



Community Systems Strengthening for Health

Programme funded by the EUROPEAN UNION

## Food and Nutrition – Policy Brief – CSS

### Executive Summary

The City of Cape Town developed a progressive Urban Farming Policy in 2007, which was one of the first of its kind in Africa, with the Western Cape Government developing an Urban Farming project, both of which have been slow to yield any tangible results, largely due to the nature of how they are geared in terms of multiple cumbersome strategic imperatives that are slow to gather momentum and work synergistically, resulting in isolated silos of development which are fragile in nature, lacking resilience.

The difficult poor soils, limited space, high crime rates, limited access to water and socio-cultural elements involved in informal settlements in and around Cape Town are significant challenges to urban agriculture. The CSS pilot project has demonstrated that through empowering local communities at grass roots level by means of training and mentorship, it is possible to improve food security – that being a fundamental constitutional right.

Through the Food and Nutrition leg of the Community Systems Strengthening (CSS) project, a partnership project managed by UCT, it has been shown that the fundamental needs of communities for often overlooked resources such as community space for recreation and engagement, access to seeds and the like; can be achieved through training and negotiation with community leaders, partnerships with Community Based Organisations (CBOs) Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Government Departments and Agencies and other support structures.

The project has overcome a variety of challenges through better understanding of augmentation of food security, which in turn leads to improved health outcomes, income generation (employment), poverty alleviation, satisfaction and sense of self-worth - which can be achieved through the implementation of a grass roots strategy incorporating urban agriculture into the lives of people who need it most.

The pilot has demonstrated that with the involvement and assistance of partners, such an approach can be sustainable with extremely limited input after initial implementation. In addition, the approach is both scalable and repeatable in other impoverished communities around the province as well as the country with the potential to improve the lives of many, and reinforcing sustainable food security practices and a healthier lifestyle.

Similar projects have demonstrated success as delivered by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations. This project takes that success and delivers it in a South African context, accounting for the local socio-cultural needs and environmental challenges.

### Introduction

Food security in urban areas is often overlooked as it is seen as a problem of rural communities living in abject poverty. In fact, it is a real issue that has been clearly identified at three pilot sites during the CSS project.

The Community Systems Strengthening project is a 3-year pilot co-funded by the European Union managed by UCT in partnership with Women on Farms Project (WFP) and Training for Transition (TfT) which aims to build the capacity of community members and health committees to realise their health rights and promote community well-being in 3 pilot sites; Belhar, Klapmuts and Gugulethu. The focus has been on identifying training needs for community members and health committees and advocacy and networking to strengthen health committees' and community voice, both locally and internationally.

As Health is multidimensional, CSS aims to respond to community health in a more holistic manner and thus focuses on the social determinants of health. The project has trained community members and health committees in four cross-cutting themes namely food and nutrition, child protection, peacebuilding and health promotion as well as developing community leadership through an Adult Education course. The Food and nutrition aspect aims to respond to high rates of hunger and focuses on food security, developing home and community gardens while also improving knowledge on healthy living.

Urban food security can be alleviated through several mechanisms; however, community interest and support are paramount.

National Government has an obligation as set out in Section 27(1)(b) of the South African Constitution, which states that “Everyone has the right to have access to sufficient food and water.” (1)

This, however, is not uniquely a South African problem, as highlighted by the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations: “There is more than enough food produced today to feed everyone, yet about 821 million people are chronically undernourished. Achieving food security for everyone requires an integrated approach from all stakeholders, including from governments. Bringing the hunger number down to zero by 2030 will require appropriate legislation backed by the necessary budgets and proper monitoring, allowing for just and long-lasting legal frameworks.” (2)

This document sets out to demonstrate what has been achieved at three pilot sites in impoverished communities across greater Cape Town, being in Belhar, Gugulethu and Klapmuts. The brief also makes recommendations that can facilitate model customisation and duplication to other sites which includes initial community representative training, seed funding from Government agencies and NGOs, and grass roots community involvement, followed by management by means of CBOs.

## Methodology

The methods employed in this policy brief include the following:

Desk based research including CSS Food security documentary; project quarterly reports from the project management team, a baseline review report, learning briefs.

In addition, extracting significant qualitative data from the experiences of those involved, from the beneficiaries in the impoverished communities, partners, local stakeholders and NGOs, relevant government stakeholders, to academic project management staff and the like.

Along with the reviews and reports, relevant recent local, regional and international policies and reviews were incorporated for reference. These included policy documents published by local government institutions as well as information published by international NGOs including the United Nations.

Relevant local policy documents, including those produced by the City of Cape Town were carefully reviewed in order to identify how the methods employed in the CSS project could be tailored to fit within existing structural frameworks – and how these may be improved with financial capacity and support from other institutions in time.

## Results and Conclusion

The Food and Nutrition training initiative used a phased approach for training - the aim of this was to enable community members to address social and health issues from within the community itself, addressing logistical, operational and management issues in these communities where government is either overburdened or has failed.

During the course of the project, the communities were trained and mentored in how to start and manage food gardens that can provide nutritious staple foodstuffs to community members that have nothing to eat. This had a primary objective of empowering communities to feed themselves sustainably following initial pilot training by NGOs, which can be sustained by community members training and empowering one another going forward.

The overall the results of the project were predominantly successful, with a few elements falling short of their desired objectives, most notably as a consequence of the drought faced by Cape Town during the project, and a lack of seed funding to support participants. Details are as follows

During the first year of the project, 8 people from Belhar and 8 people from Klapmuts were trained, with a further nine from Belhar, 29 from Gugulethu and 4 from Klapmuts trained. A total of 58 participants were trained in Food and Nutrition during the project.

Sites:	Belhar	Gugulethu	Klapmuts	Annual Total
Year 1	8	0	8	16
Year 2	9	29	4	42
Overall Total	17	29	12	58

Table 1: Project Participant Food and Nutrition Training

Many Food gardens were set up initially in open communal areas. Due to factors including the drought and vandalism, which left larger gardens fragile and risky, efforts were turned towards smaller scale, where individuals grew food crops at their homes in innovative ways such as with vertical gardens,

which increased resilience and reduced risks when pooling the resulting crops for the benefit of ECDs (early childhood development centres) and vulnerable individuals identified by community leaders.

With a more balanced approach towards the gardens and their resulting success, it has invigorated other individuals to join the initiatives at the pilot sites. The training was well received by all participants across the three sites – with some even encouraging family members to join and get involved. Despite the challenges of water restrictions due to the drought, several food gardens were set up, with individuals also starting to grow food crops at their own personal residences, envisioned for both personal and community consumption. There are now 25 home food gardens in operation in Gugulethu. In Belhar there are two known home food gardens which also support child focused projects, with the hopes of more joining soon. Klapmuts has 5 food gardens that have been established at ECDs, and which assists in the ECDS in their capacity to feed the children

The level of empowerment was tangible with the growth of their own food, as well as the new source of largely passive income that could be generated by selling or trading surplus harvests. The benefits of the project have been widespread, with some participants noting social cohesion in the communities, improving community morale with the sharing and trading of surplus crops.

Food gardens have been well received as a manner to encourage compliance with chronic medication regimens - allowing for medication to be administered as required with a meal of some sort in order to reduce negative side effects. This has been achieved in tandem with the training leg on Health Promotion, which ties in synergistically with the Food and Nutrition leg, whereby communities are educated about improved nutrition in order to promote better health outcomes. One participant noted that she has a better understanding of nutrition after growing her own crops and seeing what goes into it and understanding what comes out of the raw product after harvesting.

An interview with a Community Facilitator from the City of Cape Town revealed the interconnectedness between health promotion and food security and nutrition, *"...because you find the unemployment rate is high – that is the first point; and many people are unemployed; and now you find other, maybe mamas – they depend mainly on the social grant, which is not enough. ...And you find other community people taking medication without anything in their stomach. That is sometimes why you find defaulters, because you have the medication; you have the pills, but there is nothing in the stomach – so it kills you. It's very hard..."* So that is why at the end of the day, we say, 'how can we assist those people with a food gardens that provide those mamas and whoever – like let's say, those who have TB are supposed to be taking their medication, but they are unemployed, so they don't have any money or any food; and they end up being vulnerable, or being victims of being defaulters. So, it is very crucial.' (3)

An extract from a key informant interview illustrates the dire situation of food insecurity and nutrition in Gugulethu as follows:

*"Because I know, when you talk about nourishment, you are talking about the nutrients in the food; not necessarily whether the people had bread or not. You are talking about nutrients that the people are getting at the end – when you talk about seven colours in the nutrients; you know that means you need to have all those colours, you know: the green, the orange, the yellow – you know, all those colours; so, you know, but in terms of that, if I can report on – we would just get report that not necessarily undernourished – just that people don't have food. They didn't eat; they couldn't eat; they couldn't have anything to eat. Ya."* (4)

Other notable advantages were community involvement in a project that visibly empowered communities, for example, by having vegetables readily available to bolster supplies at local soup kitchens and community feeding schemes; and allowing people to appreciate their newfound knowledge regarding improved nutrition, and consequential health benefits.

Local knowledge relating to nutrition was found to be notably poor, with most respondents interviewed indicating that they bought and ate the most readily available cheap foods, which are generally carbohydrate heavy, and pay little attention to the nutritional value of its content. This ties in with the high levels of chronic illnesses such as hypertension and diabetes.

It was identified during the project that this can be addressed by Chronic and Old Age Clubs, which are facilitated by Health Forum volunteers, Health Activists and Clinical Monitors at the local Community Health Centres (CHC's), and assisted by facility staff members when possible, in order to educate and monitor diet and nutrition in relation to chronic medication adherence. Two such clubs are active in Gugulethu and have demonstrated positive results. (5) (6)

For such an ambitious project to be equipped to be delivered in a sustainable manner, there would need to be certain issues that are addressed by the state, some of which can be assisted by the private sector and NGOs. They are as follows:

## Secure access to water

This can be addressed as it has been achieved in the pilot site, whereby:

- the City delivers non-potable wastewater to storage tanks adjacent to the food garden plots.
- Standpipes and taps are installed close to food gardens.
- Gardeners/ communities are educated about the sustainable use of their own personal wastewater – reducing strain on drainage and sewage infrastructure
- In larger plots, well points are installed – subsidised by private sector or NGOs

## Secure premises/ garden locations

This is only achievable with support of both government authorities and local communities, by:

- Developing food gardens in secure locations which can be monitored by local community members to discourage vandalism and theft.
- Education of local community members relating to the common good outcome of the gardens to discourage vandalism and theft at a grass roots level.
- Encourage micro-gardens in private premises, where they are intrinsically more secure
- Fence off locations for food garden cooperatives, incorporating neighbourhood watch for security.

## Secure funding:

This is only achievable with input and support from various government institutions:

- Training for committed community members in business and financial management.
- Streamline the process of access to finance for registering cooperatives, with limited down payments that are achievable rather than prohibitive.
- Incorporate institutions such as the Land Bank, and NGOs who can provide ongoing secure funding for roll out of such projects.
- Assistance with registration of NPO's and Cooperatives, which allows for access to donor funding.

## Urban Spatial Planning

There is a need – arguably the greatest need, being in informal settlements, for urban spatial planning:

- Urban planning will allow for the development of sites in a secure and structured manner to develop urban food gardens
- Planting of urban space – with fruit bearing trees, to improve aesthetics, biodiversity, provide shade and remove hostility from the environment.
- Spaces for recreation.
- Spaces for adequate access and egress – particularly for emergency vehicles
- Spaces for development of service delivery facilities such as Hospitals and clinics
- Spaces that are safe to socialise
- Planning of roads, sanitation, drainage etc. - avoiding uncontrolled sprawl

Together, these planning objectives will yield improved health and social outcomes.

The ethos behind the project incorporates elements of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, (SDGs) whereby “goal 2 seeks sustainable solutions to end hunger in all its forms by 2030 and to achieve food security. The aim is to ensure that everyone everywhere has enough good-quality food to lead a healthy life. Achieving this goal will require better access to food and the widespread promotion of sustainable agriculture. This entails improving the productivity and incomes of small-scale farmers by promoting equal access to land, technology and markets, sustainable food production systems and resilient agricultural practices. It also requires increased investments through international cooperation to bolster the productive capacity of agriculture in developing countries.” (7)

This goal has been incorporated into the South African National Development Plan – 2030, through the National Policy on Food and Nutrition, which uses a multi-sectoral approach which is largely encompassed in the multidimensional approach utilised in the CSS project, with those relevant to the program which can be summarised as follows:

- Government intervention in assisting the private sector, CBOs and NGOs with nutrition support and emergency food relief programs.
- Focus on consumer literacy relating to meal and nutrition management, and their effects.

- Investment in research and technology that accounts for climate change and production challenges, with focus on improving regulation in market participation of smallholder farmers. (8)

These goals are in line with what has been narrowed down for the CSS project and builds in resilience into food security programs and development initiatives.

## Implications and Recommendations

The implications of the initiative demonstrate that training in the development of food gardens and good nutrition is a cost-effective manner to ensure communities are armed with food security, as well as with food of nutritional value by initiating or augmenting community and school feeding schemes which can continue to grow, replicate elsewhere and sustain themselves. (9)

Micro-gardens have been started and managed in back yards by local community members who had been trained, with phenomenal success.

One participant stated, “Since I started this project as a gardener, I can’t tell you the last time I went to the shop to buy vegetables. I don’t even know the price of veg at Shoprite or Pick ‘n Pay. The year before last when I planted mielies and potatoes, I harvested six bags of potatoes in the back yard – not even in the garden. I take all available leftover money from my grant and I buy seedlings. I don’t want to go to Shoprite anymore – I am Shoprite.” (10)

In order to sustain and grow this paradigm, it is necessary to somehow rekindle the connection with the land that is so engrained in African culture.

Several key informants lamented that there is a notion that moving away from poverty runs in parallel with moving away from rural living and lifestyles. While this idea can hold some truth as seen when examining the challenges faced by communities engaged in subsistence agricultural activities wholly or in part to support their household income, this is dealt with in detail by the Department of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries 2011 report on food security, who support the development and commercialisation of the sector in both rural and in urban environments. (11)

This report encourages the ideology that subsistence agricultural practices – including community-based urban food gardening initiatives and focuses on ways to support this space through fostering of an economic market that supports more small-scale producers. This is also seen in the 2013 National Policy on Food Security, as well as the City of Cape Town’s 2007 Urban Agricultural Policy.

The World Bank defines food security as “the physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food by all, at all times, to meet their dietary and food preferences”. (8)

Citizens have inadequate access to knowledge and resources to make optimal choices for nutritious and safe diets. In order to develop this space, it will require the involvement of community leaders such as ward counsellors, Health Forum members and Community Forum members to galvanize support of community food projects that are viewed as a common good, benefitting the entire community, as it is a universal challenge, and not only that of the poor to maximise outputs to put food on the table, as this is a global right enshrined in Section 27(1)(b) of our constitution as well as goal 2 of the UN SDGs. (12)

As such, innovative micro-agricultural projects in impoverished communities can be encouraged as a manner to connect with cultural ancestral roots as a modern solution to keeping in touch with the land while embracing the draws of urbanisation - maximising its benefits and controlling its weaknesses.

The home and community food gardens with their associated feeding schemes can be managed by cooperatives and CBOs, which provides local employment and upliftment in the communities, as well as providing opportunities for further individuals to be trained and mentored within these community leadership and development structures. Such cooperatives can be resourced through government and NGO assistance, and have been envisaged in policy documents produced in the past by the City of Cape Town as well as the Western Cape Government. (13) (14)

During the 42 interviews conducted with participants and key informants after the project was completed (i.e. CSS Qualitative Evaluation Report), it was repeated several times that food insecurity is leading to defaulting on the use of prescribed chronic medication for illnesses such as TB and HIV due to the negative side effects of using the medication on an empty stomach. This was highlighted as a cause for concern by Health Forums, Community Health Systems Liaisons and CHC Facility Management Staff relating to the development of drug resistance as well as further health complications for the patients. This could be largely alleviated by developing partnerships with the Health Clubs at the CHC’s, facility management and nursing staff in collaboration with the structures managing the food gardens, in order to ensure that community members are at least afforded sufficient food to encourage

consistent use of medication, health of the most vulnerable community members can be closely monitored without repeated emergency clinical admission, as well as to alleviate abject nutritional deficiency, which is an element that has been neglected or failed completely with respect to both local and national government management and involvement to date. (12) (15)

The benefits extend beyond simply filling an empty stomach, they address the need in these communities for social cohesion, community engagement, empowerment and most importantly the ethos of 'Ubuntu' – addressing the need for compassion and humanity, which has been stripped from these communities through generations of social upheaval and tension instilled by the previous apartheid regime.

A rethink is required by local and national government regarding market support of healthy affordable foods - fruit and vegetables, as well as subsidisation of seeds, which can empower communities to feed themselves rather than falling into the mentality of handouts being used to support themselves in entirety.

Food Gardens in back yards and open plots have demonstrated the potential for poverty alleviation, food security support, social cohesion and job creation, with a sustainable model that can be replicated across almost all impoverished communities. This has been identified previously by the Government of the Western Cape as well as the City of Cape Town, who have both written progressive policy documents, which unfortunately remain cumbersome and difficult to successfully implement with wide success on grass roots levels. (13) (14)

With support from institutions such as the Department of Social Development (DSD), the Western Cape Department of Agriculture, and NGOs such as Soil For Life, Abalimi Bezekhaya – which were both involved in the CSS project, the project scope can grow to use open plots and start urban farms, which is in the process of being negotiated as a case in Gugulethu, with the support of the City of Cape Town.

This demonstrates that most of the limitations perceived in relation to urban agriculture can indeed be overcome with creative strategies such as vertical gardening in confined spaces, and soil structure and nutrient augmentation through home composting techniques. This however is not a panacea and requires the undertaking from the organs of the state – both regionally and nationally to make good on their assurances as laid out in their policy documents.

With inter-agency support to initiate the program with seed funding, training, encouragement and mentorship, the initiative has the potential to sustain itself, and grow to a national scale, at a grass roots level, where the support is most needed and least often acknowledged.

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