

A Demographic Portrait of Urban Open Field Cultivators in Gweru, Zimbabwe



Social Science

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ABSTRACT

The formulation of effective policies and regulations to regulate urban agriculture in Zimbabwe has to be informed by research. This study sought to provide kernel demographic information to be later used in the formulation of models to investigate the impacts of proposed legislation on urban open field cultivation. A questionnaire driven survey was used to obtain data from 40 cultivators residing in Gweru, Zimbabwe. It was discovered that 58% of field owners were men, with 76% of all field owners being between 25 - 65 years. Children were found to contribute 35% of the labour. The majority of cultivators were formally educated; 15% had tertiary/university education, 5% 'A'-level, 48% 'O'-level and 27% primary level education. The study concluded that open field cultivation is a family practice engaged in by all social classes and thus recommended that urban agriculture be legitimized as it is an integral part of Zimbabwean urban life.

INTRODUCTION

Open field cultivation; the cultivation of crops on open spaces in and around urban residential suburbs is widespread in Zimbabwe, howbeit illegal (Tshuma and Mashoko, 2010). There have been calls by NGOs and academics for the legalization of urban agriculture which encompasses open field cultivation (Oxfam, 2007; Zezza and Tasciotti, 2010). This call is justifiable in light of the ubiquitous nature of the practice and the fact that most by-laws are an inherited artifact of the colonial era and thus totally out of sync with the reality obtaining in post colonial Zimbabwe.

As Halloran and Magid (2013) point out that legalizing urban agriculture is fraught with many issues to take into considerations. The fact that urban residents are already engaged in urban agriculture, especially open field cultivation, makes it challenging to incorporate this practice into city plans without the active participation and cooperation of residents (Halloran and Magid, 2013; Municipal Research and Services Center (MRSC), 2013). It is thus important for the drivers of open field cultivation to be identified and their evolution over time to be predicted. Having such knowledge will enable the extent and importance of open field cultivation to be quantified and thus enable appropriate legislation to be crafted that will foster compatibility between the practice and the city's master plan (Zezza & Tasciotti, 2010; Halloran & Magid, 2013).

Studies by Erenstein (2006) and Nkamleu & Adesina (2000) have indicated that demographic information is pivotal in identifying determinants of participation in various aspects of urban agriculture such as the rearing of small ruminants, agricultural chemical use and lowlands cultivation. Thus obtaining demographic data on open field cultivators in Zimbabwe would enable models to be formulated that will identify drivers of the practice in the country and go a long way in informing policy makers as to how effective proposed legislation will be as the demographics change (MRSC, 2013). This study thus seeks to provide demographic data on open field cultivation in Gweru that will enable the practice to be investigated in more detail in future studies.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

A survey relying on an interviewer administered questionnaire was used to obtain data from 40 cultivators. The prospects were approached whilst working in their fields; those willing to be interviewed qualified to participate in the study. The survey was carried out from December 2013 to January 2014. The 40 respondents were residents of Senga, Nehosho and Daylesford suburbs in Gweru, Zimbabwe. These suburbs were selected because they offered a rich mix of social classes: Daylesford is a low density suburb, Nehosho is a high density suburb whilst Senga a medium density suburb. No stratification based on

suburb was done and participation was based solely on being found performing operations in the field. The response rate to the survey could not be determined as only those respondents that were agreeable to participation were recorded.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ownership and Age: In agreement with FAO (2010), the majority of fields (58%) were owned by man, whilst 52% of the labour was provided by women and girl children. However, the proportions of labour provided varied with age group as shown below:

Table 1: Proportion of labour provided by males and females

Age Category [years]	Proportion of labour [%]	
	Male	Female
5 - 17	37	63
18 - 35	49	51
36 - 50	60	40
51 - 65	50	50

Family labour: Open field cultivation is a family practice. Only 30% of field owners use purely hired labour for land preparation, the rest rely on either purely family labour (48%) or a combination of family labour and hired labour (22%). The reliance on purely family labour increases to 93% for both the planting and harvesting operations. This is probably due to the fact that these operations require less effort than land preparation and thus can be carried out effectively by family members without the need for hired labour. In total, 35% of labour was provided by children (5 - 17 years) whilst 20% was provided by the elderly (above 65 years). Thus the majority of labour is provided by the elderly and children; this is most likely due to the fact that the middle aged are usually formal employed or involved in non-agricultural income generating activities. This point is reinforced by the fact that most data was collected during the week when only the unemployed can provide labour and during a school holiday when school going children were available to work in the fields.

Education: Open field cultivation is not confined to a specific educational domain of Zimbabwean society. Cultivators from all educational backgrounds were represented, those with no formal education accounted for 5%, those with primary education for 27%, those with 'O'- level for 48%, those with 'A'- level for 5% and those with tertiary/university education accounted

for 15% of open field cultivators. This is in agreement with the findings of Tshuma and Mashoko (2010) that participation in open filed cultivation is not dictated by educational background. It can thus be further speculated that, since educational level is correlated with social class, open field cultivation is independent of social class (Brown and Lauder, 2009).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Open field cultivation is a ubiquitous practice that is engaged in by all social classes and age groups in the city of Gweru. It is thus an integral aspect of urban life and thus should be legitimized to bring city by-laws into sync with the residents' social and cultural norms.

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