

UTILISING THE WARD COMMITTEE SYSTEM TO PROMOTE URBAN FOOD SECURITY IN THE CITY OF JOHANNESBURG

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ABSTRACT

The current global economic crisis impacts widely on the poor and destitute, especially in developing countries, where it is significantly pronounced in informal urban settlements. Consequently, from a governance point of view the issue of food security is a matter of concern. As a result, some municipal policy makers assert that urban farming activities may be an effective way in which to alleviate the effect of hunger and malnutrition among destitute households - thus providing immediate relief to the needy.

From a public administration point of view, it is argued that it may be more efficient to expend limited resources on programmes and projects to assist urbanites to become self-sufficient urban farmers, as opposed to spending such resources on merely acquiring and distributing food with the effect that dependency on government is maintained or even increased. However, the body of knowledge concerning the effective administration for food security among municipalities in developing countries is currently limited. As a case in point, only a few Southern African municipalities have pronounced policies in this regard, yet even fewer have successfully incorporated such programmes and projects in their endeavours. *En route* to dealing with this challenge, consideration may be given to improve the utilisation of the ward committee system, which forms an integral part of the South African local government system.

In this article the following aspects are addressed: *Firstly*, the case of the City of Johannesburg is cited where provision is made in the day-to-day victual needs of indigent peoples. *Secondly*, the South African local government system of ward committees is posed as an appropriate vehicle with which urban farming programmes and projects may be conducted. Furthermore, it is postulated that municipal decision makers should decisively apply an issue-driven approach as well as pro-poor growth strategies in their integrated development planning,

for such programmes and projects. Lastly, the point made that urban farming activities are not by default tantamount to Local Economic Development as such, but may be a catalyst to achieve this goal in due course.

INTRODUCTION

Across the world the current economic disposition renders many poor households, especially those among developing nations, vulnerable in terms of food security. The global meltdown according to the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, warns that the impact of the financial crisis is experienced by developing countries on macro-level, which in practice translates to an approximate 923 million people across the developing world being “seriously undernourished” (2007 statistics) and more recently, an additional 119 million receding into this category because of food inflation and related aspects. Thus, according to the former United Nations Secretary-General, the world now has the obligation of fulfilling the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by caring for approximately 1 billion poverty stricken people (www.fao.org) who suffer from day-to-day food insecurity (www.financialexpress.com).

Part of the challenge facing policy makers is the limited comprehension of all the clinical reasons for continuous worldwide increases in food prices. Some of the reasons cited could include the impact of the increased demand for bio-fuels, declining water supply, and population demographics (especially in India and China) (Fresh Link, July 2008; 3). According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation, increased investments in agriculture and in particular increased attention to improving international and domestic policies set to combat poverty, are needed immediately. Assessments conducted by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (www.fao.org) had identified particular short- and medium-term approaches to be taken rapidly to deal with this crisis, viz.:

- Protective safety measures should be implemented through policy and action to ensure day-to-day household food security to limit vulnerability among the poor.
- Improve the access to quality seeds and fertilizers to boost farmers’ productivity (including small farmers).
- Strengthening capacity building initiatives in the areas of particularly production, processing and marketing of agricultural products.
- Strengthening institutional capacity to improve policy development and policy implementation.
- Better functioning markets at all levels as well as improved market infrastructure and information services, especially for small farmers.
- Improve sustainable management of natural resources.
- Increased participation of women in the agro-food sector.

The current food security situation in Africa, for instance is exacerbated by prices, which remain high in the context of inflationary trends. In the case of developing countries, their capacities to respond to production and price-level demands remain limited. During 2008, increased production of cereals in these countries registered less than 1 percent since they may not be able to apply the above-mentioned approaches and measures. In Low-Income Food Deficit (LIFD) countries that depend on imports to support their food requirements, the situation is even worse because of price pressures on even locally produced food (www.fao.org).

This article highlights both some theory as well as practical knowledge gained in development practice in relation to the administration of programmes and projects associated with urban farming and food security issues in general. Since a developmental local government is only possible with the established institutions that embrace the principles of democracy and participatory governance involving all stakeholders and most importantly local communities in the process of decision-making and service delivery to build a sustainable society, existing systems seeking to achieve participation of relevant stakeholders should be maximised. The intention with this article is to lay the foundation for more extensive debate surrounding these issues, but in essence attempts to pose the following points:

Firstly, the case of the City of Johannesburg is cited as an example where provision is made in the day-to-day victual needs of indigent peoples (Johannesburg is currently engaged in finalising a policy on urban agriculture). *Secondly*, the South African local government system of ward committees is posed as an appropriate vehicle with which urban farming programmes and projects may be launched in a municipal setting such as the City of Johannesburg. *Furthermore*, it is postulated that municipal decision makers should decisively apply an issue-driven approach as well as pro-poor growth strategies in their integrated development planning, for such programmes and projects. *Lastly*, it makes the point that urban farming activities are not by default tantamount to Local Economic Development as such, but may be a catalyst to achieve this goal in due course.

URBAN AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY

Urban agriculture presents in many forms throughout the world. In some cases urban agriculture forms part of an extensive agri-business (economic) endeavour whereas in some cases the purposes are merely recreational. Yet, in some cases, urban agriculture is seen as an activity purposefully designed to address issues relating to food security and sustenance or survival among poor and indigent peoples in urban environments. Urban agriculture contributes to food security in two ways:

Firstly, it increases the *amount* of food available to people living in cities; and

Secondly, it allows for an offering of a *variety* of fresh vegetables and fruits and meat products to be made available to urban consumers (City of Johannesburg. Draft Policy Framework – Urban Agriculture Policy, 6).

In a rapidly urbanising world, innovative interventions such as urban agriculture activities are needed to deal with the challenges in this regard. General statistics on the world's urban population are:

- 50% of the world's population lives in cities.
- 800 million people are involved in urban agriculture worldwide and contribute to feeding fellow urban residents.
- Low-income urban dwellers spend between 40% and 60% of their income on food each year.
- By 2015 approximately 26 cities in the world are expected to have a population of 10 million or more. To feed a city of such a size – an estimated 6000 tonnes of food must be available each day.

One significant aspect of the above-quoted statistics is that most of the growth in urbanisation will occur within the developing world. Sub-Saharan Africa is the most rapidly urbanising region in the world. Much of Africa's urban population already lives in densely populated cities such as Johannesburg (City of Johannesburg. Draft Policy Framework – Urban Agriculture Policy, 6).

THE CASE OF THE CITY OF JOHANNESBURG

South Africa, as a lead-country in the international development arena, is actively involved in attempts to improve on the food security dilemma, which is described above. In particular, some municipalities are involved in this in a structured way. As a case example, the City of Johannesburg is cited to direct particular focus on urban farming and food security issues as they are currently addressed in this metropolitan municipality.

The City of Johannesburg's food security and urban agriculture programme resides within the Johannesburg Fresh Produce Market. Until recently, the City of Johannesburg has been actively involved in alleviating food insecurity within its area through a Food Bank-programme. The Food Bank is a non-profit organisation that distributes approximately 9000 food hampers per month to registered welfare organisations that care for HIV/AIDS orphans, the elderly and crèches. However, for the purposes of sustainability this programme is being extended through, a comprehensive urban agriculture intervention.

This intervention is two-pronged in that it will establish food gardens for poor urban dwellers within the confines of the City and simultaneously, it will advance the economic aspirations of those who, through the latter achieve surpluses in their food production endeavours (Fresh Link, Spring 2008, 4). This initiative is aligned to the short- and medium-term approaches suggested by the Food and Agriculture Organisation mentioned above.

The City of Johannesburg's approach and purpose with urban agriculture is to:

- improve domestic food security – reduction in vulnerability of food economy to external shocks (e.g. fuel price increases, food inflation and shortages of crops);
- improve economic opportunities (e.g. job opportunities, enterprise development);
- address social concerns relating to poverty and unemployment; and

- improve environmental conservation, preservation and mitigation.

Firstly, the City of Johannesburg adheres to a pro-poor growth development strategy, which strives towards achieving sustainability in its design and implementation. Such a strategy has the potential to provide food, environmental enhancement, education, beautification, inspiration and hope. Urban agriculture may contribute to youth education, employment creation, whilst it provides utility and respect for elders, builds communities, recycles kitchen and other urban wastes, and produces fresh nutritious food. Because many of the benefits of urban agriculture can be attained through other activities or means, producing food is perhaps the single most important benefit.

Secondly, the City of Johannesburg seeks to integrate the practices of SHREQ into its urban agriculture activities and thereby promoting sustainable development practice in adherence to the notion of the developmental state. SHREQ refers to *inter alia* the following:

- **Safety and Health** – Safe agriculture practice, instruments and implements. Use and usage of chemicals, pesticides and pharmaceutical products with due consideration for human and animal health and wellbeing.
- **Risk** – Proper assessment and analysis with regards to investment, effectiveness and efficiency, and economy.
- **Environment** – Sound environmental practices according to the principles of sustainability and Local Agenda 21.
- **Quality** – Adherence to relevant standards set as far as processes and products are concerned.

Thirdly, the City of Johannesburg follows an issue-driven approach (as opposed to a sector-driven approach) in the planning and implementation of its urban agriculture initiatives where the issues of food security and poverty alleviation retain focus, and where sectoral interests are integrated in the design of such strategies.

Among indigent urban communities, food security is the bottom line why urban agriculture is important. However, urban agriculture is only one way to solve food security issues and thus should be viewed in this larger context. Organising for urban agriculture may not always be the best way to address food security issues, but organising for food security issues is one of the best ways to promote urban agriculture.

The pursuance of pro-poor development, integrating SHREQ and an issue-driven approach for urban agriculture form the strategic thrust associated with this policy (City of Johannesburg. Draft Policy Framework – Urban Agriculture Policy, 8).

INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT PLANNING (IDP)

As far as urban farming is concerned, the Resource Centres on Urban Agriculture and Food Security (RUA Foundation) (PAPUSSA Policy Briefs, 1) recommendations are made with regards to how policy makers should reflect such activities in a sustainable way. The predominant recommendation is that all such activities should form

an integral part of urban planning and development strategies. In South Africa, a form of planning methodology termed Integrated Development Planning (IDP) is followed by municipalities to provide for sustainable development and service delivery.

Integrated development planning may be defined as both a *process* through which municipalities prepare a strategic development plan, for a five-year period and a *product* of the integrated development planning process (Integrated Development Planning and Integrated Development Plan). The IDP process comprises a single, inclusive planning process within which all other municipal processes must be located. As an extension, all local economic development in a municipality must be fully integrated as a local economic development plan (LED) within the IDP. The IDP is a strategic planning process in itself. Therefore, if a municipality is being developmental and responds to local development problems, it needs to establish a clear vision and objectives to address these issues. For example, poverty and unemployment remain the key challenges facing municipalities in South Africa, and IDP objectives, therefore, need to include targets for meeting these challenges.

The IDP is a comprehensive plan for the development of the local area. Since the IDP is the key strategic planning instrument that guides and informs all planning, budgeting, management and decision making in a municipality, the IDP draws together all the development goals and objectives, including those for local economic development and food security. It includes a long-term vision, an assessment of the existing level of social and economic development, development priorities, development objectives, a spatial framework, land development objectives, operational strategies, municipal budgeting and all related resource allocation realities. The IDP ensures co-ordination between the different initiatives of government by drawing together the development goals, objectives, priorities, strategies and budgets.

CONSIDERING THE ISSUE DRIVEN APPROACH IN INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

An Integrated Development Planning-model, as applied in South Africa for instance, is focused on integrating social, economic and natural environmental concerns across sector and disciplinary interests. Specifically, the integratedness aspect relates to the (Local Pathway to Sustainable Development in South Africa, n.a.:12):

- the special integration of place of employment and place of residence;
- the integration of multiple land uses;
- the integration between adjacent geographic areas;
- the eradication of spatial segregation and separation;
- the integration of urban and rural areas;
- the integration of ethnic groups;
- the social and economic integration of different communities;
- the integration and coordination of institutional activities;
- the integration of various developmental processes such as planning, management and implementation; and
- the integration of development information.

To ensure that integration occurs (such as in the above exposition) is practically speaking, a daunting task. It implies that the various issues, sectors and dimensions of development need to be considered comprehensively when development planning is conducted. Contrary to conventional planning practice, integrated development planning requires a focus on issues, rather than merely development sectors. The notion of integration therefore, central to integrated development planning, implies that sectors (stakeholders) are approached in the context of their contribution to addressing priorities for development. Thus, key priority *issues* are identified and forms the focus of the planning process.

In terms of the issue-driven approach, social, economic and natural environmental considerations are taken into account. This forms a cross-cutting *golden thread* throughout the planning process. Cross-sectoral intervention areas may include:

- poverty eradication;
- combating HIV and AIDS pandemic;
- gender equality and development;
- science and technology;
- information and communications technology;
- environment and sustainable development; and
- private sector development.

In addition, some integration intervention areas have been identified, being:

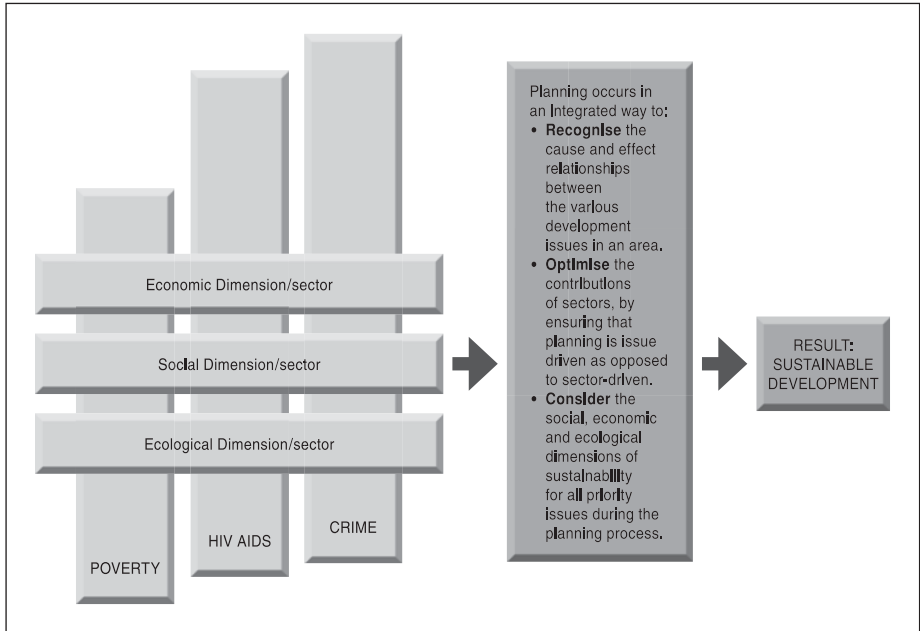
- trade/economic liberalisation and development;
- infrastructure support for regional integration and poverty eradication; and
- sustainable food security; and human and social development.

In the context of scarce human, financial and other resources, elements of institutional and structural capacity should form part of the planning and implementation processes for sustainable development. In figure 1 an example is presented which serves to illustrate the issue-driven approach and integrated nature of integrated development planning and how taking account of the cross-cutting aspect may result in sustainability in development planning.

In conjunction with the above, particular reference to pro-poor strategies is appropriate: According to a research report emanating from the University of Reading (Pro-Poor Livestock Policy Initiative – A Living from Livestock, June 2004) it should be noted that when development policies and strategies are considered, both the poor livestock producers as well as more established production entities should be targeted. However, the food security and sustenance aspects associated with urban agriculture seem to indicate that some policies and strategies should emphatically be directed to serving the poor as such whilst it could be employed in conjunction with pro-growth policies and strategies as well.

Such a notion is supported by notable scholars (www.businesstimes.co.tz) and institutions such as the World Bank (Chief Economist Africa Region, World Bank, November 2005). The essence is that development strategies must be pro-poor, yet it should be broad based and set across sectoral divides. The World Bank emphasises that shared growth as an approach seem to be beneficial in East Asian countries where a focus has recently been placed on growth across different sectors to equip the poor

Figure 1: Issue-driven Approach and the Integrated Nature of Integrated Development Planning (example)



Source: Adapted from *Local Pathway to Sustainable Development in South Africa, n.a.: 16*

to participate in, and benefit from growth. Along these lines, recognition is given to the pursuit of growth without bypassing the poor, but equally, devoid of a myopic focus on pro-poor policies, which may divert attention from the growth principle (Chief Economist Africa Region, World Bank, November 2005).

In view of the above exposition, it could be deduced that local communities, who are the beneficiaries (stakeholders) of urban agriculture initiatives by the relevant authorities, should actively have an input in the design and execution of such programmes and projects. Naturally, the established system of ward committees may be effectively utilised to further this objective. The following section depicts the ward committee system's functioning, as it presents within the South African policy and regulatory regime.

WARD COMMITTEES

A ward committee may be defined as a committee of a municipal ward, established in terms of Part 4 of the *Local Government: Municipal Structures Act, 1998* (Act 117 of 1998). A ward committee refers to a structure created to assist the democratically elected public representative of a ward (the councillor) to carry out their mandate. A ward committee is not a structure with his/her mandate to govern the ward (Department of Provincial and Local Government, 2003/2004: 2) but rather functions as an advisory

statutory body to local communities on municipal affairs by championing participatory governance and local democracy in collaboration with the ward councillor.

Ward committees constitute one of the mechanisms whereby community participation in local government is made possible (The Planact, 2001: 10). A metropolitan municipality with ward committees is category A municipality that consist of:

- A metropolitan council which exercises the complete range of legislative, executive and administrative municipal powers and duties; and
- Ward committees which are area-based committees, the boundaries of which coincide with ward boundaries.

Ward committees provide a structured channel of communication between geographic divided communities within the metropolitan area and the public representatives, for example, the ward councillor at the ward and metropolitan level. Well-functioning ward committees may provide every metropolitan resident with a local point of access to municipal government and so strengthen the accountability of ward councillors to local residents. The establishment of ward committees coincide with the strengthening of ward councillors and building accountable and effective local political leadership (*The White Paper on Local Government*, 1998: 65).

Section 74 of the *Local Government: Municipal Structures Act*, 1998 (Act 117 of 1998) deals with the functions and powers of ward committees as follows: a ward committee may make recommendations on any matter affecting its ward to the ward councillor; or through the ward councillor, to the metro or local council, the executive committee, the executive mayor or the relevant metropolitan sub-council. A ward committee may have such duties and powers as may be delegated to it by the particular council in terms of Section 32 of the *Local Government: Municipal Structures Act*, 1998 (Act 117 of 1998) and Section 59 of the *Local Government: Municipal Systems Amendment Act*, 2003 (Act 44 of 2003).

Metropolitan councils can utilise ward committees effectively through the delegation of powers, especially when local needs have to be determined and prioritised. This is of particular importance for the IDP. Thus, ward committees have advisory powers with respect to policies impacting on, the local area; they should be consulted on specific issues prior to council's approval (*The White Paper on Local Government*, 1998: 64-65).

Despite the delegation of powers and duties to ward committees by a council, the central role of ward committees is the facilitation of local community participation in decisions which affect the local community, the articulation of local community interests, and the representation of these interests within the metropolitan government system (*The White Paper on Local Government*, 1998: 65). The duties and powers that may be delegated to ward committees by municipal councils according to Department of Provincial and Local Government (2003/2004: 2) are the following:

- to serve as an official specialised participatory structure in the municipality;
- to create formal unbiased communication channels as well as cooperative partnerships between the community and council;
- advising and making recommendations to the ward councillor on matters and policy affecting the ward;

- assisting the ward councillor in identifying conditions, problems and residents' needs;
- spreading information in the ward concerning municipal issues, such as the budget, integrated development planning, service delivery options and municipal properties;
- receiving queries and complaints from residents concerning municipal service delivery, communicating them to council and providing feedback to community on council's response;
- ensuring constructive and harmonious interaction between the municipal council, its officials and community through the use and co-ordination of ward residents' meetings and other community development forums;
- interacting with other forums and organisations on matters affecting the ward; and
- to serve as a mobilising agent for community action by attending to all matters that affect and benefit the community and acting in the best interest of community.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND WARD COMMITTEES

In all spheres of government, public participation has been identified as an important factor in engaging the broader community. Several government policy documents, such as the Reconstruction Development Programme (RDP) and *The White Paper on Local Government*, 1998 serve as the policy frameworks advocating and promoting the need for public participation or involvement.

Public participation in local government and development is influenced by historical and current dynamics of the social, political and economic context in which local government seeks to operate. These dynamics should be acknowledged by municipalities in their formulation and implementation of development policies and their intentions to foster public participation (Atkinson and Reitzes, 1998: 128). The phenomenon of public participation in the South African system of government has become one of the major (and also dynamic) challenges for public managers at all levels and in all spheres of government. In the public domain, many services are provided. The public may be regarded as consumers who are entitled to good service, but they are also citizens (Du Toit, Van der Waldt, Bayat and Cheminais, 1998: 124) of a particular municipality residing in numerous wards. Public participation within a municipality is obtained through ward committees. This is also advocated and promoted by government policies and legislation, which should be utilised to capacitate communities as far as the municipal governing process and procedures are concerned.

Participation embraces many different levels of involvement apart from the provision of basic information which is an essential base for all levels of participation. There are four general, separate arrangements embodied in the terms of reference: consultation, where the council identifies an issue and seeks public response; direct involvement or power sharing, where community representatives are full members of the decision-making body; community action, where groups put forward their own demands; and community self-management, where groups have control of facilities and resources (Stewart, 1983: 132).

Public participation is more often than not restricted to public response to identified issues. The municipality has its own pattern of working, represented by its procedures, settings and roles, and giving expression to the values, assumptions and beliefs of the established organisational interests. Those interests should be respected and not disturbed by uncontrolled public involvement.

Furthermore, the public, as customers and citizens, can share needs and wants, but can also differ in their purposes. Citizens, as customers of government, are naturally more responsive to public needs than are government officials and the poorest of moral performances and accountability by government are generally associated with conditions in which few citizens have any influence (Du Toit *et al.*, 1998: 124).

People have the right to participate in government programmes and in civil society. Public participation includes standing for elections, voting in elections, becoming informed, holding and attending community meetings, joining civil and/or political organisations, paying taxes, protesting and petitioning. Craythorne (1997: 74) argues "... that public participation must also be understood in the context that cannot mean the submission of all decisions on public affairs to a decibel auction by some vague entity known as the public, as it is likely that decisions will not be taken or that the wrong decisions will be taken, and such a step would amount to the abdication by the elected representative (Ward Councillor) of his/her responsibility to govern".

LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND URBAN AGRICULTURE

A debate among policy makers and development workers prevails as to whether urban agriculture should be posed as part of local economic development and thus positioned among LED plans. Naturally, different institutions may for the purposes of their own log-frames and processes wish to position such programmes and projects within this domain. However, it may be argued that if urban agriculture has as its primary objective food security for indigent peoples and forms a measure to attend to victual needs, then it may be appropriate to position it differently. It could be argued that urban agriculture for the purposes of essentially ensuring or promoting sustenance among the destitute, should not be viewed as LED. However, once urban farming activities progress and expand to the point where surpluses arise, then such programmes may migrate towards becoming LED. It may therefore be argued that as soon as the element of growth in production, in conjunction with an element of entrepreneurship emerges, urban agriculture achieves the status of local economic development. This issue however remains subject to debate.

CONCLUSION

In the above discourse an attempt was made to refer to the essential theory concerning food security issues as it arises within the context of development, the South African local government system and sustainable development in general. Practical experience within a particular country and in particular a municipal environment does provide

noteworthy suggestions on how sustainable food security measures may be administered. Currently public administrators are faced with the challenge of how to effectively administer programmes and projects associated with LED and food security and it may be opportune to consider how the ward committee system could be utilised to ensure sustainable public participation in this regard.

In summary, it may be noted that food security is currently an immediate response to an immediate problem in the developing world. Yet, as the foundation is cast for urban farming practice to occur, it may simultaneously transpire as the precursor toward local economic development, which may improve the prospects for increased entrepreneurship, job creation and poverty alleviation. Either way, when policies are weighted, local government should lend consideration to urban agriculture interventions, which honour issue-drivenness, pro-poor growth emphasis and the principles of SHREQ, all within the context of a strategic and integrated development planning model.

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