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Urban Agriculture in Low Income Households of Harare: An Adaptive Response to Economic Crisis

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ABSTRACT Urban farming has for years served as a vital input in the livelihood strategies of urban households in Zimbabwe. In general, urban dwellers rely on the market for food but with the tremendous surge in food prices beyond the reach of the majority of the population, the poor urbanites in Zimbabwe have resorted to intensifying urban agriculture as a coping strategy to meet their immediate food requirements. This paper discusses the contribution of urban agriculture to reducing food poverty in the context of sustainable urban development. The elements of urban agricultural production and food insecurity, alleviation of urban poverty and the state of the environment are analysed holistically. The findings of the paper are derived from qualitative and quantitative data collected from 59 low income urban farming households, field observations and key informant interviews conducted in Harare, Zimbabwe in July and August 2008. The results of the data analysis indicate that urban agriculture in low income households has rapidly become a significant source of fresh produce but shortage of agricultural resources, serious environmental health risks and policy gaps remain paramount obstacles to realizing the full potential of urban agricultural development. The results also show that active participation in urban agricultural activities is done predominantly by women. The research shows that urban agriculture contributes to household food supply and access but its potential in terms of food utilization, dietary diversity and poverty alleviation should not be overemphasised. Finally, a number of recommendations are suggested for improving urban agriculture from a human ecological perspective.