agriculture in response to serious problems of poverty and food insecurity. The Gweru City Council deputy Mayor Taurai Demo highlighted that local authorities had been lenient due to economic problems that were experienced in Zimbabwe (The Chronicle 12 January 2012). When the country's economy was not performing well in 2008, the majority of urban dwellers resorted to urban farming to make ends meet and as a local authority, Gweru City Council resolved that it should let people cultivate these small pieces of land to earn a living.

What is clear from an interview conducted with the GCC Town Planning Department is that unauthorised cultivation is not allowed but farmers can only be permitted to cultivate in areas meant for institutional development which are yet to be serviced

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and developed. GCC authorises urban farming after having looked at its own development plans and is being lenient to farmers based on humanitarian grounds as UA is assisting in poverty alleviation. GCC is also now tolerating urban farming in undesignated zones due to shortage of manpower to slash crops illegally grown by farmers (Interview with Mrs Chikwatu; 10 April 2013). In 2001 the Government of Zimbabwe due to its agrarian stance allocated sixty thousand hectares of land in Harare in a bid to eradicate poverty in urban areas. This was after the government realized that many families in urban areas were actually surviving on the maize planted on the small patches of land. The Minister of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing Ignatius Chombo said the government had set aside land for urban farming because it had the potential of eradicating poverty in cities. In the past only people in high density areas were actively involved in urban agriculture. The situation has since changed with green belts being seen in all suburbs including the affluent areas.

While most land occupations during the fast track land reform programme from 2000 onwards took place in commercial farming areas in predominantly rural areas, there was a steady movement into and occupation of various forms of urban and peri-urban areas as the landless urban people took advantage of the opportunity presented by the chaotic situation created by farm occupations countrywide. There was political interference during the farm invasions in Zimbabwe as officials who had influence in local municipalities encouraged invasion of open spaces in towns (Interview with Mr Mtekeri Gweru Municipal Police; 30 March 2012). The accommodation of UA in Mkoba Gweru can be demonstrated by the nexus between land reform and resilience of UA as the ZANU PF government desired to win back the urban vote since all councillors' posts in Mkoba are held by the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Many scholars have demonstrated the importance of UA in urban areas and that access to land was the greatest constraint to the activity (Mbiba 1995, Mudimu1986, Masoka 1997, ENDA Zimbabwe 1994;10). Thus some people seized the opportunity presented by the fast track to access land for UA. Land use issues especially availability of land, access to land and usability of land and tenure problems are of particular concern to urban farmers. The existence, prevalence and growth if it occurs, of food production in urban environments is seen as being predominantly about the use of space in densely settled locations with the exception of small numbers of animals kept in backyards. Land is the fundamental resource required for farming, while access and tenure are seen as critical to the contributions UA may make to household food security and to livelihood composition of the urban poor (Ellis and Sumberg 1998 ; 2).

There has been a major paradigm shift from hostility to accommodation of UA by GCC owing to the realisation of the growing food insecurity of the urban poor especially the unemployed in Mkoba. GCC shifted to tolerance of UA based on humanitarian grounds since the farmers are not being charged anything and this is also due to the realisation of the positive impact of UA in poverty alleviation and sustainability of urban livelihoods. Since the residents in Mkoba are also a major factor in electing office bearers, the elected officials also tolerate UA for political expedience so as to guarantee their re-election by the residents.

The practice of UA has evolved over time to include new actors and has taken a new dimension as people diversified into such areas as horticulture and permaculture. In terms of scale there has been a marked growth both in scale and substance. There has been an unprecedented increase in the number of urban farmers. There has also been a marked improvement in some instances from subsistence farming to market gardening. This has resulted in the back yard garden becoming too small and the tendency has been to move to off plot cultivation. The transition to off plot cultivation resulted in the invasion of nearly every possible open space .Targeted areas are those open spaces reserved for future development.

The growing magnitude of UA has been attributed to a number of factors such as increasing urbanization coupled with increasing rates of rural urban migration. It is however difficult to create sufficient employment for their rapidly increasing population. Meanwhile diseases such as HIV/AIDS have eroded the income earning capacity of many households. As a consequence the urbanization process goes hand in hand with an increase in urban poverty dubbed the urbanization of poverty. Increasing food insecurity among the urban poor and problems in accessing fresh, nutritious food at affordable prices went unnoticed by municipal authorities due to a middle class bias in urban planning. At the same time planners paid little attention to problems of urban food production.

Urban agriculture can contribute significantly to the economic, social well-being of urban dwellers and as well as promoting food security. Urban agriculture expands the economic base of the city through production, processing, packaging and marketing of consumable products.UPA provides employment, income and access to food for the urban population which contributes in relieving chronic and emerging food insecurity.

It provides social benefits such as better health and nutrition, increased income, employment creation, urban agriculture has improved the livelihoods of many Mkoba residents .UA has been a positive response to tackle food concerns and the needs of the residents.UA contributes to energy efficiency by reducing the need for

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the transportation of foodstuffs since these can be produced locally.

The biting economic situation in Zimbabwe from 2005-2009 caused many residents in Mkoba resort to UA to subsidise their subsistence. The economic freefall led to the decline in productivity in companies, such as Bata Shoe Company, Zimcast and Zimglass. These companies used to employ a large section of their work force from Mkoba. The economic down turn took its toll and resulted in company closures, retrenchments and resignation by many workers in Gweru. The overall effect was rising poverty, loss of family income hence households were forced to engage in urban farming to make ends meet. The practice of urban farming was a contentious issue as reports of battles between farmers and City Council authorities over the slashing of crops used to be common. This was due to the perceived negative effects of UA on the environment.

VI. Conclusion

It can thus be deduced from the foregoing that the resilience of urban agriculture in Mkoba is due to a multiplicity of factors such as the need to promote sustainable livelihoods, urban food insecurity and vulnerability, rising urban poverty, change in the attitude of Gweru City Council as well as the need to mitigate the debilitating effects of HIV/AIDS. There are, however, many challenges facing urban agriculture including the absence, inadequacy or inconsistency in the policies and legislation regulating the sector. There appears to be a huge divide between officials who use the law to prohibit the practice of urban agriculture and the residents who respond to food insecurity by practising UA. The growing significance of the contribution of UA to urban livelihoods has led to a paradigm shift from hostility to accommodation. Studies during the past decade have shown that UA has been recognized grudgingly as an integral and permanent element of the urban socio-economic system as it forms an important part of the livelihood strategies of large numbers of the urban poor. The plethora of challenges that face UA need redress if it is to significantly contribute to the socio-economic livelihoods of the urban dwellers.

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