

10 facts about Urban Agriculture in

NAIROBI

About The City

Nairobi, the capital of Kenya, is also its largest city. It has a subtropical highland climate, with two rainy seasons in April-May and November-December. The city is characterised by stark contrasts between its neighbourhoods, reflecting high levels of wealth inequality. A patchwork pattern of development sees wealthier suburbs of large houses with spacious gardens often located alongside poorer areas of the city, which are characterised by informal housing self-constructed by residents without legal tenure, or with insecure tenure. Basic public services, including water and sanitation, are generally not provided. Pressures on urban land in Nairobi are pronounced, as a result of its continuing high rate of urbanisation, and urban development connected to the relatively high growth rate of the Kenyan economy of which Nairobi is the centre.



Urban farmers Kevin and Sylvester tend to their goats in Mathare, Nairobi.
Photo: Louisa Nelle

Tens of thousands of households engage in urban agriculture

Most farmers are women, living in informal settlements. The sub-counties of Njiru, Kasarani and Dagoretti are the most common locations for peri-urban farms.

Urban agriculture is continually pushed to the margins by other land uses

Housing, commercial and industrial land uses can make higher returns. Most urban agriculture takes place on marginal land beside rivers, roads or railways, in backyards or under powerlines.

Urban farming was illegal until 2015

The 2015 Urban Agriculture Promotion and Regulation Act provided the first framework under which agriculture could be practiced in the city on public land, though backyard production for private consumption had long been practiced.

Farmers rely on NGOs, private companies and other farmers for extension services

The city government provides inadequate support for urban agriculture, allocating low budgets for extension services. Most production is small-scale and household-oriented, characterised by mostly organic methods, with minimal use of chemical fertilisers, pesticides, or certified seeds.

A small number of products dominate urban agricultural production

The main crops are exotic vegetables such as kales and spinach, while the main livestock kept are poultry for eggs and meat.

Farmers producing for commercial purposes generally sell to local customers

Commercial farmers, mostly based in peri-urban areas, tend to sell at the farm gate to neighbours, local market traders and restaurants.

Most farmers do not participate in self-organised groups or collective action

Mazingira Institute, a leading civil society organisation, coordinates the Nairobi and Environs Food Security, Agriculture and Livestock Forum to train urban farmers and organise field days. Most farmers, however, are not collectively organised.

Residents of informal settlements face the highest barriers to participation

Obstacles include insecure tenure, land and water scarcity, expensive inputs, inadequate access to extension services and credit, and frequent theft of produce. Middle-class citizens with houses on larger plots of land often have organic kitchen gardens and sometimes even livestock such as chickens.

Ambitious plans for the development of urban farming are yet to be implemented

The 2018-2022 Nairobi County Integrated Development Plan identified flagship projects that could be pursued in local schools such as erecting greenhouses, multi-storey gardens, hydroponic systems, fishponds, or water tanks.

The COVID-19 pandemic makes life even harder for urban farmers

The lockdown made it harder to access extension services and inputs such as seeds and animal fodder. Farmers suffered reduced incomes due to the closure of restaurants, which are key clients.

In 2019, around **40%** of Nairobi's 4.5 million residents lived in informal settlements occupying just **5%** of the city's residential land.