Chapter 5

Marginal Urban Farming in Avondale, Harare: A Political Ecology Perspective

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Introduction

Cities and urban areas are ecological spaces, and understanding the nature of- and the nature in cities has played an increasingly significant role in understanding the socio-material construction of urban environments, their unequal distribution of resources and contestation over power and resources. These resource inequalities and contestations are at the heart of most urban food systems and are prominent in urban farming which has become a fundamental part of urban ecology.

Women in Harare have been transforming the urban farming landscape for decades, and the practice has transitioned from being solely for household food security to becoming a means of expressing their independence, asserting their positions as co-providers within their households and a way to generate income. Most accounts of Zimbabwean women in urban farming focus on legitimised forms of the practice such as on-plot agriculture (backyard farming) which is mostly practiced by women who have access to land and extension services. However, there is an overlooked group of women who—while participating in urban farming—are not acknowledged as legitimate farmers due to the marginal spaces in which they engage in the practice.

While there is vast acknowledgement of the existence of marginal urban agriculture (off-plot agriculture), it is often condemned in Zimbabwean agriculture discourse (Hanjra and Williams 2020; Moyo 1995) and as a result, minimal recognition is given to the positive impact it garners for the women who practice it and the communities that benefit from it. Marginal urban farming is the practice of cultivating crops or plants in areas that are considered unsuitable or prohibited for traditional agricultural activities within an urban environment. Areas which are typically overlooked for agriculture include roadsides, abandoned or unused plots of land, railway embankments, traffic

islands and underpasses. This practice, which is often born out of necessity, arises from a lack of access to suitable farming land which can lead people or communities to utilise unconventional spaces for cultivation (Csikó and Tóth 2023; McClintock 2010; Russo, Tomaselli and Pappalardo 2014). The limited access to land can be a result of factors which include urbanisation, population density and the high cost of accessing urban farming land. Despite these factors, it is important to highlight that marginal urban farming is not only characterised by a need for spaces to grow food, but also by innovation and the use of adaptive farming techniques to make the most of limited resources (Ahmadzai, Tutundjian and Elouafi 2021; Russo et al. 2014).

However, even with varied reasons for people engaging in agricultural activities in unconventional urban spaces, marginal farming has constantly been seen as an unfavourable, "rural" practice which negatively affects aspects of urban living, such as the health of urban residents and the aesthetic of urban spaces (Poulsen 2015). As a result, some forms of urban farming in Harare, and particularly in upper-middle class suburbs like Avondale, Harare, Zimbabwe, have historically been discouraged and even criminalised (Mupangi 2013). Despite the slow increase in recognition of women's valuable contributions in this space, the significant number of women who actively participate in urban farming, but are neglected as resourceful, knowledgeable and innovative primary food producers, must be acknowledged. The urgent need to recognise and reposition women in urban political ecology, and the need to interrogate the contexts in which women practice urban farming are what have motivated this study.

Over the years, there has been a growing recognition of the roles' women play in feeding urban populations and transforming urban foodscapes (Fletcher and Kubik 2016; Hovorka, De Zeeuw and Njenga 2009; Swinbank 2021). This has assisted in changing urban policy frameworks in many cities. In Zimbabwe, efforts made to institutionalise gender equality and equity in urban farming are evident in policies like The National Gender Policy and in the various initiatives set up to support women farmers. However, the perceived impact of these actions only reflects the women who were able to utilise conventionally accessible resources. The fact remains, the implementation of these policies and initiatives excludes most of the urban women who only have the capacity to participate in marginal urban farming.

To have a comprehensive and multidisciplinary scope, the present study focusses mainly on Feminist Political Ecology (FPE), and uses indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) theory to emphasise

the importance of recognising the invisible actors in urban political ecology and the fluid dynamics of urban foodscapes.

FPE highlights how the universal, intersectional and political nature of gender should be taken into consideration in discussions of urban farming at academic-, policy creation- and intervention levels to ensure equity and sustainability (Resurrección 2017). The invisibility of some forms of women's urban farming work is clear in the ambiguity and gender gaps present in Harare's urban agriculture policy. These gaps have contributed significantly to the structural disadvantages faced by some women in urban farming at various scales. The use of a feminist theoretical lens as an analytical framework aided the review of urban agriculture in Harare, the various urban food systems that women contribute to and the subsequent foodscapes created by women. This study was done in accordance with literature on woman-led urban agriculture, women's role in agroecology, agriculture policy inclusivity and agrarian patriarchy.

In this chapter, I critique the dominant agriculture discourses in Zimbabwe that—while acknowledging women as instrumental urban food producers—largely ignore the social and institutional constraints at household and societal levels that impede most women from making recognised contributions in urban farming. Through interviews with women in the suburb of Avondale, Harare, participant observation and policy document analysis, the roles of, and the contributions made by women who practice marginal urban agriculture in Harare were examined. This chapter will draw from FPE perspectives to emplace the knowledge, experiences and perspectives of urban women involved in marginal agriculture within the broader context of Harare's urban agriculture landscape. More broadly, this chapter seeks to contribute to academic and policy-oriented discussions on urban food systems by connecting issues at multiple scales to provide a snapshot of the complex relationship between gender, urban political ecology and urban food systems. Additionally, the results from this study can be used to re-imagine urban farming in Zimbabwe's urban spaces, especially the food production landscapes that have been a point of tension between urban farmers and council authorities.

The political economy of farming in pre- and post-colonial Zimbabwe

To fully appreciate the value of urban farming in Harare, it is important to understand the history of agricultural practices and agricultural revolutions in the country, and how these have ultimately

shaped agriculture and urban farming in the present. As mentioned earlier, urban farming is not a new concept in Zimbabwe; the country has a long history of agriculture dating back to the ancient Kingdom of Mapungubwe in the thirteenth century (Cartwright 2019). During the pre-colonial era, women played a fundamental role in agriculture and were seen as the backbone of many societies because of their significant production of cash crops and contribution to agricultural labour. The customary laws that governed these societies made food production one of the key obligations of women within the gendered division of labour. The distribution of land was also presided by customary laws where chiefs and village headman allocated land as needed to male members of a lineage. Women's access to land was mainly through usufruct rights over land owned by their fathers or husbands (Bhatasara 2020; Mutondoro, Chiweshe and Gaidzanwa 2016).

The colonisation of Zimbabwe significantly disrupted these practices, and marshalled the first agricultural revolution from 1950 to 1980 (Eicher, Tawonezvi and Rukuni 2006). The lack of substantial mineral resources—which British-settlers expected to extract in Zimbabwe—led colonisers to shift their focus to the potential of agriculture. The country's diverse range of climates and landscapes allowed for the cultivation of a wide variety of crops, such as maize, wheat, tobacco, cotton and coffee, as well as the breeding of livestock. With that, settler farmers introduced commercial agriculture and capitalist agricultural development. Prime agricultural land was owned and controlled by settlers and the distribution of land, which was controlled by the colonial government, was highly unequal with black Zimbabweans being largely excluded from owning land or participating in the rapid growing commercial agricultural sector (Gwekwerere, Mutasa and Chitofiri 2018). This led to the displacement of subsistence farmers (who were largely women), and fractured the usufruct rights women held. Most notably, this resulted in land scarcity amongst black Zimbabweans which led to a severe decline in crop production due to the poor quality of land women were farming on. Increased white economic dominance restructured traditional Zimbabwean societies and the introduction of taxes and policies (such as the Native Land Husbandry Act) forced men to become migrant workers (G. Child and B. Child 2015). The colonial economy was driven by migrant labour and led to the creation of spaces in urban areas (such as the "No. 2 location in the capital city") for migrant workers and—for married men—their families as well. Additionally, policies like the National Development Policy were put in place to govern and balance 'urbanism and detribalisation' as 'the urban African worker ought to be half-ruralist' (Yoshikuni 2007: 76). A minority of black Zimbabwean labourers deemed to be a 'better class of native (sic)' were afforded accommodation spaces that had gardens so that women had

‘some legitimate means of occupying their spare time’ (Yoshikuni 2007: 75). This marked the beginning of urban agriculture for black Zimbabwean women.

Independence in 1980 brought with it the second agricultural revolution which focussed on bringing back small-scale/subsistence farmers into the country’s agricultural economy. The post-colonial government aimed to boost the agricultural sector due to the start of political and economic instability. Various policies were introduced to aid with this which included the Command Agriculture Policy—which provided subsidies and other incentives to small-scale farmers—and the Zimbabwe Rural Act—which aimed to ensure that both spouses could hold a resettlement permit and jointly own land. Unmarried women were outrightly excluded from being permit holders, and in fact, very few women were joint permit holders with their husbands. By this point, urban agriculture was common practice in urban areas and was being carried out mostly by women for subsistence purposes, to supplement household food supply, save money on buying expensive foods and be self-sufficient as was done in rural areas. However, after independence in 1980, the government’s attitude towards urban agriculture changed, and it was often viewed as an unfavourable, “rural” practice which negatively affected aspects of urban living, such as the aesthetic of urban spaces (Kutiwa, Boon and Devuyst 2017). As a result, these activities were discouraged and even criminalised.

While agricultural-production did increase during this time, ultimately the post-colonial government failed to maintain a highly productive, industrialised agriculture sector and Zimbabwe faced an agrarian crisis. In response to this, economic structural adjustment programmes were put in place to “free agriculture from the state”. This controversial measure—coupled with inflation, low economic growth, droughts and unfavourable agricultural macro-economic policies—led to a gradual decline of subsistence or small-scale agriculture, as well as an increase in food insecurity and poverty.

In present day Zimbabwe, farming is still an essential part of the Zimbabwean culture and economy in both rural and urban areas. However, it has changed significantly since the early days of its history due to political and economic changes and instability. Along with changes in the agrarian landscape, expectations regarding women’s roles as food producers at a household level remained unchanged, however, critical factors that impact women’s ability to efficiently produce—such as access to resources—have changed, especially in urban areas. Despite various efforts to ‘correct

historical imbalances in land distribution and ownership' (Sunday Mail quoted in FurtherAfrica 2021) through policy amendments and violent land seizures, the reality is that Zimbabwean farming is still dominated by large companies such as British American Tobacco and Innscor Africa that hire growers to produce on a commercial scale on their behalf, and it is largely a male-dominated sector. The historical issue of land access and tenure for women has resulted in the steady growth of a gendering of the urban farming landscape in Zimbabwe.

Avondale: A descriptive account

The study which was conducted in Avondale, a suburb in Harare, Zimbabwe, was selected as a main study site because of the prevalence of woman-led peripheral urban farming in the area. A key feature of Harare is the favourable climatic conditions which make it conducive for farming in general. One such condition is the '*vlei* [marsh] phenomenon' which Mbiba (2000: 286) describes as:

> ... seasonally waterlogged drainage systems that occur on both clay and sandy soils... [that] become heavily waterlogged, resulting in surface marshes along all drainage systems. The *vlei* "soils" get wet with the first rains and then retain moisture long into the next wet season.

These conditions have resulted in the steady growth of urban farming in Harare, since women have taken advantage of the climatic conditions and *vlei* properties to engage in food production.

The area of focus, Avondale, was selected due to the need to have a balanced account of marginal urban farming in different areas of Zimbabwe. Marginal urban farming is typically associated with low-middle class, high-density areas where there is a perceived lack of access to adequate food, employment and land. Avondale as a study area, challenges this perspective, and broadens understandings of why women engage in marginal farming. Avondale is a suburb in the north of Harare which is a predominantly middle- to upper-middle class. Previously a dairy farm before the country gained independence, Avondale was established as a suburb in the early 1900s, making it one of the earliest suburbs established in Harare (Property.co.za 2022). During Zimbabwe's colonisation, and for some years pre-colonisation, Avondale was predominantly occupied by white British residents. While urban gardening was acceptable within the confines of a person's residence, during this time, marginal urban farming was unheard of. With independence came more diversity

in the ethnic composition of the area. More black middle-class Zimbabweans moved to Avondale from more congested suburbs, such as Highfield and Mbare, and gradually the landscape of the area transformed, while still maintaining a degree of organisation. Avondale has seen an increase in on-plot and marginal farming, and residents have also been engaging in activities such as backyard chicken rearing, maize farming and small-scale aquaponic farming to diversify or create a source of income using the resources at their disposal.

Methodological approach

For this study, a qualitative research design was used for the collection and analysis of data to better understand women's experiences of position in- and contributions to the urban farming landscape in the context of marginal urban farming. Additionally, the image analysis of the agricultural landscapes that women use was conducted to substantiate the data from qualitative methods. To obtain images that were authentic, naturalistic observation was used to capture the natural environments where marginal urban farming takes place in Avondale in various seasons. This showed the diverse ways land is used during the different seasons of the year and highlights how idle land is used to sustain agriculturally-based livelihoods, and how political ecology struggles change during different times of the year.

Homogeneous sampling was used to select participants. The characteristics of a sample member in this study are women residing in Avondale, a suburb in Harare, Zimbabwe, who engage in urban agriculture in marginal spaces or women who reside in other areas, but own or use marginal spaces in Avondale for farming. Exponential discriminative snowball sampling was used to expedite the process to find and select suitable sample members. A total of fourteen women who engage in marginal urban farming were selected to participate in this study.

Semi-structured interviews were used, since the participants agreed to incorporate women's 'personal experiences, attitudes, perceptions and beliefs' (DeJonckheere and Vaughn 2019: 2). A total of fourteen semi-structured individual interviews were conducted and the interview data was used in conjunction with images of landscapes to understand the political ecology experiences and perceptions of marginal urban farming by women who engage in the practice.

Theoretical grounding

FPE has played a considerable role in reshaping areas that look at development, landscape, resource use, agrarian reconstruction and rural-urban transformation (Hovorka 2006). It critiques the simplification of including women to statistical data and the dominant perspective that women are victims to environmental crises. FPE focusses on highlighting women as political actors who are capable of the production of unique knowledge, and the development and implementation of innovative ways of sustaining the environment (Sibanda, Hansen and Mukwada 2022). In line with this, FPE also questions the ways in which gender-based power relations influence and reinforce inequalities in decisions regarding environmental policies. This theory was applied in the present study to shape the understanding, deconstruction and assessment of the complex links between social, political and ecological processes in the suburb of Avondale, and how these processes influenced and constructed gendered socio-nature relations of power.

With one of the key aims of this study being to examine the role of women in marginal urban agriculture and urban political ecology, the IKS theory was an ideal theory to use, since it interrogates how IKS that provide a counter discourse can complete and fill the gap of conventional urban farming knowledge (Emeagwali 2021). Women using marginal urban spaces for farming have challenged and reconstructed urban political ecology in Avondale, and with the application of IKS, have a better understanding of how the knowledge systems they have developed is provided.

The IKS theory and the FPE theory complement each other as they both emphasise the importance of recognising, understanding and engaging women's knowledge and experience in urban agriculture and political ecology. Women are knowledge creators and innovators, and are at the forefront of an environmental revolution which calls for an integration of their embodied knowledge of urban ecological landscapes in formal food and agriculture discourse.

The urban farming landscape in Avondale - an overview

The urban farming landscape in the suburb of Avondale, Harare, Zimbabwe has evolved from being confined to food gardens in people's backyards to farming plots on marginal land around the suburb. While marginal urban farming in areas like Avondale is often assumed to be the work of domestic helpers and other workers in the area, residents of the area are taking part in this practice.

It has been cited as an effective way to expand the useable land for farming, and diversify the types of crops that one can grow at the same time.

For most residents, they take part in marginal urban farming during the maize season to maximise on their yield. While others use marginal land near to their properties (as in Figure 5.1, Figure 5.2 and Figure 5.3), other residents and people who live in neighbouring suburbs use any available land for the same purpose.

Figure 5.1: A resident using land outside their property during the maize season

Figure 5.2: A resident using land outside their property during the maize season

Figure 5.3: Marginal land next to a main road, outside a resident's property, being used to grow tomatoes and vegetables throughout the year

Marginal urban farming in Avondale is not restricted to crops. Although animal agriculture is still largely considered rural when compared to crop-based agriculture in urban areas, it is not uncommon for urban residents to run animal husbandry projects on their property. Backyard chicken farming and to a lesser extent, small-scale aquaponic farming are common in Avondale. Some residents, however, have utilised land for more unconventional animal husbandry as well. One resident has a goat project on their property, and often allows the goats to graze on the marginal land outside their gate. This can be considered unconventional in Avondale; however, it shows how diverse the uses of marginal urban land can be.

Figure 5.4: Goats grazing on marginal land in Avondale

It is common practice for there to be visible signage in urban areas restricting marginal urban farming activities, however, in Avondale these were scant. Although it is common knowledge that the city council does not allow this practice, the lack of signage does not reinforce this message—and this is an interesting dynamic, since signage is commonly seen in other urban areas in Harare. The places or properties that did include signage related to marginal urban farming which were privately owned, and signage was placed by the property owners. Figure 5.5 shows a sign disallowing cultivation on the periphery of a golf course as this can detract from the aesthetic of the course and is an eyesore for golf club members. However, despite this clear signage, Figure 5.6 shows the same area outside the golf course during the maize season with crops being grown there. While only small sections of the periphery have crops, the message to not cultivate was disregarded by some community members.

Figure 5.5: Visible signage disallowing cultivation on the periphery of a golf course before the maize season

Figure 5.6: Signage covered by crops growing in the same area during the maize season

Reframing local urban food systems through marginal farming

The local food system in Avondale has transformed over the years, with an increase in convenience stores, markets and home-based vendors. This is a result of the strong influence of capitalist globalisation ideology that has led to food systems failing to equitably meet the food needs of people. This failure can be attributed to the neoliberal strategies in Zimbabwe—which prioritise industrial efficiencies, production and free trade-ideologies—that underpin most of the country's agricultural and food policies. Moreover, popular discourses regarding food position, industrialised global or contemporary food systems as the most effective, efficient and logical means to ensure food equity. However, the obvious reliance on technological innovations and the guise of sustainability of these food systems has become evident to many people, as the volatility of the production, supply and access of food is influenced by volatile capitalist markets which significantly impact consumers. Zimbabwe has experienced the negative externalities created by global food systems and this has led locals to construct their own food systems.

In response to the negative impacts of the country's food systems, in Avondale there has been a clear emergence of alternative food systems which work in opposition to the dominant corporate food system. This system was created and is run by locals of the Avondale area as well as people from other areas, and it has created a space where the value of small-scale female food producers was acknowledged and harnessed. Some participants shared how they contribute to local food systems, and how these systems in turn, provide them with an easily accessible consumer base for their produce. Participant 3 (pictured in Figure 5.7), an elderly woman who lives in Avondale, specialises in sweet potatoes throughout the year which she grows on a strip of municipal land outside another resident's property. She is well known in the area for her sweet potatoes and while previously only growing them for her own consumption, she has started selling them.

> '*Mwana wangu ndiye akazondiudza kuti nditengese. Vanhu vayingouya vachikumbira. Munda wangu unozikanwa, ndayingoti enda unotora mwannagu. Asi zvandaakutengesa hadzichatokwane kuti ndidyewo* [laughs].' (Participant 3)
> (I was encouraged by my daughter to sell them because a lot of people would ask me for some and I'd tell them to go to my field. They all know where it is. Now I barely have enough for myself [laughs].)

Figure 5.7: A resident of Avondale with her sweet potato harvest

It was interesting to note that for other participants who sold the produce from their marginal land, re-investing or investing their earnings was a priority. Participant 7 emphasised that she does not use the money from her maize sales for anything other than purchasing stock for her boutique. As a season marginal urban farmer, she only invests in urban farming during the maize season. For other women, like participant 4, she tries to get optimum use of her land and uses it to grow legumes, sweet potatoes and vegetables, and re-invests her earnings into the piece of land she uses.

The paradox of being a woman urban farmer in Avondale

The wave of female empowerment in Zimbabwe has brought with it more recognition of the work women are doing in the agriculture sector as a whole. With women often being responsible for the provision of food in Zimbabwean households, urban farming activities are dominated by them. Urban farming has become a source of social and economic empowerment for women, since it provides alternative employment, complementary income, increased household status (respect, decision-making power) and a means to expand their food sources. However, despite the range of reasons for which women participate in urban farming, the dominant way of understanding this practice is related to food security and poverty alleviation. This perception is particularly prevalent in common ways of understanding peripheral urban farming.

While urban farming has been encouraged and supported in recent years, with policies being enacted to empower women who practice urban farming, there is still a segment of women who practice urban farming in alternative spaces who are excluded from these support structures. Agricultural activities in peripheral/unconventional urban spaces, such as roadsides, recreational parks and idle municipal land, have historically been seen as an unfavourable "rural" practice which negatively affects aspects of urban living, such as the health of urban residents and the aesthetic of urban spaces. This has led to debates on what is considered acceptable urban farming, and separated, discouraged and even criminalised different forms of urban farming. Despite the perceived increase in recognition of women's valuable contributions, there is still a group of women who actively participate; however, they are neglected as resourceful, knowledgeable and innovative primary food producers in Zimbabwe. These women must be recognised and repositioned in urban agriculture discourse, and the need to interrogate the varied contexts in which women practice urban farming must be understood in greater detail.

The gendered nature of peripheral urban land access

Historically, land has been one of the key resources to women's quality of life, economic freedom and to some degree, their struggle for equality. More than 50 per cent of urban women in Zimbabwe depend on land-based livelihoods, however, despite the importance of land to women, there is still a pervasive patriarch that controls urban land rights and discriminates against women. In the suburb of Avondale, Harare, Zimbabwe, while the face of peripheral urban farming is female, there is strong contestation over who "owns" the land—commonly referred to as *munda* (land suitable for cultivation). Ownership in this context is self-appointed and refers to finding and using a piece of urban land for farming purposes. The land is typically idle municipal land. Forty per cent of the study's participants stated that while the land was used by them, the real "owner" was their husband as the person who found the land. While women typically favour land ownership for the freedom it provides them, for some of the participants, like Participants 4 and 5, owning the land was not as important as having access to any land. Participant 4 is a domestic worker in Avondale and her husband, who was formerly a gardener in the same area, is now self-employed selling handmade baskets. The land she uses has been owned by her husband for seven years, and she has become the primary user for the last four years.

> *'Ah, handitombo tambise nguva ndichitsvaga pekurima, ndinopawanepi padhuze nepandogara? Zvinontesa. Ini ndinototi ndine munda, iwowuyu. Ndewedu, hapadiwe mumwe.'* (Participant 4)
> (I don't waste my time looking for my own land, where will I find it so close to where I stay? It's a challenge; for me, I say I have land - this land. It's ours, I don't need my own.)

Similar sentiments were shared by Participant 5 who is also the primary user of her husband's land.

> *'...ndini ndinorimira pano, ndongoitawo zvandirikuda kunge icho chibage chamurikuwona apa. Munda ndewangu, nditori right pandiri.'* (Participant 5)
> (I'm the one who uses this [land], I do what I want on the land, like the maize you see here. It's basically mine, I'm okay where I am.)

These participants shared that in and around the area near their land, it was common for women to work on the land owned by their husbands or partners.

Figure 5.8: Vacant plot of land where Participants 4 and 5 use their husbands land for marginal urban farming

For most participants, land ownership was a great achievement and provided them with a sense of financial security and individuality, it also allowed them to freely explore various livelihood strategies. Women who migrated from rural areas to Harare were especially proud of owning land, since this defied discriminatory customary norms from their places of origin that typically do not allow, or make it difficult for women to be sole owners of land. Participant 1, for example, highlighted how land ownership invigorated her sense of agency.

> *'Ndinofara zvikuru kutarisawo kamunda kang- hausi muhombe - asi ndaatarira ndichingoziva kuti ndekangu…hapana anouya kwandiri achiti "Pano haparimwe mbabaira, rima ichi." Ndoite zvandinoda*.' (Participant 1)
> (I'm very happy, to look at this small land—yes, it's not much—but looking at it and knowing it's mine ... no-one can come tell me "We aren't planting sweet potatoes, plant this instead." I do what I want.)

Peripheral land ownership also brought with it a sense of status and power for women in the lower income bracket. This was evident in the interview with Participant 8. As an owner of two pieces of marginal land, she equates her ownership status to economic power and elevated household status.

> *'Vanhu vanotonditarisawo semunhu ane tunhu twake, kwete kungonzi Madhumbe.'* (Participant 8)
> (People see me as someone with something, not just *Madhumbe* [Shona slang for a domestic worker].)

Contrary to this, the middle-lower income earners who also engage in peripheral urban farming mainly viewed it as a means to supplement their income. Participant 7, a boutique owner who resides in Melbereign (a suburb near Avondale), has five pieces of marginal land in and around Avondale. For her, land ownership was more opportunistic and while claiming ownership to the land by referring to it as hers, she was aware of the temporal nature of ownership and did not attach much sentimental value to it like other participants.

> 'I find *tuminda twakawanda kuti chibage chacho chiwande. Asi ndinongorima pano panguva yechibage.'* (Participant 7)

(I find multiple pieces of land to use so I can maximise my harvest. I only really use this land during the maize season.)

Figure 5.9: One of the five pieces of land where Participant 7 grows maize

A trend that was noted in Avondale was an inheritance system when it came to marginal land ownership. Most of the marginal land that participants were using was inherited from women who formerly worked or lived in the area. There was also a sense of empowerment, collaboration and comradery among women engaging in marginal urban farming in the same area. Participant 6, a recipient of marginal land from a woman who was working in the household that she is currently employed at, shared gratitude for the sense of unity she felt when she moved to Avondale:

'Ndinotorimawo kuBudirio uko, ndine ghadeni nechimunda. Pandakauya kuno ahndina kutarisira zvekurima izvi. Ndakangouyawo kubasa. Asi mumwe musi ndakasanganawo naMai X–vanogara apo. Tayitaura vakandibvunza kana ndichirima, vakabvunza kana ndichida chimunda. Takataura kwemamwe mazuva vakazondiratidza munda wacho ndikatosangana nevanwe vakadzi vaneminda ipapo. Ndakambofunga kuti pane chisina kunayatsomira mushe. Vanga vachindipirei munda? Asi ndakazowona kuti ahh, vakadzi

> *ava vakabatana. Tinotoita kunge hama.'* (Participant 6)
> (I already have a garden and marginal plot in Budiriro. Coming here, I never thought about farming. I just came for work.But one day, I was approached by Mrs X—she worked over there. We were talking and she came and asked if I farm, and if I'd be interested in a plot. We spoke for a few days and she showed me the plot where we spoke and I met the other women who farm in that area. I thought it was strange at first. Why is she giving me this land? But I realised that the women here are just united. It's almost like a sisterhood.)

From a FPE perspective, the results clearly show that having women at the centre of natural resource use and management can solidify their position in ecological and urban farming discourse as being instrumental knowledge producers.

Strategies to navigating urban foodwork on marginal land

In Harare, Zimbabwe, marginal urban farming is an illegal offense which has been supported by two key legislations: the Environmental Management Act (Parliament of Zimbabwe 2002: Chapter 20:27 section 140), which forbids agricultural activities 30 meters from water sources such as wetlands, and the Harare City council by-laws. As previously discussed in this chapter, the restrictions on urban farming have been in existence for years and while Zimbabwe's political structure and leadership has evolved since colonisation, there is a need to rethink rather than adapt the existing urban agriculture policies that to some degree, still fail to accommodate changes in urban areas.

Location: Limited barriers to accessing land

This study found that it is public knowledge among women peripheral cultivators in Avondale, that farming in marginal spaces is prohibited by local agriculture bylaws. All participants had some knowledge of the restrictions set on marginal urban farming and some cited the existence of such laws as the main, dormant hurdle they faced. Historically, The Harare City Council has been known to slash crops grown in marginal spaces, often when the crops have reached maturity. While acknowledging the harshness of measures such as slashing crops, the council has stated that the existence of signage [as shown in Figure 5.5] indicating that farming is not permitted, should be enough to dissuade people from breaking the law (Shayanewako 2022), therefore, justifying their measures.

With strict legislative restrictions on marginal foodwork and extreme measures like slashing, the overarching perception in literature and media is that this discourages people from engaging in the practice. While these restrictions are largely ignored, the consequences of breaking the law are experienced in various areas, particularly high-density suburbs where marginal farming is more prevalent. In low-density areas like Avondale, few people have experienced repercussions for marginal farming and this has mostly been attributed to location. With Avondale being a low-density suburb, there has been a notable lower presence of council workers who remove crops. As a result, plots of land can be used for marginal farming for years on end, with the practice only stopping if a development is taking place on the land. Women engaging in marginal farming in Avondale have noted this, comparing this experience with other areas where they currently, or used to farm. One participant described Avondale as '*a safe area for our kind of farming'* (Participant 4), highlighting that she has not experienced the battles with council officials she constantly had to face in another area.

In general, location has been known to influence the viability of livelihood strategy with factors such as the proximity to facilities and weather conditions commonly being cited (Monts'i 2001; Peng et al. 2017; Yobe, Mudhara and Mafongoya 2019). In this study, Avondale, as a location, is seen as a "council free zone" where residents have the freedom to use vacant land productively. For women, this has freed them from harassment and loss of produce and more importantly, has given women the ability to produce crops primarily for commercial sale (production strategies will be explored further in an upcoming section). The sparse presence of restrictive signage related to farming was also an indication that marginal urban farming was not restricted to the same degree as in other areas (particularly high-density suburbs) where signage is vast. In an area like Avondale—as a previously middle-upper class suburb during colonisation—it is easy for people to have attitudinal biases and mistaken beliefs about the impacts of marginal farming on aesthetics and crime. This study, however, has found that these assumptions cannot be generalised to all urban areas.

Means of production

While there are numerous initiatives to provide rural women with means of production, especially in the maize season, when comparing urban access to similar resources, there is a notable discrepancy. Some participants emphasised the lack of resource support as a hindrance to their progress, particularly citing a need for the correct fertiliser at the appropriate time of crop growth as an important factor to success.

'Ipapa handina kuwana D [compound D fertiliser]. *Unotowna kusiyana kwechibage chacho. Kana paunodya kuntonzwa musiyano.'* (Participant 6)
(This time I did not get D [compound D fertiliser] on time. You can see the difference in the crops. They will taste different too.)

However, most women knew of, or used the support of organisations like SEEDCO and Klein Karoo Seed MarketingZimbabwe—seed producing companies in Zimbabwe that have agreements with marginal urban farmers to provide them with seed and place their signage in the area to advertise the seed.

Figure 5.10: Seed producing company advert on marginal land

Crop diversification

Crop diversification is not a common practice on marginal land, with many Zimbabweans practicing intense maize monoculture and occasionally growing sweet potatoes on the same land. This is largely attributed to the amount of attention and resources required for other crops when compared to maize, which is often left to grow naturally with attention mostly being required at

the planting stage. For the participants of this study, however, while maize is a key crop they grow, crop diversification—even in the maize season—was highlighted as an important way to reduce the risk and minimise the impact of crop failure.Participant 1 emphasised the ecological benefits of rotating crops on her piece of land, stating that she '*get[s] healthier crops*' using this method. She does not use contemporary methods to keep her land fertile and productive, but rather employs the knowledge and skills she learned growing crops in the rural areas with her family to boost her yield. Similar strategies were employed by Participant 2 who preferred the use of traditional crop and soil fertilising methods to contemporary fertilisers. In addition to maize, Participant 2 also grows sunflowers on the same plot to diversify her crops.

Urban areas are typically linked to modernity, technological advancement and scientific knowledge; and in many instances, western influences have overshadowed the importance of, and the need for indigenous knowledge, rather than leveraging its strengths. Here, it can be seen how women have incorporated IKS—which is often labelled a rural or traditional form of knowledge that is utilised by poor or underprivileged individuals—and this can be viewed as a means to acknowledge and preserve "rustic" knowledge in urban spaces. The use of IKS in urban spaces has slowed down in Zimbabwe, since the market for crop aides has expanded, however, it is important to document the value of traditional knowledge in urban agriculture. IKS and their application in marginal urban farming provide a counter discourse that can complete and fill in the gap of conventional urban farming knowledge.

Figure 5.11: Participant 2's sunflower field

Discussion

The discussion of women in urban farming is not new. Much attention has been paid to gender issues in various sectors, with agriculture being a main one, particularly in crop-dependent countries like Zimbabwe. Additionally, there has been a parallel increase in agricultural-based female empowerment initiatives that are geared towards increasing women's presence in both rural and urban farming spaces. However, there is a paucity of relevant, current research probing marginal urban farming which, arguably, is more prevalent in urban spaces, and has more women participants than conventional forms of urban farming, like backyard farming and urban gardens.

This chapter explored the history of urban farming in Harare and traced the connections between urban farming and broader neoliberal, extractivist and patriarchal processes that work to marginalise Zimbabwean women who engage in marginal urban agriculture. It has shown that while the face of marginal urban farming in Avondale, and in Harare at large, is female, issues related to land access and "ownership" (in the context of this study) are still prevalent in spaces where it is presumed women would have easier access to land. The land access challenges which are linked to culture-based patriarchy and neoliberalism are prevalent in different contexts, and the first step to resolving the broader issue would be the acknowledgement of existing, invisible urban farming structures that are only noted in a negative light unless they are tied to dominant foodwork discourses focussed on food security.

Consistent with existent literature, this study found that the common livelihood strategies women employ in the Harare suburb of Avondale, are mostly like those in other areas of the country and globe. Maize is a cash crop that is popularly grown on marginal land and in the suburb of Avondale, it has provided women with access to organic food for their families and the opportunity to sell enough to the Grain Marketing Board at a commercial level. Maize is regarded as a safe choice among other crops as it generally takes well to various soil types with the right kind of fertiliser, where required. While marginal land—particularly owned and worked by men—in the suburb of Avondale is often solely used for maize production, participants in this study emphasised the need for crop rotation, the application of indigenous family knowledge regarding crops and the importance of experimentation on the land to constantly have produce at their disposal.

A consideration of locality of marginal urban farming activities was uncovered in interviews with

participants as the lack of prohibitive signage, participants lack of experiences with council officials in the area and long tenure periods on marginal land. While it is obvious that marginal urban farming is deemed illegal, in some areas the opposite is true. Literature on urban agriculture in Zimbabwe consistently shows the negative experiences of residents in lower-income areas with regards to urban farming, with council officials more actively enforcing law in these areas. However, the practice is seemingly tolerated in low density areas with limited, to no council presence. Marginal urban farming is a normalised practice that has largely been accepted by the community.

Literature on the use of IKS in agriculture often links such knowledge systems to rural women. Little is said about how this knowledge has been used in urban agriculture to help mitigate the economical (in the form of purchasing fertilisers and other chemicals) and ecological urban political ecology challenges women face in urban farming. Contrary to common perceptions of why women resort to traditional, indigenous knowledge-based approaches—which are often linked to a lack of technology or access to resources—this study has shown that women use these methods as an economic strategy and for health-related reasons. The use of organic materials in crop cultivation has been highlighted as the main cause for produce tasting better.

The results from this study have brought some attention to the positive impact women's land ownership can have. While some women did not own the land they worked on—findings which align with the studies on gender equity, land and women—a number of participants "owned" the land they practice marginal urban farming on (albeit on a temporal, conscientious basis). There was a sense of freedom women had with having the sole decision-making power of how the land was used. Additionally, women expressed enjoying financial freedom that comes with keeping all the earnings from produce sold, the ability to expand their livelihood strategies by reinvesting earnings from produce sales into other projects and an expansion of healthy food choices using strategies like crop rotation.

FPE has played a considerable role in reshaping areas that look at development, landscape, resource use, agrarian reconstruction and rural-urban transformation (Hovorka 2006). It critiques the simplification of including women to statistical data and the dominant perspective that women are victims to environmental crises. FPE focusses more on highlighting women as political actors who are capable of the production of unique knowledge, and the development and implementation of innovative ways of sustaining the environment. In line with this, FPE also questions the ways in

which gender-based power relations influence and reinforce inequalities in decisions regarding environmental policies. FPE pushes for more attention to be paid to the affective and personified experiences of people's interactions with their environments and ways of existing within their environments. This helps with understanding the essence of socio-environmental conflicts and how interdependent the lives of people and their environments are.FPE does not consider the relationship between gender and environment as being biologically rooted, rather they are socially constructed which vary based on culture, class, interaction among individuals and society and geographical location.

Theoretically, the theories used to support this study played a vital role in understanding the data and recognising the value of the contributions made by women who practice marginal urban agriculture in the suburb of Avondale, Harare, Zimbabwe, and in seeing the knowledge gap created by excluding these women's experiential farming knowledge from Harare's urban agriculture discourse. The FPE theory highlighted the importance of incorporating gender when understanding and addressing ecological issues which are linked to urban farming. IKS theory showed the important role of traditional, often disregarded ways of knowledge creation and how these influence ways of navigating and using ecological spaces in urban areas.

Conclusion

While literature on urban farming is vast, women are mostly depicted as under-paid agricultural labourers. There is little said about the women who are changing perceptions of women in farming and making impactful changes. There is a need for increased gender mainstreaming so that solutions to the challenges women face in farming are more nuanced and less generalised; and the contributions women make—both small and large—can be recognised as a shift in understanding how women engage with land in different contexts. Additionally, appropriate urban farming strategies that do not exclude certain forms of urban farming—like marginal urban farming—should be considered to fully understand the scope of women's urban farming work.

Study limitations

This research aimed to analyse the household, economic and knowledge-based contributions that are made by women who are engaging in marginal urban farming, and examined these women's

experiences in foodwork in precarious contexts in Harare, Zimbabwe. This was done, in part, by examining existing agriculture policies and highlighting the need for broader urban agriculture policies that do not criminalise marginal urban agricultural activities. This study does not attempt to draft new policy documents, rather it focusses on highlighting any gaps in existing policies that have posed as a barrier to urban women who engage in marginal urban farming.

Additionally, this study focussed specifically on the precarious foodwork experiences of urban women who engage in marginal agricultural activities in Harare. The research only discusses the experiences of this group of women; however, it is done so extensively. Their experiences and the challenges they are facing may not be representative of the experiences and challenges faced by women in different geo-locations who engage in marginal urban farming.

It is important to note that despite these limitations, measures were taken to ensure that the research was sensitive to the nuances of the interview sample that was obtained. Close attention was paid to the unique experiences of the participants, considering the context in which they are now farming, and how their engagement in illegal urban farming has in varying degrees, been influenced by local historical and cultural factors, such as migration patterns land use practices. This allowed for group idiosyncrasies, such as innovative crop growing techniques, community collaboration and the resourceful use of limited space to be understood in a deeper way. This insight is often lost because of the oversimplification of, and superficial understandings of illegal urban farming in Harare. Consideration for such nuances allowed for adequate analysis that drew out many important factors involved in this case study of Harare's female-driven urban farming.

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