

In recent times, there has been a paradigm shift in urban and rural populations across Africa. In Nigeria, where urbanization is now at about 50%, this paradigm shift implies that urban poverty, unemployment and urban food insecurity is on the rise. This makes urban food security in Nigeria and other African countries an important consideration for national governments. Amidst these challenges, many urban households are turning to various activities to alleviate these problems including the practice of urban agriculture (Adeyemo and Kuhlmann, 2009).

What is Urban Agriculture?

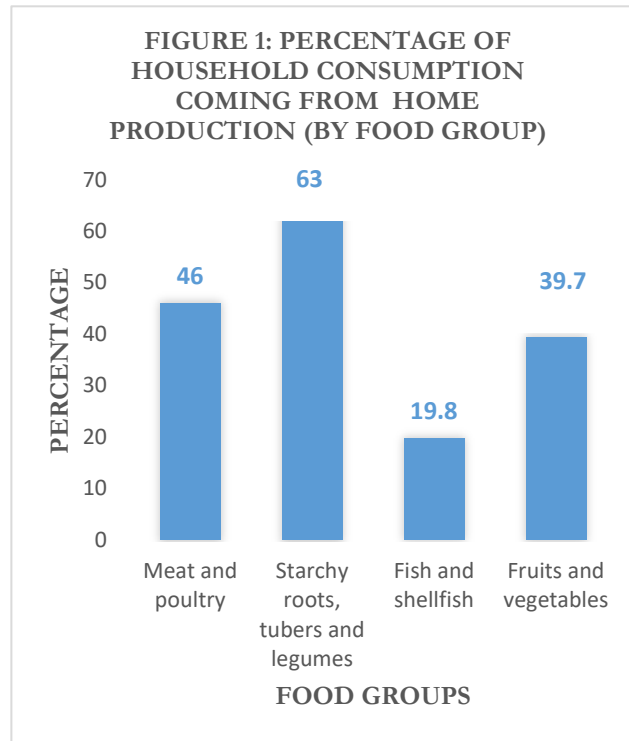
Urban agriculture is the cultivation of land and rearing of livestock within cities or towns. Many studies document that urban agriculture plays a key role in ensuring the food security, dietary diversity, and nutritional status of urban dwellers.

What are the contributions of Urban Agriculture?

With the increase in urban poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition, urban agriculture is now seen as an alternative strategy for improving urban livelihoods, income generation and food security. According to Asadu *et al.*, (2016), it was found that urban farmers significantly contribute to food availability in cities and also to the diet of urban consumers.

Urban farming, in some cases, is the major source of food for urban farmers, in other cases, it is an additional food source for the household as well as a source of income which could be used to purchase food not

cultivated by the urban farmer. In urban Southeast Nigeria, households meet their food security needs from various sources including their farms, the market, and food received as gifts or barter for labor (Figure 1).



Source: Author

An analysis of the contribution of the food harvested from urban farmland (expressed in monetary values) to the total food consumed in the household, shows that urban farming contributes to ensuring food availability within the household.

Own production among urban households in Southeast Nigeria is the dominant source of roots, tubers and cereals and accounts for almost half of meat and poultry consumption. It contributes significantly to household fruits and vegetables and fish and shell fish.



Source: thenigerianvoice.com

Roots, tubers and Cereals

An examination of Figure 1 reveals that as much as 63 % of household starchy roots, tubers and cereals dietary requirement is met by food produce from urban farm land. This is not unexpected as majority of the households were involved in the cultivation of food crops such as maize, yam, rice, cassava, cocoyam and sweet potato.

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Figure 1 seems to indicate that urban households obtain such food from their farms to meet household food needs before procuring from the market.

Foods in this particular group are reserved mostly for household consumption. Urban agriculture is very important to this category of farmer as they would more easily fall into food insecurity in the absence of food produce obtained from their urban farm plots.

Meat and poultry

Nearly half (46 %) of household meat and poultry food demands was derived from urban farming. By implication, the quantity of meat and poultry farm produce allocated by urban farmers for household consumption and sale in the market was almost the same. Home production is an important source of these animal proteins for urban households.

Fruits and vegetables

Figure 1 shows that household fruits and vegetables dietary requirement covered by urban farm produce was nearly 40 %. This is particularly important for the guaranteed supply of households with safe, fresh fruits and vegetables. These findings exemplify the important role of urban agriculture in meeting not only the food needs of urban families but providing them with a diverse diet including fresh fruits and vegetables.

Given the perishable nature of fruits and vegetable products, and Nigeria's poor transportation network, the quality of fruits and vegetables may deteriorate in transit to the consumers. Hence, the additional case for urban farms; food sourced from urban farms are likely

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fresh and safe for household consumption; key for food security.

Fish and shellfish

Fish and shellfish consumption by urban farmers from urban agriculture is low compared to fruits and vegetables. About 20 % of fish and shellfish food produced from urban farms contributed to improving household food security of urban farmers. This might be due to its capital intensive nature and water requirement in the area. It was observed that fish farmers using well water is not sufficient for keeping fish, especially during dry season.

Conclusion

We find that urban farming is important to food security of urban farming households in Southeast Nigeria. Urban agriculture contributes a significant share in the food supply of urban households across the major cities in Southeast Nigeria. It is contributing to the ability of these households to have a diverse, safe and nutritious diet. These efforts, which contribute to delivering food security, with potential to enhance income generation, should therefore be supported by policy and programs to support their growth and sustainable operation.

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Source: Author

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What is Food Security?

Food security refers to a situation where all individuals, at all times have physical, social and economic access to adequate, safe and nutritious food requisite to meet their dietary needs and food choices to maintain a healthy and active life (FAO, 2017).