

Women in Urban Agriculture: Institutional Challenges, COVID-19 and the War in Bahir Dar, Ethiopia

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Abstract : Women represent the majority of urban farmers engaged in vegetable and fruit production in Bahir Dar, Ethiopia. We examine urban agriculture in Bahir Dar city in the context of disruptions caused by the civil war and COVID-19. The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework serves as a conceptual frame to explore the vulnerability context, the structural and institutional challenges faced by women, and how this impacts their livelihoods. A total of 25 urban women farmers and 6 key informants were involved in the study through explorative and structured interviews conducted in 2021. Observations and informal conversations during repeated visits provided deeper insights. In addition, key informants employed in civil service institutions and experts were interviewed. Data were analysed by applying qualitative content analysis by using Atlas tia software. Women report that they experience a lack of access to land, insecurity of tenure, irregular technical support and input provision by agricultural extension services, and lack of access to credit and formal marketplaces. The COVID-19 pandemic restrictions aggravated this situation by delaying agricultural extension offices' provision of necessary inputs and disrupting food handling and storage leading to the loss of perishable products. Bombing in relation to the civil war has destroyed harvests and left women in fear of returning to their fields. Women stated that vegetable and fruit production could contribute to their incomes, household food supplies, and more diversified diets. However, the city municipal office has, so far, not committed to supporting urban agriculture as a livelihood strategy.

Keywords : urban agriculture, institutional challenges, Bahir Dar, sustainable livelihood framework

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